Andrews Bible Commentary

Light. Depth. Truth.

The *Andrews Bible Commentary* is a companion to the *Andrews Study Bible*. Together they provide a remarkably comprehensive and concise Bible study resource. You will be led to a life of service for Christ and the hope of His soon return.

The *Andrews Bible Commentary* is written by 60 leading biblical scholars from around the world. It's designed for new believers, experienced Bible students, pastors, and teachers. Its purpose is to trace the blessed hope (Titus 2:13) in the pages of Scripture and to read all of the Bible in the light of that hope. What does the Bible say to believers who, with both longing and joy, anticipate the return of Jesus? Answering that question is at the heart of the *Andrews Bible Commentary*, which seeks to instruct and inspire all into a stronger personal relationship with God that focuses our worship on Jesus as Savior and Lord.

Andrews University has been blessed by God to serve the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church in providing the highest standard of Adventist education and in producing important publications to support leaders, pastors, and members.

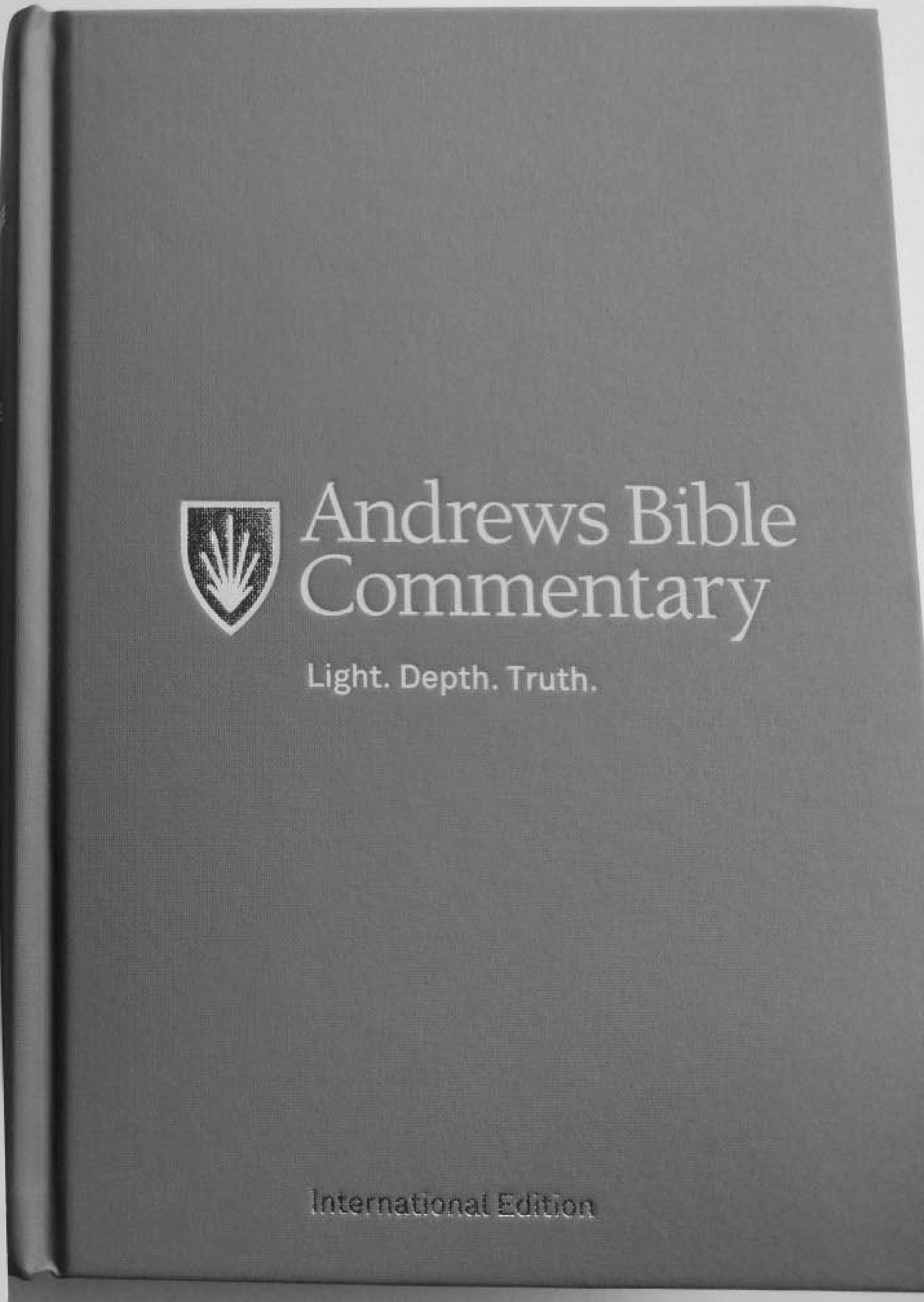
We are very pleased that many church leaders around the world have worked together to make this International Edition of the *Andrews Bible Commentary* readily available.

As you delve into its contents, may you feel the gentle stirrings of the Spirit drawing you closer to the heart of God and igniting within you a fervent desire to spread His love and truth to all you encounter.

With anticipation of the blessings to come,

John Wesley Taylor V
President
Andrews University

"I am so incredibly proud and grateful for the work of these scholars of the church in this first-of-a-kind Commentary. They placed themselves in the hands of the Lord and they have made an outstanding contribution that will bless the church for years to come. I have been honored and privileged to be part of the team."
—Angel Manuel Rodriguez, General Editor, *Andrews Bible Commentary*



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PUBLISHER'S PREFACE

You hold in your hands a work unique in the history of the vibrant faith community that has sponsored its publication. This volume marks another, perhaps inevitable, step in the searching for and unfolding of truth that is a hallmark of the Reformation and the Advent movement.

Commentaries on the Bible, from many faith traditions and perspectives, have been an important part of serious Bible study for centuries. Seventh-day Adventists have always placed the Bible alone as authoritative above all human opinion on what it says. At the same time, we have been blessed by the insights of many scholars through various Bible commentaries from these faith traditions, even while holding some significant differences in interpretation on several of the grandest and most vital themes of Scripture.

In the 1950s, the publication of the multivolume, verse-by-verse *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* met with an enthusiastic reception within the Adventist world far beyond all initial expectations. Its influence on biblical understanding in our community of faith has been profound. It has served the church well for more than sixty years.

In 2008, Andrews University was honored to be asked to produce another major landmark in the history of Adventist engagement with Scripture. The *Andrews Study Bible*, originally produced in the New King James Version (2010) and now also in the New International Version (2019), contains thousands of study notes written by prominent and thoughtful Adventist scholars. It also includes a unique linked reference system highlighting the greatest themes of the Bible. It was published with sponsorship and funding by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists and has been identified as the most comprehensive one-volume Bible study resource in the Adventist world.

Led by Niels-Erik Andreasen, then president of Andrews University, planning began almost immediately after the release of the *Andrews Study Bible* to next produce a concise, full-featured Bible commentary as a companion to the *Andrews Study Bible*. With sponsorship and funding again from the General Conference, Andrews University authorized a worldwide team of some sixty scholars and Bible teachers, under the leadership of Ángel Manuel Rodríguez, to produce this landmark work which you now hold in your hands. As former director of the General Conference Biblical Research Institute, Dr. Rodríguez was uniquely qualified for this work because of his expertise in biblical studies, his personal acquaintance with scores of scholars, and his worldwide reputation for faithfulness in effectively communicating the message and mission of the Bible as understood by Seventh-day Adventists.

It is our intent that the *Andrews Bible Commentary* complement the *Andrews Study Bible*. We believe that together these two great works form a complete, ready-reference resource for every believer.

The earnest desire of the publishers is that the *Andrews Bible Commentary* may inspire your deeper engagement with God's word and increase your fervent expectation of the Advent Hope.

John Wesley Taylor V
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As delegated by the Andrews University Press Board, production and publication of the *Andrews Bible Commentary* has been guided by an oversight Project Committee that met in 2012. The members are listed below with the professional responsibilities they held at the time that the Project Committee conducted its work. This committee supervised the development of the purpose and concept, arranged for funding, selected the General Editor, and approved the team of contributors.

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ABBREVIATIONS

General

ABC-NT	*Andrews Bible Commentary* (New Testament)
ABC-OT	*Andrews Bible Commentary* (Old Testament)
A.D.	*anno Domini*, in the year of the Lord
ANE	ancient Near East(ern)
approx.	approximately
Arab.	Arabic
Aram.	Aramaic
B.C.	before Christ
Bg.	the Heb. OT published by Daniel Bomberg (1524–1525)
ca.	*circa*, about, approximately
cf.	*confer*, compare
chap./chaps.	chapter/chapters
cm	centimeters
DH	Deuteronomic History
DSS	Dead Sea Scrolls
E	east
e.g.	*exempli gratia*, for example
esp.	especially
ESV	English Standard Version of the Bible
etc.	*et cetera*, and so forth
ff.	and following
ft.	foot/feet
g	gram/grams
gal.	gallon/gallons
Gr.	Greek
Heb.	Hebrew
i.e.	*id est*, that is
in.	inch/inches
kg	kilogram/kilograms
KJV	King James Version of the Bible
km	kilometer/kilometers

Kt.	*kethib*, the written Heb. OT preserved by the Masoretes (see Qr. below)
L	liter/liters
Lat.	Latin
lb.	pound/pounds
lit.	literally
LXX	Septuagint, an ancient translation of the OT into Greek
M	Majority Text
m	meter/meters
mi.	mile/miles
ms./mss.	manuscript/manuscripts
MT	Masoretic Text, the traditional Hebrew OT
N	north
NASB	New American Standard version of the Bible
NEB	New English Bible version
NIV	New International Version of the Bible
NKJV	New King James Version of the Bible
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version of the Bible
NT	New Testament
NU	the Gr. NT published in the Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament, 27th ed. (N) and in the United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament, 4th ed. (U)
OT	Old Testament
oz.	ounce/ounces
pl.	plural
pt.	pint
Qr.	*qere*, certain words read aloud that differ from the written words in the Masoretic Heb. OT (see Kt. above)
qt.	quart
S	south
sing.	singular
sq. km	square kilometers
SW	southwest
Syr.	Syriac
t	teaspoon
Tg.	Targum, an Aramaic paraphrase of the OT
tn.	ton/tons
v./vv.	verse/verses
Vg.	Vulgate, an ancient translation of the Bible into Latin (Jerome, trans. and ed.)
W	west
yd.	yard/yards

Books of the Bible

Gen.
Ex.
Lev.
Num.
Deut.
Josh.
Judg.
Ruth
1 Sam.
2 Sam.
1 Kin.
2 Kin.
1 Chr.
2 Chr.
Ezra
Neh.
Esth.
Job
Ps./Pss.
Prov.
Eccl.
Song
Is.
Jer.
Lam.
Ezek.
Dan.
Hos.
Joel
Amos
Obad.
Jon.
Mic.
Nah.
Hab.
Zeph.
Hag.
Zech.
Mal.
Matt.
Mark
Luke
John
Acts
Rom.
1 Cor.
2 Cor.
Gal.
Eph.
Phil.
Col.
1 Thess.
2 Thess.
1 Tim.
2 Tim.
Titus
Philem.
Heb.
James
1 Pet.
2 Pet.
1 John
2 John
3 John
Jude
Rev.

Books by Ellen G. White

AA	*The Acts of the Apostles*
CD	*Counsels on Diet and Foods*
COL	*Christ's Object Lessons*
CT	*Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*
CTr	*Christ Triumphant*
DA	*The Desire of Ages*
Ev	*Evangelism*
EW	*Early Writings*
GC	*The Great Controversy*
MB	*Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*
PK	*Prophets and Kings*
PP	*Patriarchs and Prophets*
1SM	*Selected Messages*, vol. 1
SAT	*Sermons and Talks*
SC	*Steps to Christ*
SDABC	*Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*
SL	*The Sanctified Life*
SP	*The Spirit of Prophecy* (4 vols.)
ST	*Signs of the Times*
1T	*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1
TM	*Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*

INTRODUCTION

The *Andrews Bible Commentary* is a concise exposition of Scripture written by Adventist scholars as a companion to the *Andrews Study Bible*. It is a valuable Bible study tool for lay readers, pastors, students, and teachers living in expectation of the Advent Hope. It is a confessional commentary only in the sense that the authors are Adventists, who carefully listened to the biblical text to unfold its significance and meaning for its readers, paying particular attention to the topic of biblical hope. The methodology used in the exposition of the biblical text is the historical-grammatical method. In preparing the comments on the biblical text, contributors to the *Andrews Bible Commentary* have made use of a wide range of literature, including other commentaries. This literature has helped enrich and sharpen our understanding of the biblical text. While the format does not allow space to engage with the writings of other scholars, essential questions of current interest about the meaning of the text are addressed.

Special Features

There are a number of important features in this work that together make this a unique commentary on the Bible and that will hopefully facilitate its usefulness for general reading and comprehension.

Unique Emphasis. The key distinctive feature of the *Andrews Bible Commentary* is its emphasis on the biblical topic of hope. The first article unveils some of the main theological dimensions of biblical hope, and the commentaries identify its presence and significance in each biblical book from a theological and historical perspective. This overarching topic, as well as others, provides theological unity to the commentary.

Articles. A number of articles will prepare readers to use the commentary. There is a rich collection of articles at the front of the work that helps provide background material before the reader engages with the biblical books themselves. Each block of biblical books (e.g., the Pentateuch, the historical books, the epistles) is introduced by an article that provides a general overview of the content of the books that constitute that particular block. The articles help the reader see what holds those books together historically and theologically. Some of the articles provide a general discussion of some of the historical background for both the Old and New Testaments.

Essays. Short essays on topics of relevance to the textual commentary are placed close to the biblical passages to which the topics are relevant. In addition to dealing with what appear to be problematic passages, these essays also develop or clarify significant theological issues and analyze important doctrinal passages in conjunction with other biblical texts.

Introduction to Biblical Books. In the introduction to the commentary for each book, the reader will find background information that is useful and, in some cases, indispensable for a proper understanding of the book. These introductory materials deal with questions related to authorship, date of composition, the book's historical setting, some of its main theological themes, and some of the literary features that characterize the book.

Block Commentary. With a few exceptions, the commentary generally does not provide a detailed exegesis of each biblical passage. The exposition is organized according to the blocks of passages or sections that constitute a unity by themselves. The comments show how each section is related to the other, identify the flow of the message of the text, develop some of the main theological concepts running throughout the biblical book, and clarify the meaning of the block of material. There are also personal applications of the message of the text to the present life of the believer. Sometimes it is necessary to linger a little longer on a particular passage by discussing the meaning of biblical terms or grammatical issues that have an impact on the interpretation of the passage.

Use of Ellen G. White. The readers will find occasional quotes from the writings of Ellen White or references in parenthesis to some of her writings. Adventists believe that she received from the Lord the gift of prophecy, through which He led the development of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and its institutions. Her writings contain significant theological insights on biblical topics, and the authors were encouraged to use them when contextually pertinent. The commentary, however, is based on the meaning of the biblical text and not on her writings. She is not part of the biblical canon and her writings, as she herself indicated, are to be judged by the Scriptures.

How to Use the Commentary

The *Andrews Bible Commentary* should function as a guide in the personal study of the Bible. In other words, the main interest of the reader should be to gain a better understanding of the Bible. Consequently, the Bible should be the starting point of the study. If the reader is interested in studying a particular book, he or she would do well to prayerfully read the entire book before consulting the commentary. In this way, the mind of the reader will be imbued with the thoughts from the Bible, making it easier to follow and even evaluate the exposition of the text provided in the commentary. If a person is interested in reading the biblical text and the commentary together, it would be better to read first the particular section of the Bible and then the commentary on that block of material. Priority should always be given to the biblical text.

Since backgrounds are so important in the interpretation of the Bible, it is useful to read the articles and even the introduction to particular books in order to gain a broad perspective of the times when the biblical writers and their audiences lived. Such information will provide a better understanding of the biblical text by placing it within a particular historical moment in the divine-human interaction. The essays found throughout the commentary can also be helpful in supplementing personal study of the Bible. Readers interested in a particular biblical subject can find some of the essays useful as introductions to the topic. Reading a specific essay may also help them realize the need to delve deeper into the subject through a more detailed personal study of the Bible.

Since this commentary generally does not repeat the information found in the *Andrews Study Bible*, readers will find it valuable to deepen their knowledge by consulting it at the same time. The combination of these two tools will provide a wealth of information that will enrich and broaden the reader's understanding of the exposition of the biblical text.

Gratitude

A project like this would not have been possible without the involvement of many individuals. The idea of producing a concise Bible commentary written by Adventist scholars originated in conversations between John McVay, president of Walla Walla University in College Place, Washington, and Greg King, dean of the School of Religion at Southern Adventist University in Collegedale, Tennessee. When Niels-Erik Andreasen, then president of Andrews University, showed an interest in the project, they both considered Andrews University Press to be the ideal publisher. John and Greg initially became associate editors of the commentary, but their multiple responsibilities made it impossible for them to provide leadership to the project. We are grateful to them for their contribution. The writers of the commentary for the biblical books come from around the world, representing, in a sense, the worldwide nature of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. They wrote while carrying heavy teaching or administrative responsibilities, and the final result is the volume that you have in your hands. We are grateful to them for their sacrifice and enthusiasm and for their willingness to be part of this project.

We appreciate the strong support of the administrations of Andrews University and the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, both of which provided specific funding allocations to make this project possible. We also are particularly grateful to the board and staff of Andrews University Press for entrusting to us the privilege of serving as editors in the production of the commentary and for their patience as they had to wait a little longer than anticipated for the closure of the project. The involvement of the staff of Andrews University Press—Ronald Knott, L. S. Baker Jr., and Deborah Everhart—significantly enhanced the final form of the commentary by providing valuable evaluations of the manuscripts and suggesting important changes. It has been a pleasure for us to work with them.

Finally, we are grateful to the Lord, who gave us the Bible and who, through the work of the Spirit, guides us in its interpretation. What we offer to the readers is a beginning in their study of the Bible, and we pray that the Lord will assist them in gaining a deeper knowledge of the love of Christ for us as revealed in His Word.

Ángel Manuel Rodríguez, ThD
Daniel Kwame Bediako, PhD
Carl P. Cosaert, PhD
Gerald A. Klingbeil, DLitt

OLD TESTAMENT

GENERAL ARTICLES

HOPE AND THE ADVENT OF GOD

Hope may not be the center of a biblical theology, but it certainly belongs to the inner circle of that theology. In this Bible commentary, we seek to highlight the presence of this concept throughout the biblical text and underscore its potential impact on the thinking and life of human beings. The almost hopeless condition of human existence, or at least the disorientation that characterizes it, makes this task indispensable. In what follows, we offer some of the main aspects of biblical hope. The biblical terminology for hope emphasizes the elements of expectation and trust and is grounded in the fact that human existence is rooted in time—past, present, and future. The presence of the concept of hope in the biblical text is not limited to the use of certain vocabulary, and it is found in varying contexts, including narratives, rituals, and exhortations. If hope is primarily living in expectation and in anticipation of the future and what it will bring, then we are by nature creatures of hope; hope is at the very core of being human. According to the Scriptures, true hope is found only in God and in His Son.

HOPE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

As humans came from the hands of the Creator, they were placed within the flow of time—within the sixth day of the Creation week anticipating the coming of the seventh day (Gen. 1:27, 31; 2:1). They were created standing before the future, and therefore they existed in the expectation of what that future would be like. This expectation was free from apprehension and fear because its realization was in the loving hands of the Creator. Elements of that future were made clear to Adam and Eve. So, for instance, they would rule the natural world and multiply themselves, filling the earth with their descendants (Gen. 1:26, 28). This future was masterminded by the Lord and offered to them as a gift. They simply were to look forward in expectation to its realization. They accepted it as part of their self-realization.

But the future could also present them with an element of danger, a threat to their harmonious experience and inner peace. Evil found its way into the Garden through a corrupting power represented by the serpent (Gen. 3:1; Is. 14:12–15; Ezek. 28:13–16; Rev. 12:7–9). Adam and Eve were offered an alternate future, and surprisingly, they accepted it. They were offered a future existence free from the alleged restraints imposed on them by God, in which it would be possible for them to obtain a new mode of existence—becoming like God (Gen. 3:1–3). This was an exhilarating expectation, something they had never before thought about. The "promise" of the serpent instilled in them a new hope. But it was a false hope—the "hope" of a hopeless future. Consequently, fear of the future crept into the human heart, and since then it has remained there, defining human existence to a large extent.

When humans found themselves in fear and without a future, and therefore without hope, God intervened and out of grace offered them a new future and a renewed hope. This new hope was grounded on the divine promise of the *coming/advent* of the Seed of the woman, who would permanently overcome the evil power represented by the deceptive serpent (Gen. 3:15; Gal. 3:16). Since then, hope has been grounded on God's promises to the human race and their expected fulfillment within history in a context of conflict. Hope, then, presupposes a need that should be supplied. The patriarchal narratives reaffirm the universal hope of restoration and blessing by extending it to all the nations of the earth through the descendants of Abraham (Gen. 12:1–3). Biblical hope is by nature universal (cf. Is. 42:4; 51:9).

HOPE AND CONFLICT

The moral and spiritual corruption of the human race is the basis for both divine judgment and the offer of hope. The judgment of a universal flood was announced together with a hope of salvation (Gen. 6:11–14). But the hope of survival was available only inside Noah's ark to those who would trust in the Lord. Hope was realized in the midst of judgment in the survival of a faithful remnant awaiting the fulfillment of God's promises. This pattern of spiritual decay, divine judgment, and trust in a hopeful promise of salvation is found throughout the OT. It reached its pinnacle in the preexilic rebellion of the people of God against the covenant Lord through idolatry and social injustices. The moment finally came when divine judgment was inevitable—Israel and later Judah would go into exile (e.g., Jer. 4:5–9; 6:1–5; Amos 9:1–6). Although this divine pronouncement was the end of hope for His people (Ezek. 37:11), the Lord graciously announced yet another new future (Jer. 29:11), a hope of salvation for a faithful remnant (e.g., Is. 10:20–23; Jer. 31:17; Amos 9:8, 13–15). The attempts of the enemy of God to destroy His people were frustrated by the divine preservation of a remnant through whom the Lord was to fulfill His saving will.

Even when the nations, moved by their own expansionistic desires, threatened God's people with extinction or oppression, it was hope based on faith in the Lord that sustained His servants (e.g., 2 Kin. 18:17—19:37). Under those and similar circumstances, hope and faith were severely tested, but the divine call was to trust in God. The conflict within which hope was usually present required the individual to pray for and anticipate deliverance (Pss. 33:18–19; 130:7–8), healing (Is. 40:31), and salvation (e.g., Pss. 14:7; 39:7–8; Is. 51:5), to trust in the Lord when facing trials (Pss. 27:14; 34:18–22; 130:5), and to rely on His loving-kindness in the midst of hopelessness (Ps. 147:11). In the final analysis God, and no one else, was the hope of His people (Pss. 39:7; 71:5). It is in the context of the suffering of the innocent that the strength of hope surfaces in the midst of struggle and it is finally victorious (Ps. 25:19–21). Job's suffering was so intense that he could foresee only death—the end of hope (Job 7:6–10). But even in that almost hopeless situation, he was able to affirm his *yahel* ("trust" or "hope") in God despite being "slain" by Him (Job 13:15; cf. Is. 8:17). This is a hope that is firmly grounded on the reliability of God (cf. Ps. 33:20–22; Jer. 14:22).

This hope is also related to the future of the nation. The OT looks forward to the Day of the Lord, a time when the nations will gather to fight against Israel but the Lord will permanently defeat them, bringing deliverance and salvation to His people (e.g., Joel 3:1–2, 12). This hope nurtured the life of God's people in the OT and enabled them to look forward to the future in full confidence. They knew that the future was in the hands of the Lord and that their hope would be actualized in the advent of the Lord (Is. 25:9).

HOPE AND GOD'S SANCTUARY/TEMPLE

Hope in a divine intervention that would bring salvation to God's people was expressed through the Israelite sacrificial and priestly systems. God instituted the sanctuary services in order to deal with the spiritual needs and challenges of His people. The sacrificial system was a means by which God's people worshiped Him, expressed gratitude to Him, sought His presence (Pss. 27:6; 107:22; 116:17), and asked for forgiveness of sin, hoping in faith that it would be granted to them (Ps. 65:3–5; cf. Lev. 4:20, 26, 31). The sanctuary/temple was a place where the sinner could find hope because the hope of Israel dwelt there (cf. Jer. 14:8; 17:13). The hope of the people was manifested through the vows they made to the Lord in anticipation of the fulfillment of a divine promise (Pss. 66:13–14; 116:17–19). The fulfillment of God's promises strengthened the faith and hope of the people because it revealed that God is trustworthy. By dwelling among them in the sanctuary/temple, He was near to them to bless and sustain them and to provide for them a means of atonement (Ps. 24:3–5; cf. Lev. 4:13–21).

Human sin, like that of Adam and Eve, could separate the Israelites from God, leaving them in a state of hopelessness. The relationship, broken or altered by sin, was restored through the sacrificial victims that died in place of the repentant sinners, bearing their sin (Lev. 17:11). The daily ministry of the priest in the Holy Place assured the people that atoning blood was available for the forgiveness of their sins. The annual Day of Atonement ministry of the high priest pointed to a future time when God, through His work of judgment, would cleanse the world from sin and impurity, thus restoring it to its original condition (Lev. 16:29–33; Dan. 8:13–14; Zech. 3:1–9). Thus God illustrated for them what He would do through the coming Savior who would die for them, bearing their sins and being their High Priest and the Mediator of reconciliation and judgment (Is. 52:13—53:12).

HOPE AND THE WORK OF THE PROPHETS

The prophets' messages of judgment and salvation pointed to a proclamation of a new future that was to be apprehended by the people as a reliable word of hope coming from the Lord. The promise of the Son, through whom the divine promise of salvation was to be realized, was reaffirmed (Is. 7:14; 11:1–5). The prophets announced a new future shaped by a new covenant (Jer. 31:31–34) that would bring with it a new heaven and a new earth (Is. 65:17; 66:22), the transformation of nature (e.g., Is. 11:6–9; 65:25) and social life, and the final victory over God's enemies, including death itself (e.g., Is. 25:7–8; 26:19; Dan. 12:2).

The realization of this hope would be possible through the coming/advent of the Lord in power and glory (Is. 35). This hope reminded God's people that the present configuration of what they saw and experienced was not final. Something greater and better was coming, and it was theirs in their present existence in the form of a divine promise.

HOPE AND THE MESSIAH

The institution of kingship was requested by the Israelites as a result of their concern about the future (1 Sam. 8:3–5). In the absence of a strong hope in the Lord, humans usually attempt to take their future into their own hands. But the Lord took this institution and adjusted and incorporated it into His plan for the human race. Most of the kings of the OT decided to create their own view of the future by setting aside the divine plan for them, the hope that God had offered His people. The result was the collapse of the nation and the Babylonian Exile. But the divine ideal of kingship, according to which the king was God's servant, was embodied in the person of David, who became a symbol or a type of the future Messiah ("Anointed One"; e.g., Ezek. 34:23). He would be a descendant of Abraham through the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49:8–11; cf. Gen. 17:16; Num. 24:17), God's Son in a unique way (Ps. 2:6–8; cf. Is. 7:14), His Anointed One (Ps. 2:2; cf. Dan. 9:25–26), who would sit on the throne of David (Is. 9:6–7). Micah indicated that from Bethlehem would come the Ruler of Israel (Mic. 5:2). He would be the victorious King who would reign forever over God's people and to whom the nations of the earth would be subjected (Dan. 7:13–14). He would bring war to an end (Is. 2:4; Zech. 9:10). But this most majestic King would also be a priest who would solve the serious problem of sin. He would do this by giving His life for His people, thus effecting full and final atonement. By dying in their place, He would save them from sin and from their estrangement from God (Is. 52:13—53:12; cf. 61:1). He would be installed not only as King but also as Mediator in the eschatological sanctuary (Dan. 9:24; cf. Ex. 30:26–29).

The OT closes filled with hope. In our mind's eye, we can perhaps see God's people looking up, reaching up, straining every nerve in eager anticipation of the glorious realization of their hope in the coming messianic King.

HOPE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

In the NT, the messianic expectations of the OT find their fulfillment: the arrival of the Seed of the woman (Matt. 1:22–23; Gal. 4:4; Rev. 12:5). Jesus was the promised messianic King (John 20:31), the sacrificial victim who died in place of sinners (2 Cor. 5:21), the High Priest prefigured in the sanctuary services now ministering for us in the heavenly sanctuary (Heb. 8:1–6), and the ultimate Prophet of hope (e.g., John 14:1–4; Acts 3:19–23; cf. Deut. 18:15–19). The life, ministry, death, resurrection, and mediation of Jesus infuse human existence with unprecedented meaning and hope. The community of faith that He created was grounded on the saving message and efficacy of the cross while anticipating with great expectation the consummation of salvation at the Second Coming of the Lord. Existence in the present was understood by the church to be characterized by a longing or yearning for the real physical presence of the Lord at His advent in glory. This sense of expectation determined everything they did, and it had a direct impact on their daily lives.

PROMISE AND HOPE

As in the OT, hope now found its point of departure in the trustworthiness and reliability of God (Heb. 10:23). The fact that the salvific promises of God, recorded in the OT, have become a reality in Christ demonstrated in a unique way that God was able to deliver what He promised (Acts 26:6; 28:20). The permanent interlocking of promise and hope is determined by their common divine origin and contributes to enrich the content of each other. They both reach us through Scripture. Theologically speaking, we can suggest that before hope actualizes itself in human history, it exists in the form of a divine promise. The Scripture, as the bearer of God's promises, becomes our source of hope in the shape of a promise and links hope to our faith and confidence in God (Rom. 15:4; Gal. 5:5).

If hope grounds itself in the reliability of God's promises, then Christian hope is the most reliable hope humans can find because God, in an unparalleled way, demonstrated through the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus that He fulfilled His most audacious promise to us: salvation through the sacrificial death of His Son. The NT establishes a firm connection between the saving death of Jesus and the hope of His Second Coming (Titus 2:13–14). That connection provides a historical and theological foundation for Christian hope that flows from the reliability of the promises of God and the trustworthiness of His character (cf. Heb. 6:17–19). Such a hope is a gift of divine grace to those who desperately need it (2 Thess. 2:16). The absence of this hope in the human heart leaves human existence in a state of hopelessness (Eph. 2:12).

THE CERTAINTY OF HOPE

The expectation of the return of the Lord in glory, and everything that it entails, was never conceived by Christians as wishful thinking devoid of certainty or as an illusion. The Christian hope is a "living hope" in the sense that it is related to the resurrection of Jesus (1 Pet. 1:3). The linkage of hope with Jesus is so strong that hope is identified with Him. He is "our hope" (1 Tim. 1:1). The God of hope in the OT is now Jesus the Christ (the Anointed One). The implications of this aspect of hope are extremely significant and theologically rich. Hope is not something that at the present time exists only in the human mind as a dream and as an expectation. The Christian hope is a reality outside us that in the near future will irrupt with power into our time and space, radically changing the present human condition and its habitat. For now, it is in heaven (Col. 1:5), but it is there as an objective reality.

What we are saying is that what we expect, what we eagerly wait for, is already a reality in Jesus Christ. In other words, the NT provides for us a Christological understanding of hope. Our hope is embodied in the person of Christ. Perhaps a few examples will illustrate the idea.

- The Christian hope looks forward to the resurrection of the dead at the Second Coming (Acts 24:15), but the resurrection already took place in one human being, the Son of God (Acts 2:32). He came out of the tomb alive and in the process defeated the power of death. The resurrection of Jesus anticipated and assures our future resurrection (1 Thess. 4:14, 16).
- Jesus ascended to heaven, to the heavenly sanctuary, as our precursor, and we look forward to the moment when we will also ascend to heaven (Acts 1:9–11; 1 Thess. 4:17; Heb. 6:20).
- Jesus was born in union with God and never broke that union, and we look forward to the moment when our union with God will be fully manifested in the presence of our Savior (John 17:22).
- We hope for our glorification at the return of our Lord (Rom. 5:2), totally assured that it will happen because God resurrected Jesus and glorified Him (Rom. 8:17; 1 Pet. 1:21). He is now our "hope of glory" (Col. 1:27).
- Christ was installed as King of the universe, and He has promised that we will reign with Him in glory (Rev. 3:21).
- The content of the apostolic hope includes eternal life (Titus 1:2; 3:7). Although at the present time we have it by faith, the fullness of that life is hidden with Christ in God, and when Christ our Life appears, we will appear with Him in glory (Col. 3:3–4).
- We look forward to a new creation, but Jesus already introduced this new creation to those who are in Him. In the future the new creation will be revealed in power and glory (2 Cor. 5:17; 1 Pet. 1:3; 2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1).

The content of our hope is an objective reality in Christ and in the work that He has done and is still doing for us. He is, in a very real and concrete way, our only hope (1 Tim. 1:1) and our living hope (1 Pet. 1:3). Biblical hope does not belong to the field of human dreams or wishes but is firmly grounded in the work and person of the Son of God. The cross of Christ created a new future for the human race that is ours through His work of mediation before the Father in the heavenly temple.

HOPE AND THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

Hope is by nature oriented toward the future as the place from which God will unveil it to us within our history. But this hope makes a difference in the present conditions of human existence. Biblical hope does not detach itself from the realities of the present; it boldly addresses them. It does this at a personal and collective level and in the social interaction of believers with the world at large. This idea is communicated in the NT by associating the concept of hope with other important aspects of the Christian life.

Hope, Faith, and Love

In 1 Corinthians 13:13 Paul refers to the endurance of faith, hope, and love—and love is the greatest of these. Hope is not incompatible with love and faith but coexists with both of them in the Christian life (1 Thess. 1:3). It may be right to say that the three are inseparable because, on the one hand, hope orients faith toward the future and challenges it to persevere, and on the other hand, love challenges hope to action in the present. Hope does not allow love to become so obsessed with its immediate object as to forget the consummation of salvation. But love takes the future eschatological existence, characterized by freedom from selfishness and suffering, and makes its presence felt in the here and now in selfless care for others (Heb. 6:10–11). The model for this type of life is Jesus Himself, who constantly proclaimed the coming of the kingdom of God as an eschatological expectation while at the same time caring for the poor and needy (e.g., Matt. 4:23). Elements of the eschatological expectation were made present in His ministry in order to illustrate the quality of life in God's kingdom. Like faith and hope, agape-love—a totally unselfish commitment to the service of God and others—is not natural to humans. It was poured into the human heart through the Spirit, and this assures us that our hope will not disappoint us; it will be fulfilled (Rom. 5:5).

Hope and Spiritual Growth

The expectation of the soon return of Christ conjoins hope and holiness in an unbroken bond of unity. Thus it is indicated that hope should be constantly influencing the life of believers (1 John 3:3). Hope is so deeply woven into the core of the life of believers that it sanctifies them while they are eagerly waiting for its realization. John defines this hope as the expectation of being like Jesus and seeing Him at the advent (1 John 3:2). The implication is that in order to see the Pure One, we should also be pure (Matt. 5:8). Hope impacts the present and begins, through the Spirit, to transform us into the likeness of the Son of God. We are becoming now what we will become at the end, when we will be changed (1 Cor. 15:52) and when we will see Him (1 John 3:2). Therefore the connection between hope and holiness is not only about our spiritual life but also about the ethical significance of the Christian hope (1 Thess. 5:5–8). Peter, in his discussion of the Second Coming of the Lord, refers to the importance of living holy and godly lives as we look forward to the Day of the Lord (2 Pet. 3:11). The ethical and moral lives of those who have placed their hope in Jesus reflect that of their Master. They humbly submit themselves to God's will as revealed in His law and particularly in His Son.

Hope and Perseverance

Hope also impacts the quality of our inner life, our character, by giving us consistency of action and courage to endure. Hope exists in the context of conflict and can be challenged by a hostile environment, but it is precisely in that setting that hope inspires endurance (1 Thess. 1:3). What we eagerly wait for—the return of Jesus in glory—is such a wonderful event that it moves us to be patient and to endure. The Greek word *hupomonē* ("endurance, perseverance") expresses the idea of remaining faithful to the Lord, holding on to hope by resisting oppression, affliction, and temptation while waiting for His intervention (Rom. 5:3; 2 Thess. 1:4; Rev. 14:12). The strength of hope is such that it could make us immovable in

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our commitment to the Lord and to the hope that He has set before us (Col. 1:23). The inner strength that hope provides for believers testifies about its reality and its significance in their present pilgrimage.

Hope and Joy

If hopelessness brings with it fear and anguish, the Christian hope fills the life of believers with joy. Paul exhorts believers to exult in the hope of the glory of God (Rom. 5:2) and to live joyfully in hope (Rom. 12:12). There is an inexpressible *something* about the Christian hope such that when believers meditate on this hope and anticipate its fulfillment, they are filled with joy. Hope brings elements of the future into the present, and we begin to experience now the joy that will be ours when we see our Lord coming in glory. Joy in the Bible is what defines the nature of eternal life in the presence of God, and that will permanently replace suffering, sorrow, and the oppression of death (Jude 24; Rev. 19:7; 21:3–40; cf. Is. 35; Jer. 31:13). Hope looks forward to that moment and gives us a foretaste of it in the present.

Hope and Mission

The richness and beauty of the Christian hope cannot be selfishly embraced as the exclusive possession of a few. Hope is universal because the human need for it is also universal. Humans are by nature without hope in a world of sin and death (Eph. 2:12), but God in His grace wants everyone to enjoy fullness of hope. Those who have received by grace and through the work of the Spirit the hope of the consummation of eternal salvation at the advent are impelled by that hope to proclaim it to the world. They have been chosen by God to reveal the glorious riches of the mystery among the Gentiles (nations): "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27). The Christian hope instills in the heart the urgency of sharing it with those who are drifting in an ocean of hopelessness. Believers are called to be constantly prepared to give a defense of the hope within us to anyone who asks (1 Pet. 3:15). But this is to be done with kindness and respect in order for hope to be winsome.

CONCLUSION

The eschatological expectation of the return of Christ in glory, promised in the OT through the prophecies of the advent of God to establish His universal kingdom, continues to enrich the lives of millions around the world who are constantly anticipating this most glorious event. This hope has radically altered their lives, filling it with meaning and transforming them into messengers of hope. For them, the constant human search for a hope that could bring healing to the human heart filled with fear and anxiety has ended. They are pilgrims of hope in whom the richness of this hope has been embodied in acts of love and kindness modeled after the One who is in fact their hope, Jesus Christ.

They eagerly wait for the moment when they will see God. The full realization of that hope begins at the moment of the advent of Christ. They anticipate the moment when the Day of the Lord, announced by the prophets of the OT, will irrupt into our time and space with unparalleled majesty and glory. Then they will see their Savior and Lord dressed in the majesty of His divinity (Matt. 16:27; 24:30). The event will be of a global nature, filling every segment of our space with the glory of the presence of the Son of God (Rev. 1:7). He will come in judgment against the forces of evil that denied the value of the hope, and they will be forced to witness its realization (Rev. 6:15–17). But He also will come to consummate the redemption He accomplished on the cross of Calvary (Heb. 9:28). He will descend accompanied by the angelic host and by the powerful sound of the trumpet, calling to life those who went into the darkness of the tomb firmly holding on to the blessed hope (1 Thess. 4:14–17). His people will be transformed by the power of His presence and will be permanently removed from the sphere of death and suffering (1 Cor. 15:51–55; Rev. 21:4–5). The universal gathering will occur, and they will be reunited with the risen Lord to be with Him and their loved ones through eternal ages (Matt. 24:30–31; John 14:1–3; 1 Thess. 4:17). We can only continue to anticipate with great expectation and joy what such a life will be like.

REVELATION AND INSPIRATION OF THE BIBLE

God communicates with His created beings through speech. Immediately after He is first introduced to us in the Scriptures, we hear His voice freely expressing Himself through the spoken word. God's speech or word reveals His inner thoughts, plans, attitudes, feelings, and emotions. God created humans in His own image and endowed them with the ability to speak and therefore to engage Him in dialogue using their own language skills. Speech is the primary means of communication among humans and contributes to the actualization of their social nature. The God who speaks is a social being, the Creator, who wants to be known.

The doctrine of revelation and inspiration is an exposition of the way God has made Himself known to His creatures. With respect to the Scriptures, *revelation* has been traditionally understood as the process by which God, through the Holy Spirit, reaches the minds of some individuals, called prophets, and mysteriously shares with them a specific message. *Inspiration* is usually understood as the work of the prophet in sharing with others that revelation through the spoken or written word.

GENERAL AND SPECIAL REVELATION

Theologians distinguish between a special revelation, preserved in the Holy Scriptures, and a general revelation of God outside the Bible, accessible to all but limited in scope. The distinction is important in that it shows that God wants to be known and is constantly doing what He can to achieve His purpose. He does not want to be the unknown God.

General Revelation

General revelation assumes that God uses other avenues in addition to the spoken word to reveal Himself. He reaches out to humans wherever they happen to be, in and through different means, but particularly through His actions. Probably the most impressive activity of God, apart from the act of redemption, is His work of creation. Only the most powerful, intelligent, and wise God could have brought into existence the majestic cosmos that we are barely beginning to understand. His creation is a vehicle through which He reveals to human beings His glory (Ps. 19:1), His wisdom (Prov. 3:19), and His eternal power and divine attributes (Rom. 1:20). This divine revelation is accessible to all who are willing to listen to its testimony. But due to its present damaged condition, creation cannot display the full expression of the loving character of God and His identity.

God also reveals Himself to humans through their intuitive awareness of the divine. This awareness is sometimes suppressed by the fall of humans from the divine ideal (Gen. 3), but it remains there reminding us that our very life is a witness to the existence of a divine being. Belief in God or some supernatural being is a universal phenomenon. We are by nature religious beings seeking to satisfy our need for God in different ways, and this need is evident even in the denial of Him. We still have a vague sense of what is good, even if we ultimately embrace what is wrong. The inner voice of our very nature tells us about God in spite of humanity's attempts to silence it through philosophical arguments and so-called scientific facts. This revelation of God is also general in that it does not reveal the full nature and works of God.

History could also be considered a means of divine, general revelation in the sense that humans may be able to detect in it God's activity on their behalf. Divine providence is perceptible to humans as they analyze their experiences in life. It is God who provides rain to both the righteous and unrighteous (Matt. 5:45), and He provides life, breath, and providential interaction for the purpose of drawing people to seek Him in return (Acts 17:25–27). God continues to be active in human affairs, and we continue to benefit from His work within history and experience.

General revelation is limited in its content, and because of the damaging presence of evil in the world, it may be misunderstood or even totally ignored. By itself it does not have salvific power. Consequently, the Lord provided for His people a special revelation through which He revealed His character and His purposes to the human race.

Special Revelation

God's special revelation was given to humans through prophets and apostles but reached its ultimate expression in the incarnation of the Son of God. It has been preserved for the human race in the Holy Scriptures. God revealed Himself to prophets and apostles in various ways (Heb. 1:1). At times He spoke to them in dreams, as was the case of Solomon while in Gibeon (1 Kin. 3:5), and also through visions while the prophets were awake, causing them to see what no one else could see (Gen. 15:1; Dan. 8:1; cf. Num. 12:6). In some cases God appeared to His prophets and spoke to them (theophanies; Gen. 17:1; Ex. 3:2–4). Quite often He simply spoke to them and they heard His voice or the voice of His messenger (auditions; e.g., Gen. 22:1). Through these means God shared with the prophets certain information that was meaningful to them and to their audiences. Revelation is not only an encounter with God but also an encounter in which God provides information in the form of promises and judgments that reveal Himself and His plan for the salvation of humanity. The information was to be shared with God's people through oral messages delivered in private or public settings.

The most important revelation of God was made available to humans when God became a human being and lived among us (John 1:14). Christ became the new expression of God's word in a unique modality—in human form. God's self-revelation to the prophets was limited to what the prophets could receive from Him. In God's Son we have God Himself speaking to us. The Son did not bring to us a revelation from God; He was God's most sublime

revelation of Himself. In the final analysis, only God is able to tell us who He is, and He did it through the incarnated Word. In Him we come to understand the past, the present, and the future of humanity. In Him we see a loving God who created and then redeemed us at a very high cost to Himself—a sacrificial death. It is through the love revealed to us through the death of the Son that the sin problem, the cosmic conflict itself, will find ultimate and final closure.

The revelation of God to the prophets pointed forward to Christ, and the revelation to the apostles pointed back to Him. The body of that revelation has been preserved for us in written form, the Holy Scriptures. It is the most reliable revelation of God that we have, and consequently, it is good for us to listen to it. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, the written word is still alive, and through it God continues to speak to us with power and conviction in order to make Himself known to us and to invite us to choose Him in the context of a cosmic conflict.

SELF-TESTIMONY OF THE BIBLE

The Bible itself speaks about its origin and nature, and we should seek to understand this information as much as possible. Two of the most important passages that discuss the nature of biblical inspiration are 2 Timothy 3:16–17 and 2 Peter 1:19–21. We should examine these two passages and others as we proceed to understand the biblical teaching about revelation and inspiration.

Revelation and Inspiration: Definitions

It may surprise some to realize that, strictly speaking, the Bible does not separate revelation and inspiration—the reception of the message (revelation) and the moment the prophet embodies it in language to deliver it in oral form or to preserve it in written form (inspiration). The act of revelation includes within itself the activity of the human mind in the embodiment of it in words. Peter states that prophecy—a term he uses to emphasize that the Scriptures were written by prophets—comes from God and continues to be under the guidance of God when the prophets share it with others (2 Pet. 1). This does not mean that we should use only one word (i.e., either "revelation" or "inspiration") when dealing with the topic. It is indeed good to distinguish between revelation and inspiration to facilitate the analysis and discussion of the theme, but we should always be aware of the fact that they are in reality inseparable. Perhaps it would be better to speak about the divine process of revelation-inspiration.

Origin: God

The Scriptures clearly identify God as the originator of the content of biblical revelation. Peter makes it clear that the Scriptures are not the results of human will; that is to say, they do not originate as an impulse or even an intuition of the human mind, but they come from God (2 Pet. 1:21). Paul establishes this point as well in 2 Timothy 3:16. The significant term used here is the Greek *theopneustos* ("God-breathed," from *theos* ["God"] and *pneo* ["to breathe"]). What does "God-breathed" mean? No one knows what it specifically designates, but we can comment on its metaphorical meaning, which in fact sheds very little light on the revelation-inspiration process. The term reminds us of the activity of God during the creation of humans and the cosmos. It was through the breath of God that Adam became a living being (Gen. 2:7) and all the hosts of heaven were formed (Ps. 33:6). Metaphorically speaking, Paul seems to be using the term "God-breathed" to articulate the conviction that the Scriptures are the result of God's creative power. The creative power God employed when creating the world is the same power He used in the creation of the Scriptures. This is a unique way of stating that the Scriptures originated or came into being through divine activity. God is their ultimate author.

The conviction that the Bible is the "word of God" is found throughout its pages. The prophets testified that the word of the Lord came to them (e.g., Jer. 1:11–13; Joel 1:1; Mic. 1:1), and at times they introduced or concluded their messages by stating that the Lord had spoken (Is. 7:7; Amos 1:3; Hag. 1:7). We also find them calling people to hear the word of the Lord (e.g., Ezek. 6:3; Amos 3:1). The prophets understood that the very source of what they were communicating to the people and their leaders was God, and it was not the result of their religious, social, or political preferences. The Lord Himself stated that He would punish anyone who would not listen to (i.e., obey) His words that would be spoken in His name by the Prophet (i.e., Christ) who was like Moses (Deut. 18:18–19; Acts 3:22; Heb. 3:2). The word comes from the Lord and is authoritative, and the prophet communicates it to others on behalf of the Lord.

We find in the NT the same emphasis on the divine origin of the revelation that the apostles communicated to others. The "word" is now the teachings of Jesus (Mark 4:33; John 5:24; 8:31) and the person of Jesus, who is "the Word of God" (Rev. 19:13). The word of Jesus is as authoritative as the OT (John 2:22). He told the Jewish leaders that they could not listen to Him or understand Him because He was from God and they were not (John 8:43, 47). The word of Jesus is then summarized in the message of the gospel of salvation (Acts 15:7) that Jesus brought to the human race and that was to be proclaimed by the church (Acts 10:36–43). His teachings and His own person are the revelation of God to humanity. Paul, who was not at first one of the disciples of Jesus, received the gospel through a revelation from God (Gal. 1:12–13). In fact, it would be proper to say that all of the apostles received the gospel as a revelation coming from the incarnated God, Jesus Christ.

Extent of the Inspired Scriptures

Paul states that all Scripture is God-breathed and inspired (2 Tim. 3:16). Most probably the primary reference of the phrase "all Scripture" is to the totality of the Scriptures that form the OT (cf. 1 Tim. 5:18). All of it originated from God and was given to the prophets under divine inspiration. Paul's statement means that in the content of the Bible, there is no gradation or hierarchy of inspiration, with some documents being less inspired than others; they are all inspired by God. It also demonstrates that any attempt to search the Scriptures in order to identify what is inspired and what is not is to search in vain. In that sense, the biblical understanding of inspiration is plenary—it applies to everything in the Bible. Humans are not to identify what is inspired in the Bible because the Lord explicitly stated that all of it is inspired.

The claim that "all Scripture" is inspired by God also applies to the writings of the apostles preserved in the NT. What they taught was what the Lord had commanded them to teach (1 Cor. 14:37). As apostles, their exposition of the gospel was an inspired oral or written expression of it, and consequently, it was authoritative (cf. 2 Thess. 2:15). The Spirit of the Lord was operative in their experience as they wrote the Gospels and the letters of the NT, and as apostles they were aware of this phenomenon. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians that they had accepted and believed the message that they had heard from the apostles not as a merely human word but as the word of God (1 Thess. 2:13; cf. 1 Cor. 2:12–13; 14:37). Like the prophets of the OT, they proclaimed to the people the word of God. We also find the explicit statement that the apostles proclaimed the gospel "by the Holy Spirit" (1 Pet. 1:12). Peter himself considered the writings of Paul to belong to the inspired Scriptures (2 Pet. 3:16). This should not surprise us for, as we saw, the apostles received their message from the Lord though divine revelation. This idea is clearly expressed by John when he writes that he received the content of the book of Revelation through a revelation from God through Jesus Christ (Rev. 1:1–2).

The Human Element

The process of revelation-inspiration includes the involvement of humans chosen by God, as Peter indicates (2 Pet. 1:21). The prophets and prophetesses received the messages from the Lord and then, still under the guidance of the Spirit, communicated to others the content of the revelation in a trustworthy way. The implication is that in the production of the Scriptures we find the human and the divine working together. However, the content of Scripture did not originate with humans. They were the spokespersons of God, and as such they embodied the content of the revelation in their language and expressions. God guided them in using their literary skills and linguistic expertise as they were wording the revelation received. Thus, they spoke in their own language as God's representatives and were not simply His public address system. God did not override their individuality through mystical experience.

The presence of the human element in the revelation-inspiration process is demonstrable in several ways. In the OT, the prophets wrote in Hebrew or in Aramaic because these were the languages they and their audiences knew. Some of them were excellent storytellers, and the Lord used their skills to preserve His message in the form of biblical historical narratives. He also gave messages to prophets and used them to write down the revelation in poetic form or as proverbs and other types of sayings. There were prophets skilled in the composition of psalms, and God used them to write the psalms now preserved in the Holy Scriptures. The writing style of the prophets is identifiable through the study of their books.

In the NT, the Lord used the Greek language to preserve in written form the messages He gave to the apostles, and their writings show their knowledge of Greek grammar, syntax, and vocabulary. The presence of four Gospels in the NT, each one written from a particular point of view and style, shows the human element in the revelation and inspiration process. One Gospel could not contain the fullness of the revelation brought to us by Jesus. Many of the epistles of the NT reveal the excellent rhetorical skills of the apostles, while others are less elegant and complex. One of the obvious conclusions that we can derive from this discussion is that God did not dictate to the prophets and the apostles the content of Scripture, except when He instructed them to quote Him directly. We will return to this topic later.

REVELATION-INSPIRATION AND THE EXPERIENCE OF THE PROPHET

The revelation-inspiration process is fundamentally a mystery not totally revealed to us, but there are some aspects of it that we can and should seek to understand based on the study of the Bible. As we approach the Scriptures we find different ways in which God communicated with the prophets and apostles.

Modes of Divine Revelation-Inspiration

The first way, which we have already mentioned, is a direct communication from God through dreams, visions, auditions, and theophanies. In most of these cases God directly accessed the minds of the prophets and shared with them some specific information. In such cases, the supernatural element of the revelation-inspiration process is at the forefront of the experience of the prophet. Among believers this is the most common understanding of the way God communicated with the prophets during the revelation-inspiration process. The experience of the prophets was a deeply emotional one throughout the whole process. Even at the moment of the call, it was common for them to feel unworthy of the call (Jer. 1:4–10) or even threatened by the majesty of God (Is. 6:5). At times the revelation from God overwhelmed them (e.g., Ezek. 3:15) and emotions came to expression in bodily reactions: John fell as though dead (Rev. 1:17) and wept (Rev. 5:4); Daniel was terrified and fell prostrate on his face (Dan. 8:17). There were also strong emotional experiences when delivering the message to the person or to the people. The indifference of the people to the message was painful to the prophets, who knew very well what the future would bring to the people (e.g., Jer. 4:19; Hab. 3:16). In a sense, part of the call of the prophet was an invitation to feel emotions analogous to those that God experiences as He views the experience and the reaction of humans to His message of judgment and salvation.

The second way God revealed His message to the prophets and apostles was through research. He impressed in their minds the need to collect historical information and to organize it in certain ways in order for Him to communicate a specific message to His people. Because this information was available to them, the Lord guided them in finding and using it. The best example of this phenomenon is found in Luke 1:1–4, where Luke describes in detail the reason why he wrote his Gospel. There are several important details in these verses that deserve brief attention. First, others before Luke wrote on the ministry and teachings of Jesus. This means that from very early in the apostolic church there was a serious interest in preserving the teachings and narrative of the life of Jesus for future generations. Second, Luke mentions that there were eyewitnesses who preserved in some form (orally or in written form) aspects of the story of Jesus. Third, Luke seems to have benefitted in his writing from what others had written and from the testimony and teachings of eyewitnesses.

Luke did his research to the best of his abilities under the guidance of the Spirit. We can without any hesitation apply to the experience of Luke what Peter said about prophets: Luke was a holy man of God who spoke/wrote as he was led by the Holy Spirit (2 Pet. 1:21). The revelation-inspiration process is from beginning to end the result of the activity of the Spirit as He works through the person of the prophets. In the case of Luke we have evidence from the NT that he carefully copied down the words of Jesus, preserving them for future generations in his own Gospel. This can be seen not only in the way he appears to have carefully incorporated material from Mark's and Matthew's earlier Gospels into his own, but also in his use of other sayings of Jesus in circulation at the time (e.g., 1 Cor. 11:24–25). Paul recounts one of these early sayings of Jesus along with an OT quotation (Deut. 25:4) in 1 Timothy 5:18. The quotation of Jesus was recorded by Luke (Luke 10:7). Since it is unlikely that Luke's Gospel existed at this early stage in the history of the church, this indicates Luke's careful use of sayings of Jesus that were known among early Christians, as indicated by Paul in this letter to Timothy. This passage also reveals that Christians placed the same level of authority on the words of Jesus as they did on the OT.

The third way God revealed His message to the prophets was by leading them in the selection of material already available to them that was then incorporated in their inspired writings. A few examples may suffice. In Proverbs we find a small collection of proverbs written by Agur, who was probably a non-Israelite (Prov. 30:1–33). The whole of Proverbs 31, or at least vv. 1–9, was written by the mother of King Lemuel, a non-Israelite king. Were these persons inspired by the Lord when composing the proverbs? Collections of proverbs similar to the ones we find in the biblical books were very common throughout the ANE and Egypt and there is evidence indicating that the biblical writers may have copied from some of them. Although we do not consider the original authors to have been inspired by God, we can ascertain that the biblical writers were moved by the Spirit to select and incorporate these writings into their inspired collection of proverbs. Thus the Spirit guided the prophet in the selection of proverbs from outside Israel that summarized concepts compatible with the will of God for His people. In such cases, revelation and inspiration are inseparable and consist of a process of selection of materials done under the direct influence of the Spirit.

The Scripture as the End Product

The end product of revelation-inspiration is the written word of God. It is during this process that the human element is most active. What went on within the person of the prophets as the Lord communicated with them and during the preservation of that revelation in written form has been a matter of discussion among Bible students. There are two extreme views. The first view is usually called the *dictation theory* of inspiration. According to it, God to a large extent dictated His message to the prophets and they wrote it down. Therefore, the Scripture is in a very literal form the word of God. We argue that this is not the case because, as mentioned above, the biblical books show the distinct writing abilities and styles of their authors.

The second view on revelation-inspiration is called *encounter revelation*, and it is the prevailing view among liberal scholars. It teaches that when the Lord approached the prophets, they experienced His presence in a deep and personal way. This experience was so sublime that the revelation itself was an encounter with God that transcended words. Therefore, God did not reveal to the prophets anything except Himself. There was no exchange of information about who He was or about His will and plans for His people. In other words, there is nothing in the Scriptures that comes to us from God. What we have in the Bible is the feeble attempt of the prophets to explain to us what the experience they had with God meant to them in their own cultural context. Therefore the content of the Scriptures is culturally determined and conditioned. It is a book like any other book. This also is not a satisfactory understanding. We have shown above that God's revelation to His prophets was cognitive; that is to say, during the divine-human encounter God spoke to the prophets and gave them a body of knowledge about Him, His will, and His plans for the human race. The end product of the revelation-inspiration process is called in the Bible the "word of God" or "the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15).

Since God shared information with the prophets, it is proper to conclude that in the revelation-inspiration process God accessed their minds and placed there the thoughts, concepts, or ideas that He wanted them to communicate to His people. This was an act of divine condescension in that God's thoughts were being adapted to the human way of thinking and speaking in order to make them intelligible to His creatures. The Infinite Mind was contacting and communicating with a finite mind. As we have shown above, in the revelation-inspiration process the prophets embodied the divine thoughts in human words, using their own words. Since Peter indicates that the prophets spoke as they were led by the Spirit (2 Pet. 1:21), we conclude that He continued to accompany and guide them as they incarnated the divine message in human words. God was interested in preserving the integrity and trustworthiness of the message He gave to the prophets. There are some cases in the Bible where, after the prophets received a message from the Lord, He asked them, "What do you see?" (i.e., He asked them to tell what they saw using their own words). And after they summarized what they saw, the Lord responded that they had seen accurately (Jer. 1:11–12). In such instances, God was verifying that the divine message that the prophets were to pass on to others in human words would be trustworthy. The words of the prophet became the word of God.

Working under the biblical assumptions that God did not dictate His message to the prophets and that He did not abandon them when they wrote it down, we can affirm that the guidance of the Spirit assisted the prophets in using their language skills, spoken or written, to the best of their abilities. Since the words were those of the prophets, we cannot affirm that the words were inspired, but we can affirm that the message from God, expressed through their words, was passed on to others in a trustworthy and reliable form. This was possible because they spoke through the guidance of the Holy Spirit (2 Pet. 1:21).

The special connection between God, the Spirit, and the prophets should not be interpreted to mean that a prophet reached a state of divine perfection in the reception and preservation of the messages from God. We have cases in the Bible where a prophet received a revelation from God but did not understand it. In the case of Daniel, the Lord sent an angel to explain to him a prophecy that he did not understand (Dan. 8:27; 9:22). Peter was confused as a result of a vision he had (Acts 10:17), but he gained a clear understanding during the three days that it took him to get to the house of Cornelius (Acts 10:19, 28). In this case, an angel was not sent to explain the vision to him. Since the prophets remained human beings, it should not surprise us to find in the Bible some minor and inconsequential discrepancies. Their inconsequential nature does not undermine the trustworthiness of the Bible. The Scriptures continue to be the inspired word of God and the infallible revelation of His will.

PURPOSE OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES

The revelation of God preserved in the Holy Scriptures unveils to its readers a drama of love and sacrifice of cosmic dimensions. The drama is about the Creator God, who was unwilling to abandon His creatures to themselves in spite of their rebellion against Him. From among the heavenly beings created by God, a cherub rebelled against a loving Creator and charged Him with selfishness and arbitrariness in the administration of the universe (Gen. 3:1–5; Job 1:9–11; Is. 14:13–15; Ezek. 28:13–19). The conflict in heaven was so intense that rebellious angels had to be cast out from the presence of God to pursue their own selfish interests (Rev. 12:7–10). When humans joined the rebellion (Gen. 3:6–13), God out of His grace offered them the possibility of returning to an alliance with Him (3:15).

Other parts of the Scriptures are about the cosmic conflict as it has played out within human history, in which every person is a participant. In the Scriptures we find a cosmic disclosure of the true character of God and His final victory over the forces of evil. Beginning with Genesis, God introduces in human history the hope of a coming Redeemer who will demonstrate to the cosmos that the charges of the fallen cherub were totally unfounded. Divine love, grace, and mercy were constantly manifested in the lives of the patriarchs and in God's dealing with Israel and the nations of the world in the midst of a conflict that threatened the spiritual life of God's people and even their own existence. The prophets proclaimed to the people the coming of the Redeemer, who would give His life for God's people by dying as a sacrificial victim for them (e.g., Is. 52:12—53:12).

The ministry and person of the Son of God, who became human in order to manifest to the cosmos the deepness and unfathomable nature of the love of God (John 1:14; 3:16), represents the center of the Scriptures. In Him the prophetic proclamation found its fulfillment. He became human and offered His life as an unblemished sacrifice for sinners (1 Pet. 1:19). He took on Himself what was theirs in order for them to receive as a gift of grace what was His (2 Cor. 5:21; 8:9). The cross of Christ displayed the inscrutable nature of His loving character in an unparalleled way, thus unmasking the evilness of all rebellious powers in the universe. The sacrificial love of God took Him to the realm of death, to a dark tomb, from which He came out alive!

It is part of the function of the Bible to tell us that during the Christian era the conflict will still go on but that the consummation of the salvation brought to us through Christ will result in the final extermination of evil powers (Rev. 13:1–8). It also tells us that God is willing to use human beings who join in the proclamation of God's redeeming love to the world manifested on the cross of Christ (Matt. 28:10–20). These are individuals who were transformed by the power of the Spirit of the Lord and now manifest in their own lives the love of God in selfless service to others. They constitute the church of Christ. The church will suffer while on earth, and toward the end the conflict will intensify (Rev. 13:13–18), but the victory belongs to Christ and His faithful people (17:14). The ultimate resolution of the cosmic conflict will occur when every creature in the universe unites in acknowledging the goodness of God and praising His loving character (Phil. 2:11; Rev. 15:3–4).

It is the purpose of the Scriptures to announce the coming of a new world free from suffering, death, and the presence of evil, where God's redeemed will rejoice forever (Is. 35:10; Rev. 21:1–4). The focus of the Bible is on the sacrificial death of the Son of God, through whom all of this was made possible. Since the most fundamental purpose of the Scriptures is to introduce us to such a loving God, manifested in the person and ministry of His Son, we should indeed study the word of God to come to know Him better and to be transformed into His likeness.

FORMATION OF THE BIBLICAL CANON

The work of the Spirit of the Lord in the edification of God's people did not end with the revelation of God's message through the prophets and its communication in oral or written form. The preservation of that revelation for future generations was as important as the revelation itself in that it kept alive the divine plan for humanity in the form of a messianic hope of cosmic proportions. The most effective way of transmitting God's message to other generations throughout the ages has been by faithful copying and recopying of God's revealed word. Many books were written during both the OT and NT times, but not all of them became part of the biblical canon. What made the biblical books unique, and what forces set them apart to constitute them into the Holy Scriptures?

The history of the formation of the biblical canon is complex and difficult, and at times it distracts the researcher from what is probably the most important and perhaps obvious aspect of the canon, namely, its gratuitous nature. It was from the very first steps—from the moment when the divine word reached the first prophet—a gift from God to His people and through them, particularly through the Messiah, to the world. It is a gift in which the gift and the Giver are inseparable.

THE CANON OF SCRIPTURE

We will provide an introduction to the topic of the biblical canon that will highlight some of the most important biblical and historical evidence used to trace its history. While it would be impossible, within the confines of this introduction, to elaborate in a detailed manner on most of the information provided, the general contours of the formation of the canon should be clear to the reader.

Definitions and Concepts

The English word *canon* is derived from the Greek noun *kanōn*, meaning "reed," "measuring rod," or "rule." It is a loan word from the Hebrew noun *qaneh*, which also means "reed," "rod," or "measuring unit" (see 1 Kin. 14:15; Job 40:21). The term designates a standard to be followed when measuring, leading to the meaning of a rule or guide. The term *kanōn* was well known and utilized in Hellenistic Greek. In fact, the ancient world was full of "canons" that guided different aspects of human activity. In Galatians 6:16, Paul utilizes the term in the sense of a measure of Christian conduct that can be verified. However, in Scripture it does not designate the biblical canon itself. The term *kanōn* was used in a variety of ways in the earliest days of Christianity. Around A.D. 96, Clement of Rome used it in reference to the

Christian “tradition.” Nearly a century later, Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150–215) referred to the canon of faith. It was not until the middle of the fourth century and onward that *kanōn* was used to designate the collection of sacred writings of both the OT and the NT.

The biblical canon is recognized by Christians to be authoritative for the church in terms of faith, practice, and mission. What constituted these books into a collection of authoritative books, a canon? The biblical answer is surprisingly simple but most effective: the books that now constitute the canon were considered authoritative by the community of believers (Israel and the Christian church) because of their divine origin. Their authority is deeply grounded in their nature as a gift from God that reaches us through divine revelation and inspiration. The self-authentication of these books is affirmed in both the OT and the NT. Consequently, their authority rests not upon the alleged fact that some person or group of individuals included them in the canon but upon the fact that they were recognized by their religious community as having authority because of their divine origin; that is, their gratuitous nature. It was as a result of that conviction that the books were preserved in the canon. The books were recognized as canonical and holy because of their intrinsic nature, not merely because they were declared to be such.

HISTORY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT CANON

The Biblical Evidence

The concept of a canon has its roots in the Bible itself. The OT provides valuable information concerning the existence of authoritative written documents that were recognized as coming from the Lord through His prophets. We begin at Mount Sinai, where God first gave His covenant instructions to His people audibly (Ex. 19:1—20:21). Afterward, Moses was specifically commanded to write down all of these principles, which provided a written narrative framework for them (cf. Ex. 17:14; 24:3-4; Num. 33:2). It was written in the book of the covenant and read to the people, who responded by affirming that they would obey everything the Lord had commanded (Ex. 24:7). Here we have the indispensable elements of a religious authoritative document: God spoke (divine origin), the revelation was preserved in written form (the book of the covenant), and the people acknowledged the authority of the document and promised to order their lives on the basis of its content. The written word was to be read on a regular basis to the people so that they would obey all the words of the law (Deut. 31:12).

The canonical authority of the law and Moses's instructions, as preserved in the Pentateuch, are recognized again and again throughout the OT, beginning with Joshua (Josh. 1:8), as well as in Judges (Judg. 1:20), the book of Kings (1 Kin. 2:3; 2 Kin. 14:6; 23:3), and others (2 Chr. 25:4; 34:32; 35:12; Ezra 3:2; 6:18; Neh. 8:1, 14; Dan. 9:11, 13; Mal. 4:4). The Pentateuch is foundational for the rest of the OT (see “Introduction to the Pentateuch,” p. 120). A particularly interesting case is found in Nehemiah 8:9, in which Ezra read the law to the exiles who had returned from Babylon to Jerusalem, showing that its authority was recognized by all. The covenant relationship between God and His people was determined by their adherence to

the word of the Lord preserved in written form. This collection was considered to be not of human origin but based on God's self-revelation.

Some scholars have noted that many of the books of the OT are interconnected, and have pointed to their essential unity. This is particularly true with the Pentateuch, which clearly connects Genesis and Exodus as the continuation of the same narrative. Exodus concludes with the construction of the sanctuary and God taking residence inside it, and Leviticus begins with God speaking to Moses from the tabernacle. After the covenant law is given and the sanctuary with its services is established, Numbers continues the narrative from Sinai to the promised land. Deuteronomy recapitulates the experiences of Israel in the wilderness, emphasizing the need for Israel to obey the covenant law in Canaan and concluding with the death of Moses. It is most logical to conclude that the connections between these books are the work of the author of the Pentateuch and serve to indicate that in this collection of books the readers found an authoritative revelation of God for them.

The book of Joshua is directly related to Deuteronomy by reporting the death of Moses and the new role of Joshua (Deut. 34:1–11), whose leadership is portrayed in the book that bears his name. In fact, Joshua is directly linked to Genesis and Exodus by referring to the bones of Joseph (Josh. 24:32), mentioned for the first time in Genesis 50:24–26 (cf. Ex. 13:19). Judges begins with a reference to the death of Joshua (Judg. 1:1), narrated in Joshua 24:29. While Joshua concludes by summarizing the faithfulness of the people during the time of Joshua and the elders who followed him (Josh. 24:31), Judges begins by affirming the faithfulness of the people (Judg. 1:1–26), followed by their spiritually unstable relationship with the Lord during the time of the Judges. Ruth is connected to the book of Judges by the very first phrase of the book: “In the days when the judges ruled” (Ruth 1:1). It closes with a genealogy that introduces David (Ruth 4:16–22), thus preparing the way for the monarchy and the important role of David in the book of Samuel. The book of Kings is an obvious continuation of the history of the monarchy, beginning with the ascension of Solomon and concluding with the fall and captivity of Judah during the Exile. The book of Chronicles retells or recapitulates the story of the monarchy from a particular God-centered perspective and connects it to universal history by taking the reader back to Genesis and the creation of Adam—an excellent way of closing the canon. It concludes with a reference to the work of Cyrus on behalf of God's people, as announced by Isaiah (Isa. 44:28). The book of Ezra begins the way 2 Chronicles closes, with a reference to Cyrus (2 Chron. 36:22; Ezra 1:1) and the people returning from exile. Esther provides a door of access to the life in exile and God's care for His people.

When we examine the prophetic books, we find them deeply connected to the history of God's people. In their introductions practically all of the authors relate their ministry to specific kings in Israel and Judah. The books are all part of the overarching story that finds its beginning in the Pentateuch. The prophets received revelations from God for His people within very specific historical moments. Some of them were acquainted with the ministry of other prophets and acknowledged their authority (e.g., Is. 8:16–20; 34:16; Jer. 26:17–18; 28:8–9; Dan. 9:2; cf. 2 Chr. 20:20).

Everything in the OT is related to that overarching story. For instance, the book of Proverbs is connected to Solomon and Hezekiah; Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs are also connected to Solomon. The biblical canon places these books within the history of God's people at a particular point. Even Job is connected to the patriarchal period. The book of Psalms is inseparable from the temple, and many of the psalms are connected to the experiences of different individuals in Israel, particularly David. The book itself groups the psalms in thematic blocks related to the history of God's people (see Psalms: Introduction).

What we find in the OT is a collection of books that are deeply interconnected, not only to each other but particularly to the Pentateuch, and that tell a history of the interaction of God and His people. It is not just history, but history narrated from the perspective of God revealed to and written by His prophets. It is an authoritative narrative that reveals the disastrous results of the violation of God's covenant law, embedded at the same time in a glorious messianic promise of hope. Who put this divine narrative together? It could be argued that later editors put it together, but the biblical evidence, if taken seriously, points in a different direction. The interlocking of the books is the result of the authors themselves who, under divine inspiration, were guiding God's people from beginning to end and moving from one historical moment to the next, thus affirming God's constant presence among His people. Who put the books together as a collection to constitute them into one canon?

Historical Evidence

As we close the OT, we are left with a large number of books recognized by God's people as authoritative because they contain a revelation from God. It could be that before the Exile some people may have had questions about the prophetic ministry of some of the prophets (e.g., Jeremiah), but after the Exile, seeing all their prophecies fulfilled, there was no room left for any further doubts. We do not know the specific order in which all these books were organized—for example, the place of the wisdom books within the collection. For this, we look for extrabiblical information.

The earliest datable extrabiblical reference pointing to a particular order of books is found in the prologue of the apocryphal book of Jesus Ben Sirach (Ecclesiasticus; ca. 195 B.C.). His grandson translated it from Hebrew into Greek (ca. 132 B.C.) and added to it a prologue in which he mentions three times the three main parts of the OT books: the Law, the Prophets, and the rest of the books of the fathers. In other words, it appears to point to a threefold division of the OT. The "Law" would be the Pentateuch, the "Prophets" most probably the historical and prophetic books, and the other books would designate the rest of the OT. What is particularly important in this case is that Ben Sirach is not defining the order or the content of the canon for the first time but using what was apparently well known. A similar collection, although perhaps more controversial, is mentioned in 2 Maccabees 2:13–15 (ca. 104–63 B.C.).

Evidence coming from the Dead Sea Scrolls found in Qumran is very informative and important. First, complete scrolls and fragments of all the books in the Hebrew canon, except Esther, were found there (although Esther is quoted in other Dead Sea Scrolls). This is significant since the majority of the scrolls are dated between the third century B.C. and A.D. 73. Therefore, virtually all books generally connected to the Jewish canon of the OT already existed as copies in the second to first centuries B.C., and commentaries had been written on some of them, confirming their authority. Second, the Qumran library contained many other books, but the evidence indicates that those books did not have the same authority as those that constitute the canon. Third, the Qumran community seems to have been familiar with the threefold division that was mentioned in the prologue of Ben Sirach in the second century B.C., called the books of Moses and the books of the prophets and David. This same classification is found in Luke 24:44 and implied in Matthew 23:35 (see also Luke 11:51).

Mention should be made of Philo (20 B.C.–A.D. 40), an Alexandrian Jew who sought to show the superiority of Jewish thinking over Hellenistic thinking. He mentions the laws, the oracles given by the prophets, the Psalms, and other books that, according to him, were useful for knowledge and piety. The last group of books refers probably to those outside the canon. In Philo, the Psalms refers not exclusively to the book of Psalms but to a collection that included at least Proverbs and Job, which he quotes as Scripture (e.g., "as the Holy Word says").

Josephus (A.D. 37–100), a Jewish historian, knew about the threefold division of the OT and was the first to provide a fixed number of books of the OT collection. He identifies a total of twenty-two books constituted by the five books of Moses (the Law), the thirteen books of the Prophets, and four books of Hymns and Precepts for the conduct of life. Josephus considered this collection to be a closed list of books to which nothing was to be added. He did not identify the books by name under each category, but it could easily correspond to the list we have today when we remember that some of the books at that time were combinations of books that we have today: *Law*—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy (five); the *Prophets*—Joshua, Judges-Ruth, 1–2 Samuel, 1–2 Kings, 1–2 Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah, Esther, Job, Isaiah, Jeremiah-Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, the book of the Minor Prophets (thirteen); *Hymns and Precepts*—Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs (four). Josephus's quotations from the OT in his writings seem to support this list of specific books. The list of the twenty-two books was known to Christian writers such as Origen (A.D. 185–254) and Jerome (A.D. 347–419). Other Jewish sources mention twenty-four books, instead of twenty-two, probably by counting Ruth and Lamentations as separate books; this number became the traditional number of the books in the Hebrew Bible.

The apocryphal book of 2 Esdras, written around A.D. 100, mentions that the OT contains twenty-four books, plus another seventy hidden books (the writer distinguishes between the two numbers). Melito, bishop of Sardis (ca. A.D. 170), published a list of books belonging to the OT that includes all the books in the modern canon, except possibly Esther.

Originally the books were written on independent scrolls, but once the codex (the precursor of modern bound books) was invented and became the standard format of writing (ca. A.D. 300), it was easier to arrange them in a fixed order. Today the Hebrew Bible organizes the books in a threefold order as follows:

Law (Heb. *torah*)
Genesis
Exodus
Leviticus
Numbers
Deuteronomy

Prophets (Heb. *nebi'im*)
Joshua
Judges
1–2 Samuel
1–2 Kings
Isaiah
Jeremiah
Ezekiel
The Twelve Prophets
(Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah,
Jonah, Micah, Nahum,
Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai,
Zechariah, Malachi)

Writings (Heb. *ketubim*)
Psalms
Proverbs
Job
Song of Songs
Ruth
Lamentations
Ecclesiastes
Esther
Daniel
Ezra-Nehemiah
1–2 Chronicles

In this arrangement the canon begins with Genesis and concludes with 1–2 Chronicles. This order of books appears to be the oldest witnessed in Jewish literature.

The crucial question that divides modern scholarship is whether the OT had already been standardized by the time of Jesus (or before) or whether this occurred only in the first century A.D. or perhaps even later in the second century A.D. A brief comment is necessary on some rabbinic debates about the canon. Among the Jews there were some disputed books, like Esther, in which the name of God is not mentioned. Some scholars have suggested that it was in the so-called council of Jamnia that final decisions were made concerning the books that would constitute the OT canon. Jamnia, located on the Mediterranean coast of Israel, hosted both a rabbinical school and a legal court established during the period of A.D. 70–135. In the school there were discussions on the extent of the sacred Scriptures and on many other topics. However, such discussions were not unusual, for rabbis had discussed these matters at least in the previous generation and also several times long after the Jamnia period. It is clear that these rabbinical discussions were not formative for the OT canon. The belief that there was a council in Jamnia where the OT canon was finally fixed is not historically reliable. Above all, the witness of Jesus is extraordinarily important for the fixing of the canon.

Jesus and the Old Testament Canon

When we examine the Gospels we find that Jesus confirmed the scope and divisions of the OT canon. In a discussion about the fate of prophets in the hands of the leaders of the people, He referred to the OT martyrs and held the leaders responsible for "the righteous blood [that has been] shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar" (Matt. 23:35; cf. Luke 11:51). Here Jesus was referring to the martyrdom of Zechariah recorded in 2 Chronicles 24:20–21, and He thus affirmed the canonical order of the OT books by choosing the first martyr mentioned in Genesis and the last martyr mentioned in the *last canonical* book, 2 Chronicles (*chronologically* Zechariah was not the last martyr of the OT; see Jer. 26:20–23). These boundaries of the canon used by Jesus indicate that in His day the canon was already closed. Jesus also confirmed the threefold division of the canon, which closed with 2 Chronicles, when He spoke about the fulfillment of everything written about Him in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms (Luke 24:44). Earlier in the chapter Luke wrote that Jesus had begun with "Moses and all the Prophets," as He used "all the Scriptures" to discuss matters regarding Himself (Luke 24:27). The shorter form is another way of designating the threefold order of the OT books (cf. Matt. 7:12; Luke 16:16), as it acknowledged the existence of divisions in a particular order with the Writings being the last. Mentioning only the first two of the three divisions was also the practice among other Jewish writers.

How were all the authoritative books of the OT collected and organized in a threefold order? There is no final answer to this question. Although most scholars have rejected the possibility that it was the work of Ezra and Nehemiah after the Exile, the possibility should not be ruled out. Three arguments give some credibility to this traditional proposal without demonstrating that this was the case. First, Ezra is depicted in the Bible as a man who knew the Hebrew Scriptures well and taught them to the people. Second, there is a Jewish tradition according to which Nehemiah collected books and founded a library. Obviously it is impossible to determine which books he collected, but the tradition suggests that Nehemiah and Ezra were interested in the religious books of the people of God. Third, there is another Jewish tradition that seems to have been affirmed also by some early church fathers, according to which prophecy ceased with Malachi, a contemporary of Nehemiah. The cessation of prophecy would be a way of suggesting that the canon of the OT was closed—nothing else could be added to it. Whether that was the case is impossible to establish beyond any doubt, but for Christians the fact that Jesus acknowledged the existence of a closed OT canon is of great significance and in fact becomes the historical center of the Christian canon.

HISTORY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT CANON

The canon of the Christian church is constituted by both the canon of the OT and the apostolic writings called the NT. This suggests that we should start by examining the OT canon of the Christian church. A good transition to this analysis is a discussion of the translation of the OT into Greek called the Septuagint (abbreviated as LXX).

The Old Testament Canon and the Septuagint

The Greek translation of the OT Scriptures is called "the Septuagint" because of a legend according to which the Ptolemaic king of Egypt Ptolemy II wanted a copy of the Hebrew

Scriptures for his Alexandrian library. He supposedly ordered seventy Jewish scholars to each translate the Pentateuch into Greek on the pain of death. As the legend maintains, after they had finished their independent work, the translation of each one of them miraculously and perfectly corresponded to that of all the others. The more likely situation is that the Septuagint was originally a Jewish project, which was produced from the third century B.C. onward and began with the translation of the Pentateuch. Whatever the case, the Septuagint became, during the first few centuries of the Christian era, the Christian Bible, and, in fact, Christians were also the first to call it the LXX.

As far as it can be ascertained, the Septuagint originally comprised the translation of the twenty-four books of the OT. The Gospels and the Epistles of the NT often use the Septuagint when quoting from the OT. Jewish writers distinguished the OT canonical books from other books written during the Second Temple period that were also highly regarded by the Jews. Christians usually referred to these books as the apocryphal or deuterocanonical books. The term *apocrypha* is of Greek origin and means "hidden things," probably used to indicate that such books lacked canonical status. When Christians made the Septuagint their Bible, the Jews stopped using it and produced other Greek translations of the OT (e.g., Theodotion, Aquila), but they finally returned to the Hebrew Bible.

The Apocrypha

Significant differences exist between the Hebrew canon and the canon preserved in the oldest codices of the Septuagint. The oldest codex containing the complete Greek Bible is the Codex Vaticanus (fourth century A.D.) and includes the apocryphal books of Tobit, Judith, Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus (Sirach), Baruch, and the Letter of Jeremiah, as well as additions to the books of Esther and Daniel (e.g., Susanna and Bel and the Dragon)—works written between 200 B.C. and A.D. 132 but absent from the Hebrew canon. The larger canon of the Septuagint should probably be understood in terms of confrontations and tensions between Judaism and the growth of the Christian church, already manifested in the NT. Although the Septuagint, as indicated, originated as a Jewish project, its rapid adoption and authority in the Christian community as an important tool for evangelizing the Roman world led to a definite rejection of it by the Jews early in the second century A.D. Therefore, it seems reasonable to argue that these monumental codices (that came into use only from the fourth century A.D. onward) exhibit influences prevalent in the early Christian church, which at that time struggled to define its identity against the background of rabbinic Judaism.

It must be noted that the early Christian church did not always accept the additional books as authoritative and canonical. Both Athanasius (ca. A.D. 296–373) and Jerome (ca. A.D. 345–420) mention the apocryphal books but clearly distinguish them from the OT canonical books. Jerome insisted on a return to the Hebrew canon and rejected the use of apocryphal books in doctrinal discussions. Neither the NT writers nor most patristic writers accepted the Apocrypha as authoritative and as belonging to the recognized OT canon. The larger canon of the Septuagint continued in use, but the discussion came to a climax

during the Protestant Reformation. Protestants acknowledged only the Hebrew canon as authoritative and rejected the apocryphal books. In a sense this led the Catholic Church to officially accept, during the Council of Trent (A.D. 1546), the larger canon of the Septuagint, now found in the Latin Vulgate and in the canon of the Orthodox churches. The Orthodox churches have added some other apocryphal books (e.g., 1–2 Esdras, 3 Maccabees, the Prayer of Manasseh, and Psalm 151).

The Old Testament Canon and Jesus and His Disciples

The Gospels provide clear evidence indicating that Jesus used the OT Hebrew canon and considered it authoritative. A few examples illustrate His respect for the OT. Jesus spoke about the importance of complying with OT regulations (e.g., Matt. 5:17–19), thus indicating the binding nature of the inspired and written Scripture. He referred to the OT commands, promises, and other stories in the context of the declaration "it is written" (e.g., Matt. 4:4, 7, 10; 11:10; Mark 7:6), which always appears as a conclusive argument in His discussions. However, there is no evidence that Jesus ever used the Apocrypha or that He assigned canonical status to it.

Some NT books may refer to apocryphal works, the best example being Jude 14–15, which contains a quote from 1 Enoch. The apostle found in this quote content that was compatible with the Scriptures (see Gen. 6–9; Deut. 33:2; Is. 15–16; Jer. 25:30–31; Dan. 7:10, 18, 23, 25). In other words, he found in the text a good expression or summary of what he intended to say and decided to use it. This by no means demonstrates an authorization of this work as canonical. In several instances Paul quotes Greek thinkers (e.g., Acts 17:29; Titus 1:12) without necessarily making them canonical or authoritative. In this sense, a possible reference or allusion to an apocryphal book may be made without canonizing it. The OT text is quoted or alluded to again and again in the NT to teach or support arguments, and it is considered to be divinely inspired.

This same attitude toward the binding authority of the OT is reflected in the apostolic church as well. The Bereans checked the OT Scriptures daily to verify Paul's teachings (Acts 17:11). Paul utilizes the strength of the OT in his arguments on vengeance being the sole prerogative of God (Rom. 12:19–20) and on the universality of sin (3:10–13). Peter argues for a lifestyle of holiness on the basis of the OT (1 Pet. 2:4–6). This sample of the evidence points to the OT as an authoritative, inspired body of texts. This same attitude toward the OT determined its canonicity for the Christian church. Unfortunately, and for reasons not totally clear, the church through a slow process came to accept the Apocrypha as canonical. It must be remembered that apocryphal books contain some theological concepts not supported by the Holy Scriptures. Among them we find praying for the dead (2 Maccabees 12:43–45); the preexistence of the human soul (Wisdom 9:15); martyrdom as a means of atonement (2 Maccabees 7:37–38; 4 Maccabees 17:21–22); human works as a contribution to salvation (Tobit 4:7–11); and the intercession of dead saints for living ones (2 Maccabees 15:13–14). The fact that for Christ, the apostles, and the early Christian church the Hebrew canon was recognized as part of Christian canon (cf. 2 Pet. 3:16) reveals the deep continuity between the church and the Israel of faith in the NT. They have in common a fundamental messianic message of salvation and hope.

The New Testament Canon and Jesus and the Apostles

The Christian canon includes not only the Hebrew OT but also the writings of the apostles. Here again the identification of the canon as a gift of God is evident. The origin of the content of the NT canon is located in the person, work, and teachings of Jesus Christ, in the unique revelation of God that He brought to the world. The OT Messiah, the Prophet like Moses, arrived (Deut. 18:18–19; Acts 3:19–26), and His teachings, rooted in the OT, brought light and life to the human race. This revelation is to be preserved and proclaimed to the world (Matt. 28:18–20). The revelation from God that Jesus shared with His disciples is absolutely authoritative; all the nations of the earth should learn about it and submit to it. He brought to them the gift of the word of God. Jesus is therefore the historical as well as the theological center of the biblical canon in that in Him the authority of the canon of the OT and its fullness are confirmed and in that He provided the authoritative content of the NT canon. There seems to be a Christological component in the formation of the biblical canon.

At the time of the great commission, the authoritative body of Jesus's teachings had not been written down. For many years it was passed on to others through the spoken word, although aspects of His teachings and ministry were probably soon written down (cf. Luke 1:1). The task of passing on this revelation to others was entrusted by Jesus to His disciples and, in order to make sure that they would preserve His teachings accurately, He promised them the presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit, who would teach them and bring to their memory Jesus's teachings (John 14:26). Empowered by the Spirit, the disciples witnessed for Jesus because they had been with Him from the beginning of His public ministry (15:27). The disciples were made responsible for the trustworthy proclamation and preservation of the content of the NT canon.

Soon the life and teachings of Jesus began to be written down as Scripture for future generations. This happened, as in the OT, in the context of a narrative that is part of the biblical metanarrative of the cosmic conflict. As the church was growing, there was the need to instruct members concerning the deeper content of the gospel and its implications for the lives of the believers in the specific cultural and social settings in which they found themselves. The content of the NT Epistles is clearly identified by the apostles as the word of Jesus, not simply of the apostles, and as trustworthy and authoritative for the life and convictions of all the followers of Christ. The apostolic writings were recognized as authoritative and as Scripture (see "Revelation and Inspiration of the Bible," p. 11). The Gospels preserve the teachings of Jesus that rejected nonbiblical traditions in order for the light from God to fully shine on His followers. His ministry, as narrated in the Gospels, revealed the immensity of His saving sacrifice and the love of God. His teachings and work were being preserved in a trustworthy way in written form.

The Christian audiences who first received the written documents recognized them as authoritative and useful for ordering their lives. They contained a revelation from Jesus Christ for them through the apostles; that is to say, those who had been with Him from the beginning and to whom He entrusted His revelation. The NT canon, whose content was determined by Jesus, was from its very beginning directly connected to the work of the apostles.

It is difficult to determine how widespread the use of the apostolic writings was within the church, but the apostolic teaching was well known. When confronted by heresies, Christian writers began to summarize the apostolic teachings in what they called the "rule [canon] of faith" and used it to expose the falsehood of the heretics, thus revealing the authority of the apostolic teachings in oral and written forms.

The New Testament Canon and the Early Church

If what we have described is to be taken into serious consideration in any discussion of the origin of the canon of the NT, then the writings of the apostles must have been recognized as part of the Christian canon, together with the OT, very early in the history of the church (cf. 2 Pet. 3:16). Scholars are divided on the date the NT canon was closed, some arguing for a late second century date and others for the fourth or fifth century. Evidence from the early church fathers suggests that by the close of the first and beginning of the second century A.D. there was a collection of written Christian documents that enjoyed authoritative status within the church. Irenaeus (ca. A.D. 130–200) speaks about the writings of the apostles as the Scriptures that contain the message of salvation. This suggests that apostolic writings were considered Scripture even before Irenaeus's days.

In a document called the Muratorian Fragment, usually dated around A.D. 180, there is what could be called a canonical list of the books of the NT that includes the four Gospels, Acts, the Pauline Epistles (thirteen), 2 Johannine Epistles, Jude, and Revelation; but Hebrews, James, 1–2 Peter, and one of the Johannine Epistles are not mentioned. While some books are absent, it is significant that at this early date virtually the entire NT was recognized as authoritative Scripture. Clement of Alexandria (ca. A.D. 150–215) included Hebrews among Paul's letters. It seems that Papias (ca. A.D. 60–130), bishop in Asia Minor, was acquainted with 1 John, 1 Peter, and Revelation. In 1 Clement, a nonapostolic Christian letter written ca. A.D. 96 by an unknown author, the author uses 1 Corinthians, Romans, and Hebrews and probably knew about Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Titus. The controversies with the Gnostics and their literature, such as the Gospel of Truth by Valentinus (ca. A.D. 135–140), illustrated the comprehensive use of the canonical writings in the Christian church and thus suggests that by that time the canon had already been standardized. The evidence summarized here suggests that at the beginning of the second century the Christian canon was practically in place and perhaps largely fixed. The earliest surviving list of all twenty-seven of the books within the NT canon dates to A.D. 367 in an Easter letter written by Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, Egypt.

It is true that during the fourth and fifth century A.D. it was debated in some circles whether Revelation and Hebrews should be part of the canon, but the reasons for this are not totally clear. Perhaps for some the Epistle to the Hebrews sounded very Jewish, and the book of Revelation may have been considered quite different from other NT writings. As indicated above, during the second century both books were acknowledged to be part of the authoritative writings of the apostles. It could be that the growth of the church was not accompanied by a wide circulation of these books and consequently their canonicity was not then obvious. Nevertheless, they were received as canonical books. Several synods and church councils dealt with the issue of the canon of the NT, but they did not determine the canonicity of the NT writings; instead, they ratified earlier practices. The result was the canon of the NT that we now possess.

Criteria for Canonicity

The information related to the historical origin of the canon does not provide an explicit list of the criteria used to identify the canonical books. As we look back at that history, we can identify some implicit elements that contributed and determined whether a book was to be acknowledged as canonical. As we have pointed out, in the OT the revelation and inspiration of a written document was what invested it with authority, and consequently the author had to be a prophet. This is exemplified by the conviction that with the cessation of prophecy among the Jews, no more books could be added to the canon. Perhaps another criterion was that the message of the prophet should not undermine the message God gave to previous prophets—the issue of continuity and consistency within the canon.

When we come to the NT, the basic criterion for canonicity was probably the apostolicity of the written documents. Apostolicity assured the church that the message of Jesus Christ, His teachings, was being communicated in a trustworthy way by those whom the Lord taught, and with whom He entrusted His saving message. Since the apostles received the Spirit to help them remember the teachings of Jesus and to guide them in the proclamation and exposition of the message, the written form of the revelation was considered by the church to be the word of God. The divine inspiration of the apostles was important. Apostolicity was also credited to the writings of those who were not apostles in the technical sense of the word but who had been traveling companions of the apostles and who, under their influence and probably supervision, wrote down their teachings. This includes, for instance, Luke and Mark, whose writings were considered to be apostolic and are part of the canon of the NT. Another criterion was the content of the apostolic message itself, as indicated by the fact that it was used to identify heresies and to exclude written documents that some may have claimed to be canonical. This helped establish the concept of orthodoxy in the sense that congruence and continuity with the apostolic teaching was indispensable. In this case, the criterion served to exclude spurious documents and therefore to set limits to the canon.

THE CHURCH AND THE CANON

The canon and the church should not be separated from each other, not so much because the canon needs the church but mainly because the church needs the canon in order to be what it should be. The debate on this particular topic has been whether the church is the mother of the canon or the canon the mother of the church. According to Catholic tradition, the church defined and established the canon of the Christian church—including the selection of canonical books and the moment when the canon became closed. Therefore, it is

claimed, the church has authority over the canon. One of the arguments used in this dispute is that it was the church that determined which books would be part of the canon of the OT for the Christian church by including in it a number of apocryphal books. In other words, the church had the authority to reject the Hebrew canon and create its own OT canon.

Behind this debate lies the question of the extent of the authority of the church or its limits. Unquestionably, the Lord entrusted authority to the church to perform the task He assigned it to do, but in our case the concern is whether the canon is outside the sphere of the authority of the church and, if so, how we should understand the authority of the canon. First, we should go back to Jesus, who both founded the church and gave to it the message it should proclaim. The church did not originate out of spontaneous generation but as the intended result of the work of the incarnated Creator. It was through the apostles that the risen Lord entrusted to the church the content of the biblical canon, thus indicating that the church is not the mother of the canon but a servant of it.

Second, although at first the content of the canon was preserved in oral form, it was protected from corruption by the gift of the Spirit, promised by Jesus to His disciples, until it was embodied by them in the documents and letters found in the NT. The question of the connection between canon and tradition should not cloud the priority of the canon over tradition. One of the most important functions of the written canon, if not the most important one, is to preserve the teachings of Christ and the apostles in a totally reliable and trustworthy form for the church. This was a nonrepeatable event in the life of the church and made it unnecessary to listen to an oral tradition that was not grounded in the teachings preserved now in their authoritative writings: the canon of the NT. The history of the church has made it abundantly obvious that the tradition of apostolic succession has not protected the Christian church from incorporating into its message teachings that reside outside the biblical canon. Tradition must submit to the authority of the canon.

Third, the validation of the church and its authority is not self-validation but comes to it from the outside—from the canon. The church finds in the canon its origin, its mission, its faith, and its way of life in a world that opposes it. These are all elements that display the nature of the canon as a gift from the Lord. Without the canon the church would be a faceless social phenomenon as disoriented as the world itself. One could rightly say that the church cannot define itself except through submission to the will of the Lord as preserved in the biblical canon. Therefore it is the canon that establishes the extent and the limits of the authority of the church and that functions as the rule that measures the church's faithfulness to the message of Jesus. The church did not define and establish the canon, but the canon continues to define and establish the church.

Fourth, the history of the canon indicates that the canon of the church, comprising the OT and the NT, was simply received by the church. Early in church history the received canon was identified as the Prophets (the OT), the Lord (the Gospels), and the Apostles (the Epistles; see 2 Pet. 3:2, 16). We also find a fourfold list: Law and Prophets (the OT), and

Gospels and Apostles (the NT). This body of holy and authoritative writings was received by the church as the canon. It is only late in the history of the church that we read about votes taken to define aspects of the biblical canon. The apostolic and early church had no need for such official decisions because they found in the apostolic teachings and writings the word of God, and they received the writings as holy and authoritative books to rule over their lives (e.g., 1 Thess. 2:13; 2 Pet. 3:15–16).

Finally, since the canon is the shaper of the church, the church should constantly make it the center of its concern and interest and the source for the formulation of doctrine, theology, and the Christian way of life. This means the believers must explore the totality of the canon in seeking to understand the will of the Lord for us individually and for the church. In this setting there is no room for the idea that there is a canon within the canon that is more authoritative than the collection of books of the canon itself. Some have argued that the true canon is Christ and that anything within the biblical books that testifies about Him should be considered truly canonical; hence the canon within the canon. In this approach the individual stands over the biblical canon using a critical tool to determine what is or is not canonical. The Scriptures have not entrusted such authority to any individual or group of individuals. To separate the Christ of the Scriptures from the Scriptures themselves in order to set limits to the authority of the canon is human hubris. The spiritual and missiological strengths of the church are directly correlated with the appropriation of the biblical message by those who have accepted the *Jesus/Christ of the Scriptures* as their Savior and Lord and who are being transformed by His grace. The biblical canon in its totality speaks to the church about its very foundation—Christ and the apostles (Eph. 2:20)—and about the willingness of the church to constantly listen to these holy writings during its pilgrimage on earth while waiting for the realization of the hope embraced by its members and sharing this hope with a world in crisis and despair.

BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

Humans by nature seek to understand the world around them, including their own actions and those of others. When we see or hear something, we begin the process of interpretation: "What was that sound?" "Did you see that?" We want to understand, to find meaning, and we engage others in the search for understanding. In some cases we know the meaning and we simply move on: "No, that was not a gunshot; there is a crew working on the road, and one of the tools they use emitted that sound." We use previous knowledge to interpret the phenomenon. Although often we can interpret many of our experiences rather easily, in some cases we do not have all of the information needed and usually seek help. For instance, when we want to understand who we are, where we come from, and where we are heading, we need help because relying only on our limited knowledge we cannot answer these questions. Christians believe that the answers for such questions are ultimately found in the Scriptures.

The Holy Scriptures, written by many authors over a long period of time in cultures different from ours, need to be interpreted to understand and appreciate the profound message. The task of interpreting the Bible is called *hermeneutics*, from the Greek word *hermeneuein*, used to refer to the interpretation of utterance and even to translation from one language to another. Among its many usages, the term *hermeneutics* now designates the rules and principles to be used in the interpretation of the Bible. These principles are provided by and grounded in the nature of the Bible.

APPROACHING THE HOLY SCRIPTURES

Christians are called to interpret a written text, the Holy Scriptures, originally written mostly in Hebrew in the OT and Greek in the NT. The original text written by the biblical authors is no longer available to us, but copies were made of their writings. Fortunately, we have many of those manuscripts. When the manuscripts were compared one with another, scholars occasionally detected some different readings, but none of them has a negative impact on any biblical teaching and doctrine. Knowing the biblical languages is helpful in the task of interpreting the Bible, but laypeople can gain a deep understanding of the Bible without learning Hebrew and Greek.

Most Bible translations are good enough to be used for serious Bible study, though some are better than others. There are three main types of Bible translations from which the interpreter can choose. The first type is called a *formal translation*. These translations seek to stay as close as possible to the original biblical text, providing an almost word-for-word rendering of the original, making them ideal for serious Bible study. Such translations tend to preserve ambiguities that might be present in the original text and at times include in the margins alternative translations of a word or a phrase that provide the reader with additional information for contextual analysis. Some of the most popular formal Bible translations include the New King James Version (NKJV), the English Standard Version (ESV), the New American Standard Bible (NASB), and the New English Translation (NET).

The second type of Bible translation is a *dynamic translation*. These are versions of the Bible where translators do not emphasize word-for-word equivalence but attempt to transfer from one language to another the thoughts and ideas found in the original text, working phrase by phrase. The result is a version of the Bible that is easy to read and elegant in expression. The main challenge with this type of Bible is that the translators must decide for the reader what the biblical writer is saying more broadly than do the translators of the formal translation. In other words, they provide in the translation an interpretation of the biblical text to a greater degree than those who translate word for word. The problem for Bible students using this type of translation is that they need to distinguish between what was in the original text and what is the translator's interpretation, something that is much easier to do in a formal translation. Examples of this kind of dynamic Bible translation include the New International Version (NIV), the New Living Translation (NLT), and the New Century Version (NCV).

The third type of Bible translation is a *paraphrase*. This refers to a much more free reflection of the general ideas in the original language than that of the dynamic translations. It takes the ideas of the original text and restates them as it attempts to explain or clarify their meaning, similar to a commentary. Some paraphrases work with the original text and some work off of already translated material. This type of translation can be valuable for personal devotional readings. A paraphrase could be useful in that it reveals possible meanings of the text that the interpreter needs to evaluate through her or his own reading of the Bible. This also applies to *dynamic* translations. Usually the introductory section of a Bible translation informs the reader about the nature and purpose of that translation. Some of the most popular paraphrase versions of the Bible include the New International Reader's Version (NIRV), the Contemporary English Version (CEV), and The Message (MSG).

Claims of the Bible

As we open and read the Holy Scriptures, we soon realize that it makes some claims about itself that set it apart from any other books. First, Scripture claims to be a revelation of God to the human race (2 Tim. 3:16). We are instructed that in it we can hear the voice of God speaking to human beings (see "Revelation and Inspiration of the Bible," p. 11). Second, it claims to reveal the origin of everything, including human life, through the creative power of God. Thus the Bible answers questions that humans by themselves are unable to answer. Humans were created for love and fellowship with God, which could be developed

throughout eternity. Third, Scripture teaches that humans chose to join the forces of evil in the cosmic conflict, breaking away from the Creator and bringing sin, suffering, and death into the world. Fourth, Scripture claims that God resolved the problem of the human race through the incarnation, ministry, death, resurrection, and Second Coming of His Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus is at the heart of Scripture, and every portion of it testifies in one way or another about Him.

Since the Bible originates with God, who is its ultimate Author, it makes two essential claims. First, *the Bible is authoritative*. This claim of ultimate authority is grounded in the fact that God is the Creator and the Redeemer and that in His omniscience He knows what is good for human beings and for the totality of His creation. Humans are challenged to decide how they will relate to the loving will of the Creator and Redeemer revealed in Scripture. Any attempt to remain indifferent to God's will is equivalent to a rejection of both the message of the Bible and God. Second, *the Bible is a unity*. Although the Bible is a collection of books written by different authors over a period of 1,500 years, and God is its ultimate Author, the unity of the Bible can be affirmed. It is His voice that speaks through each of its inspired authors. Thus, while the human aspect of the Bible can be seen in the different literary styles, vocabulary, and emotions of its individual authors, the divinity of the Bible is strikingly evident in its overall thematic harmony. The consistency of the divine mind speaking to us through the Bible does not allow for a message that is in conflict with itself, contradicting in one place what God states in another. In the Bible we find God's spoken word giving one message for the whole human race.

Since the Bible contains God's revealed will for humans, it is the ultimate source for the teachings of the church and the conduct of believers. In the Scriptures we read about God, His plan for us, and His invitation to live a life worth living in service to God and others. The Bible alone (Lat. *sola scriptura*) contains all we need to know for salvation and faith (2 Tim. 3:16–17).

Preparing to Study the Bible

As we open the Bible, a proper personal preparation is needed. First, we should acknowledge the need for divine guidance. The ultimate interpreter of the Bible is the Holy Spirit, to whom Jesus assigned the task of guiding us in understanding His message (John 16:13). This guidance is necessary because sin has damaged the human mind and filled it with self-sufficiency and pride (Jer. 17:9; 2 Tim. 3:2–3). Humans cannot by themselves gain a proper and full understanding of the Bible (cf. Eccl. 3:11; Is. 55:8–9). Spiritual things can be understood only through the Spirit (1 Cor. 2:11, 14). The meaning of the biblical text is not determined by the interpreters but is received by them under the influence and guidance of the spirit of the Lord.

Second, interpreters should be humble, honest, and willing to submit to the will of God as expressed in the Bible (Ps. 119:34). These qualities can be placed in the human heart only by the Spirit. Therefore, sincere Bible students have found in Jesus their only Savior and have surrendered their life to Him; they have experienced conversion. Third, in the heart of such persons there is a disposition to solicit, through prayer, the guidance of the Spirit as they open the Scriptures (Ps. 119:33). While in prayer, the human mind "touches" the divine mind, and the Spirit begins to enlighten and illuminate the human mind as it exposes itself to the word of God.

The spiritual preparation of the biblical interpreter does not mean that the meaning of the text will be accessed in a mystical and subjective experience with God or through intuitions. God expects students of His word to apply the mental abilities He has given to them in the study of the Bible. They need to employ proper methods of interpretation that may be used by others to verify whether the interpretation of the text given by someone is reliable and loyal to the intention of the biblical author. The principles of interpretation are drawn from the Bible itself. The divine Author has provided in His word the principles to be used to interpret it.

PRINCIPLES OF INTERPRETATION

That interpreters must follow certain principles of interpretation when studying the Bible does not mean that understanding it is a difficult task assigned only to a few. The content and meaning of the word of God are clear and accessible to any person who carefully and prayerfully reads it. Readers are encouraged to study the divine word for themselves (e.g., Deut. 30:11–14; Acts 17:10–11). The general meaning of the text is usually accessible by keeping in mind that the literal sense should predominate unless the context points to a figurative or symbolic meaning.

The Bible Interprets Itself

The very nature of the Bible requires from its readers the attitude of learners who are willing to open up their minds and hearts to the message of the Holy Scriptures. The axiom that the Bible interprets itself means, first, that readers will let the content of the Scriptures judge their personal ideas and convictions. For instance, if someone believes that everything we see today is the result of natural evolution, the biblical understanding of divine creation recorded in Genesis 1 will challenge that conviction, calling the interpreter to set aside his or her own personal views.

Second, the belief that the Bible interprets itself means that one portion of Scripture can and should be used to interpret another. This is based on the principle of the unity of the Bible, as discussed above. In order for this internal interpretation to occur, students of the Bible must become well acquainted with it by studying and reading it again and again. The more we read it, the easier it becomes to understand it and to appropriate its message. We are also able to perceive connections between one passage and another from a different section of the Bible, thus facilitating the interpretation of the first passage. For instance, when John writes of Jesus, the Word, becoming flesh in the incarnation and dwelling among us (John 1:14), it would immediately remind an attentive interpreter of Exodus 25:8, where God showed His willingness to dwell in a sanctuary among His people. Jesus is now God's dwelling "place" on earth because Jesus is the incarnated Son of God. The language used by John associates or connects His statement with what the Bible says in another place using similar language or concepts.

Third, in order to allow the Bible to interpret itself, we need to use clear texts to interpret difficult ones dealing with the same topic. One of the best examples to illustrate this principle is the gift of tongues discussed by Paul in 1 Corinthians 14. Establishing the nature of the gift in this chapter is a difficult task and different possibilities have been offered. Finding another passage in which the gift of tongues is discussed and its nature clearly stated would be helpful in the interpretation of the gift in 1 Corinthians 14. We find such a passage in Acts 2, the first manifestation of the gift of tongues. According to Acts 2, the gift of tongues consists of being enabled by the Spirit to speak in a foreign human language. The clear passage should be used to clarify the less clear one.

Fourth, the Bible interpreting itself means that we should study everything the Bible says on a particular topic in order to gain a truthful and reliable understanding of it. The best example of this practice is provided by Jesus Himself during His conversation with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus when He directed their minds to "all the Scriptures" that address everything about His life and mission (Luke 24:27). The unity of the Scriptures is presupposed in this type of study. In this particular case, that unity is grounded on the promise of the coming Messiah found throughout the OT.

Analysis of the Context

It is practically impossible to provide a correct interpretation of a biblical passage if its context is ignored. Taking into consideration the context is one of the most important principles in biblical interpretation; it provides the starting point for the task. The importance of the context cannot be overemphasized. There are different types of context that we should take into consideration as we attempt to comprehend the word of God.

First, there is the context of the words used in the text. Each word (a noun, a verb, a preposition, etc.) in the biblical text must be taken into consideration. Often words have different meanings and consequently the specific meaning is determined by the context within which it is used. The Greek term *parousia* may mean "coming," "arrival," or "presence," but the context will indicate which one of these meanings fits best. For instance, the *arrival* of Titus comforted Paul (2 Cor. 7:6), and the physical *presence* of Paul appeared to be weak (2 Cor. 2:10). The most important usage of this term is in reference to the *coming* of Christ in glory (e.g., 1 Cor. 15:32; 1 Thess. 4:15; 5:23). But it is also used to refer to the coming of the eschatological antichrist (2 Thess. 2:9). Only the context determines the specific meaning and usage of a word.

Second, each word is part of a sentence or a phrase, and its grammatical function can reveal its immediate significance. John says that "God is love" (1 John 4:8). In this phrase, something is being said about God, and consequently "love" functions as a predicate. Therefore, "love" is not being *equated* with "God." Thus, it would be incorrect to say that love is God because God would be identified merely as an abstract concept or quality.

Third, the interpreter should also explore the context of the sentence, namely, the section in which it is located. For instance, after one of Jesus's discussions with the Pharisees, Mark refers to Jesus's words in connection with the cleansing or purification of all foods (Mark 7:1–23). Is Mark declaring that the law of clean and unclean animals was abolished by Christ? To answer this question, we need to read the statement carefully and pay attention to the context. The discussion of food must be understood within the Jewish setting of the story—the participants in the story are Jews. Food in that context refers to the food Jews ate. Also, the sentence is part of a discussion about eating with unclean/unwashed hands that, according to the Pharisees, made the food God had given them to eat ritually unclean—and therefore forbidden to eat—a regulation that is not found in the OT. Thus the context shows that Jesus was rejecting the traditions of the Jewish elders regarding defilement (Mark 7:3). He was declaring that the otherwise clean food they claimed to be defiled by unwashed hands was still clean. He was not declaring to be clean those foods that the Levitical dietary laws had identified as unclean.

Fourth, it is important to examine the context of the section—that is, the whole book or Epistle. This specific step in the interpretation of the Bible requires students to read the entire book several times, taking notes, and outlining the development of the thoughts of the biblical writer. This is the moment when a study of the literary structure of the book can be useful. Identifying the literary structure of a block of material or even a book is time-consuming, as it requires paying careful attention to the use of similar terminology or synonyms and to the repetition of similar ideas within the passage or book. The primary point here is that very often the study of the entire book can help the reader to understand a section of it. For instance, any attempt to fully understand Hebrews 2:17 (or incorrect conclusions that might be drawn about the human nature of Christ) would require a careful study of the entire Epistle to the Hebrews.

Fifth, the ultimate context of a word or sentence is the totality of the Bible. There are cases that could require gaining a general biblical knowledge of a concept or practice before explaining a verse. The meaning of the term *nepesh* (sometimes translated as "soul") in Genesis 35:18 requires a clear understanding of the Hebrew term *nepesh*, translated here as "soul," as well as the biblical understanding of the nature of human beings. The Bible teaches that humans are an indivisible unity of life and body without an independent soul that goes on existing without a body (a Greek idea). Humans do not have a soul, but they are a soul in the sense that they are mortal, physical living beings (e.g., Gen. 2:7).

Sixth, it is good for the interpreter to know about the historical background of the biblical book that is being studied. This helps to understand veiled references to historical events found in the text. Often a biblical book (e.g., 1–2 Kin.; 1–2 Chr.) provides important historical information that frames the biblical narrative. In other cases a book provides a short historical statement to date the ministry of the prophet (e.g., Is. 1:1; Jer. 1:1–3; Hos. 1:1). Concerning the OT, it is good to have a general knowledge of the Egyptian, Assyrian, Babylonian, Medo-Persian, and Greek empires. In the NT some knowledge of the history of the Jews and the Greco-Roman world would be valuable. In this commentary, a historical background is provided in the introduction to each of the biblical books. A Bible dictionary is also a good reference source for such information.

Finally, an understanding of the religious and cultural backgrounds of the OT in its ANE setting and of the NT in its Greco-Roman world is also useful in the interpretation of the Bible. Since God chose to reveal Himself in human history, the more we can know about the world within which He acted is helpful. This does not mean, however, that we cannot understand the basic meaning of the text without such historical knowledge. Knowledge of the religious and cultural backgrounds of the ancient world simply allows us to appreciate the biblical account even more fully. In the final analysis, what determines the meaning of the Bible is the Bible itself.

STUDYING DIFFERENT GENRES OF BIBLICAL TEXTS

In the Bible we find different literary genres, and it is important to use hermeneutical principles that apply specifically to each one. Here we will mention some of them.

Historical Narrative

In the Scriptures we find a significant amount of narratives—stories told for the edification of the people of God. In many cases reading the stories is easy and enjoyable, but in others the narrative is more challenging. When analyzing a narrative, we should first pay particular attention to the plot of the story. Most stories have a beginning, a development, a climax, and a resolution of the plot. Keeping these elements in mind helps the interpreter to gain a deeper understanding of the narrative.

Second, it is helpful to look carefully for the purpose of the story. The biblical narrator is using the narrative to convey to the readers a particular message or ideology, and this is commonly done through comments made during the telling of the story. For instance, in Genesis 22:1 the narrator (Moses) introduces the narrative by mentioning God's testing of Abraham. This is something that the narrator knows and is sharing with the readers to help them understand the story but that, at this point in the narrative, Abraham does not know. The attentive reader will find here an element of suspense that in fact will run throughout this narrative.

Third, the Bible student will do well to pay particular attention to the characters involved in the plot of the narrative and their specific roles within the account. Some characters remain the same while others change as the story develops, providing clues to readers about the significance of the narrative for their own lives. Sometimes there is an interaction between the good person and the evil one, allowing us to witness a chapter in the cosmic conflict (e.g., Esth. 4–7; Dan. 6). We should keep in mind that sometimes the inspired authors are "omniscient" in the sense that God reveals to them the deepest thoughts and secrets of the characters to help the readers understand the attributes of one of the protagonists.

For instance, in the story of Elisha and his servant Gehazi, the narrator shares the inner dialogue of the servant with himself (2 Kin. 5:20), revealing to us important aspects of the character of Gehazi.

Fourth, in reading the narrative, keep in mind that the narrator is in fact sharing with us the divine perspective with respect to the narrative, its plot, and its characters. The story may be used by the Lord to tell the readers, among many other things, something about true worship, ethical values, correct leadership, or the damaging effects of wickedness. In the process, the narrative is speaking to us by helping us decide whose character reflects ours and what changes, if any, need to be made in our lives.

Parables

Another type of literature that occurs in the Bible is the parable. In a parable a known reality is compared to a lesser-known one in order to share or gain new knowledge and understanding. For instance, Jesus compared the "kingdom of heaven" (something less known to His hearers) with a hidden treasure in a field (something more familiar to them; Matt. 13:44). The task of the interpreter is, first, to look for the purpose of the parable. In general, it could be said that the purpose of a particular parable is to move the listeners or the readers to make decisions for the Lord and to take a stand for what is right. The interpreter should read the parable carefully in order to ascertain the specific divine intention embedded in it. The parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man, based on a well-known story in the time of Jesus (Luke 16:19–31), is used by some to support the belief in the immortality of the soul. The purpose of the parable, however, is to teach that it is in this life that we prepare for life in the kingdom of God; there is not a second chance (Luke 16:29–31). Its purpose is not to teach that the wicked go to Hades and the righteous to heaven.

Second, since parables are usually based on the experience of the original listeners, it is helpful if interpreters are acquainted with what life was like in biblical times. Bible dictionaries are a good source of such information, although a close reading of the parable is in most cases enough to understand it. Third, it is important to remember that not every detail in a parable conveys a particular meaning. We need to read the parable carefully to discern what is meaningful and what is not in order to avoid speculating or reading too much into the use of words, characters, and images. In the parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins, for example, sellers of oil are mentioned to increase suspense in the parable; it is unnecessary to find a particular figurative meaning for their role (Matt. 25:9).

Types

Sometimes the Bible infuses historical events, institutions, and persons with a future significance that goes beyond their immediate expression or manifestation. These are called *types*, and the fulfillments are *antitypes*. God designed a type to prefigure an eschatological antitypical fulfillment in the ministry and work of Christ. As we will see, the antitype is more encompassing and glorious than the type. In this case, the first question that the interpreter

confronts is identifying a type. Here the best rule, based on the principle that the Bible interprets itself, is to allow the Bible to identify the type. The NT writers identify historical events, institutions, and persons that prefigured the work of Christ. If we carefully study the Scriptures, we can find these types. For example, the Exodus from Egypt, a historical event, is identified as a type of the new exodus through Christ (Matt. 2:14–15; 1 Cor. 10:1–5, 11). In the book of Hebrews, the Israelite sanctuary is seen as a type of the heavenly sanctuary (Heb. 8:5; 9:11); the priesthood of the OT, a religious institution, is a type of the priesthood of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary (Heb. 8:1); the sacrificial system was a type of the sacrifice of Christ (Heb. 10:1–4; see also John 1:29). In Romans, Paul identifies Adam (the first human) as a type of Christ, who was the second Adam (Rom. 5:14).

Second, the study of the type and its antitype should reveal a similarity of meaning between the two. For instance, the priests in the OT ministered on behalf of the people, representing God before them and them before God. The antitypical fulfillment in Christ reveals that He is the exclusive mediator between the people and God and between God and the people (Heb. 4:14–16). The foundation of Christ's superiority is located, among others, in the fact that He is divine and human (Heb. 2:14–18). The earthly sanctuary is a type of the real and yet superior heavenly sanctuary (Heb. 9:11–12, 24). In other words, the type cannot stand for something that is absolutely different from it; there is always a connection between type and antitype.

Third, the fulfillment of some types does not necessarily exhaust the meaning of the type, for it may still point to another antitypical fulfillment identified by the Bible itself. The Exodus from Egypt was a type of the redemptive power of the cross of Christ, but it also points to the moment of the Second Coming of Christ when God's people leave this world of sin to be forever with the Lord (Luke 2:15–16; Rev. 15:1–3). The type-antitype correspondence found in the Bible illustrates and confirms the consistency of the divine plan to save humans through divine grace.

For the interpretation of prophecy, apocalyptic prophecy, wisdom literature, poetic literature, and the Gospels and the Epistles, see the corresponding introductory articles in this commentary.

METHODS FOR THE STUDY OF THE SCRIPTURES

In order to take as much advantage as possible in the study of the Bible, we should select a particular way of reading it with some specific goals in mind. There are several ways of doing this.

Book by Book

The first step is to select a particular book for study. At first it may be better to select a short biblical book because a long one, like Isaiah, will take a long time to analyze and could easily discourage the reader. Second, the student should read the book several times, listening to its content, taking notes of passages, and writing down ideas that seem important. It could be that all we want is to get well acquainted with the content and overall message of the book, and such a reading will accomplish that purpose. We may find that some books have a single overriding theme and others have a cluster of theological topics that enrich our spiritual life and mind. Third, it is better to have a specific purpose for the study of a book. For instance, we may study the book of Psalms to find out what it teaches about the sanctuary and its services. We then need to read it to identify and set apart the passages in which the sanctuary, the sacrifices, the priests, and the festivals are mentioned, with the intention of spending more time with such passages. In the book of Proverbs, one could read it pulling together all the passages dealing with the wise or the fool, work, the use of words, or other topics.

Section by Section

If studying a single book requires too much time, then it is better to select a smaller portion of the Bible to study and reflect on. This could be a short narrative, a parable, a section from the NT Epistles or the Gospels, a psalm, or a passage from the prophetic books. The reader would then apply the steps of biblical interpretation discussed above to unpack the divine message found in the text and to apply it to his or her spiritual life. In selecting a portion of the Scriptures for study, we must ensure that we are taking a group of passages that can stand by themselves as a unity. We must then read the context of the passage to establish its extent or simply use the natural divisions of the text as indicated in the versions of the Bible we are studying.

Topical Study

The topical study of the Bible is also very rewarding and will enlarge one's understanding of the biblical text. We have already mentioned thematic studies on specific biblical books. Here the emphasis is on topical studies based in the whole Bible. The purpose is to bring together everything the Bible teaches on a particular subject. This is a good Bible study project that could last for several years. Among the many possible subjects, one could choose God's mercy, divine promises, redemption, salvation, the Messiah, the law, animal life, natural phenomena, family relations, the Sabbath, and the Second Coming. The list of topics can be extensive. When approaching the topic, one has to decide whether to follow the canonical order of the Bible—from Genesis to Revelation—or to start with blocks of books—for example the prophetic books, the Pentateuch, or the Gospels. In any case, it would be better to study the topic first in each specific book of the Bible and then to integrate the findings into a summary.

A useful topical study could consist in exploring what the Bible teaches on the doctrines of the church, taking each doctrine as a topic by itself. In this case, as well as in the study of words, the use of a concordance is significantly useful. A concordance lists all the biblical passages in which a particular subject is mentioned, thus saving the Bible student considerable time. Each passage must be studied within its own context before bringing different passages together. Topical studies reveal the unity of the Bible and the intention of the divine mind for us. The real purpose of these studies is to strengthen our relationship with the Lord and not to satisfy human curiosity. The results of our study should make us humble as we serve others.

We have identified some of the key elements of faithful Bible study. Finally, it is always good to seek the opinion of others who know the Scriptures and to listen to what they may have to say about our interpretation of particular passages. The interpretation of the Bible ultimately is a collective work in which the Spirit is always present in the body of believers. Realizing that the content of the Bible is deeper than any individual can fully comprehend, we should depend on God in a spirit of true humility.

INTERPRETING BIBLICAL APOCALYPTIC PROPHECIES

The term *apocalyptic* comes from the Greek *apokalypsis*, meaning "revelation," "disclosure," "unveiling." It is used in the Greek title of the book of Revelation—*Apokalypsis Ioannou* ("The Apocalypse/Revelation of John"). The term is employed to designate the books of Daniel and Revelation and some Jewish books that are not part of the biblical canon (e.g., Ethiopic Enoch, 4 Ezra, 2–3 Baruch, Apocalypse of Abraham). The term *apocalyptic* is usually employed to refer to a type of literature as well as to a worldview. We will examine both usages and the nature and role of the year-day principle in the interpretation of apocalyptic books of Daniel and Revelation.

NATURE OF APOCALYPTIC PROPHECY

It is not difficult to distinguish biblical narratives, poetic books, the Gospels, and even prophetic books from biblical apocalyptic literature.

First, this type of literature consists of messages from God communicated to the prophet through an angelic mediator, in most cases using visions and/or dreams and incorporating highly complex symbols (e.g., animals, composite beasts, elements from the natural world, time periods).

Second, the content of the prophecy covers the time from the days of the prophet to the very end of history, usually culminating with the kingdom of God, thus providing a brief summary of human history from the divine perspective.

Third, it is common to find in the apocalyptic prophecy long prophetic time periods (e.g., 1,260 days; 42 months; 2,300 days).

Fourth, the prophecies are given in visionary or discourse cycles (e.g., four kingdoms [Dan. 2, 7]; three kingdoms and a little horn [Dan. 8]; seven seals [Rev. 6]; seven trumpets [Rev. 8–9]), recapitulating the content of the previous cycle and enlarging its content with new insights from a new perspective. The parallelism of the content of the cycles is helpful in their interpretation.

Fifth, apocalyptic prophecy reveals God's plans for humanity and consequently is not conditional. In general, biblical prophets functioned within God's covenant with Israel, and their prophecies of judgment or salvation were directly related to the faithfulness or disobedience of the people to the covenant law. The prophecies of judgment would not be fulfilled if the people returned to God as the covenant Lord. Apocalyptic prophecy is based on God's foreknowledge and sovereignty and manifests His unchangeable plan for the resolution of the sin problem.

Sixth, although in nonbiblical apocalypses pseudonyms are used for the authors of the books, in the Bible the prophets who received the revelation are clearly identified—Daniel and John.

WORLDVIEW OF APOCALYPTIC PROPHECY

Apocalyptic prophecy offers to its readers a very specific worldview based on a theological perspective of cosmic proportions. It is a way of interpreting the human predicament and the divine plan to resolve it. We will briefly review some of the most important aspects of apocalyptic thought.

First, it assumes that there is a cosmic struggle between God and evil powers and that this conflict is now taking place in the arena of human history and existence (cf. Dan. 5:18–21; 10:13–14; 12:1–3; Rev. 12:2–4, 10–12). Every person is involved in the conflict and must make a decision concerning allegiance: Who is the true object of worship (cf. Rev. 13:8; 14:7)? In their struggle against God, evil powers misrepresent Him, oppress humans—in particular God's people—and will plan a final attack against God's kingdom.

Second, the resolution of the cosmic conflict includes a final intervention of God in human affairs that will end the corrupted social, political, and religious structures of this world (cf. Dan. 12:1; Rev. 6:12–17). This final manifestation of the power of God will address the very root of the problem, the very source of evil and oppression in the world—Satan and his evil angels—bringing them to an end. God's people are warned against the deceptive power of demons and the miracles they will perform aimed at deceiving God's people and the whole world (cf. Rev. 13:13–14; 17:13–14).

Third, the topic of the final judgment plays a significant role in apocalyptic prophecies (cf. Dan. 7:9–10, 26–27; Rev. 14:7; 20:11–15). The resolution of the problem of evil will not be the result of evil simply destroying itself. Neither will it be an arbitrary, vindictive action on God's part. Rather, it will be the result of a cosmic judgment. In the resolution of the problem, God's justice and love will prevail. In that judgment, objective evidence will be presented and analyzed that will demonstrate beyond any doubt that it is right to remove from the universe the disturbing and menacing presence of evil powers.

Fourth, in apocalyptic prophecies the presence of a mediator before God, in His heavenly dwelling, plays a key role in the deliverance of the saints and the restoration of cosmic harmony. This mediator Figure, the Messiah/Christ, ministers on behalf of God's people during the final judgment and condemns all evil powers to eternal extinction. Consequently, the heavenly sanctuary and the throne of God, as the center of divine government in the universe, are constantly in view (e.g., Dan. 8:10–14; Rev. 8:2–5; 11:19; 13:6; 15:8; 16:1; 21:3). It is there that the final resolution of the cosmic controversy will be determined on the basis of the experience of the sacrificial sufferings of the Messiah as the Lamb of God (cf. Dan. 9:26; Rev. 5:6, 9–10).

Fifth, apocalyptic thought operates within a particular understanding of history, according to which history is moving toward a specific goal preestablished by God (cf. Dan. 2:20–21; Rev. 4:1; 17:17; 21:1). The divine plan develops within the flow of time, and this is indicated by the use of prophetic time periods and the symbolic description of the events that will take place within those periods. This segmentation of history encourages the people of God in that they are able to locate themselves within the flow of history from the perspective of apocalyptic expectation. They are also able to observe God's constant activity within history as the different signs of His coming are manifested. The particular view of history found in apocalyptic thought emphasizes a strong view of divine sovereignty. There is nothing human beings or evil powers can do to alter God's plan for His people or His determination to extinguish evil and evil powers from His universe. Because of this important element, apocalyptic prophecies are not conditional. The coming of the Messiah at the end of the seventy weeks happened as God intended it to happen; the kingdoms of Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Greece have fallen; the fourth kingdom was divided, and so forth. God in His sovereignty expressed His will toward the kingdoms of this world, and that cannot be altered or defeated by any of His creatures. In God's foreknowledge He has predicted the development of historical events and determined in advance the final destiny of history and of those who will join the Lord or the forces of evil. The call to repentance found in biblical apocalyptic literature indicates that everyone must decide by himself or herself which of the two destinies, determined by God, he or she will choose.

Finally, apocalyptic thought projects itself into the distant future and depicts for us the final restoration of cosmic harmony (cf. Dan. 2:44; 7:26–27; Rev. 21). The peace and perfect harmony instituted by God in our world during Creation week are fully restored. In Christian apocalyptic literature this is initiated by the return in glory of the Messiah to consummate the salvation He obtained for all at the cross. At that time His people will be liberated from the presence and power of sin in their own existence and a new environment will be provided for them where they will be freed from the presence of evil.

Although apocalyptic thought contains pessimistic elements, it is fundamentally positive in its outlook. It is characterized by hope. If there is any pessimism, it is related to the inescapable judgment against social, political, and apostate religious institutions. They are described as instruments of oppression employed by evil powers to persecute the people of God. The condition of these institutions and of those who support them is such that they are all totally corrupted. God can only exterminate them. But such extermination has the purpose of creating a new world free from the oppressing presence of evil powers, in which God's people will be able to achieve their most cherished dreams in the company of loved ones, their Redeemer, and their God. Apocalyptic thought is, therefore, optimistic and hopeful, and points to a future of joy and glory rather than sadness and darkness.

HISTORICISM

In the interpretation of Daniel and Revelation scholars have used various methods. Today the prevailing methods are *futurism* and *preterism* (see Daniel: Introduction). Preterists generally date Daniel to the second century B.C. and consider the content of the book to be historical accounts given in the guise of prophecy (the technical phrase is *vaticinia ex eventu* or "prophecies [given] after the event"). In other words, an anonymous writer in the second century B.C. relates the historical events that occurred from the sixth century to the second century as though his writings are predictions made in the sixth century by a prophet called Daniel. Similarly, they teach that the book of Revelation is not about the future of the church but about events that had already taken place in the church's experience during the first century A.D. Futurists generally date Daniel to the sixth century B.C. but do not interpret the antichrist as the papacy. They apply it to a personal antichrist who will appear after the rapture of the church for a period of three and a half years before the Second Coming of Christ. They believe that from Revelation 4:1 onward the prophecies of the book are about the future to be fulfilled after the rapture of the church during seven years prior to the Second Coming. Both of these methods, with some variances, were formulated by Catholic interpreters to oppose the Reformers' understanding of the apocalyptic prophecies as anticipating the rise of apostate Christianity during the Middle Ages.

Adventists use the *historicist* approach because they are persuaded that this is the methodology that the biblical text itself provides for us. Historicists believe that Daniel, as the book itself demonstrates, was written in the sixth century B.C. by the prophet Daniel. They also believe that God has full knowledge of the future and that He can reveal to His prophets events that will take place in the distant future. This is clearly found in Daniel, who received from God a sketch of major historical events that will take place from the time of the prophet to the time when God's kingdom will be established on earth.

Witness of Daniel

When we examine the book of Daniel, it is obvious that the book is to be interpreted along the lines of historicism. In Daniel 2, neither the king nor Daniel knew how to interpret the dream. It is through a divine revelation that Daniel gains a full understanding of it. He indicates to the king that the dream is about what God will do in the time of the end (Dan. 2:28). The different parts of the image are interpreted as representing kingdoms, beginning with the kingdom of Babylon, represented by its king (v. 38). There will be four kingdoms and then at the latter days God will establish His everlasting kingdom (v. 44). Three of the four kingdoms will be identified by the angel interpreter as Babylon, Medo-Persia (cf. 5:30–31; 8:20), and Greece (8:21), and Jesus will indicate that the fourth is Rome (see Matt. 24:15–16; cf. Luke 21:20).

In Daniel 7 we have the same sequence of four kingdoms, represented by four beasts (v. 17), and the establishment of the kingdom of God (v. 18), but new information is added relating to the ten horns of the fourth beast and its little horn. The angel clarifies that the fourth kingdom (Rome) will be divided and then the little horn (the historical antichrist) will arise. The approach to the interpretation of the prophecy that we found in Daniel 2 is also the approach used by the angel interpreter to clarify the vision in Daniel 7. Again, this is the case in Daniel 8 where the ram and the goat represent Medo-Persia and Greece, respectively, and the little horn stands primarily for what happened after the division of the Roman Empire. In other words, we are dealing with prophecies that cover a significant amount of history and that will require long periods of time for their fulfillment.

Witness of Jesus and Paul

In Matthew 24 Jesus announces what will take place from the time of the destruction of Jerusalem to the moment of His Second Coming, following the pattern of apocalyptic prophecies found in Daniel. He specifically refers to the prophecy of Daniel 9, the destruction of the city announced by the prophet, and places it in the future (Dan. 9:15–16), connecting it to the Romans. The same approach is used by Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2:1–10 when discussing the coming of the antichrist predicted by Daniel. According to Paul, a number of historical events will take place before the coming of Christ, and he concentrates on the figure of the antichrist. For him, aspects of the prophecy of Daniel have not yet been fulfilled, but they will be fulfilled in the future before the Second Coming of Christ.

Witness of John

John uses the same approach found in Daniel. The best example is Revelation 12, where we can identify a sequence of events from the first century to the final attack against the remnant. The vision begins with the coming of the Messiah as a child, includes the attempt of the dragon to destroy Him (Rev. 12:4), His ascension to heaven (v. 5), and His ultimate sovereignty over the nations (v. 5). The experience of the dragon begins with his rebellion in heaven (vv. 7–8) and moves to the earth where he enters into conflict with the Messiah. This is followed by his attack against the church for 1,260 days and concludes with his final attack against the remnant (v. 17). The people of God are represented by a woman expecting the birth of the Messiah and who, after the ascension of the Messiah, becomes the object of attack of the dragon. At the time of the end, the dragon prepares to oppose God's remnant. The progression is clear: the arrival of the Messiah is followed by the historical period of the Christian church; the dragon persecutes the Christian church but is unable to destroy it; and at the time of the end there is an eschatological remnant threatened by the dragon (Rev. 12:17; 13:14–15), who will be defeated again at the return of Christ (cf. Rev. 17:14). The prophecy moves from the time of Jesus to the moment of the Second Coming, covering a long period of history that outlines the experience of the church within the cosmic conflict.

Witness of the Early Church and the Reformation

The historicist method was used by some of the early church fathers to interpret the prophecies of Daniel. Some of them identified the fourth beast as Rome, the ten horns as the division of the empire, and the little horn as the future antichrist. The approach was used by the early church fathers up to the fifth century A.D., at which time a significant shift in prophetic interpretation took place when Augustine spiritualized the millennium, making it a symbol of the Christian era (amillennialism). It was the Reformers who restored historicism as the method to be used in the interpretation of Daniel and Revelation and identified the papacy as a manifestation of the antichrist predicted in these books.

As already indicated, it was the Counter-Reformation that developed a new system of prophetic interpretation that came to be known as preterism. This method was developed by a Spanish Jesuit named Luis de Alcazar (died A.D. 1613). Preterism was later adopted by some Protestants and became the prevailing method of apocalyptic prophetic interpretation among critical scholars. Futurism, also of Catholic origin, is used by most dispensationalists.

Limitations of Historicism

Probably the main challenge historicists confront is identifying the historical events represented in the apocalyptic prophecies. In Daniel we find historical applications as part of the revelatory experience. The angel interpreter tells the prophet that four kingdoms will rise on earth and the fifth one will be the kingdom of God. As we indicated, three of those are identified in Daniel (Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece) and the fourth by Jesus. As long as we follow the biblical text, we are on safe ground. But we still have other symbols not interpreted by the angel, such as the ten horns, the little horn, the beast from the sea, the beast from the earth, and Babylon (Rev. 13). How are we to identify the prophetic fulfillment of these symbols? Herein lies the challenge.

We can speak with certainty only in terms of the broad outline of the history depicted in those prophecies. Which controls should we use to identify that broad outline? We have to move from what is clearly revealed in the prophecies themselves to what is left historically undefined. It is useful, first, to pay particular attention to the chronology of events described in the prophecy itself. Second, it is also necessary to examine historical events, taking into consideration the prophetic line of thought and its historical perspective.

In Daniel 7 we find the most important outline of apocalyptic prophecy in both Daniel and Revelation. The prophetic backbone found there, together with the explanations given by the angel interpreter, provide the indispensable historical outline or skeleton to be used in fitting other apocalyptic prophecies and their fulfillment within history. The angel interpreter explains to Daniel that there will be four important kingdoms: Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and a fourth one. This fourth one will be divided into many smaller kingdoms, but a particular horn (kingdom) will establish itself as the most influential one. This little horn is a political and also a religious power that opposes God and His people. It will exercise its power for 1,260 days, and at the end of that period the heavenly court will sit to judge (i.e., vindicate) God's people and to bring the power of the little horn to an end. After that, the kingdom of God will be established on earth.

YEAR-DAY PRINCIPLE

One of the interesting and even enigmatic characteristics of apocalyptic prophecies is the inclusion of long periods of time within the prophecies themselves. We read about time, times, and half a time (Dan. 7:25; 12:7; Rev. 12:14); 1,260 days (Rev. 11:3; 12:6); 42 months (Rev. 11:2; 13:5); 2,300 evenings/mornings or days (Dan. 8:14); 1,290 days (Dan. 12:11); and 1,335 days (Dan. 12:12). Historicist interpreters, utilizing the year-day principle, have taken these time periods to be symbolic for years. The Bible provides enough evidence to support the use of this principle.

Day Stands for Year

It is a common practice in poetic literature to use the term *day* in parallel with the word *year*, making these terms synonymous (Job 36:11; Pss. 77:11; 78:33; 90:15). In these verses *days* and *years* refer to the same general time period. But there are cases in which the Hebrew has the specific number of years of a person also designated as days (Gen. 5:5; see also vv. 8, 11, 14, 17, 20, 27, 31). In the case of Genesis 5:5, the days stand for 930 years.

Day-Year in an Early Prophecy

Interestingly, we find a correlation of days and years in the first-time prophecy recorded in the Bible (Gen. 6:3). No specific number of days is explicitly given, but instead we are told the specific number of years that the use of the term *days* intended to communicate. Days stand for the number of years granted by God to the antediluvians as probationary time. We can easily detect here the foundation of what later will become the year-day principle in apocalyptic prophecies. This last usage, together with the previous one, indicates that it was natural for the Hebrews to use the two terms interchangeably in their daily speech.

Cases of Year-Day Principle

There are some cases outside apocalyptic prophecies where we can see days being clearly and intentionally used to designate years. The first case is found in the law of the sabbatical year (Lev. 25:1–7). During the seventh year the land will rest, that is to say it will enjoy a Sabbath rest. The law is modeled after the regular week with its literal seventh-day Sabbath rest, but the sabbatical rest does not stand for a literal day but for a full year (Lev. 25:4–5). Both the weekly Sabbath and the sabbatical year were referred to by the same terms (Lev. 23:3; 25:4-5). The clear implication of the sabbatical legislation is that a day can represent a year.

Even closer to the point is Leviticus 25:8, concerning the day of Jubilee. Each day of the week is equated to a year, including the Sabbath, which stands for the seventh year. The Jubilee is calculated using the principle that a day stands for a year resulting in a period of seven years that are to be counted seven times bringing the total to forty-nine years. In order to arrive at the date for the Jubilee, the seven days of a week are to be interpreted as years (see Dan. 9:24–27). A future event is to be dated using the year-day principle.

Another passage in which the year-day principle is present is Numbers 14:34. This is a prophecy of judgment against rebellious Israelites. The forty days the spies spent exploring the land are used to determine the number of years the people will have to bear their sins. The same terminology is used in Ezekiel 4:4–6, when the Lord commands the prophet to lie on his two sides for a total of 430 days. The days are then identified as the years of grace the Lord granted the people before the destruction of the city and the experience of the Exile. The language used is very clear: "a day for each year." Although these cases are not found in apocalyptic prophecies, they provide the biblical background needed to justify identifying the use of the year-day principle in apocalyptic prophecies.

Symbolism of Apocalyptic Prophecies

The symbolism of the prophetic time periods is contextually supported by the abundant presence of apocalyptic symbols. For instance, human kingdoms are represented by metals (Dan. 2:31–33), animals (Dan. 7:3–7; 8:3–7; Rev. 13:1, 11), or horns (Dan. 7:8; 8:8–9; Rev. 17:12). The people of God are depicted as a pure woman (Rev. 12:1), while the false people of God are represented by the symbol of a prostitute (Rev. 17:4). Jesus is the Lamb (Rev. 6:1; cf. 5:5), and Satan is a dragon (Rev. 12:9). There is no question that apocalyptic prophecy is by definition rich in the use of symbols. Even the use of smaller numbers is usually interpreted as representing something other than literal numbers. For instance, seven is the number of completion or perfection; four stands for the universal; ten expresses completeness; and twelve is taken to represent the diversity of the people of God. It is within the context of the use of symbols that large prophetic time periods are introduced and discussed.

Even the language used to refer to prophetic time periods suggests a symbolic usage of the periods. For instance, the phrase "a time, [and] times, and half a time" (Dan. 7:25) cannot be taken as designating a literal three and a half years because the natural biblical way of expressing that literal time period is three years and six months (Luke 4:25; James 5:17; cf. 2 Sam. 2:11; Acts 8:11). Particularly interesting is that in apocalyptic prophecies days, weeks, and months are mentioned but not years. Symbolically the day stands for the year. Within the specific symbolic context of the time periods, it is hermeneutically sound, even required, to interpret the large time periods as symbolic. It is also hermeneutically sound to use the year-day principle to interpret the large numbers because it is, as we have demonstrated, a principle provided by the Bible itself.

Self-Authentication of the Year-Day Principle

The application of the year-day principle to apocalyptic prophecies is not a decision arbitrarily made by the interpreter, but one that flows from and is authenticated by the prophecy itself. For instance, as we have indicated, the apocalyptic discussion of four kingdoms leading to the kingdom of God covers the time from the days of the prophet to the end of sinful human history at the Second Coming of Christ. The time period of 1,260 days that covers the history of the little horn, representing apostate Christianity during the Middle Ages and the struggles of the dragon against God's people during that same time (Dan 7:25; Rev. 12:6), could not designate literal days but years (A.D. 538–1798), as the history of the Christian church shows.

The self-authentication of the year-day principle is most clearly manifested in the apocalyptic prophecy of Daniel 8 (see commentary on Dan. 8:1–27). Daniel received a vision (Dan. 8:1; Heb. *khazon*) from the Lord that covered the time period from the Persian Empire to the time of Papal Rome. The question is asked, "How long will the vision [*khazon*] be?"—that is to say, how long will it take for the whole vision to be fulfilled. Daniel is told that it will take 2,300 evenings and mornings and then the sanctuary would be *nitsdaq* (lit. "justified," variously translated as "cleansed" [LXX], "restored," or "reconsecrated"; Dan.

8:14). A literal reading of the time period would not cover such a long historical period and, therefore, would not be a correct answer to the question asked in the text. The prophecy itself indicates that the year-day principle is operative and that it is required of the interpreter to use the principle in order to correctly understand it.

The self-authentication of the year-day principle is also found in Daniel 9:24–27 (see commentary on Dan. 9:24–27). The interpreter angel tells Daniel that from the going out of the decree (lit. "word") to restore and rebuild Jerusalem (in 457 B.C.) until the coming of the Messiah ("the Anointed"), the Prince Ruler (A.D. 27), there would be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks, plus another week during which the Messiah will die (A.D. 31), for a total of seventy weeks (ending in A.D. 34). It is obvious that the prophecy is using the year-day principle because it requires for its fulfillment a span of hundreds of years. Some translate the Hebrew word for week (*shabua'*) as "sevens (of years)" and interpret it to refer to literal time (seven years in each week), thus practically excluding the use of the year-day principle. The weakness in this approach is that this word *shabua'* never means "seven"; it means "week." Besides, the prophetic period in Daniel is based on the sabbatical year and the Jubilee, according to which each day of the week represents a year. Therefore, the seventy weeks stand for a period of 490 days/years.

What we have seen in our discussion is that the year-day principle is solidly based on the Scriptures and that the Lord employed it in the revelations He gave to Daniel. The long historical span covered by the visions demonstrates that the principle was operative in them, thus self-authenticating its presence in the visions.

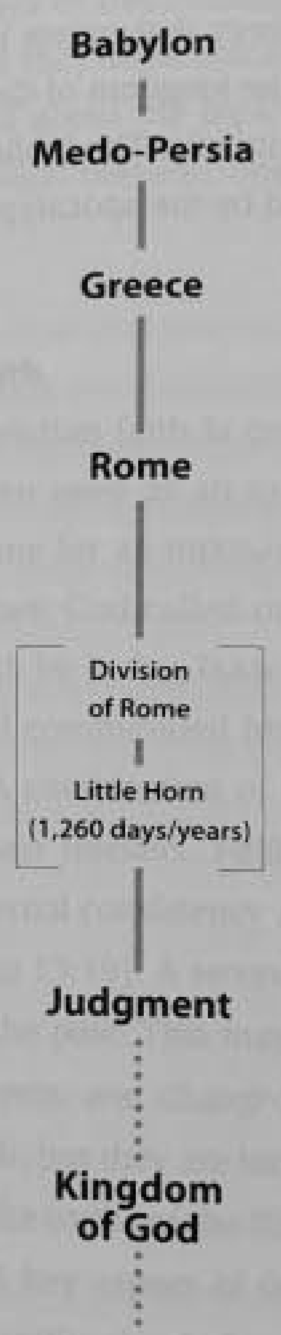
Year-Day Principle in History

As far as we can tell, apart from the Bible itself, the earliest evidence for the year-day principle can be found in the *Book of Jubilees*, a Jewish work from the intertestamental period, dated to the second century B.C. It uses the word *week* to refer to seven years. Each period of seven years is referred to as a week of years or simply as a week. The seventh of such "weeks of years" (i.e., the forty-ninth year) is designated as a Jubilee year.

A number of other Jewish sources also interpret the expression *seventy weeks* in Daniel 9:24 to mean 490 years (seventy weeks of years). They count seventy years from the destruction of the first temple to the restoration of the temple under Darius (Hag. 1:1–8) and another 420 years to the destruction of the second temple. This adds up to 490 years, although these figures do not harmonize with the actual dates in history (586 B.C. to A.D. 70).

Some church fathers who wrote commentaries on the book of Daniel interpreted it along historicist lines with Rome as the fourth power in Daniel 2 and 7. The seventy weeks in Daniel 9:24 were seen as 490 years, but the time prophecies in Daniel 7, 8, and 12 were placed as literal days either in the past, in the time of the Roman emperors, or in the future, in the time of the final antichrist. They did not yet have a clear understanding of the time periods, probably because they could not anticipate the passing of hundreds of years before the coming of Christ. The year-day principle, therefore, did not play an important role in the early centuries, though it was not unknown.

The first Christian interpreter to apply the year-day principle outside of the seventy weeks was probably Tichonius (late fourth century) from North Africa, who interpreted the three and a half days of the slaying of the witnesses (Rev. 11:11) to be three and a half years. Following Tichonius, we find throughout church history a number of Jewish and Christian interpreters who used the year-day principle, including Benjamin ben Moses Nahawendi (mid-ninth century), Joachim of Floris (A.D. 1130–1202), and Protestant Reformer Philipp Melanchthon (A.D. 1497–1560). But during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, at the time when the 1,260-, 1,290-, 1,335-, and 2,300-day prophecies were being fulfilled, the number of interpreters who used the year-day principle increased enormously (cf. Dan. 12:4).



APOCALYPTIC HISTORICAL CHRONOLOGY

The angel interpreter does not identify the historical entities represented by the fourth kingdom or the little horn. It is at this point that we move from the known to the unknown, to the dangerous zone of human speculation. Finding proper controls is not impossible. The best we can do is to use the same procedure employed by the angel. It is obvious that in the historical outline he provided for us he was describing the succession of ancient empires. The one that destroyed the previous kingdom established itself as the new kingdom. Therefore, we can use that same idea to identify the fourth kingdom: the kingdom that overcame Greece and established itself as the new kingdom was Rome. In our identification of the fourth beast, we have simply followed the same procedure employed by the angel interpreter to identify the historical powers represented by the three previous beasts.

Our interpretation of the fourth kingdom is supported by the NT, particularly by Jesus, who, as indicated already, suggested that the fourth kingdom was Rome. Consequently, the horns would represent the division of the Roman Empire. What about the little horn? Already in around A.D. 200, Hippolytus interpreted the fourth beast as the Roman Empire and the little horn as the antichrist. Christian interpreters early in the Christian era continued to use the system of interpretation employed by the angel interpreter to identify the historical fulfillment of apocalyptic prophecies. This was also done by the Reformers. Adventists locate themselves within this approach to the interpretation of apocalyptic prophecies. We also keep in mind that we begin to gain a better understanding of the fulfillment of these prophecies after they are fulfilled. Nevertheless, such prophecies should be studied because they are a revelation from God to His church to guide it and to nurture hope while waiting for the return of the Lord.

CONCLUSION

Today historicism is not the predominant method used by scholars interpreting apocalyptic prophecies. Rationalism's rejection of divine intervention in human affairs, and of God's willingness to reveal to His prophets events that will occur in the distant future, has had a major impact on Christian theology. Liberal theologians prefer to find in Daniel and Revelation the situation of the people of God when the books were written, thus eliminating their predictive role. Our study shows that historicism is the only valid approach to apocalyptic prophecy simply because this is the method that the Bible itself offers. It accepts that Daniel was written in the sixth century B.C. and that there is such a thing as predictive prophecy that covers the whole span of time from the days of the prophet to the establishment of the kingdom of God. One of the key components of this hermeneutical focus is the year-day principle. The biblical evidence in favor of this principle is clear and decisive and is presupposed by the apocalyptic books themselves. In fact, these books authenticate the principle itself.

FAITH AND SCIENCE

Much has been written about the relationship between faith and science as two different ways of determining what is true. Authors generally agree that the question is important, but they often come to radically different conclusions in trying to construct an answer. What is it about the topic of faith and science that generates such different responses? There are several reasons, one of which can be seen by comparing their definitions.

FAITH AND SCIENCE: DEFINITIONS AND SCOPE

Faith

Christian faith is confident trust in God and His word demonstrated by action. Abraham is often used as an example of faith (Heb. 11:8–12). When God called Abraham to leave his home for an unknown location, he revealed his faith by obeying and leaving (Gen. 12:1, 4). When God called on Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac as a burnt offering, he revealed his faith by laying Isaac on the altar. God intervened to spare Abraham the grief of losing his son and commended him for demonstrating his complete trust in God's word.

A combination of factors contribute to developing trust in Scripture. One factor is the appeal to our intellect. Fulfilled prophecy, archeological confirmation of biblical historical details, and internal consistency all contribute to increase one's confidence in the reliability of Scripture (e.g., John 13:19). A second factor is actual life experience. We may have found God's word trustworthy in the past. This may include events in our lives such as perceived acts of providence, answered prayers, and changed habits (e.g., John 10:38). These two factors are important in building our faith, but they are incomplete on their own. The internal testimony of the Holy Spirit impresses us of the truths of the Bible and solidifies our faith. Thus, faith is a divine gift (Eph. 2:10; John 16:13).

A key aspect of faith is that it goes beyond any direct evidence. Empirical evidence plays an indirect role here by establishing the credibility of the source on which faith rests, but faith extends that confidence to instances beyond the empirical evidence. People of faith choose to believe what the Bible says about the physical world because they have found Scripture to be reliable in their personal experience. Their conclusion may be corroborated by the experiences of other believers, adding to their confidence.

Science

Philosophers of science have been unable to provide a universally satisfactory definition of science, although most people have a fairly good idea of what it is. Two definitions of science are commonly used. Historically, science has been understood broadly as the search to understand how the world works. Using this definition, science could include almost any systematized body of knowledge, regardless of its philosophical underpinnings.

On the other hand, many scientists prefer to define science more narrowly, as a systematic search for the physical mechanisms that produce the regularities observed in the natural world, ideally expressed in mathematical terms. This definition gives science an implicitly atheistic approach, since it rejects any reference to God or any other supernatural agent. The exclusion of God from science is commonly called *methodological naturalism*.

Methodological naturalism does not necessarily require a denial of God's existence, but it does imply that everything in nature can be explained without reference to God. In effect, there is no difference between methodological naturalism and philosophical materialism in the practice of science. The naturalistic bias of science narrowly defined is a key factor in its tension with faith.

The legitimate scope of science depends on which of the two definitions is intended. Science defined narrowly applies to a more restricted scope of inquiry. This type of science is properly applied to events that follow frequently observed regularities in nature. Science that considers only physical mechanisms still in operation today will never find a true explanation for one-time events (miracles, singularities) caused by supernatural agents. Supernatural actions, by definition, are beyond the scope of this type of science.

In contrast, science defined in a general sense as an attempt to understand the world through systematic study can be applied to any aspect of reality that is accessible to human investigation. No potential explanation is excluded *a priori*, leaving the investigator open to any rational explanation, including the possibility of divine activity.

Role of Faith in Science

Faith is often considered strictly a religious idea, and indeed, faith is at the core of Christian belief and practice. It is impossible to please God without faith (Heb. 11:6). Trust is a necessary part of everyday life. Everyone has to act in situations where empirical evidence is incomplete. We may trust that another person is acting "in good faith," meaning we believe the person will honor his or her word, even when there is no written contract. We trust that our automobile will carry us to an appointment on time, even though we know there is a risk involved. Trust, or faith, cannot operate without risk, but it is a calculated risk where the perceived likelihood of failure is low enough to justify the action. Thus, faith in a generic sense is not strictly a religious idea but rather a universal experience that is present in all human activities.

Science is often considered superior to Christian faith because its claims are supposedly objective and verifiable by anyone with the proper training and equipment. Materialists often criticize faith because it is based on personal experience and cannot be independently verified. This perception is not entirely true, because many Christians have reported similar faith experiences, such as a sense of the divine presence, unexplained providences, and answered prayers. However, it is true that specific personal experience cannot be shared by another person.

Ironically, the situation in science is similar. No scientist can "share the experience" by personally verifying every scientific report. We tend to accept specific conclusions of scientists because other conclusions have so often been corroborated. This gives us confidence in science, and rightly so, but our confidence should be informed by times in the history of scientific revolutions when what everyone "knew" to be true turned out to be false or, at best, incomplete (see "Examples of Faith and Science in Tension," p. 61). In this sense, our understandings of both science and faith are subject to limitations in our ability to personally confirm the claims made by others.

The distinction between faith and science is not the presence or absence of empirical evidence, but the role of different types of evidence in drawing conclusions. Empirical evidence is also valued by faith. The Apostle John appealed to empirical evidence from his own experience as the basis for his testimony (1 John 1:1–3). However, science insists on clear physical evidence, whereas faith goes beyond the physical evidence to trusting God's word.

Reason

Reason is the use of our intellect to evaluate the logical and empirical implications of a statement, observation, or experience. A common misconception is the claim that conflict between faith and science is really a conflict between reason (science) and blind belief (Christian faith).

It is true that one cannot reason one's way to faith, any more than one can discover scientific truth purely by reason, but reason is necessary for both faith and science. We use our reason when we accept that what someone tells us is true because we have confidence in that person, even when we have no other evidence of the truth of the particular facts we are told by that person. We apply our reason as we evaluate the sometimes-conflicting claims of different sources of knowledge. It is incorrect to claim that reason is applied in science but not in faith. In both cases, we use our reason to analyze our experience, either with Scripture or with science or with both. Reason is absolutely necessary, although not sufficient, in both endeavors.

Misuse/Distortions

Both faith and science can be misused. One misuse of faith is to assume that God is acting directly in nature solely on the basis of our lack of explanations for various phenomena. This is called the *God-of-the-gaps fallacy*. Although now infrequently encountered, this has been a problem in the past. For example, the ancients did not know how blood flowed from the arteries to the veins. This lack of knowledge was used as a basis to conclude that God somehow miraculously guided the blood. When capillaries were discovered to connect the arteries and the veins, the idea that God was guiding the blood was discarded. As scientific knowledge increased, this type of experience was repeated several times until scholars discounted the whole idea of God acting directly in nature. As a result, He virtually disappeared from science.

Science also may be misused. The success of science in refuting many erroneous beliefs and discovering many aspects of nature has led some to extrapolate its successes far beyond the evidence. Some scholars claim science is the only way to obtain knowledge. This idea is known as *scientism*, and it is widely accepted in modern society, sometimes without awareness of its implications. Scientism is logically self-contradictory because the claim that there are no supernatural events is based not on scientific evidence but on a philosophical commitment to exclude God.

FAITH AND SCIENCE IN HISTORY

Faith and science are frequently regarded as hostile to each other, but the conflict is often overstated. In the history of modern science, many of the pioneers of science openly interpreted their scientific inquiries as attempts to understand how God acts in the world. At present, science is dominated by a materialistic bias, but this has not always been the case, nor is it necessary.

Most branches of modern science were founded by scientists of Christian faith. John Ray (1627–1705), considered the father of modern biology, chose to title his book *The Wisdom of God Manifested in the Works of Creation*. In this book Ray described the features of living organisms as evidence of God's actions in designing the creation.

Isaac Newton (1642–1726), probably the most influential scientist in history, made significant contributions to physics, mathematics, and other areas. It is said that Newton wrote more about the Bible than about science, but Newton's Christian faith did not interfere with his science. Robert Boyle (1627–1691), the father of modern chemistry, was a devout Christian who established a series of lectures dedicated to the study of God's handiwork in nature. Other pioneering scientists who regarded science as the study of God's works include Johannes Kepler, Blaise Pascal, Michael Faraday, James Clerk Maxwell, William Thompson (Lord Kelvin), Gregor Mendel, Antonie van Leewenhoek, and many others.

Science has contributed greatly to faith by expanding our knowledge of God's creation. Scripture tells us that God is all-powerful and all-knowing, but science has illustrated these points in ways that we would otherwise have no way of discovering. For example, scientific discoveries of the immense size and finely tuned structure of the universe have improved our understanding of God's infinite power and wisdom exercised in creating and sustaining it. Scientific discoveries of the astounding complexity of even the "simplest" living organism have increased our appreciation for God's engineering genius. Scientific discoveries of the fitness of our world for sustaining human life have added to our appreciation of His wonderful providence in designing an environment in which we can survive and thrive. These examples illustrate that science and faith can cooperate in productive partnership.

It should be emphasized that much, probably most, of science does not conflict at all with Christian faith. Instead, the two sources of knowledge are widely complementary. For example, there is no conflict over the physical constants of the universe, the structure of the atom, the principles of chemistry, cellular and organismal anatomy and physiology, ecological relationships, and a host of other aspects of science. There is no conflict between Christian faith and scientific experiments, except when the experiment is unethical, such as some experimentation on humans.

EXAMPLES OF FAITH AND SCIENCE IN TENSION

Some of the most dramatic examples of conflict between faith and science have come as the result of the corruption of faith by the incorporation of ideas from science that everyone "knew" at the time but that turned out to be incorrect. Probably the most famous examples of conflict between faith and science are the conflicts over a geocentric universe and the fixity of species.

Galileo and the Solar System

The experience of Galileo (and, by implication, Copernicus) is widely used as an example of what happens to faith when it opposes science, with the implication that faith must retreat in the face of science. There is an important lesson in this story, but it is quite different from the one usually proposed. The Galileo story is not nearly as simplistic as is sometimes claimed. There was indeed a conflict involving Galileo and some church leaders, but it was complicated by Galileo's abrasive attitude and intemperate language and the fact that his arguments were not that compelling and included some errors. There were scientists and theologians on both sides of the debate. Nevertheless, it is true that the Catholic Church was embroiled in the conflict and suffered a great loss of prestige as a result.

What is often overlooked is how the church got into that situation initially. Biblical texts are often invoked to claim that the Bible teaches a geocentric universe. However, the true origin of that idea comes from the Greek philosophers, whose ideas were organized and systematized about A.D. 150 by Ptolemy in Alexandria, Egypt. The geocentric system is known as the Ptolemaic system because Ptolemy systematized the thinking of previous philosophers into the theory that bears his name. In attempting to show that science confirms the Bible, early church fathers incorporated this Greek idea into their theology. Texts that use phenomenological words (describing an event in the language of appearance) were interpreted as literal descriptions of proven scientific reality. We still use phenomenological language when we refer to "sunrise" and "sunset," describing them as they appear, although we know that the earth's turning on its axis only creates the appearance.

Ironically, modern astrophysics tells us that any point, including the earth, can be taken as the center of the universe, as it is all relative. The advantage of taking the sun rather than the earth to be the center of the solar system is that the mathematics are much simpler.

The real lesson we need to learn from the Galileo incident is that it is inappropriate to incorporate scientific conclusions into our theology, even when "everyone knows they are true." Science is tentative, and scientific conclusions should never be given the status of biblical truths because it is likely the science will change in the future and leave the person of faith embarrassed.

Darwin and the Fixity of Species

The second example from history of a conflict between faith and science is the matter of the fixity of species. This came to the forefront with the work of Charles Darwin, who proposed that species are not fixed, contrary to what he was taught in his theology course at Cambridge. Instead, species can change and adapt to different habitats. Darwin's observations made a solid case that species can change. Unfortunately, he extrapolated the potential degree of change far beyond the evidence. The ensuing conflict with Christian faith continues to this day, and many Christians have abandoned the Creation story and accepted some form of Darwin's ideas of common ancestry. Again, the church was embarrassed in its conflict with "science."

One may ask how the church got into this predicament. Where did the idea come from that species cannot change? The answer, again, is that the idea came from the ancient Greeks, specifically from Plato's ideas of unchanging "types," further developed by Neoplatonic thinkers. Once more, church leaders took a secular, Greek idea that "everyone knew was true" and incorporated it into their theology. When science advanced and showed that the ancient Greeks were wrong, the church was wrong by association. As with the Galileo incident, the important lesson here is to resist attempts to incorporate "scientific" ideas that "everyone knows are true" into Christian theology. No scientific idea should be regarded as absolute; there is always a likelihood science will change.

CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN FAITH AND SCIENCE

God and Nature

As already noted, Christian faith affirms that God actively created the universe, our world, and all that exists, continues to maintain its existence, and occasionally acts to accomplish specific purposes. In contrast, modern science generally endorses *methodological naturalism*, which is the claim that science can discover how nature works without any reference to God or any other supernatural agent. According to this thinking, the laws of nature are fixed, and if God acts in nature, He is constrained to follow natural law, and this means all events in nature can be explained by the "fixed laws of nature."

These differences between the presuppositions of faith and of science play out mainly in questions of origins and other events identified biblically as miraculous. The contemporary issues of greatest significance are the questions of deep time, the nature of humans, and intelligent design.

Deep Time

Those who postulate production of living organisms by natural law realize this is highly improbable and cannot be expected to occur without immense periods of time and vast numbers of chance events. Long ages of time are needed in hopes they can somehow fill the gap in natural law. George Wald, a Nobel-prize-winning chemist, noted the dependence on long ages of time for the materialistic origin of life, arguing that what humans consider impossible to happen in the natural world will happen if given enough time (two billion years). According to him, time performs miracles. But the logic of the statement does not work when the event is in fact impossible, and the origin of life by natural processes is, by all available evidence, truly impossible.

Scientists have searched for methods of measuring the expected long ages of time needed by materialistic science. They believe they have found such a method in the system of radioisotope dating. Radioisotope dating is based on the observation that certain atoms (radioactive isotopes) are unstable and break down by nuclear reactions to form a different kind of atom. The rate at which this breakdown occurs can be expressed in a mathematical formula, and the amount of time required for any specific amount of material to break down can be calculated. The amount of material thought to have broken down can be precisely measured in rocks. The results of such calculations are interpreted to show that different kinds of plants and animals have existed at different times of earth history, extending over a period exceeding 500 million years.

Creationists hold a different view of God's activity in nature. Because of God's supernatural power and intelligence, He can accomplish His purposes without any constraint of time. Scripture describes the creation of our world and its inhabitants within a single week of time. This is no problem for God, because He created nature and its laws. He is not limited by the laws of nature but uses them to accomplish His purposes in any period of time He chooses.

Because the Creation story is foundational to the message of the entire Bible, and Christians have found the Bible to be reliable in their personal lives, they can have faith to believe that the biblical Creation story is true and that Creation did not occupy long ages of time. Creationists point to evidence that indicates a shorter chronology, such as in the widespread preservation of fossil biomolecules, the evidence for catastrophic deposition of many of the sedimentary layers, layers missing without evidence of erosion, and other lines of evidence that do not fit easily with the long-age timescale.

Creationists do not yet have a satisfactory explanation for radioisotope dating, but they believe that such an explanation is possible and are working toward improving their understanding. There is no logical need to replace the biblical description of Creation with processes acting over long ages; the existence of a Creator God makes the short-age model entirely reasonable.

Human Nature

The Bible teaches that humans were created by God separately from any other form of life, endowed with the image of God, and given dominion over the other creatures. Thus, humans are qualitatively different from other creatures.

The uniqueness of humans can be observed in human capacities, which include a sense of morality and spirituality; awareness of one's self and one's relationship to the rest of creation;

and the ability to conceptualize abstract ideas and create new forms, plan for future events, compose and appreciate music, and conceptualize abstract mathematical concepts.

Humans also have numerous genes not found in other species. These so-called orphan genes may be responsible for some of the unique characteristics of humans, such as the expanded brain and reasoning capacity. Creationists endorse the biblical teaching that humans are created separately from ordinary animals.

Scientists who deny God's activity in nature have searched for natural mechanisms to explain the existence of humans and their unique qualities. The theory of evolution through random variation and natural selection has been offered as an explanation for the origin of humans and other types of creatures. There is widespread acceptance that natural selection can help species adapt to different local environments (microevolution). However, new types of organisms are not produced by gradual modification of existing species, and many scientists have concluded that evolutionary theory does not explain how new types of organisms might arise (macroevolution). Despite the empirical shortcomings of evolution, there really is no other alternative except special creation, and this they refuse to accept.

Many fossils of humans and humanlike organisms (hominids) have been found. Some of these, such as Neanderthal Man and the "erectines" (*Homo erectus* and similar fossils) seem related to humans living today ("anatomically modern humans"). Some, such as most of the australopithecines, are clearly apelike. Some fossils appear to have a mosaic of human and apelike traits.

Proponents of evolutionary theory have pointed to these fossils, especially those with a mosaic of human and apelike traits, as transitional fossils that show the evolution of humans from apelike ancestors. Many attempts have been made to construct an evolutionary tree linking all these different forms together, but a steady stream of new discoveries continues to upset the theories. Despite the unstable nature of the proposed evolutionary trees, the existence of these curious fossils has been used to oppose the biblical story of the separate creation of humans.

Very few creationists have pursued the training needed to critically analyze the hominid fossil evidence. It is obvious that the data are sparse, as seen by the frequent upset of proposed evolutionary relationships, but creationists would like to know how these fossils fit with their viewpoint.

Many of the fossil hominids appear to be degenerate, perhaps from inbreeding in isolated small groups soon after the biblical Flood. The extent of variation among the humanlike fossils may be similar to the variation seen in other species. Considerable variation of genes and body form is seen in most living animal groups that have been examined. Among the many examples are dogs, horses, pigs, cattle, chickens, and carp. There is no reason to doubt that humans may have, or once had, a similar potential for variation that could include the Neanderthals and erectines.

The apelike fossils may represent an extinct type of ape, again with the ordinary variation in form that would encompass the entire australopithecine group. The mosaic fossils may represent corruption of the originally created species through degeneration, some type of genetic intermixing, or other unknown factors. Some have suggested the mosaic specimens are actually a mixture of human and apelike individuals, but this is difficult to evaluate without more data. Whatever the details, the hominid fossil record does not disprove the biblical record that humans were specially created apart from any other type of creature.

INTELLIGENT DESIGN IN NATURE: A CONTEMPORARY ISSUE

There is much debate over the possibility that evidence of God's activity can be seen in nature. Everyone recognizes that nature has a design that makes it possible for life to survive and flourish on the earth. The debate is whether this design comes from within nature itself (chance and natural law) or whether it has been crafted by an intelligent mind. As a result, there are two ways to explore this issue: establishing the complexity of design and then establishing the nature of design. With design as the hub, we can think of this as studies leading up to design and studies leading from design.

The Argument *to* Design

The claim here is that the apparent design in nature can be attributed to an intelligent cause, and not to a combination of chance and natural law, due to its complexity. This argument *to* design is the theme of the *intelligent design movement*. The identity of the designer is not a necessary part of this argument, although most people conclude it is probably the Creator God recognized by Christians and also by many non-Christians. Some examples of the argument to design are described below.

Intelligent Design in the Structure of the Universe. The origin, orderliness, and fine-tuning of the universe appear to be the result of intelligent design. Before the discovery of the cosmic redshift and the cosmic microwave background, materialists chose to believe the universe was eternal. Hence its origin needed no explanation. The new discoveries were interpreted to indicate that the universe had a beginning and was not eternal. Thus, an explanation was needed. Despite almost heroic efforts, materialists have not developed any plausible theory that explains the origin of the universe. Many see creation as the best explanation for the origin of the universe and also see it as an example of intelligent design.

The order observed in the universe is another feature that points to intelligent design in nature. The second law of thermodynamics is one of the most well-established regularities observed in nature, and it states that disorder increases over time in a closed system. What, then, is the origin of the order seen in the universe? If the universe exhibits order now, it must have been more orderly in the past. This implies the universe is not a closed system but has received input from an intelligent designer who acted to arrange order in the universe at its creation and possibly afterward.

A third feature of the universe that points to intelligent design is the fine-tuning problem. The structure of the universe is highly sensitive to the exact values of a multitude of physical constants and the fundamental forces. There are numerous physical constants, such as the charges and masses of the atomic particles, the speed of light, and Planck's constant. The four fundamental forces (electromagnetic force, weak nuclear force, strong nuclear force, and gravitational force) are responsible for interactions among atomic particles and different bodies of matter. Remarkably, the physical constants and fundamental forces have the precise values that are needed in order for the universe to be suitable for living organisms. In most cases, the slightest change would mean the universe would be unsuitable for life. It is difficult indeed to avoid the conclusion that the fine-tuning of the universe is purposeful, the result of design by an intelligent and omnipotent Creator.

Intelligent Design in the Living Cell. Living organisms provide an excellent example of intelligent design. The "simplest" living organisms are bacteria, each composed of a single cell. Bacteria are less complex than humans, but they are not at all simple. A single cell includes thousands of molecular machines that interact in chemical-mechanical pathways to produce materials that otherwise would never form in nature. Those molecular machines that have been investigated are extraordinarily complex, and it is highly probable that this is true for all the cellular machinery.

Living cells come only from other living cells and are never observed to form spontaneously from chemicals outside a living cell. Cells cannot form gradually through evolutionary processes, but a complete set of components must be in place for the cell to be alive. Thus, a living cell is irreducibly complex, meaning it cannot be constructed one step at a time through evolutionary processes. There is no plausible mechanism for the origin of living cells other than creation by an intelligent mind.

Irreducible complexity does not exclude the use of the components in other applications. Neither does it mean that there is no redundancy in the cellular components, as some opponents have pointed out. What it means is that an irreducibly complex system cannot be constructed stepwise by gradual evolutionary processes but must be assembled by an intelligent agent. The irreducible complexity of the cell, many of its interacting molecular systems, and a large number of its component parts all support the hypothesis of an active intelligent designer.

Other Examples of Intelligent Design. Intelligent design can also be seen in many other aspects of the creation. The information content of DNA and the molecules associated with its function is not explained by chance or by natural law. Information is stored in the sequence of nucleotides found in the DNA. The sequence is not determined by the laws of chemistry as we know them, and it is too specific and improbable to be explained as the result of chance. It does, however, have similarities with information codes produced by humans and thus bears the marks of intelligent design.

Numerous factors contribute to the fitness of our earth to support life. These include the distance of the earth from the sun, the type and amount of energy output by the sun, the mass of the earth and the moon, the speed of rotation of the earth, the composition of the atmosphere, the abundance of water, with its special properties, the earth's magnetic field, and more. Any single factor may seem unremarkable, but the combination of all these factors, both necessary and sufficient for life, is best explained by intelligent design.

Other examples could be described, such as the components of the nitrogen cycle, the ecological interdependence of plants and animals, the amazing migratory ability of birds, the human mind, the wonderful variety of plants and animals, and the striking mathematical nature of the creation. Any single example is a strong indicator of intelligent design and even more so when they are considered collectively.

The argument to design implies that the materialistic bias that pervades modern science is inappropriate. Because of this implication, materialistic scientists find it philosophically necessary to try to refute the evidence for intelligent design, attributing it to chance or the laws of nature. Their outspoken criticism has contributed to the perceived tension between faith and science, but, ironically, it has helped advocates of intelligent design sharpen their arguments, making the evidence for intelligent design even more compelling.

The Argument *from* Design

The argument *from* design is the argument that the intelligent designer whose works are seen in the creation must be the Creator God described in Scripture. This is certainly the biblical view, as, for example, in Psalm 19:1. Nature displays the glory of God. Many other texts affirm that God is the Creator of our world and all that is in it.

The biblical position is confirmed by many Christians in their own experiences. Many have had confirmation of the activity of God in their own personal lives and have experienced the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Human Personality. The personal nature of humans provides evidence that the designer of the universe is a person and not an impersonal force. Human beings have personality, free will, self-consciousness, and, normally, an inborn sense of morality. These characteristics are not derived from natural laws but are best explained as the result of design by a Creator having similar characteristics. The biblical explanation is that humans were created in the image of the Creator, and this remains the best explanation.

Purpose in Nature. Purpose is another evidence that the world was designed by an intelligent Person and not by impersonal forces. Purpose requires the ability to arrange events in such a way as to produce a desired result. Impersonal forces do not have purpose but merely act according to natural law or randomly. Purpose may be seen in a general sense in the structure of the universe, the fitness of the environment, and the irreducible complexity of life. It may be seen more specifically in the actions of humans as they go about their daily lives and even in the lives of animals as they seek food, shelter, and mates. Purpose is a mark of a personal intelligence, in this case a supernatural intelligence—the Creator God.

The argument to design and the argument from design combine to affirm the view that the world was created by God, who is a Person and who continues to act to uphold His creation.

This claim results in tension between faith and science that is based on the fundamental difference between the two and what each can and cannot accomplish. There is also a tension between the faith bias and the materialistic bias of all practitioners of modern science. Science itself, which is dependent on neither, is used by both sides.

REASONS FOR TENSION BETWEEN FAITH AND SCIENCE

According to the Bible, God is both the Author of Scripture and the Creator of nature. Thus the expectation is that faith and science will be in harmony when properly interpreted. And yet sometimes there is tension, as has been described in previous paragraphs. Examining the philosophical underpinnings of science can help explain the basis of the tension.

Everyone makes some assumptions about the meaning of their existence and how they choose to live. These assumptions are not determined scientifically but are philosophical in nature. Among the most important of these are the relationship of God and nature (part of metaphysics), how one obtains knowledge (epistemology), and how one should behave (ethics). All these questions are related to one's beliefs about origins, and it is here that much of the tension between faith and science is grounded.

Different Worldviews

Collectively, these philosophical assumptions form our worldview, which shapes the way we interpret our experiences and the world about us. Having a worldview is not optional—everyone has one, whether or not they realize it. We generally take our worldview for granted and believe it represents the truth about our world. There are many different worldviews, but most of them fall into one of three categories: theism, pantheism, and materialism.

Theism is the view that God created the universe and is active in it. Matter and energy are created entities under the control of the Creator. People who accept this worldview believe their lives have meaning and purpose because God created them for a purpose. Theists ultimately expect harmony between faith and science and believe tension results from incomplete knowledge. Christians, Jews, and Muslims generally hold worldviews in this category.

Pantheism is the view that God and the universe are the same thing. Matter and energy are manifestations of eternal, impersonal spirit. People who accept this worldview generally believe their bodies are temporary vehicles for eternal spirit and this life is only a phase of existence. Pantheist thought varies, but many adherents do not consider the relationship between faith and science to be important because all truth is relative. Hindus, most animists, Daoists, some New Agers, and many Buddhists hold pantheistic beliefs.

The third worldview category is *materialism*, also called naturalism. In this view, matter and energy comprise all of reality, and no spiritual entities exist. People who accept this worldview generally believe they are merely complex forms of matter, and there is no spiritual reality or afterlife. Materialists do not expect to find harmony between faith and science because they believe faith is entirely subjective and science is the best way to find truth. Advocates of this position include secular humanists, many atheists, and many of the prominent voices in science.

Deism is another worldview that has an important influence on the relation of faith and science. It does not fit easily into any of the three categories described above, but it combines elements of theism and materialism. Deists accept the existence of a Creator God, a theistic concept, but they deny any supernatural activity in nature, a materialistic principle. In the context of science, there is little if any practical distinction between deists and materialists.

Contradictory Presuppositions in Worldviews

Different worldviews make contradictory assumptions about reality. The most important source of tension between faith and science may be the different presuppositions regarding the relationship of God and nature. Christians of faith affirm that a personal God has been, and continues to be, active in nature. In contrast, science is dominated by the materialistic assumption that there is no God active in nature, while pantheists see only impersonal forces. Thus tension exists on issues such as Creation and the Flood not necessarily because of the empirical evidence but because of philosophical preferences.

Another major philosophical factor underlying the tension between faith and science is their different ways of determining what is accepted as truth. Christian faith affirms the value of special revelation in Scripture, while materialistic scientists consider only physical evidence and only known natural laws. Materialism easily leads to scientism—the belief that science is the only pathway to knowledge. If science is defined materialistically but is applied to events with supernatural causes, tension is to be expected.

Another factor in the tension between faith and science is the tentative nature of scientific conclusions compared to the expectation that faith is based on eternal truths. This becomes a problem when scientific ideas are absorbed into religious faith, as discussed earlier. Science has experienced many revolutions in thought, in which ideas that everyone believed to be true were found to be faulty and replaced by newer ideas. If a scientific idea has been incorporated into religious faith and given the status of eternal truth, any change in the science will produce a crisis of faith.

Tension Related to Historical Questions

The conflict between faith and science primarily comes when we try to reconstruct past events. This is because one's worldview presuppositions have a much stronger influence on interpreting the evidence for historical questions than when dealing with events that can be replicated and analyzed repeatedly. For example, faith and science propose conflicting explanations (supernatural as opposed to naturalistic) for the origin of the universe, the origin of life, the origins of biodiversity, the origin of humans and human consciousness, and so on. These are all historical questions. It is much easier to analyze an event for which the initial conditions are known than to try to reconstruct a past event based only on the evidence left from that event.

When we find conflict regarding these historical questions, this should alert us to the likelihood that the event in question has a supernatural element that is not taken into account by the scientist with materialistic presuppositions. We would be wise to recognize that human efforts cannot access all of reality, and *there is more to nature than science can discover*.

DEALING WITH TENSION BETWEEN FAITH AND SCIENCE

The incompleteness of our knowledge makes tension between faith and science understandable. One's interpretation of the nature of faith and science and one's reaction to the tensions will be shaped by one's philosophical presuppositions. Those with different presuppositions will react to the tension in different ways. The major ways of dealing with the tension are described below.

Neglecting the Issue

Some are simply unaware that there is an issue here. Children would naturally be in this category until they reach a certain age or educational level, usually by the time they reach secondary school. Some avoid the issue by refusing to dwell on the idea or by keeping themselves so preoccupied with other issues that they never spend time thinking about faith and science. Many seem to think that the question is resolved and no further consideration is warranted.

This approach is unsatisfactory because the issues are central to our understanding of ourselves, the people around us, our environment, and our future. It is difficult to live in modern society very long without being confronted with questions of the relationship between faith and science.

Faith and Science as Inherently Contradictory

The takeover of science by scholars with a militantly materialistic worldview is a major factor in the perception that faith and science are enemies. The theism of faith and atheism/materialism that is imposed into the neutral processes of science pose an irreconcilable conflict, and since faith deals with the unseen and science with the seen, the choice is often made to reject faith, accept the materialism of many of the practitioners of science, and call that materialism itself *science*.

For those who deny God's activity in nature, the evidence for intelligent design is a nagging problem. The vehemence of the opposition to the apparently benign claim of intelligent design betrays the depth of the struggle to resist theism despite the evidence. Hopefully, the evidence, together with the impressions of the Holy Spirit, may help many to make the transition from materialism to theism.

Faith and Science as Isolated

One strategy to deal with tension between faith and science is to mentally isolate them from each other. One popular form of this approach is called NOMA (Non-Overlapping MAgesteria). In this view, science and faith deal with two separate, independent aspects of reality. Science deals with the physical world, while faith deals with spiritual issues such as feelings and morals. There is no possibility of conflict because the two sources are "non-overlapping"—they do not deal with the same topics.

It has been rightly pointed out that it is disingenuous to claim that faith and science do not overlap in scope. In fact, Christian faith has much to say about the world, its origins, its operations, and its future. If one accepts the claims of NOMA that faith deals only with feelings and emotions and not with the physical world, one has ceded to science the entire realm of physical reality, leaving only the subjective churnings of mental states to the realm of faith. This is essentially a materialistic position and faces the same problem of evidence for intelligent design that so threatens materialistic philosophy.

Science as Foundational for Faith

The concept of science as the foundation for faith suggests that the Bible describes God's interactions with His people but it is not intended to teach us about the physical world. That task is allegedly the work of science. This proposal is commonly associated with statements such as "the Bible is not a textbook of science." This phrase is commonly used to justify the proposition that we should look to science to learn about the origins and history of our world and let science determine the validity of what Scripture says about the natural world.

Theistic evolution probably fits into this category, as it holds that God exists but does not act in nature in detectable ways, implying that science is the only reliable way to learn the truth about our world. Theistic evolution fails for several reasons. Philosophically, one may ask what evidence there is for a God who does not act in nature and why anyone should accept that proposition. Scientifically, the evidence for intelligent design described above and elsewhere falsifies the assumption that God does not act in nature. This helps explain the outspoken antagonism of theistic evolutionists to the claims of intelligent design. Theologically, theistic evolution is inconsistent with the God of the Bible, who abhors suffering and opposes death. Death and replacement are required for evolution to proceed. Why would God oppose the very means He allegedly used to create? The relationship described here results in a view of faith and science that differs little from the materialistic view and is untenable in the light of biblical revelation.

Natural theology is the attempt to use science as the basis for theology. The natural theologian accepts that God is active in nature and uses that as the basis for inferring God's character. This approach is highly problematic. While it is true that we can see evidence of God's power in the creation, it is only in the Bible that we can clearly see God's grace, justice, mercy, love, and so on. Nature does not provide a clear picture of what God is like.

The attempt to infer what God is like by studying nature runs headlong into the problem of *natural evil*. Natural evil includes the destructive effects of earthquakes, floods, famine, and fire; along with suffering from cancer, genetic diseases, and infections; venomous animals; the violence of predation, and the like. If one constructs a picture of God based only on nature, it will be a God of both good and evil, not the compassionate Redeemer and Healer described in the Gospels.

The proper method for developing an understanding of God's character is to study the Bible, especially the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, who was and is the Creator. The Scriptures reveal that there is an enemy, Satan, who introduced evil into this world and is engaged in a great controversy with Christ. Nature has been affected by the curse of Satan's activities so that it does not present an accurate picture of the Creator. Jesus showed us what God is really like.

Concordism: Compromising Faith with Science

Concordism is the attempt to combine elements from both science and the Bible into a theory of origins. Where there is conflict, conclusions about the physical world are shaped by the teachings of science, while conclusions about divine activity are derived from Scripture. In practical terms, this means combining the discrete acts of special creation from the Bible with the long ages of deep time taken from geology. Two examples of concordism are described here.

The Day-Age Theory. This theory proposes that the days of Creation were each long ages of time, not a single week as described in Genesis. This theory has declined in popularity but still has many followers. Unfortunately for the theory, there are major discrepancies between the fossil sequence and the Creation week sequence. The most glaring of these are the fruit trees. Fruit trees and grains are among the first group of organisms created during Creation week, before any animals were created. In the fossil record, fruit trees and grains do not appear until after many fossil layers of both land and aquatic animals were deposited. Another discrepancy is that land animals were created after flying animals during Creation week, but land animals appear below (i.e., before) flying creatures in the fossil record.

Progressive Creation. This theory proposes that God created in discrete events, as described in Genesis, but the time of these events is expanded to millions of years in order to fit the geological time scale. In essence, the theory takes the fossil sequence as the sequence of creation rather than the sequence of burial and preservation. The creation sequence of Genesis is discarded, avoiding the problem of trying to match it to the fossil sequence. The days of Creation week are discarded and replaced by a long, indefinite period of time, avoiding the problem of trying to make it fit into a Creation week. All that is left of Genesis is the idea that God created the various elements of our world in discrete acts. Some similar theories discard special creation altogether and replace it with divinely guided evolution.

Progressive creation intends to resolve some of the conflicts between faith and science, but it does so by stripping the biblical Creation story of its content. The costs of this approach include the integrity of the Bible, the logical coherence of the gospel, and the basis for the seventh-day Sabbath. The gospel story tells us that Jesus died to save us from death, which was the result of Adam's sin. Progressive creation implies that death is not the result of Adam's sin, but that violence and suffering were part of nature for millions of years before humans were created. The seventh-day Sabbath is undermined by denial of God's six days of work and seventh day of rest as a basis for our weekly cycle.

Scientifically, this theory is entirely ad hoc. There is no scientific evidence that God created living organisms in the sequence recorded in the fossil record. It would be just as reasonable, and far more consistent with Scripture, to propose that God caused the various types of creatures to be buried in the sequence observed in the fossil record during the Flood.

Concordism may be based on good intentions, but it ends up placing science over Scripture. In the process, it undermines the gospel and the reliability of Scripture. It denies the evolutionary story but has neither biblical nor scientific support for its distinctive claims. It produces "just-so stories" with little reason for anyone to endorse them.

BIBLICAL FOUNDATION FOR RELATING FAITH AND SCIENCE

The approach recommended here is to regard the revelation of God's actions in Scripture as the foundation on which the natural world can be understood. To explore this idea, we will address the question of how God's activities in nature might affect the practice of science.

God Is Active in Nature

The Bible records many examples of God's action in our world. God created the world and filled it with living creatures (Gen. 1–2); He sent a flood to destroy the corrupted world (Gen. 6–8); He showered Sodom and Gomorrah with fire and brimstone (Gen. 19); He opened a path through the Red Sea for the Israelites to escape the Egyptians (Ex. 14); He caused the walls of Jericho to collapse (Josh. 6); He sent fire down from heaven to burn up the stones of Elijah's altar (1 Kin. 18); He created the heavens by His word (Ps. 33); He laid the foundation of the earth and spread out the heavens (Is. 48); He set up kings and removed them, revealed secrets, and gave wisdom (Dan. 2); and He caused a host of healings and other supernatural events. Any theory that denies God's activities in nature is incompatible with Scripture.

The reality of divine activity in nature means that a true history of our world must be grounded on special revelation. It invites us to faith in the revealed description of God's activities, including a creation in one literal week in which (1) the world was formed and provided with plants and animals in harmonious ecological relationships, (2) humans were created in God's image and given responsibility for the created world, and (3) death, violence, and suffering were absent.

Types of Divine Activities

God's actions in nature can be tentatively classified into three types: Creation, directing special events, and sustaining the creation. God's work in Creation is a past event, unobservable in the present, unrepeatable in the laboratory, and not subject to scientific analysis. God's work in directing special events is occasional and is likely to be regarded as a "miracle." Such events may leave effects that are subject to scientific analysis, but their causes are likely to be beyond the scope of science. God's work in sustaining the world must be consistent to maintain stability, and the regularities are observable in the present and can be tested in the laboratory and analyzed scientifically. Thus, science works well for analyzing the consistent patterns of God's activities in maintaining nature, but not for studying God's special actions in creation and other miraculous events.

Laws of Nature

In the biblical view, God is sovereign over all of nature. This means that what we call the "laws of nature" are God's tools for managing the world, not rules that limit His power or activities. Natural laws are not inherent properties of matter but merely describe how God exercises control over His creation. They are descriptive, not prescriptive.

Science and God's Activities

A common objection to the claim that God is active in nature is the claim that if God were active in the physical world, His activities would interfere with our ability to practice science. We could not depend on getting the same experimental results at different times or in different places because God might intervene at any moment. This is a misunderstanding of God's role in nature.

Theists do not fear that God's activity will spoil the experiment. They realize that they could not conduct scientific investigations if it were not for God's consistent actions in sustaining the universe. Without this consistency, there would be no regularities to discover in the physical world, and science would be impossible. Thus, it is false to claim that being open to God's activity in nature inhibits scientific discovery. Scientists should embrace the fact of God's activity in nature, not deny it.

Science applies well to studying God's consistent activities in sustaining the universe, but it is not equipped to analyze divine acts of creation. This leaves miraculous events, including the Creation, beyond the scope of science, but this is to be expected. Expertise in how a system operates is not the same thing as understanding how it originated. An auto mechanic may be able to take a car apart and put it back together again, but that does not qualify him to design an automobile manufacturing plant. We are still free to inquire into any topic and to use the power of science to enhance our quality of life and improve our ability to wisely manage our environment. However, we cannot expect that science will provide answers to all our questions.

Science Is Worthwhile

The biblical view of creation is that it is God's handiwork, made for our benefit. Although damaged by our sin and carelessness, it remains our responsibility to take care of. This requires an intelligent understanding of nature that comes from scientific study. Thus science is a good and worthwhile activity that can enhance our quality of life and improve our ability to cope with the responsibilities of overseeing the creation.

The New Creationists

The name "New Creationists" refers to a group of creationist scholars who are attempting to understand nature in the light of the biblical record. They include biologists, geologists, cosmologists, chemists, physicists, and others. Although their numbers are small, they have already made important discoveries in understanding the world from a biblical viewpoint.

One example of creationist research is the work done by several creationist scientists studying the "fossil forests" of Yellowstone National Park in the United States. Many layers of fossilized logs are preserved, including some trees that are standing upright. These were interpreted by scientists as a succession of forests growing in place over tens of thousands of years. Examination of the fossilized "soil" associated with the layers showed sorting of the particles, indicating that the leaves and "soil" had been washed into place, not formed in place. Several additional lines of evidence were pursued, resulting in the conclusion that these trees were transported from somewhere else and are not preserved where they grew. This conclusion supports the hypothesis of a catastrophic flood.

Numerous footprints and trackways are found in the Coconino Sandstone of the Grand Canyon, in the United States. Careful study of the footprints showed they were deposited under water, and not on dry sand dunes as had been thought. Since the layers below and above the Coconino Sandstone were deposited in water, it makes more sense that the Coconino Sandstone was also deposited under water and not in a desert, again supporting the hypothesis of a catastrophic flood.

Creationist scientists are also studying a series of rock layers in Utah. These layers are separated by distinct boundaries where the grain size changes abruptly. Ordinarily, bottom-dwelling animals burrow through the deposits on the seafloor and mix the sediments thoroughly so that layers with abrupt boundaries do not form. Sequences of distinct layers indicate that deposition was too rapid for burrowing animals to mix the sediments. Such rapid deposition of layers suggests catastrophic processes at work.

As more creationists engage in the study of geology and other sciences, we can expect more progress in developing a creation-based understanding of nature, guided and facilitated by the Creator Himself. Perhaps some who are reading this will join in that endeavor.

CONCLUSIONS

What then can we conclude about the relationship between faith and science? First, we should recognize that the present tension between faith and science is largely determined by philosophical assumptions and their influence on the practice of science. If science is defined as materialistic in approach, then it is inappropriate to try to apply it to events with supernatural causes. It is important to match the scope of science with its definition. Faith and science are rarely in conflict except when attempting to reconstruct historical events associated with divine activity.

Second, we should resist efforts to incorporate scientific "facts" into faith, even if "everyone knows they are true." We should learn from the historical examples of conflict involving Galileo and Darwin and resist attempts to adjust our faith to accommodate the materialistic claims of deep time and animal ancestry of humans. The scientific path to truth is often slow and marked by many detours. The present state of knowledge is not the final destination, nor is it a safe guide for Christian faith.

Finally, we must affirm that both faith and science have value. We should give glory to God for the wonderful benefits that science has provided from the study of the created world and for the amazing complexity of life that reveals something of the power and wisdom of the Creator. We should encourage and support those who choose to prepare themselves academically and spiritually for engaging the world of science in order to present a creation-based understanding of the universe and our place in it.

ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE BIBLE

Archaeologists do not dig up dinosaurs. Archaeologists are not treasure hunters. Archaeologists study human antiquity, focusing on buried architecture and the material culture of everyday life associated with it. They need the context of buildings and even the soil in which an object is found in order to understand the significance of an object. Thus, in a way, archaeologists are like ancient crime scene investigators, recording even the minutest of details in order to reconstruct as much of the ancient past as is possible. Consequently, archaeology is a discovery science as opposed to an experimental science, although there is a field of study within archaeology that attempts to test archaeological theory by endeavoring to replicate ancient processes. Microstructural analysis, art criticism, and other such activities fall under the broad umbrella of archaeology, but exploration, excavation, and research are the traditional activities of archaeologists.

To understand the value of each discovery, archaeologists often conduct interdisciplinary studies. Cooperation with other branches of science helps to interpret what is discovered. The area of biblical studies can be used to interpret evidence established through archaeological activities.

ARCHAEOLOGY'S RELATIONSHIP TO THE BIBLE

The earliest archaeological efforts in Mesopotamia, the Levant (known more commonly as the Holy Land), Egypt, Turkey, Greece, Rome, and other parts of the Mediterranean world in the 1800s up through the mid-1900s were conducted with a general understanding that sections of the Bible were meant to reflect actual historical events, places, and persons. Many renowned archaeologists even felt it necessary to compare what was being discovered with statements contained in the biblical text. But in the 1970s and early 1980s most of these early scholars had passed away and were largely replaced by proponents of the "New Archaeology" theory. No longer was archaeology done solely for historical reasons, and therefore the connection to ancient texts (including the Bible) was no longer necessary. Today, many archaeologists avoid referencing the Bible in publications, even when it is obvious or necessary that this should be done. An understanding of both what the Bible can and cannot do and what archaeology can and cannot do should help demonstrate that this separation was unwise.

The Bible and Archaeologists

The Bible seems to arouse feelings of distrust for many scholars. This is probably a reaction to the well-meaning work of some religious adherents to prove the historical sections of the

Bible in order to justify cherished theological convictions. In the process, some archaeological discoveries have been misrepresented, and evidence that may contradict a cherished view is sometimes ignored, leading the adherent to reinterpret the biblical text in an effort to maintain a particular view. Such practices have unfortunately left many scholars outside of biblical studies (and some on the inside) with little use for the Bible. This includes the vast majority of archaeologists who are not trained in the methods of biblical studies. They dismiss the Bible and do not attempt to connect their work with it.

The Bible was written to instruct on several intellectual and spiritual levels. It contains history, but it is not merely a record of history. The majority of the supposed discrepancies critics often point out are due to hermeneutical presuppositions rather than any fault with the biblical text itself. Only a small portion of these discrepancies seem associated with scribal errors. And when given the benefit of the doubt, these discrepancies can be reconciled satisfactorily (for more, see "Revelation and Inspiration of the Bible," p. 11). Archaeology has played a significant role in helping to understand some of these discrepancies.

Archaeology and Bible Readers

Archaeologists discover evidence. This evidence needs to be interpreted. There has not been a significant archaeological discovery that has contradicted any historical element in the Bible, but there are many interpretations of evidence that contradict the Bible. This distinction is important. Misunderstanding this distinction has wrecked many sincere people's faith in the reliability of the Bible. Often it is the interpreter's presuppositions that provide the contradictory interpretation.

Lack of sufficient data can also result in contradictory interpretations of a piece of data. Most archaeological sites are only partially excavated. It has been the practice of archaeologists through the decades to purposely not excavate an entire site down to bedrock, knowing that better methods of excavation and recording will be developed in the future. As a result, it is estimated that only one-tenth of one percent of all known archaeological sites have been excavated. Further, more sites are being discovered each year and some are yet to be excavated due in large part to a lack of funding. Consequently, a significant amount of data lies waiting to be recovered. Because of this, it is common for archaeologists to discover evidence in an excavation that shifts previous understandings of the site, even from one year to the next. Thus, any dogmatic conclusion by archaeologists should be understood as zeal rather than incontrovertible fact.

A Proper Relationship

There are few, mostly minor, variants of the biblical text. It is always the hope that more manuscripts will be found, but it is doubtful that any will be discovered that will change the text as we currently have it in any consequential way. As a result, new information related to the Bible is most likely to come through archaeological discoveries.

Readers today are separated from the world of the Bible most directly by time, culture, language, and landscape. Archaeological data have the ability to provide the reader with a window in time and space through which they can glimpse the various cultures operating within the historical milieu of a given passage of Scripture. In this way, archaeology provides the modern reader with information that is not immediately apparent from a study of the text itself and that can shed light on the biblical text.

Since archaeologists are scientists and not theologians, their main interest is in providing trustworthy data that can be used by others in a study of the ancient world. The Bible is valuable for the work of archaeologists because it is an ancient document that contains information regarding life in the ancient past (be that geographical, topographical, political, or migrational). However, some secular archaeologists dismiss the value of the Bible partly because of the irresponsible interpretation of some who feel the need to "prove" the Bible to be true. Impatient with the perceived slowness by which archaeology discovers evidence, some pseudo-archaeologists publish documents, give lectures, or produce documentaries that fail to do the hard, slow work of archaeology and, instead, present their "proof" as groundbreaking. This does more damage than good.

Archaeologists, in a way, are at the mercy of elements beyond their control. They cannot control what is found, and what is found through the limited excavations may be an accident of survival following deliberate destructions, natural decay, lootings, and unfriendly environments. Organic materials, for example, do not survive well in damp environments, so any cloth, wood, parchment, paper, or organic substance has a low chance of survival in civilizations that were close to water sources. What material has survived war, natural catastrophe, and natural, organic decay also had to have survived looting through the millennia. Beyond that, it also has to be in an accessible location (i.e., not below a modern dwelling or city, in a war zone, or below water) so it can be found. And an item that has survived all of these still needs to actually be found by someone who knows how to record its context in a professionally responsible way. Putting together a picture of the ancient world, then, has been likened to trying to see life with only a few pieces of a puzzle of unknown size that comes in a box without a photograph of the completed puzzle.

Since archaeology discovers rather than experiments, archaeological findings are not controlled. And because only a small fraction of the available data has been discovered, archaeology is not well equipped to answer the question "Did it happen?" This means that aside from a fortuitous spade full of dirt that might turn up something that supports some aspect of what is contained in the Bible, the best questions that archaeology can answer are "Could it have happened?" and "Is the event, location, or person possible?"

Even when texts are discovered that seem to confirm an event from the biblical record (e.g., the Merenptah Stele; see p. 85), skeptics will not necessarily be persuaded. This is because some would suggest that the author of the text intentionally meant to mislead his audience or intended for the record to be understood as myth or legend. Some would, more kindly, propose that the author thought that he was recording an event that in reality did not happen. In the end, the interpretation of evidence allows for a broad range of views and, as a result, does not constitute proof one way or another.

The message of the Bible is believed through faith, not science. The Bible presents God as unchanging (Heb. 13:8). How He treated people in the past is how He treats people in the present and future. Archaeology helps us to better understand those who lived in the past. This understanding then also allows us to better see how God interacted with those people in the past and then, as a result, to gain a better understanding of how He will interact with us today. This is how archaeology can best help to strengthen faith. And while archaeology can help strengthen faith, the absence of archaeological evidence in relation to some biblical texts or narratives should also not lead anyone to distrust the Bible.

HISTORY OF ARCHAEOLOGY

The word *archaeology* comes from two Greek words: *archaios* ("ancient") and *logos* ("study of" or "word"). In this way, archaeology means the study of, or a word about, the ancient world. Although it is true that some ancients engaged in activities that resemble aspects of archaeological work, archaeology as a field of scientific study has been practiced for only about two hundred years. Due to its relatively young age, there is still some discussion within the discipline on the goals and aims of archaeology as a science, but nearly all agree that studying, preserving, and presenting material culture from the ancient world is what archaeologists do.

Following Napoleon's expedition to Egypt (from 1798 to 1801), in which 167 scholars and scientists accompanied him to record and study that ancient civilization, the world was captivated by archaeology and Egyptomania was born. A few decades later, as the Bible came under increasing attacks by source critical scholars, Bible believers financially supported archaeological efforts in the hope of confirming and better understanding the biblical record. Part of the original mission statement of the Palestinian Exploration Fund illustrates this well: "That the Biblical Scholar may yet receive assistance in illustrating the sacred text from careful observers of the manner and habits of the people in of the Holy Land." Likewise, the Egyptian Exploration Fund stated as one of its original purposes "to make surveys, [and] explorations...for the purpose of elucidating or illustrating the Old Testament narrative, or any part thereof, insofar as the same is in any way connected with Egypt."

In the early years, collecting objects was the primary objective of archaeology. Mysticism, prestige, and curiosity inspired scholars and laypersons alike to collect curio objects from the ancient world. The idea that the ancients had more understanding of the workings of the universe than modern humanity drove many to romanticize the potential knowledge behind even the most mundane objects. Some even ground up mummies and drank the powder thinking that they would attain some health benefit. Eventually, the first real professionals began to emerge and systematized the collection of data for the reconstruction of the historical past and a better understanding of life in the ancient world.

Sir Flinders Petrie recognized that certain pottery types were found in a specific sequence as seen from site to site. This realization resulted in the systemization of pottery as a method of dating. Although refined through the years, this system is still the standard used for dating related objects, walls, and dirt layers. His meticulous attention to detail and record keeping also became the good practice standard among archaeologists. William Foxwell Albright was instrumental in refining Petrie's ceramic typological work in the Holy Land. He became known as the father of biblical archaeology because of his insistence that all the historical aspects of the Bible were confirmed by archaeological finds. Although his premises were later challenged and his methods refined, his work inspired generations.

As criticism of the biblical text increased, two general lines of thought emerged. Those who considered the historical information in the early portions of the Bible up to the time of Ahab (ca. 874 B.C.) to have only minimal authenticity are called *minimalists*. *Maximalists*, on the other hand, argue that a maximum portion of the historical parts of the early portion of the Bible are authentic. Obviously not all minimalists agree with each other, and neither do all maximalists. Scholars of both positions have largely adjusted some terminology to avoid supporting positions of faith or political issues.

As archaeology as a discipline has become more codified, some changes of terminology have been introduced. One change that is common in publication is the practice of using B.C.E. ("before Common Era") and C.E. ("Common Era") rather than B.C. ("before Christ") and A.D. ("anno Domini" or "year of our Lord"), which has obvious Christian ties and thus can be awkward when engaged in research in modern non-Christian cultures. The numbers associated with these remain the same so that 1447 B.C. and 1447 B.C.E. are the same date. In the same way, A.D. 31 and C.E. 31 are the same date. While not all agree with the need for the change or use these new terms, it is important to understand them. As noted elsewhere, this commentary retains the dating system that acknowledges Christ's incarnation as the hinge-point of human history (for more, see "Old Testament Timeline," p. 94).

There have also been changes in the names used to describe the Holy Land. "Palestine" and "Israel" have been replaced as geographic terms in favor of "the southern Levant." (The term *Levant* comes from an Italian word adopted by the French referring to the rising of the sun and thus was applied to the western coast of the Mediterranean because it is a land east of Italy and France, from which the sun appears to rise.) This change was felt necessary by some to avoid seeming to side with either modern political entity (Israel or Palestine). Obviously, the modern world is divided up politically differently than the ancient world was, and archaeologists working in the region might need to work in territories governed by either Israeli or Palestinian authorities when researching an ancient civilization. To offend one or the other governments by terminology that suggests they are taking a side in a political disagreement does not seem wise. For similar reasons archaeologists also refer to the land in the southern Levant on the west side of the Jordan (modern-day Israel and Palestine) as

"Cisjordan" and that on the east (modern-day Jordan) as "Transjordan." In most places in this commentary, the more traditional term "Holy Land" is used for the entire region of the southern Levant.

Adventists have been conducting and joining archaeological digs in the Holy Land for decades. Siegfried Horn was the first to lead an Adventist dig in 1968 at Tal Hisban in Transjordan. This site was selected based on the similarity of the name with a site mentioned in the Bible (Heshbon; Num. 21:21–32). Since that time Adventist archaeologists have led digs or participated in the excavation of many other sites.

WHAT WE KNOW NOW

A tremendous number of discoveries have been made in the world of archaeology. A significant number of these provide information on some aspect of the Bible. Some of the more recent interpretations of discoveries are still waiting to be widely accepted.

Patriarchs

Abraham was called out of his homeland in Ur to travel to an unknown location (which turned out to be the Holy Land). In 1854 a great ziggurat (pyramid-shaped temple) was excavated at Ur. It had been built by Ur-Nammu to the moon god Nanna (also called Sin) during the approximate period that Abraham left the city. It was 210 feet (64 m) long by 148 feet (45 m) wide and 98 feet (30 m) tall. Many centuries later Nabonidus, the last king of the Babylonian Empire, restored it during his reign. In 1927 Leonard Woolley uncovered the ancient city of Ur itself. Several temples, private houses, tombs, and other buildings were excavated. One of the most impressive of these is the Great Death Pit where sixty-eight women dressed in fine clothing and six men (thought to be guards) surrounded by valuable objects were buried in a large mass grave. These objects still dazzle museum visitors today. The most famous of these are the twin Ram Caught in a Thicket statues that probably held a bowl between them. The rams are intricately decorated with shell, lapis lazuli, silver, and red limestone and have reminded scholars of both the story of the sacrifice of Isaac and the success Jacob had shepherding Laban's flock. However, these objects illustrate the pastoral element that was closely associated with the lives of even the very rich of this period rather than suggesting any association with a particular Bible story. These excavations and the literature in and about Ur have helped reconstruct the world Abraham left in order to follow God. We now understand that he was leaving the best civilization had to offer to live in a tent among strangers.

Abraham, and his family after him, entered into covenants and treaties with those who occupied the lands he moved through and lived in (e.g., Gen. 14:13; 21:25–32; 26:26–33; 31:43–54). Tablets discovered at Mari (on the Euphrates River) and dated to the first half of the second millennium B.C. reveal that such treaties were common between those living in urban centers and those living in tents around them. Tablets discovered at Nuzi (on the Tigris River) reveal that adoption of a servant in the absence of a legitimate heir was a cultural custom (Gen. 15:2). The tablets also reveal that if a woman could not produce children, it was her duty to provide a surrogate for her husband, a similar situation to what we see described in Genesis 16:2; 30:3–8. The law code of Hammurabi suggests that should an heir be produced by the original wife after providing a surrogate, the sons should split the inheritance, unless the slave and her son were released and allowed to go free (cf. Gen. 21:10). These findings help Bible scholars to have some historical background for the seemingly strange customs of Abraham and his family.

Exodus

A number of discoveries have helped us understand the world during the time of the Exodus event. For example, archaeologists are almost certain now of the locations of the supply cities Pithom and Raamses built by the Hebrews (Ex. 1:11). The locations of both have been a matter of debate for a long time. However, because of careful and persistent excavation in the delta region, the locations of both have now been established with a high degree of certainty. In the process, scholarly errors in this regard have been corrected.

Previously, it was thought that Raamses was located at Tanis in the northeast delta. This was because conclusions were prematurely reached after architectural materials dating to the time of Ramesses II were discovered there. Now we know that these building materials were robbed out of a location a bit further to the south at Qantir, where Seti I and Ramesses II (of the nineteenth dynasty) had established their capital city. Qantir had been selected for the capital (that was named Pi-Ramesses) because it was where the ruling family was from and also because a site more than half a mile (1 km) further to the south (at Tal ed-Dab'a) had been the northern capital in the eighteenth dynasty and the fifteenth dynasty before that.

During the fifteenth dynasty (seventeenth and sixteenth centuries B.C.), Semites (the Hyksos) from the southern Levant (the Holy Land) invaded and conquered Egypt. They set up a capital at Tal ed-Dab'a because it was a natural location for a harbor. This is likely the time when Joseph was in Egypt, although some scholars place him in Egypt approximately two centuries earlier (see "Old Testament Timeline," p. 94). After the Egyptians regained control of their country from the Hyksos (beginning the eighteenth dynasty, in the sixteenth century) this capital was renamed Perunefer (and possibly Raamses). The rulers of the eighteenth dynasty used Tal ed-Dab'a as one of two supply cities for the Egyptian military's excursions into what became the Holy Land. In fact, excavation has revealed that significant storage facilities and large military camps were constructed prior to the building of a large thirteen-acre palace at Tal ed-Dab'a illustrating where the priorities lay.

A similar error was made in the initial misidentification of Tal el-Maskhuta as Pithom. Excavations, as well as advances in ceramic typology, have demonstrated that Tal el-Maskhuta was not occupied in a significant way until the Persian period. Just as had happened with Tanis, building material had been robbed out of a location further west at Tal er-Retabeh. Tal er-Retabeh had a temple to Atum, one of the creator gods. Inscriptions with the name Pi-Atum (meaning "the domain of Atum") have been found. Linguistically, Pi-Atum is a match with Pithom. Tal er-Retabeh (i.e., Pi-Atum), in the western Wadi Tumilat, was constructed in the early eighteenth dynasty as a frontier fortress to supply the military's excursions into the Sinai, just at the time when the Hebrews were put into slavery. Consequently, both Tal er-Retabeh (Pi-Atum or Pithom) and Tal ed-Dab'a (Raamses) were constructed at the same time for the same purpose. A massive enclosure wall and western gate at Tal er-Retabeh made it nearly impossible to breach. It is likely that Tal er-Retabeh was the city that kept the Hebrews from leaving Egypt, which is why they needed permission from the king. Thus, Tal ed-Dab'a/Qantir is certainly Raamses and Tal er-Retabeh is Pithom.

The story of Aaron's rod changing to a serpent before Pharaoh and his court is a remarkable demonstration of the power of God. However, it may have had significance beyond just the obvious. Texts recovered in excavations in Egypt reveal that the Egyptians had more than 1,500 gods and goddesses. Two of these were considered protectors of the two lands of Egypt. Nekhbet, the vulture goddess, protected the narrow Nile valley of Upper Egypt, and Wadjet, the cobra goddess, protected the broad Nile delta region of Lower Egypt. Both appeared on the crown of Pharaoh, where Wadjet was called the Uraeus. Thus, the use of a serpent to demonstrate God's power would have clearly signaled that God was Master of the delta region, where His people lived and worked as slaves (the northern part of Egypt), and of the king himself. The use of the word *tomorrow* (Ex. 8:23; 9:5, 18–19; 10:4) when setting time designations for the plagues seems to indicate that the plagues affected Egypt for only about a one-day's journey in all directions, as that is the only territory that God's warning message could have reached and likely why He didn't connect any signs to the vulture goddess of the south.

But the Egyptians also had a god named Nehebu-kau (meaning "he who harnesses the spirits"), who had been worshiped since the time of the pyramids of the Old Kingdom. Nehebu-kau was a serpent god who was considered to have great power because he swallowed seven cobras. It is certain that every Egyptian in that room where Aaron's rod turned into a serpent would have immediately understood the significance of Aaron's serpent swallowing the serpents of the magicians. God was communicating to the Egyptians in a language that they would clearly understand, before any plague fell, that He had ultimate power over Egypt's gods. Pharaoh, who denied knowing God, was introduced to God in a way that could not have been misunderstood.

The golden calf narrative is another example of a story that has more meaning with backgrounds discovered in texts through archaeological efforts. The Bible describes Aaron as using an engraving tool to make the molded calf (Ex. 32:4). Later he said that he simply tossed the gold into the fire and a calf came out (Ex. 32:24). Although a clear misrepresentation of the process, this does describe the basic elements needed to make the calf. Statues of metal were often carved out of wax, then surrounded by clay, which was baked to harden into a mold (the wax melting and easily being poured out, leaving a hollow center). The metal was then put inside the clay mold to harden. Once the metal was cool, the clay mold was broken and out came the statue. It is certain that the calf was made in this way regardless of how Aaron minimized his participation in an effort to claim a miracle and remove

himself from responsibility. What has not been as readily apparent is why a calf of gold was used to represent the God who brought them out of the land of Egypt. The Sinai region was the land of Hathor, the mother cow goddess, who is often represented as providing nourishment. In fact, Amenhotep II (one of the candidates for the pharaoh of the Exodus) is famously depicted as drinking milk right from her udder. Hathor was a favorite patron deity of Hatshepsut (the most likely candidate for the adopted mother of Moses). Hathor was worshiped by performing that act between a man and a woman that causes a woman to become a mother. Great festivals were held where social boundaries were eliminated so that a commoner could unite with a princess. These festivals were accompanied with frivolity and excess, singing, dancing, shouting, and the clanging of metal sistra (similar to a rattle). It is likely that this was the sound that Joshua heard and mistook for war but that Moses, who was much more familiar with it, was able to recognize for the evil it was (Ex. 32:17–18). However, God was not represented as the mother cow but rather an offspring. Hesat, another cow goddess, was the divine nurse who was also the mother of the new king. Her son, the new king, was represented as a golden calf. It is very likely that Hesat and Hathor were both being worshiped at Sinai because of their similarities. God was likely depicted as their son, the golden calf, the new King who had brought the Hebrews to His mountain and had given them nourishment in the form of manna only after they arrived in the Sinai. Syncretistic worship of the gods was common in Egypt. The people certainly considered that they were worshiping the God who had brought them out of the land of Egypt by worshiping the golden calf (Ex. 32:1, 4).

A few objects also help with the dating of the Exodus. The Merenptah Stele (now in the Cairo museum), which is over ten feet high and over five feet wide, contains the earliest mention of Israel outside of the Bible, with the possible exception of the more controversial Berlin Pedestal. Found by Sir Flinders Petrie in western Thebes, the Merenptah Stele describes Pharaoh Merenptah's successful attack on the Libyans in his fifth year. Toward the end of the account, the enemies of Egypt, including Israel, are listed as also being subdued. This is significant as it places Israel as a people group in the southern Levant (the Holy Land) just five years after the death of Merenptah's father, Ramesses II (in the thirteenth century B.C.), who is often identified incorrectly as the pharaoh of the Exodus. Since the biblical account of the Exodus describes a forty-year period between the Exodus and the conquest of the Holy Land, the Hebrews could not have been a people group living in the promised land when Merenptah attacked in his fifth year. And thus, Ramesses II could not have been the pharaoh of the Exodus.

Conquest of the Promised Land

Because of her stellar reputation as a responsible and trustworthy scholar, English archaeologist Kathleen Kenyon shocked the world when she announced that the walls of Jericho did not come tumbling down and, additionally, that Jericho was not even occupied when Israel was supposed to have conquered the promised land. Nearly fifty years earlier, Ernst

Sellin and Carl Watzinger had excavated Jericho. They felt that the evidence did reflect the biblical account. In the early 1930s, John Garstang excavated Jericho and came to the same conclusion. But Kenyon, who excavated in the mid-1950s, felt that they were wrong, stating so publicly, though she never published her findings.

Reexaminations of her notes by Bryant Wood and others reveal that she only dug a trench across the site and based all her conclusions on what was found in this trench. Subsequent excavations discovered evidence of Late Bronze Age occupation (roughly 1400 B.C.), a heavy burnt layer (cf. Josh. 6:24), a double-walled fortification that had fallen outward, as if in an earthquake (Josh. 6:20), large quantities of grain (Josh. 2:6; 3:15; 5:10–12), and grain that was left by the invaders that showed signs of being burnt, as if it had been only a short siege but the conquerors did not take anything (Josh. 6:17–18). Further, a portion of the wall did not collapse (Josh. 2:18–19; 6:22–23).

Kenyon was looking for occupation during the nineteenth dynasty when Ramesses II reigned (thirteenth century B.C.). During this time, Jericho was abandoned. Since Kenyon was not a Bible scholar and had only the academic opinion of Bible scholars to go by, she made their mistakes hers. Bible chronology places the conquest of Jericho around 1400 B.C., and the Bible clearly says that Jericho was abandoned until the reign of King Ahab (1 Kin. 16:34). By the 1200s, the period Kenyon was assuming for the conquest, no one lived there. In this Kenyon was right.

The Period of the Monarchy

The existence and reign of David has been challenged in recent times by minimalist scholars who would like to deny the historicity of David and any earlier biblical history. However, in 1993 archaeologists discovered a stone inscription at Tel Dan in northern Israel that had been reused as fill in the eastern wall of the outer gate. This stele is now called the Tel Dan inscription. The author of the inscription claimed that Hadad (the storm god) made him king and boasted of killing Jehoram of Israel and Ahaziah of the house of David. There is some discussion as to the identification of the author. What is most significant, however, is the reference to the "house of David" in the text, indicating that there was a historical person named David who founded the line of kings in the Southern Kingdom of Judah.

Large six-chamber gates, built as part of a strengthening of wall fortifications at Gezer, Hazor, and Megiddo, match in design and come from the period of Solomon's reign. This work was probably referenced in 1 Kings 9:15. Similarly, excavations in Jerusalem below the Temple Mount have revealed monumental buildings that have been suggested to be the palace of David and later Solomon. In 2010, part of a wall with a gate house was found and has been associated with Solomon's fortifications. Large buildings from the tenth century B.C. in Khirbet Qeiyafa, houses built onto casemate (double) walls typical of Judean construction techniques (and not found in neighboring countries at that time), also suggest a strong centralized government at this time, and these have also been associated with David and Solomon. The twin gates (four chambers each) may help with the identification of this

site as biblical "Shaaraim" (meaning "two gates"; 1 Sam. 17:52) that guarded the Valley of Elah route between Bethlehem (north route) and Hebron (south route) to Gath in the west. However, further confirmation beyond the existence of architecture is needed before they can be associated with confidence to David and Solomon. In the meantime, the best that can be said is that these findings make a kingdom, like the one described for David and Solomon in the Bible, possible.

Another Bible story that has more credibility because of an archaeological discovery is Joram's attack against Mesha, king of Moab (2 Kin. 3). In August of 1868 a stele was shown by local tribespeople at Dhiban to a German missionary who immediately recognized its importance and informed the authorities in Jerusalem about what he had seen. Having heard about it, the French epigrapher Charles Simon Clermont-Ganneau obtained a paper squeeze of the inscription. The stone was eventually broken apart (stories vary at this point, so it is unclear what the motivation was), but the paper squeeze, together with the pieces of the stone that were salvaged, revealed that it was a stele commemorating Mesha's victory over Israel. It refers to the same battle mentioned in the Bible (2 Kin. 3:26–27) but offers the Moabite perspective and contains the earliest known reference to Yahweh outside of the Bible.

Aside from describing events in the Bible, sometimes ancient stelae provide information on events that are about Bible characters. Jehu is depicted in the Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III, discovered at Nimrud (ancient Calah) in 1846 by Sir Austen Henry Layard. The obelisk has four sides. On each side are five panels depicting tribute being brought to the Assyrian king. Significantly, the top panel reveals Jehu bringing tribute and kissing the ground before this king. It is the earliest picture of a king of Israel or Judah. Unfortunately, it shows him submitting to Assyria rather than to God.

The presence and activities of the Assyrians is well documented archaeologically. On one occasion (2 Chr. 32) they invaded Judah. Hanging on walls in a room in the British Museum are twelve panels recovered from room 36 in the Assyrian palace at Nineveh. These reliefs depict Sennacherib's conquest of Lachish, which is recorded in 2 Kings 18:13–16. By themselves they reveal much more about the battle than is recorded in the Bible, so a fuller understanding of that Bible story is gained. Excavations at Lachish reveal that the depictions are accurate. The panels show the Assyrians attacking the city using siege ramps with siege machines on both sides of the gate. Excavations have found the siege ramps right where the panels seem to depict them. This allows archaeologists to construct a three-dimensional understanding of the two-dimensional panel reliefs and thus understand the Bible story more clearly.

Prior to the Assyrians besieging Jerusalem, Hezekiah had constructed a tunnel to allow the city to have fresh water during an inevitable siege (2 Kin. 20:20; 2 Chr. 32:30). In 1838 Edward Robinson discovered a rock-cut tunnel beneath Jerusalem's City of David. In 1880 a group of boys playing in this tunnel discovered an inscription. In 1890 this inscription was chiseled out and stolen. Eventually most of it was recovered on the black market. It describes how Hezekiah had two teams tunneling from both ends toward each other, and they were able to meet—a remarkable engineering feat.

Exile

Although the Assyrians did not succeed in taking Judah into exile as they had Israel (2 Kin. 17–19), the Babylonians did a short time later (2 Kin. 24–25). "Babylon" is the Greek rendering of the Hebrew word "Babel." In this way, both the tower (Gen. 11) and the city ruled by Nebuchadnezzar (in Daniel) are known as "Babel," demonstrating that the Hebrew authors recognized the parallel. In fact, inscriptions bear testimony that Nebuchadnezzar considered the large ziggurat in Babylon to be a renovation of the tower.

The Ishtar Gate and the Processional Way of Babylon are now housed in the Pergamon Museum in Berlin, but only the smaller of the two gates is reconstructed for visitors to experience. In 1899 Koldeway rediscovered the Babylon that flourished under the kings Nabopolassar and his son Nebuchadnezzar II (famous from the book of Daniel). Over the next fourteen years, work continued until the outbreak of World War I. Since that time, nothing approaching the significance of this excavation has occurred there, although small excavations and clean-up efforts have taken place.

Babylon existed on both sides of the Euphrates River. It was circled by double walls—the larger wall being 20 feet (ca. 6 m) thick or more and possibly 100 feet (ca. 30 m) tall. A moat surrounded the walls which varied in width from 65 to 250 feet (ca. 20 to 76 m). Eight double gates (only four have been excavated) allowed entrance into the city, the Ishtar gate being the most remarkable one yet excavated. The Ishtar Gate on the north side of the city connected the palace and temple district with the bridge that crossed the Euphrates via the Processional Way. Both the gate and the way had walls lined with glazed tiles of blue, yellow, white, and brown decorated with lions, bulls, and dragons. The pavement was also decorated with white limestone and red breccia blocks. The Processional Way was about 62 feet (ca. 19 m) wide and extended for about 600 feet (ca. 182 m).

The enormous palace (that presumably contained the hanging gardens), the gigantic temple of Marduk (the Esagila), and the towering ziggurat Etemenanki were colossal in scale and were designed to wow visitors, filling them with a sense of their insignificance. It is this that Daniel and his friends would have encountered as they first entered Babylon and throughout their life in the palace. What has been excavated sufficiently demonstrates the source of Nebuchadnezzar's pride (Dan. 4:30).

Nebuchadnezzar is well attested by archaeology. Belshazzar, on the other hand, has not been. For most of the modern era, Belshazzar, king of Babylon (Dan. 5), was unknown outside the Bible. All Babylonian king lists claim that Nabonidus was the last king of Babylon, with no reference to Belshazzar. Then in 1854, excavations at the ziggurat in Ur revealed a piece of history that had been lost. At each of the corners of the last stage of the ziggurat, small clay cylinders were placed. Each cylinder contains the same inscription. Nabonidus,

who renovated that ziggurat, gave instructions on these cylinders for the construction of this temple. Each ends with a prayer for his son, Belshazzar.

It turns out, based on cuneiform inscriptions, that Belshazzar was left in charge of the city of Babylon while his father relocated to Tema, in Arabia, for the final ten years of his reign. Although still technically the king of Babylon, and thus its last king, Nabonidus left his son in charge. This is apparently why Belshazzar offered Daniel the position of third ruler over Babylon (Dan. 5:29), as Belshazzar himself was second in rank.

Intertestamental Period

One of the most significant archaeological discoveries related to the Bible happened in 1946 or 1947 when shepherds from the Ta'amireh Bedouin tribe stumbled upon a cave near the Dead Sea containing jars with scrolls in them. Over the next decade, a total of eleven caves were found and more than 800 manuscripts, dating from the third century B.C. to the first century A.D. The scrolls were mostly written on parchment (animal skin), with some on papyrus (paper) and one (in two parts) on copper.

About half of the Dead Sea Scrolls (a little more than 400 manuscripts) discovered so far are classified as Jewish literature, which had previously been available only in ancient translation but now is available in the original Hebrew and Aramaic. About a fourth of the scrolls represent previously unknown texts linked to the religious community of Qumran. Scrolls containing portions of biblical books make up the remaining fourth of texts recovered, reflecting all books of the Bible except Esther (which is referenced in other Dead Sea Scrolls). The manuscripts were only made available to the public in 1992 and now can be studied online.

Most significantly, the scrolls have provided an enormous amount of information about Jewish sects during the Second Temple period (including the time of history recorded in the NT). They also provided textual scholars with Hebrew manuscripts that are over a thousand years older than the ninth century A.D. Masoretic manuscript (the Leningrad Codex) that had been the basis for the Hebrew text of the OT. Scholars have recognized that the Masoretic Text appears to have been remarkably stable in transmission over these one thousand years.

On either side of the Dead Sea stood two major mountaintop fortresses, both containing a palace of Herod the Great. Masada, on the western shore of the Dead Sea, was the larger of the two. Machaerus, on the eastern shore of the Dead Sea, is the location where John the Baptist was imprisoned and later beheaded. Both fortresses were occupied by rebels in the Jewish War (A.D. 66). Both also have the remains of Roman siege ramps and camps still visible to visitors today. Machaerus was conquered by Rome in A.D. 72 and Masada in A.D. 73.

The third largest palace/fortress in the Roman world was constructed by Herod on a hill three miles southeast of Bethlehem. It is probable that the soldiers who killed all of the boys under the age of two (Matt. 2:16) were deployed from this fortress. Josephus wrote that Herod was buried halfway up the Herodium. In 2007 archaeologists discovered the burial site (robbed out in antiquity). In recent years some have challenged this identification. Regardless, the size and grandeur of the Herodium provides significant information about Herod.

Gospels

In 1968 Capernaum was fully excavated. Twelve simple homes were discovered around a first-century synagogue. In the largest of these homes, a few fish hooks were discovered along with simple ceramic lamps, jars, pots, and bowls. This large house, unlike the other smaller ones, had its floor covered repeatedly over time with crushed and beaten limestone, and the walls had been successively plastered and decorated. This suggests that it was more than just a simple fisherman's home at some point after the fisherman had lived there. Nothing is known for certain about the identity of the occupants or the use of the building other than this. However, based on early church documents, it is known that Peter's house in Capernaum was turned into an early church. By the Byzantine period, a basilica was erected above this large house to venerate it as the house of Peter. While the identity of Peter's house remains uncertain, the first century A.D. fisherman's home offers an authentic backdrop to the story of Jesus.

In the drought of 1985–1986, the water level of the Sea of Galilee dropped significantly, exposing parts of the sea floor that had not been seen before. Two brothers, looking for relics, stumbled upon a fishing boat from the first century A.D. Because it was waterlogged, great care was taken in preserving this object that now can be seen and studied. The boat, currently in a small museum on the shore of Galilee not far from where it was found, shows that it was repaired many times. A small deck at the stern and possibly another at the bow would have helped the fishermen haul in the nets and steer. Jesus would have slept on or under one of these decks on His boat during the stormy night described in Matthew 8:23–27; Mark 4:35–41; and Luke 8:22–25.

Many of the stories in the Gospels revolved around a pool, and quite a number of pools have been discovered in and around Jerusalem. Some were used for purification before entering the temple, others for water storage. A pool was discovered by the Sheep Gate (John 5:2) north of the Temple Mount that has been identified with the pool of Bethesda. The pool of Siloam was more difficult to identify. Since most of the modern Old City Jerusalem is built above the ancient iterations of Jerusalem, it is difficult to discover sites. For some time the pool at the end of Hezekiah's tunnel was thought to be the pool of Siloam. However, archaeological evidence suggested that this was used only from the Byzantine period onward. Then in 2004 workers digging to install pipes unexpectedly unearthed large ancient blocks. Archaeologists were called in and a massive pool was found with three landings before the bottom of the pool. Five steps descend to each landing and then to the bottom of the pool. The complete pool has not been excavated since much of it rests under the Orthodox church's orchard. However, pottery and coins discovered in the plaster of the pool confirm that it was dug in the first century B.C. and was most likely the pool of Siloam in the time of Jesus.

Also found around Jerusalem and other areas of the Holy Land are rolling stone tombs, although no two are exactly alike. Typically, they were owned by wealthy families (poorer families had rock-cut tombs but without the rolling stone). They usually had a stone bench upon which the body was prepared, carved resting places where the body would decompose, and sometimes there was a ledge where a box (called an ossuary) with the collected bones could sit so the resting place could be reused. The rolling stone itself was typically large and required several people to move. It was placed in a carved trench that allowed it to roll forward to cover the entrance and back to open the entrance. Excavation below the Church of the Holy Sepulcher has found a rock quarry, which had been abandoned in the first century, where new tombs were dug. It is likely that this abandoned rock quarry resembled a skull (John 19:17). This site (enclosed by the Jerusalem city wall in A.D. 41 and commemorated as the site of the crucifixion and burial until A.D. 66) was intentionally filled in by Hadrian ca. A.D. 135 and dedicated to a temple to Aphrodite in order to religiously "contaminate" it. In A.D. 325 it was excavated and has been associated with the death and burial of Jesus ever since. An alternate site was proposed by Charles Gordon in 1883 north of the city due to the appearance of a skull in the recently cut rock quarry. Ninth through seventh century B.C. tombs were discovered nearby that had been reused by the Byzantines. The Garden Tomb (as it is known today) provides a more authentic experience than does the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, even though the church is almost certainly the site of the death and burial of Jesus. The tombs that had been freshly dug at the abandoned rock quarry during the time of Jesus match the "new tomb" description found in John 19:41. The fact that this was a new tomb indicates that it was being reserved for the head of the family, Joseph, to die and that no other body had been placed inside (i.e., "new"). In this way, we can understand that Joseph gave up his right of first burial to Jesus.

In 1961 a fragmented stone dating to A.D. 26–36 with an inscription was recovered in an archaeological site at Caesarea Maritima. The lower portion of the inscription is missing, but what remains clearly says that Pontius Pilate was the prefect of Judea. The stone probably contained a dedication to a temple built for Tiberius. The stone had been reused in a set of stairs for a Herodian theater in the fourth century A.D. From Josephus and Philo we learn that Pilate had difficulty maintaining peace in Judea, particularly because he seemed to be insensitive to Jewish customs. On a number of occasions his actions caused near-insurrections. These incidents included allowing images of Caesar to be brought into Jerusalem, setting up gold shields to honor Tiberius (this time without an image but still despised by the Jews), using money from the temple to build an aqueduct, and slaughtering Samaritans. From these accounts a picture of Pilate begins to form of a man who had been reprimanded by Rome for his judgment on a few occasions, who cared little for the lives of those he ruled, and who certainly could not risk another riot during Passover.

Early Church

Jesus predicted the destruction of the temple of Jerusalem, which at the time seemed a nearly impossible task. Archaeological excavation around the Temple Mount over the decades has been ongoing to such a degree that most of us forget the accuracy of what He predicted. The scale of the blocks used in the construction reveals why His prediction was scoffed at.

When Herod rebuilt the Temple Mount, he did so on a grand scale. The structure covered 172,000 square yards (approx. 144,000 square meters), making it the largest temple precinct in the ancient world at that time. A staircase ran almost a half mile uphill to bring worshipers to the temple. Ritual immersion pools have been discovered along the route for worshipers to purify themselves before entering. An inscribed stone has been found instructing the priests where to stand when they blew the Sabbath trumpet.

Ancient quarries reveal that massive stones, tens to hundreds of tons each (the largest stone still at the quarry is 26 feet [or 8.5 m] long), were moved to the temple site. One of the foundation stones used in the temple wall was 45 feet (15 m) long, 11.6 feet (4 m) high, and 14–16 feet (approx. 5 m) wide and weighed almost 600 tons. The pedestrian street, discovered near the temple wall, has buckled from the weight of the stones tossed down when the Romans dismantled the temple.

Another site that was glorious but lies in ruins is Ephesus. Archaeological work began there in the nineteenth century. Because of this work we now know that Ephesus was the fourth largest city in the ancient Roman Empire. Ephesus was home to a temple dedicated to the Egyptian goddess Isis but was primarily known as the home of the goddess Artemis (who was later equated with the Roman goddess Diana). Her temple was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Archaeological evidence demonstrates that there was a building boom in Ephesus in the first century A.D. that included a new stadium, a larger agora (or open marketplace), a new theater that sat 25,000 people, and a complex to house the Olympic games. Temples to the Caesars, a concert hall, a library, a council chamber, baths, a communal latrine, and luxurious terraced houses complete with indoor plumbing, heating, water storage, and magnificent artistic paintings demonstrate the opulence of the upper class. In A.D. 262 an earthquake destroyed much of the city and the Goths attacked in the next year, leaving Ephesus in ruins.

Fake Discoveries

Some notable items of interest have not been found in spite of sensational claims otherwise. The search for Noah's ark continues. Most of the activity in this search centers around a large mountain called Greater Ararat in modern Iraq. Major expeditions took place in 1949, the 1980s, the 1990s, and the 2000s, but they were not led by recognized, professional archaeologists. The most recent claim was by a Turkish-Hong Kong expedition. Nothing found yet has satisfied archaeologists.

The ark of the covenant also has not been found. Ethiopians claim to have it, but this has been disputed with evidence that shows that what they have is a replica. Some have claimed

to have found it under the Temple Mount, but this claim has not been verified. Others claim that it is on Mount Sinai or Mount Nebo. Archaeologists nearly universally do not recognize any of these as verified.

The Tower of Babel also has not been found. It is likely that the great ziggurat of Babylon was built on its ruins, but excavation was not extensive enough to confirm or disprove this. At the moment this is mere speculation based on Nebuchadnezzar's claims.

THE FUTURE OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE BIBLE

There remains a massive amount of work yet to be done. Each archaeology field report contains crucial information about some aspect of life in the ancient world. Most of this information languishes in the world's libraries for want of scholars trained to recognize its significance. Nearly all archaeological sites are underfunded and left dormant for large parts of the year. Many are not being excavated at all. Museums are filled with objects still needing to be studied and written about. And while there are experts in nearly every aspect of archaeology, few believe in the Bible or have any interest in using the knowledge of archaeology to help illuminate the ancient world presented in the Bible.

The biggest problem is funding for projects and recruiting new generations of archaeologists. One ray of hope is the advancement of technology. Remote imaging has allowed archaeologists to see entire buried cities in Egypt via infrared satellite images. LIDAR (an acronym for LIght Detection And Ranging) and drones have also provided very helpful images from above. Magnetometry, electric resistivity, and ground-penetrating radar allow archaeologists to see below the ground and dig more surgically, thus reducing costs. Computer modeling and Internet tools are allowing excavations to be reexamined and promote collaboration among experts across the globe. The importance of managing an archaeological site even after excavation ends has become a priority. Involving the local population in digs and project management helps them to gain a feeling of ownership that protects sites. Antiquities departments are discovering the value of tourism and are adding more security to certain sites.

Archaeology is a window into the past that allows us to better understand the world of the Bible. When we understand the world that God interacted with in the long-ago past, we better understand how He interacts with us today.

OLD TESTAMENT TIMELINE

The OT generally follows a time sequence from beginning to end such that, with a few exceptions, the further one reads through the biblical text the closer in history to the Roman period one travels. However, because the canon is not always presented in chronological order, it is necessary to understand the timeline in order to also understand the relationship of each part to the others. All of the elements that make up the OT (i.e., stories, laws, wisdom writings, and prophecies) hang upon chronological statements that place these elements along a timeline that the biblical authors often appear to assume the reader is familiar with. This understood timeline is not always clear to the modern reader.

It is important, then, for the modern reader to become familiar with this timeline, for it gives relational meaning to each passage by tying one text to another and one event to another. Modern readers can most easily see the timeline through the chronological statements of the Bible. The primary value of a study of these chronological statements (i.e., the visible portions of the timeline) is that it provides deeper insights into the text by recognizing these relationships. Understanding the statements also opens further comprehension of the invisible portion of the timeline (i.e. the understood timeline that is not explicitly mentioned).

Time is a fixed phenomenon that cannot be seen, but it can be measured. Ancient scholars throughout history found their own ways to measure it. And although there are multiple ways to measure time, time itself is unchanged by these efforts. In this way the natural timeline is unseen, and attempts to measure it, in a sense, endeavor to make portions of it visible. This article will begin by briefly reviewing some of the methods ancient scholars used to measure time and providing a brief history of those who have studied these methods in modern times. This will serve as important background to a study of the biblical timeline from Jesus back to Adam.

OVERVIEW OF CHRONOLOGY

Forces beyond human control were often deified in the ancient world. These natural forces were studied in an attempt to find patterns that could bring order to life and were often used to manipulate people for religious or political purposes. Patterns were identified in daily, monthly, and yearly periods through the movement of heavenly bodies (sun, moon, and stars) and the coming and going of identifiable seasons. The ebb and flow of the cycle of life also provided measurable patterns. Religions and the governments that supported them were built around these measurements, which were systematized into calendars.

Some of these calendars were built around the movement of the moon. The Hebrews, Assyrians, Babylonians, Greeks, and early Romans developed versions of this lunar calendar. This had an immediate value in daily life. However, the basic problem with the lunar calendar was that over time it gradually lost its synchronization with the seasons. Each lunar-based civilization had its own way of dealing with this problem.

Other civilizations, such as the Egyptians and later Romans, crafted a solar calendar. This system did not lose its synchronization with the seasons as quickly as did the lunar calendar, so it took generations to identify the weaknesses of the solar calendar and then make adjustments. Today, we have largely adopted the solar calendar while maintaining some aspects of the lunar calendar for specific purposes. Our modern solution for the problems of a strict solar calendar is based in large part on the Julian calendar system that Augustus introduced in 22 B.C., in which an extra day was added to the calendar every fourth year (known as a leap year).

Another complication was the start to the new year. The Egyptians began their year when Sirius, the most prominent star in the night sky, first became visible, which corresponded roughly to the flooding of the Nile in mid-to-late July. The Assyrians, Babylonians, and Persians celebrated the beginning of their new year at the first new moon after the vernal equinox in late March or early April. God instructed the Hebrews before the Exodus event to begin their new year in the month that they left Egypt (which also corresponded to the vernal equinox). Later, the new year was shifted to line up better with agriculture so that the time of sowing marked the beginning of the year around mid-September. Understanding when and where this shift in the Hebrew calendar took place is vital to understanding some of the chronological statements in the OT and will be discussed where appropriate below. The Romans originally also timed their new year to the vernal equinox but eventually shifted it to January 1, a practice that is in wide, but not universal, use around the world today.

Relative versus Absolute

We do not know how much time passed between the creation of humans and our era. The most common modern system of numbering years increases from a point in time that was associated with the coming of Christ into the world. This system, built around the Christian religion, called all years from year one onward *anno domini*, the year of our Lord (abbreviated as A.D.). The advantage to this system is that all years before A.D. 1 are numbered in reverse order so that the further back in time one goes the higher the year number, allowing for a variety of chronological schemes to be developed and tested. These years are called B.C. (before Christ). Ironically, a mistake was made when this system was invented so that Christ was actually born somewhere between 6 and 4 B.C. (see below, pp. 101–102).

Recently, there has been a shift in scholarship away from using the Christian-influenced labels, particularly in areas of the world where they might be offensive. Instead of A.D. and B.C., which are based on the advent of Christ, the designations C.E. (common era) and B.C.E. (before common era) are used. The numbers for the years remain exactly the same so that A.D. 1 is the same as 1 C.E. This commentary will retain the A.D./B.C. labels.

A major mistake was made when this system was devised, leaving out the year zero. The result is that when using arithmetic to calculate how many years passed from a B.C. date to an A.D. date, an extra year must be added to the sum. An extra year must be subtracted for the same exercise in reverse. For example, if we wanted to start at 457 B.C. to discover when a period of 490 years ended (the seventy-week prophecy of Daniel 9), we would need to cross between B.C. and A.D. Since B.C. numbers decrease through time, we add 490 (years) to negative 457 (or 457 B.C.), with a sum of 33 (or A.D. 33). However, our integer system uses a zero, which the calendar system does not. Since the span of time between 1 B.C. and A.D. 1 was one year and not two, we must account for that missing year by adding one more year to the sum of our calculation. In this way, 490 years spans the time between 457 B.C. and A.D. 34.

An alternate dating system exists that attempts to calculate time from Creation forward. This system is called *anno mundi* (A.M.), meaning "in the year of the world" (or "year after Creation"). Many have worked on a system that could be used universally, but since there is not a consensus on when Creation took place, there is no widely accepted standard system. The Eastern Orthodox Church during the Byzantine period used the dates in the Septuagint to arrive at a date equivalent to September 1, 5509 B.C. to begin their A.M. calendar system. The Jewish community in the Middle Ages used the Masoretic Text to come up with a date equivalent to October 6, 3761 B.C. to begin their A.M. system.

The ancient people did not use any of these methods to measure time. Most ancient civilizations primarily dated events by connecting them in a relative way to other events that were well established. We call them *anchor events* because these established events were used to anchor other dates to the timeline. The reign of a king was often the anchor event. Sometimes the anchor event was a natural disaster, such as an earthquake, famine, flood, or volcano eruption. Sometimes it was a war. In all ancient civilizations, astronomical phenomena such as eclipses and the movements of planets were noted and often tied to the reign of monarchs. These phenomena are useful in establishing absolute dates and setting chronological anchors. It is upon these anchor events that the secular historic chronology is largely based. For example, approximately 1,600 cuneiform texts dealing with astronomy have been recovered from the city of Babylon alone. About 300 of these were mathematical tables used for calculating the positions of various heavenly bodies. The remaining 1,300 texts were observational diaries, general yearly records, records that tracked individual planets, and records of lunar eclipses. Modern astronomers are able to work backward from known astronomical positions today to establish absolute dates that correspond to these observations.

Statements in the OT often use these anchor events to date other events, such as "In the third year of Cyrus…" (Dan. 10:1). It is up to modern chronologists to link the anchor event to a date in an absolute reckoning system (such as A.D./B.C. or A.M.). When this is done, we can know that an event that took place in the third year of Cyrus (Dan. 10:1) happened by our absolute reckoning system in 536 B.C. because we have calculated from other sources the exact absolute dates, according to our system, of the reign of Cyrus.

Archaeology is one area of research that provides absolute dates for these relative anchor events. When an absolute date is associated with an anchor event in OT history, we have an anchor date along the OT timeline. In the discussion of the OT timeline below, these anchor dates will be identified along with the archaeological data that allowed it to be assigned a date. In turn, the anchor date can be used to help understand the relative relationship of a number of other events; the most enlightening are often those from other books of the Bible.

Chronology versus Genealogy

Debate concerning the OT timeline often results from lack of data. Wherever an educated guess is the best that can be offered, there is debate. Sometimes theories are used to support a debated point. Often these theories are themselves educated guesses. And since it is not possible (due to the lack of data) to resolve all of the debates, these theories linger. Over time, unproven but not yet discredited theories become cherished by scholars who have used them. In some cases, when data later emerges that should have clarified the original debate, it is not allowed to do so because of the cherished theory. Students of chronology should always keep this in mind and seek to resolve debate rather than maintain a theory.

The concepts of chronology and genealogy often get confused. Chronology deals with statements of time. Genealogy deals with generations of family relations. It is common to find both of these in the same OT passage. However, genealogy does not follow any given time sequence and thus is immeasurable in absolute time and often unhelpful for debates on chronology. This is because certain numerical factors vary from case to case. These varying factors may be age when married, age of parents at procreation, gender of offspring, and quantity of offspring.

This is clearly seen in the family of Abraham. Before Isaac was born, Abraham's nephew had children (Gen. 18–19), producing three generations in Abraham's brother's line but only two in Abraham's. Thus, because Isaac was born late in Abraham's life, he was essentially contemporaneous with his uncle's grandchildren, rather than his uncle's children, his first cousins. Thus, when Abraham's family is compared to his brother's, a generation was essentially skipped. Without the details of the story, we would have assumed (from a genealogical list that included only names) that Isaac was in the same generation as his cousin, Abraham's brother's son. This generation disparity is further highlighted when we note that Isaac married his own cousin's daughter (Gen. 22:20–23).

Sometimes, disparate facts from different places in one or more scriptural narratives can help us identify generational relationships. Jacob, like Abraham, did not have children until late in life. We know this because his son Joseph was thirty when he rose to power in Egypt (Gen. 41:46). Jacob came to Egypt after seven years of plenty and two years of famine (Gen. 45:11), at which point he was 130 years old (Gen. 47:9). Thus, we can calculate that Joseph was born when Jacob was ninety-one years old. Joseph was also born in the last year of the second set of seven years that Jacob worked for his two wives (Gen. 30:25–26; 31:41), so Jacob was eighty-four when he married Leah and Rachel, one week apart (29:28), and seventy-seven when he fled home (Gen. 27:41—28:5). In this way, chronology helps illustrate how generations are not parallel, even among brothers (his twin, Esau, was married several times by that point and had sons of his own).

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The earliest attempts to reconcile biblical events with the history of secular nations were undertaken by Josephus, Africanus, and Eusebius. Josephus was a Jew living in the first century A.D. during the last days before the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and caused the second Diaspora (A.D. 70). It is evident that Josephus wanted the Romans to appreciate the long history of his people, going back to antiquity, and so he wrote his famous work, the *Antiquities*. Julius Africanus was a Christian writer who lived in the southern Levant at the end of the second and beginning of the third centuries A.D. He wrote *Chronography* in five volumes. Eusebius of Caesarea lived toward the end of the third and beginning of the fourth centuries A.D. and wrote *Chronicle*. All three quoted from ancient sources. Unfortunately, their writings do not all agree chronologically. For example, one source was the writings of an Egyptian priest named Manetho, who wrote a history of ancient Egypt. Manetho's work no longer exists as an independent work. Selected quotes, found in these three sources, are all that remain. Unfortunately, the quotes that these writers attribute to Manetho do not agree with each other. This has made modern attempts to use these sources difficult. It has been necessary to find additional data to help reconcile the inconsistencies and fill in the gaps from ancient writers such as these.

Early Attempts

In 1625, James Ussher was appointed archbishop of Armagh, making him the head of the Anglican Church of Ireland. He spent the next few decades writing on theology before publishing a treatise on the calendar in 1648. Two years later, in 1650, his most famous work, *Annales veteris testamenti, a prima mundi origine deducti* (Annals of the Old Testament, Deduced from the Beginning of the World), was published. In it, he traced the chronology of the Bible back to Creation, which he thought was the evening of October 22, 4004 B.C.

Although he died six years later, Ussher's chronology lived long after him. His A.M. dates were adopted for use as margin dates in many Bibles. The first was a French Catholic Latin Bible in 1662. The best-known Bible to include Ussher's dates in the margins, the King James Version (KJV), did not originally have them. Bishop William Lloyd adjusted Ussher's dates from A.M. to B.C./A.D. in the London edition of the Oxford Bible in 1701. In 1950, the KJV replaced them with an updated set of dates based on new knowledge. By the 1970s most Bibles had removed dates altogether from margins as it was becoming clear that the dates were problematic.

Thiele's Breakthrough

Edwin Thiele, Seventh-day Adventist professor of antiquities, did his doctoral work at the University of Chicago on the chronology of the kings of Judah and Israel. Kings rarely, if ever, died conveniently on the last day of the calendar year so that their successor could begin ruling on New Year's Day. As a result, the remaining days of a calendar year in which the former king died (or was removed from office) was the accession year of the next king. Thiele discovered that the Northern Kingdom of Israel counted the accession year (remaining time in the last year of the previous king) as year one of the new king (essentially counting the same year twice; termed nonaccession- or regnal-year system), while the Southern Kingdom of Judah counted the accession year as his year zero, making the regnal year (first full year of a new king) year one (termed accession-year system).

He also discovered that the two kingdoms considered the new year to begin at different points in the calendar year. Israel (in the north) began its new year in the spring (the month of Nisan), and Judah (in the south) began its new year in the fall (the month of Tishri). Armed with these two pieces of data, Thiele was able to demonstrate that most of the chronological statements in the OT regarding the kings lined up very well. Later scholars added the possibility of coregencies (where a son ruled with his father for a period immediately prior to the father's death). The addition of coregency to Thiele's discoveries reconciled nearly all of the chronological issues for the period of the kings, although some scholars still debate minor points. These discoveries proved vital in a more accurate understanding of how related chronological statements should be understood, not just among books but also within books and particularly the prophecies of Daniel.

TIMELINE AND ISSUES

The review of the OT timeline that follows will work from known to unknown. Most anchor dates are in the more recent past. The further back in time a civilization existed, the fewer archaeological records there are to be recovered. This results in less information for the older civilizations that would enable chronologists to create anchor dates.

Most of the dates from the Roman period back to the Babylonian civilization are firm. As a result, the first section will briefly review anchor dates from Nebuchadnezzar to Jesus (Babylon to early Rome). It will become clear that even with anchor dates, there is still room for debate around events that are not firmly fixed on the OT timeline. The sections that follow this will likewise mark time from one important figure to another until Creation. All dates in these sections are to indicate relationships between chronological statements in the Bible and should not be read as absolutely definitive. They are simply a point of reference. However, one system of interpretation needed to be followed for consistency, and so the one that required the least amount of subjectivity in regard to the biblical text was the method selected. Along the way, prominent areas of disagreement will be briefly examined.

Nebuchadnezzar to Jesus

Jehoiachin Released from Prison. The length of the captivity of Jehoiachin, one of the last kings of Judah, needs some chronological explanation. He was taken captive by the Babylonians when the city of Jerusalem fell on March 16, 597 B.C. For the Babylonians, a new calendar year began on April 13, 597 B.C., about one month later. Two ways were used to record that one month. One way was to ignore it (or wrap it into the next full calendar year). The other was to count it as a separate year altogether. The modern researcher cannot always be sure which system was used.

Jehoiachin was released from prison in the twelfth month on either the twenty-seventh day (2 Kin. 25:27) or the twenty-fifth day (Jer. 52:31), which would have been either March 23 or 21 (respectively), 560 B.C. This is a little more than thirty-seven years after being taken captive (2 Kin. 25:27) but almost a year and a half after Evil (Awel)-Merodach (Marduk, also Amel Marduk) became king. However, 2 Kings 25:27 records that Jehoiachin was released from prison by Evil (Awel)-Merodach in the year that he rose to power. Nebuchadnezzar died in early October 562 B.C. (likely on October 8), making 562/561 B.C. the accession year of Evil (Awel)-Merodach. So his rise to power happened thirty-five years, not thirty-seven years after Jehoiachin was taken captive. The problem is resolved in the translation of the phrase related to Evil (Awel)-Merodach becoming king.

The statement in 2 Kings 25:27, "in the year that he began to reign" or "in the year [he] became king" must be a reference to his first regnal year (561/560), not his accession year. Without this information we might believe that Jehoiachin was released almost immediately after Nebuchadnezzar's death, rather than almost a year later. Understanding this helps us to realize that Jehoiachin's imprisonment was not immediately on the mind of Evil (Awel)-Merodach but appears to have been an issue that came up after he had taken the necessary time to secure his throne. This also demonstrates that a year in ancient (including biblical) texts does not always mean one full calendar year.

The Cyrus Decree to Release Jews. Nabonidus (Nabunaid) was the last king of the Babylonian Empire. The Nabonidus Chronicle records the fall of the city of Babylon. Based on the chronology presented in the Nabonidus Chronicle, the Persian forces of Cyrus the Great captured Sippar on October 10, 539 B.C., Babylon on October 12, 539 B.C., and Arahsamnu on October 29, 539 B.C. Having vanquished all his immediate enemies, Cyrus was able to begin the first year of his reign as king of Babylonia the following spring, with the new year in April of 538 B.C., making this the year the decree was made to release the Jewish exiles (2 Chron. 36:22; Ezra 1:1; 6:3).

Decree to Restore and Rebuild Jerusalem. One anchor date from the NT that affects the OT timeline is found in Luke 3:1, 23. This links the beginning of the ministry of Jesus (at about thirty years of age, following His baptism) to the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar, which is commonly believed to have been in A.D. 27 (although there is some discussion on this date). Remembering that there was no year zero, the prophecy given to Daniel (Dan. 9:25) can be calculated to have begun in 457 B.C., the year the command was given to restore and rebuild Jerusalem by Artaxerxes I in the seventh year of his reign (Ezra 7:8–26).

An important factor in correlating anchor dates given by different writers is the new-year reckoning system (spring or autumn) used by the audience those writers were addressing.

Daniel used the Babylonian system (spring) when writing about a Babylonian government event in the narrative portion of his book. Jeremiah, writing about the same event (from the Jewish perspective), used the autumn system (which was used in the Southern Kingdom of Judah at the time; see "Thiele's Breakthrough," pp. 98–99). On the other hand, Daniel's prophecies later in his book, written for a Jewish audience in captivity, also appear to use the autumn system of reckoning.

The Greek to Roman Transition. Alexander the Great crossed the Hellespont in 334 B.C. and defeated Darius in 333 B.C. In 332 B.C. he defeated the city of Tyre and marched into Egypt, establishing Alexandria. He marched into Mesopotamia and defeated Darius again in 331 B.C. On either June 10 or 11, 323 B.C., Alexander died in Babylon after having extended his kingdom into India.

Seleucus, former commander of the cavalry, emerged as ruler of Babylon in 312 B.C. In 301 B.C. Seleucus took control of Anatolia and Syria. Wars with other generals would mark this entire dynasty. Pompey killed the last Seleucid princes and established the Holy Land as a Roman province in 63 B.C. Hasmonean kings reigned there until Herod the Great (with the blessing of Rome) defeated the last of them in 37 B.C. and ascended to the throne.

Meanwhile, in either 305 or 304 B.C., the Ptolemaic Kingdom was established in Greece under Ptolemy I, former general and satrap of Egypt. Eventually the last (and famous) Cleopatra (the seventh) began to rule in 51 B.C. Julius Caesar, who had defeated Pompey, become emperor of Rome, and formed an alliance with Cleopatra, died on March 15, 44 B.C. His adopted son, Octavian, became emperor. In 37 B.C., the same year that Herod began ruling in Judea, Mark Antony married Cleopatra. Herod allied himself with Antony and named the Antonia Fortress just north of the Temple Mount in his honor. When Octavian defeated Cleopatra and Antony, Herod re-allied himself with Octavian, whose name was later changed to Caesar Augustus (Luke 2:1). Herod built a new port city (to replace Joppa) and named it Caesarea (Marittima) to honor his new patron.

Birth of Jesus. Luke 3:23 states that Jesus was "about thirty years of age" in A.D. 27. "About" could reasonably mean one to two years on either side of thirty (meaning that He could have been slightly younger or older than thirty at the time). Thirty years prior to A.D. 27 is 4 B.C. (remembering that there was no year zero in this system). Herod the Great died (Matt. 2:19–20) about 4 B.C.

Early church authors (Clement of Alexandria, Julius Africanus, Origen of Alexandria, Eusebius of Caesarea, Epiphanius, Tertullian, and others) record the tradition that Jesus was born anywhere from A.D. 1 to 4 B.C. Herod was named king by the Roman Senate in late 40 B.C. but not named king in Jerusalem until the summer or fall of 37 B.C. after defeating the last Hasmonean king. His reign ended after his thirty-fourth year in Judea, which was 4 B.C. (He died in Jericho but was buried at the Herodium, southeast of Bethlehem.) Both Origen and Eusebius relate the tradition that Jesus was about two years old when the wise men visited and that He was in Egypt for about two years, which fits the information in Matthew 2.

How trustworthy any of these early church traditions are (since they do not all agree) is still a matter of debate. Since Jesus spent some time in Egypt and was less than two years old when they traveled to Egypt (Matt. 2:16), it seems likely that He was not born before 6 B.C. and more likely sometime in 5 B.C.

Solomon to Nebuchadnezzar

Divided Monarchy Chronology. At some point following the death of Solomon, the years of the reigns of the kings of Judah (the Southern Kingdom) were recorded in Scripture using the accession-year system (essentially counting the remaining parts of the rest of the last year of the previous king as a year zero of the new king). The years of the reigns of the kings of Israel (the Northern Kingdom) were recorded by the regnal-year system (or nonaccession; making the last year of the previous king the first year of the new king, essentially counting the same year twice). Combining this piece of information with the understanding of coregencies of certain kings provides a solution to most chronological issues of the Hebrew kings (see "Thiele's Breakthrough," pp. 98–99).

Two archaeological objects provide the most important anchor dates that can be applied to the internal chronology to give the OT timeline absolute dates during the time of the divided monarchy. Corroborating archaeological evidence supports these dates. Shalmaneser III's Monolith Inscription records the defeat of a coalition of forces from the Levant at Qarqar that included "Ahab, the Israelite." This battle is believed to have taken place in 853 B.C. (based on the dating in the inscription) but is not recorded in Scripture. Soon after, in the same year (according to the chronology of the reigns of the kings in the Bible), Ahab died at Ramoth-Gilead, an event that is recorded in Scripture (1 Kin. 22:3, 35) and can thus be dated with confidence. The Black Obelisk shows Shalmaneser III receiving tribute in 841 B.C. from many peoples and regions, including Jehu, king of Israel. Scripture does not record this event, but it records the year in which Jehu began to reign in Israel. These two events, twelve years apart, are anchor dates in the chronology of the kings of Israel in the OT timeline.

There has been some debate regarding the date of the division of the kingdom. Alternative dates include 926 and 922 B.C. The year 922 B.C. is based on a citation of Menander of Ephesus by Josephus regarding a kings list of Tyre and not by a calculation of dates backward from Ahab. However, Josephus was wrong in his dates and also with his math. Thus, based on the anchor dates of Ahab and Jehu and on the reigns of the kings of the Northern Kingdom as given in Scripture, the date 926 B.C. is generally regarded as the correct one.

Other Anchor Dates. In an inscription, Tiglath-Pileser III of Assyria claims to have received tribute from Azariah/Uzziah of Judah in 743 B.C. This does not match with any account in Scripture, but it does fit within the chronology. Another inscription describes the defeat of Rezon by Tiglath-Pileser III in 732 B.C. (an account probably associated with 2 Kin. 16:7–9) around the time of Hoshea's rise to the throne in Israel (2 Kin. 17:1). This provides another anchor date.

A Babylonian chronicle that dates to about 500 B.C. records that Shalmaneser V destroyed Samaria in 722 B.C. (2 Kin. 17:3) in the last year of his reign. This is an anchor date. This was also the accession year of Sargon II. He also claimed in his own inscriptions to have destroyed Samaria in 722 B.C., probably because he participated in the battle before officially becoming king.

The annals of Sennacherib record that in his third campaign, dated to 701 B.C., he laid siege to Jerusalem. This is no doubt the same event that is recorded in Scripture (2 Kin. 18:13; Is. 36:1), which occurred during Hezekiah's fourteenth year as king. This is an anchor date.

Rise of Babylon. Cuneiform tablets help us pinpoint the exact dates and make sense of the chronology in the closing years of the kingdom of Judah. On November 23, 626 B.C., Nabopolassar began to reign in Babylon, according to a cuneiform tablet in the British Museum (BM 25127). He was the father of Nebuchadnezzar II (who appears in the book of Daniel). Jeremiah's ministry, then, began in the year before this event (627 B.C.). In other words, God had already begun to predict the fall of Jerusalem by a conqueror from the north (Jer. 1:14) in the year before Nebuchadnezzar's father even began to reign and while Babylon was still part of the Assyrian Empire.

Nabopolassar, king of Babylon, joined forces with the king of Media. Together they attacked and defeated Nineveh. According to a cuneiform tablet in the British Museum (BM 21901), this was in July or August of 612 B.C. That same tablet also indicates that Nabopolassar attacked the remnant of the Assyrian empire under Ashuruballit II, taking Haran in 610 B.C. The next year (609 B.C.) a large army from Egypt tried to capture Haran to assist the Assyrian king. This is almost surely what was referenced in 2 Kings 23:29 (2 Chr. 35:20–21) when Josiah died. This is an anchor date.

The Egyptians under Necho II took Kimuhu, a Babylonian fortress, in 606 B.C. according to a cuneiform tablet in the British Museum (BM 22047). The next year, 605 B.C., another tablet (BM 21946) says Nabopolassar sent his son Nebuchadnezzar to meet the Egyptians at Carchemish, where he crushed them. Nebuchadnezzar chased the Egyptians into the southern Levant and, in the process, conquered Jerusalem. This is an anchor date.

Nabopolassar died on August 15, 605 B.C. On September 7, 605 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar was made king of Babylon (making 605 B.C. his accession year). On April 2, 604 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar began his first regnal year as king of Babylon.

Dating the First Conquest of Jerusalem. Jeremiah wrote that the battle at Carchemish took place in the fourth year of Jehoiakim (Jer. 46:2). The kings of Judah, at least from the time of Josiah to the fifth year of Jehoiakim, reckoned their year from fall to fall (rather than spring to spring as they had from the Exodus at least through Solomon's reign). The book of the law was found during the eighteenth year of the reign of Josiah (2 Kin. 22:3, 8) and Passover was celebrated (because they wanted to do what the book of the law said) also in the eighteenth year (2 Kin. 23:23). Josiah died in May or June of 609 B.C. at the battle at Megiddo. Jehoahaz reigned for only three months, and thus his reign ended in either July or

August of 609 B.C. Pharaoh Necho II deposed Jehoahaz and installed another son of Josiah, Jehoiakim (changing his name from Eliakim), who reigned for eleven years (2 Kin. 23:36). Jehoiakim, therefore, took the throne in July or August of 609 B.C. with only a month left in that accession year. His first regnal year began in September of 609 B.C. and the battle of Carchemish occurred four years later, as Jeremiah said. Jeremiah also connected this event to the beginning of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar (Jer. 25:1). However, the phrase that is sometimes translated as "first year" should more accurately be understood to mean "beginning year" (or "accession year"). Because the Hebrews reckoned the regnal year from September (when Nebuchadnezzar was put on the throne), Nebuchadnezzar began his regnal year not from April of 604 B.C. (as the Babylonians reckoned) but from September of 605 B.C., as reckoned by those in Judah. Thus, it is still accurate from the perspective of Judah to call 605 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar's first year.

Exactly the reverse reckoning is seen in Daniel 1:1. Daniel recorded that Nebuchadnezzar attacked Jerusalem in the third year of Jehoiakim. But Nebuchadnezzar attacked Jerusalem after the battle of Carchemish, which, as just was said, took place in Jehoiakim's fourth year. This has been explained by simply understanding that Daniel was writing from Babylon, in which the regnal year began in April, not September, and so appears to have reflected the Babylonian government's system of reckoning. In later prophecies when writing about his people, Daniel's method appears to have used the autumn to autumn reckoning system. From the Babylonian perspective (as the first chapter of Daniel is written), the accession year of Jehoiakim ended not in September of 609 B.C. but in April of 608 B.C. Therefore, from the Babylonian way of reckoning, the battle of Carchemish, and thus the fall of Jerusalem in 605 B.C., took place in the third year of Jehoiakim, not his fourth. This does not affect the seventy-year prophecy of Jeremiah (Jer. 25:11–12; 29:10), as he was writing based on the Jewish way of reckoning. This amply illustrates the ever-present difficulty when comparing chronologies of unrelated ancient cultures. The chronologist must always remember from what perspective the information was recorded.

End of Judah. Nebuchadnezzar returned to the Levant (which the Babylonians called "Hatti-land") in May or June of 604 B.C. to receive tribute from those he had conquered the year before. It seems that when Jehoiakim became his vassal (2 Kin. 24:1), he also adopted the Babylonian calendar and returned to counting the years from spring to spring. From the perspective of those in Judah, Jehoiakim's fifth year was seventeen months long rather than the normal twelve. This explains how the ninth month of his fifth year fell in the winter (Jer. 36:9, 22).

In this way, Jehoiakim's eighth year was at this point the same as Nebuchadnezzar's fourth year. A cuneiform tablet in the British Museum (BM 21946) records that in Nebuchadnezzar's fourth year he was defeated on the border of Egypt. This most likely explains why Jehoiakim rebelled after serving Nebuchadnezzar for three years (2 Kin. 24:1).

Three years later (Jehoiakim's eleventh year; 2 Kin. 23:36; 2 Chr. 36:5) Nebuchadnezzar returned. A cuneiform tablet in the British Museum (BM 21946) says that he camped against the city of Judah in his seventh year. This tablet dates the beginning of the siege to December 18, 598 B.C. and the end to March 16, 597 B.C., which is the exact date of the fall of Jerusalem. Since 2 Kings 24:5–6 makes it clear that Jehoiakim died and his son Jehoiachin ascended to the throne and ruled for three months and ten days (2 Chr. 36:9) before Nebuchadnezzar replaced him after the siege, Jehoiakim must have died and Jehoiachin must have taken the throne on December 9, 598 B.C., just before the siege began.

Mattaniah, Jehoiachin's uncle, was made king by Nebuchadnezzar, who changed his name to Zedekiah (2 Kin. 24:17) immediately after the end of the siege, which was before the end of the regnal year in April. So the remainder of that year was his accession year. His first regnal year began on April 13, 597 B.C., corresponding to Nebuchadnezzar's eighth regnal year.

Zedekiah reigned for eleven years (2 Kin. 24:18), putting the fall of Judah in 587/586 B.C., which is dated to the nineteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign (Jer. 52:12–14). The siege had begun in the ninth year on the tenth day of the tenth month of the reign of Zedekiah (2 Kin. 25:1; Jer. 39:1). This means that the siege began on January 15, 588 B.C. Zedekiah's eleventh (and last) year as king began on April 23, 587 B.C. On the ninth day of the fourth month of that year, the walls were breached (2 Kin. 25:3–4), which was July 29, 587 B.C. Then on either the seventh day (2 Kin. 25:8–9) or on the tenth day (Jer. 52:12–13) of the fifth month, which would have been either August 25 or August 28, 587 B.C., Nebuzaradan burned the temple, the palace, and all the houses of Jerusalem. If Jeremiah was using the old way of calculating the start of the year (meaning in the fall) and not the Babylonian way, then the fall of Jerusalem was in the spring of 586 B.C. instead. This is likely the case, which is why many Bible chronologies, including this one, list 586 B.C. as the date for the fall of Jerusalem.

The wealth of data available in this period of history demonstrates what could be possible in understanding biblical chronology and the events associated with it in earlier periods if more data were available to work with.

Moses to Solomon

Dating the Exodus Event. Working from known historical dates that connect with stated biblical events, anchor dates were established that can be used to apply absolute dating to the relative dating statements in Scripture. As a result, working backward in time, Solomon died in 931 B.C. after reigning for forty years (1 Kin. 11:42). Thus, he began his reign in 971 B.C. First Kings 6:1 reads that the construction of the temple began in the second month (month of Ziv) in Solomon's fourth year. The mention of the month of Ziv reminds readers that at that time the Hebrews were still reckoning their new year in the spring. Thus, the construction of the temple began in what we call April/May of 967 B.C. This is important for dating the Exodus event because 1 Kings 6:1 also links the building of the temple to the Exodus event, 480 years earlier. According to this reckoning, the Exodus event would have taken place in March/April of 1447 B.C.

There has been an attempt to push Solomon's reign back a few years due to his coregency with David, resulting in an Exodus date of around 1450 B.C. Solomon would have reigned (as coregent and later as sole king) for forty-three or forty-four years. Other conservative scholars propose 1446 or 1445 B.C. as the date of the Exodus by rounding down. A very different approach has been suggested by those who argue that the 480 years are representative of generations and should not be understood as actual years. This is proposed in an effort to shorten the duration of the period to allow for Ramesses II (who ruled in the thirteenth century B.C.) to be associated with the Exodus event, which is not possible if the 480 years are taken as literal years. If understood literally, the 480 years allows for a ca. 1407 B.C. destruction of Jericho (it was not occupied in the thirteenth century B.C.) and a full 300 years from that date to the time of Jephthah (Judg. 11:26).

Forty Years Wandering. The Hebrews left Egypt on the fourteenth day of the first month (Ex. 12:2, 6, 31). Three months later they reached Sinai (Ex. 19:1). They left Sinai nearly eleventh months later (Num. 10:11–13), a little over a year after the Exodus event. Aaron died on the first day of the fifth month in the fortieth year, when he was 123 years old (Num. 33:38–39). On the first day of the eleventh month of the fortieth year, Moses recited Deuteronomy to the Hebrews, who had already killed Sihon and Og and were camped across from Jericho (Deut. 1:3–4). Moses died shortly thereafter on Mount Nebo, when he was 120 years old (Deut. 34:1, 7). These statements are in harmony with the age gap given in Exodus and also confirm that the forty years spoken of were counted from the Exodus event (Ex. 7:7) and not from the rejection of God by the Hebrews following the report of the scouts (Num. 14:33). They also confirm that there were only thirty-eight years from the pronouncement of the penalty until they began to fight for the land that they would later inhabit (Deut. 2:14). Understanding this helps us to understand God's mercy. The forty-year penalty included time already spent in the wilderness at Sinai.

Reign of Saul. There is a chronological statement regarding the reign of Saul (1 Sam. 13:1), the first king of Israel, that is difficult to understand because it appears that the Masoretic Text has left some words out. The Septuagint provides the possible missing information that likely appeared in other Hebrew manuscripts that are now lost but were reflected in the statement in Acts 13:21. Saul likely ruled for forty or forty-two years and may have been thirty years old when he began to reign. This information gives us some insights into the timeline of the story. Since David was thirty years old when he began to reign (2 Sam. 5:4), Saul had ruled for about ten years before David's birth.

Genealogy of David. There is a very short genealogical list between Perez, son of Judah by Tamar (Gen. 38), and the birth of David (Ruth 4:18–22), but it is consistent with other genealogical lists (1 Chr. 2:3–15; Matt. 1:3–6; Luke 3:31–33). Aaron (from the tribe of Levi) had married Nahshon's sister (from the tribe of Judah), Elisheba (Ex. 6:23). Nahshon was the leader of the tribe of Judah in the Exodus event (Num. 1:7; 2:3). His son Salmon married Rahab (Josh. 6; Matt. 1:5). Their son, Boaz, married Ruth (Ruth 4:13; Matt. 1:5), even

though she was much younger than he was (Ruth 3:10). Their son, Obed, was the grandfather of David, who was the youngest son of eight (1 Sam. 17:12–14), although it looks like one son might have died early and was not counted in later genealogies (1 Chr. 2:15). Since these genealogies do not give chronological statements, there is no reason not to trust that they are complete. However, if they are complete and there were 480 years (1 Kin. 6:1) between the Exodus and David's son Solomon's fourth year of rule, then most of these genealogical links must have also been unusual, such as marriages between those who were of different generations within a family (see Isaac and Rebekah below) and births to parents late in their lives (see Abraham and Isaac below). This is likely here since it appears that at least one of the marriages was late in life (Boaz and Ruth), at least one involved a youngest son (David), and at least one involved a son born when a parent was old (Solomon; 2 Sam. 11:1; cf. 2 Sam. 21:15–17; 1 Kin. 1:1).

Abraham to Moses

From this point back to Creation, the archaeological record is highly fragmented and has suffered data loss to such a degree that dates can be reckoned only by chronological statements. As a result, there are no more anchor dates that can be determined confidently using extrabiblical data. Thus, we move into a time when there is much uncertainty in regard to how biblical events line up with secular ones.

Call of Abram. It is clear that Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran following the death of Terah (Gen. 12:4), but it appears that the call (Gen. 12:1–3) came while the family was still in Ur. There is no chronological statement to allow us to know how much time expired between that call and the death of Terah, but it is likely to have been two to three years if the entire 430 years of the sojourn (Ex. 12:40–41) included time in Canaan beginning with Abram's call (see below).

Some scholars have suggested that Amraphel, king of Shinar (Gen. 14:1), is another name for Hammurabi, king of Babylon. There are three chronological schemes that are used by scholars to date kings of ancient Babylon. Each scheme is named based on the length of the chronology so that there is a long chronology, a middle chronology, and a short chronology. Because there is not sufficient data, there is no way to determine confidently which scheme is correct. However, it is not possible that Hammurabi was the same person as the biblical Amraphel since all three of the chronological schemes appear to place Hammurabi more in the lifetime of Isaac or Jacob than early Abraham.

Birth of Jacob's Sons. It is common to think of Joseph as much younger than his other brothers. However, chronological statements make it clear that all eleven brothers were born within a seven-year period (Gen. 30:25; cf. 31:41). In order for this to be possible and each of the four mothers to receive at least two months of recovery time before becoming pregnant again, some of the mothers were pregnant at the same time.

Sojourn and Exodus 6. One area that remains unsettled in scholarship is the length of the sojourn. The term *sojourn* means "temporary stay" and refers to a length of time either from Abraham until the Exodus or from Joseph until the Exodus. Exodus 12:40–41 says that the length of the time Israel lived temporarily (without a permanent home) was 430 years. The Masoretic Text reads that the entire 430 years were spent in Egypt. The Septuagint and the Samaritan Pentateuch read that the 430 years includes time spent in both Canaan and Egypt. This latter reading seems to reflect a Hebrew manuscript that no longer exists but was referenced by Paul (Gal. 3:16–17), who claims that there were 430 years between the call of Abraham and the Law given at Mount Sinai (three months after the Exodus and thus in the same year as the Exodus; Ex. 19:1). Exodus 6 also seems to support the understanding.

Exodus 6:13–16 recounts the names of the family members who moved to Egypt and follows the list in Genesis 46:8–11. None of the other brothers are listed because the point is to explain who Aaron and Moses were (Ex. 6:26–27). In vv. 17–25 all of the sons born in Egypt to the family of Levi are listed. Also listed is the age at death for each of those in the line of Aaron and Moses (Ex. 6:16, 18, 20). Moses and Aaron's ages are also listed (Ex. 7:7). However, because the age of the father when his son was born is not listed (as the chronologies of Genesis 5 and 11 do), there is no way to link the chronology of Jacob to Moses directly. This has allowed for both sojourn theories (Abraham until the Exodus or Joseph until the Exodus) to be debated. That said, there either have to be hidden generations (not mentioned in Exodus 6) or the time in Egypt was much shorter than 430 years. This is because the total listed years from Kohath to Moses equal only 350 years (133 + 137 + 80 = 350). However, this would mean that Kohath was only a newborn in Canaan and that all of his 133 years of life were spent in Egypt. It would also mean that he fathered his son, Amram, in the year he died (at the age of 133). It would likewise mean that Amram fathered Moses, his youngest son, in the year he died (at age 137). These scenarios are unlikely. It is also not clear where the hidden generations are supposed to be inserted to accommodate more time in Egypt, since the biblical text is clear that Kohath was born in Canaan (Gen. 46:11), that Amram married Levi's daughter/Kohath's sister (Ex. 2:1; 6:20), and that Moses was Amram's son (Ex. 2:1–10). This illustrates the difficulty of placing the Hebrews in Egypt for all 430 years of the "sojourn" (for more on this debate, see "The Four-Hundred-Thirty-Year Sojourn," p. 211).

Noah to Abraham

Flood Chronology. The Flood was tied to the age of Noah so that it began when he was 600 years old (Gen. 7:6). It ended when Noah was 601 (Gen. 8:13), although the family and animals (except for a few birds) did not leave the ark for nearly two more months (Gen. 8:14). There are chronological markers throughout the story to inform the reader when the rain stopped, when the waters started to diminish, when the tops of trees could be seen, and a few other events. This is important when discussing the event. Most events take place on a single day or within a relatively short period of time. Noah's family was in the ark well over an entire calendar year.

Dating Post-Flood Patriarchs. Because Genesis 11 provides chronological detail with the genealogy, it is possible to gain some insights into the patriarchs who lived after the Flood. There was a clear drop-off in age between Eber (who lived 464 years) and his son Peleg (who lived 239 years—only about half as long). Because the cryptic phrase about the dividing of earth is attached to the days of Peleg, some have theorized that this could be a reference to the Tower of Babel event and that it may have involved physiological changes rather than just a simple language confusion. Others have wondered if there was a physical division of the earth beyond what had happened during the Flood. Another drop in life span is noticeable between Serug (who lived 230 years) and his son Nahor (who lived 148 years). It is not clear what caused these drops in life span.

Also, because of these two major drops, a study of the chronology reveals that some of the patriarchs were alive for most of this period. Noah died two years before Abram was born. Shem died ten years after Isaac and Rebekah's wedding. This has led some to theorize that Shem may have been Melchizedek because he was the oldest living patriarch at the time. Arphaxad died two years after Ishmael was born. Shelah died only nineteen years before Sarah. And Eber (after whom the Hebrews were named) lived for 464 years and for all but sixteen years of Abraham's life.

Adam to Noah

Date of Creation. Ussher calculated his A.M. (*anno mundi*) 1 date to be equal with 4004 B.C. This was based on his understanding of Bible chronology that set Jehoiachin's release from prison in the year 562 B.C. (2 Kin. 25:27). He considered that since the Sabbath is Saturday, then the Creation week began on Sunday. Using the *Rudolphine Tables*, he thought that the autumnal equinox should match with the creation of the heavenly bodies on the fourth day of Creation, which helped him set the start of Creation to the evening of October 22.

A chronology that considers the 430-year sojourn (see above, pp. 107–108) to include time from Abram's call to Mount Sinai (Gal. 3:16–17) could calculate the Creation event as being equal to 3958 B.C. One who determines the 430 years to have been only time in Egypt might pinpoint the Creation to about 4173 B.C. Some Christian scholars allow for the Creation event to be dated as far back as 10,000 B.C. with the understanding that, since the Bible is basically a book with the purpose of teaching lessons, perhaps there are further gaps in the chronology that are not apparent in the text itself. There are enough variables in the record that no one can know with any certainty the date when Creation week began.

Dating Pre-Flood Patriarchs. Even a cursory glance at the chronological statements given in Genesis 5 reveals that the life span of humans after the Fall but before the Flood were on average somewhat less than one thousand years each, with two major exceptions. Enoch did not die (Gen. 5:21–24) but appears to have lived a life that included delivering warning messages to the pre-Flood world (Jude 14–15) before being taken to heaven (Heb. 11:5), as Elijah later was (2 Kin. 2:11; cf. Matt. 17:3). The other life span anomaly was Noah's father, Lamech, who lived only 777 years. This has led some scholars to speculate that he may have died of other causes than old age. Methuselah, who lived to an age older than any other recorded human, 969 (Gen. 5:27), died in the same year as the Flood, causing some to wonder if he died in the Flood or just before it. Altogether, the Masoretic Text lists 1,656 years between Creation and the beginning of the Flood.

CONCLUSION

A study of chronology has led some to misuse it. One way that it is misused is in the setting of future dates. One of the most common theories is the notion that since there are six days in a week and then a seventh-day Sabbath, perhaps the thousand-year millennium (Rev. 20:3) is a seventh part of the history of sin (2 Pet. 3:8). The theory postulates that the six thousand years that precede the seventh will end with the Second Advent of Christ.

Ussher predicted that the six thousand years would end in the year A.D. 2000. Many others have set other dates. All have been wrong. A chronology that saw Creation as occurring in 4173 would have expected the six thousand years to have ended in A.D. 1828. A chronology that dated Creation to 3958 B.C. would expect the Second Coming in A.D. 2043.

However, these theories need to take into account that there is no prophecy toward this end in Scripture. Also, the dates presented here rely heavily on the current understanding of archaeology, which is always open to revision due to new discoveries and excavations. Further, some of these dates are tied to eclipses, and as more precise astronomical information is collected, those dates may also be adjusted, which would shift the dates in the OT timeline. As a result, theoretical speculation regarding end-of-time date setting should be avoided.

The Bible is a document intended to teach its readers how to form a loving, healthy relationship with God. It records history, but not every part is intended to be a record of history as many events are skipped. Understanding how all of its parts are related requires a study of chronology. The OT timeline provides a line that connects these parts.

A CHRONOLOGY FOLLOWING THE INTERNAL TIMELINE OF THE BIBLE

The Bible writers followed ancient methods of marking time by linking events in a relational way to other events, usually referred to as relative dating. This sometimes makes it difficult for us today to quickly understand when these biblical events took place in regard to unrelated events. We solve that problem with absolute dating. This method assigns fixed year numbers that, by their very nature, provide the relationship for unrelated events.

Because of the relative dating method found in Scripture, modern scholars use different systems to understand how these relative dates should be reinterpreted as absolute dates. Here we provide a chronology that follows one of these systems, as reflected throughout this commentary. These dates begin with the most recent and move backward toward the beginning of biblical chronology. The dates given here should not be taken as the final word on the matter. This chronology is presented as a reference tool. Major events are highlighted with bold text. Biblical references are provided for entries based on chronological statements or statements about the event in the text.

Although several modern scientific dating systems are at conflict with some of the earlier dates in this chronology, the relative happenings of these events are seen by assigning them dates as indicated in the internal timeline of the Bible.

A.D. 98	John dies
A.D. 96	John writes his Gospel
A.D. 96	Nerva ends official persecution
ca. A.D. 95	John writes Revelation
A.D. 93	Josephus writes *Jewish Antiquities*
ca. A.D. 90	John writes his epistles
A.D. 80	Colosseum is dedicated in Rome
A.D. 79	Pompeii is destroyed by Vesuvius
A.D. 79	Titus reigns in Rome
A.D. 77	Josephus writes *Jewish War*
A.D. 73	Masada falls to the Romans
A.D. 70	**Titus destroys Jerusalem**
A.D. 70	John leaves Judea
A.D. 69	Year of the Four Emperors
A.D. 68	Nero dies
ca. A.D. 67	Paul dies
A.D. 66	Jews revolt
A.D. 66	Paul writes 2 Timothy
ca. A.D. 65	Paul writes Titus
A.D. 65	Paul writes 1 Timothy (or A.D. 65–66)
A.D. 65	Peter dies
ca. A.D. 64	Paul writes Hebrews (or early- to mid-60s)
ca. A.D. 64	Peter writes 2 Peter
A.D. 64	Nero persecutes Christians
A.D. 63	Peter writes 1 Peter
ca. A.D. 62	Luke writes Acts

A.D. 62	James, brother of Jesus, killed
ca. A.D. 61	Luke writes his Gospel
ca. A.D. 61	Paul writes Colossians
A.D. 61	Paul is acquitted of charges and released
A.D. 61	Paul writes Philemon
A.D. 61	Paul writes Philippians
A.D. 61	Paul writes Ephesians
ca. A.D. 60	John Mark writes his Gospel
ca. A.D. 60	Jude writes his epistle
A.D. 60	Paul is taken from Caesarea
A.D. 59	Festus governs Judea
A.D. 58	Paul is taken to Caesarea
A.D. 58	Paul ends his third journey
ca. A.D. 56–57	Paul writes Romans
A.D. 56	Paul writes 2 Corinthians in Macedonia
A.D. 56	Paul arrives in Corinth in the winter
ca. A.D. 55	Paul writes 1 Corinthians
A.D. 54	Jews return to Rome
A.D. 54	Nero reigns in Rome
A.D. 53	Paul begins his third journey
A.D. 52	Paul ends his second journey
A.D. 52	Felix becomes procurator of Judea
A.D. 51	Gallio becomes proconsul in Achaia (Acts 18:12)
A.D. 51	Paul writes 2 Thessalonians (or A.D. 50–51)
ca. A.D. 50	Matthew writes his Gospel
A.D. 50	Paul writes 1 Thessalonians (or A.D. 50–51)
ca. A.D. 49	James writes his epistle
A.D. 49	Paul writes Galatians
A.D. 49	Paul begins his second journey
A.D. 49	Christian community rises in Philippi
A.D. 49	Jerusalem Council meets
A.D. 49	Claudius expels Jews from Rome
A.D. 47	Ananias serves as high priest
A.D. 47	Paul ends his first journey
A.D. 45	Paul begins his first journey
A.D. 44	Herod Agrippa dies (Acts 12:23)
ca. A.D. 43	Barnabas seeks Saul in Tarsus (Acts 11:25)
A.D. 42	Paul's vision in Tarsus (2 Cor. 12:1–2)
A.D. 41	Herod Agrippa reigns in Judea
A.D. 41	Claudius reigns in Rome
A.D. 37	Caligula reigns in Rome
A.D. 37	Saul visits Jerusalem (Acts 9:26)
A.D. 36	Pilate loses his position
A.D. 34	**Stephen is stoned/gospel goes to the Gentiles (Acts 7:57–60; Dan. 9:24)**
A.D. 31	Falling of the early rain at Pentecost
A.D. 31	Jesus ascends to heaven
A.D. 31	Jesus is resurrected
A.D. 31	**Jesus is crucified (Matt. 26:17; John 19:14; Dan. 9:27)**
A.D. 31	Jesus cleanses the temple again (John 13:1)
A.D. 30	Jesus performs His last Judean ministry (John 6:4)
A.D. 29	Jesus performs His Galilean ministry
A.D. 28	Jesus cleanses the temple (John 2:13)
A.D. 27	**Jesus is baptized (Luke 3:1–2; Dan. 9:25)**
A.D. 18	Caiaphas becomes high priest
A.D. 14	Tiberius reigns in Rome
ca. A.D. 8	Jesus amazes scholars in the temple (Luke 2:41–42)
A.D. 6	Annas becomes high priest
ca. 4 B.C.	Herod the Great dies
ca. 5 B.C.	Jesus is born[1] (Matt. 2:1, 9–11, 16; Luke 2:1–7; 3:23)

19 B.C.	Herod begins building the temple
27 B.C.	Augustus reigns in Rome
27 B.C.	Corinth made capital of Achaia
30 B.C.	The last Greek kingdom falls to Rome
37 B.C.	Herod reigns in Judea
42 B.C.	Philippi is established as a Roman colony
44 B.C.	Julius Caesar is assassinated
44 B.C.	Rome rebuilds Corinth
47 B.C.	Julius Caesar reigns in Rome
63 B.C.	Pompey conquers Judea (Dan. 11:20)
164 B.C.	Antiochus Epiphanes dies in the Levant
165 B.C.	The temple is rededicated (Hanukkah)
168 B.C.	Rome begins war on Greek kingdoms (Dan. 2:40; 7:7)
175 B.C.	Antiochus Epiphanes rules the Levant
305 B.C.	Seleucus Nicator rules the Levant
305 B.C.	Ptolemy Soter rules Egypt
323 B.C.	Alexander the Great dies (Dan. 7:6; 8:8; 11:4)
332 B.C.	Alexander the Great destroys Tyre
333 B.C.	Alexander the Great destroys Sidon
336 B.C.	Alexander the Great rises to power in Macedonia (Dan. 2:39; 7:6; 8:7, 21; 11:3)
345 B.C.	Persians destroy Sidon
408 B.C.	**Jerusalem is rebuilt (Dan. 9:25)**
ca. 440 B.C.	Ezra writes his book
444 B.C.	Nehemiah leads the return to Jerusalem
444 B.C.	Artaxerxes issues a second decree (Neh. 1:1)
457 B.C.	Ezra leads the return to Jerusalem (Ezra 7:7)
457 B.C.	**Artaxerxes's command leads to the rebuilding of Jerusalem (Ezra 7:7, 12–26; Dan. 8:14; 9:25)**
465 B.C.	Artaxerxes rules
465 B.C.	Xerxes dies
479 B.C.	Esther becomes Queen (Esth. 2:16)
483 B.C.	Xerxes dismisses Queen Vashti (Esth. 1:3)
486 B.C.	Ahasuerus/Xerxes rules
515 B.C.	**The temple is rebuilt in Jerusalem (Ezra 6:15)**
520 B.C.	Zechariah's ministry begins (Zech. 1:1)
520 B.C.	Haggai's ministry begins (Hag. 1:1)
520 B.C.	Darius issues the decree (Ezra 6:1–12)
522 B.C.	Darius reigns in Persia
530 B.C.	Cyrus dies
536 B.C.	Daniel receives the final vision (Dan. 10:1)
537 B.C.	Zerubbabel leads the return to Jerusalem (Ezra 2:1–2)
537 B.C.	Cyrus issues a decree to return to Jerusalem (Ezra 1:1; Dan. 9:25)
539 B.C.	Daniel receives the seventy-week vision (Dan. 9:1; 11:1)
539 B.C.	Darius the Mede reigns in Babylon (Dan. 5:30; 11:1)
539 B.C.	**Cyrus conquers Babylon (Dan. 2:39; 5:30; 7:5; 8:5)**
548 B.C.	Daniel sees the ram and goat vision (Dan. 8:1)
550 B.C.	Daniel sees the four-beast vision (Dan. 7:1)
550 B.C.	Belshazzar co-reigns in Babylon
555 B.C.	Nabonidus reigns in Babylon
559 B.C.	Cyrus rises to power in Persia
562 B.C.	Jehoiachin is released in Babylon (2 Kin. 25:27–30)

562 B.C.	Nebuchadnezzar dies
568 B.C.	The Babylonian invasion of Egypt fails
572 B.C.	Babylon conquers Tyre
585 B.C.	Babylon lays siege to Tyre
586 B.C.	Ishmael murders Gedaliah (Jer. 41)
586 B.C.	**Nebuchadnezzar destroys the temple (2 Kin. 25:2, 8–9; Jer. 39:2; Dan. 1:2; 5:2)**
586 B.C.	Zedekiah is taken to Babylon (2 Kin. 25:7)
586 B.C.	Ezekiel gives an oracle for Tyre (Ezek. 26:1)
587 B.C.	Jeremiah buys a field (Jer. 32)
588 B.C.	Egypt forces the Babylonians to retreat from Jerusalem (Jer. 37:5)
588 B.C.	Babylon begins siege on Jerusalem (2 Kin. 25:1; Jer. 39:1)
590 B.C.	Ezekiel is visited by the elders (Ezek. 20:1)
592 B.C.	Ezekiel's ministry begins (Ezek. 1:1–2)
597 B.C.	Zedekiah reigns in Judah (2 Kin. 24:17–18; 2 Chr. 36:11)
597 B.C.	Jehoaichin is taken to Babylon (2 Kin. 24:12)
597 B.C.	Babylon conquers Jerusalem (Jer. 24:1; 29:1)
598 B.C.	Jehoiachin reigns in Judah (2 Kin. 24:8; 2 Chr. 36:9)
ca. 599 B.C.	Babylon invades the Levant (Jer. 49:28)
601 B.C.	The Babylonian invasion of Egypt fails
603 B.C.	Nebuchadnezzar has the image dream (Dan. 2:1)
605 B.C.	**Nebuchadnezzar rises to power in Babylon**
605 B.C.	**Daniel is taken to Babylon (Dan. 1:1; 1:3–6)**
605 B.C.	Babylon conquers Jerusalem (2 Kin. 24:1; Dan. 1:1)
605 B.C.	The Carchemish battle occurs (Jer. 46:2)
609 B.C.	Jehoiakim reigns in Judah (2 Kin. 23:34, 36; 2 Chr. 36:5)
609 B.C.	Jehoahaz is chained in Riblah (2 Kin. 23:33)
609 B.C.	Jehoahaz reigns in Judah (2 Kin. 23:31; 2 Chr. 36:2)
610 B.C.	Necho reigns in Egypt
612 B.C.	Nineveh is conquered by Babylon and Media
622 B.C.	Josiah renovates the temple (2 Chr. 34:8; 2 Kin. 22:3;)
627 B.C.	Jeremiah's ministry begins (Jer. 1:1–3)
629 B.C.	Josiah purges Judah of idols (2 Chr. 34:3)
641 B.C.	**Josiah reigns in Judah (2 Kin. 22:1; 2 Chr. 34:1)**
643 B.C.	Amon reigns in Judah (2 Kin. 21:19; 2 Chr. 33:21)
ca. 681 B.C.	Isaiah dies
687 B.C.	Hezekiah dies
697 B.C.	Manasseh co-reigns in Judah (2 Kin. 21:1; 2 Chr. 33:1)
ca. 700 B.C.	Hezekiah expands Jerusalem
701 B.C.	**Sennacherib invades Judah (2 Kin. 18:13; 2 Chr. 32:1; Is. 36:1)**
716 B.C.	**Hezekiah reigns in Judah (2 Kin. 18:1–2; 2 Chr. 29:1)**
722 B.C.	**Assyria conquers Israel (2 Kin. 17:6, 23)**
722 B.C.	Hoshea is taken to Assyria (2 Kin. 17:4)
725 B.C.	Hosea's ministry ends
732 B.C.	Hoshea reigns in Israel from Samaria (2 Kin. 17:1)
732 B.C.	Jotham dies

732 B.C.	Tiglath-Pileser conquers Damascus (2 Kin. 16:9)
734 B.C.	Israel and Syria attack Judah (2 Kin. 16:5)
735 B.C.	Ahaz co-reigns in Judah (2 Kin. 16:1–2; 2 Chr. 28:1)
740 B.C.	Pekah solely reigns in Israel from Samaria (2 Kin. 15:27)
740 B.C.	Pekah assassinates Pekahiah (2 Kin. 15:27)
740 B.C.	Azariah/Uzziah dies
742 B.C.	Pekahiah reigns in Israel from Samaria (2 Kin. 15:23)
750 B.C.	Hosea's ministry begins (Hos. 1:1)
750 B.C.	Jotham co-reigns in Judah (2 Kin. 15:32–33; 2 Chr. 27:1, 8)
752 B.C.	Pekah reigns in Israel from Gilead[2] (2 Kin. 15:32; 16:1)
752 B.C.	Menahem reigns in Israel from Samaria (2 Kin. 15:17)
752 B.C.	Shallum reigns in Israel from Samaria (2 Kin. 15:13)
753 B.C.	Zechariah reigns in Israel from Samaria (2 Kin. 15:8)
ca. 760 B.C.	Earthquake happens in the Levant
767 B.C.	Amaziah dies
782 B.C.	Jehoash/Joash of Israel dies
792 B.C.	Azariah/Uzziah co-reigns in Judah (2 Kin. 15:1–2; 2 Chr. 26:1, 3)
793 B.C.	Jeroboam II co-reigns in Israel from Samaria (2 Kin. 14:23)
796 B.C.	Amaziah reigns in Judah (2 Kin. 14:1–2; 2 Chr. 25:1, 25)
796 B.C.	Jehoash/Joash of Judah dies
798 B.C.	Jehoash/Joash reigns in Israel from Samaria (2 Kin. 13:10)
814 B.C.	Jehoahaz reigns in Israel from Samaria (2 Kin. 13:1)
835 B.C.	Jehoash/Joash reigns in Judah (2 Kin. 12:1; 2 Chr. 24:1)
841 B.C.	Athaliah reigns in Judah (2 Kin. 11:1–4; 2 Chr. 22:10—23:1)
841 B.C.	Ahaziah reigns in Judah (2 Kin. 8:25–26; 2 Chr. 22:2)
841 B.C.	Jehu reigns in Israel from Samaria (2 Kin. 10:36)
848 B.C.	Jehoshaphat dies
852 B.C.	Jehoram/Joram reigns in Israel from Samaria (2 Kin. 3:1)
853 B.C.	Jehoram/Joram co-reigns with Jehoshaphat in Judah (2 Kin. 8:16–17; 2 Chr. 21:5, 20)
853 B.C.	Ahaziah reigns in Israel from Samaria (1 Kin. 22:51)
869 B.C.	Jehoshaphat sends teachers to cities in Judah (2 Chr. 17:7)
870 B.C.	Asa dies
872 B.C.	Jehoshaphat co-reigns with Asa in Judah (1 Kin. 22:41–42; 2 Chr. 17:1; 20:31)
874 B.C.	**Ahab reigns in Israel from Samaria (1 Kin. 16:29)**
879 B.C.	Omri builds and reigns from Samaria (1 Kin. 16:23–24)
880 B.C.	Tibni dies
885 B.C.	Omri reigns in Israel from Tirzah (1 Kin. 16:23)
885 B.C.	Tibni reigns in Israel (1 Kin. 16:21)
885 B.C.	Zimri reigns in Israel from Tirzah (1 Kin. 16:15)
886 B.C.	Elah reigns in Israel from Tirzah (1 Kin. 16:8)
909 B.C.	Baasha reigns in Israel from Tirzah (1 Kin. 15:33)
910 B.C.	Nadab reigns in Israel from Shechem (1 Kin. 15:25)
911 B.C.	Asa reigns in Judah (1 Kin. 15:9–10; 2 Chr. 14:1; 16:13)

913 B.C.	Abijam/Abijah reigns in Judah (1 Kin. 15:1–2; 2 Chr. 13:1–2)
926 B.C.	Shishak invades Judah (1 Kin. 14:25)
928 B.C.	Jeroboam makes gold calves (1 Kin. 12:25–33; 2 Chr. 11:17)
931 B.C.	Jeroboam reigns in Israel from Shechem (1 Kin. 12:20, 25)
931 B.C.	**Israel's kingdom is divided (1 Kin. 12:1–24)**
931 B.C.	Rehoboam reigns (1 Kin. 11:43; 14:21; 2 Chr. 9:31)
931 B.C.	Solomon dies (1 Kin. 11:42; 2 Chr. 9:30)
947 B.C.	Solomon completes the palace (1 Kin. 9:10; 2 Chr. 8:1)
ca. 950 B.C.	Solomon writes Song of Songs
960 B.C.	Solomon completes the temple (1 Kin. 6:38)
967 B.C.	**Temple construction begins (1 Kin. 6:1)**
971 B.C.	Solomon's solo reign begins (1 Kin. 1:38–40; 2:11)
971 B.C.	David dies (2 Sam. 5:4; 1 Kin. 2:11)
972 B.C.	Rehoboam is born (1 Kin. 14:21)
1004 B.C.	David reigns from Jerusalem (2 Sam. 5:5)
1009 B.C.	Ish-Bosheth is murdered (2 Sam. 2:10; 4:7)
1011 B.C.	**David reigns from Hebron (2 Sam. 2:11; 5:4–5)**
1011 B.C.	Ish-Bosheth reigns from Mahanaim (2 Sam. 2:10)
1011 B.C.	Saul dies (1 Sam. 13:1; 31:4)
1041 B.C.	David is born (2 Sam. 5:4)
ca. 1050 B.C.	Philistines destroy Shiloh
1051 B.C.	Ish-Bosheth is born (2 Sam. 2:10)
1053 B.C.	Saul reigns from Gibeah[3] (1 Sam. 13:1; Acts 13:21)
1083 B.C.	Saul is born[4] (1 Sam. 13:1)
ca. 1107 B.C.	Jephthah makes a case to the Ammonites[5] (Judg. 11:26)
1401 B.C.	Caleb inherits Hebron (Josh. 14:10)
1407 B.C.	**Jericho falls to the Israelites (Josh. 1:2; 6:1–27)**
1407 B.C.	Moses dies (Deut. 34:7)
1407 B.C.	Aaron dies (Num. 33:38–39)
1407 B.C.	Miriam dies (Num. 20:1)
1446 B.C.	Spies are sent to Canaan (Num. 10:11; 13:1—14:38; Josh. 14:7)
1447 B.C.	Sanctuary construction begins (Ex. 19:1)
1447 B.C.	**The Exodus occurs[6] (Ex. 7:7; 1 Kin. 6:1; Acts 7:23, 30)**
1486 B.C.	Caleb is born (Josh. 14:7)
1487 B.C.	Moses flees from Egypt (Ex. 2:11–15; Acts 7:23)
1527 B.C.	Moses is born (Ex. 2:2; 7:7)
1530 B.C.	Aaron is born (Ex. 7:7)
1566 B.C. (1781)	Levi dies[7] (Ex. 6:16)
1589 B.C. (1804)	Joseph dies (Gen. 50:26)
1643 B.C. (1858)	Jacob dies (Gen. 47:28)
1660 B.C. (1875)	**Israel dwells in Egypt (Gen. 45:6; 47:9, 28)**
1662 B.C. (1877)	Years of famine begin (Gen. 41:30)
1669 B.C. (1884)	Years of great abundance begin (Gen. 41:29)
1669 B.C. (1884)	**Joseph is promoted by Pharaoh (Gen. 41:46)**
1670 B.C. (1885)	Isaac dies (Gen. 35:28)
1671 B.C. (1886)	The butler receives a dream (Gen. 41:1)
1682 B.C. (1897)	**Joseph is sold into slavery (Gen. 37:2, 28)**
1693 B.C. (1908)	Jacob leaves Laban (Gen. 31:38, 41)
1699 B.C. (1914)	Joseph is born (Gen. 29:20, 30; 30:25–26)

1705 B.C. (1920)	Reuben is born (Gen. 29:32)
1706 B.C. (1921)	Jacob marries Leah and Rachel (Gen. 29:20–30)
1713 B.C. (1928)	Jacob leaves home[8] (Gen. 28:5)
1727 B.C. (1942)	Ishmael dies (Gen. 25:17)
1750 B.C. (1965)	Esau marries Hittite women (Gen. 26:34)
1771 B.C. (1986)	**Eber dies (Gen. 11:16–17)**
1775 B.C. (1990)	**Abraham dies (Gen. 25:7)**
1790 B.C. (2005)	Jacob and Esau are born (Gen. 25:26)
1800 B.C. (2015)	**Shem dies (Gen. 11:10–11)**
1810 B.C. (2025)	Isaac marries Rebekah (Gen. 25:20)
1813 B.C. (2028)	Sarah dies (Gen. 23:1)
1832 B.C. (2047)	Salah/Shelah dies (Gen. 11:14–15)
1847 B.C. (2062)	**The 400-year affliction begins (Gen. 15:13; 21:8–9; Acts 7:6)**
1850 B.C. (2065)	Isaac is born (Gen. 21:5)
1851 B.C. (2066)	**Abram is circumcised (Gen. 17:24–25)**
1862 B.C. (2077)	Arphaxad dies (Gen. 11:12–13)
1864 B.C. (2079)	Ishmael is born (Gen. 16:16)
1875 B.C. (2090)	Abram leaves Har[r]an[9] (Gen. 12:4)
1875 B.C. (2090)	Terah dies (Gen. 11:32)
1877 B.C. (2092)	**The 430-year sojourn begins (Gen. 12:1; Ex. 12:40; Gal. 3:16–17)**
1909 B.C. (2124)	Serug dies (Gen. 11:22–23)
1932 B.C. (2147)	Reu dies (Gen. 11:20–21)
1940 B.C. (2155)	Sarai (Sarah) is born (Gen. 23:1)
1950 B.C. (2165)	**Abram (Abraham) is born (Gen. 11:32; 12:1, 4)**
1952 B.C. (2167)	**Noah dies (Gen. 9:28–29)**
1961 B.C. (2176)	Nahor dies (Gen. 11:24–25)
1962 B.C. (2177)	Peleg dies (Gen. 11:18–19)
2010 B.C. (2225)	Tereh's eldest is born (Gen. 11:26)
2080 B.C. (2295)	Terah is born (Gen. 11:24)
2109 B.C. (2324)	Nahor is born (Gen. 11:22)
2139 B.C. (2354)	Serug is born (Gen. 11:20)
2171 B.C. (2386)	Reu is born (Gen. 11:18)
ca. 2201 B.C. (2416)	**People are scattered from the Tower of Babel[10] (Gen. 11:9)**
2201 B.C. (2416)	Peleg is born (Gen. 11:16)
2235 B.C. (2450)	Eber is born (Gen. 11:14)
2265 B.C. (2480)	Salah/Shelah is born (Gen. 11:12)
2300 B.C. (2515)	Arphaxad is born[11] (Gen. 11:11)
2301 B.C. (2516)	The Flood ends (Gen. 8:13)
2302 B.C. (2517)	**The Flood begins[12] (Gen. 7:6)**
2302 B.C. (2517)	Methuselah dies (Gen. 5:27)
2307 B.C. (2522)	Lamech dies (Gen. 5:31)
2400 B.C. (2615)	Shem is born (Gen. 11:10)
2402 B.C. (2617)	Japheth is born (Gen. 5:32; 10:21)
2422 B.C. (2637)	**Work on the Ark begins (Gen. 6:3)**
2536 B.C. (2751)	Jared dies (Gen. 5:20)
2668 B.C. (2883)	Mahalalel dies (Gen. 5:17)
2723 B.C. (2938)	Cainan/Kenan dies (Gen. 5:14)
2818 B.C. (3033)	Enosh dies (Gen. 5:11)
2902 B.C. (3117)	**Noah is born[13] (Gen. 5:28)**
2916 B.C. (3131)	Seth dies (Gen. 5:8)
2971 B.C. (3186)	**Enoch is translated (Gen. 5:23)**
3028 B.C. (3243)	**Adam dies (Gen. 5:5)**
3084 B.C. (3299)	Lamech is born (Gen. 5:25)
3271 B.C. (3486)	Methuselah is born (Gen. 5:21)
3336 B.C. (3551)	Enoch is born (Gen. 5:18)
3498 B.C. (3713)	Jared is born (Gen. 5:15)

3563 B.C. (3778) Mahalalel is born (Gen. 5:12)

3633 B.C. (3848) Cainan/Kenan is born (Gen. 5:9)

3723 B.C. (3938) Enosh is born (Gen. 5:6)

3828 B.C. (4043) Seth is born (Gen. 5:3)

3958 B.C. (4173) Beginning of human chronology with Adam and Eve[14] (Gen. 5:5)

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[1] If Jesus was about thirty years old when His ministry began (Luke 3:23), He would have been born ca. 5 B.C. However, "about thirty" could reasonably be plus or minus two to three years, which would shift this date.

[2] The Northern Kingdom appears to have been split at this time (Hos. 5:5), which is reflected in the chronological reckoning.

[3] The Septuagint provides missing information from the Masoretic text in 1 Samuel 13:1.

[4] All dates from the birth of Saul to the Babylonian captivity are tied to dates related to Nebuchadnezzar, working backward through the chronological data related to the kings.

[5] All dates from Jephthah back to the Exodus are based on the date of the Exodus and would move proportionally with that date, were it to shift.

[6] This date reflects simple arithmetic from 1 Kings 6:1. Conservative scholars allow for an Exodus date between 1445 and 1452 B.C.

[7] This reflects a 430-year sojourn in Canaan and Egypt (from the call of Abraham to the giving of the Law at Sinai; Gal. 3:16–17). Should the 430-year sojourn consist entirely of time spent in Egypt (Ex. 12:40; Masoretic text), all dates from Levi's death backward should be moved earlier by approximately 215 years. These alternate dates are provided in parentheses.

[8] This date is deduced by moving backward through the chronological details found in Genesis 45:6.

[9] Twenty-five of the thirty years between the beginning of the sojourn and the affliction are accounted for from Har[r]an to Isaac's birth. The remaining five years are split in a way that cannot be entirely known between the time between Ur and Haran and the time between Isaac's birth and the weaning party (the beginning of the affliction). The later period could not have been more than three years. If they were fewer than three years, the time in Haran would increase from two years proportionally and all dates from Levi's death backward would shift by that same number (a potential shift of one to two years).

[10] Scripture does not provide a chronological statement for this event. The date reflects a statement connected with Peleg's birth (Gen. 10:25).

[11] If Genesis 11:10 is a reference to the end of the Flood event (when Noah's family left the ark) rather than the beginning of the actual Flood itself, all dates before this would move back one year.

[12] The date of this event depends on the accuracy of the chronology in Genesis 10 and 11 (compare Luke 3:35–36).

[13] All antediluvian dates are based on Noah's age at the Flood moving backward (except the birth of Shem).

[14] This date is extrapolated from simple arithmetic applied to the plain data in Genesis 5 and based on a trusted chronological system. This result is not meant to be the final word on the matter (for more, see "Old Testament Timeline," pp. 109–110). Some scholars allow for this date to be as far back as ca. 10,000 B.C. The Bible is not explicit regarding whether the chronology of Adam and Eve began at the Creation or at the Fall.

PENTATEUCH

INTRODUCTION TO THE PENTATEUCH

The term *Pentateuch* refers to the first five books of the Bible. It is a two-part Greek word, *penta* ("five") plus *teuchos* (a case for carrying scrolls and later the scroll itself), and it goes back at least to the second century A.D. when the church father Tertullian spoke of the *pentateuchos biblios*, the "five-scrolled book." The oldest designation of the Pentateuch is the Hebrew word *torah*. Although usually translated "law," this term also more broadly refers to "instruction" and even "story."

AUTHORSHIP

There is abundant evidence throughout Scripture (and early Jewish/Christian testimony) that Moses was the author of the Pentateuch.

Evidence from within the Pentateuch

The Hebrew phrase "God spoke to Moses" is found more than 235 times in the Pentateuch. Numerous passages refer to Moses as writing parts of the Pentateuch, and these include all three major types of writing in the Pentateuch: history/narrative, legal material, and poetry (see Ex. 17:14; 24:4; Num. 33:2; Deut. 31:9, 22, 24). Deuteronomy 31:24 mentions that Moses wrote all the words of "this *torah*" on a scroll. This verse may refer primarily to the book of Deuteronomy, but in light of the other references in the Pentateuch to Moses's writing, it ultimately applies to the whole Torah.

Even though the book of Genesis does not itself explicitly mention Moses as the author, internal evidence of the Pentateuch points strongly toward this conclusion. The opening word of Exodus contains a grammatical construction (the word "and" as a *waw* conjunction) that links it with what comes before (i.e., the book of Genesis) and thus the two books are viewed together as a unity. The book of Genesis also has numerous Egyptian loan words, giving evidence that the author was well acquainted with the Egyptian language and customs, as was the case with Moses. Finally, various linguistic peculiarities of the Pentateuch are found only in Genesis and the other four books of the Torah.

Testimony of Joshua

After Moses's death, God appeared to Joshua, Moses's successor, and exhorted him to be strong, very courageous, and dedicated to obeying all of the Torah, which His servant Moses had given to him. Indeed, Joshua was instructed to continually speak of and think about the whole Torah in order to obey it and prosper (Josh. 1:7–8). Immediately after Moses

completed the writing of the Torah, it was to be regarded as "canonical," the foundation of divine revelation to God's people.

Testimony of Later Old Testament Writers

Numerous passages in the OT refer to Moses as the author of the Pentateuch. Preexilic testimony includes Joshua 8:31–32, 34; 22:5; 23:6; Judges 1:20; 1 Kings 2:3; 2 Kings 14:6; 23:25. Exilic and postexilic testimony includes 2 Chronicles 23:18; 25:4; 30:16; 35:12; Ezra 3:2; 6:18; Nehemiah 8:1, 14; 13:1; Daniel 9:11, 13; and Malachi 4:4.

Testimony of Christ and the Gospel Writers

The Gospels cite the Pentateuch more than sixty times, often explicitly describing it as "the law of Moses" (e.g., Luke 2:22; 24:44; John 7:23) and using terms like "Moses wrote" (Mark 12:19; Luke 20:28; John 5:46) or simply "Moses" (Luke 24:27; John 5:45). In John 5:46, Jesus referred specifically to Moses's writings, noting that he had written about Him.

Testimony of Acts and the Apostles

The book of Acts cites the Pentateuch more than twenty times and contains several references to the "law (*nomos*—the Greek word used for the Torah) of Moses" (Acts 13:39; 15:5; 28:23) and other expressions implying authorship of the Torah to Moses (Acts 3:22–23; 6:11, 14; 15:21; 21:21; 26:22). The apostles quote the Pentateuch more than sixty times, often referring to Moses as the author (e.g., Rom. 10:5 says "Moses writes," citing Lev. 18:5; cf. Rom. 10:19; 1 Cor. 9:9; 2 Cor. 3:15; Heb. 10:28; 12:21).

Testimony of Early Jewish and Christian Sources and Ellen G. White

The historian Josephus (c.a. A.D. 37–100) states that "five are the books of Moses." The Babylonian Talmud likewise affirms that "Moses wrote the Pentateuch and Job." The early Christian church fathers consistently refer to the Pentateuch as written by Moses. Ellen White identifies Moses as the author of the Pentateuch, including the book of Genesis. She indicates that Moses wrote Genesis and Job in the wilderness of Midian (ST Feb 19, 1880; cf. PP 251). Other statements indicate her acceptance of Moses as the author of the Pentateuch (e.g., GC 434; PP 343, 364, 463).

Affirmation of Moses as the author of the Pentateuch does not eliminate the possibility that Moses himself used other written sources (see Gen. 5:1 and Num. 21:14) and that some explanatory phrases or updating of place-names may have been added for clarity in a later historical setting (e.g., the mention of Dan in Gen. 14:14 [cf. the original name Laish, Judg. 18:29]; the reference to the Canaanites in Gen. 12:6). The last eight verses of Deuteronomy, recording Moses's death, were apparently written by Joshua.

CRITICAL THEORIES OF AUTHORSHIP

Throughout Judeo-Christian history until the rise of higher criticism in the time of the Enlightenment, the Pentateuch was almost universally recognized as written by Moses, under the inspiration of God. But with the rise of the Enlightenment, which elevated human reason over divine revelation, questions regarding the authorship of the Torah began to be seriously entertained. Starting with the Jewish philosopher Benedict Spinoza in the seventeenth century and the French court physician Jean Astruc in the eighteenth century, scholars gradually began to reject Moses's authorship of the Pentateuch.

Especially in German scholarship, various hypotheses of multiple sources (excluding Moses's authorship) were proposed and came to be called the *Documentary Hypothesis*. During the latter half of the nineteenth century, the New Documentary Hypothesis, developed by K. H. Graf, Abraham Kuenen, and Julius Wellhausen, began to dominate over the earlier theories, and it still holds sway in much of higher critical scholarship to the present day. Wellhausen was largely responsible for giving classical expression to and popularizing this New Documentary Hypothesis (1878). According to this theory, there were four main sources for the Pentateuch:

- J (Jahwist): written about 850 B.C. in the Southern Kingdom of Judah
- E (Elohist): written about 750 B.C. in the Northern Kingdom of Israel (a redactor [R^{JE}] combined these sources about 650 B.C.)
- D (Deuteronomist): the core of the present book of Deuteronomy, produced in the time of Josiah (a redactor [R^{D}] added the D source to JE about 550 B.C.)
- P (Priestly): written between 536 B. C. and 450 B.C. (a redactor [R^{P}] incorporated the P source into the JED sources and completed the Pentateuch about 400 B.C.)

Since the time of Wellhausen, some modifications have been suggested regarding the dating of these and additional sources. But the basic schema of Wellhausen's Documentary Hypothesis is still widely defended in critical scholarship.

The basic pillars of the Documentary Hypothesis (also known as source criticism) were originally derived from the work of German classical literary critics studying the German fairy tales collected by the Grimm brothers and published in seven expanding editions from 1819 to 1857. In the spirit of the Enlightenment, it was assumed that the stories of the Pentateuch, like the Grimm stories, were myths or fairy tales and thus the techniques of literary source criticism common to the times could similarly be used for understanding the development of the Pentateuch.

The five basic pillars of the classical Documentary Hypothesis include: (1) use of different divine names (Yahweh and Elohim); (2) duplications and repetitions (double names like Jethro/Reuel, Ishmael/Midian, and Sinai/Horeb; repetitions like Abraham's two denials that Sarah was his wife [Gen. 12 and 20], and Hagar's two departures [Gen. 16 and 21]); (3) variations of style and language (such as different genres together—narrative, poetry, laws, etc.); (4) contradictions/anachronisms (e.g., the mention of domesticated camels and use of iron in the time of the patriarchs; the reference to the Hittite Empire; existence of codified laws); and (5) other signs of composite authorship (e.g., shifts and breaks in the narratives).

It must be noted that all of the basic pillars of the nineteenth-century literary-critical study of the German fairy tales and other Western folk literature have long since been abandoned, yet many biblical literary critics still continue to defend the results of scholarship based on these very pillars for supporting the composite authorship of the Pentateuch. Many of them simply ignore questions of authorship and focus on the final form of the text, called the New Literary Criticism.

Furthermore, all of the pillars of Wellhausen's Documentary Hypothesis have now been shown to be suspect when compared to other ANE literature discovered since the time of Wellhausen. (1) Numerous ancient documents with unquestioned unity use double names for the gods (e.g., Baal/Hadad in Ugaritic literature; Osiris/Wennofer in Egyptian literature; multiple epithets for God in the Code of Hammurabi). (2) Duplicates and repetitions like those in the Pentateuch can be seen in many Egyptian and Mesopotamian double names of individuals and geographical localities (e.g., the Assyrian King Tiglath-Pileser III/Pul; two names for Egypt in Merenptah's Israelite Stela). Documents and monuments with duplicate accounts, as in Genesis 1–2 (containing a general summary outline and then a more detailed account), are found throughout the ANE materials (e.g., the dual descriptions of Thutmose III on the Karnak Stela). (3) There are many ANE documents where variations of style/genre occur in the same context (e.g., the Biography of Uni [ca. 2400 B.C.] contains narrative, summary, hymns, and refrains). (4) Many of the supposed contradictions/anachronisms have now been shown to fit precisely into the times claimed for the patriarchal period: extensive evidence for the early domestication of camels and use of iron has been found; the existence of a vast Hittite Empire, unknown in the time of Wellhausen, has now come to light through archaeological excavations; various patriarchal customs described in the Pentateuch are illustrated in the Nuzi and Mari tablets from this very time; and major ANE law codes have been discovered from this period of history. Finally, (5) the supposed signs of composite authorship (e.g., narrative shifts/breaks) have been found throughout ancient literature, representing the literary style of the times. There is simply no ANE example for the kind of editorial method proposed by source critics.

Source criticism of the Pentateuch is undergirded by several specific presuppositions: (1) skepticism of the historicity of the recorded narratives; (2) an evolutionary model of Israel's development from primitive to advanced forms; (3) the rejection of supernatural activity in this evolutionary development; and (4) the assumption that the sources were human products of the life setting of the communities that produced them. Later techniques of higher criticism applied to the Pentateuch employ the same naturalistic presuppositions. This includes *form criticism* (pioneered by Hermann Gunkel in the 1920s), which focuses on the preliterary stage of oral traditions behind the written sources; and *tradition history* (pioneered by Gerhard von Rad in the 1930s), which attempts to trace the entire history of the pentateuchal tradition, from precompositional oral traditions, to written sources, to final shaping by the creative redactor.

The methodology underlying all of these approaches is that of the historical critical method (also called *higher criticism*). The central principle of this method is what scholars call the principle of *criticism* (the Cartesian principle of methodological doubt), which affirms the supremacy of reason as the ultimate criterion for truth. Nothing is accepted authoritatively at face value; everything must be verified or corrected by rationally reexamining the evidence; the Bible is always open to correction, and therefore the human interpreter is the final determiner of truth, and his or her reason is the final test of the authenticity of a passage. The basic steps of the higher critical method used on the Pentateuch involve (1) breaking down the text into sections, (2) inferring an original life setting that may have given rise to the text, and (3) reconstruction of the process in which the various stages of the tradition reached its final form.

Already at the turn of the century, Ellen White warned of the dangers of this method: "The work of *higher criticism*, in *dissecting, conjecturing, reconstructing*, is destroying faith in the Bible as a divine revelation. It is robbing God's word of power to control, uplift, and inspire human lives" (AA 474, italics added). This method is opposed to the basic biblical principle of *sola Scriptura*, the Bible and the Bible only as our rule of faith and practice (e.g., Is. 8:20). Even a modified use of the historical critical method, which retains the principle of criticism and subordinates the Bible to human reason or experience, is unacceptable to those who maintain the biblical principle of *sola Scriptura*. The biblical approach to interpreting the Pentateuch rejects the principle of criticism; it *analyzes* but refuses to *critique* the Bible; it accepts the text of Scripture at face value as true and refuses to engage in the threefold process of dissection, conjecture, and hypothetical reconstruction (often contrary to the claims of the text) that is at the heart of all historical critical analysis. The biblical approach accepts what Scripture itself claims about the authorship of the Pentateuch: that it was written by Moses under the inspiration of God.

DATE AND PLACE OF WRITING

According to 1 Kings 6:1, Solomon began to build the temple in the fourth year of his reign, which was 480 years after Israel's Exodus from Egypt. The fourth year of Solomon's reign is dated to 967 B.C., and thus 480 years earlier yields circa 1447 B.C. as the date of the Exodus (see "Old Testament Timeline," p. 94). Moses was eighty years old at the time of the Exodus (Ex. 7:7), after having spent forty years in the wilderness of Midian (Acts 7:30), during which period of time he wrote the book of Genesis (see pp. 120–121). Moses died at the age of 120 (Deut. 34:7), shortly after completing the writing of the Torah (31:24). Thus the Pentateuch was written during the fifteenth century B.C., with Genesis being written by Moses sometime between circa 1487 and 1447 B.C., while he was in the wilderness of Midian, and the rest of the Pentateuch between circa 1447 and 1407 B.C., during the wilderness sojourn of Israel between Egypt and the borders of the promised land.

UNITY OF THE PENTATEUCH

Historical Unity

The five books of Moses present a coherent and seamless history of the origins of this world and humankind and of the birth and development of the people of Israel as a nation. Genesis 1–11 chronicles the universal history of this world, including the accounts of the Creation and Fall of humankind and the history of the antediluvian world and the global Flood. Genesis 12–50 narrates the call of Abraham and pivotal events in the life of Abraham and Sarah and their descendants to the fourth generation of the covenant line—Isaac (and Rebekah), Jacob (and his wives), and the twelve sons of Jacob, with a spotlight on the life of Joseph, and Israel's entry into Egypt.

Exodus continues the story of the covenant line, focusing on God's presence with Israel in Egypt, delivering them from bondage to the Egyptians (Ex. 1–13), and God's presence with Israel in the wilderness and at Mount Sinai, delivering them from the bondage of sin (chaps. 14–40). At Mount Sinai, God revealed the Law to them, entered into a covenant with His people, and gave to Moses detailed instructions regarding the building of the sanctuary. After the people's sin of idolatry with the golden calf, God renewed His covenant with them. Israel, out of gratitude for God's forgiving grace, built the sanctuary according to divine instructions, and the glory of God filled the completed tabernacle. God's interaction with and revelation of His laws to Israel at Sinai occupied a period of almost a year and is described in Exodus 19–40, the entire book of Leviticus, and Numbers 1:1—10:10.

The rest of Numbers describes Israel's journey to the plains of Moab at the border of the promised land. This journey includes Israel's departure from Sinai and their rebellion at Kadesh Barnea; the forty years of wandering in the wilderness, interspersed with the giving of various laws; and Balaam's futile attempt to curse Israel, followed by Israel's apostasy at the Jordan. In the final book of the Pentateuch, Moses delivers his farewell address to the people of Israel, presented in a covenant renewal structure. The aged leader reviews God's leading of Israel and His covenant stipulations, and he encourages Israel to be faithful to God. The book of Deuteronomy and the Torah as a whole conclude with the account of the death of Moses and the transfer of leadership to Joshua, who would lead them into the promised land. It is a unified story, providing a connected history from the Creation of the world to the death of Moses.

In broad overview, the main story line of the Pentateuch may be summarized by highlighting the main contribution of each book. This story line actually constitutes a microcosm of the unfolding of the entire sweep of salvation history for the world:

Genesis:	Humanity *created* in God's image but *ruined* through sin (the book of Genesis ends with the words "a coffin in Egypt")
Exodus:	Humanity (God's people) *redeemed* from bondage
Leviticus:	Humanity (God's people) *worshiping* God
Numbers:	Humanity (God's people) in *pilgrimage* toward the promised land
Deuteronomy:	Humanity (God's people) experiencing *covenant renewal* with God while poised at the borders of the promised land

Literary Unity: Macrostructure of the Pentateuch

The Pentateuch is composed of four major literary types: narrative, poetry, law, and genealogy. While the genealogies provide structure to the earlier sections of the Pentateuch, especially Genesis, they do not serve to structure the Pentateuch as a whole. Likewise, the legal portions of the Pentateuch are clustered in the center of the Pentateuch, especially Leviticus, but these collections of laws are not the means for shaping the Pentateuch as a whole. The whole of the Pentateuch is structured by the juxtaposition of the two remaining literary genres: narrative and poetry.

Already in the opening chapters of Genesis, a threefold literary sequence may be observed: narrative, poetic speech, and epilogue. The Creation account of Genesis 1:1—2:22 is narrative, followed by the poetic speech of Adam (2:23) and a short epilogue (2:24). Likewise, the account of the Fall (3:1–13) is a narrative, followed by a divine poetic speech (3:14–19) and an epilogue (3:20–24). There are numerous other examples of this technique in the microstructures of the Pentateuch (Gen. 4:1–26; 6:5—9:17; 9:18–29; 14:1–24; 16:1–16; 24:1–67; 25:1–26; 27:1–45; 37:1—48:22).

The fact that the threefold structuring sequence of narrative/poetic speech/epilogue is found so frequently in the Pentateuch on the microstructural level suggests the possibility that this same technique is perhaps employed in structuring the Pentateuch as a whole. OT scholar John Sailhamer has shown that indeed such is the case. The major blocks of narrative in the Pentateuch are punctuated by four major sections of poetic speech, each then followed by an epilogue. First, the patriarchal narratives of Genesis are concluded by a major block of poetic text in Genesis 49 followed by an epilogue (Gen. 50). Second, the Exodus narrative block (Ex. 1–14) is capped off by another major poetic text (Moses's and Miriam's songs in Ex. 15:1–21) followed by an epilogue (Ex. 15:22–27). Third, the narrative block of Israel's experience in the wilderness (Num. 1–22) is climaxed by the poetic oracles of Balaam (Num. 23–24) and an epilogue (Num. 25). Finally, the pattern embraces the whole of the Pentateuch, as the overarching narrative of the Pentateuch, which stretches from Genesis 1 through Deuteronomy, is concluded by the poetic Song of Moses (Deut. 32–33) and the epilogue of chapter 34.

In three of these macrostructural junctures in the Pentateuch (Gen. 49; Num. 24; and Deut. 31) the material that connects the poetic sections to the preceding narrative sections contains similar terminology and motifs. In each there is:

- a central narrative figure (Jacob, Balaam, Moses), who
- calls together an audience in the imperative (Gen. 49:1; Num. 24:14; Deut. 31:28),
- to proclaim (Gen. 49:1; Num. 24:14; Deut. 31:28)
- what will happen (Gen. 49:1; Num. 24:14; Deut. 31:29)
- *be'akharit hayyamim* ("in the end of the days" or "in the days to come"; Gen. 49:1; Num. 24:14; Deut. 31:29).

This final phrase provides an indication that the poetic passages are eschatological—the passages point to an indefinite future time, which also embraces the ultimate end-time windup of the plan of salvation. By placing the eschatological poetic speeches after the narrative sections, Moses is also highlighting the point that the narratives are likewise to be seen as ultimately

having end-time significance. The narrative texts describing God's dealings with His people in the past may be seen to foreshadow the end-time divine acts of salvation.

The three poetic seams coming at the three macrostructural junctures in the pentateuchal narratives (Gen. 49, Num. 23–24, and Deut. 32–33) not only refer to the last days but also highlight the coming of the Messiah. These passages reveal that the very heart of the eschatological focus in the Torah is on the coming Messiah. In the first poetic passage (Gen. 49), Jacob's last words of blessing are introduced as being given to his twelve sons individually (v. 1), but the conclusion of the blessing reveals that Jacob also had in mind "the twelve tribes of Israel," not just the individual sons (v. 28). Among the blessings on each tribe, two tribes are singled out by Jacob for extended blessings: Judah and Joseph. Close reading of these two extended blessings indicates that both point beyond the tribe to a future messianic figure who will come in the last days. The Messiah will be a royal figure from the tribe of Judah, Shiloh ("Provider of peace/prosperity [Heb. *sh-l-h*]"; Gen. 49:10–12) and a divine, suffering servant, the antitypical Joseph (Gen. 49:22–26); note especially the motif of suffering in v. 23 and the abrupt aside referring to the divinity of the Messiah in v. 24, the Shepherd and Stone/Rock of Israel.

Deuteronomy 32–33, the last of the major pentateuchal poetic passages, contains a second blessing of the twelve tribes, paralleling that of Genesis 49, but this time given by Moses before his death. This blessing also occurs in the context of the "end of the days" (Deut. 31:22), which points to the indefinite future but also ultimately includes the messianic age to come. In his blessing Moses (like Jacob) singles out two tribes for extended attention, Joseph again but also Levi (not Judah as in Gen. 49). Again, close reading of these two extended blessings indicates that both point beyond the tribe to a future messianic figure who will come in the last days. The Messiah will be the new (antitypical) Joseph (Deut. 33:8–11) and also the antitypical Levitical priest (Deut. 33:13–17). Thus Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 32–33 form a pair of poetic passages in the Pentateuch, both comprising blessings upon the twelve tribes, and both emphasizing the last days and the coming of the Messiah.

In a similar way, the Song of Moses (Ex. 15) and the Oracles of Balaam (Num. 23–24) form a pair of poetic passages, highlighting the eschatological future and the role of the Messiah in the New Exodus. The oracles of Balaam portray the Messiah as a future King bringing a new eschatological Exodus, recapitulating in His life the events of historical Israel in their Exodus from Egypt and conquest of their enemies. Note how Numbers 23:22 speaks of Israel's past Exodus and how God was bringing *them* out of Egypt. Numbers 24:8 repeats the exact same line in Hebrew, except with singular forms, applying it to the future King introduced in v. 7: God was bringing *Him* out of Egypt (note that some translations continue to use the plural forms in v. 8). The identity of the "Him" as conquering King is further clarified in vv. 8b–9 with the description of Him conquering His enemies, the nations. The fact that Numbers 24:17 takes place in the last days (v. 14) confirms the Messiah's eschatological royal reign and victory over the forces of evil (v. 17).

Exodus 15 does not contain the same eschatological phrase as the other three poetic passages located at the macrostructural junctures of the Pentateuch. But whereas Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 32–33 form an *outer* pair of poetic passages, both comprising blessings on the twelve tribes, Exodus 15 and Numbers 23–24 comprise an *inner* pair of poetic passages with a common theme: the Exodus. Exodus 15 is the Song of Moses, celebrating the Exodus of Israel from Egypt and deliverance from their enemies at the Red Sea. Already in Exodus 15, the Exodus is open-ended toward the future, with a description of a future safe passage of Israel through the midst of their enemies instead of the expected portrayal of passage through the Red Sea (vv. 14–17). Next it climaxes with a description of the reign of Yahweh (ultimately the Messiah) "forever and ever" (v. 18). This forward-reaching movement in the Song of Moses finds its counterpart in the Balaam oracles, where the Exodus of Israel from Egypt is viewed as prefiguring the exodus of the messianic King and His conquest of His enemies. When viewed together, the Song of Moses (Ex. 15) and the Oracles of Balaam (Num. 23–24) form a pair highlighting the eschatological future and the role of the Messiah.

Thus the four poetic passages that form macrostructural seams in the Pentateuch are all eschatological in nature, and together they point to the Messiah at the heart of the last-days fulfillment. The four poetic passages are framed in a chiastic arrangement, ABBA, with the matching outer pair focusing on the motif of blessing the twelve tribes, and the matching inner pair focusing on the motif of the Exodus/New Exodus:

A Blessing of the Twelve Tribes: Judah and Joseph (Gen. 49)
  B Exodus and New Exodus (Ex. 15)
  B′ Exodus and New Exodus (Num. 22–24)
A′ Blessing of the Tribes: Joseph and Levi (Deut. 33)

Taken together, all of these poetic passages, placed after blocks of narrative, indicate that the preceding narrative portions are also to be seen as prefiguring the eschatological future. Thus, in the compositional strategy of Moses, under the inspiration of God, the large narrative blocks of the Pentateuch as well as the poetic seams are juxtaposed so as to be read eschatologically, and the eschatology ultimately focuses on the Messiah. The narrative portions of the Pentateuch, along with their poetic seams, may therefore be regarded as Christ-centered eschatology.

What about the major block of the Pentateuch that is not predominantly narrative/poetry, namely, the large section of legal material in the central portion of the Torah? A closer look reveals that in the compositional strategy of Moses, inspired by God, the legal portions of the Pentateuch clustered in its center, the book of Leviticus, are also framed to highlight Christ-centered eschatology.

The book of Leviticus is organized in a chiastic structure (see Leviticus: Introduction). The chiastic climax of Leviticus (and of the whole Pentateuch) is Leviticus 16, the chapter

dealing with Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. The Day of Atonement came at the end of the Hebrew ritual year. Its more accurate name (from Scripture) is not *Yom Kippur* but *Yom Lippurim*—the "Day of Atonements" (plural), which in Hebrew syntax implies the "Day of Complete or Final/Ultimate Atonement" (Lev. 23:28). All during the year, atonement was made for sins, but this day was the climax of the yearly ritual, in which the high priest made final atonement for all the sins of Israel (Lev. 16:16) and for the entire sanctuary that had been defiled during the year. On the holiest day of the year (Day of Final Atonement) the holiest person on earth (the high priest) went into the holiest spot on earth (the Most Holy Place of the sanctuary) to conduct the holiest work of the year (the work of "ultimate atonement").

The high priest is a type of Christ (see Heb. 8:1–5), and this final cleansing work in its antitypical fulfillment takes place at the time of the end (see Dan. 7:9–14; 8:14). The eschatological nature of Leviticus 16 is already implied in the passage itself in the usage of the Hebrew verb *kalah* ("to finish," "make an end"; Lev. 16:20). Only in this one occurrence in the Pentateuch is there said to be an "end" of atoning work. The Hebrew ritual year is a compacted typology foreshadowing the entire sweep of salvation history, and the Day of Atonement represents the eschatological climax of salvation history, focused on the day of final judgment. This eschatological day of judgment, centered in the work of Jesus in the heavenly sanctuary, is further developed in the books of Daniel (chaps. 7–8), Hebrews (10:25–30), and Revelation (11:19—20:15).

It may be concluded, therefore, that Moses, under divine inspiration, had a compositional strategy that cast the entire Pentateuch into an eschatological framework, with the person and work of the coming Messiah at the heart of that eschatological frame. In a sense, then, the Pentateuch as a whole, from beginning to end, may be seen as messianic eschatology.

It is not known in detail all that Jesus said to the two disciples on the way to Emmaus on Resurrection Sunday, but when Luke records that He began with Moses and *diermēneuō* ("explained," "expounded") to them the materials in *all* the Scriptures concerning Himself (Luke 24:27), this may not be hyperbole after all. On the road to Emmaus Jesus's principle of interpretation, His "hermeneutic"—for that is the word used in this verse, *diermēneuō*—may not have been different, after all, than the original eschatological, messianic hermeneutic of Moses. The entire Pentateuch is centered in Christ.

Theological Unity: The Grand Central Theme

In recent decades scholars have increasingly recognized that Genesis 1–3 is set apart from the rest of the Pentateuch, constituting a kind of prologue or introduction. These opening chapters of the Torah are now widely regarded as providing the interpretive foundation for the rest of the Pentateuch. A close reading of Genesis 1–3 allows a multifaceted theological center of the Pentateuch to emerge. Like seven facets of a beautiful diamond, there are seven interrelated themes that comprise the grand central theme of the Pentateuch.

1. *Creation and God's Design for His Creatures.* As one opens the first pages of the Pentateuch, the overriding theme of divine creation becomes immediately apparent. Not only

creation per se but also God's original design for His creation is demonstrated. For humans this included God's provision for their home, their work, their diet, their day of rest and worship (the Sabbath), their social relationship with each other, their relationship with the animals, and so on. God also established a creation covenant with humans, who were made in His image, which involved the multiple covenant blessings of descendants, dominion, land, and a personal relationship with their Creator (Gen. 1:27–28; 2:1–3, 8–17), as well as one covenant curse/sanction (not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil on pain of death; Gen. 2:17). So Creation and God's covenant provisions for His creation is an obvious first facet of the multifaceted diamond that comprises the theological center at the beginning of the Pentateuch.

The creation theme continues throughout the Pentateuch, often appearing in subtle ways. The Flood was a process of cosmic de-creation and re-creation of the earth. Abram swore an oath by the Creator of heaven and earth (Gen. 14:22). The plagues against the Egyptians were another de-creation (Ex. 7–12). At the end of the Pentateuch, coming full circle with its beginning, one encounters creation language echoing Genesis 1:1–3. God created again (Deut. 32:6, 10–11). This time He is described as the One who "made" (Heb. *'asah*, Deut. 32:6; cf. Gen. 1:7, 11–12, 16, 25–26, 31, etc.) the people of Israel into a nation, finding them in the waste places (Heb. *tohu*, Deut. 32:10; cf. Gen. 1:2) and hovering (Heb. *rakhap*, v. 11; cf. Gen. 1:2) over His people as the Spirit did at Creation. The divine provisions for human needs given at Creation are expanded throughout the Pentateuch, including legislation regarding work, diet, Sabbath, marriage/family/sexuality, care of animals, and so on.

2. *The Character of the Creator.* A close reading of Genesis 1–2 reveals an even deeper underlying issue than the work of creation: the character of the Creator. In portraying creation week in Genesis 1 (which actually continues through Gen. 2:4a), Moses identifies the Creator as "God," using the Hebrew *elohim*; but in the rest of Genesis 2, the complementary Creation account, Moses adds the name of God, which in Hebrew is *yahweh* (represented in English as "LORD"). Critical scholars have claimed that this gives evidence of two different sources, but in so doing they have missed the profound central issue portrayed in Genesis 1–2. This two-part Creation narrative does not contain different conjectured sources but rather forms a unity composed by a single author. In Genesis 1 and 2, Moses is not only portraying the divine act of Creation and God's original design for humankind but also eloquently highlighting the character of the Creator.

In Genesis 1, God appears as *elohim*. This is the generic word for God; *el* in Hebrew means "mighty one," and the plural probably serves as a superlative, meaning "the Mightiest One." He is the omnipotent God; He speaks and it is done. He is the transcendent One, totally separate from and above His creation. He is the infinite One, the all-powerful sovereign Creator. He is *elohim*. In Genesis 2 the name *yahweh* (usually appearing in English as "LORD") is introduced alongside *elohim*. *Yahweh* is the personal, covenant name of God. He is the Self-Existent, Intimate One, who comes down to be present with His creatures, who bends down over a lump of clay and blows into Adam's nostrils the breath of life, who takes one of Adam's ribs and architecturally designs and builds a beautiful creature to be his companion. He is the intimate, caring God. The two methods of representing God reveal a dual portrayal of the character of God.

Throughout the Pentateuch the character of God is repeatedly revealed by the use of one or the other (and sometimes both) of these names for God, depending on which aspect of God's character is being emphasized. Various other names for God are also employed, highlighting other attributes of the divine character:

- *adonai*: "Lord" or "Sovereign" (e.g., Gen. 15:2)
- *'el 'elyon*: "God Most High" (Gen. 14:18–22; Num. 24:16; Deut. 32:8)
- *'el ro'i*: "the God Who Sees" (Gen. 16:13)
- *'el shaddai*: "God Almighty" (Gen. 17:1; Ex. 6:3; Num. 24:4)
- *'el 'olam*: "Eternal/Everlasting God" (e.g., Gen. 21:33)
- *pakhad yitskhaq:* "the Fear of Isaac" (Gen. 31:42)
- *'abid ya'aqob:* "Mighty One/God of Jacob" (Gen. 49:24)
- *tsur*: "Rock" (Deut. 32:4, 15, 18, 31)
- *'ab*: "Father" (Deut. 32:6)

Looking schematically at the Pentateuch, each of the five books may be seen to emphasize one major character trait of God: (1) Genesis presents God's *sovereignty* as Creator; (2) Exodus reveals God's *redeeming* power; (3) Leviticus emphasizes God's *holiness*; (4) Numbers traces God's *justice and mercy* (goodness and severity) in dealing with Israel during their wilderness pilgrimage; and (5) Deuteronomy highlights God's *covenant faithfulness* (Heb. *khesed*) toward His people.

3. *The Rise of the Moral Conflict.* Why was it so important to emphasize the character of the Creator at the beginning of the Pentateuch? Because only against this background can the central issue in Genesis 3 be properly grasped. Genesis 3 describes the rise of a moral conflict on earth over the issue of the character of God. The presence of the serpent, clearly identified in Revelation 12 as the devil or Satan who was cast out of heaven (Rev. 12:9), indicates the *cosmic* nature of this conflict that had already begun in heaven (Is. 14:12–15; Ezek. 28:12–19; Rev. 12:7–9). The serpent called into question the goodness of the Creator with his insinuations to Eve. Eve and Adam believed the lies of the serpent, they fell from innocence, and the floodgates of woe were opened upon the world.

Thus, the third facet of the Pentateuch's theological center is the rise of the moral controversy, and this conflict rages over the issue of the character of God. The first part of Genesis 3:15 records God's promise that He would put enmity between the serpent and the woman, and between his descendants and hers. Here is the prediction of the continued moral conflict down through history between the spiritual descendants of Satan and the spiritual descendants of Eve.

The remainder of the Pentateuch traces this continued moral conflict in the history of the world and in the history of Abraham and his descendants, the people of Israel. The paradigm of this Great Controversy outside the Garden is first illustrated in the moral conflict between Cain and Abel, and the conflict is highlighted throughout the book of Genesis: the genealogy of Cain (Gen. 4) versus the genealogy of Seth (Gen. 5); the "sons/daughters of men" versus the "sons of God" (Gen. 6:1–4); the wicked antediluvian world versus the righteous remnant saved in the ark during the Flood (Gen. 6–9); and the history of the covenant line through Abraham versus the attempts from both human and supernatural enemies to derail the onward progress of the covenant. Throughout this continued conflict the issue of theodicy—the trustworthiness of God's character—emerges over and over.

In the book of Exodus the cosmic moral conflict is concentrated in the clash of deities—the true and living God of Israel versus the gods of Egypt (Ex. 12:12)—played out on the human level in God's deliverance of His people from the oppressive power of Egypt. The moral conflict continues throughout the narratives of the Pentateuch, as Israel's experience alternates between obedience to God (all too infrequently) and rebellion/murmuring against Him in the wilderness, including apostasy with the golden calf at Sinai and with Baal Peor on the borders of the promised land. Throughout these episodes the trustworthiness of the living God is the core issue. Israel's worship—either of the true and living God Yahweh or of the false gods, such as Baal—reveals what they regard as the worthiness of the One they chose to worship.

4. *The Gospel Covenant Promise Centered in the Person of the Messianic Seed.* Genesis 3:15 also reveals a fourth pillar of the theological foundation of the Pentateuch. The enmity described in v. 15 is not a natural hatred. After Adam and Eve sinned, there was no longer natural enmity between them and the serpent. They had sold themselves to the serpent, and their hearts had become depraved and bent toward evil, just like the serpent's. But in this verse, God Himself promises to implant enmity between Eve and the serpent and between their spiritual descendants (collective *zer'a*, "seed," "offspring").

The structure of the narrative of the Fall, found in the third chapter of Genesis, is symmetrical (chiastic), and exactly in the center, at the apex of the chiasm (vv. 14–15) is found what theologians call "the first Gospel promise." The middle part of Genesis 3:15 goes to the heart of this promise and shows that it is centered in a Person. God told the serpent that *He* would *shup* ("crush," "bruise," "strike") the serpent's head and the serpent would *shup* ("crush," "bruise," "strike") *His* heel. In this verse the conflict narrows from many descendants (a collective "seed") in the first part of the verse to a masculine singular pronoun in the last part of the verse—"He"—fighting against the serpent. Elsewhere in Scripture whenever the term "seed" is modified by a singular pronoun, it is a single individual who is in view. Likewise, in this verse God promises victory centered in a Person. "He"—the ultimate representative Seed of the woman, later to be revealed as the Messiah—shall bruise your head, Satan, and you shall bruise His heel. This is the fourth facet of the Pentateuch's theological center: the promise of redemption centered in the Person of the messianic Offspring/Seed. In the examination of the literary macrostructure in a previous section, it became evident how this messianic theme structures and permeates the entire Pentateuch.

Covenant terminology is implicit in the context of Genesis 3:15, indicating that this messianic promise is actually the first pronouncement of the everlasting covenant between the Father and the Son, announcing that a solution to the cosmic moral conflict will be forthcoming. This covenant theme figures prominently throughout the rest of the Pentateuch, including the Noahic covenant (Gen. 6:18; 9:9–17), the Abrahamic covenant (Gen. 12, 15, 17), and the Sinaitic covenant (Ex. 19:5; 24; 34). The covenant promises originally given to humankind (Gen. 1:28)—seed/descendants, land, dominion, and divine-human intimacy—are repeated to Abram (Gen. 12:1–3, 7; 17:6–8) and to Israel at Sinai (Ex. 19, 24, 34). So the fourth facet of the Pentateuch's theological center is the Gospel covenant promise of a solution to the moral conflict, centered in the messianic Offspring/Seed.

5. *Substitutionary Atonement Worked Out by the Messianic Offspring/Seed.* Visualize what is depicted in Genesis 3:15: the Seed/Offspring, Christ, takes off His sandal, as it were, bares His heel, and steps voluntarily on a venomous viper. It is a picture of the Seed/Offspring voluntarily giving up His life to slay the serpent. Christ volunteered to consciously step on the head of the most deadly viper in the universe, the serpent Satan himself, knowing full well that it would cost Him His life. Here is a powerful portrait of the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ on our behalf. Here is the fifth facet of the Pentateuch's theological center: the substitutionary atonement, as our representative Seed/Offspring would die on behalf of the fallen human race. This facet is further highlighted in Genesis 3:21, where Adam and Eve are covered with the skins of a slain animal, intimating their being covered by the robe of righteousness of their Substitute, the Lamb of God (cf. Isa. 61:10).

The theme of substitutionary atonement is developed throughout the Pentateuch: in the drama of Abraham and Isaac on Mount Moriah, with the ram dying in Isaac's place (Gen. 22); in the instructions for the first Passover service, where God passed over the homes covered by the blood of the Passover lamb (Ex. 12:12–13); and in numerous divine instructions regarding the Levitical sacrificial system elsewhere in the Pentateuch, particularly in the book of Leviticus. For example, Leviticus 1:4 points to the meaning of substitution. The sacrificial animal was a substitute, representing the repentant sinner who brought it. Leviticus 17:11 describes the meaning of the blood in the sacrificial system: the life is in the blood, and the blood of the sacrifice makes atonement for the *nepesh*—a term meaning various things but here meaning "soul" or "life." The key phrase in this passage regarding this atonement can be rendered, "in exchange for the person." This highlights the concept of substitution that is involved in the sacrifice, pointing to the substitutionary death of Christ on the cross (see also Lev. 4 and 16).

6. *The End of the Cosmic Conflict.* The sixth facet of this theological jewel of the Pentateuch is also found in Genesis 3:15. Here is predicted the resolution of the cosmic conflict at the close of earth's history when evil and the serpent will come to an end. In New (mixed with Old) Testament terms, Christ's heel would be bruised at Calvary, but this was only a wound to the heel. Later revelation, including pentateuchal prefigurations in the typology of the sanctuary (e.g., the waving of the wave sheaf on the third day after the Passover sacrifice;

Lev. 23:10–11), makes clear that though the Messiah would die, on the third day He would come back to life. But Satan would be crushed in the head, a mortal wound with no hope of recovery. The great cosmic conflict will not go on forever (see Lev. 16). Romans 16:20 alludes to Genesis 3:15, as Paul describes the end of the cosmic conflict when the God of peace will crush Satan under our feet. Satan's head was mortally wounded at Calvary and will receive the final crushing at the end of time. So the sixth facet of the Pentateuch's theological center is the predicted final end of the moral conflict as the serpent's head is crushed.

7. *The Sanctuary Setting of the Moral Conflict.* A seventh, and last, facet of the multi-faceted theological center of the Pentateuch is implied throughout Genesis 1–3. There are in Genesis 2–3 theological concepts that later will be at the heart of the theology of the sanctuary as found in Exodus and Leviticus and other places in the Bible. This incipient theology of the sanctuary is expressed through what later on will be sanctuary terminology and concepts. Although Eden is the home of Adam and Eve, it is also the place where God comes and meets with them and where an investigative judgment takes place (Gen. 3:8–19) and grace is made available through the promised Messiah and His sacrificial death (Gen. 3:15, 21). After Adam and Eve are expelled from the Garden, God placed two cherubim by the *eastern* entrance of the Garden—pointing to the future eastern entrance to the sanctuary, where humans came to worship the Lord.

In the time of the patriarchs after the Flood, the basic features of the sanctuary were represented by the altars that the patriarchs built wherever they sojourned. After Israel was delivered from Egyptian bondage at the Red Sea, the Song of Moses predicted that God would establish His sanctuary in the promised land (Ex. 15:17). In the remainder of the Pentateuch, the sanctuary becomes the locus of attention as the place where God comes to dwell in the midst of the people (Ex. 25:8) and also as the battleground of the moral conflict. At the sanctuary the people of Israel expressed loyalty to Yahweh in their worship, and conversely at the sanctuary God's people and their leaders often showed their disloyalty and even rebellion against God (e.g., Nadab and Abihu; Lev. 10) and their failure to avail themselves of the provisions of the sanctuary services (e.g., Lev. 23:29–30). Thus the sanctuary is the seventh facet of the pentateuchal theological diamond, the center of the great controversy over the character of God, as well as the center of God's work of redemption for His people.

From its opening pages the Torah's seven-faceted theological center emerges and is unfolded in the remainder of the Pentateuch. This center is not an "organizing principle" into which all the other themes, motifs, and concepts of the Pentateuch are to be forced to fit. Instead, this center serves as an *orientation point* in light of which the other themes of the Pentateuch make ultimate sense.

IMPORTANCE OF THE PENTATEUCH

The Pentateuch constitutes the foundational revelation for the rest of Scripture. This becomes apparent in several ways.

The Torah Is Foundational for Later Blocks of Hebrew Scripture

The Hebrew Bible is divided into three sections: Torah, Prophets (Former and Latter/Major and Minor, beginning with Joshua), and Writings (beginning with the book of Psalms). These major blocks of inspired material were juxtaposed in the final canonical form of the Hebrew Bible (perhaps by Ezra; see "Formation of the Biblical Canon," p. 21). They are organized so that at the seam of each of these sections is an evident pattern that presents a consistent call to focus on the Torah.

It has already been pointed out above how the book of Joshua begins with the divine charge to study, consider, speak, and perform everything written in the law (Torah) of Moses (Josh. 1:8). At the end of the Prophets, in the final chapter of its last book, Malachi, God gives a similar charge to remember the law (Torah) of Moses, His servant (Mal. 4:4). And positioned immediately thereafter, as presented in the Hebrew Bible, is the book of Psalms, which begins with a Torah psalm, echoing Joshua 1 and offering a blessing upon the one whose delight and daily meditation is focused on Torah (Ps. 1:2).

The order of books in the Septuagint, organized thematically by the Greek translators and generally followed by modern versions, likewise highlights the Torah in the way the major blocks are seamed together. Immediately after the Torah come the Historical Books, beginning with Joshua with its divine call to meditate on the Torah (Josh. 1:6–8). Then comes the collection of Hymnic-Wisdom Literature, commencing with Psalm 1, in which the person is blessed who meditates day and night on the Torah (Ps. 1:3). Finally come the Prophets, concluding with Malachi, with its last chapter exhorting us to remember the Torah of Moses (Mal. 4:4).

Later Blocks of Hebrew Scripture Reveal a Dependence on the Torah

The later writers of the Hebrew Scriptures show their great indebtedness to the Torah by references and allusions to the books of Moses. In the historical books of the Former Prophets there are references to the curses of the law (Torah; i.e., Lev. 26; Deut. 28) that would fall upon Israel for disobedience (e.g., Josh. 8:34; 23:6–13) and narratives revealing how these curses did in fact fall upon the nation in their apostasy. As another example, the promise to David that his son would build a house for God's name (2 Sam. 7:13) is intertextually linked with the original promise in Deuteronomy 12:5. Again, at the end of David's reign, his final words to his son Solomon stressed the need for him and the nation to follow the will of God as set forth in the Torah (1 Kin. 2:3). As a final example, later kings of Judah (Hezekiah and Josiah) followed the Lord in accordance with the words of the Torah given by Moses (2 Kin. 18:6; 23:25).

The greatest impact of the Torah is found in the Latter Prophets. Both Major Prophets and Minor Prophets (the Book of the Twelve) give evidence of heavy dependence on the contents of the Torah. For example, the frequent covenant lawsuits of the OT prophets (e.g., Is. 1:2–20; Jer. 2:4–13), with their call to "heaven and earth" as witnesses, allude back to the covenant lawsuit of Deuteronomy 32. In these lawsuits there are also references to the covenant stipulations of the Torah that have been violated (e.g., Ps. 50:16–21; Jer. 2:10–11; Hos. 4:1–2; Mic.

6:9–12) and the covenant curses of the Torah that have already fallen or will fall upon those who are disobedient (e.g., Is. 1:5–6, alluding to Deut. 28:51–52; Hos. 4:3; and Mic. 6:13–16). Numerous other passages in the Prophets show direct dependence upon the Torah.

In the Writings, several psalms are devoted to extolling the Torah (Pss. 1, 19, 119). In the most unsuspected places of the wisdom literature appear references to the Pentateuch. In the Song of Songs, for example, subtle allusions to the events of Israel's Exodus from Egypt occur, which were long ago recognized by various Jewish authors. As noted above in the section on Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, Ezra and Nehemiah make numerous references to the "law of Moses," and Daniel and Chronicles refer to the covenant curses of the Torah that have come upon the people of Israel for their rebellion against God.

Numerous New Testament Citations of the Pentateuch

The Pentateuch is quoted by NT writers at least 148 times. Genesis is cited thirty-four times, Exodus forty-four times, Leviticus seventeen times, Numbers three times, and Deuteronomy fifty times. Deuteronomy is the third most cited book in the OT, after Psalms and Isaiah (cited seventy-nine and sixty-six times respectively). Often these citations from the Pentateuch form the basis for major theological arguments. For example, Paul's message in Romans and Galatians about righteousness by faith without the works of the law depends heavily on the story of Abram and Moses's foundational statement about this paragon of faith—that is, that Abram believed in the Lord and He credited/accounted it to him for/as righteousness (Gen. 15:6).

New Testament Use of the Pentateuch in Typological Readings

Beyond explicit NT citations of the Pentateuch, various historical realities of the Pentateuch—persons, events, and institutions—are recognized as types (1 Cor. 10:6, 11) that find antitypical fulfillment in Jesus and the Gospel realities brought about by Him. A few of these pentateuchal types identified as such include Adam (Rom. 5:14); Noah and the Flood (1 Pet. 3:20–21; 2 Pet. 3:5–7); Melchizedek (Heb. 7:1–17); the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (2 Pet. 2:6–10; Jude 7); Hagar and Sarah (Gal. 4:24–31); Isaac, Abraham's Seed/Offspring (Gal. 3:16, 18, 29), especially in his experience on Mount Moriah (Rom. 9:7); Israel's Exodus from Egypt (Gr. *exodos*; Matt. 2:14–15; Luke 9:31); Israel's "baptism" in the Red Sea (1 Cor. 10:1–2); Israel's wilderness wandering and temptations (1 Cor. 10:1–11), especially the water from the rock (John 7:37; 1 Cor. 10:4), the giving of manna (John 6:32–58), and the brazen serpent of Numbers 21:9 (John 3:14–15); Moses the prophet (Deut. 18:15–19; John 6:14; 8:40; Heb. 3:1–6; cf. Matt. 5–7; Luke 6:20–49); the sanctuary and its services (Matt. 12:6; John 1:14; 2:21; 1 Cor. 3:16–17; 2 Cor. 6:16; Heb. 8–10; Rev. 3:12; 7:15; 11:19; 21:3, 16, 22); and the priesthood (Heb. 3:1; 6:20; 8:1; 1 Pet. 2:5, 9; Rev. 1:5–6; 5:10; 20:6). As evidenced from this representative sample, whole swaths of NT theology and practical lessons of Christian living are built upon or illustrated by typology taken from the Pentateuch.

New Testament Doctrines and the Pentateuch

Almost all of the NT doctrines are already summarized in Genesis, even in the first three chapters of Genesis. There is a growing consensus among scholars, whether liberal or conservative, that Genesis 1–3 forms the interpretative foundation for the rest of Scripture. All of the major biblical doctrinal themes—Creation, covenant, the cosmic conflict, law, the Sabbath, God and His attributes/character, Christ, the Holy Spirit, the nature of humanity, sin, salvation, righteousness by faith, the sanctuary, atonement, eschatology, the remnant, marriage and sexuality, etc.—may be traced, at least embryonically, to the opening pages of the Bible in Genesis 1–3 and are developed in Genesis and the rest of the Pentateuch. Without this foundation in the Pentateuch, many of these doctrines would be incomprehensible or at least unclear.

For these and many other reasons, the Pentateuch may be regarded as the foundation of present truth, waiting to be explored by the earnest Bible student. Every new Spirit-led examination of the jewels found in the Pentateuch will make them shine with new luster, and the Christ to whom they ultimately point will become ever more precious to the attentive reader whose heart will be filled with hope.

Ultimately, the Pentateuch's foundational nature and its all-encompassing, God-centered worldview remind us of God's intimate engagement in this world and in the lives of His people. While readers throughout the ages have been able to discern innumerable pillars of magnificent truths, they have also been encouraged by the realization of God's unfathomable grace as manifested in the ups and downs of human history. In the midst of the Pentateuch's realistic depiction of dysfunctional families, failed leadership, and rebellious mobs, interrupted by sparks of human faithfulness and stubborn reliance on God's unwavering promises, we can see grace at work. This grace is taken hold of by frail human faith, engendering hope in a future when sin will be no more and eternity will become a present reality. That will truly be Eden restored.

GENESIS

INTRODUCTION

Title and Authorship. The book starts with the Hebrew term *bere'shit* ("in the beginning") which, following ancient conventions, is also its title. The English name comes from *geneseos*, meaning "origins," the title taken from the Greek Septuagint and adapted by the Latin Vulgate. The book of Genesis does not explicitly state who its author was. However, Moses is recognized as the author of the Pentateuch by many authors of the NT (Matt. 8:4; 19:7–8; 22:24; Mark 7:10; 12:19, 26; Luke 2:22; 16:29; 24:27, 44; John 1:17, 45; 5:46; 7:22–23; 8:5; Acts 3:22; 13:39), who themselves lived with the tradition that he was the author.

Date. From the early centuries A.D. until only recently, most Christian interpreters have understood Moses to have written the Pentateuch sometime in the fifteenth century B.C. Jewish interpreters have had this understanding much longer. However, beginning with the rise of rationalism in the mid-1800s, this consensus began to be questioned by scholars using the historical-critical method. These scholars suggested that the Pentateuch was written not by a single hand but by many through a complex editorial process. They proposed at least four different sources written by anonymous authors between the tenth and the fifth centuries B.C. Although no external evidence has ever surfaced for the existence of any of these proposed sources, most academic work done today assumes this theory to be true. Key arguments of critical scholarship include the use of differing divine names as an indication of multiple sources, the large numbers mentioned in the Pentateuch (esp. regarding the number of Israelites leaving Egypt), doublets and repetition (e.g., the wife/sister incidents in Abraham's and Isaac's lives [Gen. 12, 20, 26]), supposed anachronisms (such as the appearance of camels), and so forth. Some of these challenges to the authenticity of Mosaic authorship will be dealt with in the notes of this commentary (see "Introduction to the Pentateuch," p. 120). However, the heart of the issue concerns one's understanding of what makes a text historically reliable. First, it is important to remember that the theological, biographical, selective, and interpretive nature of biblical stories does not automatically disqualify them from being historical. Rather, these characteristics highlight the important cultural differences between a twenty-first-century (often Western) audience and the biblical authors whose Eastern and holistic worldview left space for a God, who actively intervenes in human history. Considering biblical chronology as a whole as well as the internal evidence of Genesis, it is likely that the book was indeed written by Moses during his sojourn in Midian prior to the Exodus. Moses himself may have had access to archival documents that were marked by the recurring *toledot* formula (see p. 139) while other material was received by direct divine revelation (see "Introduction to the Pentateuch," p. 120).

Backgrounds. The narrative flow of Genesis moves from Creation to the arrival of the Hebrews in Egypt. Genesis 1:1—11:26 is an overview of human history that serves as an introduction to the entire Bible. This overview includes the creation of the cosmos, the creation of humanity during the creation of life on this planet, humanity's fall into sin, a universal Flood, and the confusion of the languages. From Genesis 11:27 to the end of the book, the narrative slows down as it focuses on God's promises to Abram, particularly the promise of a "Son," and the struggles, mistakes, and faithfulness in the generations of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob during their journey through the promised land and their final arrival in Egypt.

Genealogies play a significant role in the structure of Genesis. Ancient cultures placed great importance on genealogies because they

provided a link to the past, explained origins, established kinship links, demonstrated the legitimacy of people or people groups (such as priests or kings), and highlighted continuity. The Hebrew phrase *'elleh toledot* ("these are the generations," or, using a more generic translation, "this is the genealogy") appears eleven times throughout the book (2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10; 11:27; 25:12; 25:19; 36:1; 36:9; 37:2). Based on comparative ANE data, scholars have understood the phrase as either a title or a summary statement. While many of these genealogies move the story forward or act as transitions between key scenes, others seem unimportant and disconnected from the bigger covenantal picture (e.g., 25:12 contains a brief genealogy of Ishmael, and 36:1, 9 contain genealogies related to Esau, both of whom are not part of the covenant line). While they do not provide a symmetrical or clear structural layout for Genesis, their presence throughout the book suggests unity and an attempt at creating structure. The author used a collection of similar documents to tell an important story, and the distinction between primordial and patriarchal histories is one not of historical reliability but of focus. This emphasis on name lists and their relations can become monotonous or boring to modern readers, who may find their significance difficult to understand. The genealogies in Genesis point toward the future: following the first pronouncement of the good news in Genesis 3:15, generation after generation wonders about the One who would bring salvation from the curse of sin.

Theology and Purpose. Genesis provides the foundation upon which all other authors in Scripture wrote and thus lays the groundwork for understanding and interpreting the entire Bible. Key topics, including theology (studies regarding God as Creator and Savior), anthropology (studies regarding humanity's creation from dust and its return to dust), sociology (studies regarding the family, marriage, and community), cosmology (studies regarding the origins of the cosmos), and soteriology (studies regarding the plan of salvation in the context of Creation and the Fall), all have their beginning in Genesis. This is why one will never accurately understand the remainder of Scripture without grasping Genesis's introductory theological themes.

1. In the Beginning. Genesis is built around beginnings. Light and darkness, earth and heaven, animals and plants, humanity, marriage, the Sabbath, the covenant family, sin and salvation—all are topics that will be further developed throughout the rest of Scripture. Genealogical notes are carefully positioned to emphasize the importance of beginnings (births) and continuity. Creation was a movement from seeming disorder to awesome order. Genesis 1:2 describes the earth as a mass of disorganized raw material, out of which the divine word created order in a systematic manner—forming, filling, and separating the physical and temporal environments. At the apex of Creation week, the seventh-day Sabbath ordered and sanctified life. In summary, Genesis is a reminder that in regard to order, true beginnings require a divine word. It is the creative word straight from the mouth of God that produced light, plants, animals, and life and that also sanctified the seventh day. In the prologue to his Gospel, the NT writer John reveals that this creative and divine Word arrived on earth with a mission of re-creation—and His name was Jesus (John 1:1–14).

2. The Disruption of Creation. Although Genesis begins with a description of the grand scheme of things, it soon becomes relational. A perfect creation was marred by the doubt and decisions made by humanity's first ancestors, which in turn led to the loss of paradise. The entrance of sin into this world, as told in the Fall narrative of Genesis 3, reversed the initial Creation order and resulted in disorder. It affected man and woman (3:12) and the rest of creation (3:15, 17–19). The pain of separation from God was palpable when Adam and Eve had to leave the Garden (3:23–24). Disorder was further exemplified when brother slayed brother (4:8). When humanity's downward trend toward wickedness reached a nadir, disorder became so irreversible that God decided to purify the world by a universal Flood (6:1–7). However, it wasn't long before disorder reigned supreme after the Flood as well. The confusion of languages, causing the dispersion of humanity (11:1–9), serves as a good example.

3. Promises and Hope. Promises play an important role in the book of Genesis. Without prompting, God promised a resolution to the conflict (Gen. 3:15). Immediately following the Flood, He offered another promise (8:21—9:1). In the selection of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, God made additional promises (12:1–3, 7; 13:15–17; 15:7–21; 17:4–8; 22:16–18; 26:2–4; 28:13–14) that were crucial to the development of the story in the rest of the Pentateuch and laid the foundation for further promises at its end (Deut. 28–32). The promises found in Genesis center on God.

The blessings pronounced in them deal with the growth of family, the settlement of land, and the result of both of these being a blessing to those who lived around them.

Genesis reveals that in the midst of evil and separation and pain, there was hope grounded in divine promises. Hope that the One who would crush the head of the serpent (3:15) would come as a descendent of the woman. Hope that God would provide a way to survive a universal Flood. Hope that God's elected would become a blessing to all the nations of the world (12:1–3). This hope recognized the Creator but longed for the Savior. While it is, at times, veiled, it reappears at key moments in the narrative and previews the blessed hope that has moved and transformed millions since. Ultimately, the last book of Scripture, Revelation, provides the balancing counterpart to Genesis. A new creation reverses the fallen creation. The Alpha and the Omega has been recognized as the One who was slain for the sins of humanity. Instead of a garden, there is a city, a new Jerusalem that becomes the home of re-created humanity.

4. Personal Piety. The first book of Scripture is not only a source of significant theology and crucial narratives for developing an understanding of origin and destiny. It is also a book permeated by prayer. Personal devotion and prayer are presented in Genesis as crucial to a life of piety. This can be seen in Abraham's prayers. He prayed for a son (15:1–3), for the cities doomed to destruction (18:16–33), and for foreign kings (20:7, 17–18). God answered the prayer of Abraham's servant (24:12–14, 26–27, 42–44) and Isaac's prayer for his wife (25:21). Prayer was significant in the life not only of the men of Genesis. Women are also shown as having had prayers answered: Hagar's desperate cry for help (21:16–21), Leah's prayer for children and the love of her husband (29:32–33; 30:17), and Rachel's prayer for children (30:22). People called upon the name of the Lord (e.g., 12:8; 13:4; 21:33; 26:25) in worship, praise, perplexity, and desperation—and God heard and acted in His time. The God of Genesis is a God who answers prayers and interacts with His creation—a critical message in the face of uncertainties, pain, loss, and hopelessness. Those who hope also pray.

5. Cosmic Theology. Genesis encourages the reader to step back to see the larger picture of a controversy with cosmic dimensions. Creation and the Fall were followed by tangible examples of God's involvement in this world and in the lives of His people and offer helpful insights into God's character. The God who searched for fallen humanity is also the God who planted the gospel seed found in Genesis 3:15. With the conflict moving from heaven to earth (Rev. 12), the entire universe could witness the divine plan that would bring salvation, rest, and restoration to a fallen world (1 Cor. 4:9).

COMMENTARY

1:1—11:26

PRIMORDIAL HISTORY: GOD'S DEALING WITH HUMANITY

Genesis 1:1—11:26 focuses on ancient history and describes the origins of humanity (including the creation of this planet, the Fall, a universal Flood, and the division of people).

Days of Creation

The phrase "evening and morning" in the Creation narrative indicates that the days of Creation should be understood as literal days. This is reinforced by the fact that the term "day" is accompanied by a numeral (e.g., "first," "second"), and in such cases, the term "day" designates a literal day. From a biological perspective, aside from supernatural intervention, vegetation and natural life would require a short cycle of darkness and light indicated by a literal day in order to be preserved. Besides, the Sabbath commandment demonstrates that the seven days are to be understood as literal days. While the Hebrew term for "day" can indicate a period of time longer than a twenty-four-hour day (e.g., it is possible that the Day of the Lord [Is. 2:12; Jer. 46:10; Joel 3:14] does not always refer to a 24-hour day), it does so in combination with other linguistic elements (such as prepositions, prepositional phrases, or compound constructions) but never when used with an ordinal or cardinal number.

An appropriate comprehension and appreciation of these first chapters is foundational for understanding the rest of Scripture.

1:1—2:25

God's Perfect Creation

After the general outline of Creation in chapter 1, chapter 2 focuses more closely on the creation of humanity. Genesis 1 and 2 are written in prose yet exhibit a wonderful rhythmic cadence while factually recording God's creative activity. The text is interested in the *who*, the *how*, and *the result* of God's creation.

1:1–2. Introductory Statement. The first two verses appear to function as a title or summary statement for the rest of the chapter. Scripture states right from the outset that the universe did not come into existence by itself but that it was the result of the creative activity of God. Before this beginning, there was only God, the uncreated One. In Hebrew thinking, the portrayal of the result often precedes the description of the process. God, standing above and outside of creation, created the heavens and the earth (v. 1), perhaps pointing to the planet with its atmospheric heaven surrounding it, even though it could also be interpreted as a reference to the creation of the larger universe. John's "in the beginning" (John 1:1) may point to the latter possibility, emphasizing the eternal existence of the Word. While this is possible, it is important to keep in mind that Genesis is primarily interested in God's relation to earth and its inhabitants. The verb "created" (*bara'*) is always linked to divine creative activity (Ps. 33:6, 9; Amos 4:13) but does not always refer to creation out of nothing (Is. 65:17).

The description in v. 2 does not refer to chaos but to the condition of the planet before the raw materials were constituted by the Creator into the proper habitat for human existence (cf. Is. 34:11; Jer. 4:23). The spirit of God is mentioned, without any introduction, as being active in the work of creation in anticipation of the Creation week. This is the same spirit of God mentioned in other parts of the Bible (e.g., Gen. 41:38; Ex. 31:3; Pss. 51:11; 143:10; Is. 63:10). The members of the Godhead all participated in Creation, as highlighted by John's description of the creative power of the living Word in John 1. John 1:1–3 describes the handiwork of the Word that became flesh, picking up on the divine word in Genesis 1 and linking it to the important concepts of the Jewish *memra'* ("word") that appeared in intertestamental Judaism and the Greek *logos* ("word"; see notes on John 1).

1:3—2:4a. The Creation of Earth. God created the various elements and environments, as well as the creatures that would inhabit them and benefit from them—a process sometimes referred to as "forming and filling." The speech for each Creation day includes an announcement, a command, the fulfillment of the command, an assessment, a separation, a summary of the components, and the number of the day.

The creation of light on the first day (1:3–5) established the format of the other days of Creation. While the sun and moon signaling times and seasons (1:14–19) appeared specifically during the fourth day, the reference to light on the first day perhaps indicates that God created some unidentified source of light. Some believe that the sun was created on the first day but given purpose on the fourth. The phrase "evening and morning" on the first day does indicate that the light was functioning in the same way that the sun would function. The author of Genesis purposefully avoided naming the celestial lights in 1:16, instead opting to call them the "greater light" and "lesser light." While contemporary Ugarit texts from the second millennium B.C. mention a "great light" in reference to the sun, there is no equivalent phrase for the moon. When Moses penned these timeless words during the second half of the second millennium B.C., the sun and moon were the major deities in the ANE. Genesis 1 establishes their rightful place: they were created, nameless entities that do not deserve human worship. They are in the Creator's hand—like plants, animals, and humanity. There is an apparent parallelism between v. 4 and v. 18. God *badal* ("separated" or "divided") the light from the darkness (v. 4), and the luminaries divided the light from the darkness (v. 18; see 2 Cor. 4:1–6). Creation by separation established boundaries and structured the transformation of raw materials into an ordered creation propitious for life. In the Bible, God's law regulated boundaries and made possible proper social and religious interaction. In the building of the Israelite sanctuary, separation would also play an important role, indicating that its construction was an act of creation (see "Creation, Sabbath, and the Sanctuary," p. 231).

The final element of each Creation day involved God's observation and declaration of goodness, followed by naming. Scripture often links God's "seeing" to other decisive activities

(Gen. 6:12–13). In Genesis 1, God saw each Creation day activity and then declared it good (1:4, 10, 18, 21, 25) or even very good, as He did at the end of the sixth day (1:31). The Hebrew notion of "good" is more comprehensive than the common definition in English. In addition to a functional dimension ("it works"), the Hebrew *tob* refers also to aesthetic beauty, especially when associated with seeing (cf. 6:2; 24:16; 1 Sam. 16:12; 1 Kin. 1:6; Dan. 1:4), as well as to ethical uprightness (Is. 7:15). Following each creative act, God named the phenomenon or being. The divine act of naming marked divine sovereignty.

The account of the second day of Creation (1:6–8) describes the creation of the firmament. God made the expanse or the atmosphere of the planet. The text utilizes a verb that is often associated with the work of an artisan (e.g., a potter in Jer. 18:3–4). Again, God spoke and then made the sky, separating the atmosphere surrounding the earth and establishing the crucial water cycle—though described in prescientific phenomenological language.

On the third day of Creation (1:9–13), the water was separated from the dry land, and vegetation was created. Twice God called His creation "good" on the third day. The preparatory act of dividing the dry land and the water created the environment that was needed for fauna, flora, and the human inhabitants of the earth. Water was subject to divine command and was not an independent divine agent as in many creation accounts found around the world. Water could also become an agent of divine judgment (cf. Gen. 6–8). Once dry land had been established, God adorned the land with grass, bushes, and trees.

Scripture and Science

The relationship between Scripture and science has been debated heatedly since the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century. Up to that time, most scholars had presupposed the existence of God and the veracity of the Bible. Science was the handmaid of theology. This relationship changed dramatically when rationalism and materialism became the underlying philosophical presuppositions of science. Reason, logic, and matter were elevated as the all-encompassing building blocks of knowledge and truth. Since God's existence and interventions could not be rationally demonstrated or explained, scholars began to exclude God from science. They suggested that the distinction between faith and science made science more objective, and faith became a private matter. In recent decades, scientists have begun to recognize that objectivity is impossible—due to the human factor. Yet the goal of achieving objectivity still remains a high priority for modern scientists. Scripture, on the other hand, begins with an assumption: *In the beginning—there was God*. Creation, albeit described in the first chapters of Genesis in phenomenological language, had God as its cause and agent. He spoke and it was.

Christian interaction with science can be classified using three different models. The first model suggests that science and religion should remain *isolated* from each other and should be considered separate entities. A search for truth—wherever the evidence leads—would argue against this model. The second model could be described as *parallel yet separate*. Both religion and science are recognized as sources of truth, yet they should not cross-pollinate. This model is the philosophical framework of theistic evolution, a theory that seeks to combine evolution and divine revelation by suggesting that God used evolution and its mechanisms (including natural selection) to "create" this world. One particular problem with this model is the existence of death and pain—as evidenced in the fossil record of the geologic column. While equality between the two sources of truth is postulated, science actually seems to play the first fiddle.

The third model is informed by science yet gives God (and His revelation) priority in the search for truth. Christians are not hostile to science but recognize God as the ultimate Creator of natural laws and seek to understand creation based on this premise. This model recognizes God as the true source of knowledge and wisdom and gives priority to Scripture in situations that require a choice between science and faith. It recognizes the transitory nature of scientific theories (some of the assured results of science that have been disproved by later generations of scientists) and gives priority to divine revelation. This model truly seeks to integrate *all relevant data* in a holistic manner because it acknowledges God not only as the Revelator but also as the Creator who established the laws of nature that engage and intrigue scientists (for more discussion, see "Faith and Science," p. 57).

A possible translation of v. 14 would be "let the lights in the expanse be for separating." This is held up by some as support for the notion that the sun had already been created on the first day but was only given its purpose and function on the fourth day. Either way, similar to v. 5, light was to play a key role in determining time and marking the distinction between day and night and different seasons by the position of these two heavenly bodies.

Day five witnessed the creation of fish and birds (1:20–23), who are described as *nepesh khayyah* (translated sometimes as "living souls" or "living creatures"). This phrase is also used with respect to humans (2:7). The biblical text reflects the abundance of life and life-forms that filled both water and sky, including the great sea creatures (cf. Job 3:8; Ps. 74:13–17; Is. 27:1). In ANE myths, these creatures represented primeval monsters; in the biblical text, they are part of a list of living creatures that derived their existence from an all-powerful Creator. Each species of animal and flora (1:11) was created according to its kind and followed God's divine master plan and purpose (1:21). Through the command to be fruitful and multiply (or increase), God identified the means by which the earth would be filled with fauna and flora.

The Hebrew text distinguishes between cattle (i.e., livestock or domesticated animals), creeping things (i.e., animals moving on the ground), and beasts of the earth (i.e., wild animals). God made each animal species according to its kind. However, in the creation of human beings, God did something that He had not done before. He used a plural to refer to Himself. This suggests that within the mystery of the one God, there was a plurality, something that had already been indicated in the reference to the spirit of God in v. 2. While plants and animals were made according to their various kinds, humans were created in God's image, with the capacity to interact with Him and to represent Him as free, rational moral agents. Their exhibition of their divine origin was reflected not only in the beauty and symmetry of their outward appearance but also in the holiness and purity of their characters (Ps. 8:5; 2 Cor. 3:18; Col. 3:10). Several English translations recognize v. 27 from the Hebrew as the first line of poetry in Scripture, emphasizing further the significant difference between the origin of humanity and the rest of creation. The distinction between male and female in humanity's creation points to the complementary nature of the two sexes. They were both the expression of God's image while at the same time being differentiated by gender. This gender distinction would be a vehicle to transform the divine blessing into reality (v. 28). God's blessing involved not only filling the earth but also representing the Creator as stewards. God gave to both Adam and Eve the privilege of participating in God's loving and caring dominion over creation. They became stewards of the Lord.

God also took care of the dietary needs of His creatures and assigned to them a vegetarian diet (1:29). Meat would become part of the human diet only after the Flood (9:3). God has always been interested in the well-being of His creatures, and this is shown here through His concern for what they should eat (see Lev. 11). The Lord created human beings as physical entities; matter is not evil. Scripture's resounding "it was very good" (1:31) provides a fitting summary of God's forming and filling activities. Order and structure point toward a Creator who enjoys a multiplicity of life.

The work of Creation climaxed on the Sabbath (Gen. 2:1–3) and consisted in the establishment of a time for communion with the Creator. He separated and sanctified the Sabbath for holy use. Although God is described as resting, He Himself does not need rest (Is. 40:28), but He did so to model for humans the importance of working six days and resting on the seventh day. This biblical passage provides for the reader the true origin of the seventh-day Sabbath rest. God instituted it during Creation week. Since God sanctified it, no human being has the right to desecrate it or appoint a substitute for it. The rest motif pointed beyond the Sabbath. In a post-Fall world, salvation rest is closely linked to Sabbath rest, without substituting for it (Heb. 4:1–10). Humanity can truly rest in God's grace, not in its own works, and look expectantly toward the ultimate rest with the Creator and Savior.

2:4b–25. Humanity in the Garden. Many scholars commenting on the Creation account of Genesis 1–2 have suggested the existence of multiple sources, distinguishing two Creation accounts that are, at times, at odds with each other. However, a careful reading of the literary design of the first two chapters of Genesis presents a different picture. Following the general outline of Creation in chapter 1, Genesis 2:4–25 focuses more closely on the creation of humanity and the living conditions of their garden home (note the subtle shift from heavens and earth [1:1] to earth and heavens [2:4]). The chapters complement and supplement each other. On a small scale, the relationship between Genesis 1 and 2 illustrates the larger move of Genesis from the universal to the personal, from the creation of a planet to the creation of a people, beginning with a family.

God is described by a new name in Genesis 2:4. While Genesis 1 used the generic *'elohim*, "God," throughout, chapter 2 uses the combination "the LORD God."

Genesis 2:4–6 is parallel to 1:1–3 and includes an important description stating that the Lord God formed Adam from the dust of the ground and breathed life into him (2:7). The Hebrew word *'asah* ("formed" or "made") used here designates the work of an artisan (Is. 29:16; Jer. 18:4–6). This human being or "man" (*'adam*) did not originate in the divine Being, but he was formed from the dust of the earth (Heb. *'adamah*), and because of sin, he would return to it (Gen. 3:19). God's life-giving breath transformed the dust into a creature made in the image of God who was to depend constantly on Him (Job 27:3; cf. Ezek. 37:9–10). Both animals and humans are described as *khayyah* ("living"; Gen. 1:20–21, 24, 30; 2:7, 19), but only the life of humankind was directly created through the divine breath.

The man was put in a garden (2:8), the future residence of both Adam and Eve. It would become the place where God met with them, and in that sense, the Garden expressed elements of the sanctuary (3:8; Ex. 25:8). The Garden of "Eden" (conveying the ideas of "pleasure" and "delight") connotes a beautiful location filled with fertile vegetation. Notice that by mentioning Gihon, Cush, Hiddekel/Tigris, and Euphrates, the biblical writer is using geographical terms (toponyms) known to the readers. However, the pre-Flood topography of earth (and thus the probable geographic location of Eden) was markedly different from the post-Flood topography, a transformation likely caused by major tectonic changes and continental shifts (cf. Gen. 10:25).

Genesis 2:8–17 describes God as a gardener placing humans in Eden. Two specific trees are mentioned in v. 9: the "tree of life," referred to in other places in the Bible (Prov. 3:18; 11:30; 13:12; 15:4; Rev. 2:7; 22:1–2, 14, 19), and the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil," found only in Genesis 2–3. The phrase "knowledge of good and evil" is employed in other places to express the idea of independence. Children, who do not know good and evil, depend on their parents for wisdom (Deut. 1:39). Therefore, to know good and evil is to claim and act in total independence from God. Following the description of the bounty and beauty of Eden, the Lord made a home for humanity in the Garden (2:15). They would *'abad* ("work" or "serve") and *shamar* ("guard" or "tend") their new home. This is how their dominion over nature would express itself. As noted, the verb *shamar* implies guarding, which suggests the possibility of danger (cf. 3:1). The two verbs are used together to define the work of the Levites in the sanctuary, indicating that God gave them "dominion over" the sanctuary and its services (Num. 3:7–8; 18:7).

Following the positioning of humanity, God's first command involving the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was issued as a positive expression of God's goodness (Gen. 2:16–17). God's permission to eat from all other trees of the Garden (v. 16) was later twisted by the cunning serpent to emphasize the prohibition (3:1). This was a test of human obedience (cf. Gen. 22) that must be understood in the context of a cosmic conflict. Who would own the allegiance of humanity—God or the not-yet-identified opponent whose voice would be heard through the words of the serpent in Genesis 3? The issue of human allegiance and obedience is still crucial and will play a significant role in end-time events (Rev. 14:6–12).

God's Name: The Tetragrammaton

The Hebrew divine name YHWH (most likely pronounced as Yahweh), also known as the tetragrammaton (Greek meaning "four letters"), appears first in Genesis 2:4. Recognizing God's immense holiness, modern Jews do not pronounce this name but read instead the term Adonai ("my Lord") whenever the name appears in the OT. Yahweh is most likely derived from the Hebrew verb "to be" and points to God's eternal existence and covenant relationship (cf. Ex. 3:13–15). The use of Yahweh emphasizes God's personal relationship with humanity.

Genesis 2:18 contains a surprising twist. Something in God's creation, recognized by the Creator Himself as "very good" (1:31), was "not good." Creation was not complete until Adam met Eve. Until a love relationship was established, Creation was unfinished. Humankind was to replicate (on a different scale) the divine love that gives and gives—and gives more. God designed Eve to be *kenegdo*—variously translated as "suitable," "comparable," "as his complement," "as his partner"—to Adam, yet she was also different. Creation in God's image and likeness (1:26–28) required both man and woman—only together did they reflect the ideal divine image. Sovereign God caused Adam to fall into a deep sleep, emphasizing the fact that man did not contribute anything to the creation of his soul mate. Woman was as much God's creature as man was. The verb used in 2:22 to describe Eve's creation means "fashioned" or "built." This verb marked the deliberate construction of the woman out of material taken from man—a fact that is recognized in the second piece of poetry included in the Creation account in 2:23. "Bone of my bones," "flesh of my flesh" marks the acknowledgment of correspondence: "She is like me!" was Adam's refrain after the Lord God had brought Eve to him in the first marriage to take place on earth. Notice that the Hebrew term for man (*'ish*) sounds very similar to the one for woman (*'ishah*) again suggesting closeness. They were joined in the oneness of marriage (v. 24), complementing each other, experiencing sexual union, and enjoying each other in their daily existence.

Genesis 2:25 functions as an important bridge to the Fall narrative in chapter 3. Man and woman were naked yet felt no shame. The term "naked" refers here to not being clothed in a normal manner (cf. 1 Sam. 19:24). Psalm 104:1–2 suggests that God's garments include splendor/honor, majesty, and light. The fact that humans were not dressed in a normal manner yet had been created in God's image and likeness (1:26–27) suggests that they reflected God's light and glory (cf. PP 45). This would change following the Fall, when Adam and Eve were suddenly ashamed of their nakedness after their eyes had been opened (3:10–11).

3:1–24

Humanity's Fall

The chapter tells the tragic story of humanity's temptation and Fall, followed by divine judgment and the introduction of the plan of salvation.

3:1–7. The Choice: Temptation and Fall. The initial *waw* conjunction at the beginning of v. 1 (usually translated as "now") captures well the link between the Creation narrative and the story of the Fall. This conjunction is used to highlight this important connection and is typical of Hebrew narratives. The unsuspecting reader expects, after the account of Creation, another story full of "good" or "very good" things. However, a creature more *'arum* ("cunning," "crafty," "prudent," or "intelligent") than any other animal became the mouthpiece of the tempter and antagonist of God. This word *'arum* can hold both negative and positive connotations in the OT (Prov. 12:16, 23; 13:16). In this context, the use suggests a negative meaning.

Hebrew readers would catch the wordplay between the "cunningness" (*'arum*) of the serpent and "naked" (*'arumim*; 2:25), the human experience that resulted from listening to the creature. The serpent demonstrated its cleverness by its ability to speak and the craftiness of its language. Throughout the ANE, serpents were used as mythological figures acting in opposition to the creator. The Bible identifies the serpent in the Garden with Satan (Rev. 12:9; 20:2), who also challenged God at the beginning of the cosmic conflict in heaven (Is. 14:12–14). The serpent's question did not contradict God's command outright but only added the negative "not," which suddenly transformed God's loving command into an absolute prohibition. It sounded similar yet communicated something entirely different—this is a good reminder of the power of words.

Living Soul or Living Being?

The phrase *nepesh khayyah* is at times translated as "living soul." While the word *nepesh* can mean various things in the Hebrew Bible, including "emotions," "thoughts," "mental faculties," "desires" (especially in poetic passages; e.g., Job 24:12; Pss. 6:3; 13:2; 31:9; 42:4–6; Ezek. 24:25), and even sometimes "dead body" (e.g., Num. 5:2; 9:6), it often, as here in Genesis 2:7, means "life" or "person"; never does it refer to an eternal, separate, conscious entity. God formed humans from dust and then breathed life into them. Death is the reverse process—when people breathe their last, their bodies return to dust (Eccl. 12:7). The concept of a soul as a separate, eternal entity is completely foreign to Scripture and based on Greek philosophy.

By entering into a dialogue with the serpent, Eve placed herself on dangerous ground. She was appointed together with Adam to guard the Garden and to have dominion over all the animals, but she was beginning to lose that dominion. She was the one who introduced the topic of death (v. 3), and the serpent took immediate advantage of it, arguing that death did not exist. It was God who, by threatening them with death, was setting limits on their potential. At first, the serpent's statement appeared to be true because after eating the fruit, the couple did not immediately die. Instead, what they experienced was spiritual death, and consequently, they were destined to disappear forever. The serpent demonstrated himself to be in open conflict with the Creator. Eve was fascinated by the prospect of opened eyes that the serpent offered her. The opening phrase of Genesis 3:6 mimics Genesis 1, where God saw that what He created was good. This implies that Eve was usurping the Creator's role in determining what was good. Suspicion of an all-powerful God, limited understanding, and selfish interest still warp humanity's ability to distinguish between good and evil (Is. 5:20). Eve's attraction affected three key areas: taste, vision, and intellect (cf. James 1:14–15). The Hebrew term *khamad* (usually translated as "desirable," as in v. 6) expresses the same idea of covetousness as expressed in the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:17). Eve ate and became an instrument of the serpent in leading Adam to eat of the fruit of the tree. He was not deceived but voluntarily chose death over life (1 Tim. 2:14). As a result of their eyes being opened, both Adam and Eve "knew," yet this knowledge involved shame. They immediately set out to cover themselves with fig leaves (v. 7)—the first illustration of righteousness by works.

3:8–24. God's Questions and Judgment. The biblical text does not give any clue about the time span between Adam and Eve's recognition of shame and the hearing of God's voice. The reference in v. 8 to the "cool of the day"/"the time of the evening breeze" (lit. "the wind of the day"; *ruakh* can be translated as "wind" or "spirit") likely indicates a habitual meeting time. Adam and Eve heard the sound of God walking in the Garden, and instead of welcoming Him they hid from His presence. Ironically, the Hebrew word translated as "heard" can also mean "obey," which was precisely what both humans did *not* do. What followed was the first scene of divine investigation and judgment recorded in the Bible. God's approach was redemptive and began with a number of questions. "Where are you?" (v. 9) invited Adam and Eve to reflect on their relation to God. It was not a divine call for a precise geographical location. Obviously, God knew. "Who told you?" (v. 11) looked at the bigger picture, pointing the reader beyond the serpent to the antagonist whose rebellion had begun the cosmic conflict. "Have you eaten…?" (v. 11) reviewed the *what* of the transgression. All three questions were directed at Adam ("you" is singular), who immediately began pointing fingers (v. 12). Sin had changed forever the relationship between God and humanity and between husband and wife. Eve, in turn, pointed to the serpent as the source of her deception (v. 13). Indirectly, both Adam and Eve insinuated that God was responsible for sin.

The divine verdict was first pronounced against the serpent, then Eve, and finally Adam. The Lord did not leave them in total darkness to face the death that would follow their rebellion and their claim of independence from Him. Where there was no future for humanity, God provided one for them in Genesis 3:15—the first promise of redemption found in the Bible. The "seed" or "offspring" of the woman would overcome the serpent and would bring to an end enmity by restoring full *shalom* between humans and God. The "seed" (Heb. *zera'*) of the woman is singular and can refer to an immediate offspring (4:25; 15:3), a distant descendant, or a large group of descendants. David was guaranteed a *zera'* (2 Sam. 7:12). Paul applies the Abrahamic *zera'* promise to Jesus Christ but also includes the church in Christ as Abraham's seed (Gal. 3:16, 29). The Hebrew term appears repeatedly in the contexts of genealogies, leaving the reader wondering when *the* seed would finally appear. The male seed would bruise or crush the head of the serpent while the serpent would bruise or strike His heel. Since the Hebrew term is the same for both actions, the verb communicates similar enmity between both opponents—yet with different results, due to the nature of the organs involved. Judgment on Eve reflected the entrance of pain and struggle and death in birth and family relations. God is not the author of pain. Both death and pain are due to humanity's sin, and God's judgment is a result. The punishment involving "desire" and "rule" described in v. 16 involved a struggle for control, something that would become even clearer in 4:7, where both terms appear together again. Judgment on Adam involved the means of supporting life. The text refers five times to eating and to the increased struggle to provide food (vv. 17–19). Life separated from the Creator meant

toil, struggle, and constant conflict—and ultimately death (v. 19). Adam's naming of Eve (v. 20) has been interpreted as an indication of man's headship, yet the name paradoxically also marks the beginning of hope. Eve's name (Heb. *khawah*) is related to the Hebrew words for "living" (*khay*), "to live" (*khayah*), and "declaring" (*khawah*). In naming her, Adam expressed confidence in the coming of the seed/offspring (vv. 15–16).

Following this glimmer of hope, God concealed the nakedness of the couple. Dressing them was an act of investiture implying acceptance and a new status. God provided for them the skin of an animal, thus removing their shame. The plan of salvation was prefigured: the innocent had to die for the guilty in order to atone for sin. Finally, vv. 22–24 describe the expulsion of humanity from the immediate presence of God. The language of vv. 23–24 is strong: God sent them away, banished them, and drove them out. This is the language of exile. Cherubim were stationed at the entrance to Eden to prevent access to the tree of life (3:24). The biblical text points to the direction of the eviction: eastward movement marked increasing separation from the Lord (4:14–16; 11:2; 25:6).

4:1–26

The Entrance of Death

The first human death soon followed the expulsion from Eden, yet the chapter ends on a hopeful note: another son was born.

4:1–15. The First Death: Cain Murders Abel. Eve expressed awe following the first human birth. Even though neither Adam nor Eve "created" in the divine sense, they shared in the creative act that God had established. In the Hebrew of v. 1, the verb *yada'* ("to know") is used as a euphemism for sexual intimacy. This underlines the closeness of sexual love and, in this case, the joy of the arrival of a child. Humans exhibited excitement in the midst of sadness. Eve's exclamation regarding Cain (v. 1) is significant. The Hebrew particle *'et* has caused translators significant difficulty. Most translations convey the idea that Eve recognized God had helped her give birth. In that case, the *'et* means "with"—"I have brought forth a man with the Lord" (i.e., with His help). However, another translation is possible—one that is in line with the nature of the promise of 3:15 and that is plausible in the Hebrew grammar. It would read: "I have acquired [or received] a man-child—the Lord." Here the particle *'et* is translated as a sign of the direct object and suggests that Adam and Eve expected Cain to be the Savior.

Right from the outset, the biblical texts describe two basic (and, historically, often conflicting) human activities: Abel was a shepherd while Cain had chosen to be a farmer (4:2). Both Cain and Abel presented an offering to the Lord that reflected their vocations (4:3–5). The text does not provide details concerning the performance of the ritual, but it does state that God accepted Abel's offering from the firstborn of his flock but did not accept that of Cain from the fruit of the ground (vv. 4–5). Assuming that when God dressed Adam and Eve with the skins of animals, He also instructed them concerning the importance of atoning sacrificial blood, one can find in Cain's offering a lack of respect for God and His instructions concerning atoning blood. Abel's bloody sacrifice, offered in faith (Heb. 11:4), indicates his dependence on the promised Savior. Cain refused to bring a sacrifice that would have atoned for sin (cf. PP 71).

Cain's response to the rejection of his offering was rage, expressed in a similar way as the fury and anger that led Jacob's sons to massacre the city of Shechem after they had heard of the rape of their sister (Gen. 34:7). The expression referring to Cain's (lit.) "fallen face" (translated variously as "downcast," "despondent," or "resentful") reiterates the anger and frustration boiling in Cain's heart. Part of this was a reaction against God and the preference shown to Abel. This jealousy was fueled by resentment over the fact that his younger brother had not deferred to his judgment. In spite of Cain's strong reaction, God reached out and interacted directly with His wayward creature, using pedagogical questions to draw him out. He also indicated a path for Cain to overcome his anger—he could change his course and follow the Lord's plan (v. 7). This suggests that Cain knew the difference between right and wrong and between appropriate and inappropriate offerings. The idea of *rabats* ("to lie down") can convey the image of someone, an animal or an evil power, waiting by the door to attack (cf. 49:9). Another way to understand this passage is to consider the term translated as "sin" (*khatta't*) in v. 7 to mean "sin offering" (as it does in much of the OT usages) rather than "sin." The idea thus would be that God told Cain to accept and present the "sin offering" that was "at the door"—which may be understood as a reference to the worship that Adam and his posterity offered at the Garden of Eden's guarded gate. Two key words in 4:7 echo directly the Fall narrative in Genesis 3. Sin had a desire (*teshuqah*) for Cain yet needed to be mastered (*mashal*). In 3:16, the woman's desire (*teshuqah*) would be for her husband, and he would rule (*mashal*) over her. While 3:16 represents a curse, God's admonition in 4:7 showed the way to life.

In spite of God's direct intervention, Cain murdered his brother Abel. The biblical author does not provide a specific reason or cause. Cain talked with Abel. In some ancient versions, it is written that Cain said to Abel, "Let's go out to the field." But in other manuscripts, no further details are given. Then brother rose against brother, and Abel was killed. The Hebrew term used here, *harag*, indicates "slaughter" and "murder" and is distinct from the verb used in the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:13). Death entered human society and made explicit what had only been implicit in God's description of a world governed by sin.

In 4:9–15 the reader is privy to a second dialogue between the Lord and Cain, in which the Lord again sought to lead to the recognition of sin by using questions (a type of investigative judgment, as was the case with Adam and Eve). Clearly, God knew what had happened to Abel, so the issue here is not information but recognition and repentance (cf. 3:9–19). The first reference to blood in the Bible is found in v. 10, where it is personified as crying for justice to the Lord (cf. Rev. 6:9–10). Cain did not recognize the gravity of his action. Instead of repenting, he bewailed the punishment (v. 13). However, God's mercy was still at work and included protection from human recrimination (cf. Ex. 12:13). God's mark showed both guilt and protection and prefigured other marks (or "signs" as the Hebrew word can also be translated) in future narratives (Ex. 12:13; Josh. 2:12; Rev. 13:17; 16:2; 19:20; etc.).

Minkhah in the Old Testament

The term denoting "offering" used in this story is *minkhah*, representing a more generic term for an offering or a gift. In Leviticus 2, as part of a larger section dealing with different sacrifices, the term is used to describe a grain offering. In other instances, it can refer to food offerings in general (Is. 57:6; Ezek. 45:17) though it is usually translated as "grain offering." In Genesis 32:13, it describes a gift Jacob presented to his brother while in 1 Samuel 10:27, it refers to a gift for a king. Similar to its use in this story, it can also be employed to describe animal sacrifices involving the shedding of blood (1 Sam. 2:12–17).

4:16–24. Increasing Distance: Cain's Family Line and Lamech's Boast. The history of Cain's descendants (his wife was clearly one of his sisters, a daughter of Adam; 5:4) shows that they had an ever-increasing distance from God which culminated in Lamech's boastful challenge. Cain left the presence of the Lord and settled in the land of Nod (Heb. *nod*). A Hebrew audience would have immediately appreciated the wordplay employing the verb *nud*, referring to living as a vagabond or wanderer (vv. 12, 14). The juxtaposition conjured a picture of a vagabond living in the land of vagabonds. Cain's genealogy, the first in the Bible, includes not only names but also significant human accomplishments (vv. 17b, 20b, 21, 22) and concludes with Lamech's proud song (4:23–24). The founding of cities, the playing of musical instruments, and the introduction of animal husbandry and metalworking were all part of this human lineage. The section also includes the first reference to polygamy (v. 19), something that indicates further distance from the Edenic ideal of a monogamous union of a man and a woman in marriage partnership. Notably, the genealogy includes seven generations from Adam to Lamech, which reminds the reader of the importance of the number seven in Genesis. While Cain requested divine protection, Lamech, using poetic language, proudly claimed to be the ruler of his own life by using the motif of seven. While God had threatened sevenfold vengeance against anyone who harmed Cain (4:15), Lamech threatened a vengeance eleven times greater: seventy-seven (4:24). He did not rely on God's protection but sought to be his own master. Lamech was the perfect example of human hubris, self-reliance, pride, vindictiveness, and self-sufficiency.

4:25–26. Hope Never Dies: A Child Is Born. However, all was not lost. There was a faithful lineage. In two verses, the biblical author reinserts hope into a cold and desperate world. Eve gave birth to another son, Seth, who in turn had Enosh, whose name means "man," echoing Adam's name. Enosh, perhaps symbolic of a new Adam, represented a new line of faithful followers of the Lord, which would ultimately culminate in Jesus, the "second Adam" (see Rom. 5:12–21; 1 Cor. 15:45). The term Eve used to describe her new child, Seth, was very specific: *zera'* (lit. "seed," "offspring"; v. 25). It points directly and significantly back to Genesis 3:15. The birth of Seth marked another stride toward the fulfillment of God's famous promise and was characterized by reliance on God, recognition of His goodness, and worship of the Creator. The phrase referring to "calling on the name of the LORD" (4:26) is repeatedly used in Genesis in connection with the construction of an altar, the offering of sacrifices, and ultimately worship (12:8; 13:4; 21:33; 26:25). While Cain's family line was noteworthy for music, nomadism, herding, metalworking, and establishing cities, Seth's line was noteworthy for its worship. There was nothing intrinsically wrong with the ingenuity and invention of Cain's line; the problem was that they did not acknowledge God as the Giver of all of their gifts. In all of their accomplishments, there was a distinct lack of worship. In this way, the cosmic battle between Satan and God had come to earth, and humanity was choosing sides.

5:1–32

Bridging the Gap: Genealogy from Adam to Noah

Chapter 5 contains a linear genealogy of faithful descent, linking Adam to Noah. Genesis 5:1 is the only place in the book in which *toledot* ("genealogy," "family records," "generations"; see Genesis: Introduction) is associated with the word *seper* ("document" or "book"), which suggests a written document. God created humans in His image, but this is recalled here in the context of the rebellion of Cain and Lamech. Yet the descendants of Seth, the worshipers of the Lord, would preserve the image of God although it had been extremely damaged by sin.

The genealogy follows a common pattern, beginning with the name of the person, his age when the first child was born, the name of the child, the years he lived after the arrival of the firstborn, and his age at death. Adam could not create descendants in the exact image of God; Seth was born in Adam's own likeness and image (v. 3). Unfortunately, Seth's likeness was further removed from God's original image. Yet each child was named by a progenitor, marking another important connection to God's activity in Genesis 1. Human procreation was God's way of passing on the remnants of the divine image from parents to children—even after the Fall had almost entirely eradicated it.

Ancient versions (or translations) of this passage have resulted in differences in the chronology of Genesis 1–11. For example, the Samaritan Pentateuch (established at least from the first century B.C.), a text that was maintained by the Samaritans, tallies 1,307 years from Creation to the Flood, while the Masoretic Text (MT, established at least from the ninth century A.D., the text on which most modern versions of the OT are based) asserts there were 1,656. The Septuagint (LXX, established at least from the third century B.C.), the Greek translation of the OT, maintains 2,242 years for the same period. Some of these differences can be explained as variants resulting from textual errors. Others may suggest the use of a different chronological system. However, the system of the MT appears to be the most reliable since, by its reckoning, all of Noah's ancestors died before the Flood.

ANE genealogies are manifold and come in different shapes and forms. One of the most famous, the third-millennium-B.C. Sumerian King List, has often been connected to Genesis 5. The list contains the names and cities of Sumerian kings before and after the Flood. While it is primarily interested in kingship (thus having a focus distinct from Gen. 5) and contains ludicrously high numbers for royal reigns, one can note a similar pattern in longevity when compared to the genealogy of Genesis 5. Before the Flood, the reigns of the Sumerian kings were exceedingly long (e.g., King Emmenluanna reigned 43,200 years) while after the Flood, the number of years decreased drastically.

The importance of the number seven is evident in the genealogy of the faithful lineage of Adam's descendants. Enoch, the seventh member of that line, walked with God (v. 24), an expression not found in the other genealogical records. The metaphor "to walk with God" suggests intimate communion with God, is reminiscent of Adam and Eve's experience in the Garden (3:8), and would characterize the life of Noah (6:9), the only other human to whom this phrase was applied. In the Psalms, walking before God means life and prosperity (Pss. 56:13; 116:9); the prophets use the expression to highlight proper ethical choices (Is. 30:21; Jer. 18:15; Mic. 4:5). The author of Hebrews associates it with pleasing God through a life of faith, believing that God exists and that He rewards those who seek Him diligently (Heb. 11:5–6). Because of Enoch's close walk with God, He "took" him (Gen. 5:24). The Hebrew *laqakh* denotes physical activity but is also used metaphorically for death or for being saved from it. Life could be "taken" by God (1 Kin. 19:10, 14). Notably, the verb is also used to describe Elijah's ascension to heaven (2 Kin. 2:3, 10–11). Enoch's life did not end in death but in translation. For the pre-Flood generations, he represented a tangible expression of God's promise of redemption. Enoch appears in later biblical texts that extol his faith (Heb. 11:5) and his prophetic ministry (Jude 14), and he was also a famous figure in noncanonical texts.

The wish of Lamech (not the Lamech of Gen. 4) expressed at the birth of Noah (5:29) connected Noah's name with comfort. This illustrates how names and their sounds in the OT were often creatively linked to significant ideas or concepts. The genealogy of Seth splits into the three sons of Noah, thus preparing the way for the narrative of Noah (5:32).

6:1—9:29

Flood and Covenant

This section describes divine judgment by universal Flood and God's plan to fulfill His promise of salvation by ultimately renewing the covenant between the Creator and His creation. Noah, the tenth from Creation, became another type of the second Adam (see notes on 4:25–26), the first following the Flood. The text is organized in the literary form of a chiasm, pointing the reader to the most important element at its center. This chiastic structure is surrounded by two narratives that diagnose and narrate wickedness *before* and *after* the Flood (6:1–8 and 9:18–29).

- **A** Noah and his three sons (6:9–10)
  - **B** Violence in God's creation (6:11–12)
    - **C** Resolution to destroy (6:13–22)
      - **D** Command to enter the ark (7:1–10)
        - **E** Beginning of the Flood (7:11–16)
          - **F** The rising floodwaters (7:17–24)
            - **GOD REMEMBERED NOAH (8:1a)**
          - **F′** The receding floodwaters (8:1b–5)
        - **E′** The drying of the earth (8:6–14)
      - **D′** Command to leave the ark (8:15–19)
    - **C′** God's resolution to preserve order (8:20–22)
  - **B′** Covenant blessing and peace (9:1–17)
- **A′** Noah and his three sons (9:18–19)

6:1–8. Divine Diagnosis: Increasing Wickedness. The initial words of 6:1 indicate narrative continuity in the typical Hebrew manner. While the text makes reference to multiplication (which, after all, corresponds to a divine command; cf. 1:22), the distinction between the "sons of God" and "daughters of men/humankind" prefigures conflict. Many different explanations for these two groups have been suggested (for example, angelic celestial beings, human rulers, or godly men), yet the most convincing contextual interpretation appears to be the correlation of the sons of God with the descendants of Seth (Gen. 5) and the daughters of humankind with the descendants of Cain. The faithful servants of God are occasionally identified as children of God (e.g., Deut. 14:1; Is. 43:6) although in some contexts the phrase suggests angelic or divine beings (Job 1:6; 2:1; Dan. 3:25). When the sons of God saw the beauty (lit. "good") of the daughters of humankind, they married (lit. "took wives") for themselves. The language employed in 6:2 clearly echoes the Fall narrative in 3:6, where Eve "saw" that the fruit was "good" and then "took" it. These actions led to divine judgment (6:3). Life spans were restricted, and God declared the withdrawal of His Spirit, most likely a reference to the life-giving power of God in 2:7. The duration of "forever" (Heb. *'olam*) in biblical texts is always linked to the subject the term describes. When associated with human beings, it marks a limited time span: several hundred years prior to the Flood and 120 years following the Flood (6:3). The word *don* is a difficult term, as suggested by the two main translations usually given: "contend/strive," or "abide/remain." It appears only once in the OT, and in this context, it could mean "remain" or "abide."

Another difficult term is *nepilim*. Some opt to transliterate it "Nephilim", while other translators use "giants" or "fallen ones." The former translation is based on the LXX rendering, which may have been influenced by the occurrence of the term in Numbers 13:33 (where it clearly refers to men of great stature, the children of *'anaq*; Num. 13:32–33). In identifying these same men elsewhere in the Bible, the term *repa'im* is used (Deut. 2:11, 20; 3:11, 13), a term later utilized to refer to Goliath and his brothers (2 Sam. 21:16, 18, 20, 22; 1 Chr. 20:4, 6, 8). In the context of the Flood, the *nepilim* could refer to both the "extraordinary ones" (thus suggesting mighty heroes) and the "ones who have fallen" (or "ones who have fallen upon"). Since Genesis 6:1–4 describes the conditions of pre-Flood humanity, the reference to the *nepilim* is another way of depicting the wickedness of the antediluvian world and the corrupting influence of marriages with unbelievers. This leads to an important moment in the narrative describing divine action. When God saw, He acted (cf. 29:31; Deut. 32:19; Is. 59:15–16)—either as Judge or as Savior. God saw human wickedness, including the intent and inclination of the heart (6:5). This description highlights the importance of motivation and attitudes. In response, the Lord was sorry and was disturbed. This confirms how seriously God takes human actions and how they impact Him. Some versions have "repent" here, but this is potentially misleading when referring to God because it suggests the idea of remorse for wrongdoing. God changes only in response to human repentance. God's determination to destroy (Heb. *makhah*) expresses the idea of "wiping out," a term that implies that the judgment was universal. Although there did not seem to be any hope for the human race, Noah found *khen* ("favor" or "grace") in the eyes of the Lord.

6:9—8:22. Judgment Call: A Universal Flood. Genesis 6:11–12 repeats some of the diagnostics of vv. 5–6. However, the focus is not on humanity alone but includes the entire system. That the earth was "corrupt" suggests that the divine order established at Creation was no long operative. All life on earth was characterized by a violence that paid no respect to social justice and spiritual integrity. The universal corruption of humanity required for its correction a judgment of universal extent—a global Flood.

The next section (6:13–22) contains detailed divine instructions regarding the construction of the ark. It is introduced by a phrase that is significant in biblical theology, namely, "the end of all people" (lit. "flesh"; v. 13). Intriguingly, Ezekiel 7 describes the destruction of Jerusalem in similar terms (including key words such as "end," "violence," "coming," "is full"), suggesting that the end of Jerusalem and its temple was perceived to be as existentially disturbing as the cataclysmic end of the antediluvian world. Since the Hebrew *qets* ("end") often has eschatological connotations (Dan. 8:17, 19; 12:13), the Flood provides a show-and-tell laboratory for eschatological realities.

The ark was a very large structure of 450 feet (137 m) long, 75 feet (23 m) wide, and 45 feet (14 m) high, built according to the instructions that God gave to Noah. The sentence structure of v. 17 is very emphatic: God Himself was going to generate floodwaters on the earth. Divine judgment was as personal as divine creation and divine salvation. This was not merely the result of God withdrawing His protection and allowing nature to take its course, as some have suggested. Genesis 6:18 marks the first occurrence of the term "covenant" (Heb. *berit*) in Scripture, which is employed here to refer to a unilateral decision on the part of God based on His grace and expectation of a response of faith from humans.

God gave Noah specific instructions about the construction of the ark and explained His intention to use the boat to rescue Noah, his family, and all living things. Genesis 6 concludes with a brief completion formula that prefigures a similar formula found at the conclusion of the construction of the sanctuary (cf. Ex. 40:16; Lev. 8:4, 9, 13, 17, 21, 29, 36): Noah listened, he obeyed (v. 22), and he trusted that what he had heard had

The Biblical Flood Story and Extrabiblical Flood Stories

Flood narratives have been found throughout the world with significant variations. For biblical scholars, the most important stories come from Mesopotamia because they show interesting similarities to the biblical tale. They are called the Gilgamesh and Atrahasis epics, dated to second-millennium sources. When compared to the biblical narrative, there are some significant differences, two of which are worth mentioning. First, in the Bible, God was in complete control of the waters and did not feel threatened by them while in the Mesopotamian stories, the gods were afraid when they saw the waters rising uncontrollably. Second, while in the Babylonian story, the reason for the flood was an emotional reaction to human noise that made it difficult for the gods to rest, in the Bible, the Flood was a divine response to moral evil. One could speculate that Moses was acquainted with the Mesopotamian flood stories, but by offering a reliable account of what took place, he was undermining the pagan version of the event and discrediting the characters of their gods.

indeed been God's voice preparing him for an unprecedented phenomenon—a Flood.

Noah and his household entered the ark in obedience to God's command without ever having experienced rain (7:1–9). He stepped out in faith, trusting the One who does not fail (Heb. 11:7). The biblical text clearly distinguishes between clean and unclean animals here: God ordered Noah to take both types of animals into the ark (7:2–3, 9). The Hebrew text remains unclear as to whether there were one or two pairs of unclean animals. Different Bible translations handle this discrepancy differently. The distinction between clean and unclean highlights the ritual classification of animals, already known in Noah's time, that was later explicitly included in laws governing the dietary practices of the covenant people (Lev. 11:1–47; Deut. 14:3–21). Here, however, the distinction seems to prepare the reader for the sacrificial offering Noah and his family prepare after disembarking from the ark (8:20). Only clean animals were offered; this underlines divine holiness and separation. Furthermore, up to this point, God's diet for humanity had been a strictly vegetarian one (Gen. 1:29).

Echoing the larger literary design of 6:9—9:19 that highlights God's remembering of Noah (and his family), chapters 7–8 exhibit a similar chiastic design based on time markers associated with the Flood narrative.

7 days of waiting for the Flood (7:4)
7 days of waiting for the Flood (7:10)
40 days of rain (7:17)
150 days of water rising (7:24)
CENTER: God remembered Noah
150 days of waters receding (8:3)
40 days of waiting for dry land (8:6)
7 days of waiting for the return of first bird (8:10)
7 days of waiting for the return of second bird (8:12)

Genesis 7:10–24 describes the catastrophic Flood that covers everything. Every living being outside the ark perished (7:21–23), except, of course, the inhabitants of the sea, a fact that highlights the divine diagnostic of 6:5, 7, 13, referring to the earth. The destructive water came from on high and from below (7:11). The reference to the "fountains" or "springs of the great deep" involves the use of the Hebrew term *tehom* ("sea," "deep," or "abyss") that is used in the description of the earth prior to God's creation (1:2). The destructive waters of the great deep corresponded to the great wickedness of humanity leading to the Flood (6:5). Isaiah 51:10 uses the same phrase to describe God's destruction of the Egyptian armies during the Exodus. To accomplish this, the windows/floodgates of heaven were opened (Gen. 7:11). The rain (Gen. 1:6–8) fell to the earth like mighty waterfalls, and that which lay beneath the earth shot up in jets. In this way, God was returning the earth to its pre-creation state.

The biblical text provides a very specific time reference, namely, the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day. One year and eleven days later, the earth had finally dried up enough to support life (8:14). "On that day" (or, in this case, on the "very same day"; 7:13) is often used in the OT to emphasize a significant event. For example, "this day" marked the arrival of Israel at the Wilderness of Sinai (Ex. 19:1). The identical phrase found here in 7:13 (*be'etsem hayyom*, "the same day") is used to tie the Festivals of Unleavened Bread and the Passover to the first night of the Exodus (Ex. 12:17, 41, 51) and to link Moses's speech to the moment of his death (Deut. 32:48–50).

While Noah was singled out, he was not saved alone. Noah's household—including his wife (whose name is not mentioned); his sons Japheth, Shem, and Ham; and their wives (whose names are also not mentioned)—was likewise part of God's rescue plan. The miraculous entry of wild and domesticated animals into the ark must have caused quite a stir to the observing onlookers. After all had entered, the Lord sealed the door of the ark (Gen. 7:16). This highlighted God's commitment to Noah and those inside the ark. Humanity's survival was due to divine grace, not human effort. In the Mesopotamian flood narratives, the heroes shut the door themselves.

The following verses describe the immensity of the Flood. The ark was at this point moving in the waters that covered the mountains by 15 cubits, or approximately 22 feet (7 m; 7:20). All *basar* (lit. "flesh"), meaning all living things with the breath of life in their nostrils (7:22), animals and humans, died in this cataclysmic event (7:21–23); only Noah and those who had sought refuge in the ark remained alive. Here, the biblical text introduces a significant theological concept—the remnant. It is found here in Genesis and also in Revelation (12:17). In the midst of total upheaval, God is always willing and able to preserve a remnant through whom He continues to demonstrate His saving purpose for the human race.

As already indicated, God remembered Noah and all who were with him (8:1). The meaning is not that God had forgotten but that He was caring for and acting on behalf of His servants (e.g., 30:22; Ex. 2:24; 6:5). As the waters receded, the ark settled on firm ground. The might of the subterranean water and seemingly endless rain from above must have resulted in immense changes to the earth's surface, including newly created continents, mountains, deep canyons, twisted rock folds, and rugged riverbeds. The location of the mountains of Ararat (8:4) is not quite clear. Assyrian records link Ararat to ancient Urartu, covering southeast Turkey, southern Russia, and northwest Iran. Yet no specific location can be ascertained from the biblical text, particularly considering the completely changed geography of the post-Flood world.

Noah's opening of a window of the ark (8:6) was not prompted explicitly by a divine command. He released first a raven (v. 7), followed by a dove (v. 8). While the raven, which could eat carrion and was a stronger bird, did not return to the ark, the dove found no place to land or rest (v. 9). Ancient mariners often used birds to ascertain proximity to land; Noah may have used them to confirm his visual impressions after he had opened the window of the ark. The verb used to describe Noah's sending (*shalakh*) of the birds is also used to describe the sending of the spies into Canaan (Num. 13:3; Josh. 2:1) and God sending Adam and Eve from the Garden (Gen. 3:23). The image of the returning dove, holding a freshly plucked olive leaf, has become a symbol of peace and safety in contemporary culture. Here it is merely an indication of the existence of growing vegetation, resulting in Noah's removal of the covering of the ark (8:13). Only then did God speak again to Noah. The divine order was clear and echoed the order of 1:28, "Be fruitful" (8:17).

After having been inside the ark for over a year, Noah's initial action involved the construction of an altar (8:20). This is the first explicit mention of an altar and a burnt offering, even though 3:21 and 4:3–5 may implicitly refer to an altar. The burnt offering was taken from among the clean animals. The anthropomorphic phrase stating that the Lord smelled a soothing or pleasing aroma is language found in the context of the sanctuary services and communicates the idea that God accepts the sacrifice and the offerer (see Lev. 1:9). Here, it is an expression of God's grace conveyed in the poetic declaration of 8:22. The promise guaranteed God's continued preservation of the earth and its ecology until the final judgment (2 Pet. 2:5–12).

9:1–17. God's Covenant with Noah and His Descendants. The following section represents the first formal covenant ritual in the OT and starts off with a number of divine instructions (9:1–7). Importantly, God's blessing preceded any instruction. The command of 9:1 to be fruitful echoed chapters 1 and 2. After the Flood there was, so to speak, a new creation and a new beginning. Following the order to fill the earth, the passage contains detailed instructions concerning diet and cultic purity involving the use of blood (anticipating Lev. 17:10–14). Even more important, beginning in v. 5, God gives specific directions as to the sacredness of human life. Whoever shed human blood would have to answer to the Creator because life belongs to Him (v. 6). The text foreshadows the *lex talionis* ("eye for eye" [Ex. 21:24; Lev. 24:20; Deut. 19:21]), which required that the punishment for a crime correspond to the nature of the crime. Shedding blood is another way of referring to murder (Gen. 37:22; 1 Kin. 2:31; Ezek. 22:4). The taking of life required death because it was a violation of the image of God (1:27). Later legislation underlined the importance of societal punishment (over individual revenge), tempered with regulations such as the cities of refuge that governed accidental manslaughter (Num. 35:9–15; Deut. 4:41–43; 19:1–13).

God's covenant (cf. 6:18) included Noah and his descendants, as well as every living creature with him (9:9–10). It was based on the grace of God, who took the initiative to reach out to sinners and restore their fractured relationship. God's covenant sign was public and highly visible (9:12–13). The Hebrew word *qeshet* in v. 13 is sometimes translated as "rainbow" here, but it is the same word used for a warrior's bow in the OT. Part of the implication is that further conflict with God was needless. The bow was an offer of peace and a covenant sign. The context indicates that this bow "in the cloud" was a rainbow. The same word is used in Ezekiel 1:28, where "rainbow" is again evidently intended. In Revelation 4:3 and 10:1, the rainbow is associated with God's throne room in a vision. Following God's remembering of Noah (8:1), God promised twice to remember the covenant (Gen. 9:15–16). He did not forget Noah, his family, or any living creature in the ark, and neither would He forget His promises.

9:18–29. Noah's Curse and Blessings. Following the assurance of divine acceptance and protection, the focus changes from Noah to Noah's three sons. Would the future be different from the past, considering the terrifying experience of the Flood still fresh in the minds of Noah's sons?

The section opens with a description of three generations, including also a reference to Canaan, the son of Ham (9:18–19), who was the only grandchild mentioned in the genealogy. Genesis 9:20 contains the first reference to viticulture in the OT. Whether by innocent accident or carelessness, Noah's drunkenness led to his shameful condition. Nudity is, in most cases in the Bible, considered shameful and humiliating. Prisoners of war were displayed naked to humiliate them and as a sign of victory over them (for more on the idea of uncovering oneself, see Ex. 20:26; Deut. 23:13–14; cf. Hab. 2:16). In this case, nakedness was associated with the consumption of alcohol. Several passages of Scripture point to the damaging effects of alcohol on humans (cf. Lev. 10:9; Prov. 21:17; 23:20–21; 29–31; Is. 5:22). What Ham did to his father was also ignoble because, instead of covering him, he passed on the information to his brothers and thus dishonored his father.

Scripture does not reveal precisely how Noah ascertained what Ham had done; yet his curse, expressed in poetic lines, was unequivocal. The curse of Canaan (9:25) represents a surprising twist in a problematic story. Why would Canaan be cursed when his father had committed the sin? Was this not an affront to divine justice? Commentators have struggled with this verse. However, a look at the larger context of the first eleven chapters of Genesis may provide a hint. Adam and Eve's decisions to heed the voice of the tempter resulted in their expulsion from Eden and the entrance of death—affecting all future generations. The wickedness of the sons of God in Genesis 6:1–7 resulted in the Flood and the destruction of almost all human and animal life. In line with the language of the commandments, sin shatters relationships and affects both the one committing the sin as well as future generations (cf. Ex. 20:5–6). However, later generations may have emphasized this reality to such an extreme that the Hebrew prophets argued against using this concept fatalistically to avoid personal responsibility (cf. Jer. 31:29; Ezek. 18:2). Canaan's punishment was to be subservient to his brothers. The curse language is similar to 3:14, but this time it was uttered by a human being. The curse of Canaan was balanced by the blessings of Shem and Japheth (9:26) and did not exclude his descendants (e.g., Rahab and the Gibeonites) from being part of the people of God.

10:1—11:26
Dispersion of the Nations

This section describes, in geographical terms, God's interest in the nations of the world. Taking as its point of departure one family, it chronicles divine blessings (i.e., multiplication) in response to the divine command, followed by dispersion and the focus upon the line of Shem.

10:1–32. Peoples: The Table of Nations. The presence of the many genealogies in chapters 1–11 underlines their importance. In this case, the list of the nations prepares the way for the call of Abram and the divine promise to make of him a new nation by which the other nations of the earth would be blessed (12:1–3). None of these early nations could be used by the Lord to accomplish His purpose to save sinful human beings.

Japheth was likely the eldest son of Noah (10:21), although Shem is often named first since it was through his descendants that the family of Abraham came. Japheth's offspring essentially represented Indo-European people groups who populated the region covering India, Asia Minor, and southern Europe. Seven sons of Japheth are included in this list, followed by further descendants of his first two sons (10:2–5). Throughout the table of nations, it is not always clear if a name represents solely an individual or a people. Furthermore, the table seems to be based on authentic ancient data since Israel's neighbors (such as the Moabites, Ammonites, and Edomites), known from later sources (and biblical texts) dating to the first millennium B.C., are not explicitly mentioned. The final note of 10:5 mentions the peoples on the coast who were separated (or "divided") into their lands, anticipating 11:8.

The sons of Ham represented the peoples of northeastern Africa and the Levant (10:6–20). Cush (Ethiopia), Mizraim (Egypt), Put (possibly Libya or Somalia), and Canaan (the Levant) were direct sons of Ham and had names known from other biblical texts. Genesis 10:8–12 describes in further details the exploits of Nimrod, the son of Cush. Geographically, Nimrod was associated with prominent cities in Mesopotamia that impacted Israel's history (e.g., Babel and Nineveh; cf. Mic. 5:6) and is described as a "mighty hunter before the LORD" (v. 9). The description "before the LORD" is often used to indicate priestly service (Ex. 16:9; 27:21; etc.), but here it seems to simply highlight the fact that even this mighty warrior was not outside of God's control and vision. Interestingly, later

in the narrative, Esau is also described as a skillful hunter (25:27) and thus his (infamous) story becomes linked to Nimrod's story. Nimrod's name can be translated as "we shall rebel," and his kingdom and city building anticipated the huge construction project of Babel's tower in Genesis 11. The description of Nimrod as a mighty or heroic figure (v. 8) uses the same Hebrew term as in the description of the mighty ones of 6:4 prior to the Flood. While Nimrod built cities and an empire by sheer aggression and power (vv. 10–11), Abraham built altars to worship the One who led him to the promised land (12:7–8; 13:18; 22:9; etc.). Much later, the humble carpenter from Nazareth exemplified and taught the same principle: lasting change and the kingdom of God can be built only upon love, service, and community.

The reference to Casluhim (some translations read "Kasluhites") in 10:14 includes an additional note introducing the Philistines. During the early history following Israel's arrival in the Holy Land, the Philistines represented an important reference point in biblical history. A few hundred years after the Exodus, waves of people began to immigrate to the southern Levant (and even tried to settle in northern Egypt). These peoples are referred to as the "Sea Peoples." Some associate them with the later Philistines of the late Judges and early monarchy period. The question then is: *Who are the Philistines mentioned in the patriarchal narratives?* Different answers have been given to this question. It is possible that the migrants, these "Sea Peoples," assimilated into the people group already known to the Hebrews as Philistines (21:32–34; 26:1–33). It is also conceivable that the term "Philistines" was added anachronistically by later scribes since the people with whom the patriarchs interacted lived in the same location as the Philistines from the time of the early monarchy (see "The Philistines," p. 407).

Canaan's descendants (10:15–19) included later city-states and tribal groups. At the end of 10:15, the term *khet* is mentioned. Some take this to refer to early Hittites, the famous empire in Anatolia, but others suggest that this term could also indicate a different group. In the patriarchal period, the Hittites lived in Canaan around Hebron (cf. Gen. 23). In stark disregard for his parents' views about eligible marriage partners for their sons, Esau intermarried with the Hittites (26:34–35; 27:46). The final summary statement of Ham's descendants involves families, languages, clans, and peoples (similar to 10:5, 31–32). The reference to languages anticipates 11:1.

Genesis 10:21–31 lists Shem's descendants. This was the group from which God's covenant people would emerge. Shem's descendants included four tiers, for a total of twenty-six names. Attention is given to the offspring of Arphaxad and then Joktan. The name of one of Eber's sons, Peleg (v. 25), was associated with an event that was apparently so significant that it is included in the genealogy. The name Peleg means "divide" and is associated here with the division of the earth. Many have speculated on what this might mean. Most likely it is a reference to the dividing of the earth into nations at the Tower of Babel. Other suggestions include a major earthquake or even the continental shift. Shem's genealogy is not complete by 10:31 and will be continued in 11:10–26. The final statement (10:32) echoes the first verse of this chapter. This appears to form some type of literary bracket (also called an "*inclusio*").

11:1–9. The Tower of Babel and the Dispersion of Humanity. This story describes two diametrically opposed movements: humanity's desire and ill-conceived attempt to reach heaven (11:4) and God's coming down in response (11:5). The story is sandwiched between two lines of the descendants of Shem. One line ends in confusion and Babylon (Babel), the other in a promise and covenant leading to the promised land.

The Tower of Babel in Comparative Perspective

While no direct parallel has been found, Mesopotamian texts contain references to the origin of the diversity of languages (e.g., the Sumerian Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta) and the desire of humans to reach heaven, which belongs to the gods (a Mesopotamian proverb). There are also references to humanity's intention to build a structure that would extend to heaven in order to indicate their supremacy (the Enuma Elish epic). The religious connotations of the tower can also be linked to Sumerian ziggurats, or temple towers, which represented an artificial mountain with a temple at its peak. However, while some ideas are shared, the texts themselves are completely distinct from the biblical narrative.

Language is one of the most fundamental characteristics of being human. The confusion created by the multiplicity of languages made it more difficult to communicate; this damaged the possibility of peaceful existence. But perhaps this is not only about language but also about the beginning of significant cultural distinctions in the population of the earth.

Human pride resulted in the rejection of the divine promise, and this was accompanied by an attempt for self-preservation. They built a tower in order to make a name for themselves (11:4). They did not seem to know that making a name for someone is the work of God (see 12:2). Clearly, they wanted to be self-sufficient and independent from God—attitudes that are closely associated with the unfathomable origin of sin (cf. Is. 14:12–14). The desire to be independent from the Creator and Lord of the universe is not only a problem in this narrative; it represents an important theological theme found in Scripture. Humans habitually seek control over their own lives and often reject the Creator's lordship.

Genesis 11:5 describes God as "coming down" to pronounce a legal verdict. Sometimes the appearance of God is for salvation or to instruct His people, but here His coming down is also a reminder of His justice. God's descent did not mean that He was unaware of what was going on. He knows all things and is omnipresent (1 Kin. 8:27; Ps. 139:1–4, 7; Is. 46:10; Jer. 23:24). In fact, the text indicates that He knew what would have happened had He not intervened to disrupt the tower builders. Rather than showing a lack of knowledge, the anthropomorphic language used here is evocative of God's justice having been displayed. God is shown as having investigated the case before executing judgment. God once again spoke within the mystery of His being, using a plural pronoun as He did in 1:26, but this time the result was judgment in the form of confusion. The Babylonians called the city *bab-ili* ("gate of the gods"), but for the Hebrews, it was *balal* ("confusion"). The irony of this is highly significant, especially in view of the later importance of Babylon in Scripture. While Babylon (Babel) considered itself to be the gateway to the gods, it produced only confusion. As a result of God having confused the ability of the builders to freely communicate, the city (and the tower) could not be completed. The builders were scattered (v. 8); this resulted in the state that the builders had intended to avoid (v. 4).

11:10–26. The Righteous Family Line from Shem to Abram. The narrative moves almost imperceptibly from concerns of a universal nature to matters related to one single family: the descendants of Shem. The list of Shem's faithful descendants includes ten individuals—a description that echoes the list of the ten descendants of Adam (5:1–32). While the first eleven chapters of Genesis contained a number of important promises, the opening verses of chapter 12 add more that would become highly significant for God's redemptive plan. God was on the move again and was preparing an individual and his family to step out in faith.

11:27—50:26

PATRIARCHAL HISTORY: GOD'S CALL OF A FAMILY TO BE A BLESSING

Genesis 11:27—50:26 represents the second major division of the book of beginnings. Having painted in broad strokes the vast picture of Creation, the Fall, and the Flood, in order to briefly explain where Abraham came from, the text now shifts to the story of one family—Abraham's—and how that family came to live in Egypt. The history of this family with its victories and setbacks is the nucleus of God's hands-on plan of redemption. A cursory examination of these chapters may lead the reader, at times, to wonder about God's covenant people, but their struggles and God's patience highlight the nature of the kingdom. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all their descendants (including the later sons and daughters of the promise) could not lay exclusive claim to God's blessings or even argue that they deserved it exclusively. God's blessings have always been available, not because humans have a claim to them but because of His abundant grace.

11:27—25:18

Abraham

The story of Abraham brings a new tone to the biblical narrative. The earlier descriptive and genealogical material of the first eleven chapters of Genesis are complemented by the multiple facets of the story of an individual and his family. Abraham's story of faith, failure, and forgiveness provides a valuable backdrop for understanding the travails and victories of God's elect through the ages. It represents another beginning for humanity and is a reminder that the God of Genesis (and Scripture) was a God of new beginnings.

11:27—12:9. God Calls Abram. Genesis 11:27–32, as part of the genealogy of Shem's righteous line, introduces the family of the man who will be the subject of the next fourteen chapters of Genesis. The mention of Abram's and Nahor's wives, and particularly the infertility of Sarai, in the genealogy prepares the reader for what is coming (11:29–30).

Ur was an important Sumerian city-state in Mesopotamia at the end of the third millennium B.C., which corresponds to the time of Abram. The city boasted an important religious center (including a towering ziggurat), as well as sophisticated public and private buildings. The Ur that Terah and his family left was a center of the arts, science, and literature, and included many of the conveniences of city life.

God spoke at Creation (2:18) and following the Fall (3:13–14, 22); He also spoke with Cain (4:6, 9) and Noah (6:13–21; 7:1–4; 8:15–17; 9:1–17). Here He spoke again. The Lord first called Abram in Ur, before the first stage of his journey with his family described at the end of chapter 11 (see Acts 7:2–5). Abram's family had been idolatrous (Josh. 24:2), but they were willing to leave Ur with him at Yahweh's command. Perhaps the start of 12:1, *vayyo'mer*, should be translated and understood (as it has been by some commentators and translators) as, "Now the Lord *had* said to Abram." In this case, 12:1 describes God's call to Abram that had led to his family's departure from Ur as described in 11:31, and the mention of leaving Haran in 12:4 is a continuation of the previous description. On the other hand, it could also be the case that Abram received two calls—one in Ur, and one to leave Haran, which was a renewal of the first. In both cases, it could be said that Abram was leaving his house, his family, and more—in the first case, because he was leaving his homeland, friends, and extended family, and in the second case, because 12:5 indicates that Abram left Haran with only part of his family (Lot) though he was accompanied by people who had joined his household in Haran. God's call to Abram was succinct and definitive: the divine command is to *halakh*: "Go!" Some translations emphasize the separation from everything known and thus read "Get out." Abram's obedient and trusting response is described in 12:4—he went, leaving country, family, and his father's house behind. The sequence marked the different spheres of ancient society, even though "country" should not be confused with the modern notion of a nation. Important layers of patriarchal society included the family, the larger clan, and the tribe.

Even though Abram was not aware of his destination (Heb. 11:8), nor did he have an heir (cf. 11:30), God promised three specific blessings associated with this call: (1) Abram would become a great nation, (2) he would receive God's blessings, and (3) God would make his name great (in contrast to 11:4 where the builders wanted to make a name for themselves). Blessings and curses were closely linked to Abram's relationship with God. Ultimately, Abram was to bless all the *mishpekhot* ("families," "clans," "peoples") of the earth (12:3). This highlights the global dimension of God's call. God did not simply select an individual at random in order to bless him and his descendants. His mission was much larger: God wanted to reach and transform the entire world through this one family.

Abram left Haran and obeyed God's word and promise (12:4). Abram's family included not only his own large household but also the household of Lot, his nephew and the son of Abram's brother Haran (11:27). Lot's choices and interactions with his uncle would play an important role in later chapters. When Abram left Haran, he was seventy-five years old (v. 4) and did not have even *one* son—yet God promised the improbable. Canaan is mentioned as the destination following Abram's departure from Haran (cf. 11:31). The term describes a land that was somewhere on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean, comprised of parts of modern Lebanon, Syria, and most of the southern Levant west of the Jordan River. Abram's first address in Canaan was in Shechem, at the terebinth or oak tree of Moreh (12:6). Ancient Shechem was located between Mounts Ebal and Gerizim, the location where, hundreds of years later, Joshua renewed the covenant between the Lord and Israel's tribes (Josh. 24:1–25). Following the conquest of Canaan, Shechem would also be designated as a city of refuge for the central part of the Holy Land (Josh. 20:7).

The Lord then appeared to Abram, marking the first specific reference to a theophany in Genesis (cf. Gen. 17:1; 18:1; 26:2, 24; Deut. 31:15), and in response to this revelation, Abram built an altar to Him (Gen. 12:7–8; 13:18; 22:9). These altar construction references represent, in a condensed form, patriarchal worship. The altars focused the attention of the family upon the God who had called them to live as foreigners, and they also served as a public witness to the tribes living near the patriarchs. While no explicit reference to sacrifices is included, the altar suggests them. Genesis 12:8 hints at an additional dimension of patriarchal worship: calling on the name of the Lord, which is a clear reference to prayer (Ps. 116:4).

In reference to the divine promise of land, the word *zera'* ("seed" or "offspring") is used again. The Hebrew term is singular, and even though the noun can be used in a collective sense, it is an echo of the *zera'* referred to in 3:15, where the singular "He" is clearly and emphatically indicated. The theology of land in the OT is deeply rooted in God's ownership of the earth and His promise to Abram. In an agricultural society, land meant security, food, and a future.

Abram's travel log references three locations: Shechem (v. 6), a site between Bethel and Ai (v. 8), and the South (or the *negev* in Hebrew; v. 9), the region bordering the southern limit of Canaan. As a foreigner, he lived a seminomadic existence, always contending for grazing lands and water.

12:10–20. Abram's Egyptian Sojourn. Famine drove Abram's household to Egypt, anticipating similar moves by his son Isaac (26:1) and his grandson Jacob (41:54; 43:1; cf. Ruth 1:1). As a result of poor judgment, Abram failed this test of faith. Yet God did not fail him. The beauty of Sarai must have been stunning—even considering her advanced age of about sixty-five years (see 17:17). Abram felt vulnerable as a foreigner and prepped Sarai to state a half-truth (both Sarai and Abram had the same father; cf. 20:12)—that is, to refer to herself before the Egyptians as his sister (v. 13). Abram's fears were well founded, and Sarai was taken to Pharaoh's house (v. 15). In line with ANE customs, Pharaoh paid the bridal price, including slaves and a variety of animals (v. 16), to the bride's family (cf. 34:12).

The question of whether Pharaoh actually had sexual intercourse with Sarai is difficult to answer. That Sarai was taken into his house (or palace; v. 15) may not indicate that sexual intercourse took place (cf. 20:2, 6), even though the phrase is ambiguous. The Hebrew *laqakh* ("take") is used to indicate marriage and thus sexual intercourse (6:2; 11:29), but similar episodes in Genesis add additional information that usually follows sequentially once a woman had been "taken" (e.g., 34:2, 38:2). Pharaoh's strong response highlighted the fact that adultery was a serious offense in the ANE, as many law codes suggest. This episode was different from the later one with Abimelech (20:3), in which God communicated directly to the offending king. The link between the Lord and the afflictions in Pharaoh's palace (12:17) was not immediately obvious to the king. Yet he recognized the superior power of Abram's God and had Abram's household escorted to the borders of his kingdom. There are noticeable narrative parallels between this story and that of the Exodus: Abram and Israel were both welcomed in Egypt at first but later faced challenges, they were rescued by means of plagues, and in both cases, they left Egypt with increased wealth and returned to Canaan.

13:1–18. Abram and Lot Separate. The conflict between the servants of Abram and those of Lot was a dispute that could be resolved through dialogue. The Hebrew word *rib*, used to describe the quarrel, is sometimes employed in the context of legal arguments and prosecution (cf. Gen. 26:20–22; Ex. 17:2, 7; 23:2–3, 6; Job 31:35; 40:2; Hos. 4:1; Mic. 6:2). In the patriarchal narratives, Lot's actions often contrast with Abram's, thus shining a spotlight on the latter's faithfulness. Lot, as the younger man, ignored custom by actually accepting Abram's generous offer to allow Lot to choose first (13:10) and selected Sodom and the cities of the plain (v. 11). With this, he moved east (cf. notes on 11:2). Clearly, his choices were motivated by economic factors (v. 10). The author of Genesis adds an important explanatory postscript to Lot's choice in v. 13 and diagnoses Sodom's inhabitants as extremely wicked and sinful. Several examples of lexical imagery exist between Lot's poor choice and Eve's fateful decision. This suggests that Lot was moving in the wrong direction (see "Common Imagery Associated with Lot's and Eve's Choices," p. 159).

The description of Sodom's wickedness anticipates Genesis 18 and 19. The evil inhabitants of Sodom were sinning against the Lord (13:13). This is a reminder to the reader that the Lord is not a parochial or regional deity like the other deities of the ANE. God's jurisdiction and sovereignty went beyond the land—even the promised land. Just as He judged an Egyptian pharaoh and the anonymous tower builders at Babel, He also knew what was happening in Sodom.

Lot's departure, most likely disheartening to Abram, was followed by an affirmation of the divine promises (13:14–17). The Lord spoke and revealed the future to Abram. The assurance of land for him and his descendants (v. 15) represented an expansion on the original promise of 12:7. When God invited him to walk through the land (v. 17), He was asking Abram to possess it and was anticipating the filling of the land by his descendants. This land promise was partially fulfilled in Joshua's time (Josh. 21:43–45;

but note 13:1–7). Later generations saw another partial fulfillment (in the time of David and Solomon; see 1 Kin. 4:20–25); but due to Israel's unfaithfulness, the promise was never completely fulfilled, except ultimately through Christ (Rom. 4:13; Gal. 3:16). Abram's next destination was Hebron, the town with the highest elevation in the southern Levant and located at 3,050 feet (930 m) above sea level. Hebron was strategically located between Jerusalem and Beersheba. Here Abram built another altar and affirmed his commitment to the God of the promise (v. 18; see notes on 12:7, 8).

14:1–24. Abram Rescues Lot. The exciting story of the rescue of Lot and the people of Sodom by Abram and his allies seems to interrupt a narrative that is concerned with God's plan for His chosen people and not really interested in the ups and downs of regional power games. However, this story is another reminder that God is not a regional or parochial God but is interested in blessing all those who willingly receive His benedictions.

The names of the four kings who threatened the Jordan Valley city-states suggest an ethnically diverse coalition including Elamite, Amorite, Hurrian, and Hittite groups (14:1). The biblical record of these regional city-states controlling other city-states fits well into the known historical landscape of the last part of the third millennium B.C. The five city-states of the Jordan Valley (Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboim, and Zoar) could not withstand the attack of the Mesopotamian coalition, which had previously received tribute from the Jordan Valley inhabitants for twelve years (v. 4). Chedorlaomer (Kedorlaomer), the king of Elam, located in modern Persia, seems to have been the leader of the coalition (vv. 4–5). While no individual of this name has been attested in surviving texts from this period, the two elements comprising his name are authentically Elamite. The itinerary of the attacking eastern coalition and their victories (vv. 5–7) underlined the army's north-south movement along the so-called King's Highway (Num. 20:17; 21:22), which followed the Transjordanian plateau on the eastern shores of the Jordan and Dead Sea. In order to stop the approach of the eastern coalition, the five city-states of the Jordan Valley engaged them in battle (Gen. 14:8).

This chapter contains five explanatory notes suggesting that the biblical author may have used an older account that required updating so that the readers could understand it appropriately. The notes always commence with "that is." For example, Bela apparently was the ancient name for Zoar (vv. 2, 8). The Valley of Siddim was the Valley of the Salt Sea (or the Dead Sea Valley; v. 3) and was also the location of the battle between the two armies (v. 8). En Mishpat was later known as Kadesh (v. 7), and the king of Sodom met Abram and his people at the Valley of Shaveh—that is, the King's Valley (v. 17).

The asphalt or tar pits in the vicinity of the Dead Sea favored the eastern coalition. The kings of Sodom and Gomorrah and their disintegrating armies became stuck in the pits when they tried to flee to the mountains surrounding the low-lying plains (v. 10). The Hebrew term describing Abram's trained army (***khanik***; v. 14) occurs only here in the Hebrew Bible, but it can be found in a nineteenth-century-B.C. Egyptian text and in a fifteenth-century-B.C. letter from Taanak, written in cuneiform. This locates the story in time. The size of Abram's household was significant. Abram was not a poor shepherd but a powerful clan leader who had established important ties with the surrounding clans.

Whereas the king of Sodom wanted to talk business (vv. 21–24), the meeting was interrupted by the appearance of the king of Salem. Encountering Melchizedek signified a divine

Common Imagery Associated with Lot's and Eve's Choices

Concept	Lot (Gen. 13)	Eve (Gen. 2 and 3)
eyes	v. 10	3:6–7
saw	v. 10	3:6
watered	v. 10	2:6, 10
garden	v. 10	2:8
east	v. 11	3:24

blessing since he was the priest of God Most High (v. 18). Bread and wine could signify a lavish meal, perhaps even a banquet (1 Sam. 16:20). In later parts of Scripture, these items are connected with covenant and sacrifices (cf. Num. 15:2, 10; 1 Sam. 1:24; Matt. 26:26–29).

Melchizedek's blessing is written in poetic form and refers twice to "God Most High." The Hebrew is *'el 'elyon*. This divine epithet functions here as a personal name highlighting the power of God. Verse 19 includes the Hebrew term *qoneh*, which is sometimes translated as "Possessor" because it comes from the verb "to own" or "to purchase." However, based on parallels in other Semitic languages and the use of the verb in some OT texts (e.g., 4:1; Deut. 32:6; Ps. 139:13), another possible translation would be "Creator." Melchizedek's blessings would thus include two key statements about God: He is both Creator and Deliverer. Both elements are also central to a biblical Sabbath theology and the God of the Sabbath.

The person of Melchizedek would be used as a type of Jesus, the real Priest-King (Heb. 7:1–16). Abram, in response to the blessing received from the Lord, gave a tithe (or a tenth) to God's representative. The law of tithing preceded the Levitical legislation (Lev. 27:30–33). Here the practice was established on the theological idea that God is the Creator of the universe and the One who blesses humans. Giving the tithe to Him is not only a duty but also a deep expression of gratitude.

Abram's interaction with the king of Sodom was brief but poignant (Gen. 14:21–24). Abram rejected the customary practice of retaining the bounty and agreed to return the people to their cities of origin (v. 21). Framed as part of an oath, Abram affirmed his reliance on the Lord and echoed terminology and characteristics of Melchizedek's earlier blessing (vv. 19–20, 22). Abram's faith journey involved waiting upon God's timing, not his own timing or careful geopolitical plotting. The Hiphil form of the verb *'ashar* ("to make someone rich") constitutes a wordplay on "tenth" (*ma'aser*). Abram's wealth was attributed to the Lord's blessings (24:35), and he accepted only the provisions that his allies had already consumed on the campaign (14:24).

15:1–21. God's Covenant with Abram. After Abram experienced divine blessings during the daring rescue mission of Lot and his family in chapter 14, God reminded him of his future and his mission and affirmed the covenant.

Significant events begin with "the word of the Lord" (v. 1). In this case the divine intention for Abram was introduced by the assurance that he did not need to be afraid. The dialogue between God and Abram suggests intimacy and a close relationship. Abram was even ready to question God—Abram's concerns were presented to God, and He responded to him! God's promise involved protection and blessings, something that Abram had already experienced in different circumstances. However, he still has no offspring.

Abram's servant Eliezer is described as a servant born in his house and Abram's designated heir. This reflects an ancient custom where a childless couple adopted a son as their heir (vv. 2–3). In fact, Abram had already been assured a son three times (12:2, 7; 13:16), but the promise had yet to be fulfilled. God's response to Abram's question was unequivocal (15:4–5): He emphatically indicated that Eliezer would not be Abram's heir and that His plan would involve no shortcuts or alternative routes. Again, the promise was renewed by an object lesson (counting the stars in the sky) and a divine proclamation (v. 5). Echoing the futile attempt to count the dust of the earth (13:16), the impossibility of counting all the stars in a bright night sky emphasizes that only God can do the impossible. Faith is defined here as belief, in the sense of placing absolute trust in God's power to fulfill His promise. This response of profound faith in God was accounted to him for righteousness. He was declared to be so not because of his superior works but on the basis of his faith (v. 6; cf. Rom. 4:3-4, 9, 22–25; Gal. 3:6–9). God then reminded Abram of His saving action in bringing him out of Ur, employing words that anticipated God's liberation of Israel from Egypt (v. 7; Ex. 20:2; Deut. 5:6). The phrase is part of a brief historical review that precedes the account of the covenant ritual. It also reminded Abram of the fact that the promise included not only offspring but also land. The covenant was ratified through a ritual that required that the sacrificial animal, unlike a regular sacrifice, be cut in two halves. The covenant ritual apparently lasted a significant amount of time since vultures tried to feed on the split carcasses and were driven away by Abram (v. 11).

At sunset, a deep sleep and a thick and terrifying darkness overcame Abram (15:12). Both seem to have been divinely induced, which is suggested by the fact that Adam's deep sleep in 2:21 is described using the same Hebrew term. The Hebrew word for the horror described in 15:12 is the same word used when God promised to send terror before Israel when they entered Canaan (Ex. 23:27; Josh. 2:9). God spoke to Abram in his deep sleep, and His communication was significant. What He said was certain, as the construct *yadoa' teda'* (lit. "knowing, know"), an idiom for "know certainly," suggests (v. 13; on the four hundred years mentioned in v. 13, see "The Four-Hundred-Thirty-Year Sojourn," p. 211). Abram's descendants would be strangers (Heb. *ger*) in a foreign land. Readers should immediately notice the link to Egypt, considering that Abram's sojourn in Egypt is described using the same root (12:10). The Amorites mentioned in v. 16 represent all the inhabitants of Canaan.

The description of the smoking pot and burning torch that passed through the animals in v. 17 is emblematically significant. Fire is often a symbol of God's presence, and walking between the two parts of the animal was a declaration that what happened to the sacrificial victim would be the fate of the violator of the covenant (cf. Jer. 34:18).

16:1–16. Hagar and Ishmael. The prototype of faith was struggling with the practical implications of faith. In this chapter, Abram does not hear from God. However, God talks to Hagar (16:8–14).

The biblical text reminds the reader of the barrenness of Sarai right from the outset (v. 1). What appears to be a sad fact in a Western context becomes a tragedy in a biblical (and Eastern) context. Barrenness encompassed every aspect of a woman's life in biblical times and brought pain and stigma (cf. 1 Sam. 1:5–6). It not only endangered the very survival and future of a family, but it also suggested possible divine displeasure. Sarai, the main protagonist of this chapter, decided to be proactive and resolve her barrenness by turning to the practice of surrogate motherhood, which was well known in the ANE from the third to the first millennium B.C. Both Abram and her maidservant Hagar submitted to Sarai's proposal. Surprisingly (and tellingly), the end of v. 2 in the Hebrew echoes Genesis 3:17, where the same phrase is used with different names when Adam decided to eat the forbidden fruit: Abram listened to Sarai as Adam listened to Eve. Careful readers will anticipate conflict and additional verbal links and motifs that connect this story to the Fall narrative (e.g., "took" [3:6; 16:3]).

Sarah's reasoning in v. 2 is revealing: the fact that God had prevented her thus far from having children (similar also in 20:18) was suggested as a rationale for attempting the logical solution. While Hagar appears to be a tool in Sarai's hands, Hagar's pregnancy changed everything in Abram's household (vv. 4–6). Hagar came to despise (*qalal*) her mistress (v. 4). The Hebrew term used here, which Sarai repeats in v. 5, is the same as the one describing Michal's reaction to David's ritual procession in 2 Samuel 6:20. Sarai's position in the household was in danger. She complained to Abram and seemed to suggest his guilt in the matter (v. 5). The Hebrew term *khamas* ("wrong" or "violence") is strong and is later used by the Hebrew prophets to indicate social injustice (Amos 3:10; Hab. 1:3; cf. the use of the term in the Flood story in Gen. 6:11, 13). Sarai concluded her complaint by appealing to a higher authority, the Lord, to be the Judge (Gen. 16:5).

In response to Sarai's complaint, Abram confirmed Sarai's position in the household (v. 6). Once Sarai's position was validated, Sarai dealt harshly (*'anah*) with Hagar (cf. 31:50, where the same verb is used). Interestingly, this verb is also used to describe the Egyptian mistreatment of the Israelites (Ex. 1:12). As a result of Sarai's harsh treatment, Hagar fled from the family's home settlement.

The next seven verses describe the dialogue between the Lord and Hagar. Hagar's recognition, in v. 13, of a divine presence suggests that the Angel of the Lord was God Himself in this context. Surprisingly, the Angel of the Lord addressed Hagar by name (v. 8). This is the only known instance in ANE literature where a Deity addresses a woman by name.

Hagar was addressed not only by name but also as Sarai's servant, which reminded the runaway servant of her relationships and obligations. This is the first time in the Bible that a child was named before birth (v. 11). The child would be an expression of God's concern for a woman in suffering. Ishmael ("God hears") would be a reminder to her and to others that God indeed listens to those who pray to Him. As was the case with other important sites of God encounters during the patriarchal period, the place where Hagar encountered the Lord was commemorated by name.

The chapter concludes with Hagar's return to Abram's encampment and the birth of Ishmael, who was named by his father and was thus legitimized (vv. 15–16). Abram was, at this point, eighty-six years old and had been traversing Canaan for more than eleven years (v. 16). Had God's promises been realized in Ishmael's birth?

17:1–27. The Covenant Sign: Name Change and Circumcision. Following the covenant ritual described in chapter 15 and the Hagar episode, God's silence lasted for thirteen years. God spoke again in this chapter and emphasized the renewal of the already-established covenant and the institution of a specific covenant sign. God confirmed again the promises of descendants and land to Abram (cf. 12:1–3; 13:14–17; 15:4–5, 18–21). He identified Himself with the name *'el shaddai* (v. 1). The phrase appears five other times in Genesis (28:3; 35:11; 43:14; 48:3; 49:25) and thirty-one times in Job. Jewish interpreters understood the name as "He who is sufficient" while others have suggested "God of the mountain." Both possibilities emphasize power and strength. The all-powerful God offered His blessings to His elect. God also reminded Abram of the fact that the covenant relationship required his devoted response of "walking" (i.e., living) before Him and being *tam* ("sound," "blameless," "perfect"). To be *tam* is to live a life entirely committed to God rather than to sinless moral perfection (Job 1:1, 8; for the use of the phrase in a sacrificial context, see Lev. 1:3).

God changed the name of Abram ("exalted father") to Abraham ("father of many nations"; v. 5). This essentially proclaimed the promise as if it were already fulfilled. The covenant (vv. 4, 7, 9–10, 14) that is mentioned is actually part of the everlasting covenant (v. 7). Note the difference between the essence of the eternal covenant and the sign of the covenant—that is, circumcision. God's covenant with humanity is eternal.

Circumcision became the sign of the covenant (vv. 10–11) and was required from all male members of the household. Those unwilling to participate would be cut off from among God's people. This punishment was normally applied to acts of commission (e.g., eating blood [Lev. 7:27; 17:10, 14], eating sacrificial fat [7:25], eating the peace or fellowship offering while unclean [Lev. 7:20], eating what is unclean [Lev. 7:21], etc.). Being "cut off" may refer to the death penalty (as in Ex. 31:14–15; Num. 15:31; 1 Sam. 28:9) or to being separated from God's covenant community. This is the fourth account in Genesis that mentions the importance of a sign (*'ot*; v. 11). In 1:14, the luminaries served as signs of the seasons. In 4:15, God's sign on Cain signified divine protection. Following the Flood, God placed a rainbow in the sky as a sign to remind Himself and the world of His promise to Noah (9:8–17). Circumcision was also practiced by other people groups in the ANE though mostly as a puberty rite and not on the eighth day following birth (17:12). Other biblical passages clarify the fact that true circumcision is circumcision of the heart (e.g., Lev. 26:41; Deut. 10:16).

Following the introduction of circumcision as the covenant sign, God changed Sarai's name to Sarah ("princess"), another form of the earlier Sarai. While the new name is not explicitly explained (as was the case for Abraham's name change; cf. v. 5), a name change suggests a change of destiny. Divine blessings would finally transform Sarah into a mother of nations (v. 16). Abraham's reaction to this divine promise is surprising. Falling on his face, he laughed (v. 17) and rightly wondered how a one-hundred-year-old man and a ninety-year-old woman could have a son. The first act suggests worship; the second is sometimes taken as implying doubt and is replicated in 18:12–15 (and in 21:6 by Sarah). However, Abraham's question was a practical one. Without divine intervention, birthing a child was impossible. The father of John the Baptist had a similar question (Luke 1:18) and was reprimanded for unbelief (Luke 1:20), perhaps because he had the example of God's involvement in Abraham's case. Not surprisingly, Isaac's name ("he laughs") echoes the surprised reaction of his parents to God's promise. Yet God did the impossible, and doubt became joyous laughter. Finally, Abraham pled for Ishmael, the son by Sarah's maidservant Hagar. Abraham's prayer for Ishmael in Genesis 21:18 was both an expression of doubt and an appeal for blessing. The man of faith (15:6) could not predict God's solution.

God promised to bless Ishmael but also made it clear that the son of Sarah would be the son of the promise (vv. 19, 21). Finally, the promise had a name, and the clock was ticking. The reference to the time (Heb. *mo'ed*, "appointed time," "next year") is a cipher for the birth of a child following a regular pregnancy lasting nine months (cf. the promise to Abraham in 18:10 and to the Shunammite woman given Elisha's prophecy in 2 Kin. 4:16, where a similar phrase appears). This indicates that Abraham and Sarah had to act on the promise for it to come true. The final verses of the chapter report the execution of the divine order, involving Abraham himself, Ishmael, and all the male members of Abraham's household (Gen. 17:23–27). The response was immediate—twice it is mentioned that the rite was carried out that same day (vv. 23, 26). The stage was set for the son of the promise to appear; yet prior to his coming, Abraham's faith, compassion, and character needed to grow even more.

18:1–15. Abraham Entertains Three Messengers from Heaven. Even though Abraham did not immediately recognize the heavenly visitors, his generous hospitality provided another opportunity for God to affirm the future reality of the seemingly impossible.

The language of 18:1 recalls earlier theophanies (12:7; 17:1), yet Abraham himself was seemingly not initially aware of his heavenly visitors. However, it is true that he bowed down to the ground (v. 2), an act that often indicated worship (e.g., Ex. 20:5). Abraham saw three men; one turned out to be the Lord (vv. 2, 22), and two were possibly angels (19:1). Yet Abraham spoke only with the One who ostensibly stood out: Abraham's address in 18:3 uses a second-person-singular grammatical form in Hebrew. As was customary, Abraham provided his visitors with water (for washing their feet) and food (vv. 4–5).

The following verses (18:6–8) describe a household that sprang into action to prepare a meal for their guests, according to the usual customs of hospitality. The narrative then turns to the Guest's prophecy of what lies in store for Sarah. By verbalizing Sarah's private thoughts (v. 13) after she overheard the promise and laughed, the Lord showed Himself omniscient. The rhetorical question of whether anything is too difficult for the Lord (v. 14; cf. Jer. 32:17, 27) implies a negative answer. Sarah was not punished for unbelief, which indicates that, like Abraham's, her question was of a practical nature. She had long since passed the childbearing age, and she had not been able to have children, even when she was younger. In support of this, Hebrews 11:11 highlights Sarah's belief in the famous parade of faith.

18:16–33. Abraham Intercedes for Sodom. As a good host, Abraham accompanied his guests on the first leg of their onward journey (18:16). He literally walked with God (cf. Enoch in 5:24 and Noah in 6:9). Overlooking Sodom from the heights of the Judean mountains, the Lord revealed to Abraham His intentions (v. 17–19; cf. Amos 3:7). The divine rationale for this was the fact that Abraham's descendants would be a great, mighty, powerful nation (v. 18) that would bless the entire population of the earth. In other words, God wanted Abraham to develop compassion and the capacity to bless others, beginning with his household and his descendants (v. 19). "To keep the way of the Lord" involves doing what is right and just and indicates metaphorically right behavior leading to right destiny based on a right relationship with the Lord.

The "outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah" (v. 20; the cities are usually mentioned together in biblical texts) stood in direct contrast to Abraham's righteousness (v. 19). In Hebrew, the words for outcry (*ze'aqah*) and righteousness (*tsedaqah*) sound very similar. Isaiah uses the same wordplay in the famous prophetic vineyard song in relation to God's chosen people (Is. 5:7). The Lord intended to go down (see notes on Gen. 11:5, 7) and see whether the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah was warranted (v. 21). This language does not imply any lack of omniscience or foreknowledge on God's part—these attributes were strikingly evident in the detailed prophecies of the preceding chapters (e.g., 15:13–21; 17:5–8, 15–21) as well as the preceding verses, which indicate that God anticipated that Abraham would faithfully instruct his children and that the world would be blessed through his progeny (vv. 17–19). Instead, the use of this anthropomorphic language was indicative of a legal case, an investigation, and judgment.

Genesis 18:22 contains a textual note preserved by the Masoretes, the Jewish scholars who transmitted the biblical text. It suggests that the original reading of this verse was inverted to indicate that Abraham was standing before the Lord, whereas the original had indicated that the Lord was standing before Abraham. This change was most likely motivated by theological reasons, since "standing before" was the position of a servant and indicated social status (Gen. 41:46; Lev. 9:5). The theological implications are staggering and foreshadow God's willingness to serve humanity—even unto death (Matt. 20:28). God's attitude of service invited Abraham to become an intercessor.

Here Abraham entered the conversation and based his plea on God's righteousness (Gen. 18:25). Indiscriminate punishment is not divine judgment. Abraham did not question God's ability or jurisdiction for judgment—"all the earth" included every location and people group—but he appealed to God's justice. God punishes the guilty (Ezek. 14:12–20) and spares the repentant (cf. Rahab in Josh. 2 and Nineveh in Jon. 3–4).

When the Lord concluded the dialogue with Abraham, His justice and righteousness had been established beyond the shadow of a doubt. God investigated the accusations (18:21) carefully, included in the deliberation two objective witnesses as well as the faithful, and offered a way to salvation. The pattern in 18:16–33 provides a blueprint for future judgments and foreshadows the activities associated with the millennium following the Second Coming of Jesus as Judge of all the earth (Rev. 20).

19:1–38. Sodom's Destruction and Lot's Rescue. The dramatic story involving Sodom provides another example of divine judgment in response to human sin. The location of Sodom and Gomorrah is debatable. Some have suggested that they were located on the southeastern side of the Dead Sea, the areas of Bab-edh-Dhra and Numeria. A geographical text from Ebla in Syria from the same period mentions *sa-dam* as a city located in the region of Bab-edh-Dhra, close to the Dead Sea. However, Lot chose to live in the Jordan River Valley (Gen. 13:10; north of the Dead Sea). Certainly, the general region of the Lower Jordan River Valley and the Dead Sea (called "Salt Sea" in the OT) was the location of these cities (Gen. 19:25).

The following verses (Gen. 19:4–9) graphically highlight the evilness of Sodom's inhabitants (cf. 13:13), a description that provides clear justification for the coming judgment. The Hebrew verb *yada'* (lit. "to know") used at the end of the verse implies sexual activity (cf. 4:1) and is accordingly translated in some versions as "have sex" or "have relations." This exhibits the depravity of the misguided sexuality exhibited by the men of the city (v. 4) and suggests homosexual practices. The biblical text specifically indicates that this was not an isolated group of degenerate people—both old and young, and people from every section of the city, surrounded Lot's home (v. 4). Considering the important cultural value of hospitality in Eastern cultures (including also ancient Canaan), the complete corruption of basic human values that this intended sexual abuse represented becomes immediately clear, even for readers who did not worship Yahweh. Sexual predators justified the coming judgment by their utterly immoral action. Lot was rightly concerned with his guests' well-being, something that, as already indicated, was highly valued in his ANE culture. However, the offer of his daughters to the mob also reveals, on the one hand, that Sodom had affected his inner moral core (vv. 4–9) and, on the other, that girls were of very little value at that time. Ironically, Lot's daughters later abused their father sexually, resulting in competing lineages (vv. 36–38; the Moabites and Ammonites). While Lot was a "righteous person," in the sense that he had not completely allowed himself to be absorbed into the evils of these cities and was still disturbed by the people's conduct (2 Pet. 2:7), his grasp of moral principles was seriously diminished by his association with Sodom's residents. It was out of divine grace that he and his family were preserved.

Instead of ten righteous people (Gen. 18:32), only four people were left (and the righteousness of these is in serious doubt), some of whom the angels had to drag out of the city (19:16). God's mercy often involves a painful separation from the things and people that keep His children in "Sodom." Thankfully, salvation is based entirely on divine grace (Titus 3:5) and not on human performance.

In the face of an imminent inferno, Lot began to negotiate with his angelic companions. Lot's hesitation (Gen. 19:16), his objections, and his wife's ultimate destiny, as well as the later abusive ploy of Lot's daughters, suggest that even though the family had been saved physically, their hearts and minds carried the seed of Sodom with them to safety. Instead of trusting in divine protection in the mountains (v. 19), Lot longed for the urban safety and security of nearby Zoar, a name derived from the size of the city (v. 20). Hopefully, a little city would have little sin in it. Lot's bargaining (vv. 18–20) echoes lexically Abraham's intercession for Sodom and its inhabitants (18:22–33). The angels conceded, and at sunrise, Lot finally entered Zoar, one of the five cities of the plain (14:8).

The description of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah uses flood language (*himtir* ["rained"] in v. 24 and *mamtir* ["caused to rain"] in 7:4 make use of the same Hebrew root). The mention of fire and brimstone (or burning sulfur; 19:24) could be a reference to a firestorm caused by the breaking up of the surface of the earth, accompanied by strong tremors that resulted in major destruction of the beautiful region. The repeated use of forms of *hapak* ("overthrow," lit. "to turn upside down"; 19:21, 25, 29), may suggest the breaking up of the earth's crust. The nature of the fire from heaven is not defined in the text but could have been meteorites, resembling bolts or balls of fire. The biblical author makes it very clear that this judgment was not the result of a natural catastrophe; twice the Lord is identified as the originator of the cities' destruction. Later prophets considered this event to be the symbol of destruction (Amos 4:11). In the NT, it is used as an illustration of the eschatological judgment against the wicked (Luke 17:28–30; 2 Pet. 2:6–9). Tragically, Lot lost not only his

home and property but also his wife, who, in direct disregard for the command of the angels in v. 17, looked back and became a pillar of salt (Gen. 19:26). It is possible that she belonged to a Sodomite family since she was mentioned prior to Genesis 19. In Luke 17:31–32, Jesus admonishes His audience to not look back, as did Lot's wife, when the time of the end comes, for those who strive to keep their lives will lose them (v. 33).

The dramatic action was observed by Abraham from the place where he had stood before the Lord (see commentary on Gen. 18:16–33). The mediator had become a spectator, yet God remembered him (v. 29). Often in Scripture, to remember is to act on behalf of the person in need (see 8:1).

The final verses of this chapter include the last references to Lot (19:30–38), who fled further away from Abraham and his spiritual values. His story would include alcohol use, incest, and the birth of two sons whose descendants would become two enemies of Israel, the Moabites and the Ammonites.

20:1–18. Abraham and Abimelech at Gerar. The man who would be remembered forever because of his faith in God here failed another test of faith for a second time, in the same way he failed before (Gen. 12:10–20). Unbeknownst to him, an even more severe test (Gen. 22) still awaited him. Abraham's move to Gerar, a town located halfway between Beersheba and Gaza that marked the southern border of Canaan, was not motivated by a famine (12:10). Yet in brief, terse phrases, the drama of chapter 12 was repeated: Abraham publicly declared Sarah to be his sister; in response, Abimelech (also Abimelek), king of Gerar, sent for and "took" Sarah (20:2). Genesis 21:32, 34 (see also Gen. 26) link Abimelech to the Philistines (for more on the Philistines, see "The Philistines," p. 407).

God spoke to the king of Gerar in a dream (v. 3) in order to avert a grave iniquity. Dreams were believed to be important means of divine communication (cf. 28:12; 40:8; Num. 22:9, 20). Adultery was considered a serious sin among many peoples of the ANE, as can be seen in Ugaritic and Egyptian marriage contracts (cf. Deut. 22:22). Abimelech's defense (vv. 4–5) was reasonable and also emphasized that no sexual intercourse had taken place. God's response acknowledged that no sexual relations had occurred but adds an important concept: God kept Abimelech from sinning against Him (v. 6). God's restraint of the evil actions of humanity (e.g., 1 Sam. 25:39; Ps. 19:13) is another facet of His grace and mercy.

God demanded from Abimelech full restoration of Sarah to her husband (Gen. 20:7). The reference to Abraham as a prophet, the first time this technical term (*nabi'*) is used in the OT, emphasizes the intercessory role of a prophet (v. 7). Following the divine orders, Abimelech summoned his household and court and confessed publicly. The ensuing dialogue between Abraham and Abimelech echoes Pharaoh's interaction with the patriarch (12:18–19). The question "What have you done?" (20:9) recalls the rhetorical question in 3:13. Abraham's response, while plausible, lacked an important ingredient: faith in the God who called him to be a blessing. Abraham did not expect Abimelech to exhibit high moral values (20:11) and thus decided to use his old ruse.

Abimelech's response was overwhelming and included a comprehensive list of special gifts (Gen. 20:14–15), free access to the land of Gerar, as well as an "honor fee" of one thousand shekels (v. 16)—a huge sum, considering that Babylonian laborers earned half a shekel per month and a slave could be bought for a mere twenty shekels (37:28). This payment to Abraham vindicated Sarah and represented a public exoneration—particularly in view of the following chapter that describes the birth of Isaac. The phrase at the end of v. 16 is literally "a covering of the eyes." Some have suggested that this phrase signifies that she was to be veiled so as to avoid further incident—that is, that she was "rebuked," as some translations indicate. Others suggest that this means that any suspicions of adultery were covered by Abimelech's gift, signifying that her honor was vindicated, as noted in other translations. Surprisingly, the Lord, in response to the intercession of Abraham, restored the fertility of the women in the household of Abimelech. He would certainly do the same for Sarah.

21:1–21. Birth of Isaac and Expulsion of Ishmael. God's promise finally became a reality, yet joy over its fulfillment was mingled with pain over past mistakes and their effects on many lives. The chapter opens with a magnificent statement: the Lord *paqad* (lit. "visited") Sarah, and the son of the promise was born. This verb (*paqad*) often conveys the idea of "caring for"; accordingly, some translate the verb as "was gracious to," "came to help" or "took note of." Considering the long wait and ensuing complications, the description of the birth of

Isaac is very brief and emphasizes God's faithfulness (vv. 1–2, 6). The mention of the *mo'ed* ("appointed time") in v. 2 points back to 17:21 and 18:14. The bottom line of this important theological motif is significant: God always fulfills His promises—at the right time (cf. also in regard to the Messiah; Gal. 4:4). As is customary in the Abraham narrative, the age of the patriarch is mentioned at key moments in his life. At the birth of Isaac, Abraham was one hundred years old (21:5); this was twenty-five years after he had been called by God and had been promised descendants.

Yet not all is well. Unfortunately, human designs often clash with divinely ordained plans (21:8–21). Isaac's weaning, a significant rite of passage that accompanied the transition from infancy to childhood, marked the beginning of the affliction (Gen. 15:16). ANE texts uniformly indicate that weaning normally occurred after three years. The scorning of Isaac by Ishmael (who was half Egyptian), a teenager of seventeen years, is represented by a term (*tsakhaq*) difficult to translate (some read "mocking," others read "playing"). It comes from the same Hebrew root (*tsakhaq*) as Isaac's name (*yitskhaq*), meaning "to laugh." Sometimes it expresses the idea of being superior (laughing at or mocking others) and may also indicate laughter that is occasionally associated with sexual acts (e.g., Gen. 26:8; 39:14, 17). Its use here should be understood as mocking Isaac, expressing disdain and a sense of superiority. Sarah's response was immediate: she told Abraham to banish Hagar and Ishmael (Gen. 21:10), which meant that Ishmael would lose his inheritance. Abraham was distressed because Ishmael was his son (v. 11). However, Sarah based her demand on moral and legal grounds. For example, the Mesopotamian Lipit-Ishtar code (ca. 1875 B.C.) stipulated that if a master granted freedom to a slave and her children, the children of the slave should not share the estate with the children of their master. God endorsed Sarah's request but included a special blessing for Ishmael (vv. 12–13).

The expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael echoes the earlier story of Genesis 16. For a second time, Hagar found herself alone, despondent, and out of options. Yet God sustained her again. The first woman in Scripture whom God addressed by name (16:8) received another important visitor. In response to Ishmael's cries, God promised Hagar an unexpected blessing. The admonition to not be afraid (v. 17) always introduces God's special blessings (Is. 41:13–14; 43:1; Dan. 10:19). God not only spoke to Hagar but also opened her eyes (v. 19; cf. 22:13; 2 Kin. 6:17). Hagar's experience prefigured Abraham's encounter with God on Mount Moriah (Gen. 22) in many ways (a journey, provisions, a child about to die, divine intervention, a solution, and a promise).

21:22–34. Abraham's Covenant with Abimelech. After assuring the future of Abraham's family physically, the text now describes Abraham's place in society and his survival as a foreigner within an unpredictable political context. Due to the importance of water, Abraham came to an agreement with Abimelech concerning the use of wells (see Isaac's similar action later in 26:15–18), yet the covenant was much broader in scope, allowing Abraham's family to stay in the land of the Philistines for an extended period of time (21:34). The covenant ritual was sealed by the giving of gifts (vv. 27–28) and a solemn oath (v. 31). This is a classic example of a bilateral covenant involving mutual obligations from two parties. Abraham planted a tree at the well (most likely as a sign) and "called on the name of the LORD" (v. 33; 12:8; 13:4; 26:25), who had opened the way for a new alliance. God's description as the Everlasting/Eternal God (v. 33) underlines His omnipotence and power.

22:1–19. The Gospel to Abraham: The Binding of Isaac. The ultimate test of Abraham's faith involved the most precious gift the patriarch had received from the Lord—his long-awaited son. Yet while Abraham's faith is on display, it is ultimately God's character that shines through this chapter. The binding of Isaac has been an object of reflection for centuries.

Verse 1 represents, in typical Hebrew fashion, a summary as part of the introduction. The testing of Abraham consisted of creating a situation within which the faith and commitment of Abraham to the Lord would be manifested. The divine command—to take Isaac, his beloved son, and offer him as a burnt offering—is shocking (Gen. 22:2). What is missing in most English versions is the translation of a Hebrew term (*na'*) meaning "please," at the beginning of the sentence. The imperative to offer Isaac creates a theological conundrum. Why would God, who hates human sacrifices (Lev. 18:21; Deut. 12:31; 18:10), demand such an offering? The reference to testing invites the reader to reserve judgment. More than what meets the eye is at play here. The location of the offering was in the land of Moriah, most likely an area around Jerusalem (2 Chr. 3:1). The distance from Beersheba to

Jerusalem was about 50 miles (80 km), corresponding to three days' travel (22:4). Mention of Abraham's early rising and departure marks the patriarch's immediate and deliberate response. Taking with him two servants, a donkey, Isaac, and firewood, Abraham set off toward the place to which God had directed him.

On the third day (v. 4) of the journey, the party finally arrived. The third day is often when a decisive moment takes place in biblical stories (Gen. 31:22; 34:25; Ex. 19:11; Judg. 20:30; Esth. 5:1). One wonders how Abraham lived through these days, knowing that he would be required to sacrifice his only son. Abraham's comment that "we will come back," however, was not simply a reassuring reply to the slightly suspicious members of his household. It was a desperate expression of faith, similar to his answer to Isaac's question in v. 8. It anticipated the later struggle of Abraham's grandson, who pled for a blessing from the One who had wrestled with him at Jabbok (32:26). Faith can struggle, but faith holds on. The book of Hebrews confirms that Abraham believed that God could raise Isaac from the dead (Heb. 11:19). This was quite extraordinary because there is no record of anyone ever having been raised from the dead before that time.

The crucial dialogue between father and son (22:7–8) underlines the fact that Isaac's role was not passive. He could have run away from his father. Abraham's statement of faith—God would provide a lamb—was the answer to Isaac's question. They both went together (vv. 6, 8), one in obedience to God and the other in obedience to the father.

The New Testament and the *Aqedah*

The Hebrew term *aqedah* is used for the "binding" of Isaac as a sacrificial victim in Genesis 22 and has been employed in Jewish literature as a name for the story. This particular narrative plays a significant role in explaining God's work of salvation through Christ in the NT. Hebrews 11:17–19 and James 2:21–23 explicitly refer to Abraham's faith and obedience while the wording of Romans 8:32 ("He who did not spare His own Son") highlights God's willingness to offer Jesus in substitution for humanity and creates a clear link to the well-known story of Isaac's binding and Abraham's faith.

Following the construction of the altar, Abraham bound Isaac (marked by the important designation "his son") and laid him on the altar (v. 9). The following sequence reads as a slow-motion description of Abraham's most heart-wrenching moment. Yet at the right moment, the Angel of the Lord intervened (regarding the nature and identity of the Angel of the Lord, see 16:8–14 and Judg. 2:1–5). The Angel's twofold exclamation expressed the urgency of the instruction. A ram caught in a thicket (v. 13) became the substitutionary sacrifice on Mount Moriah—it was offered "instead of his son." The experience of Abraham was, in a very limited sense, a revelation of the experience of God through Jesus Christ, His Son, when He offered Himself as an expiatory lamb for sinful human beings (Mark 10:45; John 1:29, 36; 2 Cor. 5:17–21; 1 Pet. 1:18–19).

Following the climax of the narrative, God reaffirmed His promises to Abraham (12:2–3; 13:16; 15:5; 17:5–6). Abraham's obedience is one of the key themes of this chapter. Isaac is not explicitly mentioned in the report of Abraham's return, even though the phrase "they went together to Beersheba" may indicate he was included in the return party (cf. the similar phrase in vv. 6, 8). Since this chapter is primarily focused on the characters of Abraham and God, the absence of Isaac's name should not surprise the reader.

The final section of Genesis 22:20–24 functions as a bridge to what follows. Notably, the text mentions twelve sons of Nahor (by his wife and a concubine), corresponding to the twelve sons of Israel (49:28) or the twelve sons of Ishmael (25:12–15). The names of Nahor's descendants have been associated with locations in northern Mesopotamia and Transjordan. For example, "Uz" in v. 21 has been linked to Edom (cf. 10:23; 36:28). The location is also mentioned in Job 1:1 even though some translations have transcribed the Hebrew name as "Huz" in Genesis and as "Uz" in Job—in fact, a more phonetically precise transliteration is *'uts*.

23:1–20. Sarah's Death and Burial. When Sarah died, Abraham succeeded in procuring a piece of property for her burial. While still a stranger, Abraham legally owned a piece of the land that in the future would belong to his descendants. Similar to Jeremiah's purchase of a field in the face of the impending Babylonian captivity (Jer. 32:6–15), Abraham's purchase was another expression of faith.

Sarah died at the age of 127 in Hebron, twenty miles (32 km) south of Jerusalem (23:1–2).

This marked the beginning of the end of an era and slowly shifted the focus of the biblical narrative from Abraham's family to Isaac, the son of the promise. Hebron played an important role in the early reign of David (2 Sam. 2:1–4). Abraham came to mourn and to weep for Sarah (v. 2). This generally involved certain mourning rites, such as tearing garments, wearing sackcloth, shaving one's beard, and loud weeping. The presence of death in Genesis at crucial intersections of the narrative serves as a brutal reminder of the loss of immortality and paradise.

The bulk of the chapter describes the important negotiations for a burial site (Gen. 23:3–16). Keywords include *natan* ("give" or, as some translate contextually here, "sell" or "pay"; vv. 4, 9, 11, 13) and *shama'* ("listen," "hear"; vv. 6, 8, 11, 13, 15), which represent operative words in ANE negotiations and were used instead of "buy" and "sell." The identity of the sons of Heth (also called Hittites) in 23:3 is unclear, as is their relationship to the well-known Hittites from Anatolia (modern Turkey) that dominated the ANE more than half a millennium later. The Semitic names of the sons of Heth in chapter 23 may suggest a different group from the later Indo-European Hittites.

Since Abraham was a foreigner (v. 4), he did not own land that he could use as a burial ground for his family. He had to negotiate with the landowners, and this took place at the gate of the city, which was a center for business and legal decisions (cf. Deut. 21:18–20; Ruth 4:1–11). The negotiation was marked by courteous interaction and demonstrations of respect (e.g., Abraham stood and bowed repeatedly). Note that Abraham did not address Ephron directly but requested the leadership of Hebron to intercede on his behalf. This presence of an intercessor was another important feature of ANE culture.

Ephron the Hittite finally suggested an amount (v. 15) for the purchase of the field that also included a burial cave. Burial practices during the time of Abraham included cave tombs that were often used for an entire family. Following the decomposition of the body of the deceased several months or years after the burial, the bones and other grave gifts were often collected in a big vessel or ossuary, which was then placed in a niche in one section of the cave. The cave of Machpelah was not only the burial place for Sarah but also the location where Abraham, Isaac, Rebekah, Leah, and Jacob were later buried (Gen. 49:30–32; 50:13). Four hundred shekels of silver, or 10 pounds (4.5 kg; v. 15), represented a significant investment. Although later in history, "shekel" was the name of a particular denomination of coinage, at this time, coins had not yet been invented. Thus, shekel here is in reference to the weight (v. 16). The weight of silver was what merchants in this period used for transactions. Cross period comparisons are always difficult, but Jeremiah purchased his field for only seventeen shekels (Jer. 32:9) while Omri paid six thousand shekels for the entire site of Samaria (1 Kin. 16:24). In any case, Abraham was able to pay what was required for the sale. We should remember that during the time of Abraham a "shekel" was not a denomination of coinage; coins had not yet been invented. It was a weight of silver used by merchants for transactions. The final summary statement of the legal and public transaction as well as the burial of Sarah (23:17–20) highlights Abraham's faith in God's promises. Abraham invested in a future he could not see.

24:1–67. Finding a Suitable Wife for Isaac. Isaac's future and the assurance of God's promise were important concerns for Abraham, recently widowed and conscious of his age; the text introduces the patriarch as quite old (Gen. 24:1). Yet in order to secure the future of his family, Isaac needed a wife. Since parents did the matchmaking in OT times, Abraham made his chief servant swear an oath, which forms a frame around the dialogue. These are the last recorded words of Abraham.

The oath was ratified by Eliezer's symbolic act of putting his hand under Abraham's thigh (v. 9). The legal function of this symbolic act was to commit the oath-taker to fulfilling the pledge (cf. 47:29). Notably, Eliezer is never mentioned by name in the entire chapter—rather he is called the servant (or the oldest servant of his house; v. 2), and his name, presuming this is the same person, is known only from Abraham's earlier dialogue with the Lord in 15:2. The intimate nature of the symbolic gesture underlines the solemnity of the oath. Abraham made two important requests that were in line with the larger issue of the divine promise to his family: (1) the future wife of Isaac should not be from the daughters of the Canaanites (v. 3), and (2) Isaac should not return to the land of his ancestors in the north (vv. 6–8).

A brief travel log linking Canaan to Aram Naharaim in northern Syria introduces the next scene (vv. 10–27). Eliezer prayed and asked God for a sign (vv. 12–14). The decision he would make would have important repercussions for Isaac and his future. The hospitality

of the young girl was impressive, as was her physical strength—providing water for ten camels was no small matter. The servant's requests for God's kindness shows dependability and trust in the Lord (24:12, 14, 26–27, 52). Additionally, v. 16 also notes that Rebekah was very beautiful, of marriageable age, but not married. Rebekah passed the test of kindness and offered to give water to the camels, as the servant looked on silently (vv. 16–21). Finally, after the hard work had been done, the servant presented her with abundant gifts (v. 22). Jewelry was often representative of financial security when given to a woman in this context.

Bethuel was Isaac's cousin (v. 24; cf. 22:23), and thus met the first of the two requirements stipulated by Abraham. Rebekah's speedy return to her mother's household may be an indication that Bethuel had more than one wife or that they were living as an extended family (v. 28). Laban's reaction was probably motivated by selfishness (v. 30; cf. 29:1–30).

Meals were important events in ancient cultures because they brought people together and provided a space for negotiations. The drawn-out marriage negotiations began (24:33–51) with a report of divine guidance by Abraham's servant (vv. 34–49), who also included hints as to Abraham's riches (v. 35). The role of Laban in the story suggests that Bethuel was old by this time and that Laban had become the leader of the clan. Alternatively, it could also reflect a local custom involving the eminence of the brother in marriage negotiations, as attested in Old and Neo-Babylonian period documents.

Abraham's servant then offered a prayer of thanksgiving and presented the bride-price to the family. The request for a quick departure the following morning was met with mixed reception. The amount of time requested in v. 55 is literally "days or ten," which could mean few days or years. In order to settle this issue, the bride-to-be was, for the first time, actively involved in the process and was asked personally whether she would go with Abraham's servant. Rebekah's concise, affirmative answer (one word in Hebrew) settled the issue (v. 58). Prior to her departure, Rebekah received the family blessing (v. 60), which was written in poetry in Hebrew and which invoked the promise of numerous descendants and power. The blessing echoed the earlier blessing to Abraham on Mount Moriah (22:17).

The final scene of the unique love story was located in Canaan, the place of God's particular blessings. Isaac lived in the south (or Negev) and went out to *suakh* (24:62–63). This is an obscure Hebrew term that appears only once in the OT. Most versions understand it as referring to some type of activity involving prayer or meditation (LXX, Vg., Tg.). Others have suggested the translation "roaming." The point of the story is that Isaac and Rebekah met outside the camp. Following the customs of her time, Rebekah covered herself with a veil while Eliezer (still described as the servant) informed Isaac about the marriage negotiations (vv. 64–66). The next verse describes a formal marriage ceremony. Isaac brought Rebekah into his mother's tent and *laqakh*—"took" Rebekah (the technical term for marriage), which resulted in Rebekah becoming his wife (v. 67). The final statement, that Isaac loved her and was comforted after his mother's death, connects the narrative to the bigger story. Scripture highlights the special relationship between Isaac and Rebekah. On the occasion of their marriage, she would become the matriarch of the clan. By this time, Abraham would have been 140 years old (see 17:17; 25:20).

25:1–18. Abraham's Death and Ishmael's Family Line. The final wrap-up of Abraham's story brought his sons together at the grave of the patriarch. Both were sons of the friend of God (James 2:23), but only one was the son of the blessing, whose line would ultimately see the divine promise of land and offspring realized.

Following Isaac's marriage to Rebekah, Abraham took another wife (v. 1), who may also be described as a concubine (v. 6). Her ethnicity and family heritage are not mentioned. Neither the text nor the context is clear concerning the question of whether Abraham married Keturah while Sarah was still alive or whether it was after her death, though the term *pilegesh*, "concubine," might imply the former. Abraham's sons from Keturah warrant a brief genealogy, and yet, aside from Midian, they are irrelevant within the larger scheme (v. 6). At the ripe age of 175 years, Abraham breathed his last and died (25:8). The description denotes not only age but also contentment. Abraham was ready to rest in his grave, having experienced God's presence, forgiveness, and vindication of his faith. The expression used at his death, that he "was gathered to his people," is not about the survival of an immortal soul but about the reality of human mortality. This is a term used in reference to being buried in a common tomb. The equivalent is "rested," "slept," or "lay down" (*shakhab*). He was not in heaven with his ancestors/fathers (e.g., Gen. 47:30; Deut. 31:16; 1 Kin. 2:10). All are sooner or later gathered to those who preceded them; all will die (cf. 25:17; 35:29; 49:33; Deut. 32:50).

Genesis 25:11 introduces the important continuation of the story of divine blessings for Abraham's family. The verse reads like the passing of the baton, highlighting God's special blessing for Isaac, whose story would continue in 25:19. The brief genealogy of Ishmael (vv. 12–18), also described as Abraham's son, underlines the fulfillment of the promises to Hagar (16:10) and Abraham (17:20). Ishmael's twelve sons foreshadowed the later tribal units of Israel (35:22–26). The summary statement of Ishmael's life (25:17) is very similar to Abraham's (25:8) and links father and son in death. The final verse of this genealogical summary includes a brief geographical note as to the whereabouts of Ishmael's descendants as well as the obscure final phrase *al pene kol 'ekhaiw napal* (v. 18). The Hebrew text literally reads, "And upon all the faces of his brothers he fell." Some translations have viewed this as a reference to his death in the presence of his brothers, but it can also be viewed as suggesting the hostility mentioned in 16:12.

25:19—26:35

Isaac's Story

Isaac's limited role in the patriarchal stories is reflected in the space allotted to the description of his life and activities. While some have included Jacob and Esau's story as part of Isaac's family record, it may be better to recognize the quiet and unobtrusive presence of Isaac, the son of the promise, on his own terms. He represented another link in the chain of promises, and readers are privy to his struggles involving faith, trust in the God of his father, and ultimately, personal victory.

25:19–34. Birth and Rivalry of Esau and Jacob. Following the programmatic reference to Isaac's genealogy (v. 19), using the technical marker *toledot* (see Genesis: Introduction), the text focuses on Rebekah's barrenness and the birth of her twin sons in response to Isaac's intercessory prayer and God's miraculous intervention.

Isaac's story begins with his birth (v. 19), followed by a brief recap of the facts involving his marriage to Rebekah (v. 20), whose barrenness of twenty years (cf. 25:26) must have been a continuous source of stress in the patriarch's marriage. However, unlike his parents, Isaac did not succumb to the "quick solutions" of concubinage. Isaac's proactive intercessory prayer sheds a different light on Isaac, who often appears to be passive. The Hebrew term referring to Isaac's entreaty in v. 21 (*'atar*) appears repeatedly in the Exodus narrative, where it describes Moses's appeal to God to remove the plagues (Ex. 8:8–9, 28–30). The lack of time markers (when did God grant Isaac's plea?) emphasizes the powerful intercessory ministry of Isaac, as the sequence of prayer, divine response, and conception seemingly followed one after the other.

Yet all is not well. The mention of the children struggling in Rebekah's womb introduces the theme of conflict and strife into the Isaac narrative. The Hebrew word used for their conflict (*ratsats*) is a strong term, referring to "crushing" (Deut. 28:33; Judg. 9:53). Conflict began in the womb, occurred during delivery (Gen. 25:26), is highlighted by the different professions chosen by the sons (v. 27), and ultimately is reflected in the opposing preferences of the parents (v. 28). Rebekah desired to hear from the Lord, so she went to inquire of Him (v. 22; cf. 2 Kin. 8:7–15). Usually this phrase in the OT is reserved for requesting divine guidance from a prophet (Ex. 18:15; 1 Sam. 9:9). The divine reply was expressed in a poetic, four-line response that underlines the conflict between the two sons of Isaac and highlights divine election over and against established traditions (i.e., the rights of the firstborn). The statement about the older (lit. the "greater") serving the younger (Gen. 25:23) contains a wordplay between "shall serve" (*ya'abod*) and Jacob's name (*ya'aqob*). Jacob's election was based on divine sovereignty, grace, and foreknowledge (cf. Rom. 8:29–30; 9:11–12), not on his upright character.

The biblical text briefly relates how Jacob and Esau developed distinctly different personas (Gen. 25:27–28). Esau, the skillful hunter, was loved by Isaac, while Jacob, who lived in the fields, was loved by Rebekah. The Hebrew adjective *tam* (translated variously as "mild," "peaceful," "quiet," or "plain") is based on a root indicating completion or perfection. It can also be translated as "full of integrity," "complete," "flawless," "clean," "blameless," or "perfect" (cf. Gen. 6:9; 17:1 [where the similar *tamim* is used]; 20:5–6; Job 1:1; Ps. 7:8; Song 5:2; 6:9). In the present context, this word, used to describe Jacob, seems to suggest the idea of an amiable and pious person.

The stage was set for more conflict within Isaac's family. Genesis 25:29–34 illustrates the personalities of both sons. Jacob, calculating and astute, won the birthright in exchange for a meal. He sought to outsmart tradition and "assist" God, whose prophecy he must have heard from his doting mother. Esau's shortsightedness and disdain (Heb. 12:16–17) for the birthright is clearly illustrated by the speed with which he made the transaction, consumed the food, and went on his way. The *bekorah* ("birthright") refers to the rights of the firstborn in biblical times. The firstborn held a position of honor within the family (Gen. 43:33) and the right of succession (2 Chr. 21:3), or as in the case of Abraham's family, the covenant. The pentateuchal laws stipulated that the firstborn should receive a double portion of his father's inheritance (Deut. 21:17). Israel as a people was considered God's firstborn among the nations (Ex. 4:22; Jer. 2:3).

26:1–33. Isaac and Abimelech. Isaac's encounter with Abimelech contains many echoes of earlier episodes in Abraham's life. It is the first story focusing exclusively on Isaac. Genesis 25 and 26 are not ordered chronologically but thematically. Since there is no mention of children in chapter 26, it is possible that the events described in the chapter happened during the first twenty years of Isaac's marriage to Rebekah. The Philistines who recognized her beauty would have noticed her nursing or raising her children had they already been born.

Genesis 26:1 sounds like a repeat of 12:10. A famine in the land led Isaac to move to Gerar, the territory of Abimelech, king of the Philistines. Several decades separated Abraham's move to Gerar (Gen. 20) from Isaac's visit. The repetition of the same name for Gerar's king, Abimelech, is most likely due to its use as a dynastic name (something that was common in other ANE cultures; i.e., Egypt). Isaac obeyed God's direct command not to go to Egypt, given during the divine appearance (26:2). God reiterated four key promises to Isaac (vv. 3–4), including (1) the special divine presence and blessing, (2) ownership of the promised land, (3) countless descendants, and (4) the blessing of the nations through his descendants. The final verse of the divine promise, introduced by "because," reminded Isaac of the conditionality of the blessings. Obedience to the divine principles and instructions were central to the promises to Abraham as well as to Isaac (v. 5).

Unfortunately, Isaac repeated some of his father's mistakes (Gen. 12:10–20; 20:1–18). Out of a fear similar to his father's, he told a lie. The "long time" referenced in v. 8 suggests that Isaac's fears were baseless. Instead, the king saw Isaac showing affection to Rebekah. The Hebrew term used here (*tsakhaq*, "to laugh") includes the same consonants that are present in Isaac's name. There is thus here a wordplay that appears repeatedly in the Abraham narrative: Sarah *tsakhaq* in unbelief at the announcement of Isaac's birth (18:12–15) but eventually *tsakhaq* for joy at his birth (21:6). Later, Ishmael *tsakhaq* (cf. notes on 21:9) when Isaac was weaned, and then Isaac (26:8) *tsakhaq* with his wife (here the nuance of the verb is more like "to play with" or "to caress"; cf. Ex. 32:6, indicating more of a sexual playfulness). Abimelech's critique was stern, and he recognized the potential for grave sin that would have affected an entire community (v. 10).

Genesis 26:12 marks the first reference to a patriarch working in agriculture. Isaac enjoyed tremendous divine blessings and reaped a hundredfold. Gerar's inhabitants envied him (v. 14), and the resulting conflict suggested it was time to relocate. Farming and animal husbandry both required secure access to water. Three times Isaac's servants reopened a well that Abraham had dug (and that had been stopped up by the Philistines). Each time Isaac renamed the well and thus laid claim to its water (vv. 15–22). The tenuous interactions between Isaac's clan and the inhabitants of the land were mirrored by the different names given to the three wells: Esek (i.e., "quarrel" or "dispute" in v. 20), then Sitnah (i.e., "hostility" in v. 21), and finally Rehoboth (or "open space" in v. 22), which in the OT is often associated with prosperity or salvation (Is. 54:2–3).

The second theophany reminded Isaac of the true source of power in his life: God's declarations that He was the God of his father, that he should not be afraid, and that He was with him and would bless him and fulfill His promises to Abraham through his descendants dispelled any challenge he might face (Gen. 26:24). These words continue to have deep meaning for Abraham's seed (Gal. 3:29) on the other side of the cross. In response, Isaac, for the first time, built an altar and worshiped the Lord—echoing earlier responses of his father (v. 25; cf. 12:7–8; 13:18).

The final section of the narrative describes another covenant-making ceremony involving a patriarch and Abimelech, who represented the inhabitants of Gerar (Gen. 26:26–31). Initially, Isaac, because of the earlier hostilities, does not seem to be cordial toward the king (v. 27). Accordingly, he did not offer the king food, but he was probably anticipating an agreement, after which he prepared a covenant meal to seal the agreement (v. 30).

26:34–35. Esau's Foreign Wives. The final verses of Genesis 26 seem to be completely disconnected from the earlier narrative of Isaac's sojourn in Gerar and his faith-building experiences. Featuring Esau's foreign wives, they function as a bridge to move the spotlight upon Jacob, beginning in 27:1. Together with 28:6–9, they form a frame for the crucial story of how Jacob stole Esau's blessing.

Esau erred on two accounts: first, he entered into a polygamous relationship; second, he had not learned anything from his grandfather's search to find Isaac an appropriate wife, a bride who not only had a similar ethnic and cultural background but, more importantly, shared the family's commitment to the Lord. Both wives are described as Hittites (26:34), which was greatly distressing to Esau's parents. The last phrase can be literally translated as "they were bitterness of spirit to Isaac and Rebekah," and may be related to the better-known expression *marat nepesh* (lit. "bitter in soul"; 1 Sam. 1:10; Job 7:11; 10:1). The exact nature of Isaac and Rebekah's bitterness and grief is unclear; however, Isaac should have recognized that Esau was unfit to receive the blessing of the firstborn. Isaac's poor judgment is an appropriate introduction to Jacob's story.

27:1—35:29
Jacob's Story

Conflict, tension, faith, and finally, reconciliation are key themes in Jacob's story. Caught between a father committed to following tradition (while avoiding careful Spirit-guided judgment) and a mother who had heard God's voice and schemed to help God along, the son of the blessing experienced numerous mountaintop and valley experiences as he grew into the man who would become Israel.

27:1—28:5. Jacob Steals Esau's Blessing. Forms of the root "bless" appear twenty times in this suspense-filled story, representing the key word of the narrative. The ill-gotten blessing of the firstborn revealed that Rebekah's plan did not agree with that of her husband.

Isaac is described as old and suffering from eye trouble (27:1). He seemed to have been aware of his decline because, in his instructions to Esau, he asserted that he wished to bless him before he died (v. 4). In contrast to other OT figures who called their families to their side in anticipation of death (Gen. 47:29; 50:24), Isaac did not include Jacob and Rebekah.

Rebekah overheard Isaac's command to his favorite son, Esau, and immediately set in motion a plan to secure the blessing for her favorite son, Jacob (27:5–10). Note the clear distinction between his son (Esau) and her son (Jacob) in vv. 5–6. Isaac's family was a family with divided loyalties. Rebekah's words to Jacob (v. 8) were another way of saying, "Do what I tell you. I know better." Individuals should take responsibility for their own moral decision-making—even if the guidance of others appears to be pure. Rebekah's reply to Jacob's concerns suggested a possible curse (v. 13).

The word *mat'ammim* ("savory/tasty foods" or "delicacies"; vv. 4, 7, 9, 14, 17, 31) appears only twice outside of this chapter—in Proverbs 23:3 and 6. Food played an important role in Jacob's acquisition of both the birthright (*bekorah*) and the blessing (*berakah*) in 25:29–34 and 27:1–29. Following the preparation of the choice meal, Rebekah masked Jacob with Esau's clothes and wrapped the skin of young goats around her son's hands and neck (v. 16). Jacob was camouflaged—but would the ruse work?

Jacob's first words, "my father," resulted in an immediate query regarding his identity. Jacob's reply represented the first of his spoken lies. In response to Isaac's question about his son's quick return, Jacob credited God's special blessings during the hunt (vv. 19–20). The reader can sense Isaac's unease as he invited Jacob to come closer so that he could touch his skin (vv. 21–22). The deception had been successful, yet Isaac remained puzzled: it seemed to him that the voice was Jacob's but the hands were Esau's (v. 22).

Finally, Isaac finished his meal and blessed Jacob. This entailed divine gifts of fertile land as well as dominion over peoples (Gen. 27:27b–29). The land blessings, more relevant for a farmer than for a hunter, alluded to Israel's settlement of the land of the promise. The final promise is later repeated in Balaam's blessing of Israel as a nation—albeit in inverted sequence (Num. 24:9).

Following Isaac's blessing and Jacob's immediate departure, Esau entered the scene. Isaac's question, "Who are you?" (v. 32), echoed the earlier question to Jacob (v. 18) and suggested a completely bewildered Isaac. In response to Esau's answer, Isaac trembled uncontrollably (v. 33). The text describes Isaac as more animated than he is described anywhere else in Genesis, and the reason for his animation was intense fear. Esau wept in anger and begged for his father's blessing (v. 38), but what resulted was a makeshift "anti-blessing" that contained many negative statements. The words of Isaac to Esau (v. 39) began in the same way as part of the blessing of Jacob (v. 28), but translators and commentators disagree concerning whether they mean the same thing. The difficulty lies in the Hebrew preposition *min*, which can mean "with" or "in," but also "away from." Thus, some suggest that here *min* means that Isaac was proclaiming that Esau would live "away from" the fertile ground and the dew of heaven. Others suggest that the same words should have the same meaning in both verses and that the prophecy concerning Esau (which includes some bleak elements in v. 40) need not be entirely negative. The prophetic final line of the blessing in v. 40 was fulfilled during the time of the reign of Jehoram of Judah, when Edom revolted against Judah and crowned its own king (2 Kin. 8:20, 22).

Clearly beaten, Esau's hatred for Jacob smoldered dangerously underneath the surface of a dysfunctional family life. Esau's determination to kill his brother Jacob (v. 41) identified him as the seed of the serpent, following the pattern of Cain and Lamech (Gen. 3:15; 4:8, 23; John 8:44). Rebekah's dense network within the camp kept her informed of Esau's threats, and consequently, she commanded Jacob (cf. v. 8) to flee to her clan's home in Haran (v. 43). However, while she intended for her son to stay there only a short time (v. 44), the sojourn lasted twenty years (31:41), and Jacob never saw his mother again following his departure to Haran.

The last verse of this chapter contains one of the few dialogues between Isaac and Rebekah. Again, Rebekah took the initiative, shaping her request for Jacob to travel to Haran within the context of a bridal search. In response, Isaac called Jacob, blessed him, and admonished him to abstain from marrying a Canaanite (28:1; cf. 24:3–4). Then he sent Jacob away (v. 5), but not before he blessed him a second time. Isaac's second blessing echoes Abraham's earlier blessings (vv. 3–4; cf. 12:2–3, 7; 13:15, 17; 22:17). Jacob left for the homeland of his mother. Padan (Paddan) Aram (v. 5) may be linked to the Akkadian *paddanu*, "highway."

28:6–9. Esau Marries Ishmael's Daughter. The use of the Hebrew verb *ra'ah* ("to see"; 28:6, 8) suggests not only observation but also mental assimilation and thought; hence, some translate it in these verses as "learned" or "realized." The disappointment over the lost birthright, the stolen blessing, and the impossibility of revenge compelled Esau to change his strategy. Esau went to his uncle Ishmael, who had married an Egyptian (21:21), and married (again, the Hebrew verb here is lit. "took") Ishmael's daughter Mahalath as his third wife (v. 9). Esau forgot that the divine promises were to be fulfilled through the descendants of Isaac, not Ishmael. His partial obedience to his father's command was not good enough (v. 8).

28:10–22. Jacob's Dream at Bethel. A dream encouraged and guided Jacob on his way to Haran. His encounter with the God of his forefathers marked a definitive moment in his life, prefiguring another important encounter many years later on his return from Haran (Gen. 32:22–32). Following the commands of his parents, Jacob was en route from Beersheba, in southern Israel, to Haran, in modern-day Syria. The journey covered about 550 miles (885 km) and must have taken weeks. Reaching "a certain place" (Gen. 28:11), the fugitive prepared for another night on the road. The word "place" reappears several times in the passage (vv. 11, 16, 17, 19) and is significant for the identification and naming of Bethel. In some instances, the term is used to indicate a cultic place of worship (Deut. 12:5). The basic meaning of the verb *paga'*, appearing at the outset of v. 11 and translated as "reached" or "came to," is literally "to meet" or "to encounter" and reappears in 32:1 when Jacob is met by God's angels on his return trip. The presence of the verb, together with other elements, suggests a close link between chapters 28 and 32.

Jacob encountered God in a dream in which he saw angels ascending and descending a ladder with the Lord at the top of it. The movement of angels on the ladder underlines the important link between heaven and earth and is later referred to by Jesus describing Himself as the true link between God and humanity (John 1:51). God's self-description as the Lord God of Abraham his father and the God of Isaac (v. 13) emphasizes covenant continuity. In line with other patriarchs, Jacob received affirmation of previous promises of land, descendants, and the role of mediator of blessings to the world (cf. 12:3, 7; 13:15; 17:4–6; 18:18; 22:17–18). Then God spoke to Jacob's current needs: He promised to be with him and *shamar* ("keep," "watch over") him (v. 15; cf. the same promise given to Isaac in 26:3).

Jacob's response recognized God's presence and his own lack of perception (vv. 16–17). Jacob then used two phrases to describe "this place" adequately (28:17). The "house of God" (Heb. "Bethel") became an idolatrous sanctuary during the time of the divided kingdom (1 Kin. 12:28–31). The "gate of heaven" is reminiscent of Mesopotamian language linked to ziggurats (cf. notes on Gen. 11:6–7).

Following the naming, the pillow stone became a pillar stone (28:18), a memorial to Jacob's experience with the Lord in this place. He consecrated the stone by offering a libation offering of oil on top of it (v. 18). Later legislation would condemn the erection of pillars because of their function in the religions of Israel's neighbors (Ex. 23:24; 34:13; Lev. 26:1; Deut. 16:22).

Jacob's final response to the dream was a vow (Gen. 28:20)—the longest formulated vow in Scripture. Vows include conditions involving God's blessings. Some misunderstand Jacob to have been exhibiting a wrongful spirit of bargaining by using the word "if," as if he were in doubt of God's promise and would obey Him only contingently. The context (vv. 16–19; 32:9–12, 22–32), however, indicates that this was not the case. He was responding in faith and commitment to the assurance that he had just received. The "if" is best understand as "because" or "since." Jacob's pledge of a tenth in v. 22 is the second reference in Genesis (cf. 14:20) to tithing prior to the formulation of the specific law (Lev. 27:30–33; Deut. 14:22–29). Clearly, the patriarchs were aware of and practiced tithing.

29:1–14. Jacob's Safe Arrival at Haran. Jacob's arrival at his destination is marked by a change in scenery. The reader encounters a pastoral scene instead of dark nights and lonely locales. As an outsider who did not know the geography of the place, Jacob realized only later in the dialogue that he had finally arrived at Haran—safe at last. The chapter opens with a typical betrothal-type scene (see 24:10–61; Ex. 2:15–21).

Jacob's journey ended in a country populated by Eastern peoples. No specific location is mentioned, but he must have felt relief when he finally saw a well (Gen. 29:2). The stone covering of the well represented a well-known strategy of water preservation. The ensuing dialogue between the shepherds and Jacob was terse. Jacob's questions regarding location and his relations were met with one- or two-word answers in Hebrew. This changed only when the shepherds announced the arrival of Laban's daughter Rachel. At the appearance of Rachel, the text has a particle of interjection (*hinneh*), variously translated as "behold," "and look," and then "here comes his daughter Rachel." The use of this word is an indication to the reader that this is a crucial moment requiring attention.

Jacob saw Rachel and then went to the well, rolled the stone from its mouth, and watered the flock of his uncle Laban. Was Jacob showing off, or was he overcome by sheer relief at having reached his destination? Most likely both, as his strong emotional reaction in v. 11 suggests—he kissed Rachel and wept aloud. Different from Abraham's servant, who prior to accomplishing his purpose committed himself and the purpose of his visit to God in prayer (24:12–14), Jacob, the man of action, was on his way to marital bliss. At least that must have been on his mind as the conversation with Laban in vv. 15–19, following his arrival at the household, suggests. Laban likely anticipated that the arrival of a member of Abraham's family would bring with him a valuable bride-price but was frustrated by what he saw, namely, a young man without any possessions. Laban recognized Jacob's kinship by referring to him as his flesh and bone (or, in more contemporary terms, "flesh and blood"; this description echoes Gen. 2:23, where the same phrase occurs. Cf. Judg. 9:2; 2 Sam. 5:1; 19:13). The formula may indicate more than blood relations and point to a larger covenant agreement.

29:15–30. Jacob Marries Leah and Rachel. The suggestion of another successful marriage agreement (see Gen. 24) was dashed when Laban outsmarted Jacob. This dispute is programmatic and links this section to the larger theological motif of conflict in the households of Isaac and Jacob.

This brief section describes the service-in-lieu-of-a-bride-price agreement between Laban and Jacob (seven years of service). The key words "work"/"serve" and "pay"/"wages" reappear repeatedly in the following three chapters (29:18, 20, 25, 27, 30; 30:16, 18, 26, 28–29, 32–33; 31:6–7, 41). Laban's initial question regarding Jacob's wages is followed by a description of the main characteristics of Laban's two eligible daughters (29:16–17). The oldest daughter, Leah (most likely meaning "cow"), had eyes that were *rak* ("tender," "delicate"). Some translate this term as "weak" or "ordinary." However, this adjective has a wide spectrum of meaning depending on the context. Thus, either she had weak eyes, or her eyes were an attractive and captivating part of her. In comparison, Rachel (whose name means "ewe") is described as being beautiful in appearance and *to'ar* ("form" or "figure"; v. 17). Jacob loved Rachel (v. 18), and this was shown in the depth and single-mindedness of Jacob's commitment and his willingness to serve for seven years in exchange for her hand.

Deceived by Laban, Jacob completed the bridal week with Leah, and then immediately married Rachel, the one he indeed loved. The result of this polygamous relationship can be seen in the record of chronic family conflict and jealousy. This underscores the fact that such a practice was not part of God's plan for human families.

29:31—30:24. A Promise Fulfilled: Jacob's Wives and Children. The story of Jacob's wives, concubines, and children is a story of fulfilled divine promises and challenging family conflicts. Similar to Abraham's experience with Sarah and Hagar, Jacob was to suffer the consequences of a polygamous household where jealousy reigned supreme. Yet in the midst of tension, jealousy, and conflict, God showed Himself sovereign and fulfilled His promises.

In a tight sequence of seemingly never-ending pregnancies and birth announcements, the section describes the birth of eleven of Jacob's sons, plus the arrival of one daughter, Dinah (30:21), all within seven years (30:26). Dinah's presence among the birth announcements echoes the earlier inclusion of Rebekah in Nahor's genealogy (22:23). God was intricately involved in giving children—in line with other OT references that clearly link children to divine intervention and blessings.

The text also suggests God's care for His children's emotional well-being. The introduction to the first sequence of four birth announcements reveals that God was concerned about Leah being less loved than Rachel (29:31). The Hebrew word here (*sane'*) can mean "hate" but also "less loved" or "unloved." The text need not imply that Jacob detested Leah (since all of her children were begotten of Jacob). God was not passive. He enabled her to have a child (v. 31), the first reference to divine activity since Jacob's encounter at Bethel. A son was born, and Leah called him Reuben (v. 32), whose name can be translated as "See, a son!" He was Jacob's firstborn. As this story illustrates, God cares for the brokenhearted.

The naming of each son by either Leah or Rachel emphasized the substitutionary function of the two maidservants Bilhah (30:3–8) and Zilpah (30:9–13), who each bore two sons to Jacob. Both Leah and Rachel used sexuality and childbearing to outmaneuver and gain dominance over the rival wife while Jacob appeared essentially passive in the midst of the conflict.

30:25–43. Divine Blessing: Jacob's Wealth Increases. The compressed story detailing the birth of Jacob's children is followed by another recounting of divine blessings—how Jacob acquired his riches. The narrative is full of strange symbolic acts, yet it is not Jacob's cleverness or astuteness but God's hidden hand that ultimately is in control of the natural world and human hearts.

In response to Jacob's request to return home (v. 25), Laban publicly recognized God's special blessing, but he also stated that this recognition had been acquired by *nakhash* (v. 27). This word usually means "to divine." Divination often attempted to gain wisdom from the gods through ritual performances and the observation of signs. It was widely practiced in the ANE but strictly forbidden in Israel years later (Lev. 19:26; Deut. 18:10, 14). Some have taken the word to mean that Laban learned "by experience" or observation that the Lord had blessed him through his relationship with Jacob. This interpretation is highly unlikely, for the verbal root always refers to divination through means other than this. A better alternative, based on an Akkadian verbal root, is a Hebrew verbal root spelled the same way as *nakhash* meaning "to become rich." In that case, Laban would be saying "I have become rich/prospered for the Lord has blessed me on account of you." Laban finally offered a wage contract that would guarantee Jacob the possibility of acquiring his own herds while taking care of Laban's (v. 28).

Jacob's request for the speckled and spotted sheep and goats as his wage must have seemed very minimal to Laban, who immediately took the offer without any haggling (v. 35). Laban knew that goats were normally black or dark brown while sheep were white. Contemporary records set the wages for hired shepherds at around 20 percent of the newborn animals. Because of the relative rarity of speckled and spotted animals, Jacob was apparently settling for a potential wage much lower than that of a typical shepherd. Laban knew he had secured an advantageous arrangement; furthermore, he made sure that Jacob's wages would be even lower by removing the speckled and spotted animals from his herds and giving them to his sons (v. 35). Later, Jacob claimed that Laban had changed his wages ten times (31:41).

However, Jacob became exceedingly prosperous (v. 43) after an additional six years of service for Laban. Different translations present different purposes for the rods Jacob laid before his flocks (vv. 37–42): (1) to encourage more breeding or (2) to actually affect the appearance of the animals. The context indicates that the increase in livestock was the result of God blessing Jacob (31:8–12) and not the result of Jacob's unusual ideas about breeding and genetics. Jacob's riches included not only goats and sheep but also servants, camels, and donkeys (v. 43).

31:1–55. Jacob's Flight and a New Covenant. At the end of twenty years full of tension, conflict, and treachery, Jacob finally decided to relocate his large household to his homeland. Pursued by Laban and his kinsmen, Jacob experienced divine protection and reassurance (31:1–3). The charge of Laban's sons that Jacob had taken everything from their father was at least partially true. God had blessed Jacob so abundantly that his possessions surpassed those of Laban. God's commanded Jacob to return to Canaan—that is, the land of his fathers and his relatives (v. 3). Both land and community had been part of God's promise to Abraham.

The next scene involved clandestine meetings, and for the first time, Rachel and Leah agreed on a plan of action. Jacob shared his perception that their living situation had changed, following a visit from the Angel of God, called in other places the Angel of the Lord (see Judg. 2:1–5). Here He is the Angel of "God" because He identified Himself as the "God" who spoke to Jacob at Bethel (cf. Gen. 16:7–8; 22:11–18; 32:30; cf. Ex. 23:20–22; Judg. 13; Hos. 12:4). The divine "I have seen" (v. 12) is repeatedly used in Scripture to indicate God's compassion for those suffering (cf. Gen. 16:13; 29:31; 31:42; Ex. 3:7, 9; 4:31). When God sees, things begin to happen. God also identified Himself as the God of Bethel (v. 13)—that is, the God who had already appeared to Jacob and who had heard Jacob's vow. Interestingly, the brief, summarized version of God's communication to Jacob in v. 3 is expanded in the fuller description in vv. 10–13. Rachel and Leah's response was unanimous; in fact, they disassociated themselves from their father's house, utilizing terminology involving outsiders and slaves (v. 15).

With his wives in agreement, Jacob moved quickly and departed from Laban's household while Laban was away shearing his sheep (v. 19). Camels were used as means of transport for the growing family (v. 17) and had already been mentioned in 12:16 and 24:10. Critical scholarship has questioned the historicity of camel domestication in the time of the patriarchs. However, archaeological evidence confirms that the camel was domesticated in the second millennium B.C.

Rachel's theft of the family household idols (or teraphim) was her reaction to Laban retaining her bridal price (vv. 14–16), which was paid to him to be held in trust for her. Teraphim were generally portable idols, often associated with the gods of the ancestors. Rachel's thievery was not discovered because she hid the teraphim in her saddle and claimed (probably falsely) that she could not rise from it due to her menstruation (vv. 33–35). The "Fear of Isaac" is used as a surprising divine epithet or title (vv. 42, 53). Data from the third-millennium-B.C. Ebla texts support the rendering of the Hebrew *pakhad* as "dread," suggesting the translation "the Dreaded One of Isaac." Dread often befalls Israel's enemies (e.g., Ex. 15:16; Deut. 2:25; 11:25; Esth. 8:17). It should be taken into consideration that *pakhad* is also used to describe a proper awe and respect for God (e.g., 2 Chr. 19:7; Ps. 119:120; Prov. 28:14; Hos. 3:5). Also the LXX translation of *pakhad* here is *phobos*, which is also used throughout the OT and NT to refer to an appropriate reverence (e.g., Ex. 20:20; 2 Cor. 7:1; Eph. 5:21; cf. Heb. 12:28–29).

Finally, Jacob and Laban entered into a covenant (v. 44), bringing resolution to the tension between them. Pillars of stones were set up as witnesses to the covenant (v. 52). The use of Aramaic and Hebrew terms for the pillars suggests that Laban's primary language may have been Aramaic, an element that underlines the separation between the distinct families. Jacob then offered a sacrifice (v. 54), followed by a covenant meal ratifying the agreement. Laban's departure the next morning included a kiss for his grandchildren and daughters but none for Jacob (cf. 29:13). Twenty years had taken their toll on Laban and Jacob's relationship.

32:1–32. Jacob Wrestles with God. Fear is one of the threads running through this key chapter of Jacob's biography. Wrestling with the divine Messenger, Jacob finally reached the end of himself. Fear, pain, and dread fell away as he overcame and was overcome. Jacob was ready to meet his brother, Esau.

Genesis 32:1–2 describes an angelic encounter, one which was probably intended to encourage Jacob on his journey home. Mahanaim means "two camps." In order to prepare for the encounter with Esau, Jacob sent messengers ahead of his caravan (32:3–5). The report that these messengers brought back, however, was ambiguous and increased Jacob's anxiety. The prayer of Jacob expressed his fears (v. 11) and claimed divine promises (v. 12). The God of Abraham and Isaac had become the God of Jacob (v. 9). God was becoming real and personal in this chapter—in more ways than Jacob could have imagined.

Following his prayer, Jacob sent a significant gift ahead for his brother, Esau. He referred to Esau as "my lord" and himself as "your servant," which implied that Jacob honored Esau and did not seek to flaunt his birthright status. Jacob's reference to his attempt to appease or pacify his brother in 32:20 is related to the Hebrew term translated in other places as "ransom" (e.g., Ex. 21:30; Ps. 49:8).

Having divided his camp, Jacob found himself alone (v. 24). The careful reader recalls an earlier night spent alone in the fields around Bethel (28:11–22). Suddenly, a Man appeared and wrestled with Jacob in the darkness. The Hebrew verb for "wrestled" occurs only in this chapter and sounds similar to the Hebrew *yabboq*. It has been linked to a comparable Hebrew verb meaning "embrace" (29:13; 33:4). However, this was no friendly embrace. The identity of the Attacker was at first unknown, but Hosea would call Him the Angel (12:4) while Jacob would acknowledge Him to be God (32:30; cf. Hos. 12:5; see notes on Gen. 16:7–8; 31:9–12). Jacob was defeated by a simple touch, and this led him to ask for a blessing. He had finally realized that the blessing was a divine gift.

The ensuing dialogue between Jacob and the unidentified Assailant centered on the issue of names (vv. 27–28). Jacob received a new name, Israel, the future name of the covenant nation. Jacob also wanted to know his Attacker's name (v. 29). Knowing the name of another person provides access to that person. Yet Jacob's Opponent did not want to provide this information; instead, He blessed him. Even though Jacob may have only sensed the true identity of his Attacker, *this* was the blessing he had sought for years. This was the real thing. His declaration that he had seen God "face-to-face" forms the basis for the place name Peniel—that is, "face of God" (v. 30). However, "face-to-face" emphasizes more the intimacy of the encounter and not necessarily visual contact. As Jacob limped into a new morning, he walked with a constant reminder of the divine Presence—in this sense, the divine touch that had caused the limp functioned as an object lesson. He could face the coming encounters with Esau and his parents with hope. Jacob had been transformed. The dietary restriction based on this encounter was a perpetual reminder; "to this day" (v. 32) reflects the perspective of the author.

33:1–20. The Reunion of Jacob and Esau. The encounter at Jabbok changed many things for Jacob, but it did not immediately change Jacob's relationship with Esau. However, vertical transformation affects horizontal relationships. Again, God was working behind the scenes. As He did for Israel during their sojourn in the wilderness many centuries later, God went ahead of Jacob and prepared the way for reconciliation. Jacob preceded his household (v. 3) instead of staying behind them (32:17, 19, 21). The Hebrew term used here (*'abar*) is also the root of the name "Hebrew." Jacob crossed over the Jabbok, but his move from rearguard to vanguard also marked profound changes in his character. Seven times Jacob bowed to the ground before Esau. This was a common practice of vassals toward their overlords, documented in the second-millennium-B.C. Amarna correspondence. The four-hundred-man fighting force (see 32:6) behind Esau must have appeared formidable. Yet God had done another miracle and had prepared Esau's heart and blessed him (33:9). While the biblical text does not mention any direct divine intervention, as was the case during Laban's pursuit (cf. 31:29), Esau's intent on hearing of the arrival of his brother and calling up four hundred fighting men must have been hostile. The sequence of Esau's actions represents a complete reversal of what the reader expects: Esau ran to meet Jacob, embraced him, fell on his neck, and kissed him—and then both wept (33:4). A comparable scene, using similar language, is described by Jesus in Luke 15:20. This was palpable grace. Instead of attacking and hurting one another, the two estranged brothers embraced, which is described by a Hebrew term (*khabaq*) that sounds similar to the one describing Jacob's wrestling with God (*'abaq*; 32:24–25).

The ensuing dialogue repeatedly reflected the vassal-overlord motif introduced by Jacob's seven bows. Jacob referred to himself as "your servant" (33:5) and provided expensive gifts that he urged Esau to accept (v. 10). Esau's changed attitude was reflected in the kisses he bestowed on his brother. His reaction seems to indicate forgiveness (2 Sam. 14:33), recognition of Jacob as his brother (Gen. 33:9), and acceptance of the blessing (v. 11; in reference to the gifts in v. 10 and a conscious echo of the stolen blessing).

Yet all was not well—Jacob's responses to Esau's invitation to accompany his household suggest some hesitation (vv. 12–17). Jacob's delicate replies underlined his reliance on God; thus, he avoided offending his brother (vv. 12–15). Following Esau's departure to Seir (cf. 36:8), Jacob journeyed (again using a term marking nomadic travel) to Succoth (or Sukkoth), which is the Hebrew word for "shelters" or "booths." Succoth was located on the eastern side of the Jordan River Valley in territory that was later given to the tribe of Gad (Josh. 13:24–27). This is the fourth location that Jacob named (Bethel, Mahanaim, Peniel, and Succoth), each marking significant events in his journeys with the Lord.

Finally, Jacob entered Canaan proper and settled near Shechem, where he bought a parcel of land for his camp (Gen. 33:17–20). There he built his first altar, providing an important link to Abraham and Isaac (12:7–8; 13:18; 22:9–10; 26:25; 35:7). The final verses of Genesis 33 function as a bridge to the story of Dinah.

34:1–31. The Dinah Incident. Peace and reconciliation, so marvelously illustrated in the previous chapter, did not last long. There were major tensions between the residents of Shechem and the sons of Jacob, and they would lead to disaster, involving the rape of Dinah. The problems had to do with dissimilar values and matters of honor and shame.

Dinah, introduced as Leah's daughter (34:1), "went out to see," or visit with, the daughters of the Hivites that lived in Shechem. When Shechem, the son of Hamor (Hebrew for "male donkey"), "saw her," he raped her (v. 2). This verbal sequence (*ra'ah, laqakh, shakav, 'anah*) is telling and deliberate. Seeing (the first verb) led to taking (the second; cf. Eve in Gen. 3:6, with no sexual connotations). "To lay with" or "have sex with" is the third verb, which is combined with the fourth in some translations as "raped" or "lay with her by force." This is because the last of these verbs (*'anah*) comes from a Hebrew root meaning "humiliated, afflicted." This was not consensual sex but blatant rape. Yet Shechem thought he was in love. The biblical text states that he loved her and spoke kindly/tenderly to her. This last phrase is literally "he spoke upon the heart," which appears several times in the OT, in less than perfect contexts where there is often a sense of guilt or repentance (e.g., Judg. 19:3; 1 Sam. 1:13; 2 Sam. 19:7; 2 Chr. 30:22). Shechem endeavored to right a wrong and asked his father to request Dinah's hand in marriage (Gen. 34:4), initiating customary marriage negotiations. Consequently, the chapter contains a number of elaborate speeches designed to convince the opposing party.

It is unclear how Jacob heard the news, but it appeared to be public knowledge and thus brought shame upon his family. Jacob's role in this narrative was very passive—most of the talking was done by Shechem, Hamor, and the sons of Jacob. When the sons heard the news, they were disturbed and extremely angry because of the *nebalah* ("disgraceful," "senseless") act that Shechem had done (v. 7). The term *'atsav*, which is one of the words used to describe the grief, shock, and anger of Jacob's sons, had been used earlier in Genesis to describe God's response to Noah's pre-Flood generation (6:6). Interestingly, decades later, Joseph's response to his brothers' speechlessness after he had disclosed his identity employed the same two terms (45:5). *Nebalah* is a serious term, appearing thirteen times in the OT, eight of which describe sexual crimes (e.g., Deut. 22:21; Josh. 7:15; Judg. 20:6, 10; 2 Sam. 13:12).

The invitation to unite in marriages with the people of the city (v. 9) utilizes a technical term marking intermarriage, which was later forbidden in Mosaic law (Deut. 7:3). One of the key elements of marriage involved religious loyalties. While there were instances of Canaanites, Moabites, or others who married into Israel and became part of the covenant people (e.g., Tamar, Rahab, Ruth), intermarriage in general was forbidden by law (cf. Ezra 9–10; Neh. 13:23–29).

The negotiations with Shechem and Hamor were managed by Jacob's sons, who were deceptive in their dealings (Gen. 34:13). The theme of deceit and betrayal, so prevalent in Jacob's earlier story (27:35; 29:25), continued in the lives of his sons, who insisted on circumcision as a prerequisite for a marriage agreement (vv. 14–15). Jacob's sons "used" the covenant sign (17:9–14; cf. Ex. 12:43–49) and voided it of any spiritual implication. Jacob later disassociated himself completely from the two ringleaders of the massacre, Simeon and Levi (49:5–6).

Hamor and Shechem brought the proposal to the city gate (v. 20), the place of official deliberations and decisions (Gen. 19:1; 23:18; Ruth 4:1). Nowhere in their speech (34:21–23) did Hamor and Shechem explain the true reason for their request to circumcise the male population of the city. Instead, they emphasized the point

that if they joined with Jacob's family, all of the patriarch's possessions (livestock, property, and animals) would be shared (or taken over; v. 23). Two cycles of deceit and duplicity are at work in this narrative. In response to their convincing counsel, every male was circumcised (v. 24).

Finally, Jacob spoke his mind (v. 30). He reproved his sons strongly. He said that their actions had made him *ba'ash* (lit. "to stink") sometimes translated here as "obnoxious." This refers metaphorically to behavior that leads to reprisal and revenge (Ex. 5:21; 1 Sam. 13:4; 2 Sam. 10:6). Jacob feared complete annihilation (v. 30; 2 Sam. 21:5). Jacob's fear was palpable, yet no reference to Dinah's painful experience is included. The lack of respect in the reply of Jacob's sons anticipated future conflict. "Our sister" instead of "your daughter" emphasizes deeper rifts in Jacob's family (v. 31). The final rhetorical question remains unanswered in the narrative and leaves the reader to genuinely speculate about Jacob, the state of his family, and the blessing he was meant to be.

35:1–29. Jacob Returns to Bethel. Following the tragic disaster at Shechem, God was on the move again. Spiritual revival and worship characterized Jacob's journey and arrival at Bethel. Finally, the patriarch could fulfill his vow.

This chapter begins with God's all-powerful voice and the command to return to Bethel. Jacob, unlike Abram (12:1–3), knew his direction and destination. God's directions were even more specific: Jacob was commanded to build an altar. An altar indicated worship and was a witness to others of Jacob's commitment and dedication to the Lord (12:7–8; 13:18; 22:9–10; 26:25).

Jacob's response reveals a need for spiritual renewal. First, he commanded his household to dispense with their foreign gods (v. 2). The imperative appears in similar revivals elsewhere in the OT (Josh. 24:14, 23; Judg. 10:16; 1 Sam. 7:3–4; 2 Chr. 33:15). The exact nature of the foreign gods is not further described. They may have included figurines, amulets, and the family teraphim that Rachel had stolen from Laban (Gen. 31:30–35). Together with the gods, the family gathered their earrings, and everything was hidden under a tree (35:4). The hiding or burying is not expressed by the regular verb denoting burial (*qabar*) but by the rare verb *taman*—possibly an indication of a descent into oblivion (cf. Job 3:16 and its reference to a miscarriage using the same verb). The gods whom Rachel had sat upon and allegedly tarnished with menstrual blood (31:30–35) were finally being discarded. Furthermore, Jacob ordered his household to purify themselves (v. 2). Purification required ritual activities and, together with the change of garments, was an important element of the priestly ordination ritual (Ex. 29:4–9; Lev. 8:6–9, 13). The cultic language of the passage suggests the notion that Jacob's household was to be a "priestly" household, prefiguring Exodus 19:6. Because Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had all been called to be God's special people, they were to be holy and mission-driven (cf. 1 Pet. 2:5–9).

As Jacob's household journeyed toward Bethel, the terror of God fell on the inhabitants of Canaan (Gen. 35:5), enabling Jacob to travel safely through an increasingly hostile environment (cf. Ex. 15:14–15). Luz was the ancient name of Bethel (v. 6; cf. 28:19). This update suggests some type of later contextualization of the biblical text in the earlier story of Abram (13:3), for in Abram's time, the city was still called Luz. The construction of the altar seems to have functioned as a symbol of the complete fulfillment of Jacob's vow—even though the text does not elaborate further.

Genesis 35:8 contains the surprising death of someone who had not appeared by name in the story before. Deborah, Rebekah's nurse (cf. 24:59), died at Bethel and was buried under the terebinth or oak tree (the definite article, "the," indicates that this was one of the landmarks of Bethel). Her presence may have been due to Rebekah's absence. Genesis does not provide a death notice for Rebekah.

The next section (35:9–15) affirms Jacob's name change (cf. 32:28) and blessing. The mention of God having appeared to Jacob (35:9) reminds the reader that God is never far off. This covenant renewal is a powerful reminder of God's presence and care in the face of death.

The notice of the departure from Bethel (v. 16) is surprising—especially in view of the fact that Jacob's favorite wife, Rachel, was pregnant and at the point of giving birth. However, what appeared to be another blessing, fulfilling the ideal family size of twelve sons, turned out to be an experience of grief and pain. Rachel died while giving birth to her second son, whom she named Ben-Oni, "son of my sorrow" (v. 18; cf. the irony of Rachel's clamor to Jacob in 30:1, that he should give her children or else she would die). Jacob renamed his son Benjamin, "son of the right hand." The text mentions Rachel's *nepesh* (see "Living Soul or Living Being?" on p. 145). In this case, it seems evident that the meaning is simply "life"—her life was ending (lit. "going out"). This is an illustrative description of Rachel's death rather than evidence that her eternal "soul" was returning to heaven (as some have claimed). There is no evidence in Scripture for the idea of an eternal, conscious entity that survives the death of the body. The explanatory note in v. 19 clarifies the statement in 35:18. Rachel was buried in Bethlehem, about 15 miles (24 km) south of Bethel. Another pillar marked this significant place (v. 20).

Signs of further fragmentation and disunity in the family soon followed. Reuben had sex with Bilhah, his father's concubine (v. 22). Bilhah, the maidservant of Rachel and the mother of Dan and Naphtali, after having lost Rachel's protection, represented a prized target for power-hungry Reuben. His disturbing action (one that rabbinical traditions considered offensive enough to prohibit its translation in the synagogue) was meant to assert his leadership over the clan and establish his rights as the firstborn. This anticipated Absalom's later similar act (2 Sam. 16:22; cf. 2 Sam. 3:7; 1 Kin. 2:22). As one of Leah's sons, Reuben may have also detested Jacob's disdain for his mother Leah. Similar to the Dinah incident, Jacob heard about what Reuben had done but did not do anything (Gen. 35:22). The text gives the impression of an old and broken man, unable or unwilling to discipline or even engage with his family. The moral fiber of Jacob's clan became increasingly brittle.

The brief notice of Isaac's death concludes the stories of Isaac and Jacob (vv. 27–29). Isaac died at the age of 180 years. Esau and Jacob (listed in the order of their birth; 35:29) buried him. Similar to Isaac and Ishmael at the grave of Abraham (25:9), the brothers were united by the death of their father.

36:1–43. The Family of Esau. The genealogy of Esau demonstrates that God had fulfilled His promise of making Abraham the father of many nations (17:5–6, 16). Similar to the manner in which the account of Ishmael's descendants separated the family histories of Abraham and Isaac (25:12–18), this description of Esau's line acts as an interjection between Jacob's family story and Joseph's, which resumes in chapter 37.

The lists contain seventy personal names and mark an overall sociopolitical movement from extended family (vv. 1–8), to tribal organization (vv. 15–19), and ultimately to a monarchy (vv. 31–39)—a description that anticipates Israel's own historical development. The record opens with a list of Esau's wives, including his two Canaanite wives, Adah and Aholibamah, plus Basemath, the daughter of Ishmael. When compared to the earlier references to Esau's wives (26:34; 28:6–9), there is only one name, Basemath, that appears in all references, even though in 26:34, Basemath is the daughter of Elon the Hittite while in 36:3 she is the daughter of Ishmael. All three references agree that the first two wives were Canaanite (or Hittite/Hivite) while the third wife was more closely related, a daughter of Ishmael. There is no easy solution to this puzzle. The apparent mix-up in names may have been due to problems in the textual transmission, even though there is little indication of that. Perhaps the wives had more than one name.

Woven among the names of Esau's wives are the names of his five sons. The author of Genesis includes this information purposefully in this location as a contrast to the listing of Jacob's twelve sons by two wives and two concubines (35:22b–26) that anticipates the notice of Isaac's death. Children illustrate numerically the blessings and the promise of the covenant.

Esau's decision to move out of the promised land was likely motivated by an abundance of (divine) blessings. Their possessions (referring to Jacob's and Esau's clans) were too numerous (36:7) for the land to sustain them both. Unlike the situation described in Genesis 28, Jacob and Esau's separation did not involve hostilities or conflict. The land simply "could not support them." The final clause of this section, which equates Esau with Edom, is programmatic: it links Edom to Mount Seir (Deut. 2:4–6, 12, 22; Josh. 24:4), and it thus reminds the reader of postpatriarchal geopolitical realities. Esau is more precisely characterized as the father of the Edomites (36:9). "Father" can also be understood as "ancestor" (Ex. 13:5; Deut. 26:5; Josh. 24:3; etc.). Esau's grandchildren (from only two sons, Eliphaz and Reuel) were ten in number, including Amalek, the son of Eliphaz's concubine Timna (36:12). The Amalekites later became bitter enemies of Israel (Ex. 17:8–16) and became a distinct people separate from the Edomites (Deut. 25:17–19).

The next section (Gen. 36:15–19) names the chiefs of the sons of Edom. The Hebrew term can also be translated as "clans," but "chief" appears to be the better translation here as the reference is to tribal units identified by their lead

Verse 19 underlines the important links between Esau's sons and Edom's sociopolitical structure.

The following section (vv. 20–30) records the sons of Seir, the Horite. According to Deuteronomy 2:12 and 22, the Horites (perhaps Hurrians?) were the original inhabitants of the hill country of Seir but were later dispossessed by Esau's descendants. Their inclusion in the list provides a snapshot of the populations that Esau's family encountered. While Deuteronomy 2:12 and 22 suggest that Esau's descendants destroyed the Horites, some names in the list also appear as spouses or in-laws of Esau's family (including Anah [v. 20, 25; cf. vv. 2, 14], Timna [v. 22, cf. v. 12], Aholibamah [v. 25, cf. v. 2]). This suggests that the Horites were absorbed into Esau's family line. As with other genealogies in Genesis, sometimes a noteworthy event or an accomplishment of an individual is included. Genesis 36:24 includes such a note for Anah, who was possibly a father-in-law of Esau (cf. vv. 2, 14). Some translations describe him as the one who found water in the wilderness. The translation of the Hebrew word *yemim* is uncertain. The Latin Vulgate reads "hot springs," which is followed by some translations. One of the targums (Pseudo Jonathan) suggests that "mules" is the correct meaning, and this rendering is followed by some other translations.

The next section lists the kings of Edom (vv. 31–39). Eight kings are listed in the linear sequence of Edomite kings before there were any kings in Israel (v. 31). Some kings are associated with specific cities while others are mentioned in connection with specific events. Hadad is reported to have struck down Midian in the field of Moab (v. 35). Hadad is the name of the Semitic storm god who is also identified with Baal. The chapter concludes with another list of chiefs, cataloging eleven names, seven of which appear for the first time. The exact relationship to the first list of chiefs or clans (vv. 15–19) is not clear. It may be that the latter list represented later chiefs of Edom, some of which used names already employed by their predecessors. The final line of v. 43 forms a frame with v. 9 that brackets the genealogies proper of Genesis 36.

37:1—50:26
Joseph's Story

The final section of Genesis, introduced by another *toledot* (see Introduction), focuses on Joseph, Jacob's first son by Rachel. It revisits many themes from earlier patriarchal history (including sibling rivalry, famine and survival, deceit, divine blessings, etc.), yet it concludes in a different location. While Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob all returned to Canaan toward the ends of their lives, Joseph and his family died in Egypt. Thus, Joseph's story anchors the Exodus narrative many centuries later.

37:1–36. Joseph's Dreams and Slavery. Joseph's story is not told in isolation. As Jacob's son, he was only one of twelve, yet his life affected his entire family—and beyond. Like many patriarchal narratives, Joseph's story begins with a dream, followed by much trouble. Throughout the narrative, Joseph experiences divine silence but not divine absence. God works behind the scenes in the flow of the narrative and in the heart of the protagonist of the story, preparing a great deliverance.

The characterization of seventeen-year-old Joseph is nuanced: Joseph worked as a shepherd alongside his half brothers, yet he was apparently no team player since he brought Jacob a "bad report" about them. The phrase "Israel loved Joseph" (v. 3) anticipates the undercurrent of envy and hatred in the family. Considering the divided household of Isaac, Israel should have remembered the disastrous effects of having a favorite child. Instead, he made Joseph a tunic of many colors. Israel's skills as a tailor may have pointed back to the depiction of him in 25:27 as one who lived in tents. The Hebrew term for Joseph's robe is puzzling, and its translation is based on ancient versions. Egyptian contemporary tomb paintings of Beni Hassan (dated to the nineteenth century B.C.) show Semitic merchants doing business with Egyptians and wearing multicolored wraparound knee-length tunics. Clothing signaled status and played a major role in Joseph's story (37:3, 23; 39:12; 41:14, 42). The reaction of Joseph's brothers to his preferential treatment is candidly described by the author—they hated him and could not speak to him peacefully or kindly (37:4). Hebrew grammar allows for two interpretations of the object of their hatred, with "him" referring to either Jacob or Joseph. Most likely, the brothers hated both and treated them accordingly. Yet more hatred was to come (vv. 5, 8).

Joseph was not only the favorite. He was also a dreamer. Up to this point in Genesis, God has been the source of all dreams. While v. 5 does not explicitly specify God as the dream-giver, this is silently assumed since dreams were considered to be messages from the gods in the ANE. The term translated "bowed" (v. 7) reappears significantly in 42:6 when the brothers bowed to the Egyptian governor they did not recognize as their brother Joseph. Jacob recognized the potential explosiveness of the reversal of social order (v. 10), yet he kept this dream in mind as a revelation of Joseph's future (cf. Luke 2:19; 51).

Pastoral serenity is suggested at the opening of the next scene. Joseph's brothers went to feed the family's flock in Shechem (v. 12). The location is an ominous harbinger of disaster to readers of Genesis (cf. Gen. 34). However, the brothers had moved from Shechem to Dothan, about 13 miles (21 km) northwest of Shechem. All in all, Joseph traveled 65 miles (104 km) from Hebron to find his brothers. The reader may wonder why they had pastured the animals so far from the family home. Distance and location in Genesis are often used to indicate proximity to divine blessings—Joseph's brothers surely were keeping their distance. The appearance of Joseph in the distance triggered an evil scheme in the minds of the brothers, and they *nakal*, "plotted" or "conspired," to kill him (v. 18). The Hebrew term appears only three more times in the OT and marks deceitful action (Num. 25:18; Ps. 105:25; Mal. 1:14). The description of Joseph as a dreamer (lit. "the lord of dreams") was a sarcastic one (v. 19). The plan to kill their brother was a collective decision (v. 20). However, Reuben, Jacob's firstborn, intervened to rescue him (v. 21). The language of deliverance used here (*natsal*) is often linked to divine intervention (Ex. 18:4, 8; 1 Sam. 26:24), yet Reuben's impotence soon became apparent (Gen. 37:26–28).

Joseph was stripped of his robe, the symbol of his preferred status and then thrown into a *bor* ("pit" or "cistern"), which was most likely a dry well that had been dug to collect rainwater for use during the dry season (vv. 23–24). The callous nature of Joseph's brothers became evident when they sat down to eat a meal while Joseph was left terrified in the pit nearby. Next, a caravan of Ishmaelites appeared on the scene (v. 25). Ishmaelites and Midianites (v. 28) were related to Abraham (Midianites through Keturah [25:1–2]; Ishmaelites through Hagar). Joseph was sold for twenty shekels (v. 28), which seems to have been a traditional price for a slave (cf. Lev. 27:5).

The final scene returns the focus to Joseph's garment, which was presented as evidence of his death to Jacob (Gen. 37:31–35). Meanwhile, unbeknown to Jacob, Joseph had been sold in Egypt by the Midianites to Potiphar, a high official at Pharaoh's court. The name Potiphar means "he whom Ra has given" and is one that is known from Egyptian texts.

38:1–30. Judah and Tamar. The phrase "at that time" (38:1) locates the chapter within the Joseph narrative even though it does not provide clear chronological information. Judah's departure from his family recalls Eve's separation from Adam and Lot's move toward the lush plain of the Jordan (13:11). Judah saw a certain Canaanite woman and married (lit. "took") her against all previous counsel (24:3; 26:35; 27:46). This same verbal sequence was used earlier to describe action in opposition to God's guidance (3:6; 6:2; 12:15; 34:2). Shua conceived three times, and she and Judah had three sons. Judah took Tamar as a wife for his firstborn, Er (v. 6). The biblical text does not provide further information as to Er's wickedness, yet the divine judgment is immediate; the Lord killed Er (v. 7). This is the first reference to God putting an individual to death (cf. v. 10).

After Judah's second son was struck down by God, Judah refused to give Tamar his third son to be her husband. When Judah's wife died, he had sexual relations with Tamar (although he did not know it was her). Three months after the sexual encounter, Judah was told that Tamar was pregnant by means of prostitution (v. 24). Later law required adulterers to be put to death (Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:22). The Mosaic law prescribed public stoning for some sexual sins (Deut. 22:21, 24) while other crimes were punishable by burning (Lev. 20:14; 21:9). Some scholars consider the sentence for adultery a two-level procedure, according to which the involved parties were first stoned and then burned.

The dialogue between Tamar and Judah focused upon the pledge items (sources of identification) that Judah had left with the supposed prostitute. Judah admitted that Tamar was more in the right than he was (v. 26). Judah's relative righteousness contrasted with God's absolute righteousness (cf. Jer. 33:15; Rom. 3:25–26). The focus of the chapter is on what motivated Tamar—the fulfillment of the Levirate law—rather than on her actions. Levirate marriage required the brother of a deceased Israelite to produce a son with the widow of the deceased brother (Deut. 25:5–10) in order to assure an heir and the future of that family line. The practice is also known from Hittite and Middle Assyrian laws, the main difference being that in biblical law, the brother-in-law was responsible for providing an heir. Tamar, a

Canaanite woman, became part of the messianic line (Ruth 4:12, 18–22; Matt. 1:3–6). The birth of male twins (Gen. 38:27–30) compensated Tamar for her forced barrenness (cf. 25:22–26).

39:1–23. Joseph in Potiphar's House. Giving a glimpse of divine righteousness in a surprising way, 39:1 picks up the story line from 37:36. Joseph had arrived in Egypt and had been sold. The chapter reminds the reader that God is in control, and yet mountains and valleys are part of the Christian's daily journey with the Creator and Savior of the universe.

In spite of miserable circumstances, the Lord was with Joseph (39:2)—a statement that becomes the refrain of Joseph's story. Joseph undoubtedly felt alone many times in his suffering, but God was always close to him, as He is with all of those who suffer, to strengthen them. *Tsalakh* ("to prosper," "to be successful") is one of the key words in this story, and it is always connected to God's presence (vv. 2–3, 23). Potiphar is described as an officer of Pharaoh and captain of the guard (37:36; 39:1). The Hebrew term *saris* ("official" or "officer") appears over forty times in the OT and has been translated "eunuch," "court official," and "chamberlain" (1 Sam. 8:15; Is. 56:3–5; etc.). Clearly, in Potiphar's case, the classic sense of "eunuch" would not apply since he was married. Rather, he was a high official in Pharaoh's court. The second title, captain of the guard, is also a generic title that could be applied to a number of Egyptian offices.

Responding to Potiphar's trust, Joseph worked faithfully for him (39:4). The Hebrew term here denotes personal service instead of the generic word for a servant (Ex. 24:13; 1 Kin. 19:21). As the parallel texts suggest, this type of service involved grooming for leadership. Potiphar's household was blessed by the Lord because of Joseph (v. 5). The reference to blessing would serve to remind the reader of a key element of God's covenant with Abraham (12:3), as well as a key theme of Genesis. God blesses people in order for them to be a blessing to others (see v. 5).

God blessed Joseph with success and an attractive physical appearance (39:5–6). The words used to describe Joseph's handsome form are uniquely applied to a male here (cf. 1 Sam. 16:18). It is naturally assumed that this combination made him desirable to Potiphar's wife (39:7), although the text does not explicitly say this. The context of the story suggests that there was some evil power tempting Joseph to sin, not only against Potiphar but also, more importantly, against God. Had he fallen into temptation, the narrative would have taken an unexpected turn, and perhaps the story of Joseph would never have been written. Wrong decisions can alter one's life in radical ways.

Potiphar's wife's continual pressure for Joseph to lie with her demonstrates Joseph's absolute commitment to God's moral values, even under great temptation. The garment left behind as a sign of refusal was used by the woman to construct a story aimed at destroying the one who refused her (Gen. 39:11–19). Joseph had gone into the house to do his work—not to invite temptation (v. 11). Potiphar's wife caught him, described with a verb (*tapas*) implying violence (Deut. 9:17; 22:28; 1 Kin. 11:30). Upon the return of her husband, she accused Joseph of attempted sexual assault. Her reference to Joseph's ethnicity (Gen. 39:17) implied a racial slur, not only to inflame racial tensions but to defend herself from any accusation of sexually provoking this particular foreign man. Her implication was that her husband was ultimately responsible for this "travesty." This is only the second time in Genesis that a member of Abraham's family is described as Hebrew (14:13).

Potiphar's response was rapid. He threw Joseph into Pharaoh's prison (v. 20). Yet in spite

Joseph in Egypt

There are two main theories regarding the time period when Joseph was in Egypt. One suggests that he was in Egypt during the Middle Kingdom (approx. 20th–17th centuries B.C.) and the other that he was there during the Second Intermediate Period (approx. 17th–16th centuries B.C.), a difference of approximately two hundred years.

1. Origin of the Theories. The Middle Kingdom theory (hereafter, MK) exists primarily because the Masoretic version of Exodus 12:40 pushes the Joseph narrative back to that period. Most modern translations of the Bible reflect this in the text. The Second Intermediate Period theory (hereafter, 2IP) exists primarily because the Septuagint and

Samaritan Pentateuch versions of Exodus 12:40 include time lived in Canaan before coming to Egypt. Most modern translations of the Bible include this option in the margin notes. Other chronological statements in the Bible (Ex. 6:14–25; 7:7; Gal. 3:16–17) seem to reflect this although there is debate on the issue.

2. Semitic People in Egypt. During the MK, a single ruler mostly controlled all of Egypt from the capital, first in the south at Thebes and later in the north near the Faiyum region at Itjtawy. During the 2IP, which followed the MK, more than one person claimed to be king, partly because armies of Semitic people invaded the land. Due to their more advanced weapon technology (compound bow, chariot, and battle-ax) and use of horses (apparently not in Egypt before this period), the Semitic people conquered the north and set up their capital at Avaris, while Egyptians ruled from the south at Thebes. The southern Egyptian rulers eventually pushed the northern Semitics out of Egypt, unifying the country in a new period call the New Kingdom (approx. 16th–11th centuries B.C.), which was the time of the Exodus.

3. Key Issues in the Debate. The two possible time periods during which Joseph may have resided in Egypt, according to these two theories, are about two hundred years apart. The two periods represent very different cultural realities in Egypt that affect one's understanding of the story in a number of key areas.

A. Location of the Land of Goshen. Joseph stated that his family would live near to him (Gen. 45:10). It can be assumed that Joseph's seat of authority was near the royal court. The MK theory puts that court in the south. The 2IP theory puts it in the north. If the land of Goshen is in the northeastern delta, as is generally believed, Joseph's claim that they would be near to him can be interpreted to support either theory. "Near" could mean that his family was at least in the same country that he was, as opposed to still living in the Holy Land (MK), or it could mean literal geographic closeness to the royal court in the north (2IP).

B. Horses and Chariots. Joseph was given a chariot to ride in, and horses were part of the livestock exchanged for food (Gen. 41:43; 46:29; 47:17). The MK theory argues that these details were later editorial additions that were not actually part of the reality of the story but were added for other reasons or that archaeological evidence for horses is simply incomplete (MK). The 2IP theory argues that these details were actually part of the story and help to place it historically according to the available archaeological evidence.

C. Abominable Shepherds. Joseph instructed his brothers to tell Pharaoh that they were shepherds so he could put them in a part of Egypt removed from the rest of the Egyptian population because shepherds were abominable to Egyptians (46:34). Archaeologists have discovered that the ancient Egyptians were prejudiced against foreigners. However, there were Egyptians who owned flocks and herds (47:16–17; Ex. 9:1–7; 19–21). The MK theory argues that this statement by Joseph (46:34) means that *foreign* shepherds only were detested. The 2IP theory argues that there was a foreign ruling class Joseph's brothers would have been prejudicially associated with that all owned flocks and herds (47:6), and thus Pharaoh would have understood their need for separation (2IP).

4. Further Elements in the Debate. Beyond these three main interpretive issues, the debate continues. Supporters of the MK theory point to Semitic names on papyri from the MK—a canal dug in the MK that today is called Bar Yoseph, suggesting a potential memory—and records of officials from the MK who helped people during times of famine.

Supporters of the 2IP theory point to the change in land ownership from the *people* in the MK to the *king* in the New Kingdom as evidence that something happened during the 2IP famine to facilitate the switch (possibly the events of Gen. 47:18–26); archaeological evidence of Semitic people moving in to the Wadi Tumilat (the area generally accepted to be the land of Goshen) during the 2IP and various statements in Scripture can be interpreted to mean that Semitic people were ruling at the time (Gen. 39:1, 7, 14; 40:1, 22; 42:8; 43:32; 44:5; 45:2).

The difference between the two theories (approximately two hundred years) affects one's understanding of biblical chronology, particularly as it relates to interpreting other biblical statements about the length of time the Hebrews were in captivity (see "The Four-Hundred-Thirty-Year Sojourn," p. 211).

of his anger (v. 19), one gets the impression that he actually wanted to get Joseph out of harm's way (i.e., out of his wife's way). Biblical (and Egyptian) law demanded that a convicted rapist should be executed (Deut. 22:23–27), particularly in a situation involving distinct social classes, such as those of Joseph and Potiphar's wife. As the captain of the guard, Potiphar still controlled Joseph's destiny (or so he may have thought). The fact that the keeper of the prison committed all prisoners into Joseph's care (Gen. 39:21–23) may ultimately suggest Potiphar's influence over the prison, which was also under his jurisdiction. Yet neither Potiphar nor any other person controlled Joseph's life. The Lord was with Joseph and showed him *khesed* ("mercy," "kindness," "covenant faithfulness"; v. 21). In the midst of injustice and persecution, God's presence lightens even the darkest prison cell.

40:1–23. Joseph Interprets the Dreams of Pharaoh's Servants. The next chapter opens to a different scene, detailing the positive and negative turns in Joseph's story. From slave to second-in-command of Potiphar's house to prisoner to right hand of the prison warden was a journey that required longsuffering and inner strength. Joseph's interpretation of the dreams of two high court officials opened the way for God to save not only Joseph and his family but also Egypt and its neighboring countries. The two officials placed in prison were to be served and attended to by Joseph (40:1–4). Both the chief butler (or cupbearer) and the chief baker would have been responsible for preparing Pharaoh's food and protecting him from poisoning. These positions formed part of the inner circle of ancient kings. The biblical text does not contain any indications as to the cause of Pharaoh's anger (v. 2). But their roles in relationship to food and the penalty for failure to protect the pharaoh suggest that they may have been charged with a crime related to the food of the king, even attempted murder.

Dreams and their interpretation, an important ingredient of Joseph's story, reappear at this point (cf. 37:5–11). Both high-ranking prisoners had dreams and shared them with Joseph, who, in turn, interpreted them. The question "Do not interpretations belong to God?" was in itself a polemic against the Egyptian methods of interpreting dreams. Joseph was stating that only God, his God, could provide accurate interpretations of dreams (41:16, 25, 28; Dan. 2:22, 28, 47). Following the retelling of the dreams by both officials, Joseph quickly offered their meaning. The biblical text does not specifically mention a time of prayer (as in Dan. 2:18). Joseph's admonition to the chief cupbearer to remember him (v. 14) indicated his confidence in the interpretation and represented the first expression of frustration on Joseph's part. Up to this point, Joseph had been quiet in the face of injustice and displayed a distinct character change from the self-important seventeen-year-old from Canaan (Gen. 37).

While the interpretation of the butler's dream promised restoration, the interpretation of the baker's dream suggested complete disaster. His execution was described in terms that an Egyptian would consider to indicate death without an afterlife, the worst that could happen to the baker. A brief summary statement (vv. 20–22) describes the fulfillment of the dreams and confirms Joseph's interpretation (on the importance of the third day, see 22:3–6). Egyptian sources provide no evidence for the celebration of the birthdays of pharaohs before the first millennium B.C. However, it may be possible that the "day of birth" refers to Pharaoh's ascension to the throne, a celebration that is evidenced in contemporary sources. In spite of the fact that the chief butler forgot Joseph (v. 23), God continued to work behind the scenes.

41:1–36. Joseph Interprets Pharaoh's Dreams. Two additional dreams marked the pivotal point of Joseph's life. Pharaoh's need for reliable interpretation required a capable interpreter. Joseph, long forgotten by the chief butler, was brought before Pharaoh and provided the interpretation of the two dreams. Joseph's unsolicited counsel paved the way for the great reversal. No prison, no chief butler, and no pharaoh could obstruct God's plans.

Pharaoh's two dreams disturbed the Egyptian king—particularly because no one could interpret them (v. 8; cf. Job 7:14; Dan 2:1, 3, 10; 4:5, 19). Unlike Nebuchadnezzar many centuries later, Pharaoh at least described his dreams to his magicians. Double dreams appear in other ANE contexts (e.g., Gilgamesh epic, Gudea of Lagash). This repetition heightened the importance of the dream's content. Pharaoh's dreams (Gen. 41:1–7) first involved seven healthy-looking, well-fed cows being devoured by seven ugly and gaunt cows. In the second dream, seven plump and ripe heads of grain were devoured by seven thin and scorched heads of grain. Pharaoh's dream was bizarre. Even in ancient Egypt, cows did not eat cows, and heads of grain did not devour other heads of grain.

In this dramatic moment, the chief butler remembered (cf. 40:14) his error (lit. "sins") in forgetting Joseph, and he came to recall Joseph's skill as a dream interpreter (41:9–13). The main point of his concise summary of chapter 40 is that Joseph's interpretation came to pass just as he had said it would (41:13). From the butler's perspective, Joseph was someone who truly knew the art and the science of dream interpretation.

Pharaoh's reaction was quick and immediate: Joseph was brought into the royal presence after he had shaved and changed into clean clothing. Male Egyptians usually shaved their faces and sometimes also their heads while Asiatics (or Semites) wore beards. The implied washing, shaving, and clothing rites often marked the transition from one state to another (e.g., the sons of Aaron during the priestly ordination ritual [Lev. 8:6–13]). Joseph's reply to Pharaoh's question was bold, considering the fact that the pharaohs were considered gods (v. 16). Joseph's denial that he could interpret dreams on his own was a clear indication of the divine source of Joseph's capability (cf. 40:8; Dan. 2:27–28; 2 Cor. 3:5). Joseph averred that "God" would give the answer (v. 16), and thus he introduced the Egyptian ruler to *'elohim*, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Joseph seems to have used a generic term for God in an effort to speak in a manner that Pharaoh could relate to. The story is an excellent blueprint for missiologically sound communication.

Following Pharaoh's retelling of the two dreams (41:17–24), Joseph began his point-by-point interpretation with another statement of faith: he declared that in these dreams, God had shown Pharaoh what He was about to do (41:25). Pharaoh needed to know that his country was under the domain of Joseph's God and part of a larger plan that involved Egypt's survival through its connection to the covenant family. Both dreams communicated the same reality of seven years of plenty, followed by seven years of famine and hunger (41:25–32). In both dreams, the fat and plentiful were devoured by the lean and famished. The Nile flooded every year, depositing rich silt from upriver on the fields of Egypt. This natural fertilizer resulted in an excess of produce. However, if the annual Nile flooding was too high or too low, a famine was sure to follow. Too much water, and the rich silt would be washed downriver into the Mediterranean Sea. Too little, and the water carrying the silt would not reach the fields. It is not clear which was the case during this period.

Joseph's unsolicited counsel was fronted by the particle *'atah*, "now," which is sometimes used to introduce a new idea or section (41:33–36). It is also often used in the OT to introduce the lesson of a story (cf. Is. 5:3, 5). Here the particle introduces the new ideas that Joseph would offer to Pharaoh. Confronted with the magicians' inability to interpret the dreams, Pharaoh realized that he did not have a "discerning and wise man" (41:33; cf. Deut. 4:6; Prov. 10:13; 14:33; 16:21; Hos. 14:9). In order to face this extraordinary drought, Pharaoh needed someone whom he could trust.

41:37–57. Joseph's Rise to Power. Joseph's rise to power was unprecedented and functioned as an illustration of divine deliverance. Thirteen years after his arrival in Egypt (41:46), Joseph's life had gone from slave to supervisor and from prisoner to second-in-command in Egypt. From a human standpoint, this was something that would have been unimaginable if the ruling class were made up of Egyptians. It is slightly more possible if they were also Semitic (i.e., the Hyksos), as Joseph was. Whichever group was then in power, God's providence was advancing Joseph's standing.

Joseph's counsel (lit. "word") was well received by Pharaoh and his court (v. 37). Pharaoh's rhetorical question emphasized the presence of the spirit of God in Joseph (v. 38). Pharaoh's observation recognized Joseph's premise—that is, that he had not relied on his own intelligence to interpret Pharaoh's dreams. The reference to Pharaoh's house/palace (v. 40) marks the third "house" that Joseph supervised (Potiphar's house, the prison, and then a palace). The exact nature of Joseph's title has been debated, but it appears that it was not that of vizier. Perhaps Pharaoh created a new position—something that the court would undoubtedly be more tolerant of than the demotion of an existing official. That Joseph was set over the entire "land" of Egypt (v. 41) might serve to highlight the agricultural focus of Joseph's service. A signet ring, new clothing, a gold chain, and the right to ride in the second chariot (see "Joseph in Egypt," p. 183) all functioned as markers of Joseph's new status (vv. 42–43). It was common in the ANE to have servants precede a dignitary to draw attention to his presence (cf. 2 Sam. 15:1; 1 Kin. 1:5; Esth. 6:9). The term *abrek* (v. 43) is a rare Hebrew term that may be related to an Egyptian term indicating homage, and it is translated variously as "bow the knee," "make way" or "attention." A name change indicated authority and also a new identity (Dan 1:7). Joseph used this Egyptian name, but the available evidence in Genesis points toward his retention of his faith in God.

The seven years of plenty were also reflected in Joseph's personal life (Gen. 41:46–52): he married the daughter of an influential official and had two sons. The high priest of On (Heliopolis in Greek and Iunu in Egyptian, the cult center for the worship of Ra) held the title "Greatest of Seers." Together with Memphis and Thebes, On was one of the most revered cities of ancient Egypt. While previous children had been named by the family matriarchs, Joseph named his boys himself (vv. 51–52). That Joseph was fruitful (v. 52) marked God's partial fulfillment of His promise to the patriarchs (17:6, 20; 28:3). The text does not indicate whether Joseph influenced his wife to become a believer in Yahweh, but given Joseph's overall faithfulness to God, it is possible.

According to schedule, the years of plenty ended (41:53). The divine prediction, given to the pharaoh in a dream and interpreted by Joseph, was finally fulfilled, but Egypt had an abundance of food, thanks to the wisdom God had given to His servant. The stage was set for the encounter with Joseph's brothers.

42:1–38. Jacob's Sons Buy Grain in Egypt. After the great bounty followed the great hunger. Jacob's sons came to Egypt in search of food and, without recognizing him, encountered their brother Joseph. The chapter describes people in transition and their relationships to one another.

This is the first appearance of Jacob following the loss of Joseph. Though old and bereaved, Jacob was still the head of his household. He discovered (lit. "saw," 42:1, and "heard," v. 2) that Egypt had grain and ordered his sons to go down to buy food in order to assure the family's survival. The last part of v. 1 contains a perplexing phrase. Most translations read something like, "Why are you looking at each other?" The root *ra'ah*, "to see," is well known; however, the verbal form used here means elsewhere "to meet in combat" or "face one another in battle" (2 Kin. 14:8, 11; 2 Chr. 25:17, 21). The author may have used the phrase to highlight the continued strife in Jacob's household. Jacob sent only ten brothers and kept Benjamin at home.

Joseph's introduction as governor (v. 6) explains why the brothers bowed down to him (in partial fulfillment of 37:7–10). The Hebrew term *shallit*, which is usually translated as "governor," is very rare and may reflect the author's challenge to find an appropriate Hebrew equivalent for Joseph's position in Egypt. Joseph pretended not to know them and spoke brusquely to the brothers (vv. 7, 30). Speaking through an interpreter in a different language (v. 23), the adult Joseph was in an unexpected position of power. He saw his brothers and recognized them immediately while they did *not* recognize him (cf. 37:32–33; see "Joseph in Egypt," p. 183). About twenty-one years had passed since they had sold him into slavery, when all of them had been in their late teens and early twenties. In their late thirties and early forties by this point, all had changed significantly. Joseph was dressed as an Egyptian leader speaking to them in the Egyptian language. Recognizing somebody or something is a key concept in this chapter (42:7–8). Joseph not only recognized his brothers. He also remembered the dreams God had given him about them (v. 9). He knowingly tested the moral fiber of the hapless brothers.

Joseph's charge that his brothers were spies (v. 9) was a serious accusation, but it provided the occasion for the brothers of Joseph to give him information he wanted about the family. The brothers were then put into prison for three days to await a final decision. On the third day, Joseph modified his plan: he would detain only one of the brothers, but they would be required to return with their youngest brother to demonstrate the truthfulness of their account. Joseph introduced an important element in the tense conversation. He mentioned that his fear of God (v. 18) was the rationale for his changed plan. Invoking God reassured his brothers and also introduced God into the conversation. The brothers then talked amongst themselves about their guilt; they imagined their current situation to be a punishment for their treatment of Joseph (v. 21). This realization was theologically significant because it highlighted a clear relationship between guilt (or sin) and punishment. Time had not taken away their guilt but had only amplified it.

Upon hearing their conversation, Joseph turned away and wept (v. 24). The brothers' confession of guilt moved him. The text did not provide an explicit rationale for the selection of Simeon (v. 24) as the hostage. However, since Reuben as the firstborn had sought to intervene on Joseph's behalf (v. 22), the second oldest son was to stand surety. Simeon had also been one of two leaders in the cruel revenge on the Shechemites (34:25; cf. 49:5–7).

On their return trip, the brothers found their payment (lit. "silver") in their grain sacks (42:25–28). This may have been a conscious nod to their earlier greed, selling Joseph for twenty shekels (in weight) of silver (37:28). Upon their arrival in Jacob's camp in Canaan, the brothers reported all that had happened to Jacob. His reaction revealed his pain, and he felt bereaved because he assumed that Joseph was dead and that Simeon might die too (or remain in prison), and he thus refused to allow Benjamin to be lost also (v. 36). His resolute rejection of the idea of Reuben's two sons (v. 37) or Benjamin going to Egypt was accompanied by the observation that Benjamin was the only one of Rachel's sons left (v. 38). It was not a secret in the family that Rachel was the favored wife and that hers were the favored sons. Jacob's family remained divided and in need of healing.

43:1–34. Benjamin Travels with His Brothers to Egypt. Facing an increasingly devastating drought, Jacob finally agreed to allow Benjamin to travel with his brothers to Egypt as their only chance of survival. In Egypt, Joseph's encounter with his brothers culminated in a feast. The extensive dialogues in this chapter form the backdrop to the coming final test of Joseph's brothers in chapter 44.

Surviving the severe (lit. "heavy") famine (cf. 41:56–57) in Canaan (i.e., the land) required a concerted effort. However, unlike his response in 42:1, Jacob was not proactive (cf. 43:10–11). He wavered. The dialogue between Judah and Jacob revisited the known facts (vv. 3–10); in order to demonstrate their integrity, the brothers could return to Egypt only with Benjamin in tow. Israel seems to have concluded that his sons had given information to the Egyptian man that he had not requested from them, namely, that they had another brother. In doing this, they had increased his fears. Judah clarified that the man specifically asked them whether they had another brother, making it impossible for them to hide the fact. Judah offered himself as surety (Gen. 43:9), willing to carry the blame. In this exchange, Judah revealed his deepening character transformation; his tribe would become prominent among Israel's sons (49:8–10) and would include the Messiah (Matt. 1:1–16; Luke 3:23–38).

Finally, Israel agreed to let Benjamin travel with his brothers to Egypt (vv. 11–14)—with a gift in hand (Heb. *minkhah*; cf. 32:13 and sidebar on 4:3–5). Judah referred to Benjamin as a *na'ar* (43:8). This word can encompass a whole range of ages, from a boy to a young man. Based on the internal chronology of Genesis, Benjamin must have been in his twenties since he was born prior to Joseph's trip to Egypt (Gen. 37) yet after the family dwelt in and fled from Shechem (Gen. 34–35; cf. 30:25–43; 31:41). Jacob sent the brothers with the prayer that *'el shaddai* (17:1) would grant them mercy from the ruler of Egypt.

The "men" (not "the brothers" or "the sons") went to Egypt and appeared before Joseph (43:15). Joseph was most interested in the presence of his brother Benjamin, not the gift or the returned payment, and he ordered his steward to prepare a feast in his home (vv. 15–17). Joseph's brothers immediately recognized this as an abnormality and were afraid (v. 18); they decided to make a clean slate regarding the return of their payment (vv. 19–22). Unbeknownst to them, they had passed a character test. The Egyptian steward, a foreigner, ultimately affirmed the God of Jacob's sons; he said that God had given them "treasure" (v. 23; cf. Job 3:21; Prov. 2:4; Is. 45:3) in their sacks. The opening phrase is *shalom lakem*—"peace to you" (translated contextually in this verse variously as "be at ease," "it is alright," "rest assured," etc.). These Hebrew words are a typical Eastern greeting. The word *shalom* is another significant key word in this section (cf. its appearance in vv. 27–28) and implies more than the absence of war. Finally, Simeon was released to his brothers—all seemed well.

Verses 26–30 include an important dialogue between Joseph and his (unsuspecting) brothers after they had given him their gifts and bowed down (vv. 26, 28; cf. 37:7–10). Moved by the sight of Benjamin and the good news about his father's well-being, Joseph slipped out and wept (v. 30). The opening words of v. 30—that Joseph hurried away because *kamar rakhamim*—literally mean that his "compassion/mercy warmed" toward his brother. This phrase is used elsewhere to describe a mother's feeling for her dying child (1 Kin. 3:26), which demonstrates the deeply emotional nature of the interaction.

The seating arrangements at the meal included three groups: (1) the brothers, seated in their birth order; (2) Joseph seated alone; and (3) the Egyptians, who also ate by themselves. To eat with Hebrews was considered to be a *to'ebah* ("an abomination," "detestable," "loathsome"; v. 32; see "Joseph in Egypt," p. 183). This comment both anticipated the changed relationship between Hebrews and Egyptians in Exodus 1 and, at the same time, emphasized the fact that Israel would not be absorbed and integrated into Egyptian society. Benjamin's fivefold portion did not result in envy—the brothers thus passed another character test (v. 34).

44:1–34. Joseph's Cup and Judah's Intervention. Prior to reconciliation, there is conflict. Crises bring out the best (and the worst) in people—as exemplified in Genesis 44. Judah's transformation was illustrated in his speech and represented the change in the characters of Joseph's brothers.

The idyllic meal concluded with the ultimate test of genuineness: Joseph's silver cup. The Hebrew term suggests a large vessel; there is another word for a smaller "cup" (Ex. 25:31, 33–34). In Mesopotamia, divination was performed by observing liquids being mixed in a large cup (e.g., oil poured into water or milk is one example from Mesopotamian sources; cf. Lev. 19:26; Deut. 18:10 for the biblical prohibition of divination). In Egypt, gods were consulted in other ways. Divination by cup is not indicated in the archaeological record in Egypt, but this does not exclude its practice. It would seem unlikely that Joseph actually practiced divination, but the cup may have been designed for that purpose, even if Joseph did not use it in this way.

Judah's increasing preeminence among the brothers is highlighted in 44:14, where he is mentioned first in the list. The description of the brothers' prostration before Joseph employs a stronger term (*napal*) than the one used in 43:26, one that expresses complete submission. Joseph's rhetorical question in 44:15 highlighted the hopelessness of the situation for Jacob's sons: they were foreigners without any rights caught stealing the divination cup of the second-in-command of Egypt. Judah's response included an acknowledgment of their desperate situation, leading to a theologically important moment in the Joseph narrative: Judah declared that God had disclosed their guilt (v. 16). It is possible that this comment points to an admission of earlier guilt. Judah's recognition underlined the biblical notion that sin is foremost an affront to God (Is. 59:2), as Joseph's earlier reply to Potiphar's wife indicated (39:9). Both Judah and Joseph had reached the same point independently in moments of crisis. Judah's offer of collective slavery was rejected by Joseph (44:17), using oath language (cf. v. 7).

Judah's speech not only effectively communicated the grief and mourning of the father but also represented a high point in the transformation of Judah himself from a selfish man into one who was ready to take the place of another in suffering.

45:1–28. Joseph's Encounters in Egypt. Reconciliation and forgiveness are the key words of this chapter. Joseph's self-disclosure created tension and fear in his brothers that was ultimately alleviated by locating everything within the greater picture of God's actions (often behind the scenes of history) for His covenant people.

The tension that had built up in the Joseph narrative was about to be released. Genesis 45 is the theological center of the story. Following Judah's moving speech, Joseph could no longer contain himself (v. 1). While he had been able to show restraint in 43:31, this time he was unable to do so. Once the Egyptian attendants had been ushered out, it was time to make himself known to his brothers. Men become brothers when grace and mercy are extended (cf. 44:1, 3). Joseph's weeping (cf. 42:24; 43:30) was heard even by Pharaoh's household (45:2; see "Joseph in Egypt," p. 183)—a significant detail picked up in v. 16, anticipating the official resolution involving the settlement of Jacob's family.

The shocking and staccato "I am Joseph" (a nominal sentence lit. translated "I Joseph") was followed by the seemingly superfluous question about whether Jacob was still alive (v. 3; cf. 43:27–28; 44:18–34). "Your father" (43:27) becomes "my father." However, his brothers could not answer him, for they were quite fearful. Joseph's second self-disclosure contained the apposition "your brother" (Gen. 45:4) as well as the one piece of information (that he had been "sold into Egypt") that only his brothers would have known.

"God sent me" (v. 5), a phrase expressed three times in varied forms, represents the theological center of Joseph's story (vv. 7, 8; cf. 50:19–21; Acts 7:9–10). The term *shalakh*, "sent," is used to describe somebody sent on a specific mission (Gen. 28:5; Deut. 34:11; Neh. 6:5; Jer. 19:14). It speaks in a unique way about divine providence in the life of His servants. They may not hear His voice, but He is constantly present, leading them in His wisdom according to what is best for them. Joseph's ability to provide a safe haven for God's covenant people for the remaining five years of severe famine (v. 6) was part of God's design.

Joseph's next imperatives in v. 9 emphasized both his longing as well as the seriousness of the situation. Joseph's affirmation that it was God who had made him lord of Egypt (v. 9) reminded the brothers, and reminds the reader, of the God of history who was and is active in the affairs of this planet. Similar to the earlier detailed instruction to the steward (44:4–5), Joseph sent a very specific message to his father (45:9). After his speech, Joseph embraced his brothers and kissed them—two important activities expressing love and concern in Eastern cultures. Only then did his brothers converse with him (v. 15).

Once Pharaoh heard the report (lit. the "sound" or "voice") concerning the presence of Joseph's brothers in Egypt, he supported Joseph's plans (vv. 16–20). The "fat [*kheleb*] of the land" (cf. Is. 1:19) metaphorically describes the ideal conditions of the richness of the land (*kheleb* is often used to describe the best produce or animals; cf. Num. 18:12; Deut. 32:14). Carts (Gen. 45:19) refer most likely to wagons used for transporting goods and drawn by oxen. The reference to clothing (v. 22) completes the transformation of Joseph's brothers and links this section to the opening of the Joseph story. Benjamin's five garments, as well as the three hundred shekels in weight of silver that Joseph gave him, apparently did not generate the same jealous response from the brothers as the robe of many colors (37:3) so many years before. The final instruction in v. 24 from Joseph was to not *ragaz*. This has been variously translated as "become troubled," "quarrel," "worry," or "be angry." This is the only occurrence of the verb in Genesis. Elsewhere, its more literal meaning involves shaking—in fear (Ex. 15:14) or in rage (Prov. 29:9). The final verses of the chapter mark a wonderful contrast to the two previous returns of Jacob's sons, which had caused grief and heartache (37:33–35; 42:36–38). Jacob's reaction is described in terms of physical phenomena. Verse 26 reads literally that "his heart became numb," and v. 27 refers to his spirit (*ruakh*, the same word for "breath") being revived. The final words of the story are Jacob's. The transformation of Joseph's brothers was significant: their first word to their father was concerning Joseph (and not about the gifts, invitation, etc.).

46:1—47:12. Jacob and His Family Move to Egypt. This account of Jacob's journey to Egypt also includes a detailed listing of the names of his male descendants who accompanied him to Goshen. Before initiating the travel to Egypt, sacrifices were offered, and God's voice was heard again. In a night vision (v. 2; 15:5, 12; 20:6; 26:24; 28:12; etc.), God addressed the patriarch using his original name. The usage of the two names Israel and Jacob in this section reminds the reader of the weakness of human design as well as God's power to transform a situation. The Lord's declaration, "I am God" (46:3), provided Jacob with the credentials needed to assure him that God's divine presence would accompany the family to Egypt. The imagery here is of a bodyguard guaranteeing protection and the fulfillment of earlier promises. The prediction that Joseph's hand would be on his father's eyes (v. 4) was a divine promise of a peaceful death.

Following divine encouragement, there was human engagement. Jacob left Beersheba and, together with the entire family, was carried in the carts to Egypt (vv. 5–7). The mention of Jacob's daughters (v. 7) in the list of people going to Egypt suggests that Jacob had more than one daughter (besides Dinah). The migration of Jacob's household included all his descendants.

Verses 8–27 list the names of Jacob's offspring up to the third generation, thus identifying all who went into Egypt. The mention of the children of Israel (lit. "sons of Israel"; v. 8) anticipates Exodus 1:7, where the people had grown into a nation whose size threatened Egypt. Leah's children and grandchildren are listed first (vv. 8–15), followed by Zilpah's (vv. 16–18), Rachel's (vv. 19–22), and finally Bilhah's (vv. 23–25). Ohad, a son of Simeon, is not included in the lists of Num. 26:12 and 1 Chr. 4:24—it is possible that he died without leaving any descendants. In the list of Judah's offspring, Er and Onan are still included (Gen. 46:12) even though they had already died in Canaan (38:6–10; 46:12). The final two verses of this section include relative and grand totals (vv. 26–27). In total, sixty-six descendants (two of them female) born to Jacob and his sons traveled to Egypt. Seventy (Ex. 1:5) represents the grand total, which includes the three living mothers and Jacob himself. Stephen in Acts (Acts 7:14) stated that the total was seventy-five, which may reflect the Septuagint, which has that number both here and in Exodus 1:5. Joseph and his two sons were not counted in the seventy but may have been counted in the seventy-five. The remaining two could be the two sons of Judah who had died (Gen. 46:12). The Septuagint in 46:20, 27 speaks about other sons of Joseph, who could have been added to the list in the Hebrew text to reach the number seventy.

The final section, describing the emotional encounter between father and long-lost son, as well as the presentation of the members of Joseph's family before Pharaoh, concludes most of the action in Joseph's story (46:28–47:12). Joseph took his chariot to meet his father, Israel (see "Joseph in Egypt," p. 183), which marked his high status. Father and son embraced, and Joseph wept on his father's neck (46:29). Joseph's repeated reference to the historic occupation of his family captured the Egyptian distrust of Semitic seminomadic people (46:34). The benefit of a clear separation

between Jacob's family and the Egyptians was twofold: first, by maintaining their distinct lifestyle and expertise, Israel would remain a foreign people group (cf. Gen. 15:13; 17:8; Deut. 10:19; 26:5; Ps. 105:23) and would not assimilate into the Egyptian culture; second, it would help Israel remember the divine promises involving Canaan. Egypt was not their land.

Joseph presented five (unnamed) brothers as well as his father to Pharaoh (Gen. 47:1–10). He particularly emphasized the fact that they had arrived with their flocks and their herds (v. 1) and had moved to Goshen (cf. 45:10; 46:34). Pharaoh's first question involved the occupation of the brothers (47:3). The brothers' reply, that they were shepherds, was different from the description that Joseph had suggested (46:34)—that is, that they worked with livestock. They used the exact term that had earlier been identified as abhorrent to the Egyptians. Pharaoh told them that the land of Egypt was before them (47:6). This represented an open invitation to choose the land that was best suited for the needs of Joseph's family. Pharaoh's search for competent men for his livestock (see "Joseph in Egypt," p. 183) was another open door and offered Joseph's brothers legal protection. Pharaoh's hospitality was based on his high regard for Joseph. Finally, Jacob was brought before Pharaoh, who showed great respect to the aged man, who was, at this point, 130 years old. Jacob blessed Pharaoh. Jacob's reference to his "pilgrimage" made use of the same Hebrew root that marks sojourning as a foreigner (e.g., 12:10; 47:4). Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph were all foreigners and pilgrims waiting to see the fulfillment of God's promises (cf. Heb. 11:8–16). The summary clause of this section describes how Joseph provided his family with property, or a possession (a legal title to a piece of ground; v. 11). God had promised Abraham possession of Canaan (17:8). The inclusion of the name of the land of Rameses (v. 11) as another term for Goshen occurs only here (when they arrived in the land) and in Exodus 12:37 (when they left). In Exodus 1:11, the Hebrews built a supply city with a similar name. In Hebrew, the spelling of the name of the supply city (Ex. 1:11) is different than the spelling of the name of the land (Gen. 47:11; Ex. 12:37), and they were certainly not in the same location. Jacob and his family did not live in the city that later generations of Hebrews built.

47:13–26. Joseph's Wise Administration of the Famine. From Goshen's relative safety and comfort, the reader's view is directed to the larger picture of the massive famine. Joseph's astute management made it possible for the Egyptians to use their silver (vv. 13–14), their herds (vv. 15–17), and their land rights (vv. 18–26) to buy back the grain they had been required to pay as a tax during the years of plenty. Horses are mentioned (v. 17) as one type of animal that Joseph was willing to trade for food. The archaeological record does not indicate that horses were in Egypt before the Second Intermediate Period (17th to 16th centuries B.C.), when they appeared in burials. After this (in the New Kingdom [16th to 11th centuries B.C.] and following), horses are represented in iconography with the Egyptian military and as a status symbol for kings. The horse was associated with nobility, so this indicates that even those of status were in need of food.

There are two possible ways of translating Genesis 47:21. The Hebrew text reads, "He removed them to the cities," perhaps meaning that Joseph reorganized the population, probably temporarily, according to the cities in which the grain was stored. The Septuagint and the Samaritan Pentateuch read, "He made them slaves," meaning that the people were indebted to or working for the pharaoh. The difference can be explained by a scribal error confusing two Hebrew consonants that look very much alike.

The tax exemption of the powerful Egyptian priestly class (v. 22) highlighted their importance and corresponded to known periods from Egyptian history where the Egyptian crown did not tax priestly estates (the most famous is recorded on the Rosetta Stone from the Ptolemaic Period). The 20 percent tax rate on the produce of the land was the same during the famine as it had been during the years of plenty (v. 24; cf. 41:34). Joseph readily acknowledged "buying" both the people and their land (v. 23). Thus, despite the huge economic shift away from private ownership by the people to ownership by the government, the people expressed gratitude to Joseph for saving their lives (47:25; cf. 45:7; 50:20). This highlighted the severity of the crisis and Joseph's effective management of it. Thus, the picture of the people becoming Pharaoh's slaves/servants must be understood in the framework of ancient societies: the patronage system provided protection and security in an interconnected world.

47:27–31. Jacob Prepares for His Death. A description of seventeen years of peaceful living in Egypt (47:28) is followed by Jacob's preparation for his death.

The description of Israel's growth (v. 27) utilizes creation language (Gen. 1:28; cf. notes on Ex. 1:7). The death of Jacob is mentioned several times and brings to an end the patriarchal narrative (47:28–31; 48:21–22; 49:29–32). This section functions as the introductory summary statement, prior to more detailed descriptions. Note the distinction between Israel, the people, (47:27) and Jacob, the patriarch (v. 28). God's promises had been fulfilled: Jacob had seen his family safely established in Egypt, and they were multiplying greatly (v. 27), which is later highlighted in the transition chapter of Exodus 1 (Ex. 1:7, 12, 20).

48:1–22. Jacob Blesses Joseph and His Sons. The visit of Joseph and his two sons marks the beginning of the end. Jacob was settling his affairs and preparing for the important final blessings. A historic review is often part of rituals involving blessings or covenants.

Jacob's adoption of the two sons of Joseph was unexpected (v. 5). Reuben and Simeon, although mentioned, would lose their prominence among the descendants of Jacob (Gen. 49:3–7). Joseph, who was the firstborn of Jacob's favorite wife (although his eleventh son), received the double blessing of the birthright by the inclusion of his two sons. In the adoption process, children were placed upon or close to one's knees to symbolize giving birth. To remind all that Joseph was considered his firstborn and thus received the birthright, Jacob recalled the death of his beloved favorite wife Rachel.

"Who are these?" (48:8) was not only a question stemming from Jacob's poor eyesight but was also most likely an expression related to the adoption process. The practice may have required the verbal identification of those being adopted. Joseph's response was part of the official adoption ritual, leading to Jacob's blessing. The scene contains clear echoes of the earlier scene in which Jacob "stole" Esau's blessing from his father, Isaac (cf. Gen. 27). Common elements include an introductory question (27:18; 48:8), the reference to eye trouble (27:1; 48:10), and the embrace and kiss that is part of the blessing (27:27; 48:10). However, while Isaac had blessed Jacob unwittingly, Jacob's blessing was deliberate. Joseph's response to his father's blessing (he bowed down; v. 12) reflected his respect and love.

Jacob, contrary to Joseph's expectation, placed the right hand not on the firstborn but on Ephraim while Joseph himself received the blessing of his father as the firstborn of Rachel. The practice of assigning the blessing of the firstborn to the second son appears several times in Genesis and reveals God's freedom to elect whomever He wants according to His purpose. Jacob's blessing was prophetically significant. Ephraim did become more prominent than Manasseh. His tribe came to represent the whole northern kingdom (Is. 7:2, 5; Hos. 9:13). Jacob's blessing highlights two important divine characteristics. Because God had fed Jacob (using a verb associated with shepherding) and redeemed him, He would do the same for Joseph's two sons (vv. 15–16). The reference to redemption or deliverance is the first occurrence of this theologically important term (*go'el*), one which is used repeatedly to refer to God's redemptive activity (cf. Ruth 4:1, 6, 8; Ps. 71:4; Jer. 31:10–11).

Joseph reacted to Jacob's apparent error, and his attempt to correct the order was met by strong insistence. While Joseph was displeased, Jacob refused to surrender his prerogative and choice (48:17–20). Distinct from the Genesis 27 story, God's will is not specifically made clear in the narrative.

49:1–28. Jacob's Final Words to His Sons. Jacob's last words are in the form of a testament to his sons written in poetry. It is prophetic in nature. See "The Sons of Jacob and His Final Blessing" (p. 193) for a summary of the most important facts of this testament.

Most of the testaments are comprised of one or two verses. However, the extent and content of Jacob's final words emphasized the importance of two sons in particular—Judah (vv. 8–12) and Joseph (vv. 22–26). While not the firstborn, Judah's character transformation, described in the previous chapters in the Joseph narrative, had prepared him for a more significant leadership role. This, combined with the fact that Reuben (Gen. 35:22; 49:3-4) and Simeon and Levi (Gen. 34:25, 30; 49:5) had all been found wanting, left Judah as the next in line. Although he made poor choices early in life (Gen. 37:26; 38:1–18), he allowed the Tamar incident (Gen. 38:24–26) to humble and transform him. Jesus's messianic title of "the Lion of the tribe of Judah" (Rev. 5:5) is based on this text and the fact that lions were symbols of kingship in the ANE. The scepter (*shebet*) of the first line of v. 10 is parallel to the *mekhoqeq* (variously rendered as "lawgiver," "ruler's staff," "prince") in the second line of the verse. Overall, the text of 49:10 represents a challenge for translators, particularly the phrase mentioning Shiloh. Some render it as "until Shiloh comes."

Other suggested translations include "until he to whom it belongs shall come" or (based on a textual change) "until tribute comes to him." The Hebrew term is the same as the place name Shiloh but seems to hint at a future powerful leader of Judah. The text is practically quoted in Ezekiel 21:27 to describe a Davidic King. The passage in Genesis announces the arrival of a future king from Judah and points beyond David to Christ as the true messianic King (see "Introduction to the Pentateuch," p. 120).

The imagery of the even longer section describing the blessing of Joseph is varied and includes images denoting agricultural fertility (v. 22) and military prowess (vv. 23–24). The divine epithet *'abir*, "mighty," appears repeatedly in the OT (Ps. 132:2, 5; Is. 49:26; 60:16) and is followed by two additional metaphors: the Shepherd (cf. Gen. 48:15; Pss. 23:1; 80:1; Heb. 13:20) and the unique "Stone of Israel," which is distinct from the more often used "Rock" (Heb. *tsor*) of Israel (Deut. 32:15, 18, 30–31). Jacob's God had many characteristics and metaphorical names, but ultimately, He was the familiar God of his father (v. 25; cf. Gen. 49:25).

49:29—50:14. Jacob's Death and Burial. Following Jacob's final words, this section describes Jacob's death and interment in Canaan. The final scene recounting Jacob's death echoes his final words of admonition regarding his burial place (cf. 47:29–30). Interestingly, this death scene is referred to in the list of faith heroes in Hebrews 11:21. Jacob's expression of faith involved his blessings as well as his worship. He recognized that the land of God's promise was not in Egypt but in Canaan. After he had finished instructing his sons, he drew his feet up and died. Breathing one's last breath and being gathered to one's people is

The Sons of Jacob and His Final Blessing

Mother	Son (birth order)	Meaning of name	Birth reference	Order within blessing	Keyword(s) of blessing	Blessing reference
Leah	Reuben	"Behold, a son"	29:32	1	*pakhaz* (reckless, unstable)	49:3–4
	Simeon	"Hearing"	29:33	2	*'ap* (anger) and *qashah* (cruel)	49:5–7
	Levi	"Attachment"	29:34	3	*'ap* (anger) and *qashah* (cruel)	49:5–7
	Judah	"Praise"	29:35	4	*'aryeh* (lion)	49:8–12
Bilhah	Dan	"Judgment"	30:6	7	*nakhash* (serpent or snake)	49:16–18
	Naphtali	"Wrestle"	30:8	10	*'ayyalah* (deer or doe)	49:21
Zilpah	Gad	"Good fortune"	30:11	8	*gud* (attack)	49:19
	Asher	"Happy"	30:13	9	*shamen lekhem* (rich food)	49:20
Leah	Issachar	"Reward"	30:18	6	*khamod gerem* (strong donkey)	49:14–15
	Zebulun	"Abode"	30:20	5	*'aniyyah* (ship)	49:13
Rachel	Joseph	"May He add"	30:24	11	*parah* (bear fruit)	49:22–26
	Benjamin	"Son of the right hand"	35:18	12	*ze'eb* (wolf)	49:27

a formulaic expression marking death in Genesis (cf. 25:8, 17; 35:29). Jacob's fetal-like position reflects Scripture's understanding of death as sleep (e.g., Pss. 6:5; 115:17; Eccl. 9:5; Dan. 12:2; John 11:11–13).

At Jacob's death, Joseph collapsed onto his father, wept over him, and kissed him (Gen. 50:1). The strength of the emotional bond between Joseph and his father is highlighted by the minimal role that Joseph's brothers played. They first appear in v. 8, describing the large procession that traveled to Canaan for Jacob's burial. Joseph's order to embalm his father (v. 2) reflected the high status of Joseph's family in Egyptian society. Jacob was treated as nobility. Ancient Egyptians believed that to have eternal life, one needed to retain the body, which is why they practiced mummification. In Jacob's case, embalming was required for his journey to his burial site in Canaan. The physicians (lit. "those who healed") needed forty days to complete their task (v. 3)—a time period that appears repeatedly in the OT (Gen. 7:17; Ex. 24:18; 34:28; Deut. 9:9; 1 Kin. 19:8). Following the forty days of embalming was a thirty-day period of mourning, for a total of seventy days. The nation of Israel, much later, grieved the deaths of Aaron and Moses for thirty days (Num. 20:29; Deut. 34:8). The mourning period would eventually involve only seven days (1 Sam. 31:13).

Authorized by Pharaoh, Joseph, his brothers, and a number of officials of Pharaoh traveled to Canaan to bury Jacob. He had requested to be placed in the tomb he had made for himself (v. 5). Joseph's unusual use of messengers when communicating with Pharaoh may have been a clear recognition of his state of impurity following his contact with a corpse (vv. 4–5; cf. similarly Esth. 4:2). The military presence (marked by the reference to chariots and horsemen in Gen. 50:9) was a harbinger of future events associated with the Exodus, using similar language (Ex. 14:9, 17–18, 23, 26, 28).

The seven days of mourning at the threshing floor of Atad (Gen. 50:10) is an example of an important Israelite ritual practice (e.g., Ex. 12:15; Lev. 13:4–5; 14:8) and is associated with mourning rites elsewhere in Scripture (1 Sam. 31:13; Job 2:13). The recognition of Jacob's burial party as Egyptian (Gen. 50:11) by the local Canaanites highlighted the adaptation of Joseph's family in Egypt and was a marker of irony, considering the opening verses of Exodus, describing a completely different reality. The Egyptian entourage and the fact that Jacob's sons were probably wearing Egyptian clothing would have led those looking at the mourning ritual from a distance to identify them as Egyptians. The location was renamed Abel Mizraim (lit. "mourning of Egypt"), which reechoed the grievous sorrow that Jacob had felt earlier over his loss of Joseph (37:35).

50:15–21. Joseph Assures His Brothers. The need for the assurance of Joseph's forgiveness highlights the challenge of true reconciliation. Seventeen years (Gen. 47:9, 28) after the emotional reunion between Joseph and his brothers, a lingering doubt remained. This illustrates the common struggle to accept God's grace, compassion, and pardon.

When the brothers twice reported to Joseph their father's plea that Joseph would forgive them (v. 17), Joseph reciprocated by twice encouraging his brothers not to be afraid (vv. 19, 21). Joseph had recognized God's involvement in his personal history, as well as the history of the people surrounding him (cf. 45:5–8). The full significance of Jacob's death weighed upon Joseph's brothers following their return to Egypt (50:15), and they projected malevolent motives on Joseph. Joseph's reaction reflected concern and empathy. He spoke kindly and reassuringly to them (50:21; lit. "he spoke to their hearts"; cf. 34:3); he had recognized their evil intent (50:20), but God had meant it for good. Genuine forgiveness toward others is grounded in God's forgiveness (Eph. 4:32).

50:22–26. Joseph's Death. Joseph's death set the stage for a new chapter in God's story. Israel's slavery and liberation from Egypt (Ex. 1) was not yet on the horizon, but Joseph's last words referring to Israel's return to Canaan represent the introduction to God's story of redemption.

There is a general decrease in the longevity of the patriarchs, culminating with Joseph at the end of Genesis. Joseph's age was considered the ideal age in Egyptian sources, but his decreased life span (when compared to his ancestors) underscores an important theme in Genesis: following the Fall, life on earth has been on a downward trajectory, moving further and further away from the Creator's ideal for humanity. Yet, God was on the move. Joseph said that God would surely *paqad* ("take care of," "come to aid"; lit. "visit")them (50:24–25). This word appears twice in Joseph's final statement and later reappears in a similar context in Exodus 3:16, 4:31, and 13:19. He also promised that God

would bring them out of Egypt. The word here is a verbal form of *'alah*, used forty-two times in the OT to describe Israel's rescue from Egypt; the phrase functions as an important bridge to God's future acts of salvation. God's oath (v. 24) suggested the assurance of the fulfillment of His promises. Similarly, the oath of Joseph's brothers to bring Joseph's bones back to Canaan (v. 25) would ultimately be fulfilled during the time of Joshua (Ex. 13:19; Josh. 24:32).

Genesis began with the fullness of life: human life to be enjoyed in fellowship with God. It closes with a corpse: the embalmed body of Joseph. The bones were a symbol not only of death but also of hope (Ezek. 37:11–14). In this case, their presence anticipated a journey to Canaan. The story was not finished. It would continue to unfold throughout the rest of Scripture and will lead to everlasting hope for those who wait for the heavenly Canaan.

EXODUS

INTRODUCTION

Title and Authorship. The name "Exodus" derives from the LXX translation, abbreviated from a fuller title "The Exodus of the Children of Israel from Egypt" and adopted by the Latin Vulgate as "Exodus." The original Hebrew name is *we'elleh shemot*, "and these are the names of" (or simply *shemot*, "names"), taken from the opening words of the Hebrew text, as was customary for the books of the Pentateuch.

The author is identified as Moses in several explicit statements where he was told by God to write certain things down in a scroll (sometimes translated as "book") so they could be remembered (Ex. 17:14; 24:4; cf. 34:27). It is also stated that he read to the people from the covenant scroll (book) that he had written (24:7). The authorship by Moses is confirmed in later OT books where reference is made to the "law of Moses" (Josh. 8:31–32; 1 Kin. 2:3; 2 Kin. 14:6; 21:8; Ezra 6:18; Neh. 13:1; Dan. 9:11–13; Mal. 4:4). In the NT, Jesus specifically referred to Moses as the author of Exodus 3:6 (Mark 12:26) and the Torah (John 5:46–47; 7:19), as did also the apostles (Acts 3:22; Rom. 10:5).

The internal evidences of the book attest that the author was someone who was well acquainted with the language and customs of Egypt, was a contemporary eyewitness of the wilderness wanderings, and possessed a high level of education and literary skill. Moses, who received the highest education and military training in the court of Pharaoh, possessed these characteristics.

Date. If the biblical premise that Moses was the author of Exodus is accepted, then the date of the event of the Exodus provides the date for its composition. That date is evidenced by several key chronological passages (Judg. 11:26; 1 Kin. 6:1) and the nineteen generations enumerated between Korah and Solomon in 1 Chronicles 6:33–37. These internal chronological data together with the Jubilee cycle recorded in the Talmud point to a date in the fifteenth century B.C.

Backgrounds. Genesis provides a foundational setting, encompassing God's Creation, the Flood and dispersal of nations, the specific call of Abraham, and the covenant promise to establish great nations through his descendants. The book establishes how, in God's providence, a faithful Joseph, followed by his father and brothers, was saved in the land of Egypt in the historical turmoil of hardship and famine. Exodus continues this history of God's people in Egypt. It spans the gap from the death of Joseph to the birth of Moses, Moses's exile and return, the miraculous events leading up to the deliverance of the Hebrews from Egypt in the event of the Exodus, the codification of the law, the construction of the sanctuary, and culminates in God's divine presence entering into the wilderness tabernacle upon its completion.

The chronology of Egyptian kings of the Eighteenth Dynasty has not yet been firmly established, but based on the internal biblical evidence and its approximate correlation with Egyptian history, the events of the first two chapters correspond to the beginning of that dynasty. Many have suggested that Thutmose I might have issued the death decree for all the Hebrew male children and that his daughter Hatshepsut could have been the princess who rescued Moses from the Nile River. While names of the royal family are not given in the Pentateuch, this theory is made more plausible by the dynastic crisis that enveloped the royal family in the first several generations because no male heir was born to the chief queens. After the death of her father, Thutmose I, and the short reign of her husband Thutmose II, Hatshepsut assumed kingship over Egypt as coregent with her half brother and nephew, Thutmose III. In this correlation of events, it would have been

from Thutmose III that Moses fled after killing the Egyptian taskmaster. During Moses's forty years in the wilderness of Sinai, not only did Thutmose III conduct a record sixteen military campaigns in the territory of Canaan, perhaps partly in search of Moses, but his stepmother Hatshepsut died a few years after Moses fled. Moses would have returned to face either Thutmose III or his son Amenhotep II. The systematic proscription (destruction) of all records of Hatshepsut at the end of Thutmose III's or the beginning of Amenhotep II's reign suggests the threat of a rival and corresponds to the return of Moses.

Historical records of the early Eighteenth Dynasty hint at the plagues, the Exodus, and the death of the Egyptian army in the Red Sea, but these are few. The Egyptians of the New Kingdom who left vivid pictorial and historical records of their military campaigns never recorded a defeat, only victories. There is no reason to expect that the administration of Egypt would record on its temple walls a history of the most devastating series of judgments on Egypt and its gods or the defeat of their army in the Red Sea (Ps. 78:43–51; 105:26–36; 135:8–9; 136:10–15).

Theology and Purpose. The book of Exodus is theologically very rich and diverse, making it difficult to identify a particular theme as its center. The following survey identifies the theology of God's presence as one of the most important refrains in Exodus. The narrative is focused upon God's desire and willingness to dwell among His people, and the book closes when God is, in fact, dwelling among them in the sanctuary.

1. God's Presence in the Midst of Affliction. The book opens with a reminder to the reader that only seventy Israelites had descended to Egypt and that they had all died there. But the intention is to contrast the past with the present. While in Egypt, the people had been blessed by the Lord and, in fulfillment of the promises He made to Abraham, they multiplied considerably. God was with them, making them fruitful and transforming twelve small tribes into a people. The divine blessing was opposed by Pharaoh, who tried to control the population growth through the oppression of excessive work and then by asking the Hebrew midwives to kill newborn male children. Both attempts failed because the Lord was with His people, and in a special way, He blessed the midwives who disobeyed Pharaoh. The silent presence of God with His people in Egypt preserved them and caused them to grow. It was through His protective care that the life of the child Moses was preserved and he became the son of the daughter of Pharaoh.

2. God and Moses Descend to Egypt. After leaving Egypt and perhaps feeling abandoned by God, Moses met the Lord at the base of Mount Sinai. The divine presence revealed itself for the first time in the book of Exodus to one person, Moses, and in a strange form: "In a flame of fire from the midst of a bush" (3:2). Very often in the Bible, the manifestation of God's presence is accompanied by fire to indicate that God is unapproachable to humans. God remains the transcendental God. The divine presence is holy, unique, distinct, and should be approached with reverence (3:3–5). God expressed to Moses His concern for what was happening to the Israelites in Egypt (v. 7). This divine interest is dynamic and expresses itself in salvific action: God wanted Moses to go with Him to Egypt. God was searching for an instrument through whom He would accomplish His plan. He told Moses that He would be with him (v. 12). The Lord was going down to Egypt, to the place of enslavement, to the place where His people were.

God's visit to Egypt had two main purposes. First, He was going to destroy the Egyptians' sources of security, which were the powers of their gods and the economic production of the country. Through the ten plagues, the Lord brought Egypt to its knees and left the country in economic ruin. The situation became so desperate that Pharaoh's officials told him to let the Israelites go because the land was destroyed (10:7). The Egyptians had used the Israelites for their own benefit, but now the presence of the Israelites' God devastated them. God's judgment was also against the Egyptian gods (12:12). These gods, whom the Egyptians believed would protect them from plagues, were impotent before the Lord.

The second reason for God going down to Egypt was to redeem His people from the powerful hand of Pharaoh (3:8, 17). This redemption was possible through the blood of a lamb (Ex. 12). The Passover lamb was a reminder to the Israelites that their redemption from Egypt was possible through a bloody sacrifice. The life of the Passover lamb substituted for the life of the firstborn. During the plagues, God's presence among His people protected them, and He finally led them out of Egypt.

3. God's Presence during the Exodus. Moses received a very specific assignment from the Lord: "When you have brought the people out of

Egypt, you [pl.] should serve God on this mountain" (3:12). God made an appointment with the people of Israel. In Egypt, He would speak to them through Moses, but on Sinai, He would speak to them personally, and they would experience God's majestic presence in a unique way.

After leaving Egypt, God's presence became visible, powerful, and providential. It was visible in a pillar of cloud during the day and in a pillar of fire during the night (13:22). He mysteriously hid Himself in order to reveal Himself. The cloud and the fire represented the mystery of God's constant presence and His transcendence—there is a natural distance between the Creator and His creatures. The divine presence was also powerful. He protected His people and overcame their enemies (14:4). The Egyptian armies drew near to attack Israel, but the Lord fought for them and sheltered His people (v. 19). The Lord looked down from the pillar of cloud and destroyed their enemies, forcing the Egyptians to confess that the Lord was fighting against them (v. 25). God's presence among His people was also providential. During the Israelites' trek through the wilderness, He supplied water (15:23–25) and bread for them (16:4). The Israelites saw the glory of the Lord through His provision of food for them (16:10–13). The wilderness was a place of danger for the people, but there they were learning to depend exclusively on the power of the divine presence among them.

4. God's Presence in the Tabernacle. Approaching the next climax of their journey, the Israelites reached Mount Sinai to meet with the Lord (cf. 3:12). In preparation for the meeting, they were to consecrate themselves to Him, and then Moses was to lead them to the foot of Mount Sinai to meet with God (19:17). The Lord descended on Mount Sinai with power accompanied by thunder, lightning, a thick cloud, and the sound of a trumpet (19:16, 18). Yahweh and His people met together in the most glorious experience of God's presence and nearness the Israelites would ever have. This event transformed Sinai into the first Israelite sanctuary. According to the instructions God gave to Moses, the people were not to have access to the mountain (19:12) because it had become holy through God's presence. A fence was placed around the mountain to avoid any violation of its holiness.

At the foot of the mountain, an altar was built (24:4), and only a limited group of young men could approach the altar to offer sacrifices (24:5; similar to the court of the sanctuary). Access to the mountain was limited to Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and the seventy elders (24:1). They could go up to the mountain only after the covenant had been ratified (24:6–8), to worship the Lord "from afar" (24:1; equivalent to the Holy Place). Only Moses was allowed to approach the Lord (24:2) at the top of the mountain (the Most Holy Place). There the glory of the Lord was revealed to him in a special way, and there he received from the Lord the Ten Commandments (24:12). Sinai indeed became a sanctuary. Later the Lord told Moses that Sinai was not His permanent dwelling place and that He wanted to dwell among His people. They were to build a sanctuary so that He could dwell among them (25:8).

Sanctuary theology plays an important role in Exodus. First, according to this theology, access to the sanctuary presupposes redemption. God redeemed Israel from Egypt, entered into a covenant with them, and then asked them to build Him a sanctuary. The divine intention was, from the very beginning of the narrative, for God to be near them by dwelling among them (29:45–46). As already indicated, the book looks forward to that moment and ends when that goal is achieved (40:34–38). This suggests that access to the sanctuary assumes harmony between God and the worshipers. Sin is alien to the divine dwelling.

Second, the sanctuary theology of Exodus reveals that God's presence in the sanctuary was a manifestation of divine condescension. During their journey to the promised land, every Israelite resided in a tent. Similarly, the Lord wanted to make His home in a tent—to be among His people. He chose this dwelling not because He had physical needs that they could satisfy but in order to identify with His people. The sacrifices were not food for Him; when the Israelites adopted the pagan idea that the sacrifices were food for the gods, He rejected their offerings (Ps. 50:7–15). They had nothing with which to enrich or bribe Him. Rather, it was Yahweh who was the giver. His presence among them blessed Israel by providing for them a religious and national identity (33:16). Through the sanctuary, the Lord gave Himself to Israel, revealing His nature as a loving and just God who should be worshiped. The sanctuary was the expression of a divine longing: His desire to be near and among His people.

Third, the sanctuary was a meeting place. Mount Sinai was the first Israelite sanctuary where God met with His people (3:12), and what happened there was to be perpetuated in the tabernacle. The sanctuary would be the

place where God would connect with His children, a place made holy by His glory (29:43). The structure inside the courtyard was called the tent or tabernacle of meeting because it was the meeting place for God and His people. Their coming together had the purpose of revealing to the Israelites that Yahweh was their God (29:45–46).

Fourth, the theology of the sanctuary in Exodus indicates that the sanctuary is the center of divine activity. It was located in the heart of the camp as a place where God *revealed His will* to His people. On Sinai, He proclaimed to Israel the Ten Commandments of the covenant (20:1–20) and later, the law would be located in the Most Holy Place. From there the Lord would continue to reveal His will to the people (25:22). In the sanctuary, God *reigned as king* over the entire world. There was a divine movement from this central location to all the earth. The Lord as a warrior (15:3) fought for His people and caused the nations of Canaan to be afraid of Him (15:14, 15). The sanctuary was also the place from which *God blessed* (20:24) and *guided Israel* (40:36–38). For the Israelites, it was the source of life for individuals as well as the nation and where they could go to express their gratitude to God.

Fifth, the sanctuary is a place of forgiveness. Although the sanctuary and sin were incompatible, the incident of the golden calf indicated that the merciful God who would soon dwell there dispensed forgiveness from His dwelling place. The worship of the golden calf was a violation of the covenant, and the Lord treated it as such. His presence was unable to coexist with sin and threatened to consume His rebellious people (32:9, 10). When God appeared to Moses in the midst of the bush, the bush was burning, and yet it was not burned up (3:2) because the presence of the Lord sanctified it. But at Sinai, because of Israel's sin, they were imperiled by God's presence.

It was only because of the mediation of Moses that God, from His dwelling place, decided to reveal His loving and merciful character by forgiving His people. He, not Moses (32:32–33), would bear the sins of the people in order for them to remain in His presence (34:7). Forgiveness was granted, and the covenant was renewed. Moses went to the top of Sinai, and there he heard the voice of the Lord proclaiming not the law but His willingness to forgive His people for their sins, rebellions, and iniquities. He was willing to bear their sins. The sanctuary became not only the meeting place for Yahweh and His redeemed people but also a place of atonement. God was willing to deal with the sin problem from His own dwelling place. There, He and the repentant sinner could meet in order for Him to remove the sin from His presence but not the sinner.

5. The Earthly and Heavenly Dwellings. According to Exodus, the Israelite sanctuary points to a greater heavenly one. The Lord showed Moses a model of the sanctuary he was going to build (e.g., 25:9, 40). Most likely, Moses saw the heavenly sanctuary (the original) and/or a miniature model of it adapted to the needs of the Israelites. There are several reasons to support this suggestion. First, according to ANE religions, the earthly temples of the gods were considered to be a representation of the heavenly temple. Second, the OT itself indicates that there is a temple in heaven, in which Yahweh dwells. There was a connection between this earthly dwelling and the heavenly one. According to 1 Kings 8:30, when God's people pray in the earthly sanctuary/temple, God will hear their prayers in the heavenly one. The Psalms also testify about a heavenly temple where God listens to our prayers (18:6) and from where He descends to help us (vv. 9–10). God is clearly perceived in the OT as dwelling in a heavenly temple (e.g., Ps. 11:4; 102:18–19; Mic. 1:2–3). It is this dwelling that served as a pattern for the earthly one.

Third, the biblical concept of a heavenly sanctuary is also found in the NT. Hebrews argues, referring back to Exodus 25:9, that the earthly sanctuary was a copy/model of the heavenly one and, therefore, the heavenly is superior to the earthly (8:1–2, 5). The same applies to the description of the sanctuary in the book of Revelation (e.g., 11:19; 15:5, 8).

The book of Exodus indicates that behind the Israelites' sanctuary there was a sublime reality—God's heavenly abode. This is the place in heaven where God dwells among His creation. From there, He rules over creation, blesses and judges His creatures, and reveals His will to them. It is the center of worship in the universe. This is also the place where God applies the benefit of the atonement to repentant sinners, made possible through the mediation of Christ, and where the mystery of atonement will reach its consummation, resulting in the cleansing of the universe (cf. Dan. 8:14; Heb. 9:23; for more on the theology of the sanctuary in Exodus, see "Sanctuary, Covenant, Worship, and Forgiveness" (p. 226) and "Creation, Sabbath, and the Sanctuary" (p. 231).

COMMENTARY

1:1—18:27

DELIVERANCE FROM EGYPT

The Exodus is the most remembered divine act of deliverance recorded in Scripture. In this first section of the book of Exodus, the historical events leading to Israel's departure from Egypt are described, from their suffering at the hands of Pharaoh to their arrival at Mount Sinai. Chapters 1–4 describe the sojourn in Egypt and the birth of Moses, his rescue from the Nile River, his youth and eventual exile from Egypt. Taking things into one's own hands, without trusting in the timing of God, never works out well. But Moses grew into a person God could use, and He spoke to him from the burning bush, calling him to prophetic leadership. Chapters 5:1—15:21 recount Moses's journey back to Goshen, God's miraculous judgments of salvation in the ten plagues, and the Exodus from Egypt, culminating in the crossing of the Red Sea. With God all things are possible, and what He says will come to pass. Chapters 15:22—18:27 provide the itinerary and challenges the Hebrews faced as they traveled to Sinai, recounting the miraculous care of a loving God who provided fresh water to drink, manna from heaven, and victory over the Amalekites.

1:1–22

Condition of the People in Egypt

The first chapter of Exodus serves as a transition from the death of Jacob and Joseph in Genesis to the generations in the period of the sojourn and their descent into slavery. God had not forsaken His people. Just as God's providence had provided salvation through the faithfulness of Joseph, the birth of Moses ushered in a new chapter for the descendants of Abraham.

1:1–6. Sojourn in Egypt. The length of time between the entrance of Israel into Egypt (Gen. 46) and the return of Moses to Egypt ahead of the Exodus event—the period of the Egyptian sojourn—has been a matter of debate, with two lines of thought concerning how this should be understood (see "The Four-Hundred-Thirty-Year Sojourn," p. 211). In Exodus 1, the movement from those years when the people were favored by the king of Egypt to those years when they suffered under a Pharaoh who did not know Joseph (Ex. 1:8) reminds us of the changing circumstances in life that are often beyond one's control.

1:7–14. God's Blessing in the Midst of Slavery. God blessed Jacob's descendants in Egypt—they were fruitful and grew strong and numerous (Ex. 1:7). The three verbs used here are taken from Genesis 1:21, 22, and 28 and emphasize the rapid growth of the tribe of Jacob under the blessings and presence of the Creator. Even though Joseph and his brothers had died, God was faithful to His promise and blessed their descendants. This king who was unfamiliar with Joseph probably refers to a king of the newly established Eighteenth Dynasty of Egypt. The previous generation of Asiatic Hyksos rulers who had infiltrated the ranks of the Egyptians had been expelled. This dynasty instilled a fear of foreigners and built on a general disdain for other ethnicities that had existed since Egypt's earliest history. This included the Hebrews.

If Joseph lived during the Twelfth Dynasty of the Middle Kingdom, his contribution to saving Egypt from the seven-year famine would have long been forgotten. If he lived during the Fifteenth Dynasty of the Second Intermediate Period under the Asiatic Hyksos, the events might still be in the collective memory but simply ignored. Accordingly, some translators render the Hebrew *lo' yada'* as "meant nothing" instead of "did not know"; *yada'* can refer to relationships that transcend mere intellectual knowledge (e.g., Gen. 4:1). Either way, the new king would not have had a relationship with Joseph that tied the king to any previous administration's goodwill. The new king, once subjugated by the Asiatic Hyksos, became the oppressor of the Hebrews. This reflects the human condition. If given a chance, the oppressed often becomes the oppressor. The cities that the Hebrews built, Pithom and Raamses (v. 11), were storage cities made out of mud brick, as all cities in ancient Egypt were. It is nearly certain that Raamses was located at modern Tal ed-Dab'a/Qantir (for more information, see "Archaeology and the Bible," p. 77). Here, construction of a major city began in the period of the Hyksos and continued into the early Eighteenth Dynasty before it was abandoned in the first part of Amenhotep II's reign. Construction began again in the late Eighteenth Dynasty and continued into the early Nineteenth Dynasty. It is theorized that the name was later updated to reflect the location of a major palace there in the time of Ramesses II (see commentary on Gen. 46:1—47:12 for a discussion of the land with a

similar name). While this slavery aimed at controlling population, the subjugation of the Hebrews did not put an end to the divine blessing. God strengthens His children in the midst of their weakness (2 Cor. 12:9–10).

1:15–22. God's Blessing and the Threat of Genocide. The Pharaoh, possibly Thutmose I, resorted to ordering the extermination of all newborn males. In this case, genocide was used for population control (Ex. 1:15–20). He began by ordering the Hebrew midwives to execute the babies at childbirth, but the Bible reports that the women feared God (v. 17) and honored the sanctity of life. The fact that the term "midwives" is mentioned seven times and their names are recorded while the king of Egypt remains nameless testifies to the power of moral right over civil might. God honored these women and provided for their basic needs. Pharaoh finally commanded his people to cast every Hebrew male infant into the river. One cannot help but be reminded of the command by Herod the Great when he sent his soldiers to Bethlehem over 1,500 years later (Matt. 2:16–18). Neither decree could keep God from fulfilling His ultimate plan of raising up a deliverer.

2:1—4:31

The Birth, Life, and Call of Moses

Considering the internal biblical chronology, Moses was born around 1527 B.C., the youngest son of Amram and Jochebed. He was born into slavery under a death decree, but God would dramatically alter history by ensuring his rescue and subsequent training in the court of Pharaoh. God is always sovereign, regardless of the plans of the enemy of God's people (epitomized here by Pharaoh).

2:1–10. Hidden for the Service of God. Following his birth, Moses was first kept at home quietly for three months until another means for his safety could be planned. The Hebrew terminology for the box in which Moses was placed is *tebat* (construct form of *tebah*) *gome'*. These are Egyptian loanwords describing a basket made from the papyrus plant. Papyrus was often employed to construct small water vessels used along the Nile (which can be seen depicted in Egyptian paintings). The term *sup* is also an Egyptian word that is used to refer to the reeds where Moses was placed. This is the second and only other use of the Hebrew term *tebah*, which first appeared in the Flood story in Genesis 6, where it is used seven times (6:14 [2x], 15, 16, [2x], 18, 19). The use of this unique word reminds the reader of God's providence and salvation during the universal Flood and anticipates Moses's rescue. In both cases, God used *tebat* to protect His people from water and guarantee their survival. Under the watchful eye of his sister Miriam, Moses was placed in the marshy tracts of the Nile (2:1–5).

The princess who rescued Moses is not named, but she may well have been Hatshepsut, who some twenty years later would become Pharaoh over Egypt due to the dynastic crisis surrounding the lack of a male heir. Archaeological evidence indicates that two palaces along the Pelusaic branch of the Nile near Avaris, known later as Pi-Ramesses, were built at the beginning of the Eighteenth Dynasty and may have been the location from which the princess went out to bathe. The Nile was sanctified as the Egyptian god *Hapi*, who unified Upper and Lower Egypt, and was the source of life for the nation. It may well have been that the daughter of Pharaoh, knowing that there was no male heir, perceived this child to be a gift of the Nile god to solve Egypt's dilemma of dynastic succession. Later, after Moses had been brought up by his mother until the age of twelve (cf. PP 244) and presented at the palace, his adoptive mother named him Moses because she drew him out of the water.

Moses is an Egyptian name, *mes* or *mesi* meaning "son of" or "the one born of." This was appropriate for a dynasty where the kings were named Ka-mose ("son of Ka"), Ah-mose ("son of Akh"), and Thut-mose ("son of Thoth")—each portrayed as the son of one of the gods of Egypt. Moses refused the divine element of his name when he ultimately rejected the crown (Heb. 11:24–25). He modified his Egyptian name and rendered it in Hebrew as *mosheh*, which is from the verb meaning "to draw out." Pharaoh's daughter snatched him from death so that he might accomplish God's plan for his life.

2:11–15. Not by Human Strength. Moses was forty years of age when he slew the Egyptian taskmaster and buried his body in the sand (Acts 7:23). Groomed and educated to be the next king of Egypt (PP 245), he saw what was taking place and had compassion for his brothers, just as the princess who rescued him was moved to compassion for him. He confronted the oppressor and took the side of the enslaved and destitute. Moses believed that the Hebrews would declare him their new leader (Acts 7:25), but instead, they turned on him. The enslaved did not realize their plight and were not ready for freedom. How often do those enslaved by sin prefer their dark situation over the freedom offered by the Deliverer!

Which pharaoh attempted to have Moses killed? It is unlikely to have been Hatshepsut, Moses's adoptive mother, who reigned as full regent. In the dynastic crisis that followed the death of her husband Thutmose II, his son Thutmose III was declared king, but being too young to rule, Hatshepsut had taken power on his behalf and later usurped all authority from him. When Thutmose III did come of age, Hatshepsut retained that position as full regent and declared that because she was the daughter of Thutmose I she was his rightful heir. The temple at Deir el-Bahri declared her to be the divine daughter of Amun and Hathor. She took on royal titles and became the first female ruler of the New Kingdom of Egypt. It is not difficult to imagine the rivalry and jealousy that must have developed between Thutmose III and Moses. Moses's slaying of the Egyptian taskmaster and his subsequent flight from Egypt gave Thutmose III the opportunity to become the sole heir of the mightiest power on earth.

As this earthly struggle for power was taking place, there was another controversy taking place in the heart of Moses. To be king of Egypt meant to be inducted into the rituals of Egypt—to accept that he was a son of the gods, the divine pharaoh, Horus incarnate. He wrestled with issues of allegiance and loyalty. This was a test of faith. He did not flee for his life in fear of the king's anger (Heb. 11:27). He understood that his act had ruined his opportunity to free his people by his own mighty hand (cf. Ex. 3:19; 4:13; Acts 7:22). By faith, he was led by God into the wilderness where he could unlearn the sophisticated and mysterious refinements of Egyptian court life. Moses was not yet prepared to lead the people out of Egypt. He needed to learn to rely not on himself but solely on God, who would accomplish the deliverance of Israel through His own power and strength. For Moses, this would take another forty years. The exercise of daily self-denial and constant dependence on God remains a challenge for all Christians.

2:16–22. God Provides. Eventually, Moses arrived in Midian. In this period of history, the Midianites lived as nomads and moved between the territories to the east of the Gulf of Aqaba (modern Jordan and Saudi Arabia) and to the west (the Sinai Peninsula). It is to Sinai where Moses fled, and he eventually arrived at a well in Midian (see 3:1; cf. PP 247). It is customary still today for Bedouin women, not men, to draw water for their flocks. Here Moses once again delivered the weak from the hand of the strong—the Midianite priest's daughters from the shepherds—but this time he took the role of a servant and watered the women's flocks for them, an act unusual both then and today. Notice that he was identified by Reuel's daughters as an Egyptian. Perhaps on account of his dress, hairstyle, demeanor, and speech, Moses appeared to be Egyptian, but he was, in fact, their distant relative. Moses agreed to dwell with Reuel and subsequently entered into marriage with Zipporah. The name of their son Gershom means "banishment," an expression of how Moses felt living in the wilderness, separated from his people and the land that he had known.

2:23–25. God and the Suffering of Israel. For Moses, the time of banishment was a period of approximately forty years (Acts 7:30). He would be eighty years of age when he returned to Egypt (7:7). All this time, he lived as a shepherd in the desert, removed from the temples and palaces created by the Egyptians and surrounded by the majestic mountains and open plains of his Creator. During this time, the king of Egypt died (2:23). Some have suggested that it was Thutmose III (who died ca. 1450 B.C.), who had sought to kill Moses (4:19). Others have suggested it was Hatshepsut (who died ca. 1482 B.C.). After the death of the pharaoh, the exploitation of the children of Israel became even more severe. But God was still with His people—He heard their cry for deliverance, saw them, and recognized their plight (2:25). The Hebrew term used in v. 25, *yada'* ("to know"), suggests that God experienced and understood their suffering in a relational way (cf. 1:8). God remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and acted accordingly. He is a God who initiates and remains faithful to His covenant. This covenant would become the major focus of God's interaction with Israel in Exodus 19–24 and is the central motivation for God to commence a rescue plan for His people.

3:1—4:17. God Calls Moses. God's call was dramatic and arrested Moses's attention. The Angel of the Lord appeared to him when he came to Horeb, the mountain of God (v. 1). "Horeb" means literally "dry place" and appears also in Exodus 17:6 and 33:6. God's mountain

was also known as Sinai (Ex. 19:1, 18, 20, 23; 24:16). Both names may have been associated with the same larger mountain range.

The Being that appeared in a flame of fire placed in the midst of a bush that would not be consumed was none other than Yahweh, the Lord God. The three terms (Angel, Yahweh, God) are used interchangeably in this passage to describe the One who appeared and spoke to Moses (see Gen. 18; 22:11–18; 23:20–23; 31:11–13; Judg. 2:1–5; 13:2–23; Hos. 12:3–5; Mal. 3:1 ["messenger" is a translation of the same Hebrew word for "angel"]). The ground was made holy by the presence of God, and Moses was instructed to remove his sandals (v. 5). By removing his sandals and hiding his face, Moses honored the God of the covenant with awe and reverence. This passage is reminiscent of the seraphim who stand by the throne of God. Each has six wings: two covering their faces, two covering their feet, and two used for flying (Is. 6:2). Here Moses's actions are a demonstration of the honor, awe, and reverence due to the God of the universe.

God would reveal to Moses His plan for the deliverance of His people from Egypt (3:7–12). In fulfillment of the covenant promise made to Abram (Gen. 13:15), God would "come down" to deliver Israel and bring them to a "good and large land" (v. 8). Compared with the area of Goshen, the land of Israel would be enormous. While Israel today includes some desert areas, most of the land west of the peaks of the central hill country is lush, supporting extensive agriculture. The north has flowing rivers from Mount Hermon, which fill the Sea of Galilee, emptying into the Dead Sea via the Jordan River. Here there are waterfalls and rapids. The Carmel Mountains in the north central part of the country contain springs of water. The term "milk and honey" refers to the pastoralist (goat milk) and agricultural (fruit bearing) land and to the lifestyle of the future inhabitants of Canaan. Moses's objection, "Who am I?" (v. 11), is set in contrast to his earlier high position in the palace of Pharaoh. By this time, he was a lowly shepherd and filled with self-distrust. But God assured Moses that He would certainly be with him (v. 12). When God calls people to overwhelming tasks, He always enables them to accomplish His purpose.

Moses asked God to tell him what response should be given if the Israelites were to ask for His name. In response, God revealed Himself to Moses as "I AM WHO I AM," alternatively rendered as "I WILL BE WHAT I WILL BE" (v. 14). The sentence expresses "being" not as "pure being" in the Greek philosophical sense but as "active being," in terms of revelation. God has been in the past, is in the present, and will be in the future. The great I AM was sending Moses. The eternal, self-existent One (John 8:58; cf. DA 469) would accompany him. The derived form "Yahweh" is the sacred covenant name of God who makes Himself known through the act of redemption. He set Israel free from bondage, made them His special covenant people, and provided the means for them to remain His covenant people through His grace and enabling power.

To encourage Moses, Yahweh told him that He would stretch out His hand and strike Egypt with "wonders" (v. 20). The mention of stretching out the hand is a direct reference to a phrase in Egyptian used often to describe the pharaoh, who is said "to stretch out his hand" against his enemies in battle. But Moses, like most human beings, asked for evidence that appealed to his senses, and God provided him with three proofs so that the people would know that he was the Lord's representative (4:1–9). Perhaps in the back of his mind, Moses remembered the accusation of his fellow Israelites when they tauntingly asked him who had appointed him to be their ruler (or "prince," Heb. *sar*) and judge (2:14). The rod would be a symbol of God's power in the hands of Moses (7:15; 17:5) and Aaron (7:9; 8:5; 8:16). As Creator, God could fashion a serpent out of the rod and use the rod to perform wonders. The second sign indicated that Moses's hand would be empowered by God to perform His actions. The third sign gave evidence of God's authority over life and death. Moses was simply to be God's servant and rely on His strength.

Moses provided another reason for not wanting to return to Egypt, namely, that he was slow of speech (4:10–17). After forty years, had he forgotten the Egyptian language? Moses later repeated the response in part when he referred to his *'arel*—literally "uncircumcised" lips (6:12)—which contextually referred to his lacking eloquence. Other prophets (Jer. 1:6) and apostles like Paul (2 Cor. 10:10) would make similar statements. God's response is clear: when He calls individuals to deliver a message, He who created their mouths will give them the words to say (vv. 11–12). The reality is that Moses simply did not want to go. This speaks to Christians today who are called to witness for the One who saved them. They should remember that the God who spoke to Moses will always go before them.

4:18–31. Back to Egypt. When the time arrived for Moses to return to Egypt, God reassured him that it was safe—everyone who had sought his life was dead (4:19). As Moses set out, God explained his mission: to display the wonders that had been revealed to him (v. 21) and to speak the words God would give him (vv. 22–23). The hardening of Pharaoh's heart (v. 21) must be understood concretely in the idiomatic sense of Hebrew thought. In the Hebrew way of thinking, whatever God allows, He does. God predicted that He would harden Pharaoh's heart through the course of the ten plagues (which are also described as "signs" or "works" of God [7:3; 8:19; 10:1–2], "wonders" [4:21; 7:3; 11:9–10], and "extraordinary deeds/wonders" [15:11; 34:10]). This is something the Lord discerned because of His foreknowledge. But this did not remove Pharaoh's freedom of choice. Ten times during the initial five plagues where the phrase is used, Pharaoh is said to have hardened his own heart (e.g., 8:15, 32; 9:34). Rather than allowing God to soften his heart, the king became more determined and resolute with every demonstration of God's power. This was a deliberate decision on his part. During the last five plagues, God is said to have hardened Pharaoh's heart (e.g., 9:12; 11:10; 14:8). God provided the circumstances and the occasion for Pharaoh to be forced into making a decision. God was the instigator and initiator of the dilemma, but He was not the author of Pharaoh's defiance.

Moses had to spiritually and physically prepare his family for his mission (4:24–26). The sign of the Lord's covenant with Israel was shown through the rite of circumcision (Gen. 17:10–14). One son, presumably Gershom, the eldest, had been circumcised, but the younger son Eliezer had not been (cf. PP 256). This duty needed to be carried out before Moses could act as leader of the covenant people. The immediate act of circumcision evidently satisfied the Lord, and they were allowed to continue on their journey. Soon Moses met Aaron and told him all that the Lord had done (Ex. 4:27–28), and they traveled on to Goshen together. Faithful to God's assignment to act as Moses's spokesman, Aaron related Moses's experience to the elders of the people. The three signs were performed by God in their midst, and they bowed their heads in belief and reverence and worshiped God (vv. 29–31).

5:1—7:13
Judgment on Egypt and the Deliverance of Israel

Moses's journey of forty years transformed him from a self-sufficient and confident prince of Egypt (Acts 7:22) to a humble shepherd, dependent on God. The people of Israel changed from being passive slaves to crying out to the Lord for deliverance. The circumstances in Egypt had also changed, and the men who had sought Moses's life were dead, which would have included Pharaoh himself (Ex. 2:15; 23). The prophecy related to the affliction of the descendants of Abraham (Gen. 15:13) was coming to a close. God had a plan, which He set in motion at the proper time. Even though followers of God may not always see the end from the beginning, they are called to trust Him patiently. The justice of God, longed for by the Israelites for so many years, would be meted out, not only in their deliverance and salvation but also in the judgment and punishment of their oppressors. These judgments preceded deliverance and anticipated God's judgment at Christ's return in the eschaton.

5:1—6:13. Confrontations with Pharaoh. Moses was instructed by God to confront the king of Egypt. Perhaps this was what Moses feared most, given his former background. How would the king view the former successor to the throne? As a threat? As a laughing stock, given his new life as a shepherd? But the controversy that was about to unfold was not about Moses. It was about God's presence in Egypt and His demonstration of sovereignty, power, and judgment upon the nation. God chose people as His instruments to confront evil. God's love for the Egyptians had been demonstrated by sending Joseph to witness about a holy God who knows the future and is able to save a nation from famine. But several generations later, Egypt, so long steeped in pagan religious practices, had finally rejected the God of Israel and Joseph. Left to their own designs for power and supremacy, they had sunk deeper into darkness over the ensuing centuries. God desired to reach the great nation by humbling their self-reliance and challenging their worship of false gods, revealing to them His power and majesty.

Moses and Aaron entered the courts of Pharaoh as the ambassadors of the Lord (5:1–5). Moses identifies himself as a representative of the Lord God of Israel, a title that challenged the very core of the king's authority. Pharaoh's sarcastic response was a direct challenge to God: "Who is the Lord?" (v. 2). Bringing up the God of an enslaved people as a challenge to Pharaoh's absolute position as a son of the gods must have seemed absurd. The confidence of Moses and Aaron stemmed from their knowledge of who

God is while the king's sarcasm resulted from his ignorance. Notice the contrast in Moses's response when receiving the call from God: "Who am I?" (3:11) rather than "Who is the Lord?"

Pharaoh's response was to require the Israelites to construct their bricks without the government supply of straw (5:6–13). Not only did the king refuse Moses's request, but he also added to the burden of the Israelites—requiring them to obtain their own straw while still meeting the same quota of bricks. After the enlightenment, scholars questioned whether bricks were made with straw in Egypt—they were not in Europe and the Americas—and many doubted the historical accuracy of this statement. However, Egyptian texts and tomb paintings illustrating that the process involved the use of straw have since been discovered. Bricks from the Ramesseum in Thebes still have straw preserved in them after 3,200 years. The technology has not changed, for along the Nile, Egyptians still build their houses of sun-dried bricks made with straw.

Pharaoh had made the work of the Israelites almost impossible, and the result was conflict among them (5:14–21). The people cried out that God should judge Moses and Aaron for making them *ba'ash*—"abhorrent" or "odious," literally "to stink"—before the king (v. 21). The officials of Israel thought they were doomed to die under the new workload and blamed Moses and Aaron, a pattern that began here and would continue throughout their wanderings. Moses talked to God, seeking answers (vv. 22–23). To Moses, the situation seemed to be deteriorating because he had been rejected not only by Pharaoh but also by his own people. Moses did not realize that the difficulties he was facing would prepare him for some greater manifestation of God's strength.

In His response to Moses, God used the phrase "I am the Lord [Yahweh]" four times (6:1–13). His discourse was foundational in His continued self-revelation to Moses and the generations reading the story. He was the One who established the covenant. He is the One who hears and responds, the One who redeems with great judgment. From here on, the Lord would be the One to "remember" the covenant. In these verses, there is no reference to a three-day journey for the purpose of worshiping God; this time, their departure from Egypt would be permanent.

6:14—7:13. Moses's Genealogy and His Return to Pharaoh. In the middle of the narrative is the genealogy of Moses. It is provided in order to establish his credentials as a legitimate leader of Israel. The genealogy indicates that Israel was organized under tribes and that record of their divisions and subdivisions was kept. This genealogy concentrates on the tribe of Levi (v. 16), Moses's tribe. Therefore, it progresses quickly to the family of Aaron and Moses (v. 20). Since Aaron was the older of the two, he is mentioned first several times (vv. 20, 23, 26). But by the end, when the narrative resumes, Moses is mentioned first to identify him as God's chosen leader (v. 27).

When God ordered Moses to go back to Pharaoh, Moses showed self-distrust. The term *'aral sepatayim*—literally "uncircumcised lips," which is used here to express Moses's lack of speaking ability (6:12, 30)—is similar to that found in Exodus 4:10: "slow of speech." This time God overcame Moses's deficiency by telling him that He would make him like God to Pharaoh. Pharaoh assumed he himself was God, but Moses, as the representative of Yahweh, would be superior to the king. He would appear before Pharaoh with greater authority, and Aaron would function as his prophet. This authority was demonstrated in the miracle of the rod becoming a serpent (7:9–12). In Egypt, the uraeus-goddess Wadjet personified the cobra and represented all strength, power, and sovereignty over Lower Egypt. Pharaoh was imbued with the power of the goddess and was, thereby, able to rule over all the land. Wadjet appeared on his crown, at his forehead, as a cobra spitting venom at the enemies of Pharaoh. The cobra became the emblem of the pharaoh's power. In death, it was the serpent that guided the deceased king into the afterlife. The power of the serpent was observed in all aspects of Egyptian life and death.

For Moses's rod to have become a serpent and to have devoured all the other serpents before Pharaoh not only manifested the supremacy of Yahweh but also challenged the sorcery and magic of Egypt. The Egyptians loved to manipulate serpents, but Moses and Aaron could "create" (through the power of God) the serpent that devoured the Egyptian counterfeits (cf. PP 264). Finally, Moses and Aaron cast down to the ground the very symbol that gave Pharaoh power, and they were able to take it up again as a rod. But Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he rejected this sign.

7:14—12:30
The Ten Plagues

God initiated His request for the deliverance of His people with the simple command to let His people go (5:1; 7:16). Not only were the words rejected, but their Source was scoffed at as well. God knew that this would be Pharaoh's response (3:19–20), and He determined to use it to show Pharaoh who He is by demonstrating His power through the ten plagues (see below, "The Ten Plagues and the Religion of Egypt").

7:14–25. First Plague: Water to Blood. Herodotus, a Greek historian in the fifth century B.C., called Egypt "the gift of the Nile." The annual inundation of the Nile, caused by floodwaters deep in the heart of Africa, added richness to the soil that was indispensable for agriculture. Moses did not tell Pharaoh that the Nile would appear to be red like blood but that the Nile would be turned into blood. When this happened, the contamination spread not only through their water supply but also to one of their main food sources—fish. The Nile lost its capacity to sustain Egypt. But this was not limited to the Nile. The references to this plague affecting other bodies of water (v. 19) indicate an accurate knowledge of Egypt, where tributaries of the Nile, artificial canals, and reservoirs were also affected. The text also indicates that this was not some "red tide" or algae affecting only the river. All of the water of the Egyptians turned to blood. Khnum, the creator god, who was guardian of the Nile, could not change what Moses had commanded. The plague demonstrated that all sustenance comes from the Lord who spoke water and fish into existence, not the deities of Egypt. In desperation, the Egyptians dug for water. No mention is made here of the Israelites, suggesting that this plague did not affect them or their families. This is a repeated pattern: the plagues fell on the Egyptians but not on the land of Goshen. This is another indication that these were miraculous judgments of God specifically for Egypt.

8:1–15. Second Plague: Frogs. As water was restored by the God of heaven, not Khnum, the protector of the Nile, the next plague was a polemic against Khnum's spouse Hekhet, one of the primary deities of Egypt, who was depicted as a female with a frog's head. While Khnum formed human bodies on the potter's wheel, Hekhet was the goddess of childbirth, who gave life to those bodies. As a result of this plague, the lives of the Egyptians were made miserable by the frogs they worshiped, and consequently they despised and hated them. After the plague, the putrid stench of dead frogs testified against the supposed life-giving "breath" that Hekhet was thought to provide.

8:16–32. Third and Fourth Plagues: Lice and Biting Flies. The next two pestilences that were brought on by the Lord involved insects. The first (*ken*) has been interpreted as either lice or gnats. Since they were found on both people and animals, lice may be a better explanation. The second was *'arob*, which was an insect with a venomous bite that inflicted great pain (PP 266). These plagues could have been a polemic against the self-generating god of the resurrection, Kheper, who was depicted in Egyptian reliefs as the dung or scarab beetle. The female scarab beetle was worshiped because it formed with its front legs a perfect sphere of dung, where it placed its eggs, and eventually life sprang forth spontaneously as the eggs hatched. The Egyptians believed this sphere represented the life-giving sun, which Kheper gave rise to in the morning and pushed from the east across the horizon. The Egyptian magicians could not reproduce this miracle and identified it as "the finger of God" (v. 19). This recognition is not necessarily an expression of faith by the magicians, but rather it highlights the divine origins of the plague (cf. 31:18; Deut. 9:10). Miraculously, the fourth plague did not affect the land of Goshen (cf. Gen. 45:9–13).

The Ten Plagues and the Religion of Egypt

The plagues were an attack against the Egyptian source of power. The Egyptians had deified nature to such an extent that their religion had become a type of pantheism with a pantheon of about two thousand gods and goddesses. In a sense, the plagues were successive acts of divine de-creation, the undoing of the creation order and of the people's understanding of the origin of Egypt. For the Egyptians, the concept of ma'at ("truth," "justice," and "order") portrayed the universe as the harmonious coexistence of all elements. Pharaoh himself was given responsibility by the gods to maintain this universal order. This was accomplished by subduing the forces of chaos. The Egyptian concept of ma'at was thrown into chaos during the ten plagues as a direct challenge to the authority and ability of the king of Egypt.

Before nearly every plague, Moses was instructed to relate to Pharaoh the exact manner and effects of what would take place. He did this for two reasons: (1) to give the king the opportunity to avert the consequences, and (2) to make it impossible for the king to deny that the plagues had come from the Lord (PP 263). The plagues began with the most powerful force of life in Egypt (i.e., water) but had the least devastating impact on Egypt. As each plague came upon Egypt, the effects on the land and the people would become more severe. It was through this manifestation of His divine presence and power that God hoped to reveal the deficiencies of the religious beliefs of Egypt and draw the people to worship and honor Him.

The theory that the plagues could be explained as natural disasters rather than divine interventions is not supported by the biblical text. God announced that He would bring these wonders upon Egypt (Ex. 3:20), and they took place as He stated. In no instance was one plague the source of the next one. The hail of the seventh plague had no relationship to the boils of plague six. The tenth plague had no link to the previous plagues. The plagues are related in direct historical narrative and are not to be understood as metaphor or simple literary creations.

9:1–7. Fifth Plague: Livestock Diseased. The pestilence that fell on the domesticated animals struck at the property of the Egyptians—their livelihood. It included camels, donkeys, cattle, and horses, which had been introduced to Egypt by the Asiatic Hyksos (v. 3). Again, the livestock of Israel were spared (v. 4). Cattle were worshiped in two ways in Egypt. The bull cult included the worship of Apis, who epitomized the virility of life-giving strength. In Memphis, he was represented by Ptah, the divine father of Pharaoh. His consort was Hathor, the goddess embodied as a cow. Hatshepsut was depicted at her temple at Deir el-Bahri nursing from the cow Hathor, who was being led by her consort Amun-Re. The fifth plague struck at the heart of the divine origin of the king. Pharaoh set out to determine whether it was true that none of the Israelite livestock had died. Even when faced with the truth, his heart was hardened.

9:8–12. Sixth Plague: Boils. The exact nature of the disease that next fell on the Egyptians is not precisely known. Perhaps this was a boil that broke forth in blisters when fine dust fell on the skin. Even the magicians abandoned Pharaoh and fled to their homes in misery. Sekhmet was the most important of Egypt's cat deities, represented by a woman's body with the head of a lioness. She had the power to ward off pestilence and was a healing goddess, "the mistress of life." While some Egyptian texts describe the scattering of ashes as a means to end pestilence, here God used the same method to cause it.

9:13–35. Seventh Plague: Hail. In this long discourse of God with Moses, explicit detail is given regarding the hail and fire that would fall on Egypt and God's reason for not already destroying Pharaoh—namely, that as a result of the plagues, His name would be known in all the earth (v. 16). The hail destroyed man, beast, and every herb of the field, but the land of Goshen was spared (vv. 23–26). Hail is often associated with divine judgment (Is. 28:2, 17; 30:30–31; Ezek. 13:11–13; 38:22–23). This polemic was aimed against the celestial deities Nut, the goddess of the sky; Shu, the supporter of the heavens; and Tefnut, the goddess of moisture. Intriguingly, the biblical text indicates a polarization of Egyptian society: those who began to take the Lord seriously (perhaps some of those Egyptians, mentioned in Ex. 12:38, who went with the Israelites) and prepared for the plague and those who did not. The plague was directed against Egypt so that Pharaoh would know that the earth belongs to the Lord (v. 29). For the first time, the king admitted that he had sinned, that the Lord is righteous, and that he and his people were wrong (v. 27). But after the storm was called off, he hardened his heart (v. 34).

10:1–20. Eighth Plague: Locusts. Locusts were always a threat in the Mediterranean region. They could eat their own body weight in one day and could swarm in by the millions, consuming everything in their path (on locusts, see Joel 1:1–12). This was the next peril facing Egypt if Pharaoh did not let the people go. What vegetation was left after the storm would be devoured. The locusts came with an east wind from the territory of Arabia. The Tanis stele of Taharqa reads, "A fine field, which the gods protected against grasshoppers." This may suggest that this was the function of many gods, not merely one god. Pharaoh's servants tried to convince him to let the people go—Egypt was already destroyed. The persistence of the king's stubbornness would ultimately bring about Egypt's ruin. This is one of the reasons for the plagues—that they might be a testimony for generations signifying that He is indeed the Lord.

10:21–29. Ninth Plague: Darkness. The chief deity of the Egyptians was the sun god, Re. The rising of Re in the east symbolized new life and resurrection—the cyclical nature of rejuvenated life. When the sun set in the west, it entered the underworld, representing death, before it was reborn in the morning. In a land where there were rarely clouds, the sun was the constant source of life-giving power. The king's titles included "son of Re." Even during the reign of Amenhotep IV—who limited the worship of the Egyptians to the Aten sun-disk, changed his name to Akhenaten, and relocated to a newly built capital all in Aten's honor—the sun was the primary deity of Egypt. When Re was hidden by the might of Yahweh, Pharaoh's realm and, by extension, all of Egypt were plunged into symbolic death and nothingness. A deep foreboding settled over the land. Nothing like this had ever happened in the history of Egypt. What did it mean? The Lord, who had created the greater and lesser lights in the heaven on the fourth day, had never intended that they be worshiped, and He demonstrated once again that He alone is the source of light and life (cf. John 1:1–4). The darkness was so thick that it could be felt by the inhabitants of Egypt. But the children of Israel had light in their homes. No matter how dark the circumstances may become, how oppressing the situation may be, the Creator will supply light to those who trust in Him.

11:1–3. Israel Will Be Compensated. God announced to His people that they would soon leave Egypt, fully compensated for the years of slave labor they had provided to the Egyptians. God had foretold this future event to Abraham—that after the oppression of his descendants, the oppressing nation would be judged and that Israel would come out with great possessions (Gen. 15:14). The Hebrews had labored for the Egyptians for generations. They had been subjected to brutality and injustice, compelled to build Egypt's public works while receiving minimal remuneration. The time had come to ask the Egyptians for their rightful payment. The inhabitants of Egypt, so overcome by the devastating plagues, paid their debt to the Israelites and urged them to leave the land (Ex. 12:35–36). Moses had obtained great respect as the messenger of the God through whom He performed such great signs. The Lord thus communicated to Moses that all their needs would be supplied through His power.

11:4–10. Announcement of Death of the Firstborn. Moses announced to Pharaoh the final judgment of death to the firstborn. Because the king did not let God's firstborn son, Israel (Ex. 4:22–23), depart from the land, God would strike the firstborn of all Egypt. This would occur at midnight, in the darkest moment of night, marked by vulnerability and defenselessness. Moses predicted that this would be the final blow, causing all Egypt to beg for Israel's departure. Moses turned to leave in anger (11:8), frustrated perhaps at the needless judgment of death that would soon take place because of Pharaoh's stubborn heart yet triumphantly certain that the trials of Egypt would soon come to an end.

12:1–28. Institution of Passover. Once again, as in the previous judgments against Egypt, the Lord made provision for the salvation of His people. The ordinance of the Passover came prior to the plague directed against the firstborn of Egypt. The people were to take a lamb *without blemish* (v. 5). Animals that had not experienced injury, were perfect in shape, and had simple coloring without complex spots or other markings were later required as the offerings of Israel (Lev. 22:20–23; Mal. 1:8). The Passover lamb was to be a type of the Promised One, who though without sin (Heb. 4:15), would die as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29).

The sacrifice was to take place at twilight or in the evening (v. 6), or "between the two evenings," a literal translation of the Hebrew phrase. In Egypt, this would have been done before the night of the tenth plague. So, when was Passover kept throughout history? Based on Leviticus 23:5 and Numbers 9:3, which refer to Passover on the date of Nisan 14, it seems likely that Passover lambs were slain in the late afternoon, after the sun began to visibly settle in the horizon but before sunset. This time lines up well with the death of the antitypical "Lamb of God," who died on the cross at the ninth hour (Matt. 27:46–50; Mark 15:34–37).

The instruction to take some of the blood (v. 7) is a reminder that it is only the "blood of the Lamb" that saves and provides redemption (1 Pet. 1:18–19) and by which the Christian might

overcome (Rev. 12:11). The blood is life (Lev. 17:11). The unleavened bread (v. 8) is significant because yeast caused the dough to ferment and came to represent corruption. Jesus applied the two Passover symbols of unleavened bread and unfermented wine (grape juice) to Himself when He said, "Take, eat; this is My body" and "Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Matt. 26:26–28). For this reason, the Passover became a day to remember (v. 14), which pointed back to the great day of deliverance in Egypt and pointed forward to the great event when the "firstborn Son" of Mary (Matt. 1:25; Luke 2:7), indeed "the firstborn over all creation" (Col. 1:15) and "the firstborn from the dead" (Rev. 1:5), would shed His innocent blood that all might have eternal life (John 3:16). The divine "passing over" is not based on human efforts (even though it requires obedience) but, rather, on God's active protection and grace (Ex. 12:23, 27).

12:29–30. Tenth Plague: Death of the Firstborn. The death of the firstborn was the final blow to Egypt's dynastic legacy. Pharaoh was the son of Re, and his heir too would one day lead Egypt. The one who was groomed to be king was slain. The successor of Amenhotep II was not his firstborn son. Amenhotep II was likely placed as coregent to his father Thutmose III a few years prior to the king's death, suggesting that Thutmose III wanted to avoid a dynastic crisis at the end of his reign. Hatshepsut's image was erased from many of her monuments throughout Egypt, suggesting that there might have been a rival to the throne. Could it be that Moses, arriving in Egypt after forty years in the wilderness, was perceived as one reclaiming his right to the throne? Why else would Thutmose III have waited so long to have Hatshepsut's image removed? The intrigue surrounding the succession indicates that something unusual was taking place in Egypt. Extraordinary measures were taken in order to secure Egypt's future.

12:31—15:21

The Exodus and Red Sea Crossing

The miraculous judgments of God on Egyptian ideology found their final expression in the deliverance of the children of Israel through the Red Sea and the destruction of Pharaoh's armies. Under the Eighteenth Dynasty, Egypt had developed into one of the world's most advanced military powers. Through the sixteen campaigns of Thutmose III into the Holy Land, the army of Egypt, with its chariots and horses, its infantry and navy, had been tactically refined. In Egyptian military records, Egypt was always victorious, given success by Amun-Re, the god of Thebes and divine father of the king. Israel would face this formidable force in a final showdown between the powers of Egypt and the God of heaven.

12:31–42. Exodus from Egypt. Urged by Pharaoh and the Egyptians to leave with haste, the Israelites were not even able to finish baking their bread. The total number of Israelites given is about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides women and children (v. 37; see "The Number of Israelites Who Left Egypt," p. 210). The *'ereb rab*—variously translated as "mixed multitude," "many other people," or the "ethnically diverse crowd" (v. 38)—that accompanied Israel witnessed the power of the plagues and the protection of Israel and decided to put their trust in God and the leadership of Moses. At this point, Egypt was devastated, and little remained for them in the land of the pharaohs.

12:43—13:2. Further Passover Regulations. The Passover was to be observed only by Israel and their future generations. Strangers, non-Hebrew servants, and hirelings who desired to become part of this covenant community did so through the act of circumcision. Only then could they take part in the Passover. The command to not break the bones of the paschal lamb (v. 46) was typologically fulfilled in Jesus (John 19:36). The consecration of the firstborn would remind the Israelites of the redemption of grace that they had experienced during the Passover in Egypt (13:1–2). They were the firstborn of God (Ex. 4:22–23), and as such, they belonged to God because of His saving grace.

13:3–16. Festival of Unleavened Bread. This festival would be a memorial of the day when Israel left Egypt in haste. It was to be passed down from generation to generation as a reminder of the historical event. The instruction to wear the story as a sign on the hand and as a reminder between the eyes has been applied in a very literal way by Jews of the first century onward. A box or phylactery with passages from Exodus and Deuteronomy are placed on the forehead, between the eyes, and bound with black leather strips. Likewise, these are also bound around the arms during prayer. This literal interpretation was not the intention of the text, and even Jesus seemed to have criticized the motives behind the outward display of this application (Matt. 23:5). Celebrating the festival would remind the people to serve the Lord who had brought them out of Egypt with a powerful hand (v. 9). It would also be a memorial between their eyes that would orient their journey through life by reminding them of what God had done for them in the past. Consequently, they would often speak of the law of the Lord. In Revelation 14:9, the hand and the mind become the focus of true worship because one's actions and decisions determine whether a person remains faithful to God's commands or follows human inventions.

All the firstborn of the animals were to be allocated for the Lord (v. 12). If they were clean sacrificial animals, they could be offered as sacrifices to God (v. 12). Unclean animals (e.g., donkeys) and firstborn sons were to be redeemed with a lamb (v. 13; cf. Lev. 27:26–27). This ritual commemorated the salvation experienced in Egypt at the Passover when the firstborn sons of Israel were spared.

The Number of Israelites Who Left Egypt

Numbers are common in the Bible, and in most cases, they are not a matter of serious concern. Questions are raised with respect to large numbers, such as the ones given for the Exodus from Egypt. The matter is somewhat complex, and the numbers have been interpreted in different ways. Here only two of them will be mentioned.

1. *Consistency of the Numbers.* The number of people who left Egypt under the leadership of Moses is given in several places and is consistent. Exodus 12:37 reports that there were about 600,000 men on foot, besides women and children (see also Num. 11:21, where the same number is given). This number of people is confirmed in Exodus 38:25–26, when the number of men (age twenty and above) who gave half a shekel to the sanctuary is listed as 603,550. The census taken before leaving Mount Sinai, which did not include the Levites, indicated that the number of all those at least twenty years old who were able to go to war was 603,550 (Num. 1:45–46). This is a military census, and the 603,550 were men who could still function as soldiers, implying that there were other older male Israelites, besides the Levites, not included in the number. This could also be the case with respect to the number given in Exodus 12:37, where about 600,000 are identified as "men on foot," or infantry. Shortly before entering Canaan, after the previous generation had died during the forty years between censuses, another military census was taken and the number given was 601,730 (Num. 26:2, 51). One has to conclude that the numbers are significantly consistent. Therefore, a nonliteral interpretation would require new evidence that, at present, does not seem to be available (cf. PP 334, 410).

2. *A Smaller Number.* In spite of the information discussed above, some still argue that the number of Israelites who left Egypt was not that large. It is suggested that the term "thousand" is sometimes used to refer to large military units and is not to be taken literally. However, this explanation is not able to solve the computational difficulties of Exodus 38 and Numbers 1 and 26. Some scholars propose that Deuteronomy can be understood to suggest that Israel was not "more in number than any other people," but rather that they "were the least [the fewest] of all peoples" (Deut. 7:7). To this is added that the Israelites considered the nations of Canaan to be greater than them and, therefore, difficult to dispossess (Deut. 7:17, 22). Besides, if the Lord were to drive out the people of Canaan, there would not be enough Israelites to inhabit the land. It would then become desolate, and the wild animals would become too numerous for them. Accordingly, God promised to drive out the Canaanites gradually (Ex. 23:29–30). Additional concerns about survival conditions in the wilderness are often raised, but one should take into consideration God's miraculous interventions. Although these arguments are worth reflection, the main challenge to this approach to the question is the consistent use of the number 600,000 in the Bible.

13:17—14:20. The Journey Begins. The Israelites were to avoid the area where the Philistines lived—v. 17 (called the "Ways of Horus" by the Egyptians and later the *Via Maris*). The Lord did not want the Israelites to be discouraged by the Egyptian garrisons that lined the shortest route to Canaan. He sent them around by way of the wilderness of the Red Sea (v. 18) to the south instead of along the northern trade and campaign route. Sometimes, God sends His children the "long way" around situations, an approach that often seems illogical. God's ultimate goal is to build up their faith through their experience of His mighty works.

The Israelites went up from Egypt in organized military formation (v. 18; cf. 12:51). The original Hebrew verb in 13:18 derives from the number five and could be translated "and the

The Four-Hundred-Thirty-Year Sojourn

The chronology of the sojourn for the people of Israel has been a matter of debate. Part of the problem is that the Bible presents two different but related numbers of years: 400 years of affliction, according to Genesis 15:13 and Acts 7:6, and 430 years of sojourn, according to Exodus 12:40–41 and Galatians 3:16–17. If both ended in the same year as the Exodus event, when did both time periods begin?

1. *Chronology of Exodus.* The Masoretic texts of Exodus 12:40–41 give the impression that the 430 years covered the time from Jacob's migration to Egypt until the Exodus. This would mean that the people of Israel lived in Egypt a total of 430 years. Those who hold this view argue that 400 is simply a round number and that the distinction between affliction and sojourn is a matter of semantics, thus allowing 430 years for the fulfillment of the prophecy.

2. *Contribution of Paul.* Paul discusses the connection between God's promises to Abraham and the giving of the law at Sinai (Gal. 3:16–17), which was three months after the Exodus event (Ex. 19:1). Paul totals the years between the two occurrences at 430, the same number as Exodus 12:40–41. The promises are those of the covenant God made to Abraham based on his faith. Consequently, the law, added 430 years later, does not change the promises received by faith. Although Paul is not dealing here with the chronology of the 430 years, he does provide for us the historical event that initiates the time period. It is the moment when God made and ratified His covenant with Abram as recorded in Genesis 15, which itself was promised in Ur some years earlier (Gen. 11:31—12:3). The only existing texts today that reflect this understanding are the Septuagint and the Samaritan Pentateuch. Both state that the 430 years were split between Canaan and Egypt.

3. *Proposed Solutions.* Looking a little more carefully at the chronological details, one notes that Abram was called by the Lord to leave Ur (Gen. 11:31—12:1) sometime before he was 75 years old (his age when he left Haran; Gen. 12:4). This was the beginning of the 430 years, according to Paul (Gal. 3:16–17). Isaac was born when Abraham was 100 years old (Gen. 21:5). The Bible mentions that during the celebration of Isaac's weaning, he was despised by Hagar (an Egyptian) and her son Ishmael. As a result of the conflict (Gen. 21:8–12), Isaac was confirmed as the true seed of Abraham, and Hagar and her son were cast out. Weaning generally happened three years after birth. Thus, it is reasonable to expect that there were about thirty years between Abram's call in Ur and the weaning of Isaac. This would make the weaning celebration the beginning of the 400-year affliction of Abraham's descendants (through Sarah) by the Egyptians (Ishmael was half-Egyptian).

Isaac was 60 years old when Jacob and Esau were born (Gen. 25:26), and Jacob was 130 years old when he migrated to Egypt and referred to his years as a sojourn/pilgrimage (Gen. 47:9). The patriarchal period that began when Abram left Haran lasted 215 years (25 + 60 + 130 = 215). If this is a correct reading of the biblical text, then the Israelites were in Egypt a total of about 215 years, beginning with Jacob's migration to Egypt and ending with the Exodus. Although the biblical text seems to lean toward a shorter sojourn, it is best to avoid being dogmatic about whatever position is taken.

sons of Israel went up in fives"—that is, the people were divided into five major divisions. The Bible does not indicate the size of the divisions or the way in which they were organized, but it is important to remember that Moses, who was a prince of Egypt, was militarily trained and would have known how to organize a large group in military formation (PP 245). The same term is used in Joshua 1:14 and 4:12 to describe the organization of Israel before crossing the Jordan River to take possession of the promised land.

The location for the crossing of the sea that fits the biblical descriptions (see below, "The Route of the Exodus and Mount Sinai") places the crossing at the Gulf of Suez where Jebel ‘Ataqah reaches down to the gulf. According to Numbers 33:7, the Israelites moved from Etham and turned back to Pi-Hahiroth (Ex. 14:1–9). This could mean that they first moved down and camped southwest of the northern tip of the Gulf of Suez. Later realizing that they were trapped by the massive mountain range, they turned back to go around Pi-Hahiroth—"the mouth of the water"—toward the Sinai.

The Egyptian army was mobilized with chariots led by their king. The chariot was one of the most effective war machines, one which led to Egyptian supremacy throughout Asia. During the sixteen military campaigns of Thutmose III, innovators had perfected the lightweight and thereby easily maneuverable chariot, and these would be hastened to meet the Israelites.

As the Israelites made preparations to turn back from their dead-end position, they suddenly saw the army of Pharaoh and were terrified. But Moses encouraged them and told them to not be afraid (v. 13). Was not the pillar of cloud-encased fire with them (13:21–22; 14:19–20)? Was not the Angel of the Lord moving between them and the armies of Egypt (14:19; 23:20–23; 33:2)? Moses adjured the people to stand firmly still (v. 13). How often do followers of Christ fail to stand still but instead try to work out their own salvation? God instructs, "Be still and know that I am God" (Ps. 46:10a). Moses reassured the Israelites that the Lord would fight for them and that they should simply be silent (v. 14). The Christian can have a true sense of *shalom*—"peace," "health," "well-being"—even amid the greatest threats and trials, for God is stronger than any opponent.

14:21–30. The Parting of the Sea. A way is made as the sea is divided, or split open (v. 21). The verb *baqa‘* here indicates a violent, sudden action, such as splitting wood (Eccl. 10:9) or splitting a rock (Judg. 15:19). The waters were

The Route of the Exodus and Mount Sinai

The route of the Exodus and the location of Mount Sinai have been debated for centuries. The fact remains that Mount Sinai has never been positively identified. What follows is a review and evaluation of four of the major proposals made for the location of the Red Sea crossing.

1. Balah Lakes (South Central Route). The first proposal interprets the Hebrew phrase *yam sup* as "Reed Sea" instead of "Red Sea" (10:19; 13:18; 15:4, 22; 23:31). This is based on four arguments. First, the term *sup* derives from the Egyptian *twf(y)*, "papyrus reeds." Second, *sup*, when used alone without *yam*, refers to "reeds" (2:3). Third, reeds only grow along marshy freshwater banks, not at the Red Sea. Fourth, *sup* does not mean "red," which was a mistranslation in the LXX. While it is true that *sup* when used alone means "reed," recent studies have shown that when the OT refers to *yam sup* as a combined designation, it consistently refers to the Red Sea, as all modern translations of the Bible attest. Solomon refers to a fleet of his ships being stationed at Elath on the shore of the *yam sup* near Edom (1 Kin. 9:26), or the northern tip of the Gulf of Aqaba. Moses likewise refers to the Gulf of Aqaba as the Red Sea in Deuteronomy 1:40 and 2:1. These three biblical texts make it certain that the Red Sea was understood as the two fingers or gulfs of Suez and Aqaba and not a lake system on the border of Egypt.

The origin point of the Red Sea crossing is specified with geographical designations: Pi-Hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, opposite Baal-Zephon (Ex. 14:2; Num. 33:7). These locations have been difficult to identify. Some have suggested that these points refer to actual Egyptian place names located in the north, near the beginning of the "Ways of Horus," where the term *migdol*, "tower," appears with a toponym later in the Nineteenth Dynasty reliefs of Seti I. But there remain several problems. (1) If the Red Sea and not the Reed Sea is meant, then the crossing must have been at either the Gulf of Suez or the Gulf of Aqaba. (2) The journey from Rameses (Ex. 12:37) took the children of Israel to Succoth, which is identified as *Tjaru*, the Egyptian border town near the el-Balah lake district in the north. (3) According to Exodus 13:17–18, God did not lead them by the "way of the Philistines," the biblical equivalent to the "Ways of Horus," but sent Israel around by the wilderness of the Red Sea to the south, where they camped at Etham. (4) Crossing at the el-Balah lakes would have been the logical and shortest route, but the Lord told Moses that Pharaoh, noting the circuitous route of the Israelites, would conclude that they were confused by the land and had become enclosed by the wilderness (14:3). The route south and to the west of the Red Sea better fits this description.

2. Mediterranean (Northern Route). An extreme northern crossing over the spit of land separating the Mediterranean Sea from Lake Sirbonis has been suggested in connection with a natural tide of waters that would have swallowed the Egyptian army. But there are complications with this suggestion as well. (1) The route lies too close to the "Ways of Horus," which the Lord told Israel to avoid. (2) Deuteronomy 1:2 states that Kadesh-barnea was an eleven-day march from Mount Sinai. This would suggest a location for Mount Sinai in the south, further from Kadesh-barnea. (3) This is the shortest route to Canaan, but the Israelites were expressly told to take a different route.

3. Gulf of Aqaba (East Central Route). Another theory is that the Israelites wandered across the Sinai Peninsula and crossed the Gulf of Aqaba into the Arabian Desert, where Mount Sinai was located at Gebel el-Lawz. Some proponents maintain that the Sinai belonged to Egypt and that Israel could not have wandered there because the text says they had left Egypt. Others claim they have located an underwater shelf from Nuweiba beach in Sinai extending across the gulf, and this was where the Israelites crossed. This theory is unlikely for several reasons. (1) The purported underwater shelf between Sinai and Arabia does not exist, according to soundings of the British Admiralty. (2) Chariot wheels in the Gulf of Aqaba have not been confirmed. (3) The distances between Succoth, Etham, and the Red Sea indicate a three-day journey, but the Israelites could not have covered 180 miles (290 km) to reach the Gulf of Aqaba in three days. (4) The biblical account clearly locates Mount Sinai/Horeb in the Sinai, not in Midian or Arabia (3:12; 19:1–2). To use the Galatians 4:25 reference to identify Mount Sinai as being in Arabia and to extend the understanding of geography in NT times back to the second millennium B.C. ignores the fact that in Paul's time, Arabia included the Sinai Peninsula. (5) Although Egypt had copper mining activities at locations like Serabit el-Khadem, in the Sinai, the border of Egypt was at Tjaru/Succoth. The Egyptians did not consider Sinai as part of their territory in the Eighteenth or Nineteenth dynasties.

4. Gulf of Suez (Southern Route). Others have suggested a southern route that took the Israelites west of the Gulf of Suez. They understand the terms Pi Hahiroth, Migdol, and Baal Zephon as geographical or topographical features. Pi Hahiroth may refer to the "opening/mouth of the canal or water," according to one etymology. The term *migdol*, "tower," could refer to a mountain, as could Baal Zephon. If this is the case, then Pi Hahiroth may designate the opening mouth of the northern tip of the Gulf of Suez. If the Israelites camped to the east of the mountain range of Jebel ‘Ataqah, perhaps designated *migdol* as these were the closest mountains to the Nile delta to the south (Num. 33:7), their camp would have been located in between the mountains and the sea. As one writer observed, "The Hebrews were encamped beside the sea, whose waters presented a seemingly impassible barrier before them, while on the south a rugged mountain obstructed further progress" (PP 283–84). This description corresponds well with the location southwest of Suez and seems to be the best option. On the other hand, there are no mountains in the north around the el-Balah lake system or the "Ways of Horus," which rules out the northern locations.

walls on their right hand and on their left (v. 22). It is unclear how high these walls of water were, but a natural explanation does not seem to fit the violent description of the "split" or "cleaved" waters and the resulting walls. The Lord then caused a strong east wind to dry a passage through the sea.

As the pillar of cloud-encased fire followed the Israelites into the sea, the Egyptians followed them. The terms used here are comprehensive: the text mentions that all of Pharaoh's horses, chariots, and horsemen (v. 23) pursued the Israelites. If true to Egyptian military practice, Pharaoh would have led the pursuit up to the point of attack, at which point he would have held back. Egyptian armies consistently appear in Egyptian art in perfect order and symmetry while their enemies are in disarray. But suddenly, the roles were reversed (v. 24). Charioteers veered off to the right and left as chariot wheels fell off (v. 25). Horses stumbled. The God who ordered creation was fighting for Israel, as Israel moved on in martial array. The Egyptians attempted to turn and run. Moses raised his hand once again, and the waters surged back over the Egyptians (v. 27). Not one Egyptian who entered the Red Sea survived, and not one Israelite was lost (vv. 28–29). The emphasis in vv. 30–31 is that Israel "saw"; they witnessed the destruction of their feared enemy. The final triumph of the Lord over Egypt was at that point accomplished. Pharaoh, the god-king, was defeated (Ps. 136:15). So it will be at the close of the cosmic conflict, when all evil powers will be overcome and the enemy will be defeated. God saves those who trust His word and fear Him.

15:1–19. Song of Moses. This song is the poetic recounting of God's saving act at the Red Sea. The people could not have helped but sing and make a joyful noise after God's miraculous intervention. This is the earliest song recorded in Scripture and consists of three stanzas. Each stanza begins with praises to the Lord and ends with the reasons for praising the Lord. The Lord is praised because He is our salvation (v. 2). His name is powerful, and by that power, Pharaoh's armies are no more (v. 4). Though the forces of evil may plot the destruction of God's children, God's right hand delivers them, overthrowing their enemies. The motif of the right hand of Pharaoh as that which delivers Egypt's enemy is often found in Egyptian texts. Here, this image is contrasted with the right hand of the Lord, which is glorious and majestic in power (v. 6).

The certainty of this redemptive act of God in history assures us that we have nothing to fear for the future. The last stanza focuses on future enemies who would be faced in the conquest of Canaan. Because of God's powerful "arm," they would be "as still as a stone" (v. 16). When we face certain impossibilities, when we feel cornered and do not know which way to turn, we can find assurance in "The Song of Moses," for it commemorates a great event in the history of God's people. God's past intervention in our lives assures us that He will carry us and plant us on the "mountain of His inheritance," where the Lord reigns forever and ever (vv. 17–18). Women participated in the singing (vv. 20–21). Miriam prophesied to the women, and the women responded in a refrain with dances and timbrels. Dancing was an expression of holy joy (Ps. 149:3; 150:4), not to be confused with the licentious dancing of Herodias's daughter before Herod (Matt. 14:6; Mark 6:22). This song points to the one that will be sung by all those who, in the final day of deliverance, will stand on the sea of glass with Jesus (Rev. 15:3).

Crossing the Sea

The logistics of leading two million Israelites across the Red Sea in one night are not difficult to conceive. The Israelites were not an unorganized group of men, women, and children moving through the desert in a haphazard manner. They were organized in martial array, perhaps in five divisions (13:18). It should not be assumed that they left Egypt in single file. The width of the dry land God created in the midst of the sea is not known, but given Israel's formation, it might have been one mile (1.6 km) wide. Divided into five divisions, the Israelites may have stood 600 abreast, which would have been less than half a mile (.8 km) wide. Thus, each of the five divisions of 402,000 (600 abreast and 670 deep) could have occupied less than four miles (in length, adding another mile (1.6 km) for flocks and herds. Given that the rate of walking would not have exceeded more than thirty minutes for one mile (1.6 km), and the length of the sea crossing at that location was about ten miles (16 km), the crossing could have been accomplished within eight hours, or in one night.

15:22—18:27

The Journey to Sinai

The deliverance of Israel from Pharaoh's army at the Red Sea indicated that the people were free from the threat of Egypt at last. After the plagues, this marked the final victory of God over the gods and powers of Egypt. From this moment on, Israel would journey with God as their King. Under this theocracy, God wanted Israel to learn total dependence upon Him and to walk by faith. The journey to Sinai was marked by the itinerary described in Exodus 15 and elaborated upon in more detail in Numbers 33. Moses kept meticulous records of the camping locations until they reached Mount Sinai/Horeb. Egyptian texts suggest that this type of record-keeping was practiced during this period by scribes recording Egyptian military campaigns. Over the course of time, many of these oases have disappeared, making it very difficult to reconstruct the journey precisely. Taking into consideration the rate of travel per day, it seems most likely that Mount Sinai/Horeb was located in the southern part of the Sinai Peninsula (see "The Route of the Exodus and Mount Sinai," p. 212).

15:22—17:16. Miracles of Deliverance. By leading them through the wilderness, God was teaching Israel to trust in Him. The Red Sea seemed to be an immovable obstacle, but they would face further impossibilities to test their faith. Each time, God would show them that He could and would supply their needs.

First, God provided water for them (vv. 22–27). For a large group of people, donkeys, cattle, and sheep in a parched desert, water was vital, and after three days it was running out. The first oasis Israel came to after traveling for some forty-seven miles (75 km) south of Suez may have been *'Ain Hawdrah,* although the exact itinerary is not certain. Its water is still bitter today, a fact which (if this is the same location) indicates that the miracle of God through Moses was not of a permanent nature. When the people tasted the water, they grumbled to Moses (v. 24). How typical of human nature! God had just delivered Israel from the Red Sea less than forty-eight hours before, and when faced with the first test, they complained. Interestingly, the Hebrew word referring to God's "test" of the people in v. 25 can also mean "trained" (cf. notes on Gen. 22:1). There is potential for growth in adversity.

Moses was instructed to find a tree and throw it into the water. This was a miracle from God, who used the tree to do what a tree by itself could not achieve. This experience illustrates the correlation between serving the Lord and health. If the people of Israel would have listened to Him by doing what was right in His estimation, God promised to keep them from all the diseases of the Egyptians, for He is the God who heals (v. 26). This promise underlines the significant concern for health visible in the Pentateuchal laws. A similar promise is repeated on the border to Canaan (Deut. 32:39).

The Miracle of the Manna

Some commentators have suggested a natural explanation for the manna, such as the gum secretions of the tamarisk bush. However, there are many indications that the provision of the manna was, in fact, a supernatural act of God. (1) The tamarisk bush only makes these secretions in June and July, while the manna was continuous for forty years. (2) The timing of delivery of the manna was unique. It was provided six days a week, and on the sixth day, twice as much was available. The double portion of manna from the sixth day would not spoil but would be preserved until the seventh day. On any other day, the manna would spoil if saved overnight. On the seventh-day Sabbath, no manna would fall. These specific sequences suggest a miraculous event. (3) The gift of the manna was so significant that Moses commanded Aaron to place an omer of manna in the ark of the covenant. (4) In the NT, Paul calls manna a supernatural food (1 Cor. 10:3). (5) Jesus compared the miraculous gift of Himself as the bread of life with manna that had come down from heaven (John 6:31–63).

God desired to save Israel, not only from Egyptian servitude but also from the diseases of the Egyptians (Deut. 7:15; 28:27, 35). Forensic studies of ancient Egyptian mummies indicate that the upper classes of Egyptian society suffered from the same diseases that plague the affluent today. If a mummy recently identified as Hatshepsut is genuine, then later in life she was obese, suffering from clogged arteries and diabetes. God had previously demonstrated His desire to save His people during the plagues, when disease fell on the Egyptians and their domesticated animals, but Israel and their livestock were protected. In this same manner, God here shared His plan to promote the Israelites' future health. Had they obeyed, they might have given both spiritual and physical light to the nations in truth and well-being (cf. PP 378).

Second, God provided food for the people (16:1–21). The people said *man hu'* ("What is it?"). This became the name of the food—*man* in Hebrew and *manna* in the Greek LXX and NT. The manna was similar to white coriander seed with a taste like honey, flaky, and as fine as frost (16:14, 31; Num. 11:8). It could be ground into a kind of flour, boiled, or made into cakes. It is often described as "heaven's grain" (Deut. 8:3, 16; Neh. 9:20; Ps. 78:24; see "The Miracle of the Manna," p. 215). Through this miracle, God demonstrated to Israel—as well as to future believers—crucial lessons for their journey to the promised land. He will abundantly provide for the needs of His children according to what He knows is best. The human tendency is to long for and return to familiar habits, and Israel was no exception. God indulged their desires but worked out a better plan that would train them to trust and depend on Him. He would provide them with sustenance for their bodies that was superior to the diet of Egypt, which included meat.

Third, God reaffirmed the importance of rest (16:22–30). The daily gift of manna served to train the Israelites concerning proper Sabbath observance. The instruction to gather what they needed in the first days of the week and the miracle of a double provision on the sixth day were given to test them in regard to whether they would follow His *torah*—"law" or "instruction" (vv. 4–5). The text clearly suggests that the Sabbath had been observed since the creation of the world and did not originate during the giving of the law at Sinai. Despite those who did not follow God's instructions, His plan for the Sabbath did not change but became normative throughout their journeys. God provides for His children according to their needs. It is easy to worry about the future, but God's care is sufficient for each day, teaching constant reliance on Him (Matt. 6:11).

Fourth, God wanted the people to remember His blessings (vv. 31–36). The manna was to be kept as a perpetual reminder of God's deliverance and to be put before the Lord, to be kept for subsequent generations (v. 33).

Fifth, God provided water for a second time (17:1–7). After the provision of the manna, there arose another crisis of faith over water. The Lord was teaching His children total dependence on Him. The question raised by Moses is notable: What should I do with these people (v. 4)? During his forty years of exile from Egypt, Moses had learned implicit confidence in the One who had led him from pasture to pasture with his flocks. His question demonstrates the exemplary posture of a leader of God's people. Rather than depend on his own abilities, Moses asked, "What shall I do?" When humanity solicits God's help, He intervenes. In providing the water from the rock at Rephidim, God demonstrated His sovereignty before the elders of Israel so that they could then go and witness to the people. Just as the manna was a type for Christ (John 6:31–63), so also was the water (John 4:14).

Sixth, God blessed the people with victory over their enemies (Ex. 17:8–16). The battle with the Amalekites, the descendants of Esau, initiated a feud that would last through the generations to the establishment of the monarchy under Saul (1 Sam. 15:2–3). This was the first battle Israel was to fight against another nation and would test their reliance on God. The Amalekites used guerilla tactics, fighting the Israelites from behind, where the weak and feeble were easy prey (Deut. 25:18). Joshua appeared here for the first time and commanded the forces against the enemy while Moses stood upon the mountain with the rod of God outstretched. Moses once again demonstrated his absolute dependence on God; however, he did not act alone—he was assisted by others. Here lies a lesson for the Christian today. One cannot prevail in the battles of this life without trusted companions for support. Moses was in earnest prayer on behalf of God's people, supported by Aaron and Hur (vv. 10–13).

18:1–27. Visit of Jethro. The visit of Jethro marked an important development in Moses's leadership effectiveness and Israel's organizational structure. Through the wise counsel of Jethro, God was able to preserve the energies of His chosen leader. Moses had sent Zipporah and their sons back to her father for safety before his confrontations with Pharaoh in Egypt, and the time had come for them to be reunited. Jethro escorted Moses's family to Mount Sinai/Horeb. Jethro's response on hearing about God's deliverance of the Hebrews from Egypt demonstrated that he was truly a righteous man who recognized the uniqueness of the Lord and His superiority to all other gods (v. 11).

As godly priest of Midian, Jethro offered Moses sage advice as he watched a day in the life of God's chosen leader. From morning until evening, people came to Moses with complaints or problems to resolve (v. 14). Why not delegate his burdens by establishing leadership positions over groups of a thousand, groups of a hundred, groups of fifty, and groups of ten? These rulers were not merely judges but heads over their companies in times of peace and war. Their positions involved both civil and military aspects. These men were to be competent, God-fearing, honest men who were not greedy (v. 21). Under God's approval, Moses would be able to endure and serve His people more effectively. Moses did everything Jethro advised (v. 24). Effective leadership cannot be accomplished by one person alone. Responsibilities must be delegated. Courageous servant-leaders share their duties with others and work in harmony to bring about the ultimate goal, namely, that of entering the promised land.

19:1—24:18

GOD ESTABLISHES HIS COVENANT PEOPLE

This central section of Exodus describes the arrival of the people at Sinai (19:1–9) and their meeting with the Lord (19:10–25). In preparation for entering into a covenant with His people, God majestically promulgated the Ten Commandments (20:1–17), gave additional laws—the book of the covenant (20:22—23:19)—and called the people to covenant faithfulness (23:20–33). The covenant was formally made between God and His people (24:1–8), and the section concludes with a meeting between Moses and the Lord on the mountain (24:9–18).

This section reveals that the invincible God who was active in salvation is a God who was also willing to dwell close to His people and who wanted to formalize His relationship with them. The Sinai covenant was decisive for both Israel and for humanity as a whole (see "Covenant," p. 905). It was essentially a continuation, enlargement, and particularization of God's earlier covenants, containing, in essence, the same design, purpose, and goal of redemption for the human race. The Sinai covenant was *not* a covenant of works aimed at teaching the Israelites salvation through obedience to the law. Like the covenant that God made with Abraham and the other patriarchs, this one was also a covenant of grace. Surely it demanded obedience, but this obedience was not a way to gain salvation. It was a way to express gratitude to God for the salvation already provided and experienced—redemption from Egypt.

19:1–25
Arrival at Sinai

As Israel established camp at the base of Mount Sinai, the God who had revealed Himself in judgments against Egypt would reveal Himself to His redeemed people as the covenant Lord. The giving of the law is one of the major focal points of the Torah, if not the entire OT. Although the law was recognized in Genesis (PP 363), here it would be formally written by God's own finger for the children of Israel.

19:1–8. A Peculiar People. The journey of the Israelites through the wilderness took them to the mountain of God, located in the wilderness of Sinai. This is in agreement with other passages that locate Mount Sinai/Horeb in the Sinai Peninsula (3:12; Num. 10:12). The journey may have taken about forty-five days, which suggests that they camped for considerable time at certain locations before moving to the place where they would remain for the remaining events recounted in the book. At Mount Sinai, the Lord revealed His plan and purpose for Israel (vv. 3–8). This was the first time that God personally (through Moses) instructed Israel since carrying them on eagles' wings from Egypt (v. 4; Deut. 32:11–12). Three unique statements were made concerning God's covenant people.

First, they were to become God's own possession, a special treasure (v. 5). In contrast to other types of possessions, such as real estate, Israel became God's personally obtained and privately owned treasure because of His love and affection (cf. Deut. 7:6; 14:2; 26:18, 19), which implies deep value and a special relationship. Second, they were set apart as a kingdom of priests (v. 6). This phrase is found only here in the entire OT. God's particular choice of one people had universal implications. While not every Israelite was a priest, as a nation they were to function, in one way or another, as God's priestly agents, to bless all the nations of the world. Third, Israel was to become a holy nation, specially dedicated to God (cf. 1 Pet. 2:9). Again, this phrase is used only once in the OT although the modified expression "holy people" can be found a number of times in Deuteronomy (Deut. 7:6; 14:2, 21; 26:19; 28:9). It was God's promise and design to make them holy by separating them from all other nations. The Israel of the covenant was to be primarily a religious entity (see Lev. 19:2; Ezek. 36:25–28).

Obedience to God's commandments, included in the terms of the covenant, made the holiness of the people visible. The Lord planned to establish Israel as His own holy people (Deut. 28:9; cf. 7:6–9), and to that end, He called them to keep His commandments. In fulfillment of His covenant promises, He made obedience possible by dwelling among them. In this sense, holiness is not something humans can achieve through their own strength but rather something received and reflected in a life of faith and obedience. The response of the people to God's gracious offer, grounded in their redemption from Egypt, is clear: they promised to do everything the Lord had said (v. 8; cf. Ex. 24:7). But the eagerness of the people to do so is ironic when compared with their subsequent failures.

19:9–25. Meeting a Holy God. God gave specific instructions for how Israel should prepare to meet Him. They were to sanctify themselves through outward ritual purification reflecting inner conviction. This included washing their garments (v. 14; cf. Num. 8:21), abstaining from sexual relations as part of the purification required (v. 15; cf. Lev. 15:18), and building a fence around the mountain (v. 12). The Lord's presence made the mountain holy. There is hardly any reason to believe that the mountain was volcanic and that God's presence caused an eruption. This naturalistic interpretation should not be imposed on a supernatural event. Throughout the OT, theophanies or powerful manifestations of God coming down to earth are associated with earthquakes (Ps. 77:18; Is. 29:6; Amos 8:8; Nah. 1:4), lightning (Zech. 9:14), and smoke or clouds (Is. 6:4; 19:1). The Second Coming will likewise be accompanied by an earthquake, lightning, and Jesus riding on a cloud (Matt. 24:27; Luke 21:27; Rev. 14:14; 16:18) together with a voice and the sound of a trumpet (Matt. 24:31; 1 Cor. 15:52; Rev. 4:1).

Moses and Aaron were called up to the mountain to speak with God, but the priests and the people were to stay within the boundaries (v. 24; see the section on Theology in the Introduction). Order is part of the nature of God's people. They were to stand within the camp and not cross the boundaries, for if they did, death would ensue (v. 12). As the Lord came down, Moses went up (v. 20). It was only because God came down that Moses was able to approach.

20:1–21

The Ten Commandments

Here is found the most important piece of legislation in human history. The law came out of the mouth of the Lord and was written by His own finger; therefore, this religious/moral code is immovable and unchangeable. It determines how humans should relate to God and to each other (see "The Decalogue in Deuteronomy and Exodus," p. 322). There is no evidence in the OT or the NT that God intended to modify or abolish the Ten Commandments. Submission to them constitutes a joy and a pleasure for Christian believers.

20:1–2. Preamble. The Ten Commandments, or ten words, are located within the context of God's redeeming grace that freed His people from the bondage of Egypt. God revealed Himself in this tangible demonstration of love—not in abstract or philosophical terms, but as a God who acts in history. Only love can produce a response of love and obedience (Deut. 5:6). The experience and memory of redemption brings together gospel and law. Only the Redeemer can call His people to love Him with all their hearts (Deut. 6:5; cf. Ps. 18:1; Jer. 2:2; Matt. 22:37). Thus, the first four commandments focus on our worship of God (Rev. 14:7), for it is only in the context of loving worship that we will be able to live in harmony with those around us. The law then defines our relationship with God on the vertical level and our relationship with humanity on the horizontal. The last six commandments are summarized in the words "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev. 19:18; Matt. 19:19). Jesus revealed the relational nature of the Decalogue when He said that those who love Him will obey His commands (John 14:15).

Eight of the Ten Commandments are often interpreted as being negative: "Do not…." But in the context of the introduction, which reveals God as the great deliverer, these may also be interpreted in the following way: "Because I am the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt.… You will have no other gods before me." This reveals the reason for keeping the commandments—out of love and devotion for the One who created and redeemed humanity. The Hebrew negative term *lo'*—"do not"—is to be understood not only as a prohibition but also as an enabling promise.

20:3. First Commandment. Although Israel came out of the polytheistic world of ancient Egypt and would enter the polytheistic world of Canaan, they were set apart to worship the one true and living God. The Lord who made heaven and earth will not share worship with any other, for there is no other (see Is. 37:19). In fashioning for themselves gods, the surrounding nations came to worship nature and themselves. Little has changed in the modern scientific age, which is focused on autonomous reason and experience. Humanity is placed at the center of the universe, and we degrade ourselves when we worship nature and the works of our minds and hands (Rom. 1:22–25).

20:4–6. Second Commandment. The ancient Egyptians believed that by following the activities portrayed on tomb reliefs, images, and statues, the soul of the deceased could experience the afterlife. They deified all aspects of nature, such as the sun and the moon "in heaven above," the animals and trees "on earth beneath," and the Nile River, which was the sea of "water beneath." These images lowered humanity's conception of God (PP 373). Idolatry was a phenomenon practiced not only in the ancient world but also throughout human history, even in modern times. Paul was greatly disturbed when he observed the pervasive idolatry in Athens (Acts 17:16). Paul's message to the Areopagus, the philosophical leaders of Athens, was that God cannot be reduced to a mere object.

The Lord God, the Creator of all things, alone deserves worship and honor. By worshiping nature rather than the Creator, humanity places itself under the control of demonic deception. We are not to attempt to fashion God's image, we are to be restored to God's image. It is in this context that many OT passages equate Israel to a harlot, or an unfaithful wife, for pursuing foreign gods (Ex. 34:15–16; Jer. 3:1; Hos. 2:5). We are called to be exclusively faithful to God, who longs to show us His divine mercy and love (v. 6). The commandment states that unfaithfulness to God will impact the third and fourth generations. Through hereditary tendencies and the imitation of parents and culture, the sin is passed down. Today, idols can be anything to which we assign the priority and commitment that belong only to God. In popular culture, movie stars, athletes, and musicians receive the honor, respect, and admiration that only God deserves, as our Redeemer. Furthermore, time spent in the use of contemporary means of communication bombards the senses with the unimportant and desensitizes the mind. The focus has shifted away from the infinite God who created the universe. God's word alone provides an accurate image of who He is and what He has done for us.

20:7. Third Commandment. The name of the Lord is to be respected, honored, and revered. It should not be spoken carelessly. It should not be invoked in a dishonest oath. The name of the Lord is awesome in significance. It is by His name that He reveals Himself (3:13; 33:19) and by invoking His name that people are blessed (Num. 6:27). His name is to be praised (Ps. 145:2), for it is exalted (Ps. 148:13). Engaging in false worship profanes His name (Lev. 20:3; 21:6). Those who enter into a covenant relationship with the Lord are also called by His name. If they are known as followers of God but do not live as followers of God, then their witness (James 1:26) and their worship are in vain (Is. 1:11; Matt. 15:7–9). Believers represent God in every aspect of their lives.

20:8–11. Fourth Commandment. The Sabbath is a gift from God to humanity, instituted at Creation (see "The Sabbath Commandment in Deuteronomy," p. 323). This commandment stands at the center of the ten words as a reminder of God's creative act and His relational nature in our lives. It is the longest commandment. It has a distinct syntactic structure and specifies the *what*, *when*, *how*, and *why* of Sabbath observation. First, we are instructed *what* to do. We are to remember the Sabbath day. There is a double meaning here. On the one hand, we are pointed back to Creation week to recall what God accomplished. We are also reminded to keep the Sabbath holy. We are to sanctify it, or set it apart for holy use. Thus, by remembering that on the seventh day of Creation God blessed and made holy the Sabbath, setting it for communion with Him, we continue worshiping the One who is the giver of all life.

Second, the commandment specifies *when* we are to remember: the seventh day is a Sabbath of our God (v. 10). The seven-day cycle of the week was instituted at Creation. The week was not related to any other natural order (the earth rotating on its axis for a 24-hour day, or revolving around the sun for the year). This measurement of time was ordained by the Creator, and we are invited to commemorate this great event with Him every week on the seventh day. That God Himself rested on the Sabbath (Gen. 2:2) and that the Sabbath was observed by the Israelites in their weekly collection of manna (Ex. 16:23–26) demonstrates that the commandment of the seventh-day Sabbath was established and known long before Sinai.

Third, the commandment describes *how* we are to keep the Sabbath. We are to do no work (v. 10; cf. Ex. 23:12), "to desist," "to cease" (which is what the verb form *shabat*—a term related to the noun *shabbat*—means) from our daily labor. We work during the first six days of the week, but the seventh day is a divinely instituted time reserved for God. The command to rest extends to the entire household. The whole family, as well as servants, livestock, and guests, are to enjoy the peace of the Sabbath. The extended household also should enjoy the rejuvenation of resting in the Lord as part of the family of God.

Finally, the commandment tells us *why* we are to keep the Sabbath. "In six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them." Then He rested on the seventh day, as an example to us (v. 11). But He also spent that day enjoying the fellowship of Adam and Eve. Therefore, He blessed the Sabbath day and sanctified it, or made it holy (v. 11; cf. Gen. 2:3). It is blessed because this relational God desires communion with us. It is holy because He set it apart for us. Spending time with our Creator renews us spiritually and physically. Calling the world to worship the Creator (Rev. 14:7) and to keep His commandments will be a special characteristic of the remnant living just before Jesus returns (Rev. 12:17; 14:12; see "Creation, Sabbath, and the Sanctuary," p. 231).

20:12. Fifth Commandment. Our relationship with God, as prescribed in the first four commandments, is here brought to bear on the single most important relational unit on earth—the family. Both the fourth and fifth commandments begin with positive injunctions. God's plan for preserving the family is foundational to the church and society. Here, children receive their first instruction in obedience, courtesy, respect, and honor. All of life's most important lessons are to be initially taught in the home. God emphasizes this relationship with the words "Honor your father and your mother." This honor and respect for properly instituted authority will spill over into the way we relate to society.

Here, the verb "to honor" (Heb. *kabed*) implies a continuous action and attitude, indicating that to honor one's parents is not a onetime event. As long as one's parents are alive, they are worthy of honor. "Honor" also means "heavy" or "weighty" and is the word used when God is given glory. How we honor our parents is a very weighty matter. Fathers and mothers carry the authority of governance in the home. How do children give their parents honor? By caring for them and obeying them "in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord" (Col. 3:20; cf. Eph. 6:1).

There is a promise associated with honor and obedience. The children of Israel had just come out of Egypt and were entering a new land. God promised them that if they honored their parents, their days would be long in the new land of Canaan. This promise is also for us. Even though disobedience to parents is one of the characteristics of people living in the last days (Rom. 1:30; 2 Tim. 3:2), there will also be those who remain in an honorable relationship with their parents, willing to listen to their instruction in the ways of God, His love, and His salvation. They too will enjoy a long life in the heavenly kingdom.

20:13. Sixth Commandment. Honoring the life of our neighbor is one of the sacred duties of humanity (Gen. 9:5–6). Jesus extended this commandment to incorporate not only the physical act of murder but also anger (Matt. 5:21–22). John the apostle included hatred (1 John 3:14–15). The story of Cain and Abel indicates not only how rapidly sin infected the first family of God but also how anger toward a brother can lead to murder (Gen. 4:5–8). Our thoughts and words must be guarded and focused on the respect and honor due to others because they were also created in the image of God.

20:14. Seventh Commandment. Instituted at Creation, marriage is the most sacred trust instituted by God between man and woman (Gen. 1:27–28; 2:21–23). The union between husband and wife forms the bond that holds the family together (Gen. 2:24) and exemplifies the union between Christ and the church (Eph. 5:31–32). This commandment protects marriage and trust, which adultery destroys. The commandment

also extends to other forms of sexual immorality, such as premarital sex (called "fornication"; 1 Cor. 6:13–17; Eph. 5:3–4). Sexual purity is a matter of the heart. Jesus warns against the lust of the flesh and committing adultery in one's heart (Matt. 5:28). In our media-driven society, sexual immorality has become a multibillion-dollar industry. Faithful vigilance on the part of Christians protects not only the sacred bonds of marriage but also their own souls (cf. Prov. 6:32–33), or their connection to God and the salvation it brings (1 Cor. 6:9–10). As far-reaching as the impact of sexual sin is, the grace of God offers the sinner redemption (1 Cor. 6:11) as well as the power to leave sin behind (John 8:11).

20:15. Eighth Commandment. Faithful stewardship and selfless giving are essential to the life of a follower of God and greatly impact relationships between neighbors and with God. Stealing breaks these relationships. When we take what is not ours, we exhibit a lack of trust in God to care for our needs, and we deprive our neighbors of God's providence for them. Stealing does not simply involve property theft but also extends to other practices in society. Greed has led companies to cheat employees by downsizing their workforces and forcing the remaining employees to do more work than they are being paid for. It has led employees to help themselves to office supplies and cheat on their time cards. This commandment protects people from being the victim of theft and from acting the part of the perpetrator. Our time and talents are gifts from God. We are accountable not only to God but also to our families and employers. Whenever we seek to gain from the loss of others or are more devoted to our private advantage than to equity, we infringe on the government of God.

One of the great responsibilities God gave humanity at Creation was the stewardship of the world (Gen. 1:26, 28). Good stewardship requires hard work and dedication (Prov. 6:10–11) to maintaining and increasing our God-given gifts and talents (Matt. 25:14–30). It shapes our characters into the likeness of God, who is the most sublime Giver. Everything we own belongs to Him, and we have been called to share it with those who are less fortunate than we are (Deut. 10:18; Acts 6:1–2). The rich young ruler was instructed by Jesus to give all that he had to the poor, to take up the cross and follow Him (Mark 10:21). When we find joy in giving, we will be less inclined to take or hoard what ultimately belongs to God.

20:16. Ninth Commandment. Honesty and integrity, or truthfulness, is the basis for trust in human relationships and is the core of God's character. He is truth (Deut. 32:4; Ps. 31:5), and everything He does is true and faithful (Heb. *'emunah*; Ps. 33:4). The entirety of His word is truth (Ps. 119:160; John 17:17), and His truth or fidelity (*'emunah*) continues throughout all generations (Ps. 100:5; cf. 117:2). Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6), and He sent His Spirit, who would guide us into all truth (John 16:13). Because the followers of Christ are to be transformed into His likeness, Paul urges Christians to be honest with one another—for we are members of each other in the same body (Eph. 4:25)—and to learn truth (1 Tim. 2:4).

The commandment addresses perjury in a court of law (23:1) but applies to speaking falsely about others, damaging their character, or slandering their reputation through falsehood and gossip (Ps. 31:13; 101:5; Prov. 10:18). Focusing on an individual's faults, having a critical attitude, or gossiping can give one a sense of superiority, but it essentially destroys another person for the sake of one's own ego. Character assassination does not foster positive relationships, nor does it draw the individual or neighbor closer to God. Remaining silent when others take part in these actions, rather than standing up for the individual, is also being dishonest, for it allows lies and deceit to go unchecked. The suppression of truth is not worthy of a disciple of the God who is truth.

20:17. Tenth Commandment. This commandment stands at the root of the other nine because it addresses the heart, where thoughts determine actions. Most other ancient laws dealt with actions, but not the motives behind those actions. God sees the heart (Gen. 6:5; 1 Sam. 16:7; Heb. 4:13), and it is upon our hearts that God desires to place His character (2 Cor. 3:3). Desiring that which is not ours, whether a neighbor's property, wife, servants, or anything that we do not possess, can lead us to break the preceding commandments. We are called to be content with what God gives us and employ those gifts to honor Him for the glory of His kingdom. In a world that is obsessed with materialism, the challenge for the believer is to be fully content in Him. True contentment requires submission and obedience to His will (1 Tim. 6:6–10).

20:18–20. The People's Response. God's presence on the mountain impressed the people with its power and magnificence. They were terrified at the sights and sounds coming from the mountain. The Lord had spoken directly to them, and the experience was terrifying, partly because they recognized that they were sinners. Their sense of wretchedness in the presence of God's holiness caused them to tremble (cf. Is. 6:4-5). But Moses instructed them not to be afraid or to forget this experience because this had happened so that reverence for God would keep them from sin (v. 20). How often humans become arrogant and sin boldly, forgetting the almighty power of the Creator who is able, through His everlasting love, to empower us to live holy lives!

20:22—23:19

The Book of the Covenant

There are several legal sections in the Pentateuch, built upon the principles of the Decalogue, that serve to instruct God's people regarding the application of the law of God in daily life. Many of these laws could be referred to as law cases, where God deals with issues that His people are likely to face. In the next three chapters, some of these situations are described in what is called the "book of the covenant" (24:7). In contrast to the Ten Commandments, these were given to Moses privately, to be communicated to the people. These laws provided the new nation of Israel with God's perspective on many issues, such as the sanctity of life, marriage, commemorative holy days, the Sabbath, and personal rights. Through these laws, God created within the covenant a social and religious order—one that, if followed, would result in a righteous society with its members at peace with God and each other.

20:22-26. Law of the Altar. Verses 22 and 23 serve as a transition to the new regulations. God spoke to the people from heaven without being seen; therefore, they were not to make any image of Him. How should they worship Him? At this point, the Lord asked them to worship Him by offering sacrifices to Him on an altar made of earth. It would be a place of meeting for God and His people, chosen by Him, where He would bless them. In the ancient world, there were many types of altars and associated modes of worship. Excavations have revealed altars dating back to the earliest periods of history. God instructed that if the altars were made of stone, they were not to be finished with tools but were to be built of unhewn stone so that the craftsmanship would not become an object of worship. The focus would remain on God and the sacrificial victim that pointed to Christ. In order to preserve proper decorum, there should not be many steps leading up to the altar.

21:1. Ordinances Set before Them. Some have suggested that many of the laws in Exodus 21-23 and other parts of the Pentateuch were borrowed from ancient extrabiblical law codes (Eshnunna, Hammurabi, Hittite, and Assyrian). Although similarities may be expected since most societies have legislation against murder, theft, and other crimes, comparisons must also take into account the differences between these sources. No other law code was based on a covenant relationship between a god or gods and a people. Additionally, all the other known law codes were produced by a particular culture, whereas Hebrew legislation came through divine revelation. Further comparisons suggest that biblical laws were less harsh in the treatment of women and servants.

21:2-11. Rights of Slaves. Israel had come out of slavery from Egypt, and they were here given strict laws that protected slaves from the cruelty they themselves had experienced. Sometimes poverty forced people to sell themselves or their children into slavery. Debtors were sold by their creditors, but under no circumstances were Hebrew slaves to serve in perpetuity against their will; they were to be released after six years (v. 2). Only if servants wished to continue serving their masters would they be allowed to do so (vv. 5-6). The rights given to servants under these circumstances protected them from injustice.

21:12-32. Laws Concerning Physical Violence and Lex Talionis. These law cases parallel the fifth and sixth commandments. Dishonoring parents by physically striking them was a most serious capital offense (Deut. 21:18-21). Cursing parents was equated with blaspheming God (Lev. 24:16). This law reflects the honor and dignity due to parents, who stand before their children in the place of God (cf. PP 308). Murderers were to be punished based on intentionality. Premeditated murder was punishable by death (v. 14), but asylum in the "cities of refuge" was offered in cases that were not premeditated (v. 13; Num. 35:9-28; Deut. 19:1-13). Slaves or servants in the ANE were the sole property of their owners, who had complete control in decisions of life and death. Biblical legislation gave slaves certain legal rights. Justice and mercy were demonstrated in these legislations. The principle of "an eye for an eye" is found throughout vv. 23-32 and in two additional passages in the Pentateuch (Lev. 24:17-22; Deut. 19:15-21), and Jesus also referred to it (Matt. 5:38-41). The action itself was never carried out literally in the Bible (the exception being "a life for a life"). The principle implied is that punishment for injuries done to a person or an animal is to be commensurate with the harm done. Revenge, which often escalated a situation and led to more harm, was forbidden. The punishment for children and adults was the same, underlining the high level of value placed on children (vv. 22-25).

21:33—22:15. Laws Concerning Property. In an agricultural economy, where animals were considered indispensable to the landowner, this category of property was especially protected in the cases of accidental harm, injury, or loss. According to the circumstances, the appropriate compensation was specified. The specific law cases dealing with theft indicate how seriously the offense is regarded by God. The owner was to be compensated fivefold for a stolen ox, fourfold for a lamb (22:1), and twofold if the thief were caught within twenty-four hours with the stolen animal (v. 4). The restitution was comparable to the value of the animal and, in the latter case, how long the offender had deprived the owner from the service of the animal.

Property damage to fields, either by animals or fire, was to be fully compensated by those responsible (22:5-6). The person owning the animal causing the damage or responsible for starting the fire was to make restitution, even if the act was unintentional or due to negligence.

Before there were lockable storage facilities or banks, it was common in the ancient world to entrust property to a neighbor, friend, or relative (vv. 7-15). This set of legislation deals with cases where silver or gold, animals, clothing, or other valuable items were stolen, lost, damaged or hurt in some way while in the trusted possession of someone other than the owner. In situations of theft, the thief had to repay double what was stolen. In the case of inadvertent loss or death by wild animal, an oath was given of no ill intent, the owner was to accept that oath, and no restitution was required.

22:16-17. Laws Concerning Seduction. The honor of young women was protected by legislation dealing with enticement. The Hebrew verb *patah* can mean "to seduce" or "allure" and indicates that both participants consent to a sexual act. The law required that a man who seduced a virgin must marry her, with her father's permission. The right of the father to refuse her hand in marriage remained, but in that case, the woman was to be compensated by a full bride-price, or dowry, to support her future. These laws were meant to govern proper acts of courtship, marriage, and sex, and the order in which they were to take place. Even if both individuals were equally guilty, the man was to marry the woman because they had acted as if they were married by having premarital sex. The father was to make the final verdict because he was obliged to protect his daughter from decisions that could permanently damage her future.

22:18-20. Three Capital Crimes. These death penalties were legislated for abhorrent crimes that challenged the order of God's creation. Each also involved false worship. The first addressed witchcraft and sorcery. God's people were not to allow a sorceress, a woman who practiced magic, among them. Both men and women involved in the occult were to be put to death (Lev. 20:27). Practices such as fortune-telling, conjuring spells, attempted communication with the dead, acting as a medium, or participating in other magical occupations were strictly forbidden (Deut. 18:9-14). God's plan and purposes would not be manipulated. The second abhorrent crime was bestiality, or intercourse with an animal. Such an act defied God's created order in nature and defiled God's image in creating humanity as man and woman. This was attested in Canaanite religious practice where deities were worshiped in the form of animals. The third capital offense was offering up sacrifices to pagan deities. Each of these violations was extremely serious in the eyes of God. Today, these activities are becoming increasingly more common. Best-selling books and media for children and teens are saturated with the occult. In Europe and America, there are a growing number of Wiccan practitioners, and in Africa and Asia, ancestor worship remains prevalent. In some places in the Caribbean and South America, macumba, voodoo, and other African religious traditions are popular and are even integrated into certain branches of Christianity. The text reminds us that God detests such practices.

22:21-27. Laws Involving Social Obligations. The laws concerning strangers, widows, orphans, and the poor revealed God's concern for the vulnerable in society. The foreigner or stranger was not to be mistreated but was to be honored because the children of Israel knew what it was like to live as strangers in the land of Egypt (v. 21). The alien was to be loved (Deut. 10:19) and treated like those who were native born (Lev. 19:34). Oppression of the weak was a trademark of Egypt in Scripture and found its strongest expression in the enslavement of the Israelites. Widows and orphans were to be cared for and not abandoned. They were to be protected and provided with clothing and food (vv. 22–24; Deut. 10:18). Those who have been in these situations, as Israel was in Egypt, will understand how important the church is in providing a sense of family and home to those who have neither. We are not to take advantage of the poor by making a profit from their misfortune (v. 25). God's passion for the disadvantaged is visible in the usage of "I" or "me" in this section. The mission of God's people is to ease the suffering of the world.

22:28—23:9. Religious and Social Obligations. Proper respect was to be shown to God and to the leaders of the people, applying concepts contained in the third commandment (v. 28; 20:7). Speaking in a way that insulted, blasphemed, or applied the prerogatives of God to oneself was not permitted. God instructed Israel to give the first and best of their agricultural and animal products to Him (vv. 29–30). This included the redemption of the firstborn son by a money payment (13:13; Num. 3:46–48). Israel was to be a holy people unto God (v. 31; Ex. 19:6; Lev. 11:44–45; 19:2; Deut. 7:6), which was connected to food prohibitions here and elsewhere (Deut. 14:21).

Living a life of honesty and integrity is an application of the ninth commandment (Ex. 20:16; 23:1). Peer pressure must be avoided when seeking justice (23:2). Sympathy toward the poor is not to distort justice when the person has committed a crime. The reason given is that God Himself will not justify the wicked (v. 7), for ultimately, all will face His judgment.

23:10–19. Sabbatical Laws and the Festivals. The fourth commandment (20:8–11) was the focus of law cases dealing with the sabbatical year and the seventh-day Sabbath. During the sabbatical year, landowners were instructed to let the land rest by not plowing it—a beneficial agricultural practice. There was also a social interest in the legislation: the practice provided food for the poor and for the animals. Orchards, vineyards, and fields were not to be harvested, allowing those in need to take what they required for sustenance (23:11). It is reiterated here that the seventh day was for rest, not work (v. 12; cf. 16:22–30; 20:9; Deut. 5:13–14). This rest means "to cease" from work for the benefit of animals, servants, and strangers. It is God's desire that all have this seventh day to rest.

23:20–33. Divine Guidance and Obedience. God ratified the covenant by sending His Angel, His Son Jesus Christ (Mal. 3:1; cf. PP 352, 366), for only Christ was able to pardon transgressions (v. 21). God declares, "My Name is in Him," which indicates that He is coequal with God (John 1:1–31; Col. 1:13–19; Heb. 1:8). God through His Son is always the initiator of the covenant relationship, but this covenant—like the ones in Genesis—was conditional: it depended on whether the people would obey Him and do all that He instructed them (v. 22). If the people upheld their part of the covenant, then God would fulfill His promises and provide blessings. God promised to drive out the inhabitants of the land of Canaan using fear, confusion, and hornets (vv. 27–28), but this would take longer than a year, in order to preserve the ecological balance of the land (v. 29). This is what might have been had this generation believed in the promises of God rather than the report of the ten spies who returned from Canaan (Num. 13:26–33; see "The Extermination of the Canaanites" [p. 330] and "Holy Warfare" [p. 372]). God stipulated that His covenant was between Him and His people, not with other nations (v. 32).

24:1–18. Covenant and the Tablets of Stone. God wrote the Ten Commandments with His finger, and Moses transcribed all the words of the book of the covenant (v. 4) before reading them to the people (v. 7). The Hebrew terms found in conjunction here (*karat* and *berit*) literally mean to "cut a covenant." In the ancient world, it was a common practice in treaty-making to kill and "cut" an animal or animals in order to establish or ratify a covenant. The covenant with Abram in Genesis 15:7–21 was ratified by cutting animals in two. Then God, represented by the smoke/cloud and torch, passed between the divided pieces. Moses requested that young Israelite men sacrifice oxen as burnt and peace or fellowship offerings to the Lord, and he sprinkled the blood on the altar and on the people (vv. 6, 8). This represented the establishment of a covenant relationship between God and Israel. Israel declared that they would do everything the Lord had said to do. Thus, they affirmed their commitment to the conditions (see Ex. 19:5–8).

Moses ascended the mountain once more to receive from the Lord the tablets of stone and the statutes. The tablets of stone were written by God for the purpose of instructing them (v. 12). The word *torah*, "law," means, in its broadest sense, "teaching" or "instruction" and refers to all the revealed will of God. Here it is used in its narrow sense to designate the Ten Commandments. Their all-inclusive purpose was to govern the covenant between God and the people. Moses stayed with God on the mountain for forty days and forty nights (v. 18). This foreshadowed Christ's experience immediately after His baptism, before beginning His earthly ministry that would bring reconciliation and the establishment of a new covenant (Matt. 4:2; Luke 4:1–2).

25:1—40:38

THE SANCTUARY: GOD'S PRESENCE AMONG HIS PEOPLE

The main topic of Exodus 25–40 is the sanctuary and its construction and significance. The chapters could be divided into three sections: instructions related to the building of all key aspects of the sanctuary (25:1—31:18), the episode of the golden calf (32:1—34:35), and the construction of the sanctuary and its inauguration (35:1—40:38). The instructions given to Moses for the creation of the sanctuary, its tabernacle, its furniture, the courtyard, the incense and oil, and the clothing and implements of the priests underlined the significance of having the covenant Lord dwelling among them and the seriousness of that privilege. The explicit attention to detail also highlights the importance that God places on worship and how it is to take place. Since the later construction account (chaps. 35–40) closely parallels the wording of the initial one (chaps. 25–31), they will be treated together here, as indicated with parentheses in each relevant heading.

25:1—31:18

Instructions for the Construction of the Sanctuary

The instructions given for the building of the sanctuary begin with the ark of the covenant (25:10–22), where God's divine presence would reside, then move to two of the articles of furniture in the Holy Place (25:23–40). This is followed by the construction of the tabernacle (26:1–37), one of the articles of furniture in the courtyard (27:1–8), and the courtyard itself (27:9–19). Directions are also provided for the care of the lampstand (27:20–21). The clothing for the priests and their consecration, along with offerings, are then described (chaps. 28–29). Finally, the altar of incense, the issue of ransom money, the laver (also called the basin), and recipes for the oil and incense are discussed (chap. 30). The instruction ends with guidelines for the artisans and a review of the Sabbath law (chap. 31). This systematic presentation indicates the structure and order of God's design (for a discussion of the literary structure of this section and its significance, see "Creation, Sabbath, and the Sanctuary," p. 231).

25:1–9. Make Me a Sanctuary. The construction of the sanctuary would require the people to provide resources in the form of an offering to the Lord. Their offerings were to be given, presumably, from the plunder that the defeated Egyptians had conferred on them when leaving Egypt (Ex. 12:36) as back pay for their years of labor. Offerings then and today are to spring from a thankful and responsive heart (v. 2; 2 Cor. 9:6–7), otherwise they lack true spiritual value. Part of worship is returning to God a portion of the many blessings He has given us. Every member of the community was, in this way, a participant in the construction of the sanctuary. The response of the people was so overwhelming that they were restrained from giving more (Ex. 35:21–29; 36:3–7).

From the time of Creation, when He walked in the Garden with Adam and Eve, God has always been interested in being close to humans, even dwelling with them. The sanctuary provided the means by which God could dwell among the Israelites. The term *mishkan* means "tabernacle" or "dwelling." This is expressed in other places as well (Lev. 15:31; 26:11). It points to the incarnation of Christ, when the Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us (John 1:14). This theme of God's nearness anticipates the new earth, where God's dwelling and tabernacle will be with His people (Rev. 21:3; see "Sanctuary, Covenant, Worship, and Forgiveness," p. 226).

While on the mountain, God presented Moses with the pattern of the sanctuary and its furnishings (v. 9), and Moses was directed to follow the divine instructions. The Hebrew term for "pattern" (*tabnit*) can also be translated as "model" (2 Kin. 16:10) or "plan" (1 Chr. 28:19). A functional model of the heavenly sanctuary was to be used in the construction of the earthly sanctuary. God dwells in the original heavenly sanctuary, where Christ mediates for us (Acts 7:44; Heb. 8:2; 9:23–24).

25:10–22 (37:1–9). The Ark of the Covenant. The ark of the covenant, with its cherubim, was the focal point of the sanctuary, representing the throne of God. The ark was made of acacia wood overlaid with gold. It would contain the tablets of stone and, eventually, the budding rod of Aaron and a bowl of manna. Above the ark was the mercy seat, or "atonement cover," serving as the resting place of the Shekinah glory of God. Its position over the ark and the Ten Commandments indicated that mercy and justice are inseparable from each other (Ps. 85:10; 89:14)—mercy and justice perfectly reflect God's character. Thus, the blood sprinkled on the mercy seat on the Day of Atonement symbolized God's mediation of mercy toward the sinner who had transgressed the law (Rom. 3:25; 8:34; Heb. 7:25).

The cherubim fashioned of solid gold stood on either side of the throne of God as guardians of holiness and perfection (Gen. 3:24; Is. 6:2; Ezek. 1:11) and were intimately connected with the heavenly sanctuary, from where angels minister to God's people on earth (cf. PP 345). With one set of wings, they covered their bodies, representing humility and reverence, and their other wings were raised toward the center above the mercy seat.

Sanctuary, Covenant, Worship, and Forgiveness

Most of the second half of the book of Exodus concerns itself with the wilderness sanctuary, detailing the instructions from God to Moses and the implementation of those instructions in its construction and services. The narrative is interrupted by the worship of the golden calf and its implications. There are several important concepts related to the sanctuary that would be useful to explore.

1. A Place of Meeting. The sanctuary remained central throughout the history of Israel concerning the covenant. Within the covenant relationship, it was essential for the Lord to be close to His people. The central purpose of the sanctuary was to provide a particular place for God to dwell among them. In fact, the Hebrew term for "tabernacle" (*mishkan*) is related to Shekinah, God's glorious presence (Ex. 25:8). Divine love moved God to dwell in a tent, among His people. As Messiah, He became human and dwelt among us (John 1:14; see the section on Theology in the Introduction).

2. Redemption, Covenant, and Tabernacle. The construction of the sanctuary was preceded by a divine act of redemption, namely, the deliverance of Israel from the enslaving power of Egypt. This, in turn, was followed by God's willingness to enter into a permanent covenant relationship with His people. He would be their God, and they would become His people (Ex. 6:7). The way they would relate to Him and to each other was defined by the covenant law. The tabernacle was indeed a place of meeting, a place where God and humans came together. It was only after redemption and the establishment of a permanent union with God through the covenant that the people had access to God in His dwelling place.

3. The Tabernacle, Worship, and Forgiveness. Through the sacrificial services, Israel would express to the covenant Lord, who dwelled among them, their love, gratitude, devotion, and joy, thus strengthening the covenant relationship. But the sanctuary would also be the place where, in cases of covenant violations, the people could find reconciliation and forgiveness of sin by bringing to the covenant Lord a sacrificial victim. The sanctuary was the place where the sin problem was resolved through sacrificial blood and the priestly work on behalf of the people. It was through the daily and annual services performed in the sanctuary courtyard outside of the tabernacle that the problem of sin and impurity was resolved and the covenant relationship preserved or reestablished.

It was through the blood of the innocent sacrificial animal that sin was expiated (Lev. 17:11). The sanctuary services illustrate God's plan of redemption, the symbols and shadows pointing to the sinless Redeemer who one day would come to offer His life as a sacrifice and substitute for the sins of the world (Is. 53; John 3:16). He would also become our High Priest, who ministers in the heavenly sanctuary as our Mediator before the Father (Heb. 7:25; 9:11–12). The Israelite sanctuary and its services encapsulate a complete system of divinely-revealed truth, connected and harmonious, illuminating the plan of redemption and the mission and message of God's people to the world (cf. GC 23).

The Current Location of the Ark of the Covenant

What happened to the ark of the covenant? The last mention of the ark is after the refurbishing of the temple, when Josiah instructs the Levites to bring it into the temple (2 Chr. 35:3). It is never mentioned again. Today, there are at least fifteen theories about the location of the ark, with possible whereabouts ranging from Babylon to Egypt, Ethiopia to Mount Nebo, and multiple sites in and around Jerusalem. The apocryphal book 2 Maccabees 2:4–8 states that the ark was hidden by Jeremiah on Mount Nebo. But the book was written 500 years after the event. Ellen White provides the insight that the ark was hidden in a cave by the priests just before the Babylonian destruction of the temple and that it remains there today (PK 453). While many claims have been made concerning the discovery of the ark, these claims have not been verified by credible archaeological investigation and remain uncertain.

25:23–30 (37:10–16). The Table of Showbread. This is the table where "the bread of the presence" or "showbread" was placed. This terminology was used because the bread was placed before God in the Holy Place. As one entered the tabernacle, it would have been on the right side, to the north (Ex. 40:22). Like the ark, the table was made of acacia wood covered with hammered gold. Twelve loaves of showbread were set upon the table every Sabbath and were to be eaten by the priests (Lev. 24:5–9). The bread represented the twelve tribes of Israel and pointed toward Christ, "the bread of life" (John 6:35).

25:31–40 (37:17–24). The Seven-branched Candle. The lampstand (v. 31) was called a "menorah," formed from the noun *ner*, "light," and *nur*, "to shine, blaze." It was built of solid gold, weighing a talent, which is about 75.38 pounds (34.19 kg), and was engraved with almond blossoms. The almond was the first tree to blossom in the springtime, thus exemplifying Christ, the first fruit of the resurrection. Christ, who is also the light of the world (John 1:4; 8:12; 12:46), is represented as standing at the center of the lampstand, whose lamps represented the people of God disseminating His light to the world (see Rev. 1:12, 20). The lamp oil symbolized the power of the Holy Spirit to illuminate His truth through the church (Zech. 4:2–6).

26:1–37 (36:8–38). The Furnishings of the Tabernacle and the Veil. The tabernacle was to be a portable building that could be moved as the people journeyed from Sinai to Canaan. For this reason, it was made of individual parts that could be disassembled and reassembled. The ten curtains, two rows of five, were made of linen and colored thread (gold/blue/purple/scarlet). They were intricately woven by skilled craftsmen and embroidered with cherubim (Ex. 36:8). This was the layer that could be seen from inside the tabernacle by the priests who ministered there. The workmanship style reported in the Hebrew text involving the tabernacle and the priestly clothing corresponds to grades of holiness. The high priest's clothing was more elaborate than that of the other priests, just as the designs and the curtain of the Most Holy Place were more elaborate than those in other parts of the sanctuary.

The roofing was composed of a layer of goat hair coverings, then ram skins, followed by an outer layer. The outer layer was made of *takhash* (v. 14), which has been interpreted and translated variously as "badger skins," "goatskins," or "porpoise skins" from the dugong or sea cow. These durable leathers were used to make the outer layer waterproof. The Red Sea is still heavily populated with sea cows today, and porpoises would also have been available at that time. These curtains were fastened together with gold rings. The combined effect would have made the interior very dark. The frames of the tabernacle were made of acacia wood, covered in gold (v. 15). These planks would have been heavy to transport, so Moses instructed four wagons and eight oxen to be given to the sons of Merari of the Levites for their transport (Num. 7:7–8).

The veil separating the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place was made of the same material as the curtains—blue, purple, and scarlet, with embroidered cherubim. The veil in the Jerusalem temple was torn at the moment of Christ's death on Calvary, which symbolized the end of the sacrificial system (Matt. 27:51; Heb. 9). The curtain covering the entrance was made of similar woven materials and hung on pillars (Ex. 36:37–38).

27:1–8 (38:1–7). Altar of Burnt Offering. This altar was located in the courtyard and measured 7 feet, 4 inches (2.22 m) square by 4 feet, 5 inches (1.33 m) high. It was made from acacia wood and bronze, an alloy of tin and copper. It was probably hollow, which allowed for easier transport. The Hebrew term *qeren*, "horn," symbolized strength and power (Ps. 75:10). These horns have been found on altars in many archaeological contexts, including the Judean sites of Arad and Beersheba and the northern site of Dan. The horns protruded outward from the four square corners of the altar. The priests dipped their fingers in blood and applied it on the horns during the atonement process (Lev. 8:15; 9:9). Criminals seeking refuge in the temple would cling to them (1 Kin. 1:50–51). The blood of the burnt offering represented the atoning blood of Jesus Christ for sin (Is. 53:4–7; Eph. 1:5–7; 1 Pet. 1:18; Rev. 5:9). Tools were fashioned for use in offering sacrifices on the altar—shovels to remove the ash, three-pronged forks to arrange the pieces of the offering on the altar, and fire pans to dispense the coals from the fire (Ex. 27:3).

27:9–19 (38:9–17). Outer Court. It was in the court that the altar of burnt offering and the laver (or basin) were located. The outer court measured about 150 feet (44.45 m) in length and 75 feet (22.86 m) wide. The hangings or curtains surrounding the court were 7 feet, 4 inches (3.46 m) high, half the height of the tabernacle, so that it was clearly visible from outside the enclosure. They were hung from pillars of bronze (vv. 10–11) surrounding the tabernacle. The entryway to the court faced east and had a screen that was composed of the same materials as the veil separating the Most Holy Place from the Holy Place (v. 16) although the quality was not as refined as that of the tabernacle veil. The courtyard represented the death of Christ on the cross.

27:20–21. Oil for the Lamp. The oil was to be supplied by the people. Here there is a shift in focus from the apportionments of the tabernacle and the description of its furniture to the people. The subject addressed here is their obligation and involvement in the sanctuary services. Clear, pure oil of olives was collected, the olives having been beaten with a mortar rather than crushed in a press (v. 20). This provided the finest fuel. The lamps of the menorah were to be kept burning by Aaron and his sons from evening until morning or continually (v. 21). The priest was required to reside in the sanctuary throughout the twenty-four-hour period. The light represented God's eternal presence, reciprocated by the priest's continual worship. Perhaps this imagery was what Christ had in mind in his parable of the ten virgins when he admonished his followers, "Keep your lamps burning" (Luke 12:35).

28:1–6 (39:1). The Priests: Aaron and His Sons. The priesthood was not a position that Aaron and his sons aspired to; it was ordained by God. To minister as priests required being set apart for their duties by God (see 1 Sam. 2:28a). God chooses whom He will appoint. One recalls, in contrast, Jeroboam's appointment of his own priests, including himself, to serve in the apostate high places of Dan and Bethel in the northern kingdom of Israel (1 Kin. 12:32; 13:33; 2 Chr. 11:14). The results of this decision led to widespread apostasy and finally defeat and exile at the hand of the Assyrians. Just as the priests kept the lamps trimmed in the Holy Place, they were to approach God continuously, wearing unique clothes that God designated for their high office.

28:7–30 (39:1–21). The Ephod and Breastplate. The ephod was the symbol of the high office of the priest. The ephod is described in more detail than any other article of clothing. This emphasizes its significance. It was made of fine linen by skilled craftsmen who wove in the colors and threads used for the veil (v. 6). It was worn as an apron or vest. Two semiprecious onyx stones were fixed on the shoulders of the ephod (v. 9). The names of the twelve tribes of Israel inscribed on these stones signified the high priest's intercessory role (v. 12). When the high priest entered the tabernacle, he stood before the Lord as the representative of the twelve tribes whose names he bore.

The breastplate was attached to the ephod by strands of gold cord (v. 24). It was made of similar cloth as the ephod but measured about 10 inches (25.4 cm) square (v. 16), for placement over the heart of the high priest (v. 29). Twelve precious stones, each engraved with the name of a tribe of Israel, were fastened to the breastplate (vv. 17–20). Whereas the two onyx stones were placed on the shoulders (vv. 9–12), the twelve stones were positioned over the heart, the main organ of life. The instruction to place it over the heart was repeated three times for emphasis (vv. 29–30). It is interesting that in Egyptian embalming practices, the heart was never removed from the corpse. It was the heart that was evaluated in the judgment and weighed in the balances. The heart was considered the place where decisions between right and wrong were made. The Urim and Thummim were placed on either side of the breastplate. God's will was made known to the people through these stones (1 Sam. 23:9–12; 30:7–8). The Urim illuminated by light indicated divine approval while a cloud over the Thummim denoted disapproval (cf. PP 351). The twelve stones placed over the heart of the high priest probably pointed to the heart relationship Christ desires to have with His people, exemplified in both the old and new covenants (Deut. 6:5–6; Jer. 31:33).

28:31–43 (39:22–31). The Clothing of Aaron and His Sons. The text here shifts from the most important element of the priestly vestments, the ephod, to the clothing underneath. A fine robe of blue linen was to offset the brilliant colors of the ephod and its precious stones (v. 31). The color blue may have symbolized the law. The people wore garments fringed with tassels in blue to remind them of the law of God (Num. 15:37–40), and the high priest was completely covered in blue, signifying submission to God's will. It was to be made without seam, indicating its perfection. Later, the redeemed are described as being dressed in robes of righteousness, worn by the faithful who have been cleansed in the blood of Christ (cf. Zech. 3:4). Pomegranates were to hang from the hem of the robe, interspersed with bells of pure gold (vv. 33–34). The pomegranate signified life and fertility. The priest standing in the presence of God represented the lives of those he interceded for. The bells rang constantly while the high priest carried out his work. The sounds from his ornaments were constant reminders of the need for the people to be in prayer and worship during his ministration on their behalf.

The gold-plated inscription with the words HOLINESS (or HOLY) TO THE LORD indicated the most sacred task of the priesthood. It was to be placed on the high priest's forehead so all could be reminded of who God was and their relationship to Him as sinners. Only through the work of their Redeemer could the penalty of sin be atoned for. The symbolism of the priestly garments provided significant types pointing to a high priest whose messianic mission is a superior ministry because He is the Mediator of a better covenant established upon better promises (Heb. 8:6).

29:1–37. Ordination of the Priests. This passage begins with a list of items needed for the service: a young bull, two rams, and three types of flatbread (vv. 1–2). They were to be brought with Aaron and his sons to the entrance of the tabernacle (v. 4). Aaron and his sons were not allowed to enter the tabernacle until their consecration had been completed. Three rituals were performed, namely, rituals of cleansing, clothing, and anointing. The instruction to wash the men (v. 4) implied cleansing. The Hebrew term *rakhats* suggests a complete submersion or bath in water, not a mere sprinkling (Ex. 30:18–20; 40:30–32). Ritual bathing became an important representation of cleansing from sin and impurities. Standing in the presence of God as mediator required purity. After the priests were cleansed by Moses, who acted as God's representative (Ex. 4:16; 7:1), they were clothed in their holy vestments (vv. 5–6). Finally, the priests were anointed with oil, an act that probably signified consecration to their function through the Holy Spirit. The same anointing oil was also used to consecrate the tabernacle and its utensils during the ordination ritual, reflecting the unity of sacred space and personnel (see Lev. 8–9). A similar pattern is seen with Christ, who was baptized in the Jordan and anointed by the Holy Spirit descending as a dove over Him (Matt. 3:17; 2 Pet. 1:17).

A series of offerings was required to complete the consecration. The first was the sin offering (v. 14), which the high priest and his sons presented every day for seven days. Typically, a bull was offered for the congregation or for the high priest (Lev. 4:1–12). Smaller animals, such as female goats, were offered for individuals (Lev. 4:28). On the Day of Atonement, the high priest would lay both hands on the goat and confess the sins of the people over it (Lev. 16; see "The Laying On of Hands," p. 243). Aaron and his sons placed their hands on the sacrificial victim, and the blood of the bull was placed on the horns of the altar, purifying the high priest (v. 12). The second offering was the ram for a burnt offering (vv. 15–18; cf. Lev. 1), a sweet aroma or pleasing fragrance before the Lord (v. 18). This was a gift offering and was therefore pleasing to God. The third offering was the ordination or consecration offering (v. 22). The blood of this offering was applied to the right ears of the priests, that they might hear the instructions of the Lord, upon their right thumbs, that they might perform the work of the Lord, and upon their rights toes, that they might go in the way of the Lord (v. 20). The final step was for Aaron and his sons to eat the bread and the flesh of the ram to consecrate and sanctify themselves (vv. 32–33). In this way, Aaron and his sons were to be set apart to do the work of priests, teaching and leading God's people in truth and righteousness (Mal. 2:6–7).

29:38—30:10 (37:25–28). The Continual Burnt Offering and the Altar of Incense. The burnt offering was to take place in the evenings and the mornings (v. 39), perhaps in connection with the trimming of the menorah and the burning of the incense (30:1–10). A yearling lamb was to be placed on the altar first in the morning and then in the evening, left to burn throughout the night. Although two sacrificial victims are mentioned, one offered in the evening and the other in the morning, the two constitute one single sacrifice called the continual burnt offering (see Num. 28:3, 6). God promised that He would meet with His people at the altar, suggesting that it was a symbol of His presence and accessibility to the people in the courtyard. The Hebrew term *tamid*, continual or regular (v. 38), pointed to the continual or daily mediation of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary (see Lev. 6:8–13; Heb. 7:25; see also notes on Heb. 7:23–25).

The altar of incense was to be placed before the veil separating the Most Holy Place from the Holy Place. It was to be centered between the menorah and the table of showbread and, like them, was made of acacia wood covered in pure gold with horns. Incense was to be burned on it, morning and evening, before the Lord. The incense represented the prayers of the people ascending to God, mingled with the merits of Christ, the perfect sacrifice. The heavenly altar of incense was seen by John in his visions (Rev. 8:3–4).

30:11–16. The Half-Shekel of Atonement. The Lord required from the people a specific sum to be used for the maintenance and upkeep of the sanctuary. The same amount was required from the rich and the poor alike. This tax was to be a ransom for their lives. The Hebrew term *koper*, ransom (v. 12), and the phrase *kesep hakkipurim*, "atonement money" (v. 16), seem to indicate the importance of this tax. It was brought so that there would be no plague when the census was conducted. It was a legal way of counting the people and of reminding them that their lives could be preserved only by the Lord and not by their collective strength. This brings to mind the later consequences of David's census taken for reasons of personal interest and military gain (2 Sam. 24).

30:17–38 (37:29; 38:8; 40:7, 30). Bronze Laver (or Basin) and Anointing Oil. The laver (or basin) was placed in the courtyard between the altar of burnt offering and the entrance to the tabernacle. Its function was to provide water for the cleansing of the priests' hands and feet before they entered the tabernacle. On the Day of Atonement, this cleansing was also to take place upon completing the work (Lev. 16:24). The anointing oil was composed of specific ingredients (myrrh, cinnamon, cane or calamus, cassia, and olive oil) and was for the anointing of the priests, the tabernacle, and its furniture, for all generations (vv. 25–31). The incense was aromatic (Ex. 30:7) and composed of certain key ingredients. The importance of this composition is highlighted in the experience of Nadab and Abihu, who burned profane, unauthorized fire upon this altar (Lev. 10:1).

31:1–11 (35:30—36:7). The Artisans: Bezalel and Aholiab. The calling of these two individuals indicates that priests were not the only ones called by name to service. These two men were filled with the spirit of God, and God put the wisdom of skillful artistry in their hearts (vv. 3, 6). In highlighting this special calling, God established art and creativity as important ways to reflect His image. God then enumerated the types of abilities that Bezalel and Aholiab would be endowed with: wisdom, understanding, knowledge, and all kinds of craftsmanship (v. 3). Wisdom, knowledge, and understanding were to be combined with skill. All aspects were necessary for these men to accomplish their work. God did not simply call them to the task, but He also provided the means and abilities needed to fulfill His calling. All of these gifts were given for a specific purpose, namely, to honor God in building the sanctuary as a glorious place of worship. Thus, art is defined in Scripture as having a purpose: art is for God's sake. This stands in stark contrast to contemporary movements where "art is for art's sake." Everything that God does has a purpose and should draw others to Him. Thus, art as defined in these verses is for service.

31:12–18. Keeping the Sabbath Holy. This passage on the Sabbath concludes the instructions given for the building of the sanctuary. It also forms part of the chiastic structure that begins later with the renewal of the covenant and the actual construction of the sanctuary (see "Creation, Sabbath, and the Sanctuary," p. 231). While circumcision was given as an outward sign, the Sabbath was the internal sign of the heart (v. 13), indicating the loyalty of God's people to His covenant (see Ezek. 20:12, 20). The death penalty for its violation emphasized

its holiness and functioned as a deterrent (v. 14). The nature of the Sabbath, on the seventh day, is emphasized by a reference back to the Creation week (v. 15). The permanence of the Sabbath is also emphasized in vv. 16–17. It is the longest of the commandments, and it was the only one repeated and emphasized just before Moses was given the two tablets of testimony (v. 18).

32:1—34:35

Violation of the Covenant: The Golden Calf

This account is placed after the instructions to build the sanctuary but before its actual construction because this was when the event took place. What follows is a description of an act of open rebellion against the covenant Lord, an offense that He took very seriously.

32:1–6. Back to Egypt. Moses's long stay on the mountain caused unrest among the people. Fearing the permanent absence of their leader, they fell back into the idolatry that perhaps many of them had practiced in Egypt. The Hebrews and the mixed multitude had come out of Egypt, where nature was worshiped in the form of hundreds of gods, within a complex, spiritualistic religion. In this moment of anxiety, they demanded a visual representation of that which their finite minds could not conceive: "Make us gods," they demanded (v. 1). The golden calf could have represented any number of Egyptian deities. The Apis bull was worshiped in Memphis as Ptah, the god of life. Hathor, the cow goddess, was worshiped in Thebes as the goddess of motherhood, beauty, love, and joy. The description of the activities of the people in vv. 6 and 25 contains clear sexual overtones that might be equated with the rituals surrounding Hathor worship. Aaron, their spiritual leader, who was to be inaugurated as high priest, even built an altar before the image and offered up burnt offerings and incense, proclaiming that this calf was the god who had brought them out of the land of Egypt (v. 4). When the kingdom of Israel later divided in 931/30 B.C., Jeroboam also made two calves, placed them in Dan and Bethel, and quoted the same phrase from Aaron to legitimize his actions (1 Kin. 12:28).

32:7–14. God's Reaction and Moses's Intercession. From the mountain, the Lord saw what was happening and told Moses that He was ready

Sabbath, Creation, and the Sanctuary

Scholars commonly find in the book of Exodus a connection between the construction of the sanctuary, Creation, and the Sabbath. This is indeed the case in the instructions to build the sanctuary and its actual construction.

1. *Sanctuary and the Sabbath.* It is significant that in the midst of the sanctuary narrative of Exodus, the Sabbath appears, the sign of the covenant relationship (Ex. 31:12–18). Not even the construction of a holy place for God (i.e., the sanctuary) would justify the violation of the Sabbath. Its violation would be an intolerable rebellion against the loving covenant relationship God had established with them. Such rebellion would indicate that the violators are no longer identifying themselves with the covenant community because of their rejection of the sign of the covenant. They would be excluded from the community and from having access to God's presence in the sanctuary. In this way, God was emphasizing the importance of faithfulness to Him in the context of the sanctuary and its services. The sanctuary in space (the tabernacle) did not replace the sanctuary in time (the Sabbath).

2. *Sanctuary, Sabbath, and Forgiveness.* Notice how the literary structure of Exodus 24–40 combines the sanctuary, the Sabbath, and forgiveness into a unified whole.

A Theophany/Moses goes up to the mountain (24:13–18)
  B Instructions for the construction of the sanctuary (25:1—31:11)
    C Sabbath (31:12–18)
      D Apostasy, forgiveness, covenant renewal (32–34)
    C′ Sabbath (35:1–3)
  B′ Construction of the sanctuary (35:4—40:33)
A′ Theophany/Moses could not enter the tabernacle (40:34–48)

The narrative about the construction of the sanctuary is interrupted by the worship of the golden calf. The Sabbath commandment, which should have reminded the people to worship God as Creator, preceded and followed the act of idolatry. The people repented and God forgave them, thus restoring the people to the covenant relationship with God. The Sabbath was then reaffirmed in the context of the construction of the sanctuary.

3. *Sanctuary and the Garden of Eden.* The emphasis on the sanctuary, the Sabbath, and forgiveness of sin reminds us of the Garden of Eden. The Garden was not only the dwelling place of Adam and Eve (Gen. 2:8) but was also the place where God came to meet with them (3:8). This was where God instituted and gave the seventh-day Sabbath to humanity (2:1–2). In addition, it was the place where sin entered into the world (3:1–8), where an investigative judgment took place (3:9–19), and where God offered to humanity forgiveness of sin through the coming Seed of the woman (3:15), represented by the sacrificial victims (cf. 3:21). It would be correct to say that when the Israelites came to the holy sanctuary to worship God and to seek forgiveness, they were returning spiritually to the union and perfect harmony with the Creator that characterized the life of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

There is a connection between the construction of the sanctuary and the Creation narrative in Genesis. In Genesis there were seven days, and in Exodus there are seven divine speeches, introduced by the phrase "The Lord said to Moses" (25:1; 30:11, 17, 22, 34; 31:1, 12), that instructed Moses how to construct the sanctuary. The seventh speech is about the Sabbath and references Creation (31:1–12). The narrative regarding the actual construction of the sanctuary begins with the Sabbath commandment (35:1–3), and the phrase "as the Lord commanded" is used seven times to affirm compliance with God's will (40:17–33). It was in obedience to God's commands, to His word, that the sanctuary was built. In Genesis, God created by separating elements and assigning to them specific functions (Gen. 1:4, 6, 7, 14, 18). The same happened in the building of the tabernacle. For instance, the veil divided the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place (Ex. 26:33), and the priests were to separate or distinguish between the holy and the common, the clean and the unclean (Lev. 10:10). The emphasis on creation through separation and the cycle of seven, culminating with the Sabbath, indicates that the building of the sanctuary was a divine activity through which God was creating a holy space within a world of sin and uncleanness. There He would meet with His people to sanctify them. It could be suggested that the tabernacle was the beginning of a new creation that will reach a cosmic dimension. The original relationship between God and humans in the Garden of Eden was being restored, and this restoration would reach its climax on the Day of Atonement (see Lev. 16).

to consume the people on account of the violation of the covenant. God no longer referred to them as His people but as the people Moses had brought out of Egypt (v. 7). As intercessor, Moses reminded the Lord that He was the One who brought them out of Egypt and they were, in fact, His people (v. 11). God listened to Moses and did not destroy the people. After descending, Moses saw what was happening and broke the two tables of the law in recognition that the covenant had been broken (Deut. 9:17). Nevertheless, so deep was Moses's love for these people that he offered his life for theirs and asked that his name be blotted from the Book of Life (v. 32; cf. Rev. 3:5; 13:8; 20:12–15). But God rejected his offer because only His Son's death would be an acceptable substitution (see Is. 52:14—53:12).

33:1–6. Command to Leave Sinai. The Lord was willing to let the people leave Sinai to head to the promised land, but at a cost: He would not be with them. The sanctuary building project, which had not yet begun, was set aside during this crisis. Although the covenant had been broken, God would keep His promise to defeat the enemies of the people and grant them a new home in the promised land, but they would enter the land without Him. This raises a major question for Israel and for Christians today. Is anything worth doing without God's presence and blessing? He had brought them out of Egypt, but He would not go with them into Canaan. Canaan, the land flowing with milk and honey (v. 3), would be meaningless without God. This was the greatest

moment of crisis for Israel. Even in Egypt, when the people were slaves, God had been attentive to their cries for help. But if they moved forward without God, their cries would go unheeded.

The reaction of the people was to strip themselves of their ornaments (v. 6). The Hebrew may imply that they did this at Mount Horeb or, as some translations indicate, that they removed their ornaments at Mount Horeb and did not don them again. In other words, the Israelites did not wear jewelry after this point. Why? There could be several reasons. (1) They were acting in obedience to what God had asked (v. 5). (2) Some of the jewelry had been used to make the golden calf (Ex. 32:2–4). (3) It was common in ancient Egypt for jewelry to be fashioned to resemble foreign gods. Jewelry could also include amulets, which were thought to carry inherent magic. (4) Or this was a sign of contrition, repentance, and humility. Judges 8:24 seems to indicate that, at that time, the Israelites were still not wearing earrings, in contrast to the custom of the Ishmaelites. During times of apostasy, Israelites again wore jewelry, and God warned the people He would remove their jewelry as part of His judgment (Is. 3:16–23). Paul and Peter affirm this position and encourage modesty, good actions, and the inward beauty of gentleness instead of jewelry (1 Tim. 2:9–10; 1 Pet. 3:3–4).

33:7–23. Moses Again Intercedes for the People. Since the sanctuary was not yet built, Moses placed the temporary tent of worship well outside the camp (v. 7). The people had removed themselves so far from God's will that, in His holiness, He could not dwell near them. But Moses could approach Him. The pillar of cloud descended, and the divine presence spoke face-to-face with Moses (vv. 9–11). This figure of speech does not mean that Moses saw God's face (see v. 20), but it emphasizes the direct communication Moses had with God. God had not completely forsaken the people. He was willing to speak to their leader, Moses. Sinners can find comfort in knowing that, in spite of their sin, their heavenly Mediator can approach the Father on their behalf. Therefore, Moses continued to intercede, asking God not

The Sanctuary/Temple and Ancient Near Eastern Parallels

The sanctuary and the subsequent temple are often compared with the long tradition of temple buildings in the various ANE cultures. Some critical scholars suggest that the tripartite design (courtyard–Holy Place–Most Holy Place) was copied directly from the Egyptian, Canaanite, or Assyrian world. Others further argue that the technologies and design of the sanctuary resembles Bronze Age Egyptian parallels. A number of parallels have been documented. However, there also exist three fundamental distinctions. (1) There was no representation of the deity in the Hebrew sanctuary/temple. The Lord was not to be depicted in images. (2) The sacrificial system with its goal of atonement for the individual and corporate body was unique to the Hebrew sanctuary/temple. (3) Dedicating a temple to one god alone was not practiced by the polytheistic nations surrounding Israel. Egyptian temples frequently depicted multiple gods interacting with the king. Canaanite temples could have been dedicated to any number of gods in the pantheon. Despite these major differences, why are there so many similarities between the sanctuary/temple and ANE temple designs? In Exodus 25:9, Moses was shown the sanctuary according to a heavenly pattern. Lucifer was once a covering cherub in the heavenly sanctuary before the throne of God (see Ezek. 28:14–17). He was cast down because of his pride and rebellion (Is. 14:12–14). His attempt ever since has been to counterfeit God's plan. Would it not be natural for him to imitate and adapt God's plan for salvation as taught through the sanctuary service? Could not Lucifer have inspired false worship in these "sanctuaries" of Egypt, Canaan, and Assyria while God inspired Moses and Solomon to remain faithful to the heavenly pattern? Worship and whom we worship are central to the conflict in Exodus and the rest of Scripture (e.g., Rev. 12, 14). This may be a possible reason for the similarities between the Hebrew sanctuary/temple and ANE parallels. It is at least worth considering by those who are well-acquainted with the biblical concept of the cosmic conflict.

to abandon His people but to go with them to Canaan (33:12–13). God agreed to go with Moses but not with the people (v. 14). Moses was not satisfied with this answer. In the end, the Lord pronounced that He would accompany the people—because of His relationship with Moses (v. 17). In order to confirm that the Lord would escort the people to Canaan, Moses requested God to allow him to see His glory (v. 18). This time, the Lord could not grant him the request, but He could let Moses see His love, goodness, and compassion (vv. 19–23).

34:1–9. Moses Goes Up to the Mountain. Moses was instructed to cut two tablets of stone identical to the first ones (v. 4) and to carry them to the top of the mountain. The Lord would again inscribe the Decalogue with His finger. These tablets would be placed in a box of acacia wood (Deut. 10:3–5) and later within the ark of the covenant (Ex. 37:1; 1 Kin. 8:9; 2 Chr. 5:10). When Moses reached the mountaintop, the Lord descended in a cloud (v. 5), revealing Himself as "the Lord, the Lord God" (v. 6), identifying Himself as Yahweh *'elohim* ("God"), the Creator and covenant God. On this occasion, He revealed to Moses seven aspects of His character. He is merciful and compassionate. He draws near to His children in sympathy and cares about their struggles. He is gracious, a word that describes undeserved mercy. He is longsuffering, slow to anger, and patient with them in their mistakes. He is abounding in (Heb.) *khesed*—"goodness," "loving-kindness," or "mercy" and overflows with *'emet*—"truth" and/or "faithfulness." His love and faithfulness are without bounds. His *khesed* (v. 7), repeated again for emphasis, is available to "thousands." Finally, He is forgiving of *'awon*—"iniquity" or "wickedness," *pesha'*—"transgression" or "rebellion," and sin. The Hebrew word *nasa'*—usually translated as "forgive"—also means literally "to lift up, to carry," which is what God does with the sins of His people. He lifts their burdens and casts them "into the depths of the sea" (Mic. 7:19). In legal contexts, the term *nasa'* also means to assume responsibility for sin. God forgives by assuming responsibility and taking sin upon Himself. He did this through Christ. Yet those who persistently reject Him will experience divine judgment. All of God's gracious, loving, merciful, and forgiving characteristics can only truly be appreciated by fallen, sinful beings in the context of God's just wrath against sin. All of us fully deserve eternal death if we are without Christ and His forgiveness.

34:10–35. Covenant Renewal. God had revealed Himself as a forgiving God, and this was shown in His pardon of the covenant violation of His people. His relationship with His people was restored: He promised to make a covenant with the same promises and conditions He had stated earlier (vv. 11–28; Ex. 23:10–33). He is a jealous God (v. 14) who demands sole worship and allegiance. He still requires from His covenant partners obedience to the covenant law. After descending from the mountain, with his face shining with the glory of the Lord, Moses reported to the people the divine decision. His shining face confirmed that he had been in the presence of God and that he was God's appointed leader.

35:1—40:38

The Building of the Sanctuary

The worship of the golden calf had nearly eliminated the divine assurance of God's dwelling among His people. Had it not been for a persistent leader and intercessor and for the gracious and longsuffering Redeemer, Israel would have entered the promised land alone and left to their own devices. The renewal of the covenant reminds us that we serve a God of second chances. Where we are unfaithful, He is faithful; where we are impatient, He is patient. Once the covenant relationship had been restored, this Holy God was ready to fulfill His promises and His ultimate desire to dwell with His people. The construction of the sanctuary was about to begin. (In this section, less detailed explanations will be provided because of the repetitive nature of Exodus 36–39, which mirrors much of Exodus 24–31. The reader will be referred back to the comments made previously.)

35:1–3. Sabbath Commandment. Moses then gathered or assembled the whole people of Israel. The Hebrew verb *qakhal*, "to gather, assemble" is used here and in 32:1, when the people demanded the golden calf from Aaron. But the contrast between the two gatherings is stark. The first assembly was a gathering of a people rising up against God. The second gathering was an attempt to lead the people to obediently follow God's instructions. In this new gathering, Moses emphasized the Sabbath (vv. 2–3), which would guide the people's focus back to the Creator. Previously, they worshiped a calf of their own creation, but this time, through the Sabbath, they would acknowledge the God who created all things. The Sabbath closed the chiasm of covenant broken and covenant restored, becoming a sign that the people were in fellowship and communion with the covenant Lord.

35:4—36:7. Offerings from the People. The overflow of the offering was an expression of their gratitude to God not only for saving them from Egypt but also for reconciling them to Himself after their idolatry. Everyone whose hearts were impressed to contribute came with willingness (v. 21). The construction of the greatest visual representation of God's plan of salvation was possible only through the gifts of these worshipers. The Holy Spirit not only filled Bezalel and Aholiab with wisdom and understanding to build the sanctuary (see Ex. 31:1–11) but also put in their hearts the ability to teach the other craftsmen and artisans who were to work under their supervision (35:34). Men and women who are given gifts to accomplish great things are to work together with others and teach them what God has given them for His honor and glory. It is significant that when God gives instructions, in this case for the construction of the sanctuary, He also provides the means to accomplish it. He does so by giving individuals the necessary skills and by providing, through His people, the needed materials and funds. The people wanted God to dwell among them and were willing to do whatever it took to make this happen. Eventually, the builders had more than enough, and the people had to be restrained from bringing any further donations. How refreshing to see such an outpouring of sacrificial love toward God! How different churches would be if believers would consistently give freely of themselves and the means at their disposal so that God's message could go out to the world!

36:8—39:31. Construction of the Sanctuary. The instructions given in Exodus 25–31 are largely repeated here in their execution, and some may wonder about this redundancy. In the Bible, repetitions are significant. In the Creation narrative of Genesis 1, God gives a command, and this is consistently followed by a description of how His command was enacted (e.g., Gen. 1:3). This was done to demonstrate that God does what He says. In Exodus 25–31, the instructions were given by God, according to the pattern shown to Moses, in explicit detail. After the disruption of the golden calf rebellion and the covenant renewal, this information is repeated to indicate what was done. Several purposes are accomplished within this narrative. First, this account serves to verify that Moses was faithful in delivering God's commands to the people. The phrase "as the Lord [had] commanded Moses" is repeated twelve times in Exodus 38–39. Second, this testimony highlights the fact that the Spirit-filled work of Bezalel, Aholiab, the craftsmen, and the people of Israel was an expression of God's wisdom and power. Third, this record indicates that what God predicts for the future will be fulfilled in every detail through the outworking of His Spirit. Finally, it emphasizes that when the people followed God's plan, they accomplished even more than they had ever imagined.

39:32—40:33. The Work Is Completed. In vv. 31–43, it is indicated three times in different ways that the people of Israel did everything according to the Lord's commands to Moses. This is repeated to signify that all was done according to God's will. The rebellion of the golden calf is here contrasted with the obedience in carrying out the plans of God. And Moses blessed them (v. 43). This is the only time in Exodus where Moses blesses anyone. Moses's anger at seeing the calf turned into a blessing at seeing the completed sanctuary. Previous curses because of a broken covenant were, at this point, turned to blessings in response to obedience to the covenant.

The tabernacle was next erected and anointed, and Aaron and his sons were ordained (40:1–16). All of the tabernacle and its furnishings were to be anointed with oil (v. 9). The altar of the burnt offering was to be set apart, consecrated, and made most holy, or "utterly holy" (v. 10). The priests were also to be anointed and consecrated (vv. 13–15), an activity that is described in more detail in Leviticus 8. The fact that this was an anointing for a continuous or eternal priesthood throughout the generations suggests that it was an ordination service with permanence as long as the sanctuary and later the temple services functioned in Israel (v. 15).

The tabernacle was erected on the first day of the first month of the second year, precisely one year since the Exodus from Egypt (Ex. 12:2) and nine months after Israel arrived at Sinai (Ex. 19:1). Moses and the people erected the tent of meeting (the tabernacle) and carefully placed the furniture in the designated locations. They finished their work faithfully.

40:34–38. God Descends to His Tabernacle. The filling of the tabernacle with the glory of the Lord was the ultimate reward for a work well done, but above all, it was the realization of

God's longing to be near His people. Moses and the people had done what the Lord had commanded, and as a result, God resided among them. These concluding verses recapitulate the Exodus theme. The covenant had been established, God was now dwelling among His people, and He would guide Israel in all their ways. The light of God's presence would be in the sight of all Israel (v. 38), reminding them that they were not an ordinary people but a God-led people. The promise of Exodus 25:9 was fulfilled. Their future journey would be with a God who would dwell among them. Their journey to the promised land was ready to begin. The hearts of the people throbbed with hope as they faced the future, knowing that the Lord was in their midst. The Christian reader also looks forward, knowing that Christ is present in the church and leading it in its journey toward the heavenly promised land (John 16:13–15; Heb. 12:1–2). The One who has begun a good work in us will bring it to completion (Phil. 1:6). This is the promise we embrace in hope.

LEVITICUS

INTRODUCTION

Title and Authorship. The English name of the third book of the Bible is based on the name of the book in the Latin Vulgate: *Liber Leviticus*. In fact, the name "Leviticus" goes back to the Greek translation of the OT (LXX), where the book is called *Leuitikon*. This suggests that, for the translators, the book was about matters related to the Levites. However, the Levites are rarely mentioned in the book. It could be that the title refers to the Levitical priests, and in that case, it would be closer to the truth. This idea is found in Jewish writings where the book is called "The Priest's Manual" or "Priestly Torah/Instructions" although the book is hardly a manual.

The Hebrew name is taken from the opening word of the book, *wayyiqra'* ("and He called"). It was a common ancient practice to name a book after its first words. In this particular case, the name corresponds well with the content of the book. *Wayyiqra'* introduces God as the speaker—"and He [God] called" Moses—and, as will be demonstrated, the book consists primarily of a series of divine speeches addressed to Moses, or to Aaron, and to the people. Moses has traditionally been identified as the author of the book, and there is no persuasive argument to the contrary. This is principally the case at a time when critical scholars are reexamining the origin and authorship of the Pentateuch (see "Introduction to the Pentateuch," p. 120). There is also the testimony of Jesus, who, when referencing Leviticus, identified Moses as the author (see Matt. 8:4; Mark 7:10; Luke 5:14).

Date. The book is a literary unit in itself, but it is part of the history of the Israelites during their sojourn near Mount Sinai. This helps date the book. The title "and/then He called" points back to Exodus 40:34–35, when God's glory descended on the tabernacle after it was built. At that moment, the Lord called on Moses and gave him instructions concerning the services to be performed in the sanctuary (Lev. 1:1). This suggests that the book was written in the fifteenth century B.C.

Theology and Purpose. When attempting to understand the theological message of Leviticus, its connection to the book of Exodus must not be overlooked. The construction of the sanctuary had just been completed, and the glory of the Lord had filled the place (Ex. 40:34; cf. 25:8). This sanctuary was defined as holy space, made holy by the presence of a holy God (Ex. 29:43).

1. Only God Is Holy. The concept of holiness is very prominent in Leviticus and conveys two basic ideas. First, the holy is not part of the world as such. There is only One who is by nature holy: the Lord (Lev. 11:44; see also 11:45; 19:2; 20:26). Since nothing else is holy in and of itself, holiness refers to God as He is in Himself. Holiness points to the uniqueness of God and to His incomparability, completely distinct from His creation. It points to the mystery of His nature. Simply put, there is nothing and no one like Him. Second, and almost paradoxically, God's holiness also speaks to His closeness to humans as their only source of life (17:11). He brought the Israelites out of Egypt (11:45) and made them His people (20:26). Therefore, divine holiness is demonstrated by God's uniqueness and His willingness to enter into a unique relationship with humans. In the midst of a world damaged by the presence of sin and evil, a holy God created a space to dwell among His people. Now the question is: How could sinful human beings, who are not holy by nature, relate to this majestic God who dwelled among them? It is this question that the sanctuary services, as described in Leviticus, seek to answer.

2. Sin, the Unclean, the Common, and the Clean. Since only God is holy, in what condition is His creation? According to Leviticus, the world is characterized by sin, the unclean or impure, the common or profane, and the clean or pure. Since nothing on earth is considered holy, everything is in a state of separation from God. The sanctuary services described God's way of ordering the world, similar to His actions at Creation (Gen. 1–2), by establishing distinctions and boundaries that the Israelites were to respect in order to exist in harmony with Him and with each other (see "Creation, Sabbath, and the Sanctuary," p. 231). At the center of this order was the Holy God of Israel. But as indicated, there were other forces at play in the world—sin, the unclean, the common, and the clean. The Israelites were to relate to these elements in certain ways in order to preserve the order established by God.

The unclean/impure signifies death and is, by nature, incompatible with the Holy One, the fountain of life. The common/profane was not to come into contact with the holy because it would profane the holy or make it common. However, the common, the clean, and even the unclean/impure were sanctified through cleansing and sanctification rituals.

It is correct to suggest that, in Leviticus, the world is fundamentally divided into two realms, namely, the holy and the sinful/impure. In other words, there was the divine realm of life and the sphere of sin and death. There was also the common and clean, indicating that not everything was under the absolute control of sin and impurity. There were to be clean places (4:12) and clean animals (chap. 11). Even the common was not necessarily evil unless it was improperly brought into contact with the holy (Ex. 3:2–5; Num. 18:15–18). But ultimately, all living creatures come under the power of the unclean by descending into the sphere of death; everyone and everything dies (cf. Eccl. 9:2–6). The ultimate source of death is not God but Azazel (see chap. 16). Leviticus appears to indicate that humans, in themselves, are in a state of sinfulness and impurity and are, therefore, in constant need of divine grace to be cleansed, forgiven, and sanctified. Within the divine order established by God are means to deal with this existential problem.

3. God Shares His Holiness. The holy God placed His dwelling in the midst of a world characterized by sin, the unclean, the common, and the clean. He sanctified the people of Israel by redeeming them from Egypt and by entering into a covenant relationship with them. Israel became holy in the sense of belonging to God, and therefore, they were a unique people—a holy nation and a kingdom of priests (Ex. 19:6). In this context, being holy means that the Lord had set them apart to be His people (Deut. 7:6; 14:2). This is the relational side of the covenant, but there is also an ethical side to it. They were also holy in the sense of being under God's jurisdiction through obedient service to Him and to His covenant law (see Lev. 11:44, 45; 20:6–8, 22–26). Holiness is a gift and, at the same time, a task. The Israelites were to be holy as God is holy (19:2). He is the model to be followed, the image to be reflected.

Within Israel, God also set apart (sanctified) priests and Levites for a particular purpose (8:12, 30; 21:8). Additionally, portions of time were consecrated by the Lord for specific service to Him: the Sabbath (23:3), the celebration of the festivals (23:4, 7, 8, 37), and the Jubilee (25:12). There were holy things, like offerings (see 2:3; 6:17; 7:1; 21:21–22), tithes (27:30), utensils (8:9, 11), clothing (16:4, 32), the altar (8:11, 15; 16:19), and the furniture of the sanctuary (8:10). The tabernacle, in particular, was a holy space, forming the center of the sanctuary with its Holy and Most Holy Places (16:2). All of these persons, things, and times were set apart for a divine purpose, and all of them were equally threatened by the incursion of sin and impurity. When the divine order was disrupted, death threatened the covenant relationship.

4. Holiness and Covenant Violations. Obedience to the covenant law was, in a sense, the ethical expression of the holiness of God in the life of the people. Therefore, the violation of the moral or ritual aspects of the law was a serious act that required the exclusion of the violator from the sphere of holiness and life. Such individuals found themselves in the sphere of death, moving inexorably toward destruction. The violation of the *laws of cleanliness* resulted in a state of impurity. To be unclean was to be alienated from God's dwelling and from others. Unclean persons were not in the sphere of fullness of life but under the influence and power of the sphere of death. This is suggested by the fact that the sources of impurity were associated with death. These sources include dead bodies (Num. 6:6, 7, 11), diseases (Lev. 13; 14), blood discharge (chap. 15), and semen (15:16; which could be called the "seed" of life). Impurity was associated with the realm of death and, as illustrated in the experience of the leper, the individuals were separated from God and others. They were considered to be under the power of death (Num. 12:9–12). These individuals were headed toward absolute alienation from the holy community and from God. Death was their final destination unless something was done to remove them from the fatal sphere.

Disobeying the *moral aspects of the covenant law*—that is, sinning against God and others—resulted in moral impurity, and the outcome was alienation from God. Sin was not a physical impurity but a burden that left sinners in a state of guilt (Lev. 5:1–2). The Hebrew *nasa' 'awon*—translated as "to bear guilt," "to bear iniquity," or "to be held responsible"—refers to a legal declaration, indicating that sinners were responsible for their specific sin and that they were liable to a punishment or penalty (see 5:1; 20:20; 24:14, 15; Ex. 28:42, 43; Num. 9:13). The ultimate result of this condition was death, which was suggested by the fact that in order to free sinners from this condition, a sacrificial victim was to die in their place (Lev. 5:1, 5, 6; 17:11).

God's holiness cannot peacefully coexist with sin or impurity (death). Even after God sanctified His people, the presence of impurity among them was not totally eradicated. Impurity was, in some instances, inevitable, as in the case of menstruation (15:25–27). Consequently, the Lord developed and established a system that addressed the needs of His people and that strengthened and preserved or restored their moral and ritual purity. In other words, God instituted a sacrificial, priestly, and atoning system that aimed at separating impurity and sin from His people in order for them to continue to exist in His holy presence, within the order He had established for their fellowship.

5. Holiness and Atonement. According to Leviticus, atonement is a divine gift through which God ransoms the life of repentant sinners, restoring them to covenant fellowship with Him. Leviticus 17:11 establishes a direct connection between sacrifices, the use of blood, and the atoning process. It assumes that because of sin and impurity, human life is endangered and needs deliverance, which God provided in the form of blood. The blood of the animal—that is to say, its life (17:14; Gen. 9:4; Deut. 12:23)—was to represent the life of the sinner. In His grace, God, as the proprietor of blood/life, accepted the life of the animal instead of the life of the sinner.

The Hebrew verb *kipper* ("to make atonement") expresses the idea of removing sin or impurity from people or objects ("to perform a rite of cleansing"). In the case of persons, *kipper* removes the obstacle that obstructs a proper relationship with the Lord and, thus, conveys a sense of expiation. The verb is probably derived from the noun *koper* ("ransom"), indicating that the barrier between God and humans is removed by giving "a ransom" for the endangered life of the person. The concept of substitution is clearly indicated because the life of the sacrificial victim stands in for the life of the sinner (see Lev. 17:10–11). The process of atonement is seen in the verb *kipper*, which is directly associated with the sacrificial victim (5:10, 18; 7:7), the laying on of hands (1:4), the use of the blood (6:30; 8:15), the eating of the flesh of the sacrificial victim by the priest (10:19), and the Day of Atonement (16:16, 20). The atoning process consisted of two services, the daily and the annual (the Day of Atonement; chap. 16), during which different rituals were performed.

During the *daily services*, the Israelites were to approach the Lord to express their joy and gratitude, thus strengthening their communion with Him, but were also to seek cleansing and forgiveness. Two different atoning sacrifices were to be offered by the Israelites for violations of the covenant law: the sin/purification offering (Lev. 4) and the guilt offering (5:14—6:7). A specific, unblemished sacrificial victim was required, and the offerers were to lay their hands on the animal. Through the laying on of hands, the individuals were to identify themselves with the sacrificial victim, transferring onto it their sin/impurity (see "The Laying On of Hands," p. 243). After the animal was slaughtered, a complex application of the blood (ritual blood manipulation) was required. The blood, which belonged to the Lord, was to be given back to Him through the ritual process and would become a vehicle for transferring the sin/impurity from sinners to the sanctuary. There were two other important sacrifices, whose primary function was not expiatory: the burnt offering (chap. 1) and the peace/fellowship offering (chap. 3). In both sacrifices, the blood manipulation was simplified, indicating that their primary function was not to atone for sin/impurity. The burnt offering was to be offered to make atonement for a person (1:4). The use of the peace offering for atonement is not specified in Leviticus, but Ezekiel indicates that this offering also had an atoning function (Ezek. 45:15, 17). Besides, Leviticus 17:11 indicates that the blood of all sacrifices had an atoning purpose. The implication is that when God's people come before Him, they are always in need of divine cleansing and forgiveness.

The *annual service*, or the Day of Atonement (chap. 16), brought the circle of the process of atonement to its close. The rites that were to be performed on that day had the specific purpose of removing from the sanctuary the sins and impurities of the people of Israel that had accumulated there through the daily services over the course of the previous year (16:16). The Holy and Most Holy Places of the tabernacle, as well as the altar of burnt offering, were to be cleansed and reconsecrated; atonement was to be made for them (16:33). During the performance of the ritual, the true source of sin and impurity (Satan) was symbolically identified and made responsible (16:21–22). The Day of Atonement was a day of judgment (see "The Theology of the Day of Atonement," p. 264). It was not when the sins of the Israelites were forgiven but when their forgiveness was made complete or finished. For a brief period of time, holiness reigned in the absence of sin/impurity in Israel.

6. *The Work of Christ and Leviticus.* Christians have generally found in the Levitical sacrificial system and its priestly services a prefiguration or a type of the sacrifice and the high priestly ministry of Jesus. The NT uses the sacrificial system to interpret the meaning of the sacrificial death of Jesus. This is particularly the case in Ephesians 1:7, which states that Christ provides redemption and forgiveness of sins through His blood. Redemption, which is at the heart of atonement in the OT, is now the result of the death of Christ. As in Leviticus 4, this passage in Ephesians brings together redemption, blood, and divine forgiveness. Peter adds that this redemption was accomplished with "the precious blood of Christ," who is the Lamb without blemish (1 Pet. 1:19). Jesus Himself stated, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). Redemption is now a gift from God through Christ. In this particular passage, the idea of substitution is explicitly indicated through the use of the Greek preposition *anti* ("in place of" or "instead of"). This was to be the role of the Servant of the Lord in Isaiah (Is. 53:11–12; see "The Servant of the Lord in Isaiah," p. 885). The idea of substitution is even stronger in 1 Timothy 2:6: Jesus "gave Himself a ransom [*antilytron*, a "substitutive ransom"] for [*hyper*, "on behalf, for the benefit of"] all." Paul adds that Christ "redeemed us from the curse of the law" by having become "a curse for us" (Gal. 3:13). He took upon Himself what was ours—the curse—and freed us from it. He took our place and our death. It is only through the sacrificial death of Christ that atonement is possible for repentant sinners. There is no need for any other sacrifice because He accomplished what every sacrifice in the OT pointed to: redemption, reconciliation, forgiveness of sin, cleansing (Heb. 7:27; 9:14, 26, 28; 10:5–14).

Christ is now the believers' high priest before the Father: He is able to forever and completely (Gk. *pantelēs*) save those who come to God through Him, since He lives to intercede for them (Heb. 7:25; cf. Rom. 8:34; 1 Tim. 2:5; 1 John 2:1–2). He officiates, not in the earthly sanctuary but in the heavenly one (Heb. 8:1, 2, 5; 9:12, 24; 10:19, 20; Rev. 11:19; 14:17; 15:5; see also Psalms: Introduction). He began His priestly mediation after His ascension by asking the Father for the Holy Spirit on behalf of the disciples (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; Acts 1:4–5), and His request was granted (Acts 2:33). In fulfillment of the typological function of the daily services in the earthly sanctuary, Christ is interceding for His people by applying to them all the benefits of His saving sacrifice on the cross for their forgiveness, cleansing, and sanctification. The typological significance of the Day of Atonement is to be fulfilled in the consummation of the saving work of Christ before and at His Second Coming (Dan. 8:13–14; Heb. 9:23–28; Rev. 11:19). The ritual of the Day of Atonement was a day of judgment that proclaimed the coming of a day when the cosmos would be utterly free from the miasma of sin and death (impurity). The OT also anticipated a time when the holiness of God would be victorious (e.g., Zech. 14:20). Likewise, Christians look forward to the consummation of the redemptive work of Christ at the close of His priestly work before the Father in the heavenly sanctuary (see Dan. 8:14; Heb. 9:23).

Literary Features. There are four important literary features in Leviticus: divine speeches, literary structure, descriptions of rituals, and narratives. The book is chiefly made up of divine speeches given to Moses to instruct the people and the priests concerning the sanctuary services and their covenant responsibilities as a holy community. In some cases, the Lord gave private instructions to Moses (5:14; 6:1; 6:19; 8:1; 14:1; 23:26; 24:13) or to Aaron (10:8). He also spoke to Moses and Aaron together (11:1; 13:1; 14:33; 15:1). In most cases, God addressed Moses with directives for Aaron (16:1; 21:16; 22:1), for Aaron and his sons (6:8, 24; 21:1), and for all the Israelites (1:1; 4:1; 7:22, 28; 12:1; 15:1; 17:1; 18:1; 19:1; 20:1; 22:17; 23:1, 23, 33; 24:1, 25; 27:1). The only sections that are not divine speeches are the narratives. This literary feature emphasizes, in a particular way, the divine origin of the book, making absolutely clear its authoritative nature.

Overall, Leviticus is well structured. It opens with the Lord speaking to Moses, giving him

instructions for the people of Israel (1:1–2), and closes with a summary statement that the book contains the instructions from the Lord to Israel at Mount Sinai (27:34). The book is a single literary unit. It is located at the center of the Pentateuch, flanked on each side by two books: Genesis/Exodus-Leviticus-Numbers/Deuteronomy. It places in the center of the five books of Moses the important topics of holiness and atonement. At the center of Leviticus itself is the chapter on the Day of Atonement (chap. 16)—a placement which accentuates its significance. The structure of the book chapters can be represented as follows:

A Laws Related to the People and the Sanctuary (1–7)
  B Laws Related to the Priesthood (8–10)
    C Laws Related to the Individual (11–15)
      D Day of Atonement (16)
    C′ Laws Related to the Individual (17–20)
  B′ Laws Related to the Priesthood (21–22)
A′ Laws Related to the People and the Sanctuary (23–27)

Leviticus contains ritual laws and a handful of narratives. The narratives include the ordination of Aaron and his sons to the priesthood (chaps. 8–9), the experience of Nadab and Abihu (10:1–7), the incident between Moses and Eleazar and Ithamar (10:12–20), and the account of the blasphemer (24:10–14). The stories generate insight into some of the ritual laws and, in some cases, lead to the formulation of new legislation.

Most of the book is about rituals and their proper performance. In Leviticus, a ritual was basically an act of worship intended to strengthen or restore/renew the relationship between God, the individual, and the community. It usually resulted in ritual cleansing or in atonement. It was an *action* to be performed in a certain *place* (mainly in the courtyard of the sanctuary or inside of it), at a particular *moment* (daily, during festivals, once a year), and according to some specific *instructions* (bringing the offering to the Lord, laying on of hands, slaughtering, etc.). The ritual was intended to introduce *change* (such as forgiveness of sin or cleansing) or to *express* individual or communal feelings/convictions (joy, gratitude, faith) in a particular *situation* (after sinning, after an answer to prayer, after receiving a blessing, etc.).

The Christian ritual of the Lord's Supper illustrates how rituals function. Many conservative Christians gather together once every three months (*time*) inside the church (*place*) to partake of the bread and the grape juice (*action*). This is reverently done (following specific *instructions*) and is an individual and collective expression of our common union with the risen Lord (*expressing* religious convictions). Participants seek spiritual renewal (*change*), and this is done in obedience to the Lord (a particular *situation*).

Rituals are often formed by combining numerous rites. For instance, the Day of Atonement was a ritual that aimed at the cleansing of the sanctuary. But this ritual was formed by a number of rites: a cleansing rite for the high priest, another for the altar of burnt offering, and further cleansing rites for the Holy and Most Holy Places. The combination of these rites resulted in the ritual of the Day of Atonement. Rites carry symbolic meanings. For instance, the rite of sprinkling blood on the altar signified that the altar was being purified and sanctified (16:18–19). The symbolic meaning of a rite is not always clear. In order to uncover its meaning, the context, the nature of the ritual, and parallel passages need to be examined.

COMMENTARY

1:1—7:38

HOLINESS PRESERVED AND RESTORED

The first major division of Leviticus begins with a brief introduction, situating the book within the narrative flow of the Pentateuch (1:1–2a). The section contains instructions given to the people for worship through sacrifices and offerings that aimed at strengthening or preserving their relationship with the Lord (1:2b—3:17). There are also guidelines for how to restore a broken relationship with the Lord through required expiatory sacrifices (4:1—6:7). Further direction is given concerning the proper handling of the sacrificial offerings by the priests and the people (6:8—7:36). The section concludes with a brief summary (7:37–38). The first task of the book is to institute the sacrificial system, through which the order established by the Lord was strengthened, preserved, and, if broken, reestablished. The activities associated with this system took place in the presence of the holy God of Israel, who dwelled among His people.

1:1—3:17

Voluntary Offerings

The divine speech begins with instructions concerning the burnt (chap. 1), the grain (chap. 2), and the peace/fellowship offerings (chap. 3). These were voluntary offerings and, as such, expressed the willingness of the people to worship the Lord with thanksgivings and gratitude for His blessings. Bringing these offerings manifested the person's desire to enjoy fellowship with the covenant God and with others.

1:1–2a. Moses as Mediator. The Lord, who descended from Sinai to dwell in the sanctuary (Ex. 40:34–38), now addressed Moses from the tabernacle/tent of meeting. Two important ideas were being expressed. First, the tabernacle was by nature the dwelling place of God where His people would come to worship Him (e.g., Lev. 26:11, 12; Ex. 25:8; 29:45, 46; Ps. 132:7). He had become accessible to them in a unique way (Deut. 4:7). Second, the tabernacle was the place from which God spoke to Moses, giving him instructions to convey to the people of Israel (v. 2; cf. Ex. 25:22). Moses was God's messenger and the mediator between a holy God and humans damaged by sin and impurity. The sacrificial system itself had a mediatorial function. Through it, the Israelites expressed their inner feelings and needs to the Lord and sought forgiveness. The priestly system was established to provide an additional form of intercession between the people and their God (Lev. 8–9). The concept of mediation runs throughout Leviticus as a type of the mediation of Christ. God has spoken through Him to us in "these last days" and has appointed Him as our Mediator before the Father in the heavenly sanctuary (Heb. 1:2; 7:25; 8:6; 9:15; 12:24).

1:2b–17. Burnt Offering. The instructions for the burnt offering (Heb. *'olah*, "ascending/rising offering;" Gr. *holokautōma*, from which the word "holocaust" originated), are organized by the type of sacrificial victim: animals from the herd (vv. 3–9), animals from the flocks (vv. 10–13), and birds (vv. 14–17). The specific instruction is preceded by a statement about the animals to be brought to the Lord as an offering (*qorban*, "what is brought near" to the Lord, designates animal and nonanimal offerings). The sacrificial victim was to be from the herd or the flock (not a wild animal), and it was to be without blemish or physical defects and in good health (v. 3; cf. 22:20–25; Mal. 1:8–14). What was morally and spiritually expected from the people was to be a physical reality in the sacrificial animal (Deut. 18:13). Anyone (v. 2; Heb. *'adam*, "a person," used in a generic sense) could bring a burnt offering, but if it were from the herd, it had to be male—an expensive animal, demonstrating the person's willingness to give to the Lord the very best. The ritual took place in the space between the altar and the entrance to the courtyard in the presence of the Lord. The altar represented God's presence and was accessible to the common Israelites to grant them forgiveness and to accept their expressions of gratitude, joy, and worship (Ps. 43:4). The closest they could come to the Lord was to the altar. The burnt offering was to be voluntary and assumed that the occasion for the sacrifice was one of gladness and thankfulness. It was a votive offering to be brought after a vow was fulfilled (Lev. 22:18).

The ritual required the participation of the offerer and the priest according to a set of specific instructions. Worshipers were to firmly place their hands upon the head of the animal for it to be accepted and to make atonement on their behalf (v. 4; on the verb "to atone," see the section on Theology in Leviticus: Introduction). A profound relationship was to be established between the offerer and the sacrifice to the degree that when the Lord accepted the sacrifice, He was accepting the person (cf. Lev. 7:18; see "The Laying On of Hands," p. 243). The burnt offering operated under the assumption that humans are not holy by nature and, consequently, when they approach the Lord, even to express gratitude, joy, and thanksgiving, they are in need of forgiveness.

Next, the offerer was to kill the sacrifice. The verb *shakhat* ("kill") refers to slaughtering the victim by slitting the throat to reduce the pain and to let the animal bleed out and die. The priest was to gather and present the blood to the Lord and sprinkle or splash (Heb. *zaraq*, "to toss, throw") it around the sides of the altar (v. 5). Then the worshiper skinned the animal, cut it into pieces, and washed its entrails and legs with water (vv. 6, 9). The priests were to prepare the altar for the sacrifice, then place everything on it and burn the offering (vv. 7–9). By burning, the offering was permanently given to the Lord; it became irretrievable. This sacrifice was one of the most significant Israelite offerings in that all of it was given to the Lord, indicating the willingness of the offerer to surrender all to God in an act of worship.

The section concludes with a statement indicating the aim of the sacrifice: it was a burnt offering and an *'isheh*, which is usually rendered as "an offering made by fire" or "fire offering," but it probably means "gift" or "food gift," as suggested by the fact that the wine libation

(Num. 15:10) and the showbread (Lev. 24:7, 9) are called *'isheh*, but no portion of them was burned on the altar. The burnt offering is further defined as a sweet or pleasing aroma to the Lord (v. 9). This last phrase could mean that the sacrifice pleased the Lord, was pleasant to Him, or that it pacified/soothed Him by its "aroma" (e.g., Gen. 8:21; Ex. 29:18; 2 Cor. 2:15; Eph. 5:2). These ideas are not mutually exclusive. When God voluntarily "smelled the aroma" of the sacrifice, He was choosing to express His acceptance of the worshipers and not His wrath or rejection (Lev. 26:31). God chose to preserve a harmonious and peaceful relationship with them.

If the sacrifice were from the flocks (vv. 10–13), the animal was to be a male without blemish or defect (v. 10). The instructions are significantly shortened, which indicates that the procedure used was to be the same as in the previous verses. The animal was to be killed on the north side of the altar (v. 11), probably the location where all burnt offerings were killed. The section ends with an indication of the ultimate purpose for the ritual: it was a burnt offering, a gift, a sweet or pleasing aroma to the Lord (v. 13; see v. 9).

The poor could offer doves or young pigeons (vv. 14–17). No one was to be excluded from the benefits of the burnt offering. In this case, since the victim was a bird, particular instructions were given. The priest was to wring off the head of the bird, burn it on the altar, and then drain its blood at the side of the altar (v. 15). He also was to remove its crop and feathers and place them on the east side, where the ashes were (v. 16). In other words, these elements were not to be placed on the altar. Finally, the priests were to split the bird, without dividing it into two parts, and burn it on the altar (v. 17). The purpose of the burnt offering of birds was the same as in the other two cases.

In the NT, the burnt offering finds its fulfillment in the unblemished sacrifice of Christ (1 Pet. 1:19). Jesus gave His blood and flesh, His whole person, to the Lord (1 Cor. 11:23–25; Heb. 7:27) in order to cleanse us from sin, making it possible for us to approach the throne of God with joy and gratitude (Heb. 4:16). Jesus is indeed a sacrifice of pleasing aroma to God (Eph. 5:2). In the acceptance of the sacrifice of His Son, God accepts us as well. Christ's sacrifice also signals our need for sanctification (1 Thess. 5:23).

The Laying On of Hands

The Hebrew phrase *samak yad 'al* means "to press the hand on" the sacrificial victim and was used in the cultic (sanctuary services) and in some noncultic cases. It was required for the burnt (Lev. 1:4), peace/fellowship (3:2), sin (4:4, 15, 33), and guilt offerings (7:7); it was to be part of the ritual of ordination for Aaron and his sons (8:14, 18, 22); and Aaron was to take the same action on the Day of Atonement (16:21). This essay will examine both the cultic and noncultic passages.

1. Laying On of "Hand" or "Hands"? When an individual brought a sacrifice, he or she was to lay a "hand" on the animal (Lev. 1:4; 3:2, 8, 13; 4:4, 24, 29, 33), but when the subject is plural, the text reads "hands" (4:15; 8:14, 18, 22; Ex. 29:10, 15, 19; Num. 8:12; 2 Chr. 29:23). This has led some to conclude that there were two different rituals, one to be performed using one hand, to express the idea of ownership ("This is my animal"), the other to employ two hands, expressing the idea of transfer. Support for these two rituals is allegedly found in Leviticus 16:21, where Aaron placed two hands on the scapegoat and transferred to it the sins and impurities of the people, and in Numbers 27:23 (cf. Deut. 34:9), when Moses transferred to Joshua the role of leader of the people of Israel. Several comments can be made in the evaluation of this theory.

First, the use of "hands" when the subject is plural is clearly ambiguous because it could designate one or two hands from each person. Second, in other contexts, the singular and the plural are sometimes used interchangeably to designate the same action. For instance, Moses raised his "hand" in prayer, but Aaron and Hur helped to hold up his "hands" (Ex. 17:11–12). In other words, the use of the plural or the singular is not especially important. Third, the phrase "to lay hands on" shows the same shift from the singular to the plural. According to Numbers 27:18, the Lord commanded Moses, "Lay your hand on him [Joshua]," but in v. 23, when Moses obeyed the Lord, the text states that "he laid his hands on him" (see Deut. 34:9). This suggests that the use of one or two hands was not significant. Fourth, Leviticus 16:21 alone is not strong enough to prove the argument that there were two different rituals. The proposed existence of two rituals with two different meanings is a scholarly invention.

2. Nonsacrificial Use. The first nonsacrificial use of the ritual is found in Leviticus 24:14. Those who heard a person blaspheme the name of the Lord were to place their hands on the blasphemer before she or he was executed. The meaning of the ritual is not stated. It can be speculated that as witnesses, they were identifying the guilty one before the execution, but there seems to be more to it than mere identification. The individuals who heard the blasphemer were somehow implicated in the sin. This seems to be what Leviticus 5:1 is also suggesting. This passage has been understood as referring to cases in which people knew something about a crime or a sin and were adjured to tell the truth about the matter (as in a modern court trial, where witnesses testify under oath). If they knew something but did not testify, they would be also held responsible for the crime committed. Others believe that it refers more specifically to the type of case described here in Leviticus 24:14—if a person blasphemed, anyone who heard was to speak up; if not, the hearer would also be held responsible for the sin. In both cases, the crime committed impacted the person who knew about it, requiring that he or she expose the criminal. The case of the blasphemer demonstrates that, in such cases, those who witnessed what happened were to symbolically transfer to the criminal the guilt that otherwise would have permanently adhered to them.

The second case involves the ordination of Joshua. Moses laid hands on him to give to him some of Moses's authority (Num. 27:20). The idea of transfer is also present here, and since Joshua was taking Moses's role as leader, the idea of substitution is present.

The third case is recorded in Numbers 8:10. Representatives from the people were to lay hands on the Levites as they were set apart to officiate in the sanctuary. They were chosen by the Lord to serve Him in place of the firstborn of all the people of Israel (v. 16). We have here a delegation of responsibility and the concept of substitution. These cases demonstrate that, through the laying on of hands, a relationship was established between the subject and the object (witness-accused, leader-successor/substitute, firstborn-substitute), that something was transferred from one to the other, and that in some cases, the idea of substitution was present.

3. Meaning of the Ritual. With respect to sacrificial offerings, the meaning of the ritual is not explicitly stated, but there is enough information to postulate that it expresses at least the idea of transfer. First, the only place where the meaning of the laying on of hands is interpreted in a cultic setting is in Leviticus 16:20. It refers to the transfer of sin and impurity to an animal. It has been suggested that since the scapegoat was not a sacrifice, this meaning should not be assigned to sacrifices in general. But this is an arbitrary restriction because, as noted earlier, there are other passages in which the laying on of hands consistently expresses the idea of the transfer of something from a subject to an object. Obviously, the context establishes what was being transferred. With this biblical evidence at hand, one should feel safe to argue that Leviticus 16:21 serves as an interpretational link that connects the meaning of the ritual in noncultic passages with its practice in the Israelite cultus. This is supported by other biblical evidence.

Second, Leviticus establishes a deep connection between the laying on of hands, the sacrifice, and the offerers. Individuals were to bring the sacrifice and place their hand(s) on it, and the offering was to be accepted to make atonement on their behalf (lit. "for him"; 1:4). God's acceptance of this sacrifice was equivalent to His acceptance of the one who offered it (7:18). The connection was produced through the laying on of hands. It was through this action that the victim became the substitute onto which the sinfulness and deepest feelings of the worshiper were transferred in the case of the burnt and peace/fellowship offerings.

Third, those who brought an expiatory sacrifice had violated one of the commandments of the Lord (Lev. 4:2) and bore their sin or guilt (5:1–3). Through the atoning sacrifice, the sin they committed was removed from them (4:35; see also v. 26). In the case of impurity, the atoning sacrifice removed the uncleanness "from" the person (12:7). There was clearly a transfer from the repentant sinner to the sacrificial victim. The only

rite that signaled the transfer was the laying on of hands. This implies that the expiatory sacrifices were likely rituals of elimination (removal of sin and impurity).

Fourth, the life of the unblemished sacrificial victim was directly associated with the endangered life of the sinner—one stood for the other in order to bring atonement/expiation through a ransom/substitute (see 17:10–14). Atonement occurred at the cost of the life of the animal that carried the sin, transferred to it by the laying on of hands, thus removing the person's sin and guilt.

Fifth, the sin of repentant sinners reached the horns of the altar (cf. Jer. 17:1). During the atonement process, the priest was to put some of the blood of the offering on the horns of the altar (Lev. 4:7, 25). The blood/life of the sacrifice stood for the blood/life of the repentant sinner, and it carried his or her sin. It was to be transferred to the altar, which represented the very presence of God (see 1:5). This explains why a garment on which the blood of a sin offering fell was to be washed (6:27).

Sixth, the rite in which the priests ate the flesh of the most holy offerings assumes that sin/impurity was transferred to the sacrificial victim. As part of the atoning process, the priest was to eat the flesh of the sacrifice in order to bear the sin of the people (see 10:12–20). Therefore, sin "moved" from the sinner to the sacrificial victim to the priest. Whenever the priest himself was in need of atonement, he was not to eat the flesh of his own sacrifice, but his sin was to be transferred to the tabernacle through the blood manipulation in the Holy Place, where he, as a priest, had access to God (4:6–7).

Seventh, the transfer of sin/impurity to the sacrificial victim, whose flesh was considered most holy, points to the paradoxical nature of the atonement process. The process brought into direct contact sin/impurity and holiness/life, and the result was atonement—that is, the removal of sin/impurity from the sinner. This was possible only because the Lord allowed for it to happen via the altar (17:10–11). Thus, the holy priest was to eat the most holy flesh of the sacrifice and yet, in so doing, was to bear the sin of the people (10:17). The flesh of the sin offering was most holy (6:24–30), but the fact that the person who burned its flesh needed a purification bath shows that the most holy was bearing sin/impurity (4:12). The holy and the unclean stood together, but the holy was not damaged by it. This connection was broken or came to an end through the ritual of the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16), when all the sins and impurities of the children of Israel, transferred there through the daily sacrifices, were to be removed from the holy tabernacle (16:16). The modern reader cannot avoid noticing the parallels to Jesus, the Holy One (Luke 1:35), who was also the Lamb of God and who bore humanity's sins yet remained holy (John 1:29; 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15).

Eighth, the idea of an innocent victim bearing the sins of others in order to atone for them is clearly found in Isaiah 52:13—53:12 (see "The Servant of the Lord in Isaiah," p. 885). The Servant of the Lord, a messianic figure, is described as the ultimate sacrificial victim (Is. 53:10), who gives His life as a substitute for the life of many (vv. 6, 11). The transfer of sin in the sacrificial system pointed typologically to Christ as the substitute sin-bearer.

4. Contamination of the Sanctuary. The transfer of sin/impurity to the sanctuary through the sacrificial system freed the person from spiritual corruption and resulted in forgiveness or cleansing. Not so for the person who contaminated the sanctuary through the violation of the covenant law. Such individuals bore their own sin and died for it. For example, the person who, after offering a son to Molech, contaminated the sanctuary was to be put to death (see Lev. 20:1–3; cf. 18:21). The sin of Nadab and Abihu was also resolved through their death and not through a sacrificial substitute (10:1–2). The priest who ate the holy offerings while unclean was to be put to death (22:2–9). The contamination of the temple by kings, priests, and the people shortly before the exile was removed by their destruction (see Ezek. 8:5–18). The only sin/impurity that was to be removed from the tabernacle was that which, through the laying on of hands, was transferred to the sacrificial offering and, ultimately, to the tabernacle itself. Thus was sin/impurity removed from the person according to God's will.

2:1–16. Grain Offering. The instructions related to the grain offering are organized on the basis of uncooked (2:1–3) and cooked grain (2:4–10, 14–15). Additional instructions are added in 2:11–13. The Hebrew name for this offering, *minkhah*, designates both grain and animal offerings (Judg. 6:18, 19; 1 Sam. 2:15–17). It refers to a gift or tribute given to a superior as an act of homage or gratitude (e.g., Gen. 32:13–21; 1 Sam. 26:19). In Leviticus, *minkhah* is a technical term designating a "grain offering" brought on different occasions as an act of homage to the covenant Lord (see Gen. 4:3). It was always to accompany the burnt (e.g., Num. 15:2–12, 28–29) and peace/fellowship offerings (e.g., Lev. 7:11–14; Num. 15:3). It was a voluntary offering that anyone (*nepesh*, "person") could bring to the court of the sanctuary. The uncooked offering (see 2:1–2) was to be made of fine flour, semolina of wheat (see Ex. 29:2), accompanied by olive oil and incense (made of a costly dried tree resin). These were all symbols of blessing, joy, gladness, and devotion to God (Deut. 11:14; Pss. 104:15; 141:2; Is. 61:3; Joel 2:24; Acts 10:4). The priest was to burn on the altar a handful of the flour mixed with oil and all the frankincense as a memorial on the altar (Lev. 2:2), which meant that the portion burned on the altar was a token portion of the totality of the offering given to the Lord. As a memorial, it could also be an act of remembrance—that is to say, the worshipers were indicating that they had not forgotten the Lord's goodness in providing food for them. They had not forgotten His grace. It is specifically called an *'isheh*, a "gift" or "food offering" offered as a pleasant aroma (vv. 2, 9; see 1:9). The rest of the flour and oil was to go to the priests to provide for their needs. The offering was most holy (v. 3), meaning that the Lord set it apart to be eaten only by the priests in the sanctuary, not by their family members at home.

The cooked grain offering was to be baked in an oven (v. 4) in the form of thick unleavened cakes made of semolina mixed with oil. It could also be in the form of thin wafers smeared with oil. A third possibility was to cook the offering on a flat pan or griddle, which produced a type of pancake that was then broken into pieces to facilitate the burning of a portion of it (v. 6; cf. 1:6). The fourth option was to deep-fry the semolina in a covered pan (v. 7). The cooked grain offering was to be given to the Lord through the mediation of the priest, who took it to the altar to burn a portion of it (vv. 8–9).

Two additional regulations were given. First, the use of leaven or honey (Heb. *debash*, "honey" or "fruit syrup") was forbidden (v. 11). These were fermenting agents associated with death and, therefore, incompatible with God's holiness. The exception was the offering of firstfruits (v. 12; Heb. *qarban re'shit*, "first offering"), but no portion of it was to go on the altar. The firstfruits refer to the first processed foods of the harvest (Num. 18:12–13), which the Lord assigned to the priests (Num. 15:19–21). Second, the grain offering, and in fact all offerings, were to be seasoned with salt (v. 13; cf. 2 Chr. 13:5). Since salt conveyed the idea of preservation or permanency (Num. 18:19), the salt emphasized the permanent nature of God's covenant. Adding salt to the offerings may have expressed covenant loyalty, thus strengthening the covenant relationship between God and the Israelites.

The last type of cooked grain offering consisted of the firstfruits (Heb. *bikkurim*, "first produce"; v. 12 uses a different Heb. term), probably barley (v. 14; cf. Ex. 9:31). In this particular case, the green head of the grain was to be roasted and crushed, with oil added to it and incense placed on it (vv. 14–15).

Leviticus 2 suggests some important theological and spiritual lessons. First, it demonstrates that God is the Lord of His people and that He abundantly provides for them. The offering was an act of joyful gratitude, homage, and adoration to the covenant Lord. Second, the uncooked grain was untouched by human hands. The people were to bring the grain to God as they received it from Him, without processing it, because it was in itself a revelation of His goodness. But they could also bring it cooked; that is to say, through the cooked grain, they were consecrating their work and service to God. Third, the exclusion of leaven and honey (used for fermentation) as symbols of death and sin (see Matt. 16:6, 11; 1 Cor. 5:6–8) symbolizes that God does not want spiritual fermenting agents to alter His children's relationship with Him. Fourth, this offering was a plant-based meal, a fact that is often ignored. It has been suggested that perhaps this offering was a reference to the original plant-based diet of humans (Gen. 1:29–30). In that case, it was pointing back to the Edenic ideal and to the future peaceful coexistence of humans and animals (see Is. 11:6–9; 65:25). Finally, since this is about grain, from which bread is made, it is a reminder of Jesus, the true Bread of Life, who nurtures our spiritual life and preserves our physical existence (John 6:35). He should therefore be the Lord of our lives.

3:1–16. Peace/Fellowship/Communion Offerings. This chapter could be divided into two main discussions regarding peace offerings: those from the herd (3:1–5) and those from the flock (3:6–16), subdivided into sheep and goats. The chapter concludes with a regulation about animal blood and fat (v. 17).

The proper translation of the Hebrew *zebakh shelamim* is debated. Some translate the term as "peace [or well-being] offering" and others as "fellowship offering." *Zebakh* means "to kill/slaughter" and could refer to sacrifices, as is the case here, or to the common killing of animals (Deut. 12:15) and even humans (2 Kin. 23:20). The term *shelamim* appears to be derived from *shalom*, "peace," and thus refers to a peace/well-being sacrifice that would include the ideas of communion and covenant fellowship. Accordingly, both "peace" and "fellowship" are appropriate translations. This sacrifice belongs to the category of voluntary sacrifices introduced in Leviticus 1:2.

If the sacrificial victim (male or female) came *from the herd* (v. 1), it was to be without blemish or defect (see Lev. 1:3). The sacrificial procedure was very similar to the burnt offering (see chap. 1), the main difference being that the sacrifice was not to be burned on the altar. Since it was a voluntary offering, no specific occasion is mentioned. The procedure was as follows: the offerer was to lay her or his hand on the head of the animal (see "The Laying On of Hands," p. 243) and slaughter it by the entrance to the courtyard, and the priest was to collect the blood and splash it around the altar (in regard to *'isheh* ["food offering" or "fire offering"] and the "aroma," see commentary on 1:2b–17). The fat of the inner organs and the kidneys (vv. 3–4; see v. 9) were to be given to the Lord, placed on the burnt offering of the daily sacrifice.

If the sacrifice was from the flock (sheep, ewes, goats, and she-goats), the requirements were the same as for the cattle (3:6–16). In the case of the sheep, the fatty tail was also to be placed on the altar. The large fat tail of the sheep was considered a delicacy, the most delicious part of the sheep (v. 9). In fact, the Hebrew term *kheleb* ("fat") is metaphorically used to designate "the best" (e.g., Num. 18:12; Deut. 32:14; for the possible connection between this legislation and health concerns, see "Health and Hygiene in Leviticus," p. 272). In giving it to the Lord, the offerer was giving to Him the very best. It is clear that the main emphasis was on the blood and fat of the sacrifice, as the closing legislation illustrates (v. 17). They belonged to the Lord, and no one was to consume them (on blood, see Lev. 17).

The purpose of the peace offering is not explicitly stated in the text, but according to 7:11–20, it could be brought as an offering of gratitude (7:12–15; 22:29–30), a freewill offering (7:16–17; 22:17–23), and a votive offering (7:16–17). It was fundamentally understood to be a religious meal in which the food would not be consumed by God—the priest was given a portion of the meat (7:31–32), and the offerer was to eat the rest of it with relatives and friends in the presence of the Lord (7:15). It seems that the meal was to be an expression of fellowship with the covenant Lord and of the desire of the offerer to strengthen the covenant relationship with Him, as well as a deep expression of joy in the presence of God (Pss. 54:6; 107:22). Although Leviticus 3 does not speak about the atoning function of the peace offering, according to Leviticus 17:11 and Ezekiel 45:15, 17, it did have this function. Since its primary purpose was not expiatory, the blood manipulation, like that of the burnt offering, was significantly simpler than that of the sin offering. But the fact that blood was to be returned to the Lord via the altar suggests that whenever a person approached the Lord, cleansing/forgiveness was needed (see Leviticus: Introduction). The acceptance of the offering signified the acceptance of the offerer. The sacrifice finds its fulfillment in Jesus who, through His broken body, offers the bread of life to all who believe (Matt. 26:26; John 6:53–56) and grants them peace (John 14:27; Eph. 2:14).

4:1—6:7

Required Offerings

The required offerings were those that redressed violations of the covenant law, namely, the sin/purification offering (4:1—5:13) and the guilt offering (5:14–19). These offerings assumed that God's people wanted to preserve the covenant relationship with Him and that they occasionally violated it. The dilemma was resolved through expiatory sacrifices. The multiplicity of sacrifices points to the inadequacy of the system. There was no single sacrifice able to satisfy all the spiritual and emotional needs of the people. This would be possible only through the sacrifice of Christ.

4:1—5:13. Sin/Purification Offering. This section discusses the sin offering both for the inadvertent sins of the priest, the community, the ruler, and the individual (4:1–35) and for intentional offenses (5:1–13). In a sense, this is about accountability for sins based on a person's sphere of influence. The proper translation of the Hebrew term *khatta't* is still debated; some retain the traditional "sin offering" while others argue for "purification offering" or other terms. The first claim is based on the literal meaning of the Hebrew term, while the second is primarily based on the function of the offering. The second possibility is also acceptable as long as the sinner is recognized as the one who needed cleansing from sin or impurity.

The sin offering was to be brought when a person sinned unintentionally (*shagagah*) and violated any of the commands of the Lord (v. 2). The Hebrew term *shagagah* designated unintentional sin (Gen. 43:12) as well as consciously committed sins (1 Sam. 26:21). This is suggested by Leviticus 4:22–23 and 27–28, where sinners were to bring the sacrifice because they were guilty (vv. 22, 27) or because they came to know that they had sinned (vv. 23, 28). This type of sin was contrasted with open rebellion against God, which is called "high-handed sin," for which there was no atonement available (Num. 15:30–31). The term could then include the idea of sin as a result of human frailty.

Sin of the Priest and the Community (4:1–21). The phrase "the anointed priest" appears to designate the high priest, but since all priests were anointed and there is no other legislation dealing with the sin of a regular priest, it may be better to interpret the phrase as referring to any member of the priestly family (cf. Lev. 10:6–7). In this case, the priest was aware of his sin and brought the offering. The congregation, however, was not aware of their sin (4:13). Once they did become aware of their sin, they were to offer a sin offering (vv. 13–14). A sin of the congregation implicated the priest, for he was part of the congregation. Consequently, he could not eat of the flesh of the sacrificial victim. The priest and the congregation brought an unblemished and expensive young bull (or perhaps, "an animal from the herd") for the sin offering (vv. 3, 14; see 1:3). The rest of the ritual procedure was to be basically the same for both the priest and the community: (1) laying hands on the sacrificial animal (v. 4), (2) slaying the sacrifice (v. 4), (3) sprinkling the blood inside the tent (v. 6), (4) placing blood on the horns of the altar of incense (v. 7), (5) pouring out the blood at the base of the altar of burnt offering (v. 7), (6) burning the fat on the altar (vv. 8–10), and (7) burning the flesh of the animal (v. 12). The laying on of hands indicates that sin was transferred to the sacrificial victim, and it died in place of the sinner (see "The Laying On of Hands," p. 243). The sin was to be transferred to the tabernacle by sprinkling blood seven times in the Holy Place toward the veil and by putting some of the blood on the horns of the altar (v. 7)—a place of refuge for sinners (1 Kin. 1:50–51; 2:28) and where their sin was recorded (Jer. 17:1). Notice that during the Day of Atonement, blood was applied to the horns of the altar to cleanse it, but a different phrase is used: literally "on the horns of the altar all around" (16:18), which, in Leviticus, always expresses the idea of cleansing. One could then suggest that placing *some* blood on the horns indicates transfer, while placing blood on the horns *all around* could mean cleansing; the last is the undoing of the first. The fat also belonged to God and was given to Him via the altar. Since the priests could not profit from their own atoning offerings, the rest of the flesh of the animal was burned (cf. Lev. 6:23, 29–30). According to 4:20, forgiveness is a divine prerogative and not the automatic result of the atoning ritual (also in vv. 26, 31, 35). The book of Hebrews argues that because the priests had to offer a sacrifice for their sins, they belonged to a defective priesthood to be superseded by Christ's. This is because Jesus did not have to offer a sacrifice for His sin; He was without sin (Heb. 4:14–16; 5:3). But the fact that even the most important spiritual leader in Israel was in need of atonement is a reminder that the need for Christ is universal.

Sin of the Leader and the Individual (4:22–35). The most important difference between the offering of the leader and that of the individual was the value of the victim—a more valuable male goat for the leader and a female goat or a female lamb for the individual (vv. 23, 28, 32). The term *nasi'* is vague but most likely refers to a civic, tribal representative (though it is used for the unique prince or king/priest figure of Ezek. 45–46). The most important difference between this sin offering and the one offered for the priest and congregation is that, in this case, no blood was to be taken inside the tent (vv. 25, 30, 34). Instead, the priest was to eat the flesh of the animal (6:26); he was not implicated in the sin of the leader. The meaning of the ritual of eating the flesh of the sin offering is given in 10:17: by eating it, the priests bore (*nasa'*) the guilt of the people. Sin was to be transferred to the tabernacle through the priest, who assumed

responsibility for it. The burning of the fat of the animal is described as a sweet or pleasing aroma to the Lord (v. 31; see 1:9). This demonstrated that God was willing to accept both the offering and the offerer. This was possible because the offerer's sins had been removed. The text explicitly states that atonement would be made for both the offerer and his or her sin (vv. 26, 35). In v. 26, the Hebrew reads "from his sin," clarifying that the purpose of the atonement was to free the person "from" sin, indicating that this is an expiatory sacrifice. It was not the sanctuary that needed to be cleansed from sin but the repentant sinner (see also 5:6, 10; on the removal of impurity, see 12:7; 14:19).

The sin offering was a prefiguration of the sacrificial death of Christ, who offered Himself as a sin offering for humanity's sins: Romans 8:3 says that the Father sent Jesus "in the likeness of sinful flesh" (*peri hamaritias*, "because of/for sin" or, according to some translations, "as a sin offering"; *peri hamartias* was used in the LXX to translate the Hebrew *khatta't* ["sin offering"]). He took upon Himself our sins and voluntarily and vicariously accepted responsibility for them, dying in our place (2 Cor. 5:21). He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29; cf. Gal. 3:13; 1 Pet. 2:24). Through Christ, God provided the sin offering that cleanses all who seek Him (Rom. 3:25; Eph. 5:2). This is the ultimate sacrifice that cleanses humanity once and for all. The atoning work of Christ continues to be effective, even for postbaptismal sins committed as a result of human frailty (1 John 2:1–2). The proper response to such a display of love is loyalty and gratitude to Him.

Other Offenses (5:1–13). This section contains a list of sins, followed by the required sin offering. Four specific sins are mentioned, and the first and the last were definitively intentional, with the persons fully aware of what they had done. The first was the sin of someone who hears another person pronouncing a curse and does not report it (v. 1; see Prov. 29:24); that is to say, she or he ignores it. It is also possible to interpret the text as referring to the witness of a crime who is unwilling to testify when called or adjured to do so. The Hebrew text speaks about a person who sins by not testifying against someone whom they heard curse. By not reporting the crime, the person participates in it and is perhaps considered an accomplice (cf. Prov. 29:24) and bears the sin or iniquity. The Hebrew expression *nasa' 'awon*, usually translated "to bear iniquity," is a legal phrase meaning "to be responsible for the crime and liable to punishment."

The second sin involved becoming unclean by touching the carcass of unclean animals (v. 2; see 11:8). Even if the offenders were unaware of their sin (lit. "it is hidden from him"), they were still considered unclean (lit. "and/but he is unclean") and guilty. The last verb is a legal statement expressing the same idea as *nasa' 'awon* (see v. 1). Since touching the unclean did not require a sin offering (11:24–28), something else must have happened after the person became unclean. The phrase referring to the individual being "unaware" is puzzling because the verb means "to hide" (lit. "it is hidden from him"). Many scholars prefer to translate it as "to forget," but the Hebrew verb does not appear to carry this meaning anywhere else in the Hebrew Bible. It is probable that the phrase "it is hidden from him" is an idiomatic expression that conveys the idea of hiding by choosing to ignore something or by being negligent (cf. Lev. 20:4; Deut. 22:1, 3–4; Is. 58:7). If this suggestion is accepted, the person who became unclean ignored the violation of the law of cleanness; and by not performing the required cleansing rite, his or her spiritual condition was compromised. Consequently, a sin offering was required.

The third case addressed coming into contact with human uncleanness (see Lev. 15), resulting in ritual contamination (v. 3). Once again, the text explains that this act "was hidden from him" (i.e., the person ignored his or her condition and did not perform the required cleansing rite). The end of the verse has been understood in various ways—for example, that the person becomes guilty upon realizing what had happened or (perhaps, as all major translations suggest) that the person has come to know or recognize her or his guilt after being initially unaware of it. A literal translation of the Hebrew text reads, "And he knows and is guilty." This is not a matter of ignorance but a case of knowingly violating the law of cleanness.

The fourth case concerned a person who uttered a promissory oath without seriously considering it first (v. 4). According to the law, the sin does not consist of making a thoughtless oath but of not fulfilling it (Deut. 23:22–24; Eccl. 5:3–5). Some Bible translations render the passage "and he is unaware of it—when he realizes it, then he shall be guilty." But such a translation and similar ones do not make sense within the context because a person who pronounces an oath is fully aware of what she or he is doing. In fact, the Hebrew text reads literally "and he knows." The only possible interpretation is that the person simply ignored the oath and did not fulfill it. This was not an involuntary violation of the law, so consequently it required a sin offering.

The resolution of the problem began with a confession of negligence due to intentionally ignoring the law (v. 5). Translators and commentators differ over how to translate the first part of v. 6. The Hebrew term *'asham* could refer to a trespass offering (v. 15), but in this context, the topic is the sin offering (vv. 9, 11–12). *'Asham* could also be translated "reparation, penalty" (i.e., the penalty/reparation for the violation of the law is a sin offering). The sacrificial victim chosen for the sin offering was based on the financial status of the person. Some were to bring a female from the flock or a lamb or a goat, and others two turtle doves, one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering (vv. 7–10; cf. Luke 2:22–24). Since the amount of blood from a bird was very small, the blood application was simplified. If the persons were very poor, they were to bring a meal offering as a sin offering (vv. 11–13). In this case, oil and incense were to be excluded (cf. 2:1), perhaps as a sign of contrition and to distinguish it from the regular meal offering. Obviously, not everything was cleansed through blood (Heb. 9:22). This exemption was made in order to assure those facing financial difficulties that God's atoning grace is for all.

The sacrifice required to atone for human sin would cost more than anyone could pay. But God supplied it through the "precious [*timios*, "costly, of incomparable value"] blood of Christ," the Lamb without blemish or defect (1 Pet. 1:19). Christ paid the full penalty for our sins by bearing them upon Himself, and therefore, if there is repentance, there is no sin that He cannot forgive through His gracious provision (Rom. 5:20).

5:14—6:7. Guilt/Reparation Offering. "Reparation offering" is becoming a more common way of referring to this sacrifice, but it does not correspond well to the case described in 5:17–19, in which reparation was not required. This legislation lists two main reasons for bringing a guilt offering but does not describe in detail the procedure to be followed. This is provided in 7:1–7, where it is stated that it was to be like the sin offering. The only difference is the blood manipulation of the guilt offering, which was to be dashed on the sides of the altar of the burnt offering. The atoning significance of the blood was probably less emphasized because there was to be restitution and a 20 percent penalty given to the priest before the sacrifice was to be performed.

The first occasion for this offering was for cases of inadvertent sacrilege (v. 15). The misappropriation of God's property—sinning in regard to the holy things of the Lord—was an extremely serious matter (cf. Josh. 7). Such a sin included, for instance, eating the tithe after setting it apart for the Lord. Nothing is said about how the person realized that he or she sinned, which may suggest that the person was not totally unaware of what happened. In any case, three things were required: restitution of what was taken, paying an additional 20 percent of the value, and bringing a ram for the guilt offering. The person could bring the equivalent of the cost of the ram to the sanctuary to buy it from the priest (v. 18). As the mediator for the people, the priest was to perform the atoning ritual, and the sin was to be forgiven (see 4:21).

According to 5:17–19, the guilt offering was to be brought when a person suspected he or she had committed an unknown sin. Since the sin was never identified, the remedy was to treat it as a sacrilege. For this unknown sin, a guilt offering was required, but without restitution. God indeed cares for the psychological and spiritual well-being of His children. Verse 19 could perhaps be translated "It is a guilt offering; he is guilty to the Lord."

The second occasion for bringing a guilt offering was for deliberate misappropriation of human property aggravated by taking a false oath before the Lord (6:1–7). The offenses listed are deception in matters of deposit, investment, robbery, withholding goods, and finding something lost and lying about it. The charges were denied under a false oath that desecrated the name of the Lord. At some point, the person realizing or acknowledging her or his guilt was allowed to bring a guilt offering and make restitution (v. 5). This was a very atrocious sin that came very close to a high-handed sin, and surprisingly, it was forgivable. The most logical explanation is that the sinner, at a particular moment, realized that he or she was indeed guilty, found refuge in God's mercy, and brought a guilt offering. The legislation itself encouraged the person to do this.

6:8—7:38

Sacrifices, the Priests, and the People

This section of Leviticus supplements the legislations found in 1:2—6:7 and places a more specific emphasis on the role of the priests, the portions that belonged to them, and the responsibility of the people in preserving the holiness of the offerings. It is organized in terms of the laws related to the burnt offering (6:8–13), grain offering (6:14–23), sin offering (6:24–30), guilt offering (7:1–10), and peace offerings (7:11–21), with emphases on the prohibition against eating fat and blood (7:22–27) and the proper distribution of the flesh of the animal (7:28–36), concluding with a summary (vv. 37–38).

6:8–13. Law of the Burnt Offering. This legislation concentrated on the proper handling of the ashes of the burnt offering. The reference was to the daily burnt offering, which was to be kept burning all night (v. 9) and day (v. 12; see Ex. 29:38–42). The priest was to provide the wood to keep the fire burning. When removing the ashes from the altar, the priest was to put on his holy, priestly linen garments and underpants to prevent exposure of his genitalia when ascending the steps to the altar (Ex. 28:42–43). The ashes were to be placed beside the altar while the priest changed into his common clothes to go outside the sanctuary. He was to deposit the ashes in a clean place outside the camp. The fire was to be kept burning because it was originally ignited by the Lord (Lev. 9:24). The fat of the peace offering was also to be burned on it. The daily burnt offering (Heb. *tamid*) pointed to the peoples' constant dependence on God's forgiving grace that would be fully manifested through the blood of Christ (see Ex. 29:38).

6:14–23. Law of the Grain Offering. The legislation repeated part of what is found in chapter 2 but clarified who should eat the meal offering as well as the reason. It was declared to be most holy (v. 17), and therefore, only the priests (not their families) were to eat a portion of it, in a holy place in the courtyard of the sanctuary. When the grain offering was brought by the priest, no portion of it was to go to him, but it was to be wholly burned on the altar (cf. v. 30). The grain offering of the priests was to be offered every day from the moment of their anointing. For them, it was not voluntary. They were required to honor God personally, not solely through the sacrifices of the people. The end of v. 18 is understood in a variety of ways by translators and commentators. According to some, whatever or whoever (the Heb. *'asher* could be referring to either persons or objects) touched the grain offering *became holy*. According to others (and this is likely the more accurate interpretation), only those who were *already holy* could touch the grain offering. In this case, the implication is that holiness is not transferable through touch.

6:24–30. Law of the Sin Offering. The law clarified some aspects of the sin offering not mentioned before, with particular emphasis on its holiness. First, it was to be killed, like the burnt offering, on the north side of the altar (1:11). No reason is given for this specific requirement. Again, the translations and commentaries differ over whether the meaning of the first part of v. 27 is that the person who touched the flesh became holy or that the person who did so must have been holy already—that is to say, a priest. Another option, again, is to render the phrase as "whatever [not whoever] touches its flesh will be [become] holy." The basic question is whether holiness is transferrable through contact. In the present context, it is explicitly said that only the holy priests were to handle the holy, implying that only holy persons or objects could come into contact with the holy. The ritual of the eating of the flesh was an important one (see 6:26; 10:17). It is again stated that when the priest was involved in the sin that was being expiated, he was not to eat of the meat of the sacrifice (6:30). If the blood of the offering spattered on a garment, the item was to be washed in a holy place (v. 27). Ritual washing was done to remove impurity, and if this were the case here, then the blood of the sin offering, by carrying the sin of the repentant person, transferred impurity, not holiness, by contact. If it were boiled in a clay pot, the pot was to be broken because washing was not enough to cleanse it—it was too porous. If boiled in a bronze pot, then washing was enough to remove contagion (v. 28).

7:1–10. Law of the Guilt Offering. Previously, the instructions about the guilt offering were about the sins expiated and the procedure (5:14–6:7). Here the interest is defining the portion of it that went to the priest. There is some repetition related to blood manipulation and the fat of the animal (vv. 3–4). It is further established that the ritual procedure for this offering was to be the same as for the sin offering with respect to the flesh of the animal, declared to be most holy and, therefore, belonging to the officiating priest only (v. 6). The priest was also to have for himself the skin of the sacrifice of the burnt offering (not mentioned in chap. 1) and the grain offering baked in the oven or prepared in a pan or griddle (vv.

8–9; see 2:4–7). Uncooked grain offerings were to belong to all the priests (v. 10).

7:11–21. Law of the Peace/Fellowship Offering. A specific distinction is made between the peace offering as thanksgiving and the peace offering as votive or freewill. The peace/fellowship offering involved thanksgiving, and it was to be brought with grains in the form of unleavened wafers/cakes and leavened bread. One cake was offered as a heave offering—a contribution set apart—to the Lord, and it went to the priest; the rest probably went to the offerer. The leavened bread was not to go to the altar (2:11). The flesh of the animal was to be eaten the same day it was brought to the Lord, but if it were brought for a vow or voluntary, whatever was left over could be eaten the next day (vv. 16–17). After that, it was not good for human consumption. Whatever remained was to be burned.

If any of the meat were eaten on the third day, the offering and the offerer were rejected by the Lord, and the benefits were not credited or imputed to the person. In fact, the person was responsible for the desecration and liable to punishment (see 5:1). Another reason for not eating the meat was if it had come into contact with the unclean. Only those who were in a state of cleanness were to partake of it (v. 19). But if by any chance the unclean person ate of it, then he or she was to be cut off from the people (vv. 20–21). This is the most severe penalty for sin in the OT because the person was permanently banished or excommunicated from the covenant people. The ultimate punishment was in God's hands, although, in a few cases, He used humans to accomplish His purpose (20:2; Ex. 31:14). But even when humans failed, God Himself still cut off the person (20:2–3), which suggests that the penalty impacted the afterlife.

7:22–27. Prohibition of Fat and Blood. This parenthesis is a development of the regulation against eating fat and blood (3:16–17). Since this was required from all, the divine speech was addressed to the people through Moses (7:22; in chaps. 1–5, the people were addressed, and in chaps. 6–7, the priests). The text establishes that the fat of sacrificial animals was not to be consumed, and neither was the fat of animals that die of natural causes or that have been killed by other animals. In the last two cases, the fat could be used for some other purpose (e.g., to polish or grease instruments) but not for food. The penalty for eating the fat of sacrifices was serious—the offender was to be cut off from the people (v. 25; see v. 21). The prohibition against consuming blood applied to any kind of animal or bird, even at home, and the penalty was the same (vv. 26–27; see "Health and Hygiene in Leviticus," p. 272).

7:28–36. Meat Portions for the Priests. The main interest of this section is to identify the portion of the flesh that was to go to the priest. Offerings made by fire refer to the portions that were to be given to God as a gift from the worshiper (see 1:9). In this case, those offerings designate the fat that was to go to the altar and the breast of the animal that was to be "raised" (from the Heb. verb *mp*, not "waved") before the Lord as an "elevated offering" (*tenupah*) dedicated to Him (v. 30). The breast was to be for the priest, as was also the right thigh, set apart as a "contribution" (Heb. *terumah*) or "heave" (raised) offering (v. 32). These were considered the most valuable portions of the flesh that the Israelites gave to the Lord, and He, in turn, gave them to the priests as a permanent mandate (v. 34). The Lord required this same type of sacrifice from the Israelites when the priests were consecrated to minister in the sanctuary (v. 35; this prepares the way for chap. 8).

The section dealing with voluntary and required sacrifices closes with a summary stating that the previous discussion was about the burnt, the grain, the sin, the guilt, the consecration, and the peace offerings, concerning which the Lord instructed Moses on Mount Sinai (v. 38). A new offering is introduced that had not been mentioned before—the consecration or ordination offering (v. 37), which referred to the offerings brought during the consecration of the priests, to be discussed in chapter 8. These instructions were given to the people of Israel when they were ordered to bring their offerings to the Lord in the Sinai Desert (v. 38), which indicates that these sacrificial regulations were placed within a narrative, as indicated in 1:1. The meticulous instructions given by the Lord to the Israelites reveal how important order is in the eyes of the Lord. By being so specific, He was establishing boundaries that would contribute to the preservation of spiritual order in the life of His people. Order continues to be significant in the life of the church in the preservation of its unity and the fulfillment of its mission.

8:1—10:20

A HOLY PRIESTHOOD

Leviticus begins with a reference to the sanctuary that had just been built and progresses to the different types of sacrifices to be offered there. The most natural next step was to identify and enable those who would minister in the sanctuary. Chapter 8 outlines the complex ritual of the ordination of Aaron and his sons as priests and the anointing of the tabernacle itself (see Ex. 29:1–37). Chapter 9 describes the beginning of the priestly system. The narrative found in chapter 10 illustrates the serious responsibility of the priests as they operated within the sphere of holiness.

8:1–36

Anointing of Aaron, His Sons, and the Tabernacle

The priesthood in Israel was of divine origin. God selected and appointed Aaron and his sons to minister as priests on behalf of the people of Israel. This is emphasized throughout the text by the repetition of the compliance formula and its variations: "Moses did as the Lord commanded him" (vv. 4, 9, 13, 17, 21, 29, 31, 34, 35). Moses performed the priestly role before the priesthood was formally instituted. The anointing was a public meeting. It is likely that the representatives of the people were invited to be present. The ceremony was well organized: the first part had to do with the investiture of Aaron and his sons and the setting apart of Aaron and the sanctuary for God (vv. 6–13). This was followed by the offering of three sacrifices for the cleansing and consecration of the future priests (vv. 14–32). The anointing service was extended for seven days (vv. 33–36).

8:1–13. Investiture and Consecration. The complexity of the ritual was, in part, related to the fact that Aaron, his sons, and the sanctuary were in a state of transition as they moved from the sphere of the common to the sphere of the holy. They were not the subjects of the action but the objects—they were not yet priests. Later traditions indicate that there were specific areas within the courtyard, protected by a curtain, where the full washings took place. The change of clothing indicated a new status for Aaron; he was being invested as high priest (vv. 7–9; see Ex. 28). He was transitioning to a different role.

At this point in the narrative, the tabernacle, its furniture, and the altar were sprinkled with oil to set them apart for the Lord. Some oil was also poured out on Aaron's head (representing his whole person) to set him apart for the service of the tabernacle (vv. 10–12). Both personnel and location were finally ready for service because they had both been marked by the special anointing oil, which exuded a fragrant aroma. This was another step in the process of transition. The section concludes with the investiture of the sons of Aaron as priests. Moses put on them a priestly dress that was less embellished in order to establish a difference in priestly functions. This was done in accordance with what the Lord commanded Moses to do. Later, oil was also placed on the sons (v. 30).

8:14–22. Sin and Burnt Offerings. Although Aaron and his sons had been set apart, they and the tabernacle needed to go through a cleansing ritual. This was the function of the sin offering (vv. 14–17). Since the tabernacle was not yet functioning and this offering was part of the anointing of the priests, it was different from the regular sin offerings (chap. 4). The ritual emphasized the use of the blood in connection to the altar and the disposition of the flesh of the sacrifice. Since it was an atoning sacrifice (Ex. 29:36), in this particular case, it cleansed the priests (through the laying on of hands) and the altar (blood was applied all around the horns; see 4:7). The altar seems to have stood for the cleansing of the whole sanctuary complex. Since no specific violation of the law of impurity is mentioned, it follows that anyone or anything that was to be in the service of God was, by nature, in need of purification. The burnt offering (vv. 18–21) was to follow the general procedure of a regular burnt offering (see Lev. 1). The sequence of this procedure was important. First, the sin offering cleansed. Second, the burnt offering expressed, along with atonement, the total dedication of Aaron and his sons to the Lord. Cleansing both precedes and accompanies true worship.

The consecration/ordination offering (lit. "filling [offering]"; v. 31) was unique. The literal translation is related to the phrase *mille'yad*, "to fill the hand" (which occurs in the Hebrew text of Ex. 29:9, 33, 35), and refers to an act by which a new status was given to someone—for example, consecration. In fact, parts of this offering were placed in the hands of Aaron and his sons (Lev. 8:27–29). Since their hands were filled, they could not use them to do anything else but the service of the Lord. Although the sacrifice was unique, it was similar to the peace offering and was to be accompanied by unleavened bread. The main difference was the complex use of the blood. Some of the blood was applied to the tip of the right ear (perhaps signaling a willingness to listen to/obey the Lord), on the thumb of the right hand (suggesting readiness to serve), and on the big toe of the right foot (indicating a desire to walk in the way of the Lord) of Aaron and his sons (vv. 23–24). This was probably an act of cleansing and dedication (cf. 14:14, 17, 25), similar to what was done to the altar (v. 15). The portions that were placed on the altar, together with the right thigh that was for the priests (7:32–33), were put into the hands or palms of Aaron and his sons and raised before the Lord as a wave offering (see 7:30); then the portions were incinerated (in regard to the aroma of the sacrifice, see notes on 1:9.) In this case, Moses received the breast of the animal (v. 29).

The oil and blood of the consecration sacrifice were mixed and sprinkled on Aaron, his sons, and their garments to contribute to their ordination (v. 30). The anointing oil was a symbol of consecration, and the blood suggested the idea of cleansing. Since the consecration offering was similar to the peace offering of thanksgiving (7:11–15), the priests could eat it as other Israelites would. Moses gave them the breast of the sacrifice that belonged to him and told them to eat it together with the unleavened bread within the precincts of the tabernacle. Whatever was left was to be immediately incinerated (vv. 31–32).

At the end of the day, the ritual of anointing was still unfinished. Aaron and his sons were required to stay by the entrance of the tabernacle for seven days in order for their consecration to be complete. Interestingly, all the elements of the consecration ritual performed during that day are interpreted or summarized as making atonement for Aaron and his sons (v. 34). The ordination ritual of the priests was a way of cleansing them in order to serve a holy God.

The complexity of the ritual of ordination illustrates the distance that exists between a holy God and beings that are in constant need of cleansing. One is almost led to ask, Who can approach the Holy One? The answer is found in the divine disposition to interact with humans and to draw them into the sphere of His holiness. He is constantly willing to remove that which impedes fellowship with Him, and consequently, He creates a way through the atoning sacrifice, which makes heaven accessible to all, not only to priests. This requires the Christian to go through a rite of transition—moving from the secular (the world) to the sphere of salvation in Christ. This takes place through the rite of baptism, which leads to life in harmony with God, a transition from a life of enslavement to sin to a new life of service to God and fellow human beings (Rom. 6:1–11). Christ indeed opened a way (Heb. 10:19–22).

9:1–24

Beginning of the Priestly Ministry

After seven days had elapsed, on the eighth day, Moses instructed Aaron and his sons about what to do as they began their priestly work and provided a list of the sacrifices to be offered. This was followed by the sin and burnt offerings of Aaron (vv. 8–14) and the sin, burnt, and peace offerings of the people (vv. 15–21). The section concludes with a double blessing and the manifestation of the glory of God (vv. 22–24).

9:1–14. Moses's Instructions and Aaron's Sacrifices. Moses informed Aaron that this day he would receive direct confirmation from God of his role as high priest: the glory of the Lord would appear to him (v. 6; see v. 4). The inauguration of the priestly ministry was also a public ceremony, and the elders were present. They were expected to provide animals for the sacrifices of the people. Moses also told Aaron that he should offer a sin and a burnt offering for himself as well as sin, burnt, grain, and peace offerings for the people. He clarified that the purpose of the sin and burnt offerings was to make atonement for all of them.

Verse 3 contains abbreviated instructions for the sin offering (cf. 4:3–12) and the burnt offering (1:3–9). The text emphasizes the expiatory function of both sacrifices. The cleansing rituals for Aaron and his sons performed during their ordination were intended to install them as priests, but here they went through another set of cleansing rituals as they began their priestly responsibilities. This reinforces the fact that uncleanness is practically a constant in human life and that humans never reach a moment when they can stand by themselves before God.

9:15–21. Sacrifices of the People. The inauguration of the worship system in Israel began with the cleansing of the people, suggesting that worship includes the need for atonement. The procedure for the different offerings brought by the people is not given in detail. It is simply stated that they were offered in the prescribed manner (v. 16). In this case, two sacrificial victims were brought for the burnt offering and two for the peace offering. The disposition of the fat of the peace offering is repeated in more detail to stress the importance of having given it to the Lord (v. 21).

After the sacrifices were offered, Aaron performed for the first time one of his most important responsibilities, namely, blessing the people (Num. 6:23; Deut. 21:5). He did this from the altar,

and then he and Moses went into the tabernacle, perhaps to ask the Lord to accept the sacrifices. As they came out, they blessed the people (cf. 1 Kin. 8:14–21, 54–61). It was at this moment that the promised theophany occurred. The glory of the Lord appeared to all the people, and fire came out from the tabernacle and burned all the sacrifices that were on the altar. God provided the fire to demonstrate His acceptance of the sacrifices, thus inaugurating the sacrificial system and legitimizing Aaron's priestly ministry. As the consecration ceremony implies, the fire previously present on the altar was God's fire that officially inaugurated the sacrificial system, and from this moment on, no other fire would be accepted by the Lord. The people responded to the divine presence with a cry of joy and prostrated themselves before the Lord. Something wonderful and unique had occurred on earth. God had established a particular space to dwell among His creation, consecrated the place through cleansing rituals and through His presence, organized a priestly system to mediate the benefits of His presence among His people, and created a sacrificial system to strengthen and renew His covenant relationship with His people. This was the cosmic center from which God's presence would irradiate the world and restore order.

The priestly system, once established, would operate until the coming of the true High Priest, Jesus Christ, whose arrival was announced by the Lord through Daniel (Dan. 9:24–27). He offered the sacrifice on the cross and ascended to the Father, where He was installed as High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek (Heb. 6:19–20; 7:15–17) in the heavenly sanctuary (Heb. 9:11–22), and as a result of His mediation, the Spirit descended on the disciples in the form of fire (Acts 2:3, 33). He is High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary, offering before the Father the merits of His sacrificial death on behalf of humanity (Heb. 8:1–3; 9:11–12). Since Jesus Christ possesses life in Himself, He remains Priest forever (7:22–25). No other being can occupy His priestly role as Mediator between God and humans (1 Tim. 2:5–6). It will be from the heavenly sanctuary (Heb. 8–10) that He will come back to earth "a second time" to appear to those who have been relying on His work of mediation on their behalf before the Father and who are eagerly waiting for His return (Heb. 9:28).

10:1–20

Sacredness of the Priesthood

The main purpose of this narrative is to underline the sacred responsibility of the priests. It narrates the death of Nadab and Abihu (vv. 1–5), contains two prohibitions (vv. 6–11), and includes instructions about the consumption of holy flesh (vv. 12–20).

10:1–5. Death of Nadab and Abihu. This incident occurred on the day the priestly services were inaugurated (chap. 9). The two oldest sons of Aaron burned incense using unauthorized fire—that is, not from the altar. This likely took place in the courtyard of the sanctuary ("before the Lord," v. 1). God destroyed them with the same fire that had come from heaven and burned the sacrifices (9:24). The Lord, through Moses, interpreted for Aaron what had happened. God considered the priests to be servants of the Most High, responsible for revealing to others His holy character (or before whom He displayed His magnificent holiness; v. 3). God was glorified—acknowledged as right—by the people for punishing priests who did not respect His holiness (see Num. 20:13). Aaron's silence indicated that he accepted the justice of God. No atoning sacrifice was needed because they had borne their own sin and died for it.

10:6–10. Two Prohibitions. The first was given by Moses to Aaron and his sons: they were not to mourn for the death of Nadab and Abihu, possibly because this could be perceived as support for their conduct. Mourning rituals included tearing the garments; but in the case of the priests, this would have been sacrilegious and would have spiritually damaged the congregation because their garments had been sanctified by the Lord. The priests were to remain in their posts, officiating in the tabernacle (vv. 6–7). The Lord gave the second prohibition directly to Aaron. It forbade the priests to drink intoxicating beverages while officiating in the sanctuary. Such drinks would have clouded their judgment, and they would not have been able to distinguish between the holy and unholy (or common) or between the unclean and clean. They would not have been effective teachers of God's laws (v. 10). This is an excellent description of the damaging effects of alcohol.

10:11–20. Handling Holy and Most Holy Flesh. Perhaps another reason for asking the priests to continue to officiate was that their responsibilities for the day had not yet ended. They had to eat the grain offering, which is most holy. Moses reminded them that the flesh of the peace offerings was holy and they could eat it with the members of their families (for more on the heave contribution and wave offerings, see 7:30, 32). At first, Moses did not say anything about the flesh of the sin offering.

But when he realized that its flesh was incinerated instead of being eating by the priests, he became upset. For him, this was another violation of God's will. He reminded them that they should have eaten it, and in the process, he provided a valuable interpretation of the rite of eating the flesh of the sin offering: it was most holy, and God had given it to them to bear (*nasa'*) the guilt of the people of Israel and make atonement for them (v. 17; see 5:1).

The discussion is about the eating of the flesh of the sin offering and not about the atoning function of the sin offering as such. Therefore, the connection between the two phrases—"to bear guilt" and "to make atonement"—is significant and indicates that eating the flesh was part of the atoning ritual; it contributed to the removal of sin. It did so by transferring it to the priest. This explains why the priest could not eat the flesh of his own sin offering—he could not bear his own sin and at the same time atone for it. To bear sin means to be responsible for sin and liable to punishment. The person who came to the sanctuary bearing his or her sin (see 5:1) offered a sacrifice to which the sin was transferred, and by eating of its flesh, the priest became the one who bore it. This ritual capacity of the priest was symbolized by the plate of pure gold placed on the turban of the high priest, inscribed with the phrase, "HOLY [OR HOLINESS] TO THE LORD" (Ex. 28:36–37). Exodus 28:38 explains that this plate was to be on Aaron's forehead with the intention that he would bear all the iniquity ritually associated with the holy offerings of the Israelites and, thus, render the people acceptable to the Lord. Holiness is stronger than sin. Aaron could bear the iniquity of the people and not perish because he was shielded by God's holiness. It was through this process that sin in the person of the priest was transferred to the tabernacle. What is perhaps surprising is that the atoning process brought sin/impurity/death into contact with the holiness, purity, and life of God, and holiness remained undamaged by sin. It overcame everything (see "The Laying On of Hands," p. 243). This finds its ultimate expression in Christ, who became human and bore the world's sin, yet His holiness and purity were not compromised. He defeated sin and death and freed humanity from their enslaving power (see Is. 53:5–6; Col. 1:13–14, 19–22; 2:13–15).

11:1—17:16

HOLINESS AND CLEANNESS/UNCLEANNESS

The topic of clean and unclean was introduced in the previous chapter when God reminded Aaron that he should distinguish between the two (10:10–11). The topic is important because impurity brought people into the realm of death and separated them from access to the sanctuary. Unless a cleansing ritual were performed, the separation could have been permanent. Impurity is, in principle, a metaphor for death as that which separates individuals from God. The God who dwells among His people as the source of life expects them to be holy. The intention of the instructions was to teach the people how to avoid becoming unclean and what to do once a person became unclean. This section discusses clean and unclean animals (Lev. 11:1–47) and the uncleanness of childbirth (12:1–8), skin diseases (13:1—14:32), houses with mold and mildew (14:33–57), and bodily discharges (15:1–33). It culminates in the Day of Atonement, the center of the book of Leviticus (16:1–34). Chapter 17 is included in this section because it thematically deals with the question of blood while raising topics to be discussed in the following chapters.

11:1–47

Clean and Unclean Creatures

The introduction to the speech indicates that this was a dietary law (v. 2). This concern for diet reached back to the Garden of Eden (Gen. 1:29; 3:18). Using the categories and language of the Creation narrative in Genesis 1, the chapter discusses the allowance or prohibition of consuming certain land animals (vv. 2–8), sea creatures (vv. 9–12), flying creatures (vv. 13–19), winged insects (vv. 20–25), carcasses (vv. 24–40), and swarming land creatures (vv. 41–45; see "Clean and Unclean Animals," p. 257).

11:1–28. Criteria for Clean Animals. Clean (*tahor*, "clean, pure") land animals had cloven hooves and chew the cud. If they had only one of these characteristics, they were unclean (*tame'*, "to be unclean, impure") and, consequently, were not be eaten, and their carcasses were not to be touched (v. 8). The criteria for the category of clean sea creatures was fins and scales, while those without them were considered to be *sheqets*. The noun *sheqets* ("a detestable thing" or "an abomination") and its related verb (*shaqats*, "to detest") seem to express, in this chapter, the same ideas as the adjective *tame'* ("unclean, impure"; see Lev. 11:8, 11, 43; 7:21). These creatures were not to be eaten, and neither were their carcasses to be touched (vv. 9–12). With respect to flying creatures, no specific criteria are given, but instead, the text contains a list of those that should

not be eaten—those considered to be unclean, or an abomination. Many of the Hebrew names for the birds are obscure, which makes it difficult to identify the specific creature (vv. 13–19). Most, if not all of them, were birds of prey, and this characteristic has traditionally been used to identify those that cannot be eaten. Flying insects with four feet and that walk on the earth were clean if they had jointed legs with which to jump (vv. 20–23). Among them were locusts and different types of grasshoppers. If they lacked these characteristics, they were not to be eaten; they were an unclean (detestable) abomination (v. 23).

The list is interrupted by a discussion of uncleanness through touch (vv. 24–28). Touching the carcass of any of the unclean animals made a person unclean until evening (the end of the day). But if the person also carried part of it, then the individual was unclean until the evening and had to wash his or her clothes to remove the impurity (cf. 13:6). Animals with paws were unclean, and touching or carrying their carcasses was also prohibited (vv. 27–28).

11:29–47. Swarming Land Creatures. These were mainly reptiles and small mammals that multiplied quickly. A list is provided, but in many of the cases, the meaning of the Hebrew term is not clear. Touching them when they were dead made the person unclean until evening (v. 31). When the carcass fell on clothing, skins, sacks, or anything made of wood, the item it touched became unclean and was to be put in water until evening. If the carcass fell into a clay vessel, what was inside the container became unclean, and the object was to be broken. The uncleanness is viewed as penetrating porous vessels, making it impossible to remove. If the carcass fell into a spring of water or a large cistern, the water remained clean (v. 36), probably because the body of a small animal could not contaminate the entire body of water. The same happened if it fell on planting seed, perhaps inside a vessel, but if it fell on damp seed, the seed became unclean (vv. 37–38). Even clean animals became unclean after they died, and touching their carcasses made a person unclean until evening. Those who ate of their flesh or carried them were unclean until evening and had to wash their clothes (vv. 39–41). Since all these animals, to some extent, competed with humans for space, it was difficult to avoid impurity. Accordingly, it was necessary to develop ways to eliminate it from objects and humans. In most cases, these were minor impurities that were removed at the end of the day and did not require a sacrifice.

All creeping things were considered an abomination that could make God's people unclean. The reason provided for this law was that God is holy and they should be holy as He is holy (v. 44). This call to holiness was grounded in God's redemptive power, manifested in the liberation of the people from Egypt (v. 45). God invaded the world with His holiness, and He began to transform it by making His people holy. At the end, in a summary, it is stated that this law is about clean and unclean animals—animals that can and cannot be eaten (vv. 46–47; see below, "Clean and Unclean Animals").

12:1–8

Uncleanness and Childbirth

Leviticus moves now from the uncleanness of animals (chap. 11), to human uncleanness, beginning with the mystery of childbirth, which combines the start of a new life with the phenomenon of impurity as a symbol of death. The legislation deals first with impurity caused by childbirth and concludes with the atoning ritual.

Clean and Unclean Animals

The nature of the law of clean and unclean animals, as well as its purpose, continues to be debated among biblical interpreters. This commentary maintains the idea that it is primarily a health law and is still valid for God's people.

1. *The Motivation Is Holiness.* The reason provided by the biblical text to justify this unique regulation is holiness (11:44). The implicit contrast is between the unclean and the holy. The unclean is a metaphor for the realm of death while, the holy is what belongs to God and is an appropriate expression of life. The law of clean and unclean animals sought to preserve the life of the people by keeping them as far as possible from the sphere of death, including the sphere of sickness and suffering.

2. *Uniqueness of the Law.* According to Leviticus, ritual uncleanness had two basic

characteristics. First, it was acquired through the direct or perhaps indirect contact with the unclean (blood, a dead body, a carcass, etc.). Second, this type of impurity could be removed from the individual through the performance of a particular ritual (hence the designation "ritual uncleanness" that is sometimes used by commentators). Those two characteristics do not apply to the uncleanness of the unclean animals, which indicates that the nature of their impurity is essentially different from ritual impurity. First, the impurity of the animals was not acquired but was part of the very nature of the animal. They did not become unclean by coming into contact with a source of impurity. Since these animals were permanently unclean, there was no particular ritual capable of removing their uncleanness from them.

Second, the uncleanness of these animals was not transferable through contact. The Israelites could come into direct or indirect contact with an unclean animal without becoming unclean. In fact, they reared unclean animals and used them for a variety of tasks. For instance, they used donkeys, horses, and camels for transportation and to carry loads. The impurity of these animals did not affect the Israelites in any way. People became unclean only by eating the flesh of the animal, but no ritual was prescribed to remove this impurity from them. The Israelites were simply expected to obey the Lord and not eat unclean animals. Of course, an animal could become ritually unclean after it died, and this impurity was transferable through touch. Touching the carcass of a clean or unclean animal made a person unclean, and a ritual had to be performed in order to cleanse the individual. Here, the natural and ritual uncleanness of an animal are clearly distinguished.

3. The Distinction Clean/Unclean is Pre-Mosaic. The law classifying clean and unclean animals is mentioned for the first time in the Bible in the Flood narrative, *before there was an Israelite* (Gen. 7:2–3). In the context, a change in the human diet was introduced. While only two pairs of the unclean animals entered the ark, seven of each clean animal were preserved. This suggests that some of the clean animals were to be used for sacrifices, and any of them could be used as food by Noah and his family without the risk of extinguishing any particular species. Therefore, the permission to eat all moving things that are alive in 9:3 is to be interpreted contextually as restricted to clean animals that neither died of natural causes nor were torn by wild beasts—in both instances, the animals' blood was not properly drained (cf. 7:2). The early biblical narratives indicate that the patriarchs consumed the flesh of clean animals only (e.g., Gen. 18:7; 25:27–28; 27:3–4, 9–10, 14, 30–31). This universal law was incorporated into the Israelite covenant law for preservation and as guidance for God's people.

4. Context of the Law in Deuteronomy 14. The fact that this law is recorded in Deuteronomy is significant because Deuteronomy (with its focus on the covenant) generally does not deal with ceremonial laws. In this particular passage, there is no contextual discussion of ritual uncleanness. Deuteronomy 13 is an exhortation to worship only the Lord, and the last part of chapter 14 deals with tithing laws. In between them is found the law of unclean animals. This implies that the law of unclean animals was not considered a ceremonial law but a dietary one.

5. It Is a Dietary Law. One should not ignore the fact that the law of clean/unclean animals regulated the animal flesh that the Israelites were allowed to consume as food and, as such, forms part of a long tradition of dietary regulations given by God to His people. God has always been interested in the diet of humans. To Adam and Eve, He gave seed-bearing plants or herbs—that is, fruits, vegetables, and grains (Gen. 1:29). After the Fall, He modified their diet to include what may have been cultivated vegetables (3:18). Finally, after the Flood, He allowed humans to eat the flesh of clean animals (9:3–4). Clean animals are relatively safer to eat than the unclean ones. The original plant-based diet continues to point to God's ideal for His people. God allowed humans to be partially responsible for the preservation of their lives but instructed them on how to preserve it to His glory (1 Cor. 10:31). The lordship of Christ includes our bodies because He is interested in both our physical and spiritual well-being (1 Cor. 6:19–20; 3 John 2). There is no evidence in the NT that indicates that Christ eliminated, through His sacrifice, the law of clean/unclean animals (see Mark 7; Acts 10).

It leads the reader from separation to full access to the holy in the sanctuary.

At the birth of a child, a woman would become unclean because of the blood flow that accompanied the birth (v. 7). If the child was male, the woman would be initially unclean for seven days (v. 2; cf. 15:19–24). The law was based on the understanding of blood as a physical expression of life. The loss of blood/life brought the person into contact with sphere of death, which separated her from full interaction with others and with God in the sanctuary. The seven days of impurity distanced her from other human beings, allowing her to recuperate from the experience of childbearing. Obviously, there was to be limited interaction with others at home who would also become unclean through touch, but her fellowship with God did not cease. The issue was not that sex or birth were inherently sinful but rather that because of Adam's sin, humans exist in a context in which the ugliness of death is always potentially present and occasionally touches us. In the ancient world, as well as in many places around the world today, at the moment of childbirth, death occasionally manifested itself in all its power and ended a human life. Death is an enemy, but this ritual reveals that there is a remedy for it.

After seven days, her impurity was no longer contagious—she could interact freely with others and with her husband. On the eighth day, the child was to be circumcised and, thus, officially declared a member of the covenant people of God. But the woman was to go through a longer period of purification before having access to the holy. She was to wait thirty-three days for her cleansing to be final. No reason is given for this long period, and scholars have speculated about it. The total period was forty days, perhaps suggesting new beginnings, as in other contexts (e.g., Ex. 24:18). In this case, the conclusion of this interval introduces the restoration of full access to the dwelling of the Lord.

If the child was female, the waiting period was to be extended to two weeks and sixty-six days (v. 5). There have been many attempts to explain the reason for doubling the time period in the case of a girl, but none has found wide acceptance. A more popular rationalization suggests that as a result of no longer receiving maternal hormones, a newborn girl often experiences vaginal bleeding, and this bleeding, together with that of the mother, would account for the double period of impurity. The only sure conclusion is that the birth of a girl blessed the mother with a longer period of rest!

The remaining uncleanness was to be removed through a burnt and a sin offering brought by the woman to the sanctuary. Her impurity had a contamination potential above minor impurities, which were removed through a ritual bath, and consequently, a sacrifice was required in order for her to have access to the sanctuary. Women could offer sacrifices in the sanctuary, as this legislation makes absolutely clear. The sacrifices were to be offered not to remove a sin committed but to remove physical uncleanness. As a result of the ritual, she was declared clean (v. 7). The issue was not that she had committed a specific misdeed, nor had she been sick. Rather, this uncleanness was a part of the sinful state of human life, but the Lord provided cleansing even for uncleanness over which they had no control. Humanity's struggle with death in this life will come to an end at the moment of the Second Coming (1 Cor. 15:54).

13:1—14:32

Uncleanness and Skin Diseases

This section of Leviticus deals with abnormal skin conditions or diseases. The Hebrew term translated "leprosy" (*tsara'at*) is now commonly understood to designate multiple types of skin diseases (e.g., psoriasis, ringworm). Although many scholars believe that the designation does not include leprosy (Hansen's disease), others have correctly argued that it does. The translation of the term could be "leprosy," as a generic term, or perhaps "skin disease." The purpose of the discussion was not so much to identify a disease and then provide medication for it but to identify it and control its spread. Therefore, the information on how to diagnose it remains the primary concern of the text. The outbreak was to be controlled by imposing quarantine and isolating the unclean person. The people knew that the disease was contagious. In the Bible, leprosy is associated with death, as suggested by the experience of Miriam (Num. 12:10–12). In fact, lepers identified themselves as under the power of death by dressing like a person in mourning (Lev. 13:45). Since they were in the sphere of death, they were unclean, separated from social interaction, and without access to the sanctuary.

13:2–46. Symptoms and Diagnosis. The priest was to provide a rational diagnosis based on the specific instructions the Lord had given him through Moses. The priest was to examine the condition and, in most cases, to quarantine the person until it could be ascertained that the person was clean or unclean. If diagnosed with leprosy, the person was to be declared unclean (v. 3).

The chapter is organized around eight cases: (1) suspected leprosy because of certain anomalous skin conditions (v. 2); (2) skin disease (vv. 9–11; most likely Hansen's disease); (3) a full body outbreak (vv. 12–17; possibly vitiligo); (4) a boil on the skin that had been healed and later developed a white swelling or reddish-white spot (v. 19); (5) a person whose skin had been burned and the raw flesh of the burn became a bright white or reddish-white spot (v. 24); (6) a person with a sore on the head or chin (v. 29); (7) white/bright patches on the skin (v. 38); and (8) a bald person with a reddish-white sore on the head (v. 42). In cases of leprosy, the persons' clothes were to be torn and their heads uncovered (or hair disheveled), as if in a state of mourning; they were in the realm of death. In order to not contaminate others, they were to shout "Unclean! Unclean!" (v. 45) and live outside the camp in isolation (v. 46). This was a living experience of death: separation from others and physical distance from the holy sanctuary. In practice, the relatives and friends of the sick person provided for them. The law did not discourage such expressions of love because touching them, perhaps by accident, was not a sin but a way of contracting impurity, which was redressed through a cleansing rite.

13:47–59. Infested Garments. The description of the phenomenon indicates that the text is describing a fungal infection, usually identified as mold or mildew. It was a "disease" that contaminated fabrics (clothing made of wool, linen) and leather. In this case, the term *tsara'at* refers to such fungal infections. If it were suspected that a piece of clothing was contaminated, it was brought to the priest for analysis. He examined it and quarantined it for seven days, after which he might be able to determine if it was clean or unclean. If he was uncertain, it was quarantined again. Washing the clothes was part of the process which ascertained their condition. If it was declared to be unclean, then the clothing was burned. The quarantine was a preventive measure that protected the owner of the cloth from becoming unclean.

14:1–32

Cleansing of the Leper

The ritual described here is not therapeutic because it was to be performed after the person was healed. It was to be a ritual of transition that led lepers from their place outside the camp to the camp, then to the sanctuary, and finally to full restoration. The ritual wonderfully illustrated God's plan for overcoming death and moral impurity and that it is realized in stages. The resolution of the cosmic conflict is complex, but it will be resolved. There is hope for lepers.

14:1–9. Heading to the Tabernacle. If a leper concluded that he or she had been healed, the priest was asked to perform an examination. The priest was to go to the leper to carry out the cleansing ritual—a beautiful portrait of Jesus, who approaches humanity in their uncleanness. It is likely that the leper's relatives provided the required elements for the ritual: two living clean birds, a stick of cedar wood, hyssop (a type of herb; cf. Ex. 12:22; Num. 19:6; Ps. 51:7), and a string of scarlet yarn, probably used to tie the wood and the hyssop together to create a sprinkling instrument. One of the two birds was to be killed over running water and its blood collected in a vessel. Perhaps water was added to the blood to facilitate sprinkling the blood (see v. 52). The living bird, together with the wood, the scarlet yarn, and the hyssop, was to be dipped into the blood and sprinkled seven times on the leper for cleansing. The living bird was to be set free in the open field (v. 7) as an elimination rite (see 14:49–53; 16:15, 21). Similar rituals found in some cultures in the ANE have expressed, at least in some cases, the idea of evil returning to its place of origin. Leviticus seems to be hinting at the idea that impurity found its ultimate origin outside the place where God had manifested Himself—the Israelite camp. But the symbolism could also point to the leper's movement from the sphere of death (leprosy) to the freedom of life (i.e., the "resurrection").

At this early stage in the ritual, the former lepers were clean but not completely clean. In order to enter the camp, they were to undergo a ritual bath, shave their bodies, and wash their clothes. They were allowed to enter the camp but not their place of residence (their tent) for seven days, probably to avoid contaminating it with the residual impurity. On the seventh day, after the they had shaved and washed their clothes and bodies, they were declared clean and were able to have full social interaction with others. On the eighth day, they were finally able to visit the tabernacle.

14:10–32. Final Cleansing in the Tabernacle. The priest, as the mediator of those needing cleansing, was to bring the former leper to the entrance of the tabernacle and offer guilt, sin, burnt, and grain offerings on behalf of the individual. The reason for the guilt offering was probably ignorant sin (see 5:17–19). In this case, the blood of the sacrifice was also to be applied to the right ear, the right thumb, and the right toe of the person, as was done to the priest during the anointing (8:23–24), to rededicate the person to the Lord. The oil was to be consecrated to the Lord and then applied to the same parts of the body, and the rest of it was to be placed on the head of the person. The sin offering was to be sacrificed to make atonement for the person—that is to say, to remove his or her impurity. This was to be followed by the burnt and grain offerings as expressions of gratitude and full dedication to the Lord. Allowance was made for a poor person who could not afford expensive sacrifices (vv. 21–32). The summary emphasizes the importance of atonement for cleansing (v. 20; cf. v. 31). Uncleanness will be overcome.

14:33–57. Leprous House. The noun *tsara'at* applies also to fungus- or mold-infested houses. This section is placed last because it describes what was to be done once the people had settled in the land of Canaan. The passage is composed of two main cases: a house that was condemned (vv. 33–47) and a house that was declared clean (vv. 48–53). The Lord had control over the situation (v. 34). The owner of the house who suspected an outbreak was to ask the priest to come and examine it. The priest was to order the house to be emptied because once he declared it unclean, the house and anything inside it would be unclean. If it were diagnosed as unclean, the house would be temporarily abandoned, and if at the end of the period, the fungus had spread, the damaged stones and the plaster of the walls were to be carried away to an unclean place and replaced by new stones and plaster. It is important to remember that the text does not suggest any magic- or spirit-driven impurity. If the plague returned, then the house was to be demolished. Entering, eating, or sleeping in the house while it was unclean would contaminate the person (vv. 46–48). If after the seven days quarantine, the plague had not spread, the priest was to perform a cleansing rite similar to that of the cleansing of the leper, using only the two birds (vv. 49–53). The uncleanness was to be sent away through the living bird.

The law of the *tsara'at* indicates that there is something wrong with the environment in which humans live. It is under the influence and power of death and brings with it separation and pain. It causes harm to humans, clothing, and even their houses or homes. No wonder Paul conceives of death as a power that rules over humanity because of Adam's sin and from which only Jesus can deliver us (Rom. 5:12–21). We have been delivered from spiritual death through the life of Jesus (Rom. 6:5–7), but at the same time, we look forward to the moment when physical death will be vanquished forever (Rev. 21:1–4). It is this hope that the Day of Atonement announces in types and shadows (see Lev. 16).

15:1–33. Impurity and Bodily Discharges. Contamination here is the result of something that comes out of the human body, not something that enters the body. Four cases appear: abnormal male discharge (vv. 2–15), normal male discharge (vv. 16–18), normal female discharge (vv. 19–24), and abnormal female discharge (vv. 25–30). These are followed by a theological statement and a summary (vv. 30–33). The first case is that of a man with a genital infection that caused a flow from his penis (*basar*—"flesh" is a euphemism for penis), which may have included pus and blood. This was highly contagious, and anyone who touched him, his bed, or where he sat became unclean until evening, and a ritual washing of clothes and bathing was required. If he touched anyone after washing his hands, the person touched did not become unclean. Once the discharge was healed, the sick person was to wait for seven days, and then he was to wash his clothes and bathe. In order for the cleansing to be final, he was to bring two turtledoves or pigeons, one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering, to make atonement—that is to say, to remove the impurity and recommit him to God.

The emission of semen (lit. "laying of seed"; (v. 16) could have happened either during sleep or, as is commonly believed, during intercourse with a woman. There is also the possibility that the reference is to having an emission while sleeping next to a woman. In the first case of emission during sleep, the man was unclean, and in the second, both were unclean (vv. 16–18). They were unclean until evening, and a ritual bath was required. No reason is given for this legislation, but since the biblical term for semen, *zera'*, means "seed," it could be suggested that the loss of some of the seed of life resulted in the diminution of life. Again, this is in the context of the conceptual sphere of death, and death is a result of Adam and Eve's sin (Gen. 3; Rom. 5:12–21). Death and sin are closely connected. Besides, by considering semen a contaminating agent, a clear incompatibility was established between sexual activity and the worship of God in the sanctuary, thus condemning the practice of pagan fertility rites in pagan temples.

The blood issue resulting from a woman's menstrual cycle was also a contaminating substance (vv. 19–24). Sexual intercourse during menstruation was forbidden, but if it happened that during intercourse, both parties realized that the woman was menstruating, they both became unclean (see 18:19). There was nothing intrinsically wrong or sinful about menstruation, but coming into direct or indirect contact with blood brought one close to the realm of death (see 12:2). On a more positive note, because she was considered unclean for seven days following the beginning of her menstruation, she was able to rest at a time when she was in state of physical discomfort (see 20:18). No particular cleansing ritual was legislated, but one could assume that she washed herself at the end of the period (cf. 2 Sam. 11:2, 4). The case of abnormal female blood discharge was more severe (vv. 25–30). Like in the case of the man with abnormal discharge, after seven days, she was to bring to the priest two turtledoves or pigeons, one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering, to cleanse her from her uncleanness.

The closing verses (15:31–33) establish that the previous regulations intended to demonstrate how the Israelites should be cleansed from impurities that were unavoidable and natural in their lives. If the impurities were not removed, then they ran the risk of contaminating the tabernacle by approaching it in a state of impurity, and they could have died (see 20:4–5). From God's perspective, life and death cannot coexist peacefully. This connection with life suggests that throughout these legislations, there is a health concern to be taken into consideration (see "Health and Hygiene in Leviticus," p. 272). These legislations are a reminder that Jesus is the ultimate healer (Is. 53:5). Healing is needed because humans exist in a condition of impurity that can be avoided in some cases but not in others. After all, everyone will die.

16:1–34
Day of Atonement

The shift here is from the daily services to the annual, whose goal was to restore wholeness to the Israelite camp. At the pinnacle of the Israelite sacrificial and priestly services in the sanctuary is the moment that integrated all of the elements of the worship system. The tabernacle and the people were free from impurity and sin on the Day of Atonement, which ritually expressed an eschatological hope of cosmic extent. It pointed both back to the original harmony between God and humans and, typologically, to the restoration of that harmony after the consummation of the cleansing made possible through the blood of the Son of God. The chapter, placed at the center of the literary structure of the book (see Leviticus: Introduction), is carefully arranged, beginning with the statement "The LORD spoke to Moses" (v. 1) and concluding with a formula of completion: "The LORD commanded Moses" (v. 34). The literary structure of the chapter forms a chiasm:

- **A** Limitations on Aaron's ability to enter the Most Holy Place (v. 2)
  - **B** Aaron's sacrificial victim and vestments (vv. 3–4)
    - **C** Sacrificial victims provided by the people (v. 5)
      - **D** Aaron's bull, goat for the Lord, goat for Azazel (vv. 6–10)
        - **E** Aaron's bull sacrificed as a sin offering (vv. 11–14)
          - **F** Community's goat as sin offering (v. 15)
            - **G** Atonement made (vv. 16–19)
            - **G′** Atonement finished (v. 20a)
          - **F′** Community's goat for Azazel sent to the wilderness (vv. 20b–22)
        - **E′** Aaron's closing activities (vv. 23–25)
      - **D′** Goat for Azazel, Aaron's bull, goat for sin offering (vv. 26–28)
    - **C′** People rested and humbled themselves (vv. 29–31)
  - **B′** Anointed priest officiated wearing special garments (vv. 29–33)
- **A′** Anointed priest made atonement once a year (v. 34)

At the center of the structure, the high priest makes an all-encompassing atonement for the tabernacle, the altar, the people, and himself and his family. Here, the atoning work of the priest reached its climax and came to an end (v. 20a). The chapter has an introduction (vv. 3–5), a first development (vv. 6–10), a second development (vv. 11–22), concluding ritual acts (vv. 23–28), the institutionalization of the ritual (vv. 29–34), and concluding remarks (v. 34). It combines three rites into a large ritual: a *rite of entrance* that prepared Aaron to go into the Most Holy Place, a *cleansing rite* of total atonement, and the *elimination rite*, in which the goat for Azazel played a particular role.

16:2–10. Introduction and First Development. The *introduction* lists what Aaron was to bring in order to enter the Most Holy Place: for himself, a bull for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering, and for the people, two male goats for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering. He was to take a ritual bath and put on a common priestly tunic. The *first development* mentions the sacrifice of the sin offering for Aaron and his house but places the main emphasis on identifying the goat for Azazel and its purpose. The two goats to be brought by the people are identified as a sin offering. After lots were cast, only one was to be offered as the sin offering, chosen for the Lord (belonging to Him). The other was for Azazel (belonging to him). The parallelism suggests that since the Lord is a person, Azazel also stands for a person. The fact that Azazel is associated with sin and impurity identifies him as a demonic being. The goat for Azazel stood before the Lord alive, which indicates that it was not a sacrificial victim to be offered to Azazel. Verse 10 states that it was to be brought near the Lord first, then sent to Azazel, to the wilderness. The goat was not Azazel, but it was to be sent to him, and in a sense, it represented him who was already in the wilderness. At this point, no reason is given for sending the goat to him.

The mention of atonement to be made over the goat for Azazel (*kipper 'al*) has elicited much discussion. When the object of the verb is a person, the phrase *kipper 'al* is often used to mean "to make atonement on behalf of," but here the object was a goat. This is a unique usage of the phrase. This commentary has argued that making atonement meant to remove sin/impurity from the person or from the tabernacle to cleanse it (see the section on Theology in Leviticus: Introduction). This meaning is operative in v. 10 in the unique sense of removing sin/impurity by placing it upon the goat. In other words, this is the biblical way of referring to a rite of elimination. The phrase could then be translated "to perform an elimination/removal rite upon it" by placing sin/impurity upon the goat and sending it to Azazel (see vv. 21–22).

16:11–22. Second Development. Aaron was to offer the bull for the sin offering to atone for himself and his family. Absolutely nothing is said about laying hands on this sin offering, probably because its purpose was to remove sin/impurity from the tabernacle, not from the offerer. Its blood was to be transferred into the Most Holy Place. But first Aaron was to take incense and a censer with burning coals from the altar to the tabernacle, where he was to burn the incense, creating a cloud that would allow him to go into the Most Holy Place. The cloud of incense was to mediate his presence before the Lord lest he die by attempting to approach the Lord directly. The cloud must have reached the Most Holy Place before he did, to cover the mercy seat/atonement cover (v. 13), the golden slab that covered the ark of the covenant and the place God revealed His glory and forgiving grace.

Aaron was to bring the blood of his sin offering to the very presence of the Lord in the Most Holy Place, and surrounded by the cloud of incense, he was to sprinkle some of it once on the "mercy seat"/"atonement cover" (Heb. *kaporet*, "place of atonement") and seven times before it—a total of eight times, as a perfect or full cleansing. Next, Aaron was to kill the goat for the sin offering of the people and to repeat the blood rite in the Most Holy Place (v. 15), thus mixing its blood with that of his own sin offering. He was to use the blood in the same way in the Holy Place (the tabernacle/tent of meeting; v. 16), meaning that it was to be applied all around the horns of the altar of incense and sprinkled seven times in front of it (cf. Ex. 30:10). The high priest was to put some blood around the horns of the altar of burnt offering (see Lev. 4:7), sprinkle some blood seven times on the altar for cleansing (*taher*, "to pronounce clean, to purify"), and consecrate it from the uncleanness (*tum'ah*, "impurity") of the Israelites (v. 19). The meaning of the blood manipulation is explained in v. 16: (1) to make atonement for the people, the tabernacle, and Aaron and his family by removing from the tabernacle all their uncleanness (*tum'ah*, "impurity"), transgressions (*pesha'*, "crimes"), and sins (*khatta't*, "sin"), and (2) to cleanse and consecrate the altar. The terms for sin and impurity are common in Leviticus, with the exception of *pesha'* ("transgression," "crime"), which is found only in vv. 19 and 21. This term is never associated with high-handed sin. The purpose for this cluster of terms for sin is to show that all sins and impurities were removed from the sanctuary (cf. Ex. 34:7; Ps. 32:5; Is. 59:12; Jer. 14:20; see "The Theology of the Day of Atonement," p. 264). They were transferred to the tabernacle, to the very presence of God, through the ministry of the priests during the daily services. At the end of the year, God removed the sin and impurities from His residence, demonstrating that He was not the source of evil. Azazel was.

Consequently, that day Azazel assumed responsibility for sin and impurities as their ultimate originator or source. After the atoning and purifying rites were performed, Aaron was to place his hands on the head of the goat for Azazel, confess over it the iniquity (*'awon*) and transgressions (*pasha'*) and sins (*khatta't*), and transfer them to the goat that would transport all of them to the wilderness (v. 21). Once more the cluster of terms for sin indicates that all sins were to be transferred to the goat. "Uncleanness" is not mentioned, but the idea could be expressed through the term *'awon* (see Lev. 5:2; 7:18; 17:16; 18:25; 19:8; Is. 64:6; Ezek. 9:4, 9; Hos. 8:13). In fact, this term could summarize all the other sins, as suggested in v. 22 (cf. Dan. 9:13; Hos. 5:5; 14:2; Amos 3:2).

The goat for Azazel was to bear or carry all the *'awon* to a desolate place (v. 22). In this case, the "bearing" (*nasa'*) does not mean to accept responsibility for the sins of others and be liable to punishment. It means to take something from one place to another, to transfer something. The goat is described as a vehicle transporting all the iniquities of Israel to Azazel, who, it is implied, dwells in the wilderness, which was characterized by the absence of fullness of life.

16:23–34. Concluding Ritual and Institutionalization of the Day of Atonement. Aaron was to change clothes, wash himself, offer the two burnt offerings, and burn the fat of the sin offering on the altar (vv. 24–25). There were instructions for the person who was to release the goat in the wilderness and for the disposal of the flesh of the sin offerings. The ritual was to be performed once a year, on the tenth day of the seventh month. An important detail was added related to the attitude of the people during that day: they were to *te'annu* (from *'anah*, "to be afflicted, to be humbled") *'et napshotekhem* ("your souls"). This phrase has been translated various ways—for example, "afflict your souls," "humble your souls" "deny yourselves" (v. 29). This would traditionally have included fasting and other acts of humility, expressing their total dependence on God's cleansing power. The rest of the section summarizes the most important aspects of the ritual. There is a marked emphasis on removing all the sins of the people from the tabernacle.

The Theology of the Day of Atonement

Leviticus 16 prescribes a theologically rich ritual, introducing new insights in the study of the book that help to clarify the meaning of the sacrificial system and integrate it into a theological unity. It was fundamentally a day of judgment that anticipated the eschatological day of judgment.

1. Cosmic Scope. During the Day of Atonement, the ritual polarity of the holy and the impure reached cosmic dimensions, unveiling like never before the source of both. The ritual moved from the center of holiness and life to the distant space of sin/impurity and death—the wilderness. In biblical religious geography, the two places most distant from each other are the spheres of life/holiness and sin/impurity/death. In between these two poles are the common and the clean, and they could gravitate toward one or the other. In a unique theological turn, the Day of Atonement took the priest into the very center of holiness and life, the Most Holy Place, where the *kapporet*, "mercy seat" or place of atonement, was found. This was the earthly location that directly connected the people to the cosmic center, the heavenly sanctuary, and where God met with Aaron as He met with Moses. There was no place on earth like this because it was located within the residence of the Holy One of Israel. This sanctuary itself was not a cosmic temple but a cosmic center from which cosmic order was established, restored, and preserved.

Then there is the realm of sin and the impure, so distant from the holy that it is described as being located outside the camp, in the wilderness. This implied that the presence of sin/impurity within the camp was the result of the incursion of the sphere of death into the life of the people. They were not completely isolated from it. Yes, the

people, through their violation of the covenant law, sinned and were touched by the sphere of death, but the ultimate source of sin and impurity was located in the demonic figure called Azazel. Implicit here is the concept of a cosmic conflict between God and His enemies. This conflict is illustrated in the experience of Adam and Eve and their encounter with a dark power who questioned the integrity of the character of God, the serpent (Gen. 3:1–7). Job also provides a behind the scene perspective of this cosmic conflict between God and Satan, who is finally defeated (1:6–12; 2:1–7; 42:7–17; see "Evil and the Fallen Cherub," p. 1008, and the Introduction to Job). The Day of Atonement pointed to the moment when the conflict will be resolved once and for all at a cosmic level.

2. Day of Judgment. The Day of Atonement could be described as a ritual or a typological expression of the final judgment. The attitude expected from the people was to demonstrate their total dependence on God as they faced the Judge of the earth. They were expected to humble themselves by, among other things, abstaining from any type of work, and, as later biblical and rabbinical sources confirm, fasting (16:29; cf. Is. 58:3, 5, 10). These two commands addressed one common concern, namely, total dependence on God by setting aside any activity that would signal self-reliance. The human concern for self-preservation finds expression in a particular way through work and food consumption. To discontinue these activities is to thrust oneself absolutely into God's care and redemption. This total reliance on God was examined during the Day of Atonement/day of judgment (Lev. 23:29–30). There was a law that was to be obeyed, and it required total dependence on God. The law was located inside the ark of the covenant, whose cover was the *kapporet* ("mercy seat," "place of atonement"; 16:13). The lives of the people were analyzed to uncover whether they were trusting in the Lord for their final deliverance from sin/impurity, and a legal verdict was pronounced against violators. For those who trusted in the Lord, there was deliverance through the work of the high priest on their behalf, but for the rebellious, there was permanent transfer to the realm of death. On this day, God called for a separation between the faithful and the unfaithful (see Ezek. 8–9).

The connection between the Day of Atonement and the day of judgment is also found in the experience of Joshua, the high priest, and the Angel of the Lord (Zech. 3:1–5). This vision was related to the Day of Atonement through the use of similar terms and images. He was the high priest and bore the people's sin as their representative; the enemy of God (Satan) was present, but he was silenced by the Lord; the Lord removed the people's sins; and Joshua's priestly garments were changed. Unquestionably, the background is the Day of Atonement, and it is interpreted here as an experience of judgment.

We find a similar judgment scene in Daniel 7:9–10, 13–14, in which God was present, the legal records were opened, and a mediator approached, surrounded by the clouds of heaven, and was brought before God (Dan. 7:13). As a result of this apocalyptic judgment, the Son of Man received the kingdom. In Leviticus 16:12–13, the high priest was required to burn incense in order to draw near to the Lord. In both situations, the setting is a judgment, and the mediator approaches God in a cloud. The Son of Man is being described as a High Priest who, after the judgment, received a kingdom free from the presence of God's enemies. This scene of judgment parallels the scene of the sanctuary in Daniel 8:9–14. There the Commander and Prince of God's people performed the daily services while in conflict with a powerful enemy whom He would finally defeat during the Day of Atonement (see Dan. 8:12–14). There are many other places in the Bible where the judgment includes separating true worshipers of God from false ones (e.g., Ezek. 9) as well as the separation of God's people from the wicked of the earth (e.g., Joel 3:11–16). Jesus also associates the final judgment with the separation of the righteous from the unrighteous (Matt. 13:24–30, 47–50).

The judicial examination of God's people during the Day of Atonement resulted in their vindication by revealing that they had remained in a faith relationship with the Lord. Consequently, all their sins/impurities were removed from the sanctuary. During the year, they came to the tabernacle with expiatory sacrifices, through which sin/impurity was transferred to the sanctuary, and forgiveness and cleansing were granted to them. The Day of Atonement was a reaffirmation of the effectiveness of that daily cleansing. The tabernacle needed to be cleansed because it was defiled by the uncleanness and sins of the people (v. 16). The people's daily cleansing was consummated on the Day of Atonement (vv. 30, 33).

The ritual assumed that the sins of the people had been transferred to the tabernacle, thus justifying the need to remove the impurity, bringing to an end the process of atonement. Therefore, the cleansing of God's residence offered to the people a new beginning. For a day, they returned to life in the Garden of Eden, in perfect harmony with the order established by God at Creation, free from sin and impurity. The Day of Atonement anticipated the moment when the whole cosmos will be cleansed from the miasma of sin and set free from the contaminating power and influence of evil.

3. Vindication of God. The Day of Atonement was a theodicy (Gr. *theos* ["God"] and *dike* ["justice"]); that is to say, it was a declaration that God is just in spite of the presence of sin/impurity in the cosmos. First, the presence of the concept of judgment in Leviticus 16 suggests that the chapter is addressing the question of theodicy. A judgment seeks to uncover the truth in a situation in which it is not obviously accessible to the common observer. During the Day of Atonement, God functioned as Judge in order to demonstrate that the way He dealt with the sin/impurity of the people was legally justifiable and not an arbitrary decision on His part. He gave to each one what they legally deserved. The judgment ultimately reveals who in the cosmic conflict is right and who is wrong and will conclude with the cosmic recognition that God is indeed righteous. The NT captures this important theological concept when describing what will happen when God's righteousness is recognized by all (Phil. 2:10–11).

John saw the redeemed singing a song to the Lord and declaring His justice (Rev. 15:3–4). Angels are depicted as proclaiming God to be righteous and true in all His judgments (16:5, 7). At the revelation of God's judgment, a great multitude in heaven will proclaim this same reality (19:1–2). The final judgment will be a theodicy of the saving power of the cross on behalf of sinners that will reveal the justice and love of God at a cosmic level.

Second, the removal of sin/impurity from the dwelling of God revealed that, in spite of the fact that He allowed the people to transfer their sin to Him, God and sin are incompatible. Therefore, it was impossible for them to coexist permanently within the camp. The Day of Atonement reaffirmed the fact that when God assumed responsibility for sin/impurity in the tabernacle, He was bearing it as a manifestation of His forgiving grace and not because He was somehow directly and naturally connected to it (e.g., Ex. 34:7). His rendezvous with sin/impurity had a saving purpose and nothing else. During the Day of Atonement, the incompatibility between holiness and sin/impurity was graphically illustrated by removing the latter from the tabernacle and the camp and by sending it away into the wilderness.

Third, the rite of elimination—sending the goat to Azazel, loaded with sin/impurity—indicates that the Day of Atonement was essentially a theodicy. Without it, the significance of the expiatory sacrifices during the daily services could have been seriously misconstrued. By placing the Israelite expiatory sacrifices within their cultural context, the role of the Day of Atonement as a theodicy can perhaps be better understood. Similar elimination rites were practiced in the ANE with the purpose of removing evil and sickness from people by returning them to the place they came from, usually either to the camp of the enemy (in a military campaign) or to the underworld, the demonic realm. Without the Day of Atonement, it would have been easy to misunderstand the daily transference of sin/impurity to the tabernacle as a ritual return of wickedness and uncleanness to its place of origin, implying that the Lord was indeed the source of all evil. The rite of elimination, by pointing to a source of sin/impurity outside the camp, demonstrated that the origin of these most disturbing phenomena was not located in the Lord or His sanctuary, nor even in the camp of Israel, but in the wilderness—in Azazel. God could not be charged with sin. Within the context of the Pentateuch, the presence

of evil in the world could not be assigned to God because He brought into existence a perfectly organized cosmos, but an enemy, Azazel, had been plotting to upset and even destroy the divine order. The people were not excused for their sins and impurities but were required to acknowledge them, repent, and bring a substitutive sacrifice to expiate them. The divine promise is that an eschatological Day of Atonement is coming when sin/impurity will be permanently removed from the cosmos.

Fourth, during the Day of Atonement and as part of the theodicy, God's sovereignty is powerfully proclaimed. The removal of sin/impurity from the tabernacle and the Israelite camp ritually proclaimed God's power and sovereignty over evil. It revealed that holiness was superior to sin/impurity. This was indeed a message of hope. Not even in the act of forgiving and cleansing His people was God tainted by sin/impurity. Yes, in the atonement, sin/impurity and holiness touched each other, but God's holiness remained absolutely undamaged, and He was amazingly able to restore holiness to His people (see "The Laying On of Hands," p. 243). During the Day of Atonement, God also proclaimed His sovereignty over Azazel. This character is introduced as the opposite of the Lord, but he remained in the shadows, in silence, unable to oppose the work of God during the Day of Atonement. His silence was the silence of the accused who, when confronted with the evidence against him or her, is left speechless, entirely unable to rebut it. His inactivity was not like the Sabbath rest enjoyed by the people but rather like the inactivity that characterizes the realm of death. The goat itself carried the sins and impurities of the people to Azazel in submission to God and under the guidance of His appointed instrument. One could perhaps venture to say that the silence of Azazel in the text was an acknowledgement of guilt. In this powerful display of His sovereignty, God restored things to the original order He had established. Creation through separation found its counterpart in God's work of re-creation through separation (see "Creation, Sabbath, and the Sanctuary," p. 231).

4. Reconciliation and Judgment. The work of Christ as High Priest consists of a work of reconciliation and judgment (see "The Cleansing of the Sanctuary and Judgment in Daniel," p. 1043). As a Sacrifice, He took upon Himself the sins of humanity, and as High Priest, He applies the benefits of His sacrifice to them. He provided cleansing from past sin, even those committed under the first covenant (Heb. 9:15), He continues to cleanse people from sin (Heb. 9:14), and He performs the cleansing of the antitypical Day of Atonement in the heavenly sanctuary (Heb. 9:23). After finishing His work as High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary, He will return for His people (Heb. 9:28). Satan, as the antitype of Azazel, will be left in the wilderness of a planet in chaos for a thousand years (Rev. 20:1–3), after which Christ will destroy the source of sin and impurity (20:11–15). This will be the beginning of true Jubilee. There will be a new creation, free from the miasma of sin and impurity—a return to Eden (21:1–5; 22:1–4).

17:1–16

The Question of Blood

This is a transitional chapter dealing with topics addressed in the previous chapters (e.g., blood, uncleanness), but it also points to topics found in the next chapters. It could as well be placed within the following major section of Leviticus. It consists of three main legislations dealing with the offering of sacrifices outside the sanctuary or to demons and idols (vv. 1–9), the consumption of blood (vv. 10–14), and the eating of animals that had died of natural causes or were killed by other animals (vv. 15–16). These three elements were included in the decision of the Jerusalem Council in the same order, along with another transgression found in Leviticus 18, namely, sexual immorality (Acts 15:28–29). These legislations were not only for the Israelites but also for foreigners residing in Israel.

17:1–9. Sanctuary and Sacrifices. The legislation forcefully established that the desire to eat animal flesh was not to be satisfied by killing an animal in the camp or outside as an offering to other spiritual powers but by bringing it to the Lord as a peace offering—a portion of its meat was to be given back to the offerer (see Lev. 3).

If the animal was not brought to the sanctuary as a sacrifice to the Lord, the person who killed it was to be charged with murder (v. 4) and was to be cut off from his or her people (v. 4; see 7:20–21). The animal's life had been taken illegally if its blood was not poured out at the base of the altar. The punishment could have been considered too severe; consequently, the Lord provided a rational for it—it functioned as a deterrent to offering sacrifices to demons (lit. "male goats"; v. 7). Male goats living in desolate places were considered symbols of demons; for example, the goat for Azazel, a demon, was sent to the wilderness (16:10; cf. 2 Chr. 11:15; Is. 13:21). Such sacrifices were an act of unfaithfulness to God, and He wanted to bring them to an end, hence the severity of the penalty. The requirement to bring a peace offering to the sanctuary was here extended to any other sacrifice the Israelites or the resident aliens may have wanted to offer. A most severe penalty was prescribed for failing to do this: being cut off from their people (v. 9; see v. 4).

17:10–14. Consuming Blood. Israelites or resident aliens who consumed blood were also to be cut off from their people. The reason given for the prohibition is theologically significant (v. 11). Three important statements were made. First, the life (*nepesh*) of the creature (lit. "flesh") was in the blood. There has been some debate about the proper translation of the phrase, but it is possible to render it "the life of the flesh/animal is the blood." The equation of both is stated in Deuteronomy 12:23 and is also affirmed in Leviticus 17:14. Blood is the tangible expression of life. Second, God gave it to the people in order for them to bring it to Him through the altar. In other words, blood belonged exclusively to God, but He gave it to the people with the understanding that they were to return it to Him via the altar of sacrifices. This was a wonderful gift in that the blood of the animal would now stand for the blood of repentant sinners. The text then proceeds to explain the significance of this ritual. Third, the purpose of returning to God, through the altar, the blood that He provided for them was to make atonement for the Israelites (*napeshotekem*, "your lives"; v. 11). In the process of returning the blood to God via the altar, atonement was made for their lives. The implication was that their lives were in danger, but God had found a way to preserve them. The phrase "to make atonement [*kipper*] for your souls/lives" is used in other places in conjunction with the noun "ransom" (*koper*), meaning "to give a ransom [*kipper*] for your lives" (Ex. 30:11–16; cf. Num. 31:48–54). This confirms that in this particular passage, *kipper* means to atone in the sense of removing sin by "giving a ransom for your lives." The idea is that the blood/life of the sacrificial victim was given to God as a ransom/payment for the endangered life of the person. The association of the life of the animal with that of the sinner indicates that the first substituted for the second—human life was preserved through the death of the animal.

Fourth, the text indicates that it was the blood that made atonement for the soul (*nepesh*, "person, life"; v. 11). "For" suggests that what follows deals with what was said before, in this case emphasizing it: for it is the blood, as life, that serves as ransom/expiates. The "life" could be the life of the animal, as in the previous translation, or that of the person: "it is the blood that effects expiation/ransom in exchange for life." Either of these two translations would be theologically sound. One could even translate the phrase as "for the blood effects atonement by the life," but this would be done at the risk of implying that blood was an almost magical substance, able to bring about atonement because life was in it. In this case, God would be removed from the process of atonement, and blood, as the carrier of life, would be the focus.

What about the blood of clean animals or birds that were hunted for food (vv. 13–14)? In such cases, the blood was to be returned to God by pouring it on the ground and covering it with dust (earth). The reason for this legislation was the same as before: the life of every creature (lit. "flesh") was its blood (v. 14), and the penalty for its violation was the same. But what about a person who ate from an animal found dead or one that was torn by beasts? If individuals ate the flesh, which presumably still had blood in it, they were unclean until evening and were to wash their clothes and take a ritual bath. If this was not done, they were responsible and bore their guilt (v. 16; see 5:2–6).

The legislations found in Leviticus 17 are principally addressing the proper use of blood. The understanding of sacrificial blood present in the text is applied to all atoning sacrifices, and it is based on the conviction that since blood, as life, is God's property, it was to be returned to Him. But God did the unimaginable: He allowed the Israelites to send Him this blood/life, loaded with their sins and impurities, as a ransom for their lives. Thus, sin and impurity were transferred to His dwelling place through a substitute, making it necessary to remove them during the Day of Atonement. Although this chapter displays some health concerns, its main purpose is theological and it serves to point to the blood of Christ, who died as a substitute to ransom humanity from sin and who is the only means of atonement before the Lord.

18:1—27:34

HOLY PEOPLE

The presence of a holy God dwelling among His people required them to be holy. This was possible because God sanctified them and removed their sins and impurities from them through the sacrificial system (Lev. 1–17). Now, the gift of holiness became a task, and it revealed that holiness has an ethical component. The assignment was to separate from sin and impurity in order to model God's holiness. This section provides numerous instructions about sexuality (18:1–30; 20:1–27), with several laws related to morality and holiness interjected (19:1–37).

18:1–30

Holiness and Sexuality

18:1–17. Incest. The Lord spoke through Moses to the children of Israel and identified Himself as their covenant Lord, who was leading them to the land of Canaan. The laws were not given in order for them to earn the land but because their redeemer Lord was giving it to them and wanted them to retain it. Obedience to God's laws makes life enjoyable. Therefore, these laws served to organize life by establishing boundaries and differentiations, as the Lord did during Creation (Gen. 1). The repetition of the phrase "I am the LORD" firmly grounded the laws in His authority. The laws against incest are moral laws, not restricted to any particular time or nation, as is shown by the condemnation of their practice in Egypt and Canaan and by the clarification that even the resident alien living among the Israelites was to obey them (v. 26).

The legislation forbade sexual relations (lit. "to uncover nakedness") beginning with the near of kin or blood relatives (vv. 6–17; this includes one's daughter though daughters are not mentioned specifically in this particular list; see 20:2): mother (v. 7; some versions distinguish the nakedness of the father from that of the mother [the father or the mother], while others equate the nakedness of the father with that of the mother [the father "that is to say" the mother], suggesting that having sexual relations with the mother [uncovering the nakedness of the mother] dishonors the father by uncovering his nakedness—that is, only the father should have access to the mother's sexuality); stepmother (v. 8); sister or half sister (v. 9); granddaughter (v. 10); stepsister or daughter of the woman the father married who was also from the same clan (v. 11); paternal aunt (v. 12); maternal aunt (v. 13); paternal uncle's wife (v. 14); daughter-in-law (v. 15); fraternal sister-in-law (v. 16); a mother and her daughter (v. 17); and a mother and her granddaughter (v. 17). Incest was condemned not only because it violates the boundary of consanguinity but also because it is wickedness (v. 17); that is to say, it is lewdness—the shameful immorality that characterized the people in Egypt and Canaan (v. 3). Sexual purity is directly related to the holiness that God expects from His people. Throughout history, women have been abused by men in power at home and in society. These laws set limits to male power in the family, and by extension in society, and placed female sexuality under the protection of God, with serious consequences for any violator.

18:18–30. Other Sexual Prohibitions and the Rationale. The cases listed here were not based on consanguinity. The first case has been interpreted as indicating that a man was not to marry the sister of his wife while the wife was living (v. 18). However, it could also be read as prohibiting polygamy. The mention of a woman as rival to her sister could be read as meaning one woman in addition to another (see, e.g., Ex. 16:15; lit. "a man to his brother"; see also Num. 14:4). This type of marriage was forbidden because it would destroy the wholeness of the home (see 1 Sam. 1:6).

Intentionally having sex with a woman during menstruation was forbidden (Lev. 18:19; see 15:24). In Leviticus 20:18, the man and the woman who had sexual intercourse during her period were both to be cut off from their people, indicating that both had consented to the act. But here, in the context of incest, the man was to be cut off from his people (18:29).

The prohibition against adultery is part of the Decalogue (v. 20; Ex. 20:14). What follows is a case of spiritual adultery or unfaithfulness: sacrificing children to Molech, probably an underworld deity (v. 21). The reason was that such an act profaned the name of God—He was treated not as holy but as a common pagan deity.

This association of His people with idolatry damaged His reputation.

Homosexuality was clearly rejected as a proper expression of any type of sexual intimacy. It was a moral defilement and a *to'ebah* ("abomination," "abhorrence," something "detestable"; v. 22; see 20:13); it was repugnant to God and incompatible with His character. It violated the order established by Him at Creation (Gen. 2:21–24; cf. Rom. 1:26–27).

Bestiality was condemned as a *tebel* ("perversion," "confusion") from the verb *balal* ("mix," "confuse"), a term that emphasizes even more the violation of divine order.

The chapter concludes with an admonition calling the people not to commit the discussed abominations, also identified as *'awon* ("iniquity," "sin," "rebellion"; 18:25; see 16:21) because these sins defiled the land and would lead the people to be removed from it, like the previous inhabitants. The language of impurity was used to refer to moral impurity (vv. 29–30). The same high moral standards are expected from those who today claim to walk with the Lord.

19:1–37

Explicit Call to Holiness

This chapter illustrates what the Lord meant when He told His people that they were to be holy because He, the Lord their God, is holy (v. 2). The laws flowed from the basic principles of the Decalogue and touched almost every aspect of the social life of the Israelites, interspersed with laws related to God.

19:1–18. Principles, Casuistic Laws, and Respect for Others. Three of the Ten Commandments are mentioned: respect parents, keep the Sabbath, and reject idolatry (vv. 3–4). These are followed by two case laws: (1) bringing a peace/fellowship offering (see 7:11–21)—the emphasis here is on the proper use of the flesh of the animal—and (2) providing food for the poor during the harvest (vv. 9–10) by leaving the gleanings in the field for them. The next section, dealing with justice and care for others, begins with a reference to the eighth commandment (v. 11; Ex. 20:15), supplemented by a command to be truthful and a reference to the third commandment (Ex. 20:7), which prohibits a false oath—possibly taken to hide one's sin—that would profane God's name (Lev. 19:12).

The next set of laws deals with caring for the underprivileged by not defrauding them through robbery (taking their property by force) or by withholding their wages at the end of a workday. The deaf and blind (v. 14) were to be treated with respect and not abused (cf. John 9). Cursing the deaf could mean belittling the person, and placing stumbling blocks before the blind would include the idea of misleading the person. The command to care for others is grounded in the fear of or respect for God, not in natural human goodness. This respect for God was to express itself in the judicial system (v. 15). Justice was to be impartial and not controlled by bribes. Neither was one to speak unjustly before the court against someone else. If someone's brother hurt him or her, the person who was hurt was not to be hypocritical by making the brother believe that he was loved when, in fact, he was secretly hated (v. 17). It was better to rebuke or reprove the brother (v. 17); perhaps he would repent. Neither was one to seek vengeance or hold a grudge against one's brother (v. 18). God expected His people to love their neighbors as themselves (v. 18) and to care for and respect others, at least in the same way that they would like others to care for them.

19:19–30. Principles, Casuistic Laws, and More Commands. This new section begins with an exhortation to keep the Lord's statutes, followed by a law against certain mixtures: of livestock, seeds (making the harvesting process difficult; see Deut. 22:9), and fabrics, such as in the garments worn by the priests (v. 19; cf. Ex. 28:5). The law sought to preserve the divine order of Creation and religious life by establishing proper boundaries. Another boundary was established through a case law related to a man who had sexual relations with a betrothed female slave (v. 20). Since she was still a slave, capital punishment was not to be enforced, but an inquiry was to be made to determine the facts and the punishment to be applied—the compensation to be paid. He misappropriated what was not his, thus compensation and a guilt offering (see 6:1–7) were required (assuming that he repented).

The second case law is related to agricultural practices in the land of Canaan (vv. 23–25). The fruits of newly planted trees were forbidden (lit. "uncircumcised") for three years—that is, not acceptable to the Lord or for human consumption (v. 23). They were "uncircumcised" for three years, and in the fourth year, the fruits were declared holy and given as praise to the Lord (v. 24) to express joyful gratitude to Him. This legislation vividly reminded the Israelites that the land and its fruits belonged to God.

They partook of its fruits according to His will, and they were to recognize this by rejoicing when consecrating the fruits to God. They were not owners but stewards of the land. The discussion of the relationship of the people to the land was followed by instructions regarding their relationship to the dead (vv. 26–28). Eating animals with (lit. "over") the blood either refers to the previous prohibition discussed in chapter 17 (cf. Gen. 9:4) or to the pagan practice of pouring out blood for the spirits into a pit and eating over the pit. They were not to consult the spirits for divination purposes. Humans have always been concerned about the future and have thought that by knowing what will happen, they could, to some extent, have control over it. Verses 27–28 describe pagan mourning rites aimed at pleasing and showing respect and care to the spirits of the ancestors. The text forbade them and affirmed the importance of showing respect to God by not damaging the human body. The realm of the spirits of the dead is the realm of demons (Deut. 32:17; Ps. 106:28). Christians should mourn for their dead relatives in ways that express their hope in the resurrection (John 11:25–26; 1 Thess. 4:13–18), since the dead are resting and do not know anything (see Pss. 6:5; 115:17; Eccl. 9:5–6; Isa. 38:18; Dan. 12:2–3; John 11:11–13).

Parents were to care for their children and were never to sell a daughter into harlotry, either for financial benefit or for pagan fertility rites (v. 29). Respect was to be shown to the Lord (who sanctified them through His presence in time and in the sanctuary) by keeping the Sabbath holy and by serving and worshiping Him only (v. 30; see v. 3). This was to be done instead of seeking mediums or necromancers (Heb. *yid'oni*; some versions have "familiar spirits," others have "spiritists"; v. 31). By entering the realm of death, they became unclean.

The people of God were commanded to show respect to the elderly—while they were still alive—out of respect to God. They were to care for strangers who dwelt among them in their land (vv. 32–33) by treating them well, even considering them fellow Israelites, and loving them as themselves (see v. 18). In other words, they were to not do to foreigners what had been done to them in Egypt. They were to also show respect and kindness in the business world by not deceiving or taking advantage of others—they were to use balanced weights and proper measures (vv. 35–36). This was firmly grounded in God's previous work of salvation for His people. The chapter closes with an emphatic exhortation to submit to God's loving will for them as their Lord (v. 37).

20:1–27

Laws and Penalties

Chapter 20 repeats many of the laws discussed first in chapter 18 but identifies specific penalties for their violation. It is organized by the type of penalty (death, vv. 9–16; exile, vv. 17–19; childlessness, vv. 20–21).

20:1–16. Introduction and Capital Punishment. Israelites or resident aliens who worshiped Molech were to be stoned (v. 2; see 18:21). If the people failed to perform the execution, then God Himself was to cut off the idolaters (see 7:20–21), as well as the members of the family who supported them, from their people (v. 5). They dishonored the character of God, committed spiritual harlotry, and could have contaminated the tabernacle by visiting it in a state of impurity (see 15:31). This is the way Ezekiel explains the contamination of the temple through the worship of Molech (23:38–39), providing a biblical explanation for this particular case. The death penalty applied also to those who committed spiritual adultery by consulting spirits (vv. 6, 27; see 19:31) and to those who cursed, dishonored, and abused their parents (v. 9; 19:3; see Ex. 21:17; Deut. 21:18–21; 27:16). Their blood would be upon them (v. 9)—that is, this was a case of capital punishment brought by the persons upon themselves.

The list mentions other cases involving capital punishment, including adultery (v. 10; 18:20, 29), sexual relations with the wife of one's father (v. 11; 18:8), lying with one's daughter-in-law—a *tebel* (an incestuous "perversion"; v. 12; see 18:15; cf. v. 23)—and homosexual intercourse, a *to'ebah* ("abomination" or "detestable thing"; v. 13; 18:22, 23). In the case of a man marrying both a woman and her mother ("a wicked act"; vv. 14; 18:17), they were all to be burned, which probably meant that the corpses were burned after they were executed (e.g., Josh. 7:15, 25). The list of sexual sins concludes with bestiality (vv. 15–16; 18:23). The reference to being put to death may have referred to stoning (cf. Deut. 22:23–24).

20:17–21. Noncapital Offenses. In the case of consensual sex between a man and his sister ("a disgraceful, wicked thing"; cf. 18:9), the penalty of being cut off publically may have referred to exiling the persons. The same penalty applied to a couple who had sex during menstruation (v. 18). The Hebrew term used here (*daweh*) conveys the idea of "weak" or "faint," implying a time of discomfort for the woman (see 15:33; 18:19), and does not necessarily imply that menstruation was an illness (though some translations render the word as "sickness"). With respect to consensual sexual intercourse with an aunt, no specific penalty is mentioned except that they were to bear their guilt (v. 19; 18:12–13; see 5:1). Perhaps the punishment was also exile. The penalty for sex with an aunt (wife of an uncle) or sister-in-law was to be infertility (vv. 20–21; 18:14–16); the family name would not be perpetuated.

The chapter closes with an exhortation to abide by God's will as expressed in His decrees and legal ordinances (v. 22). The law orders the cosmos and society by establishing distinctions in nature and roles. God was re-creating the land of Canaan by removing the cause of chaos and disorder and restoring it to order, giving it to a new people who would support His plan and preserve the distinctions He had established. He separated Israel from the nations, not on the basis of ethnic superiority but on the basis of moral regulations that were designed to instill God's values in humans. God's people were to be holy because He is holy. He separated them for Himself (v. 24) so that they would also separate themselves for Him. This is the way God organized their world, and they were not to upset that order. The law of clean/unclean animals is used here to illustrate the importance of being holy as God is holy. Holiness has to do with how we relate to God's will in our daily lives—what we eat and how we interact with others and with Him. The laws discussed in this chapter were not abolished by Jesus because they are directly related to a life of moral integrity. God continues to abhor (v. 23) the violation of these and other laws found in the Pentateuch (cf. Acts 15:19–20).

The last verse builds on v. 6, establishing the punishment for any person who was a leader in the promotion of spiritualism. Such persons were to be stoned (v. 27). This instruction was probably left for the end because such practices were a rejection of the power of God to lead and protect His people and showed allegiance to evil powers that opposed Him—the forces that attempted to destroy the order established by God at Creation.

Health and Hygiene in Leviticus

The laws of uncleanness were chiefly theological in nature, but they also contained hygienic principles. The unclean was associated with the realm of death, to which all were exposed, while the holy stood for life. Therefore, the theological and hygienic interests were complementary. Those who were sick lacked fullness of life and vibrancy. They had been touched by death; they were weak. In a sense, the sick were already within the sphere of death (Ps. 88), and unless they were healed, they would die. The biblical emphasis is not so much on healing but on preventing sickness, and this is clearly demonstrated through the laws regulating impurity.

1. Obedience to God. God was not only the Healer of Israel but also the One who protected them from diseases. The well-being of the people was directly associated with the covenant relationship and required their faithfulness to the covenant law. Obedience to it resulted in divine blessings and, more specifically, in protection from illness (Ex. 23:25–26). This exemplifies the biblical understanding of human nature as an integrated system in which the physical and the spiritual are inseparable components of one single person. The divine call to observe the Sabbath as a day of rest and spiritual renewal is probably one of the best examples of God's concern for the spiritual and physical well-being of His people (Ex. 20:8–11).

2. Avoiding the Unclean. Since uncleanness is related to the absence of life, the preservation of health required abstaining from and not coming into contact with any unclean sources. This is particularly the situation in cases related to blood flows (Lev. 15:2–30), carcasses of animals (11:24, 26, 31), dead persons (21:1–2; Num. 6:6–9; 19:11), and lepers (13:45–46). Sex during menstruation was forbidden (15:24; 18:18; 20:18). All of these were potential sources of disease. The fungi on the walls of a house could damage the health of its residents, particularly children, and would have made it necessary for the house to be renovated or demolished (14:33–47). These are extremely useful hygienic principles.

3. The Practice of Quarantine. In order to control the potential spread of diseases among the population, a period of quarantine was often required. The Lord instructed Moses to quarantine lepers, those with discharges, and those defiled by touching a dead body (Num. 5:2). The extent of the isolation varied, depending on the case, but in some situations, indefinite isolation was required until the person was healed. For instance, a house with suspected fungi was initially quarantined for seven days (Lev. 14:38), but persons with a blood discharge (15:13, 29) or leprosy (14:3–4) were required to wait to reintegrate until they had been healed and had gone through a cleansing ritual.

4. Not Eating the Unclean. The flesh of an animal which died from natural causes was not to be eaten (Lev. 17:15; Deut. 14:21). Consumption of blood or fat in meat (two potential sources of serious disease) was forbidden (Lev. 7:22–25, 27). Even eating utensils suspected of contamination were not to be used until they had been washed (11:32), and in some cases, they were destroyed (v. 33). These were important prophylactic measures that served to protect food and water from contaminating agents (vv. 31–38; see "Clean and Unclean Animals," p. 257).

5. Use of Water. Water played an important role as a hygienic agent in the discussions of uncleanness. The garment that came into contact with blood or on which semen fell was to be washed (Lev. 15:16–17). This was also the case with the garments of a person who carried the carcass of an animal (11:24–25). After emissions of semen, persons were to bathe (15:18). The man with a blood flow was to rinse his hands before touching another person (15:11), and if he spat on a clean person, that person was to wash his or her clothes and bathe (v. 8). Coming into contact with sources of impurity required washing the garments and bathing the body. This was a very effective way of controlling the spread of disease.

6. Sexual Restrictions. There are a number of laws dealing with incest intended to set limits on the physical, mental, and genetic deterioration of the people (Lev. 18:1–18). Bestiality and homosexuality were strongly forbidden (18:22; 20:13) on the basis of morality. Furthermore, the laws would have prevented sexually-transmitted infections and other health problems threatening the well-being of God's people. The same applied to the practice of prostitution. The Israelites, particularly priests (21:9), were not to allow their daughters to become prostitutes (19:29).

7. Healthy Environment. Keeping the environment clean provided protection against infectious diseases. Instructions were given, in the context of military campaigns, for the proper disposition of human excrement. This was designed to prevent the spread of infectious diseases and odor pollutants (Deut. 23:12–14). God promised the Israelites a land that would contribute to their physical and emotional well-being (Lev. 26:4–6).

8. Mental Health. God is interested in the spiritual, physical, and mental health of His people. Very few actions upset the inner peace of human beings more than actions that damage their relationships with God and others. Guilt and shame rob humans of their inner peace. The Lord provided for the restoration of mental peace through the sacrificial system. Any Israelite who committed a sin against God or another Israelite was expected to bring a guilt or sin offering to the Lord in order for the priest to make atonement for him or her (Lev. 5; 6:24–29). Even in cases where individuals felt anxiety because they suspected that they had committed a sin which they could not recall or identify, the Lord invited them to bring a sacrifice in order to restore their inner peace (5:17–19). Divine forgiveness is the best medicine for a sense of unworthiness, regret, and guilt.

There are some important health principles present in the biblical legislations related to uncleanness. These principles are, in most cases, suggested by the text and not explicitly mentioned. The theological concern predominates, but this does not imply the exclusion of health concerns expressed in a setting in which the mechanism of infectious disease was unknown. Through these laws, God provided a way for them to prevent the inroad of disease. This demonstrates His care for the physical, mental, and spiritual health of His children.

21:1—22:33
Holiness of Priests and Sacrifices

The priests had unique access to God and were therefore called to a higher status of holiness in their lives and work than the common people. This section deals with the preservation of the holiness of the priests (vv. 2–24) and of the holiness of offerings (22:1–33). Those who served the Lord in special capacities were challenged to manifest in their lives His holiness and to become models for others while earning their respect. Whatever belonged to the Lord must be treated with respect and not dragged into a world of sin and death.

21:1–24. Holiness of the Priests. This divine speech was for the instruction of all God's people because caring for holiness is not for the priests alone. Since the common priest was holy, he was forbidden to come in contact with the dead, except for his nearest relatives (vv. 2–3). Through contamination, the priests profaned themselves. Neither were they allowed to practice pagan mourning rites, for this profaned the name of the Lord (v. 5). They were not to marry a harlot, or a defiled woman (perhaps a cultic prostitute), or a divorcée because holiness required wholeness in every form. The Israelites were to acknowledge and respect the holiness of the priest, but this holiness was to be particularly manifest within their own families. When the daughter of a priest profaned her own holiness by becoming sexually promiscuous, her conduct disqualified the priest from performing his ministry. Such a profanation of holiness was a capital offense, and she was to be burned (v. 9; see 20:14).

The holiness of the high priest was particularly important because God appointed him to unique responsibilities; he wore holy garments (v. 10). The requirements for the common priests applied to him as well, but with a few stringent additions. He was not to mourn or to defile himself by coming near a corpse, not even that of his father or mother (v. 11). In v. 11, the text literally refers to a prohibition against touching a *nepesh* (which could mean various things; see "Living Soul or Living Being?" p. 145)—in this case, a reference to a dead person. He was also forbidden to leave the sanctuary to engage in such acts. Death could not interrupt his life-preserving ministry. He was to marry only an Israelite virgin, a woman attuned to God's moral order, in order to not profane or defile his offspring/posterity (vv. 14–15)—that is to say, his descendants, from whom the next high priest would be selected.

In order to preserve the holiness of the tabernacle, priests with certain infirmities—mainly physical imperfections or health problems—were disqualified from service (vv. 16–21). These were people whose bodies did not express fullness of life, so they were not allowed to minister before the Lord of life. Otherwise they would profane the tabernacle (by treating it as a common building). Nevertheless, they were allowed to eat from the holy and most holy offerings.

22:1–33. Preserving the Holiness of Offerings. It was the responsibility of the people to consecrate their offerings to the Lord and that of the priests to not desecrate them. Priests could desecrate the offerings by handling them while in a state of impurity, thus showing disrespect to the Lord. The cases of uncleanness which excluded priests included leprosy, a bodily discharge, and impurity contracted by touching a person who was unclean (v. 4; see also Lev. 11:24, 29–30; 15:15–18; Num. 19:10–12). If the impurity came through contact, the priest would be unclean until evening and could not eat from the holy things until he had washed his body (vv. 6–7). He was not to eat clean animals that had died of natural causes or had been killed by another beast (v. 8). The emphasis was on protecting the priests from coming into contact with the realm of death because they ministered before the Lord of life. The violation of these regulations was a capital offense; the priest was to bear his own sin and die for it (v. 9).

The holy offerings constituted the food of the priests and their families. It is here stipulated who within the household could eat this food (vv. 10–13). The Hebrew word *zar* in v. 12, which refers to the man to whom the priest's daughter was married, has been translated variously as "outsider," "layman," "stranger," and so forth, and has been generally understood to refer to an Israelite from a nonpriestly line. If someone in the household ate of the holy offerings unintentionally, a guilt offering and compensation were required (vv. 14–16; see 5:14–19).

The Israelites were also instructed concerning how to safeguard the sacredness of their offerings. The preservation of the holiness of the burnt offering, brought for vows or as a freewill offering (vv. 18–20), required the proper animal, without defect. Otherwise the offering would not be acceptable on the offerer's behalf (v. 20; cf. 1:3). If a peace offering were brought, the sacrificial victim was to be without defect—a list of imperfections was provided, similar to the imperfections of the priests excluded from service but more extensive (vv. 22–23; cf. 1:2). The exceptions were a bull or a lamb with a stunted or overgrown limb, to be offered only as a freewill offering. Perhaps this was because it was a completely voluntary offering. The imperfect animals described in this passage do not represent the spiritual condition that God expected from the offerers, for they manifested the impact of death on God's creation (vv. 24–25). But above all, they were not to be a type of Christ, "a lamb without blemish" (1 Pet. 1:19).

The next two laws demonstrated respect for animal life (vv. 27–29; cf. Ex. 22:30). The third reminded the people that a thanksgiving sacrifice was a freewill offering and the flesh of the animal was to be eaten on the same day (vv. 29–30; see 7:12–15). The chapter concludes with an exhortation to keep the commandments of God (v. 31) and not profane His holy name. The leaders were to sanctify the Lord in the eyes of the people because He sanctified the people (v. 32). The call to be holy was grounded in the fact that the Lord had redeemed the people from Egypt (v. 33).

23:1–44
Holy Times: The Festivals

Time flows on relentlessly, bringing change, often boredom, and it is a common human response to seek meaningful activity. The festivals were God's way of enriching time for His people by providing celebrations and reminders of His saving acts on their behalf. These were holy occasions that stopped the common flow of time to bring the community together in worship and celebration before the Lord. They pointed to God's mighty acts in the past and in the future and filled life with meaning and hope. They were called *miqra'e qodesh* ("sacred assemblies" or "holy convocations"), during which portions of time were set apart (*mo'adai* [plural of *mo'ed*] *yahweh*—"appointed times," "festivals," "seasons" of the Lord; v. 4) to worship God in a particular way, in some cases in the sanctuary and in others in the people's dwellings (v. 3). Three of the festivals were pilgrimage festivals, requiring the people to come to the sanctuary to worship (Unleavened Bread [vv. 6–8], Weeks [vv. 15–22], and Tabernacles [vv. 33–36, 39–43]; cf. Deut. 16:16).

Many sacrifices were offered during these celebrations (cf. Num. 28), including sin, burnt, grain/food, drink, and peace/fellowship offerings. These sacrifices conveyed the conviction that atonement was needed even when the people came to worship the Lord, to recommit themselves to Him, and to express joyful gratitude. The convocations included six days of partial rest (ceremonial sabbaths), during which "laborious work" was forbidden (vv. 7, 8, 21, 24–25, 35–36), and two of full rest—the Sabbath (v. 3) and Day of Atonement (v. 27).

23:1–3. The Sabbath. The divine speech here was directed to the people who would participate in the festivals that were to be proclaimed as holy convocations or sacred assemblies for worship. The convocations required a gathering of the people. God referred to them as His appointed times or festivals (v. 3). After this, the Sabbath is mentioned as a day of total rest (*shabbat shabbaton*, a superlative expression meaning "the most restful rest/*shabbat*") and is called a holy convocation or sacred assembly for worship. The Sabbath is never called a "festival" because its celebration is not controlled by the calendar but is based on a cycle of seven days, independent of the month or the year. As a matter of fact, in this passage, the Sabbath is not specifically called a *mo'ed* but is introduced in order to suggest that the holiness of the Sabbath is extended in a limited way to the festivals—the other sacred times. Immediately after the reference to the Sabbath, the introduction to the festivals is repeated again to preserve the uniqueness of the Sabbath (v. 4). Besides, at the end of the chapter, a distinction is drawn between Sabbaths and festivals (vv. 37–38). The Sabbath was instituted by God at Creation and entrusted to Adam and Eve (Gen. 2:1–3; Mark 2:27).

23:4–22. Spring Festivals. The Passover lamb was to be slain on the date of Abib 14 and eaten in the evening—that is to say, on the fifteenth of the month. It was to celebrate the departure of Israel from Egypt—the most magnificent act of divine redemption in the OT (Ex. 12; Num. 28:16–25). It was a type of the redemptive work of Christ, who became the definitive Passover sacrifice (1 Cor. 5:7), slain during the Passover season (19:14, 36; cf. Ex. 12:46, Num. 9:12, Ps. 34:20). He instituted the Lord's Supper as a memorial of His sacrifice (Matt. 26:26–29; 1 Cor. 11:23–26). The Festival of Unleavened Bread was closely related to the Passover because it started on the fifteenth of the month and lasted for seven days. The full period was sometimes called the Passover Festival. During those days, the Israelites ate only unleavened bread to remember the food they ate when leaving Egypt (Ex. 12:39). The bread pointed to the need for believers to remove spiritual leaven from their lives. It was on the day after the Sabbath, perhaps of the first harvest week or after the ceremonial sabbath (on Nisan 16), that the people were to bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of the barley harvest. This ceremony is interpreted in the NT as a type of the resurrection of Jesus, the firstfruits from the dead (1 Cor. 15:23).

Fifty days after the Sabbath preceding the presentation of the firstfruits, the Festival of Weeks/Pentecost was celebrated (Lev. 23:15–22) for the purpose of thanking God for the harvest of wheat (see Ex. 34:22). *Shabbaton* can refer to seven weeks or seven Sabbaths (Lev. 23:15). The outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the disciples occurred during the Festival of Pentecost (Acts 2:1–42). The Spirit, for believers, is the firstfruits of what God will provide (Rom. 8:23). It is a gift more glorious than the literal harvest of wheat.

23:23–44. Autumn Festivals. Two festivals were celebrated during the autumn, besides the Day of Atonement. On the first day of the seventh month, there was a partial day of rest and a *tiru'ah* (a blast, which implies the use of the *shopar* [ram's horn]). The sound of the horn was most likely a reminder that God is Creator and Judge of the world and was used in preparation for the Day of Atonement (cf. 47:5–7; 81:3; 98:6–9). The NT does not mention this festival, but Revelation mentions seven trumpets that sound before the consummation of salvation, reminding people that God is Creator and Judge (Rev. 8:7–9:21; 11:15–19). The trumpets signify God's judgment upon impenitent sinners within the flow of history, preparing the way for the final judgment. In Revelation, the trumpets also culminate with a sanctuary scene related to the Day of Atonement (11:19).

The Day of Atonement took place on the tenth day of the seventh month and was not, properly speaking, a festival (see Lev. 16; Num. 29:7–11). It was a day of judgment for the people that brought about total cleansing (see "The Theology of the Day of Atonement," p. 264). The last festival was the Festival of Tabernacles (Lev. 23:33–43; see Num. 29:12–14; Deut. 16:13–17). It was to be celebrated after the harvest and lasted seven days, with a conclusion on the eighth day. During the week, there was to be a daily procession, with people waving tree branches to express their joy before the Lord (Lev. 23:40). They were to dwell in booths (*sukkot*) and celebrate the Festival of Tabernacles (i.e., tents/booths) so as to remember the time when they had lived in tents in the wilderness after God had brought them out of Egypt (23:42–43; Deut. 16:12–15). Later prophets announced an eschatological Festival of Tabernacles to be celebrated after the cleansing of Jerusalem that would include the nations of the earth (Zech. 14:16–21). John saw an innumerable multitude of people from all nations standing before the throne and the Lamb with palm branches, praising God and the Lamb (Rev. 7:9).

At the end of Leviticus 23, the Lord identified the festivals as occasions to worship Him through sacrifices and offerings (v. 37). These festivals were to be celebrated in addition to the Sabbath. Thus, a distinction was established between the festivals and the Sabbath (v. 38). The festivals pointed to the past—to remind the people of the goodness of God in their lives—but at the same time, they pointed to the future redemptive work of the Lord. They revealed elements of God's plan for the salvation of humanity through Christ.

24:1–23

Holy Place and Holy Name

The subject of holiness continues by transitioning into the Holy Place of the tabernacle, the house of the Lord (vv. 1–9), and by presenting a case in which the holiness of God's name was violated (vv. 10–23). The common theme continues to be how one should handle that which belongs to the Lord.

24:1–9. Light and Bread. In the house of the Lord there were, among other pieces of furniture, a lampstand and a table (see Ex. 25:23–40). The light of the lamps was a symbol of the presence of the Lord in the tabernacle (Pss. 18:28; 27:1; 36:9; 90:8), and therefore, the lamps were to be kept burning all night long or continually (vv. 2–4; cf. Ex. 27:20–21). Maintaining the lamps was one of the activities to be performed by the priest on a regular basis (Heb. *tamid*, "daily," used here adverbially, suggesting that they were to be kept burning day and night; cf. PP 348). The lamp was also a symbol of the life (Zech. 4:1–14) available through the Holy Spirit. The oil was to be provided by the people to demonstrate that the presence of the Lord among them was of utmost importance.

The table's purpose was to present the show bread. Every Sabbath, the priest was to set out twelve cakes of fine flour, in two piles of six, with incense placed by their side. The bread was to be placed before the Lord (v. 6; cf. Num. 4:7), but He was not the One who was to eat it. His description is in human terms—living in a house, receiving bread—but He is not a human being; He is the holy, omnipresent Lord. He did not need bread to subsist, and therefore, He did not eat it but gave it to the priests as a most holy thing to enjoy (v. 9). The bread represented the people of Israel, who provided the flour and who lived in the presence of a holy God, but it also represented God as Creator and sustainer of life (for more information on the fire/food offering [v. 7], see notes on 1:9). Jesus identifies Himself with the Light (John 8:12) and Bread of God (6:48) as the Source and Preserver of life.

24:10–23. Holiness of God's Name. This narrative describes one of the most serious sins that a human being can commit. In this case, it was committed by the son of an Israelite woman and an Egyptian father (v. 10). In the midst of a fight with an Israelite, he cursed the Name, which refers to Yahweh, the Holy One (v. 11; 23:3; cf. Ex. 20:7) and the very source of holiness and life for Israel. The penalty to be inflicted on the man was stipulated in terms of the *lex talionis* (Lat. *lex* ["law"] and *talio* ["like"]), the law of equivalent retribution, which was used in cases of murder (Lev. 24:17, 20; see Ex. 21:23–24; Deut. 19:21)—the penalty should correspond to the crime. Cursing the Lord was treated as the equivalent of murdering a fellow Israelite and thus required the death penalty. Apparently the man wanted the God of Israel dead. This was a most violent attack (*qalal*, "to revile, to curse" [vv. 11, 15]; it is used to indicate that someone is destitute of his or her value) against God. Since the crime was committed in public, those who heard the man were considered polluted by it. Through the laying on of hands, they transferred their guilt to him (v. 14); otherwise, it would have permanently attached to them (cf. 5:1).

The text then proceeds to legislate what to do when someone killed a person or an animal. According to the law of exact retribution, the person who killed another should die, but when an animal was killed, the offender was to replace the animal (vv. 17, 21; lit. "life for life"). The value of a human life is higher than that of an animal because humans were created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26–27). Disfigurement is the diminution of life, and the same was to be done to the criminal unless compensation was arranged (Lev. 24:19). These laws were also to be applied to resident aliens (v. 22). The chapter closes stating that the divine decision was implemented and the blasphemer was executed (v. 23). No sacrifice was required to expiate for the sin of cursing the Lord because the individuals were executed; they bore their own sin. Today, blasphemers in the church are not to be executed but are disfellowshipped from the community of believers in the hope that they will repent and return to the Lord (1 Tim. 1:20; cf. 1 Cor. 5:1–5). But in the eschatological judgment of God, those who refuse to repent will be excluded from the city of God (Rev. 13:5–6; 19:20).

25:1–55

Holy Times: Sabbatical Years and Jubilee

After dealing with the Holy Place and the holiness of God's name, there is a return to legislation addressing holy time. The sabbatical years (vv. 1–7) and the Jubilee (vv. 8–22) were not based on the calendar. The unifying topic is the land, and consequently, the legislation addresses property redemption (vv. 23–34), the poor, and slavery (vv. 35–55).

25:1–7. Sabbatical Years and Jubilee. The land was to enjoy its sabbath after six years of planting and harvesting. The seventh year was to be a sabbath of rest (*shabbat shabbaton*; see 23:3) for the land (v. 4). This meant that during that year, there would be no sowing, no pruning of vineyards, and no harvesting. The people, the laborers, the strangers, and the livestock would eat what grew by itself—the produce from the sabbath year (vv. 6–7; cf. Ex. 23:10–11; Neh. 10:31). Deuteronomy adds that during the seventh year, there was to be a cancellation of debts (15:1; *shemittah*, "release, remission"). This could refer to the seventh year after the person became a slave and not to the sabbatical year, or it could have also involved a moratorium imposed on collecting debts during the sabbatical year, when there was no sowing or harvesting. In any case, the Levitical law established that the land belonged to the Lord and that in the seventh year, He removed it from the hands of the people to let it rest. This allowed even the poor to benefit from what it produced under His blessing. It also demonstrates that human security does not exclusively depend on the productivity of the land but on the blessing of the Lord.

The Jubilee arrived after forty-nine years, was to be proclaimed on the tenth day of the seventh month (the Day of Atonement), and was to be celebrated in the fiftieth year (Lev. 25:10). Like the sabbatical year, it was to start in the autumn. During that year, slaves were set free to return to their properties and families (Lev. 25:10). When selling land to pay off debts, a person was to take into consideration how many years were left until the Jubilee in order to calculate a fair price (vv. 13–17). The Jubilee was treated as a sabbatical year, during which there was to be no sowing or harvesting (v. 11). The chronological connection between the sabbatical year and the Jubilee is best explained by looking at vv. 20–22: in the sixth year, under God's blessing, the land would yield enough produce for three years (the sixth, seventh, and eighth). Subsequently, in the eighth year, the year of Jubilee (fiftieth year), the people were to start planting and then harvest in the ninth year.

25:23–34. Redemption of Property and the Poor. The practice of freeing the land during the Jubilee was based on the theological conviction that the land belonged to the Lord (v. 23). If, as a result of poverty, it had been sold or leased, the original owner could redeem it in one of two ways. His closest relative (the *go'el*) could redeem it by buying it back for him. In the absence of a redeemer, he could buy it back after acquiring sufficient financial resources. Several other regulations were given to clarify under what circumstances houses were redeemable (vv. 29–34).

The Jubilee protected not only the land but also the poor, for whom there was specific legislation (vv. 35–38). They were to be treated with respect and not financially exploited (i.e., not charged interest). This too was based on the fact that God had redeemed them from Egypt and that He had given them the land. When Israelites had to sell themselves into debt-slavery, they were to be treated as hired servants, not as slaves (v. 40), until the Jubilee. The theological foundation is that the Israelites were the servants of the Lord and could not be treated as slaves (v. 42). Verses 44–46 establish that Israelites could purchase foreigners as slaves (in most cases, prisoners of war) or could purchase the children of foreigners who lived in Israel. These slaves were not to be released during the Jubilee. They were the permanent property of the owner, who could pass them on to his children as inheritance; the slaves' social status was permanent. However, this was not the way the Israelites were to treat their own brothers; this rigorous law did not apply to them (v. 46b). If Israelites sold themselves as debt-slaves to non-Israelites dwelling in the land with them, one of their relatives should redeem them, or if they had reached financial stability, they should redeem themselves (vv. 48–49). In setting the amount to be paid, the years left until Jubilee were to be taken into consideration. The strangers were expected to treat them as a yearly hired servant in the sight of the people of Israel (v. 53). In any case, they should be released in the year of Jubilee. The Israelites were God's servants whom He brought out of the land of Egypt (v. 55).

The legislation resonates with valuable principles and Christological insights. It teaches respect for the land/creation on the basis of the fact that God owns it. It should not be exploited because human survival is ultimately in the hands of the Lord, who provides for His children even when they cease from their work. What the land produces is for the benefit of all, not just for a few, and consequently, systems should be developed to ensure that others benefit from it. The poor should be treated with respect. Their dignity should not be undermined, and they should not be taken advantage of. Typologically, the law of the sabbatical year and the Jubilee awaken hope in the human heart for a land over which justice and love will rule forever—a new land. This eschatological expectation is a reality because we do have a *go'el*, a close relative who has acted as our Redeemer—Jesus Christ, who paid the price for our redemption (Mark 10:45). Isaiah announces that the Messiah would fulfill the Jubilee proclamation of freedom (61:1–3), and this was done by Jesus in Nazareth (Luke 4:16–30). Daniel uses the sabbatical year to establish the time for the coming of the Messiah—7 weeks of days x 7 (49) x 10 = 490 years (see Dan. 9:24–27). The typology of the Jubilee will find its consummation at the return of Jesus, when His people and the planet will be liberated from the oppressive power and presence of evil (Dan. 7:21–22; Rom. 8:20–23; 1 Cor. 15:55; cf. EW 35).

26:1–46

Blessings and Curses

This chapter brings to an end the speech that began in 25:1, while incorporating all the legislations found in the book of Leviticus into the covenant God made between Himself and Israel on Sinai (for more information on the topic of

covenants in the ANE and the Bible, see Deuteronomy: Introduction). The call to a holy life closes with an exhortation to obey the laws of the covenant Lord because doing so would bring rich blessing to the people and to the land, while violating them would result in curses or the presence of disorder and chaos in the life of the covenant community (see Deut. 28). The law established divine order, and its rejection would upset and could even destroy that order by damaging or bringing to an end the relationship between the Lord and His people. This chapter, like Deuteronomy 28, establishes that a life shaped by the blessings/promises of the Lord is possible only within a covenant relationship with Him. A life outside that sphere would be characterized by curses/judgments. The chapter can be divided into four main sections: introduction (vv. 1–2), blessings (vv. 3–13), curses (vv. 14–39), and hope for the future (vv. 40–45).

26:1–13. Introduction and Blessings. The introduction summarizes the core of the relationship between God and His people: He wanted to be their exclusive God, and He wanted them to be His people (cf. v. 12). The emphasis is on the first, second, and fourth commandments of the Decalogue (Ex. 20:3, 4–6, 8–11). God would not tolerate idolatry or the representation of the Deity in physical form. The reference to engraved or carved stone in v. 1 probably refers to stones adorned with pagan symbols used for worship (cf. Num. 8:12; 33:52). Being God's holy people was expressed in keeping the Sabbath (Lev. 26:2) and in showing respect to Him as the Lord. In principle, any violation of the laws of the Lord was a rejection of Him as Creator and Redeemer (Ex. 20:8–11; Deut. 5:12–15) and an insult to the God who dwelt among them (cf. Lev. 26:12).

Six main blessings/promises are listed for those who were willing to submit to the covenant Lord: fertility of the land (vv. 4–5), peace and safety in the land (v. 6), military superiority (vv. 7–8), population growth (v. 9), abundance of food (v. 10), and God's permanent presence among them (vv. 11–12). These promises were the outworking of God's redemptive acts on behalf of Israel when He liberated them from Egypt (v. 13). All these blessings were conditional, depending on the commitment of the people to the covenant Lord.

26:14–39. Curses or Denunciations. The curses were much more abundant and specific than the blessings because they were intended to function as a deterrent. Several things could be said about them. First, they were avoidable contingent upon the faithfulness of the people (v. 14). Most of the prophecies of judgment in the Prophets were based on the covenant curses and are conditional (see "God's Judgment in the Prophets," p. 981). Second, the intensity of the judgment increased from terror (v. 16) to the dissolution of the covenant and the removal of the people from the land (vv. 34–39). This revealed God's patience and love for them (vv. 16, 23–24, 27–28). Third, the purpose of the curses was to prevent the people from rebelling against the Lord (v. 21) and to reform them (Heb. *yasar*, "to be disciplined," "to become wise"; v. 23). This was redemptive discipline that sought, under God's power, to bring something good out of a state of chaos. There were five main denunciations: panic as a result of the threat or reality of military defeat (vv. 14–17); famine in the land (vv. 18–20); decimation of humans and animals by wild beasts (vv. 21–22); war, with its accompanying epidemics and famines (vv. 23–26); and destruction and loss of the land (exile; vv. 27–39), preceded by cannibalism (see Lam. 2:20), profanation of cultic places (Lev. 26:30–31), desolation of the land (v. 32), and intensified psychological panic (vv. 36–39). Then the land was to enjoy its sabbatical years (vv. 34–35; cf. 2 Chr. 36:21).

26:40–46. Hope for the Future. Although the people might break the covenant, the Lord was unwilling to break it, and this fact introduces into these dark verses a door of hope. In response, the Lord expected the rebellious people to confess their iniquity, humble themselves, and acknowledge their guilt and that God was righteous in His judgments (vv. 40–41). His faithfulness to the covenant assured the people that He would not completely destroy them (v. 44); that is to say, He would be willing to renew the covenant with them (v. 42). He would also remember the land: during the time it enjoyed its sabbath rest, the people were to remain in exile. Hope is always at the disposal of God's people. Such hope anticipated the coming of the Messiah, who would take upon Himself humanity's curse (Gal. 3:10–14) and who, at the end, will remove the curse from the earth (Rev. 22:3). The chapter concludes by stating that the legislations found in Leviticus, as well as the promises and denunciations, were part of the covenant the Lord made with the people on Mount Sinai through the mediation of Moses.

27:1–34
Holy Vows and Tithes

The previous chapters have emphasized the importance of protecting the holy while becoming holy. This chapter closes Leviticus on a positive note and emphasizes the laws which regulated the legal desecration or redemption of persons, animals, and things. Humans, within certain limitations, could practice the redemption of the holy. The chapter examines the redemption of persons and animals (vv. 2–13) and houses and fields (vv. 14–25), along with a discussion of certain restrictions (vv. 26–29) and the practice of tithing (vv. 30–33).

27:1–13. Introduction and Redemption of Humans and Animals. The book begins and ends with a divine speech addressed, through Moses, to the children of Israel (1:2; 27:1–2). A vow is a voluntary promise made to the Lord that must be honored. Hannah's dedication of Samuel is one example of the consecration of a person to the Lord through a vow (1 Sam. 1:11). If the person was to be redeemed, the priest was to determine the amount of the redemption money based on age and gender. This was not about the intrinsic value of a person but about the estimated amount of productive work that a person could perform. The financial assessment took into consideration the economic status of the person who made the vow (v. 8). With respect to animals, if someone promised to bring a sacrifice to the Lord, there was no way of redeeming the animal (v. 9), and neither should the owner substitute it or exchange it for a different animal that was in better or worse condition. In a case where one animal was exchanged for another (presumably when they were essentially equivalent), both animals belonged to the Lord (v. 10). If the promised animal was unclean, then redemption of it would require one-fifth more added to its value (vv. 11–13). The uncleanness could be considered a legitimate desecration. In a sense, this law motivated the Israelites to be like the Lord, who makes and fulfills His promises (cf. Acts 5:1–11).

27:14–29. Houses, Fields, and Some Restrictions. The price for a house that had been dedicated to the Lord, in the sense of giving it to the sanctuary, was established by the priest (v. 14). To redeem the house, those who made the vow would need to add one-fifth to its price (v. 15). Concerning fields dedicated to the Lord, the priest assessed its value on the basis of the amount of seed planted in it (v. 16). Its value was determined by taking into consideration the time left until the year of Jubilee. The redemption of the field required adding one-fifth to its value. The case mentioned in vv. 20–21 is puzzling, but it appears to refer, as suggested by some, to a person who, after selling a field and not redeeming it, decided to dedicate it to the Lord. In this case, the field would not return to the original owner in the year of Jubilee but would become the property of the sanctuary (*kherem*, "totally devoted to God"). When a person dedicated to the Lord a field that he had bought (leased) and that at Jubilee would return to its original owner (vv. 22–25), the field was not redeemable, and in the year of Jubilee, it would revert to its owner.

All the firstborn of animals belonged to the Lord, and no one was to dedicate them to Him. The firstborn of unclean animals were redeemable. Those things or people totally devoted (*kherem*) to the Lord were not redeemable, for they were most holy (vv. 26–29). The term *kherem* designates what was permanently assigned to the tabernacle or to be destroyed. A person had to be legally declared *kherem* (the sense of the term being, in this case, one set apart for destruction) before he or she was killed (v. 29; cf. Num. 21:2–3; Deut. 13:13–16; 1 Sam. 15:3; see "The Extermination of the Canaanites," p. 330, and "Holy Warfare," p. 372).

27:30–33. Tithe. The last section of Leviticus 27 addresses the redemption of tithe and reveals some important details. It is probably discussed last because it was related to humans, the produce of land, and animals. First, the nature of tithe is clearly established: it is holy to the Lord (v. 30). Humans are not to consecrate it to Him because it is already His. Second, since it is holy and belongs to the Lord, humans are to return it to Him as instructed. A tenth of the produce of the land, from the seeds or the fruits, and from the herds or the flocks, of whatever passed under the rod of the shepherd, belonged to Him and was placed out of the reach of humans. Third, the tithe of the animals was not to be manipulated by exchanging the animals—in which case, both animals were to be declared holy. The animals passing under the rod belonged to the Lord, whether they were in good condition or not. If the person wanted to redeem the tithe—perhaps to retain more food or seeds—the person was to add one-fifth to the value of the produce or the animal.

Based on the reading of Leviticus 27, it can be assumed that the people of God had a generous spirit and would voluntarily consecrate

some of their blessings to Him out of gratitude. By motivating them to bring donations and the tithe, the Lord was helping them overcome the deep darkness of selfishness that lodges in the human heart. We too should find ways in our own cultural settings to express our love and gratitude to God for His constant care for us, particularly for what He has done for us through Christ. The tithe is not so much an offering but a moral responsibility that involves returning to the Lord what is His (Mal. 3:10). Jesus did not abolish this expression of love but affirmed it (Matt. 23:23).

The book of Leviticus closes with a reminder to the readers that its contents are an expression of the will of the Lord. The story ends with Israel camping by Mount Sinai. The covenant had been established, the tabernacle had been erected and consecrated, the priests had been anointed, and the sacrificial system had been instituted. All that remained was to leave Sinai on a journey of hope.

NUMBERS

INTRODUCTION

Title and Authorship. Numbers is the fourth book of the Pentateuch. In the Hebrew Bible, the book is entitled *bemidbar*, "in the wilderness" or "in the desert." This title is the translation of the fifth Hebrew word of the opening verse of the book—"And-the-Lord spoke to Moses in-the-wilderness" (1:1). The Greek translation (LXX) named the book *Arithmoi*, "Numbers," which the Latin Vulgate rendered as *Numeri*, "Numbers." The English title, "Numbers," is the translation of either the Greek *Arithmoi* or the Latin *Numeri*. While the title "Numbers" highlights the two censuses recorded in chapters 1 and 26 of the book, the Hebrew title "in the wilderness" seems more appropriate because it indicates the location of the events reported in the book. It is thus a reminder of the many experiences the Israelites had with God during their journey toward the promised land. During the long journey, they felt disappointment and hope, but God ultimately managed to bring them home.

Traditionally, scholars have credited the composition of the Pentateuch, including the book of Numbers, to Moses. While many modern scholars question the Mosaic authorship of Numbers (see "Introduction to the Pentateuch," p. 120), the following biblical elements indicate that Moses should be maintained as the author of the book.

(1) Numbers itself states that Moses recorded the stages of their journey (33:2), suggesting that Moses wrote at least portions of the book. While recording the itinerary of the journey, he also narrated events that took place in different sites. (2) The phrase "the Lord spoke to Moses," which occurs over fifty times in the book and is recurrent in other books of the Pentateuch, indicates that Moses received communication from God that he wrote down. He did not write the book of Numbers in keeping with his own will, but, like other prophets and men of God, he wrote under divine inspiration (2 Pet. 1:21).

(3) The testimony of the NT points to Mosaic authorship by citing a number of events from Numbers associated with him (John 3:14; 6:31, cf. Num. 21:9; 11:7; 1 Cor. 10:5, 8–10, cf. Num. 26:65; 25:1, 9; 21:6; 14:36–37; Heb. 3:2, 11, 17, cf. Num. 12:7; 14:21–23, 36–37; Jude 5, 11, cf. Num. 14:29; 22:7; 16:1–2). These NT references imply that Jesus and the apostles Paul and Jude considered Moses to be the author of Numbers.

Date. The book of Numbers is part of a larger literary whole (the Pentateuch), produced during the fifteenth century B.C. Its contents indicate that it continues the story of the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt. Its direct connection with the Exodus story implies that it was written during the fifteenth century B.C.

Backgrounds. The book of Numbers continues the story already begun in the book of Exodus. In their journey from Egypt, the Israelites reached Sinai, where they stayed temporarily (Ex. 19:1). The book first describes some features related to their stay in the desert of Sinai (1:1—10:10). It then focuses on the history of their wanderings in the wilderness from Sinai to the plains of Moab (10:11—22:1). It finally describes their sojourn in the plains of Moab, where they prepared to enter the promised land (22:2—36:1–13). The journey from the desert of Sinai to the plains of Moab took about thirty-eight years, during which the first generation of freed Israelites—those who came out of Egypt—died in the wilderness because of their unfaithfulness (26:63–65). When they were ready to enter Canaan, they doubted God's promises. Their hope vanished, and therefore, they became wanderers in the wilderness. The new generation of Israelites, born in the wilderness, developed a strong bond of love with the Lord and believed that He would bring them into the promised land.

Theology and Purpose. The theme of Israel as the Lord's pilgrim people is a key motif in the book of Numbers. Numbers 33:1 states that the children of Israel went "out of the land of Egypt" in an orderly way. The terms *tseba'ot* ("armies"), *tseba'o* ("his army"), and *tsaba'* ("army" or "war") are altogether used more than fifty times in the book of Numbers in connection with the people of Israel. The image of an army is not used in Numbers to emphasize aggressive military action but to describe Israel as a well-organized group of pilgrims traveling under the leadership of the Lord in full commitment to Him and in opposition to the forces of evil that they will face during their journey. This image also serves to demonstrate that the people left Egypt victorious over the forces of Pharaoh.

1. *God as Leader.* In the description of Israel as the Lord's army, God is identified as the supreme leader of the people. He organized them after the censuses (1:1–46; 26:1–65) and gave instructions regarding leadership roles, camp layout, and marching formation (chaps. 2–4; 9:15—10:28). During their travels, God provided for their material, social, and spiritual needs and granted them shade, manna, quails, water (10:34; 11:6–7, 31–32; 20:2–13), security, and victory over the enemies they confronted (21:1–3, 21–35; 31:1–12). He blessed them with religious and social regulations and promised them the gift of the land (chaps. 27–30; 32–36). The headquarters of the Lord, His sanctuary, was placed in the center of the camp; He traveled with them. The terms *'ohel* ("tent") and *mishkan* ("tabernacle") occur more than ninety times in Numbers and refer to the dwelling place of God (i.e., the sanctuary from where God guided and communicated with His people; 1:1; 7:89). God even acted as the Judge of His people and settled legal disputes from the sanctuary (5:11–22; 6:9–12; 8:19; 11:16–23; 12:1–15; 14:10–12; 16:16–35; 17:1–9).

2. *Dedicated Pilgrims.* The metaphor of an army on a pilgrimage implies total separation and dedication to God's purpose under His leadership. The multitude who left Egypt were constituted as a people on a journey to the promised land. The book highlights obedience and faithfulness to God, the supreme leader, as prerequisites for their success. It also warns about the consequences of disobedience—in this case, the exclusion of many Israelites, including key leaders (Moses, Aaron, and Miriam), from entering the promised land (26:63–65). The breaking of God's covenant distances sinners from the Lord and deprives them of God's covenant blessings. Perseverance in hope and faith should have made the journey meaningful and even enjoyable in the presence of the Lord.

3. *The Threat of Rebellion.* As God's people, the Israelites were to remain loyal and in submission to Him. Whenever the order established by the Lord was upset on account of the rebellion of some, God intervened in order to enable His people to fulfill His plan for them (11:1, 4–6, 32–33; 12:1–15; chaps. 13–14; cf. Gen. 12:1–3). Finally, following the journey from Sinai to Kadesh, up to the plains of Moab, the book of Numbers tells how God faithfully worked out His plan to bring His fainthearted people to the promised land. Like the former Israel, "the church of Christ, enfeebled and defective as it may be, is the only object on earth on which He bestows His supreme regard" (TM 15). Despite the challenges God's people face, there is hope that God will take care of them and bring them safely into the heavenly kingdom.

Literary Features. The book contains diverse literary features, including lists (chaps. 1, 26), poetry (6:24–26; 10:35; 21:14–18, 27–30; 24:17, 20–25), travel logs (chap. 33), historical narratives, and legal material, which are sometimes interwoven. The structure of the book is difficult to delineate. However, most commentators seem to view the book as structured around the three major geographic locations or the two censuses. The first structure divides the book into three parts: (1) stay at Sinai (1:1—10:10), (2) wandering around Kadesh (10:11—20:21), and (3) journey from Kadesh to the plains of Moab (20:22—36:13). The second structure splits the book into two sections: (1) death of the old and rebellious generation in the wilderness (1:1—25:18) and (2) birth of the new generation (26:1—36:13). Although both are potential organizing structures, the first links Numbers to its preceding and following books, aligns well with the journey motif begun already in the call of Abram (Gen. 12:1–3), and fittingly portrays the larger picture of the book.

COMMENTARY

1:1—10:10

ISRAEL ENCAMPED AT SINAI

The first part of the book of Numbers (1:1—10:10) encompasses the organization of the people of Israel during their temporary stay at Sinai in preparation for the next step of their journey, which culminated in the conquest of the land of Canaan. The organization focused on various aspects, such as numbering of people, structuring the encampment and marching formation, and assigning tasks (1:1—4:49). We also find some legal material (5:1—6:27), matters related to the sanctuary (7:1—8:26), instructions concerning the Passover, a description of the cloud as divine guidance (9:17-23), and directions for the creation and function of the silver trumpets (9:1—10:10). The emphasis on organization was intended to unify God's people, shape their identity, and strengthen their relationship with God. Order and unity of action and purpose should always characterize God's people as they seek to participate in God's mission.

1:1—4:49

Numbering and Organization of Israel

Numbers 1-4 principally contains instructions concerning the census and the structure of the Israelite community during its sojourn in the wilderness. The section describes two censuses: (1) the general census of the children of Israel (except the tribe of Levi) and its purpose (chap. 1); and (2) the special census of the Levites, followed by an outline of their duties (chaps. 3-4). Between the two censuses, the author narrates how the Israelite community was organized around the sanctuary, which symbolized God's presence among them (chap. 2).

1:1-46. Numbering of Israel. The Lord spoke to Moses from the tabernacle/tent of meeting and ordered him to take a census of Israel (v. 2). The tabernacle/tent of meeting mentioned in the passage was a physical structure reflecting the model of the original sanctuary found in heaven (Ex. 25:8-9; 26:30; 35-40; Heb. 8:2, 5; 9:11; Rev. 4:5; 8:3; 11:19; see Exodus: Introduction). The earthly sanctuary served as God's headquarters from where He directed the affairs of His people (cf. 12:4-5). From there, He communicated with Moses from above the ark of the covenant/testimony (7:89). The census described in this section was commanded by the Lord, the supreme ruler of the people of Israel (1:1-2). In the ANE context, kings generally ordered a census to confirm their authority over the people being numbered. The census data also served to meet military, economic, religious, and political goals.

In the case of Israel, the census was used for conscripting men for military and religious service (1:3; 3:1-39; 1 Chr. 23:1-5), allotting land in Canaan (Num. 26), assigning specific tasks (2 Chr. 2:17-18), and on occasion, strengthening a person's relationship with the Lord (Ex. 30:11-16). In the specific context of Numbers 1, the census was primarily held for a military purpose (1:2-3). The conquest of the Holy Land was a divine project, and the Israelites would accompany God as He fulfilled His purpose. The census revealed that God is indeed a God of order, as is indicated in the Creation account (Gen. 1) and here in the creation of a people through whom He would bless all the nations of the earth.

Moreover, the census could be seen as a confirmation of God's sovereignty over His people. It assumed the willingness of a people who had been redeemed from Egypt to embrace the divine plan and cooperate with God in its realization, with the knowledge that in the process, He would take care of them. They were to rely on Him as their King and Leader. This is also seen in the Eschaton. Revelation 7 provides numbers for the Israel of faith, represented by a unique list of the twelve tribes of Israel. They bear on their foreheads "the seal of the living God" (Rev. 7:3), belonging to Him, and He has made them victorious through the blood of the Lamb (12:11). They too ally themselves with the King of kings, support His plan, and anticipate His victory over rebellious powers.

The census of Numbers 1 is also useful in terms of the leadership principles it contains (e.g., planning, delegation, and the involvement of the youth). The text indicates that Moses counted people according to their families, as well as each individual male (1:2). He also chose assistants to help him conduct the census (1:1-17). These assistants were referred to as called or chosen, which can imply that they were recognized as respected, eminent, and able leaders (v. 16). The age criterion for the census was twenty years old and above (v. 3). The expression "twenty years old and above" is repeated fifteen times to identify who was eligible to go to war. The narrative suggests that accurate recording of statistical reports, delegation of authority, and the inclusion of youth in God's work should be important to the people of God. Numbers 1:46 indicates that the total number of those who were counted was 603,550. This large number is considered problematic by many people, but it is not necessarily so (see Ex. 12:31-42; see "The Number of Israelites Who Left Egypt," p. 210).

1:47-54. Levites Appointed over the Tabernacle. Levites constituted a special group that was not counted in the military census (1:46-49). Their census is recorded in Numbers 3. Their exclusion from the census in chapter 1 is related to the sacred task assigned to them. The Levites were appointed by the Lord for the care and transportation of the tabernacle (1:50-51, 53); hence, their role was somewhat different from that of other Israelites. They were set apart to protect the sanctuary and, if necessary, to kill unauthorized persons who attempted to enter illegally (1:51). They were in charge of the security of God's holy headquarters. The details of the duties of the Levites are elaborated in chapters 3-4. However, one aspect can be highlighted here: the Levites were set apart to minister in the sanctuary so that God's wrath would not fall on the congregation (1:50, 53). The verb *sharat* ("to minister"), applied to the Levites (1:50), is the same term used for God's angels or the heavenly host (Ps. 103:21) and designates a special type of service that a subordinate renders to a superior. Intriguingly, the Hebrew term is also used to describe the unique relationship between Joshua and Moses (Ex. 24:13; 33:11; Num. 11:28; Josh. 1:1). This kind of service was not restricted to military or guard duties, however. The word may indicate that because the Levites took care of the sanctuary—the symbol of God's presence—they bore a great responsibility as God's official representatives before the people. Serving as guards, placed around the sanctuary to prevent all unauthorized individuals from accessing it, the Levites were protecting the people from God's wrath (v. 53). Numbers 1 closes by stating that the Israelites followed the Lord's instructions given through Moses (v. 54). The revelation of God's will for His people should always lead them to humble and grateful submission to Him.

2:1-34. Camps and Leaders of the Tribes. Numbers 2 describes how the tribes of Israel were organized with respect to each other and around the sanctuary. They formed a square or rectangular camp, with three tribes on each side. Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun took positions on the east, where the entrance to the sanctuary was located; Reuben, Simeon, and Gad on the south; Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin on the west; and Dan, Asher, and Naphtali on the north. On the east side, the tribe of Judah took the lead and broke camp first; to the south, it was the tribe of Reuben, and this group set out second; then on the west side, it was the tribe of Ephraim that led, breaking camp third; and finally, to the north, the tribe of Dan took preeminence and set out last. The tribe of Levi was placed around the sanctuary (2:17) as a military guard to protect its holiness. Chapters 3 and 4 provide more details about their position and function.

The structure of the camp probably reflected the status of each tribe. Judah took the first position and thus replaced Reuben, the firstborn. This change was based on what the patriarch Jacob had foretold in Genesis 49:2-4 and 8-11. It is encouraging to know that Reuben was not excluded from God's people. God always seeks to keep His children close to Him. The arrangement of the Israelite camp reflected order and unity. It also indicates the place of God in the life of the Israelite community. Each tribe was related to the nearer tribes, and thus, all the tribes were tied together as one body. Each tribe was part of the larger whole (i.e., God's community). Tribes were interdependent and all depended on God, whose presence was evidenced by the sanctuary stationed in the middle of the camp. Without the Lord dwelling in their midst, they could not be a united community. His presence was at the center of all aspects of their lives. A similar idea is found in Revelation 21 in the description of the new Jerusalem. The city is without a temple because "the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb" dwell among their creation (v. 22). While believers still expect the future fulfillment of this marvelous event, they can now experience it by allowing Immanuel, Jesus Christ, to be at the center of their lives as individuals and as a community of faith.

3:1-39. Duties of the Levites. While Numbers 1-2 centers mainly on the survey and organization of the twelve tribes in the camp, Numbers 3-4 focuses on the same activities specifically in regard to the tribe of Levi. This section (3:1-39) describes the anointing of the sons of Aaron for the priesthood (vv. 2-4), the duties of the Levites (vv. 5-10), and the numbering of the three Levite clans (vv. 14-39).

The priests and Levites were both descendants of Levi, the third son of Jacob (Gen. 29:34). The sons of Levi were Gershom, Kohath, and Merari (Gen. 46:11; Ex. 6:16). Aaron and Moses were descendants of Kohath (Ex. 6:16-20; 1 Chr. 6:2-3), and the priests were descendants of Aaron. They were given the exclusive task of offering sacrifices and presiding over the performance of sacred rituals in the sanctuary (Num. 4:5-15; 18:1-32). The other descendants of Levi formed the group of Levites who assisted the priests. Their major roles consisted of guarding, tending, transporting, and performing other holy activities for the sanctuary (Num. 3:21-37;

4:4–14; 1 Chr. 9:26–32; 15:16; 24:6; 26:29; 2 Chr. 23:7; Ezek. 44:11).

The censuses in Numbers 3:14–39 and 4:34–49 are mainly connected to religious service. Levites were to serve the community at the sanctuary, as well as protect, disassemble, transport, and reassemble the sanctuary during the journey to the promised land (1:50–51, 3:6–10). Each Levitical family had a specific task to perform in regard to the sanctuary (3:21–38) under the leadership of Aaron and his sons (3:9). This implies that the work of the Levites was carefully organized. The sanctuary was not primarily a public gathering place but the holy residence of God. It was a place where God's representatives (i.e., the priests) met with Him in order to mediate between God and His people. Moreover, the order to restrict unauthorized access to the sanctuary suggested that the holy presence of God should be strictly revered. Reverence or respect should always be a significant part of the worship of the Holy God. At the same time, the focus upon God's holiness was not intended to keep other Israelites away from the sanctuary. Instead, God's presence represented a constant invitation to worship and draw close to the Lord who had brought Israel out of Egypt with a "mighty hand and an outstretched arm" (Deut. 4:34). Grace, forgiveness, and hope were important elements of the sacrificial ritual of the sanctuary.

3:40–51. Levites and the Redemption of the Firstborn. As a separated group, the Levites also played the role of representing the rest of the Israelites before God. According to vv. 11–13 and 40–51, they substituted for all the firstborn of the Israelites. This substitution was related to the fact that during the Passover in Egypt, the Lord preserved the lives of the firstborn of the Israelites. From then on, they belonged to God (Ex. 13:2; 22:29; Lev. 27:26), and it seems that His plan was to appoint them to His service in the sanctuary.

At this point, however, the Levites were "wholly given" to God in place of all the firstborn of Israel in order to work on behalf of the Israelites in the sanctuary and to make atonement for them (Num. 3:7–8; 8:16, 19). In addition, the Lord required the Israelites to give Him all the firstborn of their animals and the first of their ripe produce (Ex. 13:2, 12; 22:29–30). The firstborn could be either sacrificed or redeemed. Hence, clean animals were sacrificed while unclean animals and humans were redeemed (Lev. 27:1–29; Num. 18:15). The firstborn could be considered the best or ideal gift that one could offer to God in recognition of His ownership of everything. As firstborn, the Levites were considered a precious gift to God, expected to serve Him wholeheartedly.

The text indicates that the total number of Israelites' firstborn was 22,273 (3:43). Out of this number, the Lord took 22,000 Levites as His own. The Lord commanded that the remaining 273 Levites should be ransomed with a payment of five shekels each. This money was to be given to Aaron and his sons (v. 48). The ransom money is twice referred to as "the sanctuary shekel" (vv. 47, 50). Since coins were not invented until the Persian period, the reference to shekel here is as a unit of weight used in payment or valuation. The weight and value of the shekel varied somewhat, according to time and place. The shekel of the sanctuary seems to have weighed more than the one used in the marketplace. The people could compare the value of the market shekel with that of the sanctuary shekel in order to pay an honest amount to God's treasury. Levites themselves could not debase it and were able to check if the offering had the required value. Five shekels could equate to about half a year's wages. The text does not reveal how the amount was used, but one may infer that it was devoted to God's work.

4:1–49. Tasks Assigned to the Levites. Numbers 4 returns to the census of the Levites and their duties. This census was a record of those who would do the work of the sanctuary (4:3, 23, 30, 35). As indicated, some of their responsibilities involved taking down and setting up the sanctuary, as well as its transportation. Moses numbered the Levites according to their assigned tasks and the items they were assigned to carry (4:49).

When the Israelites moved from one site to another, they bore the sanctuary with them. It was carefully dismantled by Aaron and his sons, not by the Levites (vv. 5, 15, cf., 1:51). The Levites were responsible for the transportation of tabernacle and furniture. Aaron and his sons disassembled the tabernacle, beginning with the veil (v. 5), moving from the Most Holy Place to the other parts of the tabernacle. The veil referred to in v. 5 separated the holy from the Most Holy Place of the tabernacle. The screen that was at the entrance of the tabernacle was carried by the Gershonites instead of the Kohathites, who were appointed specifically to carry items related to the Most Holy Place (3:25; 4:4–5). The holiness of the tabernacle needed to be protected, even during its disassembly.

After dismantling the tabernacle, Aaron and his sons packed the items and covered them (v. 15). The ark of the covenant was the first item to be covered (v. 5). Even Kohathite Levites were not allowed to touch or see the holy items while being packed (vv. 15, 20). Their duty was limited to transportation (v. 15). The Levites served between the ages of thirty and fifty (vv. 3, 23, 30, 35, 39, 43, 47; i.e., about twenty years of service). Numbers 8:23–26 brings the entire period of service to twenty-five years by stating that the Levites were to begin their work at the age of twenty-five. It is unclear whether the Levites began their service at thirty or twenty-five. A possible solution to this question is that they entered the service at twenty-five as apprentices, and at thirty, they were adequately skilled to carry out their official functions.

The text insists that Levites from thirty to fifty could enter into the work (vv. 3, 23, 30, 35, 39, 43, 47). The Hebrew term used here (*latsaba'*) suggests "warfare" or "army service." The Levitical service was equivalent to military service. Members were to be physically fit in order to fight and protect the tabernacle from trespassers (1:51, 53). The Levites were assigned to their roles based on the families of the three sons of Levi (3:17; 4:2, 22, 29). The Lord appointed the sons of Kohath (one of the three sons of Levi) for special duty (i.e., the transportation of articles related to the Most Holy Place of the tabernacle; 4:4, 15). The Kohathites were to carry their load on their shoulders (7:9) as indicated by the fact that poles were inserted into rings attached to the side of most of the holy furniture (4:6, 8, 11, 14). The sons of Gershom and Merari were given wagons for their duty because their load was heavier than that of the Kohathites (7:7–8).

5:1—6:27

Special Legislation

In the previous chapters, the emphasis is on the structure of the Israelite community. In the current section, the focus is on laws related to health and the social, moral, and religious lives of the Israelites. During their journey in the wilderness and at the time of their settlement in the promised land, God's people were to remember that the Holy God was living in their midst. Therefore, their camp was to be devoid of impurity (5:1–4); restitution was to be made in case of fraud (5:5–10); and cases of marital unfaithfulness were to be settled before God (5:11–31). People—other than Levites—were encouraged to dedicate themselves to God's service (6:1–21), and the priests were to bless God's people (6:22–27). All these instructions were intended to enhance the relationship between God and His people. The principles expressed in these laws are still valid today because they have the power to enhance the lives of God's people.

5:1–4. Unclean Persons Sent outside the Camp. This section is part of a series of three prescriptions recorded in Numbers 5 concerning the preservation of purity in the Israelite community. Numbers 5:1–4 concerns the Israelites who became unclean because they had an infectious skin disease (perhaps leprosy or a similar skin disease), any kind of bodily discharge (particularly emission from sexual organs due to some disease or other reason), or contact with a dead body. These instructions were based on the legislation found in Leviticus 13–15. The two passages are complementary. While Leviticus focuses on the exclusion of unclean persons from the tabernacle to avoid illegal contact with God's dwelling place (Lev. 15:31), Numbers emphasizes their exclusion from the camp (Num. 5:3) to avoid contamination through touch.

The text indicates that people who were affected by one of these three impurities were sent outside the camp so that "they may not defile" it because the Lord was dwelling there among them (v. 3). While it is true that a hygienic aspect is underlined in Numbers 5:1–4, holiness is its major focus (see "Health and Hygiene in Leviticus," p. 272). Preventing the spread of disease among the vast multitude of Israelites living in the camp was imperative (as instances of large and densely populated refugee camps have confirmed). However, God desires purity that goes beyond hygiene (i.e., spiritual purity that enhances the quality of one's relationship with Him and with others). Besides, the impurities described in Numbers 5:1–4, like those in Leviticus, have in common the element of death. Death/the unclean and God/the Holy One are incompatible. Consequently, unclean individuals were removed from the community. By removing the unclean from the camp (v. 4), the Israelites rejected death and clung to life (see Leviticus: Introduction). The Israelites complied with this law throughout their sojourn in the wilderness.

God is interested in both the physical and spiritual well-being of His children. The call is to live a holy life before the Lord (cf. 1 Thess. 5:23). Those who look forward to a condition of absolute freedom from spiritual and moral uncleanness, to be consummated at the return of the Lord, will seek true spiritual health without disregarding physical health (3 John 2).

5:5–10. Restitution for Wrongs. This second regulation is a supplement to Leviticus 6:1–7 and addresses Israelites who wronged others by robbery or fraud and then denied it under oath. Scholars have suggested that the verb *ma'al*—"to be unfaithful" against God—designates a sacrilege that, in some cases, refers to the violation of an oath taken in the name of the Lord. The parallel with Leviticus indicates that here it means the violation of an oath. This was a case of willful sin, and consequently, the wrongdoer was to confess his or her sin and make restitution to the one to whom the wrong was done in order to restore peace/wholeness in the camp (v. 7). Since this was not only a sin against others but also against the Lord, a guilt/reparation offering was required to atone for the sin committed (v. 8; see Lev. 6:1–7). What was new in this law was that it legislated what should be done when no kinsman was available to receive the restitution; it was to be given to the Lord, who assigned it to the priest (v. 8). This decree was likely meant to encourage honesty in all exchanges. But beyond that, it inspired the offender to repent by pointing to God's willingness to forgive sins, even intentional ones. Addition or clarification to already established law can be found repeatedly in Numbers (cf. Num. 27:1–11 and the case of Zelophehad's daughters). In Numbers, God's law was applied to day-to-day issues faced in the Israelite camp, which, at times, raised new questions.

5:11–31. Ritual of Jealousy. This legislation focused on the procedure to be undertaken when a husband suspected his wife of adultery. If she had been unfaithful, the alleged adulterer would have been defiled (vv. 12–14, 19–20, 27–29). Such uncleanness would have polluted the moral, physical, and social life of the Israelite community. This was a serious threat that needed to be addressed by God Himself (vv. 16, 18, 21, 30). Ancient people used a variety of tests to resolve similar issues. Practices used by other cultures included throwing the accused in the river or making the accused drink a potion, retrieve a given item from boiling liquid, or touch, lick, walk upon, or carry a red-hot object. Today, in some parts of the world, women are still stoned to death if adultery is suspected. Contrary to other ANE people, to solve the issue of alleged marital unfaithfulness, the Israelites used a ritual that involved drinking water. This Israelite ritual was not a life-threatening ordeal like those practiced by the nations surrounding Israel (see "A Woman Suspected of Adultery," p. 289).

6:1–21. Nazirite Law. The Nazirite law can be divided into four parts: (1) forbidden activities (vv. 1–8), (2) responses to defilement (vv. 9–12), (3) the ritual marking the end of the vow (vv. 13–20), and (4) a concluding statement (v. 21). The term "Nazirite" is related to the Hebrew verb *nazar*, "to separate," which implies "to keep oneself away from" or "separated for," in the sense of consecration. Therefore, a Nazirite (male or female; v. 2) was a person who consecrated a specific length of time for a particular service to the Lord.

Although the priests and Levites were set apart in a very special way for God's work, all Israelites had the opportunity to voluntarily dedicate themselves to God as a Nazirite. In this case, they separated themselves from common affairs and were consecrated to God's service for a specific period. Like the priests and Levites, Nazirites were not allowed to drink wine, touch a corpse, or shave their heads (6:1–8; Lev. 10:9; 21:5, 11). Nazirites were common Israelites who were granted a status similar to that of a priest, particularly since they were entirely consecrated to the Lord, in some cases for life (e.g., Samuel; 1 Sam 1:11). The Nazirite was not to break the vow (vv. 9–12). If the vow were involuntarily broken, a purification ritual was performed. The ritual required shaving the individual's head (v. 9) and offering two turtledoves, one for a burnt offering and the other for a sin offering, to remove ritual contamination (vv. 10–11). Since the Nazirite's consecration was defiled, a guilt offering was also required (v. 11; see Lev. 5:5–6). At the end of the Nazirite period, the individual's hair was to be shaved and burned as an offering to God (vv. 18–19). In this particular case, long hair was considered a visible symbol of the consecration of the Nazirite to the Lord (v. 7).

The offerings required at the end of the period of consecration include animals (vv. 14, 19); grain, bread, and oil (v. 15); and the hair of the Nazirite (v. 18). These were to be offered as a burnt offering, sin offering, and peace/fellowship offering (v. 14; cf. Lev. 1–7). The burnt offering involved burning the entire sacrificial animal, and it was employed in a number of different types of ceremonies (Lev. 8:18–21; Ex. 29:15–18). In the context of the Nazirite law, the burnt offering represented the complete dedication of the

Nazirite to the Lord. No reason is given here for bringing a sin/purification offering, but it could have been for any sin committed in ignorance during the period of the vow or because anyone who approached God was sinful and in need of atonement (Lev. 4:2–4; Num. 15:22–29). The peace/fellowship offering involved burning part of the sacrificial animal. The rest of the sacrifice was eaten by the priest and the person who brought the offering (Lev. 3:11; 7:14). It served to strengthen the offerer's covenant relationship with the Lord. Through this offering, the Nazirite expressed joy and gratitude to God.

The grain offerings (v. 15) were accessory to animal offerings (lamb, ram), as required in the Israelite sacrificial system (Lev. 2; Num. 15:2–12).

A Woman Suspected of Adultery

The legislation addressing a woman suspected of adultery is unique in biblical jurisprudence and sounds strange to modern readers. It would be useful to explore this passage more carefully in order to understand its intention.

1. *Role of the Husband.* This was a case of suspected marital infidelity, in which the husband's suspicions were motivated by jealousy (Num. 5:12–14). The legislation removed the case from the jurisdiction of the husband and placed it in the hands of the priest, as a spiritual leader of the people. This decision protected the wife from the physical and/or psychological abuse that a jealous husband could inflict on her. It was, therefore, beneficial to her. The husband was required to bring to the sanctuary a grain offering on behalf of his wife.

2. *Role of the Priest and the Community.* Since the husband did not have any evidence acceptable in a human court of law, his only recourse was to bring his wife to the priest (vv. 15). The priest was to set the accused woman before the Lord (vv. 16–26) and mix dust from the floor of the tabernacle with sacred water. He stood before the woman, placed the grain offering in her hand, and put her under an oath of innocence or guilt that spelled out the results of the ritual. He would then write the content of the oath on a scroll and symbolically scrape the words of oath into the bitter water. Next, he would take the grain offering from her hands and offer it to the Lord. Lastly, the woman would drink the water. The community did not take any action against her; it simply served as a witness to what the Lord would reveal. On account of their limitations, all human participants (the husband, the priest, and the community) withdrew themselves from the case and left it between the suspected wife and the Lord. She was in good hands.

3. *Role of the Lord.* The process was a search for truth unavailable to humans. In such situations, only the Lord could reveal whether the woman was innocent or guilty and restore harmony to the home and society (vv. 27–28). The offering was brought by the husband to the Lord on behalf of the wife as a prayer asking the Lord to reveal the truth. It was called an offering of jealousy or iniquity, to indicate the occasion and the mental condition of the husband (v. 15). Offering on her behalf meant that, if innocent, she would benefit from it through the blessings of God. While most ancient ordeals considered the accused guilty until the deity could prove otherwise, in this case, the accused was considered innocent unless God revealed otherwise. Thus, the ritual favored the accused woman. She would not be stigmatized by society after she was vindicated by the Lord.

4. *Role of the Woman.* The voice of the woman was heard only once—when, after listening to the oath of culpability or exculpation, she was asked by the priest to say "Amen" (v. 22). There were several reasons a woman might be willing to participate in this examination. First, it would bring to an end all accusations by her husband. Second, if innocent, she would be cleared not only before the Lord but also in public; she had witnesses. Third, if she were found guilty, the penalty would be infertility, and her husband would divorce her. This was severe but better than if she had been caught in the act of adultery—that would have resulted in the death penalty. It would appear that, overall, the law was indeed beneficial to the suspected adulterer, and it revealed God's concern for her.

The Nazirite's hair, which was burned along with the peace offering (v. 18), could also be considered an offering. Nazirites expressed their commitment to God by offering a portion of their property (animal and food) but also a portion of themselves. This reinforced the seriousness of the dedication of their lives to God.

It can be observed that through the Nazirite ritual, the Israelite community was encouraged to serve God voluntarily with all their hearts. Just as all Israelites (men and women) could take the Nazirite vow, all believers today are called to offer themselves as living sacrifices to God (Rom. 12:1). Voluntary service implies a high understanding of Christian responsibility.

6:22–27. Priestly Blessing. The legal portion of Numbers (chaps. 5–6) ends with a blessing. This section (6:22–27) is usually referred to as the "priestly blessing." However, the text clearly indicates that the blessing comes from the Lord. In fact, the passage is introduced by the phrase "The Lord bless you" (v. 24) and ends with "I [the Lord] will bless them" (v. 27). The Lord is the ultimate source of blessing. The priest was merely the instrument mediating God's blessing to His people. Hence, the act of blessing (6:24–27) was not related to any kind of magical activity.

The reading of vv. 24–27 indicates that the blessing of the Lord is associated with "keeping" those blessed by Him (v. 24). In v. 24, the Hebrew verb *shamar,* "to keep," also means "to guard" or "to protect." It can refer to protection from physical harm and any sort of evil (Ps. 91:11). Thus, the divine act of blessing and keeping implied that the Lord would make His people prosperous (physically and spiritually). This blessing highlights the graciousness of God and the peace that only He can grant to His people. Notice the parallel lines in vv. 25–26. The first and third lines both reference the Lord's "face" or "countenance." Then in the second and fourth lines, there is another parallel: "And be gracious to you," "and give you peace." When the Lord makes His face shine upon His people, He looks straight at them, regards them favorably, and bestows on them His grace and peace. The grace of the Lord connotes His saving acts that bring genuine peace and goodness to the receiver (Ps. 31:16; 44:3; 67:1–2; 80:3, 7; 89:15). By contrast, at times God hides His face, which refers to the removal of His protection and to desolation (Is. 64:6–7). Since the people had been blessed by the Lord, they bore His name (v. 27); they belonged to Him. The name of God refers to His character, which is here revealed in the blessing that constituted them as His people. God's blessed people are called to live holy lives that honor the Lord and are characterized by dependence on Him (Deut. 8:17–18).

7:1—8:26

Offerings, Lamps, and the Ordination of Levites

The current section records the tasks required for establishing the sanctuary services. This preparation at Sinai included offerings for the sanctuary (7:1–88), the setting of the lamps (7:89—8:4), and the ordination of the Levites (8:5–26). All these aspects were intended to foster a deep relationship between God and the people of Israel.

7:1–88. Offerings for the Sanctuary. The offerings described in this section are preceded by the anointing of the tabernacle and its furniture, especially the altar (vv. 1, 10, 84). The anointing functioned as an act of dedication. The tabernacle was set apart as a holy place from where the Lord revealed His will to the people. There they were drawn near to God through a variety of rituals. In addition, the text indicates that twelve princes, who were representatives of the Israelite community, brought offerings for twelve days—one prince each day (vv. 2–83).

The offerings for the sanctuary were divided into two categories. The first was comprised of offerings related to transportation—six wagons and twelve oxen in all (vv. 1–9). The Lord accepted these offerings and ordered that they should be given to the Levites who were to use them for the tabernacle service (vv. 5–8). They were to be used for the transportation of the sanctuary furnishings and materials, except for those items that were to be carried on the shoulders of the Kohath Levites (v. 9). The second category of offerings consisted of articles needed for worship—utensils, fine flour mixed with oil, incense, and animals (vv. 10–83). These offerings, which were contributions to support God's work, were brought by the leaders of the Israelite tribes (v. 2). The donations encouraged generosity and commitment among God's people. Through these offerings, the Israelites wholeheartedly dedicated themselves and their possessions to the Lord. The contributions were expensive. They included articles made of silver and gold, and there were also important plant products and animals (bulls, rams, lambs, goats) for the sacrifices. Although the individual contributions were similar, each leader brought his donation on a specific day, and record was made of every single offering. Individually and collectively, all children of God are responsible for doing His work.

All of this was done in the context of preparation for the next step of the journey, which would culminate in reaching the land of Canaan. The donations brought by the community demonstrate the depth of their motivation to fulfill God's mission. Taking the dedication of the Israelites as an example, God's people today are encouraged to use their resources for God's work. They are called to give their best in order to advance the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 16:1–4; 2 Cor. 8–9).

7:89—8:4. Arrangement of the Lamps. Before the lighting of the lamps, the Lord spoke to Moses inside the tabernacle from above the ark of the covenant (7:89; Ex. 25:22), commanding him to tell Aaron to set up the lamps so that they might give light (8:1–3). Thus, the sanctuary was inaugurated. The main purpose of the lamps was not only to illuminate the tabernacle but also to symbolize the light of God through Christ that illumines every human being (John 1:9; 8:12), as well as the knowledge or spiritual enlightenment that comes from the Holy Spirit (Zech. 4:1–14; Acts 2:1–4; Rev. 1:4; 4:5). The lighting of the lamps was one of the key daily activities in the tabernacle. The Lord ordered that the lamps should be kept burning continually (Ex. 27:20–21; Lev. 24:2–4). Therefore, they were to be maintained efficiently every day.

8:5–26. Ordination of the Levites. This portion can be divided into two parts: the cleansing of the Levites for service (vv. 5–22) and the age of Levitical service (vv. 23–26). The dedication of the tabernacle was followed by the consecration of those who should work in the sanctuary. The Levites were consecrated to serve in the sanctuary (vv. 6, 11) and were dedicated to the Lord as a wave offering (vv. 11, 13, 15, 21; see Lev. 7:30). They were taken from the community and were wholly dedicated to God as a living sacrifice. In their work in the sanctuary, they represented the people of God (Num. 8:19). Since the Levites were dedicated to God in place of the Israelites' firstborn, they, in a sense, became a permanent reminder of the deliverance God performed on behalf of the firstborn of Israel in Egypt (vv. 17–19).

Further, the Levites also reminded Israel of its identity as God's firstborn (Ex. 4:22–23). As such, the people were expected to obey the Lord and to serve the nations as a kingdom of priests (Ex. 19:5–6). The apostle Peter alluded to this passage when he referred to God's church as a chosen people, a royal priesthood, and a holy nation (1 Pet. 2:9).

The consecration of the Levites included physical and spiritual cleansing (vv. 6–12) and the laying on of hands (v. 10). The laying on of hands in this passage expresses the idea of substitution: they were dedicated to God in place of the firstborn of the people of Israel (8:9–19). The ritual also emphasized the need for the removal of uncleanness from the Levites. They were to avoid any kind of ritual or moral defilement. As to the age of Levitical service, as already indicated, the Levites were to start their service at the age of twenty-five (v. 24) or thirty (see chap. 4) and retire at the age of fifty (v. 25).

9:1—10:10

Passover Regulations, the Cloud, and the Trumpets

As the departure from Sinai drew near, the Israelites celebrated the Passover (9:1–14), and the symbols of divine guidance were set in place (9:14—10:10).

9:1–14. Passover Regulations. The initial Passover served as a prelude to the departure of the Israelites from Egypt (Ex. 12). This second Passover was a prelude to the departure from the wilderness of Sinai, where the Israelites had stayed temporarily. It was celebrated at the appointed time, as required by the Lord (vv. 3–5). On this occasion, the Lord gave Israel additional regulations about its celebration. He specified two reasons for which someone could be exempt from celebrating the Passover at the regular appointed time. People defiled by a human corpse and those who were away on a distant journey were allowed to postpone the celebration (vv. 6–12). The Lord forbade defiled persons from partaking of His sacrifice. Whoever neglected this instruction was to be cut off from the people and thus assumed responsibility for the sin committed (v. 13; 15:30–31; see commentary on Lev. 7:11–21); no atoning sacrifice was available to such persons. Therefore, since anyone who touched a dead body remained unclean for seven days (Num. 19:11), the unclean people mentioned in the passage could not celebrate the Passover at the regular appointed time. They needed to be purified first and then celebrate the Passover later, as required by the Lord.

The Passover celebration was a reminder of Israel's redemption from Egypt and its beginning as a nation (Ex. 12:27). In a particular way, the Passover celebration of Numbers 9 reminded Israel that the Lord was still working out His plan to bring them into the land He had promised to them (Ex. 12:25). Hence, the Israelites started their journey from Sinai with confidence and hope. In addition to those who were Israelites by birth, the "sojourners" or "strangers" (that is, those who were non-Israelites by birth but committed to the Israelite faith and practice) were also allowed to celebrate the Passover (v. 14). God's blessings are not a matter of birth (Acts 10:34–35).

9:15–23. Cloud of Guidance. As the Lord was preparing His people for the next step of the journey, He provided the cloud as a means of guidance and as a sign of His presence. When the Israelites departed from Egypt, after the first Passover, the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud, to lead the way, and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light (Ex. 13:21). In Numbers 9:15, the appearance of the cloud on the tabernacle was a clear prelude to the coming journey. It reminded the Israelites that the Lord would continue to lead them toward the promised land. Moreover, the cloud indicated that God was dwelling in the tabernacle (Ex. 40:36–38). When the cloud rose from the tabernacle, the people marched, and when it settled, they encamped (Num. 9:17). No human being could predict or manipulate the movement of the cloud. The Lord alone was leading His people. The Lord's command is mentioned seven times in relation to the cloud (9:18 [x2]; 9:20 [x2]; 9:23 [x3]) to emphasize that not the cloud but the Lord Himself was the Leader of the pilgrimage. At His command, the people were to obey and act accordingly. In the Christian journey, it is important that believers fix their eyes upon Jesus—the author and finisher of their faith—by laying aside every sin that easily ensnares them. The promise of the pillar of cloud for Israel is similar to the NT promise of the Spirit for the church—God is present with His people, even until the end of the world (Matt. 28:20).

10:1–10. Silver Trumpets. The current passage ends the preparatory section. The silver trumpets were a supplementary means of guidance and communication. Although the people could see the cloud (Ex. 40:38), they needed an audible signal to commence or cease the march. These trumpets gave special signals, which the people understood and which directed their movements. The silver trumpets were used for different purposes: to summon the congregation to the door of the tent of meeting (vv. 3, 7), to call the tribal leaders to Moses (v. 4), to signal the breaking of camp and the beginning of the march (vv. 5–6), and to prepare the people for war or for the celebration of festivals (vv. 9–10). Trumpets facilitated clarity in communication as well as order and unity, characteristics God seeks among His people. God was and continues to be a God of order (cf. 1 Cor. 14:8–19, 33).

The text indicates that the silver trumpets were sounded during war so that the Lord would remember His people (i.e., "care for and attend to them"; cf. Gen. 8:1; 30:22; Ex. 2:24) and save them from their enemies (v. 9). The blowing of the trumpets could be considered a prayer offered to God for deliverance or a call to God to bring judgment on the enemies of His people. Similarly, Israel was encouraged to blow the trumpets to express joyful gratitude to God, as well as to mark religious festivals and sacred times (v. 10). The trumpets became a means to express dependency on God when threatened by enemies (vv. 9–10). This reinforced the people's confidence and hope in God's plan and in His power to fulfill His promises.

10:11—20:21

FROM SINAI TO KADESH

After the long preparatory stay at Sinai, the time came for God's people to continue the journey. They were expected to trust and submit to God as their effective leader. The journey from Sinai began on a note of obedience: when the cloud lifted up from above the tabernacle, the children of Israel departed (10:11–12). The text indicates that they followed the Lord's command given through Moses (10:13), but as the narrative develops, obedient Israel quickly became rebellious Israel (chaps. 11–20). Israel's rebellion highlights two important aspects: God's faithfulness and the tragic consequences of disobedience. Despite their insubordination, the Lord would fulfill His promises. He punished the rebellious generation and raised a new one willing to follow Him into Canaan.

10:11–36

Initiation of the Journey

The current section marks the beginning of the second phase of Israel's journey toward the promised land. It focuses on the obedience of Israel (vv. 11–28), the request Moses made to Hobab (vv. 29–32), and the attention given to the ark during the journey (vv. 33–36).

10:11–28. Obedient Israel. The children of Israel started their journey at the command of the Lord (v. 13). They marched according to their military subdivisions (vv. 14–28), following the directions given in Numbers 2 and 4. God's people were on the move. Order and discipline are not enemies to spirituality. God values obedience (see 1 Sam. 15:22; Is. 1:11–19) as an expression of a mature relationship with Him, not as mechanical submission to mere regulations.

10:29–32. Moses's Request to Hobab. During the journey, Moses asked Hobab to continue the journey with them and assured him that God would bless him. Thanks to his extensive knowledge of the wilderness, Hobab, Moses's brother-in-law, had been of valuable service to the Israelites. Moses held that Hobab's assistance was still needed. At first, Hobab declined the invitation (v. 30). However, it seems that he eventually agreed because his descendants were later found living in Canaan and sharing the land along with the Israelites (Judg. 1:16).

Moses's request to Hobab begs the question why additional human aid was needed when the Lord was leading the people by means of the cloud and through direct communication. Hobab's assistance indicates that the Lord accomplishes his plans not only in unique and miraculous ways but also with the assistance of human beings. In the Exodus account, God used Moses, Aaron, and other people, as well as the cloud, trumpets, and the ark of the covenant. The role of the cloud did not prevent the Israelites from thinking logically and putting their faith in action in order to work out the details of the journey (e.g., the encampment and its related aspects). Human beings worked in cooperation with God. Like Moses, current leaders of God's people should recognize and collaborate with valuable human resources that can advance the work of God.

10:33–36. The Role of the Ark. When the journey began, the ark of the covenant moved before the people (v. 33). The Levites were appointed to carry it. The ark and the cloud were not magical elements but physical things that the Lord used as symbols of His presence among His people. At a later time, some Israelites thought they could manipulate God's power through the ark, but their effort proved disastrous because God is not compelled by human schemes (1 Sam. 4).

The reference to the ark of the covenant of the Lord preceding the people (v. 33) seems puzzling at first because of previous instructions to transport the sanctuary in the midst of the army (2:9–17; 10:11–21). Numbers 10:14 indicates that at the departure from Sinai, the tribe of Judah advanced first (cf. 2:9). Other tribes followed, along with some of the Levites (the sons of Gershon and Merari) carrying the tabernacle (i.e., its furniture, except the articles from the Most Holy Place; Num. 10:17; cf. 4:4, 15). Then came the Kohathite Levites carrying the holy things (10:21). The Gershon and Merari Levites preceded the Kohathites to facilitate the erection of the tabernacle before the arrival of the holy articles (v. 21). But there is a compelling solution to the puzzle: the Kohathites who followed the Gershon and Merari Levites did not carry the ark (10:21 does not specifically mention it) but rather left it for other Kohathites to carry out in front of the people (as is implied by vv. 35–36; see PP 375). The invocation of vv. 35–36 was an expression of absolute confidence in God's power to overcome the enemies of His people.

11:1—14:45

Rebellion and Its Suppression

This section introduces the struggle between God and Israel in the wilderness. The obedient and confident army of pilgrims (10:11–28) became insubordinate and discouraged. After three days' journey (10:33), the Israelites began to lose confidence in God's leadership, and eventually, the condition of their hearts became fully visible in their rebellion against God. As a result of disaffection, treason, and unfaithfulness to God's covenant, their entrance into Canaan was delayed for forty years (14:34). The rebellion developed slowly, with seven compounding complaints: misfortunes (11:1–3), food (11:4–35), Moses's leadership (12:1–16), the conditions in the promised land (13:1—14:45), Moses and Aaron's leadership (16:1—17:13), water (20:1–13), and further misfortunes (21:4–9). The grumbling escalated gradually from concerns about basic physical needs and expanded to social issues (leadership crises), finally culminating in deep spiritual trepidation (doubt about God's plan to bring Israel into Canaan). The ultimate origin of their complaints was distrust in God and rejection of His leadership (11:20). The Lord handled the multiple rebellions with much care.

11:1–3. Israel's Disaffection. This first complaint stirred up God's wrath, which was manifested in a burning fire (v. 1). Thanks to Moses's prayer of intercession, the fire ceased (v. 2).

The text does not mention the specific complaint. Apparently, this was a general objection to the hardships of life in the wilderness. Maybe the Israelites expected a short trip free of difficulties. The Lord did not ignore this internal unfaithfulness. God takes the attitudes of His people seriously and responds to them. One of the worst enemies of God's people is the discouragement that arises from within. Endurance in tribulation and confidence in God's promises should be a daily aspiration. The Lord is leading and promises to be with His children, even when they walk through the darkest of times (Ps. 23:4; 33:19; 56:3; 147:3; cf. Matt. 28:20). He also declares that the one who endures to the end will be saved (Matt. 24:13).

11:4–35. Rebellion Related to Food. Contrary to the unspecified complaint of vv. 1–3, here the grievance is clear. The concern was about food. As with the former complaint, this one was followed by Moses's prayer and God's response. The people grumbled about their diet, but their words concealed a deeper concern. The text specifies that they desired the fish they ate in Egypt (i.e., their mind went back to the Egyptian diet; v. 5), in rejection of the manna provided by the Lord (v. 6). The Lord understood that their true issue was distrust in Him (v. 20).

Although the complainers mentioned some vegetables and other vegetarian delicacies that they enjoyed in Egypt (vv.4–5), their major concern involved meat, including fish, which is repeated seven times in the narrative (vv. 4, 13 [x2], 18 [x3], 21). Requesting fish in the wilderness was futile because there were no rivers or lakes. Acquiring fish would require a return to Egypt. They preferred bondage over the Lord's freedom if freedom meant living without fish. They had forgotten Egypt's oppression, and they dared to say that they had lived better in Egypt (v. 18). Testing God in this way, similar to the incident at Meribah (Ex. 17:1–7), was a clear sign of unbelief and disobedience that needed to be dealt with (Ps. 95:9–11). This was an act of high treason; a rejection of the authority of the supreme Leader. In a military setting, this represents a criminal act, which called for a severe penalty.

Moses as a man of prayer consulted his superior, the Lord (vv. 10–15). But his prayer was also a complaint in itself, for out of frustration, he went so far as to request that God take his life (v. 15). Moses complained about his many responsibilities, which he could no longer bear alone, and about his inability to provide meat to the grumbling Israelites. But the Lord reminded Moses that He was in charge of the situation (v. 23). He appointed seventy elders to assist Moses (vv. 24–30) and provided quail (vv. 31–32) to feed the people. Like the apostles at the Pentecost, the seventy elders received the Spirit in order to perform their ministry. The Spirit they received belonged to the Lord, not to Moses (vv. 25, 29). The Lord provided quail to meet the demand of the complainers, but He punished their rebellion with a severe plague (vv. 33). The Israelites were overly worried about their material needs and had lost confidence in God's leadership. What was needed was temperance and trust in the Lord, the One who is always able to provide (Deut. 8:3; Matt. 4:4). God's children should not be overcome with the worries of life (Luke 21:34) but should remain confident in God.

12:1–16. Insubordination of Miriam and Aaron. The two earlier rebellions came from among the people while this one rose from among the leaders of the people. Miriam and Aaron, who were Moses's primary assistants (Mic. 6:4) as well as his own sister and brother, undermined his authority. Their grievance was twofold: (1) they were uncomfortable with Moses's marriage (v. 1), and (2) they objected to the unique relationship between Moses and God (v. 2). As in the preceding insurrection, Moses interceded for the errant leaders, and the Lord's response was swift (vv.13–16).

The text declares that Moses was a humble person (v. 3). The Hebrew word *'anaw* ("bowed," "humble") denotes the state of someone who is in deep distress or need and humbly seeks help from God alone (Ps. 40:17; 102:1). It implies a trustful, unpretentious attitude. The account mentions that before Moses could do anything, the Lord "heard" (i.e., He took note of the complaint made against Moses; v. 2). This implies that in the face of unjust attack, Moses was ready to submit his fate. During Miriam and Aaron's revolt, he endured the attacks patiently and did not seek vindication for himself or his family. He left this to God.

Most Bible translations introduce this rebellious account by suggesting that both Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses (v. 1). However, the Hebrew verb translated "to speak" is in the feminine form third person singular and can be rendered "and she spoke," which suggests that Miriam was the one who initiated the complaint; her name precedes that of Aaron. The grammatical structure suggests that Miriam

spoke against Moses (i.e., rebelled against him), and Aaron supported her as an accomplice. This may explain why she was disciplined while Aaron was spared (v. 10). Furthermore, in this case, if Aaron had been punished with leprosy, as Miriam was, Israel would no longer have had a high priestly intercessor since priests could not enter the sanctuary when afflicted with leprosy. In fact, his punishment would not have corresponded to the crime; it arguably would have been too severe.

Miriam and Aaron's objection to Moses's wife seems to have been at least partially due to her ethnicity. Miriam was displeased with Moses because he had not married an Israelite woman but had instead taken a wife from a different ethnic group (v. 1). But it appears that the issue also went beyond ethnicity. Their contention was that the Lord had spoken through them, not only through Moses (v. 2). Miriam and Aaron challenged the uniqueness of Moses's status and apparently wanted to use their own position as leaders to augment their social position or influence among the Israelites. It is possible that they interpreted the influence of Moses's wife as diminishing their own leadership roles. Their discontent was evidently with the subordinate position they held in relationship to Moses. They were envious and arrogant, similar to Lucifer's transgression in heaven (Is. 14:12–14). God's established order was being questioned.

The narrative mentions that the Lord heard the complaint (v. 2) and intervened. The Lord summoned Moses, Aaron, and Miriam to the tent of meeting (v. 4) to settle the matter. In the course of events, the Lord vindicated Moses while the insubordinate leaders were rebuked (vv. 5–11). It is indeed from God's heavenly sanctuary that He judges and defends believers and condemns the wicked. Because of her sin, and as a ringleader of the rebellion, Miriam was punished. She suffered a severe skin disease, designated by the word *tsar'at*, a term that encompassed various malignant skin diseases, including leprosy (v. 10; see Lev. 13:1). Instead of being exalted, she was publicly disgraced. God's reaction demonstrated that He does not approve of ethnic hatred, jealousy, or insubordination among His people. Aaron was not physically punished but was humiliated through his association with Miriam. He requested to be spared from punishment (v. 11). As a high priest, instead of praying for Miriam, he asked Moses, whom he called "my lord," to intercede for her healing (vv. 11–12). Aaron confessed his sin and recognized the authority given to Moses by the Lord.

Dispute over position and influence is a permanent issue that generates dysfunctional relationships inside and outside the church. God's people are encouraged to learn from Miriam and Aaron's experience and to focus on humility and loyalty to their appointed leaders (Ps. 75:5–7; Phil. 2:5–8; Titus 3:1–2). At the same time, leaders should trust fully in God and humbly seek guidance from Him and from others who have also been appointed by God to lead His people. Moreover, securing power by using one's status, authority, and social or religious connections can endanger the mission of God's people. Each believer should promote unity and collaboration in the service of God and His people.

13:1—14:45. Report of the Spies and Rebellion. The people reached the edge of the promised land, but unfortunately, they became completely disoriented and lost hope. The spies entered the promised land and made an initial survey. Sadly, ten of them were unfaithful to God. As a result, they brought a *dibbah*—"bad report" (13:32)—that generated fear, despair, and distrust in the hearts of the Israelites. They questioned God's motives and, therefore, renounced His leadership. To ensure the success of their rebellion, they decided to select another leader who could take them back to Egypt (14:4). They broke the covenant made at Sinai, but God, in His great steadfast love, did not give them up; they were still His people. The section can be divided into five parts: (1) the sending of the spies (13:1–25), (2) the report of the spies (13:26–33), (3) the people's rebellion (14:1–10), (4) God's forgiveness and punishment (14:11–38), and (5) a false repentance and an unsuccessful battle (14:39–45).

The spies were sent, with God's approval (13:1–25), on a military mission. They were to determine whether the inhabitants of the land were weak or strong, few or many, and whether or not the cities were well fortified (vv. 17–19). Before leaving for their mission, Moses commanded them to *wehitkhazaqtem* (from *khazaq*)—"strengthen yourselves" or "be courageous"—and to bring back some fruit from the land (v. 20). Therefore, they returned to the camp with an excellent sample of the fruits of the land (v. 23). Unfortunately, the abundant natural fruit did not inspire the people to bear spiritual fruit (cf. John 15:1–8; Gal. 5:22–26).

The report of the spies (13:26–33) contained two elements: a depiction of the fruitfulness of the land (v. 27) and an exaggerated description of the strength of its inhabitants (vv. 28–29). Ten of the spies gave way to pessimism and insisted that it was impossible for the Israelites to conquer the land. They purposely exaggerated the truth by describing the land of Canaan as a land that devoured its inhabitants (i.e., a dangerous place to live; 13:32) though at the beginning of their report they called it a land flowing with milk and honey (i.e., a place where it was good to live; v. 27). Their report generated fear, leading to despair and insurrection. The other two spies, Joshua and Caleb, did not deny or downplay the challenges that the Canaanites presented, but they insisted that Israel would be able to overcome their foes through God's power (13:30; 14:6–9). Because of their unbelief, the people accepted the lie rather than the truth. The majority is not always right.

The apex of the rebellion is described in 14:1–10. The people wept in expression of their hopelessness and accused God of having malevolent plans for them (vv. 1–3). They wanted to return to Egypt, which in comparison, looked like a better option (vv. 3–4). They despaired, despite the presence of the Lord in their midst (v. 9). The Canaanites had already been deprived of divine protection and could have been defeated (v. 9), but the positive contribution of Joshua and Caleb was completely ignored (v. 10).

The Lord threatened to suppress the dangerous rebellion by destroying the entire nation except Moses, from whom He would raise a new community (vv. 11–38). But Moses interceded for his people, and the Lord revealed His grace and forgave them. However, the consequence of their rebellion remained. The unfaithful spies died (vv. 36–37) and the people became wanderers in the wilderness for forty years, unable to enter the land they despised (vv. 30–35). Some of the people attempted to challenge God's judgment (vv. 39–45). Despite expressing repentance, they sinned further by attempting to take the promised land by their own force rather than waiting for God's direction. The military attack they launched on the Canaanites without God's command resulted in utter disaster (14:45). The Lord would grant the old unfaithful generation what they requested—to die in the wilderness (14:2); they would not reach Canaan.

15:1–41

Additional Legislation

The laws described in this section are, in a certain way, connected to the context of the preceding rebellion. Despite the people's rejection of God's promise, the Lord gave them hope and reaffirmed His determination to give them the land (15:1–4). He insisted that the children of Israel would inhabit the promised land and that they would bring offerings to Him in that land (15:2, 18–19). They were to make tassels on the corners of their garments to remember all the commandments of the Lord and the importance of a holy life (15:38–39). God's purpose could not ultimately be defeated, even by His rebellious people.

15:1–31. Laws Concerning Offerings. The laws described in this section concern votive, thanksgiving, and purification offerings. The Lord instructed His people that once they occupied the promised land and were enjoying its produce, they were to offer the firstfruits of their labor to the Lord (vv. 1–21). Grain and libation offerings were to accompany every gift or burnt offering brought to the Lord, and He promised to accept their offerings, as well as those of the faithful strangers dwelling among them (vv. 8–10, 13–15). In Canaan, the people were also to offer to the Lord a heave or set-apart contribution offering of grain in the form of bread (vv. 17–21) as an expression of gratitude to God for providing bread from the land for them.

In addition, knowing that people are sinful by nature, the Lord allowed for the community to bring an offering for its unintentional sin (vv. 22–29; see Lev. 4:13–21); in this case, a burnt offering instead of a sin/purification offering. The function of the burnt offering was now enlarged. But if an individual, not the community, committed an unintentional sin, then the sin/purification offering would be required (Num. 15:27–29; cf. Lev. 4:1–12). The sacrificial ritual aimed at restoring a peaceful relationship with God. However, there was a type of sin for which the sacrificial system did not provide atonement. This was the case of the sin committed defiantly or presumptuously (lit. "with a high hand"; v. 30). This was considered to be premeditated defiance against the Lord, a sin committed with the full knowledge of one's action. No sacrificial victim could bear this sin, and consequently, the sinner would have to bear his or her own sin (v. 31). The perpetrator of such defiant sin was to be cut off from the people (v. 30; see Lev. 7:20); that is to say, he or she would be permanently excluded from being part of God's people. The sin described in the following section belongs to this category of defiant sin, for which sinners show no remorse. They have rejected God's grace.

15:32–36. Stoning of a Sabbath Breaker. The preceding passage (vv. 30–31) dealt with sins committed in open rebellion against the Lord. Now the case of a Sabbath breaker is given as an illustration of this type of sin. The prohibition of work on the Sabbath was extended to outlaw the act of lighting a fire in one's home (Ex. 35:2–3). The Lord ordered that during the sojourn in the wilderness, no fires were to be built on the Sabbath. This was probably based on the fact that the climate was warm. The prohibition appears to have been temporary; it would not be applied in the land of Canaan, where significant climate changes would render fire a necessity (cf. PP 408). The one who gathered wood on the Sabbath while sojourning in the wilderness did so as an open, defiant act against God's law. Since this was a violation of the Decalogue itself rather than the Levitical laws, there was no precedent or guidance regarding how the person should be punished. The Lord provided the needed legislation; the person would be put to death (vv. 35–36). Rejecting the Lord meant rejecting life.

15:37–41. Law of Tassels. A tassel is an ornament for clothing. God required the Israelites to attach fringes or tassels to the corners of their garments (Deut. 22:12). These would remind the Israelites to obey God's commandments instead of following their own desires (v. 39). The verb *zakar* ("to remember"), which also connotes "to think about or meditate upon," is used twice in the passage to highlight the role of the tassels (vv. 39–40). The tassels were intended to help the Israelites meditate upon God's commandments and to practice them in order to be holy for God (i.e., to be consecrated to Him; vv. 40–41). In other words, the tassels were a symbol of the consecration of the Israelites to the Lord; their adornment was to be a holy life (v. 40). The tassels identified them as worshipers of the Lord.

This instruction reminded the rebellious people that the Lord expected faithfulness and obedience to the covenant law. The blue thread or cord (v. 38) included in the tassels was significant because it was the same color used in the tabernacle and the clothing of the priests (Ex. 25:4; 26:1, 4, 31; 27:16; 39:1; etc.). Wearing tassels thus emphasized that each Israelite was a member of a kingdom of priests (Ex. 19:5–6), with specific privileges and responsibilities. In Revelation 3:18, believers are exhorted to acquire white garments (i.e., the gift of the righteousness of Jesus Christ, which covers their sinfulness and produces righteous deeds in their lives).

16:1—17:13

Rebellion and Its Suppression

In the previous insurrection (Num. 14), God's people clearly chose desertion. In their spirit of revolt, they declared that the Lord had brought them to Canaan in order for their wives and children to fall by the sword and that it would be better to return to Egypt (14:3). Driven by such interests, the Israelites multiplied reasons to give up the promised land. They lost their hope and commitment to God's plan. In the rebellion described in chapters 16–17, their insolence reached its highest and most dangerous point.

Korah, Dathan, and Abiram's rebellion was the worst in the history of the children of Israel. This rebellion, involving both common people and religious leaders, was an attempt to overthrow the Israelite political and religious system established by God. Similar to the rebellion of chapter 12, this one also rose from within the distinguished leaders of God's people and aimed to challenge the leadership system operated by Moses and Aaron. Korah, a Levite (and a close relative of Moses and Aaron), was displeased with his position and wanted Aaron's (16:10). Dathan and Abiram, descendants of Reuben, the firstborn of Israel, believed it was their natural right to claim the preeminence of the civil power held by Moses (16:1–3). Their dissatisfaction escalated from envy to all-out rebellion. The Lord suppressed the mutiny and reaffirmed the leadership He had appointed.

16:1–50. Rebellion and Suppression. The rebellion of Korah and his followers was a direct affront against God's appointed leaders. They considered the supremacy of Moses and Aaron unjustified in view of the fact that all Israelites were holy (v. 3). They justified the insurrection on the basis of the people's holiness. But Moses clarified that they were actually challenging the holiness of those chosen by the Lord to serve Him in a special way. He unambiguously declared to Korah and his supporters that the Lord would reveal to all Israel who was holy, who belonged to Him, and who was designated to come near to Him in the sanctuary (v. 5). Biblical references to coming near to God point to either the act of bringing an offering to God at His altar or the fact of being chosen by God to minister in His presence (Lev. 1:5, 13–14; Ex. 29:4; Num. 16:9, 40; 18:4). Verse 5 seems to contain both aspects. This verse implies that the person who was holy was someone chosen by the Lord to officiate in His presence.

According to Korah, each Israelite was holy—that is to say, fitted to do the same service performed by Aaron (v. 3). This could also mean that there was no need for a special priestly class among the Israelites because the Lord was in their midst. However, the judgment that fell on Korah and his followers (16:31–35) and the test related to the rod of Aaron (Num. 17) implied that holiness should be also understood in terms of degrees. Though all the Israelites were expected to be holy (Ex. 19:6; Lev. 20:26), Aaron was invested with a special degree of holiness in the sense that he was separated by the Lord for a specific work (16:40; Lev. 8). Moses told Korah and his followers that it was God's prerogative to decide who should come near to Him to minister on behalf of the people (v. 5). The leadership of Moses and Aaron was determined by the fact that the Lord appointed them to their functions. Korah probably understood the priesthood in terms of social power and self-exaltation rather than service for the benefit of others. In line with ANE practices, Moses insisted that all contenders undergo a test to indicate who was holy (v. 7).

In their rebellion, Dathan and Abiram derided God's plan concerning the promised land. They applied the expression "land flowing with milk and honey" to Egypt (v. 13) rather than to the place where the Lord was leading them. They thoroughly misrepresented the ways of God. They ultimately branded Moses as an impostor, deceiving people with false promises (vv. 13–14). Dathan and Abiram also argued that God's promises had not been fulfilled. When the Lord took the Israelites out of Egypt, He had promised to give them a blessed land (Ex. 3:8, 17; 33:3; Lev. 20:24). The insurgent leaders argued that this was simply an illusion (v. 14). They conveniently chose to forget that Moses had already brought them to the border of the promised land. They had failed to enter it on account of their own unfaithfulness and rebellious spirit (see Num. 13–14). In their despair, Dathan and Abiram regarded Moses as a kidnapper who had made a sophisticated plan to take the people hostage in the wilderness in order to rule over them (16:13). They insinuated that he intended to put out the eyes of the people so that they would not discern his scheme (v. 14).

Moses forcefully rejected all the accusations. He argued that he had neither harmed the people nor taken anything from them (v. 15). He committed the matter to the Lord through prayer by asking God not to respect or accept their offering (v. 15). The expression is reminiscent of Cain's experience, when God did not respect his offering (Gen. 4:5). Moses asked God to deny them favor or acceptance when they came into His presence. Filled with defiance, the rebels elected to offer incense to God as evidence of His approval of their ministry (v. 18). But the ringleaders were not accepted into God's presence. They were swallowed up by the earth, and their followers were devoured by fire (vv. 31–35). Instead of mourning for their complicity in Korah's rebellion, the people engaged in a much larger rebellion and might have been completely annihilated (vv. 45–46) if Aaron, at Moses's direction, had not rushed to intercede for them. Even so, 14,700 people died (vv. 47–49).

Aaron stood between the dead and the living to halt the devastating plague (v. 48). He stood in the transition point between death and life. Through his intercession, atonement was made for the people. In vv. 46–47, the verb *kapar* ("to make atonement," "to ransom") is used twice to express the work of Aaron on behalf of God's people. In the immediate context of the passage, this term conveys the idea of removing sin to avert punishment. In the Israelite sacrificial system, the more common means of expiation was blood (Lev. 17:11–14). The ritual of expiation of sin by blood was performed during the daily sacrificial service (Lev. 4:20) and especially on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16). The sacrificial blood represented the life that was given on behalf of the penitent. It substituted for the sinner's blood (i.e., life). However, in the narrative of Numbers 16, atonement was made through the burning of incense (vv. 46–48). Incense could also be used by the high priest to make atonement for sin and thus avert God's anger. It is interesting to observe that the incense offered by the rebels brought wrath while that offered by Aaron, the divinely chosen high priest, brought relief (vv. 18, 35, 47–48). The incense itself had no supernatural power to effect atonement, but the Lord used it to reaffirm that He would work only through His appointed instruments.

The atonement performed by Aaron (vv. 46–48) prefigured the ministry of Jesus Christ on behalf of the human race. Jesus Christ, the true high priest, made atonement through offering His own blood (Heb. 2:2–17; 9:11–12). Today, through His ministry in the heavenly sanctuary, He applies the benefits of His expiatory death to all believers (Heb. 7:25; 10:22; Rev. 8:2–4).

The insurrection of Korah, Dothan, and Abiram resulted in a significant loss of human life. The ringleaders, their 250 closest associates, and their

14,700 accomplices perished (vv. 32, 35, 49). Why was the punishment so harsh? The core issue was that the rebels "rejected the Lord" (v. 30). The Hebrew verb *na'ats* (to "reject," "spurn," "disdain," "abhor") is used in v. 30 and previously in 14:23 to express the rebellious attitude of the people during the mutiny launched by the unfaithful spies. The use of this verb in v. 30 indicates that the rebels treated God disrespectfully; they rejected His authority and leadership and considered it devoid of any value. Such behavior was nothing less than a fundamental breaking of the covenant, a blasphemy that called for severe discipline and that placed the perpetrators outside the covenant blessings (Deut. 31:20–21). It was for such blasphemy that the Lord decreed that the old generation was banned from entering the promised land (Num. 14:28–33). The entire rebellion demonstrated that the Israelites did not want to remain on God's side. This was a serious crime, an act of treason. Hence, the Lord destroyed the insurgents and moved forward with the remnant of His people toward the promised land. Korah's rebellion should alert Christians to the fact that envy, discontent, insubordination, and greed promote the worst in humanity. The account of Korah also places a high value on the importance of the unity of God's people in their journey to the promised land.

17:1–13. Rod of Aaron. In order to reaffirm the election of Aaron, the Lord made the staff of Aaron to blossom. A staff symbolized the authority of a person. When Aaron's staff bloomed, his special call, anointing, and authority from God were confirmed, and the arguments ceased (vv. 5, 10). The almond was the earliest blossoming plant in the region; it could, therefore, signify the preeminence of Aaron's office. As highlighted in an interesting wordplay in Jeremiah, the sprouting of the almond branch (Heb. *shaqed*) also indicates that the Lord watches (Heb. *shaqad*) over His word and makes certain it is fulfilled (Jer. 1:11, 12). What He decides to do, He does.

18:1—19:22

Additional Legislation

In the previous chapters, Korah and his supporters challenged the exclusive leadership of Moses and Aaron, but the Lord intervened and revealed that the appointment of Aaron was not arbitrary. In chapter 18, He reaffirmed the privileges and responsibilities of the Levites and priests. In this section, the Lord instructed His people concerning the impurity resulting from contact with a corpse. (Perhaps this instruction is placed here because of the many people who died in Korah's rebellion; 19:1–22.)

18:1–32. Duties and Provision for the Levites and Priests. The current passage is a general summary of the responsibility of the Levites and their relationship to the priests, the descendants of Aaron (vv. 1–7). It also deals with the dues owed to the priests for their ministry (vv. 8–20) and the tithe that the Lord assigned to the Levites (vv. 21–24). In their turn, Levites were to give tithe to the priests (vv. 25–32).

The duties of Levites and priests were already described in chapters 1 and 3–4. The current section (18:1–7) insists on the importance of order in the service at the sanctuary. The Levites had the responsibility of guarding the sanctuary, preventing the approach of any unauthorized persons (v. 22), and performing the tasks assigned to them by the priests. Priests had the exclusive duty of ministering before the ark of the covenant and offering sacrifices. Thus, the issue over the priestly roles was settled in order to avoid another disastrous situation like that of Korah. The divine instruction that Aaron and his descendants should bear the iniquity related to the sanctuary or their priesthood (v. 1) indicates that the priests were fully responsible for matters related to the sanctuary and priesthood. If the sanctuary or the priesthood became inadvertently defiled, the priests and Levites should be held responsible. Thus the appointment to serve at the sanctuary carried with it a heavy responsibility.

In vv. 8–19, the Lord gave instructions about particular offerings that would go to Aaron and his sons as reward for their service at the sanctuary. The Lord pronounced that this practice would be considered a perpetual covenant of salt before the Lord (v. 19). In many ancient cultures, salt was understood as a symbol of preservation and was employed during alliances to underline the idea that the terms of the agreement would be long preserved. The covenant between God and the priests is said to be "of salt" because it was to be a permanent covenant (v. 19), for as long as the system was operative. The significance of the Levites' service was honored; the Lord assigned them the tithe (vv. 21, 23–24). The Israelites gave the tithe to the Lord, but the Lord gave it to the Levites for their service in the sanctuary. The Levites also gave a tithe from the tithe they received, and God assigned it to the priests (vv. 25–32). The system was based on the goodness of the Lord and the response of love and gratitude of the people. These same principles should continue to guide contemporary believers on matters related to tithe and offerings (cf. 1 Chr. 29:14).

19:1–22. Red Heifer Ritual. This was a ritual intended to remove impurity caused by contact with a dead body. The ritual aimed at the preservation of purity in the community and implied that God's purpose was to preserve the lives of His people. The description of the ritual and its ramifications can be divided into four sections: (1) the burning of the red heifer to make ashes (vv. 1–10), (2) the purification of someone who touched a corpse (vv. 11–13), (3) the process of cleansing those who became unclean (vv. 14–20), and (4) the uncleanness of the person who manipulated the water mixed with the ashes from the red heifer (vv. 21–22).

The unblemished red heifer was slaughtered and incinerated outside the camp by an Israelite, under the supervision of the priest, to produce the ashes (v. 3; cf. Lev. 4:11–12). During the burning of the animal, some cleansing agents were added to the fire (cedar wood, hyssop, and scarlet; see v. 6). These elements also appeared in other purification ceremonies, such as the cleansing of the leper (Lev. 14:4). Their usage in purification rituals was significant. The scarlet, for example, symbolized life by its red color, which recalled blood—a key element for a ritual that corrected a state of uncleanness and death. There was also hyssop, which the psalmist uses figuratively as a cleansing element from sin (Ps. 51:7) even though he clearly recognizes that the Lord is the one who blots out transgression (51:7), not the hyssop.

In the process of cleansing, the ashes were mixed with "living" or "fresh" water, usually translated as "running water" (v. 17). The flowing water used in the red heifer ritual worked as a symbol of purification and life, as in other biblical rituals (Ex. 29:4; Lev. 8:6; 14:5–7, 50–52; 15:13; 16:4, 24). The water, as well as other elements used in the ritual, pointed to the basic elements of life. The product (ashes plus flowing water) served for the purification of the uncleanness that resulted from touching a dead body or coming into contact with objects or places defiled by a corpse (vv. 9, 13, 17, 20). The Hebrew word *khatta't* ("sin"), used in v. 9, could designate either (1) sin (i.e., a moral failure) or (2) the offering brought for sin or impurity (Lev. 4:3). The sin offering was performed in response to immoral actions as well as physical impurities (Lev. 5:2–3, 6; 12:6–8). When the sin offering was brought for physical impurity, its purpose was to decontaminate by removing impurity from the defiled person or object. In either case, the core issue was that of sin and its effects—death, defilement, and a state of sin.

The red heifer ritual dealt mainly with ceremonial uncleanness. It is mentioned that the person on whom the water of purification was applied remained defiled until nightfall or even for days afterward (Num. 19:10–12, 19). The ritual aimed at maintaining purity or life among God's people by cleansing them from physical defilement. It should be remembered that the Lord disapproves of impurity, whether moral or ceremonial. The text declares that an unclean person who voluntarily refused to make use of the water of purification was to be cut off from Israel (19:13, 20).

There is a paradox in the ritual of the red heifer in the fact that what cleansed the defiled person defiled the clean one. In fact, those who performed some roles, such as the burning of the red heifer or the manipulation of its ashes, became ceremonially unclean while those on whom the same ash was applied were purified (vv. 7–8, 10, 18–19, 21–22). The connection between impurity and death was established in order to instill in the Israelites the fundamental truth that life is found only in the Lord (see Leviticus: Introduction). Anything related to death was foreign to the Lord and His sanctuary. The ritual system suggested that the Lord has power over death and that He can remove it from His people. This was to take place through the death of the Son of God, who cleanses sinners from all impurity (Heb. 9:13–14; 1 John 1:7).

20:1–21

Final Events at Kadesh

Following the turbulence of Korah's rebellion, the children of Israel resumed their journey and arrived at Kadesh. Two remarkable events took place there, namely, the death of Miriam and another rebellion against the Lord involving the people as well as their key leaders (Moses and Aaron).

20:1–13. Death of Miriam and a New Rebellion. Numbers 20 begins with the death of Miriam (v. 1) and ends with the death of Aaron (v. 28). Miriam, one of the most influential leaders of Israel, died at Kadesh. Her death reminded the people of Israel that, as the Lord had declared, the unfaithful generation would not enter Canaan (14:35). Sadly, shortly after her death, the

people launched a new rebellion (v. 2). At first, the issue appears to center on the lack of water (v. 2), but a deeper motivation is disclosed in vv. 3–5, where it is indicated that the people questioned God's plan to take them to the promised land.

Because of the lack of water at Kadesh, the children of Israel gathered together to oppose Moses and Aaron (v. 2). This expression denotes the idea of disaffection, a kind of aggressive attitude born out of despair and leading to riot (cf. 16:3, 19, 42). The text mentions that they had a *rib* with Moses (v. 3). This Hebrew verb generally expresses an idea of contending and quarreling, or in many OT contexts, it is a legal battle. In this context, it implies a struggle with words. Harsh words were addressed to Moses (vv. 3–5). The same verb is used in v. 13 to indicate that the whole rebellion was not directed against Moses but against the Lord Himself. The waters were called Meribah (quarrelling or contention) because the children of Israel contended or quarreled with the Lord (v. 13). The army rebelled against their Chief Commander—God Himself.

The people again gave the impression that Moses had taken them hostage, and they referred to the desert where they were as an "evil/terrible [Heb. *ra'*] place"—that is to say, a place of misfortune or calamity, a place deprived of food and water (vv. 4–5). They lost hope and confidence in God's guidance and providence and complained; they asked why Moses had brought them out of Egypt (v. 5). They had not learned from previous experience that the Lord was always able to provide for their basic needs. This time, the Lord did not punish them. He had compassion on them (Ps. 78:38).

In face of the new provocation, Moses became exceedingly frustrated and lost his patience. The Lord instructed Moses and Aaron to speak or command the rock to produce water (v. 8). Instead of speaking to the rock, Moses struck it twice (v. 11). The act of Moses and Aaron is referred to by the verb *marah*, "to rebel against" (i.e., a willful refusal to obey the Lord; Num. 20:24; 27:14). Rebellion had made its way into the hearts of the people and their leaders.

Psalm 106:32–33 indicates that Moses spoke rashly with his lips. This denotes that his statement in Numbers 20:10b was the root of the issue. By these words, Moses and Aaron failed to respect God in the eyes of Israel and thereby deprived Him of His due honor. Moreover, the sin of Moses gave the people occasion to question whether his past course of action was truly under God's control. They may have also thought that like Moses, they could excuse their own sins (cf. PP 417). Even though Moses and Aaron did not revere the Lord in the eyes of the children of Israel (v. 12), the narrative declares that God's holiness was ultimately validated (v. 13). God proved His holiness in His adherence to His promises (see Ezek. 20:41; 28:25; 39:27). Despite their insurrection, the Lord performed a miracle in their favor and manifested His faithfulness and power.

Moses and Aaron exercised significant influence over the people as their primary leaders. Their great responsibility and privilege required impeccable behavior as representatives of the Lord. The Lord could not ignore their sin without showing partiality and, therefore, a lack of integrity as a righteous God. As a result of Moses and Aaron's sin, the people learned that the Lord does not excuse any sin, not even that of leaders. In His dealings with Moses and Aaron, God showed Himself to be reliable and trustworthy.

This account of Moses's failure demonstrates the objectivity of the biblical narratives. Contrary to other ancient writings that highlight only the strong points of their protagonists, the Bible does not overlook the weaknesses of its great heroes. It narrates even the failings of God's honorable people. Christians are encouraged to learn from the mistakes of their predecessors and remain fully dependent on God. God is the only true hero of the Bible. It is on Him that all human beings must rely for their victory. The narrative also speaks to church leaders. To them also the Lord has given great privileges and responsibilities. Pressures and frustrations will not excuse rash actions or a lack of self-control. They must properly represent the Lord at all times before His people.

20:14–21. Edom Refuses Passage to Israel. The shortest route to the promised land lay through the land of Edom, but when the Israelites arrived there, they confronted opposition. Moses kindly appealed to the Edomites to allow passage through their land, but the Edomites refused the request. The people were obliged to turn around or fight against Edom. At this point, the Lord intervened and directed the Israelites to take a long detour around Edom. This time, the new generation of God's people quietly obeyed Him. Sometimes, in order for the Lord to lead His children to their spiritual, social, or professional destinations, He guides them along a detour. However, a detour with Him is preferable to a direct route without Him.

20:22—36:13

JOURNEY FROM KADESH TO THE PLAINS OF MOAB

The last part of the book describes the journey of the Israelites from Kadesh to the plains of Moab. The Lord's people finally reached the border of the promised land. Over the course of the journey, the Israelites vacillated between hope and despair, trust and distrust, obedience and disobedience. Among them, there remained a significant number of the old generation who had escaped from Egypt. This explains why their victory over Arad was followed by a rebellion against God because of the lack of food and the long journey (21:1–9). Their victory over Sihon and Og was also followed by an act of idolatry and immorality at the border of the promised land (21:21–34; 25:1–18). Despite their deficiency, the Lord continued to lead them. Reaching the plains of Moab, the new generation was ready to inherit the land of Canaan. A new census was carried out (26:1–51), and additional instructions were given that pertained to the inheritance rights of daughters (27:1–11; 36:1–13), the calendar of festivals for regular celebration of God's goodness (28:1—29:40), the division of the land (32:1–42; 34:1–29), and the Levitical cities and cities of refuge (35:1–8; 35:9–34). The instructions renewed the hope of the children of God, for they pointed toward a bright future in the promised land.

20:22–29

Death of Aaron at Hor

The children of Israel went from Kadesh to Hor, where Aaron died. His death confirmed the temporary function of his priesthood, which was a type of the perpetual priesthood of Christ (Heb. 7:23–24). In Hebrews 7:25, the apostle Paul exalts the importance of the permanent and unchangeable priesthood of Christ based on the fact that He is alive; He will never die. Consequently, Christ is able to always intercede on behalf of those who come to God through Him. The apostle insists that since Christ was tempted in all points but did not sin, He is able to assist His children in their weaknesses and give them His grace (Heb. 4:15–16).

The death of Aaron, the high priest, meant that a new high priest had to be appointed (20:28). In obedience to God, Moses took Aaron and his son to Mount Hor, where Aaron would die. But before Aaron died, Moses removed the priestly vestments from him and put them on Eleazar, his son. This was an act of investiture by which Eleazar, the priest, was installed as high priest among the people of Israel. This was not a pompous ceremony or celebration but a simple and silent transfer of responsibilities under the guidance of the Lord. The appointment of Eleazar indicated that the spiritual leadership was now being transferred to a new generation.

21:1–35

From Hor to the Plains of Moab

From Hor, the Israelites moved closer toward the promised land. Before reaching the plains of Moab, they experienced a prelude to God's victory over the unfaithful nations. With God's assistance, they defeated the Canaanites of Arad (21:1–3). But after the victory over Arad, they again became impatient and complained against God's leadership (vv. 4–9). Nevertheless, their complaints did not prevent God from leading them in their journey (vv. 10–20). The Israelites traveled as a victorious people and, as such, defeated King Sihon (vv. 21–32), and King Og (vv. 33–35).

21:1–3. Defeat of Arad. After the discouraging report of the spies thirty-eight years before, the Israelites attempted to conquer the land by their own efforts, but the Amalekites and the Canaanites who dwelt in Arad defeated them (14:39–45). Returning to this same location after their wilderness wanderings, the Israelites were once again attacked by Canaanites, and some of their people were captured. Instead of repeating their former mistake, the Israelites committed themselves to the Lord, and He "delivered up" or "gave" (Heb. *natan*) the Canaanites to them (vv. 2–3). This verb denotes the action of giving a thing or a person to someone. It is also used in the context of war when the Lord, in an act of judgment, gave or handed over unfaithful people to other nations (21:3; Deut. 2:33; Josh. 10:30–32; Judg. 1:4; 3:10; 11:21; 1 Sam. 14:10, 12; Dan. 1:2).

This text indicates that it was the Lord who gave or handed over the Canaanites to the Israelites, which implies that the Lord had authority over the Canaanites. The battle and the victory were the Lord's enterprise. This victory likely boosted morale among the Israelites. But it seems that the victory produced only short-term positive effects among some of the Israelites. The following narrative indicates that during the next phase of the journey, the Israelites were disheartened and renewed their complaints against God and Moses (21:4–5). Unlike the Israelites, believers today should consider each victory that God produces in our lives as a prelude to His ultimate victory over all the forces of evil.

21:4–9. More Complaints: Fiery Serpents. When the Edomites forbade the Israelites from crossing their territory, the Israelites were forced to take a long detour past part of the Red Sea identified today as the Gulf of Aqaba (v. 4; Deut. 2:8) and around the land of the Edomites. Over the course of the journey, they became discouraged again and criticized both God and Moses (vv. 4–5). Their complaint, centered on the need for bread and water, was preceded by their recurrent insistence that Moses had brought them out of Egypt only to die in the wilderness (v. 5). This time, the Lord withdrew His protection from them, and fiery serpents (i.e., venomous snakes) attacked them (v. 6). The serpents were described as "fiery" because their poisonous bite caused violent inflammation. Many people died. In the midst of their suffering, those yet remaining recognized their sin and cried to the Lord for help (v. 7).

In response to the prayers of the people, the Lord asked Moses to make a serpent of bronze and lift it up on a pole so that whoever was bitten could look at it and be healed (vv. 8–9). There was no healing power in the bronze serpent. The serpent was neither an idol nor a magic artifact. The Lord Himself was the healer, and the serpent on the pole was a symbol of His healing power. Looking at the serpent was an expression of faith in God, the Healer. It also indicated that sinners cannot save themselves because salvation is from the Lord (Jon. 2:9). The serpent, a symbol of evil, pointed forward to the ministry of our Savior, Jesus Christ. He who knew no sin became sin for us (2 Cor. 5:21) and was lifted up on the cross as God's means of salvation for those who look to Him (John 3:14). Placing one's faith in Jesus Christ is indispensable for salvation (John 3:15–18, 36).

21:10–35. Defeat of Sihon and Og. The travel itinerary of the Israelites is carefully preserved in the text to indicate how the Lord cared for and guided them (vv. 10–20). Soon they would confront two more enemies. Under God's command, Israel would move from victory to victory on their way to the plains of Moab (22:1). Obedience to God's command and confidence in His leadership were important prerequisites for success (21:34). The territories of King Sihon and King Og were located in the Transjordan region. This would serve as the Israelites' entrance point into the land of promise. As in the case with Edom, the Israelites requested passage from King Sihon, but he refused and engaged them in war (vv. 21–23). Sihon's army attacked, but Israel, empowered by the Lord, defeated them. The land of the Amorites became the first portion of the promised land taken by the Israelites (vv. 24–31; Deut. 2:26–31).

After the Israelites defeated Sihon, they were also attacked by King Og. But as He did with Arad, the Lord gave Og, his people, and his land to the Israelites (vv. 33–35). In preparation for the battle, the Lord told Moses not to be afraid of Og or his people because He had delivered or given them into Moses's hands (21:34). Later, Moses would remind his successor, Joshua, of the victory over Sihon and Og and reassure him that the Lord would similarly overcome the other inhabitants of the region. Then he exhorted Joshua not to be afraid because the Lord his God would fight for him (Deut. 3:21–22). During the conquest itself, Joshua confirmed that the God of Israel fought for His people (Josh. 10:14, 42). It seems that the victory over Sihon and Og was a significant one for Israel. The names of the two kings are repeated many times in the OT (Sihon [37 times]; Og [22 times]), probably because this was the first conquest in the land of Canaan (cf. Deut. 1:4; 3:1–13; 4:47; 29:7; 31:4; Josh. 2:10; 9:10; 1 Kin. 4:19).

The victory over Sihon and Og validated the word of God and the faithful speech that Caleb had given some thirty-eight years before. Caleb firmly believed that when God is with His people, they can overcome mighty enemies (14:8–9). The narrative of Numbers 21:1–3 and 21–35 demonstrates that the Amorites were powerless when confronted by the army of Israel under the command of the Lord.

22:1—36:13

Israel on the Plains of Moab

After the victory over Sihon and Og, the Israelites continued their journey and reached the plains of Moab, a steppe region located immediately north of the Dead Sea to the east of the Jordan River. During Israel's stay in the area, the Moabites attempted to destroy Israel through the influence of Balaam (22:1—25:18). A new census was taken (26:1–65), and God gave an additional law regarding the inheritance of land. It was on the plains of Moab that Joshua was appointed as the new leader of the people (27:1–23). Several laws were instituted concerning sacrificial offerings (28:1—29:40) and vows (30:1–16). The narrative continues with a report of the victory over the Midianites (31:1–54), an account of the tribes that settled down in East Jordan (32:1–42), and a final overview of the trip from Egypt (33:1–49). The book closes with instructions concerning the conquest of the land and laws related to life in Canaan (33:50—36:13).

22:1—24:25. Story of Balaam. After hearing about the defeat of Sihon and Og by the Israelites, Balak, king of the Moabites, became desperate and afraid as the Israelites approached his territory (22:2–3). Instead of launching a military attack against them, Balak decided to take what he thought would be a more effective route. He hired Balaam, an unfaithful prophet, to curse the Israelites (see see below, "God's Use of a Flawed Prophet"). The Bible identifies the homeland of Balaam, son of Beor, as "Pethor" (22:5; Deut. 23:4), a town located in northern Mesopotamia on the west bank of the Euphrates. It is possible that Balaam was Aramaean.

Some have seen a contradiction in 22:20–35 because God allowed Balaam to meet with Balak, but once Balaam was on his way, the Lord opposed him. Actually, God had already prohibited Balaam from going, and Balaam had informed Balak's messengers of that fact (v. 13). It was because of Balaam's insistence that the Lord finally gave him permission to go, but only if the messengers of Balak came to him in the morning and asked him to go with them. And if they did, Balaam could only speak what God told him to (v. 35). However, the messengers did not come to him in the morning. They left, and Balaam went after them. Therefore, it is not at all strange that after Balaam departed, God's anger was directed against him, and the Angel of the Lord stood in his way (v. 22). In any case, by trying to prevent him from going, God wanted Balaam to understand that it was not His intention to allow him to curse the Israelites.

So as to prevent Balaam from interfering with His plan, God enabled the donkey to speak. This certainly should have alarmed Balaam! But it did not. The seer did not see what the donkey saw. The narrative implicitly mocks Balaam. Balaam tried to serve his client well, but he failed, blessing Israel instead (22:41—24:24; for more information on the contribution of these oracles to the theological unity of the Pentateuch, see "Introduction to the Pentateuch," p. 120). God's determination to bless His people was unalterable (23:19), to the point that He was willing to forgive their sins (23:21). No human or demonic sorcery could alter God's will for them (v. 23).

The oracles of Balaam recorded in Numbers 24 are the most impressive of his prophecies and are recorded in poetry. In the third oracle, the Lord describes the camp of Israel as a garden planted by a river; it is a beautiful and fruitful paradise (24:5–7). Then the image transforms to that of a kingdom that is ruled by a king more powerful than Agag (v. 7), described metaphorically as a mighty wild ox (v. 8). While according to 23:22, God brought the Israelites out of Egypt, here God brings this king out of Egypt (a new Exodus), suggesting a powerful messianic figure who permanently overcomes His enemies. This messianic figure then lies down to rest like a powerful lion, whom no one dares to challenge (v. 9). The message is not only about the proclamation of the defeat of the nation of Balak, an enemy of God's people, but about the final defeat of all of God's enemies through God's Messiah, represented as an ox and a lion (see "Introduction to the Pentateuch," p. 120).

The final oracle is the high point (24:15–24). Balaam witnessed what would happen in the distant future, God's eschatological plan. The "He" mentioned in v. 8 is now identified as the future king, prophesied in Genesis 49:10, who was to come from the tribe of Judah. Balaam speaks about a star and scepter coming out of Jacob (v. 17), both symbols pointing to royalty. The NT applies the symbol of the star to Jesus, the messianic King (Rev. 22:16). The star would

God's Use of a Flawed Prophet

The figure of Balaam in the OT is unique and perplexing.

1. Archaeology and Balaam. There is some archaeological evidence that Balaam was a historical figure. In 1967, a plaster inscription containing the name Balaam was discovered in the Transjordanian site of Deir 'Alla in the ruins of a building dated to around the eighth century B.C. The plaster inscription mentions "Balaam son of Beor," a "seer of the gods" who received messages during the night concerning future things and reported them in the morning. We find in Numbers 22 and 24 some elements similar to those found in the inscription. For example, Numbers describes Balaam as a person who received messages from God through visions or dreams; he was a "seer" (22:8, 19; 24:4). In both documents, he had nocturnal visions (22:20), and in the morning, he shared them, in this case, with Balak's messengers (22:13). And in both instances, he is called Balaam, son of Beor. These similarities and others suggest that the Balaam mentioned in the inscription is the biblical Balaam.

2. He Was Used by God. In the story in Numbers, the connection between the Lord and Balaam is unusual. Was he a worshiper of Yahweh? One thing is clear—the spirit of the Lord came upon him, and he prophesied about the future of the people of God and the coming of the Messiah (Num. 24:1–9, 17–19). Although Balak, king of Moab, wanted Balaam to curse Israel, Balaam could speak only the words of God. Unquestionably, God used him and revealed to him His plan. It is unclear whether this was an isolated incident or the first time the Lord had used him as a prophet. But one thing is certain: Balaam declared to the messengers of Balak that he could not go beyond the word of the Lord his God in any way (22:18). When he identified the Lord as his God, he was obviously indicating that he knew Yahweh, the God of Israel, and worshiped Him. However, the narrative reveals a number of problems with Balaam's relationship with the Lord and implies an eventual full apostasy. Despite this reality, God still used Balaam as His prophet.

3. Use of Pagan Rituals. There are two details that contribute to Balaam's enigmatic reputation. First, he is in the service of a king who wanted him to curse Israel, the people of Yahweh. Second, in seeking a revelation from God, he used pagan practices. Pagans used various rituals to influence the gods and to predict the future. At some point in his life, Balaam combined the worship of God with pagan ritual practices and worshiped other gods. The inscription found in 1967 supports that conclusion. In the Bible, he is described as a diviner who receives divination fees or instruments used for divination purposes (Heb. *qesem* in 22:7 could refer to divination instruments or to fees). According to Numbers 24:1, before he pronounced his third oracle, he did not seek to use sorcery or divination as he had previously (Heb. *nakhash*, meaning "to call for an evil omen"; cf. 23:23), which implies that on the two previous occasions, he had practiced sorcery. The text does not specify the type of ritual he used to seek the omen. In any case, he was unable to coerce the Lord into supporting his efforts to curse Israel. His connection with polytheism suggests that, in principle, Balaam was not a faithful worshiper of the Lord of Israel.

4. Goal of the Narrative. The most important element of this story is not the information it provides about Balaam but what it reveals about the purpose and meaning of the story within the book of Numbers. First, the story reveals that there is no God like the God of Israel. Balaam was completely aware of the fact that Yahweh is unique and that, consequently, he would not be able to coerce Him. Balaam's sorcery was ineffective against Him. Several times, Balaam recognized that he could say only what Yahweh put in his mouth and that he was unable to go beyond it. By the third oracle, Balaam abandoned any attempt to influence God and placed himself at His disposal. It was then that the Spirit came upon him.

Second, the story demonstrates that the people of God are under special protection. The forces of evil cannot bring to fruition their purpose against those blessed by the Lord. In Numbers, God reveals Himself as the leader of His people, depicted as an army of pilgrims advancing victoriously toward the land of Canaan.

Third, through this narrative, God shared with the pagan world His plans for Israel. The vision of Balaam pointed to a time when, through the power of God, Israel would be victorious over all its enemies and would be at peace (24:8–9; see the Introduction to the Pentateuch). He foresaw an era in which the glorious king of Israel and His kingdom would be exalted (24:8, 17–19). The message of the story of Balaam applies with equal force to God's people today and should reaffirm their confidence in their Savior and Lord.

appear in order to guide the wise men/kings to the child Jesus, who himself was to be the Star that was to come out of Jacob (Matt. 2:1–11).

Finding here a reference to the Davidic Dynasty, from which the Messiah would come, is appropriate. David defeated the enemies of God, including Moab and Edom. But the eschatological emphasis of the text suggests that the ultimate significance of the passage is found in the coming Messiah, who was Himself the culmination of the dynasty (see Ps. 89:19–52; Isa. 11; 55:3; Jer. 23:5–6; 30:9; Ezek. 34:23–24; 37:24–25; Hos. 3:5; Amos 9:11; Matt. 1:1; Luke 1:32; 2 Tim. 2:8; Rev. 5:5). The nations mentioned in Numbers 24:17b–24 would symbolically represent all of God's enemies who would be defeated by the Messiah. Moab, Edom (see Is. 63:1–3), and Amalek would not be able to stand before the future King. The proud nations, like the Kenites, would be overpowered (vv. 21–22), even if God had to employ other nations in the process (e.g., Asshur; v. 22). Implicit in the passage is a future for God's people free from the threat of enemies. This last oracle of Balaam was an oracle of hope for Israel.

Israel later attacked the Midianites, and in the ensuing battle, Balaam was killed (31:8). Thus, Balaam died as a result of his sin. He fell from divine grace and tragically became an instrument in the hands of God's enemy. In spite of the imperfections of the Israelites in the wilderness, God was with them, protecting them from physical and spiritual forces. Israel did not discern what Balak and Balaam were attempting to do against them, but God knew and fought for them. He does the same for His people today.

25:1–18. Israel's Immorality and Idolatry. Despite a clear prelude of ultimate victory against the inhabitants of the land (see the victory over Sihon [21:21–25] and Og [21:33–35]), some Israelites remained spiritually vulnerable. When Balaam failed to curse God's people, he returned home, the place where he should have remained (24:25). But, overcome by greed, he revisited Balak with a strategy to overthrow Israel: to lead some among the people to violate God's covenant by committing harlotry with the women of Moab and worshiping their gods (25:1–2; 31:16; cf. 2 Pet. 2:15; Rev. 2:14). Balaam recognized that the formidable mix of immorality and idolatry would lead many Israelites astray.

As a result of the violation of the covenant, the people were immediately afflicted by a plague from the Lord. God commanded Moses to hang the culprits (v. 4) as a way of bringing the plague to an end. It was particularly because of the intervention of the priest Eleazar, who made atonement on behalf of the people, that God's anger receded (vv. 7–8). The punishment inflicted on Zimri by Phinehas was not arbitrary. He was a leader in Israel and, through his behavior, could have influenced others to sin. Though we no longer live under a theocracy, immoral and sinful behavior in the church always requires a firm response from God's people (1 Cor. 5:1–5).

26:1–65. Second Numbering of Israel. Part of the preparation to conquer Canaan included a census of the new generation. After dealing with the disaster at Baal-Peor, the Lord ordered Moses and Eleazar to number the people (vv. 1–56) and the Levites (vv. 57–62). This was a new census because all those who were originally numbered in the wilderness of Sinai were already dead, except for Caleb, Joshua, and Moses (vv. 63–67), and Moses himself would die soon (27:12–14). The census was conducted according to the number of the Israelite tribes. For all the tribes except that of Levi, the census included male Israelites who were twenty years old and above and able to go to war (v. 2) and female Israelites in case of fathers who had no sons (v. 33). Concerning the Levites, the numbering involved all males older than one month of age (v. 62). In light of vv. 52–56, it appears that the census was to be used in the division of the land. The number of people in the tribe determined how much land a tribe would inherit. The Levites were not counted among their Israelite brethren because they had no land inheritance (v. 62). However, since the land could only be divided after its conquest, the census had a military purpose as well. Thus, the ability to go to war was one of the considerations (v. 2). The division of the land even before its conquest reassured the people that through God's power, they would conquer the land.

In vv. 9–10, the rebellion of Dathan, Abiram, and Korah is recalled as a sign (v. 10; i.e., a warning for others). This reminder to the new generation was important because they faced a genuine challenge in conquering the land, and their success required faithfulness to God. Unlike Dathan, Abiram, and Korah, who mocked God's plan by describing Egypt as the land flowing with milk and honey (16:13–14), the new generation needed to trust in God's leadership and develop

strong hope in Him. The apostle Peter warned that in the last days, there would be scoffers who would view the promise of the Second Coming of Jesus with derision. But the children of God are encouraged to wait with hope for the fulfillment of His promise (2 Pet. 3:3–14).

27:1–11. Zelophehad's Daughters. The daughters of Zelophehad raised an issue concerning their father's property. Their situation was serious because the continued existence of someone's name was important to the Israelites, and the most enduring way to preserve a man's name was for his descendants to inherit his land. Because the matter was so complex, Moses referred the case to the Lord (v. 5).

The Lord answered that daughters have the right to inherit their father's property (vv. 6–9). He made it clear that the land of Canaan should be kept in small holdings and passed down along hereditary lines (vv. 9–11). Thus, the case of the daughters of Zelophehad facilitated the creation of a new law entitling women to be considered legal channels through which possession and inheritance of the land could be traced, as it was with sons. This was a revolutionary law that should inform contemporary society, especially cultures in which women still have lower status than men.

27:12–23. Joshua as the Successor of Moses. The current section focuses on the transfer of leadership from Moses to Joshua. The Lord informed Moses that the day of his death was drawing near. He would not enter Canaan because he had been disobedient to God and had not glorified Him at Kadesh (vv. 12–14). Instead of arguing with the Lord, Moses complied with His determination and displayed a deep sense of responsibility (vv. 15–17). Thinking about the welfare of his people, he requested that the Lord appoint a suitable leader, one who would go out and come in before the people (i.e., lead them in battle; v. 17). The Lord directed Moses to Joshua (one of the two faithful spies) and instructed him to lay his hands on Joshua, for the Spirit was in him (v. 18).

The laying on of hands denoted the transfer of power from one leader to another, with one taking the place of the other (Num. 8:10; cf. Lev. 16:21). By laying hands on Joshua, Moses consecrated him as the new leader of God's people (vv. 18–20, 23), the one who would guide them to Canaan. Aaron had given way to Eleazar, and Moses relinquished his position to Joshua. It was clear that the Lord, the ultimate leader of Israel, was in charge of the affairs of His people. He would not allow a leadership vacuum. The future of His work could not be jeopardized by the absence of appointed leaders.

Joshua, a man endowed by the Spirit with wisdom and authority, was installed as Moses's successor in the sight of the congregation while Moses was still alive (vv. 19, 22). This ensured that there would be no misunderstanding or uncertainty concerning leadership

The Status of Women in the Book of Numbers

Despite containing sparse data concerning the lives of women, the book of Numbers seems to indicate that there was a continuous effort to improve their status in Israelite society. Numbers 5–6, 12, 27, 30, and 36 provide some hints about a woman's position in the Israelite community. For example, in 5:1–4, whoever (man or woman) became unclean due to leprosy or corpse defilement was to be sent outside the camp, without discrimination. In 5:6–7, a man or a woman who did wrong to a fellow human being was considered guilty before the Lord and was required to repent. In the same chapter, the Lord indicated that no wife could be held guilty simply on the basis of her husband's suspicion. A wife was considered innocent until the Lord Himself proved her guilty (5:11–31). In relation to the Nazirite law, women as well as men were free to choose to be Nazirites (6:1–2). In addition to the Nazirite vow, women could also take other vows (Numbers 30). Moreover, the incident of Numbers 12 implies that Miriam was recognized as an important female leader in Israel. Furthermore, on the request of Zelophehad's daughters, a law about a daughter's inheritance was established in Israel. Though these illustrations are limited, they marked a step forward in the lives of women. Current society, and especially the church, is called to do better, particularly in the areas of women's education, leadership, and employment.

responsibilities after Moses's death. Joshua would cooperate with Eleazar in leading God's people (vv. 21–22). Eleazar was to consult the Lord with the Urim and Thummim to provide divine instructions to Joshua (v. 21). While Moses anticipated his death, he continued to instruct God's people.

At times, succession can be a source of conflict within religious organizations. But looking back at Moses's and Joshua's experiences, it is clear that the ability to serve and the endowment of wisdom from God should serve as key criteria in the transfer of leadership. The entire matter of succession should be submitted to the Lord, following the example of Moses. Moreover, once the decision is made, it must be reported to the public in an appropriate way. Joshua's collaboration with Eleazar would be important in order to effectively lead God's people into the promised land. God never directs one leader independently of His other chosen instruments.

28:1—29:40. Offerings in the Cultic Calendar. The offerings described in this section would be required at prescribed intervals in the promised land (see also Lev. 23). There were daily (vv. 3–8; not included in Lev. 23), weekly (vv. 9–10), and monthly sacrifices (vv. 11–15; not mentioned in Lev. 23), as well as offerings for the specific festivals (28:16—29:40). Four kinds of offerings were envisaged for the festivals: whole/burnt offerings, which consisted of burning the flesh of the whole animal; cereal/grain offerings (grain and oil); drink offerings or libations (wine); and sin/purification offerings (29:39). The various offerings presented to God during the festivals were acts of faith through which the Israelites were to express their gratitude to God for His saving actions and for the successful harvests He provided for them. They were also an expression of their commitment to Him.

In other words, the performance of sacrifices at regular intervals, particularly the sin offering, should have reminded the Israelites that God dwelled permanently in their midst and that, consequently, they were in constant need of atonement and cleansing from sin. The sacrifices also developed within the people an attitude of thanksgiving to God, compliance with His covenant, and commitment to Him, as well as the conviction of being accepted by Him. The calendrical sacrifices functioned as constant reminders of God's presence, His holiness, His grace, and, above all, His acts of salvation within the history of His people.

There were several festivals in Israel: the Passover (28:16; cf. Lev. 23:5), the Festival of Unleavened Bread (28:17–25; cf. Lev. 23:6), the Festival of Harvest (28:26–31; cf. Lev. 23:15–21), the Festival of Trumpets (29:1–6; cf. Lev. 23:23–25), the Day of Atonement (29:7–11; cf. Lev. 23:26–32), and the Festival of Tabernacles (29:12–38; cf. Lev. 23:33–43). These different festivals were organized in the context of the agricultural year and the harvests. The Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread were scheduled during the barley harvest in spring. The Festival of Weeks or Harvest came during the wheat harvest around the month of June. The Festival of Trumpets and Tabernacles, as well as the Day of Atonement, were celebrated between September and October and corresponded with the ripening of grapes, figs, and olives. By celebrating these festivals at their appointed times, the Israelites expressed their gratitude to God for His provision of food, and they were protected from the influence of idolatrous and immoral pagan harvest festivals.

The festivals also aimed to reinforce relationships among the Israelites in the promised land. The festivals were intended to shape their identity, mission, and destiny, bolstering the idea that they were God's chosen people with one major purpose—namely, to be a blessing to other nations. Moreover, the celebrations would remind them of God's saving acts, His goodness, and His continuous care for them (see Lev. 23 for the typological significance of the festivals). Today, worship should also be centered on the goodness of God and His saving power, and it should be a time of joy and thanksgiving.

30:1–16. Legislation Regarding Vows. This section of Numbers records legislation regarding the seriousness of making a vow or swearing an oath to the Lord. The specific nature of the vow or the oath is not mentioned, except in one instance (v. 13). Five specific cases are discussed. First, if a man made a vow, he was not allowed to violate it (v. 2; see Deut. 23:21–23). Second, if a young woman still living in the house of her father made a vow, and her father knew about it but remained silent (v. 4), the vow was inviolable. But if her father overruled the vow when he learned about it, the Lord would *yislah* (from *salakh*) *lah*—"forgive or release her" (i.e., release her from fulfilling the vow; v. 5). Third, in the case of a young woman who had made a vow before getting married, her husband could annul the vow the moment he became aware of it, and the woman would be forgiven by the Lord. Otherwise the vow would be confirmed through his silence (vv. 6–8). Fourth, the case of a widow or divorced woman was like that of a man; she was bound to fulfill her vow (v. 9). Fifth, when a married woman made a vow, her husband could override it when he first heard of it. Otherwise, the vow would be binding. If, later on, the husband changed his mind and annulled the vow, the women was forgiven, but her husband would bear her guilt (i.e., be responsible/punishable for the violation of her vow; vv. 10–15).

The annulment of a vow by a father or husband could have been motivated by concerns about the family's limited economic resources or by other marital responsibilities (e.g., when the wife took an oath to humble or deny herself; lit. "humble the soul"; v. 13), which usually meant fasting (Is. 58:3, 5), but which may have included abstaining from sexual relations. What is significant here is that a woman was free to make a vow by herself, without the prior approval of her father or husband, and that it was valid. The potential annulment by the father or husband could be linked to the woman owning insufficient property to fulfill her vow. The object of a vow was often a sacrifice, but it could also have included becoming a Nazirite.

31:1–54. War against the Midianites. At the suggestion of Balaam, the Midianites led Israel into a grievous sin, which resulted in a plague in which twenty-four thousand Israelites died. The Lord spoke again to Moses and instructed him to take vengeance on the Midianites before he died (vv. 1–2; cf. 25:16–18). The time of retribution had arrived, and the Lord ordered the people to go to war. It was not a common thing in the ANE or even in the Bible for a deity to command a war; this was usually done by kings. In response to God's command, Moses organized a military expedition against the Midianites. The new generation of Israelites was ready to cooperate with God and obey His instructions. Hence, they put into practice some of the previous legislations, including the use of trumpets in the context of war (v. 6; cf. 10:9), the purification from corpse defilement (v. 19; cf. 19:1–22), and the support for priests and Levites (v. 47; cf. 18:1–32).

Moses asked Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, to accompany the army to battle and to take with him some holy articles (v. 6), perhaps the Urim and Thummim (27:21). Most armies in the ANE employed priests, diviners, and portable sacred objects when they went to war. The gods were considered responsible for the outcome of the war and would be consulted on the battlefield in an effort to be victorious. In the case of Israel, the company of God's representative, the priest Phinehas, would encourage the army in its mission. His presence, along with sacred articles, could imply that the battle was under God's control, and this would encourage the Israelite soldiers to keep fighting.

At God's command, the Israelites fought against the Midianites and killed the five kings of Midian and many of their people, including Balaam, the unfaithful prophet (vv. 2, 7–8). However, the Israelite army spared the women and children and took them captive (v. 9). This action vexed Moses (v. 14). He then commanded the soldiers to kill all of the women who had ever had sexual contact with men because they were among the key agents who led Israel to apostasy (vv. 16–17). Male children were also destroyed so that they would not become a military threat to Israel in the future (v. 17; see "The Extermination of the Canaanites," p. 330, and "Holy Warfare," p. 372).

Though the war against Midian was carried out at God's command, the text does not indicate that this should serve as basis for individuals to avenge themselves. It is important to note that Moses's army did not exterminate the Midianites. The context of Numbers 31 indicates that the Lord used the Israelites as an instrument to enact His judgment on the Midianites, who were a threat to His plan of bringing His people into Canaan. The command to fight the Midianites was limited to a particular space and time, in relation to the settling of the promised land.

After the battle, the soldiers cleansed themselves, along with the plunder they took (vv.19–24). The plunder was divided according to certain regulations. One portion went for the maintenance of the sanctuary, another was given to the priests and Levites, still another belonged to the soldiers, and the remainder was taken by the congregation (vv. 25–47). The Lord granted the Midianites and their possessions to the Israelites. In turn, as a sign of gratitude, the Israelites presented an offering to the Lord (vv. 48–54). Thus, they recognized that the victory over the Midianites belonged to God. As with Israel in times long past, the Lord is still ready to give victory to His people today as they continue to trust in His promises, power, and lordship in their lives.

32:1–42. Settlement in the Transjordan. The tribes of Reuben and Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh did not wait on God to designate their allotment. They requested the Transjordan land, which had already been conquered and which was well suited to their pastoral life (vv. 1–5). Their request was accepted, with the condition that they must participate in the conquest of the rest of the land. The agreement was recorded multiple times (vv. 25–27; 31–32; see Josh. 22:1–34).

The commitment of the tribes of Reuben and Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh reinforced the sense of united purpose, mutual responsibility, and interdependence among God's people. At that time, the children of Israel worked together as one people and conquered the promised land. When God's people decide to unite and focus together on a common goal, they can do mighty things for the Lord.

33:1–49. Israel's Journey from Egypt to Canaan. In this section, Moses summarizes the journey of the people from Egypt to the plains of Moab. Many places mentioned in this passage have not yet been identified and may forever remain unknown. Place names as well as geographical environments are subject to change over time. However, the itinerary as it stands testifies that the Lord led His people progressively and in an organized manner from Egypt to the frontier of the promised land. They were about to leave the wilderness, which had been a place of rebellion and punishment, but it was also a place of divine care, grace, and love, and one where the relationship between God and the new generation of Israelites was finally solidified.

33:50—34:29. Division of the Promised Land. Before the Israelites conquered the land, the Lord assured them that it was theirs and that they could begin dividing it among themselves. But He reminded them that one of their major tasks would be to destroy the idolatry that prevailed in the land (v. 52). Failing to do this would make the Canaanites a constant threat to their physical and spiritual well-being (v. 55) and would make the Israelites candidates for destruction (v. 56). The size of the tribe was the key criterion in the partitioning of the land (v. 54). The land was to be divided among the nine and a half tribes since the others were allotted shares in the Transjordan territory (34:1–12). Though the land belonged to God, He involved the people in its division and apportionment. They were to allocate the land even before it was conquered, and thus rely completely on the promise that the Lord would indeed give it to them (34:16–29). The Israelites were to be stewards of God's land. As He had directed their liberation from Egypt and their subsequent journey, He also had full control of the division of the land. God wanted to plant His people in a safe place, where faith could grow free from the weeds of sin and rebellion.

35:1–34. Levitical Cities and Cities of Refuge. The Levites did not inherit any land (26:62). The Lord Himself was their share. He provided for them through the tithes and offerings that the people of Israel contributed. He also required the Israelite tribes to give to the Levites a number of cities and suburbs (35:1–3, 6). It should be noted that, similar to the previous instructions (33:50–34:29), these directives about Levitical cities and cities of refuge were given to the Israelites when they were still on the plains of Moab (i.e., before the conquest of the land; 35:1). The Lord was assuring them again that He would indeed fulfill His plan. There was no reason for them to despair. All they needed was faith and conviction regarding what is not seen (Heb. 11:1).

The Levitical cities would serve as dwelling places for God's servants. These cities were centers for religious instruction and aided the collection of revenue for God's work. Cities of refuge were places where persons who had committed unintentional homicide could seek safety. These cities prevented blood feuds and provided a safe haven to the accused person until the trial (v. 30). Moreover, since it was considered that the blood of the slain could only be expiated by another death, the death of the high priest eliminated the bloodguilt attached to the homicide. In other words, since the high priest was representative of the community at large, his death expiated accidental bloodshed (35:25, 28; Ex. 28:36–38; Lev. 16:16). Furthermore, in Israel, human life was of such high value that a murderer could not pay a ransom for the crime. He or she was to be put to death (35:31). This provision emphasizes the dignity and significance of human life in the sight of God.

This way of thinking short-circuited the common ANE custom of blood vengeance in which a person was obliged to avenge the death of a deceased relative by killing the guilty individual and even his or her family. In vv. 33–34, the Lord insisted that the land should be protected from all possible defilement, especially murder. The holy presence of the Lord in the land required the purity of its inhabitants.

36:1–13. Inheritance of Zelophehad's Daughters. This passage is a supplement to the law in 27:1–11, which allowed the daughters of Zelophehad to inherit the land of their father who died without a male heir (27:3). The new legislation required women in this situation to marry men within their own tribe so that their inheritance would not be taken from their tribe and granted to another. In this way, the preservation of family property (land), which was one of the highest values in Israelite society, would not be jeopardized. Consequently, the additional law of Numbers 36 contributed to the stability of relationships within the community. The final statement of the book of Numbers (36:13) indicates that the commandments and the instructions that Moses received on the plains of Moab came from the Lord. These regulations were intended to prepare the Israelites for the conquest of the promised land and to clarify how they should live in it. To conquer Canaan, they needed to trust fully in God's leadership. They were to properly organize themselves by taking the census, dealing honestly with leadership succession, and fighting under God's command.

The Lord also instructed them that once they occupied the land, their priority should be true worship and the reinforcement of civil and social rights. On the plains of Moab, at the very border of the promised land, God's instructions strengthened the hope of the Israelites that they would inherit what God had promised them, despite their moments of despair. At this juncture, they stood before the land and anticipated the fulfillment of God's promises to their forefathers and to themselves. Christians too stand waiting, looking for a new heaven and a new earth where righteousness reigns (2 Pet. 3:13).

DEUTERONOMY

INTRODUCTION

Title. Deuteronomy is the final book of the Jewish Torah, also known as the Pentateuch—this name is based on the Greek title of the five books of Moses. In Hebrew the book is known as *seper debarim* ("Book of Words"), a title taken from its opening line, "These are the words..." (1:1). The Greek translation of the OT (LXX) sets the ground for the name *Deuteronomion* ("Second Law")—a designation derived from the instructions given for an eventual king of Israel, which stipulated that he would write for himself a copy of the law on a scroll (17:18). The book reiterates the Decalogue of Exodus 20 almost word for word in Deuteronomy 5, as well as many of the laws found in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. However, because of this title, the reader of the book may get the wrong impression—unintended by the author—that Deuteronomy is only a series of speeches or sermons that review Israel's history, including the Exodus narrative and God's instructions to the people as they journeyed toward the promised land. However, the primary intention of these speeches was to motivate the people to remain faithful to God.

Authorship. Deuteronomy identifies Moses as the author of its content: "These are the words which Moses spoke to all Israel" (1:1). The thirty-eight occurrences of the name Moses, together with the use of the first-person pronoun, support the idea of Mosaic authorship. Also, the NT upholds Moses as the author of Deuteronomy: Jesus referred to Moses as the author of the law of divorce found in Deuteronomy 24:1–4 (cf. Matt. 19:7–8; Mark 10:3–4), and Stephen and Peter cite the prophetic word found in Deuteronomy 18:15–19 about the raising of a prophet likeas being spoken by Moses himself (cf. Acts 3:22; 7:37). An exception of Mosaic authorship, however, is chapter 34, which narrates Moses's death. Joshua, the Israelite leader following Moses, may have recorded this chapter.

Date and Backgrounds. The traditional date for the book of Deuteronomy places the Exodus from Egypt in the fifteenth century (approx. 1447 B.C.). After forty years of desert wanderings, Israel's new generation arrived in the fields of Moab, where Moses spoke the words of Deuteronomy to them (Deut. 1:3).

With the rise of the Enlightenment, the prevailing consensus among Jewish and Christian scholars about the Mosaic authorship of Deuteronomy and its date of composition changed. Today, many critical scholars believe that the book of Deuteronomy was the scroll found in the Jerusalem temple during the reform of King Josiah in 622 B.C. (2 Kin. 22:8—23:3; 2 Chr. 34:14–33), and that the scroll had been only recently composed and placed in the temple. Others hold that Deuteronomy is the result of Josianic reform. In any case, critics view Deuteronomy as composed by Jewish scribes and fictionally attributed to Moses.

However, not all scholars are willing to date Deuteronomy late. Many still hold to an early date of composition based on the inner-biblical testimony. The use of archaic language and literary devices such as *inclusio*, chiasms, key words, and thematic links point to the cohesive literary structure of the book, which bears close resemblance to late, second millennium B.C. Hittite treaties. These features appear across the entire book of Deuteronomy and show evidence for the unity of authorship and an early date of composition.

Theology and Purpose. Deuteronomy is often regarded as "the theology book" of the OT. Similar to Romans in the NT, Deuteronomy reviews God's gracious acts toward Israel and lays the foundation for the messages of the prophets who followed Moses. The book consists of Moses's passionate farewell address to Israel, cast into the form of an ancient covenant document. Its content centers around God's faithfulness in fulfilling His promises to the patriarchs, which were manifested in Israel's miraculous Exodus and the instructions God gave them. Deuteronomy systematizes the accounts of Exodus through Numbers into a manifesto calling Israel to respond to God's grace with unreserved love and loyalty.

1. God's Faithfulness. The 120-year-old Moses addressed the new generation of Israelites who camped in the fields of Moab and reminded them of the promises God made to their ancestors (Deut. 2:14–15; Num. 13–14). Moses highlighted God's covenant faithfulness and exhorted the people to be faithful and obedient to Him as their covenant Lord. There would be blessings for such obedience, but curses for disobedience (Deut. 27–30). Deuteronomy's purpose was to prepare the new generation of the Lord's chosen people to be His kingdom representatives in the land He had promised in the Abrahamic covenant. Loyalty to God was to be grounded in the fulfillment of God's redemptive promises to them. The book portrays a reliable God who would deliver to the people the future He offered them through His wonderful promises. Deuteronomy's spiritual emphasis and its call to a total commitment to the Lord in worship and obedience inspired references to its message throughout the rest of Scripture. In particular, the Former Prophets division of the Hebrew Bible (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings; see "Introduction to the Old Testament Historical Books," p. 350) is thoroughly imbued with the style, themes, and motifs of Deuteronomy. Among the Latter Prophets, Jeremiah also reflects a strong influence from this book.

2. God's Love. The reciprocal love of the Lord for His people, and that of the people for the Lord as their sovereign God, pervades the whole book. In fact, God's love seems to be Deuteronomy's main theological theme. The election of Israel was not based on the people's qualities, but solely on God's love toward a small and insignificant people. The deliverance of Israel from bondage in Egypt was a fundamental expression of His love as well as the fulfillment of His promises. Furthermore, because of His loving grace, God assigned them a home in a bounteous and fertile land. In response to all these benefits, it was the individual Israelite's duty to fear and to love the Lord. The love of God is portrayed as His full commitment to them and as an all-absorbing personal devotion of the people to Him. Love is the primary motivator for human duty. The Israelite was to love God with undivided affection ("with all your heart and with all your soul," 6:5), thereby renouncing everything inconsistent with loyalty to Him.

3. Love as the Rejection of Idolatry. God's covenant with Israel (Ex. 19–24) constituted the backbone of the challenge to remain obedient to Him, especially in view of the temptations that they would face among the Canaanites. In order to motivate Israel to start anew in the promised land, Moses cast his speeches into the framework of a new covenant relationship between God and Israel that placed younger generations in their parents' footsteps when they encountered God at Mount Sinai. God called each Israelite to experience by faith the same redemptive events and respond to them with trust and obedience. Loyalty in the expression of love toward God would bring an earnest repudiation of all false gods and idolatrous rites and practices. This loyal love was also to express itself as a cheerful and ready acquiescence to the positive commandments that God had laid down. God repeatedly and emphatically warned Israel against the temptations of idolatry and of the perils of yielding to it. In this context, they would exterminate Canaan's heathen populations. No intermarriage or any other relationship with them was to be permitted, and their places of worship and religious symbols were to be completely destroyed. Israel was always to remember that they were a "holy" people to the Lord (Deut. 7:6; 14:2, 21; 26:19; 28:9). The Canaanite forms of divination and magic were not to be tolerated. While other nations relied upon oracles of fortune-tellers and soothsayers, Israel would rely on the Lord's prophets for divine counsel and guidance (28:9–19). Instruction was given regarding the worship of the true God so that Israel would not follow heathen rites. Part of this worship included the celebration of the three great annual festivals (the Festival of Unleavened Bread, the Festival of Weeks, and the Festival of Tabernacles), the offering of all sacrifices, and the performance of other religious duties at a single central sanctuary where God would put His name (12:5–7, 11, 14, 18, 26). Obedience to these commandments was to be sincere and from the heart, and would bring with it the blessing of the Lord. Disobedience, on the other hand, would end in national disasters and exile (6:14–15; 7:12–16; 8:19, and especially chap. 28).

4. Love and Practicing Justice. The practical expression of loving God was not confined to Israel's religious duties, but also embraced their social and domestic life. The laws included in chapters 12 to 26 contain details for the moral and social well-being of the community that every Israelite was to follow. Love of God translated into love of one's neighbor. Any act detrimental to a neighbor's welfare was to be avoided. The moral principles that the book insists on are justice, integrity, equity, philanthropy, and generosity. Judges were to be appointed in every city to administer justice with strict impartiality so that these principles were followed (26:18–20). Fathers were not to be condemned judicially for the crimes of their children, nor children for the crimes of their fathers (24:16). Just weights and measures were to be used in all commercial transactions (25:13–16). Grave moral offenses were punished severely. Death was the penalty not only for murder but also for the rebellious behavior of a son toward his parents, for unchastity, for adultery, and for kidnapping (21:18–21; 22:20–27; 24:7).

5. Love and Caring for the Needy. The governing motive of the laws of Deuteronomy was philanthropy—compassion and charity shown toward those in need and in difficult life situations. These included those in need of a loan (15:7–11), slaves at the time of manumission (15:13–15), fugitives (13:15–16), hired servants (14:14–15), strangers (i.e., foreign residents), orphans, and widows (cf. 14:29). The Israelites' own past as foreigners and slaves was evoked in order to promote gratitude and a sense of sympathy toward the needy (10:19; cf. 15:15; 16:12; 24:18, 22). Deuteronomy promotes a spirit of tolerance, equity, and regard for the welfare of others like no other book of the OT. Israel was to live within an atmosphere of generous devotion to God and large-hearted benevolence toward human beings. Following the principles found in this book would ennoble, elevate, and refine the entire life of the community.

6. Love and Hope. The strong concern in Deuteronomy for rightful living anticipated rightful living in the land that the Lord had promised to Israel. Previous residents had corrupted the land through their inhumane and idolatrous practices, and their future was removal from it. Israel was now ready to possess it and to make it a center for the worship of the Lord who had brought the people out of Egypt. While on the plains of Moab, Moses informed them about the future and the impact of their hope on the present. In terms of their loving commitment to the Lord and to each other, they were to live the way they would eventually live in the promised land. Their future, the realization of hope, would depend to a large extent on that commitment. It could be characterized by blessings based on God's promises or by curses that would result from the rejection of God's promises. They could choose life or death, but the divine intention for them was life.

Literary Features. From a literary point of view, Deuteronomy's structure reflects the suzerain-vassal treaties of the ancient Near East, specifically Hittite and Assyrian treaties. The elements of such treaties are reflected in the book's division: (1) Preamble (1:1–5); (2) Historical Prologue (1:6—4:49); (3) Stipulations (chaps. 5–26); (4) Curses and Blessings, or Covenant Ratification (chaps. 27–30); and (5) Succession Arrangements or Covenant Continuity, which includes the invocation of witnesses and directions for the disposition and public reading of the treaty (chaps. 31–34).

The book consists of a series of speeches that correspond to treaty documents in which the suzerain orally proclaimed his terms and conditions at the covenant ceremony to the vassals. The treaty style of the book is reflected in the characteristic "I/thou" form that is found in ancient Near Eastern suzerainty treaties. In line with the oral proclamation of the covenant text was the response by the vassal during the covenant ceremony. An example of such a response appears in the text of King Esarhaddon of Assyria (681–669 B.C.), which was found in the royal city of Nimrud. The text contains a self-maledictory oath binding the vassal to the lord's stipulations and repeats a summary of these stipulations in the response. Likewise, Deuteronomy mentions the "Amen" that was to be uttered by the Israelites in the course of their ceremony (27:15–26; cf. 26:17–18; 29:12). Thus, the farewell speeches of Moses were the ceremonial words of a covenant ritual calling the people to accept the treaty offered to them by God. The formal structure of these speeches closely followed fixed ceremonial/legal traditions within the context of a passionate liturgical address.

The example that scholars cite as exhibiting the books's treaty pattern in a miniature format is Deuteronomy 4. This chapter has the following constitutive features: (1) the identification of the speaker (vv. 1–2, 5, 10); (2) the appeal to covenant history (e.g., vv. 10–12, 20–24); (3) the basic stipulation of undivided allegiance (e.g., vv. 15–18); (4) the blessing/curse sanctions (v. 27); (5) the invocation of witnesses (v. 26); and (6) the arrangements for the perpetuation of the covenant (vv. 9–10, 21–22). This brief passage

stands as a reflection of the treaty pattern of Moses's speeches and signifies the unity of the book. It is also an interesting indication of how Moses viewed the occasion on the banks of the Jordan River. One might say that in his mind, Moses understood the entire ceremony not just as a passionate farewell speech but as a call for decision making, a solemn dedication service, and a sending ceremony of the younger generation under the protective and guiding governance of their supreme Lord. Moses himself had served the Lord, and he anticipated the same from Israel. The speeches were filled with exhortations recounting important historical events, prophetic utterances, and poetic orations.

COMMENTARY

1:1—4:43

MOSES'S FIRST DISCOURSE: REMEMBERING THE GRACE OF YAHWEH

Chapters 1–4 are often referred to as the "preamble" of Deuteronomy. Moses recalled key events that occurred during the forty years of wanderings in the desert after the Israelites left Sinai. He recapped the history of their journey for a couple of reasons: (1) this younger generation was not the group who experienced these significant events, and (2) he was reminding them of all that God had done to bring them to this historic point. To understand what is to come, we must understand what has gone before; both are indispensable to biblical hope.

This introduction mentions that Moses told the people everything that the Lord had commanded (1:3), and he also expressed his own emotion. He focused specifically on episodes difficult for him: when he needed help in managing such a large group of people, when the spies presented their negative report, and when he was punished. Moses was an old man who had carried a tremendous burden. Some commentators find contradictions with the original narrative in this review of past experiences. For example, Moses centered on his own role in the appointing of the leaders of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens, without addressing Jethro's as Exodus does (1:12–17; Ex. 18:17–23). Moses mentioned that the people suggested sending spies into Canaan before they took possession of it, whereas Numbers mentions only God's command (Num. 13:1–2). Yet these narratives are not contradictory, but rather complementary: Moses commanded the people to do what Jethro had suggested, and God commanded Moses to do what the people had suggested. Most surprising of all is Moses's claim that it was due to God's anger over the Israelites' refusal to enter Canaan at Kadesh Barnea that he was refused entry as well (Deut. 1:37; cf. 3:26; 4:21). No mention is made of his own act of disobedience (Num. 20:8–12). These two events are closely associated in the biblical narrative. Here Moses is right in the sense that if they had entered Canaan when they were supposed to, those events would not have happened, and Moses would have entered the promised land. In the present context, Moses chose to highlight the rebellion of the people and its impact on his own life, which complemented what he wrote in Numbers. Thus, he accurately placed responsibility on the Israelites for not entering Canaan and for rebelling at Meribah.

In chapter 2, Moses recounts God's faithfulness and provisions (Deut. 2:7). There is an image of God as a gentle Guide who carefully directed Israel's steps. He told Moses when to pass by a nation peacefully and when to fight, and Israel followed His orders (2:37). Due to their faithfulness, God led them to military victory over the territory east of the Jordan River in preparation for their conquest of Canaan. Conversely, here God appears as a mighty warrior (3:22; cf. Ex. 14:14). Moses's speech of remembrance was meant to encourage the Israelites in what they were about to do. God led them to victory before, and He would do it again.

It is difficult to understand why Moses's account in the first chapters of Deuteronomy is so selective in its detail and condensed in scope. But we should understand that his address was meant to summarize forty years of history and personal experiences into a short period of time. Also, Moses was speaking to a crowd of millions of people and was possibly relying on others who shouted to those who were further back in the crowd. He had to be concise in order to avoid misunderstanding. This reminds us of Jesus's words in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5. Jesus condensed God's laws, which were written in large parts of the OT, into eight statements, which we call the Beatitudes. Surely, He did that not for the sake of the disciples or for the learned among the people sitting in front of him, but for the crowds who had gathered around them. A speaker is always aware of his audience and chooses the right discourse for the occasion. Moses chose to focus on the events that he saw as significant and that pointed to one indisputable fact: the Israelites had made it to the promised land not because of their efforts, but because of God's faithfulness.

The first three chapters of Deuteronomy relate bittersweet memories for Moses. He stood before the people he loved, and this was his last chance to address them before he died. He was disappointed at not being able to enter the promised land, but he had spent his life following God's orders under all circumstances. He had been a loyal servant and shepherd. Through most of the journey, we see him as a strong leader who persevered through conditions that most of us would find intolerable. But that is why God had chosen him for this mission. He had the right attitude and was totally committed to do what God had set before him. Now, at the end, we get a much more human picture of Moses. He was a man with the same weaknesses all humans share. The difference is that his faith was unshakable. No matter how bad things became, Moses never questioned God's faithfulness or love. We can learn from his example. While our lives may not turn out exactly as we had hoped, we can trust that God makes all things work together for the good of those who love Him (Rom. 8:28). In Him, we are more than conquerors (Rom. 8:37).

1:1–5

Preamble to Moses's First Discourse

The first five verses give the time and place of the addresses that make up the book. What follows consists of the laws and teachings Moses addressed to the people in the land of Moab, shortly before they entered the land of Canaan. Critical scholars argue for a multiple authorship of the book on the basis of the three introductions to Moses's speech in vv. 1, 3, and 5. However, traditional commentators have made suggestions about their coherence, based on their chiastic design:

- **A** The site of Moses's speeches—east of (lit. "across" or "beyond"—Heb. *'eber*) the Jordan (v. 1)
  - **B** The foreshadowing of the first message of the first speech (v. 2)
    - **C** The date when Moses began the speeches (v. 3)
  - **B′** The foreshadowing of the second message of the first speech (v. 4)
- **A′** The site where he delivered his speeches (v. 5)

The speaker of Deuteronomy was Moses himself, apart from a few connecting passages and the narrative about his last days. Moses reviewed the past forty years and prepared Israel for the future. He brought the laws together with the lessons learned and urged the people to keep both in mind.

Though the voice of God is heard only five times in the book of Deuteronomy (31:14b, 16b–21, 23b; 32:49–52; 34:4b), and the introduction alerts the reader to the voice of Moses, the authority behind the book was God (1:3). Moses served as the mediator of Yahweh's covenant with Israel and as a human conduit of divine revelation at Sinai. He was God's authoritative spokesperson.

Those addressed were "all Israel" and "the children of Israel" or "the Israelites" (1:1, 3). These two expressions are scattered throughout the book. The former suggests that Moses spoke to the community of faith; the latter highlights the nation's ethnic cohesion—they were the descendants of the patriarch Jacob, who was renamed Israel. The introduction gives the location of the speeches of Moses as *be'eber hayyarden*—a phrase variously translated as "beyond the Jordan," "east of the Jordan," or "on this side of the Jordan." More specifically, the text locates the speeches as being given in the land of Moab. The exact location seems to be at the northern edge of Moab (32:49; 34:1).

The time of Moses's address was in the fortieth year, on the first day of the eleventh month. The peoples' departure from Egypt appears to mark the beginning of Israel's history. On Mount Sinai, God constituted them into a holy nation (Ex. 19:6). This reference designates how much time had passed since the Exodus (Ex. 12:2). This chronological marker is synchronized with the rest of the Pentateuch (cf. Ex. 16:1; 19:1; 40:17; Num. 1:1; 9:1; 12:11; 33:38). A second chronological marker is that Moses delivered the speeches after the defeat of the two Amorite kings, Sihon and Og, who ruled east of the Jordan (Deut. 1:4). These victories provided concrete proof that when Israel was faithful to Yahweh, He would fight for them.

Moses proclaimed to the Israelites all that Yahweh had commanded him (v. 3). He functioned as an interpreter of the law (1:5), prophet (18:15; 34:10), and pastor (cf. Num. 27:17; Is. 63:11), delivering his final sermon before he passed from the scene. The use of the verb *ba'ar* ("make plain," "explain," or "expound") to designate Moses's activity refers to more than mere verbal exposition. The Hebrew word has links to the Akkadian notion of covenant making in the sense of confirming or putting a legal document into force. Through the exposition and the proclamation of the performance of the covenant renewal rituals implied in the book, the Israelite covenant ratified at Horeb was put into force for the new generation. In this sense, Moses was not just making plain the word of God, but confirming and legalizing it. The expression *hattorah hazzo't* ("this law") characterizes what follows as legal instruction. Moses taught the people (Deut. 4:5, 14; 5:31; 6:1; 31:19), and they learned the Torah (4:10; 5:1; 17:19; 31:12–13). The bulk of the book consists of instruction and exhortation, and when laws are cited, they are surrounded by exhortations.

Deuteronomy involves two kinds of Torah: oral and written. Deuteronomy 1:5 and 4:8 classify Moses's first address as oral. However, within the reports of Moses's second (6:6–9; 11:18–21; 17:18–20; 27:1–8; 28:58–61) and third (29:14–29; 30:8–11) addresses, we find numerous references to a written Torah, which is the transcribed version of his speeches. As if to dispel any doubt about the genre of the book, the introduction concludes with a verb of speech: "saying" (v. 5). Moses stood before the people as pastor, delivering his final sermon at the command of Yahweh and pleading with the Israelites to remain faithful to their God once they crossed the Jordan and settled down in the land promised to their ancestors.

1:6—4:40

Essence of Moses's First Discourse: The Grace of Calling

Moses's first discourse serves as a prologue to the book. Its description of historical events precedes the proclamation of the law in 4:44—28:68. Structurally, this speech is divided into two parts: a retrospective view (1:6—3:29), and an exhortation to obey God's laws (4:1–40). Complemented with a marked shift in style and tone, the transition to the second part is formally signaled by an exhortation to "hear/listen" (4:1). While 1:6—3:29 consists largely of historical collections, 4:1–40 bears a distinct sermonic style, as it is Moses's call for his people not to forsake the Lord and to go after other gods. They both emphasize the importance of obedience to God.

The two parts are linked by at least four theological themes: (1) Yahweh's presence (1:30–33, 42; 2:7; 4:9–14, 36–39) and (2) Yahweh's election of Israel. Although chapter 2 casts a broad vision in which Yahweh allotted lands to the Edomites, Moabites, and Ammonites (2:5, 9, 19), Israel's title to the land was based on the election of the ancestors and the divine promise of land to them (1:8, 21, 35). The rescue of Israel from Egypt was the decisive proof of Israel's elect status (1:27, 30; 3:24; 4:32–33). (3) Obedience was the appropriate response to divine grace. In 1:19, 26–46, obedience means heading for and entering the land of Canaan; in chapter 4, obedience involves adherence to Yahweh's will as revealed at Horeb, especially to the prohibition of idolatry (vv. 1–8, 15–24, 40). (4) The land of Canaan was Yahweh's gracious grant to His chosen people (cf. 1:7–8, 20, 36; 2:29; 3:20, 24–28; and 4:1–5, 21–26, 38–40). To these features we should add Moses's personal references to his experience with the people (1:37; 3:26; 4:21). In developing these themes, Moses told Israel's story backwards in four stages: Yahweh's care and guidance of Israel from Horeb to the plains of Moab (1:6—3:29); Yahweh's revelation of His will (4:1–8); Yahweh's covenant relationship with Israel (4:9–31); and Yahweh's salvation of Israel from the slavery of Egypt (4:32–38). In 4:37, there is a fifth stage: Yahweh's love and election of their ancestors.

By recounting Israel's recent past and concluding with an impassioned appeal, Moses summoned Israel to not rebel like their ancestors (1:6—3:29). Instead, they should respond to Yahweh's amazing grace with wholehearted devotion. Only then would their future be secure (4:39–40).

1:6—2:1. Yahweh's Grace to the Exodus Generation. This passage can be divided into three sections (1:6–33; 1:34–41; and 1:42—2:1) that summarize the relationship between God and Israel from Mount Sinai to the border of the land of Canaan. The passage begins with God's command to Israel to proceed and possess the land of Canaan, His gracious gift to them. When they reached the border of the land, Moses also exhorted them to take possession, but the people disregarded the exhortations of God and Moses, refusing to possess the land because of fear at the report of the spies (1:6–33). This was one of the most grievous sins: the rebellion of the people against the loving grace of the covenant Lord. Consequently, God withdrew His promise to give the land to this rebellious generation of Israelites. He vowed that none of them, except Joshua and Caleb, would enter Canaan, and commanded the people to turn back to the wilderness. When they decided to enter the land of

Canaan and fight for it (1:34–41), God warned them against this plan and left them to their own designs. Without the presence of their covenant Lord, they were defeated by the Canaanites. Disgruntled, they decided to obey God's command and turned back to the wilderness. Their disobedience and lack of faith in God resulted in the refusal to accept and possess the divine gift of the land of Canaan (1:42—2:1). In a sense it could be said that God extended His grace to the Exodus generation by not destroying them immediately. By allowing them to live, God gave them the opportunity to repent before they died as a consequence of their sin.

2:2—3:29. Yahweh's Grace to the New Generation. In order to enter the land, the Israelites were to approach it from the east, which required passing through the territories of five tribal groups: Edom, Moab, Amon, and the Amorite kingdoms of Sihon and Og. Israel was commanded to not harass Moab (2:9). The Moabites and Ammonites were descendants of Lot, the nephew of Abraham (Gen. 19:36–38). Since they and the Edomites were relatives of Israel, and the Lord had given them their land, He did not permit the Israelites to attack them (cf. Deut. 2:4—7:19). Feeling threatened by the presence of the Israelites, the Moabites and the Midianites (also related to Israel, Gen. 25:2) came together and tried to destroy Israel (Num. 22–25). This time God fought for His people, made them victorious, and gave them the land of King Og, which was east of the Jordan, from Aroer to Gilead. Israel was already beginning to possess the promised land; prophecy was being fulfilled.

4:1–40. Yahweh's Grace with the Future in Mind. Moses described how Israel reached the border of Canaan and stressed that the future welfare of the new generation would depend on their obedience to God's Torah. In vv. 2–8, he explained why obedience to the Torah was crucial: (1) The Torah in itself is normative (v. 2), and nothing should be added or deleted from God's word; (2) Obedience to the Lord's word is a matter of life and death (vv. 3–4), as was demonstrated in the experience at Baal Peor when Israel worshiped Baal (Num 25:1–9). All who followed Baal were destroyed, but those who were alive and standing before Moses were those who held fast by making a decisive and irreversible commitment to the Lord. They were a living testimony to the importance of obedience to God's will. (3) Obedience to the Torah was a high privilege (vv. 6–8). It was not a burden imposed on the people; it was a special privilege that would make the surrounding nations envious. They would recognize Israel's status as a great nation. Interestingly, the nations would understand the greatness of Israel as coming from Yahweh, and not from its own qualities.

There was no other nation like Israel (vv. 6–8). Israel was unique because God was near His people, dwelling among them and answering their prayers. When the people who worshiped other gods prayed, their gods remained silent because they could not hear. While Israel's God was not represented by images set up in the temple or in homes, He was near and He heard the cries of His people whenever they cried to Him. Hearing was more important than seeing. Furthermore, the Israelites were privileged because they knew what their God expected of them—righteous living in obedience to laws that were just and righteous. Righteousness was not an abstract norm, but was related to concrete ethical acts that were directed toward the interests of others and that led to a harmony between the people and God. Though the Lord gave them an elevated status, they were not to boast of this, but were to become a blessing and a light to the nations.

In the major section of chapter 4 (vv. 9–31), Moses recollected three main aspects of God's dealing with His covenant people. He mentioned the word "covenant" three times (vv. 13, 23, 31), and this term provides the key to the main idea of this section and to the literary structure of the verses. Each occurrence of the word "covenant" alludes to a particular moment in the covenantal history of Israel with God: the origins of the covenant (vv. 9–14); the essence of the covenant (vv. 15–24); and the permanence of the covenant (vv. 25–31).

With regard to the *origins* of the covenant, the people heard the address of the Lord when they stood at the foot of Mount Sinai. He introduced them to His covenant, which means that He initiated the relationship with Israel. He also identified the covenant partners, defined the terms of the covenant, and determined the consequences for compliance and noncompliance. The difference between this covenant and the Hittite or Assyrian treaties was that the Sinai covenant was not imposed on Israel by an overlord upon a defeated vassal. Out of His great compassion, God had rescued Israel from an oppressive overlord to establish a loving relationship with the people for the sake of their well-being. He then asked the people to fear, or revere and respect, Him and to be in awe of His amazing and mighty saving power. This kind of fear or reverence is grounded in love, which encourages God's people to obey Him and discourages disobedience. John writes about this type of fear when he calls believers to love God as our Father and Friend, and not to fear His judgment (1 John 4:18).

The *essence* of the covenant with Israel is captured in Deuteronomy 4:15–24. Israel knew that God has no form (v. 15). There was no way that one could know how to make an idol that would be an accurate material representation of Him. Another religious perversion that Moses warned against was the worship of the sun, moon, and stars. Ancient Near Eastern people perceived these as representations of divine beings who governed the earth. Moses described five concepts of such worship: raising eyes heavenward, gazing at the heavenly array with devotion, being seduced into thinking that there is more to them than mere celestial bodies, prostrating before them, and submitting as vassals to the gods. The last clause of v. 19 is one of the most difficult in Deuteronomy. Some take it to mean that the Lord assigned heavenly bodies as objects of worship to the nations, while reserving Himself for Israel. First, this interpretation not only goes against the Lord's emphasis on worshiping Him only, but also assumes that the verb "to worship" is implied after the verb "to give/apportion." Second, the fact that the Lord gave them to all the nations means that their role was defined by the Lord. Third, this role is defined in the Creation account of Genesis 1:14–19. These heavenly bodies were not created to be worshiped, but to function as sources of light over the whole earth and to establish times and seasons. These divinely assigned functions are for the benefit of all the nations of the earth.

Verse 20 is the *center* point of the passage. It highlights Israel's special relationship with the Lord: (1) Israel was the product of the Lord's saving actions; (2) Israel was rescued from the iron furnace (used to smelt iron) of Egypt to be God's covenant partner; and (3) Yahweh claimed Israel as His own special possession. The text highlights the Lord's loving relationship with Israel. Verse 24 identifies the Lord's relationship using marital language. God is a "jealous God"—not envious, but jealous to protect His exclusively intimate, marriage-like covenant relationship with His people.

The covenant between God and Israel was to last into the future; it was to be *permanent*. Moses spoke (vv. 25–31) of the future, and his tone became pessimistic. The covenant relationship would disintegrate, and Israel would descend into idolatry. This recognition was so important that Moses called heaven and earth to witness against Israel (v. 26), using the language of a formal treaty/covenant between God and the Israelite nation. Other ancient Near Eastern treaty documents, such as those of Hittite kings, called upon various gods to serve as witnesses to hold treaty partners accountable. Since the Israelites believed in only one God (6:4), Moses instead personified and invoked heaven and earth (from which people could not escape) as witnesses.

Moses's speech was filled with irony and sarcasm as he spoke of the folly of idolatry: instead of the creature worshiping the Creator, the humans worshiped their own creations, idols formed by human hands. If they worshiped idols, the Israelites would face a total disintegration of the relationship between God, the nation, and the land. But suddenly the tone of the speech changed again. According to v. 29, Moses saw a change in the people's disposition. In Exile, when Israel would suffer and worship idols, the people would start to seek God, and He, amazingly, would let Himself be found. Unlike other deities, He is a God without a particular territory; He is the God of personal relationships. A reversal would take place out of distress. In the land of exile, the people would seek their God, He would listen, and they would find Him (vv. 29–30). They would turn back toward their God. Moses assured them that the Lord would not abandon Israel, would not destroy Israel, and would not forget His covenant with their ancestors (v. 31). These are powerful promises that gave shape to a hopeful future.

In vv. 32–40, Moses's first speech reaches its climax. God is incomparable and gracious beyond understanding in the revelation of His will (vv. 1–8) and in His invitation to the covenant relationship (vv. 9–31). Moses called the audience to engage in exhaustive historical research: Has anything like this great event (Israel's salvation) ever happened? Has anybody ever heard about such a thing? Has another nation ever heard the voice of God? If it had, did somebody live to tell about it? Has any other god done what Israel's God has done in taking a people for Himself from the midst of another nation?

Moses declared that Israel's rescue from Egypt was unique and unparalleled in history. Israel's God is unique. He revealed His acts and demonstrated that He alone is God. He chose Israel because He loved their ancestors (v. 37). Love is the basis of the covenant relationship. This was a revolutionary statement in the context of the divine/human covenant relationships of the ANE. Love was the foundation of the Sinai covenant, including the Ten Commandments. Moses appealed to the people to obey the will of God for their own good (v. 40).

4:41–43

Epilogue to Moses's First Discourse

These verses are not part of Moses's address, but are a narrative appendix about the assignment of three cities to provide asylum for those who committed accidental manslaughter. The specific law about the cities of refuge appears in 19:1–13 and Numbers 35:9–34. In Numbers 35:14, the six cities to be chosen included three in the Transjordan. Deuteronomy 4:42, therefore, seems to be an abridgement of 19:3–5.

4:44—29:1

MOSES'S SECOND DISCOURSE: EXPLAINING THE GRACE OF YAHWEH

Before Israel entered the promised land, Moses communicated the laws to the people (Deut. 4:44—28:69). This speech is preceded by a description of the contents of the discourse and its setting (4:44–49). Moses described the historical circumstances under which God gave him the laws to be communicated to Israel (chap. 5). In the preamble, Moses presented the ideological basis of the laws and appealed for their observance (6:1—11:19). He then presented the laws (chaps. 12–26), described the mutual commitments made by God and Israel (26:16–19), and prescribed ceremonies to reaffirm the covenant after they entered the promised land (chap. 27). He finally announced promises and warnings as the consequences for fulfilling or violating the covenant (28:1–68). A subscription concludes the discourse (29:1).

Moses referenced the covenant made at Mount Sinai at the beginning and at the end of the speech (5:2; 28:68). The text sandwiches the core of the discourse within framing passages. Moses preceded and followed the laws with instructions about the ceremonies, reaffirming the covenant (11:29–30; 27). He also repeated the heading to the laws at their conclusion (11:32—12:1; 26:16). Below is the chiastic structure of the second discourse (author's translations):

- **A** "The Lord our God made a covenant with us at Horeb" (5:2)
  - **B** Ceremony at Mount Ebal and Gerizim (11:29–30)
    - **C** "Take care to observe all the laws and rules that I have set before you today. These are the laws and rules that you must carefully observe..." (11:32—12:1)
      - **D** The laws (12:2—26:15)
    - **C′** "The Lord your God commands you this day to observe these laws and rules; take care to observe them..." (26:16)
  - **B′** Ceremonies at Mount Ebal and Gerizim (27)
- **A′** "The covenant which He had made with them at Horeb" (29:1)

4:44–49

Preamble to Moses's Second Discourse

In the speech's preamble, the reference to the Torah—including the testimonies, statutes, and ordinances—points to the covenant stipulations given at Sinai and other regulations delivered during the time in the wilderness. Verse 46 links the speech specifically to the defeat of the Amorite kings.

5:1—26:19

Essence of Moses's Second Discourse: The Grace of the Covenant

Moses's second discourse involved specific legal stipulations. It dealt first with the Ten Commandments (chaps. 5–11), followed by legislation concerning ordinances involved in worship and social interaction (chaps. 12–26). Its text in Deuteronomy is in two parts. The first is largely sermonic (5:1b—11:32), while parts of the second (12:1—29:1) are more formal, making more direct use of previously revealed prescriptions and concluding with covenant blessings and curses. However, Moses's pastoral voice runs throughout the speech. The exhortations were not inserted, as some critical scholars argue. These are vital in determining the genre of the book and are much more extensive in chapters 12–28 than is generally recognized. In the first address, there was a pastoral exhortation to covenant faith, and in the second, there were more detailed pastoral applications of covenant faith and life.

Chapters 5–11 subdivide into three parts, each of which begins with an exhortation to Israel to hear or listen (5:1b; 6:4; 9:1). By word count, these sections increase progressively in length: Deuteronomy 5:1b—6:3 consists of approximately 570 words; 6:4—8:20 has about 830 words; and 9:1—11:32 has approximately 1,150 words. Homiletically, these three parts represent three constituents of authoritative preaching: the Scripture lesson (5:1b—6:3), highlighting the foundations of covenant relationship; the theology arising from the Scripture (6:4—8:20), focusing on the essence of covenant relationship; and the appropriate response arising from that theology (9:1—11:32), demonstrating love for Yahweh as evidence of the covenant relationship. It is fitting that Moses begins this discourse on Yahweh's relationship with Israel by reciting the foundational covenant document, the Decalogue (cf. 4:13). This was the official statement of the covenant, and it fit that time's practice of covenant making. Since most of the younger generation of Israelites had grown up after the original revelation at Sinai, it was especially important for them to hear these words from Moses himself.

5:1–33. Principles of the Covenant Relationship. Moses's purpose in the first five verses was twofold: to challenge the generation he was addressing to take hold of what their parents failed to take hold of at Sinai and to highlight the importance of his teaching. His message was the same as what was revealed at Sinai, and he delivered it as the very message of God. With the opening summons calling Israel to hear/listen, Moses both challenged his hearers to listen and called for obedience to the will of the Suzerain. This summons also introduces the content of Moses's message: the revelation given by Yahweh through Moses at Sinai. As in 4:1, with this summons Moses also declared the goal of his address: the laws were to be learned and rigorously applied. The construction *shamartem la'asotam* ("keep by doing them") in 5:1 contrasts with 4:6, which used finite verbs for both "keep and do." This form in 5:1 occurs often in the book (e.g., 6:3, 25; 8:1) and is reminiscent of Genesis 18:19, where Yahweh calls on Abraham's descendants to keep (*shamar*) the way of Yahweh by doing (*'asah*) justice and righteousness.

Before Moses described the stipulations, he made an exceptional declaration: Yahweh did not make a covenant with their ancestors at Horeb, but with the people standing before Him (vv. 2–3). Verses 4 and 5 plainly state that it was to those present at his address, who were standing at the foot of the mountain, that the Lord spoke face to face. The modern reader may ask the question, "How could Yahweh make a covenant with this generation when some or most of them had not yet been born at the time of the Horeb/Sinai covenant?" Another question may arise concerning the reference in v. 3 to the ancestors. If Moses had in mind the former generation, his statement would seem to some to contradict Exodus 19–24, which clearly shows that God had made a covenant with the Israelites.

The ancestors could refer to the patriarchs, and in this case the contrast would be between the Horeb covenant and the covenant that God renewed with Abram in Genesis 15 (cf. Gen. 17). But Deuteronomy interprets the covenant rituals at Horeb and in Moab as the means by which the patriarchs' descendants were incorporated into the covenant that was originally made with them (cf. Gen. 17:7). It is natural to treat the reference to the ancestors ("fathers") as designating the Exodus generation. The association of the stipulations, decrees, and laws with the descendants of Israel who came out of Egypt (Deut. 4:45) suggests that this was how Moses understood the matter. The reason why this way of describing the covenant in 5:3 is not contradictory is because Moses was calling the new generation to identify itself with the events at Sinai. They were exhorted not to see what happened there as something that happened to their forefathers, the previous generation, but to view it as a covenant the Lord was making with them. They were invited to incorporate themselves into the redemptive history of Israel. Every new generation was to do this through covenant renewals because the covenant was made with Israel. By faith in God's redemptive power, they had been redeemed from Egypt. The new generation stood on the shoulders of the earlier generation, and God's previous speaking was relevant and applicable to them also.

Deuteronomy 5:6–21 recounts the Decalogue of Exodus 20:1–17, but it contains a number of differences and additions. These changes in the Deuteronomy version of the Decalogue were determined by the sermonic nature of the book and the contextualization of the Exodus text for the younger generation of Israelites standing at the border of the promised land (see "The Decalogue in Deuteronomy and Exodus," p. 322).

The Decalogue is foundational for later revelations in the OT. The prophets referred to the Ten Commandments and expounded their relevance when they admonished the people concerning their behavior toward God and each other. The Decalogue itself is cast as a complete entity in Exodus as well as in Deuteronomy. Its structure resembles ancient Near Eastern treaties, which were composed of distinct sections. The Deuteronomy document (as well as the Exodus one) includes its own formal introduction (v. 6), its own discrete number of stipulations (vv. 7–21), and an epilogue (v. 22).

5:6. Historical Prologue of the Decalogue. The prologue is a fundamental part of the covenant document, similar to ancient Near Eastern treaties in which the prologue introduces the suzerain and summarizes the history of the relationship between the two parties of the covenant. Unlike many ancient Near Eastern vassal treaties, however, the Decalogue document does not speak of the suzerain God as conquering and defeating Israel; it does not reflect a superior's military conquest of Israel. Rather, the foundation of this document lies in the gracious actions of a God who rescued His people from those who held them in bondage. In his discourse, Moses addressed the people of Israel as being God's own people by divine grace (v. 6). God's grace created an environment of benevolence toward Israel, expressing His desire for the people's well-being. The law was preceded by grace in the context of the gospel. Obedience to God's terms of well-being as outlined in the following commands represented a supreme response to grace, an act of worship in all aspects of life, involving reverential acts of submission and homage before the divine Sovereign.

The Decalogue in Deuteronomy and Exodus

As already indicated, when Exodus 20:1–17 and Deuteronomy 5:6–21 are compared, a number of differences and additions to the Ten Commandments are evident.

1. *Minor Differences.* Leaving the Sabbath commandment aside for now, we find in the text minor differences. Among them are those that have to do with Hebrew vowels and the conjunction "and" (Heb. *waw*) that links the two clauses. These differences are not abundant and do not in any way affect the meaning of the text.

2. *Significant Variations.* There are a number of places where there are more significant variations between the two accounts, which to a certain extent alter or enrich the sense of the passage. First, Exodus 20:8 has the verb "remember" as the key verb, whereas Deuteronomy 5:12 has the verb "keep." The verb "remember" in Hebrew (*zakar*) has the sense of imprinting or impressing on something, while "keep, observe" (*shamar*) highlights care and stewardship. Second, Exodus 20:16 forbids giving "deceitful" testimony, while Deuteronomy 5:20 broadens this prohibition to "worthless" testimony. Third, there are several differences between Exodus 20:17 and Deuteronomy 5:21 in the prohibition about coveting what belongs to the neighbor. Exodus uses the same verb in both clauses: "desire, covet" (*khamad*). This verb indicates an emotional aspect—a desire or taking pleasure in something. It is sometimes used in a positive sense, but more commonly it suggests an inappropriate or uncontrolled, selfish passion. Deuteronomy uses this verb for the first clause, but uses a different verb (Heb. *'awah*) for "desire" in the second clause. This verb can have a more calculating connotation to it. The other difference between Exodus 20:17 and Deuteronomy 5:21 is the order of items mentioned. Exodus places house first, followed by wife, manservant, maidservant, cattle, donkeys, and anything else. Conversely, Deuteronomy places wife first, followed by house, field, manservant, maidservant, cattle, donkeys, and anything else.

3. *Additions to the Text.* Additions to the Exodus version have resulted in a longer version of the Decalogue in Deuteronomy. Verse 12 (author's translation) contains the extra phrase "as Yahweh your God has commanded you." Verse 14 adds "your cattle or your donkeys" and "so that your male servant and your female servant may rest just like you." Verse 16 includes "as Yahweh your God has commanded you…in order that it may be well for you." And v. 21 contains the extra word "field."

Moses applied the Decalogue to the present and future life of the new generation. His additions were determined by the fact that they are part of a sermon in which he makes the Decalogue particularly relevant to the new generation. In the process, the content of the Decalogue was enriched and nothing was lost. Additionally, in some instances what is implicit in the Exodus text is made explicit in the Deuteronomy text.

5:7–21. Covenant Stipulations in the Decalogue. Moses's speech cast the terms of the covenant as second person singular commands without preconditions or consequences. Except for the Sabbath commandment and the command to honor parents, the stipulations were negative in form, and motive clauses were the exception rather than the rule. To interpret them as the law code for Israel alone would mean to fail in understanding their intention and meaning. They were cast in absolute, universal, and permanent terms. God's covenant document with Israel served to create a worldview intended to govern the relationship between the redeemed and their Redeemer, and between the members of the community. It has been correctly indicated that the Decalogue functioned as a type of constitution that provided the basis for later specifications of the laws as recorded in other parts of the Scriptures.

Furthermore, in Moses's discourse the Decalogue emphasized the responsibility of individuals before God and to each other. God claims exclusive allegiance and worship (vv. 7–10) and requires proper respect (v. 11). Respect is also expected toward one's household members (vv. 12–15), to one's parents (v. 16), and to one's neighbor and their property (vv. 17, 21b). Purity and fidelity in marriage are required (vv. 18, 21a), as well as respect for the property of others (v. 19), and the proper use of our words (v. 20). The first two commands (vv. 7–11) govern the vertical relationship of the Israelite with the Lord, and the last seven govern the horizontal relationship between the members of the community (vv. 16–21). Similar to the Exodus version of the Decalogue, here in Deuteronomy the Sabbath commandment receives prominent status by its central position and great quantity of words. Its theological content emphasizes a Sabbath rest designed for the entire household and is based on the Exodus experience of deliverance from bondage.

As argued previously, the modified formulations of the Deuteronomy version of the Decalogue should be understood on the basis of the sermonic aspect of the book and as a form of contextualization of the Exodus text for the young generation of Israelites standing at the border of the promised land. One of the most significant changes becomes apparent when one studies the Sabbath commandment (see below, "The Sabbath Commandment in Deuteronomy"). The expansion in Deuteronomy involves additions in vv. 12 and 14, concerning the list of all those who were to keep the Sabbath and be affected by Sabbath rest. At the end of v. 12, Moses added the very well-known fulfillment formula, "as the LORD your God commanded you." This formula occurs frequently in the Pentateuch and indicates the execution of a command given directly or indirectly by God. In Deuteronomy 5, the phrase appears three times (vv. 12, 15 [with slight variation], and 16). The three occurrences highlight the proclamation of the ten words.

The Sabbath Commandment in Deuteronomy

The greatest difference—one which has puzzled biblical scholars—between Exodus 20:8–11 and Deuteronomy 5:12–15 concerns the motivation clause for Sabbath observance. The Sabbath commandment in Deuteronomy 5:12–15 replaces the focus on Creation and God's rest on the seventh day (Ex. 20:11) with a focus on Israel's deliverance from Egypt (Deut. 5:15). Here, too, some speak about the changed historical situation of Israel, which was about to enter the promised land and needed to hear the law in applicable words.

1. *The Deliverance Motivation.* In the introduction to the Decalogue in Deuteronomy, Moses already focused on the applicability of the covenant and the covenant law to the new generation (Deut. 5:3). In addition, the deliverance motivation suggests that the Israelites were urged to observe the Sabbath because they were liberated from Egypt, which implies that they should give others the freedom to rest on this day. However, the deliverance motivation for the Sabbath also features prominently in the Sabbath

commandment of the Covenant Code in Exodus 23:12. This text seems to be rooted in the Creation and contains the motif of God's compassionate interest in the liberation of the oppressed. Therefore, the deliverance motivation clause in Deuteronomy 5:14 does not contradict the Creation motive clause in Exodus 20:11. It appears to apply Creation themes such as rest, freedom, and equality to the actual life situation of the new generation of Israel.

2. Length of the Sabbath Commandment. The Sabbath commandment in Deuteronomy contains intricate parallelisms that show the correspondence between the Sabbath and the Exodus. Similar to the Sabbath commandment in Exodus 20, the commandment in Deuteronomy 5 is the longest, being about ten Hebrew words longer. Similar to the original version in Exodus 20, the first part of the Sabbath commandment in Deuteronomy 5 focuses on humanity (5:12–14), and the second part focuses on God, who liberated Israel from slavery (5:15).

The difference in length between the Exodus and Deuteronomy versions of the Sabbath commandment does not change its basic structure. Both versions are consistently marked by the twofold occurrence of the phrase "the Sabbath day" at the beginning and the end.

3. The Sabbath and the Individual. The text states that the Sabbath is given as an explicit command to the individual person. The personal meaning of the Sabbath is expressed four times by the second-person-singular suffix in the phrase "the LORD your God." The following parallel structure shows the importance of the Sabbath as a commandment of the personal God of each individual Israelite:

A "Observe the Sabbath day to keep it holy as the LORD your God [has] commanded you"
  B "The seventh day is a Sabbath to/of the LORD your God"
  B′ "The LORD your God brought you out of/from there"—i.e., Egypt
A′ "The LORD your God commanded you to make/celebrate the Sabbath day"

The fact that the phrase "the LORD your God" is used 308 times in the book of Deuteronomy testifies to its importance (the phrase occurs in Genesis only once, in Exodus twenty-seven times, in Leviticus twenty-six times, and in Numbers six times). Moreover, it is interesting to note that in the account of the Decalogue in Deuteronomy 5:6–21, the personal note is brought into view by the use of the phrase "the LORD your [singular] God," which occurs in this passage nine times: three times in the commandments that precede the Sabbath commandment (vv. 6, 9, 11) and two times in the commandment that follows the Sabbath commandment (v. 16). The cluster of four occurrences of the phrase "the LORD your God" in the Sabbath commandment demonstrates the importance that Moses placed upon the personal relationship between God and every Israelite, and shows the central position of this view, not only in the Sabbath command, but also in the Decalogue itself.

The two lines at the center of the parallel structure, B and B′, draw attention to the heart of the Sabbath commandment: the Sabbath was given by "the LORD your God" who delivered each Israelite individually out of slavery, emphasized again by the second-person-singular suffix of the word He "brought you out" (v. 15). In this way, the commandment expressed the idea that the Sabbath functioned as a personal sign of personal deliverance from Egypt.

Included in the dynamic character of the Sabbath commandment may also be an allusion to the people's oppression as slaves in Egypt, recorded in Exodus 5:1–9. The presence of this allusion might be supported by the chiastic correspondence of the Sabbath and the Exodus event in the commandment, which is mentioned above. In Exodus 5:1–9, the narrative mentions that the people were not allowed to "cease" (*shabat*; Ex. 5:5) from their hard labor, but were afflicted with even more hard work (5:1–9) before God liberated them with "a mighty hand" and "outstretched arm" (Deut. 5:15; cf. Ex. 6:6; 13:9).

4. Sabbath and the Household. Further insight into the text of Deuteronomy 5:12–15 may be gained from its chiastic arrangement. The following chiastic structure displays the same characteristics as the Sabbath commandment in Exodus 20:8–11 with regard to its center focusing on the members of the Israelite household:

A God's command to keep the Sabbath holy
  B Work six days and rest on the seventh day
    C Do no work: you, your children, your male and female servants (mentioned twice), your ox, your donkey, your cattle, or your sojourner
  B′ Remember you were slaves in Egypt, and the Lord brought you out of there
A′ The Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day

A comparison of Deuteronomy 5:12–15 and Exodus 20:8–11 shows that the center of the chiasm is even more specific in Deuteronomy 5:14 (where the ox and donkey are mentioned) than in Exodus 20:10. This reference alludes to or may even be a verbatim quotation of Exodus 23:12, where the ox and the donkey were to rest because of the householder's Sabbath observance. Also, Sabbath "rest" (Heb. *nuakh*) is made more specific in Deuteronomy 5:14 by two references to the male servant and the female servant as equal beneficiaries of Sabbath rest together with the householder himself. Here, the significance of the matter of equality and justice within the Israelite household comes into view and shows the concern of this Sabbath commandment for the equality of each human being, regardless of his or her status in society (see below).

5. Sabbath and Service. The literary structure of the Sabbath commandment in Deuteronomy 5:12–15 emphasizes social and spiritual service. The root *'abad*, "to work, serve," is used four times and is the key word in its chiastic structure:

A You shall serve (v. 13)
  B Your male/female servant shall not do any work (v. 14)
  B′ Your male/female servant shall rest (v. 14)
A′ You were a servant (v. 15)

This arrangement shows the emphasis in the Sabbath commandment upon the act of serving. This emphasis occurs once in verbal form as part of the clause, "six days you shall labor," which corresponds to the reference about the Israelites serving as slaves in Egypt (A / A′). The center of the structure contains two references to the male/female servant and calls for them to not do any work on the Sabbath, which corresponds with resting on the Sabbath (B / B′). This parallel arrangement, built upon the word "serve," shows that the state of slavery in Egypt paralleled the six days of weekly labor. This suggests the interpretation of the Sabbath as a sign of deliverance from slavery. In other words, the Sabbath corresponded to the Exodus as an act of redemption. Because of this, every Israelite was called to service.

6. "Remember" and "Keep/Observe" the Sabbath. The verb that introduces the Sabbath commandment in Deuteronomy 5:12–15 has a variety of nuances in the Hebrew language: "watch, guard, observe, fulfill, keep, keep watch, spy out." Its grammatical form in Hebrew is an infinitive absolute (*shamor*), which is similar to the infinitive absolute of "remember" (*zakor*) in Exodus 20:8. Whereas "remember" connotes the commemoration of the Sabbath as a day of celebration and historical remembrance, "observe" is used for the fulfilling of obligations regarding the Sabbath in the context of obeying the law of the covenant. Moses changed the verbs because he was introducing a complementary motivation. The Exodus event is to be remembered as an act of divine deliverance. In Jewish understanding, the different verbs ("remember" in Exodus and "observe" in Deuteronomy) are linked to the different motivation clauses, but are not mutually exclusive. They serve different functions: the Exodus commandment explains the origin of the Sabbath so that the motivation is to remember our Creator, while the Deuteronomy commandment explains its aim to identify God as Redeemer and offers another motive for observing it.

One more insight in regard to the infinitive absolute form of the verb "to observe/keep" is that Deuteronomy contains only five infinitive absolute forms of the verb "observe." The first occurs in the Sabbath commandment in Deuteronomy 5:12, followed by two such forms complemented or intensified by the repetition of the same verb (a common way in Hebrew to emphasize an action). Thus in Deuteronomy 6:17 and 11:22, the Hebrew word can be translated as "observe diligently" (lit. "observe observing"); in these two cases the reference is to all of God's commandments. The fourth infinitive absolute of "observe" occurs in the Passover commandment in 16:1, and the fifth is about observing all of God's commandments (27:1). The significance of the usages of this particular verbal form is that out of the call to the Israelites to observe all the commandments, only two specific laws are singled out, namely, the Sabbath and the Passover, the latter directly related to the Exodus from Egypt. The great significance of Israel's redemption from Egypt would lend itself, on the lips of Moses, to be another reason for Sabbath observance.

The use of the infinitive absolute of the verb "to observe" in the book of Deuteronomy corresponds to the use of the same verbal form of the verb "to remember" in the book of Exodus. "To remember" is used in only two passages in Exodus, namely, for the Passover festival (Ex. 13:3) and for the Sabbath (20:8). Both events have to do with origins: the creation of everything and the liberation/creation of God's people. Both events are to be remembered through obedience to the Lord's law. While "remember" characterizes the Sabbath and the Passover festival of the Exodus from Egypt in terms of the covenant and its promises made to Israel's forefathers, the infinitive absolute of "observe" in Deuteronomy identifies and regulates the Sabbath and the Passover festival in terms of the law of the covenant. The new generation of Israelites is especially urged to observe the law of God out of love and total devotion to Him (Deut. 6:5–6; 11:13).

7. Keep It Holy and Celebrate. The Sabbath commandment in Deuteronomy 5:12–15 displays a parallelism between the specific verbs (also infinitives), "to keep it holy," "to make," or "to celebrate."

Deut. 5:12 "Observe the Sabbath day *to keep it holy* as the LORD your God [has] commanded you."

Deut. 5:15 "You shall remember.... Therefore the LORD your God commanded you *to celebrate/observe* the Sabbath day."

The parallelism between these two lines is substantiated by two identical clauses, "the Sabbath day" and "the LORD your God commanded you." The analogy between these two forms concerns a Sabbath observance that aims toward Sabbath holiness by remembering the Creator God who acted with "a mighty hand and an outstretched arm" (v. 15) when He brought Israel out of Egypt. "Therefore," the commandment continues, "you are *la'asot* (from *'asah*, —"to do/make") the Sabbath." Contextually, *'asah* expresses the idea of "observing" and "celebrating." The parallelism between the verbs "to sanctify" and "to observe/celebrate" alludes to their close relationship in the Sabbath text in Exodus 31:12–17. Here, the text also uses the verb *'asah* in the same form and states that the sons of Israel are to make the Sabbath a day that is "holy to the Lord" in order to know that the Lord makes them holy. This text makes an even stronger point by suggesting that "observe/celebrate" the Sabbath has an existential meaning for human beings in a covenant relationship with God: whoever would profane the Sabbath would be put to death and be cut off from his people.

The analogy that exists between the verbs "sanctify" and "observe/celebrate" has further implications for differentiating the nature of the Sabbath and the Passover in the book of Deuteronomy. The Sabbath was to be observed by humans in order to keep it holy, and the Passover was to be observed and celebrated as well:

Sabbath	Observe to keep it holy by observing/celebrating (Deut. 5:12)
Passover	Observe and celebrate (Deut. 16:1)

While both festival days were to be observed and celebrated as a remembrance of God's deliverance, the intent of the Sabbath is emphasized by its holiness; for it was to be the day of a holy God, "the LORD your God."

8. Sabbath and the New Creation. The Sabbath commandment in Deuteronomy 5:12–15 addresses the individual Israelite as a human being delivered from slavery in Egypt and personally calls each one to remember his or her deliverance and therefore observe the Sabbath to keep it holy. The individual Israelite delivered from slavery experienced a new beginning marked by the gift of freedom and Sabbath rest. He or she was in a way a new creation, similar to the first created human being described in Genesis 1:26–29. The liberation of Israel from Egypt was the starting point of a new creation that parallels the creation of the human race in Genesis 1–2. Israel, as a liberated people, was God's new creation. This concept occurs frequently in the prophets and is often associated with the new creation after the Exile (cf. Is. 40:26; 42:5; 43:1, 7, 15; Mal. 2:10). This new creation is rooted in God's election of Abraham and his family (Gen. 12:1–3). In this sense, the Sabbath links the cosmic creation of the world to the establishment of a people who were to reflect the image and holiness of God (Ex. 19:6).

The Sabbath commandment addressed the individual Israelite (whether male or female) with the appeal of the law, which has its place in the heart and calls one to love the Lord with heart, soul, and strength (Deut. 6:5). This same law of the heart is a reminder and asks for obedience to all of God's commands, including a Sabbath observance aiming for Sabbath holiness. In following the law out of love for the Creator, the newly created human being will receive the gift of Sabbath rest and Sabbath holiness, and imitate the Creator's Sabbath observance, which testifies to the holiness of this day and to the sanctifying power of the God of the Sabbath.

9. Sabbath, Gender, and Class Distinction. The Sabbath carries high significance in regard to the question of gender and class distinction in Israelite society. In differentiating the household members by gender and social class, God placed each member at the same level in regard to the Sabbath, perhaps pointing to His ideal for the human race. His ways of dealing with distinctions in society have always been such as to mitigate their potential abuses, even while apparently tolerating some of those distinctions. This gender and class leveling during the Sabbath was highly significant, because it was given to a people who existed in a millennia-old world of hierarchical male dominance. In Exodus 20:10, seven household members are mentioned to make the house complete, with five categorized by their gender. With regard to the first "you"—a second person masculine singular—some have wondered why the wife is not part of the list.

A contextual reading of the Ten Commandments shows that they address each individual in Israel, including women and children, with a masculine singular "you." Otherwise it would mean that only males have to obey the Ten Commandments. One of the most important reasons for understanding the inclusion of the wife in the masculine "you" of the Sabbath keeper is the principle of embeddedness in Israelite society, which is based on the creation order of husband and wife to become "one flesh" (Gen. 2:24). This principle becomes visible in the Hebrew Bible by the free use of the masculine grammatical form without specification of gender unless it is used to refer to a definite, particular person.

The second and third gender-defined household members in the Sabbath commandment are the son and daughter. It is truly revolutionary that God, giving the commandment, identified the children by gender, "your son...your daughter." Even more surprising is the fact that the slaves were also differentiated by gender: "your male servant...your female servant." God spoke of each as an individual in His Sabbath address. In speaking to a community that was shaped by the paradigm of hierarchical, patriarchal power, the Sabbath opened the mind of the Israelite man and woman, son and daughter, male and female servant to a diametrically opposed model—the Creator's prototype. For the Sabbath is the Lord's, and when male and female keep this day, they equally personify the "image and likeness" model established during the Creation week.

The Sabbath's significance for equality is even more emphatic in the Deuteronomy Sabbath commandment. It was reiterated by Moses after the establishment of the Levitical priesthood. The Sabbath commandment in Deuteronomy 5:12–15 contains a more detailed list than the one in Exodus 20:8–11 in that it distinguishes nine entities (you, your son, your daughter, your male servant, your female servant, your ox, your donkey, all your cattle, and your stranger) and places emphasis on the rest of the male and female servants through repetition (Deut. 5:14). The commandment shows that God's concern and kindness toward animals is to be imitated by the Israelites. Furthermore, the importance of this list lies in remembering that Israel was a nation saved from slavery. The worldly bonds of dominance and hierarchical power were broken, and Israel was called to witness to this event in its weekly Sabbath celebrations, with a message of equality and inclusion to all the surrounding living beings. The Sabbath told every Israelite man and woman that they were set free from the bonds of any kind of slavery. They existed as human beings in direct relation to God, and each individual was placed into relational bonds with others who had the same privileges, rights, status, and opportunities. Over the course of millennia of slavery, hierarchical authority, and discrimination, the Sabbath has always carried its message forward and has remained God's standard for all cultures in all circumstances.

10. The Sabbath Is the Lord's Day. Finally, the Sabbath commandment reminds us that the day, in the sense of created time, belongs to the Creator God. Exodus 20:10a and Deuteronomy 5:14a are reminders of divine lordship and ownership, and point back to Creation. This insight has much to say to today's contemporary culture in which time is too often identified with accomplishments, and the individual is measured by his or her achievements. God has a different way of computing, measuring, and categorizing time. His Creation laws are recognized in rhythm of time that is distinct from our own perception and from life in a postmodern world. For Him the seventh day Sabbath is unique and imbued with rich blessings for those who keep it holy.

5:22–33. Epilogue. Based on a comparison with ancient treaties, many consider v. 22 to be the introduction to the next literary section that extends from 5:22 to 6:3. However, this verse is best understood as the conclusion to Moses's recitation of the Decalogue (cf. Ex. 24:12–18; 31:18). Moses mentioned the affirmative response of the people to God's grand revelation at Sinai, including their fear and the request for Moses to be their mediator (vv. 22–27). The Lord's voice was heard (vv. 28–31) accepting the people's commitment of obedience. Moses, the mediator, exhorted the covenant community to a life of obedience toward the Lord, the source of the commandments (vv. 32–33).

6:1—11:32

Proclaiming the Covenant Relationship

Chapter 6 continues Moses's second charge to the Israelites, in which he called them to acknowledge God as the teacher of the commands (6:1–2). He then discussed the third charge for the people to become doers of the commands. After reciting the Scripture in the form of the Decalogue, Moses launched into a theological exposition of that text. His primary goal in the first major part of the second address (6:4—11:32) was to impress on the people the privilege and the sheer grace of the special relationship they enjoyed with Yahweh. This grace was not to be received casually, however; it was to be embraced with grateful and unreserved devotion to their Redeemer and covenant Lord.

6:1–25. The Centrality of Torah Study. Deuteronomy 6:4–25 is formed by four units: (a) 6:4–9, (b) 6:10–15, (c) 6:16–19, and (d) 6:20–25. Thematically, these paragraphs fall into a parallel pattern: paragraphs (a) and (d) reference teaching God's words and instructions to one's children; paragraphs (b) and (c) warn against forgetting God and His providence, and against testing His ability to provide. Paragraphs (c) and (d) emphasize the reward for obedience and the role of the laws in expressing and instilling reverence for God; they point to the introductory section in 6:1–3 and create a frame for the entire chapter.

6:4–9. The Shema. Verses 4 and 5 are identified to the core of the Shema, a name that is derived from the Hebrew word for "hear." The Shema is the sum total of all the statutes, which the Israelites were to abide by and teach to subsequent generations. This section displays a meaningful structure. First, there is a proclamation containing three words that apply to God's covenant stipulations: *mitswah*—"command," *khoq*—"decree" or "statute," and *mishpat*—"judgments," "rules,"

or "laws" (v. 1). These stipulations were given as a guarantee for a prolonged life. Then, Moses emphatically appealed to his people to listen and be careful (v. 3). The metaphorical words used to describe the land—as one that was flowing with milk and honey—capture the notion of a strong desire for a bountiful, lavish place, a place so different from the wilderness where the people had lived and wandered for forty years. The land that lay in front of them would overflow with blessings.

Scholars debate the grammar, syntax, and etymology of the words used in this passage. Unquestionably, these words aimed, according to the context, at the innermost being of the listeners—at their heart (vv. 4–6). From there the words would impact the world of the family, reaching far to the outmost limits (the gates; v. 9).

The term "gates" certainly does not set limits on the impact of these powerful words concerning the only God of Israel. For "your gates" were not the borderline for God; they were meeting places to enter into dialogue with other individuals. The gates were exits into the world for lovers of God and humans; they were entry points for outsiders to be drawn in and experience God's love. "Your gates" surely hold opportunities for God as well as challenges for the lovers of God.

The problem with v. 4 is that it contains two clauses without a verb, and translators are expected to supply one. Linguistic studies indicate that in such cases the verb "to be" is usually inserted. What follows represents the main translations proposed by scholars:

"Hear, O Israel, Yahweh our God; Yahweh is one."

"Hear, O Israel, Yahweh our God is one Yahweh."

"Hear, O Israel, Yahweh is our God; Yahweh is one."

"Hear, O Israel, Yahweh is our God; Yahweh is one/unique."

"Hear, O Israel, Yahweh is our God, Yahweh alone."

The Hebrew word for "one" used in the Shema is also used for man and woman in Genesis 2:24—they become "one flesh." This majestic proclamation emphasizes the essential oneness of God. He had already been known to be the only God (cf. 4:35, 39). There are passages where the plurality of God is implied in the OT (e.g., the plural pronouns in Gen. 1:26–27). Also, there are passages where the Angel of the Lord is clearly a reference to a divine being who *is also* Yahweh (see Gen. 6:7–14; 22:11–18; 31:11–13; Ex. 3:2–6; 14:19; 23:20–23; Judg. 2:1–5; 13:2–23; Hos. 12:3–5; Mal. 3:1). Furthermore, the messianic prophecies imply the divinity of the Anointed One (e.g., Is. 9:6; Mic. 5:2). In the NT, the plurality of God is also clearly indicated or implied (Matt. 28:19–20; John 1:1–3; 14:16–18; Acts 5:3–4; Col. 1:15–20; Heb. 9:14). As a result, the unity and oneness of God mentioned here would not exclude the plurality of the holy Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (see Matt. 28:19). This is the mystery of three persons who are yet one deity (cf. Col. 1:19; 2:9). The oneness of God would also include the idea that He is the only one for His people (cf. Zech. 14:9, for all peoples). This is the concept behind the First Commandment (Deut. 5:7; Ex. 20:3). Israel's worship of idols—as attested during the monarchy, and lamented and condemned by the prophets—is astonishing in light of their testimony to the monotheistic concept of God over the course of millennia.

The recitation of the Shema had legal implications. It enjoined the people to remain true to their calling. It was a committal to follow a declaration that was true and firmly established. It had the force of an oath solemnly affirming that the obligation just recited was valid and binding in every way. Furthermore, the Shema emphasized the response that God expects from his people. The first verb, the imperative "hear," occurred in a series of subsequent imperatives: love, impress or teach, talk, bind, and write. Its binding importance is reflected in the Gospels.

A scribe approached Jesus and asked which commandment was the greatest or most significant, and He responded quoting the Shema as well as Leviticus 19:34 (Mark 12:29–31). Jesus stated further that all the Law and the Prophets were based on these two commands. To love God with all the soul (v. 5) is the driving force behind obedience to all the statutes and ordinances given by Him for the welfare of His people. Jesus regarded the principles of love for God and for other human beings as the basis of Scripture. The Ten Commandments provide principles based on two kinds of love. The fact that love is foundational should not surprise us because the Bible expresses the character of God in terms of love (1 John 4:8).

The Shema is one of the most important identifications in Judaism. Its liturgical significance is reflected in the fact that it appears immediately after the Decalogue in the Nash Papyrus, a second-century B.C. liturgical text, and in a first-century phylactery text from Cave 8 at Qumran, where the Shema is written in a rectangle and surrounded by other texts. To this day, Orthodox Jews recite the Shema as part of their prayers when they wake up and before they fall asleep (cf. according to the instruction in v. 7). In so doing, they take "the yoke of the kingdom," which means that they place themselves under the sovereignty and kingship of Yahweh. Some Jewish groups take the command of v. 8 to mean that God's written laws should be literally bound to the body. Others have understood these instructions as a symbolic emphasis of the need to remember well the commands of God (as in Ex. 13:9, 16, on remembering the events of the Exodus). In any case, placing God's laws on the hand and head highlights the importance of doing and thinking about them (cf. Ezek. 9:4; Rev. 7:3; 13:16).

6:10—8:20. Challenges of Faith. In Deuteronomy 6:10 and 8:20, Moses forecast the challenges that his people would endure as a result of their loyal confession to God. Some scholars suggest that the structure of this section is developed on the basis of internal and external tests arranged according to an ABA order. The internal tests are in 6:10–25 and 8:1–20, and the external are in 7:1–26. Whereas 6:4–5 embodies the central idea of love for God, the rest of the section (chaps. 6–8) responds to the question, "What does it mean to be totally committed to God?" Moses presented his audience with the challenges that come as a result of unreserved loyalty to God.

Deuteronomy 6:10–25 contains an internal test and the answer to it. Israel was warned not to forget their loyalty to the Lord once they entered into the prosperous land of Canaan. They were not to follow the gods of the people surrounding them. The solution to this potential test or temptation is given in vv. 20–25. In this passage, Moses tried in different ways to impress upon the people the importance of loyalty to God. Obedience to the different laws was to be firmly grounded in the Lord's saving acts. In other words, it was all predicated on His grace.

Deuteronomy 7:1–26 presents the external test that the people of Israel would face when they reached Canaan. The chapter describes the Gentile nations as the greatest danger to Israel's loyalty to God. The Israelites were forbidden to enter into covenantal relationships with the nations or to intermarry with them. They were commanded to eliminate the Canaanite population. This latter policy is known as the *kherem* ordinance and is based on the Hebrew word for "destroy, ban, devote for destruction" (see below, "The Extermination of the Canaanites"; see also "Holy Warfare," p. 372). Some find in it a reference to ritual sacredness and argue that *kharam* means "to reserve for divine service." This last meaning is far from certain. The regulation was intended to preserve both the Israelites' holiness and God's plan for them in a world of threatening idolatry and corruption.

Deuteronomy 8:1–20 contains the third challenge of faith that the Israelites would encounter in the promised land. The chiastic structure of this chapter highlights the importance of not forgetting to keep the commandments of the Lord when life is good and full of satisfaction. At that time, God would test His people to know what

The Extermination of the Canaanites

In their response to one of the most problematic texts in all of Scripture, the early church fathers tended to interpret Deuteronomy 7 allegorically. Modern scholars ascribe the chapter's harsh policies (cf. also chap. 20) to a primitive mindset that lacked the ethical and religious ideals preached by later prophets and that was inferior to those of Jesus in the NT (Matt. 5:44; Luke 6:27, 35). Other scholars hold to the concept of progressive revelation in the sense that God adapted the prevailing practices of the time to His own agenda, which consisted of establishing a future society free from violence. This raises questions about divine consistency and seems to either support Marcion's heretical assertion that the God of Israel and the God of the NT were two different Gods, or that God is the same in both, flexible in desiring an idealistic universe, but

working for the time being in the realistic universe of sin.

1. God as the Agent. It has been suggested, based on Exodus 23:20–33, that the destruction of the Canaanites was not a prescription for the Israelites, but was given as God's pledge that He Himself would exterminate the Canaanites. He would do this by sending His terror ahead of the people when they entered the promised land. He would confuse the Canaanites, make them run, send hornets ahead of Israel's army, drive out the Canaanite nations, and deliver them into the hands of Israel. All of these actions would not happen immediately, but would be implemented by God "little by little" (vv. 29–30; Deut. 7:22).

2. God as Indirect Agent. Furthermore, it is important to note that Exodus 23 does not use the word *kherem* to speak of the total destruction of the Canaanite nations, but employs another Hebrew word (*kakhad*) with the connotations of hiding, keeping something back, effacement, and nonexistence. This word occurs in Exodus 23:23 and is usually translated as "I will completely destroy them" or "I will cut them off." However, its grammatical form in Hebrew is causative (*hiphil*) and could denote God acting indirectly through afflictions that would cause the Canaanites to destroy themselves. The divine activities listed above support this latter reading. The reason for the legislation was given: the Canaanites would cause Israel to sin against God (23:33).

3. Israel as Agent. Deuteronomy 7, on the other hand, focuses on Israel's active partnership with God after they entered Canaan. In this instance, Moses placed much emphasis upon the reason for the Canaanites' destruction, namely to safeguard Israel's holiness and fidelity in regard to God. Ethnic purity was not at all in the purview of the legislation. However, the war policy of Deuteronomy 7 raises serious ethical questions, especially for a postmodern reader: How could a God who claims to be gracious and merciful command the extermination of whole populations?

Consideration of the biblical *kherem* policy needs to take into account that if Deuteronomy 7 is to be interpreted in terms of total annihilation, the Israelites should have been completely destroyed because their failure to enforce *kherem* meant its application to them (see vv. 4 and 26). But even in Deuteronomy, Moses foresees the failure of Israel and indicates that they would not be completely destroyed, but that a remnant would survive God's judgment of the Exile (4:29–31; cf. 30:1–10). Total extermination does not necessarily mean the literal extermination of all.

4. Its Implementation in Joshua. The conquest narratives in the book of Joshua cause some to cast doubt on a literal interpretation of the *kherem* ordinance that would have required the total, not partial, extermination of the Canaanite population. The case of the Gibeonites is certainly unique, but remains a good example. Although they feared that the Israelites would execute the policies of Deuteronomy 20:15–18 (see Josh. 9), they were not exterminated because they abandoned their idolatry and converted to the Lord. Although they were Canaanites, the divine command to destroy the *idolatrous* Canaanites did not apply to them. The accounts in Joshua and Judges suggest that the *kherem* ordinance was carried out in only four places: Jericho (Josh. 6:24), Ai (8:28), Hazor (11:13–14), and Laish (Judg. 18:27; cf. Josh. 19:47). This accords with the archaeological record, which does not present evidence for a widespread destruction of Canaanite cities, and it accords with texts in Deuteronomy, which mention that the Israelites would inherit cities that they did not build—cities that were intact, great, and splendid (Deut. 6:10–11). The text also makes it clear that the Hebrews made a mistake by not driving out or exterminating all the idolatrous inhabitants of Canaan (Judg. 1:27—2:4).

5. Fundamental Principles. When dealing with this subject, we should first remember that the *kherem* policy was driven neither by hate for other nations nor by ethnic concerns. The reason for the policy was the elimination of all rivals to God, who holds supreme power over Israel. Under His authority there was no room for compromise with the gods of other nations. In addition, these nations were being destroyed because of their recalcitrance and wickedness. God had allowed hundreds of years of probationary time for the Canaanites to accept His love and forgiveness, but they would not (see Gen. 15:16; Deut. 9:4–5). The uncompromising nature of God had been declared in the command of the Shema (6:4–5) and in the first two of the Ten Commandments (5:6–9).

Second, the inheritance records and the farewell speech in the book of Joshua (Josh. 13–21, 23) testify to the concept put forth in Exodus 23:20–33 concerning the initiative and activity of God in freeing the land from the Canaanite nations (Josh. 23:3; and vv. 4–13). In addition, Joshua directly referred to Deuteronomy 7 (the religious concept of war, the prohibition of covenant making with the Canaanites, and intermarriage). In a theocracy, war and destruction took place in order to eliminate idols and their worship. Biblical theocracy strove toward a society that lived uncompromisingly under the government of the supreme God.

was in their hearts (v. 2). Notice the structure of the passage:

- **A** Observe the commandments and prosper (v. 1)
  - **B** The wilderness and the manna (vv. 2–4)
    - **C** Observe the commandments in prosperity (vv. 6–10)
    - **C′** Do not forget the Lord in prosperity (vv. 11–14)
  - **B′** The wilderness and the manna (vv. 15–16)
- **A′** Remember and do not forget the Lord or you will perish (vv. 18–20)

The threat was to forget that goodness and well-being come from the Lord and not by chance. The gift of food and the sustenance of life are from the Creator God. Moses appealed five times to the people to keep alive the memory of Yahweh's miraculous actions in the wilderness (vv. 2, 11, 14, 18, 19). The remembrance of God's goodness in the past strengthens our hope and faith in the present. The notion of remembering played a key theological role in Moses's speech. The main charge was to keep the commands of Yahweh by walking in His ways and fearing Him (vv. 6, 11). Moses's dramatic descriptions of the Israelite experience in the wilderness heightened the nature of the test and called for a personal commitment to the Lord.

9:1—11:32. Disputations. The opening words, "Hear, O Israel!" (9:1), signal the beginning of the third major section (9:1–11:32) of Moses's second address to Israel (4:45—26:19). This large section can be divided according to its temporal vision, which shifts inconsecutively from Israel's future (9:1–6), to the past (9:7–10:11), to the present (10:12–11:1), back to the past (11:2–7), forward to the future (11:8–25), and ends at the present (11:26–32).

Deuteronomy 9:1—10:11 is a self-contained literary subunit featuring Moses looking forward to the crossing of the Jordan (9:1). He demonstrated that the future of Israel was grounded in the events of the past when Yahweh commanded him to lead the people away from Sinai/Horeb and toward the possession of the land He had promised to their ancestors (10:11). The appeal between these two events is composed of stories about Israel's time in the wilderness, their rebellions, the way the Lord handled their wayward actions, and their relationship with each other. All these parts of the text are held together by the temporal phrase "forty days and forty nights." This phrase occurs nine times in the OT and five times here: it took forty days and forty nights (1) for the Lord to deliver the Ten Commandments to Moses (9:9–10), (2) for the Israelites to prove the shallowness of their covenant commitment when they worshiped the golden calf (9:11–17), (3) for Moses to deal with the sin of the people and his own (9:18–21), (4) for Moses's plea before the Lord not to annihilate His people (9:25—10:5), and (5) to receive the assurance that the Lord would not destroy His people and to hear the order to march toward the promised land (10:10–11). It was a period of time that led to new beginnings—good or bad.

The elevated style of 10:12—11:1 suggests that Moses's second speech was nearing a climax. The use of *we 'attah*—"and now" (10:12) signals a climactic moment, similar to 4:1, when Moses introduced the section of commandments and statutes. With the words recorded in 10:12, Moses stressed the moral and spiritual implications of a covenant relationship with the Lord. He used the rhetorical marker "and now" before his opening question, "What does the LORD your God ask [or "require"] of you?" (10:12a). Moses answered (11:1), but also gave a preliminary answer (10:12b). It contained two main ideas: they were to fear the Lord, their God, and to serve Him with full heart and soul. In general, Moses provided three answers to the opening question: (1) allegiance to the Lord expressed by a fundamental disposition to fear and love, followed by obedience to the God of the covenant; (2) circumcision of the heart as a true sign of the Israelites belonging to the Lord (not merely the outer sign of circumcision instituted in Genesis 17); and (3) unqualified devotion to the Lord. Moses then tied the three responses together in the final climactic response that linked it back to the Shema (11:1; cf. 6:5).

Deuteronomy 11:2–28 is a complex passage of historical recollections and theological expositions and exhortations. The text is characterized by frequent repetitions, interruptive appositions, and parenthetical comments. From Moses's preacher's perspective, this style was most suited to impress the audience with his message. From a structural point of view, the passage has a break between vv. 7 and 8 as Moses moved from recollections of history to exhortation.

Moses presented lessons from history (vv. 2–7) as he reviewed God's mighty acts against Pharaoh and what He did to Dathan and Abiram when the earth opened and swallowed them. Moses included in his speech references to the land (vv. 8–12) for which God constantly cared, as His eyes were continually on it (v. 12). The land was God's climactic gift to Israel; it was the fulfillment of His promise to their ancestors (Gen. 17:8; Ex. 3:6–8; 6:8). This gift challenged the people to remain faithful to God (Deut. 11:13–21), who provided for the fruitfulness of the land. If they were faithful to the Lord, they would possess the land from the wilderness to Lebanon, from the River Euphrates to the Mediterranean Sea (v. 24). But they would have to decide whether to receive the blessings or the curses that were embedded in the covenant relationship with the Lord (vv. 26–28).

Deuteronomy 11:29–32 closes this portion of Moses's second speech (8:1—11:32) with a reference to the covenant blessings and curses. This passage looks forward and anticipates the covenant ceremony that would take place with the reading of the blessings on Mount Gerizim, and with the reading of the curses on Mount Ebal. In his brief speech, Moses described the ceremony with only nine words in the Hebrew text (v. 29b). It would occur soon because, as Moses emphatically indicated, they would cross over the Jordan to enter and possess the land (v. 31). Moses concluded this section of his second speech with a most contemporary appeal: the laws and decrees were set before the Israelites "today": these decrees were to be obeyed.

12:1—26:19

Proclaiming the Dimensions of the Covenant Relationship

In this new section of the second speech, Moses dealt with the vertical and horizontal dimensions of the covenant obligations. The dominant theme recorded in Deuteronomy 12:2—14:21 is the vertical relationship with the Lord; the theme appearing in 15:19–16:21 is primarily about human concerns. These vertical/horizontal dimensions were to teach the people that the worship of God and everyday life are intertwined. To come before the Lord with offerings and sacrifices means nothing if familial or neighborly relationships are not cleared of all burdens and strains. Acceptable worship to the Lord asks for fidelity in horizontal relationships.

Deuteronomy 12:1 introduces a new section (12:1–26:19), which is composed of a formal series of laws, and 26:16–19 is its formal conclusion. The covenant obligations found here are very similar to those found in the Book of the Covenant (Ex. 20:22—23:19). They are similar in structure, and their opening and closing sections resemble each other. An outline of the material, based on the content of these two passages, helps the reader to grasp the flow of thought. A chiastic structure occurs in both law sections, with the principles of worship framing the different laws:

- **A** Principles of worship highlighting Israel's cultic expression of devotion to Yahweh (Ex. 20:23–26; Deut. 12:2—16:17)
  - **B** Casuistic and apodictic laws highlighting Israel's ethical expression of devotion to Yahweh (Ex. 21:1—23:9; Deut. 16:18—25:19)
- **A′** Principles of worship highlighting Israel's cultic expression of devotion to Yahweh (Ex. 23:10–19; Deut. 26:1–15)

But these parallels, useful as they are, do not do complete justice to the extent and scope of the passage in Deuteronomy. The sermonic tone and style portray Moses as a preacher, as is also the case in chapters 6–11. While he drew on the specific laws and regulations that Israel received at Sinai, his aim was more pastoral than legislative.

In terms of the flow of this speech (Deut. 12–16), Moses began with the nation's direct obligations to the Lord (12:2—16:17). After presenting the vertical dimension—their relationship with the Lord—Moses moved to the horizontal dimension and gave instructions about the offices through which the Lord would exercise His kingship once the people settled in the promised land (16:18—21:9). Then, he included a section on the family (21:10—22:30), reminded the people of the boundaries of the covenant community (23:1–8), gave regulations regarding different aspects of Israelite life (23:9—25:19), and ended with instructions for worship, returning to the vertical dimension (26:1–15). By adopting the vertical/horizontal dimension and structuring his speeches accordingly, Moses, the pastor, taught his congregation that worship and daily life are intricately intertwined. Acceptable vertical expressions of covenant faithfulness are preconditioned by fidelity in horizontal relationships, which offer opportunities for the corporate celebration of the vertical.

12:2–14. Worship at the Sanctuary. The limitation of sacrificial worship to a single place is the most unique and far-reaching law in Deuteronomy. It affected the religious life of individuals, the sacrificial system, the way festivals were celebrated, the economic status of the Levites, and the judicial system of Israel. Aside from the triannual celebrations at the central sanctuary, religious activities such as prayer and study were to take place in people's lives throughout the year.

In his expositions about the obligations of the people to the Lord (12:2—16:17), Moses employed a positive and appealing strategy: he introduced the obligations by inviting the people to celebrate the presence of the Lord in the promised land (12:2–14). There were negative charges, like the command to purge the land from Canaanite idol worship (vv. 2–4, 8–9), interpolated with positive invitations and instructions to worship the Lord, (vv. 5–7, 10–12). The invitation that families were to gather and eat together in the place that the Lord would choose for worship is especially beautiful and brings out the meaning of ancient fellowship practices as the culmination of covenant making rituals (Gen. 31:54; Ex. 24:5–11). At Mount Horeb, only a small privileged leadership circle had the opportunity to eat in the presence of the Lord (Ex. 24:9, 11). Here, Moses opened the invitation to everyone. Worship is a joyful practice; it calls for celebration and communion among all participants.

Interestingly, Moses used language reminiscent of the Sabbath commandment to call the congregation to worship and joyful fellowship at the sanctuary (Deut. 12:12; cf. v. 18). The equality and inclusivity of the Sabbath in regard to social status and gender were placed at the forefront by Moses's use of this language. Male and female slaves were invited to worship together with sons and daughters and were to receive the same treatment. The Levites were not given higher authority or even a place of honor at the table, but they were to gather like the others to enjoy a meal before the Lord (Deut. 12:18).

For the contemporary readers of this text, Deuteronomy 12:1–14 offers some elements of a theology of worship: (1) The Lord, the Creator of heaven and earth, is the Redeemer of humankind and the only one who can legitimately receive our praises. All other objects are illegitimate, even abominable. (2) The purpose of worship is to please the Lord, and this is to happen with humility and awe before God in the course of the lives of the worshipers (Ps. 15; 24; Is. 1:2–17; Mic. 6:6–8). (3) The location of worship, important as it is, is less important than the presence of the divine host (cf. John 4:21–34). Fortunately, in Deuteronomy God selected the place where He would be present for worship. (4) True worship occurs in the presence of an awe-inspiring God and in communion with fellow believers. Deuteronomy emphasizes the inclusion of all; gifts of food would be shared not just with family members, but also with the marginalized (12:12). It would be correct to say, in agreement with others, that the hour of church worship is often the most segregated hour of the week. Deuteronomy stands against this and suggests that when churches split their services or differentiate on the basis of hierarchical status, social status, race, gender, age, musical tastes, or for any other reason, the house of God is divided. Consequently, God's goal for unity and fellowship in equality, inclusion, and the joy of worship is diminished.

12:15–28. Sacrifices. Moses proceeded to provide instructions about the sacrifices to be offered in the place of worship chosen by the Lord. This section has two parts, like a coin with two sides. On one side are the regulations for the regular slaughter of animals and meat eating (vv. 15–16, 20–25); on the other side are the instructions about sacred offerings at the sanctuary (vv. 17–19, 26–27). When Moses spoke about meat eating, his way of expression was remarkably positive and generous (vv. 15, 20–22). He highlighted the craving of the people to eat meat thrice daily (vv. 15, 20b, 21b) and then anticipated their expression of this craving (v. 20a). The response to the stress on craving meat is fourfold: (1) The people were permitted to slaughter animals and eat meat because of the Lord's blessing on the promised land (v. 15; cf. 16:17). (2) The people were allowed to slaughter animals and eat meat in their towns and in proportion to the Lord's blessing (vv. 15, 20–21). The regulation given in Leviticus 17:1–16, according to which the slaughtering of animals and eating their meat was only allowed in front of the tabernacle, would no longer be necessary in the land of Canaan. (3) Anyone, clean or unclean, was permitted to eat meat (vv. 15b, 22b). This included every person, even those who had touched a corpse or carcass, or were unclean because of a disease or a bodily discharge (Lev. 11–15; Num. 5; 19). (4) The people were allowed to eat the meat of clean domestic animals and of wild game (vv. 15b, 22).

The concession to eat meat does not exclude the concept of the value of animal life before God and neither does it eliminate the plant-based diet assigned to humans in the beginning (Gen. 1:29). During the journey of the people through the wilderness, the Lord initially provided vegetarian food for them (Ex. 16:1–4). The plant-based diet remained an ideal in the setting of an agrarian society. The concession to eat meat was regulated by the Lord. Slaughtering an animal to eat meat was commonly associated with the cult in the sanctuary, but it was not detached from God's perspective and the regulations about the proper treatment of animals. There was the demand to drain the blood (vv. 16, 23). The common slaughter of animals was to follow the same method used in sacrificial slaughter.

12:29—13:18. Warnings about Apostasy. Moses continued to warn his audience against idolatry as he discussed the temptations that Israel would encounter in the promised land. He placed four hypothetical circumstances before the people under which seduction toward the Canaanite gods might occur. The first might result from the work of a false prophet (13:1–5). This is the first time that Moses uses the word "prophet" (*nabi'*) in Deuteronomy. In the Old Testament, a prophet is one who is summoned or called by God to proclaim His messages (Ex. 7:1–2; Jer. 23:16–22). Moses's audience was not oblivious to the meaning and work of prophets. Abraham was regarded as a prophet of God (Gen. 20:7). The Israelites even knew of the prophetic ministry of a female prophet, Miriam. Moses, the leader himself, was regarded as a prophet in Israel, as was Aaron. There was also the incident with Balaam, the deceiving prophet (Num. 22–24; 31:8, 16; Deut. 23:4–5). Therefore, to discern between true and false prophets was of highest importance.

The second hypothetical cause of an apostasy was a dreamer (Deut. 13:1–5). Studies on ancient Near Eastern history reveal that divination through dreams (oneiromancy) was widespread. There are numerous texts from Egypt and Mesopotamia about such phenomena. Moses warned that such persons might provide a sign or wonder and then invite the people to follow other gods (13:2b [3b]). These "other gods" were ones they had not known, the gods of the Canaanites (12:29–30). The treatment of false prophets and dreamers who would try to entice Israel to follow other gods is unambiguous and absolute: they were to be put to death (13:5a). In the political arena, a person who tries to subvert allegiance to the king is sentenced to death; how much more would the death penalty apply to one who called God's people to abandon Him and worship idols?

The third hypothetical scenario of apostasy was related to a member of an Israelite family (13:6–11). Moses spoke about family members and close friends—a brother, a son, a daughter, a wife, and a friend—people who were loved and respected. The list heightens the threat of potential familial treachery. In cultures where family networks are close, this scenario involves the highest potential danger. The fourth scenario of apostasy involved anyone in Israel who was rumored to be enticing fellow citizens to desert the Lord in favor of other gods (13:12–18). Again, the seriousness of idolatry called for capital punishment.

14:1–21. Eating. Eating is connected to a holy life. Moses constructed this section as another chiasm:

A A holy people to the Lord their God (vv. 1–3)
  B Edible versus inedible animals (vv. 4–20)
A' A holy people to the Lord their God (v. 21)

There is a clear link to Leviticus 11 (see "Clean and Unclean Animals," p. 257). Moses emphasized the definition of kosher food instead of the abominable animals. In addition, vv. 1–3 build the foundation for the list of permitted and prohibited animals. Moses spoke of Israel as a holy people, possessing a unique covenant status with God. Without this foundation right at the beginning, the words spoken here would have sounded like those of a suzerain imposing his law on a vassal. The status and quality that God had placed upon His people marked them in all aspects of life, including eating and the treatment of the body. The latter was probably related to pagan rites of mourning for the dead.

14:22–29. The Economically Vulnerable. Although tithing was a well-known practice in the ancient world and is found elsewhere in the Torah, Deuteronomy provides legislation concerning a second tithe. Leviticus 27:30–33 proclaims the tithes on both produce and cattle as "holy to the Lord." This phrase normally indicated that tithes belonged to the priests and the Levites (cf. Lev. 22:10; 27:21). A farmer could redeem produce by paying its value plus an extra fifth. Numbers 18:21–32 indicates that all tithes were required to be given to the Lord, who then assigned it to the Levites, who were also to give a tithe of tithes to the priests. The Levites could then live off the rest of the tithes given to them. This was the first tithe, not to be confused with the second tithe mentioned in Deuteronomy. This second tithe was to be used for a family fellowship meal eaten in the sanctuary.

Deuteronomy 14:22–29 begins with an emphatic call to annually set aside an extra tenth of all that the fields produce. What follows is an invitation for celebration. The goal of the speech was reached when Moses expressed concern for the well-being of the economically vulnerable. From this perspective, a true covenant relationship with the Lord was to be demonstrated by active care for the poor. This commitment would reach its high point when the poor were invited to join in the celebration in the Lord's presence at the sanctuary.

Similar to the previous instruction about tithe, another highly significant insight Moses provided was about inclusion and equality (14:28–29; cf. 26:12–15). Every three years, the second tithe was to be used for the benefit of the poor and powerless in Israel (vv. 28–29). It seems that the beneficiaries of this tithe were those who had no inheritance in the land, that is to say, the widows, orphans, foreigners, and the Levites. The OT often lists the triad of widow, orphan, and foreigner as representing the poor, oppressed, and disempowered within a patriarchal society governed by a hierarchical order. They were the most easily marginalized and had no safety net; but God cared for their needs. This extra tithe that provided for the Levites and for the "disempowered triad" reveals God's concern for equality and justice.

15:1–23. Remission of Debts. The appeal to be generous toward the poor and disadvantaged found a climatic expression in the seventh year. Debts were to be canceled, and lost property was to be returned to the original owner. Creditors were not to pressure debt-slaves to pay off their loan before the arrival of the year of remission. When Moses began to speak about the different groups of disadvantaged people, he looked with a visionary eye into the future and stated that there would be no poor in Israel because of God's blessing. (v. 4). However, in order for them to arrive at this hope, an almost utopian future, Israel was called to have the greatest concern for the poor, the widows, the fatherless, and strangers. These were economically deprived and dependent on others for relief and survival. When he gave instructions on how to treat the poor, Moses used the term "brother" (or "fellow Israelite"; vv. 7, 9, 11); if the Israelites treated the poor badly and they cried out to the Lord, this treatment would be recognized as sin. There are definite warnings about hardheartedness and tightfistedness (v. 9), and there is a call to generosity toward the poor in the context of lending money to them, especially when there is little to no hope of repayment.

It was also important to establish humane laws concerning those who were bound to work for six years toward paying off a debt. Just because the debt was paid (by six years of labor) did not mean that the newly released man or woman was to leave without payment of their own (v. 13). Coinage was not invented until the Persian period (by Lydians or Greeks in the sixth or fifth centuries B.C.), so lending and payment at this time were done through foodstuff or flocks. Concerning the law of the firstborn (vv. 19–23), see Leviticus 27:26–27.

16:1–17. The Three Annual Festivals. For the celebration of three festivals, the Israelites were to travel to the place of worship that the Lord would choose for Himself in the promised land.

These three festivals were the Festival of Passover (vv. 1–8), the Festival of Weeks (vv. 9–12), and the Festival of Tabernacles (vv. 13–15). The Festival of Passover and the immediately following Festival of Unleavened Bread had their origin in the Exodus event and are described in detail in Exodus 12. In Exodus, the focus is on the festival's observance in the homes of the Israelites in Egypt; there was no centralized place of worship. In this speech in Deuteronomy, Moses envisioned and prophesied that God would choose for Himself a place of worship in the promised land; thus the locus of the celebration of the festival shifted, and it became more of a national celebration. Moses strongly charged the people to keep the Passover by using Sabbath language. The link with the Sabbath is made direct and clear by the use of the same word of command: "observe" is found in both passages (Deut. 5:12 and 16:1); likewise in Exodus, the word "remember" occurs in two passages, the Passover text in Exodus 13:3 and the Sabbath commandment in Exodus 20:8. Furthermore, a Sabbath link is also found in the reference to the six days during which the Israelites were to eat unleavened bread as a remembrance of the time of slavery in Egypt. On the seventh day, there was to be a solemn assembly before the Lord (Deut. 16:8).

The Festival of Weeks (vv. 9–12) brought the Sabbath even more to the forefront. While the Passover already showed its closeness to the Sabbath, it was the Festival of Weeks that had an even stronger connection through its counting of seven times seven days after Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread. Moreover, Sabbath inclusion was highly emphasized when Moses's words recalled the different members of the household (also mentioned in the Sabbath command) who were to celebrate and rejoice before the Lord. Then Moses continued with the list and added orphans, the fatherless, and widows (v. 11). The Festival of Tabernacles (vv. 13–15) was the final festival of the year, and the Levites were to sit together with everybody else to celebrate with people from all classes and both genders (v. 14). It seems that the festivals incorporated the Sabbath concern for equality and inclusion among the Israelites. A biblical Sabbath theology affects all parts of society, including the festivals, and emphasizes the importance of equality.

16:18—21:9. Offices of Justice. After the appeals for concern toward those in need among the worshiping congregation of Israel, Moses appropriately turned to the theme of justice (16:20). In this section, Moses described conditions that would apply directly to specific offices among the Israelites in Canaan. First, judges were to administer righteous justice (16:18—17:13), and then the future king of Israel was called to the highest moral order (17:14–20). The Israelites were to provide for priests and Levites (18:1–8), and the Levites were to care for each other. With the gift of prophecy (18:9–22), the future of the Israelites was ensured, so that standards of righteousness would be applied in all circumstances: in matters of life and death (19:1–21), when Israel's troops went to war (20:1–20), and even in cases of extreme incidents such as manslaughter and blood guilt (21:1–9).

16:18—17:13. Israel's Judge. God's pervasive concern for justice and righteousness is the focus of the section that discusses the judges in Israel. The central idea is not so much concerned with the administration of social justice by a judicial institution, but with the engagement of the entire community in living a life of righteousness as defined by the Torah. The emphatic call to righteousness in 16:20 demonstrates the passion of Moses. His words were not those of a legislator administering decrees, but were those of a passionate preacher who pleaded and strove for the real and deep need of his people.

Moses listed three examples of how righteousness could be violated. The first was spiritual syncretism. This involved a compromise between a legitimate and an illegitimate act (e.g., setting up an Asherah pole beside the altar of the Lord; v. 21). The second prohibition was against the setting up of pillars for Asherim (v. 22). This example may be understood as the Israelites erecting a symbol for Yahweh as the Canaanites did to celebrate the fertility rituals of Baal and Asherah. The third prohibition dealt with sacrifices that were defective. All three prohibitions spoke of the violation of righteousness having its roots in the breaking of the covenantal relationship with Israel's Suzerain.

The violation of the principle of doing what is right (16:20), which represented the vertical relationship, would lead to violations on the horizontal level. Deuteronomy 17:2–13 deals first with violations that could be resolved. These were to be investigated and judged by the courts of the judges in Israel, with the judicial process sometimes ending in execution. In the second part of this section, extreme cases that go beyond the power of the secular offices of the judges are discussed. Such cases were to be submitted to the sanctuary and its priests. The sanctuary was a place of judgment. Priestly judgment was to be "theocratic" in these cases. The oracles Urim and Thummim might have been involved, or there may have been a process such as the one involved with a jealous husband who was to bring his wife before the priest into the courtyard of the sanctuary because there were no witnesses to attest to her wrongdoing, and only God was in the position to judge her (see Num. 5:11-31).

17:14-20. Israel's King. In light of Moses's address, Israelite kingship was revolutionary in the ancient world. First, the desire for a king was societal. The lengthy temporal clause of direct speech that introduces the desire of the people (v. 14) shows that kingship was not necessary for Israel's society and economy to grow and flourish. The Lord was the reason for Israel's success in the land. Kingship was the result of the people's desire, which was based on what they saw among the nations. However, God legislated how kingship would function in Israel, and He would choose the king. Moses mentioned the first rule for the king: he was to be a native Israelite (v. 15). Moses then listed prohibitions unheard of in the annals of other nations: (1) the king was not to acquire many horses from Egypt (v. 16); (2) he was not to take many wives (v. 17); and (3) he was not to accumulate large amounts of wealth (v. 17). Following these prohibitions were positively formulated instructions: (1) Seated on the throne, the king was to copy the Torah for himself in the presence of the Levitical priests (v. 18). This was a sacred act showing the king's spiritual subordination to the holy book and the priests. In addition, the king did not issue the law; he received it from a higher authority. (2) The king was to keep the Torah close to himself; it would accompany him wherever he was. (3) He was to read the Torah for himself all the days of his life (v. 19). Moses used four purpose clauses to show what reading the Torah would mean for the king: (1) he was to learn to fear the Lord (v. 19); (2) he was to show a proper disposition toward his people and not consider himself superior (v. 20); (3) he was to remain faithful to the Lord and not turn in any other direction (v. 20); and (4) the reading of the Torah was the key to securing the future of Israel (v. 20).

One is amazed at such simple instructions for what was considered the highest office on earth. Each one contains lessons that run against human perceptions and operations, both at the time they were issued and in the contemporary world. Such lessons include the following: (1) Whereas leaders of the world gain power or usurp it at the expense of rivals and subjects, God's leaders are appointed by a divine call and without any need for human power. (2) Whereas leaders of the world are viewed as administrators of justice, God's leaders embody justice within a covenantal relationship with the Lord. (3) Whereas the leaders of the world codify laws to regulate standards under their government or to protect their own interests, God's leaders have no authority to issue laws. They themselves are subject to the laws of God. (4) Whereas the leaders of the world are elevated above their people, God's leaders are equals among their fellows.

18:1-22. Israel's Priest and Prophets. Israel's treatment of the Levites and priests was a barometer of their fidelity to the Lord and His standards of righteousness given in the Torah. Levites and priests were entitled to compensation, tithe, and food gifts because they would not be allotted land inheritance. The Lord was their inheritance (v. 2b).

Before speaking of Israel's prophetic ministry, Moses addressed the dangers of the occult practices that other nations used to communicate with their gods. The Israelites were forbidden to imitate the occult methods that the Canaanites used to seek guidance from their gods. Moses gave a long list of such methods and strictly forbade the Israelites to imitate them when they lived in the land together with the local inhabitants (vv. 10-11; cf. v. 14). The God of Israel detested idolatry and spiritual prostitution. Moreover, it was because of the very practice of these abominable things that God would drive out the Canaanite nations from the land.

Moses countered the occultism of Canaan with the ministry of a prophet chosen by the God of Israel to speak to His people (v. 15; see v. 18). Interestingly, the raising of a prophet was caused by the people's reaction to God's direct and awesome revelation at Mount Sinai (vv. 16-17). Moses had already referred to Exodus 20:18-21 in his first speech (Deut. 4:10-13). Here, in the context of contrasting the revelations of idolatrous gods with God's revelation to Israel, Moses reminded the people that they made the request for a mediator between them and God. Their fear of not being able to endure God's continual, direct, and overwhelming revelations became paradigmatic for a future succession of prophets in Israel.

According to Moses's speech, the contrast between a Canaanite diviner and a prophet of God was clear. However, prophets would come up among their own people and would show ambiguous signs. Moses drew lines and provided five signs in order for his people to be able to differentiate between a prophet speaking with presumptuous words and a true prophet of God. The true prophet would (1) be an Israelite (vv. 15, 18); (2) speak in the name of the Lord (vv. 16, 19-20) (death was to be the result for false claims; v. 20); (3) speak words that proved true (vv. 21-22); (4) perform miracles (13:1); and (5) give words and revelations that did not contradict previous certified revelations of God (13:1-18).

Still, for today's reader, the rejection of witchcraft, magic, or occultism is sometimes not clear. Why does God detest sorcery or necromancy? When looking at the Canaanite methods of occultism, one realizes that each practice was controlled by the power and authority of the one who performed it for another person. In order to establish, keep, or increase their power, the sorcerer or diviner would perform things meant to impress and frighten. Today, the spell of witchcraft not only spreads a fascination with a world that is thought to be governed by the spirits of the dead, but is actually led by demonic powers and therefore allows evil forces to have access to our lives. Occult practices have terrorizing effects; some put human life in danger or require the destruction of life.

God's ways of communicating with His people were completely different from those of the occultists. The prophet of God was His spokesperson and was called to speak words that show a deep concern for life. When Moses told the Israelites that there would be more prophets like himself (in their function and in terms of the content of their message), he placed himself as the paramount example for all future prophets. For the past forty years, his life and his words had been a testimony of one who deeply cared for his people. He did not exercise power to keep the people under his control. His care and love for his people especially stood out during Israel's greatest revolt, which was when they built the golden calf. Moses stood up for his people in a sacrificial way. Such a person would be the prophet whom the Lord would choose for His people. He would intercede before God for the sake of His people. At the same time, the prophet would speak only God's words. Again, Moses was the example. For a long time, the audience had listened to him speaking words of life and wisdom, words of warning and concern, words of compassion and enthusiasm.

The prophet Moses was willing to give his own life for the lives of his beloved people. The subsequent prophets in Israel all stood as witnesses of their sacrificial love for God and the people they served. For NT writers, the full actualization of God's promise to Moses came in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ (v. 18). When Philip encountered Nathanael, he alluded to Moses's prophecies in the law (John 1:45). After Jesus fed the five thousand, the people affirmed that He was "the Prophet" (John 6:14). Peter identified Jesus as the Prophet of whom Moses had prophesied (Acts 3:22-23), and in his apologetic before the Sanhedrin, Stephen declared that Jesus was the promised messianic Prophet to whom Moses had pointed (Acts 7:37-38). After Christ's death and resurrection, some may ask whether there is still a need for prophets in the church. An understanding of the NT indicates that God continues to raise up prophets to guide His people and assure the church of His presence (Acts 11:27; 13:1; 15:32; 1 Cor. 14:29; Eph. 2:20). God calls and appoints prophets according to the gifts imparted by the Spirit. Paul indicates that prophets are specifically appointed for the benefit of the church (1 Cor. 12:28-29; 14:4; Eph. 4:11-14). On the other hand, Paul, in line with Moses who once wished that every Israelite would be a prophet of God (Num. 11:29), wished that all church members would prophesy (1 Cor. 14:24-25).

19:1—21:9. Righteousness in Matters of Life and Death. This part of Moses's speech has links to Exodus 20:22—23:33. Moses spoke about everyday life as well as about extreme situations. He spoke of a provision for asylum for those who committed accidental manslaughter (19:1-14). In cases of false accusation, Moses assured the Israelites that God was in charge (19:15-21). The *lex talionis* ("law of retaliation") hindered disproportionate vengeance or malicious payback; its demand was that punishment be proportional to the crimes committed.

Righteousness was the standard in times of war (20:1-20). Since Moses knew that his people would soon be involved in war, he addressed the specific situation of corporate violence. He provides instructions for distant war campaigns (vv. 10-15). He also had instructions for how to deal with Canaanite towns and people on smaller local campaigns (vv. 16-18). The issue of the complete destruction of towns and people in vv. 16-18 brings the *kherem* policy back into discussion, which in scholarly and non-scholarly studies is often associated with the notion of "holy war." This is differentiated from ordinary warfare in the rest of Deuteronomy 20 (see "The Extermination of the Canaanites," p. 330, and "Holy Warfare," p. 372). It is important to notice that after dealing with the mustering of the troops, Moses gave a lengthy speech of encouragement. Obviously, Israel did not have trained military forces, so Moses spoke to the common people about the emotional crisis that they would experience at the sight of armed Canaanites in their fortified cities. "Do not be afraid" is the motto of the speech (vv. 1–9), an emphasis underlined by the use of three different expressions of the word "afraid" (*yare'*—"to be afraid," v. 1; *khapaz*—"to be alarmed," v. 3; *'arats*—"to be fearful," v. 3). The reason they were not to be afraid was that the Lord their God was with them to fight against their enemies and save them. The priests and other officials received direct instructions and words for the recruits. They were to provide assurance that Yahweh would be with the troops in battle.

There are several remarkable insights into military actions that prove a high ethical standard: (1) The fearful and the recently married were exempted from military activities (vv. 7–8). (2) Targeted cities were to be given the opportunity to surrender before an attack (vv. 10–11). (3) Israelites were prohibited from using the wood of fruit trees to make military machinery (v. 19). On the other hand, there were instructions to the troops about the complete destruction of towns and people. These instructions were built on the law of *kherem* as prescribed in chapter 7:

- The policy demanded the slaughter of the entire human population of Canaanite towns;
- The ordinance originated with Yahweh and not with military leaders or strategic planning;
- The people groups to be targeted were specifically identified;
- The policy was not driven by acts of hate and genocide, but by religious reasons—to punish the nations for their wickedness (9:4–5) and to keep Yahweh's people free from syncretism and idolatry (v. 18).

21:10—26:19. Righteousness in Everything. This section brings all of life under the principle of justice (16:20). The cases of women taken captive are discussed (20:10–14). They were to be treated well when taken as wives, as well as in cases where they were not. Their dignity and rights were to be protected. There are two prohibitions issued for the Israelite husband in case he decided not to marry (or according to some, to divorce after marriage) his war bride: he was not allowed to sell her nor treat her as chattel. Moses promoted a compassionate treatment of war brides even in cases when they were not married or were sent away. As a captive, she was degraded; now, she was not to be humiliated again by being treated as property. These texts speak to today's crimes of the abuse of women and show that God did not allow this to happen even in the most extreme situations. God was concerned with the dignity of and respect for women, native or alien. He did not permit denying women their rights or treating them as property.

Deuteronomy 22 addresses care for domestic animals, wild animals, and the land. Deuteronomy 22:13–30 concerns righteousness in marital relations by addressing matters of sexual infidelity and misconduct. Contemporary readers of this passage have two alternatives: to interpret the text as a document of a time and culture that has no relevance today or to try to understand the values reflected and apply them to contemporary issues in marriage. With regard to the first choice, we may recognize that this passage reflects a high view of community, family, and human sexuality. This may run against our modern perspectives where individualism reigns, and human beings strive for independence and self-sufficiency. Sexual matters today are regarded as purely private. However, Moses taught that human sexuality is sacred, and that the purity of marriage is precious and needs to be defended. In a society where families disintegrate, and the rate of divorces among Christians is as high as among nonbelievers, Moses's call for the defense of the institution of marriage is highly needed.

The law concerning the exclusion of eunuchs from the assembly did not preclude them from worshiping God (Isa. 56:3–7). Therefore, it is likely that the term "assembly of the Lord" (Deut. 23:1–8) designated an administrative body within Israel. Because they represented the people of God, the wholeness of the physical body of its members was required—representing the absence of moral or spiritual defects. In the case of foreigners, they could participate after living in Israel for a number of generations; at which time they would have assimilated into the religious culture of the Hebrews and could make

decisions more in line with God's will. This notion is reinforced in the laws concerning the holiness and cleanliness of the army that represented God (23:9–14). These laws of cleanliness not only had a theological aspect, but also contained valuable health principles (see "Health and Hygiene in Leviticus," p. 272).

The law concerning runaway slaves (Deut. 23:15–16) is thought to apply to the slaves of foreigners since Hebrew bondservants could expect their freedom after six years of work (15:12). Other cultures were not as generous in this regard. In Egypt, treaties were signed with other nations requiring the return of slaves that might have escaped to or from Egypt. In Mesopotamia, Hammurabi's Code had the penalty of death for anyone who harbored a runaway slave, and the Code rewarded the bounty hunter for finding and returning them.

Prostitution (23:17–18) was often associated with a temple or a cult as part of the way a god or goddess was worshiped. A price was paid (Gen. 38:15–23) for this service. In no instance was a Hebrew to participate in this practice, and no foreigner was allowed to bring the wages received from such service as a gift to God.

The remaining three laws in Deuteronomy 23 all address different aspects of honesty, especially when relating to another person in the community. This included interest, keeping vows, and taking advantage of neighborly generosity.

Deuteronomy 24:1–4 is often understood as the passage that regulates divorce. However, it is important to note what the passage says and what it does not say: (1) Only the husband could initiate the divorce, likely because in that culture (unlike in Egypt where the wife could initiate a divorce) only the man was able to act legally. (2) The husband found *'erwah*, "nakedness of a word/thing" (Heb. *dabar*), in the wife and divorced her. The meaning of this Hebrew word is difficult to understand in this context. It is possible that the term can be understood as pointing to a physical rather than a moral problem. The physical problem may have been related to menstrual irregularity, which would make the woman unclean and uncapable of regular marital activities, including potential childbirth (cf. Lev. 15:19–30). A number of other interpretive options have been advanced, but none of them have clarified the question of the cause for divorce mentioned here. Ultimately, there is no explicit indication of what the "nakedness/thing" is (see Mark 10:1–12). (3) Moses did not speak primarily regarding the grounds for divorce, but focused on instruction for the conduct of the husband after the divorce. The husband was not allowed to reclaim her after she had married a second time, after her second husband died, or after her second husband also divorced her. (4) The husband who divorced his wife had to provide her with legal proof of the dissolution of the marriage. This document protected the woman from being forced to go back to the husband or from being accused of adultery when she married another man. Jesus clarified that the divorce document was only allowed for sexual immorality (Matt. 19:7–9), which by the time of Jeremiah included adultery (Jer. 3:8).

In the next part of his speech (Deut. 24:5—25:16), Moses addressed different aspects of life and demanded the implementation of righteousness. Each of these short laws contains some aspect of decentness toward one's neighbor.

Childbirth provided security in latter years, value in the esteem of their culture, and most importantly, a child to love, tend, and care for. Children brought happiness to a woman. Therefore, it was improper to give a woman to a man through marriage and not to provide her with the opportunity to become a mother (24:5), something that required the man to be around before risking his life as a soldier. To be a childless widow was pitiable in that culture.

Food processing was a daily task. The reason given for not taking a millstone implies that the same principle would apply to other forms of security that directly affected a person's ability to live (24:6).

A person could become a slave in different ways. Poor or indebted families sometimes sold family members into slavery to pay debts. Prisoners of war often became slaves. This law, however, particularly prohibited the evil of kidnapping Israelites for the purpose of selling them as slaves (24:7).

A community could easily be wiped out through poor hygiene, so if a person was suspected of having a communicable skin condition, he or she needed to be sent away from the community even if they were of high standing (24:8–9; cf. Lev. 13, 14).

It was the practice to pledge objects as collateral for a debt. The dignity of a person was not to be disregarded, regardless of the financial obligation (24:10–13). It was common to pay a worker each day. However, it is reasonable that an employer might want to pay wages on an accumulated basis. Thus, it needed to be stated that if the worker was not able to survive without the daily wages, the employer was required to pay them regardless of the business inconvenience (24:14–15).

The prohibition against punishing children for their parents' sins was directed at the magistrates—apparently only God was to decide when corporate punishments were to be applied (24:16). This law was cited as the reason why Amaziah did not kill the families of the men who assassinated his father (2 Kin. 14:6).

Historical memory was to motivate kindness and compassion for those less fortunate within the community. The protected class was to include widows, orphans, and the poor (Deut. 24:17–22). This principle was still emphasized in the early church (James 1:27). The minimal personal requirement was not to hoard every last portion of a harvest so that the protected class could glean and eat.

Even in receiving punishment, dignity was to be extended to the justly condemned person (Deut. 25:1–3). This was preceded by an impartial evaluation of the evidence by the judges. The physical punishment was to be inflicted in the presence of the judge to assure that the law was properly enforced, but in the process the judge was probably emotionally impacted by the execution of the sentence.

Those who worked were to receive wages for their work. This requirement was extended to the work of service animals (25:4). Oxen were used to pull threshing sledges across stocks of grain. These sledges were flat boards that often had small stones embedded on the underside. Those stones, combined with the hooves of an ox, were what helped to release the grain from the stocks.

Aged women were cared for by their children, particularly by their sons. For a wife to be widowed before she had a son was considered a tragedy. The levirate marriage law was designed to provide her with one and was not to be taken advantage of for the pleasure of the levirate brother (see Gen. 38:8–10). The best example of how this was to work comes from the story of Ruth where the closest kin refused to do his duty (Ruth 4), allowing the next nearest kin to do so. However, in that story, it is interesting that the son of Boaz and Ruth was never considered in the genealogies to be the son of her former husband (Ruth 4:21; Matt. 1:4).

Although the punishment of the woman who attempted to help her husband in a fight (Deut. 25:11–12) sounds harsh to our ears, it was designed to prevent sexual immodesty. There were ways to help her husband that did not require her coming in contact with the genitals of another man. Thus, this was a made choice. That part of the man's anatomy was to be regarded as untouchable, probably since it was his way to produce heirs. However, this is the only law that allowed for physical mutilation as the form of punishment, and it was better than death (the punishment for adultery, Deut. 22:22). It certainly was a powerful deterrent.

Because coins were not used until the Persian period, bartering was the only way to pay for goods or services. Often this required a way to measure what was exchanged, and scales were used. However, this required the weights to be accurate. A dishonest merchant could easily doctor his weights more or less than was proper. This was not to be allowed (Deut. 25:13–16).

The Amalekites, descendants of Esau (Gen. 36:12), have not been associated with any known archaeological material culture from Sinai (Exod. 17:8–13), the Negev (Num. 13:29; 14:25, 45; Judg. 6:3; 1 Sam. 30:1–20), or lands to the east (Judg. 3:13; 7:12). There is archaeological evidence of nomads in these regions at that time, but at this point it is impossible to associate any of that material with the Amalekites, perhaps in fulfillment of God's command to "blot out" any remembrance of Amalek (Deut. 25:19). That command (Deut. 25:17–19) restates a similar one from Exodus 17:14–16 that immediately followed an incident in Israel's victory over the Amalekites. This speech by Moses was given at the end of the forty years of wandering; whoever heard this speech when the Amalekites attacked would have been eighteen years old then. In the process of reminding this new generation, it is implied that the Amalekites knew better than to attack because they were aware that God would disapprove of their actions, and yet they did so anyway (Deut. 25:18), which was, in itself, a subtle warning to the Israelites to live as God would want. True to this command (v. 19), the Amalekites were later subdued by both Saul (1 Sam. 14:47–48) and David (2 Sam. 8:11–12), and in the time of Hezekiah they were completely destroyed (1 Chron. 4:41–43).

The Israelites were to remember that God gave them the land they were living in through two unique ways that dealt with their agricultural produce. First, they were to provide an offering for the Lord in the first year (Deut. 26:1–2, 10b–11), accompanied by a declaration that recognized God's providential hand in their own history (26:3–10a). Second, they were to give the third year's tithe to the protected class (Levites, foreigners, orphans, and widows; 26:12), accompanied by a declaration of covenant faithfulness and a plea for the blessing of the nation (26:13–15).

Moses concluded this section by picking up the theme of cultic worship and calling for a celebration of the Lord's faithfulness at the central sanctuary. Deuteronomy 26:16–19 summarizes the key theological issues in Moses's second speech. With the expression "this day" (v. 16), Moses refocused the attention of the audience and asked for their positive decision and a total commitment to the Lord. Furthermore, Moses reminded his congregation that while he was speaking, they actually heard the voice of the Lord their God.

27:1–26

Call for Covenantal Renewal in the Promised Land

Deuteronomy 27 seems to interrupt the flow between chapters 26 and 28, which are linked by common vocabulary and themes (an appeal to obedience and an announcement of blessings and curses). However, in the covenant call (Deut. 27), Moses specifically identified Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim as the places where the covenant renewal was to take place after the Israelites had crossed over into Canaan. Furthermore, the Israelites were to erect inscribed stones (vv. 2–4), build an altar (vv. 5–7), and have witnesses present (vv. 12–13). Also, a speech was to be given (v. 14) with a series of curses (vv. 15–26). Moses formally charged the people and the elders to adhere to the obligations of the covenant with the Lord. In view of the fact that the congregation was gathered at the border of the promised land and was ready to enter it, this covenant underlined the triangle between God, the people, and the land. At their entrance into the land, the people were to erect stone monuments and write on them the law that Moses had spoken. If the stone monuments were inscribed in Hebrew with Moses's three Deuteronomy speeches, there would have been about twelve thousand words written on each stone. Evidence for such customs in the ancient world comes from the Code of Hammurabi, which was written on a seven-foot stela in syllabic cuneiform script.

The main part of the covenant renewal is composed of the imprecations listed in vv. 15–26. The use of the word "cursed" (Heb. *'arur*) implies that covenantal righteousness would not be enforced merely by the Israelite courts. The response of the entire congregation with a solemn "Amen" at the end of each of the twelve curses bound the people to God as the ultimate supervisor of moral order and placed the violators under divine sanction.

28:1—29:1

Blessings and Curses

Deuteronomy 28 is unevenly divided into two panels: blessings for those faithful to their covenant Lord (vv. 1–14) and curses for those persistently rebellious against Him (vv. 15–68).

28:1–14. Blessings. Before the expression of the blessings in seven principal clauses (vv. 7–14), Moses introduced them in the form of rhetorical declarations: town/country; fruit of the body (children)/fruit of the ground (crops)/fruit of the animals (the young from the livestock); basket/kneading bowl (trough); coming in/going out (vv. 3–6). Each of the following seven statements of blessing highlighted the Lord as the originator of blessings, so that Israel could not claim credit for anything that they would enjoy in the future. In the center of the material benefactions was Israel's special relationship with Yahweh (vv. 9–10). The ideal for Israel was to be a holy people, set apart and high above all nations; here, Moses envisioned the climax and fulfillment of all blessings. All the nations of the earth would recognize the name of Yahweh in Israel and that the well-being of the people was a gift of their divine Suzerain. Consequently, they would bring praise and honor to God. In these words, Israel represented all humanity in a microcosm; they were a people pointing back to the original creation order of the first human beings.

28:15—29:1. Curses and Epilogue. Moses began the curses with a series of blessing reversals (vv. 16–19), creating similarity by using the same words and concepts as in vv. 3–6, followed by a long list of curses (vv. 20–68). (1) As with the blessings, the Lord is the subject of all the actions stated in the text. (2) The preposition "until" (*'ad*) emphasizes the intent of the curses: the people would be destroyed (vv. 20, 24, 45, 51, 61). The covenantal triangle between God, Israel, and the land would be dissolved, and the entire nation would be wiped out. (3) Disasters would follow without relief. (4) Disasters and destruction would be caused by Israel's unfaithfulness to God. Deuteronomy 29:1 is the subscription that concludes the covenant made in the land of Moab. The reference to the words or terms of the covenant involve specific legal obligations and their stated consequences, and it applies to the laws, blessings, and curses of the preceding chapters (see "The Wrath of God," p. 918, and "God's Judgment in the Prophets," p. 981).

29:2—30:20

MOSES'S THIRD DISCOURSE: TRUSTING IN THE GRACE OF YAHWEH

Moses summoned the people to reaffirm the covenant they had with the Lord (4:44—26:19; and chap. 28). He emphasized that the covenant bound both the people who were present and about to enter the promised land, and those of future generations (29:9–14). He warned of exile as the consequence of disobeying the covenant (vv. 15–28); but sincere repentance would result in the restoration of God's favor (30:1–10). Consequently, Moses assured Israel that the terms of the covenant were not too difficult to fulfill (30:11–14). He concluded by making them an offer: choose between life and death (30:15–30).

In his third speech, Moses looked into Israel's past history (29:2–9), using the word *hayyom* ("today" or "this day" or "now") thirteen times to address the present generation, and provided visions of the future. The different temporal sections of the speech are arranged in an ABABA pattern, with the A sections addressing the immediate audience and the B sections looking into the future:

A Present generation (29:10–13)
    B Future generations (29:14–28)
A Present generation (29:29)
    B Future generations (30:1–10)
A Present generation (30:11–20)

The climax of the speech is in the call to choose life rather than death (30:19) by completely submitting to the will of God.

29:2—30:20

Essence of Moses's Third Discourse: The Grace of Covenant Renewal

The importance of the Exodus can never be overestimated. Moses looked back at this event and used similar words to those of God when He spoke to the Israelites at the foot of Mount Sinai (Ex. 19:4).

29:2–13. God's Guidance in the Past. Moses recapitulated the themes of his speech in Deuteronomy 1–4 and 8 and showed again how God supernaturally sustained Israel to teach them His full power. The eyes that saw the great events in Egypt were very young eyes (eighteen years old or younger). Close to a year and a half after the Exodus, the spies gave their report, and the people refused to enter the promised land (Num. 13–14). All those who were twenty years or older at that time died over the course of the next forty years (Num. 14:29–35). However, all of those living at the time of this speech had seen the more recent victories over Sihon king of Heshbon (Num. 21:21–32) and Og king of Bashan (Num. 21:33–35). In spite of this, Moses wanted them to know that they still had the same problem of the heart that their parents had when they rebelled (Deut. 29:4). They had witnessed great victories but had not been convicted. So Moses reminded them of a more recent personal experience: their clothes and sandals had not worn out (v. 5) over the course of forty years. These experiences could have enabled Israel to realize the wisdom of obeying God and the folly of disobeying Him. Deuteronomy 29:10–15 addresses both the present and future generations of Israel, and the covenant formula at the center is the same for all generations (v. 13).

29:14–28. Consequences. Moses then spoke about the consequences that would befall the individual, family, or tribe that was disloyal to the Lord because of idolatry. Such persons needed to know that the blessings of the covenant were not unconditionally guaranteed. Because of their defiant response to God, they would seal their fate and suffer the anger of Yahweh (vv. 18–21). In the second part of this section, Moses shifted the focus to the collective consequences of idolatry for all Israel (vv. 22–28). The curses of Yahweh would come over the people and the land with full fury, and all would be uprooted and destroyed. Most of this section is direct speech involving three different voices: (1) the descendants of the present generation of Israel (vv. 22–23); (2) the nations surrounding Israel (v. 24); and (3) unknown respondents to the previous voices (vv. 25–28). Verses 22–24 contain questions that fit the context of the ancient world in which devastated land was interpreted as evidence of divine fury: Why had the Lord done this to the land? Why did He have this great anger? (v. 24). The respondents would speak of Israel's treachery as the cause of their fate and of Yahweh's response to idolatry. The speech was filled with a series of unparalleled expressions of the fury of Yahweh: He (lit. in the Hebrew) "burned at the nose" (v. 23), an expression derived from

the natural phenomenon of hot breath coming from the nose of an infuriated person or creature; Yahweh acted in rage (*khemah*, v. 22) and great wrath (v. 23). He had imposed all the curses written in this book (v. 27), uprooted all the population, and tossed them away from the land (v. 28; see "God's Judgment in the Prophets," p. 981).

30:1–20. Restoration. In his speech, Moses transitioned from the horrific image of a devastated land to the promise of restored grace. But before this, he placed before his audience a most enigmatic passage (29:29): the secret things belong to the Lord God, but the revealed things belong to His people and their children forever, so that they may follow everything in the law. That generation had received a clear understanding of the will of the Lord and the nature of His covenant. Because of His gracious presence among disloyal people, there was hope for renewal and restoration.

Moses brought his audience (Deut. 30) to the climax of the gospel that he had proclaimed in all his speeches. The tone of his words completely changed. He offered the assurance that if Israel would be exiled, God would reinstate the people based on their genuine repentance and their return to Him and His will. The chiasm below shows that the keyword in this section is the Hebrew word *shub*, "turn" or "return," which expresses both Israel's return to God and God's act of returning Israel to its prior state of well-being. In the Hebrew text, this word occurs in seven clauses in which the activity of a "return" by God and Israel appears in a chiastic pattern, as noted in this literal translation of the Hebrew text:

A When…you *return* them [these words] to your heart…and you *return* to the LORD your God…and obey Him with all your heart and soul (vv. 1–2)
    B Then the LORD will *return* you from captivity…He will *return* you from all the people where he has scattered you (v. 3)
        C The LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants; love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live (v. 6)
    B′ You will *return* and obey the LORD… the LORD will *return* to rejoice over you (vv. 8–9)
A′ If you *return* to the LORD your God with all your heart and soul (v. 10)

Moses made the core, the most important part, consist of Israel's and Yahweh's turning to each other and the returning of blessings: circumcision of the heart and love for God that comes from the heart (v. 6). He reintroduced a theme that he had already presented (10:16) when he called the Israelites to circumcise their hearts. Circumcision of the flesh became a metaphor for the removal of all the barriers that hinder a person from being totally committed to the Lord. As a result, devotion to the Lord would be evident in undivided love and obedience. Those whom the Lord would bring back from the Exile would have undergone a surgery of the heart, exposing radical actions of affection toward their divine covenant partner. Concomitant with the restoration of the former exiles would be the Lord's restoration of their place among the nations. The nations would suffer the punishments that they had inflicted upon Israel. They acted as God's agents against Israel, but they were also His enemies and He would address their evilness. Moses concluded his third discourse with a most urgent appeal to choose wisely between the two options that he had presented, namely, life and death (vv. 15–20).

31:1—34:12

THE DEATH OF MOSES

This portion of the book, the epilogue to both Deuteronomy and the entire Torah, is about the last days of Moses. It describes the final steps Moses took to prepare Israel for their future in the promised land. The reader will experience soaring moments in meditating on the song of Moses and contemplating the description of his final moments: his climb of Mount Nebo and his death. The actions described in this section are interwoven with lengthy poems, which show their importance to both the new beginnings of Israel as a covenant nation and the conclusion of Moses's life: (1) Moses announced his imminent departure and appointed Joshua as his successor (31:1–8, 14–15, 23). (2) He wrote a copy of the teaching in his three speeches, placed the copy in the care of the priests and elders, gave instructions for its regular public reading, and urged the people to observe it (31:9–13, 24–26; 32:45–47). (3) Moses orally taught the people a prophetic poem and deposited a copy of it with the priests (31:16–22, 27–30; 32:1–44). (4) He delivered a final blessing on the tribes (chap. 33). (5) Finally, he ascended Mount Nebo and died (32:48–52; 34).

31:1—32:52

Preparing for the Death of Moses

Deuteronomy 31 and 32 stand as a memorial to the covenant between God and Israel that was renewed on the plains of Moab. Deuteronomy 31–32 consists of eight sections. Scholars recognize in this section an alternating order of long speeches about the transcription of the Torah and shorter speeches dealing with the appointment of Joshua; in between these are two poetic sections.

31:1–29. New Leader. In these narrative sections, Yahweh committed to the people of Israel, and they responded to their supreme Lord. The repeated mention of witnesses and testimony (31:19, 21, 26, 28; 32) reinforces the ritual aspect of the covenant renewal. Moses's legacy lives on due to his inspired writings, which chronicle a life of dedication to the call that came to him in the wilderness when he stood barefoot before the burning bush in the awesome presence of the Lord. His never-ending, passionate concern for a people who so often disrespected him, speaks more of the man Moses and his love for the Lord than any pillar of stone that has been erected for the great leaders of the world. Another remarkable act of Moses was his appointment of his successor, Joshua. One might expect that Moses would perhaps hand over his mantle of leadership in the form of his staff, which had carried a symbolic meaning for the past forty years; yet all the text records is that Moses delivered a song. (For the eschatological content of v. 29, see "Introduction to the Pentateuch," p. 120.)

31:30—32:43. Song of Moses. The Song of Moses is a magnificent artwork and didactic poem. The style is typical of biblical Hebrew poetry. Each line consists of at least two phrases or clauses that are parallel, synonymous, antithetical, or complementary to each other. Scholars refer to the phrases or clauses as "colons," and to pairs and trios of colons as "bicolons" and "tricolons" (see "Introduction to Hebrew Poetry and Wisdom Books," p. 614).

The core of the poem shows God's faithfulness and Israel's betrayal of Him. Moses began the song by praising the name of God and ascribing all greatness to Him. He spoke (vv. 4–6) of the faithfulness of the Lord as being manifested in His numerous dealings with a corrupt and ungrateful nation. Looking back upon the past, the poet described God's providence, which had brought Israel safely through the wilderness. With the word "remember" (v. 7), all attention turns even further into the days of old when God separated the peoples of the earth and set boundaries to them. There is an allusion to the story of Babel in which the nations were divided and separated all over the earth. Moses seems to have used the context of this story when singing about Israel's ancestor Jacob receiving the inheritance and portion of the Lord.

Verses 10–14 are an extravagant poem about God's care for Jacob (v. 9). The reader is reminded that just after the scattering of the nations who attempted to make themselves a name by building the tower of Babel, Abraham received God's divine call and promise to make a name for Abraham and bless him abundantly. In his song to the Israelites on the Plains of Moab, Moses cast these ancestral stories into words filled with passion and loving enthusiasm. The Lord's actions toward Jacob, the foundling in the wasteland, were twofold. First, Yahweh acted like an army encircling a village of defenseless, hungry people. He surrounded and protected them from the enemy, guarding them like a precious treasure, like the apple of His eye (v. 10). The following image in v. 11 is that of a mother eagle who encircles the nest of her young and hovers over the little eaglets to protect them from enemies and feed them out of her beak. When the birds are old enough to learn to fly, the mother spreads her wings and catches the young and carries them back into the safety of the nest for as long as they need this training.

Second, the song alludes to the beginnings of time and the primordial world as described in Genesis 1:1–2. There, the Spirit of God was "hovering over the waters" like the eagle mother over the nest with the young birds. The same verb used in Genesis 1:2 is used in Deuteronomy 32:11 to speak of the interest of the Spirit of God in a world that was to be filled with God's works of creation. Moses's song stresses the uniqueness of the relationship between God and a young Israel who knew of no other god (v. 12). He provided nourishment so that Israel would prosper. The metaphors of honey and oil that flowed from the land and rocks show the abundance that God gave.

The next stanza of the song portrays the very opposite image. Israel violated the supreme command by abandoning the Lord and pursuing other gods (vv. 15–18). Neglect of God, ingratitude, and perverse actions of idolatry committed by "Jeshurun"—a metaphor likely used in an ironic way because the name designates the "straight one"—resulted in the Lord threatening Israel with national disaster and bringing it almost to the verge of ruin (vv. 19–30). The imagery of v. 18 is especially interesting because Moses used a portrait of God that is often neglected: he spoke of God as a mother who gave birth to Israel and agonized in labor pains. Israel, the child, had forgotten God, her mother.

After a lengthy description of the evils that would come over Israel, vv. 31–43 describe the Lord's determination not to allow an unworthy foe to triumph over His people. In the ultimate sense of the poem, the underlying theme is the rescue of the people by an act of grace. Just as God found and rescued the baby dying in the wilderness, so would he save again in the very moment of imminent annihilation (cf. Ezek. 1–14). Moses returned to the theme of divine rescue in the face of despair with impassioned earnestness and great literary and artistic skill.

32:44–52. God's Address to Moses. In between the magnificent song chanted by the congregation and the grand blessing spoken over the tribes of Israel (chap. 33) is a unique paragraph: God spoke to Moses, the old leader, after Moses's three long speeches for the people of Israel. At first glance, the obvious difference in the style of the passage, with its narrations and direct speeches in between two highly artistic pieces, makes God's address to Moses seem awkwardly placed. The content of God's address to Moses is completely different from the content of the two poetic sections. While the two poetic panels tell of God's faithfulness, care, and blessing toward Israel, even in the times of Israel's apostasy, the insertion of God's address to Moses reminds readers of the most disappointing event in his life, which was when he disobeyed by striking, instead of speaking to, the rock. His disobedience was the reason why he was not allowed to enter the promised land. God used strong imperatives in all four verbs in vv. 49–50. Then He expressed the reason why Moses would not be allowed to enter into the promised land though he would be in sight of it (vv. 51–52).

The incident mentioned here is found in Numbers 20:2–13 and 27:12–14, conveying the reason why Moses could not go into the promised land. Moses mentioned this fateful event earlier in the book and told of how he pleaded with the Lord about going into the land, but the Lord remained firm on His prohibition (Deut. 3:23–27).

A look into the unusual form of God's speech reveals that the first pair of imperative verbs ("go up" and "look/view") harks back to Moses's own words in the beginning of his speeches to the Israelites (Deut. 1:21). The parallelism between God's speech to Moses and Moses's speech to the people should not be overlooked. Moses received the same command that he had given to his people: "Go up!" The sharp contrast is followed by a second pair of imperatives, which are not about taking possession of the land as Moses had told the people (see 1:21), but instead are about his dying. The combination of the verbs "die" and "be gathered" place Moses in a direct line with the patriarchs of old, all of whom died and were gathered to their dead: Abraham (Gen. 25:8), Ishmael (25:17), Isaac (35:29), and Aaron, Moses's brother (Deut. 32:50).

33:1–29

The Blessings

Deuteronomy 33 contains the blessings of Moses upon the Israelite tribes. The chapter is cast into elegant poetic Hebrew consisting of a series of benedictions, almost identical in size, for each tribe.

The poetic blessing in Genesis 49 that was spoken by Jacob to his sons before he died resembles Deuteronomy 33 most closely. However, the order of the tribes in Deuteronomy differs from Genesis 49, which lists the sons of Jacob in order of birth. Deuteronomy seems to list them in the geographical order of their territory in Canaan. The list begins with Reuben in the Transjordan and then moves west to Judah and ends with the northern tribes of the Galilee area. The list also seems to be organized according to their mothers. The first three that are listed are Leah's sons, then come Rachel's two sons, followed by Leah's last two sons. The last four are the sons of Jacob's concubines. Moses omits one son, Simeon, possibly because Simeon's territory was within that of Judah.

The three sections of the poem, the introduction, core, and conclusion, work together in a unifying way. The core of the poem is composed of the blessings on the individual tribes (vv. 6–25), with the sections on Levi and Joseph at the center. The introduction and the coda emphasize the ideal unity of the tribes as a single people and heighten their security and prosperity in the land by the chiastic repetition of key words that form an *inclusio* around the poem: the names "Lord" (YHWH), "Jacob," and "Jeshurun" appear in the introduction (vv. 2, 4, 5), and then in reverse order in the conclusion (vv. 26, 28, 29). Also, "people" and "Israel" appear in chiastic order in the introduction and conclusion (vv. 5, 28, 29).

The blessings of Moses begin with a majestic vision of the Lord coming from Sinai, rising up from Seir, and shining forth from Mount Paran (v. 2). The reference to His coming from Sinai seems to connect with God's revelation and the giving of the law, which is accompanied by the fiery phenomena and loud sounds that attended a solemn occasion. As the priestly tribe, the Levites were entrusted with the Urim and Thummim to find out God's will in specific situations (v. 8; Num. 27:21). These objects were kept in the breastplate (ephod) of the high priest (Ex. 28:30). The responsibilities of the Levites were twofold: to teach the law to Israel and to assist with the offerings (v. 10). The mediatory and instructive role of the Torah were foundational for the future of Israel as God's covenant people.

Moses had the longest blessing for Joseph, which was similar to Jacob's blessing in Genesis 49:22–26. In this blessing, Moses spoke about fertility and strength. Joseph received a double portion of territory, but was represented by his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh (v. 17b; Josh. 14:2–4). Together, the two tribes received the largest portion of land. Their areas were some of the most fertile in the Transjordan territory and in all the promised land. In his wish for fruitfulness (vv. 13, 14, 15, 16), Moses mentioned all of God's creation as a source of blessing for Joseph: heaven, sun, moon, mountains, and earth. Moses expressed Joseph's power over the nations through the horns of a wild ox, a metaphor for strength (see various uses of a wild ox as a metaphor in v. 17; Num. 23:22; Job 39:9–12; Ps. 22:21).

The messianic language in the blessings for Levi and Joseph appears in the context of a visionary speech pointing to the end of days (Deut. 31:29; see "Introduction to the Pentateuch," p. 120, for a discussion of the messianic content of Deut. 32–33). The phrase "latter days/end of the days" may refer to the coming messianic age. In the blessing for Levi, Moses spoke of the *khasid*, "holy, faithful" One (33:8), which seems to allude to the Messiah as the antitypical Priest, who is a cultic Mediator and Offerer of sacrifices as well as the Teacher of Israel (v. 10). In the blessing on Joseph, the term *nazir* (33:16) contains the meaning "consecrated" or "separated," including a notion pointing to the royal and priestly line of the Messiah (some translations have "prince"). This suggests that Deuteronomy closes with a view of the near future, the conquest of the land, and a messianic perspective of hope.

34:1–12

Death of Moses

The record of Moses's death has a mysterious element in its description of the magnificent view of the promised land and in the suggestion that God Himself officiated at the burial of His precious servant (v. 6). During Jesus's transfiguration, He was accompanied by Elijah and Moses, which indicates that Moses had been resurrected by the Lord. Moses died in good health at the age of 120 years. The Israelites lost their greatest leader; a man used by God like no one else in the OT. His successor was Joshua the son of Nun, chosen by God because he was full of the spirit of wisdom (v. 9). Moses had placed his hands on him, thereby appointing Joshua as the leader of Israel. The book closes with the absence of Moses, but the people were ready to conquer the land in fulfillment of the divine promises and under the leadership of God's instrument. In reality, there was no change in leadership. The Lord was still leading His people through human instruments. Joshua and the people shared the same hope of victory.

HISTORICAL BOOKS

INTRODUCTION TO THE OLD TESTAMENT HISTORICAL BOOKS

A large part of both testaments of Scripture include significant historical writing. Apart from the many historical sections contained in the Pentateuch, the OT books of Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther are all almost exclusively presented as history. Their NT equivalents include the four Gospels, which tell the story of Jesus, and the Acts of the Apostles, which details the story of the early Christian community.

The organization of the Hebrew Bible, which is different in book order than our modern Christian Bible, included Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, and 1 and 2 Kings in the section titled Prophets (*nebi'im*), more precisely the Former Prophets, while Ruth, Ezra, Nehemiah, 1 and 2 Chronicles, and Esther were included in the Writings (*ketubim*), the last of three groups of books in the Hebrew canon—the Law, Prophets, and Writings (see "Formation of the Biblical Canon," p. 21).

HISTORY WRITING, HISTORIOGRAPHY, AND THEOLOGY

In order to appropriately understand this particular genre of the OT canon, it is helpful to consider the relationship between biblical history writing, historiography, and theology. While the first two elements are obviously related, the visible presence of theology and theological thinking in these texts has led critical scholars to discount the historical veracity of biblical texts detailing history. After all, how does God fit into a literary category that requires objective, nonpartisan, and dispassionate reporting?

If we want to understand this legitimate question, we need to remember that any writing, including biblical historical accounts, reflects the convictions and presuppositions of the author. We always bring our own experiences, beliefs, and perspectives to the text, and these are also reflected in the way information is communicated to us. Texts and images always reflect an angle and perspective and cannot be truly "objective" since they always involve human communicators.

Right from the outset, biblical history writing identifies its most foundational assumption. Based on its claims of divine revelation (2 Tim. 3:16–17; 2 Pet. 1:19–21), Scripture makes it very clear that God is always at the center of what we read. As Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer, He is actively involved in human affairs. War is reported in terms of God's engagement; kings are evaluated based on their spiritual commitment to the covenant God made with David and his successors. Nations and individuals are participants and witnesses of God's interaction in history. While this may be a challenging concept for many Western twenty-first-century readers, the notion of divinely inspired texts, presenting history from God's perspective, was not unique to Israel in biblical times. Mesopotamian and Egyptian texts contained similar claims.

Historiography is the science of writing history. Biblical historiography includes several important characteristics that need to be acknowledged before one attempts to understand the text. First, OT authors writing historical reports were very *selective* in the choice of details they reported. The narratives in the book of Judges reflect this characteristic, as they do not provide a comprehensive and systematic list of leaders (or judges) governing Israel. Some judges included in the book seem to have led regional confederations, as Israel lacked a central government during that period. Furthermore, the tenure of a number of the judges may have overlapped with other judges governing in a different region. This is not always clearly indicated in the text of Judges, since the biblical text focuses on the response of Israel's tribes to God's call to covenant faithfulness.

Second, OT historiography is *theological and God-centered*. Events and people are evaluated in the light of their commitment to the revealed word and their relationship to the Creator God. The well-known formula "X did evil in the sight [or eyes] of the Lord" (e.g., 1 Kin. 11:6; 14:22; 2 Kin. 8:18, 27; 13:2; 2 Chr. 22:4) appears dozens of times and reminds the reader that Israel's God is not far removed but rather is intimately engaged in human history. This concept can also be found in contemporary ANE texts and would have been readily understood by ancient readers.

Third, OT historiography is unabashedly *interpretive*. The biblical text describes people and events not from a neutral, objective manner but from the vantage point of Yahweh, the covenant God. The authors emphasize what is important for salvation history, moving from Creation, the Fall, and the Flood to the ups and downs of a people called by God for a specific mission. The life of King Omri of Israel, the founder of an important dynasty in the Northern Kingdom of Israel, is summarized in only eight verses (1 Kin. 16:21–28), while the reign of his son Ahab is covered in seven long chapters (1 Kin. 16:29—22:40). This ancient characteristic of recording what is important to the purpose of the text is understood more clearly when we note that Ahab does make an appearance in Assyrian texts (e.g., in a stela erected by Assyrian King Shalmaneser III celebrating his supposed victory at Qarqar in 853 B.C. over a coalition of kings including Ahab). However, most references to Israel in these texts over the following century and a half include the Akkadian *bit ḫumria* ("the house of Omri") found in texts of Shalmaneser III, Adad-Nirari III, Tiglath-Pileser III, and Sargon II. Thus, for the Assyrian superpower, Omri himself, as the icon of his dynasty, must have played a much more significant role than suggested by his limited appearance in the biblical text.

Fourth, OT historical writing is *realistic*. While we would wish for stories that tell of perfection and excellence in the lives of God's people (including their kings), the stories told in the historical books of the OT offer us the real version without an idealized tint. In fact, compared to some other ancient texts that tell truly unbelievable stories, this trait of biblical history writing should give us more confidence in the authenticity of the material. King David, who looms large in biblical texts and whose name is the most referenced in the Bible, is not portrayed only as a fearless warrior and wise negotiator. The reader can also see his fierce and arrogant anger in his threat to avenge the disrespect from Nabal (1 Sam. 25) and his adulterous affair with Bathsheba and the eventual murder of her husband, which led to more death and pain in his family and Israel as a whole (2 Sam. 11; cf. 1 Kin. 15:5). The biblical author describes not only the extraordinary wisdom and riches of King Solomon but also his ungodly importation of Egyptian horses and chariots (1 Kin. 10:28–29; in violation of the divine command found in Deut. 17:16) and his waning commitment to the Lord due to his love for many foreign women (1 Kin. 11:1–8). A propagandist purpose would not have allowed the inclusion of these damaging facts. But the Bible includes them as lessons and examples of God's grace, forgiveness, transformation, and, at times, judgment.

People living in the world of the OT related well to stories, and history often has its best effect when it is presented in that way. This was as true then as it is today. Beyond the selective, theological, interpretive, and realistic nature of OT history writing, all these texts were given to tell the story of redemption again and again. Sometimes this happens through the vehicle of personal biographies or brief glimpses of key moments; at other times, the focus is more on the national storyline within the bigger context of a cosmic controversy. All of these stories, however, include a teaching component. In the NT, John 20:30–31 summarizes this focus by stating that John's book was written so that readers would believe that Jesus is the Christ/Messiah, the Son of God, and thus have life in His name. Ultimately, reading and hearing these stories help us to focus on the most foundational response of believing that the God who worked in the life of individuals and people is still at work today in the life of His church.

DEUTERONOMY AND THE HISTORICAL BOOKS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

Scholars have noted a number of similarities between Deuteronomy and the first six historical books (Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings), involving terminology and the overall theological lens, characterized by a focus on the covenant. Consequently, these books have been labeled as belonging to a Deuteronomistic History (DH). Clearly, many of the specific commands and values found in these books reflect those included in Deuteronomy. However, since the concept of a DH is closely linked to the source-critical paradigm pioneered by German scholars K. H. Graf and Julius Wellhausen (see "Introduction to the Pentateuch," p. 120), it suffices to recognize the logical sequence of these books following the covenant renewal described in Deuteronomy at the border of the promised land. In this sequence of biblical history, Joshua describes the time immediately prior to the conquest of Canaan and continues until the death of that first generation of conquerors. Judges continues the narrative, relating the frequent ups and downs of Israel's tribes, who often forget their commitment to the covenant made with the God who saved them out of slavery. The books of Samuel and Kings tell the story of Israel's transition from a tribal, judge-led confederation of clans and people to a united monarchy under Saul, David, and Solomon.

While the historical books do not reflect the sermonic frame of Deuteronomy, the treaty elements using distinctive vocabulary and phraseology connected to the promised land appear repeatedly in these books and highlight the close connection. One of the crucial themes of Deuteronomy, the need and requirement for a specific, single place of worship (Deut. 12:5), appears again and again in the historical books. Prior to the construction of the temple in Jerusalem, this is focused on the location of the tabernacle and the constant battle to maintain the singularity of the worship of the Lord amid the turn to high places and rival sanctuaries. After the construction of the temple under Solomon's leadership, the struggle continued as high places and household cultic places threatened to distract people from worshiping God as the unique Creator of heaven and earth. They were tempted to forget the object-lesson quality of the sacrificial and temple service, which pointed forward to the true Lamb of God.

The emphasis on heart religion and commitment in Deuteronomy is echoed by the early prophetic voices heard in the historical books. Moses's call for Israel to love God with all their heart, soul, and strength (Deut. 6:5; cf. 10:12) is repeated again and again in the later books (e.g., Josh. 22:5; 24:23; 1 Sam. 12:20, 24; 1 Kin. 8:61).

EARLY PROPHECY AND THE HISTORICAL BOOKS

Throughout history, God has very often communicated with humanity through the ministry of prophets. According to the definition found in Scripture, a prophet is an individual who has been called by God to speak on God's behalf to God's people and the larger world (as exemplified in Moses; cf. Deut. 18:15–22). Beginning in the Pentateuch, prophets are God's instruments to invite individuals or peoples to turn around and commit themselves again to God.

There are several Hebrew terms describing prophets, and all of them are used in the historical books (e.g., "man of God" [1 Sam. 9:6]; "seer" [1 Sam. 9:9]; and "prophet" [1 Sam. 3:20], to mention a few). Prophets and prophetic ministry per se were also known in the cultures surrounding Israel, including Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Syria. Texts from Emar and Mari and other regions of the ANE illustrate this phenomenon. In most instances (and rather distinct from biblical prophecy), extrabiblical prophets spoke to kings and were mostly in the employ of royalty. Their ministry happened typically within the context of cultic, ritual, and priestly activities, while biblical prophets came mostly from families that were not of the priestly line (with some exceptions, such as Samuel or Jeremiah). Unlike the monarchic and priestly functions, there was no hereditary prophetic role in Israel. God called whom and when He liked.

Early biblical prophets include Enoch (based on Jude 14; cf. CTr 51), Noah (Gen. 9:24–27; PP 117), Abraham (Gen. 20:7), Miriam (Ex. 15:20–21), Balaam (Num. 22), Deborah (Judg. 4:4), and a number of anonymous prophets (Judg. 6:8; 1 Kin. 13:1–10).

Samuel played an important role in the late premonarchic and early monarchic periods in relation to the monarchy, similar to the ministries of Nathan and Gad, who faithfully and fearlessly communicated God's messages to King David, even if that potentially meant a death sentence (2 Sam. 12:1–15; 24:11–25; 1 Chr. 21:9–19). Elijah's and Elisha's ministries affected a significant number of Israelite and Judean kings, as well as their Syrian neighbors. Like later writing prophets, such as Micah, Isaiah, and Jeremiah, their messages often annoyed and ultimately challenged their people and leaders to take a stand for the Lord and remember the covenant that God had made with them. The description of Ahab's and Jehoshaphat's encounter with Micaiah, the son of Imlah, in 1 Kings 22 provides a telling illustration of the different ways that various kings related to prophets of Yahweh.

Ahab of Israel and Jehoshaphat of Judah, linked through the marriage of their children (2 Kin. 8:18), agreed to fight the Syrian regional power to regain control over Ramoth Gilead, which had originally belonged to Israel. Like other ANE kings, they required divine orientation. It appears that Ahab followed the normal custom of maintaining a large number of court-supported prophets and diviners. The biblical text reports that about 400 prophets were gathered by the king, and they noisily proclaimed a resounding victory (1 Kin. 22:6). Jehoshaphat's skeptical reaction (v. 7) highlights one of the characteristics of true prophecy: a prophet of the Lord speaks the word from the Lord—not a conveniently packaged message requested by a king willing to pay for the right words. Micaiah's first message was full of irony and echoed what Ahab wanted to hear. Ahab's reaction suggested that he caught the irony (v. 16), and when he demanded the truth in the name of the Lord, the prophet revealed the king's imminent death. Micaiah's incarceration is a good illustration of the fact that the message of biblical prophets was not always welcomed by national leaders and the people.

In the ninth century B.C., during the time of Elijah and Elisha, the biblical text also depicts the existence of schools of the prophets. Generally, their members were called "sons/company of the prophets" (e.g., 1 Kin. 20:35; 2 Kin. 2:3, 5, 7, 15). Some scholars consider them as groups of individuals who practiced asceticism and preferred communal living. The biblical data, however, suggests a more school-like institution whose members were often married (2 Kin. 4:1–7) and may have functioned as itinerant religious teachers following their studies (PP 592–94).

The OT includes a number of books written by prophets (beginning with Jonah in the eighth century B.C.) whose ministries affected both Israel and Judah and whose writings became part of the biblical canon. Biblical prophets continued to admonish, encourage, challenge, and call back God's people until the Exile and the destruction of Jerusalem. The prophetic gift continued to bless God's people even after the Exile, as can be noted in the Ezra-Nehemiah narrative where Haggai and Zechariah play key roles in encouraging the returnees to continue the reconstruction of the temple (Ezra 5:1; 6:14; cf. the reference in Ezra's prayer in Ezra 9:11 and the many references to past prophetic ministry in Neh. 9:26, 30, 32). Intriguingly, the text also describes false prophets who had been hired to discourage Jerusalem's leadership and people through their misguided ministry (Neh. 6:10–14). This brief review clearly highlights the enduring presence of God's prophets ministering to the needs of the covenant people as well as the larger world surrounding them. During the intertestamental period this prophetic

voice essentially disappeared, but it rang out loud preceding the time of Jesus's ministry and in the foundational decades of the early Christian community.

MAIN HISTORICAL PERIODS COVERED IN THE HISTORICAL BOOKS

The historical books cover the period beginning with the conquest of Canaan (ca. 1400 B.C.) until the time of the return of the Jews to Jerusalem under the leadership of Ezra in the fifth century B.C. (ca. 450 B.C.), slightly less than a thousand years. This period comprises a significant part of Israel's history, beginning with the time of the judges, that was characterized by tribal division and near-constant conflict with local powers, until the return of the Jews to Jerusalem during the time of Artaxerxes II when the province of Yehud was under the control of the Persian Empire. Following is a brief review of the major divisions of Israelite history.

Period of the Judges (ca. 1407–1053 B.C.)

The total number of years reported in the book of Judges for individual judges, if added sequentially, significantly exceeds 450 years (in addition to the three fairly extensive periods for which the biblical text does not include explicit durations: the time that Joshua and the elders governed Israel [Judg. 2:7]; the period that Samgar led Israel [Judg. 3:31]; as well as the long period that Samuel served as a judge [1 Sam. 7:15]). This significantly surpasses the roughly 350 known years between the conquest (ca. 1407 B.C.) and the anointing of Saul (1053 B.C.). This discrepancy suggests that judges may have governed at the same time in different parts of the country. This suggestion is supported by the geography of Canaan, which may have led to the isolation of some of the tribes (e.g., the tribes living on the eastern side of the Jordan). The biblical text itself highlights the fact that not all tribes were always afflicted by the same enemy or participated in every fight for liberation (e.g., Judg. 6:35; 8:1; 12:1).

United Monarchy (1053–931 B.C.)

Three kings reigned during this period, separated by some years of strife and civil war. Luke suggests in Acts 13:21 that Saul's reign lasted for forty years, which may indicate a rounded number, in line with David's (1 Chron. 29:27) and Solomon's reigns (1 Kin. 11:42). The meaning of the text of 1 Samuel 13:1 is unclear, as can be seen in the many diverging modern versions ("Saul reigned one year; and when he had reigned two years over Israel" [NKJV]; "Saul was thirty years old when he became king, and he reigned over Israel forty-two years" [NIV]; "Saul was...years old when he began to reign; and he reigned...and two years over Israel" [NRSV]). The ancient versions reflect the difficult nature of the text: the translators of the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, simply omitted the verse. In the Targums, the Aramaic translations of the Hebrew Bible, the text is paraphrased as "Saul was as innocent as a child of one year when he began to reign."

David's forty-year reign (1011–971 B.C.) is divided into two periods. David reigned for seven years in Hebron over Judah and Benjamin. He conquered Jerusalem and made it his capital (2 Sam. 5:6–10), and he reigned thirty-three years in Jerusalem as king of a united kingdom (1 Chr. 29:27). His military victories over the Philistines and other neighboring nations laid the foundation for a short period characterized by military strength, advances in the organization of the kingdom, and economic blessings. The biblical text draws a clear connection between David's faithfulness and God's divine blessings for the nation. Critical scholars have long doubted the very existence of King David. However, recent discoveries, including the ninth-century-B.C. Tel Dan inscription mentioning "the house of David," found in 1993, and the important contribution of the excavations of Khirbet Qeiyafa (possibly to be identified as the biblical Shaaraim, mentioned in 1 Sam. 17:52 as a border town separating Israel and Philistia), strongly suggest the existence of a central administrative power in the tenth century B.C. in Israel. These discoveries have put these doubts from critical scholarship to rest (for more, see "Archaeology and the Bible," p. 77).

Solomon's reign (971–931 B.C.) also covered forty years (1 Kin. 11:42) and represents the pinnacle of power, economic prowess, art, and architecture of Israel's united monarchy. At this time, Israel's territory extended from the Gulf of Aqaba in the south to the Euphrates in the north. Solomon's plea for divine wisdom (1 Kin. 3:1–15) was granted and his fame spread throughout the ANE. His marriage to Pharaoh's daughter (1 Kin. 3:1) underlines Solomon's elevated status within the context of ANE powers of the tenth century B.C. Solomon is well known for his construction of the first temple, but from a strategic position, his construction of a series of fortified cities for his standing army and his extensive chariot force (1 Kin. 4:26; 9:15–19; 10:26) hints at his political, economic, and military significance. Israel's crucial geographical location, connecting Africa (and Egypt) to Syria, Asia Minor, and Mesopotamia, gave Solomon serious control of key routes. Unfortunately, his huge harem and his agreement to the construction around Jerusalem of places of worship honoring scores of ANE deities for his wives set the stage for Israel's continuous struggle with idolatry over the following centuries (1 Kin. 11:1–8). Furthermore, his ambitious building projects and the complete administrative reorganization of the kingdom required that every Israelite had to contribute labor, leading to disquiet and challenging the agricultural production of the kingdom.

Divided Monarchy

Due to Rehoboam's unwise decision soon after his coronation to increase the forced labor requirements for his citizens, the ten northern tribes broke away from Judah and Benjamin. This resulted in the division of God's people into the kingdoms of Israel and Judah (1 Kin. 12:1–20). The following contains a brief summary of key kings and events during the following centuries.

Kingdom of Israel (931–722 B.C.)

Jeroboam I (931–910 B.C.) became Israel's first king (1 Kin. 12:19–20). During the reign of Solomon he had been part of the royal administration (1 Kin. 11:26–28), but following a prophetic oracle anticipating the division of the ten northern tribes from Judah and Benjamin, Jeroboam had to flee from Solomon to Egypt (1 Kin. 11:29–40). He later returned to Israel after the death of Solomon, and became king over the ten northern tribes when they rebelled against Rehoboam. Even though he had been called to reign over Israel by a prophet from God, Jeroboam built two temples and installed two golden calves in two crucial geographical locations of his kingdom: Bethel (marking the southern border) and Dan (marking the northern border). This was most likely for political reasons, as he sought to keep his people from traveling to the temple in Jerusalem to fulfill a requirement of the law (1 Kin. 12:27–30). He also appointed non-Levitical priests and established high places around his kingdom (v. 31). These became known as Jeroboam's sins that caused Israel to sin (e.g., 1 Kin. 14:16; 15:30; 2 Kin. 3:3; 10:29).

Jeroboam's form of worship was a beguiling mixture of true and false religion. Jeroboam was the first king of a line of twenty kings representing many dynasties. His son **Nadab** (910–909 B.C.) reigned for only two years (1 Kin. 15:25) and was assassinated by **Baasha** from the tribe of Issachar (1 Kin. 15:27). Baasha reigned for twenty-two years (909–886 B.C.) and fought a number of battles with Judah and also Syria to the north. His son **Elah** (886–885 B.C.) reigned for less than two years and was assassinated in his capital, Tirzah, by one of his generals, **Zimri** (885 B.C.), who made himself king but reigned for only seven days (1 Kin. 16:8–10, 15). In fulfillment of the message that the prophet Jehu had delivered to Baasha (1 Kin. 16:1–4), Zimri spent his very short-lived reign killing all the family members of the house of Baasha (1 Kin. 16:11–13). After Zimri's violent coup another of Elah's generals, **Omri**, was proclaimed king by the army of Israel and took the capital from Zimri, who committed suicide, after a short siege (vv. 16–18).

The biblical text reports that, for a while, Israel was ravaged by civil war between the followers of **Tibni** (885–880 B.C.) and Omri. The reign of Omri, who finally prevailed (1 Kin. 16:21–22), lasted twelve years (885–874 B.C.) and represents the beginning of the longest-reigning dynasty of Israel (four generations). According to the Moabite Mesha Stele, Omri subjugated Moab, and during the time of King Ahab, Omri's son, Moab paid him a yearly tribute of 100,000 lambs and 100,000 rams (2 Kin. 3:4). Omri also established Samaria as Israel's capital (1 Kin. 16:24). His son **Ahab** (874–853 B.C.) reigned for twenty-two years and, based on the evaluation of the biblical text, was one of the worst kings of the Northern Kingdom. His reign overlaps with the ministry of Elijah. His marriage to the Phoenician Queen Jezebel caused a major religious crisis in Israel (1 Kin. 18:4, 19). She introduced court-sponsored prophets and priests of Baal. First Kings 22:39 states that Ahab built an ivory house in Samaria. Excavations of the palace at Samaria found hundreds of artistic ivory fragments. His son **Ahaziah** (853–852 B.C.) reigned for only two years (1 Kin. 22:51–53) and followed in the footsteps of his father. He was followed by his son **Joram** (Jehoram; 852–841 B.C.), completing the fourth generation of the dynasty of Omri. Moab rebelled against Israel during his reign (2 Kin. 3:4–27).

Jehoram (sometimes also called Joram, cf. 2 Kin. 9:14–26) was assassinated by his general **Jehu** (841–814 B.C.), who had been anointed at Elisha's direction by one of the sons of the prophets (2 Kin. 9:1–10) and had been charged to completely destroy Ahab's descendants. Jehu's zealous fulfillment of this command resulted in the divine promise of the establishment of Jehu's dynasty until the fourth generation (2 Kin. 10:30), even though he ultimately did not help Israel to return to the Lord and continued in the worship at Dan and Bethel established by Jeroboam I (2 Kin. 10:31). His son **Jehoahaz** (814–798 B.C.) reigned for seventeen years (2 Kin. 13:1–2) but did not change the general downward course of Israel. During his reign Israel lost significant territory to the Syrians, led by Hazael and Ben-Hadad. Second Kings 13:7 states that Israel was left with only 50 horsemen, 10 chariots, and 10,000 foot soldiers. His son **Jehoash** (Joash; 798–782 B.C.) reigned for sixteen years and recovered some of the territory lost to the Syrians (or Arameans; 2 Kin. 13:25). He also won a battle against Judah at Beth-Shemesh and took hostages and booty from Jerusalem to Samaria (2 Kin. 14:8–14). It is likely that he coreigned with his son **Jeroboam II** (793–753 B.C.) for twelve years.

Jeroboam II's reign represents the golden age of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Due to the weakness of the Assyrians and the Syrians, he was able to extend his reign and recover much of the territory that had been lost since the days of Solomon. While the seven verses describing his reign suggest political and economic stability and link his reign to the prophetic ministry of Jonah, he did not initiate true reformation (2 Kin. 14:23–29). Judging from the writing of Amos, a contemporary of Jeroboam II, it appears as if social injustice became an ever more pressing problem in Israelite society. His son **Zechariah** (753–752 B.C.) reigned for only six months and was assassinated by **Shallum** (752 B.C.), who in turn was killed a month later by **Menahem** (752–742 B.C.), who had to pay a high tribute to the Assyrian King Tiglath-Pileser III.

That turbulent period of Israelite history underlines the decay and diminishing importance of Israel (2 Kin. 15:8–22). The reign of Menahem's son **Pekahiah** (742–740 B.C.) was cut short when he was assassinated by **Pekah** (752–732 B.C.). Intriguingly, according to 2 Kings 15:27 Pekah reigned for twenty years, suggesting that he may have governed a small part of the kingdom during Menahem's reign. He rebelled against the Assyrian power and formed an alliance with Syrian city-states (cf. Is. 7:1–4 for more information). The last king of Israel, **Hoshea** (732–722 B.C.), killed his predecessor, Pekah, and had to pay heavy tribute to the Assyrians. He joined an anti-Assyrian alliance under the leadership of Pharaoh So of Egypt (2 Kin. 17:4), possibly Osorkon IV, who reigned in Tanis. Ten years into Hoshea's reign, Samaria and Israel ceased to exist and the people were deported by the Assyrian kings Shalmaneser V and Sargon II (2 Kin. 18:10).

Kingdom of Judah (931–586 B.C.)

Different from Israel, Judah's kings all belonged to the Davidic dynasty. **Rehoboam** (931–913 B.C.) suffered an attack and defeat by Pharaoh Sheshonq I of Egypt in his fifth year (1 Kin. 14:25–28). The temple was raided and its treasures taken. Unfortunately, like his father, Solomon, he had many wives and many concubines (2 Chr. 11:21). Judah fell more and more into idolatry (1 Kin. 14:22–24) during his reign. His son **Abijam** (913–911 B.C.) reigned for only three years and followed the general downward trend of his father. His son **Asa** (911–870 B.C.), however, is considered a good king by the biblical author because of his religious reforms (1 Kin. 15:9–15). He was one of the longest-reigning kings of Judah. Because of his lack of faith in God's power to save when Israel's Baasha attacked Judah, he was severely reprimanded by the prophet Hanani (2 Chr. 16:1–10). Asa's son **Jehoshaphat** (872–848 B.C.) reigned as coregent due to his father's ill health (2 Chr. 16:12–13). He continued his father's reforms but made an alliance by marriage with the dynasty of Omri when his son married Ahab's daughter (2 Kin. 8:18, 26). Unfortunately, this marriage opened Judah to Baal worship. He also fought alongside Ahab against the Arameans at Ramoth Gilead (2 Chr. 18–19:3).

Jehoshophat's son **Jehoram** (853–841 B.C.) reigned with his father from 853 B.C. onward. He should not be confused with Joram (Jehoram) of Israel, who reigned in the same period. Scripture's evaluation of his reign is entirely negative due to the influence of his wife, the daughter of Ahab (2 Kin. 8:16–18). Judah lost control over Edom and Libnah during his reign (2 Kin. 8:20–22). The reign of his son **Ahaziah** (841 B.C.) was cut short dramatically when he died from the injuries sustained during Jehu's rebellion in neighboring Israel (2 Kin. 9:14–28). His mother, **Athaliah**, reigned from 841 to 835 B.C. and secured her reign by killing all the royal heirs (2 Kin. 11:1) except for her grandson Joash, who was hidden by his aunt Jehosheba, who was married to the high priest Jehoiada (2 Kin. 11:2–3). Athaliah's reign of terror ended six years later when, under the leadership of Jehoiada, the army and the people of the land made Joash king of Judah and killed Athaliah.

The long reign of **Joash** (Jehoash; 835–796 B.C.), not to be confused with the king of Israel with a similar name, reflects both good and evil. Guided by his priestly uncle, Joash attempted a major religious reform, seeking to destroy the worship of Baal in the land (2 Kin. 12:1–16; 2 Chr. 24:1–14). Later on, however, he killed Jehoiada's son Zechariah, who had challenged Judah publicly (2 Chr. 24:15–22). Joash was killed by his servants, and his son **Amaziah** (796–767 B.C.) became king in Jerusalem (2 Chr. 25). God gave him a resounding victory over Edom (2 Chr. 25:5–12), but Amaziah became arrogant and challenged Jehoash of Israel, who won a great victory and marched into Jerusalem (2 Kin. 14:8–14) and took many spoils and hostages back to Samaria. Amaziah was also killed by his own servants, and his son Azariah was made king in his stead (2 Kin. 14:17–21). **Azariah** (Uzziah; 792–740 B.C.) is considered a good king, and he reigned for fifty-two years, coreigning with his father, Amaziah, at the end of his life. Judah avoided many of the dynastic struggles that Israel experienced by appointing future kings as coregents. Azariah is called Uzziah in Chronicles, perhaps reflecting a throne name. Parallel to the reign of Jeroboam II in Israel, Azariah's reign is characterized by peace and strong economic development (2 Chr. 26:10). He maintained a strong army (2 Chr. 26:11–15) and regained control over Elath at the Gulf of Aqaba (2 Kin. 14:22), thus giving him sea access and control over an important trade route. During his reign Judah experienced a major earthquake that is referenced in Scripture (Amos 1:1; Zech. 14:5). When the king attempted to enter the Holy Place and burn incense on its altar, he was struck with leprosy and had to live a secluded life in the palace (2 Chr. 26:16–21). His son **Jotham** (750–732 B.C.) reigned in his place and was a contemporary of the prophets Isaiah, Hosea, and Micah, who, most likely, were a good influence on him (2 Chr. 27:1–9). His son **Ahaz** (735–716 B.C.), however, represents one of the worst kings in Judah's history; he practiced idolatrous abominations, including sacrificing one of his sons (2 Kin. 16:3–4). Instead of trusting in the Lord, Ahaz sent a heavy tribute to the Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser III, requesting his help against the alliance of Israel and Syria (2 Kin. 16:5–9; Is. 7:3–13). He also introduced an Assyrian altar into the temple in Jerusalem (2 Kin. 16:10–16).

Ahaz was succeeded by his son **Hezekiah** (716–687 B.C.), who initiated major religious reforms and also strengthened the national defenses (at Lachish and Jerusalem) in light of the Assyrian threat following the destruction of Samaria (2 Kin. 18:1–8; 2 Chr. 32:28–29). His name is associated with the 1,900-foot (ca. 582 m) tunnel connecting the Gihon Spring to a pool in the lower part of Jerusalem inside the city walls (2 Kin. 20:20; 2 Chr. 32:30; see "Archaeology and the Bible," p. 77). Lachish, the second-largest fortified city of Judah located south of Jerusalem, was destroyed by Sennacherib during his reign. God delivered Jerusalem from the Assyrian attack and killed a huge number of Assyrian soldiers (2 Kin. 18–19).

Manasseh (697–643 B.C.), Hezekiah's son, became one of the worst kings of the kingdom of Judah, reconstructing altars for Baal, practicing magic, sacrificing children, and worshiping the stars (2 Chr. 33:1–10). Consequently, he was taken to Mesopotamia as a prisoner of the Assyrian kings (2 Chr. 33:11). Chronicles reports that Manasseh repented and God forgave and restored him to his throne (2 Chr. 33:12–13). The damage done by his example, however, accelerated Judah's fall and soon-coming destruction. God's prophetic word announced that it was for the sins of Manasseh that Judah would go into captivity (2 Kin. 24:3). **Amon** (643–641 B.C.), Manasseh's son, reigned for only two years and was killed by his servants (2 Kin. 21:19–26; 2 Chr. 33:21–25). He was succeeded by Judah's last good king, **Josiah** (641–609 B.C.), who undertook a major reform at the age of fifteen or sixteen years (2 Chr. 34:3). In the eighteenth year of his reign (622 B.C.), the "book of the law" was found in the temple, which gave impetus for more reforms, including reinstating the celebration of the Passover (2 Kin. 22–23; 2 Chr. 34:6–7). Josiah died in the battle of Megiddo against Pharaoh Necho in 609 B.C. (2 Chr. 35:20–24) as he sought to delay the arrival of the Egyptian army on their way to support the remainder of the severely diminished army of the last Assyrian king. His son **Jehoahaz** (609 B.C.) reigned for three months and was deported by the Egyptian pharaoh, who put another son of Josiah, **Jehoiakim** (609–598 B.C.), on the throne.

When the Babylonian crown prince Nebuchadnezzar took Jerusalem for the first time in 605 B.C., Judah became a vassal of the new Babylonian superpower. Among the hostages taken by Nebuchadnezzar were Daniel and his three friends (Dan. 1:1–6). When another battle between Egypt and Babylon in 601 B.C. ended in heavy losses to the Babylonians, Jehoiakim thought that his time had come, and he rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar. He died in 598 B.C. before the Babylonian troops were able to take Jerusalem for a second time. His son **Jehoiachin** (598–597 B.C.) was made king of Judah following the sudden death of his father, but he reigned for only three months (2 Kin. 24:8–12) before Jerusalem fell for a second time to the Babylonians. He was taken as prisoner to Babylon but was released in the thirty-seventh year of his captivity by Babylonian King Evil-Merodach, a son of Nebuchadnezzar, who ruled Babylon from 562 to 560 B.C. (2 Kin. 25:27–30). Judah's final king's birth name was Mattaniah ("gift of Yahweh"), but he received the throne name **Zedekiah** ("justice of Yahweh"; 597–586 B.C.) from Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kin. 24:17). He was another son of Josiah but did not live as his father had lived. He traveled to Babylon in his fourth year (ca. 594/593 B.C.; Jer. 51:59) to swear allegiance to Nebuchadnezzar. That trip to Babylon may be connected to the story found in Daniel 3 when all the princes of the Babylonian Empire were required to worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar had built on the plain of Dura. Like some of the other kings before him, Zedekiah was persuaded by Egypt into another anti-Babylon alliance (Jer. 37:6–10) and rebelled in 590 B.C. Babylon's quick response led to the destruction of all fortified cities in Judah and, finally, in July of 586 B.C., to the fall of Jerusalem (2 Kin. 25:2; Jer. 39:2), resulting in the complete destruction of Jerusalem and its temple. Zedekiah was caught when he tried to leave the city prior to the fall, was blinded, and was taken to Babylon as a prisoner (2 Kin. 25:1–7). Nebuchadnezzar appointed Gedaliah as administrative overseer of the newly established Babylonian province, and Gedaliah resided in Mizpah (2 Kin. 25:22–24). Unfortunately, he was killed by Jewish rebels, who took many of the remaining Jews, including Jeremiah, to Egypt (2 Kin. 25:25–26; see Jer. 41–43).

Exile and Return (605–444 B.C.)

Judah's Exile lasted about seventy years, beginning with the first deportation in 605 B.C. and concluding after the fall of Babylon in 539 B.C. and the subsequent decree issued by the Medo-Persian King Cyrus (2 Chr. 36:22–23; Ezra 1:1–4). The first group of Jews returned to Jerusalem around 537 B.C. under the leadership of Sheshbazzar (most likely the Babylonian version of the Hebrew name Zerubbabel; cf. Ezra 1:5–11; 2:2; 3:2–8; Hag. 1:14–15). While the altar was immediately reestablished and the sacrificial worship began right after the arrival of the returnees, it took more than twenty years to complete the rebuilding of the temple itself (Ezra 6:15 gives the sixth year of King Darius I [515 B.C.] as the time when the newly rebuilt temple was dedicated). Ezra and Nehemiah describe three returns: the first under Zerubbabel/Sheshbazzar in 537 B.C.; the second under Ezra in 457 B.C. (the seventh year of Artaxerxes I; Ezra 7:8); and the third under Nehemiah, who had been appointed as the new governor of the province of Yehud that was part of the Medo-Persian Empire (in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes I, 444 B.C.; Neh. 2:1, 11).

Judah's provincial status within the satrapy Beyond the River suggests limited control over its destiny, which is also reflected in Ezra and Nehemiah (cf. Ezra 4). Restoration of the temple and return to the land did not automatically mean political restoration equivalent to the freedom Israel and Judah had enjoyed during the centuries of the united and divided monarchies. For the next centuries until the beginning of the NT period, Jerusalem and its surrounding territory were part of a sequence of empires that controlled its destiny. God's covenant people were called to affect the world and cultures surrounding them by their example and message. In many ways, this was a time of growing expectations, as the time of the Messiah, anticipated by Israel's prophets for centuries, was drawing closer and closer.

MAJOR THEOLOGICAL THEMES OF THE HISTORICAL BOOKS

God's engagement in human history is one of the key theological motifs shared by all of the historical books of the OT. In spite of unfaithfulness by His people and leaders, God is at work. He heard Joshua's plea for wisdom and strength before he had even expressed it verbally (Josh. 1:1–9). He heard Israel's repeated cries during the period of the judges as they experienced repeated oppression due to their poor choices (e.g., Judg. 3:9, 15; 4:3; 5:28). God hears when we lack hope or when we are burdened by our sins and bad choices. As we cry we also turn toward the only One who can offer us hope and liberation. This is the covenantal framework that runs like a golden thread through the historical books. God woos us into recognizing our distress, which causes us to turn to Him and repent. In turn, God provides a way out. Sometimes He uses other people (as illustrated by the stories told in Judges and Ruth); sometimes He intervenes directly, moving the hearts of princes and kings or sending His prophets to offer a way through a parched desert, which led to an unexpected victory (2 Kin. 3:9–24); sometimes He uses kings and courtiers to make a way (see Ezra 1), as when He stirred up the spirit of Cyrus and the hearts of His own people. He moves history forward and fills it with hope.

God's engagement in human history is central to the larger cosmic battle between good and evil. There is a purpose to God hearing the cries of His people and those who are afflicted and oppressed. Ultimately, it drives us to make a decision about whom we will trust. God's covenant blessings were a way of helping the larger world surrounding Israel and Judah to pay attention to the Lord, the God of Israel, who is not a local or regional deity made of stone, wood, or metal. This principle of establishing His people as witnesses (already anticipated in Gen. 12:1–3) is appropriately expressed in 1 Kings 10:1 when the queen of Sheba came to visit King Solomon and asked him questions because of his fame and the name of the Lord. Solomon's fame was related to "the name of the LORD"—shorthand for His character and qualities. Israel was to demonstrate to the world that God is the Creator and Sustainer of *all* the world. Intriguingly, most canonical prophets writing during this period included a significant number of messages and oracles directed to the nations surrounding Israel, illustrating perfectly the universal nature of God. In the NT the same principle is summarized so powerfully in John 3:16—God loved the whole world and gave His only Son to save us from eternal death and give eternal life to those who trust in Him. There is no partiality or partisanship in God's saving grace.

Another recurring motif found in the historical books involves *the power of leadership*. Faithful leaders inspire faithful followers; idolatrous leaders seduce people to more idolatry. This clear message can be easily documented in the annals of Israelite history. Great moments of national reformation are led by God-fearing kings, prophets, or priests who don't consider the cost of unpopular decisions (e.g., Joash's repair of the temple was inspired by the godly influence of the high priest Jehoiada [2 Kin. 12:1–16; 2 Chr. 24:1–14]; following the death of his mentor, Joash served wooden images and idols [2 Chr. 24:15–22]). Other examples include Asa, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, and Josiah from the kingdom of Judah. Their examples and leadership functioned as powerful initiators of national transformation, even though we can clearly see in the biblical text some of their weaknesses and bad choices.

When we consider the importance of leadership, we should not overlook the significance of the prophetic ministry. The role of the prophets in the historical books cannot be underestimated. Their divinely inspired messages often call God's people to return to Him or, in other moments, are a reminder of the fact that God is still in control and able and willing to save His people, thus offering them hope.

God's sovereignty and grace shines through the story again and again. He gave the land to Israel. He chose Jerusalem to be the location for His temple and His presence. He listened to the cries of His people and their leaders. He appointed and empowered kings—even though a human monarchy was not part of His ideal plan (1 Sam. 8). He gathered a remnant to return to Jerusalem. His ability to hear the prayers and cries of His people is not limited by time and space. He is the all-powerful, almighty, all-knowing, and all-caring God, even though Israel often forgot these foundational truths.

As we reach the end of OT history in the Chronicles and in Ezra and Nehemiah, we wonder about the Messiah, the One foretold by prophets and prefigured by some of Israel's leaders. When will He come? How will He come, and for whom will He come? As easily recognizable from the lack of recognition in the NT Gospel narratives, Israel was waiting for the Messiah but looked for the wrong kind. The Messiah's arrival would change the world forever and validate the hope of thousands who yearned to see Immanuel, God with us.

JOSHUA

INTRODUCTION

Title and Authorship. In the Jewish canon, the book of Joshua is the first of the section called "the Prophets." The title of the book is a personal name, *yehoshua'*, meaning "Yahweh saves." Joshua's name was originally *hoshea'*, "salvation," but Moses changed it by prefixing the abbreviated form of the divine name Yahweh (*yahweh* + *hoshua*; Num. 13:16). The English form "Joshua" abbreviates the Hebrew "Yehoshua," while the name Jesus derives from the Greek version. This means that the names Yehoshua, Joshua, and Jesus are one and the same. Both in name and work, Joshua was a type of Jesus Christ, the "Commander of the army of the Lord" (Josh. 5:13–15).

Internal evidence shows that the book was composed shortly after the conquest. Several examples can be cited. First, it is stated that Rahab was still living in Israel in the writer's lifetime ("to this day"; 6:25), which suggests that the writing of the book occurred during the lifetime of the generation that entered the Holy Land (cf. Judg. 2:10). Second, the author seems to have been an eyewitness to the conquest, not only because he uses a first-person pronoun (Josh. 5:6) but also because of the copious geographical and topographical details found throughout the book. Third, the references to Jerusalem (15:63) and Gezer (16:10) as being inhabited by the Jebusites and Canaanites, respectively, as well as the preeminence given to Sidon as opposed to Tyre (11:8; 13:4; 19:28), imply that the book was composed long before the reigns of David and Solomon (cf. 2 Sam. 5:6–11; 1 Kin. 7:13; 9:16). According to the text, Joshua was literate (Josh. 8:32; 24:26). He is also the dominant human character of the book, as is Moses in the Pentateuch. It is probable, therefore, that Joshua is the author of the book that bears his name, though his death account, as well as that of Eleazar (24:29–33), must have been added by another inspired person(s). The internal evidence agrees with Jewish traditions that Joshua wrote chapters 1:1—24:28 while Eleazer and Phinehas added 24:29–32 and 24:33, respectively. Nonetheless, there are some later scribal modernizations intended to clarify the text for later generations (see 11:21; 15:13–15; 19:47). The reference to the book of Jasher (10:13; 2 Sam. 1:18) may be one of these later scribal additions. Such additions, however, do not affect the inspiration and authenticity of the book.

Date. The dating of the book of Joshua depends largely on the dating of the Exodus, since this book is a direct continuation of Genesis-Deuteronomy. Scripture supports the fifteenth-century-B.C. dating of the Exodus (see Judg. 2:10; 11:26; 1 Kin. 6:1; cf. Exodus: Introduction). Therefore, the conquest of the Holy Land must have begun about 1407 B.C. Caleb was forty years old when, along with Joshua, he was numbered among the spies (Josh. 14:7; Num. 13:6, 8). Caleb was eighty-five at the end of the conquest (Josh. 14:10), with at least thirty-eight of these years elapsing between Kadesh Barnea and the crossing of the Zered river in Transjordan (Deut. 2:14; cf. Num. 10:11–12; 33:38). The conquest then must have lasted for about seven years (i.e., between ca. 1407 and 1400 B.C.), with Joshua dying a few decades later (Josh. 23:1, 14; 24:29). As demonstrated above, the bulk of the book of Joshua was probably written by Joshua before his death. Consequently, this composition (including more than 24:29–33) was in the late fifteenth/early fourteenth century B.C.

Backgrounds. Genesis–Deuteronomy provides the background to the book of Joshua (1:1–9; 21:43–45). The call of Abram recorded in Genesis 12:1–3 highlights the universal hope of restoration and blessing. These verses sum up God's covenant with Abram (Gen. 15:7–21; 17:1–22). Abraham was promised that through him and his offspring God would bring salvation to all

the people of the earth. He was also promised a land to be inherited by his descendants after a few centuries, which included the promise of an Exodus from Egypt to the Holy Land. The reason God saved Israel from Egypt was to relocate His people in the Holy Land as promised to Abraham (Ex. 6:2–6). The promise of land, therefore, was the immediate hope of Israel at the Exodus (1:11; 13:5–11; Lev. 25:38; Num. 14:8; Deut. 1:8, 21). The realization of this promise is the focus of the book of Joshua. If the Lord led Israel out of Egypt through Moses, He settled Israel in the Holy Land through Joshua.

Although scholarly debate surrounds the dating of the Exodus and the conquest, evidence from Scripture, as noted above, suggests that the time period covered by the book is between the last decade of the fifteenth century and the first quarter of the fourteenth century B.C. (ca. 1407–1357 B.C.). During this time, the Holy Land was probably nominally under Egyptian control, with the country divided into numerous independent city-states (e.g., Jericho, Ai, Bethel). The archaeological documents known as the Amarna Letters, written about 1400 B.C., reveal that during this time a people called *habiru* were invading the Holy Land, forcing Canaanite kings to send distress calls to Egypt for military assistance. In these letters, *habiru* may refer to the Israelites.

By failing to respond to the requests for reinforcements, the Egyptians seemed to have had little interest in the affairs of Syro-Palestine at that time. Also, due probably to either internal or external reasons, none of the other contemporary powers in the ANE (Hittites, Hurrians, Kassites, and Assyrians) was in a position to interfere with developments in the Holy Land. Similarly, the major wave of Philistine immigrants was not yet ready to form a barrier against the Israelite conquest. Finally, further evaluation of archaeological discoveries places the destruction of Canaanite cities such as Jericho and Hazor around 1400 B.C., thereby confirming the scriptural account. Archaeological research, though, has equally yielded conflicting results and questions relating to the conquest. While we may hope for more reliable findings, the internal claims of Scripture should always be the final arbiter.

Habiru

Habiru, a people group, are mentioned in texts from various places in the ANE between 1750 and 1150 B.C. These were generally nomadic tribesmen or fugitives who had penetrated urbanized centers and were proving troublesome to native populations. While *habiru* could refer to any group of people "outside of the law," the *habiru* in the Amarna letters may refer to people groups including the Israelites. Moreover, *habiru* would be a fitting designation of the Hebrews (Israel) who were then invading the Holy Land.

The biblical text is clear that Israel actually conquered and settled in the land of promise (13:1—21:45), and other scriptural passages refer to this fact (see 2 Sam. 21:1–6; 1 Kin. 16:34; 2 Chr. 20:7). But what was the extent of this conquest? On the one hand, some texts use the language of totality in regard to the campaigns (Josh. 10:40–42; 11:16–23; 21:43–45). On the other hand, there are texts indicating that Joshua did not conquer the whole land (13:1–6; 17:12–13; 18:2–3; 23:4–5, 13). There is, however, no contradiction between these two sets of texts. The former texts, examined contextually, do not denote the whole land of promise but rather portions within the land. These texts emphasize that God was faithful in fulfilling the promise of land to Abraham (cf. 21:43–45). The second set of texts shows that parts of the Holy Land were yet to be possessed, though these too were divided among the tribes (23:4). In these texts, God promises to drive out the inhabitants of the land from before Israel (13:6; 23:5). This reiterates the earlier promise that God would drive out the inhabitants of the Holy Land "little by little," otherwise the land would be desolate and wild animals would be too numerous for Israel (Ex. 23:29–33; Deut. 7:22).

Theology and Purpose. The primary purpose of the book of Joshua is to describe Israel's entry into the land of promise, the conquest of the land, and its division among the tribes. This purpose underlines the message of the book, namely, the faithfulness of God in fulfilling the promise of land made to Abraham. The book emphasizes God's faithfulness to His covenant promises (Josh. 21:43–45).

1. Covenant Faithfulness. Obviously, the major theological theme of the book of Joshua is the covenant. The central element of the covenant is the promise of the Holy Land. As such, the book repeatedly emphasizes the Lord's faithfulness in fulfilling this promise (2:24; 3:10; 11:23; 21:43–45; 23:14). Israel was a covenant nation and thus was required to keep the covenant (Ex. 19–24). As enshrined in the covenant provisions, any deviation on the part of Israel was punishable (see Josh. 23:16), yet this was a means to protect the divine promise. This is the backdrop against which the destruction of Achan and his family is to be understood. Achan's sin constituted covenantal unfaithfulness on the part of Israel as a whole (7:1, 11). As a covenant community, Israel shared a corporate identity, so the sin of one member affected the whole community until it was purged (7:11–13). Similarly, by violating the covenant and thus bringing himself under the "curse," Achan damaged all who shared in his identity (7:12, 24–26). The importance of the covenant theme in Joshua is further highlighted by the several references to its renewal (5:2–9; 8:30–35; 24:1–28). Joshua's exhortation against disobedience, idolatry, and intermarriage with the Canaanites summarizes the covenantal demand on Israel (23:6–16; 24:14–27). The implication is that the continual possession of the land was contingent on Israel's obedience of the covenant law (23:16; Deut. 28:58–68).

2. God's Sovereignty. The book also places quite an emphasis on the sovereignty of God. The Lord is the "living God" whose promises do not fail (Josh. 3:10). The God of Israel is "the Lord [Yahweh]," "the Lord [Adonai] of all the earth," who is able to "cut off" the waters of the Jordan to make way for His people (3:13–17) and to command the sun and the moon to stand still till He claims victory for His people (10:12–14). It was this Sovereign Lord, El-Shaddai, who transferred the land of the Canaanites to Israel (cf. 3:10). He gave rest (23:1) to Israel by extirpating the Canaanites through the holy warfare strategy known as *kherem*, meaning to "ban" (see "Holy Warfare," p. 372). The Exodus and the conquest, therefore, demonstrate that the Sovereign Lord intervenes in history to accomplish His purposes for humanity.

3. Judgment and Salvation. The book also discusses judgment and salvation within the confines of the covenant. On the one hand, the circumcision ceremony in 5:2–8 reiterated that those who came out of Egypt died in the wilderness because of their unfaithfulness to the covenant. Achan and his family also were destroyed due to his violation of the covenant (7:24–25). On the other hand, those who sought refuge in the Lord by joining the covenant community found salvation. Rahab declared faith in the Lord, and this led to the salvation of her entire family (2:11; 6:25). The Gibeonites also joined the covenant community, though deceptively, and shared in the blessings thereof (9:3–27). As hinted in Genesis 12:1–3, the possession of the Holy Land was not an end in itself. Rather, Israel's settlement in the Holy Land was a means to the ultimate realization of the divine promise, namely, the blessings of salvation to the world. Settled strategically at the crossroads of the ancient world, Israel was God's missionary, serving as a channel of the "blessed hope" to the world.

4. True Leadership. We also find in the book a theology of leadership. It is God who establishes leaders (Josh. 1:1–9). The leaders God appoints are prepared both physically (Ex. 17:8–16; 24:12–13; Num. 13:16) and spiritually (Num. 27:15–23; Deut. 34:9) for the task at hand. Courage, dynamism, promptness, dedication, a serving attitude, firmness, and reliance on the word of God are some of the qualities of good leaders. The transition from Moses to Joshua reveals that there was a succession plan—God's people always had a leader. Yet, the success of leaders depends on their total submission to the will of the Lord (Josh. 1:8; 11:15). By submitting himself to the leadership of the Lord, Joshua succeeded in leading Israel into the promised land. Joshua's leading of Israel into the promised inheritance anticipated the work of the Messiah, Jesus Christ (Is. 49:8; Eph. 1:11–14; Heb. 4:8–11; 9:15; cf. Matt. 5:5). Through the saving work of the Messiah, the promise of the land becomes the promise of a land that is free from evil and sin. It is a land recreated by the power of Christ for His people (Rev. 21:10).

Literary Features. The book is formed by a narrative telling the experience of the twelve tribes from the death of Moses to the death of Joshua. The covenant renewal ceremonies (Josh. 8:30–35; 24:1–27) and the ritual ceremonies (circumcision and Passover; 5:1–12) are embedded in the narrative. The book can be divided in two parts: the first dealing with the conquest (chaps. 1–12) and the second with the division of the land (chaps. 13–24).

COMMENTARY

1:1—12:24

A HOPE REALIZED: CONQUEST OF THE HOLY LAND

The inheritance of the land of promise was a central element in God's covenant with Abram (Gen. 12:1–7; 15:7–21). In order to fulfill this covenant promise, God saved Israel from Egyptian slavery and led them into the promised land by His servants Moses and Joshua. Joshua 1:1—12:24 describes Israel's conquest of the Holy Land.

1:1–18

Joshua Succeeds Moses

Joshua 1:1–18 reports the commissioning of Joshua and his initial orders to the leaders of the congregation. While Moses was alive, Joshua served as his attendant (Ex. 24:13; 33:11; Num. 11:28), and this experience prepared him to succeed Moses.

1:1–9. Joshua's Commission. The phrase "after the death of Moses" connects the book of Joshua to the five books of Moses, especially Deuteronomy. Verses 1–2 recall the death of Moses recorded in Deuteronomy 34. The book of Joshua, therefore, continues from where Moses left off. Before Moses's death, the Lord had appointed Joshua and commissioned him as Moses's successor. Following the Lord's command, Moses laid his hands on Joshua and commissioned him, signaling to the entire nation the transfer of the mantle of leadership (Num. 27:18–23; Deut. 3:28; 31:1–23; 34:7–9). Not only was he a man of experience and strength, but he was also a man full of the "spirit of wisdom." Such are the qualities the leaders of God's people must demonstrate.

Joshua 1:2–9 constitutes a divine charge to Joshua, the thrust of which is to build confidence in the promises, to urge courage and obedience, and to assure victory. The opening of the book contains the excitement of knowing that the promises of God to the patriarchs were about to be fulfilled. The people would witness and be part of the fulfillment of prophecy—the promised land was becoming theirs. Although the land west of the Jordan was the allotted land for Israel, the influence of Israel would extend far beyond the Jordan (1:4; 22:19; Deut. 11:24; 12:10; 32:48–52; 34:4). God made two important promises to Joshua. The first was a promise of victory (Josh. 1:3, 5). The outcome of the battle was assured and therefore he, and consequently the people, would be invincible. Second, God promised to be with Joshua (v. 5). His invincibility was grounded in God's presence with him: God would be with Joshua; He would not leave or abandon him (v. 5). Yet, divine promises require human involvement. Two things were required of Joshua: strength and courage (vv. 6–7, 9). These two characteristics were important for Joshua to be an able military leader (v. 6), but they were also indispensable for him to remain loyal to the divine law (v. 7). Courageous and strong people remain faithful to God in the context of spiritual conflict. Such individuals are not afraid or dismayed when facing the enemy (v. 9). Joshua was expected to continually study the word of God to avoid any deviation from the covenant and to keep himself focused on the divine will (vv. 7–8). The instruction to meditate upon the law provides the platform for courage and obedience (v. 8). Through meditation and prayer, leaders draw on the divine resources. In sum, vv. 1–9 teach both that faith and obedience are inseparable ingredients for leadership and that success in leadership depends on the presence of God among His people and on the leader's relationship with Him and His word.

1:10–11. Getting Ready. God's charge to Joshua would certainly have encouraged and strengthened him (vv. 2–9). Following the charge, the officers conveyed to the people Joshua's instructions for preparing for crossing the Jordan. His communication to the people was both clear (i.e., indicating a definite plan of action) and appropriate (i.e., following a quick and effective chain of command). The people's response to this command revealed that he was both convinced of the divine promise and convincing in his rallying call to the people.

If the spying of Jericho is to be included, "three days" in v. 11 may denote "few days" rather than three literal days (cf. 2:16, 22; 3:2; 9:16). However, if the instruction in v. 11 was given after the return of the spies (2:1, 23), then the three days should be understood in a literal sense. The people were to take possession of the land that God was giving them (v. 11). The land was a gift, but it was also a task—it was to be possessed. God's gifts require a human response.

1:12–18. Rekindling the Commitment. The conquest of the Holy Land was a task to be undertaken by all Israel, including the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh, who had already received their inheritance in the Transjordan (Num. 32:20–22). Joshua urged these tribes to join the others in battle until the Lord gave rest to all Israel (Josh. 1:12–15; cf. Deut. 3:18–20). Their response evinces total obedience to the Lord and to His chosen leader. They not only pledged to cross the Jordan to assist the other tribes in the battles but also confirmed Joshua as the chosen replacement of Moses by promising to punish anyone who rebeled against him (vv. 16–18). It is only when leaders and followers unite and cooperate in the Lord that they can accomplish the divine mission entrusted to them.

Rest

The concept of rest is important in Joshua (1:13–15; 21:44; 22:4; 23:1) and finds its spiritual type in Hebrews 4:1–11. The rest intended for Israel was both political and economic (Deut. 3:20; 28:12–13). It would serve as the substratum for the fulfillment of their spiritual mission—becoming a channel of blessings to the world.

2:1–24

Hope beyond the River

The sending of spies was a crucial part of warfare, as military morale and preparations for an impending battle largely depended on their reports (cf. Num. 13:31—14:5). The report of the two spies sent to Jericho inspired hope in the hearts of the Israelites.

2:1–7. Surveying Jericho. Israel encamped east of the Jordan, while Jericho was on the west. The city was a formidable fortress guarding the access routes leading to the central highland of the southern Levant; therefore, it was particularly important as the scene of Israel's first attack in the Holy Land. Joshua's sending of spies was not an act of unbelief but good military strategy. The promise of divine intervention does not rule out human responsibility. Knowledge of the enemy's strategy and conditions would strengthen the faith of Israel (Josh. 2:24).

Why seek shelter in a harlot's house? The spies did not engage Rahab's professional services (cf. v. 8). Subsequent events in the narrative will indicate that the Lord had already been working in the heart of this woman, and that He had providentially led His servants to her house. Besides, in Rahab's house the spies would not only be less detectable but would also find an easy escape since the house was part of the city's outer wall complex (v. 15). Moreover, she had the information the spies needed (vv. 9–11). The king of Jericho expected Rahab to cooperate in an intelligence activity, but she deceived the king in order to save the spies. She would rather side with God's chosen people (6:17). By sending the king's guard on a vain pursuit, Rahab successfully deflated any suspicion against her as well as any possible search of her house. It is clear that Rahab knew that her only salvation lay with the Hebrews and their God. The text does not condone lying but reveals the well-intentioned actions of someone who was only beginning to learn about God. Meanwhile, she had hidden the spies on the roof. In this period, houses had flat roofs that were used for drying grain or stalks, as well as for eating and sometimes sleeping. The bold decision of Rahab to hide the spies can be attributed only to her fear and faith in the God of Israel. Those who truly fear the Lord do not fear humans.

2:8–21. Refuge in the Lord. Rahab's recital of Israel's crossing of the Red Sea (Ex. 14) and their subjugation of Sihon and Og (Num. 21:21–35) testify that the Canaanites had fair knowledge about Israel's history and God's plans for them. What God had done for Israel at the Red Sea and in the land of the Amorites convinced Rahab that the Lord had given Israel the land of promise (Josh. 2:9). Her report of the great fear and panic that had befallen Jericho on account of Israel recalls Exodus 15:15–16. Perhaps, the high point of Joshua 2 is Rahab's confession of faith in v. 11: she recognized that the God of Israel (to whom she refers by using the covenant name of YHWH) was the God of both heaven and earth (v. 11). Following the confession, she sought refuge in the Lord by requiring an oath from the spies to save her extended family. An oath taken in the name of the Lord could not be broken with impunity. The reciprocal relationship of mutual trust that Rahab expected is expressed by the word *khesed* ("loving-kindness," "loyalty"). In delivering the spies from the king's officers, she showed that she had shifted loyalties. The spies granted her request on the conditions that she would keep the matter secret, tie a line of scarlet cord on the window, and bring her extended family into her house. These conditions would provide a way for Rahab's family to exercise faith in the God of Israel. Salvation comes by faith, but faith is expressed through obedience—a lesson Israel had already experienced during the tenth plague when the blood of the Passover lamb had to be painted upon the doorpost of every Israelite house. It seems that Rahab immediately tied the scarlet cord on the window as a symbol of her hope for salvation. The Hebrew *tiqwah*, usually translated as "line," means "hope." The references to the scarlet cord and the gathering of the family in the house have undertones of the Passover in Egypt (Ex. 12:21–23). By acknowledging the God of Israel and pleading for salvation from the impending doom, Rahab sought entry into the covenant community. The experience of this Canaanite prostitute testifies to the gracious saving purpose of the Lord, a grace that pardons and cleanses. The NT honors Rahab for her faith (Heb. 11:31) and good works (James 2:25).

2:22–24. Report of Hope. Rahab's loving-kindness (*khesed*) to the spies was proof of her faith in the Lord. Thanks to her testimony (Josh. 2:9–11) and direction (vv. 15–16, 22–23), the spies returned to Joshua with a message of hope. The spies went to see what the enemy was planning to do, but instead they witnessed what God was already doing in the camp and in the hearts of the enemy. He had planted fear in their hearts, and in this case fear preceded defeat. God had already given the land into Israel's hands (v. 24). Unlike the majority of the spies sent to the Holy Land by Moses (Num. 13:31—14:5), the spies sent to Jericho brought encouraging words to Joshua (Josh. 2:24). Israel was now poised to take over the land.

3:1—4:24

Crossing the River

Israel crossed two water bodies, and in both instances the Lord parted the waters before His people. The crossing of the Red Sea under Moses marked Israel's departure from Egypt, while the crossing of the Jordan under Joshua marked their entrance into the land of Canaan, which was the climax of the redemptive act that began in Egypt (cf. Ps. 114). By entering Canaan, the promise of land made to Abraham was being realized. Prophecy was being fulfilled.

3:1–13. Instructions for Crossing. From Shittim (or the Acacia Grove) Israel journeyed to the Jordan—a distance of about ten miles (16 km)—and encamped on the bank of the river. The instructions for the crossing of the Jordan were clear. The people were to wait for the ark, carried by the Levite priests, to lead the way and then follow after it. They were also to consecrate or sanctify themselves in anticipation of the wondrous works of the Lord on the following day (Josh 3:5). The Lord's holiness requires and makes possible the holiness of His people. In the context of the covenant, Israel's consecration in preparation to meet the Lord included bathing, washing of clothing, and abstaining from sexual activity (Ex. 19:14–15; cf. Gen. 35:1–2).

The miracle of the crossing of the Jordan both confirmed Joshua as the leader and demonstrated that the Lord was with him as He had been with Moses. One of Joshua's primary responsibilities was to exhort the people to trust in the Lord (Josh. 3:9–11). He assured the congregation of the certainty of the Lord's promise to deliver the inhabitants of Canaan to Israel. Joshua promised that the living God among them would, without a doubt, drive out the inhabitants of the land before them (v. 10). God also promised to march in front of the Israelite army to defeat the enemy for them. He is the Lord of all the earth (v. 13). God's parting of the waters validated His sovereignty over the earth.

3:14–17. Crossing on a Dry Riverbed. The waters of the Jordan were cut off as soon as the feet of the priests carrying the ark touched the water, allowing the people to cross over on dry ground (vv. 13–17; 4:18–23). Like the crossing of the Red Sea, the crossing of the Jordan was a solemn religious event. It gave to the new generation of Israelites the opportunity to deeply ponder the wondrous things that God had done and was doing for them. The Lord, symbolized by the ark, was marching with His people to claim the land of Canaan. Although those who carried the ark in Joshua 3 are called priests, it was the Levites—the Kohathites—who were assigned that responsibility (Num. 4). The term "priest" is used here to include the Levites (cf. Josh. 3:3). Although the priests were commanded to carry the ark and cross over (3:6), the water did not stop flowing until they stepped into the river and touched the water (v. 13). Oftentimes, God waits for His people to go forward in faith before He opens a way for them. The crossing occurred when the Jordan was overflowing its banks due to the spring rains and the melting of snow on Mt. Hermon. By indicating that the Jordan was at flood stage (v. 15), the text clearly suggests it was impossible for Israel to cross over without the Lord's work (v. 5). He who commanded Israel to cross the river made the crossing possible.

4:1–24. Remembrance of the Crossing. During the crossing of the Jordan, the Israelites were ordered by the Lord to pick twelve stones from the dry riverbed as a memorial of this solemn act. That twelve men representing the twelve tribes picked the stones (3:12; 4:3–4) signifies that all Israel crossed the river into Canaan and that it was the responsibility of all tribal leaders to ensure that succeeding generations would not forget what the Lord had accomplished for them. The monument, set up at the camp in Gilgal, would provide concrete evidence to later generations and thus encourage faith in them that the waters of the Jordan had actually been "cut off" to make a passage for their ancestors. Scripture attests to the raising of stones as a memorial (see 7:26; 24:26–27; Gen. 28:18–22;

31:45–47; 1 Sam. 7:12). Remembering or celebrating the past deeds of the Lord is tantamount to participating in the blessings of those events. The Lord does not want us to forget His goodness. Joshua 4:9 possibly refers to another set of twelve stones placed where the priests bearing the ark had stood.

In Joshua 3:7, the Lord promised to exalt Joshua, and 4:14 reports a fulfillment of this promise—Israel stood in awe of Joshua as they had stood in awe of Moses. The basis of his exaltation was his humility and his obedience to the Lord. Joshua 4:19–24 reaffirms the miraculous crossing of the Jordan and the memorial function of the twelve stones. In the future, the monument would awaken the curiosity of children and would provide for their parents the opportunity to instruct them about the goodness of the Lord (vv. 21–24). Israel crossed the Jordan on the tenth day of the first month and encamped at Gilgal. Gilgal would become Israel's base of operations for the period of the conquest (10:15, 43; 14:6). God's salvific power was illustrated both in the crossing of the Red Sea by the previous generation and in the crossing of the Jordan by the present generation. Both of these supernatural events would lead the nations to acknowledge the power of Israel's God. Miracles serve to encourage faith. Historically, the crossings of the Red Sea and the Jordan marked Israel's washing away of the filth of bondage and their glorious entry into the Holy Land.

5:1–15

Preparing for the Conquest

In Joshua 5, we see the Israelites committing themselves to obedience to the covenant Lord (vv. 1–12) and to His word (vv. 13–15). The two covenantal ceremonies performed at Gilgal (namely, circumcision and Passover) prepared Israel for the conquest. Circumcision marked every male as a son of Abraham and a member of God's people (Gen. 17:10–11)—hence they were heirs of the covenant—and was a prerequisite for the Passover, which celebrated the redemption of Israel from Egypt (Ex. 12:48). Like baptism, circumcision marked one's entrance into the covenant community, and like the Lord's Supper, the Passover celebrated the salvific deeds of the Lord.

5:1. Demoralization of the Canaanites. The miraculous crossing of the Jordan was meant partly to move the nations to recognize the Lord as the only living God (Josh. 4:24). This purpose was achieved, and consequently the kings of the Amorites (west of the Jordan) and the kings of the Canaanites (east of the Jordan) got demoralized upon receiving the news of the crossing of the Jordan (v. 1). Rahab must have shared the conviction of many fellow Canaanites that the Lord had handed the land over to Israel (2:9). The demoralization of the Canaanites (5:1) was part of the covenantal blessings (Ex. 23:28). The fear expressed by the Canaanites must certainly have bolstered Israel up for the conquest.

5:2–9. Covenant Renewal. In the meantime, Israel had to renew the covenant to fully claim its blessings. Canaan was a covenantal land, and Israel could possess it only while maintaining their covenantal relationship with the Lord. The performance of the rite of circumcision before staging the conquest evoked and brought to fulfillment the covenantal promises made to Abraham (Gen. 17:10–11). The outward rite of circumcision represented the true circumcision of heart, demonstrating a life of faith and obedience (Deut. 30:6; Jer. 4:4; Rom. 2:29). A reconsecration to the Lord's service was necessary before Israel could undertake the Lord's warfare and take possession of the land.

The people were to be circumcised a second time with flint knives (v. 2). This may denote a renewal of the observance of the rite that had been discontinued for about forty years. But if mass circumcision took place in Egypt prior to the Passover celebration (cf. Ex. 12:43–49), then the second mass circumcision took place in Joshua 5. In any case, the command does not mean that there was a second circumcision of the same generation. All the males who came out of Egypt had been circumcised, but these died in the wilderness due to disobedience (vv. 4–7). Those who received circumcision at Gilgal were the second-generation males—sons born after the Exodus, all of whom had not been circumcised. Although metal knives were available, flint knives were probably more surgically efficient. The place-name *gib'at-ha'aralot* ("Hill of the Foreskins") shows that this was a mass circumcision. As a monument, this hill would remind Israel of the first renewal of the covenant upon entry into Canaan. The period after the circumcision was certainly a time when Israel would be militarily most vulnerable (cf. Gen. 34), but this act also demonstrated their faith in the Lord. Even though Israel was vulnerable, the presence of the Lord was all the people needed.

The place-name "Gilgal" derives from *galal*, "to roll away" (v. 9). The reference in this verse to "the reproach [or disgrace] of Egypt" lends itself to different interpretations. It could refer to the disgrace of the enslavement in Egypt, but it may also relate to the neglect of the rite of circumcision by the previous generation while in Egypt. It most probably refers to the people's forty years of wandering in the wilderness as a result of their rebellion, which led the Egyptians to say that God brought this people to the wilderness to kill them (see Ex. 32:12; Num. 14:13–16; Deut. 9:28). Now, finally, the people were ready to enter the promised land. The reproach of Egypt was proven to be unfounded. Within the context of the covenant, the foreskin signified opposition to God, and its removal meant dedication to Him (cf. Ex. 4:24–26). Gilgal, therefore, became a place where the nation was constituted anew as the people of God. Israel's constitution through the rite of circumcision meant that Egypt would have no basis to scorn her.

5:10–12. The Passover Event. These verses record the third celebration of the Passover (Ex. 12; Num. 9). The Passover marked Israel's redemption from Egyptian bondage. The previous generation had probably not celebrated the Passover in the wilderness, just as they had neglected circumcision. Since no uncircumcised male could celebrate the Passover (Ex. 12:43–49), the circumcision of the people before the celebration of Passover in Joshua 5 is significant. The Passover could be celebrated only by the covenant community, native or adopted, but a male person could not be a member of the covenant community without having undergone circumcision. By observing the Passover, Israel remembered the deliverance from bondage, even as the Lord's Supper is a remembrance of the death of Jesus Christ, which wrought salvation for the human race.

On the fifteenth day of the month—when the Festival of Unleavened Bread began (Ex. 12:14–20)—the Israelites ate of the produce of the land (Josh. 5:11). Consequently the "raining down" of manna ceased that same day (v. 12; cf. Deut. 8:2–4). The barley harvest took place during the first month. God provided manna to Israel during their journey in the wilderness, but now that they were in Canaan, they could eat of the fruit of the land. All instances of miraculous feeding in Scripture were only temporary; they were not intended to be regular sustenance. The unleavened bread was eaten for seven days following the Passover.

5:13–15. The Two Commanders Meet. The earthly and the heavenly commanders of the armies of the Lord met each other near Jericho in the darkness of the night. Realizing that He was his holy Lord, Joshua worshiped Him and in obedience to His command took the sandals off his feet (Josh. 5:15). Joshua was now ready to receive orders from the Commander of the heavenly army. This theophany convinced Joshua that the Lord Himself was at the head of the Israelite army, ready to conquer Canaan. With this Commander, defeat was an utter impossibility. But Joshua would soon learn from the incident involving Achan that the question was whether Israel was on God's side.

6:1–27

The Conquest of Jericho

Joshua 6 reports the destruction of Jericho and the salvation of Rahab. The destruction of all the inhabitants of Jericho indicates that the Lord judges sin, while the salvation of Rahab teaches that His grace extends to everyone willing to accept Him as Lord.

6:1–7. Instructions for the Conquest. Frozen in fear of Israel, the city was shut up inside out. This was a sure sign that the Lord had already defeated Jericho before Joshua's assault. The battle was already won; Israel only had to claim the victory (v. 16). While the victory had already been won for Israel, the army still had to follow certain instructions in order to claim that victory. It is probable that the heavenly Commander, after their brief conversation, proceeded to give Joshua instructions concerning the attack against Jericho (vv. 2–5). They were to work together. The army of the heavenly Commander would be in charge of the demolition of the wall, the most difficult part. The role of the people was to march around the city, to shout at the proper moment, and to charge against the city once the walls collapsed. The injunction to march around the city with the ark and with trumpets would teach the people that the ensuing battles were holy wars in which the Lord led the procession. Faith in the Lord, demonstrated by obedience to His word, was all that was required in order for Israel to claim the victory.

6:8–16. Blowing the Trumpets. The Lord is a God of order. In the wilderness, the Israelites marched in order (Num. 2). When crossing the Jordan, they marched in order (Josh. 3–4). Now, the army was instructed to march around Jericho in order. The six-day voiceless march, however senseless it might appear, was a requirement of faith. The wall would collapse at the shout of the marching army, yet the army was not to shout until the seventh day. At times faith may not appear to be scientifically or logically sound, but we act on it. Those who think that an earthquake was needed in order for the wall to tumble down forget that rocks obey the voice of the Lord (Ex. 17:5–7).

In the Bible, the number "seven" denotes perfection and completeness. During the march, the army was instructed to shout only during the seventh round on the seventh day. That the army had to march seven times on the seventh day meant that the land was theirs and that victory was complete. The blending of trumpet with voice would mark the fall of the city. The wall would obey the voice of the Lord. The strong shout was a war cry, which usually served to encourage the army and frighten the enemy. Given the size of Jericho (i.e., five or six acres [2–2.5 hectares] of land), Israel must have encircled the city with a number of columns of armed men. These columns could, therefore, charge simultaneously from all sides. Miraculously, Rahab's house was still standing after the collapse of the wall.

6:17–27. The Ban, Rahab, and Joshua. The injunction to destroy the city and its inhabitants, human and animal, is what is normally referred to as the "ban," translated from the Hebrew *kherem*, which denotes total annihilation (see below, "Holy Warfare"). Whatever was devoted to the Lord under this curse had to be destroyed (Josh. 6:17). In the case of Jericho, only Rahab and those of her family who sought refuge in her house were to be spared. Note that *kherem* did not include silver, gold, and bronze; these were consecrated to the Lord and were to be brought to the treasury of the house of the Lord—the sanctuary (vv. 19, 24). Through a four-fold repetition of the term *kherem*, Joshua 6:18 provided a stern warning against violating the ban regulation. Israel shared a corporate identity and responsibility, so that even if only one person violated the ban regulation, the whole congregation was answerable.

Like the blood on the Israelite doorposts at the Passover, the scarlet cord on Rahab's window signaled her faith in the Lord and occasioned her deliverance. The decision of the spies to save Rahab was taken seriously not only by Joshua but also by the Lord. An oath, once taken in the name of the Lord, is irrevocable, and God honors such. Rahab and her family were placed outside the Israelite military camp, until the moment when she and her family were fully incorporated into the community.

The conquest of Jericho was among the firstfruits of the Lord's victory in the promised land. Joshua's curse (v. 26) was meant to deter future generations from rebuilding the city. The remains of Jericho would forever remind the Israelites of the Lord's miraculous destruction of the enemy. Being prophetic in nature, this curse was fulfilled in Hiel, whose two sons died because he rebuilt the city (1 Kin. 16:34). Although the city of Jericho was not rebuilt before the time of Hiel, there were still people living in the lands around it who were still called by its name (Josh. 18:21; Judg. 3:13–14; 2 Sam. 10:5).

The concluding verse records the fame of Joshua (Josh. 6:27). He was famous only because he allowed himself to be used by the Lord. In Scripture, success in leadership depends completely on the leader's reliance on the Lord. This verse testifies to the Lord's faithfulness in delivering on His promise to exalt Joshua before the nation (1:5; 3:7).

Holy Warfare

The extermination of the Canaanites has raised many questions among believers and nonbelievers. In what follows, we will discuss this matter from within the biblical text itself, hoping to shed some light on the practice of the "ban."

1. God as a Warrior. The book of Joshua portrays God as a Warrior (5:13–15; 6:2–5; 8:1–2; 10:14). He waged war against the Canaanites and gave rest to Israel in accordance with His promise (1:13; 14:15; 21:44; 23:1–3). During the conquest, He planned the attacks, developed the tactics, and handed over the enemy to Israel (see 6:3–5; 8:1–8). Because God is the Sovereign Warrior, nature stands at His command

in battle—the walls of Jericho obeyed His voice (6:20), hailstones descended upon the enemy (10:11), and the sun and moon obeyed His word (10:12–14). These miracles, as well as the presence of the ark on the battlefield, confirmed the presence of God in the conquest. But more than these, the real Joshua, the Commander of the army, was at the head of the Israelite army, conquering Canaan with a drawn sword (5:13–15).

2. Meaning of the Term "Ban." The "ban" was central to holy warfare; it demanded the total extermination of the inhabitants of the promised land. This concept is based on the Hebrew term *kherem*, related to *kharam* ("give over," "devote for destruction," or "exterminate"), which in the context of warfare denotes what is irrevocably "devoted" or "dedicated" on oath for destruction (see Num. 21:2–3), be it animate or inanimate. Even outside of warfare, anything that was pronounced *kherem* could not be redeemed (cf. Lev. 27:28–29). By placing the inhabitants of Canaan under *kherem*, God required their complete annihilation (cf. Josh. 6:17–21; Deut. 7:1–11; 20:16–17). The policy of *kherem* as found in the book of Joshua has raised both hermeneutical and ethical questions. Why would God command the slaughter of all the Canaanites?

3. Seeking an Answer. A few points may be considered in an attempt to answer this question. First, in military contexts, *kherem* was applicable only to the conquest of Canaan; it did not apply to people outside of that land (Josh. 9:6–7; Deut. 7:26; 20:10–16). God does not desire the destruction of life (Ezek. 18:32; Jon. 4:11). Second, the destruction of the Canaanites was a fulfillment of earlier prophecy. The prophetic curse of Noah upon Canaan (Gen. 9:25–27), as well as God's covenant with Abraham (Gen. 15:7–21), foreshadowed the future displacement of the Canaanites from their territory by the Hebrews (Gen. 10:15–20; 15:18–21), who were the descendants of Shem through Eber and Abraham (Gen. 10:21; 11:14–26). Third, the Canaanites deserved destruction. While God promised to give Canaan to Abraham, He waited five to seven centuries, depending on the length of the sojourn of Israel in Egypt, until the sin of the Amorites was complete (Gen. 15:16; see "The Four-Hundred-Thirty-Year Sojourn," p. 211). In the meantime, He warned the Canaanites with the fire of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19:24), but they soon outlived the memories of such destruction from the "Judge of all the earth" (Gen. 18:25). At the time of the conquest, Canaan was at the peak of religious and moral degradation, hence ripe for judgment (Deut. 9:5; 12:29–31; 18:9–12). Fourth, God probably had to settle Israel strategically at the crossroads of the ancient world so that Israel would serve as the light and salt of the world (Matt. 5:13–16), proclaiming the salvation found in the Lord. The earth belongs to the Sovereign Lord (Josh. 2:11; 3:10; Ex. 9:29; Lev. 25:23), hence He could give it to anyone in accordance with His salvific purposes. Israel, too, would be removed from the land if they failed to live up to their calling and mission (Josh. 23:16; Deut. 28:58–68). Fifth, God's promise to drive out the inhabitants of Canaan using hornets (Josh. 24:12; Ex. 23:27–30; Deut. 7:20; cf. Josh. 13:6; 23:5) would seem to imply that the Canaanites did not have to come under the ban had they—upon receiving the miraculous news of the Exodus and the impending conquest—vacated the land so solemnly promised Israel (Josh. 2:9–11; 9:24). Finally, just as the family of Achan was destroyed in the ban because they shared in his identity, so were the Canaanites destroyed because they too shared in the identity of the Canaanite family. The conquest of Canaan was undertaken not only to secure the promised land but also to protect Israel from foreign practices and hegemony (Josh. 23:7–12; Deut. 7:3–6; 20:18). This required that all the inhabitants of the land be purged, together with their evil practices. The foregoing observations would require that the policy of the annihilation of the Canaanites be understood within the contexts of God's sovereignty, the plan of salvation, prophecies relating to the Canaanites, and corporate solidarity. To seek to unravel the problem posed by *kherem* merely on the basis of human ethics is to lose sight of the power, love, and grace of the supreme Source of morality in the cosmos, namely, the Lord. (For more on this topic, see "The Extermination of the Canaanites," p. 330).

7:1—8:35

The Conquest of Ai and Covenant Renewal

Joshua 7–8 reports the conquest of Ai (7:1—8:29) and the renewal of the covenant (8:30–35). The initial defeat of Israel by Ai indicated that Israel could not win its battles without the Lord. The renewal of the covenant was done in fulfillment of Moses's instruction (Deut. 11:26–30; 27:1–26).

7:1–5. Failure of First Attack. Joshua had warned the army against taking any of the things under the ban or curse of Jericho for themselves, lest they bring trouble upon the whole congregation (Josh. 6:17–19). Joshua 7:1–5 shows that despite this warning, Israel, in the person of Achan, violated the ban regulation. This act constituted a violation of the Lord's covenant, and hence incurred His anger (v. 1). Although only Achan did the stealing, the congregation of Israel was guilty of an egregiously rebellious sin, which deserved capital punishment (cf. Num. 15:30–36). Though Achan stole the items during the destruction of Jericho, the consequences for doing so came during the battle against Ai. God, in His mercy, had granted him enough probationary time to reflect and return the stolen objects.

Spies were sent out, and after returning they advised an attack on Ai with only a segment of the army because the inhabitants of Ai were small in number. Israel would soon realize that they were not on the side of the divine Commander in this battle against Ai. Here the Israelites experienced their first military defeat in the land of Canaan (v. 4). Their defeat was so severe that, like the inhabitants of Jericho, the hearts of the people "melted" and became like water (v. 5; see 2:9–11; 5:1). Whether then or now, the Lord is the only hope of victory. Had Joshua and the leaders consulted the Lord before engaging Ai, the congregation as a whole would not have reaped the consequences of Achan's sin. It is important to consult the Lord. Leaders are bound to fail if they lean on their own understanding (cf. 9:14; Prov. 3:5–6).

7:6–9. Joshua's Question. The killing of thirty-six Israelites was a great tragedy; it threw the congregation into a panic (Josh. 7:5). The tearing of clothes, falling down on the face, and putting dust on the head were vivid expressions in ancient times of sorrow and mourning. Even if Joshua did not consult the Lord before the battle, he now turned to Him in prayer. The words of v. 7 are not words of resignation, as if Joshua regretted crossing the Jordan. Rather, he was simply unable to imagine Israel turning its back to the enemy. His prostration before the ark was a prayer of intercession. He shared with the Lord his own feelings and showed great concern for God's reputation (v. 9). He was certainly concerned about Israel's name being cut off from the earth, but more than that, he was concerned about the Lord's "great name" (v. 9). In Scripture, a name stands for the reputation of the one who bears it, so that if the name of Israel was cut off, the Lord, whose name Israel bore, would be equally disgraced (cf. Ex. 32:12–13; Num. 14:13–19).

7:10–15. The Lord's Answer. For the Lord this was not the time to feel frustrated but to stand and find out what happened. Israel, He said, was defeated because they had sinned. Stealing the things under the ban constituted a violation of the covenant, an outrageous sin that needed to be purged. Since Israel's inheritance of the land of Canaan was a covenantal promise, the conquest could not continue if they violated the covenant. The penalty for a deliberate and rebellious violation of the covenant was death. As noted in the comment on Joshua 6:19–21, Israel shared a strong sense of solidarity. Accordingly, the Lord pressed charges against Israel as if the whole congregation was involved (7:11).

While Achan became cursed for stealing the things under the ban, which were devoted to the Lord, the whole congregation was bound to suffer for his disobedience. It would be in the interest of the congregation to purge the one devoted to the curse of destruction (here *kherem* refers to Achan and the things he stole). The command to sanctify and bring the people, tribe by tribe, was meant to involve the whole congregation in the searching process. Whenever the congregation had to meet the Lord, they needed to sanctify themselves (cf. Josh. 3:5). The people were also to undergo a searching process in order to identify and punish the offender. What we do impacts others for good or evil. Although individual responsibility is not overlooked, believers share a corporate responsibility, so the sin of one member could affect others.

7:16–21. Finding the Culprit. God's omniscience is forcefully underscored in chapters 6–7. Achan successfully hid the cursed things from the congregation, but he could not hide them from the Omniscient One. The presentation of the people by tribes, clans, families, and individuals was not intended to inform God about the identity of the perpetrator. The search signaled to the people that nothing could be hidden from Him, and that the resolution of this act of rebellion involved the entire congregation. Whatever humans think they are hiding is actually already laid out in the open before the Lord (7:23). The searching process was probably carried out through the use of the Urim and Thummim (Ex. 28:29–30). "Give glory to the LORD" (Josh. 7:19) was the oath formula by which a person swore to honestly testify or confess in a law court that he or she was guilty as charged and that God was righteous in His decision (v. 20; cf. John 9:24). Achan had disobeyed the word of the Lord by coveting, stealing, and hiding the items (Josh. 7:21). Coveting involves direct opposition to the Lord (Gen. 3:6; Ex. 20:17). He should have taken the articles to the priests, as commanded by the Lord, but he chose to keep them for himself (Josh. 6:19). Unwilling confession, like Achan's, is devoid of repentance and feelings of remorse. Such confessions often come too late.

7:22–26. The Punishment. Achan deserved death because he defiantly violated the covenant (vv. 11–15) and brought trouble upon Israel (v. 25). God would have permanently withdrawn His presence from Israel if the sin of Achan were left unpunished (vv. 12, 26). By taking the cursed things devoted to the Lord, Achan brought himself and his family under the ban (cf. 6:18). It could be that his family knew what he had done and kept quiet; we do not know. But one thing is clear, human solidarity, particularly familial solidarity, causes others to suffer as a result of the evil actions of one person. One stroke of sin flares like brushfire, licking up everything that is around it. The destruction of Achan together with his family recalls that of Dathan and his company (Num. 16). Stoning was a form of capital punishment that quickly rendered the person unconscious (see Ex. 21:28–32; Lev. 20:2–5). Achan and his family were not only stoned; their corpses were burned. Burning his property was necessary because it had also been contaminated. The pile of stones over the remains of Achan would serve as a warning against similar rebellions. The stoning was done by all Israel—probably tribal representatives—signifying their corporate responsibility as a covenant community in dealing with rebellion (see Josh. 1:18). The Hebrew *'emeq 'akor* means "valley of trouble" (vv. 24–26). With the troubler of Israel (1 Chr. 2:7) destroyed in the valley of trouble, God relented of His wrath and granted Israel His favor. The Lord is able to transform the valley of trouble into a door of hope (Hos. 2:15).

8:1–9. Instructions for a Second Attack. Having purged the accursed from Israel, the Lord assured Joshua victory over Ai in the second attack. As always, Israel only claimed the victory that the Lord had already won. Ai was also brought under the ban. But while in the case of Jericho only silver, gold, and bronze were taken as booty (Josh. 6:19–21), in Ai both the spoils and the livestock were taken (vv. 2, 27). The requirement was that the spoils should be brought to the leaders to be shared proportionally (Num. 31:27). In the second attack, Israel was instructed to lay an ambush behind Ai. Ambush suggests a surprise attack from a concealed position; when a defending army withdrew from their post, the ambushing army would move behind them. The troops in ambush would set the city on fire to signal to Joshua and his troops that the city had been taken. This would also demoralize the defending army. There is an intertwining of the miraculous and human effort in the conquest narratives. While victory was assured, Israel needed to take active steps to realize that victory. The Lord taught Israel military tactics and decoy. Yet it was not Israel alone who fought these wars; the unseen army did it together with them (2 Kin. 6:17).

8:10–29. Victory with the Lord. To be a leader means to go before the people. Joshua and the elders led the army against Ai. Joshua spent the night in the valley, probably meditating and surveying the land in preparation for the battle. While in Joshua 8:3 the warriors who were set to ambush numbered thirty thousand, Joshua set only a five-thousand-man ambush (v. 12). It is possible that the figure in v. 3 refers to the size of the entire army that attacked Ai, while the figure in v. 12 is the ambush party. There was only one ambush party (vv. 14, 19, 21), and the ambush mentioned in v. 13 would refer to it. The nearby city of Bethel joined Ai in its attack against Israel. But in the haste of the pursuit, they left the city open behind them, offering an easy entrance for the Israelite ambush (v. 17). In the battle against Amalek, Moses held up the staff of God until victory was won (Ex. 17:8–12). Joshua's stretching forth of the spear was a sign that the Lord had given them victory; it also served as a signal to the ambush party to break out into the city (Josh. 8:18–19). Just as Moses did not let down his hand until Amalek was defeated, so Joshua did not draw back his spear until he destroyed Ai (v. 26). Once the enemy was engaged, there was no room for retreat. Victory comes from the Lord, but believers must engage the enemy as if they were fighting the battle (2 Chr. 20).

Through tactical deception and decoy, the Israelite army completely broke the power of the enemy (Josh. 8:20). Israel annihilated the inhabitants and burned the city (vv. 22–28). The hanging of Ai's king on a tree follows the instructions of Deuteronomy 21:22–23. A dead body was not supposed to be hung on a tree or pole throughout the night. The fight against Ai resulted in two heaps of stones, one for Achan and his possessions (Josh. 7:26), a symbol of rebellion and defeat, and the other for the king of Ai (8:28), a symbol of Israel's faithfulness and victory.

8:30–35. Covenant Renewed. Moses had commanded the people to build an altar on Mt. Ebal. Six tribes were to stand on Mt. Ebal and another six on Mt. Gerizim for the reading of the law and the recitation of the covenant blessings and curses (Deut. 11:26–30; 27:1–26). This ceremony was a covenant renewal during which the Lord, represented by the ark, was in the midst of Israel, witnessing the pledges of the congregation. As in Exodus 19, all Israel—men, women, and little ones, citizen or alien—was present. The covenant was meant for everyone in Israel, not just for the men. The building of an altar, the offering of sacrifices, congregational standing, the proclamation of blessings, and the reading of the law, were all central elements of worship. Burnt offerings and peace offerings represented devotion and fellowship, respectively. This was an appropriate time to celebrate the Lord's victory over their enemies. The renewal of the covenant was also timely, given Achan's rebellion and its consequences for Israel. The writing of the law on stones and its reading in the hearing of the people would create an indelible impression on Israel, both in sight and in heart. As Joshua read the law and they enjoyed the blessings of fellowship, they would also ponder the blessings or the curses that would follow obedience or disobedience to the law. Israel's possession and occupancy of the land of Canaan was contingent upon obedience to the covenant law. The law, as the transcript of God's character, was the basis of life in the land.

Joshua 8:31–34 affirms Moses as the author of the book of the law. Here, the "law of Moses" is the same as the "words of the law" that Joshua read to the people, namely, the blessings and curses "written in the Book of the Law." Since these instructions of Moses are found in Deuteronomy, we may conclude that the "Book of the Law" refers, at least, to Deuteronomy. Joshua 8:31–35 testify that Joshua carefully followed the instructions of Moses. The success of Joshua and Israel was dependent upon their adherence to the law of God given through Moses. This lay at the heart of the covenant renewal ceremony.

9:1—10:43

The Conquest of the Southern Coalition

Chapters 9–10 demonstrate the centrality of the covenant in the book of Joshua. Israel's inheritance of the land of Canaan was a fulfillment of a covenant promise. In chapter 9, Gibeon established a covenant relationship with Israel through deception in order to remain in the land. Since Israel entered into this covenant by swearing on the name of the Lord, they were bound as a covenant suzerain (overlord) to protect the vassal (subordinate), Gibeon, from enemies such as the coalition of armies in 10:1–5. The covenant with Gibeon (chap. 9) was the immediate basis for Israel's battle and conquest of the southern coalition (chap. 10).

9:1–13. Reaction of the Canaanites and the Gibeonites. The city-states in the land of Canaan formed a coalition army to fight Israel following its conquests of Jericho and Ai. They ignored that Joshua, through the presence and power of the Lord, was invincible. Despite their knowledge of the miraculous deeds of the Lord among Israel, these Canaanites decided to oppose Him. Consequently, they would soon be swallowed up in their obstinate rebellion.

The Gibeonites sought a covenant with Israel for the preservation of their lives. This was based on their conviction that the Lord had given all the land to Israel (v. 24). The poor appearance of the Gibeonite delegation sent to Israel at Gilgal was intended to make Israel believe that they were coming from a far country. The dry and crumbly bread would also communicate the same message. Like the serpent in Genesis 3:1, the Gibeonites were truly crafty in deception. In Genesis 3:1, the serpent was *'arum*, and in Joshua 9:4 the Gibeonites were *'armmah*. Both of these words are related to the same root. Being cunning, they succeeded in trapping Israel into a covenant of peace. The word translated as "covenant" is *berit*, the same word which is used for the covenant between the Lord and Israel. The Gibeonites seemed to have known the rules of warfare, or they may have had some knowledge of the warfare regulations in Deuteronomy 20. Israel could proclaim an offer of peace to a far away country but not to the inhabitants of the promised land (Deut. 20:10–18). This explains why both the Gibeonites and the Israelites were concerned with distance (Josh. 9:6–7, 12–13). The Gibeonites also knew about the miraculous deeds of the Lord in Egypt and the subjugation of the two kings east of the Jordan. However, they seem intentionally to have left out mention of the destruction of Jericho and Ai (cf. v. 3). The delegation was probably sent soon after the destruction of these cities, but because they pretended to have come from a far away country, they craftily avoided mention of the destruction since the Israelites might question how this news could have reached them so soon. This too was part of the plot to convince Israel that Gibeon was a far away country. By appearing in worn-out clothes with worn-out provisions, the Gibeonites convinced the elders of Israel that Gibeon was a faraway country that merited the proclamation of peace. Moreover, by evoking the name of Israel's God and accepting His rulership over the land (v. 9), the Gibeonites theologically convinced Israel that they, like Rahab, sought real refuge in the Lord.

9:14–15. A Hasty Covenant. The Gibeonites were Hivites. Hivites were among the nations God had promised to drive out of the land (3:10). Their insistence that Israel make a covenant with them should have made the elders of the congregation more suspicious, for a truly distant country would naturally not be in desperate need of a covenant relation with Israel. Israelite leaders partook of the provisions of the Gibeonites as a covenant meal and entered into a covenant of peace by swearing in the name of the Lord to preserve their lives (cf. v. 18). By making peace with Gibeon on oath to the Lord, Israel was bound not only to desist from fighting them but also to protect them from their enemies. When they said, "We are your servants" (v. 8), they meant that they were ready to be a vassal nation to Israel, the suzerain. As in every suzerainty covenant (see commentary on 9:1—10:43), the suzerain promised on oath to protect the vassal. While Joshua and the elders of Israel made attempts to follow the divine instruction in Deuteronomy 20 and subsequently entered into a genuine covenant with Gibeon, they did not seek the guidance of the Lord (Josh. 9:14) in whose name they sealed that covenant. In other words, evidence and logical arguments were not enough to legitimize such an important decision. Any major Israelite decision with covenantal implication was supposed to be guided by the Lord. Both success and failure in leadership depend on the leaders' constant reliance on the Lord.

9:16–27. The Response to Deception. Once Israel had made the covenant with Gibeon in the name of the Lord, it could no longer be revoked. About three days later, the Israelites realized that the Gibeonites were their neighbors in the promised land, but by then they could not attack Gibeon. When leaders fail, the congregation complains. In this case the complaints of the congregation may have been justifiable, but they did not have the right to attack the Gibeonites. They apparently thought about it (v. 26). Israel's covenant with Gibeon would remain binding forever, for the Lord's name cannot be vainly misused (Ex. 20:7). And any attempt to revoke it would incur divine wrath (Josh. 9:20; 22:20). God's wrath fell on King Saul when he violated Israel's covenant with Gibeon (2 Sam. 21:1–9).

Deception and lies have adverse consequences, though. The Gibeonites successfully tricked Israel into a covenant of peace, but they had to bear the consequences. By telling Joshua to do to them what "seems good and right" (Josh. 9:25), the Gibeonites both reminded him of their covenant relationship and accepted the consequences of their deception. The penalty for their deception was the curse of slavery. As slaves, they would hew wood and draw water on behalf of the congregation for the Lord's altar (vv. 21, 23, 27; cf. Deut. 20:10–15). Interestingly, Gibeon was notable for its water supply (2 Sam. 2:13; Jer. 41:12). When Solomon became king, the sanctuary was at Gibeon (1 Kin. 3:4–5; 2 Chr. 1:3, 13). The proclamation of Joshua against the Gibeonites recalls partly the curse of Noah over Canaan (Gen. 9:25–27). The references to a curse, the service of slavery, and "the house of my God" (i.e., the God of Shem dwelling in the tent of Shem) strengthens this connection. Despite the consequences of their deception, however, the Gibeonites became members of the covenant community—hence they were partakers of the covenantal blessings (v. 27; cf. Ps. 84:10)—and shared in the service of the sanctuary, even though as menial servants. Thus, like Rahab, the Gibeonites sought and found refuge in Israel's God, the God whose salvific grace extends beyond Israel.

10:1–11. Fulfilling the Demands of the Covenant. According to Joshua 9:1–2, many Canaanite city-states formed a coalition to fight Israel, but Gibeon refused to join them and sought peace with Israel. It is the coalition of chapter 9 that Israel defeated in chapter 10. Gibeon was close to Jerusalem. The fear of Jerusalem's king was fueled both by Israel's conquests of Jericho and Ai and by its covenant with Gibeon. The defection of Gibeon gave Israel a military advantage and weakened any resistance of the city-states in the region. Gibeon is described as an important, large city—"like one of the royal cities" (v. 2).

The coalition of the five kings was formed with the intention to attack Gibeon and break its alliance with Israel. In view of the covenant relationship between Israel and Gibeon, any attack on Gibeon was an attack on Israel. All three parties of the covenant—Gibeon, Israel, and the Lord—fulfilled their covenantal obligations. On its part, Gibeon sent messengers to tell Israel not to abandon its new servants (v. 6), reminding Israel of its obligation to protect Gibeon. Joshua gathered an army of valiant warriors to rescue Gibeon. The Lord encouraged Joshua and promised victory (v. 8). While the immediate cause of Israel's attack on the Amorite kings was to protect Gibeon, the destruction of the city-states constituted a major part of the conquest of Canaan. The description of the battles mentioned in vv. 9–39 clearly shows that it was the Lord who fought for Israel. The Lord defeated the enemy both with hailstones and with Joshua's sword (vv. 10–11). Nature stands at the sovereign Warrior's command in battle. At Jericho, the wall obeyed His voice and tumbled down (6:20). At Gibeon, hailstones descended upon the enemy (10:11), and the sun and moon obeyed His word to prolong this day of great victory (vv. 12–14). As in all the battles of the conquest, victory was the Lord's.

10:12–15. The Long Day. On the chronology of chapter 10, see "Chronology in Joshua 10," p. 379. Based on the use of the verb *damam* ("be silent"), some think that Joshua asked only that the sun reduce its heat that day. However, v. 13 uses both *damam* ("be silent") and *'amad* ("stand" or "stop") for both the sun and the moon. The sun "stopped" (*'amad*) and did not go down for a whole day (v. 13). The stopping of the sun and the moon must not be considered "too hard" for the Lord (Gen. 18:14; Jer. 32:17). He who created daytime, the sun, and the moon, still had these objects under command. There have been various attempts to explain this miracle, but the truth is that it is beyond our understanding. Some have claimed that scientists have been able to establish a missing day in cosmic history. These claims have not been verified and remain in the realm of speculation. The context proves without a doubt that it was a divine miracle, unprecedented and unsurpassed. Verse 14 shows that the Lord heeds the voice of His servants and fights their battles for them. These miracles were all meant to communicate this important truth. During the conquest, Gilgal was the main base of Israel's operations. The return of the army to Gilgal occurred after the slaughter of the enemy on that prolonged daytime (Josh. 10:15). The Book of Jashar referred to in v. 13 may have been a collection of battle narratives or heroic songs (cf. 2 Sam. 1:18).

10:16–27. Execution of the Coalition Kings. Joshua was in the camp at Gilgal when the report reached him that the five kings were hiding in a cave at Makkedah. Caves provided places of hiding and refuge in the Holy Land (see 1 Sam. 22:1). Joshua barricaded the cave to allow the army to pursue the enemy. These were probably the remaining armies of the five kings and the inhabitants of Makkedah (Josh. 10:19–20, 28). Since the Lord fought the battle, Israel suffered no casualties (v. 21). Like the king of Ai, the five kings were killed and then were hung until evening (see commentary on 8:10–29). By asking the captains of the warriors to place their feet on the necks of the five kings, Joshua reiterated and fulfilled the Lord's promise to put the enemy under the feet of Israel (cf. 1:3). This would then be a concrete expression of the enemy-under-foot motif (1 Kin. 5:3; Pss. 8:6; 110:1). This gesture served to encourage the Israelite warriors to fight on with the assurance that the Lord had already defeated their enemies. For the five kings, however, it meant total humiliation and subjection. The pile of stones over the cave was another monument to remind later generations of how the Lord had conquered the Amorites.

10:28–39. Capturing the Southern Cities. The events of vv. 29–39 occurred over a period of time. The reference to the king of Jericho in association with the capture of Libnah suggests that v. 29 begins a conquest narrative that starts at a different date, after the capture of Makkedah. Throughout these verses, *kherem* ("the ban"; see commentary on 6:17–27) is completely carried out; according to the divine command, Joshua annihilated all the inhabitants of the captured cities (cf. 11:15; Deut. 20). The "second day" in v. 32 refers to the second day of the siege of Lachish (Josh. 10:31), rather than the day following the prolonged day. In several places in the narrative, the word translated as "people" is the Hebrew *nepesh*, which

is often rendered "soul" (see vv. 28–39; 11:11). In the OT, this word often represents the person as a whole; it never refers to an immaterial essence that is capable of conscious existence apart from the body. The same word is used for a dead body (Lev. 21:11).

10:40–43. Extent of the Southern Conquest. Verses 40–43 are mainly a summary of the conquest of the kings and cities narrated in 10:1–39. The *kol* ("all" or "whole") land that was conquered was not the whole of Canaan but all of the territories of the peoples defeated in vv. 1–39. This was a large area that included the central mountains of the Holy Land, the desert in the south, and the Shephelah or the western foothills. Goshen in Israel (v. 41) is not to be confused with the land of Goshen in Egypt (Ex. 8:22). For a further discussion of the extent of the conquest described in Joshua, see the section on Backgrounds in Joshua: Introduction. The Israelite army encamped temporarily at Makkedah for the subsequent battles (Josh. 10:21) and v. 43 records their return to the main camp at Gilgal. As in several other places, "all Israel" (v. 43) designates the warriors and not every Israelite. Although Israel took these portions of land during a single military campaign (v. 42), the length of time is not indicated. The conquest of these lands might have taken a couple of years (cf. *yamim rabbim*, "many days"; 11:18). Verses 40–43 stress the Lord's faithfulness in fighting for Israel and handing over the land as a covenantal gift. Now that Israel had gained a substantial foothold in Canaan, the hope of the Exodus, which was the inheritance of Canaan, was finally being realized.

11:1–15

The Conquest of the Northern Coalition

In 10:1–39, Joshua defeated the southern coalition. After this, Israel's attention turned to the northern coalition in 11:1–15. The conquest story in this chapter emphasizes the Lord's faithfulness in fulfilling His covenant promises. Joshua's obedience to the Lord and His word also stand out.

11:1–5. The Coalition. As usual, coalitions were formed because of the threat posed by Israel's victories. The northern coalition, led by the king of Hazor, was larger and perhaps stronger than the southern coalition. The armies of this coalition are compared to the sand. Its military strength is highlighted by its numerous horses and chariots (v. 4). A vast army with a large number of sophisticated weaponry thus gathered to battle Israel. Horses and chariots posed serious challenges to the Israelite army, which consisted of only foot soldiers with limited weaponry. Israel would soon be reminded, however, that the battle is not to the one who possesses chariots and horses but to the one who is on the Lord's side.

11:6. Encouragement and Instruction. The size and weapons of the coalition army might have caused alarm among Israelite soldiers, but the Lord's words in v. 6 encouraged Israel and assured them of victory. Even though Israel had to face this great and strong enemy, it was the Lord, the God of war, who would fight the battle and hand over the enemy to Israel. This divine assurance of victory breathed hope

Chronology in Joshua 10

The chronology of Joshua 10 is difficult to unravel. It appears that only vv. 10–15 constitute events of the prolonged day, while the events of vv. 16–43 occurred at other times. After the prolonged day, Joshua and the army returned to Gilgal (v. 15); but when the report came that the five kings were hiding in the cave of Makkedah, the army set out from Gilgal and encamped at Makkedah (v. 21). If Makkedah was farther than Azekah (vv. 10–11), it means that Israel did not reach Makkedah during the pursuit on the prolonged day—Israel stopped at Azekah while the five kings sought refuge in the cave of Makkedah (v. 16). The slaughter of Makkedah "that day" (v. 28) must relate to vv. 16–28 rather than vv. 10–15. That the events of vv. 16–43 did not occur on the prolonged day is supported by references to "that day" (vv. 28, 35; cf. vv. 26–27), "second day" (v. 32), and a siege (vv. 31, 34). Within vv. 16–43, the events of vv. 16–28 might have taken one day, while those of vv. 29–43 occurred on different days. According to 11:18, the battles recorded in 10:40–42 (cf. 11:16–23) took a long time, probably a couple of years.

and comfort into the hearts of the Israelites. The word of the Lord was always the strength of Joshua. The horses and chariots, which might have scared Israel, would be good only for destruction. Horses were hamstrung by cutting a tendon on the hind legs, rendering them militarily ineffective. The Lord does not need horses and chariots to fight (cf. Deut. 17:16; 2 Sam. 8:4; Is. 31:1), and so He would not let Israel take these as booty.

11:7–15. The Victory. Joshua deployed surprise attacks during the conquest (cf. Josh. 10:9). Through surprise attacks, Israel caught the enemy unprepared and drove them into the mountains toward the north, where chariots could not be used. The Lord fulfilled His promise by delivering the enemy into the hand of the Israelite army, whose task was only to pursue a terrorized army to the slaughter. There is always a blend of divine and human effort in the conquest stories (see commentary on 8:1–9). Whether literally as in Joshua's day or spiritually as in the Christian's life, victory over the enemy results from this blend of divine and human effort. Victory is always a gift from God, but believers must claim it in faith and action.

Joshua annihilated all the inhabitants of the cities of the coalition army in accordance with the *kherem* policy (the "ban"; see commentary on 6:17–27). The destruction of Hazor marked a significant victory in the region, since it was the most impressive city in the land. Unlike other elevated cities, only Hazor was burnt during the northern campaign. This was probably done because of the atrocities associated with it. Since Hazor was completely burned, it is possible that Israel did not take booty from it. As the chief city-state, it might have been the epitome of Canaanite corruption, luxury, and paganism.

This section concludes by stressing Joshua's faithfulness to the *kherem* policy (extermination) as commanded through Moses (v. 15). Since *kherem* was the central warfare policy of the conquest, Joshua's obedience to this regulation is remarkable. In chapter 11, the word *kherem* and related words occur four times, showing that the ban is a major concern. The repeated references to the annihilation of the Canaanites emphasizes this point (vv. 16, 20–21). By stressing Joshua's obedience to Moses's command, the text suggests that Joshua was completing the work that Moses had begun.

11:16—12:24

Record of the Conquest

Joshua 11:16—12:24 is an inventory of Israelite conquests. In 11:16–23, the author summarizes the conquests of Joshua. Chapter 12 summarizes the conquests of Moses east of the Jordan (vv. 1–6) and those of Joshua west of the Jordan (vv. 7–24). This inventory prepares for the division of the land that begins in chapter 13.

11:16–23. Summary of Joshua's Conquest with Special Highlights. The use of the Hebrew word *kol* ("all," "whole," "entire") in vv. 16 and 23 does not refer to the whole land of Canaan but rather to the portions of land defined in vv. 16–17 (cf. 12:7–8). For more on the extent of the conquest, see the section on Backgrounds in Joshua: Introduction. The summary description of conquered land (11:16–18, 23) seems to cover all the portions of land taken by Joshua, including the territories of the southern campaign (10:43–45). We do not know how long Israel made war with these kings, but the entire conquest under Joshua may have taken about seven years (see the section on Date in Joshua: Introduction). In their battles against the Canaanites, the Israelites remained faithful to the divine rules of engagement, their only mistake being the covenant with Gibeon (10:19; Deut. 20:16–18).

While the Israelites were eager to conquer the land, they seem to have been slow in initiating the attack. Therefore, the Lord brought the battle to Israel by hardening the already stubborn hearts of the enemy to attack Israel. Thus were the enemies quickly destroyed (Josh. 11:20). When the Lord incites or allows the enemy to come against His people, He certainly intends the destruction of the enemy.

In Numbers 13–14, ten of the twelve spies discouraged Israel from entering Canaan because of the *'anakim* ("giants"). Caleb and Joshua, the two other spies, encouraged Israel to march into Canaan and to trust in the Lord's promise to drive out these giants. Joshua 11:21–22 and 15:13–14 record the victories of Joshua and Caleb over the *'anakim* in accordance with the Lord's promise. Joshua defeated all the *'anakim* except those in Gaza, Gath, and Ashdod (11:22). These were Philistine cities, and as we read in 13:2, the Philistines were not conquered during Joshua's time. The *'anakim* who remained in these cities were the ancestors of Goliath of Gath, whom David would kill (cf. 1 Sam. 17:4–7). The references to Israel and Judah, at a time when the nation was not yet divided, constitute an example of the scribal modernization of place-names rather than evidence of late authorship (Josh. 11:16, 21).

Joshua 11:23 concludes by highlighting key theological elements of the book. Joshua took the "land" and gave it to the tribes of Israel as "inheritance." The Lord had promised to give rest (*nuakh*) to Israel in 1:13, and 11:23 testifies that the land had rest (*shaqat*) from war. The rest denoted by *shaqat* is quietness from war (11:23; 14:15) and thus prepares the way for *nuakh*, which denotes settling down or repose (23:1; see commentary on 1:12–18). In 11:23, the conquest of Canaan is at least substantially complete.

12:1–24. Kings Defeated by Moses and Joshua. Verses 1–6 describe the territory east of the Jordan that Moses took from the two Amorite kings Sihon and Og (Num. 21:21–35; Deut. 2:26—3:11). The territory included the fertile lands of Gilead (i.e., the mountainous region east of the Jordan) and Bashan (i.e., the rich pastureland east of the Sea of Galilee). The two-and-a-half tribes (Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh) who inherited the lands of these Amorite kings owned large numbers of livestock, and Gilead and Bashan provided excellent pasturelands (Num. 32:1, 26–40).

Throughout the book, Joshua's work is portrayed as complementing that of Moses. Moses had conquered the land east of the Jordan, and Joshua continued the conquest west of the Jordan. As noted earlier, the summary of land conquered by Joshua in Josh. 11:16–18, 23 includes all the territories taken during the entire conquest west of the Jordan. This is supported by the summary description of Joshua's conquests in 12:7–8. Verse 8 lists the nations the Lord had promised to drive out of the land (3:10; Deut. 7:1), implying that Israel had carefully followed the divine command. Although as in 9:1 and 11:3 the Girgashites are omitted from the list of nations in 12:8, 24:11 records the fulfillment of the Lord's promise to drive out the seven nations. The list of kings, thirty-one in all, that follows (12:9–24) illustrates that Israel massively broke the power of the Canaanites and took the land. The list includes only defeated kings with their capital cities; it is not an inventory of all the towns taken in the conquest. Among other things, the vivid descriptions of the conquest of Canaan presented throughout the book leave no room for doubt regarding the historicity of the Exodus from Egypt and the conquest of Canaan.

13:1—24:33

A HOPE REALIZED: DIVISION OF THE LAND

While the first half of the book (1–12) describes Israel's conquest of the land of Canaan, the second half (13–24) describes the division of the land among the tribes of Israel. The narrative of chapters 13–24 is fraught with geographical and topographical details that forcefully underline the historicity of the conquest and division of the land. The careful demarcation of territories enabled later generations to identify their tribal boundaries. The actual division of the land ends in chapter 21, and the remaining chapters relate to issues of unity, loyalty, and covenantal faithfulness. With the division of the land, Israel's hope of inheriting Canaan was realized (chaps. 13–21). But whether Israel would continue to receive God's blessings and thus become channels of the "blessed hope" depended on their faithfulness to the covenant (chaps. 22–24).

13:1–7

The Command to Divide the Land

Although significant conquests had been made, Joshua seemed to have delayed dividing the land. The conquest took about seven years (cf. 14:7–10; Num. 13). The Lord's promise was to conquer the land and divide it through Joshua (Josh. 1:6; Deut. 31:7), hence it was appropriate for the Lord to remind him to divide the land before he died. Verses 2–6 explain the last part of v. 1, which states that there was still much land to be possessed by Israel. Read superficially, vv. 1–6 seem to contradict earlier statements that Joshua took the whole land (Josh. 10:40–42; 11:16–23; see the section on Backgrounds in Joshua: Introduction). The portions of land yet to be taken were basically the lands of the Philistines and Sidonians (Phoenicians), who lived along the coast of the Great Sea and in Lebanon, respectively. The Philistines were not conquered during Joshua's time (13:2). This explains why the *'anakim* were still in Philistia (11:22).

While much of the land was yet to be possessed, the Lord bade Joshua to focus on his assigned task of apportioning the land, promising that He Himself would gradually drive out the Canaanites (cf. Ex. 23:28–29). In v. 6, the Hebrew *raq happileha* (lit. "only/surely cause it to fall") refers to the allocation of Israelite land into tribal divisions—this adds some urgency to the Lord's command. In later passages, it is revealed that the land of Canaan was to be divided by lots among nine and a half tribes (Josh. 18:6; 19:51). The casting of lots was probably done using the priestly Urim and Thummim and so placed the decision completely in God's hands (Ex. 28:30; Num. 27:21). Lot casting was a means of divine revelation.

13:8–33

Territory East of the Jordan

Joshua 13:8–33 describes the territories of Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh. These two and a half tribes received their inheritance east of the Jordan.

13:8–14. Extent of the Territory and the Levites. The land west of the Jordan was to be divided among nine and a half tribes because Moses had already given tribal allotments to two and a half tribes east of the Jordan. These were, namely, the lands over which Sihon and Og had ruled (see commentary on 12:1–24). The two and a half tribes failed to drive out some of the inhabitants of the land (13:13). This failure of Israel is a recurring theme in chapters 13–24 and anticipates the idolatrous practices that ensnare Israel in the book of Judges. The Levites were not given a tribal allotment since the Lord was their portion (v. 33). They received only forty-eight cities and their pastureland scattered throughout the land east and west of the Jordan. Being fully employed in the work of the Lord in His sanctuary, the priests and Levites were not to engage in farming or business activities. Since they did not possess land, it was the responsibility of the other tribes to provide for their needs through tithes, offerings, and other sacred donations.

13:15–28. Reuben and Gad. The Reubenites settled in the territory that had belonged to the kingdom of Sihon, south of Gilead and north of the Arnon River. The text mentions the slaughter of the Midianites (vv. 21–22) in the land of Moses's in-laws (Num. 31:8) and of Balaam the prophet, who unwillingly blessed Israel and subsequently entrapped them into sexual immorality and idolatry (Num. 25:1–3; 31:16). By rehearsing these incidents that took place in the Transjordan, the text indirectly warns God's people against sexual immorality and idolatry.

The Gadites shared the land of Gilead and part of the land of Ammon with the Reubenites. The Lord had commanded Israel not to conquer or claim the territory of Ammon (Deut. 2:19, 37). The reference to Ammon in Joshua 13:25 may refer to a portion of the Ammonite territory that had been conquered by Sihon before being taken over by Israel. This may provide a background to Judges 11:13–27.

13:29–33. Half-tribe of Manasseh. Half of the tribe of Manasseh settled in the land of Bashan, which Og had ruled, and Manasseh also shared the land of Gilead with Reuben and Gad. Machir (or, alternately, Makir) was the son of Manasseh and father of Gilead (Gen. 50:23; Num. 26:29). In v. 31, Machir is used to designate the tribe of Manasseh (cf. Judg. 5:14). Verse 32 summarily reasserts that Moses gave the conquered territory east of the Jordan as an inheritance to Israel. For v. 33, see commentary on 13:8–14.

14:1—19:51

Territory West of the Jordan

Joshua 14:1—19:51 describes the territories of the nine and a half tribes who settled west of the Jordan in the land of Canaan. In the division of the land, priority was given to the tribes of Judah and Joseph, probably because of their size and importance (see commentary on 15:20–16:4); these tribes were influential and would become the two major forces in Israel. The priority given to them was in agreement with the principle that the land was to be allocated based on the sizes of the tribes (Num. 26:52–56). As the Lord had commanded, Joshua divided the whole land of Canaan, including portions of the land that were yet to be conquered (Josh. 13:6).

14:1–5. Principles for the Division. The divine instruction was carefully followed in the allocation of the land. The principles outlined in vv. 1–5 suggest that the tribal territories were allocated under divine sanction and supervision. Eleazar the priest, Joshua, and the tribal heads administered the distribution. They divided the land through lot casting as commanded by Moses (on the use of lots, see comment on 13:1–7). Since two and a half tribes had already received their inheritance east of the Jordan, the land west of the Jordan was to be divided among nine and a half tribes. The Levites had no share since the Lord was their portion (18:7). By stating that the descendants of Joseph constituted two tribes (i.e., Ephraim and Manasseh), v. 4 explains why there were still nine and a half tribes even after excluding the tribe of Levi and the two and a half tribes who settled in the east.

14:6–15. Caleb. Some think that Caleb was not an Israelite because his father was a Kenizzite (cf. Num. 32:12), but in Joshua 14:6–7, Caleb seems to be included among the people of Judah. It seems that only the Judahite delegation accompanied Caleb as fellow tribesmen to claim his promised inheritance. Caleb had represented this tribe among the twelve spies (Num. 13:6). He probably would not have represented the tribe in such a capacity had he not been a direct descendant of Judah. He was probably considered a Kenizzite because his ancestor was named Kenaz (Josh. 14:14; 15:13, 17; cf. 1 Chr. 4:13–15).

Caleb reminded Joshua about the Lord's promise through Moses to give Caleb the land upon which his feet had walked as a reward for exercising bold faith and confidence in the Lord in his spy report. In his recounting of the incident of the twelve spies, Caleb noted that forty-five years had elapsed between the sending of the spies and the end of the conquest. This means that the conquest took about seven years, since thirty-eight years had passed between the time that Caleb returned from spying the land and their entrance into it (Deut. 2:14). The strength of Caleb was remarkable; even at the age of eighty-five he still could go to war (Josh. 14:10–11). But he seemed to praise his own strength in order to convince Joshua that he was strong enough to conquer Hebron if it were given to him. Caleb's request for Hebron was thus a fulfillment of the Lord's promise through Moses, who is here for the first time called "man of God" (v. 6). Hebron was noted for its warriors, greatness, and fortifications. The *'anakim* lived in Hebron. Yet Caleb was convinced that since the Lord had promised him the land, He would be able to drive out these giants. Throughout the conquest, the Lord had been faithful in delivering the enemy into the hand of Israel as promised, and so Caleb had no doubt He would do the same with the *'anakim* in Hebron (cf. Deut. 9:1–3).

In Joshua 11:21, Joshua is said to have driven the *'anakim* out of Hebron, but in 15:13–14 it is Caleb who did this. It is possible that 11:21 is a summary of all the conquests, including Caleb's conquest of Hebron. In other words, Caleb's conquest of Hebron might have taken place as part of the southern campaign. The statement that "the land had rest from war" in 14:15, which also occurs in 11:23, strengthens this observation. Notice that there is no record of a battle in chapter 14, so v. 15 may be referring back to 11:23.

15:1–12. Judah. Judah was the first to receive its inheritance in the land of Canaan. Judah's territory was the southern part of the land, covering part of the central hill country. They shared borders with the Brook of Egypt (which flows from the Sinai Peninsula into the Great Sea), the Great Sea (i.e., Mediterranean Sea), Edom, and the Salt Sea (i.e., Dead Sea). While Jebus or Jerusalem proper was in Benjamin's territory (18:16, 28), its southern slope belonged to Judah (15:8, 63).

15:13–19. Caleb Claims Inheritance. As seen in 14:6–15, Joshua gave Hebron to Caleb in accordance with the Lord's promise. The three *'anakim* named here appear in the report of the spies in Numbers 13:22. In bold confidence, Caleb had encouraged Israel to march into Canaan and possess the land because the Lord was with His people (Num. 14:9). With that same faith in the Lord, he won victory over the *'anakim*. Thus Caleb, whose name may mean "dog," proved to be that "dog" who would not rest until he had chased out the enemy. That Caleb offered Debir (i.e., Kirjath [or Kiriath] Sepher) as the bride price for his daughter may be a hint that he was already fostering the next generation of leaders, since Othniel, Caleb's nephew and later his son-in-law, is the same Othniel who became a judge in Israel (Judg. 3:9).

15:20—16:4. Towns of Judah and Joseph's Territory. Judah's territory was the largest in the land of Canaan. Judah failed to drive out the Jebusites from Jerusalem, at least at the time the book was composed (cf. 2 Sam. 5:6–10). This failure of the Israelites is a significant refrain in the second half of the book. The recurrence of this refrain implies that at the division of the land the national wars of conquest were over; wars of occupation were now the responsibility of individual tribes.

Jacob had adopted Joseph's two sons (i.e., Manasseh and Ephraim), thereby giving Joseph the right to a double inheritance (Gen. 48:5–6, 22). Ephraim was the second born, but he received the blessings of a firstborn (Gen. 48:13–20). Unlike the other tribes west of the Jordan, the description of the territory of the tribes of Joseph does not contain a list of towns. The territory may have been thinly populated (cf. Josh. 17:14–18).

16:5–10. Ephraim. Ephraim's territory stretched from the Jordan to the Great Sea. It covered the central hill country of Israel. The Ephraimites had some cities within the territory of Manasseh (16:9; cf. 17:9). Like Judah, Ephraim failed to drive out some of the inhabitants of the Canaanite cities (e.g., Gezer), though they subjected them to forced labor. The result of this failure on Israel's part was interfaith marriages and religious syncretism (Judg. 2:1–3; 3:1–6; 10:6).

17:1–13. Half-Tribe of Manasseh. Even though Manasseh was the firstborn of Joseph, Jacob transferred the right of succession, which at that time usually belonged to the eldest son, to Ephraim (Gen. 48:13–20). On Machir, see commentary on Joshua 13:29–33. Some Manassites had received their inheritance east of the Jordan in Gilead and Bashan, though it is not possible to determine the specific clan(s). The reference to the "rest" of the people of Manasseh designates the other half of the tribe who settled west of the Jordan. On the inheritance of Zelophehad's daughters, see Numbers 27:1–11 and 36:1–12. Apparently, Zelophehad had only daughters. Traditionally, women would not have had a share in the division of the land, but the Lord granted the request of these women to inherit portions of the land alongside their father's brothers. The reason for the daughters' request was to preserve the name of their deceased father and thus ensure the future of the family among the tribes. Accordingly, they had to marry within their father's clan to keep the property within the clan and tribe (Num. 36:6–9). The territory of Manasseh in the land of Canaan shared borders with Asher, Zebulun, and Issachar (north), the Sea (west), the Jordan (east), and Ephraim (south). Ephraim had several towns within Manasseh (Josh. 16:9), and Manasseh had a few towns within Issachar and Asher (17:11). Manasseh also failed to completely drive out the Canaanites, even though Manasseh eventually subjected them to forced labor (see commentary on 15:20—16:4; 16:5–10).

17:14–18. Complaint of the House of Joseph. A quick look at a map of the tribal allotments reveals that Ephraim and Manasseh inherited a large territory. Moreover, their territory was the most fertile in all Israel. Thus, while it is true that the Lord had blessed the two tribes and made them a great and numerous people, it is not true that they had only one lot and one share (v. 14; cf. v. 5). Perhaps the people viewed their inheritance in terms of the number of cities and already-cleared farmlands ready for use and not in terms of the actual size of the allotments. By stating that they received only one lot and one share, the tribes of Joseph probably sought to remind Joshua of the prophetic blessing in Genesis 48, where Joseph was given the right of double inheritance. The tribes of Joseph may also have compared their allotment to that of Judah and may have reasoned that since Joshua was a fellow tribesman, he would reconfigure the division to their advantage. Ephraim and Manasseh requested more territory because they were a great and numerous people (v. 14). Joshua turned the argument around to challenge them to subdue the land already allotted to them. If these tribes were a great people as they claimed, they should have used their numerical strength to clear out more forest country and expand their territory (v. 15). The forest refers to the central mountainous region. The Perizzites were among the nations that the Lord promised to drive out before Israel (Deut. 7:1). *Repa'im* (sometimes translated as "giants"), like *'anakim*, were a people of unusually large stature (Deut. 2:11; 3:11).

Joshua's response in Joshua 17:15 reveals that what the tribes of Joseph needed was not more territory but rather a proper mind-set and faith in the Lord. Their response reveals that the real reason for their confrontation was an unwillingness to clear a place in the forest country as well as a fear of the Canaanite iron chariots (v. 16). Thus, they refused to see the hill country as theirs because it would be difficult to clear and settle in. They also felt unable to drive out the Canaanites in the lowlands because they possessed chariots of iron. Humanly speaking, the foot soldiers of Israel were no match for the Canaanite army with iron chariots, which were formidable implements of war. But the tribes of Joseph forgot that the conquest of the land of Canaan was the Lord's business. They seem to have forgotten that the divine Warrior has no regard for horses and chariots (11:6). If the Lord drove out the *'anakim* from Hebron before Caleb (15:13–14), Ephraim and Manasseh should well have known and believed that He would similarly drive out the *repa'im* and the Canaanites with their iron chariots (cf. 13:1–7).

In vv. 17–18, Joshua forcefully repeated his challenge to the two tribes. He was truly a transformational leader who sought to effect change in the mind-set of the people. As a good leader, he would not yield to a narrow or selfish request, nor would he succumb to a tribal wooing. Rather, he would challenge their faith in the Lord. Lack of faith and courage easily turns into rebellion. The tribes of Joseph should have realized that the division of the land was done under the direct supervision of the Lord, and if by any chance they charged Joshua with unfairness in the apportioning of the land, they were in fact murmuring against the Lord.

18:1–10. Allotting the Rest of the Land. Gilgal had been the base of Israel's operations during the conquest. The tabernacle was pitched there. After Gilgal, Shiloh became the next base and religious center (18:1; see "Shiloh," p. 920). While at Gilgal, Judah, Ephraim, and Manasseh (west) received their inheritance, but the remaining seven tribes had not yet received theirs (v. 2). Joshua reproved the seven tribes for their apparent reluctance in dividing and thus occupying the land. The clause literally reads "they did not divide/share." Throughout the book, the Israelites carefully obeyed Joshua. At his command, tribal representatives went and surveyed the land, and returned with a map describing the land in seven parts defined by their cities. On v. 7, see commentary on 13:8–14. As usual, the tribal territories were divided through lot casting. It was actually Eleazar who would cast the lots in the Lord's presence at the entrance of the tabernacle in Shiloh (19:51). For lots, see commentary on 13:1–7.

Benjamin was strategically located towards the Jordan between northeastern Judah and southeastern Ephraim (18:11–28). Benjamin bordered Dan to the west. In this list we note, among other things, that Jerusalem/Jebus was shared between Benjamin (vv. 16, 28) and Judah (cf. commentary on 15:1–12, 20-63). Simeon (19:1–9) was located within the southern territory of Judah. In his parting blessings, Jacob prophesied that Simeon and Levi would be scattered in Israel (Gen. 49:5–7). According to Joshua 19:9, Judah's territory was too large for them, and so a part of it was given to Simeon. Soon, Simeon would be assimilated by Judah. Zebulun (vv. 10–16) shared borders with Asher (west), Naphtali (northeast), Manasseh (south), and Issachar (southeast). Their territory mainly covered the forested mountain rim north of Jezreel. Prophetic blessings suggest Zebulun might have had access to the seas (Gen. 49:13; Deut. 33:18–19).

Issachar's territory covered the land between Jezreel and the Jordan. Issachar shared borders with Naphtali (north), Zebulun (northwest), Manasseh (south), and the Jordan (east) (vv. 17–23). Asher bordered Naphtali (east), Zebulun (southeast), and the Great Sea (west), thus adjoining the Phoenician coast. It covered the western Galilee highland (vv. 24–31). Naphtali's territory covered the western shore of the Sea of Galilee and extended to the north. It bordered Asher (west), Zebulun (southwest), Issachar (south), and extended over the Jordan, thereby sharing a boundary with one half of Manasseh in the Transjordan (vv. 32–39). Dan's territory (vv. 40–48) was bordered by the Great Sea (west) and Manasseh (northwest); the rest of Dan's territory was sandwiched together with Benjamin (east), between Judah (south) and Ephraim (northeast). Some of the towns of Judah were reassigned to Dan (15:33; 19:41–43). The Danites failed to subdue the inhabitants of the land (Judg. 1:34–35; 18:1). Some of the Danites migrated to the extreme north and took Leshem, which they renamed Dan (Josh. 19:47). As if the rejection of their original territory was not enough, the Danite migrants also clung to idolatry (Judg. 18). Perhaps because they established idolatry in this region, it later became a major center of formalized idolatrous worship during the time of Jeroboam (1 Kin. 12:28–29).

19:49–51. Joshua. The Israelites gave an inheritance to Joshua. He had been a faithful spy (Num. 13–14) and a great leader before the Lord. Verse 50 implies that the Lord had promised to give him as inheritance whichever city he would ask for. As an Ephraimite, he requested Timnath Serah in the mountains of Ephraim. Notice that he was the last to receive his inheritance. He did not select a place for himself before dividing the land. As a good leader, he served others first. There are several indications that the division of the land was a religious activity. First, as elsewhere (Josh. 14:1; 17:4; 21:1), Eleazar the priest is named before Joshua and the tribal leaders. Second, these verses reiterate that the division was done through casting lots in the Lord's presence at the entrance of the tabernacle at Shiloh. The division of the land was not only carried out unanimously by the leadership of Israel but was done under divine sanction and supervision. Now that the division of the land was complete, it was time to designate the cities of refuge (chap. 20) and the cities of the Levites (chap. 21).

20:1–9

Cities of Refuge

In Numbers 35:9–34, the Lord commanded through Moses the establishment of six cities of refuge from among the Levitical cities—three on each side of the Jordan—where anyone who unintentionally killed a person might seek asylum (cf. Ex. 21:12–13; Deut. 4:41–43; 19:1–13). Joshua 20 contains the fulfillment of the promise in Numbers 35 and related passages. Joshua

20:1–6 states the reasons for the appointment of the cities, and vv. 7–9 enumerate them. The establishment of the cities of refuge obviously served to limit and control the practice of blood vengeance and to avoid polluting the land with innocent blood. Such a provision was unparalleled in the ANE. It was a way of teaching respect for life and justice to the Israelites.

20:1–6. The Rationale. The person who killed another person unintentionally would flee to a city of refuge from the "avenger of blood." This refers to a close male relative of the deceased whose responsibility was to avenge the dead by killing the murderer. A city of refuge provided both protection and a trial for those who killed someone accidentally. Such people would explain their situation before the council of elders at the entrance to the city gate, who upon hearing would take the person in and provide asylum, including a place to live (v. 4). The city gate was usually a complex structure that both controlled traffic and facilitated the defense of a city. The council of elders normally judged cases at the gate. It was the responsibility of the elders of the city of refuge not to deliver the manslayer into the hands of an avenger of blood who pursued the slayer into the city. After the initial hearing by the elders, person who killed someone accidentally would be tried before the assembly (vv. 6, 9). A guilty slayer was handed over to the avenger of blood (v. 9; Deut. 19:12). For having caused the accidental loss of a human life, an innocent slayer would have to remain in the city of refuge until the ruling high priest died, at which time the people who killed someone accidentally could return to their original city (Josh. 20:6). The death of the high priest—who bore the people's guilt (Ex. 28:38; Lev. 10:17)—may have provided some sort of amnesty or atonement. This aspect of the high priest's death would point obliquely to the death of Christ, the High Priest, whose death provided atonement for sin (1 Pet. 2:24; Heb. 9:11–15).

20:7–9. The Cities. Cities east of the Jordan included Bezer (Reuben), Ramoth in Gilead (Gad), and Golan in Bashan (Manasseh; cf. Deut. 4:43), while those west of the Jordan comprised Kedesh in Galilee (Naphtali), Shechem (Ephraim), and Hebron (Judah). The cities of refuge provided asylum for both the native and the stranger in Israel who unintentionally slew a person. The Lord was the God of Israel and of foreigners living in Israel. The cities of refuge were also Levitical cities (Josh. 21:13–38).

21:1–42
Levitical Cities

The tribe of Levi did not receive a tribal allotment because the priesthood was their inheritance (see commentary on 13:8–14). Joshua 21:1–42 records the allocation of cities throughout the nation as dwellings for the Levites. The Levitical cities would serve as centers for religious instruction.

21:1–3. The Directive. The Lord had commanded that forty-eight cities and their common lands be given to the Levites to settle in (Num. 35:1–8). In Joshua 21:1–2 the Levites reminded Eleazar, Joshua, and the tribal leaders to fulfill the Lord's directive regarding the Levitical cities. Since the Levites represented the nation in their sanctuary service, it was the responsibility of all the other tribes to donate the cities.

21:4–42. The Distribution. The cities were determined through the casting of lots. Verses 4–8 summarize the tribal distribution of the cities, while vv. 9–40 list the cities. Levi had three sons, Kohath, Gershon, and Merari. The priestly sons of Aaron (also the Kohathites) received thirteen cities from the tribes of Judah, Simeon, and Benjamin (vv. 9–19). The priests were thus providentially settled in the vicinity of the future temple of Solomon in Jerusalem. The rest of the Kohathites received ten cities from Ephraim, Dan, and one half of Manasseh (west; vv. 20–26). The Gershonites received thirteen cities from Issachar, Asher, Naphtali, and one half of Manasseh (east; vv. 27–33). Finally, the Merarites received twelve cities from Reuben, Gad, and Zebulun (vv. 34–40). Verses 41–42 conclude the distribution of the Levitical cities. The cities were forty-eight in number, each with its common lands for the livestock of the Levites.

21:43–45
Faithfulness of the Lord

Joshua 21:43–45 accentuates the Lord's faithfulness in delivering His covenantal promises. These verses elegantly summarize the purpose of the book and the Exodus from Egypt. The Lord had taken Israel out of Egypt and led them through the wilderness in order to give them "rest" in the land of Canaan (see on 1:12–18). The text asserts that God's oath to the fathers had now been fulfilled (see Gen. 22:16–18). God's promises are reliable and fill the heart with hope. Israel obeyed the Lord and engaged the enemy in battle, but the land remained a covenant gift from the sovereign God. The use of *natan* ("give"), *yarash* ("possess"), and *nakhal* ("inherit") indicates throughout the book that Israel's occupation of Canaan occurred through a legal transaction in which the Lord, being God of all the earth, transferred the land as a covenantal gift to Israel. While Israel thus owned the legal title to the land, it would experience true "rest" only by keeping the covenant.

22:1–34
Unity and Loyalty

Joshua 22 records how the warriors of the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and one half of Manasseh, who had crossed over the Jordan to help the other tribes take possession of Canaan, returned to their land.

22:1–6. Loyalty of the Two and a Half Tribes. Now that the Lord had given rest to the nine and a half tribes in the land of Canaan, it was time for the warriors of the two and a half tribes (Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh) to return to their inheritance in the Transjordan. In his farewell address, Joshua commended their loyalty and obedience to the Lord's command to join the other tribes in the conquest of Canaan (1:12–15; Num. 32:20–22). He then charged them to remain true and loyal to the Lord; that is, to love the Lord, walk in all His ways, keep His commandments, hold fast to Him, and serve Him wholeheartedly (Josh. 22:5). Obedience to the Lord was the key to blessings and perpetual occupancy of the land. True success has always depended on wholehearted devotion and obedience to the Lord. Joshua's address contained a charge and a blessing, in the manner of patriarchal parting words (see Gen. 49:28–29).

22:7–9. Returning Home. The warriors of the two and a half tribes returned with both material and spiritual blessings. Joshua pronounced spiritual blessings upon the people, but he also gave them material blessings. The returning warriors divided the spoils that had been accumulated during the conquest with the other tribes, but they would have to share the booty with their brothers who had stayed behind in the Transjordan (cf. Num. 31:27). Technically, the land of Canaan was the land west of the Jordan. The lands east of the Jordan were known as Gilead and Bashan, though sometimes the area was simply called Gilead (see Josh. 22:9). By emphasizing that the land of Gilead was given by divine command to the two and a half tribes, v. 9 suggests that crossing the Jordan back to Gilead did not mean these people no longer had a share in the Lord.

22:10–12. The Altar and Its Crisis. The returning warriors built a large, imposing altar by the Jordan in the land of Canaan before crossing to their territory. Moses had instructed Israel to build an altar only at the place that the Lord would choose (Deut. 12:11), which was temporarily at Shiloh (Josh. 18:1). The construction of any alternative altar for sacrifices—even if offered in the Lord's name—constituted egregious rebellion. It was the responsibility of the congregation to punish such rebellion (Lev. 17:8–9; Deut. 13:12–15). This explains why the whole community gathered at Shiloh to prepare for war (Josh. 22:12). There is a contrast in Joshua 22 between the people of Israel and the people of Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh. Often, the expression *bene yisra'el* ("sons," "children," or "people" of Israel, or simply "Israelites") designates a majority of the Israelites against a minority (see 18:10; 19:49; 21:3, 41). Notwithstanding this, there is a clear distinction between the land of Canaan (i.e., the side of the people of "Israel") and the land of Gilead (i.e., where the two and a half tribes settled).

22:13–20. The Accusation. Moses had commanded Israel to carefully investigate acts of apostasy before punishing them (Deut. 13:14–15). Therefore before the intended war, the tribes west of the Jordan sent a delegation of tribal heads together with Phinehas (son of Eleazar the priest) to the Transjordan. This was a religious matter, so a priest had to lead the delegation. The delegation assumed—without asking for the rationale—that the altar was built for sacrifices and as such would signify a turning away from and rebelling against the Lord. On this basis, they reminded the two and a half tribes of Israel's iniquity at Peor and the sin of Achan, both of which brought the Lord's wrath against the whole congregation (Josh. 7; Num. 25). Included is a suggestion given to the two and a half tribes. If they thought that their own land was unclean, they could cross over to the place where the Lord and His sanctuary stood and take possession of some of that land (22:19; cf. vv. 9–12). There was no need to rebel in order to make a point.

In their accusation, the delegation signaled their fear of the Lord's anger befalling the whole congregation on account of the rebellion of the Transjordan tribes, since the covenant community shared a corporate responsibility. This is why they rehearsed the incidents of Peor and Achan. The comment that Israel was not yet cleansed of the iniquity of Peor is intriguing. Although the Lord had destroyed the offenders with a plague, Israel felt that the Lord still held this iniquity against His people. While this might not be a wholesome theology, it certainly served to warn Israel of any further rebellion against the Lord. The building of an alternative altar constituted covenantal unfaithfulness, and Israel could no longer afford the price that came with such rebellion.

22:21–29. Response to the Accusation. The delegation of the nine and a half tribes wrongly interpreted the rationale for the altar and had thereby unjustifiably accused the builders of rebellion. By the twofold invocation of the solemn title of the Lord (*'el 'elohim yahweh*—"The Mighty One, God, the LORD" or "The LORD God of gods"; v. 22), the two and a half tribes sought to prove their innocence of the accusation. The Lord, being omniscient, already knew the rationale for the altar. But in case they were found guilty, they were prepared to accept full responsibility for the altar, as punishment either from their fellow Israelites or from the Lord Himself. Rather than an act of rebellion, the altar by the Jordan was built out of fear that the future descendants of the two and a half tribes would be denied the right to worship at God's tabernacle. This replica of the Lord's altar (v. 28) at Shiloh was built not for sacrifices but as a witness, especially as future generations of the two and a half tribes could cite it as evidence that they were part of the Lord's people since their ancestors built it. The impressiveness of the altar would thus agree with its function as a witness. Verse 29 carefully debunks all the charges pressed forward by the delegation from the west. As it turned out, the altar signified commitment to the Lord and unity with the other tribes in His service. The returning warriors had been loyal to the Lord's command throughout the conquest; there was no reason they should rebel against the Lord or His chosen leader now that the conquest was over.

22:30–34. Conflict Resolved. A good response will always turn away anger and prevent tragedy (cf. Prov. 15:1). Because of the heartwarming response of the two and a half tribes, Phinehas ended up commending their loyalty to the Lord. The nine and a half tribes were obviously waiting for the results of the delegation's investigation before engaging the two and a half tribes in war. Upon receiving the pleasing report, however, they praised God (lit. "blessed" Him) and refrained from the attack. Through confrontation and dialogue, conflicts are resolved and tragedies are averted. Among other things, Joshua 22 touches on the role of communication in conflict resolution. Unity among believers is evidence of the Lord's presence. The two and a half tribes probably named the altar "witness"—a witness to their loyalty to the Lord and their right, even if they lived outside of the land of Canaan, to share with the other tribes in the Lord's worship at His tabernacle.

23:1–16
Farewell Exhortation

Chapter 23 contains Joshua's parting message to all Israel, represented by elders, heads of tribes, judges, and military officers. This was a time when he was old and nearing death, well after the end of the conquest. By outlining both the benefits of obedience (vv. 1–11) and the consequences of disobedience (vv. 12–16), Joshua's exhortation emphasized faithfulness to the Lord and obedience of His Word.

23:1–11. Benefits of Obedience. It was the Lord who fought for Israel and gave them the land of Canaan as an inheritance. It was also He who would continue to drive out the remaining inhabitants of the land. Joshua then exhorted the people to be courageous and to resolve to do everything recorded in the book of the law of Moses, being careful not to deviate either to the right or to the left (v. 6). Keeping this law would mean that Israel would not swear by the Canaanite gods, serve them, or worship them, for such would constitute rebellion against the Lord and a rejection of His covenant. The reason Israel was required to continue to "hold fast to the LORD" (v. 8) was two-fold. On the one hand, Israel had to keep the law of the Lord because He had been faithful in fulfilling His covenant promises. No nation in Canaan, though greater and stronger, was able to stand against Israel because the Lord fought for His people. But Israel would be blessed even more through obedience to the divine law. For example, the Lord would terrify the rest of the Canaanites, so that one Israelite would chase a thousand of them and thus expel them from the land. As a response, the Israelites would love the Lord and keep His commandments.

23:12–16. Consequences of Disobedience. Should Israel turn away from following the Lord to cling to the Canaanites—mingling with them in marriage and in worship—He certainly would not drive out these Canaanites but would use them as an instrument to destroy His own people (cf. Ex. 34:12–16; Deut. 7:1–6). In Joshua 32:14–16, Joshua repeated himself by highlighting the two sides of the Lord's faithfulness. The Lord was going to be faithful in fulfilling the promises of the covenant, so that none of them would fail. But in case of rebellion, He would be faithful in plaguing them with the covenantal curses (Lev. 26; see Deut. 27–28). These words of Joshua, some of which would be repeated in chapter 24, were prophetic. The rehearsal of covenantal blessings and curses was necessary to try to avoid the people's loss of faith (cf. Judg. 2).

24:1–28
Renewal of the Covenant

Chapter 24 is a covenant renewal ceremony. Unlike chapter 23, in which a location is not given, the covenant ceremony of chapter 24 took place at Shechem. Abram had built an altar at Shechem (Gen. 12:6–7). It was here that Jacob challenged his household to get rid of foreign gods (Gen. 35:1–5). Joshua's renewal of the covenant in Joshua 8 also took place in the vicinity of Shechem. The covenant between God and Israel is the foundation of the book of Joshua. Chapter 24 concludes the book by emphasizing the centrality of the covenant in God's dealings with Israel.

24:1–13. Retelling the History of Israel. All the tribes of Israel, particularly the elders, heads, judges, and officers, were gathered for the covenant renewal ceremony. That the people presented themselves "before God" probably means that the incident took place in front of the tabernacle. It is possible that at that time—if not for that occasion—the sanctuary was at Shechem rather than Shiloh (cf. Josh. 18:1; 22:12; 24:26). In vv. 2–13 the Lord, through Joshua, retold the history of Israel, starting with the call of Abraham. These verses summarize the stories of the patriarchs (vv. 2–4), the Exodus and wandering (vv. 5–10), and the conquest and settlement in Canaan (vv. 11–13). The references to the Abrahamic covenant, the deliverance from Egypt, the crossing of the Red Sea, the desert wanderings, the Balaam episode, the crossing of the Jordan, and the terrorization of the enemy leading to the conquest and subsequent settlement in the land all combine to emphasize the sovereignty of the Lord over Israel. Israel appeared in Canaan not by chance but by divine design. (For references to the "hornet," see Ex. 23:28 and Deut. 7:20.) If the Lord had promised to defeat the nations of Canaan before Israel (Josh. 3:10; Deut. 7:1), Joshua 24:11 indicates that He fulfilled this promise (cf. 12:7–8). The Lord is as good as His word.

24:14–15. Command to Serve the Lord. On the basis of the Lord's sovereignty and faithfulness (vv. 2–13), Joshua commanded Israel to fear the Lord and serve Him faithfully in sincerity and in truth and thus take away the false gods which their ancestors served on the other side of the river (i.e., the Euphrates) and in Egypt (vv. 14–15). In commanding the people not to worship the gods of the ancestors, Joshua meant that since the Lord now owned them (vv. 1–13), they were not to turn back from following Him. It is possible that some of the Israelites served other gods during their sojourn in Egypt (cf. Ex. 32; Ezek. 20). Joshua's injunction to serve the Lord faithfully in sincerity and truth meant to completely sever any idolatrous, ancestral practices. Joshua 24:14 ends with a command to serve the Lord. But in v. 15 Joshua seems to give the option to Israel to decide whom to serve—whether the ancestral gods in Mesopotamia or the gods in the land of Canaan—if they deemed it unprofitable (lit. *ra'* means "evil, bad") to serve the Lord. The Lord detests forced or insincere worship. His salvific purpose for Israel depended on its choice to serve Him. Notice, however, that Joshua's words in vv. 2–14 and 23:12–16 carefully narrow Israel's choice in favor of the Lord. If Israel was required to sever their ties to the ancestral gods in Mesopotamia, how much more would they need to repudiate Canaanite gods! Verse 15 concludes with Joshua's personal resolution: he and his family would serve the Lord. By this declaration of allegiance, he sought to challenge others to ensure that their families too remained loyal to the Lord. If the Lord is worshiped, He must be worshiped with undivided loyalty and singleness of heart.

24:16–18. Commitment to Serve the Lord. If vv. 14–15 constitute Joshua's command to serve the Lord, then vv. 16–18 constitute the people's commitment to serve Him. In view of all the things He had done for them, they swore never to forsake the Lord and serve other gods. Thus, the basis on which Israel was commanded to serve the Lord (vv. 2–13) constituted the basis on which they promised to serve Him (vv. 17–18). The Lord must be worshiped in recognition of His ownership of and goodness toward His people.

24:19–24. Repeating the Commitment. The responsive speeches between Joshua and the people would serve to ensure and affirm the people's commitment to the Lord and His covenant. In vv. 19–20, Joshua tested the genuineness of their declaration of allegiance (v. 18) by insisting that they could not serve the Lord because He is holy, jealous, and would not forgive their transgressions and sins if they forsook Him and followed foreign gods. Joshua's statement does not contradict Exodus 34:6–7; it simply brings home the fact that the Lord would not let idolatry go unpunished. Israel was thus reminded to expect not only bountiful blessings from the Lord if they remained faithful to the covenant but also deleterious covenantal curses should they be unfaithful. This should motivate them to be loyal. Once Israel entered into covenant with Him, they were either for Him or against Him. They sealed their determination to follow the Lord (Josh. 24:22), and He would not share the allegiance due Him with other gods. Israel was commanded to take away (*sur*) the foreign gods and follow the biddings of only the Lord (v. 23; cf. v. 14). The Hebrew verb *sur* means "clear away," "get rid of," or "remove." It is possible that the reference to foreign gods here refers to the Canaanite gods who would soon ensnare Israel, rather than gods already in the possession of the Israelites. Verse 23 would thus be a command to get rid of the Canaanite gods in the land (cf. Deut. 31:16; Judg. 2:2). The final response of the people (Josh. 24:24) genuinely satisfied Joshua's charge to serve the Lord and obey His voice (v. 23).

24:25–28. Sealing the Covenant. Based on the people's resolution to serve the Lord (vv. 16–24), Joshua renewed the covenant with them and made a covenant transaction (*khoq*—"statute" or "rule," and *mishpat*—"judgment," "ordinance," or "decree"), which included the words of the Lord and the response of Israel. Joshua subsequently wrote the words or an account of the transaction, adding it to the "Book of the Law of God" (see 1:8; 8:31; 22:5; 23:6). A new canonical portion is produced in addition to what Moses had written. As a significant ceremony, the covenant renewal at Shechem needed to be memorialized for future generations. A large stone was set up to serve such purpose (v. 26). Through personification, the stone is said to have heard all the words the Lord spoke to the people (v. 27). As a legal witness, the stone would remind Israel that continual possession of the land depended on their faithfulness to the Lord's covenant.

24:29–33
Three Burials

Verses 29–33 record the burials of Joshua, Eleazar, and the bones of Joseph. These burials testify to the faithfulness of the Lord in firmly establishing Israel in the land of Canaan in accordance with His promise to the fathers.

24:29–31. Joshua. Joshua was buried in his own inheritance. He had been a *sharat* (an "aide," "assistant," or "minister") to Moses, the "servant of the LORD" (see 1:1; Ex. 24:13). Only at death is Joshua accorded the prestigious title "servant of the LORD" (Jos. 24:29). It is a great honor to serve the Lord. Verse 31 states that Israel served the Lord throughout the days of Joshua and the elders who had witnessed the Lord's mighty acts. This verse anticipates a negative situation after the deaths of the elders, as can be seen in the book of Judges. Meanwhile, the book of Joshua closes with two more burials.

24:32. Joseph's Bones. Joseph's bones were buried in the very portion of land that Jacob had acquired from the Shechemites (Gen. 33:19). The transportation of Joseph's bones from Egypt and their subsequent burial in Canaan fulfilled his deathbed wish and his brothers' oath (Gen. 50:25; Ex. 13:19). In the division of the land, Ephraim, Joseph's legal firstborn, inherited the city of Shechem. Joseph was thus buried in his own tribal inheritance.

24:33. Eleazar. Eleazar, the high priest, was buried in a plot of land belonging to his son Phinehas in the territory of Ephraim. According to 21:9–19, the priestly sons of Aaron were given cities within the tribes of Judah, Simeon, and Benjamin, but not in Ephraim. The reason Phinehas received a plot in Ephraim was probably because the sanctuary was in Ephraim at that time and the high priest had to settle close to the sanctuary.

These leaders and those who followed them lived looking forward to the final fulfillment of God's promises. They saw and enjoyed the partial fulfillment of the promises but died looking forward to their full realization in a better country, the heavenly one (Heb. 11:13–16, 39–40). Promise, faith, and hope remain inseparable in the hearts of God's people.

JUDGES

INTRODUCTION

Title and Authorship. The book takes its title from its leading characters, the "judges" (Judg. 2:16–18). It describes in some detail the rule of the six major judges: Othniel (3:7–11), Ehud (3:12–30), Deborah (4:1—5:31), Gideon (6:1—8:35), Jephthah (10:6—12:7), and Samson (13:1—16:31). The six minor judges are mentioned only in passing: Shamgar (3:31), Tola, Jair (10:1–5), Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon (12:8–15). These judges were more than judicial administrators; they also were divinely appointed deliverers of God's people (2:16; 3:9, 15).

The verb "to judge" describes the activity of most of them (Othniel [3:10], Deborah [4:4], Tola [10:2], Jair [10:3], Jephthah [12:7], Ibzan [12:8], Elon [12:11], Abdon [12:13], Samson [15:20]). After a judge delivered God's people from their oppressors, he or she ruled over them for the rest of his or her life, maintaining political order and social justice in Israel. However, it was acknowledged that God Himself was the chief judge (11:27).

The author of the book of Judges is not named in the book itself, nor is there any hint in any other part of the Bible. According to Jewish tradition, the prophet Samuel wrote 1 and 2 Samuel, Judges, and Ruth. Critical scholarship holds that the book was composed by different authors over a long period.

Date. A number of historical statements in the book provide some guidance as to the time when the book was written.

1. We find the phrase "to this day" six times (1:21, 26; 6:24; 10:4; 15:19; 18:12). Most of these refer to place-names that were still in use when the book was written; hence, they are not of much help. Judges 1:21, however, tells us that the children of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites from Jerusalem, so the Jebusites still occupied Jerusalem in the time of the author. This means that this text must have been written before David's conquest of Jerusalem (2 Sam. 5:6–9), shortly after he became king over all Israel in Hebron (2 Sam. 5:1–5).

2. In Judges 1:29, we read that Ephraim did not drive out the Canaanites who dwelt in Gezer. The town of Gezer, one of the cities assigned to the Levites (Josh. 21:21), lay in Ephraim's territory, but it was still a Canaanite town. This situation continued until one of the Egyptian pharaohs—possibly Siamun (986–967 B.C.)—conquered Gezer and presented it as a wedding gift (dowry) to his daughter, the wife of Solomon (1 Kin. 9:16). Judges 1:29, therefore, could not have been written later than the early part of Solomon's reign, which was before he married Pharaoh's daughter.

3. The observation that there was no king in Israel at the time of the events recorded in Judges appears four times in the book (17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25). It appears to draw a contrast between the prosperous times of the monarchy (which the writer may have experienced) and the necessitous time of the judges (but see 21:23–25). If that is the case, it would fit in the early reign of Saul, before he was rejected by God, or in the time of David and the early part of Solomon.

4. The reference in 18:30–31 to the carved image that the children of Dan set up for themselves at the time that the house of God was in Shiloh (v. 31) seems to indicate that when the book was written Shiloh was no longer the religious center of Israel (see "Shiloh," p. 920). When the ark was taken by the Philistines and Eli died (1 Sam. 4:10–18), God abandoned the sanctuary at Shiloh (Ps. 78:60). Most likely, the Philistines destroyed Shiloh because when the ark was given back, it was not returned to Shiloh but stayed in Kirjath Jearim for twenty years (1 Sam. 7:2).

In summary, the internal evidence of the book of Judges seems to indicate that it was written during the early period of Saul's or

David's reign, perhaps by Samuel, as held by Jewish tradition. Samuel consistently condemned idolatry and called upon the people to live in accordance with God's commandments (2 Sam. 7:3–6; 12:14–15, 20–25).

Backgrounds. The time of the Judges was a period comparable to the Dark Ages in church history—all people did as they pleased, according to their own subjective standards (Judg. 17:6). This period extended from the time of the death of all the elders who had seen the great miracles God had done for His people Israel (2:7) until the time of Samuel and the beginning of the monarchy, from about 1350 to 1050 B.C.

During this time, we find periods of oppression, brought on by apostasies, alternating with peaceful times under the leadership of the judges whom God raised up to deliver Israel. Because the Israelites failed to drive out all of the Canaanites from the land God had promised them, some Canaanite city-states existed whose culture was advanced over that of the Israelites, who had spent hundreds of years in slavery in Egypt. Not surprisingly, there was a tendency among the Israelites to adopt some elements of Canaanite culture and to combine the worship of Yahweh with the worship of the Canaanite deities Baal and Ashtoreth (2:13).

Internationally, the monotheistic reforms of Pharaoh Akhenaten (ca. 1374–1358 B.C.) were taking place in Egypt. The letters from Canaanite city-states to Pharaoh Akhenaten in his new capital city of Akhetaten ("The Horizon of the [sun disk] Aten") at modern tal al-Amarna contain pleas for help against the Habiru, a possible reference to some of the Hebrew tribes (see *"Habiru,"* p. 365). Later, around 1200 B.C., a group of people living in Crete were driven out by the Greeks and attempted to invade Egypt, but Pharaoh Ramesses III (ca. 1198–1166 B.C.) drove them back. According to a credible theory, they settled along the coast in the south of Canaan and assimilated with, or perhaps annihilated or replaced, the existing Philistine culture of Abraham's day. Their continuing existence and interaction with the Israelites is an important part of the story of the book of Judges.

Chronology. The question of the chronology of the judges is related to the date of the Exodus event and the entry of Israel into Canaan forty years later. According to Scripture, Solomon began the construction of the temple in 967 B.C., 480 years after the Exodus (1 Kin. 6:1). Solomon reigned for forty years (971–931 B.C.). Therefore, the Exodus event took place in about 1447 B.C. and the beginning of the conquest of Canaan in about 1407 B.C.

Jephthah, in Judges 11:26, reminded the king of Ammon that Israel had already dwelt in Heshbon and its villages for three hundred years. Israel had conquered Heshbon under Moses's leadership (Deut. 2:26–37) just before his death. Hence, there were about three hundred years between the time of Moses's conquest of Heshbon and the judgeship of Jephthah, the eighth of the twelve judges.

Israel was oppressed by foreign powers for various lengths of time and then freed by the judges. Most of the lengths of these periods are carefully preserved in the text. When these time periods are added together and then combined with the forty years wandering under Moses, the conquest under Joshua, and reigns of Saul and David, the total time is too long to fit into the 480 years of 1 Kings 6:1. In fact, even the judgeships add up to more than Jephthah's three hundred years. Thus, it is likely that some of these judgeships overlapped with each other and with some of the periods of oppression. For example, Samson judged Israel for twenty years in the days of the Philistines (Judg. 15:20); that is, he judged Israel for twenty years sometime during the forty years of oppression by the Philistines.

The tribes of Israel and their judges were widely scattered geographically. For example, Othniel was from Judah, Deborah from Ephraim, Samson from Dan, and so on. The biblical record shows that even in times of crisis, when a deliverer was fighting an oppressor, not all the tribes rallied to the cause. For example, when Barak fought Jabin, only the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali joined him (4:10). And when Gideon defeated the Midianites, he called on only the tribes of Asher, Manasseh, Naphtali, and Zebulun (6:35). The reason could be that not all the tribes were oppressed at any one time, and that some of the judges were local rather than national deliverers. This understanding allows for the time frame to be reduced in order to fit into the three-hundred-year period mentioned by Jephthah.

Theology and Purpose. The book of Judges describes the interaction between God and His people after they entered the land of Canaan. A new chapter in the history of the nation was being written, and what we find is disturbing. We move from some elements of social order to almost total chaos. At the center of the book is the covenant relation that God established with the twelve tribes and that would have ensured safety and security. The book is about the God of the covenant and the disruption of the covenant relationship and its results.

1. Blessings of Faithfulness. The book begins with a people who existed in union with God and with each other. Before deciding what to do after the death of Joshua, they consulted the Lord, and He identified Judah as the leading tribe (1:1–2). They were ready to finish the task of conquering the land of Canaan. Yahweh and His covenant created a deep bond of unity among the tribes, which was perhaps even stronger than blood relations. Faithfulness to the covenant relationship brought with it a peaceful social interaction among the tribes. They supported Judah's lead and moved as one person to accomplish the Lord's plan for them. God had repeatedly promised to protect and bless them (Lev. 26:3–13; Deut. 7:12–24), and the people took the divine promise seriously, knowing that the God who brought them out of Egypt would also fulfill His promises to the new generation. He was powerful enough to defeat all their enemies dwelling in the land. Therefore, they had nothing to fear from the gods of Canaan. When the Lord confronted the idols of the Canaanites, they became totally ineffective. Indeed, the union with the redeeming God manifested itself in social cohesion and oneness and in the defeat of the enemy. This book will show that Israel would continue to enjoy the blessings of the covenant as long as they remained faithful to the covenant Lord.

2. Unfaithfulness and Apostasy. The positive picture of Israel's obedience and faithfulness to the Lord in the opening verses of the book is soon undone by portrayals of marked disobedience and apostasy. The people not only forgot the Lord but worshiped and served the Baals and Asherahs (Judg. 3:7), thus blatantly rejecting the God of their fathers and of Moses and Joshua, who brought them out of Egypt. Some may have chosen to worship God using the Canaanite style of worship, thereby making the Lord (Yahweh) a Canaanite "Baal" (a term which meant "lord"). This illustrates the doleful principle that the spirit of rebellion often blinds human beings and makes them believe that they are in union with God even when their actions are totally against His will.

Others among the tribes simply decided to worship the Canaanite gods, thinking they were in charge of the fertility of the land. In sum, the covenant relationship was openly violated. When the human heart breaks away from the Lord, its true nature is manifested. There is a natural spirit of rebellion in the human heart that can be subdued only in union with the Savior (Ps. 51:5; Jer. 17:9). This corrupted condition of the human heart is repeatedly illustrated in the narratives of the book of Judges. The result was spiritual, social, and moral corruption and chaos.

The spiritual collapse brought social disruption with it. The social cohesiveness of the tribal confederation was drastically damaged. There were serious conflicts among the tribes. The first judges acted on behalf of the people against their external enemies, but some of the later judges killed their own brothers in battles that should never have taken place. Although the book begins with an emphasis on Israel as a united people who have the worship of God and trust in His promises at the center of their lives, it ends with a description of a fragmented people. All of them were doing what they considered to be good in their own eyes or opinion. The internal division was so intense that it was more damaging to the nation than the oppression inflicted on them by their common enemies. Judges clearly indicates that unfaithfulness to the Lord manifested itself in a veiled or open spirit of rebellion. This type of rebellion takes humans to unexpected depths of spiritual, social, and moral chaos.

3. Divine Wrath and Compassion. Judges makes clear that God is not indifferent to human conduct; He reacts to it through covenant blessings or curses. Israel's violation of the covenant provoked the wrath of the Lord, and consequently He sold them into the hands of their enemies (2:14). Love is God's fundamental attribute (1 John 4:8, 16), but love is not indifferent to sin and rebellion. What we call divine wrath is nothing else but God's love expressing itself in opposition to sin (see "The Wrath of God," p. 918). Every time Israel turned to idol worship, God delivered them into the hands of their enemies (Judg. 2:11–14; 3:7–8; 10:6), not simply to punish them but as an act of discipline aimed at curing them of idolatry. In the process, God revealed His power and glory over the pagan gods that Israel served by demonstrating that the idols were unable to deliver His people from oppression, suffering, and evil.

The book of Judges reveals a God full of compassion and mercy toward sinners. In the OT, divine mercy or compassion is a central theological theme. In Judges, even foreign oppression served as an instrument of God's grace to bring Israel back to Him (3:1–4). Whenever they cried out to the Lord, He heard them and sent a deliverer as a sign of His grace. In other words, what Israel experienced was not the uncontrollable power of their enemies but the response of a loving God seeking to preserve His covenant relationship with them. The hand of the Lord was actively present in the historical events that took place during the period of the Judges, and He used these events not only to discipline but also to manifest His deep love for Israel. The constant falling of Israel into idolatry was never more powerful than God's grace. God's grace always abounds over sin (Rom. 5:20).

4. *Hope and Deliverance.* While the word "hope" does not appear in the book of Judges, the concept is present throughout. Each time the Israelites suffered under an oppressor, they prayed to the Lord, hoping that He would hear and deliver them. And He always delivered His people. Hope here is inseparable from the conviction that God will fulfill His promise by coming as a Deliverer. The period of the Judges was depressing but not empty of hope. It showed that God was still in control and that He always preserves some individuals who remain faithful to Him (i.e., a remnant). Whenever there is a remnant, there is hope. In fact, the book anticipates the time when the true King shall arise in Israel, One who will deliver and rule in righteousness, the messianic King. Therefore, the book speaks to us who also live at a time when everyone is doing what seems good in his or her own eyes. It speaks of a hope that continues to give meaning to the life of believers who are still anticipating, longing, and praying for the coming of the King in order to experience ultimate deliverance.

COMMENTARY

1:1—3:6

INTRODUCTION

The first major section of the book of Judges tells the story of Israel's partial conquest of Canaan (1:1–26) and the unfaithfulness of Israel in leaving some nations in the land (1:27—2:5). This section also provides a theological summary of the experience of Israel during the period of the Judges after the death of Joshua, which will be developed throughout the rest of the book (2:6—3:6). While there seems to be a contrast between this story and the record of the conquest of the land of Canaan in the book of Joshua (Josh. 11:23), we must remember that the books of Joshua and Judges speak of two phases in the process of conquering the land. Under Joshua, in the first phase, the Israelites defeated the Canaanite *armies* without immediately occupying the whole land. The second phase of completely clearing out the *inhabitants* of Canaan after the land was divided was accomplished only partially by the individual tribes (cf. chap. 13). They failed to decisively follow through to completion what Joshua had begun; a failure that was regarded as a breach of the covenant they had made with God and a cause of permanent spiritual weakness (Judg. 2:1–3). A weak faith produces weak actions. Christians whose faith is weak do not always walk closely with the Lord but are content with a generally accepted standard of the Christian life and miss out on the full blessing of the gospel of Christ.

1:1–26

Conquest of the Land

Judges 1:1–21 recounts the success of the tribes of Judah and Simeon in conquering the southern part of Canaan. In this conquest of the hill country, Judah and Simeon were joined by the Kenites, relatives of Jethro, Moses's father-in-law, who were connected with the Midianites (v. 16; Num. 10:29). This was followed by the capture of central Canaan (Judg. 1:22–26).

1:1–21. Conquest of South Canaan. With God's help and following His directions, which were most likely given through the Urim and Thummim (v. 2), the tribes of Judah and Simeon defeated the Canaanites and Perizzites, a minor branch of the pre-Israelite population of Canaan, in the hill country of Judea. The mutilation of Adoni-Bezek ("Lord of Bezek") was a common fate of prisoners (v. 7) that both incapacitated them to shoot arrows and damaged their balance. Although Israel captured Jerusalem and destroyed it by fire (v. 8), it was rebuilt by the Jebusites (v. 21), who lived in it until the time of David (2 Sam. 5:6–7). Judah captured the cities in the hill country, but they were unable to drive out the inhabitants of the lowlands because they had chariots of iron (Judg. 1:19).

Chariots

Depictions of chariots have been found in Mesopotamia dating from the earliest periods. In Egypt, Joseph rode in the second chariot of the pharaoh (Gen. 41:43). The two-wheeled chariot became a war machine of great importance in the history of the ancient world. While the Iron Age in the Holy Land is generally dated from 1200 B.C. onwards, the use of iron was known in the ANE before that time (e.g., by the Hittites in the eighteenth to twelfth centuries B.C.). Their technology could easily have found its way to Canaan in the south.

We can detect here a lack of faith on the part of Judah, because for God, iron chariots would not have presented a problem (cf. Josh. 11:6–9). Had He not specifically promised them success against the Canaanites (Num. 33:51–53; Deut. 9:3; 11:23) regardless of whether they had iron chariots (Josh. 17:17–18)? Judah, who had been chosen to confront the enemy first, failed to provide the example the other tribes needed for their conquest of the land. Their lack of faith led them to overestimate the difficulties, just as our lack of faith may prevent us from standing firm in the face of adverse opinions, the loss of worldly advantages or friendships, and the sacrifice of personal interests.

1:22–26. Conquest of Bethel in Central Canaan. The account of the conquest of central Canaan follows that of southern Canaan. The reference to the tribe/house of Joseph (v. 22) refers to the tribe of Ephraim and half of the tribe of Manasseh, the sons of Joseph (Gen. 41:50–52), who had received their inheritance in central Canaan (the other half of Manasseh had remained in the Transjordan; Num. 32:33). They attacked Bethel ("house of God"), where God gave to Jacob the dream of the ladder reaching into heaven (Gen. 28:10–19). It was one of the sanctuaries during the period of the Judges. After the death of Solomon and the division of the kingdom into the Southern and Northern Kingdoms, Bethel became one of the two national shrines of the Northern Kingdom (1 Kin. 12:28–29). The Israelites captured the city because God was with them (Judg. 1:22), not because of their own prowess. As in the case of Judah (vv. 2–4), the presence of the Lord was a guarantee of victory. When the spies asked a man leaving the city how to gain access to it (v. 24), they were most likely not inquiring in regard to the main city gate, which would have been visible to all, but to another entrance through which they could surprise the inhabitants and capture the city.

1:27—2:5

Unconquered Cities

The last part of chapter 1 is a record of failures on the part of the Israelites, emphasizing how remiss they were in completing the conquest of the land. The text gives two main reasons that for this state of affairs. First, the Canaanites were committed to retaining their land by fighting for it (v. 27), making it more difficult for the Israelites to possess the land. Second, the Israelites apparently concluded that they could gain some financial benefits by not exterminating them. They decided to impose a tribute on the Canaanites in exchange for keeping them alive. As a result, they did not completely drive them out or destroy them (vv. 28, 33, 35). Consequently, Israelites and Canaanites lived side by side in many parts of the land, contrary to what God had planned for His people (Deut. 20:16–17).

The Angel of the Lord

This name is never used for a human messenger or prophet but always for a celestial, supernatural being who first appeared in the Bible in the story of Hagar (Gen. 16:7–13). Although in some cases He seems to be differentiated from Yahweh (see Judg. 6:12), in a good number of cases the Angel of the Lord is identified with the Lord/Yahweh Himself. For instance, the Angel of God spoke to Jacob in a dream (Gen. 31:11) and immediately referred to Himself as "God" (Gen. 31:13). The Angel of the Lord appeared to Moses in the burning bush and identified Himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Ex. 3:2–6). In Judges 2:1–2, God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt is credited to the Angel of the Lord. This Angel also appeared to Gideon under the name "Angel of the LORD" (the Angel of Yahweh; 6:12, 14, 16). Interestingly, this Angel never described Himself as a messenger bringing a message to someone from the Lord. In Him, God was speaking directly to human beings; He was His own messenger. Many Christian believers have identified the Angel of the Lord as the preincarnate Christ—equal and yet distinct from God the Father. In this case, the term "Angel" refers to the function of God as His own "Messenger," and not to His nature as God.

It is obvious that the Israelites were careless in carrying out their God-given duty to cleanse the land of idolatry. The unbelief that had kept the former generation for forty years in the wilderness kept this generation from taking possession of the whole land. Similarly, we may have experienced deliverance from the dominion of Satan and the joy of salvation, yet a weak spiritual life may keep us from progressing further on the path of sanctification.

God responded to the unfaithfulness of Israel through a strong rebuke (Judg. 2:1–5). The Angel of the Lord appeared to them with two primary purposes. First, God made a covenant with the nation, and He had remained faithful to it while the Israelites violated it by making a covenant with the Canaanites. The contrast is between the faithfulness of God and the unfaithfulness of the people. Second, since the people had intentionally preserved the life of their enemy, the Lord granted His people what they had chosen to do—He would not drive the Canaanites out of the land as He had originally intended (Ex. 33:2; Deut. 11:23; Josh. 13:6). Rather, the Canaanites would constantly be irritants, scourges, and problems, and their gods would become a snare for the Israelites (Judg. 2:3; cf. Num. 33:55; Josh. 23:13).

The Angel of the Lord came from Gilgal, which means "a rolling away" because, upon entering the promised land at Gilgal, the Israelites had dedicated themselves to the Lord through circumcision and the celebration of the Passover (Josh. 5:9–10). In response to the Lord's rebuke, the people broke out in loud weeping, which gave that place its name—Bochim ("weepers"). Here, weeping symbolizes regret and repentance.

2:6—3:6

From Faithfulness to Sin

Judges 2:6–10 is a recapitulation of events connected with Joshua's death and briefly fills in the history from that time until the experience at Bochim, emphasizing the unfaithfulness of the people (vv. 11–23). The final passage of this introductory section to the book (3:1–6) lists the names of the Canaanite nations left in the land. The reason for their being left in the land is repeated and an additional reason is added. The Israelites' apostasy is shown to have led to their intermarriage with the Canaanites.

2:6–10. Death of Joshua. The events at Bochim narrated in 2:1–5 happened after the death of Joshua. Verse 6 is a repetition of Joshua 24:28 and refers to Joshua sending off the people after the covenant ceremony at Shechem (Josh. 24:25–27). After narrating the first efforts of the tribes to consolidate their position in the land and the divine rebuke at Bochim, the author explains why it was necessary for God to raise up judges. In the rest of the chapter, he proceeds to show how God, through periods of oppression followed by times of deliverance, sought to turn Israel from their idolatry to obedience to His law.

The elders mentioned in Judges 2:7 were the tribal leaders also mentioned in Joshua 23:2 and 24:1. The emphasis of Judges 2:6–10 is on the importance of knowing the Lord through a personal experience. Most of these elders outlived Joshua because they were all younger than him. His and Caleb's contemporaries all died in the desert (Num. 14:29–30). The elders had been young when they witnessed all the mighty deeds God performed during Israel's journey from Egypt to the promised land and were well acquainted with the saving power of God in their personal experience. During their leadership, they inspired the Israelites to obey and remain loyal to Him. Once the loyal elders died, the new generation did not know the Lord. They did not remember what God had done for them in the past and did not identify themselves with the faith of their forefathers. They chose to serve the Canaanite gods. Through the work of the judges, God tried to reveal to the new generation His identity and His power to save, hoping that they would come to know and serve Him.

2:11–23. Israel's Unfaithfulness. Choosing to ignore who the Lord was led the children of Israel to serve the Baals, which was evil in God's sight (v. 11). Baal, in the singular, was the name of the Canaanite storm and weather god—the plural form refers to the many local manifestations of the weather god (see "Baal Worship," p. 493). By disregarding the Lord's requirement to destroy the pagan altars (Ex. 34:11–16) and to not make a covenant with the Canaanites, the Israelites violated the covenant and the covenant Lord abandoned them. The result was that they could no longer withstand their enemies (Judg. 2:14). The language of delivering and selling His people to His enemies makes it clear that the oppression of the people was not the result of God's absence of power to protect them. This language places the responsibility on the covenant violators. The enemy did not take them from God's hands by force. He simply abandoned them, and they fell into the hands of their enemies (v. 14).

Nevertheless, when the Israelites showed signs of repentance and remorse and cried to the Lord, He raised up judges who delivered them (v. 16). He might have abandoned them in justice, but God in His mercy took pity on them. The abandonment was not final, and therefore His anger was set aside. His mercy knows no limits if the human heart, moved by the Spirit, seeks for it. Unfortunately, as soon as the God-given judge was dead and the oppression of their enemies was a distant memory, the Israelites again acted like a prostitute with other gods (v. 17). Harlotry is a frequent metaphor in the Bible for spiritual apostasy (Ex. 34:15; Deut. 31:16; 1 Chr. 5:25; Jer. 3:6). In the prophetic books, God is at times depicted as the husband of Israel (Is. 54:5; Jer. 31:32; Hos. 2:2), and Israel and Judah are presented as faithless sisters who play the harlot, being unfaithful to their beloved (Ezek. 23). Yet, harlotry in Judges is not just a metaphor; the worship of heathen deities in the ANE was frequently accompanied by sexual immorality. God decided to use the people left in the land to test the fidelity of the Israelites (Judg. 2:22; 3:1, 4) and show them that the way of apostasy does not pay. God tested the Israelites to strengthen their character.

The sin of the people was in sparing the Canaanites, and their punishment was that God did not drive out the Canaanites; in a sense they were beaten with their own rod, as a child is disciplined for his or her own good (Prov. 13:24). Through this testing, God was endeavoring to bring His people back to Him. Throughout human history, God has "tested" His people in order for them to reveal the depth of their faith or to help them grow in grace and love.

3:1–6. The Nations Remaining in the Land. While in 2:22 and 3:4 the purpose of having the Canaanite nations in the land is to test character, faith, and obedience, in 3:2 the purpose is to train or accustom them to war. Thus, the additional reason given in this passage for God not driving out the nations was to teach the new generation of Israelites how to conduct war (vv. 1-2). God is able to transform our mistakes into something good for us. Following Joshua's conquest of Canaan, a considerable period of rest must have followed, during which the younger generations lived in relative comfort. Since Israel was to be a nation living among many others and seeking to conquer and expand, it would have to learn to war against them in order for God to fulfill His plan for all of them (Gen. 12:1–3). The Israelite hope included the expectation of a time when no one will train for war under the leadership of the Messiah (Is. 2:4).

This passage concludes by saying that the Israelites lived among the various people groups in the land (Judg. 3:5). One sad result of this situation was mixed marriages, something expressly forbidden by God (v. 6; Ex. 34:15–16; Deut. 7:3; Josh. 23:12). Marriage contracts in those days included a mutual recognition of the religions of the two parties. Thus, it was impossible for an Israelite to marry a Canaanite and maintain the purity of his or her faith. This was illustrated graphically in the life of Solomon, whose wives led him into idol worship (1 Kin. 11:4). Today, some tragic results could be avoided if Paul's counsel in 2 Corinthians 6:14–17 against marriages between believers and unbelievers were heeded.

3:7—8:35

RULE OF THE EARLY JUDGES

The second major section of Judges introduces us to the actual narrative of the book. It describes the rule of the first four major judges in some detail (Othniel, Ehud, Deborah, and Gideon), with Shamgar mentioned only briefly. We will follow their stories, noting the repeated refrain of Israel's return to evil (Judg. 3:7, 12; 4:1; 6:1) and how upon their repentance God in His mercy raised up a deliverer. The details vary from case to case, but the basic outline is always the same.

3:7–11

Othniel

The account of the first judge provides the formula for the repeated pattern in which the main episodes of the judges are set: the apostasy of the people, the time of their servitude under the oppressor, their cry of distress and repentance, their deliverance by the judge appointed by God, and the length of rest that followed their deliverance.

The sin of Israel is described in three ways: Israel did evil in God's sight, they forgot the Lord, and they served the Baals (3:7). The idea that Israel was doing evil in the Lord's estimation runs throughout the book as an indictment against the people, meaning that in the judgment of the Lord—after He examined and evaluated their lives—their religious and moral life was atrocious (2:11; 3:12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1). Surprisingly, the Israelites did what was right in their own eyes—that is, as they saw fit and according to their own subjective estimation (17:6; 21:25)—rather than doing what was right in the sight of the Lord—that is, according to His estimation. The opinion they had of their own behavior was radically different from God's opinion. Indeed, they forgot the Lord (3:7). This is a willful act by which God is no longer taken into consideration in one's life; His will is ignored. The same idea is expressed with the phrase "forsook the Lord" (10:6). Israel, the wife of the Lord, abandoned Him and served the Baals. They abandoned or forgot their God and Redeemer. Consequently, God abandoned them into the hands of their enemies. His judgment against them corresponded to the spiritual and moral crime they committed—because they abandoned Him, He also abandoned them (cf. v. 13).

Because of Israel's apostasy, the Lord sold them into the hands of Cushan-Rishathaim, king of *'aram-naharayim* ("Aram between the rivers"; i.e., the Tigris and Euphrates) or Mesopotamia (v. 8) for eight years. The identity of this king is unknown. His name, most likely corrupted by his victims, means something like "Cushan-of-double-wickedness." The specific nature of the oppression is not mentioned, but, as indicated by the use of the verb "to serve," it would have included paying heavy tributes that deprived the Israelites of enjoying the fruit of their work. Toward the end of their eight years of distress, the Israelites turned to Yahweh, their God, asking for help and hoping for a deliverer. Affliction often causes those who may have cared little about God to cry out to Him for help (v. 9). This is an agonizing cry emitted by a person who is in deep distress. And God in His mercy heard their cry and raised up Othniel, Caleb's nephew (1:13; 3:9). Caleb's daughter Achsah was given to him as wife for capturing the town of Debir (Josh. 15:15–19). The spirit of the Lord came on him (Judg. 3:10); the same is said of Gideon (6:34), Jephthah (11:29), and Samson (13:25; 14:6, 19; 15:14). These judges were empowered by God to fulfill their responsibilities; otherwise, deliverance would not have been possible.

Othniel was one of the older Israelites who had seen the works of the Lord during the conquest of Canaan. Now, endowed with the spirit of God, he became the leader who first judged Israel; that is, he reproved and reformed them, and then, under God's command, he went out and defeated the oppressors (3:10). Humans and God worked together to overcome the enemy in a literal and spiritual battle. The worst enemy is sin in the camp; when it is conquered, the enemy on the outside is easier to deal with. For forty years, as long as Othniel lived, there was peace in the land (v. 11). It could have lasted forever had they kept close to God and done their duty.

3:12–30
Ehud

Humans tend to easily forget God's goodness toward them. After the death of faithful Othniel, the Israelites apostatized again and returned to what is natural to humans—doing evil in God's sight (v. 12). The Lord, who is depicted in Judges as the Sovereign Lord over the nations, strengthened Eglon king of Moab and gave him power over Israel (v. 12). In this particular case, God provided for Eglon the military superiority he needed to overcome Israel. Eglon probably credited such superiority not to God but to his ability to form a coalition with the Ammonites and the Amalekites against God's people. But Eglon's oppression of God's people was not God's last word. Deliverance would come at the appropriate time through a God-chosen instrument.

Eglon ("little bull"), the king of Moab, and Ehud the Benjamite were both used by God (Judg. 3:12, 15): one to punish Israel, the other to deliver them. Eglon took possession of the City of Palms (i.e., Jericho), which lay within the territory of the tribe of Benjamin, from which Ehud came. Jericho at that time was probably no more than an occupied oasis. The city of Jericho was destroyed by the Israelites under Joshua around 1410 B.C. (Josh. 6) and according to 1 Kings 16:34 it was not rebuilt until the time of Ahab (874–853 B.C.).

The assassination of Eglon (Judg. 3:16–26) was well planned by Ehud. He brought to Eglon the required tribute (Heb. *minkhah*, also used to refer to an offering to God; 13:23; Lev. 9:4) and then left. The stone images mentioned in 3:19 were idols (Heb. *pesil* always refers to carved pagan cult images; cf. Deut. 7:5; 2 Kin. 17:41; 2 Chr. 33:19). The reason for mentioning this place where he dismissed his helpers and returned to visit Eglon is not obvious in the text. We perhaps can infer from the story itself that the two mentions of these pagan images serve to emphasize their impotence before Ehud, God's instrument. The gods should have protected the king, but they could not. Firstly, they could

have prevented the assassination when Ehud, in front of them, dismissed his servants and returned to Eglon. And secondly, these idols could have punished Ehud when he walked by them after the assassination. The message was clear that these idols were useless and incapable of derailing God's purpose. The God of Israel was superior to them. Ehud's ostensible reason for returning to see Eglon was that he had a secret message from the Lord for the king. The "message" was simply the assassination itself, a message of judgment against Eglon and the Moabites. After Ehud led a short war, with a great slaughter of the Moabites, the land of Israel had peace and rest for eighty years (Judg. 3:30). Thus, the experience of true rest is found only in the Lord.

3:31
Shamgar

Not much is known of Shamgar, the son of Anath. He is connected to the story of Ehud by the author's comments that he came after Ehud and performed the same function of saving Israel from their enemies. Anath is the name of a Canaanite goddess, well known from the ancient tablets from Ugarit in Syria. Thus, Shamgar's mother may have been a Canaanite woman who was named after the goddess. Even if he was a Canaanite, his victory over the Philistines delivered Israel. There is no indication of how long he ruled, but the phrase "in the days of Shamgar" (5:6) suggests that it must have been for a lengthy time. His activity and influence seem to have been limited to the south of Israel, where the Philistines made repeated incursions, because the only exploit we hear about involves them. He killed six hundred Philistines with an ox goad (3:31), which is a long stick with an iron point at one end and a flat chisel-like iron at the other. It was not this unusual weapon but God's power that gave him the victory.

4:1—5:31
Deborah

At the end of chapter 3, we read that the land had peace and rest for eighty years (v. 30). We do not know when Ehud died, but a later generation no longer remembered what God had done through him. The long years of peace and prosperity should have confirmed the Israelites in the way of the Lord. Instead, it made them secure and indulgent. They did evil in the eyes of God (4:1), as their ancestors had done. The result was the Canaanite oppression (vv. 1–3) and the deliverance through Deborah (vv. 4–16). We also find a vivid description of the death of Sisera (vv. 7–24) and Deborah's song of victory (5:1–31).

4:1–3. Canaanite Oppression. The natural human tendency is to give in to evil desires that are difficult to restrain unless the heart is governed by a love for God. This time, the Lord sold the Israelites into the hand of Jabin, king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor (4:2; see commentary on 2:11–23). The chief city in Galilee, Hazor was one of only three cities that were recorded as

Eglon's Coalition Against God's People

The Moabites were descendants of Lot (Gen. 19:30–38). They inhabited the plateau east of the Dead Sea (4,300 ft. [1,310 m] above it) between the river Arnon and the brook Zered in the south. At the time of the Exodus, they refused to allow the Israelites to pass through their territory (Judg. 11:17–18). During the period of the Judges and in the time of the monarchy, the Israelites repeatedly fought with the Moabites (3:14; 2 Sam. 8:2; 2 Kin. 3:24).

The Ammonites were also descendants of Lot (Gen. 19:30–38) and lived to the north of the Moabites between the rivers Arnon and Jabbok. At the Exodus, God did not give the land of the Ammonites to Israel (Deut. 2:19), but there was fighting repeatedly between Israel and Ammon (Judg. 3:13; 11:32; 1 Sam. 11:1–2, 11; 2 Sam. 10:6–14).

The Amalekites, a nomadic desert tribe, were descendants of Amalek, a grandson of Esau (Gen. 36:15–16). They dwelled in the area of the Negeb, south of the Dead Sea as far as Mount Sinai. The Israelites first encountered the Amalekites during their journey from Egypt to Canaan (Num. 14:25, 45; Deut. 25:17–18). They fought with Israel in the time of the Judges and later with Saul (1 Sam. 15:2–3) and David (30:11–20).

being burned by Joshua during the conquest of the promised land. The other two were Jericho and Ai (Josh. 6:24; 8:28). In time, however, Hazor was rebuilt and its king, Jabin, terrorized the Israelites in northern Canaan. This Jabin should not be confused with the Jabin of Joshua's time, a hundred years earlier (Josh. 11). Jabin was probably a popular family name like Amenhotep, Thutmose, and Ramesses in Egypt. His general, Sisera, lived in Harosheth of the Gentiles. A great number of Gentiles, it seems, had lived in this particular place, the location of which is unknown today. The fact that he had nine hundred chariots points to a place in the Valley of Jezreel rather than in the hills or mountains.

4:4–16. Deborah and Barak's Victory over Sisera. Deborah is unique among the judges not only because she was a woman but particularly for her unique role within Israel: she was a prophetess with juridical functions. There are only two other persons in the OT who were both prophets and judges: Moses (Ex. 18:16) and Samuel (1 Sam. 7:6, 15–17). This indicates that Deborah was the primary leader of Israel. As prophetess and judge, she resided in a centralized location that made it easier for Israelites all over Israel to come to her. As a prophet, she called Barak to be the military leader of the people and muster the troops (Judg. 4:6) and assured him victory. If Barak was unwilling to go on his own, it was because he understood that Deborah was, as prophetess and judge, the leader of Israel, and he wanted her by his side. She, as the leader of Israel and like Moses (see Ex. 17:8–9), was not personally involved in the fight, but her leadership in battle, based on cultural convictions, would take away the glory of the victory from Barak because a woman would defeat Sisera and another woman, Jael, would kill him.

Jael and her husband belonged to the house of Heber the Kenite, which at that time enjoyed peaceful relations with Jabin, the king of Hazor. The Kenites were a Canaanite tribe that was in some way related to the Moabites. Moses's father-in-law is called a Kenite and a Moabite (Judg. 1:16; Num. 10:29). The Kenite family joined the Israelites, and they settled in the land of Judah after the conquest. Perhaps this connection with the Israelites moved Jael to break the peace covenant with Jabin by killing Sisera in a dramatic way.

4:17–24. The Death of Sisera. Further evidence of Deborah's close connection with God is that her prophecy came true when the Israelite army defeated the armies of Jabin and when his military leader was killed by Jael. Since there were peaceful relations between the Kenites and Jabin, Sisera probably felt safe in the tent of Jael, who treated him very well at first. She seemed to have treated him like a child by giving him milk and covering him with a blanket to put him to sleep. He would not wake up from his sleep. When Barak found Sisera, he was lying dead on the floor of the tent. God uses whomever He wants to accomplish His purpose—Deborah: a woman, a judge, and a prophetess; Barak: a man who would go to war under the leadership of a woman, breaking cultural barriers; and Jael: a woman who was not an Israelite.

5:1–31. The Song of Deborah. Israel's triumph was celebrated with a victory song composed by Deborah and Barak in a standard literary form of the time. The wonderful deliverance by the hand of God from Jabin's oppression would be better and longer remembered through song than narrative prose; in this case we have both. The song divides itself into different stanzas, according to the subject matter addressed:

5:2–3 Introduction—The song begins with a general call to praise the Lord. God is praised because the leaders and the people worked together under His leadership and were victorious in battle. The unity of the people was the result of the grace of God and should have moved them to praise Him. This unity was a manifestation of God's blessing and was recognized as such.

5:4–5 The Coming of Yahweh—Deborah describes the majestic appearance of God from Edom in the east, coming to deliver His people. God manifested His presence through natural phenomena that contributed to the victory of His people. Deborah draws on the historical memory of the Exodus story, when God manifested Himself on Mount Sinai with thunder, lightning, and earthquake. With powerful poetic expressions she recounts that the rainstorm which broke over Sisera and his army was not an ordinary storm but was unleashed by Yahweh. This description of the coming of the Lord with power to deliver His people is an intrinsic element of the biblical hope and projects itself into the time of the end when deliverance from evil will be consummated.

5:6–8 Conditions Prior to the Battle—Deborah describes the sad conditions that prevailed in the country during the time of oppression before she arose as a mother in Israel. She mentions Shamgar and Jael as exceptions who left their mark during those dark days, when the highways were untraveled because there was no trade and commerce (v. 6). The fields were laid waste and the villagers (the meaning of this Hebrew word is uncertain) were inactive (v. 7). Because they worshiped pagan idols, the Lord deprived them of a peaceful life. Instead of the administration of justice in the city gates, there was war. The enemy appeared in their city gates, and the Israelites had neither arms nor the spirit to help themselves.

5:9–11 A Call to Participate—As a good leader, Deborah praised God for the unity of the leaders and the people to fight against the enemy. Under her there were also other princes, rulers of Israel whose example influenced the people, making them willing to support her call to war. She called on those who rode on white donkeys (i.e., those of rank and authority) and those who walked along the road (i.e., the rest of the people) to offer thanks to God for this great deliverance. They were encouraged to draw water in peace and rehearse the acts of the Lord in gratefulness when they returned to their city gates to resume a normal life.

5:12–18 The Mustering of the Tribes—The mobilization of the people began with a challenge to Israel's leaders to arise and prepare for war. The tribes from which people willingly came were Ephraim, Benjamin, Machir (the western half of Manasseh), Zebulun, and Issachar. Reuben, Gilead (the eastern half of Manasseh), Dan, and Asher are criticized for neglecting their fraternal duty. Zebulun and Naphtali receive special mention because their troops constituted the main body of Barak's army.

5:19–23 The Battle at the Waters of Megiddo—This stanza is about the battle itself, especially about God's decisive intervention. In this poem, the battle is no longer between Barak and Sisera but between Yahweh and the kings of Canaan and between heaven and earth. The waters of Megiddo most likely refer to the River Kishon, which apparently played an important role in the battle. The God who controlled nature was not Baal but Yahweh. The stars in their courses, which the Canaanites credited with controlling the weather, were directed by Yahweh to fight against Sisera by causing a mighty storm that swept away his chariots. The Angel of the Lord said to "curse Meroz" (v. 23). Meroz was probably a city near the field of battle that refused to get involved in the battle and in the pursuit of the fleeing enemy.

5:24–27 The Death of Sisera—The slaying of Sisera is vividly recounted. In contrast to the curse on Meroz, Jael is blessed for her deed. Though not an Israelite, she preferred the friendship of Yahweh's people to that of their enemies. Her treachery is described in heroic terms.

5:28–30 Sisera's Mother—At the end of the poem, there are some ironic contrasts: the anxious wait of Sisera's mother and her ladies is contrasted with Jael's victory and honor. The mother's dark forebodings are contrasted with the cheerful explanations for the delay by her wisest ladies (v. 29). Finally, there is the contrast between the expectations of the women and the cruel reality the reader already knows.

5:31 Epilogue—Deborah concludes with a prayer for the destruction of all God's enemies and the exaltation of all His friends. The consequences of this victory were such that the land had peace and rest for forty years. In this victory over Jabin, God, as we already indicated, used different instruments. He raised Deborah, who as a judge led the people and gathered the troops. He selected Barak as the leader of the troops and also used Jael, a member of a foreign and weak tribe.

6:1—8:35

Gideon

As a result of renewed apostasy, Israel's troubles were repeated. This time they were oppressed by the Midianites (6:1–6). God rebuked His people (vv. 7–10) and sent an angel to Gideon (vv. 11–24), who destroyed Baal's altar (vv. 25–32), gathered an army (6:33—7:8), and found victory in God (7:9—8:21). Unfortunately, before he died his imperfections emerged (vv. 22–35).

6:1–6. Midianite Oppression. After forty years, the spirit of Deborah was a distant memory and the generation that had grown up during those forty years fell back into the sin of idolatry. This time God delivered them into the hands of the Midianites, who oppressed them for seven years (v. 1; cf. Lev. 26:21). Sadly, sin is always accompanied by its evil consequences. The plight of the Israelites under the Midianites and their allies, the people of the east, was worse than under their previous oppressors. The Israelites hid in dens and caves and barely had enough food to survive because of the devastation the Midianites inflicted on the Israelites by plundering their fields and storehouses and carrying off their animals. This was a military tactic that forced the Israelites to think mainly about how to obtain food and not about war. It was a way of breaking up the willingness of the people to plan and execute an act of insurrection.

6:7–10. Israel Rebuked by a Prophet. Before God sent a deliverer, He sent a prophet to reprove Israel for their sins, lead them to repentance, and get them ready for their deliverance. The unknown prophet reminded them of God's saving power as manifested in His work of delivering them from Egypt and saving them from those who oppressed them in the land of Canaan. The prophet refreshed the memory of the Israelites in order for them to trust and come to know God. Forgetting how the Lord had delivered them in the past weakened their knowledge of God, their dependence on His power, and their understanding of His great mercy, thus making them more vulnerable to idolatry. They had forgotten that God was able to fulfill His promises as manifested when He gave them the land. Now as they prepared to face the Amorites and their gods, the prophet appealed to the Israelites to trust and obey the Lord based on what He had done for them in the past. The prophet did not ignore the sin of the people; he charged them with idolatry because they worshiped the gods of the Amorites. Although this prophet did not explicitly promise a deliverer, his message from the Lord was the preamble for the coming deliverance; the Lord had not forsaken them.

6:11–24. The Angel of the Lord Visits Gideon. The person chosen to deliver Israel was Gideon, the son of Joash the Abiezrite, a descendant of Manasseh (Josh. 17:2). Joash was a worshiper of Baal. Gideon was commissioned by the Angel of Yahweh (v. 11; see "The Angel of the Lord," p. 395), identified in v. 14 with Yahweh Himself. The Angel of the Lord came to a particular tree (identified variously as a terebinth or oak) that apparently was a landmark in the local area. There are several places in Scripture where significant events are associated with trees (4:5; Gen. 18:1; Josh. 24:26; Mark 11:13–14, 20–23), but no particular reason is given for this practice. One can perhaps guess that in a land that was very hot during the summer, the shade of a tree would be an appealing place for a meeting. The Angel found Gideon threshing wheat, not on a threshing floor, which would have been the usual place, but in the winepress where no one would suspect to find wheat. Fear of the Midianites had crippled the economy and the daily lives of the Israelites.

Gideon's commissioning is similar to the call of Moses in Exodus 3. Both were hiding from the enemy, both were working for their father figures (father and father-in-law), and both received the same word of authorization (Judg. 6:14; Ex. 3:12). Like Moses, Gideon claimed that he was not qualified for the task (Judg. 6:15; Ex. 3:11); but again, like Moses, he received the assurance of divine aid and a sign affirming the call (Judg. 6:16–21; Ex. 3:12). The Lord equipped him with all the necessary qualifications for the execution of his commission. If the Lord calls someone to perform a task, He also provides the means to do it.

Israel's Oppressors During the Time of Gideon

The Midianites, seminomadic Bedouin, were the descendants of Abraham and Keturah (Gen. 25:1–6). Jethro, Moses's father-in-law, was a Midianite priest (Ex. 2:16–21). The elders of Moab and Midian hired Balaam to curse Israel on their way to Canaan (Num. 22–24), so the Lord gave the Midianites into the hands of the Israelites, who defeated them (31:1–11). In Isaiah 9:4 and 10:26, the victory of Gideon over Midian in Judges 6–8 is cited as a precedent for the coming defeat of the enemies of the kingdom of Judah.

People of the east (cf. Gen. 25:6) were nomadic groups that migrated from the Arabian Desert, often raiding settled communities on both sides of the river Jordan. Any of the people living to the east of the Israelites could be included in this designation.

The Amorites (Amurru in extra-biblical sources) appear very early in secular history. In Scripture they denote the pre-Israelite inhabitants of Canaan whom the Israelites were to destroy (Gen. 15:16; Deut. 20:17). In Joshua 10, five kings of the Amorites were defeated by Joshua, and one of those five was the king of Jerusalem (v. 5). Thus, Ezekiel 16:3 states that Jerusalem had an Amorite father and a Hittite mother. According to 2 Samuel 21, the remaining Amorites were the Gibeonites (v. 2), on whom Saul inflicted a great slaughter for which David later made atonement (vv. 3–14).

6:25–32. Gideon Destroys the Altar of Baal. Before Gideon could deliver Israel from the Midianites, he had to be a reformer. That same night, God commanded Gideon to destroy the cult of Baal and restore the worship of Yahweh in Israel (vv. 25–26). Both Baal and Asherah were fertility gods worshiped through sexual union with male and female temple prostitutes. Asherah was often represented by a pole-shaped image, which, in this story, Gideon was explicitly instructed to destroy. The story points to the impotence of Baal to defend himself against the attack of a person commission by the Lord to destroy his altar and replace it with an altar dedicated to the Lord (vv. 31–32).

6:33—7:8. Gideon Gathers an Army. While Gideon restored the worship of Yahweh, the Midianites and the eastern people made another raid into Israel and camped in the fertile Valley of Jezreel. We do not know whether it was the vast army of the enemy in the Valley of Jezreel or the burden of the enormous responsibility that made Gideon's faith falter, but he needed again the assurance that God was with him. His two-fold test with the fleece, progressing from the unusual (the dry ground around a wet fleece) to the inexplicable (the dry fleece on the wet ground), is a reminder that God is patient with our weak faith and that He is even willing to go along with our sometimes trivial and arbitrary "tests" in our search for assurance as we follow His call.

Gideon and his army encamped by the spring of Harod at the foot of Mount Gilead (7:1). The land of Gilead is on the eastern side of the Jordan river; however, a strong spring that was named "the well of Harod" has been found on the northern slope of Mt. Gilboa on the western side of the Jordan river, leading most Bible scholars to consider Mount Gilead to be the same as Mount Gilboa, where Saul later died at the eastern end of the Valley of Jezreel (1 Sam. 31). The army of the Midianites would have been on the north side of the range. Before Gideon was able to march out of the camp to meet the enemy, the Lord reduced the number of Israelites in two stages from 32,000 to 300. The first stage allowed those who were fearful and *khared* ("trembling"; Judg. 7:3) to go home. The spring seems to have taken its Hebrew name, *kharod* (v. 1), from this event. Perhaps their lack of faith in the Lord would have made them ineffective warriors. The true reason for reducing the size of the army was to clearly indicate that the victory would be from the Lord. The second stage in reducing the size of the army involved separating from the rest the three hundred who lapped water like dogs (v. 6). The three hundred used their hands as a dog uses its tongue to scoop up the water while they remained on their feet, perhaps watchful and prepared for any emergency, while the rest knelt down to drink; that is, they were mainly interested in their thirst. Nothing prevents the Lord from saving by "many or by few" (1 Sam. 14:6).

7:9—8:3. Gideon's Victory. Having watched his army dwindle to almost nothing, Gideon may have had more doubts about defeating the enemy. God encouraged him to move ahead anyway, despite his doubts, for He was going to be with him. But God understood the inner feelings of Gideon and allowed, without condemnation, for events to develop that would help him overcome his fears. By arranging for Gideon to witness, through the soldiers' dreams and conversation, the fear and terror in the Midianite camp, God strengthened Gideon's faith and reassured him of victory. This is a remarkable insight into the way that God patiently waits for us, even while He urges us to take Him at His word and move ahead.

Gideon divided the army into three companies and provided them with trumpets (ram's horns) and pitchers containing unlit torches. The reason for the pitcher is not given, but it could be that its function was to increase the level of noise when broken. Apparently, none of the soldiers had a sword or at least none were provided for them. The reason for this most strange phenomenon was that the Lord Himself would fight for Israel, using the enemies' swords as they killed each other. Certainly, the military strategy was uncommon but, in this case, highly effective. The Israelites were required only to make a disturbance by shouting and breaking the pitchers and lighting the torches, giving the impression of being a huge army, but it would be the Lord who would instill fear in the enemy, defeating them from within.

Intertribal relationships were a major challenge for Israel during the time of the Judges. The Ephraimites' jealousy of Gideon's leadership and stunning success showed that they were less interested in God's miraculous deliverance than in sharing the glory and the spoils that God's deliverance brought. Fortunately, as the text indicates, they limited their reaction to a sharp rebuke rather than an actual fight, which might, in those times, have been expected. This is the first time in Judges that the threat of a civil war emerges, but it is not the last. Although invited at the last moment to help pursue the Midianites, the Ephraimites went out and assisted Gideon. It was after their involvement in the war that they argued with Gideon, whose answer is a great example of excellent leadership and self-denial and shows that envy is best handled by humility; as Scripture says, a gentle response defuses anger (Prov. 15:1).

8:4–21. Pursing the Enemy. Gideon's pursuit of the fleeing Midianites had two purposes. First, he wanted to complete the defeat of the enemy. While 120,000 had been killed, 15,000 had escaped (v. 10). Second, he was determined to avenge the murder of his brothers (v. 19). Believing that God was still on his side, he took only the three hundred men with him who had witnessed the miracle of the Midianite defeat. Having limited resources is not a problem for a God who can use the few and the many to accomplish His purposes.

The arrogance and rudeness of the men of Succoth/Sukkoth and Penuel/Peniel in refusing to provide food to Gideon may have been based on craven self-interest. Penuel (initially spelled "Peniel" in Gen. 32:31; the term means "the face of God") is an Israelite town five miles (8 km) east of Succoth along the River Jabbok. It was in this place that Jacob had his life-changing encounter with God when he wrestled with God "face to face" (Gen. 32:22–32). Because Gideon had not yet caught two of the kings of Midian, the leaders of the two towns cynically ignored God's obvious presence in Gideon's campaign and cast their lot with those they thought likely to win the contest. They chose to join the ones who would be totally defeated. Gideon showed his continuing dependence on God by withholding judgment on their arrogance until God, not his own military prowess, vindicated him in the capture of the Midianite kings.

According to Judges 8:4, Gideon's triumph over the remaining 15,000 Midianites who fled further east was again accomplished by God using only the 300 men. The strategy was similar: surprise and rout. We are not told whether Gideon's small army had to engage in physical fighting on this occasion or whether the rout occurred in the same way as the first one: confusion and self-destruction. Either way, it completely vindicated Gideon's faith, and his return to Penuel doubtlessly struck terror into the men of that town. Gideon kept his word and tore down the tower but also killed the men of the town. Israelites were now killing Israelites, suggesting that Gideon saw himself now as a military leader ready to inflict punishment as he saw fit. We are not told why the judgement was harsher than what Gideon would soon execute on the men of Succoth. It is not unreasonable to surmise that at least some of the men decided to protect the tower, and in destroying the tower Gideon had to dispose of them. The men of Succoth, on the other hand, received exactly the punishment, unusual as it was, that Gideon had promised.

The judgment on the Midianites was completed with the execution of the two kings. They had murdered Gideon's large family and would receive the just reward for their heinous act. Perhaps, in his righteous anger, Gideon wanted to further humiliate the kings at the moment of their death by having them killed by a boy. If that was his purpose, he was disappointed, and the two prisoners, to their credit, honorably reminded Gideon that conducting an execution is not a job for a boy. Gideon killed the kings and took the spoils of war.

8:22–35. Gideon's Wisdom and Weaknesses. The words of the kings describing Gideon's appearance as that of the son of a king, as well as the recognition he had received by delivering Israel from the Midianites, may have moved some Israelite leaders to ask him to rule over them. This request possibly meant that he would become their king and establish a dynasty or hereditary kingship. Gideon's refusal was based on a theological conviction: God was the king of Israel. Gideon's refusal of the offered crown is an excellent indication of his noble intent in following the Lord and of Gideon's strength of character. It takes a strong person to resist flattery from a crowd that wishes to confer power. However, at the very moment of his greatest, God-given achievement, Gideon made what seemed a small concession to vanity by asking for some of the plunder to make an ephod, a priestly garment used to consult the Lord through the Urim and Thummim (Ex. 28:6–14). Gideon's beautiful ephod became an idol probably because it appeared as a way of access to God. While the text is vague, Gideon's desire to make an ephod led to idolatry.

Even if Gideon himself didn't take that step, his community eventually treated the ephod as an idol. Gideon's unwise action had dire consequences for the people of Israel. It became a snare to Gideon and his family (lit. "house"; Judg 8:27). Because it caused the people to abandon the legitimate sanctuary and worship his ephod, it proved to be damaging to his family and to the nation. This illustrates what happens when a great leader uses his influence to take others down a wrong path. It should alert us to keep our eyes on the One who is above any human leader and who will never mislead us. We can only put our ultimate trust in God and not on imperfect human beings. Spiritual leaders should always abide by the will of God.

8:29–35. The Collapse of the Reformation. After Gideon's death, the new generation who had not experienced the miraculous deliverance from the oppression by the Midianites returned to the worship of Baal, even making Baal-Berith ("Baal of the covenant") their god (8:33). By regarding Baal as a god who had made a covenant with Israel, they had substituted him for Yahweh, the real covenant God (Deut. 4:23), resulting in a false system of worship. No one can live on the religious experience of one's ancestors. Each one must have a living relationship with God. In the case of the newer generation of Israelites, they forgot not only God but also what Gideon had done for them. It is often the sad case that those who turn away from God also mistreat other human beings; their humanness is damaged because only God can renew His image in us.

9:1–57

ISRAEL'S EXPERIMENT WITH MONARCHY

Chapter 9 further develops the story of Gideon and his family. Abimelech, son of Gideon, became king after murdering his brothers (vv. 1–6). Jotham's fable doomed Abimelech and Shechem (vv. 7–21), and it was soon fulfilled (vv. 22–57).

9:1–6

Abimelech's Conspiracy

The apostasy of Israel after the death of Gideon was not punished by the invasion of some neighboring people, as previously, but by a bloody civil strife. God did not call Abimelech (sometimes transliterated as "Abimelek," meaning "my father is king") to deliver Israel from any oppression. He was Gideon's son by a concubine in Shechem, about fifty miles (80.5 km) north of Jerusalem. Shechem was the place where Abram first built an altar to Yahweh after arriving in Canaan (Gen. 12:6–7). With support from his mother's family and the leaders in Shechem and with money from the pagan temple, Abimelech conspired against Gideon's family. His appeal revolved around the natural assumption that some individual from Gideon's dynasty would rule over the people of Shechem, and since that was inevitable, it should at least be someone from the families of Shechem. Consequently, he murdered all but one of his half-brothers, Gideon's other sons. Following Abimelech's utterly wicked deed, the people of Shechem and Beth-Millo crowned him king beside the terebinth tree (thought to be an oak) at the pillar in Shechem (Judg. 9:6). The pillar most likely was the witness stone that Joshua set up in Shechem (Josh. 24:26–27).

9:7–21

Jotham's Fable

Jotham, the only survivor among the sons of Gideon, confronted the people of Shechem with the nature of their choice and warned them of their fate by telling a fable about the trees of the forest seeking to appoint a king over them. According to the parable, the trees began their search by asking other trees, based on their size, to be king over all them. They began with the olive tree and then went to the fig tree. Finally, they went to the vine. The trees' response was always the same: each of them was pleased with its God-given role in nature—something that Abimelech was not willing to be. Finally, the trees went to the thorny bush, which is commonly found on the hills of the land. The fable becomes ironical when the bramble asked the tall trees to come and find protection under its shadow—things that the thorny bramble could not provide. This bush was good only for igniting a fire that could extend over the land. It would easily destroy the trees.

Through the fable, Jotham charged the inhabitants of Shechem with not acting in good faith when choosing Abimelech as king. They were the trees of the forest in the fable, and the king was the bramble, which was a source of fire. They were not thinking about the best for Israel but for what they thought was good for them. The message of the fable was that their experiment with kingship in Israel in the person of Abimelech would fail. There would be internal dissension and self-destruction, bringing kinship to an end.

9:22–57

Abimelech's Decline and Fall

Little is said about Abimelech's reign, except that it lasted three years and that his people rebelled against him. They grew uneasy with his government and chose a man by the name of Gaal to lead the rebellion. Judges does not mention whether Gaal was an Israelite or a Canaanite, but v. 23 tells us that God stirred up animosity or ill will between the people of Shechem and Abimelech by sending them a spirit of conflict (Heb. *ra'*—the word often used for "evil"). This is similar to the "evil [sometimes translated as "harmful" or "distressing"] spirit from God" that came upon Saul (1 Sam. 16:15) and the "lying spirit" that the Lord put into the mouths of Ahab's prophets (1 Kin. 22:23). In each case, when human beings turn away from God, they open themselves to the influence of the adversary, and God allows evil spirits to interfere in their lives.

As anticipated by Jotham, there was war between the inhabitants of Shechem and Abimelech. He destroyed the city and mercilessly killed common people and their leaders. The narrative depicts Abimelech as a mad, irrational man aiming at destruction, like a wildfire. His final fate occurred during his senseless attack against the town of Thebez. Millstones were made from two circular stones, usually basalt, one or two feet (30 to 60 cm) in diameter and two to four inches (5 to 10 cm) thick. An unknown woman transformed an ordinary kitchen utensil into a weapon that mortally wounded the king. At the last moment of life, Abimelech was concerned about dying with a damaged reputation based on the cultural conviction that being killed by a woman was shameful; he asked his armor-bearer to kill him. The record explicitly affirms that God's hand was in all of these events as a specific punishment against Abimelech for the treatment of his father's family and as a punishment of the various groups that had directly or indirectly allied themselves with him (Judg. 9:56–57).

10:1—16:31

RULE OF THE LATER JUDGES

This section of the book of Judges deals with two major leaders—Jephthah and Samson, whose activities are recounted in some detail—and five minor judges about whose work we hear very little: Tola, Jair, Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon. The oppressors during this time period were the Ammonites and the Philistines.

10:1–5

Tola and Jair

Chapter 10 begins by describing the rise of Tola ("worm"), the son of Puah, to save Israel (v. 1). Perhaps, similarly to Abimelech, Tola was raised up to save Israel from the corruption in Israel's religious and social life and to provide a period of stable administration. Although he was from the tribe of Issachar, he lived in the hill country of Ephraim and judged Israel for twenty-three years.

Tola was followed by Jair ("may [God] enlighten") of Gilead, who lived east of the Jordan River. He judged Israel during twenty-two peaceful years. His only claim to fame was his thirty sons, who ruled over thirty towns and rode on donkeys, a sign of wealth and prominence (see 5:10; 1 Sam. 25:20). Thirty sons also meant he had several wives, another sign of wealth, but not in harmony with God's will for His people.

10:6—12:7

Jephthah

The story of Jephthah follows a vivid description of the Ammonites' oppression of the people (10:6–16). He was appointed as the instrument of liberation (10:17—11:11) and at first tried diplomacy, but it failed (11:12–28). He made a vow, went to war, and returned victorious (12:29–40). Unfortunately, there was a conflict between him and the Ephraimites (vv. 1–7).

10:6–16. Israel Oppressed Again. Idolatry, which seemed to have been contained during the rules of Tola and Jair, flourished again after their demise. Not only did the worship of Baal and Asherah prosper, but the gods of all the surrounding nations (Syria [Aram], Sidon, Moab, Ammon, and Philistia) were venerated. Therefore, the Lord gave His people into the hands of the Ammonites and the Philistines.

It is likely that the eighteen years of oppression by the Ammonites—primarily in the Transjordan but also in the territory of Judah and Benjamin—and the forty years of the Philistine harassment west of the Jordan began at the same time. The Ammonite oppression is recounted first (chaps. 10–12), followed by the story of the Philistines and their harassment of the Israelites (chaps. 13–16).

After eighteen years of oppression, the Israelites finally realized that their misery was the result of their own sinful actions: the rejection of Yahweh and the worship of foreign gods (10:10). As in the case of the Midianite oppression, the Lord did not immediately respond positively (6:7–10). First, He issued a stern reprimand by reminding them how many times He had rescued them in the past (10:11–12), beginning with the Exodus and ending with the unknown Maonites, possibly another name for the Midianites because they are missing in the catalogue of past deliverances. In the Greek translation of the OT, the Midianites are listed in place of the Maonites.

As in Judges 1:2, the text does not mention how this dialogue between Yahweh and the Israelites was conducted, whether through an itinerant prophet or through the tabernacle. Yet Yahweh's message was clear in both instances. Since every time He saved them, they forsook Him and went back to idol worship, now God was not interested in rescuing them (10:13). In fact, He sarcastically told them to go and cry out to the idols they had been worshiping to save them (v. 14). Yet, the Israelites did not give up. They repeated their confession of guilt and initiated a reform by cleansing the land of idols and serving the Lord (v. 16). The Lord could no longer bear Israel's misery (v. 16); that is, He accepted their repentance and helped them. Anger is not God's last word to sinners. There is always hope for sinners who turn from their sins and humbly submit themselves to the mercy of God.

10:17—11:11. Jephthah and the Gileadites. When the Ammonites mobilized for one of their annual campaigns, the Gileadites decided to make a stand at Mizpah in Gilead (the location of which is unknown). However, they discovered that they had no one to lead them. It was then that Jephthah ("he [God?] has opened [the womb?]") the Gileadite—cast out by his family because his mother was a prostitute—appears in the narrative (11:1–3). According to Deuteronomy 23:2, such persons could not enter the congregation of the Lord, probably referring to the governing assembly of the people. Rejected by his family, Jephthah lived on the edges of society in the land of Tob, probably southern Syria. Gathering like-minded people around him, he made a name for himself as a strong leader by raiding villages.

The Philistines

According to Scripture, the Philistines (the meaning of the name is uncertain) originally came from Caphtor, or Crete (Jer. 47:4; Amos 9:7), and were descendants of Ham from the same line as the Egyptians (Gen. 10:6, 14). They first appear in Scripture during the patriarchal period (see Gen. 21:32; 26:1). They were later blended with a group of people that migrated from the Aegean to various places in the eastern Mediterranean in the thirteenth century. Known in history as the Sea Peoples, these migrants caused the downfall of the Hittite Empire but were repulsed by the armies of Ramesses III when they attempted to invade Egypt. Denied entrance to Egypt, they settled on the southern coast of the Holy Land, where they assimilated with the local population, retaining the name (Philistines) of the locals, and were a threat to the Israelites until the time of David, when he made them his subjects (1 Chr. 18:1–2).

This seems to be the first time that a judge in Israel was chosen by the people and not by God (Judg. 3:9, 15; 4:4; 6:14). But Jephthah certainly had the approval of God, as indicated by the spirit of the Lord coming upon him (11:29). The story of Jephthah teaches us to be careful in how we treat those on the edges of society because they also are children of God whom He can use in moments of need. And those who are slighted and ill-treated should leave it to God to let their light shine.

11:12–28. Jephthah and the Ammonites. By misrepresenting history, the king of Ammon tried to justify his invasion of Gilead (v. 13). Jephthah corrected the king's misrepresentation by letting history speak for itself. It is notable that Jephthah, the outcast, without the advantages of cultural approbation, was able to present such an eloquent appeal to the history of his people. In a way that the feckless leaders in Gilead apparently could not do, Jephthah inspired his community with a declaration of their identity as God's people. He knew who he was and who his people were. This is a lesson for us today. God's people must know that they *are* His people, and that requires a solid understanding of how God has led them and taught them in past history. Jephthah appealed to Yahweh to render judgment between the Israelite and the Ammonite peoples. Certainly, Jephthah preferred a peaceful resolution, but God provided judgment another way.

Because the king of Ammon was not interested in a settlement, war seemed inevitable (v. 28). The reference to Moab and the god Chemosh (vv. 24–25) seems to indicate that in the time of Jephthah, the Ammonites had occupied the land of Moab, south of the Arnon river, before marching against Israel. Jephthah, therefore, spoke to the king of Ammon as the successor of the king of Moab. The three hundred years (v. 26) represent the time from Israel's conquest of Heshbon under Moses (Num. 21:25–26) until the time of Jephthah.

11:29–40. Jephthah's Vow and Victory. In spite of Jephthah's attempt to come to a peaceful resolution of the conflict, the king of the Ammonites chose to fight. Before going to war, Jephthah made a vow to Yahweh, promising to offer as a burnt offering to Him whatever would come through the doors of his house to meet him upon his return (v. 31) if the Lord would give the Ammonites into his hands. Did Jephthah plan to sacrifice a human being? (See "Jephthah's Vow," p. 408). In those days, animals and human beings lived together in one house. In hindsight, we know that this vow was wrong, but for him it was an expression of his dependence on and faith in God. He knew he was utterly dependent on Yahweh, as the God of Israel's history, for his victory over the Ammonites. It is this faith that caused him to be mentioned in the list of the faithful in Hebrews 11:32.

12:1–7. Jephthah's Conflict with Ephraim. Jealousy and pride are a dangerous combination. In 8:1, the Ephraimites, the largest of the tribes in the north, were upset with Gideon because he had not called them to battle the Midianites. In chapter 12, they were angry with Jephthah, threatening to burn down his house because he had not called them to fight against the Ammonites, so they claimed (v. 1). This was a powerful challenge to Jephthah's leadership.

Jephthah's Vow

Much has been written about Jephthah's sacrifice. The two major positions are that (a) he did literally sacrifice his daughter as a burnt offering or (b) he did not sacrifice her but dedicated her to service in the sanctuary of the Lord as a perpetual virgin.

1. *She Was a Sacrifice.* These are some of the arguments for the first position: (1) Jephthah vowed to offer a burnt offering (Heb. *'olah*), and the text clearly says that he did to her as he had vowed (Judg. 11:39). (2) There is no indication in the text that she was dedicated to the service of the Lord as was Samuel (1 Sam. 1:28). (3) Why would a custom be established to bewail her fate if she was going to serve the Lord? To belong to the Lord was a position of honor, not a fate to be lamented. (4) Jephthah's and her grief indicate that she met a pitiable fate, not a position of honor. (5) This has been the position of most church fathers and commentators throughout history.

2. *She was Not a Sacrifice.* These are some of the arguments for the second position: (1) Scripture expressly forbids human sacrifice (Lev. 18:21; 20:2–5; Deut. 12:31). Jephthah must have been acquainted with these laws of Moses. (2) The Hebrew conjunction *waw* in Judges 11:31 ("and") should be taken as a disjunctive particle and translated as "or." The text would then read, "it shall be the LORD's, or I will offer it up as a burnt offering." (3) The text does not say he sacrificed her, but that he did to her according to his vow (v. 39). (4) She wept over her unmarried state, not about being condemned to die (vv. 37–38). (5) That he literally sacrificed her does not harmonize with what we know from other texts about Jephthah. The Bible portrays him as a man of high principles. Samuel accords him a place of honor (1 Sam. 12:11) and Hebrews 11:32 lists him among the heroes of faith.

3. *Lessons to Learn.* Throughout this story, God is silent. We know God gave Jephthah His Spirit and the victory over the Ammonites, but did He accept the child sacrifice, if such it was? While the first view has the strong support of the text, the second view remains a possibility. Whatever the case, some important lessons can be learned from this story. First, even the greatest heroes of faith may have weak moments, as did Jephthah prior to going into battle. We look forward to the moment when sinful human nature will be transformed at the coming of our Lord. Second, our vows to God should not be bargains to purchase the favor of God because His favor cannot be purchased with good works, money, or special vows. Third, we should make sure that our vows correspond to God's revealed will, and once we make them, we should keep them. Vows should be carefully thought through and not made rashly.

He rejected their complaint. First, he had to act at once because they were attacked, and second, he did call them but received no help. Chapter 11 neither confirms nor denies that he sent for the Ephraimites. And third, it was the Lord who gave him the victory over the Ammonites (12:3). Therefore, there was no need to proudly feel that his prowess had defeated the enemy; it was the Lord's doing. Why should they feel slighted because the Lord used him to His glory?

It may seem inconceivable to us that a civil war that resulted in the death of forty-two thousand Ephraimites was provoked simply by their leaders' petty jealousy of Jephthah. Some of those deaths certainly occurred in the actual fighting, and some occurred when Ephraimites were caught and executed in their attempt to escape back across the Jordan. The text makes it clear that the Gileadites were inspired in the slaughter by the arrogant bigotry of the Ephraimites, who viewed the Gileadites as inferiors. Differences in pronunciation are known to have also existed along the Nile so that the Egyptians in the delta pronounced words slightly differently than those along the Nile River Valley, causing those who lived upriver to mock the delta dwellers. This account confirms (vv. 6–7) that pronunciation was a basis for prejudice in other parts of the ancient world. The word *shibbolet* means "torrent" or "stream." Scripture makes no overt judgment against the Gileadites for the clever dialect trap they set to capture and execute escaping Ephraimites. But this sad and completely unnecessary civil war is a reminder of the damage caused by letting jealousy divide families and churches, and it is an admonition regarding the consequences of setting little "tests" to identify the "other" and exact retribution. The civil war was a clear sign that Israel was losing the sense of oneness and was in the process of collapsing from within. The back-and-forth from serving God to abandoning Him was beginning to have a major impact on the people and would climax with a final civil war (chap. 20).

12:8–15

Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon

Three of the six minor judges followed Jephthah. Ibzan came from Bethlehem. Scholars suspect that this was the Bethlehem in Zebulun (Josh. 19:15), not the Bethlehem in Judah (Judg. 17:7) where Jesus was later born. This suspicion is based on the tribal identity of the next judge (Elon) and the fact that Zebulun was a prominent tribe at this time. This identification, however, is not certain. Ibzan judged Israel for seven years and was remembered for his large family of sons and daughters (12:8–10).

His successor, Elon, who judged Israel for ten years, came from Zebulun. The location of the town of Aijalon (v. 12), where he was buried, is unknown. However, the city is to be distinguished from the Aijalon mentioned in Joshua 10:12, where the sun stood still, and from the Aijalon in Joshua 19:42, which was in the south, in the territory of Dan.

Pirathon, the town of Abdon (Judg. 12:13), who judged Israel eight years, was in the hill country of Ephraim, the heartland of northern Israel. The mountains/hill country of the Amalekites (v. 15) probably refers to an Amalekite settlement in this place before Israel entered Canaan. Abdon also had forty sons and thirty grandsons. The fact that nothing important is referred to during the rule of these three judges may indicate a happy state of affairs, without apostasies, but as we see in the next chapter, that did not last long.

13:1—16:31

Samson

Samson is an exceptional figure in the OT. Two things stand out in regard to Samson's life. First, he was the only judge who was chosen by God before he was born to be a judge. Second, by divine fiat he was born a Nazirite, set apart for God, like John the Baptist (Luke 1:15). In contrast to Barak, Gideon, and Jephthah, Samson never went into battle at the head of an Israelite army. His lot was to fight the Philistines alone. Therefore, his battles look like personal quarrels and acts of revenge, but he was led by the Spirit of the Lord and did what the judges were called to do—fight the oppressor. Although the Philistines continued to oppress Israel after Samson's death, he began to deliver Israel from the power (lit. "hand") of the Philistines (Judg. 13:5).

13:1–25. Birth of Samson. The background to the story of Samson is the oppression by the Philistines because the children of Israel had again done what was evil in the Lord's sight (v. 1). This time no cry was heard for deliverance, but God in His mercy raised up a deliverer for them. Twice the Angel of the Lord (see 2:1–5) appeared to Manoah's wife and not to Manoah. Since she would have to live with a particular attention to lifestyle choices during pregnancy and would be the primary caregiver to the child after he was born, God spoke directly to her, as He had to Hagar (Gen. 16:17–14). God gave her the instructions directly—directions that He would not fully repeat to Manoah, even though He would appear to Manoah in answer to his prayer (Judg. 13:8–14). God told Manoah's wife that her barrenness would come to an end and that her son would be a Nazirite from birth (cf. Luke 1:13–17, 26–38).

When she told her husband what had happened, she called the Angel a "man of God" (*'elohim*; v. 6). The same expression appears elsewhere in Scripture to describe Moses and Samuel (Deut. 33:1; 1 Sam. 9:6). Yet, she also said that His appearance was like that of an angel of God (Judg. 13:6), perhaps realizing that this was not just another human being. When asked for His name, the Angel of the Lord responded evasively with "*pil'i*," which can be understood in two ways: (1) the name "Wonderful," as in Isaiah 9:6, or (2) an expression of His nature, which is beyond human comprehension (cf. Ps. 139:6). There are secret things that do not belong to us (Deut. 29:29).

Manoah's reaction was natural for sinful beings. Ever since the Garden of Eden, sinners have been terrified in the presence of God (Is. 6:5). The final verses of chapter 13 describe the fulfillment of God's promise: the barren womb is revived and a son is born. Where there was sadness, there is now joy. Where there was despair, there is now thankfulness, evidence that with God no situation is hopeless, not in Israel nor in our lives today.

The name Samson derives from the Hebrew word *shemesh* ("sun"). Thus "sunny" or "child of the sun" are possible translations, expressing the hope of the parents for his life. How different it turned out to be once his childhood was over. In fact, his career revolved around two Philistine women: the woman of Timnah, whom he married (chaps. 14–15), and then Delilah, with whom he had an affair (chap. 16). Both betrayed him to his enemies by revealing his secrets. Sandwiched between the two stories is a brief encounter with a third woman (vv. 1–3). And yet, during the twenty years he judged Israel, Samson was a hero whom the Lord blessed and used to punish Israel's oppressors.

14:1–20. Samson's Wedding. Samson's marriage to the Philistine girl is a typical case of passion dominating reason. To his parents' serious objection, he simply said that she pleased him (lit. "she is right in my own eyes"; 14:3). He was not willing to do what was right in God's eyes and in that sense his life illustrated the condition of the Israelites. Despite the fact that God had specifically forbidden marriages with the inhabitants of Canaan (Deut. 7:3–4), she pleased him well and that, for him, was more important. No matter that as a Nazirite he had to remain ceremonially clean; reason and the fear of God were set aside and passion and stubborn determination controlled him. It is not difficult for humans even today to go down the same road, ruining their service for God and their lives.

Verse 4 raises an important question. Did the spirit of God purposely guide him into this marriage or did God use Samson's mistake to confront Israel's enemies in a way that was different from what He had done through previous judges and their armies? James 1:13 states that God does not tempt anyone to do evil; He simply *allows* human beings to do evil actions. In other words, He does not instigate them. Nevertheless, in Hebrew thinking what God allows is credited to Him; it is as if He has done it (Is. 45:7). Hence, it is said that He hardened Pharaoh's heart (Ex. 7:3), yet at the same time we are told that Pharaoh hardened his own heart (8:15, 32). The same applies to Samson's activities. God allowed him to follow his own passions but used the occasion to achieve something good for Israel.

The episode with the lion served as a sign for Samson that the Lord was with him and would enable him to defeat the Philistines (Judg. 14:6). At the wedding, Samson proposed a riddle and a wager (v. 12). It was not uncommon in ancient times to ask difficult questions or propose riddles at entertainments or weddings. However, it was somewhat reckless of Samson to make a game about possibly giving away the secret to the strength that God had given him; he should have better kept it a secret. In v. 15, the Hebrew text says that the Philistines threatened his bride on the seventh day (as appearing in some translations), but this does not fit with the three days mentioned in v. 14. Other translations follow the Septuagint and the Syriac translation that read "on the fourth day." The Hebrew words for "seventh" (*shebi'i*) and "fourth" (*rebi'i*) differ only by one Hebrew consonant (*sh* to *r*), suggesting a copying error. Furthermore, Samson's confession is easier to understand if she badgered him for several days and not only on the seventh day. In fact, v. 17 indicates that she had wept all seven days of the feast. This would mean she was unhappy from the start that he had not told her the secret.

Samson's reaction to the betrayal of his wife is the first of his spirit-directed actions against the Philistines. This unusual affair provided an obvious lesson to the Philistines that Samson was no ordinary Israelite and an obvious lesson to Samson that his romance with the Philistine

woman had been a very bad idea. From God's point of view, the immediate breakup of Samson's marriage was in Samson's best interest. True friendship could not exist between the Israelites and Philistines. Marriages between believers and unbelievers are rarely successful.

15:1–8. Growing Conflict with the Philistines. The two incidents narrated in this passage illustrate how the relationship between Samson and the Philistines quickly deteriorated on account of his marriage to a Philistine woman. In the first one, he announced that what he would do to the Philistines would be well deserved. According to him, the fact that his wife was given to someone else justified his act of retaliation, which consisted of burning the grain fields, vineyards, and olive trees of the Philistines. Using foxes sounds cruel; but for Samson, seemingly oblivious to such a concern, the foxes served to do much damage in a short period of time. The second incident was motivated by the execution of Samson's wife and father-in-law once the Philistines understood why Samson had destroyed their fields. As revenge, Samson attacked the Philistines, slaughtering many of them, and promised after this last attack to stop his rampage against them.

15:9–20. Victory at Ramath Lehi. The circle of violence continued, and this time the Philistines prepared to go against the tribe of Judah. It is surprising that the Israelites were not willing to attack their oppressors. They were so resigned to their circumstances that they were willing to betray Samson. At no point in the Samson narrative is it said that the Israelites prayed to the Lord to deliver them from the oppression of the Philistines. God, of His own initiative, raised Samson to begin delivering Israel from them (13:5). It was therefore almost natural for the Israelites to tell the Philistines that what Samson was doing was his own business; he did not have their support. Nevertheless, the Lord used Samson's arrest to inflict a significant defeat on the Philistines. His victory was credited to the Spirit of the Lord, which fell on him with great power.

Samson's song of victory (15:16) contains an element of wordplay. In Hebrew, the words "donkey" and "heap" are homonyms (they have the same spelling). Hence some translate the line as "with a donkey's jawbone I have made donkeys out of them." Another possible translation is "with the jawbone of a donkey, heaps upon heaps," referring to the many people he killed. God performed a miracle and created a spring in that place which still existed in the time of the author of the book. Samson called that place En Hakkore, meaning "caller's spring" (v. 19). The epilogue in v. 20 highlights the fact that, after his great victory, Samson was finally identified as judge in Israel, the position to which God had called him and which he held for twenty years.

16:1–3. Samson and the Prostitute. In Hebrews 11:32, Samson is a man of faith; in the book of Judges, we primarily see his other side—Samson, a man of strong passions. At the beginning of his judgeship, Samson went to Timnah and saw a woman (16:1). He desired her and made her his wife, at least for a short time. Toward the end of his judgeship, he went to Gaza and saw a prostitute and slept with her (v. 1). Like David, Samson's sin began in his eyes; his look gave birth to his desire, and his desire brought forth the sinful act. Indeed, the human heart *is* deceitful above all things and desperately sick and wicked (Jer. 17:9), and Satan knows our weaknesses better than we do. There may be a connection between Samson's action and the spiritual condition of the people. The man chosen by God to be His instrument engaged in literal harlotry while the people of God engaged in spiritual harlotry. Samson embodied the despicable condition of God's people.

By giving in to his sinful passions, Samson placed his life in danger. We do not know whether somebody tipped him off or whether his guilty conscience was the cause, but he left at midnight and no one dared approach him. He tore the gate out by its foundations and carried it about 40 miles (64.4 km) to a hill facing Hebron (Judg. 16:3), the leading city of Judah at that time, where he left it as a tangible war trophy. This was a superhuman feat, considering that the gate must have weighed several hundred pounds. Furthermore, Gaza was close to the Mediterranean coast while Hebron was more than 3,000 feet (914.4 m) above sea level in the Judean mountains. By removing the gate of the city, Samson was sending a message to the Philistines. When facing him, the Philistines were as vulnerable as a city without a gate.

16:4–31. Samson and Delilah. Not long after the Gaza episode, Samson found another Philistine woman in the Valley of Sorek (v. 4), about 13 miles (21 km) southwest of Jerusalem. It was the border between the territories of the Philistines and the Israelites. More than once, the love of women had resulted in physical and spiritual danger for Samson. Once the relationship between Samson and Delilah became known, the rulers of the Philistines offered Delilah 5,500 pieces (shekels) of silver if she could find out the secret of his strength and how he could be overcome. This was an enormous amount of silver when we consider that David bought the threshing floor and the oxen of Araunah for fifty shekels (2 Sam. 24:24) and that the wages offered to the Levite were only ten shekels a year (Judg. 17:10).

The story unfolds in four episodes. Three times Samson played a hazardous game of brinkmanship with her but refused to give up his secret (16:6–9, 10–14). The fourth time, worn out by her constant demand for mutual trust, he revealed to her that he was a Nazirite and that the secret was his long hair (vv. 16–17). He was quickly captured by the Philistines, and the eyes that saw the woman (14:1) and the prostitute (16:1) were blinded and could see no more. What is amazing is that in the first three episodes the Spirit of God did not leave him. Only when he revealed the secret of his power and his head was shaved—after the Nazirite vow was totally broken—did the Spirit of God depart from him. The condition of Samson was now like the condition of the oppressed people of Israel. The Lord departed from him, and he was to be oppressed by the Philistines. The fact that God bears His wayward children long is a great comfort to Christians today and should lead all to repentance (Rom. 2:4).

The Philistines took Samson to Gaza and set him to work grinding grain in prison like an animal. Weak, blind, imprisoned, degraded to the most menial service, Samson found his way back to God. As a sign that God had not completely forsaken him, his hair grew again and with it his strength gradually returned. God restored him so he could at last do what he was destined to do—to begin to deliver Israel from the Philistines.

At a feast in honor of Dagon, the grain god, all the lords of the Philistines were assembled in the temple of Dagon, rejoicing in the capture of Samson. He was hauled out of prison to entertain them (16:25). We are not told what kind of entertainment he performed. The Hebrew word used here means to "laugh," "joke," or "amuse." Just seeing him blind and bound like an animal may have amused them. Standing between two main pillars that supported the roof of the temple crowded with people, Samson prayed to Yahweh to strengthen him one more time so he could have revenge against the Philistines (v. 28). According to most translations, Samson's prayer was for one act of vengeance (or vengeance "at once" or "with one blow") for his "two eyes" being blinded. But it is also possible to read the Hebrew text as saying, "for one of my two eyes," as if vengeance for two eyes would have demanded more of God. The Lord in His great mercy heard him, and Samson, by the power of God, pulled the temple down on his enemies. The strength that he had lost through sin, he recovered through prayer. He killed more people in his death than during his life (v. 30). Thus, God defeated the Philistines and their god in a humiliating manner through a seemingly powerless man. Despite his many weaknesses, Samson finally gave his life in the fulfillment of his divine calling. He died for the well-being of others.

According to v. 31, Samson in the end received the respect of his father's house and an honorable burial in the tomb of his father. He had judged Israel twenty years. He began his work as a judge with his victory at Ramath Lehi (15:14–17) and ended it with his victory and death in Gaza, twenty years later.

Throughout the history of the Judges, we see human depravity at work in the repeated apostasy of the Israelites but particularly in the life of Samson, the last judge. In response, God displayed His wrath against sin and iniquity through pagan nations whom He used to discipline the children of Israel. And when they repented, confessed, and cried out for a deliverer, hoping that God would hear their cry once more, Yahweh, in His mercy, sent a Spirit-endowed judge to deliver them from their oppressors. So today, God is ready and willing to come to the aid of any of His children who are "oppressed" by Satan or their own sinful nature and who reach out to Him for help. God's grace and mercy are always available to repentant sinners.

17:1—21:25

RELIGIOUS AND MORAL DEGENERATION OF ISRAEL

With Samson's death, the record of the Israelite judges comes to an end. Nothing is said about two other judges, Eli and Samuel. Instead, the last five chapters of the book present two stories. Both stories feature a Levite: the first one traveled from Bethlehem to the hill country of Ephraim to find a place to live (chaps. 17–18);

the second one traveled from the hill country of Ephraim to Bethlehem to bring back his concubine, who had left him and had gone back to her father's house (chaps. 19–21). Both stories shed light on the religious and moral standards during the period of the Judges. In these chapters, there are no foreign oppressors or liberating heroes. We are taken into the daily life of the Israelites in the land of Canaan, and the conclusion is that they were hardly better than the former inhabitants of the land. What we see is a society in spiritual, social, and moral chaos. The picture of a united Israel found in the first two chapters of the book is gone, and now everyone is unquestionably doing whatever seems right according to subjective perceptions (17:6; 21:25). There was no centralized worship at the Israelite sanctuary or a centralized system of governance. Everyone was on his or her own.

17:1—18:31

Micah and His Idol

The first story is about a man, his mother, and a Levite (17:1–13). These were visited by a group of Danites (18:1–13), resulting in a conflict that closes the story (vv. 14–31).

17:1–13. Micah's Idolatry. The story could be called the Canaanite naturalization of Yahweh; that is to say, the Israelites had transformed Yahweh into a Canaanite god by worshiping Him in a Canaanite way. The discussion about what to do with the silver that was stolen, returned, and consecrated moved to using it to make an idol that represented the Lord. The ease with which the narrative shifts to idolatry is amazing in that none of the protagonists took a moment to examine the implications of their decision. Worshiping Yahweh à la Canaanite fashion seemed to have been a very natural thing to do.

There is some question as to whether there were one or two idols. Some translations render the phrase to mean one carved "image overlaid with silver." The Hebrew verbs seem to indicate that it may have been only one. It has been suggested that the idol consisted of two parts (e.g., a wooden idol enclosed in a casing of silver). When the idol was finished, Micah ("who is like Yahweh?") put it in a shrine in his house together with an ephod (see 8:22–28) and some household gods (Heb. *terapim*); that is, small images of human shape believed to represent the gods and to be endowed with divine attributes. Micah consecrated one of his sons to serve as priest (17:5). In doing this, he used the standard expression for the consecration of priests, "fill the hand," probably with an offering (see Ex. 28:41; 29:9). We do not know exactly when this event took place. In the next chapter, the Danites are in search of a home, and this may suggest that the event took place in the early period of the Judges when the tribes were still finding their places in the country. However, the level of social and spiritual corruption in Israel described in chapters 17–21 points to a later period of the Judges. Micah and his mother thought they were serving and worshiping Yahweh (17:3), when in reality they had transgressed the second commandment, which forbade the making of idols. Throughout history, people have adapted God to their own ideas in an attempt to manage Him as they pleased.

Since the Levites had not been given any tribal territory, only cities, they lived among the other tribes (Num. 35:2; Josh. 21:3). A young Levite who had been living with the tribe of Judah came to a group of houses in the hill country of Ephraim, one of which belonged to Micah. When Micah learned that the young man was a Levite, he invited him to stay with him and become his priest. Micah, who was not a priest, consecrated the Levite by "filling his hands" (Judg. 17:12), contrary to God's instructions that only Aaron's descendants should be priests (Ex. 29:9). The Levites were to be assistants of the priests (Num. 8:19–22). Micah seemed to have only a dim understanding of God's will. He practiced a syncretistic religion, mixing the worship of Yahweh with the worship of the local gods. This type of spiritual and moral compromise continues to be a threat for believers today who try to live the Christian life in a culture that does not support Christian values.

18:1–13. The Danites' Search for an Inheritance. The statement concerning the lack of a king in Israel (v. 1) prepares the way for the illicit deeds of the Danites. The tribe of Dan had been allotted their inheritance between the territories of Judah and Ephraim, from the western border of the Benjamites to the Mediterranean Sea (Josh. 19:40–46). It included fertile land in the valleys and the coastal plain. However, the Danites were not able to occupy all the land allotted to them because the Amorites drove them back into the hill country (Judg. 1:34). Therefore, they sent five spies north to find some additional land for their families.

The five spies arrived at the house of Micah and lodged there long enough to realize that there was a Levite residing in the house who also officiated as a priest. At this point in the narrative, the spies simply gather information that would later determine the future of the shrine in the house of Micah. Again, the perverted religious practices of Micah and the Levite were not considered by them to be unfaithfulness to the Lord, suggesting that such practices were common throughout the land of Israel. It is intriguing that the spies asked the Levite to consult God with respect to the success of their journey. Nothing is said about how the Levite consulted the Lord. In fact, one gets the impression that he immediately uttered an oracle before the scouts, and they interpreted it to be a positive one. The phrase used by the Levite is ambiguous. He literally said, "Go in peace!" (a common expression and wish) and stated that the way in which they would go would be before or in front of the Lord. This could be interpreted to mean that God was carefully watching what they are doing in a positive way (to bless them) or in a negative way (to condemn them). The Levite did not risk his life. In any case, the rest of the narrative shows that the Danites were successful not because the Lord was necessarily with them but because of their military superiority. After spying on the people living in Laish, they knew that it would be easy to possess that beautiful land that would play an important role in the Northern Kingdom.

18:14–26. The Danites Rob Micah's House. The five spies had told their brethren what they would find in Micah's house. And while the six hundred men stood at the gate to the compound, the five spies stole the contents of the shrine and persuaded the Levite to come with them. Micah, it seems, was not at home at that time. If the Danites had taken the idols and destroyed them and punished the Levite, they would have acted in accordance with God's will, but by taking the idols for their own use, they participated in the apostasy, showing that they feared neither God nor men. They left, putting their families and goods in front of them, in case they were pursued. Not long after their departure, Micah came home and found he had been robbed. He who robbed his mother was now robbed. He gathered his neighbors together and caught up with the Danites. The Danites cared little about how Micah felt; operating according to the principle of "might makes right," they chased him away with a threat (v. 25). If the loss of his idols had driven him back to rely only on Yahweh, he would have received great benefit from it, but we hear nothing more about him. The idol that supposedly represented the Lord was in fact like the Canaanite idols, unable to defend itself.

18:27–31. The Danites Settle in Laish. Based on the report given by the five spies, the Danites continued their journey north and came to Laish, which they attacked, destroyed, and burned (v. 27). This was a luxurious land with great vegetation and abundant water flowing from Mount Hermon. Out of the ashes of Laish rose a new city, which they named Dan, after the first head of the tribe, and which would become one of the centers of idolatry in the Northern Kingdom of Israel. It became the northernmost city in Israel. "From Dan to Beersheba" became a common idiom for all of Israel (see Judg. 20:1; 1 Sam. 3:20; 2 Sam. 3:10).

The last two verses of this chapter record the idolatry of the Danites. Jonathan, which was probably the name of Micah's Levite, who was further identified as the son of Gershom, and his sons were set up as priests. It is possible that this is Gershom the son of Moses. Originally, the Hebrew text of the OT did not have vowels. The name in the text for the father of Gershom is *m-sh-h* (the consonants for Moses—*mosheh*). The consonantal difference between Moses and Manasseh is the consonant *n*. In some manuscripts, one finds written above the name a small *nun* (n) that would read *m-n-sh-h* (the consonants for Manasseh). Rabbinic explanations justify the change as an attempt to avoid tarnishing the memory of Moses. If the original text read "Moses," as it appears, it is sadly possible that Jonathan was a descendent of Moses's son.

The phrase referring to the priests that were in Dan until the captivity of the land (18:30) is problematic. If this is referring to the captivity under Tiglath-Pileser in 732 B.C., we have to assume that neither Samuel nor David nor Solomon stopped the idol worship in Dan. Yet, 1 Samuel 7:3–4 indicates that under Samuel's reform the Israelites discarded other gods and served only the Lord (v. 4). Furthermore, when Jeroboam set up the golden calves at Dan, he appointed priests from among all kinds of people, not only the Levites (1 Kin. 12:31) because all the Levites and priests had left the Northern Kingdom and moved south to Judah (2 Chr. 11:13–14). Thus, the descendants of Gershom, the Levite, could not have served until the Assyrian captivity in the city of Dan.

Rather, the statement that Micah's idol was in Dan all the time that the house of God was in Shiloh (Judg. 18:31) suggests that this captivity of the land (v. 30) took place earlier in connection with the Philistines, possibly in the time of Eli (1 Sam. 4:1–11) or during the reign of Saul's son, Ishbosheth, who reigned over Israel from Mahanaim, which was east of the Jordan. The Philistines presumably controlled some portions of the Northern Kingdom, including Dan (2 Sam. 2:8–10). Archaeological evidence suggests that the temple at Dan was destroyed about 1050 B.C., around the time the ark of the covenant was captured by the Philistines (1 Sam. 4).

19:1—21:25

The Levite and His Concubine

The story of the Levite and his concubine, illustrating the moral chaos during the period of the Judges, begins and ends with the statement that there was no king in Israel (Judg. 19:1; 21:25). The absence of a king does not necessarily mean there must be chaos in the land; the comment about everyone doing as desired in the last part of v. 25, however, does. One wonders whether the absence of a king may be referring to the people's unwillingness to recognize God as their king. We are not told when this story took place, but the reference to Phinehas, the grandson of Aaron (20:28), and the fact that the tribal league was still functioning and able to take combined action points to an early date.

19:1–21. The Levite Searches for His Concubine. A Levite from Ephraim took a concubine (a second-rank wife) from Bethlehem. Most versions say that she committed adultery against him (19:2) and went back to her father's house. The penalty for adultery was death (Lev. 20:10), but nothing in the text indicates that she faced death. Some wonder if there is another explanation. A few ancient versions have "his concubine became angry with him, and she went away from him to her father's house." As Israelite law did not provide for divorce by the wife, leaving the husband was considered an act of adultery. A heated argument between them could explain why the Levite sought reconciliation. Perhaps tempers had cooled.

His journey seemed to be crowned with success. He was lavishly entertained by his father-in-law, and his concubine seemed to have agreed to go back with him. They left on the fifth day of his visit, but because they left in the afternoon, they did not get as far as he had hoped. They were forced to seek shelter in Gibeah of Benjamin (Judg. 19:15), where nobody took them in except an old man from the mountains of Ephraim who lived in Gibeah (identified with modern Tel el-Ful, about 3 miles [4.8 km] north of Jerusalem). The hospitality of this man was a ray of hope in the midst of a narrative where people care only for themselves.

19:22–30. Gibeah's Crime. During the night, the men of the city surrounded the house and demanded that the traveler be surrendered to them for homosexual abuse. There are a number of parallels to Genesis 19, but this story has a different outcome. The men are called "sons of belial" in Hebrew (Judg. 19:22)—variously translated as "wicked," "perverted," or "worthless." In the OT, the word "belial" ("not worthy" or "worthless") occurs twenty-seven times and always refers to people of bad character (see Deut. 13:13; 1 Sam. 2:12; 1 Kin. 21:10).

Hospitality played an important part in the ANE society. By it a stranger found rest, food, shelter, and asylum. The old man in Gibeah took the law of hospitality so seriously that he was willing to surrender his virgin daughter and the Levite's concubine instead of his guest, who had a sacred right to his hospitality. However horrified the modern reader may be, we need to remember that the old man was acting within the confines of his culture. Women were generally only lightly esteemed in the ancient world. It was common to sacrifice a woman's honor to save the life of a man (Gen. 12:10–16; 20:2; 26:6–9). World history shows that women have been greatly abused, and similar psychological, physical, and sexual abuse continues to be a reality in many places today. The voice of the church should be one of the first voices to speak against such evil cultural practices anyplace in the world.

This story illustrates how quickly and how low some of the people in Israel had fallen morally since the death of Joshua. Sodom was reenacted, and ever since Sodom has been reenacted many times (Rom. 1:26–27), particularly in the acceptance of homosexual practices and behavior. The reaction of the Levite to the brutal rape and murder of his concubine was overdramatic. In the narrative he was not totally innocent, for he treated the woman poorly. He handed her to the men to be raped and early in the morning, when he was leaving, found her lying down by the threshold of the door of the house and treated her with disrespect. One wonders whether she was still alive. Cutting her body into twelve parts and sending them to the twelve tribes of Israel constituted a call to the people to come together for war. Saul did something similar, but he instead cut up a pair of oxen into twelve pieces and sent them to the tribes (1 Sam. 11:7).

20:1–48. War with Benjamin. All the tribes, except Benjamin, assembled in Mizpah (meaning "watchtower"), possibly modern Tel en-Nasbeh, 6 miles (9.6 km) north of Jerusalem, to decide what to do with Gibeah. The fact that the intertribal organization was still functioning normally points to an early date for these events. In addition to the tribal leaders and elders, 400,000 foot soldiers were present. The Levite recounted his story, stating that the rulers of Gibeah came against him. Most translations render the term *ba'al* here as "men," but this word can and often does mean "ruler." Thus, some translations have "leaders" or "leading citizens" (v. 5); as noted above, in 19:22 they are called (lit.) "sons of Belial." To further enhance his story, the Levite said they wanted to kill him. Considering what happened to the concubine, he may not have been far off the mark.

The response of the assembly was unanimous. They vowed not to go home until Gibeah was punished. There is a textual difficulty in v. 9 because part of the Hebrew text seems to be missing. According to most translations, the text dealing with their decision says only that they will attack Gibeah "by lot." This probably means that ten percent of the soldiers had to get supplies and the rest would move against Gibeah. Lots would choose who performed which task. Some translations understand this differently. They convey the idea that they would go up against the city "in the order decided by casting lots," or that they would "march up against it as the lot determines." Whatever the case, in complete unity they prepared for war against their own people and were willing to destroy one of their own tribes, something that none of the heathen oppressors ever attempted to do.

Through the Urim and Thumim they had asked the Lord twice before without receiving the assurance that He would give them the victory. The third time, however, they received the promise of victory. It is not clear in the text why the other tribes were defeated twice after the Lord had, on both occasions, sanctioned the battle against Benjamin (vv. 18, 23). Was it only that the Lord wanted to teach them a lesson not to trust in their superior numbers and self-confidence? From time to time, we all have to learn humility through life's lessons. But perhaps the Lord wanted them to realize that the sin of Gibeah and the Levite's behavior were only symptoms of the overall low state of morals among them and that, therefore, they all bore responsibility for what had happened. Instead of rushing to battle and being more interested in vengeance than justice, it would probably have been better to humble themselves before God, acknowledge their share of guilt in this matter, and lament over the terrible state of wickedness amongst them. Thus, they would have been better prepared and more in harmony with God's will to punish the evildoers. As Christians, we need to watch and pray to be kept from an unholy zeal in the Lord's work. Power and knowledge have to be accompanied by divine wisdom and good judgment in order to be properly used. Only God can provide us with what we need. We need to walk humbly before the Lord, constantly depending on the atonement He provided for the forgiveness of our sins.

21:1–25. Restoration of the Tribe of Benjamin. The last episode in this story of horror shows how the Israelites, after their bloody rampage through the cities of Benjamin, came to their senses and realized that they had gone too far. In their misplaced zeal for vengeance, they had nearly wiped out a whole tribe. Now they sought ways to circumvent their rash decision not to give their daughters as wives to the Benjamites (v. 1). Without wives, the six hundred men at the rock of Rimmon were destined for extinction and with them the whole tribe of Benjamin. Instead of asking God for forgiveness for their rash vow, they continued in their hypocrisy and wiped out the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead, save for four hundred virgins, because the people of Jabesh Gilead had not come up to the Lord at the assembly in Mizpah (v. 8). The Gileadites were descended from Manasseh, the nephew of Benjamin; thus, there was a blood bond with the descendants of Benjamin.

Following the capture of the four hundred virgins, a delegation was sent to the six hundred men at the rock of Rimmon to invite them back and make peace with them, which they did (v. 14). But because four hundred virgins were not enough for six hundred Benjamite men, the leaders of Israel came up with another plan; they advised the Benjamites to snatch the daughters of Shiloh when they came out to dance at a particular festival (v. 21). This was probably a harvest festival. All this was done to avoid the guilt of perjury by equally detestable actions. However, the arrangement worked, and the Benjamites with their new wives were

able to return to a normal life and to begin restoring their devastated cities. That the elders of Israel could advise acts of treachery and violence out of a sense of duty is indicative of their spiritual blindness and shows the effects of an erroneous conscience.

The book closes with the reflection of the author that the absence of a king was largely responsible for the chaotic conditions in Israel in the time of the Judges. The breakdown in God's purposes for Israel illustrates graphically the depravity of human beings, God's wrath against sin, and His mercy and longsuffering with repentant sinners. On the one hand, it is a sad picture of how low God's children can fall; on the other hand, it highlights God's love for even the most depraved of His creatures. It does not surprise us that, for the biblical writer, the solution to the condition of Israel during the period of the Judges was a coming king. Later, kings would arise in Israel, some to instill the fear of Yahweh and others to lead the people away from Him. Yet, the ultimate solution has always been the coming of a messianic King who will establish peace, justice, and righteousness in the land. For the Christian, this Messiah has come in the person of Jesus Christ. He is the only One who can truly liberate us from the oppressive power of sin and from the daily temptation of doing what is right in our own eyes. The partial victories of the judges over the enemies of Israel are almost meaningless compared to what Christ accomplished on the cross and to what will take place at the future consummation of such a victory. The book closes in expectation, waiting for the king.

RUTH

INTRODUCTION

Title and Authorship. The book of Ruth, like various biblical books, does not mention its author. Jewish tradition attributes it to Samuel.

Date. The first verse links the narrative to the time of the Judges, Israel's premonarch era when divinely summoned "judges" delivered Yahweh's people from foreign oppressors. This time frame is supported by Boaz being born of Rahab, who received the spies in Joshua's time (Josh. 2; Matt. 1:5). The record of David's lineage, including Boaz and Ruth (4:17–22), could only have been written after David had become important enough to make such details meaningful to a reader or hearer. Thus, if the entire book was written at one time, then it could not have been written earlier than David's anointing (2 Sam. 16) during the reign of Saul.

Backgrounds. The experience of Israel described in the book of Judges provides the background for the story of Naomi and Ruth. The mention of a famine in Bethlehem, normally a fruitful land, suggests that Israel had again departed from Yahweh (see Lev. 26:18–20). But the narrative is not primarily interested in apostasy, since the book indicates that many Israelites were committed to the Lord. It is a beautiful story of profound loving loyalty to God as reflected in loyalty to other human beings. It is an account that explains how Moab (and Canaan, through Boaz's mother, Rahab) became a part of David's family line. On one occasion, David left his parents in Moab for safekeeping (1 Sam. 22:3–4). As a result, this book also shows that not all Moabites were evil.

Literary Features. The book of Ruth is a literary masterpiece. We find references to legal practices (4:1–12), a poem (1:16–17), and a genealogy (4:18–22). However, the book is fundamentally a narrative characterized by dialogues.

Theology and Purpose. Ruth is a dramatic narrative through which deep theological issues are addressed. The beginning and ending of the story indicate that it deals with the preservation of life, the divine activity in preserving it, and the role of the redeemer (Heb. *go'el*).

1. Life and Death. As the book opens, the threat of death is immediately introduced. There was a famine in the land of Bethlehem. Confronted with this danger, people searched for a way to survive. The story is about a family's concern for life and the possibility of their total extinction. The actions of practically all characters in the story revolved around the question of survival. In the absence of food in Bethlehem, Elimelech and his family went to Moab to preserve their lives. But Moab could not preserve life. In fact, there the family faced the destructive power of death and meaninglessness, even the apparent absence of the Lord from their lives. At first things seemed to go well. Then the father of the family died, leaving his two sons and wife in a strange land. Things appeared to improve again when the two sons married, thus increasing the potential for preserving the family.

Unfortunately for his two sons, the family did not grow. Their wives bore no children. The threat of extinction for this family reached a point of no return when the two sons of Naomi died. Suddenly time stopped; there was no future for her. She was ready to return to Bethlehem, not to search for life but to quietly die, leaving behind no trace of the existence of her family.

When the narrative is placed within its canonical context, we realize that this family belonged to the genealogical line from which the Messiah, typified by David, would come to preserve human life on this earth. Through a seemingly lifeless family, the Lord would eventually bring eternal life to humanity.

2. God and Life. The God of Naomi was beyond her comprehension. In the first part of the story, He seemed to be absent and she felt the pain of His absence. When death occurs, we may experience His silence, but it is not His absence. There are no miracles in the narrative because, like in the book of Esther, God was working from within history and through the characters of the story. He is a gracious and faithful God. The Hebrew term *khesed* is used several times in the story to designate an essential characteristic of God. It refers to His gracious, merciful, and faithful commitment to humans. This divine grace was accessible to Israelites and non-Israelites (1:8; 2:20). It is a divine concern for the needs of humans that leads people to show *khesed* ("mercy," "kindness," "loving loyalty") to others, as Naomi was about to discover.

Discouraged and frustrated with life, Naomi asked her daughters-in-law to abandon her. If God had already abandoned her, there was nothing they could do to change her fate. She had no future. It was at this point in the story that divine grace and love (*khesed*) flowed from God to Naomi through Orpah and Ruth. In the midst of her pain, the Lord was showing His loving loyalty and kindness through other human beings. Their unwillingness to abandon her indicates that God was still with her. The dramatic commitment of Ruth, not only to Naomi but to Naomi's people and her God, is the most powerful manifestation of divine compassion in the narrative. Through this decision, the potential for the divine preservation of life would become a reality in spite of Naomi's hopelessness.

Divine *khesed* is the force that drives the plot of the story. It takes the reader from death to life. Although the story begins with death experienced in such a dramatic way that hope dies, it ends with the blossoming of a new life that would preserve the family line from which David would come. The Lord was not allowing death to alter His plan for His people. Life overcomes death and fills the human heart with joy and hope.

3. Redemption. In the narrative, God preserved life through a redeemer. It was through His providential leading that a redeemer was found who was willing to preserve the genealogical line from which the Messiah would come. Naomi knew about a relative of her husband who was still alive and could become her redeemer. Apparently she did not know how to locate him, because when Ruth went out to glean in the fields, it was by chance—a happenstance—that she gleaned in the field of Boaz, Elimelech's relative (2:3). Behind this historical "accident," we find the hand of the Lord leading the narrative to a resolution and to the preservation of the life of this family. Boaz, the redeemer, had the material wealth the two women lacked. He also had a wealth of character and integrity that would be used by the Lord to accomplish His purposes. In this divine plan there was no room for a selfish redeemer. The irresponsible redeemer soon disappeared from the narrative, leaving no trace of his life behind him.

The work of the redeemer was not motivated by selfishness, nor was it the result of an outburst of irrational emotion. Boaz's self-appointment as redeemer took place in the court of law, by the city gate, and before witnesses (Ruth 4:5–11; Deut. 25:5–10; cf. Rev. 5:9–10). The city acknowledged that he had the legal right to redeem, and he joyfully did so. From this point on, the story's emotional tone radically changed because a redeemer had been found. The Lord created for Naomi and Ruth a wonderful future well beyond what they would have anticipated. Through them the true Redeemer would come to redeem the human family.

COMMENTARY

1:1–22

From Moab to Bethlehem

The narrative begins in Bethlehem (1:1), moves to Moab where its plot is significantly developed (vv. 1–18), and closes with the return of Naomi and Ruth to Bethlehem (vv. 19–22).

1:1–5. Elimelech's Family in Moab. The story is about the family of Elimelech and Naomi. They had two sons, Mahlon and Chilion, and were identified as Ephrathites, meaning they were from the region around Bethlehem called Ephrath (Gen. 35:16–19; 48:7). The clan name might derive from Ephrath, the wife of Caleb, whose descendants are described as settling in Bethlehem (1 Chr. 2:19, 50–51; 4:4). The narrator is thus connecting Elimelech's family to its founders, making the subsequent tragedy more poignant. The name Elimelech ("my God [Yahweh] is king" or "God is king") suggests parental religious convictions. Naomi's name could mean "my sweetness" or "sweet, pleasant one," indicative of a parent's joy over a baby girl.

The book of Ruth opens and closes in Bethlehem, a very fertile area about six miles south of Jerusalem. As the book opens, there was no food in the "house of bread" (Bethlehem). In their search for safety and sustenance, Elimelech's family traveled to Moab, east of the Dead Sea, suggesting that this famine was localized in Israel. The Moabites originated in the incestuous relationship of Lot with his eldest daughter (Gen. 19:30–38) and were often enemies of the Israelites. Elimelech's family sought refuge among a people who had been hostile to Israel, which might also suggest their dire condition, accentuating the kindness extended to Ruth by Naomi, Boaz, and the people of Bethlehem.

Mahlon and Chilion are first presented as "his two sons." After Elimelech dies, the text indicates that Naomi was left with her sons (v. 3), a poignant allusion to the calamity. These two sons married Moabite women (v. 4). After about ten years, the two sons of Naomi also died. The writer notes that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband (v. 5), underscoring Naomi's total loss. In the absence of hope, she simply said that the hand of the Lord had turned against her (v. 13). Her age and poverty eclipsed any hope of marrying again and having more children (vv. 11–13). Naomi and her two daughters-in-law faced a bleak future.

1:6–18. Naomi's Plans. Never intending Moab to be a permanent home, Naomi made plans to return to Israel. She was returning because she heard that the Lord was giving attention to His people's needs by providing them with food (lit. "bread"; v. 6). The "house of bread" now had bread. She had gone to Moab with much but was leaving empty.

With nothing to offer her two young daughters-in-law, Naomi first urged each one to return to her own mother's home (vv. 8–10). References to the mother's house occur rarely in the OT (Gen. 24:28, 67; cf. Song 3:4; 8:2). She prayed for a happy future for both of them, a future that the Lord was not providing through her. Naomi expressed concern only for the welfare of her daughters-in-law. "Go, return"/"go back" (the Hebrew has double imperatives) suggests urgency, freeing her daughters-in-law from any further responsibility.

Her tenderness is expressed by her prayer that Yahweh would grant them the same *khesed* ("kindness/mercy") they had given to her and her family (v. 8b). Though in deep sorrow, her faith in Yahweh was apparent as she commended her Moabite daughters-in-law to Him and His kindness (v. 8). Naomi believed that God's providential care extended beyond Israel. The Moabites were distant relatives through Lot (Gen. 19:36–37). Although as a nation they worshiped false gods, Naomi's words and the fact that Mahlon and Chilion had found acceptable wives among the Moabites may indicate that there was some openness to the God of Abraham. The concept that God was not just a God for the Hebrews but for all nations is seen elsewhere in the OT (Gen. 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; Is. 56:7; Zech.14:16). In the NT, this concept becomes vital to understanding the scope of the Gospel Commission and ultimate restoration at the end of time (Matt. 28:19; Acts 10:34, 45; 11:18; Rom. 16:26; Rev. 15:4).

Then there were kisses and tears. The Hebrew idiom literally translated "to lift up the voice and weep" (e.g., "weep loudly") occurs often in contexts of lamentation and mourning, suggesting loud sobbing and, in this context, evidence of affectionate bonds (v. 14). Naomi's daughters-in-law did not want to leave her, exhibiting a warm and loving attachment. The long dialogue points to the significance of the scene (vv. 8–17). With tearful responses, the two younger widows declared their intention to stay with Naomi and her people (v. 10).

In the second interchange (vv. 11–14), Naomi spoke tenderly to her "daughters," telling them to return home (v. 11) as she was too old to marry again (v. 12). Even if she would marry and bear sons, it would be too much of a sacrifice for her daughters-in-law to wait until those sons were grown up. The dialogue aims at persuasion. Naomi closed by wailing that the hand of the Lord had gone against her (v. 13). She was experiencing the apparent absence of God, overlooking for a moment that the love of her two daughters-in-law was an expression of God's loving mercy toward her. Again there were kisses and tears. This time the weeping led to Orpah's farewell kiss. She returned to Moab, doing what Naomi suggested and bearing Naomi's blessing of Yahweh. Orpah exits from the narrative.

In the third interchange (vv. 15–18), Naomi turned to Ruth and encouraged her to go back as Orpah did—to her people and her gods (v. 15). The biblical text does not criticize Orpah's decision, nor does it contrast her negatively with Ruth. Orpah has been commended for her loving kindness and entrusted to the blessing of the Lord. But her decision highlights Ruth's sacrifice in her decision to "cling to" an aged, widowed mother-in-law. The Hebrew word *dabaq* ("cling," "cleave"; v. 14), suggests loyalty or deep affection (Ruth 2:23; cf. Gen. 2:24; 2 Sam. 20:2).

Naomi finally stopped protesting as Ruth reaffirmed her intention, expressed in one of the most sublime statements in Scripture. This is the first time we hear Ruth's voice. Before her three-part commitment to Naomi, her people, and her God, she insisted that Naomi not attempt to dissuade her and invoked Yahweh as witness (v. 16). Her devotion would extend beyond Naomi's life ("where you die, I will die"). Renouncing burial in her homeland, Ruth determined to permanently live out the rest of her life in a foreign country: "Your people will be my people, and your God my God" (v. 16). Rejecting the gods of Moab, Ruth declared Yahweh to be her God, using His covenantal name. She was not seeking a husband but was seeking to serve the true God. This was affirmed with a solemn irreversible oath of her lifelong commitment to her mother-in-law, in which she called a curse from God upon herself if she failed to keep her promise (v. 17).

This decision is unparalleled in Scripture. The exchange between the three women (vv. 8–17) began with the use of Yahweh's name in a blessing from Naomi and ended with Ruth's absolute commitment to Him. Naomi had left Bethlehem with a husband and two sons, but returned with a committed daughter-in-law, whom the women of Bethlehem recognized as being better to her "than seven sons" (4:15).

1:19–22. Arriving in Bethlehem. Omitting any travel details, the journey to Bethlehem is briefly mentioned (v. 19). The narrative then shifts to a scene of happy celebration. The Bethlehemites responded joyously to Naomi's unexpected return. She described her distress with powerful emotions and insisted that they call her Mara ("bitter"). She referred to God with both His covenantal names, *yahweh* and *shadday*. Like Job, she questioned God's inscrutable justice because, in her mind, the Almighty had made her bitter (in words very similar to Job 27:2). Naomi—along with Job, the psalmists, and Jeremiah—was honest when suffering. And God accepted her complaints. She rejected the compliments because she had left "full," but now she said that the Almighty (*shadday*) had afflicted (lit. "to cause distress," "inflict misery," "do harm") her. Her life was always in the hand of the Lord, even during difficult moments.

The narrative is briefly summarized (v. 22), providing a helpful base for the next section. For the first time in the narrative, Naomi's daughter-in-law is identified by her name and ethnic heritage. She is described as one returning from the country of Moab, even though it was her country (1:7, 16, 22; 2:6). The narrative closes with a time frame as they arrived in Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest (v. 22). They arrived when grain was gathered (March or April), barley being the first crop (Ex. 9:31–32; 2 Sam. 21:9). The beginning and end of the chapter have corresponding elements which envelop the narrative. Verse 1 anchors timing and location; v. 22 closes with corresponding details. The chapter begins with famine and departure and then ends with harvest and return.

2:1–23

A Meeting in the Field

This segment of the narrative consists mainly of five dialogues. It opens (v. 2) and closes (vv. 19–22) with conversations between Naomi and Ruth. Boaz talked to his servants (vv. 4–7), with Ruth (vv. 8–14), and again with his servants (vv. 15–16). During the dialogue, the character of those involved was manifested. Ruth's Moabite origin was mentioned several times, and the connection between Boaz and Naomi was restated. Both Ruth and Boaz displayed extraordinary lovingkindness (*khesed*). Ruth risked ostracism and physical harm as a Moabitess to provide for Naomi. Boaz showed great generosity toward both widows. Boaz's concern for Ruth's well-being, mentioned four times (vv. 8, 15, 16, 22), suggests the possibility of verbal and physical abuse, which occurred in some places and among some people in Israel during the period of the Judges (see Judg. 19; 21).

2:1–7. The Plan of Ruth. Since Boaz plays an important role in the narrative, he is introduced first. He was a relative of Elimelech, deceased husband of Naomi (v. 1). This detail would provide the legal right for Boaz to marry Ruth. He was a wealthy and influential citizen in Bethlehem, a godly man of gracious generosity and uprightness. Ruth unselfishly volunteered to find food by gleaning in the field (v. 2). Although Naomi's son had died, Ruth still honored her mother-in-law, showing courage three times (1:22; 2:2, 21) when her gender, race, and social status put her in danger. Mosaic law commanded compassion for aliens, orphans, and widows, requiring harvesters to deliberately leave grain in the fields for them to glean (Lev. 19:9–10; 23:22; Deut. 24:19). The field scene, like many in the book, includes three conversations involving Boaz and the harvesters or Ruth (vv. 4–16). Ruth went to glean in the field belonging to Boaz, Elimelech's relative (v. 3). The narrative indicates that this "happenstance" (Heb. *miqreh*; v. 3) was under the guidance of the Lord.

2:8–16. Boaz Meets Ruth. Boaz came to the field and greeted the reapers by saying, "The Lord be with you" (v. 4). He was a devout religious person who showed respect to his employees. He also noticed a stranger in his field. After inquiring, he was informed that this person was Ruth, a young Moabite woman (v. 6). She had asked for permission to glean after the reapers and had been working diligently since early in the morning. Male harvesters likely would have noticed her as well, suggesting her vulnerability.

Boaz graciously addressed Ruth as "daughter" (v. 8), suggesting that Boaz was older than Ruth. His offer of help and protection to the Moabitess revealed the absence of racial prejudice (his mother being Rahab, a Canaanite). He instructed his employees to be respectful of her and allowed her to glean among the regular sheaves where gleaners were not permitted—a generous gesture exceeding Israelite law. Ruth was also offered the water that Boaz provided for regular employees (v. 9). She responded with few words, respectful of her social status. She recognized the social disparity between them and bowed before him as a sign of respect, asking why he was so kind as to notice her, a foreigner (v. 10). Boaz knew the story about Ruth and Naomi and the lovingkindness (*khesed*) Ruth had manifested toward her mother-in-law. He referred to everything she had done for Naomi, also mentioning the fact that Ruth had left her father, mother, and land of her birth. Thus, like Abram and Sarah (Gen. 12:1–5), Ruth also abandoned the security of her homeland, choosing the life of an alien in order to follow Naomi and her God.

Boaz's request to the Lord to protect Ruth uses the metaphor of a mother bird protecting her young. God is referred to as the One under whose "wings" Ruth had come for refuge (v. 12; see also Deut. 32:11–12; cf. Matt. 23:37). Boaz blessed her—asking the Lord to reward her work—without knowing that he would be God's instrument in the realization of the blessing (v. 12). Boaz also invited Ruth to lunch. A land owner eating with his workers was notable, but Boaz's generosity and compassion toward this poor Moabite widow was specifically noticeable. *Qali* ("parched," "roasted" grain; v. 14) was a staple food at the time, and Boaz presented Ruth with a surplus amount.

After a generous meal, Ruth got up to glean again. Boaz now emphatically ordered his employees to let her glean among the bundles (or sheaves), to deliberately leave some extra for her, and to not humiliate or rebuke her (vv. 15–16). The lovingkindness of Ruth moved others to show kindness to her. In his treatment of Ruth, Boaz displayed divine generosity and care for others.

The narrative summarizes Ruth's long day of work. She gleaned in the field until evening and then beat out what amounted to an "ephah" of barley (v. 17; see below, "Ephah"). Beating out the grain would separate the husks from kernels, eliminating extra weight when carrying the kernels home.

2:17–23. Ruth Informs Naomi. When Ruth returned to Naomi, she informed her mother-in-law that the man she worked with that day was named Boaz (v. 19). Naomi spontaneously pronounced a blessing, mentioning that he was their close relative: a *go'el* ("redeemer"). Naomi knew that Israelite family law invested near relatives with certain duties, particularly the obligation of an unmarried brother-in-law (Heb. *yabam*) to marry his brother's widow to prevent the name of a deceased man from dying out (Deut. 25:5–10). Although the situation of Naomi and Ruth did not correspond fully, it reflected the general intent of the "levirate" (from the Latin for brother-in-law, *levir*) system. That said, Obed is never in Scripture called the son of anyone other than Boaz (Ruth 4:21; 1 Chron. 2:12; Matt. 1:5; Luke 3:32).

The term *go'el* occurs for the first time in the narrative (v. 20) and becomes a key word connected to Boaz. Naomi again mentioned the lovingkindness (*khesed*) of God, manifested in Ruth "accidentally" arriving at Boaz's field (vv. 20–21). Ruth followed the counsel of both Boaz (v. 8) and Naomi (v. 22) throughout both harvests of barley and wheat, a period of seven to eight weeks (late April to June). The harvest time provided the opportunity for Boaz and Ruth to see each other over several weeks (v. 23). The end of the grain harvest suggests that Ruth and Boaz would not see each other anymore. But the main plot of the story has not yet reached its resolution, since Ruth was still dwelling in the house of Naomi.

Ephah

The word "ephah," probably meaning "basket" or a basket's capacity, is borrowed from Egypt (Zech. 5:5–11). The exact weight of an ephah is debated—in any case, it was a heavy load. In the OT, it was a standard dry grain measure (Ex. 16:36; Lev. 19:36; Amos 8:5). Gideon prepared bread for the angel of Yahweh using an ephah of flour (Judg. 6:19), and Jesse sent his son David with an ephah to his elder brothers (1 Sam. 17:17). For Ruth to harvest an ephah in one day suggests long hours of diligent work, assisted by Boaz's generosity.

3:1–18

On the Threshing Floor

Significant space is given to a narrative that took place during one night, indicating that the story is reaching a resolution. Naomi gave detailed instructions to Ruth (vv. 1–4), which she followed when she and Boaz met again (vv. 6–13). Ruth then returned to Naomi and reported what happened (vv. 16–17). A new future was rising before them. Their lives were about to change in significant ways.

3:1–6. The Plan of Naomi. Seeking a better future for Ruth, Naomi directed her on a mission (vv. 1–4), addressing her again as "daughter." Ruth had previously pledged to care for Naomi; now Naomi wanted to find security for her. Realizing that she would not be able to provide for Ruth much longer, she desired to provide Ruth with the security that marriage could bring. Her rhetorical question about Boaz (v. 2) again highlighted their kinship, a key element of her plan.

Boaz apparently had not indicated any interest in Ruth. Perhaps Ruth still wore the garments of widowhood and Boaz did not want to interfere with mourning her husband's death. Naomi decided to tweak the situation with an audacious plan. As the grain harvest finished (2:23), Naomi knew that Boaz would be on the threshing floor.

Threshing Grain

After the grain was harvested, it was bundled in the field and carried manually or by cart to the threshing floor (Amos 2:13) to be beaten or trampled under animal hooves (Mic. 4:13). Sometimes the grain was crushed under the wheel of a cart to remove husks from the kernels (Is. 28:28). Threshed grain was tossed into the air, kernels separated from the husks (Amos 9:9), wind dispersed the chaff (Hos. 13:3), and kernels fell to the ground. It was then sifted and collected in piles (Matt. 3:12). The straw was used to feed animals. Threshing floors were strategically placed to take advantage of breeze patterns.

Ruth was instructed to bathe, anoint herself, put on her best clothes (v. 3), and go to the threshing floor. This does not need to imply that Ruth was staging a seductive situation. She was going out at night and was to dress appropriately, needing clothing for warmth at the threshing floor where Boaz spent the night guarding harvested grain. Naomi told Ruth not to make herself known until Boaz had gone to sleep (v. 3). Boaz would likely be in a contented mood and thus more likely to acquiesce to the request.

While Boaz was sleeping, Ruth was to uncover his feet and lie down. This expression has caused much discussion. The Hebrew terms for "feet" (*margelah*) and "lie down" (*shakab*) can be taken literally. As such, the phrase "uncover his feet" means to expose them to the night's cooler temperatures so as to awaken him. Some have pointed out that both of these terms are also associated with the genitals and sexual activity respectively. Notice, for example, how *regel* (a word closely related to *margelah*; Deut. 28:57; 2 Kin. 18:27; Ezek. 16:25) and *shakab* (e.g., Gen. 30:16; 39:12; Ex. 22:16) are used. The narrative indicates that "feet" is used in a literal sense (v. 14) because it clearly speaks about the place or area where his feet are lying (*margelah* designates the place of the feet of a person who is lying down).

Since Ruth was known to be virtuous (v. 11) and this story was obviously shared without embarrassment, there is no reason to understand the narrative as describing immoral behavior. Naomi mentioned nothing about seduction, speaking only of her concern to provide security for Ruth. Neither does she say anything about Ruth lying next to Boaz. Ruth was simply to lie down and wait for Boaz to wake up and tell her what to do (v. 4).

3:7–13. Ruth and Boaz. Boaz had enjoyed his dinner and was in good spirits. The Hebrew literally says "his heart was cheerful" (v. 7). The idiom expresses the contentment and well-being accompanying a pleasant experience. When Boaz awoke suddenly in the middle of the night and learned of Ruth's identity, she took the initiative and (through symbolic language) proposed marriage in accordance with the levirate system.

Ruth invited Boaz to cover her, symbolically confirming his obligation to her. Whether this was a covering of a garment or a metaphor of being taken under his wing, the concept was clearly one of protection and redemption, foreshadowing the ultimate redemption provided by

Christ (Matt. 23:37; Rom. 3:24). God uses the same phrase in Ezekiel 16:8 for His relationship with Israel. Boaz was required to do so because he was a close relative (*go'el*). Ruth obviously understood the duties of the *go'el* and that Boaz should fulfill them. It is at this point that the nobility of Boaz is revealed. Rather than taking advantage of the situation, he praised Ruth for her family loyalty and bold action. Earlier, Boaz had praised Ruth's care for her mother-in-law (2:11) and now he praised her as a noble, virtuous woman (vv. 10–11). She had shown even more kindness than at first (v. 10). Perhaps she had been shy or nervous, for Boaz told Ruth to not be afraid, promising to fulfill her petition and noting that everyone in Bethlehem knew she was a noble woman (v. 11).

Boaz acknowledged a complication in honoring her request, reassuring her that he would work things out. A closer kinsman in the family line complicated the situation, perhaps explaining why Boaz had not exercised his *go'el* duties previously. He also lauded Ruth for not pursuing younger men, either poor or rich (v. 10), suggesting that Ruth might have had other marriage suitors. Ruth was a young woman and could have attracted younger men. Instead she was devoted to Naomi and this impressed Boaz. Boaz commended Ruth for being a woman "of noble character"/"a virtuous woman" (v. 11). This matched Ruth's character with the description of Boaz in chapter 2.

Boaz advised Ruth to remain for the rest of the night (v. 13), using the identical word she had used in 1:16 when she promised to lodge wherever Naomi did. To "lodge" has no sexual overtones in the Hebrew Bible. It was too late to leave the threshing floor in the middle of the night, but she guarded her (and his) reputation by not being recognized or seen leaving. Any negative innuendo could hamper legal transactions at the city gate in the morning.

3:14–18. Ruth Returns to Naomi. When Boaz assured Ruth that he would do what he could, he used the word *go'el* four times—sealing his determination in a strong oath with an emphatic pronoun (lit. "[by] the life of Yahweh"). Boaz would settle the matter through proper procedure, not denying another man's right to act responsibly. Blessings formed an envelope around the speech of Boaz. He sent Ruth home with threshed grain, loading one of her garments, perhaps some kind of outer mantle.

Ruth presented Naomi with the unusually large amount of threshed grain from Boaz, mentioning his statement that the narrator did not record earlier—that Ruth should not go home to her mother-in-law empty-handed. These are Ruth's last recorded words in the book (v. 17). Naomi, who declared herself "empty" when returning from Moab (1:21), was empty no longer. She had suffered two tragedies of emptiness: famine and childlessness. The generosity of Boaz replaced famine with food, and his *go'el* promise suggested that her childlessness might soon end. The narrative next moves toward the climax.

4:1–22

At the City Gate

The question as to whether there was a *go'el* for Elimelech was already settled in chapter 3. Now the question is whether the close relative would perform the duty of the *go'el*. The chapter opens with Boaz going to the city gate that morning (v. 1) and closes with him taking the responsibility of a *go'el*, bringing hope to the poor widows and sustaining the posterity of Elimelech through Obed, whom Naomi treated as her own son (v. 17).

4:1–4. The Nameless Redeemer. Civil and legal matters were handled at the city gate (Deut. 21:19; 22:15; 25:7). Ready for business, Boaz beckoned Elimelech's close relative without naming him. Ironically, the man who refused to preserve the name of his deceased kin was not named (vv. 6, 8).

The elders of the town joined the two men. These elders governed the community's civil and legal affairs (Deut. 25:7–8; Judg. 8:14, 16; 1 Sam. 11:3). Perhaps Boaz, a wealthy land owner, was one of the elders. Verses 3–10 record the legal proceeding, with one explanatory verse (v. 7). In the legal proceedings, Elimelech was called "our brother"/"our relative" (v. 3). Clan property was never to be taken permanently from the family. In Leviticus, the *go'el* was to solve property issues (25:23–25). Since Naomi possessed land, a *go'el* could redeem her property. Perhaps someone had annexed Elimelech's land while she was in Moab. Boaz spoke on behalf of Naomi, using proper legal terminology. The legal rights of the other kinsman were recognized as Boaz informed him in the presence of the elders (4:4). Acknowledging kinship order in the family, he wanted to know the other kinsman's intention (cf. Jer. 32:7–9). The other kinsman replied that he would redeem the property. Boaz added the pivotal stipulation (4:5), informing the other kinsman that Ruth would come with Elimelech's property because he had no sons—only two widows remained. Naomi's widowhood is not mentioned, probably because her advanced age prevented her from bearing children.

Boaz argued that Elimelech's family line was precarious; Naomi was past child-bearing age and her two sons had died. Ruth was her daughter-in-law. The kinsman marrying Ruth would guard Elimelech's name by fathering an heir through her. The main issue was not simply to retain the land or to care for Ruth but to ensure that Elimelech's family line would survive. The other kinsman declined the *go'el* duties. He changed his mind, perhaps previously calculating that the widow associated with the land was aged Naomi, who would pose no complication. His own land holdings would increase, and being loyal to the family name would enhance his reputation. Future profits from the land could offset expenses in caring for the elderly Naomi. But Ruth, a much younger widow, was able to bear a child—a rightful heir to Elimelech's property. He thereby waived his redemption rights (4:6), saying that he could not do it and that Boaz should act as redeemer instead, leaving no doubt regarding his decision.

4:5–12. Boaz the Redeemer. Without any hesitation, Boaz accepted the kinsman duties. Bethlehem's elders accepted the legality of the nearer kinsman's decision and Boaz's proposal. The biblical writer comments on a binding custom utilized with property transfers and redemptions (v. 7). The sandal symbolized the legal transfer of the right of redemption from one relative to another (see Deut. 25:5–10). Boaz then exercised the redemption right he had just acquired (v. 9). He spoke to the elders and to everyone listening to the proceedings. "You are witnesses today" was apparently an OT "notarizing" action (see Josh. 24:22; 1 Sam. 12:5; Is. 43:9–10, 12; 44:8). Boaz specified the issues involved in the transaction, including everything which belonged to Elimelech, Chilion, and Mahlon. He then added that Ruth had been married to Mahlon, perhaps necessary for the formal, legal declaration. This is the only time that the narrative mentions which son of Elimelech Ruth had married.

After the transfer of responsibilities, Boaz enumerated the specific details of what had happened. His speech was framed with identical phrases, "You are witnesses today" and "today," highlighting his promptness in fulfilling his promises to Ruth (3:13) and honoring Naomi's confidence in him (3:17). This family's tragic situation ended as Boaz stated emphatically that he had acquired Ruth the Moabite, Mahlon's widow, as his wife. The marriage itself would occur later (v. 13). The elders and the people at the gate responded by saying, "We are witnesses" (v. 11). With the transaction complete, a blessing was pronounced on Boaz and Ruth that Yahweh would establish a place for Ruth among Rachel and Leah, the foundational matriarchs of Israel. Like Rachel and Leah, Ruth would become an ancestress of the covenant line (vv. 11–12).

The witnesses also mentioned Judah's prominent family line, comparing Ruth with Tamar. Both were foreigners who perpetuated Judah's family line when threatened with extinction. Comparing Tamar and Ruth does not disparage their characters or ethnicity but equates the levirate nature of their situations. The blessings knit together several themes—as Rachel and Leah built up the house of Israel, so Ruth might build up the house of Boaz (see Deut. 25:9; see also 1 Sam. 2:35; 1 Kin. 1:38; 1 Chr. 17:10). The blessing of fertility was emphasized by referring to Ruth as a "young woman" (v. 12). The closing line invoked Yahweh's blessing upon her descendants (lit. "seed"; Gen. 12:7; 13:15; 2 Sam. 7:12) whom the Lord would give her. Yahweh is exalted as the true source of offspring.

4:13–22. A Genealogy. Having married Ruth, Boaz consummated the marriage. Employing a unique grammatical construction, the narrator shows that Yahweh "enabled her to conceive"/"gave her conception." Yahweh's action opens and closes the book (1:6; 4:13). While married to Mahlon, Ruth was not able to bear a child. Now Yahweh blessed her, and she gave birth to a son to preserve the family line. In the final scene, the women of Bethlehem prayed for the baby, bursting into praise to Yahweh for His kindness and goodness (vv. 14–15).

When the book opened, Naomi spoke of her life as being emptied, but after the birth of Obed she was full of joy. Ruth was declared to be better to Naomi than seven sons. A Moabite foreigner revealed true *khesed* in Bethlehem. In a sense, death was overcome. Baby Obed would be a restorer/renewer of life for Naomi (v. 15a), assuring that the family line would continue. He would also nourish and sustain her in her old age, a reversing of Naomi's suffering from serious famine earlier and providing in some sense a joyous antidote for her childlessness (1:11–13, 20–21). Naomi's bitter outburst closed chapter 1; these exuberant comments bring reversal. The inclusio, opening in 1:5 where Naomi is bereft of her two sons, closes with baby Obed in Naomi's bosom and reversing her tragic emptiness (v. 16). Surprisingly, the women give the child his name (v. 17), which means "servant." It could be that the women were confirming the name chosen by his parents, underscoring a jubilant moment.

Although nothing more is known about Obed, his birth is significant because his grandson would be David. God built the royal line through a Moabite widow. The genealogical heading (v. 18) referring to Perez is followed by nine entries in the "A-generated-B" pattern, the form appearing several times in Genesis. The genealogy in Ruth traces David's descent from Perez, the son of another foreign widow, Tamar. The promise of blessing to all people through Abraham finds partial fulfillment in the story of Ruth (Gen. 12:1–3). This promise pushes history forward and fills it with expectation and hope.

1 SAMUEL

INTRODUCTION

Title. The two books known today as First and Second Samuel were originally considered one book in the Hebrew Bible, called the "book of Samuel." The division into two books in modern translations was due to the combined length of fifty-five chapters. Following the pattern of some biblical books that end with the death of the main character (Gen. 50, Deut. 34, Josh. 24, etc.), the division between the two books of Samuel was made with King Saul at the point of death.

The practice of dividing Samuel's book into two volumes originates with the Septuagint (LXX), the earliest translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek. In this ancient version, 1 Samuel is called "First Kingdoms" (*Basileion Alpha*). The division into two books has been followed by later translations of the Bible. The opening chapters of 1 Samuel set the prophetic tone by telling the story of Samuel's birth and his early ministry for the Lord at the sanctuary in Shiloh.

Date and Authorship. Although the book does not explicitly name its author, the title of 1 Samuel reflects the dominant role the prophet Samuel played in the first volume. Samuel was the last of the charismatic judges in Israel prior to the rise of kings. He also functioned as prophet and priest. In such a capacity, this leader anointed Saul and David, Israel's first two kings, whose personal lives and activities occupy the major part of the narrative. Jewish tradition assigns authorship of the first volume to Samuel and the second volume to Nathan and Gad. This seems to find some support in 1 Chronicles 29:29, which states that information concerning David's reign could be found in books by Samuel, Nathan the prophet, and Gad the seer. If this hypothesis regarding authorship is correct, the final book of Samuel was probably produced shortly before or soon after the death of David. They cover the history of Israel from about 1100 B.C. to 971 B.C.

Linguistic and literary/critical approaches to the Bible have proposed a number of theories for the book's anonymous composition. Many of those theories have proven to be too hypothetical to be taken seriously. Clearly, a periodic updating of the language of 1 Samuel is evidenced in 1 Samuel 27:6, which states that time has elapsed since the recorded narrative occurred. At the same time, the author(s) of the books of Samuel explicitly claim to have used authentic source documents (2 Sam. 1:18) mentioned elsewhere in the Bible. In this commentary, biblical passages are treated as they stand. Their unity, as well as their historical and literary quality, is highly affirmed. Ultimately, the authority of the Bible rests on its divine origin.

Backgrounds. First Samuel is the sequel to the book of Judges. Together with 2 Samuel, it presents the story of Israel's first two kings, Saul and David. First Samuel begins by presenting the delicate transition of leadership in Israel from tribal judges to the first widely accepted monarch, King Saul. In fact, the author of the book of Judges repeatedly attributed the prevailing chaos and anarchy in the land to the absence of a king who could give the people a sense of national identity and security (Judg. 17:6; 18:1; 21:25). The transfer of power could be peaceful (from Eli to Samuel), problematic (from Samuel to Saul), or even difficult and openly hostile (from Saul to David).

Theology and Purpose. Due to its location within the canon, the books of Samuel are popularly viewed as primarily "historical" in character. However, they belong to a section of the Hebrew Bible known as "Early/Former Prophets." The books of Samuel offer us a significant number of theological themes for analysis, making it difficult to choose one as central.

Among the most important themes is the topic of divine leadership versus human interference.

1. Leadership in Transition. In the books of Samuel, we are confronted with one of the most serious crises in the history of the people of Israel. It was an attempt to redefine the nature of the relationship between God and Israel. The leaders were rejecting an old administrative structure and style—namely, theocracy—in order to introduce a new one, a monarchy with a human king. The relationship between God and Israel was properly defined and established at Mount Sinai. There Israel had an awesome encounter with God. This encounter transformed the twelve tribes into "a kingdom of priests" among the nations, a "holy nation" to the Lord (Ex. 19:6). God was recognized and accepted by the people as their only true King (Ex. 19:8; 15:18), dwelling among them while blessing, instructing, and protecting them. Thus, the theocracy was born.

The new model was, in many respects, incompatible with Israel's faith. The new system, if accepted, had to be transformed or reformulated in order for it to properly fit into the Israelite faith. The books of Samuel describe the process by which God was transforming, reformulating, and redefining kingship as known in the ANE, and Israel's demand for an earthly king was a threat to His leadership.

The books of Samuel open during the old system of judges but close with a new system in place. The first book introduces Samuel, the last judge of Israel. He is the link between the old system and the new one. He was located at a critical juncture in the history of the nation and was indispensable for a proper theological, historical, and spiritual transition. Samuel was a true giant among the prophets of the OT.

2. Redefining Human Kingship. Samuel begins redefining the nature of kingship in Israel based on God's instructions given in Deuteronomy 17:14–20. The king was to be an Israelite and was not to imitate the absolute monarchs of the surrounding nations by accumulating emblems of power and worldly grandeur. Instead, he was told to focus on the reading and practice of the Torah, God's revelation of truth and justice. Moreover, the king was to think of himself as a fellow Israelite brother. According to the Bible, kings in Israel were not allowed to do as they pleased. They were subject to a higher power and to the rule of law and morality, which was upheld by the prophets. In other words, they were to function as vassals of the true King of Israel, the Lord.

The success of the redefinition of kingship would depend to some extent on the attitude and self-perception of the early kings of Israel. The appointments of Saul and his successor were of critical importance. Herein lies the reason for the significant amount of space dedicated to the lives of Saul and David in the book. The contrasts between the two are very marked and deal with their own understanding of their role as king. It is soon apparent that Saul wanted to be king and not so much a vassal of the Lord. He acted on his own, independent of God, and the result is his rejection. God was redefining the nature of kingship in Israel, and Saul was not the model. The true model was David. He thought and acted as a vassal of the Lord—the servant of the Lord, under whose authority he functioned. He became the ideal king who was used to evaluate the performance of all later kings. He would also become a type of the future Messiah, Christ Jesus. In Christ, the divine King and the earthly king become one to rule over a kingdom that will last forever.

3. God's Presence and Purpose in History. The books of Samuel are not just historical but also prophetic in nature, teaching that the Lord cared for the people of Israel in spite of their repeated failures. The sanctuary with the ark of the covenant in the midst of the community was a constant reminder of God's abiding presence among His people. But His presence should not be taken for granted. The destruction of the sanctuary at Shiloh happened because of sin and rebellion (Ps. 78:60). Later prophets taught the people not to place their trust in the physical presence of the temple but instead to place their hope in the living God, obeying the covenant stipulations and showing mercy and justice to others (Jer. 7:4–7).

In spite of the constant failures of the nation's leaders, the Lord never completely abandoned His people. Even when human leaders fell short of the divine ideal, God promised that the coming Messiah from the house of David would fulfill His promises. Biblical narratives make it clear that God's providence directed the course of both Israel's history and that of the nations, infusing them with everlasting hope.

Literary Features. Historical narrative is certainly dominant, but it is not the only literary form used in 1 Samuel. Songs and lists are scattered throughout the book. Conversations are usually brief and include only what is essential for the reader to know. Three characters stand prominently in the stories: Samuel, the godly prophet; Saul, Israel's first king; and David, son of Jesse, the young king-elect.

The personal life of each leader is portrayed realistically, filled with their passions and aspirations. Both negative and positive qualities are placed side by side in the text. Samuel, for example, is depicted as a deeply spiritual person, whose sons unfortunately fell short of their father's outstanding example. King Saul, on the other hand, was a brave warrior who failed to heed the divine instruction given through the prophet. Young David was a very talented person with a deep sense of justice, yet he had difficulties managing his passions as well as his family's affairs. In terms of content, the book deals with the ministry of Samuel (chaps. 1–8), the reign of Saul (chaps. 9–15), and the relationship between Saul and David (chaps. 16–31).

COMMENTARY

1:1—8:22

THE MINISTRY OF SAMUEL

The opening chapters of the book focus on Samuel's early years, and they are cast in contrast with the failures of the two sons of the high priest Eli, who would normally inherit their father's position. Samuel and the two young men were reared in the same house, yet his dedication to the Lord differed from that of these two priests, who were evil and disconnected from the Lord (2:12). Samuel grew in favor with the Lord and with the people (2:26). This section discusses the birth and call of Samuel (chaps. 1–3), struggles with the Philistines (chaps. 4–7), and the call for a king (8:1–22).

1:1—3:21

Samuel's Birth and Call

The book begins with the story of the family of Elkanah and his two wives. Elkanah belonged to a distinguished Levitical family line in Israel. Samuel was born into that family and his unusual birth led to the dedication of his life to the Lord.

1:1–7. The Family of Elkanah. Although monogamy was the ideal form of marriage in Israel, some men had more than one wife (Deut. 21:15–17). Old Testament narratives describe the dangers and evil results of this practice, as is the case in 1 Samuel. Elkanah's family lived in Ramah (1 Sam. 1:19) in the territory of Ephraim, but he belonged to the tribe of Levi (1 Chr. 6:26, 33–43). The phrase "an Ephraimite" in Elkanah's genealogy (1:1) should be understood to mean that they lived among the Ephraimites. This is further supported by the fact that Samuel wore a linen ephod (2:18) and ministered in the sanctuary.

They worshiped no other gods but the Lord of hosts, who cannot be "defied" by an enemy (1 Sam. 17:45). They lived a good life. The focus of the story is on Samuel's mother, Hannah, whose name means "grace." Hannah's inability to have children spoiled the happiness of her marriage to Elkanah, whose name ironically means "God creates" or "God possesses." It is likely that Elkanah married Peninnah because Hannah was barren.

To not have children in that culture was viewed as a disgrace or a sign of God's disapproval (Gen. 30:1, 22–23). Yet Scripture includes several stories about formerly childless women who, after being visited by God, gave birth to outstanding leaders such as Isaac (Gen. 21:1–8), Jacob (Gen. 25:19–26), Joseph (Gen. 30:1–4, 22–24), and Samson (Judg. 13:2–3, 24). Elkanah's double portion of gifts to Hannah was a sign of his great affection (cf. Gen. 43:34). Peninnah seemed jealous and intentionally hurt Hannah, who did not reciprocate but chose to weep in silence.

1:8–18. Hannah's Vow. Elkanah's reference to his devotion as more important than ten sons links this story with the previous book in the Bible (Ruth 4:15 refers to seven sons). Like Naomi, Hannah in her despair decided to turn to the God of Israel for help. Neither of these two ladies was disappointed in the end. Samuel's parents went on annual pilgrimages to the sanctuary at Shiloh to present themselves and their offerings before the Lord. This statement links the books of Samuel with the end of the book of Judges, where it is explained how an annual festival to the Lord was established in Israel (Judg. 21:19; cf. Ex. 23:17).

During the pilgrimages Hannah did not eat, yet she sat politely with her family until the end of the meals. There in God's presence at Shiloh, Hannah poured her heart out and asked the Lord to give her a son. She made a sacred vow (cf. Num. 30) to dedicate him to lifelong service in the sanctuary. Hannah's vow begins and ends with the mention of God's name. She also solemnly promised to raise her child as a Nazirite. The Nazirites were persons whose appearance and behavior showed a special dedication to God (see Num. 6; Judg. 13). After receiving a blessing from Eli, Hannah returned home in full confidence that the Lord had heard her supplication.

1:19–28. Samuel is Born and Dedicated. Whenever a Bible passage states that the Lord "remembers" an individual or group, it means that He plans to bring an end to their distress (cf. Gen. 8:1; Ex. 2:24—3:10). God's providence overrode Hannah's inability to have children. Although Samuel's birth was natural, it was remarkable because the divine power was at work in a special way at his conception. This is why Hannah named her son Samuel, which can mean "His name is God" or "[the one] heard by God." Both meanings demonstrate how in biblical times names commemorated significant experiences with the living God. The verb "to ask" dominates this passage in the original Hebrew (especially vv. 26 and 27). Hannah's experience anticipates Jesus's words, "Ask and it will be given to you…" (Matt. 7:7).

Hannah knew that her child was a special gift from God. After she stopped nursing him, she kept her vow and dedicated him to serve the Lord at the sanctuary in Shiloh under Eli's care. This was in spite of Samuel's young age. According to the custom in those days, a special ceremony was held for the child at the age of two or three years to mark the end of the weaning period. Abraham did this for his son Isaac (Gen. 21:8).

Hannah's act of faith received support from her husband, whose words sounded as reassuring as the blessing she had previously received from the high priest Eli (v. 17). The couple's special offering to the Lord also included "a three-year-old bull" (v. 25), as well as a measure of flour and grape juice. Yet the best part of the offering was Samuel, their "living sacrifice," who was dedicated to the Lord all his life (v. 28). Hannah's dedicatory words remind us of Eli's blessing (v. 17) and underline the complete fulfillment of the promised blessing.

2:1–10. Hannah's Prayer. Since this prayer takes a poetic form, it has also been called a song or psalm. In fact, many prayers found in the Bible are praise hymns, just like the one composed by Daniel in Babylon (Dan. 2:20–23). Hannah's prayer can be best described as a thanksgiving psalm of victory. Some interpreters call Hannah's prayer the "*Magnificat* of the Old Testament" due to its similarity with Mary's song of praise found in Luke 1.

This prayer celebrates God's righteousness and sovereignty as it brings down the proud and lifts up the humble. It praises God because He is powerful enough to reverse the fortunes of human beings. In a situation filled with hostility and despair, the Lord has provided a way out. He who is perfectly holy has exalted Hannah's horn, a common biblical symbol of power (see Ps. 92:10). The word "horn" in the original Hebrew is found at the beginning and end of this prayer, forming brackets around it. The reference to God guarding the feet of His children is a metaphor of divine providence (v. 9).

The Lord also upsets human schemes and causes reversals in individual lives and societies. Poor and rich, weak and mighty, living and dead are all subject to the One who is all powerful. To bring up from the grave (Heb. *she'ol*; v. 6) means to deliver from the power of death (see Ps. 30:3–4). God alone controls the rise and fall of nations on the face of all the earth. Divine security and stability are comparable to a rock, a metaphor for God's never-failing support and protection.

As Hannah said, God is all-knowing and examines the actions of human beings (cf. Prov. 24:12). Her prayer begins with a personal experience, but it ends with a far and wide proclamation of God's goodness and power. He has promised to take an active role in the events of human history in order to save the righteous and punish the wicked. Even the remotest people on earth (v. 10) would see God's involvement in the events of history through His appointed agent, who would be anointed to fulfill His great plan of salvation. God's "anointed one" is *mashiakh* in Hebrew, the word from which "Messiah" is derived. Here the term refers to the future king of Israel, who would be chosen by God. The psalm looks forward to the reign of David, the man after God's own heart, but it equally anticipates the future Son of David, the Savior of the world. His life and work will bring about God's ultimate victory over cosmic evil.

2:12–17. The Wicked Sons of Eli. It is tragic that the two priests who ministered before the Lord did not acknowledge His holy presence in the sanctuary. Their high calling should have been to exalt the holiness of God before all who came to worship. They had been called to be a light to Israel, but these two sons of Eli practiced evil and wickedness in God's very presence in the sanctuary.

Priests in Israel were entitled to a portion of the animal offering only after the fat had been burned as a sacrifice to the Lord. But the sons of Eli put themselves in first place and their servant threatened to use force to take whatever the priests wanted, showing contempt for God and His holy place. Individuals in leadership positions who dare to abuse their privileged status and take advantage of others cannot escape divine retribution.

2:18–21. Samuel's Childhood Ministry. The sons of Eli set a very negative example for young Samuel, who ministered before the Lord under Eli's supervision. But Samuel's character shows the opposite of what he saw in the behavior of Hophni and Phinehas. His spiritual ascent is contrasted with the moral descent of the house of Eli. In the same sanctuary of God where an obedient person prospers, the proud and the arrogant are condemned.

The narrative demonstrates the radical change in the life of Hannah and her husband as they went to the sanctuary every year. Yes, they went full of joy and gratitude to worship the Lord but also to visit their son who was already ministering before the Lord. He was the concrete expression of an answered prayer, growing now before the Lord to become one of the most important leaders of God's people. This time Hannah did not ask for a child, but Eli blessed her, asking the Lord to give her more children. He appropriated her prayer, perhaps with a poignant recognition and regret for his own failings.

The contrast between Samuel, a growing boy of integrity and promise, and Eli's own decadent sons was readily apparent. The blessing was more than a simple pronouncement of gracious words and hopes. It conveyed the direct and rewarding interaction by God in the lives of the faithful parents, as evidenced by the children born to them year by year. Thus, the divine blessing Eli was prompted to give carried an implied rebuke for his own inexcusable failings to confront the problems in his own family. Eli is presented to us as a pathetic figure, one who knew what was right and perhaps earnestly wished things to be different, but who lacked the will to act and weakly settled for events to play out with terrible consequences.

2:22–36. Prophecy Against Eli's Household. Ironically, the Tent of Meeting between the holy God and His worshiping people (Ex. 29–40) became a meeting point between corrupt priests and women who served at the entrance of the tabernacle (cf. Ex. 38:8). The morally weak father could only rebuke his sons (1 Sam. 2:24) instead of finding courage to remove them from the priestly office.

The two men had gone so far in their sins that they were affecting the spiritual lives of others. They represented God in the eyes of the people. As such there was no remedy for their transgressions, and nothing less than death was their deserved punishment (cf. Lev. 10:1–3); God had pronounced a death penalty against them. They sinned greatly against both God and their fellow Israelites by defeating the very purpose for which the Lord had appointed them to the priestly ministry (Deut. 33:8–10). As for young Samuel, he grew in good reputation with God and other people, as the boy Jesus would do many years later (cf. Luke 2:52).

Eli's desperate warnings to his sons were reinforced by a prophetic voice. A man of God not only rebuked the sins committed in Eli's household but also predicted the end to his priestly dynasty. Of particular note was the prediction that Eli's male descendants would die young. The presence of old persons in one's household was a visible sign of God's blessings in biblical times. The Hebrew word for "house" can refer to family or dynasty, and it occurs no less than ten times in this passage. The harsh verdict pronounced here applied primarily to the death of Eli's sons, who both died a violent death in a single day (1 Sam. 4:11), showing that they did not represent God, for He was not with them in battle. That same verdict applies later to the sad story of the massacre of the priests of Nob (chap. 22).

The text does not reveal who was appointed by God to take the place of Eli and his family. The later biblical narrative informs us that the line of Zadok, the priest who replaced Eli's descendant Abiathar, served the Lord faithfully during the time of God's "anointed" leader (v. 36), King David (2 Sam. 8:17; 1 Kin. 2:26–27). The words referring to God's anointed in vv. 10 and 35 bracket a passage in which the story of Samuel's ascent and the descent of the sons of Eli is located. Moreover, the same Hebrew word (*'aman*; "to be reliable, faithful") can refer to both the priest and his house. As for Samuel, he was destined to become a faithful prophet of the Lord, which is the topic of the next passage.

3:1–21. Samuel's First Prophecy. Chapter 3 presents the story of Samuel's call to prophetic ministry. The revelation that God gave to Samuel marked him as a prophet. Samuel was not the only person in the Bible who was qualified to minister as both priest and prophet. Some later prophets like Jeremiah and Ezekiel, though born into priestly families, were called by God to prophetic ministry. The Levites were not given a territory to live in but rather were spread throughout the tribes. Phinehas, grandson of Aaron, was given territory in the mountains of Ephraim (Josh. 24:33), although Samuel's family came through the line of Korah and not Aaron (1 Chr. 6:33–38). It seems then that a few Levite families lived in that area.

God's call to Samuel came in the context of the young man's faithful ministry under the officiating high priest, who affectionately called him "my son." The golden lamp of God located in the Holy Place provided light from evening till morning (Ex. 27:20–21; Lev. 24:1–4). Together with God's ark, the lamp symbolized God's presence in the tabernacle. The mention of the Lord's voice (Ex. 25:22; Num. 7:89), combined with the words "the LORD came and stood" (1 Sam. 3:10), is reminiscent of Moses's experience with God on Mount Sinai (Ex. 33:20—34:8). Yet the divine voice was not recognized by young Samuel or the aged priest. Revelation through a prophetic word was rare at that time and never before had Samuel received a direct revelation from God. Following the third call, Eli instructed Samuel on how he should answer the Lord. Being in a state of awe, Samuel omitted the word "Lord." By asking that important question, Samuel was becoming a servant of the Lord.

This chapter also reports another message of calamity that was to come on Eli's family. The tragic judgment was inevitable because the sins of the people had reached a full measure (cf. Gen. 15:16; 2 Chr. 36:16). These words only confirmed that which the man of God had predicted before (1 Sam. 2:27–36). In agreement with Hebrew thought, God first informed Samuel of what would happen and then gave the reason why. Eli's sons were committing a grave sacrilege against God. Tingling of both ears (3:11) is a figure of speech that describes the shock felt by all who heard the report about the disaster (2 Kin. 21:12; Jer. 19:3). Although Eli had rebuked his sons (1 Sam. 2:23–25), he was not able to restrain them.

The revelation sent by God did not make Samuel arrogant. He continued his daily duties as before, much like David, who went back to his flock after being anointed as the next king. Samuel also kept quiet about the message he had received in order to spare Eli from grief. An affectionate relationship had formed between the two, and the words "my son" could indicate Eli's informal adoption of Samuel. The old priest made Samuel swear that he would tell him the whole truth. The oath formula referring to God's punishment (v. 17; cf. Ruth 1:17) omits an explicit mention of harmful consequences involved.

Publicly, Samuel was recognized as a faithful and trustworthy prophet of God. He paid careful attention to God's messages and faithfully delivered them to the people, even a message of rebuke concerning Eli's family, even though Eli was like a father to him. True prophets delivered messages of hope *and* rebuke. Moreover, the words that God spoke through them did come to pass (Deut. 18:22), and this was true of Samuel. From then on, the word of the Lord and prophetic visions would no longer be rare (cf. v. 1) at the sanctuary in Shiloh or in all of Israel.

4:1—8:22

Battles with the Philistines

As was the case in the book of Judges, 1 Samuel reports that God's punishment for Israel's sins came in the form of foreign oppression. The first to be judged was Eli's family, followed by the whole nation when the Philistines captured the sacred ark of the covenant. Although Samuel is not mentioned in 4:1—7:1, everything revolves around his ministry and the coming challenge to the theocracy by the people. First, the prophecy of the unknown prophet and Samuel was now fulfilled with the death of Eli's sons and his own death. The capture of the ark would demonstrate that the Lord was able to overcome His enemies without the presence of a human king. The narrative is a display of God's sovereignty, although it would first appear that He was defeated by the Philistines. He defeated them in their own territories, in the presence of their own gods, and He was the one who returned the ark to Israel. Two important affirmations of Samuel are offered here to the reader. One is the fulfillment of his prophetic voice, demonstrating that he was a prophet of the Lord. The other points to the future when Samuel would tell the people that they did not need a king because the Lord had already demonstrated that He could defeat their enemies (the story of the ark's capture).

4:1–11. The Ark of God Captured. The next three chapters of 1 Samuel focus on the ark of the covenant, as if to reinforce the sad condition of the priesthood but particularly to highlight God's sovereignty. The author also gives a report about the death of several members of Eli's family in a single day, as foretold by a man of God (1 Sam. 2:34) and by Samuel (3:11–14). This certainly is a very dark chapter in the book, comparable with chapter 31, which reports the death of Saul and Jonathan. The first part of the chapter tells about the Philistine victory over Israel, while the second describes the impact of the defeat on Eli's family.

The Philistines at this time were a mix of people by the same name who had lived along the coast of the Holy Land during the time of Abraham. They were probably migrants from the Greek island of Crete (biblical Caphtor, according to the prophets; Jer. 47:4; Amos 9:7). These long time enemies of Israel were descendants of Ham (Gen. 10:6, 14). They settled the southeastern coast of the Mediterranean and formed a confederation of five cities (pentapolis): Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron, and Gath. For a long time, they were at war with the Israelites and controlled them militarily. The first reported battle took place at Ebenezer, which means "the stone of Help(er)" (cf. 1 Sam. 7:12). The battle's outcome made a major impact on Israel's worship, resulting in the celebration of God's abiding presence in the midst of His people.

By the order of the elders, who were replacing the aged priest Eli, the ark was brought onto the battlefield. This was done with the hope that the ark's presence would ensure the Israelite victory as it did at the conquest of Jericho (Josh. 6). The ark was a wooden chest containing the two stone tablets that represented the covenant between the Lord and Israel (Deut. 9:11; 10:5).

Israel treated the ark as almost an idol instead of opening their hearts to the living "LORD of hosts." The Philistine knowledge of Israel's religion was very limited and even incorrect. They thought that the Hebrews worshiped idols because the Hebrews brought a sacred object to the battlefield (v. 8). The Philistines had heard about the ten plagues the Lord had sent against Egypt (Josh. 2:10–11), but they thought those events had taken place in the wilderness.

In the parlance of the ANE at that time, the term "Hebrews" was a common designation for the people of Israel. The first person recorded in the Bible to be called a Hebrew was Abram (Gen. 14:13). It is uncertain where the name came from, but most likely it was the plural form of a term used to identify the descendants of Eber (Gen. 11:16–17). Eber, the great grandson of Shem, died just 16 years before Abraham (see "A Chronology Following the Internal Timeline of the Bible," p. 111).

When the Israelites uttered a loud shout (vv. 5–6), its effect was felt far and wide. In response to it, the Philistine cry was prompted by a great fear, yet they were still able to gather courage to fight with full strength as "men" (v. 9). In a military context the word "man/men" stands for strength and courage (1 Kin. 2:2). But not only were the Hebrews utterly defeated, the holy ark was captured by the enemy as a symbol of a defeated God. The statues of gods were customarily carried away by the conquering army as war trophies. All the Israelites could do was run for their lives and grieve over their great loss.

4:12–18. Death of Eli. A soldier from the tribe of Benjamin brought the bad news about the defeat. External signs of mourning included rending of clothes and throwing dirt or ashes on the head (2 Sam. 1:2). The report he gave to Eli increased in intensity (1 Sam. 4:17) and climaxed with the capture of the ark, news which the old priest had greatly feared (v. 13). The impact of losing the ark and his sons in battle led to Eli's death. His leadership had lasted four decades, just like the careers of some of Israel's famous earlier judges (Othniel and Gideon; Judg. 3:11; 8:28) and future kings (David and Solomon; 1 Chr. 29:27; 2 Chr. 9:30). The deaths of Eli and his sons on the same day brought the end to this priestly line, as predicted by a man of God (1 Sam. 2:27–36) and by Samuel (3:15–14).

4:19–22. Ichabod. The last in the series of disasters on that fateful day was the death of Phinehas's wife during her childbirth. We do not know much about Eli's daughters-in-law, but it is clear from the narrative that although Eli's sons were married, they still committed immoral acts (2:22). Overcome with pain, Phinehas's wife managed to name her child before dying (cf. Rachel; Gen. 35:18). Names often commemorated important events that took place at the child's birth. The name Ichabod, which means "no [more] glory," was to remind all Israelites of the tragic loss of the sacred ark. The word "glory" is here a substitute name for the ark of the covenant.

5:1–12. The Philistines and the Ark. The defeat of the Israelites implied that the stronger people prevailed over the gods of the weaker one. This is why war trophies, such as images of gods (idols), sacred articles, and pieces of armament such as swords, were deposited as trophies in the temples (21:9; 31:10; Dan. 1:2). The capture of the ark of the covenant by the Philistines teaches us that the Lord is stronger than any other being. Far from being defeated by the Philistines, the God of Israel still ruled over people and their gods, since both proved powerless in His very presence. The narrative prepares the way for the opposition of God and Samuel to the establishment of a monarchy in Israel. This may be the reason why the text refers to God's "hand," symbolizing His active role in the events reported. This word is found at least seven times in chapters 5 and 6.

The ark of God was captured and carried by the Philistines to the temple in Ashdod, a town located near the coast and a member of the five-city confederation ruled by the Philistine "lords." In addition to Ashdod, two more cities (Gath and Ekron) are mentioned in this chapter. The five principal cities of Philistia are listed in 1 Samuel 6:17. Dagon was a god of fertility and the chief god to the Philistines. Another temple to the same deity was located in Gaza, but Samson had destroyed it earlier (Judg. 16:30).

In the morning, Dagon was found prostrate before the sacred ark as a sign of reverence and total submission. This position showed the Lord's superior power over other gods. But Dagon was not the only target of the Lord's hand or the manifestation of His power. Many of the people were struck by a plague of tumors, reminiscent of bubonic plague, that was most likely spread by mice (mentioned in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible). The plague was life threatening (cf. covenant curses in Deut. 28).

This story may remind us of the Lord's plagues on the gods of Egypt (Ex. 12:12) and the readiness of the Egyptian magicians to admit that "the finger of God" was at work and nothing could match such a power (Ex. 8:19). The cry of the Philistines "went up to heaven" (v. 12), meaning it was heard by the merciful Lord. The next chapter tells about the resolution of this problem.

6:1—7:1. The Ark Returned to Israel. In Ekron, one of the five main cities in Philistia, the religious leaders responded to pressure from the Lord and decided to return the ark to the territory of Israel. The second half of this chapter tells how the people of Beth Shemesh reacted when the ark reached their city. Since handling the ark correctly was a serious matter, the plan for its safe return to Israel came from the Philistine priests, assisted by diviners, whose function was similar to that of prophets. These two classes of religious personnel made important decisions for rituals and the future. This is why they were consulted regarding the details about where and how the ark should be returned. It needed to be sent back with a guilt offering that would acknowledge the superior power of Israel's God and recognize the wrong done by the Philistines.

In v. 3 of the Greek translation (Septuagint) and a manuscript from Qumran, the text reads "and atonement will be made for you," in contrast with the Hebrew text, which refers to a "trespass"/"guilt" offering required for a sacrilege. The number of golden tumors and golden rats matched the number of the cities affected by the plagues. The Philistines believed that when the symbolic objects departed from their territory their troubles would go also. The rats did the opposite of the activities attributed to Dagon, the god of fertility—they devoured the food that people believed their god provided. From a modern medical perspective, the rats were most likely responsible for carrying the disease.

The Bible often connects giving glory to God with making confession of a sin (Josh. 7:19; cf. Rev. 14:7). Some Philistines were unwilling to part with the holy ark, which they believed possessed magical power. The priests and diviners reminded the people of the plagues, which had brought great destruction on Egypt, and called on them to learn lessons from past history. It is remarkable to see how much respect the Philistine priests and diviners had for the God of Israel.

At this time, sacred objects were kept in special chests. The cart carrying the ark and the chest should be pulled by cows. In this story, the cows lowed continuously as they went because they were steered to go in a direction opposite to their instincts. This was done without human agency. It is implied that God's angels were leading the cows in the direction of the land of Israel. The phenomenon was witnessed by the rulers and the people from each of the five city-states of Philistia.

The name Beth Shemesh means the house/temple of the sun-god Shamash. It was the nearest Israelite town located on the border with the Philistine territory. It also was a town in Israel where priests lived (Josh. 21:13–16). When the people saw the ark, they offered thanksgiving sacrifices to God, whose power and grace were at work in bringing the sacred ark home. The handling of the ark was the work of the male descendants of Levi (i.e., the Levites; Deut. 10:8). No other persons were allowed to perform this duty (Num. 4:19–20).

It appears that the ark became as dangerous to the Israelites as it had been to the Philistines. The people who looked into the ark committed the sin of irreverent curiosity and many died as a result.

The people's reaction was similar to that of the Philistines when they were struck earlier by the plague of tumors. There was much they did not understand about how God's holy presence was manifested in the ark and how to stand before Him. In the end, the ark was sent to Kiriath Jearim, a city located west of Jerusalem. It could not be returned to Shiloh because the sanctuary had been abandoned by the Lord and most probably was destroyed by the Philistines (see Jer. 7:12–15; cf. Ps. 78:60–61; see "Shiloh," p. 920). The new home of the sacred object was that of a priestly family, with whom it resided until the days of King David (2 Sam. 6).

7:2–17. Samuel Judges Israel. The death of the irreverent persons reported in the previous chapter caused the people to be fearful and the ark to remain in one place for decades. While many of Israel's earlier judges had functioned, perhaps primarily, as military leaders, Samuel's primary role was spiritual and administrative. As judge, priest, and prophet, he was faithful in his ministry to God and to the people of Israel.

Israel was oppressed by enemies during most of Samuel's time as judge. The precondition to peace and freedom was the rejection of idols, just as in the times of the patriarchs (Gen. 35:2–4), Joshua (24:16–23), and the Judges (10:16). The text refers to "Ashtoreths" (Heb. *'ashtarot*), images of the Canaanite goddess of love and fertility. Her Babylonian name was Ishtar. It also mentions *habbe'alim*, which were images of the storm god Baal, sometimes called Haddad. Samuel urged the people to turn away from idols and to serve God wholeheartedly. The heart was considered the thinking organ in biblical times and here it stands for one's whole being.

In this period of Israel's history, Mizpah was the place for national assemblies (1 Sam. 10:17; Judg. 20:1). The city was situated north of Jerusalem in the territory of Benjamin, whose people were famous warriors. Samuel was a leader known as a man of prayer, and he was urged by the people to never stop praying for them. Biblical prophets were known as persons who prayed on behalf of others (Gen. 20:7; Ex. 32:31–32; Jer. 15:1; Amos 7:2). Even in the later books of the Bible, Samuel is remembered as a man of prayer (Ps. 99:6; Jer. 15:1). The ritual of pouring out water before the Lord is attested only here in the Bible. Taken in context, it could be a ritual expression of the pouring out of one's life in prayer to God for spiritual cleansing (cf. 1 Sam. 1:15).

The second half of chapter 7 echoes the pattern known from the book of Judges about Israel's sin, repentance, and then salvation. Judgment on Israel's sins would usually come in the form of a foreign invasion. Verses 7 and 8 describe Philistine aggression and Israel's fear. The people turned to Samuel for help; he then offered prayer and a sacrifice to the Lord. As in the times of the patriarchs, the prophet selected a place and built an altar to offer sacrifices to the Lord, which has implications if the sanctuary was not destroyed in Shiloh.

Through the forces of nature, such as thunder and lightning, God caused panic among the Philistines and thus helped Israel (cf. Judg. 5:20–21). Such a reaction by the Lord reflects the divine covenant promises (Ex. 23:22). A stone named Ebenezer was erected to serve as a memorial of deliverance. Stone or rock is a common metaphor for God in the Bible. The place where Israel had earlier been defeated (1 Sam. 4:1) became the place of victory.

This victory, though small, was important. Unfortunately, it put only a temporary stop to the Philistine oppression. The Israelites also lived in peace with the Amorites. Their name literally meant "westerners" and was used in Mesopotamia to describe the people who lived on the western side of the river Euphrates. The Amorites at this time lived in the cities and towns of the Israelites.

Samuel's base was now his hometown of Ramah (1:19), the base from which he made yearly rounds to administer justice in towns of the heartland. He was born in this place and lived there until placed in service at Shiloh. Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpah (v. 16) were important centers in central Israel. The name Bethel means "house of God," and the place was located north of Jerusalem. The patriarchal stories describe how this town held religious significance from early times. Abram worshiped there, while Jacob later changed its name from Luz to Bethel (Gen. 28:19). Samuel's regular trips and the building of altars remind one of Abram's journeys through the land of promise (Gen. 12). Throughout his life, the prophet Samuel was a man of prayer, following in the footsteps of his mother. His close communion with God was the ultimate source of power for his outstanding political and religious career.

8:1–22. Israel Demands a King. From the beginning, the idea of an earthly monarch posed a huge problem for the prophetic view of Israel's government. The establishment of the monarchy necessitated many changes at both national and local levels. The divine kingship, known as theocracy, would be at odds with human kingship. The disadvantages of Israel's monarchy easily outweighed its advantages.

Disappointed with the behavior of Eli's two sons and the character of Samuel's sons, the elders asked for a new form of leadership that would conform with the customs of the surrounding nations (Deut. 17:14). It is ironic that Samuel's sons were judges entrusted with the execution of justice in Israel (Ex. 23:8), yet they perverted justice. At this time, positions of power were often assigned based on hereditary rights. This ensured stability in society. The downside of this custom was it sometimes created a platform for nepotism and corruption.

There were other reasons for the elders' request. One concern was the ever-present threat posed by the Philistines, the enemy whose military actions appeared to put Israel's very existence at risk. According to Samuel's view, the people asked for a king because they lacked faith in God and had lost sight of His power as manifested in the story of the ark. They were rejecting Him as King (8:7). This is why the prophet was so reluctant to listen to them. He knew very well that a strong centralized government could lead to abuse of power.

God respects the freedom He granted to humans, so He was willing to yield to the people's desire for a king. This was the same Lord who had saved them from oppressive slavery in Egypt and whom the people had proclaimed as their only King (Ex. 15:18; Judg. 8:23). For centuries, He had fought Israel's battles and given them many victories. This is why, prior to the institution of monarchy, Israel was a theocracy, meaning that God was their King. Gideon, one of the judges, knew this very well. When asked to be king, he refused and told them that the Lord ruled over His people (Judg. 8:23). Now the people were rejecting God as their King. In spite of this, the Lord was ready to take an active part in the selection of their earthly king.

Samuel informed the people that the future king would behave like the kings of the surrounding nations. His actions would be in conformity with the standard practices of ANE monarchs. Judging by their speech, the elders expected to get something from their future king. Yet Samuel described the king as one who would take from them and not give. Like the Lord, the future king would receive ten percent of all the material increase in the land (Lev. 27:30–32).

The king would take the best fields and estates for himself (1 Kin. 21). He would also collect heavy taxes. He would take young men and women into the army and press them into forced labor. Some would become his army commanders and administrative officers in the likeness of Egypt. Biblical mention of chariots and horses is often negative because they reminded people of Egypt's opposition to God during Israel's Exodus (Deut. 17:16). All this would clash with the personal freedom of individuals and families in Israelite society. The cry to God against foreign oppressors would soon be replaced with cries about their king's exploitations.

Samuel's prophecy about the oppression and hardships that would come with a monarch would be most obviously fulfilled by the fourth-generation monarch. While the scriptural record does not emphasize these kinds of hardships during the reigns of Saul and David, we get a glimpse of such kingly excesses in the reign of Solomon (1 Kin. 4:7, 22–23, 26–28; 5:13–17; 11:3). Those excesses are explicitly highlighted in the story of the protests of the people at the beginning of Rehoboam's reign (1 Kin. 12:4). Even as God acquiesced to their demands for a monarchy, He descriptively warned His people of the very things that ultimately would undermine that monarchy and result in civil war and a divided kingdom.

Sometimes God allows people to make choices contrary to His warnings and then suffer the consequences of those choices. The people and their elders rejected not only Samuel as their leader but also God Himself. Samuel was so upset that he sent the elders home without an answer. The people's desire to be like the other nations represented a flat denial of God's call of the patriarchs and also of Israel's unique status in the world.

9:1—15:35

THE REIGN OF SAUL

This narrative covers the appointment of Saul as king (9:1—12:25) and his kingship (13:1–35), which bridges the gap between the time of the judges (Samuel being the last) and the anointing of David. The reign of Israel's first king had a promising beginning, but Saul turned out to be a very different leader from Samuel in his lack of obedience to the Lord. This resulted in God's rejection of Saul and the end of his dynasty, similar to the outcome of the priestly line of Eli.

9:1—12:25

Saul Becomes King

The fact that at least five chapters in 1 Samuel (8–12) are devoted to the establishment of Israel's kingship shows how important this event was in Israel's history. The narrative in chapters 9–12 is dominated by two leaders, the prophet Samuel and King Saul.

9:1–26. Saul Chosen to Be King. The story in this chapter describes the circumstances under which the aged Samuel and the young Saul met, most likely for the first time. It is the story of a young man who searched for lost donkeys and found a kingdom. Donkeys were beasts of burden used for short distance transportation, while camels were used for long caravan trips, especially across deserts.

The text makes it clear that Saul, whose name means "asked of the Lord," was not seeking to become someone of high importance. In this sense, Saul's beginnings were like David's. If it were not for God's providence, Saul would have never become king in Israel. In this way, the reader is shown that the choice of Saul to be Israel's first king was God's will. As Hannah had said in her prayer, God raises the humble to the throne of honor and glory among princes (2:8). Kish, Saul's father, was a man of standing in Benjamin. This was a small tribe (cf. Judg. 20) that was sandwiched between Ephraim in the north and Judah in the south. The men of Benjamin were known to be excellent warriors. Saul was a very handsome man, partly due to his unusual height.

The author narrates the details of Saul's search in order to show how God Himself directed the course of events in Saul's life. A lengthy search for lost donkeys was followed by an unusual persistence of the servant who "happened" to have some money that could be used as a gift for the prophet, as was customary in Bible times (1 Kin. 14:3; 2 Kin. 8:8–9; Ezek. 13:19). The servant insisted that Saul ask the man of God for help in their search for the lost donkeys. The title "man of God" (1 Sam. 9:6) was used to refer to a spiritual leader of the people. A prophet was one whom God used to bring messages to His people. A seer was a person who received visions from God. God used His "seer" to find the person He chose to be anointed as king.

None of the things reported in this story happened by accident. When Samuel returned to Ramah (vv. 16–17), the Lord told him about Saul. The aged prophet was told by God to anoint the young man to become a "commander," "ruler," or "prince" (Heb. *nagid*) over Israel and subject to the supreme authority of the Lord, Israel's true King. In the context of the anointing of Saul, the word "king" is not used, only the title "prince." The king of Israel would be a vassal under the true King of Israel. When speaking of Israel, God used the affectionate term, "My people." The language used by God to describe His people's distress under the oppression by their future kings reminds one of Israel's outcry in Egypt (Ex. 3:9).

The old prophet and the young man met at the city gate, which was an important place used for business transactions in the town. Saul's modesty reminds the Bible reader of Gideon's response to the heavenly messenger (Judg. 6:15). Yet Samuel's duty was to treat Saul as the guest of honor. First, he gave the young man a seat in a prominent position at the table. Samuel then gave him the best portion of the food. Later, the prophet emptied a flask of fragrant olive oil on Saul's head.

Israel's "desire" (1 Sam. 9:20) was to have a king, and God's answer was the choice of Saul. "The desire of nations," on the other hand, has always been to have a universal king of peace, and God's choice is Jesus the Messiah (Hag. 2:7; see "The Desire of All Nations," p. 1136). The task before Saul was to deliver Israel from the Philistines (1 Sam. 9:16), but the task of Jesus is to save His people from their sins (Matt. 1:21). Saul was to rule over one nation, whereas Christ is King of kings and Lord of lords. His kingdom has no boundaries, nor will it ever end.

9:27—10:16. Saul Anointed King. Due to the Philistine threat and possible jealousy from some ambitious persons in Israel, Saul's anointing was done in secret. This would also be true of Samuel's future anointing of David (1 Sam. 16:1–13). So Israel's first two kings were both secretly anointed by Samuel. The ceremony consisted of pouring fragrant oil on the head of the person designated to be king or priest (Ex. 30:22–33). The anointed person was set apart for a special task before God. Because of this custom, Israel's king became known as the Lord's "anointed" or messiah (Heb. *mashakh*). In this way, the anointing pointed to the future Messiah, who would be set apart by God to save His people from their sins.

The future king was anointed by the prophet and expected to follow his instructions. The text says that Samuel also kissed Saul as a sign of affection between the old prophet and the young man. Like Moses going down to Egypt, Saul was in need of assurance that the Lord would be with him. Just as God had given Moses three signs, which pointed to His power (Ex. 3), so now Samuel gave Saul three signs to assure him that he was chosen by the Lord to be king and lead God's people.

The first sign was the good news that the lost donkeys had been found (v. 20). God assured Saul that He would care for his needs. The second sign was connected with God's appearance to Jacob at Bethel, where He assured the patriarch of the divine plan for his life. In that same place, Saul was given two loaves of bread that were intended for the sanctuary of Bethel. This demonstrated that his future office was sacred in God's eyes.

The last sign was related to a group of "prophets." At this time, they belonged to small communities of individuals who together sought mutual spiritual support. These communities later flourished during the time of the Greater Prophetic Movement started by Elijah and Elisha (1 Kin. 20:35). The group was led by the leader, called "father" in this text (10:12; cf. 2 Kin. 2:12). Accompanied by various musical instruments, they praised God as they were moved by the Spirit. One important consequence of these signs was that Saul was changed. He became a different person, filled with God's Spirit, thus confirming his appointment as king.

Saul's hometown was Gibeah, which means "hill." It was located in the territory of Benjamin, north of Jerusalem, and became known as Gibeah of God, Gibeah of Saul, and Gibeah of Benjamin. The presence of a Philistine post in that town attested to the Philistine military superiority over Israel at that time. After Saul became king, he made Gibeah the capital city of Israel. As Saul returned to his hometown, some people were curious to know more about his whereabouts. So far only he and Samuel knew about his anointing to be Israel's first king. This secret was kept even from close relatives.

10:17–27. Saul Proclaimed King. The national assemblies of Israel were held in the city of Mizpah, which had become an important spiritual center after Israel's victory over the Philistines (7:15–16). In his speech to that city, Samuel reminded the people that the Lord was the only Warrior against Egypt during their Exodus. This was the reason why He was Israel's true King (Ex. 15:18). Samuel did not have any problem with Saul as a person and thought that Saul was the best candidate for this lofty position. The prophet's issue was with Israel for seeking an earthly king in the likeness of the nations.

The right person was chosen through the casting of lots. This was done by the use of two special stones, called the Urim and Thummim, located on the high priest's breastplate. Lots were cast to single out the tribe, clan, family, and finally the individual (Josh. 7:14). When Saul was selected and called by God, he appeared timid. Samuel's introduction of Saul to the assembly was welcomed by the people. The shout "Long live the king" was part of the coronation ceremony (1 Kin. 1:25, 39; 2 Kin. 11:12).

After the royal acclamation, Samuel reiterated the regulations of kingship (cf. 8:11) and wrote them in a book for future generations. The detailed instructions were probably an expansion of the instructions found in Deuteronomy 17:14–20. A few persons, described as "rebels" or "scoundrels" ("sons of worthlessness" in Hebrew), looked down on Saul and seemed not ready to recognize him as their king (v. 27). They refused to call him king, but rather called him "this person." Saul was aware of their resistance, and at this stage in his life, he was able to hold his temper. In his later career, he seemed incapable of controlling his anger.

11:1–15. Saul Saves Jabesh Gilead. This story shows Saul's excellent ability to take charge of the top leadership position to help his fellow Israelites. Israel's first king is described in terms of the judges who ruled before. The Holy Spirit came upon Saul as in times past with Gideon (Judg. 6:34), Jephthah (Judg. 11:29), and Samson (Judg. 14:6; 15:14). The chapter begins and ends with the report of events that took place east of the Jordan. Sandwiched between these two references is a story about Saul in his hometown of Gibeah, west of the Jordan.

Josephus Flavius and a manuscript from Qumran (4QSam^a) both supply noncanonical background information to this story. They tell how the Ammonite king Nahash oppressed the people from the tribes of Gad and Reuben. This cruel ruler plucked out his subjects' right eyes, a deeply humiliating act (Judg. 16:21). Seven thousand people were able to escape and make their way to Jabesh Gilead. The name Nahash in Hebrew means "a serpent." His people, the Ammonites, were the descendants of Lot (Gen. 19:28); their small state lay northeast of the Dead Sea. Since two and a half of Israel's tribes had settled east of the Jordan (Judg. 10:6—11:33), they had clashes with the Ammonites, who lived east of Israel.

Jabesh Gilead was a town located east of the Jordan. People who lived in that town were related to the tribe of Benjamin (Judg. 21:14), in whose territory Gibeah was located. The leaders of Jabesh seemed to have forgotten God's saving power when they doubted whether anyone would help them (1 Sam. 11:3). It is also surprising that they did not ask Saul for help. Though anointed as king, Saul's kingship had not yet been inaugurated, and he resumed his ordinary farming activities. On a previous occasion, Saul had been moved by the Spirit and prophesied (10:10). Here, he forcefully recruited people by using the threats rooted in a covenant-making ceremony (cf. Jer. 34:18).

The unity of Israel's kingdom was always a very delicate matter. It was strongest during David's and Solomon's reigns. When united, Israel's army was stronger than the Ammonites. In their second message to the enemy, the people of Jabesh said, literally in the Hebrew, "we will go out to you" (v. 3). This could be interpreted in two different ways: "we will surrender to you" or "we will come out to fight." This war was not intended to add foreign territory to Israel but to fight against oppression and injustice.

The surprise attack was carried out before dawn, at the time when sleep was deepest. Like Gideon's soldiers, Saul's army attacked from three different directions (cf. Judg. 7). In the end, the credit for victory was given to the Lord, Israel's great Deliverer. Following the victory over the Ammonites, a ceremony was held in Gilgal, a town east of Jericho where the Israelites had earlier celebrated the Passover under Joshua (Josh. 5). During this ceremony, Saul was publically recognized as king over the whole nation. This great celebration included a peace offering and great rejoicing. In biblical times, the greater the sacrifice, the greater was the rejoicing. This occasion was perfect for a renewal of the covenant and for Saul's inauguration. Samuel's farewell speech is found in the next chapter.

12:1–25. Samuel's Address at Saul's Coronation. Samuel opened his speech by declaring that he did not use his power for personal gain (see Num. 16:15) and did not *take* anything from the people. This stands in contrast to Samuel's sons, Joel and Abijah, who had been appointed as judges yet practiced corruption. It also applied to the future king who, according to the prophet's words, would *take* from his subjects one thing after another (1 Sam. 8:11–18). The old prophet also reiterated his position toward the people's request for a king. Since he did not abuse his office and the Lord had always saved them, he could see no reason for Israel's request for a king.

Samuel mentioned some of the important judges (v. 11), such as Gideon (also called Jerubbaal; cf. Judg. 7:1) and Jephthah. The third name is *bedan* in Hebrew. It could be "Barak" (Judg. 4–5), while it has been suggested that "Samuel" should be read as "Samson" due to the similarity of consonants in the original text. During Saul's inauguration, Samuel invited the people to fear and show respect for the Lord. The future of Israel did not depend so much on the king's ability as it did on the Lord's power and the nation's loyalty to Him.

In closing his speech, Samuel prayed to God for a miraculous manifestation of divine power. In the land of Israel, it rains only from late autumn to early spring. Rain in summer is extremely rare. This miracle performed by God through his prophet demonstrated the power of prayer and the Lord's commitment never to abandon Israel. After all, they were *His* people, and all the nations around them knew this (see Ex. 32:12; Num. 14:15–16). Samuel would continue to pray for them and teach them God's way.

13:1—15:35

Saul's Wars and Conflicts

Saul's reign was characterized by military conflict with the Philistines. The beginning of this king's reign was very successful. Yet the author also records the divine displeasure every time Saul failed to obey God.

13:1–15. Saul's Unlawful Sacrifice. This story contrasts Saul's great fear of the Philistines with Jonathan's courage, summed up in his declaration that the Lord is able to save "by many or by few" (14:6). In the original Hebrew, the first half of v. 1 is incomplete because the first number has accidentally dropped out ("Saul was ___ years old when he began to reign, and he reigned over Israel [forty] two years"). The statement follows the usual biblical formula for a king's age (2 Sam. 2:10; 1 Kin. 14:21; 22:42), but it does not give the age of Saul. Based on the evidence from Acts 13:21, it is probable that Saul reigned over Israel for about forty years. This is far more likely than to say that Saul reigned over Israel for only two years.

It was customary for a king to set up a standing army. Saul did this very thing in anticipation of a war against the Philistines who had gathered in Michmash, located between Bethel and Gibeah. Israel's new king feared the well-organized Philistine army. Yet his son Jonathan, the crown prince, who is mentioned here for the first time, had no fear. He took action against the enemy and triggered the revolt. The ram's horn (*shopar*) was sounded in order to mobilize all Israelite men above twenty years. This brave act on Jonathan's part is credited to his father the king. Israel faced an army much larger and far better equipped for the battle. Some manuscripts say that "thirty thousand chariots" (v. 5) came against them. This could be a scribal error since the difference between the Hebrew words for "three" and "thirty" is rather small. Other manuscripts say "three thousand," which seems more likely.

Samuel had told Saul to wait for him to offer a sacrifice and give some specific instructions for the battle (10:8), and Saul waited for seven days in Gilgal. Because of Samuel's delay, and seeing his army diminish, Saul proceeded to offer a sacrifice. Saul was Israel's political leader, not its religious/priestly leader, and he disobeyed the instructions when he offered the sacrifice. The prophet rebuked him for this. By providing a long answer to a short question, Saul tried to defend himself. The king's disobedience would have serious consequences. He would lose his kingdom in favor of a person whose heart God loved, which alluded to the anointing of David reported later in the book. By disobeying Samuel, Saul rejected God's own instructions. There is a wordplay in v. 14—because Saul failed to heed God's *command*, the Lord would issue a *command* about a new leader. In this story Saul was again called a "prince" (*nagid*), which means that he was subject to the authority of Israel's supreme King.

13:16–23. No Weapons for the Army. After Samuel's departure, Saul moved his army from Gilgal to Gibeah in order to move geographically closer to his son Jonathan. The goal of this move was to form a single army in Geba, the place separated by a valley from Michmash, where the Philistine army was positioned. The enemy's raiders went out regularly and inflicted much damage on the population. By grouping together, Israel's army became more united, while the Philistine army became more and more divided.

The Philistines held the monopoly in that area on iron tools and weapons, so the Israelites lacked the necessary instruments of war. The Israelites also depended on their enemies for the expensive maintenance of their agricultural tools. The high price is expressed by the Hebrew word *pim*, which occurs only here in the Bible and refers to two-thirds of a shekel. Due to the lack of proper armament, most Israelite soldiers fought with bows, arrows, and slingshots.

14:1–23. Jonathan Defeats the Philistines. Chapter 14 presents a story from Saul's career characterized by a mixture of military successes and personal conflicts with other Israelites, including his eldest son Jonathan. The remarkable details found in the narrative, such as the names of the two rocks, Bozez and Seneh (v. 4), place this story in a geographic location the ancient readers would have immediately recognized.

In spite of the fact that the Hebrews used inferior weapons and were fewer in number, Jonathan bravely attacked the Philistine soldiers, whom he identified in a derogatory way as the "uncircumcised" (v. 4). Although the practice of circumcision was not limited to the land of Israel, in this context the term used by Jonathan describes the Philistines, who were not a part of the Abrahamic covenant (cf. Gen. 34:14). Jonathan's courageous action, combined with a supernatural intervention from God in the earthquake, demonstrates that Jonathan was someone who was in close connection with the Lord. His prediction is given in the past tense to stress its certainty: the coming victory is as good as done.

Saul seized the opportunity to start the battle against his bitter enemies. He was accompanied by the priest Ahijah from Shiloh, who, according to some ancient versions, brought the ephod, a garment used by priests for consulting the Lord. Probably the decisions were made based on the "yes" or "no" answers from the use of two stones, Urim for "yes" and Thummim for "no." However, the Hebrew text does not read "ephod," but "ark of the God," and it is better to retain this reading. The ark was a symbol of God's presence among His army. It was brought from Kiriath Jearim for this military event and later returned there.

Saul's soldiers were joined by the Hebrews who were serving in the Philistine army, along with those who had been in hiding (14:21; 13:6). The battle resulted in a great victory for Israel that only Jonathan had expected. The text makes it clear that this success should be credited to the Lord. Later the soldiers pointed to the role that Jonathan played in this battle.

14:24–46. Saul's Rash Oath. In his pride, Saul made a series of impulsive vows that exposed his people and his oldest son to danger. The Bible

presents stories such as Jephthah's vow to show how making rash promises can afflict close family members (Judg. 11:30–31). Swearing in the Lord's name is particularly binding (Deut. 23:22–23). It appears that Jonathan had a great concern for the well-being and safety of the soldiers, and in this he was different from Saul. Jonathan's attitude served him well because when his father's irrational behavior threatened his life, the soldiers refused to carry out the execution that came from Saul's impulsive order. After all, Jonathan had only tasted a bit of wild honey, so why such a harsh punishment? What was this in comparison with the great victory granted by the Lord through the bravery of the crown prince?

Exhausted and hungry, the soldiers ate meat with blood in it (vv. 32–33). Eating meat with blood was forbidden in Israel because blood symbolizes life as belonging to God (Gen. 9:4; Lev. 19:26; Deut. 12:23). Saul took action and attempted to solve the problem he had created. When an animal was slaughtered on a stone, the blood could be drained out of its flesh before it was cooked and eaten. But despite his efforts at conformity to God's instructions, it was becoming clear that under Saul's command, the connection between the Lord and Israel's king was growing weaker. Saul would consult the Lord most of the time when he was urged by others to do so (e.g., v. 36), and sometimes the Lord did not answer him. The reason for this must have been his half-hearted devotion to God. Even when people responded to him with silence, he did not realize that the problem was with him and not with others.

14:47—15:9. Saul's Continuing Wars. Throughout Saul's reign, there were battles with surrounding nations, especially the Philistines. Moab, Ammon, and Edom were Israel's three neighbors on the eastern side of the Jordan. All three people groups were related to Israel through the patriarchs. Mention is specifically made of a battle against Amalek. The importance of obedience to God is the topic that dominates the story of God's rejection of Saul as king. Chapter 15 opens with Samuel's firm statement to Saul about the importance of following God's instructions. The people of Amalek were nomadic raiders and bitter enemies of Israel to the south. Samuel called them "wicked" and "sinners" (v. 18). Their attacks against Israel came at the most critical moments of Israel's survival in the wilderness and were aimed at the total destruction of God's people (Ex. 17:8–16; Deut. 25:17–19). This attitude was in sharp contrast with the Kenites, who showed kindness to Israel, especially through Moses's father-in-law. The command here is in the form of a ban (Heb. *kherem*, "to exterminate") to be carried out on the main Amalekite settlement (v. 5). All the spoils of war were to be dedicated to the Lord.

Saul's decision to spare King Agag and the best part of the spoils stood in direct and flagrant defiance to God's clear command. In the book of Esther, the enemy of the Jewish people was called Haman the Agagite (Esth. 3:1), whose ancestry was Amalekite. Saul may have intended to use Agag as a negotiating tool with the rest of the Amalekite people. But Agag's punishment was intended to correspond with the crimes he had committed (1 Sam. 15:33). While the author states twice that the Lord was sorry for having chosen Saul to be king over Israel (vv. 11, 35), Saul's self-centeredness led him to build a monument to honor himself at Carmel (v. 12).

15:10–35. Saul Rejected as King. When questioned by Samuel, Saul put the blame for disobedience to God on his soldiers' greed, though later he included himself ("we" in v. 15) in his report. He would not admit that he had done anything wrong. For Saul, the end justified the means, and he claimed to want the best animals to offer as sacrifices to the Lord.

Samuel's words from vv. 22–23 read as poetry. In God's eyes, to do what is right is more important than rituals. Obedience takes precedence over the best sacrifices. This same teaching would be proclaimed down through centuries by prophets like Amos, Isaiah, Micah, and Jeremiah. Rebellion and arrogance, on the other hand, are forms of idolatry. Such sins cannot be removed through the performance of religious rites but require true repentance in order for God's forgiving grace to reach us. The Lord grieves when people make wrong choices.

Saul was afraid of the consequences of his disobedience, particularly of his public humiliation, and asked Samuel for forgiveness. He was forgiven, yet his rejection as leader of Israel still stood. He was reaping what he had sown. Saul had rejected God's command, so the Lord rejected him as king. When this happened, Samuel wept bitterly and stopped supporting Saul as king (vv. 7–11). The Lord's previous rejection of Saul had to do with his dynastic succession (13:8–24). In this case, the rejection applies to

Saul himself. The way was now prepared for God's choice of David reported in the chapter that follows.

16:1—31:13

SAUL AND DAVID

The second half of 1 Samuel narrates the interaction between Saul and David. It tells about the rise of David (16:1—17:58), David joining Saul's family (18:1—20:42), Saul's antagonism against David (21:1—26:25), David in Philistia (27:1—30:31), and the deaths of Saul and Jonathan (31:1–13). Samuel, who years before had anointed Saul to be Israel's first king, was now commissioned by the Lord to anoint David to replace Saul. Needless to say, Saul became increasingly jealous of David, who was very gifted and also a man after God's own heart.

16:1—17:58

The Rise of David

The choice of David as the future king of Israel follows the biblical pattern of electing the younger child over the elder. Although not related, this was also the case with Abel, Isaac, Jacob, Rachel, Joseph, Ephraim, Moses, etc. Outside the Bible, the custom was to favor the eldest child or son in the family. The reason given for the reversal in the story of David's anointing is that the Lord looks at the heart of a person.

16:1–13. David Anointed King. The Lord told Samuel to go to the house of Jesse. In order to disguise his true mission, the prophet used the pretext of offering a sacrifice in Bethlehem, the town located just south of Jerusalem. In this way he could not be accused of attempting a conspiracy against Saul. Discretion may have been particularly necessary because the road from Ramah to Bethlehem took Samuel through Saul's city of Gibeah. When Samuel arrives in Jesse's house, an element of suspense is introduced in the narrative as one son after the other is rejected. David's name shows up at the last moment when the prophet, not God, seemed to have run out of options. The unanticipated had happened and God's choice surprised all. Eliab's appearance reminds one of Saul, whose height was unusual (9:2; 10:23). Another biblical text lists the names of Jesse's seven sons and two daughters as follows: Eliab, Abinadab, Shimea, Nethanel, Raddai, Ozem, and David, and the daughters, Zeruiah and Abigail (1 Chr. 2:13–15).

David's occupation as shepherd prepared him to lead God's people (Ps. 78:70–71), as was also the case with Moses (Ex. 3:1). Some ANE kings called themselves shepherds of their people. The author makes it clear that David was the Lord's choice as the next king. He was filled with the power of God's Spirit (1 Sam. 16:13), which came on him as it did on Saul after his anointing (10:6). After Samuel's anointing of David, the old prophet fades away from the book. His privilege was to anoint Saul, Israel's first king, and now he had anointed David, Israel's greatest king and the ancestor of the Messiah. The remaining narrative will focus on the relationship between Saul and David until the day Saul takes his own life. In choosing David, God was about to reshape the concept of the monarchy according to His will.

16:14–23. A Distressing Spirit Troubles Saul. Since Saul had repeatedly disobeyed the Lord's voice, God's Spirit withdrew from him, and in its place an evil spirit began to disturb him. The Bible teaches that evil spirits are subject to God's control (1 Kin. 22:19–23). God's Spirit came on David, while Saul began experiencing serious mental disorders under the influence of an evil spirit. Faced with a permanent threat from the militarily superior Philistines and without God's protection, Saul became increasingly fearful and depressed. His attendants searched for a musician to sooth the king's trouble, based on a widespread belief that musical therapy could help relieve mental distress. They found David, and this is how he entered into the service of the king.

Since the Lord was with David, two of his talents gave him direct access to the court. In addition to being a skilled musician, David, whose experience consisted of fighting off wildlife up to that point, would become an able warrior. In some biblical passages, he is described as a sweet singer in Israel who composed psalms (2 Sam. 23:1; Amos 6:5). The author shows that David, from the beginning of his service, was well disposed and loyal to the king. This is why Saul liked him and began treating him as his own son. Moreover, David's father, Jesse, sent gifts to the king as a pledge of support, loyalty, and also as a means to secure the king's favor toward David. Later on, when David married Saul's daughter Michal, he became a member of the royal family. All of this was possible because of divine providence in the life of the young shepherd who was destined to become the next king of Israel.

17:1–58. David and Goliath. This famous biblical story portrays the triumph of a shepherd boy's faith over the physical strength of a giant who trusted in his arms and his idols. The setting of this event is the war that followed the Philistine invasion of a portion of Israel's territory. The two armies were stationed west of Bethlehem, near Philistine territory. Duels between two opposing champions prior to a full-scale battle were customary in ancient times (see 2 Sam. 2:14–16). The detailed description of Goliath's armor explains why the Israelites were so terrified.

About forty days later, David was sent by his father to bring food provisions to his older brothers, who had been drafted into Saul's army. Jesse also sent a gift to the army commander. The Valley of Elah was not far from the town of Bethlehem. When David saw Goliath and heard him speak, the young shepherd reacted to his words that brought dishonor to God's name. The surprise in the story comes from the fact that David was the youngest and least esteemed child in Jesse's family, yet he became a hero. Others referred to his youth (1 Sam. 17:33), pointing out that he was not of fighting age (which was twenty; Num. 1:3, 20).

David did not fight for his own popularity or gain but solely for God's glory. His dialogue with Saul shows his strong faith in the living God. While the king of Israel put stress on the importance of weapons, David focused on trust in God, who gives victory. Saul's unusual height in Israel was not enough to give him courage to fight this giant. Much like the rest of Israel's fighting men, he was afraid to fight Goliath (v. 11). The people of Israel, together with their leader, seemed to have forgotten God's covenant promise that He would fight their battles (Deut. 20:1–4).

In David's view, Goliath's challenge suggested that his god was superior to the God of Israel. The duel between two unequal soldiers shows the contrasts between an experienced military champion and an experienced champion of faith in the true God. Moreover, this was a clash of instruments of death versus confidence in the Lord of life. Curses by lifeless idols in order to demoralize and intimidate are contrasted with a statement about the living God. The whole world needs to know the saving power of the Lord, who determines the outcome of battles.

David was very confident that God would use his skill with a sling rather than depending on conventional fighting tactics and armor with which David was unfamiliar. The giant underestimated God's chosen instrument and with self-sufficiency went after David, not anticipating that the little shepherd-king would defeat him. David's victory over the giant was complete and became the catalyst of a great victory for the Israelite army.

After the battle, the king inquired of Abner, his chief army commander, about David's family, which apparently did not have a high social standing in Israel. This shows that David's service at the court was not yet permanent (16:17–23). While his musical talents had been known to the king, this time Saul also learned of David's military skills. Because Saul had promised to give his daughter in marriage to the soldier who would defeat Goliath (17:25), he was now obliged to reward David with the fulfillment of his pledge. Understandably, Saul wanted more information about the family standing of his future son-in-law. Now David had officially reached the royal palace—his future home.

18:1—20:42

David, Jonathan, and Saul

Saul's eldest son, Jonathan, who was the crown prince, became David's best friend. The two young men never viewed each other as a rival for the throne. Jonathan, his father's legitimate successor, with time would recognize David as the future king of Israel (1 Sam. 23:16–18).

18:1–16. Saul Resents David. Chapter 18 combines two different topics about David and Saul. David's success is mentioned three times in the text (vv. 5, 14, 30), and the people's love for David, contrasted with Saul's jealousy of him, is also mentioned three times in the chapter (vv. 12, 14–15, 28–29). David was successful because the Lord was with him, as He had been with Joseph in Egypt (Gen. 39:2). It became clear to more and more people that he would become Israel's next king.

David's victory over Goliath brought him much admiration from all the people and especially from Saul's family members. Jonathan made a formal pledge of loyalty to David, which included gifts of great value. When David assumed a high military rank in Saul's army, women in Israel would frequently welcome him after his battles with a song praising the accomplishments of both David and Saul. This way of celebrating victories was an established practice in those times (Judg. 11:34; 2 Sam. 1:20). The author of Exodus describes a similar way by which the Israelites celebrated the Lord's victory over the Egyptians in the Song of the Sea (Ex. 15:20–21).

Saul also liked David, but at the same time he was jealous of the young man's outstanding success. Because the song of the women was based on a numerical progression from thousand to ten thousand (cf. Deut. 32:30; Ps. 91:7; Mic. 6:7), Saul took this to mean that David was more popular. Yet the intention of the words shouted by women was to emphasize the magnitude of the victory and not necessarily to compare and contrast the two military leaders. Even so, the king's interpretation of the words made him very angry, and he began to fear for his throne. On occasion, Saul tried to kill David by throwing a spear at him. When that did not work, Saul schemed to harm him indirectly by appointing David to be in charge of very dangerous military operations so that an enemy would kill him.

18:17–30. David Marries Michal. While Saul's hostility increased, David was not hostile toward him or his family but instead showed great humility. In fact, he was so modest that he seemed willing to give up his claim to marry Saul's oldest daughter. Saul took advantage of that modesty, reneged on his promise, and gave that daughter to another man. This worked to David's favor because Michal, the younger royal princess, was in love with David.

Saul doubtless hoped that a marriage to Michal would make David more subject to his control or that an additional dowry requirement might be imposed, the fulfillment of which might result in David's death (v. 25). Michal is the only woman in the OT about whom it is said directly that she loved a man.

Although David had earned the full right to marry a daughter of the king (17:25), Saul imposed additional conditions for such a marriage. He sent word to David, who was poor and could not afford to pay the bride-price, that he should kill a hundred Philistines and deliver their foreskins to the king. David not only did as Saul demanded, but he doubled the prescribed bride-price. Saul's scheme failed in that David's victory over the Philistines showed again that he was a very capable military leader. In the end, David was fully qualified to become the king's son-in-law. Unfortunately, these successes made Saul even more afraid of David, whom he now considered to be his greatest rival.

19:1–24. Saul Persecutes David. The chapter describes Saul's increasing hatred toward David, based on his own low self-perception, as shown when Samuel found him. He openly showed that he wanted David dead on three different occasions. Under this duress, David found a temporary refuge in the company of the prophet Samuel, who lived in Ramah. Although David's family lived in the south, he fled to the north for safety. He felt that he needed support from the man who had anointed him to be the future king of Israel (chap. 16). The two men stayed in Naioth, which probably means "a camp" or "a habitation." Both were saved from bloodthirsty Saul by a manifestation of God's grace.

We are informed about Saul's ecstatic experience without details. Many people in Bible times believed that a trancelike state made a person receptive to divine revelations. Beyond the borders of Israel, ecstatic experiences were closely connected with prophesying. Saul's act of prophesying did not result in prophetic messages from the Lord but in a display or sign of God's power. Saul spent all day and night lying "naked," or without the outer garment, in front of Samuel. The Lord had humiliated him. Laying aside the royal regalia confirmed God's rejection of Saul as Israel's king.

20:1–42. Jonathan's Loyalty to David. This chapter is composed of four episodes (vv. 1–23; 24–26; 27–34; 35–42), with the first and last occurring in the open field where the young men could talk in private (Gen. 31:4). King Saul's son Jonathan was David's best friend and is one of the most positive characters in the Bible. He was loyal to David, even though he knew that David's success came at his expense. He also recognized that he would never be king of Israel because the Lord had chosen David to replace his father. David, on the other hand, respected Saul and had difficulty understanding why the king hated him.

The two young men made a pledge before the Lord by saying, "as the Lord lives." They promised to protect each other's lives and families (1 Sam. 20:12–17). The pledge was significant because its purpose was to prevent any possible future rivalry between the house of Saul and the house of David. It was not uncommon in ancient times for a new king to kill the family members of his predecessor (1 Kin. 15:29; 16:11).

The extended conversation between David and Jonathan in vv. 1–16 raises some interesting questions and presents a glimpse of Jonathan's character. He is shown as a goodhearted young man who seemed incapable of believing anything bad about anyone. He was loyal both to David and to his father. Earlier, Saul had been willing to kill Jonathan himself over the trifling matter of the honeycomb (13:44). Later (19:1–5), Saul had been explicit in his desire that Jonathan kill David. Yet in this conversation in the field, Jonathan seemed to have forgotten all this, or perhaps believed that with the passage of time Saul's attitude and unpredictable personality had changed. He was a man whose apparent innocence of heart made him either unable, or at least unwilling, to recognize what appears to us as the obvious conflict between his honor of and love for David and his filial duty to his father. He was not cynical or suspicious in nature, and Scripture doubtlessly does not want us to miss the significance of this honorable and stark contrast to his father.

David was absent from the Festival of the New Moon (cf. Num. 28:11–15; Is. 1:13) without a prior excuse from the king. Ritual impurity would prevent a person from participating in a festive meal. David's excuse shows that he was humble and submissive, yet his absence raised suspicion and enraged Saul. Because Jonathan tried to defend David, Saul accused his son of treason and wanted to harm him. With contempt Saul avoided saying "David," but instead referred to "the son of Jesse" and insulted Jonathan in the presence of family members and friends.

At the festival, Jonathan's eyes were fully opened to his father's true character and shameful treatment of David, and he made good on his loyalty to David by helping him escape. The narrative of this chapter is all about Jonathan and his remarkable, self-sacrificing commitment to justice, honor, and God's way of doing things, even at the expense of his own worldly advantage. By ensuring David's escape, the prince knew that he would never be king. A tragic and honorable figure in Scripture, Jonathan came to his end by loyally dying beside his ungrateful father.

21:1—26:25

Saul Persecutes David

Jonathan had accepted the fact that David would succeed his father as king (1 Sam. 20:31), but Saul could not agree to this and instead looked for ways to kill David. He intended to do this despite the fact that he had no proof of any wrongdoings on David's part. Saul's paranoia may have been motivated by the fear that David would kill him and take the throne by force, something that David was not planning to do.

21:1–9. David and the Holy Bread. There are two stories in this short chapter and they both show David's desperate situation stemming from a great fear. After the Philistines destroyed Shiloh and captured the ark, Israel's sanctuary moved to the town of Nob. David went there and lied to the chief priest in order to get some food and the sword of Goliath. The chief priest was Ahimelech, a descendant of Eli, who had been the priest at Shiloh and Samuel's mentor. Ahimelech was the leader of eighty-five priests (22:18). He gave to David, who was a highly ranked commander in Saul's army, the holy bread that was reserved for the priests (Lev. 24:5–9). David's lie to the priest resulted in a tragedy and the loss of many innocent lives (1 Sam. 22:18–19). He later readily acknowledged that he had been wrong (22:22). As with many problematic episodes in 1 Samuel, the biblical writer lets the story stand without any evaluation of David's actions and reports what seem to be the negative consequences that followed.

21:10–15. David Flees to Gath. Searching for safety, David attempted to find refuge as a mercenary soldier in the city of Gath, which belonged to the Philistines. Gath was the home city of Goliath, the giant he had killed. David hoped that he would not be recognized by the population. But his plan failed. Even the song sung by the Israelite women had reached Philistia. When King Achish of Gath learned this was the same soldier who had previously fought against the Philistines, David played a madman in order to save his life. Had he told the truth, some think the Philistines would have still welcomed him because they were at war with Saul, who was pursuing him. The heading of Psalm 34 connects that psalm with this story about David.

22:1–5. David's Four Hundred Men. After he escaped from the city of Gath, David hid in the barren region of Adullam, located at the border with Philistia not far from Gath. Here he was joined by a number of social outcasts who were outlaws like himself. David cared for the safety of his family and made arrangements for their stay across the Jordan in the land of Moab, the original home of Ruth, one of his great-grandmothers (Ruth 4:18–22). At that time the Moabites, like the Philistines, were Saul's enemies (cf. 1 Sam. 14:47). This passage and the story of Ruth provide two exceptions to hostile relationships between Israel and Moab. While his family found safety in Moab, David stayed in the forests of Judah at the advice of the prophet Gad.

Since David came from Bethlehem in Judah, he felt safer among his countrymen. Saul's supporters were the people from his tribe of Benjamin (v. 7). The author makes it clear that David's situation was extremely difficult, but God was still with him.

22:6–23. Saul Murders the Priests. In the narrative presented here we see the fullest, most hideous outworking of Saul's character and personality. The opening verses show him in the midst of his raging paranoia, charging his closest associates and defenders with treason. In framing his question to them in terms of being rewarded materially for their loyalty, he unwittingly based his right to rule not on principle or his God-ordained authority but on whether he could provide better material rewards than David. Such is the last desperate measure of a leader who has completely lost his way. Doeg the Edomite apparently took the hint. It is not unreasonable to believe that his treachery against the priests was based on his expectation that he would be richly rewarded in the manner that Saul had just implied.

The chief priest's reply to Saul's accusation (v. 13) of treason indicates both his simple honesty and naiveté about the malevolence of Saul. The priest flatly rejected the king's characterization of David as an enemy and sealed his own fate by candidly acknowledging that he had other ministry interactions with David, on the assumption that David was the king's friend. The priest's openness on this point leads the reader to accept his protest that he knew nothing about Saul's suspicion of David. In a way, David had protected the priest on this point by not being open about his own situation. And Doeg, who had witnessed the interaction between the priest and David, must have known of the priest's innocence. Yet he was the one who personally carried out Saul's outrageous order, which Saul's own soldiers refused to follow. Such was the degeneracy of Saul's leadership that it would find service in men like Doeg. The suspicion that the priests were conspiring with David against him was too much for Saul.

Innocent of the conspiracy charge as the priests of Nob certainly were, their death was a tragic way of partially fulfilling a prediction concerning Eli's family given in chapters 2–3 in the book. From 2 Kings 2:27, it is clear that Ahimelech was of the house of Eli, since Abiathar, Ahimelech's son, was of the house of Eli, and his removal was also a fulfillment of the prophecy. Saul was responsible for this atrocious criminal act. Careful readers have noted the ironic depravity into which Saul had sunk. His downfall began when he had failed to completely destroy the Amalekites (15:3). Now, what he had failed to do to mortal enemies at the instruction of God he apparently condoned doing to his own people through the actions of Doeg. Saul activated the law of extermination and enforced it in a way that God would have never done. The king was now acting on his own, motivated by irrational paranoia.

23:1–13. David saves the city of Keilah. Dangerous life situations taught David to depend on the Lord for safety, especially as he tried to escape from Saul. The town of Keilah was located northwest of Hebron, near the Philistine border, and this position made it vulnerable to the attacks. The Philistine raiders came with their cattle at the end of the harvest to plunder the crops and carry them to their cities. They particularly targeted the unprotected threshing floors, which lay outside the city walls.

The people of Keilah preferred to ask David instead of Saul for help. Perhaps the massacre at Nob influenced this decision. In his attempts to save this town from the Philistine invaders, David turned to Abiathar the priest (22:20), who carried with him the sacred priestly vestment with the two stones Urim and Thummim for consulting the Lord. This is another example of David's total dependence on the Lord early in his life. A positive answer from the Lord instilled courage in David's fighting men.

Despite the fact that David helped them, the citizens of Keilah were so afraid of Saul that they were ready to hand David over. He learned about this after consulting the priest. Staying in touch with the Lord again helped David to know what to do next. As for the Lord, He did not forget His servant but blessed him with an increasing number of soldiers.

23:14–29. David in Wilderness Strongholds. From Keilah, David fled further southward to the wilderness of Ziph. In that sparsely inhabited region, he hid in the small outposts built by herdsmen and villagers as signaling stations. Jonathan seemed to have had no problems locating David. This was most likely the last meeting of the two men. The passage presents the last words of Jonathan recorded in the Bible.

Supplying food to David's company of 600 men was a major challenge. This is most likely why the people from this region informed Saul of David's whereabouts. They feared for their

own food supplies, and like the people of Keilah, they remembered Saul's massacre at Nob and feared him. Saul gladly welcomed their readiness to hand David over and pronounced blessings on the leaders of the town. David was forced to move immediately further south, along the Dead Sea. His capture was almost certain, but in the last moment God intervened.

It was providential that due to an immediate threat from the Philistines, Saul was distracted and forced to give up his pursuit of David. God's direct intervention saved David's life, so the place became known as *sela' hammakhleqot*, meaning "the Rock of Escape." In the Bible, names were customarily given to persons and places to commemorate unusual life experiences with God. From *sela' hammakhleqot*, David moved to the oasis of En Gedi, renowned for its springs and vineyards (Song 1:14). In this way, David and his men were assured of a dependable water supply.

24:1–22. David Spares Saul. This chapter is divided into three parts. First, there is the story of how David had an opportunity to kill Saul, but refrained from doing so. This is followed by David's speech and then Saul's speech. The Hebrew word for hand (*yad*), which symbolizes power, occurs a number of times in this narrative (e.g., vv. 6, 11). The incident in the cave shows David's respect for proper authority, even while cutting Saul's robe demonstrated his willingness to take risks in trying to restore the relationship. At the same time, whether David intended it or not, it would have reminded Saul of the symbolism Samuel had used to show that the kingdom had been cut from Saul (15:27–28; 1 Kin. 11:29–32). David still considered Saul to be the Lord's anointed (2 Sam. 1:16) and was determined to remain loyal to him. Assassinations would lead only to more bloodshed. David respected Saul as Israel's legitimate king, perhaps hoping that when he became king, others would show the same respect toward him.

While Saul's kingdom was fast drawing to an end, David's reign would endure. Though Saul wept and temporarily gave up the pursuit, David did not fully trust him and remained in the wilderness strongholds. At least Saul should have clearly seen that David was not interested in taking the kingdom from him through a military coup.

25:1–44. David and the Wife of Nabal. The long story narrated in the middle of the chapter is bracketed by David's two losses. Samuel died, a great loss of moral support, and Michal, the wife who loved him, was given to another man (v. 44). Wedged in between is the story of David's conflict with Nabal, which ended in David's marriage to Abigail.

The mention of Samuel's death appears as another marker of Saul's downward spiral. Samuel had been Saul's original promoter, and now he was gone. At the same time, Samuel's death certainly must have been a blow to David, who depended on Samuel as a symbol of God's direction in his life. Both men, enemies as they were, had reason to feel the loss of Samuel. With the death of Samuel the historical transition from the theocracy to the monarchy was final; the last judge had died. The only problem left was that Saul had not been willing to be God's vassal and the Lord was still shaping David to become His ideal king.

Meanwhile, David and his men protected the flocks of a man whose name or more likely nickname was Nabal. This Hebrew name means "a fool" or a person who is morally and spiritually deficient (v. 25). The first thing the reader learns about this man is that he was very wealthy. This is stated in the narrative even before his name is disclosed, suggesting that fools could be quite capable when it comes to material wealth. The time of shearing the sheep was a festive occasion, when wealthy people loved to show their generosity to other community members (2 Sam. 13:23). Since none of Nabal's animals was missing in the attacks by wild beasts or raiders, David sent greetings of peace with a request to return kindness by providing some food for David's group, thus giving him the opportunity to be generous. To show his humility, David described himself to Nabal as "your son David" (1 Sam. 25:8). Ten of David's men were sent with an expectation that there would be a generous gift.

Nabal was probably loyal to Saul, so he responded to David's polite message with contempt and threats. Isaiah 32:6 defines "a fool" (Heb. *nabal*) as someone selfish who keeps the hungry unsatisfied and withholds water from the thirsty. Abigail, on the other hand, showed clear signs of wisdom.

In spite of her high social status, Abigail addressed David as "my lord" (vv. 24–31) while describing herself as his servant. She took all the blame upon herself and agreed with David about Nabal's poor character, while at the same time pleading for mercy at David's feet (cf. Esth. 8:3). David's life, she says, although threatened by his enemies, would be bound "in the bundle of the living" with the Lord—which probably means that it has been recorded or sealed in God's book of life—while the lives of his enemies would be removed from there. Unnecessary bloodshed would bring only harm to David's future career. After Nabal's sudden and timely death, David took this wise woman of high status as a wife. To further demonstrate her humility, Abigail declared herself ready to wash the feet of David's servants. An amazing feature of this story is that David was willing to listen to and accept the advice of a woman who was pleading with him on behalf of a man who had insulted him. Seeking counsel from others and particularly from the Lord characterized David's leadership, with a few important exceptions.

In the meantime, Saul's daughter Michal, who was David's legal wife, had been given to another man. This suggests that Saul wanted to hurt David and tried his best to keep him away from the throne for as long as possible. David had another wife from Judah, and together with his marriage to Abigail, these connections strengthened his position in the south. David's kinship ensured the support of the elders and communities in central and southern Judah. This territory would become his future power base.

26:1–25. David Spares Saul a Second Time. This is the second story of David's kindness in sparing Saul's life. It has both similarities and differences with the first story in chapter 24. Both stories show that benevolence was a constant trait of David's character. For the second time, the people of Ziph informed Saul (23:19) about David's movements and urged him to pursue David in their territory. David had already spared Saul's life, yet in spite of it, Saul again decided to pursue the one whom he considered as competitor to the throne. Due to his paranoia, Saul did not appear to understand that David was not seeking to take the throne from him by force. He was waiting for the Lord to hand it to him at the appropriate moment.

The king came into the remote region from his residence in Gibeah, surrounded by a great number of his troops. Under cover of night, David slipped into Saul's camp accompanied by his nephew Abishai, the son of David's sister Zeruiah and the brother of Joab. The two men discovered the place where the king slept, protected by his general, Abner, who was also Saul's cousin. Abishai urged David to kill Saul, but David refused and rebuked the young man by saying that he would not lift his hand against the Lord's anointed. David took only Saul's spear and water jug. The spear represented a symbol of Saul's kingship because he seldom separated himself from it (18:10; 19:10; 2 Sam. 1:6), and it could have been used by David to kill him. Instead David spared Saul's life.

David's act of mercy in again preserving the king's life impressed Saul so much that once again he predicted the Lord would protect David from all danger and make him triumph in the end. Indeed one could say that the words spoken here by Saul regarding his own folly (v. 21) summarized his life, while the words spoken much later by the Apostle Paul, "I have kept the faith" (2 Tim. 4:7), could summarize David's life of faith.

27:1—30:31

David in Philistia

Following Saul's persecution of David in the Wilderness of Ziph, it became clear that David could no longer trust the king's promises. So he decided to again seek refuge in Philistia (cf. 21:11–16). This was the most difficult period in David's life, more difficult than when he faced the giant Goliath in the Valley of Elah. This time he had to convince his enemies that Saul and his soldiers were his worst enemies, although he had no intention of fighting them. How could he fight the army of the nation whose king he would soon become?

27:1—28:2. David Allied with the Philistines. David now commanded an army of 600 men and was received favorably by Achish, king of Gath, the hometown of Goliath. David became his vassal and received an estate in return for his services and loyalty. During this time, David's soldiers were stationed in Ziklag, on the border with Israel. David would stay in this city until the death of Saul. His army regularly raided the enemies of Judah and Philistia who lived in the area. Some of the names of the tribes that are given in the text are Geshurites, Girzites, and Amalekites. Achish thought that David's army was attacking the towns in the Negev, which is in southern Israel. He could see the spoils brought back by the soldiers but could not tell where they came from.

These raids helped David in a variety of ways: to secure provisions for the survival of his army, escape dangers from Saul, eliminate some of Israel's enemies, and secure his position among the leaders of the clans of Judah. The author only reports David's acts of deception and cruelty. He does not condone them nor try to justify them. The lesson to draw from this passage is similar to the lesson found in the story of Abram in Egypt in Genesis 12. Even when God's servants lack trust in God and use questionable means of survival, God is still with them and working to transform them. The Lord used David to protect the people of Judah from bitter enemies who often raided their towns and villages.

28:3–25. Saul Consults a Medium. While God consistently answered David's questions, Saul's line of communication with the Lord grew weaker and was eventually broken. Saul had shut off the sources of divine revelations, and now he was desperate to learn God's will. But who could he turn to for help? He had killed God's priests, and the divine Warrior was no longer present by his side. Samuel was dead, while the priestly ephod was with David's priest, Abiathar. It is possible that Saul's priest had fabricated an ephod in place of the original one.

In great fear, Saul turned to a spiritual medium. This was despite the fact that he had previously condemned such practices (1 Chr. 10:13–14; cf. Lev. 19:31; Deut. 18:9–14). So the king who had banned mediums now consulted one himself. There is little doubt that this was the lowest point in Saul's life, which would lead to his defeat and death. While going to the witch in En Dor, Saul traveled at night and in disguise to conceal his identity. Later in the story, the woman did discover his true identity. En Dor was located about six miles (10 km) from Shunem. The woman must have established a reputation as one who could successfully consult the spirits of ancestors. Her ritual pit was believed to be a magical portal through which ghosts could pass to communicate with the living (see below, "Saul, the Medium, and the Spirit of Samuel").

The message given to Saul was the same he had repeatedly heard from Samuel while the prophet was still living. In summary, Saul was told that his disobedience to God had led to his downfall and David would succeed him as king (15:26–28). The only new element was that he would die in the impending battle against the

Saul, the Medium, and the Spirit of Samuel

The narrative recorded in 1 Samuel 28:3–19 is the only place in the Bible where we find a detailed account about a consultation with a medium and the appearance of a spirit of the dead. Such activity is proscribed in the strongest terms in Deuteronomy 18:9–14. We need to look at the story carefully to identify what it is, and is not, saying.

1. *A Medium.* The necromancer is called "a woman who is a medium" (1 Sam. 28:7); that is, she had the ability to communicate with the dead, seeking oracles from them. This type of person was called "one who calls up the dead" (Deut. 18:11). Apparently, they were possessed by the spirit they consulted and functioned as a medium (see Lev. 20:27: "A man or a woman *in whom* there is a spirit..." [literal translation]). In a sense, this was a counterfeit of the gift of prophecy.

2. *The Spirit.* The Hebrew word translated "spirit" in the narrative is *'ob*, not *ruakh* ("spirit"), which is the one used to refer to the Spirit of God, and designates the necromancer (1 Sam. 28:3) as well as the spirit of the dead itself (Lev. 20:27). It is believed by some that originally it could have meant "pit, hole on the ground." Consulting the dead required that a hole be made on the ground in which food and blood were placed with the clear purpose of enticing the spirit to come up from the underworld. The underworld was also thought to be the place where demons were located (cf. Lev. 17:7). Others believe that *'ob* comes from the Hebrew word *'ab* ("father") and that it designates the spirits of the ancestors. Apparently the spirit spoke to or through the necromancer in undertones, whispering the oracle, chirping, and muttering (Is. 8:19).

3. *Communicating with the Spirit.* The spirit probably communicated with Saul through the medium, rather than directly. It should be noted that the "spirit" did not say anything new to him. It simply repeated the message given by God through Samuel. But even the prediction of the death of his children (28:19) was incorrect; not all of them died. The narrative seems to be rejecting the common idea that the spirits of the dead could function as spiritual guides for the living.

4. *Identifying the Spirit.* The necromancer did not really bring up the spirit of Samuel.

She was the only one who saw anything and then reported to Saul "that she saw a spirit [*'elohim*, 'gods, divine beings'] rising out of the earth" (v. 13). Unable to see the spirit, Saul asked what he looked like. She answered that he was old and covered with a cloth. It was Saul who concluded that this was Samuel (v. 14). So the biblical writer does not tell us who the spirit was. It tells us only what the protagonists of the story—the medium and Saul—believed him to be.

In reviewing this passage, we should take into consideration the larger context of the story, the Bible. We know that the Lord condemned any attempt to communicate with the dead (Deut. 18:10–11). We also know that the realm of death, as a place where the spirits of the dead dwell, does not exist but that death, as the end of life, is the result of sin (Heb. 2:14). In addition, we also know that demons desire to communicate with humans and at times can possess them as their instruments (e.g., Acts 19:13–16). And finally, we are told that Satan can transform himself into what seems to be an angel of light to deceive humans (2 Cor. 11:14). Based on the overall teachings of the Bible, we can conclude that it was not Samuel who spoke to Saul but some other spiritual/"divine" power not from God.

Philistines. This last statement was colored by firm determinism. The negative message brought him to a state of depression and despondency. All hope of defeating the Philistines was now lost.

Saul refused to eat, and only after strong urgings by the woman and his men did he take some food, consisting of roasted calf and unleavened bread prepared in a hurry. Saul departed from this place more frightened than when he came. Such a discouraging experience could only be the result of the deceptive work of the enemy in disguise, who was leading Saul into destruction. Thus, the objective of this experience "was not to lead Saul to repentance, but to urge him on to ruin; and this is not the work of God, but of Satan" (PP 683).

29:1–11. The Philistines Reject David. The story of David and Achish continues, presenting the solution to David's serious problem (28:1–2). It is likely that the events reported in this chapter precede those from chapter 28, because this chapter states that the Philistines were gathered in Aphek (located just north of Mt. Carmel; v. 1) before they decided to move southeastward into the Valley of Jezreel proper (v. 11). The arrangement of the material in these chapters is more thematic than chronological.

The Philistines decided not to involve David in their battle against the people of Israel, who they consistently referred to as "Hebrews." Instead, Achish sent him back to Ziklag. It is remarkable that in his dialogue with David, Achish demonstrated such high regard for the Lord God of David, in whose name he took an oath (v. 6). Moreover, this Philistine ruler trusted David so much and praised him for his loyalty, not knowing that David had repeatedly deceived him. Truly, Achish is portrayed in much better light than David, whom he called "an angel of God" (v. 9; cf. 2 Sam. 14:17; 19:28). Although the author does not state this explicitly, he implies that the Lord helped His anointed one in the midst of an impossible situation. Clearly, the Lord was still with David, not because of what he was doing but sometimes in spite of it.

30:1–31. David's Conflict with the Amalekites. The last two chapters in 1 Samuel describe a battle between David and the Amalekites. A separate battle between Saul and the Philistines would tragically cost Saul his life. The Philistines assembled up north in the famous Valley of Jezreel. This location differed from that of previous battles, which took place in the south. Gath was one of the five Philistine city-states forming a confederation referred to as *Pentapolis* ("five cities), and its people were expected to participate in the war. Shunem and Mount Gilboa are located on the opposite sides of this valley. It is clear that King Achish wanted David to fight on the Philistine side and even assume the role of his personal bodyguard. But it is not clear in the narrative what course of action David took in this war.

The battle between David and the Amalekites occurred soon after he returned from the battlefield. David and his men arrived just in time to pursue the Amalekites who had raided and burned the town of his residence, Ziklag. If they had returned a day or two later, it would have been too late to recover what was lost. This chapter tells how, with the Lord's help, David's defeat turned into a victory, in contrast to Saul's defeat reported in the next chapter. Both battles took place at approximately the same time. In this way, the author assures the reader that David had no part in the Philistine battle and victory over Saul and his army. Helping the enemy destroy God's people would have permanently prevented him from becoming king in Israel.

The Amalekites were Israel's enemies since the time of Israel's Exodus from Egypt (Ex. 17:8–16), and they would cleverly launch their attacks in the most opportune situations. This time, they attacked Ziklag when only women and children were in the town. They must have done this in retaliation for David's raids (27:6). In the beginning of his reign, Saul disobeyed God's word that came through Samuel and failed to destroy Amalek (15:1–9). Now David had to face them again. But before he could pursue the Amalekites, David faced the prospect of his own death at the hands of his frustrated people. At that moment, he did the right thing by turning to the Lord. God assured David (through the officiating priest) of His presence and victory, which unified his soldiers. When David pursued the raiders, God would grant him a complete victory.

The march from Aphek to Ziklag could take up to three full days. One third of David's fighting men were too exhausted to go further, so they stayed behind while the others pressed on. They achieved a complete victory, effectively completing the job that Saul had failed to do (15:1–9). David warmed the hearts of his men and the elders of Judah, from Hebron down to Beersheba, by distributing gifts to everyone, including the exhausted soldiers who had stayed behind. They had guarded the baggage, allowing others to move quickly in pursuit of the Amalekites, and were entitled to some of the spoil. David refused to listen to certain troublemakers who were selfish and wanted him to treat some of his men differently than others. Instead, David made sure that all the men benefitted equally from this victory and its spoils (cf. Deut. 20:10–15). After all, the victory came from the Lord. Distribution of wealth in Bible times was a sign of power and generosity. David also rewarded the elders of Judah who had provided hospitality during the time he was pursued by Saul. The city of Hebron figures prominently in this narrative and was destined to become the first capital city of David's future kingdom.

31:1–13

Death of Saul and Jonathan

The closing chapters of 1 Samuel present a series of contrasts between Israel's first two kings, Saul and David. Both were fighting important battles against Israel's bitter enemies—Saul against the Philistines and David against Amalek. While David was successful in consulting the Lord, Saul was fearful and decided to consult a medium. David's warfare resulted in a victory over the enemy, while Saul suffered total defeat. David successfully rescued family members, while all but one of Saul's sons perished alongside him in the battle. Lastly, Saul had failed to destroy Amalek; David had accomplished this very thing and thus fulfilled the command given through Samuel.

31:1–13. The Tragic End of Saul and His Sons. The book's last chapter reports the end of the war between Saul and the Philistines. The final battle began on the plain, giving an advantage to the Philistines, and soon the Israelites were pushed up the slopes of the hillside, where many of them died. Israel's army suffered a tragic defeat, and many were killed on Mount Gilboa, located at the southeastern end of the plain of Jezreel. The outcome of this battle appears more important to the author than any of the details. Following this victory, the Philistines invaded several Israelite towns because the people who lived near the battlefield fled to their homes.

Fearful of torture if captured alive by the enemy, Saul shamefully took his life. Elsewhere the Bible records a few other cases of suicide by individuals who did not want to be captured and tortured by the enemy (e.g., Judg. 9:54; 16:30; 2 Sam. 17:23; 1 Kin. 16:18). It is ironic that Saul, who was anointed to liberate Israel from Philistine oppression (9:16), was in essence killed by them. His dead body was publicly disgraced by the enemy in order to show their contempt for him. The head and armor of the defeated king were treasured prizes, so they were usually carried away and displayed in public by the victorious army (cf. 17:38, 54). These were sometimes placed in the temple to show the superiority of the local gods over those of the enemy. Dismembered and impaled bodies instilled terror among the local population. Three of Saul's sons also died in the battle. It appears that only the youngest son, called Ish-bosheth, survived. It is ironic that David's best friend in life, Jonathan, died in the same battle and on the same day as David's worst enemy, King Saul.

The people of Jabesh Gilead had never forgotten how Saul delivered them from the Ammonite oppression (chap. 11). They travelled all night to Beth Shan to steal his body away and then gave him a decent burial. They mourned over his death for seven days, as was customary in those times (Gen. 50:10; Job 2:13). Since the bodies were in a state of decay, they were cremated while the bones were gathered and buried. In the beginning of his reign, Saul rescued these people from the enemy. Now, at the end of his reign, the same people rescued his dead body and gave him an honorable burial.

First Samuel begins with the miraculous birth of the child Samuel, but it ends with the tragic deaths of Saul and Jonathan. The book looks forward to the reign of David, the king who was not perfect but whom the Bible calls a man after God's heart. Through him the Lord would bring about a complete and permanent victory over the Philistines. This is why the book presents God as the true Leader of His people, One who was primarily interested in their hearts (16:7). The word of God states boldly that the Lord on high reigns supreme and no earthly leader is above His word. The book closes looking forward to the interaction between David and the Lord.

2 SAMUEL

INTRODUCTION

Title. Like 1 Samuel, the book of 2 Samuel was also named after the prophet who anointed Saul, and later David, to rule over Israel. Together 1 and 2 Samuel originally formed one book in the Hebrew Bible. The Greek version of the OT referred to 2 Samuel as "Second Kingdoms" (*Basileion Beta*). The English title comes from the Latin *Liber II Samuelis*. Fragments of about four different manuscripts of Samuel have been discovered among the Dead Sea Scrolls from Qumran.

Date and Authorship. For details regarding the writing of 2 Samuel, see 1 Samuel: Introduction.

Backgrounds. Second Samuel continues the story of Israel's monarchy that was begun in 1 Samuel. According to the Bible, kingship in Israel had to be radically different from the absolute kingship prevalent in the ANE. Kings in Israel were not allowed to do whatever they wished. They were subject to a higher power and to the rule of law and morality as taught by God's prophets. The beginning of the book depicts the transfer of royal power from the house of Saul to David. In ancient times the nonhereditary transfers of power often triggered civil wars based on intrigue, murder, and treachery.

The book highlights David's reign, first over the territory of Judah and then over the whole nation of Israel. Israel's second and greatest king unified the nation, conquered Israel's enemies, and received God's covenantal promises of an enduring dynasty and kingdom (7:15–16). David captured the city of Jerusalem and made it Israel's capital, as well as its administrative and religious center. This city became the symbol of national unity based on trust in God. The ark of the covenant was brought to Jerusalem to publicly acknowledge God's kingship and rule over the nation. David's plan was to build a temple to God, but he was not allowed to because he fought many wars and shed much blood.

The author recorded the history of David's life and kingship with all its triumphs and troubles. David's ascension to the throne is presented, followed by his sins of adultery and murder and their devastating consequences on his family and the nation. David himself underwent great sufferings, especially in the last years of his reign. Thus the book does not conceal the dark times of David's life. Israel's greatest king appeared weak in dealing with his children and committed grave sins of adultery and murder. Toward the end of his reign, he tended to rely on the strength of his army more than on God. Yet the author of the book consistently observes that, in spite of his failures, David was always willing to recognize his sin and repent before the Lord. He faithfully worshiped only the Lord and inspired his people to do the same.

Theology and Purpose. See 1 Samuel: Introduction. There is no doubt that 2 Samuel offers information that contributes to a better understanding of God's relationship with human beings. The following are among its dominant themes:

1. *Divine Providence and Grace.* God loved and cared for David long before he became king. Speaking through the prophet Nathan, God reminded David that He had taken him from being a shepherd of sheep to being ruler of His people Israel (7:8). God took him from where he was and then providentially led and shaped him to become the leader of His people. In the process David faced many challenges, conflicts, and suffering, but they helped to develop the character needed in order for God to use David for His glory and the benefit of His people. Solomon, the second son Bathsheba bore to him, was named by the prophet "Beloved of the Lord." When David sinned and repented, God's grace proved greater than his sin.

He suffered some of the consequences of his mistakes, but God always sustained him. The life of David illustrates the fact that the Lord is patient and is constantly seeking to restore us to fellowship with Him. As a result of David's wholehearted service to God, he was honored to become an ancestor of Jesus Christ, the Messiah. The NT begins Christ's genealogy with a reference to Jesus as the Son of David (Matt. 1:1). Lives placed in the hands of the Lord are in good hands.

2. *God's Eternal Covenant with David.* Central to the book is the covenant that God made with David (2 Sam. 7). David's life and career are contrasted with those of his predecessor, Saul. Unlike Saul, David was a successful leader in war and peace time, as well as a gifted musician. While deeply spiritual, he had a strong sense of justice. David showed himself respectful toward King Saul and his whole family, in spite of the fact that Saul wanted to kill him. Unlike King Saul, when David was rebuked by the prophet he sincerely repented. Toward the end of David's life, Israel's borders extended from Egypt to the Euphrates in fulfillment of the promises God made to the patriarchs (Gen. 15:18–21). David's reign became a standard by which the reigns of subsequent kings were measured (2 Kin. 18:3; 22:2). After his reign, God blessed Israel with the reign of his son Solomon. In spite of the later division of the kingdom, the prophets promised a future restoration under the new David, Ruler of all of God's people (Is. 9:1–7; 11:1–12; Amos 9:11–15; Zech. 9:9–13).

Such messianic passages instilled in God's people hope in the coming Messiah, the future Son of David, who was destined to rule the nations of the earth and not only Israel. In the Gospels, Jesus is often called the "Son of David." This title expressed earnest expectations that the glorious promises given in the beginning of Israel's monarchy would someday come to pass by the power of a loving and merciful God.

Literary Features. Second Samuel consists mostly of narratives, but a few songs and lists are scattered throughout the text. The long narrative section of the book is bracketed by two poetic passages, namely, the lament for Saul and Jonathan (1:17–27) and psalms of praise to God's greatness (22:1—23:7). Dispersed throughout the book are lists of David's officials, prayers, and a short lament over the death of Absalom. Finally the so-called last words of David are introduced as "the words/oracle of David son of Jesse" (23:1–7).

COMMENTARY

1:1—10:19

DAVID'S KINGDOM ESTABLISHED

In 1011 B.C. David's time in the wilderness of Judea came to an end. His most important task would be to unite a much divided nation. As Israel's king he would have to lead, unify, and inspire his people. David was successful like no other king of Israel. Under his leadership, the kingdom was consolidated, enemies were conquered, and he received promises of a lasting kingdom. David acted with wisdom and discernment under the true King of Israel. The book begins with David mourning the deaths of Saul and Jonathan (1:1–27). This is followed by David becoming king of Judah (2:1—4:12), king of Israel (5:1—6:23), the perpetuity of his dynasty (7:1–29), his military victories (8:1–18), and his dealings with Mephibosheth, the Ammonites, and the Syrians (9:1—10:19).

1:1–27

Lament over Saul and Jonathan

The author affirms that it was the Lord who made it possible for David to sit on Israel's throne. David honored the office of king as a position established solely by God. As long as Saul was alive, he refused to take the throne for himself, even though God had promised that it would come to him. Thus, the quick execution of Saul's alleged killer and David's heartfelt public mourning of Saul and Jonathan underlined his reputation as an honorable and patient leader.

1:1–16. Report of Saul's Death. The introductory words of the book, "after the death of Saul," constitute a fitting place for the division of Samuel into two parts. At about the same time that the Philistines defeated Saul, David defeated the Amalekites. Then an Amalekite dressed like a person in distress came to David in Ziklag. The dust on his head and the torn clothes suggested that he was mourning. The man reported that he had killed Saul on Mount Gilboa. In the absence of any human witnesses, he brought Saul's diadem and armlet and presented them to David. Both objects were symbols of kingship. If any part of the man's story was true, it is likely that he had been taking spoils from the fallen soldiers on the battlefield.

The account of Saul's death in this passage differs from the story in 1 Samuel 31. Some commentators propose that the Amalekite messenger told lies in order to get favors from David. However, it is possible to view the two stories as complementing each other so that the reconstructed events would have happened in this way: Saul fell upon his sword, as in the first story, but he was still alive when the Amalekite approached and, with or without Saul's request, killed the king.

David believed the story about Saul's death, but his reaction to the messenger's news was very negative. David tore his own clothes as an expression of sorrow and mourning. After a long day of mourning, he rebuked the man for raising his hand against the Lord's anointed. The guilt for the man's death was entirely his own. This swift and decisive act of David was consistent with his positive attitude toward Saul as the Lord's anointed, as he had expressed on more than one occasion (1 Sam. 24:6–7; 26:8–12). In fact, David had never treated Saul as an enemy. The execution of the Amalekite demonstrated both David's sense of justice, or righteousness, and his love for Saul and respect for the office.

1:17–27. An Elegy for Saul and Jonathan. David's poem on the death of Saul and Jonathan was profoundly personal. It lacked religious and national elements, so no mention was made of God's name or of Israel's defeat. David expressed tribute to the fallen mighty warriors in Israel, whom he loved and respected. This elegy became a national poem as it eloquently expressed Israel's great loss of its beauty, glory, or splendor—sometimes translated as comparable to the grace and beauty of a gazelle (v. 19). The song was preserved in an ancient source (now extinct) called the Book of Jashar (cf. Josh. 10:13), where its title was "Song of the Bow." Verse 22 makes mention of Jonathan's bow, which symbolized his many victories over enemies.

The lament lists Saul's major accomplishments as king. He united the kingdom, defended Israel from the Philistines, and brought prosperity to his people. A large portion of these accomplishments is also credited to Jonathan and his bravery. Gath and Ashkelon are named as two of the five principal cities of Philistia (v. 20). The song contrasts the daughters of Philistia with the daughters of Israel. In that period, women celebrated victories with music and songs, but they also led in the singing of laments (Jer. 9:17–19). David ends his lament by devoting a whole verse to Jonathan. He describes his personal loss of one who was his best friend (1 Sam. 20). David's words, including the reference to "my brother" (2 Sam. 1:26), underline a deep fraternal love and echo covenantal terminology.

2:1—4:12

David Is Proclaimed King over Judah

Saul's death opened the way for David to assume kingship after having experienced much hardship. But before David's coronation, there were obstacles to overcome. The most serious was that Saul's defeat and death on Gilboa had resulted in national disaster and widespread chaos.

2:1–7. David Is Anointed King of Judah. While David was still stationed in Ziklag, he sought God's guidance on how to proceed. Nothing less than a direct revelation from the Lord could help him. The answer to his question came through the stones called the Urim and Thummim (Ex. 28:30; Num. 27:21; 1 Sam. 28:6) that were kept in the pouch of the sacred ephod. David was sent to the southern city of Hebron, where the elders of Judah publicly anointed him king. His first anointing by Samuel when he was just a lad had been private. Hebron became David's capital and remained such for seven years before the conquest of Jerusalem. It was centrally located in Judah and had several springs of water. Under David's rule this city was improved and expanded.

Before his coronation David had established a solid military reputation recognized even by the Philistine lords and generals. Through his two marriages and also the distribution of gifts (1 Sam. 30:26–31), he had created strong ties with some influential families in Judah. One of his first actions as new king was to commend and bless the people of Jabesh Gilead for rescuing Saul's dead body and giving it a proper burial (2 Sam. 2:4–7; 1 Sam. 31:8–13). He promised them the same protection they had enjoyed under Saul. By doing all these things, David demonstrated to the people that he was Saul's legitimate successor. David also hoped that these men would recognize him as king. Yet in spite of this, David's authority included only the tribe of Judah, to which he belonged, and the smaller tribe of Simeon, which was likely considered part of the same kingdom.

2:8–11. Ishbosheth Is Made King of Israel. Saul's son Ishbosheth was not killed in the battle like the other three sons. So Abner, Saul's cousin (1 Sam. 14:50) and army general, proclaimed Ishbosheth king over the tribes of Israel. Ishbosheth's name in Hebrew means "man of shame," but originally the name was Ishbaal, meaning "man of Baal." Ishbosheth's residence was in Mahanaim of Gilead on the eastern side of the Jordan, a place remembered from the story of the patriarch Jacob (Gen. 32:1–3). Since Ishbosheth was not a strong king, Abner was really in charge of the kingdom. Following the battle on Gilboa, most of Israel's territory on the western side of the Jordan was under the control of the Philistines, seriously limiting the extent of Ishbosheth's kingdom.

2:12–32. Israel and Judah Are at War. The author makes it clear that the leaders of Judah favored David. This situation soon resulted in civil war, since Abner wanted the tribe of Judah to recognize Ishbosheth as king and bring their territory under his control. The two armies clashed at Gibeon, a town in Benjamin belonging to Saul's tribe. This town is known from the Bible by its large pool, whose existence has been confirmed by archaeological excavations. Each side selected twelve of their best soldiers, all of whom died because none could prevail over their opponents.

With no apparent winners, a full-scale battle followed in which Abner killed Asahel, Joab's brother and David's nephew. The battle ended with a temporary truce, although the conflict between the two armies continued. Asahel's dead body first lay on the battlefield, then was later buried in his family tomb. Joab never forgave Abner for this act of violence and looked for the first opportunity to avenge his brother's death.

3:1–5. Sons of David. Although details about Abner dominate this chapter, the author shows that as time passed, David's kingship grew stronger, while Ishbosheth's power steadily declined. The fact that many children were born to David was a sure sign of the Lord's blessing (e.g., Ps. 127:3–5). Only one son from each marriage is mentioned by name. David's marriage to Maacah was a royal one, and it strengthened his alliance with the king of Geshur, who ruled east of the Sea of Galilee (2 Sam. 15:8; 1 Chr. 3:2). The writer makes no mention of Ishbosheth's family, implying he had none left.

3:6–21. Abner Joins Forces with David. Israel's army general Abner appears to have been a very ambitious man. He suddenly made an intrusion into the harem that previously belonged to Saul, and Ishbosheth interpreted this act as a threat to his throne (2 Sam. 3:7; cf. 16:21–22; 1 Kin. 2:22). A quarrel between the two men followed this incident and ended with Abner's decision to defect to David. He promised to bring the whole kingdom of Israel with him from north to south, beginning with the tribe of Benjamin, to whom Saul and his son Ishbosheth belonged. Abner claimed that both the people and God wanted David to be king and that he would deliver the people of Israel from their enemies. This statement about David was true even during Saul's reign (1 Sam. 18:16), and it could be that Abner heard it from Saul himself.

David asked Abner to restore his legitimate wife Michal to him because she had been unlawfully taken away from him (1 Sam. 25:44). In this way David's status as Saul's son-in-law would be restored and all would see that he was the rightful successor to the throne of Israel. In other words, David's right to succeed Saul as king was closely linked with his marriage to Saul's daughter. The ANE laws included provisions indicating that a man who had been driven from home by force might claim his wife when he returned. But above all, David and Michal had been in love at the beginning of their relationship (1 Sam. 18:20). So thanks to Abner, Michal was restored to David. As was customary in those times, the alliance between David and Abner was sealed by a feast. The word "peace" is repeatedly found in this passage to show David's sincere intentions in dealing with Abner. Yet this agreement between the two of them did not last long.

3:22–30. Joab Murders Abner. Without consulting David, Joab (David's nephew and army general) proceeded to murder Abner in a treacherous way. Unlike David, Joab did not think that Abner could be trusted. He also felt obliged to avenge his brother's death. Joab struck Abner in the belly, the same way in which Abner had struck his brother Asahel. Yet for David there was a difference between the two murders. Asahel was killed in a battle, while Abner was assassinated in times of peace. It is also likely that Joab feared Abner's power in Israel and his ambitions to take Joab's commanding position over the army.

3:31–39. David's Mourning for Abner. David was first embarrassed, then angry because of what Joab did. This infamous act could raise suspicions about the king's integrity in dealing with Abner. To distance himself from Abner's murder, David declared a national day of mourning in which Joab had to take part. When all the people heard that the king wore the garments of mourning and abstained from food to grieve over Abner's death, they concluded that their king was innocent of bloodshed and their respect for him increased. It is important to understand that Abner died in the process of making David king over all Israel. David's resentment for Joab's murder of Abner lasted for a number of years (1 Kin. 2:5–6). He was aware that Joab was helped in the plot by his brother Abishai, who was also a military man. For the time being, David could only entrust the punishment of his two nephews into the Lord's hands (2 Sam. 3:29).

4:1–12. Ishbosheth Is Murdered. This short chapter narrates the death of Ishbosheth and David's reaction to the news. His response was the same as to Saul's and Abner's deaths. By telling this story, the narrator shows that David was not involved in the death of Saul's family members. After Abner's defection to David, the popular support for Saul's son began to dwindle. This situation eventually led to Ishbosheth's murder and decapitation at the hands of his two army captains. This took place during the king's midday rest ("siesta"). No reason is given for this sudden act of violence, although the two captains probably hoped that David would reward them for such an act. The two men belonged to the tribe of Benjamin, to which Saul and Ishbosheth also belonged.

Ishbosheth left no surviving son to succeed him. His death meant that David no longer had serious rivals for the throne. Jonathan's son Mephibosheth was crippled and unfit to be king, so he posed no threat to David. Ishbosheth's assassins presented the head of their king to David to prove their involvement in the assassination. They explained their act of murder as the Lord's vengeance on Saul's house. Even though Ishbosheth's death advanced David's kingdom, he once again publicly distanced himself from it. Instead of rewarding the two generals, he executed them, and their bodies were dismembered. To dismember the bodies of the assassins was an act of extreme disgrace for the victim and shame for the family. Moreover, David spoke well of Ishbosheth by calling him an innocent, righteous person (v. 11). Thus was David cleared of any suspicions of complicity. These actions were consistent with his promise to Saul that he would show mercy on his posterity. A guiding principle in David's life and reign was that violence leads to more bloodshed, in line with Jesus' teaching that all who live by the sword will die by it as well (Matt. 26:52).

5:1—6:23

David Is Made King over All Israel

Chapter 5 of 2 Samuel presents three of David's great achievements during his reign. First, there was a nationwide recognition that he was the king of all Israel (5:1–5). Second, David conquered the city of Jerusalem (5:6–16). And third, he accomplished the decisive and final victory over the Philistines (5:17–25).

5:1–5. David Reigns over All Israel. Not long after the death of Saul's last surviving son, Ishbosheth, the tribal elders of Israel took the initiative to join Judah in making David their king. In the Lord's presence, all the people of Israel and Judah, from Dan to Beersheba, anointed him to be their "shepherd" and "king" (v. 2) in Hebron, the first capital city of David's kingdom. This was David's third and final anointing as king. In Hebron and later in Jerusalem David would reign for a total of forty years (1011–971 B.C.). His long reign stands in contrast to Ishbosheth's reign that lasted for only two years.

5:6–16. Conquest of Jerusalem. The strategic position of Jerusalem (earlier called Salem and Jebus) in the center of the land was much more suitable to David's needs than Hebron in southern Judah. Jerusalem's name means "city of peace" and it would link the territory of Judah with the northern tribes of Israel. But the city was still in the hands of the Jebusites, who were descendants of Canaan (Gen. 10:16). In earlier times the tribes of Judah and Benjamin had captured it (Judg. 1:8) but failed to completely settle it (Judg. 1:21).

The Jebusites' boastful words show overconfidence in their control of the fortress. Their statement implied that even a blind and lame army could defend it from David's attack. Yet when David and his army marched against the fortress (acropolis) of Zion, they were able to capture it. This is the first mention in the Bible of the name Zion (2 Sam. 5:7), which later became synonymous with the name Jerusalem.

The city's main water supply came from a spring located outside the city walls. Instead of launching a direct attack, David's soldiers entered the city through a secret water tunnel and thus surprised the enemy.

After the conquest, Jerusalem became the city of David. From this time on, it was Israel's capital and the location of David's palace. The cordial message sent by Hiram, king of Tyre, representing the most important Phoenician city, showed the extent of respect that David enjoyed internationally. It also demonstrated that the Lord's blessings on His chosen people and their leader were now evident for all to see. Artists from Phoenicia came to build a palace for David made of cedar wood, which was a choice building material used for building royal palaces and temples in ancient times. The royal palace provided more room for David's large family, including new wives and concubines from Jerusalem.

5:17–25. The Philistines Are Defeated. David's throne was now well established and the Lord gave him important victories over Israel's bitter enemies, the Philistines. Two decisive battles took place in the Valley of Rephaim, located southwest of Jerusalem. Recognizing himself as God's vassal, David consulted the Lord before going to war, something that Saul had repeatedly neglected to do. In this way Israel's second king succeeded in doing what the first one had often failed to accomplish. The Philistines were finally driven out of Israel's territory and never again posed a serious threat to the people of Israel.

The new name Baal Perazim ("Lord of the breaking through") was given to the place of victory to ascribe this important success to God, who came to fight with the armies of heaven. During this battle David succeeded in capturing the idols the Philistines had brought along to ensure their victory, then left behind in their panic. An army would abandon its idols on the battlefield only under the most critical circumstances. The Philistine gesture marked a reversal of their capture of the ark of the covenant at the battle of Ebenezer (1 Sam. 4:11).

6:1–23. Ark of God Is Brought to Jerusalem. The narrative in this chapter is dominated by the sacred ark of God that David brought to Israel's new capital city. The ark had been stored for a considerable time in the house of Abinadab (1 Sam. 7:1–2) in Kiriath Jearim/Baalah (1 Chr. 13:6). David wanted to bring this object that symbolized God's presence into Jerusalem. Only then could the nation be truly unified in the religious and political sense. Caring for the ark was another great accomplishment of David's reign. With the arrival of the holy ark, Jerusalem became a holy city and Israel's religious center. A large military parade was a part of the program. This testified to the importance of this event, which celebrated the glory of God sitting on His heavenly throne and commanding the armies of heaven. The appropriate music was also played for the occasion. Since the ark was particularly holy, only the priests and Levites who were descendants of Aaron were commissioned to handle it. It was not to be touched by any other individual (Ex. 25:12–15; Num. 4:15; Deut. 10:8). Instead of carrying it on poles, the two sons of Abinadab set the ark on a new cart like the Philistines did (1 Sam. 6:7) and guided it to the new destination.

When the ark shifted, Abinadab's son Uzzah reached out to steady it and was struck dead. The only reason for the punishment given in the text is that Uzzah committed an irreverent error. This is the only occurrence of the Hebrew word for irreverence in the OT. The place was named "Perez Uzzah" (v. 8), which means "outbreak of wrath against Uzzah." On an earlier occasion, some people from Beth Shemesh had suffered because of irreverent handling of the ark (1 Sam. 6:19).

King David was greatly distressed because Uzzah was punished only for wanting to make sure that the ark would not slip. For three months the ark was kept in the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite. This man may have been a member of the company of David's personal bodyguards who came with him from Gath. David now learned that the presence of the ark could be a blessing if handled with care by the priests and the Levites (Num. 7:9; 1 Chr. 15:2). So again the ark was on its way to Jerusalem.

The ark entered the capital city carried by the priests. There was a big celebration, and David offered a sacrifice to the Lord. He was not acting in a priestly role but as an ordinary worshiper because he did not belong to the tribe of Levi. In addition, countless burnt offerings were offered and completely consumed on the altar. Fellowship offerings were part of a communal meal during important celebrations such as coronations or temple dedications. In this case the Lord's enthronement in Jerusalem was the reason for celebration. The ceremony also reaffirmed David's election to kingship. The ark remained in a special tent (cf. Josh. 18:1) until the reign of Solomon, when the temple was built in Jerusalem (1 Kin. 6).

Being in a festive mood, the king distributed food and gifts to the people and chose to humble himself in the Lord's presence. Instead of being dressed in his kingly robe, he wore a priestly garment used for consulting the Lord and joyfully "danced" to the sound of the music (v. 14). The Hebrew term translated with "dance" appears only here in the OT. Comparative data from other Semitic languages suggest that its use reflects the ritual procession that accompanied the return of the ark, including the six-pace advance followed by a sacrifice (2 Sam. 6:13). This is not comparable to the modern concept of dancing, but was part of the larger ritual construct expressing reverence, joy, and the recognition that the object symbolizing God's presence was finally "coming home."

The chapter ends on another sad note, this time involving a quarrel between David and Michal, who despised David's way of rejoicing before the Lord. This caused a lasting breach between the two. In the beginning of their relationship, Michal loved David and was his only spouse, but now she was only one among his many wives and concubines. Michal never bore any children to David. Thus, no royal child was qualified to bridge the divide between the house of Saul and the house of David.

7:1–29

Promise of a Lasting Dynasty

According to this narrative, God objected to David's plan to build Him a house (temple), and instead promised to build David a lasting house (dynasty). There was a considerable time gap between the events described in chapter 6 and this chapter. The events recorded in this chapter belonged to a later period of David's reign. The two topics presented here—Israel's sanctuary and David's kingship—are vital for the entire OT.

7:1–17. God's Covenant with David. At this point in David's life the Lord had blessed him with prosperity and peace from all sides, including the hostile Philistines. God's covenant with David is presented in the context of the king's concern for the Lord's reputation. The king resided comfortably in his palace because the Lord had given him rest. In turn, David planned to provide rest for his God. David was bothered by the thought that the King of kings, whom he worshiped, instead of dwelling in an impressive temple structure, resided in a portable wilderness tent known as the sanctuary. But before David began with his plans for a temple construction, he made sure that his desire was in accordance with God's will.

The narrative in this whole section makes interesting use of the word "house," which in the original Hebrew is used here no less than fifteen times. David was relaxing in his "house" or "palace" and desired to build a decent "house" or a resting place for the Lord. Instead, God promised to build a "house" for David as a lasting dynasty. In a sense, space and location met time. God's intention for David was to provide a secure future, ultimately leading to the arrival of the other "Son of David," whose kingship would be truly "forever" and whose salvation would guarantee eternity. Instead of answering David through a priest, the Lord used the prophet Nathan to reveal His will to His servant. Although prophets spoke for God, they were not devoid of their individuality. Some of their personal opinions and feelings could differ from God's intentions. Nathan's personal opinion was that David should build a temple, but the Lord objected. This case reminds one of Samuel, who opposed the idea of setting up earthly kings over Israel, while the Lord consented to the people's demand (1 Sam. 8:6–7). In Nathan's case, the difference between the prophet's personal opinion and a divine revelation is marked by the fact that the next message he gave to David was from "the LORD" (2 Sam. 7:5), indicating the expressed will of God.

God revealed His plans for David through Nathan. He would make David's name great, just as He did for Abram by saying, "I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing" (Gen. 12:2). David indeed became Israel's greatest king. At the end of his life, he would peacefully die and be respectfully buried in his family tomb. God Himself would act as father to David's son. Divine parenthood implies care, protection, and even discipline when necessary, yet not rejection. God also indicated that the temple would be built not by David but by one of his sons (Solomon). The reason given involved David's tremendous military success. Too much bloodshed had disqualified him as the builder of God's temple. This privilege would be Solomon's (1 Kin. 5:3–5; 1 Chr. 22:8–10).

The story suggests that God is not primarily interested in the building of elaborate and luxurious temples. Instead, God is more interested in people, especially those who will accomplish His plans for the salvation of humanity. Throughout salvation history the permanence of the Davidic covenant strengthened the messianic hope. Whenever David's descendants failed, the hope of the people was directed toward the future David, also called the Son of David. In announcing the birth of Jesus Christ, the angel Gabriel referred to Him as the great Son of God—the Most High—and as having the throne of His "father David" with an everlasting kingdom (Luke 1:32–33).

7:18–29. David's Thanksgiving to God. David now humbled himself before God as Moses (Ex. 3:11) and Gideon (Judg. 6:15) had done. In response to the divine promises about a lasting covenant, he offered a thanksgiving prayer while standing beside the ark that represented the divine presence on earth. He praised the Lord's greatness and grace, far exceeding anything a human being can offer. Truly, God's ways are seen as incomparably higher when placed next to human standards.

In the Bible the uniqueness of God is one of the most important themes and provided a reason for the uniqueness of the nation of Israel. David thanked God for the promise of a lasting dynasty and recognized that the impact of His promises would be felt not only by the people of Israel but also by the nations of the world. This was God's intention from the beginning (Gen. 12:1–3). The divine assurances given here would bring comfort and hope to many faithful people.

8:1–18
Victories over Israel's Enemies

Chapter 8 shows how some of the divine promises (cf. chap. 7) made to David were realized through his victories. The order of the events reported here is topical rather than chronological, so many of the victories recorded in the chapter took place before the events of chapter 7. David's conquests extended the territory of Israel from the border of Egypt in the southwest to the Euphrates in the northeast, a fulfillment of God's promises to Abram (Gen. 15:18–21).

8:1–14. David's Further Conquests. David's rule was very successful in the military and administrative areas. Israel's power and influence extended in all directions. In the west he conquered Philistia, which included the city of Gath according to the parallel text from 1 Chronicles 18:1. This time the Philistines were not only expelled from Israel's territory (2 Sam. 5:25) but also subjugated in their land. In the east David conquered Moab, the land inhabited by relatives of the Hebrews through Abraham's nephew Lot. The friendly relationship between David and the Moabites must have been spoiled by their treachery, so David treated them harshly after the battle. The author gives no other reason for David's cruel treatment of the conquered population. A later Jewish tradition claims that the king of Moab had killed David's parents, who were refugees in his country (cf. 1 Sam. 22:4).

In the north David's kingdom extended to the cities of Damascus and Zobah, which were inhabited by the Arameans, also known as Syrians. They were related to the Israelites through the patriarchs, such as Jacob. Several Aramean city-states from the north of Israel stretching as far as the Euphrates were paying tribute to David. King Hadadezer ruled over Zobah and proved hostile toward David. The military ambitions of this king also targeted Assyrian territories. In contrast to this ruler, King Toi (or Tou) acknowledged David's superiority and sent him a present. In the south David controlled the land of the Edomites.

The concluding statement asserts that God gave victories to David wherever he went. He hamstrung the horses of the enemies, thus making them unfit for battle, because at that time Israel did not use war chariots. Garrisons were put in place to maintain control over the conquered regions. The consecration of spoils from wars, consisting mostly of silver and gold or objects coated in gold, showed that David ascribed all his victories to God.

8:15–18. David's Administration. The end of this chapter tells of David's domestic organization. The king himself was the chief executor of justice in Israel (1 Kin. 10:9; Jer. 22:2–3). Joab's name heads the list of the administrators because he was the army general and also the son of David's sister Zeruiah. David's personal bodyguards included hired soldiers led by Beniah. This commander later played an important role in Solomon's accession as king (1 Kin. 1). While the Kerethites originated from the island of Crete, the Perethites (or Pelethites) were associated with the Philistines (Ezek. 25:16; Zeph. 2:5). Later in the text the reader learns about the Gittites, soldiers from the city of Gath under the command of Ittai, who was very committed to protecting David (2 Sam. 15:18–22).

Abiathar was joined by Zadok as priest, while Nathan the prophet joined Gad. Civil advisers included a recorder and a secretary. Some of David's sons and close relatives were his royal advisers and worship leaders. The original Hebrew says that they performed the duties of the "priests," which means that they served in the sanctuary (cf. Ps. 110:4).

9:1—10:19
Mephibosheth, the Ammonites, and the Syrians

Chapters 9–20 have often been called "the succession narrative," since they relate the events about David's successor to the throne (cf. 1 Kin. 1–2). In the beginning, it was not clear even to David who would be the next king, so his sons other than Solomon pursued their ambitions to seize the throne. The author also relates David's sin and punishment and thus conveys the message that kings in Israel were not above moral laws.

9:1–13. David's Kindness to Mephibosheth. Jonathan and David were best friends, so while Jonathan was still alive David made a pledge to be kind to his descendants (1 Sam. 20:14–15). David never forgot the promises made to his friend. When he was finally well established on his throne, David desired to honor that pledge by showing loving-kindness (Heb. *khesed*) to Jonathan's only surviving son, who was also Saul's grandson.

The servant in Saul's household whose name was Ziba told David about Jonathan's son Mephibosheth (formerly called Mephi-baal), who was already mentioned in chapter 4. In the aftermath of the battle on Gilboa, where Saul and Jonathan died, the Philistines sacked Saul's capital at Gibeah. During this attack, members of Saul's household were frantically fleeing, thus causing the accident that left the child crippled for life. Mephibosheth fell on the ground and sustained a serious neck or spine injury that made him paraplegic.

The biblical text mentions twice that Mephibosheth had crippled feet. As such he was unfit to be king and posed no threat to David. When brought before the king, he was submissive and compared himself to "a dead dog," which was an expression of self-contempt (9:4). He greatly feared that David might consider him a potential rival to the throne and execute him. In ancient times, all rival claimants to the throne were systematically eliminated (1 Kin. 15:29). David calmed his fear and declared that Saul's property be returned to Mephibosheth, who as a son of Jonathan was also Saul's legitimate grandson. As the only surviving male member of the royal family, Mephibosheth was the rightful heir of Saul's estates.

This man lived in the town called Lo-Debar in the Transjordan territory of Gilead, which had been the power base of Saul's son Ishbosheth. As a cripple, Mephibosheth had lived in obscurity. David allowed him to move to Jerusalem and eat at the king's table. The king showed the same attitude of kindness toward Mephibosheth's son Mica, who was Jonathan's grandson. To be allowed to eat at the king's table was considered a special favor (1 Kin. 2:7; 2 Kin. 25:27–30). Out of his great love for Jonathan, David gave Mephibosheth honor and privileges like one of own his sons (2 Sam. 9:11).

10:1–19. Ammonites and Syrians Are Defeated. After the report on David's kindness to Jonathan's son and grandson, David sought to show kindness to Hanun, who reigned over the Ammonites. This happened in response to the news about the death of the Ammonite King Nahash, who had been kind to David. David sent an official delegation from Jerusalem to Rabbah with a message of sympathy. Ammon was a small kingdom on the eastern side of the Jordan. During Saul's reign the Ammonite king was hostile toward Israel and Saul defeated him. When David was hiding from Saul, he found refuge in the territories of Philistia and Ammon. The text does not provide the details about the kind of treaty that existed between David and the Ammonites. Although David was in alliance with Nahash, the Ammonite nobles feared that as king of all Israel, David could change his attitude toward them.

David's delegation was charged with espionage and publicly humiliated by order of Hanun, Nahash's son. As a consequence, Israel's ambassadors returned looking more like a group of captives in mourning (Is. 15:2; 20:4). They were instructed to stay in Jericho until their appearance improved. To grow long hair in Israel was a sign of dignity and honor. The shaming of David's delegation by the Ammonites appeared to be an act of shaming the king of Israel. Jericho was a border town between Israel and Ammon and had been poorly populated ever since Joshua's destruction and conquest.

The Ammonite leaders hired twenty large army divisions of Aramean mercenaries and readied themselves for a battle. (The Greeks later referred to the Aramean people as "Syrians.") In military terms, these two enemy armies appeared far superior to Israel's army, which was commanded by two of David's nephews. The Ammonites focused their defense on the city gate of their capital Rabbah. The Arameans were hired soldiers, so Joab made sure they were confronted by Israel's best men. The forces of Israel defeated Hanun's army and the Aramean troops as well.

Following this defeat, Hadadezer of Damascus gathered a vast army, which included troops that came from beyond the Euphrates. Joab delivered a speech before the battle, outlining the strategic plan and exhorting the soldiers to put their trust in the God of Israel. As an experienced man of war, he entrusted the outcome of the battle into God's hands. Once again the Israelites triumphed and so David's realm expanded further to the east. The victories over the Arameans were previously mentioned in the book's summary of David's military accomplishments (8:3–8). This was David's last military campaign against a coalition of foreign armies.

In the end, many of the Aramean city-states swore their allegiance to David rather than to Hadadezer. They also pledged to stop helping the Ammonites, who continued the war against Israel until they were completely defeated and their capital city sacked. The next chapter begins with that story. Even though David did not initiate the wars against the Ammonites and Arameans (cf. Deut. 20:12), this victory assured Israel's political supremacy in the region.

11:1—20:26

DAVID'S SINS AND FAMILY PROBLEMS

The report on David's sin changes the tenor of his life story from triumphs to troubles and from promises to punishments. His adultery and subsequent murder of Bathsheba's husband (11:1—12:31) show how easy it is for humans to corrupt themselves and misuse the power God entrusted to them. The monarchy was not yet what God intended it to be and will never be until the arrival of the King, who will eventually sit on the throne of David and whose kingdom will be eternal. Although David repented of his sins, the consequences of his actions were inevitable. God does not excuse the sin of His servants. We should be careful not to use this story to lightly deal with the sins of those to whom God entrusted great responsibilities. The story carries a stern warning not to follow David's example but to learn from the family problems he faced (13:1—20:26).

11:1—12:31

David's Sin of Adultery and Murder

Chapter 11 presents the less glorious side of David's wars and victories against the neighbors from the east. The king of Israel became guilty of two serious crimes. Fortunately, after his sins David repented and asked the Lord for forgiveness.

11:1–27. David, Bathsheba, and Uriah. David's sins of adultery and murder took place in the context of a war with the country of Ammon. Military operations normally ceased in the winter months due to rains and impassable roads. They resumed in the spring (March-May) before the harvest period when strong men were needed to work in the fields. David's earlier military successes gave him a sense of security. Thus, instead of going out to war with his army, the king remained behind. Roofs were flat in the lands of the Bible, so David relaxed on the roof of his palace and enjoyed the evening breeze. Sadly, sometimes a sense of ease and security is often the prelude to spiritual failure.

In the Hebrew, the description of David's temptation and sin is condensed and presented through a series of three action verbs: he "saw" (from the verb *ra'ah*) Bathsheba, enquired (from the verb *darash*) about her, and took (from the verb *laqakh*) her. All this he did despite the fact that he knew Bathsheba was a married woman. Her husband was Uriah the Hittite, originally from the ancient region of Anatolia (today's Turkey). He was a non-Hebrew soldier whose outstanding loyalty in this story stands in stark contrast with the infidelity of Israel's king. The name of Bathsheba's father, Eliam, is also given in the text as one of David's "mighty men" (2 Sam. 23:34). In short, the king was well acquainted with Bathsheba and her family.

The author makes it clear that Bathsheba's pregnancy was the result of David's adultery. When Bathsheba learned of her pregnancy, David did all he could to hide his sin because the punishment for adultery in Israel was death. So David sent for her husband Uriah the Hittite, who was on the battlefield as one of the king's best soldiers. However, Uriah refused to go home and sleep with his wife in spite of David's insistence that he do so. David sent gifts to Uriah and even made him drunk, hoping that in such a state he would sleep with Bathsheba and David's act of adultery would be covered up. But Uriah rejected all amenities that were not available to fellow soldiers who, as he reminded the king, were sleeping in tents in open fields (1 Sam. 21:4–5).

Uriah was a loyal soldier and a member of David's royal guard (2 Sam. 23:39). His exemplary behavior put the king of Israel in a very bad light. One is not surprised that his name in Hebrew means "the Lord is my light." In his desperation David devised a plot to have Uriah murdered by the hands of the enemy. Since Uriah "killed" David's hope to hide his sin, David was now determined to kill Uriah. This exceptionally honest man carried his death warrant in a letter, which he did not open. Ironically, David had a great trust in Uriah's integrity. Joab assisted the king in his secret plot against Uriah. A few other innocent soldiers also died in the schemed attack. David knew well that he was responsible for all these deaths. Yet he was calmed when he learned of Uriah's death.

With Uriah now dead, David took Bathsheba to be his wife. She mourned for her husband for at least seven days. The inspired author says that David's behavior did not go unnoticed by God. David sinned by abusing his power and position, but the Lord's authority was above that of the king. Moreover, nothing could be hidden from the One who sees everything (cf. 2 Chr. 16:9).

12:1–14. Nathan's Parable and David's Confession. The Lord seems completely absent from the story of David and Bathsheba. He is only briefly mentioned in the very last verse of chapter 11. The recurring verb in the original Hebrew version of that story is *shalakh* ("to send") when referring to David and other people as its subjects (vv. 1, 3, 6, 14, 27). Then about a year later, the Lord took the initiative and "sent" Nathan to confront David.

Nathan told the king a parable about a poor man's only lamb taken by a rich man for his pleasure. The rich man pitied his own lambs but showed no pity to the poor man and his family, despite the fact that the poor man's family loved the lamb and treated it as a family member. The parable built on emotions and made David burn with anger against the act of injustice. Without realizing it, David sentenced himself by swearing in the name of the Lord.

As king, David was the supreme dispenser of justice in the land (1 Sam. 15:4; 1 Kin. 3:4–28). He acted wisely in condemning the rich man, but he was not wise enough to understand that by doing so he was condemning himself. The penalty for a theft was fourfold repayment (Ex. 22:1), but David overacted and pronounced a death sentence on the criminal. The parable vividly portrayed the realities of David's sin and induced him to condemn himself.

The prophet confronted David with the words "You are the man!" (v. 7). Nathan then explained to the king his crime, which was abuse of power. He despised the commandment of the Lord that says to love one's neighbor as oneself (Lev. 19:18). David's greed was rooted in the attitude of ungratefulness to the Lord, who gave him Saul's throne and everything he had. Ironically, this included a wife by the same name as that of his predecessor, as if he truly replaced Saul. David's wife was Ahinoam from Jezreel (1 Sam. 25:43), the same name as Saul's wife, who was the daughter of Ahimaaz (1 Sam. 14:50).

Nathan also spelled out the consequences of David's sin. The punishment would be measure for measure in correspondence with the crime. Innocent Uriah had died by the sword. David's household would also experience the sword in the near future. Uriah was deprived of his wife, so David's wives would be taken from him before all Israel (cf. 2 Sam. 16:21–22). Although David's acts of violence and moral misconduct were done in secret, his humiliation would be public. Even the heavenly bodies, the sun and the moon, would witness God's justice (Eccl. 2:17; Is. 1:2).

Nathan's final prediction concerned the baby born to Bathsheba. Uriah died as an innocent man, and so would this child fathered by David. The chapters which follow show how these predictions were fulfilled in David's life. Three of his sons died violent deaths: Amnon, Absalom, and Adonijah. But the first to die was the child born to Bathsheba. In spite of this, David did not take Nathan's sayings in a fatalistic way. When confronted by a clear word from the Lord, he did not try to justify his sin or to blame someone else. Instead he humbled himself before God (Ps. 69:10). In this sense his attitude was very different from Saul's (1 Sam. 13, 15). He confessed his guilt openly and felt remorse for his crime (Ps. 51).

12:15–23. Death of David's Son. David fasted and prayed earnestly for the life of the baby whom Bathsheba bore to him. As he focused on God, his physical necessities faded into the background. He was seeking God's grace as he lay prostrate before a holy God in whose presence he felt as only the dust of the earth. Sadly, the child's life was not spared. The punishment for adultery and premeditated murder was death. David admitted that he would join the child in the tomb after his death and burial. These words remind one of Jacob's lament over the loss of Joseph (cf. Gen. 37:35).

12:24–25. Solomon Is Born. After the child's death, David's mood changed. His grieving ceased and he put on what the Bible calls the "oil of gladness" (Ps. 45:7). Then he went to worship the Lord before the sacred ark. God in His mercy gave David another son, who was called by the Lord "Jedidiah" ("beloved of the Lord"). The child's other name was Solomon, a Hebrew name related to the word *shalom* or "peace." This promised child was destined to become an agent of peace and also the builder of the temple to the Lord's name (cf. 7:12–13). Bathsheba became David's legitimate wife, and after his death she would become the next queen mother.

12:26–31. Rabbah Is Captured. Another evidence of God's forgiveness of David's sin was Israel's victory over the Ammonites. This victory put an end to a long war between Israel and Ammon, also mentioned in chapters 10 and 11. This time David joined his army on the battlefield. Joab had taken control of the water supply of the capital city of Rabbah, and David's soldiers were soon in control of the citadel with the palace. David had used similar strategy during the conquest of Jebus, which was renamed Jerusalem (2 Sam. 5:8). Joab wanted David to get the credit for the conquest of Rabbah.

The royal headdress of the Ammonite king weighed 75 pounds (34 kilos) and was made of solid gold. One of its jewels was placed on David's head, making him the ruler of this newly conquered territory. The war captives from the city were set to forced labor to repair damages caused by the war, as was customary in the ancient world. Eventually these people integrated and became citizens in Israel, working on farms or serving in the military.

13:1—20:26

The Loss of Two Royal Sons

Although the Lord forgave David's sin, there were sad consequences that almost destroyed his entire household. Absalom was David's third son (2 Sam. 3:2–3) and is the central figure in the next several chapters.

13:1–22. Amnon and Tamar. The events following the story of David and Bathsheba are described as punishments for David's sins. The story in this chapter combines the sin of lust leading to the sin of murder. David had serious problems in raising his sons, just as did Eli the priest and the prophet Samuel. His firstborn son, Amnon (3:2), was feeling a strong desire for his half sister Tamar, who was a chaste virgin and under the protection of her father David. Amnon lured her into a private room (lit. "house"; v. 8), raped her, and then cast her out. Tamar's long pleading with her brother, her alternative proposal, and her emphatic use of "no" all attest to her strong moral character.

As a princess, Tamar appealed to Amnon's honor as crown prince in Israel not to become a fool in his father's kingdom. She purposely contrasted the roles of a prince in Israel with the "fools in Israel." Her last resort was to consent to marry Amnon, but only with their father's approval. Even though marriage with a half sister was prohibited in Israel (Lev. 18:11; Deut. 27:22), Tamar tried to persuade Amnon that, if he wanted to marry her, David would allow it (v. 13; cf. Gen. 20:12). But Amnon was not interested in her proposal. He was ready to sacrifice his potential status of heir to the throne for a moment of lust. There was no true love for Tamar in his heart but only sensual desire and selfishness.

For Tamar, rape by a half brother meant that she would be despised and desolate for life. Tamar had worn a special robe described by a term used only here and in the story of Joseph, who also wore a special coat (Gen. 37:23). In Tamar's case the robe signified virginity. She tore this precious dress and placed ashes on her head to show her deep mourning (Esth. 4:3; Jer. 6:26). No longer a virgin, Tamar lost her status in her father's house. She found refuge in the house of her full brother Absalom, who named one of his daughters Tamar after her (14:27).

Amnon's character was just the opposite of Tamar's. He is presented as someone who could not control his lust. His command to get up and leave after the rape reversed the previous invitation for her to lie with him (v. 11). He appears purposely offensive when he called her "this woman" (v. 17). His guilt made him despise her afterwards. Biblical (Deut. 22:28–29) and extrabiblical (Assyrian) laws mandated that the rapist must marry the raped woman in order to provide for her needs and her status in society. But this irresponsible young man did not care about Tamar's future. David was angry, and yet he failed to punish Amnon for his wrongdoing. This passive attitude by a parent reminds one of Jacob's reaction to the rape of Dinah (Gen. 34:5).

13:23–33. Absalom Murders Amnon. Time passed, and Amnon did nothing to show regret for what he had done to his half sister. Meanwhile, Tamar's brother Absalom harbored anger that turned to hatred for his older brother. Absalom waited two years for Amnon's suspicions to abate. Finally, during a sheep-shearing festival in early summer (1 Sam. 25:4), Absalom invited the king to a celebration. He expected that David would decline the invitation but would make sure that Amnon, the crown prince, would be there to represent him.

Absalom also invited the rest of his siblings and half siblings to this celebration. At the agreed command, his servants rose up and killed Amnon to avenge his sister's rape. To make bad things worse, this tragic event was immediately followed by a false rumor that Absalom had killed all his brothers. This was not true because the other princes, fearing for their lives, fled on the mules that were used to transport royal family members (2 Sam. 18:9). Now Israel's king grieved for his eldest son.

13:34–39. Absalom Flees to Geshur. Absalom fled and found refuge with Talmai, his maternal grandfather (3:3), who was king of Geshur. This small kingdom was located across the Jordan and east of the Sea of Galilee. While David mourned for Amnon, he also missed Absalom. Three years passed before he had a change of heart and longed to be reunited with his eldest surviving son. Then Absalom showed his strong aspirations to replace David on his throne. Sadly, Absalom's character was not so different from Amnon's. In the narrative that follows, he appears equally deceitful and violent.

14:1–24. Absalom Returns to Jerusalem. Joab did all he could to convince David to allow Absalom to come back to Jerusalem. The first part of the chapter describes how a ruse was used to permit Absalom's return from exile. The second part records a lengthy dialogue, after which David consented to meet his son. The major player in the story was Joab.

Being a close relative of David, Joab tried to persuade David to forgive Absalom and let Joab bring him back to the royal court. It is likely that Joab was also concerned for the future of the kingdom, since this prince was a potential successor to the throne. When everything else failed Joab used a ruse in the interests of all Israel. He was helped in the scheme by a clever woman who used a trick and flattery to win David's heart.

Joab sent for a wise woman of Tekoa (cf. 2 Sam. 20:16–19) to go and speak to the king. Wisdom in the Bible is personified as a lady, and the word for "wisdom" is of feminine gender. This woman appropriately demonstrated that she possessed wisdom. The woman pretended to be a desperate widow in mourning who needed the king to help her in his role as chief judge (cf. 2 Sam. 8:15). She was very respectful toward the king and fell prostrate before him. She was also very articulate and used flattery, twice comparing David to an angel of God (cf. 1 Sam. 29:9). She sought the king's mercy on her only surviving son, who had murdered his brother. The conversation between the woman and David is one of the longest reported in the Bible. It was full of wisdom, rhetorical devices, metaphors, and similes.

Without her only surviving son, the woman would be left without support in her old age and also without an heir (Deut. 25:6; Ruth 4:10). So David ruled that her son should be spared because his act of murder was unintentional (Deut. 19:4–6). David agreed with the point of her story that the well-being of a whole family was more important than the punishment of an individual member. He guaranteed the young man's safety and sealed it with an oath in the Lord's name.

The woman now challenged the king to reconsider the banishment of his son Absalom. When the king's verdict was applied to Absalom's case, the well-being of the nation seemed more important than the prolonged exile of the crown prince. Her punch line was clear: death is irreversible, so Absalom's death will not bring Amnon back to life. Divine mercy will rather preserve the sinner's life than take it.

After the woman's appeal, Joab entered the stage. He was polite and submissive, fearing he might be punished for using deception. As the army general, he knew that if David died while Absalom was in exile, political chaos would prevail in the kingdom. The tribes from the north were not always fully committed to their union with the south, as would be evidenced by the rebellion of Sheba (2 Sam. 20). David understood the point of the story and sent Joab to bring Absalom back to Jerusalem, although refusing to fully restore him. According to the author, no conversation took place between father and son.

14:25–33. David Forgives Absalom. It is not clear from the text whether the king ever forgave Absalom completely. David made a mistake in that he allowed Absalom to return to Jerusalem while he refused to restore him to his position as crown prince. Had Absalom remained in exile, he could have done little to harm the king. Had David restored him, Absalom might have wished the king no harm. By failing to take a side between these two possibilities, David angered Absalom deeply, and this anger turned into a determination to conspire against his father.

Like Saul, Absalom was a very good-looking man. His growing and weighing of hair showed him to be self-centered and narcissistic. At times he also acted like a spoiled child. Although Joab was good to him, Absalom used violent means to compel him to intervene with the king. Moreover, Absalom never felt remorse about his murder. On the contrary, he considered himself free of guilt because killing his brother was an act of vengeance. It appears that his reconciliation with the king was enforced and did not last long.

15:1–12. Absalom's Treason. After his return to Jerusalem, Absalom spent several years preparing a rebellion against his father's rule. He used his good looks and charisma to mount an insurrection that almost resulted in a collapse of his father's kingdom. This time the pressure came from the divisions within the royal family and proved to be more devastating than any of the external threats to David's rule. If Absalom had possessed a different character, he might have been an excellent successor to King David's throne.

Absalom began to play the role of king by showing off before people with his chariots and horses in the style of an Egyptian ruler surrounded by his bodyguards (1 Kin. 10:28–29). He also tried to undermine the people's confidence in the king by casting doubts on David's ability to manage the government. He did this at the city gate, where most business and legal transactions took place (Ruth 4:1). As crown prince he desired to show how he could be a much better arbiter of justice than his father. Administering justice was one of the king's main functions (cf. 12:1–6; 1 Kin. 3:16–28; 2 Kin. 8:1–15), especially in times of peace.

Absalom exploited his father's weakness in failing to appoint regional and local judges, especially outside of Jerusalem. He was very skilled at building support for himself and achieved a large-scale conspiracy without any rumors reaching the royal palace. He also played a "common man" by not allowing people to bow to him but instead giving them a kiss of solidarity and kinship (v. 5; Gen. 33:4; Ex. 18:7). In this way, he "stole the hearts" of the people (15:6) and then proceeded to steal the kingdom.

At the appointed time, Absalom asked David for permission to leave Jerusalem so he could attend a sacrificial meal. This type of occasion with many guests could be an important part of the royal inaugural ceremony. The meal would also create an alliance between Absalom and the invited guests. Being unaware of his son's true intentions, David sent him with the words "Go in peace" (v. 9), though it is clear that Absalom was going to war. In Hebron, David's former capital city, the ram's horn (Heb. *shopar*) was blown and Absalom was proclaimed king. The choice of Hebron was a very clever move, because that was where his father's reign began and continued for seven years.

Hebron was located about twenty miles (30 km) south of Jerusalem. It is very likely that David's later decision to make Jerusalem Israel's capital made some of his kinsmen unhappy. Absalom was born in Hebron, and he exploited this feeling of discontentment. Like David when pursued by Saul, Absalom gained a great number of supporters in that region of Judah. This gave his rebellion greater legitimacy. Within a short time Absalom had significant support from influential people from north and south. Even Ahithophel, the chief royal adviser and Bathsheba's grandfather (11:3; cf. 23:34), joined the rebellion.

15:13–37. David Escapes from Jerusalem. As the support for Absalom steadily grew, David was forced to act. Fortunately, many of his trusted servants remained loyal to him. In order to spare Jerusalem a siege and destruction, the king decided to leave the city and raise an army against Absalom. Accompanied by his personal regiment (cf. 2 Sam. 8:16–18), he escaped across the Kidron Valley in the direction of the Mount of Olives and on toward the desert. He encamped on the western side of the Jordan.

Ittai, the commander of six hundred Philistine soldiers from Gath, was with David. The loyalty of David's personal regiment, as voiced by this captain, played a key role in David's ultimate victory. This non-Hebrew made a double oath in the name of the Lord and thus reinforced his troops' declaration of unlimited loyalty to the legitimate king of the land. Ittai's expression of personal loyalty to David implied a long-standing friendship that transcended monetary gains. The Philistine soldiers apparently lived in Israel with their families, since the text makes mention of their little ones (v. 22).

David left Jerusalem in a state of mourning and shame. As such he humbled himself before the Lord. Along the way there was an open-air altar where people worshiped God. His prayer for help was answered, and Hushai suddenly appeared (vv. 30–32). This wise man was a member of the royal council and personal adviser to the king. David sent him back to counter the wisdom of Ahithophel, whose support for Absalom caused David much anxiety. In the end, Hushai was successful in neutralizing Ahithophel's advice to Absalom.

The two high priests, Zadok and Abiathar, were also sent back to Jerusalem with the ark of God to serve as David's informers. But David left the royal harem behind. He strongly believed that the Lord would open the way for him to return, rejoin the remaining members of the family, and worship again in Jerusalem. This is probably why he sent the ark back. He did not believe that its presence could magically bring him victory. David knew that God's favor is not dependent on the veneration of religious objects. Regardless of where the king might go, God still remained the ruler of the nation.

16:1–4. Mephibosheth's Servant. The outcome of this struggle between Absalom and David would help decide which of the two men would get the support of Saul's family. Some of the incidents recorded in this chapter seem to imply that a number of Saul's relatives sided with Absalom. Ziba, who was Saul's servant and the manager of Mephibosheth's estate, came to support David and brought food supplies for the king and his entourage. His gesture of bringing a gift was similar to but smaller in size than Abigail's (1 Sam. 25). Ziba maliciously defamed his master, Mephibosheth, in order to better himself before the king (2 Sam. 19:24–28). David believed what Ziba said and granted Saul's property to Ziba, the same property he had previously given to Mephibosheth, Saul's grandson who was crippled in both feet (9:13). Ziba's accusation may have been fabricated because it is difficult to see how David's conflict with his son could result in Mephibosheth's gaining the kingdom. In this case, David made a rash decision, which later he would have to revoke (19:29).

16:5–14. Shimei Curses David. When the king crossed into the territory of Benjamin and was passing by an enclave of Saul's loyalists, a man who was a member of Saul's extended family was openly hostile. He cursed David by calling him a man of blood, a murderer, or a bloodthirsty man (v. 7). These offensive words falsely imply that David was guilty of murdering Abner and Ishbosheth in order to grab Saul's throne. This charge likely expressed the enmity that some surviving relatives of Saul felt toward David. However, the stories recorded in the initial chapters of 2 Samuel deny this accusation.

Shimei declared that David's present afflictions were the Lord's punishment. Some of the king's companions suggested that this contemptible person should be executed. David refused and instead entrusted vengeance to the Lord. Ultimately, God's justice and mercy alone determine people's fate. What the king's own son Absalom was doing to him was much worse than the Benjamite's abuse. David knew that discipline is always unpleasant as it is happening but that it later yields peace and righteousness (Heb. 12:11). While his group was waiting near the Jordan, the subject of the narrative shifts to the events in Jerusalem.

16:15–23. Advice of Ahithophel. Immediately after his unopposed entry to Jerusalem, Absalom consulted his advisors. Hushai was already in Jerusalem and did his best to win Absalom's favor. He greeted Absalom with "Long live the king!" (16:16), although readers know who was the legitimate king in Israel. A careful reading of Hushai's words shows that all of his statements were equivocal. The ambiguous language such as the titles "king" and "chosen one" could be applied to either David or Absalom. He purposely omitted personal names in favor of titles. In Hushai's mind, David was still the king supported by God and the people. Absalom assumed that Hushai referred to him as Israel's king.

The outcome of the contest between the two counselors, Ahithophel and Hushai, would determine the outcome of the pending battle between David and Absalom. The rebellious crown prince believed in Hushai, but Ahithophel's advice still mattered the most to him. So he welcomed the idea of a symbolic takeover of the kingdom by sleeping with his father's concubines (cf. 1 Kin. 2:17–25). Hushai wisely kept quiet over this advice given by Ahithophel. He knew that Absalom's immoral act would reverse the public support of his cause. Hushai's purpose was to deceive Absalom and thus help David's cause (2 Sam. 15:34).

On the same palace roof where David had secretly lusted after Bathsheba, Absalom committed public acts of immorality. There was no doubt that when David heard about this shameful act he was reminded of the prophecy concerning the results of his own sin of adultery (12:11–12). In biblical times the royal harem was considered the exclusive property of the reigning king. Any attempts to obtain women from there was seen as a sign of rebellion (3:6–11; 1 Kin. 2:20–21). The loss of the harem to another king was a sign of being deposed. By giving this advice to Absalom, Ahithophel's intention was to create a lasting breach between father and son.

17:1–14. Hushai's Success. The contest between Absalom's two counselors is paramount to the author because it would ultimately decide the outcome of the war between David and Absalom. Ahithophel's earlier advice concerned the moral aspect of the rebellion, while the second part involved the military. As the chief royal adviser, he counseled that Absalom should attack David while his troops were still in disarray. There is no doubt that this was the most logical thing to do. Speed and surprise would work against David's men, while Absalom's side would suffer very few casualties. Ahithophel concluded by reasoning that once David was dead, executed by his own hand, all Israel would support Absalom.

Absalom and all members of his entourage accepted Ahithophel's plan. Yet this time, most likely due to divine providence, Absalom also wanted to know Hushai's opinion. He was not aware that this wise man secretly worked for David (2 Sam. 15:32–36). Hushai's task was a formidable one. All odds seemed to be against him on several accounts. First, Ahithophel's advice made perfect sense. Second, it was an established fact that the opponent's suggestions were highly esteemed by Absalom and the elders. Third, Hushai was suspected of allegiance to David. In spite of all these obstacles, Hushai proved to be a brave man who eloquently expressed his opinion.

Hushai countered Ahithophel's strategy by proposing an alternative plan. He argued that Ahithophel's tactic of a quick attack would fail because of David's rich experience in warfare. All Israel from north to south knew how capable David was in hiding, so it would be impossible to find him. Hushai assured Absalom that in a short time his army would be much bigger than David's, and thus he could count on a complete victory, even if he did rush into a full-scale battle. Hushai intended to buy time for David with this advice. If Absalom delayed his attack, the king would have enough time to cross the Jordan into safety. Ahithophel's advice was logically the best, but in the use of rhetorical devices such as metaphor, hyperbole, and persuasion, Hushai's speech excelled. He wisely played on Absalom's fear by reminding Absalom that his father had the heart of a lion and was as fierce as a "bear robbed of her cubs" (17:8).

While Ahithophel's self-centered speech abounded with "I" statements, Hushai's speech gave prominence to Absalom's leadership. Hushai skillfully built his case on Absalom's pride and painted a colorful picture of a new leader in command of an army without number. The prince's imagination was captivated, and he decided to heed Hushai's directives rather than Ahithophel's. So Absalom postponed his attack and this gave the opportunity for David to distance himself further from Jerusalem.

The biblical writer makes it plain that this course of events was the work of the Lord, who was answering David's earnest prayers. God had a plan to frustrate the good advice of Ahithophel, a wise man by human standards, but one acting as an enemy of the Lord's anointed servant. Fully aware of the disastrous consequences of Absalom's move and fearing a future execution by David, Ahithophel decided to take his own life.

The triumph of Hushai's advice paved the way for David's future victory. Since this is the turning point in the narrative, from now on all developments would go in David's favor. This is confirmed by the following detail: in the same place where Shimei previously cursed the king, a woman now helped David's agents (vv. 18–20), as Rahab had once helped Joshua's spies (Josh. 2:3–7).

17:15–29. Hushai Warns David. Jonathan and Ahimaaz, the sons of Zadok and Abiathar, relayed Absalom's strategy to David. Based on this news, the king established his base across the Jordan in Mahanaim, which was previously Ishbosheth's refuge and capital city (2 Sam. 2:9). David appeared to have many supporters in this area. From the historical perspective, Mahanaim was the location where Jacob had experienced the protection of the armies of the Lord and named the place "two camps" (Heb. *makhanayim*). Jacob's small camp here on earth was strengthened by the presence of a powerful heavenly camp that was sent by God to defend His servant (Gen. 32:1).

Following the departure of Absalom's chief adviser, Ahithophel, Absalom appointed Amasa

to be his army general. This man was a relative of Joab, as well as David's nephew and Absalom's cousin. But as commander he did not have the skill and experience of Joab. In the meantime, David's friends Shobi, Makir, and Barzillai refreshed the king's exhausted army and displayed their firm belief in David's kingship. Along with other members of the royal houses of Saul and Ammon, they brought gifts to show their great support for David's cause. This was the third time in David's life and career that supportive people brought gifts and words of encouragement (Abigail in 1 Sam. 25:18 and Ziba in 2 Sam. 16:2).

18:1–18. Absalom's Defeat and Death. In the decisive battle between Absalom's army and David's men, Absalom was defeated and killed. This story provides us with a view of David as a father rather than as a king. At the urging of his soldiers, David remained behind the battle lines. His troops did all they could to make sure the life of the king was not endangered. They understood that David was the rebels' only target and his death would decide the battle. Ahithophel had rightly argued that David's death would result in Absalom's cheap and easy victory (17:1–4). In contrast with David's men, who were so protective of their king, Absalom's soldiers let their leader join the battle in which he would lose his life.

David dispatched his troops in three fighting units under the command of Ittai and his two nephews, Joab and Abishai. He then gave the instructions to care for Absalom's life. The decisive battle took place in the forests of Ephraim (more precisely, in Gilead), where the terrain was very precarious. More people died from the hostile environment than by the sword. Casualties on that day were great on both sides, even though David's army benefitted from the situation. Absalom, who had entered the raging battle as suggested by Hushai (17:11), was caught by the head in a tree and left hanging in midair. Various translations support the understanding that Absalom's long hair had something to do with this accident. If this is true, then the hair that had been a source of his pride became the means of his undoing.

The author says that Joab deliberately violated David's repeated instructions not to harm the prince and killed him instead. In fact, Absalom's death was so important to Joab that he offered a bonus of one year's pay to the soldier who accomplished it. He had done so much for Absalom, only to be disappointed by his ingratitude and rebellion. Joab's main concern was the safety of the kingdom and David's life. However, the king loved Absalom and did not view him as an enemy. This was in spite of the fact that Absalom wanted to kill him.

Absalom died without an heir. His three sons mentioned earlier in the narrative (14:27) must have died before him. The name of his daughter was Tamar. The manner in which Absalom was killed and buried showed the soldiers' contempt toward this rebellious prince (cf. Josh. 7:26; 8:29). The description of his death is full of symbolism as the royal mule deserted the would-be king and left him hanging in a tree as a person cursed by God (Deut. 21:23). His hasty burial under a pile of stones in the woods stood in contrast with the imposing monument he had set for himself in the King's Valley. When Absalom's life ended, the war instigated by greed and arrogance also came to an end. The blowing of the ram's horn signaled the end of the hostilities.

18:19–33. David Hears of Absalom's Death. The joy over the victory soon turned into David's sadness. The king was still in Mahanaim, across the Jordan, stationed between the two city gates, which were connected by a passageway. He was in great anguish as he awaited the news about the battle and Absalom. All hopes of his son's survival were dashed by the news brought by the two messengers. The choice of the messenger depended on the content of the news about the outcome of the battle (1 Kin. 1:42). One of the messengers, called Ahimaz, was confident that the news would be welcomed by David. But Joab, knowing that Absalom's well-being was more important to the king, sent a foreign soldier to inform David about the situation. The king grieved over the death of his son and wished he could give himself to bring him back to life. This was not the only lament of David recorded in the Bible, although this one is different. While his laments for Saul, Jonathan, and Abner were public, his mourning for Absalom was personal and private.

19:1–15. David Returns to Jerusalem. The state of the kingdom was more important to Joab than David's feelings toward Absalom. He urged David to rise up and fulfill his public duties as king. The post-war situation in the land required strong leadership. Instead of mourning the loss of a rebellious son, the king needed to greet his victorious troops. So David went to the city gate, the gathering place for the elders and other important people of a city. There he welcomed his soldiers, who had been willing to sacrifice their lives to ensure the safety of their king.

In the beginning of David's reign, the people of Judah were the first to unite under his leadership. This time the northern tribes of Israel were the first to reinstall David as their king. Consequently, David had to remind the people of Judah that he was one of their own. He tried to win their solid support for him because for a time they had supported Absalom. The reason for this switch of loyalty was probably their unhappiness with the transfer of David's capital from Hebron to Jerusalem (cf. 2 Sam. 15:7). This is why they first responded to David's call with hesitation. Afterwards, they welcomed him back based on his ability to rule and not for personal gain.

As a gesture of national reconciliation in the southern tribe of Judah, David appointed Amasa, Absalom's former army commander (17:25), to the post of his general. Amasa was David's nephew and exercised a great influence on the people of Judah. Another reason for this change was because the king considered Joab to be responsible for the deaths of Abner and Absalom. It is assumed that some of the elite and mercenary troops remained under Joab's command. David's difficult task at this point in his career was to keep the balance between generosity and forgiveness toward former rebels, while expressing deep appreciation for his loyal supporters.

19:16-39. David's Acts of Mercy and Kindness. The events recorded in this passage are a dramatic reversal of David's flight from Jerusalem recorded in 2 Samuel 16:1-14. Instead of humiliation and weeping, there was joy and celebration. Sackcloth and ashes were replaced by the oil of gladness. In the spirit of this glorious occasion the king proclaimed a day of general amnesty in Israel. He also decided to show an attitude of forgiveness toward hostile individuals, such as Shimei from the tribe of Benjamin, who cursed David on the way out of Jerusalem (16:5-13).

Mephibosheth also came out to welcome the king. His mournful appearance (2 Sam. 19:24) indicated that during the uprising he had no ambition to be king. It appeared that he spoke the truth but had been falsely accused by Ziba. David found it difficult to know which of the two men was speaking the truth. In the end the king had to change his previous rash oath to Ziba and divide Saul's former estate between Ziba and Mephibosheth. As Jonathan's son, Mephibosheth was still honored to sit at the royal table. David's treatment of his friend Barzillai's son continued David's pattern of magnanimity and generosity.

19:40—20:26. Unity and the Rebellion of Sheba. In spite of David's great efforts to keep the nation united, some divisions became evident as the men from the northern tribes were not invited to the welcoming party for the king. They were seriously offended by this omission. Complaints about favoritism and discrimination would continue to plague David's rule. They foreshadowed Sheba's revolt and the eventual breakup of the kingdom under Solomon's son Rehoboam.

Wars give rise to many problems even when they appear to have achieved their aims. Although Absalom's rebellion ended with a victory for David, the kingdom lost its sense of unity. God was faithful to David and preserved his throne, but his last years were not happy ones. This chapter presents yet another threat to David's rule and the unity of Israel's kingdom. As mentioned at the end of the previous chapter, suspicions of favoritism and discrimination gradually led to an intertribal argument and the threat of another civil war. David's quick and decisive action resulted in the rebel's death and prevented a division of the kingdom.

Sheba, from Saul's tribe of Benjamin, led an insurrection against David. He took advantage of the delicate situation that followed Absalom's rebellion, which was marked by divisions between Judah and the northern tribes. Fortunately, this conflict was a relatively minor affair and ended without a battle. During this crisis the men of Judah remained loyal to David. In the beginning of Sheba's rebellion, all eyes were on Amasa, who was now David's army general. But Amasa's reaction to the attempted coup was very slow. The king was forced to appoint his nephew Abishai to deal with the situation. Acting together with his brother Joab, he dealt swiftly with Sheba's challenge to David's rule. Joab used this opportunity to murder Amasa in a treacherous way, just like he had killed Abner. Amasa was Joab's relative, but he considered him to be his rival. While completely committed to David, Joab's character was brutal and ruthless.

Sheba retreated and took refuge in Israel's northernmost town called Abel Beth Maacah. This prompted David's soldiers to lay siege to the city walls. With this the people of Israel lost confidence in Sheba's chances to grab the throne from David. A wise woman from the town negotiated with Joab a resolution to the conflict, resulting in a minimal number of casualties. She was able to convince fellow citizens to offer Sheba's head to avoid the destruction of the town that, as a part of Israel, was the Lord's inheritance. The citizens of this peace-loving city were loyal to the king. They acted swiftly, and Sheba's death, like Absalom's, brought an end to the hostilities.

After this victory, Joab appears to have reclaimed his position of army general. David was not successful in his attempts to remove him from that position. The chapter ends with a short list of David's officials, similar to the one in 2 Samuel 8:15-18. This time the names of David's sons are omitted. Also, for the first time there is mention of revenue from forced labor (20:24). This novelty in David's rule would arouse popular opposition, especially later during the reign of Solomon. It would reach a climax in the murder of Adoram, chief of forced labor or revenue (1 Kin. 12:18). The list of David's officials was placed in this narrative to confirm the fact that political order in the kingdom was finally restored.

21:1—24:25

DAVID'S KINGDOM IS PRESERVED

The arrangement of the material found in the closing chapters of 2 Samuel is topical, rather than chronological. For example, the story from chapter 21 most likely took place before David's act of kindness to Mephibosheth as recorded in chapter 9. This last section of the book demonstrates how God preserved David's kingdom and opened prospects of a better future. The first narrative (21:1-22) looks back to the time when David's reign began, while the closing points toward the future of Israel's kingdom (23:1—24:25). In between, we find David praising God for His deliverance (22:1-51) and the king's farewell, along with a recognition of his valiant soldiers (23:1-39).

21:1-22

The Gibeonites Are Avenged

In this passage, the revenge by the people of Gibeon contrasts with the acts of charity to the dead done by David and the concubine of Saul. It is about the search for justice in order to restore peace to society.

21:1-14. David Avenges the Gibeonites. Early during David's reign there was a famine that lasted for three years (cf. 24:12-13). This famine was caused by a drought, and it forced the king to ask the Lord what caused such a calamity. Rains and droughts in Israel are explained in the Bible as God's way of blessing or punishing His people for the keeping or the breaking of their covenant (Deut. 11:13-17). The answer was that the famine was caused by King Saul's breaking of the long-standing covenant between Israel and the people of Gibeon (Josh. 9:25-27). These people lived in the land of Canaan before the conquest of the land by Israel. They occupied the area just north of Jerusalem in the territory of Benjamin. The covenant that Joshua made with them was confirmed by an oath taken in the Lord's name. The text says that Saul violated this treaty.

Saul's hostilities toward this minority in Israel is not mentioned anywhere in 1 Samuel. Moreover, it is unclear why Saul would attack a people who posed no threat to him or to the nation. He apparently planned to exterminate them completely, although his plan did not succeed. The author makes it clear that David was not responsible for Saul's mistakes or for the consequences of these mistakes. A blessing pronounced on Israel by the people of Gibeon would cancel the curse, but first justice had to be done. At the request of the Gibeonites, David turned over seven descendants of Saul's household to avenge the loss which these people had suffered from the hand of Israel's first king. But David spared Mephibosheth in agreement with the promise made to his best friend Jonathan to show kindness to his descendants.

After the execution of the seven men on a high hill, their remains were honorably buried and gathered with the ashes of the bones of Saul and Jonathan (1 Sam. 31:11-13). Some scholars have proposed that this execution was the reason for which Shimei accused David of bloodshed (2 Sam. 16:7-8). From a modern perspective, this passage is not easily understood. It should be kept in mind that the concept of community was very strong in the ancient world. This meant that both privileges and responsibilities were shared by all members of the community.

The big picture painted in this chapter illustrates both the Gibeonites' desire for justice over past wrongs and the acts of kindness shown toward the bodies of those executed. The latter were performed by Rizpah, Saul's concubine, and King David. All during the hot summer this exemplary lady guarded the seven corpses from scavengers until winter came. The rains put an end to the drought that caused the famine. The king then made sure that the members of Saul's family were accorded decent burials. In biblical times, burying the bones of the dead was considered an act of charity, especially if they were placed in the ancestors' grave (2 Sam. 7:12).

21:15–22. Philistine Giants Are Destroyed. This passage reports about heroic acts of David's strong men. Each one defeated a Philistine giant in a single combat. These incidents took place at various times during David's reign. This chapter ends with a catalog of wars against the Philistines, with whom David had long-standing hostilities. It also includes a list of giants, the sons of another famous giant, who were killed by David or his associates. The Hebrew indicates that Elhanen killed Goliath, while a parallel passage indicates it was a brother of Goliath (1 Chr. 20:5). For this reason, most translations say "brother of Goliath" in this passage. The short report of David's officers and their heroic deeds lays a foundation for the psalm of praise found in the next chapter. The psalm was composed by David and emphasizes the military successes of Israel. King David's rule functioned as "the lamp of Israel," which was kindled by the Lord and as such should not be quenched but should remain as the symbol of hope in God (1 Kin. 11:36).

22:1–51

David's Song of Praise

One of the best ways to celebrate victories and make such experiences memorable is to compose songs. In biblical times, it was common to compose and sing a song in response to God's help in overcoming the enemy. This is what Hannah, Samuel's mother, did after she had experienced God's saving power (1 Sam. 1–2). Seventy-two songs in the book of Psalms (about half) are credited to David.

22:1–6. God's Presence. This song is also found in the book of Psalms (Ps. 18) with minor differences. It was a thanksgiving song offered to God for David's deliverance, especially from King Saul. When facing a difficulty, David would cry out to the Lord to deliver him from mortal dangers. The narrative form of David's troubles is presented in 1 Samuel 18—2 Samuel 20. The word "Deliverer" is the key title given to God in this song. The Lord's intervention is described here in the language of the theophany at Mount Sinai (Ex. 19). The Lord came down from His dwelling place in heaven (from His heavenly temple; cf. 2 Sam. 22:7; Ps. 11:4) to rescue His faithful servant. He is a faithful God who keeps His covenant. The Lord's coming is accompanied by terrifying signs and wonders, such as earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, and thunderstorms.

The song abounds in metaphors that describe God's unlimited strength. The Lord is the psalmist's Lamp, Rock, Horn, and Shield of Salvation. Light is the metaphor of salvation and deliverance (Ps. 27:1). God gives victory over the enemy and delivers His children by leading them from darkness into light. Thunder and lightning accompany Him when He goes into battle. Some Gentile nations pictured their gods going into battles in similar ways, yet David's psalm says that none can compare to the supreme Lord of the nations. An appropriate doxology (2 Sam. 22:47–51) concludes this song.

Standing in contrast to the rock metaphor representing safety and refuge that can be found only in God is the metaphor of waves of death. Those deadly waves threaten to snatch people from the divine arms. Swirling waters in the Bible can be chaotic and destructive. Large bodies of water symbolize hostile powers that threaten to destroy God's creation. Similarly, the metaphor of the cords of the grave represents the realm of death called in Hebrew Sheol.

22:7–51. David's Safety. When the psalm is applied to David, one can see that much of his life and career was filled with struggles coming from various enemies. Yet in the end, God made His servant triumph and gave him peace. The Lord opened the way and set His child free in a broad place—a place of salvation (v. 20). David used metaphor to describe the details of the Lord's intervention in his life. Thus, David describes the Lord rushing to his aid riding on a swift angel, called a cherub. In material terms, David was delivered by a Philistine raid (1 Sam. 23) or by the wildness of the terrain (1 Sam. 24). But above these apparently material explanations, David saw the greater reality of the Lord of Sinai acting with power on his behalf.

The meaning of all this poetic imagery is that God supernaturally works through life's circumstances. Behind dark veils, the Lord works from His throne in the interest of His child. Although in the shadow, He is still in control. The psalm forms a fine commentary on David's daily walk with his Lord. As an outstanding piece of poetry, it looks forward with the eyes of faith to God's future faithfulness toward David's many descendants. The Lord promises to reward those who earnestly seek Him.

23:1–39

The King's Farewell and His Mighty Men

David's lasting legacy in Israel consisted of a firm commitment to the service of the Lord and a peaceful, prosperous dwelling in the promised land. The chapter includes David's last words in the form of a poem and lists several heroic acts of his bravest men.

23:1–7. Righteous Ruler. This short psalm was also composed by David. Other biblical personalities who uttered praises to God at the end of their lives included Jacob (Gen. 49) and Moses (Deut. 33). In this poem David compares a righteous ruler to a gentle rain, while the wicked oppressor is like thorns. The opening words of the chapter state that David was moved by the Holy Spirit to utter an oracle (*ne'um*, "an announcement"). This term, sometimes translated as "oracle," commonly introduces a prophetic speech (Num. 23:7; 24:3; Is. 14:28; Mal. 1:1) It can also introduce wise sayings (Prov. 30:1; 31:1). As far as the evidence goes, this is the only explicit reference in the OT to David's prophetic gift. In the NT he is plainly called a "prophet" (Acts 2:30). The passage looks back to the time when God acted as David's shield and protection. God protected him in the same way that He guarded Jacob in all his ways and delivered him from harm (Gen. 48:15, 16). The song also looks forward to the future Son of David, the promised Messiah, who will establish justice on earth.

The psalm is David's last formal reflection on life and his covenant with the Lord. The topic of God's relationship with His people is far more prominent in this song than the topic of Israel's enemies (cf. chap. 22). God has promised to cast aside those who oppose His plans as harmful thorns are cast into the fire. Fire is used in the Bible as a symbol of both God's presence and His judgment. The wicked will come to an end, while God's covenant with His anointed servant will never cease (7:16). The just ruler is compared to light. David was called by God to rule over Israel in righteousness and respect for the Lord ("fear of God").

23:8–39. Courageous Soldiers. This catalog of David's heroes is another tribute to God's goodness. The two songs that precede it ascribe all of David's victories to the Lord. The mention of mighty men testifies to the human help the king received from his outstanding soldiers. The list is ordered hierarchically and begins with the top three heroes. The first part of the catalog presents short stories about heroic acts, most of which were performed in the early period of David's reign. Many of the heroes came from Judah, particularly from David's hometown of Bethlehem. Others came from Benjamin and Ephraim, while at least two were of foreign origin.

David had two elite groups of champions who served as his bodyguards, along with a special fighting force. The first three accomplished significant exploits against the Philistines. The second group included thirty brave warriors whose names were listed in the royal annals of distinction. Some of the heroes died while performing their extraordinary duties. Two names that stand out in that regard are Asahel and Uriah (chap. 11). Surprisingly, Joab is not mentioned, although his name previously headed the list of David's officials (2 Sam. 8:15–18). Most commentators agree that he was counted in the total of thirty-seven mighty men.

Acts of bravery were performed during hot summers and cold winters. During one hot summer, three soldiers broke through the enemy camp to bring David some water from a well in his hometown of Bethlehem. But when they brought the water, David refused to drink and instead poured it on the ground. Drinking this water would have been like drinking the blood of the soldiers who risked their lives. On a snowy day, one of David's soldiers killed a lion in the midst of a pit. Hunting lions was a favorite sport of kings and heroes in the ANE and testified to their courage. The common technique used was a pit. The lion was pursued into a pit where a net was used to entangle it. The hunter would use a spear to finish the kill. To catch a lion in winter was more difficult because wild beasts had trouble finding food and became more dangerous.

24:1–25

David's Pride and Repentance

The closing chapter of the book deals with three dominant topics, namely the census, the plague, and the altar. Figuratively they stand for pride, punishment, and forgiveness. Thus, the book closes with a message of forgiveness in the context of worship.

24:1–9. David's Census of Israel and Judah. The parallel passage from 1 Chronicles 21:1 is helpful in understanding this story because it mentions the involvement of "an enemy" (Heb. *satan*). Although modern translations have the word "Satan" (the devil) in this parallel text, the original Hebrew has no definite article in front of the noun "enemy." There are other OT passages, such as Job 1–2 and Zechariah 3, that speak of Satan or "the enemy" (the Hebrew *hassatan*). But this is not the case in 1 Chronicles (see "Satan and David," p. 536). Nevertheless, the absence of the article does not automatically mean that the reference is not to Satan. In this case we are dealing with Satan.

The author of Samuel puts emphasis on God's control of history. The plague and its cessation resulted from David's actions, yet both were also determined by God. Since the Hebrew narrative style is such that the summary (or conclusion) is given first, we should read the statement from 24:1 as saying that the anger of the Lord burned against Israel *because* "someone" incited David to act against his subjects. According to 1 Chronicles, this someone was "Satan." The authors of 2 Samuel and 1 Chronicles seem to say that the king decided to number his fighting men in response to the threat of a military confrontation.

David usually consulted the Lord or His prophet in a time of crisis. Sadly, this time he failed to do so (1 Sam. 22:5). The Lord's prophet, Gad, appeared only later in the narrative (2 Sam. 24:11). David's decision to take the census of all men in Israel from north to south for a military purpose betrayed his pride and a growing tendency toward self-reliance. Joab's warning to the king did no good. It is true David was conscience-stricken later (v. 10), but by then it was too late to change the decision.

24:10–17. Judgment on David's Sin. God gave David a choice of three types of punishment: famine, plague, or war. All three are described as curses, which are caused by breaking the covenant (Deut. 28). David decided that the plague was the least of the three possible evils. The famous covenant chapter from Deuteronomy speaks of the three types of curses (Deut. 28:15–25). David publicly confessed that he was guilty of the deaths of many people in Israel. The nation's shepherd caused harm to his poor sheep (1 Chr. 21:17). History demonstrates that the mistakes of leaders cause suffering for ordinary people. This is a lesson that leaders often forget.

24:18–25. Altar on the Threshing Floor. The prophet came to instruct the king to build an altar on the very site where he saw the destroying angel (cf. Ex. 9:3; 12:23). Yet, the author made it clear that this angel was under the Lord's absolute control. The threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite was located on Mount Moriah. The site where God's presence was revealed to Israel's king was to become the site of the future temple (1 Chr. 22:1; 2 Chr. 3:1). It is possible that the word Araunah in the language of the Jebusites was not a personal name but a title meaning "governor." Threshing floors were usually located outside of the city and near the gate. There, on the flat ground, the grain was separated from the chaff. This large, flat, open area was a popular gathering place for the townspeople, especially during ceremonies and festivals.

David was offered the piece of land as a gift by a local landowner who lived in the area even before David's conquest of Jerusalem. In purchasing the site, David did not neglect to pay a price. In this way the future temple site became the property of David's house. There he built an altar, offered sacrifices, and prayed on behalf of the people.

Thus, 2 Samuel ends on a hopeful note. David was always ready to confess his transgressions before God and devote himself to the proper worship of the Lord. In spite of his sin, David remained the Lord's vassal. The piece of the land promised long ago to the ancestors was now dedicated to the Lord. This represented a rededication of the whole country and nation to the holy calling that originated with God. The book closes by looking forward in expectation of what would soon happen—the building of Solomon's temple to the Lord. It also closes with the people living in a land free from plagues. This local and temporal freedom from evil anticipated one at a cosmic level and filled the heart of God's people with hope.

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1 KINGS

INTRODUCTION

Title and Authorship. In the Hebrew Bible the books of Kings are simply labelled "Kings 1 and 2." They conclude the section of the Hebrew Bible known as the "Former Prophets" that also includes Joshua, Judges, and the two books of Samuel. Greek tradition saw Samuel and Kings as unified and labelled the books of Samuel as "Of the Kingdoms 1 and 2" and Kings as "Of the Kingdoms 3 and 4." It is possible that the early Greek translation of the OT, the Septuagint, was the first to divide the book of Kings into two. Christian tradition considered Kings a single book until scholars divided them in the sixteenth century.

The unified style of writing points to one primary author rather than many—one who used various records available to him, including written accounts of Solomon (1 Kin. 11:41), kings of Israel (14:19), and kings of Judah (14:29). Hebrew tradition suggests that the author may have been Jeremiah, but another prophet is just as likely since prophets play such a prominent role in the book.

Date. The events described in the books of Kings cover about 400 years and date from approximately 971 B.C., the start of Solomon's reign, to 562 B.C., when Jehoiachin was released from prison and was invited to eat at the king's table (2 Kin. 25:27–30). It is generally understood that most of the material for the book was in existence before the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.

Backgrounds. The book opens with the dying days of King David and ends with the death of Ahab. Solomon succeeded his father, David, but because of his multiplied idolatry (to cater to his foreign brides), the kingdom was subsequently divided into two (in 931 B.C.). The capital of the Northern Kingdom of Israel was Tirzah for the first fifty years, but Omri moved it to Samaria (about 12 miles [20 km] to the west). The capital of the Southern Kingdom of Judah was Jerusalem. The first northern king, Jeroboam I, afraid that his people's loyalty would remain with the temple at Jerusalem, introduced a golden calf in both Bethel and Dan and introduced a priesthood that anyone could join in order to staff the shrines. This blatant disregard of God's command regarding worship led to the downfall of the Northern Kingdom.

Each successive Israelite king maintained and embellished idolatrous worship, and all are noted for doing evil according to the Lord's evaluation. There were twenty northern kings altogether (eight in 1 Kings) from nine different dynasties: nine died by assassination, one in battle, one by injury, and nine by natural causes. During the same time there were twelve kings of Judah, all from the Davidic line except for Queen Athaliah, who was a granddaughter of the Israelite king Omri. By the time Judah went into its Babylonian Exile, they too had twenty monarchs, eleven of whom are noted for doing evil according to the Lord's evaluation.

Theology and Purpose. The books of Kings contain a unified description and evaluation of events that led to the Exile of God's people. They uncover the reasons for the loss of the land, its kings, and the temple. Its carefully constructed narrative communicates a vital message: although earthly dynasties may fail, God has bound Himself to His people through His word with covenantal promises that will not fail. He will fulfill His word within history, shaping it with His blessings or condemnation. As 2 Kings ends with the loss of land, temple, and king, readers receive a faint glimmer of hope: God, in fulfillment of His promises, would one day bring about restoration. As the books unfold, so too do a number of key theological themes: the land, the temple, the prophetic voice, sin and judgment, and hope. It is significant that each of these themes have their roots in the Pentateuch, particularly in the account of the Exodus.

1. Land. God promised His people a land to dwell in (Deut. 1:8), asked them to build Him a sanctuary to dwell among them (Ex. 25:8), and spoke through the prophetic voice of Moses (Deut. 34:10). God's action gave hope for a human-divine harmony that would benefit not only His people and their land but all peoples (Deut. 32:43). These themes are developed in the stories of the kings of Judah and Israel.

2. Temple. Solomon inherited a large domain from his warrior-father; but as a result of the idolatry he introduced for the sake of his wives, large segments of the kingdom were lost in subsequent years to increasingly emboldened enemies. Eventually this led to the destruction of the Northern Kingdom in 722 B.C., with its people scattered across foreign lands. One hundred and thirty-six years later, Jerusalem and its temple were destroyed, and the people of Judah were exiled in Babylon.

It seems that most of the Judean kings added various features to the temple to honor foreign deities (e.g., a shrine, altar, or idol), or they neglected the temple altogether to focus on a multitude of high places and attractively ornamented glades. Instead of the temple being a focal point of God's presence with His people and a constant reminder of His work of forgiveness and restoration, it was turned into a contrived monument to religious compromise and self-determination (see "The Temple in Chronicles," p. 541).

3. Prophets. In this context, the text introduces the prophets—spokespeople for God who thundered against the injustice and apostasy of idolatry. Prophets featured throughout the books of Kings include Nathan (1 Kin. 1:8–45), Ahijah the Shilonite (11:29–39; 14:1–18), an unnamed man of God (chap. 13), Jehu (not to be confused with the king who reigned about eighty years later; 16:1–7), Elijah (17:1—19:19; 21:17–29), one or more unnamed prophets (20:13–14, 22–28; 35–41), Micaiah (22:8–9, 13–28), Elisha (2 Kin. 2:1—7:2; 8:7–13; 9:1–3; 13:14–21), and Isaiah (2 Kin. 19:6–7, 20–36; 20:1–19). Other prophets also living at this time included Jeremiah, Daniel, and Ezekiel. The presence of such a large number of prophets clearly demonstrates the important role that they played throughout the books and during this period.

These prophets proclaimed the word of the Lord to the people. It is through the fulfillment of this prophetic word that the Lord controlled and guided history. Prophecy and fulfillment play an important role in the message of the books. The Lord shapes history through the word of judgment and salvation. Unfortunately, the kings and their people largely ignored the prophets, choosing instead to follow the lifestyle and cultic practices of the gods of Canaan. The word of judgment came against them and was fulfilled in the destruction of the city and the temple. But there was also the word of hope that would shape the future.

4. Hope. Destruction and exile are not the end of the story. Usually the assurance of hope, restoration, and renewal follows a prophetic word of judgment, and that is how the books of Kings end. After a description of the thorough dismantling of the realm and the complete destruction of the temple and monarchy, the story declares the release of an imprisoned king in exile (from the line of David) from his dungeon and recounts his being allowed to dine at another king's table. This indicates that the process of restoration had begun and that what had been a faint hope now ignited the assurance that by the grace of God, one day all things would be made new (cf. Rev. 21:5).

Literary Features. The books of 1 and 2 Kings probably should never have been divided—they are essentially one book. There is a definite sense of hindsight, rather than a mechanical fragmentation where the writer attempts to describe events as they happen. The style of writing is historical narrative—stories artistically crafted and told by a narrator who develops the plot and characters of each story, who repeats key words, phrases, and sounds, and who sometimes uses dialogue and the perspectives of others to communicate a lesson.

COMMENTARY

1:1—11:43

THE UNITED MONARCHY

The glorious days of David's reign were over, and a harsh reality dawned. The book opens with an aged and enervated King David who had not yet appointed his successor. Not only did this threaten the peace of the realm, but it also meant there was no new king to build the temple, complete the process of uniting the nation, build up its infrastructure, and secure its borders. David's successor would set the course, either for the success and long-term viability of

the nation or for its eventual downfall. Therein lies the drama that unfolds in the book: Would the people of promise, residing in the land of promise, be guided by the conditions of the covenant, or would they instead adopt the gods, the hopes, the inspiration, the lifestyle, and the fate of their neighbors?

1:1—2:11

David's Last Days

The narrative of Kings opens by introducing a number of key characters. Abishag played a key role in the final stages of David's reign. Adonijah, sensing the impotence of his father, seized the opportunity to declare himself king before his brother Solomon could. Bathsheba, urged by Nathan the prophet, ensured that David kept his promise to make Solomon the next king. Bathsheba's plea rekindled some of David's old fire, and he called for his trusted advisors to inaugurate Solomon as his successor.

1:1–10. Abishag and Adonijah. The short story of Abishag placed at the beginning of the book alerts the reader to the fact that a new king should be immediately appointed to succeed David. David had reached a point where he had to totally rely on others, thus risking the security of the kingdom through potential palace intrigues and disputes for power. Abishag was from the town of Sunnem, and since she had a very specific task with respect to the aged king, she was not considered to be part of the king's harem.

Realizing that his father was weakened with age, Prince Adonijah (whose name means "the Lord is my God") feared that his brother Solomon would soon take the throne. He concluded that he had to move fast in order to take over the kingdom. He was David's fourth and probably his oldest surviving son (2 Sam. 3:2–4; 13:28; 18:14–15). Possibly he considered himself rightful heir apparent on that basis. He exalted himself and let those in the right places know that he would be the next king. He acquired a chariot and appointed fifty men to run before him (1 Kin. 1:5). His tactics reflect those of Absalom (2 Sam. 15:1) and suggest a similar demise.

The text describes Adonijah as handsome (1 Kin. 1:6), as in the case of Absalom (2 Sam. 14:25) and David (1 Sam. 16:12). He managed to attract some significant supporters, especially Joab and Abiathar. Joab, Adonijah's cousin, played a key role during David's reign (e.g., 2 Sam. 14; 18:14; 1 Chr. 11:6). However, a rift developed between David and Joab from the time Joab murdered Abner (2 Sam. 3:12–39). Abiathar, the priest who had joined the fugitive David after escaping the slaughter of the priests by King Saul (1 Sam. 22:17–23), may also have fallen from the king's favor. Abiathar was being eclipsed by Zadok and Joab by Benaiah (the captain of the king's guard), so the prospect of supporting a new king may have been a very attractive option for the two old campaigners.

1:11–31. Succession Crisis. The venue for Adonijah's coronation celebration was near a well-known spring, easily visible across the Kidron Valley from Jerusalem and David's citadel valleys (v. 9). While David, in his apparent feeble condition, was unaware of what was happening, others would have understood the significance and the threat of the events unfolding. Nathan the prophet became aware of what was taking place and decided to alter the course of history initiated by Adonijah since it was not according to God's will. So immediately, together with Bathsheba, he set up a plan to approach King David, the center of power, to ensure the king's legal and proper succession. Otherwise the people of Jerusalem might assume Adonijah's rise to the throne as official (v. 20). Nathan and Bathsheba focused their coordinated speeches on the reliability of the king's word (vv. 17, 24). He had promised that Solomon would succeed him, and now the fulfillment of his word was to shape history. But the king knew that it is really the Lord who was shaping history (vv. 29–30).

This short vignette underlines the significance of the prophets of God in several of the dramas in the book. They appear suddenly on the scene at critical moments. If Nathan had done nothing, Bathsheba would not have acted; and without her impassioned plea, David would have failed to secure the throne for the divinely approved successor, and the temple might not have been built. This is an example of the crucial role of the prophets throughout the books of Kings in regard to safeguarding the future of the kingdom.

1:32–40. David's Transfer of Power to Solomon. David's vigorous and positive reaction to Bathsheba and Nathan's petition contrasts sharply with his feeble demeanor portrayed in the opening lines of the book. David ordered three trusted friends to accompany Solomon in a big procession to the Gihon Spring. The fact that Solomon sat on a mule in his inauguration demonstrates the ancient conception of mules as honored animals worthy of royalty. These animals were highly priced in that period because they had to be imported. Hebrew law did not allow the breeding of hybrid animals (Lev. 19:19).

It will be noticed that the rival ceremonies were staged at springs, doubtless because these were public places frequented by people who were constantly in need of water to carry home. Events taking place in such locations would be quickly known throughout the city. En-Rogel, on the opposite side of the valley from the city, was a well-known spring and public landmark. Gihon, down the slope from the main city, was the main water supply for Jerusalem, and while perhaps it was not as directly visible to the majority of the population in the city, it was of more immediate significance to their daily lives. A coronation procession down through the city from the palace to the Gihon Spring at the bottom of the hill would have been easily visible to Adonijah's party on the other side of the valley. Additionally, the symbolism of the place, as a counterpoint to Adonijah's location, would have been easily recognized by the people. The joyous procession, which included music, was so loud that it is described metaphorically in terms of an earthquake (1 Kin. 1:38–40).

It is significant that the security of this operation was entrusted to the Cherethites (Kerethites) and Pelethites who comprised the royal bodyguard (v. 31). They were most likely from Philistine tribes who had pledged loyalty to David in his early years. Soldiers from the Philistine city of Gath—Goliath's hometown—also formed part of David's loyal troops (2 Sam. 15:18–23). Possibly the Cherethites originated (a century or two earlier) from Crete, and the Pelethites were trusted royal couriers who also doubled as guards. While Israelite heroes like Joab supported the pretender to the throne, former enemies and worshipers of pagan deities celebrated, protected, and supported the legitimate king. God has His instruments everywhere.

2:1–11. Solomon Enthroned. Despite the repeated and more intense reminder of the nearness of David's end, the revitalized king continued his cogent instruction. He charged his son to be strong, be a man (v. 2), walk in God's ways, and abide by His instructions (v. 3). These words are similar to those used by Moses when passing on his "mantle" to Joshua (Josh. 1:7–9). David also drew on the language of Nathan the prophet when establishing a covenant between God and David (2 Sam. 12–16). In that covenant, God promised David an everlasting dynasty, the success of which would be due (in part) to the faithfulness of his descendants (1 Kin. 2:4). David wanted to ensure Solomon's personalization of this requirement of God's covenant with him. The promises of God to David, His word, would be fulfilled as long as Solomon, the new king, was loyal to Him.

The speech concluded and the aged warrior-king subsequently died. The phrase "rested with his fathers/ancestors" (v. 10) refers to the practice of burying family members in the same tomb that was used for family members who had died previously, with the bones of various generations "resting" together. The summary of David's reign informs us that it lasted forty years—placing it from 1011 to 971 B.C.

2:12—4:34

Solomon Established

After caring for his father's unfinished business (2:13–46), Solomon married an Egyptian princess (3:1–3). In a dream the Lord promised him wisdom (3:4–15), and this was fulfilled (3:16–28). He then set out to establish his civic infrastructure (4:1–19). The biblical text highlights Solomon's prosperity (4:20–28) and includes a final statement about his wisdom (4:29–34).

2:12–46. Completing David's Unfinished Business. The reason for commencing this section at v. 12 rather than at v. 13 (as some commentaries do) is the use of a Hebrew literary devise called an *inclusio*, where a repeated statement frames a literary passage. Such is the case between v. 12 and v. 46, which repeat the statement that Solomon's kingdom was "firmly established." Solomon's rival, Adonijah, unwittingly sealed his own fate and confirmed Solomon's place on the throne when he asked Bathsheba to negotiate in order to have Abishag as his wife. Solomon interpreted Adonijah's request as an attempt to legitimize his ambitions to take over the realm (vv. 15–17) and found here a way to solve a problem once and for all. He used the widely accepted practice that a new king would take over the harem of the previous king (cf. Absalom in 2 Sam. 16:21–22) to condemn Adonijah for still seeking to take over the rest of David's harem and kingdom. Solomon ordered Adonijah's execution and then followed through with the other requests of his father (1 Kin. 2:5–9). Abiathar was effectively banned from the king's court

and from the sanctuary, thus fulfilling the word of the prophet that the influence of Eli's line would come to an end (v. 27; 1 Sam. 2:31–35).

This action probably signaled to Joab that his time had come too. Although Joab was David's nephew, his kinship to the king had not stopped David from demoting him for killing Absalom (2 Sam. 19:13). Joab had also murdered Abner and Amasa, and their blood still stained his belt and sandals (1 Kin. 2:5). He fled to the sanctuary and clasped the horns of the altar in an attempt to receive asylum and amnesty. Joab thought that since Adonijah had received mercy by clinging to the horns of the altar (1:50–53), he too could receive mercy. But this Mosaic law applied to only accidental killing, not premeditated murder (Ex. 21:12–14). Joab's defiant refusal to leave the altar brought about his execution there (1 Kin. 2:28–34). Despite his shameful end, he was given an honorable burial on his home estate near Bethlehem (v. 34; cf. 2 Sam. 2:18, 32).

Shimei had cursed David during his escape from Jerusalem, but David had showed him mercy (2 Sam. 16:5–13). The time had come to set matters straight. Solomon confined Shimei to Jerusalem and forbade him to cross the Kidron Brook or to go anywhere else (1 Kin. 2:36–38). The Kidron Valley formed the boundary between Judah and Benjamin, so this restriction prevented Shimei from either working his own land at Bahurim (on the eastern slopes of Mt. Scopus) or inciting a revolt against the king among his kinsmen. The way Solomon dealt with Shimei when he disobeyed demonstrates Solomon's wisdom as a ruler, successfully walking a very fine line between just and fair leadership and alienating the key tribe of Benjamin.

3:1–15. Making the Nation Great. Now that the immediate threats to the throne had been resolved, Solomon turned to wider matters of state. Before taking the throne, he had already been married to at least one wife, Naamah (the Ammonitess; 1 Kin. 14:21), perhaps for at least two years. Naamah's son Rehoboam was forty-one when he became king (14:21), and Solomon reigned for forty years (11:42), which indicates that Rehoboam was born while Solomon was still a prince. As the new king, Solomon's next action meant to bring lasting peace by taking more wives, and his first marriage constituted a remarkable political achievement. Solomon did something that few other kings of any nation had done before: he married an Egyptian princess, becoming the son-in-law of the Egyptian Pharaoh. At this time, the king of Egypt was probably Siamun of the Twenty-First Dynasty, who came to the throne a few generations into the Third Intermediate Period (eleventh through eighth century B.C.; a time when multiple people claimed to be king simultaneously). Siamun would have seen this marriage as a way to strengthen his position as king in Egypt by aligning himself with a strong ruler. The city of Gezer served as dowry for the wedding (9:16), evidence that even by this time not all cities in the land were controlled by Israel. It also demonstrates the mutual benefits enjoyed by the two kings and of the long-standing interdependence that lasted right up to the time of the Babylonian Exile. From the outset Solomon showed his diplomatic skills. Political alliances were one way to make the nation great by protecting against invasion from the south.

At the end of 3:1 is a quick sketch of some of the civil projects that Solomon initiated: a palace for himself, the temple, and the completion of a city wall around Jerusalem. Meanwhile, the hint of future disaster is revealed—the people sacrificed at the high places (v. 2), as did Solomon. This becomes a major issue for the nation in the years ahead.

After Solomon's politically expedient marriage (which was followed by many more), the second step for making the nation great was to reinforce the importance of religious ritual (he was about to build a temple for God as He and David his father had stipulated). Solomon went to the most significant high place at Gibeon,

High Place—*Bamah*

A *bamah* or "high place" was a shrine or worship site and not strictly speaking a "high" place. The term comes from Jerome's Bible (fourth century A.D.), which translates the Hebrew word *bamah* as *excelsus* ("high" or "eminent"). The *bamah* was typically a flat platform carved in bedrock, found not just on hills and mountains (e.g., Num. 22:41; 1 Sam. 9:14) but also in towns (2 Kin. 17:29; 23:5) and in valleys (Jer. 7:31; 32:35). Although they were initially considered legitimate places of worship (e.g., 1 Chr. 21:29), they were banned after the temple's completion to prevent the Israelites from copying the ritual practices of the surrounding nations, whose "high places" included an altar for sacrifice and various stands or alcoves to display an idol or other cultic objects.

about 6 miles (9.7 km) northwest of Jerusalem, where the remnants of Moses's wilderness sanctuary resided (2 Chr. 1:3)—the ark of the covenant was in a tent at Jerusalem (2 Sam. 6:12, 15, 17). Gibeon, the largest and most important place for worship in the land prior to the construction of the temple, was in the heartland of Saul's support base. Solomon's visit to Gibeon not only sought God's blessing on his reign but also may have been an attempt to reconcile with Saul's loyal followers.

While he was still at Gibeon, God appeared to Solomon in a dream (1 Kin. 3:5–15). Not only did this unique experience (no other Israelite king received this privilege) demonstrate divine willingness to bless the new king, but it also reinforced the covenant that God had made with David (see 2 Sam. 7). On that occasion God had promised David that He would establish the kingdom of his son (2 Sam. 7:12–13), that this son would build the temple, and that God would be his Father and chastise him if he committed iniquity. God concluded His covenant speech with David by assuring him of His *khesed* ("covenant faithfulness") to bind Him and Solomon together—in contrast to the divine rejection experienced by King Saul.

When God asked Solomon to choose a gift, Solomon's four-part answer was couched in covenant language, including *khesed* (1 Kin. 3:6). Solomon recalled God's past faithfulness, pled for His continued help, demonstrated his humility, and prayed for an understanding heart in order to be a wise ruler. This became the third step for Solomon to make his kingdom great. If he truly chose wisdom over riches and fame, then every blessing would become available to him. Usually a king received wealth and honor as a result of a wise reign, but God gave Solomon all three from the beginning, and he quickly became internationally recognized as a leader of note. God assured Solomon that there would be no king like him before or after (v. 12) and that he would be preeminent among reigning contemporary monarchs as well. Unfortunately, the promise of long life was not fulfilled due to Solomon's later unfaithfulness, and he probably did not live beyond the age of sixty (11:42).

3:16–28. Solomon's Wisdom Revealed. The reality of God's promise of wisdom was publically demonstrated by the visit of two prostitutes. This remarkable drama spotlighted some very promising features for the kingdom. First, it showed that the king was approachable by all his subjects; justice was accessible to all. The struggle between the two disputing women was an impossible dialogue of "my son"—"your son," "your son"—"my son." There were no witnesses, so it was one woman's word against the other's. There was no human way through this legal impasse.

Second, it also showed that the Lord had fulfilled His promise by giving Solomon great wisdom. His immediate solution was both unexpected and seemingly brutal. Instead of analyzing the words or asking for more details, his solution revealed a deep understanding of human nature and cut through to the deepest feelings of the true mother. This story could have ended very differently if the biological mother had been as coldhearted as her companion or if she had as bad a reputation as her "profession" would suggest. Not only did Solomon expose the false claims of the false accuser, but he gave the true mother confirmation and legitimacy, encouraging her to give this child the hope of a successful and productive life in the community, despite his dubious origins.

The outcome was electric. The news traveled very quickly, and all Israel soon heard about the brilliance of their new king. They had a new respect for him and recognized God at work in their midst (v. 28).

4:1–19. Social Order. While Saul's government structure had been fairly rudimentary (mainly military), David's was a little more ordered. David had organized the basic utilities of army, public records, priesthood, secretariat, and royal bodyguards (2 Sam. 18:16–18), and later he established a department of labor or revenue (2 Sam. 20:23–25). Solomon established a more sophisticated system. He appointed chief officials with specific government functions and governors of designated districts. Solomon kept the first four basic organizational units of his father but added offices to oversee the district governors, a royal advisor (1 Kin. 4:5), an officer to manage the royal estate, and a manager to oversee the labor force necessary to accomplish the king's projects (v. 6).

Next, the governors of the districts were named (vv. 7–19). Solomon assigned twelve districts to feed the royal household—one per month. Their boundaries were not entirely consistent with the territories of the twelve tribes, which perhaps demonstrates that Solomon became more concerned with overall national unity than the preservation of tribal units. This may have caused a backlash, contributing to the unravelling of the kingdom after Solomon's death. It is interesting that no governor for Judah appears in the list of governors. It is also obvious that this system took a while to establish, since one of the governors married Solomon's daughter (v. 15), and Solomon did not seem to have had a daughter of marriageable age when he ascended the throne.

4:20–28. Extent of Palace and Realm. The description of the extent of the realm indicates fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham—from the Great River (Euphrates) to the River of Egypt (not the Nile but a wadi at the northeastern extremity of Egypt; Gen. 15:18; see 2 Kin. 24:7). The Lord was shaping history according to His word. Solomon did not have to resort to military campaigns to maintain control over the nations subdued by his father. Because God gave him "rest on every side," there were no adversaries or crises (*ra'*, "evil," "disastrous occurrence"). This gift of peace is referenced by the well-known description of each person dwelling safely under a vine and fig tree (1 Kin. 4:25)—a status that became the benchmark for peace and security that later generations longed for (2 Kin. 18:31; Mic. 4:4; Zech. 3:10).

Further evidence of the economically stable times can be found in the size of Solomon's household—estimates vary between 10,000 and 60,000. This required a carefully orchestrated administrative structure to manage it and provide enough food for it. Daily food provisions included both stall-fattened and pasture-fed animals, birds, wild game, fine flour, and meal (1 Kin. 4:22–23, 27).

In addition to the daily provision of food was the supply of fodder for the king's stables (v. 28), but it is not clear how many horses there actually were. The account in v. 26 speaks of 40,000 stalls for chariot horses, and 12,000 horsemen, but the parallel passage in Chronicles (2 Chr. 9:25) specifies 4,000 horses for the 12,000 horsemen. Considering the 1,400 chariots mentioned later in Kings (1 Kin. 10:26), 4,000 stalls seems more likely if each chariot had two horses plus a spare. The number specified in Kings is probably a scribal error. The impressive nature of the stables could be a further indication of how much Solomon relied on Egypt—if this was where he obtained his horses (10:28).

4:29–34. Solomon's Wisdom. The narrative of Kings returns again to the theme of God-given wisdom to reinforce the notion that this is the best option for the future of the nation. A large harem and many foreign alliances, huge religious ceremonies, a civil service patterned on the best political system around—none of these could compete with the effectiveness of a people guided by God's gift of wisdom. The superlatives describing Solomon's wisdom and breadth of understanding are contrasted with natural phenomena (like the "sand on the seashore"; v. 29) and with the sayings of other known wise men of the day. Neither the wise men of the East (presumably Mesopotamia; cf. the wise men in the birth story of Jesus) nor the sages in Pharaoh's court could match this (v. 30). The names mentioned in v. 31 are neither Hebrew nor Canaanite, so their identity is uncertain. Were Heman and Ethan the same people who each wrote a psalm (Pss. 88, 89)? The expression "sons of Mahol" does not tell us the name of their father—*makhol* literally means "dance" or "dancer," so they could have been from a class of musicians known for their exceptional skill. This would be in harmony with the Hebrew idea of wisdom being practical giftedness that results from being filled with the Spirit of God (see Ex. 31:2–5).

Evidently Solomon was an astute observer of nature, and he drew profound and practical lessons from it to assist especially the young to live well (1 Kin. 4:33; cf. Job 12:7–8). His many proverbs and songs were widely known, and he became so accomplished that his reputation became legendary in his own time, and foreign rulers sought him out (1 Kin. 10).

5:1—8:66

Solomon Builds and Dedicates the Temple

Solomon revealed his wisdom in the construction of the temple and the palace. He began by making preparation for the construction (5:1–18), and then he built the temple (6:1–38) and his palace (7:1–12). He also prepared everything needed for the proper function of the temple (7:13–51). Solomon brought the ark to the temple and dedicated the temple to the Lord (8:1–66). Apparently both temple and palace were considered part of the same complex, and its construction took about 200,000 workers (5:14–16) and twenty years to complete (19:10). The two buildings were structurally joined, which made it easy for the king to access the temple through his own private entrance. Solomon largely depended on Hiram, king of Tyre (c. 969–936 B.C.), for the technical details of the project, which potentially gave a Phoenician architectural touch to the buildings.

5:1–18. Workers and Supplies. Hiram was one of the first foreign kings to seek out Solomon. David's defeat of the Philistines had greatly enhanced the economic status of the Phoenicians, and a friendship had developed between the Tyrian king and David. Hiram had assisted David in building his palace (2 Sam. 5:11) and had already provided abundant materials for the temple (1 Chr. 22:4). The visit of Hiram's emissaries both affirmed Solomon as the new king and assured the continuing goodwill between the two nations.

In response to this visit, Solomon sent a diplomatic letter to Hiram (1 Kin. 5:2–6) in which he reiterated the Davidic covenant and affirmed that he would soon build a temple (2 Sam. 7:12–13). He requested not only cedar but also tradesmen to direct the local workforce. Solomon negotiated for the payment of workers and supplies, and Hiram set the rate at 20,000 kors (donkey loads) of wheat and 20 kors of first-grade olive oil per year (implying that Hiram would pay his men from this after keeping a portion for himself). This list was evidently not complete, as the Chronicles account includes an extra 120,000 gallons (440,000 L) of wine and the same amount of regular olive oil—the latter presumably in addition to the smaller quantity of first-grade oil (2 Chr. 2:10). This was almost double the quota that Solomon received for his own household, and it may be that the national production capacity struggled to keep up, which led to a national debt to Hiram. This was repaid in part by Solomon giving him twenty cities in the region of Galilee (1 Kin. 9:11). This may have also caused dissatisfaction among the populace for the increased tax burden—something alluded to by the delegation that approached Rehoboam after Solomon's death (12:4).

The narrative of 5:13–18 describes the labor force (4:6). Solomon conscripted 30,000 Israelites and rostered them in three shifts lasting a month each, so that at any one time there were 10,000 of them in Lebanon and 20,000 working at the temple site in Jerusalem. From resident foreigners he raised 70,000 to transport construction materials and 80,000 to rough cut blocks from the quarries, and he appointed 3,300 supervisors to oversee them. All stone blocks (including the foundation stones that would be hidden underground) were dressed at the quarry to a high standard (v. 17; cf. 6:7) by Solomon's and Hiram's skilled workers (v. 18).

6:1–38. Building the Temple. It is significant that the date for the construction of the temple is linked to the Exodus (v. 1). The author of the biblical text was very careful to precisely record the time—the fourth year of Solomon and the second month (Ziv/Ziph was its old Phoenician/Canaanite name), which was the spring of 967 B.C. More importantly, the prominence given to the Exodus in the context of the temple suggests the ideological linkage of the two. The temple was the permanent dwelling of God manifested among His people in Canaan. They had both found a place of rest.

The temple dimensions are impressive: sixty cubits long (90 ft. or 27.4 m), twenty cubits wide (30 ft. or 9 m), and thirty cubits high (45 ft. or 13.7 m)—double the size of the wilderness tabernacle in some regards and three times higher in others (Ex. 26:16, 18), but only half the height of the second temple (Ezra 6:3). The early cubit (probably used here) is about 17.5 inches (about 44.5 cm; see 2 Kin. 20:20) compared with the cubit adopted by later kings that is a handbreadth longer, or about 20 inches (about 50 cm; see 2 Chr. 3:13).

Phoenicia

Tyre was a major city in the Phoenician nation of seafaring people who were descended from the displaced Canaanites with colonies throughout the Mediterranean. Although we may refer to Hiram's "domain" as Phoenicia, the cities in that geographical area were not forged into one political entity in Solomon's time but were a collection of loosely aligned city-states—perhaps Hiram was recognized as the leading monarch among them. Their main cities in the northern Levant were Tyre, Sidon, Gebal (Byblos), and Arvad, and they occupied the narrow coastal strip of land (in modern Lebanon) between the Lebanon Mountains and the Mediterranean Sea. Because of lack of arable land, they were renowned merchants and seamen, specializing in cedar and also popularizing an expensive purple dye (extracted from the murex snail). They were also experts in masonry, metalwork, fine pottery, and glassware.

Cedar from the Lebanon Mountains grew to 100 feet (30 m), and the Phoenicians were famous for their skills in working with it. The Egyptians and Mesopotamians favored cedar for the roof beams of their large civic buildings. It was a long-lasting hardwood that resisted both insects and dry rot.

At the entrance of the temple building was a platform across its width and extending out ten cubits (15 ft. or 4.6 m) in front. Surrounding the building on three sides were three floors of small rooms built against the perimeter wall (1 Kin. 6:5–10). These were used for storage and possibly for the priests to stay in when rostered for duty. The description in v. 9 of the completion sounds a bit premature, but the same phrase is repeated in v. 14. This indicates that this passage is a literary unit—a parenthesis—that breaks the flow of the narrative in order to bring an important announcement (vv. 11–13). Here, the word of the Lord came to Solomon, and this drew the focus away from the impressive architecture and engineering marvels to the covenant God made with his father (2 Sam. 7:8–16). The word of promise God had given to David takes center stage, announcing that its fulfillment was directly related to a firm commitment to Him. This brief divine speech was the key to the divine presence: it was not extensive religious exercises or a magnificent building that guaranteed the continuing presence of God among His chosen people; rather, it was the covenant God had made with His people and their willingness to maintain it. While a magnificent building was under construction, God said He would dwell among the children of Israel rather than in a building (see 2 Kin. 25:1–21).

The magnificence of the temple's internal features is described in 1 Kings 6:15–36. The walls and the ceiling were lined with cedar while the floor was covered with cypress pine (v. 15). Ornamental buds, open flowers, cherubim, and palm trees were carved into the wall panels (vv. 18, 29). All of the wood, including the floor, was overlaid with gold (vv. 22, 30). This ornamentation was reminiscent of both past and future—the flora and cherubim of the Garden of Eden, and the gold-covered "floor" of the streets of gold in the new Jerusalem (Rev. 21:21).

Partitioning the main building with a cedar wall from floor to ceiling created the holy of holies (1 Kin. 6:16). Its internal height was twenty cubits (30 ft. or 9.1 m; v. 20)—compared with the main building, whose ceiling height was thirty cubits (45 ft. or 13.7 m; v. 2) —and its walls were also carved and covered with gold. As well as housing the ark of the covenant, the inner sanctum was also graced with two freestanding cherubim, each ten cubits tall (15 ft. or 4.6 m), carved from olive wood (v. 23) and covered with gold. They stood with wings outstretched, wing tip touching wing tip, stretching out to the opposite walls (v. 27) and overshadowing the ark (8:7). The two cherubim on the back wall together with the two on the top of the ark more closely reflected descriptions of the throne room of heaven, which was depicted with four cherubim surrounding the throne of God (see Ezek. 1; 10).

The final temple element in the description was the doors. The language is not clear, but it seems that the doorposts for the doors into the holy of holies may have been five-sided and both doors were made of olive wood (6:31–32). The doorposts into the Holy Place may have been four-sided and also of olive wood, with the outer doors of cypress (vv. 33–34). All were intricately carved and covered with gold (vv. 32, 35). In the account in Chronicles there is no mention of a curtain dividing the rooms (cf. 2 Chr. 3:14), although there is a reference to a gold chain at the entrance into the holy of holies that may have been used for a curtain suspended in front of the door (1 Kin. 6:21).

At the conclusion of chapter 6 the time reference given in v. 1 is repeated, adding just as precisely the date of the temple's completion (v. 38). In addition to forming a literary unit (an *inclusio*), the repetition underscores the importance of the dates involved and the connection between the temple and the Exodus.

7:1–51. Palace and Temple Furnished. One of the harbingers of Solomon's later apostasy was the fact that he took nearly twice as long to build the palace complex as it took to build the temple. The first one was described as the Palace (lit. "house") of the Forest of Lebanon (vv. 2–5), which was presumably named for its many internal cedar pillars that looked like a forest. At one hundred cubits long (150 ft. or 45.7 m), fifty cubits wide (75 ft. or 23 m), and thirty cubits high (45 ft. or 13.7 m), it covered more than four times the floor space as the temple building. Apparently, this building served as the royal armory (10:17; Is. 22:8), so it would have had storage rooms around its perimeter as the temple complex did. Other buildings in the complex included the Hall of Pillars or colonnade (1 Kin. 7:6) at fifty by thirty cubits (75 by 45 ft. or 23 by 13.7 m)—it, too, was larger than the temple—and the throne room or Hall of Judgment or Justice (Heb. *mishpat*; v. 7), as well as a residence for the king and another for his Egyptian wife. Each of these buildings followed the same architectural style with three rows of large, costly stones and a row of cedar beams (vv. 8–12).

The work of Hiram (Huram in some Bible versions), a bronze worker from Tyre, is featured in vv. 14–47. The name Hiram was obviously a common name (spelled the same in Hebrew as King Hiram), and this particular man was the son of a woman of Naphtali and a man of Tyre. He cast all the bronze items in the fine-grained clay of the Jordan Valley (v. 46), the combined weight of his handiwork being undetermined. The two pillars for the front of the temple, Jachin (Jakin) and Boaz (v. 21), were eighteen cubits high (27 ft. or 8.2 m), twelve cubits around (18 ft. or 5.5 m), and a span or handbreadth thick (cf. Jer. 52:21). On top of each pillar was a separate lily-shaped feature (1 Kin. 7:22) embellished with two rows of pomegranates and a chain lattice (vv. 17–18, 20, 41–42). The function of the pillars is uncertain, but their names (Jachin, "he is strong," and Boaz, "in strength") suggest that they served as visual reminders that the strength and stability of the king and the people were possible only with God's presence among them.

The laver, or sea, was a hemisphere ten cubits across (15 ft. or 4.6 ft), five cubits high (7.5 ft. or 2.3 m), and a handbreadth thick (v. 26). It was surrounded by two rows of ornamental buds on the outside of its brim (v. 24), and it was placed upon twelve bronze oxen, with groups of three oxen standing together and facing each of the four compass points (v. 25). Its capacity was between 11,500 to 12,000 gallons (43,500–45,500 L), about the capacity of a swimming pool that is 12 feet (3.6 m) by 25 feet (7.6 m) and has an average depth of 5 feet (1.5 m). However, it served as a reservoir for water, not for bathing or washing (cf. Ex. 30:19). For these functions, Solomon made ten smaller lavers, each holding about 230 gallons (870 L) and each resting on a bronze cart (1 Kin. 7:27–38). Half of these stood along the northern side of the temple court and half along the southern side. The side panels on the carts were embossed with cherubim, lions, and palm trees (v. 36).

The text in vv. 40–46 summarizes the bronze creations of Hiram: the pillars, their capitals, and all their special features; ten carts and the lavers to go on them; the sea and the twelve oxen to support it; and the pots, basins, and bowls. It is significant to note that each of the large items displayed numerous reminders of the Garden of Eden: cherubim, lilies, buds, pomegranates, palm trees, oxen, and lions, reflecting similar portrayals within the sacred golden precincts of the inner rooms. These constant visual reminders pointed to the purpose of the temple: not only for God to live in their midst (Ex. 25:8) but also for the eventual restoration of the face-to-face communion with God that Adam and Eve enjoyed in Eden. Worshiping there was in a sense a return to the original harmony between God and humans.

The chapter ends with a description of the items of gold, including ten seven-branched lamp stands (five along the north wall and five along the south side), wick trimmers, basins, bowls, ladles, censers, and hinges (1 Kin. 7:49–50). Since gold is not strong enough to hold a heavy wooden door, presumably this was some sort of embellishment or covering for the hinges to ensure that every surface within the inner rooms was covered with gold.

8:1–66. Dedicating the Temple. After the temple was complete, Solomon gathered all the key people—the elders and the tribal chiefs—to bring the ark and all other sacred items to their new resting place. The temple was completed in the eighth month of Solomon's eleventh year (6:38), and the furnishing and dedication happened in the seventh month—presumably eleven months later. Perhaps the delay was to coincide with the Festival of Tabernacles, so that while the people celebrated the Exodus by camping out in temporary shelters (Lev. 23:42–43), their attention also turned to God's promise through Moses to "camp" with His people if they built Him a temporary dwelling (Ex. 25:8).

Huge numbers of sheep and oxen were sacrificed outside as the priests put the ark in its place (1 Kin. 8:4–5) under the outstretched wings of the large cherubim. The ark contained only the two stone tablets of the Law—there is no mention of Aaron's rod or the golden pot of manna (Ex. 16:33–34; Num. 17:10; Heb. 9:4). It could be that these latter items had at some point been removed from the ark before the time of Solomon. Then the inner rooms were filled with smoke, making it impossible for the priests to stay there, as if God was claiming that domain for Himself (1 Kin. 8:11). Solomon responded by saying that God dwells in thick darkness (the Most Holy Place) but that he built Him a house/temple (vv. 12–13). Even though no temple could contain the omnipresent God (v. 27), He manifested His presence there as a God near to His people.

Solomon then turned to face the assembled crowd for a prayer of dedication (vv. 14–53). He began by honoring his father and quickly sketching the outlines of the Davidic covenant, and then he explained that his part in the covenant was to build the temple (vv. 15–20) and to properly house the ark. This signifies an interrelationship between the Davidic and Mosaic covenants (v. 21): the ark of the covenant spotlighting the Exodus and the temple having been initiated in God's covenant with David. As Solomon spread out his hands toward heaven (an act signifying "clean" motives and actions; Ps. 24:4), he again mentioned the importance of the word of God. God fulfilled the word He had spoken to David to place his son on the throne and for his son to build Him a house (1 Kin. 8:18–26).

There are a number of significant themes included in Solomon's prayer: sin, salvation, covenant, worship, loyalty, the sanctuary in heaven, the character of God, and the nature of humans. When Solomon made a general plea for God to "hear," he suggested seven situations in which people may find themselves and asked God specifically at those times to hear, act, forgive, or maintain their cause (vv. 32, 34, 36, 39, 43, 45, 49). Here was clear recognition that although the temple was a poignant symbol of God's presence among His people, it is from His heavenly temple that God actually administers justice and vindicates those calling on Him (vv. 30, 39, 43, 49).

Another dominant theme in the prayer is the way Solomon described sin and how God deals with it. The word that he used for sin signifies missing a target, failing in one's duty, failing to live up to expectations, or falling short of spiritual wholeness (vv. 16, 31, 34–36, 46–47, 50). Solomon suggested that if the people were taught the good way (v. 36), they would be more inclined to follow God. But he explained that the problem of sin resides like a plague within every human heart (v. 46). Only God really knows a heart's condition, and it is only the forbearance and forgiveness of God that can meet the challenge. The verb "forgive" appears in five verses (vv. 30, 34, 36, 39, 50) and leads to the conclusion of the prayer by connecting forgiveness and the covenant with the deliverance from Egypt.

Although Solomon commenced his prayer standing before the altar (v. 22), at its end he was kneeling (v. 54). The occasion must have been awe-inspiring—the numbers of sacrifices were so unthinkably large that the altar of sacrifice could not cope, so special provision was made to sacrifice on the ground in the middle of the court. These sacrifices were peace or fellowship ones, so it was only the fat that was burned and the rest of the animal was food to be shared between worshipers and priests (Lev. 7:11–15, 30–36). The atmosphere was so charged that the people did not want the occasion to end, so festivities were extended for a further week (1 Kin. 8:65–66) and the temple celebrations were combined with the communal joy of the Festival of Tabernacles.

9:1—11:43

The Remainder of Solomon's Reign

After twenty years, the great building projects were complete and the temple-palace complex had become the envy of surrounding nations. God appeared to Solomon a second time in response to the temple's dedicatory prayer and reminded the king of the importance of the covenant that David had entered into with God and the covenant loyalty expected from Solomon (9:1–9). The word of the Lord was also about judgment for rebellion against Him. This word was as certainly to be fulfilled as the word of blessing and salvation. The rumblings of disaster and judgment continued with the souring of relations between Solomon and King Hiram of Tyre over an unappreciated gift (9:10–14), the building costs, and other activities of Solomon (vv. 15–28). The narrative shifts back to the positive when describing the Queen of Sheba's visit and the gathering wealth coming into Solomon's coffers (10:1–29). Although times were good, subtle warnings of future crisis were in the background (11:1–43).

9:1–9. Challenge to Covenant Faithfulness. In response to Solomon's prayer, God appeared to him a second time. The context places this at the completion of Solomon's building program that had lasted twenty years. Does this mean that the completed temple stood unused for thirteen years, waiting for the completion of the palace complex, after which the temple was dedicated (see 6:38; 7:1)? The data is ambiguous, but the fact that temples were dedicated to be immediately used for the service of God rules out the idea that it was inactive for thirteen years. It is also unlikely that there would have been a large time gap between the dedicatory prayer and God's response assuring Solomon that the prayer had been heard. The answer must have come soon after the prayer (cf. PK 45).

God responded to Solomon (vv. 3–9) and assured him that his prayer of dedication had been heard and the temple had been consecrated. Furthermore, not only would God's name reside there, but also His "eyes" and "heart" (v. 3). This is an interesting response to Solomon's insistence throughout his dedicatory prayer that God resides in heaven. Rather than staying on the temple/abode of God theme, God challenged Solomon to remain faithful to the Davidic covenant in integrity of heart and uprightness by upholding the terms of the covenant like his father David, which would ensure the long-term viability of the dynasty (vv. 4–5).

Then God warned Solomon: if he or his successor sons worshiped other gods, the result would be loss of land, destruction of the temple, and ridicule by other nations. They would question why such disaster had befallen a people who had previously been so blessed by their God (vv. 6–8). The answer would be that since they abandoned their God, the word of judgment reached them. This was an ominous signal and hinted at coming disaster for both the monarchy and the nation, in shocking contrast to the spiritual high of the recent celebrations. It also served as a reality check affirming that magnificent architecture and fervent religious celebration do not necessarily define a life of faith. Without being true to the covenant-keeping God, these things mean nothing.

9:10–14. An Unappreciated Gift. The repetition of the statement announcing the completion of the temple closes the previous literary unit (9:1–9) and opens another. At the completion of the twenty-year building projects, Solomon still felt obligated and in debt to the king of Tyre for all the cedar, cypress, and gold he had supplied. Either Israel could not keep up with the original payment schedule (5:11) or what Hiram supplied far surpassed what Solomon had originally asked for. To settle the apparent debt, Solomon gave Hiram twenty cities around their common border (9:11), perhaps as collateral. Hiram was not happy with this and gave the region an insulting name—*kabul*. This word is related to a verb meaning "bound" or "restricted," but it could also be related to the Hebrew phrase "like nothing"—which would thus show his disdain for the cities (v. 13). This may have been the catalyst to sour relations between Tyre and Israel to the point of Tyre joining Israel's enemies a number of generations later (Amos 1:9–10; cf. Is. 23:1–18; Ezek. 28:1–23). Despite this inadequate gesture from Solomon, Hiram gave him a further twenty talents of gold, possibly to remove any sense of obligation that may have been imposed on Tyre for the "gift" of all those unappreciated cities. (See commentary on 2 Chr. 8:1–11 for further clarification of the narrative.)

9:15–24. Summary of Completed Projects. This section summarizes the labor force required for not only the temple and palace building projects but also the city walls and the Millo—a heavily-fortified citadel on Mt. Zion—and other cities built at that time (vv. 15, 17–19). The forced labor providing all the heavy work came from the subjugated peoples that Israel had displaced (v. 21; cf. Judg. 1:19, 21, 27–35). Solomon appointed his compatriots to be their overseers (1 Kin. 9:22–23). The repetition of these details suggests the end of a literary unit (cf. 5:13–16) with new information inserted: after pharaoh's daughter took up residence in her new home, work began on the construction of the Millo.

9:25–28. Life after the Big Projects. For a fifth time the statement is made that the temple was finished (see also 3:1; 6:38; 7:51; 9:1). This time all the main aspects seem to have been dealt with, and it appears that this really was the end of the process. However, there was a subtext present: What would happen from that time forward? The implication is that the completion of something major (the temple, palace, or even creation itself) marks not the end but the beginning. How the main players would act from this point on was crucial.

Life for Solomon now assumed a routine, and the text provides an example of the sacrifices he offered three times a year—presumably during the Passover (Festival of Unleavened Bread), Festival of Weeks, and Festival of Tabernacles, the festivals that every Hebrew male was expected to attend at the temple (Deut. 16:16).

A further development was the fleet of trading boats that Solomon built (with Hiram's help), based at the southern port of Elath on the Red Sea. It is unclear what later happened to this fleet—Uzziah is said to have restored Elath to Judah (2 Kin. 14:22) and the Arameans retook it a decade or two later (2 Kin. 16:6). Solomon's maritime adventures did not seem to be very long lasting.

10:1–13. The Queen of Sheba. Sheba's location is uncertain. Most likely it was in southwestern Arabia. Another possibility is the Horn of Africa (modern Somalia), or it may have been an empire that included both of those places. The narrative connects the Queen of Sheba's visit and the gifts she brought with ships of Hiram, who brought gifts from Ophir as well. Some commentators suggest that the timber mentioned here is from the Horn of Africa, others suggest it is juniper from Lebanon. The queen had heard so many unbelievable reports she just had to see for herself, and she became overwhelmed with what she saw (vv. 6–9). After proclaiming the blessed state of Solomon's kingdom and praising his God, she presented Solomon with generous gifts. The narrative suggests that further gifts came by ship (v. 11), and this apparently was matched by gifts that Solomon gave her in return.

10:14–29. Solomon's Wealth. The exchange of gifts led into a description of the wealth Solomon accumulated each year through trade, taxes, possibly tribute from other dependent nations, and other royal visits. The total was enormous—about 50,000 pounds (22,679 kg) of gold, not to mention silver, ivory, and other luxury goods (v. 22). The text mentions that Solomon was involved in one type of trade, military equipment (vv. 28–29), but that he also generated an income from answering the questions that many from all over the world brought to him (vv. 24–25).

With his wealth, Solomon embellished the temple, supplied instruments to the temple musicians, provided golden shields for ceremonial occasions (vv. 16–17), built an ivory throne and lions to stand by the throne (vv. 18–20), and made golden drinking vessels (v. 21). The net effect of all this was that Solomon surpassed all the kings of the earth in both wealth and wisdom (v. 23), and he made items that were once considered valuable as nothing compared to all the gold and luxury items he accumulated (v. 27). In all this one is left wondering about his spiritual integrity—had Solomon retained his faith, or was his amassing wealth beginning to corrupt him? God is mentioned only once in passing in all this display—people flocked to hear Solomon's wisdom, but it was God who had put the wisdom in his heart (v. 24).

11:1–43. The Beginning of the End. As well as accumulating great wealth, Solomon married many women. Astonishingly, these practices were the very things Moses had warned future kings of Israel to avoid (Deut. 17:14–20), but Solomon proceeded anyway and multiplied for himself horses from Egypt, wives, and silver and gold. Additionally, his wives were from the nations that God had warned the Israelites not to associate with because of their ingrained idolatry and the nations that the Israelites were specifically told to displace (Ex. 34:12–16; Deut. 12:30–31; 20:17–18). Moreover, the 700 wives were specifically called princesses, so Solomon appeared to be more interested in human alliances than in his covenant with God. Additionally, Solomon had 300 concubines, who were perhaps women of lower rank who may have doubled as household servants.

The Hebrew word asserting Solomon's devotion to his wives is the same word used in Genesis 2:24 for the closeness that marriage was intended to bring. However tender the relationships may have been, the women turned his heart to their own gods (1 Kin. 11:4). The verb used here is the same used to describe the action of Balaam's donkey turning aside from the angel of the Lord (Num. 22:23, 33). The text says this happened when he was old. The contrast between when Solomon was a young man who loved God (1 Kin. 3:3) and when he was an elder statesman who loved women (11:1) is stark, and it is perceptively summed up in the expression of Solomon's heart not being at peace with God (v. 4).

The result was that Solomon followed after the gods of his wives, which was evil in the Lord's estimation (v. 6). The text implies that Solomon participated in their degrading, idolatrous rites. The first foreign god mentioned is Ashtoreth, the Phoenician goddess of sexuality and war that King Hiram worshiped (v. 5). There seems to be a play on words here—in Canaanite literature she is known as Ashtart (Ishtar in Mesopotamian tradition), but by inserting the vowels from the word *boshet* ("shame"), the name Ashtoreth appears. Similarly, for the Ammonite god Milcom, transposing the vowels from *boshet* produces the derogatory name Molek (Molech)—which, translated literally, could mean "king of shame" or "shameful king." This was the god that demanded the sacrifice of human babies by fire. It appears that Chemosh, god of the Moabites (v. 7), demanded the same (2 Kin. 3:27). So to honor these gods and to keep his wives happy, Solomon constructed shrines for them on the Mount of Olives (1 Kin. 11:7). The construction of shrines where the foreign wives could worship their gods was required in politically motivated marriages.

By doing these things, Solomon was essentially nullifying the covenant with the Lord. Legally speaking, God had every right to walk away from this covenant. Instead, God became angry—an indication of the passion He has for His people—and acted with a combination of justice and mercy. He informed Solomon that the kingdom would be torn from him and given to a lesser man (v. 11). That was the justice part. In mercy, God assured Solomon it would not happen in his lifetime (which was drawing to a close anyway) and that for the sake of the Davidic covenant, one tribe would remain loyal to the throne in Jerusalem (vv. 12–13). The divine word of judgment had been pronounced, and it would be fulfilled in history.

A further consequence would be adversaries that would rise against Solomon. Hadad, an Edomite who had escaped a vicious battle in David's time (vv. 14–17) and had been given refuge in the palace of the pharaoh, returned after David's death to cause Solomon much trouble. Similarly, Rezon, a Syrian who also had passed through tragedy at the hands of David, caused continual conflict with Israel (vv. 23–25).

The main adversary for Solomon, and even for his successors (v. 39), however, was Jeroboam. He initially impressed Solomon so much that the king promoted him to be chief officer over the labor force of the tribe of Ephraim, tasked with reconstructing the Millo and refurbishing various civic structures in the city. It is not clear whether there was some deeply felt grudge against Solomon for some reason or whether it was the encounter with the prophet Ahijah that turned Jeroboam on a course against the king (v. 26).

That encounter followed the pattern we see in other prophetic interventions: a sudden but calculated appearance to deliver a short but very specific, and even shocking, message (1 Kin. 17:1; 21:17; 2 Sam. 12:1–14). Through an acted-out parable the prophet tore his cloak and explained its meaning. It represented God's adjustment of His covenant with Israel and Jeroboam's role in the new plan. The kingdom would be divided. The reason given for the dramatic change was that the people of God preferred to worship the gods of the surrounding nations. Despite that fact, the prophetic assurance was that God would maintain a remnant to keep His part of the covenant He had made with David (1 Kin. 11:34).

Remarkably, God offered to Jeroboam the same covenant as He had offered to David and Solomon (v. 38). In other words, in a sense there are not many covenants but one—offered repeatedly to successive generations—a showcase of God's persistence in redeeming the human race. Jeroboam became the start of a new line, just as David had been. As David was hunted by the reigning king (Saul), so was Jeroboam (by Solomon; v. 40). Just as David sought refuge with a foreign king—Achish of Gath (1 Sam. 21:10–15; 27:2–4)—so did Jeroboam, seeking asylum with Shishak (Shoshenq I), king of Egypt (1 Kin. 11:40). Shishak, a Libyan and former commander of the Egyptian army, had just commenced a new dynasty in Egypt, so the political alliance that Solomon had previously forged with Egypt no longer held. In fact, the narrative records that Shishak, allied with Jeroboam of Israel, would later invade Judah (14:25).

The era of King Solomon was over. The narrative says that further information about his reign may be found in another record—one that no longer exists. His reign of forty years—the same length as his father's—came to an end, he was buried with his fathers, and his son Rehoboam ascended the throne (11:43).

12:1—16:34

EARLY DIVIDED MONARCHY

After Solomon's death Israel split into two kingdoms: the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah. In order to secure his new kingdom, Jeroboam, the first northern king, built a new place of worship, made two golden calves (idols), replaced the Levitical priesthood with volunteers, and instituted new festival days. From there, the nation spiraled down into an idolatry worse than that of the surrounding nations.

At first Israel and Judah fought each other, but they came together for a time through intermarriage. For three generations, kings of Judah married daughters of the Israelite kings, which opened the floodgates of idolatry into Judah. The tragedy was that a good king started this trend—Jehoshaphat.

12:1—14:31

The Kingdoms Split: Jeroboam and Rehoboam

Rehoboam (931–913 B.C.), successor to Solomon, tried to impress the leaders of his new kingdom, but his attempts backfired, and Jeroboam (931–910 B.C.) led a revolt that divided the kingdom. He took ten of the tribes with him. Rehoboam tried from then on to regain his lost realms, and the result was great losses on both sides.

12:1–24. Rehoboam Splits the Kingdom. Rehoboam's decision to hold his coronation celebrations at Shechem (which lies about halfway between Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerizim) was significant. It was here that God promised to give the land to Abraham's descendants (Gen. 12:6–7); Jacob purchased the first parcel of land here (Gen. 33:18–19); it was here that the tribes gave their commitment to follow God when they established themselves in their new land (Deut. 11:29–32; 27:2–26); it was one of the cities of refuge (Josh. 20:1–8); it was here that Joshua gained the commitment of the nation to forsake idolatry and serve only God (Josh. 24:1, 13–18); and it was the location where Joseph's remains were buried (Josh. 24:32). If there was a best place to seek a commitment for national solidarity, this was it.

Jeroboam's arrival at Shechem may have introduced a cloud to the festivities of welcoming the new king. The apparent humility of the negotiators, which doubtlessly included Jeroboam either directly or behind the scenes, also carried a threat. Rather than simply asking that Rehoboam lighten their load, as humble servants might do, they said that if he did, they would serve him. Thus, they obviously implied that if he didn't, they wouldn't. Rehoboam certainly understood the ultimatum.

It is not surprising that Rehoboam wanted time to consider the matter. There was much at risk. He would have to either grant their request in order to keep them loyal, and thereby accept a loss of revenue and diminished kingly glory, or deny their request and see them walk away at even greater loss to his dominion.

The account of the different advice given by the two groups may be emphasizing the difference not so much between youth and age as between foolishness and wisdom. Rehoboam was forty-one years old when he became king, so while his contemporaries were obviously younger than Solomon's counselors, they were definitely into middle age. The point may be that they were foolish not so much because they were young as because, as the text says, they had grown up with Rehoboam and were the pampered offspring of the privileged class who had no knowledge of the life of the common people. As many Bible examples demonstrate (Joseph, David, Solomon, and Daniel), wisdom is determined not necessarily by age but by character. Rehoboam and his friends had been raised in a dissolute and degenerate court. Their suggested reply was arrogant and cynical, and it may contain a ribald euphemism for the private parts (v. 10), which Rehoboam wisely chose not to repeat. But he did warn the delegation that he would be using "scorpions" rather than the usual whips (1 Kin. 12:14). This may refer to a type of scourging whip with a piece of metal or bone in the end, which would feel like a scorpion's sting.

The exclamation of the people (v. 16) reveals a long-standing, bitter rivalry between Judah and the northern tribes dating back to the time of David, when the rebel Sheba uttered the same words (2 Sam. 20:1). This dramatic exit is explained in the text: added to the fact that Rehoboam ignored advice, God had His hand in this. The word of the Lord through Ahijah was being fulfilled, changing the course of the history of the kingdom (1 Kin. 12:15).

12:25—14:20. The Sin of Jeroboam. With the threat of war over for the moment, Jeroboam devoted his energies to building projects in Shechem and Penuel (v. 25). Although the verb in Hebrew is *banah* ("to build"), these cities already existed, so his activity refers to fortifying and refurbishing them (as some translations indicate). Shechem's importance was outlined above. Penuel was where Jacob had wrestled with the angel one night before meeting his estranged brother Esau (Gen. 32:30). Why did Jeroboam choose to put his fingerprints on these important places? Was it to confirm divine legitimacy for his rulership? He already had prophetic assurance of God's role for him (1 Kin. 11:31–39), and yet he was not satisfied.

Jeroboam was concerned that if the people continued traveling to Jerusalem for the three compulsory annual festivals (Deut. 16:16), it would result in them renewing their allegiance to the house of David (1 Kin. 12:26–27). This was despite being told the opposite by the prophet Ahijah (11:31) and despite the covenant God made with him: He had promised to bless his reign and give him a lasting dynasty.

Jeroboam decided to develop a new, substitute religion that would appeal to the majority. Perverting the Israelite faith, he had golden calves made and proclaimed them as the God who delivered Israel from Egypt (using exactly the same words in Hebrew as the rebellious people had used in Ex. 32:4). Perhaps the fact that the ark of the covenant, a symbol of God's presence, remained in Jerusalem led Jeroboam to construct the two images as a visual representation of the God of Israel—a clear violation of the law. The possible connection between what he did and the incident of the golden calf in Exodus is not clear, but perhaps the biblical writer, by quoting the words of Jeroboam, was indicating that what he did was as evil as what Aaron had done. The coming judgment against the Northern Kingdom is being justified on the basis of this act of idolatry. One has to wonder to what extent the priests and Levites had failed in instructing the common people about the law of Moses. Jeroboam placed one golden calf at Bethel (in the heart of the tribal land of Ephraim) and the other at Dan (vv. 28–29). The city of Dan was an enclave of Danites (Judg. 18:1, 2, 7–11, 27–29), about 12 miles (19.3 km) north of the Sea of Galilee. From there flows a powerful spring whose copious waters replenish the Sea of Galilee and in turn empty into the Jordan River to this day. As far back as human history records, Dan had always been the place where the gods and goddesses of fertility were worshiped and the God of creation ignored.

Jeroboam advanced his idea by arguing that this was for the benefit of the people, saying that it was too much for them to go to Jerusalem (1 Kin. 12:28). The lush surroundings lent themselves to pagan notions of fertility. In the symbolic list of tribes present in the new Jerusalem (Rev. 7:5–8), Ephraim and Dan are missing—the idolatry introduced by Jeroboam has eternal consequences.

Jeroboam was persistent and methodical in building a new order. He established a replacement priesthood and replacement shrines. More significantly, he introduced a new festival for the eighth month—presumably to rival the Festival of Tabernacles in the seventh month, Israel's long-standing highlight of the religious year since Sinai. That he placed it in the eighth month might have signaled that he did not want to be seen as directly competing. He could claim that his people were free to attend both festivals. But it gave his people an easy excuse not to attend the festival ordained by God. Such is often the devil's technique: create an attractive and convenient illegal substitute.

The unfaithfulness of Jeroboam became proverbial. Later in the book, when the reign of each king of Israel is evaluated, they are compared to him (e.g., 1 Kin. 15:30, 34; 16:2–3, 7; 22:52; 2 Kin. 3:3; 10:29; 13:2; 15:9, 18, 24). In the case of Omri (1 Kin. 16:25) and Ahab (16:33), their sins are declared to be even worse than Jeroboam's.

Jeroboam dedicated the religious facilities (12:32–33), which completed the rebellion and set the stage for the consequences. However, God sent him three warnings, giving him opportunity to turn around (13:1–6, 11–34; 14:7–16). The first warning was the prophecy of the man of God, in which he specifically mentioned king Josiah by name (over three hundred years in advance) as the one who would destroy the idolatrous altar at Bethel at which Jeroboam was burning incense.

The second warning was the disturbing account of the disobedience of the man of God who accepted the lie of the old prophet at the cost of his life (vv. 8–18). The text does not say what motivated the old man to lie and thus be instrumental in the temptation and ultimately the death of the man of God (vv. 26–32).

When the man of God who brought the first warning later disobeyed and died, the message should have been clear: ignore the word of the Lord at your peril. But this did not deter Jeroboam from continuing in his course of covenant violation. He appointed and consecrated anyone who desired to become a priest (13:33).

The third warning was a response to Jeroboam's misguided attempt to deceive the prophet Ahijah to try to help his sick son Abijah (14:1–6). God revealed the deception and prophesied that Abijah would die and that He would completely wipe out Jeroboam's posterity and eventually the whole kingdom of Israel (vv. 7–16).

God offered Jeroboam a measure of mercy in this prophecy against Israel (14:15–16). The destruction would be some time in the future; but for now, so God informed Jeroboam, a new king would replace him (v. 14), which would give the nation time to rethink their direction and would allow them to repent and recommit to God. Unfortunately, Israel never did.

The account of Jeroboam's reign of twenty-two years (931–910 B.C.) ended with the observation that he rested with his ancestors (or fathers) and was replaced by his son Nadab. Yet the sinful legacy of Jeroboam lived on in the lives of successive kings and became part of the life of Israel for almost 200 more years.

14:21–31. Judah Is Weakened. The impact of Rehoboam's reign in Judah was not that different from Jeroboam's in Israel, as evaluated by Ahijah (11:29–39; cf. 14:7–11). The summary statement notes that Judah's evil had become worse than that of their ancestors (14:22). The specifics include the construction of shrines and the incorporation of sacred stones or pillars and wooden Asherah poles placed in the hills under trees (v. 23).

Even more blatant was the presence of perverted persons (the Hebrew cryptically calls them "holy ones") at the shrines (v. 24). It is commonly thought that these were cultic male and female prostitutes (some translations limit the term to "male shrine prostitutes"), who engaged in fertility rites and were involved in the confusion of genuine and false worship. The fact that these were everywhere despite being specifically forbidden (Deut. 23:17) demonstrates that the nation copied the religion of the very peoples whom God in judgment had dispossessed from the land (Deut. 20:17–18).

As a consequence of the nation's interest in idolatry, Pharaoh Shoshenq (945–924 B.C.; the Hebrews call him Shishak) invaded Judah in Rehoboam's fifth year (about 926/925 B.C.). The record of this invasion is inscribed on the walls of the temple of Amon at Karnak (Egypt), which listed 150 cites that Shoshenq conquered. The Kings narrative describes him emptying the treasuries of palace and temple, including the golden ceremonial shields that Solomon had made, and taking all the booty back to Egypt (1 Kin. 14:26). This impoverished the once proud and wealthy nation of Judah overnight. In an attempt to regain some measure of dignity, Rehoboam made bronze shields to replace the gold ones (v. 27), but instead of storing them in the House of the Forest of Lebanon (10:16–17), he placed them into the care of captains of the royal bodyguard (14:27), which demonstrated their much-reduced value—a reflection of the state of the nation under Rehoboam's rulership.

Just as Jeroboam's reign ended in an anticlimax, so too did Rehoboam's. The readers are again referred to the chronicles of the kings (court records) if they want to know more (v. 29). One further piece of information is offered: Rehoboam and Jeroboam fought all their days (v. 30). Rehoboam was finally replaced by his son (v. 31). The repetition of his Ammonite mother's name indicates that she may have been the influence that turned the nation against their covenant relationship with God.

Judah's Idolatry

The sacred pillars (*matsebot*) were stone objects, sometimes occurring in clusters, that were either abstract representations of deities or phallic symbols—in harmony with the focus on fertility by the religions of the surrounding nations. The wooden images or poles (*'asherim*) were wooden representations of the goddess Asherah (or Athirat)—either in the form of a carving or of a stylized sacred tree—that may have depicted the tree of life.

At the center of the issue of worship is the question of loyalty and allegiance. Who is the Ultimate and Supreme Being? Who is the Provider and Protector of life? By choosing to follow the idolatrous practices of surrounding nations, God's people were rejecting the God of Creation and Redemption. Instead they substituted the most degrading practices in their attempts to activate the nature gods into sending rain, thus ensuring good crops, herds, and wealth.

15:1—16:34
Judah and Israel at War

Bloodshed and intrigue characterize the four or so decades covered in this section. North and South were continually at war, and the instability of the Northern Kingdom occasioned the assassination of four kings in palace plots. The kings of Israel (not included in the Chronicles account) are either described as walking in the ways of Jeroboam or sinning more than all those before them. With the introduction of the dynasty of Omri, the level of idolatry in both kingdoms increased to their highest level yet.

15:1–8. Abijah of Judah (913–911 B.C.). Abijah replaced Rehoboam. Though some translations use the name "Abijam" for him, "Abijah" is more likely to be his actual name and means "the Lord is my Father." Abijam means "Yam is my father"—Yam was the Canaanite sea god—and was possibly a derogatory name given to the king by those opposed to his idolatry. His mother was the daughter of Uriel of Gibeah (2 Chr. 13:2) and Absalom's only daughter, Tamar (2 Sam. 14:27). Evidence of her later idolatry (1 Kin. 15:13) suggests that her influence over her young son was a negative one. Meanwhile, Rehoboam groomed Abijah as his successor and prepared some of his twenty-eight sons for civil service and gave them experience over various responsibilities of state (2 Chr. 11:21–23).

It is no surprise then that Abijah walked in all the sins of his father (1 Kin. 15:3); but despite this, God kept him in order to preserve "a lamp in Jerusalem" for the sake of the covenant made with David (v. 4). This meant special protection for him. As a boy he grew up when his father and Jeroboam were at war, and this continued during his own reign. The Kings narrative is quite minimalistic compared to Chronicles, which describes a battle between Israel and Judah in which 500,000 Israelites were killed (2 Chr. 13:17), effectively ending Jeroboam's ability to wage war. The Kings narrative cuts Abijah's account short and continues with the ascension of his son Asa to the throne.

15:9–24. Asa of Judah (911–870 B.C.). In contrast to the brief, negative reign of his father, Asa reigned for as long as David and Solomon. He did what was right by getting rid of the male and female cultic prostitutes, removing the idols his father had made, and deposing his grandmother Maachah from her privileged position as Queen Mother (vv. 12–13). She had carved a detestable image of Asherah into a stylized sacred tree at a high place (v. 13). Asa cut it down and burned it by the Kidron Brook. Yet he did not destroy the high places (v. 14). This is one aspect of the slavish following of heathen practices that seems to have been too ingrained to eradicate.

Then he placed silver and gold items that both he and his father had dedicated into the temple treasury (v. 15). But war with the Northern Kingdom loomed again—almost like a refrain—for the fifth time (14:30; 15:6, 7, 16, 32). Details of war are glossed over, with more attention given to either increasing idolatry or dependence on other nations for military security. So Asa followed previous kings in emptying the palace and temple treasuries (with treasure he had just placed there) as payment for Syria (*'aram* in Hebrew) to attack the Northern Kingdom (15:18–21). It appears that Asa attempted to prevent the completion of a northern garrison city that the northern King Baasha was constructing at Ramah, only 6 miles (9.7 km) north of Jerusalem. The Chronicles narrative suggests the city was built to prevent the flow of northerners to the annual festivals in Jerusalem (cf. 2 Chr. 16:1). Asa conscripted every able-bodied person to strip the building site of all stonework and timber, and used the materials to build rival cities—Mizpah, about a mile (about 1.6 km) north of the Ramah site, and Geba, about a mile to the east.

The end of Asa's reign is a sad question mark. The Kings narrative simply states that in his old age he was diseased in the feet (1 Kin. 15:23). Although some commentators think this is gout, in some places in the Bible the feet are a euphemism for the private parts. For example, when Saul relieved himself in a cave, he literally, in Hebrew, "covers his feet" (1 Sam. 24:3). Isaiah speaks of a coming time of humiliation when all hair, including the hair of the feet (pubic hair), would be shaved (Is. 7:20). So there is a strong possibility Asa died of a sexually transmitted disease. Here the narrative comes to an abrupt halt, and a new king ascends the throne.

15:25—16:7. Nadab (910–909 B.C.) and Baasha of Israel (909–886 B.C.). The Kings narrative spends very little time with Nadab—just enough to say that he did evil in the Lord's estimation and that he acted similarly to his father (v. 26). This seems to be the pattern of the Northern Kingdom. Baasha ended the dynasty of Jeroboam by killing Nadab while the latter was involved in a siege of the Philistine city of Gibbethon, which was in the tribal land of Dan, west of Jerusalem (v. 27).

After Baasha installed himself as king, he then killed the entire household of Jeroboam (v. 29). This happened in fulfillment of the prophetic word of Ahijah, the old prophet from Shiloh (14:10–11, 14). Once more the dynamic word of the Lord proved to be invincible in shaping the history of God's people.

For the remainder of his twenty-four-year reign, Baasha warred against Judah (15:32) and continued the deep involvement of the kings before him in the fertility cult of the Canaanites. In later years, both his and Jeroboam's reigns would be the benchmark of Israel's apostasy (1 Kin. 21:22; 2 Kin. 9:9). As expected, the word of the Lord came to Baasha through a prophet to warn him of his course of action (1 Kin. 16:1–4, 7). Jehu, son of Hanani (not to be confused with King Jehu who appears forty or fifty years later), gave him a message similar to that received by Solomon (11:11–13) and Jeroboam (14:7–11): God raised Baasha up to be king, but he made God's people Israel sin; therefore Baasha's household would come to an end. Not one of them would receive a decent burial (16:4), as with Jeroboam's family. Almost as an afterthought, one of the reasons given for Baasha's judgment is the slaughter of Jeroboam's family (v. 7). Although a prophet foretold the fulfillment of the divine purpose of judgment in the destruction of Jeroboam's line, that did not excuse the one who later carried out that action.

16:8–20. Elah (886–885 B.C.) and Zimri of Israel (885 B.C.). Baasha's son, Elah, ascended the throne, but his reign was short-lived, marked by its promotion of the fertility cult, just as his father's reign had been (v. 13). One of his senior military officers took over the throne after assassinating the drunken Elah at a party in Tirzah (vv. 9–10), the early capital city of the Northern Kingdom. The death of Elah marked the end of Baasha's dynasty, which lasted only two generations—the same as Jeroboam's.

Zimri did to Elah (and Baasha's line) what Baasha had done to Nadab (and Jeroboam's line), with the added atrocity of killing all of Baasha's friends as well (vv. 11–12). Seeing that he reigned for only seven days, the coup he led must of necessity have been savage and violent. In reaction to his atrocities the people appointed Omri, the senior military figure for the nation, as king instead (v. 16). When Zimri saw Omri's military prowess and his successful siege against Gibbethon—which a previous Israelite king, Nadab, had been unable to take about twenty-five years previously (15:25–27)—Zimri gave up the struggle, went into the palace in Tirzah, set it ablaze, and died in the flames (v. 18). Even in his short reign he encouraged idolatrous worship (v. 19). It is significant that the Kings narrative highlights this as the main feature for each reign.

16:21–28. Omri of Israel (885–874 B.C.). With Zimri dead there was a power struggle as two factions tried to get their champion on the throne. This was a somewhat protracted saga: Zimri ascended the throne in the twenty-seventh year of Judah's king Asa (16:10), but it was not until Asa's thirty-first year that Omri prevailed over his rival, Tibni, to ascend the throne. This means that the throne was uncertain for about five years.

With the palace destroyed by fire, Omri set out to build a new one but decided to relocate it on a hill that he bought from Shemer, renaming it Samaria after its original owner (vv. 23–24). This process took up about half of his reign of twelve years, but meanwhile, Omri proved himself to be far more devoted to the fertility cult than any of his predecessors (v. 25). The Kings account concludes by saying about him that the rest of his acts were being recorded in the chronicles of the kings of Israel—not the biblical books of the same name but the royal court records of the time.

16:29–34. Ahab of Israel (874–853 B.C.). Ahab was the son of Omri and reigned over Israel for twenty-two years. He married Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Sidonians (v. 31). He joined her in worshiping Baal and built a temple to him in Samaria (v. 32). Ahab's rebellion against the Lord was more intense than that of all the kings of Israel who were before him (vv. 30, 33). This level of rebellion will become evident in the narratives that follow. The brief but penetrating evaluation of Ahab's reign concludes with a reference to Hiel, who built Jericho and fulfilled the word of the Lord spoken through Joshua (Josh. 6:26). According to it, whoever would rebuild Jericho would do it at the cost of the life of his firstborn and youngest sons. This was the experience of Hiel, whose two sons died in the construction project. The word of the Lord is so potent that it finds fulfillment long after its utterance by the prophet. It never fails. Jericho was the place where the last king of Judah, Zedekiah, would be captured by the Babylonian armies (2 Kin. 25:1–7).

17:1—22:53

ELIJAH AND THE KINGS

At about the midpoint of the two books of Kings, attention turns away from the kings and focuses on two prophetic giants: Elijah and Elisha. The various accounts of their activities reveal how involved God really was, not only in the lives of the monarchy and of the nation but also in the events in the surrounding nations as well. Interwoven among the stories of Elijah and Elisha, the reigns of the various kings of Israel and Judah unfold. With the prominence of the ministry of these two key prophets, relations between the Northern and Southern Kingdoms enjoyed a time of peace. A widespread drought in Israel became the backdrop for a major showdown between God and Baal on Mount Carmel.

17:1–7. Elijah's Prophecy. Elijah grew up in the mountains of Gilead in the village of Tishbe on the eastern side of the Jordan River. The expression Tishbite may describe a quality (some suggest "stranger") as well as the village he was from. His powerful persona challenged the nation to choose either God or Baal.

Elijah's appearance before King Ahab to announce that there would not be rain for three years shows His trust in the word of the Lord revealed to him (17:1). Apparently fearless in

Baal Worship

The word "baal" simply means "lord." The name serves as a generic term for the fertility gods of Canaan, the main one being Hadad, the god of dew, rain, and storm. Hadad is responsible for the wealth that comes from verdant crops and fields and abundant herds. If "Baal" and his consorts were fertile, then the farmers would be wealthy, therefore his followers practiced fertility rites to encourage the gods in their fertility. The worship of the fertility cult promoted gross immorality and greed, and the vulnerable in society were exploited to satisfy the financial and sexual lust of the privileged classes. The net effect was that money and sex were the key social values, and human-rights abuses were the norm.

his willingness to confront leadership for its failings, Elijah suddenly appeared before the king. Ahab's marriage to Jezebel, a Phoenician princess (16:31), had ensured the proliferation of the fertility cult in Israel. Hence the confrontation between prophet and king was inevitable. Having delivered God's message to the patron of Baal worship, Elijah retreated to a mountain ravine in his home area—the Brook Cherith (Kerith), or according to some, the Kerith Ravine (the Heb. *nakhal* can mean either a ravine or a brook). This was an area with a small stream in rugged yet lush surroundings about 30 miles (48 km) east of Samaria, identified today as Wadi al-Yabis. There he was kept alive by the waters of the brook and with food brought to him morning and evening by ravens (v. 6).

17:8–24. The Widow of Zarephath. When the brook dried up, God instructed Elijah to go to Zarephath, a village about 80 or 90 miles (129 or 145 km) away, just south of Sidon. It is ironic that while a Phoenician woman (Jezebel) was greatly influencing the demise of the nation, another Phoenician woman (the widow) was the means of preserving the life of the prophet whom God appointed to counter Ahab and Jezebel in order to preserve the life of the nation.

When Elijah first asked the woman for a little water and some bread, she informed him of her precarious social status (vv. 12–13). That the prophetic word could help in a household like that clearly demonstrates that the whole nation of Israel would be far better off if they would heed the words of the prophet as well. Further, this humble home saw the first resurrection of a person from the dead that is recorded in Scripture (v. 22).

18:1–15. Elijah and Obadiah. The story of Obadiah and Elijah's interactions with him demonstrates several important things. First, it helps us understand the severity of the famine and the magnitude of the national crisis. The fact that the king had to involve himself personally in such a menial task as finding grass for horses indicates the desperate nature of the situation. All other kingly responsibilities or preoccupations were preempted by this most basic need. This shows how far God was willing to push his point to bring about repentance.

Second, the story shows God's willingness to affirm and encourage a faithful believer during a genuine time of trouble. God sent Elijah out of his way to meet Obadiah. This certainly must have given the faithful man an assurance that God was still in control through Elijah's ministry.

Third, the story establishes a basis for God's later rebuke of Elijah's self-pity (19:18). In some respects, Obadiah's faithfulness to God had put him under more stress than Elijah had to endure. While Elijah had been hidden away in remote places, Obadiah remained at court, at the very heart of this great controversy. Despite all the pressures to the contrary, Obadiah (whose name means "servant/worshiper of Yahweh") had the special skill of maintaining his connection and influence with the royal family. While doing so, he had done God's work by directly undermining the machinations of Jezebel. Albeit on a smaller scale, he was playing a role very similar to that of Daniel and his companions in the court of Babylon.

Fourth, the story demonstrates, in almost a humorous way, God's willingness to accept our questionings of His commands and our emotional frustrations and outbursts based on our human experience. Obadiah openly challenged the wisdom of doing what Elijah asked, and no divine rebuke came from the prophet. Obadiah was in fact concerned about unnecessarily risking his life. He had been risking it by hiding and providing food to God's servants, but this time he wanted to be certain that things would go as the prophet said. He was reassured that the prophet would do as he had said, with the implicit understanding that all would be well for Obadiah. His heartfelt, honest questions and disputations, accepted by God, remind us of those of similar Bible characters like Moses, Gideon, and Thomas.

18:16–46. Elijah, Ahab, and Mount Carmel. Ahab's initial reaction upon meeting Elijah demonstrates his seemingly willful blindness to reality. The crisis had begun with Elijah's dramatic prophecy of the drought. But Elijah had made it clear that the prophecy was made on God's authority, not his own. Thus, Ahab certainly had every opportunity to consider that the crisis was instigated by God rather than Elijah. Yet Ahab, obtuse in the extreme, decided to ignore the obvious and identify Elijah as the "troubler of Israel" (v. 17). This expression was first used in reference to Simeon and Levi, who caused their father Jacob trouble after they killed the men of Shechem in revenge for their prince raping their sister (Gen. 34). It was also used to refer to Achan (whose name is based on the word for "trouble") and the curse that his actions brought upon the people of the Exodus (Josh. 7:24–26; 1 Chr. 2:7). However, Ahab had also brought a curse on the land—as demonstrated by the three years of drought that was still in effect. So Elijah was quite justified in throwing the accusation back at the king—Ahab and his father's family were the troublers of Israel (1 Kin. 18:18). It was the action of forsaking God and following Baal that had resulted in this trouble.

Elijah's question in v. 21 expresses the idea of being halfhearted. The expression also applies in the Psalms to "double-minded" people (Ps. 119:113). The picture is of someone limping between two options but not being convinced of either. The idea is that of a "double-minded" person who is tossed about like a wave in the wind (James 1:8) or who is neither cold nor hot (Rev. 3:15–16).

Given the challenge to call upon their god, the prophets of Baal pled for hours, slashing themselves with weapons to show their devotion. It was a common belief among the followers of Baal that during times of drought, Baal was held prisoner by death in the underworld. Therefore, Elijah's comments about Baal going on a trip or taking a vacation (1 Kin. 18:27) were a bit too close for comfort for the highly offended, and increasingly bloodied, prophets (v. 28).

It is ironic that the word describing the action of the prophets, sometimes translated as "leaped" or "danced" in v. 26, is the same Hebrew verb (*pasakh*) translated as "limping" in Elijah's challenge in v. 21. This suggests that no matter the extremes of their actions, nothing was going to work. The narrative contrasts Baal, the totally powerless storm god, with Yahweh, the Creator and Redeemer and alone the Provider of rain in its season (Lev. 26:4). It is reasonable to suppose that all this time, Elijah kept diligent watch on any attempt to smuggle in some fire from elsewhere. The impotence of Baal was patently obvious.

The text does not mention where Elijah found the water he used, but a perpetual spring is located today not too far from the traditional site of this event. Elijah used the water to drench his altar, making it nearly impossible for anyone but God to be able to ignite the soggy offering. The prophet then prayed, and in obvious contrast to the prophets' frenzied activity his words were calm and reasoned. He stressed that God could be known. The dramatic burst of fire at the prayer's conclusion consumed not only the sacrifice and water but the altar of twelve large stones as well. After the people's spontaneous and awed reaction of affirming the Lord as God (1 Kin. 18:39), Elijah commanded them to seize all the fertility cult prophets and have them executed down in the valley at the base of the mountain (v. 40). This was about the same place Deborah and Barak won victory against a vastly superior force of Canaanites—devotees of Baal—about 300 years earlier (Judg. 5:19).

After the emotional highs of the day, Elijah suggested to the king that he should quickly eat and drink because a storm was on its way (1 Kin. 18:41). This was really an invitation to partake in a covenant meal with the Lord and echoes the experience of Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and the seventy elders of Israel as they ate and drank in God's presence at Mount Sinai (Ex. 24:9–11).

It is not only God's power as Lord over nature that is recognized in this chapter, but the authority of the prophet as well. All those to whom Elijah spoke in this narrative listened and followed his instructions: the king (1 Kin. 18:20, 42, 44), the prophets of Baal (vv. 26, 28), the crowd (vv. 30, 34, 40), and his assistant (vv. 43–44). This fact highlights the significant role that prophets played among God's people and the security that attended them if they listened. This narrative forms a significant contrast with events in the rest of the book, in which the prophets were ignored and vilified.

19:1–21. Running from Jezebel. Paradoxically, the iron-willed prophet lost his nerve when Queen Jezebel found out about the execution of her prophets and threatened Elijah with the same fate. But the Lord did not condemn Elijah for running away or for his wish to die. He knew that what Elijah needed was food and rest, and He provided both for him. With renewed strength Elijah went to Mount Horeb, taking "forty days and forty nights" to travel a distance of at least 100 miles (161 km) and possibly double that, depending on the route he took.

When he arrived at Horeb, the mountain of God, he spent the night in a cave to shelter from the frigid night temperatures there. It was at this same place Moses first met God in the burning bush (at the base of the mountain; Ex. 3:1–5), where he struck a rock and water flowed (Ex. 17:6), and where he received the Ten Commandments. The next day God asked Elijah what he was doing there (1 Kin. 19:9). Elijah's answer revealed how depressed he was. He reaffirmed his commitment to the Lord and argued that everyone else had deserted God, destroyed His altars, and murdered His prophets, and that now they wanted to kill him as well (v. 10).

The Lord asked Elijah to go outside and observe what was going to happen (as He did

Moses; Ex. 33:22; 34:6). First there was a strong wind that tore rocks out of the mountainside, then an earthquake that shook the place violently, then a fire that burned vigorously in a place where there was little or nothing to burn. The narrative states that the Lord was not in any of these phenomena (1 Kin. 19:11–12). Then there was silence—the text describes it in Hebrew as "the voice of thin silence." In contrast to the just-witnessed spectacular events, God's presence was in something small and insignificant—which must have been how Elijah felt at this moment. God does not normally express Himself with fire flashing from heaven (as on Carmel), or in violent storms, earthquakes or fire (also seen during the Exodus on the same mountain; Ex. 24:11), but He makes Himself known in times of silence when nothing seems to be happening.

God told Elijah that there were still 7,000 people in the apostate Northern Kingdom—a remnant who had kept their faith in God and had not been seduced by Baal (1 Kin. 19:18; the reference to kissing Baal refers either to actually kissing his image in the shrines as an act of worship and devotion or blowing kisses if the image was too tall). Just because Elijah was deeply discouraged did not mean that God was inactive or that Elijah was the only person still faithful in a culture of apparent total apostasy. God always preserves for Himself a faithful remnant through whom He realizes His purpose.

No details are given of Elijah's return journey, but he found Elisha ploughing a field on his family land at Abel-Meholah (v. 16). This may have been near what is now the village of Mehola on the West Bank close to the Jordan River; if so, it is only about 12 miles (19.3 km) due east of Elijah's hometown. The fact that there were twelve teams of oxen (v. 19) suggests that Elisha's family was prosperous and that the ploughing of the large field must have been a community event. Consequently, everyone in the village knew that Elijah was there and probably witnessed and understood the prophet's symbolic gesture of throwing his cloak over Elisha's shoulders. Elisha also knew the significance of this action and asked to first go home and say farewell to his parents. Elijah's response indicated he was not convinced that the young man really wanted to devote his career to the prophetic ministry (see Luke 9:61–62).

Instead of kissing his parents goodbye, the narrative speaks of Elisha slaughtering a pair of oxen, offering parts of them up as a sacrifice, and sharing a sacrificial meal with the entire village as an act of commitment. He offered peace or communion sacrifices in which selected portions were burned, while the meat was cooked and shared between the one sacrificing and his family or community (Lev. 3:3–5; 22:29–30). This special event demonstrated Elisha's commitment to the prophetic call and also gave an opportunity for Elisha to bid farewell to his family and friends.

20:1–43. Ben-Hadad of Syria. The name Ben-Hadad literally means "the son of (the god) Hadad," and it may have been a popular name applied to the kings of Aram (Syria). Hadad was the popular god also referred to as Baal and was depicted holding a bolt of lightning to illustrate his role as the storm god bringing rain and thus fertility. Ben-Hadad threatened to destroy Samaria so thoroughly that there would not be enough dust for his soldiers to have a handful each (v. 10). Jezebel had used the same oath that Ben-Hadad used in swearing this action (cf. 19:2). Old priest Eli (1 Sam. 3:17), King David (2 Sam. 3:35; 19:13), Solomon (1 Kin. 2:23), and later also Ahab (2 Kin. 6:31) used this oath formula. It seems to be the strongest possible way of committing oneself to a desired outcome.

Ben-Hadad and his confederacy convinced themselves that the God of Israel was powerful only in the hills and weak on the plains, echoing the widespread notion in ANE texts of local deities (1 Kin. 20:23). They had not yet understood that Yahweh was the Creator of heaven and earth—almighty, all-knowing, all-powerful, and inviting all to come to Him and find salvation.

21:1–29. Naboth's Vineyard. Next to Ahab's second palace at Jezreel, there was a vineyard owned by Naboth (whose name means "prophecies"). Moses had specified that land was not to change hands from one tribe to another but that the inheritance of the fathers must be kept (Num. 36:7). Naboth's refusal to the king's offer for his vineyard simply involved his being true to this command of God. Ahab's guilt in destroying Naboth and confiscating his property may have a metaphorical relationship to the very reason Naboth had refused to yield. Naboth was determined to keep the land for the purpose God intended it. Here we see that Ahab had given the land over to other gods. He maintained the idolatry of the Amorites, whom God had ejected from the land for their horrendous practices. Thus, God's judgments on the

Amorites would, in effect, fall upon those who, without repentance, embraced the same sins (Gen. 15:16; Deut. 7:1–10; 20:17–18).

In another example of a prophet of God suddenly showing up and creating a dramatic scene, Elijah confronted Ahab on the very ground he had stolen. The purpose of the confrontation was to pronounce judgment. But as in the case of Jonah at Nineveh (Jon. 3) announcing judgment, however severe, almost always includes an implicit appeal for repentance. Ahab realized the gravity of his situation and had a remarkable change of heart (1 Kin. 21:27). God accepted Ahab's contrition, informed Elijah of this, and postponed a portion of the judgment for two generations. Ahab's dynasty would end with his grandson (2 Kin. 10:1–2, 6–7) rather than him. But the prophecy of the indignity of Ahab's own death remained and was fulfilled.

22:1–40. The Death of Ahab. The visit by Jehoshaphat to Ahab may have been for family reasons. Jehoshaphat had married one of Ahab's relatives to form an alliance (2 Chr. 18:1), and that alliance was apparently strengthened in the next generation when Jehoshaphat's son Jehoram married Ahab's daughter Athaliah (2 Kin. 8:16–18). Ahab shared with Jehoshaphat his concern over Ramoth Gilead (1 Kin. 22:3) and asserted that the promise of Ben-Hadad to return all Israelite cities under Syrian control (20:34) had not been fulfilled (22:3). Ahab then asked Jehoshaphat for military assistance to reclaim Ramoth Gilead. But Jehoshaphat's pledge of loyalty (v. 4), although an echo of the pledge that Ruth gave Naomi (Ruth 1:16–17), sounded a little hollow. Perhaps it revealed an uneasy peace between the Northern and Southern Kingdoms, which lasted for only another fifteen years or so.

A further indication of the tenuous relationship between the two kings occurred when Jehoshaphat asked for Ahab's prophets to reveal the word of the Lord to them (22:5–6). Perhaps Jehoshaphat was feeling uncomfortable about prophets of Baal speaking on behalf of God, so he asked if there was a prophet of the Lord anywhere. This begged the question of where Ahab's prophets came from. We know that 450 prophets of Baal were executed after the Carmel theophany (18:19, 40). Were the 400 prophets of the Asherim spared? Or was this group of 400 prophets (22:6) a group of new individuals whom Jezebel had recruited? It is disturbing that Baal would have had so many prophets in Israel.

Micaiah was identified as a prophet of God, but he was hated by Ahab because of his negative messages (v. 8). This suggests that the 400 prophets would say only what would please the king, whether true or not.

The interchange between Ahab and Micaiah, the report of Micaiah's vision, and the record of Ahab's death—all recorded in fascinating narrative detail—provide some theological insight into how God accomplishes His purposes in the realm of human free will. The two kings were enthroned in an outdoor pavilion and dressed in their finery. As expected, the false prophets

Divine Judgment

The harshness of the sentence on Ahab and his family answers the questions that most probably were in the mind of Naboth's wife and children and countless others since then: "Why did this happen?" "If God is good, why did He allow this?" These are questions for which we do not yet have satisfactory answers, but the sentence announced by Elijah gives an indication of how God views gross injustice: those who oppress the innocent will get what they deserve, and those on the receiving end of oppression will receive complete restoration and generous compensation (see Matt. 5:5). Justice will finally prevail. In other words, God does not step in immediately to prevent evil in a society even when that is what the vast majority wants—as was the case in the Northern Kingdom. In those circumstances, there will be innocent victims killed in the crossfire of a raging battle between the powers of darkness and the Kingdom of God. Nothing in the immediate situation will answer the crimes against humanity that the powers of evil perpetrate, but that situation will not continue indefinitely. God has appointed a day on which He will judge the world (Acts 17:31)—a day when the oppressors of God's people will lose their power (Dan. 7:11, 21, 22, 26) and the people of God will inherit the kingdom (Dan. 7:18, 22, 27). This is part of the Christian hope.

spoke what the king wanted to hear, providing for him a false hope and security. Surprisingly Micaiah initially supported the false message, but the king was able to detect the sarcasm in the voice of the prophet and insisted on hearing the true message. And the message was clear: there was no hope for Ahab. Micaiah's prophecy of judgment was fulfilled. The narrative highlights the apparent random chance of Ahab's death, but we are to understand that there was nothing random about it. It is obvious from this story that there was no coincidence at play but rather that the battle, and that "random" arrow, was a part of a bigger plan that God had outlined in the heavenly council. The divine verdict against the king, as indicated in Micaiah's vision, was revealed to the people in the course of time. God used a lying spirit, which always is associated with Satan and his forces, to accomplish this. That God allowed Satan's minions to deceive, within boundaries, shows how far Ahab had fallen. God in His mercy granted Ahab the freedom of will, allowing him to deliberately and knowingly choose to be deceived. God does the same for all humanity. Those who wish to be deceived will have their wish granted.

22:41–50. Jehoshaphat of Judah (872–848 B.C.). Compared to the four chapters devoted to Jehoshaphat in 1 Chronicles 17–20, Kings provides only ten verses. His reign almost overlapped with Ahab's (874–853 B.C.). He came to the throne in Ahab's fourth year at the age of thirty-five, and reigned for twenty-five years. His reign was characterized by a positive relationship with God. He brought about a measure of religious reform, removing the cult of male and female prostitutes that Asa, his father, had not eradicated. But he failed to remove the high places (1 Kin. 22:43). No doubt his wife—a near relative of the idolatrous Ahab—had some influence in this, just as Solomon's wives had influenced him.

Another action that seems to be spiritually negative was Jehoshaphat's alliance with the Northern Kingdom (again, due to the influence of both his wife and Ahab). This alliance, although initiated as a marriage between royal families, also involved their close cooperation in battles against common enemies and in a shipping venture that came to nothing when all their ships sank (v. 48). The Chronicles account adds that a prophet chided Jehoshaphat for his political alliance with Ahab as well as for the shipping venture because Judah cooperated too closely with the wicked Northern Kingdom (2 Chr. 20:35–37). Although Kings says nothing about this, it does say that when he was invited to include some of the Northern Kingdom's sailors in the fleet, Jehoshaphat refused (1 Kin. 22:49).

22:51–53. Ahaziah of Israel (853–852 B.C.). Ahab's son Ahaziah became king in Jehoshaphat's seventeenth year and reigned only two years. He did as his father had done before him, serving Baal and provoking God to anger. The fact that he followed the pattern set by Jeroboam, as all his predecessors had done before him, shows the deep-seated nature of public sympathy for the fertility cult. The narrative of 1 Kings ends on that sad note.

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2 KINGS

INTRODUCTION

Title and Authorship. The earlier manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible simply have two books named Samuel and Kings. When this was translated into Greek to be part of the Library of Alexandria, it was recognized that these two books were really one narrative, so the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible) retitled these two books "Of the Kingdoms" and separated it into four sections. What we call today 2 Kings was called "Of the Kingdoms 4," because it was the last of these four sections. The Latin translation in the fourth century (called the Vulgate) retained the same four sections (although it called all four sections Kings rather than Kingdoms). In 1517, Bibles used by both Protestants and Catholics began to use the Hebrew names while keeping the same four sections, thus giving us the 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings that we use today.

We do not know who wrote the books of Kings. The Jewish Talmud has a statement that claims Jeremiah as the author. A comparison of the last chapter of both books (2 Kin. 25 and Jer. 52) shows that there are similarities. However, there are statements in Kings that indicate that at least some of it was written before Jeremiah was alive and some was written after he was dead. Throughout both books (1 and 2 Kin.), the authors reveal their sources as the books of the written accounts of Solomon, the kings of Israel, and the kings of Judah. These statements (e.g., 1 Kin. 11:41; 14:19, 29; 2 Kin. 1:18; 8:23) also make plain that there was much more written about these kings than is recorded here, indicating that the selections that survive in 1 and 2 Kings were compiled to teach particular spiritual lessons (see section on Theology and Purpose in 1 Kings: Introduction).

Date. A statement in 1 Kings 12:19 indicates that the tribes that formed the Northern Kingdom of Israel after the split from Judah in the south were still in rebellion against the house of David when that part of the book was written. Since the Northern Kingdom was dissolved in 722 B.C. when Assyria conquered them, at least that part of the book was written before 722 B.C. It is likely that all of 2 Kings was written after 1 Kings, and since 2 Kings begins just after the death of Ahab, it must have been written at a time later than 853 B.C. The book of 2 Kings ends with Nebuchadnezzar's son and heir, Evil-Merodach (known in Babylonian accounts as Amel-Marduk or Awel-Marduk), releasing Jehoiachin from prison in the year Evil-Merodach became king. As a result, this part had to have been written after 560 B.C., when Jehoaichin was released from prison (see "Old Testament Timeline," p. 94). That passage (2 Kin. 25:27–30) indicates that Jehoiachin ate with the king for the rest of his life, which pushes the date even later. It is likely, however, that most of 2 Kings was written before the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. and that this last section of chapter 25 was appended later.

Backgrounds. By the opening chapter of 2 Kings, the kingdom had already been split for seventy-eight years and was thus generationally established. Eight kings had ruled the Northern Kingdom of Israel and four kings had ruled the Southern Kingdom of Judah. There would still be twelve kings in Israel before its end in 722 B.C. and sixteen rulers (mostly all kings) in Judah before its end in 586 B.C.

In 853 B.C. (where 1 Kin. ends and 2 Kin. begins) both kingdoms had a new king ascend to the throne, making the split in the book at this point reasonable. Following Ahab's death (1 Kin. 22:29–40), his son Ahaziah took the throne. He ruled for only two years because of a fatal accident (2 Kin. 1:1–18), and his brother Jehoram took over. In Judah, the good king Jehoshaphat was near the end of his reign and brought his son to the throne to co-rule with him in the same year Ahab died (853 B.C.). Jehoshaphat lived for about five more years after this.

Politically, to their north, Shalmaneser III was ruling in Assyria. About six years earlier, he had attacked Syria and Israel, and just prior to Israel and Judah's battle with Syria (which resulted in the death of Ahab), they had fought with Syria against Assyria. So while Assyria was the major threat, Syria was the more immediate threat.

To the south, Egypt was in disarray. The Libyans had been living in Egypt as mercenaries for some time but had finally wrested control from the Egyptians beginning in the Third Intermediate Period. However, in 853 B.C. more than one man claimed to be king. As a result, Egypt was weak and does not figure much into the narrative at the beginning of 2 Kings, but it will appear in the latter portions of the book during the Late Period, when Egypt was once again unified.

Theology and Purpose. The role of the prophet is prominent in both books of Kings. Elijah's ministry is the focus of the latter parts of 1 Kings, and Elisha's ministry is the focus in the initial parts of 2 Kings. The narrative in 1 Kings spends five chapters on all of the kings before Ahab (1 Kin. 12–16) and six chapters on Ahab (1 Kin. 17–22), so it is clear that God was trying to reach this major northern king who had married a Sidonian princess/high-priestess of Baal (1 Kin. 16:31–33). The narrative in 2 Kings focuses on God trying to reach the people of Israel (as well as a few foreigners and a couple of kings) through the ministry and miracles of Elisha (2 Kin. 2–13), which covers half of the book of 2 Kings. Two chapters after the death of Elisha, the narrative describes the fall of the Northern Kingdom. The focus of the last half of the book is entirely on the Southern Kingdom of Judah as God tried to reach them through a few good kings in spite of a few very bad kings. (For more, see 1 Kings: Introduction.)

COMMENTARY

1:1—17:41

THE DIVIDED MONARCHY

The second book of Kings continues the narrative of the experience of God's people during the divided monarchy, which was introduced in 1 Kings 17:1. It concludes with the collapse of the Northern (2 Kin. 15:8—17:41) and Southern Kingdoms (18:1—25:30). The book commences with a parenthetical note about Moab's rebellion against Israel after Ahab's death (2 Kin. 1:1; see 1 Kings: Introduction) and then continues describing the reign of Ahaziah of Israel. Nothing more is said of Moab until chapter 3. Some commentators have suggested that the purpose of 2 Kings 1:1 is to form a bridge that joins the two books together.

1:1—2:11

Elijah and the Kings

This section concludes the interaction between Elijah and the kings that was initiated in 1 Kings 17:1. God's ideal for the monarchy was that the kings would always listen to His prophets in order to make clear that He was the true king of Israel. But with a few exceptions, most of the kings did not listen to God's messengers.

1:1–18. Elijah and Ahaziah. Ahaziah's choice to send messengers to Ekron says much about God's place on the list of Israel's priorities. Ahaziah did not choose to go to Jerusalem even though there was peace between the two kingdoms. He did not even choose to go to Bethel or Dan, the two Israelite places of Baal worship. Instead, a Philistine city was the most attractive to him as the place with the most healing spiritual power. Elijah's question to the officers sent by Ahaziah carried an obvious tone of sarcasm, or at least irony. Ekron was about fifty-five miles (88.5 km) southwest of Samaria, compared to Jerusalem, which was only forty miles (64.4 km) due south. Thus, the implication that they were simply out to consult the most convenient god could not be serious. To make it worse, Ekron was just inside the northern border of the territory of Judah on another highway, west of the one to Jerusalem. It was obvious that the temple and God were being avoided.

The narrative highlights in an unusual way the conflict between the prophets of the Lord and the kings of Israel. It was a conflict between the will of God and the will of the king, and between the word of God and the word of the king. There was a deep clash between the authority of the king and that of Elijah. Ahaziah obviously disliked the message of death and was willing to do whatever was necessary to avert it. The reason behind sending for Elijah is not explicitly stated, but the fact that the king sent the army to get the prophet clearly suggests that his intentions were not good. Perhaps Ahaziah thought that he would be free of the message of death if he brought the prophet under control, or even killed him. Subduing the prophet would be, according to the king, a way of neutralizing the evil omen.

The basic question seems to be, Who is able to shape the movements of history? Ahaziah believed that the god of Ekron could reveal to him the future in order for him to act accordingly, but he soon realized that only the Lord, through His word, shapes the future and fills it with hope or judgment. The military arrived at the house of Elijah and demanded that he *descend* as an act of submission to the king, but Elijah responded with a divine judgment that served to legitimize him as a prophet of the Lord. On Mount Carmel the fire that *descended* from heaven had vindicated God; now fire, not Elijah, *descended* from heaven showing that he was the messenger of the Lord. The captain of the third military unit did not ask for the submission of Elijah but rather submitted himself and his soldiers to Elijah to avoid divine judgment; lives were preserved only in submission to the will of God delivered by the prophet.

Elijah *descended* not in obedience to the king but in obedience to the divine mandate, and he went with the soldiers as the ambassador of the Lord. By now the king had realized that opposition to the word of the Lord results in judgment, and he quietly listened to Elijah as he delivered to him the original message of divine judgment. In the conflict between the authority of Ahaziah and the prophetic authority of Elijah, the powerful word of the Lord prevailed. The pattern of prediction and fulfillment, so common in the books of Kings, reveals who is the Lord of history. The narrative closes with the statement that Ahaziah died in fulfillment of the word of the Lord that Elijah had delivered to him.

2:1–11. Elijah's Departure in a Fiery Chariot. The intriguing thing about this passage is that it takes for granted that Elijah was about to depart into the heavens. Everybody in the story seems to have known about it before it happened. When two groups of students at Bethel and at Jericho asked Elisha about it, it apparently caused him distress. The narrative focuses on Elisha's determination to stay with Elijah to the very end. The unspoken expectation, and yet uncertainty, of what was in store for Elijah is what gives a sense of drama to the story. The three requests from Elijah for Elisha to turn back and Elisha's determination to continue (vv. 2–6) were probably a test intended to reveal Elisha's commitment to the prophetic ministry as the successor of Elijah.

Elijah's mantle had been introduced earlier (1 Kin. 19:19) as a symbol of the prophetic calling, but in this passage it becomes significant as a symbol of spiritual authority. The use of the mantle to divide the river (2 Kin. 2:8) brings to mind the miraculous use of Moses's rod at the Red Sea. The crossing of the Jordan itself "on dry ground," here and in Elisha's return a few verses later, would remind any Hebrew of the earlier and more famous crossing. This episode marks the last time in Scripture that a body of water is miraculously dried up to allow passage on dry ground. In the final moments of their relationship, Elijah asked Elisha a question that is reminiscent of the question God asked Solomon at the beginning of his reign: What would he like to receive? Elisha's answer carried special meaning because a double portion was, in the practice of the time, what the firstborn would legally inherit from the father to establish the firstborn as the leader of the family (Deut. 21:17). The request and the imminent fulfillment of the answer publicly legitimized the leading prophetic role Elisha would fill in Israel. While miracles are not by any means the full measure of the work of a prophet, there was a strong emphasis on them in the stories of Elisha. So commentators who have studied the matter carefully have noted that the number of miracles wrought by Elisha as listed in Scripture is exactly double the number performed by Elijah—a clear, if symbolic, indication of the fulfillment of Elisha's request for a double portion of Elijah's spirit.

The closest parallels to the phenomenon of being taken away in a chariot of fire associated with a whirlwind occur in Ezekiel and Job. Ezekiel saw a whirlwind coming from the north with fire (Ezek. 1:4) and God's throne in its midst (1:5, 22, 25–26). Similarly, Job saw a whirlwind coming, and God spoke to him from it (Job 38:1; 40:6). Other uses of the term "whirlwind" refer to God coming in judgment (e.g., Zech. 9:14). In all these biblical references, the whirlwind or powerful storm (the same word is often used in Hebrew) came toward the one describing it, but with Elijah, the whirlwind went away from the viewer. This unique and special revelation of God's presence and its description in the biblical text can be difficult for the modern reader to understand.

Nevertheless, the story teaches important truths. First, Elisha was being tested for his persistence. Perhaps he was a little reticent to bid farewell to his master, but he needed to be able to keep up with the mundane and ordinary as well as to stand up to the blatant evils that would face him. That meant simply plodding along, even if it meant doubling back a few times to where he had been. Second, Elijah visited the schools of the prophets to tie up loose ends before his departure. The students of those schools knew what was happening, thus providing a good precedent for youth today to be informed so that they can at least observe God's action among His people. Third, the only other times that water parted was during the Exodus—at the Red Sea for the first generation leaving Egypt and at the Jordan for the second generation entering the promised land. What Elijah did in dividing the Jordan with his rolled-up mantle signified a new beginning. The end of one era had come and a new day of opportunity and salvation was dawning. Finally, the translation of a living human being to heaven speaks about the reality of heaven as a place accessible to human beings. There is an element of hope present in the narrative in the sense that if one human being was taken to heaven, then others could also enjoy this privilege. The Christian hope points to the moment when the resurrected righteous will ascend to meet the Lord and be with Him forever.

2:12—9:37

Elisha and the Kings

In the record of Elijah and Elisha, the books of Kings register a wide and rich portfolio of prophetic ministry. In addition to working for national repentance and revival, their ministry also demonstrated God's care for the needs of individuals that the apostate kings of their time failed to have. The prophets provided food, helped eliminate debt, facilitated God's blessing for childless parents to have a child, cared for widows and orphans, and raised the only sons of women from the dead. Both prophets were closely associated with the schools of the prophets.

2:12–25. Elisha's Ministry Commences. Elisha's reaction to Elijah's disappearance was rather dramatic. He cried out, tore his robe in two (v. 12), picked up Elijah's mantle (cloak) that had fallen from him—a detail mentioned twice in vv. 13–14—and headed back to the Jordan (v. 13). This repetition emphatically reinforces the nature of Elijah's dramatic departure and the mantle falling down from above in the process as part of the sign that was promised to Elisha for receiving a double portion of Elijah's spirit. The waters of the Jordan were then divided in order for him to cross over (v. 14).

Back in Jericho, the men of the city told Elisha about their desperate water situation (v. 19). As a response, the prophet asked for a new bowl full of salt and tossed it into the water supply. The biblical author stated that the water remained healed until his own day, and that is still the case. This was Elisha's first miracle and was performed for the benefit of God's people. The Lord supplied for them drinkable water, which was a vital need. The God who defeated powerful armies is the same who cares for the daily needs of His servants.

Those who mocked Elisha (v. 23) were small or young (Heb. *qatan*) *ne'arim*—a term that can mean "boys," "lads," "youths," or "servants." Accordingly, Bible translations differ in regard to what they are called. Ultimately, we do not know exactly how old they were, but they were acting like a gang of juvenile delinquents. Their actions were clearly reprehensible (cf. Deut. 21:18–21). The fate they met parallels what happened to the soldiers who attempted to arrest Elijah (2 Kin. 1:10, 12). It was also a judgment against the inhabitants of Bethel and their worship of the golden calf placed there by Jeroboam. This judgment echoed the account of the serpents in the wilderness during the Exodus (Num. 21:5–9)—when God's people turned their backs on Him and mocked Him, He withdrew His protection from them, and they suffered the consequences of facing their ever-present dangers without God's protection. The youths who mocked Elisha were in reality mocking God, and they too reaped the consequences. Their action stands in marked contrast to those of the students who honored Elisha.

3:1–25. Moab Rebels. While the book opens with the statement that Moab rebelled (1:1), it is only in chapter 3 that more is said about this. The rebellion came when a new king (Jehoram or Joram, 852–841 B.C.) ascended the throne of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. This means that both kingdoms had a king of the same name at the same time: Jehoram of Judah reigned from about 853 until 841 B.C. Jehoram of Israel was the brother of the previous king, Ahaziah, whose brief reign ended after falling from a high window.

Although Jehoram of Israel did evil in God's sight, he did curb some of the idolatrous practices of his forebears by removing a sacred pillar that his father had made to honor Baal (3:2; see also 1 Kin. 14:23). But he continued the worship practices that Jeroboam introduced (2 Kin. 3:3). Although the record of events during his reign continues through 8:15, Jehoram of Israel was not the main player; it was Elisha. The king is almost incidental to all else that was happening.

It is clear that regardless of its many other problems, the Northern Kingdom had significant political influence in the region, enough to be able to exact a significant tribute from Moab, across the Jordan and to the south along the east side of the Dead Sea. Moab first fell under the control of Israel during the reign of David (2 Sam. 8:2)—control that continued in the Northern Kingdom after the split since at least two tribes (Rueben and Gad) dwelt in the area.

The amount of the tribute gives us some idea of the livestock production of Moab, now part of the modern country of Jordan and a region roughly equivalent in size to the Dead Sea. A tribute usually was understood as a token tax to acknowledge subservience to another authority—in this case Israel. An adult ram produces as much as thirty pounds (13.6 kg) of wool yearly. Thus, 100,000 rams could potentially produce 1,500 tons (about three million pounds) of wool each year. If this was only a token, the amount of wool produced yearly in Moab alone was staggering, illustrating how lush the land east of the Dead Sea was at that time.

This story illustrates Jehosophat's puzzling relationship with God and with the Northern Kingdom. The chronology of his various military alliances with Ahab and his son may be difficult to reconstruct from the various accounts in Kings and Chronicles, but almost all of the alliances ended in disaster, and in most of them he was directly or implicitly rebuked by the Lord (2 Kin. 22:32, 48; cf. 2 Chr. 19:1–3, 36–37). Worst of all for its long-term consequences, Jehosophat, a scripturally honored "good" king of Judah, had allowed his son to marry a daughter of Ahab, which corrupted Judah for generations (2 Kin. 8:18; see also 1 Kin. 22:44; 2 Chr. 18:1). About this alliance with Jehoram, Elisha made it explicit again that the Lord decried the bad company Jehosophat kept with the king of Israel (2 Kin. 3:14).

The roundabout route of the allies' attack is interesting. It would have been much more efficient for Israel and Judah to attack from the north and Edom from the south. Instead, they all apparently traveled together around the south end of the Dead Sea to attack Moab from that direction. It can only be assumed that Moab had fewer defenses on its southern border, making it a more attractive place to invade.

As noted earlier, at times of crisis the Lord's prophet was nearby (v. 11) to pronounce judgment or, in this case, to rescue his wayward people. Why Elisha was nearby, when all of his previous miracles took place north of the Dead Sea, is not stated. It is possible that the Lord sent him there in advance, as He directed Philip to meet the Ethiopian on the road to Gaza (Acts 8:26). Even though Jehosophat was the king of Judah (the Southern Kingdom) and almost all of Elisha's ministry was in Israel (the Northern Kingdom), Jehosophat knew enough about Elisha to know that he truly was a man of God. This could have been either from Elisha's own reputation or simply because Jehoshaphat learned that Elisha had been a servant of Elijah, as indicated by the saying about pouring water on Elijah's hands (2 Kin. 3:11).

The reference to music (v. 15) is one of the few places in Scripture where the association is made between music and prophetic utterance (see 1 Sam. 10:5). Why Elisha called for a musician is not stated, but it seems likely that the music was not to induce a trance, as commonly understood, but simply to put the moment in a setting of meditative and reflective communion with God on noble themes.

The destruction ordered on Moab—including commands to spoil fields, stop up wells, and cut down good trees (2 Kin. 3:19)—indicates the Lord's intent for stark judgment on Moab. Such complete destruction contrasts with the style of conquest commanded in Deuteronomy 20, where the Israelites were instructed to preserve resources, particularly fruit trees, in areas they intended to inhabit. The purpose here was not to conquer and settle new territory but to inflict lasting damage on a long-standing enemy. Indeed, the land is arid today largely because of deforestation.

The writer relates the miracle of the water (vv. 16–24) to the time of the morning sacrifice. It would be unusual to state the matter in this way unless the writer wished to convey a spiritual, salvific significance to the timing of the event. God's salvation here is presented with the imagery of both water and sacrifice. Understood in this way, it is not surprising that to the Moabites, the water had the appearance of blood, even if they misunderstood its meaning.

The particular Hebrew word *qetsap* used in v. 27, sometimes translated as "fury" or "indignation," refers in the majority of cases to the wrath of God that comes in judgment. How this wrath is to be understood here is not made plain. In one view, this wrath may not be emanating from the Moabites but from God, who brought an end to the battle and put a limit on Israel's further success. It has also been suggested that this wrath refers to the fury of the Moabites against Israel, as indicated by the horrific lengths to which the king went in sacrificing his son in order to attempt to defend his city. In this reading, we understand that the Israelites were so appalled at this action that they withdrew from the siege (v. 27).

Without Elisha, the Israelite confederation had no chance of surviving their long desert trek. Had Jehosophat not asked for God's direction, Elisha would not have been able to act. While the story ostensibly follows Jehoram, Jehosophat becomes the key character, despite his repeated, dubious relationships with Israel. He was the one who followed God, asked to consult His true prophet, and lived to witness a victory. Certainly, it was a lesson for him, and it also should have been for Jehoram.

4:1–7. The Widow's Oil. The story of the widow afraid for her future after her husband's death gives us a view of the social structure of the times. A widow was easy prey for anyone who desired to extort her dead husband's wealth, and if she could not meet her dead husband's financial obligations, she could lose her home, her children, or both to pay the debt. This particular widow was in danger of losing her two sons, whom the creditor claimed as his slaves in order to pay a debt. The sons would have to work for the creditor until such time as he considered the debt paid (a situation ripe for abuse) or until the next Jubilee year when all such workers were to be released (Lev. 25:39–41). This arrangement was not supposed to be as restrictive or as severe as slavery—Israelites were not to be bought and sold as slaves, as was permitted with foreigners, and their servitude was not permanent (Lev. 25:39–46).

The widow did not want this for her sons, so she pleaded with Elisha for help. Her husband had been one of the sons, or students, of the prophets (2 Kin. 4:1), and she thought this piece of information might help her case. But Elisha looked past that detail to what she had in her hands—a little oil—and that was what he worked with (v. 2).

This miracle parallels that of Elijah when he went to stay with the Phoenician widow during three years of drought (1 Kin. 17:14–16). Both widows were able to support and maintain their families because of a prophet in their midst. Their acceptance of and respect for the prophet indicated their dependence and reliance on God, and God honored them at a time when the majority of the people around them had rejected God and given their allegiance to Baal instead.

4:8–37. The Woman from Shunem. The small town of Shunem, now known as Sulam on the eastern outskirts of the modern city of Afula, was in the Jezreel Valley about sixteen miles (25.7 km) southwest of the southern tip of the Sea of Galilee and about the same distance from Mount Carmel to the northwest. The town must have been along a route traveled regularly by Elisha for his ministry in the region.

Elisha's question in v. 13 is unusual in that he was apparently anticipating using his political influence to help her rather than performing a miracle. The idea of what should be done for her is recorded as having come from Elisha's servant Gehazi, rather than being an original prophetic insight from the prophet himself. This may give us a glimpse into the role of the prophet, at least in Elisha's case, who sometimes lived in the moment and, through the Spirit of God, reacted to outside information and circumstances as they occurred rather than always from anticipatory insight.

The narrative of the promised son (vv. 14–17) easily brings to mind another such promise, also given in the context of hospitality provided to travelers, with an initial, similarly incredulous reaction from the mother-to-be (Gen. 18). This story is different because the promised son is not later recorded as playing a major role in the history of God's people, as did other promised sons like Isaac, Samson (Judg. 13:3–5), and Samuel (1 Sam. 1:17). However, with this miracle, Elisha demonstrated that he indeed had the spirit that Elijah had, who had also raised a boy back to life (1 Kin. 17:22). The prophetic announcement was fulfilled as Elisha had spoken—the word of God impacted the life of the woman and her husband in a unique way.

The boy's death is commonly attributed to sunstroke (2 Kin. 4:18–20). We are not told why the mother concealed the death from the boy's father. The mother is the major character in how the story is told, and the father's role is incidental. It may be that this was also true in the actual life of the family, at least in relation to raising the son. The father was understandably puzzled at the request for a service animal during the busy harvest, which probably would have caused some inconvenience. The woman's determination to save her son caused her to engage in a demanding thirty-two-mile (51.5 km) round trip to Carmel and rested entirely on the desperate hope that the prophet could be found there. Her desperation and grief also compelled her to engage in an intimate gesture of importunity toward Elisha that his servant considered inappropriate or offensive (v. 27). Elisha, as Christ did later with many who approached him familiarly, resonated with the woman's grief, whatever the cause, and welcomed her approach and honored her faith.

The story of the boy's resurrection is notable for the process by which Elisha was involved in its accomplishment. As with some other miracles recorded in Scripture, there was a process involved. Elijah prayed seven times at Mount Carmel before the rain came (1 Kin. 18:36–37); Naaman washed seven times in the Jordan before his leprosy was healed (2 Kin. 5:10, 14); Jesus used a two-stage process to heal a man's blindness (Mark 8:23–25). Elisha's instruction for his servant to go on ahead and place his staff on the child raises in the mind of the reader the expectation that that will be the means of the boy's resuscitation (2 Kin. 4:29). But it is only Elisha's direct involvement, and that through a repeated ritual, that resulted in the intended effect (vv. 32–35). It may be that even though Elisha was the intended agent of a profound miracle (the boy had been dead for a considerable period of time), the Lord was using it as a faith-building experience for Elisha as well as the others who witnessed or became aware of the miracle.

The incident of the promised son who then became sick, died, and was resurrected illustrates that the prophetic word had again restored life and wholeness, not nationally, as was so desperately needed, but to an individual as a token of what God can do for all the faithful and willing.

4:38–44. Death in the Pot. Elisha retraced his steps back to Gilgal (near Jericho) and its school of the prophets. A famine had struck the land as a reminder of the broken covenant (Deut. 28:15, 24) and as an echo of the encounter between Elijah and King Ahab (1 Kin. 17:1). The famine showed that Baal, the storm god, was totally powerless and that it was the God of Israel alone who provides rain in its season (Lev. 26:4). When a poisonous plant found its way into the students' stew, Elisha worked a miracle. Elijah had done something similar during a famine when the meager food supplies of a widow were hardly enough to provide for her household (1 Kin. 17:10–16). This time again the Lord provided more than needed (2 Kin. 4:42–44), something echoed later in one of the miracles of Jesus (Matt. 14:13–21). That Elisha supervised the feeding of more than one hundred persons indicates that his prophetic ministry had a greater effect than that of his mentor Elijah.

The miracles performed by Elisha reveal a particular interest in the needy condition of women and reveal a God for whom gender is no barrier to personal, social, and spiritual fulfillment. But the miracles cut deeper. They were about providing food and making the infertile fertile. They were an attack against the claims of Baal to be in charge of the fertility of the land and the people. The one who could make humans and the earth fertile and who could provide food for His servants was the God of Israel. But sadly, the nation was placing its hope on the false claims of Baal and was heading toward disaster.

5:1–27. Naaman the Leper. Naaman was a senior commanding officer of the Syrian army (the nation was called Aram at the time), whose military successes were attributed directly to God (v. 1). It was unclear what his skin condition actually was since the Hebrew word (*tsara'*) used is a generic term that includes rashes, fungal infections, leprosy, psoriasis, and other conditions. The fact that he was still able to associate with people may indicate that the Syrians did not consider the disease to be contagious.

That he had a young girl working in his home was evidence of his success in raids across Israel's border (v. 2). Even though Ahab and Ben-Hadad had formalized a treaty (1 Kin. 20:34), it did not hold and there had been various skirmishes between them. In the narrative, the strong faith of the servant girl from Israel in Naaman's house was also an example of what God had told Elijah on Mount Horeb about the 7,000 who had still not bowed to Baal (1 Kin. 19:18).

The faith of the servant girl is remarkable. That she would honor her captor by suggesting, in good faith, that he visit the prophet of the Lord in Israel (2 Kin. 5:3) indicates that even in the distress and distraction of her captivity, she knew who she was. Despite the apparent benevolent treatment by her captors, she had not lost her identity, and she exemplified what was evident and later reiterated as an important teaching of Scripture: servants and slaves and the otherwise oppressed, even under adverse circumstances, are called to serve their persecutors and captors with good deeds (Prov. 25:21–22; Matt. 5:38–48; Rom. 12:19–21; 1 Pet. 2:20–25).

The response of the king of Israel to Naaman's visit indicates the obtuseness of his mind (2 Kin. 5:7). The request was for a miracle. Obviously, the king had no confidence in his own ability perform miracles, but it did not occur to him to see the possibilities for glory to

God by sending Naaman to the one person in the Northern Kingdom who had the widespread reputation of doing so. The king viewed the matter only in the political arena rather than the spiritual realm. Elisha, apparently through prophetic insight, had to intervene in order rescue the opportunity for good. It is a lesson for any leader, who should always look beyond the immediate reflexive interpretation of a situation to consider what possibilities God might have in mind.

The instruction to wash seven times (v. 10) appears to have been intended to demonstrate to Naaman that one must be diligent and exact in following God's commands. Six times was not enough to ensure the healing nor to test the full measure of Naaman's faith.

Naaman's gift, first offered to the king and then to Elisha, was an enormous sum: 750 pounds (340 kg) of silver (worth today over $150,000), and 150 pounds (68 kg) of gold (worth today over $3 million). It was common in the ancient world to pay the priests of the deity in advance to secure future blessings. That Naaman waited until after the miracle to offer gifts shows two things: first, that he was not inclined to believe that a foreign god would help him (vv. 11–12), and second, that he recognized the different character of Israel's God after the miracle (v. 15). The gift offer came from a grateful heart. Elisha's refusal was intended to convince Naaman that it is not wealth that makes a person whole but his faith in and reliance on God. Naaman obviously had an inaccurate concept of the God of Israel. With this in mind, he had assumed that God and His prophet needed gifts in payment. When he could give nothing, his sense of honor caused him to ask for something that would itself demonstrate his honor and gratitude—two mule-loads of soil (v. 17). His explanation for what seems to us an unusual request was that from that time forward he would only sacrifice to the Lord God. The relationship between his request and his explanation may be interpreted in at least two ways. First, it was commonly thought in the ancient Near East that a god's influence was confined to a geographical location (e.g., 1 Kin. 20:23). Thus, Naaman may have believed that if he took some of the ground where God had displayed His power back to his home, he would be able to worship Him at that new place too. Alternatively, Naaman's strong affirmation of faith may indicate that he considered himself now to be an Israelite and was symbolically claiming his inheritance by taking with him a portion of the land.

Naaman had become a worshiper of the true God. His request for a dispensation when appearing to genuflect to another god presents an interesting use of language. Naaman called that god "Rimmon" (2 Kin. 5:18). There are several occasions in Scripture where the Hebrew language makes a joke or an ironic statement about the meaning of names by employing wordplay—where the same or similar words are used with different meanings (see Gen. 17:17; 18:12–15; 21:6, 9; 26:8 and notes; Dan. 1:7). The actual name of the god is "Ramanu," which means "the thunderer" and is, of course, a reference to Baal, the storm god. Altering the vowels to "Rimmon" changes its meaning to "pomegranate." So the thunderer was turned into a pomegranate. When Naaman used this term, he was probably intentionally confessing faith in the God of Israel while renouncing his former faith in Baal.

The wonderful story turns sour at this point with Gehazi's betrayal (2 Kin. 5:20–27). He dishonored the Lord by taking money from Naaman. Elisha knew what Gehazi had done and told him that Naaman's skin disease would now cling to him and to his descendants forever. That effectively ended Gehazi's career. Although he now had money for olive groves, vineyards, flocks, herds, and servants, he also had what Naaman was prepared to pay a much larger fortune to be rid of. The very thing that made Baal worship attractive—wealth—was now Gehazi's, but at what cost? He had lost his wholeness and his future and became an example of a nation insistent on divorcing itself from God. The story is indeed about two men. One was a non-Israelite who came to know the God of Israel and concluded that there was no god like Him. The other was an Israelite whose association with the prophet gave him high spiritual leadership advantages yet who, like the leaders of the nation, had no respect for the Lord of Israel. The literal leprosy of Naaman would cling to Gehazi, and the metaphorical leprosy of other nations would cling to Israel and would permanently separate them from the Lord. The word of the Lord, spoken through the prophet, healed Naaman and brought judgment on Gehazi and the nation represented by him.

6:1–7. The Lost Ax Head. The story of the lost ax head gives fascinating insights into the person of Elisha and his interpersonal skills. He was obviously very closely involved in the development of a new generation of prophets.

A group of students at the school of the prophets near Jericho shared with Elisha their plan to enlarge the place where he and the students lived. He is portrayed as a loved and respected mentor who provided not only for their education but for their lodging and even for their food as well (4:38–44). It is interesting that the students made the plans and he empowered their vision, rather than Elisha being the one to dictate and micromanage (6:1–2). The presence of this master-teacher was highly valued, and when his students invited him to join their physical labor, he accepted, grateful for every available teaching moment (v. 3).

When one of the students lost a borrowed ax head, Elisha focused on the solution rather than on the cause (v. 6). The retrieval of the ax head was also left to the student—Elisha did not reach out and pick it up, but he asked the student to do it (v. 7). This story illustrates not only what it means to be a successful mentor but also the success of a group trusting in God and heeding the prophetic word in their midst. It also reveals that the prophetic ministry seeks to build up faith among those who, in the midst of national apostasy, are still serving the Lord.

6:8–23. A Banquet for the Enemy. The uneasy peace between Syria (Aram) and Israel was further weakened by the continuing cross-border skirmishes with the Syrian king (see 1 Kin. 20:34). The story of the capture of the Syrian army teaches us several things. First, God can intervene in the most private counsels of His opponents to foil their plans and accomplish His purposes. He knows everything, down to the smallest detail.

Second, and related to the first, God is in complete control of events, even in what appears to us to be the direst crises. The prophetic assertion "Those who are with us are more than those who are with them" (v. 16) has comforted God's people for millennia. The mental image of the host of the Lord surrounding and protecting his faithful servants gives us a glimpse of the protecting role of the heavenly army in the cosmic battle on earth.

Third, the prophets may sometimes, without blame, use benevolent misdirection to ultimately accomplish goodwill among enemies. Elisha was comically artful in his message to the blinded besiegers at Dothan. They sought him, without success because of their blindness, at Dothan, which was where he really was. But they would find him (when their eyes were opened) in another city (Samaria), which was also correct.

Fourth, God desires His apparent enemies to come to a knowledge of Him and experience His grace. Elisha's insistence that the captives be treated with kindness and allowed to return home unharmed explicitly anticipated the teaching of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount when he told his followers to do good to their enemies (Matt. 5:44).

6:24—7:20. Siege of Samaria. We do not know the exact time sequence, but the Syrian army was again on the offensive against Israel. Ben-Hadad continued to fulfill the words of the young prophet who had rebuked Ahab for not killing the Syrian king (1 Kin. 20:34, 42). Now he set out to besiege Samaria—about 120 miles (193.1 km) south of the Syrian capital, Damascus. Jehoram's army had not been able to stop the Syrians or break their siege, and a severe famine was afflicting the besieged city. Famine is one of the covenant curses, and therefore one of the main indicators of the broken covenant (Lev. 26:18–20, 25). The inhabitants of Samaria were compelled by hunger to eat their own (unclean) donkeys (2 Kin. 6:25; see Lev. 11:3) that had presumably died of starvation. The fact that they paid eighty shekels (about two lbs or nearly one kg of silver) for a donkey's head reveals their desperate situation. To give some idea of that cost, the average income at the time was about one shekel a month. Added to that, fuel for cooking was also at a premium, and all that was left to burn was dove dung, worth five shekels (five months' wages) for about cup.

More evidence that Israel was experiencing the specific curses of breaking the covenant is provided in the story of Jehoram's interaction with the two women (2 Kin. 6:26–30). The famine had become so great that mothers were willing to eat their own children, just as had been foretold (Lev. 26:27–29). Jehoram's reaction to the revolting encounter was similar to his father Ahab's reaction to an earlier famine: he blamed the prophet of God (1 Kin. 18:17), and the formulation of his intention was similar to Jezebel's oath to kill Elijah. It exhibited the very kind of stubborn rejection of God that the covenant curses, so clearly evidenced here, were intended to punish. The messenger Jehoram sent to Elisha was a senior army general whose position was similar to Naaman's in the previous story; he was someone on whom the king depended. The military situation was a far cry from the days when the Syrians were offering David tribute (2 Sam. 8:6). It was a sorrowful reminder of how far Israel had fallen in its rejection of God.

Through prophetic insight, Elisha anticipated the arrival of the messenger, who was refused an audience but to whom Elisha announced both a promise for Samaria and a curse on the unbelieving messenger (2 Kin. 6:32—7:1). The mockery of the messenger was serious because while he was apparently acknowledging the existence of Israel's God, he was denigrating His power. What he did not know or chose to ignore was that the prophetic word defeats the enemies of His people as it is fulfilled within history (7:17–20).

The account of the four lepers carries an element of dark humor and ultimate comedy (vv. 3–11). Their situation was desperate. Upon deciding they had nothing to lose by going to the enemy, they discovered the Lord's deliverance and became the messengers of salvation to those who treated them as outcasts. God's best news is sometimes given first to those who may be viewed by society as of little account. The shepherds of Bethlehem (Luke 2:8–20) and Mary Magdalene in the garden of the resurrection (Luke 24:1–12; John 20:11–18) are similar examples.

The listing of the spoils they found in the Syrian camp is similar to the goods Naaman the Syrian had brought to Elisha to be free of his leprosy. These resources gave this group of lepers a new start in life. The riches of this life are God's to distribute for His purposes, and we are called to share the good news He bestows on us. Those who reject that good news may be crushed by the results of it, as was the officer at the gate (2 Kin. 7:17).

As Elisha had said, the messenger who had disbelieved saw the large quantities of food greatly reduced in value but did not benefit from it because he was killed (vv. 18–20). The word of the Lord spoken through the prophet found fulfillment in judgment against a leader who had forsaken and challenged the Lord. This officer represented a nation that had largely given up on God and had given its allegiance instead to other gods. And yet, when trouble came as a direct result of breaking the covenant with God, they could not cope with the crisis.

The nation had forgotten that the Lord can be trusted in good times and in bad times. Instead, they blamed God for their troubles, charging Him with being inaccessible and venting their wrath on those they knew had a close relationship with Him. But God is good, and He provided not only for the faithful ones but for all those around. They all benefited from a great feast of good things supplied by God's saving love.

8:1–6. The Woman of Shunem Escapes Famine. It appears that the narrative of vv. 1–2 is retrospective, recalling a number of years previous, when Elisha advised the woman of Shunem to leave the country to escape a famine. The implication seems to be that the famine during the siege of Samaria was only part of that longer famine lasting seven years. This story continues the theme of Elisha's prophetic ministry in the lives of ordinary people. While the stories of his predecessor's ministry focus more on the national spiritual condition of Israel, the stories recorded about Elisha's ministry have a strong focus on the health and well-being of individuals. In this case, it was Elisha's reputation, as reported by Gehazi, that helped the woman, rather than Elisha's direct intervention to solve her problem. Doubtless, when the king learned from Gehazi of the great things Elisha had done for her, it helped him decide that he needed to help her too. While the order of the narratives here is not clear, it seems likely that this story occurred after Gehazi's disgrace in the Naaman incident. If so, we learn that Gehazi still admired his old master and that God was still willing to use Gehazi, greedy and disgraced as he was, as an agent to accomplish His purposes and restore the woman's land. The same can be said of the king, who himself had rejected God. The Lord had not totally abandoned these men. He is not willing that any should die but that all should repent and live (2 Pet. 3:9). God was willing to use them as much as He could to help this woman bring glory to Himself. No one is beyond redemption as long as they live, and God can use anyone as an agent to accomplish His purpose of blessing those who trust in Him.

8:7–15. A New King for Syria. No time frame is given between the fleeing of the Syrian army at the siege at Samaria and the time that Elisha went up to see the sick King Ben-Hadad. The king loaded forty camels with presents and sent one of his senior officers, Hazael, to ask Elisha if he would recover from this illness. It is ironic that when Israel's King Ahaziah was ill, he sent emissaries to the prophets of Baal at Ekron to see whether or not he would recover (2 Kin. 1:1–2). Similarly, Naaman came to Israel with great gifts so that he too might be healed. While God's people ran to pagan prophets, idolaters were seeking out the one true God.

In restoring Elijah after his flight from Jezebel, God commissioned him to anoint a new king for Syria (1 Kin. 19:15–16). The text does not say whether Elijah ever managed to see Hazael, but

Elisha got the chance to meet him (2 Kin. 8:9). God predicted that Hazael would be king. This does not mean that God intended Hazael to assassinate the previous king, but just that Hazael was impatient to carry out what he knew to be God's will. His violent action was a denial of the meaning of his own name, "the one who sees God." Instead of seeing or understanding how God would bring about his ascension to the throne, Hazael followed his own ambition and took matters into his own hands.

8:16–24. Jehoram or Joram of Judah (853–841 B.C.). Jehoram of Judah was the son of "good" King Jehoshaphat, but his marriage to Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, did not bode well for his reign (v. 18). He is described as one who followed the kings of Israel, especially the house of Ahab, in doing evil in the sight of the Lord. God preserved Judah in order to leave a light burning there and for the sake of the covenant made with David (v. 19). This is an important theme, and one that is repeated on other occasions, for instance, when Jeroboam split the kingdom (1 Kin. 11:36), and when Abijam was preserved despite his apostasy (1 Kin. 15:4). God was not yet ready to give up Judah.

With the weakened ties to God, it was easier for the subdued nations paying tribute to Judah to rebel, and this was exactly what Edom did (2 Kin. 8:20). Jehoram tried to defeat the Edomite army but failed, and his army deserted and fled to their own homes. Edom was never again under the control of Judah, and when the Babylonians conquered Judah and took them into captivity the Edomites were cruel with the Judeans—for which later prophets condemned them (e.g., Obadiah 1:10–14). Emboldened by this rebellion, another vassal state, Libnah, also rebelled (1 Kin. 8:22). The summary statement for Jehoram's reign again refers the reader to the court chronicles of the kings of Judah and indicates that he was buried with his fathers in the city of David (2 Kin. 8:23–24). His son, Ahaziah, replaced him.

8:25–29. Ahaziah of Judah (841 B.C.). The narrative of Ahaziah can be divided into two parts, with this as the first and the second being in 9:27–29. The first part mentions his relationship to Ahab's dynasty. The Hebrew word *khatan* in 8:27 essentially refers to any relationship by marriage. It has been translated and understood by some to mean specifically "son-in-law" (in which case Ahaziah would have followed in his father's and grandfather's footsteps by marrying into Ahab's family), but the word here could simply mean that he was connected to Ahab's family through his father's marriage into it (v. 27). It is true that since Jehoshaphat's reign there had been peace between Israel and Judah, but at the same time Ahaziah's reign paralleled the idolatrous excesses of the house of Omri, especially of Ahab, in doing evil in the sight of the Lord.

The narrative next describes a battle in which both kings joined forces against the Syrians at Ramoth Gilead (v. 28). A similar battle had been fought a generation earlier, when Ahab and Jehoshaphat were soundly beaten and Ahab was mortally wounded (1 Kin. 22:1–4, 34–35). With this latest battle, the king of Israel (now Jehoram) was wounded, and Ahaziah visited him (2 Kin. 8:29). History seems to have been going around in a circle—as it often does when people cast themselves away from God. It is only in following God that history progresses toward a grand and glorious climax.

9:1–37. Jehu and the End of Jezebel. The anointing of Jehu as king is unique in that the prophet sent his messenger to anoint him and to define Jehu's mission to him. The fact that Jehu was anointed in secret parallels the anointing of David. The significant difference is that Jehu proclaimed himself king immediately after the anointing and did not wait for the Lord to do things at the appropriate time. This may account for the ruthlessness of his action.

Although Jehu may have exceeded God's intentions (see Hos. 1:4), he was God's instrument in bringing the dynasty of Ahab to an end. That the dead body of Joram, Ahab's son, was thrown on the very ground that Ahab had stolen from Naboth (2 Kin. 9:24–26) is a stirring reminder to us that the word of the Lord, whether affirming His deliverance or promising His judgment, will be fulfilled. Jehu's recitation of the prophecy recognized, as God told Elijah (1 Kin. 21), that some of it would be fulfilled, not in Ahab's time, but in that of his son.

Ahaziah did not escape, despite his best efforts. He was shot some distance away, along the road near Ibleam (2 Kin. 9:27). Ibleam is about nine miles (14.5 km) south of Jezreel, and Ramoth Gilead is about forty-five miles (72 km) east of Jezreel. The pursuit of Ahaziah was protracted and deliberate. The narrative in Chronicles states that Jehu's men found Ahaziah hiding in Samaria, and they took him to Jehu, who had him executed (2 Chr. 22:9). The account in Kings says that Ahaziah died in Megiddo, and his body was then returned to Jerusalem to be buried with his fathers (2 Kin. 9:27–28). It has been suggested that the two accounts can be reconciled by acknowledging the possibility that Ahaziah was wounded in Samaria, pursued by Jehu to Megiddo, captured by Jehu's soldiers in Samaria after having fled back there, and brought to Jehu, who had remained in Megiddo, for execution.

When Jezebel heard of Jehu's return, she prepared herself to look her finest and waited for him while watching from an upper-level window. Dressed like a queen and adorned with religious jewelry that would assure her the protection of her gods, she was ready to face her enemy. When she saw Jehu, she mockingly asked if he had come in peace, and called him Zimri, murderer of his master (v. 31). Zimri had killed King Elah, son of Baasha, and had destroyed Baasha's entire household, but his reign had only lasted seven days (1 Kin. 16:15–20). Jezebel was implying that Jehu would not last any longer. The section closes with a reminder of the words of Elijah regarding the details of Jezebel's death and the disposition of her body, carefully noting that the matter was resolved in just the way God said it would be. The word of the Lord was working within the arena of history, accomplishing the divine intent.

10:1—15:7

The Kingdoms' Renewed Hostilities

During the time the dynasty of Jehu ruled over Israel for four generations, the royal line in Judah had almost been snuffed out by Athaliah, daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, and the prophet Elisha died after a ministry lasting about sixty years. Despite the state of war resuming between the Northern and Southern Kingdoms, both became richer as a succession of kings brought greater prosperity (and idolatry) to their respective nations.

10:1–36. Jehu of Israel (841–814 B.C.). This chapter is a straightforward recounting of the expeditious and excessive way Jehu began to fulfill his divine mandate for the destruction of Ahab's dynasty. He cleverly arranged that the caretakers of Ahab's sons, who lived in Samaria, be the very ones responsible for the deaths of those in their care. His use of threatening political pressure and brute force quickly won the support of the people of Jezreel in the slaughter of any member of Ahab's family or court in that city. He then moved on to Samaria to complete his work as he saw it. But it appears that he had already exceeded the limits of his God-given authority to wreak judgment on Ahab.

Jehu's meeting with Jehonadab, son of Rechab (vv. 14–16), on the way to Jezreel is important to note. Jehonadab was quite a significant figure in Israelite history and is featured in a later account by Jeremiah. Jeremiah referred to Jehonadab's ("Jonadab" in some versions) group as desert dwellers living in tents and refusing to build houses, plant vineyards or crops, or drink wine (Jer. 35:6–10). It appears that Jehonadab responded positively to the purging of the Baal cult that Jehu was undertaking. He had apparently come to see for himself.

Jehu's cunning was again at work in the slaughter of the prophets of Baal. Under the ruse of zeal for the worship of Baal, he identified all the leaders of the cult and promptly slaughtered them. The temple was then demolished, and the site was desecrated by turning it into a refuse dump or public toilet (2 Kin. 10:27). The specific word used can refer to a latrine or a cesspool. In this way Jehu eliminated Baal in Israel (v. 28).

However, Jehu's zeal against the fertility cult of Baal did not extend to the worship of the golden calves Jeroboam had set up at Bethel and Dan (1 Kin. 12:28–29). That worship, though it used forbidden idols in the conduct of its rituals, still had pretensions of being directed to Yahweh, the true God of Israel, because the nation had strayed so far in their understanding of what true worship was. Thus, despite Jehu's vigorous and violent actions to cleanse Israel of the worship of false gods, he failed in his obligation to end false worship of the true God. The spiritual lesson we can learn from this applies both personally and corporately. Our zeal for reform against obvious wrong can create false confidence and self-satisfaction that blind us to other commonly accepted, and equally dangerous, impediments to our relationship with God. Despite Jehu's failings in this regard, God commended him for bringing the house of Ahab to an end and promised him a son on the throne to the fourth generation. Jehu's was the most enduring dynasty of the Northern Kingdom, and Jehu was the only northern king who is described as having made any attempt to fulfill God's purposes. For him, that purpose was to bring justice to the family of Naboth for the atrocious way in which Ahab and Jezebel had confiscated Naboth's property after arranging for his death (1 Kin. 21:13–16). Jehu's destruction of Ahab's dynasty was a judgment of God and a reminder that God ultimately settles the score of all the injustices that the innocent have suffered throughout history.

However, it was also the case that through Hosea, the word of the Lord made it clear that the bloodshed at Jezreel was much more than God had asked for, so there would be a price to pay (Hos. 1:4). Jehu's dynasty ended in bloodshed, just like Omri's. Zechariah, the fourth and last member of Jehu's dynasty, was murdered in Samaria after only a six-month reign (2 Kin. 15:8–10) This was similar to Jehu's assassination of the last reigning monarch of Omri's line (9:24).

The final description of Jehu's reign outlines the territories that he lost to Hazael of Aram (Syria) because Jehu disregarded God's covenant and slavishly followed in the footsteps of Jeroboam's apostasy (10:31). This was also a fulfillment of Elisha's prophecy concerning Hazael (8:12). As a result, Jehu lost all the territory on the east side of the Jordan (10:32–33)—one of the covenant curses was loss of land (Deut. 28:25, 33, 63). The account of the twenty-eight-year reign of Jehu comes to an end with the usual concluding formula of his burial in Samaria, a reference to the chronicles of the kings for more information, and the naming of the son who replaced him (2 Kin. 10:34–36).

11:1–16. Athaliah of Judah (841–835 B.C.). It is not only the Northern Kingdom that suffered the wholesale loss of its leaders; the kingdom of Judah suffered the same fate under Athaliah, who was the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, widow of Jehoram (son of Jehosophat, king of Judah), and mother of Ahaziah, whom Jehu had killed.

Though Athaliah is the antagonist in this story, another woman plays a history-changing, positive role. Jehosheba was the sister of Azariah. Whether she herself was also a daughter of Athaliah is not made clear. Athaliah's wickedness, worthy of her parents, was evident in her attempted assassination of all the heirs to the throne. We are left to wonder how Jehosheba was able to hide Joash at the time of the slaughter. One can only admire her resourcefulness in maintaining the secret for so long (vv. 2–3). It seems likely that Jehosheba's standing as a king's daughter, a king's sister, and the wife of the priest Jehoiada gave her more connections and resources to accomplish her ruse than would have been available to the dead king's widow and actual mother of the child. Jehosheba's action reminds us of the resourcefulness of another woman of Scripture who worked to save a future leader from death by hiding him in the rushes of the Nile (Ex. 2:1–3). Whether by familial reflex, political judgment, or spiritual conviction, or perhaps all three, Jehosheba managed, in a moment of desperate national crisis, to preserve the Davidic line against the invasive machinations of the one remaining individual element of Ahab's dynasty whom Jehu had not killed—Athaliah. It is interesting to reflect on the role of these two women in the lineage of Christ. One, Athaliah, as the mother of Ahaziah, became, in spite of her attempts to destroy that lineage, a direct ancestor of Christ. The other, Jehosheba, who was not directly of the same lineage, worked courageously to preserve it.

The narrative does not explain why Jehoiada waited until Joash was seven years old before staging a coup against Athaliah. Possible reasons include: (1) the presumption that it is easier for a populace to imagine as king a seven-year-old boy than an infant or toddler; or (2) it took time for the baleful effects of Athaliah's oppressive rule to become apparent to the military leaders whose support would be necessary to make the coup successful. In any event, the people and the military leadership were ready, and Jehoiada's detailed organization worked exactly as planned. Some experts have explained that the military contingent was supplied with weapons from the temple to avoid rousing the premature interest or expectation that was likely to occur if other weapons were brought to the event. The narrative doesn't explain why a Sabbath was chosen, but we can assume that it was also to further reduce suspicion that anything momentous was about to occur. It could also be that having the coronation on a Sabbath would add, in retrospect, to the significance of the event. Restoring the Davidic line gave promise of a restoration of the Mosaic covenant, and the Sabbath itself was perhaps the most notable sign of that covenant. It would be a perfect combination of salvific symbolism.

The inauguration process was in fact divided into two parts: first, the coronation, which took place in the inner temple court, and then the enthronement, which took place in the palace. More symbolism was invoked by having the new king stand by one of the pillars of the temple. This act, the significance of which was apparently understood well enough by the people to be considered a royal custom, is seen again in the story of Josiah (2 Kin. 23:3), when he called the nation to renew the covenant after the long, dark years of Manasseh's rule. Jehoiada's success in bringing about this reform, made possible by his wife's earlier wise and courageous act, brought a final end to the dynastic degradation of Ahab and gave Judah one more chance to fulfill the Davidic promise.

The fact that there is no summary statement about the reign of Athaliah suggests that she was not accepted as one of the "kings" in the line of David—which of course she was not.

11:17—12:21. Joash or Jehoash of Judah (835–796 B.C.). Little is said about Joash in his early years apart from his desire to refurbish the temple. Under the influence of Jehoiada, the high priest, he did what was right in the Lord's estimation (12:2). Joash began his reign at the age of only seven (11:21), so it was to some degree inevitable that he would follow someone much older, such as Jehoiada. But when Jehoiada died, the leaders of Judah convinced Joash to go back to the worship of the fertility cult; and Baal worship was reintroduced (2 Chr. 24:17–18). The fact that the high places were not taken away sent a bad signal (2 Kin. 12:3). The same was said of Asa four generations earlier (1 Kin. 15:14). Asa gathered up all the treasures of his kingdom and sent them to the king of Syria (Aram) to pay him to fight against the Northern Kingdom. That opened up the floodgates of unwanted attention from the warlike Arameans, who would continue to plague both Israel and Judah for the next one hundred years until the Assyrians gained the ascendancy. Joash did the same as Asa by using the palace and temple treasuries to persuade the Syrians not to attack Jerusalem (2 Kin. 12:18).

An example of Joash's inexperience in his early years is the way he organized the reparation of the temple. He made the priests responsible for collecting the money and using it for repairs (v. 5). Years later, in his twenty-third year, he realized that the temple had not yet been repaired. So he called the priests together and asked about this problem. Since they did not answer, one can presume there had been a culture of misappropriation, apathy, and compromise among them. At the king's insistence, the priests agreed to collect no further money and not to be involved in the work of repairing the temple (vv. 7–8). Joash's suggestion of a wooden chest to collect public contributions, together with the careful way in which it was counted, bagged, and paid to the tradesmen (vv. 9–16), showed that Joash had matured as a leader.

He also made clear that financial resources would only be used for the work of repairing the temple (vv. 13–14). After the work was complete, the money left over could then be used to obtain vessels of gold and silver for the temple (2 Chr. 24:14). The persons involved in the work of repairing the temple were so trustworthy that no account was required from them (2 Kin. 12:15). This was in obvious contrast to the behavior of the priests.

As noted above, Joash apostatized into idolatry after Jehoiada died, and 2 Chronicles 24:25 indicates that Joash was assassinated by his servants because of his murder of Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada (as well as possibly his brothers—the Hebrew refers to Jehoiada's "sons," but some consider this to be a copyist's error—cf. the LXX), because Zechariah prophesied against Joash.

13:1–9. Jehoahaz of Israel (814–798 B.C.). When Joash was collecting money in a wooden chest to repair the temple, a new king was coming to the throne in the Northern Kingdom: Jehoahaz, son of Jehu. He, like all his predecessors, supported the state religion established by Jeroboam I (v. 2). Consequently, God sent Hazael and later his son Ben-Hadad, kings of Syria, to oppress Israel (v. 3). The oppression was so comprehensive that the northern army was decimated, leaving only fifty in the cavalry, ten chariots, and 10,000 infantry (v. 7), compared to the 2,000 chariots and 10,000 soldiers the Assyrian King Shalmaneser III captured in the battle of Qarqar (854/853 B.C.).

The oppression that the Arameans (Syrians) inflicted upon Israel sent Jehoahaz pleading to God for relief (vv. 4–5). The narrative in Kings follows the pattern that is found in the accounts in the book of Judges: when the people descended into idolatry, God sent an oppressor; when the people repented and prayed for relief, God sent a deliverer. The text does not specify the identity of the deliverer. It could have been the Assyrian King Adad-nirari III, whose conquests into Syria rendered it powerless, or, after the pattern set in the book of Judges, the deliverer could have been a prophet like Elisha or one of his students.

13:10–25. Jehoash or Joash of Israel (798–782 B.C.). The reign of Joash is briefly summarized by the observation that he did evil in the Lord's estimation (v. 11). There was little to say about a life wasted in rebellion against the Lord. It was during the reign of Joash that Elisha died. King Joash visited the aged and sick Elisha and recited the statement Elisha made to Elijah before the latter was taken into the heavens in a "chariot of fire" (v. 14; cf. 2:11–12). It would appear that the king was expecting a chariot to come for Elisha too.

His interaction with the aged prophet may be read with irony and pathos. He came to pay his respects to a man whose leadership he had obviously rejected. We do not know the motivation for the visit. It could have been genuine guilt, or a facile and desperate effort for some kind of deliverance from the Syrians. But even then, the Lord was willing to show His continuing love and concern for a people who had so steadfastly rejected Him. The exercise of shooting the arrows was apparently intended to show Joash God's willingness to favor Israel but also to symbolically demonstrate their leader's characteristic weakness to follow through until the Lord's work was finished. Joash's limited striking of the arrows, strongly rebuked by Elisha (13:18–19), was an effective parable to show his own weakness in accepting the help of the Lord to do what was necessary to achieve ultimate victory.

Probably soon after that conversation, Elisha died and was buried. Sometime later his bones were disturbed when a squad of Moabite raiders interrupted a funeral. The alarmed locals quickly pushed the body into the closest tomb, Elisha's, and before they could escape from the raiders, the corpse of the man came into contact with Elisha's remains and came back to life (vv. 20–21). The story serves to reaffirm the ministry of Elisha as a man of God. But perhaps it also suggests that the God who can raise the dead is also able to revive a dead nation if only they would listen to the message of His dead prophet.

The hardship that followed came from the Syrians (v. 22), but it was tempered by God's compassion and His faithfulness to the covenant made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (v. 23). This divine compassion and faithfulness was manifest when Joash won three significant military victories against the new king of Syria, just as Elisha had prophesied before his death (v. 25). The word of the Lord remained active among His people in spite of their sin.

14:1–22. Amaziah of Judah (796–767 B.C.). Amaziah came to the throne when he was twenty-five years old, following the assassination of his father Joash (not to be confused with Jehoash/Joash of Israel). Evidently he had a character similar to that of his father: doing the right things but lacking a deep, inner conviction (v. 3). That the right he did was not as his ancestor David had done comports well with the parallel description in the account in 2 Chronicles 25, which says he was not wholehearted in his right doing. These two descriptions, when combined, give us a scriptural understanding of the Davidic ideal of a strong, unhesitating, wholehearted commitment to the Lord. Joash's unfaithfulness is seen in the continuation of the very popular high places and in the worship of the gods he captured from the Edomites (2 Chr. 25:14). The rationale for only executing those directly involved in the assassination and not their families (2 Kin. 14:5–6) was the stipulation in the Mosaic law that fathers were not to be put to death for the wrongs of their children, and children were not to be put to death for the wrongs of their fathers (Deut. 24:16).

Amaziah then attempted to regain some of the territories that used to be part of the kingdom but had been lost to various raiders as divine judgments against a protracted series of apostasies. He successfully won back Sela, a small city on the northern border of Edom, about eighteen miles (29 km) southeast of the southern end of the Dead Sea (2 Kin. 14:7).

The events of Amaziah's reign are described in more detail in 2 Chronicles 25. Of those mentioned in this passage, it should be noted that some interpreters suspect that Amaziah had proposed a marriage alliance between his son and the daughter of Jehoash, king of Israel. When that proposal was rejected, this theory holds, Amaziah prepared for war and Jehoash sent his mocking message to Amaziah in response to the proposed alliance and his overconfidence after having just defeated the Edomites. As the Chronicles account details, that overconfidence was on full display in Amaziah's inexplicable and stupidly brazen (by our logic) honoring of the very gods of the people he had just destroyed.

A defeat in the war with Israel resulted in yet another plunder of Jerusalem, major damage to the wall, and Amaziah's capture and long-term imprisonment. While he was away, the people of Judah chose his son Azariah (Uzziah) as his replacement in a technical, if not meaningful, coregency. When Amaziah was released upon the death of the king of Israel, his return to Judah and his apparent resumption of kingly duties alongside, or instead of, the son who had been selected in his place, was not well received, leading to his assassination. Thus ends the sad saga of a king who, nevertheless, is to be remembered as one who did what was right in the eyes of the Lord.

Both Amaziah and his father started well but were spiritually weak, bowing to the pressures of popular culture and worshiping gods who were unable to protect them.

14:23–29. Jeroboam II of Israel (793–753 B.C.). The rise of Jeroboam II was a new day for Israel. His long and fruitful reign was due in part to the presence of Assyria that kept Syria occupied and away from Israelite territory. But behind the historical events was the hand of the Lord, who appointed Jeroboam II to save Israel from the long-term affliction they had been suffering (vv. 26–27). This was despite the fact that Jeroboam II did not do anything to change the course of evil that Jeroboam I had institutionalized in Israel. His reign was only characterized as evil (v. 24). The Lord was still fighting for the affection of His people.

One impressive accomplishment of Jeroboam II was that he restored to Israel the entire territory east of the Jordan River (v. 25). The prophet Jonah was a great supporter of Jeroboam II, which probably explains why the prophet did not want to go to Nineveh. He may have thought that assisting the Assyrians would hinder the great work Jeroboam was doing in restoring the former glory of Israel. Jeroboam's capture of the territories of the Syrian cities of Damascus and Hamath, which were previously under the control of Judah, was a reminder of the glorious days of Solomon, sadly eroded by the unfaithfulness of the nation. The admission in the narrative that God did not want to blot out the name of Israel from under heaven (vv. 27) adds a very distinct flavor to this particular era. Although the nation was not interested in the Lord and would rather worship Baal, God was not interested in destroying it. God had not yet given up on His people.

15:1–7. Azariah or Uzziah of Judah (792–740 B.C.). The fact that the narrative of Kings devotes only seven verses to Uzziah is not a reflection on his ability and effectiveness as a king but on his spiritual shallowness. He did the right things, but he was not brave enough to touch the entrenched traditions of the syncretistic high places (v. 4). No other king reigned as long as Uzziah—fifty-two years (v. 2). With a weakened Syria and a weakening Assyria, both Northern and Southern Kingdoms enjoyed a period of prosperity not seen since the time of Solomon. Uzziah won back all the land of which the Philistines had regained control (2 Chr. 26:6–7); he accepted tribute from a number of foreign lands; he fortified Jerusalem; he fortified and provided new water supplies for the main areas of agriculture; and he modernized the army and cultivated new military technologies. He was admired and respected throughout the entire region.

However, when he was the strongest, his weaknesses appeared. In line with the normal practice of ANE royalty, he elevated himself to the point that he felt justified going into the temple and offering incense on the altar in the Holy Place (2 Chron. 26:16). It is notable, and perhaps a credit to Uzziah's heretofore faithful leadership, that a large contingent of priests had the courage to confront him for his wrong action. It is easy to imagine that in other times, thoroughly wayward kings would have so completely intimidated the priesthood that such an action would not have been challenged. But like David, who numbered the people against the counsel of Joab (2 Sam. 24:3–4), Uzziah was too proud to back down. It should also be noted that the Lord was obviously still active in the temple and jealous of His prerogatives. In other words, the generally good leadership of Uzziah up to this point had created an environment where God was actively present, and he was furious when he was confronted by this large group of priests and told that he had overstepped the limits of his authority. In the moment of his rage, leprosy broke out on his face and he was taken out of the temple by eighty very determined priests (2 Chron. 26:17–20). The fact that he was in isolation for the rest of his life (2 Kings 15:5) suggests that this form of skin disease was indeed the dreaded disease now known as Hansen's Disease. Consequently, his son Jotham served as coregent until his death.

15:8—17:41

Last Days of the Northern Kingdom

There were only six more kings of Israel before the nation came to an end, and four of them were assassinated. Jehu's dynasty ended when Zechariah was assassinated, and the kings that followed each had single-reign dynasties except for Menahem, whose son succeeded him. The nation finally met its end when the Assyrians defeated them, took the people into exile, and repopulated the land with subjugated peoples from other regions.

15:8–15. Zechariah of Israel (753–752 B.C.) and Shallum of Israel (752 B.C.). Zechariah was from the fourth generation of Jehu's sons. According to the word of the Lord, he would be the last one (10:28–31). Zechariah's reign lasted only six months before he was assassinated in a palace plot (15:10). His reign is summarized like all the others: he did what was evil in the Lord's estimation, and he practiced the sins of Jeroboam. His sad end is yet another indication of the intimate connection there seems to be between a people's faith and their success. A bad king appears to be a reflection of the bad society from which he comes, and the short reign of a king is usually indicative of social upheaval. After a few decades of prosperity, it now appears that Israel was entering a period of turmoil and hardship. In the death of Zechariah, the biblical writer recognized the fulfillment of the word of the Lord that He spoke to Jehu (v. 12).

Shallum may have been one of Zechariah's generals who probably did not have the full support of his colleagues when he assassinated the king. It is uncertain whether Jabesh was his father or his hometown; but either way, Shallum probably was from Gilead in the tribal lands of Gad if Shallum and Menahem were from the same tribe, and Menahem's father's name is a reflection of the tribe's name. His reign only lasted one month (v. 13). There is no value judgment on his reign, perhaps because it was too short. More space is given to the one who plotted against him: Menahem.

15:16–22. Menahem of Israel (752–742 B.C.). It appears that Menahem was from the same tribe as Shallum, and he probably eliminated Shallum because he was working against his own clan. Menahem's father was Gadi, which is possibly an indication of a link to the tribe of Gad. Menahem was much more successful and enjoyed more support than Shallum. It is not clear from the text whether Menachem attacked Tiphsah (v. 16) just before or just after he ascended the throne. Tiphsah was the northernmost point of Solomon's realm (1 Kin. 4:24) and was the site of a major crossing of the Euphrates River. Its modern name is Dibseh, and it is located in modern Syria. The fact that Israel's army was so far from home suggests that the prosperity and expansion brought in by Jeroboam II still inspired their nationalistic hopes.

During Menahem's reign the Assyrian king attacked, devastating the Northern Kingdom financially. The king who attacked was Tiglath-Pileser III, also known as Pul. Assyrian kings usually had two names: their Assyrian name and a Babylonian one. Tiglath-Pileser III was also known by his Babylonian name, Pulu, and the author of Kings shortened it to Pul (cf. 1 Chr. 5:26).

Menahem took the required money from the wealthy. Each of the super-rich (literally in Hebrew, "the mighty of wealth") were taxed 50 shekels of silver (2 Kin. 15:20), about 1.25 pounds (0.5 kg), which means there were nearly 57,000 of them in Israel—an indication of the financial strength that was reached under Jeroboam II. But this desperate measure also hints at the nation's approaching end. The summary of Menachem's reign characterizes it as evil and not departing from the sins of Jeroboam I (v. 18). It refers to further records of his accomplishments elsewhere and that he was buried with his fathers. His son Pekahiah replaced him on the throne.

15:23–31. Pekahiah (742–740 B.C.) and Pekah of Israel (752–732 B.C.). Pekahiah only reigned two years before being killed in the citadel of the palace by another influential Gileadite, Pekah.

Pekah's reign seems to have been quite long and stable, lasting twenty years—an indication that he had more popular support than his predecessors. However, he too followed his predecessors in maintaining the evil of Jeroboam's idolatry.

In his days the imperial ambitions of Assyria's Tiglath-Pileser III led to the capture of large areas of Israel (v. 29). First Ijon was captured, a city at the far north of the country, about thirty-five miles (56.3 km) north of the Sea of Galilee, then Abel-Beth-Maachah fell, about twenty-six miles (41.8 km) south of that. Hazor was the next city to fall. It was an important military outpost about nine miles (14.5 km) north of the Sea of Galilee, set on a ridge with a commanding view of the entire area. This was a major blow to Israel's military. The Assyrians kept pressing south to Kedesh, on the southwestern shores of the Sea of Galilee, effectively securing control of the entire region of Galilee. They then secured the region of Gilead (the home region of Pekah). Mentioned in the list of captured towns and regions (v. 29) is Janoah, in the territory of Samaria and only about twelve miles (19.3 km) southeast of Samaria. Janoah was on the west side of the Jordan River and the newly captured region of Gilead was on the eastern side. Israel was becoming increasingly hemmed in.

Part of the imperial policy of Assyria was to uproot a people and scatter them in other areas of its empire, replacing them with foreigners gathered from across the empire. This seems to have been intended to break national and tribal identity and solidarity. It meant that the tie between the tribes of Israel and their inheritance in the promised land was now severed—they were exiled and replaced by foreigners. Israel had less than ten more years before this process was completed and the Northern Kingdom ceased to exist. In 722 B.C. the Assyrians would return and complete what had just begun.

15:32—16:20. Jotham (750–732 B.C.) and Ahaz of Judah (735–716 B.C.). Jotham came to the throne just two years after his northern counterpart Pekah. Jotham was another Judean king who did what was expedient in following God, even to the point of embellishing the temple complex, but he did not remove the high places (v. 35). The major event during his reign was the buildup of military tensions with the Northern Kingdom, which had renewed its ties with Syria (v. 37). This tension reached its climax in the reign of Jotham's son Ahaz, who probably reigned for a few years as coregent with his father before his death (v. 38).

Whereas Jotham tried to make things look good, Ahaz cut the ties to God and went the way of the kings of the Northern Kingdom. In former times, when the people's corruption sank to a lower level, God sent judgment on them in the form of foreign invaders. The same pattern followed Ahaz's apostasy—this time the invaders were an alliance between Israel and Aram (Syria; 16:5).

The text makes clear that the primary motivation for Ahaz's promotion of the worship of other gods, despite the "good king" legacy of his father and grandfather, was of his own apostate volition and in admiration of the degenerate worship practices in the Northern Kingdom. More of his open disdain for the faith of his fathers is recorded in Isaiah 7. That narrative describes how he disdained the promises of God to rescue him from the invasion and instead chose to rely on an alliance with Assyria. Thus, some of his actions in changing the rituals at the temple and some of its architecture, as recorded in 2 Kings 16:10–18, may also have been politically motivated. His apparent appreciation for the design of the altar he saw in Damascus, where he met the Assyrian king, and his arrangements for erecting a copy in the temple in Jerusalem may have been part of his plan to show obeisance to Tiglath-Pileser for his help against the Arameans. The text clearly states that his change of the royal entryway to the temple was done for that purpose (v. 18). Historians have noted that Assyria made it a matter of policy to require subordinate peoples to pay homage to their overlord's favorite deities. Whether that was exactly the dynamic operating here is not explicit, but certainly Ahaz was not resisting the pattern.

The brazen nature of Ahaz's apostasy is evident in his personal involvement in the offering of sacrifices (vv. 12–13). That was the very act that God had punished by striking his grandfather, Uzziah, with leprosy (2 Chron. 26:17–20).

The narrative books of the Bible present many cases such as this where God's professed people seem willfully indifferent to the explicit lessons from the past about reward and punishment, and blessings and curses. It is a stark and sobering reminder to readers of today, having no claim to evident moral superiority, to beware of engaging in the same folly. Ahaz's reign proved to be very costly—it drew the attention of Assyria to Israel and Syria, resulting in the death of the Syrian king and the scattering of the inhabitants of Damascus. This was a stark indication of what would happen not just to Israel but to Judah as well. Assyrian worship practices were now imposed upon the kingdom of Judah, which not only reduced their faith to the level of the dominant culture, but also put the entire nation, and its messianic future, in jeopardy.

17:1–6. Hoshea of Israel (732–722 B.C.). Hoshea was the last of the kings of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. His reign was characterized by the intriguing description of him doing evil, but not like his predecessors (v. 2). The narrative follows with a description of the incursions of Shalmaneser V, successor to Tiglath-Pileser III of Assyria. Hoshea used the opportunity of Assyrian political transition and instability to ally himself with Egypt, hoping for the Egyptians to reassert some of their former glory and free the Israelites from the Assyrian yoke. In the ANE the transition of power from one king to the next often spurred attempts by a number of vassal nations to try to regain independence from their overlords, but this backfired for Hoshea.

The account in Kings mentions the name So, the Hebrew version of an Egyptian name that is difficult to connect with any specific pharaoh. It may possibly be Osorkon IV (730 to c.a. 715 B.C.), who ruled from his capital at Tanis over the eastern delta region bordering the promised land, or it may be a high official of that time. Isaiah's condemnation of Israel's reliance on Tanis (using the Hebrew version of its name, Zoan; Is. 19:11–13; 30:1–5), which was the northern capital of Egypt at this time, supports either of these options. However, Hoshea miscalculated the resolve and military capacity of both the powerful Assyrians and the weakened Egyptians. The new Assyrian king was greatly angered when he discovered Hoshea's plot. Shalmaneser V reacted swiftly, both to punish Israel and to minimize Egypt's influence in the region. Hoshea was taken prisoner (2 Kin. 17:4).

Shalmaneser V now swept through Israel besieging Samaria (v. 5). The narrative in Kings recounts that the siege took three years, which is testament either to the very effective fortifications of the city or that Shalmaneser V died and was replaced by another, which caused another period of instability. Records of the time state that both Shalmaneser V and Sargon II (his successor) were responsible for deporting the inhabitants of Samaria. But it was Sargon who claimed that he broke the siege. When Samaria fell, its people were scattered across the northwestern reaches of the Assyrian empire—Halah, by the Habor River, Gazan, and the cities of the Medes (v. 6). These were towns and territories located in what are now the Kurdish regions of eastern Turkey and Armenia.

17:7–23. Rationale for the Destruction of Israel. Following the description of the windup of the nation of Israel, there is an extended explanation why such a drastic action occurred. The people sinned against the Lord, who had freed them from the bondage of Egypt, by giving their allegiance to other gods (v. 7). Following this brief introductory statement, the narrative unpacks a litany of wrongs. First, they patterned their life after other nations (v. 8). The Hebrew word *khuqqah*—variously rendered as "statutes," "practices," or "customs"—refers to appropriate behaviors that respected the boundaries of personal conduct, and it has a religious rather than a legal focus. The term also contains an element of divine promise—the undergirding principle that sustains the covenant. Instead of being in harmony with the covenant, the Israelites were more concerned about being in conformity with the surrounding cultures, even if that meant violating their corporate conscience and identity and abandoning their God. This was rendered even more distasteful since it was the very nations that God drove out of the promised land—because of their crimes against humanity—that the covenant people were trying to emulate.

Next, they secretly did things against the Lord that were not right (v. 9). The text specifies these behaviors as their construction of numerous shrines in forests, fields, cities, and hilltops, setting up the trappings of worship borrowed from the surrounding nations. These included ritual stone slabs or columns (both have been found by archaeologists), wooden representations of the fertility goddess (the Asherah poles or pillars; v. 10), offering sacrifices and incense (it seems that anybody could do this without the need of specially consecrated priests), and serving idols—all of which God had warned them not to do (vv. 11–12).

But above all, the nation of Israel spurned the appeals and warnings from numerous prophets and seers. The word of the Lord came to the people through these prophets, but they did not listen. The prophets' common theme had been warnings to turn from their evil ways and to observe God's prescribed principles (v. 13). These stipulations cover the code of moral behavior and the obligations of the covenant, both couched in a relationship with God. However, the people persistently refused to cooperate, and each succeeding generation chose to remain committed to the rebellion of the previous generations. They rejected all that God tried to offer them and became instead firm followers of the idols of the nations that God had specifically charged them to drive from the land because of their idolatry and crimes against humanity (vv. 15–16). One of these crimes was the practice of burning their babies in the fire as sacrifices. Together with this, they also became involved in witchcraft and taking notice of omens, selling themselves (like prostitutes) to do evil and provoke God (v. 17).

Since Israel was so intent on copying the nations in every aspect, God gave them the same fate. None of the surrounding nations of that time exist today as a nation, and their gods are only found in history books. The ten tribes of the Northern Kingdom were to have a similar end (vv. 18, 20). However, Judah was not left out of this. They too copied Israel (v. 19). Their "lamp" (1 Kin. 11:36; 15:4; 2 Kin. 8:19) was kept burning so that God could keep His promise of the coming Messiah. If Judah at least was not preserved, there could not be the Messiah as God had promised His people.

Because of a deep-seated rebellion in the houses of both Judah and Israel, the original united kingdom was torn apart. Israel's first king, Jeroboam I, drove Israel away from God (17:21). Each successive generation of Israelites followed the pattern set by Jeroboam, until Israel was removed from its land and scattered across Assyrian lands. God's response to Israel's apostasy is summarized in v. 20. Moses foretold this and described the land as vomiting out its inhabitants if they rejected God (Lev. 18:24–28). The summary of the sins of the nation closes by saying that the Lord removed Israel away from Him just as He had foretold by His prophets (2 Kin. 17:23). Their exile was not the result of the religious or military superiority of their enemies. It was the powerful fulfillment of the word of the Lord in judgment against a rebellious people.

17:24-41. Israel's Repopulation. True to Assyrian tradition, people were uprooted from a number of Babylonian cities and transplanted in the land of Israel (v. 24). This helped to break the resolve of the two subdued people-groups (Assyria controlled both Babylon and Israel) and to foster greater cohesion and loyalty for the Assyrian regime. The narrative specifically mentions the towns of Cuthah (Kutha), which was about twenty-five miles (40.2 km) northeast of Babylon, Ava (Ivah) and Sepharvaim, which were close together (near the ancient city of Accad and the modern city of Fallujah)—all of which were on or near the Euphrates River. Hamath, about 130 miles (209.2 km) north of Damascus, was on the Orontes River in modern Syria. The inhabitants of these cities were then transplanted into Israel's deserted cities and the nation was renamed Samaria, becoming one of the provinces of Assyria (v. 24).

The people sent to repopulate Israel did not know God's *mishpat* (v. 26)—variously rendered in this context as "custom," "rituals," "what the god of the land requires," and so forth. The most basic meaning is "judgments," and in Israel's case refers to issues of social justice and the way they needed to care for the needy (orphans and widows) and destitute (Deut. 10:18; Is. 1:17; Jer. 22:3). Without that religious background, the foreigners would not be able to please God.

One priest was allowed to return home to teach the new inhabitants. He established his base in Bethel, the site of one of the golden calves that Jeroboam established (1 Kin. 12:28–33) and the former location of the wilderness sanctuary (2 Kin. 17:28). It is nearly certain that he taught the new inhabitants the hybrid religion of Israel that saw God represented as a golden calf. Each people group brought their own gods with them and their traditional worship forms as well (v. 29). They served both their own idols and the God of Israel.

In commenting on these aberrations, the narrative points to the genuine form of worship that God intends His people to follow. Rituals are fine as long as they are not disjointed from a life grounded on God's principles (v. 34). True religion impacts the whole person and the whole of life's experience; God's version of religion was based on a commitment to the covenant (v. 35). However, being in a covenant relationship brings responsibilities. The human part was to avoid worshiping other gods and worshiping with thanksgiving the One who freed His people from slavery and oppression. If God is kept as a close and precious companion, there is no need to fear any evil (v. 39). Right up to the time of the writing of Kings, the new people of the province of Samaria also served their idols and passed on the rituals to each successive generation (v. 41).

18:1—25:30

THE SOUTHERN KINGDOM

The book of 2 Kings concentrates now on the last eight kings of the Southern Kingdom of Judah. Only Hezekiah and Josiah are described as doing what was right in the sight of the Lord, while the other six kings followed the idolatrous pattern set for them by the northern kings.

18:1—20:21

Hezekiah Reigns

Hezekiah had the courage to break a national tradition of tolerating the high places and the custom of venerating Moses's bronze serpent. He reclaimed territory lost to the Philistines and, facing the threat of a vast Assyrian army, placed his trust in God. His spectacular successes were blunted by two moments of weakness. First, he used gold and silver from the temple and palace to bribe the Assyrians into a peace deal. Second, when visited by Babylonian dignitaries in response to his miraculous healing, he chose self-glorification.

18:1-12. Hezekiah Ascends the Throne (716-687 B.C.). Verses 3–5 state that there was no other king like Hezekiah, who alone acted like his ancestor David. A similar statement is made concerning Josiah, but there are different emphases: Hezekiah's trust is highlighted in the former, and Josiah's adherence to the law in the latter. He was the first king to do something about the shrines and high places that Solomon had first popularized at the end of his reign. Hezekiah wasted no time in breaking and burning the stone and wooden objects of the fertility cult that cluttered each of the shrines and high places, effectively destroying them. He broke into pieces the bronze serpent made by Moses (v. 4; Num. 21:5–9). Its name, *nekhushtan*, is a play on the words for "serpent" and "bronze" and would have been understood by some as the healing serpent god of the ancient world and by others in a derogatory way as "that bronze thing."

Hezekiah is praised above all of the kings of Judah for the level of his trust in God and his faithfulness to the covenant (2 Kin. 18:5–6). He was not hampered by the curses of the covenant as other kings were. Hezekiah was therefore able to free himself from Assyrian control and to regain control of both the cities and the agricultural lands of Philistia (v. 8). The next narrative (vv. 9–11) recaps the last days of the Northern Kingdom (cf. 17:5–6), providing a rationale for the drastic measures that God took (18:12; cf. 17:7–23, 33–40).

18:13-16. Assyria Invades Judah. As noted earlier, Ahaz's unwise interactions with the Assyrians inevitably attracted their attention to the possibilities of profitable conquest in the broader regions of the Holy Land, particularly in Judah. About twenty years later, the armies of Sennacherib, the Assyrian king, were outside the walls of Jerusalem after decimating the rest of the country.

Hezekiah's first tactic, like that of his unwise father, was to pay a tribute by stripping the temple of much of its valuable property. The temple walls, floor, and doors had all been stripped of their gold when Pharaoh Shishak invaded during the time of Rehoboam (1 Kin. 14:25–26). It appears that Hezekiah had tried to reverse this (2 Kin. 18:16) at least in part; but when Sennacherib invaded, Hezekiah chose to take the gold back off of the doors and pillars and offer it as tribute rather than turn to God for help.

18:17—19:37. Siege of Jerusalem. Unfortunately, instead of satisfying the Assyrian king, this generous gift had the opposite effect. He concluded that perhaps there were more treasures locked up in the city and sent three senior officers with an army to Jerusalem. They stood beside the same pool that Isaiah stood by when assuring King Ahaz of divine victory (v. 17; cf. Is. 7:3–4). The Tartan was the senior military officer, the Rabsaris was the chief eunuch or court official (cf. Dan 1:3), and the Rabshakeh was the king's chief advisor.

The story of the confrontation at the wall of Jerusalem and its aftermath is remarkable for its dramatic interest, and that may be why it is one of the few narratives that is recorded in varying detail in three separate passages in Scripture (2 Kin. 18:17–37; 2 Chr. 32; Is. 36). This is a case in which the conflict is explicitly described as one between the armies of God's people and the Assyrians and between the Assyrian gods and Yahweh. The Lord is directly contrasted with the pagan gods and declared by the Assyrians to be incompetent to save. Therefore the resolution of the narrative is extremely important in that it typifies the ultimate resolution of the cosmic conflict when the Lord permanently defeats all spiritual powers and rescues His people.

In the first message, the Assyrian emissaries offered objective evidence to support their convictions. They pointed to their unquestionable military superiority and to the superiority of their gods by insinuating that since the Hebrew God had not saved other Hebrew cities He could not, or would not, save Jerusalem. The gods of other nations had not been able to deliver their cities from the Assyrians (2 Kin. 18:33–35). The emissaries also made some daring claims. They argued that Hezekiah could not rely on His own God because the destruction of the high places where the people worshiped Him had most probably angered his God (v. 22). In order to provide a religious foundation to their attack against Jerusalem, the Assyrians claimed that the Hebrews' own God had authorized the invasion (v. 23). To what extent this might have been true cannot be known from the record. But there are other places where Scripture indicates that God instructed (2 Chr. 35:21) or goaded (Ex. 4:21; 9:16; 12:12) otherwise evil powers to act as His agents for purposes of judgment. If the claim was truthful, then God had moved them to go against Jerusalem to defeat and humiliate them by displaying His majesty and power over humans and false gods.

The Assyrian emissaries were not interested in diplomacy but in breaking the spiritual backbone of the people and the king. This is made clear in the spurned request that the Assyrians speak in Aramaic, the common language of diplomacy at the time. The Assyrian emissaries instead engaged in vigorous military and religious propaganda to undermine any confidence the Hebrews might have had in their own God or in Hezekiah's leadership.

The response of the people was not to respond to the arguments of the Assyrians. They did not utter a word. Their silence indicated that Hezekiah still had their full confidence because it was on his specific orders that they chose not to respond (2 Kin. 18:36). How tempting it would have been to try to defend Hezekiah, his reforms, or their God with vigorous, noble, and defiant speeches. But this was one of those many times in institutional or personal conflict when considered silence is the most effective defensive weapon.

Nevertheless, the presence of the Assyrian emissaries created distress among God's people. In his message to Isaiah (19:3–4), Hezekiah described the day with three specific and meaningful terms: *tsarah* ("trouble" or "distress"), *tokekhah* ("rebuke"), and *ne'atsah* ("contempt," "disgrace," or "blasphemy"). In other biblical passages, *tsarah* is described as the consequence of gross injustice (Gen. 42:21) or of the absence of God (Deut. 31:17). In most cases it is something from which God delivers His people (e.g., Gen. 35:3; 1 Kin. 1:29; Jer. 30:7; Pss. 34:18; 50:15). It is the anguish caused by a threat to human existence that only God can resolve.

This experience was viewed as a rebuke in the sense of feeling that the people were under God's condemnation, as insinuated by the Assyrians. But it was also a day of humiliation, contempt, and even blasphemy against God. Isaiah's response to Hezekiah's message filled the hearts of the people and the king with hope: God Himself was to fight for His people by causing the Assyrian king to return to his land where he would die (2 Kin. 19:6–7). Would the people listen to the word of the Lord or to the threats of the Assyrian emissaries? Faith must learn to take a simple promise from the Lord for what it is—absolute assurance—because nothing can be more assured than the word of the Lord.

Sennacherib's second message to Hezekiah, delivered by letter (vv. 8–13), simply put the arrogance and blasphemy of the first message in writing. Hezekiah took the letter to the very presence of God—the One who had been maligned by the Assyrians—in His temple to express his trust in the Lord (vv. 15–19). The primary concern of the king was God's honor, reputation, and power. Hezekiah wanted all the earth to acknowledge that Yahweh alone is God.

The Lord's response to Hezekiah came through Isaiah in three parts (vv. 21–34). The first part of this reply was a taunting song directly addressed to Sennacherib for the enjoyment of the Hebrews, describing, among other things, Jerusalem's ultimate victory, the folly of Sennacherib's blasphemy against God, and the stark if unrecognized reality of his complete subservience to the will of God (vv. 21–28).

The second part was addressed directly to Hezekiah (vv. 29–31), promising in specific detail a timeline for the restoration of the fortunes of his people as illustrated by a schedule of their food supply. The wording used was the very language of the sabbatical year (Lev. 25:20–22), even of the Jubilee year, a reference that thus signified the coming of a time of freedom and restoration.

The third part filled out in more specific detail what the future of Sennacherib's military campaign would be and what would happen to Sennacherib himself (2 Kin. 19:32–34). While the exact details were not given, it didn't take long to see the evidence. The deliverance came in a stunning manner that has no parallel anywhere in Scripture (v. 35) and that would have brought to mind among the faithful a remembrance of the death and deliverance on the Passover night of the Exodus.

20:1–11. Hezekiah's Illness and Recovery. This narrative does not follow chronologically from the previous chapter and most likely describes what happened about three years earlier. Several factors lead to this conclusion: it better fits the historical context of the Babylonian characters involved (v. 12), it describes much treasure being shown off (v. 13), and Assyria was still seen as a major threat to Jerusalem (v. 6).

The sickness that afflicted Hezekiah was probably an ulcerated sore or boil (v. 7) that gave him a raging infection that was about to overwhelm his life (v. 1). Isaiah's visit, with the doleful message of Hezekiah's impending and premature death (he was only thirty-nine) provoked a natural response from one who obviously saw himself as a faithful servant of God. The image of turning his face to the wall (v. 2) should probably be understood as an act of intense devotion, of shutting himself immediately off from the world for deep, earnest communion with God. The immediacy of God's response to Hezekiah's desperate plea is amazing because Isaiah was still on his way out of the palace when the Lord instructed him to return with a different message for Hezekiah. This must rank among the quickest direct answers to specific prayer recorded in Scripture. Isaiah's message doubtlessly brought great joy to Hezekiah. While there are examples in Scripture when God informed people of their *imminent* death, such as the stories concerning Aaron (Num. 20:24), Moses (Deut. 32:48–52), the false prophet Hananiah (Jer. 28:16), and the wicked king Ahaziah (2 Kings 1:16–17), there is no other case except that of Christ (Dan. 9:26–27) where the very year of a person's death is predicted so long in advance.

To what extent Isaiah's prescription of a fig poultice had any direct therapeutic role in Hezekiah's healing cannot be known. The exercise may have been yet another example in Scripture where one is instructed to perform some apparently arbitrary physical action as a sign of faith in the Lord's miraculous work (Ex. 14:16; 17:16; 2 Kin. 4:1–7; 5:9–15; John 9:1–7). Hezekiah's request for a sign is not condemned as a lack of unquestioning faith. Asking God for a specific sign of assurance of what He will do is different from ignoring or denying what He has done for us in the past as evidence of His care.

The fulfillment of Hezekiah's wise choice for a sign leaves much room for contemplation of the miracle. The turning back of the shadow on the sundial was noted in Babylon (cf. PK 344.3), which assures us that this was not an isolated miracle for Hezekiah's benefit but was a sign to the world that God is in complete control of the creation He has made. How He accomplished it, aside from simply rotating the earth in the wrong direction for the allotted time, is not known.

20:12–21. Visitors from Babylon. Berodach-Baladan (v. 12) was a distortion of a foreign ruler's name. Isaiah's spelling of the name, Merodach-Baladan (Is. 39:1), is closer to the Babylonian equivalent: Marduk-apal-idinna. Accordingly, some translations have "Marduk-Baladan" in both places. He ruled over Babylon in two terms from 721 to 710 B.C. and again for a brief time from 704 to 703 B.C. It is not certain why he sent envoys and gifts to Hezekiah. Unquestionably, reports of the miraculous sign and healing reached Babylon, and the king wanted to know more about the God who would do this.

The record of Hezekiah's naivete in dealing with the Babylonian emissaries is a sad but potent reminder of the consequences of doing things in our own way and forgetting to ask God for guidance in the fulfillment of our duties and the nature of our witness. How much different might the result have been if Hezekiah had thought to consult with Isaiah, or had just prayed earnestly to God, before the arrival of the guests.

The story of Hezekiah, a good king like no other except David, is a stark caution to those who profess faith in God and who may have a stellar reputation for all the positive things they have accomplished. Unrestrained pride or momentary carelessness can undo it all in a moment. Past accomplishments do not protect a person from making unwise decisions that could have a negative impact on their future. While under the spotlight of honor and glory, Hezekiah gloated in self-importance and directed the Babylonian emissaries to his own treasures (2 Kin. 20:13). Instead, he should have shared with them the goodness of a life lived in a covenant relationship with the God of Israel.

In spite of this mistake at the end of his life, Hezekiah was remembered as a good king who accomplished much for God and His people, including, most importantly, bringing people back to a right worship of God. Aside from the religious reforms, he expanded the city of Jerusalem and had a massive tunnel constructed to bring water from a spring outside the city walls into a pool inside, which allowed the city to endure a much longer siege in times of war (for more on Hezekiah's Tunnel, see "Archaeology and the Bible," p. 77).

21:1–26

Manasseh and Amon and the Sealing of Judah's Doom

Manasseh was born after Hezekiah had been healed. Seemingly all that Hezekiah had worked for was reversed by his son and later by his grandson. The extent of this moral degradation is described as surpassing that of the Canaanites whom God evicted from the land. To be consistent, God now had to evict this nation from the land as well.

21:1–18. Manasseh (697–643 B.C.). The name of Manasseh's mother, Hephzibah, means "my delight is in her" (cf. Is. 62:4). It ironically expresses God's desire for His covenant people. Manasseh was only twelve years old when he became king, so presumably his mother's influence was still quite strong. Yet there is no indication that Manasseh took God seriously. The first thing he did was to rebuild all the high places and reinstall altars and images both in the shrines and in the temple (2 Kin. 21:3–4).

Manasseh set up altars (and their accompanying shrines) for the astral cult in both the priests' court and the outer court (v. 5). He also placed a carved image for Asherah in the temple building itself (v. 7). With a sense of outrage, the narrative states that this latter action was a direct affront to God and His desire to place His name in the temple. The contrast is rather startling—God, who asked not to be represented by any human-made object, had now been sidelined by a piece of wood, carved according to the fancy of some artisan, which was now being worshiped by a people who seemed oblivious to their own spiritual history, heritage, and future.

Just as Samaria had been destroyed because of its rejection of the Lord, so too would Jerusalem be wiped clean because of its filth (v. 13). This means that God would bring the covenant relationship to an end, delivering His people into the hands of their enemies (vv. 14–15). This would in fact be a temporary but necessary measure to ensure that a remnant would survive and that the Messiah would come from them. This harsh judgment on the remnant of God's inheritance (v. 14) needs to be balanced with what Micah recorded about the same remnant: God would one day pardon them (Mic. 7:18). The prophet Zechariah announced that God was determined to restore the remnant (Zech. 8:11–15). Without strong discipline, the remnant would have no future. Only God's word of judgment could reverse their course toward annihilation. The purpose of God's judgments is always for the salvation of His people, not for their destruction.

The fertility cult of Canaan, which was founded on blatant sex and financial greed, was also suffused with a lack of respect for human life. Hence it is not surprising that Manasseh filled Jerusalem with blood (2 Kin. 21:16). This was directly related to his idolatry. It is possible that the garden in which he was finally buried (vv. 17–18) was one dedicated to a Canaanite astral deity (v. 3). Intriguingly, 2 Kings does not report Manasseh's repentance during his captivity in Assyria, where he was led to recognize that the Lord was God (2 Chr. 33:10–13). Ultimately, even this did not save Jerusalem from the coming judgment described in Kings.

21:19–26. Amon (643–641 B.C.). Amon followed his father to continue the worst corruption that Judah had seen. He forsook the Lord and continued promoting and practicing the idolatry of his father (vv. 20–22). Amon only reigned two years (v. 19) before he was killed in a palace plot (v. 23). Evidently this was not a popular move, and the perpetrators were hunted down and killed in a popular backlash. They put Amon's eight-year-old son, Josiah, on the throne to replace him (v. 24). Amon was buried with his father in the garden tomb, which was possibly a last act of worship to an astral deity (v. 26).

22:1—23:30

Josiah's Reforms Delay the End

Josiah's activities as a young man paralleled much of what his forbearer Joash did eight generations, or about two hundred years, before. His enthusiasm in restoring the temple, the use of a wooden chest to collect money, his trust in the workmen who did their work faithfully and well, plus the godly influence of his mother—all of these factors slowed down the progress of the nation toward an inevitable disaster.

22:1–2. Josiah Ascends the Throne (641–609 B.C.). Josiah was only eight years old when he became king. His mother's name means "well beloved," and her father's name means "witness of the Lord." They were God-fearing people from the Judean heartland, and their son took their godly influence to heart. Fortunately, Josiah's mother and her family had more influence on the boy than his father. The description of Josiah walking in all the ways of David was a positive one that few kings received. The statement that he did not turn aside to the left or to the right (v. 2) is an expression that shows Josiah's faithfulness in every detail.

22:3–20. The Book of the Law. Josiah was stung by what he had learned from an old scroll found in the temple and wanted to know how to deal with the divine consequences of all the depravity of his people (vv. 11–13). It is likely that the scroll they found was Deuteronomy, which describes the results of breaking the covenant with God. The text underlines the confusion of Josiah's leadership circle as they asked themselves why such a calamity befell the land. They would then understand, according to the book, that this was the result of abandoning God and worshiping idols (Deut. 29:23–28). What the book said perfectly mirrored the condition of Judah. The word of God spoken to Moses anticipated the future condition of the people.

23:1–24. Josiah's Reforms. The gathering of the elders attracted the attention of the entire city, and they all made their way to the temple where they heard Josiah read from the old scroll as he stood by one of the two pillars outside the entrance to the Holy Place (v. 3). This was a significant gesture that repeated what Joash had done when he was installed as king—and which followed the tradition for all kings (11:14).

There Josiah committed himself to covenant loyalty to the Lord, pledging compliance to His commandments. The narrative says that everyone assembled there followed the king's lead (23:3). This paralleled the challenge Joshua gave to the people at the end of his life to choose which God they would serve, after which he affirmed that he and his household would serve the Lord (Josh. 24:15). Elijah did much the same on Mount Carmel (1 Kin. 18:21–22). Josiah's profession of faith is an example for spiritual leaders of God's people throughout the ages.

Josiah inspired the most far-reaching reform the nation had ever seen, beginning in the temple, then throughout Jerusalem, in all Judea, and the province of Samaria (cf. Acts 1:8). As a part of this reform, he ensured that all priests throughout Judah participated in the desecration of the illicit worship sites (2 Kin. 23:8). This implies that they were unable to participate in legitimate priestly rituals until they had been cleansed of ritual defilement. The intriguing reference to the gates that were a part of this ground-shaking reform is illustrated by the many podium-like cultic structures associated with city gates that have been excavated in Israel (e.g., at Bethsaida and Dan). Idolatry did not require hills and mountains but was facilitated by regular city architecture.

One of the most significant high places they desecrated was in the valley of Topheth (v. 10), which had been dedicated to Molech for the fiery sacrifice of babies (see Jer. 7:31). Defiling Topheth effectively ended its cultic use, and from this point on it just served as the city rubbish dump, where trash rather than babies fueled its never-ending fires. The place took on eschatological symbolism when Jesus used it to describe hellfire (Matt. 5:22; 10:28; 23:15, 33).

The narrative gives extensive details of Josiah's work to rid Judah and the territory of the now-defunct Northern Kingdom of the symbols, the structures, and even the personnel of all false and idolatrous worship. It was the most thorough physical deconstruction of false worship in the history of Judah, clearing out worship places from as far back as the time of Solomon, three hundred years before.

Once this work was completed, Josiah returned to Jerusalem and organized the most extensive and impressive Passover held since the time of the judges (2 Kin. 23:21–23). To complete the reforms, Josiah literally swept away spirit mediums and practitioners of the occult together with all types of fertility idols. All these actions were done in obedience to the law of Moses found in the scroll that Hilkiah the priest had discovered (v. 24).

23:25–30. Josiah Meets His End. Despite Josiah's unique zeal for getting the nation back on track, it was not enough to prevent the impending judgment brought on by generations of apathy toward God and especially by the excesses of Manasseh's reign (vv. 25–26). Judah would end up like Israel, despite God's intention to permanently dwell there (v. 27). But God would find a way to fulfill His saving word, namely, through the coming Messiah. God always preserves a remnant of His people.

Following the concluding statement of Josiah's reign (vv. 25–28), there is a description of how he met his end. He took it upon himself to halt the advance of Pharaoh Necho, who was on his way to join the Assyrians in battle against the new rising superpower, Babylon. But Josiah was killed by the Egyptians at Megiddo (v. 29). His body was taken back to Jerusalem, and his son Jehoahaz replaced him on the throne (v. 30).

23:31—25:30

Judah's Last Days

The remaining four kings of Judah are all characterized as doers of evil. In their days the Babylonians had become the superpower, but in its death throes Egypt made some last excursions into Judah. The Egyptians took Jehoahaz, the son of Josiah, to Egypt, where he died in prison. His three successors were each subjected to Babylon and met the compounding wrath of the Babylonian army when they tried to rebel.

23:31–37. Jehoahaz (609 B.C.) and Jehoiakim (609–598 B.C.). Shallum was Josiah's fourth son (1 Chr. 3:15), and his royal name was Jehoahaz. It seems unusual that he was chosen before his three older brothers. Josiah's firstborn son was overlooked (unless he died in childhood) and so were the next two older brothers, Jehoiakim and Zedekiah. Jehoahaz's brief three-month reign was characterized as evil (2 Kin. 23:31–32). Necho took Jehoahaz prisoner and cut his reign short, sending him to Egypt where he eventually died (v. 34). Necho appointed Josiah's second son, Eliakim, as a puppet king and changed his name to Jehoiakim (v. 34). Jehoiakim's first duty was to pay the tribute imposed by Necho (v. 33), and consequently he imposed a heavy tax on the land to meet the obligation (v. 35).

24:1–7. The Exile (605 B.C.). The regional politics worsened for Judah when Babylon gained supremacy in the region by defeating the Assyrians and sweeping away the Egyptians. Because it was a vassal of Egypt, Judah was swallowed up in the Babylonian expansion, and Jehoiakim became a vassal of Babylon instead (v. 1). It was at this time that Daniel and his friends were taken into exile to Babylon (Dan. 1:1–3). At first Jehoiakim cooperated with the Babylonians, but three years later he rebelled. Judah became the object of attack by raiding parties inspired by Babylon that inflicted much damage in fulfillment of the word of the Lord spoken by the prophets (2 Kin. 24:2). When Nebuchadnezzar arrived at Jerusalem to begin the suppression of Jehoiakim's rebellion, Jehoiakim was already dead or had died during the siege, and his young son Jehoiachin replaced him (v. 6). This was the end of the reign of another king described as evil (23:36–37). Egypt no longer rated as a regional power, and Babylon assumed all its territory from the eastern border of Egypt right up to the Euphrates River (24:7)—a territory that was once under the control of King Solomon (see 1 Kin. 4:21, 24).

24:8–16. Jehoiachin (598–597 B.C.) and the Second Deportation (598 B.C.). Jehoiachin followed the tradition of most of his forebears and did evil in the sight of God—his reign lasted only three months (vv. 8–9). When Nebuchadnezzar arrived outside the besieged Jerusalem, Jehoiachin went out to him, accompanied by his mother, his chief officers, and his courtiers, and surrendered to him. He was taken prisoner (vv. 10–12), and Nebuchadnezzar emptied the treasures of the palace and the temple treasuries. He cut in pieces the gold objects still remaining in the temple from Solomon's time and deported ten thousand of Jerusalem's leaders, artisans, metallurgists, and potential military personnel. Ezekiel was one of them (Ezek. 1:2). This tactic effectively removed from Jerusalem all those capable of leading a revolt or manufacturing supplies for an army. (The book of 2 Kings does not mention the lengthy siege of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 605 B.C. that resulted in the first deportation of Jews to Babylon.)

24:17–20. Zedekiah (597–586 B.C.). Mattaniah and Jehoahaz were full blood brothers, so Mattaniah—given the royal name of Zedekiah—was Jehoiachin's uncle even though he was only about three years older (2 Kin. 24:17–18). Zedekiah also reigned for eleven years (v. 18), the same as Jehoiakim. He too did evil in the eyes of the Lord (v. 19). Although he initially cooperated with Babylon, he also rebelled, following Jehoiakim's example (v. 20).

25:1–21. Jerusalem Destroyed (586 B.C.). The inevitable siege commenced in the ninth year of Zedekiah's reign and lasted two years (vv. 1–2). The narrative notes that Judah, the people group, was taken away from its own land (v. 21). This is a tragic admission. The divine gift of the land was withdrawn from the people because of their rebellion against the Lord who had redeemed them from Egypt and who had entered into a loving covenant relationship with them. After the nation's first generation of leaders had died, the land descended into a state of anarchy (the time of the judges) and then of entrenched idolatry during the time of the kings. Despite the few kings who really turned to God with their reforms and the prophets who made it clear that only God is worthy of worship, the nation seemed determined to head in the direction of their own destruction. The Canaanite religion enticed them by providing a fatal, false sense of security. Both the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah were cast out of the land and taken into exile. The destruction of their temple was a sad reminder of the fact that they had now lost the national identity and the privilege of having God living among them, cleansing them from sin. The loss was devastating and left the nation in chaos.

25:22–26. Judah in Exile. A few weeks after the start of the Exile, Ishmael, from the royal line, returned with a group of activists and killed Gedaliah, whom Nebuchadnezzar had appointed as governor, his associates, and the Babylonian military personnel garrisoned there (v. 25). At this, they, and many frightened locals, fled to Egypt, their political savior (v. 26). The prophet Jeremiah was forced to go with them (Jer. 43:5–7), even though he had warned them not to go to Egypt (42:19). They went back to the place from which the Lord had liberated them.

25:27–30. Jehoiachin Released. In the year 560 B.C., thirty-seven years after Jehoiachin was taken from Jerusalem, a new king ascended Babylon's throne. As a measure of goodwill, he released Jehoiachin (now about fifty-five) from his prison (v. 27; for more, see "Old Testament Timeline," p. 94). For some reason Jehoiachin became the favorite among the captive kings and was not only provided regular clothes rather than his prison uniform, but also given a prominent place at the king's table (vv. 28–29). Furthermore, he received regular food supplies for the rest of his days (v. 30).

This dramatic finale to the book is an indication of hope that the nation of Israel and its kingly line still had a future. The judgment against them would not be permanent or final; they would be restored. The covenant God made with Abraham would still come to pass. The covenant God made with David would still be able to climax in the Messiah. The kingdom of God would have a future, and the meek would one day inherit the earth (Matt. 5:5).

1 CHRONICLES

INTRODUCTION

Title and Authorship. First and Second Chronicles were originally one book, as indicated by a scribal note found in the Hebrew copies, placing the "middle verse" at 1 Chronicles 27:25. Its Hebrew title, *dibre hayyamim* ("matters/events of the days"), refers to records that were kept of activities usually associated with the king. These sources were mainly courtly journals recording salient events. The two books of Chronicles are cited thirty-two times in Kings and two times in Esther. The books of Chronicles appeared separately for the first time in the early Greek version, the Septuagint (LXX), with the name *paraleipomenon*, "a thing left aside (for the moment)," as if they were an appendix for the sake of completeness. The author does assume that the reader knows the content of the former historical books when presenting genealogies and administrative lists in a more complete form than could be compiled from them. But that is not the main function of the Chronicles. Jerome, the author of the Vulgate Latin translation, does more justice to its character as "a chronicle of the whole of sacred history," thus recovering the sense of the Hebrew name and originating the modern title.

Many have believed that the author of the Chronicles also wrote Ezra and Nehemiah, which were originally a single book. But the Chronicles differ in the implicit assessment of the reign of Solomon (contrast Neh. 13:26, partly echoed in 2 Chr. 1:12), as well as its emphasis on swift retribution for sin. The author of Chronicles is thus unknown, but his emphasis on Levite choristers (mentioned about one hundred times in the books of Chronicles, but only one time in the books of Kings and two times in the books of Samuel) has led some to surmise that he was also a Levite.

Date. The books of Chronicles are addressed primarily to the Judeans who returned to their land following the decree of Cyrus in 537 B.C. The books were probably composed during the latter part of the fifth century B.C. and, if so, could be the last of the OT books to be written. Clearly, part of the genealogical information (e.g., 1 Chr. 3:19–24) reaches into the second half of the Persian period (539–331 B.C.). The position of the books of Chronicles in the Hebrew Bible, at the very end of Scripture, agrees well with a late date. Matthew 23:35 refers to the sweep of biblical history by alluding to the time comprised by Genesis 4:8 and 2 Chronicles 24:20–21, much as "from Genesis to Revelation" would be used today (see "Formation of the Biblical Canon," p. 21).

Backgrounds. Though often seen as dull today, the books of Chronicles were written, just as the Pentateuch and the rest of the historical books of the OT, in order to guide God's people through momentous transitions in their history. The Pentateuch had inspired a group of impoverished family clans after they had escaped from the oppressive power of Egypt into less developed but freer lands, there to become a nation under God, while the other historical books mapped the transformation of this new nation into kingdoms of note in the ancient world, showing how faithfulness to God's covenant did result in the blessings promised therein.

Once those blessings had been lost through disobedience, those who returned from the Exile in Babylon found themselves as a minor district in an outlying province of the Persian Empire. Research in dusty archives was necessary in order to convince the Persian government that in times past there had been kings in Jerusalem: nobody thought of those Judeans as a nation any longer (Ezra 4:19–20), but only as a cultic group huddling around a few sacred objects (Ezra 1:7–11). The books of Chronicles served to show them how to remain God's people even without national independence or a king of their own.

Theology and Purpose. The books of Chronicles do not overtly discuss theology, except in short statements by way of explaining the success or failure of people of the past. Its main purpose was pastoral in nature: the book aimed to save the Judean community from a complete loss of heart that would only facilitate their absorption into the surrounding culture. Such a process had already begun in other Palestinian communities that also treasured the Pentateuch, as the books of Ezra and Nehemiah report about the Samaritans. This danger was averted in Judah thanks, to a great extent, to reflection on the history of the people of God such as is expounded in the Chronicles. The books also provide an answer to the question of the fall of the city and the destruction of the temple. It establishes a clear connection between the behavior of the kings and the people, and the corruption of the temple services (2 Chr. 28:22—29:36; 36:14–20; see "The Temple in Chronicles," p. 541).

1. The Glorious Past of the Covenant People. In order to understand the present situation of the people after the Exile, the books of Chronicles focus on the past history of Jerusalem and the temple and its services. It takes us back to the moment when David began to make preparations for the construction of the temple that would occur under the leadership of Solomon. The one link of the postexilic community with a glorious past that would not raise the hackles of Persian authorities too much—provided it was handled with much care, and a generous amount of providential guidance—was the temple. It had been a marvel of the ancient world before its destruction by the Babylonians. Now Cyrus, the founder of the Persian Empire, authorized its reconstruction (2 Chr. 36:23). The continuity of the covenant is underlined through an emphasis on the covenant of God with David. His lineage is given a special place in the genealogical lists (1 Chr. 3), and God's promises for him are repeated (1 Chr. 17, from 2 Sam. 7). But in the Chronicles the generic "seed" or "offspring" of the dynasty (2 Sam. 7:12) is specified as one "of your sons," namely Solomon, the temple builder (1 Chr. 17:11–12). David and Solomon were not only the glorious past but also the root from which God would make Israel to sprout again. Their throne was "the throne of the LORD" (1 Chr. 29:23; 2 Chr. 9:8). Their reigns are presented in idealized form: none of the grave sins of David or Solomon are remembered in the Chronicles except David's census, for those kings are models to be followed by future leaders. The same, to a certain extent, is true of Hezekiah and Josiah.

2. The Rise and Fall of the Nation. The glorious past of Israel poses an immediate question: What went wrong? Why were the people of God in such a wretched state? Systematically, the books of Chronicles relate the fate of kings, and the people subject to them, to their obedience or disobedience to the provisions of God's covenant and to the temple services. The author underlines the principles of David transmitted to Solomon in 1 Chronicles 28:9: Their goal was to know God intimately and serve Him loyally and willingly, keeping in mind that He is found by all who seek Him, but rejects those who reject Him, which meant He would ultimately destroy them forever if they persisted in this rejection. This is no mere formal obedience, but one that arose from the heart in true humility (see 2 Chr. 7:14, 22 a passage with a clear message for us today).

Emphasis on obedience to the law of God as a key to success is pervasive in the OT, and the blessings associated with faithfulness to the covenant are already specified in the Pentateuch (most prominently in Lev. 26 and Deut. 28). The books of Chronicles do not hesitate to identify the actions of the people or the monarchs that created well-being or disaster. The author usually includes an evaluation of the religious character of each reign together with statistics. In practice, however, things were not so clear-cut: punishment might be delayed by amends (2 Chr. 34:27–28), with the unintended consequence that some people might get it absolutely backward: they might attribute their misfortune to the renewed obedience and godly reforms of their kings, and their former prosperity to the evil deeds of previous times (Jer. 44:15–19). Thus, the just judgment of God is a tenet of faith, not an obvious conclusion to be drawn from the experiences of daily life. But even if the "obey and live, disobey and die" theology is limited in its explanatory power for the vicissitudes of this life, that very fact opens an opportunity for the doctrine of the future and righteous judgment of God.

3. God's Sovereign Elections. God made clear He had chosen the tribe of Levi alone for priesthood and temple service (e.g., 1 Chr. 15:2; 23:24–32); the lineage of David to rule the nation (e.g., 1 Chr. 28:4; 2 Chr. 6:6); the reign of Solomon in order to build the temple (1 Chr. 28–29); the city of Jerusalem as the residence of His name (e.g., 2 Chr. 6:6, 34, 38; 12:13); and even the specific site for the temple inside its limits (2 Chr. 7:12; cf. 1 Chr. 21–22). Though these choices were not a guarantee of salvation for the persons involved, neither could those who disrespected them have attained the favor

of God. The corruption of the chosen leaders and their institutions led to the collapse of both. Although the Chronicler believes that the people from both the Southern and Northern Kingdoms were still the elect people of God (e.g., 2 Chr. 30:5–9; 2 Chr. 11:4), he also understands that the northern tribes have "been in rebellion against the house of David to this day" (2 Chr. 10:19). Outside Judea there was no valid priesthood, since the priests and Levites who once resided in the north had moved around Jerusalem (2 Chr. 11:13–14). However, people from the ten rebellious tribes were not to be excluded from the covenant provided they repented and returned to worship in Jerusalem (2 Chr. 30:9–10).

4. Listening to the Law and the Prophets. The Chronicler narrates the reigns of the kings of Judah, not of rebellious Israel, and then only briefly except for those of the "good" kings, singled out because of their compliance with the law of God: David (e.g., 2 Chron. 6:16; 23:18), Jehoshaphat (2 Chr. 17:3–9), Joash (24:6), Hezekiah (29:10–11), and Josiah (34:19–21). These kings also sought and respected the word of God through the prophets: Nathan and Gad in the times of David and Solomon (1 Chr. 29:29; 2 Chr. 29:25) and Ahijah and Iddo later (9:29), as well as the prophetess Huldah in the times of Josiah (34:20–28), among others. Of special note is the prophecy of Jahaziel, the Levite who led Jehoshaphat to confront the armies of the enemies of Judah by singing praises to God (2 Chr. 20:14–17), and the admonition of the king to trust in the messages of God's prophets in order to thrive (v. 20). The stories of these kings are used to establish that if the kings had remained faithful to the Lord, the destruction of the city and the hopeless experience of the Exile could have been avoided. Yet, out of the chaos of the Exile God provided for His people a future and a hope (Jer. 29:11).

Literary Features. In order to preserve hope and awaken a sense of national pride, the Chronicles contain narratives that review the history of God's dealings with His people since the remote past. Part of this history is merely alluded to in genealogical and administrative lists, since the author presupposes the reader is well acquainted with the former historical books, but a modicum of new information is added. Other historical narratives are retold by quoting extensively from Samuel and Kings but are given a different perspective and new emphases. However, more is left out, in accordance with the purpose of the author, than is repeated or supplemented. The records of the glorious reigns of David and Solomon are especially singled out, both because of their value in buoying the spirits of the community of returned exiles and because of the connection of those kings with the temple, the center of community life. Sermons and addresses of those kings to the people are added as an aid to the purpose of the author (see "The Temple in Chronicles," p. 541).

COMMENTARY

1:1—9:44

THE ANCESTORS: GENERATIONS OF GOD'S PEOPLE

Reviewing past history is a means to establish roots and, consequently, identity. To us, history is a parade of centuries; to the ancients, it was a parade of ancestors. Some names may remind

The Genealogies of 1 Chronicles 1—9

The genealogies recorded in 1 Chronicles 1—9 are the longest in the Bible and require some attention. The fact that they are part of the book and that they are placed at the beginning of the book indicates that they have a very specific purpose. We should explore some of the theological value of the genealogies within the book itself.

1. Genealogical Details. These genealogies begin with the pre-Israelite history from Adam or Creation (1:1–3) to the Flood (v. 4), and from the post-Flood nations (vv. 5–26) to Abraham (v. 27). From this point on, the list of names is restricted to the sons of Abraham through Hagar (vv. 29–31), Keturah (vv. 32–33), and Sarah (v. 34). The genealogy narrows down even more by listing only the descendants of Isaac (Esau [vv. 35–54] and Israel [2:1–2]). At this point we reach what seems to be one of the main genealogical interests of the biblical writer: Israel as the people of God. The tribes that came from Jacob/Israel are listed beginning with Judah (2:3—4:23). The intention of this section is to take the reader to David and his descendants (3:1–24). Other descendants of Judah are also listed (4:1–23). Then the descendants of the other tribes are given. It has been suggested that the list of the tribes follows a general geographical pattern. Judah is at the center, and the next one mentioned is Simeon (vv. 24–43), one of its closest neighbors. The movement is from south to north, east of Jordan (Reuben, 5:1–10; Gad, 5:11–22; the half tribe of Manasseh, 5:23–26; and Levi, 6:1–80). This is followed by the northern tribes of Issachar (7:1–5), Benjamin (vv. 6–12), and Naphtali (v. 13), and concludes with a movement from the north to the south (Manasseh, vv. 14–19; Ephraim, vv. 20–29; Asher, vv. 30–40; and Benjamin/Saul, 8:1–40). In chapter 9 we find a genealogical list of those who returned from Exile, with a primary emphasis on the Levites (9:1–34). At the end, we return to the genealogy of Saul, thus preparing the way for the reign of David (9:35–44).

2. Purpose of the Genealogies. First, it is obvious that these genealogies contain a compressed history of global dimensions. They begin affirming the historical facts of the Creation and the Flood and close with the beginning of the reign of David. But they also include the Exile and the return from the Exile, thus providing an element of hope. At a time when the people of God were discouraged as a result of the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, and a return from a devastating exile, God assured them that they were part of a world history over which He is Lord. This history had not come to an end but remained open to His guiding hand as it had been in the past.

Second, history is depicted here as a result of the human capacity, given to them by God, to procreate. This begetting traces the human race to a common ancestor created by God in His image: Adam. This particular genealogy binds the people of God to the human race in a bond of existential solidarity that should exclude prejudices of any kind. In the list, the birth of Abraham takes us back to his election in order to be used by God to bless all the nations of the earth.

Third, based on the amount of space assigned to them, these genealogies place the emphasis on David and the priesthood (Levites). Genealogies were sometimes instrumental in the divine assignment of specific religious and social responsibilities and privileges to some, but every individual had a role to play in the arena of history simply because he or she had been begotten. In the Bible, the roles of king and priest played an important function as instruments used by God to represent the saving work and ministry of Jesus in whom the kingly and priestly offices coalesced. He was not simply the son of Mary. He was the Son of God, in a unique way, and to Him His Father assigned a unique responsibility, which He willingly accepted, namely, the redemption of the human race. The genealogies of the books of Chronicles are open-ended, pointing to the future son of David and to His priestly work—two ideas that pervade these books.

the reader of specific stories in other parts of the Bible, and in the case of the original readers, also of family stories transmitted orally. The genealogy begins with Genesis and the patriarchs (1:1–27), then moves to Abraham and his descendants (1:28–53), the tribe of Judah (2:1—4:23), the eastern tribes (4:24—5:26), the tribe of Levi (6:1–81), and the remaining tribes (7:1—9:44).

1:1–54
From Adam to Jacob

By beginning with Creation, the history of God's people, through the record of the genealogies in the Chronicles and earlier books, is incorporated into universal history and highlights the divine purpose for them.

1:1–27. The Patriarchs. In a sense the author rushes through Genesis, for he is only reminding the reader, by means of genealogical lists, of the foundational times of Creation, the Flood, the dispersion from Babel, and the story of Abraham. Family branches furthest away from Israel are dealt with first before concentrating on those of primary concern. Thus, both Japheth and Ham precede Shem. Nimrod (v. 10) appears only as a mighty warrior, no longer in

the enigmatic character of a "hunter before the LORD" (Gen. 10:9). The family branch of Aram (1 Chr. 1:17) is worthy of a passing mention among the Semites, as is that of Joktan (v. 20), being the more remote branch of Eber. After these digressions, the genealogy of Shem (v. 17) is repeated (vv. 24–27), so the reader is not sidetracked from the more immediate branch of Peleg, from which Abraham arose.

1:28–54. The Descendants of Abraham. Ishmael (vv. 29–31), the son of Hagar, seems of less interest to the genealogist than the sons of Keturah (vv. 32–33). Genesis 25:1 leaves the impression that Keturah was a new wife after the death of Sarah. Our passage, therefore, explains that she was a concubine, not (as in modern usage) a kept mistress, but an actual spouse (Judg. 19:3–5), albeit one with incomplete inheritance rights (Gen. 25:6). The line of Esau/Edom/Seir is also dealt with in some detail (1 Chr. 1:35–54), not only as neighbors of Judah but also as brothers of Israel. The long list of Edomite chiefs and kings emphasizes that kingship arose in Edom before Israel (v. 43).

In 1:36 the Hebrew text ends the list of descendants of Eliphaz with "and Timna and Amalek." This is not always reflected in the English translations. The first five sons of Eliphaz in this verse are not joined by "and," except as supplied by translators. The "and" before Timna originally seems to have introduced an explanatory clause, "and by Timna, Amalek," as in the LXX. This is in agreement with Genesis 36:12, where Timna is the mother of Amalek. Most modern translations try to represent this more accurate understanding.

2:1—7:40
The Tribes

This section begins with a list of the twelve sons of Jacob (2:1–2) but immediately concentrates on Judah. The order of the names, given in various ways in the OT, here follows loosely Genesis 35:22–26, where they are listed according to their respective mothers.

2:3—4:23. The Descendants of Judah. They are given the pride of place (because Judah is the cradle of rulers, 1 Chr. 5:1–2) with emphasis on the genealogy of David (2:9–55) and his descendants (chap. 3). His tribe then receives much more space in the text (102 vv.) than the other tribes (Levi, 81 vv.; all others combined, just 126 vv.). We can divide the list into several groups. First is the list from Judah to Chelubai (2:2–9). Ram (2:9), who does not appear in Numbers 26:20–21, is taken from the genealogy of David in Ruth 4:18–22. The Hebrew *kelubay* (1 Chr. 2:9) is an alternate form of Caleb (2:42); the latter spelling configures the word for "dog" in Hebrew.

Second, we find the family of David. The Chronicler reports that David was the seventh and last son of Jesse (2:15), while 1 Samuel 16:10–13 makes him the eighth, giving also some of their names. Perhaps a fifth son (Elihu in 1 Chr. 27:18) later died without children, leaving Jesse with just seven sons for genealogical purposes.

Third, we have the family of Caleb son of Hezron. His family (2:18–24) appears next to David's, perhaps because it furnished Israel with the talent of Bezalel (2:20), the master craftsman of the sanctuary. He should not be confused with Caleb the son of Jephunneh (4:15), one of the twelve spies who, together with Joshua, showed an attitude that differed from that of the other ten (Num. 14:24, 30). This incident happened one year after the erection of the sanctuary, when the spy Caleb was only forty years old, so he could hardly have been the grandfather of Bezalel, the sanctuary builder.

Fourth, the families of Jerahmeel and Caleb are listed (1 Chr. 2:25–55). The Chelubai of v. 9 resurfaces as "Caleb" (vv. 42–48), with another list of his descendants, where the emphasis is on place-names.

The fifth group is formed by the family of David (3:1–9). He is here on record as having reigned in Hebron over Judah as their native prince for seven and a half years before his reign of thirty-three years in Jerusalem as an elected king of all Israel (v. 4), in conformity with the report in 2 Samuel 2:11 and 5:4–5. In 1 Chronicles 10–11, however, his reign in Hebron, which partially overlapped with the claim of Esh-Baal/Ishbosheth, the son of Saul, is omitted, as the reign of the latter is not detailed either. Daniel, here in v. 1, is another name of Chileab (2 Sam. 3:3). The name Daniel means "God is my judge," while Chileab means "like unto the father," perhaps in affirmation that David was the baby's father, not Nabal, the former husband of Abigail from Carmel.

The sixth group is that of the royal line from Solomon to the kings of Judah (1 Chr. 3:10–24). The names in this line appear in the Bible in diverse forms; some may be throne names. Zerubbabel (v. 19) is here the nephew of Shealtiel, while elsewhere he is his son (e.g., Hag. 1:1; Matt. 1:12). Probably Pedaiah was his biological father, while Shealtiel was the juridical father, having died without offspring. However this may be, the lists of Zerubbabel's descendants here, in Matthew, and in Luke, are all different. In 1 Chronicles 3:22 we read of Shemaiah and six sons, though only five are named after him. We should probably read "The *sons* [as in v. 21] of Shecaniah were Shemaiah and the sons of Shemaiah, Hattush, Igal, Bariah, Neariah and Shaphat—six in all."

Finally we have the clans of Judah (4:1–23). These families included that of Jabez (v. 9), a clan leader who made a simple but eloquent request of God, which was, in a variation from the literary style of the genealogy, recorded for posterity. Jabez requested an extension of his land—God's loving hand of providence, protection, and avoidance of causing (or according to some, receiving) pain. There were families of scribes who lived at a place called Jabez (2:55), which was perhaps named after the person. Some have even suggested that these scribes were somehow related to Jabez or connected with him in some other way (such that his prayer had relevance to their work), but the text does not indicate anything specific. These scribes, the Tirathites, Shimeathites, and Sucathites, may be interpreted either as sub-family names deriving from the names of the respective heads (cf. 2:53) or as sub-specializations of scribes, namely, those who read aloud the words to be written, those who took them down in writing, and those who checked the final copy. Other clans of Judah specialized as skilled craftsmen (4:14) and potters (4:23).

4:24—5:26. The Eastern Tribes. The eastern tribes were those of Simeon (4:24–43), Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh (5:1–26). The tribe of Simeon was originally surrounded by territories of Judah. Part of the tribe was later incorporated into those territories, while the rest migrated eastward. Reuben lost his birthright, which entailed a double portion of inheritance, to Joseph (5:1–2). This was accomplished *de facto* when Jacob adopted both sons of Joseph, Manasseh and Ephraim, as his own (Gen. 48:12–16). Thus Joseph disappears from most lists of the twelve tribes in the Bible, while Manasseh and Ephraim now had rights to inheritance equal to those of their uncles. The wilderness (desert) by the river Euphrates (1 Chr. 5:9) was a result of gradually diminishing rainfall from Gilead (the territory of the Reubenites) toward the east. The Hagrites conquered by them (5:10) were descendants of Ishmael and his mother Hagar (cf. the Hagrites Jethur and Naphish in 1:31; 5:19).

The members of the tribe of Gad (5:11–22) are listed differently than in Genesis 46:16 or Numbers 26:15–18; here the tribe seems organized, not by ancestor, but by military chief (5:12). The same applies to the half tribe of Manasseh (vv. 23–26). This suggests that the source was a military census, perhaps related to the warfare of Saul in the region (1 Sam. 14:47). The figures of 50,000 camels, 250,000 sheep, and 100,000 men seem strangely high, compared to just 2,000 donkeys (1 Chr. 5:21). Since the Chronicles used archives from a bygone era, the author may have misunderstood some of the numeral symbols used in preexilic Israel, which, as archaeology shows, constituted an incipient, complex, and unstable system. We should probably read this verse as listing 1,050 camels, 1,250 sheep and 1,100 men. The same problem reappears often in the work (e.g., 1 Chr. 22:14). The eastern tribes, like the northern ones, acted like a prostitute (5:25) spiritually, by being unfaithful to the Lord, who was the legitimate husband of Israel. The Assyrian deportation was the consequence of this harlotry. Pul, the king of Assyria, (5:26) was not, as in some older versions, different from Tiglath-Pileser; the latter was his throne name (2 Kin. 15:19, 29).

6:1–80. The Tribe of Levi. This genealogy is based on the three sons of Levi: Kohath (vv. 2–15), Gershon (vv. 16–28), and Merari (vv. 29–30). Two specific roles of the Levitical tribe are mentioned: the musicians in the temple (vv. 31–48) and those in charge of the priesthood (the family of Aaron; vv. 49–53). The section closes with a discussion of the Levitical cities as the dwellings of the Levites (vv. 54–81). The Zadokites (vv. 2–15) replaced the lineage of Ithamar (6:3), which had held the high priesthood (1 Sam. 3:27–30) until Abiathar became embroiled in the royal pretensions of Adonijah and was deposed by Solomon (1 Kin. 2:20–23). The present passage aims to demonstrate the legitimacy of the Zadokite line through Eleazar, the brother of Ithamar. The other Levitical branches included the family of Samuel (1 Chr. 6:28), here placed in the clan of Kohath (6:33–38), probably by adoption into the family of Ebiasaph, Assir, and Tahath (cf. vv. 23, 37) after being dedicated by his mother Hannah to the temple (1 Sam. 1:19–28). The original organization of the musicians for the house of the Lord is traced back to David (v. 31). Even though Samuel, raised as a priest assistant, was eventually able to offer sacrifice, the distinction between the musical Levites (1 Chr. 6:31–48) and the altar-going Aaronites (6:49–52) is upheld. The family of Aaron is specifically mentioned because it constituted the priestly family (vv. 49–53). The genealogy of Zadokite priests is repeated from vv. 3–8, bringing it up to the times of David and Solomon only (cf. v. 10). As elsewhere, the main concern of the list is to show the legitimacy of the Eleazar-Zadok line. But it also reminds us of the Aaronite/Levite distinction, and in this way, it also serves as an introduction to the next section, the Levitical cities (vv. 54–81). The list includes the cities of refuge (Josh. 21), where Levites acted as judges in capital cases, but it goes on to cover every major city in the kingdom of David. This expansion of the original listing may reflect an attempt to establish a wider and more accessible judicial system by assigning special sections in the larger cities to Levitical judges. In this sense alone they become also "Levitical cities."

7:1–40. The Rest of the Tribes. The first one is the tribe of Issachar (7:1–5). In contrast to Gad or Manasseh, the names of the sons of Issachar here do match in general terms with Genesis 46:13 and Numbers 26:23–24, but the numbers given for the two main branches and others, totaling 87,000, correspond to the time of David (1 Chr. 7:2) and may reflect the ill-conceived census of chapter 21. The tribe of Benjamin (vv. 6–12) is also reported in military terms. In v. 12 the Hushim are said to be descendants of "Aher" (lit. "another one"), a term sometimes used in Hebrew to avoid mentioning a name with unpleasant associations. This might refer to Dan (Gen. 46:23; Num. 26:42), whose descendants are not otherwise listed and who are also absent from 1 Chronicles 6:68–69, where they would be expected (cf. Josh. 21:23; Rev. 7:5–8). This is probably related to the idolatrous apostasy of the tribe (Judg. 18–19). Together with Dan, the tribe of Naphtali (1 Chr. 7:13) constituted the only descendants of Bilhah, so after the disappearance of Dan from the scene there were no others; this is perhaps the significance of Bilhah's mention here.

The tribe of west Manasseh is discussed in vv. 14–19. Verse 14 is difficult to translate; the LXX makes Asriel a brother of Machir, the firstborn (Josh. 17:1). The exact relationship of Huppim and Shuppim to other family members is also unclear. As for Zelophehad (v. 15), Numbers 26:33 and Joshua 17:3 indicate that his father was Hepher, a son of Gilead, and was therefore his grandson.

The family history of the tribe of Ephraim (1 Chr. 7:20–29) opens with a tragic incident of patriarchal times, before the Israelites went to Egypt. The report on the tribe of Asher (vv. 30–40) agrees in general terms with Genesis 46:17 while adding a wealth of detail that demonstrates the access of the Chronicler to other ancient sources.

8:1–40. The Ancestry of Saul. Here the report differs from the account already given in 7:6–12. Besides different names, the list is also unique in often employing the term *yalad*, "begot" or "was the father of" or "bore" (vv. 1, 8, 9, 11, 33–37), perhaps because it originated from a different archive. Some differences may be due to alternate names; in other cases the names may be links omitted by some lists which use "son" in the sense of "descendant." Gera (v. 3) may have been in fact the ancestor of Ehud the judge (Judg. 3:15); the migration to the lands of Moab (1 Chr. 8:8) may explain why Ehud tangled with King Eglon there. The names Esh-Baal (v. 33) and Merib-Baal (v. 34) do not imply that Saul and/or Jonathan were worshipers of Baal. The term only means "owner" or "master"; it could be applied to the true God and is the regular Hebrew word for "husband." In its religious use, it later became identified with the Syrian god Hadad, who was invoked by his followers as their lord or "baal" (Hos. 2:16–17). For this reason scribes later replaced those names with Ish-bosheth and Mephiboshet (2 Sam. 2:8; 4:4; 9:6), where "boshet" ("shame") parodies such invocation.

9:1–44. The Dwellers in Jerusalem. This list of returnees from the Exile includes some from the northern tribes and Benjamin (9:1–9), but its primary emphasis is on the tribes of Judah and Levi. The Aaronite (priestly) branch of the latter is specified first (vv. 10–13), then the others in charge of security (vv. 17–27) and equipment (vv. 28–34). The list then repeats in vv. 35–44 essentially the same information as 8:29–40. This repetition serves to focus on King Saul, whose last battle and death follow (10:1–14). Overall, the brief highlighting of Saul in 9:35—10:14 is an appropriate transition to what seems to be the primary concern of the Chronicler: the reigns of David and Solomon.

10:1—29:30

DAVID'S REIGN AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE TEMPLE

After a discussion of the death of Saul (10:1–14), this long section concentrates on the rise of David to power (11:1—12:40), his decision to bring the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem (13:1—16:43), his covenant with God (17:1–27), and his military success (18:1—20:8). The rest deals with matters related to the future temple, beginning with the selection of the site (20:1–30), interrupted by the military census (21:1–6), and followed by specific preparations for the building of the temple (22:1–19) and the organization of the temple services (23:1—26:32) and the kingdom (27:1–34). Since David would not build the temple, he left for his successor instructions for the building project (28:1—29:30). After parading the broad sweep of Israelite history through comprehensive genealogies, the books of Chronicles focus on the story of the temple, which was central to the identity of the community of those who returned from Babylon. The topic is close to the center of the theology of the books (see "The Temple in Chronicles," p. 541).

10:1–14

The Death of Saul

Since David was not a crown prince, an account of the change of dynasty was necessary. The end of the house of Saul (vv. 1–7) was no mere accidental overthrow of a king by foreigners. God had in Israel a kingdom and a throne (note the emphasis on these concepts in 1 Chr. 17:14, an emphasis absent in 2 Sam. 7:16), and He had already chosen David. It was only because of the godly men of Jabesh, in Transjordan, that Saul escaped the ultimate indignity: his remains unburied (1 Chr. 10:8–12). He did not, however, escape the profanation of his corpse by enemies (his head in one place, [v. 10] and his body in another, [1 Sam. 31:10]). The well-known Philistine god Dagon (1 Chr. 10:10) does not appear in the extant copies of the Hebrew text of 1 Samuel 31:10, the source of the present account, but only in copies of the LXX. The seven-day fast (1 Chr. 10:12) was customary among the bereaved; it was limited to certain types of food or times of the day (the opposite is presented as an exception to the rule in Matt. 4:2; Luke 4:2). A theological evaluation of the tragic death of Saul is given (1 Chr. 10:13): it was the result of his unfaithfulness. Two reasons are specified: he did not keep the word of the Lord, and he consulted a medium (v. 13). Here the Chronicler elaborates on 1 Samuel 28:7–20; 31:1–3. The Lord had strictly forbidden the practice of consulting the spirits in Israel (Deut. 18:11).

11:1—12:40

David's Rise to Power

The Philistines were able to eliminate Saul and his three sons and all his official "house" (1 Chr. 10:6). Another son, Esh-Baal/Ishbosheth, survived, but he lacked preparation and/or talent for the throne (see his turning against his own power base in 2 Sam. 3). Even among Saul's intimate circle, the promises of God to David were known and weighed heavily on the outcome of the ensuing civil war (2 Sam. 3:9–10). In consequence, 1 Chronicles skips this civil war entirely, instead focusing immediately on the rise of David's star.

11:1–9. The Capture of Jerusalem. This conquest was not merely a mop-up operation that eliminated the Canaanite strongholds still present in the land, centuries after the Exodus. Rather, it was crucial for the success of David as the king of a united monarchy. The reader has already been informed in 3:4 of the reign of David in Hebron over the tribe of Judah alone (2 Sam. 2:4, 7), so the Chronicler does not repeat it here. The emphasis is rather on "all Israel" (1 Chr. 11:4), perhaps indicating either that David and his men in 2 Samuel 5:6 represented the whole nation or that there was a special force under David in addition to a larger national army. The implication was that this city, hitherto in foreign hands and therefore not in any particular tribe, was to become the capital of the whole nation. At the same time, the capture granted David the aura of a conqueror. This was how he became increasingly renowned and powerful (1 Chr. 11:9).

11:10–47. The Mighty Men of David. These were the men who had taken a firm stand in support of David's rule over all Israel (11:10). The three great warriors, the mighty men (vv. 11–12), were the innermost circle of David's supporters in the armed forces. In our copies of Chronicles two are named: Jashobeam and Eleazar, and in 2 Samuel 23:9–12 Shammah is also mentioned. These three men seem to have been different from the three of the thirty chief men (1 Chr. 11:15), two of whom are named (vv. 20–26), who in turn were different from the mighty warriors named in vv. 26–47.

Despite the mighty acts of David's men, it was the Lord who always brought about a great victory (v. 14). The cave of Adullam (v. 15) was not a specific cavern, but a collective term for an area riddled with hollows of all sizes. We are not given the exact location of the incident with the water of the well of Bethlehem, David's native town, but the stronghold of v. 16 was probably one of those hollows particularly well suited to his purposes (1 Sam. 23:29). The names after Uriah the Hittite in 1 Chronicles 11:41 do not appear in the account of 2 Samuel 23, neither is their geographical provenance provided as is the case with the preceding names. This illustrates how the Chronicler was able to supplement the information of Samuel and Kings with other sources.

12:1–22. The Growth of David's Army. This section shows how David was able to quickly confront the army of Abner after the death of Saul. Many of the best men came to him while he was still a refugee in the Philistine town of Ziklag (v. 1), affirming that his God was the One who helped him (v. 18). David was wary of the Benjamites (v. 17), relatives of Saul, who had betrayed him before (1 Sam. 23:12, 19–20). But Amasai (1 Chr. 12:18) put him at ease with a speech as he was moved by the Spirit.

12:23–40. David's Army at Hebron. The numbers recorded here attest to the fact that David had the support of all Israel, having a great army, like the "army of God" (v. 22). It was not only the sons of Issachar who understood the times and what Israel should do (v. 32); they all were of one mind to make David king (v. 38).

13:1—16:43

The Ark Brought to Jerusalem

Not only did the ark contain the tablets of the covenant, the Ten Commandments, but its cover, or "mercy seat," was associated with the throne of God (flanked by its guards, the cherubim). This was the very center of God's presence and communication with Israel (Num. 7:89; 1 Chr. 13:6). Lost to the Philistines and returned by God's miraculous intervention, it had been in a private house for a long time (1 Sam. 4:1—7:1), and Saul had done nothing to restore it to its rightful place (1 Chr. 13:3). It was now time for David to show not only how different he was from Saul but also to demonstrate his religious and spiritual leadership.

13:1–14. The First Attempt. David gathered all Israel (v. 5) from the Shihor (Egyptian term meaning "pond of Horus," probably one of the Bitter Lakes in the Suez area) up to the entrance of Hamath (sometimes translated as "Lebo Hamath"; *lebo'*—"entrance" would in that case be viewed as a town in Hamath). These locations were the God-given ideal boundaries of the promised land (e.g., Num. 34:8). Since the ark had arrived from Philistia in a cart, the family keeping it may have thought that such a vehicle was an appropriate method for its transport. But as a result of handling the ark as if it were any other load, Uzza(h), one of the members of this family, was killed, and David deposited the sacred object in the house of Obed-Edom (see 2 Sam. 6). This man was a Levite and specifically a Kohathite (1 Chr. 13:13; cf. 15:24; 16:38; 26:5; Num. 16:1; hence probably a Gittite from Gath-Rimmon; 1 Chr. 6:69). David was determined that henceforth proper procedure be followed for the transportation of the ark (chap. 16). But before the necessary preparations could be completed, he had to confront the Philistines, enemies of both the Israelites and the Tyrians.

14:1–17. The Philistine Wars. Hiram, king of Tyre (Phoenicia), was also an enemy of the Philistines. This explains the association of the topics here. Hiram sent David, his ally, a gift of palatial timber, for which his nation was famous. David interpreted this to mean that the Lord had established him as king over Israel (vv. 1–2). The Chronicler takes this opportunity to record David's palaces and new wives in Jerusalem (v. 3; 15:1). Even though displeased with the careless handling of the most sacred symbol of His presence, God was pleased with the intentions of David and provided him with the intelligence and strategy needed in order to defeat his enemies (14:8–16). His military victories gained through the Lord's help caused all nations to fear him (v. 17)—the fulfillment of God's covenantal promises (Deut. 2:25)—and his power was greatly enhanced.

15:1–24. Preparations for Moving the Ark. The account of 2 Samuel 6 is here enriched with much detail, emphasizing the care of David and the priests in preparing a place for the ark (v. 1; Heb. *maqom*, "a sacred site"). First, only the persons and transportation methods authorized by the law were to be used (1 Chr. 15:1–10; cf. Ex. 37:4–5; Deut. 10:8). Second, those approaching the ark had to be purified (1 Chr. 15:11–15). Separating sacred objects from ordinary ones helped the people to place supreme importance on God's word, so different from changeable, erring human words and concepts. Third, sacred music was to be used (vv. 16–24). The perspective and peculiar concern of the Chronicler is clear here: this sacred ministry was placed in the care of the Levites (vv. 16–24), even before their official appointment (16:37–43). Sanctuary music included singing and instruments. Levites played strings and percussion; the priests blew the trumpets (15:24).

15:25—16:3. The Procession with the Ark. First, there was a convocation (v. 25). The importance of the occasion required not only sacred personnel but also representatives from the people: the king, the elders of Israel, and the captains over thousands. The procession was, second, characterized by joy (v. 26). Bringing the ark was an especially joyous occasion (cf. v. 25), so music and a ceremony of sacrificed bulls and rams were provided. Third, proper attire was required (v. 27). None were allowed to approach the ark without sacred garments; even the king had to put on linen and an ephod (lit. "panel," placed on the chest). This was required only of high priests who had to approach the ark in the course of their yearly ministry in the inner sanctum. Now the symbol of God's presence was outdoors. Fourth, there was acclamation (v. 28). Popular shouting expressed the feelings of the people for their national religious symbol. All of this contrasted with the attitude of Michal (v. 29), Saul's daughter and David's wife (1 Sam. 18:17–30), who apparently believed that David's personal behavior, amid all the music and dance (1 Chr. 15:29) in honor of a single sacred object, was unnecessary and undignified, at least for the king. Such an attitude on the part of a member of Saul's family toward the religious past of Israel and the new king revealed her discomfort with David as king and with what he was doing.

David had erected a tent or tabernacle (16:1) to house the ark in Jerusalem (16:1–3). This differed from the sacred tabernacle of the wilderness, which had somehow survived the destruction of the temple of Shiloh by the Philistines (Jer. 7:12; cf. Josh. 18:1; 1 Sam. 1:3, 7, 24) and was now functioning as the focal point of sacrifice in Gibeon (1 Chr. 16:39; cf. 2 Chr. 1:3–6).

Because of the double-shrine situation, only some priests and Levites were assigned to Jerusalem (1 Chr. 16:4–6); the rest were left in Gibeon for the time being (16:38–39). It may be surprising that David did not bring the tabernacle from Gibeon to Jerusalem, but such a move would have been easily understood as a rejection of Gibeon as a place of worship. Instead, he was to eventually provide an awe-inspiring temple, surpassing the house of the Lord lost in Shiloh, which would silence any possible critics. The religious act concluded with a hymn of praise composed by David for this most important occasion (16:7–36). This composition includes material also found in Psalms 105:1–15; 96:1–13; and 106:47–48.

16:37–43. Arrangements for Regular Worship. The worship program in Jerusalem was intended to invoke, thank, and praise God in Jerusalem with prayer, song, and musical instruments (16:4). The burnt offerings of the daily service (16:40) were offered on the altar located in Gibeon. Just as in the early Davidic reign, those who returned from the Exile kept sacrifices together with verbal worship in the synagogue. The role of Zadok (v. 39) in the Gibeon worship center foreshadowed the future importance of his lineage (see commentary on 6:1–81).

17:1–27

Covenant of God with David

While the Chronicler does not explicitly elaborate the foundational concept of God's covenant, this section sets forth the promises given to David that imply an eternal commitment of God toward His people.

17:1–15. David's Desire to Build a Temple and God's Promises. In contrast to Saul, David's godliness was deep and sincere. Israel was no longer a group of tribes wandering in the desert or suffering the harassment of enemies. David felt that the newly found comfort needed to be correlated with the quality of the structures erected by Israel for worship (v. 1). His pious desire was met with the enthusiastic initial approval of Nathan (v. 2), who was immediately overridden by the Lord, in whose name the prophet was speaking (vv. 4–6). God had not dwelt in one and the same place since the Exodus (v. 5), nor was He concerned with having a luxurious palace of cedar (v. 6). But He did take note of David's intention. Instead of David building for Him, God Himself would build a "house" for the faithful king (v. 10), a perpetual dynasty. As for David himself, his role was that of a warrior (vv. 8–9; cf. 1 Kin. 5:3), so it would fall to one of David's sons (1 Chr. 17:11) to actually construct the temple (v. 11). Though the emphasis of the Chronicler is on Solomon, he does record divine promises to establish the Davidic king forever (v. 12) as God's "son" (v. 13; Pss. 2; 110). For the Chronicler this means indeed forever, as is strongly emphasized in the text (1 Chr. 17:14; Ps. 45:6–7). Such perpetual sonship was to provide an important foundation for the conception of the Messiah in the NT (Rom. 1:3–4; 8:29; Heb. 1:8).

17:16–27. The Response of the King. The story now shows the humility and godliness of David. He perceived that this was indeed the word of God, not of Nathan (cf. 17:2), so he sat before the Lord (i.e., before the ark that represented Him; v. 16) and acknowledged the greatness of God and His grace toward Israel (vv. 19–22) in contrast to his own unworthiness (vv. 16–17). At the same time he accepted the promises with faith (vv. 23–26), convinced that God had indeed made Israel His own people forever (v. 22), which is the central concept in the covenant (e.g., Gen. 17:7; Lev. 11:45; Jer. 31:33; Rev. 21:3).

18:1—20:8

The Military Glory of David

This section underlines David's role as a warrior, which prevented the realization of his dream to construct the temple. But the narrative illustrates what God was willing to do for His people when they and their king were totally committed to Him. David is depicted as the ideal king to whom God gave victories over their enemies. These enemies included the Philistines (18:1; 20:4–8), Moab and Zobah (18:2–11), Edom (vv. 12–13), and the Ammonites and the Syrians (19:1—20:3).

18:1–13. Victories over the Philistines, Moab, Zobah, and Edom. While the previous Philistine wars had been largely defensive (14:8–17), David now decided to eliminate their threat definitively (18:1), but he would have to face them again (20:4–8). The parallel in 2 Samuel 8 contains an unusual expression; modern versions tend to translate "Metheg Ammah" (lit. "the bridle of the capital") in the light of the present passage in Chronicles, as meaning that David took the control, until then exercised by Gath, of smaller towns of the area. Next fell the kingdoms of Moab (v. 2) and Zobah (in Syria, vv. 3–8). Their booty and/or tribute were dedicated or set aside (v. 11) for the future temple (vv. 2, 9–11; regarding other large numbers, see 1 Chronicles 5:21–26). Horses were admired and feared by ancient peoples as war equipment (Job 39:19–25; Is. 31:1; Jer. 4:13), but they were not to take up too much of the nation's budget (Deut. 17:16; Josh. 11:6, 9), at least until the flourishing times of Solomon (2 Chr. 9:25). David, however, was already able to establish a small chariot corps; the rest of the horses were hamstrung (1 Chr. 18:4), perhaps in order to sell them to other peoples for their meat but to disable them as war equipment.

The successful campaign against Edom (vv. 12–13) was led by one of the generals of David's kingdom, Abishai (v. 12), a brother and lieutenant of Joab (19:11). This piece of information is not recorded in 2 Samuel 8:13 or in the superscript to Psalm 60, again underlining the access of the Chronicler to records that supplement other accounts in the Bible. Although the Lord was giving David victories, he was well-organized for the task (1 Chr. 18:14–17). He administered his kingdom wisely (v. 14), following mainly an Egyptian model of organization. Abimelech the son of Abiathar (v. 16) remained in charge of the liturgy for the ark, close to the king. The Cherethites and the Pelethites (v. 17; perhaps Cretans and Pelasgians) were bodyguards from other countries, without local ties, as an added security measure. David's sons (v. 17) were administrative officers or chief officials for the king. Second Samuel 8:18 refers to them using a Hebrew word usually employed for "priests"—*kohanim*—suggesting that they may have performed some priestly functions, unless the term was also used to designate a secular administrative responsibility as suggested by the term used in the Chronicles.

19:1—20:8. Victories over Ammon, Syria, and the Philistine Giants. Since the Ammonite king resorted to the aid of Syrian mercenaries (19:6–7), the conquest of Ammon seems to have taken place at an earlier time, before the occupation of Syrian lands by Israel (18:5–8). These were the first to flee (v. 14), as did their compatriots from beyond the Euphrates (v. 18; on other large numbers, see 1 Chronicles 5:21–26). The crown of the "king" in Rabbah (20:1–2; present day Amman), which was taken from his head (suggesting the latter was immobile), probably refers to the Ammonite idol Milcom (1 Kin. 11:5) as read by the LXX and other ancient versions (the Hebrew letters of the name "their king" spell precisely the name of the god). This explains how such a crown might have reached the unwieldy weight of one talent (75 lb or 34 kg); David probably made use of a part of this crown with only a precious stone (singular in the Hebrew text). The king had stayed at Jerusalem (1 Chr. 20:1) where the scandalous affair with Bathsheba took place (2 Sam. 11:1–5) as well as his order to have Uriah killed by the Ammonites (2 Sam. 11:16). The Chronicler omits these incidents, probably because he is concerned only with official acts of government and institutions that emphasize the glory of David's reign.

The destruction of the Philistine giants was not a definite campaign, but a collection of incidents that took place at different times (1 Chr. 20:4–8). In one of them we read about the death of Lahmi, the brother of Goliath the Gittite, by the hand of Elhanan the Bethlehemite (v. 5). By a mechanical mistake, our present copies of 2 Samuel 21:9 misread the two Hebrew letters meaning "brother of" and have Elhanan killing Goliath himself, thus appearing to contradict 1 Samuel 17. This again underlines the value of the Chronicles for comparison with other sources.

21:1–30

The Choice of a Site for the Temple

As we have seen, the Chronicler usually omits the mistakes of David in order to emphasize his role as king and his connection with the temple. But here we find a narrative about a serious mistake made by him, namely, the story of the census. This narrative is likely included here precisely because its resolution led to finding a place for the building of the temple.

21:1–6. The Military Census. Taking a census was abominable (v. 6) because a complete list of men of military age and fitness indicated reliance on human power rather than on divine intervention since in this case it does not appear that anyone paid a ransom (see Ex. 30:11, 16). The Chronicler has Satan inciting David to take the census (1 Chr. 21:1), while 2 Samuel 24:1 attributes this incitement to the "anger of the Lord" (see below, "Satan and David"). Checks and balances in international power are, of course, fully in the hand of the Lord (Dan. 4:34–35). There is also a disagreement in terms of quantities with 2 Samuel 24:9, which may be explained by supposing that in our passage the tribe of Judah, mentioned separately (1 Chr. 21:5), is included in the total, while in 2 Samuel it is an additional five hundred thousand. In any case, David did not count the tribe of Levi (v. 6), which was exempted from mandatory military service in order to guard the temple and maintain public worship (Num. 1:47–49). Probably for the same reason he did not count the tribe of Benjamin, in whose territory the worship center of Gibeon was located.

Satan and David

The mention of Satan in 1 Chronicles 21:1 has been a point of debate among scholars. There are two main reasons for this. First, the parallel account in 2 Samuel 24:1 does not mention Satan but speaks about God's wrath against David that incited him to take the census. Second, it is debated whether the Hebrew *satan* in 1 Chronicles is a proper name (Satan) or a function (an adversary).

1. Usage of the Term "Satan." The Hebrew word *satan* means "adversary, opponent" and is used to designate human beings who functioned as adversaries or opponents of other persons, be they military or personal (e.g., 1 Kin. 11:14, 23). It also designates the heavenly being who opposed Balaam's conduct (Num. 22:22). Concerning the absence or presence of the definitive article, some scholars have argued that in Hebrew grammar when a noun is accompanied by the definite article ("the") the noun is not a proper name but rather refers to a particular function. In the case of the Hebrew word *satan*, it would simply designate a person or being who functions as the adversary/the opponent. They believe that this is the meaning of the term in Job (1:6; 2:1) and Zechariah (3:1) where the article is used. But other scholars have argued that it is precisely when the noun is accompanied by the definite article that it functions as a proper name. The prevailing view is that in 1 Chronicles 21:1, where the article is omitted, *satan* is a proper name and designates a being called Satan, the adversary, as is the case in the NT (e.g., Mark 4:15).

2. Linguistic Connections. There are clear linguistic connections among Job 2:1, Zechariah 3:1, and 1 Chronicles 21:1. In Chronicles Satan stood (*'amad*, "to stand") against Israel and incited (*sut*, "to incite") David to sin. The use of the verb "to stand" (*'amad*) together with the noun *satan* is found in Zechariah 3:1, establishing a connection between the two passages. In both cases he was opposing the people of God. The verb "to incite" (*sut*) appears in conjunction with the noun *satan* in Job 2:3, also establishing a connection between these two passages. In Job, he incited God against Job, and in Chronicles he incited David against God. It could be suggested that since the author of the Chronicles is aware of the other two passages his understanding of the term *satan* reflects the meaning of the term in the other two books. For him, *satan* in his two other sources designates a proper name. In other words, he is not contrasting his usage with that of the other two passages; the presence or absence of the article is irrelevant. The connection shared by the three passages makes it highly unlikely that what we have here is part of the evolution of a term from a function to the proper name of God's archenemy. The OT indicates that there is a being who opposes God and His plans for His people (e.g., Gen. 3:1–5; Lev. 16:8–10, 20–22; Job 1–2; Is. 14:12–14; cf. Rev. 12:9).

3. The Narratives in Chronicles and Samuel. As we have seen, the role of Satan is quite clear in the three previous passages. First, he opposed God's plan for His followers, thus becoming His adversary. This is particularly the case in Job where he opposed the way God dealt with Job. Second, he incited people to disobey God and break away from Him. Third, he wanted evil things for God's people. According to Chronicles, Satan was standing against Israel; that is to say, he was an enemy who opposed Israel, and in order to damage Israel he incited David to take a census, fully knowing that the people would suffer as a result. In the narrative, the opponent of Satan was Joab, who advised David not to do this because it would bring guilt upon the people. But Satan had blinded David, and he was unwilling to listen. The nature of the sin is not clear in 1 Chronicles. Why was taking a census a national sin? Censuses where a ransom price was paid were taken in Israel without any penalty (e.g., Ex. 30:11–16). Perhaps, as some scholars have suggested, the difference here is that this was a military census taken without divine approval, and therefore it expressed reliance on human military power. It was a breach of the covenant relation with the Lord.

If this is the case, then the difference with the account of the event in 2 Samuel 24:1 is not of major significance. The wrath of the Lord, mentioned in that verse as the cause for the census, is now clarified as God having allowed Satan to incite David to take the census. In His anger God did not intervene to protect David. Nevertheless, God was still the Sovereign Lord who brought the plague to an end and used the experience to lead David to find a place for the building of the temple. He did not give Satan complete control over His followers (see Job 1:12; 2:6). In the process, we see David acting as the ideal king who, after sinning, repented and sought forgiveness from the Lord.

Once David recognized his sin, there was confession followed by divine punishment (1 Chr. 21:7–15). In contrast to Saul, David seemed always willing to accept his sin and make amends. He said to God, "I have sinned greatly" (v. 8), a confession motivated by the ministry of Gad, David's seer (v. 9; cf. 1 Sam. 22:3–5; 1 Chr. 29:29). While God grants forgiveness, a forgiven sin may still have consequences during earthly history. David was granted, however, the privilege of choosing between three divine judgments (vv. 11–13). They were to last either three years, three months, or three days (v. 12). This consistent "threeness" of divine judgments indicates that the Chronicles preserve the best reading in contrast to 2 Samuel 24:13, which reads "seven years" (although some translations follow the LXX, which has "three years"). In the course of the ensuing pestilence, the Lord looked and relented (v. 15).

21:16–30. Divine Choice for the Site of an Altar. A heavenly vision showed David the presence of the Angel of the Lord (v. 16) in terms reminiscent of the experience of Balaam (Num. 22:31). As a response to the intercessory prayer of David and the elders (representatives of the threatened city), he was commanded to build an altar at the place where the angel had received the order to stop the slaughter (1 Chr. 21:18; cf. v. 15). Approaching God must always remind us of both His mercy and His judgment. It is the divine intention that judgment would lead to salvation. The private property rights of an Israelite were inviolable; if sold, land would eventually revert to the family. David availed himself of this unique opportunity to buy from a non-Israelite, a Jebusite, so that the site for the temple would be completely independent from any particular tribe or Israelite family. While Ornan ("Araunah" in 2 Sam. 24:16), mindful of the high investiture of David (1 Chr. 21:21), wanted to donate it for such a sacred use, David insisted on paying full price (v. 24). Its amount varies between here and 2 Samuel 24. In 2 Samuel 24:20, fifty shekels of silver was the means of payment, but it refers only to the floor of the threshing place, while according to 1 Chronicles 21:25, David paid six hundred pieces of gold for the whole sanctuary mount plus the animals for the burnt offering.

The erection of the altar (21:26–30) was a sensitive act because God had authorized only one altar at a time (Deut. 12:8–14), and the altar at Gibeon was still functioning (1 Chr. 21:29). However, God had also made provision for moving the altar site, through a special revelation, to any place where He would cause His Name to be remembered (Ex. 20:24). Hence 1 Chronicles takes pains to show such revelation by means of the fire from heaven (the usual Hebrew idiom for lightning) which ignited the offering, as well as the success of the entreaty to stop the pestilence (1 Chr. 21:26–28; not found in 2 Sam.) and to make clear that the Gibeon altar was not accessible to David (1 Chr. 21:30).

22:1–19
Preparations for the Temple

David acknowledged that God had chosen this particular site for the house of the Lord God (v. 1) and started preparations to build the temple. He began to accumulate materials for the structure, to organize the work of construction (chap. 22) and the services in the future temple (chaps. 23–26). He even defined the overall organization of the kingdom with an eye on responsibilities related to public worship (chap. 27). Indeed, the whole period of David's reign is told from the viewpoint of the conception of God's temple (chaps. 10–29). Chapter 22 lists the gathering of workers and materials for the construction of the temple (vv. 2–5) and contains David's speeches to Solomon (vv. 6–16) and to the elders (vv. 17–19).

22:2–5. David Gathers Workmen and Materials. David resorted to recruiting foreigners (v. 2), the defeated original inhabitants of Canaan still living on the land, or landless immigrants. Stones are the ubiquitous building material in the Holy Land, usually in their natural state, but for monumental constructions like the temple they were shaped (v. 2) into regular blocks. Iron joints would reinforce the solidity of such walls (v. 3). Bronze and cedar (vv. 3–4) would also contribute to a temple which had to be exceedingly magnificent, famous, and glorious throughout all countries (vv. 4–5).

22:6–19. David's Speech to Solomon and the Leaders. David charged Solomon with the sacred task of building the temple (vv. 6–10), with an induction formula that Moses had used with Joshua (Josh. 1:6–9), and that David would later use again (1 Chr. 28:20). This included encouragement (v. 13), description of the task (v. 10), and invocation of God's assistance (v. 9). There is a reference to the reason for denying David the privilege of building the temple. It was not just that David could not build it because of the wars surrounding him (1 Kin. 5:3), but it was also because he had made himself unfit because he shed much blood (1 Chr. 22:8). A temple should not be a monument to the victories of a conqueror, nor a reminder of the spoils plundered from many lands (as was the case in Egypt and other ancient cultures), but a "house of prayer for all nations" (Is. 56:7). The figures in 1 Chronicles 22:14 may seem very high. They indicate about 3,600 tons of gold (3,265,865 kg; 220 cubic yards) or the equivalent of a wall of solid gold 3 feet high (0.9 m), 3 feet wide (0.9 m), and 660 feet long (201.2 m). However, we have no particular evidence to suggest that these figures are unreliable.

Joshua had established the sanctuary at Shiloh (Josh. 18:1), which was to function as the temple of the Lord once the land was *kabash* ("subdued," "brought under control," or "conquered") by the defeat of the Canaanites and Israel was at rest (e.g., Josh. 22:4; 23:1). In a similar way, after David defeated the Philistines and other enemies who surrounded Israel, the land was *kabash* ("subdued," "brought under control," or "conquered") and brought to rest (1 Chr. 22:18). Now he was ready to promote the construction of the temple. Leaders, therefore, were exhorted to collaborate with the project. The actual dwelling of God is in heaven, as this text and many others indicate (e.g., 2 Chr. 7), yet His name resided in this temple (1 Chr. 22:19; 2 Chr. 2:1); it was there that He revealed Himself to them.

23:1—26:32
Organization of Temple Services

The actual organization of the temple services took place in David's old age, soon after he made his son Solomon king (v. 1). Though using very ancient records, the Chronicler deals with the clergy following the order of Ezekiel (Ezek. 44), who had predicted, during the Exile in Babylon, a future ideal temple. The Chronicler identifies the Levites based on their genealogy; their responsibilities were assigned (1 Chr. 12:1–32). The divisions of the priests were organized (24:1–19), and the Chronicler identifies other Levites (24:20–31). The musicians were organized (25:1–30) as well as the gatekeepers, the treasurers (26:1–28), and the officials and judges (26:29–33).

23:1—24:31. Levites and Priests. Since they had not been included in the military census, their numbers were now determined (21:6). Following the prescriptions of Numbers 4:3, those who were thirty years old or older were to do the work in the sanctuary (1 Chr. 23:3), but in view of the fact that they would no longer have to carry heavy objects the minimum age was later reduced to twenty years (23:24; Ezra 3:8). They would assist the priests in working on the temple of the Lord (1 Chr. 23:4, 28–31), as musicians (vv. 23:5, 30) and temple guards (gatekeepers; v. 5). They would also help the Israelites during sacrifices (v. 31). They were organized according to the three branches of the tribe (v. 6).

A new list of priestly lineages is provided in this passage (cf. 6:49–53; 9:10–12). Ahimelech (or Ahimelek), the high priest from the line of Ithamar and Zadok from Eleazar's, aided David in forming their appointed offices of service (24:3). While Ithamarites contributed eight lineages, and Eleazarites sixteen, the resulting twenty-four orders of priests are not classified as belonging to one or the other line. One may suppose that even numbers up to sixteen correspond to Ithamarites, and all others to Eleazarites (v. 6). Their exalted status as officials of the sanctuary and officials of God is noted (v. 5). The list of Levites in vv. 20–31 mostly parallels that of chapter 23, except in two cases. In the line of Merari, the branch of Jaaziah is added (v. 26), and in the line of Gershon, the son of Levi is missing (but not the lineage of Gershon the son of Moses; v. 20; cf. 23:16). One further generation is usually added to each lineage, again illustrating the use of different records.

25:1–31. The Musicians. These were selected by David and the commanders (v. 1) or chiefs of the temple service (24:6). Most translations read "army commanders," but the Hebrew word *tsaba'* can be translated in various ways, including in reference to the sanctuary service (Num. 4:3). Apparently three main lines of Levites were represented among these singers and players of stringed instruments and cymbals (1 Chr. 25:1): (1) Asaph (v. 2) from the line of Gershon (6:39, 43; see 15:19; 16:4, 7); (2) Jeduthun (v. 3), also called Ethan, from the line of Merari (6:44; 15:17, 19); and Heman (vv. 4–5) from Korah's line (6:33; 15:17, 19; 16:41–42). They were to "prophesy" with music (25:1–2), which probably means that they were to sing temple hymns that were originally written under divine inspiration (see 29:30). The distribution of names of family heads among the lineages is not totally random (25:9–31). It seems as if they decided by drawing lots that the lineage of Asaph should appear first, and then, alternately (every other item), names were drawn from his line until all were assigned. The second lot fell to Jeduthun, and henceforward every other item was from that line until all its names were drawn. After finishing with the sons of Asaph, the names alternated between the lines of Jeduthun and Heman, and once the names from Jeduthun were exhausted, the remainder came from the line of Heman.

26:1–32. Gatekeepers, Treasurers, and Officials and Judges. The tribe of Levi was peculiarly warlike (Gen. 49:5–7; Ex. 32:25–29), and this skill was given expression in their temple guards. If Levites did not regularly participate in war, it was not because they were not supposed to be involved in defense activities but because the temple itself needed permanent defenders (in antiquity, temples concentrated a large amount of riches, coveted by robbers and raiders) and crowd control personnel. Those assigned to this task had duties to fulfill in the Lord's temple (1 Chr. 26:12). The treasurers (vv. 20–28) appear immediately after the "gatekeepers" probably because they needed the support of those guards. Some were in charge of the treasuries of the house (or temple) of the Lord (v. 22) and received regular tithe and offerings (23:28–29), while others kept track of items like dedicated things (26:26), such as treasure collected in wars since the times of Samuel, Saul, David, and their respective generals (v. 28). In Israel, Levitical cities and city sections served as the judiciary (see 6:54–81). Special officials served also as judges over Israel outside the Jerusalem temple area (26:29), perhaps in rural areas, and others on the west side of the Jordan, away from Israel's heartland, both for all the Lord's work and in the service of the king (26:30). This shows the wide spectrum of duties that fell to the Levites once they did not have to carry the sanctuary any longer.

27:1–34

Administration of the Kingdom

As explained previously (see chap. 22), the institutions created by David did not just support the needs of the crown but also the religious needs of the people; they all contributed to the development of the temple. The administration of the kingdom involved military divisions (vv. 1–15), tribal leaders (vv. 16–23), administrators of the properties of the king (vv. 25–31), and a royal council (vv. 32–34).

27:1–24. Military Divisions and Tribal Leaders. Some of the names of the mighty men of David (11:10–47) reappear here, but as captains of monthly relays of army/military divisions (27:1). In this way the king did not need to pay a standing army, and while not all the men needed to serve in full-time active duty roles during their turn, the kingdom enjoyed some measure of protection. Though hereditary divisions such as tribes can be dangerous in a united monarchy, it is clear that David could not do without the traditional tribal structure of the nation, if for no other reason than to supply him with the "thousands" needed for the military divisions (vv. 16–23). But that structure was altered: some tribes (Asher, Gad) had no leaders, while other tribes were subdivided (Manasseh: east and west; Levi: Aaronites and the rest of the clans). The functions of these leaders were clearly related to furnishing men for the royal service. Notice that vv. 23–24 justify the absence of concrete figures for each tribe. David now trusted the promise of the God of countless Israelites, no doubt with the help of the pestilence that interrupted his census (v. 24 and chap. 21). The manifestation of God's wrath made it impossible for Joab to complete the census; consequently, official figures were not available.

27:25–34. Managers of Crown Properties and the Royal Council. There is no indication that Israelites paid taxes under David. His expenses seem to have been defrayed from the product of royal lands: grains (v. 26), vineyards (v. 27), olive and sycamore trees (v. 28), cattle and other herds (v. 29), beasts of burden (v. 30), and various flocks (v. 31). Such production required skillful management, so David brought specialists from abroad when necessary, such as Ishmaelites to manage the camels and sheep (vv. 30–31). Part of these lands may have been acquired through conquests.

A small cabinet of five members seems to have helped David make important decisions. Verse 34 refers to Jehoiada, who succeeded Ahithophel, David's adviser, after his suicide; this is the closest the Chronicler comes to reporting the rebellion of Absalom (2 Sam. 15–19), to whom a counselor had given intelligent advice, but which was fortunately undone by the disinformation of another counselor, Hushai (1 Chr. 27:34).

28:1—29:30

Successor and Temple Readiness

David is reported to have made his son Solomon king (i.e., designated him officially as an heir) in 23:1, though he was already thinking of him as such in 22:5. In this last speech, David gave specific instructions concerning the construction of the temple to the leaders and to his son. He handed to Solomon the plans for the construction of the temple and financial resources (28:1–8), exhorted the young king to be courageous (vv. 9–10; cf. 29:1), and provided offerings for the temple (28:11—29:5). The leaders of the people also provided offerings for sacrifices and for the building (29:6–9). First Chronicles concludes with a hymn of praise and a prayer by David (vv. 10–20), the anointing of Solomon as king (vv. 21–25), and a summary of the reign of David (vv. 26–30).

28:1–21. The Speech. The public speech was in general similar to the one given in the palace (22:6–16). The first part had the purpose of providing a smooth transition between the reigns of David and Solomon. Just as there was no direct mention of the rebellion of Absalom (see commentary on 27:25–34), so was no mention made of Adonijah's, or the intrigues of Nathan and Bathsheba in order to secure the throne for Solomon (1 Kin. 1–2). Overall, the picture in the Chronicles is that of a peaceful transition, supported by "all Israel" (1 Chr. 29:24–25). This is not because the author wants to hide facts (he assumes many of his readers know the stories in Samuel and Kings, and refers all readers to them) but because he wants to underline the essential facts from a religious point of view.

29:1–20. The Offerings, the Hymn, and the Prayer. A key to a successful collection appeal is to show that those promoting it are also sacrificing in order to contribute. David showed that he had dedicated not only the treasure taken in wars but his own property (v. 3). Things he dedicated included not only precious metals but also quality woods and materials for flooring and mosaics (v. 2). David then offered a prayer, which began with thanksgiving for the God-given opportunity of contributing to His cause (vv. 10–15). This thanksgiving in turn started with reflection on the majesty of God: His kingdom (v. 11e) and power and glory (v. 11b). This composition was, indeed, the source of the liturgical conclusion of the Lord's Prayer (Matt. 6:13). It ends contrasting such majesty with the transitory nature of humanity, a passing shadow and without hope (1 Chr. 29:15). Hopelessness seems to be the natural condition of humans. After acknowledging that in giving offerings the people of God were only returning to Him what He had given them (vv. 16–17), David interceded for Israel and Solomon. What was needed, above anything else, was a heart that was *shalem* (an adjectival form of the noun *shalom*—"peacefulness," "wholeness"), that is, a completely loyal or wholehearted commitment to trust in God and obey His instructions (vv. 18–19). This being a public prayer, it was followed by the response of the entire assembly, who bowed and prostrated themselves (29:20).

29:21–30. Solomon and Zadok Anointed: Succession of the Monarchy. The next day, the assembly confirmed (or proclaimed for a second time; v. 22) Solomon as heir to the throne (which he temporarily occupied as part of the designation ceremony; 29:22–23) and Zadok as acting high priest (Abiathar, though still alive, had fallen in disgrace after the rebellion of Adonijah; 1 Kin. 1:25). The anointing was accompanied by sacrifices for all Israel (1 Chr. 29:21). The Chronicler recognizes again a reign of David in Hebron, which he does not detail (see commentary on 3:1–9); he subsumes these seven years under the forty years of his reign over all Israel (29:26–27). Actually, the reign in Hebron had been only "over Judah" (2 Sam. 5:5), but the Chronicler is here emphasizing David's long life of riches and honor. The civil war in times of Esh-Baal/Ishbosheth was only a minor detour in that long and glorious march. Recognition is also given to sources in the books of Samuel, Nathan, and Gad (1 Chr. 29:29), authors who may indeed have had a hand in the composition of the history in our present books of Samuel and Kings, which have a definite prophetic perspective. The kingdoms of the lands (v. 30) may be a reference to those conquered by David (see chaps. 18–20). First Chronicles, like every book in the OT, closes leaving the reader with the expectation of more divine activity in the history of God's people. In this case, the people expectantly looked forward to the building of the temple as a center of worship and atonement.

The Temple in Chronicles

The topic of the temple in Chronicles runs from the beginning to the end of the book. In the genealogies we find a significant amount of material dedicated to the tribe of Levi and the work of priests and Levites (1 Chr. 6:1–80; 9:10–34). At the close of the book, Cyrus states that the Lord God of heaven commanded him to build a temple (lit. "house") for Him in Jerusalem (2 Chr. 36:23). In between these two textual segments, we find the history of the interaction of the kings of Judah, the people, and the temple. The genealogies also assign a significant amount of attention to King David. The tribe whose genealogy is, arguably, more carefully described than others is that of Judah (1 Chr. 2:3–55; 4:1–23), from which David came, and within it the family of David receives significant attention (3:1–24). The genealogy of King Saul and his death are mainly a foil to prepare the way for the rise of the ideal king of Israel, David (10:1–14). The theology of the temple in the books of Chronicles is worth exploring because of its connections with the kings and the people of Israel and their final fate.

1. David and the Temple. After the conquest of the city of Jerusalem, David manifested his personal devotion to the Lord by bringing the ark of the covenant to the city (1 Chr. 13:1–14). He recognized that the success of his role as king was determined by his commitment to the Lord manifested in his concern for properly handling the symbols of His presence and by obedience to the laws that regulated proper worship. Early in his career David realized that following the laws related to the sanctuary services was of supreme importance. The drastic failure of his first attempt to move the ark taught him that success was related to obedience to the divine will. In the second attempt, David followed the biblical directives and was successful (15:1–29). This pattern of success determined by submission to the cult is used throughout Chronicles to evaluate the reign of the different kings. David's practice would become the model.

The capture of the city of Jerusalem instilled in David the desire to build a temple to the Lord—a responsibility of kings throughout the ANE. He wanted for God the best house he could build (17:1; 22:5). But God surprised him by promising David that God would build a house (dynasty) for him that would last forever; one of his sons would always sit on the throne of Israel (17:10–14). David would not build the temple, but his son, Solomon, would do it (17:4, 12; 22:5). However, David would prepare everything needed for the construction, but the Lord Himself would choose the place and provide the *tabnit* (see Ex. 25:8–9) or model to be used in the construction. The first He did by manifesting Himself to David on Mount Moriah (1 Chr. 21:16, 18; 2 Chr. 3:1; 7:12; 12:13) and the second by revealing the plans for the building (1 Chr. 28:19; 2 Chr. 29:25). Thus, the temple and its services were invested with unquestionable divine authority.

David bought the land where the temple would be built (1 Chr. 21:18–30) and gathered everything Solomon would need for the building (22:1–4, 14–16; 29:2–9). He also organized the work of the priests (24:1–19) and Levites (23:1–32; 24:20–31) as musicians (25:1–31), gatekeepers (26:1–19), and treasurers (26:20–32). David encouraged his son to build the temple and to obey the laws of God (22:13). The reference here to these decrees, statutes, or judgments is not only to the moral law but more specifically to the law related to the sanctuary services (1 Chr. 16:40; 2 Chr. 23:18; 31:2–3). David established the foundation for the proper worship of the Lord in the place the Lord had chosen for this purpose. The future of the nation and of the Davidic dynasty would depend on their submission to the worship of the Lord in His temple according to the instructions He gave them. Temple, king, and nation had been permanently united.

2. Solomon and the Temple. The responsibility for the actual construction of the temple fell to Solomon, and he performed the task in perfect obedience to the instructions God gave to David. His first recorded action was to go to Gibeon, where the sanctuary was located, to worship the Lord and seek His guidance (2 Chr. 1:3–6). He then proceeded to build the temple on Mount Moriah (3:1—5:1). Finally the ark of the covenant was brought into the Most Holy Place of the new temple (5:2–12) and, as the Levites played their musical instruments praising the Lord for His goodness, mercy, and faithful love (v. 13), the glory of the Lord filled the house, thus sanctifying the temple (v. 14). The Lord was again residing among His people as His kingdom.

Solomon's prayer of dedication is theologically rich and closes with an invitation to God to arise and come to His resting place (6:41; 1 Chr. 17:5–6). At that moment fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the Lord filled the temple (2 Chr. 7:1). The people bowed down to their majestic and powerful God and worshiped and praised Him. In a sense the experience of the people at Sinai was being repeated, but this time the Lord was moving from the tent of meeting to a temple made of stone: a permanent dwelling. Soon after this, God appeared to Solomon once more in answer to the dedicatory prayer.

God promised Solomon that He would establish his throne and kingdom, as He had promised David (7:18). But this promise was always conditional. Solomon was expected to obey God's laws (v. 17), with an emphasis primarily on obedience to the laws related to the temple services. God explained to him that if he disregarded His commands and worshiped other gods, Israel would be deported and the temple destroyed (7:19). This was an explicit statement regarding the theological, political, and social centrality of the temple in the life of God's people. As a result of disregarding proper worship in the temple, the gifts of the dynasty of David, the land, and the temple would be withdrawn from the people. The future of all was dependent on serving the Lord according to His will in His holy temple (v. 28). What made Israel the people of God was the presence of the Lord in His temple.

3. Temple and Kings. Through David the Lord made clear that the primary responsibility of the king was to promote and care for the temple and its services, and to lead the people in the exclusive worship of the resident deity, the Lord. The success of the king and the nation were contingent on it. Solomon obeyed the Lord, and, like David, he and the nation prospered. Rehoboam abandoned the Lord (2 Chr. 12:1), and He handed the king over into the hands of the king of Egypt (v. 5). He was preserved because he humbled himself. The Northern Kingdom is considered by the Chronicler to be without hope because they built their own place of worship and appointed their own non-Levitical priests to serve on the high places in the worship of demons and the calf idols made by Jeroboam (11:15). It became like "the peoples of other lands" (13:9).

Second Chronicles identifies good kings, such as Abiyah (13:10–12), Asa (14:2–15), Jehoshapat (17:6–9), Jotham (27:2, 5–6), Hezekiah (29:35; 30:11–19), and Josiah, as those who undividedly served the Lord in His temple. Their fate was directly related to the temple worship. Some of the others had divided loyalties, including Joash (23:18), Amaziah (25:14–16), Uzzaiah (26:16–21), and Mannaseh (33:3–9, 12–17); they were ultimately abandoned by the Lord. Jehoram (20:33; 21:9–11), Ahaziah (22:2–4), Ahaz (28:2–4, 22–25), Amon (33:23–24), and Zedechiah (36:13–14) were unfaithful to the Lord and corrupted the temple services and/or ignored the worship of the Lord in His temple. The sin of these kings was not just idolatry but an idolatry that in Chronicles is explicitly connected to the temple of the Lord.

In the long run, most of the kings of Judah showed no respect for the temple of the Lord and sought other gods and built other places for worship. During all of this the Lord sent them warnings through the prophets because He had compassion for His people and His temple (36:15). But this was to no avail because they mocked God's messengers, despised His words, and laughed at His prophets until the Lord's anger arose against His people—"there was no remedy" (v. 16).

The defilement of the temple reached such a condition that God abandoned it, and since it was directly related to the survival of the Davidic monarchy and the nation, all three—monarchy, kingdom, and temple—came to an end. God handed them to the king of Babylon, who killed King Zedechiah, took to Babylon the articles of the house of the Lord and the treasuries of the kings, and finally burned the house of the Lord and all the palaces (2 Chr. 36:17–19).

The collapse of the temple, the monarchy, and the nation was a most disturbing occurrence for the people of God. It was not a return to the pre-monarchy period and experience but rather a return to their time of enslavement in Egypt when they were not a nation and did not have a king or a temple. The covenant had come to an end primarily because of the failure of the kings to support and seek the Lord in His temple. Why was the survival of the monarchy and of the nation so deeply connected to the temple services? Chronicles provides its own answer.

4. Temple and Theology. We have described how important the temple was for the future of the monarchy and the nation. Now we should examine what the Chronicler has to say about the theological foundation of that significance.

First, the temple was a unique space. There could not be another place like this because there is no other God like the Lord, who in fulfillment of His covenant promise to Israel chose to dwell among them (2 Chr. 6:14). But perhaps more important, what made the temple unique was that God selected the place and sanctified it with His presence (7:16); it is *His* "house" or temple (e.g., 1 Chr. 9:26–27; 23:28; 2 Chr. 3:3; 22:12). The biblical God localized Himself within the space of His creatures, thus indicating that He was a personal being who wanted, for a variety of reasons, to interact with His people. But the localized presence of God in His temple created a theological problem for Solomon: He could be confused with another creature. Solomon clarifies that this is not the case because if heaven itself cannot contain God, how much less an earthly temple (2 Chr. 6:18).

Created space is not sufficient to be a house for God, and yet He chose to dwell in heaven (e.g., vv. 21, 30) and in an earthly temple (v. 2). Solomon's prayer makes clear that the true dwelling of God is in heaven but that He has established a close connection between both dwellings. In the earthly temple resided the name of the Lord (v. 6; 20:8); that is to say, this is the place where the Lord revealed Himself to His people—the name stands for the Lord as the One who could be invoked and who would answer (20:9). This explains why it is said that the temple was built for the ark of the covenant (1 Chr. 17:1; 28:2; 2 Chr. 6:41), which was the visible symbol of God's presence by which He guided His people (1 Chr. 13:3–4).

The uniqueness of the temple as God's dwelling place also lies in the fact that it was the center that unified the people of Israel and the monarchy. The king and the people found in it a common nucleus around which they together sought and worshiped the Lord as one nation. Setting it aside would result in chaos and the disintegration of the nation. As a unifying center, the name of the God who resided there had power over the nations and when necessary defeated them or gave them victories (e.g., 2 Chr. 12:5; 14:12); He used them according to His purpose. The presence of God in the unique place had a universal impact that no other space could have. Any other place of worship in Israel that would dare to compete with the dwelling of God was to be destroyed. The kings were to destroy the high places that occasionally were built to worship God (20:33; 33:17) but that most of the time had been built to worship other deities (14:3, 5; 17:6; 31:1; 32:12). When other temples were built for Baal, the Lord reacted with anger and called for the destruction of such places (23:16–17). In Israel the very core of worship and service was centralized in the temple because the name of the Lord dwelt there.

Second, the temple was a place of prayer for all people. This is one of the most fundamental characteristics of the temple in Chronicles, as found in the prayer of Solomon. God put His name in the temple in order to hear the prayer that the king and the people would make "toward this place" (2 Chr. 6:20–21). These were mainly prayers of supplication coming from hearts that sincerely sought the Lord in times of oppression as a result of their sin (vv. 24–25) or when they simply needed His help (v. 34). It was through prayer that the deep connection between the heavenly and earthly dwellings of God was expressed. Solomon asked the Lord to listen from His dwelling in heaven when the people prayed to Him in the earthly temple and to answer their prayers and forgive them. The temple connected worshipers with the God whose ultimate residence is in the heavens and who made efficacious whatever took place in the earthly temple. Heaven and earth found a very particular point of contact in the temple (cf. John 1:14). It was from His dwelling in heaven that God granted forgiveness to His repentant people and delivered them from oppression (2 Chr. 7:14). In other words, the Name of the Lord, who resided in the temple, connected worshipers to the true dwelling of God in heaven. This privilege was also given to the aliens in Israel who came to the temple to pray. Solomon prayed for them specifically for the purpose that all peoples of the earth might come to reverence God and His name, recognizing this temple as belonging to Him (6:33).

Third, the temple was a place to offer sacrifices to God (7:12). The first human ritual act at the end of the dedication of the temple was placing sacrifices on the altar of the temple, and then as a divine response, "fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices" (2 Chr. 7:1). Sacrifices such as the burnt and peace offerings were offered primarily to express joy and gratitude and to thank the Lord for the many blessings received from Him (7:7–9). But in the case of sin, an atoning sacrifice was needed. It was the responsibility of the priests to make atonement for the sins of the people on the altar of burnt offerings and the altar of incense (1 Chr. 6:49). During his dedicatory prayer, Solomon asked God to listen to His people and to forgive their sins, but nothing was said about how that forgiveness was possible. The reformation initiated by Hezekiah indicates that this was related to atonement through the sin offering (2 Chr. 29:24). Here the Chronicler is unquestionably supported by the Levitical law regulating the services in the temple.

Fourth, the temple was a place of hope. Prayer presupposes the presence of hope in the human heart. In Chronicles, prayer was not taking the place of the sacrificial system, but it was emphasized in order to underline that genuine repentance should precede the sacrificial act. Nevertheless, since forgiveness was not the automatic result of sacrifices or prayers (6:39), the Lord was still ready to forgive His people under almost any circumstance. Even during the Exile and in the absence of the temple, if there was true repentance, the Lord would be willing to forgive His people from His heavenly temple (see 6:36–39). There was here a word of hope for the exiled returnees addressed by the Chronicler. They now knew that the Exile was the result of the desecration of the temple—the rejection of the Lord—but they also knew that the Exile was not the end of hope. Their return to the land was filled with hope because it showed that the Lord listened to their prayers. The temple needed to be built, and the Lord, in the absence of a Davidic king, had raised Cyrus, His servant, to initiate the process of reconstructing the temple as the first step in the reconstitution of His people. Perhaps in a veiled way the Chronicler is suggesting that the next thing was the coming of a Davidic king. The Lord was guiding His people from His heavenly dwelling. The past tragedy occasioned by the unwillingness of the kings and the people to seek the Lord in His temple resulted in the collapse of the nation, but now God was offering a new hope by locating Himself again in a new temple in the midst of His people (cf. Rev. 21:1–4). David recognized that all things in heaven and earth belonged to God—He is the great King, and He is exalted as head over all (1 Chr. 29:11).

2 CHRONICLES

INTRODUCTION

Title and Authorship. If 1 and 2 Chronicles represent a single volume (as they originally were) and are thus the same book that is referenced thirty-four times in 1 and 2 Kings and Esther, then the original title was the *Chronicles [or Record] of the Kings of Judah* (see 1 Kin. 14:29), and this would mean that the *Chronicles [or Record] of the Kings of Israel* (see 1 Kin. 14:19) has been lost. In the Hebrew Bible the title is *Matters [or Events] of the Days [or Times]*. The LXX called it *Things Omitted [or Left Aside]* and split it into two books. In the fourth century A.D., the title in the Latin translation (Vulgate) appeared as *Chronicles of the Whole of Sacred History*. During the early years of the reformation, Bibles used by both Protestants and Catholics included a shortened version of the Vulgate's title and retained the split of the LXX, resulting in the 1 and 2 Chronicles that we use today.

The books of Chronicles do not indicate who wrote them, though the Jewish Talmud has a statement suggesting that Ezra wrote a part of them. In 2 Chronicles the narrative essentially begins with Solomon's construction and dedication of the temple, and the book ends with the command to rebuild it (36:23). The incomplete thought at the end of 2 Chronicles (36:22–23) is repeated and completed at the beginning of Ezra (1:1–2) using an ancient composition technique that appears in other non-biblical documents. This technique (called "catch-lines") helped readers know that the two scrolls (tablets) were meant to be read together; but since the scroll (tablet) was not long enough, the narrative had to be continued on a new one. Thus, it seems that Ezra at least had a hand in the closing statement of the book of 2 Chronicles, if not much more. It is also clear that the author(s) relied on historical documents since it is impossible for anyone to have lived through the entire period. These documents are named as the books of the records of the kings of Israel (1 Chr. 9:1), King David (1 Chr. 27:24), Samuel the seer (1 Chr. 29:29), Nathan the prophet (1 Chr. 29:29), Gad the seer (1 Chr. 29:29), Shemaiah the prophet (2 Chr. 12:15), Jehu the son of Hanani (2 Chr. 20:34), the kings of Judah (2 Chr. 25:26), and perhaps even the Chronicles (or record) of the kings of Judah. These statements regarding references make it plain that much more was written about the kings of Judah than is recorded here, indicating that the selections that survive in 1 and 2 Chronicles were likely compiled to teach spiritual lessons.

Date. The closing statement of the book (the decree of Cyrus) can be dated to 537 B.C. Chronicles was designed to review Jewish history (the kingdom of Judah), which is why the kings of the Northern Kingdom of Israel are not recorded. Chronicles is the last book in the Hebrew Bible (coming after Ezra and Nehemiah), which suggests that it was written late. Also, in the genealogical section at the beginning of 1 Chronicles, information traces a family well into the Persian period (1 Chr. 3:19–24). Thus, the date for the composition of the final version of Chronicles must be after 537 B.C. with an understanding that some portions may have been written earlier.

Backgrounds. By the opening chapter of 2 Chronicles, David had died and Solomon had just been anointed king. The political struggle for the throne that is described in 1 Kings 1–2 is skipped in the narrative of 2 Chronicles 1, and instead the story of Solomon picks up where 1 Kings 3 begins—with Solomon's request for wisdom.

In 971 B.C. (the year that David died), there were no immediate threats to his kingdom from outside entities. To the north, Mesopotamia was entering a dark age. Assyria would not begin to become the strong empire that would dominate the political landscape in this region for almost sixty years. To the south, Egypt was at the beginning of the Third Intermediate period, with a king in the north (Siaman) and the high priest of Amun ruling the south, and thus it was not a threat to the outside world.

Theology and Purpose. If 2 Chronicles (along with 1 Chronicles) was written for the postexilic Jews, the purpose seems clearly to establish the kingdom of Judah in the land. To support this, the Hebrews are shown to be able to trace their ancestors back to Adam (1 Chr. 1:1). The genealogical section, in which the tribe of Judah is the first tribe presented (1 Chr. 4:1), ends with a review of those who lived in Jerusalem and those of the tribe of Levi who had responsibilities there (1 Chr. 9:2–34). Saul's reign is covered in a brief twenty-four verses (1 Chr. 9:35—10:14) in order to move quickly to David, who rose to the throne at that time (1 Chr. 10:14). From that point to the end of 2 Chronicles, the entire record is a history of David and his ruling descendents. By tracing this history (the good and the bad), the Jews would be able to demonstrate that the land was theirs and explain why they were captives returning (for more on this, see 1 Chronicles: Introduction).

COMMENTARY

1:1—9:31
SOLOMON'S REIGN

Second Chronicles concentrates on the lives of the kings who followed the model of David in terms of commitment to the Lord and to His temple. It begins with the realizations of the dream of David: building a temple for the God of Israel. The task had fallen, under divine guidance, into the hands of Solomon. The first nine chapters of this book narrate the life and accomplishments of the new king. In order for him to accomplish this most important task, God gave him wisdom (1:1–17). He then went on to build the temple (2:1—4:22) and to dedicate it to the service of the Lord (5:1–22). Finally, the main achievements of Solomon are narrated (8:1—9:31).

1:1–17
The Gift of Wisdom

Solomon inherited a kingdom appointed by God to accomplish great things for Him and His people. Guided by the Lord, David had unified it and organized its administration and its religious character. The next king, Solomon, would need wisdom and God's Spirit to lead the nation.

1:1–6. The Assembly at Gibeon. As soon as Solomon felt strengthened (i.e., secure) in his throne (in part after eliminating the enemies of David; cf. 1 Kin. 2), he organized a religious convocation for the nation at Gibeon (2 Chr. 1–3). This was the place where the only authorized altar remained (that of Bezalel, v. 5; Deut. 12; 16:2; 26:2; 31:11), even though the ark was now housed in Jerusalem. David had, in fact, used the latter altar site. The thousand burnt offerings (2 Chr. 1: 6) suggest that the Gibeon assembly was not only an inaugural celebration but also a means of assuring the people that the new king was fully devoted to the God of his father David. The people were represented by their leaders, including leaders of groups of thousands and those of hundreds (v. 2; for the significance of these units in order to understand the large numbers in Chronicles, see commentary on 1 Chr. 5:21–26; 12:23–40).

1:7–17. The Vision and the Power of Solomon. The prophetic dream reported in 1 Kings 3:5 is presented here as an appearance of the Lord in a night vision (2 Chr. 1:7). In antiquity, requests from the worshipers at the time of sacrifice were universally expected. In this case God Himself invited Solomon to express them. The wisdom granted to Solomon was multifaceted. First Kings 3:16–28 underlines his investigative acumen, while here it is connected with the design of the temple, as was the wisdom of Bezalel (Ex. 35:31). But the first expression of the wisdom of Solomon takes the form of financial and military powers. The Holy Land is the sole bridge connecting three land masses: Africa to the south, with Egypt then as a superpower; Asia Minor and lands further north in the Caucasus and Europe; and finally Syria and lands beyond it in Western Asia. The northern lands, with their vast steppes, were the cradle of the domestic horse, while Egypt was home to the best engineers of the times (notice the high price of the chariots; 2 Chr. 1:17). Solomon, thanks to David's conquests in the Holy Land and neighboring lands, was able to monopolize the trade of horses from the north and chariots from the south. Besides supplementing the equipment of Egyptians and Hittites with each other's production, he sold the complete outfits to the many Syrian (or Aramaean) kinglets (v. 17), which were in need of both horses and chariots.

2:1—4:22

Erection of the Temple

The brief introduction to this section states that Solomon was determined to construct the temple and his royal palace (v. 1). In the rest of the narrative, practically nothing is said about the construction of the royal palace, mainly because the Chronicler is interested in the temple. In order to begin the work, Solomon requested from Hiram, king of Tyre, construction materials and skillful workers (vv. 2–15). The rest of this section is concerned with the construction of the temple and its furnishings (3:1—4:22).

2:1–18. Correspondence with Hiram of Tyre. The conscription of laborers for the temple is a starting point for the narrative (vv. 1–2), though it actually took place later (vv. 17–18). Chronicles (unlike 1 Kin. 5:15–16) adds that they were aliens or foreigners, perhaps captives taken by David in neighboring lands (now "servants"; 1 Chr. 18:2, 6, 13, and esp. v. 4). Solomon requested materials and qualified workers for the temple from David's friend and ally in Tyre. He may have used as couriers the ambassadors sent to wish him well at his inauguration (1 Kin. 5:1–2). He detailed for Hiram the offerings and sacrifices to be performed in the temple (2 Chr. 2:4), mainly the daily services, and the theological reasons for the monumental scale of the construction (v. 5). Hiram obliged (v. 13) and sent Huram (or Huram-Abi or Huram, "my master" or "of my father"—*'abi* means "my father" and could be part of Huram's name or could refer to his position as "master craftsman," as some translations have it), the son of a woman from Dan (or Naphtali; 1 Kin. 7:14—there called Hiram).

3:1–17. General Layout of the Temple. Among Bible writers, only the Chronicler tells us that the temple was located on Mount Moriah. The term appears elsewhere only in Genesis 22:2, "the land of Moriah." The Hebrew root may be related to the action of "seeing." But here the term appears with an article (lit. "to build... on the Mount of the Moriah where the Lord had appeared [or let Himself be seen] to his father David"). One might even translate, "on the mountain view, where the Lord had been viewed by...David." In any case, the term connects the place with salvation, not only from the pestilence that was stopped abruptly in David's time but from Abraham's knife, which also was abruptly stopped by a command from the Angel of the Lord. The Chronicler does not date the start of the construction of the temple based on the era of the Exodus; he uses only the regnal date of the glorious King Solomon (2 Chr. 3:2; cf. 1 Kin. 6:1).

The foundation mentioned is that on which the Holy and Most Holy Places were to be erected. From this moment on, the temple of God would not be a portable house but a permanent one built on a foundation (e.g., 2 Chr. 6:5–10). The lavish finishing of the Holy Place was second only to that of the Most Holy Place (3:8–14). In antiquity, gold was used primarily for the sacred; this is why temples were often targeted by raiders. The cherubim were carved in relief on the walls (v. 7), and two of them were placed in the Most Holy Place (vv. 11–13), under whose wings the ark would be placed (chap. 5). The quantity of gold, though large (some 40 lbs [18 kg], close to an entire year of Solomon's revenue; 2 Chr. 9:13), is consistent with the gold-plated area (the walls of the temple alone amounted to about 9,687 ft. [900 m^2] or 44 lb. [20 kg] of gold per square meter, implying a very reasonable plate thickness, about .039 of an inch [1 mm]). The front pillars (3:15–17) are usually understood as freestanding fire cressets. The Jach(k)in and Boaz (lit. "May He establish" and "with strength") were typical ornamental features of Canaanite architecture also visible in the Hazor temple excavated in the 1950s.

4:1–8. The Temple Furnishings. Though the original altar of Bezalel was still available, it was too small for the proportions of the new temple. The new altar, more than fifteen feet (5 m) high, was probably accessed through steps. The Sea of bronze or cast metal (vv. 2–5) was probably so named because it was a large basin. Small bull-head pictures, three hundred in number (vv. 2–4), decorated the rim. The word *baths* is not the English word "baths" but refers to Hebrew units of liquid measure. The volume of 3,000 baths is equivalent to about 18,000 gallons (68,137 L). The difference in the number given here and that in 1 Kings 7:26 (2,000 baths) could be attributed to one of the following: (1) a simple copyist error; (2) a different value for the volume of a *bath* during the years between the writing of 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles; or (3) a different understanding of the shape of the Sea (hemispherical or cylindrical), which could affect how the volume was estimated. The shape of the Sea was probably both hemispherical and cylindrical, with vertical upper sides and a convex bottom. The twelve bull forms which emerged from the basin and supported it (or rather half-bulls; the hind legs were not needed; v. 4) may have represented the strength of the united twelve tribes, whose numbers would become "like the sand of the seashore" (Gen. 22:17; 32:12).

The description of the lavers or wash basins in 2 Chronicles 4:6 is more succinct than in 1 Kings 7:27–39 (see commentary on 2 Chr. 4:9–22). The rest of the sacred furnishings here often intrigue students of the passage: Solomon made ten lampstands of gold according to biblical specifications (v. 7; 1 Chr. 28:15; Jer. 52:19; contrast the single menorah of the tabernacle; Ex. 25:31–40) as well as ten tables to be distributed along the long sides of the Holy Place (2 Chr. 4:8). But then in 13:11 we read of a single lampstand and a single table for showbread in Solomon's temple. Note, however, that the passage speaks of furnishings *made* for the temple, not of articles later *present* there. This distinction is important, because 5:5 records that when the ark was brought from Gibeon to Solomon's temple it was accompanied by "all the holy furnishings that were in the tabernacle" of that place. Other than the bronze altar, which was outside, these "holy furnishings" were none other than the single lampstand (menorah), the single table for the showbread, and the incense altar. The latter is not mentioned here with things *made* by Solomon, but in the summary of 4:19–22, it does appear among furnishings of gold. The picture that is conveyed by this comparison is that Solomon added ten tables and ten lampstands to the Most Holy Place and put them along the walls (perhaps one table supporting each new lampstand), a reasonable addition in view of the much larger space in this temple. The original single table for showbread and the singular old menorah should have been kept in the middle, directly in front of the ark.

4:9–22. The Court, Bronze, and Gold. This section summarizes the articles made for the service of the outside altar and surrounding courts, including the decoration of the pillars described in 3:15–17. In contrast to articles for the temple proper, which were made of pure gold, the articles for outside use were made mostly of bronze and cast in the clayish earth of Succ(kk)oth and Zeredah/Zarethan (4:17; 1 Kin. 7:46) in the plain of Jordan. The emphasis on the use of pure gold is not about the opulence of the temple but about the willingness of the people, the king, and his leaders to joyfully provide the very best they had for the building of the temple (cf. 1 Chr. 29:3–9). The gold inside the temple was a display before the Lord of the generosity and gratitude of His people on the account of His loving-kindness.

5:1—7:22

Dedication of the Temple

The task was accomplished (5:1); it was now time to dedicate the temple to the Lord and to call the people to use it as their new place for worship (see "The Temple in Chronicles," p. 541). The ceremony began with bringing the ark from the city of David and the holy furnishings from Gibeon (2 Chr. 5:20—6:11). Then Solomon blessed the Lord and the people (6:3–11) and offered a dedicatory prayer (6:12–42) and solemn sacrifices (7:1–10). This section concludes with another vision of Solomon (7:11–22).

5:2–10. The Transfer of the Ark and Furnishings. The elders (v. 4), or extended family heads (v. 2), represented the entire nation. They came together for the Festival of Tabernacles in the seventh month (5:3; cf. 7:8–10; Lev. 23:33–36). While the ark was already in Jerusalem, the tabernacle and the rest of the sacred objects came from Gibeon (2 Chr. 5:5; 1:3). It is surprising that the ancient tabernacle was still in existence more than 480 years after the Exodus (1 Kin. 6:1). The tabernacle was now stowed inside Solomon's temple, which indicates that it must have also been sheltered in the temple in Shiloh (1 Sam. 1:9; 3:3). After the destruction of the temple in Shiloh (1 Sam. 4; Jer. 7:14), the tabernacle probably served again as a tent in Gibeon.

The carrying poles of the ark (2 Chr. 5:9) were more than thirty feet (9 m) long and could be seen from the entrance to the Holy Place. The writer then mentions that they are still there "today," in his time—"to this day." This latter expression is often seen as a mechanical transcription from 1 Kings 8:8. But there was no ark in the second temple after the Exile known by the Chronicler. The Jews believed that Jeremiah and his "companions" hid the ark and the tabernacle in a cave just before the Exile (2 Maccabees 2:4–5). The great length of the poles was related to the ceremonial carrying of the ark by many Levites. It is thus possible that the poles were left on the floor of the temple during the stealthy hiding operation, then carried away to Babylon and back, together with other golden objects (Ex. 25:14; Ezra 1:7), to be finally kept where they belonged, as a poignant memory of the missing ark.

5:11—6:11. God's Presence and Solomon's Blessing. In keeping with the character of the Chronicles, the role of the Levites and the priests is emphasized in these verses. During such a solemn occasion, all of them, not only the division on duty, were present and set themselves apart devotedly for the sacred events (5:11). When they praised God in perfect unison, His cloud of glory filled the building (v. 13). This thick or dark cloud (6:1) was not itself the glory but the shield that protected people from God's "unapproachable light" (v. 13; 1 Tim. 6:16). The presence of God sanctified the temple (2 Chr. 5:11—6:2). Blessing God's name for keeping His promises to Israel implied that the nation had been blessed by God and that Solomon anticipated God's blessings in the future (6:16–17). God had not expressed a preference for a particular tribe or family line before (vv. 5–6). Even though the sanctuary of Shiloh had also been a settled place for God's "name" (Jer. 7:12), as was now the temple (here 2 Chr. 6:6–10), it was in the territory of Ephraim, while the Gibeon sanctuary was on land belonging to the tribe of Benjamin. The present temple was a wholly new possession and so too was God's choice of the dynasty of David (v. 6). Thus the viewpoint of Chronicles, though focused on the past, also conveys clear hopes for the future, in spite of the loss of national independence.

6:12—7:10. Dedicatory Prayer and Sacrifices. Second Chronicles follows here 1 Kings 8:22–53 closely. One added detail is the platform that allowed Solomon to be seen and heard by the congregation, even when he knelt down in humility (2 Chr. 6:13). In the prayer the temple was basically defined as a place of prayer for God's people and for foreigners (vv. 24, 32). God's dwelling place is in heaven, and from there He listens to the prayers of His people made in the earthly temple. Solomon emphasized the divine disposition to listen to prayer and to answer it (see "The Temple in Chronicles," p. 541). The answer came in the form of forgiveness (2 Chr. 6:25, 27), protection (vv. 34–35), and restoration (vv. 36–39). Solomon recognized that the heaven of heavens cannot contain God (v. 18; 2:5), yet he prayed that His presence might come to dwell in the new temple (v. 41). The prayer closed with two statements: first, the temple is God's resting place, and, second, a request for God to be always with His Anointed (vv. 41–42). The king and the temple stood closely together. God's glorious presence, visible to the entire congregation (since the "dark cloud" inside the building, 5:11—6:2, was visible only to priests) came directly in response to this invocation (see 7:1–10). God manifested His approval of the new worship facilities in a spectacular way by sending fire from heaven (v. 1) as He had done during the inauguration of the sanctuary (Lev. 9:23–24) and when choosing the environs of Jerusalem as the new altar site (1 Chr. 21:26). In addition to the regular burnt offering already prepared on the altar (7:1), an astounding number of sacrificial victims were used to celebrate the dedication of the temple (vv. 4–5, 7). This celebration was shared by priests and the people in a sacred fellowship meal made possible through the peace offerings (v. 7). The celebration was enhanced by the music and liturgy performed by the priests, the Levites, and the congregation (vv. 3, 6) and lasted for the seven days of the Festival of Tabernacles (vv. 8–10). The temple was a place where sacrifices were offered to the Lord (see 2:4) and where the people rejoiced in His presence.

7:11–22. God's Response in a Night Vision. The signs of the cloud of glory in the temple and the fire lighted miraculously on the altar (5:3–14; 7:1) had been spectacular, but inarticulate. Miracles need to be complemented by God's revealed word. Hence, the Lord appeared again to Solomon in a night vision (as in 1:7) to deliver promises for obedience and a warning against disobedience. Here the Chronicler adds (cf. 1 Kin. 9:1–9) the famous words: "If my people... will humble themselves, and pray and seek my face...then I will hear from heaven" (2 Chr. 7:14). This is in keeping with the emphasis of Chronicles on immediate retribution (see 1 Chronicles: Introduction).

8:1—9:31

Grandeur of Solomon

In accordance with the general purpose of Chronicles, a backward look to the glorious reigns of David and Solomon was intended to instill a sense of national pride, much needed at the time. In this section we read about Solomon's achievements in the fortification of some cities (8:1–6), the wise use of human labor (vv. 7–11), his support of the temple (vv. 12–16), search for gold (vv. 17–18), the visit of the Queen of Sheba (9:1–12), and his wealth and death (vv. 13–31).

8:1–11. Urban Improvements. Since this passage begins similarly to 1 Kings 9:10–13, it has been assumed by some that they are describing the same event. If so, a question would arise: Were these cities given by Hiram of Tyre to Solomon (2 Chr. 8:2), or was it the other way around (1 Kin. 9:10–12)? According to 1 Kings 9:12–13, Hiram was not pleased with the cities which Solomon "gave" him and called them "the land of Cabul." This word is related to a verb meaning "bound" or "restricted," but it could also be related to the Hebrew phrase "like nothing"—which would thus show his disdain for the cities. Nonetheless, the king of Tyre sent 120 talents (9,000 lb) of gold to Solomon (2 Chr. 8:14). Clearly, this gesture of Hiram went beyond the initial contract for cedar wood and qualified labor that Solomon was to pay for with agricultural products (2 Chr. 2). Solomon did not sell those cities to Hiram, so all that gold needed to be repaid. One logical explanation to harmonize the two accounts, if they are referring to related events, is that Solomon borrowed those 120 talents of gold by using the twenty border towns as collateral. In such a case, the precise value of those cities did not need to be ascertained immediately, even if they left a poor impression. According to this explanation, when Solomon repaid the loan (perhaps from the gold which Huram's servants helped collect [see 1 Kin. 9:26–28]), he would have recovered the collateral from Hiram and then, as this account says, beautified those underestimated cities (2 Chr. 8:2).

He first fortified northern cities (8:3–4). The Syrian city of Zobah, which in the times of the Chronicler belonged to the Persian province of Hamath, had provided Ammon with mercenaries in the times of David (2 Sam. 10:6). Apparently it had also recently refused to pay the tribute due Israel (2 Sam. 8:9–10), so Solomon defeated and captured it (2 Chr. 8:3). Tadmor is Palmyra, an oasis in the desert of Syria, fortified by Solomon in connection with a chain of storage cities, or military units related to chariot warfare (v. 4; cf. v. 6). Solomon also fortified some cities. He fortified cities with walls, gates, and bars, and he outfitted all the cities such as Megiddo and Gezer with chariots and cavalry (1 Kin. 9:15–16), a fact that archaeology has documented (see commentary on 2 Chr. 9:13–31). Beth Horon and Baalath are in western Israel and were strengthened against a possible Philistine resurgence. For such an ambitious construction program, Solomon resorted to the conscription of forced labor among non-Israelites (2 Chr. 8:7–8). Ethnic Israelites served only as soldiers or overseers (vv. 9–10). He also took care to maintain his foreign queen and her retinue away from the holy city (v. 11; this detail is found only in this passage).

8:12–16. Support of Temple Worship. The king not only fulfilled the instructions of David, his father, regarding the organization of temple worship (v. 14), but he also himself provided an abundance of sacrifices for the required daily, weekly, and yearly rituals (v. 12). In this way his duty to the temple was completed (v. 16). First Kings 9:25 mentions a detail that the Chronicler does not, that is, that Soloman burned incense in the temple three times a year. This ritual, while legitimate in the temple area, was later moved to the unauthorized "high places" with schismatic and/or pagan worship (1 Kin. 13:2; 2 Kin. 16:2–4; 2 Chr. 34:25).

8:17–18. The Expeditions to Ophir. In addition to a conscripted labor force, Solomon's constructions required cash. A possible explanation for Solomon's interest in Eloth is that it was an important port in the heavy trade of copper out of Edom. Since there was a glut of bronze (which contains copper) in Israel (4:18), new markets were needed for this metal. Ophir was a good candidate: they were a Semitic people (1 Chr. 1:23) whose land was rich in gold (1 Chr. 29:4; Job 22:24; Ps. 45:9; Is. 13:12), and they were possibly located in Arabia or East Africa. In Africa, copper has always been used for personal adornment, so its rate of exchange for gold was more favorable than in the Mediterranean world. Solomon's agents were thus able to acquire 450 talents (15,309 lb) of gold from there (2 Chr. 8:18). Perhaps he used some of this to redeem the cities he had given as collateral to Phoenicia (see commentary on 8:1–11). Such trade required a port on the Red Sea close to the Edomite copper mines. Ezion Geber and Elath (v. 17) fit the description, located at the end of the Gulf of Aqaba. As in the case of the temple, the Phoenician friends of Solomon provided both equipment and technical skill (v. 18). They were at the time the foremost naval power of the Mediterranean world, and their ships dominated the metal trade from tin refineries in Spain and other distant lands.

9:1–12. The Praise of the Queen of Sheba. After David, a new star was rising in the commercial sky of the Middle East. Not only was Israel, the new power, controlling the land bridge between the continents (see commentary on 1:7–17), but it was also beginning to bypass the traditional Sabean spice route by using the Red Sea (see 8:16–17). As descendants of Sheba, the Sabeans were a Semitic people (Gen. 10:28) in the southwest of the Arabian Peninsula (Yemen), which receives some rain (this is the "happy Arabia," *Arabia felix*, of classical authors); they also built large dams and irrigation systems. In addition, their caravans of camels carried spices, incense, and other luxury products, both from their land and from other coasts of the Indian Ocean, to the Mediterranean world via Syria and Phoenicia.

The visit of their queen to Solomon, using one of those caravans over more than 1,500 miles (2,414 km), no doubt aimed to assess not only the new king but also Israel as a whole. She was very much impressed (2 Chr. 9:5–8), especially with Solomon's wisdom (v. 5), which she could appreciate in the areas of administration and organization (vv. 3–4). The Chronicler records her conveying the concept that God had made of Israel His throne: the king reigned there by divine election (v. 8; 1 Kin. 10:9). The exchange of gifts (2 Chr. 9:9, 12) implies some kind of trade agreement.

9:13–31. Solomon's Wealth and Death. More than twenty tons of gold (18 metric tons) entered annually the coffers of Solomon (v. 13), not counting the toll paid by merchants or local taxes raised by the governors of the land, here designated with a Persian word *pekhah* for the benefit of postexilic readers (v. 14; the term is the source of English word *pasha*). The shields of gold were made in two sizes and were treasury reserves under the close custody of one soldier each. The House (or Palace) of the forest of Lebanon refers to the palace of Solomon, which took him thirteen years to build, using a large amount of cedar from the Forest of Lebanon. Then there was the throne of the king (vv. 17–19). This was a large throne (which was white, as remembered in Rev. 20:11)—a great throne of ivory overlaid with pure gold—aimed at impressing foreign dignitaries. Its carved animal figures included lions (2 Chr. 9:17–19). Solomon's gold may have come from other sources besides Ophir (see 8:17–18). It was transported in *tarshish* ships (strong ships able to travel into the deep sea; cf. 1 Kin. 10:22; the term can also refer to a destination; 2 Chr. 9:21). The return trip brought silver, ivory, apes, and monkeys (some translations render the final term as "peacocks," some as "monkeys," and others as "baboons"; v. 21). "All the kings of the earth" (v. 23) who sought Solomon were those within Israel's sphere of influence (v. 26); the present (Heb. *minkhah*) that was brought every year (vv. 23–24) was a vassal due. Military bases (the chariot cities; vv. 25–28), which included ample facilities that have left traces for the archaeologists today (esp. in Hazor, Megiddo, and Gezer), reminded subject peoples (see vv. 23–24) that they could not easily throw off the yoke that Israel had imposed on them in the form of tribute and trade restrictions. In this way Israel enjoyed its heyday of splendor (vv. 26–28).

In accordance with its purpose, 2 Chronicles refrains from relating the apostasy of Solomon in the latter part of his life and the consequent divine displeasure (1 Kin. 11:1–25). The Chronicler is more interested in the public life of the king than in his private life. However, it does refer the reader interested in these aspects to other sources that detail them: the prophetic history of Israel composed by Nathan the prophet, Ahijah the Shilonite, and Iddo the seer (2 Chr. 9:29). These prophets are also mentioned as sources in the book of Kings, so this bibliographical reference in 2 Chronicles is either to our present book of Kings or to a common source of both.

10:1—36:23

KINGS OF JUDAH: VICISSITUDES OF GOD'S PEOPLE

The reigns of David and Solomon should have made the original readers justly proud. Those readers were also very much aware that disaster eventually struck the nation, but not before a series of ups and downs which, as 2 Chronicles shows next, are directly related to obedience or disobedience to God's covenant and in particular to how the temple was treated (see 1 Chronicles: Introduction). The life of the kings is analyzed beginning with Rehoboam and the division of the kingdom (chaps. 10–12). The other kings are Abijah (chap. 13), Asa (chaps. 14–16), Jehoshaphat (17:1—21:3), Jehoram and Ahaziah (21:4—22:9), Joash (22:10—24:27), Amaziah (chap. 25), Uzziah (chap. 26), Jotham (chap. 27), Ahaz (chap. 28), Hezekiah (chaps. 29–32), Manasseh and Amon (chap. 33), Josiah (chaps. 34–35), and the successors of Josiah and the Exile (chap. 36).

10:1—12:16

The Secession of the North

The division of the monarchy of Israel into a northern kingdom (which retained the name of Israel for ten of the tribes) and a southern one in Judah (together with part of the tribe of Benjamin) eventually, though unnecessarily, resulted in the fall of the nation. The story makes it clear that the division was the result of political intrigues motivated by pride and the human thirst for power. But even in such a case the Lord's hand was mysteriously at work to accomplish His ultimate design for His people through judgment and salvation. Not only did those kingdoms fight each other, but they also fell into the temptation of seeking foreign help to shore up their internecine war effort. The outsiders were very much happy to oblige out of self-interest. In 1 Kings 11:29–39 the Prophet Ahijah pointed out that the division of the kingdom was the result of the apostasy of Solomon later in life. But since the Chronicler chose not to dwell on the apostasy of Solomon, he only alludes to such divine judgment indirectly by reminding the reader of the prophecy of Ahijah (2 Chr. 9:29).

10:1–19. Revolt against Rehoboam (931–913 B.C.). Apparently at first there was no interest in a revolt but sincere interest in pressuring Rehoboam to deal with the common people in a fair way. The unity of the kingdom was still fragile. Even though David was a native prince of Judah, he was only an elected king for the rest of Israel, requiring a double coronation (in Hebron and in Jerusalem). Such double process was not necessary in the case of Solomon since David had him sitting on the throne while he still reigned (1 Chr. 23:1; 29:23). For Rehoboam it was important to be recognized or elected by the "elders" of the other tribes as king (2 Sam. 5:3). This took place in Shechem (2 Chr. 10:1) in the territory of Ephraim. The situation required tact: if Rehoboam gave away too much, he might lose too much authority, perhaps becoming a reigning, but not ruling, king. Hence the hot-headed young people (actually in their forties; 10:10; 12:13) were all for an iron fist (10:10–11). On the other hand, as the more experienced advisors perceived (vv. 6–7), an impolitic answer could make the situation explode. People knew the prophecy of Ahijah of Shiloh about Jeroboam (1 Kin. 11; 2 Chr. 9:29). Singling out Jeroboam as the spokesman of the tribal elders (10:2–3) was a not-too-subtle means of applying strong pressure on Rehoboam.

The rift happened (vv. 12–19) as the experienced advisors had foreseen. The heartfelt cry of the people (v. 16) had already been sounded in David's times by Sheba, who could not reconcile himself to the loss of the power his tribe had enjoyed under their fellow Benjamite, King Saul, and saw an opportunity in the civil war between David and his son Absalom (2 Sam. 20:1). The attempt of Sheba was aborted (2 Sam. 20:4–22), but it did expose strong undercurrents against the Davidic dynasty outside Judah (2 Sam. 20:2), no doubt still present in Rehoboam's time. The Chronicler states that Israel "has been in rebellion against the house of David to this day" (2 Chr. 10:19).

11:1—12:16. The Reign of Rehoboam and the Apostasy of Israel. In Kings the reign of each king of Judah is reported in relation to a contemporary king of Israel, the Northern Kingdom. The Chronicler reports only on Judah (see commentary on 13:1), but the Kings narrative on Israel still influences 2 Chronicles. Prophets had great influence on Israel; just as Ahijah's prophecy boosted the rebellion against Rehoboam among the ten northern tribes, so Shemaiah prevented Judah from embarking on a bloody civil war to suppress the rebellion (vv. 1–5) even though the forces of Rehoboam seemed adequate—180,000 men (cf. 14:8; 25:5; but see commentary on 1 Chr. 12:23–40). Barred by the reluctance of the people from engaging in an all-out war against the north (2 Chr. 11:2–4), Rehoboam used his resources in fortifying fifteen sites (vv. 5–12). But they were not aligned along the northern border of Judah: the king did not want to consolidate the division of the Hebrew monarchy. They rather presupposed a conflict with Egypt. Since fortifications in so many places must have taken quite a number of years to complete, this section should be seen from a thematic, not chronological, viewpoint. Rehoboam was right to fear Egypt, as later events would prove (see chap. 12).

The ungodliness of Jeroboam, recorded also in 1 Kings 12:28–33, is here emphasized (2 Chr. 11:13–14). He not only installed priests from tribes other than Levi, but he had in fact rejected the latter from serving as priests, thus openly opposing the law of Moses which gave them exclusive rights to the ministry (vv. 13–14). The picture of apostasy is reinforced by noting that the illegitimate priests of Jeroboam served in schismatic high places where the God of Israel was worshiped with the help of images of calves (v. 15) as in Sinai at the time of Aaron. In reality, these high places were openly pagan shrines for the *sa'ir* ("goats," "demons," or "goat-demons"), a symbol of masculine potency in nature worship, and so a general term for pagan religion (Lev. 17:7; cf. 1 Cor. 10:20). The calves or young bulls, a symbol of force, may have represented the mount or footstool of God or an abstract icon for Deity itself, as the highest Force.

While priests and Levites left the north for good, other Israelites came as pilgrims to sacrifice in Jerusalem—presumably at least during the annual festivals—thus rejecting the sanctuaries of Jeroboam in their own tribal lands (2 Chr. 11:16–17). This strengthened Rehoboam, for the kingdom enjoyed the blessings promised for faithfulness, which unfortunately only lasted three years (v. 17). This fidelity, referred to as the way of "David and Solomon," refers to David's lifelong commitment, while in the case of Solomon it can be applied only to his early reign (contrast 1 Kin. 11:1–8).

At this point in the narrative, information is provided about Rehoboam's family (2 Chr. 11: 18–22). This account about his family is likely not tied to this particular point in time; it probably covers all seventeen years of the reign of Rehoboam, not just the interval between his third (v. 17) and fifth years (12:2). For an empire such as Solomon's (see commentary on 9:13–31), a large royal harem (vv. 18–21) might have been a political necessity for both foreign and domestic affairs since covenants and pacts were often sealed through marriages. For Rehoboam, it was a case of keeping up appearances after the glory of the kingdom had already disappeared (cf. 12:9–11). The Chronicler recognizes that he acted wisely in dispersing some of his twenty-eight sons, the royal princes, throughout all the regions of Judah and Benjamin (v. 23). The palatial intrigues of his uncles Absalom and Adonijah in their attempt to succeed his grandfather David must have provided him with a lesson.

The sins of Rehoboam are not ignored by the Chronicler (12:1). The invasion by Shishak, founder of the Twenty-Second Egyptian Dynasty, is directly connected by 2 Chronicles to the backsliding of Judah. It happened because God's people had been unfaithful to Him and rebelled against Him (v. 2). The language of v. 1 suggests that the kingdom of Rehoboam (Judah) was still considered "Israel" or, at any rate, Israel's faithful remnant (v.1; see 11:16). But this remnant joined the rebellion against God. The nation abandoned God's law—His *torah* (v. 1). The use of *torah* here implies the existence of a canonical Scripture. The Pentateuch had been long in existence and in force (Josh. 1:7–8; 1 Kin. 2:3; 2 Kin. 10:31); it was not an innovation of the postexilic community. Though the transgressions are not specified in Chronicles, they refer to idolatry (1 Kin. 14:22). This idolatry may have had something to do with the presence of a large harem of pagan women (see 2 Chr. 11:18–22), as was the case of Solomon (1 Kin. 11:1–8).

Shishak, an energetic pharaoh, wanted to reassert Egyptian control over a large part of the Middle East, not only the Holy Land. He left in a temple of Karnak the record of 150 towns captured in that campaign. But he would not have dared to attack Israel in the times of Solomon, when he contented himself with harboring Israelite rebels and promoting discontent against that monarch (1 Kin. 11:14–40). The strength of the united Israelite army no doubt dissuaded him (1 Chr. 21:5). Now, with ten of the twelve tribes under a king who had been his protégé and probably remained his vassal (1 Kin. 11:26–40), success against the southern remainder of the Hebrew nation was entirely possible and even likely. The forces of the pharaoh included not only native Egyptians, but also auxiliary troops, Ethiopians, Lybians (Lubim), and Sukkiim (Sukkites; v. 3). The latter, a people from the oasis of western Lybia, are not mentioned in the account of 1 Kings, but they appear as *tjukten* in the Egyptian records, showing once again the access of the Chronicler to other reliable ancient records.

In spite of all these forces, Shishak was not to include Jerusalem in his Karnak record of destroyed cities. Repentance and confession, prompted by the prophetic message of Shemaiah, earned Rehoboam a commuted sentence in God's historical judgment (vv. 5–7). The Israelites would again be subject to the pharaoh (the same term often translated "slaves" is used in v. 8). Humility on the part of Rehoboam turned away the Lord's anger, and conditions improved in Judah (v. 12). But Rehoboam had to relinquish the royal treasury, including the gold shields (v. 9; see 9:15–16), as part of his new vassal status though he would continue the pomp of his visits to the temple (v. 11), keeping up appearances with less expensive bronze shields (v. 10). As usual in the biblical history of Hebrew kings, life span, family, and regnal statistics are recorded (vv. 13–16). Second Chronicles adds an assessment of the religious quality of the king: he was evil because he did not determine in his heart to seek the Lord (v. 14). Some bibliographical notes are also added. The wars between Rehoboam and Jeroboam, during all their days (v. 15), refer to low-intensity conflicts; thanks to the intervention of Shemaiah (11:2–4) they did not turn into a major civil war.

13:1–22

The Reign of Abijah (913–911 B.C.)

The reign of Abijah was short, lasting only three years, and is characterized as a time of war with the Northern Kingdom. In his battle against Jeroboam, the commitment of Abijah to the Lord and to the temple services is accentuated in a particular way. His image in 2 Chronicles seems to differ in a significant way from what is written in 1 Kings (see below, "Abijah in Kings and Chronicles").

13:1. Correlation with a Northern King. Statistics of the reigns of Judah are regularly provided by the books of Kings to correlate with a contemporary king of Israel, the Northern Kingdom. Here, for the first and last time, such a synchronic note is recorded in 2 Chronicles: Abijah ("Abijam" in Kings) started his reign in the eighteenth year of King Jeroboam (v. 1). Abijah's reign was to be marked by conflict with Jeroboam, and that explains the correlation. But beyond this point, the reign of northern kings is largely ignored in 2 Chronicles (cf. the introductory note for chaps. 11–12), due to considerations related to both audience and perspective. The Chronicles were written for the exiles who returned from Babylon, now conceptualized as "all Israel" (see commentary on 11:1—12:16) since they also included some people from all the tribes (1 Chr. 9:3–5; 2 Chr. 11:16), but mainly from Judah. Besides, the Chronicler sees God's covenant with Israel as being implemented through the promises given to David (1 Chr. 17). Therefore, the secession of the north, a "rebellion against the house of David" (2 Chr. 10:19), was also a rebellion against God. People from the north were welcome in Judah, but only when they worshiped in the temple in Jerusalem (11:16; 30:1–12). Even the reign of the kings of Judah is abridged from the preexilic source in Chronicles, except in the case of the "good" kings (Asa, Joash, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, Josiah), where it is supplemented with material not found in the books of Kings.

13:2. Family Lineage. Here the name of Abijah's mother is given as Michaiah, but "Maachah" (or Maakah) elsewhere (11:20–21; 1 Kin. 15:2). She was identified in 1 Kings as the daughter or granddaughter of Absalom (translations vary), but here (2 Chr. 13:2) she is the daughter of Uriel of Gibeah. This could be explained by remembering that, just as "son" can sometimes metaphorically mean "grandson" (or other lineal descendant) in the Hebrew Bible, so too "daughter" may mean granddaughter. We know that Absalom had a beautiful daughter, Tamar (2 Sam. 14:27). Tamar, the daughter of Absalom, may have married Uriel of Gibeah, thus becoming the mother of Maachah, who was therefore the "daughter" (actual granddaughter) of Absalom and also the literal daughter of Uriel, as well as the mother of Abijah and grandmother of Asa.

13:3–22. Confrontation with Jeroboam. The 400,000 men of Abijah and the 800,000 of Jeroboam are obviously round numbers. This time the civil war could not be avoided (cf. 2 Chr. 11:1–5). Commanding inferior forces, Abijah tried to discourage the attack of the enemy with a forceful speech (2 Chr. 13:4–12). Its wording may also reflect the viewpoint of the Chronicler: Judah was the kingdom of the Lord (v. 8)—they worshiped in the temple in Jerusalem (vv. 10–11), while the kingdom of the north was in rebellion against God because they worshiped idols, had a center of worship other than Jerusalem, had driven out the true priests (descendants of Aaron), and consecrated as priests anyone who came with a sacrifice. Hence the north could not possibly prosper (v. 12).

In spite of the artful military strategy of Jeroboam (vv. 13–14), God defeated Jeroboam (v. 15), and Judah won the battle because they relied on

Abijah in Kings and Chronicles

When we compare the portrait of Abijah in 2 Chronicles with the one in 1 Kings, we find a major difference. In 1 Kings, Abijah seems to be assessed as an evil monarch (15:3–6). Some have seen Abijah as a hypocrite, preaching one thing and doing another; others think that the bad behavior mentioned in 1 Kings refers to a different period of Abijah's reign. But it is unclear why Chronicles would echo the words of a notorious hypocrite, or why 1 Kings would not say a word about egregious flip-flops during the three short years of Abijah's reign. Note, however, that in the Hebrew text the name of Abijah does not actually appear in 1 Kings 15:3–6, while Rehoboam does.

One possible way of solving the problem is by suggesting that perhaps 1 Kings 15:3–6 has been accidentally transposed and should be restored between 1 Kings 14:21 and 22, where they would refer to Rehoboam. In this way the end of the passage, "and there was war between *Rehoboam* and Jeroboam all the days of his life" (not between *Abijah* and Jeroboam) would make perfect sense. If restored after 1 Kings 14:21, these verses, together with 21-24, would offer an account of the evil behavior of both Rehoboam *and* Judah (as in 2 Chr. 12:1), not of Judah alone as 1 Kings 14:21-24 now appear to record. Also, in that connection the explanation of 1 Kings 15:4-5, on why God did not put an end to the Davidic dynasty at that time, would follow immediately the account in v. 3 of a king who walked "in all the sins of his father," meaning Solomon, instead of being postponed, as in our copies of 1 Kings, for a later and much shorter reign. So, if Abijah was, in fact, a good king, this would also explain why Chronicles deals with his short reign in a rather lengthy way (see commentary on 2 Chr. 13:1), including an account of the blessings of children he enjoyed (see commentary on 13:3-22). This suggestion remains a possibility.

The other option is simply to argue that 2 Chronicles is describing Abijah at a time when he was still fully committed to the Lord in order to indicate that when the kings remained loyal to God and in full support of the temple services (2 Chr. 13:10-12; see "The Temple in Chronicles," p. 541), He did wonders for them and the people. The evaluation of his reign leaves open the possibility that at some point in his life Abijah may have been unfaithful to the Lord (2 Chr. 13:21—14:1).

the Lord, the God of their ancestors (v. 18). In the absence of any mention of natural resources such as the hail used by God on another occasion (Josh. 10:11) or confusion within the enemy camp (Judg. 7:22), we may suppose that God struck down Israel by means of the sword of Abijah and the people with him in his army (2 Chr. 13:17).

The evaluation of the reign of Abijah is brief (vv. 21-22), emphasizing that he became powerful, married fourteen wives, and had twenty-two sons and sixteen daughters (v. 21). Nothing is said about his constant commitment to the Lord. Though not strictly impossible, there is no need to suppose that those fourteen women bore all thirty-eight children within the three years of the reign of their husband. Hebrew royal family statistics are cumulative for the total life span of the monarch (see commentary on 11:1—12:16).

14:1—16:14

The Reign of Asa (911–870 B.C.)

Asa is described in Chronicles as a good king who did much to purify the Israelite faith by calling the people to the exclusive worship of Yahweh. He gathered the leaders of the people in Jerusalem and offered sacrifices to the Lord in a covenant renewal ceremony. His only weakness was relying on the king of Syria rather than on the Lord in a battle against Baasha, king of Israel.

14:1-8. The Early Years. Abijah's three-year reign, partly occupied with war, may have been insufficient to erase the remnants of Judah's idolatrous past under Solomon and Rehoboam. In contrast, Asa had leisure to do it since in his time the land had peace and quiet for ten years (vv. 1, 5). Every city in the realm was purged from the altars of the foreign gods and related stone pillars of Baal (the Father-Sky god) and the wooden pole images of Asherah (the Mother-Earth goddess) of the Canaanite religion (v. 3). These years of peace made defensive preparations possible, both by means of fortifications (vv. 6-7) and a ready army (v. 8). Perhaps Asa anticipated the Egyptian invasion, especially if he was withholding tribute.

14:9-15. The Attack of Zerah. As under Pharaoh Shishak (12:2-3), the Egyptian army continued employing auxiliary troops from subject lands bordering on their country. Here the "Cushites" or "Ethiopians" were from Nubia (modern Sudan) in the south. The Cushite commander, Zerah, had a Semitic name and answered probably to Pharaoh Osorkon I. We are not told what prompted the attack, but we may assume that in the eyes of Osorkon the new occupants of the throne of Judah (Abijah and/or Asa) were not keeping the promise of Rehoboam to behave in a proper subservient manner to Egypt (see commentary on 11:1—12:16). The invading army had the advantage of numbers, a very large army, *'elep 'alapim* (lit. "a thousand thousands"), translated variously as "a million" or "thousands upon thousands" (see commentary on 1 Chr. 4:24—5:26). In any case it seems that the Chronicler did not have at his disposal precise figures because the invaders are described as a fearsome "vast army" or "multitude" (see 2 Chr. 14:11). The three hundred chariots (v. 9) sound like a reasonable number for such an invasion. But Asa had the advantage of knowing the terrain better, and he decided to wait for the invaders at Mareshah, a southern city fortified by Rehoboam (11:8) in order to guard the road linking Judah with Egypt.

The "Valley of Zephathah" has not been identified, but Mareshah is in the Shephelah, where the invading army had to pass between closely spaced hills. Here the multitudinous camel cavalry would lose its advantage of speed and ability to perform enveloping manoeuvers. The bowmen and slingers of Asa, posted on the steep slopes of the hills, would decimate them continuously until they were forced to retreat (14:12). It is clear, however, that the result was by no means assured beforehand: Asa called out and cried to the Lord his God and was heard (v. 11). In the end, the failure of Zerah's invasion was to make Judah free from Egypt's yoke again. In the short run it would also allow treasure to be taken from the Egyptians as war reparations. Asa pursued them to Gerar (v. 13), between the southern Judean town of Beersheba and Gaza, seen at the time as the upper northern reach of the Egyptian army. The spoil included many sheep and camels, once the *'ahole* were attacked and taken. This term literally reads "tents of the cattle or livestock" in Hebrew and has been translated as "livestock enclosures"—where the animals were—or alternatively as "the camps of the herders," a reference to where the shepherds were staying (v. 15).

15:1-19. Asa's Religious Reform. The seer Azariah is called in v. 1 the son of Oded. In v. 8 there are differences among the ancient versions, and thus differences in the modern translations dependent on them. The Hebrew mentions only "Oded" and not Azariah, but the Syriac and Vulgate have "Azariah the son of Oded," assuming that v. 8 was referring to the same person mentioned in v. 1. Some translations follow the Hebrew, and others the Syriac and Vulgate. In any case, the message drove home the lesson already taught by the victory at Mareshah: the Lord is with you while you are with Him (v. 2). Not as clear is the allusion to the long time of v. 3 and the deprivation for Israel, without the true God, without a priest teaching, and without law. Some intepret this verse as referring to the period of the judges, others to a more recent time, such as the apostasy under Solomon or Rehoboam, or to the situation of Israel in the Northern Kingdom. Still others would suggest that it describes what would happen in the future if Judah did not adhere strictly to the covenant. There is no easy solution to this matter, but perhaps it would be better to interpret the time reference as designating the time of the judges, when there was no king in Israel—a situation which motivated Asa to initiate a reform in his kingdom.

The purge of pagan centers of worship had been initiated before the invasion (14:2-5) and was now completed (15:8), even if the high places were not removed from Israel (15:17). This latter statement seems to contradict 14:5. Some explain that paganism was resilient; it sprouted back time and again, and Asa left part of its later regrowth standing (17:6). But in view of vv. 12–13, it is more likely that the statement refers specifically to Israel, that is, to the cities that he had taken in the mountains of Ephraim (15:8).

As part of his religious reform, Asa called a convocation of the leaders on the third month, probably during the Festival of Weeks (Pentecost, *shabu'im*—Ex. 34:22). While the worship of any god other than Yahweh had been forbidden under pain of death (Deut. 13:6–11), Asa threatened whoever would not seek the Lord God of Israel (2 Chr. 15:13). Asa's warning was addressed to men and women, thus closing any loophole that might have been exploited in the past by the foreign wives of Solomon or Rehoboam. The latter's favorite wife, Maachah (11:21), the king's grandmother, was accordingly deposed from her position as the queen mother or "mistress of the palace" because of her involvement with a detestable and obscene image of Asherah (15:16). This kind of image was wooden (14:3), so none have survived, but if gold earrings and pendants from ancient Israel are any indication, it depicted, in stylized form, female genitalia, as a way to attract good luck (*'asherah*, "bliss," "happiness") and fertility. As a leader who sought to follow the Lord with all his heart, Asa could not afford to retain his grandmother in that position of honor—not when true worship was at stake.

As a good king, Asa supported the temple services. In antiquity, metals taken as spoils (here in Abijah's war against the north [13:19] and his own raid on Gerar [14:13–15]) were deposited in the temple as an expression of gratitude for the victory and the long peace enjoyed by the nation. War did not come until the thirty-fifth year of the reign of Asa (v. 19), when Baasha attacked (16:1). If this is taken at face value, there is a conflict with 1 Kings (15:33; 16:8), according to which Baasha died in the twenty-sixth year of the reign of Asa. There is no final solution to this problem, but it is possible that the thirty-fifth and thirty-sixth (15:19; 16:1) correspond to an era starting in Judah with Rehoboam, as a kingdom separate from Israel. After ten years of peace (14:1), Asa would have defeated Zerah in the fifteenth year of his reign. He then celebrated his victory with a feast (15:10–17) the following year. The attack of the Northern Kingdom would have come soon after, as a reaction to the intervention of Asa in the northern cities (v. 8).

16:1–14. Asa's Reliance on Foreign Help. The dynasty of Jeroboam came to a violent end at the hands of Baasha (v. 1), an upstart from Issachar (1 Kin. 15:27), who renewed hostilities with Judah. He blocked the road coming into Jerusalem from the north through Ramah in order to prevent visits to the temple of Jerusalem by his people. In a military context, this prevention of people leaving or entering conveys an attack (cf. 2 Chr. 16:1), and Asa accordingly sought ways that would force Baasha to withdraw from him (v. 3). By this time it was clear that the confrontation between the Hebrew kingdoms was more or less at a stalemate. Neither side was willing to stake everything on a great battle, such as the one in Zemaraim (13:13–20). Asa thought that the situation called for a regionalization of the conflict and reached out to Ben-hadad, king of Aram (or Syria; 16:2–3). The mention here of a treaty between Judah and Syria, and another between Israel and Syria (v. 3), does not necessarily mean overt alliances but the implicit peaceful status quo, or the establishment of "diplomatic relations" as we would say today. What Asa requested, and was granted, was for Syria to apply military pressure on the north of Baasha's kingdom, forcing him to relieve its pressure on Ramah. In the short run, this was successful: Asa liberated Ramah and used the building materials of Baasha for his own fortifications (v. 6). But, in the long run, regionalization attracted the interest of the great empires of that day (Assyria, Egypt, and Babylon) and gave them an excuse to intervene later in the Hebrew kingdoms.

Hanani the seer (v. 7) boldly confronted Asa, stating that, instead of seeking help from Syria, he should have learned the lesson of Mareshah and trusted in the Lord (v. 8; 14:10–12): the Lord is always searching throughout the world for those who are wholeheartedly loyal to Him—and He will strengthen them (v. 9; cf. Zech. 1:7–11; 4:10). The prophet minced no words and referred to Asa's actions as foolish (2 Chr. 16: 9). Revolting against the prodding of his conscience, Asa threw the prophet in prison (v. 10), but time would vindicate the words of God's messenger. Together with the usual regnal statistics, we learn that the old king died from a disease in his "feet." This disease, which lasted for for two years, may have been referring to a disease which resulted in symptoms in his feet, such as gout or diabetes, but it could also have been something of a urological nature (vv. 12–13). In Hebrew idiom, the "feet," conceptualized as the lower limbs from the crotch down, can sometimes stand for private parts (e.g., the Hebrew expressions involving "feet" in Judg. 3:24; 1 Sam. 24:3; Ezek. 16:25). The "water of the feet" is a euphemistic idiom for urine, explicit in the margin of the Hebrew text of 2 Kings 18:27. If it was a urological disease, it may have been treated by means of a flexible catheter made from a feather. There is no evidence that ancient Hebrew physicians used spells or other pagan procedures, as is sometimes suggested. The Chronicler criticizes the king for consulting *only* physicians (2 Chr. 16:12). Diseases are best dealt with by a combination of human effort and reliance on God, just like other enemies (13:18). In spite of this lapse in Asa's reliance on God, the judgment of 2 Chronicles on his reign is favorable (14:2), as was that of the people (16:14).

17:1—21:1

The Reign of Jehoshaphat (872–848 B.C.)

Jehoshaphat is considered by the Chronicler to have done what was good in the sight of the Lord. He knew that the spiritual and social renewal of the people was directly related to their knowledge of the law of God. Consequently, he sent Levites and priests throughout the land to teach them. He also revamped the legal system. But the Chronicler is also aware of the errors committed by this man of God.

17:1–19. Overview of the Reign. Second Chronicles devotes four chapters to Jehoshaphat's reign because of its favorable judgment on him (20:32; see 17:1–4): the Lord was with Jehoshaphat because he sought the God of his father (17:3–4). Most of the material is not found in the books of Kings. He fortified Judah and the cities and towns of Ephraim recovered by Asa (vv. 1–2), and he had abundant wealth and honor (v. 5). The term *yigbah lebo*—literally "his heart [mind] was high"—has been translated variously as "his heart took delight in the ways of the Lord," "his heart was devoted to the ways of the Lord," "his heart was courageous in the ways of the Lord," or he "took pride in the Lord's ways." This latter option is interesting in light of the description of Uzziah (26:16), whose "heart was high" or proud, not in the Lord's ways but to his destruction and downfall. Jehoshaphat's mind or heart took pride in the Lord—not in himself. The king did not content himself with the periodical cleansing of idols necessary even in Judah (17:6); instead, he promoted the religious education of the people by a team of laymen, Levites, and priests. The phrase referring to the laymen, his leading officials and Ben-Hail (v. 7), may also be read "his leaders, outstanding men" as in the LXX. The name "Ben-Hail" is otherwise unknown. The presence of outstanding laypeople is critical in any mass religious education effort since a professional team of ministers alone might be seen by some as self-serving. For this task the team relied not on disjointed oral traditions or brief Pentateuch extracts, as is sometimes suggested today, but on the entire book of the law of the Lord (v. 9). This was a hefty volume which, handwritten on skins, required physical effort to handle, as may be appreciated today in traditional synagogue scrolls.

The result of the teaching of the law was that the fear of the Lord fell on all the kingdoms (v. 10). The reverential obedience of Jehoshaphat was rewarded by God with the respect and submission of neighboring lands (vv. 10–11). He became increasingly powerful in terms of military and economic power (vv. 12–13). The Chronicler had at his disposal detailed information on the Judean and Benjamite regiments based in Jerusalem (vv. 14–18); others were based in the fortified cities throughout all of Judah (v. 19).

18:1—19:3. Improper Alliance with Ahab. The shrewd king of the northern Hebrew state, Ahab, realized that an alliance with Judah was more advantageous than perpetual war and, as usual, the alliance was sealed by marriage (vv. 1–2): Ahab's daughter married Jehoshaphat's son (21:6). Jehoshaphat, in contrast, was foolish in accepting such an uneven yoke. He did not need any alliance, for he had military and economic power in abundance (see 17:1–6). The consequences were quick in coming. When visiting the father-in-law of his son, Jehoshaphat was obligated to honor the alliance with Ahab, and thus he could not refuse Ahab's invitation to join him in battle against the Syrians. Ramoth Gilead (18:3) was, after all, part of the territories of the promised land, a Levitical city of refuge (Deut. 4:43; Josh. 21:38) and residence of one of Solomon's governors (1 Kin. 4:13). At some point the Syrians had taken possession of the city, perhaps at the secret prodding of Judah itself (1 Kin. 15:18–20). Ahab had been fighting the Syrians three years earlier, but he missed the opportunity to decimate them (1 Kin. 20).

The request of Jehoshaphat to consult a prophet of the Lord (2 Chr. 18:4–6) before proceeding was quite in character (see chap. 20, esp. 20:20). Four hundred prophets were summoned (v. 5). They enjoyed some kind of official protection and felt that they should support the noble cause of recovering an Israelite city (vv. 5, 11), as Nathan once thought he should support David in building the temple (1 Chr. 17:2). They all forgot that preachers should proclaim God's word, not the well-meaning ideas of human beings. Jehoshaphat somehow suspected as much since he requested a "second opinion" (2 Chr. 18:6). Micaiah, who had not been summoned before, was able to withstand the tacit and overt pressures of the moment (vv. 12–13). He was willing to repeat the complacent messages of the other prophets, perhaps with a sarcastic tone, if that was what was expected of him (v. 14). But when pressed for what he had really seen in vision, he conveyed the sad consequences of the endeavor of the kings, even hinting at the death of Ahab: Micaiah referred to the Lord's depiction of Israel after the battle, scattered like sheep without a shepherd—they would then have "no master" and would return home in peace (v. 16; cf. v. 27; for the lying spirit of v. 21, see commentary on 1 Kings 22:1–40). As usual, the prophet of doom was blamed for his message: by his colleagues first, once the emptiness of their message was unmasked (2 Chr. 18: 18–24), then by the main beneficiary of the warning (vv. 25–27).

It may seem strange that such a godly man as Jehoshaphat ignored the warning of Micaiah, thus endangering his life (vv. 30–31). In fact, through that battle God was freeing him from this improper alliance. The account of the death of Ahab is much more detailed in 1 Kings 22:29–40 than here because 2 Chronicles is concerned mainly with Jehoshaphat. But the Lord sent a message to Jehoshaphat through the Prophet Jehu (19:2), perhaps the son of the same Hanani who had rebuked Asa (16:7–10). He reminded the king not to "love those who hate the LORD." The message recognized, however, that there was some good in the king because of his dedication to God (19:3).

19:4–11. The Reforms of Jehoshaphat. In contrast to Asa, Jehoshaphat seems to have taken the rebuke with humility since he then went out again in a mission to bring the people back to the Lord, the God their ancestors worshiped (v. 4; cf. 17:7–9). At the time of the conquest of Canaan, a rudimentary trial system had been established for capital cases (Num. 35:6–34; Deut. 4:41–43; 19:1–14; Josh. 20:1–9). With the development of state institutions under the united monarchy, a better judiciary was long overdue. Abuse of kingly power such as under Ahab in the north (1 Kin. 21) was not to be the practice in Judah (2 Chr. 19:5–7). The ideal judge was to strive to implement righteous, divine justice throughout all the cities of the land, particularly the fortified ones (v. 5). In addition to the general judiciary, a system was put in place in Jerusalem to adjudicate controversies, settling disputes arising from the interpretation of divine law (v. 8) and as an appellate court (vv. 9–10). At the apex of the system stood the high priest, who settled religious matters, and the prince of the tribe of Judah, who oversaw civil matters (v. 11).

20:1–30. The Moabite War. Moab, just across the thin river Jordan in front of southern Judah, had been subjugated by David (1 Chr. 18:2), but the people of Moab attempted to regain independence after the division of the monarchy. This came in two stages: first by asserting independence from Israel, then from "the house of David" (i.e., Judah). For such an endeavor they enlisted the help of Ammon, also in Transjordan, in front of northern Judah and Samaria, together with others—the *'mnm* is vocalized in the Hebrew as *'ammonim*, "Ammonites," but this term is read by the LXX as *Minaion*, or Meunites (*me'unim*, as in a number of translations; cf. 2 Chr. 26:7) from south Arabia. In the narrative, however, the coalition army comprises Moab, Ammon, and Mount Seir (20:10, 22–23), suggesting that the others besides the Ammonites (v. 1) refers to Mount Seir or Edom. With this coalition, in a surprise attack (2 Chr. 20:2), the Moabites expected a victory over the southern half of their former oppressor. There is no mention of the attack in 1 Kings, but it was of interest to the Chronicler, whose community faced conflicts with some of those same people. The vast army, a great multitude (v. 2), sneaking in by the southern end of the Dead Sea, had already reached En Gedi, midway on the Judean side of its shore, before they were detected. Jehoshaphat was alarmed, but he had the right response to fear: he proclaimed a fast and the people gathered together, seeking help from the Lord (vv. 3–4).

The main elements of his prayer were: (a) God rules over all the kingdoms of the nations, not only over Israel (vv. 5–6); (b) He had placed His people on the Holy Land, where they built a temple in order to entreat His help in times of need (vv. 7–9); (c) at the time of the conquest of this land, Moab, Ammon, and Edom were not dispossessed, following God's instructions, but they now wanted to repay evil for good with this invasion (vv. 10–11); (d) Yahweh should intervene with His righteous judgment (v. 12).

The Chronicler is interested in all manifestations of prophecy but especially in those related to the temple services through a Levite, here Jahaziel, one of the sons of Asaph, a "seer" (29:30; cf. the titles to Pss. 50, 73–83). Judah was to meet the invaders, but instead of fighting, they would only need to stand firm, waiting in stillness for the saving deliverance of the Lord, as at the time of the Exodus (2 Chr. 20:17; Ex. 14:13). Jehoshaphat exhorted the people to receive the message of the Lord with faith, trusting in the messages of His prophets—this is what leads to true success and prosperity (2 Chr. 20:18–20). Faith in the Lord and trust in His prophets will always mean victory for the people of God. Apparently the Moabites and Ammonites held a grudge against the Edomites (Mount Seir; vv. 10, 22) and mistrusted their army, which had not yet openly rebelled against Judah (21:8; 1 Kin. 22:47). Whatever the reason, they attacked each other. The people of Judah, who all the while were singing praises to God (2 Chr. 20:21–22), were soon able to verify that no one had escaped (v. 24) and proceeded to take the spoil (vv. 25). Indeed, the Lord is always faithful to His promises. Here, He fulfilled His promise to fight the battles of His people (Deut. 20:1–4). Heartfelt gratitude rose from God's people for this deliverance in a special service organized at the temple (2 Chr. 20:26–28). After this they enjoyed peace for the rest of the reign of Jehoshaphat (v. 30).

20:31—21:1. End of Jehoshaphat's Reign. The statistical and bibliographic information found in 2 Chronicles differs little from that

found in 1 Kings 22:41–45, except to note that the people were not fully committed to God (2 Chr. 20:33), in spite of the efforts of the king. It is also indicated that Jehoshaphat made a trade alliance with Israel. This appears here, as in 1 Kings 22, almost as an afterthought. Perhaps Jehoshaphat thought that since God had blessed the cooperative enterprise of Solomon with the Phoenicians, he might obtain the same result with his fellow Hebrews in the north, who were not more pagan than the latter. But the Prophet Eliezer told the Davidic king that God could not bless this alliance (2 Chr. 20:37). There was indeed a difference between an ancestral pagan, who might not know better and was sympathetic toward the religion of David (such as Hiram; chap. 2), and an Israelite in open apostasy against the Lord. The ships were wrecked (v. 37) in the Ezion Geber port itself (1 Kin. 22:48), probably in an awful storm, lacking adequate harbor facilities. The northerners were insistent and proposed joint ventures, but Jehoshaphat had learned his lesson (1 Kin. 22:49). The reference to his death is brief: he rested with his ancestors and was buried in David's city (2 Chr. 21:1).

21:1–20

The Reign of Jehoram (853–841 B.C.)

Jehoram was greatly influenced by his wife, the daughter of Ahab, king of Israel. Jeroham led the people away from worship in the temple of the Lord to worship on the high places. The Lord reacted to this rebellion by weakening his military power and finally by striking him with a deadly disease. God gave him a great privilege, but he chose not to honor the Lord.

21:1–11. Character and Behavior. The account of this reign is brief probably because Jehoram was "evil" (v. 6). Jehoshaphat had followed the wise example of Rehoboam (11:23) in spreading his six younger sons throughout the kingdom as luxury pensioners, in order to prevent them from jockeying for the throne (v. 3). But Jehoram, the firstborn, mistrusted his brothers and had them killed together with other outstanding personalities of the realm (v. 4). By this time reality had surpassed even the worst nightmares of Samuel (1 Sam. 8:4–18): the Hebrews had become "like all the nations" in their pragmatic, opportunistic, and amoral power politics.

21:5–7. Regnal Statistics. The daughter of Ahab mentioned here (v. 6) was Athaliah (22:2), who was just as bad an influence on Jehoram as on their son Ahaziah (21:6; 22:3). Even so, because of the Davidic covenant, the Lord was not willing to destroy the house of David; He had promised to keep a lamp shining for him and his offspring forever (21:7). Data on the king are summarized and supplemented in v. 20.

During his reign, the Edomites, at the time dwelling to the southeast of the Dead Sea, revolted and gained their independence (v. 8; cf. 20:10). The account, whether here or in 2 Kings 8:21, is not entirely clear, but it seems that in attempting to put down the rebellion, Jehoram barely escaped with his life (2 Chr. 21:9). Libnah, a town named for its white (*laban*) cliffs, had been historically within Israelite territory (Josh. 15:42; 21:13) and returned to it before the time of Hezekiah (Is. 37:8). At the time of Jehoram it may have fallen into the hands of the neighboring Philistines (2 Chr. 21:16).

21:12–20. Elijah's Prophecy. This northern prophet, so prominent in the book of Kings, is only mentioned here in 2 Chronicles, which is focused on Judah. Conversely, the cycle of Elijah stories in Kings does not mention this letter sent to a southern king. The present passage is also the only extant written prophecy of Elijah. He was still in the Holy Land at the time of Jehoram of Israel, an uncle and contemporary of Jehoram of Judah (2 Kin. 1:2—2:1). The exact time of his ascension is not given, nor is the letter dated. Elijah implies that the six brothers of Jehoram of Judah were not as ungodly as their murderous sibling: they were "better" than he (2 Chr. 21:13). As a punishment for impiety and murder, the family of Jehoram and his possessions would be almost completely wiped out, and the king's end would be even more painful: he would be afflicted with a severe illness of his bowels or intestines (v. 15). This all came to pass: Philistines from the west and south Arabians from the east raided Judah and carried away most of Jehoram's family and goods (vv. 16–17). He died as predicted, apparently to no one's sorrow or regret (vv. 18–20).

22:1–9

The Reign of Ahaziah (841 B.C.)

Ahaziah was the only son of Jehoram left alive by his enemies. Under the influence of his mother, Athaliah, he followed the politics of his father. Judah had become, from the religious point of view, an extension of the Northern Kingdom.

22:1–2. The Accession of Ahaziah. The raiders, mentioned in 21:16–17, had taken captive the sons of Jehoram present in the camp of Judah's defenders (v. 1). The king himself might have been too ill to be there (21:19) and Ahaziah, his youngest son, too inexperienced. In the Hebrew text, 2 Chronicles states that he was forty-two years old at the time (v. 2), but a man, in this case, Jehoram, dying at the age of forty (21:20) cannot leave behind a "youngest son" of forty-two. According to 2 Kings 8:26, Ahaziah was twenty-two years old, so the figure "forty-two" might be a transcriptional mistake or, like the years thirty-five and thirty-six in the reign of Asa (see commentary on 2 Chr. 15:1–19; 16:1–14), it might be based on a new era, this time starting not with Rehoboam but with Omri. Ahaziah would have been regarded as a "son" of Omri through Athaliah and Ahab (22:2).

22:3–9. The End of Ahaziah. The account in 2 Chronicles is much briefer than in 2 Kings 9:27–29 since this was an evil king (see commentary on 11:1—12:16). Ahaziah first tried to flee from Jehu, but he was wounded (2 Kin. 9:27), later captured, and brought before him (2 Chr. 22:8). Jehu was an enemy of the Canaanite religion, though his methods left much to be desired (2 Kin. 9:18–24; cf. Hos. 1:4), and as a northerner he would not, of course, recognize the exclusive rights of the Jerusalem altar (2 Kin. 10:29–31). However, the house of Judah then reigning was related to Ahab and followed in his steps, so it had to be exterminated as per orders of God through Elisha (2 Kin. 9:1, 8). Consequently Ahaziah was finally executed in Samaria (2 Chr. 22:9), and permission was given to move his body to Jerusalem for burial (2 Kin. 9:28). With this execution the reconciliation of the Hebrew royal houses in the north and the south, which had started with Ahab and Jehoshaphat, came to an end.

22:10–12
The Reign of Athaliah (841–835 B.C.)

The queen mother, Athaliah, saw a unique opportunity to grab power once most of the males in the family of Jehoshaphat had been killed by Jehoram (21:4), the raiders (21:16), or Jehu (22:9). She destroyed some more (v. 10), making sure that nobody could dispute her position as the ruling queen (not as the regent queen while Joash was a minor since she tried to kill him too; 2 Kin. 11:2). But Jehoshabeath (called "Jehosheba" in 2 Kin. 11:2), the daughter of King Jehoram and wife of Jehoiada the priest (2 Chr. 22:11), was able to hide her baby nephew within the temple facilities (v. 11). The temple functioned as a place of refuge for the future king. We are told that Athaliah reigned over the land for six years, but not with the usual formula or regnal years.

23:1—24:27
The Reign of Joash (835–796 B.C.)

Here the story follows 2 Kings 11–12 quite closely, but as usual the role of the Levites is highlighted (see 2 Chr. 23:1–2), as is the need for the purity of the temple (vv. 6–7). Joash was an excellent king as long as he was under the influence of Jehoiada, the high priest. Jehoiada was the mentor of the king, highly respected by the people, and very influential. It was under the leadership of these two men that the temple was repaired. Unfortunately, after the death of Jehoiada, the king fell under the influence of spiritually corrupted advisors, and Joash did what was evil in the eyes of the Lord.

23:1–11. The Coup of Jehoiada. In order to return the kingdom to the dynasty of David, Jehoiada first contacted the captains, probably the leaders of the royal bodyguards (cf. v. 13), and showed them the royal child (2 Kin. 11:4). They in turn gathered the Levites of the realm for additional manpower, as well as clan elders for political support (2 Chr. 23:2). As noted previously, the tribe of Levi was peculiarly warlike (see 1 Chr. 26:1–19). A gathering of soldiers in Jerusalem would have looked suspicious to Athaliah, but a Levitical assembly was easier to justify because of their concern for the temple—and just as effective from a military viewpoint. Jehoiada reminded the assembly that the covenant of God with David required that his descendant, not the daughter of Ahab, be on the throne (2 Chr. 23:3).

The operative instructions were simple: the change of priestly and Levitical divisions came on the Sabbath, and both those who should be leaving the temple area and those who should be entering it would remain together with weapons in hand, but laymen had to remain in their proper place. The seven-year-old king, Joash, was anointed by Jehoiada and his sons (v. 11; not specified in 2 Kin.) and received, in addition to the crown, the Testimony (in the sense of "document") or covenant, which normally refers to the Law; here it may be some kind of coronation deed or a pledge of the people's loyalty (2 Chr. 23:11; cf. Ps. 2:7).

23:12–21. The Purge of Baalists. This account differs little from that of 2 Kings 11:13–17, though the Chronicler emphasizes again the role of the Levitical music (here in 2 Chr. 23:13). Also, here Jehoiada took care not to pollute the temple area with a corpse (v. 14)—Athaliah was killed outside (v. 15). At this point there was a renewal of the covenant in which the people pledged to be the Lord's people (v. 16). This implies several things. First the pagan religion had to be stamped out (v. 17). Here we learn that at that time there was a temple of Baal in Jerusalem, presided over by the pagan priest Mattan ("gift"). Since this is a typically Phoenician name, he must have entered the city hand in hand with Athaliah during the reign of Jehoram (21:6). Second, the temple service returned to the proper procedures established under David, with singing (23:18–19). The triumphal enthronement ceremony required the presence of all the notable persons in the realm (v. 20), while all the people of the land rejoiced (v. 21).

24:1–14. Virtual Regency of Jehoiada. Since the king was only seven years old, the real power behind the throne was his rescuer, the elderly Jehoiada, more than ninety years old at the time (v. 15; cf. v. 1). Not surprisingly, the king decided to (lit. "was with a heart to") repair the temple, the house of the Lord (v. 4). Chronicles adds the note that much of the disrepair was due to vandalism and theft on the part of the sons of Athaliah (v. 7), presumably the older brothers of Ahaziah killed by the Philistine/south Arabian raiders (21:16–17). The virtual regency of Jehoiada was recognized by the people, who buried him among the kings (v. 16; note that the name "Israel" is applied here to Judah alone).

24:15–18. Apostasy of Joash. Soon after Jehoiada's death, the leaders or officials of Judah (v. 17)—no doubt contaminated by paganism under the reigns of Jehoram, Ahaziah, and Athaliah—demanded a return to idolatry, which brought God's wrath (anger) upon the nation (v. 18). This was not merely an emotional reaction on the part of God but the consequence of the clash of His holiness with the wanton transgression of those who suppress the truth in unrighteousness or wickedness (Rom. 1:18). As on all former occasions, starting with the reign of Solomon, paganism entered Israel from the higher classes, which were subject to foreign influences, but eventually trickled down to the common people.

24:19–22. Testimony of Prophets. God forewarned the leaders about His coming wrath through prophets who testified against idolatry (v. 19). A foremost example is that of Zechariah, here called the son of Jehoiada the priest (vv. 20–22). Since Jehoiada had been born more than 130 years earlier (v. 15), we should understand the term "son" in its frequent Hebrew sense of "grandson." His actual father was Berechiah, as mentioned by Jesus in Matthew 23:35, when alluding to Bible history from the beginning of Genesis to near the end of Chronicles, which closes the Hebrew Scriptures. This, said Jesus, is the Zechariah who was stoned "between the temple and the altar." Indeed the murder took place in the courtyard of the temple (2 Chr. 24:21). The ingratitude of Joash is appalling (v. 22) and reveals a weak character. He decided to chart his own course of action independent of the principles taught him by the high priest. He chose death rather than life.

24:23–27. The Aramaean Raid and the End of Joash. Spring was the season of the year when kings went to battle in war (2 Sam. 11:1; the lull in farm work after planting the crops made more men available). In this particular spring (lit. in Hebrew—"the turn of the year"—some translations have "the end of the year"—the Hebrew year began in the spring; 2 Chr. 24:23), a small company of men from Syria was able to successfully raid Judah because they had forsaken the Lord God (v. 24). When God's people forsake Him, He may not only forsake them but also deliver them into the hands of the enemy (vv. 20, 24). But Syria did not aim at conquering Jerusalem. This would have required major war preparations that could not have been kept secret and would certainly have been matched in Judah. Instead, the raid, carried out by a small force based far away from Damascus (v. 23), was able to maintain pressure on the Hebrews, probably in order to protect Syrian interests in Gilead (see 18:1–3). If so, the promotion of religious pluralism on the part of the "leaders" of Judah (2 Chr. 24:17) may have been fueled by ulterior motives. The Canaanite religion had not only vulgar appeal but also traditional status among the mixed population of Gilead. Its toleration along with the religion of the God of Israel seemed to provide a better chance of gaining their support for the Hebrew recovery of control. Religion was also a handy excuse for murder, here perpetrated to avenge the blood of Jehoiada's son (or grandson), whom Joash had murdered (v. 25). One may wonder, however, what the sons of Ammonite and Moabite women, respectively, were doing among the officials or servants of the king in Jerusalem (vv. 25–26). The answer is probably to be found in the royal harem, where foreign women were routinely imported. In that case, the murder may have also had obscure political motives.

25:1–28

The Reign of Amaziah (796–767 B.C.)

Amaziah was an ambivalent character with double loyalties. He tried to do what was pleasing to the Lord but not with a loyal heart. He clearly gave priority to his own interest rather than to the Lord's. Consequently, God's prophets condemned his conduct, and his life ended in failure.

25:1–13. Initial Righteousness of Amaziah. Whatever led to the murder of Joash (see 24:25–27), Amaziah does not seem to have had a hand in it. He started his reign with respect for the law of God above political expediency (25:3–4). The text notes, however, that he did what was right in the sight of the Lord but not with a *shalem* (Heb.) heart (v. 2). This term literally means "whole," and is variously translated as "perfect," "loyal," "wholeheartedly." This description is in contrast to that of David (2 Kin. 14:3). The narratives that follow illustrate this strange phenomenon.

The first is the campaign in Edom (2 Chr. 25:5–13). Edom was important to Judah mainly because of its copper mines, which provided such an important part of Solomon's wealth (8:17–18). The territory had been lost under Jehoram (21:8–11), but the campaign of Amaziah was able to reconquer it (25:11–12). This provided the foundation for renewed shipping trade from the Elath port under his son Uzziah (26:2; cf. 2 Kin. 14:7). The capital of Edom, Sela ("rock") or Petra (the Greek equivalent), was probably the site of the massacre of the Edomites (2 Chr. 25:11–12; 2 Kin. 14:7). They were thrown down from the high vertical sandstone cliffs for which the place is named.

25:14–16. The Idolatry of Amaziah. The next actions of Amaziah are hard to understand, let alone explain or justify: he brought back the gods of the people of Seir (Edom) after defeating them, and he worshiped them (v. 14). Assyria and Babylon would carry away and honor the idols together with the intelligentsia of conquered nations, so that the intellectual and religious capital of their subjects was physically moved to the central capital of the empire, as a further instrument of domination. Amaziah may have attempted something similar with Edom. After the massacre of Edomite combatants, perhaps Amaziah tried to ingratiate himself to the remainder of the population by honoring this image. But even in his day and age the king's actions were seen as absurd. The Lord sent an unnamed prophet with a message: he asked the king why he would seek the gods who could not rescue their own people from his hands. When the king told the prophet to stop speaking on pain of death, the prophet responded by telling the king that God was determined to destroy him as a result of his rebellion and recalicitrance (vv. 15–16). The king would soon learn that God has power to save and to overthrow (v. 8).

25:17–28. Israel Defeats Amaziah, and His Death. Full of self-importance after his victory in Edom, Amaziah reacted to the raid of the northern mercenaries (v. 13) with a punitive expedition against their country, Israel. King Joash of Israel tried in vain to warn Amaziah about the folly of this action (vv. 18–19) and finally inflicted upon him a sound defeat (vv. 20–22). Joash did not try to eliminate the Davidic dynasty, however, which was native of Judah and enjoyed there too much popular support, but instead he made Jerusalem defenseless and took hostages as a warning against further military ventures (vv. 23–24). He also plundered the temple treasury, which had been in the care of the family of Obed-Edom since David's times (see 1 Chr. 13:13). The Chronicler's account differs from that of 2 Kings 14 (which does not mention the idolatry of Amaziah) mainly by emphasizing that the defeat of Judah was accomplished by the providence of God—He was punishing Amaziah and Judah because they were worshiping the gods of Edom (2 Chr. 25:20). The biographical information here is not entirely clear, but it seems that when Amaziah was brought to Jerusalem in disgrace (v. 23), the people of Judah immediately conspired against him (v. 27). They decided to place his son Uzziah on the throne (26:1), which was a logical reaction to the national humiliation. Amaziah was able to maintain himself in the Lachish fortress for fifteen years, hoping for a restoration of his power, but he was eventually murdered. Nevertheless, he was given military honors at his burial (he was brought in by horses; 2 Chr. 25:28). This information implies that there was a coregency of fifteen years between Amaziah and his son Uzziah, though in fact Uzziah was the only ruler in Judah.

26:1–23

The Reign of Uzziah (792–740 B.C.)

Uzziah was a king who was unquestionably committed to the Lord but who was not totally willing to recognize the limits of his power. In Israel the three centers of power were the king, the high priest, and the prophet. Uzziah tried to usurp priestly powers, and this resulted in his downfall (see "The Temple in Chronicles," p. 541).

26:1–15. The Power of Uzziah. It is clear that Uzziah was for a time faithful to the covenant and willing to listen to the Prophet Zechariah (perhaps the "son of Jeberekiah" of Is. 8:2). He was given understanding by God (2 Chr. 26:5). There are differing manuscript traditions in regard to this verse's description of what Zechariah understood: some Hebrew manuscripts, the LXX, Vulgate, and Syriac have "fear of God," while others have "visions of God"; thus some Bible translations follow one or the other of the text traditions. Either way, Zechariah had special understanding and used this to support and instruct King Uzziah. Though after the death of Amaziah Judah had been virtually reduced to the status of a tribal princedom (25:23), obviously Uzziah came to an understanding with Samaria because he was able to fortify the wall again (26:9, 15). Though we do not know the details, such arrangements precluded further warfare between the Hebrew kingdoms. In this way both the success of Amaziah in Edom and his folly in confronting Israel ultimately resulted in peace, wealth, and military might for a largely restored Israel (2 Kin. 14:25–27). As sole monarch, Uzziah reestablished the refinery trade from Elath (2 Chr. 26:2) and no doubt used the proceeds to reestablish the authority of Jerusalem over the peoples made subject by David (vv. 6–8). In this he was aided by a standing army of 2,600 officers (v. 12) and a reserve of 307,500 soldiers who were issued standard offensive and defensive weapons (vv. 13–14), a novelty for the times. His progressive outlook was also manifested in his love for the soil (v. 10). In Judah, where there is a long dry season, this implied sinking many wells (cisterns) in the watertight limestone underlying most of the country. Plants fended for themselves in such an environment and fed the abundant royal livestock (v. 10), but those animals could not survive without a continuous supply of drinking water, which those cisterns provided. During his reign Uzziah became very strong and powerful (v. 8).

26:16–23. Pride and Punishment of Uzziah. This passage expands the statement found in 2 Kings 15:5 regarding Uzziah's divinely inflicted leprosy. Uzziah acted unfaithfully and transgressed by rebelliously entering the temple and attempting to burn incense on the altar in front of the Most Holy Place (2 Chr. 26:16). This was the result of his inordinate pride and also perhaps because of a desire to impress all those nations recently dominated militarily. In Mesopotamia and Egypt the kings were high priests. Uzziah may have envisioned a similar role for himself, on the basis of the priesthood of kings in Salem/Jerusalem (Gen. 14:18; Ps. 110:4). The eighty courageous and valiant priests of the Lord commanded by the high priest to expel the king from the temple (2 Chr. 26:17) were necessary because the king otherwise could have resisted the expulsion (v. 18) with the help of his bodyguards. The leprosy (v. 19) was most probably Hansen's disease. The king was able to observe the outbreak in his own skin and hurried to leave the temple. While nothing prevented him, from that time on, from continuing to make important decisions of government, he could not, as an unclean leper (v. 23), attend the temple or court of judgment, kingly functions he had to delegate to his son Jotham (v. 21). After he died, he was accordingly buried in a special cemetery (v. 23).

27:1–9

The Reign of Jotham (750–732 B.C.)

Nothing bad is reported about Jotham. As a king he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord. Unfotunately, the people did not follow his example. But the Lord blessed him and gave him victories over his enemies.

27:1–2. Regnal Statistics and Evaluation. A careful study of the sometimes confusing chronological data of the Hebrew kings has led to the conclusion that Jotham reigned as coregent with Uzziah for about twelve years (see 26:21), plus four years as sole king (thus making the sixteen years—vv. 1, 8). He also reigned four years in another coregency, this time with his son Ahaz (thus explaining the "twentieth year of Jotham the son of Uzziah" in 2 Kin. 15:30). The brevity of his period as sole king may account for the paucity of items reported about him. He did what was right in the Lord's estimation (2 Chr. 27: 2), but the people acted corruptly by offering illicit sacrifices outside the temple (cf. 2 Kin. 15:35).

27:3–9. The Deeds of Jotham. The Upper Gate of the temple was probably the northern one, where it opened to an upward slope. The Ophel was a landfill in the south of the city, dominating the Kidron valley (v. 3). Jotham also continued the defensive construction plan of his father, with cities (fortresses) in the hill country of Judah, which were connected visually by a chain of observation towers (v. 4). He was also able to obtain a handsome tribute from the Ammonites, after a punitive expedition probably made to recover the tribute that was past due (v. 5). Because Jotham established and ordered his ways according to the Lord his God, he became very strong and powerful (v. 6).

28:1–27

The Reign of Ahaz (735–716 B.C.)

Ahaz was one of the most Caananized kings of Judah. During his reign he followed the ways of the rebellious kings of Israel, the Northern Kingdom. He even offered his children as human sacrifices. This was a dark period in the history of the kingdom of Judah.

28:1–4. Regnal Statistics and Evaluation. In spite of the efforts of the Prophet Isaiah to provide divine guidance for Ahaz, he turned into one of the worst kings of Judah. He lived (or "walked") in the same ways as the kings of Israel (v. 2). As noted previously, paganism entered Hebrew lands usually through the royal court (see 24:15–18). Worship of common deities seems to have been a precondition either for alliances, such as that of Ahab with Phoenicia (eventually resulting in the temple of Baal in Jerusalem; see 23:16–19), or for the annexation of other lands, such as Edom (see 25:14–16). However, the horrendous abominations here mentioned, such as child sacrifice in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom (Heb. "Ben Hinnom"; 28:3), do not seem motivated by diplomatic needs but by utter lack of faith in the God of his fathers. We do not know the conditions under which Ahaz committed such abominations, but he must have acted out of political or personal desperation (cf. 2 Kin. 3:27).

28:5–15. The Syro-Ephraimite War. The north was not completely devoid of prophets of the Lord, such as Oded (v. 9), who reminded Israel of the prohibition against enslaving fellow Hebrews (v. 11; Lev. 25:39). The captives gained the support of the tribal leaders or heads (2 Chr. 28:12–13), and they were finally returned via Jericho, well fed, clothed, and in some cases even helped to ride on donkeys (v. 15).

28:16–21. Treaty of Ahaz with Assyria. Completely surrounded by enemies in the area, Ahaz then resorted to an alliance further afield with Assyria, which did alleviate the pressure of Syria and Israel upon Judah (2 Kin. 16:7–9). However, there was a religious price to pay: Ahaz reformed the altar of sacrifice in the temple of Jerusalem in order to please the king of Assyria (2 Kin. 16:10–18). It soon became clear that Assyria had come to the Levant only for its own purposes. When its aid was requested against renewed Edomite and Philistine raids, the Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser demanded further payments from Ahaz but did not help (2 Chr. 28:20). Judah had been brought low in humility on account of Ahaz, a king who had encouraged moral decline, wickedness, and lack of restraint (the Heb. *para'* can and has been translated as all these), as well as unfaithfulness to the living God (v. 19).

28:22–27. Further Apostasy and Death of Ahaz. Instead of repenting and seeking refuge in the Lord amid the alarming circumstances, Ahaz only deepened his unfaithfulness, experimenting with the worship of foreign idols (vv. 22–23). He actively promoted religious pluralism in every corner in Jerusalem (v. 24) and closed the doors to the temple. The dwelling place of the God who redeemed Israel from Egypt became irrelevant and unnecessary. The temple, where atonement took place, was rejected and shut up. At his death, the judgment of the people on his reign was revealed by the fact that he was not buried in the tombs of the kings of Israel (v. 27).

29:1—32:33

The Reign of Hezekiah (716–687 B.C.)

Hezekiah was one of the greatest kings of Judah. Everything he did for the Lord and the people he did with all his heart—with undivided loyalty. He repaired and cleansed the temple, reorganized its services, and celebrated the Passover. He was an effective religious, military, and administrative leader. Unfortunately, his pride

cast a shadow on his character, but it was not powerful enough to permanently damage his relationship with the Lord.

29:1–36. Restoration of the Temple. At the beginning of the sanctuary ritual year, in the first month of spring, the new king opened the doors of the temple (v. 3), gathered the priests and Levites (vv. 4–5), and apprised them of his intentions to make a covenant with the God of Israel (v. 10). In order to accomplish this latter purpose it was necessary to clean up the temple that had been shut up by his father. The Levites and the temple were to be sanctified (vv. 1–17). Everything was ready by the sixteenth day of the month, theoretically in time for the Festival of Unleavened Bread (vv. 18–19; but see commentary on 30:1–27). Proper sanctuary service was then restored, with appropriate sacrifices, contributed by the representatives of the nation (vv. 20–24, 31–36), and the sacred music of the Levites (vv. 25–30). God was once more at the center of the life of the His people. Here we learn that David's instruction regarding the orchestra was based on the Lord's instruction through His prophets (v. 25).

30:1–27. The Passover of Hezekiah. The Passover victim had to be sacrificed on the evening of the fourteenth day of the lunar month. But since the temple was not yet ready, the festival was postponed for the next lunar cycle (which was permitted under the law; Num. 9:6–11), giving everybody time to prepare, even northern believers (2 Chr. 30:1–9). By this time, the latter were a minority in Israel, but some did accept the invitation of their southern brethren and came (vv. 10–12). On this occasion the Levites acted as intermediaries of the people and slaughtered the Passover victims (vv. 13–17). Those who came from the Northern Kingdom had not had time to cleanse themselves and yet ate the Passover. The king interceded for them, asking the Lord to atone for and pardon anyone who had sincerely sought Him, even if they had not been cleansed according to the sanctuary guidelines (vv. 18–20). The Lord listened to the king (v. 20). Moreover, by common consent, they kept the festival for fourteen days, instead of the seven prescribed, so as to give time for the Levites to instruct them on the finer points of the law (vv. 21–22). The king provided victuals for the multitude in view of this unexpected prolongation of the festival (vv. 23–26), reminding people of the bountiful times of Solomon (v. 26; cf. 7:7). Notice that the real holy dwelling place of God is not the earthly but the heavenly sanctuary (v. 27), just as the heart of religion is found not in cold ritual correctness but in atonement and spontaneous confession, praise (v. 22), and joy (v. 26).

31:1–21. The Reforms of Hezekiah. Revival of faith should always be followed by reformation and changes in behavior. All the Israelites who had been present at the festival participated in the removal of cultic images and illicit altars from Judah and from some parts of Israel (v. 1). Obviously in the north this would not have enjoyed official support. The priestly and Levitical divisions were restored (v. 2), provision was made for the regular support of the sacrificial worship from the royal lands (v. 3), as well as support for the Levites dwelling in Jerusalem, so that they could devote themselves to the law (v. 4). The people resumed the delivery of tithes and firstfruits to the temple (vv. 5–10) and to special storehouses, and proper accounting procedures were added (vv. 11–15). From these financial resources a stipend was paid to everybody in Levitical and Aaronite genealogy (vv. 16–19). Hezekiah sought God in everything he did, and he did it all with diligence—with all his heart (v. 21).

32:1–23. The Defeat of Sennacherib. Second Chronicles is mainly interested in the prosperity of Hezekiah, not in his problems, which may be supplied from other sources. The alliance with Judah had given Assyria an excuse to extend its dominion in the Levant; the Northern Kingdom fell to Assyria in 722 B.C. As a vassal of Assyria, Hezekiah was not disturbed for some time, but around 701 B.C. the Egyptians began encouraging nations within their traditional sphere of influence to rebel against Assyria. Hezekiah participated in an Egyptian-led anti-Assyrian league with Sidon (Phoenicia), Ascalon, and Ekron (Philistia; cf. 2 Kin. 18:7), cities which fell to Sennacherib once he defeated the supporting Egyptian army. He then marched into Judah and took forty-six of its towns, including the fortress of Lachish. Hezekiah bought him off with heavy tribute (2 Kin. 18:13–16), but later, still worried about the pro-Egyptian party in Judah (2 Kin. 19:8–13), Sennacherib returned. This return probably took place years later (note the time-consuming intervening preparations in Jerusalem; 2 Chr. 32:2–8). A division of the Assyrian army besieged Jerusalem under the command of the chief military officers or servants of the empire while Sennacherib himself remained in Lachish (v. 9). The Assyrians realized that the morale of the people of Judah was held high because of their religion, so they tried to discourage them by deriding Hezekiah's command to worship on one altar only (v. 12) and, for that matter, his trust in Yahweh (v. 11). As well, Sennacherib's officials touted the record of Assyria's conquests—no god of any nation or kingdom had been able to protect their people from Sennacherib or those before him (v. 15). The propaganda went as far as to revile and ridicule the Lord (v. 17). Hezekiah and Isaiah pled with the Lord (v. 20) in the temple (2 Kin. 19:14–19) to vindicate His holy name. Isaiah had accurately predicted that other military needs would soon remove Sennacherib from Judah (2 Kin. 19:7).

As for the soldiers besieging Jerusalem, the Lord sent an angel who destroyed all the warriors, captains, and officers of the army (2 Chr. 32:21). We are not told how this happened, but Herodotus records that the army of Sennacherib, near the Egyptian border, was plagued by mice who had infested their supplies. Mice are well-known vectors of bubonic plague, some forms of which kill in just twenty-four hours. In any case, Sennacherib returned in disgrace to his own land, having shamefully learned the hard way that Yahweh was able to deliver His people (cf. v. 15). Although Sennacherib boasted in the Assyrian records that he "shut Hezekiah in as a bird in a cage," in fact the Lord saved Hezekiah and Jerusalem (v. 22). But Hezekiah had more to fear from the Assyrians, who were no doubt bent on a regime change. Vassals who betrayed their trust were routinely executed and replaced by pro-Assyrian relatives on the throne.

32:24–26. Illness and Recovery of Hezekiah. The root of Hezekiah's trials, including the Assyrian attack and his illness, was that he did not respond appropriately to the Lord according to the favor and kindness shown to him (32:25) during the years in which "he prospered" (31:21), or after God's healing him from his illness. While he did offer a prayer of thanksgiving for his recovery (2 Kin. 20:1–11; Is. 38), he neglected to emphasize God's greatness when the Babylonians came, for his heart was lifted up in pride (2 Chr. 32:25). Both Isaiah and Kings provide further detail regarding Hezekiah's illness and recovery. After a message of Isaiah warning of impending death (2 Kin. 20:1; Is. 38:1), Hezekiah humbled himself (2 Chr. 32:26) and "wept bitterly" (2 Kin. 20:2–3; Is. 38:2–3). The sign and recovery then followed, fifteen years before the end of his twenty-nine-year-long reign (2 Chr. 29:1; 2 Kin. 20:6; Is. 38:5), and therefore very close to the Assyrian attack on his fourteenth year (2 Kin. 18:13). His illness is diagnosed in 2 Kings 20:7 and Isaiah 38:21 as "a boil" or ulcer (cf. the plagues in Ex. 9:9; Rev. 16:2). Perhaps this was the result of diabetes. The very high sugar content of a lump of dried figs (2 Kin. 20:7; Is. 38:21) is an effective treatment that may prevent infection in such ulcers, and the subsequent deadly gangrene. As for the sign (2 Chr. 32:24), the Chronicler assumes that readers remember it well: the Lord moved the shadow backward (2 Kin. 20:11). Though some type of natural explanation could be conjectured for this phenomenon, the biblical text records it as divine intervention.

32:27–33. Final Evaluation and Death of Hezekiah. As in the times of Uzziah, Judah's control of the southern lands brought riches (vv. 27–29) and engineering feats (v. 30). However, foolish pride is a more stubborn disease than diabetic ulcers or whatever it was that ailed Hezekiah (see vv. 24–26). When God put him to the test regarding all that was in his heart, Hezekiah failed (v. 31). The ambassadors from Babylon claimed to have humanitarian (2 Kin. 20:12) and scientific aims (2 Chr. 32:31), but in fact their main purpose was political. Babylon was, at the time, organizing its own anti-Assyrian league, which was to bring the downfall of Nineveh in 612 B.C., so they may have been sounding out Hezekiah. But no matter what the foreign powers claimed, their only constant compass was self-interest. Childish pride led Hezekiah to forget this reality and to show this "friendly" power the wealth of his realm (Is. 39), thereby exciting covetousness on the part of his visitors. Even so, the Chronicler recognizes Hezekiah's life overall as one of *khesed*—the rich Hebrew word rendered variously as "devotion," "love," "kindness," "loyalty," and "goodness" (2 Chr. 32:32). The mention of Isaiah in his bibliography shows that this prophet also had a hand in composing the sources on which the books of Kings drew.

33:1–25

The Reigns of Manasseh (697–643 B.C.) and Amon (643–641 B.C.)

The case of Manasseh will remain forever one of the most moving stories of divine forgiveness in the OT. He was a totally corrupt king who, while under oppression, repented of his sins and asked for forgiveness, and the Lord forgave him and restored his kingdom to him. Not so with his son, Amon, who decided to imitate his father in sin and rebellion but not in repentance. From the divine perspective, personal history is always open to God's love and mercy.

33:1–9. The Awful Sins of Manasseh. As seen previously, the purpose of the Assyrian invasion was probably to produce a regime change with a new king favorable to Assyrian interests (32:22). This implied, to a certain extent, a demand of recognition for the suzerain's religion, which they must have expected from a pliable twelve-year-old such as Manasseh. Indeed, the astrolatry of Manasseh (the worship of the stars—all the host of heaven; 33:3, 5) is typical of Mesopotamian religion, and the building of additional altars in the temple, the house of the Lord, clearly indicates acts of idolatry (v. 4). But the total devotion of this king to unfettered idolatry surpassed all political concerns. A carved image in the temple itself (v. 7), a blatant violation of the second commandment of the Decalogue (Ex. 20:4), only emphasized his complete denial of the covenant. The shocking evil practice of child sacrifice (2 Chr. 33:6; see 28:1–4) seems to be a residue of ancestral Canaanite practices for which the Lord had expelled such nations (2 Chr. 33:2). The Canaanites themselves resorted to such horrors only in the most extreme circumstances, and then not as a sacrifice to their chief gods, such as Father Sky Hadad (Baal), but to dark underground deities of death. These were always maligned and had to be appeased by those means in order to bring to an end an inexplicable spate of bad luck. We are not told how many sons of Manasseh suffered this fate, but his heir, Amon, was not born until Manasseh was forty-five years old. In the same order of abominations we learn of divination (fortune-telling—sometimes called "soothsaying") as well as witchcraft and sorcery. He also consulted mediums and necromancers (or "spiritists"; v. 6). The long reign of Manasseh (fifty-five years) probably includes ten years as coregent of Hezekiah plus another forty-five as sole king, during which he apostatized.

33:10–20. Punishment and Repentance of Manasseh. While 2 Kings does not mention the repentance and restoration of Manasseh, the Chronicler records this story that stands forever as a sign and testimony of God's unbounded forgiveness. We are not told on what occasion the army of the king of Assyria swooped down on Manasseh and took him to Babylon (2 Chr. 33:11). One possibility is the induction of Asshurbanipal ("Osnapper"; Ezra 4:10) as the apparent heir of Esarhaddon in 672 B.C. Vassal princes, such as Pharaoh Necho I, were made to attend and swear loyalty to the prince as future king of Assyria. Though the capital of Assyria was Nineveh, Babylon, the ancient religious capital of the Akkadians (i.e., Assyrians and Babylonians), was used for some ceremonies (it may also stand here as a general term for the Mesopotamian region). Asshurbanipal was the last of the great Assyrian kings. The empire suffered from overexpansion, and after his death in 627 B.C., it descended into chaos. Niniveh was destroyed by an alliance between the Babylonians and the Medes in 612 B.C. It may be that the difficulties of Asshurbanipal with the Medes kept him occupied in the north, facilitating the return of Manasseh to God.

The fact is that the Lord received his plea, listened to his petition, and brought him back to Jerusalem and his kingdom (2 Chr. 33:13). Idolatry was quietly eliminated (vv. 14–19), as recorded in the book of *khozay*. This word is sometimes taken as a proper name, "Hozai," and translated as such in some versions. However, it is also sometimes translated as "the seers" (from the Heb. word *khezu*—"vision"), as it is rendered in the LXX. This could be a reference to a succession of literary prophets from which the book of Kings was able to draw.

33:21–25. Amon's Reign and Death. The return of Manasseh to the Lord was not accompanied by a high-profile festival, such as Hezekiah's, which the Assyrians would have taken as an intolerable snub. Amon only continued the pagan practices of the first part of his father's reign or was too much corrupted by them to return to the living God. Thus, he did as his father Manasseh had done at first (v. 22). The people that put an end to his life (v. 24) may have invoked religious concerns, as in the case of Joash (see 24:25–27), or nationalistic, anti-Assyrian ones, or even a mixture of both, since Egyptians, in contrast to Assyrians, did not try to impose their religion on anybody else. The gods of the Egyptians were for them alone. In any case, the population of Judah did not condone the murder of Amon (33:25) since he was "the anointed of the LORD" (1 Sam. 24:6).

34:1—35:27

The Reign of Josiah (641–609 B.C.)

Josiah did not follow the example of his father Amon but decided to restore the true Israelite faith. He initiated an energetic reform movement that included the restoration of the temple, the eradication of idolatry, and the instruction of the people about what God expected from them. Unfortunately, his reform did not take root due to the fact that he died young while trying to intercept an Egyptian army heading to help the Assyrians against the Babylonians. By then the fate of the kingdom of Judah was cast (see "The Temple in Chronicles," p. 541).

34:1–8a. Regnal Statistics and Overview. Both the Chronicler and the writer of 2 Kings evaluate the reign of Josiah positively. Second Kings 22 highlights the finding of the book (or one of the five books) of the law, displaying it as a motor of reform; the Chronicler also recounts this event as well as other episodes in the process (2 Chr. 34:15–21). The Pentateuch was by this time well known and had already been in force for a long time (see 12:1). Josiah went gradually about his reforms. At the age of sixteen he was already totally committed to the living God (2 Chr. 34:3), but since he was probably still under some form of regency, he had to tread carefully. His successive campaigns, first in the south (vv. 3–5), then in the north of the country (vv. 6–7), purified the religion of the country. The term *khereb* in v. 6, taken from the margin of the Hebrew text, may be translated literally "swords," which could have been used to hack at the idols. It could also mean "ruins" (the general sense is "wasters") and would then be understood "as far as Naphthali, with their ruins all about it." We should keep in mind that much of the territory of the Northern Kingdom lay in ruins after the Assyrian invasion. Josiah's twelfth year (v. 3; 627 B.C.) coincided with the death of Asshurbanipal and the call of Jeremiah the prophet. The rapid dissolution of Assyrian power afforded the twenty-year-old monarch an opportunity to safely purge Judah and Jerusalem of idolatry (v. 8a), whether in the form of remnants from the early reign of Manasseh or from the pagan revival of Amon. The momentous discovery of a book of the law in the temple took place later, in his eighteenth year.

34:8b–21. Rediscovery of the Book of the Law. Historical-critical reconstructions of biblical history point out that many of the reforms of Josiah seem inspired by Deuteronomy (34:2; see Deut. 7:25–26; 27:3, 26; 28:58–61; 29:9, 21–27). Then they conclude that the book had recently been composed in the north of the country under the name of Moses, in order to purify its religion and that at this point in history it reached Judah. But the purging of the idolatry took place before the discovery of the book (see 2 Chr. 34:1–8a), so the role of the latter was to reinforce, not to initiate, reform. Though passages from Deuteronomy could be and were eventually used as ammunition against a sanctuary in Jerusalem, they are not the center of its powerful message (note its effect in vv. 19–22). A better reconstruction, from a conservative viewpoint, is that Deuteronomy had been for a long time neglected in the south, even during times of faithfulness to the covenant. Now, a century after the fall of Samaria, any potential arguments against Jerusalem based on Deuteronomy were largely moot and could be forgotten, so the book was given its rightful place (vv. 19–22). Josiah sought then to have the people of Judah fully comply with the instructions of the Lord as found in this book of the law.

34:22–28. Prophecy of Huldah. Some readers may find it strange that while Manasseh was personally forgiven by God (33:13), the prophetess announced that Judah was still to suffer for his sins (2 Kin. 21:10–15; 22:15–20; cf. 2 Chr. 34:24–25). Those who violate the covenant may be forgiven through sincere repentance and restored to God's favor, but the effects of their sin on the affairs of this life often cannot be avoided. Also, the evil influence of the sins of Manasseh and Amon reverberated among the people, who committed sins of their own (33:9; 34:25).

34:29–33. Public Reading of the Law. Firmly established on his throne, Josiah gathered all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem as representatives of the nation who could pass on to their families and clans the religious education provided by him (v. 29). The venue was the temple (v. 30), and the instructors were the "priests and the prophets" (2 Kin. 23:2) or, with the characteristic emphasis of 2 Chronicles, "the priests and the Levites" (2 Chr. 34:30). Since the latter regularly addressed the people in the temple, the Chronicler may have considered them to be prophets too, and they also taught Israel (35:3). The textbook of this public education effort, the book of the covenant (34:30), is normally interpreted as a section of Exodus, which presupposes the Decalogue (Ex. 20) and extends it in the immediately following chapters (Ex. 21–23), as suggested by Exodus 24:7. Such passages of the Pentateuch might be alluded to here (2 Chr. 34:31) through the mention of commandments as well as the testimonies (or "decrees") and statutes which follow the Decalogue in Exodus, either directly or by means of the parallel passages in Deuteronomy (e.g., chaps. 5, 10–26). The covenant with the God of Israel was renewed by the king and the representatives of the whole nation (2 Chr. 34:31–32). This commitment was integral to the effort to inspire all who were present in Israel to diligently serve the Lord their God (v. 33).

35:1–19. Josiah's Passover. Much of the language of this section echoes other famous sacred occasions, such as Hezekiah's Passover (chap. 30) or the inaugural festival of Solomon (chap. 7). In contrast to the Passover of Hezekiah, however, this celebration was held at the proper time, on the fourteenth day of the first month (35:1), and at the proper venue for Israel under the Davidic dynasty, the temple. Sacrificing Passover lambs in the central sanctuary alone is commanded in Deuteronomy 16:15–16. Hezekiah, however, had organized the festival in the same way, even for the people of the north (2 Chr. 30:11, 18). Josiah's instruction to the Levites, to put the ark in the temple (v. 3), seems to imply that it was no longer there, but nothing is known about it leaving the temple at a prior time. It could be that the ark was removed from the temple by one of the evil kings. The parallel words of David in 1 Chronicles 23:26 clearly refer to the recent transfer from Gibeon (1 Chr. 15–16). The text here is probably to be read as in the LXX: "they have [already] put the holy ark" (in the temple), referring to David's times. This made it unnecessary for the Levites to occasionally carry the ark (2 Chr. 35:3). Josiah also expected the Levites to teach all Israel (vv. 3–6).

35:20–27. Death of Josiah. The new power on the horizon, since the fall of Nineveh in 612 B.C., was Babylon. Pharaoh Necho, who had sworn allegiance to the Assyrians, was as good as his word and came to their aid against the Babylonians in Carchemish by the Euphrates (v. 20). On his way there, in the valley or plain of Megiddo (v. 22), he was intercepted by Josiah, who probably thought he should help give a final shove to the tottering, hated Assyrian Empire that year (609 B.C.). Necho, on his part, felt he was on a divine mission (v. 21). The invocation of God by Necho (even if tainted by Egyptian conceptions) should have given Josiah pause for reflection (as noted in v. 22), but he stubbornly forged ahead and was fatally wounded in the battle (vv. 23–24). The book of Laments here mentioned, however, is not the biblical book of Lamentations. Jeremiah, whose ministry prospered during Josiah's reign, wept until God specifically instructed him to stop weeping for Josiah (Jer. 22:10). The Egyptians were able to maintain themselves in Carchemish until 605 B.C., "the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah" (Jer. 46:2), when the Assyrian army was definitively defeated.

36:1–23

The End of the Kingdom of Judah

The death of Josiah was a significant spiritual and political blow to the nation. The religious reform was soon forgotten, and the political independence of the nation was lost. From this moment on, the kings of Judah would be vassals either to Egypt or to Babylon.

36:1–8. The Loss of Political Independence. Returning from Carchemish, Necho felt that a regime change was indispensable in Jerusalem, so he deposed and carried away the recently inaugurated Jehoahaz (609 B.C.), substituting an older brother, Eliakim, in his stead, with the throne name Jehoiakim (609–598 B.C.). We are not told in what ways he did evil in the sight of the Lord his God (v. 5). This phrase usually refers to idolatry, but 2 Kings 24:4 mentions the unjust killing of his own subjects, which may be related to struggles between pro-Egyptian and pro-Babylonian parties in Jerusalem. Egyptians, as noted previously, gave ample freedom of worship, but they taxed the land heavily (2 Chr. 36:3). Jehoiakim began his reign as an Egyptian vassal, but in 605 B.C., after the final defeat of Assyria, he swore loyalty to Babylon, only to renege three years later when the Egyptians managed to temporarily contain Babylonian power (2 Kin. 24:1). But the latter was merely strengthening its army, which invaded Judah in 597 B.C. and took Jehoiakim as a prisoner. Then Jehoiachin his son took his place on the throne (2 Chr. 36:8).

36:9–14. Jehoiachin (598–597 B.C.) and Zedekiah (597–586 B.C.). As is indicated in most translations, "eight years old" (v. 9) should probably be corrected to "eighteen." Cuneiform records in Babylon show that five years later, as a prisoner in Babylon, Jehoiachin already had five sons. Zedekiah, a son of Josiah (v. 10), was a weak monarch and changed sides constantly. He ignored the warnings of Jeremiah, who sought to maintain his submission to Babylon (v. 12), and rebelled together with Judah one time too many (vv. 13, 15–23). By this time political passions and evil precedents from the time of Manasseh, or even earlier, combined to make idolatry rampant again (v. 14).

36:15–23. Destruction and Desolation of Judah. By 586 B.C., Babylon had lost patience with the country; so, following the methods of Assyria in Israel (2 Kin. 17:5–6), all the urban population of Judah was taken captive, and the city and its temple were plundered (2 Chr. 36:17–20; 2 Kin. 25:1–21). For seventy years, as predicted by Jeremiah (v. 21; Jer. 25:11–12; 29:10), the land would lie unplowed. The text suggests that for about 420 years of prior existence as an independent and politically organized nation, the Hebrews had essentially ignored the sabbatical-year regulation (Lev. 25:1–7). The default now had to be made up with seventy years of desolation until 539 B.C., when Cyrus, king of Persia, gave them freedom to return and recover their ancestral possessions (2 Chr. 36:22–23). Special mention is made of the articles from the temple, the house of God (v. 18), taken to Babylon and of the destruction of the temple itself. In this way, the marvelous history of the people of God in the promised land, worshiping Him in His holy temple, which was carefully detailed in 1 and 2 Chronicles, seems to have come to a tragic end.

But then, in the midst of this bleak panorama, just as a pine seedling might sprout up after a fearsome fire that has consumed the forest, the new king Cyrus reported in his decree that the God of heaven had appointed and commanded him to build a temple (house) for Him in Jerusalem in Judah. He then invited all among God's people to go up to Jerusalem and even proclaimed a promised blessing for all who would go, saying that the Lord their God would be with them (v. 23). Hope was ignited, and the possibility of a new future began to take shape. The Bible is, indeed, the book of hope and new beginnings (see "The Temple in Chronicles," p. 541).

EZRA

INTRODUCTION

Title and Authorship. The book bearing the name of its main protagonist is situated historically in the second half of the fifth century B.C., during the postexilic period. Jewish scholars throughout the centuries have considered Nehemiah to be a continuation of the book of Ezra and treated them as a single unit, even though the opening caption of Nehemiah (1:1) seems to indicate that they originally were separate works. Nehemiah 3:22 was marked by the Masoretes in the seventh through tenth centuries A.D. as the center of this unified book (Ezra-Nehemiah) and included a final summary note only after Nehemiah 13:31 but did not include one at the end of Ezra. Ezra and Nehemiah have appeared as separate books since A.D. 1448 in Hebrew manuscripts and still appear that way today in modern versions of the OT. Regardless, there are very good reasons to suspect that they were indeed originally one book.

Ezra's influence during the formative period of Judaism should not be underestimated, since it was his leadership that facilitated the reestablishment of worship in Jerusalem following the rebuilding of the temple. Later the rebuilding of the wall was successfully accomplished under Nehemiah's leadership. Because the last few verses of 2 Chronicles (36:22–23) and the first few verses of Ezra (1:1–3) are nearly identical, some scholars have argued that Ezra was also the author of Chronicles. It seems highly likely that the author of, at minimum, the closing portion of 2 Chronicles could have been Ezra. Repetition is common in ancient writing when a scroll (or tablet) was not long enough and the scribe had to continue on a new scroll (or tablet). The modern term for this technique is "catch-lines" (see 2 Chronicles: Introduction). What is also clear is that both books share common terminology and a significant number of theological themes. The same is true for Nehemiah. While it is true that the two men (Ezra and Nehemiah) were contemporaries (Neh. 8:9; 12:26, 36), which may explain the similarities, it is likely that the two books were originally one.

Date. The seven official documents found in Ezra were all written in Aramaic except for the first one, which was written in Hebrew. These documents correspond both in writing style and language used to non-biblical official documents from the Persian period, which is strong evidence that this book was written sometime during that era. According to Ezra 7:1, 8, Ezra was in Jerusalem in the seventh year of the reign of Artaxerxes I, which was 457 B.C. It took Ezra about four months to travel from Babylon to Jerusalem (7:9). While the events in the first six chapters took place before Ezra arrived in Jerusalem, the last four chapters took place after 457 B.C. Nehemiah is not mentioned in the book of Ezra (see commentary on Ezra 2:1–35). Nehemiah began his ministry in 444 B.C. (Neh. 2:1). Thus, the date for the composition of this book in its final version would have been after 457 B.C., but likely most of it was written before 444 B.C. (see Nehemiah: Introduction").

Backgrounds. Artaxerxes was the third son of Xerxes I (the Ahasuerus of Esther). The Greeks called him "long-handed" (Lat. *longimanus*). His father was murdered by the royal bodyguard Artabanus. Artaxerxes then killed Artabanus, but it is unclear who killed the older brothers of Artaxerxes. In the end, Artaxerxes ended up with the throne. It seems that shortly after taking the throne, Artaxerxes gave asylum to Themistocles, the Greek who had beaten his father at the Battle of Marathon and again in the naval battle of Salamis years before. He advised Artaxerxes in matters dealing with the Greeks until his death in 459 B.C. A few years before Ezra traveled to Jerusalem (in 457 B.C.), the Persians were drawn into a fight with an Egyptian-Greek alliance seeking to gain control of Egypt. In 454 B.C. the Persians won that war. A few years later (450 B.C.) Persia was at war with Greece again at Cyprus. A year later, in 449 B.C., the Persians reached a peace with the Athenians. Thus, the world that Ezra entered was one with war on its borders both before and after his arrival in Jerusalem. It was a troubled and uncertain time.

Two major sections of Ezra (4:8—6:18; 7:12–26) containing references to official letters were written in Aramaic. Aramaic (as well as the closely related Syriac) functioned as the language of choice in literature and communication at least starting in the Babylonian Empire, which is why portions of Daniel (2:4—7:28) also were written in Aramaic. These passages in Aramaic represent the only major sections of the Bible written in what was the primary international language of the second half of the first millennium B.C., even though a few Aramaic phrases occur also in Genesis (31:47) and Jeremiah (10:11). It was not uncommon to find texts written in multiple languages in the ancient world, all written by the same person. Thus, this characteristic in Ezra is not an argument that the same scribe could not have written the entire book. In fact, it supports the underlying historicity of the book as being written in the time of its assumed historical context.

Theology and Purpose. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah describe times of struggles and victories for God's people. From the vantage point of these biblical books, these struggles were God's struggles too since it was God who ultimately returned a remnant to Jerusalem and oversaw the reconstruction of the temple and the reestablishment of its sacrificial service. God's commitment to His people is easily observable in Ezra and Nehemiah—in spite of moments of disobedience, twisted priorities, or subversive rebellion. While we cannot fathom God's commitment to a sinful world, we can accept His sustaining and amazing grace and learn from the theological themes that crisscross the book.

1. *A Biblical Philosophy of History.* Human history in Ezra and Nehemiah is clearly the arena of God's activities. This account challenges readers living in the twenty-first century to look beyond the often simplistic link between cause and effect that characterizes a secular outlook on life—there is more to humanity than we can see and measure.

The two books describe three historical returns from exile for the remnant of Judah. In 537 B.C. Sheshbazzar led a group that returned and began rebuilding the temple under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Jeshua (or Joshua) (Ezra 3:8–13) in fulfillment of God's prophecy through Jeremiah that the land would be empty for seventy years (Jer. 25:11–12; 29:10; cf. Ezra 1:1; Dan. 9:2). In 457 B.C. (Ezra 7:6–9), Ezra led another group of exiles in a return to the Holy Land and began teaching them the law (Ezra 7:10), in keeping with the command of Artaxerxes I that Jerusalem and its religious system should be rebuilt and restored (Ezra 7:11–26). This command fulfilled the starting point for the seventy weeks of years (Dan. 9:25), exactly 483 years before the baptism and beginning of the Messiah's ministry (Luke 3:1–22) in A.D. 27, even though the actual building did not start for another thirteen years. Then in 444 B.C. (Neh. 2:1–10) Nehemiah led a third group and, in spite of strong opposition, began rebuilding the wall around the city (Neh. 2:17—6:16), fulfilling the prophecy that the wall would be built during times of trouble (Dan. 9:25). Each of these historic events is clearly attributed in the text to the direct intervention of God working through willing humans. And each shows the foreknowledge of God in predicting the precise time and circumstance in which each event would take place.

2. *God Is Sovereign.* God, as portrayed in the book of Ezra, is not a local or regional deity. Ezra depicts God as bigger than Jerusalem—even though He had chosen Jerusalem (and postexilic Israel) as His manifested dwelling place and base camp to fulfill His mission of saving a lost world (see John 1:14; 3:16). In this sense, Ezra and Nehemiah continue to anticipate the fulfillment of innumerable messianic promises that ultimately point to the completion of salvation history in Jesus Christ. The sovereignty of God is highlighted in the text (Ezra 1:1–5; 7:6, 9) as He is credited with moving the hearts of rulers. This sovereignty is also manifested in the fulfillment of prophecy, something that the gods of the surrounding nations clearly could not do.

3. *God's Remnant Will Prevail.* The concept of a remnant as God's instrument in the fulfillment of His saving purpose in a fallen world (Ezra 9:8) is explicitly stated in this book. Another topic is God's activity in filling the hearts of His worshiping remnant with joy (6:22) regardless of the hardships of life. This echoes Israel's wilderness experience following the Exodus. The hope of salvation was embodied in the life of the remnant and in the promises God gave them.

4. *Holiness Is Intrinsic to the Covenant.* Ezra highlights the flawed perspectives of the remnant, who, even so, were courageous and faithful enough to make the journey back to the Holy Land to undertake the rebuilding of God's temple. When Ezra arrived, regardless of what they had accomplished with God's clear guidance, they still needed purification through changes in their lifestyle in accordance with God's law. The people already living in the land before the remnant arrived had a distorted concept of God (doubtless introduced by Assyrians brought in to repopulate the Northern Kingdom [2 Kin. 17:28], who came to be called Samaritans). The remnant needed to emphasize separation to maintain purity in those early, fragile years of resettlement. Ezra's description of these struggles echoes on a corporate level Jacob's personal struggle with God at Jabbok (Gen. 32:22–31). The reader is left with uncertainty as to whether God's people would hang on to God as Jacob did and be blessed and transformed nationally. This transformation needed to take place on an individual level so it could be reflected on a corporate scale. Eventually it resulted in factions (e.g., Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, Zealots, Yakhads) as groups (sects) responded to the change.

5. *Centrality of God's Word and Worship.* God's word moved the people to action (Ezra 9:4; 10:3). Particularly it was His law (9:6–15) that, when they heard it, brought about their desire to change their actions and repent of their errors. Ezra had studied God's law in earnest (7:6, 10) and was ideally suited to reveal it to the people. This again underscores the centrality of the revealed word of God.

Word and worship are two concepts that are inseparably connected in Ezra and Nehemiah. Worship is expressed in words and deeds. Worship had been the natural result after the successful laying of the foundation for the new temple (3:10–13). And worship remains the natural activity upon its completion (6:16–22). A saved and restored community acknowledged their God through worship. This reminds us that worship is intimately linked to our response to the experience of salvation, the recognition of who we really are, and the realization of how God has led us through trials and tribulations. Ezra keeps us looking at the bigger picture of salvation history and into a future where God's kingdom will finally break into human history with glory and power, leading to the eternal worship of the Lord.

COMMENTARY

1:1—6:22

FIRST RETURN FROM EXILE AND REBUILDING OF THE TEMPLE

Ezra 1:1—6:22 describes the first return from exile under Sheshbazzar (1:1–11), a list of the returnees (2:1–70), the initiation of temple worship (3:1–13), the opposition to Jerusalem (4:1–24), and the completion of the temple (5:1—6:22). It provides the template for the later returns led by Ezra and Nehemiah and introduces the struggles of the returnees.

1:1–11

Edict and Return

The introductory chapter establishes the historical and narrative framework of the entire book. The exiles, God's remnant, lived in a world where kings and princes determined the destinies of peoples, families, and individuals. Yet, as becomes evident, in spite of kingly powers and imperial grandeur, it was really God stirring and moving hearts and minds.

1:1–4. The Edict of Cyrus. The author locates this chapter in the first year of the Medo-Persian king Cyrus, circa 538/537 B.C. Several key themes are introduced in the first four verses of the book. The word of the Lord (v. 1) emphasizes the continued presence of divine revelation or the prophetic gift. The reference to Jeremiah underlines Ezra's rootedness in Scripture (Jer. 25:11–12; 29:1–23) and refers to the prophecy of the seventy years in Jeremiah 29:10. The seventy-year countdown started in 605 B.C. when Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem for the first time and took hostages to Babylon (including also Daniel, cf. Dan. 1:1–4). The exiles returned to Jerusalem in 537 B.C. The reference to God influencing Cyrus directly (lit. "raised or stirred his spirit") to issue his decree reveals an important philosophy of history also reflected in other biblical books (Dan. 1:2; cf. Is. 44:28; 45:1). Earlier, Isaiah had prophesied this divine stirring of Cyrus, eventual founder of the Achaemenid Dynasty, in his bid to conquer Babylon (Is. 44:28—45:25). Ultimately, God moved hearts and governed the great affairs of history regarding His people (Ezra 1:5) and their relationship with foreign leaders (1:1). The first part of the edict itself (vv. 2–4) contains near-identical wording as the last verse of 2 Chronicles. This represents a conscious link to a volume providing an overview of Israel's earlier history. However, there are significant additions in the second part which detail the order to rebuild God's temple in Jerusalem (Ezra 1:3b) as well as the call to financially support those staying behind (v. 4). The edict contains typical Achaemenid phrasing that locates the city and its temple in space, such as Jerusalem in Judah (v. 2) or the temple of God in Jerusalem (v. 4). Similarly, Cyrus's reference to the God of heaven (v. 2) is typical Persian parlance, appearing only three times outside postexilic books (Gen. 24:3, 7; Jon. 1:9).

1:5–11. Preparation for the Return to Jerusalem. Following the reproduction of the royal edict, the text includes the description of Jewish compliance. Verse 5 in the Hebrew refers to the "heads of the fathers/ancestors," which is a short version of a well-known phrase describing an important subunit of Israelite society (cf. Ex. 6:14; Num. 7:2; 1 Chr. 7:40). The phrase describes generally the extended family (or clan), yet the unit is smaller than a tribe. Both religious and civil leadership of Judah and Benjamin (Ezra 1:5) responded to the royal decree. The main purpose of the return was to rebuild the temple of the Lord in order to offer sacrifices (both individually and communally) for atonement. The goodwill provision to the Jews of gold, silver, and other goods strongly echoes the Exodus experience (Ex. 12:35–36). In the mind of the author of the book, this is Israel's second exodus.

Ezra and the Cyrus Cylinder

The purpose of Cyrus's edict allowing Jews living in exile in Babylon to return to Jerusalem and rebuild Yahweh's temple is in line with other historical documents. The well-known Cyrus Cylinder, discovered in Babylon in 1879, provides a helpful window into Persian imperial policy toward people groups who had been exiled during the Neo-Babylonian Empire. In it, Cyrus issued a decree calling for the restoration of temples in and around Babylon and is portrayed as a gracious and considerate master. While the document was undoubtedly intended to communicate royal propaganda and ideology, the similar edict in Scripture suggests its historicity. Other examples of Persian sponsorship of temple constructions in occupied territories are known from the ANE (e.g., the Syrian city of Neirab) and were part of a larger political strategy. Prayer for the royal family was part of why the Persian ruler did this (6:10) as well as generating goodwill for the new empire.

The reference to the articles of the temple (Ezra 1:7) links Ezra to Daniel. Following the final fall of Jerusalem, Nebuchadnezzar, a pagan king, had carried off the temple vessels (2 Kin. 24:12–13; 2 Chr. 36:18; Jer. 52:17–19; Dan. 1:2); yet another pagan king, Cyrus, returned them to their rightful location. The Hebrew term usually translated as "treasurer" (Ezra 1:8) is a word borrowed from Old Persian and is also used in the Aramaic section in 7:21. Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah (v. 8), was most likely the Babylonian name for "Zerubbabel" (see 1:8; 2:1, 2; 3:2–8; 5:16; Hag. 1:14–15). Sheshbazzar's designation as *nashi'* (usually translated as "prince") does not necessarily suggest royalty (cf. Ex. 16:22; Num. 1:16, 44), but may only point to leadership.

2:1–70

List of Those Going Home

For a modern reader this chapter represents tedious repetition and dozens of difficult-to-pronounce names of people and places. However, the list plays an important role in the overall structure of the book. Similar to the census list of Numbers, it gives names, places, and, ultimately, faces to those who were willing to take the risk to return home. In a sense, beyond its administrative function, it represents a veritable list of faith, comparable to Hebrews 11 in the NT.

2:1–35. The Lay Members That Returned Home. This list also appears in Nehemiah 7:2–72. The variations between the lists could have been the result of copying mistakes that confused some of the numbers and names. Verses 1 and 2 represent the heading of the section. Ezra has only eleven names here, while Nehemiah 7:7 includes twelve. It is possible that the missing name in Ezra was dropped due to a scribal error. The number twelve is significant in Israelite history and represents the totality of Israel and thus represents another link to Israel's past. The list of returnees places particular emphasis on the priests and Levites to assure that those serving at the temple were properly qualified.

The section opens with a reference to the people of the province (lit. "the sons of the province"). The plural Hebrew form *bene*—lit. "sons," which is sometimes translated as "children" or "people"—often takes on a collective meaning in the OT referring to descendants (2 Chr. 13:10). This is the usage found throughout the entire section. The "province" most likely refers to the Persian province of Yehud, the administrative Persian unit surrounding Jerusalem. The first mention of Israel in Ezra 2:2 is important. Israel appears numerous times in Ezra and Nehemiah. While most returnees were apparently descendants of Judah and Benjamin (1:5), they understood themselves as God's Israel and were thus linked to the glorious past of the divine promises involving Israel.

It is possible that this first section refers to families who had been exiled from Jerusalem, while the second section, which focuses upon locations (2:21–35), involves lay members who had come from cities in Judah. Both groups were lay members of the community and represent approximately 80 percent of the total returnees listed, while the temple personnel represent the remaining 20 percent. People were at the heart of Israel's return. Their struggles, falls, and victories are highlighted in Ezra and Nehemiah against the backdrop of the reconstruction of the temple and city.

2:36–63. The Religious Leadership That Returned Home. Priests, Levites, temple servants, and servants of Solomon, as well as those families who could not prove their priestly descent, are included in this section. The order of the list represents the Torah order of proximity to the holy of holies (or Most Holy Place) and underlines different grades of holiness. Priests (v. 36) generally served at the altar and could enter the temple proper in order to accomplish the blood manipulations needed in the Israelite sacrificial system. Once a year, the high priest entered the holy of holies during Yom Kippur (Lev. 16:32–34; cf. Heb. 9:7). The role of Levites (Ezra 2:40) involved supportive activities (including the transport of the ark prior to the construction of the temple, gatekeeping, choir work, and instruction), and they usually did not participate in the priestly duties associated with the altar and offerings. However, under specific circumstances, namely, when an insufficient number of priests were available, they could help with the sacrifices, as happened during Hezekiah's reform (2 Chr. 29:34; 30:3, 15).

Temple servants (Ezra 2:43–54) represent a lesser-known group of religious personnel. The term *natin* ("servants") appears only once outside Ezra and Nehemiah (1 Chr. 9:2) and is based on the common verb *natan*, "to give," highlighting David's appointment (and dedication) of this order of temple personnel (Ezra 8:20). Nehemiah 3:26, 31 suggest that they received special quarters in Jerusalem's Ophel. They were distinguished from the descendants of Solomon's servants (Ezra 2:55–58; Neh. 10:28). The exact nature of their service in the temple is unclear, but considering the clear hierarchical structure of the current list, they may have taken care of the menial labor needed in the temple.

The descendants of Solomon's servants (Ezra 2:55–58) are considered part of the temple servants as suggested by v. 58, which lists the total for both groups. While the Levites were "given" to the priests (Num. 3:9; 8:19), the temple servants and Solomon's servants were given to the Levites (Ezra 8:20), underlining a clear tripartite hierarchical structure. Scholars have noted the surprising fact that many names in this group are foreign, suggesting that originally the temple servants may have come to Israel as prisoners of war or resident aliens who escaped natural disaster in their home region (cf. Ruth 1). Their separate listing here, however, underlines their significance for the temple and the worshiping community. They are also a good reminder of the fact that the portrayal of God in the OT is as inclusive and transcendent, crossing ethnic and national boundaries, as the portrayal of God in the NT (Gal. 3:26–29; Eph. 2:14–22).

The last group in this section involves those whose priestly origins could not be ascertained (Ezra 2:59–63). Purity was a major concern in the community of the returnees. Since both the destruction of Jerusalem and the Exile in Babylon had been connected to the lack of obedience to God's commandments (Jer. 6:6–15; 7:1–11; 10:1–16), special attention was paid to these issues by the political leadership of the Yehud community. The governor (Ezra 2:63; possibly Zerubbabel/Sheshbazzar), designated by an official Persian title (rendered as *tirshata'* in the Hebrew), issued a decree that the missing genealogical information required the use of Urim and Thummim, or sacred lots, that had been used to know God's will prior to the Exile (Num. 27:21; 1 Sam. 14:37–42). This decree highlights the importance of political leadership in questions of religious matters.

2:64–70. The Final Tally. The total given sum of 42,360 for the entire group (v. 64) is significantly higher than the mathematical total of the list (29,818 for Ezra 2; 31,089 for Neh. 7). It is highly unlikely that scribal errors are responsible for the different numbers. The number listed here in Ezra may have included other people that did not originally live in the former Southern Kingdom of Judah. The term *qahal*, "assembly" or "company," generally includes everyone, not just the male descendants (Ezra 10:1; Neh. 8:2). The listing of servants or slaves and animals underlines prosperity. Note particularly the relatively high number of mules (Ezra 2:66), animals that had been closely associated with royalty before the Exile (2 Sam. 13:29; 18:9; 1 Kin. 1:33). Due to their hybrid nature (i.e., crossbreeding of horses and donkeys), the breeding of mules was extremely difficult, and forbidden in Israel (Lev. 19:19). They thus represented a significant monetary value.

Another important echo of the Exodus experience of Israel in the return from Babylon is the list of the special freewill offerings for the temple by Israelite leadership (cf. Ex. 25:1–9; 35:4–9; Num. 7). The translation of the currency *darkemin* in Ezra 2:69 is tentative. Some versions translate it as "darics," a Persian gold coin, weighing about 8.4 grams (0.3 oz.) and equaling a soldier's monthly pay. Other versions have "drachmas." Greek drachmas, generally made of silver, were less valuable. The final verse of Ezra 2 represents a concluding summary that forms a frame with verse 1. The settling of the Israelites in their own towns and cities was a tacit reminder of the fulfillment of God's promises. Israel was home again, the faithful had been listed publicly, and the second exodus generation was in place to build the new temple.

3:1–13

Reestablishment of Temple Worship

Once the returnees had settled in their cities, the focus shifted to the reconstruction of the temple and the reestablishment of temple worship. Both required the right location, utensils, and personnel—elements all introduced in chapters 1 and 2. Nothing could stop this movement, it seems, and yet more conflict and struggles lay ahead.

3:1–7. Let's Worship. The movement to reestablish temple worship began in the seventh month (v. 1), corresponding to Tishri (September/October), the most sacred month of the Israelite cultic calendar (Lev. 23:23–43; Num. 29). Israel's festival calendar included the celebration of the Festival of Trumpets (Lev. 23:23–25), the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16), and the Festival of Tabernacles (Lev. 23:34–43; Num. 29:12–38) during the seventh month. The time reference signals the important themes of worship and cultic celebrations, even though it is not entirely clear if it refers to the calendar month or to the time since the arrival of the exiles from Babylon. The gathering of the people "as one" (Ezra 3:1) highlights the unity of the people (see Judg. 20:1; 1 Sam. 11:7). Jerusalem's central role is further emphasized by the move from the cities to Jerusalem. Interestingly, Ezra does not include any information regarding the driving force of this movement. The work was done under the leadership of Jeshua (or Joshua) and Zerubbabel (Ezra 3:2), yet the people appear to have been self-motivated.

In the building of the altar of burnt offerings, the spiritual (Jeshua) and civil (Zerubbabel) leaders acted together following the instructions given by Moses (v. 2). If Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel are the same person, the use of the Hebrew name underlines the rejection of Babylonian influence—the Exile had ended. The concept of building with focused activity occurs repeatedly in Ezra and Nehemiah with verbal pairs of *qum* ("rise," "stand," or in some translations "begin") and *banah* ("to build"; Ezra 1:5; 3:2; Neh. 2:20; cf. 1 Chr. 22:19). The work was undertaken in accordance with the requirements of the law of Moses (Ezra 3:2; Ex. 20:24–26). The presence of fear (Ezra 3:3) in the hearts of the people anticipated conflicts between them and those residing on the land. Yet, in spite of their fear, the altar was set on its foundation. The definite article reminds the readers that this is not just any altar but *the* altar in the courtyard of the temple, the only authorized location for offering a sacrifice. The reason for the construction of the altar was simple: without the altar, no regular morning and evening offerings could be made on behalf of Israel.

The next verses (vv. 4–6) offer a glimpse into the reestablished life of worship of the returnees. The list includes the Festival of Tabernacles that reminded the Israelites of their wilderness wanderings (Lev. 23:43) en route to the promised land. Note the absence of a reference to the Day of Atonement, which required the presence of a temple. Compliance with the requirements of the law is noted at every turn by referencing the fact that they were following the written instructions in the law (Ezra 3:2, 4). The community of the returnees took great pains at avoiding discrepancies with the law, as this had been one of the reasons for the Exile. However, this attention to the law did not necessarily include personal commitment to the Lawgiver, as later episodes involving mixed marriages (chaps. 9–10; Neh. 13:23–28), misplaced personal priorities (cf. Hag. 1), and inappropriate Sabbath activities (Neh. 13:15–22) demonstrate. We cannot love and keep the law without knowing and loving the Lawgiver.

3:8–13. Restoration of the Temple. The description of the preparations made for building the temple are to some extent similar to those made by David and Solomon (Ezra 3:7; 1 Chr. 22:4, 15; 2 Chr. 2:10, 15–16). The reference to the cedars from Sidon and Tyre (including also the specific note that the wood had to be shipped along the coast via Joppa) links this temple to the first temple built when Israel was independent. The activities of David and Solomon associated with the construction of the first temple represent the backdrop of Ezra 3. The work on the foundation began seven months after the construction of the altar (3:8), which again mimicked Solomon who also began construction of the first temple in the second month (1 Kin. 6:1). Since this building had significant spiritual ramifications, the supervision of its construction was entrusted to the Levites. The Hebrew text does not include here a specific term for "foundation" but rather a verbal form meaning "to lay a foundation" (Ezra 3:6, 10). The emphasis is on the "founding" activity of the second temple community.

The unity of the community is highlighted in the list of participants of the founding activities (including Zerrubbabel [the civic, political leader], Je[o]shua [the high priest], the priests, the Levites, and all those who had returned from captivity; v. 8). Levites age twenty years and older (v. 8) were to supervise the construction. The Mosaic regulations indicated that Levites would only serve between the ages of thirty and fifty (Num. 4:2–3; 1 Chr. 23:2–3). However, their scarcity and the literary and thematic link to David's and Solomon's activities related to the temple apparently required this adjustment. First Chronicles 23:24–28 credits David with having lowered the age of service for Levites.

The laying of the foundations was celebrated with singing and worship, as well as an acknowledgment that the Lord is good and that His *khesed*—a rich Hebrew word variously rendered as "love," "covenant faithfulness," "mercy," "loving-kindness"—rests upon Israel forever. This word appears also in Jeremiah 33:10–11 and thus creates a link between the beginning of temple worship and God's prophetic timetable referenced in Ezra 1:1 (cf. the same refrain in 2 Chr. 7:6 during the inauguration of the first temple). We are here because of God's stirring and moving (cf. John 6:44). We can sing because of His promises and protection.

Yet, the chapter concludes on an ambiguous note. While all the people rejoiced with a great shout (Ezra 3:11), others wept loudly (v. 12). The mixture of joy and sorrow illustrates the increasingly difficult balance between the glories of the past and the possibilities of the future. This was not the glorious temple built by an Israelite king in a time of independence and freedom (cf. Hag. 2:3). At the same time, God opened new vistas for a future following the Exile. The ambiguity of the weeping is reflected in Ezra 3:13—the people could not tell the difference between the sound of the shouts of joy and that of the loud weeping. However, the loud noise was from far away. The next chapter will take the reader to those listening and watching from afar.

4:1–24

Opposition to Jerusalem

This chapter provides a nonchronological summary of the opposition the people faced under several Persian kings (Cyrus [559–530 B.C.], Darius I [522–486 B.C.], Xerxes I [486–465 B.C.], and Artaxerxes I [465–424 B.C.]).

4:1–5. Anatomy of Opposition. The transition from the celebration of the foundation-laying ceremony to the confrontation with Jerusalem's enemies (Ezra 4:1) is stark and shocking. These people were most likely identical to the people causing fear in 3:3. The issue of contention involves participation in the rebuilding of the temple.

The offer to help with building may have seemed generous at first (4:2). The additional information provided by the enemies, however, put this seemingly generous offer in a different light. Their declaration that they were seeking Judah's God and had sacrificed to Him (v. 2) provides a window into the possible identity of these people (v. 4). While seeking God could be done in any location, legitimate sacrifices could only happen on the altar of Jerusalem's temple. Thus, the sacrifices offered by the people of the land represented idolatrous offerings. The ancestry of these people went back to the time after the fall of Samaria when Esarhaddon brought them to live on the land (2 Kin. 17:24–41). The result was a faith that mixed their pagan religious ideas with some of the Israelite beliefs. The returnees rejected their help probably because they were not sure of the intentions of these people but more likely because this was the work that God had entrusted into the hands of the returnees (Ezra 4:3).

The reaction of the surrounding people seems to confirm the strong reaction of the returnees. The intent to discourage and frighten (v. 4) suggests needle-like irritation and opposition. Literally, the Hebrew reads here "the people of the land kept making the hands of the people of Judah hang limp" (v. 4). Constant low-level opposition can often be more disheartening than major roadblocks. Jerusalem's opposition hired counselors or officials to work against them (v. 5). This suggests an organized, coordinated commitment against the city, similar to the modern practice of hiring consultants or lobbyists to achieve a desired political end. The Aramaic form of the term appears in 7:14–15, 28 and again in Hebrew in 8:25.

4:6–24. Opposition under Xerxes I and Artaxerxes I. The nature of the accusation by the enemies is not clearly stated. The Hebrew term for "opposition" occurs only here and is related to *satan*, "accuser," "adversary," which is also at times used as a personal designation of Satan. During the time of Artaxerxes I (465–424 B.C.), Jerusalem's opposition was associated with the local leadership of the Persian administration in Samaria. Verse 7 functions as an introduction and historical anchoring of the following Aramaic letters crisscrossing the Persian Empire between the Holy Land and the Persian court. The text does not make it entirely clear whether the letter written by Bishlam and his companions (v. 7) was the same as the one introduced in v. 8 and written by Rehum and Shimshai. If it was the same letter, v. 7 functions as a heading, perhaps suggesting that Bishlam and his companions were the superiors of Rehum, the commanding official, and Shimshai, the scribe or secretary (v. 8). Persian governors of the satrap beyond the River Euphrates (v. 10) by the name *bēlšunu* (a similar name to Bishlam) are known from other fifth century B.C. documents. The Aramaic term *te'em* (v. 9) used in regard to Rehum does not necessarily indicate a military office as some translations suggest, but it can refer also to a high civilian official.

Beginning in v. 8, the language of Ezra changes to Aramaic. The letter follows the general format of an ancient letter, including the names of the senders, a formal greeting, and the content, but lacks a final greeting, which suggests that the biblical author only included the relevant sections of the original document. The list of the people in v. 9 refers to groups that were resettled in the province of Samaria by the Neo-Assyrian king Ashurbanipal (Heb. *'osnappar*; 669–631 B.C.). While there are no biblical references for these relocations during Ashurbanipal's reign, other Assyrian kings followed this practice (2 Kin. 17:24–41). The description of this king as great and honorable is a rhetorical device set in contrast with the supposed rebellious and evil city of Jerusalem (Ezra 4:12). The heading in v. 11, referring to a copy (also 4:23; 5:6; 7:11), may just indicate the content of the letter.

The essence of the accusations in Ezra 4:12–16 is this: if Jerusalem were allowed to rebuild its walls, it would again rebel against the great king and refuse to pay taxes to the Persian treasury. This carefully crafted message insinuated rebellion without providing direct evidence, and it had the desired effect. During the first years of the reign of Artaxerxes I (465–464 B.C.), the new king had to deal with an Egyptian rebellion, and he was not willing to face even a potential one. The king's answer was not only based on the information provided by Rehum and Shimshai but also included a search of the royal archives about the history of Jerusalem (vv. 19–20). This letter is important because it makes clear that Artaxerxes originally authorized Ezra to rebuild the city (see "The Decree of Artaxerxes I as Fulfillment of Daniel 9:25," p. 584). However, in spite of the unequivocal order to cease work, the king indicated that a further decree could allow for the rebuilding to resume (v. 21). This anticipates the narrative of Nehemiah 2:4–8.

The building stop was immediately implemented by the Samarian provincial government, using military force (Ezra 4:23). Rehum, Shimshai, and their cohorts went immediately to Jerusalem to carry out the king's order. The military force may have involved actual destruction (cf. Neh. 1:3–4). Verse 24 serves to introduce the conflict during the time of Darius (which is developed in chapter 5), but at the same time it returns to the concern for the temple mentioned in 4:1–5.

5:1–6:22

Prophecy Fulfilled: The Temple Completed

Following the topical list of opposition to Jerusalem in Ezra 4, covering a period of about one hundred years, the author returns to his main concern: the rebuilding of the temple, which had not been completed by the second year of Darius I (520 B.C.; cf. 4:24). The section focuses on this crucial topic and concludes with the completion of the Lord's temple.

5:1–2. God Is on the Move Again. Prophecy was not dead after the Exile. God was still speaking to His people. Haggai and Zechariah (v. 1) had been divinely called. The fact that they "prophesied to the Jews" underlines an important function of biblical prophets. While they communicated God's perspective on the future, more often than not they spoke to a particular situation currently affecting God's people. Haggai's ministry was focused on moving God's people to complete the construction of the second temple and lasted less than four months in 520 B.C. (Hag. 1:1 [Aug. 29, 520 B.C.] and Hag. 2:1, 10, 20 [Dec. 18, 520 B.C.]). Haggai's critique of the Yehud community reveals that the construction stop was not only due to external pressures but also the result of selfish priorities (Hag. 1:4). Selfishness made it impossible to receive God's blessings (Hag. 1:6, 9). Both prophets remind their audience that God was still watching "over them" (Ezra 5:1). The recognition of divine presence in the midst of severe struggles has been known to ignite hope. Again, the sequence of names, that is, Zerubbabel and Je[o]shua (v. 2), combines civil and religious leadership (see 2:2; 3:8; 4:3) working together. The biblical text explicitly states that God's prophets were supporting the temple construction work (5:2).

5:3–5. Another Challenge. Tattenai, the Persian governor of Trans-Euphrates, challenged the authorization for the reconstruction of the temple when he visited Jerusalem (v. 3). The report to the Persian king listed the names of those responsible for the reconstruction. The concern involved the rebuilding of the temple and the *'ushsharna'* (vv. 3, 9). This rare Aramaic term has been translated as "wall," but its exact meaning is uncertain, and some translators suggest that it refers to "material," "wooden structure," "paneling," or "roof scaffolding." Note that Tattenai's visit happened during the early reign of King Darius I, who had only recently overcome a rebellion led by Gaumata and was not of the royal line of Cyrus. Officials tended to be very cautious when a new king was on the throne. However, as the text indicates, God was watching over the Jewish elders. This reality underlines an important biblical motif. God is looking out for the interests of His people (see Deut. 11:12; Job 36:7; Pss. 32:8; 33:18; 34:15). One can note a curious contrast: while Tattenai and his associates functioned as the "eye" of the Persian king, God's watching "eye" (and providence) was upon His people.

5:6–17. Tattenai's Letter to Darius I. Tattenai's credentials as Persian governor are corroborated by a Babylonian document naming a certain *Tattannu* as governor of the Trans-Euphrates province during the reign of Darius I. The letter describes the visit to Jerusalem and the temple building activities of the Jews (vv. 7–10). It then quotes the justification of the Jewish leadership verbatim (vv. 11–16). The anonymous builders described themselves as "servants of the God of heaven and earth" (v. 11). This seems to contrast with the legitimate title of the "great God," which in the mouth of a Persian administrator could have implied that this God was one among others (5:8; cf. Neh. 8:6; Ps. 95:3; Titus 2:13). However, in Daniel 2:45 the phrase "great God" is used to describe God's foreknowledge of the future. It also is linked to God's creative acts (Ps. 95:3–6). The phrase appears in the Persepolis fortification tablets as well.

The reference to "a great king of Israel" (Ezra 5:11) implies Solomon. The response of the builders appealed to the ANE custom of respecting traditions and established sacred spaces. The reference to God having given His people into Nebuchadnezzar's hands in v. 12 is a good reminder of Scripture's philosophy of history: God moves people (1:1, 5), God gives His people into the hand of their enemies (Dan. 1:2), and God appoints and demotes kings and empires (Dan. 2). Following this confession, reference is made to the decree of Cyrus (Ezra 5:13; cf. 1:2–4), as well as to the return of the cultic vessels of the Jerusalem temple (v. 14; cf. 1:7–11). The order to rebuild the temple and to return the vessels is couched in a verbatim quote of the Persian king (5:15). This links the current building activity to the storied founder of the Medo-Persian Empire. Verse 16 suggests continued construction has followed the laying of the temple's foundation.

The final verse of chapter 5 includes the phrase "if it seems good to [or "if it pleases"] the king." This represents a conventional feature of official Aramaic letter writing also known from the papyri found at Elephantine in Egypt. The search of the king's *bayit nenzaya'*—Aramaic for "house of treasure"—reflects already known Persian administrative procedure (4:15, 19; 6:1). The reference to the archives (lit. "scrolls") in 6:1 clarifies the fact that there were also scrolls (Aram. *sipherayya'*) in the same place where the treasures of Babylon were stored. Accordingly, some translations render "treasure house" as "royal archives" in 5:17.

6:1–12. Decree of Darius I. Following the record of the search, the important decree of Darius is reported at length (albeit missing typical letter elements such as superscription, sender, recipient, and greeting). This vindicated the loyalty, faith, and commitment of the builders. Even a powerful Medo-Persian king was ultimately moved and used by the unseen God who is heavily invested in this world. Following an extensive search, the original decree of Cyrus was located in Achmeta (or Ectabana), one of the four capitals of the Persian Empire (together with Babylon, Persepolis, and Susa). Achmeta corresponds to the modern-day Iranian city of Hamadan. Archaeological research in the city of Persepolis has verified the close physical link between the treasury and the archives, as the previous discussion of 5:17 and 6:1 also suggests. The Aramaic *dikhron* (v. 2) is a technical term denoting an official document. Verses 3 to 5 quote Cyrus's decree in a condensed form with a few added details. It is difficult to establish the specific dimensions of the temple because the length is not provided. This temple was smaller and inferior with respect to quality, and this suggests that the reference to sixty cubits (cf. 1 Kin. 6:2) may have been a scribal mistake.

Note the important additional information involving the costs of the temple construction (Ezra 6:4), payment of which was to come from the king's treasury. This is clarified in 6:8, which indicates that the payment was to come from the taxes of the province. The decree may be emphasizing the importance of the traditional location of the temple reconstruction, the place where they offered sacrifices (v. 3), though some translations render the Aramaic in such a way as to emphasize that the sacrifices were an essential part of the function of the temple ("a place to present sacrifices" or "the place where sacrifices are offered"), rather than its location.

The royal instructions (vv. 6–12) were addressed directly to Tattenai and his colleagues, introduced by a typical "now therefore" or "now then," which marks a new section. King Darius I ratified the previous royal decree and thus suggested a political continuity (which in reality was absent since he was not a descendent of Cyrus). Furthermore, the financial arrangements of the construction as well as the costs of the daily sacrifices were clarified (vv. 8–10). Royal sponsorship of local cults is well established as having occurred during the Medo-Persian Empire and can be found in many texts of that period. The reference in Jeremiah 29:7 to pray for political leadership of a city (or a country) could be understood in this way (Ezra 6:10). The final verses of this section (vv. 11–12) describe vividly the dire consequences that would befall anyone opposing this decree (cf. Dan. 2:5; 3:29). The command to Tattenai and his associates to stay away from the temple (Ezra 6:6) clearly set the tone and transferred the responsibility of this project to the governor of the Jews and the elders (v. 7).

6:13–22. Temple Finished. The governor's response was immediate. A theme of acting diligently (v. 13) and following orders is repeatedly apparent in the Aramaic section of Ezra, often in official communication (5:8; 6:8, 12; 7:17, 21, 26)—and they denote an obedient and timely response. The description of the progress is headed by reference to the elders of the Jews (6:14). This reference would remind readers of the importance of that leadership group, which worked together with the prophets Haggai and Zechariah. In their work they honored God above the kings of Persia, as the sequence of the commands in v. 14 suggests. The construction of the temple was finished in the sixth year of the reign of King Darius (around March of 515 B.C.).

The completion of the temple was celebrated joyously by the people of Israel (6:16–18) with celebratory sacrifices. The emphasis on twelve male goats for the twelve tribes of Israel in the sin offering (v. 17) underlines the fact that this was God's Israel—even though most of the returnees belonged to the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. The temple was the residence of the Lord and the center of holiness and life for Israel. The work performed there foreshadowed the high priestly ministry of the Messiah, and as such the temple was a center of hope. The mention of the celebration of the Passover reminds us of the first Passover of the Israelites after they were liberated from Egypt. Then later, after their liberation from Babylon and the completion of the rebuilding of the temple, the people celebrated the Passover.

The biblical text highlights the fact that the Levites purified themselves and were thus ritually clean (Ezra 6:20). Ritual purity is set in opposition to the *tum'ah*—"uncleanness" or "impurity" of the nations—the practices of their Gentile neighbors (v. 21). The term is repeatedly used in cultic contexts and denotes animals or people who could not be presented to a Holy God (e.g., Lev. 5:3; 7:20; 14:19). Ritual purification was often connected to major religious celebrations (cf. Neh. 12:30), involving washing rites (of clothing and people), ritual sprinkling of water, special offerings, and possibly also sexual abstinence (Ex. 19:10, 14–15; Lev. 16:28; 22:4–7; Num. 8:5–8). The celebration of the Passover happened on the fourteenth day of the first month (Ezra 6:19), in harmony with established pentateuchal laws (Ex. 12:1–6).

Ezra 6:21 emphasizes fellowship between those who had returned from exile and those who had separated themselves from the impurity of the nations around them. Those who truly sought the Lord God of Israel were welcome in the new Israel. This represented another echo of the original Passover celebration (cf. Ex. 12:44, 48). Earnest heart searching and commitment transcend ethnic boundaries. The celebration of the Festival of Unleavened Bread is characterized by joyfulness, a topic common in Ezra and Nehemiah (e.g., Ezra 3:12–13; Neh. 8:12; 12:43).

The surprising reference to "the king of Assyria" rather than the king of Persia (Ezra 6:22) has a deliberate literary purpose. It points to the quintessential enemy of God's people (cf. Ezra 4:2; Neh. 9:32). The Assyrians first exiled Israel and Judah, followed by the Babylonians and Medo-Persians who "inherited" and often increased the empire. Then God changed the thinking (lit. "turned the heart") of the prototype of Israel's enemy. Thus, this reference to Assyria is not a scribal error or a mistaken historical reference. Rather, it is a metaphorical device underlining the fact that what had been the beginning of Israel's end God wondrously transformed into a new beginning.

7:1–10:44

SECOND RETURN UNDER EZRA AND EZRA'S REFORMS

Ezra 7:1—10:44 finally introduces the protagonist whose name functions as the title of the biblical book. Following the description of the historical backstory involving the first return under Sheshbazzar and the rebuilding of the temple, the text then moves on to discuss the rebuilding, as it were, of the people. The second return under Ezra was not so much characterized by mortar, stones, and buildings (even though they do appear!), but by a focus upon the quality of the remnant living in Jerusalem and Yehud.

7:1–8:36

Going Home—Again

This section introduces to us Ezra and his mission (7:1—8:36), but the emphasis is on God's power that brought the people back to the promised land and made them prosperous. This is followed by the consecration and purification of the people (9:1—10:44).

7:1–10. Ezra's Arrival in Jerusalem. Nearly sixty years lie between 6:22 and 7:1. The fifth month of the seventh year of Artaxerxes I (v. 8) corresponds to 457 B.C. (7:8). However, the section does not begin with time but with a person. Ezra's genealogy is detailed and includes sixteen generations, finally concluding with Aaron, the chief priest (v. 5). The Aaronic genealogy in 1 Chronicles 6:3–15 includes six more names, which suggests that Ezra used an abbreviated version of the list. The list sought to establish, beyond any doubt, Ezra's priestly credentials. Priestly leadership in the second return illustrates the increasingly important role of religious leadership in the postexilic period, as the whole book demonstrates.

Ezra is described as a *soper mahir betorat moshe*—an expert teacher or scribe of the law of Moses (Ezra 7:6). The Hebrew phrase referring to an expert teacher or scribe (*soper mahir*) is also found in Psalm 45:1. The reference to the king's granting of Ezra's request suggests that it is probable that Ezra had some influence in the Persian court. What was most important, however, was that the hand of the Lord his God was upon him (Ezra 7:6). The reference to the law of Moses emphasizes Ezra's role in establishing a special people. This reference to God's "hand" (cf. v. 9) highlights God's protection over His people.

The journey of four months was taken during the seventh year of Artaxerxes I (457 B.C.). Ezra did not travel alone, even though no specific numbers are supplied. However, the biblical text mentions predominantly religious personnel that accompany Ezra (v. 7). The explanatory note introducing v. 10 links God's blessings to Ezra's desire to study (lit. "seek") "the Law of the LORD" and to observe and teach God's rules and principles. This is the only place in the OT that links the verb *darash* ("to seek") to the *torah*—the law. There are, however, many references to seeking God (e.g., Ezra 4:2; 6:21; Deut. 4:29; Is. 55:6; Hos. 10:12). Isaiah 34:16 invites readers to search (Heb. *darash*) from the book (lit. "scroll") of the Lord (cf. Acts 17:11). The importance of Scripture as the revealed will of God was increasing in times of change and transition. If we want to meet the God of Scripture, we need to spend time with His revealed word.

7:11–28. Artaxerxes I's Decree Authorizing Ezra's Return and Mission. Ezra includes a copy of the royal decree containing two main elements. First, it authorizes Ezra's return (7:12–16); second, it confirms Ezra's supervisory role in Jerusalem and the Persian province of Yehud (7:17–26). The copy of the letter was given by the king to the emissary (7:11). In line with Ezra's reform efforts, his expertise in God's commands and statutes or decrees (shorthand for Scripture) are emphasized. The letter, in Aramaic, includes the name of the sender, position, and the customary greeting. The final exhortation to disseminate the royal order and comply with it includes also the customary penalty clause (7:25–26; cf. 6:12).

The opening lines of Artaxerxes's I decree are similar to Cyrus's first decree and provide an important historical anchor. Among those willing to return, priests and Levites in particular are named (7:13). Historical evidence suggests that a majority of Jews remained in the region around Babylon even after the first and second return. The seven counselors or advisors (7:14) are mentioned in Esther 1:14 and in extrabiblical literature as well and seem to have reflected fifth century B.C. realities at the Persian court. Ezra was being sent to *beqar* ("seek" or "inquire") concerning Judah and Jerusalem (Ezra 7:14). It is possible, as some translators have recognized, to render *beqar* as referring to evaluation or oversight. This is not only possible linguistically but also seems to fit better in the overall context. Ezra's supervisory function was based on the law of his God in his hand. Both contextual translations make better sense and are solidly based on appropriate translations of the two prepositional phrases. An important part of Ezra's mission was to establish that the Jews in Jerusalem were living in accordance with the law of Moses. Furthermore, he had to convey the financial gift of the Persian court to the temple of the Lord (vv. 15–16).

Artaxerxes I considered Ezra's God another local deity, as suggested by the phrase "whose dwelling is in Jerusalem" (v. 15). The reference to the "God of heaven and earth" (5:11) reflects the Jewish understanding of a universal God by highlighting the sovereignty of the Lord who transcends all local deities, but it probably does not reflect the king's personal belief. Ezra 7:17 allows for the use of royal funds to purchase sacrificial animals for the temple. However, v. 18 indicates that there was significant financial freedom for Ezra and opens the possibility that some of the resources were later used to rebuild the city wall.

The Decree of Artaxerxes I as Fulfillment of Daniel 9:25

The fulfillment of the prophecy of the seventy weeks, registered in Daniel 9:25, was to start during the Medo-Persian Empire and would be initiated by a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem (see Dan. 9). This prophecy was fulfilled through the decree of Artaxerxes I recorded in Ezra 7.

1. *Restoration of the City.* The decree included several important elements: (1) it granted permission to the exiles to return to Jerusalem; (2) funds were assigned for the support of the temple; (3) the temple and temple personnel were tax exempted; (4) and it established a Jewish legal system based on the Torah, which included magistrates and judges to enforce the law (Ezra 7:25–26). The Persian king made the Mosaic law part of the imperial law. The Jews could now use it freely to regulate their lives and to administrate justice in Jerusalem. The Jews were to govern themselves on the basis of the law of God. Daniel 9:25 was referring to this type of restoration. The authorization to rebuild the city was implicit in the authorization to set up a judicial system, based on the law of God, at a central place. Besides, we find clear evidence in Ezra and Nehemiah to the effect that the Jews were authorized to rebuild the city.

2. *Nehemiah and the Wall.* The first line of evidence is found in Nehemiah 1. About thirteen years after Ezra arrived at Jerusalem, Nehemiah was informed that those who returned had great misery and shame and that the wall of Jerusalem was broken down and the gates destroyed by fire (1:3). Nehemiah was obviously referring to a recent event and indicates that the rebuilding of the city had been in progress until it was stopped and much of the work done had been damaged and/or destroyed. This rebuilding project took place before 444 B.C.

but was unfinished. The question is, when did the rebuilding of the wall begin? The biblical text provides a clear answer. According to Ezra 4:7–23, it took place during the reign of Artaxerxes.

3. *The Building of the Wall Stopped.* Ezra 4:7–23 states that a group of Persian officers wrote a letter to Artaxerxes recording their opposition to the rebuilding of Jerusalem by the Jews. In the letter they mentioned, first, that the city was being rebuilt, the walls were being finished, and the foundations were being repaired. Second, this rebuilding was being done by the Jews who had returned to Jerusalem (4:12). The reference to the people coming from Artaxerxes indicates that the rebuilding was being done by a group of exiles who had been recently authorized by Artaxerxes to return to Jerusalem. According to Ezra 7, the king authorized Ezra and the exiles in 457 B.C. to return to Jerusalem.

The Persian officers were trying to persuade the king to stop the project by arguing that Jerusalem had consistently been a rebellious city (Ezra 4:13, 15), that if the Jews were permitted to finish their project they would take control of the Trans-Euphrates province, and that consequently they would stop paying taxes and tribute to the king (vv. 13, 16). This may have been based on the fact that Artaxerxes authorized Ezra to teach and to enforce the law of God throughout the province and not just in Jerusalem (7:25–26). Notice that the letter does not suggest in any way that the rebuilding of the city and its walls was being done without royal consent. Had the Jews begun to rebuild the city illegally their enemies would have charged them with rebellion against the king. The arguments they used presupposed that the rebuilding was authorized by the king. They wanted the project stopped, not because it was not supported by Artaxerxes but because of the potential danger of insurrection.

A careful reading of the answer of the king suggests that the Jews had, indeed, been authorized by Artaxerxes to rebuild the city. Once the complaint was received, the king ordered an investigation and found that the only reason he had to stop the rebuilding project was that the possibility of a rebellion appeared to him to be real. Otherwise the charges against the Jews would have been much more serious. In other words, he could only stop the project on the basis of a potential insurrection—a suspicion supported by the fact that Jerusalem had been a rebellious city (4:19). The decree allowing for the rebuilding of the city was not canceled, but its execution was postponed by the king to a future time determined by him (and which in fact occurred during the time of Nehemiah, as indicated in Neh. 2).

The Persian officers took the letter of the king and went back to Jerusalem to forcibly stop the project (Ezra 4:23). This phrase certainly indicates that the officers employed military force to stop the project and that at least some sections of the wall were destroyed. This explains why it took Nehemiah only fifty-two days to rebuild the wall of the city (Neh. 6:15). It is to this attack on the Jews and the city that Nehemiah 1 refers.

4. *A Wall in Jerusalem.* The next line of evidence is found in Ezra 9:9. In one of his prayers, Ezra states that God authorized the people through the Persian kings to repair God's house, restore its ruins, and give them a wall in Judah and Jerusalem. Some scholars interpret the reference to the wall in Judah and Jerusalem to be metaphorical. They argue that there was never a literal wall around Judea and consequently the wall is to be interpreted as a symbol of divine protection. But this is not a persuasive argument. First, the phrase could simply mean that a wall in Jerusalem (cf. Ezra 4:12) was a wall in Judah because Jerusalem was located there. Second, since the same verse mentions the literal house of God, the temple, it follows that the wall is also literal. Third, although the word *gader* is not the common word used to designate a city wall, it is also used in the OT to designate such a wall (Mic. 7:11). The metaphorical interpretation is difficult to support.

The beginning of the fulfillment of the prophecy of the seventy weeks (Dan. 9:25) was initiated in 457 B.C. when Artaxerxes authorized Ezra through a royal decree to go to Jerusalem accompanied by a group of exiles to restore and rebuild the city. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah show clearly that this was exactly what took place and that the rebuilding of the city was finished under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah.

The king's promise of up to one hundred talents of silver (Ezra 7:22), that is, nearly 7,500 pounds (approximately 3,400 kg), was referring to a huge number. The total amount of yearly tribute of the Trans-Euphrates satrapy was only 350 talents. Instead of arguing for a textual error, this should be understood in light of the wide freedoms (vv. 18, 25) that the royal order gave to Ezra. The quantities of wheat (about 650 bushels or 22,900 liters), wine (about 600 gallons or 2,300 liters), oil (about 600 gallons or 2,300 liters), and unlimited salt showcase Artaxerxes I's commitment to this project. The command to proceed diligently emphasizes the importance of the financial element of the decree and was set in the king's letter in direct relation to possible (divine) wrath against the royal house (v. 23).

The final three verses of the decree cover administrative issues. Tax exception for temple personnel is also known from other sources from the Medo-Persian Empire (v. 24). According to the Gadatas inscription of Darius I, the priests of Apollo were exempt from paying tax. The mention of tax, tribute, and custom/duty represent different types of officially levied payments. The reforms to be undertaken by Ezra were not only religious in nature but also involved political structures. The authority to appoint magistrates and judges (v. 25) fits the particular historical context. The appointment of judges links Ezra to Moses (Ex. 18). Both the law of God and the Persian law were to be fully enforced (Ezra 7:26).

Ezra's doxology (vv. 27–28), written in Hebrew, concludes this important chapter. Written in first-person singular, it reflects a very intimate and personal expression of praise for divine guidance and blessings. God's *khesed* ("mercy," "love," "covenant faithfulness") was extended before kings, counselors, and princes. In this sense it became a testimony of divine grace pointing to the King of kings and encouraging frail human beings. Only when we recognize God's amazing grace and mercy in our own lives can we become faithful leaders.

8:1–32. List of Returnees and the Journey. The list of returnees traveling with Ezra from Babylon to Jerusalem includes priestly families (8:2a), the royal line (8:2b–3a; cf. 1 Chr. 3:22), and, finally, lay members (Ezra 8:3b–14). Beginning with the sons of Parosh, there are twelve families listed. The list of returnees indicated that 5,000 to 6,000 returned to the land. The prospective returnees were assembled by the river that flows to Ahava (v. 15). The exact location is unclear but presumably was close to Babylon (7:9). Scholars have suggested that the reference is to a canal, not a river, since the Mesopotamian heartland was full of irrigation canals (similarly referenced in Ezek. 1:3) and was large enough to provide space for such a large group of travelers. In reviewing the assembled group Ezra realized that no Levites and temple servants could be found in the group and sent an invitation to Iddo and his brethren in Casiphia (Ezra 8:16–17). God's good and gracious hand (see commentary on 6:1–12) finally led thirty-eight Levites to join the returnees, together with 220 temple servants (8:18–20). The fact that all of them were identified by name (v. 20) would mark the precise registration in bona fide priestly lists and assure future eligibility to serve in the temple. The full list is not included in the book of Ezra.

The returning group's fasting and prayer underlines the religious character of this journey (8:21–23). The reference to their humbling themselves before God was a more comprehensive way of referring to fasting (also in Lev. 16:29, 31; cf. Acts 27:9 where the Day of Atonement is called "the Fast"). Ezra's purpose was to seek a literal "straight way" from God, and, considering Ezra 8:22, refers most likely to a safe journey (cf. Is. 40:3; 52:12). Ezra's decision not to ask for an escort of soldiers and horsemen to protect them may be explained by the important cultural value of shame: Ezra had testified before the king about the Lord's protection of His people, and so armed guards would have suggested a lack of faith.

Ezra needed the priests and Levites in order to carry the offering and donated articles for the temple (Ezra 8:24–27, 30). Pentateuchal legislation divided the work of carrying different parts of the sanctuary between priests and Levites (Num. 3–4). While Ezra's group did not return temple vessels, the successful collaboration between priests and Levites provided the matrix for another exodus. Furthermore, the link to the temple made the offerings as well as the priests and Levites holy (Ezra 8:28). Holiness and purity are important concerns in the rest of the book, and they emphasize the religious nature of Ezra's mission. Another reference to God's hand (v. 31) reminds the reader of previous references to this motif (vv. 18, 22; see 7:6). It was because of His presence with them, as in the original Exodus from Egypt, that no military escort was needed.

The safe arrival notice contains references to deliverance and ambushes (8:31). The journey took about four months (7:8–9) and covered the roughly 900 miles (1,450 km) between Babylon and Jerusalem. They used the major road system that connected Mesopotamia and the Holy Land. The three-day rest following their arrival (8:32) may suggest that they arrived on Friday and then delivered the precious articles on Monday. Another list documents the delivered articles and offerings. Twelve bulls were offered for all Israel (v. 35) as a burnt offering, another reminder of the self-perception of the returnees as being Israel. The sacrificial list abounds with multiples of twelve. We need to remember the emotions involved in offering a sacrifice in the temple, considering the fact that the Jews in Babylon were unable to offer sacrifices. The religious celebrations were similar to the two festivals recorded in chapters 3 and 6. The concluding verse indicates that the king's orders had been delivered to the king's satraps and the governors of Trans-Euphrates. This probably occurred late in the summer or early in the fall of 457 B.C. (see 9:1–5). In turn these leaders gave support to the people and the temple. Ezra's meticulous planning and his complete reliance on God showcase the delicate balance of God's children living in a world that often challenges faith. While we rely absolutely and completely on God's good hand, at the same time we are called to give our best for the glory of God.

9:1–10:44

Consecration and Purification

Prayers are important in Ezra and Nehemiah (e.g., Ezra 8:21–23; 9; Neh. 1:5–11; 2:4; 9:5–37), and in chapter 9 Ezra prays with respect to his role as teacher of the law. Following the prayer, we are informed about the people's resolution and commitment to make things right (chap. 10). Prayer without consequences is cheap talk.

9:1–5. Diagnosis: No Difference. Once Ezra had turned over the silver and gold that had been donated by the royal court and the remaining Jewish community in Babylon (7:15–16), he was ready to confront Jerusalem's real problems. Ezra 7:9 (first day of fifth month) suggests that Ezra's group arrived in Jerusalem late in July of 457 B.C., after they had begun the journey in the spring. The fact that long journeys were usually initiated in spring further supports this chronology. The events narrated in Ezra chapters 9 and 10 seem to have occurred about four months later (cf. 10:6–9), in November/December of the same year, soon after the events mentioned in 8:36 (see 9:1). In line with Ezra's characterization in 7:10 as one who was dedicated to studying, observing, and teaching God's law, it was now time for a diagnosis. Local leadership informed Ezra that the Jews (including also priests and Levites) had not remained separate from the surrounding nations (9:1). The list of nations reflects earlier lists before the period of the conquest (Ex. 3:8; 33:2; Deut. 7:1) but also includes new groups (e.g., Ammonites, Moabites, and Egyptians), whose wrong practices the Hebrews had adopted (even if some of these people groups may not have remained as clearly defined ethnic groups by this period). Postexilic Jerusalem and the Persian province of Yehud faced challenges similar to those of Israel during the original Exodus and conquest. The abominations or detestable practices of the nations probably refer to religious and moral aberrations. The Hebrew term appears also in Genesis 43:32, where it describes the Egyptian's abhorrence of eating with Hebrews because they worked in close proximity with livestock (cf. Gen. 46:34). Leviticus 18:30 uses this word in describing sexual perversions of the Canaanites. In Malachi 2:11 it describes idolatry in terms of a perverted marriage.

The concern of the leaders involved separation. The verb is often used in cultic and ritual contexts (e.g., Ex. 26:33; Lev. 1:17; 5:8; 10:10; 11:47) to emphasize the separation between holy and profane and between pure and impure. The term also appears in the context of Creation (Gen. 1:4, 6–7, 14, 18). This lack of separation found its expression in mixed marriages, including also the leaders and rulers who had been the most egregious offenders in this matter (Ezra 9:2). The danger was that the holy people were being mixed with the peoples of those lands. The reference to the holy people (lit. "holy seed") echoes Isaiah 6:13 and is a description of the remnant. Holiness, part and parcel of Israel's DNA (Ex. 19:6; 1 Pet. 2:9), involves commitment to the Lord in life and in mission.

Ezra's reaction to this situation was very strong and involved mourning rites (2 Sam. 13:19; 2 Kin. 19:1; Job 1:20; 2:12–13). The word *shamem* in Ezra 9:3 means "astonished," "appalled," or "in severe shock." The crowd that saw their leader sitting on the ground, his hair in upheaval, and his clothes torn, was a sympathetic crowd since they trembled at the words of God. This indicated a high regard for divine revelation (Is. 66:2, 5; cf. Ezra 10:3). Finally, at the time of the evening sacrifice, silence turned to confession and prayer. The language was intimate, Ezra referring to God as "my God" (Ezra 9:5). Prayer challenges us individually to relate to our Creator and Savior personally and corporately.

9:6–15. The Prayer: "Here We Are." Ezra's prayer is a wonderful example of intercessory prayer (cf. Neh. 1; Dan. 9). It contains confession of past sins (Ezra 9: 6–7), a historical review (vv. 8–9), confession of present sins (vv. 10–12), and a heartfelt plea for God's incomparable grace (vv. 13–15). Ezra's reflection that he was "ashamed" (v. 6) underlines the importance of shame and honor in biblical times. Sin affronts God and disrupts human relationships. Ezra also described graphically a history of overwhelming guilt—it was higher than their heads and higher than the heavens (an echo of the Tower of Babel narrative; cf. Gen. 11:4). Israel's sin and guilt had reached heaven and God's presence. Ezra's point was that due to the flagrant nature of Israel's sin, he needed to respond unequivocally. The Exile represented that response.

The Hebrew of Ezra 9:8 utilizes a unique metaphor. The text refers to a *yated*—a pin or tent peg—in the sanctuary or "holy place." A tent peg provides strength and anchors a larger structure and gives it a firm hold. God's holy place could refer to either the earthly sanctuary or the heavenly sanctuary. God's provisions are not only sufficient but also secure and encompass a location and a means of communication between God and His people (Is. 33:20; 54:2).

Ezra admitted that they did not know what to say (Ezra 9:10). This was a clear recognition and confession of guilt. Following Ezra's logic, Israel had forgotten God's commandments regarding intermarriage. The reference to the unclean or polluted land (v. 11) echoes conceptually Leviticus 18:25–28 and utilizes terminology that is elsewhere linked to menstrual bleeding (Lev. 18:19) or bodily discharges (Lev. 15:19–33). The lack of ritual purity prohibited the affected person from appearing before the Lord in the temple. Due to its nonchalance regarding mixed marriages, the Yehud community was threatened by the same fate. The emphasis on purity in marriage relations does not suggest ethnic superiority but rather obedience to God's law. As was the case in Solomon's life, a spouse was either a strong help in maintaining loyalty to God or a great hindrance. Thus, religious loyalty ultimately superseded ethnic relations. This religious commitment lies at the heart of the concern about mixed marriages.

However, Ezra's prayer reminds us of God's radical grace, highlighting the fact that God did not punish Israel as much as their sins deserved (Ezra 9:13) and had given deliverance (see 2 Tim. 2:13). The prayer ends with confession of sin and a recognition of the righteousness of God. Ezra was functioning as a true mediator between the people and God, identifying himself with the condition of the people (cf. Ex. 32:10–13, 30).

10:1–4. The People's Response. Ezra's prayer and dynamic display of emotions helped to move the people to confession and led to covenant renewal. In this chapter there is a change from first to third person, which makes it easier to distinguish the I's in Ezra's autobiographical section in Ezra 9 and Nehemiah's memoirs in Nehemiah 1. The people's admission of their sin and guilt opened the possibility of a covenant renewal, which would also include the dissolution of the unlawful marriages with the foreign women and separation from their children. Shechaniah (Ezra 10:2; his name means "Yahweh dwells [near]") belonged to Elam's family that had returned with Sheshbazzar (2:7). Based on the list in 10:26, it may be possible that even his father had married outside Israel. Since the mixed marriage problem involved descendants of the earlier returnees, Shechaniah was well qualified to respond as a representative of the local community. He also recognized Ezra's leadership and authority (10:4), particularly considering Ezra's job description given by the Persian king (7:23, 25).

10:5–17. Covenant Renewal. The covenant renewal ritual included calling an assembly (vv. 7–8), confession (vv. 9–12), and forming a tribunal to investigate specific cases (vv. 13–17). Although only four persons publicly opposed the decision, there were possibly others who did as well without indicating it because ten years later Nehemiah would have to face the same problem (though it is also possible that the later opposition was unrelated; Neh. 13:23–29).

Ezra's inclusion of Yehud leadership in this reform effort, which involved priests and Levites (10:5), is highly significant. True and lasting change can only be accomplished in unity and not by coercion. Ezra's mourning rites (including fasting; Ezra 9:3) were not necessarily a public relations stunt. Even following the commitment of Yehud's leadership in 10:5, when Ezra entered Jehohanan's room, he continued his fast privately (v. 6). The identity of Jehohanan is not entirely clear since no title is included. Some have linked the name to Nehemiah 12:22–23, which contains an (abbreviated) list of high priests, especially considering the fact that the same name is referred to as a high priest in the extrabiblical Elephantine papyri from Egypt dated to 408 B.C. However, this identification is not very convincing—especially in light of the fact that both Jehohanan (and its variant Johanan) and his father's name, Eliashib, were common in the postexilic community.

The mandatory gathering assembled three days after the announcement in the open square near or in the house of God (Ezra 10:9). Commentators and translators differ in regard to whether this place was the court of the temple or a place near it. The location of the covenant renewal is significant. This was not just a matter of decrees and quick paperwork. It happened "before God" and reminded the participants of other important meetings "before God" in Israel's history. The trembling and distress of the people was because of the sad situation and because of the heavy rain. The ninth month (or Kislev) of the Hebrew calendar falls into December. Due to Jerusalem's altitude of nearly 2,600 feet (or ca. 800 m) above sea level and average highs of only about fifty degrees Fahrenheit (or ca. ten degrees Celsius) during this time of year, the meeting was not a pleasant picnic-style gathering. Ezra indicted the people directly and affirmed their sinfulness (Ezra 10:10; cf. 9:2). The Hebrew verb is in an emphatic verbal form, which emphasized the element of personal responsibility. This could not rightly be blamed on the ancestors. Ezra's priestly credentials are referred to twice here (vv. 10, 16; see Mal. 1:6—2:16). Prophetic and priestly leadership were to work in harmony. The reference to the guilt of Israel picks up an earlier motif (Ezra 9:6, 13, 15; cf. Josh. 7:1 using the same Hebrew term). Conscious (and even unconscious) sin results in guilt requiring confession and commitment to change. The people were called upon to confess (lit. "give thanks to") to the Lord. Our confessions are part of showing God's justice and mercy within the context of the Great Controversy, as we publicly recognize our sin and throw ourselves upon our Redeemer's grace.

The people's affirmative response (Ezra 10:12) is, however, balanced by the inclusion of a list of four men (v. 15) who did not support this initiative. The text is not entirely clear if the opposition involved the procedure or the actual recognition of guilt of mixed marriages. The agreed-upon process delegated the review of individual cases to the leadership (v. 14). Verses 16 and 17 suggest that the process took three months.

10:18–44. The Final Report. The final verses of Ezra lists those implicated in mixed marriages. The sequence of implicated families follows the earlier lists in Ezra, detailing first religious leadership (priests [10:18b–22], Levites [10:23], musicians [10:24a], and gatekeepers [10:24b]), followed by others—literally "from Israel" (10:25–43). A total of 113 men are mentioned, a number which corresponds to 0.38 percent of the 29,818 returnees that are listed in Ezra 2. While less than half a percent appears to be a low incident number, God was not interested primarily in quantity but quality. The existence of mixed marriages at different levels put into question Israel's commitment to the Lawgiver. Verse 19 includes a unique reference for the important resolution of the communal guilt. The implicated priestly leaders first gave their promise (lit. "gave their hand"; cf. 1 Chr. 29:24; Ezek. 17:18) to divorce their wives, followed by a reference to a ram as their trespass or guilt offering. The reference to the special sacrificial ritual underlines the importance and responsibility of spiritual leadership and the seriousness of the trespass (or "unfaithfulness") that required divine atonement.

Contemporary Bible readers will understandably ask important questions regarding the ethics of 113 named men, many of high standing in the community, sending away their foreign wives, and the implications for any children born to those marriages. It seems evident from the text that these marriages were not viewed as legitimate; thus these were essentially dissolutions of unlawful marriages rather than divorces. It is also quite likely that the children and women who were sent away were cared for in some way, though the text does not indicate what specifically happened to them. According to the law, foreigners, widows, and the fatherless (the women and children were in an essentially analogous situation in Ezra) were to be loved and cared for (Lev. 19:34; Deut. 10:18; 14:29; 24:19–21; 26:12–13). We have suggested, based on the text, that Ezra was not driven by ancient racism or religious bigotry. Ezra focused on Israel's (or Jerusalem's) relation to the God who broke the chains of their slavery, returned them from exile, and manifested love for the orphan, the widow, and the foreigner. Religious identity and commitment lay at the heart of the issue of mixed marriages—not racial superiority or nationalistic ideas. The God of Scripture is the God who searches for the lost and calls a people (or church) to obedient commitment and faithful service as they look forward in hope to a new city.

NEHEMIAH

INTRODUCTION

Title and Authorship. Nehemiah 1:1 indicates that the words that follow are from Nehemiah himself. However, for linguistic and thematic reasons, the books of Ezra and Nehemiah were combined for the greater part of history, leading some to suggest that Ezra penned both. Not until A.D. 1448 did the two books appear in the Hebrew Bible separately. These books were so much considered a single volume that the Septuagint (LXX) calls this book "Second Ezra." The Latin Vulgate follows this title.

Since Ezra was a scribe, scholars have suggested that he (who lived contemporaneously with Nehemiah; 8:9; 12:26, 36) had a hand in the final version of this book and (very likely) in the composition of 1 and 2 Chronicles (see 2 Chronicles: Introduction). The similarities in vocabulary and style between the books of Ezra and Nehemiah may be due to them having been written in roughly the same time period by two men in roughly the same social class, or by one scribe (i.e., Ezra himself).

The so-called Ezra and Nehemiah memoirs (a modern label) are offered as an additional argument for the original intended unity of the two books (see Ezra: Introduction). The term "memoir" refers to a text that is written in an autobiographic style, using the first person singular or plural ("I" or "we"). We would expect that Ezra would contain the Ezra memoirs, while Nehemiah would include his memoirs. However, the locations of the memoirs are used to suggest a more integrated literary plan. Ezra's memoir, part I (Ezra 7–10), is followed by Nehemiah's memoir, part I (Neh. 1:11—7:73a), which in turn is followed by what scholars call the second part of the Ezra memoir (Neh. 7:73b—10:39) and the second part of the Nehemiah memoir (Neh. 11–13). Some are not comfortable with identifying these as memoirs or convinced that the second part of the Ezra memoir is actually that at all since the use of the personal pronoun when referring to Ezra is directly absent. When referring to Ezra, the third person pronoun "he" (i.e., Neh. 8:3, ff.) is used with the antecedent name "Ezra" (i.e., Neh. 8:2, ff.) as if someone other than Ezra is writing.

Date. The book of Nehemiah begins in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes I (Neh. 1:1; 2:1), which was 444 B.C. The book could not have been written before this date. Nehemiah was appointed governor for twelve years, ending in 432 B.C. (5:14), at which point he returned to Babylon (13:6). Sometime after this, he traveled again to Jerusalem following what amounted to a visit to Babylon. It is not known if he ever returned to Babylon again. As a result, the final portions of the book had to have been written sometime after 432 B.C. If Darius II is the Darius mentioned in the book (Neh. 12:22), then that portion could not have been written before 423 B.C. (since Darius II reigned from 423–404 B.C.).

Backgrounds. Esther's husband, Xerxes I (also called Ahasuerus), was murdered by the royal bodyguard. Although not the eldest son, Artaxerxes, after a short period of turmoil, ended up on the throne. He was probably born during his grandfather's reign (Darius I), when his father was just a prince, making it unlikely that he would have been related by blood to Esther. About five years before Nehemiah went to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls (in 444 B.C.), Persia entered into peace with Greece (449 B.C.). Thus, the Holy Land had relative peace with local rulers jockeying for position in the new, more stable political environment when Nehemiah entered it. This is reflected in the story.

Archaeological evidence for the wall built by Nehemiah is sparse, primarily because the city has been built and rebuilt many times since. However, portions of it have been identified and are still visible for visitors today. In fact, one portion (part of the Northern Tower and its city wall) has been dated (from pottery and burials associated with it) to almost immediately after the mid-fifth century B.C. (ca. 444 B.C.)—the same year that Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem.

Theology and Purpose. A number of theological themes appearing in both Ezra and Nehemiah have already been discussed in the introduction to Ezra. The following themes have particular significance for the book of Nehemiah:

1. *Covenant Thinking.* The covenant is an important topic in Nehemiah. The scattered remnant's only hope for restoration could be found in the Lord as the keeper of the covenant (9:32). This covenant depended entirely upon God's gracious covenant love (9:17; Ezra 7:28; 9:9), a concept also echoed in contemporary postexilic prophets (Zech. 1:3; Mal. 1:2). Ezra and Nehemiah mark the end of the OT period and anticipate already important NT developments. Nehemiah also emphasizes the renewal of the covenant, anticipating the ultimate renewal of God's covenant with humanity in Jesus. This covenant, originally made in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:15) and later renewed with Abraham (Gen. 12:1–3; cf. Gal. 3:16–18), had been prophesied through a vision to Daniel (Dan. 9:25–7) and was later recognized as being fulfilled in Jesus (Heb. 13:20).

2. *From King to Community.* Kings or prophets played only a limited role in events chronicled by Nehemiah, with individual leadership replaced by a focus on the community as the center of shared authority. Both Ezra and Nehemiah received help from the elders and family leaders who took up the leadership role in the community. As a result of the absence of rulers, the priests filled the vacuum, in a way, returning to the model of the early Israelites. The Messiah would combine these roles by being both King and Priest. This hopeful expectation undergirds the book.

3. *The Importance of the Written Word.* Just as in Ezra, the book of Nehemiah emphasizes the role of God's word as authority (Neh. 8:1–8; 9:3; 10:29). The oral reading of the law before the people moved them to repent. This reminds us of the importance of hearing God's word read as authority over His people and the positive response that is possible as a result.

COMMENTARY

1:1—7:72

THIRD RETURN FROM EXILE AND REBUILDING OF THE WALL

The first seven chapters of Nehemiah echo Ezra 1–6 and focus on Israel's third return from exile, this time to rebuild the wall under Nehemiah's leadership. The wall became a rallying point, a contentious issue, and a symbol of God's watch and care over His covenant people. The wall project, however, could not be completed without first filling Jerusalem (Neh. 7:4–5). Similar to the Creation account of Genesis 1, in the book of Nehemiah filling follows forming. Nehemiah's inclusion of the list of the original returnees under Sheshbazzar (cf. Ezra 2) demonstrates a straight line from liberation and return to filling and securing a safe future for God's people in Jerusalem.

1:1–11

Jerusalem in Crisis: Nehemiah's Prayer

God's remnant was in crisis and one man, Nehemiah, responded to the disheartening news of destruction and disdain. His response, however, did not involve feverish activity and politically expedient strategizing. Just as prayer is the foundation of every true change and reform, prayer is also foundational in Nehemiah's account (cf. 1:5–11; 2:4; 4:4–5; 5:19; 6:9, 14; 11:17).

1:1–4. Bad News from Jerusalem. Several important details are provided for us in these few verses. The chief human character of the book is introduced—Nehemiah, who worked at the royal palace in Shushan (or Susa). The year was 445/444 B.C. Artaxerxes I is mentioned as the king, as indicated by the reference to Sanballat and Hanani (cf. 7:2), the latter of whom was probably a relative (lit. a "brother") of Nehemiah. Hanani and his group brought news to Nehemiah that concerned Jerusalem and the current state of affairs in the province. The people were described as being in a state of *bera'ah* ("misery," "distress") and *kherpah* ("disgrace," "reproach"). These terms describe the inner and social condition of the people in Jerusalem as a result of the broken-down walls and burned gates of the city (1:3). The reference to the condition of the city and its walls supports the view that in Ezra 7:18 the king had authorized them to do whatever seemed good to them, which naturally included rebuilding the city.

Nehemiah's reaction ("he sat down and wept") reflects typical OT mourning rites, often associated with bad news or distressing and shameful situations (Gen. 21:16; Deut. 21:13; Judg. 20:26; Ezra 9:3–5). When confronted with difficulties and existential challenges, biblical characters often reacted with fasting and praying (Neh. 1:4). The text indicates that Nehemiah wept and mourned for "days." It appears that this situation must have been a matter of prayer for Nehemiah for at least four months since Chislev (December/January) in Nehemiah 1:1 and Nisan (April/May) in 2:1 are given as key time markers in the book. These passages also suggest that Nehemiah used a fall-to-fall calendar.

1:5–11. Prayer of Nehemiah. This prayer is an excellent example of a penitential prayer in which the mediator identifies with the sins of the community (cf. Ezra 9; Neh. 9; Dan. 9). In the Bible we often find personal and communal prayers, something that may appear strange in societies that emphasize individuality over collectivity. There are five important elements in this specific prayer in Nehemiah 1: the addressee (v. 5), a request for a hearing (v. 6a), confession (vv. 6b–7), recalling God's promises (vv. 8–9), and supplication (vv.10–11a). Nehemiah 1:6 in Hebrew contains a unique expression in which Nehemiah requests that God's ears be attentive and His eyes open. This is a metaphorical way of asking God to see the condition of the city and to hear the prayer by acting on behalf of His people. God was being asked to perform a new act of creation. The word "remember" in Nehemiah 1:8 introduces previous divine promises and is in line with the reference to Moses, God's servant. God's remembering leads to divine action (cf. Gen. 8:1)—often in favor of His covenant people.

Nehemiah and the Pentateuch

Part of Nehemiah's prayer (Neh. 1:8–9) is rooted in the Pentateuch, especially Deuteronomy. "If you are unfaithful" echoes Leviticus 26:40. "I will scatter you among the nations" reflects Deuteronomy 4:27, while "but if you return" is most likely based on Deuteronomy 30:2. The mention of those exiled in distant regions is a reference to Deuteronomy 30:4. Finally, Nehemiah's reference to the place God chose as a dwelling for His name repeats Deuteronomy 12:11 and 12:5.

"Unfaithful" in Nehemiah 1:8 appears elsewhere in Ezra and Nehemiah's account to describe the problem of mixed marriages (Ezra 9:2, 6; 10:2, 6, 10; Neh. 13:27). The language of this section echoes the covenant language found in Deuteronomy 30:1–4. Nehemiah realized that the only way forward for God's people, identified simply in 1:10 as those whom God had redeemed, involved recognition and commitment to God's covenant established long ago. Ultimately, however, it was only God's great power and strong hand that would result in deliverance (v. 10). The language used reminds us of the Exodus (cf. Ex. 6:1; 32:11).

2:1–20

Return to Jerusalem: Let's Build a Wall

The chapter describes Nehemiah's audience with the king, his return to Jerusalem, and his clandestine inspection of Jerusalem's walls. The narrative moves from dialogue to action and then returns to dialogue, resulting in the united decision to build (Neh. 2:18).

2:1–9. Nehemiah Is Appointed by the Persian King. Four months after having received the devastating news about Jerusalem, Nehemiah did not continue his business as usual. Prayer was followed by a time of expectant waiting—and then action. Timing is always crucial when dealing with royalty (cf. Esth. 5:1–8), so the urgency should not always involve haste. We often struggle with God's timing that is not always easily understandable but is always right on target (Dan. 9:24–27). Nehemiah's strong fear upon hearing the king's question highlights the difficulty of relating to an absolute monarch whose word could have meant life or death. Nehemiah's quick prayer is a testimony of his close walk with God.

The king's question regarding how long he would be away contained tacit approval of Nehemiah's request (Neh. 2:6). The approval was recognized by Nehemiah as the good and gracious hand of his God upon him (cf. Ezra 7:6). The description of the journey is very brief. The text says only that the king sent captains of the army and horsemen with Nehemiah. Unlike Ezra (Neh. 8:22), Nehemiah did not refuse an armed guard—most likely due to the fact that he was the official governor of the Persian province and thus also commanded military personnel.

2:10. Introduction of the Opposition. Two individuals who appear to have been in constant opposition to Jerusalem are specifically mentioned right from the outset: Sanballat and Tobiah (v. 10). Sanballat the Horonite was the governor of Samaria (4:1–2). His name appears in a fifth century B.C. papyrus from Elephantine, Egypt. The name also appears in the later Samarian Wadi ed-Daliyeh papyri from the fourth century B.C., probably referring to his descendant. The name "Tobiah" means "the Lord is good." It is possible that he worshiped God. His son Jehohanan ("the Lord is gracious") also had a Hebrew name. Based on Ezra 2:60–62, some scholars have theorized that Tobiah belonged to a family of the same name whose Israelite origins could not be clearly established and in consequence was rejected. If this were the case, it would explain his severe antagonism. Geshem the Arab was another enemy of the people (Neh. 2:19). He was probably a leader of Arab groups perhaps operating almost independently of the Medo-Persian Empire. The situation of Jerusalem was quite precarious since it was surrounded by enemies: Sanballat/Samaria to the north, Tobiah/Ammon to the east, and Geshem/Arabs to the south. Nehemiah's arrival deeply disturbed Judah's enemies.

2:11–18. It's Time to Move. Nehemiah's inspection of the wall occurred three days after his arrival (v. 11). The third day is often a decisive moment in biblical narratives (e.g., Gen. 22:4; 31:22; Ex. 19:11; Judg. 20:30; Esth. 5:1). Nehemiah made it very clear that this operation was God driven since it was God who had put it into Nehemiah's heart (Neh. 2:12). Nehemiah's covert operation aimed at obtaining information needed to establish and develop his plan. The Valley Gate (v. 13) was probably located on the western side of the city. The description of Jerusalem's walls confirms the original report (1:3). The situation on the ground was as catastrophic as had been anticipated in the earlier report. The reference to the unsuspecting officials (2:16) may indicate local Persian-appointed leadership. The Hebrew term (*sagan*) refers to a "ruler" or "prefect" and appears mostly in exilic or postexilic literature.

After verification of the exact condition of Jerusalem's defenses, it was time to become active. Action, however, begins with leadership buy-in. But prior to action comes recognition. Verse 17 uses again the keyword "to see" (see 1:5–11). The first-person plural pronoun ("us") highlights the inclusive nature of the action. He presented himself as a visionary leader capable of communicating his vision and involving others in the action. Nehemiah gave a personal testimony of God's gracious hand in all aspects of his mission (2:18). The response of the people of Jerusalem was a unanimous commitment to engage in the building project. We can learn from Nehemiah's example: people around us will better relate to personal testimonies than to argumentation or sermonizing.

2:19–20. Reaction of the Opposition. Similar to Nehemiah's hearing in 1:4, Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem listened to what he had to say, but then they ridiculed him. Instead of shedding tears and initiating mourning rites, Jerusalem's enemies taunted the postexilic community and disdained them. The Hebrew term (*bazah*) for "despised" or "ridiculed" appears repeatedly in contexts where divine precepts have been consciously ignored (Num. 15:31; 2 Sam. 12:9; Prov. 14:2). This provides a hint to the reader that this conflict concerned more than two groups fervently disagreeing about a particular point. It echoed the larger cosmic conflict involving God and Satan.

The rhetorical questions of Nehemiah's opponents suggest rebellion against the king (Neh. 2:19)—a serious accusation already hinted at in Ezra 4:12–16. Nehemiah told the enemies that they had no *kheleq* ("heritage," "share"). This meant that they had no legal right over Jerusalem and no *zikkaron* ("memorial," "historic right") there either. This latter term often has cultic connotations (Ex. 12:14; 13:9; 28:29) and underlines the fact that neither Sanballat nor Tobiah shared in the authentic worship of the Lord.

3:1–32

The List of Wall Builders

The chapter details those who did have a "heritage" or "share" (cf. 2:20) in Jerusalem. The list of wall builders is divided into forty different sections. It seems to begin in the northern section of Jerusalem with the Sheep Gate (3:1), moving southward down the western side and then describing the work on the eastern side of the wall, ultimately returning to the Sheep Gate (v. 32).

Each section was built by its own work crew, even though some groups did work on more than one section (cf. the men of Tekoa; 3:5, 27). The importance of the religious leadership in the postexilic community is highlighted by the place of Eliashib, the high priest, at the head of the list (v. 1). The key verbal form of the entire chapter is *khaziq* (occurring 34 times in the chapter; e.g., vv. 4–6), a causative form of a verb meaning "to be strong." The rendering given in most translations, "made repairs," is an appropriate rendering and emphasizes the restoration of something to its previous condition. This is an important indication that Nehemiah's construction project presupposes an earlier wall-building project (see "The Decree of Artaxerxes I as Fulfillment of Daniel 9:25," p. 584).

There is a close connection between chapters 3 and 4. While chapter 3 delineates the result of the project, chapters 4 and 6 emphasize the process itself, which includes the opposition faced by the builders during the reconstruction process. In this sense, the list reflects typical Hebrew thinking, in which the outcome is considered and presented before the process of achieving it. The first entry of the list includes a reference to consecration. Eliashib and the priests consecrated the Sheep Gate and put its doors in place (3:1). The use of the important verb denoting consecration (*qadash*) underlines the fact that the work of reconstructing the walls and gates was related to the Lord, the Holy One.

The reconstruction of the wall was a communal project. However, it was not a forced or obligatory project; as a result, some leaders did not support it (3:5, 27). Commentators have suggested that due to Tekoa's southeastern location, abutting the region controlled by Geshem the Arab, the town's leaders were possibly unwilling to antagonize their closest neighbor. The voluntary nature of the project highlights a character trait of God, who offers freedom to His creation and prefers willing submission to forced compliance. Verse 10 (cf. v. 23) suggests that some sections were assigned to those living closest to the particular wall section, providing significant motivation for finishing the project.

The majority of names and families listed in chapter 3 identify male participants, reflecting the common practice of biblical times. Families were known by the father's (or grandfather's) name. However, v. 12 specifically mentions the daughters of Shallum. Shallum was probably a person who did not have sons to help him. The whole community was dedicated to this important project, which eventually came to the place where it started by the Sheep Gate (v. 32). Chapter 4 shows that the work was done under great challenges.

4:1–23

External Opposition to the Building of the Wall

The chapter echoes previous references to opposition (2:10, 19) and describes the reconstruction of the walls and gates of Jerusalem. The opposition, led by Sanballat and Tobiah, mocked Jerusalem and the Yehud community with a barrage of rhetorical questions that aimed at pointing to the futility of the effort (4:2). Sanballat and Tobiah mounted a propaganda campaign that sought to intimidate the builders in Jerusalem. Sanballat's five questions are followed (v. 3) by Tobiah's ironic statement, suggesting that even a light fox could climb up the wall and break it down. Some interpreters have suggested that the reference to the fox may actually be a reference to an ancient siege machine, transforming an ironic or sarcastic statement into a plainly threatening one.

As is always the case in crucial moments in the book, Nehemiah prayed first before responding to the external challenges (v. 4; cf. Is. 37:14–35). The belligerency of Sanballat and Tobiah was not simply an opposition to Nehemiah but also an affront to the Lord.

Nehemiah and the builders continued their efforts tirelessly. Nehemiah 4:6 introduces two important facts: the entire wall had been joined and been built to half its height. This was due to the fact that the people were highly motivated (lit. "the heart of the people was to work"). However, what was good news to Nehemiah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem had a different significance for their opponents who heard and became very angry (including here, for the first time, Ashdodites, who were most likely the inhabitants of Ashdod, located on the Mediterranean coast of Israel; v. 7). In turn, the members of the opposition conspired together and plotted serious action, involving military options (v. 8). Another prayer (v. 9) was accompanied by active guard duty. The one did not exclude the other.

Disinformation and rumors are often more damaging than concrete military action. The people began to feel their strength failing as they saw an overabundance of rubble—they began to feel weak (v. 10). Nehemiah's response to this dilemma involved careful military planning while continuing relentlessly with his rebuilding effort. The call to not be afraid (v. 14) is a formula of comfort and a call to trust in the Lord. The next call to remember the great and awesome Lord reminds readers of Deuteronomy 7:21, when Israel faced powerful cities with numerous people in Canaan. These calls to courage and remembering God's power preceded a quintessential characteristic of the theocracy: God would fight for them (Neh. 4:20).

Nehemiah's leadership involved the example of his own household. The reference to half of his workers in 4:16 (also in v. 23) uses a Hebrew term often denoting "young men" (see 5:10, 16; 13:19). This group may have included members of Nehemiah's own household or his bodyguard (cf. 2:9). Half of this group was consigned to military duties while the other half worked at construction. The next verses (4:17–18) provide a visual glimpse of military preparedness: workers, building on the wall, kept their arms and shields close by to respond to enemy action communicated by the one who, shadowing Nehemiah, sounded the trumpet. However, in spite of human preparedness and contingency plans, Nehemiah tells us that it was ultimately God who would fight for them (v. 20). The final indication of extreme caution and alertness is expressed in v. 23. There is a suggestion of ever-increasing circles of inclusion starting with Nehemiah and his brothers (possibly members of Nehemiah's clan or "father's house"), his workers (lit. "young men"), and the guards, who remained fully dressed as they slept. The NT echoes this theme of preparedness for spiritual warfare in many places (Rom. 13:12; 2 Cor. 10:4; Eph. 6:10–18).

5:1–19

Internal Tension Threatening the Building of the Wall

At first glance this chapter appears to be out of place since it does not overtly continue the story of the building of Jerusalem's walls and gates. However, looking more carefully, the narrative shows that conflict is not always external. Internal tension involving social injustice impacts not only individuals and groups but also challenges the larger building effort. Justice thus becomes an extension of unity.

The great outcry of 5:1 is a cry of protest that involved great financial difficulties. The Hebrew term appears in legal contexts when justice needs to be administered (e.g., 1 Kin. 20:39; 2 Kin. 6:26; 8:3, 5; Is. 5:7). It seems that this great outcry involved debt slavery following a famine (or other calamity) where people had to mortgage even their children in order to get grain for food (Neh. 5:2), seed (v. 3), and to pay the king's tax (v. 4). The reference to the famine (v. 3) suggests a reality that must have been well known in the region. This was not just *a* famine but *the* famine. Greek sources tell us that the satrapy that included Yehud had a tax burden of 350 talents annually, which represented a significant financial burden for the local population.

The lament-like outcry paints a dismal picture: the cycle of increasing debt resulted in the enslavement of the sons and daughters of those lamenting. Since land represents the foundation of prosperity in any agricultural-based society, the great outcry is fully understandable. The social fabric of society was at stake. Without land, the men and their wives (v. 1) stated that they were powerless to help their family members (v. 5). Some translations insert "to redeem them" in order to clarify a difficult Hebrew expression that is possibly referring to the powerlessness of the people to redeem their family members by paying their debts.

Nehemiah's angry reaction echoes earlier prophetic critiques of the abuse of debt slavery (Amos 2:6; 8:4, 6). His anger was expressed in rebuke only after careful thinking and analysis (Neh. 5:6–7). The first step to resolve this issue was to call a large meeting since the solution to problems affecting a community can only be found by working in community. Nehemiah's rebuke of the leadership of Yehud refers to usury, or charging interest (v. 7). Following the unsuccessful private rebuke of Yehud's leadership, Nehemiah addressed the entire assembly, which had been called for the purpose of dealing with these creditors, and he exhorted them that because their fellow Israelites (lit. their "brothers") had been redeemed from the nations, they should not be returned to debt slavery. Nehemiah's admonition to "walk in the fear of our God" (5:9; cf. v. 15) emphasizes an important biblical concept prevalent in the wisdom literature of the OT. Fear can be an emotional response. However, in most cases it suggests reverence and a personal relationship. We "fear" (or respect) someone whom we know as trustworthy and strive to please her or him (cf. Prov. 8:13). Nehemiah puts the fear of God in an even more compelling context. Walking in the fear of God, he suggests, involves the larger issue of theodicy, that is, God's justice before the nations and the reproach of Jerusalem before the nations (Neh. 5:9).

Verse 10 again underlines Nehemiah's selfless service that involved lending grain and money (lit. "silver") to the needy. This indicates that lending was not the problem but the usury (or interest) that ultimately led to debt slavery. The next verse, while not explicitly employing the technical term, represents a Jubilee call (Lev. 25:8–17). In the Mosaic law every fiftieth year was considered a Jubilee, which involved the return of land, property, and the liberation of slaves. The creditors' response was unanimous: they would restore the possessions and money that they had been extracting (Neh. 5:12). The issue of debt slavery and the proclamation of liberty were well anchored in Judah's memory. In fact, it was disobedience to a divinely established covenant involving God, Jerusalem's leadership, and Jewish debt slaves that had led to divine judgment during the time of Judah's last king, Zedekiah, prior to the final destruction of the city (Jer. 34:8-22).

By symbolically shaking the fold of his garment, Nehemiah indicated that the violators of the pledge would be shaken out of their possessions by the Lord (Neh. 5:13). The assembly's "amen" suggests unanimity and is further emphasized by the indication that they did what they had promised.

The following section (vv. 14-19) highlights Nehemiah's leadership during his tenure as governor, which covered twelve years. During this time, he did not use tax income to support his household or levy other tariffs on the local population (vv. 14-15). Nehemiah's commitment to the well-being of Jerusalem and its inhabitants was also marked by his hospitality and refusal to enter the lucrative real-estate market (v. 16). The final verse of this section is the first of a series of "remember me" interjections (13:14, 22, 31). These statements highlight the fact that when God remembers, He acts on behalf of His people (Gen. 8:1; 19:29; Ex. 2:24).

6:1-19
Further Intimidation

Chapter 6 is about intimidation and single-mindedness. In the midst of conflict, we find a praying leader (Neh. 6:9, 14) who refused to be distracted from his God-given task. Nehemiah allowed God to do what He had placed in his heart. Finally, following three chapters detailing obstacles, intimidation, and distraction, God came through again. The One who had given the land to Israel blessed the wall reconstruction project with success, and consequently all the nations surrounding Yehud recognized that it was God who had prospered the work (v. 16).

Nehemiah 6:1 seems to continue seamlessly the narrative of chapter 4—a fact that is underlined by the use of the autobiographic "I." The first fourteen verses of the chapter are rife with dialogue and written communications but lack specific action. Verse 4 highlights the fact that Yehud's enemies had sent a threatening personal message to Nehemiah four times. This reminds the reader that important action always originates with ideas and words. Nehemiah's response is highly significant. He affirmed that he was working on a major enterprise and could not go down to them (v. 3). This was both courteous and definitive. Distraction would not work.

After realizing that direct threats were ineffective, Nehemiah's enemies tried to attack his moral integrity by spreading the false rumor that the Jews were planning a rebellion and Nehemiah was planning to make himself king (v. 6). The reference to the open or unsealed letter in v. 5 underlines the public nature of these accusations. Sanballat's messenger possibly read the letter aloud as he traveled toward Jerusalem. Verse 7 clearly implies blackmail, yet Nehemiah did not succumb to the increasing pressure. Rather, he attempted to clear his name (v. 8) and decided to pray (v. 9).

The next section (vv. 10-14) focuses on internal challenges. The Hebrew participle *'atsar* used in v. 10 is sometimes translated as "secret informer." The basic meaning of the word is "restrain," so other translations have "shut in at his home" or "confined at home." This was perhaps suggesting that Shemaiah's confinement represented what was coming to Nehemiah. The prophecy of Shemaiah was not from the Lord, which suggests that he may have been a hired prophet (cf. Num. 22-24; Deut. 13:1-5; Jer. 23:9-32; Ezek. 13; 1 John 4:1). Other prophets were also involved in the attack against Nehemiah (Neh. 6:14). The section concludes with another call for God to remember (v. 14), used here in a negative way to express divine judgment (cf. 5:19).

Finally, and in spite of constant threats, distraction, and internal challenges, the reconstruction of the wall was finished in fifty-two days (6:15). This limited time window strongly indicates that the walls had been previously reconstructed, in keeping with the broad limits of the instruction, in the time of Ezra (see Ezra 7:18). The month of Elul (Neh. 6:15) is the beginning of October. The Hebrew term for work is used in Genesis 2:2-3 for the divine work of creation and in Exodus 40:33 for the construction of the sanctuary. The implication is that the work performed in Jerusalem was a divine act of creation. The biblical author makes two important explicit statements that support this idea. First, all of Yehud's enemies lost their confidence (lit. "fell greatly in their own eyes"; Neh. 6:16). Second, they somehow knew that it was God who had prospered the work. Similar to the conquest narrative in Joshua, nations surrounding the covenant people heard and understood (cf. Josh. 9). The focus of the last few verses of this chapter moves from Sanballat to Tobiah (cf. Neh. 2:10). This

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is evidenced in the many letters that named leaders of the city (cf. also 13:4 which states that Tobiah was related by marriage to a priest named Eliashib).

7:1-72
An Empty City: The List of Returnees

The chapter is divided into two main sections. Nehemiah 7:1-3 contains a description of the reorganization of religious and civic life in postexilic Jerusalem, while vv. 4-72 contains a copy of the list of original returnees, already known from Ezra 2. The key reason for including a second copy of this long list can be found in 7:4: there were few people in the city. Following the reconstruction effort (or the "forming," if using creation language; cf. Gen. 1:2), the city needed to be filled.

7:1-3. Reorganization. Nehemiah's efforts did not end with the reconstruction of the wall. Verse 1 refers to the building of the wall, which was a point in the recent past. This reference serves to move the narrative forward. The appointment of gatekeepers and singers was presupposed and happened earlier (cf. Ezra 6:18). Nehemiah needed leadership that required administrative skills and interpersonal acumen, but ultimately he needed faithfulness in those appointed and for them to have a true understanding of their standing before God. Following the appointment of leaders, Nehemiah established basic guard duties, suggesting that he still considered Jerusalem to be at risk (Neh. 7:3).

7:4-5. The Empty City. The two verses introducing the already known list of the returnees (cf. Ezra 2) point to the real crux of the problem: Jerusalem was only sparsely populated and thus difficult to defend. This comment underlines the temple-city nature of Jerusalem. Archaeological research has suggested that Ramat Rahel, located about three and a half miles (6 km) south of Jerusalem, could have functioned as the de facto administrative center of Yehud. The site boasts an elaborate palace with a very complex water system. Hundreds of stamped storage jars, which had been used as containers for agricultural produce tax payments from the eighth century B.C. through the Persian period, have been found there. Furthermore, the site was never destroyed during the final Babylonian conquest of Judah.

Nehemiah's solution was God driven (Neh. 7:5). This highlights the divine initiative in the following census, which had caused divine indignation on another occasion (2 Sam. 24; 1 Chr. 21; cf. Ex. 30:11-16). Many, however, have wondered why Nehemiah included a register of the genealogy of those who had first returned from exile (Neh. 7:5). Possibly Nehemiah wanted to ascertain ancestral roots in the city; furthermore, the original register included many of the locations outside Jerusalem where the original returnees had settled.

7:6-72. The Register. For the differences in the totals (29,818 for Ezra 2 and 31,089 for Neh. 7), see commentary on Ezra 2:1-35, 65-70. The final catalogue of donations in Nehemiah 7:70-72 also contains numbers distinct from those found in Ezra 2. While the object of the donations referred to in Ezra 2:68 was the house of the Lord, Nehemiah 7:70-72 refers to "the work" and the treasury for the work. It is thus possible that Nehemiah employed a similar structure (i.e., list, followed by a registry of donations) but focused rather upon the specific needs of the postexilic community in his time, including the wall and the gates of the city, which had been described in 6:16 as "this work." This would also explain the distinct numbers included in the list and the reference to "the governor" in v. 70.

7:73—13:31
COVENANT, REVIVAL, AND THE COVENANT COMMUNITY

Beginning with the important topic of "filling" Jerusalem in 7:73, the second half of Nehemiah—echoing the second half of Ezra—focuses upon another important aspect of Jerusalem's revival: lasting growth can only be achieved by considering the spiritual dimensions of new beginnings. However, new beginnings are not always clean-cut and easy; the reality of God's postexilic covenant community was characterized by continued neglect of divine orders, including Sabbath observance (13:15-22), tithing (13:10-13), and intermarriages (13:23-28).

7:73—8:18
Between Word and Worship

Following the final verse of chapter 7 and introducing the important theme of empty Jerusalem, chapter 8 focuses upon two key elements of communal worship: the recognition of the power of the word and the response of God-inspired worship.

The summary statement in the first half of 7:73 connects to 7:4–5 and anticipates 11:1–3 and the problem of an "empty" city. The observation that the people of Israel settled into their own towns and cities was a recognition of God's blessings (i.e., God had returned the exiles to their ancestral lands; cf. Jer. 16:15; 30:3), but it was also a description of the problem, namely, too few people lived within the city limits, thus making Jerusalem less viable as Yehud's de-facto capital and difficult to defend. The seventh month (Neh. 7:73b) is a very important month in the Jewish religious system (see Ezra 3:1). The reference to "all the people" (Neh. 8:1) echoes what is described in Hebrew as "all Israel" in 7:73, and this description included men and women (8:2–3). The religious assembly focused on the law of Moses and appears to have been a grassroots movement since no specific convener of the assembly is mentioned; rather, the people gathered together as one. Unity and worshipful activities were two key ingredients of this revival, highlighted by the fact that the people asked Ezra to bring the law of Moses. The importance of this "back to basics" approach has already been noted several times in Ezra. The reference to the first day of the seventh month (8:2) suggests the Festival of Trumpets (Lev. 23:24).

The clear liturgical elements involved in the description of the public reading of the law in Nehemiah 8:4–8 should be noted: the people *stood* when Ezra began his reading (v. 5), *responded* in unison with a resounding and repeated "amen," *raised* their hands, and *fell* to the ground in worship (v. 6). The twofold "amen" occurs elsewhere in Scripture and marks complete agreement and commitment (Pss. 41:13; 72:19). Ezra, surrounded by members of the priestly leadership, however, was not leading out alone. He read (Neh. 8:3), he blessed or praised the Lord (v. 6), and then, together with other Levites, he helped the people to understand (vv. 7–8). The divine epithet "the great God" (8:6; cf. 1:5; 9:32) is used in other parts of the Bible (e.g., Deut. 10:17; Jer. 32:18; Dan. 9:4). Nehemiah 8:8 includes a verbal form that means "to break up" and has been understood as providing a running translation, considering the reality that most returnees coming from Mesopotamia (or Babylon) would have spoken Aramaic, the language of international commerce and diplomacy of the Persian period, and not Hebrew. However, Ezra and the Levites did not only translate but they also provided meaning and helped the audience to understand the law of Moses. This is a good reminder of the fact that translation (and proclamation) always involves interpretation. Later Targums, Aramaic paraphrases of the Hebrew text of the OT, further illustrated this process.

As the people were listening to the reading of the law, they were moved and wept, but the leaders encouraged them to rejoice (vv. 9–10). The narrative provides an important piece of historical information by placing Ezra and Nehemiah together in the same event (v. 9). The Persian title "governor" is found only in Ezra and Nehemiah (Ezra 2:63; Neh. 7:65, 70; 10:1) and helps to anchor the historical context. The reference in Nehemiah 8:10 to "the joy of the LORD" as the source of strength (or, "refuge," "fortress," "stronghold," or "protection"; cf. Is. 17:10; Nah. 1:7) echoes Ezra 6:22. The motivation for personal and collective joy is that God is the Lawgiver and Savior.

The following section describes the celebration of the Festival of Tabernacles (Neh. 8:13–18). The reference to the lack of celebration of this festival since the days of the settlement period in 8:17 refers to the particular motivation, worshipful spirit, and possibly the important element of remembering the "wilderness" experience (instead of only the harvest connotations), and not to the actual celebration, since Ezra 3:4 already recorded an instance of celebration prior to Neh. 8:17 (cf. also 2 Chr. 8:13; 31:3; 35:18). Hence some translations imply that they had not celebrated this festival "like this" since the days of Joshua. The actual construction of shelters (or tents) from tree branches (Neh. 8:15–16) is not mentioned in Ezra 3:4. These shelters were vivid reminders of Israel's past—both the distant past during the wilderness experience and the more recent past of the Babylonian Exile—and were built on roofs, in courtyards, in the temple court, and in public open spaces (v. 16). The link between obedience to God's explicit commands and abundant joy (v. 8:17) echoes Deuteronomy 16:13–15, which concludes with a reference to rejoicing. The continuous reading of the law of God represented a significant component of the worship experience (Neh. 8:18; cf. Deut. 31:12–13). Familiarity with Scripture leads to familiarity with the living Word. Israel's experience described in Nehemiah 8 highlights the deep hunger for the word, community, and the joy that came from obedient recognition of a personal Savior. The same is true today.

9:1–38

God's Past Acts and the People's Present Confession

Some days after the celebration of the Festival of Tabernacles, on the twenty-fourth day of the

same month, the postexilic community was assembled once again. No reason is given for the assembly, yet the basic tone of confession and mourning connects to the earlier response to the reading of the word (cf. 8:9). The separation from foreigners underlines the sense of shared history—and failure. The participants stood and read (or perhaps, "heard the reading") from the law for about three hours (a fourth of a day), followed by another fourth of the day spent confessing and worshiping (9:3). The public prayer was led by eight Levites (v. 5). Perhaps they took turns leading the confessional prayer—this is the longest prayer in Ezra or Nehemiah. The text mentions two groups of eight named religious leaders, with five names overlapping (vv. 4–5). The first group cried out strongly (v. 4), echoing the lament of those who had seen the earlier temple (Ezra 3:12) and the confession of the people in Ezra 10:12, while the second led the actual prayer (Neh. 9:5).

The prayer is steeped in language from the Psalms and echoes or quotes numerous texts. The introduction in Nehemiah 9:5 echoes Psalms 41:13 and 106:48. Nevertheless, the phrase "exalted above all blessing and praise" is unique to this prayer. This situation is a reminder that each generation needs to find "new" words that communicate the essence of worship. The prayer contains a review of the relationship between God and Israel to demonstrate the pattern of divine blessings and the people's rebellion against God (cf. Pss. 105, 106, 135). It begins with Creation (Neh. 9:6), moves to God's covenant (vv. 7–8), includes the experience of Israel in Egypt and the Exodus (vv. 9–12), and climaxes with Sinai and the giving of the Law (9:13–14). There is a special reference to God's holy Sabbath (9:14), which was not introduced at Sinai (Gen. 2:1–3; Ex. 16) but declared again at that time.

Nehemiah 9:25 and the Conquest of Canaan

The intriguing reference to possessing houses full of goods, wells already dug, vineyards, olive groves, and fruit trees (v. 25) sheds light on the historicity of the conquest that has been challenged repeatedly in modern scholarship: a close reading of the biblical text of Joshua highlights the important fact that Israel completely destroyed only three cities in Canaan (i.e., Jericho [Josh. 6]; Ai [Josh. 8]; and Hazor [Josh. 11]) and took most other city-states in less destructive ways. This was God's means of providing for His people and explains the lack of radical changes in the archaeology of Late Bronze Age Canaan.

The next section in Nehemiah—and one of the longest—deals with Israel's wilderness experience (9:16–21) and includes references to God's bread from heaven (or manna; cf. Ex. 16:4–5) and water out of the rock (9:15; Ex. 17:1–7). The antithetical "but" of Nehemiah 9:16, however, introduces the reality of wilderness living, which involved repeated rebellions (the Hebrew states that they "hardened their necks"). Yet the God of the wilderness—similar to the God of the second exodus—is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow (Heb. 13:8 applies these characteristics to Christ). God's attributes in Nehemiah 9:17 are clear echoes of Exodus 34:6; Numbers 14:18–20; and Daniel 9:9. God's compassion and grace are the basis of the covenant (Neh. 9:19, 31–32), completely unmerited and utterly transforming. Following the canonical sequence, Nehemiah 9:22–25 captures Israel's conquest of the promised land and then leads straight into the period of the judges (vv. 26–31) or deliverers (v. 27; cf. Judg. 3:9, 15). The Hebrew term used here is theologically significant, coming from the root *yasha'*, which is also the root of the Hebrew name "Joshua" or "Jesus" in Greek. Also, the "rest" of Nehemiah 9:28, literally, "as they rested," echoes God's rest in the Sabbath commandment (Ex. 20:11). Since Israel did not really enter God's final Sabbath rest, it remained a future expectation (Heb. 4:1–10).

Nehemiah 9:32 marks an important theological change introduced by "now therefore," which was used to bridge the distance between the past and its application to the present. They were at this time the rebellious people. The great, mighty, and awesome God (cf. Deut. 10:17) was not just the God of the past. He, keeper of His covenant of *khesed*—"mercy," "love," "kindness" (Deut. 7:9; 1 Kin. 8:23)—and He who had been faithful (Neh. 9:33) with Israel in the past was once again called upon to intervene on behalf of His people. The people's prayer in v. 36—which called upon God to consider them—echoes Isaiah's prayer (Is. 6:8) and indicates covenant commitment (officially ratified in Nehemiah chap. 10 and already introduced in 9:38), which some translations render as a "binding agreement." This term appears only here and in 11:23 where it is related to the king's command.

10:1–39
Covenant Commitment

The first part of the chapter contains a list of the names of those who committed themselves to God's covenant law. It was basically a covenant renewal that included attaching to the document the seals with their names. They were the religious and civil leaders of the people and, as such, represented all of them. The specific description of the covenant stipulations can be found in vv. 28–39. These shared a common characteristic with other ANE covenant rituals, in that they included blessings and curses (cf. Deut. 28:1–14; 27:11–26) and specific covenant stipulations. Some of these appear explicitly in Nehemiah 10:30–39, such as (1) a law against mixed marriages (10:30); (2) a reminder of proper Sabbath observance (10:31a; cf. Ex. 20:8–11; 34:21; Deut. 5:12–15); (3) the cancelation of debt and celebrating a Sabbath year (Neh. 10:31b; cf. Deut. 15:1–3); (4) the temple tax (cf. Neh. 10:32–33; cf. Ex. 30:13, where half a shekel was required, while here a third of a shekel is mentioned, perhaps because the Persian monetary system was different); (5) firewood for use in the temple (Neh. 10:34); (6) firstfruit offerings and tithes (Neh. 10:35–39; cf. Ex. 23:19; 34:26; Deut. 26:1–11).

11:1–36
The Filling of Jerusalem

The list found in this chapter contains the names of people who freely offered to live in Jerusalem, and it provides a direct link to 7:4, 73. In 11:1, the use of "lots" echoes earlier uses. For example, following the conquest of Canaan, lots were cast to determine tribal lands (Josh. 14:2; see also 1 Sam. 14:41–42; Jon. 1:7; Acts 1:24–26). Lots presuppose God's active engagement in human history—a notion that is omnipresent in Ezra and Nehemiah. Those who were selected by lot to live in Jerusalem comprised only 10 percent of those who lived in the surrounding area (a trend quite different from the exploding urbanization of the twenty-first century). This number is based on the biblical tithing principle and is accompanied by sacrificial/worship language that is usually reserved for temple- or altar-related activities. Expressions such as the "holy city" (also in Neh. 11:18; Is. 48:2; 52:1; Dan. 9:24; cf. the "holy people" [lit. "holy seed/offspring," "race"] in Ezra 9:2) and the references to *barak* ("blessing," "praise," "commendation") and freely offering (Neh. 11:2; cf. 1 Chr. 29:5–6; 2 Chr. 17:16; Ezra 2:68; 3:5) point to the religious nature of Jerusalem's "filling" or repopulation (Neh. 11:1–2). The sequence of consecration and offerings in Ezra and Nehemiah begins at the altar (Ezra 3:2) and proceeds via the temple (Ezra 6:13–18), the walls (Neh. 6:15–19; 12:27–43), and finally to the people, resulting in "the holy city" (v. 1).

The list includes priests and Levites (11:10–18), gatekeepers (11:19), and tribal groups from Judah (11:4–6) and Benjamin (11:7–9). Finally, the chapter concludes with another list of people dwelling outside Jerusalem (11:25–30). The many geographic references echo lists in the tribal division following the conquest. For example, the mention of Kiriath (Kirjath) Arba in 11:25 is a clear reference to Joshua 15:13–14 since the name used during the monarchy and later periods was "Hebron." In this sense geography becomes part of theology. God not only extended Israel's grip on the land during the conquest but also during the return from Babylon. The reference to Dibon is difficult since elsewhere in Scripture it represents a city in Moab (Num. 21:30; Is. 15:9; Dimon, which is assumed to be the same place). Here it may refer to another town located in what was formerly Judah's territory.

12:1–26
Those Who Serve

This section includes another list of priests and Levites, beginning with Zerubbabel's return and ending with Nehemiah's. Since worship is a major theme in chapter 12, it is important to retrace the genealogy of worship leaders. The first part (vv. 1–7) lists in greater detail those who returned with Zerubbabel (cf. Ezra 2:36–40), followed by a list of Levites (Neh. 12: 8–10) and of high priests beginning with Jeshua/Joshua (vv. 10–11). Verse 12 offers more details of the priestly lines (vv. 12–21) beginning with Joiakim, the son of Jeshua/Joshua who had been high priest during the return under Zerubbabel (Ezra 2:2; 3:2). Twenty-one priestly clans in total are listed.

The reference to the reign of Darius the Persian in Nehemiah 12:22 is not entirely clear since we know of at least three Persian kings with the name "Darius." Both Darius II (423–405 B.C.) and Darius III (335–331 B.C.) are possible candidates, though Darius II fits better the chronology of Nehemiah. The inclusion of an additional list of Levites and priests during the time of this Darius (vv. 22–23) underlines the importance of these lists for the priesthood and Judaism in general. Finally, the list of the leaders (lit. "heads") of the Levites in vv. 24–25 includes additional information regarding antiphonic choirs and singing, thus anticipating the processions that would be held during the dedication of the wall (vv. 27–43).

12:27–47
The Dedication of the Wall

What had been anticipated for a long time finally became a reality. The long-overdue dedication of the wall represented the grand finale of Nehemiah's ministry—yet more was to come. The dedication of the wall of Jerusalem was marked by a huge celebration. The Hebrew term used in 12:27, *khanukkah*, is also used to describe the dedication of the temple (Ezra 6:16–17). Centuries later, following the desecration of the temple by Antiochus Epiphanes, it became the name of the Jewish festival of reconsecration of the temple. The sacred significance of this ritual activity is emphasized by the purification of priests and Levites, the people, the gates, and the wall (Neh. 12:30). Purification prior to major religious festivals was commonplace in the OT (Ex. 19:10, 14–15; Lev. 8:6; 16:28; Num. 8:5–8; 19:12, 19), highlighting the fact that holiness is a major component of God's character. When we want to approach a holy God, we need to allow Him to cleanse us first.

The choreography of the event involved a lot of planning, which included two large thanksgiving choirs (Neh. 12:31), accompanied by instruments (v. 27), that moved procession-like around Jerusalem, either close to the wall or on top of the wall. One group was led by Ezra, the scribe and teacher of the law (v. 36), while the "I" in v. 38 must refer to Nehemiah himself. This would put both leaders once again in the same location at the same time. Following the entrance of these two groups into the temple precinct, "great sacrifices" (which possibly refers to many of them) were offered (v. 43). The presence and participation of rejoicing women and children underlined the secure status of the city. Joy, once again, filled the postexilic community (Ezra 3:13) and could be heard from a distance.

Chapter 12 concludes with a description of how the offerings, firstfruits, and tithe were collected and stored in the temple for distribution to Levites and priests. There was unity and order because the leaders and the people were obeying the law of the Lord. The Levites primarily benefitted from the tithe of the people and the priests from the tithe of the Levites (see "Covenant Renewal and Tithing," p. 602).

13:1–31
Nehemiah's Second Administration: Problems and Reforms

The final chapter of Nehemiah underlines the fact that blissful endings on this side of Eden are mostly artificial, wishful thinking. While we wish for an "and they lived faithfully ever after," we know that our hearts are "deceitful above all things" (Jer. 17:9).

The beginning of chapter 13 marks a new section that is not directly linked to the previous narrative. The text describes another instance of the reading from the book of Moses, an event that was perhaps linked to a regular festival that involved the reading of God's word (cf. Deut. 31:10–13). The "assembly of God" (sometimes translated as "congregation" or "community," esp. in other passages) is shorthand for God's covenant people in the Pentateuch (e.g., Ex. 12:6; 16:3; Lev. 4:13; Num. 10:7; Deut. 23:1–3, 8). The most likely reference alluded to here is Deuteronomy 23:4–5. Ammonites and Moabites, while related to Israel (Gen. 19:36–38), often represented the prototype of Israel's enemy (Num. 22–24). As on previous occasions, the critical issue involved mixed marriages (Ezra 9:2, 6; 10:2, 6). The people's hearing of the word moved them to action once again, and they separated all the foreigners (Heb. *'ereb*—lit. "the mixed company") from Israel (Neh. 13:3). The verb *badal* used here can mean "separate" or "divide." It is used in Genesis 1 when God separated things that could not go together (cf. Gen. 1:4, 6–7, 18). Here it refers to the exclusion of the pagan foreigners. Boundaries also played an important role in the sanctuary/temple involving different levels of holiness. The *'ereb*, on the other hand, echoes the Exodus (Ex. 12:38), where the same Hebrew word is used. Both the Creation and the Exodus remind us of boundaries. God called a people (that is still called "Israel" here) to attract the world around them by their unique relationship with Him. Israel was supposed to be different from the world—and yet they seldom were.

The reform initiated by Nehemiah included ousting Tobiah from the temple room (Neh. 13:7–9) and calling the people to spiritual renewal by returning their tithe and offerings to the Lord (see "Covenant Renewal and Tithing," p. 602).

Covenant Renewal and Tithing

The renewal of the covenant by those who returned from Babylon included faithfulness to the laws pertaining to tithe.

1. Sources of Tithe: The Israelites committed themselves to giving a tithe from the crops (10:39). Although the tithe from herds and flocks (Lev. 27:32–33) is not specifically mentioned, it was most probably included because the people were apparently familiar with and diligent regarding what was required by the law (Neh. 12:44).

2. The System: The system set in place by Nehemiah required that those living around Jerusalem would bring the tithe to the storehouse in the temple and those outside Jerusalem would take it to the Levites in their Levitical cities (10:37). A priest would accompany the Levites when receiving the tithe from the people in order to preserve the integrity of the system (10:38). From the cities, the Levites would send the tithe of the tithe for the priests to the storehouse in the temple and the tithe left after they received their portion of the tithe for other Levites (12:44). Following the laws related to the collection and distribution of tithe, the system was centralized in order to benefit the totality of Levites and priests serving the Lord.

3. Nature of Tithe: When Nehemiah returned to Persia, the priesthood and the people became corrupt. Eliashib, who was the priest in charge of the storerooms in the temple, allowed Tobiah, an Ammonite, to reside in one of the storerooms of the temple. Influenced by the corruption of the priesthood, the people stopped tithing. When Nehemiah returned, he dealt with the corruption of the priesthood (13:6–9). He also spoke strongly to the people for not giving their tithe. It was their responsibility to return the tithe to the Lord and not to use the corruption of the priesthood as an excuse for not tithing (13:10–12). The tithe legislation in Nehemiah assumes the holiness of tithe, its ownership by the Lord (Lev. 27:30), and that He gave it to the Levites and priests (Num. 18:21, 26–28). Consequently, the people were expected to return it to Him in fulfillment of the covenant law.

This section concludes again with a "remember me" plea (Neh. 13:14). This plea—not a self-serving request for special treatment, divine favor, or recognition of impressive accomplishments—represents the conviction of God's people throughout the ages that God knows and remembers. It clearly recognizes that God is intricately involved in all aspects of human life. Finally, Nehemiah restored true Sabbath worship, which included the Sabbath rest for foreigners (Ex. 20:10).

The issue of mixed marriages (Neh. 13:23–29) has appeared repeatedly in Ezra and Nehemiah. Apparently, Nehemiah had to tackle it once again. The reference to the inability of half of the children of these marriages to speak "the language of Judah" (v. 24) is noteworthy. The verbal and physical reactions of Nehemiah to the language limitations of the people are only intelligible if we keep in mind that a mother tongue is directly connected to the identity and culture of a people and of great assistance in the transmission of religious values. He saw in this problem a threat to the faith of Israel.

The inclusion of Solomon as a negative example of mixed marriages (v. 26; cf. 1 Kin. 11:1–13) is astonishing since Solomon was of the Davidic line and the builder of the first temple. Yet Nehemiah was willing to put the matter clearly, even if it reflected poorly on Solomon. The gist of Nehemiah's argument was that mixed marriages lead to sin! Nehemiah recognized the model function of leadership—even the high priestly family had married outside Israel and had aligned itself with Sanballat, the archetype of opposition in Ezra and Nehemiah (Neh. 13:28).

The book concludes with a summary of Nehemiah's reforms (vv. 30–31), once again using ritual terminology and contrasting two types of remembrance: "remember them" (v. 29) is pointing to divine judgment, while Nehemiah's plea for God to remember him favorably ("for good"; v. 31) represents his complete reliance on God's grace (cf. v. 22). The God who saw (and heard) Nehemiah's initial prayer (1:5–11) and opened doors at the royal court would remember—nothing more and nothing less. The request for remembrance is here connected with hope.

ESTHER

INTRODUCTION

Title and Authorship. The book of Esther is named after the female protagonist Esther (whose name is likely derived from the Babylonian goddess Ishtar; could also mean "star"), but it could have as easily been titled "Mordecai" since the two cousins worked as a team to save the Jewish people from utter annihilation. The unknown author of Esther was clearly familiar with Persian customs, laws, history, and even palace decorations in Susa during the reign of Xerxes I (Ahasuerus in Hebrew). Although unknown, the author may have even personally viewed these items, given that the details of the account suggest the recording of an eyewitness (perhaps Esther herself, or Mordecai)—one whose descriptions reflect the opulence of the royal court described by other historians.

Date. In Hebrew, the first words match the introduction to Joshua, Judges, and other historical books. In addition, the Hebrew verb "to write" is used seventeen times in Esther, implying that Esther was not only intended to be read as a book of historical records but that it also describes the recording of historical records and was likely written by someone with access to such records. The book was most likely written in the Persian period, as suggested by the many Persian loan words and a few Greek words found in it. The Hebrew is similar to that of 1 and 2 Chronicles. The third year of Xerxes I (1:3) corresponded with the great war council of Persia in 483 B.C., before the invasion of Greece, and this date could have also coincided with the 180-day banquet described in Esther 1. Given the presence and accuracy of these chronological details, the book was apparently written after this date.

Backgrounds. Xerxes I was the son of Darius I, who gave the decree for the exiled Jews to return to Jerusalem. Described by other historical sources as a king of excess, Xerxes's focus on wealth and sensual pleasures is confirmed by the book of Esther. The Persian Empire consisted of various satrapies, with smaller provinces making up each satrapy. The author of Esther uses the number of the latter to emphasize opulence and prosperity.

Esther and Mordecai lived in Persia after many of the exiles had returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. On first glance, it appears that there is no mention of Esther or Vashti outside the Bible, but careful analysis by several scholars of the details of Xerxes's harem do not rule out equating Vashti with Amestris (even linguistically), the main queen mentioned by Herodotus. Even if this is not the case, the book of Esther does not necessitate Esther being the queen that bore the heir to the throne, so Amestris could have remained the queen mother of Xerxes's heir, Artaxerxes. Clearly, Persian kings had multitudes of women in their harem and probably several queens as well. This may explain why the search for this queen (Esther) took about four years; she may not have been replacing the only queen (2:16–17).

Haman is called an Agagite, identifying him as a descendant of the Amalekite king Agag (1 Sam. 15:8) who represents the ultimate enemy of God's people. If Mordecai's ancestor Kish can be equated to or even related to Saul's father, the rivalry between Haman and Mordecai becomes more than petty and personal, with each standing instead for an entire nation and a continuing feud. In addition to heightening the tension of the story, this connection makes the miraculous deliverance of the Jews even more meaningful.

The entire book of Esther is written in chiastic form, with the last half of the book paralleling in reverse order (and in reversal of roles) the events and situations in the first half of the book. The center hinge is in chapter 6, where the seemingly insignificant event of the king's insomnia brings about the monumental shift in the narrative. In addition, the irony, satire, and humor in Esther showcase the incredible literary skill of the author. Esther is well worth reading slowly, carefully, and repeatedly in order to fully appreciate the drama and the comedy and to saturate the mind's eye with the colorful and sensual descriptions of excess, pomp, and posterity.

Theology and Purpose. The most unique characteristic of the book of Esther is the complete lack of the mention of God's name or even anything overtly religious beyond the act of fasting (not praying) during a time of crisis. While some might see this as a reason to discount any theological message of this book, God's hiddenness is actually the foundation of its theology. God is powerfully though silently active in the narrative.

1. Divine Providence. Woven deeply into this superficially secular book is a passionate and decisive theology of the providence of God: He acted through apparently unrelated and chaotic events to carry out His ultimate purpose. God definitely works through mighty and awesome miracles like that of the Exodus, but these are rare and unusual. Most of the time, God works through circumstances, providentially ordering and orchestrating events and lives to bring people closer to Him and execute His ultimate plan. God is everywhere when we look for Him, and the book of Esther reminds us that seemingly ordinary life events are actually tools in the hands of our sovereign and gracious God, who delivers us out of impossible situations for His glory. Apparent coincidences abound in Esther, but in such dramatic fashion and with such spectacular results as to almost force the reader to consider them miraculous. In addition, total reversals dominate the book, as well as a focus on the overall end result, even by relatively obscure characters like Haman's wife, Zeresh. The book portrays the pride and arrogance of Haman as well as his downfall, especially since he seems to set himself up as a god-like figure. Similarities to the stories of Joseph and Ruth abound, where God's providence is clear and all-powerful. Various allusions to other narratives by word clusters or phrases connect many portions of Esther with religious and God-oriented themes. Thus, as many scholars have noted, upon a careful comparison with the rest of Scripture, and a close reading of the narrative, God's presence shines out of the book of Esther from almost every angle in a veiled form.

For us today, God's presence may also seem far away at times, and yet when we open our eyes, we begin to see God's providence everywhere, through events that initially seem coincidental and random. Unlike the prophets, through whom God spoke all the time, Esther portrays a time more like today, when God does not always seem to give clear direction and humans make choices that seem to range from bad to worse. Instead, we can trust that God is working behind the scenes to care for His people, even in the darkest times.

2. God's Special Care for His People. The book of Esther contains remarkable links to the book of Exodus. In both biblical books God's people face annihilation; in both narratives God sends a human intercessor who intervenes on behalf of God's people; in both instances, the delivery is celebrated by the establishment of a new festival (Passover and Purim) that is closely associated with Israel's identity. The God who is working through human agents behind the scenes of history is committed to care for "the apple of his eye" (Zech. 2:8).

3. God's Instruments. The book of Esther portrays a battle between good and evil, which is a microcosm of the Great Controversy between Christ and Satan. God desires to save everyone who is willing, and salvation was always available (cf. Josh. 2). Sometimes, especially in cases in which the *lex talionis*, or law of retribution, applied, God allowed the people to defend themselves against attack by their enemies, as was the case with Esther. The book of Esther recounts many opportunities for the enemies of the Jews to repent and avoid death, but some still did not. God respects the choice of those who turn away from Him.

Many have noted that the actions of Mordecai and Esther suggested a set of moral values that may in some respects seem questionable, especially when compared to those of Joseph and Daniel in foreign lands, even though the narrative does not draw attention to the problem. Thus, it does not follow that the biblical description of these actions indicates that they should be considered morally acceptable (there are many similar examples in Scripture). Indeed, for both Esther and Mordecai, as they took increasingly risky stands for God in identifying more fully with His people, their concept of right and wrong became more visible and in line with the people of God. Ultimately, God is able to use fallen and faulty people to His glory.

For readers today, this should be very comforting. God is able to use imperfect human agents. If Christians are willing, God will use them right where they are, fallen and faulty. And yet He will also continue to change them into His image, to live more and more faithful lives, as He did for Esther and Mordecai.

4. A Message of Hope. Hope abounds in the book of Esther, as well as reminders that God delivers His people even when it seems impossible. Esther is a great book for those who need hope because there is salvation in the midst of hopelessness. It often seems that history itself is under the control of humans and that their own plans for the future will become reality. Esther tells us that, ultimately, it is God who maps out a future for His people—a future of peace and harmony. In Esther the idea of reversal as the manifestation or actualization of hope is very important and may even point to the cosmic reversal at the close of the cosmic conflict. The book of Revelation portrays a similar attempt to exterminate God's people at the end of time (Rev. 13:15), and yet God will work again in a mighty way to bring ultimate deliverance. The great cosmic controversy between Christ and Satan will conclude with a mighty and awesome deliverance of God's people from certain death and a final destruction of sin and the enemies of God and His people (Rev. 19–22).

COMMENTARY

1:1–2:23

Setting the Stage for Change

The first two chapters of Esther move from exaltation to humiliation and back to exaltation. The king was being humiliated by Vashti, the queen, who was soon deposed. This decision resulted in the loss of respect of the king in the eyes of his people. But the scene also moves to the exaltation of Esther, who is selected as queen.

1:1–9. Setting the Scene. The book of Esther opens with a rich and descriptive look into the Persian court, particularly the opulence that characterized a lengthy royal banquet. The king showed the attendees the significant wealth of his glorious kingdom and the splendor and honor of his greatness (1:4). The long strings of nouns in 1:6–7 echo the incredible amount of wealth belonging to Xerxes I and serve almost as a video panorama around the palace. This first feast was all for show in order to bring honor and glory to the king as a result of the awe and speechless wonder engendered by the ridiculous amount of splendor. This sets up the reader to expect a reversal or downfall, especially when compared with other drunken feasts preceding downfalls in Scripture, like that of Belshazzar in Daniel 5. In addition, although Vashti's name means "best" in Persian, the paucity of description concerning her feast in comparison to Xerxes's (Esth. 1:9) hints at the insignificance to which she, as a person, would soon be relegated.

1:10–22. Vashti's Disobedience and the Aftermath. The language used to describe the king's command for the appearance of the queen classifies her as a subset of the king's honor rather than as her own person (1:10–11). However, highlighting sexism is not the point here. Xerxes is really the one who is portrayed in a negative light. He appears more and more excessive, more and more superficial and petty, and more and more weak as the chapter progresses. Many scholars note his quick changes of mood, his seeming inability to have any clue as to how to deal with his own wife, and his willingness to go along with anything suggested by his officials. This sets the pattern for his characterization as a pushover throughout the rest of the book. He may appear to have been in control, but he was really only reacting to events as they came upon him. It is almost as if the narrator is inviting and expecting the reader to make a mental shift, to see between the lines and discern the divine purpose working through the erratic and unpredictable actions and reactions of the king. Similarly, God is at work today, even in the corrupt and unpredictable actions of current political leaders in the world. What seem to be coincidences are actually God's providences.

The aftereffects of Vashti's refusal to come before Xerxes end up increasing the comical impotence of this initially powerful king. The resulting law was supposed to provide security for the empire, but it actually reflected chaos, revealing the king's impulsive and irrational reactions based on the counsel of his paranoid officials (1:16–20). Almost impossible to enforce, the law universalized the Vashti incident so that it encompassed all wives (1:20), serving to foreshadow what Haman would decree for all Jews out of spite for one Jew, Mordecai. The multilingual character of the decree also set the stage for future issues regarding ethnicity and ancestry. In addition, this decree was intended to hush up the Vashti incident, but instead her deed became known to everyone. The king began by showing his power but ended by being played a fool, both by his wife and his own officials.

2:1–18. Choosing a New Queen. After the king remembered Vashti (2:1), the description of the gathering of the virgins is ambiguous in regard to whether they were brought or came of their own volition. However, one of the primary criteria was beauty, with a focus on what pleased the king (2:4). The description of the virgins as beautiful (2:3) is also used for Vashti in 1:11. We should keep in mind that in the Bible beauty is not only external but that it also includes the qualities of a character that corresponds with the function given to the person. A beautiful queen was one who was attractive but who also embodied the demeanor that was expected of such a person. Even if the virgins were gathered and did not come voluntarily, it was, nevertheless, essentially a beauty contest; although sex was involved, the king probably was not looking primarily for a sexual partner, since he had many, but for a person with the qualities expected from a queen—most importantly, the ability to command the respect and admiration of the court (2:15). Even if this situation was not something that Esther could have avoided, one wishes that she could have been more like Daniel. But the biblical text does not pass any judgment on her; it simply describes what happened and explains how God used imperfect human beings to His glory and finally brought them to a higher spiritual plane. In the same way, God is willing to use us while still working to transform us into His likeness.

Mordecai's ancestry from the tribe of Benjamin may have been intended to hint at his connection to King Saul (2:5). Scholars debate whether it was Mordecai himself or his ancestor Kish who came to Jerusalem. If it were Mordecai, he would be 110 at the beginning of this narrative, so it seems that it must have been his Benjamite ancestor who had the same name as the father of King Saul. However, the connection to Saul's line nevertheless seems intended by the author (cf. 1 Sam. 9:1) since Haman is connected to Agag's line (cf. Deut. 25:17–19; 1 Sam. 15:8). According to 2 Chronicles 36:22–23, Mordecai and his family should have returned with the other exiles rather than staying in the luxury of Persia. In addition, it seems that though they should have publicly identified with God's covenant people, they initially did not (Esth. 2:10). Their names give further evidence of backsliding. Esther's name is very similar to that of the Mesopotamian goddess of love, Ishtar, who supposedly had great sexual powers, and Mordecai's name is related to Marduk, the supreme deity of Babylon.

And yet, Esther received favor (2:15; "grace" in Hebrew), similar to Joseph in Genesis 39:4 (also in a foreign land). Esther sought to do everything she could to make herself a suitable match for the king, asking advice from Hegai, the king's eunuch, who was in charge of the women (Esth. 2:15). Esther became associated with loyalty, obedience, restraint, compliance, and receptiveness. Nothing is said about whether or not she observed Jewish dietary laws. Neither is it clear whether not identifying herself as a Jew was good or not. Clearly, she and Mordecai were concerned about anti-Semitic prejudice.

The comment that Xerxes loved Esther more than all the other women (2:17) refers to the royal selection process—the search for a new queen. However, she also obtained *khen*, meaning "grace" or "favor," and *khesed*, an important word in the OT, variously translated as "mercy," "kindness," "love" from the king—words which imply an emotional bond as well. Even though Esther ended up marrying a pagan, a Gentile, God would work through her disobedience to the law in order to preserve His people.

This took place four years after Vashti was ousted (v. 17)—this is one of the important reversals in the book. The narrator provides no vindication or condemnation of Mordecai and Esther because the point is not to focus on their shortcomings but on the miraculous power of God to deliver His people.

2:19–23. Salvation of the King. Verse 19 does not describe a second gathering of virgins. Instead it notes the time when Mordecai began to sit at the king's gate in an administrative position and saved the king from assassination (2:21). After this, more commands are promulgated by Mordecai and Esther than by the king. The book of Esther is really about Mordecai just as much as Esther. At this point, Esther still did not openly identify with God's people, and she still followed orders (2:20, 22). And yet God was already able to use her to save others—in this case, saving the king by informing him of the assassination attempt. Esther could have taken the credit here, but she was honest and identified Mordecai as her source of information. This incident becomes a key detail in the narrative because the king was negligent to reward Mordecai (2:23). All these events were written in the book of the chronicles or annals of the Persian kingdom.

3:1—5:14

A Plot against the Jews

The story moves to a new level, placing the emphasis on developments within the palace and their impact on the Jews and the nation. At this point there is a strong element of suspense in the plot of the story as evil plans were developed against God's people.

3:1–15. Haman's Ascendency and Plot. The reader would expect Mordecai to be rewarded, but instead it was Haman, a new character in the story, who received the king's favor, and we are not told how or why. The narrator makes clear Haman's connection with Agag the Amalekite king (cf. Ex. 17:8–16; Num. 24:7; Deut. 25:17–19; 1 Sam. 15:8). Israel was to utterly destroy Amalek because of their horrific slaughter of the vulnerable and weak. Indeed, according to 1 Chronicles 4:42–43 many Amalekites were killed, so perhaps the remnant represented here by Haman was a result of a diaspora similar to the Jews in Persia. Often today, the wicked and evil are promoted unfairly, in contrast to the righteous, and we are not usually allowed to know why. However, God works even through these uncertainties and difficulties to bring about His purpose and plan.

While each word can be used to refer to respect given to humans, the combination of the Hebrew words *kara'* and *khawah*—both meaning "to bow down" or "to do obeisance" (Esth. 3:2) is otherwise used only for God (2 Chr. 7:3; 29:29; Pss. 22:29; 95:6). So this action was not about Mordecai disrespecting Haman's authority but implies that Haman was asking for more than the mere respect that the king commanded. The text does not portray Mordecai as arrogant, given to tribal enmity, caring only for monotheism, or even caring for God's dignity. Even today, respect for authority is appropriate, unless that authority is commanding the deference due only to God. Although those who worked with Mordecai knew that he was a Jew, implying that his noncompliance had other motives than disrespect (Esth. 3:4), they were nevertheless bothered by his disobedience and finally reported him to Haman.

Haman's furious response (3:13–14) was similar to the king's (1:20), in that it went beyond what would be reasonable and extended to all the people (similar to how the king went beyond simply shaming Vashti and deposing her). Haman made plans even before he talked to the king and cast lots, which ironically involved some sort of divination, a belief in divine providence (3:7). The Hebrew word "fall" (usually translated as "cast") for the selection of the day is also used for what ultimately happened to Haman in 6:13. The *pur* ("lot") introduced fate and chance (3:7), as well as links to the Passover and Exodus, which were also in the month of Nisan. The center of divine hiddenness is found in the omission of God's name and the invisible yet powerful providences of God.

Haman's speech to the king was carefully constructed rhetoric, beginning with truth, then proceeding to half lies, and finally ending with flat-out lies. He was full of slanderous and shaming insinuations that would feed into the king's paranoia about rebellious uprisings, as well as his desperate need for money. The king had suffered a major defeat at the hands of the Greeks and was near bankruptcy; therefore the amount of the bribe, corresponding to two-thirds of Persia's total annual income, was attractive to him. Perhaps it would come from the plunder of the Jews. There are many similarities between the speeches of Memucan (1:16–20) and Haman. Both based their arguments on the misappropriation of what belonged to a single other, even though Persians usually loved and encouraged ethnic diversity (see 3:12). This was ironic since Haman was also an outsider, a minority, so he had to create prejudice, using generalities and abstractions such as suggesting that it would be inappropriate and not in the king's best interest to allow the Jews' presence to continue to be tolerated (3:8).

The plot gave no sense of respite until the solution had begun, just like in chapter 1. And yet, in contrast to the previous public decree and banquet of the king, this decree was adopted privately and ended with a private banquet; all the while the city was perplexed and in uproar, confusion, and chaos (3:15). Perhaps the irony of the law (3:12) to all nations was a large part of the confusion. Each person may have been wondering if he or she would be next.

The king carried on his tradition of never rejecting a proposal from one of his advisors. Many connections to Genesis 41:42 can be noted: Pharaoh gave his signet ring to Joseph; also in the Joseph story were false accusations, a decree against the innocent, the rescue of endangered people, and the exaltation of a Jew to prime minister. While this initially may seem to have represented the king's desire to refuse to be responsible for the genocide, he clearly sold the Jews to Haman because he would receive payment (Esth. 7:4). He used his signet ring

(3:10), his scribes or royal secretaries (3:12), and his name (3:12). In addition, the decree was ratified in his presence. Xerxes shows that an uncontrolled need for honor and respect, coupled with absolute power, leads to oppression and injustice.

4:1-17. Esther and Mordecai's Counterplot. This chapter consists of a series of exchanges between Mordecai and Esther. Until this chapter, Esther acted as a proper woman and queen. Once Mordecai asked her to reveal her Jewish identity, her first reaction was to hide it. This stemmed from the reality that Mordecai was commanding Esther to go against the king's direct orders and against the law (4:16). While Vashti was unwilling to appear before the king, Esther had to be ready to appear before him without being requested to come. As a result of Mordecai's pleas, Esther shifted into a new and commanding role as queen, and Mordecai did what she said (4:17). One wonders if the king had lost interest in Esther, which would have heightened the drama and danger since he had not called for her for thirty days (4:11). Esther had already once communicated with the king against the law (2:22), but that was for his protection, whereas this was her own request. Medo-Persian law was very clear that this would mean death for her since it could be considered a threat to the life of the king.

And yet Esther was really part of the solution to the king's dilemma regarding the Jews because she was both a Jew and in power. She wondered whether she would be able to hold to both her heritage and her position. Yet it became clear that God had chosen her for a moment like this and at the same time enabled her to fulfill her role. The story shows that she was ready to fulfill God's purpose at the risk of her life. Verses 9-10 record a short and concise dialogue, showing the speed and intensity of the communication, as well as how ignorant those in the palace were of what was happening in the outside world and how Mordecai knew nothing of what was happening in the palace. Hatach traveled back and forth between Esther and Mordecai, reporting their messages to each other (4:9).

Mordecai had faith that God would take care of His people because he told Esther that if she did not disclose her identity and bring deliverance, relief and deliverance would arise for the Jews from another place (4:14). The presence of God and His plan for deliverance is so clear here that some rabbis call Him "the Place," implying that God would deliver the Jews another way, no matter what. The text introduces in a veiled form the need for prayer to God. "Fasting, weeping, and wailing" (4:3) are the same words used elsewhere for grief over sin (e.g., Joel 2:12). Even the non-Jews referred to in the book of Esther were religious, so the narrative seems to assume it here. The phrase "who knows" (Esth. 4:14) is used elsewhere by sinners to call upon God for help (2 Sam. 12:22; Joel 2:14; Jon. 3:9), and implies that God may relent as He has in the other cases. Mordecai's genuine grief and agitation make clear that expressing our fears and concerns is sometimes necessary and good.

Esther also called for a fast, which is associated with prayer as well as mourning in Scripture (Esth. 4:16). She continued to remain loyal to the king in how she appeared, even as she prepared to break a law, which could cause her personal harm and complete loss of status and identity. Esther did not hear a word from God, so how did she know what to do? We often think that we must ask for a specific sign or have clear direction from God before proceeding. But although we should seek wisdom from God before acting, God does not always tell us exactly what to do. Many times, He asks us to make a choice, to exercise our free will, use our reasoning powers, and reflect His image. Whatever we choose, we can continue to follow Him in our hearts even when other things are not clear, and He will make His ultimate will happen. God would have made a way for the Jews to be delivered if Esther had not chosen to go before the king, similar to how He raised up David when Saul chose to turn away from God. But Esther did choose to follow the advice of Mordecai, to risk her life for her people, even though we have no record that God told her to do so. Ultimately, God worked mightily through her because of her faith and choice to serve others.

Esther could not avoid disobedience to the king. Yet she did not do at all what Mordecai suggested or the law demanded. As a result, she ended up commanding both the king and Mordecai. This was where she really stepped into her role as queen—and into her place in God's plan of salvation. She initially obeyed Mordecai, but then she took matters into her own hands, identifying with God's people in her own time and way.

5:1-14. Esther's Invitation. The time of Esther's approach was during Passover, which was significant for it recalled God's overlooking the sins of His people, as well as sparing them from judgment and giving it instead to their enemies. Once again the king was pleased with her, and she obtained his favor (5:2). This was another possible implication of God's action behind the scenes (cf. Ex. 12:36). Esther's clothes are mentioned to compare her royalty to that of the king. She stood before him to show royal status, but she waited for the king to invite her to approach out of the inner court of the king's palace (Esth. 5:1). The king realized she must be very troubled to risk her life.

At the feast while drinking wine, Xerxes renewed his request since he realized her invitation to eat did not reveal what she really wanted (5:6). The king made an excessive promise, showing his impulsive and naive nature yet again—or perhaps his respect for the queen. Esther then acted to create a situation that would enable her to ask without having to rely on the king's promise, noting how the banquet was for him, and played on his arrogance by not mentioning Haman at that point. Esther's actions here were politically shrewd and even calculating. God enabled her to exercise the power He gave her. After this moment she is always referred to as "queen" in the book of Esther.

Esther's actions here build tension and suspense, which is further heightened by the lack of windows into her motives. In contrast to the readers' ability to see into Haman's thoughts and insecurities, Esther is portrayed as mysterious and confident, implying that she would win out in the end. She also likely waited because Xerxes was malleable and erratic, and Haman might try to change the mind of the king once again. She chose to set a trap for Haman so she could defeat him quickly and not risk his colluding with the king behind her back. She was also trying to arouse suspicion in the king, illustrating that there is nothing wrong per se with shrewdness and political awareness—they are tools that can be used to accomplish good or evil ends.

This scene plays on the irony of the king's proclamation that all men should rule their homes (1:22) because Esther was in control here, feeding them and getting them drunk. And yet the narrator clues in the readers to the emotions of Haman so that he appears needy and unstable. It becomes clear that his lack of self-control would ultimately be his downfall. Zeresh undermined Haman's role at home as well by talking of deterministic actions, just as Esther did. Haman had boasted about being honored, promoted, and lifted up (Heb. *nasa'*) above others by the king (Esth. 5:11), but in the end he would only be lifted up on a stake. Pride and greed were more important than human life in Persia, as they often are today. But God does not forget His promises, and He can overrule human pride and greed to deliver His people when they seek Him.

6:1—7:10

The Fall of the Enemy

The resolution of the plot of the narrative is filled with suspense. The powerful appeared to have in his hand the future of God's people, and there was no majestic and visible manifestation of the power of God to save them. But the Lord was working from within the narrative as the main protagonist in charge of its course and ending.

6:1-14. The King's Insomnia and Mordecai's Ascendancy. This chapter documents events emphasizing how it was on that very night when God intervened and the reversal began (6:1). The Hebrew verb in the phrase referring to the king's insomnia (lit. "sleep fled the king") shows that the king was not the one acting—this again hints at divine involvement. This is especially true when considering the accumulation of circumstances: no sleep for the king (6:1), nothing had been done to honor Mordecai (6:3), the records of the chronicles that were read to the king (6:1), and the fact that Haman happened to be outside in the outer court (6:4). The juxtaposition of all of these events further confirms that the insomnia had some cause other than the king. Even the reference to the account of Mordecai being found suggests a search was ordered, perhaps a recollection of unrewarded action or a divine appointment (6:2).

God works through ordinary events, even through things that are full of humor and irony, with a motif of concealment. In the book of Esther, chapter 6 is the narrative center, apparently Mordecai's lowest point, but also Haman's because of his pride. This exhibits a connection with eschatology, a reversal of fortunes, when all seems to be lost for God's people. At the last possible moment, when there seems to be no other way of escape, and when destruction is certain, God intervenes and brings a mighty deliverance. In v. 6, the king asked for advice, his impulsivity characteristic of one who was easily moved to honor others. It appears that Haman was standing in the court like Esther had been, coming to make a request, highlighting his vulnerability, insecurity, and egocentric nature. Haman's response should have been perceived as odd, even signaling a coup attempt with designs on the throne (see 1 Kin. 1:33–40).

The ensuing scene in Esther 6:8–9 is almost ludicrous, with a massive reversal between Mordecai and Haman, as well as between Mordecai and the king. The narrator does not give clues as to whether the king had forgotten he had decreed Jewish destruction, and the silence heightens the dramatic tension. Haman's hurried return to his house was another sign of the reversal of his decree, with which the couriers had hurried (6:12; cf. 3:15). Zeresh and Haman's friends seem to have known of commands and promises that predicted the fall of Amalek and Israel's triumph (v. 13; cf. Ex. 17:16; Num. 24:15–20; Deut. 25:17–19; 1 Sam. 15); even seeing Haman's humiliation as the first step. Indeed, Haman was hastened again (Esth. 6:14), this time to face ultimate humiliation, while Mordecai now looked more like the king than the king.

7:1–10. Haman's Fall. Both Esther and Haman pled for their lives, but ultimately Haman fell before the Persian queen, a Jew, though she triumphed over him with her shrewdness and not a sword. She began by hosting another banquet with the drinking of wine (7:2), implying security, victory, and the opposite of fasting, and the narrative is more gripping since her request has still not be made. Esther had the very delicate task of accusing Haman, but not the king (v. 3), since in a way the king was equally responsible for the planned genocide of the Jews. To do this, she used the phrase, "If I have found favor with you" (lit. "in your eyes"), which suggests intimacy and personal favor (v. 3). She also used the king's own terms—*she'elah,* meaning "petition," and *baqqashah,* meaning "request"—and reconnected with her people (v. 3). Esther's rhetorical skill matched that of Haman's masterful speeches. She intimated that to kill her people was to kill her because she realized that the king would show less vigor to save others than to save her. She may also have hinted (v. 4) at the king's decree. She used the same words as he did (3:13; cf. Judg. 2:14, 3:8). The queen tried to persuade the king that she had his best interests at heart, using the same words as Haman in Esther 3:8, 13 in regard to the destruction of the Jews.

This chapter is full of irony. Esther implied that the king was so important that the queen would rather be sold as a slave than bring this matter to his attention (7:4), and yet Esther's pose as a weak and helpless woman does not fool the reader. Esther also hinted at the money involved with her reference to her people being sold as male and female slaves. She may have been arguing (at least according to some translations of the last part of the verse) that Haman was not actually interested in the king's welfare or Haman would have sold the Jews (v. 4). She realized that the king's convenience was the primary factor in his decisions, and he would lose labor if he lost the Jews. Likely, Esther's meekness and caution here were tactical, not manifestations of her personality, similar to Nathan's waiting to give David's name in his accusatory parable in 2 Samuel 12. In Esther 7:6 she used the balanced and resonant Hebrew sentence "*haman hara' hazzeh*" (meaning "this wicked/vile Haman"), which parallels the king's question in structure and gives the sense of a couple verbally dancing back and forth. The accusation came with force like Nathan's to David.

The king then redrew lines of personal allegiance according to criteria of royalty even though it seems it took the king a while to realize what had happened because his selling of the Jews had been so offhand. The king and queen were now working together against a common enemy. Haman was startled and disturbed, terrified before the king and queen because Esther's wit and charm effectively disassociated the king from the evil deed (7:6). Haman's panic led to misconduct that the king would use to justify his condemnation. The rage of the king followed a similar pattern as in previous incidents: instigation, rage, recommendation, implementation, return of pleasure.

Haman violated royal Persian protocol: only the king could be alone with any of his wives, so Haman should have left. Nevertheless, his departure would have suggested guilt or invited pursuit, so he was left in a very difficult position. Verse 8 contains a play on words, truly a humorous scene, as the king could now misinterpret Haman's intention: Haman is portrayed as falling on the couch, upon Esther, or both (the Hebrew is rather ambiguous). While this can also be interpreted as supplication (cf. 8:3; 1 Sam. 25:24), the ambiguity appears intentional. Haman was rendered speechless for once, and the word "fall" sealed his fate—while others cast (lit."caused to fall") the lot before him in Esther 3:7, he began to "fall" before Mordecai in 6:13.

The king looked for a convenient excuse to eliminate Haman, being now more concerned with the royal dignity (yet wives were easier to come by than prime ministers). In 7:9, it becomes clear that the palace staff favored Esther, and the king could not even formulate a coherent response. Esther did not show mercy here because Haman was an Amalekite and was not contrite. It was also not hers to offer; his fate had been devised by his own handiwork. In v. 10, the king's anger subsided when Haman suffered a fate planned for another, but for a crime he did not commit, and yet he deserved the punishment (cf. Ps. 7:16; Prov. 26:27). This turn of events shows how God's deliverance reverses impossible situations. Believers must ask for open eyes to see how God is working in their lives, especially when He seems most hidden.

8:1—10:3

The Triumph of God's People

The threat of extinction caused anguish to the people of God because the threat was universal. It moved from the palace to the whole kingdom. God was going to be left without a witness on earth, and this was not acceptable to Him. He would give wisdom and power to His human instruments to overcome and, at the end, to joyfully celebrate the victory.

8:1–17. The Salvation of the Jews and the Choosing of a New Prime Minister. This chapter begins with the comment that the events in the previous verses took place on that very day (cf. 3:13). The reversal was complete. Esther assumed Haman's position and took his wealth to give to the Jews. Mordecai received the signet ring from the king, and Esther put him in charge of Haman's house—that is, his estate (8:2). However, Esther had one more request for the king, and the scenario proceeds in a very similar way as in chapter 5 when she came before the king. Esther fell down before the king, but in this instance, she sought her own good and that of her people (8:3). The graphic description of her begging with tears (8:3) connotes intensity and importunity often used only for God.

Esther was clearly unsure of her reception since this exceeded her original petition, and so she used four elements of deference: she expressed her request in terms of whether it pleased the king, if she was regarded with favor by him, if her request seemed right to him, and if she was pleasing to him (8:5). Her request bundled approval and love together so Xerxes would find it difficult to separate the two. To the king, Esther was queen first, Jewish second, so she concluded with a lament aimed to avert destruction (v. 6; cf. Lam. 2:11; Esth. 4:1). This was not a mere request but a challenge against the administration, legal axioms, and kingdom organization that were so convoluted and bureaucratic. Esther appealed to the king's pity, knowing she would be overcome with anguish if her people were to suffer.

Verse 8 notes a quirk of Persian law: even the king could not withdraw the first set of documents because decrees made in the king's name and set with his seal could not be revoked. So the king, in a sense, appears to have abdicated the throne—he allowed Esther to write a counter decree. The decree closely mimics Esther 3:12–15: written with the king's name (8:10), sealed with his signet ring (v. 10), and sent to all provinces and in their own language (v. 9). This underscored the new safety and security accorded Jews. Even their language was given official status.

Verse 11 uses the same three verbs that were used to describe Haman's attempted genocide. According to some translations, the decree specifically mentioned the protection of the Jewish women and children; according to others, it mentioned the right of the Jews to destroy any women and children of the people involved in an assault against them. The main point in the latter case would be primarily to mirror the original decree (cf. 3:13). In confirmation of this, the Jews actually did not take spoil, but they were given permission to do so if they wished. The decree emphasized the defensive counteraction that Jews could take, in the reversal of national fortune through a preemptive strike. The allowance for avenging (8:13) does not refer to personal vengeance but to a punitive action based on the law, assuming a prior wrong (Haman's edict) and a guaranteed right to defend themselves.

The mood in the citadel was very different from that of 3:15. The city was joyful at this decree (8:15) rather than being in turmoil. Mordecai departed from the king clothed in royal robes (8:15), in contrast to Haman in chapter 3, who was inside the palace and oblivious to what was happening in the city. These garments of Mordecai symbolized the highest degree of royal recognition. These same materials are all mentioned in Xerxes's feast in chapter 1. The reference to light (or happiness), gladness, joy, and honor (8:16) reverses the fasting, weeping, and wailing of 4:3. Gladness and joy are often used to describe delight in response to divine presence and deliverance (8:16).

In light of this, many non-Jews became Jews (8:17). A similar situation is recorded in Nehemiah 10:29, where Gentiles separated from the nations to follow God's law. Even though the change was ethnic, it also involved religious awe.

Similarly, Genesis 31:53 notes that God is the "Fear of Isaac," so there could be a veiled reference to God here in the phrase "fear of the Jews," showcasing God's presence or intervention in history (Esth. 8:17). Similarly, 2 Chronicles 17:10 states that the "fear of Yahweh fell on the nations" and resulted in the protection of Israel from her enemies.

The resolution was a complete reversal: Mordecai came with royal garb, Jews experienced joy and gladness, and others became Jews. While some argue that this was not a heartfelt conversion, when Esther 8:17 is connected with 9:27, the conversion was clearly genuine. Fear or awe that leads to conversion is the work of God. No one was forced to convert because the decree only allowed self-defense by the Jews. But Haman and his gods were defeated, so this revelation of the work of the Jewish God moved their hearts. For us today, when decisions are made to live for God, others are moved, especially those who are searching for more than materialistic goods and fleeting pleasures. It may seem that there are very few souls ripe for the harvest, but a choice to follow God under great duress can lead many others to follow Him as well.

9:1—10:3. The Last Feasts and Purim. This last section is very different in narration, style, vocabulary, and content, with less story and more history and legal counsel. Mordecai is portrayed as similar to Moses. The fear of the Jews (v. 2) and the fear of Mordecai (v. 3) are noted even though the fear of God would fit perfectly, designating God's presence and intervention in history (cf. Ex. 15:14–16; Josh. 2:8–11). All gave honor to Mordecai, showing Jewish attainment of complete political mastery. Mordecai became more famous, prominent, and powerful (Esth. 9:4) than Haman had been (3:1). Mordecai's standing at court prompted government officials to help the Jews (9:3), who were now in a similar situation as Esther had been when she gained favor in the eyes of the king. The focus here is on dominion and honor, not slaughter.

The names of the ten sons of Haman are ancient Persian names associated with demonic powers (9:10). It seems probable that they organized active hostility during the months following the issuing of the decree. In contrast, the Jews followed the rules of Deuteronomy 13:6–18, and they took no plunder even though Mordecai's decree allowed them to take spoil. This reprisal was necessary because their enemies gloated and the king seemed indifferent to their suffering (Esth. 3:11, 15). However, the Festival of Purim celebrated getting rest or relief from their enemies (9:16), which implied that the ultimate victory over enemies is due to a transcendental power, not human strength. The people responded collectively to establish the days of Purim (9:26), a spontaneous response to God's faithfulness. And in yet another play on words, the reference to the presents that the people were to send to each other uses the same Hebrew word that is used for Esther's portion in 2:9. This word also refers to the gifts or choice food morsels that are given to the poor to celebrate God giving them a portion (9:22).

Purim thus celebrated relief (not killing), with an emphasis on deliverance (not overpowering or domination). Anyone was free to join them, including future converts (cf. Is. 14:1; 56:3, 6). It was a religious celebration that sought no political advantage. In the edict to inaugurate the Festival of Purim, Esther wrote with full authority, and Mordecai sent letters to the Jews (Esth. 9:29–30), continuing to integrate their Persian and Jewish identities (vv. 31–32). Mordecai was respected and well loved by all, and he sought their good and their welfare (10:3)—the literal Hebrew here refers to speaking peace. This was an action that is otherwise attributed only to God and His speaking promises to His people (cf. Ps. 85:8). Throughout Scripture, the secular roles of God's people are significant, but they give us a challenge to act in the face of oppression, even when risks seem imminent. The hope of God's deliverance will not be frustrated because He is the ultimate Deliverer, yet He works behind the scenes through faulty yet courageous humans to bring about His sovereign and providential plan.

POETRY AND WISDOM BOOKS

INTRODUCTION TO HEBREW POETRY AND WISDOM BOOKS

The beauty of poetry and its characteristics are difficult to transfer from an unfamiliar original language to a second one. The fullness of the beauty of Hebrew poetry can be totally enjoyed only through the original Hebrew language. Yet there is much that we can learn about it and its function through the study of the English translations of the Bible. These translations have done all that is possible to preserve the nature of Hebrew poetry.

POETIC BOOKS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

Traditionally Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, and Lamentations are considered to be the poetic books of the OT. The Hebrew Bible locates these poetic books among the *ketubim* (Writings), the third section within the threefold division of the Hebrew canon (Law, Prophets, and Writings). The first three books (Job, Psalms, and Proverbs) are grouped together as the *sipre 'emet* (books of truth), or just poetic books, whereas the second three books (Ecclesiastes, Songs of Songs, and Lamentations) form part of the *megillot*—the five scrolls (including also the books of Ruth and Esther) that are traditionally read during the Jewish holidays. In addition to the poetic books and the *megillot*, the *ketubim* also include a short list of historical books, namely, Daniel (placed among the prophets in the Protestant canon), Ezra and Nehemiah (originally combined into a single book in the Hebrew Bible), and both Chronicles (also originally a single book). The Protestant canon includes these books in the section of the poetic books except for Lamentations, which is placed with Jeremiah among the prophetic books of the OT.

POETRY VERSUS PROSE

Thinking of Hebrew poetry, one usually focuses on the six books mentioned above that are composed entirely or mostly of verse. Nevertheless, within the remainder of the Hebrew Bible, poetry appears so frequently that scholars have asked how much of the OT is poetry and how much is prose. Suggestions range from the traditional one third to the assertion that most of the OT was written as poetry. Furthermore, the claim of an artificial distinction between prose and poetry has become a widely discussed topic in the literary study of the OT and has been examined within narrative criticism. Beyond the six poetic books, the central role of poetry in the prophetic literature of the OT and even within the Pentateuch (which contains several highly significant poetic passages) has been recognized.

Beginning in the 1980s, the study of Hebrew poetry has undergone a revival that has to be understood within the context of literary criticism, which, in turn, was an expression of

the growing discontent with the results—or lack of results—of historical criticism. While earlier introductions to Hebrew poetry focused on technique and style, more recent studies have addressed poetic theory, namely, the questions of how to distinguish between poetry and prose and if such a distinction can be made anyway. It became clear that it is not possible to apply modern literary notions about poetry and prose to ancient Hebrew poetry and prose. One important issue in the debate is the question of the parallelism of poetic phrases, a feature that the Anglican Bishop Robert Lowth identified in 1753 as the foremost principle of Hebrew poetry.

Moving far beyond Lowth's early and somewhat mechanistic definitions of parallelism, scholars have now recognized the linguistic complexities of parallelism and its sophisticated workings on grammatical, lexical, semantic, and phonological levels. Thus, scholars have been able to move toward a list of characteristics that, through their relative frequency, distinguish poetry from prose in the Hebrew Bible: (1) terseness or conciseness; (2) ellipses or omission of verbal forms; (3) parallelism; (4) word pairs; (5) imagery; (6) less predictable tense sequence and word order; (7) lack of syntactical markers; (8) fronting (i.e., placing elements before the main verb); and (9) decontextualization (i.e., isolating poetic discourse from its context). This list is by no means comprehensive, and other scholars have approached the subject from a linguistic, statistical perspective, indicating that the three prose particles (i.e., the definite article *he* ["the"], the relative pronoun *'asher* ["that," "which," "whom"], and the marker of the definite object *'et* [not translated into English]) are conspicuously absent in Hebrew poetry, so that a count lower than five would indicate poetry, while those above fifteen would point toward prose. For the middle range (five to fifteen), they propose a new category—prophetic discourse, which mixes prose and poetry. The general tendency appears to be that the difference between prose and poetry is more a matter of degree than one of kind, and scholars are looking for methods that will make the distinction more objectively.

Variations of prose and poetry are not only a matter of different books containing primarily poetry or primarily prose, but the variations are also to be found throughout the entire Hebrew Bible. Generally, the Pentateuch has not been the preferred terrain for the study of Hebrew poetry since its style is mainly descriptive and prescriptive narrative with some personal discourse. However, there are four major poems in the Pentateuch (Gen. 49; Ex. 15; Num. 23–24; Deut. 32–33) that are found at theologically important places, aside from numerous other smaller poetic units (beginning with Gen. 2:23; 3:14–19). This trend continues throughout the remainder of the Hebrew Bible so that scholars have started to speak of inset poetry (i.e., poetry that has been deliberately and strategically placed within prose to underline or highlight an important theological point).

Another good example, outside of the Pentateuch, is Jonah 2, also known as Jonah's psalm, which some scholars in the past identified as a later addition. It has now become apparent that this inset poem serves an important role in the narrative structure of the whole prophetic book.

There are two chapters in the OT (Judg. 4–5) that illustrate the subtle differences between Hebrew poetry and prose in a fascinating way because they reference the same event, once in prose (Judg. 4) and then again in poetry (Judg. 5). The story is the courageous killing of Sisera, commander of the Canaanite army of Jabin, king of Hazor, by Jael, the wife of Heber. For the sake of this discussion, only one verse from each chapter is selected to highlight these differences:

Judges 4:19	**Judges 5:25**
Then he said to her, "Please give me	For water he asked,
some water. I am thirsty." So she opened	Milk she gave;
a container of milk, gave him a drink,	In a bowl fit for lords,
and covered him. (author's translation)	She brought curdled milk. (author's translation)

The original Hebrew counts fourteen words in prose versus eight words in poetry. The prose version tells a linear story, giving heightened attention to what Jael provided to Sisera when he entered her tent, in order to lure him into a false sense of safety (he asked for a bit of water, but she gave him milk and then covered him with a blanket). The poetic account of the same moment works with parallel and simultaneous contrasts, juxtaposing "water" and "milk" and placing (fronting) them before the two contrastive verbs ("ask" and "give"). The third and fourth lines (called *cola*) then intensify the initial contrast by describing the bowl as a special vessel designed for lords and the milk as curdled, probably a type of rich, creamy yogurt that is fit for nobles. While both texts complement each other, there is no feeling of redundancy, and the poetry even tells a slightly different and more profound story with significantly fewer words. Consequently, Hebrew poetry is not a literary embellishment or poetic reformulation of narrative content.

CHARACTERISTICS OF HEBREW POETRY

The reader must recognize the limitations of understanding Hebrew poetry through the lens of modern Bible versions. However, modern translators have an increasing understanding of the workings of Hebrew poetry so that the complexities of the original language are not lost altogether. While it is difficult to translate assonances, the most important aspect of Hebrew poetry—the usage of parallelism—is usually well preserved in modern translations. The following characteristics of Hebrew poetry are mostly based on the modern English translations and provide an adequate panorama to the modern reader of the richness of God's word in its original language.

Layout in Poetic Lines (Colography)

The oldest complete Hebrew manuscripts of the OT, dated to the tenth century A.D., set the poetic sections into lines of poetry, called *cola* (plural of *colon*), by either punctuation or spacing (or both), thus differentiating it from prose. This is called colography. When the text of the Hebrew Bible was vocalized (vowels were added to the words, because written Hebrew

originally consisted of only consonants) between the sixth and eleventh centuries A.D. by generations of Jewish scholars called the Masoretes, they used a system of disjunctive accents that mark the boundary of a colon (i.e., a poetic line). However, the accents were not primarily made to differentiate between prose and poetry but to facilitate recitation, and thus, colography serves as only one criterion for determining poetry. Furthermore, the Talmud indicates that in the manuscripts the delimitations of a bicolon (i.e., a verse in poetry consisting of two lines or cola) are indicated by aligning one colon to the right and the other to the left margin of the text, leaving a blank space in between. Most ancient manuscripts follow this layout, and colographic layouts are found in the oldest complete manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible. Ancient translations like the LXX follow this colographic layout of the Hebrew manuscripts, and most modern versions indicate the difference between prose and poetry based on ancient manuscript colography by changing between a justified layout and indented, broken-up lines.

Meter

Meter in Hebrew poetry arranges phonological events in a pattern that repeat themselves in successive lines. The question of meter in Hebrew verse has been a major point of contention among scholars throughout history. The biggest hindrance in determining Hebrew poetic meter is modern ignorance of the original pronunciation of ancient Hebrew, as only consonants were used. Modern theories of meter put emphasis on the similarities between lines, instead of superimposing a metric system that is derived from non-Semitic or modern languages. That does not mean that Hebrew poetry lacks rhythm; parallelism produces a certain rhythm because each colon usually consists of three words and each poetic line usually has two (*bicolon*), sometimes three (*tricolon*), and rarely four cola (*quadrocolon*).

Syntax

The sentence structure of Hebrew poetry is different from that of prose, and it shows a certain terseness or compactness. Poetic lines are shorter and more concise than sentences in prose. Furthermore, poems in the OT outside the Psalms rarely exceed thirty verses, and there are no epic poems in the Hebrew Bible. Transitions between poetic lines often are not expressed and connecting words (conjunctions) are missing. Often there is omission of the verb (i.e., there is no verb in the second line and the action of the verb in the first line is implied). Psalm 49:3 offers a good illustration:

> My mouth shall speak wisdom,
> And the meditation of my heart shall be understanding. (ESV)

The verb *speak* from the first line is omitted in the second line but really constitutes the implied action of both parallel lines. Nevertheless, *meditation* in English does not speak, so translators opt to provide alternatives—in the case above, "shall be." In Hebrew, however, it does speak because the noun *hagut* ("meditation") refers to the audible recitation or uttering of God's word and thus references "speaking" as well (cf. Pss. 1:2; 143:5).

Parallelism

As mentioned before, the most important feature of Hebrew poetry is parallelism, first identified by Robert Lowth in 1753 in his *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews*. His classic definition in his *Isaiah: A New Translation with a Preliminary Dissertation and Notes, Critical, Philological, and Explanatory* still holds: "The correspondence of one verse, or line with another, I call parallelism." Lowth initially established three categories for parallelism in Hebrew poetry, which, however, have proven to be limited in scope and somewhat mechanistic.

1. *Synonymous parallelism*: The second line provides a restatement of the first:

> Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles!
> Laud Him, all you peoples! (Ps. 117:1; NKJV)

2. *Antithetical parallelism*: The second line is the opposite of the first:

> A wise son makes a glad father,
> But a foolish son is the grief of his mother. (Prov. 10:1; NKJV)

3. *Synthetic parallelism*: The second line completes, complements, or expands the first:

> Let him lead me to the banquet hall,
> and let his banner over me be love. (Song 2:4; NIV)

From this first definition, the concept of parallelism has constantly evolved, and it has become apparent that parallelism in Hebrew poetry is much more complex and can occur on various levels. The result is a more current definition: parallelism is the recurrence of grammatical, lexical, semantic, and phonological aspects in two adjacent lines. Rarely, the recurrence is identical and the correspondence between lines serves not only to equate two lines of Hebrew text but also to enhance, support, or intensify line A through line B. Thus, in the following examples, a range of linguistic features and aspects that constitute parallelism in Hebrew poetry is considered.

4. *Word pairs*: These are terms that are frequently grouped together. The discovery of Ugaritic poetry (Ugarit or Ras Shamra was an ancient port city in Northern Syria boasting an alphabetic Semitic language containing many similarities to biblical Hebrew) has promoted the study of word pairs in Hebrew poetry, which primarily takes place on a lexical level. Isaiah 1:2 (NIV) says:

> Hear me, you heavens!
> Listen, earth!

The word pair *heavens-earth* is used throughout the OT as the predominant descriptor of the created world. It is used to denote either the totality of the created cosmos or the contrasted parts of the cosmos. Word pairs also occur outside of poetic texts, as in Genesis 1 where *heaven-earth* is used as a *merism* (two contrasting words referring to a totality) pointing to the cosmological dimension of the Creation account.

5. *Grammatical parallelism*: This form of parallelism exhibits corresponding syntactic grammatical structures that are rarely identical. In Psalm 6:5 (NKJV), a declaration is set in parallel to a question:

> For in death there *is* no remembrance of You;
> In the grave who will give You thanks?

6. *Semantic parallelism*: The emphasis here is on the meaning of words and can either be paradigmatic (belonging to a certain class, like *man* and *woman*) or syntagmatic (creating similar sequential structures) associations of words. Psalm 111:6 (NKJV) says:

> He has declared to His people the power of His works,
> In giving them the heritage of the nations.

The correspondence between *people* and *nations* is paradigmatic in that they belong to the same semantic domain of *groups and classes of persons*. Nevertheless, the terms are also syntagmatically related, as there is a sequential progression from "His people" (Israel) to the nations, underlining the special election of Israel among the other nations in this verse.

7. *Phonetic parallelism*: Alliteration (repetition of same or similar consonantal sounds) and assonance (repetition of same or similar vocalic sounds) are the two most common phonetic parallelisms, which, unfortunately, are largely lost in any translation from one language to another. For example, the Hebrew text of Isaiah 22:5a uses a phrase that is full of alliteration and assonance: ***mehumah—mebusah—mebukah***. In an attempt to preserve the original phonetic parallelism, this has been translated as "a day of tumult and trampling and terror" (NIV).

It is evident that there are many ways to activate linguistic equivalence and, with that, parallelism. The concentration or density of these phenomena indicates the presence of a parallelism and, thus, of Hebrew poetry.

Repetition and Recurrence

This poetic device points specifically to the repeated use of words and phrases that can be employed in a variety of ways that go beyond the parallelism of two (*bicolon*) or three (*tricolon*) lines. Psalm 122 serves as a good example, as it includes a number of poetic devices that are based on repetition and recurrence.

1. *Keywords*: The recurrence of the same word or words in the original Hebrew creates a focus on the message of the poem. In Psalm 122, three times "Jerusalem" is mentioned (Ps. 122:2, 3, 6; Heb. *yerushalaim*) and three times the word "peace" (Ps. 122:6, 7, 8; Heb. *shalom*), which in Hebrew are both derived from the same root (*shlm*). This immediately

brings the message of Psalm 122 to the forefront, namely, the peace of Jerusalem, which emanates from the temple.

2. *Inclusio*: A correspondence between the beginning and end of the poem creates a framing device or bookend, which often serves as a thematic framework. The "house of the LORD" in v. 1 and v. 9 frames Psalm 122 and points to its thematic focus.

3. *Anaphora*: Sequential lines begin with the same word or phrase. Verses 4 and 5 begin with the same Hebrew adverb of place (*sham*), which creates a movement toward the temple as the pilgrims ascend to Jerusalem, whereas vv. 8 and 9 begin with the conjunction *lema'an*, which points to the results of what has taken place in the sanctuary.

4. *Anadiplosis*: This is a rhetorical device in which the last word of the line is repeated as the first word in the next line. Verse 2 ends and verse 3 begins with "Jerusalem"; v. 4a ends and v. 4b begins with "tribes."

5. *Cataphora*: These are sequential lines that end with the same word or phrase—e.g., Isaiah 40:13–14, where both verses end with *yodi'enu* ("he made known to Him").

6. *Immediate repetition*: In Isaiah 40:1 the word "comfort" is repeated twice in order to introduce the consolation of Zion in the second part of the book.

7. *Refrain*: A phrase is repeated at the end of each subdivision. In Psalm 136, the phrase "for His mercy/love [Heb. *khesed*] endures forever" is repeated twenty-six times at the end of each verse as a liturgically composed antiphonal refrain, most probably sung as a response from the congregation when this psalm was performed.

8. *Chiasm*: This device involves lines being arranged in a cross-like pattern (ABB'A' or ABCB'A') with correspondence between the outer lines by which a focus on the center is created. A chiastic structure can even go beyond the boundaries of an individual poem; for example, Psalms 15–24 create a chiasm around the second *torah* psalm, Psalm 19. This points to the composition of the Psalms as a whole book with complex interconnections between its 150 poems. Chiastic structures are not limited to poetic texts only.

9. *Acrostic*: In an acrostic poem, each sequential line or stanza begins with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet. In the most famous acrostic poem, Psalm 119, each stanza consists of eight verses, which each begin with the same letter of the Hebrew alphabet, followed by the next stanza of eight lines with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

Imagery

An integral part of Hebrew poetry is the usage of imagery. In employing imagery, the poet creates a picture in the hearer's (or reader's) mind using a variety of devices, of which simile and metaphor are the most widely represented.

1. *Simile*: A simile compares one thing to another, and it makes the comparison explicit by using the formula *like* or *as*. An example appears in Proverbs 25:25, which states that "cold water to a weary soul" is like good news received from far away.

2. *Metaphor*: Metaphor is a deliberate form of figurative speech that works on both word and sentence level. A simplified definition of metaphor describes it as an implied comparison.

Hebrew poetry lends itself to imagery because its most prevalent literary device, parallelism, implies comparison between two lines. Psalm 23 describes God as a Shepherd in the first part of the poem and as a royal Host in the second part, whereas v. 4 creates a seam between both metaphors, overlapping both images in adjacent poetic lines in the center of the poem. It is interesting to note that language about God is often metaphorical in nature, pointing to the fact that the unknown reality of the divine is best expressed by way of known and familiar imagery.

POETRY AND WISDOM

Within the body of poetic texts in the OT, wisdom literature takes a prominent place. The principal wisdom books of the Hebrew Bible are Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes. A number of scholars also include Songs of Songs in this group, although there appears to be a lack of explicit concern for wisdom in the poetic book since the word *wisdom* is not used at all. Beyond these texts, there are a number of wisdom psalms in the Psalms (e.g., Pss. 1; 34; 37; 49; 73; 111; 112) and further passages containing wisdom concepts and ideas throughout the OT (e.g., Gen. 37–50; 1 Sam. 25:2–42; Isa. 26; Amos 3:3–8).

Terminology

The Hebrew word *khokmah*, which occurs eighteen times in Job, thirty-nine times in Proverbs, and twenty-eight times in Ecclesiastes, represents the lexical term around which wisdom literature is organized in the OT. It can be translated as "wisdom," "aptitude," "skill," "experience," "good sense," and a variety of other terms. Further words that relate to wisdom are *binah* ("understanding"; e.g., Prov. 1:2) and *tushiyyah* ("sound wisdom" or "success"; e.g., Prov. 2:7). Semantically, *khokmah* does not belong to the realm of theoretical knowledge or philosophy but rather refers to a proper understanding of the basic realities of life and of God's dealings with humanity and the human role as moral agents. It is often found through observation and analysis and by drawing conclusions that help to understand the social, spiritual, and natural order of the world.

Themes

There is a close connection between "the fear of the LORD" and wisdom as epitomized in Proverbs 1:7: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge" (cf. Job 28:28; Ps. 111:10; Prov. 9:10; 15:33). Thus, a relationship with Yahweh is the thematic point of departure for wisdom, as much as He is also wisdom's destination. The intimate correlation between God and wisdom is indicative of its mystery as well as the importance of its pursuit as a lifelong endeavor, in which choices are governed by divine perspectives. However, further themes of wisdom touch on all spheres of life.

Prosperity and suffering constitute a second grand theme of wisdom literature, touching on the question of theodicy (i.e., divine goodness and the existence of evil) and the fallacies of a rigid and unnuanced retribution theology (Job; cf. Ps. 73; Eccl. 7:15).

A third major theme of wisdom poetry can be found in the evaluation of human conduct and moral action. The first chapters of Proverbs lay out the ideals of human conduct by means of an instructional father-son conversation (Prov. 1–9), culminating with the personification of wisdom in Proverbs 8 where it is related to Creation (Prov. 8:22–31).

Historical and Social Context

Considering the date and authorship of the three principal wisdom books, it becomes apparent that wisdom sayings constituted an early element in the oral and literary traditions of the ANE and Israel itself. Moses's authorship of the book of Job can be established on various grounds, and Ellen White connects its writing to the forty years that Moses spent in the Midian desert during the first half of the fifteenth century B.C., before leading the Israelites out of Egypt (ST, February 19, 1880, Art. A, par. 14). His early education in Egypt brought him into close contact with Egyptian wisdom literature and concepts of wisdom (e.g., the cosmological principle of *ma'at*—representing truth and world order), which date as far back as the third millennium B.C. Furthermore, wisdom literature in Egypt was closely connected to the royal court, which is also reflected in the Solomonic authorship of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. A major portion of the *Instruction of Amenemopet*, an Egyptian wisdom text with didactic features dating to 1150 B.C., has parallels in Proverbs 22:17—24:34 (see Proverbs: Introduction), and Solomon's connections to Egypt through his marriage to a daughter of the pharaoh (1 Kin. 3:1) are evident in literature and history. A number of Mesopotamian wisdom works have been connected to the theme of theodicy in Job, like the Old Babylonian *Poem of the Righteous Sufferer*, dated 1500–1200 B.C. However, as in all matters of comparison, one has to carefully evaluate similarities and differences and not assume immediately that the biblical documents were influenced by the extrabiblical ones. In Hebrew culture, wisdom was used to instruct royalty (Dan. 1:4), judges (1 Kin. 3:28), teachers/sages (Jer. 18:18), and children (Prov. 1:8), moving far beyond the royal court.

Literary Forms

Wisdom poetry in the OT employs a variety of literary forms to communicate its instructions.

1. *Sayings*: The Hebrew term *mashal* ("saying") is the technical term for a proverb or wisdom saying.

2. *Admonition*: An admonition can appear as a command (Prov. 16:3) or as a prohibition (Prov. 30:10).

3. *Numerical saying*: This usually follows a numerical pattern (Prov. 30:18–19) reminiscent of a riddle that, once resolved, provides a benefit to the person who solved it (cf. Judg. 14:14). The numerical saying seems to suggest that there are more cases than those listed, motivating the reader to look for them.

4. *Rhetorical question*: Such a question has an implied and obvious answer (Prov. 30:4).

5. *Exhortation*: This occurs often in the context of parental instruction and tends to be more extensive (Prov. 1:8–19).

6. *Personification*: Wisdom is personified as in the woman Wisdom and woman Folly of Proverbs 1–9.

7. *Dialogue*: A dialogue states and counterstates the human conceptions of wisdom and theodicy, eventually with correction by the wisdom of God Himself (Job 3–41).

8. *Parable, fable, allegory*: These literary devices often take on narrative forms to communicate wisdom truths (2 Sam. 12; Prov. 7:6–27).

THEOLOGICAL DIMENSION OF HEBREW POETRY

Hebrew poetry, in both its distribution and preeminence throughout the OT, represents more than an artistic embellishment of prose. The four major poems of the Pentateuch may be taken as an example: Genesis 49 (Jacob's blessing), Exodus 15 (Song of the Sea), Numbers 23–24 (Balaam's oracles), and Deuteronomy 32–33 (Song of Moses). The intriguing change from prose to poetry in these four sections has been noted and often interpreted from a critical perspective, identifying the poetic passages as interpolations, glosses, or later additions. However, an increasing number of interpreters recognize the strategic position of these poetic passages and their linguistic integration into the overall literary macrostructure of the Pentateuch. It can be shown that they form an essential building block in the microstructure of their respective books and the macrostructure of the overall Pentateuch. (For a more detailed discussion of the role of these passages in the overall structure of the Pentateuch, see "Introduction to the Pentateuch," p. 120.)

Scholars have noted that holiness and solemnity are often expressed through poetry. What is particularly holy and solemn in the OT is expressed in poetry. The Psalms, which, like the Pentateuch, are structured into five books, continuously recount God's actions in history (Creation, Exodus, and conquest), again with eschatological and messianic overtones throughout. Hebrew poetry, through parallelism and all its other literary devices, accomplishes what prose at times is not able to achieve: a heightening of the message. Thus, some of the most important themes in the OT are written in Hebrew poetry.

The fact that the central messages were preserved in poetry also point to the divine concern for the wide distribution of the message. It was shared with the people through the reading of the poetic portions of the OT. The terseness or compactness of poetry as well as the repetition of ideas, sounds, and words made it easier for the listeners to memorize the divine instruction and to pass it on to their children. Poetry facilitated the didactic role of priests, prophets, teachers, and parents as they made sure that the new generations would never forget God's wondrous acts of love toward His people.

JOB

INTRODUCTION

Title and Authorship. Though the book of Job pays no specific attention to authorial claims, many students of the book have long claimed that it is the work of Moses, considered to be author of the Bible's founding documents. There is ample reason to associate the book with Moses, as it seems to belong to the earliest stages of biblical composition. That Job names no author is normal rather than exceptional since many nonprophetic books have no explicitly named author. Only three of them (Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon) are identified as a specific writer's work. Whether in the Hebrew Bible (MT), the LXX, or the modern versions, the book of Job is named after its great protagonist whose name occurs fifty-six times in the book, from the story's very first verse to its very last (1:1; 42:17).

Date. Proposed dates of composition range across a span of more than a millennium, from the second millennium B.C. to the times of the postexilic temple. Despite competing recommendations, internal evidence supports an early date for the setting of the story: the fact that Job offered his own sacrifices implies that the priesthood had not yet been established and the temple/tabernacle had not been built (1:5); his possessions were measured in terms of sheep, camels, oxen, donkeys, and servants (1:3), similar to what we find in the case of Abraham (Gen. 12:16); and Job's life span of 140 years fits very well with what was common during the patriarchal period (42:16). The story was a very old one. It may have been transmitted in oral form for many years before it was written down.

Backgrounds. Job's backstory is the long-standing human discomfort with suffering in general, but particularly, with the suffering of the innocent—innocent oxen, donkeys, sheep, camels, servants, children, but particularly, the righteous innocent, the servant of Yahweh named Job. The book rolls back a veil to grant to humans some insight into the workings of the Great Controversy between good and evil. Geographically speaking, the events took place in the land of Uz. In the Bible, this term is used five times as a personal name and three times as a territorial location. Jeremiah's Uz, like the land of the Philistines, was a place of foreign people (Jer. 25:20), the Edomites, according to Lamentations 4:21. The Bible's first Uz was Semitic (Gen. 10:23). Another, Uz the son of Dishan, resided in Seir (Gen. 36:28), which the Edomites later took over from the Horites. The land of Uz may have been named after him, just as the land of Israel came to be named after a man named Israel.

Theology and Purpose. Integrity is the book's major focus, whether the speakers are young or old, male or female, human or supernatural, Machiavellian or benevolent. Despite its clear focus on one individual named Job, the book really discusses the integrity of all of God's intelligent creation. In it, God's adversary argues that the relationship between God and His people is not based on disinterested love and that, therefore, it lacks integrity. The adversary's role is highly significant both to the book of Job and to the scriptural theme of the cosmic war between good and evil. The book of Job is one of the Bible's most explicit exposés of the adversary's character and role.

1. Relationship between God and the Adversary. Some have claimed that the prologue, specifically Job 1:6—2:7, shows God cooperating with the adversary, Satan, rather than being hostile toward him. Satan (*satan*), they say, was actually God's employee, His prosecuting attorney, and should not be thought of as the origin or cause of evil. The subject of Satan as God's adversary, particularly in early OT times, continues to require the attention of Bible students.

Those who think that Israel was influenced by Zoroastrianism, the Persian religion, point to the difference between 1 Chronicles 21:1 and 2 Samuel 24:1. The difference, they say, proves that dualism—the conflict between two powers—became part of Jewish thinking in the sixth century B.C. after the Persians conquered the Babylonian Empire. First Chronicles, accepted as postexilic, shows Satan doing what preexilic 2 Samuel attributes to God. In 1 Chronicles, Satan tempts David to do what God is said to push him to do in 2 Samuel. Certain scholars claim that this is evidence that before the Exile Israel knew of no conflict between Yahweh and a personal archenemy called Satan (see "Satan and David," p. 536).

Sixth and fifth century B.C. biblical books, however, provide the strongest challenge to the theory of Zoroastrian influence because the ones expected to show the most influence are the ones that lack evidence of any such influence. Postexilic historical works like Nehemiah, Ezra, and Esther do not exhibit dualistic sentiments. Zechariah's third chapter is the only postexilic prophetic material that makes any reference to Satan. Even intertestamental Qumran texts depicting a confrontation between sons of light and darkness, between the Prince of Light and the Angel of Darkness, do not use Satan as a personal name.

Extrabiblical texts, even those as old as the oldest Zoroastrian material, may or may not help with dating the book of Job. And comparative linguistics may not help either, because few, if any, cognate occurrences of the Hebrew term *satan* appear among ancient Semitic languages. This, as much as anything else, shows how distinctive the Bible's theological insights are in relation to the books and religious ideas of its time and environment. When specifically exposed, in comparison with other biblical adversaries, Satan is seen to be both malicious and secretive, a mystery to many a reader and interpreter.

2. The Role of Satan/Adversary. The book of Job calls the one who opposes God and Job "Satan/the adversary." While this Hebrew term is used in various places in the OT (e.g., 1 Sam. 29:4; 1 Kin. 11:14, 23), the use of the definite article here (*hassatan*) makes him "the Satan," entitling him more than any other being to be called Satan. Four things in Job's prologue that most promptly identify him are (1) his name *hassatan*; (2) those whom he opposed, that is, Yahweh and people like Job whom God wanted to protect—such as Joshua the high priest (Zech. 3:1, 2); (3) an account of his viciousness (i.e., his unwarranted and destructive assaults on animals and humans); and (4) his callous presumption in his return to argue that God cheated by protecting Job. But the one who had arbitrarily destroyed Job's animals, servants, and children seems hardly qualified to discuss fairness. His presence is also found in the speeches of Job's friends and specifically introduced by Eliphaz during his first speech (4:12–16). He tells about his experience of a supernatural revelation, accepted by his other friends, received through the visit of a spiritual being. The content of this revelation contradicts the content of the voice of God in the prologue and the epilogue and aligns this spirit with the adversary of the prologue (see "The Vision/Dream of Eliphaz," p. 630).

Passages in the NT, including 1 Peter 5:8, Revelation 12:9, and 20:2, leave little doubt about who Satan is or what he does. He is the devil, the ancient serpent, accuser of God's people, the beginner and chief agent of trouble in the universe and misery on earth. Job's Satan is simply the proper name and identification for the trouble-making serpent in Genesis. Zechariah's Satan is readily recognizable because of Job. And his identification in the NT as the great adversary of heaven (Rev. 12:7–9) makes it more appropriate to wonder how he hides so well in OT times, instead of arguing that he was not present there at all. In short, it may be misleading to speak of Satan as unknown in or absent from either pre- or postexilic OT Scriptures.

3. Origin of the Conflict. The message of Scripture is that Adam and Eve originally lived in a flawless world, which only became subject to corruption through their yielding to temptation and the lie of the serpent. Romans 5:12 teaches that their sin in heeding his invitation brought death to earth, as evidenced in all forms of its material decay. God's own words directly link earth's physical and humanity's spiritual degradation to that same tragic error (Gen. 3:14–24). In passages such as Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28, the Bible also gives the backstory on Satan as the force for ill that led humanity into rebellion against God (Gen. 3:1–6; see "Evil and the Fallen Cherub," p. 1008). It is essential that we recognize the evil one for who God in Scripture tells us he is in order to have a proper understanding of why sin exists, how it came to earth, and why God is doing what He is to rid the universe of it. Moreover, in the context of the book of Job, it is indispensable for a balanced reading of the book and for beginning any biblically based Christian theodicy.

It is very difficult to exaggerate the value of the book of Job's contribution to understanding the Great Controversy between good and evil through its exposé of a personal Satan.

Without proper understanding of Satan's boldness and callous brilliance, great enough to challenge the Lord in His own court and viciously attack His creatures, many people have awkwardly charged God with Satan's actions and developed theologies that justify their thinking. These ideas tend to obscure the biblical truth that Satan is specifically responsible for all the pain and suffering in God's universe. God's punishments, Jesus's death, the sacrificial system that points to it, the process of sanctification and character development—none of this would ever have been necessary without Satan's rebellion against divine government and all the moral and physical dislocation that it introduced.

4. God's Victory and Job's Vindication. By exposing the truth about Satan, and the consequence of his way of thinking, the book of Job leaves the believer in no doubt as to the outcome of the conflict between the Lord and His enemy. At no point in the drama is God ever sympathetic to Satan's evil scheme for depriving an innocent man of life and limb. He knew from the beginning of the trial that Satan's aim with regard to Job was to have Job curse God (1:11; 2:4–5). He was not beguiled by Satan's claim to be searching for integrity. At the end of Job's trial, a God of love and fairness could do no less than restore all things to their divine order of blessedness. Job's experience wonderfully pictures the final triumph of the saints of the Most High who will receive the kingdom, dominion, and greatness of all the kingdoms in the world at the end of their trial, humiliation, and abuse at the hands of the little horn power (Dan. 7:27). There may be no cross of Calvary or lake of fire in the book of Job. But Satan's head is still crushed through the defeat of his ideas and the silencing of his arguments. And just as God will crown His saints at the end, so it is right for Him to acknowledge the faithfulness of His good and faithful servant.

Job certainly defends his integrity and loyalty to God in the midst of his trial and even speaks strong words concerning the way he perceived God was treating him. For a man who knows God very well, his deep suffering is not comprehensible unless he postulates that God is now, for reasons unknown to him, treating him like an enemy. While his friends speak about who God is and how he governs His creation, Job speaks not about God in Himself but about how God is relating to Job in his present situation. Just as Job's material possessions were not at first a divine bribe, so his material restoration in the end is not represented as a reward for piety though it may also be rewarding. It was, in the first instance, simply evidence that his trial was over. Job's restoration was simple evidence of God's mercy and justice. He was finally and completely vindicated and restored. Any reward element in God's final affirmation of Job was no less or more a function of divine grace than it will be for all the saints at the end of time (Rev. 22:12). James refers to the blessedness of those who endure testing; they will receive the "crown of life" that the Lord has promised to those who love Him (James 1:12). Job's complete vindication and restoration at the end of the story is an appropriate metaphor for the final reward of the saints who, having come through great tribulation and gained victory over the beast and his image, will be crowned with glory and honor. For them as well as for Job serving God is determined by their experience of God's grace that moves them to love Him without regard for their present trials.

5. Suffering and Hope. By appreciating God's sustaining grace, we may better appreciate the critical theological purpose of the book of Job, the book of books on suffering. That purpose would be to (a) demonstrate the utter injustice of some suffering; (b) expose the malevolent supernatural agent behind such pain; (c) highlight God's categorical opposition to the person and activities of that agent; (d) show the complexity of the issues involved, to counter inaccurate theological presuppositions; and (e) point forward to the triumph guaranteed even to those unjustly tormented and tortured because the God they insist on trusting will prove Himself worthy of their trust.

Job's existence is framed within a state of constant hope. It is clear that for him hope did not come from human sources; his friends did not offer it to him but instead gave him hopelessness in the form of guilt. And the Lord would remind him that he should never hope to defeat Leviathan by himself (41:9). Although losing everything brought Job close to losing hope, he never got to that point. Instead he fell to the ground and worshiped (1:20). When the misery of his life of sickness was intense, he wished to not have been born and simply waited for death (3:21); there was no attempt on his part to bring his life to an end. He resisted death as a final solution because to embrace it was to abandon hope (17:15). He knew very well that suffering could destroy hope in the Lord (14:19) and agreed with his friends that there was no hope for the wicked (27:7–8). But Job's emphasis on his integrity was nurtured by hope. Eliphaz understood this and tried to destroy hope when he asked Job whether his fear of God was his confidence and his honesty his hope (4:6). These provided grounds for his hope. While his friends would continue to tell Job that his only hope was in confessing his sin (8:13; 11:18, 20), Job would insist on his integrity even though he recognized that there was no immediate hope of healing for him (7:6).

For Job, hope was certainly stronger than his sufferings, though he did not deny the intensity of his pain. When he concluded that God was treating him like His enemy, he confessed that there was no hope for him (19:10). He was persuaded that God was somehow involved in what he was going through and anxiously looked forward to his vindication. He firmly stated that even if God were to kill him, he would still trust (i.e., wait, hope for) Him (13:15). He knew the Lord, and therefore he could trust Him and wait for His intervention (14:14–15). This was a strong affirmation of hope in the Lord in the midst of intense suffering. But he would go further than that. His hope for restoration looked beyond the grave to the resurrection (19:25–27). Job may have concluded that his condition would take him to the grave, but he was ready to take his hope with him, anticipating with great yearning that his body would be restored and he would see his Redeemer. He would then vindicate him. In a book where human pain is extremely intense, we find a hope that holds on to God and looks forward to a final restoration beyond the grave through the resurrecting power of the Redeemer.

COMMENTARY

1:1—2:13

THE PROLOGUE: JOB'S INITIAL TESTING

Job 1:1—2:13 introduces the patriarch Job as well as all principal characters of the book except Elihu. The material is organized in scenes that took place on earth (1:1–5, 13–22; 2:7–13) and scenes that occurred in the heavenly realm (1:6–12; 2:1–6). There is a historical setting at the beginning of the prologue (1:1–5) and one at its end (2:11–13), and we find sandwiched between the two dialogues that contribute to the development of the narrative. The prologue basically consists of two trials.

1:1–22

Job's First Trial

The prologue consists of a double challenge from Satan against God's character and against the integrity of Job. These challenges set the stage for what follows in the book. Chapter 1 introduces the first trial, about which Job did not know anything, and concludes with Job's first response to his experience of pain.

1:1–5. Job Introduced. Verses 1–3 provide a description of the character and social status of Job. The introduction includes four elements that will be reprised in reverse order at the end of the book: character, children, possessions, and status. Job is introduced as a wealthy person, listing first his spiritual wealth, followed by the richness of having a family, and finally, a list of all his material possessions. Job feared God and shunned evil. He was *tam* and *yashar*. The term *tam*—rendered variously as "blameless," "complete," or "perfect"—highlights his reliance on God for his righteousness. It expresses the ideas of completeness and flawlessness and is used to describe the paschal lamb (Ex. 12:5) and every burnt offering, peace or fellowship offering, and sin offering brought to the Lord (e.g., Lev. 1:3; 3:6; 4:23). These offerings were a type of Jesus, the spotless Lamb of God "who takes away sin of the world" (John 1:29). Only through His perfectly flawless offering on our behalf can we ever be made right with God. Job was also a *yashar*—"right" or "upright"—person, meaning that he acted according to moral principles when dealing with others. He feared the Lord in the sense of respecting and reverencing Him, greatly valuing his relationship with Him. Consequently, he avoided sin by not exposing himself to it—rather, he walked away from it.

His piety found expression in his concern for the spiritual life of his children (vv. 4–5). The incident demonstrates that the description of his character is not without foundation. His intercession and solicitude for his children's spiritual state was as customary as their parties. Verse 5 comments on the integrity of v. 1 and shows that Job's righteousness was a commitment to the salvation of others, not a holier-than-thou self-centeredness. Also, Job's humble, obedient offering of sacrifice expressed his faith in a substitutionary atonement.

1:6-12. God's Court and Cosmic Conflict. This new scene took place in the divine assembly. Other OT divine council scenes include Micaiah's vision in 1 Kings 22:19 and Psalm 82:1. In v. 6, it is indicated that Satan joined them (lit. "*the* Satan also came"). The use of the definite article identifies him as the archetypal adversary, as is also the case in Zechariah 3. The text gives triple markers on Satan as an intruder through the conjunction "and," the adverb "also," and the prepositional phrase "among them" or "with them" as follows: the court assembled, *and* Satan *also* came *among them*. His place of activity and concern was the earth, where he was apparently observing how God interacted with humans, in this case with Job. No reason is given for Satan's presence in the heavenly assembly, but he was not there to speak on behalf of human beings or to testify on behalf of God's integrity.

When given the opportunity to speak, Satan accused God of feeding selfishness in his creatures by rewarding good behavior—or rather by paying for it. Satan was suggesting that God's way of governing simply bought the services of humans. God's people knew that as long as they served Him, God would keep providing for them. Therefore, their love for Him was not pure but motivated by greed that was fed by God Himself. For Satan, God and Job were not honorable but self-serving. Each reinforced the other's pretense of goodness by paying for it. God paid Job with extravagant bounties, and Job paid Him back with apparent piety. If God would stop buying human service, the true character of humans would be manifested by rejecting Him (when the text mentions "curse," it literally says that "he will surely bless you," which is a delicate and codified way of saying "curse" [see 1 Kin. 21:10, 13]). In the mouth of Satan, the demand that God stretch out His hand (v. 11) implied that havoc and chaos would come from the Lord since "hand" refers to power. Though it was never humanly apparent, and though one reporting servant spoke of destruction by the "fire of God" from heaven (v. 16), God's words showed that it was Satan, not God, who was the source and means of Job's torture.

1:13-22. Satan's First Blows: Four Disasters and Job's Response. Horror built up to its climax. Job was not allowed to recover as the rhythm went from lesser to greater, from lesser sorrow to most unbearable grief. The pattern was up, down, up, seesaw—first oxen and donkeys, numbered in the hundreds (vv. 14-15), then sheep (7,000; v. 16), followed by camels (3,000; v. 17). The rhythm also comments on the fluctuation and instability of Job's emotions and his total devastation at the climax. Reports that began with loss of oxen and donkeys, creating an element of suspense, reached their climax of pain with the death of all of Job's children (v. 19). Job prostrated himself but did not curse God. He knew that God was sovereign and transcendent, and he granted Him the freedom to do as He willed (vv. 20-22). No human is capable of knowing on his or her own the difference between Satan's direct initiatives and God's; neither was Job. The narrator's comment addresses Satan's claim: Satan's view was found wanting.

2:1-12

Job's Second Trial

The first trial was introduced by an earthly scene (1:1-5); the second trial began after an earthly scene (1:13-22) and would conclude with occurrences on earth (2:7-10). Job was victorious in both trials.

2:1-6. The Heavenly Court: Presumption's Persistence. This time the Lord rebuked Satan (vv. 1-3), whose charge was baseless. Whereupon Satan relaunched his challenge (vv. 4-5), wishing this time to damage Job's body ("skin for skin"). People will give everything they have to stay alive. Satan sought to make the case that grave sickness, perhaps perceived as a mortal threat, would be sufficient to expose Job's insincerity and separate him from his God. This presented God with a dilemma: if He denied the evil one access to His faithful children, they and He might be easily accused of collusion in bribery, with saints being paid off to be good. Providence is the natural function of His love, as well as His paternal duty. Allowing the adversary to torment His children would require Him to take the blame for whatever cruelties would result from the adversary's aggression. Nevertheless, God made clear that Job's pain was inflicted by a hand other than His.

2:7-10. Satan's Second Series: Sores and Spouse. Satan is plainly named as the agent of the cruelty inflicted on Job. The humiliating and painful condition of the patriarch is such that it provoked in Mrs. Job an outburst (v. 9), a comprehensible frustration, from one who had at this point lost as much as her husband had and was ready to give vent to her feelings, unaware of the cosmic import of her words. Her cry and its moral echoes bring to mind James's comment that whoever does not stumble in speech is perfect in being able to control his or her whole body (James 3:2). Her words came unquestionably from a heart that loved much.

Job's reaction (v. 10a, b) was not because he was any more aware than his wife of the supernatural goings on. Rather, as much as anything else, it was a shaming of the accuser and a vindication of God's confidence in His servant. Mrs. Job apparently reasoned that life with God should consist of nothing but prosperity. Her husband judged her comment as born of folly rather than wisdom. Job spoke here according to the value system of biblical wisdom that ranges mostly from what is wise to what is foolish. Job's wife echoed Satan's taunts, and they were decried as folly. The fact that Job referred to her comment as being one that was like the "foolish" women, not that she *was* a foolish woman, implies that she was speaking out of character. Her silence suggests that she received Job's rebuke well.

2:10c-12. Verdict on Job and the Arrival of His Friends. As with 1:22, the narrator's comment reflects negatively on Satan's claim that Job would sin with his lips if God removed His hedge. Job was willing to administer for the Lord not only the good things He gave him but also the pain and suffering that had come his way. His relationship with the Lord was based on disinterested love. Then friends arrived. Their names and places of origin showed that the friends were true friends. Their coming was a statement of emotional connection with and affection for Job. Their first reactions demonstrated this emotional connection: their mourning rituals expressed more than mere cultural conformity. They expressed shock. And it was not merely disfigurement that made Job unrecognizable. It was because the greatest of the men of the east who had once lived like a king among his troops (29:25) now sat on an ash heap.

3:1—37:24

DIALOGUE: JOB AND HIS COUNSELORS

The main portion of the book is a dialogue or debate that seeks to explore the significance of Job's experience. It is introduced by Job's soliloquy (3:1-26) and then followed by three cycles of speeches (4:1—14:22; 15:1—21:34; 22:1—27:23). At the end of the dialogue there is a hymn to wisdom (28:1-28), after which we listen to Job's final speech (29:1—31:40). Then we encounter the final human speech, that of Elihu (32:1—37:24). In the book, the human dialogue ultimately sets the stage for God's intervention.

3:1-26

Job's Opening Soliloquy

In this personal reflection Job opened up his heart to his friends (and to the readers), sharing with us the intensity of his physical and emotional pain. He longed for oblivion (vv. 1-10) and saw death at birth as better than his present sufferings (vv. 11-26).

3:1-10. Longing for Oblivion. Job's speech began with a curse, not upon the God who gives and takes away but against the day he was born. Job sighed for the day of his birth to disappear into its original nothingness—to be erased from the calendar. His unrealistic longing for reversal (v. 7) indicates the depth of his frustration with existence. If his birthdate could not be erased from the calendar, then it should be a night of no deliveries; if none of its births count, Job would never have been—and he would not now be suffering. In Job's speaking of the night as mother of the day, we see an echo of the Genesis order in which evening preceded morning.

3:11-26. Death Idealized. Job lamented that he was not stillborn (vv. 11-12), and he coveted death's serenity. He knew that it is an oblivion where there are no varying levels of human status: the righteous, wicked, slave, free, wealthy rulers, and weary laborers are all equal. By contrast with the peace of death, life in the midst of suffering is both burdensome and inexorable (vv. 20-26). Although Job would have welcomed death, there is no indication that he ever considered ending his life by his own hand.

4:1—14:22

First Cycle of Speeches

The first cycle is formed by the speeches of the friends and Job's response to each one of them: Eliphaz (4:1—5:27) and Job (6:1—7:21); Bildad (8:1-22) and Job (9:1—10:22); Zophar (11:1-22) and Job (12:1—14:22).

4:1—5:27. Eliphaz's Logic and Deceptive Revelation. Eliphaz's opening (4:1–5) was cautious but accusing. He seemed conflicted—apparently sensitive to Job's distress but uncomfortable about what he labeled Job's impatience. Since Job had helped others through such times as this, he should have been able to handle it himself. Verses 6–11 already betray his critical spirit. The implicit answer to his rhetorical questions (4:7) is "no one." For Eliphaz, Job may not necessarily have been doomed, but if he were, he had earned it. The revelatory experience of Eliphaz (4:12–21) appears to play an important role in the views of Job's friends (see below, "The Vision/Dream of Eliphaz"). The account never clarifies whether Eliphaz received a dream or a vision, nor from whence or when it came. The message of the spirit who communicated with him began with a rhetorical question about the possibility of humans being more righteous than God. The question can also be translated "be righteous before" or be considered righteous "by God." The translation "more" righteous than God makes no sense in the context because Job never argued for such a view. The spirit was not speaking about a mortal being (*'enosh*, "man," "human being"), for in the following part of the verse *geber* ("man") is used—a term that usually refers to a person who is in a proper relationship with God. Job claimed to be such a *geber*/man or righteous person (3:23; 16:21), and God also affirmed it (40:7), but the friends rejected Job's claim (15:7–10; 34:7). The question is not about sinful human beings but about a radical divine transcendence and the human condition. In this passage the verb "to be righteous" (*tsadaq*) stands in parallel with the verb *taher* ("to be regarded as clean, pure") and expresses the idea of moral purity. The spirit argued that all creatures are by divine design imperfect and unable to be blameless before God. This contradicts what God indicated in the prologue to the book. Besides, it is difficult to see how Eliphaz could reconcile 4:7–8 with a God who distrusts His angels (4:18) and particularly despises His human creation—those who dwell in houses of clay (4:19). While his account of the revelation is meant to urge Job to humble himself before God (5:8), it is difficult to see where he would situate himself within such a characterization of all humanity.

The Vision/Dream of Eliphaz

From Job 4:12 onward, the entire dialogue between Job and his friends hinges on, circles around, and eventually climaxes—at least for the three friends—on the story of Eliphaz's numinous experience narrated in 4:12–21. A discussion of the impact and nature of this experience will be helpful.

1. A Personal Revelatory Experience. There are a couple of important aspects in the experience of Eliphaz that we should notice. First, he argued that the trustworthiness of his wisdom is unquestionable because it was grounded on a personal supernatural experience he had with a spiritual being who spoke to him. The revelation given to Eliphaz came from a spiritual being. Second, the identity of the spirit whose voice he heard is never stated; it remains shrouded in mystery. He heard a voice from someone that remained faceless, nameless. Elijah also heard a voice but he identified it as the voice of the Lord (1 Kin. 19:12–15). The content of the revelation will establish the identity of this being.

2. The Question. The message the spirit delivered to Eliphaz was introduced by a rhetorical question: Can a man [*'enosh*; not "a mortal"] be more righteous [*tsadaq*] before/by/than God? Can a man [*geber*] be more pure [*taher*] before/than his Maker? The expected answer is no. To be righteous (*tsadaq*) here means to be blameless or pure, for it is in parallel to *taher* ("to be regarded as pure"), suggesting that this is about being perfect or morally pure before God (see 9:2). The Creator and the creature are being contrasted: Can a human be considered to be righteous/pure and morally upright before/by the Lord? According to the spirit that spoke to Eliphaz, the natural distance between God and humans is such that this is impossible. The spirit applied this judgment even to heavenly beings: God does not even trust His heavenly messengers, the angels, and considers them to be imperfect (v. 18). This is the natural condition of their existence and of humans in particular, for they were made of clay—fragile and ephemeral beings who are here today and gone tomorrow and no one seems to notice. Consequently, suffering is the natural condition of humans as created by God. All humans suffer, and Job is no exception. The discussion is not about the need for justification by faith.

3. The Identity of the Spirit. Based on the previous discussion, we suggest that Eliphaz is echoing the voice of the adversary from the prologue. First, while Satan claimed there that it was impossible for a human being to be righteous before the Lord unless prompted by selfish motives (1:9), God identified for him a human being who was blameless and upright and who feared Him—Job (v. 8). The spirit that spoke to Eliphaz was contradicting what God revealed to the reader in the prologue to the book concerning Job. Second, it also contradicted God by arguing that humans suffer by divine design. The prologue demonstrates that human suffering finds its origin not in the Creator but in the adversary/Satan. Third, it is clear that the message of the spirit projects a low view of humanity before God that contrasts with other biblical pictures of humanity as created in the image of God for dominion over all creation (Gen. 1:26–29), a view that is still highly esteemed even after Eden's moral fall (Ps. 8). Although Eliphaz did not say anything about the nature of the spirit that spoke to him, we can now ascertain without doubt that it was a messenger of the adversary.

4. Influence of the Revelation and God's Reaction. Continuing the dialogue, Eliphaz's second speech insisted on the truthfulness of the content of his revelatory experience (15:14–16), an insistence that appears again at the start of his final intervention (22:2–3). Zophar's first speech alluded to this revelation (11:2–3). Bildad, the second friend, never accepted this perspective until his brief third speech, which is a total surrender to the revelation that Eliphaz first reported (25:4–6). There he virtually repeated the falsehood, signaling the dialogue's total collapse, and the cycles end. Whether under strong delusion or, in Bildad's case, having apparently given up on rational argument, all three friends end up subscribing to and advocating a word about God that is false and allegedly based on revelation. But the voice of God that initiated the book will also be heard at the end, addressing the false revelation introduced in the dialogue. The epilogue shows that this sustained distortion of God's character left Him angry—not merely concerned, or disturbed, or offended, but furiously angry (42:7). God revealed that only their penitence and Job's intercession stood between them and unseemly treatment from God Himself (v. 8).

5. Job's Resoluteness. Initial attacks on Job's material wealth of herds, flocks, and servants, and even the unthinkable loss of all his children in a single blow, all failed to reduce him to blasphemy. Disease that made Job repugnant to family (19:17), as well as scorned and loathed by acquaintances (19:13–19; 30:9–10), also failed to accomplish the enemy's purpose. The dialogue then reveals the enemy reverting to the tactic of obscurity employed in chapter 1. There the mischief of an unseen but lethal hand led servants to blame God's fire for destruction of thousands of sheep and servants (1:16). Eliphaz's statement shows that the adversary, though unseen, continues to be present and to prosecute his goal of pressing Job to curse God. Eliphaz's revelation devalued humans and advanced a slander of God calculated to move Job to abandon his claim of integrity. But the strategy of a lying spirit is no more successful than that of widespread havoc in convincing faithful Job that God is not worth his confidence. Lying spirits work with those who choose to be deceived. Job does not so choose.

The verses that frame Eliphaz's fantastic revelation (4:7; 5:1) each include an imperative and a rhetorical question whose implied answer is "no one." Job 5:1 records an imperative, designed to point out Job's desperate need of repentance; but initially, at least, it was a command of somewhat harsh import. Just as Eliphaz had asserted that there was no innocent suffering, so now there was no "holy one" (probably angel) who could help Job in his physical or moral distress, perhaps emphasizing that only God could help (5:8). Verses 2–7 emphasize his point regarding human inadequacy. Note that labels for the culpable one, such as foolish and simple (5:2), are typical of wisdom literature. Observe as well the vigor of Eliphaz's opposition to those he labeled. At least eighteen verses of this speech depend on his subjective authority versus only three (vv. 2, 6, 7) where the truth of his words did not depend on the speaker.

Eliphaz was in a sense correct in affirming that human beings were "born to trouble" (v. 7); but if the *natural* lot of humanity were trouble, how could he argue that Job's trouble was the proof of specific wickedness? But then in 5:8–16, Eliphaz proffered an exceptional change in tone after his categorical denunciations. Job might yet have hope. He should turn to God because God is powerful beyond human understanding. He rules nature and is able to reverse anyone's circumstances. In an opening speech that had included reproof, revelation, and harsh contempt, Eliphaz moved on to soothing consolation in 5:17–27. Problematic for the whole was not the general truth of divine chastening but his specific judgment that God was punishing Job (5:13–14, 17–19).

6:1—7:21. Job: Pity for Himself, Dismay at His Friends. Frequently through the dialogue, Job longed to know he was appreciated. Though he could refuse unpalatable food, going through his recent experience was like being forced to consume a totally unsavory meal. Living in uninterrupted agony, Job insisted that he had been faithful to God. But Job was not superhuman (6:11–13). He saw no sense in going on; staying alive was to suffer. Here (6:14) is the only occurrence of the expression "the fear of the Almighty" in Job, paralleled by "the fear of the Lord" in 28:28, itself unique. Job believed the loyalty of friends should survive spiritual crises.

The reference to the brooks and streams (6:15) expresses Job's dismay at the treachery of his friends (6:14–21). In the spring, wadis in the Middle East were flooded with water from periodic rains. They dried up in the heat of summer. Desert travelers made hopeful by the evidence of waterways were disappointed to find the gullies entirely dry (vv. 16–19). Job's friends had treacherously disappointed him in their pretense of refreshing his spirit. Verse 20 is evidently descriptive of Job's own feelings as a parallel to those of the travelers; Job refers to his friends' attitude with the similar verbs *bosh*—"to be ashamed" or "distress" or "disappoint"—and *khaper*—"to be ashamed" or "to be confounded." The first phrase of v. 21 has been rendered variously as "you are nothing," "you are it," or (interpretively) "you have proved to be no help" (i.e., you are just like those dried up wadis whose water evaporates in the heat; you cower before a challenge).

Job dared them to silence him if they could (6:22–30), becoming more assertive in his challenge to his friends to show him his wrong. They should simply speak the truth rather than try to cajole or coerce. They could not constrain him to make any deals since he owed none of them anything. By referring to the words of desperate people such as himself as "wind" (v. 26), Job preempted any rebuke for irresponsible language, justifying whatever came from his lips as he vented his frustrations. He would welcome no reprimand on that account. The friends also lacked integrity; they were willing to cause the fatherless to *nepal*—a word which has the basic meaning of "fall." Accordingly, some translations refer to the attack, overwhelming, or fall of the fatherless. The word can also mean "cast lots"—"cause the lot to fall" (i.e., "roll dice" or gamble)—for society's most helpless (v. 27). Job accused them of mercenary and exploitative conduct, a readiness to do the same to a friend, to one they should, instead, loyally support.

Chapter 7 introduces the theme of Job's burdensome life. Job longed for some respite from days of stress and nights of tossing (7:1–6). But he had to confront the finality of the grave (7:7–10), anticipated though not idealized as in chapter 3. While vv. 9–10 might seem to imply that Job did not believe in a resurrection, this is not demonstrable from the text, especially in light of his later affirmation (19:23–27). He was simply affirming in poetically evocative language that the dead would not go back to their former earthly lives, for example, their homes (v. 10). He would not hold back (7:11–15). Given the immanence of death, he would speak his mind. He preferred death to his current *'etsem*—variously translated as "body," "bones," or "pains" (v. 15); moreover, given the torments of life, Job preferred death. "Let me alone" is the initial line of a unit (vv. 16–21) that pled for the peace of abandonment. Satan contended (1:10) that God had a hedge of protection all around Job. But God now felt to Job more like a vigilante than a watchful Father. Verse 21 suggests that Job recognized his need for forgiveness of sin, but he was unaware of any specific sin (v. 20) that would have caused God to punish him so severely. He wished to die in peace knowing he was right with God.

8:1–22. Bildad: Typical and Limited Wisdom. Bildad believed that fate showed a reasonable God (vv. 1–7). Of the three friends he is most faithful to radical wisdom traditions and most loyal to an orthodox theology (i.e., reward for good and retribution for evil). The human condition is one or the other—a radical view of retribution that Job rejects or questions. Bildad also seems most disposed to believe that there was hope for a repentant Job. Bildad's speeches were not characterized by Zophar's cruelty or Eliphaz's self-centeredness; he held to the tenets of wisdom. He argued that Job, like a stiff wind (v. 2), had been spouting verbiage—which Job himself had tacitly conceded, using the same metaphor of wind (6:26). He took the argument to the level of the family and suggested that God killed Job's children because of their sin (v. 4; cf. Deut. 24:16). Unlike Eliphaz, Bildad is grounded in reason rather than revelation, using the principle of retribution to establish that each one pays for his or her own sins, and this includes children paying for their own sins (cf. Deut. 24:16; Jer. 31:29–30).

Bildad suggested that God would restore Job if he was or became "pure and upright" (Job 8:6). He used further conditional expressions (vv. 4–5) to appeal to him with the promise of restoration. He emphasized the wisdom of previous generations (v. 8). Bildad's appeal to the elders would lead Eliphaz also to appeal to their authority (15:7–10), though he would also rely on his vision-dream. The idea that we were "born yesterday" is a hyperbolic way of stating that we are indebted to ancient wisdom (v. 9).

Bildad employed (vv. 11–19) multiple metaphors, including papyrus, a spider's web, and a plant. As papyrus reeds perish without moisture, so the impious perish without God (vv. 11–13). What they trust will not last because they rely on things that are as fragile as spider webs (v. 14): Job would use Bildad's own terms for confidence and reliance (*kesel*, *mibtakh*) to argue that his security had never been his wealth (31:24). The spider's web was the "spider's house," which would not stand up to anyone's weight—another image of fragility (v. 15).

This is followed by another analogy of fragility and instability: plants rooted in good soil are much harder to uproot than those that hold on to rocks (v. 18). The roots of the large plant torn from a rock heap leave a much lighter footprint than those sunk in the soil; plants holding on to rocks for support will not even be missed when removed. The first part of v. 19 has been interpreted as either referring to a new section describing God's joy or (quite differently) as the fleeting pleasure of the poorly planted and uprooted plants that were described in the previous section—symbolic of those "who forget God" (v. 13). A godless life has little profit. Verses 20–22 conclude Bildad's speech. He suggested that God does not reject (or cast away) the *tam*—a word variously translated as "blameless," "perfect," or "person/man of integrity" (v. 20; cf. 1:1, 8). He was correct in the assertion that since God does not cast away the *tam*, He would not cast away Job.

9:1—10:22. Job: Awe of God, Frustration with Him. Job highlighted God's unmatched prowess in nature in the opening lines of this second speech (9:1–12). The question of how a person could be righteous before God (9:2) is similar to the one raised by Eliphaz's vision-dream (4:17), but the concern is a different one. Job is using a different preposition, not "before God" but "with God"; that is to say, Job is asking whether it is possible for anyone to engage God in a legal dispute and win the case (i.e., be declared righteous; v. 3). The implication is that in such a legal controversy, Job would lose the case even though he was righteous (9:15, 20). Verses 13–19 describe Job's sense of inadequacy before the divine assaults. The final part of v. 13 can be rendered as "allies of the proud" or as "Rahab's helpers"—*rahab* can refer to pride or to a proper name. God's mastery over nature is sometimes personified in ANE mythology as His victory over chaos monsters with names such as Rahab and Leviathan (Ps. 74:13–14; Is. 30:7; 51:9–10). In this case Job portrayed the Lord as victorious over them.

At the end of v. 18, the word *saba'* is used. This has been rendered as "fill" or "saturate" or "overwhelm." The literal sense is that of "satisfy" or "satiate." God was feeding Job until he was stuffed full—with bitterness. Job found no evidence that God cared enough to give him a fair hearing. He was the victim of an internal conflict (9:20–24). Intense torment made him susceptible to accusations of guilt, though conscience recalled no errant deed. To him, when it came to suffering, there was no difference between guilty and innocent (v. 22). This was a momentous statement containing truth to which Job was not necessarily committed, particularly because it was only a half-truth. It was half true because destruction had befallen Job who knew he was *tam* ("blameless"). It was only half true because the "He" Job blamed (vv. 22–24) for that destruction was God. In his pain he spoke to God freely, as a friend, sharing with Him his confusion. He even concluded that he would never again live without pain and suffering (vv. 27–28).

Job was fearful of his sufferings (v. 28)—he feared to be optimistic lest he be proved wrong by suffering. By saying that God was not human like he was (v. 32), Job was acknowledging the great distance separating him and all humans from God. He doubted that God would even listen to his voice (9:16) or that his condition could be arbitrated because he lacked a mediator (9:33). But there was a possible solution (vv. 34–35): the withdrawal of His rod. The rod, the agent of discipline, may have stood for the discipline itself. If God would relent in His aggression, Job would find the courage to speak up and to make his case before Him.

But Job chose to complain and express how he felt as he continued to speak to God (10:1–7). He was not describing how God is but seeking to understand why he was experiencing so much pain. Hence, Job challenged God to justify what he was experiencing (10:2) and accused Him, through a series of rhetorical questions, of seemingly behaving like a flawed human (10:3–5), finding guilt where there was none (10:6–7). Then Job contrasted God's previous protection and support with what appeared to Job as wrath and condemnation (vv. 8–17). God, who formed his embryo (10:10), brought it to maturity (10:11), and providentially cared for him (10:12), seems to Job to have harbored ill intent against him all along (10:13–17).

Job asked whether God was trying to destroy him (v. 8). The Hebrew word used here (*bala'*—"swallow up") echoes 2:3 where Satan had been inciting the Lord to do this to Job. Job said that God was marking, watching, or guarding him (Heb. *shamar*; v. 14), another echo of the prologue. There the Lord commanded Satan to preserve Job's life (*shamar*; 2:6). Job had just celebrated God's care that had preserved (*shamar*) his spirit (10:12), but now it seemed as though the purpose of God's *shamar* was for the sake of finding fault. Job spoke of being full of shame or disgrace (v. 15), stating that God was overwhelming him (cf. 9:18) with bitterness. Job now listed manifestations of that bitterness, such as disgrace and misery, with which he was full.

The end of v. 17 has been translated variously as "changes and war," "wave upon wave" of "forces," "fresh troops," or "hardship after hardship." The Hebrew word *tsaba'* can be taken literally as "army," "warfare," or metaphorically as hardship. These terms are also employed in 14:14, where *tsaba'* is sometimes translated as "hard service." In v. 17 Job seemed to be saying that he was constantly being called upon to render more hard service. His guard duty would not end. He renewed his old lament (10:18–22). He sighed, longing to be stillborn (10:18–19)! But while he emphasized the rest that comes with death (recorded in chap. 3), he underscored here the disorder of pitch blackness (10:21–22) and again referred to the grave as a place from which he would not return—in the sense of returning to life as it had been previously.

11:1–20. Zophar: Apparent Grace. Zophar was the least sensitive of the friends and least deferential to Job. He launched a brutal attack on Job (vv. 1–6) and returned to the question of 4:17 and 9:2: Can a human being be righteous? Zophar argued that a revelation from God would condemn Job (v. 5), for when God passes by (*khalap*) He imprisons humans and condemns them (v. 10). The verb *khalap* was used by Eliphaz to refer to the apparition of the spirit that spoke to him (4:15), and now it is used by Zophar to state that when God approaches humans He brings a message of condemnation. God, for Zophar, can only condemn humans as Eliphaz's spirit argued. Zophar had continued insisting that empty talk would not vindicate anybody. He said that Job had mocked, but it is not clear when such a thing took place. Other speakers had leveled no such accusation. Since Bildad, Job had spoken of God's power and Job's impotence before it, lamented his life, and longed again for death. The book of Job also does not support Zophar's accusation that Job had claimed that his teaching was pure. It seems improbable that Job had made such an assertion. Misattribution on Zophar's part seems more likely since someone had spoken, hypothetically, of Job being pure (Bildad, in 8:6).

In contrast with Zophar's claim, the reader may consider Job's recent attitude of humility before God (10:15). Zophar's accusation, significantly uncharacteristic of Job's language, mood, and tone, is more illustrative of the passion and blunder of human arguments in the name of God. In the first part of v. 6, the Hebrew word *kepel*—"the double"—has been variously rendered in context as "they would double your prudence," "true wisdom has two sides," or "He is manifold in understanding." The last part of the verse literally refers to the idea that God had forgotten some of Job's iniquity and has been rendered as Zophar saying that Job had received less punishment than he deserved from God. Zophar claimed that God might properly be punishing Job more severely. In vv. 7–12 he expounded on God's greatness and also the wickedness and deceit of some humans. His language soared as he extolled God. He used a proverb to describe the difficulty of those who were foolish to become wise—it was less likely than a donkey's colt being born as a human (v. 12).

Zophar spoke of hope in repentance in his final segment (vv. 13–20). Like Eliphaz and Bildad, he assured Job that repentance would bring him deliverance from his present suffering. His guilt had brought him divine wrath, but his case was not hopeless. The admonition that Job should stretch out his hands toward God described an act of adoration and supplication and is a frequent OT expression (e.g., Pss. 44:20; 143:6). Wickedness or evil (v. 14) is here personified as a conscious being that should not be a welcome occupant in Job's home.

Zophar then suggested that Job could return to his former life if he were humble and repentant (vv. 14–15). Then Job would be able to forget his troubles—they would be like water that had passed by (v. 16). Zophar sought to make a positive application of Job's pessimistic simile of vanishing water (6:15–21). He suggested that Job's misery would disappear as completely as water does when a wadi dries up. He would then be able to *khapar*—"dig" or "search"—followed by rest in safety. This suggests searching or checking and finding everything in order—this would mean the end of Job's tormented nights (see 3:26; 7:13–14). Failing eyes (v. 20) are listed among the curses of Deuteronomy (28:65) that would befall God's unfaithful people.

12:1—14:22. Job: Divine Power, Creaturely Finitude. This final speech of the first cycle opens on a note of indignation at Job's friends (12:1–6). Job's sarcastic answer revealed his irritation at their doctrinaire condemnation of his character. Job was scornful of the idea that his friends' point of view was the only one that mattered (v. 2). Job seems to have emphasized (v. 5) the friends' self-righteous attitude of complacency because danger can only befall people who are doomed to trouble anyway. Job continued to be preoccupied by life's injustice and observed that criminals prosper undisturbed (v. 6). His friends joined in ridicule of the righteous person, Job himself, missing the fact that wickedness thrives in the world. The wicked thrive on power that comes from the same God whom the wicked defy.

Job's taunt lines (12:7–12) have become famous for extolling the wisdom of God as known through nature. In the context of the book they contrast with what Job had been saying thus far and are introduced with a very strong adversative conjunction ("but"). The friends find it obvious that God blesses the good and punishes the wicked. So obvious, Job now said, that any creature can tell you that "the hand of the Lord [Yahweh] has done this" (12:9). This is the only time the name of Yahweh appears in the dialogue between Job and his friends.

Job suggested that ears evaluate words, palates evaluate foods, and the aged evaluate knowledge (vv. 11–12). Bildad had referred to the wisdom of the aged (8:8–9), and Eliphaz would also seize upon it (15:7–10). Having mocked his friends' naive claim that the wicked always suffer and the righteous always prosper, Job now depicted a God entirely more unpredictable in His power than their reasoning allowed (12:13–25). Job's experience had no specific moral implication because God's power rules over all areas of our lives (v. 16). God also rules over the nations (v. 23).

Beginning with 13:1, Job's refuting of his friends' arguments included a protest that he did have wisdom, that he preferred an audience with God, and that his friends should be silent since God Himself would repudiate their fraudulent characterizations of His person. Job recognized the risks of daring to discuss his case with the Almighty (vv. 14–15). The alternate Hebrew reading "I have no hope" is not supported by vv. 15b, 16: Job viewed God as his salvation—and he was not a hypocrite. Job had certainly not given up God. At this point Job's confidence in God's salvation and his integrity still assured him of vindication before God.

Job then launched into his most extended address to God (13:20—14:22). But his optimism would not remain constant, and gradually he focused less and less on speaking directly to God. His hope of swift physical restoration also seems to have faded. He may have clamored less for God's personal attention because he no longer expected that God would promptly alleviate his suffering. As he lost hope of early physical restoration, there was less direct engagement between him and the God he spoke of but could not find.

He spoke much less to God in the second and third cycles. And though he never abandoned his insistence on personal integrity or his clamor for vindication, he seems obliged to conceive of it in terms that were different both temporally and legally. By the second cycle his hope rested in seeing his Redeemer in the future (19:25). And by his oath at the end of the third cycle, he was apparently resigned to his black and flaking skin and burning body (30:30). No allusion was made to any form of physical restoration. Job was reduced to arguing with himself, his friends having surrendered (32:1), and clinging to the ironclad certitude that acquittal in court would grant him the moral and legal vindication he deserved—and which it seems was the only thing for which he could still hope.

"Hand" here means "oppression" (13:21). Job did not wish to be far from God. In fact, he continued to demand an audience with Him. Job was confused as to why God would pursue a weakling such as he—like a leaf or dry stubble/chaff (v. 25). Job referred to "bitter things" (v. 26; cf. Ex. 15:23), meaning that while God's accusations were hard to stomach, they reminded Job of his indiscreet youth. The reference to the decay, or wasting away of human beings (Job 13:28), expressed a sentiment more clearly connected with what follows in chapter 14 and should be thought of as introducing a new section that ends at 14:22.

Chapter 14 is the second part of Job's third address to God, introduced in 13:28, as Job turned from defending his integrity against his friends to reflections on the finality of death. Job's reference to people's lives being "full of trouble" (v. 1) takes us back to Eliphaz who said that humans are born to trouble (5:7). Job more than agreed. By saying that human beings are like shadows, Job applied to humanity the fleeting days he applied to his own life (9:25). He wondered why God pays attention to finite humanity (14:3), something that may only increase their stress. He longed for God to let humanity rest (v. 6). Humanity's fate is almost the most hopeless one within creation. Plants can spring up again, but death is the end for humans (14:10, 12)—at least "till the heavens are no more" (v. 12).

Here in this verse is a hint (confirmed in other parts of Scripture; e.g., 2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1) that the righteous dead would live again. The verses that follow (14:13–17) contain further hints of resurrection: Job spoke of being hidden in the grave *until* God's anger passed, when he would be remembered (v. 13). He asked whether people would come back to life and then spoke of relief and being called (vv. 14–15). These incipient questions and longing, tentative affirmations would become a strong expression of confidence in 19:23–27. Nevertheless, the metaphors of undoing (14:18–19) show Job returning to poetically sorrowful descriptions of the tragedy and seeming finality of death (14:20–21).

Within the overall argument about Job's integrity, he and Bildad engaged in the topic of sons. According to Bildad they had paid for their guilt (8:4). Job retorted that the doom he faced made the discussion of sons irrelevant (14:21). But in the next speech Bildad would argue that it was Job's attitude that would determine his memory and that of his offspring (18:16–19).

15:1—21:34

Second Cycle of Speeches

As in the previous cycle, in this one we listen to conversations between Eliphaz (15:1–35) and Job (16:1—17:16); Bildad (18:1–21) and Job (19:1–29); and Zophar (20:1–29) and Job (21:1–34). His friends continue to press on him their peculiar theology, and Job continues to express his pain and wish for vindication.

15:1–35. Eliphaz: Learning and Not Learning. Eliphaz was first indignant (15:1–6), then a borrower (vv. 7–10), and a little later an echo of himself (vv. 14–16), and finally he sought again to assert that the wicked always suffer (vv. 17–35). To begin with, he suggested that Job should be silenced rather than increase his guilt by dishonest speech. He even asserted that Job was hindering piety by his words (v. 4). He accused Job of speaking from the perspective of his sinfulness and thus was expressing his lack of integrity. Bildad had used the wisdom of the forefathers (8:8–9). The consolations of God (v. 11) might refer to the counsel of himself and the others. Eliphaz also implied that Job's show of emotion was misleading and alarming (v. 12).

Eliphaz decided to return to his revelation (vv. 14–16). He reiterated the point that human beings are sinful (v. 14). Verse 16 has been interpreted and translated to mean either that all human beings are *ta'ab* ("abominable," "vile," or "detestable") and *'alakh* ("filthy" or "corrupt") or that Job himself was a particularly despicable example of human sinfulness. Verse 20 refers to the idea that the wicked or ruthless suffer according to the years appointed "for" them. This happens because they raise a rebellious hand against God (v. 25). The wicked are described as having fat faces (a symbol of prosperity); they appear to be thriving, but it ultimately proves futile.

16:1—17:16. Job: Despair and Appeal. Job expressed his bitter despair, first in addressing the friends (16:2–6), then God (vv. 7–14). He protested that he actually had prostrated himself (v. 15). His cry to the earth (v. 18) suggests his imminent demise, borrowing the terms *dam* ("blood") and *za'aq* ("cry out") from the murder of Abel narrative (Gen. 4:10). This cry lifts us up to the summit of this speech (Job 16:19) in which the God who was Abel's witness was necessarily to be Job's own. The similar words *'ed* and *sahed* can mean "witness" and even "advocate." This was a hopeful peak whose contrasting dark valley concluded the speech (17:13–16). Job still longed for a mediator to arbitrate the case between him and God (16:21). The mention of "no return" (v. 22) expressed the seeming finality of death but also made his next speech (chap. 19) all the more poignant, particularly vv. 23–27.

Job longed for God to pledge or put up security for him—an idea criticized in the human sphere three times in Proverbs (6:1; 17:18; 22:26). Job doubted that God would be surety for him. It was difficult for him to understand the attitude of his friends, and he concluded that it was God, in some sense, who kept them from grasping the true nature of his dilemma (17:4). Therefore, the drama would not conclude with any sense of triumph on their part. Job saw himself as a person whose face people spit at (v. 6), as one rejected and unclean (see Num. 12:14; Deut. 25:9). Later, Job spoke literally, not metaphorically, about people spitting in his face (Job 30:10). He then introduced a note of despair again by saying that his days were passed (17:11). Job repudiated his friends' exhortations to repent and prosper as a distortion of reality (v. 12).

18:1–21. Bildad: A Graphic Terror Story. In terms of harshness, Bildad's second speech resembles language we associate with Zophar. But Bildad's rationale continued to depend on standard wisdom thinking. His focus here continued to be Job's restoration to the community of sages. Of all the negative consequences to befall the wicked man, Bildad found no physical pain more climactic than the psychological argument of oblivion. Having dramatized the horror of his physical encounters with net, snare, mesh, noose, trap, death's firstborn, and the king of terrors (vv. 8–14), Bildad sealed his discourse on the fate of the wicked by citing four particular elements: (1) perishing of human memory or remembrance (v. 17a; cf. Eccl. 9:5); (2) the loss of name or fame (v. 17b); (3) being left without children (v. 19a); and (4) having no survivors (v. 19b). For Bildad death was loss of remembrance, fame, son or posterity, and any survivor. In Ecclesiastes it is reward, remembrance, love, hate, envy, portion (Eccl. 9:5–6). But the similar treatment of the subject of death shows Bildad's interest in wisdom. Since Job had already lost his children, the argument based on childlessness seems at first incongruous as a basis for appeal to Job. But this view ignores that at the end Job was restored, though not on Bildad's terms, and blessed again with a quiverful of children (42:12–16).

When Bildad asked whether the earth would be deserted and rocks would be moved from their places, he implied that Job's logic went against creation's order. Everything would have to be turned upside down for him to be right. The "firstborn" (18:13) is a Semitic superlative of significance equivalent to "the greatest" (Gen. 49:3; Ex. 4:22–23; Ps. 89:20–29). Here Bildad meant "the worst kind of death." Bildad had already warned that the hope of the godless hypocrite would perish and that what they trusted in (*mibtakh*) was like a spider's web (8:13–14). It would not be difficult for the wicked to be torn from the shelter of his tent, that is, "his trust/shelter" (*mibtakh*). Job was the only other speaker to use the term *mibtakh* to deny that he had ever oppressed the poor as the wicked do (31:16–23) and put his confidence in gold (31:24). In 18:20, Bildad used two opposite points on the compass to express the total and dramatic collapse of the wicked, astonishing to them.

19:1–29. Job's Rebuke, Plight, and Vision of Vindication. This chapter records the briefest of Job's speeches and the spiritual and emotional zenith of the book. From the depths of despair at God's treatment of him (vv. 6–13), and the abandonment of servants, intimate friends, and family (vv. 14–22), Job would soar to a testimony of confidence in his final vindication (vv. 23–27). "Ten times" (v. 3) probably stood as a superlative of intensity equivalent to "the maximum" or "the ultimate" (Gen. 31:7, 41; Num. 14:22; Neh. 4:12; Dan. 1:20). Job suggested that his error was his own problem, not a basis for his friends' conceit, gloating, or denunciation (Job 19: 4). In his opening salvo, Bildad, Job's principal interlocutor, asked whether God "subverts [*'awat*, 'to pervert,' 'to wrong']" judgment or justice (8:3). Eleven chapters later Job counters with explicit usage of the same form of the verb saying that God wronged (*'awat*) him (v. 6). He had some idea of what justice should look like but argued that in his case something went wrong.

Job expressed devastation and hopelessness (v. 10). Joshua and David spoke of death as going "the way of all the earth" (Josh. 23:14; 1 Kin. 2:2), and Job was concerned about death's seeming finality (Job 10:21), like the psalmist (Ps. 39:13). Job referred also to the fact that God's afflictions of him had caused his family, friends, and acquaintances to be alienated from him (Job 19:13–19). Job's relatives had "failed" or "gone away" (lit. "my relatives have ceased")—which makes it sound as though all of Job's relatives were dead (cf. 3:17; 14:7) and shows how lonely he felt because not even his loved ones supported him. Job said that he had escaped by "the skin of my teeth" (19:20), meaning that he felt like he was barely alive and emotionally desolate. He wanted his friends' sympathy because he felt struck by God's hand. He wondered why they were adding to God's already very difficult treatment (vv. 21–22). Job again refers to God as directly striking him. His soul is very conflicted, for he cannot expect his friends' sympathy while accusing their God of violence or accusing them of not being satisfied or sated with Job's flesh (v. 22), a phrase that suggests the idea of animals eating the carcass of another beast. Obviously the usage here was not intended to be taken literally, in the sense of cannibalism, but as suggesting that the attacks of Job's friends were so intense that Job felt that they were eating him alive. The phrase could then be an idiomatic expression meaning "to slander/abuse," emphasizing the brutality of the verbal attacks (cf. Dan. 3:8).

Job longed for a permanent record that would in the end vindicate him (Job 19:23). The reference to iron, lead, and engraving (v. 24) may refer to the practice of filling the letters traced into the rock by the iron pen with lead (see Jer. 17:1). The emphasis is here on preserving the record rather than on Job's vindication. In the Hebrew text of Job 19:25, the "I" is emphatic. Job was certain about his future because he trusted in the faithfulness of his Redeemer. He looked to a time beyond death when he would share a personal encounter with the God who is the First and the Last and who was his Redeemer (see Is. 44:6).

Job's words here (19:25–27) are one of the book's great rhetorical and spiritual mysteries. They cannot be explained as following logically or emotionally from what he had been saying thus far. They stand at a crucial point in his dialogue with his friends and are the spiritual climax of his response to Eliphaz's and Bildad's false accusations. But according to Job's inspired answer, God's loyalty to His faithful children is more powerful than death and physical decay (v. 26). Job's friends still wanted to fix him, thinking of him as the real problem. He reminded them that God, the righteous Judge, would fix them instead (vv. 28–29).

20:1–29. Zophar: Insistence on Terror. In this speech Zophar tried his hardest to frighten Job into repentance by showing him the horrible fate of the wicked. His reasoning seems to be that Job would experience even more dreadful things than what he had already experienced. In his first speech Zophar suggested that Job was not suffering as much as he might because God was not treating him as he really deserved (11:6). Job's faith and fervor about his innocence left Zophar agitated (20:2). In order to sound authentic, Zophar spoke like a true sage about ancient wisdom. Bildad, Job, and Eliphaz had already spoken of the ancient wisdom (8:8–10; 12:12) because they represented this wisdom.

Zophar described the arrogance of the wicked well but apparently applied it poorly if he thought it was true of Job (20:6). This verse is a good portrait of proud rebellion (Gen. 11:4; Is. 14:14), but the portrait did not apply to Job. Zophar spoke (Job 20:7–9) of the wicked vanishing, but Job, too, knew he would vanish because of death (7:8–10). Zophar may have been evoking Bildad's first speech to refer to the evanescence of the wicked (20:7; cf. 8:18). The reference to the sweet taste of evil (20:12), while rue of the wicked in general in many cases, cannot be applied to Job because he had neither partaken of evil nor tasted anything sweet. He had tasted the unpalatable (6:6–7, 30) or bitter misery (9:18), his soul had been bitter (7:11; 10:1), and God had written bitter things against him (13:26). There was no "sweetness" in Job's life. But after Zophar's speech Job did speak of sweetness—the sweetness of oblivion at the end of a wicked person's life (21:33).

The Redeemer

Old Testament redeemers had a comprehensive role. They could salvage a relative's property (Lev. 25:25) or buy him out of slavery (vv. 47–49). Their duty reached beyond the grave. Even after a relative's death, the redeemer could avenge his blood by killing the person who murdered his relative (Num. 35:19, 21) or preserve his name and inheritance through a special form of marriage called levirate marriage (Deut. 25:5–6; Ruth 3–4). Jacob's words about the redeeming angel, who delivered him from all evil (Gen. 48:16), show how all embracing the redeemer's work could be. In Job's case, his undoing had been so complete that he needed total redemption, much more than just someone to clear his name.

Zophar also referred to the evil of oppressing the poor (20:19). If he was attempting to apply this to Job, this would contrast with what Eliphaz first said about Job, namely, that he strengthened the weak (4:3–4). God is right to punish the wicked who purvey social injustice, and he could have been implying that Job was guilty of such (22:6–11). Zophar believed that the wicked cannot escape God's wrath (20:24). His lesson on divine retribution is vivid. Both Bildad and Zophar concluded using the image of inheritance (v. 29). While Bildad mentioned what people stand to lose by rejecting God (fame, name, survivors), Zophar mentioned what wicked people gain—a graphically horrible end. And its horror, for Zophar, is not by chance. It is what God Himself bequeaths.

21:1–34. Job's Response to Terror Stories. Job next painted his own very different picture of the life of the wicked as long, prosperous, and secure. He asked rhetorically if his complaint was with other human beings—and a negative answer was implied (v. 4). This offered reassurance to Job's companions and also clarified his focus. He was attempting to maintain friendship, but they infuriated and mocked him (15:12; 19:3; 21:3); they never called him friend. But he repeatedly identified them as friends—whether directly or implicitly (6:27; 16:20; 19:19, 21), and even brothers (6:15). His question implied that, whether irritated by them or not, his quarrel was ultimately not with humans. For no one but God could answer his questions about the injustice of his experience. Just calling them to mind made him shudder (21:6).

The description that follows about how wicked people live and die goes against everything that seems fair; it contradicted everything about the popular, cause-and-effect doctrine of retribution promoted by his friends. In effect, Job found his thoughts to be frighteningly true. When he stated that their descendants were established (21:8), he indicated the opposite of Bildad's claim that the wicked have no posterity, progeny, or survivor (18:19). He also observed that their bulls breed (21:10)—this signified high yielding stocks. The wealth of the wicked multiplies. Job's comment about the death of the wicked in v. 13 implies that they die without suffering. Elsewhere, Deuteronomy 7:4 refers to sudden death as God's punishment, and Job himself spoke of it as proof that life is fickle (Job 9:23). The prosperity of the wicked is not in their hands (21:16). Some read it as a question: "Behold is not their prosperity in their hand?" This would imply that their success is of their own making. Taken as a negative statement, the sentence means that the wicked are not in charge of their success. Job would then be rejecting the presumption of living so self-centeredly with breath that comes from God.

The rhetorical questions in v. 17 effectively argued against the claim that wickedness automatically brings misery. The translation and interpretation of v. 19 is difficult. According to some translations, Job was saying that instead of children being punished for their parents' wrongdoing, God should pay back the wicked directly. According to others, Job was refuting what his friends had said—that children are punished for their parents' wrongdoing. According to yet others, Job was saying that *both* children and parents should be punished, but that even if the children are, the parents often do not know about it. It appears that Job was saying (as he had throughout this section) that the wicked do not always receive their punishment in this life, even though their children might suffer as a result of their wrongdoing (vv. 20–21; cf. 27:14–15). In other words, Job wondered what difference punishing their children would make to dead people. The rhetorical question "Can anyone teach God knowledge?" suggests that the God who rules the *ramim*—"the exalted ones," "those on high," or "the highest"—surely knows what He is doing with humanity.

Job then observed that some people die in prosperity and others in misery. The first word of 21:24 in the Hebrew is *'atin*—a word that appears only once in Scripture, and its translation is uncertain. It is usually rendered as "breasts" because Job said that it is full of *khalab*—literally "milk." The phrase could metaphorically mean "well nourished" or "well fed," which conveys the basic meaning of the verse. The particular Hebrew word for thoughts or thinking (v. 27) here refers to assessment, and the word for schemes also often refers to evil plans. Job knew that his friends had concluded that he was receiving the punishments of God reserved for the wicked. Job suggested that his friends should learn from the testimony of those who travel and who have experienced life fully (v. 29). They would support Job's position. Some translations have the idea in v. 30 that the wicked are "reserved" for the day of trouble, others that they are "spared" from it. Job argued that the wicked do very well; they are (at least for now) spared from doom and wrath.

22:1—27:23

Third Cycle of Speeches

In this last cycle of speeches we hear only the voice of Eliphaz (22:1–30) and Job's response to him (23:1—24:25) and that of Bildad (25:1–6) followed by Job (26:1—27:23). Eliphaz's use of strong words includes some positive elements. The speech of Bildad was short and reaffirmed the first speech of Eliphaz.

22:1–30. Eliphaz's Final Manipulative Effort. In this his final speech, Eliphaz spoke both his angriest and his most positive words to Job. His denunciations were fiercer, while his invitation was more promising. He followed the stern criticism of social justice with eleven verses that mostly describe the glowing relationship Job would enjoy with God if he would only return to Him. The irony of Eliphaz's closing exhortation is that the book affirms Job's intimacy with God at its beginning and at the end. With his initial questions (vv. 2–3), Eliphaz alludes to his first speech, where he stated that God considers humans and angels by nature to be unworthy of standing before Him (4:21–21). That supernatural visitation forms the spine of the arguments of the friends in the book, running from Eliphaz's first through Bildad's last intervention. But their repetition does not make it true.

Eliphaz wanted to strip Job of his self-conceit, suggesting that it was his sin, not his fear or reverence for God, that had brought him his hardships (v. 4). In the Hebrew text the phrase regarding the charges brought against Job in the judgment is the same used by Job in 9:32 and 14:3. In the first, Job spoke of the impossibility of going to court together with God. Then in chapter 14 he voiced frustration over God's bringing a feeble mortal into judgment. As the reader knows, Job was wrong, and Eliphaz even more completely so. God was not hauling Job into court or punishing him. It was Satan who was abusing him. And it was precisely because of the devotion that Eliphaz once praised (4:6) and now mocked that Satan poured out his spite upon him. Verses 5–9 in chapter 22 record inventions of Eliphaz's desperation, all false accusations against Job.

Eliphaz accused Job of using brute force to exploit society's vulnerable (vv. 5–7). The powerful, honorable man (v. 8) was the one to whom people deferred. This person is described in a Hebrew idiom as one whose face is lifted up. Job, and later Elihu, used the same idiom in 13:8, 10 and 32:21 to refer to showing partiality. It is difficult to connect the charge in 22:13 to any of Job's previous words. It was a sheer distortion of his words. He now quoted Job (v. 17), citing Job's previous criticism of the wicked (21:14)—and perhaps implying that it applied to Job himself. Then Eliphaz appealed to Job to have a relationship with God that would bring wholeness (22:21). But his twisted judgment on Job made it difficult for Job to draw real hope from his optimistic-sounding language. Verses 21–30 close Eliphaz's body of speeches that began in 4:2–6. His words here included the sympathy absent from the rest of the speech. They reflected a sensitivity that was last heard from Eliphaz in the introductory words of his first speech (4:3–4). They were the enticement of the carrot after the rhetorical beating with the stick. Affirming as they may have been, they did not correct his false statements or undo the damage done to his relationship with his friend or to the character of the God he had claimed to speak for.

23:1—24:25. Job: Longing and Contradiction. This speech may be remembered for three things: (1) Job's dismay at God's inscrutability—he could not understand what He was doing, nor could he locate Him in order to find out (chap. 23); (2) his sense of God's knowledge of his integrity, even through this trial (23:10); and (3) his extended portrayal of the fate of the vulnerable at the hand of their exploiters (chap. 24). At the conclusion he dared anyone to disprove his account of the prosperity and fate of the wicked (24:25).

Job was confident of being acquitted, both because he was innocent and because his judge was fair (23:7). Job averred that he had kept God's ways and not turned away from his loyalty to Him. He treasured His words even more than food (v. 12). Job said that God does as He pleases (v. 13), and He would carry out what He had determined in regard to Job (v. 14). Job had anxiety as well as confidence since he did not know what God would do (vv. 13–17). Though terrified, Job was not silenced by the darkness and gloom that covered his face (v. 17). He posed a question (24:1) concerning the obscurity of God's "times"—His judgment schedule—a reality ignored by the powerful in their abuse of the desperately poor, as Job observed. Job described the wretchedness of the victims of exploitation (vv. 5–8) and narrated the violence of the strong (vv. 2–4, 9–11).

To all appearances the wicked are allowed to act with impunity (v. 12). Job showed (vv. 13-17) how their rejection of light enshrouds them in the darkness of their own criminality until the morning is the same to them as the terrors of deep darkness (v. 17). Some translate v. 18 as Job's expression of what "should be." Other translations consider vv. 18–25 as quoting the words of the friends: "You [the friends] say...." But the idea of a quote from the friends does not fit the context. Job's point was that evildoers do not last forever, that the grave will consume them, and that wickedness not merely "should" but will be broken (vv. 19–20). In other words, the wicked will eventually receive punishment, although that does not happen in all cases in this life, as his friends had claimed.

25:1–6. Bildad: Dialogue's Collapse. This is Bildad's final speech in which he finally surrenders to the lie of Eliphaz's opening speech (4:12–21), which he alone had originally refused to endorse. Scholars worry about Bildad's brevity here and the absence of a third speech by Zophar. But the book of Job is the documentation of a furious quarrel and not simply a theoretical treatise. Indeed, the greater perplexity may well be that Bildad, after long independence, so suddenly surrenders to ideas and language he has thus far not used. His unmodified falling into line with Eliphaz's distortion means that the friends' defense has collapsed, with no more hope of any new or helpful argument. Bildad argued that God is matchlessly great and all humans are simply flawed and as worms before Him (25:5–6). This was an emphatic echo of the sentiments of 4:19–20. There Eliphaz, by revelation, pronounces that if God does not even trust His angels, it is impossible for humans to enjoy His esteem (4:19–20). The friends' arguments concluded on this note regarding God's view of humanity.

26:1—27:23. Job: Emphatic Defense. Job continued to be contemptuous of the friends' elaborate speeches (26:2–4), but his most emphatic arguments in this section combined his familiar avowals of innocence (27:2–6) with arguments that sound very much like those of his friends in regard to the eventual fate of the wicked (27:7–23). The imagery of the trembling dead (26:5) does not contradict the fact that the dead know nothing (Eccl. 9:5). The Hebrew word for the "dead" here is *repa'im*, sometimes also translated "shades" or even "departed spirits"—a term that might have the unfortunate connotation of "ghosts" and thus contradicts the biblical teaching of sleep in death (cf. Ps. 6:5; 115:17; Dan. 12:2; John 11:11–12; 1 Cor. 15:51; 1 Thess. 4:13–14). This term (*repa'im*) is found in poetic texts to refer to those who died as totally lacking strength in the depth of the tomb (Sheol), the place of destruction (Job 26:6). The presence of God causes the impossible to happen: the dead react with trembling/deep anguish. Job stated that all things and beings, whether human or other, are subject to the absolute mastery of the God of life and creation (see also Pss. 74:12–17; 89:10; Is. 30:7; 51:9–10).

The reference to the pillars of heaven (Job 26:11) is imagery used to describe the earth as a building having columns supporting the sky. This is probably a reference to the mountains. Job's way of expressing the intensity of his commitment to integrity was by swearing in God's name (27:2). Verse 18 refers to the flimsy constructions of wickedness: the moth's house is its cocoon; the word for "booth" or "hut" (Heb. *sukkah*) is the term used for temporary shelters constructed for a few days. Stability and permanence are not features of wickedness.

The negations of v. 19 have been translated as referring to the transitoriness of life, but they have also been understood as expressing the transitoriness of human riches. They are there, but when people awaken, when they open their eyes, the riches are no more. Wealth vanishes and so does a person (v. 21). The east wind, known for its ferocity (Ex. 14:21; Ps. 48:7), eliminates the person. Thus, Job's complete rejection of his friends' arguments was a rational and emotional reaction provoked by their assaults on his integrity and not necessarily a rejection of their characterizations of the fate of the wicked. But even this speech, so much in sympathy with arguments they themselves had made, did not move them to change. They remained entrenched in their opposing camps.

28:1–28

Interlude: Ode to Wisdom

Within the dialogues between Job and his friends, this poem stands apart. Though it includes no introductory note to the effect, its dispassionate tone and lack of invective and personal attack mark its singularity within its context. And the unique way that Job's words are reintroduced in the chapter that follows also emphasizes the independence of Job 28 from the flow of personal arguments that makes up the dialogue. Scholars debate whether Job or the author of the book wrote the chapter. Divided into three sections, it focuses on human accomplishment (vv. 1–11), highlights human inadequacy (vv. 12–22), and honors divine omniscience, ending with God's definition of wisdom (vv. 23–28).

Thematically speaking, Job 28 documents a soliloquy on the phenomenon of wisdom that reviews the course of nature and human ingenuity, exploration, and discovery.Job sought for a satisfactory answer on the source, location, and definition of true wisdom. He began his soliloquy by pointing out that people put an end to darkness (v. 3) by exposing and exploring earth's remote regions and depths and bringing light and knowledge where before there were darkness, concealment, and ignorance. Job referred (v. 4) to places (lit. "forgotten by feet"), that is, forgotten in the sense of neglected—some translations have "untouched by human feet" or "unknown to those who walk." The poet described regions as forgotten because they were unfamiliar and rarely, if ever, trodden.

A miner's work can be precarious (v. 4). Job's mention of fire (v. 5) may have referred to the hot conditions in which mining must sometimes be done in contrast to the relative calm on earth's surface. Miners set to work on the flinty rock, accomplishing in the process what Job said God in His anger does, overturning mountains (v. 9; cf. 9:5).

People do not know the value and worth of wisdom (v. 13): value and worth are translations of a Hebrew word, *'erek*, that also means order. It is not that humans lack appreciation for wisdom but that it is beyond their control and manipulation (vv. 13–22). This is the point of vv. 13–22. Verses 23–27 indicate that it is a spiritual matter that only the all-knowing God may properly assess. The fear of the "Lord" here (v. 28) is *'adonai*, the only appearance of this word in the book of Job. By shunning evil, Job reveals understanding and wisdom (cf. Prov. 9:10). Thus, at the climax of this independent poem, set apart from the hostilities of the argument's partisanship, we learn again of Job's true standing before the God with whom he still longed to have an audience. Through the verse's synonymous parallelism, the reader is told that Job, in God's definition, is a person of wisdom.

29:1—31:40

Job's Final Speech

The seemingly independent character of Job's final speech is detached from the thrust and parry of the friends' sustained confrontation, suggesting that it may not be part of the main dialogue or that there was a break in the discourse for some period of time and Job began again with another thought. The singular phrasing that opens chapter 29, which refers to the resumption of Job's speaking, seems to support such a view. In chapter 29 Job described divine ministrations (vv. 2–6), human reactions to him (vv. 7–12), reasons why he commanded respect (vv. 13–17), his now surrendered expectations of his final days (vv. 18–20), and his earlier days of honor (vv. 21–25).

29:1–25. Reminiscence: Yesterday's Dignity. In v. 2, "months" is in parallel with "days." This does not in itself tell us how long Job's trial had continued thus far. On balance Job may have fretted much more than savored God's "watching" him (7:12; 10:14; 13:27). But he still longed for such times (v. 2). Verse 4 records one of Job's few and most direct answers to Eliphaz, whose challenge may be recalled from 15:8. Eliphaz asked rhetorically (expecting a negative answer) if Job had access to knowledge from God. The author through narrative and in Job's own sayings repeatedly commented on Job's integrity and godliness. Beyond this, Job's counter to Eliphaz, recalling times when he was close to and sheltered by God's counsel, seems all the more credible because it was far removed from the heat and confrontation of the dialogue recorded in earlier chapters. It is not to be dismissed as the mere look backward through rose-tinted lenses.

Job's mention of his children (v. 5) expressed deep emotion as it related events that the reader knows are directly connected, that is, Job's sense of the loss of intimate fellowship and friendship with God and the tragedy of his lost children. The mention of cream (not really "cream" but a fermented product of milk, similar to yogurt) and oil flowing from the rock (the olive press) provides a metaphor for Job's previous economic standing. These commodities were luxuries in a nomadic life and thus indicated the wealth that Job had enjoyed. They were so available to Job that he could speak of his life being washed with cream and pouring rivers of oil (v. 6).

Job's reference to his going out to the "gate" refers to the gate of the city as the place of political and civil deliberation; the city courts assembled there (Gen. 23:10, 18). Job was a significant personage in these deliberations. The square was an opening in the gate area. Both the deference (lit. "hiding") of the young men and the rising of the old reflected the high regard Job enjoyed (Job 29:8). "Hid" is hyperbole since the youth were not necessarily afraid but simply showing deference, while the act of standing until the great one, Job, took his seat was a precursor to a widely recognizable practice today.

The silence of the princes and nobles emphasized that everyone deferred to his presence and words. The language of the tongue being stuck to the roof of the mouth (v. 10) is graphic language used to conjure up, mainly for his own consolation, the awe in which he remembered being held by society's two categories then acknowledged, that is, age (young, old) and class (princes, nobles).

Verse 11 contains a manner of speaking that attributed to the ear and eye (in the Hebrew) what properly belonged to the person hearing or seeing. Those who saw and heard Job pronounced blessings upon him and approved of his actions. Verse 13 refers to two commendable meanings: Job received blessings from those he delivered from perishing, as well as the blessing of helping people. Verse 16 has been translated and understood as referring to Job looking into unfamiliar issues in order to help those who needed it, investigating matters before making a judicial decision, or to his taking up the cases of strangers.

Job said that he broke the fangs of the wicked and snatched the victims from their teeth (v. 17). Joel 1:6 uses the word "fangs" for lion's teeth, which provides both a frightful depiction of the wicked person in Job 29:17 and an all the more compelling sense of Job's courageous intervention. Bible readers may hear echoes of the David story (1 Sam. 17:34–35) though the second part of Job 29:17 can be understood and translated as "I made him cast prey from his teeth."

Verse 18 indicates that Job was reflecting on the expectations of one who had lived a God-fearing life as he had. He was not in complete disagreement with his friends' thoughts regarding the prosperity of the righteous and the destruction of the wicked—their retribution theology. But he recognized, as they apparently did not, that this is not a formulaic or axiomatic description of how things always work in life. For having lived a life of care for and service to others, particularly the needy of society, he had expected to enjoy a long life—days like the sand (v. 18), a standard metaphor of multiplicity (Gen. 22:17; 41:49; Josh. 11:4); he also expected to be able to live out his days in peace and die in his (lit.) nest, that is, his home. This line almost defies the truth of death, so snug and cozy is the security of home ("my nest"). This was the prevailing concept across cultures at this time.

In Job 29:19 he employed a metaphor expressing the same idea found in the psalmist's figure of the righteous as a tree planted by the rivers of water (Ps. 1:3). It contrasts with the planting of the wicked, easily removed and not even missed by the ground from which they are uprooted (Job 8:15–18). Job expected to savor the dew (29:19), a major gift of heaven particularly valued in the desert lands of the Middle East. The dew was a constituent of the birthright, one of the OT's most significant blessings. Jacob received it from Isaac (Gen. 27:28), and the outmaneuvered Esau, when he pled for some paternal legacy too, was consoled with the promise of dew (v. 39). The bow (v. 20) reminds us that Jacob's benediction of Joseph celebrates his bow as abiding in physical and spiritual strength (Gen. 49:24; Ps. 127:3–5). Job had expected to be physically, mentally, and spiritually viable for a long time yet.

Job 29:22 refers to the previous effect of his words. The second portion of the verse could be rendered also, "My speech dropped on them"—like the dew. Among other uses, the verb "drop" refers to the preaching of the prophets (Amos 7:16; Mic. 2:6, 11). Job's audiences attached great significance to his words. In v. 24, the word *sakhaq* can be translated as "mocked," but it may also be rendered as "played," "smiled," or "laughed." Job, while complimenting himself, had already shown the awe in which he was held. In context he may have been saying that people considered it an almost unbelievable honor to be the object of Job's smile. In other words, it was easier to believe he was mocking them than that he was affirming them. Job's approving smile (lit. the light from his countenance/face) was thoroughly appreciated (see Pss. 4:6; 44:3). Job's words here also suggest that no one would do anything to lose his look of approval or to provoke its opposite, a dark countenance ("fallen" or "downcast" [Gen. 4:5, 6]; "sad" [Neh. 2:2, 3]; or "angry"/"horrified" [Prov. 25:23]). Verse 25 refers to Job's decision, which determined what everyone else would do. He was their leader.

30:1–31. Present Reality: Today's Disgrace. Job proceeded to narrate the dramatic changes his life had undergone through his unexpected trial. He delineated (vv. 1–8) the small view he held of those who were now his tormentors. Their insults and life's torments (vv. 9–18) were possible because God had turned against him (vv. 19–26). Five more verses of personal lament (vv. 27–31) conclude the chapter. Job commented that the people mocking him were younger than he was and that he would not have even allowed their fathers to watch his dogs/sheepdogs (v. 1). Elihu's classic confession is illustrative of the status of youth in Job's traditional society (32:6). Dogs were a popular derogation in most periods of the ancient world—a fact reflected in Scripture (Ex. 11:7; 1 Sam. 17:43; 2 Kin. 8:13; Mark 7:27–28).

The Hebrew of v. 3 is unclear. The basic sense is that the people mocking Job were like hungry scavengers in the wilderness. They gathered mallow, a plant of the salt marshes (v. 4). The end of v. 4 refers to the broom tree or juniper tree, also known as the white broom tree, or white weeping broom tree; it was more a shrub than a tree but had a broad canopy, under which Elijah, for example, could sit in the shade when he fled from Jezebel (see 1 Kin. 19:4). It was used for kindling, but Job's tormentors used to gnaw on its roots for food. Job compared these unfortunate men to wild donkeys (v. 7). Despised and expelled by society, they huddled together for company and protection among the thorns of the desert. The expression of a song that taunts or mocks (v. 9) is later used to describe what Jerusalem had become to everyone after the Babylonian devastation of 586 B.C. (Lam. 3:14). Job described a topsy-turvy world in which the despised had become the despisers, and those who were society's outcasts might now pour scorn on one who had so recently stood at the apex of society.

Spitting in the face (v. 10) describes an action that was usually directed at individuals who refused to perform the levirate duty (see Deut. 25:5–9). But there is no indication that Job was being accused of such failure. He may simply have been the victim of an act that would be contemptuous, vile, in any culture. Jesus's tormentors spat in His face (Matt. 26:67).

The translation of Job 30:11 is problematic because the Hebrew manuscripts are divided between "His" and "my" before "bow" or "bowstring." This latter word can also be rendered as "rope" or "cord." In this reading ("my"), God deprived Job of his viability. The reading "His" would probably require "His cord," indicating that God unleashed an assault on Job.

Some translations interpret v. 13 to mean that those attacking Job had no helper—they practiced this violence all on their own. Others translate it as their saying "no one can help him." Job sensed that his nobility was under assault and *tirdop* (from *radap*), which can mean "pursued" or "driven away" (v. 15). But if Job had lost his dignity, as indeed he had lost his prosperity, he never lost his integrity.

Job expressed his feelings that his end was approaching (v. 16). His assailants had been, in turn, a human rabble (vv. 1–13), impersonal terrors (v. 15), and, from v. 18 onward, God Himself (notice the third person referent of vv. 19, 24 and "You" in vv. 20–23). Verse 24 could refer to either God or a human; the verse's second line is also obscure. If God was the intended subject, the first line implies the idea of hitting one who is already down. If a human being was the intended subject, then the line indicates abject misery: someone pleading from—or even being likened to—a heap of ruins. Job seems to have been wondering how anyone could be so cruel as to strike down a person who in distress cries out to him or her for help. Verse 26 indicates more than just disappointment. It was the profound despair of thwarted expectations. How could God thus deal with one who had lived as conscientiously as he, weeping for those in trouble, grieving for the poor (v. 25)?

The alleged contradiction between hoping for good and fearing evil was more imagined than real. Thus it may be quite inappropriate to set Job's hope of good in contrast to his fear of ill. Jesus instructed His followers to daily pray for deliverance from evil—both the person of the evil one and the disruptions his power inflicts (Matt. 6:13). Job's eschewing evil signifies his consciousness of what to avoid. His hope for good (the Hebrew verb translated "looked for" means "hoped for") rested on his awareness that he had lived a God-fearing life. Based on this he expected to die in his nest/house (29:18). His understanding of a life of faithfulness to God is apparent in the narrative and in the divine comment about him (1:1, 8; 2:3), as well as in his actions on behalf of his children. Those actions revealed his constant awareness of human finitude and sinfulness. They also constantly acknowledged his dependence on substitutionary atonement by an innocent victim. Job showed that he knew that his only hope for forgiveness and cleansing from sin came through the vicarious sacrifice whose virtue he claimed by faith

(1:5). Those who seek for contradictions in the Job story may grant that his condition through the dialogue is itself a grand and inherently traumatic contradiction, as his own words establish (9:20–21). But it is admirable that even through this new and miserable turn of life he may have consistently contended that God knew of his loyalty, faithfulness to His commands, and treasuring of God's words—even more than his daily food (23:10–12). The pathos of Job 30:19–26, most clearly heard against this background, points to Job's strong feelings that now, in his suffering, God appeared to be unfaithful to His unerringly faithful servant.

Verse 28 has been taken to mean that Job was mourning but not "in the sun" or that he was "blackened, but not by the sun." This is because *qadar* means "darkened" but is also associated with mourning (Jer. 8:21). Job was reduced to begging from the very ones who once looked up to him as a king (29:25). His pleas were probably unrelated to his sores or lost children. Job's great burden was his besmirched reputation and his inaccessible God whom he longed to have vindicate him.

Verse 29 refers to "ostriches," also translated "owls." Job's cries called to mind the shrieks of jackals and owls. Multiple biblical references to their dwelling among ruins, particularly jackals (Is. 34:13; Jer. 9:11; 10:22), show that he may also have equated himself with them in terms of his own status as an outcast. The music of his life had been transposed into grief (v. 31).

31:1–40. Constant Commitment: An Oath of Integrity. In this chapter, Job unleashed his most powerful denunciation of his friends' unwarranted accusations by describing, in detail, the course of life he was known to have followed before unspeakable tragedy struck. He invoked multiple curses on himself for any forthcoming contradiction of any of his declarations about his personal, social, and economic morality. The strength of his avowals lay in more than the fervor he exhibited or the courtroom imagery with God as Judge (see vv. 35–36; also, vv. 14, 28). The moral vindication that Job could not find from the God who continued to be silent, he found in the inability of any human being—neighbor, alien/stranger, orphan, or widow—to speak in opposition to his testimony of personal integrity. Job spoke (vv. 1–12) of the inner workings of his soul to which God alone is privy; addressed (vv. 13–23) his treatment of his slaves and of society's needy (e.g., widow, orphan), conduct for which he would be equally culpable before God but that would be apparent to his fellow humans; spoke (vv. 24–28) of idolatry—whether of the worship of gold or of sun or moon—and declared his freedom from it; extolled (vv. 29–32) his charity to enemy, neighbor, and alien alike; asserted (vv. 33–34) his freedom from hypocrisy—behavior based on what others might say; dared (in the bold invocation of vv. 35–37) God Himself and his enemy—perhaps a parallel reference to God again—to answer him (i.e., to prove him wrong). Surprisingly, his closing appeal was not before God Himself but before the land: he would have it actively demonstrate its disapproval if he had not related responsibly to these elements of his environment (vv. 38–40). With this the narrator announces the conclusion of Job's self-defense.

Job had made a covenant with his eyes to not *'etbonen* a young woman (v. 1). This is from the verb *bin*—"to understand," "to consider." Some translators render the verb "to look" or "to look lustfully" in accordance with the reference to the eyes. Job had determined to not even consider committing adultery. The language of Job's morality was as elevated as the principles it described. It is difficult to find a more solemn OT ritual than covenant making (lit. "cutting"). Cutting a covenant, or making an agreement, implied a willingness to be cut asunder if one violated the terms of the agreement. Job's agreement with his eyes was no more stern than Jesus's own words concerning plucking out an eye if it were causing sin (Matt. 5:29). Job had fretted at the obsessive closeness of God's supervision that counted his steps (Job 7:19; 14:16). He knew that God saw him. But he also valued this very guardianship (31:4). It helped him to eschew evil. Also, the fact that God saw him was a solid basis for assurance of vindication. God knew his way (Job 23:10). He was confident that he could be weighed in "honest"—"just" or "righteous"—scales. Subjected to righteous judgment, Job's integrity would shine forth before God.

Job could swear that no blemish defiled his hands (31:7). He vowed that if he had been unfaithful, then it should be that others should eat what he had sown. God predicted this consequence for Israel if they chose the path of rebellion: others would eat what they planted (Deut. 28:30, 33). Verses 9–10 exemplify *lex talionis*—the law of eye for eye and tooth for tooth—the principle that the punishment must fit the crime (see Ex. 21:23–32). Job's adultery would be an offense against another man (Lev. 18:8, 16); he would have to pay for it by being equivalently shamed.

Job 31:14 indicates the rising up of God the Judge for a decision regarding Job's guilt or innocence (Deut. 19:15–17; Is. 33:10; Dan. 12:1). The word *peqad* (Job 31:14) literally means "to visit" (Gen. 21:1; 50:25; Ex. 4:31; Ps. 106:4), but this word is also used in the OT to mean "to punish" (e.g., Isa. 26:21; 29:6; Jer. 44:29) or "to care for" or "to come to aid" (Zech. 10:3). Some translators render the word neutrally—that is, "visit" or "examine" or "call me to account"—and others as "punish." No matter which meaning is meant, Job was probably not thinking of punishment, but he knew that God would show up to scrutinize his conduct and that any divine verdict would be preceded by a divine investigation (e.g., Gen. 3:8–24; 18:20—19:29; Dan. 7:19–22, 23–27).

In Job 31:15, he stated the rationale that framed all his human relationships, a Creation principle that dictated the ethics of both commercial and noncommercial interaction, whether with people accountable to him or among society's poor for whose needs he felt a sense of personal responsibility (vv. 13–20). Job's membership among the ranks of the privileged of his society did not alienate him from the community's poverty stricken. His Creation principle, and the ethics it constrained, always works to remedy societal inequities such as slavery and human exploitation of all sorts that demean children or youth, women or men formed in the image and after the likeness of the Creator God.

Job affirmed that he had not raised his hand against the fatherless (v. 21). In the Bible the gesture of raising the hand generally expresses hostility; here it was something that Job had avoided. The verb *nup*, often translated as "raised," could be more explicitly rendered as "waved" or "wielded my hand against." Isaiah predicted terror to the Egyptians when the Lord of Hosts performed this action (Is. 19:16). Job refrained from hostility against the undefended even when he had support from the politically powerful, those in the gate (see commentary on Job 29:1–25). Based on 31:22, he understood and appreciated the significance of *lex talionis*; indeed, he considered the punishment of "eye for an eye" to be from God (v. 23).

The end of v. 27 has been rendered variously ("my mouth has kissed my hand," "my hand offered them a kiss," "threw a kiss with my hand"). It reads, literally, "my hand has kissed my mouth." The action would be a gesture of veneration to stellar objects (sun, moon) deified in many ANE cultures and countries. But for Job, neither astral deities nor the temptation to adore material wealth, personal abilities, and success would distract him from worshiping the true God (vv. 24–27). He would have no other gods before the Lord of heaven (v. 28).

Job averred that he did not rejoice at the destruction of his enemies by pridefully gloating over them (v. 29). Having progressed from his focus on inner integrity before God to his relations with society's vulnerable, thence to the issue of false gods, Job now spoke with equal clarity of conscience on the subject of enemies and aliens. They, as surely as his own people, had been the objects of his charity. Job here also denied asking for a curse upon his enemy's "soul/life" (v. 30). He did not rejoice when his enemies received what they deserved. The thought is similar to Jesus's words in the Sermon on the Mount. Job does seem to have been committed to doing good to them, if v. 31 (on providing food for all and sundry) is to be read in the context of v. 30.

Job also denied covering his transgressions as Adam had and as many people still did and do (v. 33): "*adam*" is the Hebrew term for "man," "human." Job was repudiating the charge, so typical of human beings, of concealing guilt to preserve their dignity before others or even resorting to avoiding contact with the public by staying indoors (v. 34). Zophar had implied that Job may have been hiding wickedness under his tongue (20:12), and Eliphaz had accused him of claiming that God could not see through the dark cloud (22:13–14). Job was denying any such behavior but did not, as before (31:6, 8, 10, 22), propose any negative consequence to himself should what he denied actually be true. Instead he passed on to the most daring of all his implied self-imprecations, challenging God or whoever might be his prosecutor to contradict or, in any particular, falsify his testimony. He presented his *taw*, that is, his "mark," in this case meaning his "signature" (v. 35). Job had, in effect, volunteered his own affidavit, sworn to and signed off on it, ready to plead his innocence against any indictment.

Job's attitude was the direct opposite of the cowering culprit who hides indoors. Rather, he would decorate himself with the accusations against him, totally confident of vindication. The more conspicuous the charges of the prosecutor, the more glorious would be his exoneration (v. 36). He could not go wrong, for he would be declaring the number of his steps (v. 37) to the very One who had watched over and counted them Himself. He would do it like a prince or ruler (v. 37).

In vv. 38–40 Job expressed his ecological sensitivity. Long before it was in vogue to care about the environment, the voice of Scripture was audible in solicitude for the earth and its produce. Job's inheritance in this regard was bequeathed from earth's first man and woman, and thence from the Creator Himself, to tend and care for the perfect garden (Gen. 2:8, 15). Israel's agrarian economy was to run on rhythms of work and rest for people and for land (Ex. 23:10–11; 25:8–12). Job's sensitivity to the needs of his land led him to invoke once more the law of an eye for an eye, though on this final occasion it was the earth itself that would wreak vengeance on him (Job 31:40).

The narrator's statement of the conclusion of Job's words employs a provocative wordplay by resorting to the same root (*tamam*, "to complete," "to be blameless") that opened, and has fueled, the whole drama of the book. From the opening verse, readers are introduced to Job as blameless (*tam*). The narrator chose to conclude the interlocution between Job and his three friends by stating that Job's words are completed (*tammu*). The statement obliquely reminds us of Job's last affirmation before the dialogue's start. There, despite his sudden devastation and personal affliction, and the urging of his wife to do otherwise, he did not misspeak (2:10). Job also spoke (31:30) about not allowing his mouth to sin. At the book's denouement God twice ruled in Job's favor with a startling rebuke of his friends because they had not spoken correctly about Him as Job had (42:7–8). Whatever the human judgment on Job, by his friends and by generations of readers, God and the narrator establish that there is more to his conclusion than simply an end. His words may be said to be complete. His declaration of innocence ended, Job now expected God to show the evidence against him.

32:1—37:24

A New Voice

The next speaker, Elihu, seems unexpected since there was no earlier indication of his presence (2:11–13). His genealogical record is given and also his emotional state (32:1–5). After his own introduction (vv. 6–22), he would, in his speech, attempt to answer Job's arguments addressing divine chastening (33:1–33) and freedom (34:1–37), Job's culpability (35:1–16), and God's justice and power (36:1—37:24).

32:1–5. Righteous Indignation: Introduction of Elihu. The three most significant bits of information that introduce Elihu are his identity, his relative age, and his current feelings. Much of this is stated elaborately. Job and his mature friends who appear in the book of Job's dialogue as its major personalities come to the story with rather basic information—their names and where they lived. By contrast, Elihu is introduced with an elaborate genealogy and an emphatic word on his disturbed emotional state. And all of this is set in the context of his youth, which is given as the reason why he was not worthy to speak before. It is difficult to ignore the irony that the one least established in society and in this conversation is the one with the grander genealogy. Further, the quadruple statement that his anger was aroused (vv. 2–3, 5) helps prepare the reader for the ambitious exposition that is about to follow from a sincere and insecure young man.

As his final declaration of innocence (chap. 31) makes most clear, Job continued to believe that he was an honest, decent person. The Hebrew construction in 32:2 has been rendered as "justified himself rather than God," "justified himself before God," or "justified himself more than God" comes from Eliphaz's visionary experience (4:17) and should not be given a comparative translation ("more than") either here or in 4:17 because Job has not been in competition with God for righteousness. Eliphaz has said, by revelation, that God despises His intelligent creation, even His angels. But God has stated that He is proud of Job. This becomes the issue of the dialogue (see "The Vision/Dream of Eliphaz," p. 630). And on this question, the message that emerges from the book of Job is that Job's consciousness of his failings, finitude, and sinfulness did not disqualify him from the assurance of salvation and security and righteousness by faith. Job was not justified "rather than" God, but he was justified before God on the grounds of his constant dependence on God's grace (cf. 1:5), manifested in his faithfulness to Him.

Elihu showed a sense of justice: it was unsound for the friends to condemn Job while lacking proper arguments (32:3). Elihu himself would follow the social practice of the young deferring to their elders. Not only had he acted properly, but he was anxious to make this clear once he did speak up (vv. 6–7, 11–12, 16).

32:6–22. Elihu's Self-Introduction. In his eagerness to express the urgency of his words being heard, Elihu likened himself to a windbag about to burst. The point of his protracted self-introduction was that he had listened, as was proper, for a long time, and now he had a right to speak. Elihu claimed to have felt shy. He thought that "age should speak" (v. 7), literally, "days should speak" (i.e., more experienced people should be given preference). "Days" is sometimes used in place of "years," as is clear from the second part of the verse, since the focus is on how many of them someone has lived. But God can give wisdom to anyone, not just those who have lived a greater number of days (v. 8). Elihu emphatically states, "I, even I" (v. 10; cf. v. 17), either nervously, arrogantly, or with nervous arrogance. His mention of the wind within him literally means "the wind in my belly." The idea of words as wind (or windy words) has already been so mocked (8:2; 15:2; 16:2–4) that Elihu only exposes himself to ridicule by speaking thus of himself. But he felt forced to speak, fearing that otherwise God would punish him (32:22).

33:1–33. Elihu's First Speech: Self-Validation and the Value of Chastening. This speech combined discussions about Elihu's appropriateness as speaker and arguments on the spiritual value of chastening. Elihu's challenge (v. 5) anticipated God's own to Job in 38:1–3 and 40:1–2, 6–7. Some interpreters find that Elihu spoke for God, while others think that his challenge was a parody of God's justified demand that Job face up and answer His questions. Elihu was just as insistent as the others that Job had done something specifically to warrant a punishment from God in the form of his afflictions (which could be implied from 34:36–37). It would appear that Elihu was paraphrasing Job's words insisting on his innocence (33:9; cf. 9:21; 10:7; 16:17), at least his innocence in regard to specific sins for which he was being punished, as his other friends had asserted. Job had been clear (repeatedly) that he knew he was a sinner (7:21; 13:23, 26; 14:17; 31:33). Although Elihu's words (33:10–11) come from Job (cf. 13:24, 27), Job had not said anywhere in this dialogue the exact words that Elihu claims (33:9) to have heard him say. The basic meaning of v. 12 is that Elihu was saying that Job was incorrect.

Elihu sensed God's transcendence—God did not have to give an account for His works and made a sympathetic allusion (vv. 14–18) to Eliphaz's revelatory experience. The reference to "pit" (v. 18) here means death (17:16; Ps. 30:3). Elihu took up a familiar theme and image in 33:21: Job had spoken of the suffering of the bones of his body (4:14; 30:17, 30), in contrast with the prosperity of the bones of the wicked (21:24), yet Zophar for his part had tried to describe the misery of the wicked person's bones (20:11).

Perhaps Elihu mentioned a messenger/angel, a mediator (33:23), because Job had wished for an arbitrator (9:33). But according to Elihu, who speaks in favor of the question, God's answer would be a rebuke to both him and Job (40:1–2). The word usually rendered as "ransom" in 33:24 is related to the verb which means "to make atonement." Though he did not elaborate on the idea, Elihu's unclear thoughts nevertheless seem to suggest something of deep theological value: that the ransom (or the atonement) may be effected through the mediator he had mentioned. The mention of two or three times (v. 29) means that God tries repeatedly to save His children from disaster, without any specific numeric value. In v. 32, Elihu suggested that he was working hard to persuade Job that he had his best interest at heart. Like Eliphaz (5:27), Elihu spoke as if he were very secure in the role of instructor (33:33).

34:1–37. Elihu's Second Speech: Job's Impertinence and God's Freedom. Elihu expanded on the theme of God's freedom to do what He wills. Job had already spoken of the ear (12:11); Elihu describes it as the agent of wisdom, analyzing and critiquing words (34:3). Then, following his alleged quotation of Job's words (vv. 5–6; cf. 27:2), he rebuked Job for saying that there was no profit to delighting in God. Job had not said this precisely though he said something similar in 9:22. Job had actually attributed the more exact phraseology used by Elihu here to the wicked in 21:15. Perhaps Elihu was saying that Job was sounding too much like the wicked that he himself had denounced (34:8). The thrust of Elihu's argument, consistent with the theology of Job's three friends, was that God is too great to be wrong—an idea that Job probably supported but that made his suffering more intense because in his case God did appear to be doing him wrong. Elihu was suggesting that Job, in his questionings, was coming too close to accusing God. All flesh would perish if God took back His breath (vv. 14–15). God would not be governing if He hated justice (v. 17).

Verse 18 has been rendered in different ways. According to some translators, Elihu was using rhetorical questions to show by analogy the lack of wisdom in questioning God too much: "Is it fitting to say to a king, 'You are worthless'?" According to others, perhaps closer to the meaning of the text, Elihu was saying that God condemns whomever He wills, even if they are kings or nobles: "Is He [God] not the One who says to kings, 'You are worthless'?"

Elihu finished his explanation of why Job was wrong by pointing out that God sees everything (vv. 21–22) and as a result does not need to have anyone appear before Him for judgement (v. 23). Those who are wicked, He punishes (vv. 24–27), particularly those who oppress others (v. 28). He is in control for the good of the people (v. 30), and no person or nation can stop Him (v. 29). Ultimately Elihu wanted Job to understand that simply denying that he did something wrong did not make it so (vv. 32–33). And saying that he had had enough punishment would not lift the punishment (v. 31). As a result, the words Job said sounded like foolishness (vv. 34–35) and worse, rebellion (v. 37). Job had clapped at his friends. During the time of Jeremiah this was a way to show contempt (Lam. 2:15). Because of this Elihu judged that Job deserved punishment without mercy (34:36).

35:1–16. Elihu's Third Speech: Job's Flagrant Culpability. In this speech Elihu was more consistently negative than ever. He drew out the implications of Eliphaz's revealed message: neither humans' wickedness nor their goodness makes any difference to or impression on God (vv. 4–8). He quoted Job as saying that his righteousness was more than God's (v. 2), an idea introduced in the argument by Eliphaz as a revelation from a spirit (4:17). They are both on the wrong side because the revelation is a deception. Elihu was angry that Job's companions had not been able to silence him (32:3, 5). He now meant to set them all straight. The truth is, Elihu argues, that when evil is overwhelming, people cry out (v. 9). Cries of desperation may be evidence that sufferers still need to learn the lesson God wishes to teach them (v. 12); they are still proud. He concluded that Job's speeches were useless in that they did not accomplish anything (v. 16). This callous theology most probably infuriated and insulted both Job and God.

36:1—37:24. Elihu's Fourth Speech: Divine Justice and Power. In this last speech, Elihu argued that the order of the cosmos validates the law of divine retribution according to which doing what is right brings blessings from the Lord and doing wrong results in divine judgment against the wicked. Within such a theology, there is no way to justify Job's argument. His only way out is to turn away from iniquity (36:21). He spoke of himself as one who had knowledge "from afar" (v. 3) and set out to vindicate God (vv. 2–3). Some suggest that Elihu referred to himself as the one with "perfect knowledge" of what he was about to discuss, while others suggest that the knowledge from "afar" meant knowledge from God (v. 4). When Elihu referred to (in the Hebrew) the opening (or "uncovering") of the ear (vv. 10, 15), he probably meant that God helps them to hear—listen and learn—sometimes through suffering.

Elihu's depiction of retribution is preserved in 36:5–12, where he argued that God does not preserve the wicked alive but vindicates the oppressed (v. 6) and greatly blesses the righteous (v. 7). Elihu alluded to the experience of Job when he considered the possibility that a righteous person may experience affliction. But according to him, in such cases God was disciplining the righteous. God wanted them to acknowledge their transgression and pride and to turn from iniquity (vv. 8–10). Were they to return to God, they would prosper; otherwise they would "perish by the sword" (vv. 11–15). Job's servants had died by the sword (1:15, 17).

Elihu addressed Job directly to apply the results of his previous discussion about God's power to him. He argued that had Job turned to God, He would have delivered him from his distress. Salvation is often described in the Bible as being placed by the Lord in a broad place (v. 16)—free from emotional or physical confinement. Various translations and scholars differ on the words and meaning of v. 18. Some translations express the idea that Job should beware of God's wrath and that a large ransom could not help him to escape it. Others suggest that Job should not let wrath lead him to scoffing and that he should not let the greatness of the ransom turn him aside. Still others read the verse as a warning against being enticed by riches. In Job's case, he received from the Lord the punishment deserved by the wicked (v. 18). It would be impossible for him to provide a ransom that would free him from God's wrath (vv. 18–20). Since Job did not turn from iniquity, he was being afflicted (v. 21). God had been trying to teach him something, but he chose not to learn.

The last section of Elihu's speech is a description of God's power over the natural world, more specifically over meteorological phenomena such as rain, clouds, thunder, and lightning (vv. 27–33). These God uses to judge people, which in context means to give abundant food to some and punish others.

These ideas are further developed in chapter 37, where Elihu speaks again directly to Job (v.

2). The main emphasis was on the lightning and thunder (vv. 3-5), interpreted by him as God's voice, although the snow is mentioned as well as ice storms. They are all under the power of God, and consequently, they do whatever He commands them to perform (vv. 6-12). The reason for the discussion of God's power over nature is clearly stated by Elihu: to correct the wicked or to show His mercy to others (v. 13)—the law of radical retribution. He confronted Job with a list of rhetorical questions on the topic of God's works of creation to demonstrate, as in the previous passages, that God is righteous in whatever He does (vv. 14-22). Elihu felt that because nature spoke so strongly about God's goodness and wisdom, God could not be questioned regarding the punishment that Job was clearly enduring. Consequently, the real topic was not the natural world but the fact that God is abundant in justice and that He does not oppress the innocent (v. 23), implying that Job was not as innocent as he claimed. God gives to humans what each one deserves because He is absolutely impartial. The only thing expected from Job was to revere God (v. 24).

It is clear that Elihu's last speech is from beginning to end about his personal understanding of divine retribution. It is particularly interesting that his discussion of God's power over nature is exclusively about meteorology, in which God is described as a storm god who controls thunder, rain, wind, and lightning. The servants of Job were killed by lightning, and his sons and daughters by a strong wind (1:16, 18-19). The implication is that since God controls storms, He used them to discipline or punish Job. According to Elihu, Job stood condemned before the Lord. But one more voice is about to be heard in the dialogue.

38:1—42:6

THE THEOPHANY: GOD CONFRONTS JOB

The transition between chapters 37 and 38 appears to be a little abrupt. Unlike all other times, here Job did not respond when Elihu finished speaking. The reason is that in his last speech Job presented before God the evidence of his innocence (an oath of integrity) and then waited for the Lord to speak and present evidence against him. However, God cannot be forced to speak whenever a human being wants Him to speak; He is the one who decides when to answer. Meanwhile the time between Job's last speech and the divine response was filled by the unexpected speech of Elihu. When God finally appeared on the scene to address Job, He ignored Elihu's speech, given after Job's dialogue with his friends had ended. The Lord entered in a whirlwind that seemingly brushed aside the speaking Elihu, whom God does not even mention when He later rebuked the three friends (42:6-9). Some have suggested that God seems to have continued the theme of Elihu on God's power over nature and that, consequently, what Elihu stated was basically right. As we have seen, this is hardly the case because Elihu's theological agenda was radically different from God's.

It was from the whirlwind that God delivered two monologues, each followed by short dialogues: first divine monologue (38:1—39:30), dialogue between God and Job (40:1-5), second divine monologue (40:6—41:34), and dialogue between God and Job (42:1-6). Terrifying natural displays (v. 1) are a standard feature of the self-revelations of the God who is Creator and Lord of all nature (Ex. 19:16-20; Ps. 50:3-4; Ezek. 1:4; Nah. 1:3; Hab. 3:3-15; Zech. 9:14).

38:1—39:30

Yahweh's First Monologue: God's Omnipotence

In the first divine monologue God appeared and summoned Job to enter into a dialogue with Him (38:1-3), something Job had been asking for (13:22; 23:5). God questioned Job about inanimate objects (38:4-38) and providence and the fauna (38:39—39:30). These were rhetorical questions that God did not expect Job to answer and that, in any case, he would not have been able to answer.

38:1-3. Job's Surprise: Yahweh's Appearance and Summons. Though Job had long clamored for a hearing before God, he was totally unprepared when it took place. He did not even speak when God challenged him to the confrontation. Then God unleashed a torrent of questions upon him. According to God's initial challenge, Job's uninformed words obscured the issue (v. 2). Yet God would say at the end that no one had spoken as rightly concerning Him as Job had (42:7, 9). Evidently, neither Job nor any of the other speakers fully grasped the issues at stake—none of them knew of Satan's cynical demand. Nevertheless, God did find something to honor in both Job's words and spirit during the stormy dialogue with his friends. Verse 3 reads literally, "Gird up your loins," which originally referred to pulling up one's long robe between one's legs and tucking it into the belt to prepare one to move more freely—or to be ready to perform a difficult task (1 Kin. 18:46; Jer. 1:17).

38:4—39:30. Yahweh's Transcendence: Rhetorical Questions to Job. God next subjected Job to a series of questions that first covered inanimate elements (38:4-38) and the fauna (38:39—39:30). Through a speech overflowing with attractive metaphors, God emphasized His awareness of both animate and inanimate creation and His care for a fallen creation: the fierce lion, scavenging vulture, gentle mountain goat, and vulnerable ostrich, as well as the man on the war horse. God's questions and survey show Him as very much aware of it all—the implication being that He was not simply aware but running, managing, controlling all life and nature, something Job was not unaware of (12:9-10).

The parallel reference to morning stars and sons of God, sometime rendered "angels" (38:7), indicates that they designate the intelligent, non-divine members of God's court first mentioned in Job 1:6. Doors, womb, and wrapping in darkness (38:8-9) are all metaphors for shorelines that keep the sea in bounds. The imageries highlight both the sea's almost irrepressible nature and the Lord's creative authority and control. Commanding the morning amounts to ordering the sun to rise and the light to reach out to the earth (v. 13). In v. 13, God is alluding to Job's own concern with criminal activity being covered by darkness (24:13-17) and reminds him that commanding the light would enable God to control such activity. Light gives and reveals the earth's character and contours, shape, and beauty. Since light is withheld (38:15) from the wicked, their wickedness is cemented, which will ultimately result in their final collapse. Job is ignorant of the storehouse of the snow, thus pointing to his inability to rule over it (v. 22). While the identity of some of the terms used to refer to heavenly bodies remains uncertain, Job is not unaware of these starry elements (vv. 31-32). He has already cited their testimony to God's power as seen in their creation (9:9). God then proceeded to question whether Job knew the rules of astronomy that are related to things on earth (38:33).

Concerning v. 36, interpreters are divided between those who render "mind" and "heart" in this verse and those who consider these rare terms as references to some creature of nature such as an "ibis" and "cock." Verse 39 seems to open a new series of questions, this time on faunal references (lion), suggesting that "ibis" and "rooster" would be out of place in vv. 4-38. But whether put into a human heart or a rooster brain, wisdom always has its source in God. According to God, the chicks cry to Him for food, and He provides for them (v. 41).

The Hebrew term *pere'*, translated sometimes as "onager" (39:5), designates the wild donkey that prefers the open countryside to the crowded population centers. Concerning the ostrich, it is said literally that "God caused her to forget wisdom." This does not mean that she lost something she once had (v. 17). She simply lacks what others may possess. The stork is both more elegant in motion (ostriches cannot fly) and respected for its intelligence (cf. Jer. 8:7). But whatever her lack, the ostrich too possesses her strength. God has made her a great runner (39:18). The bird's size warrants the expression "on high." The Hebrew word *ra'mah* (v. 19) has an uncertain meaning. It could be from the word *ra'am*—"to thunder." Others have suggested that it refers to the "mane" of the horse. But it is also read as "quivering" or "vibration" and as such in this context could refer to a horse in battle when it moves with speed and passion.

The Lord's first monologue ranged widely through the mysteries of earth's founding and the sea's boundaries to light and rain, young lion, wild ox and donkey, ostrich and blood-sucking eaglet. No doubt there are countless more examples that God could have given. It is likely that He chose these because they were significant to Job and a familiar aspect of life in that part of the world. One who does not properly credit the story's integrity and its principal character's intelligence may conclude that this sequence makes no sense, whether as resolution of Job's dilemma or even confirmation of the theology of the friends or Elihu.

In order to gain a better understanding of the speech, it is necessary to return to the prologue, where Satan questioned God's integrity in relation to how He governs the world. Thus in this context, God's speeches provide testimony regarding how He runs the universe that He created, revealing that in the midst of conflicts and struggles He continues to care and to provide for all of His creation. There are not ulterior motives for providing for His creation, as Satan argued, except that He by nature cares for what is His. Unquestionably the speeches reaffirm the conviction that God is greater than Job, but their ultimate intention was to show that God freely provides and cares for His creation because that is who He is. The experience of Job, who never abandoned the Lord, shows that the relationship between humans and God is grounded in disinterested love.

40:1–5

Dialogue between God and Man: Job's First Concession

God's first monologue had sufficiently exposed Job to the limits of his knowledge and pointed not only to his position in relation to God but also to God's loving concern and care for His creation. Now God rightly demanded an answer from one who had brought a lawsuit against Him (v. 2). He had stated His case. Job must react.

Job averred that he was *qalloti*—"insignificant" (some translations have "vile"; v. 4). In fact, the nature and content of the answer may be even more striking than the fact that he spoke. He acknowledged that it was impossible for him to answer God's questions, but he was not yet ready to surrender his claim. This explains the need for a second divine speech.

40:6—42:6

Yahweh's Second Monologue: God's Supremacy

In this second monologue God confronted Job with the question of whether he would actually be willing to challenge or refute God's judgment (v. 8). If Job wanted to challenge God, he would first have to challenge the mightiest creatures God had supremacy over. God as a God of order controls Behemoth (40:15–24) and Leviathan (41:1–34), and if there is any need He restores order.

40:6–14. Challenge Renewed: Offer of Divine Prerogatives. While Job had conceded that he was not able to answer God's questions, the lesson was still not over. Heaven's purposes are not served simply because creatures acknowledge their finitude. Indeed, that would wonderfully justify the taunts of the adversary whose cynicism initiated Job's drama. It would support his claim that the relationship between God and His intelligent creation is servile—that creaturely loyalty is apparent rather than real. God is both all-knowing and all-wise. But He is also all-caring. Because Job grasped this foundational truth of His character, God, in the end, would strongly affirm him. Because the three friends both missed and denounced it, God, in the end, would fiercely denounce them. Thus, it was necessary for God to continue.

God's terseness in repeating His challenge to Job was followed by a grand elaboration on the idea of girding up one's loins. God explained the nature of the task to which He was summoning Job. In effect, He wished Job to see that it was his adversarial manner, and not his sense of questioning the meaning and justice of his lot, that God rejected. God did not have to be guilty for Job to be right (v. 8).

Nothing in the theophany is more crucial for interpreting the second divine monologue, and particularly the Leviathan phenomenon, than the topic of pride directly associate with the attitude of the wicked (vv. 11–14). The discussion is now about who is powerful enough to humiliate the proud and defeat the wicked. If Job could do such a thing (resolve the problem of evil in the world), then God would acknowledge the saving power of Job. Obviously, Job could not accomplish such a task. It was too much for him, and God would make this absolutely clear to Job through the introduction in His speech of two formidable beasts: the Behemoth and the Leviathan. Indeed, there was none but God Himself who could dare to trifle with such beasts—even Leviathan, the king over all the proud (lit. "sons of pride"; 41:34).

40:15–24. Managing the Created Order: Behemoth. The first beast mentioned in the second divine speech was the Behemoth (v. 15: see below, "Behemoth"). The word is feminine plural from *behemah* ("beast," "cattle"), evidently functioning as a name or title since the creature was spoken of as masculine. By poetic intention, the identity of this creature remains somewhat vague, but God spoke of it as a creature of preeminence (v. 19), subject only to His own control. The main point of this description is the creature's power and fearlessness (v. 23). Verse 24 is difficult to interpret, but it is better to read it as a rhetorical question: "Can anyone catch him with [or in] his eyes?" "With [or in] his eyes" may mean "while he is alert" or, possibly, by poking something into his eyes, which would parallel the verse's second strophe, putting a hook into his nose.

Behemoth

The identity of the Behemoth has created much discussion, and three primary explanations have been suggested. The first seeks to match the description with a known living creature. The second seeks to identify an extinct creature. The third relegates it to the realm of mythology or poetic invention. Those in the first group generally identify Behemoth as a hippopotamus. Those in the second group typically suggest a dinosaur (generally one of the sauropods [four-legged herbivore] or ornithopods [two-legged herbivore]). But this is extremely difficult to demonstrate. The Behemoth is not mentioned in the literature of the ANE at all, which makes the mythical interpretation highly unlikely. It is also difficult to imagine why God would point to an imaginary creature as the penultimate illustration of His supremacy. Finally, the Behemoth is mentioned in the Hebrew text of the Creation account (Gen. 1:24) as created by God. As a result, the third suggestion seems fundamentally flawed. There are several things that we can say about this beast.

1. Description of the Beast. The final identity of the Behemoth remains unclear, but the biblical description of this beast, found in 40:15–24, fits quite well that of the hippopotamus, with the exception of its tail (which is described as being like a cedar; v. 17). The tail of the hippopotamus is short, while the cedars are tall trees. But it has been suggested that perhaps the comparison is not in terms of size but in terms of firmness or stiffness, and in that case the comparison with the tail of the hippopotamus fits. Unquestionably, in the description of the physical features of the animal, poetic hyperbolic language is employed to emphasize its uniqueness and strength.

2. Absence of Violence. God did not emphasize the violence of the animal at all, but it was certainly not a friendly beast. It hid but was self-confident and powerful (v. 23)—so powerful that humans were unable to subdue it, including more precisely Job (v. 24). God was the only one powerful enough to approach it, and He did so with His sword at hand (v. 19) to keep it under control. This implies that only through a struggle would the beast finally be defeated by the Lord.

3. Created by the Lord. Perhaps more importantly, Behemoth was created by the Lord as one of His most important creatures (v. 19; first in the sense of preeminent). Although created by God, it appears that for some unknown reason it opposed God, and He had to control it by using His sword. One could suggest that the contrast is between how it was created—*re'shit* (v. 19), "beginning" or "chief"—and what it has become now. In that case it was somewhat similar to Satan in 1:6. He was among the sons of God, challenged God, and was defeated by the Lord. Over such an enemy Job had no power, but the Lord did. Using creatures as metaphors for an evil power was a common practice attested to in ANE cultures.

More specifically, the hippopotamus was a symbol of evil powers in ancient Egypt. The hunting of the hippopotamus in Egypt was associated with a religious ritual in which the pharaoh, representing Horus, killed the hippopotamus, representing Seth, thus symbolically defeating evil. Since in the second divine speech God raised the question of who was able to bring to an end the proud wicked, thus resolving the problem of evil (40:11–13), God was clarifying that He is the only One who can control evil in the world. Whatever evil Job was experiencing, it was not undefeatable because the Lord had power over it and controlled its damaging effects (cf. 2:6).

41:1–34. Beyond Behemoth: Leviathan. While Behemoth was unknown in ANE literature, Leviathan was a known mythic creature. Behemoth was introduced with an invitation to look at it and was identified as a creature of God. Both of these elements point to the reality of the Behemoth, an identifiable object of God's creation, as Job was. But Leviathan, who followed, was both better known and less concrete in the ANE, a many-headed dragon also known as Lotan, who ruled the chaos of the deep and was attacked and defeated by other Canaanite deities (see "Leviathan," p. 654). Much of his description in Job 41 evokes the image of the crocodile, which, like the hippopotamus, was a constant and menacing feature of Egyptian Nile waters. Still, attempts to limit his identity to that of the crocodile do not seem to be that productive.

The fishing methods mentioned in vv. 1–2 were useless in the case of the Leviathan. In Job 41 the horrible might of the description

Leviathan

Certainly, the image of Leviathan is much more complex than that of the Behemoth and would require a little more analysis. The Bible provides a more detailed description of it, and we do have some pertinent ANE literature that need to be taken into consideration.

1. ANE Background. In the ancient Canaanite literature, Lotan, or Litanu, is a mythological, snake-like creature that threatened the order of the world, making it necessary for Baal or his sister to attack and defeat him. Its name means "the fleeing serpent." Lotan, together with Mot, the god of death, and Yamm, the god of the sea, represented the forces of chaos. Similar ideas are found in the mythology of Mesopotamia, where a seven-headed monster was defeated by Nabu (a wisdom god). Scholars tend to associate the mythological conflict among the gods with the creation of the cosmos. In such mythological ideas the motif of the conflict-with-chaos describes the rise of a hostile monster, a god who defeats him, and the creation of the world. It is possible that Leviathan was the creature behind these ANE ideas, and thus they could be useful when exploring biblical passages where Leviathan is mentioned. They should not determine the meaning of the text but can certainly help to clarify its message.

2. Leviathan as God's Creature and Enemy. The Bible describes Leviathan as one of God's creatures. According to Psalm 104:26, God formed it, and it dwelt in the sea together with many other creatures, large and small, which means that it was not a mythological creature. The text does not provide enough information for us to identify it with any known animal still living today; we can only say that it is described as a large sea creature. In His dialogue with Job, God asked him a series of questions about Leviathan (41:10). Some of the characteristics of the beast provided by the text are applicable to the crocodile (vv. 13–17, 30), and some of them to a whale (vv. 19–20), but others do not fit any known creature. Confronted by it, humans and their weapons of war were impotent and ineffective (vv. 7, 26–29). It was a threat to them that they could not subdue or stand against (v. 9), which means it could not have been a crocodile. Only God was able to subdue and control it. The description of the violent nature of this beast suggests that, although it was originally created by God as part of a very good creation (Gen. 1:31), its nature became corrupted. It could now be a useful symbol of corruption and violence.

3. Leviathan as a Defeated Power. The image of Leviathan as a many-headed monster is used in the Bible as a symbol of the historical and spiritual powers that God has defeated on behalf of His people. In a passage that points to the crossing of the Red Sea by the Israelites, the psalmist proclaims God's defeat of the sea monster and the breaking of Leviathan's heads (Ps. 74:13–14). The imagery from the ANE of a conflict with the sea monster is used here as a symbol of the Egyptian armies, the enemy of God and His people, defeated by the Lord. The biblical writer seems to acknowledge that behind the pagan mythology lies an element of truth: there is in the world an evil spiritual power that opposes God and His people, and only Yahweh can overcome him. This idea is explicitly stated in the prologue to the book of Job when Satan challenged and opposed God's actions.

4. Leviathan as a Power That God Will Destroy. The language of Isaiah 27:1 is very similar to the language of a Canaanite text in which Lotan is called "the fleeing/gliding serpent," "the twisted/coiling" one. This does not mean that the prophet was copying from that text but that this was common language used to designate an evil power. The biblical message is that the power represented by a snake-like animal will be destroyed forever, not by Baal but by the Lord. Thus in the Bible, Leviathan became a symbol of God's apocalyptic enemies whom He will confront at the end, just as He did Satan in the book of Job, before His people will settle down peacefully by their vineyards (27:1–5). The final defeat of the serpent is announced in the book of Revelation, and as a result humans will be finally liberated from suffering and death (Rev. 20:1–3, 7–10; 21:4).

There was a primeval enemy of God whom He confronted and defeated before the creation of humans. That power was not a god but one of God's creatures, now a demon (see "Evil and the Fallen Cherub," p. 1008). History is the arena where that evil power displays his hatred toward God and His people, in this case against Job; yet in history, he has been defeated again and again, and one day he will be finally destroyed by the Lord. God was telling Job that even though he did not understand how these evil powers operate, He, the Lord, knows and has power over them. Consequently, Job should acknowledge Yahweh as the wise, supreme Lord of the universe who will bring to an end the work of evil powers who are the true oppressors of the human race.

of Leviathan reached even beyond the Behemoth's. Leviathan was unconquerable by means of harpoons or fishing spears (v. 7); he was a creature not to be tampered with (vv. 5–8) or trusted in any agreement (v. 4). None who remembered their encounter with him ever attempted another (v. 8). Leviathan's awe provided the deity with His clearest statement on ascendancy. The unmistakable message of the rhetorical question found in v. 10, and of the entire second speech, is that in spite of the awesomeness of this beast, God is the greatest, the One who transcends the terrible might and power of Leviathan. Even in the midst of His intimidating description of Leviathan, it is appropriate for God to insist that He is Lord of all, a reassuring counter to the Leviathan picture (v. 11). With v. 18, the description veered away from anything natural by mentioning his smoke-breathing, coal-kindling, and flame-throwing mouth (vv. 19–21). By representing Behemoth as a grass-eating beast and Leviathan as a fire-spitting terror, God transferred Job from the natural realm in which he lived, suffered, and disputed with friends to the supernatural realm where the whole drama began and where alone the full answer to his crisis could be found.

There is nothing unnatural about Behemoth's description, but there is something indeterminate about it. And there is nothing natural about the fire-emitting Leviathan who, according to God, had no equal on earth (v. 33). Scripture shows that this supernatural Leviathan, unequaled on earth (v. 33), king of pride (v. 34), uncontrollable except by God Himself (vv. 10–11), was, like Behemoth, an object of God's creation (Ps. 104:26). Job put all this together. And Bible students may put it all together too. We may see Leviathan as an actual being created by God who now represents the embodiment of all that is evil: a real and insidious force, working in realms beyond the natural senses—a being exalted by pride and lord of all the proud but one who knows that God is Lord and cringes in His presence (cf. Job 9:13). He is a force so mighty as to have no equal and yet, for all his evil and power, is inferior to God—one whom God will at last destroy (Is. 27:1).

The evil power represented by Leviathan may not have been fully disclosed in God's revelation to Job, yet Job's responses make it clear that he understood. Through the images of strange animals, he looked into realities that exist beyond and behind what is apprehended by the physical senses. He came to better appreciate both the astonishing turmoil that rages in nature and the supernatural realm, as well as God's ultimate and unerring power and supremacy over the wildest forces contending in these realms. Without naming names, God shared with Job, in his suffering, something of the truth of the book's prologue. Many readers have claimed that Job received no answer from God. But Job's own testimony does not seem to agree with these frustrations. We may not see what he did, and now we may know more than he did. But Job, who so often clamored for an audience with his God, ended the dialogue in awe and gratitude at the encounter he was granted and at what he gained from that audience with the Almighty.

42:1–6

Dialogue between God and Man: Job's Surrender

The dialogue documented through twenty-eight chapters with Job's friends (chaps. 4–31), in Elihu's monologue (chaps. 32–37), and in God's confrontation (chaps. 38–41), concluded with a second abasement by Job (40:3–5). But it was an abasement of awe-filled gratitude, not one of shame. His first submission offered no comment of appreciation for his experience and Yahweh's intervention—only surrender. But now, something more that he had learned moved him to gratitude. Job had always known that God could do everything. But this acknowledgment was distinct from Job's spoken thoughts throughout the dialogue. This acknowledgment was a word of respect and deference rather than one of rage and desperation. At this point, Job could express belief that what God wishes to accomplish will be accomplished (v. 2). His friends had long insisted on this. On the surface Job's words could well be heard as capitulating to their side.

Only God's clarifications in the epilogue preserve us from such a misunderstanding (which also reminds us that no segment of the book of Job may be dismissed as superfluous). His plaguing doubts had given way to insight: he realized that he had uttered what he did not understand and attempted to dabble in things too wonderful for him that he did not know (v. 3). He knew better, now, how wonderful they are and how awesome his God is. Job expressed repentance and either (according to some translations) a retraction of (at least some of) his words about the things he could not understand or (according to others) an abhorrence or rejection of himself. Job's "therefore" at the outset of v. 6 should remove misunderstanding of his reason for self-abasement. He himself explained that it is because he now saw what he had not before seen, both conceptually ("wonderful" things), and physically, in the theophany. God had revealed Himself to him. Job was humbled. His was the reaction of godly persons throughout the ages in the presence of Almighty God: Moses hid his face (Ex. 3:6), Isaiah cried "woe is/to me" (Is. 6:5), and Daniel turned to a deathly pallor (Dan. 10:8). Theophanies are not shaming. They are honor. And Job was not shamed. He was overwhelmed.

42:7–17

EPILOGUE: FINAL RESOLUTION

The poetic dialogues have ended, and the narrative with which the book opened is now continued in order to bring about a resolution of the plot. God was upset at Job's friends (42:7–8), and Job interceded for them (v. 9). All that remained was the restoration of Job (vv. 10–17).

42:7–9

God and Graceless Theology

The epilogue confirms, should there be any need, that God was still pleased with Job. God's rage at Job's friends comes next.

42:7–8. God's Rebuke of Job's Friends. The brief dialogue between God and Eliphaz featured an expression of divine fury scarcely equaled anywhere else in the book. God's words represent a category distinction between God's revelation to Job and His new engagement with Job's friends. The first was both chiding and sympathetic, while this, the second, was hostile.

That God addressed Eliphaz shows that he was considered the leader of the group (v. 7). God's very first word to Eliphaz was that He was furious at him and his friends. He twice stated the nature of the offense: His character had been misrepresented, distorted in fact, as callous and arbitrary. The argument for His transcendence and omnipotence had been used to justify Satan's brutality as unassailable divine integrity; God gave three successive imperatives to Eliphaz and company (take, go, sacrifice), in order for them to escape the full force of His vengeance (v. 8). Four times in the span of two verses God called Job His servant. His language exposes, in God's mind, a yawning gap of separation between Job and his friends. It was only Job's intercession that would save them this time (v. 8). On a subsequent occasion God underlined both the value and limits of intercession. He advised Ezekiel that in his time and place it would not be enough to rescue doomed Jerusalem (Ezek. 14:13–20). God gave Eliphaz an ominous threat. Apart from Job's intercession, God was inclined to deal with the friends according to their folly. When humans, in God's name, justify satanic cruelty as integrity and justice, then God is highly incensed. It is folly.

42:9. Job and Grace: Intercession. God could trust Job just as surely at the end of this long and contorted drama as He did at the beginning. God trusted him to pray for those who had maligned him, and He honored that intercession on their behalf. It may have taken a divine order to have them humble themselves before a man whom they had so insulted and against whom they had fabricated lies in order to win their theological argument. But faced with the options of Job's intercession and God's wrath, they chose to obediently receive Job's prayers on their behalf. The Hebrew idiom for God's acceptance at the end of v. 9 is "the Lord lifted up Job's face," meaning that He treated him with respect. In this instance, treating Job with respect meant heeding his plea to pardon his friends. Job's prayer on behalf of his friends was a function of his grace-filled spirit. He would not have been able to ask God's mercy

on them if he himself were not prepared to be merciful. Jesus promised that those who are merciful will receive mercy (Matt. 5:7). Job's prayers for, and deliverance of, his friends are metaphors that recall another intercession, that of the only perfectly righteous One, through whose intervention we too are preserved from the penalty of divine wrath that we deserve (Rom. 5:9; 1 Thess. 1:10).

42:10–17. Job's Material Vindication. Job's physical and material restoration were no more contrived than was his loyalty to God. He had not remained faithful or prayed for his friends in exchange for any promises. The adversary's opening claim that Job served God in exchange for wealth was as unfounded as his cruelty to Job, his children, his servants, and his animals was unwarranted. And when he had been banished from the scene of action and torment, God was free to deal with His child, His servant, as God's own nature willed. It is His nature to care and to give—He opens His hand and satisfies His creatures' desires (Pss. 104:28; 145:16). And it is His will to honor faithfulness (Rev. 2:10). Job had been faithful to his God.

The idiom of restoration in 42:10 says that God "turned Job's captivity" and belongs to the language of liberation and restoration after exile (Pss. 14:7; 53:6). Job's restoration brought him back from a long and horrible exile. He has been exiled from family and society, and, to some extent, from constant communion with his God. In his season of distress Job listed his family, friends, and acquaintances as those who had abandoned him (19:13). His restoration was as complete as his abandonment had been (42:11).

Eating together—the idiom is "they ate bread with him"—is one of the strongest signs of full acceptance, trust, and mutuality (v. 11). His putrid sores were a thing of the past, as was the fear that he was cursed of God. There is significance in the Hebrew term used to describe the piece of silver that each of Job's children presented to him. The term *qesitah* is only used during the patriarchal period. This provides some internal evidence in favor of the antiquity not just of the story but of the writing of the book of Job. The unusual inclusion of the names of Job's three daughters (distinct from the anonymous sons) and the specific reference to their inclusion in his will (vv. 13–15) highlights Job's recognition of human equality before God. Male or female, servant or master, we recognize that before Him we have nothing to commend ourselves—except for His grace (cf. vv. 2–6).

Job died at an old age (v. 17). Job's vindication was as complete as his restoration had been, contradicting the predictions of Bildad, the most insistent of his accusing friends. His memory was celebrated in the earth (contra 18:17), and he died surrounded by his children and posterity (contra 18:19).

In a world as chaotic as Job's personal life turned out to be, Job's end rebukes a host of judgments that establish guilt by circumstance and majority vote. The story of his singular faithfulness is a standing complement to the divine grace which alone makes our faithfulness acceptable to God and our trust in His goodness possible. The ending is a mixture of the good and the bad. Good in that Job had a long life but bad in that it says that Job died (42:17). The true ending is found in the hope of Job that reached beyond the grave to a resurrection that would make seeing the Redeemer possible (19:25–27). That is where Job's hope and the Christian hope merge.

PSALMS

INTRODUCTION

Title and Authorship. The Hebrew title of this collection of hymns and prayers is *tehillim* ("praises"), which is also the central theological theme in the book. The phrase "praise the LORD" (Heb. *halelu-yah*) occurs twenty-three times, especially toward the end of the psalms and particularly in Psalms 146–150. The title "Psalms" is derived from the Greek *psalmoi*, which is used in the Septuagint (LXX) to translate the Hebrew word *mizmor* ("psalm"; see Pss. 3:1; 4:1; 5:1).

Seventy-three psalms are attributed to David using the Hebrew phrase *ledawid* ("to/for/of David"). This Hebrew phrase denotes authorship (e.g., Hab. 3:1). Other composers of psalms are the sons of Korah (Pss. 42–49; 84–85; 87–88), Asaph (Pss. 50; 73–83), Solomon (Pss. 72; 127), Heman the Ezrahite (Ps. 88), Ethan the Ezrahite (Ps. 89), and Moses (Ps. 90). Fourteen psalms mention historical circumstances associated with the person who wrote them (e.g., Ps. 57:1). There are thirty-four psalms that lack any form of superscription. These orphan psalms are mainly found in the latter part of the psalms, beginning with Psalm 91. While critical scholarship dismisses these psalm titles as late editorial additions, biblical evidence from outside the psalms in both the OT (2 Sam. 1:17–27; 3:33–34; 1 Chr. 16:7–36) and NT (Mark 12:35–37; Acts 2:24–36; 4:25; 13:35; Rom. 4:6–8) points toward their credibility.

Date. The dating of the psalms has been the object of much debate, but comparisons with extrabiblical material as well as linguistic features used in the psalms show that the majority of them were originally composed during the Israelite monarchy (e.g., 2 Sam. 22 and Ps. 18 are almost identical) and some even before this period (e.g., Pss. 19; 29; and possibly 90). Furthermore, references to personal names and historical circumstances mentioned in the titles help us to date the respective psalms. Thus, the psalms were written over a period that spans the history of Israel, and conceivably scribes like Ezra after the exile produced the final compilation and editing of the psalms (see "Formation of the Biblical Canon," p. 21).

Backgrounds. In the case of the Psalms, we have to assume a multiplicity of historical backgrounds reflecting the history of ancient Israel between the Exodus and Exile. The majority of the psalms are associated with the time of King David and the early monarchy (tenth century B.C.), but the body of hymns and prayers continued to grow during the divided monarchy (ninth to seventh centuries B.C.), the Exile (sixth century B.C.), and the postexilic period (fifth century B.C.). Annotations in the book itself suggest a variety of communal settings with a gradual growth of the collection and a purposeful grouping of the psalms.

Traditionally the psalms have been divided into five books, echoing the fivefold division of the Pentateuch (Pss. 1–41; 42–72; 73–89; 90–106; 107–150), each section concluding with a doxology (e.g., Ps. 41:13). These divisions were already present in the ancient Greek translations, but a closer look at the different books points toward a gradual growth of the Psalms based on earlier smaller collections (e.g., the collection of the prayers of David [Ps. 72:20], the pilgrim psalms [Pss. 120–134], the Asaph psalms [Pss. 73–83]). In the final editing, some of the psalms belonging to earlier collections were moved to other sections (e.g., the eighteen Davidic psalms that are found outside Book 1 and 2 [cf. Pss. 86; 89; 101; 103; 108–110; 122; 124; 131; 133; 138–145]). The compositional connections between psalms (e.g., between 42 and 43; between 18 and 144) demonstrate that there was an intentional theological structuring in the final compilation of the Psalms reflecting the history of Israel: from the Davidic monarchy as a period

of harmony with God and His law (Books 1 and 2), to the failure of the monarchy as a result of disobedience, followed by the Exile (Book 3), to the restoration of Israel under a divine King after the Exile (Books 4 and 5). This suggests that the ordering of the psalms followed a rough chronological framework with some exceptions to that pattern (e.g., Pss. 90; 105; 106).

Theology and Purpose. The book of Psalms has been the prayer book of Jews and Christians alike, providing meaningful theological insights into the OT view of God from an individual and communal perspective. It contains an OT theology in a nutshell.

1. Diversity of Themes. The theology of the Psalms is not systematically or explicitly developed but emerges from the spirituality, piety, doubts, and protests of the psalmists. Through these prayers, written in poetic language, the psalms express a theological cross section of the theocentric content of the Israelite faith from the perspective of God's covenant with Israel. Some of the overarching theological themes are the conflicting experience of God's presence and absence (e.g., Pss. 13–14; 16; 88; 95); God as Creator (e.g., Pss. 8; 19; 29; 65; 104; 139), God as Judge (e.g., Pss. 7; 51; 75) and Lord of life over death (e.g., Pss. 30; 49); God as Protector of the poor (e.g., Pss. 12; 72; 82) and Healer of the sick (e.g., Pss. 6; 41); and His sovereignty in history and His kingship over the earth (e.g., Pss. 5; 47; 105; 136). The sheer number of references to the book of Psalms found in the NT (ca. A.D. 150) demonstrates its importance in the formulation of NT theology.

2. Praising the Lord. Praise lies at the center of the book of Psalms and unlocks its theology. God is presented as the absolute and exclusive object of praises (e.g., Pss. 145–150). The worshipers came before Him to praise His name with thanksgivings for all the blessings they had received from Him. Others came with their troubles, their sickness, their doubts and fears, and their complaints concerning their oppression at the hands of their enemies. These they presented to God. But even these individuals finally thanked and praised the Lord in anticipation of the acts of salvation that He was about to perform on their behalf in answer to their prayers. Meanwhile they could feel abandoned by God in the darkness of loneliness and fear and totally unable to free themselves from such desperate condition. Yet, they always found in God a safe refuge, and this led them to praise Him in the context of hopeful expectation. At times the individual or the community offered to the Lord a prayer for the forgiveness of their sins. In such cases they praised the Lord for His mercy and for His constant willingness to forgive their sins.

Praising the Lord brought the Israelites close to their very Source of life, the only One who could preserve and renew life and who could deliver them from the constant threat of death. The connection between praise and life is unambiguously stated in the psalms. At the close of the book we hear the voice of the psalmist saying, "Let everything that has breath praise the LORD" (150:6). Human existence expresses itself in a magnificent way through words and actions that praise the Lord. To praise Him is not simply a verbal expression—even though words are spoken only by those who are alive. We praise the Lord through actions, attitudes, and every aspect of our deportment. For the psalmists, everything we think, speak, and do should result in praises to the Lord for His goodness and mercies toward us. Only those who are dead are unable to praise the Lord.

Besides the personal and collective expressions of praises in the book of Psalms, there is a cosmic dimension. Again and again we hear the psalmists calling the cosmos to praise the Lord. In fact, the final overcoming of evil, the psalmists seem to suggest, will take place when the totality of creation with one voice will sing a song of praises to the Lord. God's intelligent creatures on this planet will set aside their selfishness and pride, and everyone—kings, princes, judges, men and women, and old and young—will find in the Lord the center of his or her existence (Ps. 148:11–12). The psalmists anticipate a glorious future when everyone in heaven and on earth will praise God for His mercy, justice, and love. Singing praise to God leads to eschatological expectation—God's people coming together to praise Him is a foreshadowing of the moment when the whole cosmos, including His children, will praise the Lord.

3. God Is Our Hope. God is portrayed in Psalms as not only the Source of hope but Hope itself. Humans may hope to be victorious in battle because of the strength of their horses, but horses are a false hope for victory (33:17). No one should place his or her hope in humans, because they are liars (116:11). There are some who want to be wealthy and who hope that through extortion and robbery their goals will be achieved. Such a hope, says the psalmists, is a vain hope (62:10). Instead of seeking hope at the horizontal level, the psalmists looked up and found hope in God. When oppressed by the enemy or threatened by death, they hoped only in God. The psalmists can affirm that their hope is in God (39:7). This is hope based on trust in the Lord (71:5; cf. Rom. 15:13).

In the Psalms the world is a place where humans face the forces of evil and chaos that seek to oppress humans through the attacks of enemies, sickness, suffering, sin, and the threat of death. The solution is deliverance, freedom, and redemption that can come only from God. Consequently, God's people place their hope in Him. This is not blind hope but rather a hope grounded in a deep and personal knowledge of the Lord, who in the past did wonderful deeds for His people and for those who waited on Him (40:1). The people trust such a wonderful God and know that He will be able to deliver His people from any situation that could diminish the quality of their personal or collective life. His promises of future deliverance are reliable. In the midst of anguish and suffering the psalmists were able to affirm that God was their refuge, shield, and hope through His word (119:114). Such a hope impacts the present life: those who have the God of Jacob as their hope and help will be blessed (146:5).

God has universal dominion over chaos and death and can therefore offer hope to every human being (65:5). One of the very peculiar ways in which this hope is to be actualized, according to the psalmists, is through praises to the Lord. As indicated above, hope is connected with praising the Lord and, as such, it looks forward to a time when humans will join the cosmic heavenly choir in praising God as Creator and Redeemer. This will be the ultimate deliverance from sin, death, and all forms of oppression perpetrated by God's enemies. The hope offered to us is one of perfect harmony between heaven and earth (Ps. 148; see commentary on Ps. 150:3–6). The psalmists eagerly waited for the full realization of this hope and encouraged Israel to also hope in the Lord—now and forever (131:3).

4. *The Coming Messiah.* The theology of the Psalms can be summarized as Israel's response to God's presence in their individual lives and His intervention in the history of the nation. Biblical history points first and foremost to salvation history, and the messianic psalms (Pss. 2; 18; 22; 40–41; 45; 68; 72; 89; 110; 118), as well as the role of these psalms in the NT (e.g., the usage of Pss. 2; 45; and 110 in Hebrews), illustrate this prophetic and typological dimension of the Psalms. In these psalms the experiences of David are often described in language that goes beyond what a human king could ever achieve. Accordingly, there was an expectation of the coming of an eschatological Messiah through whom all divine promises would be fulfilled. David was therefore a type of this Messiah. The anticipated hope of the psalmists was to become a reality through the work of the Messiah. The Lord would give to Him the nations as His inheritance and the ends of the earth as His possession (2:8).

5. *Temple Theology.* The temple plays a central role in the theology of the Psalms as the dwelling place of God (e.g., 26:8; 43:3; 46:4). All prayers mentioned in the psalms were addressed to God in His temple and it was from there that He answered them (3:4; 28:2). The temple was the center of life because the God who dwelled there is "the fountain of life" (36:8–9; 52:8). He dwelled there as King of the earth (99:1–2; 103:19) and the kings of the earth would bring gifts to Him as tokens of submission. It was from this center of power that God sent the help and support needed to strengthen those who suffered in the midst of their affliction (20:2). The temple was the place from which the Lord defended the weak (68:5) and delivered His people from all kinds of oppression and affliction (18:6; 102:19–20).

From His dwelling place God blessed His people and declared them righteous by forgiving their sins (24:5; 32:1–3, 5, 11; 51:1, 11; 118:26). This was possible through the sacrificial system. When God accepted the sacrificial offering, He was in that act accepting the repentance of the sinner (20:3; cf. Lev. 1:4; 7:18). The Israelites and the priests had plenty of reasons to praise the Lord in His temple (135:2; 138:2). It was also in the temple that the psalmists were able to understand the fate of the wicked (73:17), probably in the sense that their lack of repentance would not make it possible for them to obtain forgiveness through a sacrificial victim. In that case their fate was represented by the fate of the sacrifice.

The book of Psalms also speaks about the heavenly temple. It is the cosmic dwelling of God, where the angelic host worship and serve Him (148:1–2; 150:1), and the ultimate source of help for God's people (20:2, 6; cf. Heb. 4:14–16). It is in that heavenly temple that Christ is now ministering for us through a work of mediation and judgment (Heb. 8:1–3; 9:23). Like the earthly sanctuary, the heavenly sanctuary is a place of judgment (76:8–9; 82:1–8). The judgment includes an investigation of the evidence (11:4–5) and the execution of the legal verdict (11:6–7; 102:19–20). The righteous will be involved in the judgment of the wicked (149:9; 1

Cor. 6:2; Rev. 20:4). It is the heavenly temple as the center of cosmic worship and judgment that brings together praises and eschatology. It is from there that the whole cosmos is called to praise God in order to restore harmony to it. The condemnation of the wicked and the salvation of the righteous will restore harmony to the universe when both groups will praise God, recognizing Him as a God of justice and love who granted to each one what they have chosen for their lives (see comments on Ps. 150).

Literary Features. The musical annotations found throughout the psalms suggest that they were mostly sung as hymns in the context of temple worship. Besides the superscriptions that refer to the use of specific instruments (e.g., "stringed instruments"; 4:1), tunes (e.g., "set to 'Lily of the Testimony'"; 60:1), or performers (e.g., "to the Chief Musician"; 88:1) for singing the psalms, there are also annotations in the texts that indicate their liturgical usage. *Selah* is the most common Hebrew annotation in the psalms (seventy-one times) but also the most enigmatic one. It seems to be a command and has been interpreted as a pausal sign (translated as such in the LXX), perhaps for a musical interlude or to read Scripture, as a sign to indicate that worshipers should lift up their voices at this specific point, or as a signal to the congregation to prostrate in prayer. There are also other worship-oriented terms woven into the content of the psalms such as "bow"/"worship" (5:7), "confess"/"proclaim" (30:9), "kneel" (95:6), and "come near" (95:2). Interestingly, *selah* occurs 67 times equally distributed in the first three books of the Psalms and four times in last two books (140:3, 5, 8; 143:6) which belong to the fifth group of Davidic psalms. This indicates that the annotation *selah* was particularly associated with the psalms of King David.

Metaphors of God in the Psalms

The theocentric focus of the book of Psalms provides the reader with important insights into the character of God. This is often accomplished poetically through imagery and metaphorical language. A metaphor helps us to understand an unknown reality (God) by means of a more familiar reality (e.g., a shepherd). Interestingly, our theological thinking (our thinking about God) is largely informed by these metaphors. Metaphors of God are common in the Psalms and describe Him as King, Judge, Shepherd, Host, and Father. At the same time we also learn how human kings, judges, shepherds, hosts, and fathers should be more like the heavenly One. Some metaphors come from the natural realm or refer to innate objects: God as Rock, Fortress, Shield, and Refuge. There are metaphors that make us pause and look again: God as a Warrior who is fighting on behalf of His people. These metaphors are an integral part of the authors' attempt to communicate their messages.

The question of classification of the psalms has overshadowed the study of the psalms for the last hundred and twenty years. It has been suggested that the historical setting for almost the entirety of the psalms is connected to cultic events in the worship service from the time of the Babylonian Exile. This has resulted in a rigid classification of the psalms according to a limited number of types (usually five main categories are listed), trying to fit each psalm into one of these categories. Thus historical names and events mentioned and alluded to in the psalms were ignored and the postexilic cultic setting became the determining factor for the message of the psalm. While it is important to try to organize a body of one hundred and fifty hymns into categories, it is more important to look at and listen to the texts themselves and not superimpose a system that is built on questionable premises. It is better to look for indicators in the text that point to a type and its function, which in turn can provide a basis for classification. Such pointers can be found in expressions like *tepillah* ("prayer"; 17:1), *tehillah* ("praise"; 145:1), or *shiggayon* ("lamentation"; 7:1).

COMMENTARY

PSALMS 1—41

BOOK I

Psalms 1–41 constitute Book 1 of the traditional division of the Hebrew Psalms. They focus on the assurance of God's protection and deliverance for the psalmist, mostly identified as King David. Book 1 begins with a psalm that extols God's law as the path of the righteous. This theme is reiterated in the center of Book 1. In fact, we can perceive a concentric structure from Psalm 15 to Psalm 24 accentuating the *torah* in Psalm 19.

Psalm 41, at the end of Book 1, outlines the responsibilities of the king to protect his people. This theme is also reiterated at the end of Book 2, which concludes the collection of the Psalms of David (72:20). There is a personal tone throughout Book 1 expressed through the usage of first-person speech vividly conveying the struggles and complaints of the psalmist turning to God for answers.

1:1–6
Torah as the Way of Life

While Psalm 1 is not a typical prayer or song of praise, the poem introduces the Psalms with a reference to the importance of the law. *Torah* ("law") should not be understood as an antithesis to grace, which is a misconception without foundation in the Scriptures. *Torah* is the story of God's actions in the human sphere communicated through history and instruction. Thus the beginning of the Psalms points back to the beginning of the OT, the instruction of Moses, and its fivefold division echoes that of the Pentateuch.

Without any type of superscription, we have no indication as to the authorship or date of this psalm. Nevertheless, its literary and thematic connections with the wisdom literature (e.g., Prov. 3:13; 8:32; 20:7) suggest a possible early (Solomonic?) date for the poem. The lack of superscription provides the psalm with a generic tone that fits its universal, introductory character to the Psalms.

1:1–3. Blessings for the Righteous. The first psalm begins with a description of the way of the righteous person set in stark contrast to the way of the many *resha'im* ("wicked" or "ungodly"), *khatta'im* ("sinners"), and *letsim* ("mockers" or "scornful") people (v. 1). The beatitude in the first word, *'asher* ("blessed" or "happy"), is juxtaposed with the destruction of the wicked expressed in the last word of the psalm, *to'bed* ("to be destroyed" or "to perish"). These words begin with the first and last letter of the Hebrew alphabet respectively. The contrast is heightened by a threefold description of the life opposed to God's law and that moves increasingly away from the divine path: first walking, then standing, and finally sitting. This suggests a progressive engagement and identification with sin that intensifies in a threefold way.

The positive alternative to this lifestyle is described in v. 2 by two parallel expressions centered on the word *torah* ("instruction"). Instruction and delight do not often go together, at least not in modern thought, but in the biblical worldview God's instruction is as delightful as the relationship between man and woman, often described using the same Hebrew term employed here (e.g., Ruth 3:13; Esth. 2:14; Song 8:4). The parallel action in this verse refers to an ongoing "meditation" on God's instruction. The verb *hagah* ("to meditate," "to mutter") designates a continuous audible "uttering" of God's word. Such continuous immersion in the word leads to a life that can be adequately described only through imagery.

Tree and plant metaphors, as powerful images, connect the listeners and readers of the psalm to the physical world. The tree imagery at the beginning of the psalms creates another strong link to the beginning of the book of Genesis: the tree of life found next to the rivers that water the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:9–10). In a predominantly dry climate, a tree is to be planted in a promising location—that is, close to a water source—in order to thrive and be fruitful (see Jer. 17:5–8). A threefold description of the positive results counters the threefold description of the wicked in v. 1: it produces fruit, not continuously but according to its season (possibly indicating the ups and downs of a godly life), its leaves remain green, and finally, it flourishes. The last sentence appears to be intentionally ambiguous by referring to either the tree or, most probably, the righteous.

1:4–5. What the Wicked are Like. The corresponding description of the wicked is introduced by this very abrupt statement, which creates a counter reality to the preceding abundant tree imagery. The simile of the wind-blown chaff underlines the lifeless futility of the ungodly using a well-known image that is connected to judgment terminology (e.g., Job 21:18; Is. 17:13; Zeph. 2:2). Their way is doomed to total failure, from both the legal perspective and religious perspective (Ps. 1:5).

1:6. For the Lord Knows. This final sentence underscores that the eventual separation of the two paths is dependent on God's judgment based on His knowledge of the way of the righteous. This is an ongoing knowledge expressed by the Hebrew participle of the verb *yada'* and designates much more than a mental awareness. It refers to a living, intimate relationship sustained by love—a saving knowledge that leads to abundant life and prosperity. Accordingly, some translations render this verb here as "watch over." In contrast, the wicked perish (cf. Luke 13:27) for lack of that type of knowledge. Both destinies are connected to their respective ways, which represent one's movement toward or away from God. Psalm 1 introduces so much of what is later developed in the Psalms by reducing it to an "either/or" answer centered on the relational knowledge of God and His instruction.

2:1–12
The Crowning of Yahweh's Anointed One

Psalms 1 and 2 are like two portals opening the gate into the world of the Psalms. There are a number of connections linking the two psalms. For example, whereas Psalm 1 ends with the vision of the wicked perishing (1:6), Psalm 2 ends with a vision of warning to a nation of destruction, expanding the image of the "way" from the individual to the community. This is followed by a final beatitude (2:12), connecting it to the initial beatitude in Psalm 1, thus concluding the introduction to the Psalms.

Like Psalm 1, this psalm also lacks a superscription, which further underlines its generic and introductory character. The psalm's mention of the coronation of the king on Mount Zion, surrounded by raging nations, creates an environment that is compatible with the historical situation during the early united monarchy. Yahweh's kingship becomes the ideal paradigm for earthly kingship and would find its utmost expression in the coronation of the Messiah as King.

2:1–3. The Foolishness of the Nations. The psalm is divided into four equal stanzas, beginning with a description of the wicked nations' plotting, which connects antithetically to the description of the righteous in Psalm 1. While the righteous meditates (Heb. *hagah*) on God's law (Ps. 1:2), the ungodly nations meditate (Heb. *hagah*) on emptiness (2:2), and their plots are in vain and useless (v. 1). As in Psalm 1, there is again a progression of evilness expressed by the four verbs found in vv. 1–2 and directed against the Lord and His Anointed. The psalmist refers to a rebellion instigated by the kings of the earth (v. 2), indicating a global insurgence against the authority of God and against the authority of His Anointed. The incredulous and rhetorical "why?" at the beginning of v. 1 points to the utter foolishness and futility of this endeavor. Verse 3 spells out the nature of the rebellion, saying that the nations are trying to break free from Israel's control. Literally, the text refers to God's fetters and ropes, which may be a reference to His guiding instructions for Israel. Though these were loving commands (Hos. 11:4), the nations viewed them as restrictive and oppressive. They were, in effect, fighting against God's law (cf. Hos. 11:4).

2:4–6. God Laughs from Heaven. The next stanza underlines the foolishness of the nations' attempt to throw off God's rule. While the dominion of kings is limited to the earth, in contrast, God's dominion extends from the heavens, where He sits enthroned as the heavenly King. From that perspective He is dismayed at their self-destructive efforts in a way that conjured up, in the mind of the psalmist, laughter.

However, the psalmist describes God's amusement turning into a blazing fury (v. 5): two Hebrew words used to describe God's anger here—*'ap* and *kharon*—are often found together (cf. Ps. 69:24; 78:49) and indicate the impending action that results from God's anger. Whereas the first stanza ends with the speech of the nations, the second concludes with a divine speech contrasting His action to that of the earthly kings (v. 6), saying God has set up the king Himself, through dependence on His election and not on human intrigues.

2:7–9. The Reign of Messiah. The psalm continues with the king declaring the legitimation of his reign—that is, he will reign by divine decree—echoing the language of the Davidic covenant (2 Sam. 7:14). "Yahweh's decree" (as translated in the LXX) is a covenant of adoption (v. 7). This

Anthropomorphic Descriptions of God in the Psalms

The Psalms often describe God in anthropomorphic (human) terms, assigning to Him the full range of human emotions, both positive ("laughter") and negative ("anger"). One needs to be careful not to ascribe to God the same connotations that these emotions have in the human realm. The anger of God is different from human anger. Similarly, the term "repentance," as anthropomorphically assigned to God, is "not like man's repentance. 'The Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent: for He is not a man that He should repent.' Man's repentance implies a change of mind. God's repentance implies a change of circumstances and relations" (PP 630).

is foremost the metaphor of God as a Father and appears in various places throughout the psalms (68:5; 89:26–27). The coronation of the king has coincided with his adoption into the royal covenant. The verse introduces the strong messianic overtones of Psalm 2, which are echoed almost verbatim in Hebrews 1:5. The coronation of the Christ (Messiah) was to be the ultimate fulfillment of the Davidic covenant.

Verse 8 spells out the promises of kingship establishing the dominion of the king to the ends of the earth, which had formerly been part of the dominion of the kings of the earth (2:2). The means by which the king would establish his rule are mentioned in v. 9. The rod of iron is applied in a messianic way in Revelation 2:27 and 12:5, indicating the absolute and permanent nature of the messianic kingship.

2:10–12. Kiss the Son. The last stanza of the psalm serves as an admonition and, in this sense, as an extension of grace to the nations not recognizing the Davidic kingship. It is prudent to serve the Lord with fear, which connotes worship (cf. Ps. 134:1). The call to rejoice and celebrate with trembling is paradoxical but points to the ingredients of true worship (cf. 95:1–2).

The peculiar usage of the Aramaic *bar* for "son" (v. 12) has motivated a number of suggested changes to the text (e.g., "Do homage in purity," JPS). Taking into consideration the international context and audience in this coronation psalm, it is an appropriate term here. The phrase designates an act of homage to the victorious king by his submissive vassals.

The psalm concludes with a beatitude (see 1:1) describing those who *khasah* ("take refuge" or "trust") in Him. It is an invitation to the hostile kings to find refuge in Yahweh by submitting to His Anointed One. The first two introductory psalms contain a personal and a communal invitation to follow God's instruction, and strongly focus on the typology of the Messiah.

3:1–8

Deliverance in Adversity

Psalm 3 begins with a historic annotation that connects this poem to the moment when David and his royal court fled from Absalom, his son, rendering the nation ungovernable for some time (2 Sam. 15:12–17). The content of the psalm coincides with the experience of David when his relationship with his son crumbled. Yet the psalm repeatedly returns to the motif of salvation.

3:1–2. Adversity and Many Adversaries. The repeated word "many" in these introductory verses of lament expresses the increasing adversity faced by David as he was avoiding the military conflict with his son. There are a number of verbal links at the beginning and the end of this psalm: there are many who rise up (3:1; Heb. *qum*) taunting that there is no *yeshu'ah* ("salvation," "help," "deliverance") for David (3:2), but it is the Lord who ultimately is called upon to "arise" (3:7; Heb. *qum*) and to bring salvation and deliverance (3:8; Heb. *yeshu'ah*).

3:3–6. But God Is My Shield. The contrastive "but" (v. 3) introduces the metaphor of God as a shield that is found throughout the psalms (3:3; 5:12; 7:10; 18:2; 18:30; 59:11). It is part of an imagery that describes God as a Warrior and expresses David's trust in God in a situation where he could not shield himself. God's glory serves as a second line of protection often understood as a physical phenomenon indicating His presence and saving protection (e.g., Ex. 24:15–17; 1 Kin. 8:10–11). Finally, David speaks of God as Lifter of his head, a metaphor pointing to the future restoration and vindication of the king.

Verses 4–6 each begin with a first-person statement indicating David's trusting response in prayer for Yahweh's protection and enumerate the occasions when God sustained him during difficult times: God answered him from "His holy mountain/hill" even if David himself was no longer physically present in Jerusalem (v. 4). David also mentions that the Lord sustained him when sleeping and awakening. This is language which could connect this psalm with a morning prayer. This leads to a declaration of faith that extinguishes all fear even when surrounded by many thousands of hostile people (v. 6).

3:7–8. Petition for Deliverance. There are two imperatives in this section that connect the petition to the initial lament (vv. 1–2): "arise" and "save/deliver." This is an expression of deep faith in God in circumstances with no salvation in sight. The Hebrew perfect verb tenses used for God's striking David's enemies and breaking their teeth in v. 7 have been variously rendered: some take them as past ("you have struck," "you have broken"), others take it as another imperative ("strike," "break"), and others view them as having a kind of gnomic (expressing a general truth) connotation ("you strike," "you break"). In any case, David speaks with certainty of his deliverance, and this is expressed well by any of these renderings of the Hebrew perfect. The image of the smiting on the cheekbone and the breaking of the teeth of the ungodly refers to the silencing of the enemy who spoke against the psalmist (v. 2). The enemy was not just a political adversary but was also evil on a moral level because he had attacked God's anointed one. The language used develops the Warrior language in a more active and defensive way.

The psalm concludes with a significant theological statement (v. 8). This is the third time that the key term *yeshu'ah* ("salvation"/"deliverance") is used in the psalm. It is a final statement of trust that extends the blessing from the individual to the community. The concluding beatitude, in which David solicits/declares God's blessing upon His people, is a recognition that salvation is not only for the dethroned king, but also for all of God's people.

4:1–8

A Night Prayer

There are various literary connections between Psalms 3 and 4 (e.g., call/cry, v. 1 // 3:4; lying down and sleeping, v. 8 // 3:5; many people, v. 2 // 3:6), which have led some to suggest that they represent morning and evening prayers, respectively, uttered by David when escaping from Jerusalem. The mention of Davidic authorship in the superscription would fit this historical scenario. The musical annotations may suggest that the psalm was subsequently used on different occasions.

4:1. Hear My Call. This short prayer of petition at the beginning of the psalm is an appeal for vindication. David speaks to Yahweh, the righteous God and source of his righteousness, seeking for justice from Him. In his distress (Heb. *tsar* lit. refers to a tight place), he is praying about relief. God listens *when* we call and not *after* we call (Is. 58:9), and David pleads in this psalm for His immediate response.

4:2–5. Addressing the Adversary. In this extended section of the psalm, David directly addresses his enemies, whom he identifies as *bene 'ish* ("sons of men" or "people"), possibly indicating their ephemeral existence. He confronts them with two rhetorical questions introduced by the phrase "How long?" The question in itself serves as a delimiter to evil, followed by seven imperatives that increasingly invite the ungodly to return to God. He exhorts them to leave false accusations and *riq* ("emptiness," "worthlessness," "delusions") behind (v. 2; cf. Ps. 2:1) and to recognize God's election of him. God had set apart the faithful, godly ones for Himself and would listen to the prayers of His chosen one (v. 3).

In vv. 4–5, David admonishes the enemy away from his wrong ways toward fearful contemplation and reflection, searching their hearts in the stillness of the night (see 1:1–3). This act of introspection could lead them to turn to God with acts of true worship and sacrifices of righteousness as a result of a new trust in the Lord. This trust is often expressed throughout the psalms as an assured reliance upon God and security in His promises (e.g., 32:10; 56:4; 125:1–2).

4:6–8. True Gladness in the Heart. The concluding verses of the psalm underline the richness of such a life of trust in God. Although many ask what benefit such a lifestyle has, the psalmist recounts the blessings of God in an allusion to the priestly blessings, asking for the light of God's face to shine on us (v. 6; cf. Num. 6:24–26).

This might be a polemic against idolatrous practices connected to fertility cults and their celebrations of harvest time, which was the climactic moment of joy during the year. David suggests that true joy can be found only in a relationship with Yahweh. Some translations have rendered the Hebrew *me'et* in v. 7 as "when" or "in the time" and thus describe David's joy *when* the "many" would have received grain and new wine. In this case, the text would be saying that trusting in God brings gladness to those who respond to the exhortations given in the psalm to repent and trust God. Others have understood the term to mean "more than," in which case the text would be referring to the idea that David's joy in God is more significant than the celebration time of grain and new wine, when some used the occasion to worship other gods hedonistically in fertility cults. In either case, David's point is that God is the ultimate source of joy, harvest, and new wine.

The final statement of faith which concludes the psalm (v. 8) begins with peace (Heb. *shalom*), which again echoes Aaron's blessing. Trust in the Lord leads David to sleep in peace in the midst of trouble, resulting in true joy that could not be impacted by wrong accusations and opposition. It is this joy that David wants his enemies to experience. This is indeed a wonderful way of making friends out of our enemies.

5:1–12
A Morning Prayer

If Psalm 3 is possibly a morning prayer, Psalm 5 is much more explicitly a morning prayer for deliverance from slanderous people. The psalm is organized around the contrast between the psalmist and the wicked and their respective access to God and His temple.

Aside from the superscription indicating Davidic authorship, there is no other historical annotation. The reference to "flutes" or "pipes" possibly refers to reed instruments and indicates the performance instructions for the music director associated with this psalm. It has been suggested that this was performed as an antiphonal reading at the temple gate, as it moves back and forth between the righteous and their access to the house of God versus the wicked who cannot enter into the temple.

5:1–3. Lord, in the Morning Hear My Cry. As the psalm opens, a threefold appeal for God's attention—David implores God to hear, consider, and listen (vv. 1–2)—underlines the seriousness of the psalmist's cry for help. This is a crescendo of despair, and it includes the psalmist's *hagig*, a word sometimes translated as "meditation" which here can be understood as a lament or an audible groan for help (cf. 2:1; 39:4). It is affirmed that God will hear this prayer (v. 3) as He hears all our prayers, particularly those expressed in loud shouts in moments of great pain. At the same time there is a confident expectation expressed in the verb *'arak*, which could be translated "direct," "set in order," or "lay out before" (reminiscent of the laying out of the morning sacrifice on the altar; e.g., Lev. 6:5; Num. 28:4). The introduction of sanctuary language indicates a close connection between our prayers and the sanctuary (cf. Rev. 8:4). The response to the psalmist's prayer would come only from God's presence in the sanctuary.

5:4–6. No Room for the Wicked in God's Temple. The next three verses describe the incompatibility between God and the wicked. They are unable to stand before Him (v. 5) or dwell or be welcomed into His presence (i.e., they do not have access to the temple; v. 4). Those who are liars and who are bloodthirsty and deceitful will perish (v. 6).

5:7–8. But I Will Come into Your House. This is an almost antiphonic response to the previous lines. In contrast to the wicked, the righteous have access to the temple because they are in harmony with God and rely on His abundant loving-kindness (v. 7). The term *bayit* ("house") was used as a designation for the temple or tabernacle (and some translations consistently render this Hebrew word by these terms, depending on the context) since the time of the Exodus (Josh. 6:24; 2 Sam. 12:20). From the sanctuary God's way is made straight before him and life is restored.

5:9–12. Judgment and Joy. The next counterpoint enlarges on the multiple reasons for the destruction of the wicked, listing the deeds of wickedness, which in their final analysis are acts of rebellion against God (v. 10). The last antiphonal declaration (vv. 11–12) returns to the audible expression of the psalmist. This time it is a crescendo of rejoicing as the righteous are to always shout and sing for joy. Yet, the cause for joy is not the destruction of the wicked but the fact of the righteous' trusting the Lord as their refuge and His defense of them (lit. God "covers" them with His protection like a bird covers its chicks under its wings; cf. Ps. 91:4).

The psalm concludes with another beatitude (v. 12) concerning God's blessing the righteous. Here once more God is presented as a protecting shield—not the small handheld shield of Psalm 3:3, but a large shield covering the whole person. There may be another connection with the sanctuary since the shield is a place of true refuge and protection for those who seek the Lord.

6:1–10
A Prayer for Healing

This is an intense prayer for healing from physical illness. In the Israelite worldview illness was often considered to be a rebuke from God, accompanied by the fear that enemies would take advantage of this moment of weakness. In this psalm, there is a penitential tone as the psalmist expresses the desire to be right with God during the physical affliction. The psalm is one of the seven penitential psalms that some Christian denominations read during the time of Lent (cf. 32; 38; 51; 102; 130; 143). It is a psalm of David and nothing in its content denies this. The *sheminit*, an eight-stringed harp (lit. "with eighth"), seems to be related to the psalm's performance.

6:1–7. Cry for Deliverance from Anguish and Pain. The psalm is divided into two main sections (vv. 1–7; 8–10). The first section expresses

the same sentiments in two consecutive subsections (vv. 1–3; 4–7). David appeals to God not to rebuke, chasten, or discipline him any longer (v. 1). Both imperatives are associated with God, indicating that David considers his illness to be God's fatherly discipline in reaction to a sin in his life (cf. Prov. 19:18). Nevertheless, he intensely requests God to be merciful to him (v. 2). This corresponds to David's reaction after his adultery with Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11–12) and after conducting the census in Israel (2 Sam. 24).

David is *'umlal* ("feeble," "weak," "languishing"). His bones are *bahal* ("troubled" or "shuddering"; lit. his whole body is "shaking" and "trembling"; vv. 2–3). This section climaxes with the question "How long?" The sentence is incomplete and expresses David's utter despair in his condition when writing this. The Lord is invoked five times in the first section of this psalm, emphasizing the psalmist's anxious search for God. When experiencing God's silence and apparent absence, we must continue to cry out to Him for an answer. The condition of the psalmist affects the whole person: David's "soul" is greatly disturbed. The Hebrew *nepesh*, translated "soul," usually refers in the OT to the whole person as a unity.

The psalm proceeds to repeat a plea for healing using different expressions (vv. 4–7). If God would not deliver, then death was to be expected (v. 5). Death is a state where the Lord is not remembered or proclaimed (cf. Eccl. 9:5), an unconscious state where communication between humans and God is ended.

The extremity of the psalmist's despair is expressed through a repeated hyperbole—his bed is flooded and swimming with tears, and his couch is drenched (v. 6). In that condition he is unable to see God's acts; he is experiencing only the ongoing attacks from his enemies. The focus has now shifted to the psalmist's adversaries who contribute to his pain (v. 7).

6:8–10. Vindication and Healing. In the midst of despair and the attack of adversaries, the psalmist twice declares that the Lord has heard him (vv. 8–9), and he expresses the assurance of His receiving and accepting his prayer. Faith breaks through the darkness of personal despair and affirms God's intervention. There is no report of immediate healing, but the psalmist anticipates the vindication of the faithful and proclaims that the enemies will be shamed and disturbed. Previously the psalmist was vexed, but now he writes of shame for those who anticipated his death (v. 10, cf. vv. 2–3). Their shaming is mentioned twice and follows the double hearing of God.

Psalm 6 is reminiscent of the story of Job, whose vindication from a wrong theology of retribution as the cause for his suffering also came at the end. However, the psalm clearly connects the psalmist's sickness with sin—a balanced understanding of human suffering. While suffering should not be too easily connected to sin, neither by the sufferer nor, much less, by the observer, part of the healing process could include a personal search for a sin that might have contributed to the current condition. However, in both possible scenarios there is the assurance that God hears our prayers and vindicates us before the enemy.

7:1–17
An Appeal for Innocence

The psalm is centered on the metaphor of God as Judge, a common metaphor in the psalms. In Psalms He is referred to as seated for judgment on His throne (9:4), as probing the heart (17:3), and as defending widows (68:5). The reference to Cush, a Benjamite, has no parallel in the historical books, but the psalm probably originated during the time when David was persecuted by Saul and his men. Verses 3–4 may be connected to the events recorded in 1 Samuel 24:11 or to the Cushite ("Ethiopian," "Sudanese") who reported Absalom's death (2 Sam. 18:20–32). The psalm is classified as a meditation (Heb. *shiggayon*, "lament"), a genre mentioned in the psalms themselves (cf. Hab. 3:1; see Psalms: Introduction).

7:1–9. Appeal for Deliverance and the Innocence of the Righteous. In the face of persecution, the psalmist affirms his trust in God and asks for deliverance from those trying to tear him apart like a lion would. This simile is intensified by the image of a lion ripping its prey apart in pieces. The following section legitimizes the psalmist's appeal for deliverance using the language of an oath formula. This is done by three consecutive conditional clauses (vv. 3–4; protasis) which are followed by a consequential clause (v. 5; apodosis), underlining the innocence of the psalmist. The penultimate conditional clause identifies the false charge that has been brought against the psalmist: he is accused of having dealt unjustly with somebody who was at peace with him (v. 4). He is so sure of his innocence that he invites the enemy to trample him to the ground (i.e., if found guilty, he should be put to death).

The psalmist appeals to the divine Judge to establish his innocence. The anthropomorphic appellations for God to "arise" (v. 6) are urging God to stand up and pronounce a favorable verdict. The Judge assembles witnesses from the assembled peoples around Him and then rules on high, where the judgment throne is located (v. 7). The next line is central to the judgment motif of the psalm: the Lord will judge the peoples, and David prays that God will judge him and vindicate him against the false accusations he has endured. God's judgment is both universal and individual, and the psalmist invokes both, indicating his righteousness as based on a legal principle and not on a personal, preferential treatment by Yahweh.

7:10–17. Confidence in the Righteousness of God. Appellations now turn to propositional descriptions of God's righteousness. God is a defense or "shield" for the upright (v. 10), but He is angry with the wicked every day, especially if they do not turn back and repent. God will not turn back from His anger against them. The psalmist portrays God's treatment of the wicked by employing the metaphor of God as a Warrior with sword, bow, and arrows to use against those who brought the false charges (vv. 12–13).

A proverbial statement describes what would happen to those who brought false and mischievous accusations against the righteous: they dig a pit and then fall into it (vv. 14–16; cf. 9:15; 57:6; Prov. 26:27). Verse 16 describes the situation in which the persecutor's trouble recoils and falls on their own heads. The psalm concludes with a testimony of God's righteousness, not the psalmist's. This is to be expected in the legal case described in the form of a psalm that ultimately seeks to praise the Lord. It is a testimony to the integrity of the legal process and that of the person who waits for God's vindication.

8:1–9

God's Glory in Creation

This is the first actual praise song of the Psalms, and its theme is creation, a topic frequently found throughout the psalms (e.g., 19; 29; 65; 104; 139). The psalm is bracketed by the use of the same refrain in vv. 1 and 9 about the excellence or majesty of God's name. It is attributed to David and is addressed to God using a second-person speech. The musical annotation *gittit* in the ascription may either refer to an instrument of Gath (cf. Pss. 81; 84) or a melody. It has also been interpreted as pointing to Obed-Edom the Gittite, a Levitical singer (1 Chr. 13:13–14; 16:4–5).

8:1–2. Exaltation and God's Glory. The psalmist directs his praise to God, recognizing His sovereignty, which is encapsulated in the phrase "How excellent" (*'addir*, "majestic," "mighty" or "splendid") is your name in all the earth. This links Psalm 8 to the last words of Psalm 7, expressing the psalmist's decision to sing praise to the "name of the Lord Most High" (7:17). The terms used here, "heaven(s)" and "earth," describe the magnitude of God's dominion. From this high and elevated chorus, the psalm descends to the weakest and defenseless of creation, referring to the infants and children to whom God has given strength to, with their praises, silence the enemy and the avenger. God uses the weak to confound the mighty.

8:3–9. God's Glory in Humankind. God's glory (i.e., His presence and magnificence) is visible in the dominion He has given to humans. After contemplating the majesty of God's creative power displayed in creation (v. 3), the psalmist asks in amazement, "What is *'enosh*?" (This term can be translated as "man," "mankind," or "human beings.") Why does this majestic God pay attention to humans? He pays close attention to them and is actively involved in their lives.

Verse 5 is the center of the psalm, pointing to the status of humans within creation: they have been made "a little lower than the angels" and crowned with "glory and honor." Yet, they could exercise the divinely assigned role of dominion only by acknowledging God's creative glory. Beyond its immediate implications for the understanding of humans, v. 5 is used in the NT to refer to the humanity of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15:27; Heb. 2:6–8), thus pointing to the messianic dimension of the psalm. The human dominion over creation (vv. 6–8) reminds us of the Creation story in Genesis 1. The dominion over all things is itemized and includes both domestic and wild animals. The psalm concludes as it began, refocusing on God. The greatness of the psalm lies in the connection between God's majesty and its bestowal on humanity, showcasing a God who is worthy of praise because, in His sovereignty, He works with the most frail in His creation.

9:1–20

Praise for Vindication

There is some evidence that Psalms 9 and 10 were originally one psalm that was divided into two. They together form an alphabetical psalm that is taken by the LXX to be one unit. Besides, Psalm 10 does not have a superscription, something unusual within Book 1. Finally, Psalm 9 ends with *selah* (see Psalms: Introduction). The division seems to be based on content. Whereas Psalm 9 is mostly thanksgiving, Psalm 10 is a prayer for protection against wickedness and violence. Besides claiming Davidic authorship, the superscription annotates that the psalm should be sung to the tune of "Death of the Son." This could be a specific musical tune or may point to a historic situation. Suggestions have included the death of Absalom or the unnamed child of Bathsheba.

9:1–12. Praising the Eternal Judge. The praise in Psalm 9 begins where Psalm 8 ended, praising God for His marvelous, wonderful works. The section is centered on the praise of God as the eternal Judge who has upheld David's just cause (v. 4) by completely destroying the wicked (v. 6). But He is, at the same time, a refuge in times of trouble (v. 10; cf. Ps. 10:1) to those who trust in Him (vv. 9–10). His judgment is in favor of the *dak* (the "oppressed" or "crushed"; v. 9). The section concludes with a renewed invitation to praise God (v. 11). Legal language is used in v. 12: God avenges blood (i.e., He holds the oppressor legally accountable for tyranny) and does not forget or ignore the cry of the *'anawim* ("the humble," "the poor," or "the afflicted"). The reason for praises is stated in concrete terms.

9:13–20. Prayer for Help. Praise is followed by prayer, which suggests that doxology could lead to petition. The prayer is personal, asking God to have mercy upon him (cf. 4:1), but it is based confidently on the experience described in the previous section. The "gates of death" (v. 13) are city gates that lead into a figurative city of death. In contrast, the gates of the daughter (of) Zion (v. 14) signify a city of abundance of life that leads to rejoicing in God's salvation. Verses 15–16 recount once more God's saving acts in the past in order to show the reliability of the promises of His future saving acts through judgment (vv. 17–18): the wicked shall be sent down or turned to *she'ol* (v. 17; preferred term for the grave), while the needy will not be forgotten by God (v. 18). The psalm concludes using imperatives to ask for God's immediate intervention. He asks God to rise up and terrify the wicked nations (vv. 19-20; cf. 3:1). By placing the fear of God into the nations, they will recognize their own mortality versus God's sovereignty.

10:1–18

Continued Prayer of the Helpless

Psalm 10 almost seamlessly continues after Psalm 9, although the tone is more intensified and personal and there are more petitions than praises. The lack of any superscription supports

Acrostic Psalms

An acrostic ("the tip of the verse") poem demonstrates a literary technique that emphasizes the first letter, syllable, or word of a line or verse to create a specific pattern. In an alphabetic acrostic each successive line or verse begins with the following letter of the Hebrew alphabet, which consists of twenty-two letters. In the Hebrew Psalms there are a number of acrostic psalms that use different acrostic styles: Psalms 9, 10, and 37 are *strophic* alphabetic acrostics, in which the first line of each strophe (four lines) begins with the successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet; in Psalms 25, 34, and 145 each *verse* begins with the next letter of the alphabet; Psalms 111 and 112 are *line* alphabetic acrostics, both consisting of twenty-two lines beginning with the sequential letters of the alphabet.

The largest and most complex acrostic poem is Psalm 119, which consists of twenty-two *strophes* with each strophe having eight lines and each line beginning with the corresponding letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Interestingly, Psalm 1, the first *torah* psalm, begins with the letter *aleph*, and its last word begins with the final letter of the Hebrew alphabet, *taw*, alluding to the great *torah* Psalm 119, possibly to indicate that it is a short version of 119. The acrostic technique makes it easier to memorize the poems and shows the high level of literary artistry that accompanied their composition from the earliest times of the kingdom of Israel, suggesting that literacy was widespread in Israel from an early period (see "Introduction to Hebrew Poetry and Wisdom Books," p. 614).

the suggestion that the psalm originally formed a compositional unit with Psalm 9.

10:1–11. Frightening Description of the Wicked. Two rhetorical questions express the intensification of the situation of the psalmist: "Why does God stand far away?" and "Why does He hide Himself in times of trouble?" God's hiddenness is a motif that runs through the psalms (cf. 13:1; 27:9; 30:7; 44:24; 55:1; 69:17; 88:14; 89:46; 102:2; 104:29; 143:7) and expresses in human language the psalmist's desperate sense of God's distance while hoping that He will soon draw close. The wicked are characterized as insolent and their opposition to God is stressed: pride, arrogance (v. 2), deception, curses, threats, trouble, malice, and iniquity (v. 7). The ruthless attacks of the insolent wicked are described (vv. 8–11): they lie in ambush (v. 8) and secretively plot the destruction of the helpless poor (v. 9). This idea is mentioned three times in vv. 8–9 using the mixed metaphor of a lurking lion waiting for a victim in order to catch it in a net like a hunter catches prey. While the psalmist laments the hiddenness of God, the wicked falsely count on His apparent absence or indifference (v. 11).

10:12–18. Arise, Lord! The provocation of v. 11 necessitates an immediate reaction and, in parallel fashion to Psalm 9:19, the psalmist appeals to God to "arise." But in contrast to the preceding claim by the wicked, he urges God to not forget the humble, afflicted ones (v. 12). This appeal is based on God's honor (v. 13) and the assurance that God intervenes on behalf of His people: He helps the orphans (v. 14). The prayer intensifies with a request to "break the arm" of the wicked (v. 15) and to finally do away with their wickedness. The phrase "the Lord is King" occurs for the first time in the Bible here (Ps. 5:2 makes a different point). It is one of the great images used in the psalms to describe the unknown in terms of the known (cf. 47:2, 6–8; 74:12; 84:3; 93:1; 96:10; 97:1; 98:6; 99:1; 145:1; 149:2). God's divine kingship serves as an ideal for Israel's monarchy and legitimizes it because it is God who installs His king on earth. The images of God as King and Judge are often combined, and they serve here to describe His absolute sovereignty in judging the wicked. He remains forever and ever, whereas the wicked perish (v. 16). The faithful in this psalm are described in terms of social conventions as the poor, humble, fatherless/orphan, and oppressed. This is reminiscent of the ethical ideals found in the Pentateuch (cf. Deut. 10:18; 24:17–21; 27:19). God as King is especially concerned about justice for the defenseless groups, thus providing a paradigm for Israel's king.

11:1–7

Flee or Stay

The psalm starts with the image of a fluttering bird threatened by the hunter's bow and ready to flee to the mountains. It points to the threat the righteous are experiencing at the hands of the wicked. The threat is resolved by the central image of God in His temple enthroned in heaven.

11:1–3. Temptation to Flee. The psalm begins with a programmatic affirmation of faith, saying David puts His trust in the Lord, his Shelter. This provides at the outset an answer to the rhetorical question that follows. The simile of a bird that flees from the hunter's bow and arrow to the protecting underbrush covering the mountain seems incompatible with the psalmist's faith. The imagery is clarified in v. 2, where the bird and the hunter become the upright and the wicked respectively. As in Psalm 10 there is a secret assault: the wicked are shooting secretly from the shadows. The threat is intensified when the foundations are destroyed (v. 3). These "foundations" refer figuratively to the laws, customs, and ethical norms which hold up society (cf. Is. 19:10), which David presents as being thrown down, with the righteous apparently unable to do anything about it.

11:4–7. Reason to Stay. The center of the psalm (v. 4) is focused on a vision of Yahweh in His heavenly temple assuring us He is in control—so there is no need to flee. From His elevated position in the heavenly sanctuary, God is watching all people, testing and examining them. The heavenly sanctuary is a place of judgment. God righteously judges both righteous and wicked (v. 5). It is through judgment that God tests/examines the innermost motives of humans (cf. Ps. 139:23; Ezek. 22:18). The "testing" of the wicked leads to their rejection because God hates the wicked and those who love violence (v. 5).

This type of language indicates God's absolute opposition to evil. As a result of God's judgment, He will rain coals on the wicked (*pakhim*, "bird traps of fire"). There may be here an ironic reference to the image of the bird hunter in v. 2, suggesting that the hunter will become the hunted one. The destruction of the wicked described here

is reminiscent of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (v. 6; Gen. 19). The psalm concludes with an emphasis on God's righteousness and His absolute incompatibility with evil. While He hates (v. 5) the wicked, He loves (v. 7) righteousness, and the righteous will see His face (i.e., an image of God's continuous pleasure; cf. 17:15; Job 19:26). Psalm 11 is a beautiful affirmation of God's faithfulness in the midst of a morally disintegrating and crumbling society. He provides stability and judgment on behalf of His righteous from His heavenly sanctuary. While it might be tempting to flee, God's faithfulness provides enough reason to stay.

12:1–8

Words of Silver

This is a psalm about the power of words, expressed through the use of several related terms translated as "speak"/"say," "lips," "tongue," and "words." The force of falsities is contrasted with the purity of God's words. The superscription is almost identical to that of Psalm 6, declaring Davidic authorship and mentioning the eight-stringed instrument for the musical performance of this poem. The theme of wrong accusations would fit David's experience as expressed in previous psalms (chaps. 4; 7).

12:1–4. Blasphemous Words. The psalm begins with a cry to God for deliverance because of the vanishing of faithful and loyal people—people who are honest and speak truth. In Psalm 15:2 the one who has access to the tabernacle is the one who speaks the truth from the heart. The psalmist refers to an increase in people who speak *shaw'* ("vanity" or "lies"), a noun found in the Decalogue (Ex. 20:7). Truth is contrasted with emptiness, which is equivalent to a violation of the law, even more so as they speak it with flattering lips and a double or duplicitous heart, which refers to the false flattery of their speech (v. 2). Verses 3–4 arrange the agents of speaking—lips and tongues—in a chiastic ABBA structure. This underlines the potentially devastating power of these organs, which are the actual means of rebellion against God in asking the arrogant and blasphemous question: "Who is lord over us?" This is an excellent illustration of the third commandment of the Decalogue.

12:5–8. God Speaks. The phrase "says the Lord" (v. 5) is the center of the psalm and is the only time in the poem where God speaks. It is framed by two negative statements that comment on the seemingly overwhelming power of the wicked. God's speech in the middle clearly indicates that He is in control and that He will deliver the faithful. His words connect again to the social groups mentioned in Psalm 10, assuring them that He is "arising" to action. The psalmist elaborates on the character of God's words: they are *tahor* ("pure," "flawless"). This is a term indicating ceremonial purity familiar from the legal sections of the Pentateuch (e.g., Lev. 6:4; 10:10). The process of purification is described as taking place seven times. There is some ambiguity in v. 7, as translations differ in regard to the question of who or what is being kept. The closest previous referent would be the "words" (v. 6), but it could also refer to the "wicked" (v. 8) or the needy of v. 5. In any case, the main point of the text is that God will protect and guard the poor and needy and will protect us from the wicked of this generation (cf. v. 5). The psalm concludes as it began (v. 1), describing the pervasiveness of wickedness in society. Nevertheless, God's word is still at the center.

13:1–6

How Long?

The fourfold "How long?" of this lament psalm arises from a sense of divine abandonment. The hiddenness of God is at the center of the lament (cf. 10:11), and while there is no specific historical situation connected to this psalm, a number of events from David's life would be compatible with this deep feeling of being deserted by everybody, including God.

13:1–2. Lament. The psalm moves symmetrically from lament (vv. 1–2) to petition (vv. 3–4) and ends with praise (vv. 5–6), constituting a model prayer psalm. Four times the psalmist raises the question "How long?" It occurs in this identical form only once more in the psalms (62:3), but can be found in alternative forms throughout the psalms (4:2; 6:4; 35:17; 74:9–10; 79:5; 80:4; 82:2; 89:46; 90:13; 94:3). It is one of the central questions in the relationship between the psalmist and God. It is a rhetorical question that grows out of sustained pain and the feeling of abandonment. Here, it is paired with the ensuing question that includes a time element: he wonders if he will be forgotten "forever."

This sense of a seemingly endless time of sorrow wears down the psalmist's faith but, at the same time, expresses a faint hope for a limit to the pain. God's "forgetting" is the opposite of

His "remembering." It does not refer to a loss of mental recollection but to the apparent falling out of God's favor and inaccessibility to His presence and help. This is reinforced in the parallel question: How long will God hide His face? The psalmist moves from the religious (his relationship with God) to the psychological aspect of his sense of abandonment. He has been pondering and anxiously ruminating in his *nepesh* ("soul," "heart," or "mind"). This is a continuous emotional pain, a constant state of depression. There is also a sociological aspect as he asks how long his enemy will put him down. The enemy remains anonymous in the singular but is someone who exalts himself over the psalmist. The question of "how long" expresses pain, loneliness, and fear but also the hope of deliverance.

13:3–4. Petition. The prayer moves now from lament to petition, beginning with an appeal to the Lord God to *nabat* ("consider," "look upon") him and to break His silence. The request to light up his eyes refers to renewing the weakened life-forces, reminiscent of the story of Jonathan eating honey, after which his eyes were enlightened (1 Sam. 14:27–29). Two reasons are supplied for God to answer David's prayer: the threat of death, likened to a sleep, and the rejoicing of the enemy, who will think that he has finally defeated him.

13:5–6. Praise. There is a strong contrastive "but" at the beginning of v. 5 that introduces the last section of the prayer and provides the motivation for the psalmist's confidence: his trust in God's *khesed* ("mercy," "unfailing love," "loving-kindness," "steadfast love"). David expresses trust in God's loyal love (cf. 23:6) and holds onto God's faithfulness, being persuaded that God will prevail over evil. This is an occasion for praises anticipating divine deliverance. David's confidence in this future deliverance is absolute and sufficient to reverse the abandonment mentioned at the beginning of the psalm. With God there is an abundance of blessings.

14:1–7
Foolishness

The instructional tone of Psalm 14 reminds us of Psalm 1. It focuses on the lifestyle of the godless and the pervasive corruption that stems out of a deep-rooted denial of God's existence. This psalm is almost identical to Psalm 53 and has led some to suggest that Books 1 and 2 of the Psalms were initially independent collections. There are other psalms that occur twice in the OT (cf. 1 Sam. 22; Ps. 18), making it necessary to look beyond the similarities and notice nuances such as the preference for *'elohim* ("God") as the name of God in Psalm 53. It is conceivable that Psalm 53 was adapted to a different historical reality and audience. The authorship of the psalm is attributed to David.

14:1–4. The Fool's Denial of God. Psalm 1 describes the blessed life of the righteous, but Psalm 14 describes the foolishness of a life without God. The term "fool" (v. 1) lacks a definite article, giving a generic and universal tone to the statement. The remainder of v. 1 and the following lines present a sustained negative description of the "fool," which climaxes in the repeated observation that there is none who does good (vv. 1, 3). The universal corruption becomes even more apparent when God searches the whole world in vain to see if there are any who understand and seek Him or who recognize His sovereignty. God's rhetorical question in v. 4 illustrates His astonishment at the extent of spiritual blindness. The foolish eat God's people as they eat bread, indicating that the denial of God leads to the persecution of His people.

14:5–7. From Foolishness to Salvation. The turning point in the psalm is found in vv. 5–6 with the change in perspective introduced by the use of an adverb of place (i.e., "there"). As God is gazing from heaven, He sees the foolish huddled together in fear and dread. Foolishness and rejection of God turn into terror, and their oppression of the poor is thwarted. They did not count on the fact that the Lord is a refuge (v. 6). There was to be a final day of accounting for those rejecting God's existence, and it would be a day of reversal of fortunes—Israel's restoration would result in rejoicing and gladness. The restoration of Israel is not referring to their return from exile but is used in preexilic passages to denote a time of misery followed by restoration (cf. Job 42:10; Hos. 6:11; Amos 9:14). In the NT, Revelation predicts terror and shame for the foolish and ungodly (Rev. 6:16), caused by the eventual recognition of God's existence and His care for His people.

15:1–5
The Gatekeeper I

Psalm 15 introduces a group of ten psalms that are organized in chiastic form around the second *torah* psalm (Ps. 19), ending with

Psalm 24. Both the beginning and end of this group serve as gatekeepers asking liturgical questions at the gate of the sanctuary. It is conceivable that these questions served to gain entrance to the Holy Place. In response the psalm lists ten characteristics of the person who is eligible to be admitted into the court of the sanctuary, reminiscent of the Ten Commandments. David is mentioned as the author of this psalm.

There is a rhetorical component in the questions that are asked at the gate concerning who may enter into and remain in God's tabernacle. The implication is that no one is worthy of close communion with God on their own merits. The "tabernacle" refers to a tent structure (Heb. *'ohel*) and not to the temple, which had not yet been built. The verbal forms used in v. 1 refer as well to temporary "sojourning" (Heb. *gur*) and to "settling down" (Heb. *shakan*). The remainder of the psalm answers the two questions. Inner qualities that reflect the character of God (righteousness and truth, v. 2) are emphasized, followed by characteristics which flow out of them in words and deeds (v. 3). The righteous are those who differentiate between good and evil and side with the good even if it is to their disadvantage (v. 4). They also refrain from dishonest economic practices and the exploitation of the socially disadvantaged (v. 5).

The list goes deep into all aspects of life, serving as a practical application of the Ten Commandments. They describe a life of integrity that assures that the person will never be moved or shaken (v. 5). The faith of the righteous is unshakable! From a human perspective, one may shrink back from such a high standard, yet Jesus upholds it (cf. Matt. 5:48). The second gatekeeper psalm answers the question as to how we can attain such a life: blessing, righteousness, and salvation are gifts from the Lord (Ps. 24:5).

16:1–11
The Lord Is My Cup

God's everlasting provisions for His children are at the center of this psalm, which continues the chiastic structure outlined above. It should be read together with Psalm 23, which uses similar imagery of the cup (16:5; 23:5), a term that is related to both salvation (e.g., 116:13) and judgment (e.g., 75:8). The superscription identifies the psalm as a *miktam* of David. The LXX understands this term to refer to an "inscription" (Gr. *stelographia*). From comparison with ANE images, such a prayer could have been inscribed on a stele as a permanent and public commemoration of God's goodness. There is a group of other "inscription" psalms (Pss. 56–60). The connection with Psalm 23 underscores the Davidic ascription (cf. Acts 2:25).

16:1–4. Trusting in God and Not in Idols. Psalm 16 begins with a plea for continued protection, which turns into an affirmation of David's trust in God, in whom he takes refuge. This affirmation is underlined with the statement that he has no good apart from God (v. 2; lit. "my good is not beyond you"), indicating that outside of God there is no other source of well-being. The psalmist strongly identifies himself with the *qedoshim* ("saints" or "holy people") and sharply disassociates himself from those who go after other gods (vv. 3–4). The verb *mahar* here can have a secondary meaning as in "barter" or "acquire" in the sense of paying a dowry for a wife (cf. Ex. 22:16). David shows his disgust for idolaters who have "gotten" themselves a new god. He will not follow their practices nor invoke their god's name.

16:5–7. You Are My Cup. David uses two metaphors to emphasize his trust in God's provision (v. 5). God is his *kheleq* ("Portion" or "Inheritance"), a term associated with the allocation of land during the conquest of Canaan (cf. Josh. 19:9), and his Cup, which is representative of both positive and negative destinies. This imagery connects Psalm 16 with Psalm 23. The allotment motif is further developed in v. 6. The boundary "lines" mentioned refer to cords used in the surveying and measuring of property. This is followed by a response of praise (v. 7). The biggest blessings are not material but rather God's instructions received at night. These instructions come to David via his *kilyah* ("heart," "mind"; lit. "kidneys"). The "kidneys" are used in the OT to refer to the conscience through which God can communicate with humans (cf. Job 19:27; Pss. 7:9; 26:2; Jer. 11:20).

16:8–11. Future Hope. God is at the center of the life of the psalmist and therefore he can affirm, even in the face of death, that he shall not be moved or shaken (v. 10). The soul (*nepesh*) refers to the person as a whole. The threat of *she'ol* ("the grave") and *shakhat* ("corruption," "decay"; lit. "pit") leads David to think about death and beyond. The language of the passage points beyond the immediate historical context to the coming of God's holy and faithful One, which is interpreted in the NT as a prophetic reference to the resurrection of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:25–28; 13:35). Christ's resurrection is the first fruit of the defeat of death. The life-threatening experience of David foreshadowed the ultimate experience of the Messiah, who would experience resurrection instead of corruption in the tomb. He is our true refuge.

17:1–15

A Prayer for Deliverance

David is urgently praying for deliverance from a threatening situation, which is more severe than the one in Psalm 16. The two psalms are terminologically linked and both look forward to God's vindication in a legal context (cf. 7:9; 11:5–6). The poem is framed by vv. 1–2 and 15, connected by various terms, such as *tsedeq* ("righteousness," "justice," "vindication"), *panim* ("Your face," "Your presence," sometimes translated as simply "You"), and *khazah* ("to look" or "to see"). The psalm moves from God looking at the psalmist and examining his case to the psalmist looking at God for vindication. The psalm is called "A Prayer of David," but no information is given about the historical context.

17:1–5. Oath of Personal Innocence. This psalm is replete with anthropomorphic descriptions of God, such as His face (sometimes translated "presence" or simply "You"), eyes (v. 2), and hand (v. 14), as well as the image of the shadow of His wings (v. 8). These body parts are contrasted with the body parts of the wicked (vv. 10–14). The psalmist is appealing to the divine Judge as he affirms his innocence and pleads to God that vindication will come from His presence. David employs legal terminology (testing, trying, examining; v. 3) to present his case and argue for his faithfulness.

17:6–12. Liberation from Enemies. The second plea for deliverance is based on his own righteousness. Interestingly, the language of v. 7 is strongly allusive to the "Song of Moses" (Ex. 15:7, 11–13); thus there is a parallel between his deliverance and the Exodus. Two further images, the "apple" or pupil of God's "eye" (i.e., the miniature image of what the eye sees as reflected in the pupil) and the shadow of His wings (v. 8), demonstrate God's care for His children. They also underline the psalmist's urgent plea for protection from the wicked, who are like young lions lying in wait for their prey (v. 12).

17:13–15. Assurance of Future Deliverance. The series of familiar imperatives in v. 13 (cf. 7:6; 9:19) call for God's immediate action and the destruction of the wicked. The request is for deliverance from the people of the world who live only for this earthly life (v. 14). Some interpreters understand the second part of v. 14 as referring to the righteous, but the strong contrast that is created at the beginning of v. 15 suggests that it describes the wicked. They are satisfied with the immediate and will finally reap what God has stored up for them—sometimes rendered as "treasure"—an expression often used to designate God's judgment (cf. Job 20:26). In contrast to such a futile life, the psalmist will be satisfied by beholding God's face (v. 15). This is not necessarily in conflict with Exodus 33:20, which warns that no one may see God and live. It rather means that the psalmist will witness God's favor and intervention on his behalf. It might also refer to the resurrection and when humanity will behold God's face. The term "face" depicts God in a very real and tangible way.

18:1–50

Yahweh Fighting from Heaven

Psalm 18, a thanksgiving psalm celebrating God's deliverance of David in battle, is the third largest psalm in the Hebrew Psalms (after Pss. 78; 119). It describes God as a Warrior, one of the more frequently used divine images in the psalms (e.g., 21; 46; 68). The metaphor occurs mostly at the beginning of the Psalms throughout Books 1 to 3. It can be correlated to the historical situation during the early part of the monarchy and characterized by the military consolidation of the emerging kingdom (see Psalms: Introduction).

Psalm 18 and 2 Samuel 22 are almost identical, and this further supports Davidic authorship. Psalm 18 appears to have undergone some modifications in line with its liturgical usage. The liturgically modified but otherwise identical heading—the longest in the psalms—reflects this tendency. When the two psalms are compared, we find a number of cases where there are spelling variations and places where the available manuscripts and translations differ. For example, the Masoretic Hebrew text in Ps. 18:7 mentions the foundations of the mountains, whereas 2 Sam. 22:8 refers to the foundations of the heavens.

Some translations have the words matching in both places. This situation occurs several times in these parallel passages.

18:1–3. Invocation. The psalm begins with a strong commitment to God through an expression of love to God. What is unusual is that the verb used here (*rakham*) normally refers to God's compassion for humans (cf. Ex. 33:19). Nevertheless, it expresses David's strong commitment to his Lord, a concept that will be developed using nine divine epithets based on geographic and military metaphors. They are introduced by the possessive pronoun "my," expressing a deeply personal relationship between the psalmist and Yahweh. For David, the Lord is his Rock, Fortress, and Deliverer. The Hebrew word for "fortress" (*metsudah*) was applied to the later rock fortress of Masada on the western shores of the Dead Sea. This site is dated much later than David's reign but illustrates the images the psalmist had in mind when he penned his words of confidence in God, his Shield and Horn, which are terms for military strength. The invocation closes with a statement of faith in the form of praise (v. 3). The one who prays will experience salvation.

18:4–30. Affliction, Theophany, and Deliverance. The psalm now describes the life-threatening experience David is facing (vv. 4–6). There is a fourfold poetic description of death that, for the psalmist, seems to be imminent. This causes him to cry out toward God's temple for divine help. God's intervention is described as a divine appearance (a theophany; vv. 7–15), reminiscent of the Exodus experience at the Red Sea and at Sinai (cf. Ex. 15; 19). There is an earthquake, and the description of God's anger uses natural phenomena in connection with God's body (v. 8). There is a spatial movement from above to below: Yahweh rode upon a cherub with darkness and clouds surrounding Him (vv. 9–12); His voice thundered from heaven (v. 13), and He sent His arrows, which are likened to the accompanying lightning of the divine thunderstorm. This meteorological arsenal is directed against the enemies of the psalmist (v. 14). The violent descent of Yahweh as a Warrior concludes with another earthquake and the foundations of the earth being exposed. He rescues David from his enemy, drawing him out of the waters, which represent chaotic and evil forces (vv. 15–19).

Deliverance turns into praise as the psalmist exalts God's faithfulness to those who are faithful to Him (vv. 20–30). At the center of the praise is David's threefold affirmation of his own faithfulness: he is merciful or faithful (*khasid*; v. 25), blameless (*tamim*; vv. 23, 25), and pure (*nabar*; v. 26). These three words point not to the psalmist's merits or achievements but to divine characteristics that God bestows on His faithful ones. The last one could also be translated as "purified," indicating a relationship of forgiveness through ritual cleansing (cf. Is. 52:11). The section concludes with the use of some military metaphors: advancing against troops and scaling walls (i.e., in the attack of a fortified city; v. 29).

18:31–45. Yahweh Trains the King. After a short description of the character of God in which the psalmist theologically clarifies the relationship between God (His way is *tamim*—"perfect," "sound," "complete"; v. 30) and human perfection (God makes our way *tamim*; v. 33), Yahweh equips David with strength (v. 32), training his hands for battle so that his arms can bend a bronze bow. From v. 36 onward, the king remembers God's instructions that helped him to win wars with other nations (v. 43) and foreigners (vv. 44–45). The records of David's wars provide a realistic historical backdrop for this section (cf. 2 Sam. 8–21; 1 Chr. 18–20).

18:46–50. Doxology. The psalm closes with praises that begin by affirming God's power as revealed through His acts. After describing his military successes, David affirms that it is Yahweh who delivers him from his enemies (v. 48). This recognition leads into a final high note of praise to God, who shows *khesed* ("mercy," "loyal love") to His anointed, David, and his posterity forever (v. 50). Yahweh, the divine Warrior, is not necessarily a comfortable image of God for modern Christianity, but it nevertheless forms an important part of the many metaphors found in the psalms. In a period where physical warfare has moved to a spiritual one (Eph. 6:10–18), it is still comforting to know that Yahweh, the divine Warrior, is fighting on behalf of His children.

19:1–14

Torah in Creation

Psalm 19 is the center of the subgroup of psalms that are structured in a chiastic form. It is also one of the four *torah* psalms (cf. Pss. 1; 111; and 119) and relates God's law to creation. It moves from the general revelation of God in nature to the special revelation of God in Scripture and more specifically in His law. The contemplation of both necessitates a response from humans. Some commentators have suggested that the first part (vv. 1–6), which is distinct from the remainder of the psalm (vv. 7–14), was initially an old Canaanite hymn to the sun-god. However, there is an elaborate complementarity between the two parts that is reminiscent of the complementarity between Genesis 1 and 2. The divine name *'el* (short for *'elohim*) is used in the first part of the psalm, as in Genesis 1, while Yahweh is used in the second part, as in Genesis 2. According to the superscription, the psalm was composed by David.

19:1–6. Natural Revelation. All creation—represented by the heavens and the sky (or firmament)—declares the glory of God in a united chorus (v. 1). Translators differ in regard to how v. 3 is rendered. Some understand it to mean that the message of God's glory through His works is universally displayed in all languages—that is, "there is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard." Others believe that it refers to a silent yet evident declaration—that is, "there is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard." The strongly personified description of nature (v. 2) connects repeatedly to the Creation account in Genesis 1. From vv. 4–6 the focus shifts to the sun as the central light in creation. Its daily journey through the sky begins as if in a tent or tabernacle that God has provided, and then it is described like a strong man or champion running its race through the circuit which God has ordained for it. The language can be associated with the Egyptian notion that the sun was reborn each morning, fresh and strong, or with Mesopotamian mythology, in which the sun-god Shamash (cf. the Heb. *shemesh*) is described as a "bridegroom." On the famous Hammurabi stele, the sun-god is shown as giving the law to the Old Babylonian King Hammurabi. However, there is a certain polemical element in the psalm since the sun is clearly part of God's handiwork and it runs the divinely ordained circuit in obedience to Him. This becomes even clearer in the next section.

19:7–14. Special Revelation. Instead of the sun-god providing the law, v. 7 emphatically and almost abruptly states that it is the law of the Lord. The psalmist moves on from natural revelation to special revelation. In Hebrew thought, there is often a movement from effect to cause or from the secondary to the primary. While natural revelation provides us with a glimpse of God, it is *torah*, His written revelation that contains a far superior knowledge and far-reaching effect on humans. The divine name of God appears only once in vv. 1–6, whereas there is a sevenfold mention of Yahweh in vv. 7–14. Special revelation through God's word points much more directly at God than natural revelation does.

The law has power to *shub*, a word that essentially means "to return" but has been rendered variously in its participial form as "converting," "refreshing," "restoring," etc. Its nature and effects are further explained as a perfect revelation of Yahweh's deeds, making the simple wise as right precepts or statues that bring joy to the heart and as pure and radiant commands that enlighten one's eyes (vv. 7–8). The effects of the law on human beings are so valuable that they surpass the value of gold and are more enjoyable than honey (v. 10). There is great reward (v. 11) in keeping the *torah*. This deep view of the law elicits a response in the form of a prayer for cleansing from sin that has been committed inadvertently, as well as for protection from willful or presumptuous sins (vv. 12–14). The concluding formulaic line is one of the most widely used prayers (v. 14), and its language connects it to sanctuary terminology linking it to the acceptability of sacrifices (Lev. 1:3). It is by beholding that we are changed. The contemplation of nature in union with God's word has a life-changing impact on our hearts.

20:1–9

Victory in Battle I

Both Psalms 20 and 21 are prayers for protection in battle and are linked through their content to Psalm 18. Since Psalm 21 has a liturgical change of speaker, it may have been used in a dedication ceremony at the sanctuary before King David and his army went out into battle (cf. 2 Chr. 20). It could be read as a report of what God accomplished in battle on behalf of His king and people.

The Great Reward of Psalm 19:11

David used seven distinct words to describe six aspects of God's written word (Ps 19:7–9). He claimed that the keepers of these six would obtain a great reward (v. 11). The nature of that reward, however, is not just in the clean life that results in keeping the six. Rather, the inner thoughts of such a given voice makes God happy and thus brings such a one into harmony with God. Living in the presence of God is the greatest reward of all.

20:1–5. Prayer for Protection. The psalm begins with the people's intercessory prayer on behalf of the king. It is an urgent prayer offered in times of trouble and distress for God to send help from the sanctuary (vv. 1–2). The reference to the name of the God of Jacob (v. 1) is a powerful invocation of the experience of the patriarch. But it is now the Name that will defend the king (lit. "to set on high;" i.e., make him unreachable). The name of the Lord is closely linked to His character (see Ex. 34:5–7). Thus, God's name has saving power as it invokes past experiences of divine deliverance during the patriarchal and the Exodus periods. It is also a prayer that God will remember and accept one's offerings and sacrifices (v. 3; the Hebrew verb *dashen* here implies the fat of the sacrifices). These may have accompanied the ritual at the sanctuary, stressing the total submission of the king to God and His blessing of the king's purposes and plans (v. 4). The intercession turns into a confident affirmation of salvation, deliverance, and victory, and using military language, the people proclaim the lifting of their banners in the name of God.

20:6. David's Response. There is a shift in speaker to the first person, and it is David who now expresses his confidence in divine deliverance, introducing his statement of faith with a contrastive and very strong affirmation of what he knows (v. 6). God deeply cares about His Anointed One (the Messiah). But deliverance comes not only from the earthly sanctuary but also from His holy heavenly sanctuary. This description is reminiscent of the image of Yahweh descending from heaven in a theophany, as described in Psalm 18:7–15.

20:7–9. Trust in the Name of the Lord. The psalm returns to the "we" of vv. 1–5 and concludes with a final appeal by the people for the Lord to save. The passage is sometimes translated as a general reference for God to save, "Save, Lord," and a final petition to the King (God) to answer. It could also be translated as, "Oh Lord, save the king! May He answer us on the day when we call." The final "He" would then refer to God. Although the Lord had trained the king for battle (Ps. 18:31–45), it is He who gives victory. Psalm 20 is a beautiful demonstration of the power of communal intercessory prayer on behalf of the king as he prepares for battle. God's people should always lift up their leaders in prayer, asking God to give them victories in the spiritual battle.

21:1–13

Victory in Battle II

The deliverance of the king in battle is now an experience of the past, and the resulting prayer of thanksgiving complements the pleas of the preceding psalm. The poem is consistently addressing God in the second person. The speaker might have been a temple singer or a priest who led the congregation in praises to God as David returned from battle. Davidic authorship is indicated, and the proximity of this psalm to Psalm 21 provides the background information needed.

21:1–7. Rejoicing in the Strength of the Lord. The psalm starts out with the note of praise as the king rejoices in the Lord's strength. This idea is echoed at the end of the psalm with a similar expression of praise—the Lord is exalted in His own strength (v. 13). It is God's strength that has delivered the king and answered the urgent plea that concluded the previous psalm.

Verses 2–5 list various blessings that God has bestowed upon the king. The verses move back and forth between past answered prayers (vv. 2, 4) and present ongoing blessings (vv. 3, 5), as the Hebrew verbal forms indicate. The blessings include goodness (or "good/rich/best blessings"), a crown of gold, length of days, salvation, victory, splendor, glory, and majesty. These eternal blessings are bestowed because the king trusts in the Lord. This acknowledgment forms the center of the psalm (v. 7; cf. 13:5).

21:8–13. Future Victories. The focus shifts from the king to God's (and the king's) enemies. The final defeat and destruction of the wicked is depicted (vv. 8–12), but it is Yahweh the Warrior who will fight on behalf of His king: the Lord will swallow them up in His wrath (v. 9). Their destruction is imminent because they planned evil against "you." This "you" is ambiguous, possibly intentionally, pointing to either God or His king. Ultimately it is God who, through His king (or sometimes without him), will gain victories for His people. The psalm ends on the same note it began (as in Ps. 20), praising and expressing confidence in God's power.

22:1–31
Desperate Prayer for Deliverance

Psalm 22 is a moving lament of personal suffering and affliction that typologically epitomizes the suffering of Jesus on the cross. But it moves beyond despair to deliverance and finally to praises. One cannot read the psalm without thinking of Christ's last words on Calvary. Yet, we need to consider the historical dimension to the poem. Christ's antitypical appropriation of the psalmist's words validates the typology. This Davidic psalm is "set to 'The Deer of the Dawn,'" which possibly indicates a musical tune, although the "deer" (*'ayyalah*) could also be translated as "help" (cf. v. 19). According to the LXX, which prefers this translation, help comes at dawn.

22:1–21. Why Have You Forsaken Me? The psalm starts with a double question introduced by a twofold cry of *'eli,* which appears as a personalized appellation of God elsewhere in the psalms (cf. 18:2; 63:1; 68:24; 89:26; 102:24; 118:28; 140:6) and as a positive declaration in v. 10. Yet while David feels forsaken, God is still his God and he turns to Him in the hour of despair and forsakenness. Jesus's Aramaic appropriation of these words demonstrates the messianic dimension of the psalm and demarcates the moment of redemption in which the Son of God experienced the ultimate separation from His Father through the weight of sin (Matt. 27:46).

Facing God's silence, the faithful one recalls Yahweh's deeds on behalf of the forefathers (vv. 3–5) and invokes God's holiness (vv. 3–5). But not even this resolves the sense of abandonment (v. 6) accompanied by the mockery of the wicked (vv. 6–8). The psalmist recalls God's creative power in his birth (vv. 9–10), turning the question of v. 1 into an affirmation of faith: from his mother's womb, Yahweh has been his God. The lament is found in vv. 11–18, alternating between the third-person description of the wicked and the first-person declarations of the psalmist. The wicked are compared to bulls, lions, and dogs. Such frightening animal imagery, often used in ANE iconography to describe the realm of demons, points to the demonic dimension of the imposing company of the wicked threatening the king. They pierced his hands and his feet (v. 16), divided his articles of clothing, and cast lots over them (v. 18). The section is full of prophecies and explicitly describes Jesus's suffering on the cross (cf. John 19:24). It ends with a protracted plea for deliverance (vv. 19–21), which returns to the three animal metaphors.

22:22–31. Deliverance and Praise. Pleas move to praises that emphasize the communal character of the praise (v. 22). Praise focuses on a God who has not hidden His face (v. 24) but who hears and answers prayers. This praise increases exponentially and echoes from the individual to the assembly (v. 25) and finally to the ends of the earth and all nations (v. 27). Even the future generations will come to proclaim His righteousness (v. 31). The praises of those who experienced God's silence and deliverance are a powerful witness. Beyond the historical dimension, the messianic language of Psalm 22 illustrates how David was inspired to go far beyond his own suffering to point prophetically to the Messiah, whose death would resolve suffering forever (Ps. 22:1 // Matt. 27:46; Ps. 22:7 // Matt. 27:39; Ps. 22:8 // Matt. 27:43; Ps. 22:15 // John 19:28; Ps. 22:18 // John 19:23–24; Ps. 22:22 // Heb. 2:12).

23:1–6
Shepherd and Royal Host

This is most likely the best-known psalm. However, this familiarity does not necessarily imply a full understanding of its meaning. Psalm 23 is driven by two metaphors—God as a Shepherd and Royal Host—both of which express a deep trust in God's provisions and are intimately connected to the life of David, to whom the psalm has been ascribed.

23:1–3. My Shepherd. Psalm 22 opened with a personal appellation to God ("my God"); this psalm opens with "The Lord is my shepherd." It introduces a metaphor that runs through the Bible as a beautiful image of God's care and provision with messianic overtones (cf. John 10:11–14). Sometimes it is also applied to ungodly leaders (cf. Ezek. 34:2). The image of the king as a shepherd was known throughout the ANE and served as a paradigm for just kingship. Egyptian kings held a flail and a shepherd's crook to demonstrate their might and protective responsibilities. The Babylonian King Hammurabi (1792–1750 BC) called himself "the shepherd of the oppressed and of the slaves." The second part of v. 1 functions as a result clause to the first part. Because the Lord is the Shepherd, His sheep will not be in want or lack anything.

God's perfect provisions are further developed in vv. 2–3 using images that were familiar to a shepherd in ancient Israel and terms that go beyond the shepherd metaphor. There are green pastures, evoking vistas of abundant fresh grass on which the morning dew has fallen (cf. Deut. 32:2), and still, quiet waters (lit. "waters of rest"). Interestingly, *menukhah* ("rest," "resting place") is used elsewhere to denote the rest from war that God provided after the conquest of Canaan (cf. Deut. 12:9; 1 Kin. 8:56). God also *shub* ("returns," "restores," "refreshes") the soul/life (v. 3). This theologically significant verb *shub* is often used for forgiveness and spiritual renewal (1 Kin. 8:33). Finally, He leads in the paths of righteousness (or "the right paths"). This means that God's ways always lead home; they are righteous because God is doing this for His name's sake (i.e., He is acting according to His character).

23:4. Death Valley. The image of rich abundance and bliss changes abruptly to a valley of the shadow of death (v. 4). It threatens the psalmist, who is now speaking not *about* God but *to* Him. The somewhat odd expression can also be translated as "valley of deathly darkness," expressing a life-threatening experience (cf. Job 10:21; Jer. 13:16). It is alleviated only through the immediate presence of the Lord. Verse 4 is also the center of the psalm, where the psalmist shifts from the Shepherd metaphor to the metaphor of a Royal Host. This is done through the juxtaposition of two seemingly redundant terms: the "rod" refers to a short scepter, the insignia of a king (cf. Ps. 2:9; Is. 10:5), and the "staff"/"cane" is the longer shepherd's rod used to provide support for sheep (Zech. 8:4). God is depicted here as Lord of the sheep and the One who cares and rescues them.

23:5–6. Royal Host. As the shepherd provides for his sheep, the royal host does the same in ways that reflect ANE hospitality. The first image is that of a royal banquet (cf. 2 Sam. 9:7–13) prepared in the presence of the guest's enemies. According to the rules of many ANE hospitality cultures, the enemy could not touch the guest because he or she was under the protection of the host (cf. Gen. 19). The royal treatment continues as oil is poured onto the guest's head, a treatment reserved only for royal guests (cf. Luke 7:46). Finally, there is a cup that overflows and satisfies all possible thirst and which, according to hospitality rules, was continuously refilled.

The conclusion of the psalm again shifts toward a theological reading of the imagery: goodness and mercy will follow. While righteousness was the theological keyword in the first image ("paths of righteousness"), now it is *khesed,* that rich, covenantal word previously encountered and difficult to convey in one English word. Here it is sometimes translated as "mercy," but its range of meanings includes such terms as "love," "faithfulness," "lovingkindness," and "loyalty." The covenant term *khesed* does not only follow, it "pursues" and makes one "return" to the house of the Lord. *Shub,* the same verbal root used in v. 3, can be read as "return" here. The house of the Lord is both palace and temple, merging the religious and royal sphere in the image of the Shepherd and King.

24:1–10
The Gatekeeper II

Psalm 24 concludes a group of psalms and returns to a question-and-answer liturgy performed by the Levites at the gates of the temple. It is well known from its musical arrangement in Handel's Messiah (Movement 33), which connects it thematically to Christ's ascension. The psalm was possibly sung as a song of triumph after victory in battle over the Canaanites at the conquest of Jerusalem or as the ark was brought to Jerusalem by King David, the author of the poem.

24:1–2. Doxology. Using creation terminology, the psalmist acclaims God's sovereignty and proclaims that the earth is the Lord's, indirectly requesting a response in worship from its inhabitants (v. 1). The verse expresses in poetic form the OT cosmology indicating that God established the earth upon the waters (v. 2). Most probably the psalmist is criticizing Canaanite cosmology, where creation was the result of a battle between the Canaanite gods Baal and Yam. In the psalm God is depicted as the sovereign Creator.

24:3–6. Approaching Worshiper. As the worshipers respond to the doxology, the question is raised concerning the qualifications of those who are allowed to enter God's mountain and His holy place (v. 3). These qualifications of the worshipers who are worthy of approaching the temple gates are a list of standards that reflect OT ethics found in the legal parts of the Pentateuch. These are based on an inward disposition of righteousness, a pure heart, as well as on the result of just action, clean hands. They refrain from idolatry and blasphemy (v. 4; cf. Ex. 20:7), and consequently Yahweh blesses them (v. 5). The abrupt mention of Jacob at the end of v. 6

is used to designate Israel and epitomizes the experience of the patriarch as the receptor of Yahweh's blessings.

24:7–10. Gate Liturgy. The question-and-answer liturgy continues as the worshipers stand by the temple gates. The gates, which are personified (v. 7), are the *'olam* ("ancient" or "everlasting") doors of the temple, but by extension they represent the city and people that are ready for the coming King (cf. Ps. 118:20). The King is described as the Lord mighty in battle, returning victorious from war (v. 8), and as the King of glory (vv. 7–10). The refrains found in vv. 7–8 are repeated in vv. 9–10, adding new ones. The opening of the personified gates of the temple to welcome the sovereign and victorious God, invites us to also acknowledge Him as our sovereign Lord and open up the gates of our hearts to receive the King of glory.

25:1–22

An Acrostic Prayer

Psalms 25–28 bring together a group of prayers for a variety of situations. Psalm 25 initiates this with an alphabetic composition (two lines beginning with *r* instead of the expected *q*). The psalm is clearly organized around prayer and wisdom, making it a model prayer that can be easily remembered via its acrostic pattern. David is mentioned as the author and there is nothing in the psalm that could not be lined up with the events of his life.

25:1–7. Initial Invocation. The "lifting up" of the soul or life is translated idiomatically in some versions (e.g., "I put my trust" or "I turn to You"). There is a correspondence between the initial invocation and the concluding request through repetition of terminology—for example, *nepesh* ("soul" or "life"; vv. 1, 20), *'oybai* ("my enemies"; vv. 2, 19), and *bosh* ("to be ashamed"; vv. 2, 3, 20). This creates a concentric emphasis on the second section on wisdom (vv. 8–15). An initial affirmation of trust is followed by a plea not to be ashamed (i.e., not to be humiliated and ruined by enemies' victories over him) but rather to have the shame fall on them instead, since they have been treacherous with him for no reason (v. 3). Those who have dealt deceitfully with David are inexcusable and are traitors to God's cause (cf. 78:57). The plea continues by asking for God's instruction and daily guidance in His ways and paths. These two synonyms are repeated throughout the psalm (vv. 4, 8, 9, 10, 12) and introduce the wisdom motif. The section concludes with a plea for God's forgiveness according to His mercy and love (v. 6). God's eternal (Heb. *'olam*) attributes are stressed as the basis for divine forgiveness.

25:8–15. Reflection on Wisdom. The central section consists of a series of declarative statements about the character of God and His guidance. He teaches His way, which is *mishpat* ("justice," "right," "judgment"; v. 9), *khesed* ("mercy," "lovingkindness," "loyal love"; v. 10), and *'emet* ("truth," "faithfulness"; v. 10). In the middle of the wisdom section and in the middle of the Hebrew alphabet (*lamed*), there is a supplication for forgiveness (v. 11). Then the psalm continues with a description of God's way (v. 12), focusing on the benefits experienced by those who fear Him (v. 14) and expressed in terms of the covenant promise of inheriting the land (v. 13; cf. Deut. 4:1).

25:16–22. Concluding Request. The change from third- to first-person viewpoint introduces a plea in the final section that echoes the plea of vv. 1–7. The psalmist uses the imagery of sight and asks God to look on his affliction (v. 18) and intervene. God should recognize how numerous his enemies are (v. 19) and deliver him from them (v. 20). God's seeing means action (Ps. 142:4–7). The psalm concludes with an expansion of the plea to include the people of Israel—a prayer for their *padah* ("ransom," "redemption," or "deliverance"; v. 22). This multi-themed poem is foremost an intense prayer for guidance and instruction in "the way." This term is used in the NT as the earliest self-description of Christians (cf. Acts 9:2; 11:26) based on the radical claim of Jesus as "the Way" (John 14:6–7).

26:1–12

Integrity and Vindication

Psalm 26 continues the tone set in the previous psalm by providing a model prayer for different situations in life. While Psalm 25 asked for guidance, Psalm 26 is a prayer of vindication based on a strong affirmation of the psalmist's own integrity. There are a number of links between the two psalms (e.g., v. 1 // 25:2, 21) and there is also a similar framing in the beginning and end of the psalm, centered on the theme of integrity. It has been suggested that Psalms 25–28 originated together during a specific time in the life of David, possibly during the rebellion of Absalom. They probably reflect prayers that arose from the pressing circumstances David experienced during that dark period in his life.

26:1–2. Plea for Vindication. The psalm begins with the forensic imperative, "vindicate me," followed in v. 2 by three further imperatives that use legal terminology: *bakhan* ("test," "examine," "prove"), *nasah* ("test," "try," "prove"), and *tsarap* ("try," "examine," "refine"), all intensifying the request. The petition is based on the psalmist's integrity because he trusted in the Lord (v. 1; cf. 7:8–9). This is not an expression of self-righteousness but an affirmation of faith based on his relationship with God that trustingly invites divine scrutiny (cf. 139:23–24).

26:3–8. Affirmation of Integrity. Following the invitation for divine trial, the psalmist affirms his own integrity through invoking the guiding principles of his life: he has always looked at God's *khesed* ("lovingkindness," "unfailing love") and has lived (lit. "walked") by trusting in God's *'emet* ("truth" or "faithfulness"), which refers to a lifelong commitment to God's way (cf. Ps. 25, which also uses the metaphors of *seeing* and *walking*). This implies a clear separation from the wicked, who are described as *shaw'* (lit. "empty" or "vain"), sometimes used to refer to deceit (e.g., 12:2; 41:6; 144:8) or idolatry (e.g., Jer. 18:15). They are hypocrites and evildoers (vv. 4–5). The psalmist also acclaims his ritual purity; he will wash his hands in innocence, an action that grants access to the altar in the sanctuary (v. 6; cf. Deut. 21:1–9). This is done in order to join the congregation in praise (vv. 6–8). The temple, as the place David loved (v. 8) contrasts with the assembly of evildoers that he loathed (v. 5).

26:9–12. Plea for Deliverance. The contrast is further developed in the final plea of the psalm. The description of the sinners continues and the psalmist asks not to be included among them in death (v. 9). This is followed by a final reiteration of personal integrity, which leads into public praise. Moral integrity implies a clear separation from wickedness and is foremost grounded in God's redemption and vindication.

27:1–14

Praise and Plea

Psalm 27 begins with a prayer of trust (vv. 1–6) followed by a lament in the second part of the psalm (vv. 7–14), rather than with a lament followed by praise as in most psalms. It recalls Psalms 9–10, which together form an acrostic poem following the same sequence (cf. also Ps. 40). From a theological and didactic perspective, praise should precede plea. The group of psalms that bring together prayers for different occasions demonstrates that one should present thanksgiving before requests. David's life provides the backdrop to the poem and the LXX dates it prior to his anointing.

27:1–6. Praise. At the outset the psalmist acknowledges the power of Yahweh through the metaphors of *ma'oz* ("mountain stronghold," "refuge") and *'or* ("light"; cf. Is. 60:1; Mic. 7:8–9) and asks the rhetorical question "Of whom shall I be afraid?" He then recounts how God has protected him in the past (v. 2) and how He will protect him as well in the future, even if an army were to besiege him (v. 3). Verses 4–6 enhance the image of refuge by connecting it to the sanctuary. The psalmist wants to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of his life (v. 4; cf. Ps. 23:6) in order to be in God's continuous presence and behold the beauty of the Lord (i.e., to contemplate His wonderful works; cf. 90:16). He is looking for a hiding place in the shelter of God's tabernacle/tent and offers sacrifices with joy because God has saved him from his enemies (v. 6).

27:7–14. Plea. Now the psalmist turns to his plea, requesting that God hear and answer (v. 7). In Hebrew, it is not clear who is speaking in v. 8. Some translate as if God is speaking, while others claim it is the conscience of the psalmist (his heart; cf. v. 3, 14), which seems to speak on God's behalf as the means of communication between God and humankind. Either way, the psalmist responds affirmatively that he will seek God's face (v. 8). Seeking God's face is equivalent to longing for His presence (105:4) and trusting in His miraculous intervention (31:16). The petition is then concretized by petitioning God to not hide His face, which is a request to not be abandoned by God.

The request for instruction in God's way (v. 11) connects this psalm to the two preceding prayers (Pss. 25–26) by expressing the desire to follow God's will and be led in a smooth or straight path, even in the face of his oppressive enemies who have risen against him as false witnesses (vv. 11–12). A final exhortation of trust encourages the audience beyond the psalmist with a twofold "wait on the Lord," at the beginning and end of v. 14. The prayer of Psalm

27 follows the positive confidence of the two preceding psalms, but it adds an emphasis on the sanctuary (vv. 4–6). It is the sanctuary that provides a safe haven, God's pleasant presence and future guidance for the psalmist. In Jewish tradition the psalm is recited during the sixth month in preparation for the Day of Atonement.

28:1–9

Plea and Praise

This poem concludes the group of prayers (Pss. 25–28) dealing with various pressing situations in the life of David. As in Psalm 27, the structure is twofold and help comes from the sanctuary, in this case the holy of holies (v. 2), but the sequence is reversed and plea is followed by praise.

28:1–5. Plea. The psalmist asks the Lord to hear his cry of despair and not be silent (vv. 1–2). God's silence would mean death; he would become like "those who go down to the pit." The cry intensifies as David lifts up his hands toward the tabernacle, a physical gesture that often expresses an urgent appeal (v. 2). He seems to be standing in the courtyard of the tabernacle facing the *debir qodesh* ("the holy inner room" or "the holiest of holies"). This is the only occurrence of this phrase in the Psalms (see 1 Kin. 6:19–31; 2 Chr. 4:20 for others). The psalmist next concretizes the request. He does not want to be "dragged off" like a criminal for judgment along with the ungodly, who speak cordially and peacefully but have malice and evil in their hearts (v. 4). God can deal with them in only one way: they will be destroyed and torn down rather than built up (v. 5). Notice the contrast between the endeavors of hands of the wicked (v. 4) and those of God's hands (v. 5). One leads to destruction and the other to salvation, which is the content of the following praise.

28:6–9. Praise. The praise begins with the familiar formula, *baruk yahweh* ("praised" or "blessed be the Lord"; cf. 31:21; 41:13; 72:18; 89:52; 106:48; 124:6; 135:21; 144:1), because He has answered the supplication of the psalmist. A number of metaphors for divine refuge follow that are first applied to the individual and then extended to the community. God is the psalmist's Strength (v. 7), but also the Strength of His people (v. 8). Some translations render the phrase literally "their strength" without a referent. That "His people" is the implied referent is suggested by both the LXX and other manuscripts, as well as by the final appeal for God to save His people and shepherd them. This invokes once more the image of the divine Shepherd (v. 9; cf. 23:1–4) who serves as the ideal paradigm for the earthly king. Psalm 28 is a prayer for separation from the wicked and from the judgment against them. While the prayer is just, we must recognize, as David did, that it is God who judges and executes that judgment.

29:1–11

Yahweh's Seven Thunders

The sevenfold *qol yahweh* ("the voice of the LORD") that runs through the center of this beautiful hymn (vv. 3–9) resounds like a thunder in a storm that rages above the interior of northern Israel, which provides the geographical locale for this psalm. The psalm has repeatedly been likened to a Canaanite hymn dedicated to the weather and storm god Baal. However, the exposition will show that it rather serves as a well-aimed polemic against Canaanite mythology, demonstrating the monotheistic supremacy of Yahweh over all the gods of Canaan. Davidic authorship provides a good link to the historical background during a time in which the Israelite king established the monarchy among its Canaanite enemies.

29:1–2. Glory in Heaven. There is a parallel between vv. 1–2 and vv. 10–11 (more specifically, v. 9c) that brackets the thoughts of the psalmist. This is done through the use of the word "glory" and the fourfold mention of the name "LORD." While the introduction serves as a call to angelic worship in heaven, the final invitation to worship extends the blessings to earth. We attribute greatness to God (vv. 1–2), and God gives us strength and peace. This represents a spatial movement from above to below that runs throughout the psalm. The term *bene 'elim* has been interpreted and translated in various ways. It is literally "sons of God" but has also been translated as "sons of the mighty." The term *'el* is sometimes understood as indicative of power, might, or "heavenly beings," understood as angelic beings that serve before God's throne (cf. 89:6; Job 2:1), or as those who are "godly." Being the "son" of something or someone conveys the idea of having their characteristics (Judg. 19:22; 1 Sam. 2:12; John 5:18; 8:44; Acts 4:36). Whichever is intended, they are invited to worship God and, by contrast, not to be worshiped by humankind as in Canaanite mythology.

29:3–9. The Divine Storm. Seven times the "voice of the LORD" is mentioned, and every time it is not only audible but also active, impacting fauna and flora. The divine manifestation through the thunderstorm begins over *rab* ("many" or "mighty") waters, an expression that often designates the Mediterranean. The natural event of a storm forming over the sea and traveling inland is an observable phenomenon in the Holy Land. There is an implied polemic here as the "waters" in Canaanite mythology represent the forces of chaos with which the gods have to fight.

However, Yahweh is over the waters and sits enthroned over the flood (v. 10). As the storm moves over the Lebanon and Sirion (i.e., the Sidonian/Canaanite name for Mt. Hermon) and finally subsides in the Syrian desert/the Wilderness of Kadesh (vv. 6–8), it breaks and splinters trees (v. 5), makes mountains skip like a calf (v. 6), shakes the wilderness (v. 8), and strips the forests bare (v. 9). The Hebrew text in v. 9 literally refers to God causing deer to writhe in birth pains, but some have suggested an emendation to the text in order to strengthen the parallel with the stripping of the forest. In this case, the plural Hebrew word for deer (*'ayyalot*—the singular is *'ayyalah*) should be replaced by one of the words for oaks (*'elot*—from the singular *'ayil* or *'elah*) instead, and accordingly the phrase would be referring to the convulsion of the oaks. Lightning and earthquakes accompany the thunderstorm, and trees and mountains—both of which are normally symbols of divine strength in Canaanite mythology—are subject to the majesty and power of Yahweh's thunderstorm. Even the wilderness, normally the habitation of demons, and the reproductive cycle of nature are subject to the power of Yahweh. One cannot but notice the continuous polemics here.

29:10–11. And Peace on Earth. The final call to worship in the heavenly sanctuary with a shout of "glory" (v. 9) introduces an almost tangible change of tone. In contrast to the dynamic verbal action forms of vv. 3–9, there is a static quality to v. 10 as Yahweh sits enthroned as King forever (v. 10). From the heavenly sanctuary He bestows blessings on earth on His people (v. 11). While in vv. 1–2 God was the object of worship, now He is the subject who blesses His people. The Psalm closes with peace after the storm. Worship of God in the heavenly sanctuary returns to earth as a blessing of peace.

30:1–12

From Weeping to Joy

This thanksgiving psalm represents a masterpiece of Hebrew poetry, playing on contrasts and reversals from negative to positive: e.g., "brought...up" and "go down" (v. 3), "weeping...for a night" and "joy in the morning" (v. 5), "mourning" and "dancing" (v. 11), all pointing to a drastic experience in the life of the poet based on a self-sufficiency that eclipsed God (v. 7). The superscription has been parsed in different ways, leading to different understandings. There are four Hebrew word groupings: "a psalm," "a song of dedication," "the house," and "of David."

There is universal agreement that the first two word groupings are meant to be separate. The relationship of the last three are debated. Some translations read, "A song at the dedication of the house of David." Others read, "A song. For the dedication of the temple/palace. Of David" (indicating Davidic authorship as in other psalms). In this way, some have understood the "house" (*bayit*) as referring to the house of God (i.e., the temple), which would then render the title anachronistic because David did not dedicate the temple. It is more likely a reference to a song David wrote in preparation for the future dedication of the temple, even though there is no indication that it was sung at the dedication (1 Kings 8:62–66). He may have composed it soon after the experience of the census he conducted (cf. 2 Sam. 24:1). On the other hand, David did complete his palace in Jerusalem (2 Sam. 5:11–12), which may be what is referred to here (though Scripture does not record a dedication event). For whichever event this psalm was composed, David gave God the glory.

30:1–3. Praise for Deliverance. The psalm commences with praise for healing from a potentially fatal illness, when God brought him up from *she'ol*, the realm of death and the grave (v. 3). The healing (v. 2) may be not just physical but also spiritual in nature, and both go hand in hand in the OT (cf. 147:3). If one takes David's census (2 Sam. 24; 1 Chr. 21) as the historical backdrop for the psalm, both aspects are relevant.

30:4–5. God's Discipline and Favor. The praise is extended to the congregational level, to the *khasidim* ("faithful ones" or "saints"; v. 4). The subject of their thanksgiving hymn is identified through striking contrasts. God's anger lasts for only a moment (lit. "twinkling of the eye"), while His favor is for a lifetime, contrasting the proportion between God's wrath and His pleasure. This is then further enhanced by the contrast between the night and the morning, when joy replaces weeping.

30:6–10. Self-Sufficiency. The psalmist now confesses in more detail what lies at the heart of his alienation from God. The *shalu* mentioned in v. 6 can be translated as "prosperity" or as "careless security" (cf. Ezek. 16:49), denoting a self-sufficiency that leads to the moment when David realizes that God had hidden His face. Then he was terrified (v. 7). The sobering realization of God's absence leads to a request to God for Him to hear him once more and show him mercy (vv. 8–10).

30:11–12. Mourning into Dancing. The final section replicates vv. 4–5 in returning to the contrasts and reversals that mark this psalm. The emblems of death (weeping and sackcloth) have been replaced by the emblems of life (dancing and rejoicing). It is an outward expression of joy over restoration (cf. Jer. 31:13), which leads to a final vow to give thanks to God forever. Psalm 30 is a striking image of a God who disciplines, but only for a moment if compared with life and eternity, and who is able to reverse and transform our darkness into light in a moment.

31:1–24

A Repeated Prayer of Distress

The two movements of Psalm 31 (vv. 1–8 and 9–24) are parallel in that they move from plea to expressions of trust and from deliverance to praise. Because of its repetitive content, it has been suggested that this psalm is a conflation of two originally individual poems. However, repetition is an important rhetoric and didactic device that goes through the same "story" twice, a phenomenon which can be found in various places throughout the psalms (cf. Pss. 30; 42–43; 95; 100). The two sections are furthermore connected by recurring expressions (e.g., "trust"; *khasah*, lit. "seek refuge"; vv. 1 and 19; "into Your hand"; vv. 5 and 15). Besides the Davidic authorship, the LXX adds "of alarm" to the superscription, an expression related to the Hebrew verb *khapaz* ("to be alarmed" or "to hurry in alarm") in v. 22. This has motivated commentators to link it with 1 Samuel 23:26, where this same verb is used in regard to David's reaction to Saul's pursuing him.

31:1–8. Prayer I. The psalm goes straight into a plea for deliverance, underlined by an affirmation of faith: David trusts and takes refuge in God. The divine metaphors of Rock and Fortress are used twice (vv. 2–3), and this could remind the listener/reader of Psalm 18. The request for deliverance is linked to a deceptive net or trap laid for him (v. 4), drawing on the imagery of hunting. The flight of David from Saul as he tried to pull his net closer and closer comes to mind here. Verse 5 commences with a statement of trust, which Christ appropriated just before His death (Luke 23:46)—the psalmist will commit his spirit into God's hands. This encapsulates the experience of all those who completely entrust their lives to God and praise Him for deliverance. Such people are contrasted with those who give homage to vain idols (v. 6). The psalmist can rejoice in God's mercy, because He has set his feet in an open place. With this image of wide space the psalm returns to the plea.

31:9–24. Prayer II. The psalmist pleads for mercy and then lists a number of physical and emotional consequences of his trouble: his eyes are weakened by his distress, his strength fails, he is despised by his enemies, and he is even dreaded by his acquaintances (vv. 9–11). He has become a *persona non grata*, somebody who is forgotten as if dead (v. 12). In v. 13, he mentions whispering slander as the cause and states that fear is on every side (or, alternatively, that his enemies are saying, "fear/terror on every side" as a plan for their attack), a phrase that occurs also in Jeremiah's sentencing of Pashhur (Jer. 20:2–3; cf. Is. 31:9). Jeremiah probably took the phrase from this psalm and used it to summarize his message of judgment.

The affirmation of trust and petition for deliverance (vv. 14–16) is linked to the high priestly benediction (Num. 6:25) that God shine His face on him. He is requesting a renewal of God's favor and the silencing of his enemies (vv. 17–18). This second prayer (vv. 19–24) concludes the psalm and serves as an extended praise of God's goodness that protects those who trust in Him. There is an exhortation for all of God's people to be encouraged (vv. 23–24). David, persecuted by Saul, becomes a type for Christ, who is the ultimate persecuted One, even unto death. Jesus used the words of Psalm 31:5 to express His ultimate trust in His Father as He breathed His last for the forgiveness of our sins.

32:1–11

A Prayer for Forgiveness

Psalm 32 is a penitential poem closely associated with Psalm 51. Both express sorrow over sin and the joy that comes with the forgiveness of sins (cf. also Pss. 6; 38; 102; 130; 143). Traditionally, the Davidic authorship of the psalm and its similarity with Psalm 51 have led to its connection with the aftermath of David's sin with Bathsheba. The superscription *maskil* (sometimes rendered as "contemplation") occurs here for the first time and can also be rendered as "instruction." The term is based on the verbal form *sakal*, "to instruct," which also occurs in v. 8. There is an instructive element here in that the psalmist encourages others to follow not the way he has taken but God's way.

32:1–5. Praise for Forgiveness. Similar to Psalm 1, this psalm opens with a beatitude, this time for those who are forgiven. This opening summarizes the content of the remainder of the psalm. Sin is described as "rebellion" (*pesha'*) and "missing the mark" (*khata'ah*), both of which can refer to a deliberate act. Theologically and legally, the Lord does not impute iniquity to the sinner. Rather, the Lord imputes (*khashab*) righteousness to those who have faith in Him (Gen. 15:6; cf. Paul's usage of Ps. 32:2 in Rom. 4:8). Verses 3–5 describe the agony of unconfessed sin, which is described in the strongest physical terms, indicating the far-reaching consequences of hidden iniquity and divine discipline (vv. 3–4). This is relieved only after David acknowledged his sin (v. 5). One needs to be careful not to relate sin and discipline too dogmatically (as Job's friends do), but the psalmist is here recognizing God's attempt to correct him in his sin. Note the immediacy of forgiveness following the confession, "and You forgave." This is expressed emphatically in the Hebrew by the placement of the personal pronoun "you" in the front position. This is not grammatically required but is done for the purpose of emphasis.

32:6–11. Encouragement and Instruction. David immediately feels the need to extend his experience to others as the burden has been lifted off his shoulders. He concludes by noting that God's faithful and godly ones should pray to Him while He may be found, leading to deliverance and protection (v. 6). In v. 7, the psalmist returns to the personal dimension. The final section (vv. 8–11) is the formal instruction, in which the speaker appears to be God first addressing the psalmist (v. 8; singular) but then extending His instructions to others as well (v. 9). He uses the metaphor of the horse and mule, which must be harnessed. This is the style of wisdom language. In v. 10, we find a proverb (cf. Prov. 28:25). The final line of the psalm returns to psalmodic praise with a resounding invitation for the upright in heart to sing and shout for joy (v. 11). The contrast between the effects of unconfessed sin and the experience of forgiveness marks this psalm as one of the great penitential psalms that should encourage sinners to seek forgiveness.

33:1–22

God in Creation and History

Besides the two portals to the Psalms (Pss. 1 and 2) and Psalm 10 (a continuation of Ps. 9), Psalm 33 is the only other psalm in Book 1 that lacks a superscription (cf. the LXX and a ms. from Qumran, which add Davidic authorship). Psalm 33 is a hymn of praise, describing God as Creator and Lord of history. Verse 1 responds to 32:11 with a similar bidding of the righteous to rejoice.

33:1–3. Call to Praise. Psalm 33 is introduced by an extended call to praise that includes song and instrument. The motivation is that the praise of the upright is *na'weh* ("beautiful," "comely," "fitting"). Praise is a natural outflow of a heart that has experienced the redeeming power of God.

33:4–19. Cause for Praise. The fundamental cause for praise is God and His character: He loves righteousness and justice (v. 5), together with *'emunah* ("truth," "faithfulness"; v. 4) and *khesed* ("mercy," "goodness," "unfailing love"; v. 5). These are the perfections of Yahweh that run through the Psalms (cf. 25:8–16). Verses 6–9 move from a description of God's character to a description of His work of Creation, which was accomplished by His word (v. 6). This should inspire all people to revere Him. There is a strong affirmation of Genesis 1 and 2 as a literal Creation account (v. 9). Based on John 1 and on Christ as the *logos*, we can find here a messianic perspective.

From Creation the psalm moves to history, declaring the supremacy of God among the nations. His purposes and plans supersede those of the nations (cf. Dan. 2). No king is saved by the great size of his army (v. 16), but by his relationship to God (v. 12). Yahweh's salvific actions are manifested throughout history, and He is ready to deliver those who fear and hope in Him. History in the OT is always linked to God's interventions and is focused on the salvation of His people and beyond.

33:20–22. Declaration of Trust. An affirmation of trust in Yahweh concludes the psalm, its final climax being a congregational invocation for the Lord's *khesed* ("mercy," "unfailing love") to be upon His people who hope in Him. Trust provides a solid foundation for hope. Yahweh as Creator and Lord of history provides a historical basis for the work of salvation, which finds its supreme expression in Christ.

34:1–22

An Acrostic Testimony

Psalm 34 continues the instruction of the previous psalm in the form of an alphabetic poem, with some small irregularities (cf. Ps. 25) that testify about the goodness of Yahweh. The psalm is continuously *about* God, but none of the lines are directly addressed to Him. It covers a variety of life situations together, with the corresponding deliverance by Yahweh. The form is that of a didactic poem, which one may easily recall under a pressing situation. It was composed by David, and the historic superscription connects the psalm with a time when he feigned insanity before Achish (here called Abimelech, likely because that was a title for Philistine kings). That event (1 Sam. 21:10–15) is connected to the psalm in a number of ways, such as the emphasis on fear and the usage of the rare term *ta'am* ("taste, good sense"), which occurs in both passages (1 Sam. 21:13 // Ps. 34:1, 8).

34:1–10. Declarative Praise. Praise as a continuous and iterative attitude, both on individual and communal levels, dominates vv. 1–3. The motivation for unceasing praise is Yahweh's deliverance, mentioned in the next lines. He delivers from fears (v. 4), hears, and saves (v. 6). The often quoted v. 7 emphasizes the ministry of angels but goes beyond as the "angel of the LORD," or "messenger of the LORD" (*mal'ak yahweh*) is used as a divine title and has attributes that belong only to God (cf. Gen. 16:7; Josh. 5:14; Judg. 6:11–22; Zech. 3:1–6; see "The Angel of the Lord," p. 395). It points to the presence of Jesus in the OT, the One who as the Son of God and supreme Commander of all angels cares for our well-being. With such protection one can only taste and see that the Lord is good (v. 8). God's goodness is like tasting delicious food and wanting more of it (cf. 1 Pet. 2:3).

34:11–22. Instruction. The "fear of the LORD" is something that can be taught (Ps. 32:8; see "Wisdom and the Fear of the Lord," p. 764). The didactic section of the psalm is introduced in v. 11 and continues to the end as the fear of the Lord is being taught. This fear is further explained through five statements: govern both words and deeds (vv. 13–14), live the life of the righteous (vv. 15–16), search God in prayer with a broken heart (vv. 17–18), depend on God's protection in affliction because He delivers (vv. 19–20), and be confident in the judgment because no one who trusts God and takes refuge in Him will be condemned. As we can see, Psalm 34 continues the instructional tone of the previous psalms, providing practical lessons to be memorized for times of distress and connecting them to praise.

35:1–28

The Angel of the Lord

Psalms 34–35 are the only psalms that mention the "angel of the LORD." Psalm 35 does so in more detail by drawing more extensively on the divine Warrior metaphor. While Psalm 34 was more focused on protection, in Psalm 35 the request is for the "angel of the LORD" to stop the enemies who are attacking the psalmist. Three times the psalm goes through lament, plea, and praise for future deliverance, with emphasis on one of them in each of the stanzas (cf. Ps. 31). Davidic authorship is mentioned without any further superscription, but the period of his life when he was persecuted by Saul would fit this prayer well.

35:1–10. Prayer I. The first stanza emphasizes a plea for the destruction of the enemy, who is scheming without reason to take the life of the innocent psalmist (vv. 7–8). The "LORD" (v. 6) is called upon in military terms to put on his armor, to take both his *magen* ("shield") and his *tsinnah* ("large shield"; v. 2), and to draw his spear (v. 3), indicating both protection and aggression. When David requests that the Angel of the Lord chase them, the persecutors become the persecuted (vv. 1–6). By asking for the Angel of the Lord to act, David was recognizing that God often carries out these acts through these means. The section ends with a prospect of rejoicing in deliverance (vv. 9–10). The language is reminiscent of the Exodus (cf. Ex. 14–15).

35:11–18. Prayer II. In the second stanza, the focus is on the lament as it describes how the psalmist is suffering unjustly and how his enemies render him evil for good. They are false, malicious witnesses of *khamas* ("violence"), indicating that they are more interested in bloodshed than reconciliation. The psalmist even recalls that he prayed and fasted for his enemies when they were sick, as a friend or brother would (vv. 13–14). Obviously, there was a good personal relationship between the psalmist and his enemies that was now broken. His incredulity and disappointment at their hostility is summarized with a short plea in a question that echoes through the Psalms (v. 17), "How long?" The section concludes with a brief praise for future deliverance in the great assembly (v. 18).

35:19–28. Prayer III. The final stanza returns mostly to petition, requesting that God not let the enemies rejoice over him (v. 19). It is constructed by a series of calls for a divine intervention to end the slander that is aimed not only at the psalmist but also at those who live quietly in the land (v. 20). David uses legal terminology (cf. 9:4) as he invokes Yahweh to *'awar* and *qits* (stir and awaken Himself) for his *mishpat* ("vindication," "judgment") and *rib* ("dispute") and appeals to God as Judge (vv. 22–26). The final praise concludes the psalm along the same legal lines (vv. 27–28). A psalm bearing a threefold request for the destruction of the wicked, even though they persecute the just, makes some uncomfortable. However, one should not forget that it is a prayer to God (i.e., the appropriate channeling of justified anger against injustice). God prefers to take charge of our vindication instead of us taking charge of it ourselves (Deut. 32:35; Rom. 12:19).

36:1–12

A Stark Contrast

Psalm 36 is built around a stark contrast between human wickedness and divine faithfulness (*khesed* in vv. 5, 7, 10) which is developed in three movements (vv. 1–4; 5–9; 10–12). The title identifies David as the author and qualifies him as "the servant of the LORD." The title occurs only here and in 18:1.

36:1–4. Description of the Wicked. The description of the wicked moves from the inward (thoughts) to the outward (words and actions). Verse 1 should be understood as the revelation the psalmist receives from God concerning their wickedness. This is about the motivation of evil that takes place in the heart and then outflows in words and actions. At the bottom of evil motivation lies the denial of God's authority, because they do not fear Him. The denial of divine authority leads to the elevation of self and the rationalization of sin. Most translations refer to the wicked person "flattering himself" in v. 2. This expression can also be translated, "for he deals smoothly with himself" with regard to his sin. The glossing over of sin produces wicked words (v. 3), the person ceases to act with wisdom and goodness, and evil becomes an all-consuming occupation.

36:5–9. Divine Faithfulness. Without any transition, the poem moves to address Yahweh through a description of His faithful deeds. God's characteristics of mercy or constant love (*khesed*), faithfulness (*'emunah*), righteousness (*tsedaqah*), and judgments or justice (*mishpat*) (vv. 5–6) are mentioned. These characteristics, which are often linked together in covenant language (cf. Gen. 15; Ex. 34; 1 Kin. 3), are lofty, enormous, and deep, providing the safest place for humans to put their trust and take refuge under the shadow of God's wings (v. 7). This image is connected to the sanctuary and the cherubim above the ark, where all these divine attributes were at work. This is further developed through the provisions of the temple, where people ate from the fullness or abundance (lit. "the fat") or God's house and drank from the river of His pleasures, alluding to the rivers of Eden (v. 8; cf. Ps. 23 where eating and drinking is also connected to the temple). In that sense the sanctuary and its services are a reminder of paradise (see "Creation, Sabbath, and the Sanctuary," p. 231). Ultimately, it is Yahweh who is the fountain of life and He is light (v. 9), divine attributes which are appropriated by Jesus (John 4; 8:12).

36:10–12. Preservation of the Just. The final plea of the psalm returns to the themes of love and righteousness (cf. vv. 5–6) to be bestowed on the upright in heart (v. 10). There is also a request for protection from the wicked (v. 11). The psalmist describes the future downfall of the wicked, while acknowledging that for now they could be a threat to him. For him good and evil coexist often in astonishing proximity, until the day comes when God's judgment elevates the one and destroys the other (cf. Matt. 13:24–30, 36–40).

37:1–40

The Inheritance of the Land

Psalm 37 is another acrostic psalm creating a didactic poem almost at the end of Book 1 that is modeled along the lines of wisdom literature. A number of thematic parallels can be established with the book of Proverbs (e.g., v. 5 // Prov. 16:3; v. 24 // Prov. 24:16) and also with the beginning of the Psalms (especially the *torah* instruction of Psalm 1). There is a marked contrast between the way of the righteous and the way of the wicked, likened to the image of a tree (cf. v. 35; in Ps. 1:3 the just person is the tree). This contrast also links it to Psalm 73, which stands at the beginning of Book 3 (cf. also Pss. 91; 119). All these psalms create an ideal paradigm of how things should be, even if the psalms in between show how often things are not as they should be. Theologically, the psalm focuses on the possession of the land (vv. 3, 9, 11, 22, 29, 34), but not on returning to the land after the Exile. We find here both righteous and wicked living alongside each other and the righteous being under attack. This would fit well the historical situation at the beginning of the monarchy, to which the psalm has been connected through its Davidic authorship.

37:1–6. Commitment. The focus of vv. 1–6 is perseverance in faith connected to dwelling in the land. In a way this section outlines the theme of the psalm (vv. 7–40). The exhortation to not fret in v. 1 is paralleled in vv. 7 and 8 at the beginning of the next section. Refraining from anxiety in the face of adversity is possible by trusting that the wicked are like grass that withers and is cut down (v. 2). Furthermore, one should trust in the Lord and find delight in Him, the clear opposite to fretting (vv. 3–4; cf. 1:2). Using the metaphor of righteousness as light, verses 5–6 emphasize the commitment of the faithful one to God and the future promise that is connected with it.

37:7–33. Instruction. This section contains the main didactic instruction of the psalm and is a development of vv. 1–6, as indicated by the repeated exhortation to not fret (vv. 7–8). It is again a call to perseverance, to wait patiently for Him (v. 7), because the wicked will perish but the meek will inherit the earth or land (vv. 9–11). Land possession is a covenant promise and a keyword from Deuteronomy to Judges. Jesus contextualized v. 11 in the Beatitudes, extending the promise beyond Israel (Matt. 5:5). The contrast between the wicked and the just is elaborated in vv. 12–22. These contrasts often demonstrate true biblical wisdom and a worldview that transcends the here and now: the few possessions of the righteous are preferable to the wealth of many wicked people (v. 16). In reaction to the evil plotting and scheming, the Lord laughs at the wicked (v. 13) because they will perish and fade away (v. 20). This worldview also extends to ethical behavior, as the wicked borrow and do not repay but the righteous show mercy and give generously. The section ends with a summative statement that returns, by way of contrast, to the theme of inheritance. Those blessed by the Lord will inherit the land, but those cursed by Him will be *karat* ("cut off" or "destroyed").

The psalm shifts now to the blessings of the righteous (vv. 22–26), adding the voice of experience to the instruction: from his youth to his old age, the psalmist has never seen the righteous forsaken or begging for food (v. 25). The comportment of the righteous is linked to generosity, in contrast to the wicked who borrows and does not repay (v. 26; cf. v. 21). Generosity in the OT was an expression of righteousness and lending without interest, an ethical norm (cf. Ex. 22:25; Ps. 15:5). Because of this ethical lifestyle, God preserves the just from judgment and reiterates the refrain-like promise—the righteous shall inherit the land (v. 29). Ethics is described as wisdom and consequently the righteous speak wisely and the law of God is in their hearts (v. 31). This is an internalization of *torah* that projects itself into the NT (cf. Jer. 31:33; Heb. 8:10).

37:34–40. Future Perspective. Psalm 37 ends with an exhortation for the righteous to *qawah* ("wait" or "hope for") the Lord and keep His way, connecting it to previous reflections on "the way" (cf. 25:8–15). A final contrast, now located in the future, is created between the destiny of the wicked (they will have no future; it will be *karat*, "cut off"; v. 38) and the just (they will have a future). Some translations understand the future of the upright to be one of peace, while others suggest that peace is the characteristic of the upright person who has the future. The guarantor of this future is Yahweh, who will deliver the righteous from the wicked and save them (v. 40). Psalm 37 provides an ideal paradigm for a life based on God's instruction, a life of wisdom, *torah*, and eternal peace, based on the conviction that eventually and ultimately there will be peace.

38:1–22

Sin and Suffering

The physical illness described at the outset of this psalm connects it closely not only to Psalm 6 but also to the story of Job and the extended discourses with his friends on sin and suffering. Psalm 38 is also linked to Psalm 37 through a number of literary connections, such as the usage of the unusual *teshu'ah* ("salvation"; 38:22 // 37:39). It is not an acrostic, but its twenty-two verses connect it further to the preceding alphabetic poem. The psalm is ascribed to David. While physical suffering on the part of David is not recorded specifically in the historical books, the connection between sin and illness is familiar from the Davidic psalms (cf. Pss. 32; 51). The additional superscription, "to bring to remembrance" or "a petition," is also found in Psalm 70 and can be connected to the *memorial* offering, which acknowledged God's provisions as part of the sacrificial system (Lev. 2:2, 9, 16).

38:1–14. Initial Prayer and Lament. The psalmist begins by asking God not to rebuke and discipline him in His anger. The psalmist accepts divine discipline as a result of personal sin through the usage of *yasar* ("correct, discipline, chasten"; cf. 94:10), but at the same time he asks for a delimitation of divine displeasure. The first line of the psalm is almost identical to 6:1. The psalmist repeatedly expresses his physical suffering as a result of personal sin in vv. 2–4, and vv. 5–10 provide a detailed description of the sickness: his wounds are festering (v. 5), his *kesel* (translated variously as "loins," "back," or "insides") is/are burning (lit. "burning with shame"; v. 7), and his strength fails (v. 10). All this recalls the suffering of Job, yet with recognition of culpability. It is conceivable that David modeled his experience on Job as indicated by a number of linguistic and thematic connections between this lament section and the book of Job (see Job 6–7).

The lament now moves from the personal to a social dimension describing how loved ones, friends, and even relatives and neighbors stand afar off, avoiding and ostracizing the sick person—a common human reaction to suffering. The feeling of abandonment by the people closest to him worsens through the triumphant stance of his enemies, who exploit his weakness and speak of destroying him (v. 12). His reaction is a contrastive silence to all the enemies' hurtful words: he is like a mute who does not open his mouth (v. 13).

38:15–20. Faith in God's Salvation. The turning point away from lament to an expression of faith is introduced by the contrastive conjunction (*ki*), which also begins each of the next three verses. It underlines the appropriateness of the silence with which the lament concluded: he waits for and hopes in the Lord, trusting that He will hear and answer (v. 15). He is silent so that God may answer. The emphatic personal pronoun (lit. "you, you will answer") indicates that he has handed over to God the question of personal vindication. The psalmist himself is not capable of responding because he is close to falling and his pain and sorrow are continuous (v. 17). His emotional condition is beyond the physical dimension of his suffering. Verse 18 is climactic in that it uses the contrastive *ki* for the last time, introducing the psalmist's public acknowledgment of his sin. This forms the basis for God's vindication.

38:21–22. Final Prayer. The psalm ends with an echo of its beginning, pleading for God to intervene. It concludes by invoking Yahweh as his salvation (v. 22), as Psalm 37 did. Sin and suffering are not necessarily linked to each other, but this penitential psalm expresses the sober reality of sin as the cause of suffering. What is required from all is confession of sin and a request for forgiveness.

39:1–13

Life's Brevity

Psalm 39 continues the theme of prayer for deliverance from sickness and sin found in Psalm 38, but focuses more on the final result of sin, death, and the experience of life's brevity. The two psalms are connected through verbal links such as "mute" or "silent" (vv. 2, 9 // 38:13), "rebuke" (v. 11 // 38:1), "mouth" (vv. 1, 9 // 38:13, 14), "hope" (v. 7 // 38:15). A number of repetitious phrases emphasize the transitoriness of life (e.g., everyone is vapor/breath; vv. 5, 11). The theme recalls the experience of Job (cf. vv. 12–13 // Job 10:20–21) as well as the book of Ecclesiastes (e.g. 1:2; 12:8). "Jeduthun" was a music leader in the temple during the reigns of David and Solomon (cf. 1 Chr. 16:41–42). The verbal connections with 1 Chronicles 29:15 strengthen the Davidic authorship.

39:1–3. Unbearable Silence. At the outset of the poem, the psalmist commits himself to silence (cf. 38:13) so that he will not sin with his words. Verses 8–13 (esp. v. 9) give the motivation for his silence as he wants to refrain from complaining about God's discipline in his life. He does not want to bring reproach upon Yahweh in the eyes of the ungodly. The following statement, that he did not even say anything good (lit. "I showed silence from good"), is difficult to understand. Combined with the following line, it could be interpreted as a comparative construction: "I was silent more than was good for me," therefore his sorrow increased (v. 2). The inner pressure of unconfessed sin (his heart became "hot") finally gives way to speech (he spoke with his tongue; v. 3).

39:4-6. Everyone is but Vapor. Before he confesses his sins (vv. 7-13), the psalmist directs his words only to Yahweh in a contemplation of life's brevity and the certainty of his own mortality. Verse 5 uses *hebel* ("breath" or "vapor") for describing the brevity of human life even at its best, and v. 6 repeats twice the adverb of degree, *'ak* ("surely"; translated differently or omitted the second time in some translations), followed by further descriptions of the inevitability of death. How much more fragile is life without God?

39:7-13. Hope Through Forgiveness. The turning point in the psalm is introduced by a contrastive conjunction with "now," transitioning to an expression of faith that acknowledges God's discipline yet confesses and asks for deliverance (v. 7). The plea for saving deliverance from transgressions (v. 8) refers to the forgiveness of the psalmist's rebellious acts (*pesha'*), which are the cause of his current misery. David asks God to remove His *nega'* ("plague," "scourge," "stroke"; cf. Ex. 11:1) and refers again to the motif of human mortality (v. 11). The psalm ends with a prayer in which David likens himself to a *ger* ("foreigner," "stranger"). This terminology is reminiscent of the sojourners of the patriarchic period who had no permanent dwelling place (v. 12; cf. Deut. 10:18-19; 1 Chr. 29:15).

The final petition, for God to turn His gaze away from him (lit. "blind yourself from me"), must be understood as an appeal for God not to look at the psalmist to punish him (cf. Job 7:19; 14:6). He wants to *balag* ("smile"; some translations follow the LXX and the Greek *anaphuxō* and thus have "regain strength") before he departs and is no more. The brevity of life described in this psalm serves as a sober reminder of the emotional and physical pressure that unconfessed sin creates in the life of the believer—it touches the physical, emotional, and spiritual aspects of the person. Only confession and forgiveness deliver us from this pressure, making it possible for us to smile again, even in the face of transient life.

40:1-17

Sacrificial Service

The central theme of Psalm 40 is a dedication to God's service that flows out of deliverance from a near-death experience. Psalm 39:13 ends with the idea of death and 40:1-2 follows on with a song of praise because God brought the psalmist up from the pit. The psalm moves from praise (vv. 1-12) to plea (vv. 13-17) in similar fashion as Psalm 27. It has been suggested that the two parts of the psalm were originally separate psalms, particularly because the second part is almost identical to Psalm 70. However, there are verbal links between these two parts and praise can naturally precede plea (cf. Pss. 9-10; 27; 89). It is conceivable that Psalm 70 represents a liturgical adaptation of the latter part of Psalm 40. David is mentioned as the author, and through its connection to the previous psalm it continues the theme of deliverance from sin. This psalm also has been seen as having three parts (vv. 1-5; vv. 6-10; and vv. 11-17).

40:1-12. From Deliverance to Service. The psalmist has waited patiently for the Lord, an extended time of extreme suffering that is followed by deliverance out of a horrible pit of destruction (v. 2). This is poetic language often used to describe death and the grave (cf. 28:1; 30:3; see also Jer. 38 for a literal experience). Having returned from a deadly experience, he praises God with a new song and reaffirms his faith in Him as a man who makes the Lord his trust (v. 4). Praise turns to a contemplation of God's wonderful works (v. 5) and as consequence to a personal dedication to service (vv. 6-8). That service moves beyond empty rituals (v. 6; cf. 1 Sam. 15:22-23) to commitment based on a changed understanding (opening his ears) and a new heart (where the law is).

This is not an undoing of the OT sacrificial service but a shifting of priorities to the correct motivation for service (cf. Jer. 31:33). The psalmist's dedication to service finds its typological and messianic echo in Hebrews 10:5-7 as it describes Christ's ultimate dedication to service. Verses 9-10 make personal praise a public witness and vv. 11-12 appeal to God to continue to show His love to the psalmist, as the threat of innumerable difficulties is still very present in his life. This sets the tone for the next section of the psalm.

40:13-17. A Final Plea. The final petition of the psalm begins with an appeal to God to deliver (v. 13). It is followed by a plea for divine vindication against those who seek to kill him (vv. 14-15). Then, as in the first part of the psalm, the psalmist turns from the individual to the community, asking for blessings on those whose lives are at the service of God (v. 16). Verse 17 returns to the needs of the psalmist for divine intervention as he pleads with God to not delay. The messianic dimension heightens the true motivation for service. Our dedication for service (cf. Rom. 12:1) only makes sense in the ultimate sacrificial service of the Son of God on the cross (cf. Heb. 10:5-7).

41:1-13

Healing

The last psalm of Book 1 starts, like Psalm 1, with a beatitude, thus connecting the end to the beginning and reinforcing the idea of *torah* ("instruction") once more. The central theme of the psalm is healing (vv. 4-10), which connects it well with Psalms 38-40. While there is no direct record of David being ill, there was certainly occasion in his life for him to have written this poem.

41:1-3. Beatitude. Like Psalm 1:1, Psalm 41 begins with a beatitude for those who consider the poor and needy. The focus is on ethical conduct, connecting it, through the use of the participle *maskil* ("look at," "act with insight"), to wisdom literature (cf. Prov. 16:20; 21:12). We find a list of all the fortunes that will come to those who do good to the needy. In v. 3, the blessing of right doing is recovery from sickness.

41:4-10. Healing. The section contains the psalmist's prayer for recovery. As in Psalm 38, it connects sickness with sin (v. 4; cf. also 51:2). It also includes an extended reference to the enemies who are just waiting for David to die (vv. 5-9). But it is not only his enemies who are exploiting his illness; it is even one of his close, trusted friends. The betrayal is brought to its cruel completion by the friend (some suggest Ahithophel; cf. 2 Sam. 15:31) who turned against him (lit. "lifted up his heel"). The image alludes to Jacob, who became known as the "heel-grabber" or "deceiver" (Gen. 27:36). The passage is appropriated by Jesus with reference to His betrayal by Judas (John 13:18). Yet, even if betrayed by his closest friends, the psalmist finds refuge and healing in Yahweh, who in His mercy will raise him up (v. 10).

41:11-13. Thanksgiving for Deliverance and Doxology. The psalm concludes with a short prayer of thanksgiving relating how God answered and healed him so that his integrity is reestablished and, using sanctuary imagery, he stands in the presence of the Lord once more (v. 12). The final verse (v. 13) is not part of the psalm but serves as a doxology for Book 1 (the doxologies of the other books are in 72:18-20; 89:52; 106:48; 146-150). The twofold "Amen and Amen" affirms the reality that the psalms are as much theology as they are doxology. Declarations about God call for a response in worship.

PSALMS 42—72

BOOK II

Book 2 of the Psalms continues the association with the period of the Davidic monarchy through authorship and historical notes. The book contains most of the psalms from the Korah collection (Pss. 42-49), while the remainder of this collection is in Book 3 (Pss. 84-85; 87-88). Korah and his descendants served as gatekeepers and musicians in the sanctuary from David's reign onward (cf. 1 Chr. 9:19; 26:19). This explains the thematic focus of the Korahite psalms on the nations and their pilgrimage to the temple. Beyond this group, there are Davidic psalms that end with Psalm 72:20, marking the end of an earlier collection of psalms.

The beginning of Book 2 also marks the beginning of another group of psalms that displays a preference for *'elohim* ("God") instead of *yahweh* as a designation of God (Pss. 42-83). This has motivated scholars to speak of so-called Elohistic Psalms, even though there are 45 occurrences of *yahweh* in those psalms. The divine name preference is also indicated by the fact that there are only nineteen occurrences of *'elohim* in the rest of the Psalms. However, both names often occur in poetic parallelism (e.g., 46:11), each name indicating a specific aspect of God's character; *yahweh* expresses His closeness and immanence, and *'elohim*, His distance and transcendence. It is also interesting to note that a single Asaph psalm (Ps. 50) is sandwiched between the Korah psalms (Pss. 42-49) and the Davidic psalms (Pss. 51-72), which make up the sub-collections of Book 2 (see commentary on Ps. 50:1-23).

42:1—43:5

Longing for God's Presence

A number of literary connections between Psalms 42 and 43 allow a unified reading of the two poems: (1) Psalm 43 is the only psalm in the Korahite collection without a superscription (cf.

Pss. 9–10); (2) there is a recurring refrain that is repeated thrice throughout the two psalms (vv. 42:5, 11; 43:5); (3) some Hebrew manuscripts combine the two psalms; and (4) there is a thematic continuation from lament to plea between the two poems. The superscription *maskil* ("instruction"; sometimes translated as "contemplation") occurs with thirteen psalms designated as instructional or didactic psalms (cf. Pss. 32, 42, 44–45, 52–55, 74, 78, 88–89, and 142).

42:1–5. Longing for God. The simile in v. 1 of the deer that pants for water effectively introduces the theme of longing for God. It is applied to the psalmist, whose soul (*nepesh*, refers to the whole being; v. 2) thirsts for God. More specifically, he wants to appear before God and meet with Him, an expression that is linked to the sanctuary (cf. Deut. 31:11). The deer is a familiar image found on seal impressions from OT times and communicates the intense longing for God's presence. Verse 2 repeats *nepesh*, and v. 3 introduces the mocking enemies who repeatedly ask throughout the psalm, "Where is your God?" (cf. v. 10), indicating that the psalmist is far from the temple. He reminisces the time when he had access to the temple, when he joined the thronging multitude and went *dadah* ("to walk slowly in procession") with them to the house of God. The section concludes with the first occurrence of the introspective question "Why are you downcast?" It is also an expression used in mourning (cf. Ps. 35:14). The positive answer comes with a resounding encouragement to hope in God (lit. "wait upon God"). Inner dialogues of the faithful often include God and the inner voice speaks to our conscience. Jesus appropriates the words of vv. 5–6 during His experience in Gethsemane (cf. Mark 14:34; John 12:27).

42:6–11. More Longing. After a short glimmer of hope expressed in the first refrain, the psalmist returns to the despair of separation from God's presence, using the geography of northern Israel to underline his argument. Continuing with the initial image of the deer panting for water, the psalmist now refers to the land of the Jordan, which has its headwaters at the foot of the heights of Hermon, the multi-peaked mountain on the northeastern border of Israel (v. 6). The Hill or Mount Mizar is an unknown locale, but the waterfalls in v. 7 bring to mind the cascading river Jordan at Baniyas. However, thundering nature and water imagery speak of despair and life-threatening experiences as God's waves and billows sweep over him. There is a ray of hope in the middle of despair—the Lord's love by day and His song by night (v. 8). This is the only mention of *yahweh* among the twelve occurrences of *'elohim* in Psalms 42–43, expressing God's closeness in the middle of divine absence and in response to the psalmist's longing for His presence. The scornful question of the enemies is repeated, "Where is your God?" (v. 10). The refrain of v. 5 is also repeated. Some translations follow the LXX in which vv. 5 and 10 are identical, both affirming the Lord as the psalmist's personal Savior and God. The Masoretic Hebrew text renders v. 11 with slight modifications from v. 5, making it more affirmative. Whereas deliverance in the first refrain (v. 5) came from God's presence or countenance, now the God who delivers is his personal God and Savior.

43:1–5. Plea for Vindication. Taking both psalms together, the poem now moves into petition, requesting God in legal language to plead his cause against a faithless nation, placing the prayer in the national arena. Verse 2 connects well with Psalm 42:9, asking the almost identical rhetorical question: Why must he go mourning because of the enemy's oppression? The appeal for God's deliverance follows in v. 3 and restoration is connected to the return to God's holy *har* ("hill" or "mountain") and to His *mishkan* ("dwelling place" or "tabernacle").

Return to the sanctuary is further developed in v. 4, climatically fulfilling the longing of the psalmist to stand once more in the temple (see 42:2–4). The third repetition of the refrain in v. 5 completes the fulfilled longing, and within the context of the third section it becomes now a shout of joy, sung with rejoicing (v. 4). Longing for God's presence is often accompanied by a despaired feeling of His absence. However, His perceived absence is not necessarily real absence. Jesus used the words of Psalms 42–43 in the garden of Gethsemane, but His Father and the angelic host were at His side: "God suffered with His Son. Angels beheld the Savior's agony" (DA, 693).

44:1–26
National Defeat

The psalm is a communal psalm, using mostly "we" instead of the individual "I" that has characterized the Davidic psalms. It connects verbally to Psalms 42–43 in looking for deliverance (v. 4 // 42:5, 11), mentioning oppression (v. 24 // 42:9; 43:2), and noting the fear of being cast off by God (vv. 9, 23 // 43:2). The historical background of the psalm appears to be a national defeat (vv. 9–16), which is difficult to date. The Assyrian invasions recorded in 2 Kings 15 and 18 provide possible occasions for the poem. The superscriptions of Psalms 42:1 and 44:1 are identical (though the order is slightly changed) and unique in the Korahite group in Book 2. It identifies this psalm also as instruction.

44:1–8. Past Glories and God as King. The psalm commences with a recollection of the conquest when God drove out the nations (v. 2) and settled Israel in the promised land. This event is clearly viewed by the psalmist as a historical event, namely, the invasion of the Holy Land under the direction of God. Building on the historicity of the conquest, vv. 4–8 didactically extol Yahweh's kingship, asking Him to once more ordain victories for Jacob (v. 4). Victory, as in days past, was possible only through Him when He saved them from their enemies (vv. 4, 7). A chiastic structure for vv. 1–8 is perceivable, placing an emphasis on v. 4 as the central declaration of trust in the section.

44:9–16. National Defeat. After the historical praise of vv. 1–8, the psalmist next introduces a major contrast using the disjunctive *'ap* ("yet," "even," but"). God's defeating of the other nations for the sake of Israel (v. 2) appears to have ended. He seems to have rejected them, no longer accompanying and helping their armies in battle (v. 9). This results in national defeat and exile (vv. 10–12), making Israel a byword among the nations (v. 14). All this has resulted in dishonor, disgrace, and shame for Israel (v. 15), which ultimately reflects on Yahweh.

44:17–22. Claim of Innocence. The psalmist speaks collectively, affirming faithfulness to God and to His covenant (vv. 17–18). This is not a defeat brought about by the sins of the people but rather the suffering of the innocent, and they are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered (v. 22). Romans 8:36 quotes this passage and applies it to the suffering of Christians for the sake of Christ.

44:23–26. Plea for Deliverance. The psalm concludes with four imperatives directed to God as a plea for deliverance: *'awar* ("awake," "raise Yourself"; v. 23), *qits* ("awaken," "rise up"; v. 23), *qum* ("awake," "rise up"; v. 26), and *padah* ("redeem"; v. 26). The final appeal is to Yahweh's *khesed* ("mercy"). Innocent suffering has been the experience of God's children throughout the ages, but we can appeal to God because faith knows that the moment comes when He arises again to redeem.

45:1–17
A Wedding Song

Somewhat surprising is this *shir yedidot* among the Korahite psalms. A *shir* is a song and the term *yedidot*, which occurs only here in the Hebrew Bible, is closely related to the adjective *yadid*, "beloved." The phrase has thus been translated as "a love song" or "a wedding song"—the latter primarily because of the content of the Psalm. It seems to be more in tune with the Song of Solomon (cf. Song 3:6–11; 5:10–16). It is conceivable that the psalm was composed for a royal wedding, possibly during the early monarchy. There are seven references to the king and royal regalia (throne, scepter, garments). There is a messianic dimension underlying the psalm, as characteristics which are attributed to the king seem to move beyond the human sphere (especially in v. 6, where the King is referred to as "God"). Thus the psalm has been interpreted as messianic from earliest times (supported by Ellen White, MB 49). The portrayal of military activity fits with the time of David. The poem is set to the tune of "Lilies," which is also referenced in Psalm 60.

45:1–9. Dedication and Groom. The psalmist describes himself as one whose tongue is that of a skillful scribe and who is ready to recite his poetic work for the King while his heart is *rakhash* ("stirred," "moved," or "overflowing"), a verb used only here in the OT. The psalmist is stirred by his vision as he clads a messianic prophecy within the beautiful garment of love poetry. The description of the groom begins with his outer appearance (v. 2): he is superlatively "handsome"/"fair," a description reminiscent of David's introduction in 1 Samuel 16:12. The comparative expression then moves beyond the human sphere. Beyond the physical, there is also grace that characterizes the words of the royal groom.

The king is described in terms of his military role as commander in chief, mentioning his sword and arrows (vv. 3, 5) and his enduring throne and scepter (v. 6). The expression "Your throne, O God" (v. 6) has been rendered in various versions to make it applicable to an earthly royal wedding (e.g., "Your throne is from God," NJB). However, the original text points beyond the immediate historical context to a prophetic messianic reading of the psalm. The inspired commentary on vv. 6–7, as found in Hebrews 1:8–9, confirms this by identifying Jesus as the Anointed (v. 7), the Messiah. Verses 8–9 switch back to the immediate historical context in describing the clothing of the royal groom. They are scented with myrrh and aloes and cassia (v. 8) as he awaits his queen (v. 9). The Hebrew word used here, *shegal* ("royal consort"), occurs in its noun form only here and in Nehemiah 2:6.

45:10–16. Bride. The psalm turns now to address the bride using marriage terminology reminiscent of Genesis 2–3. The emphasis is on the physical and emotional relationship between husband and wife. The king is enamored with the queen's beauty, and she is to bow down and honor him because he is her lord. The verb *'awah* ("desire, crave") does not always have positive connotations, and the description accurately reflects the marriage relationship after the Fall (Gen. 3:16). As the groom's garments were described at the end of the previous section, now the bride's attire is also described (vv. 13–14) as she is led in procession to the king (v. 15). Her dress identifies her as the queen. The wedding poem concludes with a blessing for procreation, wishing that the sons will succeed the fathers so that the royal line will continue.

45:17. Blessing. Psalm 45 concludes with a blessing for the king that he be remembered throughout all generations. The language moves once more beyond the human sphere when it is said that the people will praise the king forever. Bride/groom is an important metaphor for the relationship between Christ and His church (John 3:29; Eph. 5:25–27; Rev. 19:7–9). While it is important not to overlook the historical aspect of this psalm, the prophetic dimension is clearly indicated in the NT.

46:1–11
A Mighty Fortress

The poem is a declaration of trust in a God who, in the midst of turmoil, provides peace from His city to the whole earth. At the center of this declaration are the references to God as "our refuge," which is found three times in the psalm (vv. 1, 7, 11). The first stanza begins with the refrain, whereas the second and third stanzas are concluded by it. *Selah* marks the end of each section. The heading identifies the psalm as Korahite. The musical annotation *'alamut* occurs here and, in a modified form, *'almut*, in Psalm 9:1 (where it means something different. In comparison with 1 Chronicles 15:20, it has been suggested to translate it here as "according to maidens," possibly meaning that the instruments were tuned to a high (soprano) key.

46:1–3. Even Though. Following the programmatic refrain "God is our refuge" at the outset of the psalm, a series of four enormous upheavals in nature creates a striking contrast with the safety that the faithful find in God. Verses 2–3 describe an earthquake accompanied by roaring waters and shaking mountains that fall into the sea. These are the accompanying natural phenomena of theophany (cf. 18:7–15).

46:4–7. Peace in the City of God. From a cataclysmic nature the psalm changes its tone and moves to a peaceful description of the city of God (v. 5) that enjoys divine protection because God is in it, especially in the *mishkan* ("the holy place" or "tabernacle"; v. 4). Instead of roaring waters, there is a peaceful river whose streams make the city glad (v. 4), an image that is taken from the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:10–14; Rev. 22:1–2). The remainder of the stanza returns to the upheaval coming from nations instead of nature, again connected to theophanic language (the earth melts at God's voice; v. 6). The refrain is now repeated with two modifications. First, instead of the more abstract *makhaseh* ("refuge;" v. 1) we find the more concrete *misgab* ("secure height," "a stronghold," "a retreat"), denoting a physical structure. Second, the phrase "God of Jacob" is added, which recalls the experience of the patriarch under the protection of Yahweh.

46:8–11. Peace on Earth. The final stanza is a surprising one. While the description of God in the previous sections has been dominated by terminology that draws on the Warrior metaphor (e.g., *yahweh tseba'ot*, "Lord of hosts" or "Lord Almighty"; v. 7), the psalm suddenly creates a striking contrast by stating that God makes wars cease (v. 9) and extends peace from the city to the ends of the earth. He destroys the implements of war (i.e., bow and spear). The destruction of warfare is completed as He burns the chariot (or shields; LXX) in the fire. This irenic departure from the expected Warrior metaphor enlarges our understanding of it and demonstrates that the ultimate objective of divine warfare is peace. The physical connotation of the refuge as a stronghold in Psalm 46 motivated Martin Luther to compose the hymn "A Mighty Fortress is Our God." The hymn recalls not only the towering fortresses of Germany but also how God will finally make all wars cease.

47:1–9
God Reigns

The divine epithet of God as Most High (*'elyon*) is used in Psalm 47:2 as well as in the previous psalm (46:4) connecting the two psalms to each other. Further connections include the universal perspective of "nations" and "peoples" (vv. 3, 8; 46:10) and the mention of Jacob (v. 4; 46:7, 11). Psalm 46 ended with a universal extension of divine peace to all the earth, and Psalm 47 invites all to acknowledge God's universal kingship as the foundation of peace. Critical scholarship has called this an *enthronement* psalm, describing Yahweh's coronation ritual, which was supposed to be an annual festival comparable to similar occasions in other ANE cultures. However, a close reading of the psalm reveals that it is an acknowledgment of eternal divine kingship rather than the initiation of God's reign. The psalm belongs to the collection of the sons of Korah.

47:1–5. Yahweh Subdued Nations. The psalm begins with a universal invitation for all people and nations to clap their hands. This is an expression of joy that acknowledges God as the universal and triumphal King. "For" or "because" (*ki*) provides the first reason for the praise of Yahweh Most High: He is a majestic and sovereign God (cf. Gen. 14:18–22; Ps. 57:2). He has also subdued the peoples. Some translations understand this to occur in the future ("will subdue") while others see it as a current situation ("subdues"). The verbal context of vv. 1–5 and the reference to the past experience of Jacob in v. 4 suggest that the section can also be understood as a reference to the past election of Israel when Yahweh subdued the nations during the Exodus and the conquest of Canaan. This is confirmed by the use of the expression *ga'on* ("height," "loftiness"; translated variously as "pride," "excellence," or "glory"), which can be a literal reference to the hill country of Israel. As Israel occupied the heights of Canaan, so God ascended with a shout and the sound of a trumpet. These expressions are associated with the conquest (cf. Josh. 6). Theologically, the exaltation of God is the reason for Israel's exaltation.

47:6–9. Yahweh Is King. The correspondence between the two sections of Psalm 47 provides a blueprint for its interpretation. The invitation to praise in v. 1 is repeated four times in v. 6, occurring as a framing device at the beginning and end of the two lines that make up the verse. The motivational clause of v. 7 (introduced by *ki*) offers God's kingship as the second reason for praise, repeating the invitation once more (lit. "sing a *maskil* praise"). God's universal sovereignty is stressed again in v. 8, and v. 9 concludes the psalm with another reference to Israel and the nations. The last motivational sentence has a Hebrew reference to the shields of earth belonging to God. This has been translated by some as a possible reference to the kings or rulers (cf. Hos. 4:18). The psalm ends with a final exaltation of God. The universal proclamation of God's kingship in Psalm 47 and the offer of peace to all the earth in Psalm 46 remind us that the healing of the human race is found in humble submission to Him.

48:1–14
The City of God

The focus of Psalm 48 is on Zion as the city of our God, linking it to the two previous psalms. This is done through its reference to the Exodus and conquest, the universal nature of divine deliverance, and other literary connections (e.g., *misgab* "fortress"; v. 3; 46:7, 11). Both psalms 46 and 48 could have been performed as victory songs, and the superscriptions on both assign them to the sons of Korah.

48:1–3. City of God. The psalm begins with an extended invitation to praise God from Zion as the great King (v. 2) who lives in Zion's citadels or palaces (v. 3). God is recognized as Zion's refuge and as the fortress (cf. 46:7, 11) that provides refuge for the whole earth (v. 2). The mention of the *tsapon* ("north"; v. 2) stresses the importance of the city, since the "north" is where the abode of God is located (cf. Is. 14:13). It could also be a polemic against Canaanite religion, for which Mt. Zaphon (Heb. *tsapon* in v. 2 can be translated as either "north" or "Zaphon") was the abode of its main deity, Baal. Thus, Zion is occupying the most important position among all mountains, and Yahweh—not Baal—is the sovereign God above all other gods.

48:4–8. Victory over Foreign Forces. The next section provides the motivation for the statements in the first section. The image is that of an attacking army that melts away in fear as they behold the fortress of Zion. The extent of their terror is likened to birth pains of a woman in labor (v. 6), and the destructive power of the *yahweh tseba'ot* ("Lord of hosts" or "Lord Almighty"; v. 8) is compared to the east wind that breaks the strongest of all seafaring vessels. The ships of Tarshish refers to ships that were capable of making the long journey to southern Spain on the other side of the known world (cf. 1 Kin. 10:22; 2 Chr. 9:21).

48:9–11. Human Response. Worship is the adequate human response to divine acts of deliverance. The language used draws on the Song of the Sea in Exodus 15 (e.g., God's right hand, v. 10 // Ex. 15:6, 12). In His temple, people meditate on God's *khesed* ("kindness," "unfailing love," "faithfulness") as the driving force that has brought deliverance from Zion. The daughters of Judah most probably designate the cities or towns of Judah (cf. Josh. 15:45).

48:12–14. Victory Procession. There is an invitation to walk throughout Zion and all around her (v. 12). A victory procession circumnavigates the city of God from all angles, marking all its architectural features and defense systems. The purpose is to tell the next generation all about the city and keep alive the memory of God's deliverance in order to sustain future generations. God has promised to always guide us, even to the end. The peace that the earthly Jerusalem has never been able to experience will be a reality when the New Jerusalem descends from heaven (Rev. 21:2, 10) as the eternal habitation of God's people.

49:1–20

Trust in Riches

The final Korahite psalm of Book 2 deals with, in the tradition of wisdom literature (cf. Pss. 1; 37), the question of where to put one's trust in the face of death and its inevitability. In line with the remainder of the collection, it maintains a universal scope by appealing to the peoples of the earth. There is a refrain that concludes both main sections (vv. 12, 20), contemplating the transience of human life apart from an understanding of God—a human being is "like the beasts that perish" (v. 12).

49:1–4. Call to Listen to Wisdom. The introduction to the poem is reminiscent of Proverbs 1–2, emphasizing the need to reflect on wisdom as it applies to everyone—low and high, rich and poor (v. 2). It draws on all sensatory faculties (the poet's mouth provides wisdom, and his heart, understanding).

49:5–12. Futility of Human Wealth. The psalmist now explores the futility of those who trust in their wealth (vv. 5–9). Since death is inevitable, wealth cannot save us or our relatives. Similarly, names, land, and wealth are subject to fading away since human beings do not remain (v. 12). The section ends with the sobering refrain that people are like "the beasts that perish." The lifestyle of those who trust in richness does not much differentiate humankind from animals.

49:13–20. Futility of Humankind. The psalm moves from the wealthy to those who pursue a beast-like lifestyle. Death is the final destiny for them, in contrast to the upright who will rule over them in the morning (v. 14). This is a reference to the concept of resurrection, which is reinforced by the reference to being redeemed from *she'ol* ("the grave"; v. 15). The rich person was not able to redeem (*padah*) him or herself or any relative (v. 7), but God will redeem the whole being (*nepesh*) of the faithful on resurrection morning. Verses 15–19 once more review the futility of humans who, separated from God, pursue riches; their final destiny is death. The repeated refrain of v. 12 in v. 20 has a variation that underlines the final message of the psalm. While v. 12 emphasizes the finality of death, in v. 20 the emphasis is on discernment. It is of existential importance to understand at some point in our lives that the riches of this world are nothing in the face of death and eternity. Only God can redeem us from the inevitability of the grave, and He has done this through the death of His Son.

50:1–23

Trust in True Sacrifice

Psalm 50 connects to Psalm 49 through numerous verbal links. Twenty-two significant terms appear in both psalms that are otherwise rare in the rest of Book 2 (e.g., *ratsah*, "to be pleased with," "to join"; v. 18; 49:13). This psalm provides a counterpoint in focusing on the sacrificial system and its life-giving effects when approached in true worship. Again, the connecting theme is trust in God (Ps. 50), not in riches (Ps. 49). There is a prophetic dimension to the psalm (esp. vv. 1–6), which is in line with its authorial superscription, "of Asaph," who was a seer and musician in David's days (1 Chr. 15:17, 19; 2 Chr. 29:30). It will become evident below that the psalm has connections not only with the first collection of the Korah psalms (Pss. 42–49) but also with the second group of Davidic psalms (Pss. 51–72). The Asaph psalm is thus sandwiched between the two groups and serves as a hinge between them. The rest of the Asaph psalms are found in Psalms 73–83 in Book 3.

50:1–6. Covenant Lawsuit. The introduction to this psalm is the proclamation of a covenant lawsuit which has its roots in Genesis 3:8–19 and the legal material of the Pentateuch (cf. Lev. 26; Deut. 27–28), and which is also common in the prophetic literature (cf. Is. 1; Mic. 6:6–8). God calls upon heaven and earth as witnesses (v. 4) as He appears from Zion (v. 2; this establishes a link with Ps. 48). The theophany is accompanied by fire and tempest (cf. 18:7–15) as He gathers together those who made a covenant with Him by sacrifice. The reference to the making of the covenant echoes the ritual of Genesis 15:7–21 but also clarifies that the covenant was ratified by sacrifice (Ex. 24:5–8), pointing typologically to the new covenant in Christ (Heb. 9:18–23).

50:7–15. First Accusation. While the previous section does not identify the parties of the lawsuit, v. 7 indicates that the accused are God's people, and it does so by modeling the charge on the Shema (Deut. 6:4). The Shema is the most explicit monotheistic confession of the covenant in ancient and modern Israel. It begins with the command to *shim'ah*, imperative of the verb *shama'* ("to hear" or "to listen"), and ends with the allusive expression "I am God, your God!" The substance of the accusation goes along the lines of 1 Samuel 15:22. While there is an abundance of sacrifices and external ceremonies, there is a lack of personal commitment and true obedience, which contradicts the original covenant conditions. The center of the section clarifies that God is not dependent on our sacrifices: all the animals in the forest and the cattle on a thousand hills belong to Him (v. 10). God rather looks for a heart full of true thanksgiving, true commitment, and a sincere prayer life (v. 15).

50:16–23. Second Accusation. The accusation intensifies against those who speak of God's covenant (i.e., those who claim to be part of the covenant people) and are now identified as being wicked (v. 16). Verses 17–20 list the ethical infractions through which the covenant has been broken (i.e., injustice, deceit, and slander). God patiently kept silent for a time, but now it is time to arraign them, rebuke them, and help them to consider this (lit. "understand"; v. 22) before it is too late, lest God tear them in pieces. This is the same understanding (Heb. *bin*) that concluded the previous psalm (49:20), creating a further link between the two poems. The psalm concludes with an invitation to salvation for the person who directs his/her conduct well, namely, the one who responds positively to God's charges, repents, and returns to covenant faithfulness.

51:1–19

Repentance

As a truthful reaction to the indictment of Psalm 50, Psalm 51 is a penitential poem, emphasizing heartfelt repentance as the only way to return to God. Psalms 31, 38, and 51 focus on the confession of sin. Psalm 51 makes an explicit historical connection in its superscription to the life of David when he committed adultery with Bathsheba (cf. 2 Sam. 12). As in the previous psalm, God is looking not for external forms and sacrifices but for a broken and contrite heart (v. 17; 50:9–13). The psalm introduces the second group of Davidic psalms, which continues until the end of Book 2.

51:1–9. Confession of Sin. The psalmist begins with a plea for God's grace, appealing to mercy (*khanan*, "to have mercy"), faithfulness (*khesed*), and compassion (*rakhamim*) as the foundation of divine grace. All three theological terms are an integral part of Yahweh's self-revelation in Exodus 34:6. The psalmist is asking God to deal with him in accordance with His character. The three mercies of God are juxtaposed with the three offences of the psalmist that are the subject of this psalm: transgressions, iniquity, and sin (vv. 1–2). The true character of evil is identified in the acknowledgment that all our sins are committed against God (v. 4). Sin, while tragically and destructively impacting other people, is foremost a rupture of our relationship with God (vv. 3–4). Further, all of humanity is systemically affected by sin from conception. This is not an implicit reference to David's birth but a sobering affirmation of the pervasiveness of sin on this planet; it is about humanity's inherently sinful nature (v. 5). It is exactly in the *tukhot* ("the inner being") that God wants to effectuate change (v. 6). Verses 7–9 constitute a desperate cry for forgiveness and cleansing from sin. It takes us back to vv. 1–2, thus effectively framing the section.

51:10–15. Personal Restoration. Beyond forgiveness, the psalmist now moves to restoration: he asks God to give him a clean, pure heart and a steadfast spirit (v. 10). The verb *bara'* is reserved for divine creative power (cf. Gen. 1:1), which is needed to effectuate a change of heart. Such re-creation leads to the restoration of the joy of God's salvation and enables us to witness to others (v. 13). Such persons proclaim praise to God (v. 15).

51:16–19. True Sacrifice. The psalm could have ended with such high note of praise, but it returns once more to the question of true sacrifice: a broken spirit and a broken, contrite heart are just as (if not more) important to God than the sacrificial rituals themselves (vv. 16–17). However, personal transformation has a national impact because through it the walls of Jerusalem are built (i.e., the moral safety of the city depends on the integrity of its citizens). As a result, they shall offer bulls on God's altar that are acceptable to Him (v. 19). The external form of worship will finally coincide with the internal motives of the heart. Interestingly, words for sin predominate (twelve times) in vv. 1–9 and God is mentioned only once, whereas in vv. 10–19 sin (mentioned only twice) is pushed out by God's grace and God is referred to six times.

52:1–9

The Boasting of the Wicked

The psalm picks up on the theme of Psalm 49 in the form of an instructive wisdom poem, annotated in the superscription as a *maskil* ("instruction"). The idolatrous dependence of the wicked on riches and their accompanying boasting is contrasted with the righteous, who are content to dwell in the presence of God. The historical note connects this psalm with "Doeg the Edomite," who divulged to Saul that David had visited the priest Ahimelech while fleeing from the king. In the ensuing massacre, it was Doeg who killed the priest and his family because none of Saul's servants were willing to be part of the hideous act (cf. 1 Sam. 21–22).

52:1–5. Wicked Arrogance. The central rhetorical question involves the challenge to the mighty warrior, asking why he is trying to boast in evil. Doeg, as a mighty man in Saul's service, creates a credible historical backdrop for the wicked in this psalm. He was someone whose tongue devised and plotted destruction and who loved evil more than good (vv. 2–3). There is a repeated emphasis on the deceitful tongue (v. 4), and its destructive force finally leads God to take action and uproot him from the land of the living (v. 5).

52:6–9. Righteous Perspective. In contrast to the wicked, the righteous person looks at the arrogance of the wicked and, surprisingly, laughs at him. Laughter (*sakhaq*) in the Psalms is often reserved for God when He sees the futility of the wicked (cf. Ps. 37:13). The reason for the laughter of the righteous is that the wicked, instead of depending on God, trusted in wealth. Using the metaphor of vegetation, the righteous (in contrast to being uprooted; v. 5) are like a green olive tree in the house of God (v. 8). They are safely rooted in the presence of God, enjoying longevity and fruitfulness (cf. Jer. 11:16; 17:8; Hos. 14:6), which echoes the first poem of the Psalms (cf. 1:3). The psalm concludes by praising God for His intervention and reiterating His goodness. The destructive boasting of the wicked fades away as a result of his foolish self-sufficiency that leads only to his being uprooted. This is in marked contrast to the permanency of the righteous person, who is deeply rooted in God.

53:1–6

Foolishness—Once More

Psalm 53 is almost identical to Psalm 14. However, this similarity should not obstruct its exposition in this part of the Psalms. It is important to look at the poem in its context; that is, in juxtaposition to the previous psalm, which confronted the wicked and unmasked the senselessness of life without God. Psalm 53 enlarges on the theme of foolishness, which finds its ultimate climax in the denial of God's existence. The superscription adds that the psalm is related to *makhalat*. This term has been variously defined as being related to sickness/persecution or being a musical term for a tune or an instrument. It is also called a *maskil* ("a contemplation" or "instruction"), which integrates the psalm well within the current context of instructive poems. Jewish interpretation connects the fool (*nabal*) of v. 1 with the story of Nabal (1 Sam. 25).

53:1–4. The Fool. As in Psalm 14, in this psalm the fool is a person who has said that there is no God (v. 1). Whereas Psalm 14 uses *yahweh* and *'elohim* interchangeably, Psalm 53 does not use *yahweh* at all, creating a more universal tone for this wisdom psalm. The rest of this section describes the foolish from God's perspective, reaching the general conclusion that no one does good (v. 1; repeated in v. 3). Those who fashion evil lack knowledge as they ignore God and turn against His people (v. 4).

53:5–6. God's Reaction. In v. 5, we find the clearest divergence between the two almost identical poems (v. 5; corresponds to 14:5–6). Whereas Psalm 14 placed an emphasis on God's protection of the righteous using the metaphor *of refuge*, Psalm 53 concentrates exclusively on the destruction of the wicked in v. 5. It is only in v. 6 that their destruction is contrasted with the salvation of Israel when God returns His people from captivity. Thus, Psalm 53 is less concerned with the fate of the righteous than with the dire destiny of the fool. It is reassuring to know that judgment and salvation come out of Zion, from a righteous God who sees deep into the motivation of the human heart.

54:1–7

The Name that Saves

This psalm is a plea for deliverance connected through its superscription to the historical experience of David when the Ziphites betrayed him to Saul by revealing the fact that he was hiding among them (see 1 Sam. 26; cf. 1 Sam. 23:19). The sequence of Psalms 52–54 aligns with the sequence of events from the life of David (1 Sam. 21–26), illustrating human foolishness and a life without God from different angles (Doeg, Nabal, and the Ziphites).

54:1–3. Calling on Your Name. God's name serves as a framing device of the psalm. It is mentioned in v. 1 as the means by which David is saved and then praised in v. 6. Interestingly, *'elohim* and *yahweh*, together with *'adonai*, are used in this psalm in connection with the theology of God's name that emphasizes His character and authority. Verse 3 provides the rationale for the plea. The people who are rising up to attack can be connected to the Ziphites who lived in a town southeast of Hebron where David escaped from Saul. They decided to betray David because they disregarded God's authority like the fool in Psalm 53 who denied His existence. The Ziphites were part of David's own people, and while they knew God, they did not follow Him.

54:4–5. Vindication. The central message of the psalm is in v. 4, which states that God is David's help and He supports those who uphold and sustain his life. This is in contrast to those who have sought his life (v. 3). Consequently, God will cut them off or annihilate them (v. 5).

54:6–7. Praising Your Name. Beyond the crisis, the psalmist will express his praise to God in an act of worship and will sacrifice a freewill offering to Him (cf. Ex. 35:29; Lev. 7:16). A final praise for deliverance concludes the psalm and gives the psalmist an opportunity to look down on his enemies (v. 7; cf. Ps. 37:34). In the Bible, calling upon God's name is a transferral of authority to Him, a willingness to follow His will versus our own.

55:1–23

Betrayed by a Friend

As in the previous psalm, there is a strong plea for deliverance from an enemy or enemies, with a constant shift from the singular to the plural (e.g., vv. 9–10, plural; vv. 12–13, singular; v. 15, plural). There is also a progression in the usage of the divine name from *'elohim* (v. 1) to *'adonai* (v. 10) and then to *yahweh* (v. 16). There are two pleas that follow each other (vv. 1–8 and 9–14) with some correspondence between them, and then a statement of hope concludes the psalm. The psalm is a didactic poem or contemplation (*maskil*) of David, accompanied by "stringed instruments."

55:1–8. First Plea. The fourfold plea for God to hear underlines the urgency of the psalmist's need for deliverance from the enemy who is first introduced in v. 3, in both the singular and the plural. The agony of the psalmist in v. 4 is described as his *khul* ("pain," "agony"), which is used elsewhere to describe a woman giving birth (e.g., Is. 26:18). He also experiences the terrors of death (v. 4); horror has overwhelmed him (v. 5) like the Flood covered the earth (Gen. 7:19). He longs to escape this situation and wishes for the wings of a dove to fly away and remain in the desert (vv. 6–7). David's escape into the wilderness may well serve as the historical backdrop for this psalm. Some commentators have identified Ahithophel, David's counselor who deserted to Absalom, with the betrayer mentioned in the psalm (cf. 2 Sam. 15–17).

55:9–15. Second Plea. Whereas the first plea was for God to listen, the second asks Him to act by confusing their words (lit. "divide their tongues"; v. 9), which echoes the confusion of tongues in Genesis 11. This effectively puts a stop to the plans of the wicked. The motivation for this request is the presence of violence and strife in the city, caused by someone who is not an enemy but his peer, companion, and friend (vv. 12–13). It is a person that belonged to David's immediate circle, a friend with whom he had had close (Heb. *mataq*, "sweet") fellowship and walked to the house of God in procession. The enormity of this personal betrayal leads the psalmist to God for deliverance, requesting that He let death come suddenly upon his enemies (v. 15). Interestingly, the psalm switches here again to the plural, indicating how the person who betrayed him is part of a larger conspiracy. He serves as an agent of a larger evil scheme.

55:16–23. Expression of Trust. A transition is introduced in the psalm ("as for me") that reveals the psalmist's reaction to the threat: he will pray, crying out in distress—in the evening, in the morning, and at noon (vv. 16–17; cf. Dan. 6). He also expresses his confidence that God will act on his behalf and by faith states that He will rescue him unharmed from the battle (Heb. "redeem my soul in *shalom* ("peace," "soundness," "completeness"; vv. 16–18). The prophetic perfect in the Hebrew ("He *has* redeemed") here indicates that the psalmist considers his redemption as certain as if it had happened already. Accordingly, some translations place the verbs in the present ("He rescues") or future ("He will redeem"). In vv. 19–21, there is another shift from the plural to the singular, focusing on the faithless friend who betrayed the psalmist using smooth words that contrast with his violent actions (v. 21). But the psalmist reaffirms his trust in God, who will never allow the righteous to be shaken (vv. 22–23). He extends a general invitation to others, encouraging his listeners to cast their burdens and cares on the Lord, for He will sustain them. The noun *yehab* ("burden") occurs only here in the OT and is rendered in the LXX as *merimna* ("anxiety," "worry," "care"). Some personal disappointments in life are difficult to bear, but the psalmist extends the invitation across the millennia to throw onto God what life has thrown onto us.

56:1–13

Continued Persecution

Psalms 56–60 are each titled as "A Michtam/*miktam* of David," a designation that already occurs in Psalm 16. Psalm 56 connects thematically with the previous two psalms, issuing a plea for deliverance from persecution combined with imprecations against the enemies (56:7; cf. 54:5; 55:9, 15, 23). The psalm also displays close ties with Psalm 57, starting with the identical plea for God to be merciful and describing deliverance from similar situations. The historical note concerning his capture by the Philistines in Gath may allude to one of two experiences of David with the Philistines (1 Sam. 21:10—22:1; 27:1—29:11). The wistful musical note about the silent, distant dove occurs only here and creates a further link to Psalm 55, where the psalmist longs to fly away like a dove. In some ANE cultures, doves were messengers that carried communications to and from the gods.

56:1–4. Complaint and Trust. The request of the psalmist is introduced with a cry for God to be merciful. The verbal form *khanan* ("to be merciful") combined with the divine name occurs throughout the Davidic psalms as an appeal to God's grace for deliverance (cf. 6:2; 31:9; 41:4, 10; 51:1; 56:1; 86:3). The psalmist experiences oppression, and he feels continuously (lit. "all day") *sha'ap* by his enemies. This word can mean either to "gasp" or "pant after"; that is, he is pursued by the wicked like dogs chasing a hunted animal (or in some translations, to "trample" or "crush"; i.e., he feels crushed by his enemies). However, the section concludes with an affirmation of trust in God, ending with the rhetorical question "What can human beings do to me?" (v. 4). This puts the threat into perspective, and ultimately the enemy is only *basar* ("flesh").

56:5–13. Complaint, Imprecation, and Vow. The psalm now returns with greater detail to the initial complaint, describing the ongoing (lit. "all day") attempts of the enemies to look for an opportunity to bring him down (v. 5). The psalmist now turns to God, asking Him to act and throw down the nations (v. 7). This is followed by a request to record his lament permanently, to count his difficult experiences, and to put his tears into God's bottle (lit. "wineskin") and on His scroll or book (v. 8). Some translations follow manuscript variants which have text that reads that the psalmist's tears are on God's scroll and (with parallelism) in His record and thus omit the reference to the "bottle." But the basic meaning is the same—he wants the Lord to collect his suffering as one would collect precious liquids and place them in a leather bottle.

The idea of recording David's sorrows fits well with the idea of the *miktam* in the superscription as a commemorative inscription. God's record of human actions and experiences is mentioned throughout Scripture (e.g., Ps. 69:28; Mal. 3:16). "In the book of God's remembrance…every act of sacrifice, every suffering and sorrow endured for Christ's sake, is recorded" (GC, 481). The section is completed with a threefold expression of trust in God (vv. 10–11) that echoes v. 4 in a refrain-like manner. The psalm concludes with vows (v. 12) and their legally binding character (cf. Ps. 22:25). The psalmist promises to render praises to God (cf. Gen. 28:20–22) for His deliverance. Human fear can be effectively countered only with a continuous confession of trust in God.

57:1–11

Deliverance from Persecution

Psalms 56 and 57 have been called twin psalms as they coincide with each other in theme and structure and begin with the identical plea for mercy. Psalm 57 moves the emphasis to deliverance and has a more triumphant tone than Psalm 56. There is a twofold refrain (vv. 5, 11) that concludes the two parts of the poem. There are similarities in the superscriptions of the two psalms (except the tune, "the words were set to 'Do Not Destroy,'" also found in Pss. 58–59, 75; cf. Is. 65:8) and the historical background of both are connected to 1 Samuel 21–22. It is possible that David wrote the poem in the cave of Adullam, which is traditionally located on the eastern side of the Elah Valley.

57:1–5. First Plea and Deliverance. The psalm begins with a plea identical to the previous psalm, followed by the imagery of a hen gathering chicks under her wings and the cherubim throne above the ark of the covenant to express the idea of refuge in the "shadow" of God's "wings" (cf. 17:8; 36:7; 57:1). The psalmist is totally sure that God will send from heaven and save him (v. 3). David compares the experience he and his companions had as they made their nightly resting place in the wilderness among wild animals to that of a potential prey surrounded by lions. There are threats on every side, particularly that of destructive words used like a sharp sword (v. 4). A refrain concludes the first section, exalting God's sovereignty above the heavens (v. 5), creating a sharp contrast with the surrounding threats.

57:6–11. Second Plea and Deliverance. The second plea returns to the plotting of the enemies who are hunting the psalmist like a wild beast and have dug a pit for him. But this time the enemies' purposes are thwarted and consequently they have fallen into their own trap (v. 6). In reaction to this surprising turn of events, the remainder of the psalm breaks out into a sustained song of praise (vv. 7–10), closing with the repetition of the refrain in v. 11. The mention of the dawn in v. 8 brings to mind how David might have arisen after a dark night of impending threat to a new morning of hope. The reference to God's unlimited *khesed* ("mercy," "unfailing love," "grace") connects v. 10 to the initial plea of vv. 1 and 3. The historical scenes from David's life that underlie these psalms illustrate how God can surprisingly turn a dark, life-threatening situation into a bright new hope.

58:1–11

Judgment on Unjust Judges

Psalm 58 is replete with violent imagery that vividly portrays God's judgment on unjust judges. The unjust judges are asked if they are speaking and acting justly (v. 1). This question is answered in v. 11, affirming that God is the One "who judges the earth." The psalm follows the same tune of the previous psalm, and David is identified as the author.

58:1–5. Unjust Judges. The psalm opens with an address to the *'elem*. This term has been interpreted in various ways: it might be referring to leaders (changing the Heb. text to *'elim*, "rams," "men of power") or even gods (changing the Heb. text to *'elohim*). The parallel expression *bene 'adam* ("sons of men") at the end of v. 1, connected with the verb *shapat* ("to judge"), indicates that the psalm is directed against powerful human judges who, through their corruption, have elevated themselves to the level of gods (cf. 89:6). The violence and lies of the wicked (vv. 2–3) are likened to a deaf cobra that no longer heeds the charmers (vv. 4–5), not even the most skillful.

58:6–11. Plea for Divine Judgment. The request for God to intervene changes the imagery from cobra to lions (v. 6) and connects this psalm to the previous one (57:4). Human violence meets divine judgment and God reduces all evil intentions to nothing. This is communicated through the use of fast-paced images, such as cut arrows, a dried up slug or snail, a stillborn child, or a pot that is blown over by the wind before the food is cooked (vv. 7–9). What remains is the rejoicing of the righteous (v. 10) as they see wickedness being destroyed and the confession of all human beings acknowledging that there surely is a God who judges the earth (vv. 10–11). Corruption abounds and no one is exempt from its damaging impact, not even God's children. But God is the Judge who will eventually and permanently set things right.

59:1–17

Deliverance from Violence

As in Psalm 57 there is a refrain that concludes each of the two sections of this psalm, in which David refers to God as his *misgab* ("defense," "fortress," "strong tower"; vv. 9–10a, 17). There is another repetitive phrase in each section that provides the background imagery for the psalm: the wicked traitors return at evening, growl like dogs, and go all around the city (vv. 6, 14). The imagery is that of a pack of stray dogs that are viciously dangerous, running their deadly attacks during the night (cf. 1 Kin. 14:11; 21:23; 2 Kin. 9:34–37; Ps. 22:16). Like the preceding two psalms, Psalm 59 follows the tune "Do Not Destroy" and is a *miktam* of David. The historical note connects this psalm directly with 1 Samuel 19:11 and Saul's intention to kill David in the morning. Instead, he escapes and praises God the next morning (v. 16).

59:1–10a. Attack of the Enemy. The psalm begins with a request for deliverance from the enemies, identified as those who practice evil, are bloodthirsty, and lie in wait like a prowling animal (vv. 2–3). Affirming his innocence, the psalmist now implores God to intervene with a series of imperatives in which he asks God to rise up to help him and rise up to punish the nations (vv. 5–6). He invokes punishment without mercy on all the nations and any wicked people who *bagad* ("to act treacherously"), thus raising his request to a universal level. Personal deliverance is merged here with national protection (vv. 4–5). The simile of the threatening dogs (v. 6) is followed by a sudden turn of events, as Yahweh will laugh at them (v. 8), showing that under God's protection the deathly threat amounts to nothing. David refers to God as his *misgab* ("defense," "fortress," "stronghold"). This refers to an elevated place of refuge out of reach from the attack of the enemies (cf. Ps. 46:7, 11; 48:3). God is referred to as being One of *khesed* ("mercy," "faithful love") in vv. 10 and 17.

59:10b–17. Defeat of the Enemy. The second part of v. 10 moves the focus from the psalmist's deliverance to the enemies' defeat. He asks for God not to kill them but to *noa'* ("scatter" or "uproot") them and ultimately consume them in wrath (vv. 11–13), leading them to acknowledge Yahweh and know that He rules over Jacob (v. 13). Once more the simile of prowling dogs is repeated, but now they wander around looking for food and are not satisfied (vv. 14–15). This reversal of fates based on the same imagery provides a powerful antecedent to the final praise (vv. 16–17) in which the psalmist once more invokes the refuge metaphor of the *misgab* ("strong tower"; cf. v. 9) and God's *khesed* ("mercy" or "faithful love"). It is encouraging to understand that God laughs at what we perceive as snarling dogs and deathly threats to our lives. He laughs because He can reverse threats into blessings.

60:1–12

Military Defeat

This is the last psalm that, like Psalms 56–60, is introduced in the superscription as a *miktam*, a commemorative inscription. The language of violence that permeated Psalm 59 becomes even more pronounced in this psalm. The background seems to be a military defeat suffered by David against the Edomites (2 Sam. 8; 1 Chr. 18). There are some differences between the superscription of the psalm and the other passages (e.g., the number of Edomites slain and who did the deed), possibly pointing to variant text forms. There is an additional note, "for teaching", which occurs only here in the Psalms and recalls David's instruction to teach his song of lament about Saul's death to the people of Judah (2 Sam. 1:18).

60:1–5. Communal Lament. Verses 1–3 voice Israel's communal lament after they have been defeated by an enemy that is not further identified, unless the question at the end of v. 9 ("Who will lead me to Edom?") is understood as pointing to Edom in accordance with the historical superscription. However, within a Hebrew theocentric worldview, God is viewed as responsible for the hardships of His people. Consequently we find a series of laments directed to God, all beginning with descriptions of His actions, including their negative effects. Verse 4 continues along the same syntax, but this time a positive statement is introduced. There is a banner raised by God as a final stand against the advancing enemy and around which those who fear Him rally (cf. Is. 5:26; 11:12). It is a banner *mippene qoshet*. This has been translated as either "against/from the bow" or "because of the truth." *Mippene* can mean "in front of" or "because of." *Qoshet* can mean either "bow" or "truth," and it occurs in only one other place in the Hebrew Bible (Prov. 22:21), where it seems to mean "certainty." Here the translation "bow" would fit the military context, but it is most probably referring to the valuing of the truth by those who fear *Yahweh*. Whichever the case, the banner is displayed in order that God's beloved people may be delivered (vv. 4–5). In the narrative in Exodus, it is God Himself who is this banner (cf. Ex. 17:15), and here the psalm invokes the Exodus imagery through usage of *nes* ("banner, standard"). The section ends with a request for God to save.

60:6–8. God Responds. The following lines contain God's direct response to the allegations and appeals of the previous section. As the experience in Exodus was invoked, the psalmist now calls on the experience of the conquest of Canaan and the division of the land among the twelve tribes, covering the geographic areas east (e.g., Gilead) and west (e.g., Judah) of the Jordan River. But the conquest moves beyond the initial conquest under Joshua and includes more recent victories over Moab, Edom, and Philistia that are associated with David's conquests and battles. As much as the defeat of the nations has been God's responsibility, so is the victory that has made the nations God's washbowl.

60:9–12. Lead Me On. The question is now directed to God and the focus returns to Edom as the current enemy: "Who will bring me to the strong, fortified city? Who will lead me to Edom?" (v. 9). This is a reference to the rock fortress of Sela, the capital of Edom. In v. 10 God is asked whether it was not He who did not go out with the armies. In response, vv. 11–12 conclude the psalm with a request for God to lead on once more, to give them help against the trouble caused by their enemies and to trample them down. Overall, one can perceive an intensification of threats in this group of *miktam* psalms of David (Pss. 56–60). This has led some commentators to call this group of psalms the "passion of David," likening it to Christ's passion, as they describe moments of persecution, betrayal, and apparent defeat, which are reversed into divine victories.

61:1–8

The King's Prayer

The psalm has been associated with the time that David was exiled from Jerusalem while fleeing from his son Absalom (cf. 2 Sam. 16–19). It is a royal prayer expressing his desire to return to the sanctuary. It is mostly in first-person speech (vv. 1–5, 8) but that changes to third person in vv. 6–7. The prayer for the king is framed in vv. 5 and 8 by the expression "my vows," which may indicate that vv. 6–7 are a wish echoing the king's vows, possibly pronounced by a court official. The psalm is to be performed on a stringed instrument and is ascribed to David.

61:1–5. Plea and Vows. The prayer is introduced by a petition (v. 1) that echoes Psalm 17:1; both verses emphasize the psalmist's request to be heard by repetition with intensification. Verse 2 expresses the circumstances under which David lifts up his petition as he cries to God "from the end(s) of the earth," which hyperbolically describes his distance from Jerusalem and his emotional exhaustion from running away from Absalom. A series of three familiar refuge metaphors follow (rock, refuge/shelter, and tower), which alludes to elevated places that could be associated with Mahanaim, the fortified city along the Jabbok River to which David fled and where he regrouped before attacking the pursuing Absalom (vv. 2–3; cf. 2 Sam. 17). Verse 4 expresses the psalmist's desire to be in God's tabernacle/tent under the protection of the shelter of His wings (i.e., under the cherubim that stand above the ark of the covenant). The section concludes with an affirmation of vows that David has made toward God during his exile.

61:6–7. May the King Live Forever. The shift to a third person speech in vv. 6–7 makes it possible to understand this section as a responsive prayer on behalf of the king by one of his officials. Based on the royal vows, he reaffirms the king and prays for his longevity.

61:8. Final Vow. The final lines of the psalm return to the first-person speech and reconnect to v. 5 by mentioning "my vows" once more, indicating that it is David who now speaks. It is a final praise and a desire to *shalam* ("fulfill," "complete," "repay") these vows. This was accomplished at a special dedicatory offering publicly performed in the sanctuary (cf. Num. 6:13–21). David's prayer from exile and his longing for the sanctuary can cause us only to renew our longing to be with the Lord in the house of the Father (John 14:1–3) and pray for the end of our exile.

62:1–12

Trust in God

Psalm 62 continues the refuge imagery of the previous poems by referring to God as "Rock" (vv. 2, 6–7 // 61:2) and *misgab* ("Defense" or "Fortress"; vv. 2, 6 // 59:9, 16–17). The context of the psalm is a threatening military conflict, possibly an attack on the rock fortress of Mahanaim, which created the historical backdrop for the previous psalm. This creates a sustained affirmation of trust in God, although it is only in the last line that the psalmist addresses God directly. In the Hebrew text, there is a sixfold repetition of the adverb *'ak* at the beginning of vv. 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, and 9. This term can have either an emphatic ("surely," "truly") or a restrictive sense ("only"). In the former case, it would serve to increase the certainty of God's protection (or, in v. 4, the certainty of his enemies' plots) and set this psalm apart from the previous ones (cf. 39:5–6, where *'ak* occurs in three consecutive lines). If the word is taken as restrictive ("only"), it would serve to emphasize the uniqueness of God's capacity to save; in v. 5, it would indicate the singularity of the enemies' intentions, despite their false posture of friendliness.

In v. 9, the Hebrew word *hebel* ("breath" or "vapor") is used. The word *ak* could refer to either the certainty of the vapor/breath-like state of human beings or to the idea that they are "only" breath/vapor. There is a refrain-like repetition which frames the first section of the psalm (vv. 1–2, 5–7). The association in the superscription with "Jeduthun," one of David's music leaders in the temple, possibly points to one of his musical arrangements (cf. 39:1; 77:1).

62:1–7. Trust and Plea. The affirmation that introduces the psalm in the indicative ("my soul" or "I") *damam* ("wait" or "find rest") for/in God is repeated as a self-directed imperative desire in v. 5, "my soul, wait/find rest." Verse 2 expresses trust in God's protection, drawing on the imagery of refuge used in previous psalms. At the center of the plea, the attitude of the attackers is described. They bless with their mouths but curse in their hearts and plot to topple him from his high position. This is possibly referring to David when he found refuge in the rock fortress of Mahanaim. Verses 5–7 expand on vv. 1–2 with repetitions and additions clarifying that God is the Refuge.

62:8–12. Trust and Advice. The second section of the psalm takes on a more universal and didactic tone in addressing the people encouraging them to trust in Him at all times and reaffirming that God is a Refuge. The psalm then turns to wisdom literature and draws heavily on Proverbs and Lamentations (vv. 9–11). The likening of humans, both low and high, to *hebel* ("vapor" or "breath") approximates the poem to Psalm 39:5–6, but it also creates a strong link with Ecclesiastes, in which this same term ("breath," "nothingness") is a central motif. The numerical saying in v. 11 is comparable with Proverbs 6:16–19 and others. The message here is clear: trust not in riches, violence, oppression, or robbery but only in God. Appropriately, the final line addresses God directly and ascribes both *khesed* ("mercy," "unfailing love") and justice to Him in His dealings with humanity. It is difficult to remain silent and wait on God in the midst of oppression, but Psalm 62 encourages us to do just that and to trust God in the midst of the storms of life.

63:1–11

Longing for God

In contrast to the previous poem, Psalm 63 continuously addresses God in a personal way. The last line shifts from the first-person viewpoint to the third. The psalm is annotated as written by David from the wilderness of Judah and consequently expresses a deep longing for closeness to God and His sanctuary.

63:1–2. Longing. The psalmist's longing for God is expressed by the vivid metaphor of someone anxious for water in a dry, parched, and weary land, a description very much in tune with the conditions of the Judean desert. In his search, he has seen God in the sanctuary, a place from which the psalmist is physically separated. The verb "to look/see" (*khazah*) could also refer to a prophetic vision. The visionary character is furthermore underlined by his desire to see God's glory (*kabod*), which is associated with God's presence in the Most Holy Place (cf. 2 Chr. 7:1–3).

63:3–8. Joy in Communion. In response to David's vision of God's glory, the psalm breaks into an extended praise, emphasizing the satisfaction the psalmist receives from communing with God. In this experience, the psalmist is satisfied as with *kheleb* ("fat") and *deshen* ("fatness"); the imagery is of rich foods in abundance within the context of an ANE banquet scene (cf. 23:5–6). In v. 6, reference is made

to the spiritual experience introduced in v. 2 by clarifying how the king contemplates God's glory during the night. He meditates on Him in the night watches and finds refuge, protection, and joy in the shadow of God's wings. This is possibly another reference to the sanctuary (i.e., the cherubim above the ark; see commentary on 36:5–9; 57:1–5). He is determined to totally rely on God and encourages others to do the same (v. 8).

63:9–11. Long Live the King. David has turned his thoughts to God during a sleepless night in the wilderness of Judah. Away from the immediate threats of his pursuers, his mind now returns to his enemies and concludes that since he is under God's protective wings, those who are trying to kill him will go down into the depths of the earth. The psalm closes by contrasting the fate of the wicked with that of the king. While the wicked will be destroyed, the king will rejoice in God and together with his people will glory in Him (cf. 61:6–7). Longing for God and meditating on His goodness will strengthen the soul. Turning our thoughts to Him when the night hours are dark and long nurtures hope.

64:1–10

Deliverance from Evil Tongues

Psalm 64 concludes a group of Davidic psalms (Pss. 52–64) that addresses war and persecution combined with prayers for deliverance from violence and scheming enemies. This psalm focuses on the last motif, that of the attackers, followed by a statement of trust in God's deliverance from them. All this is done using military language in which the destructive power of the tongue is compared to swords or razors (cf. 52:2, 4; 55:9; 57:4; 64:3, 8). The superscription of the psalm points to David but lacks any further historical annotations.

64:1–6. Evil Plotting. After the initial plea for God to hear him, the psalmist describes the verbal attacks of the wicked (v. 2). They move from conspiratorial plots to open attack as they sharpen their tongues like swords and shoot cruel and bitter words like arrows. Military attacks were often accompanied by verbal assaults, as in the case of David's conflict with Absalom. It started with the young prince's sharpened words spoken at the city gate that turned away the hearts of the people from his father, the king (2 Sam. 15:1–6). This led to the open rebellion and civil war portrayed throughout this group of psalms. The section concludes with a comment about the deep corruption of the inner being of rebellious humanity.

64:7–10. Deliverance. Deliverance begins with an ironic reversal of action. As the enemies shot their verbal arrows at the psalmist, God will now shoot an arrow at them. In this section, God's deliverance is described as something that has already taken place. David has seen how God made his enemies fall, turning their own words against them (vv. 7–8), which constitutes another ironic reversal (vv. 1–6). Verses 9–10 anticipate the time when all people will acknowledge God's work as they consider what He has done. At the end of the previous psalm the king rejoiced, and now the righteous will rejoice in the Lord. In both psalms they are said to "glory" in the Lord (cf. 63:11). The psalm affirms a biblical truth related to the cosmic conflict, namely, that the attacks of the enemy will finally come to an end through divine intervention.

65:1–13

God Waters the Earth

This Davidic thanksgiving hymn sets a different tone from the preceding psalms, although it shares some of the universal perspectives that have characterized previous psalms. It also introduces a series of four "songs" (Pss. 65–68) that provides an interlude of praises in the laments that surround the group. The psalm is characterized by praises to God for all His provisions in nature. It starts by depicting a scene of praises in the sanctuary, then moves into all of creation, concluding with a picture of God as the One who fertilizes the land. All three sections use *'elohim* ("God") only in their opening lines, and each section closes with a description of the effects of God's provision for the congregation (v. 4), for creation as a whole (v. 8), and for the land in particular (v. 13).

65:1–4. God in the Sanctuary. The congregation gathers in Zion to praise God in His sanctuary, a place where vows will be kept (v. 1; cf. 61:8), where all people (lit. "all flesh") will come, and where God will forgive their transgressions by providing atonement for them Himself (vv. 2–3). A beatitude concludes this section, describing the blessing of the atonement God provides for His congregation from His holy temple (v. 4). The *hekal* ("temple") most probably refers to the tabernacle that David erected in Jerusalem to house the ark of the covenant (cf. 2 Sam. 6:17). The same term was also used to describe the tabernacle at Shiloh during the time of Samuel (1 Sam. 1:9).

65:5–8. God in Creation. This section recalls the awesome deeds of God in Creation when He formed and established the mountains by His power and might (vv. 5–6). But it also affirms that He is able to still the noise of the roaring seas, keeping the forces of nature as well as the people who dwell throughout the earth (vv. 7–8) under control. The usage of *le'om* ("people," "ethnic group") is a more inclusive term than the usual *goyim* ("peoples," "nations") that one would expect here. It points to the universal manifestation of the power of God.

65:9–13. God's Provisions for the Land. There is a third shift in the poem with the coming of God to *paqad* ("visit" or "care for") the earth. The term *'erets* ("earth") could also be translated "land," as indicated by the reference to local geographic features, specifically the semi-desert grasslands and pastures of the wilderness (v. 12). The central hills and valleys (vv. 12–13) of the Shephelah are covered (lit. "clothed") with flocks and wrapped (*'atap*) in grain. It is God who waters the earth through the river of God (lit. the "canal of God"; v. 9), saturating its furrows with water and creating abundance (v. 10). This image of agricultural richness leads to a shout for joy (v. 13) that echoes through the valleys. The song of praise which goes out from Zion to creation in general, and to the land in particular, reflects the joyful reality that the blessings of God are dependent on His work of atonement on behalf of repentant sinners.

66:1–20

Communal and Individual Praise

This "song" divides into two parts, a communal hymn praising God for His "awesome" deeds in the past history of Israel (cf. 65:5) and an individual thanksgiving for deliverance. The latter could have been antiphonally presented at the sanctuary by the king in response to the first part of the psalm. The psalm is not explicitly associated with David in its superscription.

66:1–12. Deliverance during Israel's History. The psalm begins with a summons to shout joyfully to God and praise Him for His awesome acts (vv. 1–4), thus creating a universal perspective. This is followed by another invitation (vv. 5–7) to come and see the works of God (v. 5), namely, His acts of salvation when He turned the sea into dry land and His people went through the *nahar* ("river," "water") on foot. There are verbal links that connect this psalm to the Song of the Sea in Exodus 15 (e.g., the reference to God ruling forever by His power clearly echoes Ex. 15:18). A final summons (vv. 8–12) invites the peoples to praise God for constantly preserving them from death. He is specifically thanked for bringing them to *rewayah* ("overflow," "superabundance") after going through fire and water (v. 12).

66:13–20. Deliverance Now. There is a change from "we" to "I" that introduces the individual thanksgiving in the second part of the psalm. The one speaking is most probably the king as representative of the people before God in the sanctuary. He sacrifices burnt offerings and fulfills his vows made when he was in trouble, thus creating a strong verbal link with the preceding psalm (cf. 65:1). The sacrificial ritual is concluded in v. 15, listing an extensive offering of rams, bulls, and goats (similar to Solomon's sacrifices at the inauguration of the temple, 1 Kin. 8:62–64). It is an offering fit for a king, which suggests that the individual in the psalm could be David. Verses 16–20 are a final invitation to all who fear God to listen to the testimony of the king that God has answered his prayer and did not turn away His *khesed* ("mercy," "steadfast love," "kindness"). The awesome deeds of God on behalf of Israel still echo through the millennia, assuring God's children today of salvation and deliverance.

67:1–7

From Israel to the Nations

It is impossible to overlook the similarity between v. 1 and the Aaronic blessing in Numbers 6:24–26. It has been suggested that this hymn was sung as a congregational response to the reading of the Aaronic blessing in the sanctuary. The Ketef Himnon silver scrolls, found in a burial cave near Jerusalem and dating to the late seventh century B.C., attest to the popularity of the blessing during OT times. The superscription of the psalm does not connect it to David, but there is nothing that disqualifies him from being its author. Both Psalms 66 and 67 could have been moved to this place in the Psalms in order to complement David's hymns (Pss. 65 and 68) that surround them on each side. There are two refrains repeated in vv. 3 and 5 that divide the psalm into three sections.

67:1–2. Blessings for the World. The previous psalm ended with *barak* ("praise" or "blessing") expressed toward God and continued in v. 1 as an invocation for God to bless (*barak*). The psalm also ends on the same note—God's blessing—making the concept of blessings the main theme of the poem. The psalm moves immediately from "us" to "all nations," who are to acknowledge God's blessings on Israel and His salvation beyond their borders throughout the world (v. 2).

67:3–5. God is Just. The outer frame of blessing is followed by an inner frame of praise as vv. 3 and 5 repeat the refrain inviting all people to praise God. This creates a concentric emphasis on v. 4, which describes God as the One who will justly rule and lead the nations. He has become the universal King.

67:6–7. Blessings for the Land. As in Psalm 65, the result of God's blessings is seen in nature as the earth yields its harvest (v. 6). The psalm concludes with a return to the initial invocation of God's blessing, which again leads to the recognition by all the ends of the earth that God is the One who blesses all. The psalm has given to the Aaronic blessing a universal theological content by connecting it to the promise given to Abraham that through him all the nations of the earth will be blessed (Gen. 12:3; 18:18; 22:18).

68:1–35

God in History

As the last of the four songs (Pss. 65–68), Psalm 68 provides a grand finale that expands on themes found in the other three hymns and includes a procession of Israelite tribes to the temple, accompanied by other nations to testify about Yahweh's power from a universal perspective. Commentators have noticed a certain disjointedness in the poem, but a thematic unity runs throughout it. The psalm could be divided into three major sections. David is once again associated with the composition of this "song."

68:1–10. Exodus and Conquest. The first lines (vv. 1–4) portray Yahweh in terms of a Warrior and invite people to extol Him. God is referred to here as "YAH," often rendered as "LORD." This shortened form of Yahweh appears from here onwards more frequently in the Psalms (e.g., v. 18; 89:8; 115:18; 118:19), and it was also used in the Song of the Sea (Ex. 15:2). The image of the divine Cloud Rider is reminiscent of Psalm 18:7–15, which indicates that it is an ancient poetic expression connected to the Exodus experience. The geographic terms "wilderness" and "Sinai" (vv. 7–10) recall the days of the desert wanderings, while "inheritance" connects to the time of the conquest.

68:11–23. From Sinai to Zion. This section begins with a victory song (vv. 11–13) celebrating the conquest and occupation of the land as the kings of armies flee (some translations imply that their armies flee with them; v. 12). The mention of the dove's wings plated with silver refers to the ancient custom of decorating the wings of doves after a victory and letting them fly as messengers of good news. The Transjordan geography of Zalmon (v. 14) and the mountain of Bashan (vv. 14–16) describes the battles east of the River Jordan during the Conquest. The mountains, as the abodes of the gods, are polemically set in contrast to God's mountain. These other mountains look with envy as God proceeds toward the sanctuary. His return to Jerusalem was like that of a king returning victoriously from war with captives and tributes. He "led captivity captive" (according to some translations) or "took many captives" (according to others; v. 18), and He provides escapes from death (v. 20). Paul applies this passage to the ascension of Christ and His ultimate victory over death (Eph. 4:8). The final lines of the section (vv. 21–23) return to the Warrior imagery to speak about the destruction of enemies who are unable to hide from the Lord, for He will bring them back even from the depths of the sea (v. 22; cf. Rev. 20:13).

68:24–35. Procession to the Temple. The third section of the poem begins with a detailed description of a procession as God moves into the sanctuary (v. 24). There are singers and musicians (v. 25) and the leaders of the tribes of Israel, limiting the list to Benjamin (the tribe of Israel's first king), Judah (the tribe of David), as well as Zebulun and Naphtali, representing the tribes furthest to the north of Israel (vv. 24–27). Verses 28–31 highlight God's localized presence at the temple in Jerusalem (v. 29), and God is implored to rebuke Egypt (the beast in the reeds; v. 30). Then Egyptian ambassadors would come, and Ethiopia (or Cush) would stretch out her hands in submission to God. The image of God as a heavenly Warrior who rides on the clouds is invoked in vv. 33–34, and the psalm concludes with a resounding praise of God that is universally sung by the kingdoms of the earth. God always deserves our praises for His marvelous acts of salvation on our behalf. This makes the cross of Jesus the supreme reason to praise and serve Him.

69:1–36
Zeal for God's House

Following the glorious hymns of the previous psalms, this poem returns to familiar laments and introduces the last group of Davidic psalms (Pss. 69–72) in Book 2. The complexity of its imagery has motivated commentators to suggest that the psalm was composed using two originally different psalms. However, the sequence from lament (vv. 1–12) to plea (vv. 13–28) and finally to praise (vv. 29–36) is a familiar one (cf. Ps. 28). This is evidence for the unity of the psalm, something which is also underlined by a contrastive *wa'ani* ("but I" or "but as for me"; vv. 13, 29) used to introduce the second and third sections. Thematically, the poem is a lament and prayer of an individual who is suffering under the persecution of those who hate him for no reason (v. 4). The poem is associated with David, whose authorship is confirmed by Paul (cf. Rom. 11:9). Its tune is set to the tune of "Lilies" (cf. Ps. 45).

69:1–12. Lament. After the psalmist's initial plea for God to save him, the first lines of the poem (vv. 1–3) introduce the lament describing the situation of the psalmist using the imagery of water. The threat of the enemy is like *shibbolet* ("a flowing stream" or "flood") that overwhelms the psalmist and takes him into deep mire (v. 2). From there he cries to God for deliverance as his strength fails (v. 3). Affirming his innocence, David identifies his enemies as many (more than the hairs on his head), and they hate him without cause (v. 4; cf. John 15:25 for a messianic application). Verses 5–12 describe the reason for the adversity the psalmist is experiencing and centers on his zeal for God's house (v. 9). David's intense zeal for the sanctuary has made him a reproach and alienated him from his family (v. 8). The misinterpretation of his pious actions reminds us of the moment when David was transferring the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem and Michal's reaction to his rejoicing (2 Sam. 6:16–23). When Jesus cleansed the temple, His disciples applied this psalm to Him (John 2:17).

69:13–28. Plea. The plea is introduced by a contrastive *wa'ani* ("but I" or "but as for me") and returns to the initial water imagery, asking God to deliver him out of the mire and from the deep waters (v. 14). What began as a lament now becomes a prayer for deliverance, using the identical expressions as in vv. 1–12.

The messianic dimension becomes more pronounced in vv. 20–21 as the psalmist looks for someone to show sympathy, but there was none. This situation foreshadowed the Savior's loneliness in the Garden of Gethsemane (cf. Matt. 26:56; 27:34, 48; Mark 14:50; John 15:25), as well as the gall and vinegar (v. 21) that was offered to Jesus on the cross (John 19:28–29). The remainder of the section (vv. 22–28) is a prayer for vindication that climaxes in a final request for the eternal punishment of the wicked—for them to be blotted out of the Book of Life. Within the messianic context of the psalm the request is especially meaningful as it outlines the final destiny of those who opposed the Messiah (cf. Dan. 12:2; Rev. 1:7).

69:29–36. Praise. The final *wa'ani* ("but I" or "but as for me"; v. 13) accomplishes a further change in tone from request to praise, similar to the change in another messianic poem (Ps. 22:22–31). This is a response to God's acts of deliverance, which involves all of creation (v. 34). God's saving acts extend from Zion to the cities of Judah and to all descendants of His servants who will dwell in it forever. David's personal experience, which underlies this psalm, prophetically foreshadowed the suffering of the Messiah, His loneliness, and His physical pain on the cross. The agony of the Messiah assures us of the end of all pain and suffering.

70:1–5
A Temple Plea

One of the longest psalms in Books 1 and 2 is followed by one of the shortest in the Psalms, reproducing the final plea of Psalm 40:13–17 almost verbatim. It is an adaptation of the passage for use during the memorial offering alluded to in its superscription: "to bring to remembrance" or "a petition" (cf. Ps. 38:1). Many ancient manuscripts combine Psalms 70 with 71, pointing to the possibility that the two once were a single composition. This seems to be supported by the fact that Psalm 71 does not have a separate heading and by a number of verbal and thematic links between the two poems (e.g., the unusual *khushah*, "hasten," which serves as an *inclusio* in vv. 1 and 5, appears twice in 71:12 at an important place but rarely throughout the rest of the Psalms). Furthermore, the temple plea of Psalm 70 is answered in the concluding statements of Psalm 71. Thus, Psalm 70 becomes the invocation for the overall composition of both psalms.

70:1–5. Invocation. The combined poem of Psalms 70–71 begins with an invocation from the psalmist that serves as a plea for deliverance from those who are seeking to kill him. Verses 1 and 5 stress the theme of deliverance by using the term *khushah* ("hasten"). There is an urgent request to punish the attacker, asking repeatedly for them to be ashamed and turned back. This is contrasted with the experience of those who seek the Lord, rejoice, and are glad in Him. While the wicked say *he'akh* ("aha!") as a public expression of contempt and derision (v. 3), the righteous magnify the greatness of God.

71:1–24
Old Age

Psalm 71 directly continues with the plea that was introduced in Psalm 70. However, there is an additional concern over the difficulties that come with old age (vv. 9, 18) accompanied by a statement affirming the psalmist's trust in the Lord from his youth (vv. 5, 17). The three sections (vv. 1–8, 9–16, 17–24) are each concluded with a verbal praise. "David was deeply moved; he was distressed as he looked forward to the time when he should be aged…David felt the necessity of guarding against the evils which attend old age" (1T 423).

71:1–8. Looking Back. An initial plea asks for God's deliverance from being put to shame. The idea of being shamed serves as a connection to the previous psalm (cf. 70:2) and is a key one in the current poem (cf. vv. 13, 24). At the center of this section is a reflection on how God has led the psalmist in the past, moving backward from youth (v. 5) to birth (v. 6) and finally to his mother's womb (vv. 5–6). This leads to a verbal expression of trust and hope in the Lord.

71:9–16. Old Age. After the psalmist reviews how God has led him in the past, his thoughts turn to the impending difficulties of old age when strength fails (v. 9). The waning power of the monarch is accompanied by the increased pursuit of his adversaries who want to capture him so that no one can deliver him (vv. 10–11). With an accumulation of volitional forms, David pleads for God's protection and is ready to testify about God's righteousness.

71:17–24. Youth and Old Age. The final section of the psalm combines the two previous themes to reaffirm once more that God has taught the psalmist from his youth. Now he asks for God's continuous guidance when he is old and gray (v. 18). This suggests that David composed the psalm in his old age. The section moves between praises for the past and prayers for the present and future, concluding with praise accompanied by musical instruments (v. 22). God's deliverance is described as an already accomplished fact. God never abandons us, particularly during the time when we are perhaps more fragile. He is always trustworthy.

72:1–20
A Prayer for My Son

The final psalm of Book 2 represents David's prayer for Solomon, either as remembered and recorded by Solomon when he ascended to the throne or written by David himself. This is not clear because of the tension between the superscription referring to Solomon (cf. Ps. 127:1) and the subscript referring to the completion of the prayers of David at the end of the psalm, which closes book 2. However, if one reads the heading in the light of the ending, then *lishlomoh* could also be translated "for Solomon," identifying it as a poem written by David in old age for his son (cf. Ps. 71). It is also recognized to be a messianic psalm.

72:1–7. A Prayer for Justice. The psalm opens with a request for the new king to judge God's people with righteousness. It is a prayer for the king to exercise his authority in accordance with God's will, which anticipates Solomon's prayer in 1 Kings 3. The mountains and hills represent the geography of Israel and the blessings that come as a result of a righteous king, which are likened to showers that water the earth, an image of fruitful abundance in the land.

72:8–14. A Prayer for Dominion. The prayer continues, asking for dominion also from sea to sea. The geography could refer to the Red Sea and the Mediterranean in a north-south direction and east-west from the Euphrates River to the Aegean islands and as far as Spain. While some of the geographic dimensions reflect the extent of Solomon's reign and his international recognition, there is an element of hyperbole in his idealized prayer at the beginning of his government. More importantly, the rationale for dominion is grounded in ethical concerns (vv. 12–14). Whereas righteousness was the keyword for the first section, now it is the needy, poor, and afflicted.

72:15–17. A Prayer for Longevity. Recognition from foreign rulers and fruitful abundance of the land will characterize Solomon's reign and his name will endure forever as he is blessed and others are blessed in him (v. 17). A prayer for longevity of his reign and a final blessing concludes the psalm and at the same time creates the transition to the doxology.

72:18–20. Doxology for Book 2 and Subscript. The doxology largely corresponds to the one at the end of Book 1, except that it expands it in mentioning the splendorous things God is doing by filling the earth with His glory. The subscript ends Book 2 as well as the first two Davidic psalms, concluding with a hopeful description of not only Solomon's future kingdom but also an ideal kingdom that finds its realization only in the kingdom of the Messiah.

PSALMS 73—89
BOOK III

Book 3 begins with a group of Asaph psalms (Pss. 73–83), which is the largest collection in this part of the Psalms. Thematically they concentrate on the question "God, where are you?" which is introduced in Psalm 73. This collection also includes the second and last group of Korahite psalms (Pss. 84–85; 87–88), which largely deal with Zion theology (cf. Pss. 42–49). It is interrupted and followed by two psalms of David (Pss. 86 and 89) that were not included in the main collection of the Davidic psalms.

73:1–28
The Prosperity of the Wicked

Psalm 73 provides an answer to the question of theodicy, more specifically, why the righteous suffer and the wicked prosper. It is a didactic poem in the tradition of Psalms 1 and 2 and is framed by vv. 1 and 28 with the repetition of *tob* ("good"), emphasizing God's goodness. In this way the question of theodicy is answered right from the beginning: God is good! There is also a reversal of fates where the psalmist finds himself on slippery ground (vv. 1–3) and the wicked are secure (vv. 4–12). Then it is the wicked who are slipping (vv. 18–20) and the psalmist is on firm ground in God's presence (vv. 21–28). This first Asaph psalm in the present collection introduces the question of God's absence and presence that will characterize the remainder of this group.

73:1–12. The Wicked Prosper. Following the preemptive declaration of God's goodness, the psalmist recalls how the question of the wicked person's prosperity (v. 3) vexed him to the point that he nearly slipped and stumbled (vv. 1–3). The psalmist is confused by the observation that everything seems to go well for the wicked while practicing their wickedness. They speak arrogantly about heaven and earth (vv. 8–9), and there is an increase in their accumulated wealth (vv. 4–12). How could this be?

73:13–16. Why Should I Remain Pure? This is the crucial but ill-directed question by the psalmist, who has kept his heart pure seemingly in vain (v. 13) and is trying to live a life of integrity in the face of adversity and successful adversaries. This question continues to haunt us even today.

73:17–20. Understanding from the Sanctuary. The turning point of the psalm is reached when the psalmist goes into the sanctuary of God. He recognizes that human reasoning by itself lacks understanding (v. 16), but that understanding comes only from the sanctuary. Like Elijah (1 Kin. 19:14), he turns to the only source of true knowledge, and there in the sanctuary he suddenly discerns the end of that generation (i.e., their ultimate destiny; v. 17). He then realizes that it is the wicked, not the righteous, who are set in slippery places and facing eternal judgment (vv. 18–20).

73:21–28. I was Wrong. As a result of his new insight, the psalmist realizes that his previous reasoning was *ba'ar* ("brutish" or "foolish") and ignorant. His foolishness is contrasted with God's faithfulness (v. 23) and guidance that accompanies him from here into eternity (v. 24). The psalm ends with a recognition that all the things that happen to us in this life can draw us closer to God, and He is the One we should desire most of all (v. 25). Thus, it is good to be near to God (v. 28; cf. v. 1). God's goodness is reiterated as the ultimate answer to the question posed in the psalm.

74:1–23
The Sanctuary in Ruins

As in the previous psalm, the sanctuary lies at the center of the psalmist's *maskil* ("instruction" or "contemplation"). The two poems are connected by verbal links—the only two occurrences of *mashu'ah* ("destruction," "desolation," "ruins") in the Hebrew Bible (Pss. 73:18; 74:3). But whereas Psalm 73 provided spiritual insight through the perspective of the sanctuary, Psalm 74 laments the desolation of the sanctuary. This is probably connected to the destruction of the temple by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C. With this historical background, the superscription "of Asaph" can be understood not as designating an individual but as a reference to a category of temple singers, as was the case after the Exile (cf. Neh. 11:22).

74:1–8. Destruction of the Sanctuary. The psalm begins abruptly with the question of why God has abandoned Israel forever. The question refers to God's apparent rejection of Israel that resulted in the destruction of the temple. The Lord is invited to lift His steps toward the perpetual ruins; that is, to direct His attention to the temple and to see what is happening to Mount Zion, where He had dwelt (vv. 2–3) and which is now desolated. Verses 4–9 describe the destruction in detail as the Babylonians set up their military standards or banners (*'ot*), which usually bore the sacrilegious symbols of foreign gods. This is set in striking contrast to the Judeans who do not see signs (*'ot*) anymore, for there are no more prophets (v. 9). Not only has God abandoned His people, He is not sending them prophetic messages. The Babylonians break, smash, and burn God's sanctuary, destroying all the places of worship (lit. "appointed places of God"). This indicates that other places of congregational gatherings (Heb. *mo'ed,* "meeting-place"), existed in Judah at this time.

74:9–17. How Long? The second section of the psalm is also introduced by a series of questions. Since there is not a prophet to answer the question of how long the situation will continue (v. 9), the questions are directed to God (v. 10). They are not only a request for God to look at the destruction but also a call for Him to act and destroy the enemy (v. 11) as He had done in the past. References are made to the experience of the Exodus, the crossing of the Red Sea, and Leviathan, which is an allusion to the power of Egypt (cf. Is. 30:7 which uses another name for the sea monster, "Rahab," and connects it to Egypt; see "Behemoth," p. 652, and "Leviathan," p. 654). The psalmist goes as far back as Creation to underline God's power (vv. 16–17).

74:18–23. Final Plea. The psalm concludes with an urgent plea for Yahweh to act, suggesting that those who destroyed the sanctuary have ultimately reviled and blasphemed His name. The image of God's people is that of a helpless dove that is about to be devoured by wild beasts. Most English translations follow the LXX *therois* ("wild beasts") here as a clarification of the Hebrew MT, which has *khayyat* ("living thing," "companies," or "animals," but not necessarily "wild"). This image is used to depict their frailty and their need for divine action (v. 19). There will be moments in history when the forces of evil seem to be triumphant and we experience God's silence, but the message remains clear: God's justice will prevail.

75:1–10
Deliverance

The "proper time" (*mo'ed,* "appointed time" or "meeting place") serves to answer the questions of "how long" and "why" in the previous two psalms where the word was used to describe the meeting places destroyed by the attackers (cf. 74:4, 8). The psalm praises God for His deliverance through judgments that come at the appropriate time. While it is possible to connect the impending destruction of Babylon at the end of the Exile with the writing of the psalm, especially based on its connections to the book of Jeremiah (cf. Jer. 25:15–29; 48:25–26), there are other occasions in the history of Israel (e.g., the deliverance from the Assyrians in 701 or 689/8 B.C.) that would fit the tone of the poem. The tune "Do Not Destroy" has also been used for Psalms 57–59.

75:1–6. Doxology and Judgment. A congregational praise at the beginning of the poem expresses thanks to God for His wonderful works and the nearness of His Name. This declaration contrasts with the emphasis of the preceding psalm on the question of God's absence. The change to first-person speech affirms that God's judgment comes at His appointed proper time (v. 2), which does not always coincide with human expectations (cf. Hab. 2:3). The effects of Yahweh's judgment are felt by the earth and its people (v. 3). Twice the arrogant and wicked people are warned to not lift up their horns (vv. 4–5). The horn is here a symbol of human strength (cf. Ps. 18:2) accompanied by arrogant defiance (lit. an "arrogant" or "stiff" neck). This self-exaltation lacks a real foundation (v. 6) and was the cause for the fall of Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 4).

75:7–10. God is Judge. This is a didactic reflection about God as Judge (v. 7) written in the third person. God's wrath is represented by the image of a cup (cf. Ps. 60:3; Is. 51:17, 22) that is poured out on all the wicked of the earth (vv. 7–8; see "The Wrath of God," p. 918). This leads to praises expressed in the first person (v. 9), followed by another first person statement, this time by God, that picks up the symbol of the horn (v. 10). The constant change of perspectives may point to the liturgical usage of this psalm. God's timetable is always perfect, and what may appear to be delayed judgments are opportunities for grace.

76:1–12

Zion Saved

Psalm 76 has been associated with the deliverance of Jerusalem during the Assyrian attack under Sennacherib in 701 B.C. (or on his second campaign to Judah in 689/8 B.C., as some scholars have suggested; cf. 2 Kin. 19; Is. 36–39). The LXX makes that explicit by adding "to the Assyrians" in the superscription of the poem. It is a victory song for Zion that echoes Psalms 46–48 and describes God in His dwelling place in Zion, which is the focus of the Asaph psalms.

76:1–3. God in Zion. The usage of "Salem" (v. 2) as the ancient name for Jerusalem (cf. Gen. 14:18) before its conquest by David recalls the past saving acts of God that made Judah, Israel, His tabernacle/tent in Jerusalem into a place where He could be known (v. 1). It is the place where Yahweh as a Warrior broke arrows, shields, and swords (v. 3). This thought provides a smooth transition to the next section.

76:4–9. Deliverance. Yahweh's sovereignty and majesty are described in this section by recounting His deliverance from valiant, mighty warriors. Verse 4 mentions mountains filled with game or prey. The reference is to the result of the victory that precedes this verse and that left the hills around Jerusalem replenished with spoils of war that were ready to be plundered (v. 5). In line with the historical occasion, v. 6 portrays how the Assyrian army, with their chariots and horses, were caused to lie still as though sleeping. (The terminology and mention of Jacob echo the deliverance from Egypt; cf. Ex. 15). God rendered judgment from heaven (v. 8), delivering not only Jerusalem but all the *'anaw* (poor," "afflicted," "humble," "meek"; vv. 8–9).

76:10–12. Praise. Victory leads to praises to the point that God's wrath directed against human rage and rebellion results in His praise—even Assyria needs to recognize that God is awesome and to be feared (vv. 11–12). At the ultimate manifestation of God on the arena of human history the superpowers of this world will indeed melt away.

77:1–20

God of Ages Past

In similar fashion to Psalm 73, the problem the psalmist is experiencing is resolved once he acquires a divine perspective from the sanctuary (v. 13). This takes place when he looks back at the wondrous deeds of God when He led His people out of Egypt. In looking back, the distress that the poet is experiencing is put into proper perspective and he can once more believe in God's guidance for his life. Psalms 77–80 recall God's historical deeds on behalf of Israel.

77:1–9. Lament and Questions. The psalmist finds himself in deep sorrow. He cries to God *qoli*. Some translations have rendered this as "[with] my voice" and some as "aloud," while others leave the word untranslated, as it might seem to create a redundancy. What else would one cry out with? This poetic idiom is clearly an audible expression of distress. The reference to "voice" or "sound" is also mentioned in v. 18, thus forming an *inclusio*. Verses 2–6 describe the trouble the psalmist is experiencing. It is an existential trouble so intense that his spirit became weak and overwhelmed (v. 3). He does not find sleep during the night (v. 4), and he meditates, earnestly trying to understand (v. 6). In his distress he raises six questions to God (vv. 7–9), climaxing in a question concerning whether God has shut out His *khesed* ("mercy," "faithful love," "compassion"; v. 10).

77:10–12. Reflections. These questions are interrupted by a contrastive section, which introduces some reflections that are centered on the root *zakar* ("to remember"), used twice in v. 11. By remembering Yahweh's wondrous actions, displayed from ancient times, the psalmist tries to find answers to his anguished questions.

77:13–20. God's Way. Understanding God's way begins in His sanctuary (cf. Ps. 73:17). Verse 13 says that God's way is *baqqodesh*. This has been translated as "holy" (i.e., God's way is "holy"; lit. "in holiness") but can also be translated as conveying the idea that God's way is "in the sanctuary" (*qodesh* can mean "holiness" or "sanctuary"). The psalm has now turned to a second-person speech, addressing God directly and recounting His deliverance of Israel (v. 15) from Egypt. The language and imagery strongly resemble that of the Song of the Sea (Ex. 15). After the description of Yahweh's theophany, the psalm abruptly moves to an image of the divine Shepherd leading His people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron (v. 20). God in this psalm is One who listens to our most desperate cries screamed out in anguish during the long hours of a sleepless and threatening night, and He is able to lead us on through the darkness as He has powerfully done in the past.

78:1–72

God in History

This epic psalm is the second largest poem in the Psalms after Psalm 119. As its predecessor, it records God's miraculous interventions in the history of Israel, covering in more detail the period from the Exodus to the time of David. There are verbal and thematic links between Psalm 77 and 78 (e.g., "Most High"; vv. 17, 35, 56 // 77:10; as well as the Exodus motif). It is a historical psalm that reviews the history of Israel to provide a rationale for the current situation of the people (cf. Pss. 105–106; 135–136 for other historical psalms). The failure of Ephraim (vv. 9–11) at the outset of the poem (following the introduction in vv. 1–8), his rejection, and the election of Judah and David at the conclusion of the psalm (vv. 65–72) indicate how the psalm is legitimizing the Davidic monarchy. The *maskil* ("contemplation" or "instruction") in the title underlines the didactic nature of the psalm.

78:1–8. Wisdom Introduction. The psalmist invites the people to listen to his *torah* ("law" or "instruction"). Verses 2–7 go back to Deuteronomy 6:7: God gave the *torah* to Israel and commanded the ancestors to teach their children (v. 5). The instruction has multiple purposes—that the children would remember God's works, keep His commands, and not be stubborn and rebellious like their ancestors (vv. 7–8). The motif of rebellion follows throughout the whole psalm, contrasting God's wondrous deeds with Israel's repeated rebellion.

78:9–11. Ephraim's Failure. Ephraim's unwillingness to participate in a military battle (cf. Judg. 1; 12:2; 1 Chr. 7:20–24) might provide the background to this section. It is also possible that the "day of battle" (v. 9) refers to the Assyrian conquest of northern Israel (Ephraim; see Hos. 10:11–14). Whatever the occasion it might have been, Ephraim's failure is connected to his rejection and the election of Judah (vv. 65–72). The central part of the psalm (vv. 12–64) moves back and forth between God's deeds and Israel's rebellion.

78:12–32. Exodus and Rebellion in the Wilderness. This section begins with the wonders God accomplished during the Exodus as He divided the sea and led them with the cloud (vv. 12–14). However, they continued to sin and rebel against the Most High in the wilderness (v. 17) in spite of all the provisions God gave them: water (v. 20), "manna" (v. 24), and meat (v. 27).

78:33–43. God's Grace. At the center of the psalm, the psalmist recalls how God disciplined Israel until they finally sought and diligently returned to Him The section goes back and forth between a halfhearted return and rebellion, underlining the fact that God repeatedly turned His anger away because He was merciful and compassionate and He forgave their iniquities (v. 38). As in the previous psalm (77:11), the verb *zakar* ("remember") plays an important role in this section, occurring three times. First, they remembered that God was their Rock (v. 35), then God remembered that they were but flesh (v. 39), and finally they forgot His power (v. 42) and returned to their own ways.

78:44–64. Ten Plagues and Rebellion in the Promised Land. In order to counteract the lack of memory on Israel's part, the psalmist returns once more to the time of the Exodus, listing the plagues that preceded it. The list is neither complete (plagues 3, 6, and 9 are missing) nor in sequence (plague 5 [livestock in v. 48] follows plague 8 [hail in v. 47]). The point here is neither chronology nor completeness but bringing back to memory the wondrous acts of Yahweh as He guided them in the wilderness like a flock of sheep (v. 52; cf. 77:20). The remainder of the section (vv. 54–64) returns again to the topic of rebellion, condensing Israel's history from the conquest of the promised land to Shiloh (v. 60), where the sanctuary was located for about 300 years during the time of the Judges (cf. Josh. 18:10; Judg. 18:31; 1 Sam. 4:3). In reaction to Israel's renewed rebellion (vv. 56–58), God abandoned the sanctuary of Shiloh and handed

His glory into the hands of the enemy—a reference to the capture of the ark of the covenant by the Philistines (1 Sam. 4; see "Shiloh," p. 920).

78:65–72. David's Election. As the psalm ends with the continuous rebellion of Israel, God begins to react like a man awaking from sleep (v. 65). He rejects the tribe of Ephraim (v. 67), but chooses the tribe of Judah, Mount Zion (v. 68), and David, His servant (v. 70), to shepherd His people (v. 71). The previous psalm concluded with the peaceful image of Moses and Aaron shepherding Israel, while this one closes with David shepherding God's people. After centuries of turmoil and rebellion, there is peace once more through the shepherd-king. There is spiritual safety in remembering how God has led His people in the past.

79:1–13

The Temple in Ruins

The content of this Asaph psalm aligns itself with Psalm 74 by referring to the destruction of the temple during the Babylonian attack under Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C. It also connects with Psalm 78 in that the previous psalm ends with the election of David and Jerusalem, whereas Psalm 79 begins with the destruction of the city. All three psalms are linked by the otherwise infrequently used *nakhalah* ("inheritance"; 74:2; 78:55, 62, 71; 79:1).

79:1–9. Destruction and Confession of Sin. Jerusalem and the holy temple have been destroyed by the nations (*goyim*; v. 1). The reference to the heaps of ruins in Jerusalem echoes Jeremiah's description of its capture (Jer. 26:18; Mic. 3:12). A triple question concerning the extent of God's punishment (v. 5; cf. 89:46) introduces a section that climaxes in a petition for atonement for sins (v. 9). The verb *kipper,* as the technical term for expiation in the OT, has also been at the center of the previous psalm (78:38; cf. 49:7; 65:3; see Leviticus: Introduction).

79:10–13. Vengeance on the Oppressor. The psalmist asks for a sevenfold return of calamity on the aggressors (v. 12); and as in the two previous psalms, he uses the peaceful imagery of the shepherd in an expression of praises (v. 13). While Psalm 78 dealt with the divine rejection of leaders from the northern tribes, Psalm 79 deals with God's punishment of Judah that ended the Davidic dynasty elected by God. Divine election does not preclude the possibility of rebellion or rejection.

80:1–19

A Prayer for Ephraim

The divine rejection of Ephraim in Psalm 78 still echoes through the reading of this psalm, which connects through the use of terminology similar to the previous psalm. The "Shepherd of Israel" is requested to once more lead His flock, identified as Joseph, Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh (vv. 1–2). After the rejection of Israel (Ps. 78) and the destruction of Judah (Ps. 79), this prayer asks for restoration as expressed in three refrains that irregularly intersect the poem (vv. 3, 7, 19). The expression referring to God's shining face is reminiscent of the Aaronic Benediction (Num. 6:24–26) and expresses the need for God's blessings. This psalm "of Asaph" is set to the tune of "The Lilies of the Covenant."

80:1–7. Shepherd: How Long? The initial section of this psalm describes God as the divine Shepherd who is requested to restore His people, in this case the northern tribes. The reference to God's residing between the cherubim (v. 1) is in line with the theological focus of the Asaph psalms on the sanctuary as God's dwelling place. The section concludes with the refrain asking God to restore Israel, make His face shine on them, and save them (v. 3). The invocation is followed by the same question—regarding how long God's anger will last—that marked the confessional section of the previous psalm (cf. Ps. 79:5). Israel has become a source of derision for their neighbors; contention with them leads to ridicule (v. 6). The second refrain is slightly longer than the first one, adding another divine appellation: *'elohim tseba'ot* ("God Almighty" or "God of hosts/armies"), which alludes to the image of Yahweh as a Warrior.

80:8–19. Israel as Vineyard. The familiar image of Israel as a vineyard (cf. Is. 5:1–7; Hos. 10:1) serves as the theme for the final section of the psalm. God brought a vine out of Egypt (v. 8). This alludes (as in Psalm 78) to the experience of the Exodus, and He caused it to take deep root in the land during the conquest (v. 9). As in the Song of the Vineyard (Is. 5), its hedges are broken down (v. 12) and damaged by wild animals, so the vine is burned and cut down (v. 16)—all imagery which reflects the devastating situation of the nation. The psalm concludes with an appeal for restoration and the promise of future faithfulness, followed by the third refrain adding to the divine name (v. 19). The irregular stanzas of the poem grow longer as the increasingly longer refrain reflects the growing intensity of the anguish and prayer for restoration. It is good to read Psalms 78 and 80 together and to understand that God's rejection at one point does not prevent the possibility of future restoration. Hope is always present with the God of hope (cf. Rom. 15:13; cf. Jer. 29:11).

81:1–16

Listen!

As in the previous psalm, Joseph's experience in Egypt is singled out in this festival hymn, still recited today during the Jewish New Year's festival. Repeatedly the poem urges the people to "listen" (*shama'*; vv. 5, 8[2x], 11, 13) to what God has to say. This is a psalm of Asaph (see commentary on 50:1–23).

81:1–5. Festive Summons. The psalm begins with an invitation to worship accompanied by timbrel, harp, and trumpet (vv. 2–3). The specific time for worship is connected to the New Moon, perhaps the reference is to the Festival of Trumpets that introduced the ten-day period of repentance up to Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. The reason for celebrating this festival goes back to the time of Joseph (v. 5), when God went against the land of Egypt.

81:6–16. God Speaks. The change in person at the end of the v. 5 indicates that this line should be read as part of the next section, in which God speaks (lit. "I heard lips I did not know"). The statement refers to God listening to a cry for deliverance from a people (Israel) who did not have a relationship with Him. Verses 6–10 describe how God delivered Israel from the burden of slavery and the testing experience at the waters of Meribah (v. 7; cf. Ex. 17:1–7; Num. 20:13; Ps. 78:20). The giving of the law at Sinai with thunder (v. 7) is mentioned and followed by an allusion to the *shema'* ("hear") from Deuteronomy 6:4. The first two commandments of the Decalogue are also mentioned (vv. 8–10). The historical reality is that Israel did not listen, and now the Lord expresses His own pain (vv. 13–14). If Israel had listened, they would have had victory and well-being (vv. 14–16). The Lord would have provided for them, not just water from the rock, as in Meribah, but the best and purest food that can be imagined. God's yearning desire for His people to listen and walk in His ways continues to ring through the ages down to His children at the time of the end. It reminds us that listening to Him is also serving Him.

82:1–8

Judging the Judges

This Asaph psalm turns the focus from a nation that does not listen to its leaders and judges who rule unjustly. Crucial for understanding the psalm is the usage of *'elohim* ("gods") at the end of v. 1, which can designate human "judges" holding positions of divinely ordained authority among the people of Israel (Ex. 21:6; 22:8–9; cf. 7:1). Verses 1 and 8 serve as an *inclusio* for the poem, describing God as the supreme Judge over the earth.

82:1. God Judging the Judges. The psalm begins with a description of God standing in the *ba'adat 'el*. This term can be understood as God's divine council or alternatively as a superlative expression ("the highest assembly"); see 36:6. In either case, the phrase would refer to the highest council where God presides as the divine Judge.

82:2–7. Unjust Judges. Following this ideal perspective, an appeal is made to those who judge unjustly (v. 2). This is explained in terms of defending the poor and fatherless as well as the disadvantaged (vv. 3–4), whose rights have been violated by corrupt judgments (cf. Lev. 19:15; Deut. 24:17). As a result of the unjust legal decisions the foundations of the earth are tottering (v. 5). The expression "you are gods" (v. 6) should be interpreted in terms of v. 1 as referring to human judges who will eventually fall from their supreme height when God judges them. Jesus supported this understanding of the phrase (John 10:34–36).

82:8. God Judging the Earth. The final line of the poem connects to its beginning by asking God to judge the earth in the absence of just earthly judges (v. 8). It is most unfortunate that those appointed by God to care for the needy in the political and religious arena have often used their positions to abuse and exploit them. The world would be a better place if we cared for each other as God cares for all.

83:1–18

The Conspiracy of Nations

A unique conspiracy of ten surrounding nations against Israel (vv. 6–8) is at the center of this last

Asaph psalm. The number represents not necessarily a specific historical alliance but the totality of the threat under which God's people lived for most of the OT period. The mention of Assyria, which concludes the list, could point to the volatile events of the late eighth century B.C., resulting in the deportation and end of the northern tribes.

83:1–8. The Crisis. Following a plea for God to not keep silent any longer (v. 1), His silence is contrasted with the noise of Israel's enemies (v. 2) who formed a shrewd confederacy of conspiracy (vv. 2–5). The list in vv. 6–8 consists mainly of relatives. Ammon, Moab, Edom, the Ishmaelites, the Hagrites, Gebal (Byblos or a mountainous territory in Edom), the Amalekites, and Israel's immediate neighbors (Philistia and Tyre) were all aggressors at different stages in history (though never all at the same time). The superpower of Assyria completes the list and serves as a climax of the anti-Israelite coalition. The closer hostile relatives, the descendants of Lot, were actually strengthened by this archenemy.

83:9–12. God's Interventions in the Past. The psalmist now mentions famous events from the history of Israel, mainly from the time of the Judges (Judg. 4–5; 7:25; 8:5–21), to describe how God acted in the past in comparable situations. Interestingly, the seven names that are mentioned in connection with God's past victories (Midian, Sisera, Jabin, Oreb, Zeeb, Zebah, Zalmunna; vv. 9–11) anticipate the failure of the ten nation coalition.

83:13–18. God, Please Do It Again! Based on these victorious experiences, the psalm now moves to a plea. Using metaphors from nature (vv. 13–15), God is asked to punish the enemies so that they will be disgraced and terrified forever and will finally acknowledge the supremacy of God as "the Most High over all the earth" (v. 18). This divine epithet has been an important part of the vocabulary of the Asaph psalms (cf. Pss. 73:11; 77:11; 78:17, 35, 56; 82:6; 83:18) and answers the theological question found throughout them concerning the location of God in the tumult of history: He is still the Most High over all the earth.

84:1–12

Just to Be in Your House!

This is the first poem of the four Korah psalms in Book 3. In terms of content it is close to Psalms 42–43, also Korahite, expressing an existential longing for the tabernacle and its altars. We also read about pilgrimage, as in the pilgrim psalms (Pss. 120–134), and a longing for the temple, suggesting that the author was temporarily removed from access to the temple, as was the case during David's exile from Jerusalem. On the superscription *gittit*, or "instrument of Gath," see Psalm 8:1.

84:1–7. Longing for the Temple. The psalm opens with an existential longing for the temple as the psalmist faints for the courts of the Lord (v. 2). The image of the sparrow that has found a home in the temple precincts (v. 3) is most likely a metaphor for the psalmist that likens him to a defenseless bird that is hunted as prey and longs for a safe haven (cf. Ps. 11). In like manner, the altars mentioned represent a safe haven (vv. 3–4). The psalm moves to the image of a person in whose heart are the pilgrim highways to Zion (v. 5) approaching the temple through the valley of *baka'*, a place otherwise unknown in the OT. Some versions translate it as "valley of balsam" because *baka'* is used as a plural noun for what are variously referred to in translation as "balsam," "poplar," or "mulberry trees" (cf. 2 Sam. 5:23–24; 1 Chr. 14:15–16). It could also be understood as a verbal form, the "valley of weeping," since the term is related to the verb for "weeping." This would coincide with the experience of David making his way back to Jerusalem and the temple with tears but trusting in the promise that each one will appear before God in Zion (vv. 5–7).

84:8–12. Prayer. The poem turns into a prayer asking God to look upon the face of His anointed (i.e., look upon the king with favor; v. 9). The desire to be in the temple is expressed through two striking comparisons: a day in God's courts is better than a thousand anywhere else. It is also better for the king to be a doorkeeper in the house of God than to live in the tents of the wicked (v. 10). The final metaphor of God as a sun and shield (v. 11) is evocative of God's life-sustaining and protective characteristics and does not necessarily connect with ANE worship of sun-deities (e.g., the Assyrian sun-god Shamash). The Messiah is called the Sun of Righteousness in Malachi 4:2. The sevenfold mention of both divine names, *'elohim* and *yahweh*, in this short psalm demonstrates the deep longing of the psalmist to be in the presence of God.

85:1–13

Shalom

A common theme running through this Korah psalm is expressed through five occurrences of the verbal root *shub* ("return," "repent," "bring back"; vv. 1, 3, 4, 6, and 8). The psalm moves from thanksgiving (vv. 1–3) to plea (vv. 4–7) and finally to a prophetic vision of restoration. The restoring of Jacob (v. 1) could be connected to the return from the Babylonian Exile but also to other historical situations in the OT that involved restoration.

85:1–7. Return and Restoration. The psalm begins with a recollection of Yahweh's deeds in the past as He restored Jacob. The noun *shebut* ("captivity"), preceded by the verb *shub* ("bring back," "return") has been translated by some as referring to God bringing back captives from Babylon. However, it is possible to render the phrase idiomatically (as some translations have) as "restoring the fortunes" or "restoring the prosperity" of Jacob (cf. 14:7; Job 42:10 where the same phrase appears and which did not involve literal captivity). The return is based on the divine forgiveness of the people's sins, which had led to their difficulties. While God has made a return possible, the psalmist still asks for complete restoration and revival, bringing an end to God's anger (v. 4). In contrast to divine wrath, a specific request for Yahweh's *khesed* ("mercy" or "unfailing love") and salvation concludes this section.

85:8–13. Peace. The final section of the psalm turns the psalmist's attention to what God is saying (v. 8). In this way, God's utterances take on a prophetic element. The first thing God speaks is *shalom* ("peace") to His people. In the Bible, this word for peace designates a state of well-being that encompasses our relationship with God, fellow humans, and the natural environment. The following lines contain a list of theological keywords with surprising metaphors: *khesed* ("mercy," "faithful love," or "grace") and *'emet* ("truth" or "faithfulness") have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed as loving companions (v. 10). Further, *'emet* ("truth" or "faithfulness") shall spring out of the earth, like a tree that grows and flourishes. These are key characteristics of God that occur together in Yahweh's self-revelation recorded in Exodus 34:6–7. The result of the restorative process is that the land will yield its produce. The psalm ends with the beautiful image of righteousness walking before God to prepare a way for His footsteps. Full restoration includes all spheres of human life and we can experience it when God's footsteps become our pathways.

86:1–17

A Model Prayer

The only psalm in Book 3 that is explicitly associated with David is basically an anthology of other prayers (e.g., v. 1 // 40:17; 31:2; 102:1; v. 4 // 25:1) and verses found throughout the OT (e.g., Ex. 34). The psalm has been likened to the Lord's Prayer, which put together a variety of requests to form a model prayer. The poem is punctuated by the causal conjunction *ki* ("for," "because"; vv. 1–4, 7, 10, 13, 17), which provides the rationale for David's requests.

86:1–7. Invocation. The first section of the psalm is framed by a plea for God to listen and answer (vv. 1, 6–7), including further pleas to save and be merciful to him (vv. 2–3). Every plea is motivated by a different rationale that focuses on the psalmist's needs or, by way of contrast, on God's characteristics as found in Exodus 34:6–7 (e.g., vv. 1 and 5).

86:8–10. Central Praise. The central section of the psalm breaks out into universal praise, which also has an *inclusio* structure like the previous section. Verses 8 and 10 describe the exclusivity and superiority of God and His deeds (cf. Ex. 15:11). This doctrinal proposition is most accurately expressed in the context of worship and doxology when all the nations will come and worship before the Lord (v. 9).

86:11–13. Change Me! As a response to the preceding universal praise, the psalmist moves to the individual and inward realm, asking God to teach him (cf. 27:11; 119:33) and give him a sincere, undivided heart to fear His name. A divided heart cannot serve God completely (cf. Deut. 6:5; Jer. 32:39), but a united heart praises God (v. 12), echoing the universal praises of the previous section.

86:14–17. Protect Me! A plea for protection from a group of ruthless, violent men concludes the psalm, although it is punctuated by expressions of trust in God, which involve more explicit references to Yahweh's self-revelation at Mount Sinai (v. 15) than the one used in v. 5. It echoes the exact wording of Exodus 34:6, although the original *yahweh* is replaced with *'adonai* ("my Lord"), which reflects the liturgical reading of the divine name in worship. The final request is for a sign, a visible manifestation of Yahweh's power, like the signs that preceded the Exodus (cf. Ps. 78:48). The sequence of this model prayer is instructive, as only the changed heart that calls on Yahweh in worship and praise is ready to bring requests before God.

87:1–7

Born in Zion

The choice of Zion as God's dwelling place (vv. 1–3) and its future role as the exalted birthplace of nations (vv. 4–6) provides structure to this short Korah Psalm; its somewhat terse language takes on the form of prophetic speech. The psalm aligns itself with utterances found in the prophetic books about the messianic kingdom conditioned by the faithfulness of Israel to the covenant (e.g., Is. 60–62). The universal character of this psalm connects well with the universal praise of the previous psalm.

87:1–3. God's Election of Zion. God has founded Zion (cf. Is. 14:29–32; note the mention of the Philistines in Isaiah's message) and loves the gates of Zion more than all the other dwellings of Jacob (v. 2). God's preference for Zion is expressed through the "glorious things" that God speaks about it.

87:4–7. Glorious Things. These verses present three sayings of Yahweh about the city, each stating that "this one was born (in Zion)." It is thus a divine birth register that records Zion as the aspired birthplace not only for Israel but for the surrounding nations. They include Rahab, (a name for Egypt; v. 4; cf. Is. 30:7) and Babylon, covering both the hostile superpowers south and north of Israel, plus other enemies: Philistia, Tyre (already mentioned in the conspiracy of the nations in Psalm 83:2–5) and Ethiopia or Cush (modern Sudan). These nations are also mentioned in Isaiah's oracles (Is. 13–23).

The psalmist makes it clear that this is a matter of divine election, as the Most High Himself will establish Zion and record the inhabitants in His register (vv. 5–6). Verse 7 contains an instruction for the musical performers of this psalm to sing about all their springs being found in "you." This "you" ending the line can be understood as referring to Zion, which then compares the birth of peoples to springs of water that gush forth from Zion. While Zion, on account of Israel's unfaithfulness, never became what this psalm envisions, the Israel of faith can claim a citizenship in the heavenly Jerusalem (Phil. 3:20).

88:1–18

Utter Darkness

The last of the Korah Psalms does not end on a high note; on the contrary, it appears to express utter darkness reflecting a time of physical and mental pain in the life of the psalmist. Death is ever present. A plethora of words appear throughout the poem that can be associated with the experience of a fading life (e.g. "grave," "pit," "dead," "slain," "depths," "destruction,"). The last word of the psalm in Hebrew is *makhshak* ("darkness"), which provides a woeful climax to this sad poem. It is a meaningful psalm for those moments in life when the darkness surrounding us seems to be impenetrable. The tune "*makhalat le'annot*" was also used in the title of Psalm 53. "Heman the Ezrahite" was a Korahite (1 Chr. 6:33) and is mentioned among the temple singers appointed by David (1 Chr. 15:16–19). The chronological proximity of David and Heman could indicate that the temple poet wrote this psalm while contemplating the experience of the old and dying king.

88:1–9. Affliction. The psalm begins with a plea for God to turn/incline His ear—a metaphorical image of listening closely. It is clear that we are dealing with a life-threatening situation that will be laid out in detail in the following verses. In his physical and mental affliction, the psalmist finds himself near to death and the grave (v. 3). It is replete with morbid imagery as he experiences his situation as God's wrath rolling over him like waves (v. 7). The psalmist finds himself in a pit, in darkness (v. 6), from which he is unable to escape (v. 8). He can only call and stretch out his hand in despair. Job's description of his experience bears a close similarity to these dark lines (cf. Job 10:21–22).

88:10–12. Questions and More Questions. Several rhetorical questions punctuate the center of this psalm and emphasize a common topic—being among the dead (*repa'im*; v. 10). This clearly refers to the lifeless human form and not to "ghosts" or "departed spirits" (as some versions translate). There is no recognition of God's wonders (v. 10); it reflects the belief that when a person dies, all physical, mental, and spiritual activities come to an

end (cf. Eccl. 9:5–6). Interestingly, the question mentions divine characteristics such as love (*khesed*), faithfulness, and righteousness (vv. 11–12) that seem to penetrate the darkness with the light of hope.

88:13–18. In the Morning. The phrase "in the morning" (v. 13) introduces the last section of the psalm, but instead of referring to God's favor that so often comes in the morning (cf. Pss. 5:3; 30:5; 46:5), there is only a return to suffering. God's terrors (v. 15) are surrounding the psalmist all day long like a flood of water (v. 17). The psalm ends in darkness (v. 18). There is not always a bright morning after the darkness, not then and not now. However, one can find encouragement in the fact that this prayer is part of the Psalms and God hears this type of prayer as much as the hymns of praises surrounding this psalm. In fact, the psalmist affirms from the outset that the Lord is the God who provides salvation for him (v. 1). Indirectly, the believer is invited to continue to hope in the Lord in every situation of life.

89:1–52

A Covenant Psalm

This is the third longest psalm (after Psalms 119 and 78) and concludes Book 3. Its repeated focus on "Your anointed" (vv. 20, 38, 51) echoes the portal of the Psalms (i.e., Ps. 2), which describes the anointed as God's answer to the plotting of the hostile nations. While the Davidic covenant stands at the beginning of this psalm, it ends with an uncertain outlook into the future of David's descendants, especially in view of the national disaster at the beginning of the Exile and the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. This event has been associated with the writing of this poem and agrees with the approximate chronological setting of Book 3, which concludes the monarchic period of Israel and Judah.

The sevenfold mention of God's *khesed* ("lovingkindness," "mercy," "faithfulness") found throughout this psalm (vv. 1, 2, 14, 24, 28, 33, 49) not only unifies the poem but also points to the underlying eternal basis of the covenant, namely, God's continuous faithfulness. As a frame, the poem mentions God's mercy and covenant with David at the beginning and end (vv. 2–3, 49). "Ethan the Ezrahite" is mentioned only here in the Psalms; as with Heman in the previous psalm, he was a temple sage and musician (1 Kin. 4:31).

89:1–4. Introduction. The introduction to the psalm is an invitation to sing of the *khasde* ("mercies," "faithful love," "kindnesses") of the Lord based on two historical deeds of God: Creation (alluded to in the mention of the heavens in v. 2) and God's covenant with His servant David (v. 3). There is an antiphonal change of speaker between vv. 2 and 3, moving from worshiper to God. Other psalms have connected David's election with the Exodus (e.g., Ps. 78), but here the psalmist concludes Book 3 with a grand historical sweep from Creation, to David, and to the time after the Babylonian Exile.

89:5–14. God of Creation. Nature lifts up praise to God in the heavens for His faithfulness, emphasizing His sovereignty and wonders (v. 5) manifested in creation and the Exodus (cf. the reference to Rahab in v. 10; 87:4). God created the north, south, east, and west, represented by Tabor and Hermon, mountains in the north of Israel that demarcate the eastern and western extension of the land (v. 12). The section is concluded with the mention of Yahweh's attributes (v. 14; cf. 25:10), which serve as the foundation of the covenant and transition to the next section.

89:15–37. God of Covenant. Verses 15–19 begin this section with a beatitude for those who walk in the light of the Lord's *paneh* ("face," "presence," "countenance"); i.e., they live according to the stipulations of the covenant. Then God speaks and announces the election of His servant David (vv. 20–29), with whom His covenant will be confirmed (v. 28). The blessings of the Davidic covenant also include the permanence of the Davidic line, even if his sons forsake God's law. God will punish them but will remain faithful to His covenant (vv. 30–37).

89:38–51. God's Judgment and Mercy. There is an abrupt change in the poem, introduced by a change in speaker and a contrastive description of God's rejection of and anger with His anointed (v. 38). The final section replaces praises and rejoicing with complaint and mourning, describing the ultimate failure of the monarchy, which contrasts with the permanence of the Davidic covenant and lineage described in the previous section (vv. 38–45). Consequently, the psalm ends with a series of questions elaborating the familiar "How long, LORD?" (v. 46). A plea for God to "remember" the ridicule against His servants (v. 50) provides a glimpse into the desperate historical situation in which Israel found itself at the end of its monarchic period.

89:52. Doxology. The doxology that ends Book 3 stands in sharp contrast to the content of the psalm. It concludes the first macrocollection of Psalms 2–89, which reflects the monarchical period of Israel. The anointed one in Psalm 2 presented God's counterprogram to the machinations of nations, climaxing in David's election as king of Israel. Its failure created the urgent need for a new firm foundation, as well as the Messiah, who has repeatedly come to the fore throughout the first three books of the Psalms. A twofold "amen" confirms that God's plans will continue forever (v. 52).

PSALMS 90—106

BOOK IV

The question of "How long?" near the end of the previous book still rings in the mind of the reader (cf. Ps. 89:46), and Book 4 appears to pick up the question (Ps. 90:13). This book begins its sequence with the only psalm ascribed to Moses. The name of Moses occurs seven times in Book 4, most notably at the end (90:1; 99:6; 103:7; 105:26; 106:16, 23, 32), in comparison to only two occurrences outside of Book 4 (18:17; 77:20). This has led commentators to call it the "Moses book." Thematically, Book 4 begins with a confession of Israel's guilt, a fitting counterpoint to the complaints that mark the end of Psalm 89. After the failure of the monarchy, the search for a rationale for Israel's existence takes us back to the beginning of the nation, when the *torah* was given. Psalms 93–100 provide a central collection within this group that stresses divine kingship as a further basis for the future of Israel. The final psalms of Book 4 (Pss. 103–106) return to Moses and God's blessings in the history of Israel. This effectively underlines the theme of Yahweh as King, creating a positive outlook for the future with a hope centered on the Messiah. There is hope for the Davidic lineage, which seemed to have collapsed by the end of Book 3.

90:1–17

God's Word Remains

This "prayer of Moses the man of God" deliberately returns to the origin of God's people and connects its content to Moses' final speech in Deuteronomy 32–33 (cf. esp. Deut. 33:1, which also uses "Moses the man of God" in the introduction). The poem creates a contrast between God's eternal nature and human brevity, an adequate response in a time of national disaster when socio-political structures are disappearing. Its place and chronological function in the Psalms do not necessarily coincide with the date of composition, yet its content is timeless. Psalms 90–92 form a thematic unit that moves from lament (Ps. 90) to divine promise (Ps. 91) and thanksgiving (Ps. 92) around the topic of long-lasting life under Yahweh's protection.

90:1–12. Past and Present. The poem begins with a wisdom meditation on the eternity of God (vv. 1–2; cf. 93:2) versus the finite nature of human life—God is from everlasting to everlasting (v. 2). The realization that a thousand years in His sight are like yesterday (v. 4) puts into perspective the immediate, but temporary, threat of the Babylonian Exile. Imagery of withering grass (v. 5; cf. 37:2; 103:15; 129:6) completes the idea of God's permanence and human transience. The poem changes now to first-person speech (vv. 7–12), taking the withering grass imagery and applying it to the current situation of God's people (His servants; v. 13) as they are consumed by His anger (v. 7). In contrast to God's thousand years, the brevity of a normal life-span is seventy years (v. 10), a life-span that is shortened by God's anger (v. 11). This can be understood only by a heart of wisdom (v. 12). In a subtle way, Moses (who lived to 120 years; Deut. 34:7) recognized that the extra forty years he lived beyond age eighty were a gift from God. By calling Moses into service at age eighty (Ex. 7:7), when his life should have ended (Ps. 90:10), God was essentially reclaiming him from death.

90:13–17. Future. The call for God to *shubah* (from *shub*, "return," "relent") followed by the question "How long?" connects this psalm to the previous one and to the historical situation of the Exile. God can warn humans to "turn/return" and then relent from His judgments if they repent and return to Him (cf. Jer. 18:1–8). The constant reference to time units in this psalm (days and years; cf. also the seventy years that coincide with the prophesied time of the Exile) makes one wonder if this psalm describes the ongoing agony of the Exile and an enduring concern for its duration (cf. Dan. 9:2). Meanwhile, the psalm ends with a request to "establish the work of our hands," granting some degree of permanence based on the presence of God's *hadar* ("honor," "glory," "splendor"; v. 16) with His people. The recognition of the fleetingness of our lives invites us to hope for permanency and eternity in the presence of God.

91:1–16

Long Life

The fleetingness of human life in the previous psalm is contrasted here with the promise of "long life" (v. 16) for those who rest in "the shadow of the Almighty" (v. 1). An individual speaks in the first-person viewpoint to affirm his trust in God at the beginning (vv. 1–2), followed by promises of divine protection in third person (vv. 3–13). The psalm finally returns to first person, but as a direct discourse with Yahweh answering the initial petition (vv. 14–16). The change in speakers and roles points to a possible antiphonal use of this psalm in the temple liturgy.

91:1–2. Trust in God. The individual emphasizes from the outset that he trusts in God every day. The shadow of the Almighty and the appellation of God as the Most High (v. 1) introduce temple terminology (cf. 17:8; 36:7; 57:1; 63:7). The psalmist's chief desire is to be in the presence of God to find refuge in Him (v. 2).

91:3–13. Divine Protection. The central section of the psalm is replete with vivid imagery expressing God's protection of those who trust in Him when passing through dangerous situations (vv. 3–8). The situations are increasingly dangerous, including the terrors of the night, arrows (war) of the day, stalking pestilence, and ultimately the destructive plague (vv. 5–6). The repeated movement between night and day expresses the ongoing dimension of the threats, which take on anti-godly or even demonic dimensions. This day/night alternation provides a fourfold contrast to the fourfold mention of God's name in vv. 1–2. The threat climaxes in a beautiful promise of protection, which has carried innumerable readers of this psalm through perils of war and persecution (v. 7). The large numbers amplify God's protecting power in the middle of an overwhelming and dangerous situation. Verses 9–13 return to the initial refuge metaphor and detail how God will protect the individual from all of these perils. Verses 11–12 stand out dramatically for their partial use by Satan during the temptation of Jesus (Matt. 4:6). Satan is the ultimate personification of the anti-godly threats in vv. 5–6. But here the psalmist enlists the ministry of angels, who protect him even from mortally dangerous beasts.

91:14–16. God Promises. The last section of this psalm abruptly changes to God as the subject. Through direct divine discourse, He confirms the protection requested and described in the two previous sections. In addition to that, He provides an answer to the question of the transience of human life raised in the previous psalm. God will give the psalmist a long life (v. 16) and his salvation. Jesus's response to Satan's temptation demonstrates that the intention of this psalm is not to encourage presumptuous gambling with physical and spiritual dangers, but rather to promise true protection for those who continually abide in God. Note also Jesus's implied quotation of v. 13 in Luke 10:19, where He bestows on His disciples authority over demonic forces.

92:1–15

Sabbath Praises

The title of the psalm identifies it as one used on the Sabbath day. It is a unique title within the Psalms that points to its use in the temple. It connects to Psalm 91 by giving thanks for what has been promised in that psalm. It also connects to Psalm 90 in its wise, didactic tone and usage of contrastive imagery.

92:1–3. Invitation to Praise. The poem begins with an invitation for continuous praises on the Sabbath. In Psalm 91, the deathly and demonic threats were felt day and night, but now the psalmist describes the goodness of declaring God's *khesed* ("lovingkindness" or "mercy") in the morning and His faithfulness at night (vv. 1–2). This creates a positive contrast by alluding to the evening and morning sacrifices that marked the Sabbath day. Praises are also expressed through instruments and music. A *nebel* (a ten-stringed instrument, possibly a lute) and the *higgayon* ("resounding music," "harmonious sound," "melody" of the lyre) combined in a kind of "orchestra."

92:4–9. The Wicked Are Like Grass. The psalm's wisdom section begins with repeated references to God's works (vv. 5–6) and their subsequent association with Creation (cf. vv. 12–14). This provides an apt beginning for a poem about the Sabbath. The connection to the Creation narrative is further strengthened by the sevenfold mention of Yahweh in the psalm (vv. 1, 4, 5, 8, 9, 13, 15), which links it to the seven days of Creation. It then moves from the works of Yahweh to the destruction of the wicked. In Psalm 91, humanity was likened to withering grass, but here the wicked spring up like grass that will ultimately be scattered by God (vv. 6–9). This presents an answer to the question "How long?" introduced in Psalm 90:13.

92:10–15. The Righteous Are Like Trees. In contrast to the destruction of the wicked is the exaltation of the righteous, who will flourish as a palm tree and grow as a cedar (v. 12). Instead of dry grass, they bear fruit in old age (v. 14). It is interesting to note the association between tree imagery, the house of the Lord (the temple; v. 13; cf. 52:9), and a description of the fruitful longevity of the righteous in the presence of God (cf. Ps. 1). A further association with Creation might be present here through the imagery of the tree of life as it stood in the middle of Eden. The psalm ends with a reference to Deuteronomy 32:4 and God's righteousness, which provides an adequate rationale for the blessing of longevity the righteous enjoy under the protection of His righteousness. Rootedness in God versus the transiency of human life concludes this group of three psalms and prepares us for the permanence of divine kingship that characterizes the next section of Book 3 (Pss. 93–100).

93:1–5

Yahweh Is King

The divine kingship psalms in Book 4 (Pss. 93–100) are aptly introduced by the programmatic statement "the Lord reigns," which may be translated as "Yahweh is King" (cf. also 97:1; 99:1). The psalm does not have a Hebrew heading, although the LXX connects it liturgically to the "day before the Sabbath" and associates it with David.

93:1–2. Throne Scene. The declaration of Yahweh as King describes Him as dressed with majesty and strength, which denotes His divine splendor, appearance, and readiness to engage in battle. The verb *'azar* ("to gird oneself"), is usually found in a context of preparation for warfare (cf. 2 Sam. 22:40; Ps. 18:39; Is. 8:9). The question of when Yahweh's kingship began is answered in v. 2 by describing His throne as being established from the earliest times (*'az*). He is from *'olam* ("everlasting," "eternity").

93:3–4. Subduing the Nations. Some have suggested that the background for this part of the psalm borrows from the Canaanite mythological battle between the storm-god Baal and Yam, who represented the waters of chaos. A more biblically informed reading recognizes the threefold mention of *nahar* ("rivers," "streams") as referring to nations (see Is. 8:7).

93:5. Palace and Temple. The psalm concludes with a description of God's house adorned with holiness and supported by Yahweh's *'edot* ("statutes," "testimonies"; synonymous to His law; cf. 19:7). The house of the Lord is both palace and temple (cf. 5:7; 26:8). The combination of a reference to God's house and "rivers" is also found in Psalm 36:8, where the imagery connects to the rivers of Eden and sets God's eternal kingship in the context of Creation. While Yahweh as King might not be an easily accessible image in modern times, the sovereignty of God and acknowledgment of His majesty are important matters for Christian believers, who anticipate with hope the consummation of their manifestation in history.

94:1–23

Royal Judge

Psalm 94 provides further information about divine kingship, identifying God as a Judge of justice, who is ready to render punishment (v. 2) and bring onto the wicked the consequences of their sin (v. 23). The psalm lacks any superscription.

94:1–8. The Foolish. The poem begins with the twofold divine epithet *'el neqamot* ("God of vengeance"), followed by a request for Him to rise up as Judge of the earth. The question of how long the wicked will exult creates a strong verbal link to the preceding psalms, especially the beginning of Book 4 (90:13). Verses 4–8 describe the foolishness of the wicked when they break and crush God's people. The mention of the widow, stranger, and fatherless recalls Psalm 10:16–18 and its strong ethical overtones drawing on legal literature from the Pentateuch (cf. Deut. 10:18; 24:17–21; 27:19). It is unclear if the wicked represent oppressing nations or senseless people who think the Lord does not see their sin (vv. 7–8). In v. 7, a shortened form of the divine name (*yah*) is used, which becomes more prevalent in the last two books of the Psalms. The section ends by asking the fools when they will become wise (v. 8).

94:9–15. Wisdom. This didactic wisdom contemplation, similar to Psalms 90 and 92, is a response to the question of v. 8; the mention of nations in v. 10 gives the psalm a universal tone. At the center of this section is a beatitude of wisdom about instruction in God's law (v. 12) followed by a promise of restoration when judgment will return and again be established in righteousness (v. 15).

94:16–23. Personal Petition. Two questions reflect a troubled individual's need for justice and divide this section (vv. 16 and 20), each followed by answers that affirm Yahweh's role in defending the righteous. The reference to the throne of corrupt iniquity in the second question (v. 20) contrasts with Yahweh's throne of the previous psalm. The throne of iniquity gives judgments that are against the law and condemn innocent blood (i.e., condemn the innocent to death; v. 21). Here, Yahweh as Judge is contrasted with a wicked form of justice. The throne of God is also the seat of judgment. For the psalmist, Yahweh is a *misgab* ("fortress," "stronghold," "defense") in this context, perhaps connoting the idea of God as the psalmist's legal defender. The psalm comes full circle with the announcement of the punishment of the wicked (v. 23; cf. vv. 1–2). God as King and Judge are two images found in Daniel 7 in the description of the judgment scene in the heavenly sanctuary. "Thrones" are set up there and the investigative judgment begins. This psalm reminds us that Yahweh is our defense.

95:1–11

Invitation to Praise

This royal thanksgiving psalm invites God's people to sing to the Lord as a response to His wonderful works (vv. 1–7c). It then exhorts the people to listen to God's word and learn from the negative experiences of the heart-hardened generation in the desert after the Exodus (vv. 7d–11). The contrasting content of these two sections has caused questions about its original unity, but other festal psalms (e.g., Pss. 50 and 81) exhibit a similar twofold structure, whereas the second part is also a direct discourse of Yahweh. Hebrews 4:7 quotes from this psalm and mentions David in connection with the authorship of the poem, although the NT sometimes associates all of Psalms with David.

95:1–7c. Exhortation. The first part of the psalm alternates between exhortation to worship (vv. 1–2, 6) and reasons for worship (vv. 3–5, 7a-c). The exhortations give rare insight into OT worship services. There is an invitation to shout joyfully to Him with *zamir* ("songs," "psalms"; v. 2) but also to bow down and kneel before the "Lord our Maker" (v. 6). The rationale for worship is found in God's work of Creation. We also find two divine metaphors that are familiar in the psalms and are often combined (cf. e.g., Ps. 23), Yahweh as King (v. 3) and Shepherd (v. 7).

95:7d–11. Yahweh Responds. Yahweh's direct discourse picks up where the previous section left off, with the image of God as Shepherd, which connects well with the Exodus experience. Interestingly, the verb *nahal* ("to lead"), appears in both the Shepherd Psalm (Ps. 23:2) and the Exodus poem (Ex. 15:13), describing God as Shepherd during the Exodus. The psalm's unity is indicated through the image of God trying to lead them as a shepherd while they hardened their hearts. Such was the case at Meribah (Ex. 17:7; Num. 20:13), a name that means "contention" or "rebellion." Their attitudes in the latter incident led to forty years (v. 10) of wandering in the wilderness, and that generation did not enter God's rest (v. 11). While in exile years later, Israel looked forward to returning to the promised land and was called to learn from its remote past experiences. Hebrews 4 uses this psalm and issues a similar warning to hear His voice "today" (v. 7c; cf. Heb. 4:7–8). The promise of the Sabbath rest still remains today.

96:1–13

A Universal Call to Worship

This psalm, also called a missionary psalm, expands the invitation to praise found in the previous psalm and broadens it to a universal dimension by including "the nations" (vv. 3, 10) and "peoples" (see vv. 3, 10, 13). It also connects to previous psalms by a reference to divine kingship (cf. 93:1; 95:3; 97:1; 99:1) and the invitation to praise. It is parallel to the psalm recorded in 1 Chronicles 16:23–33, which David composed when the ark of the covenant was brought to Jerusalem. The differences between the two versions can be explained by the liturgical use of the poem in the Psalms.

96:1–6. First Call. Three universal calls to worship run through this poem; the first is issued to all the earth (v. 1). It is a proclamation of God's sovereignty over the natural world. God's people are invited to sing, to proclaim, and to *basar* ("proclaim the good news") of His salvation to the inhabited world (vv. 2–3). The rationale for praise is found in God's sovereignty above all gods (v. 4) manifested through His work of Creation and presence in the sanctuary (v. 6).

96:7–10. Second Call. The second call is directed to the families/tribes of the peoples/nations (v. 7), and it serves as a response to the proclamation shared in the previous section. Verses 7–8 are a quotation from Psalm 29:1–2, although here the *bene 'elim* ("sons of God," "mighty ones," "heavenly beings") have been replaced with *mishpekhot* ("families," "tribes," "clans"). The response of the people also includes bringing an offering and coming into His courts (v. 8); that is to say, they come to worship God in His temple in Jerusalem and become part of His people. The recognition of universal divine kingship stands behind the central phrase of this group of psalms (Pss. 93–100)—the Lord reigns (v. 10).

96:11–13. Third Call. The call to worship rolls back into the uninhabited world that has witnessed the conversion of the nations. Heavens, earth, sea, and trees all lift up their voices in praises (vv. 11–12). The psalm concludes with the eschatological hope of the coming of the Lord to judge the earth (v. 13). The reference is to the coming of the Messiah and the beginning of His reign of justice (cf. John 5:22; Acts 17:31). The inclusion of creation in the act of worship and its relationship to the conversion of nations are vivid reminders of the role of humanity in the preservation of the natural environment, as the creation also eagerly waits for the revealing of the children/sons of God (Rom. 8:19).

97:1–12

Yahweh Is King

This psalm is similar to Psalms 93 and 99 as it is introduced by the phrase *yahweh malak* ("Yahweh reigns," "Yahweh is King"). The psalm describes the theophany (i.e., the appearance of God's glory) that is often accompanied by dramatic events in nature (cf. Ex. 19:18; Ps. 18:8–16; 77:17–19). Psalm 97 continues where Psalm 96 left off, describing the arrival of the King as He descends from heaven to execute the judgment announced at the end of the previous psalm. The poem is framed by the invitation to rejoice (vv. 1 and 12), first directed to the earth and the righteous, who have been justified. There is no title for this psalm and no further indication as to the date of composition, except for its thematic connection with the surrounding psalms.

97:1–6. Invitation to Praise and Theophany. Following the universal invitation to praise in v. 1, a theophanic event is described. God's appearance is accompanied by a cloud cover that surrounds Him and serves to protect the human observer (v. 2; cf. Ex. 19:9). Fire, lightning, and intense heat melt the mountains in the presence of the Lord of the earth (v. 5). The usual elements of a thunderstorm are absent (cf. Ps. 77:17–19) and the fire imagery is emphasized, communicating the idea of judgment. The theophany climaxes in a universal declaration of God's righteousness as all the peoples see His glory (v. 6). God's appearance evokes a declarative response because it is impossible to remain indifferent to His coming.

97:7–9. Effects of God's Appearance. The positive effects of the theophany are now contrasted with its consequences on those who worship and serve carved images, emphasizing the sovereignty of God over the other gods (vv. 7 and 9). At the center of this section, the poet quotes Psalm 48:12 but transposes it into an indicative, describing the effects of God's judgments on Zion and Judah as already accomplished. The psalm is less future-oriented but views God's appearance as if it had already happened.

97:10–12. Application and Renewed Invitation. The final section begins with an admonition for those who love the Lord to hate evil. This is followed by deliverance, joy, and gladness for the upright in heart (cf. v. 8). The root *samakh* ("to rejoice") is found four times in the psalm (vv. 1, 8, 11 [as the noun *simkhah*], and v. 12). While a theophany is a dramatic event whose effects are felt negatively by the unrighteous, it is also a moment of intense rejoicing for the righteous, foreshadowing the realization of the Christian hope, the final appearing of God and the eternal joy that will accompany it.

98:1–9

A Second Universal Call to Worship

Psalm 98 has been described as an echo of Psalm 96 as it substantially repeats both beginning and end. In three similar calls to worship (vv. 1–3; 4–6; 7–9), the text moves back and forth between "Israel," the "nations," and the natural "world," focusing on the "salvation of our God" and His judgments as the central reasons for worship.

98:1–3. Invitation to Israel. The first invitation to worship is directed at Israel in the sight of all nations. The combination of the terms *khesed* ("mercy," "grace," "steadfast love") and *'emunah* ("fidelity," "faithfulness") in the psalms is used to demonstrate God's covenantal commitment to His people (cf. 36:5; 40:10; 88:11; esp. 89:2, 3, 24, 33, 49).

98:4–6. Invitation to the Earth. The implications of Yahweh's salvation for all the earth (v. 4) are expressed in a symphonic hymn of praise that recognizes God as King. The instruments of the harp, *khatsotsrah* (a metal trumpet for signaling), and *shopar* ("ram's horn") are associated with temple service (cf. 2 Kin. 12:13; 1 Chr. 16:42) and point to the liturgical dimension of the psalm. The center of praise is thus to be found in the temple.

98:7–9. Invitation to Nature. As the praises grow in concentric movements, the third invitation is directed to the natural world, which joins the singing and instrumental praises. The whole of creation praises God and (like Psalm 96) the psalm climaxes with a universal acknowledgment of Yahweh, who will judge the earth in righteousness (v. 9). The good news of God's salvation concentrically expands, reaching to the end of the world with the hope that everyone would finally praise the Lord (see Ps. 148).

99:1–9

Holy, Holy, Holy!

Like Psalms 93 and 97, this poem is introduced by the phrase *yahweh malak* ("Yahweh reigns," "Yahweh is King"), celebrating once more the divine kingship, this time from the perspective of God's holiness. The threefold refrain referring to God as holy (vv. 3, 5, and 9), which is amplified in each occurrence, divides the psalm into sections. Its historical imagery connects it to the Exodus experience ("Moses and Aaron;" cf. Ex. 15:1–18) as well as the early monarchy represented by the reference to "Samuel."

99:1–3. Yahweh Is King. The first section of the psalm is a song about Yahweh on His throne, dwelling between the cherubim in the holiest of holies (cf. Ps. 80:1). As in Psalm 97, there are elements of theophany present, but this time they are only hinted at (v. 1 reference to trembling of the earth). A universal invitation to praise God for "He is holy" (echoed in v. 5) concludes the section.

99:4–5. Yahweh's Strength. In contrast to ANE god-kings, whose strength was founded on their military power, Yahweh's strength is in His law, with which He has established equity, justice, and righteousness (v. 4). The ideas of king and judge are combined as in the concluding theme of the previous psalm (cf. 98:9). The invitation to worship at His footstool (v. 5) stands in parallel imagery to the cherubim throne of the first section and once more introduces the idea of holiness. The second refrain ("He is holy") is now amplified by the invitation to exalt and worship Him.

99:6–9. Historical Witnesses. There is a sudden change in the psalm, listing three historical personalities from the early history of Israel. The mention of Moses and Aaron (v. 6), both of whom are called priests (Moses is not called a priest outside this psalm, but he ordained Aaron; Lev. 8), associates the poem with the Exodus. The mention of Samuel (v. 6) connects it to the early monarchic period. Both are important key moments of election that form the basis for the future establishment of Israel after the Exile. Moses, Aaron, and Samuel all kept God's *'edot* ("testimonies," "statutes") and the *khoq* ("ordinance") He gave them; thus they shared a common foundation—the law of God. These individuals had to rely on the mercy of Yahweh, who is a forgiving God (v. 8; lit. the "God who lifts up," "who carries"; cf. Ex. 34:7); the verb *nasa'* is also used to denote forgiveness. The final refrain expands the concept of the holiness of God by adding a third and final refrain, "the Lord our God is holy." God's holiness is grounded in His sovereignty (vv. 1–3), His Law (vv. 4–6), and His being experientially known as the forgiving God.

100:1–5

Final Doxology to the King

Psalm 100 concludes the divine kingship psalms (Pss. 93–100) and is similar to the first psalm in this group. The psalm serves as a concluding doxology to this collection even though the word "king" is not used. In its absence there is an abundance of royal terminology (e.g., "serve"; some translate *'abad* as "worship," "gates," "courts"), as well as references to the other psalms in this group. It is a final universal hymn that invites people to worship in the temple of

Yahweh through a series of *seven* imperatives that are concentrically arranged around v. 3b and which describe God as Creator and Sustainer using the metaphor of the shepherd. The superscription marks the psalm as a psalm of thanksgiving, which points to its liturgical usage within the temple service. The psalm has found its way into Christian liturgy as the basis for the widely used doxology "Praise God, from whom all blessings flow."

100:1–3a. First Call. The first call to worship, which comprises the first group of four imperatives, is directed to all the earth. The thankful need to shout joyfully and rejoice in the presence of the enthroned king (cf. 1 Sam. 10:24; Ps. 47:2–3). The nations are to acknowledge that the Lord is God, the universal sovereign.

100:3b. Covenant. The center of the psalm is framed by imperatives on each side and emphasizes the covenant relationship between Yahweh and Israel through creation (God made them) and election using the metaphor of the shepherd—they are His people and the sheep of His pasture (cf. Deut. 26:16–19).

100:4–5. Second Call. A second call to worship using three imperatives invites the universal congregation to enter His gates and His courts (i.e., the temple, which serves as Yahweh's palace where His throne of grace is symbolically represented by the ark of the covenant; v. 4). The inclusiveness of the call is highly significant; it invites the whole world into the temple precincts, a place usually reserved for Israel only. The psalm concludes with a contemplation of Yahweh's goodness, reminiscent of His self-revelation at Sinai (cf. Ex. 34:6). The psalm anticipates the moment when the redeemed ones will enter through the portals of the eternal city to worship their Creator and Redeemer with eternal joy.

101:1–8

How to Rule

Following the group of psalms emphasizing divine kingship (Pss. 93–100), this poem serves as a response of commitment to the principles of divine governance laid out in the previous psalms. This commitment is made by the ruler on behalf of the people. It is the first poem since Psalm 86 that is associated with David in its superscription. Psalms 101–103 have been reognized as the third group of Davidic psalms. While the original authorship fits David's commitment to God, its placement in the Psalms and the absence of any explicit reference to a king may point to its use as a foundation for the governing of a new nation after the Babylonian Exile under God as King.

101:1–4. Personal Commitment. The principles of *khesed* ("steadfast love," "mercy," "grace") and justice are related at the end of the previous psalm. These divine characteristics and guiding principles of the covenant mentioned in this section form the theological basis for governance (cf. Mic. 6:8). The commitment is expressed in the form of a song of praise (v. 1), which provides insight into the use of this psalm during an inauguration ceremony for leadership. The personal commitment of the king is centered on an inner attitude, a heart that is *tamim* (v. 2), a word expressing the idea of completeness, integrity, and straightness (cf. Ps. 15:2). This is contrasted with the psalmist's resolution to abstain from a perverse heart, which is crooked or twisted (v. 4). The realization that sin often enters through visual perception is interesting to note (v. 3). This becomes especially meaningful in connection to David's initial look at Bathsheba from his palace roof (2 Sam. 11:2).

101:5–8. Public Commitment. The resolve for a pure inner attitude translates now into a public commitment to act against the wicked and support the righteous. The psalmist (i.e., the king) will oppose anyone who is slanderous, proud, or deceitful (vv. 5, 7). He will even destroy all the wicked in the land (v. 8). On the other hand, the faithful (v. 6) and the one who walks in the way of *tamim* ("integrity" or "completeness," see above on v. 2) shall be part of the future government. The heart of *tamim* in the leader translates itself into the *tamim* way in which his servants will walk. This psalm not only provides a good road map for a renewed nation under God after the Babylonian Exile but also describes a model of timeless commitment for anyone called and appointed to lead God's people.

102:1–28

It Is Time for God's Mercy

This is the fifth of the seven penitential psalms found in the Psalms (cf. Ps. 6; 32; 38; 51; 130; 143) and describes the hope of God's people in Exile for divine intervention and deliverance. A complaint (vv. 1–11) is followed by a statement of confidence (vv. 12–22), which concludes the psalm with praises to the eternal God. The

psalm is permeated by references to different units of time that climax with a contemplation of God's eternity: "day(s)" (vv. 3, 8, 11, 23, 24), "years" (vv. 24, 27), "generations" (vv. 12, 18, 24), "time" (v. 13 [2]), "endure/remain" (vv. 12, 26), and so on. All this identifies the main theme of the poem: the time has come for God to have mercy and compassion for Zion (v. 13). The superscription is unique in the Psalms, although a similarity to headings of some Babylonian prayers has been noted. This could underscore a date for its composition during the Exile in Babylon.

102:1–11. Bad Days. A plea for God to hear and answer (vv. 1–2) introduces a complaint framed by the image of human life that will wither away like grass (vv. 4, 11). Other images underline the fact that these are bad days (v. 3). There are three similes of birds (vv. 6–7), whose species are difficult to determine. They are each connected to the ideas of loneliness and abandonment. These images are used to express Israel's experience of God's wrath when He threw them down or away (Heb. *shalak*) into exile. The section concludes with the image of withering grass, emphasizing the shortness of human life. It is like a lengthening evening shadow, which eventually disappears into a night of oblivion. The idea is that the nation may fade away and disappear in exile.

102:12–28. The Time Has Come. A strong affirmation of God's eternal nature and character (v. 12) contrasts with the experience of the people. There is a similar description of God's eternity at the end of the psalm, creating another frame around the second section (v. 27). Verse 13 stands out as a long line in the poetic arrangement of the psalm and is the center of the poem. There is merciful compassion for Zion and a doubly emphasized rationale—the *mo'ed* has arrived. This term, meaning "appointed time," is used for some of Israel's annual gatherings (Ex. 23:15; Lev. 23) and by the prophets as a reference to a prophetic time (e.g., Dan. 8:19; 12:7). In this psalm, it may indicate Jeremiah's prophecy about the length of the Exile (cf. Jer. 29:10).

Like Daniel (Dan. 9:1–2), the psalmist eagerly anticipates the end of the Exile. The section looks forward to the rebuilding of Jerusalem (v. 16) and the nation (v. 18). In v. 19 we find an interesting reference to the heavenly sanctuary describing the Lord as looking down from His sanctuary, and viewing the earth from heaven. Verse 23 briefly returns to the shortness of life in exile. The psalm concludes with a prospect of God's eternity, which serves as a guarantee for a future Israel whose descendants will be established before the Lord (v. 28). The divine plan is fulfilled within the flow of history and specific moments are identified by God as particularly significant in reminding His people that He is still guiding them.

103:1–22

Yahweh's *khesed*

Psalm 103 expands on the topic of God's *khesed* (variously rendered as "mercy," "faithful love," "lovingkindness," "covenant loyalty"; vv. 4, 8, 11, 17), raising a chorus of praises that grows concentrically from the individual (vv. 1–5) to Israel in the past (vv. 6–10), Israel at present (vv. 11–14), humanity at large (vv. 15–18), and finally the whole universe (vv. 19–22). A repeated beatitude begins and concludes the poem, creating an *inclusio*. Throughout the psalm are found numerous references to the divine self-revelation at Sinai, focusing on the attributes of God (cf. Ex. 33–34). There is a timelessness about this psalm. However, the image of withering grass as a simile for the brevity of human life (vv. 15–16), in contrast to God's eternity, reminds us of the previous psalm. This psalm has been ascribed to David, but its location in the Psalms points to an application to the historical situation of the Babylonian Exile.

103:1–10. *Khesed* on the Individual and Israel. The invitation to bless (or praise) the Lord begins this psalm and is echoed at the end. The verb *barak* ("to bless"), with God as the object, can refer to the act of worshiping and praising Him. Five relative clauses in vv. 3–5 describe the characteristics of God centered on His *khesed* ("mercy," "steadfast love") and *rakhamim* ("compassion," "tender mercies"; v. 4) and their effects of forgiveness, restoration, and healing the individual so that one's youth is renewed like the eagle's (v. 5; cf. Is. 40:31). The psalm now turns to God's deeds of mercy in the past, specifically during the time of Moses, invoking in v. 8 the experience of the Exodus through a quotation from Exodus 34:6. Verse 8 forms the theological center of the psalm and has become a formulaic point of theological reference throughout the Psalms (cf. also 25:10; 86:15; 99:8). Verses 9–10 provide a commentary on v. 8.

103:11–22. *Khesed* on Humanity and the Universe. The scope of the psalm and of God's mercies gets broader now with the invocation of both heaven and earth (v. 11) and the poetic description of God's forgiveness: He has removed our transgressions from us as far as the east is from the west (v. 12). In effect, this is a further comment on v. 8. Similar to Psalm 102, this psalm also deals with the fleetingness of humanity versus God's eternity (vv. 13–17). The shortness of human life is contrasted with God's mercies, which are "from everlasting to everlasting" (v. 17). These mercies are extended to those who keep His covenant (v. 18). The conclusion of the psalm returns to the blessing at the beginning, where heavenly beings lift up their voices in praises within the heavenly realm (vv. 20–21). The impact of a person's experience of God's mercies and forgiveness can reach into the universe (cf. Luke 15:10).

104:1–35

Old Testament Cosmology

Both Psalms 102 and 103 share a common concern for humanity based on the view that humans are like withering grass. Psalm 104 moves from humans to the cosmos, shifting the focus to the way in which creation and the cosmos are held together by the Creator. As in the previous psalm, there is an *inclusio* on the topic of personal worship (vv. 1, 35): the psalm concludes with the first Hallelujah chorus of the Psalms ("Praise the Lord"). From this point on, it is found at the beginning or end of the remaining psalms in which it occurs (2x at the beginning [Pss. 111–112]; 5x at the end [Pss. 104–105, 115–117]; and 8x at both beginning and end [Pss. 106, 113, 135, 146–150]). It becomes especially prominent in the final doxology of the Psalms (Pss. 146–150).

The author of the psalm is not identified. The poem has been likened to the Egyptian Aten Hymn (fourteenth century B.C.), which originated during the reign of Amenhotep IV (who renamed himself as Akhenaten in honor of the sun-god Aten). This period was characterized by a fairly short-lived monotheistic reform focusing exclusively on the worship of Aten. Unquestionably, there is some resemblance in the imagery used. For example, v. 21 describes lions lurking during the night roaring after their prey, comparable with line ii 8 of the Aten Hymn, which mentions the lion coming from its den at night. However, the psalm constantly relates the sun to God as its Creator and the sun is not considered divine. In the Aten Hymn, the sun is divine. One could even suggest that Psalm 104 is a polemic, contrasting the superiority of Yahweh with the inferiority of the gods of the ANE. The psalm can be divided into seven sections, echoing the seven days of Creation (vv. 1–4, 5–9, 10–18, 19–23, 24–26, 27–30, 31–35).

104:1–4. God in Heaven. As in Psalm 103, the personal acclamation of the Lord opens and closes this psalm (cf. v. 35), framing the hymn with an invitation to worship (cf. 103:1, 22). In five relative clauses (vv. 2–4) the psalm describes the activity of God as He begins to create (stretching out the heavens; v. 2) and makes close verbal links to the Creation account in Genesis (e.g., light, heavens, waters, winds/spirits [the Heb. *ruakh* can mean either]; Gen. 1:1–5).

104:5–9. Establishing the Earth. The second section uses poetic language to describe the establishment of the earth and its atmosphere, focusing on the division between the waters above and those below the firmament, creating a boundary between water and dry land (vv. 6–9). The foundations of the earth (v. 5) do not necessarily refer to pillars that stand on an underworld ocean, as has often been suggested in the discussion of this psalm; rather, these are images taken from the field of architecture (cf. 1 Kin. 8:13). Overall, while the language is poetic, there is no mythological overtone in the description of God establishing the earth. The link is with the second day of Creation (cf. Gen. 1:6–8).

104:10–18. Creator and Sustainer. The next section continues with water imagery but focuses on its effect on plants and other vegetation and recognizes its role in the sustenance of animals and plants. God is not only the Creator but also the Sustainer who preserves creation on a daily basis that it may bring forth food from the earth (v. 14). A geographical description of Israel's fauna and flora (e.g., cedars of Lebanon; v. 16) links this section with the third day of Creation (cf. Gen. 1:9–13). There are also connections with the fifth and sixth days (cf. Gen. 1:20–25).

104:19–23. Night and Day. The fourth day of Creation (cf. Gen. 1:14–19) comes into focus in the next section as it describes God appointing the moon and sun to their assigned activities. The sequence of darkness followed by light reflects the evening/morning sequence found in Genesis 1:19. There is a strong demythologizing tendency in the wording here, as moon and sun, both worshiped as deities within religions of the ANE, have clearly set limits: the moon has its seasons and the sun "knows" to go down (v. 19). The section concludes with a description of human activity (Heb. *'adam*; "man," "humanity") and alludes to the sixth day of Creation (cf. Gen. 1:26–31). It also connects humans with the daily labor of life on earth after the fall.

104:24–30. Wonder of Creation. At the end of the Creation week God contemplates His work (cf. Gen. 1:31). Within the psalm is a moment when the psalmist looks at creation and declares the bounteous plenty of God's works (v. 24). All living things are under the caring dominion of Yahweh. All nature and humans are dependent on God for sustenance (vv. 27–30). Once more the language of creation is used, as God's *ruakh* ("spirit," "breath") is identified as the source of life for all living creatures, and when it is taken away they die.

104:31–35. Final Praise and Exhortation. The psalm concludes with an invitation to praise and recognize God's majesty and its negative effects on sinners (v. 35). A contemplation of God's creative power should lead to worship. Psalm 104 moves between God's initial creation and His constant preservation of it. At a time when science seeks to explain everything in terms of cause and effect within a closed system, we must remember that God is the Creator in whom we find the purpose for our existence.

105:1–45

Yahweh in History

This praise psalm shifts the focus to Yahweh's saving activities in the history of Israel. It does so by concentrating on important historical events, beginning with the Abrahamic covenant, the Exodus, and the entrance into the promised land. Verses 1–15 are almost identical to the psalm recorded in 1 Chronicles 16:8–36, which commemorates the bringing of the ark to Jerusalem by David and may represent the incorporation of material from that composition for a liturgical purpose.

105:1–6. Invitation to Remember. The psalmist uses ten imperatives (vv. 1–5) to exhort the congregation of Israel—offspring of Abraham and Jacob, His chosen ones (v. 6)—to praise the Lord. The praises move from outward expressions (e.g., make known, sing, speak; vv. 1–2) to an inward attitude (e.g., seeking the Lord with the heart; v. 3) culminating in the command to remember His wondrous works (v. 5). The verb *zakar* ("to remember") plays an important role here by concluding this section and framing the next section, moving from human to divine remembrance.

105:7–45. God Remembers. The verb *zakar* at the beginning and end of this section (cf. vv. 8, 42) serves to frame the historical review that makes up the major part of this poem. God's remembrance involves His concrete acts of salvation in history. The psalm begins with Israel's election through the covenant He made with Abraham, including the covenant renewals with Isaac and Jacob, and culminating in an everlasting covenant (vv. 8–10). Israel's election and accompanying promise of the land characterize the next section, which focuses on the time of the patriarchal wanderings (vv. 11–15).

The patriarchs are described as anointed ones and prophets (v. 15; cf. Gen. 20:7 for Abraham as prophet), creating a historical lineage of salvation that ultimately points away from the patriarch to the Messiah. Joseph and the preservation of Israel is the next historical event in the memory of God (vv. 16–25). The experience of Joseph is summarized and followed by that of Moses and Aaron, the story of the plagues (only eight plagues are selected [vv. 26–36]; cf. Ps. 78:44–53 where seven plagues are mentioned), and the Exodus (vv. 37–41). Only the positive aspects of the Exodus experience are listed—silver and gold (v. 37), quail, bread of heaven (v. 40), and water (v. 41). Consequently, no mention is made of Israel's rebellion in the wilderness. The psalm concludes with another reference to God's remembrance and ends with entrance to the promised land (vv. 42–45). That generation and the one returning from the Babylonian Exile were called to observe God's precepts (*huqqim*) and instructions (*torot*; v. 45). Another Hallelujah ("Praise the Lord") shout concludes the psalm. A surprising element in this psalm is that God does not remember the sins of His people, probably because at the end of the conflict our sins will be no more.

106:1–48

Israel's Confession

The final psalm of Book 4 aptly presents an extended confession of Israel's wrongdoings throughout the history of the nation. Thus, it serves as a mirror image of the historical account in the previous psalm. The psalm focuses not on God's goodness and faithfulness but on the failures of Israel that finally led to the Babylonian Exile. All this is framed by a summons to praise (vv. 1–3) as individuals (vv. 4–5) and as a community (vv. 47), followed by the doxology that concludes Book 4 (v. 48). The twofold Hallelujah ("Praise the LORD") appears for the first time, both at the beginning and the end of the poem (vv. 1, 48). As one moves toward the end of the Psalms, the Hallelujahs ("Praise the LORD") become more frequent and intense until they reach the great final Hallelujah doxology at the end (Pss. 146–150). Historically, the Babylonian Exile provides the occasion for confession, and this leads to return from exile, which is thematically at the center of Book 5.

106:1–5. Introduction. In an almost identical fashion to the previous psalm, the short introduction to this psalm uses a number of imperatives to invite the congregation to praise and worship God. His goodness (v. 1), emphasized in the previous psalm, is now set into sharp contrast with Israel's sinfulness. Again the root *zakar* ("remember") appears in the introduction (v. 4) and toward the end, framing the main section (vv. 7, 45) and emphasizing God's salvific remembrance (cf. 105:5, 8, 42). The section concludes with the hope of a future restoration and communal praise for God's inheritance (v. 5).

106:6–46. Confession. The tone abruptly changes, focusing on the main theme of the psalm, that is, confession of Israel's sins (v. 6). It is a communal confession (cf. 1 Kin. 8:47; Dan. 9:5) pointing to a long history of guilt. The historical review of Israel's sins begins in Egypt at the time of the Exodus (vv. 7–12) when Israel rebelled by the sea (v. 7). Yahweh saved them for His name's sake (v. 8), thus establishing a pattern for the conduct of Israel. Next comes the rebellion in the wilderness and God's provision of manna (vv. 13–15), followed by the Korahite rebellion against Moses and Aaron (vv. 16–18; cf. Num. 16). The events at Mount Sinai are recalled (vv. 19–23), in particular the worship of the golden calf (cf. Ex. 32:4), which theologically exchanged their glory (God) for the image of an ox (v. 20). Verses 24–27 point to the rebellion instigated by the spies at the borders of Canaan (cf. Num. 13–14) and provide the first glimpse of the Exile, as God intended to scatter them through the lands (v. 27). This is followed by the apostasy to Baal of Peor (v. 28) and Phinehas's courageous intervention (v. 30), which in terms of results was the same as Abraham's faith—it was credited or accounted to him as righteousness forever (v. 31; cf. Gen. 15:6).

The rebellion at the waters of strife (Meribah, vv. 32–33) precedes a list of wrongdoings committed in the promised land (vv. 34–39), which spans the time from the conquest to the Babylonian Exile; idolatry and child sacrifice are identified as the major abominations during this period (cf. 2 Kin. 16:3; Jer. 7:30–31). Consequently, the Exile came as God gave them into the hands of the Gentile nations (vv. 40–43). At this point the confession turns to Yahweh's *khesed* ("mercy," "steadfast love") as He remembers His covenant (v. 45), thus closing the circle of remembrance (or lack thereof) that introduced this section (cf. v. 7).

106:47–48. Final Plea and Doxology. A communal plea for salvation and return from exile concludes the psalm, connecting it to the introduction with the words "thanks" and "praise" (vv. 1, 47). The final doxology of Book 4 is slightly more expanded than the conclusion of Book 3 but is almost identical to the doxology of Book 1, adding the divine epithet "God of Israel." This title is appropriate for the end of collected confessions that tried to come to terms with the reality of the Exile, seeking a foundation for hope in Yahweh's saving deeds on behalf of Israel in the past. The confessional anti-history of Israel demonstrates the greatness of God's mercies toward His children.

PSALMS 107—150

BOOK V

The final book of the Psalms begins with another historical psalm that almost seamlessly connects to the end of Book 4, thus providing a response to the final plea for the return from exile (106:47). The compositional theme of Book 5 is the restoration of Israel during the postexilic period. Before the final doxology of the Psalms, which spreads over five psalms (Pss. 146–150), there is a last group of Davidic psalms (Pss. 138–145). Some have been adjusted to the historical realities of the postexilic Jewish communities (e.g., Ps. 144 and its dependence on Pss. 18 and 104). The importance of David as an ideal paradigm for a postexilic state formation is underlined by the insertion of this group at the end of the Psalms. The pilgrim psalms (Pss. 120–134) constitute the largest subcollection in Book 5. The expression *shir hamma'alot* ("A Song of Ascent"), found in the superscriptions of this group, may refer to the Babylonian exiles returning from captivity and "going up" to Jerusalem or possibly the annual Israelite pilgrimage to one of the main festivals. It is also possible that both meanings merged in the late exilic and post-exilic periods, emphasizing the central role of Jerusalem and the temple for the national reconstruction.

107:1–43

Israel Restored

The links between this and the previous psalm are plentiful. Both psalms begin with the same thanksgiving formula and form historical narratives of God's salvation deeds (Ps. 106:44 is taken up as a refrain in 107:6, 13, 19, 28), demonstrating that the division between Books 4 and 5 is to some extent artificial. Psalm 107 serves as a bridge between the two books. However, the negative tone of Psalm 106 gives way to thanksgiving and the topic of Yahweh's redemption. The return from the Babylonian Exile is no longer something hoped for but instead is an accomplished historical fact that leads to the restoration of Israel as a nation.

107:1–3. Invitation to Praise and Thanksgiving. The invitation to praise at the beginning of the poem is almost the same as the one in the previous psalm (106:1) and vv. 2–3 connect to the ending of the previous psalm. The request in 106:47 (to be gathered from the Gentile nations) is now a reality. God has redeemed His people from the hands of the enemy and gathered them from the lands. Yahweh's redemption brings Israel back from all four directions of the compass (cf. Is. 49:12).

107:4–32. Four Experiences that Motivate Thanksgiving. As a rationale for thanksgiving, the psalmist now lists four experiences of deliverance. They are primarily metaphorical in language and all end in a refrain followed by a short exhortation (vv. 4–9; 10–16; 17–22; 23–32). The refrain of praise and thanksgiving (vv. 8, 15, 21, 31) refers repeatedly back to the introduction and possibly serves as a liturgical response by the congregation during congregational singing of the psalm. The first experience (vv. 4–9) recounts that Israel wandered in the desolate wilderness wastelands (v. 4). The description is vague and could be a reference to the experience of the Exile rather than to the wilderness wanderings after the Exodus. The return from the Babylonian Exile is depicted as a second Exodus. At the end of the experience Yahweh provides a straight path to a city where they may reside (v. 7).

The second experience (vv. 10–16) is even more abstract as it describes liberation from darkness (v. 10), which came as a consequence of rebellion against God's instruction (v. 11). The breaking of bronze gates and cutting of iron bars echo the promise of Cyrus's liberation in Isaiah 45:2, making the reference to the Babylonian Exile explicit. Verses 17–22 describe the rescue from the gates of death (v. 18; cf. Job 38:17; Ps. 9:13), which poetically refers to proximity to the grave (cf. Ps. 28:1; 30:3). In this case, it designates the Exile as a threat to the existence of Israel. The final experience recounts a storm at sea (vv. 22–32), which reminds us of Jonah 1–2. The metaphor of God rescuing Israel from a storm may point to the diaspora of Israel that took them to a number of foreign shores beyond Babylon (Egypt and the rest of the Mediterranean ancient world). All narratives end with the refrain to give thanks to the Lord for His *khesed* ("goodness," "mercy," "steadfast love").

107:33–41. Yahweh's Transforming Power. The psalm next moves into a contemplation of Yahweh's acts that change the destiny of both humanity and nature, characterized by a reversal of fortunes. Through His creative powers He turns dry, parched ground into flowing springs of water (v. 35). Again there is mention of a city where they could reside (v. 36; cf. vv. 4, 7), pointing to the return from exile and rebuilding of Jerusalem. Yet there is also punishment for the powerful (He pours contempt on leaders; v. 40) but deliverance for the poor and needy, who are like a flock led by the divine Shepherd (v. 41; cf. Ps. 95:7).

107:42–43. Wisdom Exhortation. The experiences of Israel in exile have a didactic function expressed in the final appeal of the psalm: the wise should pay close attention to all of these things (v. 43). All this leads to an understanding of God's *khesed* ("lovingkindness," "mercy," "faithful love"), which creates another strong linguistic link with the previous psalm (cf. 106:7, 45). Looking back at how God led us through darkness and in the wilderness can increase our faith and move us to sing about His mercies as we anticipate in hope the fulfillment of His promise of a future city for us.

108:1–13

Déjà Vu

Psalm 108 combines material from earlier psalms (vv. 1–5 // 57:7–11 and vv. 6–13 // 60:5–12) in a new way, a phenomenon that also occurs in other places of Book 5 (cf. Ps. 144 and its dependence on Pss. 18 and 104). Subtle changes take place that shift the focus from David's personal experience of musical praise (v. 2 // 57:8) to a more theocentric approach stressing Yahweh's sovereignty. Thus, it is no longer the king that is the principal actor; he is used only as a historical backdrop for a theocentric form of government, which creates a new foundation for postexilic Israel. Psalm 108 is the first of three poems that refer back to Davidic authorship (Pss. 108–110) at the beginning of Book 5.

108:1–5. Praise for Yahweh's Mercy. A hymnic praise to Yahweh introduces the poem. Some have taken *kebodi* (lit. "my glory") at the end of the verse as a reference to God (cf. Ps. 3:3), whereas others think it refers to "my soul" or "my whole being" (cf. Pss. 16:9; 57:8). Contextually, either could apply here. The praise echoes with a universal tone, combining with musical instruments to call peoples and nations to "awaken the dawn" (v. 2). This expression alludes to the Day of the Lord when Yahweh will intervene (cf. Joel 2:2; Amos 4:13); the intervention is further developed in the second section of the psalm.

108:6–13. Plea for Yahweh's Military Intervention. The petition for deliverance invoking Yahweh's right hand (v. 6; cf. Ex. 15:6, 12) is followed by the quote of a divine oracle (vv. 8–10). It is a declaration of God's rule over Israel's ancient territories on both sides of the Jordan, such as Shechem and Succoth, Jacob's first dwelling places in the land (v. 7; cf. Gen. 33:17–18), as well the neighboring countries of Moab, Edom, and Philistia. References to the tribes in v. 8 echo Jacob's blessings in Genesis 49. Following the oracle, the psalmist recalls God's abandonment of Israel in the Exile (cf. 44:9). For the psalmist, salvation is the exclusive work of God, who stands by and defends His people like a Warrior. He is always present in our battles.

109:1–31

Deliverance from False Accusations

Psalm 109 is permeated by legal terminology, turning the psalm into a court case in which the petitioner (the accused) is asking for vindication from God as the universal Judge. The long list of curses in vv. 6–19 are pronounced by the psalmist's enemies as they express the charges against him. In the second section, the psalmist does not defend himself but instead turns to God with an appeal for justice (vv. 20–29) that climaxes in a praise of thanksgiving for deliverance (vv. 30–31). The psalm has been attributed to David and can certainly reflect a dramatic situation in his life. However, its strategic placement in the Psalms and connections with Psalm 107, which portrays Israel's deliverance from the Babylonian Exile, suggest a reuse of the psalm. The legal conflicts and false charges raised against the Jews during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah could serve as a historical background for the use of the psalm.

109:1–5. Appeal to God as the Highest Judge. Following an appeal to God to not keep silent (v. 1), the psalmist repeatedly refers to the verbal accusations of his enemies and their words of hatred (v. 3). This description of the attitudes of the enemies is followed by the psalmist's reaction.

109:6–19. Accusations. As in court proceedings, the psalm now turns to the accusers' list of accusations and curses that reflect the words of hatred mentioned in the previous section, ultimately asking for a death penalty (v. 9). Most interpreters have understood this section as curses the psalmist utters against his accusers, as is the case in other psalms traditionally called imprecatory psalms. This is a viable interpretation. Nevertheless, the legal framework of the psalm, as well as the next section, which strongly contrasts the psalmist's position with that of the accusers, suggests that this section is the direct discourse of the accusing party, who are his enemies (cf. especially the contrast in v. 28 below; see "Imprecatory Passages in the Psalms," p. 733).

109:20–31. They Curse, You Bless. David asks God to help him for His name's sake, appealing to God's *khesed* ("mercy," "steadfast love"; v. 21), which culminates in the contrast of v. 28: the enemies will curse, but God will bless. Eventually, wrong accusations will return to their originators

Imprecatory Passages in the Psalms

There are a number of psalms in which the psalmist uses such strong language (referred to as imprecations) against his enemies that, according to some, it reveals an attitude that is incompatible with Christian love. For instance, when oppressed by the wicked, the psalmist prays that they be disgraced (35:4), destroyed (54:5), or descend to the grave alive (55:15). He also asks for God's wrath to consume them (59:13) and considers happy those who dash Babylonian children against the rocks (137:8–9). We will examine this type of language and explore its purpose and the theological significance.

1. *Origin of the Language.* First, there is significant evidence that the imprecations in the Psalms have theological and linguistic connections with previous revelation. The primary background for the language is the covenant curses against covenant breakers (cf. Ps. 37:22 and Deut. 30:1; Ps. 69:23 and Deut. 28:22, 28). In other cases, there are connections with previous descriptions of God's judgments in historical narratives (cf. Ps. 140:10 and Gen. 19:24; Ps. 83:9–18 and Judg. 4–5, 7–8; Ps. 55:9, 15 and Num. 16:30).

One of the significant and consistent themes is that of divine retribution. This principle is evident in the context of the court as well as that of war. There is often an implication that God's defeat of the enemies of His people in the past is a harbinger of His future judgment as well. Accordingly, it can be legitimately claimed that the imprecatory Psalms are not unique in their descriptions of God's roles of retributive Judge and Sovereign over the wars of the nations (Ps. 35:4–9; 70:2). These psalms thus often employ the language God Himself had previously used to indicate His evaluation and punishment of evil, and the suppliant was calling upon God to do again what He had done before (cf. 55:9, 15).

2. *Concern for God's Honor.* When praying for the punishment of the wicked, the psalmist is ultimately interested in God's honor (e.g., 58:6–11). Were the wicked to decisively triumph over the righteous in the contexts involved, it could convey the impression of divine indifference. God was thus implored to demonstrate His righteous character and vindicate His Name and the loyalty of His people. In some cases, there are implications that the divine punishment called for involves persons who might see the error of their conduct and repent (e.g., 9:19–20; 83:16–18). In most cases, however, the implication is that the persons are irredeemably recalcitrant and will thus be destroyed (e.g., 68:1–3; 69:25). In both circumstances, God's justice and sovereignty would be manifested to His people as well as their enemies (59:11–13).

3. *Imprecations and Revenge.* The call for vengeance is found in some of the imprecatory passages in the Psalms (e.g., 58:10). Concerning vengeance, it should first be pointed out that the English term does not exactly correspond with the biblical term. The Hebrew term *naqam* is primarily employed in two ways. It is (1) the declaration of a proper punishment against the wicked or (2) the vindication of the innocent who were oppressed by evildoers. The verb form connotes "to avenge" or "to repay," while the noun means "vengeance" or "retribution." *Naqam* appears in legal or covenant settings where the punishment is retributive (e.g., Ex. 21:20; Lev. 26:25; 2 Kin. 9:7; Esth. 8:13).

Second, extremely important for a proper understanding of the imprecatory passages is their affirmation that God is the One who is ultimately responsible for applying vengeance (18:47; 79:10; Deut. 32:43). Even when the psalmist prays to God to help him defeat his enemies and avenge him involving war or other human means (or refers to this situation in the past), it is clear that his victories were impossible without God's own righteous judgment and aid (e.g., Ps. 18:32–50; 44:1–8; 118:1–12; 144:1–10). The cries for vengeance were a request to God for the triumph of His justice and mercy, bringing redemption, restoration, and healing to the oppressed and judgment on the oppressors.

Third, personal, selfish revenge is prohibited in a number of biblical passages (e.g., Lev. 19:18; Deut. 32:35; Prov. 25:21–22// Rom. 12:19–20). It is true that provisions were made in the Mosaic theocracy for avenging the murder of a relative (Num. 35:19–21), but this type of vengeance or justice was controlled under the law of retaliation (*lex talionis*), a principle that the punishment should correspond to the crime committed (a tooth for a tooth; an eye for an eye). The imprecatory prayers were requests that God render a just verdict and punishment upon the rebellious in proper proportion to their crimes. This kind of prayer and affirmation of God's vengeance is not unique to the OT (see Rom. 12:19; 1 Thess. 4:6; Heb. 10:30; Rev. 6:10; 18:4–8, 20; 19:1–3).

3. Imprecation and Retribution. First, while some have evaluated the *lex talionis* to be morally primitive and determined that its association with imprecatory prayers confirms the psalmists' reprehensible stance toward wicked people, scholars have rightly pointed out that this law is found in contexts of legal settings that ensured the proper implementation of justice and compassion, including for those who were foreigners or women (Ex. 21:22–25; Lev. 24:17–22; Deut. 19:16–21). It has accordingly been suggested that a better name for this law might be the "law of equivalence"—the "eye for eye" passages use standardized language (e.g., "life for life" in Lev. 24 could refer to equal compensation for losses sustained) to convey the idea of just dealings in legal settings, not those of personal revenge.

Second, in the psalms the principle of retribution provides a legal background for the punishment of the enemy (Ps. 28:4; 54:5). This is important because through retribution the justice of divine vengeance is manifested. In other words, the judgment against the wicked is not arbitrarily imposed or unnecessarily cruel, but rather it is based on the principles that a punishment should coincide with the magnitude of the crime and that it should be restricted to the criminal. God judges individuals and nations on the basis of their deeds, and that is what the psalmist is requesting through his imprecatory language.

Third, the magistrates were responsible for ensuring law and order in society, and the implementation of the *lex talionis* was under God's purview. The individual had to learn to trust God and His judgment. As noted above, justice throughout Scripture is God's ultimate responsibility (cf. Rom. 12:17–19). He will judge, punish, and reward everyone according to their deeds (e.g., Rom. 2:6; 1 Pet. 1:17; Rev. 22:12).

4. Imprecations and Hatred. Sometimes the idea of hatred is used in imprecatory passages (Ps. 139:21–22). A few comments are in order. First, it should be noted that the Hebrew verb *sane'* does not have all the same connotations as "hate" in English. *Sane'* can mean "disregard," "despise," "dislike," "love less," as well as to hate maliciously. Hatred in this sense of continual hostility and antagonism is condemned (Lev. 19:17–18). The Israelites were called to love their neighbors as themselves (Lev. 19:18) as well as to extend love to strangers (Lev. 19:34; Deut. 10:19).

Second, the use of *sane'* in the context of the imprecations implies a strong disassociation of the psalmist with evil and those who are given over to the practice of it. "Hating" the assembly of evildoers (Ps. 26:5) means a rejection of their ways and loyalty to God's. A similar idea is expressed when the psalmist says that he hates those who worship idols (31:6). This is a unique way of affirming that he is not an idolater. In other passages (e.g., 101:3), the psalmist refers to his hatred—in this case referring to strong disapproval—for the actions of evil people.

Third, the hatred in these passages is not irrational or indicative of a self-inflated or fragile ego. It is referring to those who hate God and are His enemies—God's enemies are the psalmists also. He is refusing to be identified with their evil actions and hatred of God. Accordingly, this hatred is not an evil emotion but rather a rejection of evil and the evil one who exists in opposition to God. Fourth, in the Psalms this type of hatred is implied to be something that must be learned and which is not natural to fallen human beings. The psalmist exhorts those who love the Lord to hate what is evil (97:10; cf. 45:7). The natural human heart does not hate what is evil but rather loves it instead (e.g., Gen. 8:21; Jer. 17:9; Matt. 15:19; Eph. 2:1–3). Hating evil comes from a study of God's word (e.g., 119:104). Loving the law of God is associated with hating double-minded people (119:113) as well as falsehood (119:163) because the psalmist could not support any evil dispositions and actions.

Finally, none of the above findings clash with those of the NT. Jesus's reference to

loving the neighbor and hating the enemy was referring not to an OT command but to a misunderstanding of some of the rabbis. However, it is significant to note that He affirmed the necessity of "hating" our immediate family as well as ourselves (Luke 14:26). Consistent with one of the connotations of the OT *sane'*, this use of the Greek verb *miseō* is not a call to harbor hostility toward relatives but rather a call not to allow any natural ties to hinder our dedication to Jesus as Savior and Lord. This "hate," as we saw above in the Psalms, actually stems from love: love for God above all else with dedicated loyalty. We could suggest that hatred in the imprecatory Psalms is not a repudiation of the law of love but actually presupposes a strong allegiance to it. Indeed, David's imprecations in the Psalms should not be read without considering how he often treated his personal enemies: Saul (1 Sam. 24; 26); Abner and Ish-bosheth (2 Sam. 3–4), Absalom (2 Sam. 18:5, 33), and Shimei (2 Sam. 16:5–14; 19:19–23). While he recognized the need for eventual punishment and justice (1 Kin. 2:8–9), he allowed for the possibility of forgiveness and did not take vengeance into his own hands unilaterally or impulsively.

6. The Psalmist and Us. While the psalmist asked God to conquer, chastise, and even kill his enemies, he renounced personal or private vengeance and requested that God would judge and execute vengeance for him. The question inevitably arises as to whether we should pray the imprecations of the Psalms at times. The answer is affirmative if we pray them with the same rejection of personal pride or vindictiveness, concern above all for God's glory and His justice, longing for the eventual eradication of all sin and rebellion, and firm faith in God as the One who saves. The problem we have with these prayers is not that they are incompatible with Christian love (as is often supposed) but rather that we are not loving enough and need the Lord to help us to find the dedicated love and commitment to Christ and His cause that the psalmists exhibited.

and they will be clothed with disgrace (v. 29). The psalm concludes by praising God for His righteous judgments and defense of the poor and needy. The NT quotes from this psalm (v. 8) in Acts 1:20, connecting it to the betrayal of Judas and the election of Matthias. Church tradition refers to this psalm as the *Psalmus Ischarioticus*, reflecting the above interpretation of the curses. It provides an inspiring example of how to react when false accusations come our way, even if it means betrayal by a close friend.

110:1–7

King and Priest

This Davidic poem points far beyond itself as one of the most prominent messianic psalms in the Psalms. It presents Christ in His twofold role as King and High Priest, in the order of Melchizedek. Outside of Genesis 14 and the book of Hebrews, it is the only mention of the typological figure of Melchizedek in the Bible. The psalm divides into two parts (vv. 1–3 and 4–7), each introduced by a divine speech. One uses the imagery of the king and the other uses the imagery of the high priest, while both parts describe the subjugation of the enemies. In the context of Book 5, it introduces an ideal form of theocratic governance for a restored Israel.

110:1–3. Christ as King. The psalm is introduced by a direct address from Yahweh to David's *'adonai* (his "Lord"). In the NT this is considered to be a conversation between God the Father and God the Son (cf. Matt. 22:41–45; Mark 12:35–37; Luke 20:41–43). It describes the king as sitting metaphorically at God's right hand, a position of honor (Mark 10:35–37). The imagery of footstool and rod or scepter (vv. 1–2) points beyond the historical and represents the universal power of the Messiah. References to the womb and youth in v. 3 mark a sudden change from the Warrior imagery and are probably an allusion to the bringing forth of the Messiah King by Yahweh (cf. Col. 1:15).

110:4–7. Christ as High Priest. Another oracle by Yahweh introduces the second messianic imagery of Christ as High Priest (cf. Heb. 7:21). The reference to Melchizedek illustrates the convergence of both kingly and priestly function into one person. Christ's supremacy as Judge of the nations (v. 6) and His strong rule are emphasized once more through warrior terminology. The section ends in a more peaceful image of the Messiah; His drinking from a brook by the road evokes the story of Gideon (cf. Judg. 7:4–6) and his army as they prepared for battle. The hopes of a postexilic Israel were directed toward a kingly priest or priestly king, yet the psalm prophetically goes beyond those immediate hopes and points to the Messiah, who fulfills the hopes of all people.

111:1–10
Torah and Wisdom

This praise psalm focuses on God's law and wisdom within the structure of an acrostic poem, as each line begins with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Psalm 112 has been considered a twin of Psalm 111, as it follows the same pattern with similar content. Both psalms begin a group of psalms (Pss. 111–119) that concludes with the most extensive wisdom contemplation of *torah*, also in acrostic form. While Psalms 111–112 do not mention the word *torah*, their terminology (e.g., "precepts" in 111:7) is clearly geared toward *torah*. The initial "Praise the LORD" stands outside of the acrostic structure and functions as a title (cf. Pss. 112:1; 113:1). While an acrostic poem has an inherent structure, there are some content-based divisions in the poem.

111:1–6. Thanksgiving. The praise of Psalm 111 is congregational and in response to Yahweh's works, which should be considered carefully by all who delight or take pleasure in them (cf. 119:35). Yahweh's wondrous acts are described in terms of covenant (v. 5) terminology, identifying Him as gracious and compassionate (v. 4; cf. Ex. 34:6–7), sustaining those who fear Him (v. 5), and giving them the *nakhalah* ("inheritance") of the nations. Verse 6 has been translated to mean that the nations have become part of Israel's inheritance ("the nations as their heritage") or that the other nations' inheritances now belong to Israel ("giving them the lands of other nations"). In either case, the basic meaning is the same. The historical references are to experiences during the Exodus and conquest of the land.

111:7–9. God's Greatest Work: His Law. The gift of the Lord's precepts are described in v. 7. The noun *piqqudim* ("directions," "orders") occurs only in the psalms (cf. Ps. 19:9 and throughout Ps. 119) and expresses God's concern (*paqad*; "be concerned for," "be mindful of") for the well-being of His people. The giving of God's law to His people is part of His plan for their redemption (v. 9).

111:10. Wisdom Contemplation. The statement "the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom" at the end of the psalm is associated with God's people as those who, according to the Hebrew text, "do them." "Them" probably refers back to the "precepts" of v. 7, which have been described. The psalm is a beautiful hymn about God's tender concern for His children as particularly manifested by giving them His law.

112:1–10
Beatitude

As a companion psalm to the previous one, Psalm 112 employs the same acrostic structure and contains similar expressions (e.g., God's "righteousness endures forever" in v. 112:3b // 111:3b). However, while both psalms focus on the blessings of *torah*, Psalm 112 picks up where the previous poem ended, emphasizing the didactic aspect of wisdom and how it plays out in the life of one who follows the Lord's commandments. Its introductory beatitude connects closely to Psalm 1.

112:1–3. Beatitude. Following the initial title ("Praise the LORD") the beatitude introduces the one who fears the Lord and is greatly delighted by His commandments. The blessing is for that person's family, both the current generation and the descendants. The blessing of wealth is balanced with righteousness (v. 3), which is always connected to correct ethical behavior in the psalms.

112:4–6. Representing Yahweh's Character. Correct behavior is further described in this section, listing the attributes of the God-fearer as being gracious, compassionate, and righteous (v. 4). The characteristics of a person of God are used to describe the character of His people, who also become eternally memorable (v. 6).

112:7–9. Even in Bad Times. Even in adversity, when there is news of calamity and confrontation with enemies (v. 8), the psalmist twice underlines that he will not fear because he is trusting in the Lord (vv. 7–8). The metaphor of the exalted horn (v. 9), representing strength (cf. Deut. 33:17; Pss. 75:10; 89:17), concludes this section.

112:10. Fate of the Wicked. In contrast to the righteous, the wicked have their desires come to naught. This creates a further literary link with Psalm 1. It also ends with the identical two Hebrew words, *resha'im to'bed*—the

evil will come to an end (cf. 1:6; there it is the "way" of the wicked that will perish, not specifically their desires). The twin Psalms 111–112 connect well with each other; one (Ps. 111) presents theology (God's law) and the other (Ps. 112) presents anthropology, namely, the playing out of God's law in the righteous life of humans.

113:1–9
Hallel Psalms

Psalms 113–118 constitute the Passover Hallel, a group of psalms recited during the *pesakh* (Passover) which commemorates the Exodus. Jesus and His disciples most likely sang from these psalms during the Last Supper (cf. Matt. 26:30; Mark 14:26). They are bracketed by two acrostic *torah* wisdom psalms at the beginning (Pss. 111–112) and the most extensive *torah* psalm, also in acrostic form, at the end (Ps. 119). Replicating the relationship between Psalms 111 and 112, the first three Hallel psalms (Pss. 113–115) have a theological perspective on the Exodus, whereas the second three Hallel psalms (Pss. 116–118) are more anthropologically oriented. Psalm 113 serves as a hymnic introduction to the group, framed by a Hallelujah ("praise the LORD") at its beginning and end.

113:1–6. Praise and Reason. A threefold exhortation to praise the Lord introduces the psalm. This praise is not limited by time ("forevermore") and space (reference to the rising of the sun to its setting serves to refer to the totality of creation; vv. 2–3; cf. Ps. 50:1). The reason for praise is found in another set of spatial observations, namely, that God is exalted high above all nations as He dwells and reigns on high (vv. 4–6). A rhetorical question concludes the section, including another expression of totality (the heavens and the earth; v. 6), which invites a contemplation of creation.

113:7–9. God on Earth. The spatial dimension of God concretizes itself in His intervention on earth as He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap (v. 7). These descriptions, including the childless woman in v. 9 (cf. 1 Sam. 2:5, 8), are focused on lifting up the socially disadvantaged, elevating them to a position of power (cf. 112:9). It is this majestic God who is able to restore Israel after the Exile and who is still able to elevate the oppressed. Those whom God restores, He also elevates.

114:1–8
God of the Exodus

Foregoing an introduction, this poem immediately launches into a historical account of God's miraculous interventions during the time of the Exodus. Some ancient versions (e.g., LXX, Vg.) and a few Hebrew manuscripts consider Psalm 114 and 115 to be a single psalm. However, the literary independence of Psalm 114 is supported by its intricate structure and artistically composed four stanzas (vv. 1–2, 3–4, 5–6, 7–8). They are chiastically arranged (e.g., "Jacob" in stanzas 1 and 4 [vv. 1, 7]; "sea" and "Jordan" in stanzas 2 and 3 [vv. 3, 5]). The preference for Jacob throughout the psalm serves as a possible indicator for the postexilic date of the poem (cf. Is. 48:20).

114:1–2. Election of Israel through the Exodus. The first stanza of the poem describes the Exodus in terms of the election of Israel. The reference to Judah becoming God's sanctuary points to the fact that the parallel pairs of Judah/Israel and sanctuary/dominion (v. 2) describe the origins of Israel as a nation and God's dominion over the earth from His sanctuary. This theocentric perspective was illustrated by the arrangement of the camp during the desert wanderings when the sanctuary was in the center of the camp (cf. Num. 2).

114:3–4. Nature Reacts. Psalm 114 addresses nature in the second stanza, describing the reactions of sea, Jordan, mountains, and hills (vv. 3–4). The imagery is reminiscent of Psalm 29, where nature reacted in similar fashion to the "voice of the Lord." The miraculous passage through the Red Sea during the Exodus and crossing of the Jordan at the end of the desert wanderings caused reactions in nature that could be associated with the theophany at Mount Sinai (cf. Ex. 19:18). One can also interpret the mountains and hills as referring to the promised land and its joyful reaction at the arrival of God's people. Interestingly, Isaiah promises a rejoicing of mountains at the return of the exiles (cf. Is. 44:23), an idea that fits the general context of Book 5.

114:5–8. Questions and Answers. Nature is addressed through a series of four questions, which appear to move the focus from past to present. The questions recall the different reactions of nature in the previous stanza: Why do the sea and Jordan flee while mountains and hills leap and skip? The problem in this psalm is the translation of the verbal form *khul* in v. 7. While it is translated in most modern English versions with a negative connotation (i.e., "tremble"), another possible meaning of this verb is "dance," "whirl," "twist" (e.g., Judg. 21:21). This would involve the earth dancing as a sign of rejoicing. The psalm concludes with further water imagery that dominates the remainder of the fourth stanza in v. 8. The Exodus, both first and second (i.e., the return from the Babylonian Exile), is cause for solemn joy for His people because Yahweh is the One who has led the way. The next psalm reveals that the nations who have rejected Him tremble because their gods are useless.

115:1–18
God Alone

God's supremacy in history during the Exodus is followed by a liturgical poem that is characterized by polemics against idolatry and, conversely, by its strong monotheistic theology. As nature acknowledges God's sovereignty (Ps. 114), humanity needs to follow (Ps. 115). Within a postexilic context, Israel had to come to terms with the problem of idolatry that constituted one of the main reasons for the Babylonian Exile (cf. Ezek. 5–8). The message is clear: this should never happen again in the restored Israel. As a liturgical reading for the Passover, the poem constitutes a communal response to Yahweh's sovereignty in the cosmos.

115:1–8. The Idols. A brief invocation to give glory to God culminates in a question raised by the Gentile nations: "Where is their [Israel's] God?" In response to this mocking question, the first section of the poem offers an extended polemic against their idols by focusing on the contrast between the impotence of their gods against the superiority of Yahweh. One can perceive the historical context of the postexilic community that is faced with similar questions during the reconstruction of the temple and Jerusalem (cf. Ezra 4).

115:9–18. Israel's Response. In contrast to the idols of the Gentiles, Israel is exhorted by the speaker—perhaps the priest officiating at the temple—to trust in the Lord (v. 9). Following this exhortation, the priest bestows blessings on the congregation, while the change in person in the following section indicates that both the priest and congregation stand as a community before Yahweh, with the priest functioning as a mediator. The verb *barak* ("to bless") occurs six times throughout this section (vv. 12 [3x], 13, 15, 18). This verb is sometimes translated as "praise" or "extol" when directed toward God, as is the case here in the last blessing, which is a thankful response to Him. The blessings are in the form of land, descendants, and prosperity (vv. 13–15) and are rooted in God's sovereignty as Creator of heaven and earth (v. 15) who has given the earth to humankind (v. 16). The psalm concludes with another Hallelujah ("praise the LORD").

116:1–19
Thanksgiving

Psalm 116 moves from theology to anthropology (cf. introduction to Ps. 113), focusing on the human response to divine deliverance. This personal thanksgiving psalm presents the psalmist as an individual rescued by Yahweh from a life-threatening situation, which is not further clarified ("death" occurs 3x in vv. 3, 8, 15). As in Psalm 30, there is a double structure in the psalm (vv. 1–9, 10–19), repeating the thanksgiving in parallel fashion. The first section expresses the thanksgiving verbally, whereas the second section expresses thanksgiving by means of a ritual.

116:1–9. Expression of Thanksgiving. Verses 1–2 introduce the psalm with a beautiful manifestation of the psalmist's love for God (cf. 18:2) grounded in his experiences with Yahweh throughout his life. In vv. 3–6 Yahweh rescues the psalmist from the torments of Sheol. The emphasis is not so much on the exact nature of the threat but on God's characteristics (cf. Ex. 34:6). The self-characterization *peti* ("simple," "unwary," "inexperienced") in v. 6 is found elsewhere in the Psalms. Only in Psalms 19:7 and 119:130 is it used as an expression of a person who needs to grow in wisdom (cf. Mat. 11:25). As a result of the rescue, the psalmist has found rest and returns to "the land of the living" (vv. 7–9).

116:10–19. Demonstration of Thanksgiving. There is a transition in vv. 10–11 to the repetition of the thanksgiving. The conjunction *ki* ("therefore") in v. 10 could also be translated as "even though" (i.e., "I believe, even though I spoke"), similar to the confession of faith in Yahweh found at the beginning of the poem. What follows, as in the previous section, is the negative experience of affliction and a judgment that indicates that truth is found only in

Yahweh. The cup of salvation (v. 13) is a festal cup of abundance (cf. 23:5) that the psalmist takes up as a libation ritual, which connects it to the fulfillment of vows (v. 14; e.g., Num. 15). The action is repeated once more in vv. 17–19 with the addition of the place where the offering will take place (i.e., in the courts of the Lord's house). The reference to being freed from bonds or chains, which is sandwiched between the two thanks offerings (v. 16), can be understood as a reference to the Exile. Taken within the context of the postexilic community, this section expresses the hope and confidence that the psalmist will one day be able to offer his sacrifices within the precincts of a rebuilt temple. Psalm 116 is quoted by Paul (v. 10 in 2 Cor. 4:13 and v. 11 in Rom. 3:4), both within the context of faith and human response, reflecting the spirit of thanksgiving.

117:1–2
Praise the Lord

The shortest of the psalms finds itself in close proximity to the longest (Ps. 119) and is framed by a hymnic invitation to praise. It is universal in character and links to Psalm 115:1–2, inviting the nations to participate in worship to Yahweh. It forms the center of the triad of psalms (116–118) emphasizing human praises before the Lord.

117:1. Praise the Lord. The beginning and end of the psalm is an imperative directed at the nations/Gentiles and all people to praise God. With the return of Israel and the reconstruction of the temple that is envisaged in the previous psalms, Jerusalem becomes the center of universal praise. The nations that subjugated God's people in the past (106:41), who have mocked a defenseless Israel (115:2) and who have been the subject of divine judgment (110:6), are now invited to join God's people in praises.

117:2. Because God Is Good. Verse 2 provides the rationale for praises and thus constitutes the principal theme of the hymn. Exodus 34:6 is invoked once more through the mention of *khesed* ("faithful love," "kindness," "mercy") and *'emet* ("faithfulness," "truth") as eternal characteristics of Yahweh. Although most translations render the verb *gabar* in the present tense ("is great"), the Hebrew perfect tense here could also be translated as "was great" or "was mighty," in which case this could be a reference to the completed first and second exodus, from Egypt and Babylonia respectively. The psalm concludes with the second and final Hallelujah ("praise the LORD").

118:1–29
Entrance into the Temple

As the last psalm of the Passover Hallel, Psalm 118 is a thanksgiving psalm that takes its audience to the gates by means of a liturgical procession, which is reflected in the twofold division of the poem (vv. 1–18, 19–29). Verses 1–4 and 29 create an *inclusio* around this procession with the repeated phrase, "His *khesed* ("mercy," "lovingkindness," "faithful love") endures forever." The psalm has been associated with the temple dedication after the Exile, recorded in Ezra 6, or with the first celebration of the Festival of Tabernacles described in Nehemiah 8–9. Psalm 118 also contains a number of quotations from Exodus 15 (e.g., vv. 14, 16 // Ex. 15:2), applying the Song of the Sea to the return from the Babylonian exile.

118:1–18. Rescue from Exile. The exhortation to give thanks to the Lord is motivated by His goodness and the fourfold repeated formula: His *khesed* ("mercy," "lovingkindness," "faithful love") endures forever (vv. 1–4) is echoed once more in v. 29. Three groups are invited to praise (i.e., Israel, the house of Aaron, and those who fear the Lord). The last group opens up a universal dimension to the psalm, a feature that also characterizes the previous psalm. Verses 5–18 describe a crisis and the rescue Yahweh provided, using the experience of an individual who recounts the various threats he faced and the divine interventions that occurred. The literary connections to Exodus 15 in vv. 14–19 (see above) call on Yahweh's rescue during the Exodus from Egypt, but also contextualize it to the second exodus by mentioning a seeming paradox—the Lord has *yasar* ("chastened," "disciplined") him severely but has not given him over to death (v. 18).

118:19–29. Festival in the Temple. The ritual of the gatekeepers at the temple doors (vv. 19–21) has already appeared in Psalms 15 and 24. As access is provided to the righteous (v. 20), the postexilic community marvels at the rebuilt temple, looking at its stonework and masonry. The imagery of the selection of appropriate stones for building lies behind the proverbial statement in v. 22: the stone rejected by the builders has become the cornerstone. The reuse of stones from the temple ruins for rebuilding after the Exile is a familiar sight in archaeological excavations. Theologically, it signifies Israel's re-election and takes on messianic dimensions through repeated quotations and allusions in the NT (Matt. 21:24; Mark 12:10; Luke 20:17; Acts 4:11; Eph. 2:20; 1 Pet. 2:6–7). Rejoicing and blessing accompany the festive procession as it enters into the house of the Lord (v. 26). In v. 27 the altar comes into focus. The Hebrew term *khag* has been translated here as a festival (its usual meaning) or a festival sacrifice (see Ex. 23:18). Thus, this verse refers either to the binding of the sacrifice to the horns of the altar or joining of the festival procession with branches (Heb. *'abot*) waving. The twofold monotheistic confession ("You are my God") cites once more from the Song of the Sea (v. 28; Ex. 15:2), leading into the final invitation to "give thanks to the Lord" in v. 29, which is identical to v. 1 and closes the frame. While some people cried when they saw the second temple (cf. Ezra 3:12), it was this temple that greeted the Messiah.

119:1–176

The Great *Torah* Psalm

This is the greatest (and longest) of the four *torah* psalms (Pss. 1, 19, 111, and 119), presented as an intricate acrostic structure that divides the poem into twenty-two strophes of eight lines each. Each strophe, and each verse in it, begins with the subsequent letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The central theme of the psalm is *torah*, although no single commandment from the law of Moses is quoted. It is rather a constant recital of the relationship between the "I" of the psalm and God's *torah*. Thus, it serves as a personal meditation on *torah*, which has a much broader scope in biblical thought than just the Ten Commandments given at Mount Sinai. It represents a life in close relationship with God, and therefore meditation on *torah* is always a contemplation of its Giver. *Torah* is thus the complete revelation of His will, and Psalm 119 seeks a deeper understanding of it (cf. v. 18).

The psalm's location in the Psalms and its composition in eight verses for each strophe could point to its use during the Festival of Tabernacles that was celebrated for eight days at the inauguration of the temple under Solomon (cf. 1 Kin. 8:2) and again under Nehemiah following the Exile (cf. Neh. 8). *Torah* is thus the foundation of the first and second temple periods, and the reading of this poem serves as a charter for public governance and personal piety. Psalm 119 is framed in similar fashion as the whole Psalms: a beatitude begins the psalm (strophes 1 and 2; cf. Ps. 1), and it ends with an extended praise (strophes 21 and 22; cf. Pss. 146–150). There is a center (strophes 11–12), which elaborates on the power of *torah*.

119:1–8. *Aleph*. Blessings are designated for those (plural, not singular as in the beatitude of Psalm 1) who are *tamim* ("complete," "sound") in their ways; they have a life in harmony with *torah* (cf. Ps. 25:10; Prov. 11:20). Verses 5–8 respond to the beatitude with the individual's desire to be steadfast in following God's instructions (v. 5).

119:9–16. *Beth*. In typical wisdom style, the section begins with a question that refers back to the theme of the Aleph section (v. 9)—how can young people keep their ways pure? The answer provides a comprehensive list of synonymous expressions which focus on *torah*: word, commands, *huqqim* ("decrees," "statutes"), *mishpatim* ("judgments," "ordinances," "laws"), *'edot* ("statutes," "testimonies") precepts, and ways (vv. 9–15). Throughout Psalm 119, the psalmist varies these expressions in order to demonstrate the meaning of *torah* as well as to avoid monotony. While *torah* needs to be internalized in the heart (v. 11), it also must be expressed outwardly and audibly through the lips (v. 13).

119:17–24. *Gimel*. The focus moves beyond the psalmist to external threats that may interfere in the relationship between *torah* and the individual. When the psalmist says that he is a stranger on the earth (v. 19), a phrase drawing on patriarchal imagery, he probably refers to the situation of the returning exiles who were surrounded by Samaritans and Edomites (cf. Neh. 2) and estranged in their own country. Within this context of personal insecurity, the psalmist, in contrast, meditates on God's *huqqim* ("decrees," "statutes"; v. 23).

119:25–32. *Daleth*. The negative situation intensifies in this section, and the psalmist finds himself in a deathlike situation as he is in the dust (v. 25; cf. 22:15). The Hebrew word used here, *dabaq* ("to cling"; i.e., he is "clinging to the dust"), is also used at the end of the section, where he is clinging instead to God's *'edot* ("statutes," "testimonies"; v. 31) and is totally persuaded that Yahweh will (literally in the Hebrew) make his heart larger (v. 32). This metaphor could refer to God's giving him freedom from death, or it could mean that God broadened the psalmist's

understanding (*leb* can refer to the mind), and this metaphor has been translated accordingly by some scholars.

119:33–40. *He*. All eight verses in this section begin with an imperative directed at Yahweh, and the first request—to be taught—is complemented by the last, to *khayah* ("preserve," "revive") him. Instruction in *torah* leads to a renewed life.

119:41–48. *Waw*. The psalmist is longing for God's *khesed* ("mercy," "kindness," "faithful love") and salvation, which come through *torah*. The twofold profession of love for the law (vv. 47–48) is accompanied by the psalmist lifting his hands (*nasa' kap*) toward God's commandments. This has been interpreted (and translated) as either a gesture of homage or an expression of desire—he is reaching out for God's precepts as he meditates on *torah*, audibly recites it, and contemplates it (v. 48; cf. 1:2).

119:49–56. *Zayin*. The strophe is arranged around the verb *zakar* ("to remember"), which occurs three times in this section (vv. 49, 52, 55) and only here in Psalm 119. The psalmist prays for God's remembrance (i.e., His concern; cf. Gen. 8:1 and commentary), but the psalmist also remembers both God's *mishpat* ("judgments," "laws," "ordinances"; v. 52) and His name and appeals to them for deliverance from the wicked (v. 53).

119:57–64. *Heth*. There is a subtle appeal to Yahweh in the usage of the noun *khelqi* ("my portion") at the beginning of this section. It connects to the land distribution at the beginning of the conquest (cf. Josh. 14:5) but is also applicable to the repossession of Israel following the Exile. The Exile is indirectly mentioned as being bound with the cords or ropes of the wicked (v. 61).

119:65–72. *Teth*. The first and last lines of the section begin with *tob* ("good"), thus creating a frame that communicates the main theme of the passage, namely, the goodness of God. This theme permeates the remainder of the section (cf. vv. 66, 68, 71) and goes hand in hand with the psalmist's request for God to teach him (vv. 66, 68) so that he would learn (v. 71).

119:73–80. *Yod*. God as Creator introduces the section (v. 73) and forms the rationale for the psalmist's petition for Yahweh's *rakham* ("compassions," "tender mercies"; v. 77). This request connects to the deliverance from the proud, who should be ashamed (v. 78). The psalmist wants to completely follow God's statutes and decrees so that he would not be shamed (v. 80).

119:81–88. *Kaph*. The central two strophes of the psalm are juxtaposed to each other and begin with distress that is counteracted through *torah* as Yahweh's saving power. At the beginning of the Kaph section, the psalmist's soul faints (v. 81) and he asks God to *khayah* ("preserve," "revive") him. The intensity of the distress is underlined by reuse of the root *radap* ("to persecute"; v. 86), the imagery of a dried wineskin (v. 83) that can no longer hold liquids, and the pits (v. 85) dug by enemies.

119:89–96. *Lamed*. The cry for help that ended the previous section is answered at the beginning of this section with the assurance of God's faithfulness that endures through all generations (v. 89). Central to the passage is the idea that *torah* gives life (v. 93), probably referring to the role of the sacrificial system in the law. In v. 96, the psalmist says that he has seen the *qets* ("end") of all *tiklah* ("perfection"). This has been understood as "consummation of perfection" in the greatness of the law or as the "limit of all perfection," referring to human limitations over the *rekhabah mitswateka me'od* ("exceedingly broad," "boundless," "unlimited") nature of God's commandments (v. 96).

119:97–104. *Mem*. The tone of the psalm becomes more positive as it focuses on the psalmist's love for *torah*, which is the appropriate response of humankind to God (cf. Deut. 6:5; Rom. 13:10). The simile of honey (v. 103) is reflective of another *torah* psalm (cf. 19:10). The love for *torah* produces wisdom, understanding (v. 104), and a life in harmony with Yahweh.

119:105–112. *Nun*. The section begins with the most widely used line from Psalm 119, which likens *torah* to a light that illuminates the believer's path, a familiar metaphor in the wisdom literature (cf. Prov. 6:23). OT lamps were made of clay, filled with oil, and carried through the darkness as a source of light to illuminate the path ahead. *Torah* is a light that provides safe passage in the midst of darkness.

119:113–120. *Samek*. The Samek and Ayin sections are linked chiastically; the Samek section begins by contrasting hate and love (v. 113), whereas the Ayin section concludes with the reversed contrast love–hate (vv. 127–128). Strong emotions toward God and *torah* generate equally strong opposite emotions against the double-minded (v. 113), namely, people that reject God's Law.

119:121–128. ***Ayin.*** The psalmist realizes that the abhorrence of evildoers does not exempt him from a sinful attitude in his own heart. Consequently, this section deals with an internalization of *torah* with the accompanying request that God will give him understanding and discernment for the purpose of knowing His *'edot* ("testimonies," "statutes"). Categorically, the psalmist ends the section by expressing hatred for every deceptive path.

119:129–136. ***Pe.*** From a positive metaphor of a cave entrance that illuminates the darkness (v. 130), the psalm moves once more to a petition asking God for redemption from oppression (v. 134). The psalmist experiences pain and sorrow because people do not follow God's law (v. 136).

119:137–144. ***Tsade.*** The keyword in this section is the root *tsedeq* ("to be righteous," "righteousness") occurring five times in various forms in the Hebrew text (vv. 137, 138, 142 [2x], 144) and always associated with Yahweh. In contrast, the psalmist is insignificant and despised (v. 141), and he can live only through an understanding of *torah* (v. 144).

119:145–152. ***Qoph.*** The section takes the form of a repeated cry for help with an interesting contrast between near and far. While the wicked draw near, they are far from God's law (v. 150). However, Yahweh is near through His commandments (v. 151).

119:153–160. ***Resh.*** The verbal sequence *ra'ah* ("see/look," "consider") and *khayah* ("preserve," "revive") frames this section (vv. 153–154, 159), indicating God's response to the cry of the previous section. When God sees, as in the Exodus story (cf. Ex. 3:7–8), He acts and revitalizes.

119:161–168. ***Sin/Shin.*** Following a final negative allusion to persecution at the beginning of the section, the psalm now turns to a final praise of *torah* in its last two strophes, including a double expression of love for it (vv. 163, 167). The statement about praising God "seven times a day" (v. 164) emphasizes the completeness or fullness of praises.

119:169–176. ***Taw.*** The final lines of the psalm once more intonate praises (vv. 171–172) and end with a number of requests. The last appeal (v. 176) uses the familiar metaphor of a shepherd and affirms that the psalmist does not forget God's commandments. The psalm describes a type of personal piety that is grounded on the divine *torah* and framed by love toward God. This is truly the good and happy life.

120:1–7

War and Peace

The contrast between "war" and "peace" characterizes this psalm and expresses the psalmist's petition to be delivered from "distress," identified as living side by side with those who hate peace (v. 6).

120:1–2. Call and Petition. The song is introduced by a call to God for help in distress, followed by a statement of trust: God heard and answered the prayer (cf. 81:8; 99:6–8). God's hearing is His acting as well. Consequently, the psalmist clarifies his petition, asking God to act and deliver him from people who speak deceitfully (v. 2).

120:3–4. Retribution. The next lines turn to the consequences that those who speak dishonestly will experience (vv. 3–4). Since the words from a false tongue can serve as arrows and weapons (cf. 57:4; 64:3), they will receive sharp arrows and burning coals. This evokes the imagery of Yahweh as a Warrior. The "broom" is a desert bush still used by Bedouins today to make charcoal. The roots burn for a long time and can be used as fiery arrows to set houses and tents ablaze in warfare.

120:5–7. Protection among Enemies. The negative mention of Meshech and Kedar could refer symbolically to threats that surround the psalmist. Meshech has been identified as a warrior people in Asia Minor (cf. Ezek. 32:26) and Kedar as a reference to Bedouin tribes in the Arabian desert (cf. Ezek. 27:21). One can understand these topographic names as referring to the extreme north and east directions and thus as a metaphorical or proverbial allusion to life-threatening forces from the far ends of the world. The final line of the psalm reaches a climax by contrasting the desire

of the psalmist for *shalom* ("peace") with his current situation in the midst of war. The persistent threat is resolved only in the following psalm. David's desire for the peace of long ago is a good starting point for the postexilic pilgrims as they make their way to Jerusalem, once more surrounded by enemies from every side.

121:1–8

I Lift Up My Eyes

This beautiful poem about Yahweh's protection on the journey to Jerusalem begins with an introductory question, which is answered throughout the remainder of the psalm. The psalm is a liturgical dialogue between the pilgrim (or David in its original setting) and the congregation or officiating priest at the temple. There is a small variation in its title with the addition of a preposition that could literally be translated as "a song *for* ascents" (*shir lamma'alot*) instead of "a song of ascents" (*shir hamma'alot*), although it is grammatically ambiguous. Some have suggested that it marks the beginning of pilgrimage as this psalm is the only one in the group with the variation.

121:1–2. Help from the Lord. As the pilgrims set out on their journey, they lift their eyes to the hills/mountains. The "hills/mountains" should not be understood metaphorically (for danger) in this case but are used positively to denote the protective function of Mount Zion and reflect the actual topography of Israel (cf. 133:3). The ensuing question concerning the source of the psalmist's help is used rhetorically to set up the answer in v. 2. The last word of the line is repeated as the first word of the next line, here *'ezri* ("my help"). Yahweh helps from His abode in Mount Zion, and He is further identified as the One who made heaven and earth. The same formula concludes the Song of Ascents in Psalm 134:3, indicating that God's continuous creative power sustains Israel (cf. also 124:8).

121:3–8. Confirmation of Help. In response to the initial question and answer, the remainder of the psalm describes Yahweh's protection with verbal links to the Aaronic blessing (Num. 4:24–26). Yahweh protects Israel and neither slumbers nor sleeps, in contrast to other gods of the ANE who claim the right for undisturbed sleep. Verses 5–6 change the metaphor of protection to Yahweh providing shade at the right hand (i.e., right next to the individual or king), and His shade continues day and night. The mention of the Lord's power over the sun and moon can be understood as a further polemic reference to the deities of the surrounding nations. As a second motif from Aaron's blessing, the psalm concludes with a more concrete description of God as He will *shamar* ("preserve," "keep"; see Num. 6:24). The formulaic ending of the psalm from *'attah* to *'olam* ("from now till forever") is also found in Psalms 125:2 and 131:3. It expresses the forward and upward movement of the Pilgrim psalms, thus initiating the journey to Jerusalem.

122:1–9

Prayer for Jerusalem

The poem is accentuated by keywords creating sound pictures, which transmit the main focus

Pilgrim Psalms

The Pilgrim psalms (120–134) constitute an important subgroup sharing the title *shir hamma'alot*, translated as "song of stairs" (referring to the steps leading up to a city, temple, or altar; cf. Ex. 20:26; Neh. 3:15; Ezek. 40:20, 26) or "song of ascents" (referring to the return from exile or pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the annual festivals; cf. resp. 1 Kin. 12:28; 2 Chr. 36:23). Metaphorically, they are also characterized by an upward movement, describing Israel's elevation from degradation to new spiritual heights after the Exile.

Some of the songs are further associated with Davidic authorship (122, 124, 131, 133), but their grouping together and location in the psalms demonstrate their application to the historical situation following the Babylonian exile. Their short length and liturgical character made them suitable to be sung at the temple, and it has been suggested that their number of fifteen corresponds to the number of words in the Aaronic blessing (Num. 6:24–26). The keywords of the blessing ("peace," "bless," "gracious," and "keep") are frequently found throughout the collection.

of the psalm. The recurring and similarly sounding terms "Jerusalem" (*yerushalaim* 3x; vv. 2, 3, 6) and "peace" (*shalom* 3x; vv. 6, 7, 8) come together in v. 6 as the climax of the poem—"pray for the peace of Jerusalem." The psalm is ascribed to David and continues the ascent toward Jerusalem to the annual festival.

122:1–4. Ascent and Expectation. The psalm begins and ends with mention of the house of the Lord (vv. 1 and 9), a structure which communicates the function of the temple as a conceptual frame for Jerusalem's peace. This term ("house of the Lord") is echoed by the reference to the house of David in the center of the psalm (v. 5). The verbal forms of the first section are indicative, describing the ascent of the pilgrims as they approach Jerusalem. They also portray the city with its gates (v. 2) and other features that provide security, such as its being built compactly (v. 3). It is a place where the tribes of the Lord (v. 4) come together once more, a situation which is reminiscent of the early origins of Israel. The purpose of the pilgrimage is to give thanks and praise the name of the Lord for all His wondrous saving deeds (v. 4; cf. 106:1; 136:1–3).

122:5. Judgment Scene. The preposition *ki* ("for") introduces v. 5 as the center and relates it to the preceding lines. A judgment scene is described that is allusive to Daniel 7:9–10 and 13–14. It is set in the house of David, and the connection with the "house of the Lord" in v. 9 establishes a connection between sacred and governance. Israel's reign needs to be framed by Yahweh's reign. The fact that the Hebrew word for temple (*hekal*) is one of the words also used for palace is another detail which implies the overlapping of the religious and secular spheres. The Day of Atonement provides a feasible historical backdrop for the occasion of the psalm.

122:6–9. Prayer of the Changed. The ascent to Jerusalem for the festivals is not a mere ritual requirement, but it effectuates changes in the pilgrims who attend. Thus, the verbal forms of the final section of the psalm change to volitional ones, a prayer that expresses the desires of the pilgrims, who enjoy the life-changing effects of the Day of Atonement. It is a prayer for *shalom* ("peace," "wholeness") within the walls and *shalwah* ("quietness," "rest," "security") within the palaces of Jerusalem (vv. 6–7). This prayer includes the concept of *shalom*, which is an all-encompassing concept of well-being that includes physical, emotional, and spiritual aspects. Jerusalem thus becomes the eternal city of peace, and the prayer echoes the wish of the postexilic community.

At His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, Christ alluded to the LXX of Psalm 122:8 (Luke 19:42). The text in Luke 19 reflects the progression of this Song of Ascents in a dramatic way. As in the times of Psalm 122, Jesus and His disciples approached Jerusalem as pilgrims, but this time Jesus wept over Jerusalem with the realization that the time of peace for Jerusalem was coming to an end (Luke 19:35–42). This is followed by a judgment scene (Luke 19:43–44), which is acted out in the ensuing cleansing of the temple (Luke 19:45–46). Then there is *shalom* when Jesus taught (Luke 19:47) and healed (cf. Matt. 21:12–14). The peace of Jerusalem begins with those who pray for it.

123:1–4

From the Mountain to the Master

As the psalmist looked up to the mountains in Psalm 121 and to Mount Zion in Psalm 122, the poet in Psalm 123 looks up to God as the Master (v. 2). This expresses once more the upward movement of the Pilgrim psalms. The "proud" (v. 4) could indicate the resistance manifested by the enemies of the exiles when they returned from Babylon to Jerusalem.

123:1–2. Looking Up to Yahweh. The hopeful look of servants/slaves up to their masters and a maid/female slave to her mistress is used as a metaphor for the relationship between Israel and God. While clarifying the sovereignty of God on one hand, it also expresses Israel's expectation on the other. There is a chiastic arrangement in vv. 1–2, beginning and ending with the expectant look at God (vv. 1b–c and 2c–d), which frames the inclusive metaphor of the male and female servants (vv. 2a–b). The hand of the master is the location from which blessings or favors are to be expected (cf. 145:15).

123:3–4. Petition for Mercy. The hopeful expectation of the first section is verbalized in vv. 3–4 through a twofold petition for mercy (v. 3). Among the reasons for the petition are contempt and scorn (vv. 3–4), things which occurred in Jerusalem during the rebuilding of the temple and city (cf. Neh. 2:19; 4:1, 4). We can look hopefully and expectantly to God in times of ridicule by lifting our eyes from our circumstances to the source of life.

124:1–8

True Help

A national calamity, which is not further identified, underlies this thanksgiving psalm. It is ascribed to David but can easily be contextualized to the situation of national threat following the Exile. This is also underlined by its liturgical tone.

124:1–5. Crisis. The national crisis is viewed in retrospect, preceded by Israel's liturgical repetition of a conditional clause. Verses 1–2 constitute the first part ("If...") and vv. 3–5 the second ("... then"). The contingent description ("if") of the situation, wherein the Lord was not on their side, implies that Yahweh has been faithful showing Himself as a God who delivers. The language points back not only to the Exodus (cf. Ex. 3:14) but also to the postexilic experience of Nehemiah (cf. Neh. 4:20). Verses 3–5 use water imagery to express the overwhelming threat of attack (cf. Ps. 42:7). The waters are likened to floods that would have overwhelmed them (i.e., threatened their lives).

124:6–8. Rescue. This section begins with the formula familiar from previous psalms, the verb *barak* ("bless," "praise") applied to Yahweh as "Praise/bless the Lord." This is always connected to Yahweh's marvelous deeds of deliverance (cf. 28:6; 31:21; 72:18; 144:1). It is followed by a metaphor of wild animals with sharp teeth (v. 6), introduced already in v. 3 but developed further in v. 6 and then modified once more in v. 7, where there is a switch to the metaphor of a hunter who traps prey. This overlapping of metaphors creates a fast-paced imagery, which effectively dramatizes Yahweh's rescue of Israel. Verse 8 concludes with an expression of trust that refers to the name of the Lord and His role as sovereign Creator, emphasized in the Pilgrim psalms (cf. Pss. 121:2; 134:3). The psalm's imagery foreshadows Paul's confident statement in Romans 8:31, "If God is for us, who can be against us?"

125:1–5

Mount Zion

Once again, mountain imagery and upward movement are used (cf. Pss. 121–123) to describe "those who trust in the Lord" as immovable like "Mount Zion" and its surrounding mountains. The negative threats of the preceding psalms give way to a sense of security based on the reestablishment of Israel in Jerusalem by Yahweh. It climaxes in the final blessing, which invokes peace for Israel (v. 5). The subgroup of Psalms 125–129 within the Pilgrim psalms is marked by an *inclusio* (e.g., wicked scepter in 125:3; parallels of the cords of the wicked in 129:4) and a center (Pss. 126–128), which describes the daily life of a returned and redeemed Israel.

125:1–3. Mountains and Freedom. Two related but slightly varied similes introduce the psalm. The first one is Mount Zion, which points to the immovability of God's people (v. 1), and the second finds Yahweh protectively surrounding Israel as the mountains surround Jerusalem (v. 2). The center of the psalm introduces Israel's newfound freedom from the wicked scepter—a powerful metonymy for unjust foreign rule. Here it serves as an admonition to discourage the righteous from reaching with their hands to act wickedly. This freedom charter encompasses the allotted land, a term which references the time of the conquest (e.g., Josh. 14:2). This allusion serves to portray the return from exile as the second exodus.

125:4–5. A New Rule. God's new order of righteousness will create a contrast between those who are upright in their hearts and those who turn aside and follow their own crooked ways. For this last group there is no room in the land; the Lord will lead them away and banish them as He led Israel into captivity. The righteous will receive their allotment, as in the times of Joshua (cf. Deut. 30:5). The psalm ends with the blessing of *shalom* over Israel, which is further developed in a practical way throughout the following psalms.

126:1–6

Return to Zion

Psalm 126 celebrates Israel's return from Babylonia and recalls the "great things" (vv. 2–3) Yahweh has accomplished on behalf of Israel, which ultimately signify God's return to His people. The practical effects of freedom in daily life are recounted using agricultural imagery. The poem is a jubilant song that celebrates the reversal of fortunes for Israel at the end of the Exile.

126:1–3. Return. God brought Israel back from exile, and at the same time He again returned to Zion. The verbal form of *shub* used here and the reading of "again" (*shibah*, "turning," "return") instead of "captivity" (*shebi* "war captivity") make it possible to render v. 1a alternatively as "When Yahweh returned again to Zion." Another possible reading found in some translations is to view *shibat* as a variant of *shebut* (both from *shub*), which can mean either "fortunes" or "captivity." Thus, God has "restored the fortunes" or "the captivity" of Zion, a reading which would imply that God was restoring their land and possessions. Israel's return from Babylon implied a return of Yahweh to His city. The dreamlike character of this experience refers not necessarily to its lack of reality but to a wondrous realization that they were once more favored by Yahweh like those who receive dreams in divine revelation; that is, God once more was in communication with His people (cf. Gen. 41:15; Jer. 23:25). The result is laughter and singing as the nations recognize that the Lord had done great things for them. This is confirmed by Israel as they affirm that indeed the Lord had done great things for them (vv. 2–3). These were the same nations that mocked Israel when Jerusalem was destroyed, asking, "Where is their God?" (79:10).

126:4–6. Joy after Sorrow. The second section echoes the beginning of the first and, in line with the observations in v. 1a, could be rendered, "Return to us again, O Lord" or alternatively (as noted above) as a plea to "restore our fortunes" or "bring back our captivity." This returning is as the streams in the South or "Negev." The reference is to the riverbeds of the Negev that dry up during the summer but return in winter filled by the rains. This reversal of fortunes is further expressed in vv. 5–6, which picture the dramatic change from tears to joy through agricultural imagery familiar to its audience and often recited in the prophetic literature (cf. Jer. 31:23–25; Amos 9:13–15; Hag. 2:19). The psalm is about the reunion of God and His people in Zion and the deep joy that will accompany that experience. We also anticipate this most glorious moment at the return of the Lord.

127:1–5

God's Gift

The practical blessings of a restored Israel move from agriculture in the previous psalms to the building of houses and the blessings of children in the present poem. In Hebrew thinking the term "house" (*bayit*) denotes both a physical structure and a family unit (cf. 2 Sam. 7:5, 11–12). The association of the psalm with Solomon reminds us of his building projects, which provided important foundation stones for the postexilic community. Furthermore, there are also important links between Psalm 127 and the book of Proverbs (cf. Prov. 5:10; 10:22; 14:1).

127:1–2. Building Houses. The psalm begins with the twofold emphatic statement that all human activity is in vain unless God is the author and partakes in it. This thought is applied not only to the building of houses but to the guarding of cities (v. 1) and the daily routine of work and sleep (v. 2). Work after the Fall is characterized by the bread of *'etseb* ("sorrow," "toil"; cf. Gen. 3:17–19). This is stated as a reality and not so much as a critique (cf. the positive description of the fruits of labor in Ps. 128), especially in view of the last line of v. 2, which describes sleep as God's blessing for a fulfilled life.

127:3–5. Building Families. A further important aspect of OT daily life is the family, which is dealt with in the second section of the psalm: children are a heritage from the Lord (v. 3). This is a further extension of God's blessings (cf. Gen. 30:2; 1 Sam. 1:27). The heritage (or "portion") is reminiscent of the language of the conquest (cf. Jos. 13). The following war imagery of a quiver full of children (vv. 4–5) denotes future social and political stability that depends on Yahweh. As a result, Israel is ready to confront their enemies, meet them on par in legal or economic disputes, and not be at a disadvantage (cf. Prov. 22:22). According to this psalm, a life permeated by God's constant companionship is a truly fulfilled life. Its foundations are built on a strong family and a strong community.

128:1–6

The Fruit of Labor

This poem further develops the ideal of the Israelite family after the return from exile. It relates happiness to work, family, and society.

128:1–4. Beatitude. Psalm 128 begins with the same beatitude formula (*'ashre*, "happy," "blessed") with which the previous psalm ended, continuing the theme of daily living and family blessing bestowed on those who fear the Lord and walk obediently in His ways. As a consequence, the reward will be happiness and prosperity—the fruit of what is worked for (v. 2). This represents a significant promise in the context of postexilic Israel under the Persian administration. The Persians implemented a system of taxation that left small farmers often unable to provide for themselves and their families. Further happiness comes through the relationship between husband and wife, who is likened to a fruitful vine (v. 3). They are visibly blessed by children who are like growing olive plants (v. 3). This is a more peaceful metaphor than the quiver in Psalm 127 and more in line with the agricultural imagery that permeates this psalm. Interestingly, the olive tree in Hebrew is masculine and the vine is feminine, thus describing the complementary relationship between husband and wife as the prerequisite for a blessed family. Verse 4 resumes the beatitude of v. 1 and concludes with the same thought.

128:5–6. Blessing. In vv. 5–6, a divine blessing comes from Zion, which once more connects the Pilgrim psalms to the Aaronic blessing (Num. 4:24–26). The blessing reaches out from Zion to Jerusalem, to one's life, and further to one's progeny. This is a truly fulfilled life that is an expression of the desire that there will be peace on Israel. This conclusion points back to Psalm 125:5 and once more illustrates how *shalom* for Israel is worked out in the daily life of its citizens.

129:1–8

Liberation from Exploitation

This poem continues to use imagery from the world of agriculture, though this time it is in a negative context. The metaphor of plowing (vv. 1–4) points to Israel's exploitation by their enemies while the metaphor of a frustrated harvest (vv. 5–8) serves as a petition for Yahweh to punish and withdraw His blessings from the enemies. The postexilic context brings to mind the socio-economic realities of the Persian Empire with a heavy taxation system that made life difficult for the common Israelite peasant. Another possible scenario is the experience of the Babylonian Exile, during which the farmers were not able to sustain themselves, in contrast to the previous psalm where the farmers where able to enjoy the results of their own labor (cf. 128:2). However, the psalm makes it clear that the negative experience is already in the past.

129:1–4. Plowing. The psalm is introduced in similar fashion to Psalm 124 by a liturgical double statement affirming the *rab* ("many," "great") hostilities suffered by Israel since its "youth." It is first introduced by the speaker/minister and then repeated by the congregation (vv. 1–2). Israel's "youth" is sometimes used as a reference to the time in Egypt (e.g., Hos. 2:17). However, the emphasis here is not on the beginning but rather on the duration of Israel's suffering, and the current situation is just another period of distress. The metaphor of plowing in vv. 3–4 presupposes that Israel is under a yoke, the preferred metaphor for bondage in the OT (cf. Deut. 28:48; Is. 9:4), and the image is cruelly intensified as Israel's back is plowed (v. 3; cf. Is. 51:23). This refers to Israel being exploited to the fullest by oppressors who make their furrows long by plowing to the edges of the field. God delivered Israel when He cut the cords of the wicked (v. 4; cf. Ps. 125:3). Yahweh has put an end to this suffering.

129:5–8. Harvest. Consequently, the psalmist shifts his focus by invoking God's wrath on those who hate Zion—he requests that they be shamed and turned back (v. 5). They are further likened to grass on the housetops, which withers quickly for lack of soil and is not even fit for harvest (vv. 6–7). The psalmist concludes with the observation that the traditional blessing usually given during the time of harvest (cf. Ruth 2:4) does not apply to the haters of Zion (v. 8). The paradox in the psalm is that those who exploit the poor to become wealthy will become poor because they lack the blessing of the Lord.

130:1–8

Out of the Depths

While Psalms 125–129 dealt with the daily life of the returned exiles, who are now in their own land, this last subgroup of the Pilgrim psalms (Pss. 130–134) portrays the restoration of the inner person after the Exile. It culminates in the blessings of righteousness and justice that proceed from Zion. Psalm 130 deals with the forgiveness of iniquity for the individual (vv. 1–6) and the community (vv. 7–8).

130:1–6. Forgive Me. Using water imagery ("out of the depths"; cf. 69:2), the psalmist implores Yahweh to let His ears be attentive to the sound of his cry for help (vv. 1–2). This is followed by an indirect acknowledgment of personal guilt by means of a rhetorical question—who could stand if God dealt with us according to our sinful records? (v. 3). The description of

God as having ears is characteristic of the language of prayers in the psalms (cf. 17:6; 31:2; 71:2; etc.). It is also common throughout the ANE (e.g., some Egyptian steles show oversized ears to which the petitioner raises hands in prayer). Verse 4 resolves the tension with an affirmation of Yahweh's willingness to forgive. The psalmist has placed his hope in this forgiveness and watches for it with more intensity than the night watchmen who wait for the morning (vv. 5–6). The morning is the time for Yahweh to save (cf. Ex. 14:24; Ps. 46:5) and to judge (cf. Jer. 21:12; Zeph. 3:5). Through divine forgiveness the psalmist has moved from the depths of darkness (first Hebrew word in v. 1) to the brightness of the morning (last Hebrew word in this section, v. 6).

130:7–8. Forgive Israel. The speaker of the psalm now turns to the congregation and extends his hope to Israel, who can also trust in God's *khesed* ("mercy," "unfailing love," "redemption"; v. 7). This is the foundation of the relationship between Yahweh and Israel, and the psalmist emphatically affirms it: God will redeem the people of Israel from all their sins and iniquities (v. 8). When the angel appeared to Joseph for the naming of Mary's baby, he alluded to Psalm 130:8 and stated that He would save His people from their sins (Matt. 1:21). The saving relationship between Yahweh and Israel is personified in Jesus, who saves us from the depths of sin and will lead us to the morning of redemption.

131:1–3

Hope in the Lord

Although this short psalm is attributed to David, it is frequently interpreted as a woman's prayer based on v. 2. The wording itself does not give any clues as to the gender of the speaker (the first person in Hebrew is not gender specific). While it is conceivable that David used this tender imagery as much as a prophet might use female metaphors (e.g., Is. 1:2; 42:14; 45:10; 46:3; 49:15; 66:9), it is also possible to see him appropriating a mother's song and applying it to Israel.

131:1. Humility. The psalm begins with a series of four negative statements that contrasts the speaker's life of humility with the lives of the arrogant and proud (cf. Prov. 16:5). The heart stands for thinking and internal attitudes, while the eyes represent sight. The distancing from things too *pala'* ("wonderful," "profound") for him is not reluctance to think deeply but should be understood along the lines of Job 42:1–6, as an act of submission to God's knowledge versus human hubris.

131:2. Mother and Child. The metaphor of the "weaned child" builds on the calming influence of a mother toward her child (weaning usually took place at about three years of age in ancient Israel). The image here is not so much about separating the child from the mother as about fulfilling all the needs of the child and the resulting calm (i.e., God provides for all human needs; cf. 23:1).

131:3. Hope for Israel. Similar to the end of the previous psalm (cf. 130:7), hope moves from the individual to Israel. The focus is once again on hope. Within the context of this psalm, not only forgiveness is hoped for but also divine provision for all human needs without resorting to an arrogant and proud way of life. True humility is always based on forgiveness and the acknowledgment of God as the source of all human hope.

132:1–18

Remember David

From forgiveness to humility, the inward journey of this last group of Pilgrim psalms now moves to David as a role model for these qualities as manifested in his desire to build a temple for the Lord and bring the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem. As the longest of the Pilgrim psalms, it also has strong verbal links with the dedication of the temple of Solomon (2 Chr. 6:41–42, closely quoted in vv. 8–10). The emphasis has shifted toward David as the original initiator of the project to build the temple. It adds the inner attitude of commitment to God, based on the Davidic ideal, to the list of desired attitudes for a postexilic Israel.

132:1–10. David's Prayer. With an emphatic plea for the Lord to remember David, vv. 1–2 introduce David's prayer in the form of an oath directed to the Mighty One of Jacob. The reference is to Jacob's oath while fleeing Esau and seems to include a promise to build a sanctuary to Yahweh in Bethel (cf. Gen. 28:10–20). David's oath follows in vv. 3–5, and it emphasizes his humility before God (v. 3), as well as his determination and commitment for the building of the temple (vv. 4–5). Verses 6–10 retell the story of bringing the ark to Jerusalem, beginning with its return from the Philistines, which was announced in Ephrathah (the ancient name of Bethlehem), the home of David and birthplace of the Messiah (cf. Mic. 5:2). It was found in the fields of the woods (or "fields of Jaar"; v. 6), which is possibly a reference to Kirjath Jearim from where the ark was brought to Jerusalem. The psalm then describes the procession of priests and God's *khasidim* ("the faithful ones," "pious ones," "saints") as they rejoiced when the ark was brought to Jerusalem to the temple (v. 9; cf. v. 16). The section closes as it began, with a request for God to remember David and with an added future dimension—a reference to God's Anointed (v. 10), a successor in the line (and spirit) of David and ultimately the Messiah.

132:11–18. Yahweh's Response. In response to David's oath, Yahweh Himself has sworn a true oath that there will always be a descendant on David's throne if his children will keep God's covenant (vv. 11–12) because the Lord has chosen Zion (vv. 13–14). God's election of Jerusalem results in blessings on the poor, priests, and *khasid* ("kind," "saints"; vv. 15–16; cf. v. 9). Thus, the temple is not only a place to which the people bring their offerings and gifts to the Lord but also a place from which He generously distributes His gifts to them (cf. 23:5–6).

The internal theme of the psalm is further enhanced as these gifts are identified as salvation and joy (v. 16). Verses 17–18 use two images, the horn as a metonymy of power (cf. 89:17) and David's lamp (cf. 1 Kin. 11:36). The mention of God's Anointed (v. 17) points again to a future perspective, just as it does in v. 10. In contrast, God will clothe the Anointed One's enemies with shame, but His crown will flourish and shine radiantly (v. 18). The psalm uses Israel's past as a motivation for the present and guarantee for its future. "We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and his teaching in our past history" (3SM, 162).

133:1–3

Living Together

The practical outworking of Yahweh's presence on Mount Zion in the life of Israel is expressed by the use of two similes (vv. 2–3). Living peacefully together as a community is linked to the imagery of Aaron's anointing, once more invoking the Aaronic blessing (Num. 6:24–26), an important theme throughout the Pilgrim psalms. Davidic authorship is mentioned in the title and following Psalm 132, which portrays David as the originator of the plan for the temple, this psalm associates David with the institution of the priesthood and festal liturgies.

133:1. Brothers in Harmony. The wisdom statement at the beginning of this short psalm introduces the theme of the poem—the blessings of living together in unity. The two adjectives *tob* ("good") and *na'im* ("pleasant") are used together to describe the life of the righteous (Job 36:11); they are also applied to God and His Name (Ps. 135:3). The term *'akhim* ("brothers") in this psalm is ambivalent and can refer to the community of Israel but may also refer to the old sibling quarrel between Jacob and Esau. The placement of the psalm in its present context suggests that dwelling together has to do with the postexilic community. Furthermore, if the verb *yashab* ("to dwell," "live") is understood as "to sit," the scene is that of a festive gathering, a religious banquet along the lines of Psalm 23:5–6.

133:2. Like Oil. The anointing of Aaron and his sons included pouring aromatic oil on their heads, which would then drip on their garments (cf. Ex. 29; Lev. 8). The ritual inaugurated the temple service and provides a historical rationale for the gathering of the postexilic community. The repeated mention of Aaron's beard (v. 2) focuses attention on the oil as it drips down and naturally flows onto the clothing of the priest, which includes the ephod and breastplate containing the names of the twelve tribes. Thus, the blessing extends once more onto Israel as a whole.

133:3. Like Dew. The imagery shifts now to the dew on Mount Hermon (v. 3), described as a substance that descends in order to illustrate that the blessings of the Lord are continuously flowing to His people. Geographically speaking, it is impossible for the dew from Mount Hermon in northern Israel to descend upon the mountains of Zion. The imagery is not attempting to describe things as they really are, but instead it depicts a theological topography. Hermon is the highest peak in Israel, closest to the heavenly realm than any other, while Mount Zion is the highest of all and the true spiritual dew flows from it (cf. Ps. 126). The concluding line of the psalm serves as a final blessing from Zion and seems to be an introduction to the Aaronic blessing in the next psalm (cf. 134:3).

The blessing is given directly by Yahweh to the people: life forevermore (v. 3). As a Christian community under God's blessings, life can be characterized only by harmony. Where it is lacking reveals a need to reorient ourselves to the Giver of these blessings.

134:1–3

Night Service

The final poem of the Pilgrim psalms is a farewell psalm that is set against the background of a night liturgy at the temple. This ceremony could have been the culmination of the festal activities on which the Pilgrim psalms were focused. Verse 3 begins with the exact words of the Aaronic blessing in Numbers 6:24 (*yebarekeka yahweh*; "May the LORD bless you").

134:1–2. Praise God. The congregation is exhorted to bless/praise the Lord. The "servants of the LORD" can refer to the whole nation (cf. 113:1; 135:1). Considering the qualifying subclause, which describes those who are serving in the house of the Lord at night, the term may point to the priests and temple singers officiating during the night service at the conclusion of one of the annual festivals (cf. 1 Chr. 9:27–33). The praise is expressed by a gesture of adoration as they are invited to lift up their hands in the sanctuary, a movement which expresses the upward direction of the Pilgrim psalms. The end of the section includes a repetition of the first phrase (bless/praise the Lord). Blessing/praising God is an act of worship and an acknowledgment of His sovereignty (cf. Ps. 63:4).

134:3. Blessing. There is now a change of direction within the psalm. The blessings of the people have gone up to Yahweh, and now He gives His blessing to them in the form of the first line of the Aaronic blessing. He who blesses them is the One who made heaven and earth. The Creator blesses them from Zion. This identifies the specific locale from which He will bless and reestablish His people after the exile.

135:1–21

Praise and History

Psalms 135 and 136 constitute another set of twin psalms (cf. Pss. 56 and 57; 111 and 112), both of which review the history of Israel and Yahweh's divine kingship. It has been suggested that both psalms constitute the Great Hallel (in contrast to only Ps. 136 as the Great Hallel), one of the three Hallels in Book 5 (Pss. 113–118 as Passover Hallel and Pss. 146–150 as Final Hallel). The Hallelujah ("Praise the LORD") frame of this psalm and similar content of the two psalms seem to further support this suggestion.

135:1–4. Invitation to Praise. The psalm begins and ends with a Hallelujah shout of "Praise the LORD!" (cf. the Passover Hallel; Pss. 113–118). The "servants of the LORD" who stand ministering in the house of the Lord refer back to the previous psalm and not only to the priests and Levites who are lifting up their praise. The corresponding section at the end of the psalm demonstrates that all of Israel is included (vv. 19–20). The word pair "good" and "pleasant" (v. 3) as descriptions for Yahweh recurs in 133:1, while the term *tob* ("good") may also connect the psalm to the beginning line of Book 5 (107:1). It employs the concept of God's goodness as an important theological pillar for the postexilic community. A further rationale for praise is God's election of Israel (v. 4).

135:5–18. God in History. The section is introduced by an emphatic *ki* ("indeed," "yes," "for"). Verses 5–7 emphasize God's sovereign uniqueness among all gods and His omnipotence within the universe as Creator. The review of God's deeds in history begins in v. 8 with the plagues of Egypt (cf. 78:44–64; 105:26–36) and continues to the beginning of the conquest (Ps. 135 stops at approximately the same place), and He is portrayed as King and Judge (vv. 12–14). In concentric parallelism, vv. 15–18 correspond to vv. 5–7, taking up the theme of the idols. The emphasis here is not so much on God's omnipotence as on the impotence of idols. God was described as Creator in vv. 6–7, while the idols of the ANE have no creative power (there is no breath in their mouths; v. 17), a fact that epitomizes the life-creating capabilities of Yahweh (cf. 115:4–8). The final observation—that those who make them are like them—shows that humans emulate what they worship; therefore, the idol worshiper becomes like a lifeless replica of the idol (cf. Jer. 51:17).

135:19–21. Exhortation. In contrast to this lifeless imagery, the final exhortation of the psalm invites various representative groups of people—Israel as a nation with its priests (Aaron) and other temple officials (Levi)—to bless/praise the Lord. All who fear the Lord are invited to bless/praise Him from Zion, His dwelling place. The old truth that we will become like what we worship is still relevant for God's children today.

136:1–26

His Mercy Endures Forever

The second account of Israel's history in the Great Hallel is liturgically composed with an antiphonal refrain line that concludes each of its twenty-six verses: His *khesed* ("mercy," "love," "lovingkindness") "endures forever." Between the introduction (vv. 1–3) and conclusion (v. 26) are twenty-two verses, which is similar to the acrostic structure, although it is not alphabetic. In terms of its threefold structure and content there is a close correspondence to its twin psalm, taking up the themes of Creation, Exodus, and conquest, as well as a final universal note. The refrain makes it clear that Yahweh's *khesed* is the sustaining principle that underlies both history and the present.

136:1–3. Introduction. A threefold summons to give thanks to the Lord introduces the psalm using His goodness as the rationale. This is followed by an allusion to His sovereignty (He is the "God of gods") as well as His divine kingship ("Lord of lords").

136:4–25. God in History. As in the previous psalm, the section begins with a description of Yahweh as Creator (vv. 4–9), although the references to Genesis 1–2 are more explicit and direct. For example, God creates the heavens, earth, and waters (vv. 5–7) and then He fills them with content (great lights, sun, moon and stars; vv. 7–9). The Exodus with its plagues (vv. 10–16) and the conquest with the subjugation of the Canaanite kings (vv. 17–22) serve as the historical highlights of Yahweh's wondrous deeds. These are applied to Israel's situation in vv. 23–24 and commemorate their return from Exile—Yahweh has rescued them from their enemies (v. 24). A final reference to God's provision of food for all His creatures (lit. "all flesh") expands the scope of His work beyond Israel and serves as a conclusion for this section (v. 25).

136:26. Exhortation. The final exhortation repeats the first line of the psalm. God's mercy and love, which continuously echo through this psalm in its antiphonal liturgical setting, still serve as the guiding principle of our lives today.

137:1–9

By the Rivers of Babylon

While the historical context of the psalm is clearly the Babylonian Exile, the text does not clarify if it was written from an exilic or postexilic perspective. When we take into consideration the position of the poem within Book 5, the second option seems more plausible; the exile is mentioned as a traumatic memory. Psalm 137 is a transitional psalm between the historical twin Psalms 135–136 and the group of Davidic psalms (Pss. 138–145), which appropriate themes from the monarchy and adapt them to a postexilic setting. Thus, the poem transfers Yahweh's historical deeds from the Exodus and conquest (Pss. 135–136) to the return from the Babylonian Exile.

137:1–6. Babylonian Memories. The psalm commences with a description of Babylonian topography: rivers of Babylon (v. 1), willows/poplars (v. 2), and foreign land (v. 4). The Euphrates poplar would qualify for this description, and Ezekiel 3:15 refers to a Jewish community living by the Chebar River. It is possible that Jewish captives were settled along these waterways to work in the waterworks or mud brick production of the Babylonian empire. The hanging of *kinnor* ("harps," "lyres") in the trees was in resistance to the taunting question of the captors who required them to sing a song of Zion, indicating that there was no more reason for praise (cf. the connection between harp and praise in e.g., Ps. 92:3; 98:5; 150:3). The rhetorical question in v. 4 about singing songs of the Lord in a foreign land is retrospective and could be translated as, "How could we have sung the LORD's song…?" The noun *nekar* ("foreign land") is often used in cultic contexts to contrast God with foreign gods (e.g., Deut. 32:12; Jer. 5:19), so it seems that the mocking request was bordering on blasphemy. The painful past memory of Babylon is contrasted with commitment to Jerusalem in the present through the use of two oath formulas that pledge allegiance to a restored Jerusalem (vv. 5–6).

137:7–9. Edom and Babylon. During the turmoil surrounding the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C., the Edomites formed an alliance with Babylon and provided mercenaries who were involved in the final destruction of Zion (Jer. 27:1–7; Obad. 10–11). These traumatic memories of war form the backdrop for the wishes of retaliation in vv. 8–9 (see "Imprecatory Passages in the Psalms," p. 733). They provide a glimpse into the atrocities of ANE warfare, often including the killing of innocent women and children, that Judah certainly experienced during the fall of Jerusalem at the hands of the Babylonians (cf. Is. 13:16; Jer. 6:11; 51:56). In the announcement of the fall of Babylon, Isaiah predicted that the children will be dashed against the rocks by the enemies of Babylon (13:16; cf. Jer. 51:20–25, 33, 48). In this psalm, it is a wish that is delimited by the law of retribution as expressed in v. 8. It is a wish not for disproportional punishment but for justified repayment—happy will be the one who repays Babylon for what was done to Israel. This war-torn world is filled with atrocities that far surpass the imagery at the end of this psalm. The poem invites us to deal with the trauma of the past by focusing on the present and future coming of the heavenly city, where injustice and warfare will come to an end.

138:1–8

Yahweh Delivers

The group of eight prayer psalms (Pss. 138–145) before the Final Hallel (Pss. 146–150) is called the fifth group of Davidic psalms as each one bears the king's name in the superscriptions, pointing to Davidic authorship. They begin with an allusion to Yahweh as King (Ps. 138) and move progressively toward a celebration of His kingship, climaxing in Psalm 145. The central Davidic themes of personal righteousness and relationship with God (Pss. 139; 141), social justice (Ps. 140), death (Pss. 142–143), and human kingship (Ps. 144) are again reviewed and at times adjusted to the needs of the postexilic community (see esp. Ps. 144).

138:1–3. Praise before Kings. The group begins and ends with a psalm of praise (cf. Ps. 145) that is introduced by a self-exhortation to praise. This praise is performed before the "gods" (the LXX translates the expression as "before angels"). As previously noted in Psalm 82:1, *'elohim* ("gods") was translated as "judges" or persons of authority ("mighty ones"). Most translations render it "before the gods," finding here a possible polemic expressed by the preposition *neged* ("before"), which can also mean "opposite" or "against." The praise is directed toward Yahweh's name (i.e., His character; v. 2). The reason for praise is His *khesed* ("mercy," "lovingkindness," "faithful love") and truth, which exemplify His character (cf. Ex. 34:6). Verse 3 speaks about deliverance without any specific definition of its nature.

138:4–6. Praise of Kings. In similar fashion to the beginning of the first section, all kings of the earth respond now in praise to Yahweh. This might support the interpretation of *'elohim* ("gods") in v. 1 as "mighty ones" or "rulers." The terms high (or exalted) and lowly (v. 6) illustrate both the transcendence and immanence of Yahweh. He specifically distances Himself from the proud.

138:7–8. Trust in Yahweh. The psalm ends with an affirmation of trust in Yahweh that resembles the syntax and tone of Psalm 23 in several places (e.g., "though I walk" in v. 7 // 23:4; God's *khesed*, "faithful love," "mercy," in v. 8 // 23:6). This promises that the Lord will *gamar* on our behalf. The verb has been rendered variously as "perfect," "complete," "fulfill," or "vindicate" and (especially if the first two nuances are emphasized) is a concept continued in the NT in Philippians 1:6.

139:1–24

You Know Me

Following the transcendent loftiness of Yahweh as heavenly King in the previous poem, Psalm 139 reveals that God comes intimately close to humanity in His omniscience and omnipresence. At the beginning and end of the psalm (vv. 1, 23–24) God is described as one who has searched and known David (in v. 23 as imperatives). The phrase portrays God as both Judge and Creator, who is personally interested in the psalmist's life and destiny. In terms of language, there is an affinity between this psalm and the book of Job, which would point to an early date for the writing of this Davidic psalm.

139:1–6. God Searches and Knows Me. The depiction of God as one examining and probing the life of the psalmist is a familiar theme (e.g., Ps. 7:9; 26:2). His omniscience encompasses the totality of human existence (vv. 1–4). The statement that God has *tsur* ("confine," "shut in") behind and before (v. 5) is ambiguous, since it can negatively refer to the encircling of a city during a siege (1 Kin. 15:27) or an act of protection as one binds up money (Deut. 14:25). Only for the wicked is Yahweh's omniscience a fearful thought, while for the righteous it is "too wonderful" (v. 6).

139:7–12. Where Can I Go? From God's omniscience the psalm moves now to His omnipresence, which is expressed by the vertical, heaven and hell (*she'ol*, "grave"; v. 8), and the horizontal, "wings of the morning" or dawn (v. 9), the remotest part of the sea (v. 9), and darkness and light (vv. 11–12). These extremes comprised the known limits of the ancient world. The reference to being held (lit. "grasp") by God's right hand creates an ambiguity between Yahweh's protection and restraining control (cf. Job 12:23; Ps. 119:53; 137:9). Nonetheless, the psalmist affirms that the abiding presence of the Lord is comforting to the believer.

139:13–18. Wonderfully Made. The pervasiveness of God's presence also transcends time, and the next section contemplates the miracle of human birth. It is a beautiful description of creation through reproduction as the embryo is intricately woven by God (v. 15). The verb used here is the same technical term used for the workmanship in the construction of the sanctuary (cf. Ex. 26:36; 28:39; 35:35). It continues with powerful statements about the value of human life before birth (e.g., God saw the unformed substance of the body in the womb; v. 16). The psalmist reacts to these wonderful thoughts with the insight that God's thoughts are countless in sum, yet this does not prevent closeness to Him (vv. 17–18).

139:19–24. Final Wish. The psalm takes a sudden turn as the psalmist asks God to slay the wicked (v. 19), who maliciously speak against Him and disregard the Ten Commandments as they misuse God's name (v. 20). The psalm concludes with a return to the initial thought as the psalmist asks God to search him and know his heart (v. 23). With confidence as to the outcome of His judgment, the psalmist can request that God will lead him in the everlasting way (v. 24). The realization that God knows the most intimate thoughts and is always present can be comforting for the believer and damaging to the wicked. Romans 8:27 takes this relationship one step further by quoting from vv. 1–2 and 23 of the psalm to introduce Christ as our intercessor.

140:1–13

Preserve Me from the Wicked

Psalm 140 begins where the previous psalm left off (namely, with a strong contrast between the righteous and wicked) while asking for deliverance from evil people. There are a number of references back to Book 2 (esp. Pss. 52; 55–59; 62; 64).

140:1–5. Description of the Wicked. The initial section of the poem uses a number of violent images to describe (in general terms and through the use of plural) the enemies (e.g., violent men). They look for war (v. 2), are likened to a poisonous serpent (v. 3; cf. 58:4), and resemble hunters who have set traps (v. 5; cf. 64:5). These metaphors depict the wicked as being completely removed from Yahweh's sphere and belonging to the sphere of other gods (cf. Ex. 34:12; Ps. 106:36).

140:6–11. Prayer for Protection. The language mode of the psalm changes to volitional forms as David asks God to hear his prayer for protection (v. 6) while at the same time expressing thankfulness for the protection already received (v. 7). In contrast, the heads of those who surround David will be covered by their own evil mischief (v. 9). Eventually, the evil that the wicked have accomplished will return to them. *Ra'* ("evil," "disaster") will hunt the violent man (v. 11); this reverses the hunter metaphor that concluded the previous section.

140:12–13. Expression of Trust. Following the reversal of fate for the wicked, the psalm concludes with an expression of trust in Yahweh. He will ensure that justice is done for the poor and needy, whose fates are also reversed. The righteous will give thanks and praise God's name, and the upright will abide in His presence (v. 14). Paul quotes v. 3 to describe human depravity without God and create a similar contrast between the wicked and God's righteousness (Rom. 3:13), which He has revealed through Christ (Rom. 3:21–24).

141:1–10

Protect Me from Being Wicked

This prayer appears similar to the previous one as it speaks about snares, traps, nets (vv. 9–10), and protection from the wicked. But here the psalmist is taking a critical look at himself, considering the ever-present possibility of wickedness entering his own heart.

141:1–5b. Prayer for Protection. The prayer is introduced by sanctuary terminology, taking the evening sacrifice as a liturgical occasion for the supplication (v. 2). The idea of prayer as incense, which was part of the daily morning and evening sacrifice (cf. Ex. 30:7–8), is continued in Revelation 8:3–4. The psalmist continues by describing the danger of wickedness manifested through the door of the lips (v. 3) and a heart enticed to evil (v. 4). Participating in iniquity is likened to eating delicacies of the wicked. There is a progression of engagement with wickedness here that is reminiscent of Psalm 1:1. In contrast, righteous and corrective discipline are likened to oil on the head (v. 5; cf. Prov. 9:8; 27:5–6).

141:5c-7. Contrast. The last line of v. 5 shifts the focus back to the evil acts from which the psalmist intends to distance himself. Verse 6 mentions their *shopetehem* ("judges," "rulers") in a derogatory way—the unjust judges or leaders (cf. 58:1–5) will be thrown over the cliff. The expression is difficult and has been translated in a variety of ways (e.g., "their judges have fallen into a crevasse [lit. 'side of a rock']"), but the idea is that unjust judges would receive their just punishment and the rock could serve as a possible reference to God (cf. 18:3). However, the psalmist tries to convince the wicked of their mortal danger by speaking to them words that are *na'em* ("pleasant," "sweet"; i.e., the words are well spoken). The danger is underlined with imagery of bones scattered by a plowing farmer at the entrance of a grave (*she'ol*; v. 7), possibly a burial cave.

141:8-10. Resolution. Shrinking away from this morbid imagery, the psalmist confirms his commitment to Yahweh (his eyes are looking to Him; v. 8), and he asks to be kept safe from the snares or traps that have been set for him by the wicked. This can refer to either the persecution (as in Ps. 140) or the temptation of falling into wickedness himself. He is certain that he will escape safely (v. 10). A wise rebuke given in love to a friend who may be wandering onto the wrong path may preserve him or her in the path of righteousness.

142:1-7

Deliver Me!

The superscription identifies this Davidic psalm as a *maskil* ("contemplation," "instruction"; cf. 32:1) and "prayer" (*tepillah*; cf. 17:1; 86:1; 102:1). A historical annotation is also included, the first since Psalm 63: "when he was in the cave." It could refer to the cave at En-gedi, based on links between the poem and the narrative in 1 Samuel 24. For example, *qol* ("voice"; v. 1) parallels 1 Samuel 24:16 and *nepesh* ("soul," "life"; v. 4) parallels 1 Samuel 24:11. The psalm might then represent the poetic recollection of Yahweh's deliverance of David from Saul, which could have later been adapted to the life of the postexilic community.

142:1-4. Situation of Distress. The two sections of this psalm are introduced by a loud cry (cf. 107:6) to Yahweh for deliverance. The first section mainly describes the distressing situation in which the psalmist finds himself. As in the previous two psalms, there is mention of snares or traps (v. 3); an expression of utter abandonment is repeated three times and leads to the final conclusion that no one cares for him (v. 4).

142:5-7. Cry for Deliverance. The tone of the psalm becomes more personal as David addresses God directly and appeals to the ancient divine promise of a portion in the land. But the psalmist is talking about the land of the living (v. 5), indicating that he is facing a life-threatening situation. The Portion is an epithet for Yahweh Himself (cf. 16:5; 73:26), suggesting that the promise has been internalized into a life-saving relationship with God. A number of pleas appeal to Yahweh for deliverance (vv. 6–7), climaxing in the plea for God to bring him (lit. his "soul" or "life") out of prison. The infrequent noun *masger* ("prison," "dungeon") is used in connection with the return from exile (v. 7; cf. Is. 42:7; Jer. 29:2) and suggests that the prayer of David is being adapted to the experience of the postexilic Israelite community. The psalm concludes with a final note of confidence in Yahweh's deliverance. When we make the Lord our Portion, the search for self-satisfaction comes to an end because we find in Him the center of our existence.

143:1-12

Close to Death

The distress the psalmist experienced in Psalm 142 is now intensified. Both psalms are connected by verbal links (e.g., the faint/overwhelmed spirit in v. 4 // 142:3). Beyond that similarity, Psalm 143 seems to be a collection of quotations from other Davidic psalms (Pss. 25; 69; 77; 86). Perhaps it is an anthology of prayers that David collected. This psalm was later appropriated by the postexilic community for their situations of distress.

143:1-6. Distress. The psalm begins with three imperatives of intensified urgency, asking God to hear and answer (v. 1). As he appeals to Yahweh's faithfulness and righteousness (cf. Ex. 34:6–7), the psalmist contrasts his own lack of righteousness; indeed, no one living is righteous before God (v. 2). Verses 3–4 describe the situation of distress caused by persecution: the enemy crushes him to the ground (lit. "grinding my life against the ground"—an image which evokes a millstone that grinds out the psalmist's life). The imagery is used in other contexts for the oppression of the poor (cf. Is. 3:15). This section ends with a remembrance of Yahweh's historical works in past days, a reference to both the Creation and the Exodus (cf. Ps. 77:11–12; 139:14). The poet spreads out his hands in supplication and expresses his longing for deliverance (v. 6).

143:7-12. Petition. The petition is concretized in the second section, which begins with a renewed and more intensified plea for Yahweh to answer (v. 7). The next lines read like an anthology, collecting prayer lines from other psalms. The death metaphor in v. 7 comes from 28:1, the morning motif (v. 8) is similar to 30:5 (cf. also 59:16), and the plea for deliverance (v. 9) is also found in 59:1. In vv. 10–11, the focus shifts from deliverance from enemies to the future of the psalmist. He asks for instruction, guidance, and revival, and concludes with the request to bring him (lit. his "soul") out of trouble. This is concretized in a final request for deliverance from the enemies (v. 12). Paul quotes v. 2 in Romans 3:20 and Galatians 2:16, building the argument for the doctrine of justification by faith around these quotations.

144:1-15

A New Government

Psalm 144 takes up the theme of human monarchy by drawing from older psalms, mainly from Psalms 18 and 104 (e.g., v. 1 // 18:34; v. 2 // 18:47; v. 5 // 18:9, 104:32; v. 6 // 18:14; v. 7 // 18:16). The material apparently was reworked by David and may have been adapted later to the needs of the postexilic community. After the exile, a new type of leadership is needed, based on the Davidic ideal and Yahweh's kingship.

144:1-4. Divine Epithets and Humans. The introduction employs a long list of divine epithets (e.g., Rock, Fortress/Stronghold, Tower, Shield) that are reminiscent of Psalm 18:2 and 46. They are all related to war imagery used to depict Yahweh as Warrior. In contrast to the divine omnipotence, there is the fleetingness of human nature (cf. 8:4; 102:11). Humans cannot provide permanent refuge in times of conflict.

144:5-8. Theophany. The section is modeled after Psalms 18 and 104 and describes Yahweh descending from heaven. However, a number of important changes take place. One significant change is the switch from indicative to mostly imperatives (e.g., in v. 6). This corresponds to Psalm 18:14, which describes God's activities of sending arrows and lightning to destroy enemies. Possibly the most important change is that Psalm 144 contextualizes the old theophanic realities by a new request that fits the postexilic circumstances. Yahweh must again come down from heaven and rescue, but this time from the hands of foreigners (v. 7).

144:9-15. A New Song and Blessings. In this new song (v. 9), the rescue of David from the deadly sword (v. 10) becomes a model for Yahweh's rescue of Israel from the hand of foreigners (v. 11). The final section of the psalm makes reference to the Mosaic blessings (vv. 12–15), and it follows the sequencing of Deuteronomy 28:4–5 and 11 (v. 12, sons and daughters; v. 13, agricultural produce; vv. 13–14, sheep and oxen). Some conclude that the tone of the psalm is directed not toward an individual new king but toward postexilic Israel as a whole. Two beatitudes that emphasize the relationship between Yahweh and Israel as a nation conclude the psalm (cf. Ps. 33:22). It is important to build a new community and a new life around the old historical truths and promises of salvation, claiming them anew.

145:1-21

Alphabetic Praise

The concluding psalm of the fifth group of Davidic psalms is an acrostic poem that praises God through the psalmist (vv. 1–9), through the congregation, and through nature (vv. 10–20). The psalm is framed by a blessing to Yahweh's name (vv. 1–2, 21), a common feature in this group (cf. 138:2; 140:13; 142:7). One letter of the Hebrew alphabet, *nun* ("n"), is missing in the acrostic sequence, although a psalm manuscript from Qumran (11QPs^a) and the LXX provide the missing line. The psalm presents Yahweh as King as a logical consequence of Psalm 144, which searches for a new form of government after the Babylonian Exile. Psalm 145 also serves as the last psalm before the final Hallel doxology and thus provides a theological climax to the Psalms with its focus on divine kingship.

145:1-9. Individual Praise. The psalm is introduced by a promise or commitment to praise God's name forever and ever, which is also mentioned in v. 21. This future outlook is further developed by the statement that one generation extols God's works to the next and passes on the knowledge of Yahweh's saving acts in history (vv. 5–7; cf. 143:5). The grace formula from Exodus 34:6, slightly shortened and adapted to the requirements of the acrostic, is used in v. 8 and reaches a universal dimension when it states that the Lord is good to all (v. 9).

145:10–21. Creation and Community Praise. The universal dimension in v. 9 is continued in v. 10 as it introduces a wider praise choir. All of creation and the community of Israel are invited to raise their voices. They praise God for His mighty acts and His everlasting kingdom and focus on the image of Yahweh as King, whose dominion endures throughout all generations (vv. 11–13). Yet, God still cares for the poor (v. 14) and sustains the natural world (vv. 15–16; cf. 104:27–28). God is righteous and gracious in everything He does (v. 17) and is near to all who call upon Him and follow His way (v. 18). This implies the preservation of all who love Him and, by logical implication, destruction of all the wicked (v. 20). Verse 21 closes the frame by again mentioning the extoling of God's holy name. It is astonishing how this acrostic psalm of David weaves the most important themes of the Davidic psalms into a continuous fabric that is held together by praises. Doxology truly is the key to theology.

146:1–10

Individual Praise

The last five psalms are characterized by the dominance of the verbal root *halal* ("to praise"). It occurs thirty-five times in Psalms 146–150 and ten times as an imperative to which a shortened form of the divine name is attached (*halelu yah*). The phrase is found at the beginning and ending of each psalm. The circle of worshipers who "praise the LORD" gets progressively larger, beginning with the individual (Ps. 146) and growing to include Jerusalem/Zion (Ps. 147), the created world (Ps. 148), Israel within the cosmos (Ps. 149), and finally the cosmos through time and space (Ps. 150). This creates an ever-increasing cosmic symphony that rings through the ages and carries the theological themes of Creation, *torah*, and Zion toward an eschatological end. Psalm 146 has a number of parallels with other psalms, especially with Psalms 103–104. These are not mere quotations but rather form a condensed theological summary of the Psalms in its final doxology.

146:1–2. Frame. After the initial Hallelujah ("Praise the LORD"; v. 1), which is replicated at the end of the poem (v. 10), the psalmist commits himself to a lifelong melody of praise. This type of life is a guarantee for a full life (v. 2; cf. 104:33).

146:3–9. Yahweh Reigns. The psalm contrasts a false trust in earthly princes and the fleetingness of their rule (vv. 3–4) with the true hope that only the God of Jacob (v. 5) provides. This hope is introduced through a beatitude; He is our hope not only because He blessed Jacob (Gen. 28) but also because He is the Creator (cf. Ps. 75:9; 76:7). From the God of history the psalm moves to the God of creation (v. 6) and His rule as the heavenly King (vv. 7–9). The ethical dimension of the theology of the psalms surfaces when God is described as caring for the socially disadvantaged groups—those who are oppressed, hungry, prisoners, fatherless, strangers/foreigners, and widows. The liberation of Israel from the Babylonian Exile is echoed in these lines (cf. Is. 42:7).

146:10. Frame. The final "praise the LORD" of the psalm is preceded by a summary of the poem's contents. The reign of God is to be praised from Zion and throughout eternity (cf. 147:12). The contrast between human and divine rule is also found at the outset of the Psalms in Psalm 2. Thus, the end of this Psalm closes another theological circle.

147:1–20

Praise from Zion

The horizon of praises expands from the individual to the inhabitants of Jerusalem/Zion (v. 12). The LXX reproduces Psalm 147 as two separate poems (vv. 1–11 and vv. 12–20). However, the division of the poem in three sections (vv. 1–6, 7–11, 12–20), each beginning with an invitation to praise, supports the structural unity of the psalm. Each invitation to praise is followed by divine predications describing Yahweh as the Restorer of Jerusalem, Sustainer of the world, and Giver of the *torah*. The constant change of speakers points to the poem's liturgical use.

147:1–6. Restorer of Jerusalem. The psalm begins and ends with Hallelujahs ("Praise the LORD"). The first section describes Yahweh as the One who builds up Jerusalem (v. 2) and who deals kindly with the *nidekhe* ("exiled," "banished ones," "outcasts"; the latter translation would echo the end of the previous psalm). As the divine Shepherd, He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds (v. 3; cf. Ezek. 34). As Creator, He *manah* ("counts," "appoints/determines") the number of the stars (v. 4; cf. Is. 40:24–26). As King, He takes care of the humble but "casts the wicked to the ground" (v. 6; cf. Ps. 113:7). Yahweh is accomplishing an outward and inward restoration of Jerusalem.

147:7–11. Sustainer of the World. After the second exhortation to praise (v. 7), the next section describes Yahweh as the Sustainer of creation (cf. Ps. 104), who provides rain for the earth and gives food to the animals (vv. 8–9). The negative references to the strength of the horse and the power of a soldier's legs (v. 10) point to the reversal of power under the rule of Yahweh as King (cf. Ps. 143:3–4) and to the total reliance humans have on Him.

147:12–20. Giver of Torah. The psalm then turns to Jerusalem and Zion as the sources of praise. In addition to security and fruitfulness (v. 13), the main reason to praise is given in v. 14 as peace. Jerusalem has finally become the city of *shalom*. Verses 15–18 return to the topic of Yahweh's power as the Creator, who sends out His command to the earth and utters things into existence (see Gen. 1). It was this powerful and life-giving divine word that gave His ordinances and rulings to Israel (i.e., the blessing of *torah*). This creates a further connection to Psalm 1, the first *torah* psalm. Psalm 147 celebrates God as the One who even today can restore peace, provide sustenance, and give a rule of life.

148:1–14

Worldwide Praise

The choir that sings Yahweh's praise expands now to the whole of creation. The twofold cosmology of the psalm is centered on the totality of heavens and earth, which are used to divide the psalm into two parts (vv. 1–7 and 8–14). Psalm 148 occupies the center of the final Hallel and is linked to the previous two psalms by the recurring Creation motif and its emphasis on Israel's preeminent role in the cosmos.

148:1–7. From the Heavens. Yahweh's praise begins "from the heavens" with His angels (v. 2) and then moves through sun, moon, and stars (v. 3). Mention of these entities praising God clarifies their position within the created order, in contrast to their function as deities in other ANE religions. The mention of the waters above the heavens or skies refers back to the cosmology of the Creation account (cf. Gen. 1:7). The verb *bara'* ("to create"), used in Genesis 1:1, is also employed here in v. 5.

148:8–14. From the Earth. In the second section, praise is now requested "from the earth" (v. 7). The great sea creatures are connected to the waters below the firmament (Gen. 1:6–8), and they join the praise song in submission to Yahweh (in contrast to the ANE forces of chaos often portrayed as sea monsters). The psalmist then presents a list of earthly praise choir members, always in pairs. This echoes the order of creation in Genesis 1 and ends with humankind as the crown of creation, again in pairs that cover the whole spectrum of humanity by age, gender, and socio-political status (vv. 11–12). All these pairs reflect the differentiated but complimenting created order. Yahweh's glorious majesty and splendor are above the earth and heaven (v. 13) and above the created sphere that lifts up its praise in unison. Within this worldwide choir, v. 14 zooms in on Israel as a people near to Him and close to His heart. The reference to His people connects this psalm to the two preceding psalms and prepares the way for the next praise song. The whole psalm is a narrowing down from the broadest heavenly scope, climaxing with the people closest to Yahweh.

149:1–9

Israel's Praise within the Cosmos

Psalm 149 picks up the theme of the preeminence of Israel among the nations but with an increasing emphasis on the eschatological perspective of Yahweh's reign. This is expressed through a movement from imperatives in the first section (vv. 1–4) to future-oriented volitional verbal forms in the second section (vv. 5–9). According to Isaiah 42:5, Israel's "new song" is a song of liberation from exile and from the power of all "nations" and "peoples" (vv. 7; cf. also Ps. 96:1; 98:1). This psalm replicates the message at the beginning of Psalm 2 and follows the same sequence of nations, peoples, kings, and nobles (vv. 7–8; replacing the "rulers" of 2:2 here with "nobles"). The initial raging of the nations against Yahweh's "Anointed" is finally resolved eschatologically in Yahweh's eternal reign at the end of the Psalms.

149:1–4. A New Song. The Hallelujah ("Praise the Lord") frame now provides an invitation to praise that focuses on the assembly of the *khasidim* ("faithful," "godly," "pious," "saints"). The parallelism between Maker and King (v. 2) makes it clear that Yahweh's divine kingship is meant here. The expressions of praise include dance, as well as the use of timbrel and harp (v. 3). The word *makhol* could either refer to "dance" or a musical instrument; the latter would seem to be the case in vv. 3–4, where *makhol* is listed in parallelism with musical instruments (see also 150:3–5). In any case, dance was an expression of joy, but it was never performed in the temple. That joy is the result of deliverance from Israel's enemies (cf. Pss. 30:11; 150:4; Jer. 31:4, 13). Consequently, Yahweh will *pa'ar* ("beautify," "glorify," "crown") the *'anawim* ("poor," "humble," "afflicted," "meek") with salvation (v. 4). This expresses the divine concern for the oppressed and reveals the ethical dimension of the psalms.

149:5–9. Judgment for the Saints. The joyful song projects itself here into the future through a change from imperatives to volitional verbal forms, elaborating how the crowning of Israel will play out eschatologically. Praising God on beds (v. 5) recalls Deuteronomy 6:7 and the reciting of *torah* in all life situations (cf. also Ps. 1:2). The surprising metaphorical connection between praise and a two-edged sword (v. 6) alludes to the power of words (Ps. 52:2; 57:4; 59:7; 64:3), a theme that can also be found in the NT (cf. Heb. 4:12). Verses 7–9 portray the *khasidim* ("faithful," "kind," "pious," "saints") as having the glory or honor of performing the judgment written against the nations. Within the eschatological framework of the psalm, this could be understood as the participation of the righteous in the executive judgment of the nations based on the heavenly written records (cf. Dan. 7:9–14; 26–28). The overall imagery of binding with chains and fetters (v. 8) provides surprising links to Revelation 20:1–2 (cf. also Jude 1:6). Psalm 149 opens a wide vista into the glorious future of God's people, characterized by praise, ultimately leading to eternal victory and the end of sin.

150:1–6
Praise Eternal

The grand finale of the Psalms consists of ten exhortations (the imperative *halelu,* "praise," occurs ten times) to praise Yahweh, framed by the two Hallelujah shouts at its beginning and end. They all build in a crescendo to a final cosmic invitation for everything that has breath to "praise the Lord." This is an impressive conclusion to the book of Psalms in which doxology touches eternity. The number ten can be biblically associated with totality but also with the Decalogue and the ten utterances of God in Genesis 1. Thus, the beginning and end of the Psalms bring the theological motifs of Creation and *torah* into view once more. Consistent with the numerical schemes, the seven musical instruments mentioned in vv. 3–5 represent the perfection of praise.

150:1–2. From the Heavenly Sanctuary. In the last Hallelujah ("Praise the Lord") psalm, praises occur in two places, namely, in God's sanctuary and His mighty firmament in the heavens. While *qodesh* could also refer to the earthly sanctuary, the parallelism with the mighty firmament opens up a cosmic dimension and at the same time looks back to Creation. In Genesis 1:8, the firmament is called "heaven," a meaning that would fit well in this passage. The acts of God are referred to as *geburah* ("powerful," "mighty"), and they describe the historical deeds of God from Creation to re-creation.

150:3–6. Into the Cosmos. There is an interesting sequencing of musical instruments in vv. 3–5. They move from instruments used predominantly in a sanctuary context—*shopar* (trumpet), *nebel* (lute or harp), and *kinnor* (harp or lyre; e.g., Lev. 25:9; 1 Chr. 15:16)—to other instruments that were used in both cultic and non-cultic contexts, especially for the celebration of victories and deliverances (timbrel, string instruments, flutes [or pipes], and cymbals; e.g., Ex. 15:20; 1 Sam. 18:6; 2 Sam. 6:5). The dance (cf. observations to Ps. 149:3) is likewise associated with these manifestations of festive joy that go out from the heavenly sanctuary into the cosmic courts. The twofold repetition of the cymbals with the additional qualification *teru'ah* ("resounding," "clashing") cymbals announces an audible climax in the final symphony of the Psalms. The call is universal for everything that has breath to praise the Lord (v. 6) and manifests an eschatological expectation. The Hebrew *neshamah* ("blowing," "breath") refers primarily to humankind (cf. Gen. 2:7; 7:22). The final Hallelujah ("Praise the Lord") concludes the doxology of Book 5 and with that all of the Psalms.

The cosmic and eschatological perspective that concludes the psalm points to a final doxology of cosmic dimensions that will accompany a procession out of the heavenly sanctuary and

fill the universe with praises. The whole cosmos will praise the Lord; the dissonance of sin has come to an end. The cosmic conflict will end in a doxology of praises to the Lord. The Christian still looks forward in hope to the moment when everyone will acknowledge Christ as the supreme Lord of all (Phil. 2:10–11).

"The great controversy is ended. Sin and sinners are no more. The entire universe is clean. One pulse of harmony and gladness beats through the vast creation. From Him who created all, flow life and light and gladness, throughout the realms of illimitable space. From the minutest atom to the greatest world, all things, animate and inanimate, in their unshadowed beauty and perfect joy, declare that God is love" (GC, 678). In the book of Psalms, praise is directly connected to soteriology and eschatology, and as a consequence, it nurtures hope.

PROVERBS

INTRODUCTION

Title and Authorship. The Hebrew title of the book of Proverbs consists of the first word in the book (*mishle*, a form of the word *mashal*), whose meaning is similar to but broader than the English word "proverb." It refers to not only proverbial sayings but also to various other types of sayings (see Num. 23:7; Job 13:12; Is. 14:4; Ezek. 18:2). Therefore, *mishle* (commonly translated as "proverbs") is best understood as "wisdom sayings." In this commentary, the two expressions will be used interchangeably.

According to a Jewish tradition, Hezekiah and his associates wrote Proverbs. This would mean they compiled the sayings rather than authoring them (Prov. 25:1). The book itself ascribes the authorship of most of its contents to Solomon (1:1; 10:1), Agur (30:1), Lemuel (31:1), and other sages (22:17). The repetition of identical or virtually identical proverbs in the book (6:10–11 and 24:33–34; 14:12 and 16:25; 18:8 and 26:22; 21:9 and 25:24; 22:3 and 27:12; possibly also 20:16 and 27:13) suggests that parts of the book may have existed as separate collections that were eventually brought together as one book. Other proverbs are not identical but are very similar (see 10:9 and 28:18; 16:2 and 21:2; 19:5 and 19:9; 19:24 and 26:15; 20:10 and 20:23; 20:18 and 24:6; 22:13 and 26:13). Furthermore, there are instances where the exact wording of part of a proverb is repeated in another wisdom saying (see 10:6 and 10:11; 10:8 and 10:10; 10:15 and 18:11) Sometimes, the repetition is similar but not exact (see 16:28 and 17:9; 19:12 and 20:2). This suggests that some parts of some proverbs were reused in the creation of new wisdom sayings (it is, of course, impossible now to determine which saying preceded which). Thus, it is probably better to say that the book of Proverbs consists of collections of wisdom sayings that were compiled by Hezekiah and his associates from the writings of Solomon, Agur, Lemuel, and other sages (see 25:1).

Date. Following the Jewish tradition, the collections of wisdom sayings in Proverbs were gathered and compiled in their final form around 700 B.C. However, Solomon would have written his portion (the majority of the book) in the tenth century B.C.

Backgrounds. The reign of Solomon, which was the golden age (in terms of wisdom, wealth, and power) of the united monarchy, provides the appropriate setting for the collection of his wisdom sayings. The word "wisdom" is used in reference to both a concept and a type of literature. The concept of wisdom in Proverbs (and in the Bible) has a wider range of meaning than it does in English. Whereas the English word "wisdom" means good judgment and the ability to use knowledge, the biblical concept of wisdom encompasses a wide spectrum, including simple factual knowledge (e.g., Solomon's knowledge of trees, animals, birds, fish, etc.; 1 Kin. 4:29, 33), various types of professional skills (see Ex. 35:35; 36:2, 8; 1 Chr. 22:15–16), good judgment and common sense (e.g., Solomon's understanding of human nature; 1 Kin. 3:16–28), and righteous living (e.g., in Prov. 10–13 the contrast between the righteous and the wicked is interwoven with the contrast between the wise and the fool). Proverbs never speaks of a God-fearing person lacking wisdom or of an unrighteous person who is wise (see 1:1–7). Though the biblical concept of wisdom is difficult to define, it can be described as the attempt to understand the order of the world through observation and analysis, appropriate its principles, and successfully live by them.

Theology and Purpose. A number of theological observations can be made regarding the book of Proverbs. The observations below are selective and do not cover the entire theological significance of the book.

1. Proverbs and Inspiration. The book of Proverbs presents important insights concerning inspiration, especially for those who hold a high view of Scripture. First, some have suggested that there are similarities between Proverbs 22:17—24:22 and the Egyptian *Wisdom of Amenemope*. Were some of Solomon's wisdom sayings copied from Egyptian wisdom? And if so, can these sayings still be considered inspired? Or did *Amenemope* copy from Proverbs? Or did they both borrow from common sources of ancient Near Eastern wisdom? The common opinion among scholars is that *Amenemope* is older than Proverbs, and consequently Proverbs was in some way influenced by it. The relationship between Proverbs and Egyptian wisdom should not bring into question the inspiration of the book of Proverbs. Inspiration does not always claim originality. Inspired NT writers, under the guidance of the Spirit, sometimes gathered material from uninspired sources (Luke 1:1–4) and even quoted them (Acts 17:28; Titus 1:12–13; see "Revelation and Inspiration of the Bible," p. 11).

The book of Proverbs does not claim to be based on direct visions and dreams. In fact, sometimes it draws lessons from nature (Prov. 6:6–11) or personal observation (24:32). It offers a broader understanding of how inspiration works. This aspect of the book of Proverbs may have relevance to Seventh-day Adventists since the inspiration of Ellen White has been challenged because of her alleged literary borrowings. It is important to consider not only what was borrowed but also how it was modified in order to achieve the purpose of the inspired biblical writer. It would also be useful to consider what was rejected and not borrowed in order to better understand the process of selection followed by the inspired writer. Further, the fact that 25:1 states that Hezekiah's scribes collected Solomon's wisdom sayings suggests that a high view of Scripture does not preclude later scribal rearrangement or compilation.

2. Central Theological Message of Proverbs. Though the book makes significant theological contributions, there is no consensus on its central theological message. Besides the ubiquitous theme of wisdom, a number of other themes are prominent. One recurring theme is the proper upbringing of children (see 13:24; 22:6, 15; 23:13–14; see also 3:11–12), which is also reflected in the frequently used introductory formula admonishing children to listen to parental instruction (see 1:8–9; 4:1–4; 6:20). Another prominent theme is wise speech (see 10:6, 10–11, 13–14; 16:20–30; 18:2–8; 25:12; 26:23–26), which is also reflected in the frequent occurrence of words such as "lips," "mouth," and "tongue." Another theme is righteousness in contrast with wickedness (see 1:3; 2:8–9; 10:1—11:31; 12:5–7; 21:3; 24:15–16; 28:1; 29:27), including references to just scales (see 16:11), integrity, justice, uprightness (see 17:26; 18:5), and so on.

Also prominent in Proverbs are the themes of fidelity and infidelity (see 2:16–19; 5:1–23; 6:20—7:27; 22:14; 30:20), diligence and laziness (see 6:6–11; 12:27; 16:5; 19:24; 21:17, 25; 24:30–34; 26:15), riches and poverty (see 18:11; 19:6–7; 23:4–5; 30:8–9), proper behavior by or toward a king (see 16:10–15; 24:21–22; 25:2–7; 31:1–9), and dealing with conflicts (see 25:8, 21–24; 26:17–22), including warnings against anger (see 25:28). Of course, this list could be expanded. However, it is questionable whether any of these themes could be considered the central theme of the book of Proverbs. The fact that so many of the wisdom sayings are self-contained units may mean that there is no one overarching theme or theology. In addition to the apparent lack of an overarching theme, Proverbs also seems to lack a clear sequence or arrangement of its themes. Hence, some scholars prefer to summarize the book as a collection of miscellaneous wisdom sayings without a central theme. This position seems to be strengthened by the fact that scholars who do propose a central theological message cannot agree on what that message is.

Perhaps the concept that could function as the theological center of the book of Proverbs is wisdom. It pervades the book from beginning to end. In addition to the frequent occurrence of terms from a Hebrew root related to wisdom (the adjective *khakam*, "wise," forty-seven times; *khokmah*, "wisdom," thirty-nine times; various conjugations of the verb *khakam*, "to be wise," thirteen times), there are also related words that occur frequently (e.g., *da'at*, "knowledge," forty times). The word *leb* ("heart," "mind," "understanding") occurs ninety-seven times. Many words related to instruction also occur frequently (e.g., *musar*, "discipline," "instruction," "correction," thirty times; *tokakhat*, "reproof," sixteen times; *torah*, "instruction," "law," thirteen times). To these could be added words that contrast with wisdom (e.g., "fool," "folly," "scoffer"). Since wisdom is, among other things, the correct application of knowledge and understanding, it can be expanded to include the various qualities promoted in the book (e.g., righteousness, diligence, the fear of the Lord). Hence, the theme of wisdom seems to be a good candidate for the central theme of the book.

Since wisdom attempts to apply a correct understanding of the order of the world by appropriating its principles in order to successfully live by them, there is a sense in which wisdom and life are related. Therefore, while the issue of the theological center of the book is still debated, this commentary adopts the working hypothesis that the central message is how to enjoy a meaningful and productive life. "In the proverbs of Solomon are outlined principles of holy living and high endeavor, principles that are heaven-born and that lead to godliness, principles that should govern every act of life" (PK 33–34).

3. *Wisdom and Faith.* An interesting aspect of the book of Proverbs is its apparent universal application. It does not mention the details of Israelite religious history, such as the Exodus from Egypt. There is no discussion of the temple or of the significance of the sacrifices. Further, many of the stated consequences of following or not following wisdom concern earthly, not spiritual, life (e.g., long life, riches, and honor; Prov. 3:16; cf. 22:4). The righteous are repaid on earth (11:31).

Although details particular to Israelite religion are not discussed, the book mentions different religious aspects of life. These include prayer (15:8, 29; 28:9), offerings and sacrifices (7:14; 15:8), firstfruits (3:9), and vows (7:14; 20:25). Proverbs also mentions God's involvement in human affairs (see 15:25; 20:22; 22:22–23; 23:10–11) and the sovereignty of God (see 16:33; 19:21; 20:24; 21:30–31). The book also states that "the fear of the LORD" is the foundation of wisdom (1:7; 9:10) and exhorts trust in Him (3:5). "The LORD gives wisdom" (2:6), and "those who seek the LORD understand" (28:5; see "Wisdom and the Fear of the Lord," p. 764).

Thus, though the book's counsel applies to the secular details of life and its benefits are not limited to any national group, Proverbs is a deeply religious book. It could be said that the historical facts concerning the religion of Israel are assumed as background knowledge. Further, the book's focus on this earthly life shows that the fear of the Lord is not limited to religious contexts. God is the God of the secular as well as the sacred. Indeed, it is hard to separate the two in the ancient world, where all life was tied to the sacred. Hence, all of life, including what are today considered secular activities, should be lived in relationship to the Lord.

4. *Wisdom and Hope.* As already mentioned, except for the Creation, the book of Proverbs does not discuss God's intervention in history, such as the Flood, the Exodus, or the future messianic age. Since the book is not prophetic or apocalyptic, not much is said about God's future direct intervention in human history. This does not mean that Proverbs is exclusively interested in everyday life. The book is also interested in a transcendental life, a life beyond the confines or limitations of an earthly existence. True life must be grounded in hope in God and requires a deep fellowship with the Lord. Therefore, Proverbs unambiguously asserts that there is no hope for the wicked beyond the grave (11:7). They know only the present, and when it is gone, their hope perishes with them. But the experience of the righteous is different: the righteous have a refuge in God even in death (14:32). This seems to imply that, for the righteous, death is not the end.

Another passage that seems to point to a life beyond the grave is 12:28, according to which there is no death in the pathway of righteousness and life. A literal translation would be "and the way of a path no death." The meaning seems to be that true life does not lead to death but transcends it. If this interpretation is right, then wisdom is associated with eternal life. It points to a life that transcends the limited nature of human existence.

The emphasis of Proverbs on earthly life offers a balancing perspective for Christians living in hope of the Second Coming of Christ. Though the ultimate Christian hope has an eschatological focus (i.e., the coming of fullness of life through Christ), which Proverbs points to, the present life should not be ignored. There is hope in the present as well as the future. Our fallen, sinful world does not always function as it should, yet God's justice and mercy are not completely absent because the law of cause and effect is still at work. Wisdom and folly still have predictable, though not unfailingly consistent, results. "To Adam and Eve in their Eden home, nature was full of the knowledge of God, teeming with divine instruction. To their attentive ears it was vocal with the voice of wisdom. Wisdom spoke to the eye and was received into the heart, for they communed with God in His created works.…Nature is now marred and defiled by sin. But God's object lessons are not obliterated; even now, rightly studied and interpreted, she speaks of her Creator" (CT 186).

Further, Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 15:19 about hope beyond this life must be balanced by John's statement that hope purifies us (1 John 3:3). That is, our eschatological hope results in changes in our present life. Proverbs also reminds us that true biblical hope impacts the way God's people live and treat others in this life. There are many wise sayings about living righteously (see Prov. 2:9; 8:20; 14:34; 16:8; 29:4); being honest (see 3:27–28; 11:1; 16:11; 20:10, 23); being generous (see 11:24; 14:21, 31; 19:17); not taking advantage of the helpless/defenseless (see 15:25; 23:10–11; 30:10); speaking with wisdom, honesty, and kindness (see 8:7–8; 15:1–2; 20:15; 25:11–12; 31:26); and even showing compassion to animals (12:10). Thus, Proverbs reminds Christians that eschatological hope should lead to choosing the path of wisdom in this present life.

5. *Wisdom Acquired and Transmitted.* Wisdom is not primarily obtained through supernatural revelations, such as visions and dreams (though these are not necessarily excluded). Rather, it is acquired by observation and experience followed by analysis and application (see 6:6). Wisdom is also acquired by accepting wise counsel, a fact emphasized throughout Proverbs. Thus, the value of wise counsel is highlighted (see 11:14; 15:22; 20:18; 24:6). The sayings are often addressed to a child urged to receive parental instruction (see 1:8; 5:1; 6:1; 7:1; 31:1).

Proverbs emphasizes the need to not only acquire wisdom but also transmit it. One of its frequent themes is the education of youth, which may have been the original setting of many of its wisdom sayings. Hebrew words for parents and children are used very frequently. In the first nine chapters, each lecture is addressed to a son (see also 23:19, 22; 24:13–14, 21; 31:2). It contains instruction concerning the responsibilities of children (see 10:1; 13:1; 15:5, 20; 17:25; 19:13, 26; 20:20; 23:24–25; 28:7; 29:3; 30:17) as well as of parents (see "Child Discipline in Proverbs," p. 776).

We can also draw some inferences from Proverbs concerning the content of education. Since God is the God of all aspects of life, including both what we consider sacred and what we consider secular, education in the context of biblical wisdom is not limited to theological reflection. A careful reading of Proverbs, as well as wisdom literature in general, suggests a positive attitude towards all kinds of learning, including practical and scientific knowledge. Nevertheless, true wisdom, hence true education, has its foundation in "the fear of the LORD."

Literary Features. On this, see "Introduction to Hebrew Poetry and Wisdom Books," p. 614. The book of Proverbs is rich in descriptive and prescriptive sayings. With the exception of the first nine chapters and portions of the last few, most wisdom sayings in Proverbs are short, often consisting of one or two lines with parallel, opposite, or related thoughts. Many of these can be characterized as aphorisms, maxims, or pithy sayings. Since biblical proverbs are poetic in form, they use poetic parallelism. In most cases, these short wisdom sayings are self-contained units (i.e., each saying is contextually unrelated to the sayings before and after it) and the interpretation of each passage is not related to other passages in the context.

This commentary will not discuss every single wisdom saying in Proverbs individually since most of them are transparent and do not need comment or explanation. Instead, in sections where larger themes can be discerned, the discussion will focus on the larger context rather than on specific verses. Some individual verses that require special comment or explanation will also be discussed.

COMMENTARY

1:1—9:18

PROVERBS OF SOLOMON THE SON OF DAVID THE KING OF ISRAEL

The first nine chapters of Proverbs contain longer poetic sections than most of the rest of the book. Whereas much of the book consists of specific counsel for practical living, the poems in the first nine chapters interweave instructional poems with poems that praise or commend wisdom. Hence, even the admonitions against infidelity occur in the context of a contrast between choosing wisdom or the adulterous woman (see 7:4–5).

As some scholars have suggested, the material in this first major section consists of ten lectures or didactic speeches (1:8–19; 2:1–22; 3:1–12, 21–35; 4:1–9, 10–19, 20–27; 5:1–23; 6:20–35; 7:1–27) with four intervening interludes (1:20–33; 3:13–20; 6:1–19; 8:1–36), in addition to a prologue (1:1–7) and an epilogue (chap. 9). The lectures typically consist of three parts: the introduction, the body of the lecture, and some type of conclusion. The introduction usually begins with a formula expressed in the format of parental instructions. That is, the lecture is addressed to a child who is advised to listen to parental instruction (see 1:8–9; 3:1–2; 4:1–4; 6:20). This is followed by a statement of the benefits that heeding these instructions can bring. This may reflect parental instruction as the original setting of these sayings (see also 31:1). However, given the fact that the book of Proverbs is addressed to a wider audience (see 1:1–7), the imagery of parental instruction must be seen as a literary formula employed in the genre of didactic wisdom. This type of introductory formula also occurs elsewhere in the book of Proverbs (see 10:1; 23:19, 22).

1:1–7

Prologue

The title introduces the book and indicates that the following section is a compilation of proverbs written by Solomon, who was the son of David and king of Israel (1:2—9:18). Although the first seven verses of Proverbs function as a prologue to the first major section, they are also a fitting introduction to the entire book. These verses establish the book's purpose and audience.

The prologue clearly states the book's purposes: (a) To gain (lit. "know") wisdom and instruction means to obtain and apply principles of behavior that will regulate a disciplined life (1:2). (b) To perceive/understand words of understanding/insight means to separate or distinguish what is right from what is wrong in order to appropriate what is insightful or meaningful. Wisdom, discipline, and understanding are to be acquired for practical purposes. (c) To receive instruction regarding wisdom/prudent behavior means to live a life characterized by justice/righteousness (the preservation of proper relationships), integrity, and fairness (lit. what is "smooth," "straight," "free from any obstacle") and to do what is right/treat others justly (v. 3). (d) To give prudence to the simple means to enable them to avoid being misled (v. 4). Someone who is "simple" (Heb. *peti*) is naïve and, consequently, open to enticement. The Hebrew word is related to the verbal root *patah* ("to be gullible," "to be open to enticement," "to persuade," "to entice"; v. 10; Ex. 22:15; Judg. 14:15). In some contexts, the word "simple" has a neutral connotation, referring to one who is inexperienced and needs instruction in regard to what is prudent. Such a person could either learn wisdom or be enticed to sin (Prov. 1:4; 7:7; 9:4, 6, 16; 19:25; 21:11). In other contexts, "simple" has a negative connotation. The simple are contrasted with the prudent (14:15, 18; 22:3; 27:12) and compared to fools (1:22, 32; 8:5).

Young people need knowledge and discretion that will enable them to plan (i.e., to wisely decide their own course of action in life). But Proverbs addresses not only the simple and the young but also the wise, who can increase their knowledge (1:5). Wisdom is a way of life, but it is also a way of expressing ideas and teachings through proverbs, parables, and riddles (v. 6). Although the meaning of most wisdom sayings is clear and easy to understand, the fact that they are called "riddles" encourages the reader to go beyond a casual surface reading to carefully ponder their meaning. According to v. 7, the fear of the Lord is the foundation of true wisdom. Those who want to experience true knowledge and wisdom must "fear the LORD" (i.e., be in the right relationship with God). This "fear" does not mean being afraid of God but denotes an awe-inspired respect for and obedience to Him (see below, "Wisdom and the Fear of the Lord").

Wisdom and the Fear of the Lord

The expression "the fear of the LORD" occurs quite often in Proverbs and is usually connected to wisdom. In fact, it provides a proper starting point for the search for wisdom, making it indispensable to the wise. Therefore, it is important to have a clear understanding of the expression.

1. *Terminology.* The expression may employ the Hebrew noun *yir'ah* ("fear"; 1:7, 29; 2:5; 8:13; 9:10; 10:27; 14:26, 27; 15:16, 33; 16:6; 19:23; 22:4; 23:17), the adjective *yare'* ("fearing"; 14:2; 31:30), or the verb *yara'* ("to fear"; 3:7; 24:21), all from the same root. Though the basic meaning of this root is "to fear" in the sense of "to be afraid" (see Gen. 32:11; Deut. 2:25; 20:8), it can also express the idea of "respect" (e.g., toward parents; Lev. 19:3; cf. Prov. 13:13) or "reverence" (e.g., for God and His word; Lev. 26:2; Ps. 112:1). Further, the word "fear" can also refer to the "worship" of a deity (see 2 Kin. 17:32–34). There is also a sense in which the fear of the Lord includes trust in God (Prov. 3:5–8). In Proverbs, the fear of humans is contrasted with trust in the Lord (29:25). The book exhorts trusting in the Lord (3:5; 16:20; 28:25) and waiting for Him (20:22).

2. *Fear as Behavior.* What is perhaps more important is the fact that the expression "the fear of the LORD" highlights not an attitude or emotion but a type of behavior. The fear of the Lord is often synonymous with righteous living (see Job 1:1; Ps. 128:1; 2 Sam. 23:3). In Proverbs, it characterizes those who walk in uprightness (Prov. 14:2). The expression means to hate evil (8:13) and to depart from it (3:7; 16:6). The parallelism in Psalm 111:10 matches the fear of the Lord with obeying His commandments (see Ps. 111:7–9; see also Deut. 6:2; Eccl. 12:13). Notice also that the commandments are to be feared/respected as well (Prov. 13:13). Thus, in the context of Proverbs, the fear of the Lord includes an awe and reverence manifested in good behavior and implies a right relationship with God. It ultimately means walking according to God's will (i.e., keeping His commandments). A life lived according to God's will is the beginning of wisdom (1:7; 9:10).

3. *Fear and Wisdom.* The book of Proverbs highlights the relationship between the fear of the Lord and wisdom. The fear of the Lord is described as the beginning of wisdom (1:7; 9:10) and the instruction of wisdom (15:33). In 2:5 the expression parallels "the knowledge of God," and 2:6 explains that the Lord gives wisdom. In 1:29, the fear of the Lord is contrasted with hatred of knowledge. According to 28:5, it is those who seek the Lord who have understanding. Further, the fear of the Lord is described in terms of its benefits, which are similar to the benefits of wisdom. These include health (3:7–8), safety (14:26), riches, honor, and life (22:4). Of these, long life seems to be more prominent (10:27; 14:27; 19:23). Thus, the fear of God, which includes living according to His will, is the foundation that leads to true wisdom and its rewards. The sages presupposed that there was a God whose wisdom was manifested in the order of His creation, and that living according to His will would place them on the path of wisdom and life that would be in harmony with His creation.

1:8–19

First Didactic Speech: Avoid Evil Companions

The first didactic speech consists of a warning to avoid evil associates. Like most lectures in this part of the book, there is an introduction (1:8–9), the body of the lecture (vv. 10–16), and a conclusion, which here consists of an explanation of the admonition (vv. 17–19).

As is typical of the introductory formula, the lecture is addressed to "my son," who is encouraged to pay attention to parental instruction (v. 8). The benefit of following this parental instruction is compared to an elegant garland on the son's head and to a chain of honor, probably made out of gold, around his neck (v. 9). This metaphor emphasizes the beauty and value of wisdom.

Verses 10–11 introduce a long quotation (vv. 11–14). The first part (the "if" clause) in v. 10 is resumed in the second (the "then" clause), beginning in v. 15. The admonition may be summarized thus: if sinners invite you to join them in evildoing, do not join them. Although the warning involves an evil and violent gang that violates social order through violent robbery, the principle (i.e., resisting peer pressure) also applies to less extreme temptations to do what is evil. In v. 12, "Sheol" (the grave) is personified as swallowing those who enter it. Verse 16 is missing from some early translations, including some manuscripts of the Septuagint. However, it fits perfectly with the sentiment in the preceding verses. The conclusion of this lecture consists of an explanation of the admonition: the plans of those who do evil are futile because they result in their own destruction.

1:20–33

Interlude 1: The Call of Wisdom

In this interlude, wisdom is personified (which also occurs elsewhere in Proverbs; see 8:1–36; 9:1–6) as a messenger proclaiming her instruction to large audiences in the public areas of a city. Wisdom is anthropomorphically depicted as a prophetess delivering a message to the people. The implicit idea is that no one could claim that wisdom was inaccessible.

The message consists of two parts—an invitation/call and the announcement of judgment. The invitation calls to the simple/naïve to pay attention to the rebuke of Wisdom. If they would turn and listen, Wisdom would enlighten them with true knowledge. She would pour out her thoughts/spirit on them (1:22–23). The message of judgment is based on the fact that the simple reject wisdom. The judgment reflects the law of retribution: because the simple laugh at and mock Wisdom, Wisdom announces that when they face misfortune, she will laugh at and mock them (vv. 26–27). Verses 28–31 use the third person ("they") to address those who spurn Wisdom. The element of retribution is more visible in this case. When she called and sought them, they did not answer. So Wisdom announces that when they call on and seek her, she will not answer and they will not find her. They had the chance of gaining knowledge from her, but they hated true knowledge, defined here as fearing the Lord.

Living according to divine wisdom should constantly characterize the life of God's people. Wisdom is not something to access in times of trouble; in fact, wisdom will help avoid some misfortunes. The conclusion contrasts the fate of the simple and the righteous (vv. 32–33). The simple should understand that their present decisions determine their ultimate fate. The rejection of the Lord's counsel, given through divine wisdom, will result in the destruction of the wicked. The ultimate fate of those who listen to Wisdom (i.e., those who appropriate and live according to her instructions) will be a life under divine protection, free from the fear of calamities. In the context of the cosmic conflict, such promises now find partial fulfillment in the lives of God's people, but they anticipate a future when evil will never again touch them.

2:1–22

Second Didactic Speech: The Path of Wisdom

The instruction of this lecture consists of a call to seek wisdom and to learn to follow her path. It could be subdivided into two parts. The first is a call to seek wisdom (vv. 1–10), and the second describes deliverance from the enticements of the wicked (vv. 11–22). Each of these consists of smaller blocks of verses. The first part of the lecture consists of three stanzas. The first stanza contains three "if" clauses (vv. 1–4). The following two stanzas each begin with a "then" clause (vv. 5–8, 9–11). The second part of the lecture also consists of three stanzas (vv. 12–15, 16–19, 20–22), each beginning with the same preposition.

2:1–9. If You Seek Wisdom. The speaker is the teacher, and the addressee is, as usual, called "my son" (v. 1). The instruction is identified with that of Wisdom, indicating that Wisdom shares a deposit of instruction that can be the object of analysis—one may apply the heart (one's rational abilities) in seeking to understand it. The exhortation to listen to Wisdom takes up the rest of this first part of the poem.

Three "if" clauses suggest that the attainment of wisdom requires effort and discipline on the part of the seeker, including accepting/receiving instruction (v. 1), calling/crying out for it (v. 3), and seeking/looking for it (v. 4). But the ultimate purpose of such efforts is to gain a better understanding of the fear of the Lord, resulting in knowing Him better and developing a deeper relationship with Him (v. 5). Wisdom does not exist for her own sake but offers a deeper fellowship with the Lord. The source of wisdom is God Himself, indicating that wisdom, often personified in Proverbs, is one of His attributes. Therefore seeking wisdom is in fact seeking God. He has wisdom in abundance and is willing to give it to His children. Through this divine instruction, God keeps His people in the path/way of life characterized by justice and righteousness. Only in seeking God can His people come to understand how to relate both to Him and to others (v. 9).

2:10–22. Deliverance from the Wicked. This section describes the practical benefits received by those who embrace and appropriate God's wisdom. It is a pleasant experience that enables them to act according to their values and what they have found to be good (vv. 9–10). It prepares them to resist temptations to do evil (v. 11). The clauses regarding deliverance in vv. 12 and 16 express either purpose (i.e., wisdom preserves in order to deliver) or specification (i.e., wisdom preserves by delivering from certain kinds of people). This distinction is one of nuance, since the general substance of the passage remains the same. Three examples of deliverance are given. First, those who embrace Wisdom will not identify with those whose words entice others to do what is evil (v. 12). Second, they will not join those who abandon the way of life and choose the way of death/darkness, who find their joy not in wisdom but in crookedness (vv. 13–15). Third, they will not be trapped by the immoral/adulterous woman (vv. 16–19).

According to v. 17 the immoral/adulterous woman in this poem is a married woman who is willing to forsake the marriage covenant made before God. The word *'allup* ("companion," "partner") is not the regular word for "friend" but refers to someone very close (see 16:28; 17:9). Here the Hebrew expression *'allup ne'urim* ("companion of [one's] youth") is best understood as the masculine counterpart to the expression *'eshet ne'urim* ("wife of [one's] youth"; 5:18). The expression *'allup ne'urim* also occurs in Jeremiah 3:4, where it possibly means "husband." The motivation for following Wisdom and not the immoral woman is that the immoral woman's path leads to the dead (Prov. 2:18; the Hebrew term *repa'im* is a poetic term used to designate the dead; see Job 26:5; Is. 14:9). She promotes death while Wisdom promotes life.

Proverbs 2:20 begins with the Hebrew expression *lema'an* (see vv. 12, 16), which can express either purpose ("in order to") or consequence ("so that"). Hence, the message of the second part of the poem is that Wisdom will preserve those who follow her (v. 11), delivering them from wicked men (vv. 12–15) and wicked women (vv. 16–19) so they may walk in the right paths (v. 20). This parallels the end of the first section (v. 10). In Proverbs, as in many other places in the Bible, there are two ways/paths to walk on—the way of life or the way of death. Verses 21–22 contrast the results of walking on the two different paths: the righteous, who follow the way of life, are preserved by Wisdom and receive a promise of life. The wicked, who follow the way of death, have their lives come to an end. These verses conclude the second part of the lecture.

3:1–12

Third Didactic Speech: Trust in the Lord

This lecture contains the typical three parts: introduction (vv. 1–4), body (vv. 5–10), and conclusion (vv. 11–12). The message of these wisdom sayings is that God must be put first. This chapter contains three lectures about wisdom (vv. 1–10, 11–20, 21–35), each beginning with an appeal to the son.

3:1–4. Introduction. On the introductory formula, see remarks above on the organization of chapters 1–9. The word *torah* ("instruction," "teaching," "law") forms a fitting parallel with *mitsvot* ("commands"; 3:1). The structure of vv. 1–2 is very similar to that of vv. 3–4. The second-person negative command in v. 1 parallels the third-person negative wish in v. 3. Both are followed by affirmative commands and a statement of the results of heeding the injunctions. The concept of memory surfaces in the exhortation not to forget the father's instructions. They bring healing/wholeness and lengthen the lives of those who keep them in their hearts. When interacting with others, mercy and honesty are important (v. 3). Those who follow these instructions find grace in the eyes of God and others (v. 4).

3:5–12. Trust in the Lord. The lecture itself can be considered to begin in v. 5. A number of commands are given in vv. 5–10. Most are affirmative: God's people should trust in Him (v. 5), acknowledge and submit to Him (v. 6), fear Him, reject evil (v. 7), and honor Him with their abundance, including the firstfruits of their produce (v. 9). A couple of the commands are negative: God's people should not rely/lean on their own understanding (v. 5) or be wise in their own eyes (v. 7). Also, a few blessings are mentioned that result from heeding the commands (vv. 6b, 8, 10). In light of the parallelism, the various commands should be understood as related facets of a proper relationship with God. Hence, this wisdom saying expands the meaning of the phrase "the fear of the Lord," which occurs throughout the book. That is, to fear the Lord does not mean to be afraid of God but rather to trust, honor, and acknowledge Him in everything and to depart from evil. Likewise, though those who trust in the Lord feel confident and safe (cf. v. 23), as opposed to afraid (see 14:16; 29:25), they should also depart from evil and honor the Lord in His rightful claims to their possessions.

Proverbs 3:5–8 affirms the human need for divine guidance, suggesting that human wisdom is not enough to lead to ultimate success. This passage exhorts fully trusting in God, meaning acknowledging Him in all activities and decisions and living in humble submission to Him and His will. The implication is that there is something wrong with humanity and that a meaningful life is achieved only by fearing God in the sense of turning away from what is evil. The promise of v. 6 uses the Hebrew word *yashar,* which does not primarily mean "to guide" but rather "to make [the path] straight/smooth." Though "to make straight" one's own path can mean "to behave righteously" (see 9:15), to make another person's path straight means to remove obstacles and difficulties from the way (see Is. 40:3). However, since trusting in the Lord involves departing from evil (Prov. 3:7), the notion of straightening/smoothing out a path that leads to righteousness could be included. Trusting the Lord has a physical impact on the life of those who do so; there is a psychosomatic component in trusting Him. Trust will impact the physical body and the bones, considered in the Bible to be the seat of a person's inner life and emotions (v. 8).

It is not only the body and the bones of the wise but also their possessions that are blessed (vv. 9–10). This passage clarifies that God is honored by those who place their possessions at His service and give Him offerings from the best they have. Since it is good for God's people to honor Him, God promises to bless them in order for them to have enough to honor Him. Although the temple is not mentioned, it is obvious that the gifts were brought there.

Verses 11–12 change the topic to a degree, but they seem to function as a conclusion to this lecture. After the emphasis on God's blessings upon the wise in the previous verses, it is surprising to find the topic of suffering at the end of the lecture. Things do not always go well for God's children. In such cases it would be tempting to despise God, but the passage exhorts those who suffer to see in their painful experience the discipline of a loving Father, who is helping them grow in His wisdom.

3:13–20

Interlude 2: Praising Wisdom

This section consists of a poem that extols the value of wisdom, both to humans and to God. The poem can be subdivided into two parts: the value of wisdom to humans (vv. 13–18) and the value of wisdom to God (vv. 19–20).

3:13–18. The Value of Wisdom to Humans. The introductory formula of this interlude is clearly different from the way the other lectures in chapters 1–9 begin. The Hebrew expression *ashre* ("happy," "blessed") is a type of beatitude (i.e., "blessed is..."). Here it emphasizes the value of wisdom by calling attention to how fortunate are those who obtain it. The enjoyment of life is directly related to the possession of God's wisdom. The benefits received from wisdom far exceed those from material valuables, such as silver, gold, and pearls (3:14–15). Searching for and finding wisdom is more rewarding than working hard to obtain material wealth. The passage proceeds to list some of the benefits of wisdom (vv. 16–18): it frees from premature death and provides true wealth and wholeness of life. The reference to the tree of life recalls the Creation narrative (Gen. 2:9). Access to the tree of life is possible now by following divine wisdom. The direct connection between wisdom and life runs throughout Proverbs as one of its unifying themes. This part of the poem ends with a Hebrew verb that comes from the same root as the first word of the poem, *'ashar* ("to be blessed/happy/fortunate"; Prov. 3:18).

3:19–20. The Value of Wisdom to God. These verses connect wisdom to God's activity in Creation and make it clear that it was God who created everything by/in wisdom. Creation is not the result of natural, irrational forces but the outworking of the divine mind configuring all of it. To speak of God "using" wisdom in Creation does not imply that wisdom is some entity that could exist without a wise God. Rather, saying that God employed wisdom in Creation is a figure of speech that is equivalent to saying that God created the world in His wisdom. Hence, the Creation reveals the wisdom of God. Verse 20 is probably a reference to Genesis 1:9 and 2:6.

3:21–35

Fourth Didactic Speech: How Not to Treat Others

This section consists of an introduction (vv. 21–26), a body (vv. 27–31), and a conclusion (vv. 32–35). The message of this wisdom saying, to deal honestly and fairly with others, is given in the form of a series of negative commands.

3:21–26. Introduction. Some consider this section to be a continuation of vv. 13–20. The reason for the uncertainty is that in Hebrew the first line has only a verb without its object. To fit English usage, some translations insert "them" or reiterate "wisdom and understanding" from v. 13. Other translations resolve the problem by reversing the lines. But it is more likely that the second line of the proverb contains the objects of the verb: sound wisdom/judgment and discretion. The Hebrew word *tushiyyah* ("sound wisdom/judgment") points to practical wisdom/ability, hence to "competence." The word *mezimmar* refers to private thoughts that people keep to themselves and could mean "discretion." These qualities are indispensable for proper social interaction. Those who keep their eyes fixed on them will enjoy a favorable, safe, and long journey in life (vv. 22–23). Notice that such virtues do not themselves create safety, protection, and inner peace (vv. 24–25). It is the Lord who does that for those who keep their eyes fixed on wisdom (v. 26).

3:27–35. Message of the Lecture. The didactic speech itself (vv. 27–31) consists of five prohibitions that, when rephrased in positive terms, exhort giving what is good (payment for work, property, etc.) to those to whom it is due (v. 27); promptly giving neighbors what belongs to them (v. 28); planning to do only good to neighbors, knowing their services may be needed in the future (v. 29); going to court only with a just case (v. 30); caring for the well-being of others; and promoting peace (v. 31). The conclusion is that those who defy the prohibitions are an abomination/repulsive to God (v. 32). Verses 32–35 contain a series of four antitheses, which convey the message that God blesses the upright and curses the unjust. This provides good reasons for avoiding the evil actions forbidden in vv. 27–31.

4:1–9

Fifth Didactic Speech: Seek Wisdom

This lecture is slightly different from the others. It has only two parts, the introduction (vv. 1–2) and the body of the lecture (vv. 3–9). A father recalls his own father's advice and repeats it to his son. The message itself can be summarized as an exhortation to get wisdom.

As in the typical introductory formula, vv. 1–2 address children, urge them to heed parental instruction, and explain the benefit of heeding the instruction (see remarks above on the organization of chaps. 1–9). However, though most of the previous exhortations are addressed to a "son," this one is addressed to "children" or "sons." The benefit of heeding instruction is simply that the instruction is *tob* ("good," "sound," "correct"). It corresponds to God's good will for all. The body of this exhortation (4:3–9) contains the words of a grandfather and is almost autobiographical (vv. 3–4). His father instructed him to take his instruction seriously because it directly related to the quality of his life (v. 3). The exhortations are about getting/acquiring the most important thing in life, namely, wisdom and understanding (vv. 5, 7). Verse 7 is ambiguous. The Hebrew word *re'shit* connotes "beginning" (cf. Gen. 1:1), but it can also be translated as "principal" or "foremost." Thus the verse can be translated as "The beginning of wisdom is this: get wisdom" or "Wisdom is the principal/supreme thing: therefore acquire wisdom." Wisdom is described as a wife who is not to be forsaken but loved (Prov. 4:6) and highly valued (v. 8; *salal*, "raise," "lift up," "exalt," "praise"). Wisdom will also honor and exalt those who embrace her (vv. 8–9).

4:10–19

Sixth Didactic Speech: The Two Paths

This section advises choosing the path of wisdom rather than the path of wickedness. It may be outlined as an introduction (v. 10), a body (vv. 11–17), and a conclusion (vv. 18–19). The introduction follows the typical introductory formula (see remarks above on the organization of chaps. 1–9): a son is urged to listen to and take firm hold of parental instruction (equated with wisdom; 4:10, 13) and promised that this will result in a long and stable life, a key theme in Proverbs (vv. 11–12). The passage exhorts staying/turning away from the way/lifestyle of the wicked (vv. 14–15), whose whole life, day and night, is characterized by their obsession with doing evil. Their actions reveal what nurtures them (vv. 16–17). The passage closes with a description of the ultimate fates of the righteous and the wicked. There are some eschatological overtones in the description of the path of the righteous (v. 18). In contrast, the way of the wicked is described as darkness, suggesting that is a way of ignorance or foolishness (v. 19).

4:20–27

Seventh Didactic Speech: Guard Your Heart

An interesting feature of this group of Proverbs is the figurative reference to various parts of the body, namely, the ear (v. 20), eyes (v. 21), heart (vv. 21, 23), flesh/body (v. 22), mouth (v. 24), lips (v. 24), and feet (vv. 26–27); wisdom impacts the whole person. In addition to the typical introductory call for the son to listen to his father's advice, these verses add the command to keep his words before his eyes and in his heart (v. 21). These same two body parts are used again in reverse order in the body and at the end the passage (the heart in v. 23 and the eyes in v. 25).

Since, in the biblical understanding, the heart is the seat of thinking and intentions, to keep/guard one's heart means to guard one's thoughts and will (v. 23). The Hebrew word *tots'ot* ("springs," "issues," "flows"; v. 23) refers to the place from which something or someone goes out (e.g., city exits or border limits; see Ezek. 48:30). What comes from the heart or mind is that which guides the course of life's river, as it were. In other words, the heart must be guarded because that is where life begins its journey. The thoughts of the mind determine how a person lives. The admonition to guard the heart is followed by advice against deceptive speech (Prov. 4:24). Jesus also noted the relationship between the heart and the mouth when He stated that the mouth speaks out of the abundance of the heart (Matt. 12:34).

In a sense, Proverbs 4:25–27 are part of the admonition that began in v. 23. However, these verses give less explicit counsel on the evils to be avoided. Instead, they admonish walking on the right path without swerving to the right or the left (v. 27) and staying focused on what is most important in life—divine wisdom—without being distracted by what is on the side of the path (see Heb. 12:2).

5:1–23

Eighth Didactic Speech: Warning against Infidelity

This speech is the first of three that deal with infidelity. An interesting feature of this lecture is that vv. 15–20 forms the only passage in Proverbs that celebrates marital sex. It contrasts marital sex with sex outside of marriage, endorsing the former and disapproving the latter. The introductory formula is typical, urging a son to heed advice (v. 1), followed by a statement of the benefit (v. 2). The passage exhorts preserving/maintaining discretion (i.e., behaving with discretion). The word "lips" here refers not to the physical lips but to the act of speaking. Hence, the idea that the lips will guard/preserve knowledge means that those who accept wisdom will speak knowledge, just as the priest keeps/guards knowledge in the sense that he speaks it when teaching (Mal. 2:7). The word "lips" also serves as a transition since it occurs again in Proverbs 5:3, which begins the main body of the speech.

The speech can be subdivided into three parts. Verses 3–6 state the deadliness of the immoral woman. Like the sweetness of honey and the pleasantness of oil, she appeals to the sensory dimensions of men (v. 3), but what she really offers is bitterness and death (vv. 4–5); she is deceptive (v. 6). The passage exhorts young men to keep their distance from her. Otherwise their lives would be ruined (vv. 7–14). In the end, those who listen to the words of this woman will be left with nothing of value in the midst of remorse. The metaphor of a fountain of water involves an exhortation to enjoy marital life instead of joining the immoral woman (vv. 15–20). The wife is like a cistern, and she provides streams of water to the husband. The couple is also compared to a doe and a deer in beauty and strength (v. 19). They are encouraged to sexually enjoy each other. In v. 18, "the wife of your youth" may mean either "the wife you married when you were young" or "your youthful wife." Since marital sex is such a beautiful and enjoyable relation, going to the immoral/wayward woman is foolishness/irrational (v. 20). The passage concludes by stating that the Lord is the Judge and wickedness will be punished by the outworking of the sinner's own actions (i.e., the wicked will be ensnared and held in the cords of their own sins, vv. 21–23).

6:1–19

Interlude 3: Various Topics

Although this interlude begins with the words "my son" (v. 1), it does not contain all the elements of the typical introductory formula of other speeches in Proverbs. This interlude consists of three or four wisdom sayings placed together because of related topics or themes.

6:1–5. Loans. The book of Proverbs counsels against guaranteeing someone else's loan (see 11:15; 22:26–27). This passage gives instructions on what those who have already made that mistake with a friend or a stranger should do (6:1). Some have suggested that the loan is not given to aid the needy but is a business transaction for a fee or for profit. However, the passage does not give such details. The Hebrew verb *taqa'* literally means "to clap" or "to strike" but is sometimes translated idiomatically, in terms of Western culture, as "shake hands." Contextually it refers to sealing an agreement in order to guarantee someone a loan (see also 17:18; 22:26). Verses 3–5 advise those caught in such an agreement to humble themselves before the lender and ask for mercy. Though Proverbs is against loan guarantees, it also encourages generosity in giving to the needy (22:9; 31:20).

6:6–11. Laziness. This wisdom saying draws a lesson from the diligence of the ant (vv. 6–8) and is used to rebuke the lazy (vv. 9–11). This saying resembles 24:30–34. In fact, 24:33–34 repeats 6:10–11. Although the saying in vv. 6–11 is separate from that of vv. 1–5, it is possible that they are placed next to each other because both sayings call for diligence. The counsel to the loan guarantor not to sleep (v. 4) parallels the warning against the sleep of the lazy (v. 10). Notice that wisdom is acquired by observing the natural world, learning from it, and then applying to life the lessons drawn from the acquired knowledge.

6:12–15. The Worthless Person. Proverbs refers to wisdom as acquired by observing human behavior. These verses describe a person who is *beliyya'al* ("worthless," "useless"), a word usually applied to those with some type of serious character defect (see 1 Sam. 1:16; 2:12; 25:25). It often, though not always, refers to the wicked (see Judg. 20:13; Job 34:18). Proverbs 6:12–14 describes the gestures the worthless make with different parts of their bodies. Though the cultural significance of the gestures is not fully understood in each case, the mention of the various body parts (the mouth, eyes, feet, fingers, and heart) seems to imply that the whole person is involved in wickedness. The collapse of the wicked will arrive unexpectantly and without a remedy (v. 15; *marfe'*, "remedy," "healing"; cf. 1 Thess. 5:3).

6:16–19. What the Lord Hates. The formula "six things...seven" (v. 16) is called a numerical saying. Sometimes the climax of a numerical sequence comes at the end. For a discussion of this formula, see commentary on 30:10–33. The list of body parts in 6:17–18 is similar, though not identical, to the list in vv. 12–14. This leads some to interpret vv. 12–19 as a single saying. Alternatively, however, these lists of body parts may simply be the reason why these two sayings are placed next to each other. Verse 19 departs from the list of body parts. The common element in the list is that God hates all these personal traits of the wicked; He even abominates/abhors them. The list is about personal traits or ethical behavior that upset the social order established by the Lord. If the climax of this numerical sequence is the last item, then the focus of this wisdom saying is on those who stir up conflict and discord in a family or community. This is similar to the expression about conflict and discord created by those who are disruptive (v. 14).

If vv. 12–19 are viewed as one wisdom saying, then sowing discord can be interpreted as the chief characteristic of the worthless. However, if vv. 12–15 and vv. 16–19 are seen as separate wisdom sayings, then the first saying is simply a depiction of various actions of the worthless and their final fate, whereas the second saying focuses on how the spreading of discord is abominable to the Lord.

6:20–35

Ninth Didactic Speech: The Consequences of Adultery

Although the speeches found in 5:1–23 and 6:20–35 are independent wisdom sayings separated by the interlude in vv. 1–19, they share the common topic of infidelity. Whereas the previous passage contrasted marital relations with extramarital relations, this time the focus is on the consequences of adultery. This lecture consists of an introduction (vv. 20–24), a body (vv. 25–29), and a conclusion (vv. 30–35).

6:20–24. Introduction. As in the typical introductory formula of lectures, the addressee is "my son." The exhortation to accept parental instruction (vv. 20–21) is followed by a statement of the benefits of receiving it, which in this case involves wisdom's guidance in life (vv. 22–23). The words for "command," "law"/"teaching"/"instruction," and "bind" (vv. 20–21), as well as the references to traveling (Heb. *halak*, "walking," "roaming") and sleeping (v. 22), echo the instruction in Deuteronomy 6:4–9 concerning God's commandments. The light of divine instruction protects the wise from stumbling and falling from the way of life. Proverbs 6:24 can be considered either part of the introduction or the body. The term *ishah ra'* in this verse is unusual in Hebrew and has been understood as a "married [adulterous] woman," "woman of evil," or "woman/wife of a neighbor." The latter is the expression used in v. 29.

6:25–35. Avoid Adultery. This passage admonishes the "son" to neither nurture sexual thoughts about a seductress in his heart/mind nor allow himself to be allured by her (v. 25). Immoral behavior has a financial impact on anyone who pays for sexual favors (v. 26). Those who sexually engage another's spouse will unquestionably reap the consequences of their action (vv. 27–29). The Hebrew of v. 26 is difficult to translate. The expression *be'ad* can be translated as "by means of," "through," or "on account of." Some translations add "a man is reduced to" in order to make sense of the Hebrew sentence. Others have suggested translating the sentence as "the price of a harlot is as much as a loaf of bread," but this is uncertain. Either way, here is a comparison between going to a prostitute and committing adultery. Following the first translation means that going to a prostitute brings poverty but adultery results in death. Following the second means that going to a prostitute costs a loaf of bread but adultery costs one's life.

In terms of application, it is important to keep in mind the context of this wisdom saying. The ancient world considered adultery a more serious crime than prostitution. But the book of Proverbs (and the rest of the Bible, for that matter) never condones prostitution (23:27; 29:3). In this particular case, it simply points out that the results of adultery are more serious than the results of prostitution. The fundamental teaching is that sexual immorality in any form has serious consequences. Proverbs 6:30–33 compares adultery with stealing food. In contrast to stealing, which can be resolved, adultery does not arouse any sympathy in the eyes of others. Consequently, the honor of the adulterer will be permanently damaged. According to the passage, the ultimate reason for not committing adultery is that the husband will take vengeance against the adulterer (vv. 34–35). The grounds for the exhortation are based on an observation and an analysis of the social consequences of adultery. Nothing is said about the commandment against adultery, but reasons are provided to support its value in preserving social harmony.

7:1–27

Tenth Didactic Speech: Warning against the Adulteress

This instruction continues the series on infidelity. The three lectures are independent sayings placed in sequence because of their common theme. This one again contains an introduction (vv. 1–5), a body (vv. 6–23), and a conclusion (vv. 24–27). The body of the lecture is a narrative of a first-person observation, similar to 24:30–34. The warnings of this and similar wisdom sayings are addressed to a son. Therefore, it is important not to read too much into the fact that they picture the woman as the temptress. In terms of application, the roles could just as easily be reversed. The warning against infidelity applies equally to both genders.

7:1–5. Introduction. As in the preceding lecture, expressions such as "words" (v. 1), "commands" (vv. 1–2), *torah* ("law," "teachings," "instruction"; v. 2), "bind," "write," and "tablet of your heart" (v. 3) echo instructions elsewhere concerning God's commandments. In addition to the typical lecture introduction, the "son" is also exhorted to choose wisdom in order to be kept from the seductress. Whereas chapter 5 pictures marital relations as the alternative to infidelity, 7:4–5 pictures the woman called "Wisdom" as the alternative to the seductress.

7:6–27. An Illustration. The wise observe human behavior and its consequences. Here the author of this passage first tells what he saw: a young man who was simple, who lacked wisdom and was unable to distinguish right from wrong, walking on the street where the harlot met her clients as the sun was setting and darkness was approaching (vv. 6–9). Then the author describes the woman's attire (perhaps referring to a particular type of veil; cf. Gen. 38:14) and demeanor, which was similar to that of a wild beast seeking its prey. Once she found the young man, she attached herself to him through a kiss, a foretaste of what she would offer him (Prov. 7:10–13). The author also reports her seductive speech (vv. 14–20). She tells the young man that he should not worry about becoming ritually impure because she had offered a peace offering in fulfillment of a vow (see Lev. 3:1–17; 7:11–21), implying that she was ritually pure. Her luxurious home indicates that she was a wealthy woman, an observation confirmed by the fact that her husband was a merchant. Even though she was dressed like a harlot, she was not a prostitute but a married woman seeking an affair. She told the young man not to worry about her husband because he was away on a business trip. Finally, the wise author reports the conduct of the simple young man. Unable to resist the seductive speech of the woman, he was led by her, like a dumb animal, to the slaughter (Prov. 7:21–23).

The author observed and analyzed human behavior and finally used it to exhort his children (vv. 24–27). He depicts those who tempt others to commit adultery as murderers to emphasize the serious risks to those who succumb. An adulterer's house is indeed the gate to Sheol/the tomb.

8:1–36

Interlude 4: Wisdom's Offer

Chapter 8 seems to be an interlude consisting of an extended call to gain wisdom. It is also a poem exalting wisdom. As in the first interlude (1:20–33), wisdom is here personified and depicted as calling out. The passage can be outlined as follows: the setting (8:1–3), Wisdom's introductory call (vv. 4–11), Wisdom's self-description (vv. 12–21), Wisdom's origin (vv. 22–31), and the conclusion (vv. 32–36).

8:1–21. Setting, Call, and Wisdom. This interlude begins with a rhetorical question by an anonymous speaker. As in 1:20–21, Wisdom's words are here preceded and introduced by a description of Wisdom calling. Though Wisdom's words here are not addressed to a son, they are similar to other introductions in that, like the prophets, she appeals to her audience to listen to her words (8:4–6) because they are truthful, righteous, and easy to comprehend (vv. 7–9). Verses 10–11 repeat the same structure: wisdom again urges people to receive her teaching and not place their trust in financial security because the value of her teaching is incomparable (v. 10).

In this passage, Wisdom describes her attributes and virtues (vv. 12–14), states her value to kings and rulers (vv. 15–16), and indicates the benefits/rewards for those who love her (vv. 17–21). In v. 12, Wisdom, prudence, knowledge, and discretion comprise four personified virtues. In contrast, v. 13 lists four vices that characterize the way of the wicked: pride, arrogance, evil, and perversity. Then v. 14 again lists four virtues that Wisdom possesses: counsel, sound wisdom/judgment, understanding/insight, and strength/power.

The activity of Wisdom in the latter part of v. 12 has been translated variously to mean that Wisdom finds out knowledge and discretion, Wisdom has found/possesses them, or Wisdom shows the way for people to find them. In any case, Wisdom is personified here and, hence, is portrayed in human terms (i.e., anthropomorphically). Human beings are not naturally endowed with wisdom or knowledge but must find them through the process of learning. Wisdom will show the way. Some regard the first poetic line in v. 13, which equates fearing the Lord with hating evil, as a later addition because it disrupts the meter of the poem and could have been influenced by similar statements in Proverbs and elsewhere (cf. 3:7; 16:6; Job 28:28). That is, whereas most verses contain two lines (i.e., two parallel statements), Proverbs 8:13 contains three, and this line seems to break the continuity of Wisdom's words. Nevertheless, the line is part of the final form of the Hebrew text and fits the general message of the book of Proverbs. The poetic lines in vv. 15–16 are addressed to kings, princes, and judges, but they apply to all leaders. Wisdom is indispensable to those who lead if they are going to do it well.

8:22–36. Wisdom's Origin. These verses could be described as a history of Wisdom. They can be divided topically into Wisdom before Creation (vv. 22–26) and Wisdom during Creation (vv. 27–31). Whereas the previous part of the poem began with Wisdom (v. 12), this part begins with the Lord (v. 22) and ends with a reference to humanity (v. 31). This part of the poem ends with an almost personal touch. The word *sha'ashu'im* ("delight") occurs twice. Verse 30 portrays Wisdom as the Creator's delight, and v. 31 portrays humankind as Wisdom's delight.

The statement regarding the Lord's relationship to Wisdom (v. 22) has been variously interpreted. The Hebrew verb used is *qanah*, the basic meaning of which is "to acquire." However, the specific translation depends on whether God acquired Wisdom already in existence or whether God acquired her by bringing her into existence. The first would best be translated as "to get," "to possess," or even "to purchase" (see 17:16), and the latter as "to beget," "to create." Some have suggested that these are actually two different words with identical spelling in Hebrew (i.e., homographs), but the evidence seems to support the view that these are simply two different shades of meaning of the same word. Since the context describes the beginning of Wisdom (i.e., when it was born or brought forth; 8:24–25), the translation "created" is a possibility. In this case God did not acquire an already existing entity called "Wisdom," but He created it. On the other hand, there was never a time that God was not in possession of Wisdom. It has also been suggested that the word in this context means "to beget" (which is probably the meaning in Gen. 4:1) because the language of conception and birth is used. The idea is that Wisdom came from God. But the main point of the passage is that Wisdom came into existence before the Creation of the world (Prov. 8:22–26; see below, "Proverbs 8:22 and Christ"). In vv. 32–36, Wisdom repeats her invitation. The addressees are "my children" (lit. "my sons"). There are two calls to listen to Wisdom accompanied by two statements of the blessing to be received (vv. 32–35). This is followed by a statement contrasting benefits for those who receive Wisdom with the consequences for those who reject her.

Proverbs 8:22 and Christ

In the early centuries of Christianity, there were some Christians who believed that the Son of God was not eternal but had a beginning. The most prominent among them, though certainly not the originator of this idea, was the church father Arius (A.D. 256–336), and the doctrinal debate over the Trinity came to be known as the Arian controversy. Arian Christians cited Proverbs 8, especially v. 22, as evidence that Christ had a beginning and, therefore, was not eternal. Their interpretation was based on the parallel between wisdom and Christ both existing before Creation and having a part in it (cf. John 1:1–3).

1. *Wisdom as a Divine Attribute.* Some scholars have viewed this passage as being directly related to Christ and His installation (cf. the birth language of Ps. 2) as Creator and eventual Mediator (due to God's foreknowledge of sin). Others have viewed the passage as being primarily related to the preeminence of Wisdom over Creation as a personified attribute of God, related to Christ only by a secondary typological application (see below).

The NT stresses the religious significance of wisdom by referring to Christ as God's Wisdom. Paul says, "Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 1:24). While in the OT divine wisdom was to some extent accessible through the created world, the NT presents God's wisdom as being revealed in the person and work of Christ. In Him "are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3). He in Himself is the Wisdom of God. In this case Wisdom is not a personified divine attribute but God Himself in human flesh. This wonderful Wisdom was God's hidden Wisdom, which was ordained for our glory before time began (1 Cor. 2:7). By becoming flesh, He brought life to repentant sinners. Such individuals are in Christ Jesus, who has become Wisdom from God for us—our Righteousness, Holiness, and Redemption (1 Cor. 1:30). We appropriate that Wisdom of God in submission to Him—in the fear of the Lord.

2. *Wisdom as a Type.* The personified attribute of God's wisdom in the OT seems to point, almost like a prophetic type, to the incarnated Wisdom of God in the person of His eternal Son. Without Him it is impossible to acquire true salvific wisdom. The most glorious revelation of God's wisdom is now located in the incarnation, death, resurrection, and mediation of our Lord. The revelation of divine wisdom is now uniquely present in a Person and not only in the objects of the natural world. Proverbs 8:22 should not be cited to support the notion that Christ had a beginning. Instead, both the Father and the Son claim, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End" (Rev. 21:6; see also 1:8; 22:13). And the NT teaches that both the Father and the Son are eternal.

9:1–18

Epilogue: Two Banquets

Chapter 9 is the last wisdom saying in the first major section of the book. It is possible that the poem is placed here not as an epilogue but simply because the interlude that immediately precedes it (chap. 8) contains an invitation by wisdom. Nevertheless, the contrasting invitations of Wisdom and Folly in chapter 9 make it a fitting climax to the section. It seems, therefore, just as likely that the placement of chapter 8 would have been influenced by chapter 9 as the other way around. The epilogue may be outlined in three parts: the invitation of Wisdom (vv. 1–6), the scoffers and the wise (vv. 7–12), and the invitation of Folly (vv. 13–18). The message of these contrasting invitations is a call to choose a way of life.

9:1–6. Wisdom's Invitation. These verses consist of the invitation/call of Wisdom. Wisdom is described as having built her house (v. 1), prepared her banquet (v. 2), and sent out the invitation (v. 3). Verses 4–6 contain her words of invitation. The seven pillars/columns (v. 1) suggest a large building. Some of the houses of rich families in ancient Israel did indeed have columns facing a courtyard; some even had seven columns. The number seven conveys the notion of completeness. Thus, both the columns and the number seven convey a picture of the greatness of the house. The size of the house shows how much Wisdom has to offer. Accepting the invitation and partaking of her food and drink (wine mixed with water) in her house means learning wisdom—and there is enough to last a lifetime.

9:7–12. The Scoffers and the Wise. Some scholars suggest that these verses constitute a later insertion because they seem out of place. But it should suffice to say that, in their present context, these verses offer a contrast between those who accept Wisdom's invitation (the wise) and those who accept Folly's invitation (the scoffers). Verses 7–9 discourage correcting scoffers because nothing good could come out of it but encourage correcting the wise because they will respond positively. Verse 10 repeats a common theme in Proverbs, the fear of the Lord.

In v. 11 Wisdom seems to refer to herself again in the first person, promising long life to those who possess and follow her. Verse 12 returns to the topic of vv. 7–9 and contrasts the wise with scoffers. The point is that they must bear the consequences of their own response to Wisdom.

9:13–18. Folly's Invitation. Folly is personified as a foolish woman. Like Wisdom, Folly is pictured as giving a loud invitation (vv. 13–15). There is, however, no description of her building a house or preparing her banquet. Verses 16–17 contain the words of her invitation to the simple/naïve, the same group that is addressed by Wisdom (v. 4). Interestingly, Folly herself is described as simple (v. 13). Although the stolen water in v. 17 may be an allusion to illicit sexual enjoyment (see 5:15–20), the imagery of stolen drink and secret food probably applies to all illicit activities (see 1:10–14). The words *lekhem setarim* ("bread of secrecy") can mean either that the bread was secretly obtained or that it was eaten secretly. The words in 9:18 are not Folly's words but state that death is the result of following Folly. Proverbs offers only two options: following Madam Wisdom or Madam Folly. The choice is a matter of life or death.

10:1—22:16

PROVERBS OF SOLOMON

This section contains wisdom sayings that are short and less closely connected. Some sayings are placed next to each other not because they address the same topic but because a word occurs in both sayings (see 22:5–6). Therefore, these proverbs are harder to group, and it is not always possible to discern thematic subsections. There is no overarching theme running through the entire section. Each proverb generally provides its own context, and the proverbs occurring before and after are not necessarily related to it. Hence, each wisdom saying in this section is a separate saying and should generally be individually interpreted.

Nevertheless, this section can be roughly divided into two major subdivisions, though neither the twofold division nor the exact boundary between the subsections is precise. The subdivision in 10:2—15:33 contains more antitheses and sayings about the righteous and the wicked than 16:1—22:16, which in turn has a greater variety in terms of structure and topics. Although the sayings in this section cannot be thematically organized, there are a few clusters of sayings where some themes are prominent. Yet, even within those clusters, there are sayings that are not related to their prominent themes. Since most of the individual sayings in chapters 10–22 are clear and easy to understand, the ensuing discussion will not comment on every proverb but will focus on words or expressions that require clarification or whose relevance needs to be highlighted.

10:1—15:33

Introduction and First Subdivision

Proverbs 10:1 introduces the section and includes a title and an introduction. The first part of the verse consists of the title or heading of the section. The section is a collection of different proverbs of Solomon. He may have intended them for his children, but they speak to a wider audience as well.

Although there is no overarching theme in either the first or second subdivision of this section, chapters 10–15 contain a significant number of wisdom sayings about the righteous. They also consist mostly of antitheses, with only a few exceptions (see 11:29–30; 12:14; 13:14, 19; 14:7, 13, 26–27; 15:3, 10–12, 30–31). Further, many of the sayings in this section are chiastic in structure. It is worth noting that the righteous/upright are contrasted not only with the wicked but occasionally with fools (10:21), those who trust in riches (11:28), and the lazy (15:19). Also, the wicked seem to be contrasted with those who fear the Lord (10:27). Hence, there is a sense in which righteousness is equivalent to wisdom and all its good attributes (including the fear of the Lord), whereas wickedness is equivalent to folly and all its bad attributes. Chapters 10–15 most clearly bring out that wisdom entails righteousness. To be wise means to be righteous, and it is impossible to be wise without living righteously.

10:2—11:31. The Righteous and the Wicked. Although the whole subdivision (chaps. 10–15) contains many sayings about the righteous and the wicked, chapters 10–11 contain the densest group of such sayings (10:2–3, 6–7, 9–11, 16–21, 23–25, 27–32; 11:1, 3–11, 18–21, 23, 28–31). A number of sayings focus on the speech of the righteous or the wicked (see 10:6, 11; 11:9). A few of the sayings that do not explicitly mention the righteous or the wicked also focus on speech (see 10:8, 10, 13–14; 11:13).

The wording of many wisdom sayings allows them to be classified under more than one topic, and a few sayings are clustered together by common themes. The result is an interweaving of many themes. In addition to clusters of sayings whose main common topic is the contrast between the righteous and the wicked (as noted already), this group of sayings also contains single proverbs and clusters of proverbs that deal with wealth and righteousness (10:2–3), diligence and laziness (vv. 4–5, 26), speech (vv. 6, 8, 10–14, 18–21; 11:9, 13), the wise and fools (10:8, 13–14; 11:12), hatred and love (10:12), the rich and the poor (vv. 15, 22), pride and humility (11:2), the talebearer or gossip (v. 13), counsel and guidance (v. 14), being a surety/security (v. 15), honor and riches (v. 16), mercy and cruelty (v. 17), the beautiful and unwise woman (v. 22), generosity (vv. 24–26), and seeking good and evil (v. 27).

In a few instances, verses are placed next to each other not because they share the same topic but because they both contain the same word. For example, both 10:6 and 7 contain the Hebrew word *berakah* ("blessing"), while both vv. 11 and 12 contain the verb "to cover." Since the meaning of most wisdom sayings in these verses is clear, only a few isolated verses deserve further comment. That the rich find safety in their wealth but poverty brings ruin to the poor should be understood as descriptive rather than prescriptive (v. 15). That is, it is not advice, but simply an observation. In the second part of 11:7, some translations follow the Septuagint, which uses the Greek word *asebōn* ("ungodly"). The Hebrew text has the word *'onim* ("wealth," "riches"). The meanings are similar: hope based on wealth will perish, and the hopes of the ungodly will also perish.

In 11:21, the expression *yad leyad* (lit. "hand in hand"), a Hebrew expression that could mean "be assured" or "certainly," is sometimes translated as referring to the wicked "joining forces" (i.e., joining hands; see 16:5). Hence, 11:21 states the certainty of the rewards of the wicked and the righteous. Verse 30 also deserves some comment. The meaning of its first part is clear (i.e., righteousness results in a long life). The beautiful metaphor does not refer to the fruit of the tree but states that the tree is the fruit. However, the meaning of its second part is not as clear. Some translations render *loqeakh nepshot* as "he who wins souls." Some have associated this verse with the modern expression that refers to evangelism or the proclamation of the gospel. But the Hebrew word *nepesh* can mean "life" rather than "soul." In fact, the Hebrew verb *laqakh* ("to take"), coupled with *nepesh* ("soul," "life"), normally means "to kill" or "to take life" (see 1:19; Ezek. 33:6; Jon. 4:3). In Proverbs 11:30, however, it could be that the Hebrew verb *laqakh* is being used in a positive sense. That is, just as righteousness results in a long life, so the wisdom of the wise, if listened to, gathers/saves life, both that of the wise themselves and of others (see 13:14 for a proverb with a similar message).

12:1—15:33. Miscellaneous Sayings. In addition to clusters of sayings whose common topic is primarily the contrast between the righteous and the wicked (12:5–7, 12–13; 13:5–6; 15:28–29), there are verses and clusters of verses that address topics such as wisdom and folly (see 12:1, 15–16; 13:1, 13–16; 14:1, 6–8; 15:5, 7), diligence and laziness (see 12:11, 24, 27; 13:4; 15:19), wise speech (see 12:14, 17–20, 25; 13:2–3; 15:1–2, 4, 23), wealth and poverty (see 13:7–8, 22–23; 14:20–21, 31), pride (see 13:10), the discipline of children (see v. 24), the fear of the Lord (14:26–27; 15:25–26, 29), strife (vv. 16–18), and the need for counsel/guidance (see v. 22).

Child Discipline in Proverbs

Some passages in Proverbs deserve to be briefly discussed because they have been understood as commanding corporal punishment. For example, 13:24 says that parents who spare the rod hate their children but those who discipline them demonstrate their love for them. Most of these passages use the word "rod" (Heb. *shebet*; 10:13; 13:24; 22:8, 15; 23:13–14; 26:3; 29:15). There are other passages that do not use the word rod but that may also refer to corporal punishment (see 19:18).

1. Contextual Considerations. Such passages must be read in the larger context of Proverbs and of the ancient Near East in general, where the use of corporal punishment was not only a parenting technique but a general form of punishment. For example, Proverbs also mentions corporal punishment applied to adults (see 10:13; 17:26; 19:29; 20:30; 26:3), which, incidentally, was sometimes administered with anger (22:8). In fact, corporal punishment was also applied to slaves even in NT times (see Luke 12:47–48). Though it may have been acceptable to beat or whip an adult wrongdoer in the ancient Near East, that does not justify continuing such a practice today (slavery was also common in the ancient Near East). Thus, a proper contextual application of passages concerning the rod teaches the need for age-appropriate discipline but does not prescribe the specific form of discipline.

2. Hebrew Terminology for Discipline. It is instructive to understand some of the Hebrew words used in combination with the rod. One of these is the word *musar* ("instruction"), which occurs thirty times in the book (see 1:8; 3:11; 13:1, 24; 15:5, 33; 19:20, 27; 22:15; 23:12–14; 24:32). This term is not limited to contexts referring to raising children (23:12) and may be used in contexts where physical punishment is involved (see Jer. 2:30; 30:14), but it primarily refers to oral instructions (see Jer. 17:23; 32:33; 35:13). It is accompanied by the verb "to listen" in Proverbs 19:27 (cf. 23:12), and it parallels Hebrew words such as *torah* ("teaching," "law"; 1:8), *'etsah* ("counsel," "advice"; 19:20), and *da'at* ("knowledge"). The word "rod" (*shebet*) also occurs in combination with the Hebrew *tokakhat* ("reproof," "reprimand," "correction"; 29:15). The two words *tokakhat* and *musar* also occur in combination with each other (cf. 3:11; 15:5). Further, *musar* is a noun formed from the root *yasar*, which is also used in the context of parenting (see 19:18; 29:17; 31:1) and can mean either "to instruct" or "to discipline." On the one hand, *yasar* in the sense of "to discipline" can refer to punishment (see Deut. 22:18) and can be translated as "chasten," "discipline" (Prov. 19:18), "correct," or "reprove" (9:7; 29:17, 19). Alternatively, however, *yasar* in the sense of "to instruct" can refer to teaching rather than punishment, such as the proverbs that King Lemuel's mother "taught" him (31:1; see also Is. 28:26). Therefore, the passages in Proverbs that are relevant to parenting do not always deal with discipline or punishment (see Prov. 22:6), and what the book emphasizes more than discipline is the need for parental teaching and instruction. Thus, the application of "the rod" must always be accompanied by a loving explanation of what the parents are trying to teach the child. And happy is the wise child who accepts instruction without the need for discipline (19:25; 21:11).

In summary, Proverbs, read in its proper context, neither requires nor forbids corporal punishment in the upbringing of children but rather teaches the need for parental instruction, which on occasion may need to be accompanied by age-appropriate discipline.

In a few instances, sayings are placed next to each other because they both contain the same word or expression. For example, the Hebrew word *tob* ("good") is the last word in 13:21 and the first word in v. 22. The word *leb* ("heart") occurs at the beginning of both 15:13 and 14, and *tob* (here usually translated as "better") again occurs at the beginning of both vv. 16 and 17. These two verse pairs are connected by v. 15, which contains both words in the Hebrew expression *tob leb* ("good of heart"), meaning "a happy mind" or "a cheerful/merry heart." It is also possible that vv. 8 and 9 are placed next to each other because both verses contain the expression *to'ebat Yahweh* ("an abomination to the Lord," "the Lord detests").

A few sayings are related by both thematic and verbal links. For example, *dabar* ("word," "instruction") and *mitsvah* ("command") occur in 13:13, and *torah* ("law," "instruction") occurs in v. 14. Thus, in addition to the fact that both verses share the common theme of the importance of listening to advice—a theme that is also reflected in some other sayings in this section (see vv. 10, 18)—they are also connected by the use of words with similar meanings.

A number of wisdom sayings are purely descriptive. For example, v. 12 states that delay in the fulfillment of a desire discourages the heart, but its fulfillment is like a tree of life. This is not an admonition but a psychological observation. It is possible that v. 12 is placed here because v. 11 speaks of gathering by slow labor. However, v. 12 deals with fulfillment versus nonfulfillment rather than gradual fulfillment. Other examples of descriptive sayings are found in vv. 7, 21, 23; 14:5, 10; 15:13. It is important to read 13:21 in the context of wisdom literature: the statement that evil pursues sinners but the righteous are repaid with good is not an inviolable rule but a general description of truth (i.e., it tends to happen this way, but exceptions do occur).

Though the meaning of most sayings is clear and needs no comment, it is appropriate to make some remarks concerning a few specific verses. In 12:4, the expression *eshet hayil* ("excellent wife," "wife of noble character," "virtuous wife") is the same Hebrew expression as in 31:10. The saying in 12:12 presents difficulties in interpretation, as can be seen in the various ways modern versions have translated it. Notwithstanding the technical problems, the verse states that the righteous will prosper. In v. 14, the word *gemul* can mean "recompense," or it can also mean "deed" or "work." The message is that both the fruit of the mouth and the deed of the hands (i.e., speech and actions) will bring their own consequences.

Another difficult passage is v. 26. Various suggestions have been made to read the Hebrew text differently. In its present form, the Hebrew word *tur* can be translated in such a way as to imply either the idea of the cautiousness of the righteous in choosing friends or the ability of the righteous to guide others well. The text contrasts being on the right path with being on the wrong one.

The saying in 13:8 has been variously interpreted since the Hebrew word at the end of the verse (*ge'arah*) can mean either "rebuke" or "threat." Accordingly, some suggest that the verse teaches that whereas the rich can pay their way out of trouble, the poor do not heed threats because they have nothing to lose.

The two lines in v. 19 seem unrelated and have been variously interpreted. One interpretation is that they provide the context for each other. In other words, since a fulfilled desire is sweet to the soul (first line), fools do not want to depart from evil (second line). If this interpretation is correct, v. 19 is descriptive rather than prescriptive.

The expression sometimes translated as "the wise woman" in 14:1 is similar to an expression found in Judges 5:29 that refers to the wisest ladies and, hence, could mean "the wisest women." However, because the rest of the sentence is in the singular, some have suggested correcting the Hebrew text to read "wisdom" instead of "wise ones" (i.e., "the wisdom of women"), but this is unnecessary since the contrast in Proverbs 14:1 is between wisdom and folly.

In v. 14, some translate *me'alayv* (lit. "from upon him") as "from above," but others suggest correcting the Hebrew text to read *mimma' alalayw* ("by his deeds"). Again, such changes are unnecessary. The text is making a clear point, namely, that both the backslider and the good receive the consequences of their own actions.

Proverbs 15:19 contrasts the lazy with the righteous rather than the lazy with the diligent or the righteous with the wicked. The contrast between the lazy and the righteous also occurs in 21:25-26.

16:1—22:16
Second Subdivision

The exact place where the first subdivision of this section ends and the second one begins is not completely clear though, as already mentioned, there seems to be a difference between the two subdivisions in terms of the structure of the sayings. This second subdivision contains a few groups of sayings clustered around common themes. However, most of its sayings are best read individually rather than as part of a cluster. In addition to the few clusters of sayings, there are also individual sayings concerning good and bad speech (17:4, 9, 27-28; 18:4; 20:15, 19; 21:23; 22:11), false testimony (19:5, 9, 28; 21:28), riches and poverty (17:1, 5; 19:17; 21:17, 20; 22:1-2, 7, 16) being a surety/security (17:18; 20:16), disciplining children (19:18; 22:6, 15), honoring parents (19:26; 20:20), conflict (17:1, 14; 20:3; 21:9, 19; 22:10), anger (16:32; 19:11), friendship (18:19), diligence and laziness (v. 9; 19:24; 20:4, 13; 21:5, 25; 22:13), wisdom and folly (17:2; 21:22; 22:3), divine sovereignty (16:33; 19:21; 20:24; 21:30-31), the fear of the Lord (22:4), righteousness/honesty and wickedness (20:7, 10; 21:3-4; 22:5), justice (17:26; 18:5), kings (19:12; 20:2, 8, 26, 28; 22:11), the blessing of a good wife (18:22; 19:14), the grief of a contentious wife (19:13; 21:9, 19), drunkenness (20:1), vows (v. 25), adultery (22:14), and other topics.

16:1-9. Wisdom Sayings about Divine Sovereignty. This cluster of wisdom sayings consists of a group of independent sayings that share the theme of divine sovereignty. It is possible that this cluster actually begins in 15:33 since that verse also mentions the Lord (cf. 16:9). In 16:1, the heart stands for the internal processes, such as thoughts and plans, whereas the tongue stands for speech or, more broadly, that which eventually comes out. Hence, people may plan, but it is God who controls the outcome. The message of v. 2 is similar to 21:2; that is, we may think ourselves pure, but it is God who is the ultimate judge.

The saying in 16:3 states that God will honor and establish the plans of those who submit their lives to Him. Next, in v. 4, the text discusses the fact that the Lord has made everything for His *ma'aneh*. This word means "answer" or "purpose," but some translate it as "for Himself," which might convey some of both nuances. Most commentators prefer the idea of "purpose." Thus, the statement that God made the wicked for the day of doom not only implies that they will not escape the judgment but also serves as an illustration of His sovereignty. The Lord uses all things, even the wicked, to accomplish His purposes (cf. Rom. 8:28).

The saying in Proverbs 16:5 condemns pride (on the expression translated as "joining forces" or "being assured," see commentary on 10:2—11:31). The parallelism in 16:6 is interesting: the words *khesed* ("mercy," "love," "loyalty," "steadfast love") and *'emet* ("faithfulness," "truth," "trust") usually refer to attributes of God (see Gen. 24:27; Ex. 34:6-7; Deut. 7:9; Pss. 25:10; 26:3; 40:11), which Proverbs exhorts people to emulate (Prov. 3:3). If those terms refer to God's character, then the basis for atonement is His mercy and truth. The second part of the proverb would describe the human response to divine atonement. The fear of the Lord is powerful enough to turn us away from evil. Proverbs 16:6 would remind us that forgiveness and atonement must coexist with a life lived according to God's will. Though forgiveness comes through God's grace and not through our good works, a changed life is evidence of that grace. An alternative interpretation, although perhaps less likely, would be based on the fact that the Hebrew word for "atone" (*kipper*) occurs only twice in Proverbs, here and in v. 14, where it refers to appeasing the king's anger. It is possible that v. 6 may refer not to atonement in the sight of God but to reconciliation among people (i.e., acts of kindness help others forgive previous wrongs).

Verses 7-8 provide a contrast with v. 5. Instead of what is detestable/an abomination to the Lord (v. 5), vv. 7-8 describe the results of pleasing God.

Verse 9 is similar to v. 1, though the contrast here is between heart and steps rather than heart and tongue. Together, vv. 1 and 9 provide an envelope structure surrounding wisdom sayings focusing on God's sovereignty.

16:10-19. Wisdom Sayings about the King. These sayings are grouped together around the theme of the king. The placement of v. 10 may be due to the word *qesem*, which refers to some kind of a supernatural statement (see Jer. 14:14) that usually involves forbidden occult practices (Deut. 18:10). In this context, it does not refer to the occult but compares the king's words to a divinely inspired verdict, which then becomes the reason why he is urged to pronounce just sentences. Thus, *qesem* connects the two clusters of sayings on divine sovereignty and on the king.

Proverbs 16:11 is not directly related to the previous verse but is placed here probably because honest weights/balances and scales are relevant to the king's duty to carry out justice (vv. 10, 12). The placement of v. 11 may also be due to the fact that *mishpat* ("justice," "judgment") occurs in both v. 10 and v. 11 (there conveying the idea of "honest" or "just").

Verses 12-13 use two words from the Hebrew root *tsadaq* ("to be right"): righteousness (v. 12) and righteous, implying honest speech (v. 13). A king who seeks righteousness detests wickedness (v. 12) but delights in words that are upright and honest (v. 13). Just as vv. 12-13 contrast what the king detests and what he delights in, so vv. 14-15 contrast the king's wrath with his favor. In fact, the same Hebrew word (*ratson*, "pleasure," "acceptance," "favor," "will") occurs in both vv. 13 and 15. Verse 14 compares the king's anger, which only the wise can appease, to a death sentence (cf. v. 6). In v. 15, the king's favor is compared to the latter/spring rain. The early/autumn rain (around October/November) and the latter/spring rain (around March/April) mark the beginning and end of the winter rainy season. Both are important for the growth of crops (Deut. 11:14). The proper timing of the rainy season was seen as God's blessing (Joel 2:23; Zech. 10:1), and the withholding of rain as His displeasure (Jer. 3:13; Amos 4:7). This section closes with a few miscellaneous wisdom sayings addressing the topics of wisdom's surpassing value (Prov. 16:16), the upright path (v. 17), and pride and humility (vv. 18-19).

16:20-30. Wisdom and Speech. This cluster of sayings connects wisdom and wise speech. Verses 20 to 23 describe some of the benefits of wisdom. In v. 20, the Hebrew word *dabar* can mean "word," "matter," or "thing," so alternative readings are "the one who heeds the word" or "he who is prudent [Heb. *sakal*, "to act with insight"] in a matter." Either way, this parallels trusting in the Lord and results in finding that which is good and in being happy. Verse 21 states that those who are wise in heart are recognized by others as prudent/discerning, and from their lips flows a sweet increase of knowledge. Such *sekel* ("prudence," "insight," "understanding") is like a wellspring of life for those who possess it. It enriches the quality of their lives (v. 22). This is contrasted with the correction of fools, which has been interpreted and translated as referring to the discipline that fools receive what they give. In the first sense, the proverb says either that it is foolish to discipline fools or that fools will be disciplined because of their folly. In the second sense, it means that the discipline/instruction that fools give amounts to foolishness. The understanding found in the heart of the wise teaches their mouths what to say and adds learning/instruction to their lips (v. 23).

True wisdom determines what will come out of a person's mouth. The pleasant or gracious words coming from the mouth/lips of the wise are like honeycomb in that they make life (lit. "the soul") enjoyable and the body ("the bones") healthy (v. 24). That is, they enrich the whole being, not only the mind. Verse 25 is a repetition of 14:12 and deals with the way people choose to live their lives and the need of wisdom to avoid death. The thought of death leads almost naturally to the idea of self-preservation. In 16:26, the Hebrew word *nepesh* (lit. "soul") is used in the sense of "appetite," as it is sometimes translated. That is, a person's hunger serves as motivation to work.

Verse 27 returns to the topic of speech. The ungodly are interested in searching for what is evil, and once they find it, it becomes like a burning, scorching fire on their lips, damaging both the speaker and the listener. The image worsens in v. 28, which describes a perverse person, a whisperer/gossip (from the Heb. *ragan* "to slander") who spreads strife and damages friendships. The next proverb then turns from those who spread strife to the violent who entice others and lead them into an evil way of life (v. 29). This group of proverbs concludes with a reference to those who express evil intentions through body language, like winking or pursing/compressing their lips (v. 30).

16:31—21:2. Miscellaneous Sayings. These verses include wisdom sayings on a variety of topics (see commentary on 16:1—22:16). Since the meaning of most sayings is clear, the comments below focus primarily on verses that need clarification or explanation. As elsewhere in the book, some wisdom sayings are only descriptive rather than prescriptive. For example, 17:8 describes the effectiveness of a *shokhad* ("gift," "present," "bribe"). This is not an encouragement to resort to bribes but only an observation from the perspective of the giver. Other possible short-term benefits of bribes or gifts are mentioned in 21:14 (if referring to a bribe, this would also be descriptive rather than prescriptive), but bribes are also condemned directly because they are used to pervert justice (see 15:27; 17:23). Similarly, the "gift" in 18:16 could be understood as a "bribe" (see 21:14), in which case this is also a descriptive rather than prescriptive proverb.

Other descriptive sayings include the comparison between gossip and delicious food (18:8), the contrast between the rich and the poor (v. 23; 19:4, 6–7; 22:7), and the description of a buyer's attitude (20:14). The word "heart" in 17:16 refers to "mind," "sense," "intention," or "understanding," and it is often so translated. Thus, the meaning of the verse is that there is no point in fools having money to buy wisdom since they have no understanding.

The sayings in 18:4–8 are loosely related. Verse 5 condemns improper verdicts in the context of court proceedings. Verse 6 is placed after v. 5 because of the Hebrew word *rib* ("argument," "strife," "contention"), which is often used in the context of litigation. Verses 6–7 convey similar messages (i.e., fools bring trouble on themselves by their words). They also have a chiastic relationship: v. 6 has the sequence of lips then mouth, and v. 7 has the reverse sequence, mouth then lips. In addition, though vv. 4 and 8 are not directly related, both concern speech, namely, the speech of the wise (v. 4) and the words of a talebearer/gossip (v. 8). Since vv. 10 and 11 are placed next to each other, it is possible to read them in contrast to each other to say that the rich consider their wealth as their safety (v. 11), but it is the Lord who is the safety of the righteous (v. 10). However, it is best to see v. 11 as a descriptive proverb (see 10:15). Probably the main reason why 18:10 and 11 are juxtaposed is that the Hebrew verb *sagab* ("to be inaccessible/protected") occurs in both verses, implying safety in v. 10 and height in v. 11.

The practice of casting lots was common in the ancient world (18:18; Lev. 16:8; Num. 26:55; 1 Sam. 14:41–42; Jonah 1:7; Acts 1:22–26). Since the Hebrew word *goral* also expresses the idea of destiny or fate (Is. 17:14; Dan. 12:13), casting lots was believed to be a supernaturally guided way of determining God's will (Prov. 16:33). It was also used in secular settings as a way of making decisions (Joel 3:3; Obad. 11; John 19:22–24), similar to the modern-day practice of tossing a coin. This proverb suggests that some issues cannot be resolved without resorting to casting lots.

The sayings in 18:20–21 both figuratively describe a person's speech as the fruit of the mouth, which in turn is eaten by the speaker. Both proverbs teach the importance of wise speech. The exact meaning of v. 24 is not clear. In Hebrew, there is a play on the words *re'im* and *hitro'ea'*, which some translate as "A man who has friends must himself be friendly." However, the second verb can be understood as "to smash together" or "break in pieces." Hence, some interpret it negatively to mean that those who have many friends may "come to ruin" or "be harmed" (by the friends). Others have suggested a slight change in the Hebrew text to read "to associate with." If so, the message of this proverb may be that there are different kinds of friends; that is, there are friends who simply "associate" with you, and there are friends who are closer than brothers.

The interpretation of 19:2 depends primarily on the meaning of the Hebrew word *nepesh* (lit. "soul"), which can have several possible meanings, at least two of which could fit this context. If the word is used in the sense of a "living being" (i.e., "person"), the proverb speaks of those who lack knowledge, whose haste results in sin. If the word simply means "desire," "craving," "zeal," or "passion," the proverb warns against ignorant passion. If so, the Hebrew word *khata'* (usually translated as "to sin") could be understood in the sense of "to miss the mark" or "to err." The idea then is that ignorant passion and haste result in making mistakes. In other words, "haste makes waste." The sayings in vv. 13–14 are not related but are juxtaposed because both verses mention father and wife. The proverb in v. 18 can be understood in different ways. It is possible to read it as advice to correct children but not so harshly as to cause their death. On the other hand, in light of similar passages in the book (see 13:24; 23:14), it is more likely that this proverb asserts that failing to correct children is like wishing for their destruction (cf. comments on vv. 12–14).

The Hebrew word *khesed* ("goodness," "love," "mercy"), used in 20:6, often has the connotation of "covenant loyalty." The contrast in this verse is between the large number who claim to be loyal and the few who are truly faithful. In v. 19, the last clause has been variously translated because the Hebrew verb *patah* could mean "to be simple/naïve" or "to be wide/open." Whether it refers to those who are naïve with their lips or those who are open with their lips, both possibilities fit the context and express the idea of avoiding either those who flatter or those who say too much. The message of v. 21 is very similar to that of 13:11, though the wording of the two proverbs is different. Both warn against the danger of wealth gained without honest labor.

The sayings in 21:1–3 all mention the Lord. Verse 1 asserts the Lord's sovereignty over kings. Verse 2, which is similar to 16:2, states that the Lord is the ultimate judge of the heart. Verse 3 says the Lord loves righteousness and justice more than sacrifice (cf. 1 Sam. 15:22; Mic. 6:6–8). This, in turn, initiates a cluster of wisdom sayings in which the contrast between the righteous and the wicked is very frequent.

21:3–29. The Righteous and the Wicked. This cluster of proverbs is similar to the first cluster in the first subdivision of this section (10:2—11:31) in that it contains a larger than usual concentration of sayings about the righteous and/or the wicked (21:3–4, 7–8, 10, 12, 15, 18, 21, 25–27, 29). However, as in the earlier cluster, there are also many sayings that do not directly mention the righteous or the wicked (vv. 5–6, 9, 11, 13–14, 16–17, 19, 20, 22–24, 28). The sayings in vv. 11 and 12 probably occur next to each other because both use the Hebrew verb *sakal* ("to have insight"). In v. 11, it refers to the instruction that the wise receive (or, according to some renderings, it refers to paying attention to the wise); in v. 12, it refers to observing/considering the house of the wicked. "The righteous one" is probably a reference to God (some translations imply this by either inserting the word "God" or by capitalizing "One"). If this is a reference to God, it is the only instance in Proverbs where God is called righteous.

The sayings in vv. 25–26 can be read either as two separate sayings or one long saying. Verse 25 describes the lazy, who have intense desires but refuse to work to achieve them, whereas v. 26 contrasts greedy desire with the generosity of the righteous. It is also possible to read the two verses as one wisdom saying, in which case there is a contrast between the lazy and the righteous (see also 15:19). The claim in the first line of 21:28 that a false witness will perish is clear, but there is some difficulty with the second line. The one who hears could be understood as hearing the false witness or simply as being a good listener, which is a trait of the wise (see 18:13). The word *lanetsakh* can mean "forever," "successfully," or "victoriously."

21:30—22:16. Miscellaneous Sayings. These verses include wisdom sayings on a variety of topics (see commentary on 16:1—22:16).

Though these sayings are independent units, some are placed next to each other because of common themes or words. The sayings in 21:30–31 both deal with divine sovereignty. Similarly, the sayings in 22:5–6 are probably placed next to each other because both verses speak of a "way" or "path": the way of the wicked, those who are *'iqqesh* ("crooked," "perverse"; v. 5), and the way that a child should go (v. 6). Some verses deserve a brief comment. The saying in v. 2 is similar to 29:13. Whereas 22:2 compares the rich and the poor, 29:13 compares the poor and the oppressor. Both passages teach that all are equal in the sight of God, and both may serve as a warning to the rich and powerful not to exploit the poor. In 22:6, the Hebrew word *khanak* ("train," "start off," "dedicate") could also mean "to initiate" (Deut. 20:5; 1 Kin. 8:63). The proverb teaches that if parents "initiate" children in the way they should go (Heb. *'al pi darko*, lit. "upon the mouth of his way"), they will not depart from it even in old age.

22:17—24:22

THIRTY SAYINGS OF THE WISE

The wisdom sayings in this section consist of a mix of short sayings and slightly longer sayings. They are also miscellaneous in nature with no discernible overarching theme. The Hebrew expression used in 22:20 can mean "excellent things" or may, alternatively, mean "thirty sayings" (see below, "Excellent Things or Thirty Sayings?"). There is a general consensus that there are thirty sayings in this section, though there is some disagreement on how to divide them.

Excellent Things or Thirty Sayings?

1. Textual Problem. There is a Hebrew expression in 22:20 which has been translated as "excellent things" or "thirty sayings." This may be explained as follows. First, the Hebrew word *dabar* (v. 17, assumed to be the referent in v. 20) can mean not only a "thing" but also a "word" or "saying." Second, there is some uncertainty concerning another word which has occasioned both textual and translational questions. The main text of the Hebrew Bible reads *shilshom*, which has been translated by some as "the day before yesterday," but *shilshom* carries that meaning only in the phrase *temol shilshom* ("yesterday and the previous day"; see Ex. 5:8). Besides, it does not seem to fit the context. There is a scribal reading tradition (preserved in the margin of the manuscripts) that assumes that the text is misspelled and corrects it to *shalishim* (lit. "the third man"), which designates "a military officer." The translation "excellent" has been derived from this without any linguistic basis. In any case, this suggestion does not fit the context.

2. Possible Solution. Scholars usually modify the Hebrew text (changing only the vowels, not the original consonants) from *shilshom* to *sheloshim* ("thirty"). They argue that this is contextually supported because there are thirty sayings in this section of Proverbs. This modification of the Hebrew text was to some extent suggested by the discovery and publication of an Egyptian wisdom document called *Instructions of Amenemope* in 1922. Scholars began to notice similarities between Proverbs and the Egyptian document. Since the latter consists of thirty chapters and this section of Proverbs also consists of thirty sayings, most scholars conclude that the best reading of the Hebrew text is *sheloshim*, "thirty."

Moreover, it is important to note that the translation "thirty sayings" is not completely dependent on the supposed similarities between Proverbs and *Amenemope*. First, the similarities between the two occur mostly in the sayings in Proverbs 22:17—23:11. There are fewer similarities in 23:12—24:22, though these may have similarities to other documents from ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature. In some cases the similarities are not convincing. Second, this solution was first proposed by Felix Perles in 1906, a decade and a half before the publication of *Amenemope*. However, Perles had in mind the thirty(-one) chapters of the book of Proverbs. In the final analysis, the suggestion to read "thirty" instead of "excellent" remains hypothetical, but it does clarify the contextual meaning of a difficult Hebrew phrase.

22:17—23:9

Sayings One through Ten

Proverbs 22:17–21 contains the *first* of the so-called thirty sayings and also serves as an introduction to them. The message of these verses consists of an exhortation to listen/pay attention (lit. "incline your ear") to wisdom, meaning not only to pay close attention to it but to organize life accordingly. The end result of embracing wisdom is being able to trust in the Lord, whose wisdom is unfathomable, and gaining a clear understanding of the certain and reliable truth for the purpose of teaching others (v. 21).

The *second* saying calls for caring for and protecting the poor and afflicted by defending their legal rights (vv. 22–23). The primary motivation is that God cares for them and will take up their cause. Similar statements depicting the Lord as the defender of the defenseless can be found in 15:25 and 23:10–11.

The *third* proverb points to the danger of being friends with a person who is controlled by anger, lacks self-control, and is hot-tempered (22:24–25). Friendship with them would imply support for their behavior. Their influence ruins the lives of those who learn to behave like them.

According to the *fourth* saying, it is not wise to assume responsibility for the debts of others (vv. 26–27). If debtors do not pay, whose who guarantee their debts have to pay for them. As a result, what they have will be taken from them. The warning of this saying is similar to that of 6:15; 11:15; and 17:18.

The *fifth* saying is about respecting the landmarks/boundary stones that served as property markers (22:28). It was illegal to move these boundary markers, which would have been equivalent to stealing land (Deut. 19:14; 27:17; see also Prov. 15:25; 23:10–11).

Instead of stealing, the *sixth* saying commends diligence in work that enables the wise to serve/stand before those in the highest places in the land (i.e., kings; Prov. 22:29). Self-development is encouraged as a tool for effective service.

Proper behavior in the presence of those who rule is an expression of true wisdom, according to the *seventh* saying (23:1–3). Those who eat with rulers should control their appetite because the food is deceptive food (v. 3); that is, the person offering it may have some hidden agenda.

The *eighth* saying raises the topic of wealth and warns against making its acquisition a goal (vv. 4–5). Riches are like a mirage, seen one moment and then suddenly disappearing. They are like a bird that is here now and then flies away.

The *ninth* saying returns to the topic of food, counseling against accepting an invitation to eat with a person who is stingy or selfish (vv. 6–8). Such a host speaks hypocritically, causing the guest's stomach to reject the ingested food. Even the good words expressed during the meal are wasted.

The *tenth* saying unpacks what is insinuated in the previous one (v. 9). It stresses the futility of giving counsel to fools, who despise words of wisdom and insightful thoughts (cf. 9:7, 8; Matt. 7:6).

23:10—24:4

Sayings Eleven to Twenty-One

The *eleventh* saying is similar to that of 22:28. Both proverbs encourage respect for the property of others, but the emphasis here is on taking the land of the fatherless/orphan (23:10). The reason given is that there is a mighty Redeemer/Defender who will take up their case in court (cf. 15:25; 22:22–23). The Redeemer/Defender probably refers to the Lord.

Similar to vv. 17–18 and 23:19, the *twelfth* saying is an exhortation to listen to the instruction that follows (v. 12). There is an interesting wordplay here. The Hebrew word *musar* ("discipline," "instruction," "correction") is used in both vv. 12 and 13, which has caused some scholars to join v. 12 with vv. 13 and 14. But the use of the same word in the two verses justifies locating the proverbs one after the other.

The *thirteenth* saying, counsels giving correction, is presumably based on the instruction received in v. 12 (vv. 13–14). In light of the parallelism with v. 14, v. 13 does not mean that punishing children will not kill them. It means that it will rescue them (Heb. *nepesh*, "soul," "life") from the grave (see also 19:18).

Wisdom positively impacts not only those seeking it but also, as the *fourteenth* saying indicates, the parents or instructors (23:15–16). Wise children make their parents rejoice. Joy enriches the totality of a person. Nothing brings more joy to parents than to hear their children speaking what is right.

The *fifteenth* proverb teaches against envying sinners and assures a future reward for those who live in reverent submission to the Lord (vv. 17–18). This is one of the few places where Proverbs reveals a reality beyond the present, a future eternal life. The sinner may seem to prosper, but the time will come when those who hope in the Lord will triumph and the wicked will perish.

Verse 19 can be considered an exhortation introducing the *sixteenth* saying (vv. 19–21), which exhorts temperance when eating and drinking. Drunkenness and gluttony lead to poverty (cf. Deut. 21:20).

The *seventeenth* saying also begins with an exhortation to pay attention to the words that follow (Prov. 23:22–25). These words describe the joy that righteous and wise children bring to their parents (vv. 24–25). The motivation to listen to and appropriate truth, wisdom, and instruction is found in the joy that it brings to parents. Children are responsible for making the life of their parents as enjoyable as possible in the present life (see vv. 15–16).

As in the previous wisdom saying, the *eighteenth* begins with an introduction (vv. 26). The phrase "my son, give me your heart" renders the Hebrew expression *tenah beni libbeka*, which does not occur frequently. It is probably equivalent to the similar expression *sim leb* (lit. "to place the heart"), which means "to consider," or "to pay attention" (see Deut. 32:46; Is. 41:22). In this case, an alternative translation would be "pay attention to me." After the introduction, the main part of this saying warns against the potentially fatal temptation of prostitutes and adulterous women (Prov. 23:27–28; cf. 22:14).

The *nineteenth* saying contains a vivid description of the harmful effects of alcohol (23:29–35). It describes its negative social, physical, and psychological impact on the lives of those who drink it. The exhortation is so strong that it discourages even looking at it. Alcohol may appear attractive, but it is like a poisonous serpent. The condition of those under the influence of alcohol is described as pitiful. They hallucinate, and like a ship at sea or a person sitting at the top of the mast, they cannot control the movement of their own bodies. Such individuals are out of contact with reality and yet are ready to go out and drink again—a miserable life!

The *twentieth* saying exhorts against envying and wanting to be with evil people who seem to be doing well in life (24:1–2). The reason given is that they justify violence in their inner beings and then express their desire for violent behavior that disrupts proper social order (cf. 3:31).

Wisdom, according to the *twenty-first* saying, supports order (24:3–4). The example given is that of a house that is built with wisdom and that, consequently, is firmly established. In it will dwell pleasant richness. Here the house stands for the family that is guided by divine wisdom, understanding, and knowledge, which contribute to the development of the characters of its members in the fear of the Lord.

24:5–22

Sayings Twenty-Two to Thirty

The *twenty-second* saying describes the inner strength of those who have wisdom (vv. 5–6). Verse 5 does not exhort the wise to be strong but states that it is the wise who are strong (i.e., wisdom is more important than physical strength; cf. 21:22). The imagery of war in 24:6 could be understood as military advice, but it is more likely simply an illustration of wisdom's superiority over physical strength. The emphasis on the importance of many counselors is similar to 11:14 and 20:18 and applies particularly to those in leadership positions.

The *twenty-third* saying states what was observable at the city gate, where the elders met to discuss issues of importance in the community (24:7). People assembled to listen to the wise talk, to conduct public transactions (see Ruth 4:1–12), and to have judicial decisions made (see 2 Sam. 15:2; Amos 5:15; Zech. 8:16). This proverb does not mean that fools remain completely quiet at the city gate (see Prov. 15:2) but that they cannot contribute anything of value in such a setting.

The main subject of the *twenty-fourth* saying is the reputation of fools (24:8–9). By describing their poor reputation, Proverbs discourages others from following their way of life. They are social schemers/troublemakers, abominations to others/detested by all.

The *twenty-fifth* saying encourages diligence in the face of adversity (vv. 10–12). The word "if" is not in the Hebrew but is supplied for the sake of clarity. The verb *rapah* (rendered as "faint," "slack," "weak," or "falter") expresses the idea of being lax in contrast to being diligent (see 18:9). The implicit call is to become strong through wisdom (see 24:5). The saying also admonishes rescuing those in mortal danger. In the context, the One "who weighs the hearts" (i.e., God) knows that the excuse of ignorance is not an honest one. When the moral fabric of society is failing, the wise should speak for those who cannot speak for themselves. The passage also affirms that the divine judgment will be based on our deeds. Although some scholars see a break between v. 10 and vv. 11–12, resulting in a divide that

creates separate sayings, the content of the verses, as we have seen, holds them together.

The *twenty-sixth* saying emphasizes the exquisite nature of wisdom (vv. 13–14). It begins with an observable phenomenon: honey is sweet and delicious, so it should be enjoyed. This is then applied to wisdom, which is as sweet as honey. It is enjoyable and enriches life to such an extent that the hope for a better future is nurtured through it. Hope will prevail over disruption.

The *twenty-seventh* saying is a warning against doing violence to the innocent and is addressed to the wicked (vv. 15–16). The righteous may fall in the sense of experiencing disaster or calamity, but there is hope that they will prevail. The righteous will recover even if they fall seven times, but the situation of the wicked is hopeless.

The placement of the *twenty-eighth* saying here may be due to word association (vv. 17–18). That is, though the two sayings are not thematically related, the verb "to fall" occurs both at the end of the previous saying and at the beginning of this one. Although the wicked will fall, the righteous are exhorted not to rejoice in that fall because it will displease the Lord, and, consequently, He will turn His wrath away from those who deserve it.

The topic of envying the wicked is raised again in the *twenty-ninth* saying (vv. 19–20). The reason given is that there is no future for the wicked. Since they exist in hopelessness, why envy them?

The *thirtieth* and final saying of the so-called thirty sayings admonishes respect for the Lord and the king (vv. 21–22). Rebellion against them will result in calamity/disaster. The principle can be applied to having respect not only for the king but for all authority established by God (8:15–16; cf. Ex. 22:28). At this point, the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint) adds a few extra lines and then skips to Proverbs 30 (see below, "The Organization of Proverbs in the Septuagint").

The Organization of Proverbs in the Septuagint

1. *Discrepancies.* The Septuagint (LXX) is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament. Its translation of the book of Proverbs dates to around 200 to 150 B.C. In general, both the Hebrew and the Septuagint have the same order for the first three sections of the book (1:1—24:22). After that, the order of the passages in the Septuagint departs from the Hebrew as follows:

IV. My Son, Fear My Words (30:1–14)
V. Words to the Wise (24:23–34)
VI. Things That Come in Fours (30:15–33)
VII. Words Spoken by God (31:1–9)
VIII. Sayings Copied by Hezekiah's Men (chaps. 25–29)
IX. The Virtuous Wife (31:10–31)

Though the order of the contents is different in the Septuagint, the individual wisdom sayings and their messages are not affected. However, the different organization does affect the section titles and their ascription of authorship. In the Hebrew text, the placement of the words of Agur and Lemuel (chaps. 30–31) at the end of the book results in their functioning as an appendix of sorts, whereas the Septuagint weaves those passages among the Solomonic proverbs.

2. *Reasons for the Discrepancies.* It has been suggested that the organization of the Septuagint may be due to the desire of the scribe/translator to maintain Solomonic authorship of the entire content of Proverbs. This may be supported by the translation of some of the section titles. The names of Agur and Lemuel are omitted. Instead of the title for Agur's words, the Septuagint reads "My son, fear my words…" (30:1, LXX), and instead of the title for Lemuel's words, it reads "My words have been spoken by God…" (31:1, LXX). Further, in 24:23, instead of additional words belonging to (i.e., "by") the wise, the Septuagint has the words spoken to the wise (i.e., "These things I say to you who are wise that you may know them," 24:33, LXX). The assumption of a single author (i.e., Solomon) for the entire book may also be the reason for the Septuagint's omission of the title "Proverbs of Solomon" in 10:1. Hence, though the different order of the contents of Proverbs 24:33—31:31 in the Septuagint does not alter the message of the individual wisdom sayings, it may have been motivated by the desire to ascribe all of them to Solomon.

24:23–34

MORE SAYINGS OF THE WISE

This small collection consists of five wisdom sayings that may function as an appendix to the previous section (22:17—24:22). The title does not identify the author but simply says that they were written or collected by the wise. In the Septuagint translation, this section of the book is placed after 30:14 (see "The Organization of Proverbs in the Septuagint," p. 785).

24:23–26

Verdicts and Honest Speech

The setting of the first of these proverbs is a court of law. Showing partiality in court is characterized as "not good" not only because of the moral outrage is raises but also because it disrupts the social order and damages the legal system. The basic issue is that making partial or biased legal decisions that cannot be supported by the evidence presented results in the court not operating the way it should. The saying contrasts illegal decisions and their results with proper, legal decisions and their results. The wicked/guilty should not be declared righteous/innocent. Whenever that happens the legal system will be hated by the people and the judge will be discredited. But when the judges convict/rebuke the guilty/wicked, they will be blessed and will enjoy the peace of knowing that they did what was right. Notice the shift from the singular to the plural. The implication seems to be that there are more judges doing what is right than those doing what is wrong. A *nacoakh* ("straightforward," "right," "honest") answer implies a willingness to tell the truth (v. 26). This attitude is compared to a kiss, which in many cultures of the time was a sign of true friendship. The implication is that true friendship (or, for that matter, any type of social relationship) has to be based on transparency and not deceptiveness.

24:27–29

Plans, Witnesses, and Revenge

Enjoying life requires making plans for the future and prioritizing matters. Living is not just breathing but being in charge of one's life. Having a home requires making plans and then following them. This passage admonishes preparing a field outside before building a house. This could mean obtaining the field and then preparing it for the building project. It could also mean making sure that the land is good enough to farm. The wise are those who do not leave things to themselves but who work with what they have at hand to achieve what is good.

Although vv. 28 and 29 may originally have been two separate sayings, placing them together implies that they should be read as one. Verse 28 warns that those who give false testimony against someone in court damage their moral fabric. Verse 29 admonishes against revenge. Coming after v. 28, it can also mean that God's people should not seek revenge against those who give false testimony against them. They are not to render unto others according to their work. Only God should do that (v. 12).

24:30–34

The Lazy

These verses provide insights about how the mind of the wise functions. They observe a situation, analyze what they observe, and finally draw some objective conclusions that would benefit others. Here observing and analyzing the experience of the lazy leads to the conclusion that slumbering and inactivity results in poverty. The land needs the activity or involvement of a human agent in order to be fully fruitful. Otherwise, its future will be unproductive, and poverty will prevail (see 6:6–11).

25:1—29:27

HEZEKIAH'S COLLECTION OF SOLOMON'S PROVERBS

This section is a compilation of proverbs written by Solomon that were collected by the men of King Hezekiah and preserved here in the book of Proverbs (25:1). It shows Hezekiah's interest in wisdom literature and thinking. The wisdom sayings in chapters 25–29 consist mostly of short, single-verse units. Although scholars have proposed a number of suggestions for a thematic or theological organization to this section, there is no consensus, and it is probably best to accept that the sayings in this section have no particular organizational center. Nevertheless, there is some agreement on the stylistic differences between chapters 25–26 and 27–29. One of these differences is the fact that there is a greater tendency for the sayings to occur in thematic groups in the first subdivision than in the second. Especially in the first subdivision, the wisdom sayings are often arranged in groups of sayings containing some type of verbal link. These groups do not necessarily have a common message (see 26:4–5), but they are brought together because they mention a common word or topic. There are also some longer sayings that stand alone (see 27:23–27). In the Septuagint translation, this section of the book is placed between vv. 9 and 10 of chapter 31 (see "The Organization of Proverbs in the Septuagint," p. 785).

25:2—26:28

First Subdivision

The wisdom sayings in this subdivision may be thematically grouped into proverbs about kings (25:2–7), judicial conflict (vv. 8–10), the value of wise words (vv. 11–15), dealing with others (vv. 16–28), fools (26:1–12), laziness (vv. 13–16), provocations that incite conflict (vv. 17–22), and deception (vv. 23–28). However, these clusters of sayings have no common overarching theme.

25:2–7. Kings. These proverbs are grouped together because they concern matters that relate to the king and the court. The king makes matters clear (v. 2), but those who stand before him must remember that they cannot read his mind (v. 3). The king must remove wicked advisors if he is to rule righteously (vv. 4–5). The wise do not promote themselves before the king but wait for the king to do so (v. 6). By extension, these wisdom sayings apply not only to kings but to all human authority by showing how to properly relate to authority in order to avoid conflict (8:15–16).

25:8–15. Judicial Conflicts and Words to the Wise. Verses 8 to 10 consist of two sayings that occur in the setting of a judicial lawsuit. Verse 8 counsels against being too quick to bring matters to court for fear of losing the case. In other words, it is important to evaluate the situation and the possible results of an action before making a decision. The second saying advises those already involved in a legal case to show restraint and willingness to resolve the conflict between those involved without creating more animosity (e.g., revealing another person's secret). The application of these principles goes beyond lawsuits, encouraging restraint in interpersonal conflicts and respect for privacy in all settings.

The wisdom sayings in vv. 11–15 consist of a group of proverbs that advocate the value of wise words. Though vv. 11 and 12 are separate sayings, they are probably placed next to each other because the word "gold" occurs in both. Verse 12 states that a listening ear values reproof as much as gold, whereas v. 11 is more general, comparing words that are appropriate and fitting in various circumstances with apples of gold in silver settings (i.e., something very valuable and precious). Verses 13 and 25 are similar descriptive proverbs expressing the refreshing experience that comes from receiving good news. It revives the spirit of those who were probably depressed. Verse 14 is a warning against false claims and promises. Since rain is very important in the semiarid climate of the Holy Land, such boasting claims are compared with rainless clouds and wind. The proverb in v. 15 promotes the power of gentle, patient speech. The tongue (i.e., words) correctly used is harder than a bone.

25:16–28. Dealing with Others. The section in vv. 16–20 consists of a series of self-contained sayings that mostly relate to getting along well with others. The wise understand that social life can enrich personal life or make it miserable. Hence, this section contains instructions on how to correctly relate to others. Verses 21–22 teach the wisdom of forbearance (see Rom. 12:20). Proverbs 25:23–28 contains miscellaneous sayings on human relationships.

A few of the verses deserve brief comments. It is possible that the sayings in vv. 16 and 17 were originally separate (i.e., v. 16 advises moderation in eating and v. 17 not to visit friends too often). These sayings were then placed next to each other because the Hebrew verb *saba'* ("to be sated," "to be full") occurs in both (though the word is usually translated differently in each verse because of the differing contexts). Their adjacent placement also possibly, though not necessarily, makes an interpretation that connects the honey of v. 16 with the friendship of v. 17. Verse 24 repeats 21:9 (see also v. 19). In spite of statements elsewhere that the righteous will never be *mot* ("shaken," "removed," "uprooted"; 10:30; see also 12:3), the proverb in 25:26 acknowledges that the righteous may falter. What should have been clean becomes polluted through bad influence.

26:1–12. Fools. Almost all the verses in this group of sayings share a common mention of fools. One exception occurs in v. 2, which is not about fools, though its structure is similar to v. 1. Hence, just as honor is not fitting for a fool (v. 1), so a curse without cause (i.e., that is undeserved) will not take effect (v. 2). Also, the last saying in this group is not about fools—though it does mention a fool—but is a warning against being wise in one's own eyes (v. 12; see also 29:20).

Some brief comments on 26:4–5 are appropriate. The sayings in these two verses seem contradictory at first. Does Proverbs advise answering fools according to their folly or not? The two sayings may originally have been independent but were brought together because of their common topic and vocabulary, as is the case with the rest of the sayings in this section. There are various approaches to harmonizing the two sayings. For example, one approach is to suggest that the expression "according to" has different meanings in vv. 4 and 5. But the simplest way to harmonize the two is to acknowledge that Proverbs requires contextual application; that is, it is necessary to take the situation and circumstances into consideration in determining how each proverb is applicable. In addition, the fact that the saying in v. 5 is placed after v. 4 makes v. 5 a response to v. 4. Hence, the two verses in combination teach that, though in principle the wise should not lower their speech to the level of fools, there are times when that becomes necessary.

26:13–28

Laziness, Provocation, and Deception

Verses 13–16 contain four short proverbs that focus on the lazy, who seek reasons to justify their inactivity. They are so lazy that after placing their hands on their food, they will not perform the simple task of bringing their hands to their mouths. The saying in v. 13 is similar to 22:13, and the one in 26:15 is similar to 19:24. The lazy live in self-deception (26:16).

The wisdom sayings in vv. 17–22 warn against actions that provoke/incite conflict. Verse 17 warns against meddling in other people's quarrels, vv. 18–19 warn against deception, and the three proverbs in vv. 20–22 warn against gossip and slander. In addition to the thematic link, these verses also share verbal links. The Hebrew word *rib* ("quarrel," "fight") is used in both vv. 17 and 21. The word *madon* ("strife," "quarrel") in v. 20 might also be used in v. 21. Textual variants indicate that it may be either the same Hebrew word (*madon*) or a closely related word from the same root (*midyan*, "contention"). All the proverbs in vv. 18–21 mention fire, vv. 20 and 21 contain the word "wood," and vv. 20 and 22 mention the *nirgan* ("gossip," "talebearer," "whisperer"). The saying in v. 22 is a repetition of 18:8.

The wisdom sayings contained in 26:23–28 are self-contained units that share the common theme of deceptive speech or false friendship. The apparent exception occurs in v. 27, which mentions someone digging a pit. However, since a pit is a type of trap/ambush, this saying fits with the others that deal with deception. Further, digging a pit semantically parallels the act of deceptively covering hatred/malice in v. 26.

27:1—29:27

Second Subdivision

Except for 27:23–27, the wisdom sayings in this subdivision consist of short, self-contained units. There appears to be no clear unifying theme in them, though some are thematically connected.

27:1–27. Miscellaneous Sayings. Verse 1 warns those who would boast about what they could accomplish tomorrow that they have no control over the future. Those who have a reason for boasting should let others compliment and praise them (v. 2). The topic of wrath unifies vv. 3–4. The uncontrolled anger of fools is a heavy load, probably for those around them (v. 3). While anger is almost impossible to control, a jealous person is even worse (v. 4). What good is love if it is not expressed? At least rebuke shows some level of concern, but how much better it would be to simply express love (v. 5). In fact, the wounds inflicted by a friend are useful and much better than the deceitful kisses of an enemy (v. 6).

Many of the sayings are based on observable facts. For the hungry, even what is bitter tastes sweet (v. 7). Those who abandon their homes are like birds that abandon their nest (v. 8). Friendship is emphasized in vv. 9–10 because it enriches life and provides needed support. But blessing a friend loudly at the wrong time will offend others (v. 14). That people sharpen each other (lit. "a man sharpens the face of his friend") signifies that constructive criticism helps sharpen the character of a friend (v. 17).

Wise children bring joy to their parents and enhance their reputation (v. 11). Verse 12 contrasts the prudent and the simple in terms of how they relate to evil: the prudent avoid it, but the simple become its victims. The relationship between spouses could be as annoying as the continual dripping from a leaking roof on a very rainy day, suggesting that it is much better to learn to live in peace (v. 15). However, achieving this end could be difficult (v. 16). Verse 18 applies the observable reality that those who protect their fig tree will eat of its fruit to the relationship of servants with their master. In order to be honored by their master, they need to care for and protect him or her (v. 18).

Human identity is a matter of concern for the wise. A person's true image is located in the heart—the thoughts and desires are found there (v. 19). Like death, a person's desires are never satisfied. Everyone always wants more and more (v. 20). As the quality of gold is revealed by the refining pot, a person's value is established by the opinions of others (v. 21). Fools have foolishness so deeply intertwined within their very being that it is impossible to remove it from them (v. 22).

The wisdom sayings in vv. 23–27 emphasize the rewards of caring for livestock. When other riches come to an end, livestock will provide for the needs of a family (v. 24). Therefore, it is important to provide for the well-being of livestock every day. The message of this saying can be extended in principle and applied to the need to prepare for life's uncertainties.

28:1—29:27. More Miscellaneous Sayings. Chapters 28 and 29 consist of many short, self-contained wisdom sayings on various topics. Some have suggested that these chapters contain royal proverbs with instructions especially addressed to a prince or king. However, unlike typical ancient Near Eastern royal proverbs, an example of which may be found in 31:1–9, this section is not addressed to a king. Further, although many of these sayings mention kings and rulers, their teachings are appropriate for not only monarchs and others in authority but also for those in other situations. The various wisdom sayings in this section intertwine advice to kings and rulers (28:2, 15–16, 28; 29:2, 4, 12, 14, 26) with themes such as the contrast between righteousness and wickedness (28:1–2, 5–6, 10, 12–13, 15, 17–18, 28; 29:2, 4–6, 7, 10, 13, 16, 27), wisdom and folly (vv. 1, 3, 5, 8–9, 11, 15, 20), riches and poverty (28:3, 6, 8, 11, 19–22, 27; 29:13–14), and various other topics. Thus, it is best to characterize the wisdom sayings in these chapters not as royal proverbs but as miscellaneous proverbs.

The references to *torah* are especially interesting (28:4, 7, 9; 29:18). Since this Hebrew word means "law" or "instruction," it may here refer to God's law or to instruction in general. It is used in the latter sense elsewhere in Proverbs (see 1:8; 3:1; 4:2; 6:20; 13:13; 31:26). In the context of the verses in question, while the rendering "instruction" is appropriate, the word can also be translated as "law" because it occurs in the expression "to keep the law" (28:4, 9; 29:18) and because there is a parallel in v. 18 between *torah* and revelation (Heb. *khazon*, "prophetic vision"), which may allude to the Hebrew Scriptures (i.e., the law and the prophets). The word *khazon* occurs in a similar expression in 1 Samuel 3:1, which refers to the rarity or absence of prophetic activity.

A few of the wisdom sayings in this subdivision are placed adjacent to each other likely because they share some common Hebrew vocabulary. The sayings in Proverbs 28:16–17 are probably two independent sayings that both use words from the root *'ashaq* ("to oppress," "burden," "torment," "exploit"). Likewise, vv. 25–26 consist of independent sayings that both use the word *batakh* ("to trust"). Similarly, the sayings in 29:19–20 address different topics but both use the term *dabar*, which in this context refers to speech or words.

The sayings in 28:19–22 seem to cluster around the theme of prosperity (i.e., riches and poverty). This is apparent from the occurrence of words and expressions referring to food/bread (vv. 19, 21), riches/wealth (vv. 20, 22), and poverty (vv. 19, 22). Also of interest are the proverbs that refer to discipline in 29:15–21. These verses teach that both children and slaves must be disciplined and corrected. Verses 15 and 17 advise using the rod and words of rebuke/reprimand to discipline a child. Similarly, v. 21 warns against requiring too little of slaves. Though the meaning of the first clause is relatively straightforward, involving a slave pampered from childhood, the meaning of the word *manon* in the second part of the verse is not completely certain, as is evident by the renderings provided by translators that range from the slave becoming a son/heir to the slave becoming insolent/arrogant/ungrateful. The basic idea of this proverb is that a slave that is pampered from youth and not taught to work cannot function well as a slave. Further, v. 19 teaches that words are not sufficient to correct a slave; the rod may also be necessary (v. 15; see also 10:13; 19:29; 26:3). Though slaves are not part of modern society, the principles of these sayings apply to management and leadership in general. That is, managers who expect productivity from their employees must use appropriate rewards and consequences. However, the connection between the treatment of slaves and the treatment of children is important (29:15, 17). Just as corporal punishment for slaves was acceptable in the ancient Near East but not in today's society, the application of the rod in the education of children may not necessarily involve a literal beating, but it does require age-appropriate discipline of other kinds.

An additional observation on the proverbs concerning the treatment of slaves in vv. 19 and 21 is that they serve as examples of how the counsels of this book are adapted to a fallen world. The word in these verses is the Hebrew *‘ebed*, which means "servant" or "slave." But slavery was never God's ideal, and the counsel of these verses on what is necessary to make slaves work does not reflect God's ideal. In the NT, Paul instructs slaves to serve their masters in the fear of the Lord, as slaves of Christ (Eph. 6:5–8; Col. 3:22–23). He also instructs slave owners not to threaten their slaves (Eph. 6:9) but to treat them as fellow slaves of God (Col. 4:1), that is, as brothers (Philem. 15–16). Thus, God's ideal is for His people to serve each other out of love, not out of fear of punishment or greed for rewards. That also means that God-fearing employers should treat their employees differently from the way other employers do. God Himself wants to be served out of love, not fear (John 15:12–17).

30:1–33

THE WORDS OF AGUR

Some have suggested that the last two chapters of Proverbs consist of a four-part appendix to the book, namely, the reflections of Agur (vv. 1–9), things that come in fours (vv. 10–33), the counsels of Lemuel's mother (31:1–9), and the virtuous wife (vv. 10–31). This is especially possible since the content and organization of these units differ from one another. However, since 30:10–33 does not have a title, and since the poem in 31:10–31 is not introduced by a line ascribing authorship, this commentary adopts the traditional outline, which takes 30:1a as the title for chapters 30 and 31:1 as the title for chapter 31.

30:1–9

The Reflections of Agur

Some interpret the word *massa’* ("burden," "oracle," "inspired utterance") as the proper noun "Massa," a place located in northern Arabia (Gen. 25:14; 1 Chr. 1:30). However, since the form of the Hebrew word would have to be modified to read "from Massa" or "Massaite," it is best to understand it as the common Hebrew word for a prophetic oracle. Agur expresses inspired personal reflections. The identity of Agur and the other individuals named in Proverbs 30:1 is unknown. The Septuagint resolves this problem by translating all the names as regular words. It reads "Fear my words, my son. And when you receive them, repent. This says the man to those who believe in God. And I stop." That is, Agur is translated as "fear," Jakeh as "when you receive," Ithiel as "those who believe in God," and Ucal as "I stop." However, the Septuagint presupposes a few changes to the letters in the Hebrew original. Besides, as explained above, the Septuagint reading may be influenced by its attempt to ascribe all of the proverbs to Solomon.

In these verses, Agur confesses his ignorance. The questions in v. 4 are rhetorical, since no human being could have claimed to have performed these actions. They may be compared to the rhetorical questions in Job 38. In contrast to human ignorance, God's word is perfect. Though no one can bring knowledge from heaven, God does speak to human beings, and His revelation is reliable. Agur makes two requests of God: to be kept from practicing/speaking deception and to be kept from both poverty and riches. In effect, he prays to be kept from temptation in order to live a balanced life.

30:10–33

Things That Come in Fours

The sayings in this section seem to be grouped by the use of the number four, though they are interspersed with shorter sayings in between. The first saying condemns any malicious report against a slave (v. 10). Since slaves in the ancient Near East were defenseless, their only recourse would be to curse the wrongdoer before the Lord. Verses 11–14 contain four sayings about the wicked generation. The number four is not used, but the saying consists of four lines that each begin with the Hebrew word *dor* ("generation," "period," "dwelling"). Some translate this term as referring to some group of people in general; others, as a "generation."

Verse 15 portrays a leech as the epitome of greed, and this is followed by a reference to four greedy things (vv. 15b–16). This is the first of several sayings that use the formula "three things…four." The pattern of a graded numerical sequence is also found elsewhere, especially in wisdom literature (see 6:16–19; Job 5:19–22). The exact rhetorical purpose of the formula is not clear. In many instances the fourth item is the climax of the list (see Prov. 30:18–19), but this is probably not the case in the context of vv. 15b–16. The list could also mean that there are many more than four and that these are examples. Since some of the sayings in this section contain four items but do not use the formula (vv. 11–14, 24–28), it is possible that the formula calls attention to the number rather than the last item on the list. The purpose is to highlight a list of things that can never consume enough or be satisfied. It seems that the idea is to learn to be satisfied because dissatisfaction is mainly associated with negative things.

Verse 17, like other proverbs, condemns contempt for parents. The first three items in vv. 18–19 refer to natural phenomena, whereas the fourth item refers to human relationships. Hence, the climax of this saying is the fourth item, the way of a man with a young woman/virgin (the Hebrew word means a young woman, whether married or unmarried). Some have explained this passage as referring to the wonder of human procreation, though it may also simply refer to love and courtship between a man and a woman. Verse 10 introduces another way: the way of an adulterous woman. The adulteress commits adultery and then denies having done wrong. One sin leads to another—an attempt to conceal the first.

The list in vv. 21–23 consists of events that violate the common order of society and that are disturbing to common sense. It is not clear whether or not there is a climax in this list. Verses 24–28 contain another numerical saying. Though not introduced by the formula "three things…four," there are four things in the list. This wisdom saying consists of a list of small creatures that display wisdom: ants, *shepannim* ("rock badgers," "hyraxes," "conies"), locusts, and the *semamit* ("spider," "lizard"). The verse does not specify how people should apply the behavior of these creatures to their own lives. In contrast to the previous list, the list in vv. 29–31 includes large creatures that display a stately, fearless stride (i.e., they walk with style): a lion, a *zarzir* ("strutting rooster," "greyhound"), and a male goat. The fourth item of the list, a king, is undoubtedly the climax. Although there is some uncertainty concerning the exact translation of this clause, this proverb seems to focus on the impressive personality of the king.

The wisdom saying on folly in vv. 32–33 does not consist of a list of four items. Instead, a double "if" clause introduces the counsel for those who are proud and who plot/devise evil to put their hands on their mouths (v. 32). This is explained through three clauses that all contain the Hebrew word *mits* ("churning," "pressing," "twisting," "squeezing"; v. 33). The point here is that foolish words and actions produce strife.

31:1–31

THE WORDS OF LEMUEL

Proverbs 31 consists of two main sections: instructions related to the behavior of a king (vv. 2–9) and a description of a virtuous woman (vv. 10–31). This commentary takes the title in v. 1, which attributes the sayings to King Lemuel's mother, as the title for the content of the whole chapter.

31:1–9

The Counsels of Lemuel's Mother

Although Proverbs elsewhere mentions the teachings of both mothers and fathers (see 6:20), this is the only passage that actually ascribes a wisdom saying to a mother. This wisdom saying contains a title (31:1), counsel on what a king should not do (vv. 2–7), and counsel on what a king should do (vv. 8–9). The message is that a king should use his power not to gratify his own desires but to serve the needs of those who are powerless. By extension, the principle also applies to anyone in a position of authority.

Proverbs 31:1 could serve as the title of only the first section, in which case the words that Lemuel's mother taught him end in v. 9, or it could attribute the entire chapter to these words. As in 30:1 the Hebrew word *massa’* can be understood as the word for a prophetic burden/oracle or as a proper name (i.e., "king of Massa"). The word *mah* in 31:2 can also be variously understood. It is usually a simple interrogative particle ("what?," "why?," "how?"). In some cases, it is an interrogative that implies an emphatic negation (Gen. 37:26; 1 Kin. 12:16; 2 Kin. 9:18–19), and in others it could serve as a negation (e.g., Song 8:4). Hence, the three occurrences of *mah* can be understood as an emphatic negation ("No…! No…! No…!") introducing the counsel that follows. Alternatively, they could simply be a form of address ("O my son," "Listen, my son!") calling attention to the counsel that follows.

The passage admonishes the king not to waste his strength on women (Prov. 31:3) or on wine (vv. 4–7). The admonition is especially applicable to most ancient kings, who were proud of their virility (see Deut. 17:17). However, the second part of Proverbs 31:3 may indicate that the warning does not mean that the king should never love a woman, as if all women were bad, but rather that it is a warning against the kind of woman who ruins and destroys kings. Instead of wasting his strength on wine and women, a king should defend the cause of the powerless (vv. 8–9). He should open his mouth not to drink wine or beer but to speak on behalf of the helpless.

31:10–31
The Virtuous Wife

It is fitting that the book of Proverbs concludes with a portrait of a wise woman. Although wisdom is portrayed in the book as a woman and is often contrasted with an immoral woman, this passage presents the clearest, if not the only, portrayal of a wise woman. There are several ways to apply the message of this poem. The virtuous wife is the opposite of the immoral woman. Hence, this is the description of the ideal woman. On the other hand, it is noteworthy that this poem repeats some of the themes of the book. That is, the virtuous wife exhibits diligence (31:13–19, 24, 27), foresight (vv. 21, 25), wise speech (v. 26), generosity (v. 20), and the fear of the Lord (v. 30). At the same time, her actions bring to herself and her family the wealth (vv. 11–12, 24) and honor (vv. 23, 28–31) that wisdom promises. Thus, there is a sense in which the description of a virtuous wife is more than simply a portrait of the ideal woman.

Since wisdom is personified as a woman in Proverbs, the virtuous wife can also be viewed as the personification of wisdom, in contrast to the immoral woman, who is the personification of folly. By extension, then, the picture of the virtuous wife is a depiction of not only a wise wife but also a wise person (man or woman, married or unmarried). It should be noted in passing that the various levels of application do not deny the possibility that this poem may have been originally written to praise a specific individual (i.e., it could have been a praise poem composed by an unnamed husband for his wife).

The description of the virtuous wife is given in the form of a poem. However, the statements in the poem are not thematically organized. Instead, they are aesthetically organized to form an acrostic poem (i.e., the verses are arranged in alphabetical order, each verse beginning with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet). Hence, apart from the first verse (v. 10), which introduces the topic of the poem, and perhaps the last few verses, the message of the poem is best understood in terms of the sum of its totality rather than by the way it is organized.

Some of the features of this poem, such as the characterization of this woman as a woman of strength (the Heb. word *khayil* can have several meanings and nuances; though it is usually translated variously as "virtuous," "noble," "excellent," etc., it can also mean "power," "wealth," and "army"), have led some to suggest that the poem could be a heroic hymn, which was often written for military heroes. However, since not all aspects of the poem fit that type of poem, others suggest that it is better classified as an encomium). If so, it is not an encomium in terms of the classical rhetorical type (which includes a prologue, a narration of the person's birth and upbringing, etc.) but in the general sense of a speech given in praise of a person, a type of person, or a character quality. Other examples of encomia in the Bible include Psalms 1 and 15 (see also Ps. 112; Is. 52:13—53:12; 1 Cor. 13).

There are several words or expressions in Proverbs 31:10 that deserve comment. The poem begins with the central character, an *'eshet khayil*. The expression is also found in 12:4 and Ruth 3:11. As noted above, the word *khayil* means "strength" and can refer not only to physical strength but also to character. Boaz is also referred to as *khayil* (Ruth 2:1). As various translations indicate, there the expression could mean wealth, prominence, or noble character. Though the virtuous wife is not depicted in terms of military prowess (though there is a military metaphor in Prov. 31:11), she does possess physical strength (vv. 17, 25). Though she is not depicted as wealthy, she is a resourceful woman with business abilities that bring wealth to her family (vv. 11, 14, 16, 18, 24). Her greatest strength is her character, which displays diligence (vv. 15, 18, 27), foresight in providing for the future (vv. 21, 25), wise speech (v. 26), and generosity (v. 20). She is valuable to her husband (vv. 11, 23), her children (vv. 21, 27), and even her servants (v. 15). "Who can find?" in v. 10 is a rhetorical question that expects the answer "no one" (cf. 30:4). However, in contrast to the rhetorical question in Ecclesiastes 7:28, this question does not mean that such a woman does not exist but rather that she is precious because she is rare and difficult to find. Indeed, her value is far above rubies.

Another word in Proverbs 31:10 that deserves a brief comment is the word *meker* ("sale price," "merchandise," "value"). According to some, it refers to a dowry price. Although this interpretation is possible, it is probably better to understand it metaphorically in the sense of "value" or "worth." A few remarks can be added to some of the remaining verses. In v. 23, the husband of the virtuous wife is described as a man of prominent status who meets with other leaders at the gate. The implication is that it is because of her virtuous character and behavior that he can achieve such success. The word *khayil* is used again in v. 10, where it is translated in a variety of ways that demonstrate the richness and range of meanings possible in the word: "done well," "excelled," "are capable," "done virtuously," "act competently," or "done nobly." It is not clear whether or not v. 30 continues the husband's words begun in v. 29, but this does not affect the message of the poem.

Verse 30 contrasts physical beauty with wisdom. That does not mean that the virtuous wife is ugly or that beauty is bad, but simply that the beauty of character is far more important than physical beauty. By extension, the principle applies to both men and women in the sense that their relationship with the Lord is more important than looks, strength, or any other asset. Since the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (1:7; 9:10), it is fitting that this picture of the virtuous wife includes the fact that she is a woman who fears the Lord. The final verse (31:31) is an exhortation to praise the virtuous wife but also functions as a restatement of the theme of the poem.

The journey through the book of Proverbs has been a search for wisdom. The search is in many ways never-ending. Wisdom speaks to all, the simple as well as the wise, challenging them to embrace her values and to keep on learning from her. The book communicates the importance of constantly looking forward for new and deeper expressions of God's wisdom. The wise live in hope of the constant enjoyment of a never-ending life.

ECCLESIASTES

INTRODUCTION

Title and Authorship. The name "Ecclesiastes" is derived from the Greek word *ekklesia*, which means "assembly" or "church." It is the Greek translation of the Hebrew word *qahal*, which refers to the "assembly of worshippers." The word *qohelet*, "Ecclesiastes," seems to allude to 1 Kings 8, where the word *qahal* occurs seven times to designate the assembly of worshippers who were gathered to be instructed and exhorted by Solomon. In a parallel manner, the word *qohelet* occurs seven times in the book of *qohelet* (Ecclesiastes) and thus refers to the one who instructs and preaches to the *qahal*, Solomon himself, hence the translation "the Preacher" in some Bible versions. This subtle allusion to the Solomonic authorship of Ecclesiastes in the title of the book is explicitly affirmed in the introduction of the book itself (Eccl. 1:1, 12, 16; cf. 2:7, 9) and is implied in the numerous reminiscences of the life and personality of King Solomon (2:1–2; 5:1–7).

Date. A number of Egyptianisms (in ideas, expressions, and literary features) suggest the antiquity of the book and support its association with Solomon, who was very much immersed in ancient Egyptian culture and wisdom (1 Kin. 4:30; 10:28–29; 11:1). Furthermore, the language of the teacher who often refers to himself in the past ("I was," "I acquired," and "I was king") and his profound concern with death suggest that the author was old and approaching death, an idea that was also entertained in Jewish tradition. Therefore, the book may have been written in Solomon's last years and before 931 B.C., the date of Solomon's death.

Backgrounds. The historical setting of the book is well indicated, pointing to the time of Solomon (1:2), when the temple was still present (5:1–7) and Israel was still united under the same king (1:12). There are even specific allusions to particular critical moments in Solomon's reign when he abused his power (4:1; cf. 1 Kin. 9:21; 12:4) or when his future was threatened by a potential successor (4:13–16; cf. 1 Kin. 11:26–40). Yet, the existential issues discussed in this book and its warnings and lessons transcend times and cultures.

Theology and Purpose. The keyword of the book is the Hebrew word *hebel*—"futile," "meaningless," or "vanity"—which appears thirty-eight times. This word refers to the ephemeral character of "vapor" or the emptiness of chaos and death, or it evokes the tragic fate of the frail Abel (in Hebrew, *hebel*), who came and disappeared like a vapor in contrast to his dominating brother Cain. Because this word is rendered in various ways by Bible translators ("pointless," "meaningless," "futile," "vapor," or "vanity"), this commentary will often use the single word "futile" unless there is a discussion of the particular significance of the Hebrew word *hebel* or its superlative form *habel habalim* ("vanity of vanities," "absolute futility," or "utterly meaningless"). The lesson that is emphasized throughout the book embraces all aspects and values of human existence. The book of Ecclesiastes questions the value of common activities or qualities such as work (2:4–11), joy (vv. 1–3); wealth (5:10—6:12), power (5:8–9), wisdom (2:14–15; 9:15), and even religion (5:1–6). They are denounced as futile insofar as they are the result of human achievements. Challenging questions and disturbing paradoxes can upset our easy serenity. Yet, instead of Ecclesiastes promoting skepticism or pessimism, as it has often been interpreted, the book confronts us with the tough reality of life and ourselves, inviting us to reassess our values and reorient our existence. We are thus called to be responsible before God in the heart of a complex world, where we encounter both the good

and the bad. All is futile unless all is received as the gift of God. Only God's grace will save us from the vanity, futility, or meaninglessness of this world. The message of Ecclesiastes draws intensely from the early pages of the book of Genesis: the fall of humankind, the curse, sin, evil, death, the destinies of Abel and Cain, the reference to the angel/messenger of God. The book is thus universal and concerns everyone, as indicated in expressions such as "under the sun," "under [the] heaven[s]," "on [the] earth," "man/human (Adam)," and the use of the generic divine term *'elohim* rather than the particular name of the God of Israel, *YHWH*. The book addresses a number of great universal theological issues, such as the Creation, judgment, righteousness by works, grace, sin, hope, inspiration and revelation, the state of the dead, prophecy, and the apocalyptic destiny of the world. In its own peculiar way, it speaks of hope in the context of a disoriented world. Amazingly, the book of Ecclesiastes confronts us with existential issues and even speaks to secular, nonreligious people, using philosophical language, and appealing to logic and existential reflections rather than to religious considerations. References to God are rare or implicit, as are references to the cult or to the temple. The discourse of the book resonates, then, with our postmodern times, as we have begun to realize that naive optimism and what appear to be coherent systems do not fit anymore. Shaking all our shallow securities, the book of Ecclesiastes obliges us to face the desperate condition of the world and to only hope in its cosmic and eschatological salvation. The final message of the book, which summarizes all its lessons (12:13–14), is concerned not only with the totality of human existence and wise counsels for the present life but also with a great warning of judgment and good news for the redemption of the world.

Literary Features. Although the structure of the book is not clearly delineated, the regular and symmetric distribution of the two Hebrew keywords, *hebel*, "vanity," "meaningless," "futility," and *qohelet*, "Preacher" or "Teacher," play a role in the structuring of the book. The use of the word *hebel* marks the two sections of the book: *hebel* appears mostly in chapters 1–6, rarely in chapters 7–12, and can be found in the expression referring to *hebel* and chasing the wind, which appears only in chapters 1–6. Likewise, the word *qohelet*, "Preacher" or "Teacher," appears in the beginning (1:1, 2, 12), in the middle (7:27), and in the end (12:8–10), thus paralleling the design in two sections suggested by the other keyword. The first half of the book is concerned with the problem of vanity, futility, or meaninglessness. It is characterized by a refrain (1:14; 2:11, 17, 26; 4:4, 16; 6:9) that refers to *hebel*, "vanity," "meaningless," or "futility," and chasing the wind, and it is characterized by the greatest concentration of the word *hebel* (twenty-four times out of the thirty-eight times in the book). The second half of the book is concerned with the problem of wisdom and is characterized by the greatest concentration of the word "wisdom" (*khokmah*), which occurs sixteen times in this section (versus eleven times in the first section). In addition, the beginning and the end of the book echo each other (a so-called *inclusio*) with the expression *habel habalim*—"vanity of vanities," "absolute futility," "utterly meaningless" (1:2; cf. 12:8) and with the same cosmic perspective linking the prologue (1:1–11) to the epilogue (12:9–14). All these literary features suggest a particular literary structure: Prologue: The Nonsense of Creation (1:1–11); The Problem of Futility (1:12—6:12); The Problem of Wisdom (7:1—12:8); Epilogue: The Sense of Creation (12:9–14).

COMMENTARY

1:1–11

PROLOGUE: THE NONSENSE OF CREATION

Following the superscription (v. 1), which identifies the author of the book as Solomon, the only son of David who was king in Jerusalem, the prologue is introduced by the phrase *habel habalim* ("vanity of vanities," "absolute futility," or "utterly meaningless"), which serves as the motto of the book (vv. 2–3). This is followed by a discussion and analysis of the absence of the new from God's creation (vv. 4–11).

1:2–3

Futility and Profit

The word *hebel*—"meaningless," "vanity," or "futility"—is used five times in v. 2. This repetition emphasizes the importance of the concept. The phrase *habel habalim* is a superlative suggesting the maximum of *hebel*. The word *hebel* designates the "vapor," what is passing and has no substance, and may be identified as the unformed state of creation before the Creation week (Gen. 1:2; cf. Is. 49:4). If all is futile, it is pertinent to ask if there is any profit or gain under the sun (Eccl. 1:3). The word *yitron* literally means "the plus, the supplement" and is often translated as "profit" or "gain." To the question "What is the plus; what has been gained under the sun?" the answer is already implied in the motto: it is *hebel*, meaning "nothing." The expression "under the sun," unique to the book of Ecclesiastes, echoes an Egyptian idiom and evokes the solar cycle, which refers to what is repeated on a "regular" and "daily" basis without producing any new thing.

1:2–11. Cosmic Movements. As the prologue appears to parallel Creation, the stage of formlessness and emptiness (Gen. 1:2) seems to be identified in Ecclesiastes as futility (Eccl. 1:2), after which cosmic movements are described. Generations of humans come and go, in contrast to the abiding earth (v. 4). The sun rises and sets and then goes back to its original place (v. 5). The wind goes to the south, then to the north, and then returns to its starting point (v. 6). The rivers go to the sea from where they originate, but the sea does not benefit from them and thus is never full (v. 7). Likewise, humans speak, see, and hear but are never satisfied (v. 8). From these observations Solomon concludes that there is no progress. In response to the question earlier raised of what profits, he proposes that there is no profit. "There is nothing new under the sun" (v. 9) implicitly suggests that there is no remembrance from one generation to another (v. 11), as if no one ever existed. All these vain movements of creation attest that creation has not gone beyond the stage of formlessness, the stage of futility, thus confirming the introductory programmatic statement: all is futility (v. 2).

1:12—6:12

THE PROBLEM OF FUTILITY

1:12–18

All is Futile, Utterly Futile

The first application of this truth concerns the search for wisdom. Solomon shifts from the third person in the prologue to the first person (vv. 12, 14, 16, 17). He will draw his lessons from his own thinking and personal experience of wisdom, and no longer from the objective movements of creation. Solomon verified the futility of wisdom both objectively in the object of wisdom itself and subjectively in the task of searching for wisdom.

1:12–15. The Object of Wisdom. The object of wisdom, the state of the earth, was so tragic that even wisdom would not improve its vain condition. Indeed, all these works done under the sun (v. 14) were in fact God's works. The phrase "under the sun" alludes to the work of creation that had already been observed in the prologue and thus refers to God the Creator as the subject, an idea implicit in the passive form of the verb "done." This principle is reaffirmed in v. 15—what is crooked cannot be straightened—which also implies God as the subject (v. 13). No one would be able to change a world that was under the curse of God (Gen. 3:17, 18).

1:16–18. The Search for Wisdom. The search for wisdom, even though a gift of God (v. 13), would not resolve the problems of the world. Solomon observes that the acquisition of wisdom, which he ironically could boast about (v. 16), increases the troubles of the world.

Prologue and Creation Story Parallels

Note the parallels between the prologue (Eccl. 1:2–11) and the Creation story (Gen. 1:1—2:4a):

Ecclesiastes	Genesis
All is futile (1:2)	Shapeless and empty earth (1:1–2)
Under the sun (1:3)	Light; under the sky (days 1 and 2: vv. 3–8)
The earth (1:4)	Dry land/ground (day 3: vv. 9–13)
Sunrise and sunset (1:5–6)	Lights for days and seasons (day 4: vv. 14–19)
Rivers and sea (1:7)	Waters and seas (day 5: vv. 20–23)
Humans speak, see, and hear (1:8)	Creation of humans (day 6: vv. 26–31)
Past and future generations (1:9–11)	Historical record of generations (summary of Creation: v. 4a)

2:1–26

The Futility of Happiness

Solomon urges us to test his observation in the domain of life. The purpose of the test was to see what was good for people (lit. the "sons of *adam*"—Adam or "humanity"; v. 3). The word "good" is another allusion to the text of Creation, where it occurs seven times, and is also associated with the verb "see" (Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). Solomon's test was to check whether there was something left from the "good" of creation. Echoing the Creation story, he repeats seven times the word *hebel*—"vanity," "meaningless," or "futility" (Eccl. 2:1, 11, 15, 19, 21, 23, 26). In other words, the good of creation had turned into *hebel*, the stage of pre-Creation emptiness and formlessness. It was as if Creation in its fullest sense did not happen; good had not yet been created. Solomon included all aspects of happiness in this test (joy, work, and even wisdom).

2:1–3. Joy. Looking at his own experience, Solomon proposes now to search for the meaning and the effect of these values (v. 1). These pleasures are qualified from the outset as futile (v. 1). The kind of joy Solomon describes is not external. It was Solomon himself who produced this joy and gave himself these pleasures. With the help of his wisdom, in all lucidity (v. 3), Solomon explains the mechanism of these pleasures and provides three reasons why he considers them futile. First, they are "madness" and do not make sense, just like laughter (v. 2), which is irrational and is triggered by a person who stumbles or by a stupid joke. Second, they are inefficient; they accomplish nothing (v. 2), just like the game or the movie that entertains us. They will leave no trace, like the vapor (*hebel*) in the air. Third, they are artificial, just like wine or a drug that creates a false sense of happiness in a world of illusion.

2:4–11. Work. Solomon refers to his own works of achievement: to building projects (v. 4), clearly pointing to himself as a great builder (1 Kin. 7:1–12; 9:15–28), to his wealth (Eccl. 2:7, 8; cf. 1 Kin. 10:23), to his acquisition of cattle (Eccl. 2:7), to his silver and gold (v. 8; 1 Kin. 10:14–29), and to his many women (Eccl. 2:8; cf. 1 Kin. 11:1). The sevenfold repetition of the verb "make" (*'asah*) in this paragraph (Eccl. 2:4, 5, 6, 8, 11) may be another pointer to the Creation narrative where "make" is a keyword (Gen. 1:11, 12, 16, 25, 26, 31). The idea is that Solomon was acting as the Creator. Likewise, when he refers to his building projects, he seems to allude to the building of the temple by using the verb "build" seven times (1 Kin. 8:8–13), referring to himself as building for God, while in our context Solomon speaks of building for himself. These allusions to the building of the temple intended for God unveil the true intention of the builder. Even in building for God, Solomon was in fact working for himself and to his own glory. This is why he concludes that all of these works, acquisitions, and achievements, including the pious ones, are futile (Eccl. 2:11).

2:12–23. Wisdom. Then Solomon turns to what he considers the most valuable quality, namely, wisdom (v. 12), which refers to intelligence, science, and practical discernment in daily behavior (7:1–12; Prov. 24:3). He acknowledges the positive value of wisdom. It is better than folly (Eccl. 2:13) and thus allows one to see clearly and to walk in the light, while folly takes one into darkness (vv. 13–14). The language is reminiscent of ancient Egyptian beliefs according to which the wise walks in the light and is alive, while the fool walks in darkness and will die. For Solomon, however, both the wise and the fool have the same destiny: they will die (vv. 15–16). Therefore, he concludes that since all will die, the possession of all the works of wisdom amounts to nothing and life is not worth living (vv. 17–23).

2:24–26. Conclusion: The Gift of God. The discourse about the futility of joy, work, and wisdom is upsetting. Solomon puts these values in the right perspective. Although we are entitled to joy, work, and wisdom, these qualities are all futile insofar as they are the product of our doing. The only way to make these values fulfill their purpose and not become futile is to receive them as the gift of God. This idea is underscored four times in different ways. The first time is through an image that evokes creation as the good (or "enjoyment," "satisfaction") from the hand of God (v. 24), and three times through the use of the verb "give" (v. 26), a verb that also belongs to the language of creation (Gen. 1:29). To make his point even more acute, Solomon concludes with a paradox. God gives to whom he wants, that is to the man who is good or pleasing in His sight

(Eccl. 2:26). This is another way of saying that who we are or what we do does not justify our beneficial reception of God's gifts, but that they are the gift of God. Only a life oriented by this perspective of God's grace is worth living and is not futile.

3:1–11
The Gift of Time

The first observation of grace is found in time. Unlike Greek philosophers, who saw time as a destructive power, the ancient Hebrews saw life in time. Thus, when Solomon says that there is a time for every event (v. 1), he does not mean that there is an appropriate moment for humans to act; neither does he mean that events happen without our control in a deterministic manner. The use of the preposition *le* ("to"), attached to the word "all," (to everything...) suggests instead that all these time-events, the times of human existence, are to be received as grace from God. This truth is then shaped in a poem balancing the opposites:

1. Birth/death; plant/pluck (v. 2)
2. Kill/heal; break down/build up (v. 3)
3. Weep/laugh; mourn/dance (v. 4)
4. Cast away stones/gather stones; embrace/refrain from embracing (v. 5)
5. Search (or "gain")/cease searching (or "lose"—lit. "destroy"); keep/throw away (v. 6)
6. Tear/sew (or mend); silence/speak (v. 7)
7. Love/hate; war/peace (v. 8)

The lesson of this poem is that all times, positive and negative, are God's gifts. He is the One who made everything (good and bad) beautiful (or "appropriate" or "fitting") in its time (v. 11). This idea is repeated to emphasize that God is always in control. It also affirms the monotheistic principle that there is only one God (Deut. 32:39; Is. 45:6–7). Even when things are bad, all will work out for good (Gen. 50:20; Esth. 4:14; Rom. 8:28). The seesaw movement between the two poles also contains a lesson of hope: when bad things happen, the good is around the corner.

3:11–14
The Gift of Eternity

In Hebrew thought, eternity is not the absence of time but the intensification of time that will last forever. God has put eternity in the hearts of human beings (v. 11). Just like time, eternity is God's gift. The verb "give" (*natan*) that is used here is variously translated as "set," "placed," or "put." Yet this gift is only in the heart. Humans have not been created eternal; they only have a sense of eternity. This gift of eternity, which humans have as an intuition, affirms the grace of God in time. This hope in eternal life helps us to see in our time, embedded in pain and under the constant threat of death, the presence of the Invisible. On the other hand, we are urged to enjoy the good we receive in our life (vv. 12–13). These good moments are the evidence we have now of this eternity. They are, like eternity, the gift of God (v. 13), and as such they are perfect; nothing can be added to them, and nothing can be taken from them (v. 14). This is a way of inculcating reverence in the human soul (v. 14). In passing, Solomon appeals for a life oriented by the fear of God, which is the sense that God sees everything and that we are accountable to Him for everything we do (v. 15).

3:16–22
The Gift of Judgment

Yet, Solomon's theology, which invites us to see "good" in everything, poses problems. Indeed, he observes that reality is otherwise, and things are not what they are supposed to be: instead of justice, righteousness, and judgment, there is only wickedness (v. 16). Faith is not blind. It has to confront evil in the world.

3:17. God Shall Judge the Righteous and the Wicked. The only solution to the problem of the world was in the future judgment of God, an event with a cosmic scope that concerns all. The Hebrew word *kol*, "all" or "every," occurs seven times in this passage (vv. 17–20). We have to face reality: *all* this crooked and absurd world is irreparable (1:15).

3:18–22. The Estate of the Sons of Men. To prove his point about the tragic condition of our human condition, Solomon refers to humanity's mortal nature, which is absolute and cannot be repaired. In regard to death, humans are like animals (v. 19), just as the wise is like the fool (2:16). All have the same breath, which is the vapor-breath (*hebel*; 3:19). All will die. From this hopeless description, Solomon concludes that the only and ultimate lesson for humans is to enjoy the gift of God (v. 22) and live in the perspective of His grace. As far as the future is concerned, Solomon simply encourages trust because we cannot control it. The cosmic scope of the passage, which embraces humans and animals, the wise and the fool—that is to say, everything—suggests an eschatological perspective.

4:1–16
The Case of the Other Person

Still preoccupied with the problem of human wickedness, Solomon discusses its manifestation in human relationships. Four cases are considered: the oppressed, the envious, the companion, and the usurper. Each case is introduced by the same formula in the first person, alternating between what he "returned" to consider (or considered "again") and what he "saw," referring to Solomon's initiative to investigate.

4:1–3. The Oppressed. Solomon saw the tears of the oppressed, which are those who are lacking power and suffering injustice. The nature of the oppression is not explained. What primarily disturbed him was that these victims had no comforter (v. 1), which is another way of referring to God (Lam. 1:2, 9; Is. 51:12). This absence of God in the midst of unjust persecution is indeed troubling and challenges faith. Solomon, like Job (Job 3:11, 20), questions the sense of existence. He even goes so far as to "praise" (*shabakh*) the dead (Eccl. 4:2), using a verb that normally applies to God (Ps. 117:1; 147:12; 1 Chr. 16:35), as if God is no longer worthy of praises and is absent. Yet, the repetition of the phrase referring to the lack of a comforter, which alludes to God (Is. 51:12; 66:13), contrasts with the phrase referring to wickedness in the place of justice (Eccl. 3:16). This suggests by analogy that the divine Judge is here on the horizon. There is hope despite pain. Solomon shakes the traditional logic of success religion, which provides the automatic assurance of immediate gratifications. He knew otherwise and therefore promoted the true religion, which does not deny the reality of evil but perseveres in faith despite suffering.

4:4–6. The Envious. This time Solomon did not see the human face but only the hands or arms (v. 5) and the fists (v. 6). The one turning against us is our neighbor, who is comparable to us and thus can envy what we have. This attitude will ultimately lead to wickedness, stealing, and murder (2 Sam. 12:1–15). Solomon proposes that in such conditions it is better to be alone (Eccl. 4:6). A handful of "rest," "tranquility," or "peace" is better than production that chases the wind. All these hands and fists without faces convey a warning against the race for wealth and achievement at the expense of seeing the human face. It is better to stay alone.

4:7–12. The Companion. And yet, it is not good to be alone. Two arguments support this advice. First, it is simply not good to be alone (v. 8), for work is not gratifying. We are not satisfied (v. 8), for we do not use and enjoy what we have gained. If we have no one to give to, what we have amounts to nothing. Second, it is good to be with someone. In the Hebrew, the word "good" is repeated twice ("better" uses the root "good"; v. 9). We need the other when stumbling (v. 10), cold (v. 11), and fighting (v. 12). In conclusion, Solomon refers to a proverb that enunciates in paradoxical language the value of being two: if we are two, we end up being three. The proverb may refer to God, to the coming of a friend of our friend, or to the birth of a child to a human couple.

4:13–16. The Usurper. The fourth person is not described as a physical person. While the other three collectively have a face, hands, and eyes, this one is described simply as a poor, wise youth (v. 13) coming out of prison (v. 14), who would become king and thus take the place of the former king (v. 15). The scenario fits the sad story of Solomon's succession. Like this fourth person, Jeroboam, Solomon's successor, was poor (v. 13; cf. 1 Kin. 11:26), young, wise (Eccl. 4:13; cf. 1 Kin. 11:28), and very popular (Eccl. 4:15; cf. 1 Kin. 11:35). Solomon describes himself as old and foolish (Eccl. 4:13; cf. 1:17; 2:3, 9, 10), which is an indication of his repentance at the end of his life. The story, predicting that those who would follow the new king would not be pleased with (or "rejoice") in him (4:16), also fits the case of Jeroboam (1 Kin. 15:34; 16:2, 19, 26; 22:52). The ending shows that Solomon was right. Even the young wise man, who succeeded the old fool, would grow old and foolish and finish in futility (Eccl. 4:16). Here we find a universal and paradoxical lesson to free us from the illusion of our own wisdom. Only the awareness of our own futility will save us from futility.

5:1–7
The Futility of Religion

Suddenly, the tone changes and becomes imperative. Until this point, Solomon had merely shared his reflections about the futility of life. Now, he speaks about religion in the first person and addresses his pupil in the second person, using ten imperative verbs that end with the command to fear God (v. 7).

Verse 1 begins with the admonition to "walk prudently" or "guard your steps." The Hebrew text literally means "keep your feet." The first imperative verb *shemor*, "keep," belongs to religious language and generally indicates obedience to God's commandments (Ex. 20:6; Lev. 18:26; Deut. 5:12). Solomon refers here to conduct in the house of God and to the way we worship. Our prayers, our singing, our moving around in church should be controlled and guided by a deep sense of reverence toward God. This command also applies to the way we live our religion and keep God's commandments. We may stumble not merely in the refusal to observe God's laws but also while attempting to keep them. The greatest profanations of religion are often performed in the very practice of religion. They offer the sacrifice of fools (Eccl. 5:1).

Religion is more about hearing, obeying, and receiving from God than about giving or speaking to Him (v. 1b). Two examples illustrate this aspect of the futility of religion. The first case concerns our words (vv. 2–3) uttered before God. We should not pronounce them hastily, for we may lose the sense of the distance of God: He is in heaven and we are on earth (v. 2). Solomon urges us, then, to use few words, for many words are, like dreams, futile (v. 7). The second case concerns our vows and our commitment to God. What is implied here is not so much our failure to fulfill our pious promises. Solomon has in mind the lies religious people tell in relation to religious matters. Such behavior shows that God is not taken seriously and may generate the annihilation of the very pious goal (v. 6). With this dramatic warning, Solomon concludes with the general principle of the fear of God (v. 7), which is another way of reminding the religious person of God's capacity to see our motivations and judge the futility of our religion.

5:8–9

The Futility of Power

Solomon knew by experience the futility of power. The first illusion entertained by those in power is that they can do whatever they wish. This is based on the naive belief that there is no power above them. This futility is unveiled by Solomon by taking the reader down step by step until finally reaching the land/the earth, which represents the last and highest authority. The language of the parable is reminiscent of two other biblical passages. The first is the curse of Genesis (common words: "earth," "land," and "serve"), which enslaves humans to the earth (Gen. 3:17–18). The second text is found in David's prayer (common words: "over all" and "earth"), which underlines God's sovereignty (1 Chr. 29:11–14). While these two parallel passages emphasize the futility of power, they both contain a perspective of hope. In Genesis we find the promise of redemption, and in David's prayer we find the assurance of the God who even controls and rules over all wicked powers.

5:10–17

The Futility of Wealth

What we observed in regard to power is similarly observed in regard to wealth. In both cases we experience futility and we end with nothing. Wealth, which begins with the positive account, ends systematically with a negative evaluation (vv. 9, 11, 13, 14). We always want more money (v. 10). Second, wealth will be taken from us (v. 11). Third, the value of wealth is denied; the rich are always worried and hurting (vv. 12–13). Fourth, we will end up as we came, which was with nothing (vv. 15–16). The lesson is that there is no profit in accumulating wealth (vv. 16–17).

5:18–20

The Gift of God

Solomon was not against wealth. His critique essentially concerns the way we see these material blessings. His message is that they should not be taken as inherently valuable. In fact, he insists that we should enjoy them. They are to be enjoyed because they are the gift of God. He affirms this lesson explicitly: God gives wealth and possessions (v. 19). This idea is reinforced by the use of the term *kheleq* ("heritage," "portion," "lot," or "reward") twice (vv. 18, 19) to signify God's effective presence (Ps. 73:26; Deut. 7:9). The lesson is the same: all is futility except if it is taken as the gift of God. Only the gift of God is not futility.

6:1–12

The Futility of the Gift of God

This is the shortest chapter in the book and may function as the conclusion of the first part of the book. After having systematically demonstrated that all is futility except the gift of God, Solomon now finds the ferment of futility even in the gift

of God. He calls this "great evil" (some translations read "common" or "prevalent"—the Heb. *rab* can mean "great" or also "much"; the latter leading to the rendering of "common").

6:1–2. Lack of Satisfaction. Solomon next considers the case of a person to whom God does not provide the opportunity to enjoy all of His gifts. The thought was expressed in a positive way in 5:19. Now the negative alternative expresses the personal experience of Solomon. Like the person in the example, Solomon did receive riches, wealth, and honor (2 Chr. 1:12). Yet, the enjoyment of these gifts was limited to Solomon's life (1 Kin. 3:13). Like the man in his parable, Solomon saw that they are consumed by a foreigner. This autobiographical allusion illustrates the point of Ecclesiastes, namely, that even the gifts of God, if we are no longer present to enjoy them, qualify as futility.

6:3–6. If a Man Begets a Hundred Children. While in the previous observation the quality of futility was drawn from the experience of death, now it is inferred from the experience of birth. Another autobiographical reference is implied here. Solomon had an ambivalent experience of birth: a positive one, for Solomon had many wives and must have begotten many children, and a negative one, since his birth was associated with the birth of David and Bathsheba's child, who died not long after birth (2 Sam. 12:24). Looking at his long life (1 Kin. 3:14) and at the stillborn, Solomon reaches the conclusion that they both are futile. This hyperbolic presentation intends to prove that even without death things are bad. For the more we live, the more intense will be our experience of the futility of life, even if life is God's gift.

6:7–12. The Wandering of Desire. This last paragraph resonates with the prologue concerning the longing (*nepesh*) that is never satisfied (v. 7; cf. 1:7). The Hebrew word *nepesh* (6:9), rendered here as "desire" or "appetite," is often rendered in other contexts as "soul." This "soul" (*nepesh*) is not a separate spiritual entity distinct from the body. The term refers to a living person who has spiritual (vv. 2, 3) as well as physical aspirations (vv. 7, 9). Every part of the person is involved in desire: the mouth (metaphor for the stomach, or appetite; v. 7), the eyes (metaphor for vision; v. 9), the foot ("walk"—metaphor for conduct; v. 8), and the full person (v. 2). To express this longing of the soul, Solomon uses an idiomatic expression: the wandering of *nepesh* (v. 9). It figuratively suggests the journey of a person (our own journey) to another place (2 Kin. 5:26). The soul, the whole person, longs for another place; it yearns for something that it does not have and cannot grasp. What is missing belongs to another order. In this connection, the wise is not more than the fool (v. 8). We are all visited by the same nostalgia and frustration; it is a thirst that will never be quenched (John 4:13–14). Solomon warns, then, that it is vain to try to explain it and systematize it. This thirst is beyond comprehension, and the more words we may utter to dissert on this mystery, the more vapor there will be and the foggier the result will be. Words are the many things that increase futility (Eccl. 6:11). The word *debarim*, translated here as "things," also means "words," which fits well here since the context implies the exercise of speech (v. 10 refers to naming and contending). Ecclesiastes concludes with a rhetorical question that implies a negative answer: who knows what is good for people (Heb. *'adam*—"man" or "humanity") in life (v. 12)? Solomon acknowledges his failure. The lost good of creation will always lie beyond human reach. He is alluding to Genesis 3:22, with which this passage shares common wording ("know," "good," "man" [*'adam*], and "life"). This allusion suggests that Adam's loss of the good was really the loss of wisdom (1 Kin. 3:12). Yet, a second rhetorical question reveals that the answer belongs to the future: who can tell a man (*'adam*, "humanity") what will happen after him, or them (Eccl. 6:12)? The second question parallels the first one and is related to it. Both questions are concerned with human destiny. The scope of these questions embraces human civilization. Similar to Gen. 3:22, Ecclesiastes ends (cf. Eccl. 6:12; 12:13–14) on a note of cosmic hope in an eschatological perspective.

7:1—12:8

THE PROBLEM OF WISDOM

7:1–18

The Ambiguity of Wisdom

This chapter begins the second half of the book. While the first half is concerned with futility, the second half is more concerned with wisdom. Solomon just concluded that no one knows what is good (6:12). Now, he focuses on the nature of this good (*tob*), a keyword in this passage (it occurs twelve times).

7:1–10. A Good Name Is Better (tob) than Precious Ointment (or Perfume). This statement parallels the observation that death is better than birth (v. 1). The following statements convey a similar lesson: mourning is better than feasting (v. 2), rebuke is better than song (v. 5), end is better than beginning (v. 8), patience is better than pride (vv. 8–9), and present is better than past (v. 10). Solomon's point is that often the "good" is found in places where one expects the bad.

7:11–18. Wisdom Is Good with an Inheritance. Wisdom works in the present only for those who have already received it and for those who have inherited it from the past (vv. 11–12). The preceding lesson was that good was found in the present. Now, the lesson is that good is also found in the past. Good is here but was also there. You cannot change a world that is made of both good and bad. Therefore, one will have to receive them both; there is good in both. The day of adversity will make one think, and the day of prosperity will make one happy (v. 14). This confirms Solomon: God has made (or appointed) the one as well as the other (v. 14). The corollary of this principle is that a fanatical obsession with righteousness is fatal. Solomon saw that (sometimes) righteous people perish in their righteousness, and wicked people prolong their lives in wickedness (v. 15). Consequently, he recommends that we not be excessively righteous, otherwise we will destroy ourselves (v. 16), and that we not be overly wicked, otherwise we will die prematurely (vv. 16–17). Instead, the good way is to grasp this and also that (v. 18). He is not promoting a compromise. This paradoxical statement means that balance is needed when applied to the good (Rom. 16:19). What justifies this unusual advice is that sometimes what we consider good or bad is not necessarily good or bad. We may not understand all of the ramifications or have enough knowledge to evaluate correctly.

7:19–8:1

The Elusiveness of Wisdom

It is not surprising, then, that wisdom is so difficult to find. The verb *matsa'* ("to find" or "discover") occurs seven times in this passage, indicating the struggle of Solomon in his search for wisdom. Two reasons are given to explain this trouble. The first has to do with the nature of wisdom itself, which is far beyond reach and is deep, mysterious, and profound (vv. 23–24). The second has to do with the ambiguity of wisdom and its complex association with folly (vv. 25–26). The mingling of wisdom with folly makes it difficult to sort out the one from the other—to seek and find wisdom and the reasoned explanation of the scheme of things (v. 25). The word translated here as "reason," "explanation," or "scheme" (*kheshbon*) belongs in the realm of accounting and refers to the difficulty of sorting out the good from the bad and wisdom from folly. It is in the context of Solomon's frustration at not finding wisdom that we should understand his parable about a woman he could not find (vv. 27–28). He is not defending the idea of the superiority of men over women. The use of the word *'adam* for "man" suggests that Solomon had in mind the generic idea of humankind (v. 29). The woman he speaks about represents wisdom (Prov. 8). He uses hyperbolic language to demonstrate that it is impossible to find wisdom. Let's assume that it would be possible to find one human among a thousand; it would still be impossible to find a woman (wisdom) among all these, meaning all humankind. This reference to adding one thing to the other to find out the reason (*kheshbon*; Eccl. 7:27) points back to the accounting that characterized the search for wisdom (v. 25). The conclusion of this essay on wisdom (8:1), which belongs more to what precedes than to what follows, is an ironic allusion to the priestly blessing—makes his face shine (Num. 6:25)—that is directed toward those who would claim to have found wisdom.

8:2–17

The Ambivalence of the World

The impossibility to know wisdom, hence the incapacity to distinguish between good and evil, leads to a world where the borders between right and wrong are not clear. The world is both right and wrong. Solomon finds symptoms of the ambivalence of the world in the exercise of authority and in the unfairness of retribution, and he proposes an ambivalent solution.

8:2–9. The Ambivalence of Authority. The preceding discussion could lead to anarchy. For if the king is not wiser than others, why should they submit to him? The first argument to support submission to authority, even though this authority is not intrinsically superior, is its connection with God: an oath to Him (v. 2). The language of Solomon is reminiscent of the story of

Shimei, who was known for his lack of respect to the king (2 Sam. 16:5–13) and with whom Solomon had made a covenant under the "oath of God" (1 Kin. 2:43–44). The second argument is that submission to authority is in our own interest. He who obeys will not be harmed (Eccl. 8:5), which is also verified in the case of Shimei (2 Sam. 19:20). And even if the misery of a person increases, faith in God's grace is still the answer, for there is judgment for every action, just as there is a time for everything (Eccl. 8:5; cf. 3:1). In addition to this transcendent judgment, Solomon warns that judgment already works here and now. As powerful as the wicked rulers may be, they will not have power over their own breath; they will die (8:8). For surely, continues Solomon, the king's power will not save him from suffering from his own abuse of power (v. 8), just as the case was for Solomon in regard to Shimei (1 Kin. 2:46). In fact, ruling abusively is at the abuser's own expense (Eccl. 8:9).

8:10–14. The Ambivalence of Retribution. The honors that the wicked received at the funeral (v. 10) and their long life (v. 12) are not evidence of God's blessing. This is deemed as futile (v. 10). The life of the wicked, no matter how long it may be, is insignificant and comparable to a shadow (v. 13). On the other hand, promises Solomon, the righteous remain in touch with the "good" (*tob*) of creation: it will be better (*tob*) for those who fear God (v. 12). The logic is, however, upset by the observation that the wicked seem to be rewarded while the righteous seem to be punished.

8:15–17. The Ambivalent Solution. Solomon reacts to the observation of this futility (v. 14) in two ways. On the one hand, he recommends the enjoyment of the good (*tob*) of creation and remaining grateful for the gift of God (v. 15). On the other hand, he is puzzled and seeks to find the wisdom that will help him understand (v. 16). Solomon does not try to make sense of the absurd condition of the world. He knows that he cannot find the wisdom to explain it. The section ends as in the preceding chapter, with the same acknowledgment of failure and the same unanswered question. Yet, Solomon insists that he has to strive to find the answer. The solution of the wise is then ambivalent. The wise will enjoy life even though he knows that he will never be happy, and he will search for wisdom even though he knows he will not be able to fully find it (v. 17).

9:1–18

Totality of Life

The ambivalent condition of the world was the basis for Solomon's reflection. He considered all this (v. 1), referring back to all the preceding perspective. The word *kol*, "all," is a keyword in the chapter (occurring fourteen times in the Hebrew). The perspective of Solomon was comprehensive, covering the totality of humankind, the totality of life, the totality of chance, and, in conclusion, the totality of wisdom.

9:1–6. Totality of Humankind. All human categories are included in Solomon's analysis. The righteous and the wise, along with their actions; love, and hatred, are all in the hand of God (v. 1). They will all die. The list, referring to opposites, the good and the bad (v. 2), acknowledges that there is no privileged party. Death is total; it will affect the totality of humankind and will embrace the totality of the human person. No one and nothing will survive death. This description leaves no room for the idea that someone, the good one, will not die or that something of ourselves, our soul, will continue to live. Therefore, a living dog is better than a dead lion (v. 4). The unconscious state of the dead is explicitly affirmed: in contrast to the living who know, the dead know nothing (v. 5). All the spiritual faculties (memory, love, hatred, envy) have *'abad* ("perish," "vanish," or "disappear"; v. 6). This verb implies total annihilation (Ex. 10:7; Deut. 4:10). The condition of the world is hopeless. Yet Solomon assures us that there is hope (Eccl. 9:4), a unique emphasis in the book. The Hebrew word for "hope" (*bittakhon*) implies trust in God's action within a desperate situation (2 Kin. 18:19; cf. Ps. 22:4). This hope is connected to those righteous who are still alive (Eccl. 9:4; cf. Deut. 30:19).

9:7–10. Totality of Life. For this hopelessness of the human condition, Solomon recommends enjoying life. A series of imperatives describe the steps of this move.

Go (v. 7): This first verb introduces and contains all the others. The Hebrew verb *halak* is reminiscent of God's order to Abraham (Gen. 12:1; cf. 22:1), which was a call to move from his place to live a life of faith and enjoy God's gifts.

Eat and drink: Bread and wine are two basic products associated with the blessings of "grain and new wine" in the land (Deut. 33:28; Gen. 14:18). The wine Solomon refers to is "new wine" and is therefore nonalcoholic wine. This identification better fits the context of our passage, which uses the language of creation (*tob*, "good"; *ma'aseh*, "work").

Feast (Eccl. 9:8): White garments and oil are the visible signs of feasting (2 Sam. 14:2; Ps. 23:5).

Live (Eccl. 9:9): The expression "live joyfully" or "enjoy life" literally means "see life," implying that to see life with another woman (or man) is not an option. This attention, which concerns all the days of the life of futility, does not only mean faithfulness; it also helps in the endurance of the human condition.

Work with all your strength (v. 10): life with God is not passive. Humans are invited to be creative, like God. This phrase shares a common wording with the passage on the Sabbath in Genesis 2:1–3 and conveys a double lesson about work. First, it affirms the value of work; it is a sign of life. Second, it warns against abuse. Work should be controlled in proportion to our strength. The Sabbath, alluded to in this passage, puts work in the right perspective.

9:11–12. Totality of Chance. This poem confronts us with the unfair blindness of chance; time and chance happen to them all (v. 11). What we may interpret to be the result of our work—the race, the battle, the bread, the riches, the favor—is in fact undeserved. Chance is unfair, as is death; it strikes unexpectedly and unjustly, like a snare or trap for an animal (v. 12). This universal experience of the unfairness of chance paradoxically contains a universal lesson of grace: no one deserves what he or she gets.

9:13–18. Totality of Wisdom. The parable of the poor wise man, whose wisdom saved the little city and yet was forgotten (vv. 13–15), conveys an important lesson on the total value of wisdom. This is the conclusion of Solomon's meditation on the unfairness of life: wisdom is better than strength (v. 16). Despite the rule of fools, wisdom remains sovereign. Yet, he regrets that one fool may ruin much of it (v. 18), thus anticipating the following section.

10:1–20

Fools Are Everywhere

Just as dead flies putrefy perfume (v. 1), fools may penetrate wisdom and affect its identity. The perfume loses its odor and wisdom is not wise anymore. Like fleas, fools are found everywhere: in schools, in the workplace, in public life, and even in government.

10:1–7. In Schools. Solomon begins with the last place where a fool should be found, the place of instruction. This syndrome of dead flies in perfume first affects the very institution respected for its wisdom (v. 1), the so-called academic authority that teaches a corrupt lesson (falsehood, racism, evolution, etc.). Unlike the wise, whose heart is on the right side and who can therefore think clearly and rightly, the fool teaches from the left side (v. 2), the side of deception (Judg. 3:15; 21:2). The fool lacks wisdom and yet accuses the others of being foolish (Eccl. 10:3). It is therefore expected that the fool is intolerant and abuses his power. Solomon recommends self-control and a conciliatory spirit, without compromising integrity (v. 4). For the fool is dignified by authorities (v. 6). Society reflects this lack of discernment since servants ride on horses and princes walk on the ground, an image showing the same value crisis as noted before (9:11).

10:8–10. In the Workplace. Fools who are placed in their positions not because of their skills will sooner or later be unmasked by the poor quality of their performance. They will fall in the pit they have dug (v. 8). The bad mason will be bitten by the serpent (v. 8). The bad quarryman will be hurt because of his clumsiness (v. 9). The bad woodcutter will waste his energies because he does not know how to use his ax (v. 10).

10:11–15. In Public Life. The fool's foolishness will be revealed by his words. Thus, the fool is comparable to an amateur snake charmer who, for lack of knowledge, is bitten by the snake. He is unmasked as a fraud (v. 11). Their many words compromise them, and their lips will swallow them (v. 12). Fools are thoroughly fools (v. 13). Thus, they have no contribution to make. Their effect is limited to the present (v. 14). Solomon concludes his satire on the talkative fool by referring to the fool who was walking along the way, lacking wisdom, and calling everyone a fool. The fool is lost in the way and does not even know how to get to the city (v. 15). He cannot find help because he considers everyone else a fool. The mention of a city that cannot be found points to the earlier city, saved by the poor wise man (9:13–15). Yet this time, there is no wise man to save it.

10:16–20. In the Government. Wise men are no longer around. Only fools are left, and the result is catastrophic. An immature child is sitting on the throne (v. 16) and officers are continually feasting. While this situation is under the curse ("woe to you"), for a moment Solomon recounts the blessing of good leadership (v. 17). He describes a time of crisis when "the house" (the temple or the palace) is neglected because of laziness and the lack of responsible leadership (v. 18). The leaders are only interested in immediate pleasures, and they only value money, which they identify as their god; money answers everything (v. 19). The verb *'anah* ("answer") applies normally to God (Ps. 3:5; 13:4). Solomon then turns to another group of people, which was implied before in the blessing (Eccl. 10:17), and he addresses them discreetly. Considering the pervasive presence of the fools, he urges this other camp to keep quiet and behave with great prudence: even their thoughts and words in their bedrooms must be guarded—the king and the rich have ways of finding out (v. 20). Against the rule of iniquity and foolishness, Solomon does not call for a revolution. Against the talkative and noisy fools, he only recommends the silence of faith.

11:1–10

The Life of Faith

The last words of prudence do not mean cowardice and passivity. The faith Solomon has in mind implies running risks. Each risk is promoted with a specific admonition: the risk of generosity toward others, the risk of hope in the future when there is no prospect, and the risk of enjoying life in the midst of troubles.

11:1–2. The Risk of Generosity. From words against people, Solomon moves to actions on behalf of people. It is interesting that the first admonition calling for the first act of faith is not directed toward God but toward the poor. The message is based on a proverb (v. 1). Casting bread upon waters means to risk losing bread. Similarly, giving to the poor is giving without the expectation of reward and giving out of grace (9:11). This act of generosity is therefore an act of faith. It is precisely this expectation of loss that will bring the bread back. The expression *al pene hammayim* ("on the surface of the waters," "across the sea," or "on the face of the waters") is reminiscent of Gen. 1:2, when the spirit was "upon the waters." The language therefore implies the promise of God's act of creation, which will turn the futility, represented by waters, into existence and significance. In Ecclesiastes, the image of waters is also associated with the idea of return (Eccl. 1:7). There is therefore wisdom in the apparent folly of losing bread, an idea in tune with Solomon's paradox that wisdom may be found in folly (see also Matt. 10:39).

The numerical parallelism of seven and eight (Eccl. 11:2), where the first number is followed by a higher number, is intended to express the idea of intensification (Prov. 30:29). An act of generosity should expand beyond a single act of charity. Liberality is encouraged here. The reason why we should give is not only justified with the promise that the bread will return; this act is also needed because we do not know what calamity will fall on the earth (Eccl. 11:2). Paradoxically, humanitarian activities will save us from a potential evil. Giving to the hungry will save the world from political and economic crisis.

11:3–6. The Risk of Hope. The second admonition is to sow seed. Here again the idea of not knowing is repeated three times (vv. 5 [twice], 6), but now the phrase is pregnant with hope. Instead of evil (v. 2), what is expected is the miraculous work of God. Our act of faithful "sowing" is motivated by the fact that "we do not know" how the clouds will produce rain (v. 3), where a tree will fall (v. 3), how (if) the wind will blow (vv. 4–5), or how human bones grow in the womb of a woman (v. 5). This is the faith of creation: we cannot know or understand the work of God who is the Creator of everything (v. 5). In parallel to the previous admonition, the call to sow is intensified; both morning and evening work is encouraged (v. 6). We should always sow because we do not know which seed will prosper. The last word (*tob*, "good" or "well") reminds us of God's grace. Our acts of grace are acts of creation, responding to the Creator's acts of grace.

11:7–10. The Risk of Life. The third admonition is a call to rejoice in and enjoy life (vv. 8–9). The word *tob* is used again here (v. 7), evoking the context of creation. The idiom of seeing the sun means "to be alive." This section is saturated with the language of creation (good, sun, light, living, man [*'adam*]). The call to rejoice is based on our remembrance of both life, when light is sweet (v. 7), and death, the days of darkness (v. 8). This enjoyment applies to all sorts of things (11:8). It means that we have to enjoy everything of creation. The paradigm of youth implies the intensity of enjoyment. Solomon encourages us to take all the risks of life, and walk or live according to all our desires (according to all our thoughts, emotions), and according to the sight of our eyes—all that is proposed to us. This comprehensive grace reminds us of God speaking to Adam in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:16). The key conjunction in Ecclesiastes 11:9 may be better understood as "and" instead of "but," conveying not so much an implicit warning as a simple statement of fact, or even an assurance. All this enjoyment is thus reinforced, not discouraged, by the knowledge of the judgment of God, which points to the good news of God's gift of salvation that is prepared for the righteous (3:17; 8:6; cf. Dan. 7:22). However, this grace is associated with a commandment just as the grace of God's permission to eat of every tree in the Garden of Eden was associated with the commandment not to eat of one tree (Gen. 2:17). Solomon's commandment is a call to remove *ca'as* ("anxiety," "sorrow," or "vexation") from the mind and *ra'* ("evil," "pain," or "trouble") from the body—he is concerned with the inside as well as the outside. Solomon's exhortation to refrain from sin is not a response to the fear of judgment but is instead a response to the grace of God.

12:1-8

Cosmic Catastrophe

Surprisingly, the Preacher/Teacher now places the emphasis on the future judgment, introducing an eschatological dimension in his discourse. Wisdom and eschatology stand side by side here.

12:1-4. The End of the World. The last message of Solomon concludes with an evocation of creation (11:7-9a) and the perspective of the future day of judgment (vv. 9b-10). The same association recurs in chapter 12, which begins with creation (v. 1) and ends with judgment (v. 14). However, the perspective has shifted from the limited scope of personal life (11:7, 10) to the cosmic scope of the world and human history (12:2-7, 14). From an allusion to old age (v. 1), Solomon moves to the description of a cosmic catastrophe. The eschatological language of the passage ("in that day," "darkening of the sun," "blossoming of the almond tree," etc.) suggests that he is referring to an apocalyptic vision of the end of the world.

12:5-7. The End of Humankind. From an allusion to the death of a man (*'adam*) going to his grave (v. 5), Solomon moves to the broader scene of the death of all humankind: the return to dust. This evokes the miracle of creation (Gen. 1:2; 2:7). In fact, creation (Eccl. 12:1) is related to the two cosmic eschatological events. The end of the world and the end of humankind are both introduced by the same expression "before" (vv. 1, 6).

12:8. The Motto Again. In the introduction, Ecclesiastes begins with the motto of *habel habalim* ("vanity of vanities," "absolute futility," or "utterly meaningless"; 1:2) followed by creation (vv. 2-11); the conclusion echoes in a chiastic parallel the introduction of the book (AB // BA): the motto follows the reference to creation. At the end, the world returns, then, to the same state it was in before it started.

12:9-14

EPILOGUE: THE SENSE OF CREATION

12:9-12

The Words of Truth

In parallel to the destiny of the world, the book ends as it began, with an autobiographical note (1:1), but this time it focuses on the words of Solomon (vv. 9-12). His task was not only to teach the people but also to seek and sort out his heritage of wisdom (v. 9) and to find the true taste of the words (v. 10) in order to make sense of creation. The description of the written words as upright and true underlines their association with God (2 Sam. 7:28; Ps. 119:43), which is implied in the expression "One Shepherd" (Ps. 23:1). This short lecture on wisdom has a double function. First, it establishes the divine inspiration of this difficult message (it is like firmly set nails). There is a warning against anything beyond or in addition to this message that admonishes (Eccl. 12:12), which is therefore to be honored and received as holy Scriptures (Deut. 4:2; Rev. 22:18-19). It also prepares for the reception of the last and most important message (Eccl. 3:14).

12:13-14

The Day of Judgment

This is the conclusion and therefore the climax and goal of the book (v. 13). All humankind (*kol ha'adam*) is urged to make sense of life: fear God and keep His commandments. The reason for this call is the cosmic judgment, which covers everything, good and evil (v. 14). Note that this association of creation, judgment, and the fear of God reappears in the apocalyptic message of John (Rev. 14:7). This hope, which is part of the agenda of Ecclesiastes, is also shared and nurtured by those who wait on the Lord during the final judgment.

SONG OF SONGS

INTRODUCTION

Title. The title "Song of Solomon," as known to centuries of English readers, is more technically understood to be "Song of Songs." This title expresses the superlative, just like the parallel phrase "Holy of Holies" (for Most Holy Place), and thus may be translated as "The Most Sublime Song."

Authorship. The first verse of this book not only provides the title "Song of Songs" but also adds the qualifier "of Solomon." This is how authorship is expressed in other books in the Hebrew OT. In this way, then, Solomon is identified as the author of the Song. Numerous lines of external and internal evidence support the book's self-assertion that the Song was composed by King Solomon: (1) 1 Kings 4:32 mentions Solomon's 1,005 songs; (2) the name "Solomon" appears seven times in the book (Song 1:1, 5; 3:7, 9, 11; 8:11, 12); (3) all five "king" references (1:4, 12; 3:9, 11; 7:5) portray him in a manner consistent with the written account of Solomon; (4) terminology associated with a wedding (3:7-11) has been identified with Solomon's wedding to the Egyptian princess (1 Kin. 3:1); (5) the profusion of flora (twenty-one varieties) and fauna (fifteen species) mentioned in the Song parallel the account of Solomon's knowledge (1 Kin. 4:23, 33; 10:2, 10, 25); (6) an association can be made between the chariots of Pharaoh (Song 1:9) and the acquisition of horses from Egypt (1 Kin. 10:28) during Solomon's reign; (7) throughout the Song a number of luxury goods are described (e.g., Song 1:12, 13; 3:6, 9), comporting with the written description of the wealth of Solomon (1 Kin. 10:14-23) and associated with the extensive trading that took place at that time (9:26-28); (8) references to Tirzah and Heshbon fit the time period of the united monarchy; (9) there are extensive linguistic parallels between this book and others (Proverbs and Ecclesiastes) that are traditionally attributed to Solomon; (10) contrary to scholars who posit a late date after the time of Solomon, the use of archaic grammatical and poetic features point to an early date for the book; and (11) numerous allusions to the Solomonic temple and palace can be found in the Song (e.g., Song 1:5, 16-17; 2:4; 5:15; 8:7, 9).

Date and Backgrounds. The weight of the evidence favors the traditional view that the couple in the Song are not merely literary figures existing in the author's imagination but a historical married couple. Solomon is clearly the male lover in the Song. Besides the points mentioned above in which the book refers to King Solomon, he is explicitly identified several times as the groom in the wedding of the couple (3:7, 9, 11). The Song was probably written early in Solomon's reign, circa 950 B.C., before he apostatized into idolatry and polygamy (1 Kin. 11:1-8).

The identity of the female lover in this book is a mystery that has yet to find a satisfactory solution that is widely accepted in scholarship. The various views posit, among other possibilities, that she may have been (1) Pharaoh's daughter (the traditional view in the history of interpretation until the rise of critical scholarship; 3:1; 9:24); (2) Abishag the Shulamite (1:3, 15; 2:17, 21-22); (3) both Pharaoh's daughter *and* Abishag; or (4) an unidentified woman from the village of Shulam (Shunam), an Israelite and not a foreigner (cf. 11:1-3). In light of the monogamous nature of the marriage relationship revealed in the Song viewed against the historical background of Solomon's life (see below, Theology: number 3. Monogamy) and the reference to "Shulamite" (see commentary on Song 6:13—7:10), this commentary could favor either the first or the third option above, but the verse-by-verse commentary that follows does not depend upon accepting one of these options above the other.

Theology and Purpose. The Song of Songs is a return to Eden. It presents an inspired reflection and elucidation of the divine ideal for human sexual love within the context of courtship and marriage. This theology of sexuality may be summarized under ten subheadings.

1. Creation Order. Underlying the entire Song is the same high doctrine of Creation that is found in Genesis 1-2. Sexuality is assumed to be a Creation ordinance, given by God for humans to enjoy (see commentary on 8:5–14). At the same time, sexuality and divinity are radically separated; sexuality belongs to the Creation order, not the divine realm.

2. Heterosexual Marital Form. In the Song of Songs, consistent with the divine pattern in Genesis 2:18–23, we find a heterosexual love relationship described in the context of courtship and marriage.

3. Monogamy. In harmony with the monogamy set forth as the divine pattern for marriage in Genesis 2:23, the marriage relationship depicted in the Song is a monogamous one (see e.g., Song 1:7; 2:2, 3, 16; 5:1, 10; 6:3; 7:10; 8:6–7). The historical record also implies a monogamous marital relationship between Solomon and the wife of his youth (1 Kin. 3:1; 7:8; 9:16). According to this historical record, Solomon was married early in his reign to Pharaoh's daughter, and some twenty years later he brought her to the palace he had built for her in Jerusalem. No other wives or palaces for them are mentioned during this time period. This seems to imply that Pharaoh's daughter (who became a faithful follower of the true God, Song 8:6; cf. PK 53) was Solomon's sole wife during the time when he composed this Song in the early years of his reign. The biblical record indicates that Solomon remained faithful to God during this twenty-year period (1 Kin. 9:1–5; cf. 3:3–15). Ellen White writes that “for many years he [Solomon] walked uprightly, his life marked with strict obedience to God's commands” (PK 27).

Some have pointed to the record that Solomon reigned for forty years and that his son Rehoboam took over the throne at the age of forty-one (11:42–43; 14:21), implying that Rehoboam was born the year before Solomon became king. From such data it is inferred that Solomon had other wives before the Shulamite and was therefore polygamous at the time when the Song was written. But the LXX records in 1 Kings 12:24a (in an extended section not found in the MT) that Rehoboam was sixteen years of age when he began to reign (not forty-one), and that he reigned twelve years. The LXX may well preserve the correct chronological data since this data makes more sense of the statement in v. 8 that Rehoboam “consulted the young men who had grown up with him.” The Hebrew term used for the “young men” means “boy,” “[male] child,” “youth.” If those who grew up with him were called “boys”/“youths,” then Rehoboam himself was a “boy”/“youth” when he became king, and this would not easily apply to a forty-one-year-old. But if Rehoboam was only sixteen when he ascended to Solomon's throne, there is ample chronological space for the twenty-plus years of Solomon's monogamous marriage to the Shulamite before he married Rehoboam's mother, and she gave birth to Rehoboam. As an alternate interpretation, one may note that according to 14:21 Rehoboam's mother was Naamah, an Ammonite. It is possible that Naamah had already given birth to Rehoboam by an Ammonite father before her political marriage to Solomon, and Solomon simply adopted Rehoboam as his own (eldest) son (a practice hinted at from around this very time in Ps. 2:7). David's bloodline in this case was to be passed on through Rehoboam's wife Maachah (the granddaughter of Absalom, David's son), who gave birth to Rehoboam's successor, Abijam (1 Kin. 15:1, 2; 2 Chr. 11:21).

Although later in life (after he composed the Song of Songs) Solomon fell into polygamy (1 Kin. 11:1–8), his later, dark history must not detract from the reality depicted in the narrative frame of the sublime Song. The Song has a happy, monogamous literary ending.

4. Equality within the Love Relationship. In parallel with Genesis 1–2, the lovers in the Song are presented as full equals in every way. The keynote of egalitarianism in mutual love is struck in Song of Songs 2:16: “My beloved is mine, and I am his.” The Song of Songs begins and closes with the woman speaking; she carries the majority of the dialogue; she initiates most of the meetings and is just as active in the lovemaking as the husband; she is just as eloquent about the beauty of her lover as he is about her; she is as gainfully employed as he is. In short, throughout the Song the woman is fully the equal of the man.

5. Wholeness. The concept of wholeness in sexuality is highlighted in the Song of Songs by one of its key themes—the presence and/or absence of the lovers with/from each other (3:1–5; 5:2–8). Wholeness in the Song includes the holistic view of the human person as a sexual being. Sexuality in the Song is not just the sex act; it involves the whole indivisible human being: physical, sensual, emotional, and spiritual. Physical attraction includes the whole body—not just the sexual organs (vv. 10–16; 7:1–9)—and the expressions of praise often refer to inner (character) qualities of the one praised and not just physical beauty.

6. Exclusivity. As in Genesis 2:24 man is to “leave”—be free from all outside interferences in the sexual relationship—so in the Song of Songs the lovers are unfettered by parental prearrangements and are in love for love's sake alone. The exclusivity of the couple's relationship is apparent from numerous references in the Song (e.g., Song 2:2, 16; 6:3, 9; 7:10).

7. Permanence. As in the Genesis model (Gen. 2:24), man and woman are to “cleave” to each other in a marriage covenant so the Song of Songs climaxes in the wedding procession, ceremony, and wedding night (Song 3:6—5:1; see Literary Features below). As in Genesis 2:24, the fidelity, loyalty, and devotion of the partners and the steadfastness and permanence of their love is revealed in the Song (see esp. Song 2:16; 6:3; 8:6–7).

8. Intimacy. The Song of Songs as a whole may be considered as nothing less than an ode to intimacy. As in Genesis 2:24, where the “one-flesh” union follows the “cleaving,” so in the Song of Songs sexual intercourse occurs only within the context of the marriage covenant. At the time of the wedding, the Shulamite is a garden “locked” or “enclosed” (Song 4:12), which refers to her virginity. The lyrics of Solomon in the Song also seem to indicate his virginity at the time of the wedding (2:2; 6:9; 8:5). The Song moves sequentially through the entire historical scope of the relationship between Solomon and the Shulamite. There is a consistent pattern of maturing intimacy, appropriate to each stage of their relationship.

9. Sexuality and Procreation. The Song contains no reference to the procreative function of sexuality. As in the Creation account of Genesis 2, the sexual experience within marriage is not linked with the utilitarian intent to propagate children. Lovemaking for the sake of love, not procreation, is the message of the Song. In the Song sexual union is given value on its own, without the need to justify it as a means to some superior (procreative) end.

10. The Wholesome Beauty and Joy of Sexuality. In the Song of Songs, as in Genesis 1–2, sexuality (along with the rest of God's creation) is portrayed as “very good [beautiful]” and is to be celebrated and enjoyed without fear or embarrassment (cf. Gen 2:25). A plenitude of intertwining themes and motifs in the Song highlight this wholesome beauty and goodness of paradisal sexual love. Paradisal love is presented as stunningly beautiful (e.g., Song 1:15, 16); wonderfully sensuous (e.g., 4:16; 5:1); an exuberant celebration (e.g., 3:6–11); a thrilling adventure (e.g., 1:4; 2:8, 10); an exquisite delight (e.g., vv. 3–4); marked by strong sexual desire (e.g., 5:1–6); unashamed and uninhibited (e.g., 7:2, 8–9, 11–13; 8:2); yet also restrained and in good taste (e.g., 2:7; 3:5; 5:8; 8:4); lighthearted play (e.g., 1:7–8; 7:9); romantic love (e.g., vv. 10–13; 8:5–7); powerfully passionate (e.g., 6:12; 7:4); and an awe-inspiring mystery (e.g., 6:4, 10).

A whole book of the Bible is devoted to celebrating the wholesome beauty and enjoyment of human sexual love. The Song of Songs in its literal sense is not merely a “secular” love song but is already fraught with deep theological significance. God reveals His love for humanity in the enjoyment and pleasure that He designed for lovers to find in each other in the marriage context.

The echo of God's names resonates in the dominant recurring refrain of the Song (see commentary on 2:6–7), and the actual voice of God resounds from the Song's central literary summit (see commentary on 4:16—5:1). But when one moves to the Song's thematic climax and conclusion, the great paean to love (8:6), the actual name of Yahweh makes its single explicit appearance in the book, and His flaming presence encapsulates the entire theological message of the Song: “Its [Love's] flames are flames of fire”—the very flame of Yahweh (see commentary on 8:5–14 regarding this translation).

Since human love is described as a gift from God, a flame of Yahweh, the love displayed between Solomon and the Shulamite not only depicts wholesome human sexuality but points beyond to the love of Yahweh Himself. The various characteristics and qualities of holy human love that have emerged from the Song—selfless mutuality and reciprocity, joy of presence, pain of absence, exclusivity (yet inclusiveness), intimate oneness, disinterested and enduring covenant loyalty, wholesomeness, beauty, goodness, and so on—all reflect the divine love within the very nature of God's being. Furthermore, the Song is not only a love song about human lovers but ultimately points (typologically) to the love relationship between God and His people. Far different from the allegorical approach, which regards the literal, historical meaning as the husk to be discarded in favor of a fanciful interpretation that is alien to the text, the typological approach upholds the literal sense by acknowledging what the Song already indicates—that human love typifies the divine.

In the Song of Songs, we have come to the supreme OT statement on the theology of human sexual love and the divine-human love relationship, even (as Rabbi Akiba put it) to "the Holy of Holies"!

Literary Features. For fifteen centuries the allegorical method for interpreting the Song of Songs was predominant in the Christian church. Influenced by pagan Greek philosophers, Christian allegorists posited a dichotomy between things of the flesh and things of the spirit, and all expressions of bodily pleasure—including sexual expression—were considered evil. The literal sense of the Song—the human love relationship between Solomon and the Shulamite—constituted the literal reading to be stripped away allegorically to find the intended spiritual meaning, which was the love relationship between God and His church or the individual soul. The reformer John Calvin moved away from this interpretation and interpreted the Song of Songs as an inspired song of human love. In modern scholarship, the plain-reading approach has become the consensus method for understanding the Song.

The Song of Solomon is a literary masterpiece. It is set within nature, which provides a backdrop of sensuous beauty portrayed through exquisite poetic language laced with figures of speech. The lovers in the Song celebrate the beauty of married sexual love. There are numerous parallels between the Song of Songs and Egyptian love poetry. But unlike the lengthy monologues of the Egyptian songs, the two lovers in Solomon's Song of Songs are continually interacting in speech. The Song also frequently employs the literary form of the *wasf* (Arab., "description"), a term used to describe the extravagant praise of the physical charms of the bride and groom in modern, rural Syrian wedding customs.

The basic building block of the Song, in common with other Hebrew poetry, is poetic parallelism, including chiasm (reverse parallelism, ABB'A' pattern) and block parallelism (or panel writing, ABCA'B'C'). The macrostructure of the Song contains twelve sections (demarcated by refrains) comprised of both chiasm and block parallelism, forming a double-seven pattern (including the two-verse central climax) as follows:

A 1:2—2:7 Mutual love
 B 2:8–17 Coming and going
  C 3:1–5 Dream I: Lost and found
   D 3:6–11 Praise of groom, I
    E 4:1–7 Praise of bride, I
     F 4:8–15 Praise of bride, II
      G 4:16 Invitation by bride
      G' 5:1 Acceptance of invitation by groom and divine approbation
  C' 5:2–8 Dream II: Found and lost
   D' 5:9—6:3 Praise of groom, II
    E' 6:4–10 Praise of bride, III
     F' 6:11—7:10 Praise of bride, IV
 B' 7:11—8:4 Going and coming
A' 8:5–14 Mutual love

Although the Song of Solomon is not a full-blown drama, a basic story line emerges from the dialogues involving Solomon, the Shulamite, her brothers, and her female companions (the daughters of Jerusalem). Numerous recent literary analyses have pointed out the presence of narrative progression or plot throughout various sections of the Song. A three-part historical progression of the Song has been suggested: the courtship (1:2—3:5), the bridal procession and wedding (3:6—5:1), and the life of love after marriage (5:2—8:7). In this commentary the analysis is further refined, suggesting seven acts. These acts are interlinked with members of the symmetrical macrostructure (as presented above), which often subdivide these acts into separate scenes. The basic story line of acts is as follows:

I. Mutual love: Courtship (1:2—2:7) = Member A
II. Betrothal and dream of lost and found (2:8—3:5) = Members B and C
III. Wedding procession and wedding service (3:6—4:7) = Members D and E
IV. Wedding night in the bridal chamber (4:8—5:1) = Members F, G, and H
V. Marital conflict and resolution (5:2—6:10) = Members C', D', and E'
VI. Maturation of marriage (6:11—8:4) = Members F' and B'
VII. Mutual love: Mature reflections on love's meaning (8:5–14) = Member A'

This narrative structure does not consist of a detailed plotline but rather presents a collage or kaleidoscope of scenes encompassing the historical scope of the relationship between Solomon and the Shulamite. There is a consistent pattern of more restrained sexual imagery (without reference to sexual intercourse) in the scenes before the wedding, and an intensification of sexual imagery (with frequent allusions to sexual intercourse) after the wedding. The Song provides practical theological insights pertaining to each stage of the love relationship.

COMMENTARY

1:2—2:7
Act I. Courtship/Mutual Love

As noted in the introduction, the superscription of the Song indicates that it is "the most sublime Song" among the 1,005 songs written by Solomon (1 Kin. 4:32), or it may even suggest that this is the "most sublime Song" (about love) of all time. The first act is formed by eight different scenes and opens with the statement "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth" (Song 1:2). This poetic line strikes the keynote of the entire Song—intimate romantic love. The sublime Song begins with the lovers already well into what we today may term a courtship relationship. This first act presents a collage of scenes from the courtship of Solomon and the Shulamite, involving both northern Israel (the home of the Shulamite, where Solomon comes to visit her) and Jerusalem (the home of Solomon, where the Shulamite comes to visit him). A close look at the clues of each scene provides hints that the seven major scenes of this act alternate symmetrically between northern Israel and Jerusalem:

Scene 1. Song 1:2–4	Jerusalem
Scene 2. Song 1:5–6	Northern Israel
Scene 3. Song 1:7–8	Northern Israel
Scene 4. Song 1:9–11	Jerusalem
Scene 5. Song 1:12–14	Jerusalem
Scene 6. Song 1:15–17	Northern Israel
Scene 7. Song 2:1–3	Northern Israel
Scene 8. Song 2:4–5	Jerusalem
Refrain. Song 2:6–7	

1:2–4. Scene 1. The Shulamite unabashedly expresses her longing for romantic kisses from Solomon (v. 2). The first poetic line of the Song begins in a third-person address (perhaps more distantly to draw the audience into the scene) but then segues to the more intimate second-person direct address to Solomon in the next line: "For your love...." The Hebrew word for "love" here (see also v. 4; 4:10; 5:1) describes physical display of affection or lovemaking without specifying the level of intimacy. In context, here it is Solomon's kisses that are sweeter than the sweetest wine!

In her expression of love for Solomon (1:3), the Shulamite compares Solomon's external desirability (his kisses and his fragrant oils) with his inner being—his name, which stands for his character (cf. Ex. 34:5–7). The Song upholds the importance of wholistic love, encompassing the entire person, and especially emphasizes one's character qualities and good reputation. After telling Solomon that her unmarried female companions admire him, she energetically invites her lover to come draw her away (Song 1:4). The maidens (probably part of a group called the "daughters of Jerusalem" later in the Song), respond spontaneously that they will hasten after her. Solomon brings the Shulamite and her female companions into his palace chambers in Jerusalem (vv. 4–5; cf. Ps. 45:13–15). The plural "chambers" refers to the whole palace of the king, and not just his bedchamber. Sexual union is not described in this courtship scene.

1:5–6. Scene 2. The scene changes, probably to northern Israel in the surroundings of the Shulamite's home (Shulam), where King Solomon has come with shepherds to examine his royal flocks, bringing with him some daughters of Jerusalem (who had perhaps become acquainted with the Shulamite earlier while she was in Jerusalem). From the Shulamite's conversation with her female companions from Jerusalem (vv. 5–6), it seems that she was not a native of Jerusalem, but grew up working outside in the hot sun, taking care of the vineyards, by order of her overbearing brothers (lit. "her mother's sons," perhaps implying a second marriage and stepbrothers). There is no mention of her father here or elsewhere in the Song.

1:7–8. Scene 3. Still in northern Israel, the Shulamite speaks to her beloved Solomon, and for the first time in the Song, Solomon replies. She learns about the king's occupation as a shepherd (probably to be taken literally as overseeing his flocks of sheep or possibly also figuratively as the king tending to his business as shepherd of the people of Israel), and a connection is made because she is also a shepherd. The Shulamite is worried about being regarded as a prostitute as she wanders around looking for Solomon among Solomon's shepherds, and Solomon wisely advises her to follow the footsteps of his flock, implying that then she will find him.

1:9–11. Scene 4. In still another scene in the collage of courtship, Solomon's voice is heard expressing words of endearment likening her to his mare among Pharaoh's chariot horses, which were beautifully decorated (see Song of Songs: Introduction). Solomon's mare and the war chariots imported from Egypt were probably located in Jerusalem; and the young women's offer to make ornaments for the Shulamite give us another hint that this scene is back in Jerusalem where the young women would have access to materials with which to make the ornaments (v. 11).

1:12–14. Scene 5. In this fast-changing collage of scenes, the courtship now highlights the meal fellowship of Solomon and the Shulamite at the king's table (in Jerusalem), with her perfumes giving forth their fragrance and causing her to imagine him like a pouch containing a bundle of myrrh lying between her breasts all night and like a cluster of henna blossoms in the vineyards of En Gedi. The henna, not the king, is in the vineyards of En Gedi, and likewise it is the pouch, not the king, that is literally between her breasts all night.

1:15–17. Scene 6. Another vignette depicts Solomon and the Shulamite exchanging short expressions of praise for each other's beauty (vv. 15–16) as they walk in the forest, an idyllic outdoor setting (probably in northern Israel) with tree branches serving as rafters or a roof. They sit down under the forest canopy on a couch or bed of green with fir and cedar trees as the roof or beams of their forest house (v. 17).

2:1–3. Scene 7. Still in northern Israel, the Shulamite acknowledges her singular, special status like a *shushan*—variously interpreted as "lily," "crocus," or "lotus flower"—among the others in the valleys (2:1), and Solomon confirms that she is indeed like a lily among thorns (v. 2). Then the Shulamite compares Solomon to an apple tree among the other (non-fruit-bearing) trees of the forest and expresses her delight in sitting (not lying, no sexual intercourse implied) under his shade (v. 3). The Hebrew verb for "take delight" is in the intensive form, which may be translated as "take great delight over and over." This description involves not just a pause for a moment in her beloved's presence but personal contact such as sitting down in joyful companionship with him. Such intimate communion between human lovers typifies the blessed fellowship Christians may have with Christ in their times of personal devotions.

2:4–5. Scene 8. In the final scene of this courtship collage, which is back in Jerusalem, the intimate communion is intensified as the Shulamite is brought to Solomon's banqueting house with his banner of love over her (2:4). The tasting of his "fruit," when viewed in context with what precedes, is a metaphorical reference to the sweet and sustained fellowship, just as the "love banner" is metaphorical, and not an allusion to sexual intercourse. In v. 5 the Shulamite asks the daughters of Jerusalem to sustain her with cakes of raisins and apples, for she is lovesick—or faint/weak with love.

2:6–7. Refrain. The first act ends with a refrain (2:6–7) that appears again (with slight modifications) in 8:3–4. Verse 6 may be taken as either in the indicative mood, expressing reality, as rendered by most versions, or in the optative, expressing a wish. The word for "embrace" in these passages has been interpreted by some as "fondle" or "stimulate [the genitals]." However, this Hebrew word in all of its other OT occurrences outside of the Song never carries these meanings but consistently denotes the act of embracing, and there is no contextual reason to suggest a different meaning in the Song. Since the narrative approach considers v. 6 to be during the courtship period, in the context of growing intimacy but not sexual intercourse, the term implies intimate affection and loving support even though these same phrases indicate the opposite after marriage (8:3–4). In other words, in this model this could be understood as a wish, whereas vv. 3–4 is the fulfillment of that wish.

The refrain concludes (2:7) with the Shulamite adjuring her unmarried female companions not to stir up love "until *shettekhpatz*." This has been variously translated as "until it pleases," "until it so desires," "until she pleases," or "until the appropriate time" (3:5). Using the language of the formal oath, the Shulamite "swears" by animals whose names not only refer to beauty (the same word is used for "gazelle" and "beauty") but sound similar to the names of God ("gazelle" sounds like "[Lord of] hosts," and "does of the field" sounds like "El Shaddai [Almighty God]")

thus bringing together the beauty of their love relationship (symbolized by the animals) with the blessing of God Himself.

In the collage of courtship, there is a period for the development of various kinds of intimacy, all at the appropriate stages of the relationship: romantic (1:2, 13; 2:6); recreational (1:4, 16–17; 2:3–4); occupational/work (1:6–8); aesthetic (vv. 8, 12, 15–16); intellectual (v. 9; 2:2); creative (1:11); meal (v. 12; 2:4); communion (v. 3); celebrative (v. 4); emotional (v. 5); and communication (1:9–10, 15–16).

2:8—3:5

Act II. Proposal of Marriage (Betrothal) and Dream of Lost and Found

This second section is frequently taken as a continuation of the deepening relationship between Solomon and the Shulamite during the courtship, with visits to the countryside illustrating a healthy dating relationship. However, a closer look at the clues in this section strongly suggest that this is no casual countryside date on the part of the couple.

2:8–17. Scene 1. Coming and Going: Betrothal/Engagement. The cumulative effect of the various lines of evidence emerging from vv. 8–17 can be seen as pointing toward a covenant-making (betrothal) setting for this stanza of the Song. Sublime Hebrew poetry forms the "musical" backdrop for a beautiful springtime betrothal between Solomon and the Shulamite. Some of the major lines of evidence supporting this conclusion are the following:

(1) "Behold/Look" (vv. 8–9) calls attention to something special to come, giving the aura of eager and breathtaking excitement.

(2) Solomon comes to the Shulamite's house (v. 9), as was the biblical custom in arranging for a betrothal or marriage.

(3) The expression "come for yourself" or "come away," which by repetition brackets Solomon's poetic song to the Shulamite (vv. 10, 13), is in Hebrew the same expression (except in the masculine), which occurs elsewhere only where it brackets God's covenant with Abraham (Gen. 12:1; 22:2), and implies a break from outside interferences so as to enter into or maintain a covenant relationship.

(4) Various kinds of imagery (Song 2:10–13) describe that winter is over and spring has come. The ripening of the figs and blossoming of vineyards are metaphors for the maturation of the Shulamite and her readiness for marriage.

(5) In the inaccessible places (rock clefts and cliff) Solomon invites his dove the Shulamite to respond to his proposal (v. 14). He calls her out of her inaccessibility in the sense of inviting her to accept his proposal of betrothal. The imperative "let me see" or "show me" is an allusion to the same construction in Hebrew (except in feminine) used by Moses when he asks Yahweh for the opportunity to see His glory (Ex. 33:18) immediately before Yahweh reveals Himself and enters into a covenant with him (34:10–28).

(6) The reference to the foxes that ruin or spoil the vineyards (Song 2:15) no doubt alludes to Samson's experience in connection with obstacles to his wedding covenant (Judg. 15:1–5) and is probably a statement of mutual agreement by the couple to count the cost and determine to belong exclusively to each other, undistracted by things that might jeopardize their covenant faithfulness and intimacy.

(7) The Shulamite uses explicit covenant language as she proclaims, "My beloved is mine, and I am his" (Song 2:16). This wording is similar to covenant formulas of God with His people (e.g., Gen. 17:8; Lev. 26:12; Hos. 2:23). This may reflect the Shulamite's acceptance of Solomon's marriage proposal, and thus she eagerly proclaims the reality of their covenant relationship in betrothal.

(8) "Until the day breaks" (lit. "breathes"; Song 2:17) is a phrase that not only refers to the beginning or ending of a regular day but in this context echoes covenantal and eschatological figurative language. "The day" can sometimes refer to times of trouble and judgment; this usage is found already in the time of Job (Job 20:28; 21:30; 38:23) and is also used this way by David (Ps. 20:1; 59:16) and Solomon (Prov. 6:34; 11:4; 16:4). The Hebrew verb for "breathe" (*puakh*) not only refers to the arrival of the morning or afternoon cool breeze (cf. Gen. 3:8 for usage in a covenant lawsuit setting) but can also denote the testimony of a witness in a legal (or covenant-making) setting (Ps. 27:12; Prov. 6:19; 12:17; 14:5, 25; 19:5, 9). In the Song this phrase probably alludes to the future eschatological legal assize—the day of judgment.

(9) The reference to the fleeing shadows (Song 2:17) not only alludes to the end of a day filled with the loving relationship between the betrothed couple but ultimately has connotations of the eschatological end of time or the end of a human's existence when life departs as a "shadow" (Job 14:2), the equivalent to our modern vow or promise to love "till death do us part." The Shulamite is vowing to be forever faithful to her covenant with Solomon.

(10) The covenant-making (betrothal) setting is suggested by the Shulamite's reference to the mountains of *bether*. In Hebrew the word *bether* denotes "cleavage/separation" and probably has several layers of meaning in this verse. While the phrase may refer both to a literal mountain cleft named *bether* and to the cleavage of her breasts, it ultimately refers to the "mountains of the covenant," as some translations recognize. The Hebrew word *bether* is used to describe the separation of the covenant-making animals in Genesis 15:17 when God made a covenant with Abraham, and Isaiah 53:8 uses this term (alluding back to Gen. 15) in predicting the covenant-sealing death of the suffering Servant. The Shulamite alludes to this covenant ceremony in Abraham's history (foreshadowing the new covenant) and applies it to her covenant relationship with Solomon, in other words their betrothal or formal engagement, which will be consummated in the marriage that is described in the next stanzas of the Song. The Song affirms the important stage of a love relationship in which the couple makes a life commitment to each other in betrothal/engagement.

3:1–5. Scene 2. Dream 1, Before the Wedding. This scene occurs sometime after the previous scene depicting the betrothal, with which it is connected by numerous terminological links. In its position in the Song just before the wedding procession (vv. 6–11), the scene may portray a situation very near the time of the wedding. The Shulamite is apparently in the city of Jerusalem visiting Solomon, perhaps to plan their wedding now that they have become betrothed.

The Shulamite had what might be a recurring night dream (v. 1; the word "night" is in the plural), either on different nights or during different parts of the night's watches. Anticipating her imminent wedding, the Shulamite had lost her lover and searched anxiously for him. The theme of seeking and finding—absence and presence—highlights the need for mutuality and wholeness, as with the first couple in Eden. As in the Garden of Eden, the lovers in the Song need each other so as to be whole.

The Shulamite went about the city (probably Jerusalem) looking for Solomon, especially in the market streets and town squares where townspeople gathered. The night watchmen who were patrolling the city found her. The Hebrew order of the sentence in v. 3 heightens the sense of drama and urgency: "The one whom I love—have you seen?" With no introductory phrase such as "I asked the guards..." the pace of the narrative poetry is quickened.

No sooner had she left the watchmen than she found her lover (v. 4). She held him in her embrace; the shift in the Hebrew tense implies her continuing to hold on to him in her present time and on into the future. In this verse the Shulamite transitions from her dream to a statement of the present situation. She announces to the daughters of Jerusalem (likely at a time other than during the night) her intention to bring her lover to her mother's home, which is still also her own home until she gets married. She may be alluding to the time of the imminent wedding, when Solomon would come to take her in his royal palanquin (i.e., his enclosed litter, suspended by poles and carried on the shoulders of several men) to the wedding ceremony in Jerusalem.

This account captures some of the conflicting emotions as the wedding approaches: eager expectation mixed with reservations and thoughts of life in her mother's house up to this time. She finds herself poised on the threshold of a new married life with her lover, yet she experiences reluctance to leave home and family. It has been suggested that she only dreamed of bringing her lost lover into her mother's room (v. 4), which would anticipate the consummation of the marriage in the near future, rather than describing a real experience of sexual intimacy with him before the marriage, as would be understood by a cursory reading of the text. The refrain (see 2:7) admonishes the daughters of Jerusalem (and by extension, the readers) not to stir up love until *shettekhpatz*. As noted in the comment for v. 7, this has been variously translated as "until it pleases," "until it so desires," "until she pleases," or "until the appropriate time" (3:5). The scene ends with the same refrain that ends the first section of the Song (2:7) and is the refrain in 8:4, except that there is no mention of the intimate embrace of the Shulamite and Solomon (cf. 2:6 and 8:3). This could be explained if the Shulamite was not actually present with Solomon but only in a dream, which she related to her female companions.

3:6—4:7

Act III. Wedding Procession and Wedding Service

The symmetrical structure of the unified Song which finds its apex in the central sections, which appear to describe the royal wedding of Solomon to his bride and their wedding night.

3:6–11. Scene 1. Wedding Procession: Praise of Groom I. It has been suggested that scene 1 portrays the wedding procession of Solomon "on the day of his wedding" (3:11). The description of this lavish wedding procession is strong evidence that what is taking place is not just a simple wedding between commoners who take on the title of "king" and "queen" for a day, as some scholars have suggested, but rather a description of the royal marriage of Solomon. Commentaries are divided over *who* is riding in Solomon's palanquin. Is it Solomon, the Shulamite, or both? In light of v. 11—where the daughters of Jerusalem are admonished to observe King Solomon—it seems clear that at least Solomon is in the palanquin and that the focus in this section is upon him. At the same time, evidence within the passage, contextual indicators, and intratextual parallels with 8:5, appear to indicate that the Shulamite is also involved in the procession. In this commentary we suggest that this scene portrays Solomon bringing his bride from her home in northern Israel to Jerusalem by way of the Jordan Valley, up through the wilderness of Judea to Jerusalem for the wedding ceremony. In fact, in ancient times the bringing of the bride from her house to the house of the groom may have been part of the wedding ceremony (cf. Gen. 24:67; Ps. 45). Solomon may have traveled all the way to Shulem in northern Israel to escort his bride throughout the entire journey of several days, or he may have sent the armed guard and royal entourage to Shulem to escort the bride and then come down from Jerusalem himself on the day of the wedding to meet the Shulamite and join the formal procession up from the wilderness to Jerusalem.

The word for crown in Song 3:11 can refer to a "garland," "crown," or "diadem." Later Jewish weddings may illuminate this verse, as both groom and bride wore wedding crowns on their wedding day, a practice continued until the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. The crown that Bathsheba, Solomon's mother, placed upon Solomon's head was not for the occasion of his coronation as king (predating his wedding to the Shulamite) but for a special crowning on the occasion of his wedding.

4:1–7. Scene 2. Wedding Ceremony: Praise of Bride I. This scene appears to encompass the wedding ceremony itself. The groom sings a wedding *wasf* (song describing the beauty of his bride) in which he lauds the Shulamite's beauty. In light of our analysis of Song of 2:17, where the statement "until the day breaks and the shadows flee" was seen to constitute the Shulamite's covenant vow at the time of her betrothal to be faithful "till death do them part," the use of precisely the same covenant language at the end of this section (4:6) appears to serve a similar function in the groom's marriage vow to love and cherish his bride "as long as they both shall live." The wedding ends with the groom repeating (v. 7, as an *inclusio* with v. 1) his summary admiration of the beauty of his bride.

Allusions to the sanctuary and its services and setting are more concentrated in this passage than in any other stanza of the Song. Note the references to dove (v. 1), goats (v. 1), sheep (v. 2), scarlet (v. 3), mouth (v. 3, a Hebrew word that elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible means wilderness, and a cognate word that refers to the Holy of Holies), veil (vv. 1, 3), pomegranate (v. 3), lilies (v. 5), myrrh and incense (v. 6), and being without blemish or flaw (v. 7)—all of these are related to the sanctuary elsewhere in Scripture! An aura of sanctuary holiness is thereby drawn over the bride, who is extolled in the wedding service by the groom. The wedding service, and yes, marriage itself as an institution, are cast as sacred, as made holy (see 5:1) by the presence of God's presiding over the service, as in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:22–23).

4:8—5:1

Act IV. Wedding Night in the Bridal Chamber

Only in Song of Songs 4:8—5:1 does Solomon address the Shulamite as his bride (4:8, 9, 10, 11, 12; 5:1). The wedding has taken place and now it is the wedding night. This section encompasses the foreplay of the couple in the bridal chamber on their wedding night.

4:8–15. Scene 1. Wedding Night in the Bridal Chamber: Praise of Bride II. In 4:8 Solomon invites his bride to come with him from Lebanon, Amana, Senir, and Hermon. These mountain peaks were some distance away to the north and thus might serve as symbols of her character (cf. 2:14). Solomon is inviting her to come with him, to descend from this inaccessible state to one of accessibility and intimacy. He is inviting her to make love. She has kept herself pure as a virgin (a locked garden, an enclosed spring, and a sealed fountain, 4:12), inaccessible to any sexual advances, but now following the wedding, Solomon and the Shulamite are free to engage in foreplay in the wedding chamber, leading up to sexual intercourse, all the while as Solomon describes her ravishing beauty (vv. 9–15).

4:16—5:1. Scene 2. Consummation of the Marriage in Sexual Union. These two parallel verses appear in the exact middle of the Song (111 lines or 60 verses on either side), thus clearly designed by the Song's artistic composer to form the central, climactic verses of the entire symmetrical structure of the Song. These verses represent the consummation of the marriage in the marriage bed. The groom has compared his bride to a garden (4:12, 15), and now the bride invites her groom to come and partake of the fruits of her (now his) garden (v. 16) and the groom indicates that he has accepted her invitation (5:1). The identity of the speaker for the last portion of v. 1 is unclear. It may be best to understand that the marriage covenant having been solemnized, the authoritative Voice—Yahweh Himself—extends the divine approbation, while the bride and groom drink deeply in the consummate experience of sexual union (v. 1).

5:2—6:12

Act V. Marital Conflict and Resolution

After the wedding night, the remainder of the Song describes the life of love between Solomon and the Shulamite during their marriage. Act V portrays marital conflicts that arise after the wedding and models of how the resolution of such conflicts may take place.

5:2–8. Scene 1. Dream 2, After the Wedding: Marital Conflict. It is possible that there are nocturnal dream scenes (3:1–5 and 5:2–8), one coming before and one after the wedding. If so, they reveal a historical progression in the relationship by intensification in sexual intimacy. In what has been proposed as Dream 1, the woman wanted to hold him and not let him go (3:4), while in this proposed Dream 2, the husband comes by night to her boudoir, clearly for the purpose of making love (5:2), possibly with the double entendre of lovemaking embedded in the dream description.

Verses 2–8 utilize some of the same literary techniques as employed in 3:1–4, but here the eagerness is further underscored by recording the man's bold actions and words and the woman's inner feelings of desire for the presence of the beloved. In 5:2, the man "knocks repeatedly" (this is the force of the Hebrew grammar). Solomon is not just timidly tapping on the door! And he calls out—using the imperative—for her to open for him. He then addresses her with one of the longest strings of endearment terms anywhere in the Song: "my sister, my love/darling, my dove, my perfect/flawless one!" (v. 2). His heart is overflowing with eagerness for her.

She, in turn, is reluctant to respond, making excuses to herself (v. 3). But when he perseveres in his expressions of desire for intimacy, her deep emotional desire to be with him is stirred (vv. 4, 6, 8). But by the time she responds, her husband has already turned away (vv. 5–6). What follows appears to take place in a dream. She is so intense and even frantic in her search for her lover that apparently the watchmen mistake her for a harlot and try to physically restrain her (v. 7). But she manages to adjure her female companions to tell her lover how lovesick she is for him, should they find him (v. 8).

It may be inferred from this account that adjustments need to be made in their newly married life together. Two issues seem to come to the fore: the husband's late-night arrival home from work (v. 2, describing his head as covered with dew of the late night), and the wife's indifference or lack of interest in sexual intimacy (v. 3). She realizes anew how much she loves Solomon and wants him to know her deep feelings for him. The Song is realistic; every marriage relationship will inevitably involve challenges, calling for action on the part of husband and wife to face them together.

5:9—6:3. Scene 2. Resolution of Marital Conflict: Praise of Groom II. After the Shulamite adjures her female companions to tell her lover, should they find him, how lovesick she is for him (5:8), the daughters of Jerusalem question her concerning what sets him apart (v. 9), and this query calls forth from the Shulamite a flowery song (*wasf*) expressing praise of his handsomeness and sterling character qualities (vv. 10–16). Her attitude and action change as she focuses her attention on his many wonderful attributes. There is also an intensification of intimacy in this description of Solomon compared to the matching praise of the groom earlier in the Song of Songs (3:6–11). This section ends with a double entendre that intensifies similar language used earlier in the Song before the wedding: before, Solomon had "grazed" among the lilies (2:16; cf. vv. 1–2 where she herself is a lily), but here the married Solomon not only grazes but actually gathers the lilies (6:2–3, NJPS), that is, experiences sexual activity with his wife.

6:4–12. Scene 3. Resolution of Marital Conflict: Praise of Bride III. In this scene Solomon

shows no resentment for his wife's earlier indifference to sexual intimacy and for her insensitivity as he extols her exquisite and awesome beauty, highlighting her unique inner qualities (vv. 4–10), which may indicate that part of that was indeed a dream. He avoids sexual imagery here, perhaps because he does not want to give her the impression that he only desires her in a sexual way. The Shulamite and Solomon enjoy quiet fellowship together after their conflict resolution (vv. 11–12).

When Solomon looks at the Shulamite, he sees such an awesomeness revealed that he likens her to two awesome cities in Israel (v. 4). Not content with one such statement about the impressiveness of her appearance that likens her to soldiers on parade, he repeats it a few verses later (v. 10). In these passages, the term for "awesome" has the connotations of "fear/dread/awe" and "majesty."

Solomon also describes his wife as perfect and unique (v. 9) compared to the sixty queens, eighty concubines, and virgins without number. The mention of sixty queens and eighty concubines need not necessarily refer to Solomon's harem (1 Kin. 11:3), as many have supposed. Solomon does not say "*I have...*" but "*There are...* [queens, concubines, and virgins without number],...and my beloved is the only one [for me]" (Song 6:8–9). Furthermore, the Hebrew word for "queen(s)" in this passage is never used elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible for the wife of a Hebrew king, but only for the wife of a non-Hebrew king. In light of the evidence shown elsewhere in the Song that the relationship between Solomon and the Shulamite was a monogamous one (see Song of Songs: Introduction), it can be concluded that Solomon seems to have been proclaiming that however many other women of whatever status there may be around (at their wedding or in general), his beloved wife is his one and only. This interpretation is consistent with the typological meaning of the Song in which God enters into an exclusive covenant relationship with His people.

The final verse of this scene depicts the Shulamite as one who looks like the dawn of the morning, is as fair as the moon, is as bright and clear as the sun, and is as awesome and majestic as a procession (interpreted and translated variously as being one of "stars" or "banners"; v. 10), a description that John seems to allude to in Revelation 12:1 when describing in symbolism the pure woman representing God's true church.

6:13—8:4

Act VI. Maturation of Marriage

6:13—7:10. Scene 1. Praise of Bride IV Followed by Lovemaking. In this section the Shulamite went down to her garden and vineyard to see what was ripe, and while lost in contemplation, her mind seems to have wandered back to her roots, and there is an enigmatic reference that is best rendered as "chariots of my noble/royal people" or "chariots of Amminadib" (6:12). If the wife of Solomon in the Song is Pharaoh's daughter, as suggested as a possibility in the Introduction, this phrase could be linked to the Shulamite's royal Egyptian lineage and the famous chariots of Egypt (cf. 1:9).

The women of Jerusalem interrupt her contemplative experience, apparently inviting her to join a special dance, called the dance of the two camps (Mahanaim; v. 13), perhaps alluding to a group of dancers that dance in a formation of two lines and/or alluding to the historical experience of Mahanaim (see Gen. 32:1–3).

In Song of Songs 6:13, the daughters of Jerusalem use a name for Solomon's wife that only appears here in the Song: "the Shulamite." The grammatical form of this term usually refers to a person's place of origin and thus probably denotes a woman "from [the village of] Shulam." Shulam is an alternate spelling for the city of Shunem in northern Israel, the town from which Abishag the Shunamite came (1 Kin. 1:3, 15; 2:17, 21–22). Those positing the views that "the Shulamite" of the Song is either Abishag or another (unnamed) woman from the village of Shunem in northern Israel find support for their view in this verse. The alternate spelling may have been used because "Shulamite" allows a play on words with the name "Solomon" and may serve as the functional equivalent of "Mrs. Solomon" or "the Solomoness." The use of this name with this spelling also makes possible a three-way play on words with the word *shalom*, meaning peace/contentment (see Song 8:10–11).

Song of Songs 7:1 seems to transition from a public dance to a private one in the (exclusive) presence of Solomon while he sings to her of her stunning beauty. He expresses his desire for intimacy with her (vv. 7–8), and the scene climaxes with an allusion to their making love together, involving deep kissing and/or other intimate sexual activity (v. 9). As the scene comes to a close, the Shulamite expresses the egalitarian nature of their relationship: she belongs to her beloved, and his desire is toward her (v. 10). This is an allusion to Genesis 3:16, but the "curse" is reversed. Whereas in Genesis 3:16 the “desire” of the woman was for her husband, the Song announces that God longs for couples to return to the Edenic ideal before sin (Gen. 2:24), where there was full equality and mutual desire between husband and wife.

7:10—8:4. Scene 2. Going and Coming: Married Sexual Adventure in the Countryside. After the resolution of marital issues, with renewed confidence and comfort in their relationship, the Shulamite invites Solomon to make love to her, as she did on the wedding night (4:16). At her suggestion, they go for a vacation into the countryside. They continue to enjoy an ever-deepening intimacy as their marriage matures. The paired pictures of going and coming to the countryside (2:8–17 and 7:10—8:4) present another example of intensified intimacy including sexual intercourse after the couple is married. The various kinds of fruits (7:12–13; 8:2) denote the delicious aspects of the lovemaking process, including old and new sexual explorations and delights between the lovers.

The scene (and stanza) ends with the same refrain as found in 2:6–7. In its usage in the parallel stanza of 1:2—2:6, the context can be understood as one of a restrained physical relationship during courtship and wishing for fulfillment, whereas in this context of marriage (8:3–4) the same words can be understood as a reference to lovemaking culminating in intercourse.

8:5–14

Act VII. Mutual Love: Mature Reflections on the Meaning of Love

In this concluding stanza of the Song, the Shulamite reflects on her love relationship with Solomon from its beginning to the present. Her wisdom statements reveal that she is a believer in the true God of Israel. She describes the enduring quality of love that comes from Yahweh (v. 6). Love is nothing less than a *shalhebetyah.* This term has often been translated as either expressing a superlative construction using the divine name—“a most vehement flame”—or as referring directly to *Yah*—a shortened form of *Yahweh*—the divine name, in which case the term would be referring to the very “flame of Yahweh.” There is substantial evidence indicating that this expression is best translated as “flame of Yah[weh].” Coming at the thematic climax of the entire Song, this verse reveals that Yahweh is the Source of human love, and thus provides the basis for the typological interpretation of the Song (see Song of Songs: Introduction).

The Shulamite also reviews her life from the time of her puberty (v. 8), when her brothers protected her from sexual predators (v. 9), and she determined to remain a pure virgin, thus finding *shalom,* “peace,” in her husband’s eyes (v. 10). She then describes the current ongoing and growing love relationship with her husband Solomon (vv. 11–12). The final stanza (and the entire Song) ends as it begins, with the couple exuberantly in love. In fact, the final refrain that concludes the Song (v. 14) parallels almost exactly the refrain that concludes the courtship/betrothal part of the Song (2:17). The man longs to hear her voice (8:13; cf. 2:14), and she invites him to a thrilling adventure (8:14; cf. 2:17). The Song ends with the same sensual and tantalizing ambiguity that we see so often elsewhere in its stanzas: the Hebrew word used in v. 14, *barakh*—“to hurry,” “to flee,” “to come away”—may also mean to “penetrate.” The passionate, romantic love of Solomon and the Shulamite does not lessen in intensity as they continue to enjoy married life together. The conclusion of the Song instructs us that a marriage filled with divine love will only become more joyous and beautiful as the years go by. Typologically, in the deepest dimension of our hope, the love relationship between God and His people will grow more intimate and glorious throughout eternity—ablaze with the flame of Yahweh!

PROPHETIC BOOKS

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROPHETIC BOOKS

The writing prophets, whose messages are preserved in the biblical canon, ministered from the eighth century B.C. to around the middle of the fifth century B.C. The work of these canonical prophets occurred during the divided Israelite monarchy, during the Exile of both Israel and Judah, and during the period after the Exile when God's remnant returned from Babylon (2 Kin. 14:25; Jon. 1:1; Mal. 3:1). The messages of the prophets contain inspired evaluations of Israel's responses to God's revelation of His love, holiness, justice, and hope for all humanity through the promised Messiah. The prophets functioned within the historical shift of nations and spoke to (and beyond) the concerns of their time.

PROPHETIC VOCATION

True biblical prophets were never self-appointed but were considered mouthpieces of God. Their messages at times disrupted, affirmed, challenged, engaged, and even enraged their audiences. The preclassical prophets (e.g., Elijah and Elisha; ca. tenth and ninth centuries B.C.) provide examples of how prophets operated in and outside Israel. In those settings, several terms were used, often interchangeably, to refer to the prophet. The terms *seer* (Heb. *ro'eh*; Is. 30:10) and *visionary* (Heb. *khozeh*, from *khazah* "to see a vision"; Amos 7:12) imply that the prophets received divine insight into their present circumstances that was unknown to others. In 1 Samuel 9:1–10, Samuel the "seer" was expected to know where the lost donkeys had gone. The "man of God" (Heb. *'ish ha'elohim*; Deut. 33:1; 1 Kin. 13:1; 17:18; 2 Kin. 1:9) was God's special servant who proclaimed His will. Similarly, the prophet/prophetess (Heb. *nabi'*; Is. 38:1) was one who was called to proclaim God's message.

A brief profile of the prophets allows readers to see parallel motifs that recur from time to time in the descriptions of their prophetic ministries. The prophetic call of Moses (Ex. 3–4) is paradigmatic for other call narratives. God called persons of varied backgrounds and life experiences (e.g., Amos 7:14). Many times, the prophets include autobiographical information as they respond to the divine call. They respond with anxiety from being overwhelmed by the sheer magnitude of God's presence; at times they protest their inadequacy or reticence for their mission (cf. Isaiah [Is. 6:5], Jeremiah [Jer. 1:6], and Ezekiel [Ezek. 1:28; 3:16; 3:23–27]). This is often followed by the divine reassurance of empowerment and fitness for the task (cf. Is. 6:6–13; Jer. 1:7–10; Ezek. 2:1–3:15). Prophetic calls often come unexpectedly, and the person feels overwhelmed by it and by the magnitude of the task. Ultimately, the prophets realized that the One who called them would also empower them to complete the task.

A variety of life experiences shaped the ministry of biblical prophets. Their background, previous vocation, education, and most importantly, their relationship with God all influenced how their interactions with kings, leaders, and the general populace occurred. Amos informed Amaziah, the officially sanctioned priest serving at Bethel, about his prophetic call and appointment and pointed out that he was not a prophet or the "son of a prophet" (possibly a reference to the school/company of the prophets; cf. 1 Kin. 20:35; 2 Kin. 2:3–4; 4:1, 6:1; Amos 7:14–15). God uses an intriguing story about Hosea's life and marriage to express Israel's unfaithfulness. Micah came from a small town but was soon seen as an authoritative prophet (Jer. 26:18). Isaiah, a member of the royal family, had easy access to kings Ahaz and Hezekiah. Jeremiah and Ezekiel were priests, but apparently they did not minister in the temple in Jerusalem in the typical and expected way. As they received the divine messages, the language and imagery that each prophet used to communicate them were drawn from their familiar surroundings, vocations, and life experiences. Though persons of deep theological conviction, the prophets were subservient to God's directives no matter what.

God often called the prophets to engage in symbolic actions that, in some cases, exposed them to ridicule: Isaiah's required nakedness (Is. 20:2); Hosea's marriage to a harlot (Hos. 1–3); Jeremiah's donning of an ox's yoke (Jer. 27); and Ezekiel's miniature models, haircut, cooking forays, and extended repose (Ezek. 4). Through these means, God was attempting to awaken His people out of their spiritual stupor. As Judah moved closer to the Exile, the critique of the state apparatus (kingship, priesthood, prophets) became bolder and often brought the prophet into conflict with the ruling administration. By the time Ezekiel described Israel's history and crises of leadership, the imagery was extremely graphic, somber, and seemingly hopeless.

The prophets operated in Israel within a covenant relationship between God and the people. The heartbeat of God's covenant relationship with Israel is expressed through variations of the fundamental covenant promise that He would be their God and they His people (Gen. 17:7; Jer. 7:23; 11:4; 30:22; Ezek. 36:28). Springing out of this relationship, God's plan for Israel to be a light to the nations was to teach them to live out His selfless character (Is. 60:1–4). This plan necessitated Israel's restoration from sin in all its forms and a revitalization that would ultimately lead to mission (Ps. 96:1–6). The needs of the community of faith were met by the prophetic guidance of God's Spirit (Num. 24:2; 1 Sam. 10:10; 2 Sam. 23:2). Imbued with His presence as servants of the Lord of history, the prophets continually pointed to God's acts of mercy and grace in Israel's past as well as the instructions He had given to sustain them on their journey of faith.

Within this framework the prophet's role included at least five functions: (1) God's *preachers* of His revealed will in line with the revealed law of Moses (Is. 2:3; 42:21; 51:4; Mic. 4:2; Mal. 4:4); (2) God's *messengers* to summon the people to repentance (Is. 31:6; 44:22; 55:7; Jer. 3:12; 15:19; 18:11; Ezek. 14:6; Hos. 14:2); (3) God's social (covenant) *reformers* pointing to God's desire for justice and righteousness in the covenant community (Is. 1:17; Jer. 7:5–7;

Amos 5:24; Zech. 7:9–10); (4) God's *representatives* to the nations (Is. 42:1; 49:22; Jer. 1:5; Zech. 2:8; 9:10); and (5) God's *announcers* of a judgment and a future hope (Is. 40:31; Jer. 14:7–9; 17:13; Hos. 12:6).

PROPHECY FROM CREATION TO THE MONARCHY

After the Fall, God called for Himself a special people (election) with whom He would have a special relationship (covenant) to make His will known to humanity. This required that His people reflect His holiness within their community and to their neighbors. This special relationship with His people also meant that they were not to take up the "prophetic" (often occult) practices of the nations surrounding them in order to understand the past, present, or future (Deut. 18:9–14). As the Creator of all, God identified Himself as the source of true prophecy (Is. 46:10; cf. 41:22–23; 44:7; 45:21). Thus, eschatology (the study of the end of all things) is intimately connected to protology (the study of the origin of all things; cf. Is. 65:17; 66:22–23). For the prophets, Israel's eschatological hope was grounded in Creation, covenant, and redemption. The very language of the opening book of the Pentateuch, Genesis, suggests that God's plan for His people was embedded in the revelation given to Moses, God's prophet (Deut. 34:10).

First, time played a significant role in biblical prophecy. The phrase *be'akharit hayyamim* ("in the last days" or "in days to come"; Gen. 49:1), used by Jacob concerning the future of Joseph's sons, is a prophetic expression designating the last days or the end of time, the coming of the messianic King, and eschatological salvation (cf. Is. 2:2; Jer. 23:20; 30:24; 48:47; Ezek. 38:16; Dan. 10:14; Hos. 3:5; Mic. 4:1). This phrase has been recognized as a key structural indicator for the entire Pentateuch. It is found in the introduction to messianic poems (Gen. 49:1; Num. 24:14; Deut. 31:29; see "Introduction to the Pentateuch," p. 120). The forward-looking character of the Pentateuch serves as a prophetic eschatological precursor of God's divine design for humanity. Its eschatological structure and ethos would be proclaimed by the prophets in light of God's additional revelation and historical developments.

Second, the major themes of the prophetic messages are already operative in the period under discussion. The storyline seen throughout Genesis (Creation–Fall–judgment–redemption) is paradigmatic for the prophets in light of God's lordship over all creation. The prophet's *messianic hope* stems from the original promise to our ancestors (Gen. 3:15; cf. Dan. 9:25–26). This hope was continually expressed through a promised Seed (Gen. 12:7; 16:11–12; 18:9–10; Gal. 3:16). The notion of *universal judgment* is first found in the Flood narrative (Gen. 4–7; Jer. 25:33; Ezek. 38–39; Zeph. 1:7–18; cf. Matt. 24:37–38; 2 Pet. 2:4–10). The hope of a remnant who were saved from worldwide destruction is found in speeches that request God's providential leading (Ex. 33:13; Judg. 6:17; Acts 7:46). The subsequent *hope of restoration* or re-creation sprang forth from God's renewal of the earth after a worldwide destruction (Gen. 8:21; 9:11). The promise of a *renewed earth* was strongly connected with the renewal of the people's relationship with God (Is. 11:3–5; 35:1–2; 41:18–20; Ezek. 34:25; Hos. 2:16–23). Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob's election contained a promise of *land* (Gen. 12–24; 50:22–26). This correlation of the gift of land as an inheritance from God played a key role in the prophets' calls to faithfulness (Jer. 3:18–19; Ezek. 47:13–14).

The *covenant* is a bond established by God with human beings that is (1) given by grace; (2) described in explicit promises; and (3) conditioned on the human response of faith, love, and loyalty (Ex. 20:1; Lev. 19:18; Deut. 6:4–6). The basis upon which the prophets give their stinging rebukes stems from Israel's penchant for breaking the bond of love that God established as well as following after their lustful desires and selfish ways. God's judgments against His people were both retributive and restorative and came in the form of covenant curses (Lev. 26:14–39; Deut. 28:15–68). The people of God were initially made up of the direct descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Gen. 49:1–27; Ex. 1:1–4), yet God's plan was always to reach out and include those from all nations who yielded to His lordship (cf. Josh. 2; Ruth 1:15–18; Is. 2:1–5; 19:16–25). The people of God were addressed as people with responsibilities based on their covenant relationship with God (Jer. 2–6; Hos. 1–3; Amos 2:6—3:8). The *nations* (Gen. 10–11; 25:23) are often mentioned, and several of the prophetic books contain a collection of oracles of judgment against them (cf. Is. 13–23; Jer. 46–51; Ezek. 25–32; Amos 1–2), indicating God's concern for them as well as His judgment.

Third, there is the dynamic of the Spirit and prophecy. From the initial promise to Abram to establish a people set apart through whom the promised Messiah would come (Gen. 12:1–7; Gal. 3:16), God's plan was to bring a knowledge of His name to the world through the indwelling of His Spirit in His chosen instruments (prophet, priest, and king) as well as in the construction of the sanctuary, the place where He would make His name and presence known (Ex. 31:1–11). The expression of Israel's status as God's elect, the people among whom He would dwell, was enlarged, enriched, and made more explicit from the time of the patriarchs to Israel's entrance into the land of Canaan (Ex. 25:8, 40). The Spirit of prophecy moved among His people to lead, guide, and correct. We see God's purposes and the Spirit of prophecy working through Abraham (Gen. 20:7), Aaron (Ex. 7:1), Miriam (Ex. 15:1), Eldad and Medad (Num. 11:27–29), Moses (Deut. 34:10), and a future prophet like Moses—Christ (Deut. 18; Acts 3:20–26).

As Israel transitioned into the promised land, God revealed His standards for the prophetic witness. Not only was the fulfillment of a prophecy important but so too was its effect in leading to trust in the Creator, Yahweh, and faithfulness to His lordship (Deut. 13:1–11). The spirit of God would give the needed divine guidance while Israel's dependence was to rest in God's wisdom and not the spiritualistic activities of the nations. As Israel transitioned from a unified tribal group to a monarchy under the Lord's kingship (Judg. 8:23; 13:9), they were to depend on His revealed will found in His Torah (Genesis through Deuteronomy) as well as the prophetic leading of His Spirit.

PROPHECY FROM THE MONARCHY TO THE EXILE

The theology of the historical books (Joshua through 2 Chronicles) reflects God's revealed will for Israel's mission on the international scene and is expressed during the centralization of the Israelite monarchy, the division of the kingdom, and the dissolution of both kingdoms. These books contain a prophetic evaluation of Israel's history from the conquest of the promised land to Judah's Exile in Babylon. The endings of both the Pentateuch and the historical books close with hope. The Pentateuch ends as they anticipated entering the land with the expectation of a prophet like Moses. The historical books end with the anticipation of returning to the land with the release of the exiled king, Jehoiachin, as a visible reminder of the Davidic promise. In both instances, a figure of hope sustained Israel as it transitioned from the land to exile and back to the land.

The place of kingship and prophecy appears after Samuel's prophetic ministry during Saul's failed kingship. Nathan, God's spokesman, delivered God's dynastic promises to David (2 Sam. 7), confronted David dramatically with his gross violation of God's covenant (2 Sam. 12), and served in the expanding role of prophets who were involved in the transition of dynastic succession (1 Kin. 1:11–40). According to the author of Chronicles, Nathan also assisted, in tandem with Gad the prophet, in David's arrangements for ritual worship and music (2 Chr. 29:25). Though Nathan served the king, his primary responsibility was to express God's authority through words of encouragement and criticism. This expansion of the prophetic role during the monarchy served as a pattern for the involvement of the classical prophets (ca. eighth through sixth centuries B.C.) in Israel's political, cultic, and social affairs.

The appearance of the classical prophets (all the OT canonical prophets pointed to the Babylonian captivity) was prompted by God's providential dealings with Israel and the broader historical and political events of the ANE. The period of the classical prophets covered more than three centuries (ca. 760–460 B.C.) and underscored two catastrophic events. The first writing canonical prophets appeared about fifty to sixty years before the fall of northern Israel (722 B.C.) and after the conclusion of a century-long entanglement with the Arameans—a conflict whose results can be correlated with the vast societal division between the economically destitute masses and the wealthy few. In a little more than a century, all would experience the ravages of deprivation following the destruction of Jerusalem (586 B.C.). Within this period, three major empires successively dominated the world scene: Assyria, Babylon, and Persia.

Foundational for understanding the context in which the prophets ministered is the centralization of Israel's united monarchy under David. He continued the model of listening to the guidance of the Spirit through the prophetic office that was particularly operative during significant transitions in God's plan for His people: Moses during the establishment of the national sanctuary service, Samuel during Israel's transition to kingship, and then Nathan during the centralization of the temple, ritual worship, and kingship in Jerusalem. Sadly, even with such great promises given to David and the prosperous reign of Solomon, God's plan to work through the united Israelite monarchy was frustrated after the reign of these two kings. In the momentous time of the fracturing of the kingdom, the prophet Ahijah delivered God's message,

and subsequent events eventually led to the Exile and dissolution of the Northern Kingdom, which had an impact even up to Jesus's day (1 Kin. 11:29–39; Luke 10:25–37).

From Jeroboam I to Jeroboam II (1 Kin. 12:16—2 Kin. 14:23) references to prophets are restricted to the Northern Kingdom. The events that eventually led to its dissolution and Exile began during the time of the first major nonwriting prophet, Elijah, who ministered in the Northern Kingdom during the Omride dynasty (Omri, Ahab, Ahaziah, Jehoram; 1 Kin. 15:21—2 Kin. 10:17). During this period, Israel devolved into state-sponsored idol worship (1 Kin. 18). The authoritative prophetic revelation was often introduced by the phrase, "The word of the Lord came to…," indicating God's direct revelation expressed in the prophetic proclamation (1 Kin. 17:2).

Another well-known nonwriting prophet, Elisha, ministered with Elijah and then further into Jehu's dynasty. This prophetic period of Israel's history focused on the polemic of the Lord's superiority over Baal. Elijah and Elisha's personal miracle experiences emphasized God's care for His people (1 Kin. 17:1–7, 8–16; 2 Kin. 4:1–7, 38–44), His control over nature and fertility (2 Kin. 4:8–17), His healing power (2 Kin. 5), and His power over death (1 Kin. 17:17–24; 2 Kin. 4:18–37). Shortly after the death of Elisha, the first writing prophet appears in the historical books. The prophet Jonah continued to minister to the Northern Kingdom (1 Kin. 14:23–29) during a time of prosperity for Israel. Jeroboam II (ca. 786–746 B.C.) successfully reestablished the northern borders as they were in the days of David's rule and fulfilled a prophecy of Jonah at a time of great economic and agricultural prosperity (2 Kin. 14:25, 28).

Material prosperity and enlarged borders did not translate into a more profound faith. As Israel's fortunes rose, her moral core continued to crumble (e.g., the apostasy amid prosperity described in the books of Hosea and Amos). Israel's territorial expansion and agricultural production attracted the attention of the surrounding nations. Israel's prosperity should have been used as an opportunity to glorify God before the nations, but selfishness and unconverted hearts misused power and exploited the weak and vulnerable. Even in light of God's previous prophetic warnings (2 Kin. 10:30; 15:12), the kings of Israel did not repent. Instead they sank further into rebellion and murder, and worst of all, they turned away from God's providential wisdom to make covenants with foreign nations to protect them or to establish unauthorized coalitions to reduce the threat of external aggression (2 Kin. 15:8—17:6). The prophets warned Israel and Judah to turn from their wickedness back to God's principles in the Torah (2 Kin. 17:12–13).

Classical prophecy arose and reached its pinnacle during the rise and fall of world empires. Daniel prophesied of world empires up to the coming of Christ (Dan. 2; 7–12). The age in which these great empires rose bears witness to the providence and foreknowledge of God declared through the prophets. The prophets foretold of the rise and fall of each nation up to the period of Israel's restoration to the land and interpreted world-significant events in the light of God's continued preparation for the advent of the Messiah. As the Lord of history, He is the director of the theater of world history. His changing cast included renowned historical figures: Sargon, Sennacherib, Nebuchadnezzar, and Cyrus. However, His attention was constantly focused on Israel. In Scripture, figures find their importance only insofar as God sought to reveal Himself to them and through them to others even as agents of judgment for and against His people.

In addition to calling for surrender to God's redemptive purposes and lordship, the prophets supplied answers to the why of destruction and the how of future restoration, and they offered future generations the hope of One to come who would restore all that had been broken and would rule in justice and righteousness. A common notion in the ANE was that the defeat of a nation meant the defeat of its deity. However, classical prophecy teaches that Israel's defeats did not show the Lord's weakness but His strength, wisdom, and especially His foreknowledge. The play and interplay of God's predictive pronouncements, Israel's response, and world affairs are revealed through the prophets.

One of the initial examples of a long-range prophecy is the one made by a "man of God" from Judah to King Jeroboam I concerning the work of reformation that King Josiah would undertake. A special sign was given to confirm the accuracy and authenticity of the prophetic word (1 Kin. 13:1–3; 2 Kin. 23:15–20). God's sovereignty, foreknowledge, and providential acts directed affairs toward the fulfillment of this prophecy. From sustaining young Josiah on the throne with godly aides (2 Kin. 22:1–2), to the discovery of a scroll containing the Torah by the high priest Hilkiah (2 Kin. 22:8–13), to the prophetic guidance of the prophetess Huldah (2 Kin. 22:14–20), which led to the reforms that included the breaking down of the altar at Bethel (2 Kin. 23:1–25), God was fulfilling His prophetic word (see 2 Samuel: Introduction). God also continued working on the international scene. The death of Assyrian King Ashurbanipal (627 B.C.) and the ensuing civil war and general strife in Assyria provided a respite from Assyrian hegemony over and aggression against Israel. Several of Assyria's vassal states openly asserted their independence—Judah under King Josiah, Babylon under its new Chaldean dynasty, as well as the Medes.

PROPHETIC LITERARY FEATURES

Three major characteristics of prophetic poetry and narrative emerge from Scripture. They include the use of different types of literature, literary styles, and structure. These are important features insofar as they express the dynamism and beauty of God's message and serve to control speculative and fanciful interpretations.

Types of Literature

Distinct literary categories express a mode of communication that can generate an emotion, a set of expectations, and a general context for hearing the message. Among them we find laments (i.e., funeral dirges; Amos 5:1), oaths (Is. 5:9; 14:24), lawsuits (i.e., legal controversy; Is. 3:13–15; Mic. 6:1–16), salvation and judgment speeches or oracles (Mic. 3:9–12), and hymns of praise (Is. 12). Prophetic oracles largely occur in two major types: (1) salvation oracles, which are pronouncements of the Lord's intent and power to save, redeem,

and restore His people or, in some cases, the nations (Is. 41:8–16), and (2) judgment oracles, which are pronouncements of the Lord's judgment against the people of God or other nations on account of their sin and rebellion (against God's people: Is. 2:6–4:1; 28:14–18; Jer. 2–10; against the nations: Is. 13–23; Jer. 46–51; Ezek. 25–32; Amos 1–2; see "God's Judgment in the Prophets," p. 981).

Other genre types include messenger speeches and vision reports. Messenger speeches are oral messages delivered by a messenger in which the words uttered by God are proclaimed by the prophet to the recipients. The prophet serves as the Lord's messenger relaying authentic messages sent from God to Israel (Is. 6:9; 43:1). Springing out of the messenger speeches are messenger formulas, standard expressions that introduce or conclude sayings, such as oracles, identifying them as words of the Lord for various purposes, such as evoking God's authority or certainty for what is said. These include the *'amar* formulas, which refer to what the Lord says (e.g., Is. 49:5); the *ne'um* formulas, which refer to the proclamation of the Lord (e.g., Ezek. 5:11); and the *dibber* formulas, which refer to the word that the Lord had spoken (e.g., Joel 3:8). Vision reports are autobiographical accounts of a prophet's revelatory experience received by seeing objects or events, often involving images that require explanations (Is. 1:1; Jer. 1:11–19; 24:1–10; Amos 7:1–8:3; Zech. 1–6).

Literary Styles

The literary style is expressed in prophetic narratives and prophetic poetry. Prophetic narratives are engaging and dramatic portrayals of the prophet's interaction with God, God's people, or the nations. They typically offer background information to prophetic oracles and reports. Time applications of prophecies typically can be broken up into three states: present, future, and distant future. The time of the application of prophecies that occur during the prophet's lifetime or shortly after that are usually found in the descriptions of the prophet's mission (call narratives: Is. 6:1–8; Jer. 1; Ezek. 1:1—3:27; prophetic encounters: Is. 39:1–8; Jer. 28; Amos 7:11–17; Jon. 2–4; or phrases that accentuate the nearness of God's action: Is. 38:5; Hab. 1:6). The time of the application of prophecies that were to occur in the people's future regarding the nearness of the Exile or the return to the land is marked by temporal expressions referring to the day, days, or time when the prophecies would be fulfilled. The last and more distant eschatological future tended to focus on the messianic reign over the nations or the distant future (Is. 24–27; Zech. 7–12).

Prophetic poetry is similar in structure, imagery, and meter and rhythm to poetry found in other parts of the Bible (including the Psalms). Its most significant characteristic involves parallelism (see "Introduction to Hebrew Poetry and Wisdom Books," p. 614).

Literary Structure

Literary structure is the most significant guide to discover the main point of any passage. This requires careful attention to a larger section defined by patterns and parallelism. This necessitates that the reader pays close attention to the text to understand how its content is organized.

Almost every biblical book in the OT exhibits chiastic structures (i.e., a concentric structure patterned ABCB'A', with C being the central thought) or parallel symmetric patterns (ABCA'B'C'). Many of these are identified and discussed in the relevant commentaries.

FACING FALSE PROPHETS

In the prophetic books, it is as crucial to receive the divinely inspired message as it is to recognize the toxic and devastating effect of false prophets. God's prophets were chosen to proclaim His word faithfully. Sometimes that meant words of comfort and sometimes words of rebuke. Unfortunately, Judah's fascination with false prophets is well documented in the Hebrew Bible (cf. Jer. 6:13–14; 8:11; 14:13–14; 23:17; Ezek. 13:10–16; Mic. 2:6–11; 3:5, 11). While most of the Minor Prophets rebuke false leaders and prophets (see especially Amos 7:10–17; see also the story of Micaiah in 1 Kin. 22 as an illustration of the conflict between true and false prophets), the Major Prophets of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel give a sustained refutation of this practice and its practitioners.

In Isaiah, God's rebuke was more generalized and applicable to nations beyond Israel's borders. It dealt with the problems of (1) *the source of knowledge of the future* (i.e., occultism; Is. 8:19; 19:3); (2) *equating creation with the Creator* (Is. 40:18–31; 41:21–29; 44:6–8); and (3) *unbelief in God's clear message* (Is. 6:9–8:22). During Jeremiah's ministry God was very specific about false prophecy and warned against its deceptive and inauthentic nature (Jer. 29:8–9). Judah's last kings rebelled against God's counsel and accepted messages from false prophets, such as Hananiah (Jer. 28:1–17) and Shemaiah (Jer. 29:24–32), that encouraged them to think that geopolitics was the answer to their problems. The influence of these false prophets and their messages was so pervasive, both in Judah and among the exiles in Babylon, that Jeremiah sent a letter to Babylon containing God's condemnation of the false prophets in the exiled community in Babylon (Jer. 29:1–23).

In Ezekiel, the words that characterize these false prophets' visionary experiences (Ezek. 13:1–16; Heb. *shaw'*, "false"; *qesem*, "divination"; *kazab*, "lie") describe the type of messages that come from private and, in this case, pernicious interpretations of events (Heb. *millibbam*, "from their own heart/imagination," Ezek. 13:2; cf. 2 Pet. 1:20–21). Having an understanding of the times (1 Chr. 12:32) is crucial to know how God is leading in order to encourage the faithful. Yet two different reactions emerged against a faithful prophet's messages: (1) he was seen as a doomsayer and alarmist—some people were saying that Ezekiel's words would come to nothing since nothing had happened yet (Ezek. 12:22; cf. 2 Pet. 3:3–4); and (2) people intimated that prophecy was irrelevant for them since they claimed that his messages were only for the far distant future and not for them (Ezek. 12:27). This second class of naysayers does not doubt biblical prophecy is real but rather decides that its fulfillment is so far away that it is of little consequence to their immediate lives. However, God vindicated His prophets, and the historical fulfillment of their predictions demonstrated their veracity. At times God gave, through His prophets, short-term prophecies that were soon fulfilled in order to demonstrate who was speaking for Him (Jer. 28:15–17).

READING THE PROPHETS CHRONOLOGICALLY

Reading the prophets in their *chronological* sequence helps to focus on three notable historical eras that highlight Israel's relation to the nations.

Preexilic Prophets—Main Goals of Their Message

The first historical era during which the classical prophets functioned was the Neo-Assyrian (745–612 B.C.). During this period there were strong calls to repentance with the threat and promise of exile as a restorative measure. The prophets who ministered during this period include Hosea, Amos, Isaiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, and probably Joel.

The prophets addressed their message to their contemporary situation. In Israel Amos ministered during the time of Jeroboam II before the rise of Tiglath-Pileser III and the Neo-Assyrian Empire (745 B.C.). His warnings foretold the eventual Exile and destruction of Israel without specifying that it would be Assyria who would be God's agent of judgment. Hosea, a contemporary, also ministered to Israel and foresaw its destruction. His book shows an awareness of both pro-Egyptian and pro-Assyrian factions (Amos 7:11). Turning to Judah, Isaiah's call came at the time of the crowning of Assyrian dominance. Isaiah called Assyria the rod of God's anger (Is. 10:5) and preached his message in the context of the choice between the Lord's help and Assyria's (Is. 7:1–9). Isaiah filled out more of the prophetic picture by describing the fall of Assyria as well as the nations who would follow it: Babylon and Persia (Is. 13; 36–39; 45). Isaiah's contemporary Micah also pointed to the Assyrian menace and addressed the lethargic spiritual atmosphere stemming from Uzziah's material gains in Judah. Nahum prophesied the eventual fall of Assyria. Contemporaries Zephaniah and Habakkuk both ministered after the fall of the Northern Kingdom, during the reign of King Josiah (640–609 B.C.), when Hilkiah found the book of the law (622 B.C.), and the rise of Babylon up to the fall of Assyria (626–612 B.C.).

Exilic Prophets—Main Goals of Their Message

The second historical era involved the period of the Neo-Babylonian Empire (606–539 B.C.). The primary prophetic emphasis during this period was the calls to accept God's plan and the threat of destruction and exile. The prophets Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and Obadiah ministered to God's people with these messages in Judah and Babylon. Jeremiah received his call to ministry in the year the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal died (ca. 627/626 B.C.), and he confirmed what Isaiah had prophesied, equating the enemy described as a nation from the north with Babylon. While Jeremiah does not specifically mention Persia as the successor to Babylon, he portrays the eventual defeat of Babylon and affirms the word of Isaiah as he utilizes his earlier image of a nation from the north. Jeremiah's call to accept the Exile was intended to be encouraging as he prophesied that it would last only a short time of seventy years, after which the people would be brought back to Jerusalem (Jer. 29:10). The majority of the leaders of God's people failed to heed Jeremiah's word. Ezekiel ministered during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, and he too announced the fall of Babylon. Jeremiah and Ezekiel bore witness to the fall of Judah and, along with Daniel and Obadiah, are the last voices to the people of God before the first exiles returned to Jerusalem in 538 B.C.

Postexilic Prophets—Main Goals of Their Message

The third historical era within which the biblical prophets proclaimed God's message of hope was the Persian period (539–331 B.C.), at the beginning of which the people of God returned from exile. During this time there were prophetic calls to reestablish God's temple and His Torah as well as the announcement of the coming Davidic kingship. The prophets who guided the people of God in this time of high expectations included Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. Almost two centuries before, Isaiah had prophesied that it would be Cyrus, king of Persia, the Lord's anointed, who would help restore the people back to the land (Ezra 1:1–4; Is. 44:28; 45:1).

COMMON THEMES AND PERSPECTIVES

The prophetic books are marked by a unity that brings to light a number of shared themes and perspectives. For example, Isaiah through Malachi shine a light on the various nuances of the theme of the Day of the Lord in its positive and negative contexts (Is. 13:6, 9; Jer. 46:10; Ezek. 13:5; 30:3; Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11, 31; 3:14; Amos 5:18–20; Obad. 15; Zeph. 1:7, 14; Mal. 4:5). The Major Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel) and the twelve called Minor Prophets (Hosea-Malachi) all express a theological concept pointing to a time of great hope. The key themes that connect the message of the prophets include (1) the Day of the Lord, (2) the destiny of the wicked, (3) the hope of the remnant, (4) God's control over the succession of the nations (from Assyria to Babylon to Persia), and (5) the promise of the hoped-for Davidic King.

A structural reading emphasizes the cohesive nature of revelation, salvation, and hope in the prophets from which NT writers drew. Hearing the prophets together makes God's comprehensive message of hope ever relevant, for it exposes an aspect of God's grace that is typically overlooked. The God of the OT is often thought of as vengeful and full of wrath. On the contrary, His love, grace, pity, and mercy are clearly visible in all three major categories of the OT (Law, Prophets, and Psalms). He desired the restoration of land and people and the reestablishment of the faithful Davidic kingship, which would help to set things right through His restored rule over the nations. This was the hope of Israel into which Jesus was born; this was the hope that was more fully expressed in cosmic terms in the apocalyptic visions of Daniel and Revelation.

Finally, tracing God's prophetic word to His people *historically and geographically* is a fruitful method of hearing the message of the prophets. Comparing the prophetic books' descriptions of what was happening in the Northern Kingdom (Israel) and the Southern Kingdom (Judah) allows us to see the interplay of prophecy and history, and the information in the books of the Kings helps us in that task. All but three of these prophetic books indicate the king who was reigning at the time. Of the prophets who ministered to Israel, Jonah was from the north while Amos and Hosea were from the south, and though they were from divided kingdoms, their messages were similar and displayed conceptual unity (Jer. 30:3; 33:14–16; 50:4; Ezek. 37:15–28). These prophets wrote from the time of Jeroboam II to the destruction of Israel, which was exiled to Assyria in 722 B.C. (2 Kin. 14:23—17:41; Hos. 1:1; Jon. 1:1), and detailed the conditions that led up to Israel's demise (2 Kin. 17:6–23). Special mention is even made of the prophetic ministry to God's people in the Northern Kingdom, offering a direct connection between history and prophecy (2 Kin. 17:13).

The prophets who ministered to Judah (Joel, Isaiah, Micah, Zephaniah, Habakkuk, Jeremiah) wrote from the days of Jotham to Judah's Exile in Babylon, including also a special note on the release of Jehoiachin, king of Judah, from prison (Jer. 52:31–34; Mic. 1:1). As a collective group, their emphasis focused more toward the nations, mainly because of Judah's dependence on the nations rather than on the Lord. Two books address nations other than Judah: Obadiah was a messenger of the Lord to Edom (Obad. 1), and Nahum wrote concerning Nineveh (Nah. 1:1). Both books gave hope and comfort to Judah that her enemies and, in fact, all of God's enemies would be judged (Obad. 10; Nah. 2:2). The prophets who ministered to God's people in the Babylonian Exile—namely, Ezekiel and Daniel—use imagery and descriptions familiar to their exilic overlords, presumably as a way to minister to them as well as to God's people.

The postexilic prophets Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi paint a clear picture that because of the response of the people and the nations to God's sovereignty, many of the beautiful pictures of restoration for Israel and the nations were not going to be fulfilled in their lifetime or in the way they expected. Hope still reigned as Malachi closed out the prophetic voice with a beautiful picture of renewal (Moses and Elijah) until John the Baptist would reignite that prophetic hope.

CONDITIONALITY OF PROPHECY

Although God's final intention for humans is salvific, He respects human freedom, and consequently many of the prophecies found in the OT contain an element of conditionality. While the faithful have always constituted the true people of God, within the larger body of professed believers the call to faithfulness was always tied to God's blessings or curses (Deut. 27–28). In biblical prophecy, there are two types of God's communicative activity in relation to the more immediate and the distant future: classical and apocalyptic prophecy. In their own way, these types of prophecy reveal important characteristics that help the reader recognize them and establish their differences.

Classical prophecies are generally (1) local in space and time, referring to Israel's contemporary situation during the monarchy, Exile, and return to the land; (2) eschatologically focused on Israel's national, geopolitical, and ethnic framework; and (3) connected, in most cases, to the covenant response of the people. Classical prophecy expresses three major categories of prediction: (1) messianic prophecies, (2) oracles for/against the nations, and (3) covenant-centered kingdom prophecies. The messianic predictions were unconditional in the sense that the Messiah would come because God determined from the beginning that the hope of humankind rested upon the coming of the Seed of the woman to defeat the enemy of righteousness (Gen. 3:15; Deut. 18:15, 18; Pss. 2; 110; Is. 53). The other two categories of prediction are primarily conditional because their specific fulfillment required a human response to the Lord's threats and promises (typically seen in calls to repent; Is. 44:22; Jer. 3:12, 14, 22; 18:11; Ezek. 18:30; Hos. 14:2). In the case of Israel, most of the promises and judgments were determined by their commitment to or lack of covenant faithfulness. The specific fulfillment was determined by the human response. In such cases God announced the judgment in terms of covenant curses while calling the people to repent, return to Him, and renew their covenant commitment. Prophecies against the nations were in some cases conditional on their response to the Lord (see Jonah), but in other cases they were unconditional. God in His sovereignty and foreknowledge announced the final collapse of nations and the rise of others. These nations fall in order for God to fulfill His plan for the human race.

Comparing classical and apocalyptic prophecy, one typical distinction between them is that the apocalyptic prophecies of Daniel and the apocalyptic sections found in Isaiah 24–27, Ezekiel 38–39, Joel 2–3, and Zechariah 9–14 reflect God's plan for humanity, but they are not contingent on human response; that is to say, they are not conditional. In these prophecies, God's word is decisive.

Nevertheless, the relationship between classical and apocalyptic prophecy reflects the same goal: God's redemptive purposes and the vindication of His justice and righteousness. Briefly, taking Isaiah as a case study, while the features among the local-immediate/historical judgment of the nations (Is. 13–23; 28–33) and the universal-eschatological judgment of the world (Is. 24–27) differ in their relationship to their temporary fulfillment, they both express how the principles of God's kingdom cohesively operate, whether referring to the immediate circumstances of the biblical text or to the future eschatological hope of the people of God. The justice of God works to right the wrongs of sin in its personal, public, and cosmic dimensions. The relationship between Isaiah 13–23 and 24–27 is akin to the relationship between Isaiah 44:24—45:4 and Daniel 2:39; 7:5; 8:3, 20. Isaiah's proclamation of hope was set within the context of Israel's return from exile as God worked through Cyrus. Daniel's proclamations were in the context of God's sovereignty and foreknowledge over history that pointed to the end of earth's history as we know it when Jesus comes for the second time. The fulfillment of these two texts, the former understood as classical and the latter as apocalyptic, is seen in Ezra 1:1–2.

The plan for God's people during the time of the classical prophets is seen in the kingdom prophecies. The promise of the land given to Abraham and the promise of the perpetuity of the kingdom of David are fundamentally nonconditional. They were part of God's eternal covenant with His people. Yet it is paradoxical that their fulfillment was related to the faithfulness

of the people to God. However, their unfaithfulness did not bring to an end God's faithfulness to His promises. God always remained faithful to all of His promises (see Josh. 21:41; Rom. 3:1–4). He had determined to fulfill them through a faithful remnant within Israel and, more specifically, through His future faithful King, the Messiah. It is in and through Christ as the Messiah that the kingdom prophecies will now be fulfilled in a powerful and magnificent way (Dan. 7:13–14, 27; Matt. 28:18). In the NT this future hope is clearly spelled out as transcending geographical and ethnic limitations and finds in the book of Revelation its ultimate proclamation in cosmic dimensions. God was always able to preserve a faithful remnant who became the carriers of all of His election promises—promises that will be fulfilled through His Anointed One.

ISAIAH

INTRODUCTION

Title and Authorship. As far we know, Isaiah 1:1 served as a title for the original scroll of Isaiah. Some Bible translators translate it as "the book of Isaiah" or "Isaiah" for practical purposes. The author of Chronicles refers to it as the "vision" of Isaiah the prophet, who was the son of Amoz (2 Chr. 32:32). Each component in Isaiah 1:1 is found among other superscriptions of prophetic books. As a whole, however, it has a vital distinctiveness, implying that it is not a late addition to the book, as believed by some, but part of several features that make the book of Isaiah a literary whole.

The superscription in Isaiah 1:1 gives the identity of the seer (Isaiah, son of Amoz), the mode of revelation (vision), the main topic of the book (Judah and Jerusalem), and the approximate time in which the revelations were received (during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah). Isaiah's name (*yesha'yahu*), whose form is attested on ancient seals, means "the Lord's salvation," "the Lord is [my] salvation," or even "the Lord has given salvation" (cf. 12:2–3; 49:26; 60:16). The meaning of the name confirms the central message of the book.

Isaiah, the son of Amoz of Jerusalem, received the book's foundational divine revelations (1:1; 2:1; 7:3; 13:1; 20:2–3; 37:2, 6–7; 38:1; 39:3). His father, Amoz, is otherwise unknown. The book assigns no occupation or official function to Isaiah except for the epithet "the prophet" in chapters 37–39. The Lord referred to Isaiah as His "servant" or "messenger" (20:3). His wife was a "prophetess" (see 8:3). They had at least two sons, Shear-Jashub (7:3) and Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz (8:3). Their names have symbolic meanings, "a remnant shall return" and "speed the spoil, hasten the plunder," relating to both salvation and judgment. Isaiah's own name may have a similar symbolic function.

An OT prophetic book is normally the fruit of a process of revelation, memorization, oral or literary communication (i.e., speech or public reading), and preservation. Five steps may be implied in the process that has given us the book of Isaiah: (1) God's message was *made known* to Isaiah (e.g., 6:1–13; 7:3; 8:1, 5, 11). God was the Author-Originator, and Isaiah the recipient. (2) As *author-mediator*, Isaiah expressed divine insight in a language known to the intended audience; God was speaking through the inspired prophet, whether in explicit quotations or in implied paraphrases (e.g., 7:10–17). (3) In a *dialogue* between God and the prophet, God's words are distinguished from the prophet's words (e.g., 6:1–13), but both were recorded by the prophet-narrator; (4) *Borrowed* material was previously written by other authors but *selected* by the prophet (e.g., 36:1–22; 37:8–14; 38:9–20). (5) Prophetic messages were *delivered orally*—either by speech or by being read aloud in a public or private setting. *Written* prophecy preserved the message, and Isaiah made a point to preserve predictions that would be fulfilled in a distant future, which compelled the audience to *wait* and *see* the fulfillment in real events (e.g., 29:11–12, 18; 30:8–11; 34:16). Isaiah undoubtedly wrote some prophecies himself (8:1–2; 30:8–11), but he may have used scribal assistance, which was the usual way of producing books (cf. Jer. 36:1–4).

Isaiah subordinated himself to the will and power of the Lord. Dwelling on himself was not part of his mission. However, some information on his social role in the environment of Jerusalem may be inferred from the book:

1. *Family Head.* Isaiah's family had a "prophetic" function. He and his wife were prophets, and both Isaiah's name and the names of his sons communicated prophetic messages (Is. 7:3; 8:1–4). In keeping with common practice, he passed on prophetic wisdom and scribal skills to his sons (cf. 38:19b). A part of this was commonly accomplished by reading and learning to write (copy) Scripture.

2. *Counselor.* As a prophet, Isaiah belonged to the circle of royal counselors. The wisdom and counsel of the Lord is occasionally contrasted with that of His human opponents (e.g., 3:2–3; 8:9–10; 14:24–27; 19:1–4). In fact, the Lord announces that the wisdom of those who consider themselves wise will come to an end (29:14). The prophet opposed the wise because his counsel was based on prophetic revelations from the Lord and differed from the empirical observations of the wise (cf. 5:19). What Isaiah said required faith and trust in the Lord, not human and political schemes. His concern was not to eliminate the wisdom-oriented theology itself but to remind the wise of God's standards for their work.

3. *Teacher.* Isaiah brought the Lord's instruction to His people in Israel and Judah. Following the Assyrian destruction of Israel (733 and 722 B.C.) and Judah (701 B.C.), the temple was the only remaining institution of religious teaching with legitimacy and credibility. Priests and prophets were particularly linked to the temple (Lam. 2:20), and teaching and counseling were their main functions (Deut. 33:10; cf. Jer. 18:18; Ezek. 7:26; 44:23; Hos. 4:6; Mic. 3:11). God had Isaiah use the Torah for instruction concerning the sacrifices in the temple (Is. 1:10–17). His emphasis on the revealed prophetic word as "instruction" (*torah*) from the Lord implies a teacher's typical concern with what students hear (cf. 50:4). Isaiah had interactions with priests (8:2; 37:1–4), discussing priesthood (61:6; 66:21) and the temple (6:1; 44:28), and some have even suggested that he may have been a priest like Jeremiah (1:1) and Ezekiel (1:3) though there is not enough evidence to know this with any degree of certainty.

4. *The Mouthpiece and Servant of the Lord.* The book indicates that there were "prophets" (*nebi'im*) in Jerusalem and Judah (3:1–2; 29:1, 10; 30:10). However, only Isaiah bears the title "prophet" (*nabi'*) in the narrative section of chapters 36–39, a section which is almost the same as 2 Kings 18:13—19:37. He never calls himself "prophet." The book gives the impression that his ministry was not determined by a prophetic office but by what the Lord had said to him: it was *the word of God* that mattered.

5. *Scribe.* Books had become common in Isaiah's time. They were read by scribes or by persons with scribal education. A mass audience such as the children of Israel would have heard the word being read. Thus, Isaiah knew that the words of his book would be heard and seen (Is. 29:18). He was an educated person who had the ability to write and edit his book, but scribal assistance is not to be ruled out. His book is fundamentally a record of the words of the Lord waiting for future fulfillment, which makes it dependent on the future work of the Lord, who in His time would confirm His counsel or plan as revealed to Isaiah. In this book, the writer's identity is not the most important thing; what matters is the word of the Lord.

Date. His commission in "the year that King Uzziah died" (6:1) occurred sometime in 740 B.C. King Ahaz ruled (735–716 B.C.) during the Syro-Ephraimite crisis, when Isaiah had revelations from the Lord and functioned as a prophetic counselor (7:1–17). At the time that he was commissioned, he may have been a very young man, like Samuel and Jeremiah (1 Sam. 3; Jer. 1:6–7).

Isaiah likely survived Hezekiah and continued his ministry in the days of Manasseh, who was king from 697 to 643 B.C. (2 Kin. 21:1). It is not known how far into Manasseh's reign Isaiah continued his ministry. A tradition attested in the apocryphal book of the Martyrdom of Isaiah claims that Isaiah was killed by Manasseh, who opposed his prophetic ministry. Ellen White accepted this tradition, which is possibly reflected in Hebrews 11:37 (see ST, Feb. 17, 1898). Scattered signs in the book make it plausible that Isaiah continued his ministry up to the first half of Manasseh's reign.

Following the practice of OT prophetic books, Isaiah did not date all of his prophecies. Establishing the dates, therefore, depends on the literary unity and historical setting of the book and on the relationship between prophetic predictions and historical fulfillments. The view taken in this commentary is summarized as follows:

1. *No Indications of Different Authors.* Recent studies have shown that chapters 40–66 never existed independently of chapters 1–39 and that the book has a remarkable internal unity.

2. *The Editor and the Author Are One.* The book of Isaiah is a planned composition. The thought in the small units corresponds with that of the larger blocks of material, suggesting that the prophet handled the overall editing of the text.

3. *Use of the Name Isaiah.* "Isaiah" is used only sixteen times, in three superscriptions (1:1; 2:1; 13:1) and in three third person narratives (7:3; twice in 20:2–3; ten times in chaps. 37–39). In comparison, the name "Jeremiah" occurs 131 times in his own book. The existing name references provide a central role in the book to the person of Isaiah. Thus, being mentioned in 1:1,

he speaks in 1:2–31 without any other introduction. The text merely implies that the prophetic voice is his. This technique is consistent in the book. Governed by v. 1, the other references to his name mark Isaiah as the *implied* speaker in the following sections: 2:1 marks Isaiah as the prophetic speaker in 2:2—6:13; 7:3 in 7:1—12:6; 13:1 in 13:2—27:13; 20:1–6 in 20:1—35:10; and 36:1—39:8 in 40:1—66:24. This feature suggests that the book we have today was written for people who knew Isaiah as prophet and author, with the Lord as the primary speaker (cf. 40:8; 55:10–11). The use of his name indicates that Isaiah was the recipient of a divine communication addressed to a particular initial audience. Only the seer of the vision was personally involved in shaping the text. Only Isaiah son of Amoz had the authority, knowledge, and skills to produce the final form of the text.

4. *The Book's View of Itself.* The book of Isaiah claims to be a reliable witness to the Lord's salvation of Zion and Israel, an idea which strengthens the conviction that the Lord's promises can be trusted. It is therefore our conviction that Isaiah—who had "seen" the things of the Lord—committed his vision to writing.

5. *Final Product in Manasseh's Reign.* During Isaiah's ministry, and increasingly toward the end of his life, the destiny of God's people became a burning issue. Assyria's grip on Jerusalem tightened, and the persecution of the prophets and the gross apostasy under Manasseh's reign confirmed that Israel's judgment would continue (cf. 1:2–31). The faithful remnant needed hope to find the strength to wait on the Lord. This is a plausible setting for the consolation and messages of restoration in the second part of the book of Isaiah (chaps. 40–66). Hypothetically, the final form of the book may be assigned to the first half of Manasseh's reign.

Backgrounds. Isaiah's commission as prophet coincided with Assyria's rise to sovereignty over the ANE. The reign of Tiglath-Pileser III (745–727 B.C.) began a century of the greatest expansion of the Assyrian Empire. It brought disorder and upheavals through fear and hopelessness, it brought the destruction of nations and peoples, and it forced the mixing of peoples and their cultural practices. The resultant religious syncretism and lack of faith in the God of their ancestors was especially problematic for Israel and Judah (cf. 2 Kin. 17:24–41). Isaiah addressed these threats, teaching faith in the Lord by revealing His plan for Israel, His elected people, and for Zion-Jerusalem, His elect city.

The word of the Lord to Isaiah regarding Assyria was complex. Assyria was to be God's instrument for punishing Israel and Judah for their unfaithfulness to Him. But Assyria was also made the object of God's punishment in order to maintain His sovereignty and to deliver His people from oppression.

1. *The Role of Babylon.* In the time of Tiglath-Pileser III (745–727 B.C.), Babylon was the religious and cultural center of Mesopotamia. It was the source and center of civilization and a religious shrine of the highest sanctity. Assyria therefore needed Babylon's prestige to keep its power over its conquered kingdoms. Tiglath-Pileser, therefore, created in 729 B.C. a close bond between Assyria and Babylon. He captured the king of Babylon, gave himself the title "king of Babylon," and turned Assyria into a dual monarchy. Babylon constantly sought to gain the upper hand in the empire and finally succeeded when Nabopolassar (Nebuchadnezzar's father) conquered Nineveh with the aid of the Medes in 612 B.C. Consequently, Isaiah referred to the Assyrian power not only as "Ashur" but also as "Babylon" and to the "king of Ashur" as the "king of Babylon" (cf. e.g., Is. 14:4, 22–23, 24–27). Thus, not all of Isaiah's sayings concerning Babylon refer to the Babylon of the Judaean Exile in the sixth century B.C.

2. *The Syro-Ephraimite War (734–732 B.C.) and Judah's Assyrian Vassalage.* The initial incident that brought Isaiah into confrontation with Assyria was the Syro-Ephraimite war. A coalition of vassal states including Syria and the Northern Kingdom of Israel coerced Jotham's son Ahaz (ca. 735–716 B.C.) to join them against Assyria. Although Ahaz did not join the coalition, he failed to heed Isaiah's warnings (7:10–13) and instead sought help from Assyria (2 Kin. 16:7–9). In 733 B.C. the Assyrian king annexed Galilee and the area east of the Jordan, establishing these regions as the Assyrian provinces of Megiddo and Gilead. The Northern Kingdom of Israel was restricted to the remnant state of Ephraim. In keeping with Assyrian practice, the urban upper classes were deported to Assyria.

3. *The Destruction of Israel in 722 B.C.* When King Hoshea of Israel renounced his allegiance to Assyria while conspiring with Egypt (2 Kin. 17:3–4), Shalmaneser V (727–722 B.C.) took immediate action and besieged Samaria. Shortly before his death and the reign of Sargon II (722–705 B.C.), Samaria succumbed and Israel was made into the Assyrian province of Samerina (722 B.C.). The first major consequence was the deportation of the people of Israel from the promised land (2 Kings 17:6). The land was lost, and the "seed of Abraham" was scattered far and wide. Another consequence was that, following the Assyrian practice, non-Israelites were brought into the land of Israel from Babylonia and Syria, which led to widespread idolatry and foreign cult practices in the promised land (2 Kin. 17:24–41). A third consequence was that numerous refugees from the north took refuge in Jerusalem. As Isaiah therefore addressed the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem, he also included references to the Northern Kingdom (Is. 8:14; 28:1–29; "Ephraim" was the appellation for Israel as a whole) and to the remnant of Israel and those of the house of Jacob who had escaped (8:14; 10:20–22; 28:1–29; 46:3).

4. *Sargon II (722–705 B.C.) Proclaimed King of Babylon.* The Chaldean Merodach/Marduk-Baladan (known outside the Bible as Marduk-apla-iddina II) secured a formal alliance with the kings of Susa and Anshan and seized the kingship in Babylon in 721 B.C., which he kept for about ten years. The military support of Elam (i.e., Anshan and Susa) held the Assyrians back for a decade, and the dual monarchy was suspended. Sargon later came against Babylon and deposed Merodach-Baladan. Like his predecessors, Sargon held the kingship of Babylon in 709–705 B.C. and restored the dual Assyro-Babylonian monarchy.

5. *Sennacherib (705–681 B.C.), Babylon, and Elam.* Under Sennacherib, the dual Assyro-Babylonian monarchy continued as a demonstration of power and prestige aimed at securing the loyalty of the vassals. When Sargon died in 705 B.C., however, Merodach-Baladan raised Babylon in rebellion and took back the title of king of Babylon. The title returned to Sennacherib when he forced his opponent to escape in 703 B.C. Merodach-Baladan resumed his subversive activities in southern Mesopotamia, but Sennacherib forced him to escape to Elam with his idols and even the bones of his ancestors (cf. 43:14–15).

For several years, the kingdom of Elam attempted expansion and proved a well-organized enemy of the dual monarchy of Ashur-Babel. Elam was initially a dual kingdom comprising Anshan in the highlands and Susa in the lowlands. When Susa was destroyed by the Assyrians in 646 B.C., Anshan had been independent and growing since the 690s under a powerful new dynasty founded by King Teispes. The son of Teispes was Cyrus I, and his great grandson Cyrus II. In 689 B.C. Sennacherib captured Babylon, killed the recent usurper of the throne, and ruthlessly destroyed the city. Some passages in Isaiah may be referring to this attack against Babylon (e.g., 13:6–9, 12–19; 14:22–23; 21:1–10). The capture of Babylon by Cyrus II in 539 B.C. was "peaceful."

6. *Sennacherib, Judah, and Siege of Jerusalem in 701 B.C.* King Hezekiah of Judah (716–687 B.C.) broke with the syncretism of his father, Ahaz, and initiated a complete reform of religious life (2 Kin. 18:1–16). But against Isaiah's prophetic warning, he joined an insurrection of coastal cities in 701 B.C., which was backed by Egypt. His purpose was to restore the kingdom of David. However, Sennacherib defeated all the allies and, turning to Hezekiah, subdued forty-six cities and deported over two hundred thousand people. A large part of Judah was given to obedient Philistine kings. Hezekiah himself was besieged in Jerusalem, and his annual tribute was increased (2 Kin. 18:13–16). Jerusalem was miraculously spared, and Hezekiah, despite his central role in the rebellion, continued to rule. Isaiah had twice conveyed the word of the Lord that the king in Jerusalem had no reason to fear because Sennacherib would not enter Jerusalem but would return home where he would fall by the sword (Is. 37:6–7, 21–38).

7. *Esarhaddon (681–669 B.C.) and the Divided Kingship of Ashur and Babylon.* Sennacherib's son Esarhaddon restored Babylon and assumed the titles of king and priest of Babylon in 680 B.C. He deported King Manasseh of Judah to Babylon (2 Chr. 33:10–13) and recognized the growing power of the Medes and Elamite Anshan. Babylonians and Elamites were settled in the territories near Samaria (2 Kin. 17:24; Ezra 4:9–10), and the Israelites were settled in the cities of the Medes (2 Kin. 17:6; 18:11) and Elam (Is. 11:11). Elamite Anshan was therefore not unknown in Jerusalem in Isaiah's days.

8. *Elamite Anshan, the Medes, and the Persians.* Isaiah saw that the powers of the nations from the mountains east of Mesopotamia, the Medes and the Elamites (esp. Anshan), would be used as the Lord's tools to punish Babylon (13:1–5, 17–19; 21:2). He was shown that the rise to power of the Medes and Elamite Anshan would coincide with the decline and fall of the Assyro-Babylonian Empire. The Medes seized Ashur (614 B.C.) and Nineveh (612 B.C., in alliance with the Chaldeans of Babylon), and Cyrus II (a Persian), king of Anshan, captured Babylon in 539 B.C.

The Medes and Persians were associated tribes settled in the Zagros Mountains to the east of Assyria and Babylon. Many of them migrated to the southern and central areas of Zagros, where they became integrated in the Elamite kingdom of Anshan in the seventh and sixth centuries B.C. Anshan was therefore a growing kingdom in Isaiah’s time. Elam was divided into lowland Susa (also called Susiana; modern Khuzestan) and highland Anshan in the Zagros Mountains to the east and southeast. The title of the king of Elam was “king of Anshan and Susa.” As a name imposed by Assyrians and Babylonians, “Elam” could have been used for highland Anshan. Thus, when Isaiah speaks of “Elam” (11:11; 21:2; 22:6), he may be including the kingdom of Anshan, the home of Cyrus I and Cyrus II.

Theology and Purpose. In times of extraordinary crises and change in the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, Isaiah’s purpose was to convey God’s plan, which he had “seen.” This plan is the unifying and structuring feature in the book and is conveyed by instruction, warning, exhortation, and comfort. Israel had apostatized, and the Lord used the Assyro-Babylonian Empire as an agent to chastise and purify them until (1) a faithful remnant of Israel would survive (i.e., Abrahamic and Sinai covenants restored), (2) royal Zion-Jerusalem would be glorified (i.e., Davidic covenant restored), and (3) the nations would acknowledge the Lord as Ruler of the world (i.e., the everlasting covenant with humanity at Creation and with Noah would be restored). As this program is laid out in the book, some key theological perspectives may be considered.

1. The Lord is Sovereign, the God of Truth and Faithfulness. Against mounting doubts in the Lord’s power and will to save His people (cf. 20:6; 40:27–31; 49:14—50:4), the book of Isaiah points to His sovereignty as Creator and Lord of history and of nations and kings (40:12–31). He is the true God (65:16), just, reliable, and trustworthy (cf. 9:7; 10:20; 16:5; 25:1; 26:3; 42:3; 43:9; 61:8), whose word accomplishes His will (40:6–8; 55:8–11), whose plan cannot be obstructed or changed (14:24–27; 46:10–11), and whose faithfulness to His covenant promises is firm and reliable (cf. 1:26; 11:5; 25:1; 40:27–31; 49:7; 64:4–5). His plan is implemented by His word. It predicts judgment and future salvation, which He has the power to make happen, unlike the false gods and idols (e.g., 5:12, 19; 41:22; 42:9; 43:9, 44:26; 46:9). One of the greatest sins that Isaiah mentions, therefore, is contempt for the word of God (5:24; cf. 8:16, 20), for only the word of God brings salvation to the world (2:3). In the short term, God’s word and purpose should be believed because of who He is and because of His past acts of salvation (6:1–13; 7:4–9; 41:2–4, 25–26; 51:9–11). In the long term, the evidence of the continuing fulfillment of the written prophetic word proves that the word of God abides forever (40:8). God’s faithful people must wait on Him as an expression of faith (8:17; 25:9; 26:8; 30:18; 42:4; 51:5; 64:4–5).

2. God Is Holy. God is the Other, completely different from any human or other part of His creation (57:15). His thoughts and ways are higher than those of humans (2:22; 55:8–9). He is exalted (2:11) and pure (6:5–7), and the earth is full of His glory (v. 3). His holiness is marked by the epithet “the Holy One of Israel,” which is first and predominantly attested in Isaiah and is used throughout the book (e.g., 1:4; 5:19; 37:23; 41:14; 54:5; 60:14). Worshiping Him requires respect for His holiness, which makes humans feel unworthy or unclean (cf. 6:5–7). God’s holiness is an *ethical* holiness (5:16). His holiness is integrated with justice, righteousness, and love (1:16–17; 5:16; 45:19–25; 58:6–7; 61:1–3). His salvation of penitent Israel expressed a love for His people that was rooted in the covenant and the election (cf. 41:8–14; 43:1–4). Although Israel had not fully repented, the Lord still offered salvation and forgiveness to His people (33:24; 43:25–26; 48:1–11; 54:6–7). His love and acceptance were extended to the nations (2:2–4; 18:1–7; 53:6; 55:6–8) because as Creator He is the God of the whole earth (54:5). The message of the Lord’s mercy and abundant pardon is central in chapter 55, one of the high points of the book. God’s holiness implies that He is passionate in judgment as well as in salvation. His passion in anger against sin and criminal offenses is reflected in an array of terms for anger, fury, and wrath (see “The Wrath of God,” p. 918). The Lord’s compassion is compared to that of a mother for her children (Is. 49:14–15; 66:13).

3. The God of Israel, Zion, and David. Isaiah’s prophetic messages about Israel’s apostasy and restoration are founded on the covenant (cf. “Covenant,” p. 905). Israel’s election, the covenant with Abraham, the Exodus and Sinai, and the promise of the land of Canaan to Abraham and Jacob are all referenced in this book. There are frequent appeals to covenant laws as models of righteous behavior. Israel’s God was intimately connected with Zion, which was His dwelling and resting place, His throne, and His place of worship (e.g., 1:11–12; 2:2–4; 6:1–3). Historical circumstances associated with King

David linked the temple with the king and the royal palace. The covenant with David and his dynasty (9:7; 16:5; 29:1; 55:3; cf. 2 Sam. 7; 23:5) was neglected under apostate kings like Ahaz and Manasseh. This Davidic covenant was the ground for Isaiah’s predictions of an ideal royal Savior: Immanuel (Is. 7:14—8:10), the Davidic Prince (9:2–7), and the Rod/Shoot from the stem/stump of Jesse (11:1–10). It was also the ground for the promise of a future glorification of David’s dynasty in an everlasting covenant (55:3–5).

4. The Lord Is Creator and the God of the Nations. In Isaiah, the theological foundation for seeing God as the God of the nations is the “everlasting covenant” between the Creator and human beings (24:5; 54:9–10), which established the fundamental order of the world of creation (Gen. 9:16). This covenant implies that the Creator has granted life and sustenance to every being on the earth (Is. 9:11, 15–17). God is the Creator and, compared to Him, the nations and their idols are worthless (40:12–26). It is part of God’s plan, however, to gather not only Israel but also those who worship Him from the nations (2:2–4; 56:6–8). This is part of His claim to world sovereignty, which means that He, as Creator of all peoples, would restore the everlasting covenant.

5. A Message of Hope. The hope proclaimed by Isaiah was based on God’s claim that there is no other god besides Him, a thought developed in 44:6—46:13 (cf. 45:5, 14–25; 46:5) and through the work of the Holy Spirit (63:10–11, 14), who is identical with the Lord (11:2; 30:1; 34:16; 40:13; 42:1; 48:16; 59:19, 21; 61:1; 63:10–14). He cooperates with the Lord God and with the promised Davidic King (11:2). The coming salvation of Israel through this King is associated with the outpouring of the Spirit (42:1–9; 48:16; 59:20–21; 61:1–3). God had a plan, and Isaiah was the first prophetic book that emphasized it through the use of the term *ʽetsah*, which not only meant “counsel” but also “[determined] plan.” This word constitutes a central concept in Isaiah’s prophetic ministry (5:18–19; 19:17; 28:29; 40:14; 44:26; 46:10–11; cf. 30:1). God’s plan would not fail in spite of the sins of His people because He would preserve for Himself a remnant. In the book of Isaiah, the concept of “remnant” represents the faithful among God’s people who would enjoy His blessing when He fulfilled His promises. A remnant from the nations would also join them (see “The Remnant,” p. 843). This shows that the hope of salvation was not exclusively for Israel and Judah but was also offered to all nations. As Creator, God cares for the nations and desires to be their God (e.g., 2:2–4; 52:13—53:12; 56:6–8; 66:19–24). It is a universal salvation in that it is offered to all.

God’s plan would reach deep into the future and would include the resurrection of the dead, announced by the prophet in no uncertain terms (26:19; cf. v. 14), and even the destruction of death (25:8). Isaiah announced the coming of a future world; the creation of a new heaven and a new earth by the power of God. In this new everlasting creation there would be neither sin nor suffering (65:17; 66:22–23; cf. Rev. 21:1–4).

But it would be through the work of the Messiah that hope would reach its theological summit. The passage in Isaiah 52:13—53:12 speaks about a suffering and righteous individual who would atone for the sins of the nations of the world. Only Jesus Christ has fulfilled this prophecy by His life, teaching, suffering, death, and resurrection. God’s plan and control of history mean that Isaiah provided a prophetic timeline of future events, beginning with his time and leading up to the full consummation of the Lord’s plan (see commentary on 6:5–13; 10:5–19; 11:1–16).

6. The Sacred, Prophetic Writing. Beyond the revelation to the prophet and its subsequent communication to readers and hearers, Isaiah assigned a distinct value to the preserved, written prophecy as evidence of the power of the word of the Lord. It was to be a preserved record that could be seen and verified by its historical fulfillment (30:8; cf. 8:16–17). The predictive word of the Lord would necessarily wait for fulfillment because of its testimony to the truth of God’s sovereign knowledge of history. Isaiah’s authorship of the text, therefore, has important theological implications because it proves the issuing of God’s predictions before His fulfillment of them. In fact, one of the ways in which the Lord demonstrates that there is no other God like Him is by announcing from the beginning what will take place even in the distant future. And His predictions happen (see 34:11—35:2; cf. 29:11–12, 18; 45:1–8; 46:8–11). The command to search the book/scroll of the Lord and read it (34:16) was most probably given so that readers would confirm the veracity of God’s prophecy (cf. 46:10–11; 48:3). They were then invited to be His witnesses by hearing and seeing the prophecy’s fulfillment (43:9–12; 44:6–8; 66:19). Thus, Isaiah’s book has an eschatological function connected with the fulfillment of the Lord’s plan of salvation: it predicted a time when faithful Israel would “hear” the prophetic word and "see" its fulfillment (29:18); that is, the book would prove its relevance even in the distant future.

Literary Features. The book of Isaiah took shape in a literary setting where writing and books experienced a significant revival. Its literary genre may be defined as *prophetic book* (i.e., the literary presentation of the words of the Prophet Isaiah). The book is also in a sense a long sermon or a didactic-hortatory speech designed to persuade its hearers and readers to remain faithful, or repent and return, to the Lord. Thus, the book of Isaiah may be defined as a divine revelation functioning as a persuasive discourse. It contains literary features that imply an advanced level of learning and literary skills. Within a unit of speech, Isaiah has a wide range of literary forms associated with a lawsuit: accusation, witness statements, verdict, judgment, and argumentation. It also has lamentation, instructions, hymns, and didactic material like proverbs. There is a rich variety of metaphorical imagery, plays on words, artistic arrangements, chiastic structures, repetitions, and so on.

The book is a carefully planned composition as indicated by the prophet's continuing insights from "seeing" and "hearing" the Lord's messages. The material is fitted into a grandiose vision of the Lord's world sovereignty, which is based on prophetic predictions and divine fulfillments that provide the arguments for instruction, paraenesis (advice or counsel), and exhortation. It opens with a title (1:1) and a prologue (vv. 2–31). The rest is divided into two major parts, chapters 2—33 and 34—66. This division is marked in the oldest complete manuscript of the book, which dates to the early part of the second century B.C. In one of the complete Dead Sea Scrolls copies of Isaiah (1QIs^a), there is a space of two lines after chapter 33.

The prologue in 1:2–31 describes the fundamental issue of the whole book. The covenant people of Israel—here exemplified by Judah after the Assyrian destruction in 701 B.C.—continued to disobey the covenant despite their severe punishment (vv. 4–9). This implies that Israel would face a long time of punishment until a purified remnant remained in Zion because the Lord would act with justice and righteousness (v. 27).

Chapters 2–33 outline the Lord's plan to establish His worldwide sovereignty at Zion-Jerusalem (its fulfillment is described in 2:2–4). Chapters 2–4 summarize the thematic structure of the book of Isaiah. They announce the Day of the Lord (2:10–21), to which chapters 2–66 repeatedly refer, and describe the Lord's purification of Israel for their role in His plan—by predicted judgment (3:1—4:6), by words of hortatory instruction (2:5–10, 22; 3:10–12), and by a prediction of the deliverance of His remnant people (4:2–6). This core message is then developed in chapters 5–12, 13–23, 24–27, and 28–33.

The second part, chapters 34–66, begins announcing judgment to the nations (34:1–4) and the day of recompense for the cause of Zion (v. 8). This new phase in the Lord's plan meant that He had ended the purification or chastisement process of His people by foreign powers (chaps. 2–33) and would prepare His faithful remnant for the restoration of Zion and His everlasting covenant with Israel (chaps. 34–66). However, this aim involved the salvation of the nations (52:13—53:12; 56:6–8; 60:1–22; 66:19–24) and the gathering of scattered Israel and the nations to worship the Lord at Zion (60:1—62:12; 66:5–24). The intimate tone of the Lord's appeals to His people in chapters 40–55 suggests that He was beginning to implement His plan by persuading them to become the restored covenant community in Zion. Chapters 34–54 form the foundation of the central invitation in chapter 55, which is further developed by instructions concerning a restored Zion and her citizens, and is marked by the chiastic *inclusio* in chapters 56–59 (A), 60–62 (B), and 63–66 (A'). The details of this compositional structure are provided in the commentary.

COMMENTARY

1:1–31

TITLE AND PROLOGUE

1:1

Title

The title consists of several parts. The type of text stands first and is determined by what follows:

1. Type of Text. The book of Isaiah records the "vision" (*khazon*) from God that Isaiah "saw" (*khazah*). The technical term *khazon* affirms the supernatural nature of the vision (cf. Num. 24:3–4, 15–17; Job 4:12–16; 33:14–16; Hos. 12:10). Isaiah emphasizes the divine source of his message by repeatedly using nouns derived from the same Hebrew root (Is. 21:2; 22:1, 5; 28:18 [here

khazut is rendered as "agreement" in most translations]; 29:7, 11). The term belonged to the circle of seers, where it was associated with the supernatural revelation of divine words.

2. Identity of the Seer. The vision was given to Isaiah the son of Amoz. The Hebrew form of Isaiah's name is *yesha'yahu*, which involves *yahu* as the Lord's name. The later and abbreviated form *yesha'yah* is used as a book title in early codices. The name is attested on ancient seals and means "the Lord's salvation," "the Lord is [my] salvation," or even "the Lord has given salvation" (cf. 12:1–3; 49:6; 51:6).

3. Mode of Revelation. The vision was determined by what Isaiah saw. To "see [*khazah*] a vision [*khazon*]" is a rare, technical expression that implies a visionary experience involving the reception of God's words (cf. 2:1), as exemplified in Isaiah's commission account (6:1–13). It is rooted in the *prophetic* experience of the Lord speaking through visions (cf. Num. 24:3–4, 15–17; Job 4:12–16; 33:14–16; Hos. 12:10). Ezekiel uses a similar Hebrew phrasing (Ezek. 12:27; cf. 13:7, 16) to speak about prophecies for a distant future. Isaiah's use of the same terminology implies the presence of predictions of events in a distant future.

4. Topic of the Book. Isaiah 1:1 also indicates that Isaiah's vision would impact Judah and Jerusalem. The book's intended recipient is not specifically mentioned in the title; only the city and those in power, who would be involved with and impacted by the vision, are mentioned. Thus, the title announces its relevance to any recipient but keeps Israel, the people of God, and especially Zion-Jerusalem close to the heart of the message (see 66:10–14).

The designation "Judah and Jerusalem" (cf. 2:1) may function as a synecdoche or *pars pro toto*, namely, a figure of speech in which the *part* "Judah and Jerusalem" represents the *whole* of "Israel" as the people of God. The designation had certain political connotations. Jeroboam's rebellion in the tenth century B.C. led to the secession of the Northern Kingdom of Israel with ten of Israel's twelve tribes. Judah and Benjamin became the Southern Kingdom of Judah when Israel broke off (7:17). "Judah" therefore alludes to the *separation of* the kingdom of Israel from the kingdom of Judah (e.g., 11:12–13), while "Jerusalem" symbolizes the *unification* of the two kindred peoples by the common God worshiped there (note "the house/temple of the God of Jacob" in 2:3; cf. 10:20–23; 59:20; 65:9).

5. Time of Isaiah's Vision. Isaiah's vision was seen during the approximate time span of the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. However, his predictions about the future of Judah and Jerusalem went far beyond the time of those reigns. "Kings of Judah" brings to mind the dead rulers of Judah and Jerusalem. They are contrasted with the King of Zion-Jerusalem (2:2–4; 6:1–5), that is, the Lord. References to the reigns of kings in the superscriptions of prophetic books provide approximate dates (cf. Jer. 1:1–3; Hos. 1:1; Amos 1:1). Thus, the wording of Isaiah's title does not preclude the possibility that his ministry continued until the reign of Manasseh.

1:2–31

Prologue: Restoration of Jerusalem/Zion

This well-defined passage functions as a prologue to the book of Isaiah. It reflects the Lord's plan to chastise and purify Israel and redeem the remnant of Zion. This grand work of restoration characterizes the whole book. The unity of the passage emerges when the whole is taken as an extended lawsuit: a calling of witnesses (v. 2); a complaint against Israel for covenant crimes by the plaintiff (vv. 2–3); a complaint supported by a witness statement (v. 4); a review of the nation's moral status to ascertain the necessity or nonnecessity of further judgment (vv. 5–8); a witness statement regarding the remnant of Zion (v. 9); a further complaint against Jerusalem concerning false worship and a divine instruction offering a remedy (vv. 10–17); an offer of settlement by an arbitrator (vv. 18–20); a further complaint against Jerusalem's leaders (vv. 21–23); a predicted judgment followed by a purge and a restoration of Jerusalem; and a redemption of Zion with justice and righteousness (vv. 24–31). This summary of chapter 1 provides the essence of the Lord's plan, which is further developed in the whole book.

Chapters 1 and 65–66 form an *inclusio* that unites the book of Isaiah. Twenty-five Hebrew words or phrases in 1:2–31 are repeated in 65:1—66:24, and some of the less common ones in English are "ox," "bull" (1:3; 66:3); "sacrifices" (1:11; 66:3); "hear the word of the LORD" (1:10; 66:5); "not delight"/"displease" (1:11; 66:4); "burned incense"/"burned sacrifices" (1:13; 65:7); "New Moons, Sabbaths" (1:13; 66:23); "sword" (1:20; 66:16); "rebellious/obstinate," "rebels" (1:23; 65:2); "my enemies/foes," "his enemies/foes" (1:24; 66:14); those who "forsake the LORD" (1:28; 65:11); "chosen" (1:29; 66:3); "gardens" (1:29; 66:17); and "quench" (1:31; 66:24).

Several themes are also common to chapters 1 and 65–66: the nation, the people, and the offspring/descendants (1:2–6; 65:1–9); the destruction and the saving of a remnant (1:7, 9; 65:8–16); the survivors of Zion and the restoration of Jerusalem (1:8–9; 65:8–10, 18–19); the disapproval of worship that is not matched by righteousness (1:10–20; 66:1–4); the apostates having chosen that in which they, and not the Lord, delighted (1:11, 29; 66:3); the punishment of Jerusalem and the Lord's enemies (1:21–26; 66:5–6); the liberation of Zion and the faithful, and the destruction of Zion and the Lord's enemies (1:27–28; 66:7–16); the apostate cult in the gardens (1:29–31; 65:3; 66:17); the apostates being "ashamed" (1:29; 65:13); the judgment of the apostates by fire (1:31; 66:15–16); the apostates destroyed together (1:31; 66:17); and the unquenchable fire consuming the apostates (1:31; 66:24).

1:2–9. Rebellious Children and the Remnant. Isaiah appealed to the heavens and the earth as witnesses to verify the truth of what he said (Deut. 30:19; 31:28; 32:1; cf. Job 20:27). This belonged to the lawsuit genre (cf. Mic. 6:1–2), where those who witnessed the making of a covenant were called to witness the settlement of covenant crimes. Using two metaphors, God brought His complaint against Israel. The first used the case of a parent who had raised children (lit. "sons"; Is. 1:2c; cf. 38:19; Job 31:18). Parents instruct their children so that they "know" and "consider"/"understand" (Is. 1:3). Children's rebellion against their parents was regulated in the covenant law and led to a court proceeding involving the elders at the city gate (Deut. 21:18–21). God's claim in Isaiah 1:2 that His children had rebelled against Him means that they had abandoned their covenant loyalty (cf. 2 Kin. 1:1; 3:5, 7).

The second metaphor was that the ox knows its owner and the donkey its owner's feeding (Is. 1:3), which echoes a proverbial wisdom saying. The animals' faithfulness to their owners should have been a model for Israel's attitude to the Lord, but the people lacked knowledge and understanding. Both metaphors adduced commonsense arguments from social life.

The Lord's complaint in vv. 2–3 is supported by the prophet's witness statement (v. 4). The statement is followed by a review of Israel's moral status and past judgment to ascertain the necessity or nonnecessity of further judgment (vv. 5–8). The interjection *hoy*, "alas" or "woe," in 1:4 is associated with laments for the dead. In this context it was used to call attention to the people's reprehensible conduct toward the Lord—in support of the complaint in vv. 2–3. The people were addressed as a sinful nation, a people weighed down with iniquity/guilt (v. 4a–b). "To sin" (*khata'*) literally means to "miss the way," that is, overstep divine laws. The term for *'awon*, "iniquity" or "rebellion," expresses the idea of a wrong mindset that is opposed to God's will. Both of these terms are used in Isaiah for the wrong *action* (e.g., 5:18; 31:7; 43:24), the *guilt* caused by the wrong (e.g., 1:18; 59:3), or the *punishment* for the wrong (53:12).

The vocabulary used in describing Israel's crimes is rooted in covenant texts (1:4; cf. Deut. 31:20; 32:16). The reference to Israel turning away (Is. 1:4) implies that when the covenant was made, Israel was loyal to their Lord. This thought returns in v. 26: the promise was that God would restore the city's rulers as they were in former times. Israel had offended "the Holy One of Israel" (v. 4). This divine epithet is used with particular frequency by Isaiah. It occurs throughout the whole book and supports its unity. It is particularly common in passages describing a violation of divine majesty (e.g., v. 4; 5:19; 31:1) or a turning to the Lord as a powerful Savior (e.g., 10:20; 17:7; 29:19; 41:14; 45:11; 55:5), which is closely associated with the idea of creation (e.g., 43:15; 45:12; 54:5). The epithet identifies the Lord as the God of Israel, the people of the two kingdoms (cf. 5:7).

The image of Israel as a sick body (1:5–8) reflects both their moral deficiencies and their punishment for disloyalty. The ruined nation is symbolized by a body covered with wounds, bruises, welts, and open, putrefying sores that had not healed for want of care. Both Israel and Judah were broken by sin and judgment, but this had not led to humility and repentance. A further witness statement testifies to the Lord's salvation of the remnant of Zion (v. 9), designated as "Daughter Zion" or "the daughter of Zion" (v. 8). The representation of a city or a people by the figure of a woman is common OT poetical imagery (cf. 3:16—4:1). The statement indicates that Zion's survival was the work of the Lord (see 36:1—37:38; note the concept of "remnant" in 37:4, 32). In the lawsuit context of 1:2–9, however, v. 9 confirms Israel's guilt *and* punishment (like Sodom and Gomorrah; cf. Gen. 19:24–29) but with the caveat (as in Gen. 19:29) that *yahweh tseba'ot*, the Almighty, Sovereign Lord of armies, had left a surviving remnant (see "The Remnant," p. 843). This title is linked to the Jerusalem temple in the OT (as

well as here in chap. 1); it also alludes to the Lord's role as a Warrior and the Defender of His people (see "*Yahweh Tseba'ot*," p. 912).

The speakers in Isaiah 1:9 are a community of survivors created by the Lord of Hosts. Isaiah associates himself with them by using the first person plural (vv. 9–10) The speech in v. 9 is therefore the climactic point of vv. 2–9 and shows that in the midst of apostasy and judgment, God's plan of salvation had been (and would be) accomplished through the remnant of Zion.

1:10–17. Worship, Justice, and Righteousness. This passage is a complaint against Jerusalem concerning false worship, but with an added divine instruction offering a remedy. This "word of the Lord" and "law [or instruction, Heb. *torah*] of our God" zooms in on a central part of Israel's covenant crimes in Isaiah 1:2–4: their impure and blasphemous worship of the Lord in the temple of Jerusalem (see "The Temple in Chronicles," p. 541). The passage involves charges particularly against Jerusalem, which had committed crimes that defiled both temple and city. The crimes of rulers and people are described figuratively as involving hands full of blood, a description that points toward the need for purification (Is. 1:15–17).

The designations of Sodom and Gomorrah in v. 10 indicate that the people were corrupt and deserving of judgment (cf. Gen. 19:1–29). The Lord's initial rhetorical questions (Is. 1:11–12) pave the way for His ethical instructions (vv. 16–17). If the God who was worshiped in the temple was asking such questions, it could only mean that the worshipers did not know Him. What the Lord wanted was primarily an ethical purity of the heart to turn the religious practices into true sacrifices given with a contrite heart.

The people were told to stop bringing empty sacrifices and holding meaningless assemblies (vv. 13–14). The religious observances were not to be abolished. The repeated references to "your sacrifices," "your hands," "your festivals," and "your gatherings" (vv. 11–16) indicate that what God was rejecting was the hypocrisy of the worshipers. He turned against the multiplication of sacrifices, rituals, and festivals because they reflected the idea that "the more you offer, the more you get." The instruction does not indicate that the Lord was abolishing the weekly Sabbath, which has an important function in Isaiah (56:2, 4, 6; 58:13; 66:23). In fact, 66:23 indicates that the Sabbath was to be kept after the return from captivity and beyond. What the Lord was inveighing against was the combination of rebellion and sacred assemblies, in other words, the people's wickedness and their attempts to hide it behind a sanctimonious attitude. The Lord would not hear the prayers of such persons (1:15).

Injustice is symbolized by a reference to hands filled with blood—the blood of people who had been victimized by the community (v. 15). "Blood" denotes the blood guilt that the people had incurred by their actions. Verses 16–17 are a profound criticism of a type of worship that satisfies itself with formal and temporary cultic rituals and rites but is blind to justice. "Justice" (Heb. *mishpat*) in this context refers to the right judgment that would give what was legally right to all—especially the poor, the needy, and widows. This justice is one of the Lord's characteristics (Deut. 32:4). Justice should express itself in the life of the worshipers, who are exhorted to seek it

The Remnant

The terms *sarid* (used here in 1:9) and *she'ar* (elsewhere in Isaiah), both meaning "remnant"/"survivors," originally referred to the physical survival of any group of people after disasters, such as floods, famines, and war, but in Isaiah they are used in a theological sense with reference to the community of Israel, following the Assyrian disasters in the eighth century B.C. The remnant became the purified and faithful community, the Israel of faith. Isaiah used this concept in reference to Judah (7:3), Israel (10:20–23), a group in Jerusalem and on Mt. Zion (4:3; 28:5; 37:4, 32; cf. 14:32), or all the scattered communities of Israel once deported or having escaped to foreign nations (11:11, 16; 24:6, 12; 46:3). Of the faithful remnant of Israel, God's plan was to build a new nation through the return of scattered Israel (cf. 49:8—50:3) and the restoration of Jerusalem (cf. 52:1–12) and culminate with the glorification of Zion (cf. 59:21—62:12). In the book of Revelation, the concept of "remnant" or "rest" is used to designate the faithful people of God at the end of time (Rev. 12:17).

(Is. 1:17). Closely linked to this admonition is the demand to remove evil deeds, desist from doing evil, and learn to do what is right (vv. 16–17). Thus, the basic principles of the Lord's judgment and salvation are justice and righteousness (cf. vv. 21, 26–27). "Righteousness" is the fulfillment of the demands of goodwill in a relationship and may be associated with faithfulness, justification, and salvation, which also characterize the Lord (Deut. 32:4). This word pair is central in the whole book of Isaiah (e.g., Is. 1:21; 5:7; 9:7; 51:4–5; 56:1; 59:14).

The instruction in 1:16–17 implies that the people had ethically defiled themselves and needed cleansing (cf. v. 25). This admonition was rooted in the Lord's holiness, and as an offer to settle the dispute, it implies an offer of forgiveness to the penitent. The point in this *torah*/instruction is that true worshipers must reflect the essence of the will and nature of the God they seek. Jesus made the same point in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:21–26, 43–48).

1:18–20. Call to Settle the Lord's Complaint. The Lord's formal offer to settle the dispute was to *yakakh*, "argue" or "settle"/"decide," sometimes translated as "reason," with the people. The word conveys the idea of arguing in court in order to settle a dispute (cf. Job 23:7); the Lord as the plaintiff and Israel as the accused could argue against each other. The Lord expressed the desire to purify His people from their sins (Is. 1:18). His settlement offer was the blotting out of the blood guilt of which their hands were full (v. 15). The result of making themselves clean would be that even if their sins were like scarlet, they would be as white as snow, and even if they were red like crimson, they would be like wool (vv. 16, 18). This offer was, however, conditioned by the people's choice between two ways: either they would obey the instruction (vv. 16–17), which meant that they would eat the good produce of the land, or they would continue in rebellion, which meant that they would be "devoured by the sword" (vv. 19–20). The offer would lead to a separation between righteous and unrighteous (vv. 27–31), which was needed in the purifying judgment and the redemption announced in vv. 25–27. This theme is picked up again in 2:1—4:6 and at the end of the book. The gift of salvation comes with a choice that everyone has to make, but those who accept this gift will repent of their old way of life and depend completely on the Lord through the enabling of the Spirit.

1:21–31. Restoration and Redemption. The people's choice is implied in vv. 21–31. It resulted in a division of the people into Zion's faithful penitents (v. 27) and Jerusalem's apostate leaders (vv. 21–26) and their followers (vv. 28–31). The faithful would be redeemed and delivered (v. 27), but the apostates would be destroyed. The penitents of Zion would eat the good produce of the land (v. 19), but the apostates would be "devoured by the sword" (v. 20). The epithets *yahweh tseba'ot*, "Lord of Armies," "Lord Almighty," "Sovereign Lord," or "the Mighty One of Israel," are used in Isaiah to emphasize the Lord's power in defeating enemies and protecting His faithful people (v. 24). In order to have justice and righteousness in Jerusalem, the apostate leaders had to be replaced by faithful judges (vv. 26–27). This would restore the city to what it was in the beginning.

The apostate religion included trees (alternatively understood and translated as either "oak" or "terebinth") and gardens (v. 29). The strength and vitality of these trees made them symbols of fertility gods, and rites of fertility were carried out under them (see 57:5; Jer. 2:20, 23–27; 3:6; Hos. 4:13). In gardens with such trees, sacrifices were offered (Is. 65:3) and various rites of purification were used to prepare the worshipers for cultic activities (66:17). The seductive attraction of this cult is implied by the verbs "desire"/"delight" and "choose," but the Lord's judgment would change this admiration to disgrace (1:29). The apostates would themselves become like the oaks (or terebinths) and gardens where they worshiped, but they would be without water (v. 30). The restoration of the city by faithful officials (v. 26) and the redemption of the penitents of Zion (v. 27) form the climax of the prologue. The Lord's actions, described in vv. 24–31, would resolve His complaints mentioned earlier in the chapter.

2:1—4:6

PREPARATIONS OF ZION-JERUSALEM FOR GOD'S UNIVERSAL KINGDOM

This literary block concerns God's preparations for His universal kingdom by purifying His people Israel and His city Zion-Jerusalem and by demonstrating His sovereignty over the nations, particularly Assyria. This section of the book outlines the essence of God's plan for His universal sovereignty. It is defined by its internally coherent ring structure, in which the end is announced at the beginning—the events in 2:2–4 were to follow

those of 4:2–6. The beginning is marked by the title in 2:1–2, and the end by the new unit in 5:1–30. The passage contains many links with the rest of the book, some of which are noted in the commentary. Major connections exist with the prologue in 1:2–31.

2:1–4

The Word, the End, the Nations

When associated with a prophet, the term *dabar*, "word"/"thing"/"matter" (some translations leave it untranslated here; v. 1) designates the conventional genre of "prophecy" (cf. Jer. 18:18; Ezek. 7:26). The formula "in the latter/last days" is best understood here as referring to the remote future or the end of a certain but indefinite period of time: "at the end of the days." The subtitle in Isaiah 2:1–2a could be translated in such a way as to connect the end of v. 1 with the beginning of v. 2 ("The word that…which shall come to pass at the end of the days"). It establishes a large time span between Isaiah's time and "the end of the days." This time span applies to all "the days" in chapters 2–66, which will lead to the *ultimate* events in 2:2b–4. Therefore, vv. 1–2a announce the temporal framework of the great plan of "the God of Jacob" to assume universal sovereignty.

The nations would acknowledge the Lord's sovereign kingship. The "mountain of the Lord's house/temple" refers to the throne of the Lord (cf. 6:1; 66:1; Pss. 9:4; 47:8), and the verb "established" refers to the unchallenged confirmation of a royal reign, kingship, or throne (e.g., 2 Sam. 7:16–26). The term *ro'sh* may be translated "head"/"highest"/"chief"/"top"—here related to the mountains. The language here may imply God's sovereignty over the nations and their gods. The actions by all nations will affirm God's royal kingship (cf. Is. 33:17–22; 52:7). The translation "shall flow/stream to it" builds on the term *nahar* I ("to flow"/"stream"). Another option would be to build on *nahar* II, which means "to make the face shine," "be radiant with joy," or "rejoice." This fits Isaiah's own usage in 60:5 (see also Ps. 34:6; Jer. 31:12; 51:44). On this premise, the text may be translated "And all nations will shine with joy toward Him." Such an act of joy by a king's subjects was traditionally part of the acclamation of a king.

Many peoples would decide to accept God's rule, follow His ways, and encourage each other to go up to the Lord's temple mountain, a description which signifies a pilgrimage to the temple (see Ps. 122:4); this was usually done to bring gifts, fulfill vows, participate in festivals, pray to the Lord, praise the Lord, or "seek the Lord." The peoples would encourage each other to obey the Lord (i.e., to "walk in His paths"). The temple is called the house/temple of the God of Jacob. "Jacob"/"Israel" is the ancient name of God's elected people as a whole and includes both Israel and Judah (cf. Is. 5:7; 8:14). The phrase "the God of Jacob" occurs only here in Isaiah, but it was used in the temple worship (e.g., Ps. 46:7, 11). References to the descendants of Jacob (lit. "house of Jacob") are rather frequent in Isaiah (e.g., 2:5–6; 8:17; 14:1; 46:3; 58:1).

The law (or instruction) or the word of the Lord would go out from Zion-Jerusalem because His kingship would be acknowledged by the nations, which would result in world peace. The Lord as King would judge and decide cases (2:4), something also characteristic of the prophesied messianic righteous King (11:4). In both passages the outcome would be world peace. In view of 9:2–7 and 11:1–10, "Wonderful Counselor" and "Prince of Peace" refer to the work of the Lord's messianic agent through whom the law/instruction would go out from Zion and the Lord's word from Jerusalem (2:3).

2:5–10

Idols Removed

This hortatory passage addressed the people of Jacob (lit. "house," meaning descendants). Its purpose was to persuade them to end their widespread devotion to foreign gods and turn to the God of Jacob (v. 3). The Lord showed Isaiah what the future pilgrims to Zion would say, and this is followed by an invitation to the contemporary house of Jacob from a speaker in their midst. The invitation is to join him in walking in "the light of the Lord." The phrase "the light of the Lord" is a unique expression. "Light" is a symbol of the Lord's saving and merciful presence in the temple (Pss. 27:1; 37:6; 97:11; 112:4; Mic. 7:8). The Lord's people "walk in the light" (Is. 2:5) of His presence because "righteousness and justice are the foundation" of His throne, and *khesed*, "mercy," "love," or "covenant faithfulness," and *'emet*, "truth" or "faithfulness," go before Him (Ps. 89:14–15). Verse 6 could be also translated "For you [house of Jacob] have forsaken your people, O House of Jacob!" In other words, through its unfaithfulness the house of Jacob is no longer part of the true people of God, identified here as "your people."

The rest of the passage provides the evidence needed to support the charge.

The accumulation of objects, practices, and idol worshipers listed in 2:6–9 is contrasted with their removal on the Day of the Lord (v. 18–21; 3:1–7; 3:16—4:1). The people had adopted foreign idolatrous practices from the east and west, including (in the latter case) divination in the manner of the Philistines. The people were too closely connected with foreign, pagan influences. The silver, gold, and treasures (2:7) may reflect an accumulation of riches or material for making idols (cf. vv. 8, 18–21), or it may reflect human pride. Horses and chariots may refer to military power, the symbols of sun-worship at the entrance to the house of the Lord in Manasseh's time (2 Kin. 23:11), or both. The house of Jacob was full of idols of silver and gold. The people worshiped and bowed down to the work of their own hands (Is. 2:8–9b; cf. 17:7–8; 31:7).

The people were being exhorted to turn away from idols and humble themselves before the Lord's powerful glory (2:11–21). This served as a warning in view of the coming of the Day of the Lord.

2:11–22
The Day of the Lord

In Isaiah's time, the Day of the Lord was understood to be the day when God would come to save His people and defeat their enemies—the title *yahweh tseba'ot*, "Lord of Hosts," "Lord of armies," or "Lord Almighty" (v. 12), was specifically linked with Zion-Jerusalem and God's royal power. The Day of the Lord is a point of reference for the phrase "in that day/time," which occurs about forty-five times between 2:11 and 31:7. The description of God's judgment during the Day of the Lord moves from a local situation to a universal one (cf. 2:21). The central Day of the Lord in vv. 12–16 is framed by an *inclusio* in vv. 11 and 17. This arrangement draws attention to the fundamental contrast between God and the human idol makers. By His terrifying power and holy majesty, the Lord would supersede all and would humble humanity (v. 12). The enumeration of symbols of human pride (vv. 13–16) involves a movement from north to south and expresses totality: from the cedars of Lebanon and the oaks of Bashan, through mountains, hills, and cities with towers and walls, to the trading ships of Tarshish in the Gulf of Aqaba in the south.

In the light of how "Lebanon" is used in Isaiah, the "cedars of Lebanon" and the "oaks of Bashan" (v. 13) may metaphorically refer to the proud people of the house of Jacob, who saw themselves as living in the fruitful and protected garden/mountain of God (i.e., Zion). But as a result of a humiliating encounter with the Lord (vv. 11–17), the idolaters would end up in holes, rocks, and caves (vv. 18–19). They would cast away their idols to moles and bats as they desperately hid themselves in caverns and rocks before the frightening revelation of the Lord's power and majesty (vv. 20–21; cf. v. 10).

An idol was the work of human hands/fingers (vv. 8, 20), beautifully crafted in order to attract the admiration of human eyes (vv. 9, 11). Humans would prostrate themselves to the ground to worship the idols (v. 9). But on the Day of the Lord, people would be bowed down and humbled because of the fear of the Lord, and they would reject their idols (vv. 11, 17); only the Lord would be exalted (vv. 10–11, 17, 19, 21). Based on his condemnation of idolatry, Isaiah admonished the house of Jacob to cease trusting in human beings (esp. idolaters), and he reminded them that human life depends on the breath in the nostrils, given by God (v. 22; 42:5; Gen. 2:7). The exhortation in Isaiah 2:22 prepares the way for 3:1—4:1 that predicts the removal of three things: (1) all bread/food and water, exposing human neediness (3:1); (2) all human officials in Jerusalem and Judah (vv. 2–7) who oppress the poor and needy (vv. 8–9, 12–15); and (3) the insignia of high office, symbols of the abuse of power and foreign practices (3:16—4:6). Idolatry, pride, and injustice have no place with the Lord.

3:1—4:6
Cleansing and Restoration

The prologue in 1:2–31 predicts that the Lord would purge the apostate leaders of Jerusalem and restore it as a faithful and righteous city (vv. 24–26). In this section the purification of Jerusalem and Judah is dealt with in further detail.

3:1–7. God Removes Leaders. The reminder of human neediness in 2:22 is the foundation of 3:1–7. God was going to remove all means of support for Jerusalem and Judah and would send a famine, removing all traces of bread and water (v. 1). The cause of the famine is not stated, but the references to warriors and the mighty (v. 2a), as well as their men, falling by the sword in battle (v. 25) suggest that the cause would be a siege. The reference to the captain of fifty (v. 3a), which is possibly a figure of speech (synecdoche) for the whole army, points in the same direction.

Once the wicked leaders had been removed, children would be princes and rulers, which would result in an upheaval of the social order (vv. 4–7). The utter lack of human leadership is illustrated in vv. 6–7. Having a piece of clothing (lit. "mantle" or "cloak") would be enough for one to be asked to lead the clan, which implies that leadership requires some kind of insignia of authority, in this case a mantle. This idea is fully developed in the removal of the finery of the women (lit. "daughters") of Zion in vv. 16–23.

3:8–15. Oppression of the Poor. The reference to the stumbling and falling of Jerusalem and Judah summarizes the effect of the judgment and describes the coming disaster as having already taken place. The mention of the look (the noun *hakkarah*) on their faces (v. 9) is related to an expression using a similar verbal form (*nakar*, "to regard") that is used in an idiomatic expression ("to regard faces"), which means to "show partiality" (Deut. 1:17; 16:19; Prov. 24:23–24; 28:21). In this context it could be referring especially to judges making unjust verdicts in return for bribes (cf. Is. 1:23; 5:23). The ruin of Jerusalem and Judah would be the working out of the fundamental law of retribution—the righteous are rewarded and the wicked punished (3:9–11; cf. 1:19–20).

Two legal processes are merged here: the oppression of the poor in the courts by wicked judges and elders and the Lord's future lawsuit against them, which would restore justice to God's people (3:13–15; cf. 1:23). In the context of the implied law of retribution, crimes would be punished according to the actions suffered by the victims. The crimes of the wicked judges, princes, and elders included (1) partiality in judgment (vv. 17, 23); (2) false teaching that had mislead the people and caused them to veer from the correct paths (v. 12); (3) gleaning and eating up their vineyards without leaving some produce for the poor (v. 14); (4) keeping the plunder of the poor in their houses; and (5) crushing God's people (v. 15). The punishment of the judges, princes, and elders stands in proportion to their crimes: loss of the Lord's support and all supply of sustenance for life (v. 1d), loss of authority and honor as leaders (3:2–7), loss of pride and tokens of honor and dignity (3:16—4:1), and loss of human life, which would make the city desolate (3:25–26).

The first "woe" (v. 9; cf. v. 11a) flows from the description of the indisputable evidence against the wicked (v. 8–9c). The exhortation to tell the righteous (v. 10) stands between two woes against wicked judges. According to Proverbs 24:23–25, the verdict pronounced by judges and elders was central in legal proceedings. Judges were admonished to speak the right verdict, as they are also here. The second "woe" (Is. 3:11) repeats the point of v. 9. In v. 12 the Lord was addressing His people and acting both as prosecutor and defender (cf. vv. 8–9, 14–15). Verse 12 has been understood in different ways. Some suggest that "children" is not the best translation for the Hebrew *me'olel* and that it should rather be translated as "gleaners" (cf. "graze the vineyard" in v. 14) or "those who inflict or maltreat" (as in Lam. 1:22; 2:20). In this case the basic meaning of the text would be "the oppressors of My people are gleaners/exactors"—oppressors who share nothing with the poor (see Lev. 19:9–10; Deut. 24:18–22; cf. Jer. 6:9). However, if the majority of translators are correct that the meaning is "children," the text would be conveying the idea that the people were so weak that they were allowing those who were acting like children to oppress them.

The word *nashim* has also been debated. The LXX takes it to be pointed with different vowels as *noshim*, which means "usurers, extortioners," and on this reading it would parallel the first part of the verse according to the first interpretation given above, as well as introduce a topic that is resumed in Isaiah 3:14 (cf. Ex. 22:25; Lev. 25:36–37; Deut. 23:19–20). Based on these observations, Isaiah 3:12 may be translated as "My people's oppressors are gleaners/exactors, and extortioners rule over them." It could also be that the MT is correct in regard to the word *nashim*, which means "women." In this case, the parallel would be with the second reading mentioned above, in other words, "Children oppress them, and women rule over them." In this case, the meaning would be that the people of Israel were so weak that they were allowing men who were acting like women and children to oppress and rule them.

The mention of those who were leading the people refers to teachers and counselors who were failing to reproach or warn the people concerning their ways (cf. Prov. 24:25). On the evidence of open wrongdoings and according to the law of retribution (Is. 3:8–12), the Lord was (as it were) rising to plead His case in court and to judge the peoples. The legal proceedings were against the elders and leaders/princes of God's people (vv. 14–15). The action is literally described as "the Lord will come before the court of justice" (cf. Job 9:32). The elders (cf. Is. 3:2) were local rulers and dignitaries who could also be called leaders/princes (cf. Job

29:8–10). The accusations are summarized in Isaiah 3:8–15: the vineyard in v. 14 is meant to feed the poor, but the elders and princes had "grazed" it, revealing a lack of compassion for the poor by not leaving behind any gleanings of their fruit trees. Such compassionate acts were stipulated in the covenant (Lev. 19:9–10; Deut. 24:18–22; cf. Jer. 6:9). The plunder of the poor (Is. 3:14) had been obtained by usury or extortion (v. 12a) and bribery in the court proceedings (cf. 1:23; 5:8, 23). The verbs "crush" and "grind" have almost the same sense, suggesting an oppression that destroys the poor (cf. Prov. 22:22–23). The latter word, "grind," is a very strong expression that conveys the idea of afflicting the poor by bribery and the perversion of justice (Is. 1:23; 3:8–15; 5:23).

3:16–23. From Pride to Humiliation. The Lord's accusation against the women (lit. "daughters") of Zion (vv. 16–17) is explained (v. 16) and would result in a complete reversal from pride to humiliation (vv. 18–24). The daughters of Zion are often taken to be the women of Jerusalem (as in Song 3:11). Another possibility would be to take the expression as a figurative reference to Jerusalem and the cities of Judah (see Is. 3:26; 4:1, 4). One could take the list of the leading classes in 3:2–3 as corresponding to the list of the daughters' finery in vv. 18–23, the scene of the people seeking a ruler (vv. 6–7) could parallel the seven women seeking a husband (4:1), and the references to food and clothing in 3:7 and 4:1 both function as the minimum tokens of authority. The combination of "daughters" and the name of a city usually referred to daughter cities. In administrative contexts, the entire territory of Judah contained about 115 cities with their villages under the capital Jerusalem (e.g., Josh. 15:20–63). It could be that the reference here to daughters of Zion refers to the dependent cities, towns, and villages of Zion-Jerusalem in Judah. Obviously, the message was for the leaders.

The list of items in Isaiah 3:18–23 is constituted of *insignia of authority* for the officials in Jerusalem and Judah (cf. vv. 1–7), *luxury items* linked to pride and wealth obtained by the abuse of power and the oppression of the poor (cf. vv. 8–15), and *magical items*, implying crimes against the covenant (cf. 2:6–22). Thus, the leading officials of the cities of Jerusalem and Judah, fittingly symbolized by the finery of the high class ladies of the city (the daughters of Zion), are described as proud, self-seeking, rebellious, and abusing their authority (as already indicated in detail in 2:6—3:15). The *accusation* in 3:16 implies their figurative behavior as harlots or unfaithful wives (cf. 1:21; Ezek. 16:15–43). The *punishment* would consist of disgrace and shame in proportion to their crimes (Is. 3:17, 24).

The Hebrew word for finery (*tip'eret*) in v. 18 does not refer only to women's adornment but indicates that which brings glory and honor to a person, including dress and ornaments functioning as insignia of office or marking rank (e.g., 28:1, 4–5; 52:1; 62:3; 63:12, 14–15). The meaning of some items in 3:18–23 is uncertain, but a wealth of archaeological material now gives us a better understanding. At least several of the items were exclusively used by women, and others had magical associations: jingling anklets or bangles for protection against evil (v. 18); crescents, in the shape of the waxing or waning moon (v. 18); perfume boxes and amulets in the shape of the sun that were related to the cult of the dead (v. 19); and charms or amulets for religious purposes (v. 20). All can be classified as luxurious tokens of pride, idolatry, or riches unfairly obtained.

3:24—4:1. Lament and Mourning. The leaders' authority, pride, and beauty would be turned into slavery, shame, and ugliness (3:24), illustrating God's sovereignty, justice, and righteousness. The historical fulfillment of this prophecy was possibly the Assyrian destruction of forty-six cities in Judah and the siege of Jerusalem in 701 B.C. (see Isaiah: Introduction). The references to stench, rope, baldness, sackcloth, and branding may all be associated with captivity, mourning, and disgrace.

The woman who would sit desolate on the ground while her gates lamented and mourned represents Zion-Jerusalem. Her garb of pride and beauty would be exchanged for the garb of mourning and sorrow (see 61:3). The mourning of the mother city would be caused by the death of her men at war (3:25–26). Such a loss of men in war (v. 25) would result in humiliation and lack of people. Since Zion-Jerusalem would lose her men in war, seven women (4:1) would marry one man with the sole request of being called by his name (i.e., to belong to him). They would dispense with the husband's customary duty to provide his wife with food and clothing (Ex. 21:10) because their main desire would be to remove their disgrace as *desolate* (and barren) women (cf. the disgrace of widowhood in Is. 54:4).

4:2–6. The Branch and the People. The climax in the chain of events in that day (2:11—4:6) would be the reward of the faithful remnant, namely, those Israelites who would escape and remain in Jerusalem (4:2–3). The reference to all who were recorded among the living in Jerusalem refers to those who were inscribed on the register of the citizens of Zion (cf. 63:1—66:24). The apostate leaders of 2:6—4:1 were to be replaced by the Branch of the Lord, the promised King (for "Branch" as a messianic term, see 11:1; Jer. 23:5; 33:15; Zech. 3:8; 6:12). His reign would be beautiful and glorious—in contrast to that of the apostates. The marvelous fertility of the soil in the messianic age is a favorite theme in Isaiah (Is. 30:23; 32:1, 16–19). The fertile land would yield fruit and life, and the Branch of the Lord would bring justice, righteousness, and peace.

The summary in 4:2 is explained in more detail in vv. 3–6, with an emphasis on God's *purification* of people, land, and city (vv. 3–4) and on His *protection* of the worshipers against cold, heat, and storms (vv. 5–6). The emphasis in vv. 2–6 is on the *holiness* to be restored to God's people and on the anticipated permanent *peace* and *protection* of the faithful. It is an appropriate preparation for the fulfillment of the vision of many nations ascending to the temple to walk in permanent peace in the Lord's paths (2:2–4). The Lord would ultimately accomplish this through the Branch, the Davidic Prince of Peace, whose work would bring hope to the nations.

5:1—12:6

ISRAEL, ZION, AND THE DAVIDIC KING RESTORED

This section of Isaiah explains in more detail the Lord's plan to establish His universal sovereignty as outlined in chapters 2–4. Chapter 5 contains the vineyard song and its interpretation. The plan of God is set in the context of the commission of the prophet (6:1–13), who announced the coming of Immanuel as a sign (7:1—8:15). The prophet characterizes his family as also being a sign for the people (8:16—9:7). The judgment against Israel is described as a warning to Judah (9:8; 10:4), and the section includes announcements of the defeat of Syria, the coming of the second David, and the restoration of Israel (10:5—12:6).

5:1–30

The Song of the Vineyard

The song itself is found in vv. 1–7; it is followed by woes against the upper classes (vv. 8–23) and judgment by a foreign nation (vv. 24–30).

5:1–7. The Song. The Song of the Beloved is a parable in which the bride, in keeping with ANE customs, is compared to a vineyard. In reality, however, the song is an *accusation* in the name of a disappointed and betrayed lover. Isaiah speaks, at first, as the friend of the bridegroom who acted as an intermediary in wedding arrangements and who could have presented any complaint on behalf of the bridegroom. From v. 3, Isaiah presents God as calling upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem and Judah to recognize His justice and announcing His verdict against them.

Isaiah presents his song on behalf of the one he loved (v. 1), followed by the Lord's response about His vineyard, whose identity is not revealed until v. 7. The Hebrew preposition *le* in 5:1 has been variously translated as "to" or "for." These have some linguistic basis, but "concerning" may better fit the context. Isaiah sings a song concerning the One he loves with regard to His vineyard. The Lord complained that He had done everything possible to receive good grapes, but His vineyard had brought Him only "wild," "bad," or "worthless" ones (v. 2). The inhabitants of Jerusalem and Judah were being asked to judge between the Lord and His vineyard (v. 3). Since the answer to the Lord's question was self-evident, He proceeded to the judgment announcement: the protection of the vineyard would be removed (vv. 5–6).

5:8–23. Proclamation of Woes. Isaiah finally and clearly identifies the vineyard as the house of Israel and the people of Judah (v. 7) who had violated the principles of justice and righteousness (cf. 1:10–27; 3:8–15; 5:8–23). The statement of woes follows. The first reproaches the rich for accumulating houses and land while ignoring the coming judgment when many impressive houses would be desolate, and vineyards and fields would yield meager fruit (vv. 8–10). The second woe concerns those who drink wine and dance from early until late (v. 11) while disregarding the Lord's doing (v. 12; cf. v. 19). The third woe touches on Isaiah's conflict with the wise teachers (vv. 18–19). They were metaphorically pulling evil with cords of *shav'*, "deceit," "dishonesty," or "falsehood," which often referred to a false witness (Ex. 23:1; Deut. 5:20; Job 15:31; cf. Ps. 24:4). The parallel metaphor goes even further and refers to their sin as being so massive that a cart rope was needed to pull it.

The rebellious people mocked the Lord and Isaiah's prophetic ministry by sarcastically implying that there was no reason to believe that the Lord would hasten to fulfill His predictions (i.e., "His work") or that His purpose could be known.

The fourth woe is directed against those who remove justice and righteousness by distorting the truth (Is. 5:20). The fifth pleads for humility and rebukes those who are wise in their own eyes. This is a common negative assessment in the wisdom circles (e.g., Prov. 3:7; 26:5, 12; 28:11). The last denunciation is directed against judges and elders with minds so affected by intoxicating drinks that they justify the wicked for a bribe and deny justice to the righteous (Is. 5:23; cf. 3:9d–15).

5:24–30. Judgment by a Foreign Nation. Because of the rejection of Isaiah's instruction, the Lord's anger was aroused against His people. He had already struck them with His hand (i.e., power) with disastrous effects, but a still greater disaster was to come (vv. 26–30). The words for the Lord's anger are metaphorical expressions of His attitude toward sin, injustice, unrighteousness, and pride. They are closely connected with the holiness of God, which is a central concept in Isaiah. The OT uses at least ten different terms for anger, and Isaiah uses eight of these.

The description of an invading army, which the Lord would call as an agent of His punishment from a distant nation, underlines their speed (v. 26), the preparation of the soldiers (v. 27), the efficiency of their weapons (v. 28), and their frightful roaring like young lions (v. 29) when the prey would be taken. It would be like the roaring of the sea (vv. 30; cf. 17:12). The people of Israel would be carried away with nobody to save them (5:29), and there would be darkness and anguish (v. 30). The banner that would be lifted up for the nations would be set up on a hill to call the warriors to assemble either for attack or defense (v. 26; see 11:10).

6:1–13

The Lord's Plan and Isaiah's Commission

This chapter reveals the Lord's plan for apostate Israel and reaffirms Isaiah's prophetic ministry (PK 307–308). In this intimate dialogue between God and His prophet (cf. Gen. 18:22–33; Amos 3:7) the prophet saw or perceived (Heb. *ra'ah*) and heard God's word (Jer. 23:18). According to his commission account, Israel would refuse to be converted (vv. 9–10), and judgment would come. In the end only a holy remnant would emerge (vv. 11–13).

6:1–4. The Lord in His Temple. Isaiah's commission account is connected with the first king mentioned in 1:1, which states, "In the year that King Uzziah died" (around 736 B.C.). At this time the Assyrian threat under Tiglath-Pileser III was already evident. The scene of the vision was the earthly temple. Isaiah was standing at the entrance to the temple building, perhaps in the vestibule looking into the Holy Place. In the vision the doors to the holy of holies were opened, and he saw the Lord enthroned "between the cherubim" (1 Sam. 4:4; 2 Kin. 19:15; Ps. 80:1; Is. 37:16). The ark of the covenant in the Most Holy Place was probably understood as a throne with golden images of cherubim.

The occasion of Isaiah's vision may have been the Day of Atonement, when God passed judgment on Israel and atonement was made for their sins, thus cleansing them (Lev. 16:1–34; 23:36–42; Num. 29:7–11). It was the time of the year when God appeared in a cloud above the cover of the ark, often called the "mercy seat," in the holy of holies (Lev. 16:2). Only the high priest was allowed to go into the holy of holies with the appropriate offerings on behalf of the people. Thus, Isaiah functioned as a priest, perhaps as an assistant of the high priest, who stood in attendance at the entrance to the temple. The Lord's enthronement in judgment is essential in the context of Isaiah 6:9–13, and the concept of a judgment that purifies Jerusalem and Judah is meaningful in view of 1:21–26 and 3:1—4:6.

The robe is an insignia of the Lord's royal dignity. He is clothed with honor and majesty and covers Himself with a garment of light (Pss. 93:1; 104:1–2). That the train of His robe filled the temple shows the limitless character of His glory and majesty (cf. 1 Kin. 8:27). The Jerusalem temple was usually called "house" (*bayit*), but here the word is *hekal*, which could refer to a "fine building" or "temple." It was separated from the Most Holy (*debir* or *qodesh qodashim*) by a wall with doors of olive wood (1 Kin. 6:31–32). Isaiah saw the Lord sitting on His throne in the Most Holy Place, the train of His robe spilling through the open doors and filling the Holy Place. The Lord's heavenly council was comprised of a multitude of beings singing His praise and ready to serve Him. The seraphim (Is. 6:2) probably represented all the heavenly beings (1 Kin. 22:19). The seraphim hovered above the Lord's robe on both sides of the throne, flying with two of their six wings and covering their eyes and feet with the other four as an expression of humility and respect (Is. 6:2; cf. Ezek. 1:11).

The Bible mentions the seraphim only here. Their name and nature are unclear. They are represented as winged human beings with faces, voices, hands, and feet. This makes them entirely different from the winged serpent figures around the throne of Pharaoh, which may have been known at least by name to Isaiah (Is. 14:29; 30:6). Another point of contact with "seraph" is the *sarap* (lit. "fiery"; contextually translated as "poisonous" or "venomous"), the serpent of bronze that Moses made in the desert (Num. 21:6–9; Deut. 8:15) and that remained in the Jerusalem temple until the time of King Hezekiah (2 Kin. 18:4). Thus, Isaiah possibly knew the term "seraphim" in the sense of "fiery ones with wings" and applied it to heavenly beings that he had not seen before. They were closely connected with the concept of the Lord's *holiness* (Is. 6:3), which is central in Isaiah and intimately associated with fire and burning (e.g., 5:16–24; 10:17; 30:27–29).

The threefold proclamation of the Lord's holiness by the seraphim results in the temple being filled with smoke from the incense altar (v. 4). The reference to the seraphim calling to each other may imply that they were two in number, but the phrase may also have a collective sense. The emphatic threefold repetition of the word "holy" (v. 3) conveys the sense of "most holy," but it also reflects a fixed formula in the temple cult (Ps. 99:3, 5, 9). The holiness of the Lord of Hosts (or Lord Almighty) means that He is transcendent, powerful, and sovereign beyond what any human can imagine. He is perfectly pure and genuine in His very being.

That the whole earth is full of God's glory (Is. 6:3) is a central statement in the Lord's plan for universal sovereignty (cf. 11:9). The Lord's "glory" is the manifestation of His person, especially of His holiness, light, and majesty. As the train of His robe filled the temple, His glory fills the whole earth. Since His glory represents His presence, it may be said to fill the temple (6:1; cf. Ps. 63:2). It is then depicted as a cloud (1 Kin. 8:10–11; 2 Chr. 5:13–14; cf. Is. 4:5–6; 6:4). Zion-Jerusalem was considered the "center of the land/earth" (Ezek. 38:12). The localized holy presence of God in the temple anticipated the moment when the whole earth would be conquered through His holiness.

6:5–13. The Prophetic Commission. The threefold emphasis on the holiness of the Lord of Hosts, the implied relationship between temple and earth, and the need for a ritual cleansing of human sin (vv. 3–7) are all central concepts linked to the temple. Isaiah exclaimed that he had seen the King, the Lord Almighty (v. 5). After he was purified from sin (vv. 6–7), he dialogued with the Lord and expressed a deep sense of unworthiness and fear (v. 5). Israel's apostasy and sinfulness had rendered them unclean before God's holiness. With unclean lips, their prayers for mercy would not be heard (cf. 1:15; Ps. 17:1), but the purification of Isaiah's lips removed his guilt and sin and enabled him to speak to the Holy One. Human messengers of the Lord are not without sin: He forgives, cleanses, and empowers.

The Lord's plan had been decided, and He asked whom to send to announce it. Isaiah's reply indicated his readiness to serve the Lord. His mission was part of the Lord's plan concerning "this people" (Is. 6:9)—an expression implying contempt and disfavor (8:6, 12; 9:16; 28:11, 14). Israel is described, in proverbial style, as a people who heard and saw but chose not to understand and know because they had rejected the Lord as their God (6:9–10). God's words in v. 9 allude to 5:12, 19 where Israel is accused of ignoring His counsel and disregarding His work. The Lord's commission is stated as a command (6:10). The verbal links with the characterization of the people in v. 9 are picked up, but now there is an emphasis on the human organs of hearing, seeing, and understanding. This is arranged as a chiasm: heart, ears, eyes//eyes, ears, heart (v. 10).

The people would not return to God to be healed. There was no longer any mercy for Israel; what remained was judgment. Isaiah's mission was to continue instructing Israel with warnings and predictions of judgment, but God knew that they would continue to reject Him. The command was not a denial of their freedom of choice but a way of saying that the more Isaiah would plead for conversion, the more they would choose to remain disobedient, and the judgment would therefore no longer be averted. Isaiah's question "How long?" belongs to the laments of the people (6:11; e.g., Pss. 74:10; 79:5; 89:46; 90:13; 94:3), in the hope that the judgment would not be God's final work but that in view of His loving-kindness, there was salvation in sight. The question comes from the faithful ones who wait for the Lord and trust/hope in Him (Is. 8:17). These ideas are key themes in the whole book.

The Lord's answer (6:11–13) described a series of future events for Israel. There would be destruction and deportation (vv. 11–12), comparable to the downfall of the Northern Kingdom of Israel caused by the Assyrians in 722 B.C. The holy seed (cf. 4:2–3; 11:1), which would eventually grow out of the stump or stem of Jesse, would be the remnant in Jerusalem, namely, those who would patiently wait for the Lord. Based on His loving-kindness, the Lord would not completely destroy His people: a restored Israel would be established from the remnant (cf. chaps. 60–62).

7:1—8:15

The Immanuel Sign

A sign from the Lord may (1) impart knowledge (e.g., 19:20), (2) produce faith (e.g., 7:9c, 11–16), (3) confirm a prophet's authority (e.g., 38:7, 22; cf. 2 Kings 20:8–11), or (4) reinforce the message by a symbolic act (e.g., Is. 7:3; 8:1–4, 8, 18; 20:3). It may be a *miracle* (38:7–8) or an *event* that fulfills a prediction (55:13). The Immanuel sign is a mixture of these functions. The setting of chapter 9 is the Syro-Ephraimite crisis in 734–732 B.C. (see Isaiah: Introduction). King Ahaz of Judah and his people were stricken with fear due to an imminent attack by Syria and Israel.

7:1–12. Isaiah and the King. God told Isaiah to bring his son Shear-Jashub (meaning "a remnant shall return") and give a message to the king. He encouraged Ahaz not to fear because the schemes of Syria and Israel would fail. The admonition to not fear was often used to reassure someone in trouble and was intended to alleviate fear (of death) and to strengthen resolve (vv. 8–9). The meaning of the elliptic formulation of vv. 8–9, substantiated in 8:5–10 (cf. 7:4, 8), is that Syria and Ephraim/Israel were at the time intact and their kings secure, but very soon Syria would be ruined and Ephraim diminished, and within sixty-five years Ephraim would be so broken and shattered that it would not be a people. Ephraim/Israel was destroyed by a massive Assyrian deportation in 722 B.C., but the prophecy of ceasing to be a people was fulfilled when Esarhaddon (680–669 B.C.) repopulated Israel and Samaria with many foreign colonists (Ezra 4:2; cf. 2 Kin. 17:24–41).

Ahaz was warned that if he did not firmly trust in God's promises, he would not be established (Is. 7:9). This concluding message to Ahaz implied that Judah, too, would be broken unless he and his house trusted the Lord (cf. 10:20; 26:3–4; 30:15–18; 31:1). There is a Hebrew wordplay in 7:9. The Lord told Ahaz that if he did not *'aman*, the *hiphil* form of the verb, meaning to "believe" or "trust," he would not *'aman*, the *niphal* of the same verb, meaning "to stand," "be confirmed," or "be established." Faith in the Lord, which implies trusting and relying on Him, is all that He requires from His people. Ahaz failed to trust the Lord and contacted the Assyrians with a request for help against the Syro-Ephraimite coalition, resulting in foreign cult practices in Judah and disastrous consequences resulting from the Assyrian "protection" (2 Kin. 16:10–18).

The Lord invited Ahaz to ask for a sign—from the depths or the heights (7:11). It would be *miraculous* because it would affect anything in the realm of creation. It would *produce faith* (v. 9), and it would *confirm* that the Lord's promise of salvation would be fulfilled (vv. 3–9). But Ahaz refused the offer (v. 12). His pretentiously pious reason, that he did not want to test the Lord, followed the covenant principle in Deuteronomy 6:16, but in reality he had already decided to rely on the power of Assyria. Isaiah then reproached the house of David (Is. 7:13), which implies that the disobedience of the Davidic kings to the Lord was a major reason for the Assyrian judgment. God promised David that He would establish his house forever (2 Sam. 7:11–16). It was founded on the Lord being "with" David (2 Sam. 7:3, 9). This implied God's *protection* of David and *peace* for Israel (2 Sam. 7:9–10). The relationship between the Lord and the Davidic king was defined as a father-son relationship (2 Sam. 7:14). This Davidic covenant also contained the idea of mercy in the context of judgment (2 Sam. 7:14–15). This covenant is implied in the sign of Immanuel: *'im* ("with") and *'anu* ("us") and *'el* ("God"; Is. 7:14–16).

7:13–25. Promise of Immanuel. The translation "the virgin" is based on the LXX (cf. Matt. 1:23), but the Hebrew *'almah* designates a young woman of marriageable age. To mean "virgin," Hebrew uses the word *betulah*. However, *'almah* is flexible in meaning and can refer to a virgin. It is usually suggested that *'almah* probably referred to the unknown mother of Immanuel in the time of Ahaz. The NT would identify the fulfillment of this prophecy with the miraculous birth of Jesus, the true Immanuel (Matt. 1:25).

Immanuel means "with us God" and alludes to the ideological foundation of the house of David (2 Sam. 7:3, 9). Immanuel implies the Lord's presence, blessing, and protection and functions as a guarantee of peace. Even if God chastised the Davidic kings with the rod, His mercy would not depart from them. But the sign would not function without the king's faith in God. It is connected to the Davidic, messianic Prince of Peace in Isaiah 9:6–7 and to the righteous Branch of the stem/stump of Jesse in 11:1–10 (cf. 4:2). The simple diet of curds and honey would be eaten in times of hardship by those remaining in the land (7:22), implying survival in humble conditions. Like the "stump" or "stem" in 11:1, the diet figuratively describes the lowly state to which the house of David would be reduced as a result of Ahaz's disobedience.

Before the age of knowing to refuse evil and choose good, the child would eat curds and honey. This refers to the time when the Assyrians would turn Judah into briars and thorns (7:18–25). However, Syria and Israel would fall before that time (vv. 1–9; 8:1–10). Thus, Isaiah drew a timeline: (1) his crisis at the time of writing (7:1–9; in 734–733 B.C.); (2) the Assyrian punishment of rebellious Syria and Israel, as the Lord predicted (v. 16b; in 732 B.C.); and (3) an Assyrian invasion of Judah, which would humiliate the house of David but not completely destroy the country (vv. 10–25; in 701 B.C.; cf. 6:11–13).

Ahaz's rejection of the Immanuel sign would have disastrous consequences over a long time. The Lord would bring the king of Assyria upon Ahaz, his people, and his family (v. 17). Ahaz's subjection of Judah to Assyrian protection brought the Assyrian army into Judah, resulting in the subjugation of Jerusalem to Assyrian overlords. Isaiah states that this would bring back the days when Ephraim departed from Judah, which resulted in the Davidic dynasty suffering a significant loss of land and people. Assyria and Egypt would be called upon to execute judgment against Judah (vv. 18–20). The mention of all those who would be left in the land refers to a remnant after death and deportation, when the available food would be curds and honey. This is a figurative reference to the humble circumstances of Judah and the Davidic dynasty in the future as a consequence of Ahaz's rejection of the Immanuel sign. God commanded Isaiah to write Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz on a scroll. The name literally means "speed, spoil, hasten, plunder" or "quick to the plunder, swift to the spoil." The Hebrew word *gillayon* can mean "scroll" or "tablet" (of wood, stone, or leather). The reference to the *kheret 'enosh*, literally meaning "human engraving tool," presumably meant writing in a script that was legible to the people (cf. Hab. 2:2). That it was to be a large scroll or tablet may mean that it was fixed in a public place where it could be seen by all or that the text was extensive. Isaiah took faithful, reliable witnesses (Is. 7:2) to prove the authority and time of the prediction (cf. comments on 8:16). Notice that Isaiah's wife was a "prophetess" (*nebi'ah*). It was not a practice in ancient Israel to refer to a wife by the profession of her husband. No other biblical prophet named his wife "prophetess." Thus, Isaiah's wife was likely an active prophetess. The name Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz means that the wealth of Damascus and the plunder of Samaria would be taken by the king of Assyria, confirming the prophecy in 7:3–9.

8:1–15. Assyria Captures Israel and Judah. The prediction of Assyria's capture of Syria and Israel in v. 4 continues in vv. 6–10, but with Syria replaced by Judah, making Israel and Judah the targets of the Assyrian attack. Two contrasting metaphors relating to "water" are used: the gentle, flowing waters of Shiloah (i.e., the Davidic dynasty under the Lord's protection of Zion) are contrasted with the torrents of the Euphrates (lit. "the River")—the king of Assyria in all his splendor (vv. 6–7). Isaiah quotes the Lord saying that because "this people" (i.e., the Northern Kingdom of Israel) had refused the waters of Shiloah and had instead rejoiced in Rezin and Remaliah's son, the Lord would bring the king of Assyria against them.

Assyria would first capture Israel (8:4; 2 Kin. 15:29; 17:5–6), but would then pass through Judah and overwhelm it (Is. 8:8). Here the Lord addressed Immanuel and said that the outstretched wings of the king of Assyria would cover the whole land. This is a way of saying that although Assyria would overwhelm Judah, Jerusalem would be spared because Immanuel was the Lord's sign confirming His faithfulness to His covenant with David. The prediction may, therefore, concern Sennacherib's destruction of Judah in 701 B.C., when the Lord spared Jerusalem and the Davidic king (cf. 1:4–9). The judgment against Judah turns here to salvation (8:9–10), for the Lord issued orders against the aggressors, and the people could say, "God is with us"—Immanuel. The Lord instructed Isaiah concerning "this people," including both Israel and Judah (vv. 11–15). As confirmed by the sign of Immanuel, the faithful needed to hold on to the Lord (v. 13). He would be a sanctuary or holy place (i.e., a refuge and place of rest) for the faithful but a stone of stumbling for the apostates (vv. 14–15).

8:16—9:7

Isaiah's Family: A Sign

In this section, Isaiah's predictions concerning the defeat of Syria and Israel were confirmed (cf. 7:1—8:15). The dark aftermath for Israel and Judah (8:21—9:1) would be changed by the messianic Prince of Peace (9:2–7).

8:16—9:1. Law and Testimony. The "testimony" and the "law" (or instruction) have been taken by some as two words expressing one thought, which in this case is another way of designating the word of God written on a large scroll or tablet (8:1–2) containing the Lord's judgment against Syria and Israel (v. 4). But their use in v. 20 indicates that we are dealing with two different things. The "law" refers to the written revelation of God and the "testimony" to the prophetic word as the standard by which falsehood is distinguished from truth. In Isaiah, the Hebrew word *torah* often means not only the "law" but especially "instruction," which is at times in parallel with the "word of the Lord" (1:10; 2:3; 5:24; 8:16, 20; 30:9; 51:4, 7). But it can also refer to God's law as preserved in the Pentateuch (5:24; 24:5). The sign of the testimony and the law indicates that God's word, both in His law and in the prophetic voice, is true, and yet Israel and Judah rejected both.

Literally, a "sealed" scroll was one that had been signed and witnessed legally. Metaphorically, however, it was "sealed" in the sense that its content was inviolable and to be preserved. What the people rejected—the law and the testimony—was as valid as if it had been sealed. It was also to be "sealed" or "preserved" in the sense that it was to be written in the heart of the "disciples"—those who accepted and practiced the law and the testimony (see Prov. 3:3; 6:20–21; 7:2–3; cf. 2 Cor. 3:2). In the case of Isaiah, the sealing of the testimony could refer to the validity of his prophecy that had been proven true by real events, thus confirming the reliability of God's word through him. The Hebrew verbs usually translated as "bind up" and "seal" could also be translated as "the testimony is bound up, and the instruction is sealed." The phrase "among my disciples" would then keep its literal sense "in my disciples." The house of Jacob was already under judgment (Is. 8:17). Isaiah continued to wait for the Lord and hope in Him, expecting the promise of salvation through Immanuel to be fulfilled. He would totally depend on God's revealed will.

Isaiah affirms the Lord's call (cf. 6:8). He speaks of his literal children, for children as "a gift of God" had deep roots in ancient Israel (Pss. 113:9; 127:3–5; 128:1–6; 144:12). Isaiah and his children were God's signs and wonders (or symbols) for Israel. They, and their names in particular, were evidence that God was still active within His people to move them to believe in Him.

The tragic fate of Israel served as a warning to Judah (Is. 8:19—9:1). Ahaz thought he could save his kingdom by seeking help from the Assyrian overlords, but as a result of his lack of faith in God, Judah would suffer the same fate as Israel. The law and the testimony (8:16) and the children of Isaiah (v. 18) invited the people to seek God and reject deception. But instead of listening to the written law of God and to the prophetic word, some of the people were asking mediums and wizards/spiritists for help (Deut. 18:9–14; 1 Kin. 22:5). Verse 20 contains an important hermeneutical principle: the law and the prophets are to be used to establish what is from the Lord and what is not (cf. Matt. 5:17). "They" refers to any false counselor who led the people away from their God and His word. The rejection of God's revelation would leave them in total darkness (Is. 8:21–22).

In v. 21, "they" refers to the people of v. 19 who were not seeking the Lord for help. Afflicted by hunger and oppression, the people would be enraged, cursing their king and their God (v. 21c). In desperation the people would look upward and to the earth (i.e., everywhere; v. 22a) for help, but they would be disappointed. However, there is something better (9:1a): the condition of the land would change because the state of darkness would not be permanent.

Although 9:1b is difficult, the general meaning is quite clear. There is a contrast between the former condition of the land on account of the sin of the people and what God would do to it in the future. The "land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali" are the Israelite names for northern Israel, while the second set of names refers to the three provinces that the Assyrians created when Tiglath-Pileser annexed northern Israel in 732 B.C.: "the way of the sea" refers to Dulru (Dor), the land "beyond the Jordan" to Gal'azu (Gilead), and "Galilee of the Gentiles" or "nations" to Magidu (Megiddo). Thus, the two enumerations refer to the same areas of land but with Israelite and Assyrian names—one refers to the time before the Syro-Ephraimite war, and the other to the time thereafter.

9:2–7. Prince of Peace. In the future the Lord would bring the Davidic Prince of Peace, Immanuel, to the land to reunite the two houses of Israel. The promise of Immanuel (7:14–16; 8:8–10) reaches its climax in the promise of the Davidic Prince (9:2–7; see Matt. 4:12–16). The light of the Lord's salvation would replace the darkness (9:2) of the Assyrian occupations, which resulted from the people abandoning the Lord (8:21—9:1) by following the instructions of mediums and wizards/spiritists (8:19–20). However, the Lord's future plan was to break the yoke of the people's burden, the staff or bar on their shoulder, and the rod of their oppressor (9:4; cf. 10:24–27) and bring war to an end (9:5; cf. 2:4). The "great light" (9:2) is a symbol of life, joy, and salvation (cf. 42:6; 49:6; Num. 6:24–26; Job 3:20; Ps. 36:9). They rejoice because God would be victorious over the oppressor, grant them everlasting peace (vv. 3–5), increase the nation (v. 3), and give it a secure future (note the contrast between the joy of harvest in v. 3 and the hunger and curses in 8:21). But more specifically, the joy derives from the announced birth of a Davidic Prince and Savior (9:6–7).

The passage in vv. 6–7 is an announcement of the birth of a unique child who would be officially elevated to the status of Crown Prince and proclaimed as the future Ruler. He would rule with just judgment and righteousness on the throne of David and over his kingdom (v. 7). War and strife would be no more, for He would end oppression from without and injustice from within (cf. 2:2–4; 4:2; 29:18–20; 30:20–22; 32:16). The statement that the government would be upon the King's shoulder alludes to the symbol of a scepter borne on the shoulder (cf. staff and rod/bar in 9:4; and cf. 14:5; Gen. 49:10; Ps. 110:2; Ezek. 19:14) as sign of power (Num. 24:17; cf. Ps. 125:3). It is contrasted with the oppressive shoulder yoke and staff mentioned in Isaiah 9:4 and indicates a shift from the oppressors to the Davidic Prince. In Israel the scepter implied that the king was a "son" of God—he was a vassal of the Divine Overlord (cf. 2 Sam. 7:14)—suggesting a very intimate relationship between the Lord and His earthly representative, the king. However, the list of names found in Isaiah 9:6 was never applied to the kings of God's people. We are dealing here with a unique king. The first two names concern the King's attributes, the second pair the character of His rule. The two words "wonderful" and "counselor" are one component (lit. "wonder of a counselor"). Counselor applies to a Ruler who, like the Lord, plans wonderful and amazing things (cf. 28:29).

"Mighty God" (*'el gibbor*; 9:6) could literally be translated "God of a Warrior," "God is a Warrior," or "Warrior God." Although this name does not by itself demonstrate that this messianic king is divine, in light of 10:21 we can claim that He is divine. There the title "Mighty God" (*'el gibbor*) is used to identify God. This qualification enables the King to overcome all enemies (cf. 11:1–10). The Child is revealed as both divine and human (the Mighty God born of a woman).

Everlasting Father (*'abi'ad*) literally means "Father of Eternity." Although the dynasty and kingdom of a faithful king were thought to continue forever (2 Sam. 7:16; Pss. 21:1–4; 72:5, 17; 132:11–14), no king in Israel was called by this name. The reference to the messianic "son" as also being the "eternal Father" is not a confusion of the persons of the Trinity. The language of fatherhood could be applied to the Messiah because He brought His people into existence, redeemed them, and has treated them as a loving father would, with care and mercy (cf. Is. 22:21; John 1:1–3; 1 John 2:29). The passage also bears witness to the fact that the Messiah has always been—He is eternal.

The "Prince of Peace" (*sar shalom*) is a surprising title in the context of titles that imply the power of this King. This new name shows that His power expresses itself in peace. He protects and safeguards peace by His wisdom, justice, and righteousness (cf. Is. 11:1–3; Ps. 72:3, 7). Isaiah's prediction of a royal Savior in Isaiah 9:6–7 remained unfulfilled until the coming of Jesus of Nazareth. He is called the Light (John 1:4–9), and His coming to Capernaum in Galilee, in the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali, in order to preach the imminence of the kingdom of God, was a literal fulfillment of Isaiah 9:1–2 (Matt. 4:12–17).

9:8—10:4

Israel's Chastisement: A Warning to Judah

This passage adds further background to the judgments against Israel and Judah (cf. 5:1–30; 7:17–25; 8:1–10), a review of past cases, and a warning to Judah.

The first case under review is that of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. It had been punished because of its "pride and arrogance of heart." The "heart" in Hebrew was the seat of the will and intentions, where decisions were made and the word of God was heard (i.e., understood and obeyed). A proud and arrogant heart (6:10) is often associated with idol worship (cf. 2:6–22; 3:16–23). As a whole, the proverbial saying in 9:10 expresses the pride that led to Israel's secession in the tenth century B.C. (cf. 7:17; 1 Kin. 12). References to building refer metaphorically to the people. Bricks of clay and beams of sycamore (Is. 9:10) were used by people in general, whereas hewn stones and cedar wood were used by the upper classes for palaces. The refrain in v. 12 applies the lesson of history to Judah: God's anger had not been appeased, and more disasters were to come (cf. 5:25). "For all this" summarizes the people's crime and the punishment resulting from the Lord's anger, yet His anger was still not turned away.

The second case concerns false rulers and teachers (9:15-17). The consequences for Israel and Judah would be the suffering of the innocent and great loss of life. If all Israel would have turned back to the Lord (v. 13; cf. 8:19-20), His anger would have been turned away (9:17). But since they rejected Him (v. 13), He would cut off both head and tail in Israel in one day (v. 14). In the metaphor, the head (v. 15; cf. 19:15; Deut. 28:13, 44) refers to the elders and honorable dignitaries (i.e., the political rulers), and the tail signifies the prophets who were teaching lies, in other words, the religious teachers (9:15). As representatives of two extremes, they signified totality (cf. 3:1-3). The rulers led the people astray (9:16; cf. 3:12), and every one of them was profane and evil (9:17).

The third case under review is about evil that destroys fraternal bonds and breeds its own punishment (vv. 18-20; cf. 3:9-11). The metaphor of wickedness as a consumer of the briars, thorns, and forest thickets (i.e., the apostates themselves; cf. 5:6) is explained in 9:18-19. The people's wickedness had elicited the Lord's wrath, leading to the Assyrian invasions that burned up the land and the people. The invasions would cause social chaos and civil strife (9:19d-20d). People would not spare each other, and there would be tribal warfare between the tribes of Israel (vv. 20-21). To eat the flesh of someone is a figure of speech for a bitter hostility toward them (Ps. 27:2; cf. Job 19:22). The historical background for Isaiah 9:21 was the ongoing power struggle between Manasseh and Ephraim. Roughly between 750 and 722 B.C., the struggle for the throne was mainly between these two tribes. In the Syro-Ephraimite war, Ephraim and Manasseh turned against Judah (2 Kin. 15:37; Is. 7:1—8:15). In summary, Isaiah 9:18-21 warns that if Judah were to continue in apostasy, the same fate that befell Israel would fall on Judah.

The fourth case addresses the royal officials of Judah, holding them accountable for the past and present conditions (10:1-4). Isaiah speaks regarding enactors of evil statutes and oppressive laws, who have the authority to produce documents that legalize their social injustices. The protection of the rights of the poor, the needy, widows, and orphans was the special responsibility of the king (e.g., Ps. 72:1-4; Prov. 29:14). Compliance with this responsibility revealed the king's willingness to be loyal to the Lord. The crimes mentioned (Is. 1:17, 23; 3:14-15) elicited God's anger and judgment (10:3-4; cf. 9:17). Three rhetorical questions in 10:3 describe the judgment. For the refrain in v. 4, see 9:12.

10:5—12:6

Assyria Defeated, a Second David, and Israel

Within the frame of God's plan for Zion, He had chastised and cleansed His people through Assyria's invasions (5:1—10:4), but now He would restore His universal kingdom through a remnant of Israel and a righteous Davidic King (10:5—12:6).

10:5-19. Assyria Is Judged. The Lord chose Assyria as His agent to chastise Israel, but the woe had become directed against Assyria because of its arrogance. Isaiah quotes the Lord's decision to commission the king of Assyria as His instrument. Assyria's task was to remove Israel's pride in material goods and to humble them. But the Assyrian king distorted his task and, instead of chastising and purifying Israel, sought to destroy nations as he strove for power (vv. 7-14). God rejected the imperial goals of the Assyrian king, accusing him of excessive destruction, robbery, arrogance, and claiming world power for himself.

The king expressed arrogance in two ways. First, it was his plan to destroy Jerusalem as he had destroyed Samaria, but this was not God's intention (vv. 8-12). Second, through his arrogance and claim to world power, the Assyrian king (vv. 13-14) challenged the Lord's sovereignty. In all his self-praise in vv. 7-14, the Assyrian king never mentioned the Lord. The Lord's announcement of the punishment of Assyria opens with a set of four metaphors (v. 15). The ax, saw, rod, and staff/club are merely instruments in the hands of power. Some of these metaphors may be related to the royal insignia of rod and staff/club (v. 5), implying that Assyria's royal power was granted by God, who alone sets kings and removes them.

Another set of metaphors occurs in vv. 16-19. First, the Lord would send emaciation on the well-fed people (i.e., the people of Assyria would lack food, and the well-grown vegetation of the land would fade away; v. 16). Second, under his (the king's) glory/pomp the Lord would literally "burn a burning like burning of fire." The Light of Israel and his Holy One are terms for the Lord Himself. The fire would burn and destroy Assyria's thorns and briars in one day, as a retribution for what Assyria had done to Israel (9:18-19). The Lord would avenge His people.

10:20-34. The Remnant of Israel. Assyria at this point stands as a symbol of the fall of God's enemies, and the prophecy moves from the time of Assyria to the coming of the Messiah and the final restoration of the earth. The *first consequence* of the fall of Assyria—representing the fall of God's enemies—is that a remnant of Israel would be converted (vv. 20-22) when God inflicted His punishment upon Israel (vv. 23-27). The people in Zion were encouraged not to fear Assyria (v. 24). Although it would strike Israel as God's rod and staff/club (cf. vv. 5-6), God's wrath would eventually turn against Assyria (v. 25). He would save His people through signs and wonders as He had done when He destroyed Midian and delivered His people from Egypt (v. 26).

The *second consequence* of Assyria's fall would be the replacement of the proud human king by a righteous Davidic King (10:27—11:10). Assyria stands for the fall of the kingdoms of the earth at the coming of the Messiah. The destruction of Assyria's yoke (10:27) and the Lord's humbling of proud, mighty Assyria (vv. 33-34) frame the central passage on the arrogance and threat of the Assyrian king (vv. 28-32). The phrase *mipne shamen* (lit. "because"/"before"/"by the face of the oil"/"fat") has been understood in various ways. Some take it to refer to the *shemen*, "fat" or "oil" (i.e., "fertile," "fruitful," "plenteous"; cf. 5:1; 25:6; 28:1, 4, where the same Hebrew word is used) which indicated the prideful wealth of Assyria. Others understand it as a reference to the anointed king—Hezekiah or David (for whose sake God would defeat Assyria [37:35]), and by extension the Messiah (Heb. the "anointed One"), who was associated with the breaking of the yoke in 9:4-7. The focus is on the destruction of the yoke itself, Assyria, which stands for all of God's enemies.

During his western campaign of 720 B.C., Sargon moved quickly south to deal with the Egyptians, who supported the rebellious Philistine city of Gaza (10:28-34). By marching by Jerusalem, he intended to discourage Judah from joining the rebellious states. However, Sargon would shake his fist against Jerusalem (v. 32). This would be an act of blasphemy against the Lord comparable to the later threat by Sennacherib in 701 B.C. Jerusalem survived on both occasions. The predicted punishment of the Assyrian king and his people is recorded in vv. 33-34.

11:1-16. The Stem of Jesse. Isaiah's announcement of a Davidic King follows rather abruptly after the account of the downfall of the Assyrian king (10:33-34), which might suggest the downfall of Assyria as a microcosm of the fall of all of God's enemies. Chapter 11:1-10 resumes and elaborates the announced coming Savior as the "Branch of the LORD" (4:2), the sign of Immanuel (7:10-16; 8:5-10), and the Davidic Prince (9:2-7). The stem of Jesse refers to the father of David (1 Sam. 16:1). The future Davidic King would not be subordinated to David but would be, in typological terms, a second David (cf. Is. 9:7; 16:5; Jer. 23:5-6; 30:9; Ezek. 34:23-24; 37:24-25). The point of the image is that the royal Savior would come from humble beginnings after the disappearance of the royal house in Jerusalem (cf. Is. 39:5-7), just as it happened with Jesus of Nazareth.

"The Spirit of the LORD" (11:2) equipped leaders with divine power (e.g., Judg. 6:34; 1 Sam. 11:6), wisdom, and knowledge (Ex. 31:1-5; Is. 42:1-4; 59:21; 61:1-3; 63:10-14). Three pairs of words describe the gifts of the Spirit bestowed on the ideal messianic King (11:2): (1) wisdom and understanding refer to His judicial office (cf. vv. 3-4); (2) counsel and might refer to His role as a military leader (cf. vv. 4-5); and (3) knowledge and fear of the Lord indicate His relationship with the Lord (cf. vv. 6-9). He would delight in the fear of the Lord (v. 3), which would be necessary for making righteous judgments (v. 4). His attributes and divine values of righteousness and faithfulness are pictured as His military armor (cf. 59:17; Eph. 6:14). This description of peace among the inhabitants of Zion would impact the nations of the earth: they would come to have knowledge of the Lord (Is. 11:9). The rule of the promised messianic King would be established on "the fear of the LORD" (v. 3a) and "the knowledge of the LORD" (v. 9b). This would certainly be the ultimate result of the work of Christ.

The *third consequence* of Assyria's fall (see 10:20) would be the future recognition of the Davidic King and Savior by the nations (11:10). The peaceful reign of the coming King, with righteousness, faithfulness, and justice, would bring the nations to Him (v. 10). Verse 10 can be literally translated "A Root of Jesse who is standing as a banner of the peoples—to him will the nations turn" (see John 12:32). The "banner" or "standard" was a sign indicating a point of assembly in a military setting. The peoples' attention would be drawn to the Davidic King by His ethical attributes (v. 2), quality of government (vv. 3–5), and the peace of His reign. Finally, the earth would be full of the knowledge of the Lord (vv. 6–9). The implication is that this King, identified in the NT as Jesus Christ, would not depend on military might, executive power, or material glory.

The Gentiles would seek Him (v. 10). The act of the nations would be a religious activity. They would turn to the Davidic King (gather around Him), the Savior and Lord, to obtain His teaching and blessings (cf. 2:2–4). The "resting place" is associated in the ANE with the temples that functioned as the resting places of the gods. Similarly, the Jerusalem temple is portrayed as God's resting place in Isaiah (18:4; 66:1; cf. 28:12; 30:15; 32:18; Ps. 132:14).

The *fourth consequence* of Assyria's fall (see Is. 10:22) would be the future restoration of Israel under the messianic King (11:11–16). As the Lord had once delivered Israel from Egypt (vv. 15–16), He would now also save the remnant of His people (cf. 43:3–7, 16–21; 48:21). The countries listed in 11:11 reflect the idea of "the four sections of the earth" (v. 12; cf. 43:5; 49:12). The "banner" (11:12) has been identified as the messianic King (v. 10). The "nations" either include the remnant of the Lord's people from foreign lands or those who would be summoned to escort or bring the exiles back to Israel and Judah (cf. 49:22; 60:9; 66:18–21). The background for 11:13–14 seems to be the schism and secession of Israel from Judah, which was a severe blow to the Davidic dynasty. In 7:17 it is suggested that the split was mainly blamed on Ephraim's envy, which made them hostile to Judah. As the tribes of all Israel reunited, their archenemies would be subdued by the glory of the messianic kingdom.

The concluding passage describes the future return from exile as a new exodus from Egypt (11:15–16; cf. 42:15–17). The first part of v. 15 alludes to the Red Sea, where it is called (lit.) the "tongue" (i.e., the gulf) of the sea of Egypt, which the Lord miraculously parted so that the Israelites could cross (Ex. 14). Here it is a symbol of the power that God would display during the new exodus. The expression "seven streams" may refer to passageways through the river that God's wind, *'ayam*, variously translated as "mighty," "scorching," "powerful," or literally "glowing," would make for the returning remnant (cf. Ex. 14:22, 29).

12:1–6. Hymn of Praise. The downfall of God's enemies would move the remnant to sing a hymn of praise to God (vv. 1–6), a hymn serving as a conclusion to chapters 2–12. The reference to what they would say on "that day" is repeated in v. 4 to introduce another hymn of praise (cf. 11:10–11). The hymn opens with words that reflect the faithful attitude of the speaker. It consists of thanksgiving, prayer, confession, and affirmation of salvation (cf. Pss. 6:9; 22:19–24; 56:13). God's last word is not of anger, and consequently the petitioners would testify of God comforting them. There is no complaint against the Lord, only faith and thankfulness. Isaiah's text contains a message of comfort, telling them that they would "draw water from the wells of salvation" (Is. 12:3), that is, there would come a day when they would experience God's salvation and draw the water of life with joy from the wells of salvation. Indeed, the messianic King, Jesus, is the water of salvation (John 4:13–14).

The second hymn of praise (Is. 12:4–6) announces that "in that day" the redeemed would burst into collective praises to the Lord for His acts. The Lord's wonders for His people would be made known to the nations so that they would turn to the "Root of Jesse" (11:10) and to the word of the Lord and His law/instruction (2:2–4). The vision of the coming messianic kingdom of peace is saturated with a hope that has sustained and continues to sustain God's people in the midst of the unrest of the nations of the earth.

13:1—23:18

PREPARATION OF THE NATIONS FOR THE LORD'S KINGDOM

This block of prophecies against twelve nations (13:1—23:18) describes the future removal of those opposed to God's sovereignty and prepares the readers for the establishment of the Lord's reign as the King of the world in 24:1—27:13.

13:1—14:27

Utterance Concerning Babylon

The superscription mentions only "Babylon," but the utterance itself concerns Babylon *and* Assyria (13:19; 14:4, 22, 25) because the Assyrian emperor had dual kingship (see Isaiah: Introduction).

13:1–5. Preparation for Battle. The Hebrew *massa'* has been variously translated as "burden," "prophecy," or "oracle." It could also mean something like "utterance" (as in Prov. 30:1; 31:1; cf. Is. 14:4). Babylon is placed first in chapters 13–23 because it is the primary representative of the evil, wickedness, iniquity, arrogance, and pride of the earth, which the Lord would punish on the day of His wrath. Assyria was also "Babylon" in the sense that it relied on Babylon's enormous prestige and power, its unique and leading role in religion, and its learning and culture. The Assyrian kings were kings of both Ashur and Babel.

"Babylon" is associated in Isaiah with human arrogance and rebellion against God (13:1—14:23; 47:7–8; cf. Gen. 11:1–9) and with divination, sorcery, astrology, and idolatry (Is. 21:9; 47:9, 12–13; cf. 41:21–29). Babylon was widely thought to be the "gate of God." In the Lord's plan for world sovereignty, therefore, the removal of Babylon was of first importance. God commands the army leaders to summon their warriors using a banner, a vocal summons, and a gesture. The Lord musters the troops, formed by soldiers from far away countries, that will attack Babylon. They are the weapons of God's wrath to destroy all the land (13:5).

13:6–22. The Day of the Lord for Babylon. The fall of Babylon is described using the images and language of the Day of the Lord. What the Lord would do to Babylon would cause upheavals of cosmic dimensions, and there is accordingly an eschatological flavor to the prophecy. The people were commanded to wail for the coming of the Day of the Lord, which would bring destruction, fear, pain, and sorrow. The Lord's holy anger would destroy His enemies. It would be a cruel day of wrath, and it would create great commotion, for it would desolate the land and destroy the sinners in it (v. 9). The cosmic order would also be upset when the cosmic lights would go dark and leave the land in obscurity (v. 10). The Lord would punish the world and human evil and arrogance (v. 11).

The massive military attack would almost exterminate humans from the land. The reference to fine or pure gold illustrates precious value. Only a few human survivors would be left in the land—and they would be rarer than precious gold (v. 12). The prophet returns to the cosmic upheaval that would shake the heavens and the earth, giving to the prophecy a universal perspective that would reach beyond the experience of Babylon to the time when God would overcome all His enemies. The war against Babylon would include the extermination of men, women, children, and houses (vv. 14–16).

Finally, the prophet identifies the enemy that would destroy Babylon: the Medes. There would be no way to escape the Medes because they would reject gold as a ransom for human life (v. 17). They would mercilessly kill the young, the unborn, and children. They would reduce Babylon to the condition of Sodom and Gomorrah. The city and its land would be desolated, and never again would it be inhabited; it would become a wild land (vv. 20–22).

14:1–4. Mercy for Jacob. Right in the middle of the message against Assyria-Babylon we find a message of comfort for Jacob. God would have mercy on Jacob, choose Israel again, and settle them in their own land (v. 1). Amazingly, foreigners would join them and become attached to the "house" (or descendants) of Jacob. The name "Israel" implies a reunited Israel as in the times of David (cf. 11:11–16) that would also include the nations turning to the Lord (e.g., 2:2–4; 11:10; 49:8; 54:5; 55:5; 56:6–8). The nations would help in the Lord's mission of gathering the dispersed Israelites back to the promised land (cf. 11:10, 12; 49:22; 56:6–8; 60:1–16; 66:19–24).

But there would be a role reversal: they would make captives of those who had held them in captivity (14:1–2). And finally, Israel would be guaranteed peace and well-being, and the nations would join them in worshiping the Lord (cf. 56:6–8). Then they would all enjoy rest from their pain, sorrow, turmoil, and hard labor (14:3), which was caused by being separated from the promised land, and would worship the Lord in His dwelling place in Zion-Jerusalem.

14:4–11. Taunt Song and Babylon. This taunt song illustrates the disastrous fate of the wicked (cf. Job 15:20–35; 20:4–29; Pss. 7:14–16; 37:1–40). Specific details may be connected historically with Sargon II (14:8, 18–20), who was both king of Assyria and king of Babylon. The term *mashal*, which is sometimes translated as "proverb," refers here to a taunt song. After finding rest (vv. 1–4), Israel would look back at the past pride and death of the king of Assyria-Babylon to deride it. The dirge accuses the dead tyrant of wickedness and tauntingly pictures his punishment (vv. 5–6). The Lord has broken the staff or rod of the wicked and the scepter of the rulers (v. 5; cf. 9:4, 6). The king had ruled peoples and nations in anger (14:6). The last part of v. 6 has been understood in differing ways. Some translations imply that the description is still referring to what the king of Babylon had done in persecuting the nations, others imply that the king was now himself the object of persecution or aggression. This last suggestion is contextually more appropriate. The cypress or juniper trees and the cedars of Lebanon (v. 8) symbolize people, particularly kings and the rich. The whole land (or earth) is at rest and in peaceful quietness when the tyrant is dead (v. 7), but the trees celebrate since the woodsman is no longer coming (cf. the metaphor of trees in 10:17–19, 33–34).

The prophet sarcastically describes how the dead kings of the nations receive the tyrant in Sheol, the realm of the dead (14:9). Sheol is a poetic term used for the tomb, the realm of the dead, but here it is personified. It is astir and excited to meet the dead king, and the *repa'im* are agitated (v. 9). The term *repa'im* (perhaps meaning "the fallen ones") is used in the Bible to designate an ethnic group (Gen. 14:5), a geographical location (Josh. 15:8), and the dead in poetic texts (Is. 26:14, 19; Ps. 88:2). In v. 9, it is often translated as "the dead" or "spirits of the departed" who lack the vitality of life (v. 10). The language of the passage is highly poetical. The trees are personified and rejoice at the death of the king. The grave is also personified and rises up to meet the new dead king and to wake up the dead, the *repa'im*, to greet him. In an ironic tone they tell the king that he is now one of them, weak and covered by maggots and worms. The language is metaphorical, not literal. The poem is an excellent piece of literature in which a powerful person is mocked by a figurative description of what happens when he reaches the grave. It presupposes that the dead are in the grave in total unconsciousness. It is not describing the shadowy existence of human beings in the tomb. There is much biblical evidence that death is an unconscious, sleep-like state (e.g., 1 Kin. 2:10; Ps. 13:3; Eccl. 9:5; Acts 7:60; 1 Thess. 4:13–18).

The metaphorical description continues as the dead kings of the nations (such as Og, king of Bashan; Deut. 3:11) tauntingly address the tyrant (14:10b–15). In death, he will be as weak as all the other dead kings and his former glory will be gone. Death eliminates social distinctions, and the king is, like all of those in the tomb, covered by maggots. At long last, the enemy of God's people, represented by Assyria-Babylon, comes to his end.

14:12–17. King of Assyria-Babylon and Lucifer. The king lying on maggots is contrasted with his desire to ascend into heaven, elevate his throne above the stars of God, sit enthroned on the mount of assembly (i.e., the heavenly temple), and make himself like the Most High (vv. 13–14). His humiliation is illustrated by the contrast between his desire to reach the heights of the north (*zapon*) and his final abode in the lowest depths of the pit (vv. 13, 15). The passage uses the language of the origin of evil in heaven through a fallen cherub to describe the human aspirations of the king (embodying the intentions and feelings of the fallen cherub). This angel or cherub became proud and sought to put himself in God's place but was cast down (cf. Ezek. 28:12–19). The book of Revelation expands this theme of the cosmic conflict (Rev. 12:7–9) and identifies the fallen cherub as Satan, the enemy of God and the cause of all evil on earth (17:1—18:24; 19:11—20:10; see Job: Introduction and "Evil and the Fallen Cherub," p. 1008).

The Hebrew name of the tyrant is *helel ben shakhar*, which literally means "shining one, son of the dawn," referring to the morning star, the planet Venus. The name "Lucifer" does not occur in the Hebrew text. It was introduced by the church father Jerome in his translation of the Bible into Latin (i.e., the Vg.) as a name for the morning star, literally meaning "light bearer." The naming of the tyrant as "the shining one, son of the dawn" mocks his desire to elevate his throne above the "stars of God" (Is. 14:13). It names him after the star known for rising up in the early morning sky, but this is followed by the star's sudden descent without completing its orbit. The OT refers to "morning stars" as "sons of God" or angels (Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7). They belong to the heavenly council (Job 1:6; 2:1; Ps. 82:1), and Satan was prominent among them. Isaiah described the pride of the king of Babylon and his disastrous end in terms of what other biblical passages relate regarding the fall of the cherub who became Satan (see commentary on Ezek. 28:11–19). Isaiah 14:16–17 pictures living beings gazing in unbelieving amazement on the tyrant at his death (in the pit of Sheol), bringing to mind the final destruction of Satan (Rev. 20:10).

14:18–27. Final Fate of the King. The emperor's fate is, however, worse than that of other kings. Each of them rests in glory in his own tomb, literally "house" (v. 18), but the oppressor is thrown out of (Heb. *min*) his grave—the preposition *min* indicates that "he was thrown out without his own grave" (i.e., there was no tomb for him). To be unburied was the ultimate

fate of the wicked. The tyrant's corpse would not even be buried with the dead warriors because he had destroyed his land and killed his people (i.e., he had betrayed the principles of God's government; v. 20).

The traditional fate of the wicked was that their descendants would never be named (v. 20d; cf. Job 18:16–19; Ps. 37:28, 35–36, 38; Prov. 10:7). The tyrant's children would perish, and no member of his dynasty would rise to inherit the land and populate the world with cities. The mocking dirge for the dead king of Assyria-Babylon is followed by the fall of Babylon (Is. 14:22–23) and Assyria (vv. 24–27). The Lord would eliminate their survivors, their name, and their descendants (v. 22). The city would become desolate and given to porcupines and marshes (cf. 13:17–22).

Isaiah 14:24–27 is a summary-appraisal of 13:1—14:23 that is formed by two parts: the Lord's oath concerning Assyria (14:24–25) and its application to all nations (vv. 26–27). The oath literally says, "I will break *'ashur*" (v. 25), which includes the god, city, and nation. God's land and His mountains refer to the promised land (cf. 49:11; 65:9). God would trample Assyria, thereby humiliating them and demonstrating His sovereignty. His ultimate purpose is the removal of Israel's yoke/burden (14:25). God intended the removal of Assyria's yoke to benefit the whole earth and all the nations (v. 26). The Lord delivers His people from the enemy, and this ultimately means the destruction of the enemy.

14:28—16:14

Messages against Philistia and Moab

This section is composed of two messages unveiling the destruction of Philistia (14:28–32) and Moab (15:1—16:14) and the reason for it.

14:28–32. Utterance concerning Philistia. The Philistines were the traditional enemies of Israel in Canaan. In this brief utterance, Isaiah warned Philistia and gave an assurance of salvation to the remnant of Judah. This particular message is dated to the year when Ahaz died, around 715 B.C. The Lord advised Philistia not to rejoice because of the downfall of Assyria—the rod that struck them. In the arena of international politics, another oppressor, a fiery (or poisonous) flying/darting serpent would follow the first (v. 29). He would besiege Philistia's cities with famine and leave no surviving remnant (v. 30). Therefore, Philistia was summoned to wail because smoke would come from the north, and all Philistia would melt (v. 31). The end of v. 31 has been translated variously. The literal Hebrew is essentially "no one is separated from his appointed place," and this probably refers to the army approaching in closed, organized ranks with no one missing. Meanwhile, the royal court in Jerusalem must provide an answer for the messengers (ambassadors) from a nation seeking alliance with Judah because the Lord had founded Zion and His people, and *'ani*, "poor" or "afflicted," would find refuge there (v. 32; cf. v. 30).

15:1—16:14. Utterance Concerning Moab. This lamentation over the destruction of Moab concerns one of Israel's archenemies across the Jordan River. On the term *massa'*, "burden," "oracle," or "prophecy," see 13:1. The cause for the lament was a devastating foreign invasion. The description of the events moves from the north (15:2–4) to the south (vv. 5–7) to include all of Moab by mentioning its borders and including Eglaim and Beer Elim to the south and north of the River Arnon (vv. 8–9). The section concerning the north mentions the armed soldiers of Moab (v. 4), while the section on the southern locations mentions Moab's refugees (vv. 5, 7). The main Assyrian attack in 733 B.C. was north of Arnon, which agrees with vv. 4–7. The practices mentioned in vv. 2–3 were customary signs of mourning. Verse 6 pictures a famine brought on by drought and pictures mourning after an enemy invasion.

Isaiah advised Moab's "ruler of the land" (16:1) to send a peace offering to the mount of Daughter Zion (or Daughter of Zion). The reason was the fleeing of the daughters (perhaps a reference to the cities) of Moab across the Arnon, like birds scattered from their nests, apparently looking for refuge in Zion. Translations and commentators differ in regard to who is being addressed in vv. 3–5. Some suggest that Isaiah was advising the Moabites to be a shelter for God's outcasts (i.e., the people from Israel), while others suggest that either God or Moab's messengers were telling Israel to accept the refugees from Moab. Another issue is the unique word *pelilah*. Though usually translated as "judgment," "decision," or something similar, it is thought by some to be derived from *tepillah*, "prayer," and thus this would convey the idea of making a petition. If this is the case, and the text is referring to Moab's words to Israel, the meaning would be that Moab was to petition Zion to hide its refugees, allow them to live in Zion, and shelter them from the destroyer (or devastator). This advice was motivated by God breaking Assyria's power in the world (v. 4; cf. 10:5–34; 14:24–27) and would lead to the Messiah's kingdom when He would sit on the throne in the tabernacle of David (16:5). Once more the prophet has taken us from the local situation to the eschatological consummation in the messianic kingdom. Nations, as seekers of refuge in Judah and her God, would receive blessings.

The prophet acknowledges the news of Moab's downfall (vv. 6–8). Moab's pride, self-exaltation, and insolence were proverbial in Judah (cf. Jer. 48:29–30). The final clause of Isaiah 16:6 literally means "[we have heard of] the errors of his boastings." Proud Moab was to wail for itself (vv. 6–7), for it was like a vine with branches that stretched out and went over the sea (v. 8). This might be a reference to the export trade in wine or to the opulence of Moab's vineyards (cf. Jer. 48:31–33).

In 16:9–12 the prophet wails because the shouts of joy over Moab's summer fruit and harvests have ceased (some render *hedad* as "battle cries" rather than "shouting" or "shouting for joy"). Gladness and joy are removed from the plentiful field or orchard: the singing and shouting in the vineyards at the time of the harvest and the treading of grapes in winepresses have ceased. Praying at the sanctuary will not help. Then a new word of the Lord is added (vv. 13–14). In three years—not one moment more (time counted as in the situation of a slave who wants to leave once the debt is paid)—an enemy attack or famine would heavily reduce Moab's population.

17:1—18:7
Syria and Israel

The title includes only Damascus, and the passage provides a warning example of how the Lord punishes a proud and disobedient nation. Damascus was allied with the kingdom of Israel in the Syro-Ephraimite war (734–732 B.C.) and was ruined by Assyria.

17:1–14. Desolated Cities. Israel lost the city of Aroer to the Syrians and then to the Moabites, and it was finally destroyed by the Assyrians. This loss was a sign of the consequences of Israel's disobedience, which is the theme in vv. 4–6. Verse 2 has a common image of flocks of sheep grazing or resting in a ruined city to symbolize abandoned cities. The reference to the remnant of Syria (Aram) being like the glory of Israel means that they would perish in the same way that the political glory of Israel perished because of their sin. According to vv. 4–6, the glory of Israel would decrease and weaken as a result of punishment. The mention of gleaning refers to the very poor remnant of the people who would survive the punishment (v. 6).

Isaiah says that a time would come, after the punishment, when humanity would recognize the Holy One of Israel (v. 7). Consequently, they would reject their idols and altars because they were the work of their hands (v. 8; cf. 2:8, 20; 5:12). But at that present time there was judgment because Israel had abandoned God, their Savior and Stronghold (17:10). The planting (end of v. 10) of foreign seedlings or imported vines may refer to fertility cults (cf. 1:29–30; 65:3). Such rebellion would make the harvest—not blessed by the Lord—into a heap of ruins on the day of grief. The woe to the multitude of many nations or peoples marks the beginning of their rebuke (v. 12). The peoples are first compared to the roar of the seas and the rushing of mighty waters. They would flee away like the chaff that is chased away by the wind during the harvest grain threshing (v. 13).

18:1–7. Distant Nations. The prophet announced that distant nations would recognize the Lord of Hosts on Mount Zion (v. 7), while Israel would reject the Lord and seek alliances with Egypt (17:1–11; 18:1–2). Israel would, therefore, be "trimmed" by the Lord (vv. 4-6). Ethiopia, or Cush (territory of modern Sudan), maintained diplomatic relations with the Near East by sea, or perhaps the Nile (v. 2). Israel and Judah occasionally considered the option of striking deals with Egypt when Cushite dynasties ruled. The speech in v. 2 seems to have been made by a king of Judah or Israel who sought to establish diplomatic relations with the nation south of Egypt. But at some point in the future, the nations of the earth would recognize the Lord. All the people in the world would see and hear the Lord's rallying signs (v. 3). As Lord of the world, He would review all nations from His heavenly temple (v. 4). Before the harvest the Lord would "trim" the buds and grapes and cut off the shoots and take away the branches (v. 5). Like the wasted parts of the vines, Israel would be cut off because of its apostasy (vv. 7–8). It would become like Damascus (17:1–3), which is what happened to Israel in 722 B.C. However, in contrast to Israel, the nation of Cush would represent all the nations from afar who would turn to the Lord (18:7).

19:1—20:6
Egypt

The message poetically describes the Lord's manifestation in the land of Egypt and its damaging effects on the nation. He would stir up civil conflicts (19:2) and destroy Egypt's spiritual guidance that was obtained through idols, charmers, mediums, and sorcerers (v. 3). He would hand them over to Assyria (v. 4). Pharaoh's counselors would not know what the Lord had devised against Egypt (v. 12). Therefore, they would give foolish counsel and make their princes into fools. Human wisdom does not save, and it would not save Egypt. The judgment of God would have five consequences (vv. 16–25). First, Egypt would fear what the Lord had determined against it, and it would also fear Judah (vv. 16–17). Second, five cities in Egypt would speak the language of Canaan (probably because they would be inhabited by Israelites who speak Hebrew), swear by (or pledge allegiance to) the Lord of Hosts, and honor Him as the true God (v. 18). Third, there would be an altar to the Lord in the land of Egypt and a pillar or monument to Him at its border as a sign and witness to the Lord. These would remind the Egyptians of the Lord's punishment, their suffering under oppressors, and the Lord's healing. The punishment would cause Egypt to turn to the Lord; they would pray to Him, and He would heal them. His healing consists in sending them a mighty Savior to deliver them (vv. 19–22). Fourth, a highway would unite Egypt and Assyria, and Egypt would serve or worship with Assyria (v. 23). Fifth, the Lord would bless the three nations: Egypt would be called God's people, Assyria the work of His hands, and Israel His inheritance. They would all belong to the Lord when He would rule the world (vv. 24–25). In this and other oracles, the prophet offered the nations an eschatological hope that could only be realized by the coming Messiah. The consequences listed in vv. 18–25 suggest that the Lord's plan not only exposed the weaknesses of Egypt but also included healing and salvation for the nations.

Isaiah 20:1–6 is a brief narrative dealing with events that occurred in 713–711 B.C., when the Assyrians conquered the Philistine city of Ashdod (for Tartan, or Sargon, see 2 Kin. 18:17). The Lord's command to Isaiah (Is. 20:2) and His explanation (vv. 3–6) tell of a symbolic action that would be a sign and a witness to Egypt and their neighbors to the south (cf. 18:1b–2, 7; 19:1b–25). Isaiah had walked naked and barefoot (i.e., the condition of those taken into exile, which probably conveys the idea of being without adequate clothing [Is. 58:7]) for three years. This act symbolized the coming captivity of the Egyptians and those to the south who had been subdued by Assyria (19:3–4).

21:1–17
The Wilderness, Dumah, and Arabia

The three utterances on Babylon, Dumah, and Arabia belong together. When Babylon rebelled against Assyria, it often had Arabian allies.

21:1–10. The Wilderness of the Sea. This expression designates the tribal borderland ruled by Merodach/Marduk-Baladan, king of Babylon (cf. 39:1–2). In a disturbing vision, Isaiah saw an enemy from a terrifying land approaching like a whirlwind through the desert. He heard of treachery and destruction. The poetic Hebrew construction used here is also found in similar forms in 24:16 and 33:1. The Lord would make Babylon's lamentation cease by the coming event revealed in the vision. There would be no hope for the attackers' victims (21:3–4).

There is a sarcastic command urging Elam and Media to defend their ally Babylon by attacking the approaching Assyrian army (v. 2). Merodach/Marduk-Baladan's primary allies in the defense of Babylon were Elamite Susa and Anshan. Isaiah's reference to Elam and Media likely meant Elam and allies from the Zagros mountains, including Anshan. The vision predicted Babylon's fall (vv. 6–9). The prophet heard a command to the military officers to prepare for battle (v. 5)—an oiled shield would resist arrows better and would therefore be used on the walls of a fortified city.

A watchman, carefully watching and listening (v. 8), saw a charioteer shouting that Babylon had fallen and the images of her gods lay destroyed on the ground (v. 9; cf. Rev. 14:8; 18:2). This news is the focal point of Isaiah 21:1–10, indicating the loss of the power of Babylon and her gods. The passage ends with an address to those being threshed like grain, that is, the people in Judah who had put their hope in an alliance with Babylon but who would suffer the wrath not only of Assyria but later of the Medo-Persians (v. 10).

21:11–12. Utterance Concerning Dumah. This passage records a watchman's report that there was no news from Dumah, implying that it had fallen and that there were no survivors. If Dumah was an ally of fallen Babylon, the passage may be taken as a warning against foreign alliances. Dumah refers to the fortified religious center of Adummatu (i.e., Dumat al-Jandal in the Wadi Sirhan), which controlled the major Arab trade routes between Syria and Babylonia. The reference to "Seir" (v. 11b) indicates the eastern direction from which one would inquire concerning news about Dumah. In the passage, Isaiah is both the implied speaker of the text and the watchman ("He calls to *me* out of Seir"). The repeated question for news from Seir was put to him (v. 11). The answer was that the morning would come and also the night (v. 12), but no news had come. The person asking the question is told to inquire again later and to return.

21:13–17. Utterance Concerning Arabia. The intention of Isaiah's message is, as in vv. 1–10 and 11–12, to warn against reliance on foreign allies and to confirm that the Lord is in command of events. The Dedanites and Temanites are asked to assist the refugees in Arabia, who were fleeing to them from battle, by giving water to the thirsty and offering food to the hungry (vv. 14–15). The Lord had spoken to Isaiah concerning the decimation of Kedar's people and its destruction within a year. Kedar was the second son of Ishmael (Gen. 25:13; 1 Chr. 1:29) and the eponym of an important Arab tribe.

22:1–25

Utterance Concerning the Valley of Vision

"The Valley of Vision" is a unique name. It may signify the Kidron Valley to the east of Jerusalem, which could be seen both from the city walls and from the slopes of the Mount of Olives, where the Assyrian army had taken its stand in the siege of 701 B.C. Shebna's magnificent tomb was located on the eastern side of the Kidron Valley where high officials were buried during the reigns of the Davidic kings (vv. 15–16). During the Assyrian siege, Shebna's tomb—a symbol of his pride—was in Assyrian hands. The Kidron Valley therefore visually represented the fate of Jerusalem's disobedient people (i.e., the yoke of Assyria).

22:1–14. Message Against Jerusalem. There was noise in the city, but not of rejoicing. Warriors had died, not in battle but while trying to escape. Sennacherib's records confirm that many of Hezekiah's troops deserted him. The city was under siege, the people were weeping, and there was no reason for comfort. What they were facing was chaos and destruction, the safety of the city determined by the people's faithfulness to the Lord and not by the inviolability of Zion as the dwelling of God. There would be trampling and terror and people crying to the mountains (v. 5). There has been some discussion over the translation of the latter part of the verse, but most have rendered the text as "breaking down of walls." The approach of the Assyrian army is illustrated by the troops provided by Elam and Kir (vv. 6–7). After his defeat of Merodach/Marduk-Baladan and his Elamite allies, Sennacherib reported taking thousands of Elamite captives and a great deal of military equipment, such as chariots and horses.

The Assyrian army would spread out across the valleys of Judah. Before besieging Jerusalem, Sennacherib conquered forty-six cities and countless villages in Judah and deported around 200,000 people. Isaiah states that the Lord eliminated Judah's defenses (lit. "uncovered the covering of Judah"; v. 8). When Jerusalem got the news of Judah's destruction, the people looked to the armor and weapons of the Forest Palace (v. 8; lit. "House of the Forest") and to Hezekiah's efforts to fortify Jerusalem and secure the water supply, but they disregarded the Lord. This palace was one of the buildings erected by Solomon near the temple (1 Kin. 7:2; 10:17) and may have been used as an armory. Here it refers to the house of David. Hezekiah's fortifications caused great damage to the city of David, and he broke down houses to fortify the wall (Is. 22:9–10). The mention of the lower pool seems to refer to the tunnel Hezekiah made under the city to gather water from the spring of Gihon in the Pool of Siloam (2 Chr. 32:2–4).

When Judah was destroyed and Jerusalem besieged, the Lord called for mourning, baldness, and sackcloth (Is. 22:12). However, the people failed to understand the significance of the Assyrian siege. God wanted them to repent and return to Him (v. 4). Instead they celebrated and said, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!" (v. 13; cf. 1 Cor. 15:32). There would be no atonement for such iniquity (Is. 22:14). Atonement can be given only when humans repent of their sins and humble themselves.

22:15–19. Servant Shebna. Before the Assyrian siege, Shebna was the king's master of the house. The Lord's message about him was derogatory, in contrast with His acknowledgement of Eliakim as His servant (v. 20). Isaiah's description of the status and function of the master of the house (vv. 20–24) reflects the Lord's designation of Eliakim and summarizes his investiture. Isaiah's question to Shebna implies that they had met at the tomb before the Assyrian siege. In the accusation, Shebna's tomb represents pride linked to a high office. He was self-sufficient and concerned with preserving the future honor of his name and the security and honor of his descendants (v. 25), thereby ignoring Isaiah's warnings that the Lord would punish pride (cf. 2:11–16; 3:1–3, 16–18). He had sought security by making a place for his burial in a rock (22:16) rather than seeking refuge in the Lord.

The predicted punishment of Shebna was that the Lord would hurl him away violently by seizing him, wrapping him firmly, and throwing him like a ball (vv. 17–19; lit. "winding He will wind you up [with] a winding like a ball"). Shebna would end up dying in obscurity in a large, foreign country. Thus, he would not be buried in his magnificent tomb in Jerusalem. His magnificent chariots—the sign of his high position and honor—would become the shame of his master's house. Shebna may have been deported to Nineveh as a captive, either as Sennacherib's prisoner or as part of Hezekiah's generous tribute (see 2 Kin. 18:13–16).

22:20–25. Servant Eliakim. This remarkable passage focuses on Eliakim the son of Hilkiah. His office was related to the following: (1) God who appointed him (vv. 20–21); (2) the people of Jerusalem and Judah to whom he would be a father (v. 21; "father" is an honorific title or term of respect; e.g., 2 Kin. 2:12; 6:21; 13:14); (3) the household of the king (he would receive the key of the house of David, symbolizing his administrative authority to make decisions; v. 22); (4) his own posterity (Eliakim's position would be secure, that is, he would have an enduring name; vv. 23–24). The simile of the peg involves one fixed in the wall with vessels hanging on it (v. 24; cf. Ezek. 15:3). The fact that it could be unfastened forewarned that Eliakim's security, like that of every other human, depended on his faithfulness to the Lord. Eliakim would also be honored by his descendants, for he would elevate them to a position of glorious distinction. Isaiah 22:25 is difficult: some have taken it to refer to Shebna as being a different "peg" from Eliakim—Shebna and all who depended on him for support would fall. Since v. 25 continues the metaphor as well as the description of the glorious descendants of the previous verses, others have viewed it as referring to Eliakim. The phrase "in that day," used in v. 20 to designate the exaltation of Eliakim, is now used to designate the moment of his or Shebna's fall.

23:1–18

Utterance Concerning Tyre

This lamentation over Tyre and Phoenicia relates to Sennacherib's capture of Tyre's mainland settlement in 701 B.C. Tyre was a neighboring trading partner with Judah situated in the southern part of Phoenicia on a small island.

The passage presents six appeals by the prophet for a communal lamentation over Tyre and Phoenicia (vv. 1–14). The first call addressed the ships of Tarshish. The luxurious cargos of these large ships made them symbols of wealth and luxury (cf. 2:16; 1 Kin. 10:22; Jer. 10:9). The motivation for the lament was the destruction of the home harbor. The second call addressed the coastal inhabitants and the merchants of Sidon (Is. 23:2–3). The reason was the loss of Sidon's commerce, which was the marketplace of the nations. The third call addressed Sidon. The reason was that the sea no longer provided sustenance (vv. 4–5). The report on the condition of Tyre would cause agony in Egypt, an important trading partner. The fourth call addressed the coastal inhabitants, who were told to cross over to Tarshish, a distant but unidentified port (vv. 6–9). Amazement is expressed at the downfall of the joyous, ancient, and far-reaching Tyre. The Lord had determined to humble the proud and honorable (cf. 2:11–17).

The fifth call addressed the daughter (of) Tarshish, the distant Phoenician colony (cf. vv. 1, 6). Verse 10 has been translated and interpreted in various ways: some read the verb *'abar*, "to pass over," as meaning "to till" or "cultivate." The LXX has "cultivate your land; for ships will no more come out of Carthage"—that is, their supply source would be removed. Others understand *'abar* to mean that the people of Tarshish should go through their land and look for another harbor since Tyre would no longer be available. Still others read *'abar* as "leave," "abandon" (see 29:5; 31:9; 40:27; Job 6:15; 30:15). It seems better to understand it to mean that at that time Tarshish would be as free as the river (the Nile). There was no longer any restraint (lit. "belt," *mezakh*) upon Tarshish (v. 10). *Mezakh*, "belt," is sometimes rendered as "strength" (an image of restraint; cf. Ps. 109:19)—the motherland had fallen, and the colony was now free to leave Phoenicia. Some render the term here as referring to the "harbor" of Tarshish. The downfall of Tyre was part of the Lord's plan (Is. 23:11). He had granted Assyria sovereignty over many kingdoms, commanding the Assyrians to destroy the fortresses of Canaan, including Phoenicia. The

Lord's command to Sidon to cross over to Cyprus (v. 12) happened when King Luli of Sidon escaped from the Assyrian army. Phoenicia's downfall paralleled that of Babylon/Chaldea (v. 13)—both were part of the anti-Assyrian rebellion with Judah and Philistia. The sixth call to wail addressed the ships of Tarshish (v. 14; cf. v. 1b) because they could not any longer rely on Tyre's *ma'oz*, "place of refuge" or "fortress," sometimes rendered as "strength" (i.e., military and financial power).

Tyre would be forgotten for seventy years (vv. 15–18)—corresponding to a normal lifespan (v. 15). The mortal wound of Tyre would be healed, and it would behave like a harlot. Since Tyre's chief deity was the fertility goddess Astarte, which was related to temple prostitution, the city's trade is metaphorically described as a return to her hire as she prostituted herself with all the kingdoms of the world (v. 17; cf. Rev. 17:2). At the end, however, her financial success would benefit Judah—it would be set apart for the Lord and would provide His people with food and clothes (Is. 23:18). The implication appears to be that Tyre would join God's people and would thus be blessed.

24:1—27:13

THE LORD'S NEW WORLD ORDER: THE NATIONS AND ISRAEL

The message of the Lord's sovereignty over the nations (13:1—23:18) culminates with a prediction of His new world order and His blessing on Israel and the nations.

24:1–23

Law and Rule of God over the World

Having established His world sovereignty (vv. 1–22), God proclaimed that He would reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem (v. 23). In the process, He would devastate the earth and scatter all its inhabitants (vv. 1–2) because the earth was defiled by crimes against the laws of the Holy One (v. 5). The punishment would remove the contaminants, and the earth was to be entirely emptied or laid waste (v. 3). The "everlasting covenant"—expressed in the laws and the ordinances or statutes (v. 5)—refers to the agreement between the Creator and humans (cf. Gen. 9:16–17), and its violation disrupts the divine world order. The coming judgment would end rejoicing in the city of *tohu*, "formlessness" or "emptiness," sometimes translated here in Isaiah 24:10 as "ruined" (*tohu* is the same word used for the primordial state of earth before it was filled with life; Gen. 1:2). The unidentified, nameless city would be broken down, and all its houses closed (Is. 24:7–13).

At the announcement of the fall of the evil city, people from different parts of the world would erupt in praises to God, acclaiming Him to be righteous (vv. 14–16). But the prophet spoke, knowing that the end had not yet arrived, and he exclaimed that he was ruined and wasting away. He knew that evil was coming upon the earth because of the violation of the Creator's world order (vv. 17–18). His word heralded an eschatological judgment of cosmic proportions (vv. 18–20). At that time the Lord would punish the powerful ones in heaven and the kings of the earth (v. 21) because He is Ruler of all—the moon and the sun were deities worshiped by the nations (vv. 22–23b). The significance of vv. 1–23 is captured by the conclusion that the Lord of Hosts would gloriously reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem (v. 23; cf. 2:2–4; 60:1—62:12).

25:1–12

The Lord's Blessing

The restoration of the Lord's world order through judgment (24:1–23) would result in universal blessings (25:1–12), which would include the restoration of Israel (26:1—27:13). The collapse of the universal, evil city would be followed by the praises of the people and the blessing of the Lord. This communal song of praise is grounded, first, in the fact that the Lord had done "wonderful things," proving that He had been faithful and sure in His purposes from long ago (v. 1). Second, the song notes the Lord's ruin of a mighty city that symbolized resistance to God's sovereignty (note its various names in 24:10; 25:2–3; 26:5). Third, the song recognizes the Lord, a good king, as the protector of the poor and the needy (i.e., Jerusalem; 25:4–5).

The Lord would respond to the nations' acknowledgment (v. 3) by making a feast on Mount Zion for all the peoples (v. 6). He would destroy or remove the covering or veil over the nations (v. 7). This symbolizes the Lord's revelation of Himself to the peoples. Among the Lord's blessings for the peoples of the earth is the extraordinary announcement that He would "swallow up death forever" and wipe away tears from all faces (25:8a; cf. 26:19; 1 Cor. 15:54–55; Rev. 21:4). As reigning Lord, He would remove the

curse of death that resulted from the rebellion in the Garden of Eden. This hope is central to the Christian faith.

Another blessing is directed particularly to Israel: He would remove the disgrace of His people from all the earth (25:8). Israel's response would express (1) loyalty: they had waited for God and trusted in Him (v. 9; cf. 8:17; 12:1–6); (2) confession: "this is our God" and "this is the Lord"; and (3) acknowledgment: as Savior and as the source of joy (25:9). What a wonderful description of the Second Coming of Christ!

The prophet asserted that the hand of the Lord would rest on "this mountain" (i.e., He would protect Zion from harm; v. 10; cf. 4:6; 31:5–7; 33:20–24; 51:16). The prediction of the demise of Moab was a contrast and a warning. Here Moab represents nations that were invited to seek refuge in Zion but did not accept (16:1–4). Their notorious pride would be turned into utter humiliation (cf. 2:6–21; 16:6).

26:1–21

Song of Thanksgiving

In this song of thanksgiving, as Judah asks the Lord to deliver them from their enemies, the singers express joy in their strong city (v. 1), made secure by the power of the Lord. This is the righteous city. Their praises mingle with admonitions to trust in the Lord forever (v. 4) and praise Him for having defeated and humiliated the lofty city and those dwelling on high (vv. 5–6). Jerusalem's gatekeepers were commanded to open the gates to let the righteous nation (i.e., the redeemed Israel) that is true and faithful enter (v. 2). A faithful one is the person who is constant and trusts in the Lord. The Lord keeps the faithful in "perfect peace" (v. 3). They had waited for the Lord by keeping His principles and had confessed that their deep desire was for the Lord (vv. 8–9). The believer knows that when the Lord's judgments are upon the earth, the world will learn righteousness, but the wicked do not learn righteousness or see the majesty of the Lord (v. 10).

Pointing to the unwillingness of the wicked to see and learn (v. 10), the petitioners ask that they be ashamed and destroyed by fire of the Lord (v. 11). The Lord is asked to establish peace for the people because everything they had accomplished was actually done for them by the Lord and His power (v. 12). This preliminary request is extended through reflections on the past (vv. 13–15). The Lord had acted against lords or masters who, alongside Him, governed the people (v. 13). Because of their removal, the Lord increased the nation and expanded all the borders of the land. By these actions, He was glorified (v. 15). The petition ends with the Lord's comforting answer announcing the resurrection of the dead (v. 19). This verse literally translates as "They shall live, your dead, my corpse; they shall arise." Since it is the Lord who is speaking, "my corpse" refers to the corpses of those who trusted in Him (the singular is collective). The Lord's dew gives life like the dew of the morning gives to herbs, and therefore the earth would *repa'im tapil*, literally "cause the fallen ones to fall"; the verb *napal* ("to fall") expresses here the idea of "to cause to cast out" (on the word *repa'im*, see commentary on 14:4–11)—a poetic way of stating (as most translations indicate) that the dead would rise (cf. 25:8).

Meanwhile, the people are admonished to enter their quarters, shut their doors, and wait for the Lord to bring about what He had promised (26:20–21; cf. 10:25). They are to wait patiently for ultimate deliverance during the Lord's punishment of the earth (cf. 24:1–23). The promised resurrection would bring justice: as the faithful would be raised from the dead, the bloodguilt of past atrocities and murders would be disclosed.

27:1–13

Restoration of Israel

The destruction of the city will happen on the same day that the Lord destroys all the spiritual powers that have opposed Him, powers used by the fallen cherub (14:12–15) and represented by the figure of the Leviathan (27:1; see "Leviathan," p. 654). By destroying Leviathan, the Lord will restore order and justice in the world. This victory is followed by a song about the restoration of Israel. The new vineyard allegory (27:2–6) is interpreted in vv. 7–13 (cf. 5:1–7). On that eschatological day, God will announce that His anger has passed and will offer Israel peace (27:4–5). If they accept, His people will take root, blossom, bud, and fill the surface of the earth with fruit (v. 6). The vineyard song is explained in an exhortation to the Lord's dejected people. They are asked whether they are not better off than their completely destroyed oppressors (v. 7). The meaning of v. 8 is not clear. The first word appears to be a repetition of the unit of measure, *se'ah*. So, it is taken by some to mean that God's judgment of Israel was "measured"—it was not overwhelming. Others read the first part of the verse as referring to warfare and exile. Still others see a continuation of the tree metaphor in the verb *shalakh*, "to send away," and thus translate it as "shooting forth." The basic sense is that God disciplined His people in the Exile but not to the extent of completely destroying them; Israel will spring back to life again.

The effect of scattered Israel's suffering is stated in v. 9: Jacob's sins would be atoned for—the experience of the Exile has a redemptive goal, but repentance, manifested in the rejection of idolatry, is required from the people. There would be fruit from this taking away of sin: the purification of the land through the destruction of idol worship. Ultimately, the suffering of scattered Israel would not atone for their sins and purify the land and the nations, but the Suffering Servant of the Lord would (cf. 52:13—53:12).

Because He is a God of justice and righteousness, the Lord carried away those Israelites who did not know Him (27:10–11). However, in the day of salvation, the Lord would thresh (i.e., separate the wheat from the chaff) and gather scattered Israel from the flowing channel of the river (i.e., Assyria) to the brook/wadi of Egypt (v. 12). The great trumpet would be blown as a signal to those who were about to perish in Assyria and those who were exiles in Egypt to come and worship the Lord on the holy mountain in Jerusalem (v. 13).

28:1—33:24

THE LORD'S PLAN FOR JERUSALEM

Isaiah has been showing Israel that the nations are unreliable and will come to an end under the power of God. The prophet continues to encourage God's people to trust in Him as their only dependable refuge. This section concludes the first part of the book that began in chapter 2. We find here five passages concerning the Lord's plan for Jerusalem, culminating in the vision of the Lord as King (33:17–24).

28:1–29

The Lord's Purpose for Sending Assyria

In this passage, Isaiah admonishes the leaders of Jerusalem to seek to comprehend God's plan. Otherwise, they would fall like the leaders of Ephraim.

28:1–13. Learning from Ephraim. The Ephraimite leaders are described as having had a prideful wreath or crown and as having been drunkards—note the contrast with the Lord as a glorious crown and a beautiful diadem in v. 5. Isaiah says their prestige as leaders of the fertile land is like a fading flower (v. 1). Their intoxication was a sign of their lack of the knowledge of justice (cf. 5:11–13, 20–23). The Lord had sent Assyria to punish Ephraim's leaders, and they would be trampled underfoot (v. 3). But to the remnant of His people, the Lord would bring glory and beauty. He would be a spirit of justice to the judges and strength to those defending the city (vv. 5–6).

The transgressions of Ephraim's leaders should have been a lesson to Jerusalem (vv. 7–13). Their spiritual leaders were corrupt; the priest and the prophet erred in vision and stumbled in their judgments. The image of drinking bouts and orgies at a banquet may be associated with the original Canaanite practices of contractual celebrations that often led to orgiastic excesses. Isaiah's description in vv. 7–8 is not an exaggeration. The refusal of Ephraim's leaders to hear and understand the word of the Lord is illustrated by a didactic comparison: (1) they are like ignorant babies (v. 9), and (2) they lack knowledge and understanding (v. 10). Isaiah quotes a peculiar sequence of single-syllable words that may have been a school exercise for learning to read and write. The first two parts of the sequence may be divided up to say "[the letter] *tsade* [and the letter] *waw* [unite] into *tsaw* [meaning 'rule']" and "[the letter] *qop* [and the letter] *waw* [unite] into *qaw* [meaning 'line']" (i.e., a reading exercise). The last part, in Hebrew *ze'er sham*, may then refer to the small space that separates each word "here and there." The point is that the leaders were children learning elementary things. (3) They also rejected the comforting word of the Lord (v. 12). He therefore spoke to them with *la'eg*, "mocking," "foreign," or "stammering" lips and a foreign (lit. "another") tongue (v. 11) By rejecting God's invitation to find rest and refreshment in Him (v. 12), the Ephraimite leaders brought judgment upon themselves (v. 13).

28:14–29. Warning to Judah's Rulers. This passage is a warning to the rulers of Judah. The Hebrew term for mockers (v. 14) and the concluding admonition not to be mockers (v. 22) contain the same Hebrew root, meaning "to scorn." The Assyrian punishment was caused by Jerusalem's covenant with death or the agreement with Sheol—the grave. Some suggest that this refers to some kind of anti-Assyrian alliance; others, that it refers more generally to the complacent, proud, and deceptive (as the rest of the verse mentions) attitude of the rulers. They evidently conceived of themselves as impervious to the threat of death and had come to believe that the deceptions which they had inculcated would protect them. They proudly assumed that they could not even be reached by God's providence and punishment. The lies and falsehoods that served as the leaders' refuge were the mistaken beliefs that the Lord's punishment could be avoided by political alliances and fortifications.

Instead, the Lord said that He laid a cornerstone for a sure foundation in Zion. The Lord—not the establishment in Jerusalem—would set the measuring line for true security in justice and righteousness (vv. 16–17, 21). The metaphor of God as a Rock or Stone occurs frequently in the OT, especially in the context of salvation (e.g., Gen. 49:24; Deut. 32:4, 15, 18; Pss. 18:2, 31, 46; 28:1; 31:2–3; 62; 95:1; Is. 17:10; 51:1). The NT writers found references to Christ as the Rock in these verses. He was the Rock of Israel (1 Cor. 10:1–4), the rejected (Ps. 118:22; cf. Is. 53) and tried Stone upon which God would build the foundation of His church (Eph. 2:20; 1 Pet. 2:1–6). Placing one's faith and trust in God as the Rock became an important indication that faith, not meritorious works, is the instrument by which God's salvation can be grasped (Rom. 9:30–33). Pride is the opposite of the humble trust admonished here. Thus, the proud deceptions of the leaders would not avail because the covenant with death would be swept away (Is. 28:17c–19). The people were warned not to mock God's prophecy, or else their fetters would be made stronger (v. 22). Wise persons see the whole picture, as illustrated by the farmer who gets his food by working in various stages for various complementary needs according to correct principles taught by God (v. 26). Although the farmer's work is initially destructive, it does not result in the destruction of the crop but in its survival. Israel was chastised to prepare it for the time when the Lord would restore righteous leaders to the land (vv. 5–6). The temporary judgment would be followed by comfort and salvation. The Lord is wonderful in His plan and magnificent in His wisdom (v. 29; cf. 9:6).

29:1–24

The Lord's Purpose for Ariel/Zion

The Lord would cause the threat of Assyria against Ariel (vv. 2–8), but its dissolution would have a positive outcome for Israel (vv. 22–24).

29:1–10. Message for Ariel. This threat was to be directed against Ariel, the city where David lived and a symbol of Mount Zion and Jerusalem, the city of David (vv. 1, 7–8).

The Lord announced His intention to lay siege to Jerusalem and bring it down (vv. 3–4). Its people would lie prostate on the ground before their conqueror, like one dying and, figuratively speaking, would whisper from the dust like an *'ob*—"necromancer" (some translations have "ghostlike" or "spirit"; v. 4)—this simile does not endorse spiritistic beliefs, for Isaiah condemns the practice of necromancy (8:19; 19:3), as did the covenantal law (Lev. 19:31; 20:27; Deut. 18:10–11).

The scene of the punishment of Jerusalem is immediately moderated by the description of the destruction of those who had attacked Jerusalem. They would not enjoy their success for very long. They would not be satisfied but would have their short-lived dream of victory interrupted by the reality of their defeat (Is. 29:5–8). The addressee is instructed to reflect upon the significance of the assault on Jerusalem. How could it happen when God had promised to protect Zion from the attacks of the nations? The prophet's answer raises the people's unwillingness to understand the message in vv. 2–8. They were not understanding because the Lord, on account of their sins, wanted first to chasten them and then to open their eyes.

29:11–24. The Need to Understand. The vision of the Lord's plan is compared to the words of a book that cannot be read because it is sealed or because the reader is illiterate (v. 12). In this illustration, the "whole vision" refers primarily to the revelation concerning Ariel in vv. 1–8, but it could also include the whole vision of the prophet (1:1). It would be heard and seen "in that day" when the Lord would fulfill His plan (29:17–21). The Lord would deal with Jerusalem's inability to understand His plan by removing the wisdom of the wise (v. 14; cf. 5:18–19). But the Lord's plan would soon be implemented (29:17). The oppressor would be brought down, and the oppressed would flourish. This is expressed metaphorically: Lebanon—known for its dense forests and therefore a common symbol of mighty Assyria (10:18–19, 33–34)—would be turned into a fruitful field (*karmel*) that would appear like a forest. Lofty Lebanon-Assyria would be humbled, and the humble Israel (*karmel*) exalted.

"In that day" the Lord's wisdom, counsel, and plan would be seen and understood by the deaf and blind (29:18–19). Those who had waited for the Lord would be saved, but the unfaithful would be cut off, especially the unjust and unrighteous officials and judges condemned by Isaiah (vv. 20–21; cf. 1:16–23; 3:1–3, 12–23; 10:1–4). Those who ensnared defenders in court, literally the one who "decides in the gate," were appointed, impartial participants in a court setting who were supposed to put things right between contenders (cf. 1:18–20). In vv. 22–24 we find a concluding assurance from the covenant God, who redeemed Abraham, concerning the house or descendants of Jacob (i.e., all the children of Israel). Assyria's assault on Ariel would be a temporary, short-lived threat, for the Lord would resist the attackers and punish the abusive leaders. He would restore the house of Jacob, and all Israel would eventually worship the Lord in His temple at Zion. The faithful followers of the Lord would have their fate reversed when He visited them in due course.

30:1–33

The Lord's Delay

This chapter opens with a serious charge against the rebellious, obstinate children who were executing plans of their own, not of God's Spirit (v. 1). The problem was that ambassadors were going down to Egypt (v. 2; i.e., reversing the Exodus when God delivered them) without consulting the Lord (lit. "without asking My mouth"). They were seeking their strength and protection in Pharaoh and placing their trust in the shadow or shade of Egypt (v. 2). But Pharaoh would be Israel's shame, and their trust in Egypt their humiliation (v. 3). Egypt would not be of help against Assyria (vv. 6–7).

Since the people were rebellious, the Lord commanded the prophet to write His word or message (vv. 12b, 15) on a tablet or a scroll, so that it might be remembered for the times to come, forever. The people were rebellious and wanted the prophets to tell them only "smooth" or "pleasant" things (vv. 8–12). Consequently, the Holy One of Israel announced judgment against them (vv. 12–17). Their punishment would come "suddenly, in an instant"—illustrated by several similes in vv. 13–14. The Lord's word of salvation was clear: they could be saved in repentance or returning to Him and in resting in Him (v. 15). But since the people had declined the Lord's invitation, Assyria would punish them. The reliance on horses would prove futile (v. 16), and the promise made to Israel at the Exodus would be reversed (v. 17; cf. Lev. 26:8; Deut. 32:30; Josh. 23:10). Israel would be decimated until they would be left as a pole or flagstaff on the top of a mountain, or as a banner upon a hill (Is. 30:17). A small remnant would endure further suffering until the Lord's justice would be fulfilled (v. 20).

The Lord would indeed deliver a purified remnant of Israel because He is a God of justice and grace (v. 18). He would be patient with them (lit. "the Lord waits") and be exalted in the display of His justice and mercy. Since the Lord was "waiting," or "longing," from *khakah* to deliver the remnant of Israel, the prophet blesses all those who wait for (or hope/trust in, from *khakah*) Him (v. 18; cf. 8:17; 25:9; 33:2; 40:28–31; 49:23). It is a blessing to patiently wait on the Lord; waiting encourages the faithful to remain hopeful that the Lord will reverse their fate and turn their mourning into a dance, according to His plans. The Lord would ultimately defeat Assyria. He would approach her from afar in anger, with His lips full of indignation, His tongue like a destroying fire, and His breath like an overflowing torrent that would reach to the neck (30:27–28). His intervention would mean deliverance for Israel and joy for the remnant.

31:1–9

Egyptian Support Against Assyria

The people were instructed to trust in the Lord because He would protect Zion and defeat Assyria. The prophet directed a woe against those trusting in foreign alliances and military force (Egypt) but failing to seek the Holy One of Israel (v. 1) in whom is wisdom (v. 2) and divine power (v. 3). God promised that He would descend to fight for, protect, and deliver Jerusalem (vv. 4–5). Two similes are used: the Lord would fight for Jerusalem like a lion, and He would protect the city like a mother bird protects its young in their nest. But the people were to return to God, against whom they had revolted (v. 6; cf. 30:1–11, 13–17). On the Day of the Lord, the people would throw away their idols of silver and gold and reject them (31:7; cf. 2:7–9, 18–21; 30:22)—the sin made by their own hands. The return of Judah to their God was to trigger the ultimate defeat of Assyria (31:8–9). The sword of the Lord would devour him (cf. 30:30–33); God would summon the armies that would cause Assyria's downfall.

32:1—33:24

The Lord as King and Savior

Judah's hope was not to be found in Egypt but in the Lord. The instruction is about the nature of the righteous versus the wicked ruler (32:1–20) in order to indicate that only in the Lord would there be a future for His people. This is followed by a prayer (33:1–24).

32:1–20. The Righteous King. This passage is a reflection concerning the king and his officials in Jerusalem, and it prepares the way for the account of the Lord's kingship in chapter 33. It is about ruling in justice and righteousness, the fundamental ethical basis for kings and leaders, rooted in the Lord Himself. The initial *hen*, which can mean "behold," "see," "indeed," or introduce an "if" or "when" construction, is common in the reflections of the wise (e.g., 54:15; Job 9:11–12; Hag. 2:12). If Isaiah 32:1 is the *condition*, it is followed by the *effect* (vv. 2–4), clarifying the meaning of the passage (vv. 1–2; cf. 4:5–6). Attention is given to the people who would be ruled in justice and righteousness. The example of the righteous ruler is then contrasted with that of the wicked. The full range of the wickedness of the Lord's opponents was to be exposed, while the righteous would stand (32:5–8).

A righteous ruler was to contribute to the land's fertility and peace, which were essential for survival. A righteous ruler would bring the Lord's blessing upon the people and their land, while a wicked ruler would bring a curse. In the absence of righteous leaders, complacent women (v. 9) are summoned to mourn because the harvest would fail (v. 10). The land and the cities were desolate and showed signs of a curse (thorns and briars; vv. 13–14; cf. 5:6; 7:23–25; 27:4). Such are the conditions under a wicked ruler. However, the Spirit would be poured out upon the people through a righteous ruler from on high (32:15; cf. 11:2), and the wilderness would become a fertile field (32:15). Justice and righteousness being upheld, fertility would be joined with peace (vv. 16–19). Those sowing their seed beside all places of water and allowing their oxen and donkeys to roam freely are those who faithfully wait for the Lord and hope in Him (v. 20).

33:1–9. A Prayer of Distress. A prayer for salvation stands at the center of the passage (vv. 2–6), framed by a word of woe against a foreign enemy (v. 1) and a description of the tyrannical rule (vv. 7–9). The enemy is not named, but certain code words in the passage point to Assyria. Isaiah portrays the oppressed community of Israel praying that the Lord may be gracious to them because they have waited for Him. In Isaiah, patiently waiting for the Lord's intervention characterizes the faithful (cf. 8:17; 25:9; 26:8; 40:28–31; 49:23). The next part of the prayer is a petition for God to be the strength of the people (lit. "their arm"; 33:2). The motivation for the supplication was the Lord's power and past victories. The prophet instructed the people concerning their relationship to the Lord as a condition for receiving His salvation. They were reminded that the Lord is exalted (v. 5; cf. 2:11, 17; 12:4) and that although He dwells on high, He is the One who filled Zion with justice and righteousness, that is, with His personal presence (cf. 32:1, 15–17). The prophet admonished them that God and His wisdom and knowledge would provide a stable foundation for their times and that reverence for Him is a great treasure (33:5–6).

33:10–16. Fall of the Oppressor. The Lord told the oppressor Assyria that He would destroy him. His victory meant that He would be exalted among all the nations—when they heard about His actions, they would acknowledge His might. Assyria is mocked as a nation that is like chaff and stubble; it would be annihilated (vv. 10–13). The prophet presents the Lord creating fear among the sinners and hypocrites in Zion through their recognition of the eternal results they would experience in the destroying fire or everlasting burnings (v. 14). The Lord's plan was to purify Zion by removing the sinners (1:28; 4:4). Out of the purified remnant, the Lord would create citizens of the new Zion (cf. vv. 2–6). The reward of the righteous is that they would enjoy security from attack (cf. 4:6; 31:5; 32:17–19) and freedom from want (30:23–26; 32:17). They would dwell in the elevated places with the Lord (33:14–16).

33:17–24. Triumph of God and Zion. Those left in Zion and those seeing from afar (i.e., scattered Israel) would see the King in His beauty (v. 17). With the establishment of the kingdom of God, He is recognized as Judge, Lawgiver, and King. Israel's salvation comes from Him (v. 22).

There is an underlying joy over the disappearance of the oppressor who wrote letters of blasphemy (cf. 37:8–20), weighed the tribute (cf. 2 Kin. 18:14–16), and sought out their tower defenses (Is. 33:18; cf. 2:15; 23:13). Zion would again be a secure and peaceful place with the Lord enthroned there as King. It is called the city of our festivals, or our appointed festivals (Heb. *mo'adenu*—from *mo'ed*)—all Israel would gather at the temple to worship the Lord. It would be a secure residence for scattered Israel returning from the nations (33:20). The Lord would forever dwell with His people in Zion. According to some translations and interpreters, it is the city of Jerusalem that would be like a "place of broad rivers and streams," or a place where these would flow. According to others, this metaphor applies to God Himself. Unlike the rivers in Assyria, no powerful ships or galleys with oars would pass by.

The concluding vision is of Zion's deliverance from pain and suffering and of its impregnability. Since the Hebrew word *khebel* does not only mean "cord" but can also be related to "pain," another possible translation of v. 23a is "Your [Zion's] pains are gone; they [the oppressors] shall not seize the socket of the flagstaff; a banner shall not be spread out." This translation better fits v. 23b, which describes the people in Zion taking much spoil from the oppressors. Besides, there would be no illness in Zion, and the sins of its inhabitants would be forgiven. The Lord is the Savior of His people. His actions express His wisdom, justice, righteousness (vv. 5-6), power (vv. 10-13), forgiveness, and love for His people (v. 24). The victory of the Lord over the enemy is an assurance that the believer will share in this victory.

34:1—66:24

THE LORD'S PLAN TO RESTORE ISRAEL AND RULE THE NATIONS

Chapters 34-66 aim at moving Israel to seek the Lord by *understanding* His prophetic word and *seeing* its ongoing realization in history. The nations would witness the divine salvific power on behalf of God's people (34:1—35:10) and His defeat of the threat of Babylon (36:1—39:8). God would reveal His faithfulness to Israel, Zion, and the nations (40:1—55:13). The word of exhortation is centered on chapter 55, a summons to Israel to become citizens of restored Zion. This invitation is complemented by the requirements for citizenship (chaps. 56-59), the vision of restored Zion (chaps. 60-62), and the selection of citizens (chaps. 63-66). Thus, a new phase of Isaiah's presentation of the Lord's plan is opened. It develops the theme found in chapters 1-33 that the Lord's anger would cease and that He would act as the Restorer of Zion and as the wonderful Savior of His people. This work would involve saving the nations (52:13—53:12; 56:6-8; 60:1-22; 66:19-24) and gathering scattered Israel on Zion (60:1—62:12; 66:5-24).

34:1—35:10

The Nations, the Lord's Power, and the Return of Israel

The purpose of this section is to convince the audience of the Lord's sovereign power over *all* nations (vv. 2-4) and provide the setting of a court proceeding (v. 8) for dealing with Edom's crimes and Zion's recompense.

34:1-7. Calling the Nations as Witnesses. Isaiah sets the scene as a universal "hearing" in which the Sovereign Lord of the world would act. The witnesses are summoned to come near, hear/listen, and give attention (v. 1), due to the Lord's anger or fury against the nations (vv. 2-4). In particular, the summons is caused by the Lord's judgment against Edom, which represents the rebellious nations devoted to destruction (v. 5). The Lord's sword symbolizes His tool of punishment (vv. 5-6; cf. 1:20; 27:1; 31:8). It would be drenched in heaven (v. 5), probably caused by the overthrow of the hosts of heaven or the pagan gods (34:3-4; cf. 24:21). The Lord's punishment is described as a sacrifice in Bozrah (the capital city of Edom) and a great slaughter in Edom. The clean sacrificial animals would be lambs, goats, rams, wild oxen, bull calves, and strong bulls. These would represent the inhabitants of Edom that would perish with their leaders (34:6-7).

34:8—35:10. Day of the Lord's Vengeance. The court proceeding would be the Lord's day of vengeance against Edom and the year of retribution or recompense for the cause of Zion. The proceeding, aiming for Zion's deliverance (35:1-10), was to include witnesses (v. 1), punishment (vv. 5-17), and recompense for the victims (vv. 1-2). No specific offense by Edom is mentioned, but it symbolized arrogant and oppressive nations because of its opposition to the sovereignty of the God of Zion and its lack of compassion toward Israel and Judah (see Obadiah: Introduction). It would be filled, not with people but with unclean animals (34:11, 13-15). The result would be confusion, the breakdown of social order, and the overthrow of Edom's palaces and fortresses (vv. 11-13). Verse 10 is alluded to in Revelation 14:11 in regard to the

final punishment of the wicked worshipers of the beast and its image. Isaiah 34:10 shows that the language of smoke rising forever poetically conveys the idea of total and eternal destruction, not eternal torment.

The nations (including Israel), witnesses to the Lord's power (v. 1), are instructed in Isaiah to search the book/scroll of the Lord and read (v. 16). Twelve desert animals would occupy Edom after the Lord's punishment (i.e., everything prophesied in the book would happen). The nature of this book or scroll is a matter of debate. It could designate the prophetic writings or refer to God's workings and plans that would be fully comprehended someday. It would then be clear that everything occurred according to the will of God—what He had commanded (i.e., His *word*) and what His Spirit had gathered (i.e., His *work*). The call to "search" changes the role of the nations from being mere *witnesses* to actually *knowing* who the Lord is, namely, seeing the glory of the Lord, the majestic splendor of God (35:2).

In vv. 3-10 the idea of the recompense of Israel, announced in the court proceeding (34:8), is further developed with the intention of instilling hope. It begins with an instruction to comfort the weak and the fearful (35:3-4). The weak would be restored, the land would be watered and become fertile (vv. 6c-7), none of the redeemed would go astray, and Israel would no longer be threatened by foreign nations—symbolized by the lion and the ravenous beast (vv. 8-9). The ones the Lord had saved and redeemed would return with singing and everlasting joy; there would be no more sorrow or sighing (v. 10; cf. 51:11). These words have been of great hope and comfort to God's people over the centuries, and they provide hope during times of doubt, persecution, and loss (cf. Rev. 21:1-4).

36:1—39:8

The Lord's Power and the Threat of Babylon

This section will demonstrate that Isaiah's prophetic word is true, that the Lord has sovereign power over the kings of the nations (even over the Assyrian emperor), that He is able and willing to save those who seek Him, and that, following Hezekiah's reign, a time would come when the treasures and descendants of the Davidic house would be carried to Babylon.

36:1—37:38. The Lord and Assyria. This narrative reflects events in 701 and 681 B.C. Hezekiah had rebelled against Assyria, and Sennacherib had devastated Judah as punishment and was threatening Jerusalem from the captured fortress of Lachish. As usual, the Assyrian attack was preceded by negotiations for surrender. The participants on the Assyrian side were Sennacherib, the Rabshakeh, a high royal official, and some messengers. On Judah's side were Hezekiah, Eliakim the master of the house, Shebna the scribe, Joah the recorder or herald, and Isaiah the prophet. They met by the aqueduct from the upper pool on the highway to the Washer's Field (36:2), which was where Isaiah met King Ahaz (7:3).

In his first speech (36:4-10), the Rabshakeh, or field commander, quoted Sennacherib. The fundamental argument was that the Lord had no power to save the Israelites because He was just like the gods of the other nations who could not save them from Assyria (vv. 18-20). Hezekiah sent a message full of regret and remorse to Isaiah, asking for his counsel (37:2-5). His request was not one that normally would have been directed to a prophet but rather to a priest.

The word of God concerning Sennacherib, as proclaimed to Hezekiah, appears in vv. 21-35: (1) The *accusation* in vv. 23-25 describes Sennacherib's reproach and blasphemy of the Holy One of Israel. Sennacherib had forgotten that it was the Lord who appointed Assyria as a conqueror of cities and peoples (vv. 26-28). (2) The *judgment* against Sennacherib appears in v. 29. The Lord would turn him back by the way he had come (cf. v. 34). (3) A *sign* related to the coming harvests was given to Hezekiah to guarantee that the prophecy would be fulfilled (vv. 30-32). And (4) the passage ends with a word of *salvation* for Jerusalem: Sennacherib would return to Assyria by the same way that he had come (vv. 33-35).

The fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy against Sennacherib is summarized in 37:36-38. An angel of the Lord killed many men in the Assyrian camp. The miraculous event has some resemblance to the tenth plague of the Exodus from Egypt (Ex. 12:23, 29) and to the Philistine capture of the ark (1 Sam. 5-6). Assyriologists have estimated that in a general call-up across the Assyrian Empire, a mustering of troops in the hundreds of thousands was possible. The record of Sennacherib's death in Isaiah 37:37-38 refers to events in 681 B.C., twenty years after Isaiah's prophecies.

38:1—39:8. The Sickness of the King. Faced with a life-threatening illness, Hezekiah turned to the Lord in prayer (vv. 2-3; cf. 37:15), pointing to his faithfulness and obedience. The Lord had compassion on the king and granted him another fifteen years to live. In this time the Lord would defend Jerusalem and deliver the king and the city from the Assyrians (38:4–8). A sign was given to guarantee this promise (v. 8). It consisted in bringing the shadow of the sun ten steps backward on the sundial of Ahaz—alluding to Ahaz's disobedience (7:10–13).

The events recorded in 38:1–10 followed the healing and recovery of Hezekiah but preceded the confrontation with Sennacherib in 36:1—37:38. These events took place before 701 B.C. (date of Sennacherib's invasion of Judah), when Merodach/Marduk-Baladan was still king of Babylon after his rebellion in 705 B.C.

Hezekiah committed two errors leading to Isaiah's ominous prophecy. He proudly boasted of his treasures to the Babylonian envoys (39:2–4). The unwise display of his riches and armory to the Babylonians functioned as a foreboding of the mistakes of his descendants that would be punished by the future plundering of Jerusalem and the deportation of the Davidic dynasty to Babylon (vv. 5–7). A postponement of the disaster was all Hezekiah could hope for, but the fate of the Davidic dynasty (and the kingdom) was left in jeopardy.

40:1—55:13

The Lord's Faithfulness to Israel, Zion, and the Nations

The Lord's plan to save and restore originated in His heavenly council, and He commissioned Isaiah to proclaim comfort (40:1–11). Chapters 40–55 answer the implied questions in 39:1–8. Would the Davidic dynasty end with the future Babylonian oppression? Would the Lord remain faithful to His covenants with Zion, Israel, and the nations? These questions are answered in the *present* for scattered Israel under Assyrian dominion as well as in the *future* for Judah during the Babylonian exile.

40:1–11. Commission to Proclaim the Restoration of Israel. The mission of hardening people's hearts by announcing judgment had been completed (6:9–13). God spoke through Isaiah as Zion's Restorer and Israel's Savior because His anger had ceased (cf. 12:1–6). He commissioned His servants to proclaim His irrevocable decision concerning Israel's comfort (40:1–2, 9–11) and announced His appearance as King (vv. 3–5, 10–11). The decision would be heralded to the cities of Judah (v. 9) and witnessed by the nations (v. 5).

The act of "comforting" (cf. vv. 9–11, 27–31) implies the conclusion of the judgment because the people had received "double" punishment for all their sins. The idiom of "double" often implies "fullness" or "completeness" (see Jer. 16:18; 17:18; Rev. 18:6), but it could also have a positive connotation (i.e., "double" grace; cf. Is. 61:7; Zech. 9:12). The speaking of comfort or tenderness to Jerusalem literally means "speak to the heart of Jerusalem," which is the language of loving care (cf. Gen. 50:21; Ruth 2:13). The term for *tsaba'*, "army" or "warfare," could refer to the ending of Jerusalem's forced labor. The Hebrew verb *ratsah*, often translated as "pardoned," means "to be accepted, to be pleased with, to be paid." Since the verb is in the passive form, it is God who is pleased or who accepted or considered the debt as paid. The term *'awon*, "sin" or "iniquity," could also be rendered "punishment for iniquity." It may be better to understand the phrase here to mean that God had accepted and acknowledged that the punishment they received was enough and that their sin was paid for. The question of how their sins could be fully atoned for so the people could be restored to fellowship would be addressed later (Is. 53).

The command to prepare "a highway for our God" (40:3) in the desert is intended to hasten His coming and enable all humans to see His glory. The "highway" was a raised road that connected major cities. "In the wilderness" should be read together with preparing the way of/for the Lord (i.e., prepare the way...in the wilderness), which forms a parallelism with the rest of the verse. Wilderness/desert is contrasted with God's glory, symbolizing Israel's desolate and dry land in the time of judgment. Glory (v. 5) is associated with the splendor, majesty, sovereignty, light, revelation, and presence of God. Humans perish but the word of God stands/endures forever (v. 8). A voice says that all human beings (lit. "flesh") are like grass that withers and flowers that fade when the breath of the Lord blows upon them (i.e., when He speaks His word [cf. v. 24], though the Heb. *ruakh*, "breath," also means "wind"), but the word of God stands/endures forever. No one can resist God's purpose (vv. 6–8). Humans are weak and frail and completely dependent upon God's power for life (2:22). The decision of Israel's God could not be changed. His plan of salvation would be implemented.

The message to the cities of Judah from Zion and Jerusalem (or from those proclaiming the message to them as well—translations differ) was that they would see their God. The meaning of this message in 40:10–11 is connected with the coming of God in vv. 3–5, which relates the Lord to the nations (v. 5; cf. vv. 15–24). He was to come with strength and power (28:2; 42:13). In Isaiah, God's "arm" is an image of strength that accomplishes righteousness, salvation, and justice (see 51:1—52:10). God's reward and *pe'ullah*, "work" or "recompense" (cf. 62:11), speaks to the coming of the Lord to judge, save, and rule. God's work of judgment and salvation anticipates the revelation of His personal glory. Isaiah was familiar with the designation of a king as "shepherd" (31:4; 44:28; 56:11). The king's role as shepherd is applied here to the Lord's care for His people (cf. Ps. 23:1–4).

40:12–31. The Lord's Sovereignty in the World. This instruction backs up vv. 1–11 in the form of a disputation speech (i.e., an argumentation that attempts to prove a disputed point). By a set of rhetorical questions, the prophet declares the incomparable power and wisdom of the Lord (vv. 13–14). Some of the prophet's audience considered the Lord as merely one of numerous gods and not the most powerful. This objection is refuted by the argument that the nations are worthless compared to the Lord and by an appeal to Israel's traditional faith, which is based on God's past acts (vv. 15–20).

Considering the history of humans and nations, no one can fail to see that the Lord of the universe brings princes and judges/rulers to nothing (vv. 21–24). The phrase about God's reigning above "the circle of the earth" refers to God's dominion and power over all that is encompassed by the term "earth" (Gen. 1:6; cf. Job 22:14; Prov. 8:27). This leads to the topic of the incomparability of God (Is. 40:25–26). Creator of the stars and planets in heaven, He calls each one by name (v. 26). This is an implied polemic against the view that the stars and the planets were divine and deserved worship. It would have been foolishness for Israel to conclude that their way is hidden from such a Lord. He possesses endless power, lasting strength, unsearchable understanding, and loving care for the weak (vv. 28–29). Therefore, Israel must wait for (or "trust in," "hope for") the Lord. This is a key exhortation in the whole book of Isaiah (8:17; 25:9; 26:8; 30:18; 33:2; 40:31; 49:23). Like Israel's remnant, it is important for us to remember that those who wait with hope and trust will renew their strength (40:31).

41:1–29. Israel: To Reveal the Lord to the Nations. This passage has the form of a speech before the council of nations in which the Lord, in a dispute with (the gods of) the nations, proves that He is the true God. The speech in Isaiah begins with God formally calling the council to order. The reference to the renewal of the peoples' strength favors their coming together to find the truth about the true God (cf. 40:31). The truth is His sovereignty over the events of history. The one raised or stirred up from the east who had nations given to him (41:2) has been identified with Abraham, Cyrus, or the Messiah (of whom Cyrus was a type). In any of these cases, it could be said that the Lord gave nations to him, subdued kings before him (v. 2), and helped him to pursue these kings, remaining unharmed (v. 3). The more common view is that it refers to Cyrus, king over the Medo-Persians. Then the Lord answered the question of who had done all of these things (v. 4). Thus, He proved that He is the first and the last (i.e., He is constantly in control of human history). Seeing what the Lord had done, the people reacted with fear but also encouraged each other (vv. 5–7).

Israel was God's servant (vv. 8a, 9c; cf. 44:1–2). A "servant" (*'ebed*) could be a "slave" who serves a master, usually in exchange for protection. The term may also express the relationship of the weaker to the stronger party in a "covenant" (cf. 42:6; 49:8). Israel was collectively the "servant" of the Lord in the sense that He was their God and they worshiped Him (cf. Ps. 136:22). Isaiah applies the title "servant" to both Israel as a nation and to the Messiah. Israel was a servant in the sense of being "chosen" (41:8–9) as one who belonged to the Lord (44:1–5), who was not forgotten by Him (vv. 21), whose sins were removed (vv. 22), who was redeemed by the Lord (vv. 22–23; 45:4; 48:20), and in whom the Lord revealed His glory (44:23).

God chose Jacob (41:8, 9; cf. 44:1), a reality that reminds us that Israel's servanthood was based on the Lord's election (cf. Ex. 19:3–6). The mention of Abraham enlarges that election to include all the families of the earth (Is. 41:8; cf. vv. 2–4, 25–26; Gen. 12:1–3). The Lord also had a plan for Israel and the nations. He would gather His servants, scattered Israel, who were deported and had become refugees. He also gave them an assurance of protection, an admonition to not fear, and a promise of strength and endurance (Is. 41:10). "I am your God" is the formula that maintains the covenant (cf. 42:8; 43:3). The promise of the removal of Israel's enemies fits into the history of God's people under Assyrian-Babylonian dominion (41:11–13). No particular oppressor is mentioned, and the setting of the promise is Israel's condition as a "worm" among the nations (v. 14).

The derogatory "worm" is contrasted with "the Holy One of Israel," here called "your Redeemer" (*go'el*), which Isaiah often uses (e.g., 43:14; 49:7; 59:20). The "redeemer" or "next-of-kin" had both power and obligations, especially (1) to redeem family land that was sold by a relative due to financial difficulties (see Lev. 25:23–28); (2) to redeem a family member sold into slavery in payment of a debt (Lev. 25:47–49); (3) to provide an heir for a dead, childless brother (Deut. 25:5–10; cf. Is. 49:20–21; 54:1, 4–5); and (4) to avenge the murder of a kinsman (Num. 35:6–34; the "avenger" in this passage is from the Heb. *go'el*, "redeemer"). As "Redeemer" the Lord would forgive their sins (i.e., release them from their debt), restore the land to Israel, free the deported and the refugees, provide new children to Israel, and avenge the injustices against His people (cf. Is. 34:8).

Israel's commission as the Lord's servant was that God would set them as a sharp threshing sledge for the mountains and hills (41:15). A "threshing sledge" was an instrument for separating the grain from the chaff. Israel may have been a "worm," but the Lord would strengthen His people and return them to their land, and the nations would not be able to stand in their way. There would be rejoicing in Israel because of the Lord's salvation (v. 16). He would relieve their suffering and thirst (vv. 17–18). Trees of all kinds would be planted in the arid land (v. 19). God's work would be seen by Israel, and the surrounding nations would know that it had all been done by the power of the Holy One of Israel (v. 20).

The Lord had stated His case (vv. 2–20), and at this point He challenged the idols of the nations to "present your case" (vv. 21–24). They were invited to recount the past, tell the future, and prove their knowledge. This evidence would enable the council of nations to decide if the idols were gods. But the evidence was not there. The opening rhetorical question in v. 26 is worded as a quotation. It is acknowledged that no one—except the Lord—is able to predict the future. The Lord then addressed the idols and their worshipers, concluding that the idols were silent and could not predict coming events. The Lord then announced a wonderful event: good news for Jerusalem (v. 27). The Lord was referring to His promise of liberation. The idols were incapable of announcing the end from the beginning (vv. 28–29), and their worshipers had no counselor who could answer a word: they were all worthless and false. Verse 29 summarizes vv. 1–28 and prepares for the continuation in 42:1–13.

42:1–13. The Servant and Justice. Verses 1–4 constitute the first of the so-called Servant Songs in Isaiah (cf. 49:1–6; 50:4–9; 52:13—53:12). However, there is no reason for treating these passages as independent units because they are deeply integrated into their contexts. First, the close relationship between the Servant and the Lord is established (42:1). Second, the Lord empowers the Servant for mission with the Spirit. Third, a specific mission is given to the Servant: He would bring *mishpat*, "judgment," or in this context, "what is right and proper, what is truth and righteousness." This could refer to a society organized around fundamental legal and moral principles. Fourth, the ministerial style of the Servant is established: He would not be ostentatiously loud, and He would be gentle with the weak (vv. 2–3). He would finally establish true or real justice in the world. Fifth, the success of the Servant is affirmed (v. 4). Sixth, as a new Moses He would give to the nations the *torah*, the divine law as instruction and as exemplified in His life. In fact, the islands or coastlands would wait for (or trust in) His *torah*, "law" or "instruction." The Servant's mission to "establish justice" alludes to the righteous messianic King in 11:1–10 and the universal reign of the Lord in 2:2–4. The identity of this Servant has been a matter of dispute. It would be difficult to identify Him with Cyrus. The NT finds in this prophetic announcement a messianic prophecy describing the work of Jesus of Nazareth (Matt. 12:18–21; see "The Servant of the Lord in Isaiah," p. 885).

In 42:5–9 the Lord seems to address the Servant, elaborating a little more on His mission. The section is introduced by a description of the exclusive creative power of God (v. 5) and concludes with His unique power to announce new things before they happen (v. 9). By giving the Servant as a covenant to/for the people and as a light to the Gentiles, God reaffirmed His call and His divine guidance (v. 6). The Servant appears as the embodiment of God's covenant relationship; as such, He is representative of God's ideal for Israel (49:8) and the nations (cf. 42:5). They would indeed walk in the light or the new revelation that the Servant would bring. This light frees humans from the darkness of an existence separated from the Lord (v. 7).

The Servant would reveal to all who the Lord truly is (cf. 29:18–19; 35:5–6; 42:16) and liberate them from idol worship. Only God could announce the coming of a new world order of such a magnitude (v. 9). The disputation initiated in 41:1 closes with an admonition to the nations to praise the Lord. He is to be praised as a great Warrior who would defeat His enemies (42:10–13).

42:14—43:21. Israel and the New Exodus. The purpose of this section is to show the certainty of the coming deliverance by comparing God's past actions with His promises for future deliverance. The Lord would deliver faithful Israel by a new exodus (42:14–22). He had been quiet during Israel's oppression, but now He would act (v. 14) because He would not forsake them (v. 16). The negative description of the mountains and hills and the drying up of all their vegetation may figuratively describe the defeat of Israel's enemies (v. 15). The Lord would lead blind Israel by an unfamiliar way (v. 16), the way of the new exodus. The reference to turning darkness into light may allude to the pillar of fire that gave Israel light (Ex. 13:21). The display of God's power in the Egyptian Exodus miracle should have convinced Israel that He is the only true God. And yet, they abandoned Him and turned to idolatry (Is. 42:17).

The Lord's servant Israel had been deaf to His word and blind to His acts (vv. 18–20). And yet God called them to conversion (43:10). Israel had failed to walk in the Lord's ways and obey His law (42:24), and therefore they were given to robbers as His anger was poured on them (vv. 24–25). For Israel, now oppressed and in darkness (v. 22), the Lord had a plan to show the greatness and glory of the law (v. 21). They were still His people because He had created and formed them (43:1, 7). Thus, His plan for Israel was as firm as the created world order. The assurance given by the admonition to not be afraid is motivated by the Lord's *past* actions of the election and Exodus (v. 1) and by His *future* actions (vv. 2–3). Both sets of actions reveal His identity as the Holy One and Savior of Israel (v. 3). The Lord's love for Israel made them precious in His sight, and they had been honored (v. 4). Therefore, He would give again, in a new exodus, people and nations in exchange for them. The second assurance, to not be afraid, is motivated by the Lord's presence and His promise to return scattered Israel (v. 5; cf. 11:11–12; 49:12–13).

Another phase in the disputation with the nations commences in 43:8–13. The Lord said that only He could promise salvation and grant it. The supportive evidence is Israel's election through Abraham and the Exodus. In the present situation, the Lord had appointed Israel as His witnesses and had chosen Israel to be His servant (v. 10; cf. 41:8–9; 42:1), and consequently they would, through personal experience, know and believe Him and understand that He is God. They were to testify that, in contrast to idols made by humans, the Lord is eternal (43:10, 13). Only He could save (v. 11). He had declared His plan in advance and then saved His people; there was no foreign god that could do the same (v. 12). Therefore, the Lord declared that Israel had the knowledge of the true God and were His witnesses (v. 12), announced His plans to restore and bless His people to the shame of the foreign idols, and asserted that no power could prevent His plans (v. 13).

In order to show that the Lord controls the future, He announced a new future saving act: the destruction of Babylon (v. 14). It was a most daring prophecy, announcing the fall of the proud Babylonians long before they became a powerful empire. God would send a message to Babylon, a message that is not quoted because the argument lies in its fulfilment, which would benefit God's people. In vv. 16–21 the prophet describes the liberation of Israel from Babylon as a new exodus.

43:22—44:5. Pleading with Israel. Isaiah records the Lord pleading with unfaithful Israel, who are pictured as living in a spiritual desert. They had failed to truly worship Him, and they had burdened Him with their sins (43:23–24). The Lord's plan was to restore Israel by mercifully forgiving them (v. 25; cf. 44:22; 55:7). He would not remember their sins but would ask them to remember Him. The Lord's declaration of the approaching restoration of Israel is announced. The Lord repeated that He had made and formed His people (43:1, 7), and since He would help them, they should not fear (vv. 1–2; cf. 41:10; 43:1, 5). "Jeshurun" is a rare poetic name which designates Israel as "upright one," according to its ideal character. The coming deliverance is described metaphorically as water for thirsty people and for dry ground, symbolizing the pouring out of the Lord's Spirit and His blessing on the children of Israel. The Lord promised that they would spring up among the grass (cf. 40:6–8) like willows or poplars by the streams (44:4). This metaphor implies strength, prosperity, and the continuity of God's people.

44:6–23. God Is Israel's King and Redeemer. Several subordinate themes are integrated here under the notion that Israel's King and Redeemer, the Lord, is the only God in the world and would be recognized as such by the nations. The people of Israel were reminded about their role as God's witnesses (vv. 6–8). The central declaration—that there is no God besides the Lord (v. 6d)—is reinforced by the question and answer in v. 8: His people would testify that there is no God besides Him, no other Rock (cf. 17:10; 26:4; 32:2; 33:16)—their testimony founded on their experience of His salvation. For any god to compare with the Lord, evidence must be given that he has predicted an event that came to pass (44:7).

God contrasted Himself with the gods of the nations. He described the makers of idols (vv. 9–13), the idols themselves (vv. 9, 14–18), and the idol worshipers (vv. 9, 19–20). The repeated conclusion is that the idols cannot see or understand and that the idol worshipers will be ashamed (vv. 9, 11, 18). The passage contains an appeal to Israel to return to the Lord because of the assurance of His salvation. Isaiah presents Israel as the servant of the Lord, who was formed by Him, which implies that He would not forget them and that He had blotted out their sins (vv. 21–22; cf. 43:25). This reminder is followed by a summons to the world to praise the Lord for having redeemed Jacob and revealed His glory in Israel (44:23; cf. 52:9).

44:24–28. The Lord and the Future. The phrase "I am the Lord" (v. 24) may allude to the Lord's appearance to Moses, which preceded the Exodus (cf. Ex. 3:6–7, 14–15). A new exodus was announced in Isaiah 42:14–16 and 43:3–4. A summary in hymnic style mentions the Lord's actions in the past (Creation), present (verifying the words of His servant), and future (Jerusalem and Judah rebuilt). The point is that the future events predicted by the Lord and His prophet would come to pass because as Sovereign Lord His word is reliable. Jerusalem and Judah would be rebuilt, and Cyrus would be His appointed agent. Cyrus is partially portrayed as a second Moses, and as such (Deut. 18:17–18; Acts 3:22), he is a type of the Messiah (cf. 45:1, where he is in fact called a *mashiakh*, a "messiah"). Cyrus would free Israel from captivity; so also would the Messiah free His people from the captivity of sin (61:1; Matt. 1:21). The reference to the drying up of the deep and rivers/streams may be an allusion to the Exodus and Moses (Is. 44:27; cf. 63:11–13), as well as to the means by which Babylon was invaded and fell—that is, the accounts of some historians that Cyrus diverted the Euphrates River and entered the city through the dry channels. Isaiah calls Moses the shepherd of His flock (v. 11) and Cyrus His shepherd (44:28). The Lord would hold the right hand of Cyrus to lead His people out of Babylonia (45:1), just as He led Israel out of Egypt by the right hand of Moses (63:12). In 45:1–13 Cyrus is depicted as a conqueror of the nations. By destroying the power of the nations through Cyrus's predicted victories, the Lord would turn Israel and the nations to Himself (vv. 3–7).

The Lord first promised that through Cyrus Jerusalem would be inhabited and the destroyed cities of Judah would be rebuilt (44:26). The reference to Cyrus performing everything that God had desired (vv. 28b) does not mean that under Cyrus Jerusalem and the cities of Judah would be actually rebuilt but that he would initiate the process that would ultimately bring this about. Since the Lord Himself was Israel's Shepherd (40:11), Cyrus was His vassal. The Hebrew term *hekal* that is used in 44:28 can mean "temple" or "palace." But contextually the palaces are included in the rebuilding of the city. According to Ezra 1:2–4, the decree issued by Cyrus authorized only the rebuilding of the temple.

45:1–8. God's Appointment of Cyrus. The divine appointment of Cyrus (vv. 1–3) was turned into an argument (vv. 3c–8) that proves that the God of Israel is the only true God. Thus, by His appointment of Cyrus—announced long before he appeared in history and even though he did not know the Lord (vv. 4–5)—God proved that *only He is God*, and therefore all nations would acknowledge that only He rules over light and darkness, peace and calamity (vv. 7–8). An extended messenger formula in v. 1 indicates that the Lord's commission appointment speech to Cyrus follows; it is found in vv. 2–8. It has the character of a covenant stipulated by the Overlord, "the God of Israel" (v. 3), and obediently accepted by the vassal, "Cyrus." Cyrus would be His anointed (v. 1), which is used figuratively, as in 61:1 (there used in regard to the Messiah), and signifies his consecration to the Lord's plan (cf. Ps. 105:15; Jer. 1:5). The Lord would subdue the nations before him (Is. 45:1) and give him the treasures of the vanquished nations (v. 3). The Lord calling him by name (vv. 3–4) indicates that He knows Cyrus in advance and has titles of honor for him—His shepherd (44:28) and His anointed (45:1).

That Cyrus was a type of Christ is supported by the fact that both of these titles (in addition to being used for priests and kings in general—who were also types of Christ) are used for Christ in both the OT and NT (Shepherd: Ezek. 34:23–24; Mic. 5:2–5; Zech. 13:7; John 10; Heb. 13:20; 1 Pet. 2:25; Anointed/Messiah/Christ: Ps. 2:2; Is. 61:1; Dan. 9:25; Matt. 1:16; 16:16; Mark 14:61–62; Luke 9:20; 24:26; John 1:41; 20:31; Acts 10:38; Rev. 12:10).

Cyrus is promised victory over nations and kings, but this will be the Lord's work (45:1–3). The purpose of his victories involves not only liberating the Israelites and rebuilding Jerusalem and the temple but converting the nations (vv. 3, 5–7). The covenant with Cyrus was to have the purpose of bringing to him and to all nations the knowledge that the God of Israel is the only true God and that He would bring to the earth righteousness and salvation (vv. 3–8; cf. 2:2–4).

The naming of Cyrus is a sign of the Lord's divine power and foreknowledge (45:4–5). As He emerges in the book of Isaiah, the Lord certainly has the predictive power to reveal such a name in advance. The Lord is sovereign over all nations; He gives dominion to whomever He chooses and accomplishes His mission through any He deems fit.

45:9–25. Doubt and Assurance. This passage begins with a disputation against doubting the Lord's word (vv. 9–10) and turns into an assurance regarding His prediction of future events concerning Israel and His sovereignty over human history as based on His power as Creator (vv. 11–12). These points confirm the Lord's appointment of Cyrus in righteousness (i.e., in accordance with God's plan of salvation) and that He would direct all his ways or make them straight (v. 13). The reference to the idea that Cyrus would not receive a price or reward for freeing Israel is rooted in the concept that a slave could be redeemed by the payment of a ransom to his master. But, by the law of the covenant, a slave in Israel could be set free without payment on the seventh year (cf. 50:1; 58:6; Deut. 15:12–18).

The concluding statement that Cyrus would build God's city and let His exiles go free (Is. 45:13) summarizes the outcome of his victory over nations and kings (vv. 1–3). His actions meant that Jerusalem could be rebuilt and Israel would worship the Lord at Zion. Besides, the nations would submit to Israel (cf. 14:1–2) when they realized that God was with Israel and there was no other God (45:14–15; cf. 1 Cor. 14:25). The idol makers would be ashamed and disgraced, but Israel would be saved by the Lord with an everlasting salvation (45:16–17, 24–25).

Firstly, God is the only God because He created heaven and earth for a *purpose* (i.e., not in vain, to be empty, but to be inhabited; v. 18; Gen. 1:2ff.). Secondly, He had demonstrated that He alone is God by declaring true things for the *purpose* of saving the descendants of Jacob, His covenant people (45:19). But God would convince the surviving refugees from the nations that He is a just, righteous God and a Savior and that there is no other (vv. 20–21). God invited all the ends of the earth to find salvation in Him (v. 22). Many would recognize that only in the Lord could they have righteousness, deliverance, and strength, that those who were angry with God would be disgraced, and that every knee would bow before Him (vv. 23–24; cf. 2:2–4).

46:1–13. The God of Israel and the Gods of Babylon. Isaiah compares the Lord with Babylon's two main gods. The gods of Babylon were unable to save their worshipers, but the Lord had demonstrated that He could indeed save Israel. Bel (v. 1) is Bel Marduk, the chief god of the Babylonian pantheon, who was also manifested as the god Ashur. Bel was the supreme god of the nations, the head of the gods, and the creator of the world. Nebo was the son of Marduk/Ashur and was worshiped both in Babylon and Assyria. He was the god of destiny. Keeping the Tablets of Destiny, which were thought to predict and govern the fate of humans, he was seen as the (scribal) god of history.

One way to understand the metaphor of vv. 1–2 is that Bel and Nebo are compared to beasts of burden (cf. the Lord in vv. 3–4), carrying their burdens, in other words, the people worshiping them (cf. Israel as a burden of the Lord in vv. 3–4). The two gods could not deliver the burden. Instead, they had themselves gone into captivity (i.e., when their images were taken by conquerors; v. 2). Another way to understand this is that the images of Bel and Nebo were placed onto beasts of burden (v. 1) because they couldn't move about on their own. These supposed gods could not even rescue their own images that supposedly represented them—the gods (as it were) and their images would be carried into captivity. The Lord, however, had successfully carried His people from the womb and would continue to do so in their old age (vv. 3–4). He declared (lit. "I am He," i.e., Israel's God) that He had made them, and He would carry and save them (v. 4). Some of the same vocabulary is used here as in the description of Bel and Nebo—God was able to carry his people, but the false gods had to have people carry their idols. The comparison in vv. 1–4 between Bel/Nebo and the Lord leads to a general comparison between the idols and the Lord in vv. 5–7 (cf. 40:18–26). The Lord is incomparable (v. 5). The Lord is the Giver of life, but the idols were lifeless, made of gold and silver by a hired goldsmith and then worshiped as gods. It is only the God of Israel, the Creator-God, who deserves worship, not human-made idols.

Israel is encouraged to remember that the Lord had fulfilled His word and that He would do so again in the future. The Lord says, "I am God, and there is no other" (Is. 46:9). He had predicted actions in the past, such as those related to Abraham, the Exodus, and the conquest of Canaan, which He then fulfilled (v. 9), knowing and revealing the end from the beginning (v. 10). He predicted that He would call a bird of prey from a distant land in the east—the man to execute His plan. He had spoken it and would cause it to happen. He had planned it and would accomplish it (v. 11). Contextually, this is the prophecy concerning Cyrus. The point is that God's prediction of future events would surely come to pass because He is the Lord of history. In conclusion, the Lord admonished obstinate Israel to listen to Him (v. 12). Being scattered among the nations, Israel would still be blind to the real identity of the Lord (cf. 40:27; 42:16–25; 43:22–28). God's righteousness in 46:13 is closely related to His salvation or deliverance—they are placed in a parallel relationship. The contrast between "far" and "near" indicates that here "righteousness" has the same meaning as in v. 12b. The only way for sinful people who are far from God's righteousness to be saved is for God to give them His own righteousness as a gift. The ultimate display of God's righteousness for salvation is in the life, death, resurrection, and intercession of Christ (chap. 53). His salvation would be placed on Zion for Israel, who would be a display of His glory (i.e., the gathering of Israel on Zion would mean that the Lord would redeem and restore a wretched Israel so that they would reflect and be witness to His own splendor; cf. chaps. 60–62).

47:1–15. Humiliation of Babylon. Babylon is addressed as a queen (notice the mention of "virgin daughter" and "throne" in v. 1) who would be humiliated by the Lord's vengeance (v. 3). This is followed by Israel's collective acknowledgment of the Lord as "Redeemer" and the "Holy One of Israel" (v. 4). The silence referred to in v. 5 is the silence of grief or humiliation (cf. Lam. 2:10; Amos 8:3), and darkness is often used as a symbol for sorrow (Is. 9:2; 42:7; 50:10). The Lord explains that, being angry with His people, He had profaned or desecrated His inheritance (i.e., Israel) by giving them into the hands of Babylon (47:6). Punished and humiliated, Babylon would no longer be called the lady or queen of kingdoms (vv. 5, 7). The accusations against Babylon are of different kinds. Firstly, she had oppressed Israel without mercy while caring only about her own power and glory (vv. 6d–7; cf. 10:5–15). Secondly, she did not think of the One who had authorized her to punish His people and who would call her to account for her actions (47:7).

Babylon's crime was especially her pride: she was addicted to pleasure (i.e., the Babylonians were prosperous and ignored their duties toward the Creator), she lived in security (i.e., they trusted in their power to maintain their own security), she thought that she was the "I am" and there was no one else like her (i.e., they were self-centered and claimed to be divine [cf. God's words about Himself in 45:6; 46:9], amounting to blasphemy against the only God), and she thought that she would never know any loss or defeat (i.e., ignoring the Lord's justice and control of history). The punishment would include widowhood and loss of children, and this would take place in a moment, in one day, and in fullness (47:9). These predictions were particularly fulfilled in the destruction of the city by the Medo-Persians.

Babylon was also guilty of sorcery (v. 9) and of being deluded by the misuse of their knowledge and wisdom, which resulted in blasphemous pride. Believing that misfortune came from demons or the anger of the gods, Babylon still felt secure because she was able to thwart the demons by sorcery, spells, and enchantments, and she did not know of any god who would punish her for her crimes. The result was that she trusted in her wickedness (v. 10). In the announcement of judgment (v. 11), Babylon is firmly placed under the jurisdiction of the Lord. Her enchanters and astrologers are summoned to demonstrate whether they can save her from what would come against her (vv. 12–13). The term usually translated as "astrologers" means literally in Hebrew "dividers of the heavens," who seek to predict the future by studying the changing constellations of the stars. Those who look at the stars (sometimes translated as "stargazers") may refer to some kind of astrological occupation or simply to worshipers of the stars.

There were also those who made monthly predictions, which involved lists of lucky and unlucky days and important events that ruled the lives of their followers. The astrologers would perish like stubble in the flames (v. 14). The fire may symbolize the anger of God on the day of judgment, but it could also refer to the destruction of conquered cities, which was usually by fire. The word *sakhar* in its participial form in v. 15 means literally "those who go around." It has been translated as "merchants" or as those "who have trafficked," "traded," or "dealt with." Some have understood the "merchants" to be representative of the practitioners of magic arts described in the previous verses. In Babylon, each astrologer-counselor offered a different prediction of the future (cf. v. 9), and each of them was in error. This is completely reversed when the Lord's plan of salvation for Israel is offered in chapter 48.

48:1–11. God's Plan for Israel. The prophet resumes the theme found in chapters 1–33 that Israel's King would redeem Israel as an act of purification, enabling them to assume the task of a servant and to reveal Him as the true God to the nations (chaps. 49–54). Israel's apostasy is described as a superficial, formal ritual faith or even hypocrisy. Isaiah says they claim to rely upon (lit. "lean upon") the God of Israel (48:2), while in reality trusting in other gods. "The holy city" alludes to the Lord as "the Holy One of Israel"—the purified Jerusalem is ideally called the righteous and faithful city (1:25–26), and the purged remnant would be called "holy" (4:2–3).

Israel's chastisement came as foretold because the Lord's word accomplishes what He sends it to do (48:3–5; cf. 55:10–11). The point is to convince Israel of the certainty of the prophetic word and to confirm that the Lord gave them an opportunity to avoid their punishment. The Lord conceded (48:4) that He knew that Israel was obstinate, a state symbolized by an iron neck and a bronze forehead. His predictions were made to prove that He, as the Lord of history, and not the idols, brought the judgment.

The Lord would make them hear new, previously unknown things regarding the future (vv. 5–6). Israel had not heard or understood, for they were unable or unwilling to know their Lord (v. 8; cf. 6:9–10; 29:9–13; 43:8–13, 22–28). But through the vision of Isaiah, Israel was being admonished to notice what God was telling them (48:6) and to recognize that God would delay or defer His anger and not completely destroy them (v. 9). The chastisement of apostate Israel had been going on long enough (cf. 40:1–2). The Lord's plan was to discipline them so that they would repent. His plan was not to annihilate them because He remained faithful to His covenant with them. Therefore, although Israel was not yet fully converted, He had forgiven them and would restore them by His love and mercy and not because of their merit (cf. 43:25; 44:21–22).

God had refined them, though not like silver. He had tested them in the "furnace of affliction," the Exile (v. 10). The implementation of the Lord's plan had so far resulted in the purification of Israel—the term translated "refine" has the literal sense of "smelt" (48:10; cf. 1:25). In the refining process, the "affliction" that had fallen upon Israel served as a smelting "furnace," which alludes to the deliverance from Egypt (as in 48:20–21). As the Lord took Israel out of the iron-smelting furnace (i.e., Egypt) to be His people (Deut. 4:20), He had chosen Israel "in the furnace of affliction" (Is. 48:10; i.e., under Babylonian oppression) to restore them as His people (cf. 41:8–9; 44:1–2; 48:9–11; 49:7).

48:12–22. The Lord Predicts Redemption for Israel. The disputation here serves to establish that the redemption of Israel was part of the divine plan. At the passage's beginning, Isaiah relates that the Speaker confirmed Himself as the only God, the First and the Last (vv. 12–13); then He called all nations together (v. 14).

A prophecy is announced concerning the future prosperity of Israel (vv. 14–15), which ties in with vv. 9–11, 20–21. The one whom the Lord had loved (some translations have "chosen"; v. 14) has been understood to refer to either Israel (who is referred to elsewhere in Isaiah as beloved of the Lord—43:4) or most probably to Cyrus, who would be instrumental in accomplishing God's purposes against Babylon. The climax of the prophecy in 48:15 is the Lord's words "I have called Him."

The Lord urged the nations, including Israel, to come near to Him and listen (v. 16). It is a little difficult to identify the speaker in this verse. In the first part of v. 16, the speaker is clearly God, but it is not clear who is speaking in the last part of the verse as having been sent by Yahweh (lit. "and now the Lord Yahweh has sent me and His Spirit"). It could be Israel responding to God's call. It could be the Messiah, representing His people, who would be sent and empowered by the Spirit (11:2; 42:1; 61:1), or it could be the prophet who would then proceed to deliver the message the Lord gave him (48:17–19). This last possibility is most likely. As Israel's Redeemer, God lamented their disobedience to His commandments (i.e., the core of the covenant), reminding them of all the benefits that would have come to them—instead of the furnace of affliction (v. 10)—if they had heeded His instructions.

The section ends with a prediction of the future salvation of Israel (vv. 20–21) and a caveat concerning the lack of peace for the wicked (v. 22). The command to Israel to flee from the Chaldeans in Babylon is in v. 20. The parallel "Babylon"/"Chaldeans" represents the home of the supreme idols among the nations (46:1–13) and the enemy that the Lord would humiliate by destruction and desolation (47:1–15). The command to leave or flee (i.e., to leave in haste; v. 20) is a reminder of the Exodus from Egypt (cf. Ex. 12:11, 31–34, 39; 14:5). Other allusions to the Exodus are Israel's song of praises to the Lord their Redeemer (Is. 48:20; cf. Ex. 14:31—15:21) and the Lord's sustenance of His people as illustrated by the provision of water (Is. 48:21; cf. Ex. 15:22–25; Num. 20:11; Ps. 78:15–16). The act of going forth from Babylon would enable Israel to proclaim to the ends of the earth that the Lord had redeemed His servant Jacob (Is. 48:20).

49:1–13. The Lord's Servant: A Light to the Nations. This passage is considered by some to be one of the so-called Servant Songs that supposedly originated independently of the present context, but since it is so well integrated in the context it is to be considered as originating in Isaiah for this specific context. The passage focuses on how the Lord commissioned His Servant to bring the knowledge of God to the nations. Scholars have debated the identity of this Servant without reaching a consensus. We will suggest that since the Servant's mission is to Israel, He cannot be Israel (see commentary on 42:4). In this passage Israel is embodied in this figure called the Servant, and the name functions as a messianic designation fulfilled in Jesus Christ (see "The Servant of the Lord in Isaiah," p. 885). The passage focuses on how the Lord commissioned His Servant to bring the knowledge of God to the nations. The Servant first acknowledged that the Lord had appointed and equipped Him as His Servant: the Lord's plan would be glorified in Him (49:3). But in the realization of His mission, He faced disappointment. However, the Servant anticipated success (v. 4).

Verse 5 begins with "and now," which indicates the arrival of a new situation that would result in the ultimate success of the work of the Servant of the Lord. His mission, which began with disappointment, would consist in bringing Jacob back to Him to gather Israel. However, His mission would also embrace the nations to whom the Servant would be given as a light (cf. 42:6–7). Through the Servant, the Lord's salvation would be given to "the ends of the earth" (49:6; cf. v. 8; 42:1–9; 44:5; 45:6–8, 14–25). This aim reveals the Lord's faithfulness to His covenant with Abraham and Israel (Gen. 22:18; cf. 12:3) and to the everlasting covenant with humanity (Is. 24:5; Gen. 9:12–17).

In Isaiah 49:7, Isaiah relates the Lord's announcement to the Servant that even though He would be despised and abhorred by His people, kings would see and stand (as a sign of homage) and princes would also worship (lit. "prostrate oneself"). This would be possible because of the faithfulness of the Lord to His commitment to save sinners. In v. 8, we find a description of the close connection between the Lord and the Servant. The references to the acceptable or favorable time are rooted in the genre of the individual lament. The troubled speaker waits for and hopes in the Lord (e.g., Ps. 69:3) and prays for salvation in a situation of unjust suffering, while the acceptable/favorable time (Ps. 69:13) would occur later when the prayer met with the Lord's favor. Isaiah 49 reveals a temporal structure that follows this pattern: (1) the Servant suffering unjustly while praying and waiting for the Lord (vv. 4, 7, 9); (2) the Lord hearing and helping Him (v. 8); (3) the Lord preserving Him and appointing Him as a covenant to restore the nations (v. 8d–g); and (4) the nations restored (vv. 9–12).

The meaning of the covenantal Servant (49:8; cf. 42:6) emerges in chapters 49–54: somehow the Servant reestablished the covenant in Himself after it was violated by the people. The people mentioned are primarily the people of Israel, though the context mentions the Gentiles as well. Through the Servant, the Lord would establish peace on earth (49:8; cf. 2:2–4; 54:1–17). Specifically, He would restore the earth/land and cause its inhabitants to live in the previously desolate areas (49:8), and the prisoners and those in darkness would emerge and see the light (v. 9; cf. 9:2; 42:7; 61:1). The proclamation of the prisoners' release is associated with the Jubilee (Lev. 25:8–17; see 2 Cor. 6:2). Under the leadership of the Servant Messiah, God would provide for the needs of His people as they gathered from the four corners of the world (Is. 49:10–12). The whole cosmos is called to rejoice in the Lord's comforting of His people and His merciful compassion to the afflicted.

49:14–23. God Remembers Zion. In spite of the rebellion of Zion, the Lord had not forgotten her. In fact, Zion reproached the Lord because she felt forsaken and forgotten by Him, implying that He did not have the will to save His people (v. 14). The Lord responded with words of assurance (vv. 15–16) and a promise (vv. 17–23). Surely, He had the will to restore His people. He had formed and created Israel (cf. 43:1; 44:1–2), and therefore He declared, "I will not forget you" (49:15; cf. 44:21). He had inscribed or engraved her name on the palms of His hands; His attention was continually directed toward her walls (49:16). Zion would be the Lord's standard or banner for the peoples (v. 22).

The reference to the children (lit. "sons") hastening (v. 17) reminds us of the Exodus from Egypt that took place hurriedly (see commentary on 48:12–22). In the second part of the verse, the rare Hebrew word *haras* is used. It has been translated as "destroyers" or "those who have laid you waste," but it can also mean "those who have overthrown or overtaken you." The Hebrew word *kharab* in the parallel expression that follows normally means "those who made you desolate," a term referring to the removal of inhabitants from the cities and the land (37:18; 42:15; Judg. 16:24; Ezra 19:7; Zeph. 3:6; cf. the reference to those who had swallowed or devoured them in Is. 49:19). The survivors in Zion were admonished to look around and see the sons gathering together and coming to mother Zion (v. 18; cf. 60:4). "As I live" is the Lord's oath (49:18; cf. 45:23) that Zion would ornament herself as a bride with the returning children of Israel (cf. Rev. 21:2). Zion, which had been desolated, would be rendered too small for all the many people returning to it (Is. 49:19–20). Zion would only wonder and marvel at what had happened (v. 21).

The gathering of scattered Israel is based on two actions communicating to Zion the reality of Yahweh and that those who wait obediently for the Lord would not be ashamed (v. 23). First, God would lift His beckoning hand to the nations (v. 22). The Servant of the Lord would be given as a light and a covenant to the nations (vv. 6, 8), and Isaiah presents the Lord affirming a covenant with them through His oath (v. 22). Second, the Lord would lift up a standard, or banner, for the peoples (v. 22). This "standard" or "banner" figuratively functions as the rallying point of scattered Israel and the peoples (cf. the figure of a light to the nations in v. 6), and this role would be fulfilled by Zion, the dwelling place of the Lord. The kings, who would see and arise, and the princes (or "officials"), who would bow down in homage (v. 7), would come to Zion, bringing Israel's sons and daughters. The scenes of the past deportations would be reversed.

49:24—50:3. The Lord's Power to Save Israel. This passage complements 49:14–23, answering the question raised in v. 24 and presenting the Lord as indeed able to save Zion-Israel from the mighty. The Lord's answer is that scattered Israel would be saved even from mighty armies and terrible nations. He was committed to contend with those contending with Zion in order to save her children. He would punish Israel's oppressors with internal strife or extreme situations of famine. The salvation of Zion-Israel is linked to a defeat of powerful nations. Therefore, all people would come to know of the Lord as the Savior, Redeemer, and Mighty One of Jacob (v. 26; cf. 60:16).

Isaiah presents Israel's doubts about the Lord's willingness and power to save them, which are finally summarized by the Lord (50:1–3) with answers to a series of questions. The first set of questions concerns the Lord's willingness to save (cf. 49:14–23). Asking where the certificate of divorce was involved a metaphor of marriage for the relationship between the Lord and His people (50:1; cf. 54:6–8; 61:10). The covenant law stipulated that a permanent divorce was not valid unless the husband had issued a document of divorce and that, if his former wife remarried, the first husband could never take her back again (Deut. 24:1–4; Jer. 3:1, 8). However, in Israel's case, there was no letter of divorce, which indicates that the Lord's plan was to take her back again after a time of separation and chastisement (cf. Is. 54:6–8).

The second question applies the metaphor of selling children as slaves in payment of a debt (50:1). The rhetorical question in this verse is ironic, for the Lord had no creditors and would restore His children without money and without price (45:13; 52:3); namely, He would take back what rightfully belonged to Him. The nature of the metaphorical questions confirms the Lord's certain willingness to save His people. The Israelites themselves must carry the blame for their disgrace (50:1).

The Lord's *power* to save is raised in the second set of questions (vv. 2–3; cf. 49:24–26). First, He questioned Israel's reluctance to trust His promises. In the second pair of questions, the Lord raised questions regarding His power (50:2). His answer invited the people to consider His power over both the earth and the heavens.

50:4–11. The Servant and Hope. This passage probes further into the work of the Servant (vv. 4–9). Verses 4–9 are usually considered another Servant Song with a call to listen to the Servant (50:10—51:8). The speaker in the text is not defined until the mention of His Servant in 50:10. The Lord had empowered the Servant to be an efficient teacher. His patient endurance under opposition and suffering illustrates His humble trust in God (cf. 54:6–10). This may be taken as a literal description of opposition to His instruction by fellow Israelites. The giving of the Servant's back to those striking it speaks of humility and willing submission (50:6). Plucking out the beard was an extreme form of insult (cf. 2 Sam. 10:5; Ezra 9:3; Neh. 13:25), and spitting was a sign of contempt (cf. Job 30:10). The Servant passed through a humiliating experience in the hands of fellow humans (Is. 50:6). This was fulfilled in the experience of Jesus.

The Lord God's help is mentioned in both vv. 7 and 9. Setting one's face like flint (v. 7) is a figure of resolute endurance in the face of opposition (cf. Jer. 1:18; 20:11; Ezek. 3:8–9). In Isaiah 50:8–9, the Servant's confidence in God is illustrated by the dual image of the Lord as a fair judge, who would pronounce judgment in His favor, and the Lord as His advocate, who would invalidate the charges against Him. Verses 10–11 present addresses to a wide group ("you" is in the plural), probably Israel as a whole, with different counsels to two opposite groups. First is a call for the attention of those who "fear the Lord" but who are despondent, reminding them to keep trusting in God. Second is an address to disobedient Israel. The metaphor of fire may be understood as a reference to the wicked and their actions (cf. 9:18; Job 31:11–12; Prov. 26:18). Isaiah records the mocking advice for them to walk in the light of their fire and among the torches or sparks that they had ignited (Is. 50:11); that is, they were sarcastically told to continue living in their wickedness, which would be their own ruin.

51:1–16. Comforting the Faithful. The Lord would comfort and restore Zion by making it like the garden of the Lord (v. 3). As a reason for believing this promise, He admonished His people to remember where they had come from and the covenant with Abraham. The Lord announced that His law, or instruction (Heb. *torah*), and justice would be set as a light for the nations (cf. 42:6; 49:6, 8) and that Israel would soon experience His salvation through the defeat of their oppressors. God's righteousness is His faithfulness to the covenant, manifesting itself in acts of salvation (51:5–6). In metaphorical poetry, the "arm" of God is summoned to "awake" (v. 9). The Lord is asked to intervene as of old when He delivered His people from Egypt (vv. 9–10). The sorrow and sighing of the Lord's redeemed people would be replaced by everlasting joy (cf. 35:10; Rev. 21:1–4). God Himself comforts His people and reminds us not to be afraid of other human beings (cf. Ps. 27; Rom. 8:31–39).

The Lord's plan was to expose the oppressor's lack of power. He contrasted the (powerless) fury of the oppressor with His own promise to relieve and sustain the oppressed. Thus, the verbal expressions in v. 14 are in the future tense. The Hebrew verb *tsa'ah* (sometimes translated here in its participial form as "exile") can convey the idea of being bowed down (under a burden; cf. 51:14; Jer. 2:20). Accordingly, it is also translated as "the oppressed" or "cowering prisoners." The foundation of the assurance of deliverance (Is. 51:12–14) is expressed in vv. 15–16: Israel's God is the powerful Creator and loving Savior of His people. The mention of being covered in the shadow of God's hand is a repetition of the promise to the Lord's Servant (49:2). In 51:16, the Lord reaffirmed the promise to deliver His people and return them to the promised land.

51:17–23. Jerusalem Is Summoned. The Lord calls on Jerusalem to awake and rise up from the state of hopelessness in which it finds itself (vv. 17–20). Drinking from the cup of God's wrath (v. 17) means to experience God's judgment. The ensuing intoxication is a figure of fear, desperation, shame, and suffering (cf. Jer. 25:15–29; Lam. 4:21–22). Jerusalem is pictured in Isaiah 51:18–20 as a mother staggering under the effects of the drink, suffering especially by a decimation of her population. The Lord addressed the afflicted staggering under the weight of their affliction (vv. 21–23). He was contending for His people in a court of justice where the sins of Jerusalem had been condemned and the length of the punishment discussed (cf. Job 1:6—2:10). The Lord announced that He had removed His cup of wrath from Jerusalem and that she would no longer drink from it (cf. Is. 40:1–2). Instead, He would give the cup to those who had afflicted His people.

52:1–12. Zion-Jerusalem Is Summoned. In this case Zion-Jerusalem is summoned to dress herself for celebration. Jerusalem would again be called the holy city—the time of disgrace is now over, and the city is restored (cf. 1:21–26). The people of Zion-Jerusalem were told to remove their bonds themselves by believing in the Lord's plan of deliverance. In 50:1 the Lord told His people that they had sold themselves into slavery because of their sins and, in 52:3, that they had sold themselves for nothing (cf. 45:13); therefore, they would be redeemed without money (i.e., the Lord would take back what he rightfully possessed).

The motif of redemption without price is further explored in 52:4–6, in the context of Israel's slavery in Egypt (in the past) and in the Assyrian Empire (at present). The Lord delivered Israel from Egypt although they had willingly moved there. In the case of Assyria, however, the certainty of Israel's deliverance by the Lord is even greater because Assyria oppresses them for no reason (i.e., Assyria did not pay a price for them—it took them by force—and, therefore, has no right to Israel now that the Lord is reclaiming His people). At the moment the Lord would take action, Israel would learn that He has both the power and the will to fulfill His promises, for His people would know His Name (i.e., they would witness His boundless power; v. 6).

The future deliverance of Zion and Israel is announced with absolute certainty (vv. 7–12). The feet of the heralds were already treading the mountains of Judah with the good news for Zion that there would be peace (i.e., deliverance, well-being, security, and harmony; cf. 54:10, 13) and salvation from God who reigns (52:7). The watchmen on the walls of Jerusalem (cf. 21:6–9; 40:9; 62:6–7) would sing and praise the Lord when they saw Him bringing back Zion (i.e., scattered Israel; 52:8)—or, according to some renderings, when the Lord would return to Zion. Their hymn of praise is recorded in vv. 9–10. The promise was that God would bare His holy arm (i.e., He would throw back the folds of His garment in order to use His sword; cf. Ps. 74:11), a metaphorical description of a display of His power, deliverance, judgment, and care (cf. Is. 30:30; 33:2; 40:10–11; 51:9). Then all the earth would see God's salvation (52:10). These clauses are vital for the understanding of 52:13—53:12.

Isaiah 52:11–12 describes the deliverance of the priestly servants of the temple as a new exodus. They were holy because their God was the Holy One of Israel. The return would be a new exodus under the Lord's command: just as He had done then, He would go in front of and behind them (cf. Ex. 13:21–22; 14:19–20). But while the first Exodus was carried out with haste and flight, the new one would be peaceful and orderly because the oppressor's power had already been broken (52:12).

52:13—53:12. The Suffering Servant of the Lord. This passage brings the mission of the Servant of the Lord to a climax (cf. 42:1–9; 49:1–9; 50:4–11). It is followed by the everlasting covenant of peace (chaps. 54–55) and the acknowledgment of the nations that the Lord is the only God (chaps. 56, 60, 66). As previously indicated, a number of attempts have been made to identify the Servant, but it is better to identify Him, as the NT does, with the Messiah, Jesus Christ (see below, "The Servant of the Lord in Isaiah"). The passage provides a glorious prophecy concerning the experience, ministry, and results of the Servant's work.

The Servant of the Lord in Isaiah

The identity of the Servant of the Lord in Isaiah has been explored by scholars throughout history. In the NT, the Ethiopian, while reading Isaiah 53, raised the question but was unable to answer it and asked Phillip about the identity of the person described in the passage (Acts 8:34). Scholars have struggled with the question, but there is no consensus among them. As we look at the question, we will begin with what appears to be clearly stated in the text and try to draw some conclusions from that information.

1. *Israel Is the Servant.* No one would question that in some passages Isaiah indisputably identifies Israel as the servant of God. While announcing His work of gathering Israel from among the nations, the Lord states this clearly (41:8). Israel was the servant by divine election, and therefore God would not reject them (v. 9). Some of these ideas are repeated in 44:1–5. The promise of restoration is introduced with a message of encouragement (v. 1). The Lord had bound Israel to Him through election and creation, and in faithfulness to that commitment He would

restore them (vv. 2–5), be with them, and become their Redeemer (vv. 6, 22; 48:20). It is even stated that the Lord would raise Cyrus as His anointed for the sake of His servant Jacob and His chosen Israel (45:4).

2. The Failure of Israel as Servant. It is also clear that, according to Isaiah, Israel often failed in their task as servant of God. In a disputation between God and His people, evidence is presented against them. Israel, the servant of God, is described as deaf and blind (42:18–19) because even though they saw many things, they did not obey the Lord (v. 20). They went into exile but were unwilling to learn from that experience and to understand that it happened because of their sins and their lack of obedience to the law of God (v. 24). But Israel as a servant was also a messenger (v. 19). The servant had a mission to the nations but was often unable to fulfill it because they were deaf and blind. God's plan to display His great and glorious law could not always be fulfilled through His people (vv. 21–22). Because of their spiritual corruption, they should not have even claimed to be Israel (48:1). Their actions did not correspond to their claim of being Israel. Of course, God did not give up on them, as the next two chapters indicate. Some have suggested that the faithful Israelites (the remnant) are the Servant in Isaiah 53. However, according to Isaiah, the faithful ones—the remnant—should obey God's Servant (50:10), and it is the Servant who causes Jacob to return to God and gathers Israel to the Lord (49:5). He is the One who will restore those of Israel that the Lord has preserved—the remnant—v. 6. Clearly, the remnant (52:8–12) is distinguished from the Servant of the Lord (52:13—53:12).

3. The Mission of the Anonymous Servant. There are some similarities between the anonymous Servant of the Lord and Israel as servant of the Lord. Both were chosen by the Lord (41:8; 42:1; 44:1–2; 49:1), called by Him (41:9; 42:6), and entrusted with a mission (42:1, 6–7; 43:10). But there are major differences indicating that the prophet is describing two different servants although both are closely related. The mission of the Servant of the Lord was different in that He had a mission to Israel. It consisted of the restoration of Israel and Jacob through the preservation of a remnant (49:5–6). Besides, the Lord gave the Servant as a covenant to the people, to restore the earth and set free the prisoners and those in darkness (vv. 8–9). This mission assigned to the Servant could not have been fulfilled by the nation of Israel.

The mission of the Servant is also universal (v. 6). The Servant would not simply proclaim salvation to the nations but would be their light and salvation, a task that would be impossible to assign to Israel or even to the prophet himself (cf. 56:1). He would also provide justice and truth to the nations (42:1–3) and would not stop until His justice and the law were established throughout the world (v. 4). The Lord gave the Servant as a covenant to the people and as a light to the Gentiles (v. 6). The new covenant mediated to Israel by the Servant who embodies it (49:8) would also include the Gentiles. He was called by the Lord to heal the blind and to free the prisoners and those in darkness (42:7). The blindness is universal, but it particularly applies to Israel (vv. 18–20). The *means* by which this most powerful act of salvation would be accomplished is not stated until 52:13—53:12.

4. The Experience of the Servant of the Lord. In the fulfillment of His mission, Isaiah presents the Servant as going through two main stages: humiliation and victory. From the very beginning, it is stated that the Servant would not lose strength or be discouraged (42:4), a description which implies that He would face serious challenges. In the so-called second Servant Song (49:1–9) we find a sequence of the trials and victories of the Servant. He testified that His work seemed to be in vain (v. 4). In the first stage of His experience, the work of the Servant appears unsuccessful, but He is not discouraged because His reward would be with the Lord (v. 4). By using the word "now," the Lord announced a new task for His Servant (v. 5), namely, to bring salvation to Israel and to the nations (v. 6). Then we are taken back to the humiliating experience of the Servant being despised by the people and abhorred by the nation (v. 7). This is followed by the announcement of His victory: kings and princes would worship Him. He would be acknowledged as King of kings. This would be possible because at the proper moment the Lord would hear the prayer of His Servant, preserve Him, and give Him as a covenant to the people (v. 8).

The third so-called Servant Song (50:4–11) is more explicit concerning the humiliating experience of the Servant. He is described as struck and spat upon, and His beard is plucked (v. 6). In this passage He is willing to go through this physical assault, knowing that the Lord would help Him. He accordingly set His face "like a flint" (v. 7), persuaded that the Lord would vindicate Him (v. 8). The depth of the humiliation of the Servant of the Lord is more fully described in the fourth Servant Song (52:13—53:12.

5. The Identity of the Servant. The Servant is described as a person to whom the Lord had spoken (42:6–7) and who spoke about Himself (50:4–9). He is not a personification or a metaphor for Israel because His description in 49:1–9 is strongly individualistic, describing the Servant as a historical figure with a particular biography. Perhaps what is surprising is that the anonymous Servant in vv. 1–9 is specifically called Israel (v. 3). This is important in that although He could be differentiated from Israel, He still carried the name, thus indicating a deep connection between both. Here we should recall that behind the people of Israel lies an individual, namely, Jacob/Israel. What Isaiah seems to be saying is that now, in front of the people of Israel and related to their future, lies a single person, namely, Israel/the Servant of the Lord. Embodying Israel, He would accomplish for the people what they could not accomplish for themselves and much less for the nations of the earth. While not making the people of Israel irrelevant, He to the contrary appears in Isaiah bringing salvation to them and gathering them back as the people of God. He would accomplish what no human being could—God's personal work of salvation for humanity. Isaiah only announces His future coming in humility (suffering) and glory. His identity is fully disclosed in the NT in the person of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

6. The Suffering Servant. It is in Isaiah 52:13—53:12 that the work of the Servant of the Lord is finally unveiled with penetrating detail. The passage begins and ends with a summary of the humiliation of the Servant (52:14; 53:12) as well as an announcement of His exaltation (52:13, 15; 53:11–12), and in between there is a vivid description of the attitude of the people, the humiliating experience of the Servant, and the Lord's interpretation of the work of the Servant (vv. 1–10).

(a) The Experience of the Servant. *First*, we read about the appearance of the Servant. Isaiah presents Him as coming from humble beginnings like a plant growing in dry ground, hardly surviving the absence of water (53:2). The prophet says that people are not naturally attracted to Him. *Second*, He is described as sorrowful and familiar with *kholi*, literally "sickness," which is sometimes translated as "pain" or "grief" (v. 3), and his appearance at some point would be disfigured or marred beyond recognition (52:14). In fact, He would be oppressed, afflicted (53:7), placed in confinement, and condemned as a wicked person (v. 8). He would finally die (v. 8), having been treated like a criminal, but would be with the rich in His death (v. 9). *Third*, the people would reject Him and argue that He had no beauty to make Him desirable (v. 2). They would despise and abandon Him and would not value Him (v. 3). They would see in the Servant a person under a divine curse who was struck by God and afflicted (v. 4), a person abandoned by God.

(b) Repentance of the People. There is a moment when the people finally understand the significance of the experience of the Suffering Servant. *First*, they acknowledge their sins and confess that all of them had been like straying, lost sheep who followed their own ways (v. 6). *Second*, they realize that the Servant did not deserve what He went through because He had done no violence and had not been deceitful (v. 9). Although innocent, He did not open His mouth but was led like a lamb to the slaughter (v. 7). *Third*, they give deep theological significance to the sufferings of the Servant: He was bearing their sins and taking on what they deserved. He died as their substitute. They would recognize that He had borne their sicknesses and sorrows (v. 4), that He was wounded for their transgressions and crushed for their iniquities (v. 5), and that He was chastised in order for them to have peace with and healing from God. This was possible because the Lord would lay upon Him the iniquity of all (v. 6).

(c) God and the Servant. The biblical text also provides for us the divine perspective of the experience of the Suffering Servant. *First*, the Lord provides through Isaiah a theological interpretation that coincides with that of the people and goes deeper. The Lord states that the Servant would be struck for the transgression of His people (v. 8), but this is part of the divine plan for their salvation. It was God's will that the Servant be bruised and experience grief. This is interpreted as a sacrificial act (v. 10) by which the Servant would bear the iniquities of the people (v. 11). God had provided the Sacrifice that would finally resolve the problem of sin. As a sacrifice, the Suffering Servant poured out His life, was numbered with the transgressors, and bore the sin of many (v. 12). As a result of His substitutionary death, the Servant would now function as their intercessor (v. 12) and would justify many (v. 11). *Second*, the Lord announces the exaltation of the Servant, which is firmly grounded on His sacrificial death as a substitute for sinners. His death would be followed by His return to life to see the satisfying result of His sacrifice (v. 11). He would come out victorious over His enemies and would get the spoils of victory (v. 12). Kings would submit to Him, and He would be highly exalted (v. 13).

(d) The Servant and the Nations. The atoning work of the Suffering Servant that emerges in 52:13—53:12 becomes the foundation for the establishment of peace on earth in 54:1–17. He would restore the earth and cause the people to dwell in previously desolate areas (49:8). The prisoners and those in darkness would be freed (v. 9; cf. 42:7). The exaltation of the Servant (52:13; 53:10–12) would include the restoration of His people and Zion's Davidic glory, which would bring the nations together to worship the Lord (49:5–6; 55:3–5; 56:6–8; 60:1–22; 66:18–24). The Lord's covenant with Israel would be embraced by the nations, and worldwide peace would follow (2:2–4; 51:4–5; 54:1—56:8). The establishment of God's worldwide rule through the Servant would not be through violent means but in humility (42:1–4; 50:4–9), in righteousness (45:22–25; 51:4–5), and by His Spirit (42:1; 61:1–3). The Servant's atoning suffering would make it possible for the nations to participate in Israel's glorification and victory (53:12; 60:1—62:12). Thus, Israel's descendants would inherit the nations (54:3; cf. Gen. 12:1–3).

7. The Suffering Servant and Jesus. The description of the experience and work of the Suffering Servant places Him in a unique category incomparable to that of any other human being or that of Israel. Here the Israelite sacrificial system reaches and transcends its deepest significance. Its symbolic or typological function is implicitly recognized as the Servant of the Lord is identified as the ultimate substitutionary sacrifice for sin, provided by the Lord Himself. The NT announces that the Suffering Servant of the Lord had come in the person and ministry of Jesus Christ and bears ample witness to it. He is the true Servant of the Lord who fulfilled in every detail the prophetic word of Isaiah (e.g., Matt. 8:14–17; Mark 10:45; 15:28; Luke 22:35–38; John 12:37–41; Acts 8:32–35; Phil. 2:5–9; 1 Pet. 2:19–25). When the Ethiopian asked Philip about the identity of this anonymous Servant, Philip took the opportunity to show him all the places in the Hebrew Bible where the coming of this messianic figure was predicted. He then presented to the eunuch the fulfillment of these prophecies in the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus the Christ/Messiah (Acts 8:35).

Isaiah 52:13—53:12 is quoted or alluded to in the NT more than any other OT passage (e.g., Matt. 8:14–17; Mark 10:45; 15:28; Luke 22:35–38; John 12:37–41; Acts 8:32–35; Phil. 2:5–9; 1 Pet. 2:19–25). The earliest Christians regarded Isaiah 52:13—53:12 as a prophecy of the expiating suffering, death, and exaltation of Jesus (e.g., Acts 8:32–35; cf. Is. 42:1–4 and Matt. 12:18–21; Is. 61:1–2a and Luke 4:16–21). It is clear that Jesus thought of His sufferings as having been written about in certain passages of the Scriptures (Matt. 26:24, 54, 56; Mark 9:12; Luke 18:31; 24:25–27, 46) and that Isaiah 52:13—53:12 belonged to them. He must have had Isaiah 53 in mind when He spoke of coming to be a Servant who would give His life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45).

The identification of Jesus as the Suffering Servant of Isaiah is established on several grounds. *First*, a messianic understanding of the Servant in 52:13—53:12 is facilitated by the pronounced individual character of the Suffering Servant as the agent of peace in an everlasting covenant (53:5; 54:10; 55:4). The recurring features associated with David in the passage (see 52:13–14; 53:2, 6, 10–12), and Isaiah's prophecies in 9:2–7 and 11:1–10, further invite the reader to a messianic understanding. *Second*, as indicated by historical facts, Jesus's suffering, death, and resurrection match several striking details in Isaiah 52:13—53:12, like His humble beginnings (53:2), His rejection (52:14; 53:2–3, 7–9), His expiation of the human burden of sin laid upon Him by God (vv. 4–6, 10–12), His intercession for transgressors (v. 12), His being assigned a grave with the wicked and the rich at His death (v. 9), and His glorification (52:13; 53:11, 12). According to the NT, the prophecy of the Suffering Servant unquestionably found its fulfillment in Christ.

52:13–15. The Nations Are Astonished. The nations would be greatly perplexed at the Servant's success and exaltation. Notice that future events are stated as if they have already taken place. The Servant's exaltation (52:13 summarizes 53:10–12) is contrasted with His suffering and dishonor (52:14 summarizes 53:2–3). The shift from humiliation/suffering to exaltation/glory was to elicit the amazement and respect of kings (52:15—53:1). The interjection *hinneh* ("behold" or "see" in 52:13) calls attention to the Servant's future exaltation, which would be seen with amazement by the nations. The Hebrew verb *sakal* has been translated as "act wisely/insightfully," "deal prudently," or "succeed." The idea in vv. 14–15 is that just as many were astonished at the Servant's suffering, so also would many be astonished at His exaltation. The Hebrew *rabbim* ("many"), used several times in Isaiah 52:13—53:12, generally has an inclusive meaning ("a multitude" or "whole assembly"), but here it may mean "all." In 52:15 "many nations" refers to all the nations that would see the Lord's power and salvation (v. 10). The "many" in 53:11 designates all, the great multitude, or the whole assembly, and includes the "we" (i.e., people of God who speak in vv. 1–6) and "they" (i.e., many nations and kings in 52:15). Finally, the *rabbim* in the first part of 53:12 seems to refer to a host of prominent and powerful nations, namely, an elite body of nations among "all nations." The second reference to *rabbim* in that same verse refers to the same group as the "many" in 53:11 (i.e., all, or the great multitude, or the whole assembly).

His disfigurement or marred appearance is probably a way of speaking about His suffering and humiliation (cf. v. 2; Pss. 22:6–8, 12–18; 38:3–14). Through His actions, the Servant would purify the nations of their guilt (Is. 52:15) and enable them to approach the Holy One of Israel. The kings would shut their mouths in amazement and wonder (cf. Job 29:9) because they would see the Lord's mighty acts that were predicted in Isaiah 52:10.

53:1–3. Humiliation and Rejection. In the previous passage, the speaker was the Lord, but now the speaker is "we," the people of God. They speak about their *shemu'ah*, literally "something heard," in other words, their "report" or "message" and what the Lord's "arm" has revealed that has amazed them. The amazement is expressed in two rhetorical questions concerning those who had believed these things (v. 1). The "we" in vv. 1–6 first *see* the Servant's suffering and despise Him (vv. 1–3) but later *consider* that He actually suffered innocently and atoned for "our" sins (vv. 4–6). They finally hear the Lord's words identifying all this as a fulfillment of the Lord's purpose (vv. 7–10). The Lord would exalt the Servant among the nations (vv. 10–12).

The reference to the Servant growing up (v. 2) covers His birth and earthly ministry, leading to the preparation of His tomb (vv. 2–9) and, finally, His exaltation (52:13; 53:12). The phrase "before Him" denotes being in the presence, and under the watch, of the Lord. The metaphors of the tender plant or shoot and the root from the dry ground are the opposite of the tree planted by the water (Ps. 1:3), which refers to one who enjoys the divine blessing (cf. Is. 41:17–20). The Servant would have no *hadar*, "glory" or "honor," and His appearance would not be desirable—He would not stand out by virtue of outward splendor. The people would despise and reject (or forsake) the Servant; they would think that He was under the curse of God, based on a connection between suffering and sin (53:4–5; cf. Ps. 38:11). The Hebrew words in Isaiah 53:3 are sometimes translated as "sorrows," and "grief" can also be rendered as "pain" and "sickness." The hiding of faces refers to the Servant's lack of support. He who took the sins of the world upon Himself would be rejected by the sinners for whom He came to die.

53:4–9. A Radical Change. The "we" finally recognize the reason for the Servant's suffering, that He was a righteous person and was not smitten and afflicted by God for His own sin (vv. 4–5). His suffering was caused by *their* griefs (sickness) and sorrows (pains), by *their* transgressions and iniquities. They see that the penalty that grants them peace was placed on Him and resulted in healing for them (v. 5). The Servant was God's instrument for their salvation and redemption. The reason for the people's insight is not explicitly stated but seems to be the result of the Lord's exaltation of the Servant (vv. 10–12), which brought peace and healing to them and resulted in their being declared righteous.

The Hebrew word *'aken*, "surely," in this case emphasizes a contrast: "but indeed," "but in fact." Verses 4–6 are contrasted with vv. 2–3, underlining the realization that the Servant's grief (or sickness) and sorrows (or pain) in v. 3 are in reality *our* grief, sickness, sorrows, or pain that would be borne by Him (v. 4). The Servant would suffer for our transgressions and iniquities, and this undeserved punishment would bring us peace—and we would be healed by His wounds (v. 5). The people realized that they were wrong to think that the Servant *deserved* to be chastised by God (vv. 4–5). They saw that their own transgressions and iniquities had caused His sufferings and had even brought them peace and healing. Their confession that they had lost their way appears in v. 6, along with their confirmation that the Lord had atoned for their iniquity through His Servant. Indeed, it is only through confession and faith—that the Lord Jesus is our Savior—that one can receive the gift of salvation made available through His suffering and death.

The confession that all of us have gone astray (cf. Ps. 119:176; Jer. 50:6; 1 Pet. 2:25) and have turned to our own ways (cf. Is. 56:11; 1 Sam. 8:3) is answered by an act of forgiveness from the Lord: the Lord would lay all of our iniquities upon the Suffering Servant. Through Isaiah, the Lord had repeatedly made assurances of forgiveness, but this generally had referred to Israel (Is. 33:24; 43:25; 44:21–22). In 53:6 forgiveness is extended to all people. From being mere witnesses of the Lord's salvation of Israel (52:10), the nations would be drawn into a closer relationship with the Lord through the ministry and atoning death of the Servant.

Acting as the Shepherd of His sheep (53:6), the Lord would restore the people by letting His Servant become an atoning and substitutionary sacrifice. Thus, in 52:13—53:12, the Lord is presented with a twofold purpose: to save Israel and the nations by opening their eyes to who He is and to vindicate His Suffering Servant. By exalting Him, the Lord confirms both His pleasure with the work of the Servant and that His purpose has been achieved successfully through the Servant. In the divine speech in 53:7–9, the Servant's innocence, silence, and humility are described. His undeserved sufferings are therefore presented as sufficient for the expiation of the sins of all people. The verb *'anah* is usually translated as "afflicted" here, but it could also be rendered as "He humbled himself." The clause would then mean "He was oppressed, but He humbled Himself and did not open His mouth." The Servant's silence is underlined through repetition. The Servant's silence (vv. 7–9) anticipates the Lord's intervention (vv. 10–12).

It is also stated that the Servant would be taken away by coercion or restraint (some translations have "prison"; v. 8). The Hebrew word *dor*, usually translated as "generation," could also convey here the idea of "fate" or "plight," and the word *siakh*, sometimes translated as "declare," essentially means to "consider." The translation would then be "And who [i.e., no one] will consider His plight?" (cf. 53:3). In a positive context, "the land of the living" refers to the sphere of life and shows that the Servant died—He was "cut off" for the transgressions of God's people. The innocent suffered for the guilty (cf. 1 Pet. 3:18). Assigning the Servant's grave with the wicked means that He was considered a criminal. Being buried among criminals was deeply shameful in Israel, but being buried with a rich person after a violent death would reveal innocence (Is. 53:9).

53:10–12. Exaltation of the Servant. In Isaiah's account, accomplishing the Lord's purpose through sacrificial suffering results in the Servant's exaltation. It was the purpose (lit. "be willing") of the Lord Himself to cause the suffering of the Servant (v. 10). This indicates that what the Lord was doing through the Servant was not done reluctantly but out of love. The Lord was pleased that humanity would be brought back to Himself through the Servant's suffering, and He was personally involved in the Servant's experience, reconciling the world through His death (cf. 2 Cor. 5:19). This happened when God made the Servant's soul or life an offering for sin. The Hebrew speaks about a trespass/reparation offering brought for the misappropriation of what belonged to the Lord, a very serious sin (see Lev. 5:1–13). The Servant atoned for the sin of the many.

The Servant would be raised from death and see the wonderful results of His immense sacrifice (Is. 53:10). In some manuscripts and the Greek version (LXX), the text reads: "He shall see light from the labor of His soul/life," in contrast to the Hebrew text, which refers to the Servant seeing the labor of His life (or "soul") and being satisfied (v. 11). The Lord confirms the expiating effect of the Servant's sacrifice: the Servant's knowledge (v. 11) could be the object of the preceding clause (being satisfied by His knowledge). Various suggestions have been made concerning what kind of knowledge is meant here. In Isaiah, the central knowledge is to know God, understand who He is, and consider His plan (1:3; 37:20; 43:10; 49:23, 26; 52:6; 60:16). But knowledge is also experiential, so it could here refer to the experiences leading to the Servant's death. If "by His knowledge" is a continuation of "and be satisfied," then the idea is that the Servant shall be satisfied by what He shall see after His suffering. However, if "knowledge" is the experience of suffering, then the point is that the Servant would justify many by His suffering. By stating that the Servant is "righteous," the Lord underlines the Servant's innocence (53:6, 9–11; Deut. 32:4; Ps. 145:17; on bear iniquity/sin, see Lev. 16:22).

The Servant's reward and exaltation are closely related to His justification of the people by expiating their iniquities (Is. 53:11–12), and in doing this He would accomplish the Lord's purpose (v. 10). The military expression regarding the division of plunder with the strong or mighty is associated with victory, power, and rejoicing, used figuratively here for the victory of the Servant over His enemies. The Servant would pour out His life and die (v. 12; cf. v. 8c). His life is figuratively seen as being "poured out," like the blood/life of a sacrificial victim. The term *paga'* means "entreat passionately" on behalf of someone, or "intercede for someone" (cf. 59:16). The Servant is here assigned a priestly and prophetic role of intercession.

54:1–17. Citizens of Zion. The restoration of Zion is based on the Lord's everlasting covenants with Israel (vv. 1–17), David (55:3–4), and the nations (24:5; 54:5; 55:5). Zion would expand and spread out in all directions because of the increase in population. Her people would receive the nations, and the desolate cities would become inhabited. The period of disgrace was over. The Lord declared that Zion's husband is her Maker (cf. 43:1), who is also the God of all the earth, a concept that underlines the Servant's atonement for all the earth (52:13—53:12) and the gathering of the nations in Zion (56:3–8). The Lord's abandonment of Zion only lasted for a short while because He loved her and would reclaim her with abundant compassion, mercy, and everlasting *khesed*—a rich word with many connotations such as "love," "kindness," "covenant faithfulness," "mercy" and so forth (vv. 7–8; cf. 49:10). He had determined not to be angry again with Israel (54:9–10). The mountains and the hills might be removed (i.e., symbols of stability and permanence), but neither His *khesed* (love, mercy, and kindness) nor His covenant of peace were to be removed (v. 10; cf. Ps. 125:1). Since all their children would be taught by the Lord, Zion's inhabitants would know the Lord's *torah* ("law," "instruction"; cf. Is. 48:18–19) and do what He desires.

As is common in Isaiah, righteousness is associated with salvation or redemption (v. 14; cf. 1:26–27; 56:1). Being far from tyranny and oppression meant that they were to consider themselves free from oppression. Internal injustices (cf. e.g., 1:10–31; 3:1—4:1; 5:1–23) and foreign oppression (cf. 52:4–5) would be absent. When enemies would assemble, they would fall and surrender to them because the Lord would protect His people (v. 15). Zion would be immune to enemy attacks because weapons would fail against her, as would false accusations in court. The Lord declared that this heritage of peace belonged to the servants of the Lord (i.e., the faithful Israelites) and that their righteousness (or salvation/vindication) comes from the Lord. God's grace forgives and cleanses; the righteousness of the Servant translates into the salvation of His faithful servants because it is accounted as theirs.

55:1–13. Embracing Life. Isaiah here conveys the Lord's invitation to embrace His offer of life, which is offered without money and cost and is satisfying because it is good (v. 2). The life offered by the foreign gods requires the spending of money but yields what is not bread, what does not satisfy (v. 2). There is an appeal to listen and come to God for life made on the basis of the promised *khesed*, "mercy," "love," "kindness," "faithful love," for David. This refers to the promises that the Davidic dynasty would endure forever (2 Sam. 7:8–16) and that Israel would dwell securely and have rest from their enemies (vv. 9–11). These promises were an everlasting covenant (Is. 55:3; cf. 2 Sam. 22:51; 23:5; Pss. 18:49–50; 21:7; 89:28–49).

According to Isaiah 55:3–5, the Lord would appoint the new David as a witness to the peoples and a leader/ruler/commander for them.

David was commissioned to incorporate the nations into his kingdom (cf. 11:10–16; 14:1–3). The new David would witness to the nations about the Lord's glorious acts (cf. Ps. 18:49; Is. 11:9–10). The words in 55:3–5 allude to the promise to give the Davidic King (ultimately, the Messiah) the nations as an inheritance and the whole earth as a possession (Ps. 2:8; cf. Is. 54:3). Worshipers in the temple may have been familiar with Ps. 18:43–44, which also refers to a Davidic dominion over the nations, including a people that he had previously not known. The fact that God glorified Israel makes it possible for them to attract unknown people groups, who will come streaming to Israel (Is. 55:5); like David, they will have dominion over the nations (cf. 9:2–7; 11:1–10). The message to Israel, therefore, was that the Lord's covenant with and promises to David are everlasting. The invitation to repentance was an act of grace from God, whose love and righteousness, so deep and unsearchable, are above human imagination (55:6–9) and whose word is powerful and effects salvation (cf. 40:6–8). Repentant receivers of forgiveness would have joy and peace and would glorify the Lord's name (55:12).

56:1—66:24

The Restored Covenant Community at Zion

The invitation and call for repentance in chapter 55 is followed by an instruction concerning the restored covenant community gathering for worship at Zion. It is formed as a chiasm:

A Requirements for Becoming Citizens of Restored Zion (chaps. 56–59)
  B The Glory of the Restored Covenant Community (chaps. 60–62)
A' Selection of Citizens for Restored Zion (chaps. 63–66)

56:1–12. Sabbath Obedience and Leaders. Justice and righteousness—shown to God and one's fellow beings (vv. 1–2)—are defined as the central principles for belonging to restored Zion. A brief instruction outlines the principle of keeping justice and doing righteousness in order to enjoy blessings. Two specific laws are mentioned in v. 2. First, to avoid profaning the Sabbath is to remember it as a sign of the covenant with the Lord (Ex. 31:12–17; Ezek. 20:12, 20). Acknowledging that a seventh of all time (the Sabbath) belongs to God symbolizes the Creator's complete lordship in the believer's life. Its blessing consists in a deep communion with God as the Savior and is symbolized by resting from human labor. Isaiah develops his teaching on the Sabbath in 56:6–7 and 58:13–14. Second, to keep one's hand from doing any evil is to actively do acts of kindness to one's fellow humans (see vv. 6–7, 9–10). Foreigners and eunuchs represent people from "all nations" (v. 7). The restrictions against their participation in the assembly of the Lord (vv. 6–7; Deut. 23:1–8; cf. Lev. 21:16–20) would not impede them as long as they would keep the covenant and serve the Lord (Is. 56:4–6; cf. Josh. 2; Ruth).

The Lord ordained that eunuchs—who by accident or intent had lost their ability to procreate—fulfilling the covenant requirements would be given a *yad* (lit. "hand"; translated as "place" or "memorial") and a name in the temple. A eunuch was unable to have children, and his name was therefore not carried on in the community. This inability would be compensated by the better gift of having an eternal name with the Lord—spiritual blessings far outweigh material blessings. The Lord ordained that foreign proselytes be brought to His holy mountain to rejoice in His house of prayer. It was His plan that His house would be called a house of prayer for all nations (cf. 52:13—53:12; Matt. 21:13; Mark 11:17; Luke 19:46). The Lord God, gatherer of the dispersed exiles and outcasts of Israel (cf. Is. 11:12), would gather others together with them (56:8). It was necessary for Israel's failing leaders to repent in order to belong to restored Zion (vv. 9–12). Their negligence had made the flock an easy prey for wild beasts. They disregarded the Lord, became drunk, and saw no danger coming.

57:1–13. Israel and Idolatry. Something awful was happening in Israel; the righteous people were perishing, and consequently the whole nation was becoming corrupt. Those who were upright would find peace and rest in death (lit. "lying down" or "in their beds," that is to say, in their graves). The idolaters are addressed as the offspring of sorceresses, adulterers, and prostitutes. Unfaithful Zion-Jerusalem had raised unfaithful children. They seem to have been scoffing and ridiculing the prophet (57:4). The Hebrew term *khamam* can mean "warm yourself" or may refer to being sexually "heated up" or "inflamed" (cf. Gen. 30:38–39). The mention of "every green [or spreading/luxuriant] tree" (Is. 57:5) is a formulaic reference to Canaanite fertility cults and shows that Israel was involved in idolatry. Child sacrifices were condemned by the prophets (cf. Jer. 7:31; Ezek. 20:31; Mic. 6:7).

The audience in Isaiah 57:6–13 is addressed in the feminine singular as one acting like a prostitute (i.e., Zion-Jerusalem). The mention of "smooth" (most translations supply "stones" as the referent) is referring to some kind of pagan rite. "Portion" and "lot" combine the idea of choice and its consequences: as the Israelites had chosen, so would be their fate. Those to whom they had given offerings may refer to the *'ayil*, which can be rendered as the "oak," "terebinth," or "pillar" (some translations accordingly have "gods") mentioned in v. 5 or the "smooth stones" mentioned in v. 6. It seems that the Lord was among the deities worshiped by the people. This syncretism or polytheism was an abomination against the Lord. Drink offerings and grain offerings were legitimately offered to the Lord, but He was not to receive comfort in their having been given to other gods. The Lord then turned to the fertility cults, whose rituals were performed on the mountains (v. 7). The reference to a bed suggests a cult with sexual practices, as was common in Canaanite cults (cf. Ezek. 23:17).

The mention of activities behind doors and posts may refer to private homes or shrines (Is. 57:8). In view of the context, the term *zikkaron*, literally "remembrance" or "sign," may refer to a pagan cult symbol, perhaps an image of the male sexual organ, which would not have been unusual in the ANE. This term *zikkaron* may be related to a word meaning "male" (cf. Ezek. 16:17). The use of sexual imagery in Isaiah 57:8 indicates idol worship as spiritual whoredom. The last part of v. 8 literally means "you saw [or looked with satisfaction at] a hand"—the word for "hand" can be used as a euphemism for the male sexual organ. Zion the prostitute had tried to attract foreign lovers to herself (v. 9). The mention of going to the king could refer to Jerusalem's approach to a foreign king or, if the Hebrew word for king—*melek*—is pointed differently as *molek*, to a foreign false god. In either case, this resulted in idolatry and apostasy (cf. 2 Kin. 16; cf. Is. 7). The statement that unfaithful Jerusalem even descended to Sheol (the realm of the dead) may refer to the "covenant with death" mentioned in 28:14–22.

Israel's stiff-necked idolatry continued at length. The phrase "life of your hand," in the latter part of 57:10, has been understood as referring to Israel's continued commitment to their stubborn idolatry or alternatively as referring to the fruits of the soil that resulted from human work but for which Israel failed to be thankful to the Lord, as demonstrated in their idolatry (vv. 11, 19; cf. Hos. 2:8). The last view is preferable. God reproached His people's deceit and predicted their fate. Israel had lied (57:11) by disgracing the covenant through syncretistic fertility-cult practices (v. 5) and by claiming a righteousness with requirements they failed to meet (v. 12). The Lord proceeded to address the apostates with irony (vv. 12–13), proclaiming them as doomed to rely on their useless idols for salvation. But only those trusting in the Lord would find salvation by inheriting the land and possessing God's holy mountain (v. 13).

57:14—58:14. The Need for Humility. The speaker in v. 14 is not identified. The Hebrew verb indicates "He will say" or "it will be said." Here the Lord indicated that for Israel to return/repent, the stumbling block or obstacle had to be removed. The stumbling block was the people's lack of a contrite and humble, lowly spirit. This spirit characterizes the faithful worshiper for whom the Lord particularly cares (cf. 66:2; Pss. 34:18; 51:17). Coming to the Lord in the spirit of true worship was the implied purpose of the restoration of Zion. The Lord assured His people that His anger would not last (Is. 57:16–21; cf. 40:1–2) because He did not want them to despair. He therefore promised comfort, healing, and peace to all Israel, far and near. The Lord would heal the righteous (cf. 57:1–2), but God said there is no peace for the wicked (cf. 56:9–12; 57:3–13).

Desirous for His people to humble themselves, He instructed them on what humility really looks like (58:1–14). Although the people acknowledged the Lord as their God, worshiped Him, and daily sought Him, they failed to understand why He did not answer their prayers. The reason was that they fasted with the wrong attitude and for the wrong purpose and they transgressed against God and other human beings (vv. 2–3; cf. 56:2). The last part of 58:4 has been understood either as a command (to discontinue their contentious fasting) or more likely as a warning that they would not be heard "on high" if they continued in their error. The Lord's chosen or required fast is described as doing acts of kindness to the needy (vv. 6–7), for only then would they receive divine blessings (vv. 8–9).

The teaching on the true fast continues with an application of the two principles mentioned in 56:2: human relations (58:9–12) and the Sabbath (vv. 13–14). If the Lord's people would practice compassion, such as feeding the hungry and helping the afflicted (vv. 9–10; cf. vv. 6–7), then darkness and gloom would disappear, and

God would constantly guide His people. He would provide for them, like a shepherd, and give the flock food, drink, and protection (v. 11; cf. 40:11). He would strengthen their bones (or frame; v. 11c; cf. 66:14)—the bones were considered the seat of health and strength (cf. Job 20:11; 21:24). The comparison to water, springs, and gardens symbolizes the blessings of well-being and bliss.

The instruction concerning the Sabbath (58:13–14) is warranted because the Sabbath is a fundamental law in the covenant (56:2–7). In vv. 1–2, it expresses justice and righteousness. Here the Lord refers to the Sabbath as His holy day (cf. Ex. 20:8; Deut. 5:12), which humans should consider to be an honor and a delight. Two rewards are promised for Sabbath observance: (1) joy, restoration, and revitalization from the Lord; and (2) a triumphant ride on the high hills with abundant sustenance from the heritage of Jacob (cf. Deut. 32:13–14; Ps. 18:33; Hab. 3:19). The emphasis on Sabbath keeping as a requirement for becoming citizens of a restored Zion is central, recognizing that Judah's captivity is elsewhere blamed on their defilement of the Sabbath regulation (2 Chr. 36:21; Jer. 17:21–27). This seems to indicate that the Sabbath indeed encapsulates the moral law (cf. Ex. 20).

59:1–21. Separation, Confession, and Redemption. Isaiah acknowledges the Lord's will and power to intervene for His people (vv. 1–8), but their iniquities and sins had separated them from Him (v. 2; cf. 1:15; 50:1–3). The law of retribution is illustrated in 59:5–8: evil acts would bring evil on the perpetrators, and this was Israel's predicament. The people of Israel, who were mourning in the dark and departing from the truth, were to acknowledge their sins as the cause of their misery (59:9–15), and then the Lord would intervene on behalf of the penitent (vv. 15–21). He was displeased over the lack of justice among the leaders (vv. 15–16), for it was contrary to His own character (v. 17). The law of retribution is again stated in v. 18 as the basis for the Lord's anger and vengeance against His adversaries and enemies among the nations. The references to the Spirit of the Lord in v. 19 may indicate that the Lord will act through the righteous King foretold in 11:1–10. The Lord's intervention would result in His retributive punishment of the nations (59:18), but His coming to Zion means the redemption of the penitent in Israel (v. 20), to whom He would grant His Spirit and words forever (v. 21).

60:1–22. The Glory of God. The vision of the restored Zion-Jerusalem is a climactic point in the book of Isaiah. This passage, together with chapters 61–62, develops three themes: (1) when the glory of the Lord rises upon His temple in Zion-Jerusalem, the nations would come to her light, scattered Israel would return to her, and the nations would pay tribute to the Lord as their Ruler (60:1–20); (2) an everlasting covenant with the people of Zion-Jerusalem would bring restoration, righteousness, and praises before the eyes of the nations (60:21—61:9); and (3) the Lord would glorify Zion-Jerusalem before the witnessing nations and kings (61:10—62:12).

The passage begins with the command to Zion-Jerusalem to arise, shine (i.e. "shake yourself from the dust"), and reflect their light, the glory of the Lord, which had now come to them. Nations and kings, in darkness, were to come to Zion's light, to their glorious Lord (60:3). The passage continues with a further command to mother Zion-Jerusalem to look at her sons and daughters approaching with the nations from afar (v. 4; cf. 49:14—50:3; 54:1–17). The nations would come to pay homage and bring tribute. Peoples from afar would not only come with gold and incense but would come to proclaim the praises of the Lord (60:6; cf. Deut. 26:19) in the holy temple. In restored Zion-Jerusalem, the nations would have access to the temple, to worship the God of Israel. The phrase "the Lord's blessing of Zion with glory and splendor" is a fulfillment of God's covenant promises (Is. 60:9; cf. Deut. 26:18–19, where similar a Hebrew word is used). Zion's ornamental splendor and glory would consist of the Lord's shining glory—as expressed in the references to the Lord's glory rising upon them (60:1–2) and God being their glory (v. 19). Zion's ornamental glory, no longer determined by her ornamental jewelry (see 3:16–23), would be the beautiful garments that the Lord had commanded her to put on (52:1). They are defined in 61:10 as the "garments of salvation" and the "robe of righteousness," which are compared to the jewels with which the bride and bridegroom were adorned (61:10). The Lord would rename Zion, signifying forgiveness and restoration.

The nations and their kings would submit like vassals to their overlord (60:10–12). They were to build up the walls of "thé City of the LORD" (v. 14) and serve Zion (v. 10). Zion would be ornamented by "the glory of Lebanon" (v. 13). Its fertile ground and the various trees and their shade would ornament the temple. God would make the place for His feet glorious, which means that

Zion, as God's dwelling place, would be glorified through the worship of the nations who formerly afflicted Zion (vv. 13–14; cf. v. 7d). The nations would call Zion by a new name: "The City of the LORD, Zion of the Holy One of Israel" (vv. 14d-e). Then Zion-Jerusalem would know that the Lord, the Mighty One of Jacob, was her Savior and Redeemer (v. 16) and would enjoy peace and well-being. All violence and destruction would be gone, and Zion's walls would be called "Salvation" and her gates "Praise."

The Lord would be Zion's everlasting light (vv. 19–20; cf. Rev. 21:23). Zion would no longer live in darkness because the time of her mourning would end. The symbol of the Lord as a light may be associated with His creative and reconciling power (cf. Pss. 18:28; 36:9; 104 [esp. v. 2]; John 8:12). Although the earth and all the nations were covered with darkness (i.e., lacked justice and righteousness), Zion's light (the Lord) had come, and the nations and their kings would come to Him (Is. 60:1–3). The inhabitants of Zion would be righteous and would experience the Lord's blessings (vv. 21–22). He would be glorified by the redeemed people being the work of His hand. The Lord's plan was to hasten the fulfillment (v. 22).

61:1–11. News of Restoration. Verses 1–3 summarize the mission of the righteous Servant of the Lord. Jesus applied the first part of these words to Himself in the synagogue of Nazareth (Luke 4:16–22). Isaiah presents the Servant acknowledging that He had been anointed by the Lord with His Spirit (Is. 61:1). This passage thus alludes to another messianic promise in 11:2 and to the association of the Servant with the Spirit in 42:1 and 48:16. The tasks of the Servant consist in comforting the oppressed and announcing that the Lord had heard their prayers and would grant them glory, joy, and praises. The "trees [or oaks] of righteousness" (61:3) may refer to people who had been restored by the Lord's righteousness. In this context, righteousness or vindication is connected with salvation (cf. 41:10; 45:8; 51:5; 62:1) and glory (cf. 58:8; 62:2).

The prophet proceeds to describe the future restoration of the cities of Israel that had been ruined by the enemy (61:4). Strangers would become servants of Israel as shepherds, farm laborers, and vinedressers (v. 5). The people of Israel would be called the "priests of the LORD" and the servants/ministers of God (v. 6; cf. 66:21). This probably alludes to Exodus 19:6, where Israel is referred to as "a kingdom of priests" and "a holy nation." The everlasting covenant would bring joy to the people of Israel. God would clothe His people in garments of salvation and the robe of righteousness (Is. 61:10; cf. Zech. 3; Matt. 22:1–14; Rom. 13:14; 1 Cor. 1:30; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:27; Phil. 3:8–9; Rev. 7:14; 19:8; 21:2). These are wedding dress metaphors contrasted with a bridegroom who decks himself with ornaments or a bride who adorns herself with jewels (Is. 61:10). The wedding image points to the new covenant between God and Israel (v. 8; cf. 24:5; 54:10; 55:3; 2 Sam. 7:13, 16, 25, 29; 23:5). The blessings of the everlasting covenant would be witnessed by the nations (cf. Is. 61:9).

62:1–12. Zion Glorified. The Lord's silence (v. 1) is a recurring motif in Isaiah (42:14; 57:11; 64:12). The Lord would not be silent until He had accomplished salvation for His people. For the symbol of "light" and related images as references to the Lord when He glorifies and saves Israel, see 2:5; 9:2; 60:1–3. All nations and kings would see Zion's righteousness (or vindication and salvation; see commentary on 61:3) and glory (i.e., honor and dignity), and she would be called by a new name given to her by the Lord. His delight in His bride is expressed in her new names: Hephzibah means "my delight is in her" (62:4; cf. 2 Kin. 21:1), and Beulah means "married" (Is. 62:4). The new names indicate Zion's new status and destiny, which is further developed in 62:3, 5. The beautiful crown of splendor and glory and the royal diadem (v. 3) indicate the honor and dignity that the Lord would bestow on His people, reflecting the practices of a royal wedding. The wording in v. 3 is remarkable in that Zion, the glorious crown, would be in God's hand. The wedding and marriage metaphors hinted at in 61:10 and 62:4 highlight the honor and dignity that the husband bestows on His wife and their mutual delight. The Lord would delight in His people as the groom delights in his bride.

If in 62:6–7 the speaker is the prophet, the verses express his longing for the Lord to make Jerusalem praised throughout the earth (v. 7). The watchmen of v. 6 would be prophets invoking the Lord's saving actions for Jerusalem. But if the speaker is the Lord in v. 6a–b, and the prophet adds his comments in vv. 6c–7, the watchmen would probably be heavenly beings keeping watch over the city. As the Lord's heralds, they would keep watch in and around Jerusalem and report to the Lord. They were to continue until the Lord established Jerusalem

(v. 7). Verses 8–9 are directly connected with vv. 4–5 and assume that the future restoration had already been accomplished. The powerful image in vv. 8c–9 describes the Lord's solemn promise that Zion would never again suffer the terrors of a foreign invasion. The commanded procession into the holy city and the temple marks the end of the symbolic wedding ceremony between the Lord and His people (v. 10). The Lord's proclamation to Zion had reached to the end of the world, to scattered Israel among all the nations: Zion's Savior was coming, and His reward and recompense would be with Him (v. 11; cf. Rev. 22:12).

63:1–6. The Lord at War. The prophet describes the Messiah's victory over all His enemies (vv. 1–6; see chaps. 13–23 and 34–39). The text refers to the Lord coming from Edom and Bozrah, a possible allusion to 34:5–15. However, the central point is the defeat of the nations (59:15b–20) during the day of vengeance when God would restore His redeemed people (61:2; cf. 34:8). The passage has the form of a dramatic dialogue. A bloodstained warrior is seen returning from Edom and Bozrah. Someone—perhaps a watchman on the walls of Jerusalem—asks Him to disclose His identity, and the answer is that He is the One mighty to save (63:1). The watchman seeks an explanation of the red stains on His garments (v. 2), and the answer is that He has intervened on behalf of His people without human assistance and has annihilated the oppressive nations. The bloodstain on the Messiah Warrior signifies His victory over the enemy (symbolized here as Edom) and the redemption of His people.

63:7–14. Prayer of Remembrance. This prayer expresses the attitude which the Lord favors (see 57:14–20). A herald, on behalf of the people, recalls the Lord's *khesed*, "mercy," "love," "covenant faithfulness," and *rakhamim*, "tender mercy" or "compassion" (63:7). He made a covenant with Israel as their Savior (v. 8; cf. Lev. 26:12; Deut. 29:13; Jer. 7:23; Ezek. 11:20) because He had compassion on them. Because of the similarity of certain Hebrew words, there is some variation in regard to the Hebrew manuscripts, the LXX, and commentators with respect to Is. 63:9. Most translations have opted for the reading that God was afflicted in all of their afflictions. God carried His people as an eagle carries its young on its wings (Deut. 32:11). But the people rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit, and consequently the Lord turned against them as an enemy (Is. 63:10). Israel remembered the days of old, when they sought the Lord who had saved them during the Exodus (vv. 11–14). They remembered Moses as the shepherd of His flock and how they sought the One who put His Holy Spirit within (or among) them (lit. "within him")—the Lord put His Spirit upon Moses (Num. 11:16–25). They remembered how the Lord led them in the wilderness. The simile of a horse in the open desert describes how the Lord led Israel with ease through the Red Sea (Is. 63:13; cf. Ps. 106:9). A second image depicts livestock given rest by the Spirit of the Lord, an image that alludes to the Lord's promise: "My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest" (Ex. 33:14). In Isaiah 63:9–10, interesting references are made to the Lord, the Angel of His presence, and the Holy Spirit, probably pointing to the three persons of the Godhead. The three are fully involved in the work of redemption.

63:15–19. Prayer of Penitence. Based on vv. 11–14, an appeal is next made to the Lord to show His zeal, power, and compassion (v. 15). There is a phrase in the Hebrew which literally means "the sound of your inward parts," the "inward parts" being a metaphor for the seat of emotions. The Hebrew term *me'eh*, "inward parts," may be used in the context of a sense of pity (cf. 16:11) or compassion (cf. Jer. 31:20). The petitioners are confident that the Lord wants and has the power to save them (cf. Is. 64:1–4) because He is their Father and He has proven Himself to be their Eternal (Heb. *'olam*) Redeemer (or "Redeemer from old/ancient times"; 63:16). The concept of the Lord as Israel's Father, which corresponds to Israel being His son, is defined in Deuteronomy 32:6 in the context of the Lord creating Israel as His elected people.

Isaiah, on behalf of his fellow Israelites, asks difficult and perplexing questions of God, such as "Why have You caused us to wander? Why have You hardened our hearts?" (Is. 63:17). This kind of language is similar to other passages that attribute divine involvement (in some sense) in regard to human sin and hardness of heart (e.g., 6:10; Ex. 4:21; Deut. 2:30; Rom. 9:18; 11:7–9; 2 Thess. 2:11). In the Bible God is at times described as doing that which He allows. He respects human freedom and makes humans responsible for their actions. Those who harden themselves against the Lord cannot prosper because the Lord's wisdom and strength will prevail over them (Job 9:4; Prov. 19:21). The Lord allows for the sinners' actions, but He is also ready to save them from their wrongdoings. This is what the petitioners are asking for in this passage. The appeal for the Lord to return for the sake of His servants (i.e., Israel; cf. e.g., Is. 41:8–20) and the tribes of His heritage (cf. e.g., 54:17; 58:14) is motivated by His covenant with Israel (cf. 63:15–17).

In the Hebrew, the assumed referent of what God's holy people possessed is not clear. However, an analogy may exist between the list in 64:9–11 and the content of 63:17c–19: (1) Israel as Your people (v. 17; 64:9); (2) the desolation of (lit.) "the cities of Your holiness," namely, Judah (63:18a; 64:10a); and (3) Zion-Jerusalem desolate and the temple exposed to burning (63:18b; 64:10b–11c). This analogy suggests that the implied "it" refers not to the temple but to the cities of Judah (i.e., the land). The trampling of the sanctuary may be referring either to the destruction of the temple or, figuratively, to "treating it with disdain."

64:1–12. May the Lord Come. This section is a continuation of the prayer of penitence. It begins with an appeal to the Lord to "rend the heavens" in order to show Himself (cf. 63:15). His powerful appearance is described as fire that burns brushwood and twigs and causes water to boil (64:2). The purpose of His revelation before the nations (cf. 40:3–5) was to make His power known to His adversaries (cf. 63:18b) so that the nations would tremble before Him, that is to say, in His presence. The petitioners remembered the Lord's past actions during the Exodus, the wilderness wanderings, and the conquest of Canaan. From the earliest times (Heb. *'olam*), the Lord had been known as the One who helps those who wait for Him (64:3–4). They had complete confidence in the Lord because He *paga'*, "helps" or "welcomes" (lit. "meets" or "encounters") those who rejoice in doing what is right (v. 5). But then the sad reality dawned on them: God had been angry on account of their sin. Sin causes grief in the heart of the repentant soul. Recognition and confession of one's sin result in forgiveness.

All righteous deeds are like "filthy rags." This is probably a reference to the cloths used by a woman during her menstruation or after childbirth (cf. Lev. 12), which were fit only for destruction. The people's situation was hopeless—all their acts of righteousness were so polluted that they could not be cleansed but only destroyed. Therefore, they confessed that they were withering like a leaf and being blown away by the wind (cf. Ps. 90:5–6). The hopelessness of the petitioners in Isaiah 64:6 is underlined by the reference to the lack of response to the Lord, His punishment, and the removal of His sustaining presence from them (v. 7).

After a marked shift in the text with the Hebrew *we'attah*, "but now" or "yet," the petitioners expressed renewed confidence in the Lord as their Father (cf. 63:16) and Creator (64:8; cf. 57:16). The image of the potter and the clay is used here (as in Job 10:9) to remind the Lord that He made humans out of clay, and therefore they are weak and fragile beings who are fully dependent on His mercy (cf. Jer. 18:1–12). The next two requests of the Lord, namely, not to remain angry with them and not to always remember their sins, were combined with the plea to notice that they were still His people (cf. Is. 63:16–19).

The suffering and shame of the petitioners is related to the fact that the nations afflicted Judah and Jerusalem (64:10–11). The phrase "Your holy/sacred cities" is unique in the OT. That the cities belonged to the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, and therefore were holy, contains an appeal for the Lord's intervention for His name's sake. The lamentation continues: the temple referred to in v. 11 is clearly Solomon's temple, for it was where the ancestors praised the Lord. In the Hebrew it is referred to as a "house," not a "sanctuary" (see 63:18). The reference in v. 11 is most probably written from the perspective of the future Babylonian destruction of the city in 586 B.C. The reference to the *makhmad*, "pleasant," "desirable," or "treasured" things, may refer to valuables in, and ornaments of, the temple (cf. 2 Chr. 36:19; Lam. 1:10–11; Ezek. 24:21; Hos. 9:6). The lamentation ends with an appeal for the Lord's intervention. The question regarding whether God would continue to hold back (Is. 64:12) alludes to 63:15–16, where the Lord's intervention is expected because Israel is His covenant people. The question of whether He would remain silent is essentially the question of whether He would refuse to intervene on behalf of His covenant people. The final question of 63:12 is in regard to whether the Lord would continue to punish His people. The questions are an expression of hope and anticipate a positive response from the Lord.

65:1–16. First Answer: God Is Righteous. The Lord's answer to Israel's lamentation in 63:7—64:12 begins with this passage. It predicts that the Lord, in His righteousness, would punish the rebellious and reward the faithful in Israel. Paul applies 65:1 in Romans 10:20 to the gospel going to the Gentiles (see 66:12, 18–20). Isaiah places the emphasis on the fact that the Lord made

Himself available to His people, but apostate Israel behaved as a nation that was not called by His name (i.e., that did not belong to Him; v. 1). A list of offenses is given (vv. 3–5) involving practices of fertility cults, divination by consulting the dead, and defilement by breaking dietary laws. The concluding offense (v. 5) is the blasphemous claim by those who had broken the covenant law and defiled themselves that they were as holy as the priests (cf. Lev. 21:6–8). Their offense lay in the blasphemy of treating defilement as holiness.

Concerning the offenders, the Lord states that they are like smoke in His nostrils and a continual fire (Is. 65:5). They had made Him angry, and their punishment is expressed in the characteristic references to the Lord's active intervention—He would not keep silent, and He would take vengeance upon them (cf. 34:8; 63:4). The image of repaying in their "bosom" or "lap" (65:7) refers to a fold of garment where money was carried, but here it is used to refer to a payment according to the law of retribution. However, God would save the faithful remnant and let them dwell in restored Zion (v. 8). The good fruit is a gift of God. As repeatedly stated by Isaiah, the righteous remnant needed to be separated from the wicked. God's chosen remnant were the people who sought Him (vv. 9–10). They affirmed the invitation to seek the Lord while He could be found (55:6) and had honestly sought the Lord (cf. 65:1). Consequently, they would inherit and possess the land (cf. 54:3; 57:13; 60:21).

Those indifferent to the peace of Zion and the worship of the Lord would be left to perish by the sword. They were preparing a table for *gad*, which refers to the worship of a Syrian god named "Fortune," and they were bringing drink offerings for *meni*, a god of fate (both Gad and Meni may have been star deities; 65:11–12). The Lord's servants would prosper in the sense that they would have food, drink, and joy. The wicked would experience only shame, pain, and a crushed spirit (vv. 13–14). The name of the wicked would function as a curse (cf. Jer. 29:22), while the name of the Lord's servants would bring blessings from the only true God who speaks truth. For those who would inherit the land, previous troubles would be forgotten and hidden from the Lord's eyes (Is. 65:16).

65:17–25. Second Answer: New Heavens and New Earth. The Lord promised to create new heavens and a new earth (cf. 66:22) and affirmed that the former things would not be remembered or come to mind. In Isaiah's setting, this verse is a reference to the new conditions that the Lord would create for Zion-Jerusalem and His people. The prophet has just indicated that the former troubles would be forgotten (v. 16) and continues to describe the joy of salvation (vv. 18–19) and the long life of all the people except sinners (vv. 20–22; see below, "The New Heavens and Earth and the Presence of Death"). Isaiah is the first prophet who explicitly announces God's future creation of an everlasting new world without sin and suffering (v. 23; cf. Rev. 21:1–4). In the new world that God would create for His faithful ones, children would be born for blessing, not for trouble, because they would be children of those blessed by the Lord. The Lord would answer before they called and hear while they were still speaking (Is. 65:24). In all of His holy mountain, the Lord says, there would be a new order of things, a state of peace and not of destruction (v. 25; cf. 11:9–10).

The New Heavens and Earth and the Presence of Death

Isaiah 65:20 has perplexed some Christian readers because it is connected to the new creation. This promise of longevity, that presupposes the presence of sin and death, is found in the context of a divine announcement of the new heavens and new earth (v. 17). The context (vv. 17–25) describes the transformation of society (vv. 18–19, 22–24), nature (v. 25), and humanity's relationship with God (vv. 19, 24). In the interpretation of the passage, we should probably examine first the concept of the "new" in Isaiah.

1. New Heavens and New Earth. The phrase "new heavens and a new earth" obviously designates a new creation (vv. 17–25; 66:22; cf. Gen. 1:1). According to Isaiah, this new creation would totally displace and bring to an end the former things. The "new" work of God would be so radical that the former would not be remembered (Is. 65:17b); absolute joy would prevail (v. 18), weeping and crying would disappear forever (v. 19), and the nature of wild animals would be transformed (v. 25). Elsewhere, the prophet even announces that God "will swallow up death forever" (25:8) by bringing it to an end when He resurrects His people (26:19). This would be the ultimate defeat of death. For the prophet, this is an end-time expectation, a return to God's paradise.

2. Israel and the "New" in Isaiah. In Isaiah God announced to His people new things before they would come into being (42:9). In fact, He was already doing a "new thing" (43:19), namely, His work of redemption for Israel, the deliverance from exile, and the return to Jerusalem. The new thing was His work of salvation within their history. This event would have an impact on nature (vv. 19–20) and would bring healing to His people (42:16). What was particularly new was that in the deliverance of Israel, the nation itself would not play any role at all (God would use the Persian king; 44:24—45:7) because it would be based on God's forgiving grace (43:25) and even the nations would benefit from it (45:22–24).

The context of this new, radical, unique work of salvation is the history of Israel, and it did not immediately bring the history of the nations to an end. The Medo-Persian kingdom would still be in power, but God was using it to bring something totally new into existence. The old oppressive powers coexisted with the new things, that is to say, the new creation that God was already bringing into existence. We could say that what the NT calls the present age and the future age (Matt. 12:32) are described in Isaiah as simultaneously present in the arena of human history.

Therefore, in Isaiah the new creation is not something totally in the future. It was to irrupt into the present of Israel through God's glorious work of redemption and forgiveness. It is within this conceptual framework that Isaiah 65:20 is to be placed. It announces that soon, in the present existence of Israel, God would begin to defeat death. This idea is expressed through the promise of longevity and the elimination of infant mortality. This promise points to a restriction imposed on the power of death, and consequently it was a prelude to the future extermination of death from the world. These promises were to be literally fulfilled in Israel had it remained faithful to God, but this was not the case. The coming of the Messiah enriched the prophecy and enlarged its fulfillment.

3. The New in the New Testament. Similarly to Isaiah and in fulfillment of his prophecy, in the NT the age of salvation was inaugurated by Christ. For now, the evil age of sin and death coexist (cf. Gal. 1:4; Heb. 6:5). The defeat of death is already a reality through the redemptive work of Christ (Heb. 2:14; Rev. 1:18). Through Him the new creation is a present reality and believers are part of it (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 1:4). It is already here as a promise, as a gift, as a process by which sinners are being transformed into the likeness of Christ (2 Cor. 4:16). We now wait for the consummation of that salvation (Rom. 8:19–23; Rev. 21:1).

66:1–4. Third Answer: True Worship. The true worshiper is humble, contrite, and trembles at God's word (v. 2; cf. 57:15–21). God will reject those who believe that He, the Creator of heaven and earth, could reside only in a temple built by humans (66:1–2), formally worshiped by covenant breakers (v. 3). God declared that heaven is His throne and the earth His footstool (v. 1). This alludes to Israel's ancient conviction that the Lord's favor does not depend on building a wooden building (2 Sam. 7:7) and that the highest heavens could not contain God, let alone an earthly temple (1 Kin. 8:27; cf. vv. 23, 57–61; Ps. 11:4). The Lord's footstool (see e.g., Ps. 132:7) normally represents the ark, Zion, or apparently the earthly temple (cf. Is. 60:13), but when Isaiah identifies the earth as the Lord's footstool (66:1), he is describing the Lord as the Sovereign King of the world.

Considering that the Lord's throne is heaven and earth is His footstool, these rhetorical questions belittle the presumptuous thought that humans can build a house to worship the Lord while being disloyal to Him. The Sovereign King of the universe cannot be caged in a house and manipulated through ritual formalism. The prophet describes the false worshipers as those who offer sacrifices to the Lord while committing abominable offenses (v. 3; cf. 1:10–17). The dog was a sacrificial animal in some countries but considered unclean in Israel. As the apostates—who feared their threatening enemies—had chosen what was displeasing to God, God would choose their punishment (*ta'alulim*, which could designate a severe treatment or delusion) and would bring upon them what they had feared (66:4).

66:5–13. Fourth Answer: I Will Vindicate Zion. Verses 5–13 are addressed to the poor and contrite people of the Lord. They are clearly distinguished from their own people (lit. "brothers") who hated them and from those who excluded them because of God's name (v. 5). The latter were the apostates (vv. 3–4) who were oppressing the faithful (cf. 50:4–11; 51:7), taunting their faithful brothers and scoffing at the predictions of the Lord's intervention against the oppressors. But these would not have a part in the restored Zion: they would be ashamed (66:5), and the voice of the Lord would be heard as He took vengeance upon His enemies (v. 6). The prophet already hears the noise from the city and the voice of the Lord from the temple (v. 6).

The scoffers continued their taunt, speaking of the predicted sudden change of Israel's situation as just too miraculous to be believed (v. 8). "Zion" is treated here as a metonymy for the land of Israel and Judah, and the taunt builds on earlier passages (e.g., 49:17–26; 52:1–12; 54:1–17; 60:1–22). The Lord replied to the taunt with two rhetorical questions relating to His power and control of history and to His plan to restore Zion and return scattered Israel (66:9).

The Lord invited the faithful citizens of new Zion to rejoice and take part in the celebration of her glory (vv. 10–11; cf. chaps. 60–62). He refers to them as those who love her and mourn for her (cf. 57:18; 61:2–3). The apostates, however, were those who forsook the Lord and forgot His holy mountain (65:11). In 66:11 the restored community is depicted through the image of a child being nourished (comforted) by its mother's milk (cf. 60:16). The metaphor of glorified Zion as a mother feeding, carrying, and dandling her child (i.e., her people) continues. The Lord would extend peace to her like a river and give her the glory or wealth of the nations (or Gentiles) like an overflowing stream (66:12). Then they (the faithful citizens) would be nursed and fed (i.e., their needs would be satisfied; cf. 60:16). This portion of the passage emphatically resumes the Lord's decision in 40:1–2 to comfort Jerusalem (66:13).

66:14–24. Fifth Answer: Final Judgment. The citizens of restored Zion were told that their hearts would rejoice and that they (or their "bones," the Heb. word *'etsem* can mean "self" or "bone") would flourish like grass when they would see God's salvation and glory (v. 14; cf. 58:11; 60:5a). This prediction rejects the taunt of the apostates in 66:5. God would demonstrate His power and righteousness in two ways. His hand (i.e., power) would be known to His servants when they saw His plan being implemented and their oppressors being defeated (v. 14c). By contrast, His enemies would be exposed to His anger (vv. 14d–15). The apostates in Israel were among the Lord's enemies. The first clause of v. 18 does not contain a verb in the Hebrew text, and thus translators have usually supplied one. Some supply "know," in other words, "I know their works"; others have "because of their actions and thoughts" or "I can see what they are doing." These enemies are those who go to gardens to worship idols and who eat swine and mice (v. 17; cf. 65:3–4 and the prohibitions against unclean food in Lev. 7:21; 11:10–23, 29).

The Lord would rule as the King of the world: He would gather all nations and languages (lit. "tongues"; Is. 66:18). This would be the result of the atonement and intercession of the Lord's Suffering Servant on behalf of the nations (52:13—53:12). The Lord's acceptance of their sacrifices in His temple, which He had declared to be "a house of prayer for all nations" (56:6–7), implies that the nations would be citizens of the Lord's future kingdom (cf. 2:2–4). He would set a sign among the nations—probably "the banner" that is repeatedly mentioned in the book (cf. 11:10b). The survivors who would escape, that is to say, the Lord's faithful remnant that included the faithful among scattered Israel, would be saved from the fate of the apostates (cf. 66:14–17). These would be sent to the nations in order to announce God's glory among the Gentiles (or the nations; v. 19; see 11:11; Ezek. 27:10–13). They would go to Tarshish, a distant Phoenician colony; to Pul, which was probably Somaliland or Libya in Africa; to Lud, which may be Lydia in Asia Minor; to Tubal, which may refer to the people living south of the Black Sea; to Javan, which refers to the Greeks; and to the islands or coastlands, which refer to distant peoples.

The Lord told His faithful ones that those of the remnant of Israel whom He would send to distant nations (Is. 66:19) would bring their fellow Israelites to the Lord's holy mountain in Jerusalem as an offering (*minkhah*, "offering," "tribute," "gift"). The metaphor of the people being offered to the Lord in a ceremonially clean vessel describes their return as a tribute to the Lord (v.

20; cf. 52:11–12). The means of transportation are reminiscent of 60:4–9 and lend force to the multitude of people coming from distant places. Some of them would be chosen as priests and Levites (66:21). Priests and Levites were among the apostates and those who lost their lives during the Assyrian and Babylonian invasions. Consequently, faithful Israel would replace the unfaithful, and the needed numbers of temple servants would be filled (cf. 61:5–6). Thus, the Lord's plan would be accomplished—purified Israel would worship Him properly in His holy temple.

The new heavens and the new earth that the Lord would make (66:22) were to remain before Him (see commentary on 65:17–25). The new heavens and new earth would display the glory of the Lord. Israel and his descendants were to remain before Him, never to be separated. Humanity's worship of the Lord would continue eternally, from one new moon to another (i.e., monthly) and from one Sabbath to another (i.e., weekly; 66:23). The Lord's world sovereignty was to be confirmed by *worship*. The corpses of the apostates would be an abhorrent reminder of their permanent state of death and defilement. The going out referred to at the beginning of v. 24 alludes to the custom of ending the regular worship at Jerusalem with a procession from the temple. On this occasion, the worshipers would see the bodies of the dead apostates in the Valley of Hinnom (from which is derived the expression Gehennah, "hell" in the NT) at the foot of Mount Zion. Its disgrace and defilement derived from its association with human sacrifice (2 Kin. 23:10; Jer. 7:31; 32:35) and from its use as the city's rubbish dump. Unclean corpses that were denied proper burial were also deposited there to be burned or left to decompose. The worm that would not die and the fire that would not be quenched refer to what would happen to their bodies and does not refer to the concept of an immortal soul. The verb tenses denote actions that are not yet complete and convey the sense that the worm had not yet died and the fire had not yet been quenched. The clauses simply say that no one would act to extinguish the worms or quench the fire before the consumption of their bodies, which agrees with 1:31. The fate of the corpses confirms that the apostates would permanently perish (cf. 26:14) and would be excluded from participation in the new life that the Lord would create for His people. The reference to these dead people who had rebelled or transgressed (Heb. *pasha'*) against the Lord in 66:24 echoes 1:2, where the same verb is used. The problem with God's children, announced in 1:2–3, was at last to be addressed. The many verbal and thematic connections between chapters 1 and 66 serve to mark an *inclusio* of the whole book (see commentary on 1:2–31). The nations would see the Lord's glory in Zion and the glorification of faithful Israel (61:4–11; 62:1–4, 10–12) and would choose to join the worshiping community in Zion-Jerusalem (60:1–18).

The book of Isaiah closes with a description of the final fate of the wicked, which implies the conclusion of the conflict and the transformation of hope into a visible reality through the power of God. Isaiah announces the extinction of the wicked in order to accentuate the final victory of the righteous. This hope anticipates the moment when God's people will eternally dwell in the presence of Him who is the Creator, Redeemer, and Sovereign of the universe.

JEREMIAH

INTRODUCTION

Title and Authorship. This major prophetic work is introduced as "the words of Jeremiah" (Jer. 1:1). Considering the technical sense of a prophet's "word" (*dabar*; 18:18; cf. 37:6–17), the plural "words [of Jeremiah]" signifies a collection of prophetic messages (cf. Amos 1:1). Jeremiah was the son of Hilkiah, one of the priests in the land of Benjamin (Jer. 1:1). The composition of the book of Jeremiah is best understood as a *process*. Firstly, the "word" of the Lord became the "word" of the prophet. God was the author-originator and Jeremiah the author-messenger. God placed His words in Jeremiah's mouth (v. 9; 5:14; 15:19; cf. 19:2) or commanded him to write (30:1–2; 36:2, 28), and they became "the words of Jeremiah" (1:1; 51:63). Secondly, as *mediator* of God's word, Jeremiah expressed the divine insight in his own words under the guidance of the Spirit. In this sense, Jeremiah is the author of his book, the content of which he received through divine revelation and inspiration (1:1–2). Thirdly, in some cases, Jeremiah used material that is nearly identical to that found in other books to convey his message (e.g., 2 Kin. 24:18—25:26 in Jer. 52:1–34). Arguably, this was because he either authored the other material or borrowed it because it expressed God's message to him in a particularly useful way. Finally, Jeremiah wrote some of his "words" with his own hand (29:1; 30:2; 51:60) but also used a scribe to whom he dictated his message (32:13, 16; 36:2–4, 32; 45:1). Although the composition of the book was a process (see 36:32), the final work bears the clear imprint of Jeremiah's individual and sensitive personality, and a masterful poetical and rhetorical style.

The Two Editions of Jeremiah

There are two different editions of the book of Jeremiah. The Hebrew text, from which the Septuagint (LXX) was translated, is about 13 percent or 2,700 words shorter than the Masoretic Text (MT) of the Hebrew Bible. Certain sections in the MT are missing from the LXX, and some material is in a different order. The Dead Sea Scrolls include six fragments of Jeremiah in Hebrew, four following the MT and two following the Hebrew text used by the translators of the LXX. Since the shorter edition of Jeremiah existed in Hebrew during the second century B.C., the major differences were not introduced by the LXX translator.

However, the overall message of Jeremiah does not significantly differ. Many differences result from repetitive material found in the MT that is missing from the LXX. While two versions of Jeremiah appear to have been in circulation at least from the second century B.C., the fact remains that the canonical edition in our Bibles was endorsed by Palestinian Judaism, associated with the Jerusalem temple, and continued in Rabbinic Judaism. These important questions remain: Which edition goes back to Jeremiah, and why do we have two editions? Various answers have been suggested, and there is no conclusive verdict.

For readers who accept the repeated claim of the book as the word of God, the same God also has the power and means to protect His word from distortions (cf. Jer. 23:28; 26:2; Ps. 119:160; Matt. 5:17–18; 1 Pet. 1:22–25). Although both editions contain, in slightly different forms, the word of God, the fact remains that the longer version in the MT was recognized as authoritative by both Judaism and Christianity as part of the biblical canon. In this we see God's providential work.

Date. The title in 1:1–3 dates Jeremiah's ministry from King Josiah's thirteenth year (627 B.C.) until the Babylonian Exile (586 B.C.). Prophetic "words"/"messages" were dictated and/or written over a period of time (30:1–24; 36:1–32; cf. 29:1–32; 45:1–5; 51:59–64). The epilogue in chapter 52 mentions events dated to the thirty-seventh year of the exile of King Jehoiachin of Judah (vv. 31–34; cf. 2 Kin. 25:27–30), that is, the year that Evil-Merodach of Babylon succeeded Nebuchadnezzar (562 B.C.). Chapter 52 was not written by Jeremiah (see 51:64), but it demonstrates how his prophecies were fulfilled. It also indicates that the book of Jeremiah as we now have it was in existence around 562 B.C. The earliest known manuscripts of the book are among the Dead Sea Scrolls, which date to about 200 B.C., approximately when the LXX translation was initiated in Egypt. The importance of the book is attested in Daniel (9:2; cf. 2 Chr. 36:21–22), in Ezra (1:1), and in the apocryphal book of Ecclesiasticus (chaps. 44–49).

Backgrounds. Jeremiah's long prophetic ministry (627–586 B.C.) coincided with the reigns of five successive kings in Judah: Josiah (641–609 B.C.), Jehoahaz (609 B.C.), Jehoiakim (609–598 B.C.), Jehoiachin (598–597 B.C.), and Zedekiah (597–586 B.C.). Jeremiah was well acquainted with loneliness and was forbidden to marry and have children (Jer. 16:1–2). The social and political establishment opposed his messages (e.g., 1:18; 26:7–24) and put him in the stocks (20:2) and in prison (37:15–16; 38:1–13, 28). People in his hometown and family rejected him (11:18–23; 12:6), but he was sustained by his awareness of God's presence (1:8, 19; 14:8–9; 15:20) and the power of the divine word (1:9; 15:16, 19; 20:8–9; 23:29).

The most intense phase in Jeremiah's ministry occurred during the sustained historical crisis in 605–586 B.C. that climaxed in the destruction of Jerusalem (15:19; cf. 1:9; 5:14). Speaking candidly and with divine power, his relentless prophecies of judgment were intended to lead the people to repentance. Repentance was needed because the cause of the crisis was the people's desertion of the covenant God. Jeremiah's messages eventually enabled the remnant of Israel to survive Judah's fall and the Exile. Jeremiah directed them toward God's future and gave them a hope that was founded on God's grace and power (cf. 29:11).

Jeremiah's call to ministry was closely connected with Babylon's rise to supremacy. On his death, Ashurbanipal left behind a weak Assyrian Empire (627 B.C.). The same year, Nabopolassar became king in Babylon and soon subjugated Assyria. Thus, Jeremiah's appointment in 627 B.C. as a prophet to the nations (1:5) coincided with the rise of the Neo-Babylonian power that would dominate Judah politically for about seventy years. The ministry of Jeremiah covered five historical periods.

1. Before Josiah's Reform (629–622 B.C.). Jeremiah 2:1—6:30 possibly derives from these early years (cf. 3:6). The passage is characterized by (a) strong denouncements of Judah's idolatry (e.g., 2:1—3:5); (b) harsh announcements of impending punishment "from the north" (e.g., 1:13–16; 4:5—5:17); and (c) messages of hope and salvation (e.g., 3:6—4:4; 4:14).

2. Josiah's Reform (622–609 B.C.). Inspired by a book found in the temple (perhaps Deuteronomy), King Josiah launched a reform based on covenant fidelity to the Lord (2 Kin. 23:4–25). The call of Jeremiah five years earlier is congruent with this reform (Jer. 1:4–19). The messages in Jeremiah 11:1–8 (on covenant faithfulness) and 17:19–27 (on the Sabbath) were probably proclaimed to support the reform. Unfortunately, Josiah fell in a battle near Megiddo in 609 B.C. at the hands of Pharaoh Necho II (2 Kin. 23:29). A biblical record notes that Jeremiah mourned his death (1 Chr. 35:25).

3. The Reigns of Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, and Jehoiachin (609–597 B.C.). Josiah's son Jehoahaz (or Shallum; Jer. 22:11; 32:7; 35:4) is mentioned unfavorably (22:10). After only three months as king (2 Chr. 36:2), Pharaoh Necho II put him in chains and appointed another of Josiah's sons, Eliakim, as king, renaming him Jehoiakim (2 Kin. 23:34; 2 Chr. 36:4). Jehoiakim's reign marks a turning point for Jeremiah. He now faced persecution and imprisonment, alternating with brief periods of freedom (Jer. 20:1–2; 26:8–9; 32:2–3; 33:1; 36:26; 37:12–21; 38:6–13). Jehoiakim's hostility arose from Jeremiah's repeated message that Judah was destined to fall at the hand of Babylon (36:1–32). Jeremiah attacked the syncretistic temple cult and urged the people to be faithful to Yahweh and worship Him alone. This created strong opposition from the royal establishment (e.g., 38:1–28; cf. 7:1—20:18; 22:1–30; 25:1–14).

In 605 B.C., Nabopolassar's son and successor, Nebuchadnezzar, crushed the Egyptians at Carchemish on the Euphrates (Jer. 46:2–12), and Babylon exercised authority over Western Asia for the next seventy years. The same year, Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem, humiliated Jehoiakim, and carried off Daniel and his companions to Babylon (Dan. 1:3–6). In 597 B.C., Jerusalem was defeated again, and the rebellious Jehoiakim was deported in chains to Babylon. His eight(teen?)-year-old son Jehoiachin ruled only three months (2 Chr. 36:9; cf. 2 Kin. 24:8). Jeremiah's prediction of his captivity (Jer. 22:24–30) was later fulfilled (24:1; 29:1–2; cf. 52:31–34).

4. *The Reign of Zedekiah and Jerusalem's Destruction (597–586 B.C.).* Young Mattaniah, Jehoiachin's uncle and another son of Josiah, was renamed Zedekiah and placed on Judah's throne by Nebuchadnezzar in 597 B.C. (37:1; 2 Chr. 36:9–14). Zedekiah sometimes befriended Jeremiah and sought his advice (Jer. 37:3–17) but otherwise allowed the prophet's enemies to mistreat and imprison him (38:1–28). When Nebuchadnezzar blinded and deported Zedekiah, he appointed Gedaliah as governor of Judah, and Jeremiah chose to remain in Judah (40:1–6). When Gedaliah was murdered in a conspiracy (41:1–9), his entourage feared Babylonian reprisals and fled to Egypt, taking Jeremiah and Baruch with them (43:4–7).

5. *Sojourn in Egypt (586–?).* Limited information about this period comes from 43:8–13 and 44:1-30. Because the book was not written in chronological order, Jeremiah's last recorded words are probably found in vv. 24–30. The prophecy about Nebuchadnezzar's defeat of Pharaoh Hophra was fulfilled in 568–567 B.C. (v. 30; 46:26). The circumstances of Jeremiah's death are unknown, but a Jewish tradition maintains he was stoned to death (cf. Heb. 11:36–37).

Two factors are significant for understanding the setting of the book of Jeremiah—namely, the internal conflicts between various parties in Jerusalem and Judah and the successive Babylonian deportations (cf. Jer. 52:28–30). The narration covers (a) the Sinai covenant going back to Moses; (b) the memory of earlier apostasies and prophetic judgments, at least since Amos and Hosea; (c) royal claims to power; (d) the temple theology promoted by the various groups in the priesthood; (e) pro-Babylonian and pro-Egyptian parties; (f) the influential families of nobility that were in tensions with the king; and (g) the interests of rural village elders. These contrasting voices had engaged in an ongoing dispute about these central questions: Who had trustworthy insight regarding the nations and Judah, and who could give safe guidance regarding faith, worship, ethics, and political power? Jeremiah maintained that faithfulness to the covenant with God was the key to public well-being and that a violation of such faithfulness would bring disaster to the community. This is the position of the *prophetic movement* (e.g., Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah, and Zephaniah), and Jeremiah consciously included himself in this movement (28:8–9).

Secondly, the promises of hope and salvation for the faithful, prompted by the successive Babylonian deportations, grew in importance. After the fateful destruction of Jerusalem and Solomon's temple, the book of Jeremiah was read both as an explanation of the disaster and a promise of hope for redemption and a new beginning. This influenced the central position of the so-called Book of Comfort (30:1—33:26) and the pivotal role of the prophecy of Babylon's fall (50:1—51:63).

Theology and Purpose. Jeremiah's theology is nowhere outlined or nicely articulated. Instead, the book reveals a living and moving relationship with God, a poetic mind devoted to rich and varied imagery, personal reflections, and biographical accounts. Even so, a number of theological themes are clearly emphasized.

1. *The Covenant God.* Yahweh was the God of the covenant with Israel (7:23). His faithfulness to the covenant meant that (a) He held His people accountable when they violated it and (b) He gave grace and hope to those who were faithful and to those who returned to Him. Yahweh's faithfulness to the covenant—which included blessings on the faithful and curses on the unfaithful (cf. Deut. 28)—is understood as His righteousness and loving-kindness (4:2; 9:24). The covenant provides the basis for God's messages of salvation and judgment against His people.

According to the Sinaitic covenant, God saved His people and showed them His undeserved love and mercy. The people were to faithfully respond in love, trust, and obedience. God would show mercy but would also punish rebellious lawbreaking with judgment. This belongs to God's righteous ordering of the world based on His character and will (cf. Ex. 20:4–6). In keeping with the common ANE practices of covenant making, the covenant with Israel included curses and blessings on the party that broke or kept the agreement (Deut. 28). In regard to vengeance, the principle of retribution is in view (Jer. 20:10–12; cf. Ex. 21:12–27; Deut. 19:21), especially as

a reason for the judgment against Babylon (e.g., Jer. 50:15, 28; 51:11, 24, 35–36, 49, 56). However, God has the right, power, and wisdom to exercise mercy according to the circumstances. His judgment serves certain purposes and may be overruled by the same purposes if His will so requires. Thus, Jeremiah's prophecies of judgment have a sequence of purposes: (a) to declare the judgment God had in store for Judah; (b) to warn them and lead them to turn from their evil condition (25:5); (c) to instruct the people that God's judgment is a response to human behavior (i.e., judgment is a consequence of their actions); (d) to evoke a sense of inevitability since the judgment was impending; (e) to communicate God's willingness to forgive repentant sinners (36:3) and restore the covenant; and (f) to confirm the truth of the word of God. Thus, the relationship between God and His people was the central concern, not merely the approaching punishment.

The theological foundation of judgment may be summarized as follows: (a) God is the Sovereign Lord of human history; (b) God is also sovereign in the realms of nature and morality; and (c) human beings may choose a life in relationship with God or one without Him, and both history and nature will, at God's command, either reward or punish them for their choices (see "God's Judgment in the Prophets," p. 981).

Covenant

The term "covenant" (Heb. *berit*) occurs twenty-three times in Jeremiah, always in the sense of a legally binding agreement between two parties (cf. e.g., 11:2–3, 6–8; 14:21; 33:20–21, 25; 34:8). Of central importance, however, is the covenant between God and Israel. This is either the Lord's covenant with the fathers after the Exodus from Egypt (e.g., 11:10; 14:21; 22:9; 31:32), which had been broken, or His new and future covenant with the remnant of Israel (e.g., 31:22, 31–33; 32:40; 50:5). A "covenant" created a legal, contractual obligation outlining requirements (usually in writing) that were to be faithfully maintained by all parties. The legal and obligatory status of the covenant explains the juridical aspect of God's just judgment against Judah. A covenant could also be promissory when the superior party Himself took on an obligation. This is exemplified in Jeremiah by God's promises of a future, everlasting covenant with His people (e.g., 31:31–34).

Some of Jeremiah's prophecies anticipate a complete restoration of Israel (23:1–8; 30:10–11, 18–22; 31:10–14, 23–25), a gathering of the remnant from the nations (23:3–4; 30:10–11; 31:10–14), the raising up of a Davidic righteous "branch" (23:5–6), and a new exodus (vv. 7–8; 50:33–34). These promises of a blessed and hopeful future grow in importance at each deportation of Judean exiles to Babylon (see 52:28–30), especially after the disaster in 586 B.C. They are, however, coupled with realism, a demand for patience, and a fundamental appeal for faithfulness to God.

The covenant formula (i.e., God's declaration that made Him Israel's God and Israel His people) runs throughout the book (see 7:23; 11:4; 24:7; 30:22; 31:1, 33; 32:28). Since this declaration was predictive, its future realization was anticipated and experienced through the prophetic word. Such a promissory word enables the faithful to wait for God while already experiencing its future blessing. The divine promise of a lasting agreement and union between God and His people will find its ultimate fulfillment when God's mission on earth is completed (Rev. 21:1–5).

2. *The Mutual Knowledge between God and Humans.* Jeremiah speaks in an unparalleled manner about God's knowledge of him and his knowledge of God. Jeremiah knew that God foreknew him (Jer. 1:5). Often in his prayers, he appeals to the God who knows him (12:3; 15:15; 17:16). God's knowledge of Jeremiah presupposes a relationship. But human beings may also know God (9:24). Humans have a profound need to know God, and Jeremiah reproached Judah for not knowing Him (2:8; 4:22; 5:4; 7:9; 8:7). The nations who did not yet know God would be exhausted and fall (51:58, 64). They had not yet found the rest that life with the Lord inevitably brings (6:16; 30:10; 31:2; 46:27; 50:34). To know God is to have hope, and hope brings rest.

3. *God and the Sanctuary.* The covenant theology included the promise that God would dwell with His people in the land He had given them. The Jerusalem temple eventually became His dwelling place under David and Solomon. God's presence rendered the sanctuary most holy. However, according to Jeremiah, the false gods set up in Jerusalem (and in the local sanctuaries in the cities of Judah) contributed to the defilement of the sanctuary and caused God to

abandon it. This is described as Israel's abandonment of the Lord. The judgment that would destroy the sanctuary would confirm that God was no longer living among His people—in other words, Israel's disobedience had put an end to the covenant (cf. 5:19; see "The Temple in Chronicles," p. 541). However, the disappearance of the sanctuary did not end God's relationship with His people. It continued through the prophetic word.

The sanctuary plays an important role in Jeremiah's admonitions to the exiles in Babylon. The hope of restoration at the end of the seventy-year Babylonian captivity incorporates the restoration of God's honor and glory associated with His temple (Jer. 14:21; 17:12; 31:6–7; 51:50–51). God would respond to what Babylon had done in Zion (51:28) and address the shameful fact that foreign invaders had entered God's holy sanctuary (v. 51). Thus, God's punishment of Babylon (50:1—51:63) was to be God's act of vengeance for His temple (50:28; 51:11, 24). God's people would again worship Him in the temple in Zion when He would restore His honor and glory before the nations (50:4–5; 51:10; cf. 31:6–7, 12). The nations would no longer look favorably toward Babylon's chief god (51:44)—they would look favorably toward the Lord in Zion (3:17; cf. Is. 2:2–4). In essence, this theological insight continues in Daniel (cf. the little horn's pride, oppression, and desecration of the sanctuary in Dan. 8:9–14) and Revelation (cf. the appeal to the nations to give honor and glory to God in Rev. 14:6–13, turning away from "Babylon" to the true God).

4. *God and the Nations.* God is Lord of all nations (Jer. 1:4–10; 3:17; 4:2; 5:15; 10:7, 10; 18:7–10; 25:17–28; 46:1—51:63). The Creator gives dominion over the earth to whom He deems appropriate (1:5, 10; 27:5; cf. Dan. 2:21, 37–38, 44; 5:18–21; 7:26–27; Acts 17:24–28; Rev. 19:11–21). His power to give dominion to the nations or remove it is expressed in the central metaphor in Jeremiah's call as a prophet: to pluck up, tear down, and destroy, but also to build and plant (Jer. 1:10; cf. 18:1–11; 31:28). Thus, in the context of judgment, God made Babylon His agent in the punishment of His disobedient covenant partner, Judah (27:6–9). In the context of salvation, however, God admonished His remnant people not to fear Babylon because He was able to deliver them (42:11–12). When Babylon's allotted time would run out, God would turn against her and punish her (50:1—51:63), and world dominion would be given to another people (51:11, 28).

5. *God as Creator.* God's sovereignty over the nations is founded on His creation of all that exists (10:12–16; 32:17–25; 51:15–19). He is all-powerful (32:27; 48:15; 51:57) and omnipresent (23:24). Since God created the earth and all the living creatures on it (27:5), it is His to govern as He desires (vv. 5–11; cf. 18:1–11). He is in charge of the created universe with its fixed order and purpose (5:24; 8:7; 14:22; 27:1–22; 31:35–37). Therefore, those who hope in the Lord will be blessed (17:7). Under the covenant, Israel had promised to acknowledge God as Creator (Ex. 20:8–11) and care for its neighbors (Deut. 5:12–15) by keeping the Sabbath day. God called Jeremiah to remind the people of this by proclaiming in all the gates of Jerusalem to keep the Sabbath holy, just as He had commanded their ancestors (Jer. 17:22).

6. *Hope and the Word.* God's faithfulness includes His promise to David (33:17). The messianic hope would be fulfilled, and the King of righteousness would be Lord over God's people, bringing salvation and safety to Judah (vv. 15–16). This promise was not fulfilled immediately after the return from the Babylonian Exile, but Christian faith sees its fulfillment in Jesus Christ (Rom. 3:21; Rev. 19:11). This promise was given to Jeremiah through the divine word. Speaking the word of God was Jeremiah's destiny (e.g., Jer. 1:4, 11, 13; 2:1, 4, 31). The fact that the noun "word"/"words [of God]" occurs over 150 times in the book (besides verbal expressions like "the Lord says") underscores the introductory note to Jeremiah as one to whom the word of the Lord came (1:2). The word has God's intention and will in it. It is alive with divine energy and sovereignty, and conveys judgment at times but also, ultimately, hope. It is not only powerful and is experienced like a fire (5:14; 20:9; 23:29) or a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces (23:29), but it is also "a joy and delight" (15:16).

The word can be "seen" (2:31) because there is no distinction between the *spoken* word and the *performed* word (the Heb. *dabar* designates not only "word," but also "thing" or "matter"). Human beings have no control over the word; it cannot be conjured up by their will (17:15; 23:18). It is given, at times, even against one's own wishes (1:6–8; 15:15–21; 28:6–7). True prophets must subject themselves to God's word in obedience—listening and waiting. At certain points, Jeremiah waited for extended periods of time (42:1–7). The fulfillment of the word of God is certain (1:12; 28:9; 32:24). Many of Jeremiah's predictions were soon fulfilled (e.g., 16:15; 20:4; 25:11–14; 27:19–22; 28:15–17; 29:10; 34:4–5; 43:10–11; 44:30; 46:13; 51:41–44), while others were to be—or will yet be—fulfilled in another era (e.g., 23:5–6; 30:8–9; 31:31–34; 33:15–16).

Jeremiah was concerned with the integrity of the word of God. In conflicts with the popular prophets of the day, he was compelled to understand the nature of God's revelation to him. They too spoke in the name of the Lord, but Jeremiah denied that they had been sent (23:21, 32), that they had stood in the divine counsel (vv. 18, 22), and that God had spoken to them (v. 21). Their word lacked true hope. But Jeremiah was aware that he stood in the line of God's true prophets (7:25; 25:4; 26:5; 29:19; 35:15; 44:4) and that his word, coming from the Lord, would shape history as a beacon of hope.

7. *The Prophetic Word.* God's word was conveyed to Jeremiah by revelation. This term is not found in the book, and the experience is not described in any detail. Most often, the word of the Lord simply "came to" Jeremiah, and the prophet then proclaimed what the Lord "says" (e.g., 2:4; 19:2). Obviously, matters relating to the prophetic experience were widely known and accepted in Jeremiah's setting and did not need an explanation. When God reveals His message, a prophet simply "knows" the word of the Lord. Therefore, the sign of a true prophet is an intimate relationship with God and a knowledge of Him. The closest we come to Jeremiah's prophetic experience is through the reference to his standing in the council (or counsel) of the Lord (23:18, 22). This refers to an intimate dialogue between God and His prophet (cf. Gen. 18:22–33; Amos 3:7) in which the prophet listened attentively to the word (Jer. 23:18).

God's word is powerful and holy (5:14; 23:9, 29) because it carries His power and holiness. Jeremiah takes it in his mouth or writes it on a scroll with awe and trembling. Governed by this understanding, Jeremiah does not distinguish in his prophetic speeches between the linguistic elements purely from God and those from himself. God's speech is, in a sense, beyond human control and can only be accessed through the prophet. The awesome power of God's speech cannot be received and communicated by just any human being but only through mediation by a duly appointed prophet of the Lord (1:4–19; cf. Is. 6:1–13).

The prophet is called to receive God's word (cf. Jer. 23:18) and then to make it presentable in human form so that it can be efficiently communicated (i.e., spoken or written) in the language and speech forms of the intended audience. Ellen White caught this point of prophetic speech when she said, "The Bible points to God as its author; yet it was written by human hands; and in the varied style of its different books it presents the characteristics of the several writers. The truths revealed are all 'given by inspiration of God' (2 Timothy 3:16); yet they are expressed in the words of men. The Infinite One by His Holy Spirit has shed light into the minds and hearts of His servants. He has given dreams and visions, symbols and figures; and those to whom the truth was thus revealed have themselves embodied the thought in human language" (GC v. 3).

The Lord's words and Jeremiah's words are one. This explains why it is often impossible to separate them in the text. God is the originator, and Jeremiah the preacher and text producer. For example, in the call of Jeremiah, the divine word was given by God (Jer. 1:4, 11–13), then spoken (i.e., formulated) by the prophet (vv. 9–10), performed or fulfilled by God (v. 12), then recorded by the prophet. Jeremiah's message is that hope, peace, and true well-being are found only in faithfulness to God, the Creator of the world and Israel's covenant God. The book of Jeremiah revolves around God's rule and the supremacy of His kingdom (cf. 1:10; 46:1). Since any relationship between God and human beings is based on who God is and what He wants for them, His promise is therefore valid at all times: He desires to bring peace and future hope (29:11).

Literary Features. In terms of word count, Jeremiah is the longest book in OT prophetic literature. One of the extraordinary features of Jeremiah is the use of a variety of literary forms and text types with striking examples of poetry and prose at a high artistic level. Having received a priestly upbringing (1:1), Jeremiah displays an intimate familiarity with the temple literature from the book of Psalms. He also draws on passages and themes in the Pentateuch (esp. Deuteronomy) and the historical and prophetic books (e.g., 2 Kings, Isaiah, and Habakkuk). He expresses his prophetic insight through extraordinary artistic skill in speeches, prayers, and reflections.

The book of Jeremiah belongs to the literary genre of prophecy. Features of this genre found in the book include announcements of disaster with or without elements of the covenant lawsuit (Heb. *rib*): indictments, judicial sentences, and predictions of judgment (2:1–37; 29:30–32; 50:1—51:58); sermons (7:1–15); predictive prophecy (30:1—33:28); various narratives: history (39:1—44:30), biography (26:1—24), autobiography (11:18–19; 13:1–11), symbolically enacted prophecy (18:1–11), call narrative (1:4–19), and vision report (24:1–10); various kinds of instruction (11:1–17; 17:19–27; 35:12–19); letters (29:1–30); and the so-called Confessions (11:18–23; 12:1–6; 15:10–21; 17:14–18; 18:18–23; 20:7–18).

Jeremiah's Confessions contain outpourings of emotion and anguish mixed with trust and gratitude. In the midst of faithfully delivering God's word in perilous circumstances, Jeremiah remained in deep and candid dialogue with the Lord. The Confessions show the depth of honesty and forthrightness that is appropriate in prayer when the situation requires it. Although personal and original, they include conventional forms of the lament prayers found in the book of Psalms.

Jeremiah's poetry reveals great variety: the ecstatic lyricism of the war songs (4:5b–9, 13–16, 19–22), the cosmic brooding of the imminent destruction (4:23–26), the intense subjectivity of the confessional laments (15:10–11, 15–20; 20:7–18), the unsparing and withering invectives with their accompanying threats (22:13–19), the pathetic effusion of intimate grief (13:15–17), the breathtaking judgment of an entire society by "an ode to the sword" (50:35–37), and the rhetorical diversity of prophecies against the foreign nations (46:3–12; 50:35–38; 51:1–58).

Jeremiah contains examples of the effective repetition of striking phrases or ideas, such as "sword, famine, and pestilence/plague" (14:12–16; 21:7, 9; 24:10; 27:8, 13; 29:17–18; 32:24, 36; 34:17; 38:2; 42:17, 22; 44:13) and the language of plucking up, tearing down, and destroying, or building and planting (or variants thereof), which expresses God's power to destroy or prosper a nation (1:10; 12:17; 18:7–9; 24:6; 31:28; 42:10). God communicates His earnest and continuous actions through His prophets by persistently (some translations have "rising early") speaking/sending/teaching (7:13, 25; 11:7; 25:3–4; 26:5; 29:19; 32:33; 35:14–15; 44:4; cf. 11:7; 25:3; 32:33; 35:14).

To lend force and coherence to his message, Jeremiah often uses alliteration and assonance, which are not reflected in the English translation (e.g., *shaqed...shoqed*, "almond...ready," 1:11–12; *zarim wezeruah*, "foreigners to winnow her," 51:2; *pakhad wapakhat wapakh*, "fear and pit and snare," 48:43; cf. Is. 24:17). Thematically important are his plays on the Hebrew word *shub*, "turn," "return," "backsliding" (Jer. 3:1—4:4; 8:4–17; 15:1–21; 34:8–22; cf. *shub shebut*, "restore the fortunes" or "bring back from captivity" in 29:14; 30:3, 18; 31:23; 32:44; 33:7, 11, 26). In almost every passage, we find the stylistic device of synecdoche, a partial expression referring to the whole, particularly for peoples, nations, cities, and lands (e.g., "Jerusalem" for Judah or Israel).

Like Ezekiel, Jeremiah uses powerful symbolism to highlight his messages (e.g., 13:1–11; 19:1–12; 24:1–10; 27:1–22; 43:8–13). Symbolism is also applied in the Lord's commands to perform certain actions (e.g., 16:1–4, 5–9; 32:6–15). Large portions of text are repeated throughout the book (e.g., 6:12–15 and 8:10–12; 10:12–16 and 51:15–19; 16:14–15 and 23:7–8; 23:5–6 and 33:15–16; 23:19–20 and 30:23–24; 30:10–11 and 46:27–28; 39:1–7 and 52:4–16). The purpose is pedagogical and communicative. Since books in ancient times were often read aloud to an audience due to limited reading skills and the scarcity of books, the repetition of key passages aimed at emphasis and it created bridges between different parts of the book. The technique of organizing sentences and larger units according to the principle of chiastic structures is particularly frequent (e.g., 2:1–37; 8:18—9:3; 9:4–16; 19:3–9; 31:1–40; 32:1–44).

The great variety in literary forms and styles underscores the predominant feature in the book's composition, which is the mixture of systematic order and lack of order. Some portions of the book have marked beginnings and endings, while others are lengthy sequences with little or no transition. What seems clear is that while the first half of the book deals primarily with the disobedience of Judah (chaps. 2–25), the second part focuses more on the Babylonian threat and the judgment (chaps. 26–52) with a middle point of comfort in chapters 30–33. Unlike Ezekiel, the oracles in Jeremiah are not arranged in chronological order.

COMMENTARY

1:1–19

TITLE, PROLOGUE, AND PROPHETIC CALL

The first section of the book introduces us to the Prophet Jeremiah and the historical background of his ministry (1:1–3). His prophetic call (vv. 4–19) plays a significant role throughout the book—it is a source of strength when he suffers greatly or has to confront false prophets.

1:1–3

Title and Prologue

The title is similar to that of some other prophetic books; the book contains the words of a particular prophet whose ultimate source is the Lord (cf. Amos 1:1; Is. 1:1). The "words" designate the specific messages the prophet proclaimed. Jeremiah is identified historically as emerging from the priestly circles of Anathoth, a city in Benjamin that was situated three miles (5 km) northeast of Jerusalem. Jeremiah's father, Hilkiah, may have been the Hilkiah who served Josiah (2 Kin. 22–23). Anathoth was the home of Abiathar, the priest who served David faithfully and carried the ark of the Lord before being removed from service by Solomon (1 Sam. 22:20–23; 23:6, 9–12; 2 Sam. 15:24–29, 34–36; 1 Kin. 2:26–27).

Jeremiah's Hebrew name exists in two forms, *yirmeyahu* (e.g., Jer. 1:1; 29:27; 36:4) and *yirmeyah* (e.g., 27:1; 28:5; 29:1). The literal meaning is not clear, but part of his name refers to God (cf. 15:16). The name could mean "Yahweh has exalted or appointed." God's name was written *yhwh* (cf. Ex. 3:13–15) and appeared in theophoric proper names as *yahu* or *yah*, so it is no surprise to find both name forms in Jeremiah. Hebrew *yirmeyahu* became *Ieremias* in Greek (the LXX, ca. 250–200 B.C.) and Latin (Vg., ca. A.D. 400). The English form *Jeremiah* is attested from the fourteenth century A.D. The purpose of Jeremiah 1:1–3 is obviously not to provide an exhaustive list of kings and dates (two minor kings are missing) but to indicate that Jeremiah prophesied under several kings until the Babylonian disaster (ca. 627–586 B.C.).

1:4–19

Prophetic Call

This passage cements Jeremiah's prophetic authority as established by God's commission, the details of which anticipate the content of the book as a whole. Jeremiah was called to be a prophet to the nations (v. 5), but his special task was to warn Judah and Jerusalem of the impending judgment (vv. 13–16).

1:4–10. A Prophet to the Nations. The call is a dialogue in which God declared that He was appointing Jeremiah as a prophet to the nations (vv. 5, 10). Jeremiah's immediate reply was that he was too young and unable to speak, which is a sign of humility (v. 6). God rejected the objection by repeating His decision and proceeded to assure Jeremiah of His presence and deliverance (vv. 7–8). He then touched Jeremiah's mouth, which was a sign of placing His words in the prophet's mouth. He also explained that Jeremiah's task as prophet "over" the nations would be to announce their destruction or rise to prosperity (vv. 9–10). The motif of God's words in Jeremiah's mouth is found elsewhere in the book (5:14; 15:19; 36:18; cf. Ezra 1:1; 2 Chr. 36:12, 21–22).

The references to God knowing, sanctifying (or setting apart), and designating Jeremiah as a prophet to the nations in Jeremiah 1:5 seem influenced by formal calls to an office (cf. 49:19; 50:44). However, the technical or sacramental sense of the English term "ordain" that is found in some translations is not conveyed by the Hebrew verb. The verb *natan* used here simply means "give," "put," or "make." Jeremiah 1:4–19 describes, however, the formal commissioning of a royal priest-prophet. First, the technical Hebrew term *peqad*—"appoint," "set," or "commission"—is used in v. 10 (cf. 49:19; 50:44; 51:27). Secondly, the reference in 1:5 to God's sanctifying (*qadash*) alludes to the priestly appointment (Ex. 28:3, 41). Thirdly, Jeremiah's commissioning included the appointment (Jer. 1:5), charge/sending (vv. 6–7), assurance (v. 8), authorization to speak God's word (v. 9), acknowledgment and commission (vv. 10, 13–16), charge and exhortation (vv. 17–18), and renewed assurance (v. 19).

As the Sovereign Lord of the nations, God consecrated Jeremiah as His royal servant and messenger who would stand in His *sod*—a Hebrew word meaning "counsel" or "council" (cf. 23:21–22). God's commission (1:10) included both judgment and salvation. This dual aspect of Jeremiah's ministry is expressed in the visions of the almond branch (vv. 11–12) and the boiling pot (vv. 13–16). The duality of judgment and salvation is particularly applied to God's chosen people Israel (e.g., 2:2–3, 21; cf. Deut. 7:6). The judgment messages call the unfaithful to repentance, while the messages of salvation bring comfort and hope to the faithful in exile.

1:11–19. Commission and Assurance. The dialogue between God and Jeremiah continues with two contrasting visions. The almond branch is associated with what God would "build and plant," and the boiling pot with what He would pluck up, tear down, destroy, and overthrow (cf. v. 10). The former receives scant explanation, while the judgment on Judah and Jerusalem is detailed. The vision of the almond branch is described in terse, almost mystifying words. God's words in the Hebrew read literally, "I am *watching* my word, to carry it out" (v. 12). The striking wordplay between the branch of "almond" (*shaqed*) and God's "watching" (*shoqed*) means that God was eager and ready to accomplish His word. The almond branch is associated with "planting" (cf. v. 10), and Jeremiah often describes the harmonious relationship between God and His people as an act of "planting" (18:9–10; 24:6; 31:27–28; 32:41; 42:10; cf. 2:21; 12:10). The term "watch" (*shaqad*) is a key word in Jeremiah. In 31:27–28, God says that as He had "watched" over His people to pluck up, tear down, destroy, and overthrow, so would He "watch over them to build and to plant." Here, the theme of "watching and planting" leads directly into the prophecy about God's new covenant with His people (vv. 29–34). Thus, while the literal sense of God's explanation of the almond branch is "I am *watching* my word, to carry it out," the context (cf. vv. 4–19) allows us to understand it as an allusion to God's promissory word: as watching overseer and Lord of history, He carries out His word, which means destroying the old (vv. 13–16)—the disobedient people and the broken covenant—and planting something new (vv. 11–12)—the new covenant with His remnant people (cf. 31:27–34).

Jeremiah's office as a prophet to the nations (1:5, 10) is described with specific regard to Judah and Jerusalem (v. 18). Here, Jeremiah is contrasted with the land, the kings, the princes, the priests, and the people of the land: he was to be a stronghold against the apostate Judah and Jerusalem (cf. 15:20). It is predicted that they would fight against him, but they would not prevail. God's presence would be with him to deliver him (1:19; cf. 37:11—38:28).

2:1—25:38

JUDGMENT AND CALL FOR CONVERSION TO JUDAH AND JERUSALEM

This first half of the book of Jeremiah contains seventeen sections concerning Judah and Jerusalem. It particularly addresses the people's faithlessness to the covenant with the Lord, His judgment against them, and His repeated calls for repentance.

2:1–37

God's Case against Israel

Considering its content, internal literary features, and the number and gender of the forms of address, this section is formally structured as two chiasms. Both call attention to God's legal case against Israel as wife (marriage) and as people (covenant):

A Wife: Israel's First Love Lost: A Disaster (vv. 1–3)
  B People: God's Lawsuit against Israel (vv. 4–13)
A′ Wife: Admonition of Israel: Foreign Oppression (vv. 14–19)
A Wife: Israel Goes After Alien Gods (vv. 20–28)
  B People: God Defends His Case against Israel (vv. 29–32)
A′ Wife: Israel's Innocence Contradicted by Evidence (vv. 33–37)

The feminine singular form addresses Jerusalem (v. 1) as a "woman" or "daughter" and Israel as God's "wife" (the metaphor of marriage dominates this passage). The masculine plural form addresses "the house of Jacob"/"the house of Israel" (v. 4). As a central city and sanctuary, Jerusalem represents the people, and the people represent Jerusalem's inhabitants and worshipers in her sanctuary.

2:1–3. Israel's First Love Lost: A Disaster. Jeremiah's account of the formal address to Jerusalem (v. 1) includes the house of Jacob and all the families of the house of Israel (v. 4). The unit consists of three parts. First, the Lord said that He remembered Israel, whereas Israel had "forgotten" the Lord (v. 32). When the Lord "remembers" His people, it is generally associated with His saving actions and is expressed, for example, in prayers for God's saving intervention (Ex. 32:13; Ps. 9:12; Jer. 15:15). However, in v. 2, the Lord's positive "remembrance" of Israel concerns only the distant past, and any positive future expectations it might raise are crushed by the abrupt indictment and judgment in v. 3.

Second, the Lord remembered His people's initial relationship with Him, their *khesed* ("kindness," "devotion," "faithfulness"), their love, and their willingness to follow Him. In response, He honored them by regarding them as holy to Him and the firstfruits of His *tebo'ah*—"revenue" or "increase"; in this context, it is sometimes rendered as "harvest" (i.e., Israel specifically belonged to Him; v. 3). These references concern Israel's distant past, the Exodus, Sinai, and God's protection in the wilderness. The Lord was loved in Israel's youth, at the

time of their betrothal (Sinai), in the wilderness, and in a land not sown (v. 2). This theme is expanded in more detail in vv. 5–7b.

Third, the Lord's positive remembrance of Israel is abruptly contrasted in the text by the stirring and shocking judgment announced against those who would attack them (v. 3). The reasons for such an attack are explained in vv. 4–37. The reference to "following" or "going after" describes Israel's faithfulness to God (v. 2). Following or going after God (as a husband) or gods (as lovers) binds vv. 2–37 together (vv. 2, 5, 8, 23, 25). This term is associated with an act of loyalty that may still be seen in the Near East, where the wife literally walks behind her husband in recognition of his role as her "master" (*ba'al*).

The end of v. 3 implies that anyone mistreating Israel would be held guilty before God. The literal Hebrew text reads, "All that *eat it* will be guilty," with "it" referring to the "firstfruits," symbolizing Israel (v. 3b). The metaphor derives from the custom of setting aside the firstfruits only for the Lord (Lev. 23:9–14). If they were put to common use, the firstfruits were "profaned." Thus, if God's firstfruits (Israel) were "eaten" like common food (i.e., treated like any other nation), God would hold the adversary accountable because the holiness of Israel would be profaned. This theme is resumed and expanded in vv. 4–37.

Israel's status as "holy" and as God's "firstfruits" among the nations was conditioned by their faithfulness to the covenant (v. 3c). If they violated the covenant stipulations, God's holy temple in Jerusalem and their special role as His servants among the nations would both come to an end. The point of the unit is that God's intimate and beautiful memory of Israel's love and faithfulness (vv. 2–3b) would be overshadowed by the breaking of the covenant.

2:4–13. God's Lawsuit against Israel. Jeremiah continues with the judgment announced as a lawsuit against Israel, with indictment (vv. 5–8) and charges (vv. 9–13), and with an assertion that Israel had abandoned their God. This indictment frames the unit as a whole (vv. 5, 13) and develops the charge against Israel mentioned in Jeremiah's call (1:16). It also explains why the harmonious betrothal of Israel and the Lord had turned into judgment.

God initiated the procedure by asking what fault or injustice Israel's ancestors had found with God (2:5a). The answer was "None." Yet unfortunately, Israel had forgotten to follow Yahweh and had turned to other gods (vv. 5b–8). These ideas are structured in a chiastic form:

A Follow (*halak akhar*) idols (v. 5b)
  B Where is the Lord? (v. 6)
  B′ Where is the Lord? (v. 8a)
A Walk after (*halak akhare*) things that do not profit (v. 8b)

The expression "walk after" was used positively to refer to the young bride Israel who faithfully followed God (v. 2). In vv. 5–8, it is applied to Israel's marital infidelity. Israel had forgotten God's faithfulness, how He had delivered them out of Egypt and led them through the wilderness (v. 6), but God remembered Israel's initial fidelity (v. 2). They had defiled the land the Lord had given them (vv. 7–8), the land made holy by His presence (v. 3a–b). All the people had defiled the land by following idols. Jeremiah holds everyone responsible for the demise of the nation: priests, those who handle the law, rulers, and prophets (v. 8).

The lawsuit, based on the indictment (vv. 5–8), is introduced by "therefore" (*lakhen*; v. 9). The formal charges follow in vv. 9–13. The substance of the lawsuit (vv. 10–11) is that Israel had changed its God. The Lord appealed to common sense: no nation changes its gods (which are not gods), but this is what Israel had done to the Sovereign Lord (v. 11). He summoned the heavens as legal witnesses (v. 12) and restated Israel's crimes (v. 13). Verses 6–7 clearly imply that when the story of the land as a divine gift was lost (i.e., when Israel failed to remember Yahweh), the loss of the land soon followed.

2:14–19. Admonition of Israel: Foreign Oppression. These verses discuss the problem of the oppression of Israel by foreign powers. First, God asks why Israel is under foreign oppression (v. 14). The initial questions regarding whether Israel was a slave, or born a slave, may be answered with yes or no. In vv. 14–19, the answer is yes, for Israel had, in reality, become a servant/slave to the foreign nations. Looking at vv. 2–37 as a whole, however, the answer is no, for Israel was meant to be a much-loved nation holy to the Lord and the firstfruits of His revenue/harvest (vv. 2–3). Some translations follow the LXX in v. 20 and describe Israel as breaking off their yoke and bonds—which could be taken to refer to their rebellion and refusal to serve God, which is described in the rest of the verse. The MT, however, states that it is God ("I") who broke their yoke and bonds, which would probably refer to the deliverance from Egypt. Thus, the answer to the final question of why Israel was plundered is implied in the first two questions: oppression and slavery were not God's plan for Israel, but they resulted from Israel's choices.

Second, we find the description of the oppression (vv. 15–16). Assyria's power in its destruction of the lands of Israel (722 B.C.) and Judah (701 B.C.) is compared to that of lions roaring at their prey (v. 15). Egypt is referred to as the people of Noph (Memphis) and Tahpanhes. The last part of the verse uses the verb *ra'ah*, which usually means "to feed" or "to graze," but is often interpreted as referring here to either breaking or shaving Israel's head (v. 16).

Third, the foreign oppression was Israel's own fault (vv. 17–19). The answer to the initial questions in v. 14 is confirmed: Israel had brought their oppression upon themselves by forsaking their God. Israel's faith in Assyria and Egypt is referred to as drinking from the waters of these superpowers (v. 18). Israel had forsaken the Lord, the spring and fountain of living waters, and instead had dug broken cisterns that could not hold water (v. 13). For forsaking their Lord, Israel would be disciplined and rebuked. The concluding messenger formula uses the name *yahweh tseba'ot* (v. 19)—translated variously as "the Lord of Hosts," "Lord of Armies," or "the Lord Almighty." This is the first use of the term in the book of Jeremiah, where it is a frequent name for Israel's God. It is commonly associated with the concept of God as King of the world.

2:20–28. Israel Goes After Alien Gods. In an exchange between Israel's self-indictments (vv. 20, 23, 25, 27) and God's responses, the pursuit of fertility religion is denounced as a shameful criminal offense. The intention of each of these arguments is to move Israel to repentance and to return to God, the central theme of 3:1—4:4.

The first self-indictment is Israel's response to God delivering them from Egypt. There is a manuscript difference in v. 20: Some Hebrew manuscripts have *lo"e'ebod*—"I will not serve," while others have *lo"e'ebor*—"I will not transgress." If the former is correct, Israel's refusal to "serve" God is seen in their widespread apostasy to fertility cults (v. 20c). The "high hill" was a country shrine for the Canaanite deity Baal. Its altitude pointed to Baal's heavenly home from which rains fell to water the land. Shrines were located under flourishing trees (i.e., as symbols of fertility). The religious practices in these shrines were essentially sexual. Being "married" to the Lord, Israel became a prostitute when she went after other gods.

Another indictment (v. 21) is that God planted His people as a special vine and a reliable seed (cf. Ps. 80:8–11), and consequently, there was no reason for them to turn into a degenerate, wild vine. They could not claim innocence because their crimes were obvious (Jer. 2:22–25). Vivid and dynamic symbols are used: the swift dromedary (v. 23) illustrates unreliability and aimless movement; the wild donkey (v. 24) illustrates lust-debased passion and seeking a partner with whom to fulfill urgent and animal passions. Similarly, Israel had lost all sense of direction and was driven by selfish lusts.

Yahweh Tseba'ot

The solemn title *yahweh tseba'ot* was associated with the ark of the covenant in the Jerusalem temple. Jeremiah's close connection with the temple and his frequent judgment speeches in and about it would make this well-known designation of God appealing to his audience.

1. Use in the Old Testament. Of the total occurrences of the term in the OT (ca. 285), 247 are found in the prophetic books. Eighty-two of these are found in Jeremiah, thus placing the book at the top of the list of occurrences. A number of passages underscore that this is God's name (31:35; 35:18–19; 50:34; 51:19, 57), which is associated with His roles as "the God of Israel" (35:18–19; 50:18; 51:33) and Judah (v. 5) as well as the King of the nations (46:18; 51:57).

2. Meaning of the Name. The name of God (Heb. *Yahweh*) is translated "the LORD" in the LXX and in most Bible translations. The Hebrew epithet *tseba'ot* derives from *tsaba'* ("host," "army"), but its meaning is unclear. Various suggestions have been made, but the most attractive possibility is that it refers to angels or divine messengers (Gen. 1:26; 32:1–2; Josh. 5:14; 1 Kin. 22:19; Ps. 82; Is. 6). The "hosts" or "armies" of servants surrounding the throne of God would then illustrate the royal power of God (Jer. 8:19; 10:10; 46:18; 48:15; 51:57); hence, some translations render the term as "the Lord Almighty."

3. Cultic Significance. The general function of the epithet *Yahweh tseba'ot* is rooted in its cultic significance. It was used in Shiloh (1 Sam. 1:3, 11) and was closely connected with the ark in the sanctuary (1 Sam. 6:4). The ark was a wooden box overlaid with gold, surmounted by the golden "mercy seat" or "atonement cover" with two golden cherubim on either end (Ex. 25:17–22). It was a symbol of God's throne, but since He is not visible, He is said to be enthroned between the cherubim. The two cherubim on the ark probably symbolized the host of God's servants (messengers, armies) forming His heavenly council. The epithet is also associated with the covenant because the ark contained the two stone tablets that Moses placed there (1 Kin. 8:9; cf. Ex. 25:16, 21). From Shiloh, the ark was eventually moved to the house of Abinadab, then to the city of David, and finally to the temple in Jerusalem (1 Sam. 7:1; 2 Sam. 6:1–15; 1 Kin. 8:1–13).

The people's attitude turned into resignation and continued rebellion (v. 25). The text presents the shameful idolatry of the nation (cf. v. 8) as ridiculed by the absence of life in the images of the gods (v. 26). What a shame to refer to a tree as father and a stone as mother while turning their backs on their Lord (v. 27; cf. Is. 44:9–20)! In the times of trouble awaiting Judah, the nation would be destroyed due to its unfaithfulness and the powerlessness of its false gods to save (v. 28).

2:29–32. God Defends His Case against Israel. After God declared His intention to bring an accusation (*rib*, "conduct a lawsuit") against Israel (v. 9), He asked why Israel was bringing an accusation (*rib*) against Him (v. 29). The foreign oppression generated accusations against God for not remaining faithful to the covenant, but such claims are refuted. All Israel had transgressed against the Lord (vv. 28–29). God had chastened Israel in vain. They accepted no correction and killed His prophets (v. 30). Jeremiah appealed to them not only to hear the word but also to see its reality and fulfillment (v. 31a).

God denied that He had been a desert or darkness to Israel (v. 31), for in reality, He had led Israel through these dangers (v. 6). The real issue was why the people declared their unwillingness to return to God and why they proclaimed "*radnu*," which could mean "We are lords," "We are free to roam," or as the LXX reads, "We will not be ruled over." The main point is clear—the people were claiming their independence from God. Israel was oppressed because they had forsaken God as their Lord and had made themselves lords by worshiping idols made by their own hands.

A virgin cannot forget her ornaments, nor a bride her attire (v. 32a). A husband's provision of ornaments and attire for his wife at their wedding ceremony represented the honor and new status of the woman. Since God had bestowed His honor upon Israel (vv. 2–3, 6–7), she should have been devoted to Him, yet she had forgotten Him (v. 32b).

2:33–37. Israel's Innocence Contradicted by Evidence. The rebuttal of Israel's claim to innocence in vv. 20–28 returns in vv. 33–37 with verbal links in the Hebrew (which are not clear in all English versions): (a) *derek*—"way," "manner" (vv. 23 [2x], 33 [2x], 36); (b) *'akhabah*—"love" (vv. 25, 33); (c) *matsa'*—"find" (vv. 24, 26 [some translations have "caught" or "discovered" here], 34 [x2—some translations have "catch" in the latter part of the verse]); and (d) *bosh*—"shame" (vv. 26, 36 [x2—some translations have "disappointed"]. Israel's claim to innocence was framed by judgment (vv. 33–37). Thus, 2:1–37 begins and ends with the theme of "love" (the love of betrothal versus the "love" of prostitution, vv. 2, 33) and the execution of judgment (vv. 3c–d, 36b–37).

Claiming innocence, Israel believed that God was not angry with them (v. 35a). However, evidence reveals that the Israelites sought love by prostitution (v. 33) and that they had oppressed the innocent, as the blood on their skirts indicated (v. 34). God's covenant protected the poor and the innocent, while the fertility cults turned "love" into sexual lust. In the face of the evidence, God would plead His case with unfaithful Israel (v. 35c–d). According to some interpretations of the Hebrew, God was reproaching His people for "taking so lightly"

(Heb. *zalal*) the need to change their ways (v. 36a). Others render the verse according to the verb *'azal* ("go about," "go away"), which results in a question regarding why Israel was going around changing their ways.

The section concludes with judgment (vv. 36b–37). Israel would be ashamed of (or disappointed in) Egypt just as much as they were of Assyria. The reference to hands placed on the head refers to captivity and death (Egyptian reliefs depicting warfare show prisoners of war or those about to be killed with arms upheld in a position of self-protection). Israel would not prosper with the support of these allies because God had rejected these nations (cf. 46:1—51:58). No ally could accomplish anything without permission from the Lord of the nations (cf. 1:10).

3:1—4:4

The Return of Unfaithful Israel

Following the indictments against God's people (2:1-37), a passionate plea for repentance and return to the Lord appears next, with a promise of restoration (3:1—4:4). It is only thereafter that judgment is declared (4:5—6:30).

3:1-5. Return to Me, Unfaithful Wife. The wife's return to her husband after belonging to another man would have raised a legal issue. The law stipulated that a divorced wife who had married another man could not return to her first husband (Deut. 24:1-4). A transgression of this law was a serious sin that polluted or defiled the land that had been made holy by God's presence. Jeremiah quotes this law in condensed form and as a popular custom, but he shifts the emphasis. The law prohibited the husband from "taking her back" as his wife, but the question in Jeremiah 3:1 is whether the husband could lawfully return to his wife whom he had divorced. The question is whether God's acceptance of Israel was proper or not. Though Israel was the estranged wife, God was asking her to return because of His loving forgiveness. Although Israel had been unfaithful, with many lovers (cf. 2:2-37), God still (3:1) wanted her back. This powerful expression of God's grace should have had a strong persuasive impact on Jeremiah's audience. The yearning of God for His people makes Him risk even the apparent dishonor of receiving His unfaithful wife back. Thus, Jeremiah echoes Hosea regarding the depth of God's love for Israel and anticipates the gospel in the NT where God's grace, not the law, is the way of salvation. The implied message is that God assumes responsibility for our transgression of the law on the basis of His compassion. He could offer forgiveness to the people as their rejected Husband—something that many human husbands would not do.

The Lord made all Israel aware of their infidelity. His wife's unfaithfulness and wickedness had defiled the land, resulting in a sustained drought and shortage of food (vv. 2-3, 5b). She had acted like a harlot—without shame (3:3b). She ignored the outcome of her disobedience (i.e., the drought), which should have convinced her of God's power. Baal supposedly brought rain and fruitfulness, but God proved His sovereignty by withholding the rain (v. 3).

The unit ends with a summary reproach against the people for their evil words and deeds (v. 5b). Verses 2-3 describe what they had done and vv. 4-5a what they had said. Some translations suggest (v. 4) that God directs another plea for repentance to His people. However, if v. 5a continues the people's speech in v. 4, then that verse can be understood as God's way of ironically reproaching them for their treacherous way of speaking (i.e., for feigning faithfulness to the Lord while, in reality, being unfaithful). The Hebrew word *'allup* has been translated as "guide" or "friend" in v. 4. It may also be translated "Did not you then call Me: 'My Father, you are the husband of my youth?'" (cf. 2:2). The cry "My Father" characterizes the language of worship, whether of idols (2:27) or of the Lord (3:19b). Thus, God's quotation of the people's words in vv. 4-5a is a reproach for their syncretistic hypocrisy. They wanted both the old covenant promises and the new attractions of fertility worship. By saying one thing (vv. 4-5a) and doing another (vv. 2-3), they were breaking the covenant but continuing to claim the blessing of harmony with God.

3:6-11. Israel's and Judah's Past Refusals to Return. This prose unit may be dated between Jeremiah's call (627 B.C.) and the death of Josiah (609 B.C.). It develops the theme of 3:1-5 through the use of repeated terms: (a) "backsliding/faithlessness," "return," "turn" (*shub*; vv. 6, 7, 8, 10, 11; cf. v. 1); (b) *zanah*—variously rendered in translations as "to act immorally," "act like a prostitute," or "commit adultery" (vv. 6, 9; cf. vv. 1, 2, 3); (c) "divorce" (*shalakh*; v. 8; cf. v. 1); and (d) "defile" (*khanep*; v. 9; cf. vv. 1-2).

This unit starts with an account of the evil apostasy of Israel (the Hebrew word *meshubah* used to describe it derives from *shub*, "turn," "return," "repent"). The Northern Kingdom of Israel had utterly apostatized and defiled the land (vv. 6, 9), and its destruction by Assyria in 722 B.C. was the punishment. Although God, through the prophets, invited them to return to Him, Israel refused to comply (v. 7). This ended God's covenant with the kingdom of Israel (v. 8). God then reproaches Israel's sister, the "treacherous" or "faithless" Judah (vv. 7-11). Judah failed to learn lessons from the experience of Israel and committed the same mistakes (vv. 8, 10). Therefore, Judah had less of an excuse than Israel (v. 11).

3:12-18. Israel and Judah Summoned to Return. God first turned to the Northern Kingdom (Israel) because it was "more righteous" than the Southern Kingdom (Judah), who did not learn from Israel's experience (v. 11). He commanded Jeremiah to proclaim the merciful message to Israel to return (vv. 12-13). The territory of the Northern Kingdom came under the control of Judah during the days of Josiah (2 Kin. 23:15-20), following the decline of Assyria. If 3:1—4:4 originated during Jeremiah's early ministry and in connection with Josiah's reform (see Jeremiah: Introduction), an invitation to return to the Lord would therefore have included the northerners. They were invited to respond to Josiah's call to return to the Lord.

The distinction between Israel and Judah, which was vital in vv. 6-13, is now abolished. God took a more personal and intimate approach in the invitation to return by addressing them as faithless or backsliding children (vv. 14, 22), which implied that He was their Father and God (cf. v. 19). God's call to Israel was based on the fact that He was married to them (v. 14). With the covenant in place, based on His grace and the people's repentance, God promised hope for His people. The appeal in vv. 14-18 contains a plan for the restoration of God's people. They would return to worship God in Zion; the reference to "one from a city/town" may signify the city elder, and "two from a family/clan" might refer to a married couple (v. 14). Their shepherds (kings and elders) would feed them with knowledge and understanding (v. 15), and the families were to multiply and increase (v. 16a). The ark of the covenant of the Lord would no longer be present (according to an ancient tradition, it was secreted away before the final fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.). Instead, God Himself was to be present. Jerusalem would be called the Throne of the Lord, and the name of the Lord was to be attached to it (vv. 16b-17a; cf. Rev. 21:22-23). God's sovereignty would be acknowledged by all nations (cf. Rev. 21:24-26). They would gather in Jerusalem and follow His law (Jer. 3:17; cf. 4:2; Is. 2:2-4; Mic. 4:1-4). Peace and reconciliation would prevail, and Judah and Israel would reunite in the promised land (Jer. 3:18).

3:19—4:4. Implications of a Return. This unit interacts with 3:1-18 through key terms such as "children" (some translations have "people"; vv. 19, 21, 22; cf. v. 14), "heritage," "inheritance" (v. 19; cf. v. 18), "desolate [or barren] heights" (v. 21; cf. v. 2), "reproach," "shame" (v. 25; cf. v. 3), "obey"/"hear" (v. 25; cf. v. 13), and variant forms of "turn" (Heb. *shub*) throughout the entire section. The theme of the section is "turning to the Lord," and it is developed from four different angles: (a) turning to the Lord is the foundation of the covenant (v. 19); (b) Israel's adultery is healed by turning to the Lord (vv. 20-22b); (c) Israel's prayer of penitence is the path toward turning to the Lord (vv. 22b-25); (d) Israel's failure was their "turning" (*shub*) away from God and toward the fertility gods, but their healing also comes from their "turning" (*shub*) toward God. This is about the direction our lives are heading, and there are only two options: toward or away from the Lord. The consequence of returning to the Lord is that He will fulfill His promise to Abraham (4:2; cf. Gen. 12:1-3) when all the nations will pronounce blessings by God and will glory or "boast" in Him.

This unit (Jer. 4:3-4) concludes the call to repentance and return found in 3:1—4:4 and introduces a lengthy section on judgment (4:5—6:30). Two metaphors are used to illustrate the need for changing hard hearts: sowing in good, broken soil (cf. Hos. 10:12; Matt. 13:1-23) and the circumcision of the heart. Failure to do this inevitably results in judgment. God's holiness and rejection of evil are described through the symbol of an anger that would burn with such intensity that no one could quench it (see "The Wrath of God," p. 918).

4:5—6:30

The Divine Judgment

God's case against unfaithful Judah (2:1-37) is followed by repeated calls for repentance and returning to Him (3:1—4:4). Subsequently, the text develops the theme of judgment (4:5—6:30): God's reaction to the covenant violations of His people in Judah (see Jeremiah: Introduction).

4:5-10. Destruction from the North. In this unit, the language of warfare is used to warn Judah and Jerusalem about the importance of seeking shelter (vv. 5–6a). The Lord's invasion from the north would cause massive destruction: the land would become abandoned, and the cities uninhabited (vv. 6b–7). The people would lament and wail because of the fierce anger of the Lord (v. 8; cf. v. 4). The identity of the northern invader is unclear. Both Assyrian and Babylonian armies were seen as coming from the north. The metaphor of a lion (v. 7) would fit Babylon since this symbol was prominent in Nebuchadnezzar's palace. The point of the unit is that the Lord would send the invader because of the broken covenant.

The priests and the prophets had falsely promised peace to Judah (cf. 6:14; 8:11). Yet Jeremiah states that it was God who had deceived the people by promising peace (v. 10). This may be explained in various ways: (a) Jeremiah may have been interceding for the people, expressing before the Lord what they believed (even he had questions about God's judgment; cf. 12:1); (b) he may have held God responsible for allowing the deceptive prophecies to be given; or (c) he may have mocked the talk of "peace," when, in reality, what was coming was destruction by the "sword." The two best possibilities are (a) and (b); Jeremiah's point, however, is the tension he experiences between loyally delivering God's words of judgment and praying that it might be averted. In this regard, Jeremiah's attitude resembles that of Moses (cf. Ex. 32).

4:11–31. Winds of War, Woe, and Disaster. This unit opens using images of wind and winnowing to describe the harsh judgment of the invaders (vv. 11–12). The swiftness of the attackers, expressed through images of clouds, a whirlwind, and eagles, elicits a cry of woe from the people of Judah (v. 13). In response, Jeremiah announced that to be saved, Jerusalem would have to cleanse their hearts from evil (v. 14). The Lord attributed the judgment to the city herself (vv. 17b–18). This is a poignant example of Jeremiah's powerful prophetic poetry. In rapid succession, he presents multiple distinct images, hoping to persuade Judah to return to the Lord and avoid the threat of judgment. Verses 19–32 could be grouped into three subunits.

1. Destruction and Anguish—God's Lamentation over His People (vv. 19–22). The sound of the trumpet announced the alarm of war, followed by deep anguish. In the prophecy, the destruction moves closer, beginning with the whole land, then the tents, and finally the sheltering curtains (v. 20). Death is approaching in a dramatic way, and its anticipation causes fear and anxiety—hopelessness. This personal anguish is contrasted with God's grief over His people. He laments their foolishness, their lack of understanding and knowledge of Him, their astuteness in regard to evil, and their ignorance regarding how to do good (v. 22). Knowing God and acting in harmony with God's values is a central theme in Jeremiah (see Jeremiah: Introduction).

2. Judgment as De-creation (vv. 23–28). The effects of the prophesied invasion were clearly seen by the prophet (the phrase "I beheld" or "I looked" is repeated four times). In the prophecy, judgment reinstates an absence of order: the earth was formless and void, or empty; the heavens had no light (v. 23); the mountains quaked, and all the hills moved to and fro (v. 24); there were no people (Heb. *'adam*); all the birds of the heavens had fled (v. 25); the fruitful land was deserted, and all its cities were destroyed (v. 26). A surprising statement is suddenly made: God promised that the destruction would not be complete (v. 27). This is a marked deviation from the relentless onslaught of judgment. Although the Lord announced devastation, He yearned for His people. This divine yearning was the source of hope for Judah. God had plans to create a new community through whom His mission in the world would be achieved.

3. Desolation, Contempt, and Wailing (vv. 29–31). The invaders would desolate all the cities of Judah (v. 29). After the plundering, the prostitute wife Israel/Zion would no longer be attractive, and her lovers would not only despise her but would also seek her life; she was to be like a woman wailing in labor or in fear of murderers (v. 31).

5:1–19. Indictment and Pardon. God challenged the prophet to find one person in Jerusalem executing *mishpat*—"judgment" or "justice," and seeking the truth. He would pardon the city for the sake of one person (v. 1). In the case of Sodom (Gen. 18:22–32), the condition for saving the city was to find ten righteous people. God's stated condition here to Jerusalem was less than what He required of Sodom, underscoring Jerusalem's utter depravity (cf. Jer. 23:14). Jeremiah was forewarned that even if someone swears to tell the truth, he probably swears falsely (5:2). As Jeremiah went searching, he realized that neither the poor (vv. 3–4) nor the powerful (v. 5)—the entire city—met the criteria of righteousness. This confirmed their refusal to return to the Lord.

The word "therefore" introduces the judgment (v. 6). It is described by metaphors of ferocious beasts (lion, wolf, and leopard) that would strike down, devastate, and lie in wait for the cities of Judah to tear into pieces everyone trying to escape. This judgment was a response to the increased transgressions and backslidings of the people. Verses 1–6 intensify the description of both the nation's many crimes and the cruelty of the judgment. In the midst of this, however, God spoke, still ready to pardon the repentant (v. 1). God's word in vv. 7–9 is the core of the dialogue. He asked how He could forgive the people for what they had done. The implied answer here is the impossibility of pardon. After a detailed and vivid outline of the people's violation of the covenant, God concluded by asking whether He should not punish and take vengeance upon His people (v. 9; cf. v. 29). Thus, while judgment was inevitable, God desperately looked for a way to pardon His people. But they gave Him no valid option.

The Lord's indictment of His people continues (vv. 11–13, 19). His judgment predicted in realistic and vivid terms (vv. 14–17). However, the judgment is framed by God's firm decision that He would not completely destroy Judah and Jerusalem (vv. 10, 18; cf. 4:10). Speaking of His people as a vine (cf. 2:21–22), He placed parameters on the execution of His judgment (5:10). Here, the judgment takes on the nature of pruning and removing what is alien, with the vine left to grow new branches. The grounds for this caveat to the judgment is God's love for His people and His never-ending hope that a faithful remnant would return to Him. Through them, God's plan for Israel's new future would be carried out (cf. 29:10–14; 31:1—33:26).

The Lord announced that the result of Israel's unfaithfulness would not be extermination but exile. This is underlined by connecting unfaithfulness with the coming exile (5:19b). Judah's exile would be caused by her having served other gods—a covenant term that includes loyalty, worship, moral behavior, and lifestyle—and by her forsaking the Lord—another reference to the covenant that is related to the metaphor of marriage (cf. 2:2–3). Going after alien lovers (cf. 3:1) led to an alien marriage, and this choice had brought Israel into an alien land without God's promise and provision. The hope of liberation from exile lay in returning to God, the One who would provide a future for Israel.

According to 4:10, the people were deceived not only by false prophets who promised them peace but also by the Lord, who confirmed their willingness to believe the lie. This theme is resumed in vv. 12–13. Deceived by false prophets (v. 13), all Israel concluded that God would not be the agent of the judgment and that no evil would come upon them (vv. 11–12). This mockery of the Lord completely denied His authority and right to judge His people, but it freed God from the allegation that He had deceived them.

5:20–31. The Foolish Heart of God's People. This unit develops various aspects of the people's failure, providing reasons for the inevitable judgment. The admonition to "hear" announces an instruction that Israel was to accept. But they were "without understanding" or "senseless" (lit. "without heart" or "mindless"; the Hebrew word *leb* includes intellectual as well as emotional connotations). Seeing and hearing leads to "a heart of wisdom" (e.g., Ps. 90:12; Prov. 8:5; 16:23; 21:11), while having eyes/ears but neither seeing nor hearing indicates foolishness (Jer. 5 21; cf. Prov. 16:22–23; Is. 6:9–10). God's call to Israel was to "hear" and "love their God with all their heart" (Deut. 6:4–5). The people's recalcitrant and rebellious hearts (Jer. 5:23) were challenged through a hymn that praises the power and greatness of the Creator (v. 22), using motifs found also in Isaiah (40:12–17; 44:21–28) and Job (5:8–15; 9:5–10). God rules over His creation (cf. Gen. 1:1–2, 9–10). The people foolishly did not fear the Lord, which they should have done since He, and no one else, gave them life. Only He, not the fertility gods whom the people were serving, was able to provide both rain and harvest (Jer. 5:24).

When the heart is empty of the word of God, His life-giving blessings are turned away (v. 25), there is a ruthless lack of love and care for one's neighbor (vv. 26–27), and people hoard riches while failing to show compassion to the poor and needy (vv. 27–28). Thus, Jeremiah connects the commandment to love God with all of one's heart (Deut. 6:4–5) with the commandment to love one's neighbor as oneself (Lev. 19:18; cf. Matt. 22:34–40). Jesus endorsed Jeremiah's teaching that the fear of God (Jer. 5:22, 24) unlocks divine truth and fullness of life (cf. Matt. 22:37–40). Such reverential fear is part of the eternal gospel proclaimed by the first angel to all peoples on earth (Rev. 14:6–7). The passage concludes with a question to Israel: "What will you do in the end?" (v. 31). The "end" (*'akharit*) includes the temporal sense of "future" as well as the logical sense of "outcome" (cf. Deut. 32:20; Jer. 17:11). But this term may also signify "posterity" or "remnant" (Num. 24:20; Ps. 109:13; Ezek. 23:25; Dan. 11:4).

Israel needed to hear the word of the Lord, return to Him, and be saved; if they would not listen, the outcome would be disaster (cf. Jer. 5:21).

6:1–8. Saving a Remnant. The people (lit. "children") of Benjamin were urged to flee from Jerusalem (v. 1). Benjamin represents all Israel. Since Tekoa and Beth Haccerem were located south and west of Jerusalem, and Benjamin was to the north, the warning was to be sounded around the city (v. 3). In warfare, provision could be made for some people in a city under attack to be spared from the killing and destruction (cf. Josh. 6:22–25), which would make it possible for a small remnant to survive. The faithful were warned to escape, but the vast majority (the unfaithful) would face destruction.

The record of the predicted invasion opens with an unexpected image. The daughter of Zion (Jerusalem) is presented as an attractive and delicate woman (Jer. 5:2; cf. 2:2). The foreign rulers (shepherds) she had courted would come and dwell around her with their people—though not for her pleasure but in hostility and for plunder (6:3), with the intention of destroying the city. The record communicates urgency and ruthlessness; attacking at noon and continuing into the evening and through the night was unusual (vv. 4–5). The invasion would be an act of God, for He commanded the shepherds to make preparations to besiege the city, and it is He who identified Jerusalem to the invaders. God again brings a stern indictment against the oppression and wickedness in Jerusalem's midst (vv. 6–7).

The prophet finally turns to Jerusalem. He appeals for her to be instructed, take warning, and change, lest God depart from her and she become desolate (v. 8). There was still an opportunity for repentance. Because of God's love for His people, the judgment brings Him great sorrow. Even if the judgment had to come, the passage as a whole contains subtle hints at the escape of a faithful remnant and a restored covenant. God's relentless love is always seeking to preserve humanity.

6:9–15. The Judgment Caused by Israel's Refusal to Hear. This partial dialogue between God and His prophet resembles 5:1–9. The sequence of speakers is the same: the Lord (vv. 1–2; 6:9), Jeremiah (5:3–6; 6:10), and the Lord (5:7–9; 6:11–15). The same key words and themes occur: "the streets of Jerusalem" (*khutsot*) and "outside" or "the street" (*khuts*; 5:1; 6:11); the crime of falsehood (*sheqer*; 5:2; 6:13); the "great" or "leaders" (*gadol*) among the people (5:5; 6:13); and the judgment labeled as "punishment" (*peqad*; 5:9; 6:15). The judgment in 6:12–15 also points forward to 8:10–12.

God first described the remnant of Israel as a vine to be reaped and thoroughly gleaned (6:9; cf. 2:21; 5:10). In this metaphor of judgment, God admonished the grape gatherer to relentlessly continue harvesting. Jerusalem and Judah together are called a "remnant of Israel" (6:9), which is language that recalls the destruction of the Northern Kingdom of Israel (722 B.C.). As stated in Isaiah 6:12–13, Judah and Jerusalem were then left as a remnant of God's people, Israel. A thorough gleaning of the vine does not preclude the preservation of a remnant. God sought to warn the people and to bring them to repentance, but they refused to listen. Their ears were closed (lit. "uncircumcised")—that is, they were not committed to God—and consequently, they could not receive the word of the Lord (Jer. 6:10; cf. 5:21). It was displeasing and offensive to them, for its content condemned and corrected them (6:10).

The Wrath of God

The biblical language of the wrath of God needs to be understood in its proper context. In Jeremiah, three things should be noted about such language.

1. *Wrath, Infidelity, and Rejection.* God's anger is rooted in the metaphor of a betrayed father and an abandoned husband. The infidelity and rejection by His beloved people wounds God's heart, and this wounded love manifests itself in anger as an expression of deep feelings. These metaphorical expressions should not be taken to mean that God's anger is exactly like human anger (cf. Is. 55:8–9; Hos. 11:9) but rather to show the similarities of His evaluative and emotional response—which is based on His eternal character—to their apostasy. Human anger usually comes from natural, sinful, and selfish motives, but God's anger comes from His loving, just, and merciful character. The law played an important function in the life of the covenant people, but they did not establish a relationship with an impersonal law. The covenant was the expression of the disposition of the heart of a redeemed people to remain in a permanent and personal relationship with the Lord. In interpersonal relationships, what a person does or does not do can hurt others. In the covenant relationship, God has a deep respect for His people, and when their actions hurt His loving heart, His love reaches them in the form of disciplinary anger. In such cases, the Lord expects them to return to Him (i.e., to repent).

2. *Wrath and Covenant.* God's covenant agreement with Israel was a legal contract that included certain lawful punitive measures to be applied to a disloyal partner (see "Covenant," p. 905). Thus, God's anger was part of this contract, in the context of which it represents the discipline applied by the sovereign partner to the violators of the covenant. This was done in order to maintain the spiritual and social order that was created when the covenant relationship was first established. This covenant, based on God's redemptive grace, created a sphere of safety and blessings for His people. When the covenant was violated, the individuals had abandoned the sphere of blessing and, from the legal perspective, they entered the realm of chaos and disorder. But this was not the end of the covenant. God was always ready to direct His anger against Israel's oppressors and against their pride and evil deeds. In such cases, divine wrath brought salvation to His people and destruction on their enemies (Jer. 46:1—51:58).

3. *Wrath, Holiness, and Righteousness.* God's holiness is like a burning fire that consumes impurity and sin. His righteousness designates His right and lawful actions that are always inseparable from His love. Love is God's faithfulness, grace, and goodness. In Jeremiah, these character traits of God are kept in balance. As an outpouring of righteousness, God's anger (judgment) deals with Israel's guilt for breaking the covenant. As an outpouring of holiness, God's anger is a burning fire that consumes sin and moral defilement. As an outpouring of His love, God's anger is His emotional reaction to the betrayal and rejection by His beloved people. However, since God's love towards the faithful remnant of Israel continues beyond His anger, love dominates His character. The revelation of the supremacy of God's love is found at the heart of the gospel of Jesus Christ, who took upon Himself our violation of the covenant and reconciled us with God (cf. John 3:16–17; 2 Cor. 5:14–21).

The judicial sentence was an expression of God's wrath, which He could not hold in any longer (v. 11). The sentence was an outpouring of His anger on all the people (vv. 11–13). The metaphor of the gleaning of the vine in v. 9 is now explained. Their houses, fields, and wives would be taken by others when God stretched out His hand against the inhabitants of Judah. The Lord said that all of them were given to greed (v. 13), coveting houses, fields, and wives (cf. Deut. 5:21). In the application of the principle of retribution, they would lose houses, fields, and wives (Jer. 6:12). Covetousness, or greed, destroys our inner peace because our trust is placed on the ephemeral instead of on the eternal.

The unit (vv. 9–15) concludes with attention to particulars (vv. 13–15), including God's condemnation of the prophets and priests for proclaiming false messages of peace to the people (cf. 4:10; 5:12–13; 8:11, 15). Because of their shameless actions, He would punish them.

6:16–30. Judgment as "the Fruit of Their Thoughts." God's efforts to save His people had been rejected (v. 16). The people had refused to listen to His prophets (v. 17; cf. v. 27). Therefore, God resumed the lawsuit and invited an assembly of the nations and the earth to be His witnesses (vv. 18–19). The coming judgment was to be the fruit of their *makhashaboh*—"thoughts," "intentions," or "schemes"—brought by their rejection of the covenant and His law/instruction (torah), which gives life (cf. Ps. 19:7–9). The people had replaced God's word with the performance of temple rituals (Jer. 6:20), but God rejected all of this. They relied on their wealth and material possessions that required no demands for obedience. According to the covenant, obedience to religious ceremonies should not be separated from total submission to the Lord and to His social and moral requirements (cf. 1 Sam. 15:22–23; Hos. 6:6; Amos 5:21–24; Matt. 9:13; 12:7).

Based on this indictment, Jeremiah conveys the Lord's pronouncement of judgment (Jer. 6:21). Instead of Israel walking in the old paths—the good way (for it would give them rest for their souls; v. 16)—God would put stumbling blocks or obstacles in their way, and they would stagger and fall. Here, Jeremiah skillfully contrasts the true covenant with idolatry. Israel was invited to an obedient walk: "old paths" and true obedience to God's word lead to life (vv. 16–19), but ritual activities linked to unfaithfulness are "stumbling blocks" that lead to death (vv. 20–21). God's judgment (4:5—6:30) ends here with a repetition of the invasion of the enemy from the north (6:22–26; cf. 4:5–10) and a reminder of His call to Jeremiah to test Israel's ways (6:27; cf. 1:17–19). The crimes of the people are confirmed, and the verdict is that God has rejected them as rejected silver (6:28–30).

7:1—8:3

Jeremiah's Temple Sermon

This section is probably the clearest statement of the basic themes of the book of Jeremiah. The Temple Sermon has been dated to 609 B.C., in the early reign of Jehoiakim (26:1). The prophet was in deep conflict with the official temple ideology on which Judah relied, and his position was regarded as treason (cf. v. 11). The king and his establishment assumed that Jerusalem could not be violated because God's promises were unconditional. In Jeremiah's day, the royal tradition linked to the temple (cf. Ps. 132:6–10; Is. 37:33–35) had become distorted. Many claimed that the presence of God's throne restricted His judgment against disobedient Israel. This was the grave error Jeremiah attacked in his sermon. The theme is worship (true and false), which necessarily involved the temple. The key word "place" (Heb. *maqom*) ties the sermon together (7:3, 6, 12, 14, 20, 32 [sometimes translated as "room"]; 8:3).

7:1–15. True and False Worship. The setting for this speech was the New Gate, which connected the inner and outer temple courts (cf. 26:10). The messenger formula (7:3) names God as *yahweh tseba'ot*, which is translated variously as "Lord of Hosts," "Lord Almighty," or (perhaps most literally) "Lord of Armies," which was associated with the ark of the covenant and the temple (see "*Yahweh Tseba'ot,*" p. 912). The sermon began with an exhortation to correct their ways and actions (7:3). It targeted the deceitful royal temple ideology (v. 4). The first argument for the exhortation summarized the covenant principles: fairness in judgment, care for the poor and needy, justice in the temple court (desisting from shedding innocent blood, that is, capital punishment inflicted on innocents), and rejecting idolatry (vv. 5–6). The second argument was a promise to let Judah dwell in the land given to their fathers (v. 7). However, the promise was conditional (i.e., its fulfillment depended on faithfulness to the covenant).

The Lord indicted the people who trusted in worthless lies (vv. 8–11). He challenged his audience with two questions. The first described the perpetrators, providing a sample of Judah's violations of at least five of the Ten Commandments (v. 9). Despite their flagrant and shameful crimes, Judah had the nerve to come before God to claim the covenant promises of salvation (vv. 9–10). God's second question concerned the compatibility of the temple with God's holiness: it had become a den of thieves. The expression "den of thieves/robbers" figuratively refers to a gathering of lawbreakers (see Matt. 21:13). God testified that He had seen it (v. 11). The One worshiped in the temple was Himself the witness. God predicted judgment against Judah (vv. 12–15). It began with a lesson from Shiloh. Judah was admonished to notice how God had punished Shiloh because of the wickedness of its people (v. 12). If Shiloh's example would not lead to repentance, the same punishment would be given to Judah (v. 14).

Shiloh

Shiloh in Ephraim was the first dwelling place for the ark of the covenant in the promised land (cf. Josh. 18:1). The ark remained in Shiloh for many years, and the sanctuary in Shiloh was considered to be "God's house" (Judg. 18:31). Following the capture of the ark by the Philistines, it was moved to Kirjath Jearim and stayed in the house of Abinadab for twenty years (1 Sam. 4:1—7:2). Then David moved it to Zion (2 Sam. 6), and finally, Solomon relocated it to the temple in Jerusalem (1 Kin. 8:1–13). It appears that the name *Yahweh tseba'ot* (see notes on 7:3; cf. 2:14–19) was first used in Shiloh (1 Sam. 1:3; 4:4; cf. notes on Jer. 2:19). In Shiloh, the Lord revealed Himself through His word (1 Sam. 3:21), but it was also a place of priestly abuse (1 Sam. 2:12–17, 22–25) and idolatry (1 Sam. 7:3–4).

Among the prophets, only Jeremiah uses Shiloh as a symbol of God's judgment, which he did when speaking to all of Judah in the temple (7:12, 14; 26:6, 9). The historical books do not directly speak about God's judgment against Shiloh, but Psalm 78 does (vv. 56–64). The psalm describes Israel's having broken the covenant after entering Canaan and how God in His anger deserted the sanctuary of Shiloh and gave His strength and His glory (the ark) into the hands of the enemy (vv. 60–61), referring to the time the Philistines took the ark (1 Sam. 4:1—7:2). The psalm's description of the event closely resembles Jeremiah's judgment speeches (Ps. 78:62–64). The psalm ends with God's rejection of Ephraim (where Shiloh was situated) and His election of the tribe of Judah and His beloved Mount Zion, where "He built His sanctuary like the heights, like the earth," which He has established forever (vv. 67–69). Thus, Shiloh was associated with God's departure from both His sanctuary and His people, His judgment against Israel, and His selection of Zion/Jerusalem for the permanent location of the temple. The symbol of Shiloh was, therefore, particularly meaningful to Jeremiah. Since Judah had turned away from God, God would turn away from the temple as He had done with Shiloh (Jer. 7:14). Instead of learning from the past, the royal establishment was infuriated by the comparison between Jerusalem and Shiloh and sought to kill Jeremiah (26:6, 9).

The indictment leading to judgment (v. 13) recalls the accusations in vv. 5–6 and 8–12. God, through His prophets, had been addressing Judah, speaking earnestly and continuously (lit. "rising early and speaking"), but Judah refused to answer His call (v. 13). The temple in Jerusalem would meet the same fate as the temple in Shiloh (v. 14). God would remove Judah from His presence, as He did with the Northern Kingdom of Israel in 722 B.C. (v. 15). God would throw Judah away from Him, as He did with all the descendants of Ephraim (cf. Gen. 48:14–16; Jer. 31:9). The temple building on which Judah had placed its trust (7:4) would be destroyed, and the glory (i.e., the Lord) would depart from Israel (cf. 1 Sam. 4:19–22). This sermon would have shocked the audience.

7:16–20. The Queen of Heaven. In the Hebrew text, this unit opens with a shift in perspective from the people to the person of Jeremiah (cf. 1:15–19). In view of the nature of Judah's crimes, Jeremiah was asked not to intercede for them because God had made up His mind and would not listen (7:16). Their worship of the "queen of heaven" (and other gods) is evidence of their utter rejection of Yahweh (vv. 17–18). The specific identity of the queen of heaven is difficult to determine, but it was most likely an astral deity (see 44:17–19, 25; cf. Amos 5:26).

The indictment in Jeremiah 7:17–18 is connected with the sermon in vv. 1–15, where breaking the Decalogue is referred to (v. 9). The cult of the queen of heaven demonstrates how the breaking of the first commandment leads to the breach of others. Children gathering sticks during the Sabbath was an illegal activity (cf. Num. 15:32–35), as was the kindling of fire (Ex. 35:3). If the pagan cult practices occurred on the Sabbath, they involved several breaches of the Decalogue (cf. Jeremiah's defense of the Sabbath in Jer. 17:19–27). Judah's crimes brought shame and the anger of the Lord upon themselves (7:18–20). The Lord's wrath would be poured out on the temple and the city: on people, animals, and crops (v. 20). Although God was bringing the judgment, the responsibility lay with the people, who were bringing shame upon themselves (v. 19).

7:21–28. Obedience Better than Sacrifice. This unit opens with a shocking command for the people to add burnt offerings to their sacrifices and to eat their meat (v. 21). The burnt offerings were to be completely consumed by fire, but for some other types of sacrifices, the worshiper could eat a portion. God's command to eat the meat of all sacrifices means that He had rejected them and their offerings. This leads to the main point of the unit. During the Exodus from Egypt, God did not command Israel to offer burnt offerings and sacrifices but to obey/hear His voice. Such submission to Him was to indicate that the Lord was Israel's God and Israel His people. In order that it might be well with Israel, they were to walk in all the ways that God commanded them (vv. 22–23). The moral and social obligations of the covenant could not be superseded by the performance of ritual acts. Religion and morality stood together. Judah's trust in the temple cult was futile if they did not hear and obey the voice of the Lord in His covenant law.

The verdict, stated four times (vv. 24, 26, 27, 28), was that Israel did not listen. It signaled four indictments against the people: (a) they were led by their evil hearts (v. 24), (b) they refused to listen to God's prophets (vv. 25–26; cf. v. 13), (c) they would not obey/hear God's word through Jeremiah (v. 27), and (d) they were a disobedient and incorrigible nation who had lost the truth (v. 28). Judah had rejected the covenant, and God was compelled to answer by rejecting them to their detriment.

7:29—8:3. Judgment on False Worship. The people were told to lament their rejection by God by cutting off their hair, which was a mourning practice (v. 29; see Job 1:20). The desolate or barren heights symbolize Judah as the object of God's wrath (cf. Jer. 7:34). An indictment (vv. 30–31) is followed by judgment and desolation (vv. 32–34). The indictment targeted the idolatry in the temple, which had polluted its holiness—*shiqquts* ("abominations" or "detestable things") refers to altars dedicated to idols in the temple area from the time of Manasseh (2 Kin. 21:1–5). These also included the high places of Tophet(h)—namely, sites for idolatry in the Valley of the Son of (*ben*) Hinnom, outside Jerusalem (referred to as "Gehennah" in NT times).

At the judgment, the Valley of Hinnom would be called "the Valley of Slaughter" (Jer. 7:32). In dishonor, the fallen of Judah would be buried there, and when graves could no longer hold the bodies, birds and beasts would consume the corpses (v. 33). The desolation of the land would bring an end to joy and gladness in the cities of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem (v. 34).

Expanding the theme of vv. 32–34, this unit also mocks the peoples' idolatrous astral worship. The bones of all the dead in Judah would be placed before the astral deities whom the people of Judah had loved, served, followed, sought for advice, and worshiped (8:2). God should have been the object of these devotions, and by applying this terminology to the people's idolatry, the seriousness of the rebellion is vividly depicted. The bones of the people would be dishonored because they would be left unburied (cf. 7:33). This drastic message paints a picture of the complete annihilation of Judah. Choosing idols instead of the Lord meant choosing death instead of life.

Tophet(h)

The Valley of Hinnom was a steep-sided valley associated with burning—both of garbage at the city dump and of children in sacrifices at the "Tophet(h)" (lit. "hearth," "fireplace"). Child sacrifices appear to have been common among the Canaanites and were sometimes practiced in Israel (2 Kin. 16:3; 21:6). Josiah's attempt to eradicate the rite (2 Kin. 23:10) was reversed under Jehoiakim. The references to child sacrifice in Ezekiel (20:25–26) indicate that it was common in Judah before Jerusalem's destruction in 586 B.C. God condemned the practice as contrary to His will (Jer. 7:31; 19:4–5).

8:4—10:25

No Balm in Gilead

This section depicts the people of Judah and Jerusalem as an ailing community approaching death. The diverse themes in this section are worked out in rich and imaginative language.

8:4–17. Peril of False Teaching. An indictment concerning Judah's failure (vv. 4–13) is followed by the Lord's judgment through an invading army (vv. 14–17). For Judah, only faithfulness to the covenant could provide life and peace. Abandoning the Lord removes any protection against the surrounding nations and brings judgment. The first part of the indictment resumes the theme of "turning" (3:1—4:4; 15:1–21). The Hebrew word *shub*—"turn," "return"—is used six times in 8:4–6. God's deepest desire was that Judah would return to covenant loyalty. However, the prophet laments that God's people do not know His principles, contrasting Judah with birds who instinctually know the time of their migration (v. 7). Even the animals had a better sense of order and propriety than Judah.

The supposedly wise leaders who handled the instruction of the covenant and the scribes who had produced the writings were unreliable (v. 8) because they had rejected the true word of God and lacked wisdom (v. 9b). Therefore, at the judgment, they would be ashamed (loss of external honor), dismayed (loss of inner peace), and captured (loss of land; v. 9a). True discernment comes from a deep knowledge of the word of God. The statement of their judgment (vv. 10–12) is almost identical to 6:12–15. Their wives and fields would be given to others because of their unlawful desire and deceit (8:10). The false teachers could provide only temporary remedies to Judah's troubles. They taught that "all is well," but the approaching judgment would bring destruction (v. 11). The judgment speech against the wise ends with a summary of the theme of the loss of wives and fields (vv. 10, 13).

Those who were attacked sought refuge in the fortified cities and resigned themselves to God's punishment of drinking poisoned water (v. 14; the LXX and the MT [as well as the different English translations that rely on them] differ in regard to whether the people were resigning themselves to death [LXX—lit. "jumping overboard"] or being silent [MT]). Here they finally acknowledge that they have sinned against the Lord. The metaphor of drinking poison may imply a trial by ordeal (cf. Num. 5:11–31), which suits the marriage metaphor of Israel as wife and the Lord as husband. This practice was used to ascertain whether or not a man's wife had been unfaithful. If she got sick from the bitter water, she was guilty and would be rejected by the husband and become infertile. This imagery also fits the metaphor of the people's ill health, with neither a balm in Gilead nor a physician to bring them healing (8:15, 22).

The people looked for peace, but there was none. They expected healing, but there was only distress (v. 15; cf. 14:19). This was a rejection of the message of the false teachers who proclaimed peace (vv. 8–12). Jeremiah states the unfortunate fact that there would be no recovery for unfaithful Judah (v. 22). Instead, the people could already hear the snorting of horses coming from the land of the tribe of Dan (cf. 4:15), where the invading armies were first seen. The army was like a beast that had come to "devour" the land and its inhabitants, bringing death and destruction (v. 16). The invading army sent by the Lord is described as venomous vipers that cannot be charmed (i.e., they are merciless and cannot be controlled; v. 17). The snake's bites fit the theme of illness in this section; there would be no healing for the people. The devastating judgment was a way of urging God's people to confession and repentance (vv. 14–15).

8:18—9:3. Mourning for an Unfaithful People. The mixed sequence of speakers in 8:18–21 derives from Jeremiah's role as both a prophet and intercessor. The meaningful order in the sequence is supported by a chiastic structure, which forms a dialogue between the pretense of the worshiping community of Israel and the corresponding empathy of Jeremiah with his people (cf. Introduction). This may be displayed as follows:

A Sorrow (vv. 18–19a)
  B Question of the people concerning salvation relating to God's presence (v. 19b)
    C God's question of indictment and indignation (v. 19c)
  B′ Question of the people concerning salvation relating to God's timing (v. 20)
A′ Sorrow (v. 21)

The speaker in vv. 18–19a and 21 could be Jeremiah or the Lord. If Jeremiah is the speaker, he would be demonstrating his heartsickness at the fate of his fellow Israelites. If God is the speaker, He would be stating that He saw and shared in the suffering of His people. Yet the people, who had brought about their own anguish, did not know or care. Their questions in vv. 19b–20 show that they continued to misinterpret the covenant. The temple was no longer God's place, and His promises were not being fulfilled because of the people's disobedience (7:1—8:3). Therefore, God's saving presence was no longer among them (v. 19c), and consequently, His anger was provoked (cf. 6:9–15).

Continuing this line of inquiry from vv. 18–21 and using "healing" as a metaphor for salvation, God asked three questions in v. 22. Gilead was a region east of Jordan, famous for its medicinal herbs (Gen. 37:25), but even there no remedy could be found for Judah's illness! There was no immediate healing for unfaithful Judah. God's protection and care depended on Judah's relationship with Him. Idolatry placed Judah outside of the covenant relationship in a world of chaos. Jeremiah's answer to the questions in Jeremiah 8:22 expresses a mixture of feelings. He wept for their dead (9:1; cf. 8:18, 21), but he also wished to depart from them into the wilderness (9:2). God, the speaker, then accused the people of speaking lies and of not knowing Him (v. 3). The verb "to know" is a covenant term for the intimate relationship between the Lord and His people (cf. 8:7, 12).

9:4–16. Punished by Desolation. This unit addresses social and relational crimes rooted in deceitful self-seeking and the fertility cult. The outcome would be desolation of the cities through death and exile. But God's ultimate purpose was to refine and test His people. The covenant required honesty and care for one's neighbor, but the people of Judah demonstrated through their deceit that they did not know God (vv. 3, 6). "To know" in Hebrew goes beyond mere mental cognizance—it often implies a strong relationship (cf. Gen. 4:1). Accordingly, some translations render *yada'* here as "acknowledge" or "take into account." The warning against friends' and relatives' deception in 9:4 involves the Hebrew phrase *'aqob ya'qob*, which may be an allusion to Jacob's deceitful dealing with his brother Esau (cf. Gen. 27:36). None of the people were to be trusted to tell the truth; they were all living in an environment of deceit (Jer. 9:5–6). Here "deceit" consists of speaking lies and doing wrong. A loving relationship with God is deeply connected to a loving relationship with our neighbor; loving one leads to loving the other (cf. Matt. 22:34–40).

The idea that the Lord of Hosts would refine and try, or test, His people (Jer. 9:7) had been expressed before (e.g., 5:10, 6:27). The word *tsarap*—"refine"—is associated with the melting of metal (cf. v. 30). "Refine" is in parallel with "try" or "test," which may also refer to refining metal (cf. Job 23:10; Zech. 13:9). These verbs allude to the hope that God would not entirely abandon His people and that repentance was still possible. This is followed by an indictment (Jer. 9:8) that deepens the theme of the people's deceitfulness. Deceitful speech is like an arrow because what it says is denied through its actions: the tongue speaks peaceably but the heart lies in wait to destroy.

The questions in v. 9 indicate that God would punish and avenge Himself on the nation of Judah. God had to be avenged because His honor was at stake. He would not be mocked or manipulated, not even by His covenant partner. The judgment would be God's way of saying "I am God." This theme belongs to the cosmic conflict, where God's character is at stake and where His Son fully reveals His character as redeeming love. In Christ's redemptive work, judgment condemns the wicked and brings salvation to those who see God's saving power in Him.

The announcement of judgment is expressed in a lamentation (v. 10). There would be weeping and wailing for the burned-up and lifeless land—it was completely desolated. The breaking down of mutual social trust creates an atmosphere of suspicion and death. When God is left out of our social interactions, we will experience psychological and, in some cases, physical desolation. Judgment is the demonstration of God's disapproval of destructive human and social behavior.

In v. 12, the reflections on judgment are summarized in three rhetorical questions. First, it is asked, *who* has true wisdom to understand the desolation of Jerusalem and Judah? Only through the word of God, which interprets history from a divine perspective, could such wisdom be obtained (cf. vv. 13–16). Second, to *whom* had the Lord spoken who might explain or declare it? The word of God was given to His prophet (cf. e.g., 1:4–19; 6:27). Thirdly, *why* had the desolation of the land come? This question seeks the reason for the judgment, and the answer is found in an indictment (9:13–14) and the juridical sentence (vv. 15–16). The indictment is structured in terms of chiastic contrasts:

- **A** Forsaking the law/instruction (torah) that God had given
  - **B** Not walking according to or following God's voice
  - **B'** Walking according to or following their own hearts
- **A'** Walking after or following the Baals, as their fathers taught them

This is a question of choice (i.e., God, the Baals, or one's own heart)—a choice directly related to the covenant law. Deuteronomy 29:14–19 defines faithfulness to the covenant in three ways, present also in Jeremiah 9:13–16: (1) not turning away from God to serve other gods (cf. v. 14); (2) avoiding the *la'anah* ("wormwood," "bitterness," or "poison") of idolatry (cf. v. 15; 8:14; 23:15; Lam. 3:15, 19; Amos 6:12); and (3) never assuming that they would be blessed despite following the dictates of their own hearts (Deut. 29:19; cf. Jer. 9:14). Now the Lord would feed His people with bitter, even poisonous, food and water (v. 15). Jeremiah had adapted the phrase to the symbol of the bitter water (see commentary on 8:4–17).

Jeremiah 9:16 alludes to Leviticus 26:32–33, which is set in the context of covenant promises of blessing and retribution (Lev. 26:1–46; cf. Deut. 7:12–24; 28:1–68). God would (1) desolate the land, (2) scatter them among the nations, and (3) pursue them with the sword of warfare (Jer. 9:11–16; Lev. 26:27, 32–33). Thus, the answers to the questions in Jeremiah 9:12 about the wisdom, the word of the Lord, and the reason for the desolation are found in the covenant law that Jeremiah applies to Judah (vv. 13–16).

9:17–26. The People Mourn in Judgment. This section joins together several themes: (1) the previous theme of public mourning (v. 10) is further developed (vv. 17–22); (2) covenantal faith and Judah's self-sufficiency are articulated as two ways of life (vv. 23–24); and (3) God's judgment of the nations (vv. 25–26; cf. 46:1—51:58). The people were invited to imagine that the worst would happen in order to prepare for it (9:17–22). Public lamentation requires skillful experts, and specialists were summoned to mourn and teach their daughters and neighbors a lamentation for the death of their children and young men (vv. 17–21). Death would enter through the windows and take over the palaces, or fortresses, and the open streets of the entire city. The corpses would fall like refuse (v. 22; cf. 7:32–33). This would be a time of sorrowful mourning.

God set two ways of life before Judah (9:23–24). He had created human beings with glory and honor (cf. Ps. 8:5) and wanted them to preserve this noble state. One option would be to follow the human way of wisdom, power, and riches. These are condemned as tokens of self-sufficiency. The opposite option is *khesed*—"loving-kindness," "love," "fidelity," "judgment," "justice," and "righteousness" (i.e., God's character)—because He delights in these things. This way of life consists of understanding and knowing God, and it leads to humility and dependency on Him.

The unit closes by pointing to the coming days of retribution (vv. 25–26). God charged His people with being uncircumcised in their hearts (v. 26), identifying them as no different from the surrounding nations (v. 25). Being equal to the other nations meant losing their special election and covenant relationship. It also meant sharing the destiny that sooner or later reaches every nation: invasion, death, and destruction. God is indeed a God of justice.

10:1–16. Nature of a True God. The comparison between idols and the true God develops and explains the two ways of life in 9:23–24. The point is to warn against learning the way of the nations (or Gentiles) (v. 2). Verses 2–16 mock the idols and praise God's sovereignty. They present the idols as having no knowledge or power and being unable to do anything (vv. 4–5, 14). Jeremiah presents the idols made by human hands (vv. 3–4, 9) as completely stupid (v. 8), false, and futile (vv. 14–15); and, as worthless teachers (v. 8), they could not impart knowledge. They would perish at their time of punishment (v. 15; cf. v. 11). In contrast, there is none like Yahweh (vv. 6–7, 16). He is the powerful Creator of the world (vv. 12, 16), the mighty King of the nations (vv. 7, 10), and Israel belongs to Him (v. 16). He is the great, true, and living God (vv. 6, 10), the Lord of nature, rain, and wind (v. 13), worthy of being feared (v. 7; cf. v. 5). His wrath makes the earth tremble, and the nations cannot endure it (v. 10). He is Israel's God, and His name is great. He is *yahweh tseba'ot*—"Lord of Hosts," "Lord of Armies," or "Lord Almighty" (vv. 6, 16; see "*Yahweh Tseba'ot,*" p. 912).

10:17–25. The Certain Desolation of Judah. Jeremiah urged Judah to prepare for the approaching judgment (vv. 17–18). He summoned the inhabitants of the city fortress to flee or prepare for exile, for God would expel the people (suddenly and violently) from their land (v. 18).

This dramatic scene is followed by a lamentation over the invasion from the north (vv. 19–22). The exclamation of "woe" (v. 19) is an expression of anguish in the face of death and the loss of home and children (v. 20). The speaker from the countryside tells about the setting up of tents for homes (v. 20). The shepherds designate the leaders, and the scattering of the flock refers to the Exile (v. 21). The leaders had not asked the Lord for guidance. It is only in v. 22 that the invasion from the north emerges as the instrument to turn the cities of Judah into a place of jackals (cf. 9:11).

The unit concludes with a prayer of repentance (10:23–24). The prophet asks that God's anger be expressed for the purpose of correction and justice, not complete annihilation (v. 24). He also asks God to direct His wrath toward the pagan nations, who do not know Him (that is, do not appropriately acknowledge Him), and toward those who do not call upon His name (v. 25a–b). Because Judah faced the oppression of the nations (v. 25c–d), its salvation would require the destruction of their power. Later on in the book, the prayer for judgment against the nations is answered (chaps. 25, 46–51), but only after the defeat of Judah and Jerusalem. Jeremiah presents God's punishment of His people as irrevocable, but for the enduring faithful, there was hope for a return to the land. This hope was based on understanding that God directs humanity's steps (10:23–24).

11:1–17

Breaking the Covenant

This section has been called a meditation on Deuteronomy 6:4 or a theological treatise on the covenant. In the treatise, God's people must "hear" and "obey" the central tenet of the covenant (i.e., to love the Lord with all their heart, with all their soul, and with all their strength).

Without this, Israel loses both its identity as a people and God's special protection, thus becoming an object of the power struggles of the nations, which leads to destruction.

11:1–5. Covenant Foundation. This unit has three parts. First, the Lord said that Judah and Jerusalem are required to listen to the content of the covenant (cf. Deut. 6:4). To listen or hear in this context means to "obey" because the covenant impacts every aspect of one's life (vv. 2–3). Second, the Israel of old obediently listened to God's voice when He articulated the covenant formula (v. 4). Contemporary Judah and Jerusalem were here invited to do the same. But in this case, the message begins with the curse against those refusing to hear/obey (v. 3). The blessings are left out because priests and prophets had blindly overemphasized them by teaching that God would grant peace despite flagrant violations of the covenant. Third, the covenant was God's way of keeping His oath to the fathers and His promise to give Israel the land of Canaan (v. 5). This promise was significant in Jeremiah's setting. Facing a threat from an invading army and the immediate prospect of extermination, exile, and loss of land, this promise gave hope to Judah. But the people at large failed to fulfill the condition of the promise, which was faith in God. It was Jeremiah's task to remind them of this conditional element.

11:6–8. Covenant Violation (Ancient). The unit is structured as a proclamation of the covenant requirements (v. 6), a summary of the history of God's instruction to Israel through the prophets (v. 7), and an indictment (v. 8a) followed by judgment (v. 8b). God recalled how He had, through His prophets, reminded Israel to obey the covenant (v. 7). Since they did not listen to Him, God would not listen to them (v. 11), and the covenant curses would be enforced (cf. Deut. 28).

11:9–17. Covenant Violation (Contemporary). God revealed to Jeremiah a conspiracy against the covenant. Judah and Jerusalem were accused of breaking the covenant and following other gods (vv. 9–10). God's response was an irrevocable judgment (v. 11) and a refusal to listen to their complaints (cf. 10:23–25). All the cities of Judah worshiped Baal, and in every street in Jerusalem, there was an altar of incense to Baal (11:13). These gods were incapable of saving Judah on the day of trouble (v. 12). Verses 14–17 expand the point in v. 11 that God would not listen to Judah when they cried out to Him (v. 14). The judgment was final. Judah could not be saved by formal rites in the sanctuary while worshiping other gods (v. 15; cf. 2:2). Although the Lord referred to Judah as a beautiful, thriving, fruitful, and green olive tree (11:16–17; cf. 2:21; 8:13; 11:19; 17:8), their covenant crimes had provoked His anger to such a point that He allowed the invaders to burn and break this flourishing tree (11:16b–17).

11:18—12:17

Confessions, Punishment, and Redemption

In this section we find the first two Confessions in Jeremiah (see Jeremiah: Introduction). One is linked to a plot to kill Jeremiah (11:18–23), and the other concerns Jeremiah's questioning of God's judgment (12:1–6). The section closes with a description of God's work of punishment and redemption (vv. 7–17).

11:18–23. Jeremiah's Life Threatened. Following the conventional structure of the lament prayer, the first Confession includes invocation and complaint (vv. 18–19), petition (v. 20), and divine response (vv. 21–23).

1. Invocation and Complaint (vv. 18–19). Jeremiah was initially unaware of the plot against him, but God informed him of it (cf. 12:6) and identified people from Anathoth—Jeremiah's hometown—as the ones who were trying to kill him (11:19, 21). Through the complaint, the Israelites expressed the troubles they faced, hoping for a positive divine response. In his complaint, Jeremiah accused the people from his own town of plotting against him. Drawing on the familiar language of the lament (cf. Ps. 44:11, 22), he describes himself as a lamb brought to the slaughter. God quoted the words of the conspirators who intended to destroy Jeremiah so that his name would not be remembered any more. Being unmarried and having no children (Jer. 16:2), Jeremiah would leave no descendants to continue his line or to remember him. His ministry challenged the royal temple ideology (cf. chap. 7), and his priestly family (1:1; 12:6) regarded him as a threat to their status and ambitions (v. 21).

2. Petition (v. 20). Jeremiah turns to the Lord of Hosts as the righteous Judge, praying for the Lord's vengeance on his enemies. The Hebrew *naqam* may be used as a noun ("vengeance") or a verb ("avenge") and is used to express the idea that God cares for the cause of the innocent (11:20; 15:15; 20:12) or that He deals with the adversaries of His oppressed people (46:10; 50:15, 28; 61:6, 11, 36). The term expresses justice. The plot against Jeremiah was a response to what he prophesied in the name of the Lord (11:21), so he invokes God's promised protection (cf. 1:18–19; 15:20–21).

3. Divine Response (vv. 21–23). As the judge in a court, God gave His verdict and sentenced the men of Anathoth. What they had plotted against Jeremiah would now fall upon them. The divine judgment confirms the reliability of the words of His prophet.

12:1–6. Jeremiah's Question and the Lord's Answer. Jeremiah's second Confession may also be divided into invocation and complaint (vv. 1–2), petition (vv. 3–4), and divine response (vv. 5–6).

1. Invocation and Complaint (12:1–2). In his prayer, Jeremiah first acknowledges that God is righteous (v. 1a). The complaint concerns God's judgments and the reliability of God to care for His faithful covenant partners. Jeremiah asks why wicked people prosper (cf. Job 21:7). Put another way, is there a gap between God's righteousness and His allowance of evil? The prayer does not seek an explanation but is rather an accusation of God that anticipates a reaction.

2. Petition (12:3–4). Since God is righteous (v. 1) and knew Jeremiah's innocence, a righteous judgment is proposed against the wicked oppressors. The wicked should be set for slaughter—what his adversaries in Anathoth proposed for him, he now wishes for them (cf. 11:19; 12:6). Jeremiah's argument is that the severe drought, caused by the wicked, would damage all, righteous and wicked, faithful and unfaithful. This raises the question of how God would righteously deal with the faithful remnant in Judah and Jerusalem when the approaching judgment became reality.

3. Divine Response (12:5–6). A supportive answer could be expected in light of the assurances in 1:8 and 19, but God's answer comes as a surprise—a warning that something worse was yet to come! The present ordeal compared to the tribulation to come was like becoming weary by running with people on foot (present) and then having to contend with horses (future). Or it is like feeling exhausted in a cultivated land of peace (present) and then having to dwell in the floodplain of Jordan, with its heat, humidity, wild vegetation, and animals (future). Thus, God intensified the judgment theme. Jeremiah would have to live in continued uncertainty about the issue of God's righteousness. In the meantime, the righteous and faithful, of necessity, were to wait for and trust in the Lord. The same was taught by Jesus in His parable of the wheat and the tares (Matt. 13:24–30). The saints in the end time are admonished to have patience until the time of the harvest, even if some "die in the Lord" (Rev. 14:12–20). God's response, in sum, avoids the issue of His justice but urges the faithful to trust and obey Him. At the present time, the solution to suffering and injustice is not to be found in how the world operates but in one's relationship with God, which involves patiently waiting for His salvation.

12:7–17. Punishment and Redemption. Next, God spoke in a different tone. He pronounced a judgment that caused Him pain and grief, like a loving husband who must abandon His unfaithful and yet dearly beloved wife (v. 7; cf. 2:2). God had been compelled to give her into the hand of her enemies (12:7), despite her crying out against Him like a lion (v. 8). The Lord described her as being like a vulture under the attack of other vultures (or other birds of prey) and wild beasts (v. 9). This probably refers to the rulers' destruction and desolation of the vineyard of the Lord (vv. 10–12). God's people had sown wheat but reaped thorns because of His fierce anger (v. 13). God's righteousness requires judgment, and the faithful are asked to wait and trust in Him. Because of the faithful remnant, God would bring back the exiles and offer them a new covenant (vv. 14–17).

13:1–27

The Pride of the Chosen People

There are three units in this chapter that make the same point in strikingly different ways: the symbol of the linen garment (vv. 1–11), the symbol of the wineskins (or wine bottles; vv. 12–14), and the description of how the people's pride would be followed by captivity (vv. 15–27). All announce a verdict based on Judah's conduct and underscore the fact of God's justification in His decision.

13:1–14. The Symbols of the Linen Sash and the Wine Bottles. As the linen *'ezor*—translated variously as "sash," "loincloth" or "undergarment"—clings or is bound to the waist of a person, so God had made all Israel "cling" to Him for His renown, praise, honor, and glory (v. 11). This indictment is illustrated by three symbolic actions on the part of Jeremiah. He was to put a linen garment around his waist (vv. 1–2), go to the river Euphrates and hide it in a hole in the rock (vv. 3–5), and, after some time, return to find it ruined (vv. 6–7). In the same manner, God would ruin the pride of Judah and Jerusalem, manifested in their apostasy (vv. 10, 27). Like bottles or wineskins being filled with wine (v. 12), God would fill all Judah with drunkenness and dash them against each other. His destruction of Judah is irrevocable and will be implemented without mercy (vv. 13–14). These emphatic and harsh messages of judgment provide the background for Judah's two options in vv. 15–19.

13:15–27. Pride Precedes Captivity. Twice, the prophet asked Judah to listen in order to choose (vv. 15, 17). There was still time to hear God's word, to repent and obey, even with the looming judgment. Repentance would mean giving glory to the Lord their God (cf. Rev. 14:7) before He brought calamity (v. 16). Giving glory to God implies true worship and humility (abandoning pride)—the path to life (vv. 16, 18). There was a second option—pride or arrogance, an attitude of disobedience, which included a lack of humility and led to shame (vv. 9, 15, 17, 18, 22, 26–27). It would result in death, captivity, weeping, and the collapse of the state, the splendorous crowns (vv. 16–19, 24–27). Humility breeds glory, but pride generates shame. The shaming of Jerusalem (the unfaithful wife) through judgment (vv. 22, 26–27) would be a consequence of the shaming of the Lord (the faithful husband) through adulterous defilement (vv. 26–27). Justice in the covenant context would be brought by the curses and blessings generated by Israel's conduct (see Deut. 28; cf. Jer. 16:10—17:18), but the Lord's love and mercy would be received in humility.

14:1—15:21

Personal Experiences of the Prophet

God's relentless pursuit of righteousness and justice in the face of apostasy continues. It is mingled here, however, with the people's collective prayers of lament and the life and experiences of Jeremiah. He was both an intercessor for his people (of which he was himself a part) and a spokesperson for God (who had called him).

14:1–22. The Word Concerning the Droughts. Severe droughts in Judah had hit both farmers and nobles. Threatened by death, the people turned to God, confessing their sins and appealing to Him for His name's sake (vv. 7–9). God was merciful, faithful, and loving (see, e.g., Ps. 136; Jer. 33:11; Lam. 3:22–26). The appeal to God's name was a request for Him to act according to His character. In a desperate prayer, the people addressed God as Israel's Hope and Savior (Jer. 14:8). The people pleaded with God to not leave or forsake them, but God's answer was one of rejection (v. 10). The nation had broken the covenant, and the consequences were inevitable.

The people's prayer of lament was interrupted by God commanding Jeremiah to stop interceding for them (vv. 11–18). God would neither listen to them (for they were not listening to Him) nor accept them, regardless of their (dishonest) offerings. Instead, He would consume them by sword, famine, and plagues (vv. 12–16). Judah had lost the covenant blessings and was experiencing the curses. God particularly condemned the false prophets prophesying peace in His name (vv. 13–18). He denied any responsibility for the *'elil* ("worthless" or "idolatrous") "words"—divinations and visions—flowing from their deceptive minds (Heb. *leb*—often translated as "heart" but also inclusive of the mind—both thinking and feeling). They all would be under the curse of the sword, famine, and pestilence (vv. 15–16). By quoting from God's previous judgment, Jeremiah reinforces it.

Verses 17–18 describe God's personal empathy for His people, expressed in a lament after the execution of judgment. The lament blames the devastation on the prophets and priests who failed to acknowledge that the land was God's gift, which could be retained only when the people remained faithful to Him. After the devastating judgment, the land would belong to strangers while God's people wandered around in an unknown land (v. 18). The people's lament continues in vv. 19–22. Three questions are asked in v. 19 regarding whether God (1) had rejected Judah fully, (2) loathed/despised Zion, and (3) had wounded them so deeply that they could not be healed. The people seem to have known the answers, for they confessed their guilt (or iniquity) as well as that of their ancestors; they had sinned against God (v. 20). They prayed for rain (v. 22), which was included in the covenant blessings (v. 21c). Two arguments provided the basis for this request. First, God was petitioned to act for His name's sake (cf. vv. 9b, 21a), to avoid disgracing His glorious throne, and to avoid breaking His covenant with them (v. 21b). Second, they acknowledged that the idols of the nations and the heavens (astral deities) were not saviors and that they could not bring rain. They recognized that only God has such power. The prayer concludes with a commitment to wait for the Lord, for He had made all the nations and the heavens (v. 22).

15:1–9. The Lord Will Not Relent. Answering the people's prayer in 14:19–22, God declared that His verdict against the people remained (15:1–9). This is followed by a reflective lament by Jeremiah (vv. 10–18) and a conditional assurance by God (vv. 19–21). The decision to punish Judah was final (vv. 1–4). Intercession for the people was pointless. If intercession was rejected by God, then only curses remained, and these are symbolized by the four destroyers: death, sword, famine, and captivity (v. 2). The phrase "let them go" (at the end of v. 1) was once God's liberating command to Pharaoh (Ex. 5:1), but now He used it to express rejection and their return to bondage (Jer. 15:1). Four forms of destruction were appointed: sword, dogs, birds, and wild animals that would slay, drag, devour, and destroy (v. 3). The nations of the earth are depicted as wild animals destroying the flock of lambs, which are identified as God's people (e.g., 13:17, 20; 23:2–3; such metaphors are possibly the root images of the "beasts" in the visions of Daniel 7–8). Largely because of Manasseh's reign of bloodshed and apostasy, Judah would become repulsive to all the nations of the earth (Jer. 15:4; cf. 2 Kin. 21; 23:26; 24:3).

Through rhetorical questions, God revealed to Jerusalem that no one would pity her, cry over her, or inquire about her (Jer. 15:5; cf. 30:14). Since Jerusalem had forsaken the Lord, no one would care about her (v. 6a). This is an implied call for her to return to the Lord. Israel's persistent refusal to change had made God weary of relenting (v. 6). The metaphor of "winnowing" (i.e., separating the grain from husks at harvest time) is used to illustrate the coming terrifying judgment (v. 7; cf. 51:2). In permitting the nations to bring down Judah, God would winnow the people (i.e., their children would die, the number of widows would increase, mothers would feel anguish and terror, and even the "remnant" [normally the survivors] would be killed by the sword, vv. 7–9). This was not what God wanted, but Judah had brought it upon themselves by their refusal to return to Him as their only safety (v. 7). Punishment in the form of chastisement had become punishment by destruction, for God's patience had come to an end.

15:10–21. Jeremiah's Dejection and Reassurance. This unit constitutes Jeremiah's third Confession (see Jeremiah: Introduction). It consists of Jeremiah's personal woe (v. 10), a response by God promising a remnant and repeating the judgment (vv. 11–14), a prayer by Jeremiah asking God to save him from his persecutors (vv. 15–18), and a reassurance by God linked to Jeremiah's call (vv. 19–21; cf. 1:17–19).

Jeremiah's woe is a bitter complaint addressed to his mother for having borne him (15:10; cf. 20:14–18). Jeremiah became a man of contention to the whole land (v. 10b) because he was called to preach unpopular messages that undermined the royal ideology and the order of the Judean state. His claim that he had not lent or received loans with interest (v. 10c) is a figure of speech (synecdoche) where a part of the covenant law represents the totality of the law. The covenant law stipulated that it was unlawful to lend money to the poor with interest (Ex. 22:25–27; Lev. 25:35–37). By mentioning this specific law, Jeremiah claimed to be obedient to the covenant law. Since his prayer of lament is sincere and just, not like that of unfaithful Judah, he knew that God would hear him.

God first assured Jeremiah (Jer. 15:11). The Hebrew text at the beginning of the verse is uncertain. Some translate it as "it will be well with your remnant" while others render it as "I will deliver [or free] you for good [or good purposes]." God then identified the coming enemy, the northern iron and bronze, as one that no one could break (v. 12). God's anger would remove personal and national wealth (e.g., the temple vessels and furnishings; v. 13; cf. 52:17–23), and the people would be exiled to a country unknown to them (15:14; cf. 6:9–15). Verses 10–14 move uncompromisingly from the land of contention (v. 10) to the land of exile (v. 14). In vv. 15–18, Jeremiah resumes his prayer, requesting God's intervention and explaining why God should hear him (vv. 15–17). He claims to be innocent and righteous and to belong to God, while being filled with words (which he "ate") of judgment and God's anger (v. 16a). This leads to a complaint which resembles an accusation against God (v. 18). Jeremiah refers to his suffering and needs as a perpetual pain and an incurable wound. From the context, Jeremiah seems to have suffered an affliction caused by his prophetic ministry and by God. Thus, in the last lines of v. 18, drawing on the well-known motif of a tree planted by a river symbolizing a righteous person (e.g., Ps. 1:3; Jer. 17:8), Jeremiah asks God why He seems to be like failing streams of water, deceptive and unreliable. His complaint, therefore, is rooted in the conviction that he had been faithful to his prophetic call and yet had not received God's promised protection and blessing (1:8, 17–19).

In His answer (vv. 19–21), God assured Jeremiah of deliverance from the wicked. God does indeed care about the faithful. However, the Lord began by putting a condition before His prophet, built on a play on the Hebrew word *shub*, "turn" (it occurs four times in v. 19; cf. 3:1—4:4; 8:4–17). The Hebrew text may be translated as "If you will return (*shub*), I will return (*shub*).... They will turn (*shub*) to you, but you shall not turn (*shub*) to them." The carefully constructed statement sets out the condition for a new covenant based on a new faithfulness. The first two occurrences of the verb *shub*, "turn," concern Jeremiah's relation to the Lord. He had accused God of being like an "unreliable stream," and the Lord wanted him to turn to Him with renewed faithfulness and to trust Him. Only then did God promise to sustain him. The second pairing of the same verb concerns Jeremiah and his persecutors. God promised that when Jeremiah turned to Him with renewed faithfulness, his opponents would yield to him, but he should never yield to them. Thus, the promises depended on Jeremiah's new obedience, which would change his relation to God and to the people. God would restore him, and his human opponents would submit to him. Jeremiah serves here as a model for God's faithful people. A foundation was laid for a covenant reorientation that would give the community hope for the future. Thus, in the dialogue between Jeremiah and God in chapter 15, steps were taken that would lead to a new covenant (see chaps. 30–33).

The exchange between Jeremiah and God may be read and understood on several levels. First, it is the prayer of a faithful person in need of God's faithful response, which he received. Secondly, it is the prayer of a prophet who had been charged to proclaim the painful and dangerous word that Jerusalem would perish, and the question was whether God, the Originator of the word, would stand by His prophet, the carrier of the word. If God did not sustain the messenger, the message would not be taken seriously because the prophet would then lose his credibility. If the message was about God's righteousness and the righteousness of His covenant that was broken by Israel/Judah, then God was also obliged, by His own righteousness, to stand by the righteous messenger proclaiming His word. In this dialogue, Jeremiah is seeking God's protection and arguing with Him on the basis of His righteousness, and God responds by assuring Jeremiah that He will be with him and save him (15:20; cf. 1:8, 19). Third, Jeremiah's personal prayer may be read as a word of assurance to the people of God after the destruction of Jerusalem. He is a paradigm, an example of God's new community. God's servants, who "find the words of God" and "eat them" and to whom His word brings joy (15:16), will be like a fortified bronze wall—despite opposition and persecution, God will be with them and save them (vv. 20–21). The passage brings hope, therefore, to God's "end-time people."

16:1–21
Symbolic Actions and Restoration

Jeremiah 16 discusses two prophetic, symbolic actions illustrating the impending doom of Judah (vv. 1–13). This is followed by a message of hope that does not ignore the sins of the people (vv. 14–18) and a concluding message of hope for the nations (vv. 19–21).

16:1–13. Symbolic Actions of Doom. The Lord first commanded Jeremiah not to take a wife or have children "in this place" (vv. 2–4). Jerusalem and Judah were under curse, and all the living—fathers, mothers, sons, and daughters—were to die. The prophet's life symbolized Judah's destiny. Second, Jeremiah was not to mourn or lament the dead (v. 5), for God had removed His peace, love, and compassion from the community. All were to die without burial or lamentation. Nobody was to cut themselves or shave their heads (these mourning rituals, though prohibited in Israel, were practiced by the covenant violators; Deut. 14:1). The radical removal of all human interaction and compassion included the preclusion of giving bread or a comforting drink to the mourners (Jer. 16:7). Jeremiah was not to take part in eating and drinking at feasts. All joy of community life had broken down, even the loving and cheerful communication between bridegroom and bride (v. 9; cf. 7:34). This stern message was intended to lead Judah to rethink its way of life and return to the Lord.

In a didactic reflection on the painful prophecies, God anticipated the reaction of the people (16:2–9). They would ask why God had announced such disasters against them—they were not aware of their sin (i.e., of violating the covenant; v. 10). Jeremiah was to tell them that the transgressions of the fathers (idolatry) were heightened in Judah at this time because no one was listening to God (v. 11–12). The covenant required that Israel listen to and obey God's word (e.g., Deut. 6:1–9) and remain in Canaan. However, since they had broken the covenant, the people were sentenced to exile in a land they did not know and where they were to serve other gods, for the Lord would show them no favor (Jer. 16:13).

16:14–21. Message of Hope and Justice. The dark and depressing picture of the future (vv. 1–13) is unexpectedly interrupted and brightened by a message of hope. God described a new future for His people. He would repeat His miraculous deliverance of the Israelites from bondage in Egypt and bring the faithful back from all the lands where He had driven them to the promised land that had been given to their fathers (vv. 14–15). However, this promise did not weaken the force of the coming judgment. God would act through mysterious agents to trap the Judeans: the fishermen and the hunters (vv. 16–19). God's eyes could not ignore what they had done (cf. Heb. 4:13). Before restoration, God would first punish Judah for "defiling" His land with idols (16:18). The Exile is here seen as a "purification" of the Holy Land preceding the restoration.

The new age for God's people was to include the future submission of the nations (vv. 19–21). Seeing God's deliverance of His people and their restoration as a nation (vv. 14–15, 21), the nations would realize that they had inherited lies from their own ancestors. They would consider their own idols to be worthless and powerless (v. 19). God would show them His hand or might—that His name is the Lord (v. 21). Jeremiah here touches on an important biblical theme: God's purpose in calling Israel was to set them as "a light to the nations" (cf. Is. 2:2–4; 51:4; 60:1–3) so the nations would recognize Him as the only true God. This is the content of "the kingdom of God" celebrated in the temple service (Ps. 93–99). It remains God's plan through Christ (Matt. 28:18–20) and acquires central importance at the end of time (Rev. 14:6–20; 15:4; 21:1–4).

17:1–18
Judah's Sin and Punishment

Jeremiah addresses again the sin of Judah through a lawsuit speech (vv. 1–4), followed by instruction regarding curses and blessings (vv. 5–13). He concludes with a prayer for deliverance (vv. 14–18), which is his fourth Confession in the book (see Jeremiah: Introduction).

17:1–4. Lawsuit Speech. The Lord proclaimed Judah's undeniable guilt as written with an iron pen and engraved with the point of a diamond on their hearts and the horns of their altars (v. 1). The horns of the altar symbolized the blessing of forgiveness, but the sacrificial blood put there for atonement engraved the people's sin due to lack of repentance. The sins of Judah had not been removed from the heart of the people or from God's temple; they had not been forgiven. Judah's sin was idolatry, especially involving the fertility cult (v. 2; cf. 10:1–16), and without God's protection, an enemy would remove the wealth and treasures from Jerusalem (17:3–4; cf. 52:17–23). The land given by the Lord would be lost and replaced by captivity in a foreign land (cf. 16:13). These punishments were to be blamed on Judah, who kindled a fire in God's anger that would burn forever, an expression signifying the intensity of God's anger or the permanence of His judgment.

17:5–13. Blessings and Curses. The reference to the two ways in vv. 5–8 was influenced by Psalm 1. Trusting in humans brings the curse of death, but trusting in God brings the blessing of life. In the year of drought, the tree planted by the waters would yield fruit (cf. 14:1–18) because it stood on the source of life. The human heart is deceitful and incurable (i.e., unfaithful; cf. 17:5), but God, from whom nothing is hidden, makes us aware of our true condition (cf. 16:17). It is useless to trust in the power and wisdom of human beings who act independently of the Lord.

A proverbial illustration of sin warns against the unrighteous gain of riches (17:11). Economic deceit was a serious issue, committed both by individuals (cf. the unrighteous practice of usury in 15:10; cf. 9:3–8) and by the royal administration (i.e., abuse of authority, 22:13–17; cf. 1 Sam. 7:10–17). Those who unjustly gain riches are, according to some translations, like a partridge that broods but does not hatch, or, according to others, like a partridge which hatches eggs it has not laid. They would not retain what they did not own; they would be shown to be fools at the end (Jer. 17:11).

The prophet praises God's majestic power—illustrated by His glorious high throne in the Jerusalem sanctuary—and addresses Him as the hope of Israel (vv. 12–13). This forms the ground for Jeremiah's conclusion: all those who had forsaken God would be ashamed. The punishment corresponds with the sin. The sins of those who depart from God are written on the tablet of their hearts and the altars (v. 1); therefore, they would be written in the earth (or dust) (v. 13); that is, they would die because they had forsaken the fountain of living waters. Abandoning God is like being a shrub in the wilderness (i.e., there is no future for it), but trusting in Him is like being a tree planted by the waters (vv. 5–8).

17:14–18. Prayer for Deliverance. Jeremiah's prayer of deliverance is his fourth Confession. It balances the lawsuit in vv. 1–4, which foretold a harsh future. As an intercessor, Jeremiah did what was needed: he turned to God. His prayer resembles the psalms of lamentation, with ongoing shifts between motivations and petitions. Jeremiah prays for salvation, defined as healing from a disease. He had served God as a shepherd (vv. 14–16). He asks God, his hope in the day of judgment, not to terrorize him (v. 17). He prays for protection from his persecutors (cf. 15:10–21) and for their destruction (17:18) because of their mockery of the word of God (v. 15). Increasingly, Jeremiah contrasts the faithful, who are in need of God's mercy and deliverance, with the persecutors, who are deserving of judgment. This distinction implies that God would justly punish the unfaithful while mercifully restoring His faithful remnant.

17:19–27

Keeping the Sabbath Day Holy

This section has a simple structure: an admonition to remember the Sabbath (vv. 21–22), followed by a warning against repeating the disobedience of Israel's fathers (v. 23). The people were reminded of the blessing that came from following the Sabbath command (vv. 24–26) and the curse that came from not following it (v. 27).

17:19–20. Leaders, People, and the Sabbath. Jeremiah was sent by the Lord to stand in all the gates of Jerusalem, specifically where the kings of Judah went in and out, to deliver instruction regarding the Sabbath. The vital social dimension of the Sabbath made it necessary to involve the rulers. The Sabbath commandment is included in the Decalogue (Ex. 20:8–11; Deut. 5:12–15) and was considered a perpetual sign between God and Israel, reminding them that the Lord made them holy (Ex. 31:13; cf. Ex. 31:12–17). Its importance in Judah is supported by an inscription on an ostracon (a potsherd used for writing) from Jeremiah's time, in which the writer complains that as he was finishing the reaping before the Sabbath, his garment was taken as a pledge for a debt; he was asking for its return according to the law (Ex. 22:25–27).

17:21–27. Remember the Sabbath. According to vv. 21–22, Sabbath observance consists of not doing any work. This is illustrated by the admonition not to carry burdens into Jerusalem to be sold on the Sabbath. The Sabbath was to be a day of rest and was set apart as sacred. Hallowing and resting on the Sabbath acknowledges God as the Creator of the world (Ex. 20:11) and as the Deliverer of Israel from bondage in Egypt (Deut. 5:15). Faithfully keeping the Sabbath represents covenant observance. It is singled out for its special significance as a covenant sign. Obedience to this command would ensure that descendants of David would walk through the gates to sit on the throne of David and that the leaders of the people would come to Jerusalem to offer sacrifices to the Lord (Jer. 17:24–26). If the Sabbath were desecrated, then the Lord would kindle a fire in the gates that would devour the palace and the city (vv. 27). The future of the city was directly connected to Sabbath observance.

18:1–23

In the Potter's Hands

The chapter opens with a symbolic action (vv. 1–4) and its application to the people (vv. 5–11). It continues with the rejection of the divine warning (vv. 12–17) and the persecution of Jeremiah (vv. 18–23).

18:1–17. Symbolic Action and Application. God commanded Jeremiah to visit the potter's house where he would receive His words. Jeremiah observed the potter's complete control of the clay, shaping and reshaping it in any form he wanted. Similarly, God could do with Israel as the potter did with the clay (cf. Is. 45:9–11), for He is the sovereign Lord and Israel is His servant. The potter and the clay illustrate God's sovereignty and Israel's duty. Israel was in the hands of the Lord and was expected to submit to the will of the Lord in order for Him to accomplish His loving intentions for the people. In view of the impending judgment, God asked Judah and Jerusalem to turn/return from their evil ways and to make their doings good (Jer. 18:11).

But the people decided that they would not change (v. 12). This reaction on their part was the reason for the judgment speech immediately following (vv. 13–17). Three rhetorical questions were put to the nations as witnesses of the

legal proceedings. The essential question was "Who has heard of a nation making the choices that Israel has made?" (vv. 13–14). The symbolism of water in v. 14 refers to the Lord as the water of life for Israel (2:13, 18; 17:13). What Judah had done went against common sense. God's people had forgotten their Life-Giver and resorted to idolatry (18:15a). Therefore, they had brought judgment upon themselves (vv. 15b–16). God would scatter them and show them no favor (v. 17).

18:18–23. Oppression of Jeremiah. The Judeans, who listened only to their own evil hearts (v. 12), conspired against Jeremiah and his prophecies (v. 18). They made plans to take him to court and charge him with insurrection (cf. 26:8–11). They defended their priests, sages, and false prophets but opposed the word of God from Jeremiah. The divine action (18:1–17) is compared to what Jeremiah's enemies would do to him in their resistance to God's word (v. 18). In his fifth Confession, Jeremiah appeals to God's righteousness (vv. 18–23) in not allowing the innocent to be punished (cf. 11:18–23; 12:1–4; 15:10-12, 15–21; 17:14–18; 20:7–18).

Turning to the Lord in prayer (18:19–23), Jeremiah asks for Him to pay attention to his opponents' plans. He appeals to God's sense of justice when asking whether good should be repaid with evil. The people planned to kill Jeremiah, while he was interceding on their behalf for God's wrath to be turned away (v. 20; cf. vv. 22b-23a). The unit ends with several petitions similar to the imprecatory psalms (see "Imprecatory Passages in the Psalms," p. 733) regarding the removal and punishment of adversaries opposed not only to Jeremiah but also to God Himself (Jer. 18:21–23). It should be noted that Jeremiah left vengeance in God's hands—as did the psalmists—and did not unilaterally seek vengeance. In addition, as Jeremiah mentions, he had been pleading for the people, and his decision to cease praying for them was in obedience to God's admonition to stop praying on their behalf (cf. 7:16; 11:14; 14:11). Besides, his imprecations were consonant with what God had already decreed. The Confession in 18:18–23 illustrates the irreconcilable conflict between unfaithful Israel and God, between the Judean establishment and Jeremiah, between the lies of false teachers and the truth of God's word. It argues not only for God's judgment but also for deliverance from evil and death, opening up the possibility for God's salvation of His remnant (chaps. 30–33).

19:1–15

The Clay Water Bottle

God announced the coming judgment (vv. 1–3) and offered evidence to justify His decision (vv. 4–9; the breaking of the flask illustrated the future of Judah [vv. 10–15]).

19:1–9. Announcing the Judgment and Punishment. Jeremiah was commanded to procure a clay water bottle (vv. 10–12) and take some elders as witnesses to the Valley of Hinnom, near the Potsherd Gate in Jerusalem (where broken pottery was thrown away). There he was to address the kings and people of Judah and Jerusalem. The first part of Jeremiah's prophecy imitates the lawsuit form and contains three units arranged as an *inclusio* (vv. 3–9):

A Punishment (v. 3)
  B Indictment (vv. 4–6)
A' Punishment (vv. 7–9)

The coming destruction would be so terrible that all who heard of it would be stunned and shocked (v. 3; cf. Deut. 28:37).

The indictment sought to provide the needed evidence to justify the coming judgment. The evidence indicated that the people had abandoned God and treated Jerusalem as a place for foreign gods (Jer. 19:4–5). They had burned incense in Jerusalem to these gods whom neither they, their fathers, nor the kings of Judah had ever known, and they had filled their land with the blood of innocent people. God emphasized how these defiling acts had impacted Jerusalem. The place where Jeremiah delivered his prophecy intentionally oscillates between the shameful Valley of Hinnom, Tophet, and the city gate. Jerusalem had become foreign to the Lord. The blood of the innocent was associated with the high places of Baal (Tophet) where they sacrificed their children as burnt offerings (v. 5). God had never intended for this to happen.

In response, God would avenge the acts of apostasy (vv. 6–9). Those who broke the covenant by slaughtering their innocent children as sacrifices to alien gods would be slaughtered by an alien army, and the name of Tophet and the Valley of Hinnom would be changed to the Valley of Slaughter (v. 6). God's judgment is expressed by a series of verbs rooted in the covenant curses (vv. 6–9; Deut. 28:15–68). Being righteous, He was obliged to be faithful to the stipulated curses for a broken covenant.

Even the horrific sacrifice of their innocent children to Baal (Jer. 19:6) would be avenged by the desperate act of parents eating the flesh of their children (v. 9; cf. Deut. 28:53–57).

19:10–15. The Flask and the Future. Jeremiah's symbolic act of breaking the flask (v. 10) meant that God would permanently destroy the city (v. 11). In this case, the principle of justice demands retribution: the houses in Jerusalem would be defiled like Tophet, just as the people had defiled their houses by burning incense to all the host of heaven and pouring out drink offerings to other gods (vv. 12–13). Through the prediction of this judgment, God intended to bring Jerusalem to repentance. However, in a concluding scene, Jeremiah moved to the court of the temple and announced God's word to all the people. Since they had proudly and stubbornly refused to hear His words, the Lord of Hosts would surely execute the judgment (vv. 14–15).

20:1–18

Jeremiah Persecuted

This section deals with Jeremiah's struggle with his prophetic calling in the face of persecution. After recounting his confrontation with Pashhur (vv. 1–6), he describes his unpopular ministry (vv. 7–18). The reference to Babylon (vv. 4–6) suggests a date after 605 B.C., when the Babylonians defeated Egypt at Carchemish.

20:1–6. The Word of God to Pashhur. Pashhur the son of Immer, a priest and chief governor in the temple, sought to silence Jeremiah by beating him and putting him in the stocks. In response, Jeremiah delivered a prophecy linking Pashhur's fate with that of Jerusalem (vv. 3–6) and declared that the Lord had renamed him Magor-Missabib, "terror all around." This symbolic naming is linked to the first prediction in Jeremiah concerning the Babylonian disaster (vv. 4–6). The message embedded in the name was that the temple, associated with peace, would in reality bring terror.

God would make Pashhur a terror to himself and all his friends—he would see them fall by the sword. God would also give Babylon all the wealth of Jerusalem (v. 5). Pashhur and his household would be exiled to Babylon, where he would die and be buried. The reason for this punishment was that Pashhur had prophesied lies (v. 6). By falsifying the covenant law, he had made himself an agent of deception.

20:7–18. Jeremiah's Unpopular Ministry. This unit contains Jeremiah's sixth and last Confession (see Jeremiah: Introduction). Jeremiah's prayer opens with a powerful lamentation (vv. 7–10). He claims that God, at the moment of his call, persuaded (*patah*, "persuaded," "seduced," "enticed," or "deceived") him with wonderful promises (v. 7; cf. v. 10). God overpowered him. The language appears to be that of a man seducing a woman and finally forcing himself on her. Jeremiah was not able to reject his call. After the sweet moment of the divine call, Jeremiah faced the reality of a complex and difficult ministry and the hostility of the people (v. 8). Even if he wished to remain silent in order to avoid the hostility, he could not do so because the word of God was like a fire in his bones (v. 9). His oppressors mocked him, and his friends or acquaintances (lit. "all men of my peace," i.e., "all who wish me well") were trying to make him fall so that they could take their revenge on him (v. 10; cf. v. 7). This is about the cost of being God's servant at a time when God's warning of judgment against Judah was severe, though the people appeared to be enjoying peace and prosperity.

Jeremiah put his trust in God (vv. 11–12). Though his enemies attempted to make him stumble, God would make them stumble. He pleaded with God to act in his favor—the mighty, awesome One who examines the righteous. As for the conspirators, their infamy would never be forgotten. Jeremiah asked to witness God's vengeance on the persecutors who were plotting vengeance against him (vv. 10, 12). As a servant of God, Jeremiah did not take revenge into his own hands, but he asked God to act according to His will. The tone changes in v. 13, when Jeremiah offers praise to God for His salvation. The lament prayer leads to praising God for the coming deliverance (v. 13). God's favorable answer had either been given or Jeremiah knew that God would answer in the future, so he praised Him.

Surprisingly, another profound lament follows in vv. 14–18. Jeremiah seems to have moved in a circle, always coming back to the comfort of God's care but also returning to his own suffering and lamentation. The crude reality of prophetic service is that it often generates ongoing pain for the prophet, while the faith of the prophet generates ongoing comfort for the people. The lament has no explicit addressee but seems to be a personal reflection. The speaker curses the day he was born because life has brought labor and sorrow and shame (vv. 14, 18; cf. Job 3).

The lament in vv. 14–18 expresses not only Jeremiah's sense of hopelessness (v. 18) but also the hopelessness of God's people experiencing destruction and exile. This mingling of individual and collective speakers is common in some biblical texts (e.g., in the book of Psalms) and indicates that the intercessor may be identifying himself or herself with the suffering people. Jeremiah also shows a fondness for transforming a current situation into a symbol of the future situation of the people (e.g., Pashhur in 20:1–6). Thus, Jeremiah expresses his own despair in the text, but in a way his words also express his people's despair and shame after the predicted devastating judgment. His prayer for salvation from his persecutors becomes a prayer for the salvation of God's people under the hopelessness brought by the judgment (cf. 11:18–23; 12:1–6; 15:10–21; 17:14–18; 18:18–23). This theme points forward to the promise of hope and a new future (e.g., chaps. 23–25, 30–33).

21:1—25:38

Judgment and Hope

The content of this section is characterized by judgment against Judah (21:1—23:40) and is interrupted by a messianic prophesy (23:1–8), a powerful central statement of hope (24:1–10), and judgment against Babylon and the nations (25:1–38).

21:1–14. Message to King Zedekiah and Judah. Jerusalem had been left enfeebled and fearful by the Babylonian invasion in 598 B.C., when Zedekiah was on the throne. The troubled king sent servants to Jeremiah to inquire of the Lord for them. The initial question (vv. 1–2) has four answers (vv. 3–7, 8–10, 11–12, 13–14). The question aimed at averting the approaching Babylonian threat but is expressed as a wish. Zedekiah wanted to ascertain whether he could still rely on God's faithfulness in the new crisis. But he only asked because he lacked faith.

God's first answer through Jeremiah was not what the king wished to hear (vv. 3–7). Allusions are made to the Exodus (vv. 4–7; cf. Deut. 26:8; Ps. 136:12), indicating that God remained the same. But the shocking surprise was that He was now acting against Judah and in favor of Babylon. The king and all his people would be given to the Babylonians. There was no hope for Judah because of God's intense anger (Jer. 21:5).

Jeremiah's second answer addressed the people (vv. 8–10). God set before them the ways of life and death (see Deut. 30:15–20). The way of death would be in trusting the king, his army, and Jerusalem's walls (i.e., to stay in the city and experience the sword, famine, and plague; v. 9a). The way of life and hope would be to escape from the city and defect to the Babylonians because the judgment would target the royal establishment and the temple. Surrender would be the prophet's way of survival. It may mean exile, but lives would be saved, and God might bring His faithful people back.

The third answer addressed the royal house (vv. 11–12). The evil of their past deeds was clear, but there was hope if they would change their ruling practice. The way out is expressed by imperatives to always be just and to rescue victims. This is based on the covenant duty and on what God Himself does (e.g., Ex. 22:22; Deut. 10:18; 24:14, 17–18; 27:19; cf. Jer. 22:1–30; 49:11). Jeremiah's fourth answer (vv. 13–14) addressed the self-sufficiency of people boasting that there was hardly any threat from the Babylonians. He announced that God would punish these people by fire because of their contempt for the covenant and the prophetic word.

22:1–30. Indictments of the Royal House. Jeremiah addressed the Davidic house (vv. 1–9) and the failure of the monarchy (vv. 10–30). If the king would execute justice and righteousness, safeguarding the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and would not shed innocent blood, then the monarchy would remain (vv. 3–9; cf. 7:5–7). But because the king did not listen to/obey, the royal house would collapse. The main concern is obedience to the covenant laws protecting the innocent and the needy (see e.g., Ex. 22:22; Deut. 10:18; 24:17; 27:19). The Davidic house was precious to God but so also was caring for the poor in accordance with the covenant (Jer. 22:16c–17).

The failure of the monarchy is addressed in vv. 10–30. It opens with an invitation to lament for the one going into exile never to return. The text then identifies the exiled as King Jehoahaz ("Shallum"), who was taken captive to Egypt, where he died (vv. 11–12; cf. 2 Kin. 23:30–34). This is followed by an indictment against the self-seeking interests of the kings (Jer. 22:13–30), illustrated by King Jehoiakim. The principles of a just ruler are outlined in vv. 13–17, and Jehoiakim's father, King Josiah, appears as an example (vv. 15–16). The basic tenet is that "knowing God" means to act justly toward the poor and needy (v. 16). But Jehoiakim is characterized in the text by covetousness, the shedding of innocent blood, and oppression and violence

(v. 17; cf. 13–14). This indictment is followed by a judgment speech (vv. 18–23). Jehoiakim's death would not be lamented, and his burial would be dishonorable (vv. 18–19). The foreign gods ("your lovers") would be destroyed (v. 20). Verse 21 is a reminder of the refusal of the king to listen to/obey God's voice. The unit concludes with a description of the shame and humiliation of the king that the judgment would bring (vv. 22–23). The leaders of God's people are expected to set aside self-interest in order to serve the people and care for those in need.

God then turned to "Coniah," also known as King Jehoiachin (598–597 B.C.). Although the king was "the signet of His right hand," God would now pull him off. Jehoiachin would be handed over to the king of Babylon and taken to exile with his mother and descendants—they all would die there (vv. 24–27). God then declared to the whole earth that the current royal house would no longer rule in Judah (vv. 26–30). This vacuum on the throne is dealt with in 23:1–8.

23:1–8. The Lord Our Righteousness. The general indictment against the kings in vv. 1–2 is followed by three promises to the remnant (vv. 3–8). First, God would gather His people from all the countries where He had driven them, bring them back, and make them fruitful (v. 3). The scattering of the flock was the result of the unfaithful shepherds who did not attend to it (cf. Mark 6:34). God would, however, intervene and bring the remnant back to the land. He would set rulers over them who would show His care for them, and they would no longer be afraid (Jer. 23:4; cf. Ezek. 34:1–31).

Second, God promised the coming of the Messiah. In fulfillment of His covenant with David, God would raise a righteous Branch (i.e., a Son of David in the "tree" of David's house), a King who would reign and prosper, executing justice and righteousness on earth (cf. Is. 11:1–16). He would bring peace and reunite Judah and Israel. His name would be the Lord our Righteousness (Jer. 23:5–6), a possible play on the name Zedekiah (21:1–14), which means "the Lord is righteous." Unlike Zedekiah, the Messiah would practice God's righteousness (v. 12; 22:3), and His rule was to bring well-being to all through justice for the poor and needy.

Third, God promised a new exodus for God's people, a return from exile (23:7–8). The return was fulfilled by the command of the Persian king Cyrus in 537 B.C., but the kingdom was not restored. However, the successive foreign domination by Persia, Greece, and Rome kept alive the hope for a coming Messiah. When Jesus of Nazareth announced "the kingdom of God" and that God's people needed to "repent" (Matt. 4:17), Israel still lived in expectation of the Messiah (see e.g. Luke 2:25–37).

23:9–40. Judgment on False Prophets. Jeremiah ministered in the midst of competing claims to "truth," each professing to be a revelation of God's will. In this unit, he makes his clearest argument for the truthfulness of his prophetic words. In the first part (vv. 9–22), Jeremiah brings a general indictment against the religious leaders (i.e., prophets and priests). He expresses a deep inner turmoil as he contrasts the Lord's holy words with the unfaithful words and deeds covering the land, causing it to *'abal*, which can mean "mourn" or "dry up," under a curse (vv. 9–10). The profanity and wickedness practiced in the temple by both prophets and priests would be punished (vv. 11–12).

God indicted the false prophets in Samaria (Israel) and Jerusalem (Judah; vv. 13–15). They prophesied in the name of Baal and led God's people into error; they were committing adultery and practicing deception (lit. "walking in lies"). In Jerusalem, they supported the evildoers rather than calling people to turn from their wickedness. God had therefore rejected them as He had Sodom and Gomorrah and would punish them (cf. v. 15 and 9:15). As the Ruler of the world, God had laid plans and had made decisions in the council (or counsel—the Hebrew word can mean either) of His heavenly court (23:18). When a decision had been made, a messenger or a prophet was commissioned to announce it (e.g. 1 Kin. 22:19–23; Is. 6:6–8). God firmly stated that He had not sent or spoken to the false prophets (Jer. 23:21). They did not stand in God's council. If they had, as was the case with a true prophet such as Jeremiah, they would have announced God's words to His people to help them turn from their evil ways (v. 22). Unlike a false prophet, a true prophet would have led the people to faithfulness to God.

The critique of false prophets continues in vv. 23–32. God asserted His sovereignty, declaring that He would not be controlled or manipulated by humans. He is supreme, and before Him all humans must bow. God cannot be drawn into human schemes and political agendas. He could be near to His people and also distant from them. Yet He could not be avoided because He sees all and fills heaven and earth. With this in mind, God turned again to the false prophets.

Having dreams (v. 25) was no proof of divine authority. What mattered was the turning of the people to God through their messages (vv. 25–27, 30–32).

In vv. 28–29, the text provides a comparison between true and false prophets, where dreams are contrasted with God's word, like chaff and wheat. The criterion for true prophecy lies in the nature of God's word: it is like a fire and a powerful hammer that breaks rocks in pieces. Thus, the word has great power, and nothing can hinder its implementation (cf. Deut. 18:15–22; Is. 55:10–11).

God rejected the false prophets on four grounds (vv. 30–32): (a) they were stealing God's words from their neighbors (v. 30)—they were claiming for themselves others' alleged revelations (perhaps words of other genuine prophets or of other false prophets); (b) they were quoting God although He had not spoken to them (v. 31); (c) they were prophesying false dreams (v. 32a); and (d) they were causing God's people to err by their lies (v. 32b). Their uselessness to the people was based on the fact that God had not sent them (v. 32c).

The last unit (vv. 33–40) is built on a play on the word *massa'*, which is difficult to translate. It derives from the verb *nasa'* ("bear," "lift") and can mean both "that which one bears" (i.e., "burden") and "that for which one raises one's voice" (i.e., "utterance"). A prophetic utterance would be an "oracle," "message," or "prophecy." The key to the meaning of the passage is the identification of the words of the false prophets as their own words—a perversion of God's words (v. 36; cf. vv. 25–27, 30–32). Therefore, God forbade them from claiming the *massa'* ("the message," "utterance") of the Lord (six times in vv. 33–34, 36, 38). His name was not to be attached to their false prophecies. People could ask about the Lord's "burden"/"message"/"oracle" but were not to presume to know it (vv. 35–38). Such false assumptions would result in closing oneself off from the true knowledge of God's omniscience, omnipresence, and sovereignty (cf. vv. 23–24) and in being cast out into exile (v. 39). Thus, the religious leadership in Judah was accused of attempting to control God's actions through knowledge that they did not have. This is a serious matter that even Christian leaders need to recognize.

24:1–10. Two Baskets of Figs. God showed Jeremiah two baskets with figs that had been placed in front of the temple. One had good figs, but the figs in the other were so ruined that they could not be eaten (vv. 1–2). Through this image, God revealed His plan for the faithful remnant in Babylon (i.e., the good figs) and His plan for the unfaithful people in Judah and Egypt (i.e., the bad figs). The judgment against the royal establishment in Judah included exile or death. God would send the sword, famine, and plague against them until they were consumed (vv. 8–10). The promise of hope to the faithful remnant in exile included the return to their homeland (vv. 4–7). Language found in Jeremiah's call (1:10) is used to describe their experience: God would build them up and plant them (24:6). The new covenant would be based on what God would do: He would give His people a heart to know Him, and when they returned to Him, a new covenant would be made (v. 7; cf. chaps. 30–33).

25:1–14. Seventy Years of Desolation. This unit dates to the first year of Nebuchadnezzar (605 B.C.). Babylon has now entered the scene as a new world power, becoming a threat to Judah. But God will limit Babylon's dominion to seventy years. This knowledge is central to Jeremiah, for it underscores that God is sovereign, even over Babylon, and that the possibility of Israel's return and restoration is kept open. Jeremiah accused Judah and Jerusalem of refusing to listen to God's word as given through His prophets. This had been the case not only during his own twenty-three years of ministry but also in the prophetic movement through which God had led His people for centuries (vv. 3–7). In v. 4, the Hebrew verb *shakam* (lit. "rising early") conveys the idea of "repeatedly" (see commentary on 7:13 and Jeremiah: Introduction). All of God's prophets called Israel to repentance with instructions on right conduct, warnings against apostasy provoking God's anger, and assurances of God's protection. But the people refused to hear (obey), and the Lord's anger was provoked to their own detriment (25:5–7). This is an excellent summary of Jeremiah's prophecies from chapters 2–25.

God then announced that because of their refusal to hear/obey, He would send His servant Nebuchadnezzar against Judah and the nations all around, resulting in their destruction (25:8–9). The life and joy of the community would disappear (v. 10; cf. 7:34; 16:9; 33:11). The land of Judah and its neighbors was to become desolate, and they would serve the king of Babylon seventy years (v. 11). After that, God would punish Babylon for its iniquity and make it a perpetual desolation (v. 12; cf. 50:1—51:58). Judah's liberation after seventy years came in

536 B.C. (606/5–537/6 B.C.), when the Persian king Cyrus allowed the exiles to return home. The message is that God is the sovereign Lord of all the nations. He gives and takes away their life and dominion (1:10; cf. 18:9; 24:6; 31:28; 32:41; 42:10). God rules supreme, and His kingdom is everlasting. Therefore, despite the judgment, there is hope for God's people.

25:15–38. God Judges the Nations. This unit announces God's judgment upon all the nations of the earth, including Judah and Babylon. His judgment on Babylon was what made the restoration of Israel possible (23:1–8; 30:1—33:28). The unit integrates two concepts: (a) God "ordained [Jeremiah] a prophet to the nations" (1:5) and "set [him] over the nations and over the kingdoms" (v. 9); and (b) the Lord is the Sovereign God and universal Ruler of the nations, and no kingdom or nation could endure His fierce anger (25:30–31, 38). The first part of the judgment outlines Jeremiah's ministry in symbolic terms (vv. 15–29). God commanded the prophet to take the cup of the wine of His fury from His hand (i.e., God's anger expressed in His word of judgment) and to cause all the nations to whom he was sent to drink it (i.e., proclaim to them God's word of judgment), with the result that they would drink, stagger, and go mad because of the sword that God would send among them (i.e., fear and chaos would rule from the day of their hearing the word until its fulfillment). The wine cup of fury is a common biblical metaphor for God's anger, which brings judgment and causes its recipients to stagger and lose control, resulting in fear and chaos (cf. Is. 51:17–22; Jer. 49:12; 51:7; Lam. 4:21; Ezek. 23:31–34; Hab. 2:15–16; Obad. 15; Zech. 12:2). Jeremiah communicated God's word to a range of nations, beginning with Judah and ending with Babylon (transliterated as "Sheshak" or "Sheshach, Jer. 25:17–26; cf. 46:1—51:58). But there is also an emphasis on all the kingdoms of the earth (25:26; cf. vv. 15, 17), linked with God's plan to bring calamity on all people (45:4–5; cf. 25:31) and which may be associated with a universal day of judgment when God's judgment, depicted by the metaphor of the sword, would fall on all the earth (v. 29).

According to vv. 30–38, God would come to hold judgment on the earth—He would bring a "lawsuit" (*rib*) against the nations (v. 31), rulers, and kings. This resembles the Day of the Lord, when God would deal with the nations and establish justice and peace (e.g., Is. 2–4; 13:6, 9; 34:8; Jer. 46:10; Ezek. 7:19; 13:5; Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11; 3:14; Amos 5:18; Obad. 15; Zeph. 1:7; Zech. 14:1; Mal. 3:23). The cause for the judgment is not clearly stated, except in Judah's case and in general reference to the wicked (Jer. 25:31). The message has more to do with God's sovereignty over the nations than with their behavior and fate. Its purpose was to strengthen Israel's faith in God as Babylon was rising to power (v. 1) and to explain why the prediction of a limit of seventy years for Babylon's dominion (vv. 3–14) was indeed to be trusted. The section closes affirming that not one of the nations on earth is autonomous—they are all accountable to God.

26:1—29:32

CONFRONTATIONS WITH PRIESTS AND PROPHETS

These units cover the time of Jehoiakim's early reign (609–598 B.C.) to the reign of Zedekiah (597–586 B.C.). The chapters have been placed together between chapters 2–25 and 30–33 because of the common theme of the two perspectives on Judah's fate. On the one hand, there was the official view that Jerusalem was safe and its survival from the threat of Babylon was guaranteed by God's promises. On the other hand was the opposite view from God that Jerusalem had no guarantees of survival because the Babylonian threat was His punishment for widespread apostasy and the violation of the covenant.

26:1–24

The Rescue of Jeremiah

In this section of Jeremiah, we gain new insights into the various reactions to his sermon in the temple, recorded in chapter 7 and summarized here. In this particular case, the narrative focuses on the prophet's credibility. Was his prophetic word trustworthy? Knowing that this was going to be the heart of the debate, the Lord informed Jeremiah that He had sent the same message of judgment against the city and the temple through other prophets before him (vv. 4–6). In other words, his prophecy was in agreement with that of previous prophets.

The reaction of those who listened to Jeremiah varied. The false prophets and the priests immediately condemned Jeremiah because, based on their false sense of security, they assumed that the temple and the city would never be destroyed (vv. 7–9). Therefore, based on their preconceived ideas, Jeremiah could not be a true prophet of the Lord. Their intention was to kill Jeremiah for pronouncing judgment against the temple and the city. Years later, similar charges would be raised against Jesus (Matt. 27:61) and Stephen (Acts 6:13–14). Jeremiah knew that everything depended on the people's acceptance of his prophetic ministry. After the arrival of the princes of Judah, he proclaimed his message once more and reaffirmed that he was a true prophet of the Lord (Jer. 26:14).

The elders decided to compare the message of Jeremiah with that of previous prophets (vv. 18–28). They tested his prophetic claim. They demonstrated that there was continuity between what Jeremiah was proclaiming and the messages of judgment against the city and the temple announced by the prophets Micah and Urijah. King Hezekiah had listened to Micah, but King Jehoiakim had killed Urijah. The implicit question was whether they should react like Hezekiah or like Jehoiakim. For the moment, the continuity of Jeremiah's message with that of previous prophets indicated that he was a true prophet. The fact that the life of the prophet was preserved particularly through the intervention of Ahikam (v. 29), a supporter of Josiah's reform, suggests that the enemies of Jeremiah had not been persuaded.

This unit (vv. 1–24) also places Jeremiah within a spiritual movement in Judah that maintained the covenant—here supported by the elders of the land (vv. 16–19) and prophets like Urijah (vv. 20–23). They were in conflict with the ideology of the royal establishment that compromised the covenant by self-seeking and fertility cults. This mixed audience of the faithful and apostates explains the contrary themes of judgment and hope in Jeremiah's prophecies.

27:1–22

God's Servant Babylon

The purpose of the section is to show that God appointed Babylon as His servant to execute His judgment and that lives would be preserved only in submission to the Babylonians. God issued three decrees: to Judah's neighboring nations, to King Zedekiah, and to Judah and Jerusalem. God commanded Jeremiah to make a yoke of straps and bars and to put it on his neck as a symbol of Babylonian domination (v. 2; cf. 28:1–11). Envoys arriving at the Jerusalem court would take these symbols and a decree from God to the kings of Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre, and Sidon (27:3). The first decree has five statements (vv. 4–11): (1) God had made the world and given it to whom He deemed proper (v. 5; cf. Acts 17:24–27); (2) He had given both the land and beasts of Judah's neighboring nations to His servant, the king of Babylon (v. 6); (3) He would limit Babylon's dominion until the time of judgment against his land would come—when the nations would make Babylon serve them (v. 7; cf. the limit of the seventy years in 25:11–14); (4) therefore, God put a choice before Judah's neighbors: resisting the Babylonians would mean annihilation by the sword, famine, or pestilence (27:8), but submitting to the Babylonians and accepting their yoke would allow the Israelites to remain in their land (v. 11); and (5) the recipients were to reject the lies of the false prophets (diviners, dreamers, soothsayers, or sorcerers) advising them, for shortsighted personal gain, not to serve the Babylonians. Such false prophecies would result in exile (v. 9).

The second decree was to Zedekiah and repeated the choice offered to the kings of the neighboring nations (vv. 12–15). The third decree (vv. 16–22) was to Judah and Jerusalem. It emphasized that life and hope were connected with God's words through Jeremiah. However, a particular issue was raised. The false prophets had lied, saying that the temple vessels already taken to Babylon (597 B.C.) would be brought back shortly (v. 16). God told them that this would not be the case and that even the vessels remaining in Jerusalem would be carried to Babylon and would remain there until God's restoration of His people to Jerusalem (vv. 18–22). With irony, Jeremiah invited the false prophets to pray to God that the remaining vessels not be taken by Babylon (v. 18), which would only happen if Judah would repent and return to the Lord.

28:1–17

Hananiah's False Prophecy

Hananiah appeared, claiming to be sent by the Lord (vv. 1–4). His name means "the Lord is gracious," and he asserted that God was indeed more gracious than Jeremiah's harsh judgments suggested. He confronted Jeremiah in the presence of the priests and all the people with a supposed word from the Lord (vv. 2–4). Opposing Jeremiah's message in 27:16–22, he announced that God had broken Babylon's yoke, and within two years the temple vessels and Jehoiachin ("Jeconiah"), together with other exiles, would return. Hananiah twisted the covenant promises and ignored the fact that God's promises of protection had been made void by Judah's disobedience.

Though wishing that Hananiah's prophecy were true (28:6; cf. 27:18), Jeremiah changes the topic and makes prophetic authority the central issue. Because God's prophets in the past protected the covenant, they were called to prophesy war and disaster and plagues against many nations (28:8). Their messages concerned God's covenant, not politics, and their indictments against Israel therefore resulted in judgment. Hananiah's words of peace and well-being could be tested (v. 9; cf. 6:14; 8:11). Jeremiah appealed to the covenant (Deut. 18:22), insisting that a fulfilled prophecy proved that such a messenger was one whom the Lord had truly sent. The burden of proof was on Hananiah. Only time would tell. But what if Hananiah were wrong? Did not the deportation in 597 B.C. indicate Babylon's power and intentions to rule over Judah?

Hananiah confidently broke the wooden yoke (cf. 27:2), restating his prophecy that, within two years, God would break the Babylonian dominion (28:10–11). Jeremiah withdrew from the debate. God later instructed him to tell Hananiah that he had broken the yokes of wood, but in the process, he had created unbreakable yokes of iron! The judgment, rather than being averted, would be intensified: God would put yokes of iron on all of the nations, forcing them to serve Babylon (vv. 12–14). The point is that Hananiah's prophecy was false, and he was a deceiver, not sent by the Lord. In order to show that Jeremiah was a true prophet, God announced the death of Hananiah. He died that same year, in the seventh month, because he had spoken rebellion against the Lord (vv. 15–17). The fulfillment of Jeremiah's short-term prophecy demonstrated that he was a true prophet and that, consequently, his other prophecies would be also fulfilled. He had passed another prophetic test. Hananiah's error was his unfaithfulness to the covenant and the word of God.

This episode illustrates the repeated instruction in 27:9–10 and 14–18 to reject the false prophets. But the confrontation goes deeper; it is about who God is. As Israel's God of the covenant, Yahweh loved His people and was righteous (i.e., He was faithful to Israel, as defined by the covenant, and true to His word). However, He is also the holy and powerful Sovereign Lord of the nations, who plucks up and tears down, who builds and plants (cf. 1:10). Israel's destiny, therefore, depended on their faithfulness to God.

29:1–32
Jeremiah's Letter to the Captives

Jeremiah sent a letter to the captives in Babylon through two royal messengers of King Zedekiah who had access to the court of King Nebuchadnezzar (vv. 1–3). The content confirmed the existence of at least two groups in Babylon: defectors and keepers of the covenant. The disobedient defenders of the royal establishment who trusted in the false prophets, all of whom would be punished, were admonished to repent. God's faithful remnant people, who would survive in exile and eventually be brought home, were encouraged to be patient and faithful (cf. chaps. 23–28). In the meantime, the remnant were required to (1) realistically accept the Exile as the setting where they were now required to live and where God had called them to obedience (29:5–7) and (2) continue to hope/wait for their return and restoration (vv. 10–14).

The passage (vv. 4–28) is framed by a repetition of the main admonition of hope given by God: to build houses, live in them, plant gardens, and eat their produce (vv. 5, 28). This is the letter's key pastoral advice. Another important theme is the warning against false prophets (vv. 8–9, 21–32; cf. chaps. 24–28). The most poignant part of the letter is found in 29:5–7. God's people in exile were to build and plant (cf. 1:10), to marry and have children, and to let their children marry. The promise to Abraham of a large offspring remained in place, even in Babylon. They were even to seek peace for Babylon because peace for the city would mean peace for the exiles (29:7). The purpose was to assure God's remnant of hope and a future with Him (v. 11).

Attention was given to the hope of a return from exile by reference to the seventy years (cf. 25:11–12) and God's good promise (lit. "word") for them (29:10–14). This assurance was based on God's inner thoughts toward His people: plans for peace, not harm, a future and hope i.e., hopeful future). God's plan was based on His love for Israel and His desire for communion with them. Israel would search for Him with all their heart, and they would find Him (vv. 12–14a). Then God would bring His scattered people back to the promised land.

The letter is filled with warnings against false prophets. Besides the prophets in Judah (see chaps. 23–28), there were prophets in Babylon among the exiles (29:1, 8, 15). Jeremiah deals with them in vv. 15–19, 20–23, and 24–32, particularly attacking an opponent in Babylon named Shemaiah the Nehelamite (vv. 24–28). In a letter, Shemaiah had urged Zephaniah, the priest in Jerusalem, to take advantage of his temple office and suppress any false prophets (v. 26). Shemaiah reproached Zephaniah for not having rebuked Jeremiah for prophesying that the captivity would last a long time, and that accordingly the exiles should build houses, live in them, plant gardens, and eat their produce (v. 28). Hearing what Shemaiah had said, Jeremiah sent a letter back to the community in Babylon, warning that Shemaiah was not sent by the Lord but had caused the people to trust in a lie and had taught rebellion against the Lord (vv. 31–32). Therefore, none of his family would return from the Exile.

30:1—33:26
BOOK OF COMFORT

God commanded Jeremiah to write in a book all the words He had spoken to him (v. 2). This included the assurance that Israel would repossess the land promised to their fathers. Based on the introduction (30:1–4) and the common theme of restoration, chapters 30–33 may be understood to be a single unit called "the Book of Comfort." As we have seen, both judgment and hope were part of God's plan to restore the covenant with Israel (cf. 16:14–21; 23:1–8; 24:1—25:14; 27:7, 11; 29:1–14). In this plan, judgment (destruction) and hope (reconstruction) grew out of God's will to create a new beginning (cf. v. 11). His desire to restore Israel was rooted in His character: (a) His faithfulness to His people, His promise, His honor, and His mission; (b) His power as Ruler of the nations; and (c) His forgiveness of Israel's moral and spiritual corruption. The substance of the Book of Comfort, therefore, is God's faithfulness, His power to liberate from oppression, and His compassionate forgiveness.

30:1–24
Restoration of Israel and Judah

This chapter can be divided into three units: assurance of salvation (vv. 1–11), judgment as correction (vv. 12–17), and covenant renewal (vv. 18–24).

30:1–11. God Will Save Jacob. The listener was first invited into a situation of fear and unrest but was reassured by the promissory theme of the section: Jacob was to be saved out of his trouble (v. 7; cf. Dan. 12:1). God would break Babylon's dominion over Israel; foreigners would enslave them no more; they were to serve the Lord their God and David their king, whom He would raise up for them (Jer. 30:8–9; cf. 23:1–8). Therefore, the listener was encouraged not to fear or be dismayed (vv. 10–11). God would save His servant Israel from captivity, and the people would have rest and quietness (or peace and security) because of His saving presence with them. He would wipe out all of the nations surrounding Israel (cf. 46:1—51:58), but not Israel itself (cf. 5:10, 18; 46:28). The restoration promise was balanced by a time of judgment. God would discipline His people and punish them (30:11). The reality could not be hidden—Israel was in exile as a result of a devastating judgment for their sins. But after a time, God would restore them as His servant in the world.

30:12–17. Judgment as Correction. The concept of God's punishment as "correction" (v. 11) is expanded in vv. 12–17. The Exile/restoration is described as illness/healing, which is common to both Jeremiah (e.g., 8:15, 22; 10:19; 14:19; 15:18; 30:13; 33:6) and the book of Psalms (e.g., Pss. 22; 38; 41; 74; 79; 80; 83; 90; 102; 109; 137). Israel's affliction is at first described as incurable (Jer. 30:12). At least, it could not be cured by any of the nation's erstwhile allies or by any other human means (vv. 13–16). In the end, God would cure Israel and heal the wounds (v. 17). On what grounds would God cure the incurable? The passage moves from hopelessness to hope. It begins with a portrayal of the incurable illness of Israel in exile, with no one pleading the nation's cause (v. 13), and moves to a description of the nations that had forgotten and not cared for (or sought) the chastised Israel (i.e., Israel is irrelevant to them; vv. 14–15). At that point, however, God would restore Israel (vv. 16–17) because the nations viewed Israel as a despised outcast (v. 17). Thus, God would take action against the nations that judged Israel (vv. 16–17), with the same judgment that God had brought upon Israel (v. 14), and He would release Israel from the deeply humiliating experience of being scattered and exiled before the eyes of the nations. He was moved to forgive and restore in a way similar to the petitioners who prayed in the temple, asking for salvation from "the depths," "deep waters," or "the pit" of death (e.g., Pss. 6; 30; 35; 40; 49; 57; 69; 88; 94; 109; 130; 141; 143) while their enemies gloated at their predicament. In these laments, the worshipers of the God of Zion experienced His deliverance because of His love and compassion. This would be Israel's experience.

In the book of Psalms (e.g., Pss. 46; 48; 76; 84; 87; 122; 132) and in the Prophets (e.g., Is. 2:2–4; 18:7; 60:10–12), God's deep affinity for Zion is integrated into His plan to be known as God among all the nations of the world (Pss. 47;

93; 96–99). Consequently, the nations' mocking reaction toward Zion (Jer. 30:17) undermined God's mission to the nations. Only if His glory and honor were restored could the God of Zion, the God of Israel, be acclaimed by the nations as Sovereign Ruler of the world.

Thus, the ground for God's "curing the incurable" was His love for His faithful people and His goal to be worshiped by all nations (i.e., the mission of God). God would lift up His wounded people from "the pit" (i.e., exile, contempt, death) to restore them to a new life. This new life would elicit amazement among the nations. Israel's salvation from death would become God's way of making Himself known among the nations. This message parallels the theme of the suffering servant of the Lord (Is. 52:13—53:12), who sheds light on God's redemptive intention behind the suffering and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

30:18–24. Renewed Society. God envisaged a new marriage/covenant with Israel. The gradual movement from Israel's captivity to God's final covenant declaration in vv. 18–22 begins with location and homes (v. 18), followed by a peaceful communal life (v. 19a) and the growth of the population (v. 19b–20b). All external threats and oppression were to be thwarted by God (v. 20c), and their own nobles and governors would be from among themselves (no alien rulers; v. 21). Then, God would draw Israel's ruler to Him (v. 21). The climax is God's pronouncement of the covenant formula: Israel would be His people, and He would be their God (v. 22; cf. Introduction). Finally, Israel's promised salvation assumes Babylon's defeat. No specifics are given in vv. 23–24, but the text describes God's fury moving like a whirlwind against the wicked (including Babylon) in order to perform His intentions. In due course, this would be a reality, but meanwhile God's people were to trust Him and wait for His actions (cf. chaps. 50–51).

31:1–40
The Remnant of Israel Saved

In v. 1, this section resumes the covenant formula of 30:22: God pledged to be the God of all the families of Israel, and they would be His people. This emphasis on God as father and on Israel as families and kindred people characterizes the chapter. Several promissory units follow (31:2–6, 7–14, 15–22, 23–26, 27–30, 31–34, 35–37, 38–40) that address "all Israel" as a worshiping community (vv. 2–6, 33–40) as well as exiles from "Israel"/"Ephraim" (vv. 15–22) and "Judah" (vv. 23–30). The arrangement suggests a chiastic pattern:

A All Israel (vv. 2–14)
  B Ephraim (vv. 15–22)
  B′ Judah (vv. 23–30)
A′ All Israel (vv. 31–40)

31:1–14. Deliverance and Restoration. In 31:2–6, there is a movement from exile to restoration (cf. 30:18–22). We read about the people surviving the sword and finding grace (or favor) in the wilderness (31:2), the rebuilding of community life (building, celebrating, planting, eating), and the pilgrimage to Zion for the worship of God (v. 6); this movement is driven by God's everlasting love (v. 3). God's deliverance of Israel and His granting of new life are celebrated in vv. 7–14. His people, who are referred to as the chief (or foremost) of the nations (cf. Amos 6:1), are summoned to sing, shout, proclaim, give praise, and petition God to save them (Jer. 31:7). All would be brought home from the north (Assyria and Babylon) and the ends of the earth (v. 8). They would weep and pray in gratitude and joy as God their Father led them through dry lands and by the rivers of waters in a straight way where no one would stumble (v. 9).

God told the nations (vv. 10–12) that He had redeemed and ransomed Israel from the hand of those stronger than him and that He who scattered Israel would gather them and keep them as a shepherd does his flock. As a result, Israel would come singing to Zion with shining faces and rejoicing (v. 12; Heb. *nahar*, "to stream," "shine") at the goodness of the Lord and the wealth of food (see commentary on 51:36–50). Their lives would be like a well-watered garden and free from sorrow. The salvation of the Lord would lead to "rejoicing," the central theme of the unit (31:4, 7, 12–14).

31:15–22. Hope for All Israel. The next unit formally addressed Ephraim but concerned all Israel (vv. 15–22). In a scene of mourning over the dead, God declared that there was hope for the future, including their children (vv. 14–17). Ephraim's grandmother Rachel symbolized the mothers who mourned their lost children (v. 15). When her lost child Ephraim repented, God heard his lamentation and prayer for deliverance (vv. 18–19). It was His fatherly love for Ephraim that moved Him to action. This is depicted in intimate language: God still earnestly "remembered" Ephraim as His dear son in whom He delighted and for whom He yearned and had mercy and compassion (v. 20).

The concluding appeal for repentance was motivated by God's creative act: a woman would *sabab* a man (vv. 21–22). This expression is of unknown meaning, and the verb has been variously translated in this passage as "encompass," "shelter," or "return." If it alludes to the Creation story, where man encompassed woman before they became "one flesh" (Gen. 2:21–24), it may mean that God would enhance the fertility of man and wife to greatly compensate for the previous loss of children (31:8, 15).

31:23–30. Prosperity of Judah. Judah is addressed in vv. 23–26. Its future prosperity is illustrated by farmers and shepherds dwelling in the land and its cities. The people would recognize God and bless Judah and Jerusalem. In this land of peace and blessing, God's people would experience sweet, pleasant sleep (cf. blessing in v. 23). Two promises concerning Israel and Judah are made. God would make humans and beasts fruitful (cf. vv. 22, 23–26). As He had overseen the plucking up, tearing down, destruction, overthrow, and calamity of Israel, so would He now watch over them as they built and planted (cf. 1:10). The proverb in 31:29 was often quoted and caused concern among the exiles (cf. Lam. 5:7; Ezek. 18:2–3). It expressed concepts stated in the covenant law (e.g., Ex. 20:5–6; Deut. 5:9b–10). The Lord clarifies that the current situation is not the result of the sins of the forefathers; the sins of the present generation are enough to condemn them.

31:31–40. The New Covenant. The promise of the new covenant was addressed to all Israel (vv. 31–35), renewing the old, broken covenant connected with the deliverance from Egypt. In the new covenant, God declared that He would put His law into the peoples' minds and hearts (as He had always wanted to—Deut. 6:6–9). He would be their God, and they would be His people (Jer. 31:33; cf. e.g., 30:22; 31:1; 32:28). The new covenant is based on God's forgiveness of sin, which would definitively and ultimately be accomplished by Christ (Heb. 8:8–12; 10:16–17). By this, all of His people would know Him (Jer. 31:34).

Finally, Yahweh guaranteed Israel's permanence (vv. 35–40). As long as the heavenly bodies (sun, moon, and stars) remained before the Lord, and as long as heaven remained immeasurable and the earth unsearchable, so Israel would remain before the Lord. In the rebuilding of Jerusalem (vv. 38–40), the area mapped out for the new temple was beyond the old city walls. The area of the Valley of Hinnom, with its dead bodies and ashes (cf. 7:31–32; 19:2, 6; 32:35), down to the Brook of Kidron and the corner of the Horse Gate would be holy unto the Lord. God's presence would restore the city's sanctity.

32:1–44
Jeremiah Buys a Field

Chapter 32 begins with a historical introduction (vv. 1–5), followed by Jeremiah's land purchase (vv. 6–15), his prayer for understanding (vv. 16–25), and God's assurance of Israel's return (vv. 26–44). Jeremiah's purchase of land was a symbolic act of Israel's rightful ownership of the land of Canaan, and consequently, it implied the promise of a future return from the Babylonian Exile.

32:1–15. Purchase of the Land. The context of the purchase was the predicted impending Babylonian Exile. King Zedekiah faced the siege of Jerusalem by the Babylonians (587 B.C.). Jeremiah was imprisoned for having prophesied that the city would be destroyed and that Zedekiah would be taken into exile (vv. 1–5; cf. 38:1—39:10). Jeremiah purchased the land as directed by God (32:6–7, 9–12). One of Jeremiah's relatives, Hanamel, visited him in prison and requested that the prophet buy his field because of Jeremiah's right of inheritance (i.e., redemption)—Israel's laws ensured that the possession of land remained within a tribe or a family (cf. Lev. 25:25–31; Ruth 4:1–2).

The details of the purchase process are given (Jer. 32:10–12), and the scribe Baruch, Jeremiah's assistant, is mentioned here for the first time. Before witnesses, Jeremiah gave the purchase deeds to Baruch (one sealed and one open). On the Lord's instruction, he asked Baruch to put them in a clay container so that they would last for a long time (v. 14). The significance of this act was that houses, fields, and vineyards would be purchased again after the Exile (v. 15). Jeremiah's plot of land was paradigmatic of all the land that Israel lost at this time to the Babylonians but which God would restore it to them in the future. The written deeds in the jar symbolized Israel's right to the promised land and God's commitment to restore it to them (vv. 14–15, 42–44).

32:16–44. Jeremiah's Prayerful Dialogue with God. A two-part prayer in the form of a dialogue between Jeremiah and God is next (vv. 16–44). In the dialogue, two interventions in each part of the prayer together form a chiasm that unifies the exchange:

- **A** Jeremiah's Prayer: God's power to deliver Israel (vv. 17–22)
  - **B** Jeremiah's Prayer: Israel's disobedience and punishment (vv. 23–24)
  - **B′** God's Answer: Israel's disobedience and punishment (vv. 26–35)
- **A′** God's Answer: God's power to deliver Israel (vv. 36–44)

There are several key elements that deserve to be noted. First, the covenant formula (v. 38; cf. 7:23; 11:4; 24:7; 30:22; 31:1, 33) underscores the deep and intimate relationship between God and His people, as in a marriage: He would be their God, and they would be His people. If stated in the present tense, it is a declaratory formula that actually makes or institutes the covenant. Here it is a prediction revealing God's plan: the future covenant being made in the present by the promissory prophetic word of God. Living in the hope of this promissory word would bring hope as a foretaste of the future reality. Second, God's gift to His people—undivided loyalty and direction—was to manifest itself in the people as the fear of God (32:39; cf. 6:16; 21:8; 24:7; 29:13; 42:3; Ezek. 11:19–20; 36:26–27). Thirdly, the promise of an everlasting covenant (Jer. 32:40) would not be broken or terminated by disobedience and divine judgment, the fear of God being forever in Israel's heart; Lastly, God promised to plant Israel in the promised land with all His "heart" and "soul" (v. 41).

These elements emphasize God's faithfulness and His transforming work in the hearts of human beings with whom He enters into a relationship. God's promises in vv. 36–44 taught Israel that hope for a future good life depended on God's loving care and their faithfulness to Him as their Redeemer Lord. Having the fear of God in one's heart enables people to experience God's love and to commune with Him (cf. Rev. 14:6–7).

33:1–26

Excellence of the Restored Nation

The word of the Lord came a second time while Jeremiah was imprisoned (v. 1; cf. 32:2). Asserting His name by reference to His creative acts (33:2), God invited the listeners to call to Him and promised that He would answer by showing them great and *batsurot* things. The Hebrew word *batsur* can mean either "unassailable" (i.e., strong, mighty) or "inaccessible" (v. 3; cf. 32:17, 27). These "things" are seven promissory announcements regarding God's decision to reverse the fortunes of Judah from exile to restoration. These promises conclude the Book of Comfort.

33:1–10. Health and Healing. The historical context of these verses was the Babylonian destruction as a result of God hiding His face from Jerusalem. His anger against the wicked people had raged through the victorious Babylonians, who had desolated the cities of Judah and destroyed their houses (vv. 4–5).

God's first promise was to bring health and healing (vv. 6–10; cf. 8:15, 22; 30:17). This theme is common in the psalms of lament (cf. vv. 4–24). God would restore the conditions of old by bringing Israel and Judah back from captivity (*shub*, "return," and *shebut*, "captivity") God would restore the fortunes of Judah and Israel (33:7; cf. *shub shebut* in 29:14; 30:3, 18; 31:23; 32:44; 33:7, 11, 26). He would rebuild the city and make it inhabitable, cleanse the people, and forgive them for their sinful rebellion (vv. 7–8). All the standard Hebrew words for "sin" occur in v. 8: *'awon* ("rebellion," "iniquity"), *khata'* ("to sin"), and *pasha'* ("to transgress"). The shame and humiliation caused by Israel's sin would be replaced by joy, praise, and honor from God. The nations would be afraid and tremble because of God's goodness to Israel, and His honor among the nations would be restored (v. 9; cf. 30:12–22). The most persuasive evidence of God's kingship in the world is His power to bring the dead back to life. Jeremiah exemplifies this through the healing of Jerusalem, and the Bible revisits this theme in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

33:11–13. Joy and Gladness and Restoration. The second promise (vv. 10–11) is of a massive restoration of fortune for Judah and Jerusalem (v. 11; cf. vv. 7, 26). The cities would be reinhabited, and there would be joy and gladness (of bridegrooms and brides) and praise to God. Three times in Jeremiah, Jerusalem's destruction is illustrated by descriptions of the disappearance of the sounds of weddings (7:34; 16:9; 25:10). As a symbol of joy and life, God would restore the joy of the bridegroom and his bride. The hymnic chorus of praise to *yahweh tseba'ot* (see "*Yahweh Tseba'ot,*" p. 912) will resound because He is good and His *khesed*—"mercy," "faithful love," "kindness"—endures forever (cf. Ps. 106:1; 107:1; 118:1–4, 29; 136:1–26).

The third promise (Jer. 33:12–13) announces that the empty cities of Judah (cf. v. 10) would be filled by shepherds and their flocks (cf. 32:44). There would be safe governance (shepherds), abundant food (pastures), and the people (the flock) would again pass under the hands of those counting them. Order, growth, and safety were to be restored.

33:14–18. New Leadership. The fourth promise (vv. 14–16) repeats 23:5–6, adding to it 33:14 and applying the name "The Lord Our Righteousness" or "The Lord Our Righteous Savior" to "her" (Jerusalem) instead of "him" (the Branch). A righteous king of Davidic descent was to arise who would execute justice and righteousness (see commentary on 23:1–8). The identity of the city was inextricably tied to that of the Davidic king.

The fifth promise (vv. 17–18) concerns Israel's governors. The hereditary offices of the Davidic king and the priests/Levites would be permanent. Since the king's tasks are not specified, but those of the priests/Levites are, this promise may imagine Israel as a worshiping community rather than a kingdom. In his judgment speeches, Jeremiah prophesied the permanent abrogation of the corrupted Davidic monarchy (22:30), but 33:14–16 (also 23:5–6) gives room for the fulfillment of the true Davidic covenant. The implied hope of a messianic king is confirmed in the following promise in 33:19–22.

33:19–26. God's Faithfulness to His People. The sixth promise (vv. 19–22) expands on 31:35–37, underscoring the permanence of God's covenants with David (cf. 2 Sam. 7:11–16; Ps. 89:24–37; Is. 55:3) and the priests and Levites (cf. e.g., Ex. 29; Lev. 8). They would remain as surely as the continuance of the created order of day and night. God would multiply their descendants like the countless stars and immeasurable sand of the sea. The final promise (vv. 23–26) is a response to the fact that the nations had despised God's chosen people (Israel and Judah) by assuming that God would no longer consider them a nation. This argument against faith in God's promises is refuted by a reference to God's ordering of night and day and heaven and earth (cf. 31:35–37; 33:20–22).

The concluding words confirm God's intention, based on chapters 30–33, to bring the captives back (or "restore their fortunes") and have compassion on them. This promise was fulfilled in 537 B.C. when the Persian king Cyrus ordered the return of the exiles. However, if the promise of a Davidic king in Israel concerned an earthly king, it was not fulfilled. As a messianic promise, many hundred years later, Christians acclaimed Jesus as the "Christ" (Messiah), not of an earthly kingdom but of the kingdom of God (Matt. 16:16; Acts 17:7; Rev. 19:16).

34:1—35:19

CASE STUDIES: INFIDELITY AND FIDELITY

This block contains two narrative examples of infidelity (Zedekiah: 34:1–7; treatment of slaves: vv. 8–22) and one of fidelity (the Rechabites: 35:1–11). Two case studies are discussed in the conclusion (vv. 12–19).

34:1–7

Zedekiah Warned by God

The setting for the first case study was the Babylonian invasion (vv. 1–2, 6–7; cf. 21:1–7; 37:3–10; 38:14–28). Only two fortified cities near Jerusalem continued to resist (34:6–7; cf. 2 Chr. 11:5–11). Azekah (Tell Zakariya, southwest of Jerusalem) and Lachish (Tell ed-Duweir, further north) appear in one of the letters found in the debris of Lachish's destruction in 586 B.C. ("And let [my Lord] know that we are watching for the signals of Lachish…for we cannot see Azekah"). Jeremiah's prophecy suggests a massive attack (Jer. 34:1). God's warnings through Jeremiah had been proven true (cf. 32:25).

Jeremiah warned King Zedekiah concerning Babylon's approaching victory, Jerusalem's destruction, and the king's captivity in Babylon (cf. 34:2–3; 32:3–4a). However, this is followed by a description of a different fate for Zedekiah: the king would not die by the sword but in peace. He would be honored in death and duly buried and grieved (34:4–5; cf. 52:8–11). Probably the best way to interpret this shift is to suggest that Jeremiah was telling Zedekiah what would happen to him if he surrendered to the king of Babylon instead of opposing him, as suggested in 38:17–18. Zedekiah's actual fate is evidence that he did not pay attention to the message of the Lord (53:8–11). Thus, Israel had two options for responding to God: infidelity and fidelity. This theme is developed further in 34:8—35:19.

34:8–22
Setting Slaves Free

Infidelity was exemplified by the people and their leaders. They broke the covenant by not freeing their Hebrew slaves every seventh year (vv. 8–9, 14; cf. Ex. 21:1–6; Deut. 15:1–18). Fellow Israelites became slaves because they were unable to pay their debts. The sabbatical law not only presumed that the debt would be written off but also required that a freed slave receive a liberal provision of food and drink (Deut. 15:14). Faithfulness to this law implied that Israel "remembered their slavery in Egypt and the Lord's redemption" (Deut. 15:15)—this was an act of faith that demonstrated care for one's kin in the covenant community. Zedekiah compelled the people to follow this law. However, though they initially obeyed, the princes and the people eventually changed their minds and broke the covenant (Jer. 34:8–11, 15–16), perhaps out of greed and selfishness. Such infidelity implied gross indifference to God and to the duty of sharing His gifts with people in need.

God drew a parallel (vv. 12–22) between the covenant He made with Israel's fathers (vv. 13–14) and the covenant regarding freedom for Hebrew slaves made by Zedekiah (vv. 8–9, 15–16). Both covenants concerned a proclamation of release, but God's fidelity and Judah's infidelity are contrasted. Using a wordplay on "turn" (*shub*; cf. 3:1—4:4; 8:4–6; 15:19), God asserted (34:15) that Israel turned (*tashubu*) back (or "repented") to covenant fidelity and swore to practice the commandment regarding liberty for debt slaves. But this commitment was soon abandoned: they turned around (*tashubu*) from covenant fidelity and profaned God's name by bringing the debt slaves back into subjection. Since the oath of the covenant was taken in the temple in God's name, breaking the oath meant profaning His name (v. 16). God concluded that Judah had broken their oath to the Lord, making a mockery out of Him and of their obligation to fellow members of the covenant community.

God sentenced Judah using ironic wordplay: because of their infidelity in not proclaiming freedom to their own people, He would proclaim freedom to the sword, plague, and famine (v. 17a). He would give Judah into the hands of the Babylonians, and Judah and Jerusalem would become desolate (vv. 17–22). This sentence is based on the fact that all the people had entered the covenant with Him and cut the calf in two and passed between the parts of it (vv. 18–19). Again, wordplay is included: the word cut (*karat*) is used both for the making of the covenant (vv. 8, 13) and for the cutting (*karat*) of the animal, which represented the fate of covenant breakers (v. 18; cf. Gen. 15:7–11, 17).

The argument in Jer. 34:8–22, then, is that covenant fidelity, exemplified in the act of releasing the debt slaves, would bring safety and well-being to Jerusalem. Breaking the covenant by economic exploitation, however, would clear the way for the invasion of Babylon. Obedience to the Lord brings peace, but disobedience brings destruction. God had entered into a covenant with His people based on His work of redemption on their behalf. Their role was to accept Him as their God and respond in gratitude and obedience. If they trusted Him, He would continue to protect and save them from their enemies. But because they rejected Him and no longer trusted Him, the covenant was violated.

35:1–19
The Rechabites

In contrast to Judah's disobedience, the obedience of the Rechabites is adduced as a model. God asked Jeremiah to bring the Rechabites into one of the chambers in the temple area and to test them by giving them wine to drink (vv. 1–2). They refused because their father commanded them not to drink wine or build houses, sow seed, plant vineyards, or own any of these things, but to live in tents and maintain a nomadic lifestyle (vv. 3–7). They had obeyed their father's command. Only when the Babylonians entered the land did they seek refuge in Jerusalem (vv. 8–11). God then compared the disobedience of Judah and Jerusalem with the obedience of the Rechabites (vv. 12–16). The Rechabites obeyed their human father, and Judah refused to obey their divine Father. He had tried to call Judah to repentance through His prophets. Had they obeyed, they would have dwelled in the land He had given them. But they did not. Therefore, God's sentence of doom against Judah would be executed (v. 17).

God also recognized the obedience of the Rechabites and rewarded them with the promise that their descendants would prevail and there would always be a servant of the Lord from their household. The Hebrew expression *'omed lepanay*, literally "stand before," is associated with the concept of standing before an authority ready to serve (Gen. 41:46; 1 Kin. 1:28; 17:1). Accordingly, some translations render it as "serve." A life of fidelity results in blessing and communion with God, but infidelity results in the loss of God's protection. Jeremiah 34–35, therefore, is an urgent message to the listeners to be faithful to God and His word. This faithfulness is also a mark of the end-time community of faith (Rev. 14:12).

36:1—45:5
JEREMIAH AND THE FALL OF THE CITY

This portion of the book reveals that God's will was visibly working in the shifts of international power occurring in the ANE. Refusal to accept the "pro-Babylonian" reading of the destiny of Jerusalem was seen as disobedience to God's word and will. This section is also about the experiences of Jeremiah shortly before and after the fall of Jerusalem. Baruch was Jeremiah's scribe, preserving the prophecies (36:1–32), and Jeremiah would be imprisoned during the fall of the city (37:1—40:6). The section details an insurrection against Gedaliah (40:7—41:18) and finally a flight to Egypt (42:1—44:30). It closes with an assurance to Baruch (45:1–5).

36:1–32
The Jeremiah Scroll

Jeremiah had been on trial for his life. Although acquitted, he was treated with suspicion by the Jerusalem establishment (cf. chaps. 7, 26). Thus, chapter 36 pictures him as an outsider and an unwelcome threat to prevailing policies. The confrontation between Jeremiah and King Jehoiakim (609–597 B.C.) is a classic example of "truth speaking to power." Chapter 36 is central for understanding how prophets preserved their messages for future generations and how these messages finally became part of the biblical canon. Jeremiah's scroll had come to have a life of its own and to exercise authority independently of Jeremiah. It was, at this time, the written word of God that challenged the king.

36:1–3. Purpose of the Scroll. It was in 605 B.C. (v. 1a) that God commanded Jeremiah to write His words on a *megillat seper*, "scroll of writing" (vv. 2, 4; Ps. 40:8; Ezek. 2:9; cf. the single word *megillah*, "scroll," in Jer. 36; Ezek. 3:1–3; Zech. 5:1–2). The book was not an invention of Jeremiah but of God. Jeremiah was to write down all of the words God had given to him from the beginning of his ministry regarding Israel, Judah, and the nations (Jer. 36:2). The purpose was to inform the people of Judah about the potential disasters God was threatening in order to encourage them to turn from their wicked ways so that God would forgive them of their sin and guilt (v. 3).

36:4–19. Role of Baruch. Baruch the son of Neriah wrote the scroll at Jeremiah's instruction (v. 4). A clay imprint of a seal from Jeremiah's time, which was used for sealing papyrus scrolls, has been found with the text "Belonging to Berechiah [short form of Baruch] son of Neriah." Because he was either barred from entering the temple or was imprisoned (cf. 7:2–15; 20:3), Jeremiah commissioned Baruch to read the scroll in the temple to all the people of Judah so that repentant prayer might avert the anger of the Lord (36:5–9).

Baruch's public reading was heard in the temple and repeated before the princes in the palace (vv. 10–15). The leaders reacted with fear and promised to tell the king (v. 16). They asked if Baruch wrote the scroll at Jeremiah's instruction. When Baruch affirmed this (vv. 17–18), the prophetic authenticity of the scroll was established. Anticipating the king's reaction, they warned Jeremiah and Baruch to go into hiding (v. 19; cf. v. 26).

36:20–32. Burning and Rewriting of the Scroll. Receiving a verbal summary, the king ordered the scroll to be brought to him and asked Jehudi to read it (vv. 20–21). For every three or four columns that Jehudi read, the king cut the scroll with a scribe's knife and cast it into the fire until the whole scroll was burned (vv. 21–23; a papyrus sheet normally had room for three to four columns).

Jeremiah rewrote the scroll at God's command (vv. 27–28). It was accompanied by a divine indictment and a judicial sentence against the king. Sadly, the narrative includes a brief assertion indicating that the rewritten warning did not have the desired effect (vv. 29–31). The sentence of condemnation was harsh: no leader would sit on David's throne, and the king's corpse would be dishonorably cast out into the heat of day and the frost of night. God would punish him, his family, and his servants and would bring on them and on Jerusalem and Judah all of the predicted disasters.

This narrative illustrates how God counters human pride and resistance. God's relentless resolve brings the truth back again and again to those who need to hear it. His word cannot be stopped, only ignored or accepted. Chapter 36 reveals that Jeremiah's proclamation of judgment was intended to lead Judah to change its ways. Yes, the Babylonian invasion was inescapable, but, in order to survive, it was necessary for the people to listen to God's voice. He yearned to forgive their sins (v. 3) and to grant them peace and well-being. He wanted once more to be their God and for them to be His people (cf. 30:1—33:26).

37:1—40:6

Jeremiah Imprisoned and the Fall of Jerusalem

After the final reaction of the king to the word of God, he could only wait and witness the fulfillment of the word of judgment against him and the land. Next, the events surrounding Jerusalem's fall in 586 B.C. are described. Judah's struggle for survival in the international rivalry between Babylon and Egypt impacted Jeremiah's life and ministry.

37:1-10. A King Seeking Help. King Zedekiah (597-586 B.C.) was at first a Babylonian puppet king who finally rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar. The text indicates that the king, his servants, and the people refused to accept God's words through Jeremiah (v. 2). Zedekiah had abandoned his covenant faithfulness, and by ignoring the Lord's word, he had brought about Judah's fall.

Surprisingly, he asked Jeremiah to intercede for the people (v. 3). He wanted the prophet's (God's) aid but did not want to obey the prophet's (God's) command. This type of compromise is unacceptable.

The king's request was motivated by fear and desperation rather than faith. Jerusalem was under siege by the Babylonians (v. 5; cf. vv. 7-10). Against Jeremiah's clear warning, Zedekiah had rebelled against Babylon's rule, relying on Egypt for help (cf. Ezek. 17:15; 29:1-21). The Babylonians reacted quickly and imposed a siege on Jerusalem from the beginning of 588 to August 586 B.C. (2 Kin. 25; Jer. 21:3-7; 39:1-10; 52:4-5; Ezek. 24:1-2). Under Pharaoh Hophra, Egypt supported Judah militarily (Jer. 37:5-11; cf. Lam. 4:17; Ezek. 17; 29-32), but this temporary support was insufficient to save Judah. After the Babylonians' temporary withdrawal from Jerusalem (Jer. 37:5), Jeremiah insisted that Pharaoh's army would return to Egypt and the Babylonians would come back, take Jerusalem, and burn it (vv. 6-10). This was bad news for the king and gave no warrant for interpreting the movements of the two imperial powers in Judah's favor.

37:11-21. Jeremiah's Arrest and Imprisonment. The story in this passage provides evidence for the level of fear and paranoia that had engulfed the court and the confusion regarding the loyalty of Jeremiah. The prophet had opposed the politics of the king, supporting surrender to the Babylonians instead of fighting them. Now during a moment of respite, the prophet left the city to claim his property in the land of Benjamin and was unjustly accused of defection to the Babylonians. This was a serious charge of treason. Jeremiah's enemies in the army and at court found a pretext to arrest, abuse, and imprison him. The relationship between Zedekiah and Jeremiah had been problematic. Since the charges were serious, the king probably approved of the actions taken against Jeremiah. The king's reason for seeking a word from the Lord is not stated, but one could suggest that since Jeremiah was in a precarious situation, Zedekiah may have hoped that he would deliver a positive message in exchange for deliverance from prison. But a true prophet cannot alter the word of the Lord. Zedekiah's steadfast practice of ignoring that word had already sealed his fate. God's word remained, and no last-minute and feckless courtesies to the prophet he had despised could alter the course he had chosen.

38:1-13. Back to the Dungeon. The insincerity of Zedekiah's apparent kindness to Jeremiah was evident in his decision to send him back to prison on pressure from the cabal at the court. But Jeremiah's deliverance from inevitable death depended on the compassion of Ebed-Melech the Ethiopian, one of the eunuchs in the king's palace. He informed the king about Jeremiah's condition, and the king ordered Jeremiah's release (vv. 7-13). Ebed-Melech's act was an act of faith in God and His word. Later on, Jeremiah announced to him the Lord's promise that He would deliver him from the sword at the coming destruction of Jerusalem because he had put his trust in Him (39:15-18). There is a close solidarity between God and His servant the prophet, and people's actions against the prophet are indeed actions against God and His word (cf. Matt. 25:40).

38:14-28. Once Again, the King and the Prophet. In a secret conversation, Zedekiah asked for straightforward counsel, and Jeremiah could not have been plainer: surrender and live, resist and die. In order to persuade the king, Jeremiah pointed to the outcome of a wrong decision: it would harm his wives and children (vv. 22-23a), his close friends would turn against him (v. 22b), he himself would be captured (v. 23b), and his city would be burned (v. 23c).

The king did not seem to realize the danger he was in (vv. 24-26). Rather than dealing with the larger issue, he kept God's word secret, fearing the princes in Jerusalem more than the Babylonians. The king and the princes of Judah were about to face complete destruction, but rather than accept God's word, which would allow them and their people to live, they dwelled on their petty intrigues and disputes over personal power. Jeremiah remained in prison and was still there when Jerusalem was taken (v. 28).

39:1-18. Fall of the City. The most significant event in the book is the fall of the city, mentioned in the prologue (1:1-3) and in the historical epilogue (52:1-30). It is the central topic in numerous judgment speeches of Jeremiah and is the background for the words of comfort given to the faithful. Jerusalem's fall and Zedekiah's fate, in this account, are the fulfillment of God's word, and they confirm Jeremiah's prophetic ministry (39:1-10). After penetrating the walls of Jerusalem, the princes of Babylon sat down in the Middle Gate (cf. 21:4). Zedekiah and his armed men were able to escape by night, but the Babylonians pursued and captured them in the plains of Jericho, eighteen miles (30 km) northeast of Jerusalem. They were brought to Nebuchadnezzar in his headquarters in Riblah, on the Orontes River in Hamath, Syria.

Nebuchadnezzar killed Zedekiah's sons and all the nobles of Judah. He then put out the eyes of Zedekiah, bound him, and carried him off to Babylon. Killing Zedekiah's sons may have been intended to halt future claims to the throne. The killing of the nobles may have had to do with their anti-Babylonian position, which is well documented in Jeremiah and would have been known to the pro-Babylonian faction. The torture of Zedekiah is usually understood as an example of Babylonian cruelty—the killing of his sons was the last thing he would ever see—however, inflicting blindness may also be understood in a wider context. First, blinding could be an ANE suzerain's punishment for a rebellious vassal, for Nebuchadnezzar had made a treaty with Zedekiah when he became king of Judah in 597 B.C., which Zedekiah had confirmed with an oath (cf. Ezek. 17:11-21). Second, being blinded was included among the punishments for breaking the Lord's covenant (Deut. 28:28-29, 32). Third, Jeremiah's numerous prophecies against the kings of Judah included the punishment of no longer seeing the homeland (Jer. 22:8-12; 42:17-18) and never again seeing the good that God would do for His people (29:32). Although Zedekiah was largely responsible for the disaster, his fate was for now left open-ended (cf. 32:3-5; 34:2-5). The idea seems to be that even if Zedekiah were to survive imprisonment and return to Jerusalem, he would not be able to see the land, which was the predicted punishment for breaking the covenant. It was precisely this cruel warfare practice that the Lord had wanted the king to avoid by listening to His word.

After the destruction of Jerusalem (39:8; cf. 52:12-14), Nebuzaradan, the Babylonian captain of the guard, carried away the remnant of the people to Babylon but left the poor in Judah and gave them vineyards and fields (39:9-10). This was an initial fulfillment of God's promise to give His people "a future and a hope" (29:11). God's people were, at this time, a remnant in Judah and a remnant in exile. Both groups had to wait for the fulfillment of God's promises. Jeremiah was set free from prison by the Babylonians (39:11-18). He was not to be harmed, and his wishes were to be followed. Jeremiah was assigned to Gedaliah, who took him home to Anathoth in Benjamin to dwell among the people (for the account regarding Ebed-Melech in vv. 15-18, see commentary on 38:1-13.)

40:1-6. Jeremiah and Nebuzaradan. More details are given about the future of Jeremiah. The town of Ramah, five miles (8 km) north of Jerusalem, served as a staging post for captives bound for Babylon. Jeremiah had been brought there in chains (v. 1), but Nebuzaradan liberated him and gave him two options: either to follow the captain to Babylon or remain in the land. Later, Nebuzaradan gave Jeremiah another choice: either to follow Gedaliah, the new governor over the cities of Judah, or go wherever he wanted. Jeremiah decided to stay with Gedaliah at Mizpah, among the people who were left in the land.

Nebuzaradan's speech (vv. 2-5) summarizes the fulfillment of God's judgment on Jerusalem and Judah and explains its cause: their sinfulness and disobedience. Although this was spoken by the Babylonian captain of the guard, its truth is undeniable and originated from God. The defeat of the city was not credited by this Babylonian to the superiority of his gods but to the actions of the God of Jeremiah in reaction to the sins of His people.

40:7—41:18

The Insurrection against Gedaliah

This section deals with the governorship of Gedaliah in Judah and the plot to kill him. The setting is Judah after the Babylonian conquest (39:1–10). The idea of an escape to Egypt emerges toward the end of the narrative (41:17–18; cf. 42:1—44:30).

40:7–8. New Leaders in Judea. After the fall of Jerusalem, three parties are represented under Gedaliah, Ishmael, and Johanan. A respected Judean, Gedaliah son of Ahikam, was pro-Babylonian (vv. 5, 9). His father and grandfather had been sympathetic to Jeremiah (e.g., 26:24). Ishmael fought fiercely for Judean independence, cooperating with the small neighboring nations. And Johanan eventually opted for Egypt. Jeremiah had long opposed Ishmael's goal (e.g., 38:2–3). He would also object to Johanan's belief that Egypt was the solution (42:1—44:30). However, Gedaliah, who agreed with Jeremiah's pro-Babylonian views and with whom Jeremiah was dwelling in Mizpah, would fall victim to a conspiracy. The story of Gedaliah illustrates that the political tensions and divisions that existed in Jerusalem before its fall (see commentary on 37:1—40:6) continued after it.

40:9—41:18. Gedaliah. Gedaliah spoke to the people under oath and assured them safe dwelling and income from wine, summer fruit, and olive oil (40:7–10). All Judeans who were scattered during the war returned from Moab, Ammon, Edom, and other countries (vv. 11–12). However, Gedaliah was soon killed by Ishmael and his men. The rebels killed many others and carried away as captives all the remaining people in Mizpah, including the king's daughters who had been left in Gedaliah's care. Hearing of these atrocities, Johanan and the captains of the forces pursued Ishmael and found him in Gibeon. His Judean captives escaped and joined Johanan, while Ishmael and eight men joined the Ammonites (see 40:7—41:15). Johanan gathered his people and set out for Egypt, in fear of a Babylonian retaliation for the murder of Gedaliah, who had been appointed governor by the king of Babylon. On the way, they stayed in Chimham, near Bethlehem (41:17).

42:1—45:5

Flight to and Experiences in Egypt

The flight to Egypt was characterized by fear and rebellion against the Lord. This block of material describes the prophetic ministry of Jeremiah among the survivors as they traveled to and lived in Egypt. He received five messages from the Lord: one on the way to Egypt (42:1–22), three while in Egypt (43:8–13; 44:1–19, 20–30), and one for Baruch (45:1–5).

42:1—43:7. Requesting a Message. When the leaders ran out of options, they turned to Jeremiah and sought the word of God (cf. 37:3, 17; 38:14, 24–28). Thus, Johanan's Judean remnant, who were already escaping to Egypt in disobedience (41:17–18), asked Jeremiah for divine guidance regarding what the "remnant" should do (42:1–3). The request came at a decisive moment. Johanan's people understood that they were a small and vulnerable community, encamped near Bethlehem en route to Egypt. Their choice was vital to God's plan for Israel (i.e., to reveal His glory to all the nations). They promised Jeremiah unconditional obedience to God's will (vv. 5–6; cf. Ex. 24:3, 7; Josh. 24:21, 24; 1 Sam. 7:4, 6–8; 12:19). They acknowledged that they had been "many" but were at this time "few." Israel had begun as a small group when Jacob's family went to Egypt, but they later became numerous (Deut. 10:22). When Johanan referred to his group as being the few left over from the many, it was a reminder of how God's blessing of multiplication had been reversed with a curse of diminution.

God offered two options (Jer. 42:10–22), each with a condition and its consequence. The positive option was to remain in Judah. If they did so, then God would build and plant the remnant of His people (vv. 10–12). The negative option was to go to Egypt (to avoid war and famine), which would mean disobeying God. If they chose this option, then the sword, plague, and famine, which they feared, would overtake them (vv. 16–17). The same divine fury that struck Jerusalem would reach them in Egypt, making them a public example of divine rejection (vv. 13–18). God's word was plain: do not go to Egypt (v. 19).

43:8–13. Jeremiah's Message in Tahpanhes. Jeremiah received another message from the Lord (vv. 8–13). He was commanded to take stones and secretly hide them in the brick courtyard at the entrance to Pharaoh's house. This was interpreted to mean that God would send Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, His servant, to set his throne over these hidden stones and to spread his royal pavilion over them. Nebuchadnezzar would defeat Egypt and would bring death and exile (v. 11). He would destroy the temples of the Egyptian gods and break down the sacred stones of Beth Shemesh (lit. "house of the sun"), which was central to sun worship (cf. 46:1–28). Acting as God's servant, Babylon's destruction of Egypt and its gods would testify to the sovereignty of Israel's God (43:12). The response of the people is not stated, but a considerable group of Judeans went to Egypt (44:1).

44:1–19. Message of Judgment. In the first part of God's message through Jeremiah in this section, there is a summary of God's wrath against Judah and Jerusalem because of their disobedience (vv. 2–6). In the second part, Jeremiah announced that the Judeans in Egypt were practicing the same idolatry that had led Judah to disaster (vv. 3, 5, 8). Consequently, all of them would be cut off (vv. 7–10) or rejected by God (cf. e.g., Ex. 30:33, 38; 31:14; Lev. 7:20). The destruction of Jerusalem had not humbled them. They did not fear God and did not live according to the covenant. Therefore, the Judean remnant in Egypt would die (Jer. 44:11–14)—the standard punishment for breaking the covenant was death by the sword, famine, and plague (vv. 12–13). God's declaration that they would be destroyed in the land of Egypt was balanced by an open door of invitation for individuals who desired to dwell in Judah (v. 14). The possibility of a faithful remnant remained. God did not give up on His plan to restore His people in Judah.

Unfortunately, the people rejected God's word (vv. 15–19). They continued to burn incense to the queen of heaven and pour out drink offerings to her, as they and their forefathers and kings did in Judah (cf. 7:18), where they had plenty of food, prospered, and were safe. Their flagrant and shameless apostasy was rooted in a fundamental misunderstanding, for their past blessings did not come from the queen of heaven but from the Lord. Their hardship at this time was the result of their disobedience. It was possible for their well-being to be restored by repentance, but in their degenerate state, they were not interested in returning to the true God.

44:20–30. Message against the Apostasy of the Judeans. Jeremiah addressed the people's reliance on the queen of heaven. First, he declared Judah and the Judean remnant in Egypt to be one and the same. They had burned incense (as admitted in vv. 15–19, 24–25), sinned against the Lord, and had not obeyed His *torah* ("law," "instruction"), *khuqqah* ("decrees," "statutes"), and *'edot* ("testimonies," "stipulations"; i.e., they had refused to heed the words of the prophet). Second, God summarized what the Judean remnant in Egypt had said (vv. 24–25). The men and their wives had made vows and had implemented them by burning incense to the queen of heaven and pouring out drink offerings to her. So God sarcastically told them to continue performing and fulfilling these vows.

Third, the judgment in vv. 26–30 against the Judeans in Egypt repeats what is found in vv. 11–14. God disassociated Himself from the Judean community in Egypt. Just as they had sworn an oath to worship the queen of heaven (v. 25), so God swore that His great name would no longer be used by these Judeans in their oaths (v. 26). Because of their apostasy, the Judean community was alone and without God. Yet, again, there was a faithful remnant: a small number would escape the sword and return from Egypt to Judah, and all the remnant of Judah who went to Egypt would come to know whose word would endure—God's or theirs (v. 28). God announced a particular sign that would confirm that His words would surely stand against them: Pharaoh Hophra would be given into the hands of his enemies, just as King Zedekiah had been given to the Babylonians (v. 30). God was acting here in defense of His authority, His plan, the covenant with Israel, and His prophetic word, which invites repentance from idolatry and predicts judgment against the disobedient. In the midst of judgment, however, He carefully kept the door open for a faithful remnant desiring to follow His instruction.

45:1–5. Assurance to Baruch. This long section (chaps. 36–45) concludes with a message to Baruch that was given after he wrote the words of Jeremiah on the scroll, before the fall of Jerusalem. The message is motivated by a lament he expressed after writing the scroll for Jeremiah (45:2–3). Baruch complained that the Lord had added sorrow to his grief and left him without rest. Through Jeremiah, the Lord confirmed His judgment against Judah: He would tear down what He had built and uproot what He had planted (v. 4; cf. 1:10; 18:7; 24:6; 31:28; 42:10). He then reprimanded Baruch for expecting too much. He was not to seek great things for himself because the coming judgment would bring adversity onto all people. However, God would give his life to him as a prize (i.e., spoil or prize of war) everywhere he went (45:5). God knows the pain of His servants and comforts them.

There is a future with Him for those who, in faith, risk everything.

46:1—51:64

JUDGMENT AGAINST THE NATIONS

Prophecies against foreign nations are common in the prophetic books (e.g., Amos 1–2; Is. 13–23; Ezek. 25–32). The messages reveal Israel's God as Sovereign Lord over all nations, none of whom could effectively challenge His authority and power. Their rise and fall is an unmistakable witness to such universal sovereignty. Theologically, Jeremiah 46:1—51:64 presumes that the God of Israel had created the world (see Jeremiah: Introduction) and assigned it to different nations (Gen. 10; Deut. 32:8). Consequently, He was to be feared and worshiped by the nations (Ps. 96; cf. Rev. 14:6–7). He was their King, and they were His servants (Jer. 10:7, 10; 46:18; 48:15; 51:57; cf. Ps. 96), and He had the right to hold them accountable (Jer. 18:7–10). His intention was to move them to fear Him and give glory to Him, as modeled in His covenant with Israel, through whom He would accomplish His purpose (3:17; 4:2; cf. Ex. 19:5–6; Ps. 2:8; 82:8; Is. 2:2–4; 49:1–7). God acted as Israel's protector against hostile nations, provided they remained faithful to Him (cf. Num. 23:9; Ps. 2:1, 8; 46:6–7). If Israel were unfaithful, God would judge them in accordance with His judgment of all nations (as amply illustrated in Jeremiah). The prophecies against the nations in Jeremiah were designed for Israel's instruction, particularly for those in exile.

46:1–28

Against Egypt

God's massive judgment against all people (lit. "flesh") was to begin with Egypt. It was, at that time, the only power capable of resisting Babylon. In Israel's history, Egypt symbolizes those who resist God's will. The escape of the Judean remnant to Egypt caused God to issue harsh judgments against Egypt (43:10–13; 44:30).

46:1–12. Introduction and Battle. Verse 1 introduces chapters 46–51, declaring that the word of the Lord determines the future of the nations (cf. 1:10). This connection between 1:10 (the core theme of Jeremiah's call in vv. 4–19) and 46:1 suggests that the book of Jeremiah revolves around God's rule and the supremacy of His kingdom. The abrupt title found in v. 2, *lemitsrayim*—"against" or "concerning Egypt"—is meaningful only in the context of God as Ruler and Judge of the nations. The full title mentions the battle of Carchemish (605 B.C.) where the Babylonians defeated Pharaoh Necho II. The ensuing prophecy describes Egypt under the burden of this defeat.

The battle of Carchemish proved the foolishness of relying on Egypt (vv. 3–12). God invited the audience to imagine a dramatic battle that would demonstrate the weakness and shame of Egypt (vv. 3–4). The Babylonian army was called to move into action while the Egyptian army was already in retreat, struck by fear (vv. 5–6). Playing on its intention to rise up and cover the earth, like the annual flooding of the Nile, Egypt was derisively summoned to battle with its horses, chariots, and army of allies (vv. 7–9). Egypt's real enemy was not the Babylonians; it was the Lord God (v. 10). Babylon was merely His tool. His rule required the demise of Egypt, and the shame of the defeated empire was heard among all the nations (v. 12).

46:13–28. Impotence of the Egyptian Gods. God predicted the Babylonian attack on Egypt (568 B.C.). God would assert His power by defeating Pharaoh and his gods (vv. 15–17). Verse 15 may be a reference to the sacred bull Apis that represented the god Ptah of Memphis. God's imagery belittled "powerful" Egypt. Using the metaphor of a biting fly defeating a beautiful heifer (as a sarcastic reference to Egyptian bull worship; cf. vv. 15, 21), He illustrated how the mighty empire, with all its gods, would be overcome by the sting of a small insect. From the image of something mighty and numerous being destroyed by something small and singular, the text switches to an image of something small and singular (a snake) being cut down by something mighty (an army with axes) and numerous (like locusts or grasshoppers). All that the Egyptians could do was hiss like a serpent (v. 22).

Israel's God would punish Egypt's national god, Amon of No (i.e., Amun of Thebes), and all of Egypt with its gods and its kings (vv. 25–26). The punishment of Pharaoh and those trusting in him would include the Judean remnant, who relied on Pharaoh's protection instead of obeying God's call to dwell in Judah (see chaps. 42–44). Israel's God is indeed the Sovereign King of the nations. Therefore, the word of comfort to Israel in 30:10–11 (cf. 45:4–5) is repeated here (46:27–28). God would extinguish the power of all the nations except that of Israel. He would not leave Israel without due punishment, but they were not to be afraid, for He would bring them home and give them rest.

47:1–7

Against Philistia

The Philistines were old enemies of Israel (cf. 1 Sam. 4), but by the time of Jeremiah, Philistia had been reduced to a pawn of Egypt (cf. Jer. 47:1). Consequently, this prophecy is short and follows the one against Egypt. The Philistines were under threat from the north, and the description of their peril uses formulas common in Jeremiah for invasions and war. But it was the Lord who would punish the Philistines (v. 4). The invader from the north was the sword of the Lord (vv. 6–7). No specific reason is given for this judgment against Philistia. But the defeat of this ancient enemy by the Lord was to instill in Israel the hope that God would eventually restore His people's fortunes.

48:1–47

Against Moab

This lengthy prophecy is structured as an explanatory sequence of woes (i.e., "trouble," "death," "judgment"; v. 1), which constantly shifts between admonitions to escape, indictments, judgments, and lamentations. The historical events are unknown, and many of the locations mentioned cannot be pinpointed. The section has obvious links with other OT passages (e.g., Num. 21:28–29; 24:17; Deut. 28:49, 52; Is. 15:2–5; 16:6–12; 24:17–18). It addresses a close neighbor on the other side of the Jordan River with a long history of rivalry with Israel and Judah.

48:1–13. Moab's Judgment and Complacency. The woe in 48:1–9 predicts the destruction of the cities of Moab. The judgment upon these military strongholds and centers of economic power would elicit cries of mourning and desperation throughout Moab. The inhabitants were admonished to escape and save themselves although they would be like the juniper in the wilderness—a symbol of desolation (vv. 6, 9). Chemosh (the Moabite chief god; cf. 1 Kin. 11:7) would be powerless and exiled with his priests and princes. All Moab would be attacked, and every city and the entire land would be made desolate.

Moab was accused of complacency through the metaphor of winemaking (Jer. 48:10–13). All of its life, Moab had been, like wine, at ease, prosperous, and indolent (cf. Amos 6:1; Zeph. 1:12). Moab was the wine that had been left undisturbed, not moved about or poured out, which means that it had not experienced exile/captivity. The absence of turmoil had made Moab complacent. Now God would pour out its bottles and smash its jars (Jer. 48:12–13). This is a reference to destruction and exile. Thus, Moab would resemble Israel under judgment and would be ashamed, together with its god Chemosh, in whom it trusted.

48:14–28. Moab's Pride and Indictment. Another accusation against Moab highlighted its pride. Moab had no reason to be proud, for it would be plundered and its young men slaughtered (vv. 14–16). Its former power would be broken (vv. 17, 20). As an illustration of this fate, the inhabitants of Aroer (also north of the River Arnon) were admonished to ask the fleeing crowds what had happened; the response was that Moab had been shamed, broken, and ruined (vv. 19–20). God's case against Moab was painted in rich and varied images in a dual indictment followed by judgment (vv. 21–28). The first indictment was that Moab had arrogantly defied the Lord (v. 26). This is a peculiar statement since Moab had no covenant with Israel's God. However, it fits the theme of the Lord as Ruler of the nations. Israel celebrated this in hymns which called all nations to acknowledge the Lord as the true God (Ps. 93–99; cf. Rev. 14:7–8). Moab had offended the Lord's honor and status as Ruler of the universe by its proud self-seeking (Jer. 48:26) and its scorn of Israel (v. 27). The latter was the second indictment. The language here resembles the psalms of lament (Ps. 59:8; Jer. 20:7; Lam. 1:7). Moab's contempt for Israel had offended God because an intimate relationship existed between God and His people that could encourage Israel in exile and give them hope.

Following this dual indictment, the judgment was severe. Moab would lose its power and strength (Jer. 48:21–25). It would be made drunk by God's cup of wrath (cf. 25:15) and would wallow in its own vomit (48:26)—an image of humiliation and degradation. It would be treated with the same contempt that it had held for Israel (v. 26; cf. v. 27). The offense and its punishment corresponded, according to the principle of retribution (Ex. 21:23–24; Lev. 24:19–20; Deut. 19:21; cf. Matt. 5:38–42). Moab was admonished to flee to a remote location, hiding in caves among the rocks (Jer. 48:28)—another sign of humiliation.

48:29–39. Lawsuit and Punishment. The next unit includes a lawsuit with an indictment (vv. 29–30) and a punishment (vv. 31–33; cf. Is. 16:6–10). The indictment develops the theme of Moab's arrogance (Jer. 48:26). In a terse proverbial utterance, the verdict was made—Moab's arrogance was without substance (v. 30). The coming devastation is worded as lamentation: instead of the joy and laughter associated with wine, there would be sorrow and wailing (vv. 31–33).

The theme of Moab's punishment is expanded in vv. 34–39 (cf. vv. 21–26, 31–33). The text is clearly influenced by Isaiah (15:4–6; 16:11–12), but the lament in Isaiah 16:11 resulted from the loss of the wine trade, while the lament here followed the cessation of idolatry. This adaptation of the material borrowed from Isaiah adds to the evidence that God's power and sovereignty were central to Jeremiah. An overwhelming outpouring of grief and lamentation is described. The last lines refer to the derision and dismay of Moab's neighbors at its fate.

48:40–47. Summary of the Message to Moab. The prophecy ends with variants on previous themes: Moab was to be destroyed because it exalted itself against the Lord (v. 42; cf. v. 44). The references to dread, pit, and snare (v. 43) summarize a series of events in a movement from one danger to another, which indicate inescapability and hopelessness for Moab. The climax contains three motifs. First, Moab's destruction is illustrated by the fate of Heshbon, a center of power that was now powerless and devastated (v. 45). Second, a concluding woe (cf. v. 1) concerns the captivity of the worshipers of Chemosh (v. 46; cf. vv. 7, 13). Moab's defeat was to be, in effect, a defeat of Chemosh, who was not a god at all. Third, a promise of hope was to be fulfilled in the future (v. 47). Elsewhere, Jeremiah uses the phrase *shub shebut* for restoration after exile (cf. 29:14; 30:3, 18; 32:44; 33:11, 26). Even for Israel's enemy, there was hope, but only after exile. Thus, God's primary concern with Moab was not primarily its destruction but destruction as a means of establishing His sovereignty and turning Moab and the remnant of Israel in Moab to Himself. His response to their turning to Him would be mercy and a new life. From then on, the life of the nation would be founded on God's deliverance, as in the case of Israel's deliverance from Egypt.

God's purpose is to establish His rule over the nations as a condition for their well-being. He is the Lord of heaven and earth, and therefore, life cannot be preserved without Him, not even among the nations. Moab resisted the Lord's authority by trusting in its own works and treasures (48:7), by exalting itself at the Lord's expense (vv. 26, 42), by holding Israel up to ridicule (v. 27), and by its pride and arrogance (vv. 29–30). Such behavior was unacceptable, and Israel's God was in command of the nations and held them accountable. The prophecy sought to prove to Israel that they could trust such a God because He could reverse the fortunes of His remnant people in exile. In this regard, the prophecies against the nations in Jeremiah 46–51 were designed for the instruction of Israel.

49:1–6

Against Ammon

This prophecy consists of two units. Each unit is introduced by an indictment.

49:1–3. First Indictment. In the first indictment, which uses the metaphorical language of sons, heirs, and family rights (v. 1), Ammon was accused of taking land through military aggression. Israel had sons and heirs, so *Malkam* (also called "Milcom" or "Molek") had no right to occupy the land of Gad or dwell in the cities of Gad. As a result of the judgment for this crime (v. 2), Ammon would become a desolate mound, be burned down in a military attack, and Israel would dispossess those who had dispossessed them and reacquire their inheritance. This outcome would inspire hope that Judah's land, at this time occupied by the Babylonians, would one day be restored to its rightful owner. A call for wailing and mourning was to be made after Ammon's defeat, when *Malkam* would go into exile with his priests and princes (v. 3). *Malkam* was to have proven himself powerless at the intervention of Yahweh—again a tribute to the power of Israel's God.

49:4–6. Second Indictment. In the second indictment (v. 4), Ammon was accused of pride, boasting of her fertility, and trusting in her treasures by claiming that nobody could threaten her. But God would turn pride into fear (v. 5; cf. 48:43–44). All the people would be driven out of their land with no leader to gather them. Instead of the wailing mentioned in the first indictment, this section ends in a promise of Ammon's return to her land (49:6; cf. 48:47). Yahweh would demonstrate His sovereignty over Milcom when He punished the Ammonites for their aggressions and pride. The prophecy that the land of Gad would be restored to Israel created hope for a restoration of Judah. As the Ammonites came to understand that Israel's God ruled the nations, they would submit to Him and not to Milcom.

49:7–22

Against Edom

The Edomites, situated southeast of the Dead Sea, were descendants of Esau, the brother of Jacob/Israel (Gen. 36:1, 9). There is a verbal connection or dependence between vv. 9, 14–16 and Obadiah 1–5. Prophecies against Edom are common in the OT (Amos 1:11–12; Is. 21:11–12; 34:5–15; 63:1–6; Ezek. 25:12–14; 35:1–15; Obad. 1–21; Mal. 1:2–5). The passage in 49:19–21 is a variant of 50:44–46.

49:7–13. Images of Judgment. The judgment against Edom is presented in vivid language (vv. 7-13). First, through rhetorical questions, Edom was accused of having lost his famous sense of wisdom (cf. 1 Kin. 5:11; Obad. 5). Second, Edom was to flee the approaching disaster of Esau (Jer. 49:8; cf. 48:6–8, 28; 49:30; 50:8–10; 51:6, 45). Through synecdoche (a part representing the whole), this was addressed to the inhabitants of Dedan (an Arabian city southeast of Edom, or perhaps a settlement of Dedanites along the caravan route passing through Edom). The point was to warn Edom against the coming punishment.

Third, two images underline the rigor of the judgment (vv. 9–10). Grape gatherers would not pick the vines completely clean but would leave a portion for the gleaners (cf. Deut. 24:19–22). Thieves in the night would not take everything available—only what they needed. Both would leave something behind, but God would leave nothing in Edom because the nation would not survive. Fourth, the scene abruptly shifts to the innocent victims of the judgment, the orphans and widows (Jer. 49:11). In His mercy, God would care for them (cf. e.g., Ex. 22:22; Deut. 10:18; Ps. 68:5; Mal. 3:5). The covenant laws about caring for orphans and widows included leaving some grapes of the vineyards for them, and the reference to this law in Jeremiah 49:9 explains the content of v. 11: only the abandoned and defenseless would find rescue in the Lord.

Finally, in a prose summary of the judgment, God used the image of the cup of suffering and devastation (vv. 12–13; cf. 25:15–29). The punishment on Edom was as sure as God's oath. It was aimed first at Bozrah, the capital, which was to become a curse (cf. Deut. 28:37), and all the other cities were to become perpetual wastes.

49:14–16. The Pride of Edom. This unit contains a central indictment against Edom for trusting in his god and for his pride (v. 16), framed by judgment themes (vv. 14–16). God was mobilizing all the nations against Edom (v. 14), and they would despise him (v. 15). The people of Edom had been deceived by their god, the pride of their hearts. This god is referred to by the unusual Hebrew word *tipletset*, which seems to be a by-form of *mipletset* (1 Kin. 15:13), some type of image or symbol dedicated to Asherah. Translations have rendered this word variously as "fierceness," "terror," or "horror" (nominative terms derived from the verb *palats*, "shudder," "be horrified"). Figurines representing Astarte or some other fertility goddess have been found in Edom.

49:17–22. Metaphors of Defeat. The third and final unit returns to God's judgment against Edom, here expressed in three powerful metaphors (vv. 17–22). First, Edom's fall would be like that of Sodom and Gomorrah: no one would remain and dwell in it (vv. 17–18). Second, God was to be like a lion, attacking and devastating the flock of sheep in Edom (vv. 19–21), for no shepherd (king) in Edom could stand up to the Lord. Third, Edom's attacker would be like an eagle (v. 22), that is, threatening and terrorizing, making warriors quake like women in labor. Behind these images in Jeremiah stand God's power (v. 19) and intention (v. 20a). He would be the lion-God, sending the eagle-Babylon as His agent against Edom. The purpose of vv. 7–22 was to denounce Edom's pride and idolatry (i.e., not recognizing the sovereignty of God over the nations of the world). The passage reassured exiled Israel that Yahweh was indeed the most powerful God. He could not be defeated by any other god or nation. This was to assure Judah that God's promises of delivering His remnant were trustworthy.

49:23–27

Against Damascus

Damascus, Israel's northern neighbor, is a reference to all of Syria (cf. Is. 7:8), but Jeremiah also uses Hamath and Arpad to represent Syria as a nation (Jer. 49:23). The introductory terror and paralysis inflicted by judgment (vv. 23–24) are followed in the passage by a cry of lament by the inhabitants of Damascus that can also be read as a taunt from the prophet (v. 25). This section concludes with a harsh judgment in vv. 26–27. No formal indictment explains the punishment because the intended function of the prophecy was to remove every rival claim to historical-political power. Its message brought hope to Israel because it exalted Yahweh and His sovereignty over all nations, kings, and gods.

49:28–33

Against Kedar and Hazor

Kedar refers to Arabian tribes who were descendants of Ishmael (cf. Gen. 25:13) and lived in the desert (cf. Jer. 2:10). The eastern location of Hazor (not the famous city, north of the Sea of Galilee) is unknown, but the noun may mean "unwalled villages," implying a nomadic form of life (cf. Jer. 49:31). The prophecy announced invasion and devastation (vv. 31–33) and explicitly mentioned Nebuchadnezzar as the agent (vv. 28, 30). The Lord gave a command mobilizing the enemies of Kedar and Hazor (vv. 28–29) and urged the inhabitants to escape to safety (v. 30). Nebuchadnezzar had conceived of a plan against Kedar and Hazor (v. 30), but he acted under the command of God (vv. 28, 31). Israel's God would scatter the people and bring devastation upon them from every side (v. 32). The prophecy exalts God's sovereign power over the nations, their kings, and their gods.

49:34–39

Against Elam

This prophecy against Elam, located east of Babylon, dates to Zedekiah's reign (ca. 597 B.C.). Elam was once an ally of Babylon but later came under its control. It may symbolically represent the eastern nations subjugated by Babylon who would be liberated when Babylon fell. This prophecy forms a transition to the extensive prophecy against Babylon (50:1—51:58). Threats and judgments are worded in the first person, with the Lord as agent. The climax is God's resolution to nullify the power and leaders of Elam by replacing them with His own direct rule (49:38). As in the cases of Egypt (46:26), Moab (48:47), and Ammon (49:6), God planned better days for Elam. He would bring back the captives of Elam and restore their fortunes (v. 39) when His throne was established in Elam and all other claims to power had been eradicated (v. 38). These are subtle hints to the exiled remnant of Israel that God would also bring them back home.

50:1—51:58

Against Babylon

The pattern followed in the prophecy against Babylon is the same as for other nations: the Lord called military forces against Babylon and declared her fall. While in the rest of the book Babylon is God's agent for punishing the nations, in chapters 50—51 she is the object of God's punishment. Since Babylon stood under judgment and would soon fall, trust in her as a lasting power was futile. These chapters support the promises of a return from the Babylonian Exile for the remnant of some nations (46:26; 48:47; 49:6, 39) and for Israel (e.g., 30:1—33:26), and they exhort Israel to trust God and wait for the fulfillment of His promises. The fall of Babylon had only been hinted at in previous passages (cf. 25:11–12, 26; 27:7).

The prophecy of the fall of Babylon is so certain that at times it is described as if it had already taken place (e.g., 51:8). God would intervene to punish the oppressor and to liberate His people. The danger of remaining in doomed Babylon and the necessity of avoiding complicity in Babylon's guilt are used to persuade the remnant to make the right choice. The theme of God's vengeance gains ground in this prophecy (i.e., God's judgment is founded on the principle of retributive justice). This is particularly linked to His concern for Zion and for the restoration of the sanctuary and its services.

The theme of God's vindication that runs throughout the book reaches its climax in chapters 50–51. The collapse of Babylon and her gods clearly demonstrates that the destruction of Jerusalem and the Lord's temple was not the result of God's impotence before the Babylonian gods. At this point, it was clear that He always had dominion over them. He had voluntarily, as a result of the sin of His people, handed the people, the city, and the temple into the hands of Babylon, but He—indeed, the Lord of Hosts—was now ready to take them back from her hand.

50:1–3. Introductory Message of Judgment. (See "Content of Jeremiah Chapters 50 and 51," p. 957). The introduction of this prophecy resembles the introduction in 1:1–3. In both instances, Jeremiah received the word of the Lord, and both concern the issue of the Exile in Babylon. Since the fall of Babylon had been announced, the end of the Exile was on the horizon (cf. Rev. 14:8). The content of this section of the message is very rich. There is an announcement among the nations of Babylon's fall. The accumulation of six verbs for the act of proclamation underlines its importance. The fall was to include Babylon's chief god, Bel, as well as Merodach (or Marduk). The passage refers to venerated idols that would be put to shame, terrorized, and shattered (cf. 50:38; 51:17, 47, 52). Through the destruction of Babylon, Yahweh would assert His supremacy over the gods of Babylon, and He would completely undermine the idea that in the destruction of Jerusalem, the Babylonian gods had defeated Yahweh. The instrument of the downfall was to be a nation coming out of the north.

Content of Jeremiah Chapters 50 and 51

The structure of Jeremiah 50 and 51 has been a matter of discussion among scholars, and the result has been a significant number of organizational arrangements. The following is a useful breakdown of both chapters.

1. *Content of Jeremiah 50.* Jeremiah 50 has an introduction and a conclusion. The introduction (vv. 1–3) is a brief summary proclaiming the fall of Babylon and its gods, which is reiterated in vv. 45–46. The content of the rest of the chapter seems to be organized around those to whom God speaks. His messages appear here addressed to three groups: Israel, Babylon, and the enemy of Babylon. These three are clearly introduced in vv. 4–16: Israel (vv. 4–10), Babylon (vv. 11–13), and the enemy (vv. 14–16). In the next block of material, the addressees of the messages are Israel (v. 17), Babylon (v. 18), and Israel (vv. 19–20). The enemy is not mentioned, which indicates that the problem was between God, Israel, and Babylon. The messages begin and end with Israel as the addressee in order to show God's concern for His people.

The next section of the material is organized as follows: enemy (vv. 21–23), Babylon (vv. 24–25), and enemy (vv. 26–30). This time there is no message addressed to Israel because the main emphasis is on what God was doing to Babylon through the enemy from the north. The last section returns to the problem between Israel and Babylon: Babylon (vv. 31–32), Israel (vv. 33–34), and Babylon (vv. 35–46). The emphasis is on what God would do to Babylon on behalf of His people.

2. *Content of Jeremiah 51.* The organization of chapter 51 is difficult to establish. A helpful approach would be to focus on the speakers, namely, God and the prophet. There are five divine and four prophetic speeches. Through the interlocking of the speeches in this chapter, the destruction of Babylon is effectively announced.

The *first divine speech* (51:1–5) contains God's announcement of the coming judgment against Babylon. The *first prophetic speech* (vv. 6–19) contains two sections: one exhorting the people to leave Babylon, and another summoning the enemy of Babylon for war.

The *second divine speech* (vv. 20–26) is a confirmation of the previous prophetic one: the Lord at this time announcing that He would use the enemies of Babylon, the Medes, to punish Babylon. In the *second prophetic speech* (vv. 27–32), God's right to attack Babylon is justified based on His status as Creator and Sustainer of the world.

The *third divine speech* (v. 33) is the proclamation that the time to harvest Babylon was coming. The *third prophetic speech* (vv. 34–35) is in the form of a lament and includes a call for retribution on behalf of Israel.

The *fourth divine speech* (vv. 36–50) is God's response to the words of the people expressed by the prophet. The final *(fourth) prophetic speech* (v. 51) is a confession of the shame experienced by the people because of what Babylon had done to them.

The final *(fifth) divine speech* (vv. 52–58) is a response to the words of the prophet, culminating in the announcement of the total destruction of the city of Babylon.

50:4–10. Message to Israel. The fall of Babylon was good news for all captives. God's people would return to Him and to Zion in an eternal covenant that was not to be forgotten (v. 5). This prophecy announced the unquestionable fulfillment of earlier promises (29:12–14; 31:31–33; 32:40). In the message, God's people are described as lost sheep misled by false shepherds. God laments over what the shepherds did to His people (i.e., kings or leaders; cf. 22:22; 23:1–4; Ezek. 34:1–10). Their priests and prophets had led them away from Him by encouraging them to worship other gods, thus causing them to forget their resting place (cf. Ps. 23). The indictment is against the leaders, particularly the royal establishment. As a result of being a lost sheep, Judah was devoured by Babylon. Apparently, Babylon claimed innocence at Judah's fate, blaming it on the sins of the people against their Lord, who was their abiding place of righteousness (Jer. 50:7). The remarkable balance between God's righteous judgments and His love for Israel indicates that the Babylonians understood, better than the kings of Israel did, the price to be paid for sin and the deep roots of hope in Israel's history. However, Babylon did what was in her heart to do, and it was inexcusable. It would have to assume responsibility for its action. This speech concludes with an admonition to Israel to leave Babylon (vv. 8–10), which should have prompted leaders to take action. The metaphor of rams is used to describe the strong leaders that Israel would need. The military threat that God would cause to overtake Babylon is described as a coalition of nations from the north (vv. 9–10; cf. 51:27–28).

50:11–16. Speeches to Babylon and the Enemy. Babylon's joy would turn into shame (vv. 11–13) for having gleefully taken advantage of Judah and recklessly plundering it. The superpower is derogatorily described as being like a heifer thrashing grain and bellowing like stallions (lit. "the mighty," sometimes translated as "bulls"; cf. 46:21). Babylon's abuse and self-serving exploitation would be judged by God. Babylon would become the least of the nations, and all passing by would hiss or whistle at her in derision (50:13; cf. 49:17, 33). The deep shame of the city ("mother") and her desolation would be caused by the indignation of the Lord (50:12–13; cf. 6:9–15).

In 50:14–16, the object of the speech is the enemy of Babylon. God was summoning armies against Babylon, for she had sinned against the Lord (v. 14; cf. v. 24). Subject to His vengeance, she would be punished according to the law of retributive justice: as she had done, so would be done to her (v. 15; cf. 50:28; 51:11, 24, 35–36, 49, 56). Babylon would surrender (lit. "give her hand"; 50:15). This expression could also refer to a broken covenant, perhaps to stave off destruction (cf. 2 Kin. 10:5; 1 Chr. 29:24; 2 Chr. 30:9; Lam. 5:6; Ezek. 17:18). The sower and the harvester would be cut off from the city, resulting in famine. Then everyone would turn to his own people and flee to his own land (Jer. 50:16).

50:17–20. Messages to Israel, Babylon, and Israel. The first message here is about Israel as a victim of political powers, and scattered throughout the nations (v. 17). But the Lord also addressed Babylon, announcing that He would punish her for her actions as He had done to Assyria. He then turned to His people and proclaimed that He would bring them back home. They are commanded to leave Babylon (vv. 17–20) and to return home (vv. 4–5, 8, 16b). This was to be the work of the Lord; He would reconcile with and forgive those whom He would preserve (v. 20; cf. 31:34). Israel's Good Shepherd would give them life, hope, and a place of rest (cf. 50:6–10).

50:21–30. Messages for the Enemy, Babylon, and the Enemy. God summoned the armies of the unidentified enemy of Babylon to attack and destroy her (vv. 21–23). The text now describes how God would deal with Babylon. Merathaim (in southern Babylon) and Pekod (Aramaean people on the eastern bank of the lower Tigris River) are used to represent the whole of Babylon. Merathaim may be linked with "the bitter river" in southern Babylonia, which was taken as a symbol of the outer edges of the earth, with Babylon at its center. Its ironic use here implies that the city, formerly the center of the world, would now be at the world's outer edges. Next, the Lord spoke about the fall of Babylon in a lament that continues this irony (vv. 23–24; cf. 49:25). Such an expression is that of Babylon as a hammer (which symbolized power and strength—cf. 23:29; 51:20–23) that has been cut down and smashed. Having fought against the Lord, Babylon was to face His judgment (50:24–25; cf. v. 14). What Babylon did against God's people was considered a sin against God Himself. The text returns to the topic of the enemies of Babylon, who were again summoned to punish and destroy her (vv. 26–27). Fugitives from Babylon (cf. vv. 8, 16, 19) would declare in Zion that God had repaid Babylon for what she did to the temple (v. 28; cf. v. 15; 51:11, 24, 35–36, 49, 56). Babylon's crime was proud defiance against the Holy One of Israel (50:29) and proven indifference to His authority, power, and status.

50:31–46. Messages for Babylon, Israel, and Babylon. The one who was to attack and punish Babylon was the Lord Himself (vv. 31–32). He would set the city on fire, and everything would be consumed. However, Israel and Judah, with Babylon's refusal to release their captives, had now a strong Redeemer defending their case who would liberate them and give rest to the land. He would disturb the inhabitants of Babylon (v. 34; cf. Rev. 14:9–11). The language in this section alludes to the deliverance from Egypt (cf. Ex. 2:23–25; 3:7–8; 6:6; 7:14; 15:13). Thus, a new exodus, this time from Babylon, was to be followed by a new covenant with the Lord (cf. Jer. 30:1—33:28; 50:4–5).

The last object of the discourse is Babylon. This section begins with an ode to a sword (vv. 35–38). The Lord's sword against Babylon (cf. v. 25) would impact every part of Babylonian society—princes, wise men, soothsayers, warriors, horses, chariots, mercenaries, and treasures. It would reduce everything to weakness, lifelessness, and instability. All of this was to happen because of their idolatry (v. 38), that is, the self-serving pride that had distanced Babylon from the God of heaven and earth.

Second, God would judge Babylon's pride (vv. 39–40). Because of her pride, Babylon would become a perennially desolate place. The symbols of human power and presence would disappear, and its inhabitants would be the wild animals of the desert. Its fate would be like Sodom and Gomorrah. God's judgment would come from the north, from a great nation allied with many kings from the ends of the earth. Verses 41–43 reiterate 6:22–24, with the essential difference being that Babylon is no longer the attacker (vv. 22–24) but the attacked (50:40–43; there is also a parallel between vv. 44–46 and 49:19–21). Again, the inversion of fates was to be complete. God (not Babylon) would rule the world, and there is none like Him (v. 44b).

51:1–19. First Divine and Prophetic Speeches. (See "Content of Chapters Jeremiah 50 and 51," p. 957) In His first speech, God expressed His resolve to destroy Babylon (vv. 1–4). He would raise up a destroyer against Babylon, who is here called "Leb Kamai," "the heart of those who raise up against me." A destructive *ruakh*, "spirit" or "wind," would winnow and destroy the land. At the same time, He would comfort Israel and Judah (v. 5). In spite of their sins, God had not forsaken His people, and the fall of Babylon would demonstrate this. The first part of the prophetic speech is an admonition to God's people to abandon Babylon and to worship God in Zion (vv. 6–10). Thus they would save themselves from God's judgment against Babylon (v. 6). The common practice of using balm for pain and healing would be ineffective for Babylon: she could not be healed because her judgment would reach to the skies or "the heavens," literally, "the clouds" (v. 9). Here, "judgment" (*mishpat*) may, as in other cases (Deut. 19:6; 21:22; Ezek. 7:23), refer to "guilt," and the idea of something reaching the clouds or heaven could mean that it has no end (cf. 2 Chr. 28:9; Job 20:6; Pss. 57:11; 108:5; Dan. 4:22). The remnant of Israel would realize that God had vindicated them (lit. "brought out" or "revealed" their righteousness), and therefore they were to worship Him in Zion (Jer. 51:10; cf. 50:5). The righteousness of Israel (cf. vv. 4–5) was totally dependent on the mercy and grace of God, their pardoner (cf. v. 20; 51:5). In forsaking Babylon, the people were not only to escape judgment but also to show no complicity in Babylon's crimes (cf. Rev. 18:4).

In the second part of the prophetic speech, the Medes are summoned against Babylon (51:11–14). God had taken an oath to destroy Babylon (v. 14) as vengeance for His temple (v. 11; cf. 50:15, 24, 28; 51:24, 35–36, 49, 51, 56). The prophet proceeds to contrast the Lord with Babylon's idols (vv. 15–19) in order to demonstrate His right to judge Babylon. This unit is parallel to 10:12–16. It celebrates God's power by contrasting it with the powerlessness of the idols lacking "breath" (i.e., life). The superiority of Israel's God asserted Israel's special status.

51:20–35. Second and Third Divine and Prophetic Speeches. In His second speech, God expresses again His resolution to destroy Babylon (vv. 20–26). The structure of this unit is similar to 50:35–38. Commentators have differed over the identity of the referent in 51:20–23. According to some, it is Israel, due to the immediately preceding verses; others believe it is Babylon (in light of 50:23, 51:25, and vv. 13–14, where Babylon is addressed as "you" a few verses before this section, starting in v. 20). According to others, and most likely, it is the kingdom of the Medes (vv. 11; 41–46). Babylon's social structure would be destroyed as retribution for all the wickedness they had perpetrated in Zion (v. 24; see vv. 11, 51). The prophetic speech was a summons for the nations to come to attack Babylon (vv. 27–29), and it recorded the reaction of the Babylonians (vv. 29–32).

The third divine speech announced that the time for the harvest of Babylon would come. Babylon would become like a threshing floor—its pride and honor would be trampled (v. 33). The Judean exiles were encouraged to remain confident in God's purpose and to wait faithfully until the Lord's soon-coming harvest. In the third prophetic speech, the prophet appropriates a lament of the people concerning Babylon's abuse of Jerusalem (vv. 34–35). He accuses Nebuchadnezzar of deporting the people and swallowing the city like a *tannin* ("serpent," "dragon," "sea monster"), a symbol of chaos and evil. Bloodguilt is assigned to the Babylonian king. His state policy was regarded by the victims as murder. This is an enormous allegation that cannot go unpunished. The principle of retributive justice is therefore adduced (v. 35).

51:36–50. Fourth Divine Speech. God responded to the lament of vv. 34–35 by pleading Zion's case and taking vengeance for her (v. 36a). He would dry up Babylon's water and would make her completely desolate, a home for jackals. God would provide banquets for them and make them drunk and merry until they would sleep and not awaken (v. 39). Through the attackers, He would slaughter the Babylonians and render them helpless, like sacrificial animals (v. 40). God here introduced the topic of reversal (vv. 41–44). A complete reversal would come to the city (vv. 40, 44)—the glory of Babylon would be turned into desolation and derision (v. 41; for "Sheshach," cf. 25:26). Her devastation was to be like a violent flood (51:42). Her cities—once filled with people, bustling life, and treasures—would be deserted (v. 43). God would punish Bel, the god of Babylon, and would liberate the captives he had "swallowed" (i.e., conquered, killed, and exiled). The nations that formerly praised Babylon's glory (v. 41) would no longer *nahar 'el*. This has been translated "stream to him," which would imply the streaming of nations in their masses to Bel and his city. However, in chapters 50–51, Bel is shamed by the nations attacking Babylon (50:2–3, 9; 51:27–28). As in 31:12, *nahar* can be understood in 51:44 as "shine" (i.e., look with favor or favorably toward). The acclamation of a great ruler traditionally involved greeting him with joy or "shining faces," and v. 44 could imply that the nations would no longer "look favorably toward" Bel.

Babylon would be defenseless, and its famous and secure walls would fall (v. 44). God would demonstrate His supremacy over the Babylonian gods by punishing the city. Babylon would no longer command the respect of the nations; it would not receive tax, allegiance, or praise. Babylon was to fall (50:32; 51:44). This implies a message of hope for exiled Israel and desolate Zion. At this time, the Lord admonished Israel to abandon Babylon (vv. 45–46; see v. 6). God's anger was no longer directed toward His apostate people but toward the oppressor who was preventing the fulfillment of His plan to bring His people to the promised land. Endless rumors of violence and intrigue could create fear, but the exiles were admonished to trust in the Lord and avoid the impending judgment by fleeing Babylon (v. 46).

Another reason to abandon Babylon was God's judgment of her false gods (v. 47). The land would be ashamed, and the people would die in her midst. While the nations had looked favorably toward Bel in Babylon (v. 44), the heavens, the earth, and all in them would at this time sing with joy at the demise of the oppressor (v. 48). Babylon's bloodguilt for killing God's people would be avenged through retributive justice. The exiled remnant was admonished again by the Lord to leave Babylon (cf. 50:8–10, 11–13, 14–16; 51:6, 45), with the instruction to keep the Lord and Jerusalem in mind (v. 50) as they were traveling.

51:51–58. Fourth Prophetic and Fifth Divine Speeches. The fourth prophetic speech is a short confession voicing the shame of Judah that had been brought on by the Babylonians (v. 51). This could have been another reason to leave Babylon and return to Jerusalem to restore the temple services. In vv. 11 and 24, Jeremiah expressed concern regarding Zion and the temple. Here, in v. 51, the reason for abandoning Babylon is that the temple had been profaned. In His final speech, the Lord responded to the shaming of Judah by announcing that the judgment against Babylon's gods was inescapable (vv. 52–53; cf. v. 47). Nothing would stop those who sought to plunder Babylon, not even if Babylon reach up to heaven (cf. Gen. 11:1–9). These prophecies seek to persuade the remnant of Israel to prepare for their return home.

The Lord announced that Babylon would be destroyed by plunderers (Jer. 51:54–58). He is a God of retribution, and He would certainly repay the nation completely (v. 56). The sovereignty of the Lord and the principle of retributive justice come together. God's resolve was to make drunk (i.e., punish; v. 39) all representatives of Babylonian society (v. 57) to cause them to fall into a perpetual sleep. This was the decision of the King, the Sovereign Lord.

Verse 58 summarizes the chapter's divine speeches against Babylon. Babylon's substantial walls would be destroyed and her high gates incinerated (v. 58). The collapse of Babylon demonstrates the futility of the peoples' labor (in building and defending their broad walls and high gates). Verse 58b parallels Habakkuk 2:12–13, though with some differences. What Habakkuk says generally about the ongoing works of the Babylonians, Jeremiah applies specifically to the future fall of Babylon. Jeremiah draws a lesson for the nations: they all labored and exhausted themselves in futility and would be destroyed by fire. Implied is a contrast between the nations and God's people, who would find "rest" for their souls (6:16). By dwelling in the land with the Lord, they would find their "resting place" (50:6; cf. 30:10; 31:2; 46:27; 50:34).

51:59–64

Jeremiah's Command to Seraiah

This short narrative dramatically underlines, by word and acted parable, the content, seriousness, and intentionality of the prophecy about the fall of Babylon (50:1—51:58). Jeremiah had written this prophecy against Babylon on a scroll and asked Seraiah son of Neriah, who was possibly Baruch's brother (cf. 45:5), to be his representative. As one of the king's staff officers, Seraiah accompanied King Zedekiah to Babylon (ca. 593 B.C.).

The life of the scroll had three parts: (1) Its *preparation* was completed by Jeremiah, who wrote it himself (51:60). (2) Its *administration* was managed by Seraiah. He was instructed to take it to Babylon, read it publicly (cf. chaps. 32, 36), and invoke the Lord's resolve to destroy Babylon (51:61–62). (3) Its *deposition* (vv. 63–64) was a formal and public act that symbolically linked the content of the prophecy against Babylon with the geography of Babylon (cf. 13:3–11). The scroll, with its prophecy describing the future of Babylon, became a symbol for the city itself. Thus, its "drowning" in the river was intended as a prophecy that Babylon would be overwhelmed. As history would reveal, the Euphrates and its engineered manipulation by Cyrus played a key role in the city's destruction.

God's word stands and will be fulfilled, but Babylon would sink to its death, and its fall would be permanent. God's sovereignty is sure. As repeatedly underscored in 50:1—51:58, this message was to bring hope and resolution to the remnant, saying, "Rely on God's plans for you. Break away from Babylon, and become a part of God's future for Israel!"

The reference to weariness or exhaustion in the last word of the prophecy (51:58; some render it as "fall") could apply literally to the walls of Babylon or to the nations that behave like her. It translates one single word in Hebrew (*ya'ap*) and resumes the theme that the nations—even the impressive historic Babylon—labor for nothing if their lives are not submitted to the King, the Sovereign Lord (v. 57). This is a vital message for God's people, for unless they know God and acknowledge Him as the Lord of their lives, all their labor is in vain. The message of the fall of Babylon is a call to rely on God's plans and to break away from Babylon to become a part of God's future for Israel (cf. Rev. 14:6–12).

Chapter 51 ends with a note that Jeremiah's words end here. Thus the book essentially closes where it began, with a reference to the words of Jeremiah. (1:1; 51:64). The phrase indicates that what follows in chapter 52 was added to the book but was not written by Jeremiah.

52:1–34

HISTORICAL EPILOGUE

This chapter confirms the fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecies regarding Judah's punishment. It also provides a necessary background for the promissory words to the exiles in Babylon, with encouragement to them to remain faithful and wait for the return to their homeland (30:1—33:28). In relation to the prophecy against Babylon in 50:1—51:58, chapter 52 balances God's opposition against Babylon and removes any doubt that He would relent in His resolve to punish Judah. The material in chapter 52 (except vv. 28–30) derives from historical biblical sources (2 Kin. 24:18—25:30) and does not mention Jeremiah. The story about Gedaliah in 2 Kings 25:22–26 is found in Jeremiah 40:7—41:18. The unit in 52:1–11 partially overlaps with 39:1–10.

52:1–23

The Fate of Zedekiah and Fall of the City

Zedekiah (597–586 B.C.) is said to have done evil in the Lord's estimation and is compared to King Jehoiakim (609–598 B.C.). The gruesome fate of Judah and Jerusalem is blamed on Zedekiah, who was thrown away from God's presence. The account of the events begins with Zedekiah's rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar (v. 3b). Nebuchadnezzar's punitive invasion (vv. 4–10) is addressed in the notes on 39:1–10 (cf. also 2 Kin. 25:1–7).

Here, the reckoning of time shifts to the chronology of Nebuchadnezzar, Judah's new ruler (12–23). The siege of Jerusalem began in January 588 B.C. and lasted eighteen months. Three things are reported from the conquest: (a) a great destruction of the temple, the walls, and many houses (vv. 13–14); (b) a massive deportation (v. 15); and (c) some people who cared for the vineyards and the fields were left in the land (v. 16). The report becomes more detailed. The taking of the vessels of the temple meant a loss of honor for the God who resided there. There are also hints at how the plunder signifies the end of the Davidic dynasty and the historical splendor of Jerusalem since Solomon (v. 20).

52:24–30

The People Taken to Babylonia

The occupation included the seizure and execution of leading citizens. The deportations from 597 to 582 B.C. are listed, with the number of exiles (vv. 28–30) totaling four thousand six hundred. The actual number may have been considerably higher since this figure may cover only the heads of households. This compact list of Nebuchadnezzar's three acts of deportation is absent from the historical source material and is found only here in the OT (for the deportation in 598 B.C., see also 2 Kin. 24:15–16). This underscores the fact that "exile" is central in the book of Jeremiah. The deportations in Jeremiah 52:28–30 give a sense of completeness and finality to the prophecies of Jeremiah. The punitive concept of being thrown out from the presence of God (v. 3a) looms over this brief unit.

52:31–34

Jehoiachin Released from Prison

This unit is chronologically removed from the fall of Jerusalem (cf. 2 Kin. 25:27–30). The last date in Jeremiah 52:30 is 582 B.C.; here in v. 31, it is 560 B.C. Jehoiachin or Coniah (22:24–30), the young king brought to Babylon in 597 B.C., was still alive and recognized as king after thirty-seven years (commentators and translators differ over whether the Heb. *shemoneh*, "eight," for Jehoiachin's age in 2 Chr. 36:9 is an error that should be corrected to *shemoneh 'esreh*, "eighteen," in light of 2 Kin. 24:8). His new Babylonian master, Nebuchadnezzar's son Evil-Merodach (562–560 B.C.), befriended him and treated him honorably. Extrabiblical records confirm that Jehoiachin and his family received regular rations of oil and barley during their captivity in Babylon.

Is this simply a report of historical events, or does it have a theological point? Although Jehoiachin ruled only a few months before his deportation (2 Chr. 36:9–10), he was a special royal exile (cf. Jer. 22:24–30; 24:1; 29:1–2). Given the threat of the extinction of the Davidic line, this paragraph may have given a feeble hope for its continuation (cf. the promises in 23:5–8; 33:15–18), even though Jehoiachin would die in Babylon (22:26–27). A note in 1 Chronicles 3:19 makes Zerubbabel ("seed of Babylon") the grandson of Jehoiachin, and according to Ezra 2:1—3:13 (cf. Neh. 7:6–73), he and the high priest Joshua led the return from Babylon and the restoration of the temple. In some of Jeremiah's prophecies, it is stated that God would not completely destroy His people (Jer. 4:27; 5:10, 18; 46:28), and the note on Jehoiachin may serve to confirm this assurance. Thus, the theme that runs throughout the book of Jeremiah—of hope in the midst of a hopeless condition—closes the book.

LAMENTATIONS

INTRODUCTION

Title and Authorship. In Hebrew, the book of Lamentations is referred to as *'ekah*, a cry of exclamation meaning "how," which is the first word in the Hebrew text. It also occurs at the beginnings of chapters 2 and 4. The book was also known among the Jews as *qinot* ("lamentations") on the basis of its contents. As in the case of many biblical books, the author is anonymous. The traditional view is that Jeremiah wrote it. This tradition is quite solid and goes back to the second century B.C., to the Greek translation (LXX), which introduces the book, saying "And it came to pass after Israel had been carried away captive and Jerusalem had become desolate that Jeremiah sat down weeping and lamented this lamentation over Jerusalem, saying. . . ." This tradition is confirmed both by Jewish and early Christian traditions. It is also supported by biblical data. Second Chronicles 35:25 reports that Jeremiah sang lamentations for Josiah that were found in the *quinot* (the Laments). The reference may not be to the book of Lamentations, for the only king who is specifically mentioned in it is Zedekiah (4:20). It is clear, however, that Jeremiah wrote some lamentations.

The book of Lamentations uses expressions that parallel those found in Jeremiah, particularly when dealing with similar subjects (e.g., Lam. 3:14, 48–49 // Jer. 9:1; 20:7 //Lam. 5:16; 3:42 // Jer. 14:7; Lam. 3:52–56 // Jer. 12:9; 37:16; 38:6). Also, the personal sufferings described in Lamentations 3:14, 48–57, and 61–63 are similar to those of Jeremiah. There is no legitimate reason to reject the traditional view of Jeremiah as the author.

Date. It is generally agreed that Lamentations was written shortly after the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C., before Jeremiah was forced to join his contemporaries as they traveled to Egypt (Jer. 43:1–7). It was probably written no later than 580 B.C., while the memory of the events described was still fresh in his mind.

Backgrounds. The previous twenty years in Judah were politically turbulent. Babylon in the north and Egypt in the south competed for the control of the strategically located Judah. Upon the death of King Josiah in 609 B.C., the people of Judah placed his son Jehoahaz on the throne (2 Kin. 23:30). Three months later, the Egyptians invaded, deposed him, took him captive to Egypt, and replaced him with his older brother Eliakim, whom they renamed Jehoiakim (2 Kin. 23:34). They also imposed a heavy fine on the land.

In 605 B.C., the Babylonians took several individuals captive to Babylon, among them Daniel and his three friends. King Jehoiakim reluctantly submitted to the Babylonians. Following a confrontation between Babylon and Egypt in 601 B.C., in which Babylon was apparently defeated, Jehoiakim openly defied Babylon (2 Kin. 24:1). Jeremiah strongly advised him against rebelling and encouraged him to submit to Babylon instead. But the king and his advisers saw these messages as evidence of treason and responded accordingly by oppressing Jeremiah.

On December 19, 598 B.C., the Babylonians returned to Judah, besieged the city of Jerusalem, and captured Jehoiakim (2 Chr. 36:6). But before he could be deported, he either died or was killed (cf. Jer. 22:18–19), and his son Jehoiachin took his place on the throne. Three months later, on March 16, 597 B.C., the city fell and the king surrendered (2 Kin. 24:12). Leading citizens and ten thousand captives (including the Prophet Ezekiel) were taken to Babylon, along with the treasures of the king's house (vv. 12–13). The king of Babylon made Jehoiachin's uncle, Mattaniah, king in his place and changed Mattaniah's name to Zedekiah (v. 17). He proved to be a weak leader, unable to stand up to his nobles (Jer. 38:4–6). Even though he owed his allegiance to Nebuchadnezzar, he ventured to rebel against him at a time when fierce, but misguided, patriotism pushed Judah into open and irrevocable rebellion.

On January 15, 588 B.C., Jerusalem was again under a siege that lasted eighteen months (2 Kin. 25:1; Jer. 52:4). As the city was about to fall, Zedekiah wished to surrender but lacked the courage to do so. When the walls were breached, Zedekiah and his soldiers snuck out of the city into the night but were captured near Jericho (for more on the chronological issues with dating the fall of Jerusalem, see "Old Testament Timeline," p. 94). After seeing his sons killed before his eyes, Zedekiah was blinded, chained, and brought to Babylon (2 Kin. 25:7; Jer. 52:9–11). A month later, Nebuzaradan, one of Nebuchadnezzar's captains, set fire to the city and broke down its walls (2 Kin. 25:8–12). Most of the Jews were deported to Babylon, with only some of the poorest left behind. These events marked the end of the kingdom of Judah and form the background to the book of Lamentations.

Theology and Purpose. The book is primarily a poetic reflection precipitated by the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. It is about the experience of national disaster and the place of the nation in God's overall plan for His people. The reflection faces the pain of a loss and the possibility of hope for the future. The book opens with a sense of divine abandonment and the sense of loneliness that comes with it. The city that had been full of people became isolated and desolate (Lam. 1:1). Without God in our lives, we are indeed alone. The book ends with hope and a prayer that the divine abandonment of the city would not be final (5:21–22).

1. A Painful Sense of Loss. Almost everything that had characterized Israel's place among the nations was gone—the Davidic kingship, the priesthood, the temple with its services, and even the land itself. Three hundred and fifty years of the nation's independence had come to an end. For some, it was inconceivable that such a thing could happen to God's special people. More than a thousand years earlier, God had called Abraham to be the father of His people in order to make them a visual evidence of the blessings of serving Him. This election was reiterated at the time of the Exodus (Ex. 19:5–6). The blessings of obedience and the curses for failure are summarized in Deuteronomy 28 (cf. Lev. 26). The people quickly became accustomed to expecting only God's rich blessings that were promised within the covenant. They gradually lost sight of their responsibilities as covenant partners with God and of the conditional nature of the covenant promises. Consequently, they suffered the curses of the covenant. A reliance on the external aspects of their faith, without an underlying heart commitment, ultimately brought them to their ruin (cf. Jer. 7:3–7).

2. The Cause of the Loss. In Lamentations, the prophet expresses his understanding of the destruction of Jerusalem as the deserved consequence of Judah's sins (1:5, 8, 14–15, 18, 20, 22; 3:42; 4:3; 5:7, 16). The priests and prophets, who should have warned and guided the people, failed them. Instead of warning the nation against iniquity and transgression, they proclaimed peace and prosperity, thereby giving the people a false sense of security (see Jer. 8:8, 11; Lam. 2:14). They even took part in spilling the blood of the righteous (4:13). The temple, which represented God's presence among His people (Ex. 25:8; Lev. 26:12), had been desecrated and destroyed. This came as a shock to the people, who had assumed that God would miraculously protect His sacred meeting place (Lam. 2:15; 4:12) from their enemies. Jeremiah, however, was well aware of the fact that the disaster was a direct fulfillment of the predicted consequences of departing from God's ways, as listed in Deuteronomy 28. Given that sin was the cause for the disaster, God's decision to hand His people over to the enemy was considered to be just and right.

The poet and the faithful among God's people ultimately admitted their sinfulness and recognized God's justice. But they also appealed to God to avenge them of their enemies. This attitude can best be understood in light of the so-called imprecatory psalms, which are prayers for a curse on one's enemies, who were seen to be the enemies of God Himself (e.g., Ps. 37:20; 137; see "Imprecatory Passages in the Psalms," p. 733).

3. Hope as the Solution to the Riddle. Chapter 3 is the theological center of the book. It was difficult for the exiles to understand that belonging to God and being His special people meant more than having a superficial religious experience. They had lost sight of the true essence of religion: doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God (Mic. 6:8). The central section of the book (Lam. 3:21–42) gives the theological solution to the riddle of the disaster. God had warned the nation not to forget Him in times of prosperity (Deut. 8:10–20). If they failed, He would discipline them. This should not, however, be seen

as a rejection but rather as a means of bringing them back to Him. Human experience has demonstrated that it is easier to remember God in hard times than in prosperity. It is often when we are in our deepest despair that we come closest to God and remember that the Lord is the one who provides salvation (Jon. 2:9).

Thus, the author challenged the nation to remember how they had experienced the Lord's steadfast loving-kindness in the past: it had never failed but was "new every morning" (Lam. 3:23). Remembering God's loving-kindness awakens hope in the midst of despair (vv. 21–23). After declaring that all he had hoped for was gone (v. 18), the prophet found new hope in the memory of God's loving acts of salvation in the past. Hope looks forward without losing sight of the saving work of God in the past. In fact, the two are inseparable. This is particularly clear in the message of hope found in the NT. It is grounded on the cross of Jesus—the past—and yet patiently waits for the return of the Lord in glory. Since in Lamentations remembrance brings hope, Judah's punishment, far from being an indicator of final rejection, was for the purpose of restoration. God is in control, and He promises that everything will ultimately work together for the good of those who love Him (Rom. 8:28).

It has been noted that Lamentations outlines the steps for processing grief. Difficulties are not denied. The pains and grief over the destruction and ruined dreams are openly acknowledged. This is indispensable to the healing process. The detailed listing of specific events and situations, along with the confession of sins, is an important part of the process of dealing with grief. Jeremiah wrestles with the thought of God causing this disaster and at the same time sees Him as the source of comfort, hope, and help. It is comforting to have the assurance of God's unfailing compassion and faithfulness. At the end, Jeremiah felt safe turning the situation over to Him in prayer, confident that He would do what was in the best interest of everyone involved.

Literary Features. The literary structure of Lamentations is somewhat unique. It consists of five poems/chapters, each one structured on the basis of the Hebrew alphabet. The first four chapters are acrostic—that is, the first line of each stanza or verse begins with a consecutive letter of the alphabet, with a few variations. Scholars agree that this is by design, but they have debated the specific purpose of the acrostics. Some see the structure as a memory device, and others think it may be part of a liturgical ritual. Though no specific reasons are given, the choice may indicate the poet's interest in literary beauty. Unfortunately, this literary feature is lost in translation.

The book belongs to a literary type called a lament. A characteristic feature of laments is the expression of a great loss with a vivid contrast between past glory and present misery. Laments may also express the community's despair over its misfortunes and sorrow for its wrongs (Jer. 22:18; Ezek. 19:1–14; 26:17–18).

It has been proposed that the five laments that form this book follow a chiastic arrangement, also referred to as inverted parallelism (these terms refer to a literary structure arranged in an ABCBA pattern, in which the most important idea/concept is in the center; e.g., Is. 45:5–6). Accordingly, chapters 1 and 5 present a general description of the scenes of misery. Chapters 2 and 4 further illustrate the people's sufferings, their enemies, and God's wrath. The central and longest chapter (chap. 3) views the people's suffering in the context of their understanding of God. Even though He is punishing them, He is not capricious—He is acting in righteousness. Several speakers are present in these laments, one of whom is identified by various titles, such as "the daughter of Zion"/"Daughter Zion"/"Judah"/"Jerusalem"/"my people"/"the widow Jerusalem." In chapter 1, Jeremiah bemoans the disaster that struck the "daughter of Zion"/"Daughter Zion" (Lam. 1:1–11, 17) and she also expresses grief over her fate (vv. 12–16, 18–22). In chapter 2, the prophet again mourns over the city's misfortunes (2:1–9), tries to console her (vv. 10–17), and calls on her to lament (vv. 18–19), which she does (vv. 20–22). In chapter 4, Jeremiah again weeps over the city (4:1–16), and her inhabitants likewise bewail their fate (vv. 17–20). Then the poet proclaims punishment for Edom and salvation for Zion (vv. 21–22). In chapter 5, the community takes up the lament.

The identity of the speakers in chapter 3 has puzzled some scholars. Jeremiah speaks of his sufferings at the hand of the Lord (3:1–18), then expresses his hope for deliverance (vv. 19–24) and challenges the sufferer to trust in a just and compassionate Lord (vv. 25–39). Then the community breaks into lament (vv. 40–47). The speakers grieve Zion's fall (vv. 48–51) and give thanks for the Lord's deliverance (vv. 52–58). The poem comes to an end with the community's prayer for deliverance (vv. 59–66).

COMMENTARY

1:1–22
Zion: A City in Shambles

Jeremiah and the city itself reflect on the fate of Zion. The present condition of the city is described in contrast to her former glory and beauty (1:1–11). What they are experiencing is profoundly painful. The prophet expresses his deep need for comfort but acknowledges that there is none (vv. 12–17). They are experiencing the Lord's affliction. In the last section (vv. 18–22), the prophet recognizes the guilt of the people and prays for God's intervention against their enemies.

1:1–11. The City's Destruction. The city was deserted and lonely like a widow (v. 1). The same image is found on a victory medal issued by Titus when the temple was destroyed in A.D. 70: a woman weeping beneath a palm tree, with the inscription *Iudaea capta* ("Judah captured"). Once full of people (Is. 1:21; 1 Sam. 2:5), it had become empty (Lam. 1:1; cf. Jer. 4:23–26). "Her lovers" (Lam. 1:2) is a reference to those who tempted her into alliance against the Babylonians (Jer. 27:3). They had turned against her, and therefore there was no one to help or comfort her (Lam. 1:2, 7, 9, 16–17, 21). Once a prestigious hub of activity, she had been reduced to the status of a slave (v. 3; cf. Deut. 12:10). Once her roads had resounded with the songs of rejoicing as pilgrims flocked to the city for the appointed festivals (Pss. 48; 122–134), but now, the prophet said, the roads to Zion mourned (Lam. 1:4). The gates, which had regularly been the center of important activities (Deut. 21:19; Ruth 4:1, 11; 2 Sam. 19:8; 1 Kin. 22:10), were now desolate (Lam. 1:4). How incredible that this could have happened to the great city of Jerusalem!

Even God Himself seemed to have turned against her because of her rebellions (v. 5). As a result, the splendor had departed from the daughter of Zion (v. 6), and she felt like a widow, sitting alone. Throughout the book, Jeremiah refers to the city in endearing terms, such as "the (virgin) daughter (of) Zion" (e.g., "the daughter of my people"), "the (virgin) daughter (of) Judah" (e.g. v. 5; 2:5), and "the daughter (of) Jerusalem" (e.g. vv. 13, 15). Jerusalem was remembering all of its precious things from the days of old (1:7). The city had been renowned for her beauty and great treasures from the time of King Solomon (1 Kin. 6:21–35; 10:11–25), but as a result of various invasions by foreign powers, these had been stripped away and removed (2 Kin. 18:15–16).

The relationship between God and His people is most frequently seen as a marriage (cf. Deut. 29:12–13; Jer. 31:32). Unfaithfulness to God is seen as a breach of that relationship and is, therefore, often expressed in terms which imply sexual immorality. Those who despised her saw her nakedness (Lam. 1:8), and there was filthiness or uncleanness in her skirts (v. 9). Now, other nations had come into her sanctuary (v. 10). The term *goyim*, "nations," is almost exclusively used for pagan nations. Ammonites and Moabites were not to enter the assembly, much less the temple (Deut. 23:3–4). As a result of the attack against the city, Gentiles had entered the holy precincts (2 Kin. 24:2; Ps. 70:1; 74:3–7). The siege, which lasted eighteen months, drained the city's food rations (Lam. 1:11; cf. Deut. 28:17, 38–42; Jer. 52:6). The people were forced to barter away their valuables in order to obtain bread to eat (Lam. 1:11).

1:12–17. A Plea for Comforters. In this section, Jerusalem reflects on her fate and acknowledges it as the direct result of her own rebellion (vv. 14, 20, 22). Even though she complained about her harsh treatment at the hands of the Lord through the actions of her enemies, she did not blame Him. She recognized that He is righteous (v. 18) and that she deserved her sentence though the experience was difficult to bear.

The city searched for someone to comfort her in the midst of her sorrow, but people passed by and did not show sympathy (v. 12). The only one who could comfort her was the Lord, but He felt distant (v. 16). In fact, He was inflicting the punishment. In the aftermath of the disaster, the city had time to assess the situation and its causes. She realized that the Lord had brought this upon her on the day of His fierce anger (v. 12). All of her boasting had vanished, and she was like a captive animal because of her transgressions. Divine wrath is always a response to human sin. After realizing that the Lord had called for a *mo'ed*—the word used for Israel's festivals here designates "an appointed time" (which is sometimes translated in Lamentations as "assembly" or "army")—against her (v. 15), she wondered if there were any pain or suffering like hers (v. 12). In spite of God's mercy, there comes a time when humans reap what they have sown. The winepress is a graphic picture of God's judgment (v. 15). Grapes were put into a stone trough and then trampled in order to release their juice. Neither the children (v. 16) nor the elders and priests (v. 19) escaped the destruction. The nation had been forewarned by the Prophet Jeremiah (Jer. 19:8).

1:18–22. Admission of Guilt and Plea for Revenge on Enemies. In this section, the city admits her wrongdoing three times (vv. 18, 20, 22) and pleads with the Lord not to overlook the cruelty of her enemies (vv. 20–22; cf. Deut. 32:35). She expected her lovers to help and comfort her, but they showed no interest (Lam. 1:19, 21). She now realized how pointless it is to rely on human strength. Sin brings with it a deep sense of loneliness and abandonment. She prayed that the Lord might avenge her of her enemies (cf. Ps. 37:20; 137:1–9). Instead of seeking to implement her own vengeance, she surrendered it to the Lord and asked Him to act on her behalf.

2:1–22
God, the Destroyer of Zion

Chapter 2 further clarifies the nature of the disaster that had struck Zion. It emphasizes God's anger against Zion (vv. 1–14), the suffering of the city and the attitude of her enemies (vv. 15–17), and ends with an appeal to God for compassion in the form of a lament (vv. 18–22). The main emphasis of the chapter is on the fact that the Lord Himself had caused the destruction of the city, thereby assigning no supreme power to her enemies. What happened was not their doing, but the Lord's, because of the people's unfaithfulness.

2:1–14. God's Anger against Zion. Verse 1 introduces two topics that will be further developed in the first nine verses of the chapter: God's action against the city (v. 1a; developed in vv. 2–5, 8–9) and the destruction of the temple, His footstool (v. 1b; developed in vv. 6–7). This is followed by a description of the reaction of the elders and the prophet to the fall of the city (vv. 10–13), concluding with a charge against false prophets (v. 14). God's anger against the nation is mentioned five times in vv. 1–6. In His anger, He destroyed the city by throwing down the beauty and splendor of Israel from heaven to earth (v. 1)—hyperbolic language of total defeat, most likely emphasizing the magnitude of the fall (cf. Prov. 25:3). God's footstool refers to the temple (cf. Ps. 99:5; 132:7). God had destroyed the houses, the strongholds of the city, and the princes (Lam. 2:2). God's anger is compared to a fire that devours everything (v. 3). The Lord had also been likened to a warrior fighting against Zion (v. 4). He had become the enemy of Judah, destroying the palaces and the strongholds, and leaving behind Him increased or multiplied mourning and lamentation (v. 5). But above all, the Lord destroyed the tabernacle, His dwelling (vv. 6–7), the outward symbol of His presence among His people (cf. Jer. 22:5; Ezek. 9:3; 10:4, 18–19; 11:23; Matt. 23:38). The religious festivities associated with the temple—the appointed festivals and sabbaths—had come to an end. The king, who was responsible for protecting the temple, and the priests, who were responsible for ministering in it, had been removed (Lam 2:6). The sacred precincts had been profaned by pagans, who made a noise of victory where Jews once raised shouts of praise to God (v. 7). This was happening because the Lord had abandoned His sanctuary and had handed over the city to the enemy of His people (v. 7). They were not taken from Him by force. This was a coming of the Lord in judgment against His people as a result of their sins and rebellions.

The disaster affected the elders and the young women or virgins of Jerusalem (v. 10). But it particularly impacted the prophet when he saw children, infants, and mothers struggling to survive (vv. 11–12). He was overcome with emotion over their condition, crying his heart out in pain over the apparently hopeless situation (v. 11). He felt unable to console the city (v. 13). The catastrophe was absolutely without parallel in his eyes. The prophets who should have delivered warnings from God to the people to bring them back from their evil ways (Jer. 23:22) had failed in their duties and instead communicated false and deceptive messages (Lam. 2:14; cf. Jer. 23:9–22).

2:15–17. The Sufferings of the City and the Taunts of Enemies. This situation could have been avoided. Had the nation repented, it might have enjoyed peace and prosperity again. But as it was, passersby would hiss and shake their heads, gloat and scoff at the nation's misfortune (vv. 15–16; cf. Obad. 12–15), and wonder why this calamity had struck Jerusalem (cf. Jer. 22:8). The reason was that Judah had forsaken the Lord (cf. Jer. 22:9). The catastrophe happened in accordance with God's ancient warnings (Lev. 26:14–16ff; Deut. 28:15ff). Therefore, what the people experienced was the fulfillment of prophecy (Lam. 2:17).

2:18–22. Appeal to God for Compassion. Jeremiah appealed to the wall of the daughter of Zion to lift her hands to God and take her sorrow to the Lord. The wall is personified to represent the whole city (vv. 18–19). In her desperation, the city responded and cried out in pain to the Lord, "How could this happen to us?" The people should have learned from the earlier experience of Israel (2 Kin. 6:25–29), but they did not (Jer. 3:6–10). Therefore, due to the severity of the siege, mothers in Judah stooped to eating their own offspring (Lam. 2:20; cf. Jer. 19:9), and God's servants were killed within the holy precincts of the temple. There was no safe place for anyone in the day of the Lord's anger (v. 22).

3:1–66

Hope Amid Crisis

Chapter three is the literal center of the book, with vv. 19–39 forming the theological hub, which gives meaning to the rest of the book and provides hope in an apparently hopeless situation. At times, the speaker appears to speak as an individual, but at other times he speaks on behalf of the population in general. The chapter moves from despair (vv. 1–20) to hope (vv. 21–29), mercy (vv. 40–47), and vindication (vv. 48–66).

3:1–20. A Cry of Despair. Jeremiah moves away from the specific description of the destruction of the city to a discussion of human suffering. Usually God's leading (v. 2a) is toward salvation (Ex. 15:13) or out of captivity (Is. 40:11; 49:10; 63:13, 14), but here the Lord is a shepherd who seems to have misled, a ruler who oppresses and imprisons. The prophet says that the Lord led him to darkness (v. 2b), which represents imprisonment or even death (Ps. 88:10–12). He no longer listens to the prayers of those who suffer (Lam. 3:8) and has frustrated the intentions of the prophet (v. 9). The prophet depicts Him as a wild animal (vv. 10–11) and as a hunter performing target practice (vv. 12–13), someone who had served bitterness (lit. "poison"; v. 15). Jeremiah has been made an object of derisive laughter and ridicule (v. 14). As the prophet describes his condition, he concludes in a shout of despair that his strength/splendor and his hope are lost (v. 18). But sometimes hope can be found even in moments of extreme hopelessness.

3:21–39. A Ray of Hope. Hope flourishes when we recall the wonders of God's mercies in our past experiences with Him. Jeremiah remembered the compassions of the Lord (vv. 20–22; cf. Ex. 34:6–7). Because His boundless mercies and inexhaustible compassion are new every morning (Lam. 3:22–23), the prophet could wait for or hope in (Heb. *yakhal*) the Lord (v. 24). Even in our trials, the Lord continues to be our "portion" (v. 24). This is a probable reference to the time when the Israelites received their allotments, except for the priests, for God said to Aaron that He Himself was the portion (or allotted share) for them (Num. 18:20). Even though they were now without a homeland, God would remain with them (Ps. 73:26).

Trials can be transformed into something positive for those who wait for or hope in (Heb. *qawah*) the Lord (Lam. 3:25; cf. Rom. 8:28). He can turn sufferings and trials into gains (cf. Ps. 94:12–14). It is therefore useful for us to learn to trust the Lord in times of difficulty and silence, for there may yet be hope (Lam. 3:29). The prophet was filled with confidence, knowing that it is not God's nature (lit. "from His heart") to cause grief (vv. 31–33). Even when our troubles are due to sin (v. 39; cf. Job 2:10), God shows compassion (v. 32). This leads to a call for repentance.

3:40–47. Appeal to God's Mercy. In the midst of disaster, the prophet gave a call for the nation to examine itself and return to the Lord (vv. 40–41). It is only in Him that true refuge is found. In the absence of repentance, there was no divine forgiveness (v. 42). In the absence of forgiveness, the nation was faced with the disturbing anger of the Lord (vv. 43–47). He had forsaken them, and consequently He no longer listened to their concerns (v. 44). Enemies had overcome God's people (vv. 46–47).

3:48–66. Assurance of Vindication. Perhaps the voice here describing streams of tears like water is that of the prophet (v. 48). Those who do not rebel against the Lord may also experience pain—their struggles may not always be the result of personal sin. In such cases, like Jeremiah's, they bring their concerns to the Lord in prayer, seeking vindication (vv. 49–54). The prophet had been oppressed by his enemies, but he had not given up on the Lord. He could testify that God was close to him and had told him not to fear (v. 57). He confidently states that the Lord redeemed his life, thus vindicating him (v. 58). His enemies would receive what they deserved according to what they had done (v. 64), based on righteous judgment. He wanted the Lord to judge his case (v. 59) and to avenge his enemies for wronging him (vv. 60–66). It was not for him to avenge himself but for the Lord to do it with justice.

4:1–22

The Guilt of Zion's Leadership

Chapter 4, like chapter 2, is an eyewitness account of the contrast between Zion's former glory and present condition (vv. 1–10). The content of the two chapters is very similar although chapter 4 reiterates the Lord's part in the city's demise and emphasizes the effect of the ruin on the various classes of people rather than on the city itself. The blame is primarily laid at the feet of the religious leaders, who failed in their duties and thus became part of the problem (vv. 11–20). The chapter ends on a note of hope for the suffering people (vv. 21–22).

4:1–10. Then and Now—Contrast. The first two verses summarize the contents of the whole chapter. The fine gold referred to in v. 1 is clearly a metaphor for the precious children of Zion (v. 2), who are regarded as clay pots. The reference to the sacred stones of the sanctuary scattered all over the city points to the total destruction of the temple. The dwellers of the city had become worse than animals, neglecting their own infants (vv. 3–4). The rich were to be found among the ashes (v. 5), a symbol of humiliation and worthlessness (Gen. 18:27; Is. 44:20). The fate of the city was severer than that of Sodom due to the city's lingering condition, with no hand of compassion to help her (Lam. 4:6; cf. 1:7). The use of the term *nezireah* and its meaning here have puzzled scholars and elicited various translations: "Nazarites," "princes," "dignitaries," or "consecrated ones." It could refer to a select group who took a vow of self-discipline, such as abstaining from wine and contact with the dead—the "Nazarites" (Num. 6:2–8). It could also be a picture of an elite who was the epitome of leadership, health, and beauty, like Joseph, who was said to be a *nazir* of his brothers (Deut. 33:16). The situation had become so desperate that self-preservation had become everyone's sole focus, even if this meant cooking their own children (Lam. 4:10; cf. 2:20).

4:11–20. The Failure of Religious Leaders. Verses 11–13 summarize what had happened and why. The fall of Jerusalem was unanticipated and came as a surprise to all (v. 12). Not only was the city strategically located between two converging valleys, but it was also the holy place of the Most High (Ps. 46:4). The Assyrian army had surrounded the city in 701 B.C. but was destroyed in the night by an angel (2 Kin. 19:35). The current collapse was due to internal weakness, the sins and iniquities of those who were appointed to ensure obedience to the covenant but who had become a part of the problem and the cause of the siege. This fact is emphasized in all the poems (Lam. 1:8; 2:14; 3:42; 4:13; 5:7). The priests, the prophets, and the elders had become unclean. When the people saw them, instead of showing respect, they shouted at them to go away because they were unclean (4:13–16). In vain, the people had worn out their eyes looking for help from Egypt (v. 17; cf. Jer. 37:5–10). The siege became increasingly oppressive (Lam. 4:18–19), and King Zedekiah—"the breath in [their] nostrils"—fled but was caught by the Babylonians (v. 20; cf. Jer. 39:4–7). The king is also identified as the anointed of the Lord, and the nation had felt safe under his shadow (Lam. 4:20; cf. Ps. 17:8). In spite of Zedekiah's resistance to the message, Jeremiah still considered him to be the appointed leader.

4:21–22. Enemies Warned against Gloating. The book of Obadiah points out how the Edomites, descendants of Esau, took advantage of the chaos following the collapse of Jerusalem. Using irony, Jeremiah commanded them to rejoice while they could (v. 21), for the cup, a symbol of punishment and approaching death (cf. Is. 51:17; Jer. 25:15; Obad. 1:16; Mark 14:36), would ultimately be passed on to them. A note of hope is introduced, for the sin of Zion would ultimately be pardoned, and its punishment would end (cf. Is. 40:2).

5:1–22

Hope for the Future

This last chapter differs from the others. It is not an acrostic, but it has twenty-two lines, the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet. It is written in the form of a prayer, beginning with a review of the situation in Jerusalem (vv. 1–14) and climaxing in a plea to the Lord for help (vv. 15–22).

5:1–14. Orphans in Their Own Land. The poet calls on the Lord to remember His people (v. 1). Biblical "remembering" is not limited to the recollection of facts but includes acting upon that remembering (cf. Gen. 8:1; Ex. 2:24ff.). The emphasis is on the people's reversal of fortune. God's promised blessings—for example, land, houses, water (Deut. 6:10–11)—had been overturned (Lam. 5:2–4). The people were as defenseless as orphans and widows (v. 3). Their economy was controlled by foreigners (v. 4). Their status as God's special people had been removed, so there was no rest for them (v. 5), and their investment in alliances with Egypt and Assyria had proven futile (v. 6; cf. Hos. 2:5). The sins of the fathers were now being visited on their children (v. 7; cf. Jer. 3:25). Instead of being "the head and not the tail," as God had wanted them to be (Deut. 28:13), they were now being ruled over by servants or slaves (Lam. 5:8; cf. Prov. 30:21–22), and their young men (lit. "choice men") were grinding at the millstones, a work commonly done by women or slaves (cf. Judg. 16:21; Is. 47:2). Their religious and social life had been turned upside down (Lam. 5:12–14).

5:15–18. Admission of Guilt. Jeremiah was overwhelmed when he realized that the destruction of Jerusalem, which could have been avoided, was the result of the people's defiance of God's covenant. He exclaimed, "Woe to us, for we have sinned" (v. 16). He identified himself with his people and prayed on their behalf. He again fearlessly declared that the present deplorable condition of Jerusalem was a result of the sinful condition of the people. They were living in fear—their hearts were faint and they were slowly dying—their eyes were growing dim (dark; v. 17). The desolation of Zion was extremely depressing.

5:19–22. Plea for Restoration. The book opens with a cry of desperation but concludes with an assurance based on the central concept of the book—the Lord is good to those who wait and hope for Him (3:25). The experience of the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple would have raised questions about divine sovereignty and effectiveness. It is therefore appropriate for the book to end with an emphasis on the everlastingness of God. Everything may collapse, but God will remain King forever (v. 19). He is the final and supreme refuge. His throne is unshakable, and His kingdom will not be replaced by any other kingdom (cf. Dan 7:27). It is to this God that Jeremiah turned as the source of hope and restoration. Though it appeared that God had forgotten His people, the prophet nevertheless requested that He reestablish them (Lam. 5:21). This is about the divine willingness and initiative in restoring repentant sinners. The miracle of grace consists in the fact that it does for us what we cannot do for ourselves. The book closes in anticipation of the full renewal of God's people. Though it ends in the context of a desolating experience that appears to be the result of God's absence, hope remains that God's anger will be set aside and His people renewed (vv. 21–22). For those who accept God's offer of salvation through Christ, God's wrath has been removed: "God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess. 5:9). The full realization of this salvation continues to be the hope of His people.

EZEKIEL

Title and Authorship. The title, "Ezekiel," appropriately designates the person and prophetic voice of the book. Ezekiel (Heb. *yekhezqe'l*, "may God strengthen") was a priest and prophet taken from Judah into exile by the Babylonians in 597 B.C. Mentioned twice in the book (1:3; 24:24), his name indicates encouragement and consolation. The book's emphasis on purity and holiness points to Ezekiel's priestly, Zadokite lineage (1:3; 40:46; 43:19; 44:15; 48:11). He writes of the Jerusalem temple with a depth of familiarity, which indicates his access to it by vocation. As a deeply devoted married man (24:15–16), he conveys the messages of Israel's husband, Yahweh, with tenderness while also bearing the message that lambasted the people's fornicating ways with a holy zeal.

The book of Ezekiel is part of the section of the OT known as the Major Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel) and points to a time period covering more than two decades (ca. 592–571 B.C.). Several factors, which occur throughout the book, point to single authorship: (1) its consistency of thought, literary genres, ritual perspective and language, and uniform formulaic markers; (2) a clearly identifiable movement from judgment to restoration; (3) autobiographical accounts; and (4) a standardized usage of dates. Ezekiel's messages mostly address "Israel" (e.g., 2:3; 3:1–9; 4:3; 8:9–12), though at the time of his call, the Northern Kingdom of Israel had already been taken into Exile. In this book, the preferential usage of the term "Israel" instead of "Judah" probably reflects the prevalence of the term since the time of Hezekiah's reign. Hezekiah saw himself as the king of both Israel and Judah. The remnant of the Northern Kingdom had fled south to Judah after the Assyrians destroyed it. The usage of the term "Israel" also points to the promised reunification for Israel and Judah under the Davidic Shepherd (e.g., 37:18–28).

Date. Ezekiel prophesied during the reign of kings Jeconiah (Jehoiachin, 598–597 B.C.; 1 Chr. 3:16; Esth. 2:6; Jer. 24:1; 27:20; 28:4; 29:2) and Mattaniah (Zedekiah, 597–586 B.C.; 2 Kin. 24:17–20) from the Southern Kingdom of Judah (Ezek. 1:2–3). Jehoiachin, a young man of eighteen years, was brought to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar after reigning for only three months (2 Kin. 24:8–17; 2 Chr. 36:9–10). His uncle, Mattaniah, was installed as a puppet ruler until Israel's final deportation in 586 B.C. The dating outline of the book uses Jehoiachin's and Ezekiel's exile (Ezek. 40:1) as its reference point. Ezekiel's ministry is last dated in the twenty-seventh year after his deportation (29:17; ca. 570 B.C.). In addition, this dating plan serves a larger theological purpose: prophecies in the book serve to verify Ezekiel's prophetic calling (cf. 2:5; Deut. 18:22) as well as significant events in Israel's history. The book itself covers the period before and after the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.

Backgrounds. God secured a place for His people at the crossroads of the nations. The temple was built for all nations to come to hear about Him and to worship Him as the true God. He had promised that after cutting off David's enemies, God would first establish a royal dynasty under Himself as Israel's true King and under the human king as His son; after that there would be an eternal Davidic kingdom under the Messiah, God's Son in a unique sense (2 Sam. 7; cf. Ps. 89; Matt. 21:9; Luke 1:27; Rom. 1:3). After the Northern Kingdom of Israel apostatized and was taken into exile to Assyria, Judah was the sole witness to God's glory and promises (722 B.C.; 2 Kin. 17). God graciously gave more than a century for Judah to fulfill His divine mission. However, by the time of the first Babylonian invasion (Dan. 1:1), Judah had also lost its way.

From the time of King Manasseh of Judah (ca. 697–643 B.C.; 2 Kin. 21:1–18), Israel continued to stumble along, so God sent a succession of prophets (Zephaniah, Jeremiah, Nahum, and Habakkuk) with strong messages of hope to warn Judah of its impending judgment if it did not repent and submit to God's plan. The messages of faithfulness to God, rejection of idolatry, and biblical social justice (i.e., feeding the poor, caring for widows and orphans, and dealing honestly in business matters) were God's means of showing grace and mercy by providing for and protecting the vulnerable. Sadly, the rich and powerful used God's blessings to enrich and comfort themselves (Is. 5:11–12; Amos 6:4–6). They engaged in unauthorized political alliances that compromised cultural and worship customs (Is. 30:1–5; 31:1–3; Amos 3:13–15) and engaged in dishonest business practices (Is. 5:8–10; Mic. 6:11–16). Finally, they rebelled against God's messages (Mic. 2:6; 3:11–12). Ezekiel began his ministry alongside other prophets serving the exiled community in Babylon (Daniel) as well as those who remained in Israel (Jeremiah). By the time Ezekiel was called to the prophetic ministry, Jeremiah had been laboring for God's people for over three decades (Jer. 1:1–3) and they were in the process of reaping their final harvest of rebellion. Ezekiel's message, like those of the prophets before him, focuses on the religious leaders and their failure to fulfill God's plan. Their roles encompassed the administration of a godly society as a witness to the nations: (1) the prophet would proclaim God's messages of justice and righteousness; (2) the priest would mediate God's plan for forgiveness, purity, and worship; and (3) the Davidic king would administer God's ethic of justice and righteousness in Israel and oversee diplomatic overtures to the nations. Israel's godly society collapsed when the leaders thwarted God's organizational structure through wickedness and rebellion (Ezek. 7:26–27; 12:1—14:23). Against the background of Israel's failure and Assyria's ensuing demise by the late seventh century (626 B.C.; Is. 14:15–27), Babylon emerged as the major power in the ancient Near East.

During Ezekiel's prophetic career of over twenty years, Babylon was his point of reference, both geographically and politically (Ezek. 1:1). His vision of the Jerusalem temple served as God's point of reference for judgment, but Babylon served as the place where Ezekiel carried out his prophetic calling. During Ezekiel's captivity, Babylon's control over the region of Syria-Palestine was secure. The tendency to depend on Egypt for military help against Babylon (Is. 30–31) finally proved unfruitful to Judah (2 Kin. 24:7).

There are probably two reasons why Ezekiel does not use the reign of Zedekiah (597–586 B.C.) as a date marker. First, Zedekiah was a puppet king placed on the throne by Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kin. 24:17). Second, Ezekiel's exile was connected with Jehoiachin's, so he used his experience as a reference point for the book as he associated himself with his fellow exiles. Jehoiachin's surrender and exile included the elite in Judah: the royal court, chief persons, military elite, craftspersons, and artisans (2 Kin. 24:14–16). Babylon often used this policy of removal to weaken the political and economic backbone of a nation in order to ensure that it would lack the potential for an organized revolt. The fact that many of the exiles were of the powerful and elite class of Judah is crucial to understanding God's command to Ezekiel to not fear their faces and words (Ezek. 2:6–7).

Theology and Purpose. The main character in the book of Ezekiel is the Lord, and consequently the theology of the book is developed around His words and actions. We will explore some of the concepts associated with Him.

1. Yahweh, the Lord of Glory. God's name, His character and reputation, plays a significant role in the book. The phrase "I am the Lord" appears more than one hundred times in various contexts throughout the book. Israel, as well as other nations, needed to know the true God and understand His gracious and holy ways (20:9, 14, 22; 36:20–23). These statements underpin Yahweh's sovereignty and require that humans worship Him. His character would be vindicated in the face of rampant idolatry inside and outside of Israel. God's abhorrence of idol worship stems from proud humans who ascribe glory and honor to the work of their hands rather than evincing a reverential awe for the Creator and Lord of life (6:4–13; 8:10; 14:3–7; 18:6–15; 20:7–39; 22:3, 4; 44:10–12). The glory of Yahweh was to be the central focus of Ezekiel's ministry. His condemnation of sin, portrayal of history, and messages of hope were to be understood as the outworking of God's glory. In the opening visions of the book, we find that prior to the destruction of Jerusalem, the glory of the Lord departed to Babylon (10:18–19; 11:16). In the closing visions, however, we see the return of the glory of the Lord to the temple (43:2–5). As it were, the Lord voluntarily exiled Himself and followed His people to Babylon; there He would comfort them and cause them to return to their "own land" (37:21).

2. Yahweh, the Lord of History. Ezekiel's considerable interest in the history of God's unfolding plan is expressed in the careful dating of his prophecies and in his outline of Israel's history and future (1:1–2; 3:16; 8:1; 20:1; 24:1;

26:1; 29:1, 17; 30:20; 31:1; 32:1, 17; 33:21; 40:1). Ezekiel frames three major historical reviews in the context of a marriage covenant: chapter 16 utilizes the metaphor of a bride, chapter 20 traces the history of Israel from the Exodus to the Exile, and chapter 23 utilizes the metaphor of unfaithful sisters that parallels chapter 16. History in Ezekiel is more than a cause-and-effect sequence of events. It is the unfolding of the sovereignty of God revealed in two important ways. First, through a messianic hope announcing the coming of a Shepherd-King, God would establish a messianic-centered community. Second, in this account of history God reveals His sovereignty through His promise to return to dwell in His temple. Ezekiel portrays the presence of God in His temple as central to Israel's hope (Ex. 33:15). In the context of a disaster, the Lord was ready to create a new hope for them.

3. Yahweh, the Judge of the Wicked and Vindicator of the Righteous. God's holiness demands justice against iniquity. Hence, the Babylonian Exile was the consequence of Israel's idolatry. Israel, as God's elect, had a high and holy mission to represent God's character of grace through just and righteous lives. They would proclaim His name and reputation to the nations through their ethical values, sanctuary system, prophetic utterances, praise and worship, and covenant faithfulness. However, Israel failed on all fronts, and God characterized them as a "rebellious house" (Ezek. 2:5–8; 3:9, 26; 12:2, 9; 17:12; 24:3; 44:6), indicating a tenacious unwillingness to yield to His authority. They often took up the cultic practices of their pagan neighbors (2 Kin. 21:10–18; 2 Chr. 28:1–4; Jer. 10:1–16). Daring to speak in the name of God, false prophets gave false messages (Jer. 28:1–17) while attempting to quench the voice of the true prophets (Amos 2:12; 7:10–13; Mic. 2:6). The people did not speak about trust in God's power to deliver, but they put their trust in foreign nations (2 Chr. 28:16; Is. 30:1–5). Finally, not only did the kings enter into unauthorized covenants and alliances with foreign rulers (2 Kin. 16:5–20; Jer. 37:1–10), but most of them also engaged in pagan practices (1 Kin. 11:1–8; 16:29–34) and thus encouraged the people to apostatize.

4. Prophecy and Covenant. Israel's creation, Exodus, election, and covenant are narrated in the Pentateuch and provide the background for many of the prophets' criticisms of the people. The history of the monarchy, as described in Samuel and Kings, gives the background for the ultimate failure of the people to live out God's unfolding covenant of grace. Prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah provide chronological developments of the demise of both Israel and Judah, giving details that are not addressed in Ezekiel's book. Finally, the prophet Daniel, Ezekiel's contemporary, who also was in Babylon, provides a message that addresses the universal, apocalyptic perspective whose fulfillment reaches even to our days. Ezekiel mainly addresses the more local and immediate issues of Israel's restoration to the land of Canaan and points to the Messiah's mission. The book of Ezekiel plays a special role in the Christian's understanding of the book of Revelation, as the latter uses much of Ezekiel's imagery, themes, and language. Close attention to these parallels shows the consistency of God's plan and illustrates how the local situation of Judah in the sixth century B.C. can illuminate our understanding of the cosmic conflict in Scripture's last book.

5. Personal Application. We are remiss if we read Ezekiel simply as a historical record of the sins of Israel and Judah and God's pleas and punishments. The problems of Ezekiel's time are the problems of our time. We have the hindsight to look back and see the consequences of idolatrous hearts, stubbornness, and vile practices. The hope of Ezekiel's time is the hope of our time as well. For Israel, the ministry of reconciliation meted out through the earthly sanctuary was central to their relationship with God. For the church, the ministry of reconciliation is meted out through the cross and Christ's high priestly ministry in the heavenly sanctuary. In the book of Ezekiel, the church can see and learn what the book of Revelation describes and affirms—the throne room, God's heavenly sanctuary, as the vehicle through which hope and joyous worship are found (Rev. 4–5). As we listen in on Ezekiel, it behooves us to sit with the prophet and hear God's Word, to sit with the exiles and hear God's rebuke, and to sit in a foreign land and hear about a better one where the God of righteousness and purity reigns.

Literary Features. Ezekiel has been noted for its depth of descriptive imagery and the evocative prophetic indictments couched in language familiar to Israel from the Torah. This language signals Israel's unfaithfulness to God's covenant with the resulting curses uttered through a variety of prophetic speech patterns. Its wide array of depicted visions, symbolic acts, parables, and prophecies are intermingled with historical date markers, personal incidents, and prophecies.

Structure. The general survey of the book outlines a three-part structure: chapters 1–24, before Jerusalem falls; chapters 25–32, an indictment of the nations; and chapters 33–48, after Jerusalem falls. A more detailed study has revealed an intricate chiastic structure:

A God comes to His defiled temple to investigate and then departs (1–11)
  B Oracles of judgment for Israel (12–23)
    C Jerusalem besieged (24)
      D Oracles against the nations (25—28:10)
        E Judgment on the fallen cherub (28:11–19)
      D′ Oracles against the nations (28:20—32:32)
    C′ Jerusalem falls (33)
  B′ Oracles of restoration for the restored people (34–39)
A′ God comes to His restored temple to dwell with His people (40–48)

The structural emphasis of this chiasm brings into focus two complementary themes: (1) Yahweh, the Lord of history; and (2) the cosmic conflict motif (i.e., judgment on the fallen cherub). First, the storyline of the book moves historically from disaster (chaps. 4–7), judgment against Israel (chaps. 8–11), and alienation (chaps. 12–24) to joy, restoration, and communion (chaps. 34–48). The prediction of Jerusalem's Exile and final destruction in 586 B.C. is an indication of God's sovereignty over history. The dating system of the book can be broken up into three periods: (1) dates that focus on the reasons leading up to judgment and Exile (1:1; 8:1; 20:1); (2) dates that focus on the immediate circumstances of the judgment and Exile in international terms (24:1; 26:1; 29:1, 17; 30:20; 31:1; 32:1, 17; 33:21); and (3) one date concerning the postexilic plan of God for His restored people, their worship, and their land. Second, the battle between Yahweh (God's covenant name) and the false gods of the nations, through whom the anointed cherub Lucifer is working, is pervasive not only in international militaristic terms but also, as chapters 8–11 detail, in Israel's worship life and daily living.

Within the book there are smaller groupings by themes: prophecies of judgment through sign-acts (chaps. 4–5); judgment oracles against Israel (chaps. 6–7); parables of reproof and judgment (chaps. 15–17); judgment oracles against outside nations (chaps. 25–28); prophecies of a restored temple (chaps. 40–43); prophecies of restored worship (chaps. 44–46); and prophecies of a restored land (chaps. 47–48).

Literary Forms. As a prophet and trained priest, Ezekiel expresses God's message through various literary genres, prophetic formulas, and ritual expressions characteristic of his professions. The patterns of some of Ezekiel's speeches indicate that they were public proclamations that at some point were embedded into a structured literary book. A comparison of Ezekiel with the prophetic writings and speeches of the historical books (Judges through 2 Kings) and with the legal and cultic language of the Pentateuch (Genesis–Deuteronomy) reveals a similarity of literary patterns intended to guide the reader in understanding the biblical message more clearly. These literary patterns include genres, prophetic formulas, and acted parables. Among the literary genres we find:

- Narrative
- Call Narrative (Ezek. 1–3)
- Divine Abandonment and Return (8–11; 40–48)
- Poetry
- Oracles (28; 29:1–5; 31:1–9)
- Laments (19; 26:15–18; 27; 30; 32:1–21)
- Riddles, parables, allegories; for example, the parable of the vine and allegories of an eagle and cedars, a lion, and a boiling pot (15; 17; 19; 23; 24; 27).

Among the prophetic formulas we find:

- Judgment Oracles—a prophecy of calamity; a speech on behalf of God to announce disaster to individuals, groups, or nations.
- Salvation/Restoration Oracles—a prophecy of salvation; a speech on behalf of God that reverses a judgment to individuals, groups, or nations.
- Recognition Formula—a formula used to express the purpose of God's action. The main elements (with minor variations) are: (1) "and you/they shall know," (2) "that I am Yahweh," and sometimes (3) "when I. . . ." This formula expresses God's sovereignty, revelatory purposes, and vindication of His reputation whether Israel suffered or prospered. This paradigm was first used in Exodus (Ex. 6:7; 7:5, 17; 14:4, 18; 16:12; 29:46).
- Revelation Formula—a formula used to identify how God communicates with His messenger to reveal Himself to the people. Two basic forms are "the hand of the Lord was upon me" and "the word of the Lord came to me, saying."

Among the prophet's acted-out object lessons or prophetic signs are the following:

- Ezekiel acting out the siege and destruction of Jerusalem (Ezek. 4:1—5:17).
- Ezekiel acting out the Exile (12:1–20).
- Ezekiel being commanded not to mourn his wife as a sign of Israel's response to exile (24:15–27).
- Ezekiel using sticks to symbolize the reunification of Israel (37:15–28).

COMMENTARY

1:1—3:27

VISIONS OF GOD AND EZEKIEL'S CALL

Chapters 1–3 form a unit, an introductory collection of three visionary experiences that expose readers to the grandeur and indescribable glory of God and His mission for His servant (1:1—3:11; 3:12–21, 22–27). Each instance includes the same elements and similar or exact language. The use of similar language holds this unit together: smaller plot vignettes can be recognized by the repeated phrase "son of man" (2:1, 3, 6, 8; 3:1, 3, 4, 10, 17, 25), the characterization of Israel as rebellious (2:5, 6, 7; 3:9, 26, 27), and stylistic features such as small literary chiasms (cf. 2:6; 3:1) and parallel clauses (2:5, 7; 3:11, 27) seen best in the original Hebrew.

God's revelation, call, and commission to Ezekiel manifested His purpose for His people and the world. Judgment on Israel and the nations would be an antidote to the injustice and anguish in a world bent on living apart from God and His creation design. In that vein, Ezekiel saw God coming from the north, from where judgment typically came in the form of nations hostile to Israel (26:7; Is. 41:25; Jer. 4:6; see "God's Judgment in the Prophets," p. 981).

Ezekiel's first visionary experience sets forth the context of the book and the issues its messages express—judgment intended to turn the hearts of the rebellious and hold the unrepentant accountable. God called Ezekiel to a restorative mission that would possibly bear little fruit and would inevitably stir up animosity and dissension among the rebellious. Ezekiel's response to God's glory and His intention to pierce the hardened and disobedient hearts of His people exudes both awe and despondency. In Ezekiel's book there is a record of God having the first and the last word with this prophet, encouraging him as He put His words in the prophet's mouth and moved him from place to place. Like God's other prophets, Ezekiel was responsible for holding the people (especially the leaders) accountable for their sins, calling them to return to God in covenant faithfulness. It is crucial to understand Ezekiel's passiveness in the visionary experiences. He was picked up, transported, shown what God wanted him to see, and given the interpretation of the symbols. The book is entirely God's word to His people through Ezekiel (e.g., 2:3–5). It is noteworthy how often it is said that "the word of the Lord came" to Ezekiel (e.g., 1:3; 20:45; 30:1; 38:1). It was not his word, but the Lord's.

1:1–3

Setting, Context, and Prophetic Experience

Several years before the Babylonians' final breach of the walls of Jerusalem (2 Kin. 25:2–4) in Ezekiel's thirtieth year (Ezek. 1:1), which was the fifth year of King Jehoiachin's exile (v. 2; 592 B.C.), Ezekiel was in the strange land of Babylon by the River Kebar (alternatively spelled as Chebar), known for the large manors and date palm groves located along its course. This "thirtieth year" most likely refers to Ezekiel's age, which indicates that he was born around the year in which the book of the law was discovered in the temple (622 B.C.; 2 Kin. 22:8–20). His upbringing was filled with experiences of reformation and focused attention on the Word of God. Ezekiel and the other exiles, however, were not to enjoy the accoutrements of prosperity and blessing found in the Torah (cf. Deut. 6:10–11). They were most likely reduced to forced labor for irrigation canals in Babylon. They lived in strange settlements, not as guests but as the displaced covenant people of God (Deut. 28:45–68). Yet, what seemed catastrophic for the people was ultimately a sign of hope because the land was dormant and in a process of restoration until it was ready to receive back a purified people (Ezek. 36:24–28; Lev. 26:34; 2 Chr. 36:21). Ezekiel, in harmony with earlier prophets, warned of this impending judgment (Is. 39:6–7; Mic. 3:9–12; 4:10).

The introduction sets forth the main characters and setting of the book. The prophet was among the exiled people (Ezek. 1:1), which indicates he probably belonged to the upper class: the elite, the educated, and those skilled in various professions who were typically taken into exile (2 Kin. 24:14–16). This was the second wave of exiles taken to Babylon. The prophet Daniel was among the first wave taken in 605 B.C., during the reign of Jehoiakim, the father of Jehoiachin, when Nebuchadnezzar attacked Jerusalem and took the royal class hostage to Babylon (2 Chr. 36:6; Dan. 1:1). In Israel, God's covenant was a corporate relationship as much as it was individual. Not all of Israel individually rebelled against God, but as a nation, they failed to live up to His plan and turned their backs on Him (see Ezek. 18). Ezekiel was with them in the second deportation, and he had experienced the grueling and dehumanizing march of the faithless. It took Ezekiel and the caravan with which he was traveling many months to traverse the nearly 900 miles (1,448 km) from Jerusalem to Babylon. An army could have traveled much faster, but Ezekiel's fellow exiles probably included hungry and tired children and elderly people. This protracted march invited reflection.

When he was old enough to take up his priestly responsibilities (Num. 4:3, 23, 30), his prospects seemed hopeless outside of the temple in Jerusalem. Five years after the decimation of the Davidic kingship of Jehoiachin and the non-start of his priestly ministration, Ezekiel received his prophetic call. Though God gave a message of encouragement through the prophet Jeremiah (Jer. 29:4–7), the outlook of a true worship experience seemed a faint pipe dream (Ps. 137:1–6). In this hopeless situation, from what was basically the beginning of a seventy-year waiting period (Jer. 29:10), God's call of Ezekiel involved both hope and judgment. It was from the throne of the universe that he received his commission to serve as a mouthpiece to correct and encourage his people. His message for them embraced a universal hope, the glory of God breaking out of the confines of geographical limitations.

Ezekiel knew about the glory of God appearing after the ordination of the Aaronic priests, and he saw similar elements as they appeared in his commission. The Levitical ordination finished with a sign of divine acceptance and fitness for priestly mediation in the proper worship of God (Lev. 9:6, 22–24). So God gave Ezekiel several indications of his divine ordination for the ministry of summoning the people to return to the true and proper worship of God (Ezek. 2–3). Ezekiel's response, the only acceptable one, was to fall down in reverential awe. In the Bible a theophany (i.e., an appearance of God) usually contains portents of hope (Num. 20:6–9; 2 Chr. 7:1–3), judgment (Num. 14:10–12; 16:19–50), or both. Here the phrase "the heavens were opened" (Ezek. 1:1), as used elsewhere in Scripture, points both to the threat of judgment and the hope of re-creation according to God's grace (Gen. 7:11; cf. Is. 24:18). The word of the Lord to Ezekiel in prophetic vision was signified by God's hand upon him (Ezek. 1:3; cf. 3:14, 22; 8:1; 37:1; 40:1), which could terrify in judgment (Ex. 9:3; Deut. 2:15; Josh. 22:31) or sustain, direct, and encourage the fulfillment of God's salvific plan (1 Kin. 18:46; Acts 11:21). Ezekiel's recounting of this dual purpose draws from the enduring revelations of God and indicates that the same God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and Israel was with him in exile.

1:4–28

Glory of the Lord Approaches

This section of Ezekiel's visionary experience focuses on three interconnected entities: the four living beings (vv. 5–14); the wheels (vv. 15–21); and the dais, the throne above, and God Himself (vv. 22–27).

In reverential awe, Ezekiel moves cautiously to his description of God. First, he describes a pyrotechnic storm cloud (v. 4; cf. Ex. 19:16; Job 38:1; Pss. 77:18; 107:25; 148:8) that he saw coming from the north, out of which came four living creatures. The prophetic books frequently utilize animal imagery to depict certain aspects commonly understood in historical and cultural contexts (cf. Dan. 7:1–8; 8:1–8). Ezekiel's description of these creatures is similar to ancient Near Eastern images of protectors of a deity (e.g., griffins in Persia and Greece, the sphinx in Egypt, winged bulls in Mesopotamia). His description is of a dynamic, gleaming, portable, Spirit-driven team of throne protectors or bearers. The major distinction in the Hebrew Bible is that they are not attached to mythological stories, but they appear in judgment scenes and the construction of the sanctuary as real entities (Ex. 25:17–22; 1 Kin. 6:15–30). The language and imagery is highly symbolic. The moveable chariot-throne would serve two purposes for the exiled community and for those in Jerusalem. First, it would affirm God as being not another deity confined to a temple but the Sovereign Lord. Second, it would acknowledge that the glory of the Holy One would not reside in a temple filled with abominable practices and competing idols.

Ezekiel was so overwhelmed by the awesome sight that it was not until fourteen months later that he would write a clear explanation of the powerful beings he saw and their relation to the work of God (Ezek. 10:3, 20). In Ezekiel's account, these angelic beings or cherubim are linked with God as guardian figures (28:14, 16; cf. Gen. 3:24). The Apostle John picks up on much of Ezekiel's language and description: (1) the fourfold description of the faces of a human, a lion, an ox, and an eagle (Ezek. 1:10; Rev. 4:6–8); (2) the glory throne with a rainbow over it (Ezek. 1:28; Rev. 4:2–3); (3) the brilliant and splendid appearance of God in luminous colors (Rev. 4:3); and (4) the terrifying magnificence of God's glory (Ezek. 1:26–27; Rev. 4:5; cf. Ex. 19:16). The significance of these beings in Scripture and in the ancient world comes from their association with divine majesty (the human face or image, Gen. 1:26–28; Ps. 8), royalty and ferocity (the lion, Ps. 7:2; Prov. 28:1; 30:30; Amos 3:8), speed and power (the eagle, 2 Sam. 1:23; Is. 40:31; Jer. 4:13), and strength and fertility (the ox, Deut. 33:17).

Ezekiel's account of the glory of the Lord (Ezek. 1:28) and the imagery of God as the Divine Warrior, a familiar concept in Israel's history (Deut. 33:26; Job 38:1; Pss. 18:7–14; 68:4; 104:3–4; Is. 19:1), are in harmony with the work God had come to do. Unfortunately, this time it would be not only against the enemies of His people but against His people as well. Ezekiel depicts the sound of the movement of God's throne in militaristic language. He uses language from after the Flood—God set His rainbow (lit. "bow," the same word used for the weapon—Gen. 9:13; cf. Ezek. 1:28) in the clouds as a sign of His promise. In Ezekiel's account, the God of judgment and the Lord of restoration are one and the same. Against the backdrop of a firmament, expanse, or vault (vv. 22–26; cf. Gen. 1:6–8; Ex. 24:9–10), Ezekiel can only speak in similes as he uses language from the Creation narrative. He saw something that looked like a throne and someone who looked like (Heb. *demut*; Gen. 1:26) a human being (Heb. *'adam*; Gen. 1:26), in appearance like gleaming metal, or a bonfire.

Ezekiel's descriptions of visions of God (Ezek. 1:1; 8:3; 40:2) portray an indescribable multimedia extravaganza that serves several purposes. What begins as a storm ends with the appearance of the throne of God front and center. Hence, the throne of God, His sovereignty, is central to understanding the book. The movement of the book reveals the glory of the Lord as a terror in judgment but ends as a source of hope to the people of God. Here Ezekiel writes concerning God as the ruler of the world responsible for Israel's exile—reassuring realities to him. Despite current circumstances, God promised that their exile would be for a limited period (Jer. 25:11; 29:10), that He would judge Babylon, and that Israel would go free (Is. 14:4, 22; 44:24—45:13; Jer. 28:4). Additionally, the glory of God reveals the serious nature of Israel's covenant breach. In times past, God had come to His people through His prophets to address their sins and rebellions. Now He would come to His sanctuary to investigate and render judgment (Ezek. 8–11).

2:1–10

God Calls and Prepares Ezekiel

Transitioning from observation to dialogue, Ezekiel records the divinely empowering call for him to stand on his feet and listen. The infusion of God's Spirit points to the life-giving potency of God's presence (3:24; 37:14; cf. Gen. 1:2–3). The account here of Ezekiel's call follows the familiar pattern of God sending an emissary for a special mission (Ezek. 2:3). In other texts, God is the subject of the "sending" in contexts of judgment (Ex. 9:14; Jer. 25:9, 15–16, 27; 29:17), protection (Ex. 23:20), and restoration (Mal. 3:1–2). The central themes of hope and judgment come to light as Ezekiel's ministry would be dominated by the leading of the Spirit. This emphasis serves to highlight the distinction between Ezekiel and false prophets (Ezek. 13:8–16). He was commanded to utter what he had first experienced. His physical weakness paralleled the spiritual weakness of the people and required the same remedy: the necessity for God's Spirit to empower the people to stand faithfully in the light of His presence and hear in obedient submission (chap. 37).

In Ezekiel's call and commission, God conferred His authoritative stamp on his ministry, the content of the message appearing afterward (2:4; 3:27). The focus is on the divine word and its efficacy (2:1–2, 7–8). Forty-nine times Ezekiel uses the announcement "The word of the LORD came to me" to confirm the divine origin of his message and the basis of judgment that stemmed from a divine assessment of the people's sins as well as those of their ancestors (v. 3). The overwhelming designation of the people of Israel in the book is that they were rebellious. The Hebrew Bible uses the noun "rebellion" (Heb. *meri*) twenty-four times; sixteen of those are used by Ezekiel to indicate a central problem in Israel. God's description of Israel's rebellious mind and actions appears in various ways. Their actions (v. 3; "they rebelled," "they broke faith with") and their disposition, literally described as "hard-faced" and "strong of heart" (i.e., obstinate or impudent and stubborn; v. 4), are structurally central and the reason for God sending Ezekiel. God said:

- **A** I am sending you to the children of Israel (v. 3a)
  - **B** They are a rebellious house/people who rebelled against God (v. 3b)
  - **B′** They are impudent/obstinate and stubborn children (v. 4a)
- **A′** I am sending you to them (v. 4b)

The irony is profound: the rebellious people were exiled because they had been rebellious, but instead of surrendering to God, they continued on their present course. Verses 5–7 sharpen the focus on the obstinate, hostile reaction and dangerously aggressive response to the divine message.

- **A** Ezekiel would convey God's messages whether they listened or not (v. 5)
  - **B** He was not to be afraid of them or their words (v. 6a)
    - **C** Briers and thorns were around him and he lived among scorpions (v. 6b)
  - **B′** He was not to be afraid because of their words or presence (v. 6c)
- **A′** He would give God's messages regardless of whether they listened or not—the people were rebellious (v. 7)

The rebellious nature of the people "to this very day" (v. 3) is further developed in chapters 16 and 23. The validity of the message is grounded in the source of its authority; people would know that the Lord had sent a prophet. The fulfillment of the prophetic word implies that by delivering his message, Ezekiel demonstrated his commission, his reception of the divine instruction, and his mission as God's authorized messenger. God's command for Ezekiel to open his mouth and eat what God was giving him (v. 8) emphasized the source of the message as well as the problem with the people. Not only were they rebellious, but they also refused to take the medicine God offered for their healing: His word and its authority. And instead of consuming the humbling divine message of rebuke, the rebellious house in Jerusalem would eat their children (5:10; cf. Deut. 28:53–57).

3:1–11
God's Preparatory Commissioning and Empowerment

God was preparing Ezekiel for his prophetic ministry in two ways: through Ezekiel's consumption of the message (vv. 1–3) and through the divine strengthening for the negative response he would receive (vv. 4–11). The divine command to "Go!" (vv. 1, 4, 11) structures Ezekiel's commission. This command focuses on his reception of the message in the form of a scroll. As can be seen throughout the book, symbolic actions follow a similar pattern of an introductory formula (2:8), a symbol or sign-act (3:1–3), and a prophetic interpretation (vv. 4–11). The scroll is described as a symbol of the message of lamentation, mourning, and woe (2:10). The symbolic action of eating the scroll is interpreted as a prophecy; as the eaten scroll contains lamentations, mourning, and woe, so too the substance of and the responses to Ezekiel's prophecies and revelations consist of lamentations, mourning, and woe from God's people. Thus, the command to eat portrays a divine enablement to absorb the prophetic word in its most hopeful, doleful, and woeful tones (Jer. 15:16). The assertion that God fed Ezekiel the scroll, or caused him to eat it, evokes the passive reception on Ezekiel's part while emphasizing that his mission encompassed divine content and carried the force of God's will. By eating the scroll, the prophet appropriated the divine message and joyfully accepted the prophetic call.

Ezekiel was not commissioned to go to a foreign nation that might show signs of receptivity (cf. Ezra 1:2–4; Jon. 3:6–10) but to those who had the benefit of the revelation and grace of God for over a millennium. The repeated references to the recipients as the *bet yisra'el* ("house" or "people of Israel") emphasize the message as being for the covenant people (cf. Deut. 30:11–20) who had participated in a persistent, self-induced spiritual coma (Ezek. 3:1, 4, 5, 7, 11). Israel's response was foretold as an unwillingness to obey and submit to God's humbling tutelage under Nebuchadnezzar, for they were hardheaded and trusted in human devices (namely, Egyptian support) to solve their crises (cf. chap. 17; 2 Kin. 24:20; Jer. 27; Hab. 1:5–11). As a sensitive and caring soul (Ezek. 24:15–18), Ezekiel was prepared by God with the strongest resolve for a head-on collision (3:7–9; cf. Jer. 1:18). In the face of corporate rebellion, God empowered Ezekiel to neither fear the aged, the powerful, or the multitude, nor become emotionally dismayed or shattered (*khatat*, "dismayed," "terrified") by Israel's abominations, acceptance of false prophecies, or recalcitrant attitude toward the true prophetic message (cf. Ezek. 2:6).

3:12–21
The Spirit's Work and Warning

Up to this point, Ezekiel has described the movement of the living creatures and his own experience in harmony with the Spirit (1:17–21; 2:2). Consequently, he describes the two together as the account of his first visionary experience closes (3:12–15). Two powerful and overwhelming experiences converged as the Spirit lifted him up while he heard the departure of the living creatures lifting up the glory of Yahweh with the sound of a great earthquake (cf. 1:24; 3:13). The creatures' wings flapped together, creating a divine panoramic perspective as he was brought back to the Chebar River (1:1; 3:15) at the village *tel 'abib* ("mound of the flood," i.e., "mound of ruins"). Back to reality, bitter with an intense anger or "heat" of spirit, he sat appalled among his fellow exiles for seven days. His reality forced him to wrestle with the certainty that many, if not most, of those he dwelled among were just described to him as the callous rebels who would fight against God's message of rebuke. So the word of the Lord came to him again to explain his role as a watchman for the house of Israel (vv. 16–17; cf. Is. 21:6–8; Jer. 6:17–21).

Ezekiel's mission and message of rebuke and judgment were so vital to the restoration of Israel that God repeated it right before the message of the fall of the city reached them (Ezek. 33:1–9). The relation between God and the prophet is clearly stated: he would give God's warning to the people (3:17). He was the messenger of the Lord in charge of delivering a clear message; the prophet must deliver a dire warning of death, or he would be held accountable for the death of the wicked (vv. 18–19). The future of the people would be determined by their response to God's message of warning that was conveyed to them through the divine word. God described the status of His people before Him in moral terms: the "wicked" (vv. 18–19) and the "righteous" (vv. 20–21). The morally upright were the true covenant keepers (Deut. 6–9), and the morally bankrupt were the covenant breakers (Ezek. 16:8, 59–63; 17:13–19). The assent to outward religious ceremonies (cf. Is. 1:5–15), as outlined in the Pentateuch, was no evidence of true faithfulness. The main covenant breaches of the people were: (1) idolatry (Ezek. 6:13; 8:10; 14:3–7; 20:8–39; Deut. 12:29–32); (2) false leadership, including false prophecy (Ezek. 11:1–13; 14:1–11; 34; Deut. 13); (3) social injustice (Ezek. 16:49; 18:5–18; 22:29; Lev. 25:36, 37; Deut. 23:19, 20), and (4) religious syncretism (Ezek. 16:36; Deut. 17:17; 18:9–14). The divine declaration identifying the wicked and the righteous was made in the courtroom of God's heavenly sanctuary. We should keep in mind that its earthly counterpart was in a state of disrepute and impurity (Ezek. 8).

Ezekiel's own deliverance would be connected to the faithfulness he exercised toward his calling, but his culpability for neglecting his role would receive God's judgment (3:19, 21). As watchman, his vocation required wisdom and discernment to recognize danger and report it for the safety of God's people (2 Sam. 18:24; 2 Kin. 9:17). The danger ironically came from within their hearts. His proclamation of God's message was not to inspire the people to greatness but to call them to humility and surrender; they were to turn from wickedness and dwell in God's righteousness (Ezek. 3:19–20). Yesterday's good deeds provide no assurance for today's standing before God, and today's failures can be repented of as long as the doors of God's mercy are still open.

3:22–27
God's Sovereignty over Ezekiel's Ministry

In the final part of his prophetic calling, Ezekiel was taken in a visionary experience that ended where it began. Following what he saw (the glory of the Lord, 1:28), how he reacted (falling on his face, 1:28), and the work of the Spirit in him (infusing, standing, speaking; 2:2), Ezekiel was commanded to shut himself inside his house (3:24). It seems like an ironic order in light of God's earlier instruction to speak to His people (2:7; 3:4). However, Ezekiel was to be bound (v. 25) by God's sovereignty regarding how he should interact with the people. The glory of Yahweh was to be the central focus of Ezekiel's ministry. His condemnation of sin, his portrayal of history, and the messages of hope are to be understood as the outworking of God's glory. The muteness that was imposed should not be understood as Ezekiel's inability to talk. Indeed, he would speak after receiving his call (4:14; 5:5–17; 11:25). Because they were a rebellious people, the temptation for Ezekiel would be to rebuke or reprove/arbitrate (3:26) on behalf of the people. God would have none of it; a true assessment of their spiritual condition and its practical implications was necessary to prepare the people for true repentance. God would open his mouth to engage in a type of reconciliatory mission after Jerusalem's fall (33:22). Until then, only messages of God's judgment would come from Ezekiel's mouth.

4:1—7:27

JERUSALEM'S JUDGMENT

Chapters 4–7 form a unit that elaborates on Jerusalem's judgment and the devastation that would follow. This unit can be divided into two sections, namely, (1) sign-acts or acted-out object lessons (chap. 4, the siege of Jerusalem; chap. 5, Jerusalem's judgment and exile) and (2) judgment oracles (chap. 6, the mountains of Israel; chap. 7, the disaster soon to come). Chapters 5 and 6 begin with "son of man, take," while chapters 6 and 7 begin with God's word coming to Ezekiel, who is addressed as "son of man," and end with the same phrase affirming that they will know that God is Yahweh through His described judgments and actions. (On the concept of judgment, see "God's Judgment in the Prophets," p. 981.)

4:1—5:17

God's Sign-Acts

Chapter 4 records the beginning of God's prophetic show-and-tell (cf. Is. 20:2–3; Jer. 13:1–7; 19:1–5; 27:1–22; Hos. 1:1–9), followed by symbolic actions and a prophetic interpretation. Chapters 4 and 5 record symbolic actions: (1) building a model siege (Ezek. 4:1–3), (2) lying on his sides (vv. 4–8), (3) preparing a siege diet (vv. 9–17), and (4) dividing up hair (5:1–17). They follow a similar pattern: God addressing Ezekiel as "son of man" and then commanding him to engage in a sign-act.

4:1–3. Ezekiel's Street Ministry. Ezekiel was commanded to take a piece of clay and draw on it a picture of Jerusalem under siege, including the details of a siege with ramps, camps, and battering rams (cf. 2 Kin. 25:1; Jer. 39:1–7). The intricate detail indicates that the city was entrapped so that no one could get out and the besiegers would be able to intercept incoming supplies. The process would be laborious and psychologically overwhelming, yet efficient. God previously told the people that He would cut off all staples necessary for survival (Is. 3:1) and thus create a situation that implemented a covenant curse: the lack of bread (Lev. 26:26). Here in Ezekiel, it is God who proclaims through these acts that an army would besiege Jerusalem and break through the wall to take the city captive.

4:4–8. Prophetic Time and Judgment. Ezekiel has established the action to take place; now he describes the duration. He would lie on each of his sides in turn. God Himself makes clear His, not Babylon's, control of Israel's future. The time appears here as converted from years to days. The three hundred and ninety days for Israel and forty days for Judah (v. 5) are representative of the period of each kingdom's defection. The times generally refer to the starting period of the divided monarchy for Israel and the beginning of the downfall for Judah. Similarly, Numbers 14:34–35 reverses a day for a year and states that Israel would bear their punishment for forty years, a year for each day that the spies searched the land. Both texts associate one or more time periods with judgment for Israel's rebellion. Ezekiel's historical view of Israel in chapters 16 and 23 indicates that Israel's monarchical failure was one in a long line of apostasies. God commanded the prophet to roll up his sleeves for his prophetic work that, before the fall of Jerusalem, would be centered on judgment against Israel.

4:9–17. Unclean Food and People. Ezekiel's next symbolic actions involved bread, water, and dung. He was to bake bread using dung as fuel, to eat measured portions of it, and to drink measured portions of water, indicating the smallest of rations for the people of Israel during the siege. This command is connected to the previous one because God ordered Ezekiel to eat the rations during his symbolic action of lying on his side (v. 9). God described the experience of the Exile using the language of covenant curses. Ezekiel's rationed meal times (v. 10)

and small portions indicated that Israel would have to eat bread and drink water in rations because God would make food and drink scarce, breaking their supply of food (v. 16; 5:16; Lev. 26:26). Also, among the Gentile nations where God would drive them, Israel would eat food defiled by the use of human waste as fuel (Ezek. 4:10–11, 13; Josh. 22:19). Human waste was unclean and had to remain outside the camp of Israel (Deut. 23:15). Ezekiel's revulsion to engage in such culinary procedures harked back to his priestly training and faithfulness to ritual cleanliness and avoidance of forbidden food (Ezek. 4:14; cf. Lev. 5:2; 7:18, 24; 17:15; 22:8). Ironically, it highlights the condition of Israel, defiled and under a covenant curse. God allowed Ezekiel to substitute human waste with cow dung and then reiterated the prophecy of Jerusalem's coming starvation (Ezek. 4:15–17).

5:1–4. God's Barbershop and Israel's Trouble. In an increasingly doleful picture of a slowly emaciating, malnourished form, Ezekiel was commanded to shave his hair and his beard, divide it into three parts, and then burn one-third, repeatedly strike one-third, and scatter one-third. After the description of the trauma of a siege, the protracted act of shaving with a sword or sharp knife indicated that one-third of Jerusalem would be a smoldering heap, destroyed by fire. One-third would suffer a military defeat that would leave an unsightly bloodbath. Finally, one-third would be scattered, exiled from the land of Judah with God pursuing them as an enemy. A small number of them or a remnant (v. 3), made up of the poor, would be left over in the land (Jer. 52:16). In addition to the escalation of catastrophes, an unavoidable experience of horror would come to the people of Jerusalem. If one thing did not get them, something else would (cf. Amos 5:19).

5:5–17. God's Dynamic Speech. In a series of four prophetic announcements that emphasize His sovereign lordship, the messenger formula ("Thus says the *'adonai yahweh*"—"Thus says the Lord God," or "This is what the Sovereign Lord says") is used three times in vv. 5, 7, 8 (cf. v. 11). God explained why judgment was coming. First, God set Judah at the crossroads of the major nations (Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Syria) to be a light, but the people rebelled by refusing God's lordship (vv. 5–6). In their refusal to accept the divine charter for a just and holy society, the people did not even follow the customs of the pagan nations (v. 7). Second, Israel tended toward a syncretistic practice of religion (2 Kin. 16–17). Thus, the worst scenario of God's response would be their punishment: God changing His role from that of covenant Lord to that of enemy (Ezek. 5:8). Israel saw God break greater nations like Egypt, Syria, and Assyria. Now, without the empowering and life-transforming presence of God as an ally, the basest human instincts would emerge in the form of a famine-induced cannibalistic fury (v. 10). Verse 11 gives the first indication of what is described in chapters 8–11, namely, the withdrawal of God from His sanctuary. Third, Israel had been unfaithful to God. In vv. 12–15, Ezekiel's sign-acts are interpreted as covenant curses: plague, famine, sword, and exile (Lev. 26:25–39; Jer. 29:17). Fourth, its results would be revelatory and missional; the judgment would remind the people and the nations that God is the sovereign Lord (Ezek. 5:16–17). (On the concept of judgment, see below, "God's Judgment in the Prophets.")

God's Judgment in the Prophets

The messages of the prophets are in most cases announcements of judgment or salvation. In the case of prophecies of judgment, we encounter expressions and language that may sound too strong to the contemporary reader. For example, in regard to His punishments, God spoke of (1) parents eating their children (Ezek. 5:8–10); (2) cutting off food and causing famine (14:13); (3) the destruction of infants and the rape of women (Is. 13:16); and (4) destruction by cruel people in which the Israelites would become "fuel for the fire" (Ezek. 21:31–32). There are many other passages like these. We suggest that when reading the prophetic announcements of judgment, we should keep in mind a few principles or concepts that may help us understand the origin and reason for such seemingly harsh language.

1. Covenant and Judgment. When we read the messages of judgment proclaimed by the prophets against Israel, we find in practically all of them the common charge that the people had violated the covenant relationship with the Lord. The covenant between God and Israel was established after God redeemed His people from Egypt and permanently formalized the initial redemptive relationship He had established with them. God became their God, and they were constituted into His people. Within that covenant relationship, the people enjoyed God's presence and blessings. The violation of the covenant by the people was a rejection of the covenant and of the Lord of the covenant (i.e., a claim of independence from Him). In most cases this act of rebellion expressed itself in the worship of other gods and in political alliances with other nations that were intended to secure self-preservation in case of war (e.g., Hos. 7:11; 12:1). Theologically speaking, the people were in fact abandoning the sphere where divine blessings were operative and entering into the dangerous realm of sin and death (i.e., the curses of the covenant). After the violation of the covenant, the people of Israel had two alternatives: either to repent and renew their commitment to the covenant (which would mean forgiveness and healing from the Lord) or to continue the path of rebellion and separation from God (which would mean abandonment by the Lord and destruction). The prophetic word that connected covenant and judgment was used to provide a legal foundation for the announced judgment of God. Judgment was not an irrational or arbitrary decision on the part of a violent God but what the people should have legally expected from Him in response to their rebellious actions against the loving covenant Lord.

2. Prophetic Nature of the Judgment. The words of judgment proclaimed by the prophets were indeed prophecies concerning what the Lord would do soon or even in the distant future. The fact that the judgments were proclaimed before they happened served several purposes. Among these we mention a few: First, in some cases the description of the nature of the coming judgment was so intense that it could have and should have moved the people to repentance in order to avoid its damaging effects—it should have appealed not only to their emotions but also to their reason. Second, the prophetic prediction demonstrated that the Lord knew what was going to happen and that consequently He was not surprised by the unfolding events. The implication is that the divine judgments revealed God's sovereignty over history. He, not the nations, was in ultimate control of what would happen to Israel. Third, by announcing the coming defeat of His people, the Lord was demonstrating that the nations that would attack Israel were not more powerful than He. In fact, it was the Lord who was using the nations to accomplish His own purpose, namely, disciplining His people for their sins. But in doing this, there was great pain in the heart of the covenant Lord (cf. Hos. 11:8).

3. Rejection of the Lord and Judgment. Breaking with the Lord, who was and continued to be the only reliable "place" of safety, left the people of Israel at the mercy of their enemies. The result of their rejection of the Lord blocked the only source of blessings and life, bringing with it famine and plagues. These results were not the impersonal and automatic consequences of sin but those of God's decision to abandon the city, the temple, and the land. They chose to abandon Him, and He honored their decision by abandoning them—He granted them their wish. Most of the language used in the messages of judgment against the people is of a military or political nature. What we often read about is what a military attack would look like: the siege of the city bringing famine, and often cannibalism, inside the city (Ezek. 5:8–10); the destruction of the city and the temple (Jer. 9:11; 12:10–12); the raping of women (Lam. 5:11); the killing of children, women, and men (Is. 13:16); and the leaving behind of a few survivors, many of whom would have preferred to die during the attack. The language describes the cruelty and inhumanness of war, not of God. In a sense the Lord assumes responsibility for the military fall of His people by referring to it as His response to their rebellion. Ultimately, the people are responsible for what happened to them because of their rejection of the covenant Lord (Jer. 18:16). In the destruction of Samaria or Jerusalem, the nations did not defeat the Lord nor did they defeat His people; it was the Lord who handed His people over to the nations because Israel had chosen the path leading to death rather than the one leading to life with Him (Deut. 30:15–19; Jer. 12:7; 21:8).

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4. Judgment and Cosmic Conflict. God's people have always existed in the context of a cosmic conflict. This conflict does not take place in a mythical world but in the arena of human history. The enemies of Israel were primarily the political and military powers of the nations that surrounded them, but behind the nations were their gods and the demonic powers that in many cases influenced the people of God (see Ezek. 28:14). This often led Israel into idolatry, a rebellion against the Lord that left them vulnerable to military defeat and political oppression as the Lord handed them over to their enemies. In the context of the cosmic conflict and through the words of judgment, the Lord continued to inform His people that there was hope for them because not only was He in control of what was happening to them, but He would also be fighting for them against their enemies if His people returned to Him. Through His judgments, He would ultimately defeat the nations and their gods (Jer. 51–52). God's last word was not condemnation but salvation and victory for the remnant of His people and of the nations who would come and worship Him in His temple (Is. 2:3). Because of the righteousness of God's judgment, His people would recognize that He was righteous in what He did to them (Ezek. 14:21–23), and the nations would come to know that "I am the Lord" (36:23). The end result of the judgments would be that the nations would no longer take up the sword against each other nor train for war ever again (Is. 2:4).

6:1—7:27
The Nations Will Know That I Am Yahweh

Through a series of prophetic formulas (recognition formula—"you will know that I am *yahweh*": 6:7, 10, 13, 14; 7:4, 9, 27; messenger formula: 6:3, 11; 7:2, 5), Ezekiel proclaims God's authoritative speeches of judgment coming on the people. These prophetic formulas also serve to organize the messages. The structure of chapter 6 expresses an alternating parallel format and thus emphasizes knowing the identity of Yahweh in the face of idolatry (vv. 4–6, 13). The chapter is introduced by a messenger formula plus a "son of man" command in vv. 1–2.

A First announcement of punishment: Destruction of idolatrous worship and people (vv. 3–7)
Summary: Recognition formula

B Description of the results of rebellion: Only a remorseful remnant left (vv. 8–10)
Summary: Recognition formula

A′ Second announcement of punishment: Famine, sword, and plague (vv. 11–13a)
Summary: Recognition formula

B′ Description of the results of rebellion: The land desolate (vv. 13b–14)
Summary: Recognition formula

Picking up much of the language used in Isaiah 13:1–16, Ezekiel 7 can be divided into three sections that announce the coming judgment (vv. 2–4, 5–9, and 10–27). All three sections assert that the end is coming by using different emphases—the certitude, the experience, and the results (the end, v. 2; disaster, v. 5; doom, v. 10).

6:1–10. Judgment: Defilement and Restoration. God continued to ask Ezekiel to proclaim His message against the rebellion of His people. Anticipating His departure from the sanctuary and city, God painted a doleful picture of death, decay, and destruction while using the language of the covenant curses (Lev. 26:25–32). God would decimate the holy vessels along with the carved idols beside them (Ezek. 6:4–5). The mixture of the holy and the profane necessitated a complete eradication of the works of humans (cf. Gen. 7:23). Chapters 8 and 9 more fully depict the extent of idolatry among God's people and its requisite result of judgment, defilement, and execution. Both here and in chapter 9, the remnant are described as penitent (Ezek. 6:9; 9:4). The description of the destruction of the altars uses what is typically called a *divine passive* (the use of the passive voice of the verb to denote the hidden action of God as the agent responsible for the activity) and is used mainly in reference to the articles of worship (6:4, 6). Concerning the people, Ezekiel presents God's message with Him speaking in the first person (vv. 4–5, 8). The very presence of corpses would have the effect of defiling everything within the same enclosed space

(Num. 19:14–15). The place chosen by God to be a center of worship (Deut. 12:1–7) had become an abominable place.

So Israel's rebellion was twofold: they set up competing worship sites (cf. 1 Kin. 11:1–8), and they set up idols instead of tearing them down. Ezekiel 6:8–10 shifts the focus from the announcement of judgment to its devastation: a few survivors (Ezek. 7:16), a scattered captive nation (5:10, 12), and a self-loathing disgust and revulsion of their covenant infidelity (cf. Ps. 119:158). On the other hand, the results of judgment would elicit a faithful remnant who would remember their Lord and recognize His claims on them (Ezek. 6:8–10; cf. 20:43; 36:31). He in turn will remember His promise and restore the relationship the people had broken (Lev. 26:40–45).

6:11–14. Judgment: Death and Destruction. Verses 3–10 and 11–14 share many of the same words and parallel phrases, but the emphases are radically different. The sections that describe the results of rebellion (vv. 8–10, 13b–14) both serve as a prophetic affirmation of God being in control: He knows the future and He is directing events to those ends. The first section (vv. 8–10) ends with the hope of restoration among the exiles and with Ezekiel's word of hope to those scattered among the nations and lands. This second section (vv. 11–14) ends with an account of the despair of the wicked and with Ezekiel's word of judgment against those far/outside the city proper, those near/inside the city, and those left over (v. 12; cf. v. 14; 7:15–16). Through both restoration and judgment, all would know that God is the Lord of the covenant, the Lord of history, and the Lord of human destiny.

Ezekiel was commanded to express feelings of anger and lamentation—to stamp his feet in conjunction with clapping his hands and to say, "Alas" (v. 11). These actions would depict God's anger in response to the wickedness of the people. The destruction that would follow (sword, famine, and plague/pestilence) was known to the people as evidence of divine displeasure in the form of covenant curses. Ezekiel condemns the mountains of Israel (v. 13), which earlier referred to people (v. 2), because the people built high places or cultic platforms on them. These were often situated on the wooded heights of hills or mountains frequently used for idolatrous worship (e.g., Lev. 26:30; Num. 33:52; Deut. 12:2; 1 Kin. 14:23). The people used sweet incense (Ezek. 6:13) to cover the stench of their idolatry. God would turn their cultic groves into a desolate wasteland all throughout the furthest reaches of Israel's territorial extent (47:17–20; Num. 34:11).

7:1–4. The End Is Coming. With a tripart blast of urgent warning (vv. 2–3, 6), God sought from His people a response of faith and a recognition of the impending danger. The two keywords in this chapter—the Hebrew verb *bo'* (contextually here, "to come," "to enter," or "to bring"; vv. 2, 5–7, 10, 12, 22, 24–26) and the noun *qets* ("end"; vv. 2–3, 6)—emphasize the imminence, certainty, and pervasiveness of judgment. God addressed the message to the land of Israel (vv. 2, 7), but contextually it was directed to the exiled community. The purpose for both communities was the same: God would punish them for their evil ways (vv. 3–4). Zedekiah's rebellion and the messages from false prophets like Hananiah (Jer. 28:1–17) and Shemaiah (Jer. 29:24–32) may have encouraged some to think that geopolitics was the answer to their circumstances. Evidently, their influence was so strong that Jeremiah had to send a letter to the exiled community in Babylon (Jer. 29:1–23).

The punishment would match the crime (Ezek. 7:3), and the picture of the coming judgment evoked the deepest feelings of abandonment (cf. 6:9). Though not the eschatological end, Ezekiel uses eschatological language ("the four corners of the land"; 7:2b) to indicate not simply a transition to another king but a cataclysmic end of the kingdom. The covenant promises that God made to David would reach fruition, not through the stratagems of a political kingship (chap. 34; cf. Pss. 89, 110) but through God's kingship (Matt. 4:17; Mark 1:14). The scope, experience, and results of judgment are associated with God's anger (Ezek. 7:3, 8), disaster (v. 5), doom (v. 7), tumult (v. 7), horror/terror (v. 18), day of wrath (v. 19), and devastation/desolation (v. 27). They would know that God is the covenant Lord because of His complete defeat of the wicked.

7:5–9. The Fury of the Lord. This section almost seems redundant in its language, yet it has, among other things, two pivotal functions: emphasis and anticipation. The certainty of the end is repeated, but now the experience of disaster and the psychological paralysis of impending doom is added (vv. 5–7). The finality of God's actions in pouring out His anger without pity would overwhelm the people (vv. 8–9; cf. Zeph. 1:14–16). Israel's wickedness had ripened, and it had borne the fruit of idolatry, social injustice, and abominable practices; the Master Harvester must come, and the people would reap the judgment that they had sown in their pride (cf. Rev. 14:14–20).

7:10–27. The Totality of Judgment. Arboreal imagery is used to describe the wickedness of Israel. Violence is pictured as growing into a *lematteh resha'* (translated as either "a rod of wickedness" or "a rod to punish the wicked"; v. 11). Aaron's staff budded under the blessing of God (Num. 17), but here Ezekiel reverses the picture with a botanical metaphor showing the result of the wickedness of the people—God's curse was coming in the form of the Babylonian invasion. This invasion would have multiple effects. In the ancient Near East there was not a clear separation of civic, religious, and economic life. Together they expressed an integrated whole of life and the consequent impact on the life of the people. Babylon's invasion was seen as (1) creating economic turmoil (Ezek. 7:12–19), (2) a profanation of the land (vv. 20–24), and (3) a devastation of political life (vv. 25–27).

As a result of God's judgment, the commercial life in Israel would come to an end (vv. 12–13a). This meant that the buyer and the seller alike would share the same fate. Their most treasured possessions—land, temple, and holy furnishings—would become the booty of the invaders (v. 21). Ezekiel uses linguistic parallels to draw out the association of God's judgment with the irrevocable outcome of the word of God given in the vision (vv. 12–13; chaps. 4–6).

Typically, a trumpet was blown in times of warfare as a call to prepare for battle (7:14; Num. 10:9). But Israel had prepared for battle in vain; they would only suffer the casualties of divine warfare against them (Ezek. 7:14–15). Even the physiological effects (v. 17) reflect a psychological paralysis created by God's judgment (v. 18). Alongside the sad conditions of a future with rationed sustenance (4:9–17), Ezekiel addresses those who may have believed they had the resources to mitigate the scarcity and economic woes of a siege. The affluence of the wealthy could not possibly assuage the wrath of God (7:19; cf. Zeph. 1:18).

The defilement (Ezek. 7:21–22, 24; cf. Lev. 20:3) of the land and sanctuary created two major problems. First, if the very system of maintaining the holiness of God placed among the people turned sour, how was Israel to abide in God's presence? Second, if the temple and its ritual activity were defiled, how was forgiveness to be mediated? Israel's world and worldview would be shattered.

The prophets, priests, and kings stood as covenant mediators and as political operatives in God's political and ritual economy. Confusion and chaos within the confines of Israel's leadership meant that access to the divine word and its corporate blessing were unavailable. As if this was not bad enough, God Himself took responsibility for the profanation of His temple and land (Ezek. 7:22; 24:21). He would bring the worst, the most despicable people, to displace them from their beloved home and take their accoutrements of covenant life with Yahweh (e.g., strangers and foreigners, the wicked of the earth, robbers, and the most evil of the Gentiles; 7:21–24; cf. 2 Kin. 25). The principle of retribution was working here. The people had committed murder (i.e., bloodguilt) and violence, so they in turn would experience the same (Ezek. 7:23, 27; cf. vv. 1, 8).

8:1—11:25

THE GLORY OF GOD WITHDRAWS FROM THE TEMPLE

The structure of chapters 8–11 is framed as a literary chiasm supported by a cadre of parallel words and themes.

A Introduction (8:1–4)
  B Abomination: the problem (8:5–18)
    C Judgment on land and leadership (chap. 9)
      D God's glory to abandon the temple (chap. 10)
    C' Judgment on land and leadership (11:1–13)
  B' Abomination: the solution (11:14–21)
A' Conclusion (11:22–25)

This second major vision details the story of the abandonment of the temple by God. Each section explains, expands, or resolves the preceding section as it moves to the central focus of the catastrophic reality: God leaving Jerusalem (D). Learning that God Himself would leave the place where all hope, forgiveness, worship, prayer, and wisdom were centered would leave a dim sense of meaning in life.

The significance of the theophany in chapter 1 now unfolds as it relates to the sanctuary, to judgment, and to God's presence. Both the introduction and conclusion (A, A') focus on the glory of God (8:4; 11:22–23), both indicate that the Spirit lifted Ezekiel up and took him somewhere in a vision (8:3; 11:24), and both focus on a previous vision (8:4b; 11:25). The account of the intervening vision paints a doleful picture of the people's condition. But there is also a note of hope: God was moving to Babylon with the exiled community! He had not totally abandoned His people. After His revival and restoration of His true people, He would return to Jerusalem (43:1–5).

God's departure (chaps. 8–11) and return (chaps. 40–48) to His restored temple indicate that judgment was not God's final word for His people. The theme of divine abandonment frequently occurs in ancient Near Eastern writings, where usually the military defeat of a people by another nation is interpreted to mean that their gods had abandoned them or that the gods of the enemy had defeated their gods. In the OT, however, Yahweh abandons His temple because of the people's moral failures, covenant breaches, and faithless compromises with pagan ideologies and rituals. In this OT context, God is not conquered; His people are conquered by sin, and the judgment against them is the Babylonian Exile (cf. Hab. 1:5–11).

The importance of Ezekiel 8–11 for the message of the Bible cannot be overemphasized. The account in these chapters of the investigation and execution of judgment on the faithless was related initially to Ezekiel's immediate audience and location, but its application has resonances for our time as well. John the Revelator presents a number of parallels with this vision in Ezekiel and shows that the work of judgment applies to the whole of creation (see "Judgment in Ezekiel and Revelation," p. 986).

8:1–18
Abominations in the Temple

After describing his visionary experience (vv. 1–4), Ezekiel utilizes a repetitive fourfold pattern that reaches its climax in a description of utter abomination (vv. 5–6, 7–13, 14–15, 16–18). The Spirit brought Ezekiel to and guided him through the temple complex (vv. 5, 7, 14, 16), addressed him as "son of man" (vv. 5–6, 8, 12, 15, 17), asked him to see what was happening (vv. 5–7, 9, 12, 15, 17), and guaranteed that the worst was yet to come (vv. 6, 13, 15).

8:1–4. Visions of God. Over a year's time, Ezekiel had performed a prophetic street ministry and had spoken what appeared to be discouraging words to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the exiles. God's dialogues, earlier with Jeremiah about Israel's exile (Jer. 7:1–34) and subsequently with Ezekiel about Israel's final destruction (Ezek. 12:21–28), indicate a hard-hearted rejection of God's word by the people (3:5–7). Now God was giving the elders of Israel a final confirmation of Ezekiel's prophetic calling through a visionary experience, which they later would be told involved Jerusalem and the temple (8:4; 11:25).

Judgment in Ezekiel and Revelation

A brief comparison with Revelation 14 makes clear that John's language parallels Ezekiel's account of the vision, yet the Revelation account involves the people of God from every nation, kindred, tongue, and tribe. The parallels help readers of Revelation to understand that God's plan and methods have not changed; He expects His professed people to live by His righteousness. This will lead to faithful obedience and will glorify His name. The parallels include the following:

- Judgment/vindication at the sanctuary: Ezek. 8:3 (Jerusalem); Rev. 14:1, 15 (heavenly Mount Zion).
- Six messengers of judgment: Ezek. 9:2; Rev. 14:6, 8–9, 15, 17–18.
- Seal of God/mark of the righteous/wicked: Ezek. 9:4; Rev. 7:3; 9:4; 14:1, 9.
- The wicked are killed: Ezek. 9:6–8; Rev. 14:10, 19–20.
- The righteous are saved: Ezek. 9:4; Rev. 14:1–5, 14–16.

In Revelation, conditions have not radically changed from those of Ezekiel's time. In both accounts, the righteous exhibit the same call to faithfulness while they express sorrow for the condition of God's people (Ezek. 9:4; Rev. 6:9–11), and the wicked engage in the same sins (idolatry, Ezek. 8:3, 14; Rev. 14:10–11; defiling God's sanctuary, Ezek. 8:7–13; Rev. 11; cf. Dan. 8:9–12; sun worship, Ezek. 8:16; Rev. 14:6–10; and injustice, Ezek. 9:9; Rev. 18). As in Ezekiel's day, in our time God's activity results in judgment and in the revelation of His justice. Revelation 14 also uses imagery and language from the judgment section of Ezekiel (chaps. 4–24): the cup of wrath (Ezek. 23; Rev. 14) and the vine of the land (Ezek. 15; Rev. 14:18–20). The two books complement one another and bring out issues of present relevance for our thoughts and prayers.

8:5–18. God Who Sees. God's questions to Ezekiel and the description of Israel's apostasy appear in Ezekiel's book, depicting the activity of the people. Twice Nebuchadnezzar had come and decimated Judah's population as God had announced, but the people continued to be engaged in the very practices that called forth God's judgment. God clarified now that not only would judgment come, but these abominations were driving Him far away from His sanctuary. In the daily ministration of the sacrifices, the confessed sins of the people were forgiven as the blood was shed and the priest made atonement (Lev. 1–7). In the yearly ministration, the sanctuary itself was cleansed (Lev. 16). The only known cases of unforgiven sin were of unconfessed sin and high-handed sin (deliberate, intentional, and defiant; Num. 15:30). So, God leaving His defiled sanctuary implies that the people's sins were unconfessed and/or high-handed.

For now, God took up residence in the temple to begin His covenant lawsuit against the people (cf. Ps. 50; Amos 2:9–16) that included, per typical form, a summons (Ezek. 8:1–5a), a trial (vv. 5b–17), and a sentence (v. 18). Ezekiel specifically describes four types of abominations (vv. 4–6, 7–13, 14–15, 16–18) that God prohibited. The description of the divergences from His revealed character and will could not be more vivid. The abominations were connected in some way with Israel's misconstrued theology of God's presence and the denial of the prospect of divine abandonment. First, not only were they breaking the first commandment by making an image or idol of jealousy (or an idol arousing God's jealousy; vv. 3, 5; Ex. 20:4–6; Deut. 4:16; 2 Chr. 33:7), but it was placed in the temple precinct as a rival to the glory of God. Second, God had revealed Himself as the Creator of all things (Gen. 1–2) and as the Holy One of Israel (Is. 1:4; 12:6). His holiness was being defiled by the engravings of unclean animals and idols (Lev. 7:21) and by the unholy worship of creation. Similar things have been observed in Egyptian burial chambers, and Israel did engage in religious syncretism with Egypt (Ezek. 16:16). As in times past, the elders of Israel probably incorporated in their worship the rituals of idol worship and the religious practices of the nations from which they sought help (cf. 11:12; 2 Kin. 16:10–20). Especially evident was their pro-Egyptian attitude (cf. Is. 30–31; Jer. 37:5–10), their proud mindset against the Lord, and their denial of His judgment and omniscience (Ezek. 8:12). Third, the worship of Tammuz (called *dumuzi*, "the good/proper son" in Sumerian), a Mesopotamian god widely honored as a god of vegetation and who was also the lover and consort of Inanna/Ishtar, was instituted most likely as a response to the scarcity of agricultural produce (cf. Is. 3:1–2). The women's lamentations (Ezek. 8:14) reveal a religious syncretism associated with an annual ritual mourning practice concerning the death of the deity. Some in Israel, besieged and exiled, interpreted God's supposed absence (v. 12) as a reason to compromise the true worship of the Lord instead of confessing and repenting of their sins in submission to God and His will. Finally, in front of the temple between the porch and the altar, there were twenty-five men worshiping the sun in the east (the Babylonian god Shamash, who was worshiped primarily as the "lord of judgment"). This was the place where they should have come before the Lord to seek forgiveness (cf. Joel 2:17).

The people had unquestionably turned their backs on the Lord physically and spiritually as they worshiped the sun (Jer. 32:33–35), and the result was rebellion and violence in the city (Ezek. 9:9). Apparently the people wanted the benefits of God's presence without accepting and yielding to God's lordship (Jer. 27:12, 17; 38:17–18).

9:1–11. Judgment on Land and Leaders. In Ezekiel's vision, God gave His verdict. The compromising religious activities of the people (8:18) were connected to God's response in judgment. Though He would later judge the nations (chaps. 25–32), God began His judgment at His house, among the leaders and at the place where the professed people of God congregated. By standing at the bronze altar (9:2), God started in the area where the twenty-five elders would have been. He specifically started with the leaders (chaps. 12–14) as His representatives. The writing angel would put a mark on the foreheads of those who would be saved (9:3–4). God always has an authentic remnant who are faithful to Him and who also show reverence to His holiness (i.e., those who are disturbed by and mourn over all the abominations done in the land, v. 4).

God's command to execute without pity and without mercy (v. 5) may seem hard-hearted to modern ears, but divine love shows divine patience for as long as God's holiness allows. God put up with numerous impenitent, rebellious, and heartless kings and with injustice, oppression, idolatry, cruelty, commandment-breaking, stubbornness, and selfishness from His people for almost four centuries. He continually sent them messages of warning and hope, but there was no consistent response of faith and trust. Sin had run its course, and the cancerous heart of rebellion had to be rooted out (cf. Gen. 15:12–16) so that God's faithful ones could continue to bear witness to His glory. Ezekiel's response of intercession (Ezek. 9:8) shows a depth of covenant care (cf. 11:13) seen in the lives of faithful leaders like Moses (Ex. 32:30–34), Daniel (Dan. 9:1–19), and Paul (Rom. 9:1–2), and without equal in the life of our Savior, Jesus (Luke 23:34–43).

10:1—11:25

Abandonment of God's Temple

Echoing his earlier vision, Ezekiel alternates between God's movement toward and away from the entrance of the temple and the movement of the cherubim. The phrase "I looked" (10:1, 9) divides chapter 10 in two sections. Verses 1–8 focus on God's movement toward the temple and His purifying work, while vv. 9–22 depict the glory of God and the cherubim as Ezekiel describes God's departure from the temple complex. Chapter 11 also divides into two sections: judgment on land and leadership (vv. 1–13) and the question of a remnant (vv. 14–25).

The Mark/Sign/Seal of God

In times of national importance, God has always had a sign to distinguish His faithful people from those who simply claim His name without the fruit of faith (Ezek. 9:4; cf. 20:12, 20; Exod. 12:23; Eph. 1:13; Rev. 7:2; 14:6–12). The mark (Heb. *taw*, the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet) is a divine sign of ownership, identity, and faithfulness and is placed on the forehead (Deut. 6:8).

1. *Sabbath as a Sign.* The Sabbath is a seal of God because it carries the title (Creator), territory (the world), and the authoritative name of the Lord (Yahweh, your God). In Exodus 20 the fourth commandment is the only command that relays and emphasizes these aspects of a seal (Ex. 20:8–11). It is a visible sign of faithfulness to God's authority and all of His revealed will. The Sabbath is a sign that recognizes that God is the Creator who blesses and sanctifies (Gen. 2:3), is Sovereign Lord (Mark 2:27–28) as well as Redeemer, and gives us true rest (Heb. 4:9–13). Genesis 2:3 emphasizes the sanctifying agency of the Lord, who blessed the seventh day and sanctified it—i.e. made it holy, and set it apart as special. Those who faithfully worship God in time (Sabbath) and space (holiness) belong to God by creation and redemption, and they acknowledge His lordship in their lives. The disciples' postresurrection Sabbath observance indicates that they did not understand the Sabbath to be replaced by another day, but that they had in fact found a deeper meaning to the Sabbath in light of Christ's life, death, and resurrection (Acts 13:27, 42, 44; 15:21; 16:13; 17:2; 18:4). In this regard, the Sabbath will continue to serve as a "sign" between God and His people (Ezek. 20:20; Ex. 31:12–17).

2. *Eschatological Seal.* In Revelation 7:2–3 John uses imagery similar to that in Ezekiel 9:3–4. God's end-time people have two main identifying marks that set them apart as His covenant people: (1) they have the faith of/in Jesus (the gospel), and (2) they keep all His commands (Rev. 12:17; 14:12). In Ezekiel 9, the sealed ones are persons who are faithful and keep God's commands, mourning over all the abominations in Judah (v. 4). In the first of the three angels' messages found in Revelation 14:6–12, an allusion is made to the Sabbath in connection with worship and the time of universal judgment (Rev. 14:7). Thus, there are important parallels between the sign/seal of God in Ezekiel and John: worship/Sabbath and judgment (Ezek. 20:12, 20; cf. the linguistic parallels between Exod. 20:8–11 and Rev. 14:6). Moreover, if the Sabbath, with its call to worship, encapsulates the commandments of God—in that observing it expresses one's love for God and recognition of His ownership—then the saints with the "faith of Jesus" who "keep the commandments" (Rev. 14:12) are those who will also observe the Sabbath.

10:1–22. The Lord Departs. Ezekiel interrupts his narrative about the man in linen with a description of the presence of God, moving from a scene of destruction to a scene of God's glory (v. 1; cf. 1:26; 43:7). The glory of God and His royal prerogatives must always be kept central to our understanding of judgment and salvation. God's command to the man in linen in 10:2 reminds us that the purging of the wicked is a part of God's judgment activity (cf. Rev. 8:5; 20:7–15). In this case, the fire represents Babylon's destruction of Jerusalem and the removal of the people from the land (cf. 2 Kin. 25:9).

Ezekiel clarifies that the four living beings he saw were cherubim (Ezek. 14–17, 20; cf. 1:10; 1 Kin. 6:29–35). His understanding of God's sovereignty as displayed in the sanctuary and its rituals enabled him to appreciate God's royalty and holiness and how human sinfulness is a revolt against Him. He also began to perceive the relationship between the earthly pattern and its heavenly reality (typology; cf. Ex. 25:8, 40). It was no longer just a vision of grand proportions; Ezekiel saw that God is the King, and the significance of the vision he saw at the beginning was clarified. In language reminiscent of the inauguration of the sanctuary (Ex. 40:34–38) and the temple (1 Kin. 8:10–11), Ezekiel describes a divine de-inauguration (i.e., abandonment) of the temple. It would not function as the site of God's sovereignty and place of atonement until after the Exile (cf. Ezra 6:13–22). Israel's disobedience and idolatry had pushed away God's holy presence, and He was ready to leave, granting them what they wanted.

Describing the functional importance of his earlier vision of the wheels (Ezek. 10:9–17; cf. 1:15–21), Ezekiel focuses on the departure of God's glory from the temple (10:18–19). The people had forsaken God—His kingship, His plan of salvation, His ethical guidance, and His wisdom for social justice (cf. 2 Kin. 21; 23:31—24:20)—and now Ezekiel's vision presented God as abandoning them.

11:1–13. Judgment on Land and Leadership. The vision continued as God acquainted Ezekiel with the activity of the leaders and its influence on the people (v. 2). The leaders were expected to guide the people and teach them the will of God, but Jaazaniah ("the Lord hears") and Pelatiah ("the Lord rescues") did not follow through on their holy calling. They are characterized as wolves destroying lives (v. 6; 22:27). The evil schemes of the powerful led them to seize the houses of those who were already exiled (cf. Is. 5:8; Mic. 2:1–2).

The rule of King Zedekiah (597–586 B.C.) and the oracles in Ezekiel 12–14 about the leaders, who apparently were mulling over their course of action in light of Babylonian oppression, provide the historical backdrop for this occasion. Vacillating Zedekiah naively believed the rebellious war party in Judah, who trusted that Egypt would help them and refused to trust in God. The sudden death of Pelatiah validated God's message (Ezek. 11:13). Through divine judgment the people would know that God is the Lord (vv. 11–12; cf. Phil 2:9–11). Ezekiel's reaction is instructive to Christians. On the one hand, our proclamation of the judgment message ought to cause us to reflect as we seek to understand and live out God's justice in the community. On the other hand, we need to understand that God is holy, just, and true to His word, and He will work out His purposes in harmony with His character. His constant attention to Israel, His overwhelming and undeserved care, and His protection and providence were, and often are, met with unbelief, disbelief, and willful rebellion. God calls humanity to Himself and appeals to us not to harden our hearts (Ps. 95:7–11; Heb. 3:7–19), for He must be true to His holy, just, and true character.

11:14–25. Solution to the Abomination; but Not Yet. In His continued dialogue with Ezekiel, God answered his question about the "remnant" (v. 13). In Isaiah the remnant are (1) a penitent group who would return to God and to the land (Is. 7:3; 10:20–22; 11:10–16; 17:5–8; 28:5; 30:17–19; 37:4, 31–32; cf. 6:13), (2) the survivors who would be the foundation of the renewed community (Is. 1:25–26), and (3) those called to a fruitful life as the people of Yahweh (Is. 4:2–6). Ezekiel was concerned about the possibility that the righteous remnant would be wiped out with the wicked (Ezek. 11:13). God responded with one of the greatest pictures of divine love: though His people were removed and scattered from the land, God would go into exile with them (cf. Ex. 25:8, 40). He also addressed what would have been a main concern for any displaced Israelite, namely, the future of the land. God promised a reversal; the faithful would be restored to the land, for He would gather His people out of exile (Ezek. 11:17), but not for a return to "things as usual." Idols would be removed, new hearts would be implanted, and the covenant would be renewed: they would be His people, and He would be their God (v. 20). This is a theme that permeates the whole book (e.g., 14:11; 36:28; 37:27).

At the end of the vision, the glory of God lifted off from within the city and exited to the east, toward what later would be known as the Mount of Olives (11:22–23). For Ezekiel, it was a vision of God's grandeur and Judah's defeat, but also a vision of hope for the remnant. Now that Ezekiel had received the message, His prophetic task would deliver all of God's messages to those in captivity (v. 25).

12:1—14:23

COUNTERFEIT LEADERSHIP REBUKED

Now that Yahweh had abandoned His temple, the people were open to the assaults of the surrounding nations. Yet the main concern of the Lord was the failure of the leaders of His people. They either tried to inculcate a false sense of security through false messages, or they encouraged the mixing of pagan ideas and rituals with the true worship of God. Ezekiel's account begins by describing the wicked leaders as the main culprits for Judah's demise: the prince (chap. 12), false prophets (chap. 13), and idolatrous elders (chap. 14).

12:1–28

Portrayal of Judah's Captivity

The storyline follows Ezekiel's sign-act (vv. 1–7), its interpretation (vv. 8–16), its effects (vv. 17–20), the leaders' foolish thinking (vv. 21–25), and God's response (vv. 26–28). Ezekiel uses a repetitive pattern to establish the certainty and implications of the Exile. Israel refused the knowledge of God that was given through His wise words and ways (Deut. 4:5–8), and now they would know who He is through judgment.

12:1–7. Ezekiel Is a Sign: The Rebellious House. Ezekiel first summarizes his prophetic drama by stating God's word that the people among whom he was living were rebellious (vv. 1–2). The emphasis on Israel as a rebellious people recapitulates the result of God's previous investigation into Israel's condition. Israel lacked the spiritual discernment of sight and listening, though they had the physical senses to see the signs of the times and hear the message of judgment. Israel was unresponsive to God's overtures of grace—the same problem addressed by Isaiah (Is. 6:9–10) and alluded to by Jesus Himself about the majority of the people in His day (Matt. 13:13–15).

Ezekiel packed his bags and left home. The sign-act describes how the leaders (Ezek. 12:10) would try to avoid the consequences of their rebellion. It appears that it was not readily clear to his audience just what Ezekiel was doing by carrying his baggage (v. 9), but the interpretation in vv. 8–16 shows that He was acting out a direct prophecy. An exile's baggage probably included only the scantiest essentials: a skin for water, a mat for sleeping, and a container for food. The drama juxtaposes two realities: the certainty of exile and the dogged desire to escape it (vv. 5–6).

12:8–16. Prophecy and the Prince. As a sign to the people, all the prophet's acts (i.e., digging through the wall, carrying this baggage, going out at dusk, covering his face, and not seeing the land; v. 7) would meet their historical fulfillment in Nebuchadnezzar's siege of Jerusalem and Zedekiah's attempt to flee. The experience of Zedekiah is specified in that he would not be able to see Babylon (v. 12; cf. 2 Kin. 25:7). The exiles were assured of the divine agency while being depicted as beasts of prey (Ezek. 12:13–14). As a result of the experience of judgment, the people would know who Yahweh is (v. 15, cf. Ex. 6:1–2). The judgment remained the same; God would scatter His people because of their rebellion. Ezekiel had explicitly stated the destructive means in the final exile and connected his description with earlier statements (sword, famine, plague, Ezek. 12:16; cf. 5:12; 6:11; 7:15). The fulfillment of his prophetic message affirmed to the exiled community that his messages were from the Lord (cf. 2:5). But at this stage in their rebellion, they doubted the immediacy and authenticity of the message (12:21–25).

12:17–20. Fear and Trembling. Ezekiel acted out another scene of the psychological effects of judgment. To make the action prophecy realistic, we can picture Ezekiel shaking and trembling to the point that he could barely get any food or drink in his mouth (v. 18). Reminiscent of the siege rations from 4:10–11, the people of Jerusalem and the land of Israel would eat and drink with anxiety and horror (12:19). Invading armies often took the crops and livestock of the inhabitants, so the concerns of those remaining would not be focused on real estate (11:15) but on the preservation of life itself. Since the land would be desolated, it would be impossible for the people to find security in politics, economic stability, and religious history. Israel's hopes, purpose, identity, and pride were attached to the land. Not only would most of the people be exiled from it, but the remaining few would not be able to sustain the land, the traditions, or the corporate worship system; the land would lie in ruins (cf. Lev. 26:14–16).

Contrary to some popular uses of these "scattering and gathering" passages in end-time scenarios, no rapture of the church will occur secretly with the lost left behind. As in Israel's history, at the end of time God's judging of the wicked entails Him turning their fortunes into rubble (Rev. 18:9–24). In the execution of judgment at Christ's coming (Rev. 19:11–16), there will be only death for the wicked (Rev. 19:17–21). John presents the finale of God's judgment for the rebellious in the end as being not a second chance in a renewed Israel but only the second death (Rev. 20:11–15).

12:21–28. The Lord Will Speak and It Shall Happen. The validity of Ezekiel's visions and sign-acts were doubted on two counts. First, the people thought Ezekiel's words would come to nothing since nothing had happened yet (v. 22; cf. 2 Pet. 3:3–4). The prophets were often seen as doomsayers and alarmists. A few years earlier, Jeremiah had experienced the same kind of denial (Jer. 5:12), even receiving physical blows because of his perceived pessimistic message (Jer. 27:12—28:11). It had only been about six years since the exiles were deported in 597 B.C., and only a year into Ezekiel's ministry (Ezek. 1:2; 8:1), yet proverbs had already developed discounting God's warning. Even Isaiah and Micah had spoken about the coming Exile, and the people replied with cynicism and doubt (Is. 5:19; Mic. 3:11). Jeremiah indicated that the people's belief in their status as the chosen people in God's appointed place would not save them from destruction if they failed to amend their ways (Jer. 7:4). Some of the leaders in Jesus's time had the same mentality, misunderstanding His relationship to the temple as well as their own to the point that they were ready to condemn Him and commit murder (cf. Matt. 12:6, 14; Mark 14:57–58; John 2:19). Second, the people intimated that prophecy was irrelevant to them since it was related to times far in the future (Ezek. 12:27). They did not doubt that biblical prophecy was real, only that its fulfilment was so far away that it was of little consequence to their immediate lives.

The institutions, buildings, and leadership roles were a means to an end—not a religious talisman that proved divine acceptance and protection irrespective of their relationship to God. The false vision or flattering divination (v. 24) apparently had been successful in its intended effect. Whether the cause was false prophetic proclamations or false hopes, the result was an environment of religious deception. God had given instructions on how to relate to prophetic sayings (Deut. 13:1–5) and how to avoid judgment through repentance (cf. Jer. 18:1–11; Jon. 3:4–10). God's spoken promise (Ezek. 12:25, 28) that the deceptive proclamations would cease was a response to the cynicism of the leaders and the people. He would bring judgment on the false prophets as announced in the next chapter.

13:1–23

Prophecy against the Prophets

Beginning a series of seven woes (vv. 3, 18; 16:23; 24:6, 9; 34:2), Ezekiel's message addresses male prophets who were lying about having received a divine word (13:1–16) and female prophets who were engaging in obscure magical practices (vv. 17–23). Two major problems are addressed: (1) the character of God's prophetic leading and (2) the reliability of the prophetic message. The nature of prophecy is integral to understanding the sanctuary judgment message in Ezekiel (chaps. 8–11) and the eschatological prophecy found in the book of Daniel and the NT. It was important for the people of God to have a true understanding of how God was leading His people through the prophetic message and its ethical component. Because people make moral choices based on their understanding of prophecy, false prophecy always poses an obstacle to the clarity of God's purposes and expectations.

True biblical prophecy is of upmost importance because it helps to keep holy living in a broader context (Matt. 24:4–5, 11; Rev. 10:7; 22:6). The words of some false prophets and leaders in Israel are quoted and refuted in Ezekiel's account (Ezek. 8:12; 9:9; 11:3; 12:22, 27; 18:2, 19, 25, 29) because their false messages were leading the people astray. Their influence in the community added a persuasive power to their words, especially when they introduced their messages with "Hear the word of the LORD!" (13:2). God corrected the first problem of the false prophets' claiming to represent Him to the people by clarifying that everyone would know who God is at the coming of judgment (vv. 9, 14, 21, 23). He addressed the second problem of the lies and false visions by having His own prophet, Ezekiel, state what would take place, in advance of its happening (cf. John 13:19).

13:1–16. Lies, Divination, and False Vision. The words characterizing these false prophets' visionary experiences (e.g., false, lie) describe the type of messages coming from private and, in this case, pernicious interpretations of events (v. 2; 2 Pet. 1:20–21). Instead of protecting and sealing the breaches with faithful messages from God, the false prophets' lies were making use of the breaches like sly foxes or jackals in a vineyard, running about through the ragged walls and damaging the vine shoots (Ezek. 13:4; cf. Neh. 3:35; Song 2:15). Contrast this depiction with God's command to Ezekiel to be a watchman warning of impending danger (Ezek. 3:17). The Lord specified that the deceptive nature of these prophets was expressed in two ways: (1) using the same religious language as God's true prophets (13:6–7; cf. vv. 8, 16), and (2) engaging in spiritualism—a product of supernatural intervention—to give a semblance of accurate prediction that lacked a moral component.

Deuteronomy 13:1–5 establishes a miracle, sign, or accurate prediction as being no proof of God's leading if it turns the people away from God's revealed word (cf. Ex. 7:22; Rev. 16: 13–14). God's response was threefold: (1) the false prophets would not be a part of the assembly of leaders; (2) they would not be written in the civil list (census); and (3) they were not to come back to the land of Israel (Ezek. 13:8–9). These responses anticipated the final exile of 586 B.C. but clarified that the false leaders would not be a part of the restored community. False prophetic messages would be refuted because of their tendency either to promise things not in accordance with God's word (v. 10, cf. Jer. 14:13–16) or because of their tendency to take financial advantage of the people of God with false messages (Ezek. 13:18–19; cf. Jer. 6:13–14; Titus 1:11). Their false messages were unstable like whitewashed (limestone mixed with water), flimsy walls: initially thought to provide comfort and stability, but truly exposed by judgment striking like a hurricane, hailstorm, and tsunami all at once (Ezek. 13:11–13; Deut. 13:6–18).

13:17–23. Witches, Witchcraft, and Wickedness. Several women served as prophetesses in Israel's history: Miriam, Moses's sister (Ex. 15:20); Deborah (Judg. 4:4); and Huldah (2 Kin. 22:14; 2 Chr. 34:22). It is important that Ezekiel does not call the women he was dealing with "prophetesses" (cf. Ex. 15:20; Judg. 4:4; Is. 8:3). By taking up the pagan practices of sewing magic charms, these women are more accurately called witches. The Hebrew word *keset* (meaning "bands, cushions") in v. 18 is a term likely related to the Akkadian term for magic. Babylonian incantations involved magical knots and bonds and making veils (Heb. *mispakhah*, suggesting a special type of covering, possibly with an amulet used in magical rituals). The popular image of a dark, horned demon can be a misleading portrayal of the obviousness of the evils in witchcraft, which in fact is often presented in attractive wares, beautiful tapestry, and appealing artistic symbolism (GC 566–567). The moral purpose of prophecy is brought into view through the condemnation of wickedness and through God's message calling His people to fidelity and obedience to His revealed will (Ezek. 13:22–23). The Hebrew term *nepesh* (which is used in vv. 18, 20) can have various meanings, including "emotions," "thoughts," "mental faculties," "desires" (especially in poetic passages, e.g., 24:25; Job 24:12; Pss. 6:3; 13:2; 31:9; 42:4–6), and even sometimes "dead body" (see e.g., Num. 5:2; 9:6), and is sometimes translated as "souls." In no case can it be said to denote a bodiless entity living within the body, which is a pagan idea. In this context it refers to the whole person.

14:1–23

Matters of the Heart

The theme of false prophecy is taken up again, this time with the elders of Israel in view. Though removed from Jerusalem, the problem remained: idolatrous hearts. Ezekiel associates the idolatry of the elders ("these men," v. 3) with the deceptive message of the false prophets (vv. 4, 10). This indicates that the ones accepting the false message were not victims but were in a sense complicit in the deception because their hearts were not with God (cf. 2 Tim. 4:3–4).

14:1–11. They Shall Be My People. Ezekiel's priestly training and prophetic calling helped him understand the relationship between prophetic proclamation and holy living. There are many linguistic parallels between this chapter and Leviticus 17–26 (esp. Lev. 17). Just as Israel was instructed about the sanctity and purity of life as they were moving into the promised land, so in Ezekiel they were instructed, as those who would go back to the promised land as the remnant, to repent and renounce their idols (Ezek. 14:6). Restoration is twofold: God called His people to return to Him in faithfulness and to turn away from idolatry.

Some of the elders did not see any problem with serving idols in their heart while at the same time going to God's designated spokesperson to hear God's word. But God would have none of their religious double-mindedness. He would "set His face against" such people. (cf. Lev. 20:6), and make the wicked a negative example (Ezek. 14:8; Deut. 28:37).

God said something seemingly strange (Ezek. 14:9), which was that in the case of a false prophet, He Himself had *patah* ("persuaded," "seduced," "enticed," or "deceived") that prophet. Since God is morally pure and cannot lie (Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:8), this should probably not be taken to mean "deceived"—at least not in an overly literal sense. God's involvement consisted of both establishing and permitting circumstances in which He knew the deception of already recalcitrant and rebellious people would occur, and He used these circumstances to bring about His will in their punishment (cf. Ezek. 14:9; 1 Kin. 22:19–23; Is. 63:17; 2 Thess. 2:11). These foolish prophets, who benefit from capitalizing on the fears of people with words of peace (Ezek. 13:10), would be destroyed by God; this is an announcement of complete annihilation (see Lev. 26:30). Yet judgment was not the final word, and herein lay an instructive warning to Ezekiel. He needed spiritual discernment because he had people with idolatrous hearts coming to him and seeking a word from God. God desired to restore His people to a faithful covenant relationship with Him, and consequently, He would see to it that false leaders would not make His people wander around like lost sheep (Ezek. 13:11; cf. chap. 34; John 10).

14:12–23. A Survivor Will Be Left. Denying any notion of corporate righteousness by proxy, God told His people not to rest their spiritual laurels on their heroes of the faith. He summarized the modes of punishment described earlier (vv. 12–23; cf. chaps. 5–7): famine (14:12–14), wild beasts (vv. 15–16), the sword (vv. 17–18), and pestilence or plague (vv. 19–20), which were part of the covenant curses (Lev. 26:22–26). Thus, He made the people's true condition clear to them. Reaffirming the terror of His just punishment (Ezek. 14:21), God then announced that He would preserve an unfaithful remnant from Jerusalem to be taken to Babylon. Their rebellious and corrupt way of life, even in exile, would demonstrate that the Lord was just in His judgment against Jerusalem. The Lord promised Ezekiel that by observing the evidence of rebellion in the former inhabitants of Jerusalem, he would be comforted knowing that the Lord did what was right (vv. 22–23).

The repetition of Noah, Daniel, and Job (vv. 14, 16, 18, 20) at the end of each section brings up two important practices in Israel's history: intercession by prayer and sacrifice, and the effect of the presence of the righteous. First, the prayers of intercession were an expression of righteousness. Job interceded for his children (Job 1:5). Daniel interceded for Jerusalem (Dan. 9). Noah also interceded for his family after the Flood, when he expressed his faith and offered a sacrifice as an act of atonement—an expiation for their sin (Gen. 8:20). But even those known for their righteous intercession could not rescue others from the judgment to come. Second, because the righteous found favor in the eyes of God, others also were delivered (Gen. 6:8; Job 1:1; Dan. 1:8, 17). But here Judah's sin was so ingrained and malignant that the intercession of the faithful would bring no healing balm (cf. Amos 7:1–9). The judgment is here stated as indeed final and, given the circumstances, unavoidable.

15:1—17:24

GOD'S PARABLES: A VINE, A SPOUSE, AND TWO EAGLES

Ezekiel uses three different parables about a useless vine, an unfaithful wife, and two eagles to show God's tender care and Israel's rebellious and ungrateful heart. Each chapter focuses on a different aspect of Israel's rebellion. The vine symbolizes what Israel should have been—full of life and fertile growth in righteousness as a witness to God's care for humanity (cf. Is. 5:1–7)—but it had become useless (cf. Jer. 2:21), ready for the fire.

The unfaithful wife depicts Israel's political and religious activities as shameless infidelity toward their covenant Lord (cf. Jer. 3:14). Ezekiel uses wisdom language from the book of Proverbs to describe the illicit lust of the adulteress woman, Folly (cf. Prov. 5; 6:20–35; 7; 9:13–18). Israel's rebellious ways reflected a rejection of the wisdom of God in establishing a faithful covenant relationship. The two divinely established institutions from Creation that are the target of Satan's ire are the Sabbath and marriage (between one man and one woman). When God's people break those vows of faith, hope, and love, His character is impugned in the sight of the nations and, more immediately, in the sight of their neighbors.

The parable of the two eagles and the vine shows the folly of rebelling against Babylon and seeking help from Egypt. Israel's history is fraught with unfaithfulness. They broke their covenant with God, and without God's grace and lordship, Israel had no reason or power to be faithful to their commitments. These three chapters are held together by a repetitive formula: "The word of the Lord came to me": "'Son of Man....'" This section shows the recalcitrance of rebellious hearts even in the face of divine grace and providence.

15:1–8

Israel, a Useless Vine

Like other writers of the Hebrew Bible, Ezekiel depicts Israel using the floral imagery of a vine, a symbol of God's care and of His plan to make Israel a blessing to the nations (Ps. 80:8–11; cf. Gen. 12:1–3). This chapter begins with a graphic depiction of God's judgment resulting in the demise of His people as worthless wood (Ps. 80:12–13; Jer. 2:21). Not only had the people failed to live up to God's expectations, but they also had flagrantly rebelled against Him and His word. As the vinedresser, God should not be blamed for moral evil. Jesus utilized this prophetic imagery multiple times: (1) a parable where pernicious weeds of rebellion would be consigned to the fires of judgment (Matt. 13:24–30); (2) a metaphor for the connection between Himself and His believers (John 15:1–8); and (3) the fruit of the vine to symbolize His blood (Matt. 26:27–29). John the Revelator also used the fruit of the vine as a metaphor for judgment (Rev. 14:18–20). God's plan was for His people to bear fruit (justice and righteousness; Is. 5:7), but when the spoiled fruit of oppression, selfishness, and idolatry was found, the vine was fit only for firewood.

16:1–63

Faithless Bride

Ezekiel continues to use different pictures to illustrate the development of Israel's apostasy. While chapter 20 describes a cyclical picture, chapters 16 and 23 describe a picture of ever-increasing apostasy. As in Hosea, the image of Israel as God's wife shows the love God has for His people. Sadly, His love was often spurned and not reciprocated. Ezekiel uses lewd and almost sexually explicit imagery to describe Israel's infidelity to Yahweh. The metaphor of whoredom expresses Israel's false worship (16:15–18), and her paramours, the pagan nations, represent the political associations Israel made instead of trusting in God's abiding presence and revealed will (vv. 26–32).

16:1–14. Israel Abandoned but Adopted. After being given a summary statement of his mission to make the capital city aware of their abominations (v. 2), Ezekiel was commanded first to show what Israel had abandoned. After calling attention to the ethnic origins of the Hebrew people (v. 3), God reminded them that their present status as God's people was an act of grace. During the time of the Exodus, the Canaanites, Amorites, and Hittites would be displaced once Israel entered into the land (Ex. 3:8, 17; 23:23; 33:2; Deut. 7:1; 20:17) in fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham (Gen. 13:14). Their displacement was also a judgment on them because of their deplorable ways, not because of ethnic inferiority (Gen. 15:15–21; 1 Kin. 21:26).

Ezekiel uses a motif common in the ancient Near East in which an abandoned child found in the open country is adopted and cared for. This serves as a rebuke and a tribute. In several societies in the ancient world, the exposure of unwanted babies, especially girls, was an alternative to birth control. This unwanted baby that God rescued reminded Ezekiel's audience of their historical deliverance from slavery to adoption and pointed toward God's ability to once again free His people from the bondage of exile and restore them to Himself as His children. Israel's adoption was a prominent marker of divine election that brought the nation into a covenant relationship with Him (Ezek. 16:8). This gracious act of the adoption of an enslaved nation was later utilized by NT authors to describe the special status of the people of God who were redeemed by the sacrificial work of Jesus (Rom. 8:14–17; Gal. 4:4–7; Eph. 1:5–6). Israel's growth from wilderness wanderers to a thriving monarchy during David's and Solomon's reigns is depicted as a young woman's development into a beautifully adorned queen (Ezek. 16:9–14).

16:15–34. Israel's Harlotry and Adultery. But Israel became a harlot and engaged in foreign, anti-Yahweh practices: (1) false worship at shrines (vv. 16–19; cf. Prov. 7:16–17); (2) filicide (i.e., killing one's child; Ezek. 16:20–23; cf. Lev. 18:21; 1 Kin. 11:5); and (3) making illegitimate covenants with the surrounding major powers—Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon (Ezek. 16:24–30). Isaiah warned Judah repeatedly against seeking alliances with Egypt in order to resist Assyria, but his warnings went unheeded (2 Kin. 18:21–24; Is. 30–31) even though they knew such a plan had not worked for the Northern Kingdom (2 Kin. 17:1–5). Judah's alliance with Assyria refers to Ahaz's appeals to Assyria for help against the Syro-Ephraimite coalition and the Northern Kingdom of Israel in the eighth century (2 Kin. 16:1–9; Is. 7:1–9). The interaction with Babylon (Ezek. 16:29) probably refers to Hezekiah's foolish interaction with the Babylonian envoys (Is. 39:1–8) and later kings' alliances with Babylon (2 Kin. 24).

The vulgar description of the people of God acting as an insatiable prostitute (Ezek. 16:15–17, 26, 28)—engaged in idolatry, spiritualism, and covenant infidelity—provides a background for the description of the unfaithful people of God in the book of Revelation (Rev. 17:1–14). The faithful people of God are described as chaste (James 1:27; Rev. 14:4; cf. Heb. 13:4). The adulterous ways of a harlot are used to describe how God's people turn their backs on Him to serve other gods. Just as in Ezekiel's time God's people became enamored with paganism and God appealed to them to come out of that false religious system, so in Revelation the true people of God are called to turn from their spiritual adultery, come out of spiritual Babylon, and return to true worship that is centered in the Creator and covenant faithfulness (Jer. 50:8; 51:6, 45; Rev. 18:1–4).

Israel's harlotry was worse because normally prostitution resulted from economic privation, but Israel had all God's blessings, even royalty. Prostitute Israel did not take payment for their services; they gave the payment (Ezek. 16:30–34) in the form of God's material blessings for erecting idolatrous practices in defiance of their covenant Lord (cf. Deut. 23:18). The end-time harlot depicted in the book of Revelation goes one step further to become the worldwide epicenter of spiritualism (Rev. 18:1–3), arrogance and cruelty (Rev. 18:4–8), and political and economic depravity (Rev. 18:9–20). God's call is the same in Ezekiel: come out of her and cease following her ways!

16:35–43. O Prostitute, Hear the Word of the Lord. Israel's debauchery exposed them to paganism and did not lead to fruitful results. Most pagan deities were connected with nature in some fashion, and agricultural produce was a sign of the deities' blessing. Israel's self-imposed bondage to ungodly acts stemmed in large part from their confused beliefs about God. Their intention to manipulate God through rituals, like that of the surrounding nations, was met with divine wrath. Because Israel trusted in false deities, Yahweh would allow them to be returned to the state in which He found them in order to show Israel what those false deities would do for them (v. 39; cf. vv. 7, 22). Like Israel, God would mobilize those nations, but for different purposes. Because of capital offenses like adultery (Lev. 20:10) and the shedding of blood (Deut. 19:11–12), the people deserved to die, and God would bring judgment, but in all this His purposes were redemptive.

16:44–59. Samaria, Sodom, and Hypocrisy. Israel's defection from God was so thorough that there was no difference between them and the surrounding nations. The saying "Like mother, like daughter" was an appropriate one (v. 44). The mother (Hittite) represents the heathen Canaanites, and the sister (Israel) is associated with Sodom (vv. 44–46; Gen. 19:1–29; Is. 1:15). The people of Judah had surpassed the notoriously infamous and immoral Sodomites and the people of the Northern Kingdom of Israel (Ezek. 16:47). God's objection to Judah and Israel was that they strove to be like the pagan nations. The implication was that Yahweh was just another localized deity, one among others. Whenever conceptions of God are brought down to the level of human machinations, He makes it clear that He has no equal (20:9; 39:7; Is. 45:20–21; 46:5–13; 48:9–11). God's original plan was for Israel to be a light on a hill to the nations, an illustration of God's rule of justice and righteousness (Deut. 28:1–14; 1 Kin. 3:1–15). When God and His truth are disregarded, there is nowhere else to go but in a downward spiral of destruction (Ezek. 16:47–48). Spiritual rebellion has a social impact, and in Israel it took the form of the oppression of the vulnerable (poor and needy, v. 49; cf. Deut. 15:11) and spiritual pride (Ezek. 16:56–58).

16:60–63. God's Memory and Mercy. Memory plays an important role in the life of the people of God. When God said He would remember His covenant, it meant He would act in light of it

(v. 60). To establish the covenant meant to confirm and maintain something that already existed (vv. 60, 62; 34:20–31; cf. Gen. 6:18; 9:9, 11, 17; 17:7, 19, 21; 26:3). To remember their sins meant that Israel would feel ashamed and act in a way that would honor God. In both the OT and the NT—in type and antitype, in shadow and reality—restoration was made by atonement (Ezek. 16:63; Heb. 8–10).

17:1–24

Two Eagles and a Vine

Ezekiel is given a parable (vv. 1–10), its interpretation (vv. 11–21), and a parable reiteration with a statement of its consequences (vv. 22–24). A crucial question is raised throughout the chapter: "Will it thrive?" As Ezekiel brings back the metaphor of the house of Israel as the vine (cf. 15:2, 6) to comment on the political situation, he sets forth Judah's imminent demise.

17:1–10. Great Eagles and the Vine. In the Bible, animals are used to symbolize important historical events (e.g., Dan. 7–8; Rev. 12–13; 17–20). Ezekiel's symbolism points to his immediate circumstances to explain Judah's folly. The words *khidah* ("riddle" or "allegory"; cf. Judg. 14:12–16) and *mashal* ("parable" or "proverb"; cf. Prov. 1:1; Eccl. 12:9) are used in wisdom contexts, and here they serve to reinforce Judah's folly. Both words intimate a need for interpretation and introduce an allegorical story. By couching history in an enigmatic story, the people would be drawn initially into the plotline. The story, however, ends on a sour note. A beautiful eagle (or griffon vulture), known for its size and flying ability, took the top of the cedar (Ezek. 17:1–6). The irony of the eagle planting the topmost of the cedar's young twigs is already a subtle indication of the presence of foreign elements. Dissatisfied with its condition, the now finely trestled vine turned its attention to another eagle (v. 7). With deadly claws, the first eagle would not accept a swap, especially since it helped the vine to grow (vv. 9–10).

17:11–21. Prophetic Riddles and Parables Explained. The first eagle stands for Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, who campaigned in Judah in 597 B.C. and took King Jehoiachin (the topmost of the cedar's shoot; vv. 4, 12b) and his officials (v. 12) into exile ("city of merchants," Babylon; v. 4). Zedekiah is probably the one referred to as the seed of the land (vv. 5, 12–13; 2 Kin. 24:15; 25:6). The planting of a vine by Nebuchadnezzar refers to his stratagem to reestablish the kingdom of Judah as a puppet client and buffer state against any Egyptian aggression. Branches turning to the eagle emphasize Judah's vassal state under Babylon's control. The second eagle most likely represents Pharaoh Psammetichus II of Egypt (595–589 B.C.). However, Judah's hope was not Egypt (Jer. 27:1–22). The faith of God's people must not rest in human wisdom and strength (cf. 1 Cor. 2:5). The prophet Daniel later made it clear that Babylon would be followed on the world stage by Media and Persia (Dan. 8:20). The wisdom of God is seen in His foreknowledge and proclaimed through prophecy, which serves to establish faith in His providence despite external circumstances (Is. 46:10).

17:22–24. Messianic Hope. God continued to show His sovereignty, entering the arena of politics and promising to set up His own royal leader. This is a messianic prophecy of a Davidic king originating from on high (v. 22). The branch, fruit, and splendor that earthly powers intended for Israel would come to naught (vv. 8–9), but the same characteristics would be fully displayed in God's promised king (v. 23). Here, God is evidently the agent instead of the eagles, indicating that His will supersedes the machinations of earthly powers in the establishment of His king and kingdom (cf. 1 Sam 2:1–10; Dan. 2:34, 44–45). The influence of a foreign nation or king would not impede the fulfillment of this messianic promise, though Herod tried (Matt. 2).

18:1—23:49

ACCOUNTABILITY AND RETRIBUTION

Chapters 18–23 in a sense recapitulate Ezekiel's criticism against the leadership of Judah (chaps. 12–14), but in a more specific and larger historical context. Because of the corporate exile of Judah, some of the people seemed to believe that they were the unjust victims of their fellow Israelites' crimes. In several historical vignettes, God showed how all Israel benefitted from His gracious acts. At the same time, the promises of redemption and returning to the land were corporate. So the Exile was a response to the nation's faithlessness. The innocent would suffer, but the others were guilty by sins of omission or commission, in word or deed, and by faithlessness or presumption. But in His gracious way, God would punish individuals for their own sins and save individuals by His grace as they trusted in Him.

18:1–32

The Righteous Shall Live; the Wicked Shall Die

Those in exile used a proverb to question God's fairness (vv. 2, 25). This catchy adage attempted to put the spotlight on God, and it garnered some popularity, as shown by its use in Jeremiah 31:29–30. God correctly put the spotlight back on the people, where it belonged. Like a petulant child, Judah refused to acknowledge their sins and brazenly accused God of being reckless in His execution of justice. God set the record straight by using irony to show these "righteous" people that the judgment was justified and that in His patience He had borne long with them.

18:1–18. If…Then. God, through an oath, stated that His assessment of the problem would bring clarity to the situation (v. 3). In chapter 14 it was noted that the righteous (Noah, Daniel, Job) could not mitigate the punishment of the wicked. In chapter 18, the focus is on individual responsibility, answering the question of whether children would be punished for the sins of their fathers. Three case studies are given to disprove the proverb: the righteous person (vv. 5–9); the wicked son (vv. 10–13); and the righteous son of a wicked father (vv. 14–18). The righteous person is described (vv. 5-9, 14–18) as one faithful to the covenant. Justice and righteousness show themselves in what a person avoids and by what people promote through their actions. The main issues that all three cases touch on are: (1) worship—pagan monuments, idol worship (v. 6); (2) sexual contact—sexual contact with a neighbor's spouse (v. 6; Ex. 20:14; Lev. 18:20), sexual ritual impurity (Ezek. 18:6; Lev. 18:19); (3) financial dealings—piling up bad debts, theft, exploitation of the vulnerable (Ezek. 18:7; Ex. 22:21), living by impulse and greed; and (4) legal disputes—considering one person better than another (Ezek. 18:8; Lev. 19:15). It is important to note that the passage presents the lives of the righteous son and father as in accordance with God's gracious revelation (Ezek. 18:9, 17), while the wicked son would die because of disobedience (v. 13). Notice that Ezekiel presents only the righteous as going beyond the prohibitions and promoting justice and acting with integrity (vv. 7–9, 17). This includes feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and executing true justice with fairness and equity as an expression of what it means to worship God (cf. Ps. 5:3–8). Not just their behavior but their character is in view (Ezek. 18:9), and the righteous do what God loves (Ps. 33:5). Habits, dispositions, and the will express the heart's condition, for out of it flow the issues of life (Prov. 4:23).

18:19–32. Turn and Live! Justice and righteousness describe and define God's character from Genesis to Revelation. God wants His people to pursue justice and righteousness as a sign of submission to His lordship. The second commandment indicates that the immoral behavior of parents often carries negative results for children and grandchildren, whether by nurture or nature. The judgment applies to those who hate God and only to the third and fourth generations. So while this command describes the consequences for the disobedient and unbelieving, it focuses on God's mercy, especially in view of His steadfast love for thousands of those who love Him (Ex. 20:6). A misunderstanding of God's justice often leads to despair and doubt about His grace, love, holiness, and wisdom in the practical spheres of life. Ezekiel addresses two interconnected problems. First, though Scripture (including elsewhere in Ezekiel itself, e.g., 21:4; 23:46–49; 24:21) mentions many examples of children being punished for their parents' sins (e.g., Gen. 9; Ex. 12:29; Lev. 26:39–40; Josh. 6:26; 2 Sam. 12:14; cf. 2 Sam. 21; 1 Kin. 14:10; 16:34; 22:19–20; 2 Kin. 5:27; 23:26–27; Matt. 23:34–39), children will not ultimately and eternally bear their parents' guilt, and parents will not bear their children's guilt. Second, any wicked person can be transformed into a righteous person, while a righteous person can turn from his or her righteousness and commit iniquity (Ezek. 18:21–27; 33:18–19). In both instances, the person who sins is culpable for his or her own actions, and one's past does not dictate one's future.

Apparently the people did not want to be treated as individuals but were wrongly using the principle of familial guilt as an excuse to be fatalistically complacent in regard to their own guilt and sin. In 18:19, 25, and 29, the people objected.

Ezekiel uses the verb *shub* ("to turn," "repent," "restore") in several passages to show the nature of hope and of rebellion (vv. 21, 23–24, 26–28, 30, 32). True repentance includes a godly sorrow for sin as well as a turning from sin and selfishness to righteousness and holiness. God's command to repent, turn, and live (vv. 30, 32) was a call to Israel to surrender to God's authority as Creator and Father. Herein lies the biblical teaching of righteousness by faith. The call to life (vv. 9, 17, 21, 28, 32) is a call to embrace God and the gift of His holiness. He gives to His children a new heart and new spirit (v. 31; 37:22–32; cf. Ps. 51:7–12). His commands are indeed His enablings, for it is His love that seeks out human beings, honestly assesses their condition, and offers forgiveness, reconciliation, and sanctification. When individuals return to God, though they have been sinful, none of their sins will be remembered (Ezek. 18:22, 24). That God will not remember their rebellions, perversions, injustices, abominations, and treachery means that He will not treat them as sinners.

The question in v. 23 and the affirmations of v. 32 point to the depths of God's love and the sickness of the human heart. God seeks to save and not to destroy. He wants sinners to live. How will His people live? By (1) honoring God in obedience (v. 21); (2) turning from wicked ways (v. 23); and (3) doing justice and righteousness (v. 27). But the rebellious are disobedient and seem only to assail God and question His motives rather than their own (vv. 25, 29). Thus, the ultimate purpose in judgment is revealed: God wants His people to see what life is like without Him. The removal of His presence can only result in calamity (chaps. 8–11), but His abiding presence with His people results in abundant life (chaps. 40–48).

19:1–14. Lament for the Princes of Israel. Ezekiel confronted his contemporaries by exposing them again to the reality of God's sovereignty over history. Two familiar images, the lion (cf. Gen. 49:8–12) and the vine (cf. Ezek. 15; 17; Is. 5:1–7), show the crisis of leadership in Judah (cf. Ezek. 17). The many literary connections with Jacob's words about Judah in Genesis 49:8–12, which are filled with the messianic promise, emphasize the failure of the Davidic kingship. Haggai and Zechariah would encourage the despairing hopes of the people to see God's promise to David realized. The coming of the messianic King would be fulfilled in Jesus (Matt. 9:27; 15:22; 20:21; 21:9; Mark 10:47; 12:35–37). Not only would this Davidic King rule over the earth, but even at this time He would reign over the hearts of His people in love and grace.

In the first section (Ezek. 19:1–9), the first lion, taken to Egypt, was Jehoahaz (vv. 3–4; 2 Kin. 23:29–33; 609 B.C.). The second lion, taken to Babylon, was most likely Jehoiachin (Ezek. 19:5, 9; 2 Kin. 24:8–12; 598 B.C.), who is described in Ezekiel 17:2–4, 12 as one exiled to Babylon. Also, the text makes it clear that the mother lioness raised up the lion. The imagery of a mother represents Judah (19:2, 10), and the other lions are the other kingdoms of the world, the Gentile nations (vv. 2 [lions], 4 [nations], 6 [lions], 8 [nations]). The vine also represents the kingdom of Judah, which became a fruitful vine but was then uprooted in fury (vv. 10, 12). The focus on the activities of the lioness emphasizes that God was no longer being consulted about the kingship. In fact, as a result of God's judgment, foreign rulers were seemingly in control of the monarchy from 605 to 586 B.C. (cf. 2 Kin. 23:34; 24:17; Dan. 1:1). The image of the vine focuses on the Davidic dynasty and the branches represent their rulers. The parable describes how it was dismantled from its high estate and taken into exile.

The literary significance of chapter 18 is now brought into view. The placement of this chapter on individual responsibility—between chapters 17 and 19—shows God's justice and mercy being applied to the Davidic kings. Unfortunately, as the author of the book of Kings informs us, most of the kings did evil in the sight of the Lord. God's mercy and justice apply to all alike, regardless of status.

20:1–49

Rebellion, Revelation, and Redemption

As Ezekiel's timeline moves closer to the besiegement of Jerusalem, Israel's history is described as a repetition of apostasy. This reinforces the fact that God had gone above and beyond in His dealings with His people. Pivotal events in Israel's history are noted, with an assessment of that generation carrying serious implications for Judah during its exile and for us as well. The content of the chapter is organized around the ways God revealed Himself to His people ("I am the LORD," vv. 5, 7, 12, 19, 20, 26, 38, 42, 44).

20:1–17. Exodus and Sinai. During the Exodus (vv. 5–9), God elected Israel and promised them the gift of the land of Canaan. He was their Savior and Warrior (Ex. 15:1–18). Yet Israel rebelled against God and retained their vile and abominable/detestable idols (Ezek. 20:7–8; cf. Ex. 32–34; Deut. 29:16–17), defiling themselves with Egyptian idols (cf. Rom. 1:18–23; PP 315-330). God's restraint was based solely on His sovereign choice of maintaining the holiness of His name/reputation, which would be vindicated before the nations (Ezek. 20:9).

At Sinai (vv. 10–17), God gave them His regulations and His Sabbath (vv. 11–12) as a sign of the covenant, and He revealed Himself as Israel's wise Lawgiver. Sadly, Israel's first generation of the Exodus established a pattern of sin and rebellion in the wilderness (vv. 10–16). The core of the problem was that their hearts were unwilling to appropriate God's grace and holiness. The focus of worship must be the true Creator and Redeemer, whose relationship to Israel and all creation is particularly detailed in the Ten Commandments. The plural form "Sabbaths" does not necessarily include the religious festivals that required the people to go up to Jerusalem to worship God three times a year (Ex. 23:14–19; Deut. 16:1–17). The reference is to the Sabbath as a sign of the covenant. The ceremonial sabbaths served to promote the true worship of God by identifying Him as the source of Israel's temporal wealth and blessings. In the NT, these sabbaths find their deeper meaning through biblical typology in the life, death, and high priestly ministry of Jesus (cf. Acts 2:1–4; 1 Cor. 5:7; Rev. 7:9–12). Because the people desired something other than God's way, He was justified in disciplining them. But because He is a gracious and loving God, He continually sought to bring them back to covenant faithfulness (Ezek. 20:17).

20:18–44. From the Wilderness to the Monarchy. God gave to the second generation of the Exodus the same opportunity He had given to their fathers, but they also sinned in the wilderness (vv. 18–26). The children did not learn the lessons of their forebearers and repeated the same sins. But this time God informed them that one day they would be scattered among the nations (v. 23; Deut. 28:64). The pattern of rejecting God's way of life had become a way of life for the people (Ezek. 20:24). On the idea that God gave statutes and laws that were "not good" to the Israelites, see below, "God and Bad Laws (Ezekiel 20:25)."

The people rejected the laws of the firstborn (Ex. 13:2, 13; 22:29; 34:20; Num. 18:15) and offered their children in sacrifice to the surrounding pagan idols instead. They disregarded God's law by passing their firstborn through the fire (cf. Ezek. 20:31; Deut. 12:29–31; 2 Kin. 21:6; 23:10; Jer. 7:31; 19:5; 32:35). God passed judgment on their actions and declared them defiled

God and Bad Laws (Ezekiel 20:25)

Ezekiel 20:25 is probably one of the most difficult passages in the book of Ezekiel. Some translations render it as "I gave them statutes that were not good." The commentaries offer different interpretations, but unfortunately none of them has been widely accepted. We will offer a possible way of reading the verse.

1. Stating the Problem. If Ezekiel is stating that God gave the Israelites statutes and laws that "were not good, and judgments by which they could not live," then He would be contradicting Himself. This is the basic problem we face. Nowhere else in the OT is any divine statute or law described as "not good." Rather, what we find is that God told the Israelites that His principles were ones that they should live by (Lev. 18:5; cf. Deut. 4:1). These verses are even quoted in Ezekiel 20:11, 13 and 21—all in the very same context as v. 25, where God refers to giving them what was "not good." On the surface, these statements seem to be in conflict. However, it is important to take into account other considerations, including other aspects of the context, which will help lead to a viable harmonization.

2. Contextual Considerations. As indicated in the commentary, v. 25 belongs to a passage in which the Lord recounted His mighty acts of redemption on behalf of Israel during their departure from Egypt and their sojourns in the wilderness. But the main interest of the text is to reveal the constant spirit of rebellion manifested by God's people in acts of idolatry. It was because of His concern for His honor that God did not abandon them. It is within that review of what He had done for Israel that the Lord said, "I gave to them statutes that were not good." Therefore, He was referring to something He Himself did at a particular moment. However, the context also indicates that the laws God gave to His people were good, and they were expected to live by them. Interestingly, while Ezekiel uses the feminine form *khuqot* ("statutes") when referring to God's law (vv. 11, 13), in v. 25 the masculine *khuqqim* ("statutes") is used. This change may be a signal that in v. 25 Ezekiel is not referring to the same statutes mentioned in vv. 11 and 13. Whatever v. 25 may mean, Ezekiel himself, as well as the rest of the OT, considered God's laws to be good.

3. Suggested Solution. A possible solution is found in the next verse (v. 26), where a specific law is mentioned. The passage refers to the law of the firstborn. Every firstborn child belonged to the Lord, but since the Lord rejected child sacrifice, the Israelites would redeem their children. Unfortunately, there were times when they chose to sacrifice their children to the pagan deity Molech. This practice is explicitly mentioned in v. 31. This certainly was a bad law, but it was not from the Lord. So, the context informs us what was meant by a law that was "not good." If that is the case, then we must ask, Why would the Lord say that He gave them statutes that were not good? We should look at the text a little closer.

Most Bible versions render the first verb in v. 25 to read "I gave them." That is a good translation, but there are other possibilities. For instance, we could also translate it as "I even imposed on them" or "I also gave them over to statutes." These translations are based on the fact that when the Hebrew verb *natan* ("to give") is followed by the preposition *le* ("to"), it could mean "to deliver someone to." The translation "I also gave them up to statutes that were not good" could be correct. In that case, the text would be saying that since the Israelites determined to follow bad laws from their neighbors, the Lord confirmed their willing rebellion against Him by handing them over to obedience to laws that were not good. The idea that God confirms disobedience by handing rebellious people over to it is attested in other places in the Bible (e.g., Is. 6:9–10; 63:17; 2 Thess. 2:11–12). According to Ezekiel 20:26, even then the Lord is seeking to impress upon them the magnitude of their sins, hoping to lead them to repentance.

(Ezek. 20:31). This custom of filicide (killing one's own children) indicates that the Israelites were following the cultic practices of pagan nations (cf. v. 18). Declared defiled, they could not approach the Lord and finally had to be expelled from the land. Thus, God would show that He is God. Verse 27 summarizes the charges against the people as being related to blasphemy and disloyalty. God is blasphemed when His people take up the customs of the world and reject His grace, love, and lordship.

The experience of the people, from the times of the Judges to the monarchy (vv. 27–32), shows that God fulfilled His promise of the land (v. 28). But unfortunately, Israel blasphemed Him by worshiping the gods of the Canaanites.

Each section of the chapter reflects the same pattern: God giving undeserved grace, Israel responding with apostasy, and God withholding judgment for His name's sake. Though there were bright spots in the history of Israel, Ezekiel's long view of that history is one of false starts, calamitous outcomes, and continuous rebelliousness (cf. 2:3). God's remedy was restorative judgment (20:33–44). To remind the exiles that He was the reason for every good thing they experienced, He promised to bring them back to the place where they had experienced His grace and covenant promises.

20:45—22:31

The Drawn Sword and the Impure City

The storyline of this section is structured around fire (cf. the *inclusio* 20:45–49//21:31–32) and the sword—the riddle of the sword (21:1–7); the sword sharpened and ready (vv. 8–17); the sword in action (vv. 18–27); and the sword sheathed (vv. 28–32). (In modern translations, 20:45–49 corresponds to 21:1–5 in the Hebrew text.) Ezekiel was informed that God would execute judgment on Israel in the same way He judged the nations—through military defeat (cf. chaps. 25–32). His sword, Babylon, would be unsheathed, slicing and dicing, bringing death and destruction, yet even the sword would become an object of God's judgment (21:30–32; cf. Hab. 1:5—2:20). Because the people complained that Ezekiel was speaking in parables, the metaphor of fire is interpreted as referring to the sword (Ezek. 20:46–49; 21:3). Bad news was coming that would cause hearts to melt, hands to become feeble, spirits to faint, and knees to become weak as water (21:7).

20:45—21:7. The Flame and Sword of Judgment. Now that a historical review of Israel has been given (chap. 20), the consequences are to be meted out (21:1–5). God had made use of a multitude of images that depicted historical circumstances, and He used fire to depict judgment on the inhabitants of Jerusalem (cf. 15:5–8) and stating that Babylon was God's instrument of judgment on His own people (12:13; 17:12, 16, 20; 19:9). The apparent grievance was not due to the content of the message; it stemmed from the spiritual dullness of the people, whose attitude is elsewhere expressed as being in denial (12:21–28). God directed Ezekiel to use his present position in Babylon as his point of reference (20:46). Teman (Southland) is Jerusalem, which is considered to be south of Babylon (vv. 46–47). The land of Israel is depicted as a forest that is fuel for the unquenchable fires of judgment (v. 47; cf. 1 Kin. 5:6). Ezekiel has already described the circumstances of the besiegement of Judah (Ezek. 4–7), and here he writes about the reaction to the report of Babylon's preparation for the invasion (21:6–7). While God can distinguish between the righteous and the wicked in an investigative judgment (cf. chap. 9), an invading pagan army could not make such a distinction (21:3–5). In this regard, the few righteous persons would suffer with the wicked.

21:8–17. The Sword Is Sharpened. In a poetic utterance filled with anguish, the sword is made ready for Yahweh's use in judgment—it was sharpened and polished (v. 9). In His workshop of divine providence, He had prepared Babylon (the Neo-Babylonian Empire) for the world stage. The actions of the nations would be seen within the purview of God's sovereignty and prophetic fulfillment (Is. 44:28; Jer. 25:9). Through the prophet Jeremiah, God told His people to accept the current political regime (i.e., Babylonian rule) and focus on restoring their relationship with Him (Jer. 25:5–6; 29:1–14).

God directed Ezekiel to strike his hands together (Ezek. 21:14) as a symbol of God's use of the sword (v. 17). He would move the sword to the right and left, up and down (v. 16). The Lord would cause slaughter and destruction everywhere upon the people. However, there was a note of hope in this proclamation of judgment.The nations, subject to God, could only go as far as He would allow. God's people were not to be left wholly to the machinations of the wicked; it was God who would brandish the sword (vv. 16–17). The prophet Habakkuk (ca. 640–609 B.C.) saw the decline of the Assyrian juggernaut and the ascendancy of Babylon, and he asked about what many today are concerned with: the justice of God (theodicy). But Ezekiel is depicting God as the Divine Warrior who restores justice and righteousness to the land (Israel), albeit through warfare.

21:18–32. The Sword in Action. Ezekiel would mark out two ways or roads and place a signpost where the two roads branched out, one to the Ammonite capital of Rabbah and the other to Jerusalem (vv. 19–20). The king of Babylon would stand at the head of the two roads with his sword, using three specific types of divination to choose one of them: (1) the selection of marked arrows; (2) consulting idols; and (3) hepatoscopy—examining the liver of slain animals to make predictions. Not only would God send Babylon to execute judgment upon Judah, but He would allow the Babylonian king to work through his religious practices to determine the way to go that would result in the fulfillment of God's purposes. Behind all of this was God's sovereignty. To the Judahite leaders, whose focus was on ritual rather than on obedience (1 Sam. 15:22–23), it seemed like a false divination, and because it was judged false, they would deny its validity. But the message to Judah was clear: God is sovereign and He works with people where they are. Nebuchadnezzar eventually came to his senses (Dan. 4:34–37), but the Davidic king, who had contact with the God of heaven, access to His revelation and abiding presence, and evidence of His faithfulness and mighty acts on the Israelites' behalf, remained in disbelief and rebellion.

The Ammonites probably assumed that since Babylon attacked Israel, they would be safe, but God assured them that their time was coming (Ezek. 21:28–29). In 25:1–7, God laid out further details in regard to Ammon's destined doom. Like Assyria (Is. 10:5–19), Babylon was used by God to bring judgment but would also receive judgment. God's engagement with Israel's neighbors in the wider landscape of history shows how, with Israel's compliance or defiance, the nations would have a witness to the Sovereign of the world.

22:1–31. The Impure City. Israel's concept of holiness included their God (Lev. 19:1–8), their bodies (Lev. 11:1—14:32; 18), their social interactions (Lev. 19:9–18; 25:35–55), their homes (Lev. 14:33–57), their land and property (Lev. 25:1–34), and their worship (Lev. 17:1–8; 23). Every area of life was set apart as belonging to God. Ezekiel now describes the reason for the judgment announced in the previous chapter. Israel had defiled herself in every area of life: religiously, politically, socially, and economically. God enumerated Judah's sins (Ezek. 22:1–16), stated His response of punishment (vv. 17–22), and identified the main culprits (vv. 23–31).

The catalog of Israel's offenses includes breaches of covenant provisions found mainly in Leviticus 18–20. God's focus was the city, a metaphor (i.e., metonymy) for those who constituted the city. The nations would mock Israel (Ezek. 22:4–5). The breakdown of the social relationships among God's people can be attributed to an unbiblical view of the image of God (Gen. 1:26). The shedding of blood (Ezek. 22:3) refers to the literal taking of life, demanding the life of the one who took it as recompense because people are made in God's image (Gen. 9:6; Num. 35:33). But the shedding of blood created another problem. It had defiled the land and had made it incompatible with holiness. Ezekiel's point is that left unresolved, such a defilement would lead to exile (Lev. 18:28). The murderers deserved just retribution. Other problems are identified: idolatry (Ezek. 22:3; cf. Ex. 20:2–7), dishonoring parents (Ezek. 22:7; cf. Ex. 20:12; Lev. 19:3), not caring for the disadvantaged classes of society (Ezek. 22:7; cf. Lev. 19:3, 10), Sabbath breaking (Ezek. 22:8; cf. Ex. 20:8–11), slander (Ezek. 22:9; cf. Ex. 20:16), pagan worship (Ezek. 22:9; cf. Lev. 18:17), sexual deviancy (Ezek. 22:10–11; cf. Lev. 18:7–20; Ex. 20:14), and financial bribery and extortion (Ezek. 22:12; cf. Deut. 16:19; 27:25). All these, in one way or another, defamed God's intention to restore His image in humans. But God would bring all of this to an end (Ezek. 22:13–16).

The God of Ezekiel and the God of Gideon are the same (cf. Judg. 7). God wanted the pure metal of faith; the dross of unbelief, doubt, and rebellion needed to be removed (Ezek. 22:18). Quality is desired over quantity. While God's desire is for everyone to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4), His rhetorical question (Ezek. 22:14) indicates that many would not be willing to have the gold of a faith that could endure to the end (Luke 18:8). Judah had become impatient with God's call for endurance and trust (Jer. 28:1–4; 29:24–28). The future "gathering" prophecies typically signify hope, restoration, and renewal (Is. 11:12; 40:9–11; 54:7; Jer. 23:3; 29:14). Unfortunately, here the people would be gathered for judgment (Ezek. 22:19). The imagery is of leftover dross, the waste material left after metals are purified by the process of smelting (vv. 17–22).

Though leaders and people alike were guilty of rebellion (cf. Hos. 4:9), the emphasis in Ezekiel is predominantly placed on the leaders who were primarily responsible for defiling the city. They were chosen as God's agents of grace who would (1) proclaim His word faithfully (prophets; Ezek. 22:25); (2) help the people distinguish the holy from the profane, mediate God's reconciliation, and lead out in true worship (priests; v. 26; Lev. 10:10); and (3) exemplify God's sovereignty before the nation through justice (princes or officials; Ezek. 22:27; Deut. 1:9–18). They turned upside down every means and method God established to guide the people in holy living: the Torah, the holy places, the purity laws, justice, etc. The leaders used their position to enrich themselves through lies, manipulation, bribes, extortion, and all forms of injustice. Among God's people, leadership is meant to protect and provide for an environment where God's grace can be made manifest and His character can be revealed.

23:1–49

Oholah and Oholibah

The evident parallels with chapter 16 display once again God's love for His people and their constant refusal to live in harmony with Him. Through the imagery of two sisters, the acts of the capital cities of Samaria (23:5–10) and Jerusalem (vv. 11–35) are described. God's judgment on the two kingdoms is reviewed in graphic detail as He again encouraged Ezekiel to get through to His people in His final word (vv. 36–49). The theme of harlotry ties together the various sections of the parable. Israel's adulterous acts describe a moral pathology, where they courted political alliances, copied foreign cultic rituals, and denied their Lord, who provided for them.

23:1–4. Two Sisters and Their Harlotry. Israel's mission would be a light to the nations as a royal priesthood and a holy nation (Ex. 19:6). Solomon's son Rehoboam foolishly misused his position of trust as a badge of autonomous rule and brought an impassable division to an already tense relationship between the Judahites and the northern Israelites (2 Sam 2–5; 1 Kin. 12). The two sisters, Oholah ("her tent") and Oholibah ("my tent is in her")—Israel and Judah—came from one mother: a common patriarchal origin and exodus experience (Ezek. 23:2; cf. Ex. 19:1–5). In the description of the sisters as the capital cities of each kingdom (Samaria and Jerusalem; Ezek. 23:4), a political context is in view. The picture of a fractured people of God (the Northern and Southern Kingdoms) is addressed by God's gracious promise of the renewing work of His Spirit (chap. 37). Before that work of grace could occur, it was necessary to address their sin. Israel's idolatrous relationship began early in Egypt and carried on throughout their political existence (23:3; cf. 16:23–26; 20:5–8; Ex. 16:1–3; 32; Is. 30–31). Samaria was ultimately forsaken by Egypt, who never had their best interests at heart like their Lord Yahweh did (2 Kin. 17:4).

23:5–10. Samaria and Her Lovers. Samaria's harlotry with Assyria is seen best in its dependence on Assyria to the point of becoming a vassal who paid tribute. The northern kings Menahem (2 Kin. 15:19) and Hoshea (2 Kin. 17:3) operated by sight and not by faith, and they assumed that placating the major world power at the time was the best way to retain their own hold on power (Hos. 5:13; 7:11; 8:9). The political influence on Israel's religious actions stemmed back to the Northern Kingdom's first king, Jeroboam, who was the prototype of covenant failure in kingship (2 Kin. 10:29; 17:21). It is interesting that he tried to connect Israel's worship to Egypt with his idolatrous acts (1 Kin. 11:40; 12:28). The Northern Kingdom's relationship with foreign nations was constantly a subject of criticism by the prophets sent to them (Hos. 8:9; Amos 1–2).

23:11–35. Judah and Her Lovers. While it is hoped that people learn from the mistakes of others, Jerusalem never took any lessons from the destruction of Samaria. In fact, Jerusalem's duplicity seems to have gone far beyond Samaria's (Ezek. 16:47–52). More attention is paid to Judah (Oholibah) for two reasons: (1) she was the only kingdom left when Ezekiel wrote, and was so for over a century; and (2) Judah was the only and last bastion of hope for God's purposes to be carried out through the Davidic dynasty. Isaiah's proclamations of the coming of the Branch from Jesse seemed a distant dream (cf. Is. 11:1). Judah's vacillations between Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon exemplified the existing confusion among the leaders. Even one of Judah's best kings, Hezekiah, was carried along with a folly typical of the northern kings. While still subject to Assyria, Hezekiah accommodated envoys from Babylon, which drew the dismay and rebuke of Isaiah (Ezek. 23:12–18; 2 Kin. 18:14–16; 20:12–13; Is. 39). Though the people of God had been liberated from Egyptian bondage, Egypt continued to be a major influence on the political scene for Judah. Even after the only king prophesied about by name (Josiah) fell to the Egyptians (2 Kin. 23:28–30), even after Jehoahaz was taken captive to Egypt (2 Kin. 23:31–34), even after having a puppet king placed on the throne and being stripped financially (2 Kin. 23:34–35), Judah still lusted after Egypt for aid (Ezek. 23:19–21). In four oracles of judgment, God explained how Judah would be dismantled: the betrayal of their lovers (vv. 22–27), the economic devastation of agricultural life (vv. 28–31), the international disdain and exile (vv. 32–34), and the necessity for divine retribution to be rendered for their idolatrous ways (v. 35).

23:36–49. This They Have Done to Me. The presence of God departed from the sanctuary in Jerusalem because it had been polluted with Judah's abominations. Child sacrifice is mentioned several times (16:20; 23:37, 39), and it is crucial to ascertain why this was such an abomination, even beyond the murdering of their own children, which was horrifying enough. The law required that every firstborn be given to Yahweh—set apart for Him as a memorial of His redemption in bringing the people out of Egypt. Every male firstborn had to be redeemed by an animal (Ex. 13:12–16; 34:19–20). Unlike Israel, some of the surrounding pagan nations sacrificed their children to their idols (2 Kin. 3:27). It is likely, as the Moabite Stone intimates, that King Mesha used this practice to appease his national god Chemosh, who was angry with his land. The practice is also associated with Molech (Lev. 18:21; 20:2–5). The Judahites may have at times engaged in this practice in an attempt to avert the judgment of God. They may have brought this pagan practice into God's sanctuary, thus making it even more atrocious (Ezek. 23:39) as they rejected God's call to repentance and worsened their situation instead of averting disaster. Furthermore, by duplicating the practices of the nations, Judah may have been seeking to curry acceptance from the surrounding nations, thereby abandoning their distinctive role as a covenant people through whom the nations could seek Yahweh. Sadly, their sons would be killed anyway, this time not to avert a crisis but as part of the crisis (vv. 46–49).

24:1–27

SIEGE OF JERUSALEM

As a pivotal turning point in the book, Ezekiel 24 in a way foreshadows Jerusalem's ultimate destruction because of Judah's constant fracturing of their relationship with God. Yet God's ultimate purpose remained for a redeemed and purified people. While the besiegement of Judah meant the beginning of the end of the Davidic dynasty, it also marked the fulfillment of the Torah's warnings and the fulfillment of the prophecies of a series of preexilic prophets. The effect of suffering included an encouragement to go back to God's word and to ask what went wrong. In the aftermath of the siege, the postexilic prophets conveyed a deeper sense of, and hope in, God's sovereignty as they saw His promises of return and restoration come to fruition.

The siege of Jerusalem would establish trust in what the Lord, Yahweh, had said, which had permeated Ezekiel's proclamations up to that point. Ezekiel's contemporary, Daniel, proclaims an apocalyptic view of history while standing on the shoulders of Ezekiel's eschatological language and focusing on the sanctuary of God, atonement (Ezek. 8–11; 40–48; Dan. 8:14; 9:24–27), the judgment of the nations, and the vindication of the faithful people of God (Ezek. 25–32; 34–37; Dan. 2, 7–8, 10–12). Because of Israel's misplaced trust in a physical structure (Jer. 7:1–4), the destruction of the first temple in a sense paved the way for a temple of greater significance (Matt. 12:6; John 2:19). In Ezekiel's book, the last message before the beginning of the siege divides into two sections: the parable of the boiling pot (Ezek. 24:1–14) and the sign-act of a sudden death (vv. 15–27).

24:1–14

The Boiling Pot and the Siege of Jerusalem

The parable of the boiling pot is told in a poem (vv. 3–5) and is followed by its explanation (vv. 6–14). God commanded Ezekiel to write down the date when the king of Babylon began his siege against Jerusalem (i.e., January 15, 588 B.C.; vv. 1–2). The divine request to date prophetic events was not simply done to satisfy human curiosity but was an announcement of divine foreknowledge and providential sovereignty. It was implicitly a call to submit to the all-powerful and all-knowing majesty of the Creator and Redeemer. Scripture proclaims God as telling the *what* (event) and the *when* (time), but also as being intimately involved in the *how* (process) (cf. Dan. 9:20–23; 10:18–21).

The boiling pot (Ezek. 24:6; Jerusalem) in chapter 11 and the corrosive elements mentioned in 22:18–22 are now combined in a proverb of epic proportions. What was thought of as a metaphor of protection by the princes (11:3, 6–7) here (chap. 24) is turned on its head by God becoming a purifying cauldron of judgment. In satirical fashion, the cook would put all the good and choice pieces into the pot (cf. 23:7). This is a reference to the political and social elite. Combined with sacrificial language, the unusual use of a copper cauldron (24:11) suggests both a court banquet and a cultic meal. God's interpretation of the parable is twofold. First, Judah's defilement included a disdain for the sanctity of life (vv. 6–8). Their acts of bloodshed (v. 7) are here described as a failure to observe the obligation that respects life, for which the penalty was to be "cut off" and to "bear his iniquity" (Lev. 17:10–16). Second, God is described as the master cook, whose work would bring the needed cleanness (Ezek. 24:9–14). Judah's attempts to purify itself were short-lived and ultimately failed to work the type of purity God called for (e.g., Hezekiah's reforms, 2 Kin. 18; Josiah's reforms, 2 Kin. 22–23).

24:15–27

Ezekiel's Wife a Sign

God informed the prophet Ezekiel that he was going to take away from him the desire or delight of his eyes, but He would not allow any type of visible grief on the prophet's part. There would be no ceremonial mourning rites (v. 17; cf. Lev. 13:45; Mic. 3:7). So Ezekiel's wife died, and noting Ezekiel's past unorthodox actions, the people realized that his response carried some prophetic import. Just as Ezekiel experienced suddenly the death of his wife, so would the sanctuary of God be destroyed suddenly. Just as Ezekiel would not mourn for the loss of his wife, even so the children of Israel were not to be permitted to mourn for the profanation of God's dwelling place or the loss of their spouses and children who would perish during the siege (Ezek. 24:15–24). This was not a typical situation that would elicit the typical responses to death. During the long trek to Babylon from Jerusalem, the survivors would confirm the veracity of the prophetic message.

25:1—32:32

ORACLES AGAINST THE NATIONS

The oracles against Judah's surrounding neighbors start in the upper Transjordan area in the northeast and move southward and then westward toward the coastal regions: northeast (Ammon), east (Moab), southeast (Edom), and southwest (Philistia). All nations addressed in

chapter 25 denote small, local nation-states whose power and influence was typically exerted within their geographical boundaries and who in some way took advantage of Judah's misfortune. Sporadically they formed alliances and fought against God's people (2 Sam. 8; 2 Kin. 24:2). Ezekiel proclaims a series of three oracles in chapters 26–28 against Phoenicia (Tyre and Sidon, powerful city-states), Israel's neighbor situated in the northwest. He rounds out his oracles in chapters 29–32 against Egypt. The oracles against Tyre/Sidon and Egypt follow a similar pattern of prophecy (chaps. 26, 29) and lament (chaps. 27, 30), followed by another prophecy (chaps. 28, 31). The oracles against the nations have a common format that shares a varied form of four or five elements between them (here there are four):

- Messenger formula—God's declaration
- Indictment of the wrong committed
- Verdict of God's judgment
- Purpose of revealing God

It is unknown whether these oracles were actually sent to the nations they critique. For Judah, the literary placement of these oracles between the commencement of the siege (chap. 24) and its completion (chap. 33) served several instructive purposes. First, these prophecies pointed to God's sovereignty over the nations. Created in the image of God, all humans share ethical norms and are accountable to Him. The law codes of Israel's neighbors indicate that in many cases they had judicial, social, and cultural mores similar to those of Israel. So the lawsuits against the nations are based on a basic code of ethics (cf. Amos 1–2). Second, the prophecies also served as a warning to Judah: (1) not to trust in the human devices of military strength or political acumen because they too receive the judgment of God, and (2) that though Judah was His elect people, God is no respecter of persons; if Judah was acting like the surrounding nations, it would experience the same judgment. According to Jeremiah 27, with the exception of Egypt, which is mentioned later in the book, these nations would be given over to Babylonian control by God's decree.

25:1–17

Ammon, Moab, Seir, Edom, and Philistia

Typically grouped together in the prophets, the first several nations mentioned can be seen as extended familial states that engaged in unending conflicts with Israel (Ps. 60:8; Jer. 9:25–26). First, Ammon (Ezek. 25:2–7) was born to Lot, Abraham's nephew, through an incestuous encounter (Gen. 19:30–38). His ancestor's historical interaction with Abraham's descendants was marked with squabbles over land and economic interests (Judg. 10–11; 1 Sam. 11; 2 Sam. 10; Jer. 49:1–6). Ammon's pagan influence and attitude toward God's sanctuary, land, and kingship (Ezek. 25:3) were part of the reason for Josiah's efforts to remove the holy places dedicated to Ammonite idols (2 Kin. 23:13). In Ezekiel 21:19–20 a signpost marked Nebuchadnezzar's decision to move his invading army first against Judah. Ezekiel 25:1–7 expands on 21:28–29, alerting Ammon not to gloat over its assumed escape because judgment was on its way. True to his warning, God turned the capital city and center of Ammon's economic activity (Rabbah) into a pastureland; it was largely depopulated, with many of its people displaced. Nebuchadnezzar's punitive campaign, around 582 B.C., stopped Ammon from functioning as an independent polity.

The ancestors of Ammon's brother Moab (Ezek. 25:8–11) had a history of conflicts with Israel (Judg. 3:12–20; 2 Kin. 3), but also a history connected with Israel's kingship (Ruth 4:13–18; Matt. 1:5). Solomon's introduction of Moabite religion into Israel near Jerusalem (1 Kin. 11:7, 33; 2 Kin. 23:13) established a pattern of syncretism in the political activity of the kings of Judah and Israel, leading Moab and others to assume Israel was just another small nation-state (Ezek. 25:8, cf. Is. 37:8–13). However, God would show the Moabites that despite Judah's failures, their God was Lord of all (cf. Is. 15:1). Through a series of providential events, Moab would be open to invasion. All three cities, Beth Jeshimoth, Baal Meon, and Kiri[j]athaim were along Moab's western line of defense. Like Israel, Moab would be the recipient of the execution of divine judgment (Ezek. 5:15; 11:9; 16:41).

The perpetual enemy of Israel, Edom (25:12–14; Is. 34) consisted of the descendants of Jacob's brother, Esau (Gen. 25:19–30). Edom's duplicity was exposed as it initially joined the conspiracy against Nebuchadnezzar (Jer. 27:3) but then took advantage of Judah's weakened state as a result of the Babylonian invasions. In poetic justice, the vengeance that Edom took against Judah would be met with divine vengeance through Israel at some future time (Ezek. 25:14). This promise provided Israel with the hope of a restored kingdom as God's elect (God referring to them as "My people"). God declared that Edom would know His vengeance (v. 14), with a biblical principle of retribution at work (cf. Obad. 15). Since the language used in the message against the Philistines is similar to that of Edom, the inclusion of the Philistines stems from its similar interaction with Judah.

26:1–21

Tyre and the Judgment of God

The oracles against Tyre ("rock," cf. v. 4) are divided into four sections introduced by the messenger formula: the announcement of Tyre's destruction (vv. 1–6), the agent of Tyre's destruction (vv. 7–14), the impact of Tyre's destruction (vv. 15–18), and the aftermath of Tyre's destruction (vv. 19–21). As a major commercial merchant and occasional ally to Israel, Tyre's lucrative exchanges with Israel (2 Sam. 5:11–12; 1 Kin. 5:1; 9:26–28; 10:11–12) showed signs of deterioration as Egyptian, Assyrian, and Babylonian hegemony shifted throughout the ancient Near East. The anticipation of a fortuitous plundering of Israel—the gateway to the nations/peoples (Ezek. 26:2)—during the besiegement (v. 1) indicates how Tyre traded in on power politics through subterfuge that would ultimately lead to an astonishing lament (vv. 15–18). Foreshadowing later descriptions, Tyre's duplicity, indifference, and deception based on its commercial affluence portrays a historical archetype and a foreshadowing of subsequent theological use (see chap. 28).

The proclamation of judgment and its fulfillment bring to light the different emphases of the two types of prophecy. Though it uses eschatological language when it comes to the judgment of the nations, classical prophecy, unlike the apocalyptic prophecies of Daniel and Revelation, is typically focused within the immediate timeframe and circumstances of the prophet, or soon thereafter. Tyre's destruction is described as the result of the attacks of many nations (26:3, 5). However, only Nebuchadnezzar is mentioned by name (v. 7). His siege from 585 to 572 B.C. cut the major supply lines to the island and devastated Tyre's mainland satellite cities (vv. 6, 8), but not the island proper (29:17–20). Historians affirm that it was Alexander the Great in 332 B.C. who penetrated Tyre's defenses on the island and finally incapacitated it. While giving a nod to its eventual captors (26:4–5, 12–13), the focus of the prophecy is on the judgment of this commercial juggernaut and Babylon as God's agent in judgment. Elements from its final destruction are mixed with historical elements from Nebuchadnezzar's siege.

Two important points of interpretation for classical prophecy are: (1) the literary placement and the theological description of events, and (2) the historical fulfillment within the context of God's merciful warnings, His providential acts, and a nation's response (cf. Jer. 18:1–11; Jon. 1–4). By devoting three chapters to the description of Tyre's judgment, Ezekiel sets the literary scene for the judgment of the anointed cherub in 28:10–19. Historically, when Judah was besieged and finally fell, only Tyre and Egypt still offered resistance to Babylon. Thus, it is understandable that the larger focus is on these nations in comparison with the others in chapter 25.

27:1–36

Tyre: A City Shipwrecked

Continuing the lament (Heb. *qinah*, term for a dirge sung at the death of a person or city; cf. 19:1) from 26:17–21, Ezekiel increases the metaphorical weight of Tyre's self-confidence, affluence, and excess that provides the language and themes upon which the anointed cherub will be paralleled in the next chapter. In a catalog of nations (27:12–24) couched between two laments (vv. 4–11, 25–36), the key Hebrew verb *rakal* ("to trade" or "to gossip" in its participial form; translated as "the trading ones" or "merchants" in vv. 3, 13, 15, 17, 20, 22, 23, 24)—provides the context for the litany of Tyre's international reach in commerce. Some of the nations mentioned (Greece [Javan], Tubal, Meshech [Meshek], Togarmah, Dedan, Uzal, Canneh [Kanneh], Sheba, Asshur [Ashur], vv. 12–27) appear in the Table of Nations in Genesis 10. The use of Tyre's king as an archetype is thus based on its international reach, its commercial trade among the powerful, and its connection back to a time of worldwide diffusion of nations.

The lament satirizes Tyre metaphorically as a ship (Ezek. 27:4). This is an apt metaphor for a maritime power with two major sea ports that served as a trader for the Mediterranean world and transported commodities throughout the ancient Near East. By underscoring the highest-quality materials (vv. 5–7) and the skilled crew (vv. 8–11), Tyre's commercial ability, efficiency in trade, and prominence among its peers is revealed. The impressive networking among the nations (v. 10; Persia, Lydia, and Put [or Libya]; i.e., Iran, Turkey, and Egypt) signifies the farthest parts of the known world that were within

its reach. The scope of its business, ranging from the domestic (food, animals, and slaves) to the royal (precious stones, war implements, elegant palace wares) left no aspect of life untouched (vv. 12–25). In poetic style, its massive shipwreck (v. 26) is described in the most catastrophic terms. All that made its value formidable was destroyed not by war, intrigue, or a loss in vitality or skill but by the providential hand of God in the "east wind." The east wind represents a sign of judgment, and in scriptural accounts God is typically the agent who brings it (Gen. 41:6; Ex. 10:13; Ps. 48:7; Is. 27:8; Jer. 18:17). Tyre's demise would cause confusion as well as dismay (Ezek. 27:28–32). Tyre is said to have provided the accoutrements and allurements of wealth and ease, but they would be like scattered pieces of wood on the sea. What made Tyre great was what ultimately led to its demise. One more vivid picture is relayed before the central issue of the book is reached: the cosmic conflict—its actors, its plotline, and its finale.

28:1–10

Tyre and the Prince

The indictment and judgment of the human ruler (Ithbaal), the prince or ruler (Heb. *nagid*; 1 Sam. 9:16) of Tyre, is summarized here, harking back to Adam and Eve's fall—the attempt to be God (Ezek. 28:2; Gen. 3:6). The main issue of their sin was their attempt to claim divinity and independence from God. Eve took upon herself the prerogatives of God's sovereignty (cf. Gen. 1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31: "and God saw that it was good"; and Gen. 3:6: "and the woman saw that the fruit [that God had forbidden] was good"). This resulted in Eve making judgments in the place of divine providence: seeing the food as (1) "good" to eat, (2) pleasing to her eyes, and (3) something desirable for wisdom (Gen. 3:6). The Lord God had already made provision for these in His gift of what He deemed good (Gen. 2:9). God intended life, but humans desired autonomy, which usually leads to unintended negative consequences (Prov. 14:12). The prince of Tyre took up the same quest and met with the same reminder of human limits (Ezek. 28:2; cf. Gen. 3:17–19). His acquisition of wealth was not in accordance with God's desire (Ezek. 28:4; Prov. 16:16; Zech. 9:2–4). Instead of seeking to reflect the image of God in obedience, mercy, love, and justice (Deut. 10:12–13), his accrual of wealth was intended to reflect his aspirations for divinity (Ezek. 28:6). God promised to bring Babylon against Tyre (v. 7; see also 26:7; 30:10, 11; 31:12).

28:11–19

Tyre and the Judgment on the Fallen Cherub

Ezekiel shifts the focus to the king of Tyre. This subtle shift from "prince/ruler" (Heb. *nagid*) to "king" (Heb. *melek*; vv. 2, 12) perhaps suggests someone more prominent being in view beyond the earthly ruler who was just addressed. Although one can detect some linguistic parallels with the narrative of Adam and Eve, the background of the passage is more sinister. In describing the activities of the King of Tyre, the language and experience of the fall of a heavenly cherub is used in Ezekiel's account and consequently provides important information related to the origin of evil. The king/cherub is described in three ways. (1) He was the seal (Heb. *khotem* from the verb *khatam* could also mean "the one who seals") of perfection. This king is compared to a perfectly designed seal, probably in order to indicate that he possessed influence and authority (see Is.14:12; cf. Ps. 104:2). Also, (2) he was full of wisdom and (3) perfect in beauty, a description that suggests he had inner and external beauty (Ezek. 28:4, 5, 7). This being, who had a symmetry of character ("perfect" or "blameless," v. 15; cf. Gen. 6:9) and appearance, was in close proximity to God and was consequently respected by others. His beauty, wisdom, capabilities, and previous access to the heavenly abode would have made him a formidable foe. Ezekiel's description was a warning not to underestimate him (see 2 Cor. 11:14; 1 Pet. 5:8).

The precious stones in the list (Ezek. 28:13) are similar to the precious stones on the priestly vestment (Ex. 28:17–20) but not exactly the same. The primary function of the precious stones is probably to identify the person as a royal figure. The Hebrew text could be read as indicating that the cherub was wearing the stones or that the stones were part of the fence of the Garden of God. Contextually, it may be better to see them as part of the dress of the cherub. This anointed cherub (Ezek. 28:14), like the cherubim mentioned earlier in 1:4–14 and 10:1–22, was a throne guardian with a doxological function. The meaning of the Hebrew words *top* and *neqeb* (v. 13) in the context of this passage is not clear. If the reference is to musical instruments ("tambourine" [Ex. 15:20; Ps. 149:3] and "pipe" or "flute"), the implication would be that the cherub was also a musician. Other options are to see these terms as referring to "settings" and "mountings" or "sockets" for precious jewels, or "pendants" and "engravings" themselves. Moreover, the presence of this cherub in the heavenly holy mountain of God suggests a cosmic focus (Ezek. 28:14). All told, the connection of royal and religious prerogatives with his anointed status indicates that this cherub had an exalted position over the other cherubim in heaven. In the earthly sanctuary, there were two covering or guarding cherubs (Ex. 25:18–22), so this angel (Ezek. 28:14) dwelt in the very presence of God.

The moral descent of this heavenly being to wickedness is incomprehensible. One thing is clear, namely, that he was a creature (vv. 13, 15). Evil originated not in God but in a creature. Moses states that the serpent, whom NT writers later identified as Satan (Gen. 3:1; Rom. 16:20; 2 Cor. 11:14; Rev. 12:9; 20:2), was created, yet by sophistry and subtlety it deceived Eve. Like Tyre, this powerful angel was successful in trafficking (Ezek. 27:3; 28:5, 16, 18), albeit in iniquitous acts that generated violence (28:16; Heb. *khamas*, "malicious intent"; cf. Ex. 23:1) and sin. The notion of trafficking pictures a trader in wares going back and forth, plying his trade with skillful artistry to enrich himself in some way (see below, "Evil and the Fallen Cherub"). In comparison with the prince who gained wealth, the anointed cherub applied his wisdom to traffic in a pursuit of praise and worship on account of his splendor and beauty (v. 17). Yet like Israel, he corrupted himself on account of pride (cf. 16:47; 20:44; 23:11). Just as Israel's iniquity profaned (24:21) God's sanctuary, so the cherub corrupted his sanctuaries (v. 18; some manuscripts have the singular "sanctuary"), which presumably could refer to himself as the object of God's holiness or perhaps to his profanation of God's dwelling (v. 18). This was redressed by his expulsion from it. Like Tyre, all would be appalled that one so blessed of God could rebel and come to such an inglorious end (v. 19; see also 27:36).

The nature of Satan's sin can be better apprehended through the many linguistic parallels that the text has with the Flood narrative (Gen. 6). This narrative has been understood as a reversal of creation. Humanity corrupted itself in rebellion against God, so did Satan (Gen 6:11). The earth was filled with violence, so was Satan (Gen. 6:11). Noah was blameless and walked with God, at one point so did Satan (Gen. 6:9). Just as the implications of the Flood were universal, so also are the implications for the destruction of this anointed cherub.

Evil and the Fallen Cherub

It would be useful for a clearer comprehension of the topic to summarize the origin of evil in a fallen cherub as depicted in Ezekiel 28 and Isaiah 14. In both passages the activities of two earthly kings (Tyre and Babylon) are described using the experience of the fall of a majestic cherub. It is here that we find the origin of the cosmic conflict.

1. *A Heavenly Creature.* The cherub was not a self-existing being but a creature (Ezek. 28:15). This is important when we discuss the nature of evil itself. It first indicates that sin and evil are not eternal, parallel phenomena, coexisting with God as the source of what is good. Second, it shows that evil did not originate in God but in one of His creatures. God is not responsible for sin because free creatures are responsible for their own actions. Finally, the fact that the cherub was a created being speaks about its finitude. Its existence can and will come to an end (Rev. 21:1–4).

2. *A Covering Cherub.* The idea of covering cherubim is found in the setting of the sanctuary with the making of the two golden cherubim placed on each end of the cover of the ark of the covenant and looking down toward the place where the glory of God was manifested (Ex. 25:20; 37:9). They represented the heavenly beings who were worshiping God in the heavenly temple. The living cherub of Ezekiel was the one located in closest proximity to God. Therefore, he must have been influential among the angels. This position of honor had been assigned to him by God. The language of Ezekiel 28:14 could be translated as "I ordained/appointed you." He seems to have been exercising an important leadership position.

3. *A Blameless Cherub.* God describes this cherub as being perfect in his ways since the day he was created (Ezek. 28:15). This is about both his inner being and his outward appearance. When God created him, there was nothing wrong with him. The Hebrew noun *tamim* ("perfect") refers to someone who is as complete as God intended him or her to be. Through his actions, the cherub contributed to the preservation of order within the cosmos. This is something that God himself does because "His way is perfect" (2 Sam. 22:31). When applied to humans, *tamim* designates a person who walks according to the law of God (Ps. 119:1) and who consequently has access to God's dwelling (Ps. 15:2). This is the person who does what is right. The least we can say about the perfection of the cherub is that he lived in submission to God's will for him and the rest of His creation. In other words, there was once a perfect harmony between him and God.

4. *Wickedness in the Cherub.* The origin of evil is and will remain a mystery because it lacks a reason for its appearance. The cherub was "perfect" in his ways until sin was found in him (Ezek. 28:15). The biblical text makes clear that God created a blameless cherub, but God does not assume responsibility for his wickedness—an unexpected phenomenon was found in him. This was not the way God created him. The verb *matsa'* ("to be found") is often used in legal contexts to indicate that what was found was the result of a judicial process (e.g., Esth. 2:23; Ps. 17:3). It is implied here that the strange behavior of the cherub was legally examined—he went through a judicial process—and it was determined that his behavior did not correspond to what was expected from him but that he was disrupting the harmony of heaven. The judicial process established that there was wickedness in him. Evil became his natural disposition.

5. *A Proud Heart.* Something strange happened in the inner being of the cherub—something that was related to pride. This is the desire to be high and exalted, to see oneself as better and superior to others. He tried to justify this experience in view of his beauty and splendor (Ezek. 28:17). Because of his pride, the wisdom of the cherub was corrupted or permanently ruined. But behind all of this was a deeper yearning in the heart of the cherub: he wanted to be like God (Is. 14:13). This is what is meant when the text says that the cherub desired to be exalted. The conflict was between the cherub and God. His person was recentralized and at its center was placed hubris—his own ego. He was claiming total independence (i.e., self-sufficiency) from God. He was able to persuade a number of angels and finally Adam and Eve to join his rebellion (Gen. 3:1–8).

6. *Trade and Violence.* Ezekiel describes the cherub as involved in trade (*rekullah*) that filled him with violence and resulted in sin (Ezek. 28:16). He was a merchant who, in the context of the passage, was trading a spirit of rebellion. This suggests that other heavenly beings were listening to him. The root meaning of the term *rekullah* (related to the verb *rakil*, "to slander") designates a person who walks about like a merchant seeking to sell merchandise. The cherub was distributing what he considered to be his goods, but what he was really doing was slandering God, and the result was violence in heaven. This violence probably expressed itself in false accusations, influencing others to do likewise, and even self-aggrandizement. The cherub was upsetting God's established order and damaging the quality of life for himself and others. The conflict was now in the open, and there was war in heaven (Rev. 12:7)—a war that continued on earth after the fall of Adam and Eve and that would be resolved through the cross of Christ. (For a significant discussion of the origin of sin in the writings of Ellen White, see 1SP, 17–24; PP 33–43, and GC 492–504.)

28:20–26

Oracles against the Nations (Sidon)

The oracle against Sidon almost seems like an addendum, yet it reinforces the conviction that the cosmic judgment of the anointed cherub is the paradigm for understanding the local judgment against the wicked. It also buttresses God's sovereignty over the universe and gave Israel the hope that their King to defeat their enemies, sin, and the nations. While the format follows that of the briefer oracles against the nations in 25:1–17, Sidon's judgment is mainly framed as a reversal of Israel's fortunes (cf. 5:17). God's glory and holiness would be displayed as Sidon became a pawn in the fight of the major powers of the ancient Near East and could no longer obstruct Israel's growth (28:22–24, cf. 1 Kin. 16:29—22:40). The future "gathering" prophecies reflect not only a return to the land but a return to holiness and God's covenant relationship with Israel (Ezek. 28:25–26; cf. 11:16–17; 20:34; 34:12; Deut. 6:10–11).

29:1—32:32
The Fall of Egypt

The seventh nation, Egypt, received pronouncements of doom in a sequence of seven oracles, mainly dated to around the time of the fall of Judah (29:1, 17; 30:1, 20; 31:1; 32:1, 17). Chapters 29–32 prophesy Egypt's destruction in relation to God, Babylon, and Assyria. First, 29:1–16 describes Egypt's fall because of its hubris toward God. Second, vv. 17–20 and 30:20–26 describe Egypt's fall to Babylon with a lament (vv. 1–19). Third, 31:1–18 compares Egypt's fall to Assyria's fall and is followed by another lament (chap. 32).

29:1–21. The Great Dragon Pharaoh. Escaping Assyrian control only to face a new menace in the Babylonian Empire during the Saite Period (Twenty-Sixth Dynasty), Egypt continued to pose a formidable counterpart to the major powers east of Israel. Shortly after the ascension of the Egyptian Pharaoh Hophra (Apries, 589–570 B.C.), Ezekiel was given two oracles concerning the arrogance and pride of Egypt that mark a year into the siege of Judah (vv. 1–16; ca. 587 B.C.) and probably the end of his ministry (vv. 17–21; ca. 571 B.C.). The *tannin* (variously translated as "crocodile," "dragon," or "monster") reflects Egypt's crocodile cults that were associated with the divine ruler. For Israel, it was the embodiment of a mysterious evil (Is. 51:9–10). God showed His sovereignty over all of creation and predicted that Pharaoh Hophra would be destroyed by the "sword" (i.e., by military might; Ezek. 29:8; cf. Jer. 37:7; 44:30); this destruction is also described as a hunt (Ezek. 29:4–5).

The conventional language of forty years (i.e., a generation) reminded Judah of Israel's wilderness wanderings (v. 11; Deut. 1:6—3:29) and the time of judgment described earlier (Ezek. 4:6). Judgment for Egypt meant that there was no second option for Judah. Initially, before the siege, King Zedekiah ill-advisedly requested help from Egypt (17:11–21), and subsequently God's word came to pass and Pharaoh Hophra, in a twist of irony, had to flee Egypt when a rebellion broke out against him. He was later defeated by Amasis, his own general. After Nebuchadnezzar despoiled Egypt's wealth, the subsequent domination of Egypt by the Persians and the Greeks affirmed God's omniscient promise (29:15). The first oracle closes on a note of hope in a restored horn (v. 21), a token of power whose symbolism likely points to the restoration of a faithful Davidic kingship through the Messiah, which is developed further along in chapter 34 (cf. Ps. 132:17). Those who lived through the Exile and its aftermath would see Zedekiah's folly in trusting in even the most promising human power, and they would realize that God indeed declares the end from the beginning and brings His word to pass (Is. 46:10–11).

30:1–26. Alas for the Day. In two more oracles, Ezekiel lays out a dateless lament with prophetic elements (vv. 1–19) followed by a dated prophecy about the weakness of Egypt on the world scene (vv. 20–26). In the first oracle, there is an announcement (vv. 1–5), its consequences (vv. 6–9), a description of God's agent (vv. 10–12), and a summary of judgment (vv. 13–19). In language similar to the Day of Yahweh motif in other prophetic books (i.e., clouds or thick darkness; Joel 2:2; Zeph. 1:15), Egypt was called on to wail (Ezek. 30:2), for God's judgment through warfare ("sword," v. 4; cf. 7:1–27) would encompass the entire land of Egypt (Migdol to Syene, 30:6) and devastate Egypt's economic and military infrastructures (vv. 4–10). Military treaties, paid mercenaries, and trade usually sustained cordial relationships between nations (Jer. 46:9), but now Egypt and its allies would no longer present an option for Israel's faithless overtures. Nebuchadnezzar would take the resources that enabled Egypt to remain a superpower for so long: land and money. After the Saite Dynasty (664–525 B.C.), Egypt was controlled by a succession of foreign empires. The country was annexed by Cambyses of Persia (525 B.C.), then by Alexander the Great (332 B.C.), and finally by Rome (30 B.C.). The litany of toponyms (place names) emphasizes how God's judgment would affect all the major links in Egyptian life, especially its geographically significant areas and well-known religious centers, and this would prevent coordinated coalitions and cultural solidarity.

In the second oracle (Ezek. 30:20–26), God proclaimed that He had broken Egypt's military might (to "break the arm" indicates the removal of power; cf. Job 38:15; Pss. 10:15; 37:17; Jer. 48:25) and thus frustrated its attempts to intervene in the affairs of Judah. In contrast to the pharaonic art of the period, which featured a strong arm with a raised sword, Ezekiel describes the pharaoh (representing Egypt's military power) with an unattended broken arm that could not hold a sword (Ezek. 30:21). Egypt's strength would atrophy and become incapacitated, limping on for about four decades, until its eventual dispersal amongst the nations (v. 23). The cascade of first-person verbs emphasizes God's providential leading over the movement of history and thus affirms the dream and its interpretation that God gave to king Nebuchadnezzar (vv. 24–25; Dan. 2:1–45). The message to Judah was clear: hope in Egypt's help was fool's gold. After the destruction of Jerusalem, God would send a catastrophe against those people of Judah who had fled to many of the cities mentioned here and were astonishingly engaging in many of the same idolatrous practices that landed them in those places to begin with. By this they would learn the lesson that God's holiness is not confined to one geographical place because He is sovereign over the world (Ezek. 30:19; Jer. 44:1–11).

31:1–18. Fall of a Great Tree. Using a familiar ANE motif of a great tree (vv. 2–9) in his fifth oracle two months later, Ezekiel points to Assyria (v. 3) as a historical lesson for Egypt and for the people of God. Assyria exercised hegemony over such a vast empire and impacted almost every nation by its power. Yet the prophet Isaiah had earlier prophesied that God would hew down Assyria (Is. 10:5–19). Egypt's fruitless attempts to help Assyria against Babylon ended in Assyria's destruction and Egypt's isolation (2 Kin. 24:1–7). Egypt's likeness can be found in Assyria (Ezek. 31:3). The message for the people of God was clear: if in prophetic fulfillment Assyria was broken by the mighty hand of God because of its pride, Egypt's fate would be assured (vv. 10–14) and Judah's folly would be exposed. For over a century, Assyria's fall (Is.10:5–19), Babylon's ascendancy and judgment (Is. 13:1–22), and finally, Persia's rise (Is. 13:17; 44:24—45:13) had been foretold. Yet Judah still trusted in Egypt's power to deliver. Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel describe the rise and fall of nations to show that the prophetic word had and would come to fruition. God took responsibility for Egypt's demise (Ezek. 31:15–18), and despite human strategies and plans, His judgments carried worldwide significance (v. 16).

32:1–32. Requiem for a Funeral. This prophecy revisits many of the prophetic elements of Egypt's demise as announced two years earlier in chapter 29. Ezekiel was instructed to lift up a lament (32:1–16) over Egypt's descent to the grave with its allies (vv. 17–32). In these last two sayings, dated two months after Jerusalem's fall (vv. 1, 17; cf. 33:21), his funeral dirge blends apocalyptic language, familiar cosmic motifs, and prophetic proclamations as he details the fulfillment of God's victory over Egypt. Suffering from an apparently pride-induced identity crisis, the self-styled lion is described by the Lord as little more than a crocodile (or sea dragon, 29:3) churning up water by thrashing around (32:2). God's providential sovereignty (v. 3; 12:13; Hos. 7:12) among the nations had reduced Egypt to a feast for scavengers (Ezek. 32:3–6).

God's people would be reminded of His victory over Egypt during the Exodus through the language of judgment and the "Day of the Lord" imagery: the land covered in blood, and the darkening of the sun, stars, moon, and land (vv. 7–8; cf. Ex. 7:14–24; 10:21–23; Is. 13:9–11; Amos 8:9). John the Revelator draws together all these themes of judgment in his description of prophetic events throughout Christian history (Rev. 6:12–13; 8:12). God reminded His people that He determines the destiny of nations when He again identified Nebuchadnezzar as His agent of divine judgment (Ezek. 32:11–15; cf. 29:18–19; 30:10, 24–25). Ezekiel proceeds to show how Babylon's destruction of Egypt had shifted international relations. In highly repetitive and formulaic language, each nation is described as languishing in the grave (Heb. *she'ol*) as victims of Babylon's might. Its reach crossed the then-known world and encompassed a formidable force made up of the temperamental allies of Egypt and Judah (Assyria, Elam, Meshech-Tubal [Anatolia], Edom, the princes of the north [Syria], and Sidon [Phoenicia]). Ezekiel emphasizes that these nations are uncircumcised (32:32), which means they were not in a covenant relationship with God. Judah had failed to carry their mission to the nations. They had not demonstrated the faith of David, who trusted in the living God (1 Sam. 17:26). Instead, they trusted in failed states that were destined for judgment and death. The coming of the Davidic Shepherd would provide hope to those choosing to believe His word (Ezek. 34; Rev. 14:1–5; 22:16).

33:1–33
JERUSALEM FALLS

The interlude of the cosmic conflict between God and Satan depicted in the oracles against the nations places the announcement of the fall of Jerusalem in perspective (Ezek. 24:1–26). Behind the nations' and Israel's idolatrous ways stood a powerful angel striving to usurp the sovereignty of God by obliterating His image through various means. Israel's special status as the people of God had not made them immune to the machinations of the proud cherub. Chapter 33 goes back to events in Jerusalem that focus on the justice of God, a pivotal issue in the conflict. The evidence of God's justice had been presented by Ezekiel and the preceding prophets, yet God's people remained stubborn and rebellious. As the warnings from all the previous prophetic oracles would be fulfilled in the fall of Jerusalem, the foundation for a restored remnant is being laid.

33:1–20

The Watchman and the Justice of God

God encouraged Ezekiel to faithfully carry out his mission as a watchman for the house/people of Israel (v. 7). His role as a watchman (vv. 2–9) is a repetition and intensification of 3:17–19. The responsibility of the people is almost a repetition of 18:21–32. The recurrence of these themes points to a crucial aspect of the cosmic conflict, namely, that the God of judgment and the God of salvation are one and the same and the message is the same. There are no such things as the OT God of vengeance and judgment and the NT God of love and mercy. In fact, God reinforced His unswerving compassion, declaring that He does not take pleasure in the death of the wicked and desperately wants people to turn to Him in faith (33:11; see also 18:21–24). In chapters 3 and 18 the messages pointed toward Judah's judgment, and now the same messages point to their—and by extension to humanity's—hope.

33:21–33

Fall of Jerusalem

Though the city was captured (Heb. *hukketah*, "is struck down") in 586 B.C. and the people were dismayed at the destruction of their homes and place of worship, salvation was still available. The present orientation of a person's life is what matters to God. He desires that the wicked repent and return to faith in Him, trusting completely in Him. Yet, the people continued to question the fairness of God because of their suffering (vv. 17, 20; 18:25, 29). But the Lord clarified that they would be judged according to their ways because their works testified to their faith or lack of it (v. 20; cf. James 2:24). The people focused on the quantity of their number rather than the quality of their faith; they lived in continual disobedience to God's revealed will (Ezek. 33:24–26). They epitomized those who hear the blast of the trumpet but do not heed the warning (vv. 4, 31–33).

Two years had passed between the announcement of the siege and the actual fall, so plenty of time was given (1) to see the folly of dependence on Egypt, (2) to recognize the fulfillment of God's previous warnings, and (3) to respond to God's overtures of grace and mercy. Ezekiel's mouth was loosened to begin his pastoral ministry of restoration, focusing on the messianic hope, restoration of Israel, and judgment of the confederacy of evil. Israel might yet live a renewed life in safety. Ezekiel repeats several of Israel's abominations regarding the land, the people, the king, and the temple (see chaps. 5–24), but then he begins to shift toward how God will bring restoration in all these areas (chaps. 34–48).

34:1—39:29

ORACLES OF RESTORATION

In a series of oracles, God's messages now would convey hope—the hope of resurrection and restoration. Before the restoration of the temple and the land, Ezekiel set forth the ultimate basis of hope: the Messianic Davidic King. His rulership must be restored in the hearts of the people or else the restoration of the temple, land, and even the destruction of Israel's enemies would only be an external window dressing. God's purpose is to restore His image in human beings. The rulership of His chosen King pointed to a reign beyond a simple restored political rule. Like Hezekiah and Josiah, this new Davidic King would restore the covenant with God's people, but His reign would also reach and change the human heart.

34:1–31

Restored Covenant and Messianic Hope

Now that God had pointed out what a just society is—one governed by justice and righteousness—He began to establish how that society would come to be. First, godly leadership would reign at the heart of His ordered society. Ezekiel spent much time exposing the problem of leadership. In a language and theme similar to Jeremiah 23, Ezekiel's last woe message uses a

familiar ANE metaphor of leaders as shepherds and the community as a flock (sheep). The leaders had been exploiting the people (Ezek. 34:3) through political, economic, and religious manipulation and deception. In a series of six indictments (v. 4) the leaders are exposed and shown to be preying on the people for personal benefit. They were not showing the sacrificial care for God's people that was expected from them (Deut. 15:7, 11). The announcement of the Exile due to the lack of a true shepherd (Ezek. 34:5, 6, 12, 21; Deut. 4:27) points to a string of unfaithful kings, despite the bright spots of Hezekiah and Josiah. God proclaimed through Jeremiah that because of Manasseh's wickedness, Exile would come to Judah (Jer. 15:4; cf. 2 Kin. 21:9).

God's ministry of restoration encompassed care for the vulnerable, weak sheep and judgment on the callous, selfish leaders. While judgment was often brought through the nations during Israel's long history, redemption was only brought through God's specially chosen leader. In the redemption of Israel, it was Moses; in the establishment of Israel's dynastic kingship, it was David; in Israel's return from exile, it was Ezra and then Nehemiah. The promise of the seed (Gen. 3:15) would be fulfilled, but He would not entrust His restoration project to another king of the current line of the kings of Judah. Though glimmers of hope rested on King Jehoiachin's grandson (Hag. 1:1; Ezra 3:2; cf. Matt. 1:12; Luke 3:37), and in a twist of irony even Cyrus is referred to as God's shepherd (Is. 44:28), the promise of the messianic hope found no fulfillment prior to the first century B.C. The promised shepherd is designated as the Lord's Shepherd (Ezek. 34:23–24; Is. 42:1), and He would be of Davidic lineage (Ezek. 34:23; cf. Is. 11:1). Combining language from Ezekiel 34 and Psalm 23, Jesus pointed to Himself and His ministry as the fulfillment of all of Israel's hopes (John 10:11–21). His statement in John 10:8 alludes to Ezekiel 34:2–4—those who came before Him were thieves and robbers. He stated that He would separate the nations as a shepherd separates sheep and goats in His work of judgment (v. 17; Matt. 25:32–33). Scripture presents Jesus's work as one of restoration (Ezek. 34:25, 30–31; Mark 14:22–26; Rev. 21:3–4). The prophets testified to the work of the promised shepherd, and Jesus showed in word and deed that He alone fulfilled all messianic expectations; in Him alone one flock would be gathered (Ezek. 34:23; cf. Num. 27:17; Mic. 2:12–13; Matt. 9:36; John 10:3). His establishment of the covenant promises of a restored land, safety, and blessing reached beyond the temporal borders of Israel and, as the NT writers explain, pointed to a universal application for a new heaven and new earth, a heavenly Jerusalem, and eternal safety and blessing (2 Cor. 1:19–20; Heb. 12:18–24; Rev. 7:9–17; 21:1–5).

35:1—36:38

Two Mountains, Yahweh's Land, and Honor Restored

When read without the standard versification of most Bibles, it becomes readily apparent that 35:1–15 and 36:1–15 are parallel texts that should be read together. The reference to the mountains of Israel (35:12) provides a clue for comparing the links between these oracles. This is followed by the renewal of the people (36:18–38) and the announcement of the resurrection of the nation (37:1–28), and it concludes with the failure of the final attack of the nations against God's people (38:1—39:29).

35:1—36:15. Mountains. This is the story of two mountains, Mount Seir (Edom) and the mountains of Israel (35:2; 36:1). Ezekiel 35:1–15 proclaims judgment on Mount Seir, and Ezekiel 36:1–15 proclaims salvation to the mountains of Israel. The comparisons in these chapters resonate with the proclamations about Esau and Jacob (Gen. 25:19–28), who over time spiraled into conflict (see Ezek. 25:12–14). The prophets Amos and Obadiah, and later also Malachi, depict this tension of brothers (Amos 1:9; Obad. 10–12; Mal. 1:2–5). In these passages Edom seems to play a symbolic role as the representative of all the nations of the earth (see commentary on Obadiah). Just as in Rebekah's womb two nations struggled, the stress in Ezekiel is on the struggle between the righteous and the wicked. When Israel was unfaithful, their lot was thrown in with the noncovenant peoples. Paul picked up on God's words toward Esau (Ezek. 35:3) and toward Jacob (36:9) to discuss God's promise and divine election (Rom. 9:10–13). His point is that God's grace toward His people is not based on merit but on faith. Ezekiel's seminal expression of this can be seen in chapter 9, where a distinction is made between the righteous and the wicked within Israel. While historically Edom as a nation was ultimately defeated and God restored Israel to the promised land, these two divine oracles illustrate the character of the righteous and the wicked. Mount Seir depicts the arrogance, hostility, and covetousness of a people who wanted to take possession of what they saw as a land abandoned by God (35:10–13). Using language from the Creation narrative and covenant promises in Deuteronomy, the mountains of Israel depict the covenant recipients of God's grace, a reversal of 6:1–14 (36:8–12). Israel would be a new creation. The land is depicted in flourishing terms in preparation for the exiles' homecoming (vv. 6–12). This is an expansion on the theme of the covenant of peace in 34:25–30.

36:16–38. Internal Renewal. Against the backdrop of the restoration of the land and judgment on Judah's enemies, the renewal of the people now comes into view. As God reviewed His reasons for bringing judgment and exile (vv. 17–21; Lev. 18:24–25), He clarified that His work was done because of His holy name or reputation (Ezek. 36:20). Israel did nothing to merit a return to the land, but God is gracious, longsuffering, and merciful (Ex. 34:6–7), and it was necessary that His name be vindicated before the nations (Ezek. 36:23, 36). His sovereignty encompasses all creation, and everyone will know that He is the Lord of grace and justice (vv. 22–23; Rom. 9:14–18). Even the faithful need God's purifying grace (a new heart and a new spirit; Ezek. 36:26). The promise of renewal (a new covenant), fulfilled in the life and work of Jesus, is announced here and in Jeremiah 31:3–34. The work of redemption and regeneration would not replace God's holy law, but it would rather engrave the law on a transformed, submissive, and receptive heart. The role of the Messiah, the Davidic King, would bring this about, as confirmed in the pastoral imagery of Ezekiel 36:37–38. Chapter 34 emphasizes the royal work of the new David; here the priestly work is emphasized (v. 25; Heb. *zaraq*, "sprinkle," Num. 8:7; 19:18–19; *taher*, "cleanse," Lev. 16:30). The language of a ritual that cleanses from the impurity of corpse contamination (Ezek. 6:1–7; cf. Num. 19:13–20) signifies Israel's need of purification to atone for their idolatry and bloodshed. That regeneration would be made efficacious only by the work of the Spirit (Ezek. 36:27). The doctrine of righteousness by faith has been the keystone of God's plan from the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8). The litany of first-person verbs in Ezekiel 36:24–30 emphasizes the providential leading of God and His role in the work of restoration. The promised divine enabling is captured in a beautiful literary chiasm in v. 27:

A God would "cause" or "move" (Heb. *'asah*, "make, do") the people
  B They would "walk" or "follow" (Heb. *halak*) God's principles
  B′ They would observe (Heb. *shamar*, "keep, guard") God's decrees
A′ They would be careful to keep (Heb. *'asah*, "make, do") God's rules

Yahweh's work of building and planting is a picture of the restored covenant community that He would establish (v. 36; see also 28:26; Is. 65:21; Jer. 24:6) and a reversal of the judgment of uninhabited houses and unfruitful vines (Deut. 28:30; cf. Zeph. 1:13). God would restore the remnant, a holy and consecrated people, as a testimony to His grace and power.

37:1–28

Valley of Dry Bones

Ezekiel relays another vivid visionary experience similar to his encounters with Yahweh in chapters 1–3, 8–11, and 40–48. The parallels with other visionary experiences indicate that here God's justice had come full circle: a similar setting (a valley, 3:22–23; 37:1; the city, 8:3; 40:1); the hand of the Lord upon him (3:22; 8:1; 37:1; 40:1); the work of the Spirit (3:24; 8:3; 37:1, 10; 40:2; the vision of God is combined with "spirit of God" in 11:24); and a divine question (8:6; 37:3). The first two visionary experiences deal with judgment and death, and the last two deal with resurrection and life. In chapter 37 we find a great message of hope for God's people. What hope of life can there be for very dry bones? God's question to Ezekiel in the vision narrative (vv. 1–10), "Can these bones live?" evokes a response of faith and points to His sovereignty. Ezekiel would have been familiar with the possibility of resurrection based on the experiences of the prophets Elijah (1 Kin. 17:17–24) and Elisha (2 Kin. 4:32–37). In the interpretation of the vision (Ezek. 37:11–14), Yahweh explained to Ezekiel that the bones represented all of Israel. Continuing the theme of ritual contamination from Numbers (Num. 19:14–16), whoever would touch Israel's bones would be defiled, but astonishingly the ritual contamination does not apply because the Life Giver is present and His life enlivens, purifies, and sanctifies—something that the blood of animal sacrifice could not do (Heb. 10:1–7). He gives life, and as in His original creation of humans, He would breathe into lifeless matter and human beings would come into existence (Ezek. 37:9; Gen. 2:7). In this chapter we see a graphic reversal of death and decay, reiterating the fact that the Lord has power over death. It presents the prophecy that the lifeless, dry bones of Israel will be brought back to life by the word of God. As at Creation, the Lord breathed into a human and he became a living being, so here the spirit (Heb. *ruakh*, "spirit," "wind," "breath") entered the lifeless bodies and they became living beings once again. The vision of the dry bones also gives an assurance of resurrection.

Ezekiel's performance of the sign-act, consisting of bringing two sticks together, depicted the reunification of Israel and Judah (Ezek. 37:15–20; cf. 33:23, 29; Jer. 3:18; 23:5–6; Hos. 1:11; Amos 9:11). This reunification must be seen in its cosmic context. Israel, like humankind, was brought to life to live in relationship with God and fulfill His will in their election. The promised Seed spoken of in Genesis 3:15 would come through the royal line of Judah (Gen. 49:8–10; Num. 24:15–17). Scripture presents God's restoration of Israel to the land as carrying the profound purpose of universal hope (Gen. 12:1–3, 7; Matt. 1; Luke 3:23–38; Gal. 3:16). The faithful kings of Judah, Hezekiah and Josiah, strove to incorporate the people within the former Northern Kingdom into a covenant hope (2 Kin. 23:15–20; 2 Chr. 30:1–12). This hope of reunion was also a mainstay among the prophets who drew from God's covenant promises to Abraham (Is. 11:12–13; Jer. 3:6–18; Hos. 1:10–11). This point is brought out in the interpretation (Ezek. 37:21–28). The two kingdoms would have one king over them—the Messiah, the new David, their Shepherd—who would establish an everlasting covenant of peace (v. 26; cf. Gen. 17:7, 13, 19; 2 Sam. 23:5; Is. 24:5; 55:3; Jer. 32:40). Righteousness would prevail under the Davidic Shepherd (Ezek. 37:23–24). The promise of the restoration of the sanctuary meant that God would reestablish His presence, covenant, salvation, and vindication in connection with the work of the Messiah (vv. 24–28). The sanctuary and its place in the plan of salvation become the main focus of the concluding chapters of the book (chaps. 40–48).

38:1—39:29

Gog and Magog

This oracle of judgment ends the section on the restoration of the people of Israel. Several features connect these two chapters: (1) both begin the same way, (2) the main antagonist is the same (Gog of Magog), (3) there is a cohesive storyline of war and judgment, and (4) the result is the same (all the nations will know that the Lord is God; 38:16, 23; 39:6, 13, 21, 28). There are several factors to keep in mind when interpreting this prophecy. First, Ezekiel uses geographic references from the Table of Nations in Genesis 10 to give a worldwide scope to his vision. Magog is the second of the Japhethite nations (Gen. 10:2), and several of the other nations can be found in Genesis 10:2–6. Second, the use of this prophecy in the book of Revelation highlights an apocalyptic/eschatological fulfillment applied directly to Satan after the millennium (Rev. 20:1–10). Also in Ezekiel, this prophecy is one that would take place in the future (Ezek. 38:8, 16).

Indeed, 38:17 is a key verse that refers to previous prophesies about Gog. However, nowhere in Scripture is a direct prophecy about Gog ever mentioned. The intertextual biblical parallels suggest that this refers to a conglomerate of previous prophetic oracles concerning Israel's enemies and indicates a theological interpretation of the passage.

It is probably better to follow the storyline of the prophecy and comment on a few motifs that emerge from this cosmic war between good and evil. In broad terms, what is described is the summons to war (38:1–9) and the defeat of Gog (vv. 10–23), followed by the disposal of Gog (39:1–29). Gog was the commander-in-chief (Heb. *nesi' ro'sh*, "chief prince"; some translations render the Heb. *ro'sh* as a place name—"prince of Rosh") of Meshech and Tubal (38:2, 3, 5–6, 15). God would force him to assemble with all his allies, encompassing an unholy alliance of seven nations from the remotest parts of the known world: as far east as Persia (Paras), as far north as Anatolia (Gomer), and as far west as Libya (Egypt) (27:10; 30:5; 38:16–17). They would assemble against Israel (i.e., against the returnees from captivity; 38:8–9, 11–13), who is described in language reminiscent of chapters 34–37. Like the king of Assyria, Gog's ambitions would be to conquer Israel and enrich itself (38:13; cf. 27:15–22; Is. 10:5–14). In a time when the returnees of Israel would rest securely, trusting in the Lord (38:8–12, 14), Gog would proceed from the farthest parts of the north (cf. Is. 14:13). But forewarned of God's promise of judgment, Gog and his allies would be broken (Ezek. 38:14). The creation language mixed with imagery of the Divine Warrior, similar to descriptions of the cosmic upheaval in the plagues of the Exodus, and the conquering of Canaan signals Yahweh's victory and the confounding of the enemy (vv. 15–23; 39:3; Gen. 1; Ex. 9–15; Josh. 1–10). Through the defeat of Gog and his allies, the nations would know that the Lord is God (Ezek. 38:23).

Chapter 39 expands on the judgment against Gog with details of the defeat. It remains clear that when the Lord fought Gog, He would do so to protect and defend His chosen people (i.e., the house of Israel) for His name's sake. The chapter emphasizes that what would take place would be the last judgment; the tragic events of 586 B.C. would not happen again (Ezek. 39:29). Israel would have a new king, a renewed land, no foes, and a clear understanding of their guilt. The covenant promise of God's presence is in view here; He would not hide his face, meaning that His people would see Him in His glory. His Spirit would enable justice and righteousness to function without deterrent.

The destruction of these nations from the ends of the earth represents an ultimate attempt by the joint forces of evil to destroy the tranquility of God's people. Revelation's use of this text and others like it indicates that those prophecies are applied theologically in the context of the cosmic conflict between Christ and Satan. Two motifs that emerge from these chapters express this principle: the Day of the Lord and the Defeat of the Nations. (1) The Day of the Lord: Ezekiel's expressions "after many days" (38:8; Dan. 8:26), "in the latter years" (Ezek. 38:8), "in the latter days" (v. 16; Dan. 2:28; 10:14), and "on that day" (Ezek. 39:11) give a general future time framework for this prophecy. The use of phrases such as "the Day of the Lord," "in the latter days," and "in future years" is typical of eschatological passages. Thus, eschatological judgment and victory are in view here. (2) The Defeat of the Nations: in chapter 37, God's Spirit transforms a valley of dry bones into a living community, while in chapter 39 God reduces a numberless throng to a valley of bones (37:1–14; 39:11–15). Israel would spend seven months burying the corpses of Gog and his multitude in order to cleanse the land (39:12–16). By this time, the land of Israel would have been already restored, so a worldwide cleansing is in view. The defeat of the nations means a cessation of antagonism toward the people of God, and it means a restored world. The number seven (v. 12) also points toward the completeness of victory.

40:1—48:35

VISION OF GOD AND HIS REVIVED PEOPLE

Like chapters 38–39, chapters 40–48 are a vision that appears to deal with "theological geography" rather than literal geography. To be sure, the contours of the land and the dimensions of the temple are described in realistic fashion, but the application has no literal fulfillment in human history; it was never built, and there was never an attempt to build it. Israel's hope lay in the presence of God with His people, the return of the King, and the reestablishment of the covenant apparatus of land, law, and leadership. Through Ezekiel, God was inviting His people to view their renewal and hope as being beyond the normal expectations of ritual. Ezekiel's plan for the temple is described in a language that has many parallels with the construction of the wilderness tabernacle and the temple of Jerusalem (40:1—43:27; Ex. 36–40; 1 Kin. 6:1—8:21). Coupled with the Davidic hope, the promise of a new temple inspired the returning, postexilic priests and prophets to rebuild the temple (Ezra 2–3; 5; Neh. 2–3; 6:1—7:3; Hag. 1:1—2:23; Zech. 2–3; 8). Ezekiel presents the ritual laws of the new temple as patterned after many laws found in the Pentateuch (Ezek. 44:1—46:24; Ex. 21–23; Lev. 1–7; Deut. 12–26). Finally, the allotments of the land are described similarly to the tribal allotments in Numbers 34:1–12. The visionary descriptions carry a degree of familiarity that conjures memories of the grace God expressed in the giving of the sanctuary, law, land, and leadership. Revelation's use of this section in its description of the New Jerusalem points to a NT understanding in eschatological rather than literal terms (cf. Rev. 21–22).

40:1—43:27

Temple Restored

Structurally, Ezekiel's vision revisits Israel (8:1). The vision related in chapter 8, from about twenty years previously, was of God abandoning His sanctuary, which fell, along with Jerusalem, to the Babylonians. One can imagine Ezekiel's anxiety as he now encounters another being similar to the one he interacted with as judgment commenced on Israel (8:2; 40:3). One can also imagine his hope as this new vision, according to priestly reckoning, was around the time of the Passover (Ex. 12:2–3). His experience, mediated in apocalyptic sensory form ("see" and "hear," Ezek. 40:4; cf. Rev. 1:10–12; 7:4, 9; 14:1–2), was also similar to the apocalyptic visions facilitated by a supernatural being (Dan. 10:2–9; Rev. 17:1). He saw something like a city structure on a very high mountain. He entered the city and was given a tour of a complex like a fortress with guardrooms at the entrance (Ezek. 40:5–7; cf. 1 Kin. 14:28). He began and ended at the outer court entrance of the temple. This spatial description is important because this was where God's glory would enter the temple complex; it was the same point from where He exited because of the abominations that took place in the temple before it was destroyed (Ezek. 43:1–5; cf. 10:18–22; 11:23). At the end of his tour, Ezekiel was taken out to see God's entrance from the east, where the sights and sounds evoked awe, reverence, and a sign of hope (1:24, 28). The reference to the glory of the Lord filling the temple (43:5) indicates a divine acceptance and inauguration (vv. 12–27). A similar reference also appears in connection with the inception of the wilderness tabernacle (43:5, cf. 42:15; Exod. 40:34–35) as well as the temple of Solomon (1 Kin. 8:10–11).

The key word "measure" is mentioned thirty times in this section (e.g., Ezek. 40:27; 41:1, 5, 13; 42:15, 20). The man with the measuring rod measured the wall (40:5), the temple (vv. 6–49), and the *hekal*—usually translated as "temple" but here rendered variously as "sanctuary," "main hall," or "nave" (41:1–4). The passage from 41:5 to 42:20 provides further descriptions and measurements of the temple. Not only do these measurements speak of the architectural precision of the temple, but as Zechariah also later expressed, they indicate that it would be ready to welcome its divine inhabitant and for Him to receive joyful songs of praise (Ps. 137:1–6; Zech. 1:16; 2:2). The priests would once more administer the sacrifices (Ezek. 40:39–46; 42:13–14). Ezekiel was moved closer to the inner court, into the interior of the temple, but was not taken into the Most Holy Place (41:4). Though different in some respects, the general layout is similar to Solomon's temple, which is described in 1 Kings 6:1–37. The scarcity of detail concerning the Holy and Most Holy Places suggests that Ezekiel was not being shown an architectural plan to be followed, but a vision of the gradations of the sacred space where the cherubim and palm trees evoke the hope of a new creation (Gen. 1–2; 3:24; Rev. 7:9–17). The function of the temple was finally revealed to Ezekiel—radiating from the top of the mountain, everything around it became holy ground. With no need for a royal palace like Solomon's, Israel's King would rule from His throne room in the temple (Ezek. 43:7; 1 Kin. 7:7). The return of the glory of the Lord (Ezek. 43:2–7) required that Israel put away idolatry and seek the Lord (vv. 9–11), who tabernacles among His people (vv. 12–27).

44:1—46:24

The Torah Restored and the Prince

Since Ezekiel's focus had shifted to the rules and procedures regulating the activities in the temple, he exited its complex precincts and was informed that only the Prince had entered through this entrance; His status is thus associated with the Lord (44:1–3; 43:4; 46:12). Usually, the word "prince" (Heb. *nasi'*) in Ezekiel denotes a political role, namely, the leader of the Jewish community (7:27; 12:10; 21:25; cf. 1 Kin. 11:34). Ezekiel also uses the term to refer to the Davidic Messiah (Ezek. 34:24; 37:25). His special access to the temple reflected the idea of a special processional entrance open only to the honorable (Pss. 15; 24). The focus on the glory of the Lord filling the temple (Ezek. 44:4) shows that this Davidic King would have access to the very presence of the Lord, which is reminiscent of Moses at Sinai (cf. Ex. 19–24). Yet in this case, the laws address a superior quality of sanctity and a more rigorous form of access and ritual purity (Ezek. 44:5–14). Even though Yahweh directly gave him laws, Moses could not enter into the presence of God when His glory filled the tabernacle (Ex. 34:34–35). Ezekiel presents the Prince as having a special relationship with Yahweh: not only having access to the Lord's presence but also having a deep covenant relationship with Him (Ezek. 44:3; cf. 34:23–24; 37:24–28). The book mentions the rebellions of Israel (44:6), how they brought uncircumcised foreigners who profaned the temple (vv. 7–9), and how the Levites deserted God (vv. 10–11). As far as the priests are concerned, only the Zadokite priests would approach to minister before the Lord. These priests are presented as showing sacrificial fidelity, but stricter regulations apply to them concerning ministry, including whom they could marry and how they would arbitrate among the people (vv. 15–31).

The purity required in this new temple emphasizes that the maintenance of God's holiness would be of a different order than in the past. In anticipation of the fuller account of the allotment of the land (47:13–23; 48:1–35), holiness would radiate outward from God's holy mountain to the land—the Priest and the Prince would extend the purity of the temple (45:1–9). The bulk of the material emphasizes the special status and responsibilities of the Prince as a leader (44:3; 45:7–9; 46:10, 12, 16–18), and it emphasizes the maintenance of holiness through ritual (45:1–25), through worship (Sabbath and New Moon, 46:1–15), and through equity in land inheritances (vv. 16–18). The book of Revelation picks up on this theme and expands on the faithful being closest to the presence of the Lord with the Davidic King on the mountain of God (Rev. 14:1–5; cf. 1:6).

47:1—48:29
The Land Restored

Ezekiel's temple tour concluded at the entrance of the temple proper, where he saw a stream of water coming from beneath the temple and flowing east (47:1–12). What started out as a trickle eventually became so deep that it was over Ezekiel's head, and it was going out into the land. The healing property of the water was rejuvenating the driest portion of the land (the Dead Sea area) and preparing for the description of the purified land, recalling the Edenic fertility and Zion's hope (Gen. 2:10–14; Pss. 46:4; 65:9). Revelation's portrayal of the renewed earth uses Ezekiel's description of the waters of the river of life healing the people (Rev. 22:1–2).

Ezekiel builds on his earlier picture of a restored people of God (Ezek. 47:13; cf. 37:15–28). The inheritance of the twelve tribes and the allotment of the land recall God's victory during the wilderness wanderings (Josh. 13:1—21:45). However, in Ezekiel, contrary to earlier biblical descriptions, Israel's former enemies had been destroyed (Ezek. 38–39). The account of the division of the land in chapter 48 elaborates on the brief account in chapter 45; its borders were already demarcated in chapter 47. The allotment of sections of the land follows this order: (1) sections for the first seven tribes (48:1–7; cf. 45:6); (2) a holy district set apart for the Lord—for the priests and the temple (with the temple in the center; 48:8–12; cf. 45:1–4); (3) a section for the Levites (48:13–14; cf. 45:5); (4) the common land (48:15–20); (5) the portion for the prince (vv. 21–22; cf. 45:7–9); and (6) sections for the last five tribes (48:23–28; cf. 45:6). The foreigners or strangers, resident aliens (47:22–23) who are "grafted" into the people of God, would experience the same covenant benefits of inheritance (cf. Rom. 11:11–24). The book of Ezekiel ends on a note of hope for all people who choose to be a part of God's family.

48:30–35
The City Restored

Ezekiel's prophetic account concludes with the restoration of the people and the land, ending with a picture of hope: God reigns while the world remains at rest. The book of Revelation picks up this covenant rest when it focuses on the twelve gates named after the twelve tribes, representing the royalty of the people of God (vv. 30–35; Rev. 21:12). Revelation expands Ezekiel's picture of the ultimate covenant blessing. The Hebrew name of the city would be *yahweh shammah* ("The LORD Is There") which symbolizes Yahweh's promise to dwell among His people (Ezek. 48:35). This remains the hope of God's people (Rev. 22:4–5, 17). The book of Ezekiel closes the way it began, focusing on the God of all glory and hope.

DANIEL

INTRODUCTION

Title and Authorship. The Hebrew name of the book is *daniyye'l,* rendered in English as "Daniel," meaning "God is my judge." It appears to have been a common name in the Semitic world. The book is named after its main character, a young man from Judah called Daniel who was taken into exile in Babylon. Although there have been debates concerning the author of the book, the book itself indicates that the Prophet Daniel wrote it (e.g., Dan. 12:4). The historicity of Daniel is confirmed by Jesus (Matt. 24:15).

Date. The date for the composition of Daniel has been a topic of disagreement among scholars. Critical scholars, influenced by rationalism and its denial of divine intervention in history, have rejected predictive prophecy and therefore sought arguments to date the book to the second century B.C. They believe that Daniel's so-called predictions were written after the events had taken place, that is, after the empires of Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Greece had already disappeared from history. The book was written, they claim, to provide meaning and encouragement to the Jews in the mid-second century B.C. in their struggle with the Syrian king Antiochus IV Epiphanes, with whom the book ends. But when all evidence is taken into consideration, the liberal position is either ambiguous or lacks clear historical support. Interestingly, in the manuscripts from Qumran, written in the second century B.C., the book of Daniel was already well known and considered an authoritative prophetic book. Conservative Christians, including Seventh-day Adventists, who take into consideration the historical and chronological information found in Daniel, believe that it was written by the Prophet Daniel in the sixth century B.C.

Backgrounds. When Nabopolassar ascended to the throne of Babylon (626 B.C.), the Neo-Assyrian Empire underwent a rapid decline. The Medes captured Assur in 614 B.C., and Nabopolassar, in alliance with the Medes, took Nineveh, the Neo-Assyrian capital, in 612 B.C. The final collapse of the Neo-Assyrian Empire occurred during the battle of Carchemish in 605 B.C. In the same year, Nabopolassar died and his son Nebuchadnezzar II became king of the Neo-Babylonian Empire. It was also the year when Daniel, as a young man, was taken to Babylon. He served at the court of Nebuchadnezzar as minister and counselor. After the Persians conquered Babylon in 539 B.C., he also served under Darius the Mede and the Persian king Cyrus. During his long and distinguished career, Daniel consistently displayed a profound trust in God, regardless of circumstances. He served God faithfully to the end of his days (sometime after 536 B.C.).

Theology and Purpose. The book of Daniel is formed by a series of historical narratives and a series of apocalyptic prophecies. The historical conflict Daniel and his friends experienced was a microcosm of the cosmic conflict depicted in the prophetic chapters. This conflict provides a theological center to the book around which other theological topics are developed.

1. *God's Sovereignty.* The God of Daniel is indeed the Lord of history. History is the arena in which the cosmic conflict between God and the powers of evil takes place. Throughout the book it is repeatedly demonstrated that in spite of the efforts of human instrumentalities, behind which evil powers are at work (Dan. 10:12–13) to destroy God's faithful servants, God is always able to deliver them. The acknowledgment of His sovereignty is expressed by the willingness of God's people to worship Him at any cost.

2. *God's Messiah.* God's most important instrument in this cosmic battle is His Messiah, the Son of Man (7:13–14). Historical narratives in Daniel record His deliverance of His servants from the attacks of their enemies

(3:19–30; 6:18–22), and the prophetic words in Daniel promise He will do the same during the last eschatological drama (12:1). The messianic prophecy of the seventy weeks points to the time when the Messiah, the hope of God's people, would come to procure salvation for them. He would be the sacrifice to bring to an end all the animal sacrifices by giving His life for the world (9:26–27).

3. *Judgment*. The book begins and ends with references to judgment: apostate Israel is judged at the beginning (1:1–2), and the king of the north is judged at the end (11:40—12:2). The middle of the book (7:9–13) portrays God as the Ancient of Days, with the books of judgment open and multitudes of angels present. On each side of this great judgment scene, we find further references to judgment. In Daniel 4 heaven judges Nebuchadnezzar, the proud boaster, and humbles him to animal status, and in chapter 5 Belshazzar, his grandson, receives the message that he has been evaluated and found wanting (v. 27). Chapters 8 and 9 indicate the beginning date of the pre-advent judgment, and chapter 12 spells out its significance concerning rewards and punishments.

4. *Vindication of God's People*. Daniel places great emphasis on the people of God on earth and on their struggles against the forces of evil. The historical chapters of the book (Dan. 1–6) illustrate how God vindicates and delivers those who remain faithful in the midst of a pagan nation. These chapters contain the motif of trial and trouble ending in elevation and glory. Thus, the good news that trials and temptations are followed by blessings for those obedient to God is continually proclaimed, anticipating the full realization of the hope that at the Second Coming of the Messiah all trials and temptations will come to an end.

Literary Features. Daniel was written in two languages, namely, Hebrew (1:1—2:4a; 8:1—12:13) and Aramaic (2:4b—7:28). The reason for this particular phenomenon is unknown, but perhaps it could be said that when dealing with the rulers of worldly empires, Daniel decided to use Aramaic (the diplomatic language of these empires), whereas the sections written in Hebrew deal primarily with matters important to the people of God.

The book is divided into two parts: the first six chapters primarily contain narrative (chaps. 1, 3–6), while the last six contain visions (chaps. 7–12). The climax in each narrative is the elevation of the worshipers of the true God, and each vision ends with the establishment of the kingdom of God. The worshipers of the true God are associated with the kingdom of God. The first chapter tells the story of the destruction of God's earthly kingdom, Judah, while the last chapter promises the establishment of His heavenly kingdom, which will last forever. Daniel 2 and 7 contain visionary symbols and their interpretation. The first half of chapter 8 again contains a symbolic vision, but after 8:14 most of the symbolism is dropped, indicating that 8:14 is the climax of the symbolism of the book. In the next verse the explanation begins; it is continued in 9:24–27 and enlarged upon in chapters 10–12. In other words, the rest of the book seems to be a development and explanation of the symbolic vision in chapter 8 or a new revelation in the form of an audition.

Interpretation of the Book. The history of the interpretation of Daniel is quite extensive. We will only offer a brief description of the major interpretational systems used for the understanding of the book of Daniel.

1. *Historicist School*. This is the oldest school of interpretation. It accepts the authorship of Daniel in the sixth century B.C. and holds that the prophecies of Daniel cover the entire historical period from Daniel's day to the Second Advent of Christ. Seventh-day Adventists are historicists (see "Interpreting Biblical Apocalyptic Prophecies," p. 46).

2. *Futurist-Dispensational School*. Interpreters of this school also accept Danielic authorship in the sixth century B.C., but they believe that the little horn power in Daniel 7 is a future antichrist rather than apostate Christianity. This school can be divided into two groups: (a) dispensationalists, who believe that there is a gap in the fulfilment of the prophecies of Daniel from the first century until seven years before the Second Advent; and (b) futurists, who believe that from the destruction of the Roman Empire (the fourth beast) until the appearance of the antichrist (the little horn) there will be a number of kingdoms (the ten horns), which are the successors to the Roman Empire.

3. *The Historical Preterist School*. Like historicists and futurist-dispensationalists, historical preterists believe that Daniel wrote the book in the sixth century B.C., but they limit the fulfillment of its prophecies to the time period which runs from the time of Daniel to the first coming of Christ, or to the end of the Roman Empire.

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4. *The Historical-Critical or Modern Preterist School*. Adherents of this school hold that an unknown Jew in the second century B.C. wrote the book of Daniel. They believe that all the prophecies in the book end in the time of Antiochus IV Epiphanes, in the second century B.C., and that the book is a reflection of the political and religious situation of the Jewish people during the time of persecution under that Syrian king.

COMMENTARY

1:1–21

GLIMPSES OF JUDGMENT AND RESTORATION

The first chapter of Daniel introduces a number of topics that will surface several times and in different ways throughout the rest of the book. It begins with a description of the result of God's judgment against His people (vv. 1–2) and proceeds to describe an effort to influence Daniel and his friends to adopt the Babylonian culture (vv. 3–7). The issue of diet illustrates how important it is to preserve one's identity in a setting of conflict (vv. 8–14). The chapter ends describing the results of remaining loyal to the Lord (vv. 15–21). Daniel and his friends model what it means to be faithful servants of the Lord in a context of opposition while waiting for deliverance.

1:1–2. Inevitable Results of Disobedience. The fall of Jerusalem mentioned here took place in the year 605 B.C. Daniel lived in the sixth century and was a contemporary of Nebuchadnezzar. Here he is not simply recounting casual historical incidents but also identifying the cause of the events: the Lord ensured that Jehoiakim would be defeated and given over to Nebuchadnezzar (v. 2). The biblical obituary of Jehoiakim states that he did evil in the Lord's estimation, just as those who came before him had done (2 Kin. 23:37), and Judah did the same (2 Kin. 24:3). Daniel begins his narrative describing God's judgment against His people and His sovereignty over history. He records the conflict between Babylon and Jerusalem; Jerusalem represents the rule of righteousness and Babylon the rule of evil. The first time we read of Babylon and Jerusalem in Scripture is in the book of Genesis; the last time we hear of them is in the book of Revelation. The stories and prophecies of the book illustrate the Great Controversy between good and evil.

1:3–7. Conflicting Identities. Daniel and his three Jewish companions (Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah) were selected to obtain the best education Babylon (Shinar) could offer them. This opportunity would make it possible for them to change their social status as prisoners of war or slaves to that of Babylonian scholars or wise men. In the process, their faith was to be seriously tested. First, they were offered a new Babylonian identity by being given Babylonian names. This was part of a larger purpose of gradually transforming their allegiance to Babylon and its gods. The new names associated Daniel and his companions with Babylonian deities (v. 7). So Daniel, which means "God is my judge," was changed to Belteshazzar, "may Bel [another name for Marduk, the principal god of Babylon] preserve his life." Hananiah ("the grace of God") was named Shadrach ("the command of Aku," a Babylonian god). Mishael ("who is like God") became Meshach ("who is like Aku"). Finally, Azariah ("God has helped") was named Abednego ("servant of Nebo," another name of Marduk).

1:8–14. Babylonian Diet. The second attempt at Babylonian indoctrination came through a new lifestyle. It was the king, not the Lord, who carefully determined what they should eat and drink. In fact, they would eat from the table of the king. The meal would have included unclean foods and food offered to the Babylonian deities. This test over eating and drinking seems insignificant, but the first test recorded in the Bible (Gen. 3) also seems to have been insignificant; it too concerned appetite. At times, the depth of love is best revealed in the little things we do. Great doors often swing on little hinges. Genesis 3 and Daniel 1 illustrate that Satan always endeavors to reach us through our senses. Successful Christian living, therefore, depends on the adequate control of the senses.

Daniel and his friends decided not to defile themselves with the king's food and wine (1:8). The request from Daniel and his companions must have seemed very strange and even foolish to the Babylonian officers. But the Lord used Daniel's kindness to gain him the respect and sympathy of the chief of the eunuchs (v. 9), a high court official, and he assented to their request and tested them for ten days (v. 14).

Daniel's diet was nothing particularly new but was based on faithfulness to God's will for him and his friends. They asked for a simple and wholesome plant-based diet and water (v. 12). The term *zero'im* (plural of *zeroa'*) used in v. 12 (usually translated as "vegetables") is related to the one used in Genesis 1:29 to designate the original diet assigned by God to humans. The Hebrew young men were going back to God's original diet.

1:15–21. Blessings of Obedience. Under God's influence, the ten days were enough to show that the diet established by God was the best. The four young men were in better health than any of the other young men who had been eating the king's food (v. 15). A battle had been won. They also excelled in their education in literature and wisdom (v. 17). However, this was not directly credited to their diet but to the Lord who gave them such capacities. In other words, God blessed their faithfulness and gave them more than they expected. When they went before the king for their final examination, he witnessed their superiority over the other students. It was ten times better, and as a result they were given jobs close to the king himself (vv. 19–20). Daniel and his three friends were able to remain faithful to God through "the right exercise of the will" (SC 48), through the recognition of the influence of the body on the mind (CD 154), and through a prayerful dependence on God (SL 20). What helped Daniel and his friends in their walk with God remains true for every follower of Christ today.

Daniel 1:21 is the epilogue of the chapter. The chapter starts describing the people of God as having been taken captive to Babylon, but it ends with a reference to Cyrus, the king who brought the captivity of the people to an end by allowing them to return to Israel. He is described by Isaiah in messianic terms as the liberator of God's people (Is. 44:28). According to Daniel, not all was dark; there was a happy ending on the horizon. At the beginning of the chapter, there is hardly any hope left for the people, but at the end there is a glimpse of hope for them. The Deliverer would be coming. The book of Daniel is designed to inspire hope in the midst of a cosmic conflict for those who put their trust in the Lord and remain loyal to Him.

2:1–49

GOD INTRODUCES NEBUCHADNEZZAR TO HIS KINGDOM

Four facts stand out in this chapter: the complete uselessness of divination to forecast the future (vv. 1–13); God as the only One who knows the future (vv. 14–30); the miracle of prophecy (vv. 31–45); and God's invitation to Nebuchadnezzar to become part of His kingdom (vv. 46–49).

2:1–13. Control over the Future. Nebuchadnezzar was worried about the future of his kingdom. The God of Israel, who cares for all peoples, listened to his concern and spoke to him in a dream. The dream captured the attention and interest of the king. He apparently could not remember all of its details but remembered enough to realize that its content was important. He needed two things, a full description of the dream and its interpretation. In the ancient Near East, the dreams of a king were extremely important, for they were considered to be messages from the gods announcing, among other things, possible misfortunes for the king or the kingdom. Therefore, it was important for the king to know about these matters in order to perform certain rituals that would protect him, his family, and the kingdom. Dreams could be a matter of national security. What Nebuchadnezzar was doing was not strange at all.

Kings had professional interpreters of dreams and people who could use different means of divination to predict the future. In the case of Nebuchadnezzar, he had a group of wise persons trained in the art of divination and in the interpretation of dreams. He decided to call a meeting of those skilled in divination. Human wisdom would be seriously tested. It was precisely the wise persons who immediately realized the limits of human wisdom. They possessed different techniques for divination, but they had not developed one that would allow them to recover a forgotten dream. They argued that no one on earth could do what the king was asking them to do and, further, that no ruler had ever asked for such a thing (v. 10). In other words, what the king was requesting was not only irrational but, since it lacked a legal antecedent, was an arbitrary demand.

The king was abruptly confronted by the limits of human wisdom, and consequently, he was frustrated. If wisdom is so useless, who needs it? Angry and frustrated, Nebuchadnezzar ordered that all the wise men of Babylon were to be executed (v. 12). Among them were Daniel and his friends (v. 13). Perhaps they had not been invited to the meeting because they were considered young and inexperienced, but their fate was the same as that of all of the others.

2:14–30. God's Lordship over the Future. What first impacted Daniel was the urgency of the king's command. Once properly informed, Daniel went to see the king to ask him for time so that he could inform him of the dream's interpretation (v. 16). The wise men of Babylon complained about the impossibility of the task, but this young man told the king that what he was requesting was not impossible. All he needed was time—time to pray that God would reveal to them the secret (or mystery) of the interpretation in order for them to be delivered from death. Daniel opted for the only way out of the problem, namely, divine intervention. This possibility had been considered by the magicians, astrologers, and Chaldeans, but they concluded that this was impossible because the gods do not share that information with humans (v. 11). However, the God of Daniel knows all mysteries and could reveal them to His servants the prophets. And the secret (or mystery) was revealed to Daniel (v. 19).

After receiving the revelation, Daniel gave thanks and glory to God. In his prayer, which is a doxology, Daniel identified God as the source of true wisdom (v. 20) and as the One who has control over the flow of history (v. 21). This wonderful God is willing to provide wisdom and knowledge, as well as to reveal deep, hidden, secret things to humans (vv. 21–23). After talking to the King of kings, the young man was ready to talk to the king of Babylon. In order to highlight the limits of human wisdom, Daniel told the king that there were no wise men that could reveal the mystery the king had requested (v. 27). This is the first time that Daniel is described as testifying before the king on behalf of God. What the king had demanded could be done by a God he did not know but who would be introduced to him by Daniel (v. 28). It is this God, unknown to the king, who had made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what would be in the future (lit. "days of the end" or "latter days"). In this case that future reached from the days of Nebuchadnezzar to the advent of the stone kingdom. Daniel did not take any personal credit. It was revealed to him for the benefit of the king and in order for the king to know what had been in his mind (lit. "heart"; v. 30).

2:31–45. Prophecy and History. Daniel would give the king what he had requested, namely, the dream and its interpretation. He dreamed about a colossal image of a man made of different materials. This type of ima was common in the ANE. Images were ma to represent the gods (idols) or the king. In th particular case, it was a royal image because would represent the king and the kingdoms. I head was of fine, pure gold; the arms and th chest were made of silver; the abdomen an thighs of bronze; the legs of iron; and the fee were a mixture of iron and clay (vv. 32–33). The metals decreased in value but increased in strength, except for the feet. The feet made the image vulnerable and anticipated its final collapse. In the dream, the king saw a stone or rock, which was cut without human hands (i.e., not of human origin), hit the image on its feet, blowing it apart. Daniel used the language of winnowing to express the effortlessness with which the image was destroyed. It was as easy as separating the grain from the chaff that is blown away by the wind. The stone became a large mountain that filled the whole earth (v. 35).

The interpretation is introduced by a establishing a connection between the king and the God of Daniel. Daniel acknowledged the king of Babylon as a king of kings (v. 37) but stated that he was expected to function as the representative of God, who is indeed the King of kings (cf. Rev. 19:16). It was the Lord who entrusted to Nebuchadnezzar kingly dominion, power, strength, glory, and his rule over nature and humans (Dan. 2:37–38). The language is similar to Genesis 1:28, with the exception that God did not give to Adam and Eve dominion over other human beings. But the point is that the king was to function under God. Daniel's God ruled above the king.

The head of gold as a symbol represented the king of Babylon and his kingdom (Dan. 2:38). The king was concerned about his kingdom and its future, and Daniel told him that his kingdom would be succeeded by another, represented by silver and inferior to his—stronger but less magnificent. A third kingdom of bronze would arise, to be followed by a fourth kingdom of iron (vv. 39–40). The mixture of clay and iron of the feet meant that the last kingdom would be divided (vv. 41–43). The stone was a symbol of the kingdom of God that would never be destroyed and that would remain forever (v. 44). This fifth kingdom would bring to an end all the kingdoms of the earth. Intriguingly, stone imagery denoting divine action and power is known in Mesopotamian religious literature. In order to effectively communicate with the Babylonian king, God used familiar imagery that was able to connect to Nebuchadnezzar's heart and head.

This prophetic dream represents an outline of the history of human kingdoms and was fulfilled as predicted. The kingdoms that followed the Babylonian Empire (605–538 B.C.), in the order announced, were Medo-Persia (538–332 B.C.), Greece (332–168 B.C.), and Rome (168 B.C.–A.D. 476). The kingdoms that came out of the division of the Roman Empire have never reunited into a single empire. They tried to unite by marriages between the different ruling houses of Europe, but these alliances never lasted. The European nations and the whole world have been a dramatic spectacle of divisiveness and conflicts between the weak (clay) and the strong (iron).

That the stone must symbolize the Second and not the First Advent becomes clear when we remember (a) that the stone struck the image on the feet of iron and clay, indicating that it came after the Roman Empire had been divided, not when it was united; (b) that the shattering of the image suggests a world-shaking catastrophe rather than an obscure event almost unnoticed by the world; and (c) that if the First Advent is meant, the stone kingdom had been running concurrently with the iron-leg and the feet-and-toe powers for two thousand years. The vision represented the stone destroying all the preceding kingdoms and replacing them, not coexisting with them.

This dream and its interpretation provide an excellent introduction to the nature of apocalyptic prophecy. This type of prophecy provides an outline of history usually beginning at the time of the prophet and running up to the establishment of God's eternal kingdom. Apocalyptic prophecy provides hope for those who wait on the Lord in the midst of a world fragmented by sin. But in a very particular way, apocalyptic prophecy is about God's sovereignty that assures us that love and justice will finally prevail. The fulfillment of the prophecy of Daniel 2 alone is sufficient to demonstrate the inspiration of the Bible.

2:46–49. Nebuchadnezzar and God's Kingdom. The reaction of the king was the reaction of a person who had seen the greatness and majesty of the God of Daniel. He honored the prophet by prostrating before him and ordering that an offering and incense be presented to him (v. 46). This is close to an act of worship, but the fact that Nebuchadnezzar immediately acknowledges the superiority of the God of Daniel indicates that this was not an act of worship directed to Daniel but to his God. The king was not accepting the God of Daniel as the only God but as the God of gods, the Lord of kings, and the Revealer of secrets and mysteries (v. 47). He is superior to all other gods and rules over all kings. God used this incident to locate Daniel in a social position where he could be more useful to Him as His servant. He was placed in charge of Babylon and over all its wise men (v. 48). The prophet did not forget his three companions who went seeking wisdom together with him in prayer to the Lord and whose prayers He answered. They were delivered from death through divine wisdom. The connection with Jesus, who is the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:24), is appropriate. He is the One who delivers humans from death by giving His life for them (Mark 10:45). This is divine wisdom and the mystery of all mysteries.

3:1–30

THE IMAGE OF GOLD AND TRUE WORSHIP

Daniel 3 reveals the unwillingness of the king to accept God's plan for him and his kingdom. The idea that his kingdom would be followed by another made Nebuchadnezzar unhappy. He sought to alter the divine revelation to fit his own desires. In the process the king transformed the issue into one of loyalty to him and his kingdom by forcing everyone to worship his image. Daniel 3 is about false and true worship. It describes the call to worship (vv. 1–7), the challenge to the king's command (vv. 8–18), the divine deliverance (vv. 19–25), and the king's reaction (vv. 26–30).

3:1–7. Call to Worship. The question remains the same: Who is in control of history? The king was unwilling to accept that the One who has ultimate control of history was the God of Daniel. He preferred to believe that his kingdom would remain forever, applying to himself and to his kingdom the attributes of the kingdom of God. He decided to make this clear by building a colossal image of gold.

The dream image's head of gold, representing Nebuchadnezzar, now became the whole colossal image. The king anticipated the failure of the prophetic dream. What was needed to avoid the collapse of the kingdom was the absolute loyalty of those in administrative positions throughout the kingdom. The king ordered all

of them to be present at the dedication of the image (v. 2).

The ceremony was not only a political one but also a religious one. At the appropriate moment, all of those standing before the image were to fall down and worship it (v. 5). The rejection of the divine plan for the human race leads to idolatry. But this was compulsory idolatry imposed through absolute royal power. The matter was so serious for the king that whoever would not fall down and worship would be cast into a furnace of blazing fire (v. 6). He, not God, seemed to have had the power to determine who would live or die. The oppressive power of the state made no allowance for dissenting minorities.

3:8–18. The King Is Challenged. On the plain of Dura (v. 1), a battle was to be fought between false and true worship. While there may have been other Hebrews in the crowd, only Daniel's friends were reported to the king for their refusal to serve the king's gods or worship the golden image (v. 12). The word "worship" indicates that true religion springs from the awareness that God is worthy to be revered. This event on the plain of Dura is a particularly notorious example, among others from the ANE and throughout history, of a government attempting to achieve conformity through a particular worship ritual. King Nebuchadnezzar attempted to enforce uniformity of worship by threatening a death decree to be administered to those who refused to worship his golden image.

In comparing Daniel 3 with Revelation 13:11–18, we notice several important parallels: (1) in both chapters the issue is worship—in Daniel 3 the people involved were only those living in the Babylonian Empire, while in Revelation 13 we are told of a universal test over worship at the climax of history; (2) in both chapters an image appears to be worshiped—one a literal image, the other a spiritual image; (3) in Daniel 3 the king of literal Babylon demanded this worship, while in John's prophetic vision in Revelation 13 spiritual Babylon requires the worship of the image to the beast; (4) the three Hebrews faced a death penalty—in the future, church and state will unite to enforce uniformity of worship, and those who refuse to conform will face economic boycotts and ultimately the death penalty; and (5) in both chapters the number *six*, as a symbol of humans under the control of evil powers, is prominent. Human beings and "the serpent" were created on the sixth day, and in Revelation 13:18 that number is associated with satanic opposition to God. In the time of Daniel, the people in Babylon were to worship the golden image. This is mentioned six times (Dan. 3:5, 7, 10, 12, 14–15, 18). In the book of Revelation, the warning against worshiping the beast and his image is also given six times (Rev. 13:15; 14:9, 11; 16:2; 19:20; 20:4).

Following the three Hebrews' refusal to bow down to his image, King Nebuchadnezzar threw down the gauntlet and rhetorically asked which god could deliver them from his power—in other words, there was none (Dan. 3:15). The three young men knew the options very well. They knew that the God whom they served was able to deliver them from the fire (v. 17). But they also knew that sometimes God, in His wisdom and love for us, does not deliver His servants from the burning fire. Their loyalty to Him was not determined by selfish concerns but by a love that was strong enough to sustain them when facing death. When the three young men were thrown into the oven, dressed in all their regalia and with their hands tied, the heat was so intense that the flames killed the soldiers who threw them in (v. 22). This incident indicates that only the God of the young men could deliver them from certain death.

As the king watched closely, he was astonished at the fact that the three Israelites were walking around in the fire with their hands loose (v. 25). The ropes used to tie their hands had burned, but not their flesh. But what really surprised the king was that instead of three there were four men inside the furnace and that the form of the fourth was like the Son of God (v. 25), meaning a divine being—in other words, the preincarnate Christ (PK 508–9). Some translations have "son of the gods" instead, most likely to indicate that Nebuchadnezzar might not have fully understood that this figure was *the* unique Son of God. Perhaps he considered him to be a majestic supernatural being related to the gods. Fire is associated in many cases in the Bible with the presence or apparition of God (e.g., Ex. 19:18; Deut. 4:11–12). In this case, the fire prepared by the king to destroy God's servants became the fire that accompanied the saving presence of God among mortals. The young Israelites had a private audience with their God, and the king was allowed to witness it.

3:26–30. The King's Reaction. Realizing that the fire did not do any damage to the three men, the king answered his own sarcastic question (v. 15) by stating that their God had saved His servants who trusted in Him (v. 28). The mighty act of God on behalf of His servants was so impressive that the king immediately reacted to it. First, he extolled the God of Israel because He frustrated his own plans as king of Babylon against God's servants. In other words, he recognized that this God was more powerful and majestic than he was. In the presence of the God of heaven, who manifested Himself in the fire of the furnace, the king could only raise his voice in praise. He called the God of the three Hebrews "the Most High God" (v. 26). This is a title applied to God in order to emphasize His supremacy and is used several times in Daniel 4 and 7. Second, the king made a decree in the form of a threat against any person throughout the kingdom who would dare to say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (v. 29). To speak against God meant to show disrespect or even to blaspheme Him. The penalty would be death. Finally, the king reacted to the power of God by promoting the three Hebrews to important positions within the province of Babylon (v. 30). Their loyalty and commitment to the Lord were rewarded by Him in order to make them even more effective in His service.

4:1–37

CONVERSION OF NEBUCHADNEZZAR

After his introduction (vv. 1–3), the king continued by telling his experience of a dream (vv. 4–9) and its content (vv. 10–17). This is followed by Daniel's interpretation of the dream (vv. 18–27), its fulfillment (vv. 28–33), the restoration of the king (vv. 34–36), and a conclusion (v. 37). The central topic of the chapter is God's universal dominion over the dominion of earthly kings. True kingly human dominion is only meaningful in submission to the God of heaven.

4:1–3. Introduction. The format is that of a royal letter to be sent to the nations that constituted the Babylonian Empire (cf. Ezra 7:11–13). The king wanted everybody to know about his experience with the Most High God. The language used emphasizes the universality of the proclamation (see Rev. 14:6). He was witnessing on behalf of the God of Israel. In fact, that was the purpose of the letter: God had performed miracles of signs and wonders for him, and this had led the king to recognize and proclaim that God's kingdom is everlasting and His dominion is from generation to generation (Dan. 4:3). The signs and wonders God performed were rejected by Pharaoh but not by Nebuchadnezzar. The eternal dominion of God's heavenly kingdom was already a reality and would be fully manifested in the future among the kingdoms of the earth (Dan. 2, 7).

4:4–9. The King's Dream. The king provided the setting within which he experienced the wonders of the Most High. He was in the palace, enjoying the benefits of national peace. In the absence of war, he was interested in developing, strengthening, and beautifying the city of Babylon. It was in this setting of peace that the king had a dream that made him afraid and unsettled (v. 5). His inner peace was gone, and he could only think about this dream. This time, in contrast to the earlier dream (Dan. 2), Nebuchadnezzar remembered every detail of it and expected his wise men to interpret it for him. Once more human wisdom was unable to provide the interpretation. Finally, Daniel was summoned before the king to interpret the dream.

4:10–18. Content of the Dream. The dream was indeed very strange. The king saw a very high tree in the middle of the earth, reaching to the heavens and visible from the extremes of the earth. It was a beautiful and fruitful tree that provided food for all and shade to the animals. This was a cosmic tree, which was a common idea in the mythology of the ANE. The cosmic tree integrated the cosmos by bringing together the heavenly and the earthly realms of creation. Life flowed from it to all living creatures. The reference to its height reaching the sky (v. 11) reminds us of the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11:4), which was a symbol of human pride, arrogance, and ambition.

In the dream the king saw a heavenly being, an angel called a holy watcher or messenger, descending directly from heaven with an urgent message of judgment against the tree. The cosmic tree would be chopped down. Only a stump with a band of iron and bronze would be left.

There is some evidence for an ancient custom of putting metal bands on trees, whether to prevent them from cracking or for some other undetermined reason. Tree stumps with bands of metal have been found at Khorsabad and on cylinder seals from the palace of Ashurnasirpal (885–860 B.C.) at Nimrud.

The images used change rather quickly from the tree stump to a human being grazing among the animals of the earth (Dan. 4:15). The heart of the human being was to be changed to the heart of an animal. This mental condition would last for "seven times" (v. 16) or seven years. The reasons we do not apply the year-day principle to this time period are that (1) this is primarily a historic and not a prophetic chapter and (2) it is a period of judgment restricted to King Nebuchadnezzar.

The purpose of this judgment was to make clear to humans that the Lord rules over all the kingdoms of the earth (v. 17). The final authority in human affairs is found in God and not in political and religious institutions of human origin. There is a proper place for an earthly kingdom as long as it recognizes that God's kingdom is above all others. He gives the earthly kingdom to whomever He wants.

4:19–27. Daniel Interprets the Dream. It appears that the interpretation of the dream was given to Daniel as he was listening to the king. For a moment he was disturbed (v. 19). One of the Aramaic words used here means "to be devastated." This suggests that he respected and appreciated the king. Daniel was perhaps troubled because he could not anticipate the reaction of the king to what Daniel had to tell him. The king, sensing the emotional state of Daniel, encouraged him to speak. The prophet cautiously began to tell the king the interpretation of the dream, starting with the graceful and diplomatic wish that the import of the dream would not apply to the king but to his enemies.

The tree represented the king, not his kingdom. It illustrated the human achievements of the king who, like the tree, had become strong. His greatness reached to heaven/the sky and his dominion to the farthest parts of the earth (vv. 21–22). But like the tree, the king would lose all of his greatness and would be deprived of social interaction. For seven years he would dwell among the beasts of the field, eating grass and without shelter (v. 25). Some scholars have identified this type of behavior with a mental disease that used to be called lycanthropy (Gr. *lukos*, "wolf," and *anthrōpos*, "human being," a person behaving like an animal or a wolf). The emphasis of the text is not on natural causation but on direct divine intervention. Although the greatness of the king would be removed from him, his kingdom would be preserved—the stump and the roots were to be left in place. There was hope for him. The dream was not about the collapse of the Babylonian kingdom (v. 26).

Daniel informed the king of a divine purpose in the experience he would go through. He had infringed on the realm of God, and this needed to be redressed. It was important for the king to understand that the Most High is the Sovereign Ruler of all human kingdoms and that He gives them to whomever He chooses (v. 25). Nebuchadnezzar had to acknowledge that Heaven rules (v. 26). This may be the first time in the Bible where the term "Heaven" stands for "God." There are limits to human power, particularly in cases when it expresses itself through human kingship. Human pride should never attempt to usurp divine sovereignty. Daniel concluded his speech with personal advice to the king. If the king ruled with justice and mercy, his prosperity would perhaps continue (v. 27). Daniel's counsel indicated that the king still had a chance to avert the necessity of learning the hard way. It was a call to repentance, to accept his role within the divine plan.

4:28–37. Fulfillment of the Dream. The Lord gave the king a year to reflect on the dream and on Daniel's advice to him. While walking about the royal palace, his pride reached up to heaven—he claimed to be able to rule over the earth by himself, in total independence from God. He ascribed to himself might, power, honor, and glory, based on his achievements (v. 30). What was left for him was a divine judgment that would reveal to him his true condition. Instead of greatness, the king had reached the level of irrational animals, and God would actually bring him down to that level. By his actions the king sealed his fate, and the heavenly messenger announced it to him. Once more it was revealed to the king that judgment aims at salvation. This happened in order for him to know that the Most High rules over earthly kingdoms. This would not be an arbitrary divine action but rather something intended for the good of the king.

At the end of the seven years, Nebuchadnezzar looked toward heaven, and his mental state was restored (v. 34). This was not a mere look to the heavens but a look that acknowledged the supremacy of the God of heaven and a willingness to be part of His plan for the king. This was a fundamental act of humility and dependence on God (cf. Ps. 123:1–2). His first recorded action was to praise and honor the

Most High (Dan. 4:34) because only His dominion and kingdom are truly everlasting (v. 35). Compared to Him, said the king, humans are reputed as nothing and are unable to restrain His hand. No one could call Him to account. But this confession does not mean that humans could not enjoy success, splendor, and honor. Once the king found his place within the divine plan and will for him, he was restored to even higher greatness (v. 36). He concluded his royal missive not only praising God, the King of heaven, but confessing that He could humble those who live (lit. "walk") in pride (v. 37).

This is one of the most remarkable stories in the Bible. It is a public confession by one of the greatest kings of ancient times, telling of his arrogance, humiliation, and eventual conversion to the God of heaven. Nebuchadnezzar's life prior to this event was one long success story. By military might he had subdued all the surrounding nations. At his feet bowed the representatives of all nations. But at the height of his power, God brought him low. It is a story of warning to us all. If we make our happiness depend on anything less than heaven, we invite failure.

With this chapter Daniel brings to a close the involvement of Nebuchadnezzar in the affairs of Babylon. The existing Mesopotamian records do not provide detailed information about his death. His conversion and public proclamation of his acceptance of the authority of God was the last act of his life recorded in Scripture. "The once proud monarch had become a humble child of God" (PK 521). After a long reign, he died clearly blessed and full of glory. None of those who succeeded him on the throne were able to maintain the golden glory, much less follow the example of repentance and surrender to the Almighty. The principle that Nebuchadnezzar took a long time to learn is still valid today—God is in control of this universe and has assigned to each individual a place and a task in His great plan.

5:1–31

THE WRITING ON THE WALL

The events in Daniel 5 took place on the night of the fall of Babylon in 539 B.C. Daniel at that time had been in Babylon for more than sixty years and was an old man. A thousand guests were in a great banquet hall. While the king and his guests drank from containers from the temple in Jerusalem (v. 2), a divine hand wrote on the wall. The king was terrified and called for the wise men, but they were unable to decipher the writing. Finally, the queen mother reminded the king about Daniel (vv. 10–12). The aged prophet proclaimed God's judgment to the king (vv. 25–28). The epilogue simply states that during that very night God's judgment was carried out.

5:1–12. Belshazzar's Feast. In the ten years that followed the death of Nebuchadnezzar in 562 B.C., four different rulers ascended the throne of Babylon in quick succession. The fourth, Nabonidus, a prince from Haran who had served Nebuchadnezzar as a diplomatic officer, married his daughter Nitocris. Around 550 B.C., while campaigning in the Holy Land, Nabonidus fell ill and went to Lebanon to recuperate. He summoned his son Belshazzar and entrusted the kingship to him; in other words, Nabonidus made him coregent to safeguard the perpetuity of his royal house. After recovering from his illness, Nabonidus began an invasion of northwestern Arabia where he conquered the oasis of Tema, which was to become his residency and where he built large palaces. He stayed there until 539 B.C. while his son Belshazzar reigned in Babylon as its king. Until 1854, critics claimed Belshazzar was an invention of the biblical author because ancient sources available at that time reported that Nabonidus was the last king of Babylon and made no mention of Belshazzar. Then in 1854 the first cuneiform cylinder with Belshazzar's name was found in the city of Ur. In 1882 the Nabonidus Chronicles, which state that Nabonidus lived in Tema for several years while his son Belshazzar was ruling in Babylon, were translated.

In 539 B.C. Cyrus captured Babylon without a fight. According to the Babylonian Chronicles, Nabonidus fled south prior to the attack, while Belshazzar, who had stayed in Babylon, remained there, trusting in the city's strong fortifications. It was here that, in a spirit of pride and arrogance, he spent his last evening with his friends in frivolous drinking, using the sacred drinking containers of Solomon's temple. Then the fingers of a human hand appeared on the wall (v. 5). Instantly, the laughter, singing, and merrymaking stopped, and a stunned and petrified silence filled the room. The night of revelry became a night of revelation. The biblical text notes that four things happened to Belshazzar: (1) a recognizable change came over his face; (2) courage left him; (3) he lost strength in his legs/bowels (a description of incontinence); and (4) his knees knocked together (v. 6). In one brief moment, the boastful king became a shivering, shaking, and hopeless mortal. God is deadly serious when it comes to holy things. Belshazzar wantonly profaned the sacred drinking containers from the temple of Jerusalem, and he died by the end of the day. What God has declared holy (including the Sabbath or His tithe) should be treated with reverence and care.

The inscription was probably in Aramaic, which like Hebrew is written only in consonants, and it was so short that although they may have understood the individual words, they did not grasp the overall message. The queen mother referred to Nebuchadnezzar as Belshazzar's "father," but as already stated, according to the ancient sources, Nabonidus was the father of Belshazzar. The word "father" in Semitic languages, to which Hebrew and Aramaic belong, can also mean grandfather, ancestor, or even unrelated predecessor. There are no known terms for "grandfather" or "ancestor" in these languages.

5:13–31. The Fall of Babylon. Before Daniel read and interpreted the writing, he reviewed the experience of the king's grandfather, who was humbled by the Lord as a result of his refusal to heed God's warnings. Belshazzar was acquainted with these experiences, but he had chosen to ignore them. Daniel told Belshazzar that he had learned nothing from his grandfather's experiences and that he had now lifted himself up against the Lord of heaven by bringing the vessels of the temple in Jerusalem into the banqueting hall.

Then Daniel proceeded to read the inscription. In Aramaic the inscription consisted of four words. How they were to be read depended on what vowels were supplied. Daniel read them out as *mene', mene', teqel, (u)parsin* and then gave the interpretation. The interpretation spelled imminent doom for Belshazzar. A few hours later, the Persians under Gobryas (probably the biblical Darius the Mede, one of Cyrus's generals) entered the city and slew Belshazzar (v. 30). Gobryas established order in the city and won the people's goodwill by his respect for their temples.

How were the Persians able to penetrate the seemingly impregnable defenses of the city? The Greek historian Herodotus reports that the Medes and the Persians turned the Euphrates out of its channel and were able to march into the heart of the city through it. The Babylonians did not expect their city to fall. They thought they were safe behind its mighty walls, but there is no real peace in human achievements (cf. 1 Thess. 5:3).

Cyrus appears in Isaiah 45:1 as a type of Jesus the Messiah. As Cyrus came from the east (41:2, 25; 46:11) to overthrow ancient Babylon and deliver Israel from the Babylonian captivity, so Christ would come from the east to deliver His people from end-time Babylon at the battle of Armageddon (Rev. 16:12–16). As God's people of old left Babylon to return to Jerusalem, so God's people will leave this earthly, spiritual Babylon (18:1–4) to enter the new Jerusalem (21:2).

6:1–28

THE DELIVERANCE OF DANIEL AND DARIUS

Daniel 6 is the last historical chapter in the book. Although he was now more than eighty years of age, Daniel was placed in charge of the government of Babylon by the Persians, the conquerors of the Babylonian Empire. But this aroused the jealousy of his colleagues. They managed to deceive the king, and Daniel ended up in the lions' den, but God delivered him, and in the end the king honored God.

6:1–9. Plot against Daniel. The term "satrap" means "protector of the kingdom." According to Xenophon and other Greek historians, it referred to any rank of subordinate officials in the kingdom and should not be confused with the geographic regions of the kingdom called satrapies. According to Herodotus, the Medo-Persian Empire was divided into twenty satrapies. Since Darius the Mede in Daniel 6 ruled only over the kingdom of Babylon, the 120 satraps most likely were royal officials who ruled over smaller divisions within his realm.

Under Darius the Mede, Daniel was recalled from retirement and became one of the three chief officials. As such he had supervisory powers over all the provincial governors. The king undoubtedly acted in the best interests of the state in elevating Daniel to the highest civil office, but he failed to take into account the feelings of jealousy among his top officials. To place a Jew, a former prime minister of the defeated Babylonians, in such a high position was too much for the other officers. These politicians, therefore, ordered their legal sleuths to "dig for dirt" in Daniel's character, but they could not find any skeletons in his closet because he was loyal to the king (v. 4). Digging up dirt and slandering the other contenders has obviously been a favored method since ancient times to bring down the opposition.

Daniel's "colleagues" managed to persuade the king to make a firm decree that his people must pray for one month to no one but the king. Though in this instance aimed at Daniel, it may have been suggested by a national custom of earlier times among the Medes, according to which special honors were rendered to the king.

6:10–17. Daniel in the Lions' Den. In spite of the decree, Daniel went home and did what he was used to doing; he prayed three times to his God. Daniel neither left on pretended business nor said his prayers in secret. To rationalize such compromises to preserve his life and his position would have been easy, but he refused to compromise. Knowing very well what was going on, he was willing to risk his life to honor God, trusting his Lord to deliver him if He saw fit. Like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, he chose loyalty to God over obedience to a pagan government.

Daniel's house would have been the normal flat-topped dwelling, with a room built on the roof that had large latticed windows to allow free circulation of air. The custom of turning toward Jerusalem when praying is based on Solomon's prayer (1 Kin. 8:35) and is still practiced by many Jews today. Eliezer and Solomon stood when praying (Gen. 24:12–14; 1 Kin. 8:22–23). Daniel, like Ezra (Ezra 9:5), Jesus (Luke 22:41), Stephen (Acts 7:60), and Paul (Eph. 3:14), used the more customary position of kneeling.

The king soon realized that his own officials had led him into a trap to get rid of Daniel, and Darius was greatly upset. Although he did his best to save Daniel from the den of lions to which Darius had unwittingly condemned him, Darius was unable to change the law of the Medes and Persians. At sunset he was forced to execute the sentence. What a long night he must have spent with a bad conscience!

The den of lions was probably an underground pit with perpendicular walls and an opening at the top. The condemned were lowered or thrown into it from above. In this particular case, a large stone was rolled over the opening and was sealed with the king's signet ring and that of his nobles. The seal was a guarantee to Daniel's enemies that no attempt would be made to save him but also to the king that Daniel would not be harmed in any way if, as the king hoped, the God of Daniel should preserve him from the lions.

6:18–28. Daniel Saved and Darius's Response. As soon as the morning dawned, the king hastened to the lions' den. He called to Daniel and asked him whether his God had been able to deliver him (v. 20). Yes, God is able to deliver, but whether He does or not must be left in His hands. He did not deliver Daniel from being thrown alive into the den of lions, and neither did He deliver John the Baptist. Through the ages many martyrs who perished were comforted as they recalled that Christ Himself had been permitted to suffer.

In throwing the accusers with their wives and children into the den of lions (v. 24), the king acted in the fashion typical of the despots of his day. Herodotus testifies that consigning to death whole families along with condemned men was in accordance with Persian custom. Darius then sent out a letter in different languages across his kingdom (cf. 4:1). He commanded his people to fear and revere the God of Daniel, the living God who performed a miracle in delivering Daniel from the lions (6:26). The chapter concludes with the statement that Daniel prospered in the reigns of Darius and Cyrus (v. 28). Daniel prospered because he could give thanks to God although facing the lion's den (v. 10); he believed in prayer. He was faithful in his work and refused to do evil. Neither rank nor wealth could sway him from his faithfulness to God (2:48; 5:29; 6:3).

7:1–28

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Daniel 7 is the last chapter written in Aramaic. This links it with the preceding chapters, while the vision of the four beasts connects it with the later chapters. It is largely parallel to the vision of the image given to King Nebuchadnezzar in chapter 2, but from here on we have the record of Daniel as the recipient of the visions and their interpretations. There are some differences between both chapters. Daniel 2 provides a general survey of the future from Nebuchadnezzar's days until the Second Advent, while Daniel 7 focuses on the time period between the end of the fourth empire and the Second Advent. Daniel 2 portrays the worldly empires from a political perspective, but Daniel 7 includes the military struggles, through the symbol of wild animals, and also the spiritual conflict, through the symbol of the little horn. Daniel 7 shows that between the fourth

empire and the Second Advent, symbolized by the falling stone in Daniel 2, a religiopolitical power would grow from small beginnings to great dominion.

7:1–8. Vision of the Beasts and the Little Horn. In 550 B.C., during the first year of Belshazzar (v. 1), or about fifty years after the vision of chapter 2, Daniel saw that the four winds of heaven were breaking out upon the Great Sea, from which four beasts arose. These symbols were familiar to the prophet. In Scripture, winds represent storms of war and conquest (Jer. 25:31–33; 49:36–37; Zech. 7:14; Rev. 7:1). Flooding rivers symbolize the movements of invading armies (e.g., Is. 8:7–8; Jer. 46:6–8; Amos 8:8). According to Daniel 7:17, the four beasts represent four kings or kingdoms that would be or exist upon the earth (v. 23). In both the Scriptures and popular symbolism of ancient and modern times, wild animals are a familiar symbol for nations and empires. The symbolism of beasts that rise from a wind-torn sea points to political wars and conquests. Three of the kingdoms are identified in Daniel as the Babylonian (2:38), the Medo-Persian (5:28, 30), and the Greek (8:20–21). The fourth one was identified by Jesus as Rome (Matt. 24:15–16).

The first beast, a lion (Dan. 7:4), was a particularly appropriate symbol for Babylon. Representations of lions have been found on the walls of the great Babylonian processional way to the Ishtar Gate and on the gate itself. That its wings were taken off indicates that after Nebuchadnezzar's completion of his immense program of conquest and reconstruction, his successors settled down, in the way so typical of human complacency, to enjoy the wealth and luxury they had inherited. The second beast, a lopsided bear that was crunching three ribs, represents the empire of Medo-Persia and its conquest of Lydia (547 B.C.), Babylon (539 B.C.), and Egypt (525 B.C.) under the leadership of Cyrus and Cambyses. The third beast, a leopard, is noted for the swiftness and the agility of its movements. The four wings are a fitting symbol for the speed of movement that was characteristic of the young Alexander the Great, who set out in 334 B.C. with thirty-five thousand men and who, in ten years, established the greatest and most influential empire the world had known up to that time.

In vision, Daniel saw that the empire of Greece would be divided into four kingdoms, and this is exactly what occurred. When Alexander died, a power struggle among his generals led to the division of the empire into four kingdoms: Seleucus controlled Syria and the East all the way to India; western Asia Minor and Thrace fell to Lysimachus; Ptolemy became king of Egypt; and Cassander, already governor of Macedon, was now recognized as the sovereign of Greece. In this way they created a new political map of the Near East that was to last until the Romans conquered the whole ANE.

Based on the clear parallel structure of the visions between Daniel 2 and 7, the fourth beast, the animal with iron teeth (v. 7), appears here as evidently the counterpart of the iron legs and feet of the image in Daniel 2. By A.D. 200 it was commonly recognized among the church fathers that the fourth kingdom was Rome. World power may be said to have passed from the Greeks to the Romans at the Battle of Pydna in 168 B.C., when the Roman general Paullus won a decisive victory over Perseus of Macedonia. By 146 B.C. Macedonia was a Roman province, and in 63 B.C. Syria and Judea became Roman provinces. During the next few decades, Roman legions marched westward and conquered the countries that were to become Spain, France, and England. Finally, in 30 B.C. Egypt, the last of the great Hellenistic kingdoms, was annexed as a province, and all the then-known world was united under one government, speaking Greek in the east and Latin in the west. Notice that the Roman Empire is described as different from all the previous kingdoms (7:7, 19) and that it would do what the others could not do, namely, "devour the whole earth" (v. 23). It was to transcend geographical boundaries and become a universal phenomenon.

The ten horns (v. 24) are not treated independently from the beast but are seen as a continuation of its activities. The horns correspond to the feet and toes of the image and represent the nations that would arise from the ruins of the Roman Empire and would maintain Roman civilization to a large extent. Some interpreters have identified the ten horns as ten tribes and the European kingdoms descending from them (e.g., Vandals, Visigoths, Sueves, Anglo-Saxons, Franks, Alemannians, Burgundians, Lombards, Ostrogoths, and Heruls). Others have argued that it is best to take the number ten as a round figure (e.g., Gen. 31:7; Num. 14:22; 1 Sam. 1:8) representing a multiplicity of states in contrast to the one empire of Rome.

Among the ten horns, another horn, a small one, emerged (Dan. 7:8). Though small at the beginning, this little horn is later described as more significant than the other ones (v. 20).

Critical scholars, as well as some conservative Bible interpreters, identify the little horn in Daniel 7 and 8 as the Syrian king Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175–164 B.C.). This interpretation goes back to the Neoplatonic philosopher Porphyry (A.D. 232–305), who wrote fifteen books attacking Christianity. In one of them, he claimed that the book of Daniel was written in the second century B.C. and that the little horn is the Syrian king Antiochus IV (see "The Little Horn and Antiochus IV," p. 1039). Today, most conservative interpreters are futurists and see the little horn as a symbol of a yet future end-time antichrist or argue that the symbol has a dual application to Antiochus and the antichrist. Seventh-day Adventists, who champion historicism, agree with those church historians who believe that the only power in history that fits the description of the little horn is Christian Rome and that the three uprooted horns were Arian kingdoms (see "The Union of Church and State," p. 1033).

7:9–14. Vision of the Ancient of Days, the Beast, and the Son of Man. This passage presents three scenes: (a) a judgment in heaven (vv. 9–10); (b) an announcement of the end of the fourth beast (vv. 11–12); and (c) Christ receiving the kingdom (vv. 13–14). The whole picture is one of overwhelming grandeur, with God, the Ancient of Days, as supreme judge, seated on His throne in the heavenly court surrounded by myriads of angels. The prophet saw the Ancient of Days (v. 9), literally "one advanced in days," a symbolic description of God the Father as a wise judge, moving to where the judgment would take place. His movable throne was like a chariot of fiery flames, with wheels of burning fire, similar to the movable sapphire throne Ezekiel saw in vision (Ezek. 1). The emphasis is on the brightness of the throne.

In the vision Daniel saw that books were opened (Dan. 7:10). In Scripture the heavenly books are a record of human deeds, experiences, and words, and they are used in a judgment setting to provide objective evidence supporting the pronouncement of a just verdict. In the biblical concept, the judgment includes an examination or investigation of the information found in the books. The Bible mentions the Book of Life (or "the living"; Ps. 69:28; cf. Phil. 4:3) and the scroll or book "of remembrance" (Mal. 3:16), and John not only mentions the Book of Life but also other books (Rev. 20:12), perhaps the same as those mentioned in Daniel 7:10. The Book of Life contains the names of those who place their faith in God (Dan. 12:1; Heb. 12:23; Rev. 17:8; 21:27) or of those who have entered the service of God. One of the purposes of the judgment is to publicly show whether a person has remained faithful to his or her commitment to God. The judgment described in Daniel is of cosmic proportions and takes place before the heavenly family (see "The Cleansing of the Sanctuary and Judgment in Daniel," p. 1043).

In the vision the judgment scene was interrupted by the proud (lit. "great") words uttered by the little horn (7:11), but when Daniel turned, he saw the ultimate destruction of the beast whose body was burnt because of its unfaithfulness (cf. Lev. 20:14; 21:9; Josh. 7:15; Rev. 17:16; 18:8). This executive judgment against the beast was to occur at the eschatological end and not at the time of the collapse of the pagan Roman Empire. The beast was to remain alive through the period of the ten horns, into which it was divided, and particularly through the period of the little horn itself (Dan. 7:25–26).

Verse 12 functions as a parenthesis that reflects on the fact that the first three beast-kingdoms, although deprived of their authority, were allowed to live for a period of time. Babylon was conquered by Persia in 539 B.C., but the city continued to exist for centuries. Greece and Persia still exist today but not with the power and glory they had in OT times. Thus, each of these powers lived on after its dominion was taken away. Elements of those ancient cultures have impacted the Western world.

In the judgment scene (vv. 13–14), Daniel saw One like the Son of Man or a humanlike being coming to the courtroom (v. 13). "Son of Man" was Jesus's favorite title for Himself (e.g., Matt. 8:20; 10:23), and it is one that can be viewed as emphasizing His connection with humanity. At the same time, it was a messianic title, based on this text in Daniel (26:63–64). Some have assumed that coming with the clouds must refer to the Second Coming of Jesus, and in fact there are passages which associate the clouds of heaven with the Second Coming of Christ (24:30; 26:64; Rev. 1:7). But in Daniel 7 this interpretation is not possible because in the vision the Ancient of Days was not on this earth but in heaven. The text says that He went before the Ancient of Days. Both of them move from one place to another—as the high priest did during the Day of Atonement. In fact, the imagery used in the vision is that of the high priest approaching God covered by a cloud of incense during the Day of Atonement—a day of judgment (see "The Theology of the Day of

The Union of Church and State

The apostles hardly could have imagined that the time would come when the church would move from the fringes of the Roman Empire to its very center of power. In fact, the church received civil power in almost unexpected ways and soon began to use it, becoming an oppressive institution. The details about how this happened are not always clear, but we have enough historical information to pinpoint the events that led to a radical transformation of the Christian church and its message.

1. Chronological Focus. As we examine the history of the first few centuries, we can identify the following events as key ones in the union of the secular and the sacred powers.

- **A.D. 303** Beginning of the last and most severe persecution of Christians in the Roman Empire under Emperor Diocletian.
- **A.D. 313** Edict of Milan. Christians were granted full religious freedom. This included the restoration of confiscated property to the previous owners. Only one year later, religious freedom was restricted through a decree that ordered that the returned church property must be given to the Catholic body of the Christians. From that time Constantine began to side with the Catholic faction of the Christian church.
- **A. D. 314** Sylvester I was named bishop of Rome. He was crowned and clad in imperial raiment as an earthly prince. For centuries persecuted by the Roman Empire, Catholic Christianity assumed an intimate relationship with secular power and quickly grew to a position of great influence over the affairs of the empire.
- **A.D. 321** Emperor Constantine issued an edict, establishing a pagan day of rest that prohibited work on "the venerable day of the sun" (Sunday), the day that has come to be substituted for the seventh-day Sabbath. (In about 364, the local Catholic Church Council of Laodicea formally prohibited the keeping of the "Jewish Sabbath" by Christians.)
- **A.D. 324** The emperor formally recognized Christianity as an official religion of the empire. The previous year, Constantine defeated the eastern emperor, Licinius, and became the sole emperor of east and west. Thus, Christianity was at this time an established religion throughout the Roman world.
- **A.D. 330** Emperor Constantine moved the capital of the empire to Byzantium (Constantinople). The result was that the bishop of Rome gradually filled the power vacuum left in Rome.
- **A.D. 380** Emperor Theodosius I (378–395) made Catholic Christianity the official religion of the empire. In 394 he formally outlawed worshiping the ancient gods in the empire.
- **A.D. 452** Attila the Hun appeared in northern Italy with a great army. The road to Rome lay open before him. Its citizens expected the worst, but Rome was spared. The bishop of Rome at this time, Leo I (440–461), traveled northward to the River Po to meet the mighty Attila. There is no record of the conversation between the two, but one fact is clear: as a fearless diplomat, Leo confronted the "Scourge of God" and won. He somehow persuaded Attila to abandon his quest for the Eternal City. Attila died shortly afterward, and the Huns troubled Europe no more.

The prestige of the medieval church was greatly enhanced by Leo's intervention on behalf of Rome. As the civil government grew increasingly incapable of keeping order, the Catholic Church began to take its place, assuming many secular responsibilities. History records that it was Leo the Great who laid the foundations for the temporal power of the popes. Leo became the leading figure in Italy, and in the religious sphere he strongly asserted the primacy of Rome's bishop over all other bishops. Earlier in the century, the illustrious Augustine (354–430), bishop of Hippo in North Africa, uttered the now-famous words, "*roma locuta, causa finite*" ("Rome has spoken, the case is closed"). At the Council of Chalcedon in 451, the assembled bishops responded to Leo's pronouncements with the words "Peter has spoken by Leo; let him be anathema who believes otherwise." The doctrine that papal power had been granted by Christ to Peter, and that that power was passed on by Peter to his successors in Rome, began to take firm root.

- **A.D. 533** Emperor Justinian in Constantinople recognized the pope in Rome as the head of the whole church, both east and west. This was incorporated in his law code, Codex Justinianus, which ensured that Catholic Christianity was the state religion of the empire. All citizens of the empire became required to belong to the Catholic Church. Through this legislation Justinian achieved the complete union of church and state.

- **A.D. 538** Belisarius, the general of the Eastern Roman emperor Justinian, delivered Rome from the siege of the Arian Ostrogoths, and the papacy was able to freely expand its power from then on. Thus, the formal appointment of the bishop of Rome as "the head of all the Holy Churches" was implemented with the liberation of Rome in 538 and the establishment of the Justinian code as the underlying philosophical and legal basis of Roman law.

2. Arian Influence. The Germanic tribes who invaded the Roman Empire were converted to the Arian form of Christianity. The Council of Nicea (325) condemned Arianism, but the movement continued to be strong in many areas of Europe. Arianism was a heresy of the fourth century A.D., named for Arius, a presbyter in Alexandria, Egypt, who denied the eternal existence of Christ and the Trinity. Arius held that Jesus was created by God as the first act of Creation. This view was condemned at the Council of Nicea in 325. However, Arianism achieved great popularity after the death of Constantine in 337 because his son and successor Constantius promoted it. The controversy came to an end at the Council of Constantinople in 381 when Arianism was again condemned.

It was probably in 508 that Clovis, pagan chieftain of the Franks who was married to a Catholic wife, converted to Roman Catholicism and was baptized (see commentary on Dan. 12:5–13). The Catholics rallied around him as the only Catholic prince in the west and assisted him in conquering the Arian princes. In turn he found it prudent to promote the church, and the Franks were called the "oldest son" of the Roman church.

Through the influence of the bishop of Rome, the emperors of the Roman Empire were instrumental in eliminating three of the ten barbarian kingdoms that had settled in the Roman Empire. In 493 the Heruli were eliminated by the Ostrogoths as one of the three "plucked out" horns. The other two Arian kingdoms were defeated by the Eastern Roman emperor Justinian's general Belisarius: the Vandals in 533 and the Ostrogoths in 553.

3. Centralization of Power. Political foresight and shrewd diplomacy are characteristic of apostate Christianity. The removal of the capital to Constantinople in A.D. 330, and the end of the Western Empire in A.D. 476, left the bishop of Rome as the one to whom the people in the Western Empire looked in place of the emperor. Thus, the pope in Rome soon became the political, as well as the spiritual, head in the west. Three events greatly enhanced the power of the church.

The first event was the *Donation of Pippin.* In 756, Pippin, king of the Franks, responded to an appeal from Pope Stephen II for help against the Lombards. Pippin went to war against the Lombards, defeated them, and presented the pope with some of their conquered territory.

The second event was the purported *Donation of Constantine.* In the eighth century, a document appeared that claimed that Emperor Constantine (306–337) had given to the pope the city of Rome, all of Italy, and the western regions as his temporal domain and that Constantine had also given him supremacy over the four principal sees of Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem, and Constantinople and the churches of God in the whole earth. It has been suggested that Stephen II used this document in his negotiations with Pippin to obtain the conquered Lombard territories. In 1440 Lorenzo Valla exposed the document as a fraud.

The third event was the crowning of Charlemagne by the pope. On Christmas Day A.D. 800, Pope Leo III unexpectedly placed a crown on the head of Charlemagne while the latter was kneeling before the altar of the old St. Peter's Basilica, proclaiming him ruler of the Holy Roman Empire. The pope thereby established under his own control the so-called Holy Roman Empire, in which, for a thousand years, emperors would be presumed to rule Europe by permission of the pope. The Holy Roman Empire continued until 1806 when Napoleon forced Emperor Franz II of Austria to relinquish the title "Holy Roman Emperor."

The power of the church reached its zenith under Gregory VII (1018–1085), who first promulgated the theory that the pope could depose kings, and under Innocent III (1198–1216), who made himself absolute sovereign over the Roman Catholic kings of the Holy Roman Empire and organized crusades against the Muslims in Spain and the Holy Land and the Albigenses or Cathars in southern France.

Atonement," p. 264). It is in the presence of God that the Son functions as the Mediator for sinners (Dan. 12:1; Heb. 7:25), and it is there that at the eschaton the Son receives dominion, glory, and the kingdom.

7:15–28. Interpretation of the Vision. As in chapter 2, here also the symbolic revelation is followed by its interpretation. Daniel found the vision incomprehensible and sought an interpretation from the accompanying angel, who offered a brief interpretation identifying the four beasts as four kings that would arise in human history. But the only kingdom that was to last forever was the kingdom of the Most High, and it would be given to His saints. Note that the term "kings" is used throughout this section interchangeably with "kingdoms" (7:17–18, 22–23).

Daniel was particularly concerned about the fourth beast and its little horn. In a flashback, he describes again what he saw in the vision, adding a few new insights (vv. 19–22). He saw the little horn persecuting the people of God and also that the coming of the Son of Man to the Ancient of Days would initiate the judgment that resulted in the vindication of His people (v. 22). An angel said to Daniel that the judgment would result in the destruction of their enemies (v. 26). The angel proceeded to interpret the vision and informed Daniel that the beast would not be an ordinary kingdom but one intending to control the whole earth through terror and violence. The angel explained the ten horns as a symbol of the division of the kingdom and clarified the nature and work of the little horn that would last for a time, times, and half a time (see below, "The Little Horn in Daniel 7").

The Little Horn in Daniel 7

The interpretation of the little horn is to be based on the information that the text itself provides for us and its correlation to the history of God's people. The text informs us about its origin, its nature, and its work.

1. Its Origin. The text places the origin of the little horn at a particular chronological moment in the vision. First, it appears in history after the division of the Roman Empire, that is to say, after the ten horns/kings arise (v. 24). The Christianization of the Roman Empire prepared the way for the rise of the little horn after the fall of the kingdom. The successor of the empire was not the barbarian kingdoms but the Christian church, later to be known as the Holy Roman Empire, a kingdom without geographical boundaries. What at first may have seemed to be a good thing—the union of church and state—proved itself to be toxic to Christianity. Second, its origin is associated with the uprooting of three of the ten horns (vv. 8, 20, 24), thus confirming the fact that it was the successor of the Roman Empire. The three kingdoms that accepted an Arian understanding of the Trinity were basically exterminated (see "The Union of Church and State," p. 1033).

2. Its Nature. The little horn is described as both different from and more significant than the others (vv. 20, 24). Compared to the other horns, this one was to have an element of uniqueness. It consolidated the remainder of pagan Rome under the Christian faith and the civil power. It was a religiopolitical entity with the power needed to violate human conscience or to persecute others. In the vision, it had eyes (vv. 8, 20), probably referring to the misuse of wisdom and insight in order to achieve its purpose. Its words were to evince arrogance, pride, and the absence of the humility that characterized the Savior (Matt. 11:29). In fact, it would speak against the Most High (Dan. 7:25). By seeking political power to promote and impose its ideas, the little horn would act against God, who has the power to lead and protect His people without human political powers. This therefore would be an arrogant religiopolitical power, identified in history as Christian Rome, which, like the kings of Israel and Judah, united with other political powers to achieve its purposes.

3. Its Work. The work of this religiopolitical power is quite clearly stated. First, it would attempt to change times and law (v. 25). The term "times" plays an important role in Daniel. God changes the "times" in the sense that He, as the Lord of history, determines when kingdoms arise and fall (2:21). He is also the One who determines the time when the saints will receive the kingdom (7:22). The fulfillment of prophecy is in His hands. The little horn, by uniting political and religious powers, would believe itself to be in control of history and the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth. It was to practically take or assume the place of God on earth. The attempt to change the law is well attested in history with the change of Sabbath to Sunday as the day of worship and rest, as well as in the modification of the second commandment regarding the worship of images. In a broader sense, the law could refer to God's instructions to His people that were preserved in the Bible. Apostate Christianity has in many ways changed, ignored, or abandoned biblical truth (cf. Acts 20:28–29).

Second, the little horn would make war against God's holy people (Dan. 7:21); that is to say, it would persecute and oppress them (v. 25). This is one of the ways in which the union of church and state was to demonstrate its power. Christianity appeals to the human conscience through the persuasive power of the word of God and the power of the Spirit without violating human freedom. When the church uses civil power to enforce its positions, it is acting against God and His people. The best example of the persecuting power of the little horn is the Inquisition. During the Middle Ages, the growing threat of heretical groups led to the acceptance of the use of secular authority and an inquisitorial method by the church as a means to suppress heretics. Part of the theological justification for this practice was based on Augustine's (A.D. 354–430) understanding of Luke 14:23, where Jesus, in the parable of the Great Supper, said, "Compel them to come in." Augustine took this as a justification for the use of force if they would not come of their own free will.

Third, the oppressive power of Christian Rome was to remain unchallenged for a time, times, and half a time (Dan. 7:25). This time period is identified in the Bible as the equivalent of 1,260 days (Rev. 12:6) or 42 months (13:5 [42 x 30 = 1,260]), indicating that the "time" is 360 days (12 months of 30 days each = 360), "times" is twice as much (24 months of 30 days each = 720 days), and "half a time" is half a year (6 months of 30 days each = 180 [360 + 720 + 180 = 1,260]). This prophetic period extends from 538 to 1798 (see "The 1,260 Days/Years," p. 1037; "The Union of Church and State," p. 1033; and "Interpreting Biblical Apocalyptic Prophecies," p. 46).

The victory of the people of God and the destruction of the beast are directly related to the heavenly court and the opening of the books. For God's people this would be a moment of paramount importance, for at that moment they would be vindicated before the universe. As a result of their vindication, the dominion of the little horn would come to an end, and it would be consumed and destroyed forever.

While the destruction of the enemy was to be eternal, the kingdom of the Most High is an everlasting kingdom entrusted to the saints through their Mediator, the Son of Man (vv. 13–14, 27). The vision was about the limited power of the earthly kingdoms that were to come to an end. They would succeed each other through violence and would even oppress the people of God in an attempt to defeat God's plan, but at the end all of them would fail, and God's love and concern for His people would prevail. This reversal of history was to be determined in the divine court of law and enforced in human history through the power of God and the Son of Man.

8:1–27

GOD'S SANCTUARY UNDER ATTACK

Daniel 7:28 concludes the Aramaic section of the book of Daniel; chapter 8 resumes in Hebrew. Even the symbols employed are different from those in the Aramaic section. No longer do we have wild beasts, but the clean sacrificial animals of the sanctuary are present. On the Day of Atonement, the ram and the goat were the burnt and sin offerings used in the cleansing ritual of the sanctuary (Lev. 16:5). Beyond representing Medo-Persia and Greece, these animals imply that this chapter is interested in the sanctuary service, specifically the Day of Atonement. This chapter contains a vision (Dan. 8:1–12), an audition (vv. 13–14), and a partial interpretation (vv. 15–27).

8:1–8. Vision of a Ram and a Goat. In this vision, which Daniel received about 548 B.C., he saw a ram that had two horns (v. 3). Daniel was specifically told that the ram represents the kings of Media and Persia (v. 20). Ancient records tell us that the king of Persia, when at the head of his army, bore in the place of a crown the head of a ram. The same figure is frequently found on Persian seals. The Persian kings established an empire that stretched from Asia Minor (Turkey) in the west to the borders of India in the east. Perhaps what is surprising in this vision is that it ignores the Babylonian Empire even though it is dated to the third year of the reign of Belshazzar. The chapter itself suggests an answer: the time period mentioned in it (the 2,300 days; v. 14) is to be counted from the beginning of the vision, that is to say, from the time of the Medo-Persian kingdom.

Next, Daniel saw a goat with a notable horn between its eyes. The interpretation identifies it as the kingdom of Greece (v. 21). Alexander the Great claimed to be the offspring of the god Jupiter Ammon, whose symbol was a goat. He established an even greater empire than that of the Persians. Alexander first drove the Persians out of Asia Minor. Following these victories, he marched his armies down through Syria, Phoenicia, and the Holy Land to Egypt, taking time to destroy the kingdoms along the way, including the great sea power of the island city of Tyre (332–331). After defeating Egypt, he turned east, subdued Babylon and Medo-Persia, and did not rest until he reached India. He marched his soldiers ten thousand miles (16,093 km) in eight years.

When Alexander returned to Babylon, he was only thirty-two years old and the world was at his feet. But in 323 B.C., at the height of his glory, he died, and thus the large horn was broken (v. 8). In its place four significant horns came up. The four horns represented in the vision the four kingdoms (v. 22) that arose from Alexander's empire (see 7:6). In his explanation Gabriel stated that these four kingdoms would not be as powerful as Alexander's kingdom (8:22).

8:9–14. The Little Horn. Next, we are told that a small horn came out of one of them (lit. "one horn came from smallness"). This new horn came forth from small beginnings and developed in various directions, gaining immense strength. Most commentators have assumed that in the prophecy's fulfillment the little horn came out of one of the four horns, in other words, out of one of the four Greek kingdoms that succeeded the kingdom of Alexander the Great. They have identified this little horn with the Syrian king Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175–164 B.C.). But grammatically this is unlikely, first, because the nearest antecedent of "one of them" is the winds of heaven, not the

The 1,260 Days/Years

The time, times, and half a time mentioned in Daniel 7:25 is equivalent to 1,260 days/years (see "The Little Horn in Daniel 7," p. 1035). This period extends from A.D. 538 to 1798. In A.D. 533 Emperor Justinian recognized the bishop of Rome as head of the church of both the west and east, and in A.D. 538 General Belisarius delivered Rome from the siege of Arian Christians. Thus, the bishop of Rome as "the head of all the Holy Churches" became effective in 538 (see "The Union of Church and State," p. 1033).

On November 9, 1793, the French Revolution abolished Christianity and replaced it with the worship of reason, and on February 10, 1798, Napoleon's general Berthier entered Rome and took Pope Pius VI prisoner, ending the dominant position the church had held throughout the Middle Ages. The events that took place in 533 and 1793 prepared the way for the beginning (538) and ending (1798) of the 1,260-day prophecy.

Roman Christianity, however, began to recover after 1798, as prophecy had predicted (see Rev. 13:3). On February 11, 1929, a treaty was signed in the Lateran Palace between the See of Rome (Pope Pius XI) and the Kingdom of Italy (King Victor Emmanuel III); the Lateran Treaty, as it is known in history, was ratified on June 8 of the same year. The treaty recognized the Kingdom of Italy under the dynasty of the House of Savoy, with Rome as its capital, and Italy recognized the See of Rome, with its absolute, sole jurisdiction over the state called the Vatican, and guaranteed its freedom and independence.

four horns. Thus, from the perspective of Daniel's time, the little horn would come out from one of the four points of the compass (the winds of heaven) and grow toward other directions of the compass (east and south). Second, in the vision of Daniel 7:2, "the four winds of heaven," in conjunction with the sea, were the source from which the kingdoms arose, and from that same source the little horn originated. It designates the origin of another powerful kingdom, not the origin of an insignificant political power. Third, notice how the description of the previous kingdoms compares with that of the little horn: Medo-Persia "became great" (8:4), Greece became "very great" and strong (v. 8), and the little horn was *gadal yeter* (v. 9). *Gadal* can be translated as "to become great"/"strong" or "to grow." *Yeter* can mean "excess" or "preeminence." But the phrase itself should be translated as "it became great exceedingly." It underscores the little horn's greatness as superior to those of both Medo-Persia and Greece, something which is evident from its description in the rest of the chapter (e.g., it will reach up to the heavenly hosts; v. 10). The comparison and contrast in the vision is not between the four kingdoms that were to come out of Greece but with the two previous kingdoms. This is understandable because the little horn stands for the fourth beast of Daniel 7—the part (the horn) stands for the whole (the beast). The beast is not explicitly mentioned in order to emphasize the work of the horn (Christian Rome). Besides, the symbols for the kingdoms were clean animals, and the beast was anything but clean. Fourth, the Hebrew word *yatza'* ("set out"/"came," "go out"; v. 9) is often used in Hebrew to describe movement in reference to location (e.g., Gen. 2:10; 11:31; Ex. 16:29). It is never used to describe the growing of a horn, an activity designated by the Hebrew word *'alah* ("go up," "come up") used in Daniel 8:3, 8.

Since references to the little horn in Daniel 7 and 8 come after references to Persia and Greece, it must be, as suggested, a symbol for Rome in both chapters. In Daniel 7, both the union and the distinction between pagan and Christian Rome is pointed out by their being represented separately and yet united as beast and horn. In Daniel 8, the essential unity is taken for granted, and the horn represents Rome in both its phases. Gabriel's reference to the latter period of the Grecian kingdom (v. 23) fits the gradual rise of Rome well.

The little horn, we are told, extended itself to the south, east, and the Glorious or Beautiful Land (v. 9). Rome ruled a larger territory than any of the kingdoms before it. Persia ruled from Asia Minor to India, Greece from Macedonia to India, Rome from England to Mesopotamia. Rome also ruled for a longer period than any of the kingdoms before it. Persia and Greece each ruled for about two hundred years. As a civil power, Rome ruled for six hundred years, and adding its religious form, papal Rome, has existed for more than two thousand years. Rome also had a better organized government than Persia and Greece.

Not only did the little horn become great politically, but it grew up to the host of heaven and caused some of the host and the stars to fall (v. 10). The reference to the heavenly hosts introduces a vertical shift toward heaven. According to the interpretation given to Daniel, they would be God's people on earth (v. 24) but with citizenship in heaven (Phil. 3:20; see "The Work of the Little Horn and the Prince," p. 1040). According to Revelation 1:20, stars symbolize the leaders of the church. In Daniel 8:24, the stars are called the "mighty" among God's people. When Jerusalem was destroyed by Rome in A.D. 70, more than a million Jews perished but no Christians. In the first two centuries of the Christian era, however, the emperors Nero, Decius, and Diocletian destroyed hundreds, perhaps even thousands, of Christians who refused to offer incense to the emperor.

In v. 11, the transition to the vertical plane is total. The horizontal movement serves to identify the activities of pagan Rome, but now we see the full vertical dimension. In the vision, the little horn magnified itself even as high as the Prince of the host or the Commander of the Lord's army. This suggests that now we are dealing with Christian Rome. In Joshua, the title Prince or Commander (Heb. *sar*) of the host of God's people is used to refer to a heavenly being later identified as the Lord Himself (Josh. 5:13–15; 6:2). In Daniel that heavenly being must be the One called Michael the prince (*sar*; 10:21) and Michael, the great prince (*sar*; 12:1; i.e., Christ; see "The Work of the Little Horn and the Prince," p. 1040). In 9:25, the Messiah is called *nagid*—a similar term (ruler or prince). Since the scene in the vision took place in heaven, it is obvious that we are dealing with the heavenly sanctuary, and since it was related to the work of Christian Rome, it described Christ's work after His ascension. The vision described a conflict between the little horn and the ascended Lord. In fulfilling the vision, how was the little horn to

magnify itself against Christ? By openly assuming the office of Christ as mediator between God and humans, apostate Christendom would exalt itself against the Prince of the host and would fulfill 2 Thessalonians 2:4.

In the vision, the little horn also took away the *tamid*—"continual" or "daily" (the word "sacrifice" is not in the text but is supplied in most translations). This Hebrew word is frequently used in connection with the ritual in the sanctuary, not only with the sacrifices. Various parts of the sanctuary ministration in the OT are qualified by *tamid*, such as the burnt offering (Num. 29:6), the lamp that was to burn continually (*tamid*; Ex. 27:20), the fire to be kept burning on the altar (*tamid*; Lev. 6:13), and the bread that was to be (*tamid*) on the table (Num. 4:7). The word designates cultic activities performed on a regular basis, every day or once a week, in the courtyard or inside the Holy Place of the tabernacle. The term is never used with respect to the ritual of the Day of Atonement. Daniel is providing for us a view of the priestly work of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary. He is performing the antitypical work of mediation and intercession typologically represented by the daily work of the priests in the Holy Place of the earthly sanctuary (Heb. 7:25; 8:1–2).

Furthermore, the little horn cast down God's sanctuary (lit. "the place of His sanctuary"). There are two sanctuaries in Scripture: the earthly (Ex. 25:9, 40) and the heavenly (Heb. 8:1–6). The second Jerusalem temple was destroyed in A.D. 70. Yet even at that time it was not "His sanctuary" anymore (Matt. 23:37–39; 27:50–51). The only sanctuary functioning after Christ's ascension was the heavenly one.

In fulfilling the prophecy, how did apostate Christianity take away the daily and cast down the place of its sanctuary? By placing the work of intercession into the hands of priests through the confessional and by sacrificing Christ anew in every mass, spiritual Rome removed Christ's heavenly ministry from the thinking of people. Through the absolution of sins, the Roman priests occupied the place of Jesus before believers. These teachings and practices led to the overthrowing of the ministry of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary in the minds of many

The Little Horn and Antiochus IV

Characteristics of the Little Horn	**Reasons Why the Little Horn Is Not Antiochus IV**
The little horn came up among ten horns (7:8).	Antiochus IV did not come up among ten Hellenistic kings.
Three horns were plucked out before it (v. 8).	There is no historical evidence that Antiochus uprooted three kingdoms.
The little horn became greater than his fellows (v. 20).	Antiochus was not greater than the other kings in his time. In fact, the presence of the Roman ambassador Popilius Laenas, without an army, was sufficient to cause Antiochus IV to withdraw from Egypt. Seleucus I and Antiochus III the Great were definitely greater Syrian kings than Antiochus IV.
The saints were to be given into his hands for three-and-a-half times/years (v. 25).	According to 1 Maccabees 1:54; 4:52–54, the desecration of the temple lasted only three years and ten days. According to 2 Maccabees 10:3–4, the desecration of the temple lasted only two years.
As indicated, there appears to be a definite progression of increasing greatness from Medo-Persia to Greece to the little horn (8:4, 8, 9, etc.).	Antiochus IV's kingdom was not greater than Medo-Persia or Greece.
It would last for 2,300 days, and then the sanctuary was to be cleansed (v. 14).	The sanctuary defiled by Antiochus was cleansed after three years and ten days, not after six years and approximately four months if the 2,300 days are taken as a literal time reference.
The little horn was to come in the latter days of their kingdom (v. 23).	Antiochus IV was the eighth king in the Seleucid kingdom. He was followed by another twenty kings.

Christians, and its place was effectively taken by human substitutes. Through the mass and the confessional, the minds of Christian believers are drawn away from a continual dependence upon the mediatorial ministry of the Savior in His sanctuary. By elaborate ceremonies, all in the name of Christ, the ministry of Christ is obscured and lost sight of. The full forgiveness that Christ offers to those who put their trust in His perfect righteousness is taken away, and its place is taken by an ineffective pardon dispensed by humans.

In v. 12, the little horn continued its attack on Christ's ministry in heaven. The beginning of v. 12 has been translated and understood differently: some take *tsaba'*—"army" or "host"—to refer to a different army from the one previously mentioned in v. 11. There the *tsaba'* referred to God's people, as it evidently does in v. 13 also. If so, this other *tsaba'* would be referring to a spiritual army, the Roman priesthood, through which the little horn would operate its counterfeit daily (see below, "The Work of the Little Horn and the Prince").

As its final action in the prophecy, the little horn threw the truth to the ground—that is, he rejected and disregarded it. The Lord Jesus said of Himself, "I am…the truth" (John 14:6). In another place, but with not greatly different meaning, He said, "Your word is truth" (John

The Work of the Little Horn and the Prince

Daniel 8 contains an apocalyptic narrative describing a conflict between the little horn and the Prince of the heavenly hosts. It is part of the cosmic conflict and will result in its closing. The narrative combines military and cultic language that helps us understand the nature of the little horn. We will summarize the findings of the previous exposition of the text.

1. Little Horn in Daniel 7 and 8. It is difficult to ignore the parallelism between the little horn in Daniel 7 and 8. A summary of the similarities may suffice: (1) both are represented by the same symbol, a horn (7:8; 8:9); (2) the title "little" or "small" applies to both (7:8; 8:9); (3) both become "great" (7:20; 8:9); (4) both are persecuting powers (7:21, 25; 8:10, 24); (5) both persecute the people or the saints (7:27; 8:24); (6) both seek self-exaltation (7:8, 11; 8:10–12); (7) both exercise a crafty intelligence (7:8; 8:23–25); (8) both represent the enemy of God at the climax of the vision (7:8–9, 25–26; 8:12–14, 25); (9) both are associated with prophetic time (7:25; 8:14); (10) both of their activities reach the time of the end (7:25–26; 8:17–19); and (11) both are finally destroyed (7:11, 26; 8:25). These similarities demonstrate that we are dealing with the same religiopolitical power—Christian Rome. The prophecy has taken us from the Medo-Persian Empire, through the Greek and Roman ones, and into the Christian era.

2. Initial Work of the Little Horn. The horn was to interact at the horizontal level with other earthly powers. The prophecy shows that it was to grow through aggressive military expansion and to become great (v. 9) like the other two kingdoms (vv. 4, 8). It was to extend itself to the south, the east, and the land of Israel with unstoppable aggression. This first stage of growth was to be fundamentally of a military and political nature. Verse 10 is transitional because, although it refers to the servants of God on earth, at the same time it points to the heavenly host (cf. 10:13). It introduces an important shift in the work of the little horn.

3. Vertical Move. By launching an attack against the people of God, the horn moved to the vertical dimension of its conquests. It was reaching out to control those belonging to the Lord. The term "host" refers in the OT to troops or an army (Deut. 20:9; 1 Kin. 2:5; Ps. 60:10), but when it is associated with God, it designates the people of Israel as God's army (Ex. 6:26; 7:4) or the army of God's angels (Ps. 103:19–21). A leader of the army of Israel is called "a commander of the hosts"/"a commander of the armies" (Deut. 20:9; 1 Sam. 14:50; 26:5; 1 Kin. 2:5). The earthly and the heavenly hosts work closely together in the realization of the Lord's plan. It could be said that an attack against one of them is an attack against the other. Interestingly, "host" is used in the context of the sanctuary to refer to the Levitical guard in charge of protecting the sanctuary from those intending to violate its holiness (Num.

4:3, 23, 30). This usage fits very well into Daniel's prophecy.

The apocalyptic narrative speaks about a military and political power that would go through a radical change in its search for power. It would intend to take the war to a new level: a celestial one associated with the heavenly temple. It would try to achieve what the fallen cherub had attempted to do (Is. 14:12–13). From this point on, the primary emphasis of the text in Daniel is on language related to the sanctuary and its services. The little horn was to become a political and religious power opposing God and His people. In this new move, the first enemy the horn was to face would be the Levitical guard/army that would protect God's dwelling (Dan. 8:10). It would be able to throw down or overcome them and then to trample or humiliate them. But the victory was not to be total because the horn would overcome only "some" of them (v. 10). Nevertheless, there would be a breach, and the horn would take advantage of it.

4. The Work of the Prince. In the vision, the first target in the attack was the heavenly host. The second was the Prince or Commander of the host—the Prince of the heavenly army, as revealed in the experience of Joshua, who as prince of the earthly army of the Lord had met the Prince of the heavenly hosts (Josh. 5:14). Daniel refers to this Prince as the Messiah and the heavenly high priest. The term prince/commander was also applied to the Israelite high priest, and in Daniel the context indicates the Prince's function as a high priest (cf. 1 Chr. 24:5; Ezra 10:5). In the prophecy, He officiated in the heavenly temple and was responsible for the daily services—the work of mediation on behalf of the people (Dan. 8:10). The parallel with the judgment scene in 7:9–10, 13–14 also shows the Prince as directly involved as high priest in the final judgment, typologically represented by the services of the Day of Atonement (see "The Theology of the Day of Atonement," p. 264, and "The Cleansing of the Sanctuary and Judgment in Daniel," p. 1043). This facet of His work is announced in v. 14: "Then the sanctuary shall be cleansed." This Prince is none other than the high priest mentioned in Hebrews who officiates in the true tent/tabernacle set up by God, not human beings (Heb. 8:2). Through His incarnation, sacrificial death, resurrection, and ascension, He is totally qualified to be our high priest in the heavenly sanctuary.

5. The Little Horn against the Prince. Because the work of the Prince is of such importance for the redemption of humans, the horn would threaten it. In the prophecy, it removed the continual (or daily) from the Prince by usurping His priestly work. It also threw down the place of the sanctuary. The adverb "down" is an addition not found in the Hebrew text. When the verb is used without a preposition or an adverb, it means to abandon, reject, or forsake. The "place of the sanctuary"/"foundation of the sanctuary" refers metaphorically to the very essence and purpose of the sanctuary (cf. Ps. 89:14) as the place where the Prince was to perform His work of mediation, intercession, and forgiveness of sins. In the vision, the little horn rejected or forsook the true nature of the sanctuary and its services and established its own.

Once the little horn claims to be in control of the daily services, it appoints its own host/army (human priestly system) to perform its own religious services. This is considered to be an act of rebellion (Dan. 8:12). According to 11:31, the work of the little horn profaned (not "defiled," for the Heb. verb is *khalal*, "to profane"; it is not *tame'*, "to contaminate," "defile") the sanctuary by treating it as a common place. In the prophecy, the horn expressed its rejection of the order established by God and regulated through His law, acting against God's sovereignty. The horn finally threw the truth to the ground (8:12). Contextually, "truth" refers to the truth about the daily and the sanctuary and summarizes the work of the horn. But the term is broad enough to include the revelation of God's redemptive plan as well as the revelation of His will for us (see 7:25). Truth was to be despised and disregarded by this prophesied religiopolitical power. Although in the vision, the horn did what it intended to do (8:12; interpreted as being in the future in v. 24), at the end of the narrative we are informed that it "shall be broken without human means," in other words, by God Himself. The Prince would be victorious (12:1–3).

17:17). How the written truth of Scripture has been cast down by apostate Christianity is well known. From the twelfth century onward, various popes prohibited the use of the Bible in the vernacular. The Council of Trent in 1546 decreed that no one was to interpret Scripture contrary to the interpretation given by the church, the church being the judge of the true sense of Scripture.

In 1897, Pope Leo XIII, in an encyclical letter, forbade all versions of the Bible, in any vernacular language, made by non-Catholics. Today, of course, the picture has changed. In 1943, Pope Pius XII issued an encyclical letter urging priests to study and preach from Scripture, to help Catholic associations to spread Scripture in modern languages, and to encourage the laity to read the Bible daily. What has not changed is the conviction that Scripture and tradition continue to have the same authority in the life and beliefs of the church. History clearly shows that not only has the Bible been placed on the same level as tradition but that the church continues to be the final interpreter of Scripture.

8:13–14. Time Period: Cleansing of the Sanctuary. In vv. 13 and 14, Daniel heard two heavenly beings speaking to each other. One asked the other how long it would be for the events in the vision to take place. The question was not about how long the desolation would last but about the historical time period that this vision would cover. The scope of the whole vision—beginning in v. 3, which reached back to the time of the Persian ram (v. 20) and extended forward to the time of the end (vv. 17, 19, 26)—was in view. The time element encompassed all the events mentioned in the vision (see "The Cleansing of the Sanctuary and Judgment in Daniel," p. 1043).

The answer given was 2,300 evenings and mornings—some translations have "days." The phrase "evening and morning" appears in the Creation account, where it constitutes one calendar day (Gen. 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31). The 2,300 prophetic days/years would reach to the time of the end (Dan. 8:17). In 9:24–27, Gabriel explained that this long time period was connected with and included the first coming of the long-expected Messiah and extended to the year A.D. 1844 (see chap. 9).

At the end of the 2,300 evenings and mornings, the sanctuary would be *nitsdaq*, from the verb *tsadaq*. This is the only place where this particular verbal form of *tsadaq* appears in the entire OT. This latter root word (*tsadaq*) has the basic meaning "to be just or righteous" or "to be in the right." Apart from this basic meaning, it could express the idea of being "put right," in the sense of restored to its rightful place, "to be clean"/"to be pure," "to cleanse"/"to purify," or even "to justify" or "vindicate" (for further analysis of the term, see "The Cleansing of the Sanctuary and Judgment in Daniel," p. 1043).

The cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary corresponds to the cleansing of the Mosaic tabernacle on the Day of Atonement once every year (Lev. 16:30). As the Israelites had a daily and a yearly service in the respective first and second apartments of the earthly sanctuary, so Jesus in the heavenly sanctuary performs the daily service, in other words, His intercessory ministry, and is now also performing a work of judgment equivalent to the Day of Atonement as a day of judgment.

The context of the prophecy of Daniel 8:14 shows that what was cast down—the daily sacrifice, the truth, and the sanctuary's place—was to be restored at the end of the 2,300 evenings and mornings. While the translation "shall be restored" serves well to indicate the restoration of the truth about the sanctuary, the rendering "shall be cleansed" conveys the important truth of the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary (see Heb. 9:23).

Daniel 8 describes, in apocalyptic symbols, a deeply religious conflict between Christ, the Prince of the host, and the little horn, apostate Christianity, with each side offering a plan of salvation. During the judgment described in Daniel 7, the true plan of salvation is reestablished, God's people are vindicated, and the little horn is condemned. While this judgment is taking place in heaven, the people of God on earth continue to depend on His grace, walking humbly with Him and restoring the truth cast down to the ground by the little horn, particularly the biblical teaching of the high-priestly work of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary. In this sense they are also participating in the restoration of the sanctuary on earth (see Rev. 11:1).

8:15–27. Gabriel's Interpretation of the Vision. The vision strongly impacted Daniel intellectually and emotionally. He was trying and was unable to understand it. Since he could not understand it (cf. 1 Pet. 1:10–12), the angel Gabriel was sent to help him ascertain the import of the vision (*mar'eh*, the term used in regard to the evenings and mornings).

In the OT, the name Gabriel occurs only here and in Daniel 9:21. In the NT, he appears several times in Luke 1. He tells the prophet that the vision (*khazon*, the totality of the vision) reaches to the "time of the end" when the desolating power was to be destroyed (cf. 2 Thess. 2:8). The phrase "time of the end" is found only in the book of Daniel (Dan. 8:17; 11:35, 40; 12:4, 9) as a technical term for the final period of human history leading up to Christ's return. Based on the historicist method of interpretation, the books of Daniel and Revelation indicate that this "time of the end" began at the close of the 1,260-year period in 1798 (see 12:40; see also "The 1,260 Days/Years," p. 1037).

In vv. 20–22, Gabriel explains the symbolic details of the vision recorded in vv. 3–8 but not the vision related to the "evenings and mornings" in vv. 13 and 14. This is left for chapter 9. Gabriel said that the ram symbolizes the kings of Media and Persia and the goat symbolizes the king(dom) of Greece. This is an important passage for the interpretation of all the visions in Daniel because this is the only

The Cleansing of the Sanctuary and Judgment in Daniel

It is generally acknowledged by many scholars representing different Christian traditions that the temple/sanctuary motif plays a significant role in the book of Daniel. The services in the Israelite sanctuary were performed to preserve and strengthen the relationship of the worshipers with the covenant Lord and, whenever necessary, to restore, through atonement, a broken relationship with Him (see Leviticus: Introduction). The priestly ministry consisted of a work of mediation performed on a regular basis (the daily services) in the courtyard of the sanctuary and in the Holy Place. Once a year, during the Day of Atonement, the sanctuary was cleansed from the sins and impurities of the people of Israel (see "The Theology of the Day of Atonement," p. 264). These two services pointed typologically to the high-priestly work of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary. Daniel addresses both of them (see "The Work of the Little Horn and the Prince," p. 1040). Here we will concentrate on the cleansing of the sanctuary mentioned in Daniel 8:13–14.

1. Context of the Passage. The context employs, within a few verses (vv. 9–14), a significant number of Hebrew terms often found in the setting of the sanctuary/temple services or having sanctuary connotations. We are referring to terms like "the daily," "regular," or "continual" (*tamid*; Ex. 29:42; Num. 28:3; Lev. 6:13); "holy," (v. 2); "sanctuary" (*miqdash*; Dan. 8:11; Ex. 25:8; Lev. 26:2); "glorious"/"beautiful" (Dan. 11:45); "host"/"army"/"service" (*tsaba'*; Num. 4:3, 5); "prince"/"commander" (*sar*; 1 Chr. 24:5); "take away" (Lev. 2:9; 4:8); "horn" (v. 7); "transgression"/"rebellion" (16:16); and "truth," which could designate the true instruction given by the priests to the people (Mal. 2:6). This language is related to the sanctuary and its services in a context dealing primarily with the daily service (the *tamid*), and, as indicated, it serves to identify the Prince as a heavenly high priest. The movement to the Day of Atonement is addressed in Daniel 8:13–14.

2. "Then the Sanctuary Shall be Cleansed" (v. 14). The Hebrew verb *nitsdaq* ("to be brought to its right state"), a verbal form used only here in the OT, is from the root *tsadaq*, meaning primarily "to be righteous," "to be vindicated." It is employed in the OT in three different contexts. First, in legal contexts it designates the restoration of the legal rights of a person falsely accused of a crime. The innocent who was charged with a crime was to seek the Lord's vindication in the sanctuary (e.g., Ps. 7:8), and the Lord would vindicate him or her (9:4). When the righteous were acquitted, the accuser would be condemned by the Lord (7:8–9; Deut. 25:1). Second, it is used in the context of salvation. Since those who are vindicated by God are delivered from oppression, the terms "salvation" and "righteousness" are used as synonyms (Ps. 98:2–8; Is. 1:27; 46:13).

Third, it is used in the context of the sanctuary services. In Leviticus what is required in order to have access to the sanctuary is purity obtained through sacrificial atonement. In the book of Psalms, what is required to enter the temple is "righteousness" or "vindication" granted to the worshipers as a gift from the Lord in the sanctuary (Ps. 24:3–5). These people were righteous not only because they remained loyal to the covenant but also because their sins had been forgiven (Ps. 32:1–2, 11). In the book of Daniel, the verb *tsadaq* is connected to *kipper* ("to make atonement"), which expresses the idea of the removal of sin or impurity (Dan. 9:24). The concept of righteousness is deeply connected to the sanctuary/temple. The Israelites had access to the temple through "the gates of righteousness" (Ps. 118:19), brought a righteous sacrifice (4:5), and the priest, a mediator before the Lord who "is righteous" (11:7), officiated while clothed with righteousness (132:9). Consequently, the worshiper received blessing from the Lord and righteousness/vindication from God, the Savior (24:5). This person "has clean hands and a pure heart" (v. 4). The person was declared righteous/purified/vindicated.

The connection between the Hebrew root *tsadaq* or its noun form *tsedeq* and the sanctuary is indicated by the fact that they are used as synonyms for words related to purity, cleanness, and justification (18:20; 51:4). One of the best examples of this linguistic phenomenon is found in Isaiah 53:11. God's righteous (*tsadiq*) Servant would justify (*yatsdiq*) many, for He would bear their iniquities (by removing/cleansing them from iniquity). To be declared righteous by God is the same as to be cleansed/purified and thus forgiven from sin, and, as an act of divine salvation, it vindicates the people of God.

Since the root *tsadaq* expresses in some contexts, particularly in a sanctuary setting, the concept of cleansing, it is expected to find it used this way in Daniel 8:14. The ancient Greek translation of the OT, the LXX, as well as the first-century Greek Theodotion translation, renders the Hebrew *nitsdaq* in v. 14 by the Greek verb *katharizō*, "to cleanse" (the same Greek term used in the LXX in Lev. 16 for the cleansing of the sanctuary). Also, in the Aramaic translation of the Hebrew Bible (the Targums), *nitsdaq* is translated as "to be pure," "to be clean" in 40 percent of its occurrences. If the meaning of the Hebrew verb *nitsdaq* is "to be brought to its right state," the best interpretational option would be to find in the use of the verb in Daniel a reference to the moment when the Israelite sanctuary was restored to its right state or condition, namely, the Day of Atonement. It is useful to observe that the word translated in Daniel 8:14 as "sanctuary" (*qodesh*) is the same Hebrew word used in Leviticus 16, the chapter dealing with the Day of Atonement, to refer to the Most Holy Place of the tabernacle (vv. 2–3, 16–17, 20, 23, 27, 33). It was during this day that all sin and uncleanliness was removed from the tabernacle and its purity and holiness were restored.

3. The Question of Time. The reference to the Day of Atonement is introduced by a question that one holy being asked another (Dan. 8:13). The question was not how long the little horn would usurp the work of the Prince of the hosts but about the time period that was to cover the fulfillment of the whole vision. A literal translation of the question makes this clear: "Until when the vision [*khazon*], the daily [*tamid*], and the rebellion/transgression [*pesha'*] that causes desolation to give both the host and the sanctuary a trampling?" The "vision" refers to v. 1 and designates the totality of the vision, the "daily" refers to the work of the Prince (v. 11), and the "rebellion" designates the work of the little horn (vv. 11–12). The question was how long the vision (vv. 3–14), including the daily and the rebellion, would last ("Until when?"). It was not about how long the little horn would be able to usurp the daily.

Within this long period of 2,300 prophetic days, the kingdoms of Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome and its subsequent division would pass away, and the little horn would oppose the priestly work of the Prince. Then, after the 2,300 days, the antitypical Day of Atonement would begin. The question indicates that the 2,300 days/years (see "Interpreting Biblical Apocalyptic Prophecies," p. 46) would begin during the time of the Medo-Persian Empire—a more specific date is provided in Daniel 9.

4. A Day of Judgment in Daniel. The Day of Atonement was essentially a day of judgment when God and His people were vindicated and their ultimate enemy deleted from God's creation (see "The Theology of the Day of Atonement," p. 264). In Daniel, we find several important insights on the topic. First, judgment is clearly coupled with the Day of Atonement. Apart from the fact that

tsadaq is a legal term, the parallels between Daniel 7 and 8 demonstrate the direct connection between the Day of Atonement and judgment. In both chapters the kingdoms of Medo-Persia (7:5; 8:3–4) and Greece (7:6; 8:5–8) are mentioned, as well as Rome and the little horn (7:7–8; 8:9–12). In Daniel 7, after the struggles between the little horn and the Lord and His people, we find the judgment scene and the final disposition of God's enemies (vv. 13–14, 26–27). In Daniel 8, we find at the same juncture the reference to the purification of the sanctuary and the final disposition of God's enemies (vv. 13–14, 25). The parallel between the two chapters makes clear that the cleansing of the sanctuary and the judgment in heaven refer to the same event, in other words, the Day of Atonement.

Second, the judgment described in Daniel 7 was to take place in heaven, before the Son of Man and the saints would receive the kingdom. The preparations for the initiation of the heavenly judicial inquest were to begin while the little horn would still be active in its opposition to the people of God (vv. 9–14). Therefore, the judgment was to begin before the Second Coming of Christ, and consequently it could be called a pre-advent judgment. It would also be proper to call it an investigative judgment because the heavenly books would be opened to analyze the life of God's people. Third, the reception of the kingdom was to be the divine verdict, pronounced in the judgment in heaven, on behalf of God's people (vv. 21–22). Their ultimate destiny is firmly grounded on a legal process, which is accessible to the dwellers of the cosmos (v. 10) and shows their immovable faith commitment to the covenant Lord who redeemed them. Fourth, the vindication of God's people would result in the defeat of the little horn that unjustly oppressed them (v. 26). This decision, made in heaven, would be executed within history. Through judgment, destinies were to be determined before any rewards would be given. Fifth, Daniel speaks not only about the beginning of the judgment (vv. 9–10) but also about the moment of its end (12:1–3), when the work of Michael the Prince, as the high priest of God's people, would come to an end. In the absence of a Mediator before God for wicked humanity, there would be an unparalleled time of trouble on earth, but deliverance would only come to those with names preserved in the heavenly book after the judgment (12:1). This will be followed by the resurrection of some to eternal life and others to everlasting death (vv. 2, 13). In the biblical time frame, the investigative judgment in heaven precedes the granting of rewards. Finally, the prophecy indicates that after the judgment, and as a result of it, God's cosmic order would be reestablished by His everlasting kingdom (7:27).

5. Cleansing and Cosmic Judgment. The book of Daniel and the rest of the Scriptures show that the removal or cleansing of sin from the universe is grounded in a legal process beginning in the heavenly temple of God as the center of cosmic governance. First, theodicy is at the center of the Day of Atonement as a day of judgment. The Godhead has been involved in the cleansing of God's people from sin and uncleanliness through the sacrifice of Christ (1 John 1:7) and the work of the Spirit in the human heart (Titus 3:5–6). This saving and cleansing act of God on behalf of sinners is a magnificent revelation of His love and will demonstrate that He is indeed righteous and loving (1 John 3:16; 4:10). The display of His love on the cross will have been so powerful that at the end even the evil powers will recognize the love, mercy, and justice of God (Phil. 2:9–10). Second, God's people are vindicated before the universe, for the judgment will reveal that they found justification only in Christ, in other words, in what God had done for them through His Son. Third, the judgment will therefore provide a solid legal basis for the cleansing of the universe from all evil powers, sin, and death. It will reveal that their presence in God's creation was totally unnecessary and damaging to God's established order at Creation. After the cleansing of the cosmos, the eschatological Day of Atonement will restore cosmic order through God's work of re-creation.

We can summarize the biblical understanding of the final judgment in terms of three phases, each one containing an investigation and a verdict.

(1) The Pre-Advent Judgment in Heaven. This is the judgment of those who have claimed at some point in their lives to belong to God. It involves an examination of

their lives in the divine tribunal (Rom. 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:10) and judgment according to their works (1 Cor. 3:8–15; Eph. 6:8). Works reveal where the heart is and will provide objective evidence to show that God's people have been firmly established in their faith in Jesus and are covered by His righteousness. This pre-advent judgment in heaven involves believers giving an account of themselves to God (Rom. 14:12), not in person but through Jesus, as their Mediator, speaking for them and confessing them before God and the angels in heaven (Luke 12:8–9; cf. Heb. 7:25; 1 John 2:1). At the Second Coming, they will receive the benefit of the verdict pronounced on their behalf in heaven. It will be on the day of divine wrath (the Second Coming) that God's righteous verdict (*dikaiokrisia*) will be revealed, and He will render to each person according to what he or she has done (Rom. 2:5–6). The verdicts determined in heaven will be made public on earth at the return of Christ. The judgment of God's people begins in heaven before the coming of Christ, and they will be rewarded at the Second Coming (e.g., Heb. 9:28). They will be saved while the wicked that are alive will perish (2 Thess. 1:3–10).

(2) Millennial Judgment. This judgment takes place after the Second Coming when God's people in heaven will participate in the judgment of the wicked (Rev. 20:4). Paul expressed the idea well when he stated that God's holy people will judge the world (1 Cor. 6:2). They will even judge the fallen angels (v. 3). During the Millennium they will examine the heavenly records of the deeds of the wicked, and a verdict will be pronounced against them. This decision will be revealed to them after the Millennium.

(3) Executive Judgment. After the Millennium, Satan, his fallen angels, and the wicked of the earth will stand before the throne of God to receive their final reward. The evidence for their eternal condemnation will be presented to them to clearly understand the reason for their exclusion from the company of the redeemed ones (Rev. 20:12–13). They see the records of their lives and the immensity of the love of God in saving the righteous ones and condemning the wicked. This will be the moment when the cosmic theodicy takes place and the whole cosmos, including the wicked, will acknowledge the justice and love of God (Phil. 2:9–10; see "The Theology of the Day of Atonement," p. 264). The moment has come for the cosmos to experience eternal cleansing from the presence and effect of evil. This will be the permanent return to Eden for the human race.

place where the second and third kingdoms in the four-kingdom scheme are clearly identified by the angel himself. It is one of the passages historicists can use to show that the historicist method of interpretation is found in the book of Daniel itself.

As already indicated, after the death of Alexander, his kingdom was divided into four Greek kingdoms (see 7:6). When the iniquity of these kingdoms had reached a point of no return (8:23; see Gen. 15:16), the Roman Empire would begin to rule the then-known world. Rome was the fierce king described in Daniel 8:23. This is an allusion to Deuteronomy 28:50, which was a passage long understood as applying to the Romans and their oppression of the Jews. The statement that the little horn was to be strong and mighty, but not by his own power (Dan. 8:24), suggests that Christian Rome would be mighty by means of the secular powers over which it exercised spiritual control and behind which there was an evil power (cf. Rev. 13:2, 4). The little horn would misuse intelligence and wisdom through deception to establish and enforce the convictions of this power (see "The Little Horn in Daniel 7," p. 1035).

Yet in the end, the little horn would be broken without human power. Evil may assert itself for a long time, but it will be destroyed by divine decree in the end. The metal image in the prophecy in Daniel 2 came to an end by a stone prepared without human hands (2:45), and the little horn would have its dominion taken away by the heavenly court (7:26). So, the willful king who is the main actor in Daniel's most detailed prophecy would likewise come to his end, and no one would help him (11:45).

Finally, the angel confirmed to Daniel the reliability of the vision (*mar'eh*) of the evenings and mornings, which was not interpreted for him (8:26). He was told to seal up

the vision (*khazon*) because it primarily dealt with events related to the distant future (lit. "for many days," that is to say, "many years" or "the time of the end"; v. 17). Daniel had a general grasp of the meaning of the vision, except for the section dealing with the evening and mornings, the *mar'eh*. He was disturbed by it and could not understand it.

9:1–27

THE COMING OF THE MESSIAH

Ten years had passed since the vision of chapter 8, and during that time Babylon, the conqueror of Israel, had fallen to the Medo-Persians, but the Jews were still in exile in Babylon. Daniel seems to have been interested in the political changes and their significance for his people. This chapter is formed by an introduction (9:1–2), Daniel's prayer (vv. 3–19), and the prophecy of the seventy weeks (vv. 20–27). There is a clear connection between this chapter and the prophecy of the 2,300 days recorded in chapter 8.

9:1–19

Introduction and Prayer

The chapter opens with a dating statement of great importance for Daniel and his people: the Babylonian Empire had ended, and a new one had arisen. Daniel's prophecy of the four kingdoms had been partially fulfilled. The date is also important in that it implies the arrival of the moment for the liberation of God's people from exile. King Cyrus, the messianic figure announced by Isaiah (Is. 44:28—45:4), was reigning, and hope was rekindled in God's people, particularly in Daniel. Through a study of Jeremiah, Daniel understood that the prophecy of the seventy years of the desolation of the land would soon come to an end. He was most probably concerned about the relationship between the seventy years and the prophecy of the 2,300 years that he had not been able to understand. Although the longer period is related to the seventy weeks, the prophecy of the seventy years prepares the way for the other. The prophet looked forward in hope while facing deep uncertainty; he prayed.

The reason for Daniel's prayer was his misunderstanding of the vision in chapter 8. Although according to Jeremiah's prophecy (Jer. 29:10) the time for the return of the Jews to Jerusalem was close at hand, Daniel's last vision gave him the impression that it would be a long time before the sanctuary/temple was restored to its right condition. Daniel no doubt feared that God intended to prolong the period of captivity because of Israel's sins. The prayer is one of the longest and most moving prayers recorded in Scripture. It models the nature of prophetic mediation that anticipates the role of the coming Messiah as the supreme Mediator between humans and God. As mediator, Daniel pleads for the people dispersed throughout the nations and for the leaders in Jerusalem and Judah (Dan. 9:7). First, he stands before the Lord as their representative (cf. Heb. 7:25). Second, he identifies himself with his sinful people and asks God to forgive and bless them (Dan. 9:8–9; 2 Cor. 5:21). Third, Daniel recognizes that God has shown Himself to be righteous in what He has done to His people (Dan. 9:7, 18; see Rom. 3:25–26), thus representing God before the people. Finally, Daniel appeals to God's mercy and not to human achievements as he prays for forgiveness (Dan. 9:18; see Matt. 7:11; John 16:24).

9:20–27

The Seventy Weeks

While Daniel was still praying, Gabriel appeared and delivered to him one of the most important messianic prophecies found in the OT. Daniel 9:24–27 is to a certain extent the foundation stone of the Christian religion because it predicted almost six hundred years in advance not only the time when the Messiah would appear but also the duration of His public ministry, His atoning death for humanity, and His work as Mediator in the heavenly temple. In his prayer Daniel uses three different names to address God: Yahweh (vv. 4, 8, 10, 13–14); Adonai (vv. 4, 7, 9, 15–16, 19); and Elohim (vv. 4, 9–11, 13–15, 17–20, 23).

9:20–23. Coming of Gabriel and Daniel 8. In response to Daniel's prayer, the angel Gabriel was sent again (vv. 20–21; cf. 8:16–17) to help him understand the vision (v. 23; *mar'eh*). The information Gabriel provided did not describe a new vision but was an explanation of that part of the earlier vision in chapter 8 that Daniel did not understand (8:27). What he did not understand was the time element—the 2,300 evenings and mornings. He had received an explanation for the animals, the four horns, and the little horn (vv. 20–25) but not for the 2,300 evenings and mornings.

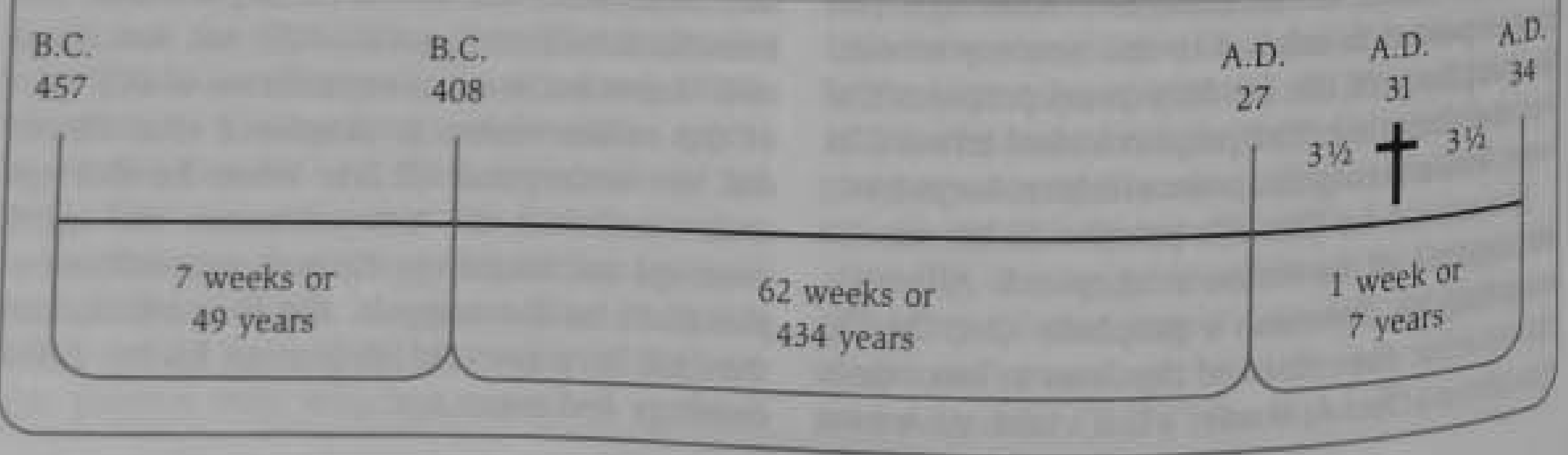
There are some specific links between Daniel 8 and 9 that show a close connection between both chapters. First, the same angel, Gabriel, revisited Daniel (8:16; 9:21); second, Daniel makes reference to the vision of chapter 8 (9:21); third, Gabriel came to give Daniel understanding of the previous vision (v. 23); fourth, the time element not explained in Daniel 8 is now discussed in 9:24–27; fifth, in both chapters Daniel uses two words for vision, *khazon* (8:1, 2, 13, 15, 17, 26; 9:21, 24) and *mar'eh* (8:16, 26–27; 9:23). When in 8:26 Gabriel said that "the vision [*mar'eh*] of the evenings and mornings" was true, he was referring to the time prophecy of the 2,300 years. Upon returning he said that he had come to help Daniel understand the *mar'eh* vision (9:23). In other words, what Daniel did not understand was the time element in Daniel 8. In Daniel 9 Gabriel came to him again and said that he would explain the time element of the 2,300 evenings and mornings.

9:24. Goal of the Seventy Weeks. According to the year-day principle, seventy weeks are 490 years (see "Interpreting Biblical Apocalyptic Prophecies," p. 46). Gabriel told Daniel that the seventy weeks were "decreed" or "determined" for his people. The Hebrew word *khatak* used here could also mean "to cut off." This is the only occurrence of this root in the Hebrew Bible, but in postbiblical Hebrew it is used to mean "to cut," "to cut off." In the LXX, the Greek translation of the OT, the verb used is *suntemno*, which means "to cut," "to cut off," "to chop up," or "to divide." Contextually, that is to say, in view of the connections between Daniel 8 and 9, the seventy weeks or 490 years are "cut off" from the longer period of the 2,300 evenings and mornings in Daniel 8:14. The great work to be accomplished within the seventy-week period is listed using six infinitive constructions in three pairs.

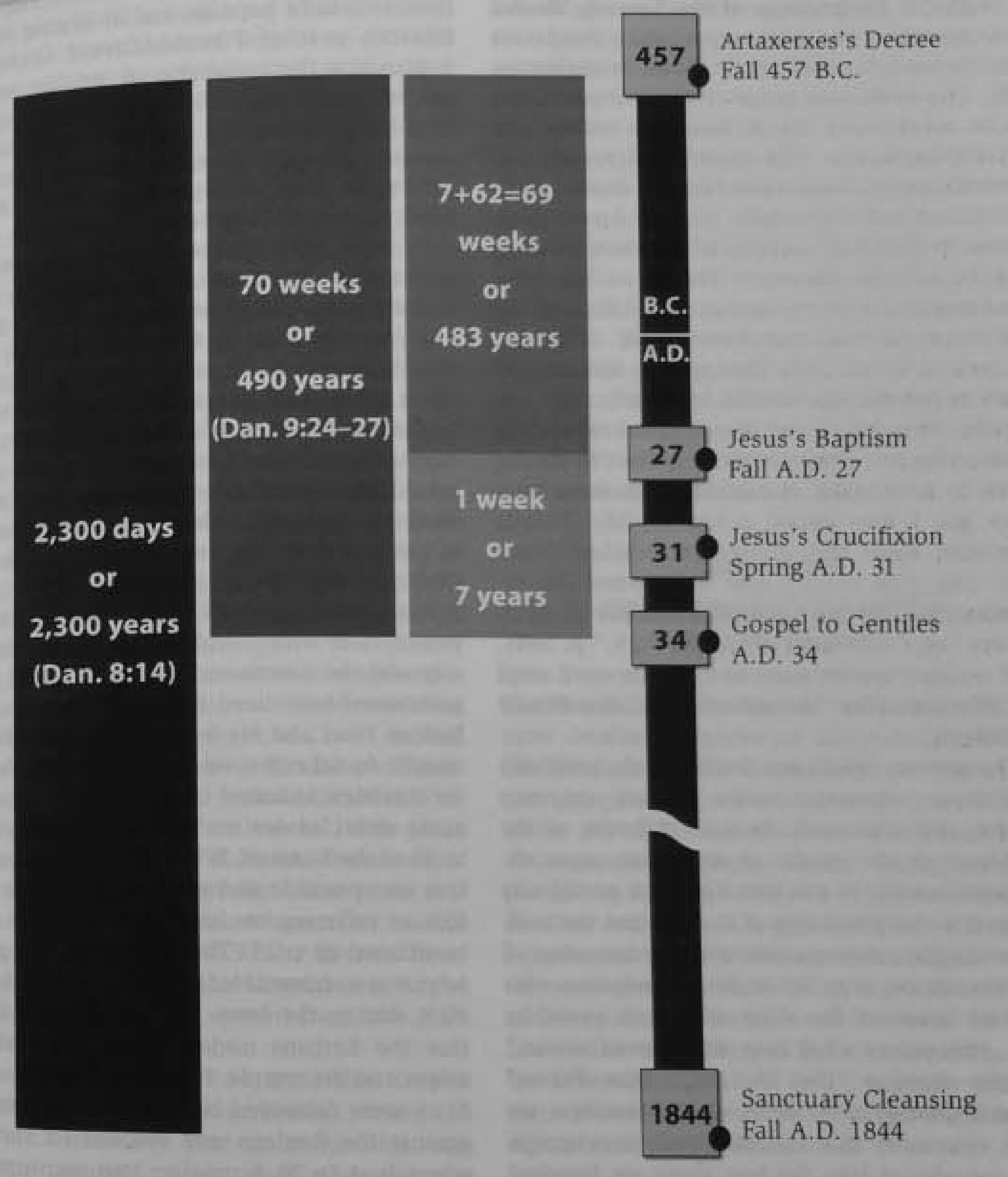
To finish and *to bring* sin to an end; to eliminate (*kalah*) it. Jesus came "to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself" (Heb. 9:26), thus providing salvation for those who place their faith in Him (Rom. 3–5; 2 Cor. 5:17–21). *To atone* (*kipper*, "to make atonement"; some translations have "make reconciliation") for wickedness and *to bring* in everlasting righteousness. This was all achieved through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross (cf. 1 John 2:2). It is only through Christ's atonement that we can be declared righteous by faith (Is. 53:11–12; Rom. 3:4–5; 21–31). *To seal* means to authenticate something and to affirm its genuineness. In the context of a prophecy, it means that the prophecy is authenticated when what it has announced finds its fulfillment in history. Here the prophecy is the messianic prophecy of the seventy weeks. Its fulfillment was to establish that God spoke through Daniel and that the rest of his prophecy would also be fulfilled. The coming of Christ is considered to be the fulfillment of prophecy (e.g., Matt. 2:5–6). According to Paul, He came at the appropriate prophetic time (Gal. 4:4). Jesus Himself announced the fulfillment of this prophecy in Mark 1:14–15 when at the beginning of his ministry He said that the time was fulfilled or had come. Such an expression would have been clearly understood as referencing the prophecy of Daniel 9.

To anoint the Most Holy is not a reference to the anointing of Jesus as the Messiah because the phrase "Most Holy" is practically always used in the OT to refer to the sanctuary or something connected with it (e.g., Ex. 26:33; 29:37; 30:10, 29; Num. 4:4, 19). The best interpretation is to find a reference here to the anointing of the heavenly sanctuary, where the Messiah, Christ, began His high-priestly work after His ascension toward the end of the seventy weeks (Heb. 9:18–24: cf. Ex. 40:9–16). This echoes the anointing of the earthly sanc-

70 Weeks / 490 Years



2,300 Years Prophecy (Daniel 8 and 9)



457 B.C. Beginning of the 70 weeks (490 years). Marked by the command to restore and rebuild Jerusalem (9:25) issued by the Persian king Artaxerxes I in the seventh year of his reign (Ezra 7:11–26).

A.D. 27. End of the 69 weeks (483 years) predicted for the coming of Messiah the Prince (Dan. 9:25) and beginning of the last week. Fulfilled in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar when Jesus was baptized and began His ministry (Luke 3:1, 21).

A.D. 31. Middle of the last week (Dan. 9:27) of the 70 weeks (490 years). After 3 1/2 years of earthly ministry, the death of Christ confirmed a covenant for the benefit of all.

A.D. 34. End of the 70 weeks (490 years). Marked by the martyrdom of Stephen and the related persecution that scattered Christians from Judea, which thus spread the gospel to the Gentiles.

A.D. 1844. End of the 2,300 days (2,300 years). Marked the beginning of the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary and the end-time work of judgment.

tuary during the priestly ordination ritual (Lev. 8:10–12).

9:25–27. Chronology of the Seventy Weeks. The beginning of the seventy weeks is the decree (lit. "word") to restore and rebuild Jerusalem (v. 25). The beginning point of the 490 years was to be a particular decree issued to restore and rebuild Jerusalem. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah record three main decrees dealing with Jerusalem and its temple: (1) the decree from Cyrus in 538 B.C. to rebuild the temple (Ezra 1:2–4); (2) the decree of Darius in 519 B.C., confirming the previous one (6:3–12); and (3) the decree of Artaxerxes I in 457 B.C. (7:12–26; cf. Neh. 2:4–10). Only the last one allowed the Jews to restore and rebuild Jerusalem. The restoration was not about the physical rebuilding of the city but about returning the city to the Jews to administer it according to their own laws (cf. 1 Kin. 20:34; 2 Kin. 14:22). This is precisely what this decree established (Ezra 7:12–26). The decree also authorized the rebuilding of the city (see "The Decree of Artaxerxes I as Fulfillment of Daniel 9:25," p. 584). The seventy weeks were to carry forward until the Messiah (the "Anointed One," the Prince or Ruler).

The seventy weeks are divided in the prophecy into three segments: seven weeks, sixty-two weeks, and one week. In the fulfillment of the prophecy, seven weeks or forty-nine years extended from 457 to 408 B.C. This time period was allotted to the rebuilding of the city and the wall. Some English versions follow the punctuation of the Masoretes, a group of Jewish scholars who worked between the sixth and tenth centuries A.D., that places a full stop after "seven weeks," thereby making "the Messiah," "the Prince" come at the end of the seven weeks. However, we must remember that the Masoretic punctuation was introduced into the text about six hundred years after the Christian area and is not part of the original text. Theodotion, who around A.D. 150 translated the Hebrew Bible into Greek, reads "seven weeks and sixty-two weeks." In any case, the seven weeks and sixty-two weeks are included together in the following verse, and v. 25 cannot be taken to imply that the Messiah was to come after 49 years—the next verse indicates that He was to be cut off after the 483 years.

The sixty-two weeks or 483 years extended from 408 B.C. to A.D. 27, when the Messiah was to appear. In A.D. 27, Jesus was about thirty years old (Luke 3:23) because He was born about four to five years before A.D. 1. The Roman abbot, Dionysius Exiguus, who in 532 established the Christian era, miscalculated the birth of Christ by at least four years. The time of Jesus's baptism and anointing was the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar (Luke 3:1); it was also the beginning of the last week of the seventy weeks. Tiberius became emperor in A.D. 14. According to the Syrian method of computing regnal years, his fifteenth year would have commenced in September/October A.D. 27 when Jesus was baptized.

In A.D. 31, in the middle of the last week of seven years, the Messiah would be executed—literally "cut off." When Jesus died, type met antitype (Ex. 12:21; 1 Cor. 5:7), the veil in the temple was torn in two from top to bottom (Matt. 27:50–51), and this event marked the end of the earthly ceremonial system. The terminology used indicates that, abandoned by all, he would experience a violent death (lit. "no one shall be for him"). This is an apt description of the experience of Jesus on the cross (Matt. 26:56; John 1:11).

Daniel 9:26 also tells us that the people of the prince/ruler who would come would destroy the city and the sanctuary. The prince and people mentioned here have been traditionally identified as Titus and his legions when the Romans sought to take Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Support for this view is found in Daniel 8:24, where the same verb ("to destroy") is used to describe the work of the Romans. While this may be possible, it is also possible and contextually better to see this as referring to Jesus, the Messiah Prince mentioned in v. 25. The "people of the prince" who was to come refer to the people of the Messiah, that is, the Jews. History clearly indicates that the Romans under Titus destroyed Jerusalem and the temple. But the city and the sanctuary were destroyed because the Jews rebelled against the Romans and refused to surrender when, in A.D. 70, Jerusalem was surrounded by the Roman army. In this sense it could be said that the people of the Jewish Messiah caused the destruction of their city and temple. The description stating that the end would come like a "flood" fits well with the manner in which the Romans penetrated the defenses of Jerusalem in the summer of A.D. 70. The comparison of military forces to a flood occurs elsewhere in the Bible (e.g., Is. 8:7–8; Jer. 46:6–8; 47:2).

The next verse (Dan. 9:27) begins with the pronoun "He," which is clearly referring to the Messiah of v. 26. If, in v. 26, the Prince/Ruler is Christ, then the "He" mentioned here in v. 27 would refer back to the Prince or Ruler who was to come and who, as the Messiah, would be executed. If the reference in v. 26 to the prince/ruler is to Titus, then the "He" of v. 27 would be a switching of antecedents back to the Messiah. It is helpful to consider the prince/ruler who is to come as the Messiah for it is grammatically consistent and helps explain why the futurist interpretation is faulty. Futurist interpreters see the Roman general Titus as the coming prince/ruler and do not consider the "He" of v. 27 to refer back to the Messiah but to the antichrist, in its final phase, in other words, the ten-toe phase of Daniel 2 and the ten-horned-beast phase of chapter 7. They believe the final antichrist will be involved in concluding this covenant with the people of God during the final seven years before Christ's return. This view assumes a long gap of time between vv. 26 and 27, from Titus in the first century A.D. (v. 26) to a future Roman ruler, the antichrist, in the time of the end in v. 27. The text, however, does not support such a gap. Christ is the One who confirms the covenant in v. 27, and this is the best option here.

The Messiah would "confirm [strengthen] a covenant with many" in the sense of extending it to many people. The death of Christ ratified the covenant God made with His people (Matt. 26:28) and extended it to include Gentiles. This event, part of the seventy weeks, took place during the last week, in A.D. 34, at the end of which the theocracy formally came to an end and the faith of Israel was embraced by Gentile believers (see Acts 8 and 9). In the middle of the week, the death of the Messiah was to put an end to the sacrificial system (see John 4:21; Heb. 10:1, 9).

The last part of v. 27 is somewhat cryptic and has been translated variously: some indicate that a desolator was to be on "the wing of abominations," others that someone was to "set up an abomination that causes desolation," while others refer to the abominations to be placed at "a wing of the temple." In all of these cases, the text is taken to be referring back to the desolation mentioned in v. 26, in other words, to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple (see Matt. 24:15–16; Luke 21:20–22). The phrase "on the wing" might be used to indicate that, once the abominations were present, desolation would follow. However, now a new thought appears: at the eschatological end, the final destruction determined by God would be poured out on the one causing the desolation. The desolation would not be something that would happen only to Jerusalem but something that would be part of the Christian experience, even to or until the occurrence of the end/destruction that God has determined against the oppressor (cf. Is. 10:23). We detect here a connection to Daniel 8. The desolating power of Rome, in its pagan and Christian expressions, is mentioned in Daniel 8:24–25. The attack of the little horn against the Prince is called the desolating transgression (v. 13; cf. 11:31; 12:11, where it is called the desolating abomination). The Lord told Daniel that at the end the little horn would be broken but not by humans (8:25). This is what the Lord determined to do to the desolating power, and now 9:27 returns to the same idea. Daniel 9 takes us from the beginning of the 2,300 days/years to the very eschatological end when the little horn would be unmasked and the enemies of God and His people would be permanently defeated. The chapter closes with the proclamation of a victorious God.

10:1—12:4

KINGS FROM THE NORTH AND THE SOUTH

The last vision in the book of Daniel contains the most detailed prophecy of future events in the OT. We do well to remember, therefore, that the great prophecies in Daniel are given according to the principle of repetition and enlargement. These prophecies begin either in the days of Babylon (Dan. 2, 7) or Medo-Persia (Dan. 8, 10–12), but they each climax in the establishment of the kingdom of God. All these prophecies deal with the same powers; Daniel 7 enlarges the outline of Daniel 2, and Daniel 8 and 9 enlarge the outline of Daniel 7. We can expect, therefore, that the vision of Daniel 10 to 12 enlarges at least the outline of Daniel 8 (see "Interpreting Biblical Apocalyptic Prophecies," p. 46).

10:1—11:2

Introduction to the Prophetic Speech

Daniel 10 to 12 form a unit with three main elements:

- A **Introduction**—Daniel and Heavenly Beings (10:1—11:1)
  - **Vision** of Heavenly Man in Linen (10:4–14)
    - **Dialogue**—Daniel and Heavenly Being (10:15–21)
- B **Prophetic Speech** (11:2—12:4)

- **A′ Epilogue**—Daniel and Heavenly Beings (12:5–13)
  - **Vision** of Heavenly Beings (12:5–6)
    - **Dialogue**—Daniel and Man Dressed in Linen (12:7–13)

The introduction and conclusion of the book correspond to each other in terms of the visionary presence of heavenly beings and Daniel's dialogue with one of them. The man dressed in linen is presented in both chapters, which constitute a literary unit. The last vision of Daniel was given two years after the return of the Jews from Babylon. In this vision God lifted the veil of history and showed Daniel some of the realities of the unseen world—the conflict going on between the forces of good and evil. In Revelation 12:7–9, we find a similar picture: Michael and his angels fighting the prince of evil and his angels. Yet the outcome in both books is the same—Michael, the great prince, overcoming Satan and delivering His people.

10:1–9. Date and Vision of Heavenly Being. The introduction dates the experience of Daniel to the third year of King Cyrus (536/535 B.C.). Daniel had been mourning and fasting for three weeks (v. 2). The reason for this is not given, though from v. 14 we can infer that the future of his people must have been of concern to him. Cyrus succeeded to the throne of Babylon in 538 B.C., and probably because of Daniel's witness, Cyrus had come to know the prophecies of Isaiah about himself (Is. 45:1–3, 13) and had already taken steps to fulfill them (Ezra 1:1–4; 6:3–5). At the end of the three weeks, Daniel received a vision by the Tigris River in which he was shown the Great Controversy between the spiritual forces in the universe. The conceptual connections between this description of the controversy and Daniel 8 to 9 are presented in "The Great Controversy in Daniel 8—12" (p. 1053).

In answer to Daniel's prayer, a celestial being appeared to him. A comparison of the words of Daniel 10:5–6 with Revelation 1:13–15 suggests that this divine Being was Christ, who is named Michael later in the chapter (Dan. 10:13, 21; 12:1).

Only Daniel saw the vision (10:7). This was a day vision, in contrast to night visions or prophetic dreams. The effect of this day vision on Daniel's companions is comparable to what happened when Jesus appeared to Saul on the Damascus road (Acts 9:3–7; 22:6–9). The physical effects of the vision on Daniel were similar to that of Balaam (Num. 24:2–4) and John (Rev. 1:17). Daniel, like Peter (Acts 10:9–11) and Paul (2 Cor. 12:1–3), was unconscious of his immediate surroundings. He was so fully absorbed in the things he was shown that he became a participant in the actions (Dan. 12:5–9; cf. Rev. 1:10; 5:4–5; 19:10; 21:5).

10:10–14. Behind the Scenes. At this juncture another angel came to Daniel and touched him (v. 10). Although this angel is not named, the way he addressed Daniel is similar to the way Gabriel spoke to him. It is a wonderful fact that a human being can be said to be the object of such regard by the Creator of the universe.

The heavenly being informed Daniel that he had come to respond to Daniel's words (v. 12). This gave Daniel confidence that his prayer would be answered. Gabriel then explained that while Daniel was fasting and praying, there was a struggle between the forces of good and evil to influence Cyrus's mind. God does not force, and neither does He allow Satan to force humans to act against their wills. The reference to the prince of Persia (v. 13) is primarily to Satan himself, who through his agents tried to turn the Medo-Persian ruler against Israel. Ezra 4:1–6 relates the events in the Holy Land, while in this chapter the veil is drawn back, and the supernatural powers of good and evil are seen engaging in the conflict concerning the rebuilding of the temple. Probably no other text in Scripture than Daniel 10:13 describes more clearly the struggle between the invisible powers that control and influence nations. Scripture indicates that even as God's angels carry out His purpose in the natural world (2 Sam. 24:16; Ps. 78:43–49) and in the moral world (Luke 15:10), so they also do in the political world. And just as Israel had a spiritual champion to protect her (Dan. 10:21), so the powers opposed to Israel had their demonic princes.

In order to understand the prophecy in chapter 11, Daniel 10:14 is particularly important. This text tells us that the vision is concerned with the future (lit. "days of the end" or "days afterwards"; see 2:28). Other nations are mentioned only as to their effect on the lives of God's chosen people, but the prophecy transcends geographic limitations and has cosmic dimensions.

10:15—11:1. Dialogue with Heavenly Being. Daniel then describes his own subjective experience while in vision: he bowed with his face to the ground (v. 15). Again, he speaks of the complete loss of physical strength and of the supernatural strength received (v. 16). He also mentions a new feature: he stopped breathing (some translations interpret the literal description "no breath left" to mean that he had difficulty breathing). Twice in these verses, we read of the strengthening of Daniel (vv. 18–19). This time Daniel became a partner in dialogue with the heavenly being—Daniel sharing the reason for his reaction to the vision, and the angel speaking words of encouragement. Gabriel then predicted the struggle with the powers of Persia and their successors in the days of the Greek Empire (v. 20). He explained that he received no help from anyone, except from "Michael your prince." "Michael" means "who is like God?" No one is like God except the

The Great Controversy in Daniel 8—12

Daniel 8		Daniel 9		Daniel 10–12	
8:2	At the river Ulai			10:4	At the great river
8:3	I raised my eyes and saw, and behold			10:5	I lifted up my eyes and-looked and behold
8:8	The large horn was broken—four horns toward the four winds of heaven			11:4	His kingdom was to be broken/divided toward the four winds of heaven
8:9	The little horn grew mighty—toward the Glorious/Beautiful Land			11:23	He was to become strong with few people
				11:16	The Glorious/Beautiful Land
8:11	The daily/continual (*tamid*) was taken away			11:31	Was to take away the daily/continual (*tamid*)
8:11	God's sanctuary was overthrown	9:26	Was to destroy… the sanctuary		
8:11	The Prince/Commander of the host/army	9:25	An Anointed One, a Prince/Ruler	11:22	The prince of the covenant
8:13	The desolating transgression/rebellion	9:27	Desolating abomination	11:31	The desolating abomination
8:16	Gabriel was to explain the meaning of the vision	9:21–23	Gabriel came to help Daniel understand		
8:17	Gabriel identified the vision as being for the time of the end	9:26	Until the end	11:35	Until the time of the end
8:19	The future time of anger			11:36	Until the anger would be finished
8:24	Destruction of the holy people	9:26	Destruction of the sanctuary		
8:25	He was to oppose the Prince of princes	9:26	An Anointed One/ Messiah was to be cut off/executed	11:22	The prince of the covenant would be killed
8:25	He would be broken/ destroyed without human power (lit. "hand")	9:27	Total destruction would be poured out on the desolator	11:45	He would come to his end
8:26	The vision: true			10:1	The word/message: true

Son of God (John 10:30), who intercedes for His people (Heb. 7:25; 1 John 2:1–2). Jewish literature describes Michael as the highest of the angels and identifies him with the "Angel of Yahweh," who is frequently mentioned in the OT as a divine being (see Gen. 16:7–14; 22:11–18; 31:11–13; Ex. 3:2–6; 14:19; 23:20–23; Judg. 2:1–5; 13:2–23; Hos. 12:3–5; Mal. 3:1). This "Angel" (Ex. 23:23) was capable of pardoning or refusing to pardon transgressions, and God's name was "in Him" (Ex. 23:21). Since forgiveness of sins is the prerogative of God (Ex. 34:7; Is. 43:25; Mic. 7:18; Mark 2:7), the conclusion is inevitable that God's Angel or Messenger (Ex. 23:23) is a member of the Godhead. In this case "Angel" does not designate a creature but a function. One of the members of the Godhead is the Messenger of the Lord.

In Daniel 10:21, Michael is called "your prince," in other words, the Prince of God's people. In Isaiah 9:6, Jesus the Messiah is called the "Prince of Peace"; in Daniel 8:25, He is "the Prince of princes"; and in Daniel 9:25, He is identified as "Messiah the Prince/Ruler." Thus, the conclusion seems justified that in the OT "Michael" is "the Angel of the Lord" or "My Angel," who is also called "My Son" (Ps. 2:7).

11:2—12:4

The Prophetic Speech

Daniel 11 is the most difficult chapter of the book, and in some cases there are different interpretations among historicist expositors dealing with the historical fulfillment of the prophecy (we will discuss various Adventist views). Modern critical scholarship views Daniel 11 as a description of the wars between the Seleucid and Ptolemaic kings, culminating in the career of the Syrian king Antiochus IV Epiphanes, who is seen as the main actor in vv. 21–45 (see "The Little Horn and Antiochus IV," p. 1039). Evangelical scholarship generally follows this outline, except that some see, starting with v. 35, the career of Antiochus IV Epiphanes foreshadowing the activities of the last-day antichrist; others have postulated a gap of many centuries between vv. 35 and 36 and interpret the last ten verses as applying only to a future antichrist. We see no need to inject such a huge time gap into the biblical text.

Although there are some differences among historicists on the interpretation of Daniel 11, there are five events within the prophecy that are fairly clear and straightforward; these can be used for interpretations based on the principle that Scripture interprets Scripture, with one passage being the key to other passages. First, at the beginning of Daniel 11, the angel referred to Persian and Greek kings. The reference to the mighty king (v. 3), whose kingdom was to be broken up toward the four winds (v. 4), was clearly a reference to the reign of Alexander the Great (336–323 B.C.). This is supported by parallelism with Daniel 8:8, where Alexander is the large horn that was broken and in whose place four other significant ones rose up toward the four winds of heaven. The four horns symbolize the Hellenistic kingdoms that emerged after the breakup of Alexander's empire.

The next clearly identifiable event is the death of the Messiah in v. 22. The word for "prince" in this verse is *nagid*. It is used only in one other place in the book of Daniel, namely, in Daniel 9:25–26. In other places Daniel uses the similar word *sar*, "Prince"/"Commander" (8:11, 25; 10:13, 20, 21; 12:1). On linguistic grounds, therefore, the "prince of the covenant" in 11:22 is the same as the one who would confirm a covenant with many (9:25–27). Since Daniel 9:26–27 and 11:22 obviously refer to the crucifixion of Christ by the Romans, the Roman Empire is probably prophesied as entering the stage of history sometime prior to the prophecy in 11:22.

The third event is the taking away of the *tamid* ("daily"/"continual") and the setting up of the abomination of desolation (11:31). The terminology used in 11:31 for this event is also used in 8:11, where it refers to the earthly priesthood taking away the intercessory ministration of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary. And the desolating abomination refers to the vast system of beliefs and practices of spiritual Rome, which led people away from the priestly ministry of Jesus for more than a thousand years. Thus, it appears that apostate Christianity is prophesied in this chapter in either v. 31 or before.

The fourth event that provides a chronological marker in the prophecy is the "time of the end" (11:40). This phrase is found only in the book of Daniel, once in Daniel 8:17 and four times in connection with Daniel's last vision (11:35, 40; 12:4, 9). The visions of Daniel 8 and 11 both reach to "the time of the end," at which point, according to Daniel 12:2, a resurrection will take place. Thus "the time of the end" is the

time prior to the Second Coming (see v. 1). At the end of the vision, Daniel was told to close the book and seal it for "the time of the end" (v. 4). At that time knowledge of these visions would increase, and their meaning would be understood (v. 10).

The fifth event that is easily understood is the resurrection at the end of the vision (v. 2). We suggest that this resurrection includes a special resurrection that will occur immediately prior to the appearance of Jesus in the clouds of heaven and will be followed by the general resurrection of the righteous (v. 13). This interpretation seems warranted by the fact that some of the wicked will be raised at this special resurrection to witness the coming of Christ (Matt. 26:64; Rev. 1:7; cf. GC 637).

These five events provide the basic chronological outline for Daniel 11. All the other historical events mentioned in the chapter must fit into this framework. That this is by no means an easy task is shown by the various interpretations.

11:2–4. Medo-Persia and Greece. Gabriel told Daniel that three more kings would arise in Persia and that the fourth would be much wealthier than the others. At the time of the vision, Cyrus (559–530 B.C.) was the ruling monarch. The next four kings were Cambyses (530–522 B.C.), Gaumata or the false Bardiya/Smerdis (522 B.C.), Darius I (522–486 B.C.), and Xerxes I (486–465 B.C.). The last one was the king who married Esther. When his fleet was destroyed by the Greeks at Salamis (480 B.C.) and his army was defeated at Plataea (479 B.C.), the Persians gave up the idea of conquering Greece. About one hundred and fifty years later, the Greeks under Alexander the Great (336–323 B.C.) conquered Persia instead. After Alexander's death the kingdom was eventually divided among four of his generals (see Dan. 7:6). Out of the divided Greek Empire arose two dynasties, the Seleucids and the Ptolemies, who became the kings of the north (the Seleucids in Asia Minor) and of the south (the Ptolemies in Egypt) in relation to their geographical proximity to the Holy Land.

11:5–39. Warring Kings of North and South. Adventist interpreters, with a few exceptions, generally identify in the first part of the chapter the king of the south as referring to the rulers of Egypt (south of Israel) and king of the north (11:5–6) as Syria (north of Israel). In Egypt, the Ptolemies ruled from 305 to 30 B.C. (Cleopatra VII, 51–30 B.C., being the last ruler of this dynasty). The kings of the Seleucid dynasty in Syria ruled from 305 to 65 B.C. Verses 5–13 and 15 describe the wars between these two countries. Both dynasties were eventually replaced by the Roman power.

Within the Seventh-day Adventist Church, a wide variety of interpretations have been applied to several details of this portion of Daniel 11. "Different Historicist Views on Rome and the Papacy in Daniel 11:5–39" (p. 1056) shows three of the interpretations, all of which are based on the historical-grammatical method used in the interpretation of prophetic chapters. The differences are based on the challenge of identifying some of the historical fulfillments of the prophecy. The differences among the various Adventist interpreters primarily concern the question, "At what points in the story do the Romans and the papacy enter the picture?" The table summarizes three views for Daniel 11:5–39.

Here we will provide a short commentary on each of the three positions summarized in "Different Historicist Views on Rome and the Papacy in Daniel 11:5–39" (p. 1056).

Position 1. According to this view, following the death of Jesus (v. 22; the fulfillment of the seventy weeks), v. 23 would take us back two hundred years to 161 B.C., when the Jews under the Maccabees made a pact with Rome against the Seleucids. Next, Rome under Augustus fought against the king of the south, the Ptolemies in Egypt (v. 25), and returned to their land with great riches (v. 28). Having incorporated Egypt into the Roman Empire, Rome turned against the holy covenant God had made with His people and destroyed Jerusalem in A.D. 70 (v. 28).

The ships from *kittim* are identified with the ships of the Vandals from Carthage who sacked Rome in A.D. 410. Although this word originally referred to Cyprus, it later was extended to include the Mediterranean Roman coastlands to the west of Israel. Verses 31 and onward contain a prophecy concerning the main actor—apostate Christianity, the spiritual king of the north—that would take away the *tamid* ("daily"/"continual"). On this view, the *tamid* refers to paganism, and the abomination of desolation refers to the power that apostate Christianity developed from A.D. 538 onward. A new power is introduced in v. 36, namely, the new king who would speak blasphemies against the God of gods. According to this view, this figure is identified with the atheistic power of France.

Position 2. This interpretation basically follows the previous one in the first section of the prophecy but has imperial Rome enter the prophecy in v. 16. The prince of the covenant who was to be broken (v. 22) is again Jesus, but from vv. 23 to 39 it sees the activities of spiritual Rome not in chronological but in topical order. This means that vv. 23–30 are about the military campaigns during the Crusades (eleventh to thirteenth centuries), followed by the subversion of the system of salvation in v. 31. The profaning of the temple/sanctuary fortress in v. 31 is interpreted as the attack of apostate Christianity on Christ's ministry in the heavenly sanctuary. Thus the *tamid*, "daily"/"continual," is not identified with paganism but with Christ's ministry that was taken away from Him and put in the hands of earthly priests (see 8:1–14). Martin Luther identified the desolating abomination in Daniel 11 with the papacy, its doctrines, and practices. In view of the parallelism between 8:11, where in prophecy the little horn took away the *tamid*, and 11:31, where again the *tamid* was to be taken away but in addition the abomination of desolation was to be set up, it is concluded that the power that would take away the *tamid* is also the power that would set up the abomination of desolation. This means that spiritual Rome and its unscriptural teachings constitute the fulfillment of these prophecies in history.

Different Historicist Views on Rome and the Papacy in Daniel 11:5–39

Position 1		Position 2		Position 3	
11:5	King of the South: Ptolemies in Egypt	11:5	King of the South: Ptolemies in Egypt	11:5–8	Rise of Christianity and papacy
11:6	King of the North: Seleucids in Syria	11:6	King of the North: Seleucids in Syria	11:9–10	Rise of papal supremacy
11:14	Rome conquers the Holy Land	11:16	Rome conquers the Holy Land	11:11–12	Avignon captivity, Renaissance, and Rationalism
11:20	Emperor Augustus	11:20	Emperor Augustus	11:13–25	Counter-Reformation, missionary expansion, wars, and persecutions
11:21	Emperor Tiberius	11:21	Emperor Tiberius		
11:22	Prince of the covenant broken: Jesus crucified	11:22	Prince of the covenant broken: Jesus crucified	11:22	Persecution of God's people using the language of the experience of Jesus
11:23	Roman league with the Jews in 161 B.C.	11:23–30	The Crusades		
11:29	Removal of the seat of the empire to Constantinople in 330			11:25–27	French Revolution—Napoleon and the Concordat (1801)
11:30	Ships of Cyprus (*kittim*): ships of the Vandals from Carthage attacked Rome	11:30	Ships from the western coastland helped in the last Crusade	11:28–39	Nonchronological report of a theological nature—denunciation of the corruption of the church
11:31	The daily: paganism; the abomination of desolation: the papacy	11:31	The daily: Christ's ministry in heaven; the abomination: the union of church and state		
11:32–35	Papal persecution	11:32–35	Papal persecution		
11:36	Self-exaltation and blasphemy of papal Rome	11:36	Self-exaltation and blasphemy of papal Rome		
11:37–39	French Atheism				

That many were to fall by sword and flame (11:33) describes the persecution of the people of God during the Middle Ages. The king that would exalt and magnify himself above every god (v. 36) corresponds to the activities of the little horn in Daniel 8:11, which was fulfilled by the display of the power and blasphemy of the apostate church in history.

Because this interpretation views the historical events described in vv. 23–39 in topical and not chronological order, the events in v. 31 were to occur before those described in vv. 23–29. The same is also true of position 1, which breaks the chronological sequence in v. 23 by going back two hundred years in history to the Jewish league in 161 B.C.

Position 3. This interpretation divides Daniel 11:5–39 into three sections based on the structure of the text. (1) The first is the emergence of the little horn. Daniel 11:5–13a describes the troubled period of the rise of Christianity and the beginning of alliances between the church and the state (Constantine, Clovis—see "The Union of Church and State," p. 1033), the abuses and iniquities of Christian Rome during the Middle Ages, the Crusades, and the Inquisition. These were followed by a reaction from the other side: the Avignon captivity, the Renaissance, and the rise of Rationalism.

(2) The next section (11:13b–27), describes the process of persecution from its beginnings and development to its fall. This is the time of the wars of religion and of intensive persecution. This part of the vision can be applied to the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre and the intrigues of Henry IV's conversion to Catholicism. This is the time of the development of foreign missions when the church, supported by the Jesuits, expanded to the whole world. This period ended with the dramatic blow of the French Revolution (the "wound"; cf. Rev. 13:12), which marked the fall of the persecuting power.

(3) In 11:28–39, the vision does not follow a chronological progression but focuses on the church's opposition to God and His people. The iniquity of the church is denounced ("the abomination of desolation" and the taking away of the *tamid*, "daily"/"continual," from the heavenly sanctuary are mentioned). The perspective here is the eschatological Day of Atonement.

11:40–45. A Closer Look. This passage contains some unfulfilled prophecies. Christ counseled that full understanding often comes only after a prophecy's fulfillment (John 14:29). This does not mean that we should not try to interpret a prophecy, but it certainly indicates that we should not be dogmatic on a position taken. The identification of the kings of the north and south in these six final verses of chapter 11 has been a matter of debate among Adventist interpreters, some of whom look for identifications of these kings in contemporary religiopolitical events within a given period in modern history. For example, at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries, Turkey (the Ottoman Empire) was identified as the king of the north, but the majority of Adventist interpreters now agree that the king of the north is the papacy. During the Cold War, communist Russia (the Soviet Union) was identified as either the king of the north or the south, who was in clear opposition to religion. With the fall of the Soviet Union, this interpretation is no longer viable. Israel itself was also, for a time, proposed as the king of the south. This approach is still being used by some who find in current events an anticipated fulfillment of Daniel 11:40–45. We will suggest that it would be better to connect this passage to the book of Revelation, where we seem to find a further expansion of the end-time prophecies of Daniel. Prophecy indicates that spiritual Babylon will be the final persecutor of the people of God and describes the final, deadly conflict of the church with the powers of darkness (Rev. 12–14).

The prophetic events in vv. 40–45 occur during the time of the end. The term "time of the end"—which appears five times in the book of Daniel (8:17; 11:35, 40; 12:4, 9)—is not found in any of the other OT books or in any extra-biblical Hebrew sources. The key to its meaning is found in the vision in Daniel 11. In the concluding part of this vision, a resurrection of the dead is prophesied to take place (12:2). It is this event that holds the key to the proper understanding of the expression "time of the end." In Daniel 12:4, the prophet was told to shut up the prophecies and seal the book until the time of the end. Many will then intensively search the book of Daniel, and as a result the knowledge of these prophecies will increase. The expression "time of the end" in 12:4 refers back to "the time of the end" in 11:35, 40. In view of the larger context, "the time of the end" in these texts refers to the time preceding the resurrection of the dead in 12:2 that will happen at the Second Advent. This is also the meaning of 12:4. Prior to the end of history, people will study and search out the Danielic visions just as Daniel himself searched out the seventy-year prophecy of Jeremiah (9:2). From history we know that in the nineteenth century, after the end of the 1,260 years of Daniel 7:25, knowledge of the Danielic prophecies increased dramatically. It is reasonable, therefore, to conclude that the time of the end began with the end of papal dominance in 1798. This means that the events from Daniel 11:40 onward must be sought in the time between 1798 and the resurrection at the end of time.

In what follows, we offer a possible way of reading the closing verses of Daniel 11 that takes into consideration the connection between Daniel and Revelation. In Daniel 11:40–45, the king of the south is identified with Egypt. In Exodus 5:2, Pharaoh proclaimed his independence by asking who the Lord was that he should listen to His words. He declared that he did not know the Lord. This does not mean, of course, that he was not aware of the existence of the God of the Hebrews. It simply reflects the king's views that Yahweh was irrelevant to him, implying that he was only under submission to the gods of Egypt. Revelation 11:8 uses Egypt to signify that which is opposed to true religion. Thus, in Daniel 11:42 Egypt represents the nations that put all their trust in something other than the biblical God. These would include non-Christian religions and nations where secularism and atheism prevail. The spiritual Babylon of the last days was prophesied to defeat this anti-God power and overcome it through demonic agencies and spiritual deception (Rev. 13:13–14; 16:13–14), until even the most distant powers (represented by Libya and Ethiopia) were to be brought to submission (Dan. 11:43).

Verse 40 also says that the king of the south would attack the king of the north. Which power is symbolized by the king of the north? In the OT, Babylon was the king of the north and the enemy of the kingdom of Judah (e.g., Jer. 1:14–15; 4:6; 6:1, 22). In the book of Revelation, Babylon is a code name for spiritual Rome. Thus, the king of the north stands for the end-time spiritual Rome. This harmonizes with Daniel 11:36–39 where the king who would exalt himself also represents a spiritual Rome.

The king of the north, on his way to do battle with the king of the south, would pass through the Glorious/Beautiful Land, which represents God's people living during the time of demonic deception. While he was to overthrow many, Edom, Moab, and Ammon would escape. These nations no longer exist although their descendants do in the country of Jordan. Accordingly, we are not expected to understand this passage literally. In the OT, these nations were related to the Hebrew people but were all enemies of God's people (Edom from Esau; Moab and Ammon from Lot). God in His grace promised to save a remnant of them (cf. Is. 11:14). Through the Prophet Amos, God prophesied that all the Gentiles/nations having His name (Amos 9:12) would be part of the messianic kingdom. Thus, it could be suggested that Edom, Moab, and Ammon represent those who hear the call of Revelation 18:4 and come out of Babylon during the time of the end. The people of God are found in all Christian communities, and some are even found among the world religions. As we approach the end, the Lord is going to do a special work among those religions, and many adherents will join God's remnant people. Escape from Babylon is the same as finding refuge on Mount Zion (Joel 2:32).

The king of the north was to conquer the land of Egypt (Dan. 11:42), in other words, the king of the south, but this victory was only to be enjoyed for a short time because news from the east and the north was to frighten him (v. 44). The message troubling the king of the north could be the message of Revelation 18:1–4 that unmasks Babylon and proclaims its fall at the moment when it was apparently all-powerful. Another possibility is the announcement that the kings from the east were to march forth (Rev. 16:12) and engage in the spiritual battle at Armageddon (v. 16).

The chapter concludes with the statement that the king of the north would try to meet the challenge of the news from the east, but he would come to his end and no one would help him (Dan. 11:45); he would be defeated (see Rev. 16:17–21). In general, Seventh-day Adventists have held the fulfillment of vv. 40–45 to be yet in the future, and consequently any interpretation of this segment of the prophecy is tentative.

12:1–4. Michael Stands. The concluding portion of the vision in chapter 11 is found in 12:1–4. It describes the final battle between the forces of God and the forces of Satan and the deliverance of the saints. When Christ appears in the clouds of heaven, the righteous dead will be delivered from their graves. Deliverance will come only to those found written in the Book of Life, the register of the redeemed, whose sins were forgiven by the blood of the Lamb and who now will enjoy the consummation of their salvation.

The chapter division between 11:45 and 12:1 is unfortunate, for the vision of chapter 11 ends in 12:4, not in 11:45. "That time," which is mentioned in 12:1, is the time period just mentioned in the preceding verse. The first three verses of chapter 12 describe the end of the conflict that is discussed at length in chapter 11. At that time God determined that Michael was to "arise" or "stand up." The word *'amad*, "to stand up" or "arise," is used repeatedly in this long vision (11:2–4, 7, 16, 20–21). Each time it refers to a new king ascending to the throne or establishing himself as the new power. When Michael stands up, he will assume rulership. Jewish literature describes Michael as the angel who vindicated Israel against Satan's accusations at the heavenly tribunal. Similarly, Christ is prophesied as vindicating His people in the final showdown.

Michael will stand up after completing His work in the heavenly sanctuary and the finishing of the pre-advent judgment. Since there will be no mediator before the Father, the door of mercy will be closed, and the time of trouble will begin (12:1; cf. Rev. 22:11). We are told that many people "who sleep in the dust of the earth" will awake to either eternal life or everlasting damnation (12:2). As mentioned before, this description is inclusive of a special resurrection of some righteous and wicked (Matt. 26:64; Rev. 1:7), which will occur shortly prior to the general resurrection at the Second Advent when only the righteous will be resurrected (Dan 12:13; 1 Thess. 4:16–17). The resurrection of the wicked will occur a thousand years later (Rev. 20:4–6).

The reference to those who were to lead or turn many to righteousness (lit. "justify") and who were to shine like the stars (Dan. 12:3) is an encouragement to all who faithfully work for the Lord, often under the most difficult circumstances. There is no greater joy than seeing people change under the influence and power of the Holy Spirit. To see them in the kingdom will be a wonderful reward for God's servants.

Daniel was told to seal the book/scroll until the time of the end. This indicates that "the time of the end" begins with the unsealing of the closed portions of Daniel. Concerning the time of the end, it was prophesied that many would run or move quickly back and forth. This does not refer to the inventions of cars or planes since the end of the nineteenth century. The Hebrew word used here is sometimes associated with searching (cf. Jer. 5:1; Amos 8:12; Zech. 4:10). When the book of Daniel is unsealed after the commencement of the time of the end, the knowledge regarding its prophecies will be increased.

12:5–13

EPILOGUE

Daniel was still by the Tigris River, where he was in 10:4. Now he overheard a conversation between two heavenly figures and eventually joined in (see chap. 10 for its literary connection with the epilogue). This passage parallels Daniel 8:13–14 in several ways: both take place beside a river, involve two anonymous heavenly beings, and ask the question "How long?" (12:6). This refers back to the vision in chapter 11. Gabriel had given Daniel this long explanation to help him understand what was to happen to God's people in the future (10:14). This passage also has a number of linguistic and thematic parallels to Revelation 10.

Next, two other heavenly beings appeared, and one of them asked Michael, the man clothed in linen, a question that aimed at sharing more information with Daniel. The answer is that it would be for a time, times, and half a time and that the period would end when the power of the holy people would be broken completely. This defines the time of the end as that following the 1,260 years (three and a half times) of papal supremacy and persecution (see "Interpreting Biblical Apocalyptic Prophecies," p. 46).

A new time prophecy is introduced in v. 11. The taking away of the *tamid* ("daily"/"continual") is mentioned three times in the book of Daniel (8:11; 11:31; 12:11), but only in 12:11 is it connected to a time period ("From the time…1,290 days"). There are important parallels between Daniel 11:31 and 12:11. In both passages the taking away of the *tamid* ("daily"/"continual") is associated with the setting up of the desolating abomination.

The two texts are clearly parallel and refer to the same events in history. Since 11:31 refers to the past, so must 12:11. In Daniel 8:11, we saw that the *tamid* ("daily"/"continual") refers to Christ's intercessory ministry that was usurped by the work of the priests through the mass and the confessional. By sacrificing Christ anew in every mass, Christ's heavenly ministry has been removed from view. Since the period of 1,290 is based on the prophetic period of 1,260 days, to which another month was added (1,260 + 30 = 1,290), the year-day principle is to be used in its interpretation. The extra month points to the beginning of the prophetic events while the 1,260 years place the emphasis on the end of the period in 1798. Therefore, the process mentioned in this prophecy began in the sixth century (1798 – 1,290 = A.D. 508). Using the historicist method of interpretation, the 1,290 years would have begun in A.D. 508.

Sometime before A.D. 508, or, as some historians claim, in A.D. 508, Clovis, the king of the Franks who had married the Catholic Burgundian princess Clotilda, became a Roman Catholic. All the other Germanic tribes who had dismantled the Roman Empire were Arians (see "The Union of Church and State," p. 1033) and were therefore in opposition to the pope in Rome. After his great victory over the Visigoths in A.D. 507, Clovis went to Tours in A.D. 508 to hold a victory celebration. According to Gregory of Tours, Clovis was dressed in the uniform of imperial officials. The Franks became the first civil power to join with the rising Church of Rome. France, therefore, is called the oldest daughter of the Roman Catholic Church.

The joining of the civil and the religious powers (the Franks and the papacy) at that time was an important step in setting up the abomination of desolation, in other words, a religiopolitical system that cast truth to the ground and used force to enforce its religious teachings. It is one of the ironies of history that France, the power that helped the papacy at the beginning of the 1,290 years, was the same power that brought about its demise at the end of this time period. From history, we know that the supremacy of the medieval church came to an end in 1798 when Pope Pius VI was taken prisoner by Napoleon's army.

Another new time prophecy is introduced in v. 12. No specific event is mentioned for the beginning of the 1,335 days/years, but it is an extension of the 1,290 days (a month and a half is added to the previous prophetic period: 1,290 + 30 + 15 = 1,335). The prophecy simply promised a special blessing to those who keep waiting. Contextually, it is most probable that this prophetic period began at the same time as the 1,290 days. Unless the 1,335 days were to begin at the same time as the 1,290 days, they would be the only time prophecy in Daniel that has no historical starting point, which would be out of character with the other time prophecies in Daniel. Therefore, the 1,335 prophetic days ended in 1843. This time period is closely connected to the 2,300-year prophecy that ended in 1844. The 1,335 days and the 2,300 evenings and mornings respond to the same question, "How long?" (8:13; 12:6), and connect the two prophetic periods, after which there are no more time prophecies (Rev. 10:5–6). Those who lived at the time of the advent expectancy when the first angel's message (Rev. 14:6–7) was proclaimed in Europe and the Americas were blessed to see the fulfillment of prophecy. This message was then followed by the full proclamation of the messages of the three angels of Revelation 14:6–12 by God's end-time remnant (Rev. 12:17).

The connections between the epilogue of Daniel and chapters 7–11 are clear. For example, (1) since the little horn in Daniel 7 and 8 designates the same historical power, the removal of the *tamid* ("daily"/"continual") in 8:11 and 12:11 must refer to the same past historical event. (2) There is a strong thematic and linguistic connection between the texts in 7:25 and 12:7. The shattering of the power of the holy people in 12:7 was to last for three and a half times, the same as the persecution of the saints in 7:25 that also was to last for three and a half times. (3) The year-day principle is operative in all the time prophecies. The 1,290 and 1,335 days are prophesied as extensions of the 1,260 days mentioned in 7:25 and 12:7 as a time, times, and half a time. Because the periods of 1,290 and 1,335 days are based on the 1,260 days, and because the 1,260 days are years, the year-day principle is also applied to the 1,290 and 1,335 days.

The book closes with two messages for Daniel. He was exhorted to go on with his life until he would rest—a euphemism for death (cf. Job 3:13, 16, 26). However, death would not be the absolute end because he would rise to receive his inheritance in the general eschatological resurrection. The book closes with a return to the topic of hope that characterizes it. The forces of evil would oppose the divine plan and oppress God's people throughout history, but at the end they would receive, together with Daniel, their inheritance. In the context of the book, the inheritance is the kingdom of God. It will be theirs through the work of the

Son of Man, the Messiah whose First Coming is clearly announced in Daniel 9, where He is described as a sacrifice and the high priest. At His Second Coming, His enemies and the corrupt kingdoms of the earth will be destroyed. This wonderful hope will be revealed in greater detail in the NT. Ultimately, it is humanity's only hope.

HOSEA

INTRODUCTION

Title and Authorship. The title of the book is the name of the author (Hos. 1:1). *Hoshea'* means "He [Yahweh] has saved" (shortened from *hosha'yah* "Yahweh has saved"; cf. Jer. 42:1; 43:2). This was also the name of Israel's last king (2 Kin. 15:30; 17:1–6), as well as of other figures in OT history (Num. 13:8, 16; 1 Chr. 27:20; Neh. 10:23). Joshua and Jesus are variations of the same name. Hosea's father was named Beeri, and his wife was named Gomer, daughter of Diblaim. He had three children: a son, Jezreel; a daughter, Lo-Ruhamah; and another son, Lo-Ammi. Nothing is known about Hosea's birthplace, but he probably came from the Northern Kingdom of Israel since he mainly addressed his prophecies to its people.

Date. Hosea addressed his message primarily to the last generation of the Northern Kingdom of Israel before its fall in 722 B.C. He prophesied during the reigns of four kings from the Southern Kingdom of Judah: Uzziah (= Azariah; ca. 792–740 B.C.), Jotham (ca. 750–732 B.C.), Ahaz (ca. 735–716 B.C.), and Hezekiah (ca. 716–687 B.C.; Hos. 1:1). The first verse mentions only one king of Israel (Jeroboam II; 793–753 B.C.), although six more kings reigned after Jeroboam II. These last six kings were probably omitted because the Lord did not appoint them (8:4). Hosea prophesied under more kings than any other prophet. His ministry probably lasted at least thirty-five years (ca. 760–725 B.C.).

Backgrounds. Hosea began his ministry during a period of great prosperity for the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. Jeroboam II, the third king in succession of the Jehu dynasty, brought Israel to the zenith of its power and enlarged its territory to the northern boundary it held under Solomon. King Uzziah likewise enlarged Judah's territory to the southern border of the united monarchy. During this time the Assyrians were preoccupied with foreign invasions to their north, while Egypt experienced a period of internal weakness. Israel and Judah were safe from their enemies and internally strong.

Commerce flourished in both Israel and Judah, bringing great wealth and luxury to the upper class. Excavations of Samaria, Israel's capital city, have revealed spacious ivory-inlaid palaces. Excavations in Judah's capital city, Jerusalem, have demonstrated great expansion and fortification. It was a time of external optimism and national pride. The people confidently expected a glorious future because they believed that God's election guaranteed their ongoing prosperity.

But it was also a time of internal sickness with a shocking disparity between the wealthy and the poor. The middle class all but disappeared, as is evidenced by excavations at towns like Tirzah (Tell-el-Farah). Those in power demonstrated heartless injustice, materialistic greed, and flagrant dishonesty. Society was rife with crime of every sort, feasting and drunkenness, gross licentiousness, debauchery, and corrupt religious practices. Jeroboam I had set up two golden calves at Dan and Bethel (1 Kin. 12:26–30), which became centers for the counterfeit and syncretistic worship of Baal (Hos. 2:8; 13:1), nominally carried out in the name of Yahweh. Baal worship involved gross immorality, including cultic prostitution, as part of worship.

After the death of Jeroboam II, the Northern Kingdom fell into chaos. They experienced a thirty-year period of political anarchy, a veritable revolving door of power (cf. 8:4). A series of political assassinations led to three different kings ruling within a period of one year. Shallum assassinated and supplanted Zechariah, and Menahem assassinated and supplanted Shallum. A decade later, Menahem's son, Pekahiah, was himself assassinated by Pekah. The political security of Israel and Judah

began to crumble with the rise of the Neo-Assyrian Empire under Tiglath-Pileser III (also called Pul, 745–727 B.C.). During his first campaign into the Holy Land, he exacted a high tribute from Menahem (2 Kin. 15:19–20). He returned to the Holy Land in 734 B.C., when King Ahaz of Judah cried for help against King Pekah of Israel and King Rezin of Syria during the Syro-Ephraimite War (2 Kin. 15:37; 16:5–9; Is. 7). In 732 B.C., Tiglath-Pileser III conquered, exiled, and annexed the northern and eastern provinces of Israel, placed Hoshea on the throne, and reduced Judah to vassal status (2 Kin. 15:29–30). When Tiglath-Pileser III died, his son Shalmaneser V (727–722 B.C.) succeeded him. King Hoshea withheld tribute from Assyria, shifting his loyalty to Egypt. In response, Shalmaneser (via his general, Sargon II) besieged the city of Samaria for three years. The city finally fell in 722 B.C. Sargon II succeeded Shalmaneser, subdued the rest of the Northern Kingdom, and sent the populace into exile. The Prophet Hosea prophesied during this turbulent time in the history of Israel and Judah. His prophecies, apparently ordered in general chronological sequence from the 750s to the 720s B.C., probably allude to various details of the contemporary political chaos.

Theology and Purpose. Written in the last days before the destruction of the Northern Kingdom, the book of Hosea serves as God's "Laodicean message" (see Rev. 3:14–22) to the people. In an attempt to stop their national apostasy, God sent a personal, emotion-packed message calling for them to change their course. Hosea's wife, Gomer, was unfaithful to him, but he forgave and ransomed her out of enduring love. Their relationship became a dramatic life parable of Yahweh's steadfast love for unfaithful Israel.

1. God as the Source of All Blessings. Among the OT prophets, Hosea became the leading expositor of God's paradoxical outrage and heartbreak at Israel's participation in pagan fertility cults. The promiscuity/adultery motif and God's reaction to it appear repeatedly throughout the book. God, at the risk of being misunderstood, used unmistakable sexual imagery to counteract the distorted sexual theology and ritual of Baal worship. The book of Hosea describes the genuine love relationship between God and His people and affirms that the fertility of the people, the land, and the animals comes from the Lord.

The book presents a conflict between Baal and the Lord, who was unwilling to let Baal have Israel. The Lord was the exclusive source of all of Israel's blessings. He, not Baal, fertilized the land like the dew (Hos. 14:5). Although outside nature, the Lord acts within it. To a people obsessed with the fertility of the land, He presented Himself as an evergreen tree, unaffected by seasonal changes (v. 8). As Israel's Husband, He cared for His wife by bestowing upon her gifts from the land (2:5, 8).

2. Rejection of Divine Love. In Hosea, the history of Israel illustrates God's contemporary relationship with His people. The problem with the Northern Kingdom dated back beyond the rebellion of Saul (13:10–12) to the conquest of Canaan and Israel's first experience with Baal (9:10). Hosea uses these and other historical references (e.g., the Exodus, 2:15; 11:1; the desert wanderings, 2:3, 14; 9:10; 13:5; Jacob, 12:3–4, 12) to expose the present guilt of Israel and the Lord's struggle with His people. Throughout their history, the Lord had cared for and protected them (2:8), but they went after foreign lovers (vv. 5, 13). Israel acted like a stubborn son, who rejected the love and concern of his Father (11:1–6). Hosea also describes God as a Husband, vividly equating Israel's sin with harlotry, an image applied to both political and religious behavior (2:2–5; 3:3; 4:10–18; 8:9). The religious and political leaders had all been unfaithful to Israel's loving, divine Husband.

The priests encouraged national apostasy instead of teaching God's word (4:6, 8, 11–13). The political leaders committed intrigues and murders instead of consulting the Lord when appointing new kings (7:5–7; 8:4). They thirsted for power without any concern for the people. They also sought the assistance of Egypt and Assyria, physicians who could not heal (5:13; 7:8–11). In Hosea, sin is simply unfaithfulness. The Lord had been their loving Husband (2:2–20), their Father (11:1–6), and their healing Physician (7:1; 14:4). But the people committed adultery and abandoned Him (2:13; 4:10).

3. Everlasting Love. The key theme in the book is God's steadfast love (Heb. *khesed*) for His people and His passionate desire for an intimate love relationship with them. He wanted them to know (Heb. *yada'*) Him on a personal level. They had gone after other lovers, but He longed for them to return/repent (Heb. *shub*) and to seek (Heb. *baqash*) Him again. Indictments (about two-thirds of the book) and threatened covenant curses (about one-fourth of the book) fill the extended legal case (Heb. *rib*) against God's wayward wife/son. Yet seven times God extended a promise of hope and salvation for His people in the eschatological future (1:10—2:1; 2:14–23; 3:5; 6:1–3; 11:8–11; 13:14; 14:1–8). Yes, He announced punitive judgment (1:5; 4:1–3; 5:7; 7:16; 8:3; 10:14), but that judgment constituted a loving act of a God striving for the love of His people. For change to come, the Lord would have to bring it about. He would cut off the way to the idols (2:6), bring Israel back to the wilderness (2:14), and remove all the perverted political and priestly institutions (3:4). He promised to heal their rebellious nature and love them freely if only they would return to Him (14:4). If this hope remained unrealized, it would not be because God stopped loving but because His unfaithful wife would not repent/return.

Literary Features. The book of Hosea is a literary masterpiece. Except for the narrative prose of chapters 1 and 3, it has an elegant poetic style. Hosea utilizes more figures of speech (metaphors, similes, wordplays, etc.) and makes more allusions to Israel's history than any other OT prophet. The Hebrew of Hosea's book also contains more obscure passages than that of any other prophetic book. The prophet probably spoke a distinct northern dialect of Hebrew.

The book comprises three main sections. The first section (chaps. 1–3) pictures Israel as God's wayward wife, as illustrated in the life parable of Hosea's marriage to Gomer. The matching final section (chaps. 11–14) portrays Israel as God's wayward son, whom God would finally bring home. The middle section (chaps. 4–10) forms an extended covenant lawsuit (Heb. *rib*) in which God presents the legal case against His people. The middle section contains five symmetrical subsections, forming an overall seven-part chiastic mirror-image macrostructure.

- **A** God's Wayward Wife (chaps. 1–3)
  - **B** Indictment for Spiritual Prostitution/Idolatry (4:1—5:7)
    - **C** Indictment for Political and Cultic Unfaithfulness (5:8—6:11)
      - **D** Laments over Israel's Failure to Return to Yahweh (6:11b—7:16)
    - **C′** Indictment for Political and Cultic Unfaithfulness (8:1—9:7b)
  - **B′** Indictment for Spiritual Prostitution/Idolatry (9:7c—10:15)
- **A′** God's Wayward Son (chaps. 11–14)

Each of the seven sections of this macrostructure also contains internal chiastic structuring, as shown in the commentary on each section. The chiasms in Hosea display traits generally true of any chiastic structure. The central member often highlights the major emphasis of the section, and the second half of the chiasm reaffirms and amplifies the major themes of the first half *in reverse order*. Sometimes the first and last chiastic members also serve to emphasize a major theme.

COMMENTARY

1:1—3:5

GOD'S WAYWARD WIFE

Chapters 1–3 use a life parable to illustrate the message of the whole book. God instructed Hosea to marry a harlot and have children. This relationship enabled the prophet to personally experience and communicate the pathos of God's relationship with His spiritually wayward wife, the people of Israel. These chapters form an ABA′ pattern that alternates between narrative prose (chaps. 1, 3) and poetry (chap. 2).

1:1—2:1

Hosea's Unfaithful Wife and Their Children

Following the introductory verse of the book, the remainder of the first chapter (plus 2:1) forms a chiastic structure:

Introduction Hosea's Promiscuous Wife (1:2–3a).

- **A** Jezreel ("God Sows"; 1:3b–5)
  - **B** Lo-Ruhamah ("Not-Shown-Mercy"; 1:6–7)
    - **C** Lo-Ammi ("Not-My-People"; 1:8–9)
      - **D** Israel Multiplied (1:10a)
    - **C′** Lo-Ammi Reversed (1:10b)
  - **B′** Lo-Ruhamah Reversed (1:11a)
- **A′** The Great Day of Jezreel (1:11b)

Conclusion "Mercy" for "My People" (2:1)

1:2–3a. Hosea's Promiscuous Wife. Many have insisted that God did not actually ask Hosea to marry a harlot. But the Bible forbids only priests from marrying a harlot (Lev. 21:7), and Hosea was not a priest. The Hebrew word *zenunim* ("harlotry") normally refers to the actual status and practice of a harlot. Hosea 1:2 probably indicates that at the time Hosea married her, Gomer was either a common prostitute or one of the temple prostitutes of the fertility cult. These desperate times called for desperate measures on God's part. He involved Hosea in shocking actions as an attempt to wake up Israel before it was too late.

The reference to children of harlotry/promiscuity possibly refers to children Gomer had before marrying Hosea, but in the immediate context the phrase more likely reflects the promiscuity of the children's mother. God did not tell Hosea which harlot to marry. Hosea chose Gomer, whose name, ironically, means "perfection."

1:3b–9. Gomer's Three Children. Only the first of Gomer's children is explicitly referred to as the son of both Gomer and Hosea (1:3). The other two may have been born as a result of Gomer's prostitution (vv. 6, 8). Hosea named his first son Jezreel ("God sows") because of the bloodshed that occurred in the city of Jezreel when Jehu wiped out all the royal line of Ahab and Jezebel (v. 4; cf. 2 Kin. 9–10, esp. 9:22). Although carrying out God's behest (2 Kin. 10:30), Jehu was motivated by bloodthirsty self-interest and pride (2 Kin. 10:16, 31). The Hebrew word *paqad*, sometimes translated as "avenge" or "punish," literally means "visit" (Hos. 1:4). Jezreel may epitomize how God's "visitation" brings an end to dynasties and kingdoms. God would break the bow of Israel in the Valley of Jezreel (v. 5), the same location where He once broke the bow of Israel's enemies (see Judg. 6–7). Tiglath-Pileser III probably fulfilled this prophecy when he took away the northern and eastern territories of Israel (ca. 732 B.C.; see 2 Kin. 15:29).

Gomer's second child was a daughter. God told Hosea to name her Lo-Ruhamah ("Not-Shown-Mercy"; Hos. 1:6). Because of Israel's persistent covenant faithlessness, God would no longer show them mercy. The Hebrew word *nasa'* can mean "take away," "forgive," or "bear." The last clause may mean that God could no longer bear or forgive them. But since v. 6 matches v. 11, which prophesies the gathering of Israel and Judah, it probably means Israel would be taken away into captivity.

God commanded Hosea to name Gomer's third child, another son, Lo-Ammi ("Not-My-People") as a sign of covenant breaking. The final line of v. 9 reads literally "I am no longer 'I Am' to you." God called Himself by the name "I Am" (Heb. *'ehyeh*) in Exodus 3:14. God would withdraw His very name from Israel.

1:10—2:1. The Eschatological Restoration of Israel. In the first of seven passages addressing eschatological hope and salvation, God promised to ultimately fulfill the covenant promises by restoring Israel from exile with an innumerable posterity (1:10a; cf. Gen. 13:15; 22:17; Lev. 26:9, 45; Deut. 30:5). In the eschatological future, He would undo the curses represented by Gomer's children, listed in reverse order. "Not-My-People" would once again be His people (Hos. 1:10b). "Not-Shown-Mercy" would once again receive His mercy. He would gather them together in a new exodus from the land of their exile (v. 11a; cf. 2:15). The great day of Jezreel would once again unite both Israel and Judah under one *ro'sh* ("head," "ruler," "leader"), an allusion to the coming Davidic Messiah (1:11b; see 3:5).

This prophecy looks ahead to the last days (3:5), which according to the NT began when Jesus came to earth (Heb. 1:2). Paul claims that the faithful remnant of Israel, including believing Gentiles, fulfills Hosea 1:10 (along with 2:23) when they accept Jesus as the Messiah (Rom. 9:25–26). This section concludes with the reunion of Israel, a complete reversal of the fortunes symbolized by Gomer's children (Hos. 2:1).

2:2–23

Yahweh's Covenant Lawsuit against His Unfaithful Wife

Hosea 2:2–23 introduces the covenant lawsuit that occupies much of the book (see "Covenant Lawsuit in Hosea," p. 1066). Hosea's relationship with his promiscuous wife, Gomer, illustrates the formal trial proceedings. While this chapter applies primarily to God's case against Israel (see v. 13), it also pertains to Hosea's relationship with Gomer (and to broken marriages even today).

- **A** The First Punishment: Removal of the Land's Fertility (vv. 2–5a)
  - **B** The Second Punishment: Restraints on Israel (vv. 5b–7)
    - **C** The Third Punishment: Reclaiming Gifts Attributed to Baal (vv. 8–13)
      - **D** Wooing Israel Back (vv. 14–15)
    - **C′** Reversal of the Third Punishment: Removal of Baal's Name (vv. 16–17)
  - **B′** Reversal of the Second Punishment: God's Marriage to Returning Israel (vv. 18–20)
- **A′** Reversal of the First Punishment: Restoration of the Land's Fertility (vv. 21–23)

2:2–13. Three Indictments and Punishments. In v. 2 God calls for His wayward wife to immediately remove the outward signs of her prostitution (e.g., amulets and other jewelry worn in connection with the fertility cult; see v. 13). A broken marriage cannot mend without the offending party being held accountable and taking concrete steps to separate from promiscuous practices. If His wayward wife remained unfaithful, God would invoke the legal ultimatum—public exposure (v. 3). In a shame-based society (see v. 5), stripping a woman bare and publicly exposing her constituted the ultimate punishment (see Ezek. 16:37; 23:29). Historically, this means the land would be stripped and the people taken into exile in fulfillment of the predicted covenant curses (Lev. 26:31–33; Deut. 28:38–42). The common people would not escape either because they had also participated in the Baal cult (Hos. 2:4–5a).

Verses 5b–13 provide further evidence against Yahweh's wife, focusing on her spiritual harlotry and worship of Baal. God quotes her own words as testimony against her (v. 5b). This testimony reveals the basic theological tenets of the Baal fertility cult, which regarded the land as a female deity and Baal as the storm god who impregnated her with his semen (i.e., the rain fertilizing the land). Yahweh turned Baal theology upside down, presenting Himself as the Provider of fertility and Baal as sterile (vv. 8, 12).

God pronounced two formal sentences against His wife for her adulterous actions, each prefaced by the word "therefore" to emphasize His intention to actually mete out the sentence. The first sentence was a preliminary attempt to save the relationship: God would block her way with a hedge of thorn bushes to prevent her from finding her lovers (v. 6). Historically, the Assyrian domination of the northern and eastern parts of Israel (ca. 732 B.C.; see Hosea: Introduction), which thwarted Israel's participation in the Baal cult located there, probably fulfilled this prophecy.

Covenant Lawsuit in Hosea

The Hebrew word *rib* (used as a verb twice in Hos. 2:2 and as a noun once in 4:1) is a technical term for "covenant lawsuit" or "investigative judgment." In the Hebrew Bible, it occurs forty-four times in reference to a divine lawsuit, either a negative judgment (condemnation) or a positive judgment (vindication) of God's people. Hosea 2 involves both. The basic structure of the covenant lawsuit mirrors the regular covenant-making procedure in Scripture and in the ancient Near East (esp. Hittite suzerain-vassal treaties). The basic structure of a covenant in the ancient Near East normally contained the following elements:

1. List of witnesses
2. Preamble (introduction of the suzerain and call to judgment)
3. Historical prologue (review of the suzerain's benevolent acts toward the vassal)
4. Indictments or charges (evidence of covenant violations investigated)
5. Verdict and sentence (either condemnation or vindication)

The complete structure of this lawsuit pattern occurs in Hosea 4:1–13 (see also Deut. 32; Josh. 24; Is. 1:2–20; 3:13–15; Jer. 2:4–13; Mic. 6:1–8). Scripture contains over three hundred references to a divine covenant lawsuit. Condemnation resulted in the pronouncement of covenant curses/punishments (cf. the twenty-seven different kinds of covenant curses/punishments summarized in Lev. 26:14–39 and Deut. 28:15–68). Vindication resulted in the pronouncement of covenant blessings (cf. Lev. 26 and Deut. 4, 28, 30, 32).

Hosea 2 contains a partial formulation of the covenant lawsuit pattern. In v. 2 the children of the adulterous wife are called as witnesses to her promiscuity. As applied to the relationship between Yahweh and Israel, the children probably represent the common people, the individual members of the nation, while the mother represents Israel's upper-class leaders who are responsible for the nation's unfaithfulness to Yahweh. Most of the lawsuit in chapter 2 involves indictments and the verdict and sentence. The covenant curses (vv. 2–13) and blessings (vv. 14–23) are taken largely from Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 27–28 (see "God's Judgment in the Prophets," p. 981).

The covenant lawsuit in this chapter resembles the adultery trial proceedings described in Numbers 5:12–31 and conducted by God in Ezekiel 16 and 23. In Hosea 2:2, God's statement regarding Israel probably signifies the broken relationship and not yet actual divorce. This divine lawsuit, like many others in Scripture, aims to both correct (in the immediate situation) and restore (ultimately).

The second sentence predicts the captivity and Exile of Israel after the fall of Samaria in 722 B.C. Yahweh's wife would refuse to return to her Husband, so He would take back His gifts that she considered to be rewards from her lovers (v. 12). He would uncover (*galah*) her lewdness (*nablot*, which probably refers to the female genitalia) in the sight of her lovers (v. 10). The Hebrew *galah* also means "go into exile." Hosea plays on the double meaning of the word to predict Israel's Exile and shameful exposure in the process. Yahweh would realize the covenant curses by making the land barren (Lev. 26:20; Deut. 28:39–40) and canceling Israel's entire cultic calendar—pilgrim festivals, new moons, and ritual sabbaths (Hos. 2:11; Lev. 26:31). Israel had forgotten Yahweh (Hos. 2:13), so the marriage was over.

2:14–23. Wooing Israel Back and Reversal of the Three Punishments. Verse 14 begins with a third "therefore." But instead of pronouncing the expected further punishment, Yahweh defies all logic by announcing that He would *patah* ("allure," "persuade," "woo," "court") Israel back to Himself. This is the second of seven passages of eschatological hope and salvation in the book. Eventually Israel would willingly choose to return to Yahweh (vv. 15–23). The Great Reversal employs language from Israel's Exodus from Egypt, recalling the joyful desert days when God tenderly spoke comfort to Israel (lit. "spoke to her heart"; v. 14). The Exodus, wilderness wandering, and settlement in the promised land prefigure the re-betrothal and remarriage of Yahweh and Israel. The Valley of Achor (lit. "trouble"; located southwest of Jericho), where Achan and his family were stoned for their sin (Josh. 7:26), would become a door of hope when the divine Groom brings His new bride home. The singing/responding (Hos. 2:15) may allude to the Song of Moses after the crossing of the Red Sea (Ex. 15). The Hebrew word *'anah* can mean "sing" as well as "answer" or even "[sexually] respond." God promised to revirginize Israel, as it were, bringing His bride back to the intimacy, ardor, and covenant relationship of her youth. Such actions toward an adulterous wife engender hope for any marriage, even one scarred by unfaithfulness. But both parties must be willing to reconcile and start anew.

The phrase "in that day" in Hosea 2:16 looks forward to a future eschatological fulfillment. God promised to reverse the three punishments announced in vv. 2–13. First, instead of focusing on Baal and the gifts attributed to him, Israel would have his name totally removed from their vocabulary and memory. Playing on the twofold meaning of Baal—the name of the fertility god Baal and a word denoting a husband (lit. "master")—God promised that Israel would not only forget the god Baal but would also no longer call Yahweh Himself *ba'ali* ("my Master"), which implies ownership or possession. Instead, they would call Him *'ishi* ("my Husband"), which implies an intimate, personal partnership. Thus, God would take a new marriage name, a common feature in the ancient sealing of a marriage covenant.

Second, instead of restraining His wife, Yahweh would remarry her (vv. 17–20). Using language reminiscent of the peace in the Garden of Eden before sin (Gen. 1–2) and of the divine covenant made with the earth after the Flood (Gen. 9:8–17), Yahweh promised to betroth Israel to Himself forever. Instead of the normal dowry, God offered to bestow upon her His own character qualities: His righteousness (Heb. *tsedeq*), justice (*mishpat*), steadfast love (*khesed*), compassion (*rakhamim*, lit. "womb love"; derived from *rekhem*, "womb"), and covenant faithfulness (*'emunah*; related to "amen"). This language reflects God's self-revelation in Exodus 34:6–7. These marriage gifts climax with the promise that Israel would know the Lord. The Hebrew word *yada'* ("know") often refers to a deep personal relationship, even sexual intimacy.

Third, Yahweh promised to reverse the first punishment by restoring the land's fertility. Hosea 2:21–23 describes the entire agricultural cycle, which would cause the land to burst with new life. The word *'anah*, as noted above, may not only refer to various parts of the ecosystem participating in the antiphonal responding/singing during the wedding festivities. It may also have sexual connotations. Ultimately, Yahweh would sow/plant (*zara'*) Israel for Himself in the earth (v. 23). The Hebrew *zara'* alludes to the name Jezreel ("God sows") but can also have sexual connotations. Biblical and ancient Near East thought compared the insemination of a woman with a man's seed to sowing a field. Obviously, God is above the sexuality depicted among the pagan gods, and this passage does not refer to actual sexual relations. Nonetheless, God used sexually charged language to describe His intimate personal relationship with His eschatological bride!

In the end-time restoration of Israel, God would have mercy on His people, another allusion to the reversal of the name *lo-ruhamah* ("Not-Shown-Mercy"; v. 23). The wedding ceremony would end with another name change, this time the bride's. Both Paul (Rom. 9:25) and Peter (1 Pet. 2:10) point to the Israel of faith, comprising all who place their trust in Jesus the Messiah, whether Jew or Gentile, as the fulfillment of this verse.

3:1–5

Taking Back the Unfaithful Wife

- **A** Hosea's Love for Gomer (v. 1)
  - **B** Gomer Bought Back (v. 2)
    - **C** Gomer Restricted from Harlotry and Sex (v. 3)
    - **C′** Israel Restricted from Court and Cult (v. 4)
  - **B′** Return of Israel (v. 5a)
- **A′** Fearing Yahweh and His Goodness (v. 5b)

3:1–3. Gomer's Return to Hosea. Verses 1–3 recounts the rest of Hosea and Gomer's story. In contrast to the third person account of chapter 1, Hosea now narrates in the first person to enhance the sense of intimacy. Although some have denied that this woman was Gomer, the context clearly assumes a specific woman already known, and the description of this adulterous woman matches that of the promiscuous Gomer in chapter 1. The adverb *'od* ("yet," "again") probably does double duty in 3:1. God told Hosea to go and love "yet again." Hosea's relationship with Gomer is a life parable, as he compares his love for Gomer, despite her promiscuity, with God's love for Israel, despite her spiritual harlotry/idolatry.

Hosea bought Gomer for fifteen shekels of silver and one and a half homers (lit. "one homer and one letek") of barley (v. 2). The shekel weighed about six ounces (170 g), and a homer held about ten bushels (about 87 gal or 330 l). The *letek* probably measured half a homer. The fact that Hosea had to piece together silver and barley (the cheapest flour) may indicate how much he had to sacrifice to purchase Gomer. When Gomer came home, he insisted that she stay at home with him for many days without sexual intercourse, neither with her former lovers nor with himself. This may represent a time of purifying and probationary deprivation.

3:4–5. Israel's Eschatological Return to God. Like Gomer, Israel would go through many days of purification, a period of exile that would deprive them of king and cult. The *matsebah* (variously translated as "sacred pillar," "pillar," "sacred stones," "image") was a phallic symbol used in the fertility cult. The ephod and *teraphim* ("household idols/gods") were used in pagan divination (see Ezek. 21:21; Zech. 10:2). Hosea 3:5 has a chiastic arrangement:

- **A** "Afterward"
  - **B** Returning and Seeking Yahweh
    - **C** Seeking David, the (messianic) King
  - **B′** Fearing Yahweh and His Goodness
- **A′** "In the Latter/Last Days"

This verse serves as the climax of the entire first section of the book. It clarifies that Israel's promised restoration would have an eschatological fulfillment (see Deut. 4:29–30). This is the third of seven passages of eschatological hope and salvation in the book. As elsewhere, God called for His people to perform two major actions—return/repent (Heb. *shub*) and seek (Heb. *baqash*) Him. The people would respond to the Lord and His goodness/blessings with fear/awe/trembling. The center of the chiasm reveals the Christocentric focus of the book: Israel would one day seek the Messiah, the Davidic King (Is. 9:1–7; 11:1–9; Jer. 23:5–6; 30:9; Ezek. 37:15–25; Amos 9:11–12; Mic. 5:2–5). As already discussed, this began when Christ first came and will reach its consummation when Christ returns and the faithful Israel of all ages will receive the complete fulfillment of Hosea's restoration promises (Rev. 3:7–13; cf. PK 298–300).

4:1—10:15

GOD'S COVENANT LAWSUIT AGAINST ISRAEL

4:1—5:7

Indictment for Spiritual Prostitution and Idolatry

Hosea 4:1—5:7 begins Yahweh's formal covenant lawsuit (Heb. *rib*) against Israel. He summoned His people to court, examined the evidence, found them guilty of violating His

covenant stipulations set forth in the Torah (esp. the Decalogue), and sentenced them to receive the covenant curses. In contrast to the sevenfold structure of most other sections of the book, this section has a fivefold structure, perhaps in conscious parallel to the five books of the Torah. It does not include a historical prologue or witnesses, possibly because these elements occur in chapter 2.

- **A** God's Legal Case (*rib*) against Israel: Basic Indictments and Covenant Curses (4:1–3)
  - **B** Condemnation of Priests and People: A Hopeless Situation (4:4–10)
    - **C** Israel's Harlotry (4:11–14)
  - **B′** Condemnation of the People: A Hopeless Situation (4:15–19)
- **A′** God's Legal Case against Israel: Indictments and Imminent Judgment (5:1–7)

4:1–3 (A). God's Legal Case (rib) against Israel: Basic Indictments and Covenant Curses. Hosea 4:1–3 constitutes a virtual paradigm of Hosea's whole message. In v. 1, God lists Israel's basic sins of omission. They lacked the essential character qualities of Yahweh, *'emet* ("faithfulness," "truth") and *khesed* ("mercy," "steadfast love"; see Ex. 34:6), and did not know/acknowledge (Heb. *da'at*) Him. These sins of omission broke the first four commandments. Hosea 4:2 delineates their sins of commission, which broke at least five commandments: swearing/cursing, lying, killing, stealing, and committing adultery. Verse 3 describes the destruction of the three categories of animals in the Creation account, listed in reverse order. The divine sentence constituted a reversal of Creation.

4:4–10 (B). Condemnation of Priests and People: A Hopeless Situation. Hosea 4:4–10 focuses on the priests who, along with the prophets, stumbled in their sin (v. 5; cf. 5:5). Hosea pinpoints the underlying problem of both leaders and nation: they lacked knowledge (i.e., a personal relationship with God) and forgot/ignored God's Torah (4:6; cf. 5:4). Forgetting is not amnesia but failure to act in harmony with God's covenant by obeying His law. In response, God would *shakakh* ("forget"; i.e., ignore or not act in favor of) their children (cf. chaps. 1–3, where "mother" and "children" represent Israel). The priests, chosen to make atonement for sin, instead increased sin. They enriched themselves by encouraging the people to bring more sacrifices.

4:11–14 (C). Israel's Harlotry. The major theme of Hosea 4:11–14, the center of this section's chiasm, concerns the immorality and spiritual harlotry (idolatry) Israel committed by participating in the fertility rituals of the Baal cult. The entire section of 4:1—5:7 contains a twelvefold repetition of the Hebrew root for prostitution/harlotry (*znh*), the root of *ruakh* for *zenunim* ("[spirit of] prostitution"; 4:12; 5:4), *zanah* ("to act as a prostitute"; 4:10, 12–15, 18; 5:3), and *zonah* ("prostitute"; 4:14). Other terms referring to committing adultery, such as *na'ap* (4:2, 13–14) and *qedeshah* ("ritual or temple prostitute"; 4:14), reinforce this emphasis.

Verse 11 contains a proverb that links harlotry/prostitution to wine and new wine (cf. v. 18), which *laqakh* ("take," "seize," "take away") the *leb* ("heart," "mind," "understanding"). This means they all cause either addiction or loss of understanding/judgment. In the days of Baal-Peor, the use of wine "beclouded the senses and broke down the barriers of self-control" (PP 454; cf. Num. 25:1–3). Likewise, in Hosea's day, it led to immorality (*qalon*, "shameful lewdness"; Hos. 4:18) in the Baal cult.

Verses 13–14 describe the heart of the fertility cult rituals. According to Canaanite theology, since the sperm (rain) of Baal fertilized the land (see commentary on 2:2–13), his sexual activity must be stimulated. Worshipers engaged in ritual intercourse with the shrine devotees (male and female ritual prostitutes) in order to emulate and stimulate the sexual activities of the gods. Hence, cultic groves on the sacred mountaintops, seemingly upon every high hill and under every significant tree (Jer. 2:20; 3:6; cf. Deut. 12:2; 1 Kin. 14:23; Is. 57:5, 7), became scenes of the most degraded sexual debauchery—all under the guise of worship.

God held the fathers particularly responsible because they apparently encouraged their daughters to join them in these sexual orgies (Hos. 4:14). This verse, a landmark in moral history, insists that men are no less responsible for faithfulness to their marriage vows than women are.

4:15–19 (B′). Condemnation of the People: A Hopeless Situation. Hosea 4:15–19 matches vv. 4–10. Yahweh warned the Southern Kingdom of Judah, which did not yet completely participate in Baal worship, to avoid coming up to the Northern Kingdom's cult centers (v. 15).

"Beth Aven" is probably a slur on the name Bethel, where Jeroboam erected one of the two golden calves (1 Kin. 12:26–29). The Hebrew word *'aven* ("wickedness") is substituted for *el* ("God").

The animal simile of Hosea 4:16 compares Israel to an obstinate heifer that forced Yahweh to let it range free. In one of the saddest verses of the entire book, God commanded that Ephraim be left alone (v. 17). He recognized that Ephraim (a synonym for the Northern Kingdom of Israel) had become addicted to (Heb. *khabar*, lit. "join") idols. This resulted in the dissolution of the marriage between Yahweh and Israel implicit in 2:9–13.

5:1–7 (A'). God's Legal Case against Israel: Indictments and Imminent Judgment. Hosea 5:1–7 matches 4:1–3. God indicted Israel, especially the political leaders, for prostitution (5:4). The leaders had not protected Israel, their intended function, but had instead hunted the people down and captured them (vv. 1–2). The *ga'on* ("pride," "exaltation," "arrogance") of Israel probably refers to Yahweh, the true Leader Israel had rejected, but some translators understand it to refer to Israel's arrogant attitude (v. 5; 7:10). The indictment declares the whole nation *tame'* ("corrupt," "defiled"; 5:3), having *bagad* ("acted treacherously", "faithlessly") against Yahweh while continuing with formalistic sacrifices. Consequently, when they sought Yahweh, they would find that He had withdrawn from them as a result of their choice (vv. 6–7a). They were children of apostasy (lit. "alien," "pagan," or "illegitimate" children), and their New Moon festivals (when the moon is dimmest) represented darkness enveloping the land (v. 7b).

5:8—6:11A
Indictment for Political and Cultic Unfaithfulness

- **A** The Alarm Raised in Benjamin (5:8–9)
  - **B** Social Injustice in Judah and Ephraim (5:10–11)
    - **C** Judah and Israel Torn to Pieces by God (5:12–15)
      - **D** Israel's Repentance and Healing/ Resurrection (6:1–3)
    - **C'** Judah and Israel Cut to Pieces by God's Prophets (6:4–6)
  - **B'** Social Injustice in Ephraim (6:7–9)
- **A'** The Horrible Thing in Israel (6:10–11a)

5:8–9 (A). The Alarm Raised in Benjamin. The Syro-Ephraimite War of 734–732 B.C. probably forms the background of Hosea 5:8–9 (see Hosea: Introduction). The Israelites blew a ram's horn (*shopar*) to warn of invasion by an enemy force and/or to rally troops for battle. The towns mentioned are all in the territory of the tribe of Benjamin, situated on the often-disputed border between Israel and Judah (see 1 Kin. 11:31, 35; 12:21; 2 Chr. 11:12–13). Since the towns are mentioned from south to north, these verses probably describe the attack of Judah upon Israel after the failure of the Syro-Ephraimite coalition, when Judah may have secured its northern defenses by recapturing the land of Benjamin.

5:10–11 (B). Social Injustice in Judah and Ephraim. Ultimately, both Judah and Ephraim had transgressed by committing acts of social injustice (vv. 10–11). In this context, the Hebrew *tsaw* (usually "a command" or "precept") is probably a slang expression for "excrement," "vomit," or "filth of drunkenness" (the variety of renderings in translations includes "worthless," "filth," and "idols") denoting the depths of degradation to which the two nations had sunk.

5:12–15 (C). Judah and Israel Torn to Pieces by God. Verse 12 compares the divine judgment upon Judah and Israel to *'as* (often translated as "moth," but in this context it probably refers to "putrefaction" or "pus") and to *raqab* ("rottenness," "decay"). Maggots have infected the putrefied wound (v. 13; the Hebrew word *mazor* occurs only here and in Jer. 30:13) and have begun to devour the flesh (cf. Job 13:28), probably alluding to the wounds Israel and Judah inflicted upon each other in the aftermath of the Syro-Ephraimite War. The king referred to in this verse is probably Tiglath-Pileser III. The Hebrew, sometimes translated as "King Jareb," may read *malekh rab* ("great king"). This would parallel the Akkadian *sarrûrabû*, a title for the Assyrian kings that had the same meaning (cf. 2 Kin. 18:19). Any appeal to Assyria was in vain. Far from providing a cure, Assyria would become the rod of Yahweh's wrath, destroying Israel and subjugating Judah as a vassal state.

Hosea 5:14–15 describes the stages of a lion's hunt, including the lion capturing and killing the prey, tearing up the carcass, and dragging it away to his den to eat. The imagery of the lion, also used by other prophets (Is. 5:26–30; Nah. 2:12–14), fittingly describes Assyria. God declared that no one would rescue Israel and Judah. Other uses of lion imagery also indicate the impossibility of escape from divine judgment (Pss. 7:2; 50:22; cf. Is. 43:13; Mic. 5:7–8). These verses clearly depict the death (i.e., dissolution and exile) of the Northern Kingdom at the hands of the Assyrians (see Hos. 1:4; 2:3; 7:16; 8:14; 9:11–16; 10:15; 13:1, 7–9, 16) in fulfillment of the covenant curse of Deuteronomy 32:39. Judah's death would come a century later at the hands of the Babylonians. Although by this point they could not escape from lethal punishment, nonetheless hope remained in the eschatological future, when Israel and Judah, torn to pieces, would accept the consequences of their guilt and diligently seek Yahweh's face (Hos. 5:15b).

6:1–3 (D). Israel's Repentance and Healing/ Resurrection. Hosea 6:1–3 is the fourth and center of the seven eschatological messages of hope and salvation in the book. Hosea 5:13–15 describe sickness and mauling leading to death, but these verses depict healing and resurrection in response to Israel's decision to return (*shub* "return," "repent") to Yahweh. Although some commentators hesitate to acknowledge a resurrection hope in this passage, the language of resurrection is unmistakable: the two Hebrew words *qum* ("revive," "arise") and *'khayah* ("raise," "restore," "stand"; 6:2), when used together elsewhere in Scripture, clearly refer to resurrection (2 Kin. 13:21; Job 14:12–14; Is. 26:14, 19). The reference to three days may well allude to Jonah's experience. In Jonah's prayer during his three days and nights in the belly of the great fish, the prophet's language went beyond his own literal ordeal to describe a virtual death and resurrection (see Jon. 2:2, 6). Only a few years after Jonah's experience in the early eighth century, while Israel still vividly remembered his "death and resurrection," the late-eighth-century Prophet Hosea seems to have alluded to this event. Hosea reinforces this parallel to the experience of Jonah in the next chapter, where he compares Israel to a *yonah* (Jonah's name, which means "dove"; 7:11) who, like Jonah, fled from the presence of the Lord (7:13; cf. Jon. 1:3), went to Assyria (Hos. 7:11; cf. Jon. 3:1–3), and was swallowed up (Heb. *bala'*; Hos. 8:8; cf. Jon. 1:17). Hosea envisioned the Exile and subsequent return of Israel (and Judah) as recapitulating the "death and resurrection" experience of Jonah.

Also in the eighth century B.C., Isaiah clearly described the Messiah as the Representative Israel, whose life would recapitulate the experience of Israel, especially with regard to His death and resurrection (see esp. the Servant Songs of Is. 42–53). There are numerous intertextual links between Hosea 5:11—6:3 and the messianic Servant Songs; for example, the words *ratsats* ("crush" or "trample"), *kholi* ("sickness," "grief," or "pain"), *rapa'* ("heal"), *nasa'* ("carry," "bear," or "go away"), *'asham* ("guilt" or "sin"), *khabash* ("bind"), *nakah* ("strike"), and numerous additional linguistic parallels in the messianic Psalm 22.

Thus, Hosea identifies Israel as another Jonah, dying and then being resurrected on the third day, and Isaiah shows that the Messiah would be the Representative Israel, undergoing a death and resurrection like the first Israel. Jesus recognized these OT connections between God's servant Jonah (2 Kin. 14:25), the servant Israel, and the messianic Servant when He confidently proclaimed that as Jonah was in the belly of the fish for "three days and three nights," so the antitypical Jonah would be in the heart of the earth and rise after three days (Matt. 12:40). Likewise Paul can say that Christ rose on the third day "according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:4). Both Jesus and Paul accurately announced the fulfillment of the Jonah/Israel typology indicated by the prophets.

Yahweh would come to Israel like the dawn and like the rain (Hos. 6:3). The similarity in language between this description of Yahweh and the description of the messianic (Davidic) King in Psalm 72:6 gives this passage messianic connotations (cf. 2 Sam. 23:4). In the Holy Land, the rain falls throughout the grain-growing season from autumn (September and October) to early spring (sometimes translated as the "former rain"). It appears again at the end of the season (late March and April; sometimes translated as the "latter rain") and ripens the grain for harvest. In the eschatological context of Hosea 6:1–3 (cf. Joel 2:23, 28), this analogy prefigures the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2) and the climactic outpouring of the Holy Spirit just before Christ's Second Coming to gather His people (Rev. 14:14–16; 18:1–4).

6:4–6 (C'). Judah and Israel Cut to Pieces by God's Prophets. Hosea 6:4–6 matches 5:12–14, repeating the same themes in reverse order. Historical Israel and Judah had no intention of repenting. In desperation God asked them both what He should do with them (6:4). He compared their *khesed* ("covenant loyalty," "love," "faithfulness") with morning clouds and dew that dissipate when the sun rises. Verse 5 repeats the image of God cutting Israel to pieces, but here the Lord specifies that He used the pronouncements of judgment through His prophets to cut (v. 5). The next verse presents His desire for *khesed* ("covenant loyalty," "love," "mercy," "kindness") and *da'at* ("true acknowledgment"; that is, knowing Him in a personal relationship), not meaningless, formalistic sacrifices (v. 6). Jesus cited this verse when challenging the Pharisees, linking this prophetic word with His own ministry of compassion (Matt. 9:13).

6:7-9 (B'). Social Injustice in Ephraim. Hosea 6:7-9 matches 5:10-11. God compared Israel's covenant breaking to the time of Adam. Though the Heb. *'adam* has been interpreted as a place name ("at Adam") or as humankind in general ("like men"), it is best translated here as the personal name of the first human. Adam and Eve broke the covenant of Creation by their disobedience (6:7; cf. Gen. 1-3). Hosea 6:8-9, like the matching 5:10-11, describes various acts of social injustice, collectively called *zimmah* ("infamy," "monstrous crimes," "villainy," "atrocities").

6:10-11 (A'). The Horrible Thing in Israel. Hosea 6:10-11 matches 5:8-9 and decries to the cultic defilement (*tame'*) and spiritual harlotry (*zenut*) of Ephraim/Israel (see commentary on 4:11-14), called the "horrible thing" (Heb. *sha'aririyyah*). The subsection ends by warning Judah of a harvest of judgment appointed for them in the more distant future (6:11a).

6:11b—7:16

Laments over Israel's Failure to Return to Yahweh

Hosea 6:11b—7:16 is the central, climactic chiastic section of the book of Hosea. In a series of accusations, Yahweh lamented over Israel's sins and coming fate. He referred to them in the third person, as if addressing the court as a witness in the covenant lawsuit. This passage probably occurs during the unstable history of the Northern Kingdom in its final years of existence (see Hosea: Introduction).

- **A** Lament over Failed Divine Efforts (6:11b—7:2)
  - **B** Lament over Samaria's Domestic Policies and Practices (7:3-7)
    - **C** Lament over Folly in Foreign Affairs (7:8-9)
      - **D** Failure of Israel to Return and Seek God (7:10)
    - **C'** Lament over Folly in Foreign Affairs (7:11-12)
  - **B'** Lament over Domestic Policies and Practices (7:13-14)
- **A'** Lament over Failed Divine Efforts (7:15-16)

The Hebrew word *shub* ("return," "restore," "repent") encapsulates the major theme of this section: Israel has sealed their fate by not returning to Yahweh. The section begins with 6:11b, best translated as a dependent clause connected to what follows in 7:1. Thus, it conveys the idea that God would cause the fortunes of His people to return (*shub*). The section ends in 7:16 with the divine lament of the fact that the people of Israel had not turned (*shub*) to the Most High (the "Most Sublime One"; cf. Deut. 3:12; 1 Sam. 2:10; Is. 59:18). Hosea 7:10, the center of this section and of the whole book, records the legal testimony of Yahweh against His people. Despite all His efforts to get their attention, they still refused to return and seek the Lord their God.

6:11b—7:2 (A). Lament over Failed Divine Efforts. Yahweh longed to restore Israel's fortunes and heal them. But despite His efforts to train and strengthen them, they had followed the way of evil, apparently oblivious of the fact that God knew all about their evil deeds (7:2).

7:3-7 (B). Lament over Samaria's Domestic Policies and Practices. Hosea 7:3-7 probably depicts the last years of Israel's history as a nation, when one king after another took the throne by means of conspiracy, lies, and/or assassination (v. 3; cf. v. 7, which refers to the fall of their kings). The text plays on the Hebrew word for "adulterers" (*na'ap*) and the similar-sounding words for "bake" (*'apah*) and "anger" (*'ap*) (v. 4, 6; 8:5; 11:9). Yahweh compares the passion of the rulers for the fertility cult and for political treachery to an oven so hot that the baker does not need to stoke the fire throughout the baking process (7:4, 7). The rulers were also inflamed with wine (v. 5; cf. the parallel v. 14). Stretching out/joining hands (v. 5) refers to sealing an agreement with a handshake, as still occurs in modern times (see Is. 42:6).

7:8-9 (C). Lament over Folly in Foreign Affairs. Two baking metaphors calling Israel mixed up and half-baked describe their disastrous policy of flip-flopping between loyalties to Egypt and to Assyria. Bakers had to turn bread dough around in the bee-shaped oven so that all parts would get exposed to the hot coals. Like a round flat bread/cake that the baker failed to turn, Israel was half-baked, a fitting description of the poor quality of Israel's political situation.

7:10 (D). Failure of Israel to Return and Seek God. Hosea presents the Pride of Israel (i.e., Yahweh; see commentary on Hos. 5:1-7—although some translations consider the text to be referring to Israel's arrogance) giving legal testimony summarizing the divine indictment: Israel pursued other alliances but would not return to Yahweh. Yahweh did not identify any particular sin that Israel needed to stop. Rather, He repeatedly pled for the people to return/repent (Heb. *shub*) and to seek Him (Heb. *baqash* or *darash*); that is, seek a personal relationship (Heb. *da'at*) with Him (see 2:7; 3:5; 5:15; 6:1, 3, 6; 10:12; 11:5, 10-12; 12:6; 14:1-2). All the other reforms would naturally follow these two essentials. But Israel persistently refused, until finally God could do nothing more. They had broken the covenant relationship, and God lamented their imminent demise.

7:11-12 (C'). Lament over Folly in Foreign Affairs. Hosea 7:11-12 matches vv. 8-9. Like a silly dove (Heb. *yonah*; see commentary on 6:1-3), Ephraim first called to Egypt, then shifted to an alliance with Assyria, only to shift back to Egypt a few years later (7:11; see Hosea: Introduction). They were mixed up indeed.

7:13-14 (B'). Lament over Domestic Policies and Practices. Hosea 7:13-14 matches vv. 3-7. Yahweh cried out in woe (Heb. *'oy*), a cry usually reserved for a funerary lament or situation of impending disaster (v. 13; cf. 1 Sam. 4:7-8; Is. 3:11; Jer. 4:13; Ezek. 24:6). Translators render the key verb in Hosea 7:14 variously as "assemble" or "slash/gash." The latter would refer to the violent practice of members of the fertility cult, who cut themselves to get the attention of Baal so he would provide rain (cf. 1 Kin. 18:28).

7:15-16 (A'). Laments over Divine Failed Efforts. Hosea 7:15-16, the closing section of the chiastic structure, repeats the same themes as the opening section in 6:11b—7:2.

8:1—9:7b

Indictment for Political and Cultic Unfaithfulness

This section (C') repeats and reinforces various themes encountered in the matching section (C) above.

- **A** Announcement of Coming Judgment (8:1-3)
  - **B** Political and Cultic Sins (8:4-6)
    - **C** Alliances with Other Nations (8:7-13)
      - **D** Israel's Maker Forgotten (8:14)
    - **C'** Alliances with Other Nations (9:1-4)
  - **B'** Dissolution of the Cultic Festivals (9:5-6)
- **A'** Announcement of Coming Judgment (9:7a-b)

8:1-3 (A). Announcement of Coming Judgment. Hosea 8:1-3, probably written during the reign of Hoshea, the last king of Israel (732-722 B.C.), begins with an alarm sounded on the *shopar*, warning of imminent judgment upon Israel (as section C began in 5:8). Yahweh compared the coming judgment to an eagle/vulture swooping down upon its prey (cf. Deut. 28:49-50), which reverses the picture of Yahweh as an eagle hovering over its nest at Israel's creation (Deut. 32:10-12). Hosea 8:1-3 gives a general summary of Israel's sins: though Israel claimed to know God, they had in fact broken Yahweh's covenant and rebelled against His Torah. A series of indictments and covenant curses follows.

8:4-6 (B). Political and Cultic Sins. Verse 4 refers to the rapid succession of kings at the end of Israel's history. Most took the throne through coups, intrigues, and assassinations (see Hosea: Introduction). Yahweh also condemns the counterfeit worship of the golden calf Jeroboam I set up in Bethel, called the "calf of Samaria" (a metonymy for the entire nation; cf. 10:5; 13:2). Only one calf remained because by this time in Israel's history, Assyria had already taken the northern part of the country, where the calf in Dan was located.

8:7-13 (C). Alliances with Other Nations. Verse 7 contains a proverbial wisdom statement expressing cause and effect. Israel had sown the wind (so to speak) of strife by casting about between alliances with superpowers. As a result, they would receive a much stronger blowback, reaping a storm/gale/whirlwind of devastating destruction (cf. Is. 29:6; Amos 1:14; Nah. 1:3). Another metaphor describes Israel as a stalk that never reached maturity and thus would produce no flour. But even if it were to produce, the grain would be swallowed up by foreigners.

The Lord continued to compare Israel to something undesirable (Hos. 8:8), to a wild donkey hiring lovers (v. 9; cf. Jer. 2:24–25), and to menial servants (Hos. 8:10). These metaphors all describe Israel's shifting alliances with other nations. Israel had also committed cultic sins related to the sacrifices (see 4:8) and spurned the many important teachings of God's Torah (8:11–13a). So God announced a reversal of the Exodus: Israel would return to Egypt (v. 13b).

8:14 (D). Israel's Maker Forgotten. Verse 14 summarizes the judgment against Israel for breaking the divine covenant. It closely parallels the covenant lawsuit of Deuteronomy 32:15–18. As the only explicit reference in Hosea to the Creation motif, it also parallels Isaiah 51:13. God made Israel a nation, but instead of remembering their Maker, both Israel and Judah had trusted in the constructions of their own hands (i.e., their vast building projects of temples, royal palaces, and city fortifications/strongholds). The historical fulfillment of their punishment, the covenant curse of destruction by fire (Deut. 32:22), occurred when Assyria destroyed Samaria in 722 B.C. and when the Babylonians later destroyed Jerusalem in 586 B.C.

9:1–4 (C'). Alliances with Other Nations. Hosea 9:1–4 matches 8:7–13. Hosea again rehearses Israel's spiritual harlotry. They loved the prostitute's wages but would not receive them. They would not continue to dwell in the Lord's land (see Lev. 25:23) but would "return to Egypt" (Hos. 9:3; further developed in 9:6; 11:5, 10–11).

9:5–6 (B'). Dissolution of the Cultic Festivals. Hosea 9:5–6 matches 8:4–6, returning to the theme of the false cult. The entire cultic calendar, including the counterfeit Festival of Tabernacles (cf. 1 Kin. 12:32), would end with the destruction and exile of the nation.

9:7a–b (A'). Announcement of Coming Judgment. Hosea 9:7a–b briefly summarizes the section and matches 8:1–3. Hosea proclaims the imminent arrival of the days of punishment/recompense. The nation knew what it had done, and Yahweh would hold it responsible.

9:7c—10:15

Indictment for Spiritual Prostitution/Idolatry

Hosea 9:7c—10:15 reinforces and further elaborates on the theme of Israel's spiritual harlotry discussed above. The whole section is structured around historical and geographical allusions that show that Israel's covenant unfaithfulness (spiritual harlotry) had a long history. It stretched all the way back to the time of the Exodus and the period of the judges and involved some of Israel's most revered and sacred geographical locations.

- **A** Sins at Bethel ("House of God"; 9:7c–8)
  - **B** Sins at Gibeah (9:9)
    - **C** Sins at Baal Peor (9:10–14)
      - **D** Sins at Gilgal (9:15—10:4)
    - **C'** Sins at Beth Aven (10:5–8)
  - **B'** Sins at Gibeah (10:9–10)
- **A'** Sins at Bethel (10:11–15)

9:7c–8 (A). Sins at Bethel. The reference to "house of his God" (Heb. *bet-'elohayw*) probably alludes to Bethel ("house of God"; v. 8). This matches the mention of Bethel in 10:15 (subsection a'). Hosea 9:7b–8 can be understood either as God's indictment against the foolish prophets and the *ish haruakh* (lit. "man of the spirit," "inspired man"), who had become insane, or alternatively as a false evaluation of true prophets by the wicked in Israel. Hosea 10:11–15 indicts the nation's vain trust in their mighty men. Both passages indicate that the punishment was to come because of their wickedness (9:7; 10:15). Bethel, once the place where the prophets flourished (2 Kin. 2:3), had become the main center for idolatrous worship of the golden calf, and the prophets had become fools and snares to the people (Hos. 9:7–8).

9:9 (B). Sins at Gibeah. Hosea's reference to Gibeah looks back to the time of the Judges, when the rape and murder of a Levite's concubine resulted in outrage and subsequent war (Judg. 19–21). Placed at the end of the book of Judges, this incident shows the shocking depths of depravity to which Israel had sunk. Now Hosea compares that generation to his contemporary generation, which had become just as deeply corrupted (Hos. 9:9).

9:10–14 (C). Sins at Baal Peor. Continuing the historical and geographical comparisons, Hosea refers back to the period of the Exodus from Egypt (9:10). He likens God's delightful experience with Israel, His "firstborn" son (Ex. 4:22), to the taste of early figs. But at the time of Israel's tragic apostasy at Baal Peor, just before entering Canaan (Num. 25:1–5), they devoted themselves to *laboshet* (lit. "the shame"), the Baal fertility

cult rituals and deities. Thus, they became an object of abhorrence themselves (Hos. 9:10). In a parody on the fertility cult, Hosea warns that the people would receive the opposite of the fertility they desired: infertility, infanticide, miscarriage, and shriveled breasts (vv. 11–14).

9:15—10:4 (D). Sins at Gilgal. Gilgal was a major cultic center in Hosea's time (see 4:15; 12:11). Because of the evil deeds Israel had done there, Yahweh said that He hated them, which He immediately explained to mean that He would no longer love them (9:15). To "hate" in this context means to reject (see commentary on Mal. 1:2–5). This was no insensitive, arbitrary abandonment of His people. Letting them go caused God deep anguish (see Hos. 11:8–9). Using a wordplay on Ephraim's name (from Heb. *para'*, "fruitful"), Hosea announced that they had dried up and would no longer bear fruit (*peri*; cf. 13:15; 14:8). God said He would cast away/reject/drive out (*garash*) Ephraim from His house (9:15), technical language that finalized the divorce between Yahweh and Israel (see Lev. 21:7; Num. 30:9).

Gilgal may have been singled out because of its historical association with King Saul's failed kingship and rejection by God (1 Sam. 11:14–15). Now God would reject His people and their princes (Heb. *sar*), who were stubborn/rebellious (Heb. *sarar*) just as Saul was. As God had rent the kingdom from Saul, so would He remove the kingdom of Israel, sending the people into captivity as "wanderers among the nations" (Hos. 9:17). He would break down the cult centers with their altars and sacred pillars and remove their king (in fulfillment of the covenant curse of Deut. 28:36) because they did not revere the Lord. The people, whose hearts were divided (Heb. *khalaq*, "slippery," "deceitful"), would realize too late that their human king, far from being a blessing, was like a poisonous herb growing up in the midst of a food-producing field (Hos. 10:1–4).

10:5–8 (C'). Sins at Beth Aven. Hosea 10:5–8 matches 9:10–14. Hosea depicts the dismantling of the cult at Beth Aven ("house of iniquity," a slur for Bethel; "house of God"; see 4:15; 5:8), its glory or splendor taken away. This alludes to the naming of the child Ichabod ("the glory has departed") when the Philistines captured the ark in the time of Eli (1 Sam. 4:21). The golden calf would be given over to the great king of Assyria (see Hos. 5:12–15), the cultic high places of Ephraim destroyed, and their king cut off/destroyed. In unbearable shame the people would cry for the mountains and hills to fall on them (cf. Luke 23:30; Rev. 6:16). In short, Assyria would wholly destroy and dissolve Israel (fulfilled in 722 B.C. and afterward).

10:9–10 (B'). Sins at Gibeah. Hosea 10:9–10 matches 9:9. The Lord charged Israel with sins that had continued since "the days of Gibeah."

10:11–15 (A'). Sins at Bethel. Hosea 10:11–15 matches 9:7c–8. In 10:11 the Lord compares Israel to a heifer that once loved to thresh grain and did not even need a goad or tight rein. But now He had to harness it along with Judah. Employing another agricultural metaphor, He encouraged His people to sow righteousness, reap love, and till the ground by seeking Him so He would come down and rain (Heb. *yarah*, which can also mean "teacher of") righteousness (v. 12). He mentioned the foundational work of tilling last. But instead they had plowed/planted wickedness and reaped injustice (v. 13). As punishment their fortresses would be decimated, as some already had been when Shalmaneser III campaigned in Israel in the time of Jehu (841 B.C.), forcing the king to capitulate (v. 14). The location of Beth Arbel is not known.

11:1—14:9

GOD'S WAYWARD SON

This third major part of the book also forms the seventh section of the book's chiastic macrostructure.

- **A** Israel's Ultimate Return (11:1–11)
  - **B** The Deceitful Son (11:12—12:8)
    - **C** Israel Led Up from Egypt (12:9–14)
      - **D** Summary of Yahweh's Case against Israel (13:1–3)
    - **C'** Israel Led Up from Egypt (13:4–9)
  - **B'** The Foolish Son (13:10–16)
- **A'** Yahweh's Invitation and Promise of Restoration (14:1–9)

Whereas Hosea 1–3 depicted Israel as Yahweh's wayward wife, chapters 11–14 shift the metaphor to describe the nation as Yahweh's wayward (prodigal) son.

11:1–11 (A). Israel's Ultimate Return. Hosea 11:1–4 contains the most tender depiction in all of Scripture of Yahweh's love for Israel, His own son (v. 4 extends the metaphor to God's loving care for animals). In its immediate context, the statement "out of Egypt I called My son" refers to historical Israel's Exodus from Egypt. But both in Hosea and in other eighth-century prophets, it also refers to the future eschatological exodus connected with Israel's return from exile and the coming of the Messiah (see 2:14–15; 12:9, 13; 13:4–5; Is. 11:15–16; 35; 40:3–5; 41:17–20; 51:9–11; 52:3–6, 11–12; 55:12–13; Amos 9:7–15; Mic. 7:8–20). The Latter Prophets recognized Israel's Exodus from Egypt as a type of the messianic new exodus. Matthew remains faithful to this larger context, citing Hosea 11:1 as a catchphrase for all OT passages that predict the eschatological new exodus and point to the Messiah as the Representative Israel. The life of the Messiah would recapitulate the experience of ancient Israel, but He would succeed where the historical Israel had failed (Matt. 1–5).

Instead of responding to Yahweh's tender love with respect and obedience, His prodigal son rebelled and left the Father (Hos. 11:2; cf. Luke 15:11–32). Israel spent his fortune, so to speak, on riotous living amid the licentious Baal cult. Bent on backsliding/turning away from God (Hos. 11:7), they refused to return and repent (v. 5). In the Torah the punishment for such a rebellious son was death (Deut. 21:18–21), which happened when the nation was destroyed and the people were exiled (Hos. 11:5–6).

Hosea 11:8–11 constitutes the fifth of the seven hope and salvation oracles in the book. As in the covenant lawsuit against His wayward wife (2:14–15), the verdict upon God's wayward son ends with a surprise. God could not bear to give Israel up or hand His people over to everlasting destruction, as He had the cities of the plain (Admah and Zeboiim; Gen. 19:24–25). Yahweh had overturned (Heb. *hapak*) those cities in His anger, but now His own heart was overturned/churned/disturbed (Heb. *hapak*; cf. Lam. 1:20) with passionate love, and His compassion/sympathy (Heb. *nikhumim*) was aroused/stirred (lit. "grew warm"; Hos. 11:8). Although having every right to eliminate Israel forever, the Holy One is not vindictive, arbitrary, and heartless. The Lion (Heb. *'aryeh*) of Israel would roar, calling His wayward children (cubs) home. Never again would they be destroyed. They would come back home trembling (*kharad*), a fitting attitude of humility before the great Lion (vv. 9–10). But they would also return from Egypt (=Assyria) swiftly and eagerly fluttering (the second meaning of the Heb. *kharad*) like a bird (v. 11). The prodigal son would return home, welcomed by the rejoicing Father.

11:12—12:8 (B). The Deceitful Son. Judah still roamed (*rad*, "walks," "roams," "rules," or "is unruly") with God, the faithful Holy One (11:12b), but Israel was self-deceived like a person attempting to herd the wind (12:1). Hosea might have written these verses during the mid-720s B.C., when a measure of prosperity briefly returned to Israel under its last king. Self-deceived Israel dealt deceitfully with Yahweh (11:12; 12:1), cheating on His covenant, making foreign treaties with Assyria (12:1), and using deceitful scales in commerce (v. 7; cf. Prov. 11:1). Self-deception overtook the nation: they felt secure in their riches and confident that no one could accuse them of a sinful offense (Hos. 12:8; cf. Rev. 3:17).

Yahweh included Judah in His covenant lawsuit (Heb. *rib*) against "Jacob" when He announced the verdict. According to the principle of lex talionis (retributive justice), the punishment would correspond to their deceitful ways (Hos. 12:2). Hosea reinforces the theme of deceit by reminding Israel of the experience of their forefather Jacob, whose life story and very name (*ya'aqob*, "supplanter") were linked to trickery. This is the only mention of the patriarchal period in the book. Hosea focuses on Jacob's positive experience of repentance at the Jabbok River, where with anguish and tears he struggled and prevailed against the Angel (Gen. 32:24–28), and on Jacob's night vision at Bethel (Gen. 28:12–19). Some translations bring home the message to Hosea's contemporary audience (and to us) by characterizing Jacob's experience as God speaking to *us* (Hos. 12:4). Other translations, including the LXX, read "spoke to him." Although the experience happened to Jacob, later generations could relate to it as if it had actually happened to *them*. Hosea continues his aside by appealing to the faithful remnant of Israel (and to us today) to repent/return (Heb. *shub*) with God's help, to keep the basic covenant stipulations of mercy/love (*khesed*, "covenant loyalty") and justice (*mishpat*), and to wait/hope (*qawah*) continually on their God (v. 6; cf. Mic. 6:8).

12:9–14 (C). Israel Led Up from Egypt. Yahweh reminded Israel that He was the God of the Exodus. In an ironic reversal of Israel's current prosperity, Yahweh would punish their rebellion by stripping them of their opulent luxury. Instead of dwelling in tents for just a few days during the Festival of Tabernacles (Lev. 23:42–43), they would again dwell in tents permanently (Hos. 12:9–10). In Gilead (*gil'ad*, "heap of witness"), where Jacob memorialized his covenant with Laban by erecting a heap (Heb. *gal*) of stones and making sacrifices (Gen. 31:52), Israel had erected pagan altars. The destruction of these altars would turn them into heaps (Heb. *gal*) of stones (Hos. 12:11). In vv. 12–14, Hosea compares Jacob's experience tending/keeping/guarding (Heb. *shamar*) sheep in Syria (Gen. 28–29) to that of the Prophet Moses, who kept/cared for/preserved (Heb. *shamar*) Israel at the time of the Exodus. Alluding to the covenant curses predicted by Moses (Deut. 4:25–26; 32:16), Yahweh would leave Israel in their bloodguilt and repay (Heb. *shub*, lit. "return") them for their reproach/contempt of Him and His law (Hos. 12:14).

13:1–3 (D). Summary of Yahweh's Case against Israel. In three pathos-filled verses Hosea summarizes Israel's apostasy and the fundamental indictments of Yahweh's covenant lawsuit against them. Verse 1 has been understood as either saying that before committing apostasy Ephraim spoke with trembling (Heb. *retet*)—that is, humbly and with "piety" (NJPS; cf. Is. 66:2)—and was exalted in Israel, or that he spoke with such imposing authority that people trembled (*retet*)—either way a positive evaluation. But they incurred guilt in the Baal fertility cult and (spiritually) died (Hos. 13:1). Verse 2 summarizes how Israel kept sinning "more and more" by worshiping idols. Verse 3, the final verse of this section, depicts Israel's disappearance from history, utilizing four similes from the natural world—morning mist/clouds, early dew, chaff before the wind, and smoke.

13:4–9 (C'). Israel Led Up from Egypt. Verse 13:4a repeats the opening verse of the matching subsection (12:9–14) almost verbatim. Focusing on Israel's Exodus, 13:4–5 provides a synopsis of the Decalogue in Exodus 20:1–3, including the covenant preamble (lit. "I am Yahweh"); a historical prologue identifying Yahweh as the Savior who freed them from Egypt and led them in the wilderness; and a restatement of the central stipulation, the first commandment against worshiping other gods. Yahweh then indicted Israel for following the path predicted by Moses (Deut. 8:11–15; 31:2). When they were filled/satisfied, they became proud and forgot Yahweh, going after other gods (Hos. 13:6). At the conclusion of this subsection, Yahweh sentenced Israel to destruction for their polytheism using the imagery of brutal and fatal wild animal attacks (vv. 7–9). The reference to Yahweh keeping watch/lurking (*'ashur*) like a leopard may be a wordplay on the homonym Assyria (*'ashur*), implying that God would use Assyria as the agent of Israel's destruction.

13:10–16 (B'). The Foolish Son. Ephraim was not only a deceitful son (as in 11:12—12:8) but an unwise one who lacked the sense to even present himself at the opening of the womb at the time of birth (13:13). This birthing metaphor captures a time of crisis in Israel's government, probably after Shalmaneser V took King Hoshea captive along with the royal family and high-ranking government officials (722 B.C.; see vv. 9–10). A baby in a breach position in the womb also puts the life of the mother in serious doubt. The situation seems hopeless.

Amid this context of apparent hopelessness and imminent death, the Lord presents the sixth of the seven eschatological hope and salvation oracles in the book (v. 14). There will be a resurrection from the dead. God promised to ransom/deliver His people from the grave and redeem them from death. The following two sentences are either declarative statements (MT, "I will be...") or rhetorical questions (LXX, "Where are...?"; the two phrases look similar in Hebrew) announcing victory over death and the grave (cf. 1 Cor. 15:54, 55). Yahweh assures that vengeance/revenge (sometimes translated as "pity, compassion, repentance") would end (lit. "hidden from My eyes"). In the meantime, however, Israel's fruitful prosperity would pass away before the proverbial withering east wind (Hos. 13:15), as Samaria would face a three-year siege (2 Kin. 17:5). In fulfillment of the covenant curses, the cruel and violent onslaught of the Assyrian army would slit pregnant women open (Hos. 13:16; see 2 Kin. 15:16; Amos 1:13; "God's Judgment in the Prophets," p. 981).

14:1–8 (A'). Yahweh's Invitation and Promise of Restoration. Hosea 14:1–9, the final section of the book, matches 11:1–11. It addresses a people soon to be orphaned in exile. In 14:1–3, Hosea urged Israel to return to Yahweh, even suggesting what to say to Him: words of repentance, requests for forgiveness, and vows of right actions (sacrifices/fruit "of our lips") and loyalty to/trust in only Him. He encouraged them to come boldly, with the promise that in God the fatherless/orphan finds mercy/compassion (v. 3).

The last of the seven passages of eschatological hope and salvation, vv. 4–8 present the glorious promise that God would one day heal their backsliding (Heb. *meshubah*, "turning back," "apostasy," "waywardness") and "love them "freely" (Heb. *nedabah*, "unconditionally"). His anger would turn away (v. 4). In vv. 5–6 Yahweh depicts Himself as dew watering Israel. As a result Israel would grow rapidly and prolifically like a lily/crocus, with roots (stability), spreading branches/shoots (splendor), a fragrance (desirability) like the mighty cedar forests of Lebanon, and beauty like the olive tree—all in fulfillment of the promised covenant blessings (Deut. 30:9–10; 33:13–16). Shifting the metaphor, Hosea 14:7 presents God Himself as the spreading tree (for the only time in Scripture) and those who would return (*from* exile and *to* Yahweh) as sitting/dwelling under His shadow (cf. Song 2:3). They would experience abundant life comparable to new grain, a luxuriant vine, and the sweet scent of wine from Lebanon (Hos. 14:7; cf. Song 4:11–15). Again, God likens Himself to an evergreen tree with edible fruit (perhaps the stone pine, *Pinus pinea*). He, not the idolatrous fertility cult, is Israel's sole source of fruitfulness (Hos. 14:8).

14:9. Wisdom Epilogue: The Ways of Yahweh Are Right! The final lesson of Hosea is a wisdom saying inviting wise readers to understand and know (Heb. *yada'*) the contents of his message; that is, to apply it to their own lives in practical ways. The invitation opens with a question: "Who is wise?" (or "Whoever is wise..."; Heb. *mi khakam*). This parallels other such wisdom invitations (see Ps. 107:43; Jer. 9:12), as does the contrast between the righteous and wicked/rebellious (Ps. 1:6; Prov. 10:24, 29–30; 11:3; 12:3, 5, 7). However, in keeping with Israel's rebellion against Yahweh detailed in his book, Hosea uses the more specific word "rebels" for the wicked. Finally, Hosea focuses on vindicating the character of Yahweh, whose ways are right (Heb. *yashar*, "upright," "straight," "just"). He leaves the reader with a choice: walk according to the upright ways of Yahweh (i.e., the covenant stipulations) and reap the glorious blessings promised for the future of Israel or rebel and stumble in iniquity (i.e., reap the covenant curses; cf. Hos. 4:5; 5:5; 14:2; Lev. 26:37) as Israel did. In other words, the reader must either embrace the hope offered by the Lord or stagger in the hopelessness that leads to destruction.

JOEL

INTRODUCTION

Title and Authorship. The book is named after its author, the Prophet Joel, whose name means "the Lord is God." Several others bear this name in the OT, so it was not uncommon. Much of Joel's life remains unknown, yet the literary quality of his poetry and his familiarity with the temple rituals suggests that he was well educated. He may have lived in Jerusalem, since most of his message refers to Jerusalem and Judah.

Date. The book of Joel provides no direct information to determine its date of composition. Based largely on internal evidence, scholars have suggested dates ranging from the early monarchy to the postexilic period. Although evidence exists for a later date, this commentary opts for an early date, around the ninth century B.C. This date appears to be more consistent with the historical context reflected in the book, although there is evidence that it could be a little later.

Backgrounds. Joel delivered his message against the backdrop of a plague of locusts that decimated the entire agricultural production of the nation. Since the book provides no information about the time when this plague occurred or about the historical circumstances of Joel's ministry, it is difficult to determine the background of the book. Some scholars have attempted to reconstruct its background based on circumstantial information within the book itself. It makes no reference to the king, prominently mentions priests and elders, portrays active temple service, discusses captive Israelites and Jewish slaves sold to the Greeks, and alludes to Egypt, Edom, Tyre, Sidon, and Philistia as enemies. Therefore, some have argued that the prophetic activity of Joel occurred during the childhood of King Joash, when priests and elders held power over Judah (2 Kin. 11:18–21). Therefore, Joel's invective against foreign nations may allude to the invasion of Judah by a coalition of nations in the time of Jehoram (852–841 B.C.; 2 Chr. 21:16–17). These circumstantial details, however, may have more than one interpretation, and most scholars have tended to understand the same data as indicating a later time, most likely the postexilic period after the reconstruction of the temple.

Joel is a unified composition produced during a crisis caused by a locust invasion. Although the ambiguity of the data precludes absolute certainty, the lack of any reference to the Assyrians and Babylonians may indicate that Joel ministered prior to the appearance of these nations as enemies of Israel and Judah. Joel's prophetic message begins by describing a locust invasion in his own time and follows with predictions of future judgments and blessings. This appears to place Joel's prophetic activity sometime during the early monarchy.

Theology and Purpose. The book of Joel belongs to the genre of classical prophecy and contains a prophetic message framed within God's covenant with Israel that reaches universal dimensions in the context of the Day of the Lord.

1. Day of the Lord. Joel organizes his message around the concept of the Day of the Lord, when God would intervene in history to judge and/or deliver His people and punish those who oppose His kingdom (Is. 13:6–16; Amos 5:18–20; Obad. 15–16; Zeph. 1:7–18; Mal. 4:5). Joel depicts the coming of the Day of the Lord in three stages. First, an unprecedented plague of locusts fell upon the land as an immediate judgment, which called for a response of submission and repentance (Joel 1:1–20). Joel implies that the Lord brought the current crisis because the people had neglected their covenantal responsibilities. Second, a worse judgment would follow the locust plague: an enemy invasion led by the

Lord (2:1–27). Finally, the Lord would mercifully reverse the punishment and fully restore the land and the people. In connection with the eschatological Day of the Lord, God would pour out His Spirit, accompanied by signs in the heavens, and would bring His people to their land. Subsequently, the Lord would summon the nations to gather together in the Valley of Jehoshaphat to receive God's verdict, culminating in the final establishment of God's rule from Zion (2:28—3:21).

2. *God and Evil.* The book depicts a conflict between God and evil in Israel and among the nations. In keeping with His holy character, God would bring judgment on both His people and the enemy nations. Indeed, the judgment would begin with His people, indicating the responsibilities entailed in the covenant relationship. Once His people respond with repentance and humility, God would mitigate judgment with mercy. In other words, God's rightful reaction against sin and sinners always blends with mercy and forgiveness. Through the outpouring of the Spirit, God would generously bestow immeasurable blessings upon His people to transform them into instruments of the Spirit. The theme of cosmic conflict emerges in a very particular way as God unceasingly battles the evil forces embodied in the enemy nations. On the eschatological Day of the Lord, He would reverse the chaotic circumstances of a world marked by sin and rebellion. As God's chosen city, Zion (Jerusalem) would play an important role in this conflict (Zion is mentioned seven times; 2:1, 15, 23, 32; 3:16–17, 21). The mention of Zion, the seat of God's presence and universal kingship, evokes God's covenant with His people. It appears as the place of refuge and joy for the remnant. The prophet announces the final restoration of God's people and the establishment of God's kingdom. The promises of salvation would infuse hope in the hearts of the people.

COMMENTARY

1:1–20

The Immediate Day of the Lord

Joel 1:1–12 describes a locust invasion, drought, and fire that combined to devastate the nation. In the face of such unspeakable disaster, the prophet calls the leaders and the people to lament, fast, and pray as they appeal to the Lord to reverse the crisis (vv. 13–20).

1:1–12. Description of the Judgment. The prophet commences by describing an unprecedented plague of locusts that destroyed the economy. The content of the message originated with God. He revealed it to His servant, the prophet, who proclaimed the word of the Lord (v. 1).

As described here, locust probably refers to a common edible insect (Lev. 11:22). Locust plagues are always a concern throughout the Middle East. They sometimes come from the semiarid parts of eastern Africa and southwestern Asia. They form huge swarms that migrate to distant lands, where they rapidly devour large amounts of vegetation. After the devastation, the locusts either depart or stay and reproduce themselves to continue their destructive task. The prophets often declared destructive natural phenomena, such as locusts (cf. Deut. 28:38, 42) and drought (Deut. 11:17), to be manifestations of God's judgment against His people's unfaithfulness to the covenant (cf. Deut. 28:15, 38, 42; 11:17) or against the nations (cf. Ex. 10:1–20). When He punished His people, God intended to call them back to the covenant faithfulness (Deut. 30:1–3; 1 Kin. 8:35; 2 Chr. 6:26) that would enable them to find refuge in Him. In other words, these were disciplinary actions of a loving Father who controls all natural phenomena.

Although locust invasions happened occasionally, the plague mentioned by Joel caused exceptional destruction of crops, grains, and orchards. It must have caused terrible devastation, leaving in its wake starvation, poverty, and disease. The animals had no food, and the priests had no resources to perform the ritual oblations and sacrifices in the temple.

In addition to the locusts, a severe drought caused a fire and devastated the land, likely destroying whatever had escaped the voracity of the locusts (Joel 1:19). The prophet addressed different groups within the community, the elders, the inhabitants of the land, the drunkards, the priests, and the farmers, calling attention to the impact of the disaster on each one of them. The breakdown of the economic and spiritual situation had affected all segments of society and called for an urgent response. What God had done to Egypt, He was now doing to Israel (cf. Ex. 10:4, 5). The prophet lists no sins to merit so harsh a punishment, but the reference to the drunkards may indicate that the people enjoyed sinful pleasures. Other prophets explicitly condemn drunkenness (Hos. 7:5; Amos 4:1). Joel 2:27 may also indicate a problem with idolatry, a sin which would constitute a most serious violation of the covenant bond. As a result of covenant transgression, all

the trees of the field dried up and the joy of all the people (lit. "sons of Adam") withered (1:12). In the Garden of Eden, God gave the first couple the fruit of all the trees of the garden for food, but now human survival was threatened because of the unfruitfulness of the trees.

1:13–20. Response to the Judgment. In view of that devastating plague, the priests should have taken the lead and convoked the elders and the people to lament, fast, and pray. Human strategies and resources could not resolve this crisis. A crisis that has spiritual causes ought to be confronted with spiritual resources. Lamentation provides sufferers with a strategy to master a crisis. Lamenters pour out their souls before the Lord and acknowledge that only He can provide relief amidst their suffering and grief. Some psalms demonstrate how the Israelites lamented. They usually contain not only expressions of grief but also statements of confidence in God and vows to praise Him (Pss. 3; 4; 13; 22; 31; 39; 57; 69; 71; 77; 139).

In modern times, fasting (abstaining from food) has become a means of protest and a way to pressure higher authorities. In biblical times, however, fasting expressed grief over sin and a recognition of our ultimate dependence on God. The law mandated fasting only on the Day of Atonement; however, in times of crisis the leaders could call for fasting as an expression of repentance and humility to seek God's mercy (1 Sam. 7:6; 2 Chr. 20:3; Neh. 9:1–3; Jon. 3:5–8).

Crying for help seems to be one of the primary functions of prayer in the Bible. Joel summoned the people to cry out to the Lord, the proper response to the ominous crisis engulfing the land. In crying to the Lord, the suffering people expressed not only pain but the recognition that only the Lord could reverse their unbearable circumstances. By urging lamenting, fasting, and praying, the prophet acknowledged the swarm of locusts and its consequences as the Lord's work. While humans engaged in rational communication with God, the cattle, flocks of sheep, and beasts of the field groaned (their way of praying?) to the Creator for the satisfaction of their hunger (Joel 1:18). Because of human sin, both human and animal life suffered, and both depended on God for restoration.

The first section of the book describes a contemporary crisis, triggered by the locust invasion, and a prescribed response to it. However, as terrifying as that disaster may have been, an even worse judgment loomed on the horizon: the impending Day of the Lord.

2:1–27

The Impending Day of the Lord

Using the imagery of a locust plague, the prophet predicted that the Lord would raise up a foreign army to punish Judah (2:1–11). In response to the impending intensified disaster, the people should repent and turn to the Lord (vv. 12–17).

2:1–11. Description of the Judgment. Guards manned the towers on the walls of ancient cities and would sound the trumpet (*shopar*) as soon as they spotted an enemy army or a suspicious movement on the horizon. Having privileged information, the prophet demanded they sound the trumpet/horn to warn of the impending disaster. The crisis would come with thick darkness, clouds, and fire (vv. 2–3). Notably, these elements also appeared on Mount Sinai when God came down to make a covenant with His people (Deut. 5:22). Now the Lord would come to enforce the covenant curses. As He brought the darkness of the ninth plague on the land of Egypt (Ex. 10:21–23), the Lord would also bring darkness on His unfaithful people. Next, the prophet describes a powerful army marching toward Zion. Some scholars have argued that this section, like chapter 1, describes a locust invasion. However, the language and imagery of the locusts appears to metaphorically announce an imminent enemy attack. By evoking the ceaseless advance of a locust horde, the prophet describes the enemy's military prowess. They would come like an avalanche that no barricade could hold.

As that powerful army marched forward, humans would panic with terror and the cosmic order would come to the brink of collapse. This poetic description stresses the severity of God's impending judgment, which would dwarf the previous crisis triggered by the locusts. After a brief description of an invading army, this section climaxes with an astonishing observation: the enemy army belongs to the Lord, who marches forward to execute judgment upon His own people (Joel 2:11). At times, the Israelites understood the Day of the Lord as a day of deliverance and blessings for Zion. They felt secure in the promises of God and firmly believed that even though other cities like Samaria might be defeated, Zion would stand forever because it belonged to the Lord in a unique way. Indeed, no enemy could overtake Zion. But the Lord Himself could. Because they neglected their covenantal responsibilities, the people had become the Lord's enemies. He would march ahead of that destructive army to inflict due punishment upon the covenant breakers.

2:12–17. Response to the Judgment. The prophet now explicitly demands a change of heart. The external signs of contrition he called for in response to the locust invasion should reflect internal thoughts and intentions. Israelites customarily tore their clothing to express grief or repentance, but Joel tells the people to rend their hearts, not their garments (2:13). Repentance ought to accompany fasting, prayer, and weeping as the proper response to the impending Day of the Lord. God invited His people to turn to Him (v. 12), a call the prophet immediately reiterated (v. 13). God intended for the people to repent (Heb. *shub*, "turn," "repent"), turn toward Him, and completely change the direction of their lives. The prophet again lists no specific sins from which they were to turn, although, as already noted, drunkenness (1:5) and idolatry (2:27) are plausible inferences. Presumably, once they humbled themselves and turned to the Lord, they would know which sins to confess in order to mend their broken relationship with God.

As the basis for repentance, the prophet alludes to the covenantal relationship between God and His people that is implicit in the expression "your God" (v. 13). Furthermore, by listing God's gracious attributes, Joel points to God's immutable character and loyalty to the covenant in order to reinforce the hope that God would reverse the judgment. After all, God is not a vengeful judge but a gracious and merciful Lord (Ex. 34:6–7; Num. 14:18; Neh. 9:17; Pss. 86:15; 103:8; 145:8; Jon. 4:2; and Nah. 1:3). Repentance, however, does not function as a magic manipulation of God; the Lord remains sovereign to either accept or reject the penitent response of His people. All they can do is repent and leave the rest with God. As the prophet clarifies, who knows if the Lord might relent? (Joel 2:14). The phrase "who knows" expresses hope amidst uncertainty, calling people to willingly submit.

Again the prophet called for the trumpet to be blown. But instead of announcing the coming of an invading army, this time the trumpet call was to convoke a sacred assembly to plead with the Lord for mercy. Joel addressed the priests using language reminiscent of the Sinai covenant. He commanded them to sanctify the congregation in order to prepare them to appear before the Lord (see Ex. 19:10). Usually, only the elders or heads of families attended such an assembly. However, the seriousness of the impending crisis required the entire nation to attend the convocation, including children and nursing babes, who apparently had no formal worship obligations (1 Sam. 1:21–24). Even those recently married, who were usually excused from such convocations (Deut. 24:5), had to interrupt their honeymoons. Such a time of crisis required them to deny themselves a most legitimate human pleasure and come to the temple to join the sacred assembly. Such an extensive demonstration of contrition recalls the response of the Ninevites to the preaching of Jonah (Jon. 3:5–9).

Joel called the priests, as representatives of the community before God, to stand in the inner court (1 Kin. 6:36), the area between the porch (i.e., the door of the temple) and the altar of burnt offerings, where priests performed some of their cultic services. The priests wept and interceded for the nation on the same spot where Solomon had prayed to the Lord during the inauguration of the temple years before (1 Kin. 8:22). Scholars have called prayers like the one Joel composed "communal laments" (see Pss. 44; 79–80; 89; Lam. 3:40–42; 5:1–22). This prayer reveals three essential aspects of biblical prayer. First, it petitioned God to spare the people and, in doing so, acknowledged the people's sinfulness and exclusive reliance on God's mercy. Second, it appealed to the covenant. God Himself had a vested interest in the restoration of Judah because they were His people and His inheritance/heritage (Joel 2:17). The exhortation for the people to honor their covenant obligations (v. 13) matches the petition for God to remember His covenant with His people. Third, the prayer focused on protecting God's reputation among the nations, not on the material prosperity of the people.

2:18–27. Reversal of the Judgment. Joel 2:18 marks a turning point in the crisis Joel had announced. Because of His inexhaustible love, God would accept the people's repentance and answer their prayer. In turning His merciful attention to His land and His people, the Lord restored the covenant bond and set out to reverse the effects of the locust plague. He reiterated the covenant promises and pledged to give grain, wine, and oil back to His people (Deut. 11:13–15). To a people suffering the ravages of famine and other hardships, such promises must have sounded like hope for the renewal of life itself. The Lord would even go beyond their material needs by removing their reproach

and restoring their dignity. Moreover, He would drive away the very enemy threatening their security (lit. "the northern one"; some translations supply "army" or "horde" because of the context; Joel 2:20). Weakened by lack of food, that enemy would drown in the eastern sea (the Dead Sea) and the western sea (the Mediterranean), provoking a rising stench. The identity of "the northern one" is debated. It may refer to either a locust swarm or an invading foreign army. Although the locusts are a plausible reference, this term most likely refers to a foreign army attacking God's people. Most invasions of Israel and Judah came from the Syrians, Assyrians, and Babylonians who penetrated the land from the north (Is. 14:31; 41:25; Jer. 1:4, 13–15; 4:6; Zeph. 2:13; cf. Ezek. 38:6, 15; 39:2).

In light of such bountiful blessings, the prophet invited those who had previously groaned and lamented to celebrate the restoration. In a complete reversal of fortunes, the prophet exhorted the personified land to rejoice because of the marvelous acts of the Lord, assured the beasts of the field that the fields and trees had received new life, and finally urged the people to rejoice in the Lord because He would send rain to reverse the drought (Joel 1:7), bringing back bountiful harvests (2:21–24). The call for celebration progresses from the inanimate land to the animals and finally to God's people. This reverses the arrangement of the first chapter, which begins by summoning the people to mourn (1:2–15) and concludes with a portrayal of the miserable state of the animals and the land (1:16–20). The former/autumn rain normally began in September and October and produced the right conditions for plowing and sowing. The latter/spring rain fell in March and April, enabling the crops to ripen fully.

The Hebrew word *hammoreh*, usually translated as "the former rain" or "the autumn rain," can also mean "the teacher." Joel 2:23 would then become a promise to send "the teacher of righteousness." The context may favor the translation "the former rain" in connection with the word *litsdaqah* ("righteously," "faithfully"). Moreover, the Bible associates rain with right teaching (1 Kin. 8:35–36; Is. 30:20–23) and compares the lack of the word of God to a drought (Amos 8:11–12). On the other hand, the translation "the teacher of righteousness" could refer to the eschatological prophet announced by Moses (Deut. 18:15–18; 34:10). This messianic figure, in contrast with the previously mentioned "northerner," would expose error and teach the truth to the people.

In an absolute reversal, the Lord promised to restore the years of devastation by reaching back into the past and recovering all that the plague had destroyed. This magnificent act of redemption would culminate in a restoration and reaffirmation of four fundamental truths: God would reaffirm His presence in the midst of His people, reiterate His covenantal relationship with them, claim their exclusive loyalty, and deliver them from shame (Joel 2:27). The destructive Day of the Lord would become the redemptive Day of the Lord. The devastated land would turn into a fertile ground teeming with lush vegetation and fruitful harvests, the starving cattle would enjoy abundant pastures, and God's suffering people would delight in the blessings of the covenant.

2:28—3:21

The Eschatological Day of the Lord

The final major section of Joel takes a clear eschatological turn. Although God's covenant with Israel remains the frame of reference, the scope of the prophetic message transcends national and ethnic boundaries to depict a universal Day of the Lord, a day of blessing and salvation. In connection with that day, God would give the Spirit to all flesh (2:28–32), judge the enemies of His people (3:1–15), and eventually establish His eternal kingdom (3:16–21).

2:28–32. Description of Promises. The opening sentence of v. 28 clearly marks the beginning of a new section. This promise harks back to Moses, who wished all of God's people would become prophets (Num. 11:29). Throughout OT times, God gave the Spirit intermittently to enable select individuals (e.g., judges, prophets, and kings) to perform specific assignments. Through Joel, God promised the Spirit to all flesh, regardless of age, gender, or social boundaries. The universal outpouring of the Spirit points back to the promise of rain in Joel 2:23. As the rain would revitalize the vegetation, so the Spirit would rejuvenate the people. The outpouring of the Spirit prophesied here specifically entails the manifestation of the prophetic gift. By turning all people into prophets, the Spirit would propel a powerful proclamation of God's message.

Joel announced wonders in heaven and on earth that would come in connection with the outpouring of the Spirit and would precede the Day of the Lord. These signs would include blood, fire, pillars of smoke, and the upheaval of the sun and the moon (vv. 30–31), some of which also accompanied the events surrounding the Exodus (Ex. 7:17–25; 9:23–29; 13:21–22; 19:16–18) and other divine apparitions (Ps. 18:7–15; Hab. 3:8–16). This short section closes with the Lord's promise to deliver whoever "calls on" His name; that is, whoever worships Him and publicly proclaims His deeds (Ps. 105:1; Is. 12:4). He promised to in turn call them among the survivors/remnant who would dwell safely in the eschatological Zion (Joel 2:32; see below, "Outpouring of the Spirit").

3:1–15. Description of the Judgment. The opening of Joel 3:1–15, "in those days and at that time," conveys the eschatological tone of this section and points to events far beyond the lifetime of the prophet. In connection with the restoration of His people and the establishment of His kingdom, the Lord would inflict upon the nations the punishment they deserve for having oppressed the chosen people. Along with other crimes, they took over the land, sold the people as slaves, and pillaged God's treasures to adorn foreign temples/palaces (vv. 5–6). The Lord would repay them by inflicting on them the same evil deeds they had inflicted on His people. While Tyre, Sidon, Philistia, Edom, and Egypt are mentioned, no reference is made to Assyria or Babylonia. The prophetic message, however, summons all the nations (v. 11), an indication that these political and ethnic entities function as a sampling of a much larger gathering of enemy nations for the eschatological judgment.

The Valley of Jehoshaphat (vv. 2, 12) is not mentioned anywhere else in the OT, and its location, if it is a literal place, is unknown. Two observations suggest that the name may be symbolic. First, the name Jehoshaphat means "the Lord judges," making it a most appropriate designation for a place of judgment. Second, the name "Valley of Jehoshaphat" calls to mind the Valley of Berakah, where God defeated a coalition of enemy nations on behalf of Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah (2 Chr. 20:26). Regardless, the appellation "Valley of Jehoshaphat" most likely points to the universal judgment of the nations, not to the place of its occurrence. Significantly, Joel also calls the same location "the valley of decision" (Joel 3:14), which points to God's decision to punish the nations for their crimes against His people. A harvest scene also portrays the same event. The command to put in/swing the sickle and come down to trample the grapes (v. 13), which was probably addressed to the angelic host (Ps. 103:20; Zech. 14:5), portrays a frightening image of punishment (Is. 63:1–6). Again the prophet associates cosmic signs with the eschatological Day of the Lord. The darkening of the sun and moon, along with the dimming of the stars, further emphasizes the seriousness of that day (Joel 3:15). If the created order quakes before such a powerful Judge (v. 16), the enemy armies stand no chance of success.

Outpouring of the Spirit

According to Peter, the outpouring of the Spirit on the small group of disciples during Pentecost fulfilled Joel's prophecy (Acts 2:16–21). God poured out the Spirit even on Gentiles (Acts 10:44–45). The work of the salvation of Christ and the coming of the Spirit inaugurated a new age. But Pentecost was only a partial fulfillment that signaled the ushering in of the eschatological era. Joel pointed not only to the inauguration of the age of salvation but also to its consummation on the Day of the Lord. He described cosmic signs, which Jesus associated with His Second Coming—the ultimate Day of the Lord (Matt. 24:29; cf. Rev. 6:12). According to the NT, the judgment of the nations mentioned in Joel 3:1–2 will take place at the close of the cosmic conflict (Rev. 20:7–15). The partial fulfillment during Pentecost points to the future fulfillment of all elements of the prophecy in preparation for and in connection with the coming of the Lord. The initial outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost will intensify in a unique way to prepare God's people (His end-time remnant) and the world for the final events leading to the glorious return of Christ (cf. Rev. 12:17; 19:10; 22:17). At that time, God's people will find refuge on Mount Zion (Rev. 14:1). The coming of the Spirit at Pentecost was like the early rain, and His intensified and glorious manifestation at the end will be like the latter rain that matures the crops for the harvest (Joel 2:23; Rev. 14:14–20; 18:1; cf. Is. 44:3). Joel compresses a large sweep of salvation history into a short description. The outpouring of the Spirit, the cosmic signs and earthly portents, the remnant on Mount Zion, and the judgment of the nations all refer to a cluster of eschatological entities and events, covering a significant span of history leading to the end.

While the enemy would receive due punishment, God would reconfirm Israel as the covenant people. The Lord reassured them that He was their God, who dwells in Zion (v. 17). God encamped among His people during the Exodus and subsequently chose Zion to be His permanent dwelling among them. The promise that by no means would any alien/foreigner pass through Zion implies the exclusion of Gentiles. It means that Zion, as a holy city, would be off-limits to unclean and rebellious people. To those who call on the name of the Lord, the city would remain shelter and home (2:32; Zech. 14:17; Heb. 12:22; Rev. 21:1–3, 27).

3:18–21. Description of the Blessings. Joel ends his book by announcing a glorious future for God's people. The blessings of "that day" (3:18), the eschatological age, would reverse all the disasters lamented in the beginning of the book. The lack of wine (1:5) would give way to vineyards that would produce rivers of grape juice. The formerly starving cattle (1:18) would have so much pasture that copious streams of milk would flow from the hills. The dry brooks (1:17–20) would overflow with abundant water. And the temple, previously deprived of joy (1:9, 13, 16), would become a source of living water (cf. Ezek. 47:1–12) irrigating the arid Valley of Shittim/acacias. (Acacias usually grow in arid and infertile soil.) This valley was likely a continuation of the Kidron Valley that runs down to the Dead Sea; however, the emphasis does not lie on its geographical location but on the paradisiacal life-giving waters that would flow from the temple in eschatological times. This image points back to the river in the Garden of Eden and forward to the river of life flowing from the throne of God in the new Jerusalem (Rev. 22:1–2).

In contrast, Egypt—in spite of the Nile River—and Edom would become desolate places because of the crimes committed against God's people (Joel 3:19). These two nations, persistent adversaries of Israel and Judah, symbolize the enemies of God and His people. In concrete language, the prophet affirms that the restoration of God's people would entail the removal of all threats to their security. So Joel closes his book with a message of hope and deliverance: Judah and Jerusalem would stand forever because the Lord dwells in Zion (vv. 20–21).

AMOS

INTRODUCTION

Title and Authorship. The opening verse attributes the book to the Prophet Amos, whose name derives from the Hebrew verb *'amas* and means "carried," "supported," "lifted," or "saved" (i.e., by the Lord; cf. Ps. 68:19; Is. 46:3). The name alludes to the message of the book: the Lord will preserve those who repent, trust in God, and love justice and mercy. Amos was from Tekoa, a fortified city south of Bethlehem (Amos 1:1; cf. 2 Chr. 11:5). He worked primarily as a *noqed* (1:1; a term that appears elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible only in 2 Kin. 3:4), a shepherd who may have been involved with breeding sheep. God chose him as a prophet for the Northern Kingdom of Israel (Amos 7:15).

Date. Amos prophesied during the reigns of Uzziah, king of Judah (792–740 B.C.), and Jeroboam II, king of Israel (793–753 B.C.; 1:1). This would place his ministry between 792 B.C. and 753 B.C.

Backgrounds. The reign of Jeroboam II was a time of territorial expansion, peace, and prosperity. He reconquered the Transjordanian region of Israel, including Damascus, Lebo Hamath, Lo Debar, Karnaim, and the Sea/Valley of Arabah. This proved a token of divine mercy, for it secured Israel's existence a little longer (6:13–14; 2 Kin. 14:23–29). Hegemony over these lands led the kingdom to the zenith of its power and affluence (see Amos 3:10–12, 15; 4:1; 5:11, 17; 6:4–6, 11). Archaeologists have found written documents from that time that record the delivery of quality wine and fine oil as (tax) payments to the capital city (cf. 2:8), shedding light on the extensive production of wine and oil in the region. Unfortunately, however, religious syncretism marred the reign of Jeroboam II, corrupting the worship of the Lord and perverting justice and mercy. Indeed, Samaria sinned through the monumental cultic centers (i.e., sanctuaries) that Jeroboam I had set up at Dan and Bethel to house the two golden calves (7:13; 8:14; 1 Kin. 12:25–33; 2 Kin. 14:24).

Theology and Purpose. God sent Amos to the Northern Kingdom with a message of final judgment, though one not totally devoid of hope. The book has three main theological themes.

1. God's Righteousness. The book of Amos contains three beautiful doxologies describing God's power and proclaiming Him as Lord over the created world (4:13; 5:8–9; 9:5–6). This monotheistic and universalistic understanding of God explains His intervention within history. For Amos, God is Lord over nature because He created it and can therefore uncreate it (4:13). The second and third doxologies communicate the same idea (5:8–9; 9:5–6). But between the act of creation and the act of judgment comes an act of revelation. The transcendental and powerful God of Creation willingly speaks to humans. He led Israel out of Egypt, protected them in the wilderness for forty years, and guided them through His prophets (2:10–11; 3:1). But He is also Lord over all nations, overseeing and guiding their movements (9:7). The One who raises up nations (6:14) and brings them down (2:9) controls the political and military achievements of these nations. As the moral Judge of both Israel and the nations, He cares about proper interpersonal relations among human beings and reacts against the oppression of the poor and the needy. He is not indifferent to social evils but requires that His people live in righteousness (5:24).

2. Social Justice. Amos speaks against social injustices, showing the importance of proper social behavior in the eyes of the Lord. Religion cannot be divorced from respect for other human beings. He decries Israel's inability to understand what was honest and right (3:10). God expected them to let justice run down like a river of water and righteousness like an ever-flowing, mighty stream (5:24), but instead they turned justice into bitterness and threw righteousness to the ground (5:7). They transgressed through court procedures, the accumulation of wealth, and worship. Amos criticizes the court procedures at the city's gate because they abused the poor and the innocent and refused to recognize their rights (2:6–8). Those in power economically abused the poor (5:11) and hated those who stood up to defend them (5:10). They accepted bribes (5:12) and turned justice into venom and righteousness into the bitterness of wormwood (6:12). Amos condemns the lifestyle of the upper classes because the poor suffered as a result of their greed (4:1).

Chapters 1–2 also address the problem of social injustice among the nations. The Lord condemned Damascus for its treatment of prisoners of war (1:3; cf. 2 Kin. 10:32–33), Gaza and Edom for selling slaves for economic gain (Amos 1:6, 9), Ammon for ripping open the pregnant women of Gilead (1:13), and Moab for showing total disrespect for human remains (2:1). God is not indifferent to such crimes against humanity.

Amos also attacks Israel's religious practices. The upper class appeared very religious, offering many sacrifices to the Lord (4:5; 5:21–23). But the Lord rejected their sacrifices not only because the people offered them in Bethel and Gilgal (4:4) but also because they did not practice social justice (5:23–24). Social injustices, a violation of the covenant, tainted their offerings and songs. Our relationship with God should transform the way we relate to our fellow human beings. If it does not, then we are not properly relating to God, even though we may follow the external forms of religion.

3. Judgment and Hope. The Lord would put an end to the social injustices practiced in Israel. The luxurious mansions of the upper classes would be destroyed (3:15), and the proud wives of the wealthy would go into captivity (4:2–3). The Lord would raise His sword against the house of Jeroboam (7:9) and destroy the altar at Bethel (3:14), resulting in weeping and mourning (5:16–17). Amos never identifies the instrument of judgment (Assyria), but he makes it clear that a military power (3:11; 5:5; 6:14) would take the people into captivity (5:7, 27; 6:7). Amos did not doubt that Israel would be led away captive (7:17). The Lord had done all He could to bring them back to repentance, but they refused to listen (4:6–11).

Amos calls that day of destruction "the day of the LORD" (5:18, 20). The popular theology in Amos's days defined the Day of the Lord as the future punishment and destruction of

Israel's enemies. The people looked forward to that day as a day of liberation. But Amos redefined it as a day when the Lord would confront Israel because of their sins, a day of darkness and destruction for His people (5:18–20; 8:3). The religious festivals would end (8:10), strange natural phenomena would occur (8:9), an earthquake would destroy many, and those who survived would be killed with the sword (9:1). God would preserve only a very small remnant, first described as the survivors of the catastrophe (historical remnant) and then as those willing to seek the Lord (faithful remnant; 5:6). But because of the severe nature of Israel's sins, the remnant who survived would not necessarily suffice to perpetuate the nation (5:14). Yet, a note of hope remained: God might have mercy on the remnant of Joseph (5:15).

This opens the door to a hopeful future. The Day of the Lord would not result in the extermination of God's people. The book of Amos ends on a positive note (9:11–15). God would restore David's kingdom, the united monarchy, and bring the nations under the rule of the future David. The true eschatological remnant embraces peoples from all nations who willingly submit to the rule of the Messiah under the new Davidic covenant. The rule of the new David would bring fertility and blessings. The exiled ones would return to their own land, never again to be removed from it (9:15). Thus, the book of Amos, which proclaims judgment, ends with a proclamation of hope that looks to the future establishment of social, moral, and religious justice once and for all.

Literary Features. Amos uses characteristic oracles, sayings, and vision reports to communicate judgment against Israel and hope for the remnant. These include features such as numerical formulas (see 1:3, 6), rhetorical questions (3:3), metaphors (4:1), taunts (4:4–5), allusions (4:10–11), and laments (5:2).

COMMENTARY

1:1—2:16

SUPERSCRIPTION AND ORACLES AGAINST THE NATIONS

After the superscription (1:1–2), the first occurrence of the messenger formula (1:3) declares the divine origin of the prophecy. The Lord is speaking. He unveils the transgressions of eight nations and passes judgment against them. These transgressions include the practice of lawlessness and violence and the violation of common social laws protecting the life of the innocent and the rights of the weak (Ex. 23:7; Deut. 24:14; Prov. 14:31; 22:16). The Lord specifically charged them with genocide, corpse desecration, brutality, and a lack of compassion (Amos 1:3—2:16; Ps. 11:5). Such transgressions brought about the Flood (Gen. 6:11, 13). As in the days of Noah, God would again decimate the wicked. The oracles against the nations contain three important elements. First, the ascending numerical sequence ("three...four") lists three despicable transgressions plus a fourth climactic condition that exceeds the limit of God's forbearance. Second, this formula of irrevocability stresses that God had determined not to avert His judgment and would inevitably pour out His wrath. Third, God would use fire to target the buildings that provided the inhabitants with a sense of power and security: temples, altars, fortresses, and palaces.

1:1–2. Superscription. The opening phrase refers to the book as "the words of Amos" instead of the more common "the word of the Lord" in other prophetic books. Only Jeremiah uses the same formula (Jer. 1:1; 36:10; 51:64). However, these words of divine revelation came to him from the Lord. Amos had no prophetic pedigree, but he willingly obeyed God. Amos 1:2 introduces the theological theme of the Day of the Lord by describing God as a lion roaring from Zion. His roar causes nature to wither, even to the top of Carmel, a place famous in Israel's history for deliverance from a drought (1 Kin. 18:41–46). From the outset, the book prophesies divine judgment (see "God's Judgment in the Prophets," p. 981).

1:3–8. Damascus and Gaza. The Aramaeans fought with the Northern Kingdom over possession of Gilead, the region to the east of the Jordan River. This continued for decades until Jeroboam II put an end to the wars (1 Kin. 15:16–22; 2 Kin. 14:28; 2 Chr. 16:1–6). In Amos, Gilead refers to the land and its inhabitants, who suffered brutal attacks. Hazael and Ben-Hadad represent two dynastic titles rather than different kings (Amos 1:4). God would directly punish the leadership and the public edifices but send most of the population into exile to Kir as a historical remnant (v. 5; 9:7).

The Philistines settled in the southwestern portion of the Holy Land, where they established a confederation of five city-states, each under a lord, mostly along the coastal plain. Among these city-states, Gaza was the leading power. Beginning in the period of the Judges, this confederation constantly fought with the Israelites. Later, David, Solomon, and Uzziah all subjugated them. In the interest of economic gain, the Philistines engaged in the slave trade and human trafficking, probably perpetrated against the people of Judah (1:6; cf. 2 Chr. 28:18; Ezek. 27:13; Joel 3:6–7). They sold the slaves to the Edomites to work in their copper mines. As with the Aramaeans, the Philistines' punishment would target mainly the structures and the ruling class. The destruction of the remaining Philistines does not refer to the whole population but to the army and leaders (Amos 1:8).

1:9–12. Tyre and Edom. Tyre was the chief city of the Phoenician city-states. God accused the Phoenicians of complicity in the slave commerce (v. 9). Together with the Philistines, they plotted against the Israelites (Ps. 83:4–6), thereby violating the covenant made with David, Solomon, and, later, Ahab (2 Sam. 5:11; 1 Kin. 5:1, 7–11; 9:13–14; 2 Chr. 2:11–16). As punishment, God would send an inferno upon the city wall and fortresses (Amos 1:10).

Edom is another name for Esau (Gen. 25:30), who lived in conflict with his brother, Jacob (Gen. 27:40). The Edomites had acted unbrotherly toward the Israelites since the time of their ancestor, and this continued in the time of Amos and beyond (cf. Obad. 10–16). The Lord indicted them for cruelty and deadly persecution of Israel (Amos 1:11). As the sentence, a blaze would consume the main fortresses of the kingdom, signaling the collapse and permanent defeat of the nation (v. 12). The fire refers to a military attack.

1:13—2:3. Ammon and Moab. The people of Ammon were the descendants of Ben-Ammi, a son of Lot (Gen. 19:30–38). During the conquest of Canaan, God explicitly ordered the Israelites not to attack them (Deut. 2:19, 37). Despite this privilege, the Ammonites often showed animosity toward the Israelites and sought to take over their territory (Judg. 11; 1 Sam. 11; 2 Sam. 10:1–19; 2 Chr. 20:1–30) until Uzziah subdued them (2 Chr. 26:8; 27:5). They committed a heinous genocide against the pregnant Israelite women from Gilead (Amos 1:13). Consequently, God's inferno would consume their military defenses and political structures. The king and his officials would go into exile as a historical remnant (vv. 14–15).

Moab was the brother of Ben-Ammi and the ancestor of the Moabites (Gen. 19:30–38). Moab and Edom were relatives through Lot and Isaac. Biblical history depicts them as a pair of powers inhospitable toward Israel (Judg. 11:17–18), but they would ultimately be defeated (Ex. 15:15; Num. 24:17; 1 Chr. 18:2). On one occasion the king of Edom joined forces with King Jehoram of Israel and King Jehoshaphat of Judah against Moab. This alliance led King Mesha of Moab to sacrifice his crown prince as a burnt offering (2 Kin. 3:26–27). The burning of the bones of the king of Edom attests to great hatred (Amos 2:1). According to the expression's common usage, the destruction of Moab may designate the army, soldiers, leaders, or strongholds (v. 2; cf. Num. 22:14; Judg. 3:28–29; 2 Kin. 3:22–24). On account of their transgressions, the Lord would burn down their fortresses and annihilate their king and his officials (Amos 2:2–3).

2:4–5. Judah. Whereas the Lord charged foreign nations with very specific transgressions against humanity, He condemned Judah because they *ma'asam* ("despised," "rejected") His law (v. 4). However, the nature of the punishment placed Judah alongside the foreign nations under the same destiny. Judah disobeyed by perverting justice and mercy. To *ma'as* ("despise," "reject") the law of God generally means reversing the values of justice, goodness, and mercy rooted in God's commandments (cf. Ex. 18:16, 20; Deut. 5:1–21). In Amos it refers to such wrongs as false oaths, deception, bribery, extortion, theft, adultery, murder, and bloodshed. The lies of false prophets, priests, and officials had superseded God's laws (Amos 2:4). These lies typify a form of speech and behavior that wears the deceptive appearances of truth (cf. Hos. 4:1–2, 6). Like the other nations, Judah's sentence included the burning of its palaces.

2:6–16. Israel. The previous oracles pave the way for a thorough indictment of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. The Lord accused Israel of crimes similar in nature to those of the foreign nations, in that they exploited the weak. But even worse, the Israelites perpetrated these crimes against their own people. Since the divine law embodied justice and mercy, these crimes should be viewed against a legal background. The guilty party, always referred to in the plural, frequently represents the government, the high social classes, and the religious elite. Amos chronicles brazen crimes, often perpetrated at the gate of the city; that is, the courthouse and center of commercial and civic activity (3:10; 5:7, 10, 12, 15). As to Israel's relationship with God, Amos records how Israel forgot and forsook their Maker (cf. Hos. 2:13; 8:14), rebelled against His law and the prophetic word, and broke His covenant (Amos 2:11–12; 7:13; 2 Kin. 17:15–16; 18:12; Hos. 7:13; 8:1; cf. Num. 12:6; Deut. 18:15). Their moral violations included sexual relations with a girl by both a man and his father (Amos 2:7; Gen. 19:30–38; Lev. 18:6, 9; 20:17) and the transgression of the law of the Nazirite (Amos 2:11–12; Num. 6:3, 21).

As to the Israelites' relationship with each other, Amos chronicles how they denied the most vulnerable people justice by favoring the ruling class and by breeding corruption through bribes and dishonest scales (Amos 2:7–8; 4:1; 5:12; 8:4–5; Hos. 12:7, 8; cf. Lev. 19:15, 36). They infringed the laws that protect the defenseless (Ex. 23:7; Deut. 24:14; Prov. 14:31; 22:16). In other words, they overturned kindness and generosity (Deut. 15:7, 11; Hos. 6:4) by selling the righteous, the needy, and the poor into slavery for a pittance; imposing levies on them; charging interest on money lent to them (Amos 2:8; 5:11; cf. Ex. 22:22–24; Prov. 17:26); and keeping their pledges for loans overnight (Amos 2:8; cf. Deut. 24:12–13, 17).

Power, wealth, and security caused them to forget their roots and the way the Lord had led them in their journey from Egypt to the land of Canaan. When they were oppressed and persecuted, God saved them. When they were orphans and homeless, He gave them an inheritance (Amos 2:9–10). Now that they had become the oppressors and persecutors, God, in retribution, would bring the kingdom ruin and death on the Day of the Lord. The swift, the strong, the warrior, the archer, the fleet of foot, the rider, and the stouthearted would all fall victim. But despite the severity of the devastation, a bruised remnant would remain as Israel's hope for survival.

3:1—6:14

ORACLES AGAINST ISRAEL

3:1–15

Ruin and Survival

Amos 3:1–15 articulates divine justice and mercy, retribution for iniquities, and the preservation of a remnant torn into pieces.

3:1–8. The Revelation of Judgment. In Amos 3:1–8 the Lord speaks against Israel, whom He had brought out of Egypt. The revelation of God's grace requires fidelity on the part of those who receive it (vv. 1–2). The Exodus from Egypt, His care for His people during their wilderness travels, the covenant at Sinai, and the inheritance of the land all attest to God's mercy. Israel's election did not grant the nation an unconditional covenant relationship. The covenant required them to reciprocate God's love and behavior. As their Redeemer, God was justified in disciplining His people. Amos artfully represents retributive judgment through a list of causes and effects, moving from imagery to reality. The images of the lion, the hunter, and the trumpet portray God's refusal to continue leading Israel as their Shepherd. Because they had entangled themselves in their own paths instead of seeking Him, the unexpected would happen. God would turn against them like a hungry lion and like a hunter laying a trap. Israel would become His prey (vv. 3–5). The blowing trumpet heralds God's presence as an enemy. In the past, the personal manifestation of God served to instill the people with fear so that they might not sin (Ex. 20:20). However, another theophany in the near future would effect ruin upon the nation. Previously, the people had trembled in awe; now they would tremble in terror for their lives. But God did not leave His people in darkness, unaware of His plans. Before the execution of judgment, He sent a prophet to them to warn them about the coming disaster and to urge repentance (Amos 3:7–8; 5:4–6). Despite any opposition to prophesying (2:12), God would ultimately succeed in conveying His message.

3:9–12. The Sentence and Promise of a Remnant. Before imposing a sentence, God summoned eyewitnesses in compliance with Israelite law, which required two witnesses for a conviction for a crime (v. 9; cf. Deut. 17:6; 19:15; cf. 1 Kin. 21:10). He probably summoned the Philistines and the Egyptians because of their historical status as known oppressors. They could therefore give competent testimony to support the legality of the penalty. The Lord would execute judgment on those who stored up ill-gotten plunder in their fortresses (Amos 3:10). He would send an adversary as His instrument to invade the land, take its wealth, and plunder its palaces (v. 11).

The Lord compares the coming experience of Israel to that of a shepherd facing a voracious lion (v. 12). The passage portrays the Lord as both Shepherd and Lion, both the Condemner and the Defender of His people. In His wrath, God would decimate the sinful leaders of the kingdom to the extent that the residue of human resources would not suffice for the recovery of the nation (9:8, 10). But in His grace, He would save a historical remnant, survivors of trauma and loss, as a shepherd saves a bruised and mutilated sheep (3:12). In antiquity, when a wild beast killed a domestic animal, a hired shepherd had to present evidence of the loss. The smallest rescued pieces could serve as proof that the shepherd had not stolen the animal. Likewise, the mention of the corner of a bed and the foot of a couch indicates that an insignificant amount of the wealth of Samaria would remain. Even though God would disempower Israel's leadership and deplete their material resources, a bruised and almost useless remnant would remain. Those who remained in the land would probably comprise commoners and patricians. Thus, the land was occupied by shepherds, farmers, fugitive soldiers, war survivors, professional lamenters, palace singers, and relatives of the dead officials (1:2; 2:14–16; 5:3; 5:16; 6:9–10; 8:3; 2 Chr. 30:1, 6–12; 34:6–9). Those in the diaspora would mainly include members of the religious, military, and political aristocracy as well as their families (Amos 4:1–3; 2 Kin. 17:27–28). But God intended to transform them into a faithful eschatological remnant (see Amos 5:14–15).

3:13–15. Evidence against Israel. God continues presenting the evidence against the nation and describes in more detail the punishment that would follow. He does not identify the invaders but describes their onslaught here. The conquerors would dismantle the religious and political centers of the nation and demolish the altar and its horns, destroying the Bethel sanctuary (v. 14). The invader would also destroy the splendid residences of the aristocracy, mansions and houses adorned and decorated with ivory (v. 15; 1 Kin. 22:39). Excavations at Samaria have unearthed the opulence of these precincts with their plethora of ivory inlays. The imminent devastation combined with the preservation of a remnant (Amos 3:12) expresses the two sides of God's character: justice and mercy.

4:1–13

Refusal to Repent

This prophecy justifies the irrevocable stroke of divine retribution upon Israel. Despite various divine warnings, they refused to repent of their heinous religious and moral misconduct. God rebukes the entire population and especially the authorities of Israel, who had oppressed the needy.

4:1–3. Judgment on the Social Elite. The designation "cows of Bashan" calls to mind the fertile plain in Transjordan known as Bashan, where cows grew well-fed, plump, and healthy (v. 1; cf. Deut. 32:14; Ps. 22:12; Ezek. 39:18). The "cows" are generally understood to denote the leading women of Samaria. However, they may well represent the overindulged and defiant chiefs (cf. Hos. 4:4–6, 16; 5:1; 10:11), who fattened themselves on the poor. Bashan stands for the rich kingdom. The husbands/lords with whom they wished to feast and celebrate their ill-gotten fortune were probably their peers in the regime (Amos 4:1). The title *'adon* ("master," "lord") not only denotes the servant/master relationship but also, less frequently, refers to an esteemed and respected social equal (Gen. 23:6, 11; 32:5–6, 18; 33:8). That is probably the meaning intended here. God describes the coming punishment of the wealthy oppressors using the painful image of fishhooks, representing military defeat (Amos 4:2–3).

4:4–5. False Worship. The Lord next presented the list of transgressions requiring requital. The first transgression was their religious and moral duplicity. The panacea of ritual behavior, manifested in the presentation of animal sacrifices, tithes, and thanksgiving and freewill offerings, substituted for moral behavior. They performed these ritual enactments on a daily basis and every three days at the shrines of Bethel and Gilgal, places of religious importance throughout Israel's history (Gen. 12:8; 28:10–22; 35:1–8; Josh. 4:19–20; 5:2–12; 1 Sam. 7:15–17; 11:14–15). Out of the two, Bethel was the primary national sanctuary in the Northern Kingdom at the time of Amos (Amos 7:13; cf. 1 Kin. 12:26–33). The sarcastic invitation to sin/transgress by bringing sacrifices to the cultic centers serves as a parody of justice and mercy. The leaders apparently assumed that after performing the established rites through which they obtained forgiveness, they could still go on sinning. Ironically, they enacted these rights to compensate for their injustice and exploitation of the vulnerable. Intellectual assent to faith and devotion to religious practices may help to arouse spirituality, but they alone do not avail before God. However, if coupled with repentance, trust, and a moral life in accordance with God's will, they become a blessing. That theoretically sound religion had so little impact on their lives is a travesty. Consequently, the prophet rails heavily against the rupture of cult and moral conduct.

However, although other prophets list idolatry as one of the causes of Israel's fall (2 Kin. 17:5–23; Hos. 2:8, 15, 19; 4:17), Amos does not stress this (but see Amos 5:26). He grapples with the core of the problem: the separation of worship and divine moral standards (i.e., formalistic ritualism devoid of the true fear of the Lord) that results in idolatry and merely human standards (5:4–6, 25–26). Idolatry replaces the image of God, whereas lawlessness and violence deface that image.

4:6–11. Human Impenitence. The second transgression requiring divine requital was willful and obstinate impenitence. Before sending Amos, God had sent seven temporary calamities against the Israelites to condemn their sins, move them to repentance, and restore them. Each calamity represented a preamble of judgment which, if abided by, would have revoked the next calamity and, ultimately, the retribution. Unfortunately, every one of them proved ineffective. First, God sent a famine that covered the entire land (v. 6). Second, He sent a tragic drought (vv. 7–8; 1 Kin. 17:1, 7; 18:5–6). Because He withheld the latter rains three months prior to the harvest in May and June, the yield of crops failed. Moreover, wells and cisterns dried up, causing some people to search for water in other places. But they could not quench their thirst. Despite the havoc, evidence exists that God cared for and protected righteous individuals, such as Elijah, the seven thousand, the widow of Zarephath, and Obadiah (1 Kin. 17:1–24; 18:3–4, 7–8, 12, 16; 19:18). The third and fourth plagues struck the cereal crops (Amos 4:9). Damaging winds of blight (scorching desert winds from the east) and mildew (humid winds from the west) caused the desiccation and withering of the crops (cf. Gen. 41:6; Hag. 2:17). Locusts devoured the most important agricultural products of the land: gardens, vineyards, and fig and olive trees. The fifth scourge, pestilence, alludes to a similar disaster that struck the livestock and the population of Egypt (Amos 4:10; Ex. 9:3–7, 15). Sixth, the Lord slew the young soldiers, together with their captive horses, in the course of battle. The direst of all the calamities occurred last (Amos 4:11). The Lord compares the devastation to that which befell Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19:25, 29), emphasizing the state of ruin of some of

Israel's lands, probably resulting from war. But most of the people remained alive. Apparently, some lands and properties were destroyed, but God, as a token of divine grace, saved the leaders and the population from death's door, like a firebrand plucked from the fire (Amos 4:11). The divine characteristics of justice and mercy always give hope to God's people.

4:12–13. Meeting the Lord. Having presented the evidence for all to see, the Lord found the Israelites guilty of committing willful, brazen transgressions and of resisting His calls to return. After ignoring numerous admonitions, they had missed the opportunity to return to God. Consequently, God signed the sentence. He would not send another announcement of judgment because the final hour was at hand. This dramatic situation mirrors the plagues executed against Egypt. Pharaoh did not heed the warnings of the calamities, hardening his heart instead of relenting. Therefore, the hour came when the Lord brought the worst of the plagues, the death of the firstborn. Paradoxically, those who had once endured Egypt's oppression had now become the oppressors, the embodiment of Pharaoh. Instead of calling for repentance again, the Lord summoned them to the theophany of the "Day of the Lord," a day of divine retribution (4:12). As Creator and Warrior (v. 13), He would mobilize an enemy nation against Israel to forcibly deport the (surviving) members of the aristocracy, the historical remnant, into exile (3:11; 4:2–3). The oath formula stresses the irreversibility and finality of the Day of the Lord: God has sworn by His holiness (4:2).

5:1–27

Justice and Mercy

Amos 5:1–27 portrays God's justice and mercy through the manifestation of the "Day of the Lord" and the establishment of a righteous remnant at the end. Ancient Israel understood justice and mercy to be character traits of God (Job 37:23; Pss. 33:5; 89:14; 103:6; Is. 5:16; Jer. 9:24) that He also required of His people (Pss. 72:1; 106:3; Ezek. 18:5; Mic. 6:8; Zech. 7:9), especially a leader (king, ruler, judge, etc.). These traits served to harmoniously preserve order in society. Justice and mercy refer first and foremost to the establishment of justice, the restoration of morality, and the protection and deliverance of the weak. As Judge and Lawgiver, God used Moses and Aaron to give His people laws that embody justice and mercy (Ps. 99:6–7; Is. 33:22). He commanded any future king to fear Him and obey His commandments, learning them by heart and reading them all the days of his life (Deut. 17:14–20). In Amos, the opposite of justice and mercy is lawlessness (*khamas*) and violence (*shod*; Amos 3:10; 6:3). The transgression of these pillars of society sets in motion God's justice and mercy in a context of judgment, condemnation, and salvation.

5:1–9. Lament and Call. In a short lament, the prophet announces that the Northern Kingdom would never rise again. Only ten percent of the population would survive the decimation of the cities and towns (vv. 2–3). Based on the lament, the Lord called the people to seek Him and not go to Bethel and Gilgal, their centers of false worship. Gilgal would go into exile and Bethel would be totally desolated (vv. 4–5). If the people wanted to live, they had to obey the Lord's urgent call. Otherwise, He would break out like fire to devour the house of Joseph (v. 6). The fire would be unquenchable on account of the people's perversion of justice and righteousness on the earth.

Seeking the Lord implies repenting, returning to God, and trusting in His salvation and providence instead of in self-sufficiency, human power, or a religious system (4:6, 8–11; 5:4–6, 22–23; 6:1, 13). It also connotes a total dedication to a moral life; that is, seeking and loving justice and mercy (5:7, 24; 6:12). Although the sinful kingdom of Israel would inevitably meet its end, God offered life to all on an individual basis. As the Creator and Sustainer of the earth, the Lord has the power to destroy the strong and accomplish His design (5:9).

5:10–15. Sin, the Lord, and the Remnant. Amos provides more specific reasons to seek the Lord—all of them based on the sins of the powerful. The gates served as places where the poor and needy could seek justice, but those in power were not interested in justice. They hated those who spoke the truth (v. 10). The powerful exploited the poor. They selfishly acquired wealth to build beautiful houses and plant wonderful vineyards. But because of the impending catastrophe, they would not live in those houses or drink wine from those vineyards. The Lord knew very well that they lacked integrity and abused the poor. Many quietly suffered under such evil circumstances (v. 13). The only way out was for the people to stop and seek good instead of evil so that they might live (v. 14).

The call to seek the Lord transitions the topic back to the remnant. The historical remnant, introduced in vv. 1–3, could become a righteous (eschatological) remnant, crediting their existence to God's grace (vv. 14–15). In this case the Hebrew term *'ulai* ("perhaps," "it may be") could mean "hopefully," denoting a hope rooted in God's generosity/mercy and, therefore, likely to happen (Gen. 16:2; 32:21; 1 Sam. 9:7; 14:6, 12–14; Zeph. 2:3). The hope of justice being restored at the gate resided with them.

5:16–27. The Day of the Lord. The Lord announces the Day of the Lord by describing the wailing that would occur throughout the land (v. 16). Those who expected its coming hoped for the light of a new day, but they would be surprised to receive absolute darkness (v. 18). God compared the terrors of that day to running from a lion only to find a bear ahead or finding safety at home only to be bitten by a snake while leaning on the wall (v. 19). He would bring military defeat (vv. 2–3, 9) and exile beyond the territory of Aram (v. 27) to destroy the oppressors in Israel, as well as their sources of power and wealth (v. 17).

The last part of Amos 5 returns to the topic of worship in the context of the Day of the Lord, as if to provide another reason for that event. Since His people had separated ritual performance from justice, the Lord rejected their celebrations of the annual festivals, their sacrifices, and their songs of praise (vv. 21–24). He posed a rhetorical question to underline the limited value of sacrifices (v. 25). During the wilderness period, the people and God enjoyed a strong relationship without an emphasis on sacrifices. Thus, a righteous life took priority over nominal, ritual practices. Verse 26 is difficult to interpret. It could refer to a "shrine," a "tabernacle," or "the pedestal for an idol," but it more likely refers to the specific names of two astral deities. On the Day of the Lord, the people and their gods would go into exile together.

6:1–14

Inwardly-Directed Attitudes

This oracle addressed the distinguished elite of Zion (cf. 2:4–5) and Samaria (cf. 3:12, 15; 4:1), who lived a carefree and secure lifestyle. Overall, Amos condemns core sentiments because they thwarted any recognition of personal sin and shut off the voice of God.

6:1–8. People at Ease. The Israelites experienced all the ease, comfort, and security that material prosperity, military strength, and systematic religion could provide. But Amos called them to reflect on what was happening around them—to go and observe Calneh (also Kalneh), Hamath, and Gath (v. 2). The Assyrians destroyed Calneh and Hamath, while Gath fell to King Uzziah of Judah (2 Chr. 26:6). The Israelites were not superior to or better off than these defeated kingdoms. They, too, would soon receive the onslaught of the Assyrian blow.

Pleasure and excess were the hallmarks of Israelite society. The selfish pursuit of luxury, idleness, gluttony, and extravagance in drinking and music hindered fellowship with God. The rich lounged on couches decorated with precious ivory, ate the best meat, and lavishly imbibed wine, all while listening to soothing music played on harps. They anointed themselves with the finest oils and used cosmetics as a sign of self-sufficiency and wealth (Amos 6:4–6). In v. 3, Amos uses the phrase *yom ra'* as another name for the Day of the Lord. The term *ra'* often means "evil," but it can also connote the idea of "calamity," "doom," or "disaster." In addition to the lack of justice and mercy (vv. 3, 12), their privileged attitudes and sheer lack of concern over the imminent calamity (v. 6) provoked the divine visitation.

Self-confidence and self-indulgence left little room for God (v. 8). The army of Samaria was alienated from God, following its own military interest. They viewed their conquest of Lo Debar and Karnaim as a testament to their military strength (v. 13). The Lord abhorred their pride (a form of idolatry; v. 8; cf. Prov. 8:13) and was ready to destroy the palace and the city (Amos 5:21–23; 6:8).

6:8–14. Demolition of Houses. Through the agency of another nation, God would bring Israel to its knees. The enemy would demolish their houses; annihilate the wicked chiefs, their wives, and their children; and deport the people into captivity (6:7–9, 11; 7:17). The oppression would reach all the way to the northern and southern boundaries of the Northern Kingdom, the entrance of Hamath/Lebo Hamath, and the Valley of the Arabah (6:14; 2 Kin. 14:25). They would lose all the land they had previously reconquered. However, as a token of divine mercy, a remnant would survive. The remnant would include relatives who would perform the burial ceremonies for the dead chiefs (cf. 1 Sam. 31:12–13; 2

Chr. 16:14; 21:19). Because of death's pollution, they would not invoke the name of the Lord in the houses of the deceased (Amos 6:9–10).

7:1—8:15

VISIONS OF DIVINE RETRIBUTION

7:1–17

Mercy for Israel and Justice for Evildoers

The visions in Amos 7:1–17 focus on God's use of the natural world and human affairs as agents to judge His people. The Lord did not expunge Israel's guilt, but He alleviated the punishment. He expressed both justice and kindness in determining to destroy property and the evildoers and to exile others. Amos trusted in the righteousness of God's judgment.

7:1–6. Locusts and Fire. The plague of locusts Amos saw would threaten the agricultural land. The late crop was the harvest after the late spring rains (v. 1; Ex. 10:15). It consisted of vegetables and other non-grain produce. A locust attack on the crop would create an agricultural disaster, potentially resulting in a famine so devastating that the entire population would die, leaving no surviving remnant. Therefore, Amos interceded for the people, and God listened to him.

Blazing fire and heat would cause the desiccation of the soil, resulting in a drought. These conditions would also lead to hunger and the extermination of the people. Consequently, Amos again interceded on behalf of the remnant, and God, in His mercy, listened to him. These visions reveal God's divine disposition to show mercy to His people.

7:7–9. The Plumb Line. Amos's third vision is difficult to interpret because the meaning of the Hebrew term *'anak*, traditionally rendered "plumb line," is uncertain. It appears only in this passage. Scholars have found a similar Akkadian term (*annaku*) that means "tin," but they debate how this meaning would fit into the context of Amos. The translation "plumb line," an item used to construct a vertically straight wall, better fits the context. A plumb line has a weight that could have been made of tin. This could make "the tin" an idiom referring to a plumb line. In the vision, it represents God examining His people to establish whether they were morally and spiritually upright. He would no longer ignore or even forgive their sins (v. 8). The Lord would come as a Warrior with His sword against the dynasty of Jeroboam and would destroy their multiple places of worship (v. 9).

7:10–17. The Penalty. King Jeroboam and Amaziah the priest responded by opposing Amos's message. As a result, they and their offspring would receive the death penalty. Assyria would conquer the nation and exile some of the population (7:11, 17; 2 Kin. 15:29; 18:9–12).

8:1–14

Vision of the Summer Fruit

Amos's fourth vision proclaimed the end of Israel. The content of the vision itself precedes three oracles explaining its significance, each one introduced by "in that day" or a similar phrase (vv. 9, 11, 13).

8:1–8. Doomsday. The message of the vision revolves around a play on words. The Hebrew *qayits* ("summer fruit") and *qets* ("end") resemble each other in orthography and in pronunciation. Israel was like a summer fruit ready for the harvest, but that harvest symbolized its end, the collapse of the kingdom (vv. 1–3). This time Amos describes the judgment as carnage accompanied by natural phenomena and lamentation. Despite heaps of corpses strewn everywhere, the Lord would demand silence from all in recognition of their guilt and rebellion. No one would invoke the name of God, because He had brought about everything they experienced as punishment for their religious and moral duplicity (v. 3; cf. 5:13; 6:10; see commentary on 4:1–13; 5:1–9, 10–15, 16–27).

A focus on religious doctrine and ritual at the expense of God's moral demands resulted in lawlessness and violence. On the new moon (Num. 29:7; 2 Kin. 4:23; Is. 66:23; Hos. 2:11) the Israelites discontinued work and trade (Amos 8:5) as they did on the weekly Sabbath (Ex. 20:8-11; 23:12; 31:15; Lev. 23:3), but they violated the commandments requiring justice, mercy, and the use of honest scales, weights, and measures (Amos 8:5; cf. Lev. 19:35–36; Prov. 11:1; Ezek. 45:10–11). Merchants measured grain using an ephah smaller than the normal thirty-nine liters (10.3 gallons) but measured their payment using a shekel heavier than the normal eleven grams (.02 pounds or .39 ounces). Because of this fraud, the buyer received too little and paid too much. The

merchants also sold the gleanings, the fallen grapes designated as food for the poor (Amos 8:6; Ex. 23:11; Lev. 19:10; 23:2; Deut. 15:9). The Lord would not forget or ignore the sins of the people and would act accordingly. The prophet's proclamation should have instilled fear in their hearts, but they apparently remained unimpressed (Amos 8:7–8).

8:9–10. Nature and Mourning. Divine retribution would take the form of an earthquake and a solar eclipse (8:9). The imagery of waters in upheaval (surging, swirling, and sinking) depicts the rise and fall of the earth's surface during an earthquake (9:5). The ancient world considered eclipses as representing the anger of the gods. These disasters would bring about a complete reversal of normal conditions. The people, possibly the professional "wailing women," would chant dirges, and survivors would perform mourning rites as an expression of sorrow, national disaster, and loss of divine protection (8:10; cf. Jer. 9:17).

8:11–15. Expectation. Beginning with the phrase "the days are coming," the oracle in Amos 8:11–15 suggests an intermediate phase of the Day of the Lord (see 5:1–3, 14–15), a time of spiritual awakening and crucial choices due to the unavailability of prophecy and shrines (8:11; cf. 1 Kin. 8:46–53). As an act of grace, the survivors would have another chance. The downfall of the political, economic, and religious powers would enable them to undergo a process of testing, shaking, and sifting (Amos 9:9), whether in the native land or in exile. Without sanctuary, ephod, teraphim, or oracle, God would be inaccessible (Hos. 3:4; 5:6), and the people would experience divine abandonment. While waiting for restoration, some would lose their hope in God, but others would repent, confess their sins, and look forward to their deliverance and the establishment of God's kingdom (cf. Dan. 9:3–19). Throughout this period, God would remain sovereign over the times and seasons, awaiting the due time to inaugurate a new action in history, reunite His people, and restore all things anew (see Amos 9:11–15).

During this time, those who engaged in the syncretistic cult at Dan and Bethel and who made pilgrimages to Beersheba would fall among the condemned (8:13–14; cf. 2:11; 4:10; 5:2; 1 Kin. 12:28–30; Hos. 8:6). Hosea compares the devastation of abandoned Israel to a parched land whose inhabitants die of thirst (Hos. 2:3; cf. Ezek. 19:12–13). Accordingly, the imagery of death by thirst in Amos 8:13 may serve as a metaphor to depict the tragic death of impenitent sinners.

9:1–15

ORACLES ON SURVIVAL AND RENEWAL

The book closes with a vivid description of judgment against the Northern Kingdom (9:1–6), followed by promises of renewal and hope (vv. 7–15). God never runs out of mercy and grace if only humans would listen to Him.

9:1–6. God's Word of Judgment. The last chapter of Amos begins by stressing the finality of God's judgment against Israel, a divine blow that He would personally inflict as Creator and Sovereign Lord over the cosmos. Amos depicts God as standing by the altar of the northern temple—not as a mediator to make atonement but as an enemy ready to annihilate the sanctuary and the religious/political culprits (v. 1; see also 7:7; Ex. 17:9). The Lord would end all contact with His people. From Sheol ("the tomb," "the depths," "hell") to the heavens and from the top of Carmel to the bottom of the sea, there is nowhere to flee to escape from His judgment (Amos 9:2–3). Divine agency is thus linked to the idea of God's cosmic presence.

9:7–10. Judgment and Survival. God's impartiality is universal. Just as God had saved Israel and the nations (the Ethiopians, Philistines, and Aramaeans) each through its own exodus, so, too, would He hold each accountable for its crimes on the "Day of the Lord." The Northern Kingdom would come to an end. In Amos, the term "Israel," also called "Jacob" (3:13; 6:8; 7:2, 5; 8:7; 9:8), "Isaac" (7:9, 16), and "My people Israel," denotes strictly the Northern Kingdom (cf. Hos. 11:12). Although Israel would suffer material and human loss and oppression, a historical remnant would survive both in exile and in the land and would undergo a sifting process of evaluation and selection (Amos 5:3; 9:8–9; cf. 8:11–12). God compared this process to a sieve that retains grain. Throughout the time of expectation for the eschatological restoration, He would remove the rubbish (i.e., the sinners) to perish but preserve the fine grain (i.e., the righteous who had recommitted to the Lord) to join the ranks of the end-time kingdom.

9:11–15. Restoration. God's final message to His people communicates a promise to save the people and give them righteous leaders (cf. Prov. 2:21–22). He would restore the palace, their property, their joy, and the abundant fertility of the land (cf. Lev. 26:5). The phrases "that day" and "the days are coming" represent not only a time of retribution but also an eschatological time of restoration. This is the only place in the OT that the tabernacle/shelter/booth of David occurs. It is unlikely that it designates a royal residence. It could mean the same as the "house of David" (that is, the Davidic dynasty; 2 Sam. 3:1, 8, 10; 1 Kin. 12:19–20; 2 Chr. 10:19), or it could refer to the kingdom, united under David but now fallen, that the Lord would restore under a messianic David. After the establishment of the kingdom, his heirs would gain authority over the righteous remnant of Edom and all the other nations. The nations that have God's name would not only belong to Him but would also embrace the religious and ethical values necessary for a covenantal relationship with Him, including care, compassion, and justice (Amos 9:12; cf. Deut. 28:8–10; Prov. 21:3; Is. 63:19; Hos. 2:19; 12:7; Joel 2:32; Zech. 7:9). Amos specifically includes Edom in this group of *goyim* ("nations," "Gentiles"; cf. 1 Kin. 8:43). James and the early church understood this passage as evidence that Gentiles could receive full membership among God's people without first having to become Jews (Acts 15:13–21). This remnant would constitute the remnant of Joseph, that is, the eschatological people of God.

The motif of the remnant is present in every chapter of the book (Amos 1:5, 15; 2:16; 3:12; 4:2–3, 6–11; 5:3, 13–17, 27; 6:7, 9–10; 7:8–9, 11, 17; 8:3, 8, 10–12; 9:8–15). The eschatological remnant would be both exclusive, because its members would be righteous, and inclusive, because its members would comprise all ethnicities. The righteous of Israel, Judah, Edom, and all the nations would inherit God's end-time kingdom. The book of Amos, filled with prophesies of doom announcing the collapse of the Northern Kingdom, closes with a message of hope proclaiming the final victory of God's mercy in a world of social injustice, moral corruption, and rebellious sin.

OBADIAH

INTRODUCTION

Title and Authorship. Obadiah contains only twenty-one verses, making it the shortest book in the OT. The title of the book comes from the first line, *khazon 'obadjah* ("the vision of Obadiah"). The name Obadiah means "servant of the Lord," and some have suggested that it may be a generic way of referring to a prophet rather than the specific name of the author. However, Obadiah is a common name in the OT, referring to more than ten different individuals. Therefore it is most likely the actual name of the prophet, whose very name would constantly remind his listeners of the divine source of his message.

Date. Based on the content of the book and its near-parallel passage in Jeremiah 49:7–22, most interpreters place Obadiah in the first half of the sixth century, after the Babylonian army destroyed Jerusalem in 586 B.C. and before Babylon's war against Edom in 553 B.C. The vivid description of the fall of Jerusalem and the plight of its people at the hand of Edom may suggest a date shortly after the city's destruction, perhaps around 585–580 B.C. However, the ancient conflict between Israel and Edom allows for an earlier date (cf. Amos 1:11–12).

Backgrounds. Obadiah lived during one of the most traumatic periods in Israel's history, shortly after the fall of the Southern Kingdom of Judah. Centuries before, the nation had divided into two separate kingdoms, Israel in the north and Judah in the south. In 722 B.C. Assyria conquered the Northern Kingdom and exiled many of its citizens. Less than 150 years later, in 586 B.C., the Southern Kingdom of Judah met a similar fate. Babylon defeated Judah and burned Jerusalem, the capital city, and its magnificent temple to the ground (2 Kin. 25:9). The small neighboring nation of Edom, Judah's brother and longtime rival, helped sack Jerusalem and gloated over Judah's defeat. Obadiah wrote his book to bring renewed hope when all hope seemed lost.

Theology and Purpose. The theology of this short book emerges from its two central themes: the divine judgment of wicked nations and the establishment of God's kingdom.

1. Edom and the Nations. Obadiah focuses his message on Edom, a relatively unimportant nation on the world stage. Edom sided with Babylon in the war against Judah, identifying itself with those who destroy God's people (cf. Ps. 137:7–8). Obadiah decries conflict that respects no boundaries, demolishes family ties, and makes humans cruel and inhumane. This ungodly treatment of others occurs not only at a national level but also at a personal level. When humans inflict pain on others or refuse to help them, they violate a basic principle of Christianity (cf. Matt. 7:12). The phenomenon is universal, and Edom/Esau merely serves as a symbol of all who fight against the Lord and His people. They rejoice prematurely in their partial and temporary victory, unaware of the coming of a more powerful kingdom.

2. Edom's Punishment. As God works out His plan in the cosmic controversy, He humbles the proud and lifts up the humble. Pride is the root of all sin, the very essence of transgression (cf. Is. 14:12–20; Ezek. 28:11–19). It eliminates any sense of need that humans have and produces feelings of superiority, ruining their life-giving relationship with their Creator and ultimately making them insensitive and cruel toward others. Humility, on the other hand, recognizes the need for a life-giving relationship with God and results in care and concern for others. God condemned Edom's pride and how they rejoiced over the captivity of God's people (Obad. 11–12). It would lead to the undoing of the whole nation. The Day of the Lord against the nations was yet to come (v. 15).

3. Jerusalem and Judah's Restoration. God promised restoration not merely to replace one earthly nation with another but to restore the kingdom of God in the world. In a preliminary restoration, God would return His people to their home as He promised their forefathers. At that time the land would become safe, it would support life, and peace would ensue. The Savior, representing the presence of God Himself among His people, would accomplish this (v. 21). Thus, Obadiah's prophecy anticipates and symbolizes the final restoration of the earth itself, when God would establish His kingdom in the world (cf. Rev. 21). It moves from the regional (Edom) to the universal, culminating in the return of God's people, the rule of the saviors/deliverers (Heb. *moshi'im* from *moshia'*) from Mount Zion, and the restoration of the Lord's kingdom (Obad. 19–21).

Literary Features. Obadiah wrote his prophecy in poetic form. It displays a certain rhythm and cadence when read in its original language. Hebrew poetry frequently repeats thoughts for heightened effect, a feature known as parallelism. For example, in v. 8 Edom and "the mountains of Esau" (lit. "Mount Esau") refer to the same place. Hebrew also uses repetition for emphasis or dramatic effect. For example, vv. 12–14 contain the word *'al* ("not") eight times for emphasis. This builds up in a crescendo of persuasion (a similar technique is used in Prov. 30:18–31; Amos 1–2).

Additionally, familiar expressions serve as formulas to help explain what follows. For example, in the ancient world servants proclaiming an edict or proclamation of the reigning king would use a messenger formula similar to Obadiah 1. Obadiah and other prophets used this formula to indicate that their message came from the one true King, the Sovereign Lord. Moreover, they used standard expressions to indicate an important subject. For example, "the day of the LORD" (v. 15) generally introduces prophetic announcements regarding final events. Such literary devices are telltale clues to what follows.

COMMENTARY

1–4

Introduction and Message of Doom

The book of Obadiah recounts a vision (*khazon*). Of the two terms used to describe a prophetic vision, *ro'eh* and *khozeh*, the former generally refers to the visionary experience of the prophet, while the latter typically focuses on the content of a special revelation given to the prophet in vision. Obadiah, the messenger, attributes his message to God. He is not venting personal hostility toward Edom but announcing what divine revelation showed him.

The originator of the message, the Lord God, is identified by His personal name, *yahweh* (translated as "LORD"), as well as the title *'adonai* ("Lord"), indicating that God is Lord of the whole world. Some understand the recipient of the message to be Edom, but in this case *le-edom* (lit. "to Edom") probably means "concerning Edom" or "about Edom." The plural "we have heard" confirms that the recipients were the surrounding nations, including the people of Judah, called to listen to God's message. The report/message concerned all the nations in the region and the role Edom played among them. They would humiliate Edom, thereby ending its arrogance and pride. The Hebrew verb *qum* ("rise"), repeated for emphasis, expresses God's command to the nations to mobilize for a battle against Edom.

The reversal of fortunes from arrogance to humility is a familiar theme in the prophetic books (cf. Is. 14:12–23; Ezek. 28:1–19). God brings the proud low, regardless of the heights to which they have ascended (Obad. 2–3). Those who lived in the rock clefts were Edomites who inhabited the caves and crags of the massive mountains found in Edom (v. 3). The word *sela* ("rock") may specifically refer to the Edomite site by the same name, which Judah had captured much earlier (2 Kin. 14:7), or it could represent the entire territory of Edom.

The first part of Obadiah's vision concludes by comparing Edom to a soaring eagle (Obad. 4). Here the eagle represents national strength (cf. Ezek. 17:1–21) not only because of its plumage and the power of its talons but also because it builds its nest on the highest pinnacles. However, the Lord declares His intention to bring the eagle down from its lofty position. This illustrates one of the central, universal messages of the book: God will humble the proud.

5–7

Complete Destruction

Given Edom's pride and sense of security, their fall would seem stunning and almost inexplicable. But the higher the eagle soars, the further it will fall (v. 4). Obadiah prophesies Edom's total destruction using two familiar images: thieves coming to steal in the night and grape gatherers working during the day (v. 5). Edom would not be safe during either the night or the day.

God had instructed harvesters to leave some of the crop for the poor to glean (v. 5; cf. Lev. 19:9–10; Ruth 2:2–3, 7). But the destruction of Edom would leave nothing in the houses or the fields.

In commenting upon this remarkable punishment, Obadiah refers to the story of Edom's ancestor, Esau, Jacob's brother (Obad. 7; Gen. 27). Deception followed deception in the life of Jacob and his family. In the end he felt obliged to return large gifts from his flocks to appease his angry brother (Gen. 32:1–21). Obadiah hints at these stories in his prediction that Esau/Edom's former confederates (lit. "all the men of your covenant") would remove all their possessions and drive the people of Edom to its national borders (Obad. 7). The friends in whom Edom once trusted would now become enemies. Pride breeds deception, and deception leads to destruction. Eventually that fate overtakes the proud everywhere.

8–14

Edom's Offense: The Heart of the Matter

The expression *ne'um yahweh* (lit. "the declaration of the Lord"), frequently used throughout the prophets, introduces the third part of Obadiah's message, underscoring the divine authority behind the message. The passage describes the impending punishment (vv. 8, 9), the charge against Edom (vv. 10, 11), and the violations against Jacob, Edom's brother (vv. 12–14).

8–9. The Punishment. "That day" in v. 8 might refer to the "day of the LORD," when the Lord would restore Zion to its former glory (v. 15). However, here it more likely refers to the immediately preceding description of the punishment of Edom, a catastrophe caused by the absence of understanding in a land traditionally known for its wisdom (v. 8; Job 4:1; Jer. 49:7). God would destroy the wise in Edom and understanding on Mount Esau (Obad. 8; cf. 1 Cor. 1:18–30). The latter is not otherwise identified and could refer to Mount Seir or Mount Teman. However, the parallel construction shows that it refers to the entire country. The lack of Esau's understanding alludes to his foolish decision to sell his birthright for food (Gen. 25:29–34). Without understanding, they would lose the battle. First the warriors and then everyone in the city (Teman) and throughout the country would be cut down. In the OT, a lack of understanding, rather than a lack of power, frequently leads to personal or national defeat (cf. 2 Sam. 16:23; 17:14).

10–11. The Charge Against Edom. God clearly spells out the reason for punishing Edom: they had committed violence against a brother (Jacob) that reached unimaginable proportions (vv. 10–11). That is not how brothers should relate to each other. Specifically, Edom stood by or even assisted the Babylonians when they attacked Jerusalem. By taking the side of the enemy, Edom became like one of the Babylonians, a foreigner who acceded to Judah and Jerusalem's defeat. Edom helped decide Jerusalem's fate, treating it like an object to "cast lots" (i.e., gamble) over (v. 11). They had broken the bond of brotherhood.

Therefore, what Edom did to Judah would now happen to them. They would be covered with shame (v. 10). Those without clothing normally suffered shame (Gen. 3:7, 10, 21), so conquerors customarily stripped their defeated enemies naked for all to gloat over (Obad. 12). As punishment for crimes against a brother, Edom would be stripped bare.

12–14. Principles Violated. As though sensing questions about the severity of this punishment, God lays out eight prohibitions that Edom violated. The Hebrew negative *'al* ("not") indicates a strong, categorical prohibition. Here God directs these prohibitions specifically at Edom's offences at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem. The total number of eight highlights the seriousness of Edom's unbrotherly conduct: (1) They gazed on/gloated over their brother's captivity. (2) They rejoiced over the destruction of Judah. (3) They spoke proudly at the time of Judah's distress. (Boasting, always wrong, is particularly hateful when it occurs at a family member's expense.) (4) They entered Jerusalem's gates on the day of disaster. (By doing so, Edom joined the Babylonians.) (5) They gazed on/gloated over Judah's suffering, finding pleasure in harm done to others. (6) They laid hands on Judah's possessions, stealing from the defenseless on the day of their greatest need. (7) They cut off/destroyed those who escaped. (8) They delivered up/handed over the remnant of survivors, taking the escaping fugitives captive or, worse yet, selling them into slavery.

In his vision, Obadiah experienced the disastrous event of Jerusalem's destruction as though it were current, reliving its pain, and so described the prohibitions as they would have applied at the time of the offense. The family is a sacred unit, making hatred toward brothers or sisters particularly offensive. When love turns to hate, it respects no bounds.

15–18
Reversal of Fortunes

This section begins with the prophet announcing the approaching Day of the Lord for all nations (v. 15). He transitions from the previous judgment gradually, as though unable to leave behind the horrors of the eight prohibitions without a backward glance. The prophet announces judgment on the nations (vv. 15–16) and the deliverance of Zion (vv. 17–18).

15–16. Judgment on the Nations: The Day of the Lord. The Prophet Amos had first prophesied about the Day of the Lord nearly two hundred years before Obadiah (Amos 5:18–20; cf. Is. 13:6–13), so the expression was familiar to at least some of the covenant people. It refers to the day (time) of the end, when God will enter history to determine its outcome, saving His people and punishing the enemy. Unlike "that day" for Edom (Obad. 8), the Day of the Lord would be universal—the day when the Lord Himself would judge all nations and restore the whole world. This phrase connects the local conflict between Judah and Edom with the worldwide conflict between good and evil and with God's judgment upon all nations (v. 16). Obadiah compares this judgment to drinking God's cup of wrath. As Edom had drunk to celebrate victory on God's holy mountain (Zion; v. 16), so all the nations, including Edom, would continually drink the cup of defeat/wrath. For those opposed to the Lord, this cup would contain a curse (cf. Rev. 14:10) leading to drunkenness and judgment that would render them as though they had never existed (Obad. 16). However, for followers of God, drinking from the cup He provides results in blessing (cf. Ps. 23:5). The consequence of drinking from God's cup depends on whether one drinks with a heart of confession and commitment or a heart of unbelief and denial (cf. 1 Cor. 11:27–29).

17–18. Deliverance from Zion. On that day only Mount Zion would be secure, but it would make the whole world a safe and holy place (on the centrality of Zion on the Day of the Lord, see Is. 2; Ezek. 40–48; Mic. 4). From there God would teach all nations His law, and they would beat their weapons into farming tools (Is. 2:1–5; Mic. 4:1–5). Zion would be God's holy mountain—a house of worship for all (cf. Is. 56:7).

The house of Jacob refers to the family of the patriarch, the twelve tribes, and thus to the whole nation of Israel (Obad. 18). The house of Joseph would again constitute part of the house of Jacob, as when Jacob blessed his descendants (cf. Gen. 48:5). The northern and southern tribes would reunite and, like a fire, burn everything in their path, including Edom. In a reversal of fortunes, Edom would end and the land and people of Israel would be restored. This foreshadows the outcome of the final conflict between good and evil. God would banish wickedness forever and exalt His people. This section concludes with the assurance that the Lord has spoken (Obad. 18b).

19–21
Restoration of Land and People

The ultimate goal of God's judgment was not the destruction of Edom but the restoration of Judah and all Israel. The people of Israel would retake possession of areas that had fallen into the hands of others since the period of the united monarchy. The people of the Negev, the southern desert between the Arabah Valley and the Sinai Desert, would occupy the southernmost part of Transjordan (the land east of the Jordan River), including Edom (v. 19). To the west, the inhabitants of the Shephelah, the lowlands/hill country between the Judean mountains and the coastal plain, would inhabit the land of the Philistines (v. 19), including Ephraim and Samaria, areas once controlled by Philistine outposts. Benjamin, just north of Jerusalem, would possess the northern part of Transjordan, known as Gilead. Israelite exiles would return to the Holy Land and possess the northwest as far as Zarephath by Sidon (v. 20). Finally, captives from Jerusalem in faraway Sepharad, perhaps in the distant north, would return to the south. This redistribution of the promised land to displaced Israelites would once again unite land and people within Israel's original borders.

In the center of it all, saviors/deliverers would rule from Mount Zion over Edom and all the territory Israel held during the golden age of David and Solomon, from Dan to Beersheba and from the eastern desert to the western sea. This vision of Israel's future was never realized, even when Judah returned from exile and restored Jerusalem a few decades after Obadiah. Sadly, the restored Judah was just as disobedient as before. However, the vision anticipates a future endtime kingdom as promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The destruction of Edom would merely pave the way for the restoration of the righteous in a kingdom belonging to the Lord (v. 21). This promise has become the advent hope of those who wait for the Messiah to return. The resolution of the conflict between Edom and Judah represents a future when God's eternal kingdom, populated by God's faithful children throughout the ages, will replace all the nations of this world.

JONAH

INTRODUCTION

Title and Authorship. In Hebrew this book is titled *yonah*, the name of the Prophet Jonah, which means "dove." Jonah was the son of Amittai from Gath Hepher in the territory of the tribe of Zebulun (Jon. 1:1; 2 Kin. 14:25). Unlike many other prophetic books, the book of Jonah does not specify its author. Though it tells Jonah's story, another person could have written it using material from the prophet himself. This would explain why the narrative is written in the third person.

Date. Jonah prophesied in the first half of the eighth century B.C., during the reign of King Jeroboam II of Israel (793–753 B.C.; 2 Kin. 14:23–27). Sometime during this period, God sent the prophet to Assyria, the major foreign power at the time, to prophesy in the city of Nineveh. The author states that Nineveh "was" a large city (Jon. 3:3). Some suggest that the use of "was" implies that, by the time the book was written, Nineveh was no longer large. This would point to a time after the fall of the city in 612 B.C. However, the likelihood that the book was written in the Northern Kingdom would point to a date before Israel and Samaria fell to Assyria in 722 B.C.

Backgrounds. During the reign of Jeroboam II, Israel experienced a period of territorial expansion and economic growth, developments that Jonah interpreted as God's will (2 Kin. 14:25). However, other prophets during this period of prosperity denounced the injustices and rampant materialism that arose (see Amos 2:6–8; 4:1–3). Against this background, the book of Jonah reveals a prophet willing to announce God's blessing on Israel but not His positive involvement with the nations.

No independent historical evidence exists for Jonah's ministry in Nineveh. However, some have plausibly suggested that events in Assyria during this period might reflect his ministry or provide a context for its acceptance. For example, Adad-Nirari III (ca. 810–783 B.C.) introduced religious reforms that shifted away from traditional polytheism. Also, several plagues and a solar eclipse occurred during the reign of Ashur-Dan (ca. 772–755 B.C.). These might have predisposed the Ninevites to accept Jonah's message. The title "king of Nineveh" in Jonah 3:6 may suggest a local ruler rather than an emperor since Nineveh did not become the capital of Assyria until the time of Sennacherib (705–682 B.C.). So the emperor did not live there at that time.

Theology and Purpose. The book of Jonah presents a more complex theology than its length or apparent simplicity might suggest. It covers three main areas: the sovereignty of God, God's people and the people of the world, and the compassion of God.

1. The Sovereignty of God. Jonah sums up the extent of God's sovereignty when he states that he fears/worships "the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land" (1:9). As Creator, God has dominion over creation. He sent a great wind on the sea (1:4), prepared (Heb. *manah*) a great fish to swallow Jonah (1:17), commanded the fish to deposit Jonah on dry ground (2:10), prepared (*manah*) a plant to shade Jonah's head (4:6), prepared (*manah*) a worm to destroy the plant (4:7), and then prepared (*manah*) an east wind to beat on Jonah's head (4:8). Significantly, in each case creation immediately obeyed. God also showed His sovereignty in His role as Judge. He told Jonah to denounce Nineveh, a city He had judged to be wicked (1:2). When God renewed this commission, Jonah proclaimed a message of destruction against the city (3:4). Yet the sovereign Judge also saved Nineveh from destruction (3:10), just as He used the fish to save Jonah from drowning (1:17; 2:10). In the absence of hope, God creates hope for all.

2. God's People and the People of the World. The heart of the book's radical message concerns how God relates to His chosen people on the one hand and to the nations on the other. The author communicates this message through a series of striking comparisons and contrasts. In chapter 1, while the pagan sailors prayed, Jonah, the Israelite prophet, slept (1:5). Using the same Hebrew verbs which God used to call Jonah at the outset—*qum* and *qara'* (1:6; cf. v. 2)—the ship's captain roused Jonah from his slumber and told him to pray to his God. The captain understood that when life is threatened and hope seems to fade away, prayer provides the most important refuge. In this respect, the pagan mariners appear more spiritually aware than Jonah. Moreover, God answered the prayers of both the Gentiles (1:14–15) and the Israelite (2:2), saving both from the storm. Jonah's rejection of God's word in chapter 1 contrasts with the positive response of Nineveh to God's word in chapter 3. In both chapters, the ship's Gentile captain (chap. 1) and the Gentile king of Nineveh (chap. 3) humbly submitted to the will of God. They did not try to dictate His actions (1:6; 3:9). By contrast, the salvation of Nineveh angered Jonah, who refused to accept God's will (4:1–3). These and other comparisons and contrasts challenge Jonah's view that only God's chosen people should receive His compassion and grace.

3. The Compassion of God. Jonah summed up the depth of God's compassion, affirming His attributes of grace, mercy, slowness to anger, abundant kindness, and long-suffering patience before bringing judgment (4:2b). The prophet quoted Exodus 34:6–7 in confessing that he had disobeyed because of God's well-known compassion (Jon. 4:2a). The plot of the whole book revolves around the consequences of Jonah's rejection of God's compassion for others. Jonah did not want to extend the hope of life to the nations. Yet Jonah himself received God's compassion. God prepared a fish to rescue him from certain death and implicitly forgave his initial rejection of God's call by renewing it the second time (3:1). His experience parallels Nineveh's. Despite their moral offenses, the Ninevites experienced God's compassion when He responded to their repentance by explicitly forgiving them (3:10). God heard the sincere cry of sinners and relented (3:9–10). Indeed, the abounding compassion of God, an expression of His loving-kindness (Heb. *khesed*), continues to give hope to sinful human beings who repent and run to Him.

Nineveh

Nineveh was a large city in Assyria, an empire with a legendary reputation for ruthlessness and barbarity. The prophets frequently prophesied about God's future judgment on Nineveh/Assyria. The entire book of Nahum addresses the issue (see also Mic. 5:6; Zeph. 2:13). Situated on the Tigris River, Nineveh exerted a strong political influence for several centuries. In Jonah's time it had not yet reached its golden age as the Assyrian capital under Sennacherib (705–682 B.C.). Nevertheless, it had already achieved considerable power. The Assyrians conquered the Northern Kingdom of Israel in 722 B.C., and Nineveh itself fell to a Babylonian and Median coalition in 612 B.C.

Literary Features. Jonah is one of the most accomplished literary works in the Bible. It is meticulously structured, with each part of the book preparing for or echoing another. This is most obvious when comparing chapter 1 with chapter 3 and chapter 2 with chapter 4. However, important interconnections extend beyond those pairings. The use of chiasms (see 1:4–16) achieves an accomplished balance and symmetry. Subtle repetitions of key terms (e.g., "arise" and "call"/"cry out") underline important themes. The use of wordplays and words with more than one connotation (e.g., "overthrow") keep the reader alert to deeper meaning in the text. The author artfully crafts allusions to other passages of Scripture into the narrative, suggesting numerous comparisons and contrasts to guide interpretation. Finally, the large number of questions (see 1:10; 3:9; 4:11) shows that the book is less concerned with telling readers what to do or believe and more with asking them how they might respond to its challenging message.

COMMENTARY

1:1–16
God's Word and Jonah's Response

God told Jonah to go to Nineveh, but he disobeyed and fled by ship (1:1–3). A great storm threatened to wreck the ship, and the terrified pagan sailors discovered that God had sent it to punish Jonah (vv. 4–7). Jonah confessed his faith in the Lord and requested that the sailors throw him overboard (vv. 8–15a). The sea immediately calmed down and the sailors worshiped the Lord (vv. 15b–16).

1:1–3. Jonah's Call. Jonah ministered to two evil rulers, Jeroboam II of Israel and the king of Nineveh. He was apparently willing to prophesy success for Israel (2 Kin. 14:25); but for Nineveh, only judgment. Such contrasting attitudes to Israel and the nations appear throughout the book.

Like many other prophets, Jonah is introduced by a declaration that "the word of the Lord came to" him (see also Hos. 1:1; Joel 1:1; Mic. 1:1). The same phrase introduces Elijah (1 Kin. 17:2–3, 8–9), the first of several parallels between the ministries of the two prophets. In 1 Kings 17:9, God's command to Elijah begins with the same words as His command to Jonah (Heb. *qum lekh*, "arise and go, go at once").

Despite this conventional introduction, Jonah's response contrasts not only with Elijah's but also with all other prophets. He refused to go to Nineveh to denounce its wickedness. Instead, he fled to Tarshish. Some identify Tarshish with Tartessos, on the Baetis River in modern-day Spain. If correct, then Jonah tried to flee as far west from Nineveh as possible. However, Tarshish may more likely be Tarsus in Cilicia, home of the Apostle Paul. Several texts seem to place Tarshish close to Greece (see Gen. 10:2–4; Ezek. 27:12–14). Wherever it was, Tarshish was outside of Israel and nowhere near Nineveh. Jonah intended to go there to flee from the Lord (Jon. 1:3). The only other character in the OT to do something similar was Cain, who went to the land of Nod after murdering his brother (Gen. 4:16). That connection suggests the seriousness of Jonah's disobedience. Significantly, however, the text does not immediately say why Jonah disobeyed. The author wants to reveal a little more about him first.

1:4–16. Jonah's Flight. Jonah 1:4–16 forms a chiasm:

A Beginning of the Storm: Worshiping Other Gods (vv. 4–5a)
  B Goods Thrown into the Sea (v. 5b)
    C The Captain's Hope for Deliverance (vv. 5c–6)
      D The Culprit Discussed (v. 7a)
        E Jonah Identified as the Cause (v. 7b)
          F Jonah Interrogated (v. 8)
            G God, the Creator of All Things (v. 9)
          F′ Jonah Interrogated (v. 10a)
        E′ Jonah Identified as the Cause (v. 10b)
      D′ Punishment Discussed (v. 11)
    C′ The Means of Deliverance Revealed (vv. 12–13)
  B′ Jonah Thrown into the Sea (vv. 14–15)
A′ End of the Storm: Worshiping the Lord (vv. 15b–16)

The structure begins and ends with pagan sailors worshiping and hinges in the center on Jonah's confession of faith in God as the Creator of all things. This highlights the main feature of this section: the contrast between pagans and God's prophet.

The series of contrasts begins with mariners worshiping their gods while the prophet, who was running away from his God, slept (v. 5). In a striking role reversal, the ship's captain had to wake Jonah up and tell him to call on God (v. 6). Normally, the prophet should call on others to seek God. Just as strikingly, the captain's words repeat God's commands to Jonah (cf. v. 2). The word of the Lord came to Jonah (v. 1), but a pagan sailor, not the Israelite prophet, spoke it. Jonah finally confessed his faith but only when the sailors discovered his guilt and forced him to answer their penetrating questions (v. 7–9). His confession of God as the Creator of all things rings very hollow considering he had boarded the ship to flee from Him (v. 3). However, it forms the basis of the rest of the book, which serves as a commentary on its implications.

The sailors then prayed to the Lord, worshiped Him, offered a sacrifice, and made vows (vv. 14, 16). This contrasts with the beginning of the section, when they worshiped their individual gods. Despite Jonah's behavior, they had come to believe in the power of his God. But Jonah did not pray, sacrifice, or make vows to the God of Israel. He mentioned God's name only when directly asked about the cause of the storm. The pagan sailors behaved more admirably than the prophet called by God. This disturbing assessment paves the way for even more radical revelations later in the book.

The ship's captain roused Jonah from his sleep because he hoped that Jonah's God might have concern for them and prevent them from perishing in the storm (v. 6). The captain wanted to save all life on board his ship but knew he could not demand it. This is the first of several expressions of hope found throughout the book (see 2:1–2; 3:9). The full significance of Jonah's willingness to be thrown overboard, essentially a death wish, does not become clear until his second expression of the same desire (1:12; 4:3, 9).

1:17—2:10
God's Salvation and Jonah's Praise

God prepared a fish to swallow Jonah (1:17). From the belly of the fish, Jonah praised God for saving him from drowning (2:1–7), denounced idol worship (2:8), and vowed to offer sacrifices to the Lord (2:9). At God's command, the fish vomited Jonah onto dry land (2:10).

1:17. Jonah Swallowed by the Fish. The book of Jonah stresses God's sovereignty, a theme that recurs several times in chapter 1. In His sovereignty, God sent Jonah to cry out against Nineveh (v. 1), sent a great wind on the sea in response to Jonah's flight to Tarshish (v. 4), and later calmed the storm (v. 15). He also prepared a large fish to swallow Jonah to rescue the prophet from drowning to death. Jonah was in the great fish for "three days and three nights" (v. 7). His experience foreshadows "the three days and three nights" Christ would spend "in the heart of the earth" (Matt. 12:40).

2:1–10. Jonah's Psalm and God's Response. Jonah offered a type of psalm known as a thanksgiving, used in Israel to thank God for specific acts of His grace, especially for saving the worshiper(s) from death or persecution. The fact that he uttered the thanksgiving from within the fish shows that Jonah recognized it as God's means of saving him from drowning. Understanding the role of the fish is essential to understanding the dynamics of the book as a whole. Significantly, the psalm is not a lament (such as Pss. 22, 44), in which psalmists typically complained to God when they faced death or experienced persecution. A lament would mean Jonah viewed the fish as punishment rather than salvation.

The Sign of Jonah

In Matthew 12:39, Christ responded to a request for a sign by saying that the only sign his generation would get was "the sign of the prophet Jonah" (cf. Matt. 16:4; Luke 11:29). He explained that just as Jonah was in the fish for three days and three nights, so He would be in the earth. He, like Jonah, would face death but be rescued from it after three days. But the parallel is only partial, for Christ is "greater than Jonah" (Matt. 12:41; Luke 11:32). Nonetheless, Jonah prefigures His death and resurrection (see commentary on Hos. 6:1–3).

Jonah used conventional language commonly found in many other psalms to describe his cry from the depths of *she'ol* ("grave," "death," or "pit"; Jon. 2:2; cf. Ps. 86:13), God's answer (Jon. 2:2; cf. Ps. 120:1), the feeling of turbulent waves sweeping over him (Jon. 2:3; cf. Ps. 42:7), and his removal from the Lord's sight (Jon. 2:4; cf. Ps. 31:22). Numerous other similarities to various psalms also occur throughout Jonah. These similarities indicate that he knew how to worship in an appropriate manner, just as his words to the sailors show he knew his theology well (Jon. 1:9). He was an orthodox Israelite. Yet he declared his faith in God, called on God to rescue him, and offered Him praise all while fleeing from Him. Jonah had an orthodox faith but struggled to live out its obvious implications. The introduction of this theme here leads to the climax at the end.

Jonah's psalm begins with a description of his thoughts and experience as he descended through the deep waters. The psychological distress/affliction caused by the real threat of death moved him to seek help from the Lord. He affirms that the Lord had answered his prayer, probably in the sense that God sent him the great fish to preserve him alive (2:2). He again describes his fearful experience, but this time he expresses his real fear that he had been permanently expelled from the presence of God (vv. 3–4). Nevertheless, Jonah looked toward the heavenly temple and prayed to the Lord. Another description of his deadly experience follows (vv. 5–6b), closing with the affirmation that God rescued him from the grave by sending the fish (v. 6c). The Lord had heard Jonah's prayer and answered it from His holy temple (v. 7). Jonah concludes the psalm by renewing his commitment to the Lord, affirming God's superiority over idols, and making a vow of thanksgiving to the Lord for saving him (vv. 7–9). The psalm demonstrates his orthodox faith, such as his belief in the efficacy of prayer and the heavenly sanctuary (v. 7; cf. Ps. 20:7).

Jonah's experience parallels that of the sailors. They faced a threat to their lives and called on the Lord (Jon. 1:14). He heard them and delivered them (1:15). Jonah also came face to face with death and called on the Lord, and God heard his voice and delivered him (2:2).

God answered the prayers of Gentiles and Israelite alike. Unknown to Jonah down in the belly of the fish, these same mariners on board the ship also offered a sacrifice to the Lord and took vows (1:16). The prophet and the sailors reacted in identical ways because they had all seen the power and authority of Jonah's God. The rest of the book reveals how this saved Israelite would react to more Gentiles in need of salvation.

This entire section began with the fish swallowing Jonah (1:17) and ended with the fish vomiting him out. The fish's obedience to God contrasts with Jonah's disobedience and brings the first half of the book to an appropriate conclusion.

3:1–10

God's Word and Nineveh's Response

Jonah obeyed God's renewed call to go to Nineveh (3:1-3). He prophesied the city's imminent destruction. The population repented because the king hoped that their repentance would avert punishment (vv. 4-9). God accepted their repentance and did not destroy the city (v. 10).

3:1-4. Jonah Preaches God's Word. Verses 1-3 echo the language of Jonah's first call in chapter 1. For a second time the word of the Lord came to Jonah, telling him to go to Nineveh and proclaim God's message to the people. This time, however, rather than fleeing to Tarshish, he obeyed God and went to Nineveh. The contrast between Jonah's two responses to the word of God shows how his salvation from death had profoundly affected him. He had already praised God for His grace, promising to serve Him (2:9), and now he obeyed Him.

Jonah proclaimed that Nineveh would be overthrown in forty days (3:4). The same Hebrew verb, *hapak* ("overthrow"), describes the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, when God "overthrew the cities" (Gen. 19:29). Nineveh's destruction also seemed certain because Jonah did not invite the people to repent. It took three days to save Jonah (Jon. 1:17); it also took him three days to preach judgment (3:3). However, Nineveh was given forty days to await its destruction. Yet the city responded immediately—on the first day (vv. 4-5). Nineveh's immediate repentance contrasts with Jonah's delayed obedience.

Although Jonah ministered in the first half of the eighth century B.C. (2 Kin. 14:25), the fate of Nineveh can be compared to the later fate of two other cities. The capitals of Israel (Samaria) and Judah (Jerusalem) were destroyed as divine punishment for their sins in 722 B.C. and 586 B.C., respectively (2 Kin. 18:9-12; 25:1–10). If God did not spare His own people, surely He would not spare Nineveh, a center of pagan injustice and cruelty. The rest of Jonah gives a surprising response to this assumption.

3:5–10. Nineveh Repents and God Relents. Nineveh's startling reaction to Jonah's preaching strongly contrasts with others in the Prophets, particularly Jerusalem's reaction to Jeremiah. In Jeremiah 36, Jeremiah threatened Jerusalem with God's judgment so they might repent of their sins. Repentance would lead to God's forgiveness (Jer. 36:3), just like it did in Nineveh. However, King Jehoiakim of Judah rejected Jeremiah's preaching, so God responded by bringing about all the threatened disasters (Jer. 36:31). In contrast, the king of Nineveh commanded his people to call urgently on God (Jon. 3:8). Consequently, God relented from the threatened disaster and did not destroy Nineveh (v. 10).

Jonah 3:4 subtly conveys the possibility of Nineveh repenting. Jonah's announcement that Nineveh would be "overthrown" (*hapak*) seems to offer no hope of salvation. If he had used the verb "perish" (*'abad*), used by the captain (1:6), the sailors (1:14), the king (3:9), and finally the Lord (4:10), then this would definitely be the case. However, the verb *hapak* has two distinct meanings. It can mean "overturn," in the sense of "destroy" (Gen. 19:29), or it can mean "turn around." For example, in Jeremiah 31:13 God promises that He will turn [*hapak*] mourning into joy/gladness. In fact, all occurrences of *hapak* in the Niphal verbal stem, the form used here, mean "turn around" rather than "destroy." Before Nineveh repented, Jonah's words seemed to mean that the city would be overturned, but instead it was turned around. So, Jonah's words were in fact fulfilled, just not in the way Jonah expected. The repentance of Nineveh decided between the two possibilities.

While Nineveh's response to God contrasts with Jerusalem's later response, it resembles the reaction of the pagan sailors in chapter 1. The sailors "feared the LORD" and "offered a sacrifice" (Jon. 1:16), while the Ninevites believed God and proclaimed a fast (3:5). The ship's captain and the king of Nineveh also behaved in similar ways. The captain (unconsciously) repeated God's own words (1:6; cf. 1:2) like a prophet delivering "the word of the LORD." The king's call for Nineveh to repent and reform resembles the prophets' frequent

call for Israel to repent (3:8; cf. Joel 2:12–14). The king's choice of words when he admonished the people to turn from/give up their evil ways in Jonah 3:8 also occurs in God's instructions to the prophet Jeremiah (Jer. 36:3, 7; cf. 26:3), a passage already shown to be closely related to Jonah 3. The king's behavior also contrasts with Jonah's. In chapter 1 the word (*dabar*) of the Lord came to Jonah, commanding him to leave immediately (Heb. *qum lekh*, lit. "arise and go"), but instead he immediately rose and fled from the presence of the Lord (1:2–3). In 3:6, when the king heard the message/word (Heb. *dabar*) from God, he immediately rose (Heb. *qum*) from his throne and told the city to repent, reform, and call out urgently to God (v. 8). Nineveh was more responsive than Jerusalem, and the sailors and the king of Nineveh were more responsive than Jonah.

This chapter climaxes with God's response to Nineveh's repentance. The people of Nineveh turned (*shub*) from their evil (*ra'*) ways, and God relented (*nakham*) from the disaster (*ra'ah*, lit. "evil"; v. 10). The people changed their behavior, so God changed His intention. The king received precisely what he hoped for when he wondered whether God would yet turn (*shub*) and relent (*nakham*; v. 9). His hope echoes the ship captain's hope for divine deliverance (1:6). For a pagan, the king showed remarkable spiritual insight, for God often changes His intention (*nakham*) in a demonstration of His grace (see Jer. 18:8; 26:3; cf. 2 Sam. 24:16). In Exodus 32:14, a verse virtually identical with Jonah 3:10, the Lord relented (*nakham*) from the disaster (*ra'ah*, lit. "evil") which He said He would bring on His people, Israel. What God did for Israel in the past, He now did for Nineveh. In the OT God frequently relents from sending punishment on Israel. But the book of Jonah makes clear that God's mercy extends beyond His own covenant people.

The experiences of Jonah and of Nineveh parallel each other. At the beginning of the book, Jonah deserved God's judgment because he disobeyed and fled from His presence. He faced death when he was thrown overboard into a raging sea. But God, in His grace, saved him by sending the fish to swallow him. Like Jonah, Nineveh too deserved God's judgment because of its wickedness. It too faced death when Jonah prophesied its overthrow in forty days. And God, in His grace, also saved them when He "relented" from sending the punishment. God offers salvation by grace through faith to all, whether Jew or Gentile (Eph. 2:8).

4:1–11

God's Salvation and Jonah's Protest

The final chapter is structured in three parts. Each concludes with God asking Jonah a question (4:4, 9, 11). Jonah answered only the second question. The first two challenged Jonah's right to be angry. The third defends the Lord's pity for Nineveh—the main reason for Jonah's anger.

4:1–4. Jonah's Anger and God's First Question. When God saved him, Jonah was extremely thankful (2:1–9). But when God saved Nineveh, Jonah was extremely angry (4:1). In a book full of contrasts, this is the most telling of all. The repetition of the Hebrew word *ra'ah* to describe Jonah's anger recalls both Nineveh's repentance and God's relenting in order to underline that Jonah was angry about both of these.

- The king of Nineveh told the people to turn from their evil (*ra'*) ways (3:8).
- They turned from their evil (*ra'*) ways (3:10).
- God relented from the disaster (*ra'ah*) (3:10).
- But it displeased Jonah exceedingly (*ra'a' ... ra'ah*) (4:1).

Jonah responded to Nineveh's repentance and God's relenting with great displeasure and anger. Verse 4:1 literally reads, "it was evil to Jonah—a great evil—and he became angry." His anger prompted him to offer his second prayer in the book, which produces yet another contrast. In his first prayer, Jonah prayed that he might live (2:2, 6). In the second, he prayed that he might die (4:3). What could possibly explain this huge contrast between life-affirming thankfulness for his own salvation and death-seeking anger for Nineveh's salvation?

Jonah's problem was not caused by a lack of biblical knowledge or theological understanding but by an inability to accept the implications of his belief. He finally confessed why he fled to Tarshish at the outset. He disobeyed because he understood the character of God. He quoted Exodus 34:6–7, which enumerates God's loving, gracious, and patient characteristics, including His willingness to relent from His threatened punishments (Jon. 4:2b). God did precisely what Jonah had surmised He would do (v. 2): He relented (*nakham*) from the disaster (3:10). Elsewhere, the people of Israel cited Exodus 34:6–7 to praise God (see Num. 14:18; Neh. 9:17; Pss. 86:15; 103:8; 145:8; Joel 2:13), but Jonah cited it in order to condemn Him. The grace which God offered to Israel, He now offered to foreigners. Jonah had enough theological knowledge to predict that but not enough compassion to accept it. That is why he was extremely angry (see PK 271).

Jonah's confession sheds light on why he told the sailors to throw him into the sea (Jon. 1:12), which should have meant certain death. He had a death wish when running away from Nineveh, and he had one after going there. Whether fleeing or going, disobeying God's word or obeying it, he would rather die than see Nineveh saved. Jonah refused to embrace the lesson the Lord was trying to teach him.

This section ends with the first of three questions God asked Jonah in this chapter. "Is it right for you to be angry?" (4:4). The answer is surely "no!" But Jonah's answer is delayed to the end of the next section, maximizing its effect.

4:5–9. Jonah's Anger and God's Second Question. Arresting contrasts are common in Jonah, and this paragraph provides three pairs of them. The first contrasting pair comes from within the book itself. Inside the city, the king of Nineveh repented and sat (*yashab*) in dust and ashes, hoping for the city's salvation (3:6). Meanwhile, outside the city, Jonah made a shelter and sat (*yashab*) under it, wishing for the city's destruction (4:5). While Jonah sat there, God made a plant grow to shade Jonah from the heat. Jonah's response to the plant contrasts with his reaction to Nineveh's turnaround: Jonah was exceedingly glad about the plant (lit. "Jonah was glad concerning the plant—a great gladness"; v. 6) but upset about Nineveh's salvation (literally, "it was evil to Jonah—a great evil"; v. 1).

The second and third contrasts look beyond the book of Jonah. Just like Jonah, Elijah sat beneath a plant and prayed that he might die (1 Kin. 19:4). But Elijah wanted to die because the Israelite king and queen were apostate and did not listen to his message. Jonah wanted to die because the king of Nineveh had listened to his message and he and his people had repented. Formerly, Abraham argued with God about the destruction of the wicked, pagan cities of Sodom and Gomorrah because he wanted to preserve them if even a few righteous remained (Gen. 18:23–33). Jonah wanted the wicked, pagan city of Nineveh to be destroyed despite its mass repentance.

Such stark contrasts with characters within and beyond the book highlight how it ridicules Jonah for his narrow-minded bigotry. He was indeed behaving like a silly, senseless dove (*yonah*; cf. Hos. 7:11). God again asked if Jonah had a right to be angry, this time about the plant that died (Jon. 4:9a). This time Jonah responded that he had every right to be angry (v. 9b), confirming just how self-centered he was and how unwilling to rejoice in the salvation of others. In this book two things make Jonah happy: his own salvation (2:1–9) and the plant shading his head (4:6). Two things make him angry: the salvation of Nineveh (v. 1) and the death of the plant (vv. 8–9). He was glad when God saved him or provided for him, but he was angry when God saved others or withdrew His provision from him. Jonah would not accept the idea that God had any concern for anyone other than Israelites like himself.

4:10–11. Jonah's Anger and God's Final Question. The book concludes with God asking Jonah to consider a challenging point. He reminded Jonah of his pity for the plant, which Jonah neither created nor destroyed. God then asked why He should not have pity on Nineveh if Jonah had such great concern for a plant. God wanted Jonah to understand that the city of Nineveh was far more important than Jonah's plant and the shade it gave him.

The book ends on this question and, at first sight, seems incomplete, for we never hear Jonah's response. However, the book ends on an open question not to encourage speculation about Jonah's possible answer but to challenge readers to answer it for themselves. The Apostle Paul posed the same question using different words (Rom. 3:29). Is the one true God not also the God of the Gentiles? Does He extend hope to all or only to a few? The answer to these questions lies at the heart of the message of the book of Jonah.

MICAH

INTRODUCTION

Title and Authorship. The book is named after the Prophet Micah (Micah 1:1). This name, a short form of *mikayehu*, means "Who is like Yahweh?" It reflects part of the book's message: the uniqueness and incomparableness of the Lord (7:18). Micah himself authored the book, as indicated by both the first-person editorial note in 3:1 ("I said") and the personal conviction about the power of his prophetic office in 3:8. Micah hailed from Moresheth Gath (1:1, 14), probably modern Tell ej-Judeideh (Tel Goded), which is located in the lowlands near Lachish and Gath, about twenty-one miles (33 km) southwest of Jerusalem. The byname "Micah of Moresheth" shows that Micah was well known beyond his hometown. He was a contemporary of the older Prophet Hosea and the younger Isaiah. God proclaimed His message through Micah in tears (1:8), with pleading and beseeching (6:1–8). Outside his book, Micah is mentioned only in Jeremiah 26:18, in a context a hundred years later and relating to his prophecy of doom as remembered by some elders in Jerusalem. According to tradition, Micah died peacefully in his hometown during the first half of Hezekiah's reign.

While some believe that the passages about the return from exile and Israel's restoration were written at the time of the Exile or later, these messages of hope belong to the twin messages of impending divine judgment and ultimate divine mercy relentlessly proclaimed by all the prophets. Doom and salvation, blessings and curses: all play an integral part in classical prophecy (see Deut. 28). Nothing in the book conflicts with the style and theology of the eighth-century prophets.

Date. According to 1:1, Micah prophesied around 740–700 B.C., during the reigns of three kings of Judah: Jotham (750–735 B.C.), Ahaz (735–715 B.C.), and Hezekiah (716–687 B.C.). The book prominently features the Neo-Assyrian Empire. Partly due to their army of mercenaries and their deportation policy, Assyria was becoming a world power. In v. 1:6, Micah presents the fall of Samaria as still in the future. The Assyrian King Sargon V captured it in 722 B.C. Micah 1:8–16 contains prophecies against particular cities of the Southern Kingdom, which date the book before 712 B.C., when Gath no longer belonged to Judah (1:10). The Assyrians destroyed Lachish in 701 B.C. (1:13). Micah 3:12 reports an Assyrian invasion that apparently succeeded. Verses 5:4–5 refer to another invasion that would fail, most likely Sennacherib's campaign against Jerusalem in 701 B.C. (cf. 2 Kin. 19; Is. 37).

Backgrounds. The rise of Assyrian dominion put its stamp on the second half of the eighth century B.C. In its wake the Israelite double monarchy came to an end when the Northern Kingdom fell in 722 B.C. Tiglath-Pileser III (745–727 B.C.) campaigned against Philistia in 734 B.C. and came threateningly close to Israel and to Micah's hometown (2 Kin. 16; 2 Chr. 28; Is. 7–8). Rezin of Aram/Syria and Pekah of Israel formed an alliance against Assyria, but Ahaz of Judah did not join. In the ensuing Syro-Ephraimite war (734–732 B.C.), Ahaz called Assyria for help. Tiglath-Pileser conquered Damascus in 732 B.C., subjugated parts of Israel, and allowed Hosea to take the throne. However, Assyria did not settle quickly. Soon after, Shalmaneser V (727–722 B.C.) besieged Samaria, the capital of the Northern Kingdom, for three years (725–722 B.C.). In 722 B.C. Sargon II (722–705 B.C.) captured it and deported the inhabitants. His son Sennacherib (705–681 B.C.) engaged the western front in 701 B.C. and captured most of Judah. But he had to withdraw from Jerusalem empty-handed (Is. 36–37).

Like the other prophets before him, Micah announced that God would use foreign nations to castigate His covenant-breaking people. He prophesied the siege and fall of Samaria (Mic. 1:6–7) as well as the Assyrian invasion of Judah under Sennacherib (1:8–16), but this only foreshadowed a far greater disaster: the destruction of the temple and the Babylonian Exile (3:12).

Jotham "did what was right" in following the Lord, although the people continued to sacrifice on the high places (2 Kin. 15:34–35). However, his son Ahaz followed the practices of the kings of Israel, sacrificing on the high places with the common people (2 Kin. 16:1–4). He even burned his son in the fire as a sacrifice to a false god, one of the abominable practices of the Canaanites (2 Kin. 16:3). The people's hypocrisy intensified the situation. Many formally followed the religion of their fathers while simultaneously practicing idolatry. The priests and prophets did not want to lose their popularity, so they tolerated the double standard and predicted peaceful times (Mic. 3:5). Hezekiah attempted to reverse the negative effects of his father's reign and succeeded to some degree. He trusted in the Lord like no other king of Judah (2 Kin. 18:5; similar to Josiah in 2 Kin. 23:25). It seems that Micah prophesied mainly during the reign of Ahaz and the early years of Hezekiah. He certainly supported Hezekiah in his religious reformation (cf. Jer. 26:18).

The book of Micah provides enough information to sketch the internal situation in Judah. Social exploitation accompanied the religious and moral demise under Ahaz. Everyone in leadership was corrupt. They lived in wealth but ruthlessly oppressed the poor and the marginalized. Micah, often called the "prophet of the poor" by modern scholars, fought for the cause of the poor and the oppressed (Mic. 2:1–11).

Theology and Purpose. Micah oscillates between messages of judgment and doom and messages of mercy and salvation. The core of his message emphasizes that God stays true to His covenant with His people in three ways: He accuses Israel and Judah of sins and transgressions (see 3:8). He announces punishment, specifically the Exile and the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. And in His mercy, He promises salvation to instill hope for the future.

1. *Judgment.* Micah's accusations cover all areas of society. He accuses the wealthy of economic exploitation (6:9–12); the leadership of judicial oppression, bribery, and corruption (chap. 3); and the entire people of social and moral bankruptcy (7:1–7). Micah specifically upholds the principle of representative accountability; that is, leaders are responsible for the people. If the leaders do not walk with God, the people will also err on their path. All are guilty and will suffer punishment, but Micah holds the leaders particularly accountable for not exerting a godly influence. The prophet believed that God would inevitably judge His covenant people. Deportation and exile would come. Israel would go to Assyria (1:16) and Judah to Babylon (4:10). Even Jerusalem and the temple would be destroyed (3:12; 6:16) as the last effective means to lead the people to repent of their sins. As a result, God would save the remnant comprised of those who had returned to Him. Through judgment the Lord sought to continue using Israel to fulfill His plan to save the nations (see "God's Judgment in the Prophets," p. 981).

2. *Salvation.* God is merciful and compassionate; He loves to forgive and to bless (Micah 7:18–20). His promises of hope include the deliverance and restoration of Israel and the glory of the coming messianic kingdom (2:12–13; 4:1—5:15; 7:8–20). He does not restrict salvation to the remnant of Israel but offers hope to all. Although God would punish the nations, He would also give them a part in the promise. They would come to Zion to seek counsel from the Ruler of Israel (5:4) and to receive God's manifold blessings (4:1–3; 7:12–17) in fulfillment of the covenant promise given to Abram (Gen. 12:3).

3. *Messianic Prophecy.* The messianic reign provided the only hope for a society in which justice and mercy would prevail. With a few strokes, Micah sketches the reign of the messianic Davidic King born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). He would lead "in the strength of the Lord" (5:4) and His influence would encompass the entire world, making Zion the center of the nations. The world would never find peace except at the coming of the One who is peace (5:5). The NT identifies Jesus Christ as the royal Shepherd-King from Bethlehem (Matt. 2:5–6).

4. *Remnant Motif.* The term "remnant" (*she'erit*), a keyword in the message of hope, appears in each of the promises of salvation (Micah 2:12; 4:7; 5:7–8; 7:18). Although the expression itself seems to indicate that only a few would survive, the remnant would consist of many people (2:12) and become a strong nation (4:7). The term "remnant" thus serves as an honorific title for the faithful in Israel.

Literary Features. The book takes the form of oracles of judgment followed by oracles of salvation. This pattern subdivides it into three

main parts (chaps. 1–2; 3–5; 6–7), each beginning with the imperative "Hear!"/"Listen!" (1:2; 3:1; 6:1).

COMMENTARY

1:1
Prophetic Formula

Like many other prophetic books, Micah begins with the prophetic formula "the word of the Lord that came" (see Hos. 1:1). Micah came from Moresheth, a small town in the south Shephelah, and prophesied in the second half of the eighth century B.C. The reference to three Judean kings—Jotham (750–735 B.C.), Ahaz (735–715 B.C.), and Hezekiah (716–687 B.C.)—indicates that Micah mainly prophesied to Judah. But his prophecies concern both Samaria, the capital of the Northern Kingdom of Israel (Mic. 1:5–6), and Jerusalem, the capital of the Southern Kingdom of Judah (see vv. 5, 9, 12), though they focus on the latter (see Micah: Introduction).

1:2—2:13
Penalty and Promise

The first cycle of judgment followed by salvation focuses on the imminent threat to Samaria (1:6–7), the threat to Judah and Jerusalem (vv. 8–16), and Judah's social, economic, and religious injustices that were deserving of divine punishment (2:1–11). Though God would war against His people (1:2–5), He would also gather the remnant of Israel and be their Shepherd-Leader (2:12–13).

1:2–5. Yahweh's Judgment. Micah repeats the imperative "Hear!"/"Listen!" at the beginning of several sections (3:1, 9; 6:1–2, 9; see also Amos 3:1, 13; 4:1; 5:1; 8:4). Elsewhere, he summons the leaders or the people of Judah to hear. But in Micah 1:2, he calls the physical earth and all its inhabitants as witnesses of God's judgment upon His covenant-breaking people (cf. 6:2). Verses 3 and 4 describe a theophany of the divine Warrior in which the Lord leaves His holy temple (i.e., the heavenly sanctuary and throne room; vv. 2–3; cf. Jon. 2:4, 7; Hab. 2:20) to come down to the earth, obviously ready to judge (cf. Gen. 11:5). As the Creator and Judge, He would trample the heights/high places of the earth, an apparent allusion to Amos 4:13. The disintegrating elements recall the theophany at Mount Sinai (Mic. 1:4; Ex. 19:18–19), except that in Micah's time the people were not prepared to meet their God. The awe-inspiring, ominous image portrays the natural world as unable to withstand God's presence when He comes to pass judgment on both kingdoms. The Lord singles out their capitals, Samaria and Jerusalem, as centers of idolatrous practices (Mic. 1:5). Consequently, He would destroy Samaria (vv. 6–7) and devastate the towns of Judah (vv. 8–16). The historical instrument of judgment, though not explicitly mentioned, was the Assyrian army.

1:6–16. Samaria and Judah Lost. The prediction of Samaria's downfall focuses on its stone buildings and idols. The personification of Israel's capital as a harlot represents the Northern Kingdom's religious prostitution with other gods (cf. Jerusalem as a prostitute in Ezek. 16). The God of Israel would repay them accordingly. The prophet laments over the doom of Samaria.

The passage about Judah and Jerusalem also takes the form of a dirge. The prophet physically displayed his grief (Mic. 1:8). The list of eleven villages in vv. 10–16 does not appear to involve any sequence, but all the towns were located in the Shephelah, west and south of Jerusalem, and all were captured or suffered loss during the Assyrian military campaign against Jerusalem in 701 B.C.

The names of the chosen towns create assonance (similar sounds in Hebrew) and wordplays with the prophetic statement associated with them. For example, people would roll in the dust in the "house of dust" (Beth Aphrah/Ophrah); the "beautiful" (Shaphir) would be humiliated in naked shame; no one would go out of "going out" (Zaanan); support would be withdrawn from the "house of withdrawal" (possible meaning of Beth Ezel); "bitterness" (Maroth) would long for good but receive disaster; "deceit" (Achzib/Akzib) would prove a deceitful lie; and an heir/conqueror would come against "inheritance" (Mareshah; vv. 11–15). The first and last places mentioned recall the frailty of the early history of the monarchy in Israel. "Tell it not in Gath" is identical to David's words in his lamentation for Saul and Jonathan (v. 10; cf. 2 Sam. 1:20). The *kebod yisrael* (lit. "the glory of Israel"; possibly the nobility, the army, or, less likely, God Himself; cf. 1 Sam. 4:21–22; Is. 17:4) would find refuge in Adullam, the place of David's refuge (Mic. 1:15; cf. 1 Sam. 22:1). At the climax of the prophet's lament, he announces the Exile (Mic. 1:16).

2:1–11. Wealthy Oppressors and False Prophets Condemned. Micah directs his oracle of woe in 2:1–5 against the greedy rich in Judah, who acquired more property by oppressing others and hijacking their inheritance, robbing them of their socioeconomic livelihood (v. 2). Like the preflood generation, the affluent continually focused their thoughts and actions on wickedness and evil (cf. Gen. 6:5). As retributive judgment, God planned a time that would be *ra'* ("evil," "disaster") against Judah, just as He did for Israel (Mic. 2:3; cf. Amos 5:13). The judgment day for the mighty would leave them with no inheritance among "the assembly of the LORD" (Mic. 2:4–5).

Although the Hebrew of vv. 6–11 is difficult, the passage clearly recounts a dispute between Micah and his opponents. His accusation met resistance, so he pinpointed their socioeconomic crimes against their fellow men, women, and children (vv. 6, 8–9; cf. vv. 2–3). To take away God's glory and blessing from children means to despise the human dignity that God conferred on them (v. 9; cf. Ps. 8:5). Consequently, the prophet either warns the passersby to flee or pronounces judgment by ordering the violators to leave (Mic. 2:10). Micah's sarcastic mockery of his adversaries in v. 11 refers back to v. 6. The verb *natap* ("prophesy," "prattle"; lit. "drip," "dribble" words) occurs three times in v. 6 and twice in v. 11, forming an inclusio (or bracket). Micah, fueled by the Spirit of the Lord, spoke of transgression and sin (3:8), but the unrighteous deserved false prophets (2:11; cf. Is. 28:7).

2:12–13. Hope for the Remnant. God's plans for His people do not end in exile. Micah's first message of hope briefly describes God as the source of salvation. Micah 2:12 introduces the theme of the remnant using the familiar metaphor of the shepherd and his flock (cf. 4:7; 5:6–7; 7:18). God Himself, the royal Shepherd, would assemble and gather the remnant of Israel from exile (2:12; cf. Is. 40:11; Jer. 23:3; 31:8–10). He would deliver His people to safety in the sheep pen (lit. "like sheep in the fold"; cf. Jer. 23:3; Ezek. 34:14) and increase their number enormously (cf. Ezek. 36:37–38). God Himself would break through the enemies to open the way and, in a new exodus, lead His people from exile (Mic. 2:13; cf. 2 Sam. 5:20).

3:1—5:15

False Leaders and a Righteous Ruler

In the second cycle of judgment followed by salvation, the judgment on the unjust leaders of Judah, both political and religious (3:1–12), contrasts with a fantastic future outlook. The Lord will reign in Zion, and the temple will be the religious center of the world (4:1–5). He will gather His people from the Diaspora and judge Israel's enemies (vv. 6–13; 5:5b–15). The messianic King from Bethlehem will bring peace and rule justly from Jerusalem (5:1–5a).

3:1–12. False Leaders Rebuked. In chapter 3, Micah rebukes all of Israel's leadership, including the political leaders (vv. 1–4), the prophets (vv. 5–7), and the priests (vv. 9–12). Each of the three sections follows the same pattern, first naming the accused, then listing their offenses, and finally announcing the penalty. The first and the third sections start with the imperative "Hear!"/"Listen!" (vv. 1, 9; cf. 1:2).

The keyword "justice" encompasses not only judicial justice but also ethics and morality (3:1, 8–9). The rulers perverted good and promoted evil (v. 2). Returning to the shepherd metaphor, Micah uses brutal and graphic language to describe Israel's shepherds mercilessly slaughtering the flock for consumption (vv. 2–3). They should have led and protected the flock as God Himself promised to do (cf. 2:12–13). Because of their love of evil deeds, Micah declares God's sentence of divine silence. Although He had promised to help His people if they cried out to Him (see Is. 30:19), He would not listen to the rulers or answer them (Mic. 3:4). God would completely forsake them.

The prophets also misled the people (vv. 5–7). They no longer spoke for God; they made the content of their prophecies dependent on money. Bribery led to oracles of peace (v. 5). They sanctioned the behavior of the upper class, blessing the rulers who exploited the common people but declaring war on the poor and oppressed who could not pay. Therefore, God would punish them with silence as He would the rulers (vv. 6–7; cf. v. 4; Amos 8:12). They would no longer see visions. In shame, they would cover their faces/lips (lit. "mustache"; Mic. 3:7), an act required of a leper (Lev. 13:45) and practiced in mourning rituals (Ezek. 24:17, 22).

In a rare first-person speech, Micah declares that, in contrast to the false prophets, he is filled with power from the Lord's Spirit, making him God's legitimate prophet (Mic. 3:8). His virtues of justice, strength, and courage enable him to uncover the horrendous condition of the leadership and make it public. He does this in the all-encompassing final rebuke against all of Israel's leaders (vv. 9–12). Their corruption spoiled the entire society. The leadership perverted moral

standards and sold "justice" to the highest bidder (v. 9). They built up Zion with bloodshed, proving their hostility toward God (v. 10). Worse, they arrogantly claimed that nothing bad could ever happen to Zion because of the Lord's presence, a blatant misapplication of Zion theology and the epitome of blasphemy (v. 11; Ps. 46:5; Zeph. 3:15, 17).

Micah 3:12 announces the divine judgment: since the leaders had built Zion (Jerusalem) through bloodshed, the city, including the temple (lit. "the house"), would be devastated. This is the first announcement of the destruction of Solomon's temple in prophetic literature, and Micah's audience must have found these words outrageous and shocking. Jeremiah's contemporaries remembered Micah's prophecy just before its fulfillment in 586 B.C. when the Babylonians conquered Jerusalem and destroyed the temple (Jer. 26:18).

4:1—5:15. A Righteous Kingdom and Ruler. After the section on the false leaders (chap. 3), Micah describes the idyllic reign of the Lord in Zion. God's plan for obedient Israel after the Exile included the future messianic kingdom and its impact on the nations (4:1–4). God would bestow the benefits of the kingdom on all who would come to Jerusalem, including Gentiles. Everyone would worship the Lord, and in Jerusalem the Messiah would lead justly. The vision in Micah 4:1–3 also occurs in Isaiah 2:2–4, with slight variation. The question of which one is original or whether they both used another source might never be resolved beyond doubt. However, Micah 4:1–3 is closely integrated within its context. It contains references that look both backward (Zion, the temple mountain, teaching, judging; cf. 3:10–12) and forward (walking in God's ways, strong nations; cf. 4:5, 7). The phrase "in the last days"/"in the latter days" refers to the future messianic age, when Mount Zion would be the highest point on earth (4:1). The static aspect of its great height (cf. Ps. 48:2) precedes a description of dynamic movement. The nations would flow into Zion (Mic. 4:2a) and the law out of Zion (v. 2b), making it the hub of the world (cf. Ezek. 38:12).

Many peoples and nations would "go up" to Jerusalem (Mic. 4:1–2; cf. Is. 60:3; Hag. 2:7; Zech. 8:22). The same verb appears regularly in the title of the pilgrimage psalms: "A Song of Ascents" (Pss. 120–134). The imagery of many nations streaming uphill to Mount Zion represents God breaking down national and ethnic barriers. The house/temple of the God of Jacob will truly become "a house of prayer for all nations" (Is. 56:7). All will desire the teaching and wisdom of the Lord and will walk in His paths (Mic. 4:2), making God's Torah universally effective. The Lord will "judge between many peoples" (v. 3), which refers either to imposing law and order among the nations or to peaceful conflict resolution. In Micah, peace leads to disarmament, not disarmament to peace. Instruments of destruction will become instruments of agriculture when the nations beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. This line reverses the call for war in Joel 3:10. The United Nations garden in New York City contains a bronze sculpture of a powerful blacksmith beating "swords into plowshares." Then and now, Micah's imagery depicts the world's hope for an end to all wars and conflicts, but Micah insists that only through the teaching of the Lord and an adherence to His law will this hope find fulfillment.

Following God will result in agricultural blessing and peace (Mic. 4:4). Micah's reference to sitting under a vine and a fig tree evokes a tangible image of safety, a symbol of the *pax messianica* ("messianic peace"; cf. 1 Kin. 5:5; 2 Kin. 18:31; Zech. 3:10). The concluding formula affirming this as a proclamation of the Lord of Hosts impresses God's seal on this prophecy (cf. Is. 40:5; 58:14).

Micah follows up his vision of hope with a call for action. He calls the Israelites of his time to walk according to the future vision and to do what all the nations would do in the latter days: to walk in the name of the Lord their God (Micah 4:5; cf. v. 2). "In that day" in vv. 6–8 refers to the time of the glorious kingdom described in vv. 1–3. Micah portrays the Lord as both Shepherd (first-person speech; vv. 6–7a) and King (third-person account; v. 7b). The lame and the exiles/outcasts harmed by the Lord refers primarily to His people as a nation, though it could also refer to the poor classes of society oppressed by the leadership (v. 6; cf. chap. 3). God will make them a remnant, a strong nation among strong nations (4:7; cf. v. 3). The true King is the Lord, and He will reign from His temple (v. 7; cf. v. 2). The Lord will rule in Zion forever. Even at the time of this proclamation, when Israel was in danger of being corrupted by its leaders and taken by foreign nations, God was ultimately in charge. Therefore, even as the people watched God take the kingdom away from them (4:9—5:15), they could hope that He would one day reestablish the former dominion, the glorious Davidic kingdom, with Zion/Jerusalem as its capital (4:8).

Micah 4:9—5:4 is marked by the repetition of the Hebrew word *'attah* (lit. "now," or translated idiomatically as "this/that day"; 4:9, 10, 11; 5:1, 4), forming three units: the *'attah* of the crying and labor (4:9–10), the *'attah* of the assembled nations (vv. 11–13), and the *'attah* of the coming king (5:1–4). Each section moves from distress to a turn of events. The first compares Jerusalem's distress to the pain of a woman in labor. In their time of distress, both their king and ruling counselor would disappear, and they would have to go to Babylon (4:9–10; cf. Jer. 6:22–26). This is arguably the first explicit prophetic mention of the Babylonian Exile. However, Israel would experience a new exodus, for the Lord would redeem (Heb. *ga'al*) His people. Israel's deliverance from exile would correspond to their Jubilee release described in Leviticus 25:25–55, where *ga'al* occurs ten times.

The second unit describes the nations assembling against Jerusalem, either for battle or to mock them after falling to the Babylonians (Mic. 4:11–13; cf. 7:8–10; Ezek. 36:1–15; Obad. 11–14). But this would result in their undoing, for God planned to gather them for judgment (Mic. 4:12–13). God would make Zion like a threshing animal under His guidance, administering just punishment to the mocking nations (cf. the judgment against Babylon in Jer. 51:33). In the end, the God of Israel would stand as the Lord of the entire world (Mic. 4:13; cf. Ps. 97:5).

The third unit (Mic. 5:1–4) both starts with *'attah* (omitted in some translations) and ends with a final *'attah* (sometimes translated idiomatically to refer to the future of the prophecy as "at that time" or "then") that envelops all the *'attah* sections by stating a purpose: His greatness would "now" (at that time) extend throughout the world (v. 4). As with the other two units, the third starts with a grim look at a hopeless situation. Some translations interpret the Hebrew *gadad* in v. 1 to mean troops, referring to the futile mobilization of Zion's military power against its enemies. Others render this word as "slash yourself in grief," indicating a rite performed as Zion mourns her siege and fall (588–586 B.C.; cf. Jer. 16:6; 41:5; 48:37). This prediction and the humiliation of Israel's judge/ruler (Heb. *shopet*) who would be struck on the cheek with a rod (Heb. *shebet*, a wordplay on *shopet*) likely refer to the downfall of the king of Judah in 586 B.C. It is less likely that they might refer to Sennacherib's siege in 701 B.C.

The attention shifts suddenly from the large city of Jerusalem to the small village of Bethlehem Ephrathah (Micah 5:2), which demonstrates the folly of underestimating something because it is small. This otherwise insignificant place suddenly becomes important because of the One who would come from there. The Messiah, not strength or size, determines importance. The humble King originated from a small village. "House of bread" (Bethlehem) and "fruitful" (Ephrathah) characterize His rule.

Verse 2 affirms the coming One as a Davidic King. Bethlehem, Ephrathah, and Judah are closely associated with David and his father, Jesse (1 Sam. 16:18; 17:12). The Hebrew word *li* ("to," "for Me") recalls 1 Samuel 16:1, which uses the same word to describe God choosing David to replace Saul as king. The reference to the rule of the messianic King also recalls God's words to David in 2 Samuel 7:8.

The King would come as a king comes forth for victory (cf. Is. 11:1). He would stand in the service of the Lord because He would come "to"/"for" God, in marked contrast to the present rulers. The dominion of this King is from antiquity (cf. Is. 45:21; 46:10; Hab. 1:12), from the days of *'olam*, a word variously translated as "ancient times," "days long ago," "days of old," "former years," "the days of eternity," or "from everlasting" (Mic. 5:2; cf. 7:14; Is. 63:9, 11; Mal. 3:4). These time references seem to indicate the eternal existence of the Messiah. The woman in labor in Micah 5:3 might recall the young woman who would give birth to Immanuel (Is. 7:14), or it could refer back to Zion in labor (Mic. 4:9–10). In any case, God would reverse the fortunes of His people, and the faithful remnant would return from exile.

Micah 5:4 describes the inauguration of the Ruler who would shepherd His people (cf. David as shepherd-king in 2 Sam. 5:2; Ps. 78:70–72). He would stand (i.e., have authority) and reign as the Lord's Representative because He would act in the strength and majesty of the Lord His God. As a result, the flock (Israel) would abide in safety (cf. 2 Sam. 7:10). In Jesus's time the Jews considered this prophecy to refer to the Messiah (John 7:42). Matthew identifies Jesus as the Messiah from Bethlehem (Matt. 2:5–6).

At the climax of Micah 5:2–5a, Micah refers to the coming King as *shalom*, a word that encompasses peace, welfare, prosperity, friendliness, deliverance, and salvation. It is the best word to describe not only the reign of the King but the King Himself. The threat of Assyria itself was immediate, and Assyria is also a code name for Mesopotamian enemy powers (cf. 7:12; Ezra 6:22; Zech. 10:10–11). The Assyrians and the Babylonians ("the land of Nimrod"; cf. Gen. 10:8–12) invaded between the eighth and sixth centuries B.C. (Mic. 5:5–6). However, the Messiah would strengthen Israel, raising against the invading Assyrians a group described as seven shepherds and eight rulers, referring to a plurality of military powers (for similar numerical literary devices, see also Prov. 30:15, 18, 21, 29; Eccl. 11:2; Amos 1:3). Israel would emerge victorious because God and/or the coming King would rescue them from the Assyrians (Mic. 5:6).

The remnant would be like the dew, which brings blessings, and a majestic, invincible lion (vv. 7–9). The subject of the praise in v. 9 could refer to the coming King, to the remnant of Jacob, or to God Himself.

In vv. 10–15 the Lord declares His intention to destroy/cut off (Heb. *karat*, used four times in vv. 10–13) not just His enemies (v. 9) but also the military protection and pagan Canaanite religious activities that gave Israel a false sense of security, including witchcraft, fortune-telling (Lev. 19:26; Deut. 18:10, 14; Is. 2:6), idols, and pillars (Lev. 26:1). "In that day," when God would assemble the remnant of Jacob, He would prove the land's only real security and the only God worthy of worship (Mic. 5:10; cf. 4:6). Then Israel would set their hopes on the Lord alone. The conclusion in 5:15 reveals that God would direct His vengeance not against Israel but against the nations that have not obeyed Him. This unexpected ending shows that vv. 10–14 describe Israel's cleansing, not judgment. God would renew His covenant with a purified people. Micah's message for the nations expressed their need to understand that God would both punish Israel *and* stand by His covenant. They needed to come to Israel (4:1–3) to hear and listen (1:2), for those that disobeyed God would receive His anger and wrath.

6:1—7:20

Judah's Fault and God's Forgiveness

The third cycle of judgment followed by salvation presents God's covenant lawsuit against Judah (6:1–8), another set of accusations and the threatened punishment of Jerusalem (vv. 9–16), and a lament of the bankruptcy of moral values in society (7:1–7). But in the end, hope once again shines forth as the prophet predicts a change in Judah's attitude toward God and the reversal of their fate because of His compassion and forgiveness (vv. 8–20).

6:1—7:7. Judah's Sin and Misery. The covenant lawsuit in 6:1–8 consists of the summons (v. 1), the call of witnesses (v. 2), the plaintiff's address reviewing benevolent acts (vv. 3–5), the defendant's response (vv. 6–7), and the indictment stating the general covenant stipulations broken (v. 8). The call to "Hear!"/"Listen!" introduces the Lord's trial against Judah (v. 1; cf. 1:2; 3:1, 9; 6:2). The Hebrew word *rib* appears as a verb in v. 1 ("plead the case") and as a noun in v. 2 ("complaint, accusation"). A common term in prophetic literature, it describes a lawsuit between God and His people (Jer. 2:4–9; cf. Is. 3:13–15; Hos. 2:4–25; 4:1–3). God called mountains and hills as witnesses, indicating the universal character of the dispute (Mic. 6:1–2; cf. Deut. 32:1). Though God tried hard to hold them back, Judah, like Balaam of old, continued to follow the wrong path. God saved His people during the Exodus and the wilderness wanderings. He protected them from enemies and an ill-minded prophet (Balak and Balaam; Num. 22–24). He led them over the Jordan from Shittim/the Acacia Grove to Gilgal (Josh. 3:1; 4:19–24). And He provided leadership through Moses, Aaron, and Miriam (Mic. 6:4; cf. Ex. 15:20).

Confronted with the past salvific acts of their covenant God, the people responded with a series of four questions that reveal their wrong attitude toward worship (Mic. 6:6–7). These would-be worshipers offered God what they believed to be increasingly more valuable sacrifices as a show of their commitment. Burnt offerings and year-old calves were common sacrifices (v. 6; Lev. 1; 9:3). Thousands of rams and ten thousand rivers of oil were part of extraordinary offerings during special occasions (Mic. 6:7; 1 Kin. 8:63; 1 Chr. 29:21; 2 Chr. 29:32–35). Micah even speaks of the abhorrent practice of offering firstborn children, though God forbade human sacrifice (Mic. 6:7; Lev. 18:21; Ps. 106:38). God required them to redeem their firstborn (Ex. 13:13; cf. Num. 3:44–51). The people gravely misunderstood God's desire for far more than sacrifices (1 Sam. 15:22). Confronted with the past salvific acts of their covenant God, the people ought to have worshiped Him in spirit and in truth rather than in outward formalism.

The climactic statement in Micah 6:8 responds to the people's lack of covenant loyalty by providing them with divine guidelines, the "golden rule" of the OT (cf. Deut. 10:12–13). To act justly forms the ethical basis of society (cf. Mic. 3:1, 9). To love mercy goes even further to restore compassion, kindness, and generosity. To walk humbly with God fully recognizes dependence upon the covenant Lord. Humans should imitate God, who loves justice and mercy (7:18, 20; cf. Ps. 33:5). This statement summarizes the message of the preexilic prophets, the essence of true worship and life within God's covenant.

The verdict of the lawsuit rules against the city of Jerusalem (Mic. 6:9-16). Because of the prevalent injustice of the wealthy oppressors and the cunning merchants ripping off innocent people, it would share Samaria's fate (vv. 10-12, 16; cf. 2:1-11; Amos 8:4-7). God would strike the country with fertility and military covenant curses (Mic. 6:13-15; cf. Lev. 26:26; Deut. 28:30, 39-41). Omri and Ahab—kings of the Northern Kingdom's most prominent dynasty—had set Samaria on a course of destruction (1 Kin. 16:15—22:40). Like Samaria, Jerusalem would also become desolate. Onlookers would hiss and scoff at the city (Mic. 6:16; cf. Jer. 19:8; Lam. 2:15-16).

Micah laments the disintegration of moral principles and solidarity in society, both in public (Mic. 7:1-4) and in private (vv. 5-6). Although the prophet again accuses the leaders specifically (cf. 3:9-11), he refers to universal corruption. No "faithful" (derived from the same Hebrew root as "mercy" in 6:8) or "upright" person remained anywhere (7:2; cf. Ps. 14:1-3). Therefore, Micah announces the approach of the day of the watchman (Mic. 7:4; cf. Ezek. 33:2-9), that is, the judgment he had proclaimed. Even in private affairs, no one could be trusted, not even friends, neighbors, leaders, or household members (Mic. 7:5-6; cf. Matt. 10:35-36). The nucleus of Israelite society, the family, had become corrupted. Everyone stood alone except those who trusted in God (Mic. 7:7). Micah refers to God as his Savior/salvation (cf. Ps. 25:5) and insists that God will hear his prayers (cf. Ps. 55:16-17). He, like the psalmist(s), hoped that God would save him from his plight. Micah uses the first person at both the beginning and the end of 7:1-7, balancing his frustration about society (v. 1) with his declaration of hope in the Lord (v. 7).

7:8-20. God's Forgiveness and Judah's Rise. The last section completes the book's third cycle of judgment followed by salvation. It consists of four subunits. The first unit affirms that Judah would bear the just wrath of God (7:8-10). But even in such dark times, the Lord would be their light (v. 8). The confession of sin is central to Micah's message (v. 9). Judah acknowledged God's accusations as justified (cf. chaps. 1-3; 6:9—7:7), reflecting a change of attitude (cf. 6:1-8). This confession allowed God to remove Judah's iniquity and transgression (7:18) and to fulfill His promises of salvation (2:12-13; chaps. 4-5). God will justify those who ask for forgiveness, and they will see His righteousness (7:9; cf. 2 Chr. 7:14). In Judah's case, this included seeing the final fall of its gloating enemy (Mic. 7:10).

The second unit describes the day of reversal for Judah and Jerusalem (vv. 11-13). Judah would become a large, secure country (v. 11). God would return His people from exile (v. 12) and devastate unbelievers in an apocalyptic scene (v. 13; cf. Is. 24:1, 5).

The third and fourth units concern the relationship between God's people and the nations (Mic. 7:14-17) and the relationship between the remnant and their God (vv. 18-20). God would shepherd His people (v. 14; cf. 2:12). In remembrance of the Exodus and the conquest, He would bring His people out of exile and into the promised land in full view of all the nations. As a result, the nations would fear the Lord (7:14-17; cf. Josh. 2:9-11).

The last unit is a short doxological hymn of God's grace and mercy. It starts off with the rhetorical question (v. 18; *mi-'el kamoka*), an allusion to the prophet's own name (*mikah*). It recalls the profound question from the Exodus: Could there be any among the gods like the Lord (Ex. 15:11)? Micah illustrates God's uniqueness through His attributes (Mic. 7:18) and His achievements (vv. 19-20), highlighted by His willingness to forgive. Several lexical similarities link the description of God's uniqueness in vv. 18-20 with the positive part of His self-introduction in Exodus 34:6-7. Micah apparently omits God's retributive character because God has already judged (cf. Ex. 34:7). Also, the allusion to Exodus 34:6-7 and the emphasis on judgment in Nahum 1:2-3 (cf. Joel 2:13; Jon. 4:2) balance the emphasis on forgiveness in Micah 7:18-20. Chapter 7 moves from justice to mercy, reflecting the book's main movement from judgment to salvation, from punishment to forgiveness. God would much rather forgive than punish.

Once more the remnant motif appears. God does not forgive everyone without any consideration of attitude. He forgives the faithful remnant made up of those who seek Him (v. 18; cf. 2:12; 4:7; 5:6-7). The unique picture of God hurling sins into the depths of the sea (7:19) recalls Him hurling Pharaoh's army into the sea at the Exodus (Ex. 15:5; Neh. 9:11). Micah goes even further back in time to Jacob and Abraham, showing God's covenant faithfulness throughout the entire patriarchal period (Mic. 7:20). In the end, Micah and the remnant put their confidence in the faithfulness and unchanging love and mercy of God. As long as God is involved in human affairs, there is hope.

NAHUM

INTRODUCTION

Title and Authorship. The book begins with information about its primary focus and its author (1:1). It is titled after the Prophet Nahum the Elkoshite, who wrote the oracle against Nineveh, the capital city of Assyria. The name Nahum, a shortened form of Nehemiah ("comfort of Yahweh" or "the Lord comforts"), occurs only here in the OT. It means "consolation" or "comfort," a fitting name for the prophet and the book because the message of the fall of Nineveh would bring comfort to the people of Judah.

Date. Though scholars debate the date of the book, several clues narrow it to a period in the mid to late seventh century B.C. The mention of the fall of Thebes (No Amon) to the Assyrians in 3:8-10 provides a precise historical anchor point. Assyrian cuneiform texts dated to 663 B.C. record the conquest of the city by Ashurbanipal (669-627 B.C.). The prophet portrays Assyria as a nation of strength, near the height of its power (1:12; 2:11-13; 3:1, 4), and indicates that it still controlled Judah (1:12-13, 15; 2:2). The Assyrian empire began to decline after Ashurbanipal's death in 627 B.C. Shortly prior, in 629 B.C., King Josiah of Judah (641-609 B.C.) enforced massive religious reforms that would have been impossible had Assyria still maintained tight control of the region. Therefore, Nahum probably prophesied sometime between 663 B.C. and 629 B.C., between the reigns of Manasseh and Josiah, making Nahum a contemporary of Habakkuk, Zephaniah, and the young Jeremiah.

Backgrounds. The book of Nahum is a sequel to the book of Jonah. But Nahum offers no hope for Nineveh. By 722 B.C. the Northern Kingdom of Israel had fallen to a succession of attacks led by Assyrian kings that culminated in Sargon II (721-705 B.C.) removing the last survivors from Samaria and placing them in Babylonia, Media, and Persia. Around 700 B.C., Sennacherib (705-681 B.C.) moved the Assyrian capital city from Dur-Sharrukin (Khorsabad) to Nineveh. In 670 B.C., Esarhaddon (681-669 B.C.), son of Sennacherib, moved other conquered peoples into Samaria and Galilee (2 Kin. 17:24; Ezra 4:2), further weakening the region. Assyria's brutality reached its peak at the height of the empire, during the reign of Ashurbanipal. Nahum probably prophesied during this time period. Nahum's prophecy was fulfilled in 612 B.C., when Assyria and King Sin-shar-ishkun (623-612 B.C.) fell to a coalition of Medes under Cyaxares (625-585 B.C.) and Babylonians under Nabopolassar (626-605 B.C.). A small remnant of Assyrians escaped Nineveh in 612 B.C. and fled to Haran, where they made Ashur-uballit II (612-609 B.C.) the new king of Assyria. However, Haran also eventually fell to the Babylonians, making Babylonia the most powerful empire in the ancient Near East.

Theology and Purpose. Nahum's opening statement summarizes the message of the book: God's awesome power in wrath and in judgment. God spoke to Judah, but the message concerns Nineveh. The obvious celebration of vengeance against the Assyrians reveals the character of God, forcing the reader to ask what kind of God the book portrays. The answer lies in the two themes addressed in Nahum: judgment and salvation.

1. Judgment against Nineveh. To correctly understand God's intent here, the book of Nahum must be read after the book of Jonah, which portrays God as compassionate and patient, not wanting any to perish. God's loving-kindness frustrated Jonah in the mid-eighth century B.C., but now a hundred years later, God had seen enough suffering, not only of His chosen people but also of the surrounding nations. Nahum refers to Nineveh as the city of bloodshed, deception, and pillaging (3:1). He further describes the city as a prostitute engaged in witchcraft

(3:4). God declared that Nineveh and its gods would be *karat* (lit. "cut off"), indicating complete destruction (1:14–15). In a terrifying tirade, Nahum outlines the nature of Nineveh's military violence, painting a scene of destruction and death in one breath (3:3) and the naked exposure of Nineveh the prostitute in the next (3:5–7). As punishment, other nations would attack the Assyrians, and they would experience the cruelty of war they themselves had practiced, including the brutal destruction of their children (3:10; see "Introduction to the Prophetic Literature"; see "God's Judgment in the Prophets," p. 981). Nineveh had had a chance to repent, but the time for forgiveness was past, and the sovereign God made it clear that justice must prevail against such a wicked city. This was a nation in a state of absolute hopelessness.

2. Salvation for God's People. Interwoven throughout the oracles of doom against a wicked nation are promises of hope and blessing for Judah. Divine wrath and judgment fill the book of Nahum, but it also contains the consolation that ultimately God will not stand by and allow those who hurt His children to go unpunished. The magnitude of His power matches His apparent slowness to anger (1:3), and He is a shelter in times of distress/trouble (1:7). As a result of God's judgment on Nineveh (1:12), salvation would come to Judah, and once again God's people would joyously celebrate their sacred festivals (1:15). But the message also implies a forewarning that Judah might eventually share Nineveh's fate if oppression and wickedness continued there unchecked. The same message applies today: God will not tolerate oppression and corruption. The book of Nahum declares the universal sovereignty of God; He is the Lord of history, the Lord of nature, and the Lord of destinies. He alone provides a future for His people.

The connection between hope and the fall of Assyria implies at least an eschatological hope. In Nahum, God's promise that trouble and affliction would not return lies at the heart of this hope. He announces the end of evil extending beyond the evil caused by Assyria, a promise reinforced by the statement that God would finish it completely (1:9). At the end of the book, God describes the wickedness of Assyria in universal terms. Its cruelty had affected everyone (3:19). Consequently, the book constantly emphasizes the absolute extermination of Assyria (1:14–15; 2:10) followed by the resurgence of Jacob in excellence and splendor (2:2). Like Edom in Obadiah, Assyria in Nahum seems to stand for much more than an ancient empire. It stands for the archenemy who has oppressed God's people throughout history. The power of God would permanently destroy this enemy, ushering in a new era of peace for His people (cf. 1:15). Isaiah, who also used Assyria as a symbol of God's ultimate enemy, voiced this same eschatological hope when he announced that the coming Messiah would bring Assyria to an end (Is. 10:20–34).

Literary Features. The book of Nahum contains several woe oracles against Assyria (cf. Is. 13–23; Jer. 46–51). The prophet uses poetic language with vivid, evocative imagery to convey intense moods and sights. He utilizes sound-based wordplays, metaphors (Nah. 2:11–12), similes (1:10; 2:8; 3:12), repetition (2:11–13; 3:15–17), and short, often staccato, phrases. The oracles in Nahum are war poetry with taunting motifs and imagery referencing God as the divine Warrior (1:2–11). They communicate certain judgment, with no mention of redemption for Assyria.

COMMENTARY

1:1

Introduction

The double title in the superscription introduces what follows as both a prophetic pronouncement and the "book" of Nahum's vision. No other superscription of a prophetic book refers to the contents as a *seper* ("book," "writing," "scroll"). The Hebrew word *massa'* ("burden," "prophecy," "oracle") denotes a pronouncement made about or against an entity, in this case, Nineveh. The term *khazon* ("vision") also appears in the superscriptions to Isaiah and Obadiah. The author does not mention the source of the vision, but presumably this was a divine revelation.

The location of Elkosh, Nahum's hometown, is unknown. Early tradition placed it in the territory of Simeon or in Galilee, possibly Capernaum (lit. "village of Nahum"). Later tradition suggests 'Alqush, a town near Mosul in Iraq. This mountainous site maintained by modern "Assyrian Christians" was home to a Jewish community that survived into the 1940s of the modern era.

1:2–8

A Psalm Praising the Divine Warrior

Nahum begins his oracle by describing God as jealous (1:2; Ex. 20:5; 34:14) and avenging (Nah. 1:2; Deut. 32:35, 43; Is. 1:24), yet slow to anger (Nah. 1:3). His jealousy and vengeance arise from a justifiable sense of indignation (Ps. 94). He appears in the whirlwind and storm (Nah. 1:3; Jer. 23:19; 30:23) and rebukes the sea (Nah. 1:4; Ps. 106:9). In His presence, the mountains quake, and the hills melt (Nah. 1:5; Pss. 18:7; 46:6; Jer. 4:24; Amos 9:5).

The use of the terms *'el* for God and *ba'al* for Lord (Nah. 1:2) may reference Canaanite religious ideas in order to show who is the true God and Lord. The association of God with seas, rivers (v. 4), storms (v. 3), and fire (v. 6) further supports this. Similar imagery of water, sea, floods, storm, and fire/lightning also appears in Psalm 29. The God of Israel, not the Canaanite Baal, controls the fertile regions and rich pasturelands of Bashan in northern Transjordan, beautiful Mount Carmel next to the Mediterranean Sea and close to Lower Galilee, and mountainous Lebanon, the source of luxuriant cedars (Nah. 1:4; Is. 33:9).

God's anger burns against His enemies; but in contrast, He is a refuge and deliverer for those who *khasah* ("trust," "take refuge") in Him (Nah. 1:7–8; Pss. 27:1; 37:39; Is. 17:10; Jer. 16:19).

1:9—2:2

Judgment on Nineveh and Deliverance of Judah

God's promise that *tsarah* ("trouble," "affliction," "distress") would not return indicates that He would not give Assyria another opportunity to torment His people (1:9). In fact, the great power of Assyria disappeared from the pages of history soon after 612 B.C. If Assyria represents God's archenemy, then this promise would also apply to the eternal destruction of evil at the end of time (cf. Mal. 4:1; Rev. 20–21). The Hebrew word *tsarah* means not only "trouble" or "affliction" but also "adversity," "anguish," and even "calamity." Isaiah also announced the eschatological end of all affliction/adversity (Is. 65:16). Never again would sin raise its ugly head in God's universe (cf. GC 504).

At the time of Nahum's prophecy, Assyria seemed at the height of its power (Nah. 1:12a), which historically was most likely during the reign of Ashurbanipal (669–627 B.C.). Assyria heavily oppressed both Israel and Judah (2 Kin. 16:7–8; 18:13–16; Is. 7:18–25) and did not ease up until the reign of Josiah. They attacked Judah for the last time during the reign of Manasseh (2 Chr. 33:11) and led him away like an animal to Babylon. But God promised His people that He would no longer afflict them (Nah. 1:12). Instead, He would bring the oppressor, Assyria, to its end (1:13–14).

The fleet feet of the bearer of glad tidings are blessed because the bearer brings news of Nineveh's imminent fall and the ensuing period of peace for God's people, when they could once again celebrate the festivals (v. 15). During Josiah's eighteenth year, Judah celebrated Passover as never before (622 B.C.; 2 Kin. 23:21–25), and by the end of his reign, the Assyrian empire had been completely eradicated. The motif of feet bringing good news also appears in Isaiah 52:7, which announces deliverance from the Babylonians. In Romans 10:15 this motif again appears, but this time the bearer of good news tells of deliverance from sin.

Assyria had scattered nations through mass deportations. Israel fell victim in 722 B.C., and much of Judah was decimated in 701 B.C. However, another nation came to scatter Assyria. The Lord used Assyria as a scourge and rod (Is. 10:5, 24) against both Israel and Judah, but He would restore the majesty of Jacob (Nah. 2:2). This would culminate in spiritual restoration through the coming Messiah (cf. Rom. 9:4–5).

2:3–13

A Vision of the Coming Destruction of Nineveh

The prophecy moves from the restoration of Jacob (2:2) to a lengthy description of the fortification of the city of Nineveh against the coming attack (v. 5). The Babylonians attacked the neighboring Assyrian city of Ashur in 615 B.C. but failed to take it. In the next year, the Medes successfully conquered the city. In 612 B.C., a Median and Babylonian coalition besieged Nineveh for three months before it fell. Excavations have uncovered two preemptive, fortified narrowings of the eastern Halzi Gate, one of the fifteen gates of Nineveh. Within the same area lay the remains of numerous fallen Assyrian soldiers from the 612 B.C. battle. Nabopolassar graphically described his victory over the hated Assyrian enemy: "I slaughtered the land of Subartu (Assyria), I turned the hostile land into heaps and ruins. The Assyrian, who since distant days had ruled over all the peoples, and with his heavy yoke had brought injury to the people of the Land, his feet from Akkad [Babylonia] I turned back, his yoke I threw off."

Nahum prophesied that the city would be led away captive into exile (v. 7). This certainly refers to the inhabitants of the city of Nineveh but may also refer to the city's goddess, Ishtar, whose temple and its associated cult prostitution dominated the religious lives of Assyrians. Her attribute animal, the lion, figured prominently in Nineveh, especially during the reign of Ashurbanipal. His North Palace is replete with reliefs of lion hunts staged in the expansive grounds within the walls of the city. At the end of the hunt, the killed lions were presented to Ishtar while the king poured libations over the heads of the dead victims.

Nahum's use of lion imagery draws upon the many levels of meaning that the lion held in Assyrian ideology. Assyria had torn apart its victims as a lion tears its prey, but now Assyria itself would be torn to pieces (vv. 11–12) and the stunning wealth of the city looted (v. 9). Using powerful wording, Nahum characterizes the city as desolate, plundered, and devastated (v. 10). In the Hebrew, three words with alliterative similarity (the first two from the same root) express the idea that emptiness signals absolute desolation: *buqah* ("emptiness," "pillaged"), *mebuqah* ("void," "plundered"), and *mebullaqah* ("devastation").

3:1–19

The Sin and Destruction of Nineveh

A declaration of a curse and lament (Heb. *hui*, "woe") for the city of bloodshed (3:1) succinctly introduces the final focus of this oracle. The single word "woe" contains within it the horrors facing Assyria, while the designation of Nineveh as the city of bloodshed provides the justification for the meting out of those woes.

3:1–4. Woe against Nineveh. Three charges brought against the city justify its ruin: bloody violence (v. 1), deceitful harlotry (v. 4; cf. the Assyrians lying to Hezekiah's men; 2 Kin. 18:31–32), and lion-like plundering of the nations (Nah. 2:11–12; cf. Is. 10:13). The consequences match the crimes: Nineveh would meet a violent end. Just as Assyrian kings had boasted of erecting pyramids with the heads of their enemies, so countless corpses would fill the streets. The city would be exposed and shamed, as befits a lying prostitute (cf. Jerusalem in Jer. 13:22, 26 and Babylon in Is. 47:1–3), and that which the Assyrians had stolen would be stolen from them.

3:5–17. Taunts against Nineveh. God declared that He was against Nineveh (3:5), an idea that first occurs in 2:13, conveying the Lord's determination to destroy the city. Passersby would indeed confirm that Nineveh lay in ruins (3:7), just as the many enemy cities Assyria had destroyed. In vv. 8–10, the mention of the fall of No Amon (lit. "city of [the god] Amun"; see also Jer. 46:25; Ezek. 30:14–16) reflects Ashurbanipal's conquest of the Egyptian city in 663 B.C. Known to the Greeks as Thebes, this city housed the great Karnak temple of Amun. Their alliance with Egypt, Put (probably Libya or possibly Somalia), and Lubim (another poetic name for Libyans) would have made Thebes appear indomitable before it fell. What the Assyrians did to Thebes would now be done to Nineveh. Just as Ashurbanipal "put a dog chain on [the captured leader] and made him occupy a kennel at the eastern gate of Nineveh," so Nineveh's great men would be bound with chains. Nahum calls Nineveh's strongest men *'ishah* (lit. "women"; Nah. 3:13). This cultural insult of the time refers to their physical weakness. Isaiah uses it in reference to the Egyptians (Is. 19:16). Nahum prophesied that fire would devour the bars of Nineveh's gates, and in fact, the Halzi Gate burned in the 612 B.C. battle. Archaeologists have since uncovered the charred remains.

3:18–19. Destruction of Hopeless Nineveh. Tragically, Judah, like Nineveh, refused God's salvation. As punishment, the Babylonians also conquered them and took them into exile. Other descriptions of Judah during the Babylonian attack of 587 B.C. employ imagery very similar to that of Nineveh's final days: calamities against children (Is. 51:20; Lam. 2:19; 4:1–2), leaders as bad shepherds (Jer. 23:1–2; Ezek. 34:2–10), and passersby clapping their hands (Lam. 2:15). The book of Jonah concludes with God asking, rhetorically, whether He should have pity/concern for Nineveh (Jon. 4:11). In contrast, Nahum ends by asking whether anyone had not suffered Nineveh's relentless cruelty (Nah. 3:19). God had reached out His divine hand to save Nineveh, but they ultimately refused His salvation. The resulting loss forever serves as a lesson in the pages of human history. It also brings hope that in the experience of Nineveh, we can anticipate the ultimate collapse of the wicked.

HABAKKUK

INTRODUCTION

Title and Authorship. The book of Habakkuk is the eighth book among the Minor Prophets. Named after the prophet, its Hebrew title (*khabaqquq*) is probably derived from the root *khabak* ("to embrace"), which may serve as a key to deciphering the principal message of the book. But Habakkuk had already been expecting God to embrace humans with His love, compassion, and grace. Rather, the prophet himself, as well as all humanity, needed to wholeheartedly embrace God and His word by faith. The Greek Septuagint translation used the name *ambakoum*, possibly derived from the Akkadian word *hambaququ*, a type of exotic flower. The Latin Vulgate adopted this name (*habacuc*), which became the title of most translations.

While the book of Habakkuk does not mention its author, one can assume the prophet himself presumably wrote it since the Lord specifically commanded him to write out the vision plainly (2:2). The book gives no information about Habakkuk's family, occupation, or leadership position in his country of Judah. This is not uncommon because the prophets wrote about God, not themselves. However, Habakkuk states twice that he is a prophet (1:1; 3:1). Among the other prophetic books, only Haggai and Zechariah make this claim in the superscription (Hag. 1:1; Zech. 1:1).

Outside of his own book, nothing from historically reliable sources is known about Habakkuk. The apocryphal book *Bel and the Dragon* mentions a legend according to which he was miraculously transported to Babylon to feed Daniel in the lion's den. Jewish traditions claim that he was the son of the woman who hosted the Prophet Elisha. This is rather fanciful since Elisha ministered in the ninth century B.C., whereas Habakkuk lived in the late seventh century.

Backgrounds. Although the book does not mention a date, the internal data reveals the historical background. The Northern Kingdom of Israel came to an end when the Assyrians destroyed Samaria in 722 B.C. Nabopolassar (624–605 B.C.) established the Neo-Babylonian Empire, which Nebuchadnezzar (605–562 B.C.) then expanded and fortified. Nineveh, the ancient capital and stronghold of the Assyrian Empire, fell to the Babylonians in 612 B.C. From Judah's perspective, this event happened far to the north. However, when Pharaoh Necho tried to assist the Assyrians in May/June 605 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian crown prince, defeated him at the battle of Carchemish (2 Chr. 35:20; Jer. 46:2). This unexpected victory removed the whole Syro-Palestinian territory from the strong influence of Assyria and Egypt and opened it up to Babylonian control. Nebuchadnezzar pursued the Egyptian army southward while simultaneously besieging Jerusalem in the late summer of 605 B.C. (Dan. 1:1–2).

Date. The book's prediction of the imminent Babylonian attack on Judah (Hab. 1:6) narrows down the timeframe of the writing of Habakkuk. At the time of this prophecy, Babylon had not yet threatened Judah, but they would soon unexpectedly come. Habakkuk does not write about or allude to the fall or destruction of Jerusalem; he was still waiting for God's judgment upon Judah (2:2–3; 3:16).

Considering the book's internal evidence, Habakkuk probably wrote it during the short period of time after Assyria and Egypt had lost their domination of the land to Nebuchadnezzar but before Babylon's power had grown enough to threaten Jerusalem. This would place Habakkuk after the fall of Nineveh in 612 B.C. but before the battle of Carchemish in 605 B.C. The corrupted state of God's people likely places the book after 609 B.C., when Pharaoh Necho defeated and killed Josiah, the last godly king of Judah, at Megiddo (2 Kin. 23:29; 2 Chr. 35:20–24).

After Josiah's death, it looked like Egyptian supremacy would dominate Judah's future. At that time, Judah lacked a positive figure on the throne in Jerusalem to stop, prevent, or at least slow down the avalanche of evil and violence that spread unrestrained through society. The first part of the book reflects on this unjust and corrupt situation. The prophesied shocking surprise occurred in 605 B.C., when Nebuchadnezzar gained a decisive victory over Pharaoh Necho, making the Chaldeans the new dominant force in the Middle East (Hab. 1:5).

Theology and Purpose. The book of Habakkuk, like the book of Job and Psalm 73, is a theodicy, a response to the question of God's silence in the midst of evil. The prophet expresses frustration with God's way of handling injustice and approaches Him with serious complaints regarding His character, government, judgments, and care for His people. Habakkuk does not understand why God seems to overlook the sins of His people by not doing anything to stop the flood of wickedness. The prophet's questions bring out the main theme of the book: embrace God's word by faith and wait patiently for the fulfillment of His promises because He is reliable.

1. Opening Up to God. Habakkuk differs from other prophetic books in that it contains a dialogue between the prophet and God. In the book, God does not so much speak *through* His prophet as *with* His prophet, addressing Habakkuk's questions. This conversation is open and honest but also tough and disturbing. Habakkuk asks hard questions because evil and rebellious people prevail. When calamity strikes, God seems far away. Why does God not intervene and do something against wickedness? Why does He not respond? Why does the holy and just God not punish the guilty when things go wrong? Is God really in control of history? No wonder one of the key themes of Habakkuk is God's justice. The book challenges His character and holiness because, despite the incompatibility between good and evil, God seems to tolerate evil (Hab. 1:3, 12–13).

Dialoguing with the Lord allows Him to provide answers to difficult questions, react to disappointments, heal emotions, and save. God welcomes open, sincere, and honest dialogue. He delights in His children as they pour out their hearts to Him expressing honest thoughts, feelings, and expectations. He reacts to problems, frustrations, and troubles by giving hope and renewed strength. The book of Psalms also contains many sincere and honest prayers full of frustration and emotion.

2. Patiently Waiting and Hoping in the Lord. Even after lamenting in his frustration, Habakkuk is still dissatisfied and disheartened. He needs to learn to look up to God and constantly trust His word as the source of power and courage. Strength does not come simply through crying out to God but through trusting His word. The book underlines the importance of God's promises and previous mighty acts as revealed in Scripture. The fulfillment of His promises instills hope and trust in the human heart. The Lord's past mighty acts prove the reliability of His word even in times of crisis. The prophet as well as the people needed to wait patiently, trusting God's word. Meaningful and true answers to real-life problems do not come suddenly; they come at the end. Although God's way often seems paradoxical, waiting for Him is necessary (see 2:3).

Thus, Habakkuk provides a crucial example of what it means to live by steadfast trust (2:4): trusting God's word and waiting unwearyingly on the Lord in times of crisis or prosperity. The prophet's point is clear—God's word alone provides security. Trusting in Him means believing in His word, relying on it, and living according to it. This trust brings inner peace and joy even in times of national and personal adversity. The deep undertone of the book encourages believers to cultivate God's presence in their lives through a personal relationship with Him. Trusting His word opens our eyes to see Him even though He is not visible to our naked eyes.

3. The Wicked and the Righteous. The book contrasts the righteous with the wicked. The key phrase that the righteous live by steadfast trust (2:4) means that the believer needs to embrace the word of God by faith and wait patiently on the fulfillment of His promises. Such promises not only reorient us but also address life's problems and empower us to go forward in hope. On the other hand, the wicked, typified by the Babylonians, have no future because they are proud, self-centered, violent, and arrogant. Habakkuk describes five woes that result in disaster for the wicked (2:6–19).

The book attests to the importance of prayer. The righteous pray. The prophet directly addresses God and recalls His past mighty acts. He wishes that God would renew them in his day (3:2). The last chapter forms a prayer or hymn culminating with a doxology where the prophet expresses His full trust and joy in the Lord (3:17–19).

4. The Righteous God Overcomes Evil. Habakkuk uses several different names and titles for God, including Lord, Sovereign God, and Savior. Even when God's power and presence are invisible, He provides joy and strength, enables a victorious walk, and empowers His people to go through life singing. Thus, in the midst of life's troubles, the prophet underlines the true source of happiness and joy as the Lord who strengthens and saves (3:18–19).

The book attests that God will inevitably judge humanity and hold them accountable because He created them. Habakkuk understood that God would judge Judah and the nations for their wickedness and rebellion. But he could not comprehend how God could use the Babylonians as His agents of judgment. They were more wicked than the inhabitants of Judah! Hence he questioned whether the punishment fit the crime (1:12–13). God assured him that although He may delay His judgments, they would certainly come at the appropriate time (2:3; 3:16). This called for patience. The prophet needed to wait for the fulfillment of God's word, to learn to live with his questions while relying on the divine promises.

The prophet concludes his book by saying that he would wait patiently with the Lord as his strength (3:16, 19). In the midst of calamities, violence, disorder, evil, unanswered questions, and disappointments, believers must look up, embrace the Lord by faith, and stand firm on His promises because He is a righteous God. This trust in the Lord gives hope, courage, joy, and a renewed motivation to press on.

Literary Features. The book of Habakkuk is unique when compared to other prophetic material. Habakkuk does not simply prophesy but rather poses pertinent questions to God regarding Judah's current disturbing situation and other issues impacting himself. The dialogue between the prophet and God is an exceptional literary feature. The different discourses contain rhetorical features that require close attention in order to discover the meaning of the overall message. The book has a very straightforward literary structure divided into two main sections: Habakkuk's dialogue with the Lord (1:2—2:20) and his prayer with a concluding hymn (3:1–19). Both these sections contain several subsections.

COMMENTARY

1:1—3:19

THE LORD IS MY STRENGTH: WHEN EVIL REIGNS AND FAITH NEEDS TO WAIT

In spite of his serious questions, frustrations, and disappointments with how God treats evil and judges the guilty, Habakkuk ultimately recalled God's past mighty acts, enabling him to trust God's promises and joyfully wait for the fulfillment of His word. Habakkuk was a prophet of hope.

1:1—2:20

Dialogue with the Lord

After a brief introduction to the book (1:1), the prophet expresses his disappointment with the Lord (vv. 2–4), and God answers (vv. 5–11). Habakkuk then complains further (1:12—2:1), prompting God's final response (2:2–20). Because God had delayed His response to evil, Habakkuk questioned His reputation, His holiness, and ultimately His ability to rule and care for His people. At the end, the prophet saw the majesty of God in His temple and was reverently silent because He understood that God, in His timeline, would bring judgment on the wicked and punish the arrogant. The Babylonians would answer for their wicked behavior.

1:1. Introduction. The introduction identifies Habakkuk as God's spokesperson. It characterizes the revelation he received as a *massa'*. This Hebrew word can mean "burden" as well as "oracle" or "prophetic utterance." The first nuance would suggest that carrying the divine message was a heavy burden. Habakkuk had a difficult role because, although he had received God's word, it required him and his listeners to wait for its fulfillment. The message he received (lit. "saw" in a vision), gave him special historical insights that helped him gain a better perspective on life. As a prophet, he spoke on behalf of God, reminding the people of God's faithfulness, care, judgments, and sovereignty.

1:2–4. The Prophet's Disappointment with the Lord. The book opens not with the expected revelation from God but with the prophet's lamenting and complaining. A tough dialogue between the prophet and the Lord ensues. In frustration, Habakkuk confronted God with forceful, pointed, and dramatic questions: Why are You silent? Why do You not intervene? Why does evil among Your people continue unpunished? How long will You not listen and save? The phrase "how long" occurs sixty-five times in the Bible (see Pss. 6:3; 13:1–2; 74:10; Rev. 6:10) and usually invites divine intervention in undesirable situations. Six keywords describe the condition of Israelite society—injustice, wrong, destruction, violence, strife, and conflict—and Habakkuk passionately detested this situation. The law was powerless/paralyzed, meaning that God's teaching was ineffective, not respected or honored. For the first time the prophet mentions two opposite groups of people: the righteous and the wicked.

Habakkuk's questions show his bitterness and deep disappointment. He could not understand why God did not answer his prayers and intervene to punish evil. But he did right by bringing all these frustrations and negative emotions to the Lord. He invoked Him as "LORD" (Yahweh), which designated Him as a close, personal God, the God of His people, the God of the covenant.

1:5–11. God's Answer: The Babylonians will Punish Judah. God assured the prophet that He was about to do a strange and unbelievable work. He would use the Chaldeans (Babylonians) as His instrument to punish Judah. Three events fulfilled this shocking prediction: (1) In 605 B.C., the Babylonians besieged Jerusalem and took Daniel and other young nobles into captivity (Dan. 1:1–5). (2) In 597 B.C., the Babylonians deported King Jehoiachin along with ten thousand others, including Ezekiel (2 Kin. 24:10–16; Ezek. 1:1–3). (3) In 586 B.C., Judah lost its autonomy, and the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and the temple (2 Kin. 25:1–12). Habakkuk never mentions the fall or destruction of Jerusalem, suggesting that he wrote the book before the invasion. The Lord characterizes the Babylonians as behaving like animals, ruthless, violent, selfish, and proud. But in the end, they would also experience divine judgment according to the law of retribution. This happened in October 539 B.C., when Cyrus, the Medo-Persian king, conquered them (see Dan. 5:28–30; 6:28; Is. 45:1–4).

1:12—2:1. The Prophet's Complaint. Habakkuk struggled with the Lord's answer and became even more frustrated, leading him to question God's character. If the Lord is holy, how can He tolerate evil and wickedness? Furthermore, how can He use a more wicked people (Babylon) to punish a less wicked people (Judah)? The Babylonians played with human lives like fishermen with fish (1:14). The metaphor of catching enemies in nets symbolizes power, defeat, and judgment. The book mentions violence five times (1:2–3, 9; 2:8, 17). In the book of Genesis, the same word describes the condition of society in Noah's time (Gen. 6:11). Why is God silent when injustice prevails even among His people? The book of Psalms contains similar expressions of frustration with God's apparent silence in the face of evil (see Pss. 83:1; 109:1). But Habakkuk insisted on hearing the Lord's response (Hab. 2:1). By His powerful word, God created the world, and as the incarnated Word, He redeemed the world. When He speaks, tangible things occur because of His creative power (Ps. 33:9).

2:2–19. God's Answer: The Punishment of the Babylonians. The Lord responded that Habakkuk would have to wait patiently for Him to act. The implementation of God's revelation would take time (2:2–3; see Ezek. 18:32; 2 Pet. 3:9). At the core of the book, Habakkuk 2:4-5 contrasts the wicked with the righteous. The Lord describes the wicked as prideful, deceptive, arrogant, selfish, greedy, violent, and shallow. The wicked, modeled by the Babylonians, live without God, controlled by their own decisions and evil passions. The righteous, on the other hand, live by personal steadfast trust, not by visions, dreams, proofs, or miracles. They live by embracing God and trusting His word, patiently waiting for its fulfillment. They find their strength in His promises because His word is trustworthy. Paul says that the believer lives by faith rather than by sight (2 Cor. 5:7). A passage in the Talmud suggests that Habakkuk narrows all the commandments of the Torah down to one command: Israel must live by its faith in God.

Scholars debate both the meaning of the Hebrew word *'emunah* ("faith," "faithfulness," "trust") and the antecedent of the pronoun "his." The word *'emunah* does not mean "faith" in the sense of "belief" so much as "steadfast trust" in the sense of one's commitment to God. In Habakkuk, it means recognizing God as the only One who can preserve life and holding on to Him in the midst of uncertainty. The Septuagint, the Greek translation of the OT, reads "my faithfulness" (i.e., God's faithfulness), suggesting that it is God's faithfulness to His promises that preserves the lives of His people. The Hebrew plausibly refers to God's faithfulness. However, the contrast with the wicked (Hab. 2:4a), described as proudly relying on their own strength for survival, shows that the pronoun refers to those who rely on the Lord. In 1:12–17 the prophet contrasts the wicked with the righteous, represented by Babylon and Judah, respectively. Since 2:4 is part of God's response to the prophet's question, the righteous one who lives by faith may refer to Judah as a nation and the proud one may refer to Babylon (vv. 4–5). But the existence of both the wicked and the righteous within Judah (1:1–4) implies that in the coming disaster only those totally committed to the Lord would survive.

God promises life to the righteous but pronounces five woes against the wicked (2:6–19). The first woe condemns greediness, plundering, dishonesty, and violence (vv. 6–8) and describes the wicked as proud, selfish, violent, greedy, lacking self-control, and idolatrous. The second condemns exploitation, covetousness, and pride (vv. 9–11). The third condemns injustice and crime (v. 12).

In the middle of this list of woes God proclaims His lordship and His intention to reveal Himself and fill the earth with His glory (vv. 13–14; cf. Num. 14:21; Ps. 72:19; Is. 6:3; 11:9). Humanity will acknowledge Him as the Lord, recognize the beauty of His character, and understand His presence in human affairs. This positive message affirms God's control even though His presence may not be recognized.

After this brief interlude, the list of woes continues. The fourth woe condemns intemperance and the resulting immorality and lack of self-control (Hab. 2:15–17). And the final one condemns the constant problem of idolatry (vv. 18–19). Instead of recognizing God's benevolence in their prosperity and success, the Babylonians attributed their victories to their gods, represented by idols (cf. 1:11). This section concludes with an important theological statement affirming the Lord's presence in His temple and commanding all to remain silent. Though people on earth could not yet perceive God's holy, dazzling, and awesome presence (see Gen. 28:16–17; Is. 6:1–9), the faithful could find rest and peace in the middle of real threats because the Judge of all the earth had taken His seat and would soon pronounce judgment against the wicked.

3:1–19

The Prophet's Prayer: Talking Confidently to God

This section includes a brief introduction (3:1), a discussion of God's awesome deeds (vv. 2–15), a hymn (vv. 16–19a), and an epilogue (v. 19b). The book begins with questions but ends with a magnificent affirmation. The prophet, silent since the beginning of chapter 2, eloquently expresses his full confidence in God in a powerful prayer. After perceiving God's awesome presence, he contemplated God's past mighty acts. He stood in wonder before the Lord's miraculous interventions in the history of His people. Relying on these accounts, the prophet asked God to again intervene according to His timing. Then people would stand in astonishment before the Sovereign God, who deals with evil and saves the

Habakkuk 2:4 and the New Testament

Three NT epistles mention the phrase in Habakkuk 2:4 about the righteous living by faith.

1. *In Romans.* For the apostle Paul, this central thought demonstrated that God's righteousness comes by His grace through faith in Christ Jesus (see Rom. 1:16–17). According to his reading, the text does not simply refer to the believers' faithfulness to God but to the saving faith in Christ that makes faithfulness possible. Paul considered this key prophetic text on justification by faith as complementing texts from the Torah (Gen. 15:6) and the Writings (Ps. 32:1–2). These connections between the Pentateuch and the Prophets strongly attest to the continuity between the teaching regarding redemption in both the OT and the NT. There has always been only one way of salvation—by God's grace through faith in Him.

2. *In Galatians.* In Galatians, Paul underlines the fact that the law cannot save anyone, otherwise Christ would have died in vain. The law, however, continues to be an important guide for the believer (Gal. 5:6, 13–14). When Paul speaks about the misuse of the law and explains that Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, he shows that the law cannot justify. In God's sight, the righteous live by faith (Gal. 3:11). God justifies those who place their trust/faith in Christ.

3. *In Hebrews.* Hebrews 10:36–38a references Habakkuk to show that only by faith can a believer confidently and victoriously persevere through trials, conflicts, and the crises of life. While Paul uses Habakkuk 2:4 to underscore justification based on a saving faith in Christ, the book of Hebrews uses the passage to encourage maintaining faith in God to endure the hardships of life. The apostles explained to the church the different theological elements all packaged in Habakkuk 2:4.

righteous. Interestingly, the Lord does not speak at all in chapter 3. The entire chapter contains Habakkuk's expression of full trust in the Lord in response to His revelation. He would look up in hope and find power and joy in the Lord.

3:1. Introduction. Recalling how God had fulfilled His promises in the past encouraged the prophet to face tomorrow and strengthened him to live in the midst of calamity. God's faithfulness to His covenant forms the background of this prayer. Two Hebrew musical terms (not always translated into English) attest to the poem's status as a psalm sung as part of the temple liturgy: *shigyonot* may designate changes in the mood and rhythm (3:1), and *selah* may indicate a change in melody (vv. 3, 9, 13). In addition, v. 19 contains a specific notation for the music leader.

3:2–19a. God's Past Awesome Deeds. In this passage, Habakkuk portrays God as a divine Warrior (cf. Ex. 15:3; Deut. 1:30; Zeph. 3:17). Using the Exodus from Egypt as background (Hab. 3:2–10), Habakkuk pleads with God to show His mighty deeds in his time (lit. "in the midst of the years"). This is the only place in which this phrase appears in the OT connected with time. The prophet wishes for God to act, to intervene, and to again reveal His mighty actions and His mercy. God does not require blind trust but trust built on His past mighty acts. Because He saved His people in the past, we can have confidence for the future.

The reference to Teman in v. 3 points to Edom in the south (Is. 43:6), and Mount Paran represents Sinai (Deut. 33:2). With poetic language and colorful imagery, the prophet recalls Israel's liberation from Egyptian slavery. God opened the Red Sea (Ex. 13:17—14:31) and led His people on dry ground across the Jordan River (Josh. 3:3–17; 4:21–24). Later, He stopped the sun during Joshua's victory at Gibeon (Josh. 10:12–14; cf. 2 Kin. 20:9–11; Is. 38:8) and gifted the promised land to His people (Hab. 3:11–12).

Habakkuk 3:13–15 recalls God's triumphant victory over the powers of evil. Habakkuk remembers some of the greatest events in the history of God's people: the Exodus, the covenant at Sinai, and the conquest of Canaan. God accomplished all these splendid and magnificent deeds. As He led Israel during that time, so will He lead His faithful ones to the final day of victory, when they will rejoice in His salvation. This eschatological perspective anticipates its ultimate realization at the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

The Anointed One of v. 13 is the Messiah, the Representative of Israel. Because God remembered His covenant promise to send the Seed (Gen. 3:15) and to protect and preserve the ancestral line of the coming Messiah, He would intervene and save His people. When the fullness of time came, God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world (John 1:12; Gal. 4:4).

In the end, Habakkuk did not respond to disaster in fear and trembling but in triumphant faith (Hab. 3:16–19a). His powerful concluding confession of faith provides a model for trusting the Lord. His total dedication is exemplary. Habakkuk went from theological crisis (chap. 1) to triumphal faith because God taught him the difference between the wicked and the righteous. Like Thomas in the NT, he grew from doubts to a full trust in the Lord. In this way, he encourages his readers to be faithful to the Lord, which gives the book a pastoral aspect. When the prophet finally looked fully to God, his joy burst forth in a prayer of trust in the Lord (3:18–19). God's past mighty acts bring peace, assurance, and new hope for the future by building trust in God and in His word.

This culminating passage presents one of the best OT confessions of trust in the Lord. These verses express full confidence in God's goodness and care in spite of disappointments, difficulties, and the tragedies of life. Despite everything going wrong, the prophet vows to stay with the Lord, not only clinging to His word but actually rejoicing in the Lord. Why could he rejoice? Because the Lord was His strength! In the past, God had proven the sufficiency of His promises by fulfilling His word, and this satisfied Habakkuk. He could go forward in full confidence knowing that God is still on His throne.

3:19b. Epilogue—Sing It! The book ends with a seemingly strange note dedicated to a musician, giving instructions to play it on "my stringed instruments" (v. 19). Habakkuk designed the whole book, or at least the prayer of chapter 3, for singing purposes in public worship (see also v. 1). The message of the book of Habakkuk needs to be part of our personal experience. Trust and joyfulness in the Lord should be our song. The cantillation of the text serves to strengthen our confidence in the Lord as a collective expression of faith, trust, and joy in Him. Singing expresses thankfulness, reminds us of God's promises, ties us together, and brings victory (see Ex. 15:1–21; Deut. 31:19, 30; 32:1–47; 2 Chr. 20:22; Rev. 15:3). Despite incomprehensible struggles, Habakkuk anticipates God's ultimate triumph.

ZEPHANIAH

INTRODUCTION

Title and Authorship. The book of Zephaniah is the ninth of the Minor Prophets and bears the name of its author. However, scholars debate the meaning of the name. The majority hold that it means "*yah[weh]* has hidden/protected," from the root *tsapan* ("to hide," "to conceal") and the shortened form of the divine name, *yahweh* (i.e., *yah*). Others suggest that it means "watchman of *yah[weh]*," from the root *tsapah* ("to watch") and *yah*. The book identifies the Prophet Zephaniah as the great-great-grandson of Hezekiah (1:1). Although not explicitly stated, the unusual length of this genealogical note seems to imply a reference to the famous King Hezekiah of Judah. No other superscription in a prophetic book traces the prophet's ancestry as far back as four generations.

Date. Zephaniah prophesied during the reign of Josiah (1:1), the son of Amon and grandson of the notorious Manasseh. Josiah ruled the kingdom of Judah from 641 to 609 B.C., so the prophet must have ministered within this timespan. More specifically, Zephaniah predicted the destruction of Nineveh (2:13–15), which occurred in 612 B.C. The repeated mention of Judah's wickedness (cf. 1:4–6, 8–12; 3:1–3, 7) probably points to the time before Josiah's reform, which picked up steam with the discovery of "the book of the law" in 622 B.C. These observations place Zephaniah's ministry in the first half of Josiah's reign, perhaps around 630–625 B.C. Yahweh likely raised him up as a prophet to further the spiritual revival during the reign of Judah's last godly king.

Backgrounds. The fall of Samaria in 722 B.C., an event that brought about the end of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, should have warned the leaders of the Southern Kingdom of Judah about the possibility of divine judgment. But wickedness and apostasy characterized the reigns of Manasseh (697–643 B.C.) and Amon (643–641 B.C.). When Josiah (641–609 B.C.) ascended the throne, the people of Judah participated in many kinds of foreign cults and worshiped various astral deities and Canaanite gods (1:4–5; cf. 2 Kin. 23:4–25). These spiritual and moral lows threatened the kingdom's very existence. Judean society was on the brink of collapse. At this critical moment for the nation, God called Zephaniah to warn the people of impending judgment.

Zephaniah's ministry overlapped with the early part of Jeremiah's ministry. Around this time, the tumultuous international scene saw Assyrian power declining, while Babylon grew in might under Nabopolassar. Babylon would soon pose a serious danger to its neighboring countries, including Judah. Egypt also periodically threatened Judah. God called Zephaniah to his prophetic ministry during a time of serious political and moral decline in Judah.

Theology and Purpose. The book of Zephaniah affirms the need for God's people to remain faithful to the covenant relationship. The prophet highlights the impending Day of the Lord, when Yahweh would judge Judah for their continued apostasy and idolatry. But He would also preserve a faithful remnant to fulfill His mission to the nations. The Day of the Lord would bring both justice and mercy.

1. The Day of the Lord. Zephaniah's message revolves around the coming of the Day of the Lord, when God would judge the whole world and vindicate a faithful remnant. Through His prophet, God describes the Day of the Lord as an imminent day of war (Zeph. 1:7, 14), a dark, cloudy day of gloom, desolation, and ruin (1:15–16). He does not take pleasure in proclaiming judgment and destruction, but He offers a warning to call His people to seek Him and to save them from destruction (3:17–20). For the wicked, the Day of the Lord would bring judgment and divine punishment (1:7—3:8); for the righteous, salvation and hope (3:9–20). It would have both a historical fulfillment (2:4–15) and an eschatological one (3:8–13), affecting both God's covenant people (1:4–13) and the nations (2:4–15). The NT refers to the same epochal event using a variety of phrases, including "the day of judgment" (Matt. 10:15; 11:22, 24; 12:36; cf. 2 Pet. 3:7), "the last day" (John 6:39–40, 44, 54; 11:24; 12:48), "the day of the Lord" (Acts 2:20; 1 Cor. 5:5; 2 Cor. 1:14; 1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Thess. 2:2; 2 Pet. 3:10), "the day of Christ (Jesus)" (Phil. 1:6, 10; 2:16), "the day of God" (2 Pet. 3:12), "the great day" (Jude 6; cf. Rev. 6:14, 17), and "the blessed hope" (Titus 2:13). All these refer to the day of Christ's Second Coming. Believers should look forward to this event and prepare the world as well as themselves for that day.

2. *Justice and Mercy.* Zephaniah describes Yahweh as a God of justice and judgment as well as love and mercy. In fact, God's wrath springs from offended love, resulting in a mixture of judgment and mercy. He promises to slaughter the wicked in His anger (Zeph. 1:2–18) but also to intervene for His people, restoring and exalting the remnant of Judah and Israel, the meek and humble who trust in His name (2:7, 9; 3:12). He would reign over them as the King of Israel, and His people would no longer fear (LXX, "see") evil (3:15).

Literary Features. Zephaniah delivers a direct and forthright message using rich and concise language that manifests powerful rhetorical skills. He vividly portrays the destructive character of the Day of the Lord through imagery of war and devastation (1:2-3, 15). The book contains three main sections: the judgment upon Judah (1:1–18), the judgment upon the nations (2:1–15), and the destruction of Judah and preservation of the faithful remnant (3:1–20).

COMMENTARY

1:1–18

JUDGMENT UPON JUDAH

Chapter 1 focuses on God's judgment of Judah. The description of the Day of the Lord reveals that continued apostasy and idolatry had made Judah's destruction inevitable (see "God's Judgment in the Prophets," p. 981).

1:1

Superscription

Verse 1:1 introduces the author and the timeframe of his message. The book begins, as some other prophetic books do, by stating that the word of the Lord came to the prophet (see Hos. 1:1; Joel 1:1; Jon. 1:1; Mic. 1:1). If the name Zephaniah means "Yahweh has hidden/protected," it is a fitting name for a prophet conveying an urgent but unwelcome message to a wicked people. Zephaniah was probably of royal descent, giving him access to Josiah, the king of Judah, during whose reign he ministered. Being a godly king, Josiah might have listened to Zephaniah and other contemporary prophets, who would have encouraged the reforms the king undertook.

1:2–6

Destruction Declared

Yahweh first directed His judgment against all living things (Zeph. 1:2–3) and then focused on His people, Judah (vv. 4–6). Verses 2–3 proclaim the Lord's devastating judgment. Because of the intensity of His wrath and indignation against all kinds of evil, God would destroy everything, including humanity, animals, birds, and fish, in a divine act of uncreation (v. 3; cf. Gen. 1). Human sin had caused all nature to groan and suffer (cf. Rom. 8:21–22).

While Zephaniah 1:2–3 portrays Yahweh's judgment as universal, vv. 4–6 focus on the judgment of Judah and its inhabitants. Judgment would begin with Judah and Jerusalem. They deserved punishment more than others because they had committed deliberate apostasy against their Lord. Their main sin—idolatry—included the worship of Baal and the stars of heaven, gods worshiped by the Canaanites and Assyrians (cf. Deut. 4:19). Led by idolatrous priests (Zeph. 1:4), they professed loyalty to God verbally but in practice swore by Milcom/Molek (Heb. *malkam*)—an Ammonite deity for whom Solomon had built a high place to please his foreign wives (1 Kin. 11:5–7).

The Lord mentions three groups of people: those who worship the host of heaven, those who swear oaths by both Yahweh and Milcom/Molek, and those who turn/have turned back from the Lord and from seeking Him. In those days, as today, it was fashionable to profess and practice syncretism (i.e., combining the worship of Yahweh with that of other gods or powers). But the worship of the true God is incompatible with the worship of other gods.

1:7–18

The Day of the Lord

This section contains two subsections that start with the imminence of the Day of the Lord. 1:7–13 describes the judgment of Judah on the Day of the Lord, and vv. 14–18 further describe the Day of the Lord in universal terms.

1:7–13. The Destruction of Judah on the Day of the Lord. Zephaniah portrays the Day of the Lord as a sacrifice prepared by Yahweh Himself. The sacrifice in 1:7 represents the destruction of the guilty nation of Judah, and the invited and consecrated guests represent the foreign nations the Lord would use as instruments of punishment (cf. Is. 13:3). The Hebrew word *qadash* ("holy," "consecrated") here seems to mean "set apart for a special purpose." Thus some translations render the word as "invited." In the context of Zephaniah, this refers to the Babylonians (cf. Hab. 1:6). The Lord would punish Judah's princes/leaders/officials as well as the king's children—the members of the royal family. They had all transgressed the law and deserved punishment. Their foreign apparel reflects their adoption of heathen values and customs, including idolatrous worship (cf. Is. 3:16–24). They would leap over the threshold, possibly pointing to the heathen practice of not stepping on the threshold when entering a temple (Zeph. 1:9; cf. 1 Sam. 5:4–5). The second part of Zephaniah 1:9 also suggests a possible reference to servants who ignored boundaries when carrying out commands to enrich their wicked masters. The Fish Gate (located on the north side), the Second/New Quarter (where the rich lived, northwest of the temple), Maktesh/Mortar (probably a market district), and the hills (including Ophel, Zion, and Moriah) were all sections or places within Jerusalem. As the capital of Judah, Jerusalem represented the whole nation (vv. 10–12). Yahweh's inevitable judgment would begin with His people, Judah, because of their deliberate apostacy. They violated the Lord's explicit commands by repeatedly worshiping the idols of surrounding nations.

1:14–18. Further Description of the Day of the Lord. Verses 1:14–18 contain the most detailed description of the Day of the Lord of any passage in Scripture. Although vv. 7–13 make Judah the immediate object of destruction, the lack of any specific reference to Judah in 1:14—2:3 and the proclamation of judgment against foreign nations in 2:4–15 seem to allow for a universal application of the Day of the Lord. Indeed, the final Day of the Lord would bring judgment not only to Judah and the surrounding nations but to the entire world. The word "day" occurs seven times in 1:15–16, reflecting the seven days of Creation (Gen. 1–2). As God created this world in seven days, He uses seven "days" to proclaim its destruction.

The prophet uses five pairs of words to describe the Day of the Lord. The first pair describes the distressing emotional pain that the day would bring; the second, the devastating physical destruction of the earth; the third, the terrible scene of darkness and gloom; the fourth, the feeling of utter helplessness before the black storm clouds; and the fifth, the sounds of battle trumpets warning of attacking enemies. On that day, people would try to save themselves with silver or gold (Zeph. 1:18), only to find them useless before the God of righteousness and justice. On this day of the Lord's wrath, He would pour out the blood of the wicked like dust and their intestines like excrement (v. 17).

Zephaniah emphasizes the imminence of the coming judgment (v. 14) as the NT emphasizes the imminence of the Second Coming of Christ (Rev. 22:12). On that day, the Lord would bring the bitterness of war against the impenitent, and His jealousy would burn like fire to devour the whole earth/land (Zeph. 1:14, 18). These "prophecies of impending judgment upon Judah apply with equal force to the judgments that are to fall upon an impenitent world at the time of the second advent of Christ" (PK 389).

2:1–15

JUDGMENT UPON THE NATIONS

Chapter 2 exhorts Judah to repent and declares judgment against five neighboring nations. The aftermath of the divine punishment would prove more disastrous for these nations than for Judah, from whom God would preserve a remnant (vv. 4–7).

2:1–3

Urgent Call to Seek Yahweh's Mercy

Because of their wickedness, Judah deserved destruction just like the heathen nations (cf. 2:4–15). However, Zephaniah offered them the hope of mercy if they repented. The meek/humble of the land refers to the righteous, and to "seek the LORD" means to seek righteousness and humility (v. 3). Zephaniah both urgently summons the wicked to repent of their ways and return to the Lord and encourages the righteous to continue to uphold His commands of justice. The threefold repetition of "before" in v. 2 emphasizes the urgency of the call to repent and seek the Lord. He might hide/shelter them from His anger on the day of judgment, but the Hebrew word *'ulai* ("it may be," "perhaps") points to the divine freedom to show mercy. Humans have no control (v. 3).

2:4–15
Geographical Oracles

Verses 2:4–15 contain oracles against the Philistines, Moabites, Ammonites, Ethiopians/Cushites, and Assyrians. The Philistines lived to the west of Israel (vv. 4–7), the Moabites and Ammonites to the east (vv. 8–11), the Ethiopians to the south (v. 12), and the Assyrians to the north (vv. 13–15). The Lord would punish them for their wickedness, including their hostility against Judah. As Creator, Yahweh rules over all nations and controls the whole world.

2:4–7. Philistia. The land of the Philistines consisted of five major cities, also called the Pentapolis: Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron, and Gath (2:5; 1 Sam. 6:17). Here, as in Jeremiah 25:20, Gath is not mentioned, because it was destroyed earlier. The Cherethites/Kerethites, who originated from the island of Crete, inhabited the southern part of the Philistine seacoast (cf. 1 Sam. 30:14). God would desolate these cities and destroy the people living in them. Curiously, Zephaniah does not explain God's judgment against the Philistines. But God had already stated the reason through the Prophet Amos: the Philistines ruthlessly took people captive and sold them to Edom (Amos 1:6). Therefore, the remnant of Judah would pasture their flocks in the desolated land of the Philistines.

2:8–12. Moab, Ammon, and Ethiopia. Moab and Ammon appear together in the book of Zephaniah because of their common origin and geographical proximity. Their history dated back to the time of Abraham and Lot. Moab and Ben-Ammi (i.e., Ammon) were the sons of Lot by his two daughters after God saved them from the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19:36–38). The descendants of these brothers threatened the Israelites for many generations. About a century earlier, God had accused Ammon and Moab of cruelty (Amos 1:13; 2:1). He now condemned them for their reproaching insults, pride, and arrogant threats against His people, Judah, and swore to destroy them like He did Sodom and Gomorrah (Zeph. 2:8–9). These nations emerged out of the destruction of those very cities but failed to treat Israel, their brother, with mercy. Once again, Yahweh would give their lands to the remnant of Judah. He would destroy all the gods of the earth, leading to the true worship of the sovereign God. Even those from distant shores would join the remnant in worshiping Him (v. 11).

The Hebrew *kushim* (lit. "Cushites"), though sometimes translated "Ethiopians," refers to the northeastern peoples of Africa in modern Sudan. God simply states that His sword would slay them too. He may have had a particular offense in mind, or He may have cited the most distant known nation to the south to show that His judgment would extend over the whole world.

2:13–15. Assyria. At the time of Zephaniah's ministry (ca. 630–625 B.C.), Assyria posed the greatest threat to Judah. Its capital city, Nineveh, was destroyed by the Medes and the Babylonians in 612 B.C., but it was still strong during the time of Zephaniah's ministry (ca. 630–625 B.C.). Nineveh consisted of an inner city surrounded by a wall eight miles (12.9 km) in circumference, plus an outer city, twelve hundred towers, and fourteen gates. Pronouncing the doom of this awesome and seemingly impregnable metropolis must have appeared a tall order and an enormous risk. But the Lord, using human instruments, would stretch out His hand and destroy Assyria (2:13). The desolation of the once proud city would leave it as dry as the wilderness. Passersby would hiss in ridicule and shake their fists in horror and amazement. Through Nahum, God accused Nineveh of idolatry, lies, robbery, harlotry, and sorcery (Nah. 1:14; 3:1–4). Zephaniah condemns this rejoicing, reveling city for pridefully considering itself greater than all others (Zeph. 2:15). In fulfillment of his prophecy, the Medes and the Babylonians destroyed Nineveh in 612 B.C. Indeed, pride goes before a fall.

3:1–20
JUDGMENT AND BLESSING

The final chapter begins with a reiteration of the judgment against Judah and the nations. It picks up the universal tone of 1:2–3 before concluding with promises of the restoration of the faithful into a glorious state of blessing. The prophet condemns Jerusalem and its inhabitants for their flagrant sins and their persistent refusal to listen to the divine warnings. But God would not destroy His people completely. Yahweh, the jealous covenant-keeping God, would protect the faithful remnant and restore them to eternal joy and happiness.

3:1–7
Jerusalem Rebuked

Zephaniah proclaimed woe to Jerusalem because of obstinacy, impurity, and oppressiveness. In 3:2, the prophet summarizes their misdeeds with four negative sentences. Jerusalem refused to obey, accept correction, trust the Lord, or draw near to Him, all things God's chosen people should do. In vv. 3–4, God denounces the four leading social classes of that time: the princes/officials, the judges/rulers, the prophets, and the priests. He condemns them for their iniquity, injustice, impurity, idolatry, and violence to the law. The people of Judah and Jerusalem, both leaders and followers, knew no shame despite the Lord's unfailing faithfulness to His people (v. 5). Yahweh had punished them and other nations, which should have led them to fear Him and to accept His instructive correction. Yet their corruption persisted (v. 7). Judah had disregarded the righteous Lord among them and deserved destruction (v. 5).

3:8–13
Judgment upon All Nations and Restoration of the Remnant

In 3:8, Yahweh envisions the great day when He would arise in wrath and judgment in order to testify against all the inhabitants of the earth. The King and Judge of the world would gather the nations and assemble the kingdoms to punish them in His fierce anger. This universal judgment would devour all the earth, consuming it with the fire of His jealousy. The righteous, however, would join Isaiah in proclaiming that the Lord is Judge, Lawgiver, and King. He would save them (Is. 33:22).

In contrast to His roles as Judge and Lawgiver that are emphasized in Zephaniah 3:8, vv. 9–13 show Him as Savior and King. He would purify the lips/language of the peoples (cf. the cleansing of Isaiah's lips by one of the seraphim; Is. 6:5–7). He would remove impure elements from Judah and the nations so that the faithful remnant might remain and call on the name of Yahweh, serving Him with one accord (Heb. *shekem 'ekhad*, "with one shoulder, shoulder to shoulder"; Zeph. 3:9). The meek, humble, and contrite remnant would seek to please Yahweh (v. 12). With no unrighteousness or lying among them, they would live in peace under Yahweh's care. No one would make them afraid (v. 13). What a blessed world after centuries of distress and disasters!

3:14–20
Redemption and Restoration

Zephaniah calls God's people to sing, shout, be glad, and rejoice because of Yahweh's past deeds (3:15a), His future deliverance (v. 17), and His very presence with them as their loving and gracious King (vv. 15–17). Verses 14–17 form a short, self-contained psalm with a chiastic structure. Israel rejoicing over Yahweh's deliverance at the beginning corresponds to Yahweh's joy over their return to Him at the end. Yahweh would keep His covenant of love and mercy by preserving the remnant of Judah, an assurance that certainly calls for rejoicing on the part of the faithful.

In vv. 18–20, Yahweh repeats His promise to redeem and restore His people from exile and give them renown and honor among the nations. The use of several active verbs, the emphatic interjection "behold" (Heb. *hinni*, from *hinneh*, omitted in some translations; v. 19), and the final affirmation that Yahweh Himself had spoken (v. 20) combine to emphasize this as a proclamation of Yahweh's desire to fulfill His covenant promises through Israel. Yahweh spoke as the sovereign God of punishment for the wicked but also as the covenant-keeping God of redemption for His people.

The book of Zephaniah vividly describes the Day of the Lord as a day of destruction for the wicked but also as a day of redemption, restoration, and rewards for those who trust and follow the Lord until the end (Ps. 18:20; Is. 40:10; 62:11; Acts 3:20–21; Eph. 4:30; Heb. 11:6; Rev. 11:18). This is "the blessed hope" of God's people of all ages (Titus 2:13; Rom. 10:12; 1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:7–9, 28; Col. 3:11). This eschatological Day of the Lord will bring the cosmic conflict to an end.

HAGGAI

INTRODUCTION

Title and Authorship. The name Haggai is based on the Hebrew *khag* ("festival"). The ending *ai* could be an abbreviation for *yahweh* ("festival of the Lord") or a personal pronoun ("my festival"). The Prophet Haggai's name and ministry expressed hope and joy and aimed at energizing God's people to fulfill His plan for them. The book of Ezra mentions Haggai (Ezra 5:1; 6:14), and Zechariah alludes to his work (Zech. 8:9), but no information exists about his ancestry, occupation, or age. The text gives the impression that he was a dynamic, young preacher.

The book gives no indication whether Haggai had remained in Judah or returned from exile, but it twice claims he was a prophet of the Lord (Hag. 1:3; 2:1). More than two dozen times, this prophet of new beginnings used the messenger formula and variants of it to affirm his message as divine communication (see 1:13; cf. 1:2–3, 12; 2:1, 10). He themed his oracles around the Exodus and saturated them with covenantal language.

Date. Haggai was the first of the postexilic prophets who ministered in Judah. Like other prophets, he provided specific dates for his messages (see also Ezek. 8:1; Dan. 1:1; 2:1; Zech. 1:7; Ezra 1:1; Neh. 1:1; 2:1). His prophetic activity spanned a period of a little more than three months, but the effects transcend millennia. He proclaimed his first message at the celebration of the new moon on August 29, 520 B.C. (Hag. 1:1) and his last oracle a couple of months later, on December 18, 520 B.C. (2:10, 20).

Backgrounds. During the early Persian period, Jerusalem was not the political center of the province. The governor of Judah lived in Mizpah, while the religious center continued to be in Jerusalem. The Neo-Babylonians had left Jerusalem in ruins after their short hegemony over the land (cf. Jer. 40:5–8). It no longer served as the political center of the province, though it continued as the religious center and as a place of pilgrimage (see Jer. 41:4–5). Archaeological evidence shows occupation among the ruins and in some parts of the city that did not suffer the full intensity of the Neo-Babylonian destruction.

While the kings of Babylon weakened and the kingdom slowly became ineffective, the Medes and the Persians gained strength. Cyrus arose from the obscure tribes of today's southern Iran and began conquering kingdom after kingdom until he finally faced the Neo-Babylonians. When he entered the city of Babylon on October 12, 539 B.C., he did not meet serious resistance. Thus, Cyrus the Achaemenid, grandson of a Median king, consolidated an empire even larger than the one achieved by the Neo-Babylonians.

Ezra carefully documented the events that fulfilled Isaiah's and Jeremiah's prophecies (Ezra 1:1–4; cf. 2 Chr. 36:22–23; Is. 44:24—45:25; Jer. 29:10). Cyrus, "the anointed one" (Heb. *mashiakh)*, ordered the rebuilding of the temple of the Lord (ca. 538 B.C.; see 2 Chr. 36:22–23; Is. 44:24—45:3), so batches of exiles returned to Judah to resettle Jerusalem (Ezra 1:11; 7:7). After Cyrus's untimely death, his son Cambyses occupied the throne (530–522 B.C.). During his reign the reconstruction of the temple of Jerusalem stopped, due mainly to opposition from neighboring groups (Ezra 4:24). Cambyses's rule ended unexpectedly when he died on his way back to Persia to fight a usurper, the so-called "Pseudo-Smerdis."

Darius Hystaspes (522–486 B.C.) then rose to power. He was from the Achaemenid family, not a descendant of Cyrus II, the Great. He promoted and supported the rebuilding of temples that had been neglected or destroyed before his rule, and his propaganda stimulated the good will of temple administrators. His major contribution to the people of Judah came in 520 B.C. when

he supported the reconstruction of the Jerusalem temple and the restoration of its services (Ezra 6).

Theology and Purpose. Haggai lived and preached hope in a time of hopelessness, during which those who had returned to Judah were stuck in survival mode.

1. Hope for the Hopeless. Because of their condition, the people focused only on satisfying their material needs. They had lost their kingdom and the land promised to them. Haggai called their attention to higher ground, to the covenantal promises that the Lord had made to their ancestors. He assured them that the promise made to Abram (see Gen. 15:13–14) and fulfilled in the Exodus from Egypt also applied to the exodus from Babylon. Haggai echoed Moses with prophetic authority directly from the Lord.

2. Faithfulness to the Covenant. Haggai succinctly summarizes the blessings and curses uttered at the dawn of Moses's ministry. He challenges his audience in a covenantal lawsuit that moves them to react as the Israelites had a millennium earlier. His oracles are a condensed version of Deuteronomy but strengthened with far-reaching promises of hope. In order to completely fulfill the promised deliverance, the Lord needed a sanctuary so He could dwell among His people to direct, protect, and atone for them. The forgiveness and cleansing of the nation came through the sacrifices. The temple would please the Lord by providing a place of hope for God's people to praise Him, and its services would point to the atoning work of the coming Davidic King, the Messiah.

3. Messianic Hope. Haggai's vision of the Messiah's rule and the submission of the nations to the Lord in His temple transcends the pitiful reality of his time and motivates all believers to fulfill the plans of the Almighty and hope for the fulfillment of the covenant.

Literary Features. The book of Haggai communicates its message using a simple, direct style and energetic tone mixed with rhetorical questions (Hag. 1:4, 9; 2:3, 12–13, 19), key phrases (1:5, 7), parallelism (1:4, 6, 9–10), and allusions (cf. Gen. 46:3; Ex. 3:12; Deut. 28:22–24, 38–40; Josh. 1:9; Is. 7:14). The book follows a chronological order formed by four parallel oracles. Oracles one (1:1–11; Aug. 29; followed by a response from the people, 1:12–15; Sept. 21) and three (2:10–19; Dec. 18) charge the audience with their failures, while the second (vv. 1–9; Oct. 17) and fourth (vv. 20–23; Dec. 18) promise hope to the people.

COMMENTARY

1:1–11

An Apparently Hopeless Situation

The experience of the new exodus from exile was not what the returnees expected. Unlike their ancestors' glorious deliverance from Egypt (ca. 1447 B.C.), no signs or wonders signaled their departure from Babylon. The hopes of a present-day kingdom ruled by the promised Messiah had crumbled under the weight of the Persian Empire, and they had lost their original enthusiasm to rebuild the house of the Lord. Haggai 1:1–11 rebukes the people for their failure to rebuild the symbol of God's presence among them. According to the prophet, the economic crisis they faced resulted from their unfaithfulness to the covenant.

1:1. Introduction. During the exodus from Babylon, God had not visibly displayed His divine power but had exhibited His silent presence among His people. But the word from the Lord that Haggai received interrupted the apparent divine silence, arriving precisely when the people needed it. Haggai dates his oracle to the second year of King Darius of Persia, on the first day of the sixth month (i.e., August 29, 520 B.C.; 1:1), a festival day to celebrate the new moon (cf. Num. 10:10; 28:11; 2 Kin. 4:23; Ps. 81:3).

For the first time, a prophet of Yahweh did not mention a Hebrew king as a point of reference for his ministry. They had no king when Haggai dated the messages, so he had to refer to King Darius instead. This serves as a gloomy reminder of Judah's colonial status and the degenerate times in which the prophet lived. Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, though a descendant of David, was only a governor (Ezra 3:2; Neh. 12:1; cf. Ezra 2:2; Zech. 4:6; Matt. 1:12; Luke 3:27). The chronicler identifies Zerubbabel as the son of Pedaiah (1 Chr. 3:17–19). Some connect him with Sheshbazzar, governor of Judah in Ezra (Ezra 1:5–11; 5:14). Regardless, he was clearly a descendant of Jehoiachin (2 Kin. 24:15; 1 Chr. 3:17) and a rightful candidate for the throne of Judah.

Joshua the son of Jehozadak (also Jozadak), the high priest, was a descendant of Aaron (1 Chr. 5:1–15). He emerged as a capable spiritual leader, listening to the words of the prophet. The Prophet Haggai is mentioned without pedigree or renowned ancestry. But as the Lord's prophet, he spoke with as much authority as the prophets during the monarchy. The phrase *dabar yahweh* (lit. "the word of Yahweh") first appears in Genesis 15:1 to describe God's revelation to Abram. It later became a common description of a divine and authoritative communication. This "word" calls us to celebrate and to hope.

1:2–4. Their Place in the Journey. The prophet introduces his message by invoking *yahweh tseba'ot* ("Lord of hosts/armies, Lord Almighty"; 1:2), a name that emphasizes the rule of Yahweh, the covenantal God of Israel, over all armies and nations. The Lord controls human affairs (cf. Dan. 4:34–35), but by not finishing the rebuilding of the temple, His people actually denied His presence among them. Joshua and Zerubbabel had laid the foundations of the temple two years after arriving in Jerusalem (Ezra 3:8–10), but almost twenty years later, they had not finished construction. Because of God's perceived absence, the people focused on their own survival and not on restoring religious structure.

The contrast between what the people said and what the Lord said could imply a covenantal lawsuit (cf. Ex. 33:12–13; Is. 1:18; 43:26; Hos. 4:1; 12:2; Mic. 6:2). The Lord accused the people of obstructing His work through indifference, neglect, and mistaken priorities. Haggai avoids discussing sociopolitical explanations for the delay, like opposition from enemies (Ezra 4:5) or a lack of resources. The people did not oppose rebuilding the temple; they simply concluded that the time had not yet come (Hag. 1:2). Meanwhile they lived in *sepunim* ("paneled," "roofed") houses, not luxurious mansions but houses with roofs, in contrast to a temple in ruins. The book of Haggai, along with archaeological findings, indicates that Judah was a poor province during the time of Haggai.

1:5–11. Considering the Past. Before the Israelites entered the promised land, Moses reminded them of the Exodus and invited them to reflect on their past experiences. Haggai used a similar approach, calling the people to consider their ways and how their covenant violations had caused a deep ecological and economic crisis (vv. 5–7; 2:15–18; Deut. 28:15; 38–39, 48; cf. Lev. 26:20). No matter how much they sowed and planted, they harvested only a little (see also Mic. 6:14–15; cf. Hag. 2:15–19).

Despite having clothing, the Israelites could not stay warm (1:6). Sheep and goats need nourishment to produce healthy wool and hair. Perhaps scarcity of green pasture affected their production. Without water there was not enough linen, so no one was warm due to lack of sufficient clothing materials. Even their small leather bags rotted and broke apart, letting their wages fall to the ground. While most transactions at the time were in kind, the people of Judah may have used Samaritan, Philisto-Arabian, or Phoenician coins for taxes, commerce with foreigners, or wages.

Reflections on the past must lead to positive actions in the present. The Lord commanded the people to go up to the mountains to collect wood and to build the temple for His pleasure and glory (v. 8). The rebuilt temple would bring Him honor. The command did not necessarily require the people to seek timber from Lebanon, an unlikely task given their tense relationship with their neighbors. More likely they went to the surrounding hills of the Judean highlands to find trees for scaffolding to support the stone structure and roofing of the temple. Because of their proximity to a quarry of high-quality stone, they needed only wood to finish the work.

The Lord explained that He had caused the people's dire situation because they had left His house in ruins while preoccupied with their own houses (v. 9). God took responsibility for the drought and the scorching desert winds that brought about the covenant curses, including lack of grain, wine, and oil (v. 11). In an agrarian society, climate changes can mean the difference between prosperity and starvation, especially in the highlands, where irrigation requires terraces and cisterns to maximize the use of the rain. The Judean hill country needs the seasonal rains affected by the atmospheric pressure and winds coming from the sea (see Lev. 26:4; Deut. 28:12). That area has only two seasons: the dry season and the rainy season. Most of the year, moisture coming from the Mediterranean Sea falls as dew before condensing over the hill country. The Lord sent the dew from the heavens (cf. Gen. 27:28; Deut. 33:28; Zech. 8:12), so Judah's only hope for survival was to rebuild His house.

1:12–15
The People's Response

In response, the people obeyed the voice of the Lord their God as the ancient Israelites at the feet of Mount Sinai had sworn a thousand years earlier (1:12; cf. Ex. 19:8). The passage concludes by describing how the Lord stirred up the spirit of each group that constituted the Lord's community—the civic establishment, the religious leaders, and the rest of the people (Hag. 1:14). Their answer must have been unanimous.

This time everyone supported the prophet, making Haggai one of the most successful prophets in terms of community response.

Zerubbabel, Joshua, and the rest of the people obeyed the voice of the Lord (v. 12). Haggai does not differentiate between the returnees and the ones who had remained in Judah. The *she'erit* ("remnant," "rest") included *all* those affected by the experience of the Exile. Through them the Lord would fulfill His purpose. Moses had warned the Israelites about the possibility of exile (Deut. 28:36, 41, 63–68), the ultimate curse, but he also promised that the Lord their God would bring them back from captivity and have compassion on them (Deut. 30:3). The restoration of the community fulfilled this promise. As the Lord's messenger, Haggai offered the people hope and promised them God's presence (Hag. 1:13; cf. Deut. 7:21, Josh. 1:9; Ps. 23:4; Is. 43:2). Like the official messenger of the Persian Empire, he had access to the "Great King."

God's action rallied His people to action (cf. 2 Chr. 36:22–23; Ezra 1:1–4; Is. 41:2, 25; Zech. 4:6–10; Phil. 2:13). Energized by God, they cut trees for the scaffolding, removed stones, and cleared the site. Several weeks later, on the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month in the second year of King Darius (September 21, 520 B.C.; Hag. 1:15), the people began to build the temple in Jerusalem. The temple provided an unquestionable symbol of the covenant and a clear evidence of hope.

2:1–9
Hope and the Temple

Haggai presented his second message at the climax of the Festival of Tabernacles. The twenty-first of the month (Oct. 17, 520 B.C.) was the final day of the celebrations. He addressed a discouraged people who felt that the reconstructed temple did not compare to the magnificent temple of Solomon. He rejected their attitude and reminded them of the covenant the Lord established when they came out of Egypt (2:5). They needed to be strong. This passage climaxes with the announcement of the coming of the Desire of all nations.

2:1–3. Faded Glory. The Festival of Tabernacles, celebrated in the seventh month (known as Tishri), reminded the people of their experience during the wilderness wanderings (see Lev. 23:33–44; cf. Num. 29:12–40; Deut. 16:13–15). The religious calendar climaxed on the twenty-first of the month, a time of feasting and celebrating the harvest. But in the time of Haggai, the harvest was sparse, leaving little to celebrate. Hopelessness had disheartened the builders (see Ezra 3:12), so Haggai delivered a message from the Lord. He asked the people if any among them had seen the temple in its former glory, a rhetorical question since few of them would have been alive when the Babylonians destroyed Solomon's temple in 586 B.C. But even though it looked less impressive, the glory of the temple did not come from the gold and silver that once decorated it but from the presence of the Lord in His house of worship (see Hag. 2:7).

2:4–5. Covenant and Promise. The book of Haggai uses the Exodus as a type of the return from Babylon. God reminded the people that He had acted according to the covenant He made with them when they came out of Egypt (v. 5). He promised redemption to humanity (Gen. 3:15), reassured Abram of it (Gen. 12, 15, 22), formalized it with the Israelites (Ex. 19–20; cf. 34:10; 1 Kin. 8:9), and guaranteed it to David (2 Sam. 7:1–16). God is faithful to His word. The prophet echoed Moses's words to Joshua son of Nun when he encouraged Zerubbabel, Joshua son of Jehozadak, and the people of the land to be strong (Hag. 2:4; Deut. 31:7; Josh. 1:6–7, 9, 18). He uses the Hebrew verb *hazaq* ("be strong") three times to highlight the need for effort in the task at hand (cf. Zech. 8:9, 13). But success would come from the Lord, whose Spirit remained among them (see commentary on Hag. 1:12–15). The divine presence would cast out their fear of the nations and provide them with hope that was grounded in the presence of God with His people.

2:6–9. Future Glory. The Lord promised to shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land, just like He did in Egypt during the Exodus (see Heb. 12:26–29). In ancient Near Eastern literature, the deities demonstrate their power through earthquakes, eclipses, and storms. The Lord established His authority using imagery familiar to His people (cf. Judg. 5:4; Joel 2:10–11; Amos 9:1). God's rule over the natural and political worlds would shake all the nations, as the people of Judah had witnessed through the edicts of Cyrus and Darius to rebuild the temple. In a little while, God would again intervene directly in history, shaking all nations by the manifestation of His power and leading them to the Desire of all nations.

Although Haggai lifted the spirits of the people with the assurance that silver and gold belong to the Lord, his main concern was not economic prosperity but the restoration of the glory of God. After the shame of the Exile, the Lord would restore His honor and glory in the new temple. Even though Haggai encouraged the rebuilding of a physical temple, it merely served as a symbol of God's sanctifying presence among His people. And the presence of the Messiah would bring greater glory to this temple (see Mal. 3:1). In fact, He would take the functions of the earthly temple on Himself (John 2:19).

2:10–19
The Lives of Committed Believers

Before asking the Israelites to build the sanctuary, the Lord gave them the Decalogue and laws concerning purity and holiness. On the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month in the second year of Darius (December 18, 520 B.C.), several weeks after beginning the rebuilding of the temple, God instructed His people how to live in faithfulness to the covenant (2:10). Haggai explained the importance of holiness and the need to avoid defilement (vv. 10–14). But he also reminded them of God's power to turn the curse into a blessing (vv. 15–19; see Deut. 28:1–14). The "early rains" had recently arrived in the month of October and its abundance promised a plentiful harvest, reenergizing Judah's hope.

2:10–14. Holiness and Defilement. The prophet's words demonstrated the people's need for cleansing. Moses had instructed the people concerning holiness as a prerequisite for approaching the Lord (Lev. 17–26). The priests were responsible for instructing the people on such matters (see Deut. 17:8–13; Ezek. 44:23–24; Mal. 2:1–7), and Haggai affirmed that function of the priesthood. He reminded them that although uncleanness is transferable through touch, holiness is not (Lev. 22:4; Num. 19:22). Touching a dead body would make a person unclean and would contaminate anything else the unclean person touched, including offerings. To enjoy the coming of the Desire of all nations, they needed to cleanse their hearts and turn to the Lord (Hag. 2:17).

The Desire of All Nations

For centuries Jewish and Christian interpreters supported the rendering "desire" for the Hebrew *khemdah*, which made "desire of all nations" a treasured messianic title (Hag. 2:7). However, modern translators have questioned and mostly abandoned that reading, preferring to render *khemdah* as "wealth." Linguistically, both translations are possible, but the context supports the traditional translation.

1. Syntax of the Verse. The verb "they shall come" is third-person plural, while the noun *khemdah* is feminine singular. For *khemdah* to be the subject of the sentence, it would have to agree with the verb in number. The only way to translate the phrase without changing the text would be "they [the nations] will come to the desire of all nations." The subject of the verb is the nations mentioned in the first part of v. 7, and the noun "desire" functions as the object of the verb.

2. A Theophany. Haggai 2:6–7 describes a theophany that would shake nature and the nations. They would witness a powerful manifestation of the Lord that would create a new order. Confronted by this majestic power, the nations would come to the Messiah to seek refuge. Verses 21–23 also describe the shaking of nature and the nations in reference to the coming Messiah. The passage emphasizes the glory of God. The people perceived the glory of the new temple to be inferior to that of the temple of Solomon (v. 3), but the prophet immediately corrected this false perception. The glory of the temple did not stem from external appearance (v. 9) but from the presence of God within it (vv. 4–6). The power of this glory would completely fill the temple (v. 7) and would spill over the earth and the nations, shaking them up. In that temple, the nations would find the Desire of all nations, making it more glorious than the previous one (v. 9). The silver and the gold did not matter because it all belongs to the Lord (v. 8).

3. Use of khemdah. The word *khemdah* has a variety of uses, including references to Israelite kings. At the beginning of the monarchy, "the desire of Israel" was on Saul as the appointed king (1 Sam. 9:20). The people did not desire an evil king (2 Chr. 21:20). Therefore, Haggai logically identifies the Messiah as the Desire of all nations, including Israel.

2:15–19. Blessings Strengthen Hope. The people needed radical change. Haggai reminded them that when they expected twenty units of grain, they reaped only ten, and when they expected fifty liquid units from the winepress, they received only twenty. The Lord had struck the work of their hands (the fields) with blight (scorching desert winds from the east), mildew (humid winds from the west), and hail in fulfillment of the covenantal curses (see Deut. 28:22; Amos 4:9). Through this experience, the Lord wanted them to understand their spiritual condition and turn to Him, but they had not. So He would now do something different. He would show them kindness even though they did not deserve it. He would bless them (Hag. 2:19). Love turns people around. Yes, they needed to be reminded to seek the Lord, but His mercy would change their hearts.

2:20–23
Present Promises and Future Hopes

The imagery in Haggai's last message—chariots overthrown, horses and riders hurled down, heaven and earth shaken—again recalls the Exodus (see Ex. 14:23–25). He looked at the past, applied it to the present, and then pointed to the future and God's final work of deliverance, the awaited Messiah, the Hope of His people.

2:20–22. The Shaking. In the new exodus, the Lord would shake heaven and earth. This global event looks beyond the conflicts faced by Darius to the establishment of the kingdom of the Lord (cf. Dan. 2:44). The apocalyptic language describes the climax of the cosmic conflict, when God would overcome all the kingdoms of the earth. As in Haggai 2:7, the shaking of the nations not only pertains to the temple but to the role of the Messiah as Judge and Savior.

2:23. The Signet. Zerubbabel was a governor (v. 21), a title highlighting his status as a vassal of Persia (see commentary on 1:1). But the Lord also identified him as His "servant," a title used for David and for the Messiah (Is. 42:1; 49:5–7; 52:13—53:12). Zerubbabel seems to function as a type of the Messiah. In this eschatological context, the signet (Heb. *khotam*) symbolizes God's redemptive power and the reversal of earlier curses. Haggai must have had in mind Jeremiah's warning to Coniah (Jehoiachin) that even if he were the last king of Judah, the *khotam* in the Lord's hand, God would nevertheless pluck him off (Jer. 22:24–30). But now the Lord would reverse the curse, making Zerubbabel, who was never a king, like a signet ring, a type of the One who would come as the *khotam* of the Lord. The Lord rejected Coniah as a symbol of the Davidic monarchy but would make Zerubbabel a symbol of the Messiah. The book of Haggai closes with a look forward—a hope grounded in the experience and expectations of the remnant of Judah.

ZECHARIAH

INTRODUCTION

Title and Authorship. The Hebrew title of the book, *zekaryah*, means "Yahweh remembers." The author names himself four times but provides little personal information (Zech. 1:1, 7; 7:1, 8). He is also mentioned in Ezra 5:1 and 6:14 and probably Nehemiah 12:16. Several others in the Bible bear this name (Ezra 8:11, 13, 16; 10:26; Neh. 11:4–5, 12; 12:35, 41).

Zechariah was the son of Berechiah/Berekiah and the grandson of Iddo, but we know no more of his father and grandfather than of him. The title "prophet" probably refers to Zechariah himself, not his grandfather (Zech. 1:1, 7). The Berechiah mentioned in Nehemiah, seven decades later, could not have been Zechariah's father (see Neh. 3:4, 30; 6:18). Since Zechariah's ministry began less than twenty years after the Jews returned from exile, he was probably born in Babylon and returned to Judah with Zerubbabel in 536 B.C. If Nehemiah 12:16 refers to the prophet, then he was a priest.

Some scholars argue that chapters 9–14 come from a different author than the one who wrote chapters 1–8. The two sections do have differences in form and content, but there is no concrete evidence to determine how long Zechariah's ministry lasted. He could have written chapters 9–14 later, when concerns about the temple were no longer pressing. The content of the latter chapters does not necessarily reflect a different author.

Date. Zechariah contains three dates. He received his call "in the eighth month of the second year of Darius" (1:1). Darius's second regnal year began in the spring of 520 B.C. and the eighth month fell in the autumn. Thus Zechariah's ministry began about November 520 B.C. He saw the visions "on the twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month...in the second year of Darius" (1:7). All eight of Zechariah's visions probably occurred on the same night or within a short interval during the winter of 519 B.C. Consequently, Zechariah heard from the Lord again "in the fourth year of King Darius...on the fourth day of the ninth month" (7:1). This date, near the end of 518 B.C., probably applies to chapters 7 and 8. Chapters 9 through 14 are not dated. Since they differ somewhat in subject, vocabulary, and style, Zechariah may have composed them later in his ministry.

Backgrounds. Zechariah's prophecies addressed the situation of the Jewish people shortly after their return from Babylon (for the historical background, see Haggai: Introduction). The first part of the book (chaps. 1–8) deals with the immediate issues concerning the returning exiles: resettling the people, rebuilding the temple, and reestablishing sacrificial worship and annual festivals. The second part (chaps. 9–14) deals with the postexilic community's future concerns: relations with neighboring nations, messianic expectations, and eschatology.

Theology and Purpose. The central theme of the book of Zechariah is the restoration of God's people (Israel and Judah) following captivity. The divine promises to Israel and Judah foreshadow the eschatological restoration of God's people throughout the earth.

1. Restoration and Salvation. The book of Zechariah announces the restoration of land (14:10–11), cities and towns (1:17), people (8:4–8), temple (6:12–13), and priesthood (3:1–7). Zechariah calls the people to abandon their prior sins, which led to the Exile (7:8–14), and to return not only to the land (10:6–10) but to a proper relationship with God (1:3). He assures them of God's promises to return to them (8:3). His presence would fill the rebuilt temple (1:16), and He would forgive their sins (3:9; 13:1), restore the land, deliver them from their enemies (12:2—13:1), and provide them with the hope of a glorious future that would extend to all humanity (14:6–11). God will restore not only Judah to its promised earthly homeland but all humanity to their Edenic home. The nations will turn to God (2:11; 8:22–23) and worship Him in Jerusalem (14:16). In this regard, Zechariah's message parallels that of the Bible as a whole.

The Scriptures tell how God placed humanity in a perfect home. But because of sin, they lost this home and face-to-face communication with their Creator, who exiled them into a hostile world to suffer the consequences of their misdeeds. Nevertheless, God showed them kindness by bringing them back into communion with Him and promising them a glorious eternal future in which they and their world would be consecrated to Him. Zechariah tells the same story. When exiled to Babylon, the people of God lost their home in the promised land and the privilege of close communication with God in the temple. But in His love, God forgave their sins and brought them back to their land, where the temple was rebuilt and the priesthood was reestablished. And there, through the ministry of Zechariah, God assured His people of His presence and promised them a glorious future.

In this way, the book of Zechariah communicates an overarching message of Scripture. It does not deal merely with some small aspects of God's workings with His people in antiquity but presents a microcosm of the entire plan of salvation. Judah's exile and restoration represent, in miniature, the story of humanity from paradise lost to paradise restored. Thus, Zechariah offers both a present historical hope for the people of Judah and a future eschatological hope for all nations.

2. The Coming King. In his description of the promises of restoration, Zechariah refers to a coming King and Agent of restoration called the "Angel of the Lord," the "Branch," and the "Shepherd." In the OT, the Angel of the Lord is often identified as Yahweh but is sometimes presented as a divine being distinct from Yahweh (e.g., Gen. 16:11–12; 31:11–13; Ex. 3:4, 7–18; 14:19, 24; Judg. 6:11–25). Similarly, the book of Zechariah both distinguishes between the Angel and Yahweh and presents the two as divine persons (e.g., 3:1–2, 6–9; cf. 1:8–12; 12:8). Again, in Zechariah we have the promise of Yahweh to send His "Servant the Branch," through whom the guilt of the land will be removed (3:8–9; 6:12). This is the coming King whose kingly and priestly roles are symbolized by Joshua and Zerubbabel, the kingly role being further presented through the shepherd metaphor—the "Shepherd" (the Lord's close associate) who would be betrayed and stricken for His people (cf. 11:12–13; 12:10; 13:7–9). He would combine the kingly and priestly roles symbolized by Zerubbabel, the governor, and Joshua, the high priest. The descriptions in Zechariah recall the promise of a divine Branch who would reign on the Davidic throne in everlasting peace and righteousness (Is. 7:14; 9:6; 11:1–16; Jer. 23:5–6; 33:14–18; Dan. 7:13; 9:25–27; Mic. 5:2) and whose suffering and death would bring healing to humanity (see Is. 52–53). The book anchors the hope of God's people in this Messiah, who would come to Zion riding on a donkey, bringing salvation and joy (Zech. 9:9).

Literary Features. The book of Zechariah uses three distinct literary forms, forming the three major sections of the book. Apart from the introduction and appeal for repentance in Zechariah 1:1–6, it contains a series of vision reports (1:7—6:8) that ends with a command for a symbolic act (6:9–15), a prophetic inquiry (chaps. 7–8), and two prophetic oracles (chaps. 9–11; 12–14).

The form of the vision reports resembles those in the book of Daniel. Both present the supernatural revelation in symbolic terms, explained by an angelic interpreter. The angel may explain only the historical significance of the symbols or may expand on the spiritual implications with appeals to repentance and declarations of encouragement.

The prophetic inquiry in chapters 7–8 resembles some of the inquiries found in preexilic biblical books (see 2 Kin. 22:11–20; 1 Chr. 17:1–15; Jer. 21:1–14). In each case, someone (often a messenger) comes to the prophet with a question about some contemplated course of action. The prophet then gives an answer from God. The answer, often more complex than the question, not only specifies God's will on the matter but also includes messages of warning or encouragement that spell out the practical implications of proceeding.

The prophetic oracles of Zechariah 9–14 resemble the national oracles in many of the preexilic prophets that announced God's judgments against various nations (cf. Jer. 46–51; Amos 1:3—2:16). Zechariah formally directs the two oracles against "the land of Hadrach" (Syria; Zech. 9:1) and against Israel (12:1), though he also mentions several other nations.

Certain sections of Zechariah contain characteristics of apocalyptic literature, which normally involves symbolic visions, interpretations by angelic messengers, and messages of deliverance for God's people and judgment against other nations. The apocalyptic character of the book is most evident in the first and third sections, which discuss God's plan to restore not only the postexilic Jewish community but also the entire world.

COMMENTARY

1:1–6

INTRODUCTION

The introduction dates the beginning of Zechariah's prophecies to the second year of Darius (i.e., 520 B.C.). The eighth month of the Jewish calendar would overlap October and November. Like many other prophets, Zechariah asserted the authority of his message by claiming to speak "the word of the LORD" (1:1). All the major sections of the book of Zechariah also begin with some indication of the divine origin and authority of the message (v. 7; 7:1; 9:1). The call to repentance begins with a statement of God's anger. Because of the actions of their forebears, Judah had experienced difficulties since the Exile. Their ancestors refused to listen to the prophets (1:4). But the Lord's command to return to Him (i.e., repent; v. 3) offers the solution for the sin of disobedience.

Even after the prophets died, the potent words they spoke on the Lord's behalf came to pass and eventually led those who went into exile to confess that the Lord had treated them as their deeds deserved (v. 6). The people of Judah needed to learn from what happened to their ancestors and to act differently. After all, even their forbearers eventually returned to God and repented when they were exiled.

1:7—6:15

THE NIGHT VISIONS

Each of Zechariah's eight visions follows a similar literary pattern: the prophet describes what he saw in his own words and requests an interpretation, which an angel provides. In several cases, the interpreting angel adds an oracular statement that emphasizes the significance of the vision. The visions assured the postexilic Jewish community of God's protection as they built the temple and restored worship of the Lord.

1:7–17. The First Vision. Zechariah gives a more precise date for his vision than for his call (cf. 1:1)—around February 15, 519 B.C. The prophet affirms the message as "the word of the LORD" even though he himself describes the vision. He presumably saw all the visions on the same day since he gives no other date. He wakes up in 4:1, suggesting he may have slept between the visions.

The prophet saw a man riding on a red horse standing among the myrtle trees (1:8). This was probably the Angel of the Lord (v. 11), not the angel who talked with Zechariah (v. 9). The designation "man" probably refers only to appearance since this messenger disclosed supernatural information. Scripture often identifies the Angel of the Lord as Yahweh but sometimes presents Him as a divine being distinct from Yahweh (cf. Gen. 16:11–12; 31:11–13; Ex. 3:4, 7–18; 14:19, 24; Judg. 6:11–25). Details such as the colors of the horses are not significant in any discernable way, and the text does not interpret them. But the series of four colored horses recalls the similar vision in Revelation 6:1–8. Symbolic horses show up again in Zechariah's eighth vision (Zech. 6:1–8) and in the latter half of the book (see 9:10; 10:3).

The horses had roamed throughout the earth and returned to inform the Angel of the Lord that everything was quiet, peaceful, at rest, and still (1:11). This could mean that the Persian Empire, including Judah, was under no threat, so the Jews could proceed to reconstruct the temple without fear. The promises of vv. 16–17 would support this interpretation. But it could also indicate that the nations around Judah were not assisting the Jews and remained hostile, an interpretation supported by the rebuke against the nations in v. 15. It seems that while Judah struggled, other nations enjoyed ease and did not care about Judah's welfare. In either case, God clearly wanted the Jews to rebuild the temple.

The Angel of the Lord responded to the message with a complaint that reflected the thoughts of the people. Although the world was at rest, Judah had still not received relief (v. 12). Apparently, the return of the small remnant did not completely fulfill the prophecies of restoration (cf. Jer. 29:10; 24:6–7). They also had to restore the city and temple. The seventy years (Zech. 1:12) may refer to the years of captivity predicted by Jeremiah (Jer. 25:11–12), from 605 to 536 B.C., or to the seventy years extending from the beginning of Nebuchadnezzar's final siege of Jerusalem to the year of Zechariah's visions, from 589/8 to 519 B.C.

Concerning the response of God to the angel, we are only told that He spoke *tobim* ("good," "pleasant," "kind,") and *nikhumim* ("comforting," "compassionate") words (v. 13). Whatever He said, He intended to encourage. Though He had been a little angry with Judah, He could not accept how the nations had treated them. Judah had not done what the Lord wanted, but their enemies had overdone what He wanted. God's anger against Judah (v. 2) had turned into extreme jealousy/zeal for Jerusalem and Zion and anger against the complacent nations (vv. 14–15).

In his vision, Zechariah explains that God had returned to Jerusalem with mercy and compassion. As a sign of His mercy, the Lord would secure the rebuilding of His house, symbolized by the line (of the surveyor or builder) stretched out over it. He would reinstate His past mercies by comforting Zion, choosing Jerusalem, and causing the cities to overflow again (v. 17).

1:18–21. The Second Vision. In the Bible, horns symbolize power and pride (cf. Deut. 33:17; Ps. 75:4–5; Dan. 8:3–9). Here, the horns which had scattered Judah, Israel, Jerusalem, and the nations that lifted up horns represent those who opposed the Jews (Zech. 1:19, 21). But craftsmen would oppose the horns by frightening them and throwing them down. The Hebrew word *kharashim* ("craftspersons," "carpenters," "metalworkers") can refer to any type of skilled worker but often indicates those who produce religious objects (see Is. 40:19; Hos. 13:2), including those who built the sanctuary (Ex. 38:23) and Solomon's temple (1 Kin. 7:14). Here, the "craftspersons" are those building and furnishing the temple. Thus, rebuilding the temple would repel Judah's enemies.

2:1–13. The Third Vision. The "measuring line" in 2:1 translates a different Hebrew term from the one used in 1:16, but both are instruments for architectural measurement used to measure Jerusalem. In Zechariah's time, they had not yet rebuilt the wall, so the man could not have measured Jerusalem's walls. But the act of measuring Jerusalem implies that the city would have a specific size. Two angels explained this vision and the two implications for Jerusalem of the absence of a wall. First, a wall would not limit the city because of its great size and population (2:4). Second, the Lord would protect the city and be the glory inside it, making a wall unnecessary. In some sense, the wall is the glory of a city and not its fortifications. God would not only surround the city to protect it but be present within it as well (i.e., in the temple). The repetition of the verb *'ehyeh* ("I will be") seems to imply two different but complementary roles for God. The Hebrew says literally "I will be a wall…and I will be for glory" (v. 5). Zechariah did not see either of these predictions fully realized. Nearly a century later, in the time of Nehemiah, the city was still underpopulated. Not until the time of Jesus did it overflow during festivals.

A poetic explanation follows the vision. The Lord repeatedly exhorted the exiles to flee from the land of the north (i.e., from Babylon; v. 6; cf. Jer. 25:9; Ezek. 26:7) and to escape from the daughter of Babylon (Zech. 2:7). They no longer needed to cringe in Babylon. God assumed responsibility for the punishment and restoration of Judah: He had scattered them abroad to the four winds (v. 6), so they could safely return when He called them back.

Verses 8 and 9 offer additional reasons to return. God watches over Judah as the apple of His eye (v. 8). The "apple" of the eye is either the eyeball or the pupil. In either case, this is a very sensitive, easily seen body part. God was very aware of and sensitive to any offense against Judah. The Jews also needed to return because God would soon punish the nations in which they were exiled. It was no longer safe to remain in Mesopotamia. This confirms the message that Zechariah received in the first vision: either all was at peace (and it was safe to return to Judah), or the hostile nations would be punished (and it was unsafe to remain there). The fulfillment of Zechariah's prediction would prove to the people that God (*yahweh tseba'ot*, "LORD of hosts, LORD Almighty") Himself had sent Zechariah (v. 9). Unfortunately, most of the Jewish exiles never returned despite these assurances.

Two seemingly paradoxical exhortations bracket the latter part of the oracle, one to shout, sing, rejoice, and be glad because God was coming to live among them (v. 10) and another to be silent because the Lord had aroused Himself from His holy dwelling (v. 13; cf. Hab. 2:20). But the first exhortation is addressed to the daughter of Zion and the latter is addressed to all flesh/human beings. It was time for Zion to rejoice and for the rest of humanity to hold its tongue in awe because the Lord would inherit and take possession of Judah. In response, the nations had to join with the Lord (Zech. 2:11) or else face destruction (14:3, 12). Then they would know that God had indeed sent Zechariah (2:11). Thus, both the affliction of the nations and their conversion appear as signs of the truthfulness of Zechariah's message. The idea of foreigners joining with Judah recurs in 8:20–23.

3:1–10. The Fourth Vision. The next two visions address the two leaders of the Jewish community, a pivotal issue in this part of the book. The fourth vision centers on Joshua, the first high priest after the return from Babylon (see Ezra 3:2, 8; 4:3; 5:2; 10:18; Hag. 1:1, 12; 2:2, 4), and his fitness to serve. The high priest represented the people before God. Bringing Judah and the world back into order necessitated two things: the temple and the priesthood. But both had been out of commission for nearly sixty years, and only appropriately consecrated priests could renew the temple and minister in it.

In his vision, Zechariah saw a courtroom scene: Joshua stood before the Angel of the Lord with Satan at the right to oppose/accuse him. The verb "oppose" or "accuse" derives from the same Hebrew root as the name "Satan." The prospect of Judah's restoration aroused challenges from the opponents of God's people (Ezra 4:4–16; cf. Neh. 4:1–11), here epitomized by the Accuser (i.e., Satan). He based his objections on the sinfulness of the people both before and after the Exile. Strangely, however, instead of Satan rebuking Joshua, the Lord rebukes Satan. Although Joshua stands before the Angel of the Lord (Zech. 3:1), the Lord Himself speaks in his defense. Here, again, the divine Angel of the Lord is distinguished from Yahweh (see commentary on 1:7–17). In such contexts, the Angel most probably refers to the Messiah (3:1–9; cf. Ex. 14:19; 23:20–21; Mal. 3:1–3).

God Himself had grounds for accusing the people of Judah and sending them into exile. But now He had again chosen Jerusalem (Zech. 3:2; cf. 1:17; 2:12). Since God had chosen Jerusalem, the restoration of the city constituted a rebuke of Judah's enemies, including Satan. The brand rescued from the fire refers not only to the high priest Joshua but also to all of postexilic Judah. The high priest represents the people whom God had taken back from the "fire" of exile and reinstated in their holy calling.

Zechariah saw Joshua dressed in dirty clothes, representing the iniquity of Joshua and the people he represented. The defiled garments and his personal iniquity would make him unfit for his priestly functions. This presented a vicious dilemma: Joshua could not officiate because of his defilement. He could be cleansed only through a sacrifice, but he was the priest who had to offer the sacrifice to remove the defilement. Divine intervention solved Joshua's problem. God ordered Joshua's filthy garments removed and replaced them with clean garments that would enable him to serve in his capacity as high priest. He does not deny Joshua's defilement. He takes it away. Joshua's transformation symbolizes what God would do for Judah and for every person who turns to Him. By taking the side of repentant sinners, God continues to remove the iniquity of those who cannot rescue themselves.

In the vision, a series of assurances follows the change of Joshua's clothes. First, God would assure Joshua's position if he would remain obedient, walking in the Lord's ways (moral conformity to God's will) and keeping the Lord's charge (faithful performance of ritual duties). If he would do these things, Joshua would have a share in Judah's restoration and a place among the heavenly beings present in this scene (3:7).

Second, God assured Joshua that He would send His Servant, the Branch (v. 8). "The Branch" is a messianic title (cf. Jer. 23:5–6; Is. 4:2; see Zechariah: Introduction). Zechariah 6:12 indicates that the Branch would build the temple. Though Zerubbabel rebuilt the temple (4:6–10), he was not the Messiah. Rather, as the sanctuary builder, he symbolized the coming Messiah, who would inaugurate a new sanctuary, as indeed Jesus did (Heb. 8:1–2; 9:11).

Third, God assured Joshua that He would remove the iniquity of the land (Zech. 3:9). The text does not explain the stone with seven eyes placed before Joshua. Commentators have variously associated the stone with Christ, the kingdom of God (cf. Dan. 2:34–35, 44), and Zerubbabel, though none of these has been conclusively established. Since the promise of the coming Servant, the Branch, immediately precedes (Zech. 3:8), the stone may refer to the Messiah (Is. 28:16), who would come to remove iniquity (Zech. 3:9; cf. Is. 53:4–5), and the seven eyes may refer to the Holy Spirit, who accompanies and endues the Servant (cf. Is. 11:1–2; 42:1; 48:16). Elsewhere in Scripture, Revelation 5:6 mentions seven eyes, which are "the seven Spirits of God." Understood differently, "seven eyes" may refer to seven facets on the stone, though a seven-sided stone would be unusual. Since God would engrave an inscription on the stone, it likely had some commemorative purpose. Some have suggested that the stone was a cornerstone, but a cornerstone with seven sides would seem impractical. The word translated as "eyes" could also mean "water springs" or "fountains," and the expression *mepattekh pittukhah* (usually rendered as "I will engrave an engraving") could instead mean "I will open its openings." If this is correct, it would fit with the final clause of the verse, which refers to the removal of the iniquity/sin of the land in one day (Zech. 3:9), especially in view of the promise in 13:1. The idea of removing iniquity in one day probably refers to the Day of Atonement and fits well with the high priest's change of clothes on that day (Lev. 16).

Fourth, the Lord assured Joshua that after the cleansing the inhabitants of the land would dwell at peace. This also fits the Day of Atonement because after the cleansing the inhabitants of the land would dwell at peace. Zechariah 3:10 points to times of peace and prosperity when the people of Judah would invite their neighbors under their vine and fig trees (cf. 1 Kin. 4:25; Mic. 4:4).

4:1–14. The Fifth Vision. In his fifth vision, Zechariah saw a lampstand resembling those in the tabernacle and Solomon's temple. Zechariah's description of the seven lamps probably means that each of them had seven lips, or notches, to hold wicks. This single fixture would then have forty-nine flames on it, making the lamp very bright. The bowl on top may have contained oil for the lamps, though this is not specified. Unable to understand the vision or the function of the two olive trees, the prophet asked about it, but he did not receive an immediate answer (v. 4).

Before answering the prophet's question, the angel provided a spiritual interpretation: the Spirit of the Lord, not human activity, would fulfill the vision. This certainly provided hope to a people whose limited numbers and resources made the tasks at hand quite daunting. The first few visions represented God's decision to scatter Judah. But now God's power had reassembled them and purified Joshua. Here, the message encourages Zerubbabel, the governor of the postexilic community. The Spirit of God would accomplish great things, leveling obstacles that seemed like mountains before him (v. 7), and he would have the honor of placing the capstone on the completed temple.

Fifteen years after the exiles had returned from Babylon, they had still not restored the temple, the very reason for returning. Zerubbabel, who was probably already old, might have doubted whether he could complete the reconstruction. But the angel assured him that this would happen. Like the punishment of the nations (2:9) and their future conversion (v. 11), the completion of the temple would show that God had truly appointed Zechariah. Some may have despised "the day of small things" because of its seeming insignificance (4:10). Others would weep seeing how the new temple paled in comparison to Solomon's temple (cf. Ezra 3:12–13; Hag. 2:3). But the prophets viewed this meager building as a sign of God's intervention and the promise of greater glory to come (cf. Hag. 2:7). The seven may refer to the seven lamps with seven pipes representing God's presence on the earth (cf. Rev. 4:5; 5:6), to the seven eyes of the Lord, or possibly to those who despise "the day of small things" (Zech. 4:10). The combination of the words *eben* and *bedil* in v. 10 are somewhat obscure. Conjectural translations include "plumb line" and "chosen capstone," the last stone put in place.

The angel finally answers Zechariah's question from v. 4. The seven lamps represent the eyes of the Lord, which scan back and forth through the whole earth (see Rev. 4:5). The two olive trees/branches and the two gold pipes are the two anointed ones who stand beside the Lord, serving the Sovereign of the whole earth (Zech. 4:14). As high priest, Joshua would have been anointed (cf. Ex. 28:41), and the previous vision had already depicted him standing before the Angel of the Lord (Zech. 3:1). Zerubbabel, as a descendant of David, would also have been eligible for such a rite (see 1 Sam. 9:15–16; 16:1–3). Similarly, Revelation 11:3–4 refers to two olive trees and two lampstands standing before the God of the earth.

The word *tsanterot*, usually translated as "pipes" (Zech. 4:12), does not appear elsewhere in Scripture. The symbol of the trees is not perfectly clear. Although the two anointed leaders did not have the power to reestablish Judah, they served as intermediate sources of God's power. The lampstand itself appears to represent the community, which God empowers to become "the light of the world" (Matt. 5:14). Despite the obscurity of some of the description, Zechariah 4:13–14 clearly explains the point of the vision: God's power would accomplish what Judah needed.

5:1–4. The Sixth Vision. In his sixth vision, Zechariah saw a scroll of normal length but abnormal width. Normal scrolls were much smaller than 10 cubits (15 ft or 4.6 m) wide. The size indicates the importance of the message written on it. The flying scroll must have been unrolled (and therefore readable). Zechariah did not see the content of the scroll, but the interpreting angel told him that the scroll contained the curse going out over the face of the whole earth/land (5:3). One side of the scroll announced the expulsion of thieves, the other the expulsion of perjurers. It does not mention idolatry, the sin the preexilic prophets most commonly denounced.

After the Exile, polytheism was rare among the Jews. Like the words of God, the curse worked without human agents (see also Ps. 147:15; Is. 55:11). Since the scroll and its curse would destroy the homes of thieves and perjurers, no place would remain for them among the returned exiles (Zech. 5:4). The fourth vision provided for the purification of the nation, and the sixth provided for the removal of those persisting in sin.

5:5–11. The Seventh Vision. While the sixth vision denounced sin, the seventh describes its removal. An *'epah* was either a fiber basket or a clay jar used to measure about 20 liters of grain (5.3 gal). A normal *'epah* could not hold an adult, so the basket, like the scroll in the previous vision, must have been oversized and, therefore, symbolic. Its occupant symbolizes wickedness. She apparently attempts to leave the *'epah*, but the angel throws her back in. The heavy lid prevents the woman from reopening the *'epah* and escaping.

The removal of the *'epah* to Shinar (i.e., Babylon) describes the process of Judah's purification, accomplished by the seventy-year Exile, which destroyed most of the nation and scattered most of those left (cf. Ezek. 5). Of those scattered, a few faithful ones returned home, leaving behind the idolatry of previous generations. Spiritual problems, but not idolatry, remained after the Exile. Throughout the Scriptures, Babylon symbolizes evil, even when God uses it as an instrument of punishment (as in Jer. 25:9 ff.).

The Hebrew name for the stork (*khasidah*; Zech. 5:9) derives from the adjective meaning "faithful," so "faithful ones" removed wickedness from Judah and took it to a land representing enmity toward God. They would build a house/temple for the *'epah* and permanently install it in wicked Babylon. Wickedness would no longer have a place among God's people; this is possibly connected to the removal of sin from Israel on the Day of Atonement.

6:1–8. The Eighth Vision. The eighth vision reprises the first, except that Zechariah saw chariot horses instead of riding mounts. Again the colors remain unexplained, as do the mountains of bronze (which could represent God's dwelling place; 6:1; cf. 8:3). The angel does explain that the chariots represent "four spirits of heaven." The Hebrew word *rukhot* can mean either "winds" or "spirits." The meaning "winds" (as in Dan. 8:8) would perhaps imply their destinations (the four directions), but the fact that they stand before the Lord of all the earth allows for "spirits" (i.e., angels) as a possible translation (Zech. 6:5). The angel sent two of the chariots to the north (i.e., Mesopotamia) and one to the south (i.e., Egypt). However, some translations render the destination of the white horses as "west" rather than the more literal "after them" (i.e., north, following the black horses). The angel did not give the chariot of the red horses a destination but sent the chariots to travel throughout the earth, patrolling the nations (v. 7).

Those going toward the north gave God's Spirit rest in that region (v. 8). This differs slightly from the first vision, in which the whole earth rested quietly (1:11), but both represent peace. Assyria and Babylon always invaded Judah from the north, so the mention of rest in the north assured God's people that these invaders would not return. The postexilic community no longer needed to worry about the dangers around them (cf. Hag. 1:2). The rest for God's Spirit may refer to Darius's decree permitting the rebuilding of the temple (cf. Ezra 6:1–12). The night visions ended as they began, on a hopeful note. The whole earth was at rest, including Judah (Zech. 1:11; 2:12; 12:1–14). Even the Lord had found rest in the restoration of His people and temple.

6:9–15. The High Priest's Crown. At this point the book shifts from vision reports to an oracle commanding symbolic action. The exiles who had come from Babylon had perhaps brought the silver and gold as an offering for the temple from the Jews remaining in Mesopotamia, as Sheshbazzar had twenty years earlier (cf. Ezra 1:1–11). Since the Branch is a messianic title, this entire passage could prophesy the coming of the Messiah (see Zech. 3:8). More likely, it presents either Zerubbabel or Joshua as a historical type of the Messiah. Zerubbabel, the first governor of the postexilic Jewish community, was a descendant of King David, a "branch" from the Davidic line. He led the rebuilding of the temple (6:12). Both Matthew and Luke identify Zerubbabel as an ancestor of Jesus (cf. Matt. 1:12–13; Luke 3:27). But the Lord told Zechariah to crown Joshua the high priest, not Zerubbabel, the Davidic scion. The Hebrew word *'atarot* is plural, though many translations render it as "crown" rather than "crowns." The text indicates that Joshua was to receive both crowns. However, the command for Joshua to behold the Man named the Branch implies that Joshua should look for another messianic figure (Zech. 6:12). The crowns foreshadow the dual role of the Messiah as both priest and king (cf. Heb.

3:1; Rev. 17:14; 19:11–16). Jesus fulfilled these prophecies, for He is King (cf. Luke 19:37–38; John 18:37–39; Rev. 19:11–16), Priest (Heb. 3:1; 9:11), and the Provider of a new temple (John 2:19–21; Heb. 8:1–2; Rev. 21:22).

The crowns would remain in the temple as a memorial for those who would come from afar to rebuild it, drawing their attention not to individuals but to the temple's whole reconciliatory function (Zech. 6:14–15). Though worn by the high priest, the crowns honored the temple and the Lord. The assistance of distant people in reconstructing the Lord's temple would serve as a fourth sign that the Lord had sent Zechariah (v. 15, cf. 2:9, 11; 4:9).

7:1—8:23

QUESTIONS ABOUT RELIGIOUS PRACTICE

Chapters seven and eight form the third section of the book, containing Zechariah's response to an inquiry. Other prophetic books also contain such responses (cf. Jer. 21:1–2; Ezek. 20:1). These two chapters form an *inclusio* in which the end of Zechariah 8 echoes the beginning of chapter 7. The question (7:1–3) receives an extended answer (7:5—8:23) centered around an appeal to restore social justice and a promise of material restoration (7:8—8:17), which leads to the encouraging note within the direct response eventually granted to the inquiry (8:18–23).

7:1–7. Inquiry about Fasting. Two years after the visions of Zechariah 1–6, during the winter of Darius' fourth year (around December 7, 518 B.C.), Zechariah received an inquiry about fasting. By this time, the people had resumed work on the temple, as indicated by the presence of the priests in the house of the Lord (7:3), though they did not complete reconstruction until about March 12, 515 B.C. (cf. Ezra 6:15). Zechariah 7:2–7 describes the messengers sent to make an inquiry, but different translations understand the Hebrew *betel* ("house of God") in different ways. It could mean the place of Jacob's encounter with God (Gen. 28:19), the temple itself, or the city. In any case, they came to inquire concerning a traditional day of fasting on the ninth day of the fifth month that commemorated the destruction of the temple by the Babylonians in 586 B.C. Since the fast commemorated the Exile, which had ended, and the destruction of the temple, which was being rebuilt, they wondered whether they should still observe it. They asked this question in the ninth month, eight months before the next observation of the fast. This was not a spur-of-the-moment question; the enquirers wanted to know how their religious life should change after the return from exile.

Zechariah responded with the divine authority of the word of God (Zech. 7:4). But first he challenged the inquirers' sincerity. They fasted and feasted, motivated by personal concerns rather than a real interest in the Lord. They had ignored His instructions given by the prophets. God did not command the fast in question. It was merely a human ordinance. The other fast in the seventh month (Tishri) commemorated the murder of Gedaliah. The seventy years in v. 5 refers to the period from the destruction of Jerusalem in 587/6 B.C. until this inquiry in 518/7 B.C., seventy years by inclusive reckoning.

7:8–14. A Call to Justice. The Lord has always desired social and economic justice over meaningless rituals (see Is. 58:1–12; Mic. 6:6–8). It is therefore no surprise that God responded to an inquiry about fasting by calling for His people to practice justice and mercy and to stop oppressing the weak and plotting evil against each other (Zech. 7:9–10; see also Deut. 27:19; Is. 1:16–17; Jer. 7:5–7). The four commands mentioned—two positive (practice justice and show mercy) and two negative (do not oppress the widows and orphans or plan evil; Zech. 7:9–10)—were intended to change the way worshipers related to their fellow beings. This, rather than external ceremonies, is the essence of true religion (cf. Prov. 21:3; James 1:27). Such justice was particularly commanded toward widows, orphans, aliens, and other marginalized people (Zech. 7:10). God has expected the same behavior of humanity in all ages (cf. Matt. 23:23). When His people had obstinately refused to listen to His message, as communicated through the prophets, God had treated them the same way, refusing to listen to them when they called (Zech. 7:11–13). Finally, He scattered them with a whirlwind, the inevitable consequence of their own behavior (v. 14).

8:1–8. The Promise of Restoration. God did not desire the Exile, and the curse that followed was not His final word. God always wanted to bless His people, and when they were ready to receive blessings, He granted them abundantly. God promised to dwell again in the city (i.e., to sanctify it) and to repopulate it with His people, whom He would save from the east and the west (8:3–8). The "east" may refer to Persia, but the "west" is less identifiable. Instead, east and west may represent all directions. God plans to do the same again in the last days by bringing His people from all nations (cf. Rev. 5:9) and all directions (Luke 13:29).

8:9–15. The Promise of Prosperity. For God to restore Judah, giving them a place in the city again, the people needed to give Him a place again by rebuilding the temple. The Lord had refused to listen to those who did not listen to Him. But now He would bring Judah back to dwell in Jerusalem, and they would provide a temple for Him to dwell in among with them. The repeated exhortation to "let your hands be strong" (8:9, 13) parallels the instructions Haggai gave to Zerubbabel and Joshua, leaders of the postexilic community (cf. Hag. 2:4–5). The words of the prophets seem to refer to the preaching of Haggai, the only other prophet around this time (Zech. 8:9).

The people had previously neglected the work of rebuilding the temple. As a result, poverty, harassment, and conflict characterized the nation (v. 10; Hag. 1:3–9). Both Zechariah 7:14 and 8:10 mention God punishing His people by means of human choices and actions. Through free choice and providence, He both allowed and arranged circumstances under which He knew the nations would ravage Judah and turn against their neighbors. But now God promised to reverse Judah's desperate situation, including changes in both the natural and the social worlds. God would make the land fertile and send rain to the fields (see Deut. 7:13; 28:4; Hag. 2:18). He promised to restore both Judah and Israel, all twelve tribes (Zech. 8:13; cf. 10:6–7; Jer. 50:17–20). In return, He required Judah to both rebuild the temple and reestablish socio-economic justice (Zech. 8:16–17).

8:18–23. The Response to the Inquiry. Until this point, Zechariah had given no answer to the question about fasting. But Judah's response to the Lord's appeals would elicit a natural change in their fasting. Just as true worship and justice would replace the preexilic sins, so festivals would replace fasting. The fast on the seventeenth day of the fourth month (Tammuz) commemorated the breaching of Jerusalem's defensive wall during the last siege (2 Kin. 25:3–4). The fast on the ninth day of the fifth month (Ab) commemorated the destruction of the temple (2 Kin. 25:8–9). The fast on the third day of the seventh month (Tishri) commemorated the assassination of Gedaliah (2 Kin. 25:22–26), and the fast on the tenth day of the tenth month (Tevet) commemorated the beginning of the final siege of Jerusalem (2 Kin. 25:1). But they would all become festival days.

The rebuilding of the temple would reverse the improper worship so common before the Exile, and justice would replace preexilic injustices. So the return of the exiles would also reverse the scattering of Judah. People from other nations would seek to join them in worshiping the Lord (cf. Is. 60:3–22). Zechariah had earlier announced God's judgment against the nations (Zech. 1:15, 21; 2:8–9), but now he foretells their attachment to His people (8:22–23; cf. 2:11). Zechariah predicted this future ingathering of foreign nations would join the ingathering of Judah that was already happening (8:9, 15).

9:1—14:21

COMING JUDGMENT AND DELIVERANCE

Zechariah 9 begins the last major section of the book. It contains two prophetic sermons (9:1—11:17; 12:1—14:21) that form a continuous, integrated message arranged as a chiasm:

- **A** God's Acts in History, Giving Victory to Zion (9:1–17)
  - **B** God's People Restored (10:1—11:3)
    - **C** Leaders Appointed (11:4–17)
  - **B′** God's People Reformed (12:1—13:9)
- **A′** God's Acts to Culminate History on the Day of the Lord (14:1–21)

9:1—11:17

The First Prophetic Sermon

Both prophetic sermons are called *massa'* of the word of the Lord. The prophets used the Hebrew word *massa'* (9:1; 12:1) two dozen times to refer to an oracle from God, but it does not occur in the earlier sections of Zechariah. This final section of the book appears less systematic than the earlier parts, leading some commentators to suppose that it comes from a different writer. But the hypothesis is unnecessary since we do not know how long Zechariah remained active as a prophet. He possibly wrote various parts of the book at widely separated times, resulting in differences of topic and style.

9:1–8. The Punishment of the Coastal Peoples. The first part of Zechariah 9 announces the

Lord's judgment regarding Judah's neighbors. The cities mentioned were north of Judah, either in Syria (Damascus and Hadrach) or near the Syrian border (Hamath). Zechariah does not describe any particular sins of these Syrian cities or specify any particular punishments. Some translate the Hebrew preposition *be*, used in v. 1 before the land of Hadrach and possibly implied before Hamath in v. 2, as "against." However, it is unclear whether this prophecy condemned or commended. Either way, the eyes of all people (including the tribes of Israel) had turned to the Lord (vv. 1–2).

Tyre and Sidon, both located north of Jerusalem, were the principal surviving Phoenician cities. Several prophets pronounced oracles against these cities (see Is. 23:1–18; Ezek. 26–28; Joel 3:4–5; Amos 1:9–10). The word *matsor* ("tower," "stronghold," "fortress") in Zechariah 9:3 refers to fortified defensive constructions built in the time of King Hiram. The people of Tyre took great pride in these defenses, and God's judgment came against them precisely because of this pride (Is. 23:8–9).

Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron, and Ashdod were four of the five cities of the Philistine confederacy located southwest of Jerusalem along the Mediterranean coast (the text omits Gath; see Jer. 47:1–7; Amos 1:6–8; Zeph. 2:4–7). Zechariah foresaw these cities becoming dependencies of Judah, without a king and inhabited by a mixed population (Zech. 9:5–6). Ironically, around this time Judah itself had no king, depended on the Persian Empire, and struggled with problems of ethnic and religious diversity. Despite the antagonism between Judah and Philistia, Zechariah predicted the conversion of a remnant of the Philistines, who would integrate into the covenant community, each becoming an *'allup* ("leader," "chief," "clan") in Judah (v. 7). The comparison of Ekron with a Jebusite recalls David's conquest of Jerusalem when the Jebusites were not destroyed but integrated into David's kingdom.

9:9–17. The Triumph of Zion. In contrast to the Philistine's lost king, Judah's king would come (v. 9), initiate an era of peace (v. 10a), and reign over a vast realm. No one between Zechariah and Jesus even remotely resembles the career of this coming King. Zechariah certainly did not expect Zerubbabel to exercise worldwide dominion (v. 10). He expected the coming Messiah. Jesus Christ, a descendant of Zerubbabel (Matt. 1:12–13; Luke 3:27), fulfilled the general terms of this prophecy. Jesus's triumphal entry into Jerusalem fulfilled the prophecy that Judah's King would come riding on a donkey (Matt. 21:1–7; John 12:12–15). Although the military commonly used horses, both judges and kings rode donkeys and mules (see Judg. 10:4; 1 Kin. 1:33). Though "lowly" (Zech. 9:9), this King would exercise global authority with justice and power, and He and His people would promote peace (v. 10; cf. Is. 9:6–7; Matt. 5:9; Eph. 2:13–17; Heb. 12:14). The expressions *bat tsiyyon* and *bat yerushalam*, literally "daughter [of] Zion" and "daughter [of] Jerusalem," are personifications or poetic terms for the city and/or its inhabitants.

In another postexilic reversal of fortune, the prisoners would return from their places of captivity. The waterless pit (Zech. 9:11) may metaphorically refer to the arid climate of Mesopotamia. Captives hoping for God's deliverance (lit. "prisoners of hope"; i.e., "hopeful prisoners") would return to the stronghold/fortress, presumably Jerusalem, whose fortifications at the time were not impressive. However, God, their true stronghold, had promised to be a wall of fire around Jerusalem (2:5). The text does not explain the nature of the double restoration promised in 9:12, which may relate to the double blessing given to the firstborn (cf. Gen. 48:15), but clearly their final condition would surpass that of their former state.

The military imagery of Zechariah 9:13–15 does not propose that the Jews went to war but rather identifies the returning Jews as the weapons of the Warrior God. In the past God had used the pagan nations as instruments against His disobedient people (cf. Is. 5:24–28; 10:5–6; Jer. 5:15–17; 25:8–9; Hab. 1:5–6). After this, God would use these returning exiles to accomplish His will in a resistant world.

The Lord would punish Judah's neighboring enemies (Zech. 9:1–8), provide Judah with a king (v. 9), establish peace (v. 10), release their imprisoned compatriots (vv. 11–12), and arm Himself with the returning exiles (v. 13). Finally, He would assure their safety (vv. 14–16) and prosperity (v. 17). God Himself would advance as a Warrior to defend His people (vv. 14–15) and display them as His special treasure, a mark of His presence (v. 16). The beauty and goodness Zechariah praises is possibly God's, and he also praises His land (v. 17). As in Zechariah 8:12, God promises the bounty of the earth: grain and new wine (9:17).

10:1—11:3. Restoration of Judah and Ephraim. Canaanite religion associated rainfall with the activities of Baal. Before the Exile, pagan influences had often led the people of Judah into this belief as well. However, the prophets insisted that the Lord, not the Canaanite gods, made the farms and flocks fertile. Zechariah reasserts the teaching of the earlier prophets: idols deceive but the Lord would provide the rain (10:1–2). The "rain" contrasts with the "waterless pit" (9:11). The latter/spring rain fell around February or March, bringing grain crops to maturity.

Zechariah reprises the shepherd metaphor, commonly used in the Torah and the Prophets to describe a national leader (see Num. 27:17; Ezek. 34:1–12). Some passages portray the shepherds positively and some negatively. Zechariah uses the metaphor both ways. At the beginning of chapter 10, Judah either lacks a shepherd (v. 2) or has shepherds who displease the Lord (v. 3). The Hebrew verb *paqad* ("visit," "attend to," "care for") has both positive (see Gen. 50:24–25) and negative connotations (see Ex. 32:24). In this case, Zechariah uses it to express God's care for His people, Judah. The Lord threatened to punish the shepherds and *'attudim* ("leaders," lit. "male goats"; Zech. 10:3–4). These may have been Judeans rather than foreigners, but Zechariah portrays the Lord as warring against foreign enemies, resulting in the restoration of His people. Judah would be His flock and His royal, valiant warhorse (v.3; cf. 9:13).

For Zechariah 10:5, some translators supply the object "enemies" after the verb for treading down/trampling. Other translators, however, indicate that Judah would tramp through muddy streets to fulfill of God's commission. This is the first indication that Judah would join the fight. But their victory would depend on God's presence with them.

God promises to rescue not only Judah but also Joseph and Ephraim (vv. 6–7); that is, the Northern Kingdom of Israel, exiled nearly a century and a half before the captivity of the Southern Kingdom of Judah. In contrast to the promises to Judah, which emphasize leadership (the shepherds) for the nation and their victory, the promises to Ephraim focus on their return. The Lord would willingly restore the northern tribes, just like those of the south. Sadly, few of the exiles from the Northern Kingdom responded to God's call.

The Lord makes several promises to Ephraim. He would *zara'* ("sow," "scatter") them among the peoples, where they would remember Him. Then He would gather them, and they would return with their children. They would survive and their numbers would increase (vv. 8–9). God foretells good for Judah and Israel, not evil.

God promises twice to return the exiles from both Egypt and Assyria (vv. 10–11), conveying the wide scope of the message. Zechariah himself had not returned from either of these nations. He returned from Babylon (at that time part of the Persian Empire). Most of the exiles in Egypt had gone there voluntarily at the time of Jeremiah (cf. Jer. 41–43), and the exiles in Assyria were from Israel, not Judah, and had been taken there many years before Nebuchadnezzar began deporting the people of Judah to Babylon. The scope of the message conveyed by Zechariah is very wide, not concerned only with the exiles from Judah in Babylon but also with God gathering all the tribes of Israel, whether they had been scattered forcibly or voluntarily, and adding to them non-Israelite nations (Zech. 8:22–23). The returning exiles would reenact the Exodus, passing through the sea and the dried-up river (cf. Ex. 14:21—15:22; Josh. 3:10–17).

In chapter 11 Zechariah again addresses Judah's neighbors, Lebanon to the north and Bashan to the east. In Scripture, forests and trees, especially the cedar, symbolize pride (cf. Is. 2:12–13; Ezek. 31:3–5). The destruction of their forests may symbolize the fall of the nations themselves or of their leaders. The shepherds in Zechariah 11:3 probably refer to the leaders of the nations.

After the poetic portion that ends with v. 3, only two other short passages in Zechariah contain poetry (v. 17 and 13:7–9).

11:4–17. Good and Evil Shepherds. A reference to wailing shepherds in Zechariah 11:3 brings the discussion back to Judah's leaders. If this part of the prophecy refers to specific historical persons and events, it is the least transparent part of the book. The two staffs and three shepherds are not easily identifiable. The prophet writes as though he is actually acting out the prophecy as the Lord commands him. Since the flock (v. 4) probably refers to the inhabitants of the land of Judah (v. 6) rather than to an actual flock of sheep, the scene is symbolic, like the manufacture of the high priest's crown in 6:9–15.

The Lord commanded the prophet to feed the "flock" intended for slaughter (11:4), implying that the flock was destined for slaughter even before the prophet became responsible for it. The owners exploited the flock, and its shepherds did not pity them (v. 5). Further, the Lord warned Zechariah that he would not succeed in rescuing the flock, for even God Himself would no longer

pity the people (v. 6). Despite God's warnings, Zechariah accepted his appointment and became a good shepherd, or at least an obedient one. He fed the flock, giving special attention to the poor, and selected two staffs for his work as a shepherd, symbolically named *no'am* ("Grace," "Favor," "Beauty") and *khobelim* ("Bonds," "Union," "Harmony"; v. 7). He does not identify the three dismissed shepherds or clarify the reason for the mutual hatred between himself and them—possibly based on their disdain for the flock or, according to some translations, on the enmity with the flock itself (v. 8). The frustrated prophet finally left those of the flock who were dying to perish and those remaining to eat each other (v. 9). Like the Lord in v. 6, the shepherd abandoned the flock to the consequences of their chosen way. He broke the first staff, which represented the covenant he had made with all people (v. 10). This seems to represent the prophet terminating connections between himself and the nations, perhaps represented by the false shepherds and the flock.

Zechariah then broke the second staff, ending the bond between Judah and Israel (v. 14). Of course, Israel had not existed as a nation for about two centuries at this point. Previous chapters foretell the restoration of the people of the Northern Kingdom (cf. 9:13; 10:6–8), so it is not clear why Zechariah announced that the alliance between Israel and Judah would not prevail. He seems to indicate that such prophecies were conditional. In the rest of the book, he speaks about only Judah.

Finally, the prophet asked for payment for the services he rendered as a shepherd, and he received thirty shekels. This acted-out prophecy predicts God's rejected prophet, the Messiah, who would give His life for the people. To this service, they would assign an estimated value of thirty shekels (Matt. 27:9–10).

It is not entirely clear how the foolish shepherd of Zechariah 11:15–17 differs from his predecessor in vv. 4–9, except that the rejected shepherd seems more responsible than the cruel shepherd. The former shepherd let the "dying die" and the "perishing perish" (v. 9). His successor would not care for the dying, young, ill, or healthy of the flock and would go further by exploiting the flock (v. 16). Zechariah curses both the shepherd's action (his arm) and his perception (his right eye; v. 17). Because the flock had not accepted the shepherd appointed by the Lord, they would end up with a cruel shepherd under whom they would fare even worse. They would suffer because of their own wrongdoing. If we assume that "the flock" refers to Judah, this passage leaves the nation in a perilous state, deprived of God's pity and led by a worthless shepherd (vv. 6, 17). Judah had experienced this situation in exile, when they gravely needed the divine deliverance described in the second prophetic sermon (chaps. 12–14).

12:1—14:21

The Second Prophetic Sermon

12:1–9. Jerusalem's Rescue. Zechariah's second *massa'* ("burden," "oracle," prophecy") concerns Israel (i.e., the people of God residing in Judah; 12:1). In it he denounces all the nations of the earth who gather against Judah and Jerusalem (vv. 2–3). The prophecy contains words of hope intended to encourage the people, both historically and eschatologically. Therefore, the Hebrew preposition *'al* in v. 1 probably means "concerning" rather than "against." The passage communicates God's promise to protect Judah and Jerusalem.

This oracle often uses the imagery of war. As in 9:13, which describes Judah as a weapon in God's hands, Zechariah here prophesies that Judah would become an instrument capable of impeding or injuring the nations opposing it—a heavy, massive stone/immovable rock (12:3) and a cup causing drunken reeling/staggering (v. 2). "That day" refers to the time when God would punish His enemies, purify His people, and perform wonders (v. 3; cf. v. 8; 13:1–2; 14:4, 6). In the Hebrew, this expression (*bayyom hahu'*) occurs five times in chapters 1–11 but seventeen times in chapters 12–14, indicating a shift in Zechariah's focus from his own era to the eschaton.

The Lord's promise addresses the *'alupe*, a term sometimes rendered as "clans" and sometimes as "governors," "leaders," or "chieftains" (12:5–6). During this time Judah had no king, leaving royal appointees, like Zerubbabel, as the highest political officials. Whether leaders or clans, the *'alupe* would consume/devour all the surrounding peoples on the right and left (v. 6). Since "right" and "left" in Hebrew can equally mean "south" and "north," respectively, this may refer to the nearby nations mentioned in 9:1–7, to the more remote superpowers in Egypt and Mesopotamia (10:10–11), or most probably to all of Judah's enemies. Like a flaming torch among sheaves, Judah would completely destroy their enemies. Again, Judah's own strength would not accomplish this, but God would assure their protection and destroy all the nations coming against Jerusalem (12:9; cf. 4:6). The promises of deliverance not only extend to Jerusalem but also to the rural areas, the dwelling tents of Judah, where seminomadic shepherds moved from season to season. God promised that the glory/honor of Jerusalem would not exceed that of the less developed areas (12:7).

12:10–14. Jerusalem's Mourning. Zechariah foresaw not only material restoration for Judah but spiritual restoration as well. The same God who would defend them and cause them to rebuild their city and temple would also give them a spirit of grace and supplication (v. 10). They would not rejoice over the destruction of their enemies. Instead they would mourn as a parent mourns for an only child or a firstborn son. But they would not mourn because of their own material losses but because of the God they pierced (v. 10). Christian interpreters usually take this as a reference to the crucifixion of Jesus, when the only begotten Son of God was pierced on the cross for the sins of humanity. The listing of various families and clans who would mourn implies that God's people would mourn both universally and individually over their offenses against Him (vv. 12–14; cf. Matt. 24:30; Rev. 1:7). This passage contains several similarities with the messianic prophecy of Isaiah 52:13—53:12.

13:1–9. Spiritual Reformation. In response to Judah mourning over their offenses, a "fountain" would open in Jerusalem to deal with sin and uncleanness. Zechariah 13:1 does not state who would open this fountain, but v. 2 specifies that the Lord Himself would remove the names of the idols as well as the prophets and the unclean spirits (cf. 1 Kin. 22:22). The "names of the idols" signifies calling upon idols to invoke their help, and their removal means that the people would commit themselves exclusively to the Lord. The Lord does not explain the reason for the removal of the prophets, but Zechariah 13:4 hints that some people dressed in hairy garb resembling that of prophets in order to deliver false messages. In fact, all references to prophets in chapter 13 are negative. The prophets God would remove were likely those He had not commissioned. Not only would God remove the prophets, but their own families would reject and kill them (v. 3). These prophets would deny any pretention to prophetic function, no longer wishing to be identified as prophets (vv. 5–6). They would explain away their wounds, possibly associated with prophetic ecstasy, as injuries suffered in "the house of my friends" (v. 6; cf. 1 Kin. 18:28). Some consider the reference to the wounds as a messianic prophecy announcing the sufferings of Christ during the crucifixion (see Zechariah: Introduction; Matt. 27:26; Mark 14:65)

Zechariah 13:7 returns to the image of the shepherd that is used eight times in chapters 10–11. The text does not explain the striking of the shepherd and the scattering of the people, nor does it identify the shepherd. But he is clearly an agent of God, who calls him His companion, someone close to Him, and His associate. Jesus quoted this verse to predict that His disciples would abandon Him at His arrest (Matt. 26:31). Some translations capitalize the words "Man" and "Shepherd," considering them divine titles referring to Christ. The death of two-thirds of the flock does not correspond precisely to any historical event in the time of Zechariah or in the ministry of Christ (cf. Matt. 26:31; Mark 14:27). But the proportions are not necessarily mathematically precise. The ratio of two-thirds to one-third means that most would be cut off. But God would bring the remaining third through the fire to refine them (Zech. 13:9). This refining process would result in their attachment to the Lord. He would call them His people, and they would call Him their God. In this way, He would purify the mourners and prepare them for the Day of the Lord.

14:1–21. The Day of the Lord. For the first time in the book, Zechariah 14:1 introduces the concept of the Day of the Lord. Eight of the other prophets also use this expression, usually to describe a day when the Lord would act on behalf of His people to correct wrongs and to establish justice. Christian interpretations often associate it with the return of Christ since the prophecy of Chapter 14 was never fulfilled in Judah. Its eschatological character suggests that its fulfillment may not follow the specific details mentioned in this chapter. The concept of the Day of the Lord in the Hebrew Bible includes the gathering of not only God's people but also His enemies for a final confrontation between good and evil (v. 2; cf. Joel 3:1–2). Zechariah depicts it in menacing terms, including the capture and looting of Jerusalem, the rape of its women, and the captivity of half of its survivors (Zech. 14:1–2). He predicts a time not of ease and delight but of conflict, calamity, and cataclysm, though not utter destruction. God would spare His people. He would not *karat* ("cut off," "remove") the remaining remnant from the city (v. 2).

In the eschatological conflict, the forces of evil would have their moment. But in the end God Himself would fight against them and defeat them (vv. 3, 5). The presence of the Lord and supernatural changes in the earth are essential elements of the concept of the Day of the Lord. In Zechariah's description, this includes the transformation of not only the land (v. 4) but also changes in the celestial realm (vv. 6–7). Enemies would capture Jerusalem (v. 2), but God would provide an escape by dividing the steep Mount of Olives (a north–south ridge) from east to west, creating a very large valley by which the inhabitants of Jerusalem could flee (vv. 4–5). The *kedoshim* ("holy ones," "saints") mentioned in v. 5 could be humans (cf. Deut. 33:3; Ps. 50:5), but here they are probably heavenly beings (cf. Job 4:18; 15:15).

The cataclysmic alteration of the earth on the Day of the Lord continues in Zechariah 14:8–10. Historically, Jerusalem owed its existence to a permanent water source, the Gihon spring. This spring provided just enough water to sustain the city in all seasons. However, the waters of Gihon all flow out into the Kidron brook, which leads to the Jordan River and the Dead Sea. Zechariah describes geographical changes in the land which would convert all of Judah, from Geba to Rimmon, south of Jerusalem, into a plain. Much of this area is mountainous, so this would require a striking transformation. In Zechariah's description, two streams originating from Jerusalem would water this vast plain. But even after the creation of the vast, well-watered plain, Jerusalem itself would remain elevated on a mountain (i.e., a defensible location), safe and inhabited (vv. 10–11). Similarly, the book of Revelation describes a transformed earth and a high-walled, holy city with gates that never close, apparently because there is no need for defense (Rev. 21:1–25).

As the spiritual consequence of His intervention, God would establish His reign. Those who have trusted Him have always regarded Him as King, but Zechariah recognizes the distinct unity and unique authority of the Lord as King over all the earth (Zech. 14:9; cf. Ps. 10:16; Is. 33:22; Jer. 10:10; Dan. 7:27). The oneness of the Lord implies that all the peoples of the earth would worship only Him. The Lord would not only intervene on behalf of His people but also send plagues to afflict those opposing Judah (Zech. 14:12). The plagues would affect even the livestock of Judah's enemies (v. 15).

Although Zechariah expected the surrounding nations to oppose the people of Judah, he also anticipated their conversion (cf. 8:22–23). The survivors of all the opposing nations would eventually go to Jerusalem to celebrate the Lord's festivals (14:16). Those failing to observe the Festival of Tabernacles would lose the seasonal rain necessary for cultivation. The possibility of disobedience and punishment suggests that this foretells what would happen if Judah remained faithful rather than serving as an unconditional eschatological prophecy.

As a result of the events of the Day of the Lord, Jerusalem would be holy. Even common vessels used for everyday purposes would be just as holy as the vessels of the temple (v. 21). A term regarding the Lord's holiness was engraved on a gold plate attached to the turban of the high priest (v. 20; cf. Ex. 28:36). On that day, every pot in Jerusalem would be holy to the Lord, and everyday utensils would be raised to sacred status (Zech. 14:21). Some versions translate the word *kena'ani* (lit. "Canaanite") as "merchant," which would indicated the end of commerce in the Lord's temple. God would accept all nations and would no longer consider anyone a foreigner.

This description of the Day of the Lord in Zechariah closes the book on a high note by proclaiming hope. The direct and personal intervention of God in human history would permanently defeat evil. Holiness would triumph over uncleanness and sin (see Lev. 16), bringing with it a glorious future in the presence of the Lord.

MALACHI

INTRODUCTION

Title. The book is named after the Prophet Malachi and contains the prophetic messages the Lord sent to Israel through him. Since the Hebrew word *mal'aki* means "my messenger," some interpreters suggest that it is not a proper name. In that case, we would not know who wrote the book. But the fact that the name has a general meaning does not signify that it is not a proper name. Obadiah, for instance, means "servant of the Lord," but it is also the name of a prophet.

Date. Malachi did not date his message, but the content of the book leaves little doubt that its author ministered during the postexilic period, possibly during middle of the 5th century B.C., which would make him a contemporary of Ezra and Nehemiah, whose books address similiar issues current at the time.

Backgrounds. After his victory over the Babylonians (539 B.C.), Cyrus the Great issued an edict to rebuild the temple of Jerusalem (Ezra 1:2), bringing Israel's captivity to an end. The first batch of returnees laid the foundation in 536 B.C. Malachi must have ministered after Haggai and Zechariah, during whose time the temple was rebuilt (Ezra 6:14). The social and religious conditions reflected in Malachi's preaching closely resemble the situation faced by Ezra and Nehemiah. Malachi condemns similar abuses, such as the exploitation of widows and orphans (Mal. 3:5; cf. Neh. 5:1–13), divorces, and mixed marriages (Mal. 2:10–16; cf. Neh. 10:30; 13:23–29). Both Malachi and Nehemiah emphasize tithing as part of religious reform (Mal. 3:7–10; Neh. 10:37–39).

Authorship. Everything known about the author comes from the book itself. This commentary shares the view of a growing number of modern scholars that Malachi is the personal name of the author of the book.

Theology and Purpose. Malachi presents his message within the framework of God's covenant with His people. God gives abundant love and undeserved grace as His part within the covenant (Mal. 1:2, 9; cf. Deut. 7:7). Malachi addresses the people's response to these gifts.

1. Obedience. God expected the people to respond to His election with love, obedience (cf. Deut. 20:12–13), faithfulness (Mal. 2:14–16), and respect (1:6). Malachi prophesied because the people were not living up to the responsibilities required by this covenant relationship. The prophet assured the people of God's unfailing love, but also held them accountable for their response. God's love is unconditional, but His blessings are not. Basing his appeal on the "oneness" of God (cf. Deut. 6:4–9), Malachi calls for not only total, undivided commitment to God but also for loyalty and faithfulness in human relations, such as social justice, equality, and marriage vows (Mal. 2:9–10, 14–16).

2. The Covenant. Malachi conveys his message using covenant language, much of it borrowed from Deuteronomy. Terms such as "love," "fear," "faithfulness," "law of Moses," and "all Israel" fit the covenant context, as does Malachi's emphasis on the Levitical priesthood, tithing, and the covenant blessings and curses (2:2; 3:8–10, 12). The Lord calls His people to "remember," a concept central to the personal relationship embedded in the covenant (4:4; cf. Deut. 4:10; 5:15; 32:7), and promises to remember those who feared Him and honored His name (Mal. 3:16).

3. Universality and Hope. Malachi contains strong elements of universality (cf. 1:5, 11, 14; 2:10; 3:12), which provide a solid basis for future hope by encouraging the reader to look back to God's original design. The universality provides a solid basis for future hope. Malachi exposes and condemns sin and warns of the fate of the unrepentant. But he also promises a better future and a faithful remnant (1:5; 2:14; 3:12, 16–18; 4:2). A future generation would experience a revival that would prepare them for the Day of the Lord (2:15; 4:5–6).

Literary Features. Malachi's style borders between prose and poetry. Following the superscription (1:1), he presents his message in a series of five disputations (i.e., oral defense of thesis using logic) between God and the people of Judah.

COMMENTARY

1:1–5

First Disputation

After a brief introduction (1:1), the book immediately moves to the first disputation, which addresses God's love for His people. The people question His love for them, and God responds (vv. 2–5).

1:1. Superscription. The superscription identifies the originator of the message (the Lord), the prophetic instrument (Malachi), the recipients (Israel), and the nature of the message (the word of the Lord). The Hebrew word *massa'* literally means "burden," but in this context it seems to carry the technical meaning of "oracle," a divine communication through a prophet (cf. Is. 19:1; 21:1; Nah. 1:1; Hab. 1:1). The prophets repeatedly use "the word of the Lord" to stress the divine authority and reliability of their messages. As commonly used during postexilic times, the name Israel designates the people of God in Judah.

1:2–5. God's Love for His Elect. The disputations in Malachi all follow the same basic structure: God's initial statement, the people's objection, and God's response to the objection. Here the people questioned God's love for them. The statement "I have loved you" could also be translated as "I love you." God's love is not based on any merit or inner quality of the people but on God's grace (Deut. 7:7). The people should have responded to such abundant grace with loving obedience (cf. Deut. 6:6; 10:12–13), but instead they questioned His love (Mal. 1:2).

In response, the Lord reminded them of His election of Jacob instead of Esau, as evidenced by the condition of Esau's land at that time. The strong statement "Esau I have hated" does not imply any animosity against Esau or his descendants (v. 3). Such hatred was actually prohibited in the law (Deut. 23:7). In context the phrase simply means, "I have chosen Jacob rather than Esau." The nonelection of Esau was manifested in the condition of his land at that time. The description leaves no doubt that the fate of the Edomites was connected to their sins and not predetermined by God. Their ambition to return and build up what they had lost was rejected because they were a wicked land (Mal. 1:4), against whom God's indignation/wrath would last forever. During the fifth century B.C., the Nabateans expanded their power and forced Edom further south into what in NT times was named Idumea.

The notion of God's wrath is part of an important biblical pattern. Sin and apostasy lead to retribution, which results either in repentance and purification or in condemnation. This first disputation ends, however, on a positive note of hope for the future. The people of Israel would see the Lord magnified and His greatness acknowledged beyond the border of Israel. They would proclaim Him as Lord over history. This prophecy gives the disputation a universal perspective.

1:6—2:9

Second Disputation: Honoring God's Name

The second disputation contains two dialogues in which God accuses the priests of dishonoring His name (1:6–11, 12–14), followed by a monologue affirming God's sovereignty (2:1–9).

1:6–11. First Dialogue. In this disputation, Malachi invokes the name *yahweh tseba'ot* ("the Lord of hosts," "the Lord Almighty," "the Lord of heavenly forces") eleven times to emphasize the divine origin of his message. The oracle opens with two proverbial sayings contrasting Israel's attitude toward God with a son who honors his father and a servant/slave who honors his master. As Israel's Father, God created and cared for them (cf. Is. 64:8; Hos. 11:1). As Israel's Master, He brought them out of Egypt, redeemed them, and became their Lord. God naturally expected respect, but His children despised/showed contempt for Him. They had shamed His name through disloyalty to the covenant.

The Hebrew word for "honor" (*kabod*) literally means "to be heavy." God is a person of weight, and His children should honor Him by taking what He says seriously. But the priests, who were responsible for maintaining proper worship, offered imperfect sacrifices on the Lord's table (the altar of burnt offerings). They would never have offered the Persian governor such gifts (Mal. 1:8). In this way, they despised the Lord by belittling His importance in the eyes of the people and the nations. Only a perfect sacrifice could represent the sacrifice of Christ to atone for the sins of the world. The Lord found this practice so contemptible that He wished someone would shut the doors leading to the temple complex so the priests could not offer defiled sacrifices (v. 10).

The Lord concludes by expounding on the future, when all would worship Him. His name would become great among the nations/Gentiles, a hope also reflected in the writings of previous prophets (see Is. 56:6–7). This broad, grand vision marks a stark and deliberate contrast to the petty attitude of the priests who received the message.

1:12–14. Second Dialogue. Like the first conversation, the second contains God's statement, a response, and a reference to the universal nature of the covenant. The Lord condemned the priests for treating the altar and the sacrifices as common and for complaining about their ministry, which they considered a burden instead of a privilege (Mal. 1:12–13). In response, the Lord rejected their blemished, disrespectful sacrifices. As a great King, He should be feared among the nations (vv. 13–14).

2:1–9. God's Speech. Malachi now moves from dialogue to divine monologue. "And now," introduces a judgment oracle (cf. Is. 5:5; 16:14; Jer. 18:11; Hos. 5:7). The Lord had presented evidence against the priests and would now pronounce the verdict. The word *mitswah* (lit. "commandment," "decree") underscores the certainty of God's verdict against the very priests expected to guard His commandments. God would curse the blessings of the priests, reversing the blessing He gave Aaron, unless they resolved (Heb. *tashimu al leb*, lit. "take it to heart") to honor/glorify His name (Mal. 2:2; cf. 1:6; Num. 6:24–26; cf. Deut. 28–29).

God further explained two consequences of the curse. First, God would rebuke the descendants of the priests (Mal. 2:3). Scholars dispute the vocalization of this phrase (the original Hebrew text did not contain vowels). The word translated as "descendants" could actually mean "arm," implying that God would weaken, even paralyze, the priests, making them unable to perform their duties (cf. 1 Sam. 2:31; Ps. 10:15). However, the translation "descendant" or "offspring" (lit. "seed") makes better sense. In context, the use of *ga'ar* ("rebuke") suggests that God would humiliate the descendants of the priests by withholding His blessings in order to hopefully preserve the covenant with Levi (Mal. 2:4). As the second consequence of the curse, God would spread refuse/dung from sacrificial animals on the faces of the priests. This gross act would not only humiliate them but also render them unclean. The priests normally removed and burned the feces from the sacrifices (Lev. 4:11–12). But because of this ritual pollution, those appointed by God to remove uncleanness would find themselves carried off from His presence and thrown out with the fecal matter of the sacrifices.

God issued this stern verdict to preserve His covenant with Levi (Mal. 2:4). Translations such as "abolish" or "fall to the ground" presuppose an unnecessary change of the Hebrew text. God positively recalled the time when Levi showed Him respect/fear and reverently stood in awe of His name (v. 5). As Levi taught the truth, his descendants, the priests, were tasked with sharing divine instruction as the messengers of the Lord (vv. 6–7). This wordplay on the meaning of Malachi's own name ("my messenger") identifies the failure of the priests. By failing to communicate God's message, they had corrupted/violated God's covenant with Levi.

God's retribution naturally followed. Just as the priests despised God's name by making His table contemptible (1:7), so would He make them contemptible and humiliate them before the people (2:9). They had failed to walk with God and had shown unfair partiality and favoritism in their implementation of the law (cf. 1:9).

2:10—3:6

Third Disputation: God's Justice and Judgment

Malachi begins the third disputation with a passionate appeal to the people (2:10). The divine indictment follows, juxtaposed with two attempts by the people to defend themselves (vv. 11–13). They first protest God's judgment and then question the fairness of His justice. God responds unambiguously with the facts about the people's behavior (vv. 14b–16, 17b). The oracle ends with a pronouncement of God's judgment: He will arrive at His temple (3:1–2), and both the priesthood (vv. 3–4) and the people (vv. 5–6) will face their fate.

2:10–13. God's Lawsuit against the People. The prophet's passionate appeal to the people in v. 10 functions as a transition to this section. Malachi condemns the partiality of the priests

by citing the universal implications of the nature of Yahweh as "one God" (cf. 2:9–10; Deut. 6:4). God, not Abraham, is the one Father of all because He created us (cf. Ex. 4:22; Hos. 11:1). In the OT, only God appears as the subject of the verb *bara'* ("create"). God created all humanity (Gen. 1–2), and He created His people when He delivered them from Egypt (cf. Is. 43:1, 7, 15).

Like Daniel in his prayer of penitence, Malachi includes himself among the people when he asks why "we" are treacherous/unfaithful with each other (cf. Dan. 9:4b–19). He emphasizes the brotherhood and common ancestry of the people of Israel through their collective covenant with God. Equality before God should lead to proper behavior toward each other. The Hebrew verb *bagad* ("to be treacherous," "unfaithful") occurs five times in Malachi 2:10–16, highlighting God's condemnation of faithless behavior in marriage and social relationships. The use of metaphors from family relations is expanded by a reference to their collective covenant with God, emphasizing the brotherhood of the people of Israel with a common ancestry.

In vv. 11–13, the prophet accuses the men of Judah of marrying women who worshiped foreign gods (lit. "a daughter of a god"). The Hebrew word *to'ebah* ("abomination," "detestable thing") often refers to foreign gods or the act of marrying foreigners and worshiping their gods (see also Ezra 9:14). The abomination was not the mixed marriages but the resulting corruption of worship, as the foreign women brought pagan worship into the community. The social problem arose from the religious element. The peoples of the ancient Near East (despite ethnic differences) did not divide life into sacred and secular elements. Everything had religious implications. The people of Judah had desecrated God's sanctuary by what some today might consider a secular act (Mal. 2:11). The women's ethnicity did not matter, but their religious beliefs did. The Hebrew word *qodesh* ("holy institution," "sanctuary," "holy place") may refer directly to the temple, but it may also include everything set apart for God (e.g., the temple, the city, and the people). God had expressly forbidden the Israelites from marrying foreigners because they would turn them away from God (Ex. 34:11–16; Deut. 7:3–4). Through these marriages and the pagan worship resulting from them, the people became both ceremonially and morally unclean. The prophet wished that the Lord would cut off/remove (Heb. *karat*) anyone acting this way from the tents of Jacob (Mal. 2:12). *Karat* means to expell from the worshiping community of God by exile or, in extreme cases, by execution (Gen. 17:14; Lev. 7:20, 21; 17:10; 19:8; 20:17; cf. Dan. 9:26).

Finally, Malachi reveals the utter hypocrisy of those who, though living in violation of the covenant, bring an offering to the Lord and cover the altar with tears and laments (Mal. 2:13). Immoral behavior does not necessarily prevent expressions of strong religious emotions.

2:14–17. Objections Refuted. When Malachi declared that God would no longer favorably accept their offerings, the people demanded to know the reason. He answered that they had broken their marriage vows, which rendered their expression of religious emotions worthless. Their moral life directly conflicted with the values of the covenant (see Ezra 9–10). It appears that the men had divorced their Jewish wives, the wives of their youth, in order to marry the pagan women.

God intended marriage to reflect the covenant love and faithfulness He Himself showed His people (cf. Jer. 2:2; Hos. 2:18–20). Marriage is a permanent covenant between a man and a woman with God as the witness (Mal. 2:14; cf. Prov. 2:17). God intended close intimacy between them. The word *khaberet* means a close friend/companion/partner with whom one shares everything.

Malachi 2:15–16 is fraught with grammatical issues that make translation difficult. Some translations apply "one" to God (the "one God"). Others apply "one" to the marriage union, referring to the Creation, when God made the first couple one. In this context, the reference to the Spirit would mean that husband and wife share the same original spiritual bond of love and understanding because God continues to be part of it. Such a union results in "godly offspring," children taught to follow God because they have a mother and father who both have a right relationship with Him. Malachi reminded those men of Judah who had divorced their wives to take foreign wives that the spiritual dimension of their previous marriages remained because God remained as witness. In light of the original ideal of Eden, it is no wonder that God hates divorce (v. 16). Those who divorce their spouses engage in an act of treachery/disloyalty (Heb. *bagad*).

The people's second objection functions as a transition and introduction to the subsequent divine speech (3:1–6). The question "Where is the God of justice?" cynically casts doubt on God's moral integrity, prompting Him to answer.

3:1–6. God's Response: Judgment Will Come. The Lord assured His people that He would suddenly and dramatically come to His temple to judge (cf. Pss. 96:13; 98:9; Dan. 7:22). Before His coming, He would send His messenger to prepare the way. In Hebrew, "my messenger" is the same as the name of the prophet, but the context seems to militate against any reference to Malachi himself. The messenger would announce God's arrival and encourage the people to pave the way (cf. Is. 40:3). He would proclaim peace, joy, and the good news of salvation (cf. Ps. 68:12, 18; Is. 52:7–8).

Judgment implies deliverance and often has a positive connotation in the OT. Given Judah's moral state in Malachi's time, however, the statement that the people seek the Lord and delight in/desire Him must be ironic (cf. Amos 5:18–20). The messenger of the covenant, a concept unique to Malachi, stands in clear parallel to "the Lord," suggesting that it is a name for God (more specifically, for the Messiah), not for the prophet. "Lord" here translates from the Hebrew *'adon*, referring to God as the heavenly King (cf. Zech. 4:14; 6:5).

"The God of justice" would come to His sanctuary to judge, beginning with the Levites (Mal. 3:3; cf. 2:17). He would purify and refine them, bringing moral and spiritual renewal that would make the sacrifices and offerings once again ceremonially pure and acceptable/pleasing to the Lord (cf. Jer. 2:2–3). After purifying the priesthood, God would judge all the people, eradicating those who practice sorcery, commit adultery, perjure themselves, treat foreigners unjustly/turn away aliens, defraud laborers of their wages, and oppress widows and orphans.

Malachi 3:6 is a transitional verse that many consider an introduction to the following section. If so, the Hebrew conjunction *ki* ("for," "because"), which some versions leave untranslated, could mean "indeed." That God does not change does not mean that He is indifferent to what happens. It emphasizes that He has always been and will always continue to be the covenant God of mercy (cf. Ex. 34:6–7). Through judgment and purification, God shows grace to the descendants of Jacob, saving them from destruction though they are wayward deceivers just like their ancestor.

3:7–12

Fourth Disputation: The Practical Benefits of Repentance

The fourth disputation plays off of the reference to Jacob in 3:6, equating the attitude and behavior of the people to that of their ancestors. This leads into a divine call for the people of Malachi's time to return to the Lord, followed by their response (v. 7). The central part of the disputation covers the covenant curses and blessings associated with the laws of tithes and offerings. The phrase *amar yahweh tseba'ot* ("says the LORD of hosts," "says the LORD Almighty," "says the LORD of heavenly forces") highlights Malachi's prophetic authority.

3:7–9. The Past and the Present: Tithing. The people continued to turn away from God's decrees and ordinances, as they had since the time of their fathers/ancestors. The Lord begins the discussion by appealing to the people to return to Him, the typical OT expression for conversion. If the people would return to God, God would return to them. Both parties would stop walking away from each other.

The people responded immediately by asking in what way/how they should return, an apparent claim of innocence denying that they had done anything that required repentance. The Lord responded with a clear example: they had robbed Him. When they again asked in what way/how they had robbed Him, God replied that they had cheated Him "in tithes and offerings." This had brought the covenant curses on them (vv. 8–9). A tithe (lit. "a tenth") refers to the divine law requiring the Israelites to give a tenth of their income or spoil to the Lord (Gen. 14:18–20; 28:20–22; Lev. 27:30–33). An offering refers to any gift carried to the temple.

3:10–12. The Tithe and Blessings. God appealed to the people a second time, this time to supply His house with food by bringing all the tithes/the full tithe into the storehouse (i.e., the temple treasury). God set this up as a test. If the people would faithfully bring in the tithes and offerings, He would open heaven and pour out His blessings, proving that He alone supplies all His children need (see "Covenant Renewal and Tithing," p. 602). This reciprocal movement connects the earthly sanctuary with the heavenly sanctuary, the location of God's throne room.

The practice of tithing, already introduced in Genesis, relates closely to the concept of blessing (Gen. 14:18–20; 28:20–22). This sermon in Malachi reflects the theological message of these accounts from the origin of Israel. Tithing is not about paying God, and blessing is not about God automatically repaying the giver. Jacob had to learn that tithing involves more than a simple trading contract (Gen. 27:20; 32:27–30).

Like marriage, it is a covenant based on mutual grace, love, faithfulness, trust, and commitment (see Mal. 2:11–16). God's people should bring Him tithes and offerings as an expression of gratitude for His undeserved mercy, responding to His initiative by returning a portion of what He has already given them.

God's promise to bless the fertility of the land resembles the covenant blessings in Deuteronomy (Mal. 3:11–12; Deut. 28:12–13; 30:8–10). God's blessings again have universal implications, indicating that He was about to fulfill His promise to make Abraham a blessing to all people (Mal. 3:12; Gen 12:3; cf. Mal. 1:5, 12; 2:10).

3:13—4:3

Fifth Disputation: Benefits of Serving God

The fifth disputation begins by contrasting two groups with two very different attitudes concerning judgment. The Lord characterized each group by its words. The first group argued with God's assessment of them (3:13–15). God never directly replies to their objections. Instead, He turns His focus to the second group, those who feared Him and trusted His plans for them (vv. 16–17). The section ends with God explaining what would happen to these two groups in the judgment to come (3:18—4:3).

3:13–15. Speech of the People. The Lord charged the people with speaking harsh, arrogant words against Him, claiming that it is useless/futile to serve Him. They treated God's commands as a means to gain profit/benefit for themselves, so they considered serving Him a drudgery that brought only sorrow and mourning (3:14). By calling the arrogant/proud blessed, they mocked God's promise that all the nations would call His people blessed (vv. 12, 15). By proclaiming that the arrogant and wicked successfully get away with tempting/testing (Heb. *bakhan*) God, they mocked God's plea to try/test (*bakhan*) Him through tithing (vv. 10, 15). Since God did not intervene, they stopped caring.

3:16–17. Those Who Fear God. Following the dialogue of the previous section, verse 3:16 switches to prophetic monologue. Malachi portrays those who respond favorably to God's message as people who fear the Lord (i.e., honor Him) and *khashab* His name. This Hebrew word, sometimes translated as "meditate," means to esteem and value (cf. Is. 13:17). It contrasts with the attitude exhibited by the priests (Mal. 1:6, 11). The Lord does not accept the worship of the rebellious (1:8, 10, 13), but He listens to those who fear Him.

Malachi describes a scroll/book of remembrance written in God's presence in His heavenly sanctuary concerning the words and actions of those who fear the Lord. The Bible speaks about several heavenly books, most significantly the Book of Life, which records the names of those who believe (Ex. 32:32–33; Ps. 69:28; Dan. 12:1). The mention of a "book/scroll of remembrance" is unique to Malachi. This may refer to the Book of Life, but it more likely refers to a book of deeds (cf. Esth. 2:23; 6:1). The word "remembrance" underlines the fact that God does not forget anyone or anything. Those who fear the Lord would become His special possession and receive their reward on the day of judgment (Mal. 3:17; cf. Ex. 19:5). Because they are so precious to Him, He will spare them.

3:18—4:3. Two Destinies. The Lord proclaimed that the fire of purification would burn on the day of judgment to destroy the arrogant and wicked, those who do not serve Him. The fire would burn them completely, leaving neither root nor branch (4:1; cf. 3:2–3, 18). There is no "soul" burning in an eternal torment. This contrasts with the fate of those who fear God's name, who would leap and jump for joy (Heb. *push*, "leap," "gallop," "frolic," sometimes translated as "grow"; cf. Hab. 1:8), like calves running free in the field, and trample the ashes of the wicked (Mal. 4:2–3; cf. 3:16).

The phrase "Sun of Righteousness" occurs only here in the OT. The authors of the Bible hesitated to associated the sun with God, mainly because of the prevalence of pagan sun worship (but see Ps. 84:11; Is. 60:1–3). Here the image portrays the dawn of a new day in which the rays/wings of the sun bring healing. "Righteousness" often describes God's merciful intervention in the life of His people to save and deliver them (Pss. 96:10–13; 97:4; 98:1–2; Is. 56:1; cf. Rom. 3:21–22). God's new day of righteousness would bring life and joy. The saved ones are compared to calves: they would *push*. The idea is that the people would leap and jump for joy like calves running freely on a field after leaving their stall. They would trample the ashes of the wicked. This image also connects to Malachi 4:1, which states that the proud would be completely burned. There is no "soul" burning in eternal torment.

4:4–6

Final Appeal

The book of Malachi concludes with the Lord's final appeal to the people. It summarizes and weaves together major themes of the previous disputations and connects them with the larger theological setting.

4:4. Remember the Law. God exhorted the people to "remember" the law. A key concept in God's covenant with Israel, remembering means more than just mentally recalling the event (Ex. 13:3; 20:8; Deut. 5:15; 24:18). It means reacting appropriately to the recollection, in this case by obeying the law (cf. Ps. 103:18). The law of Moses broadly encompasses all of God's revelation at Mount Sinai. Together with the *khuqqim* ("statutes," "decrees") and *mishpatim* ("judgments," "laws"), it designates the law in its totality (cf. Lev. 26:46). Horeb is another name for Sinai (Ex. 33:6). These repeated references to the covenant make this exhortation to remember the law a natural, final summary of God's intention for His people (Mal. 1:6; 2:6; 3:7, 14).

4:5–6. The Coming of Elijah. The Lord moves from a discussion of the law to prophecy, combining the references to the past with expectations for the future. He promised to send the prophet Elijah to prepare the way for the Day of the Lord. Elijah, as the typical prophet for spiritual renewal, represents the messenger prophesied in 3:1. Jesus applied this text to John the Baptist, who came "in the spirit and power of Elijah" (Luke 1:17) to prepare the way for Jesus (Matt. 3:1–12; 17:12–13). The announcement of the coming of the "great and dreadful day of the LORD" clearly links it to previous descriptions of God's intervention (Mal. 3:2; cf. Joel 2:31). In Malachi, by the pairing of law and prophecy, the reference to the past combines with the expectations of the future.

The prophetic messenger would turn the hearts of the parents (lit. "fathers") to the children and the hearts of the children to the parents. This description expands on the function of the messenger in 3:1 by describing how the messenger would prepare the way for the Lord. Malachi uses several family metaphors and references to fathers/ancestors (see 1:6; 2:6, 10), but God promises more than bridging generational gaps. He promises a return to His original covenant made with the fathers/ancestors at Sinai. Hence the call to remember serves as a call for His people to return to the faith of their ancestors. The mutual turning of hearts between parents and children indicates the two temporal directions of law and prophecy, both past and future. The appeal closes with a warning that God would strike the earth/land with a curse if the people rejected the message. The "earth" could refer to the land of Israel, or in view of Malachi's proclamation of the universality of the God of Israel, it could refer to the entire world.

Christians place Malachi as the last book of the OT. It fittingly ends without closure, looking to the future. The Lord promised blessings to come but also warned the impenitent. He commanded His people to remain in His family, to keep His law, to listen to His prophets, and to honor and praise Him (3:16). The book closes with the potential for either judgment or salvation, leaving the last word yet unspoken. There is still hope.

NEW TESTAMENT

GENERAL ARTICLES

HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION TO THE NEW TESTAMENT

Foundational to Christianity is the belief that God has revealed Himself in human history. Whether it is in the stories of Joseph and Moses in Egypt, Daniel in Babylon, Jesus in Judea, or the early church throughout the Mediterranean world, God is described in Scripture as working in a world made up of different languages, cultures, and customs in order to accomplish His will. He has revealed Himself in this world through the person of Jesus and the Holy Spirit's workings in the early church. It may be useful, therefore, to be aware of the historical circumstances through which Persian, Greek, and Roman rule helped to shape the political, religious, cultural, and social aspects of the Holy Land in which God chose to act.

THE PERSIAN PERIOD IN THE HOLY LAND (539–332 B.C.)

The devastating destruction of Jerusalem and its sacred temple, along with the forced deportation of thousands of Jews to Babylon in 586 B.C., appeared to leave little hope that the Jewish nation would survive. The Babylonians expected that their Jewish captives, like other people before them, would over time lose their sense of national and ethnic identity and eventually assimilate into their new surroundings. The sense of hopelessness that initially overcame the exiles in Babylon is evident in the book of Lamentations and in the poignant words of the captives expressed in Psalm 137:1–4 as they recall weeping by the rivers of Babylon and being forced to sing for their captors while remembering Zion.

The Jewish people as a whole, however, did not lose their sense of identity. There was a common belief that when a people experienced disaster it was because their god had been defeated by another god. Through the work of prophets Daniel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, the Jews came to understand that the God of Israel had not been defeated, but their exile was deliberately intended by Him for redemptive purposes. The God of Israel had purposed that Jerusalem fall into the hands of the Babylonians, but He had not abandoned His people. In fact, He would intervene on their behalf to bring them back to the promised land.

The deliverance that the Jewish people longed for came about when Babylon fell to the Persians in 539 B.C. Unlike the Babylonians, who had forcibly resettled captive subjects outside their native lands, the Persians sought to win the loyalty of Babylon's captives by allowing them to return to their native homelands. The Persians even restored destroyed temples and returned the sacred images, vessels, and utensils the Babylonians had looted and stored in their own temples.

While most Jews chose to remain in Persia, a minority chose to return to Jerusalem over a number of years. The first group of returning exiles made the journey under the leadership of Zerubbabel in 537 B.C. When they arrived, some settled in Jerusalem while others returned to their own ancestral towns.

The land to which the Jews returned was a small Persian province known as Yehud, and Jerusalem was nothing more than an open village with little trace of its once glorious temple. With the help of Joshua the high priest and the prophets Zechariah and Haggai, Zerubbabel was eventually able to rebuild the temple, though it paled in comparison to the temple of Solomon.

A second wave of settlers returned in 457 B.C. under the leadership of Ezra, a Jewish priest and skilled scribe. While Ezra received authorization from the Persian king Artaxerxes to reestablish Jerusalem as a walled city (Ezra 7:11–20), his primary concern was to reestablish the religious commitment and identity of the Jewish people by calling them to study "the Law of the LORD" and to follow it rigorously (Ezra 7:10). He was particularly concerned that the relationships they had established with people from the surrounding region would lead to religious compromise. The actual work of completely rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem fell to Nehemiah (Neh. 2:1–8), who arrived thirteen years later. He also worked closely with Ezra in imposing religious reform on the Jewish populace (Neh. 13:15–31).

The Judaism that emerged in the Holy Land had changed in several significant ways. First, the rebuilding of the temple, without a restoration of the Davidic monarchy, resulted in the Jewish priesthood having significant influence over both the religious and the secular affairs within the province. The most important person was the high priest, whose lineage had to be traced back to Zadok, a descendant of Aaron, who was high priest to Solomon (1 Kings 2:35). Although the ultimate authority resided in the Persian king, the high priest served as the local ruler of Jerusalem. He was also seen as the leader of the Jewish people scattered across the ancient world.

The temple and its services played the dominant role in Jewish religious life until its destruction in A.D. 70. At the same time, the Exile had taught the Jewish people that religious piety could be expressed through prayer and the study of Scripture. As a result, the knowledge and interpretation of the law of God (the Torah) also began to have a much greater influence in general Jewish life. Since Jews believed that disobedience, and in particular idolatry, had led to destruction and exile, they were determined to be more faithful than their ancestors had been.

It was also under Persian rule that Aramaic began to gradually replace Hebrew as the common language of the Jewish people. Since Aramaic was the common and official administrative language throughout the Persian Empire, it was expedient that Jews learn to speak it to survive and to relate to the new world in which they found themselves. While the Scriptures were read in Hebrew, over time an Aramaic paraphrase or translation, called a Targum, became necessary for the people to understand it. By the first century A.D., most Jews in the Holy Land spoke Aramaic as their native tongue, as was the case with Jesus.

THE HELLENISTIC PERIOD IN THE HOLY LAND (332–63 B.C.)

The Jewish people lived in a state of relative peace and stability for nearly two centuries until the Greeks conquered the Persian Empire. The Persians had generally allowed the people they conquered to retain their own religious identity and culture. The Greeks actively sought to spread, or even impose, Hellenistic (i.e., Greek) culture and language. While other conquered subjects willingly adopted the Hellenistic way of life, many Jews did not. For them, Hellenization posed a significant threat to their Jewish identity.

Alexander the Great (336–323 B.C.)

Alexander was the son of King Philip II of Macedonia, the warrior-king who was the first ruler to unify all of Greece. Alexander's sudden rise to power was entirely unexpected. At the mere age of twenty, he was crowned king when his father was assassinated in 336 B.C. Alexander not only inherited his father's crown but he also took command of the vast army his father had spent years mobilizing in order to drive the Persians out of the region of the eastern Aegean. Young Alexander turned out to be uniquely suited for the task he inherited. Under the private tutelage of Aristotle, Alexander had also developed a keen interest and appreciation of Greek literature, philosophy, science, and even medicine. In fact, Aristotle convinced him that the Greek way of life was superior over every other culture. So when Alexander set forth at the head of the Macedonian army, he embarked on a far greater expedition than his father ever imagined—a quest to conquer the mighty Persian Empire and to spread Greek culture across the ancient world.

Alexander quickly achieved a series of stunning military victories over the Persian armies between 334 and 331 B.C. in Asia Minor and Persia itself: he conquered Syria, Tyre, Gaza, and Egypt; took control of the Holy Land; and ended the existence of Persia as a world power.

After routing the Persians on the battlefield and burning their capital, Alexander set out to unite east and west under his control. The primary way he sought to accomplish this was through the propagation of the Greek culture throughout all the territories and peoples he conquered. A common form of Greek quickly replaced Aramaic as the new language of government, literature, and international commerce. Since Greek culture had developed in connection with the lifestyle that had emerged in urban centers in Greece, Alexander also founded hundreds of Greek cities wherever his armies marched. His veterans and colonists from Greece settled in these cities, which boasted all the amenities to which Greeks had grown accustomed: a market, which served as the economic center of the city; theaters for entertainment; hippodromes and stadiums for athletic competitions; temples to honor the Greek deities; and a gymnasium, the educational gateway that prepared local inhabitants in both body and mind to embrace Greek culture and thereby become members of the privileged elite who assumed the most powerful civic responsibilities within each local community. Although these cities varied in size and importance, they became effective in the diffusion of Hellenism in the surrounding region.

Although Alexander died unexpectedly of a fever in Babylon in 323 B.C. at the age of thirty-two, the Greek language and culture that he had spread across the ancient world would dominate it for centuries. It not only influenced the world into which Jesus was born, but Greek also became the language of the early church and the NT.

After Alexander died, his kingdom was ultimately divided among his generals. The two most important in relation to the Holy Land were Ptolemy I, founder of the Ptolemaic dynasty in Egypt, and Seleucus, who founded the Seleucid dynasty in Syria and the eastern Mediterranean region. Located halfway between Egypt and Syria, the Jews in this land often found themselves caught up in the power struggle between the two rivals. Each viewed the region as an important land bridge between Egypt and Asia that would allow them to control important trade routes and serve as a valuable buffer zone.

Ptolemaic Rule in the Holy Land (320–198 B.C.)

After enduring several battles to determine control of the Holy Land, the region eventually came under Ptolemaic rule in 301 B.C. For the next 122 years, the Jews largely lived in a state of relative peace and prosperity. As long as they were not rebellious, they were allowed to practice their ancestral faith and traditions with little interference. As was the case under Persian rule, their Macedonian masters in Egypt also allowed the high priest to continue to rule over Jerusalem as a temple-city.

The tolerance with which the Ptolemaic rulers of Egypt treated the Jews prompted many to choose to immigrate willingly to Egypt in hope of creating a better future for themselves and their families. Since the Greek rulers did not allow native Egyptians to join the country's standing army during this time, Jews enlisted for military service with the promise of eventually receiving land in return. The economic expansion that Egypt was experiencing under Macedonian rule, especially in newly founded Alexandria, also attracted Jews who had little hope of social advancement and wealth in their traditional homeland. In addition to manual labor and agricultural employment, they filled a range of administrative jobs that the Ptolemies were hesitant to award to native Egyptians. In fact, so many Jews flooded into Alexandria that not only was one of the five sections of the city completely Jewish but Jews also lived in the other areas of the city.

In return for their support of the Ptolemaic regime, the Jews were granted the privilege of building "prayer houses," which is one of the earliest evidences of synagogue-like institutions outside of the Holy Land. The Jews in Alexandria were also allowed to govern themselves according to their ancestral laws. Of course, in order to survive in Egypt, the Jewish immigrants had to learn to communicate in Greek; it was a concession to Hellenization that many Jews were willing to make.

It was during this time in Alexandria that the Hebrew Scriptures were first translated into Greek. According to the legendary account in the second-century B.C. *Letter of Aristeas*, Ptolemy II Philadelphus (ca. 285–246 B.C.) set out to create a library that would contain all of the most important books in the world. His head librarian, a man named Demetrius, convinced him that a Greek translation of the Jewish law should be part of the collection. To accomplish the task, the Jewish high priest in Jerusalem authorized seventy-two Jewish scholars to travel to Alexandria. In the course of seventy-two days in the capital, so the story goes, these scribes, working independently, miraculously produced identical translations of the Pentateuch into Greek from Hebrew. Legend aside, while the translation of the Hebrew Scriptures likely did begin in Alexandria in the third century B.C., it was probably not a project of the king. It was more likely for the benefit of the Greek-speaking Jews who could no longer read Hebrew.

The new translation, which over time eventually included the entire Hebrew Scriptures, came to be known to as the Septuagint (LXX), meaning "seventy," a rounded-off reference to the legend of the seventy-two scholars who supposedly completed the work. The Septuagint was widely used as the OT Scriptures by Jews throughout the Diaspora, and even among some in the homeland. Its influence was so significant that when many of the NT authors quoted a passage from the OT, it was a quotation from the Septuagint rather than a translation of the original Hebrew or Aramaic.

Seleucid Rule in the Holy Land (198–167 B.C.)

The largely tranquil existence the Jews experienced under Ptolemaic rule changed when the Seleucids under Antiochus III seized control of the Holy Land in 198 B.C. Unlike the Ptolemaic rulers in Egypt, the Seleucid rulers in Syria and the eastern Mediterranean region appear to have been more aggressive in encouraging acceptance of Hellenization among their subjects. Yielding to the pressure, some leading families in Jerusalem began to advocate more openly for Hellenistic reforms. They wanted to enjoy the same amenities in Jerusalem that their fellow Jews had experienced in Hellenistic cities like Alexandria in Egypt and Antioch in Syria. The principal opponents in Jerusalem against Hellenization under Ptolemaic rule were the high priests who ruled over Jerusalem as a sacred temple-city and conservative Jews known as the Hasideans (or "pious ones").

Since the Seleucid dynasty was initially occupied with a number of aggressive military campaigns that sought to expand the borders of its empire, followed by a time of political upheaval after the death of Antiochus III, there was little effort to alter the situation in the land of the Jews. All this changed, however, when Antiochus III's grandson, Antiochus IV Epiphanes, took control in 175 B.C.

To consolidate his rule, Antiochus IV sought to ally himself with those in his kingdom whom he felt could strengthen his hold on power. Concerned that the opposition of the Jewish high priest Onias III toward Hellenization revealed a political sympathy for Ptolemaic rule, Antiochus replaced Onias with his Hellenizing brother Jason. In return, Jason set out to Hellenize Jerusalem by building a gymnasium within its walls. The fascination with Hellenism was so strong that it not only affected Jewish youth, who began to dress according to Greek fashion, but even priests who officiated in the temple. Eager to watch the athletic events in the gymnasium, priests paid little attention to their duties in the temple (2 Macc. 4:12–15). Some Jews even participated in the sporting activities themselves, which, according to Greek custom, took place in the nude. Since Greeks saw circumcision as mutilation, some Jews underwent a painful surgical procedure known as epispasm, which attempted to remove the marks of circumcision (1 Macc. 1:14–15). The Hellenizing faction in Jerusalem was so prevalent under Jason that when Antiochus IV subsequently visited the city a short time later, many of the citizens warmly greeted him as their benefactor (2 Macc. 4:21–22).

The support Antiochus IV found from the Hellenizing Jews in Jerusalem quickly disappeared, however, when in return for a hefty bribe, Antiochus awarded the high priesthood three years later to a Jew named Menelaus (2 Macc. 4:23–27). Many Jews were outraged, particularly the conservative Hasideans. Not only did Menelaus not belong to the high-priestly family of Zadok, as did all the other high priests dating back to King Solomon, but he was a Benjamite without any legal claim to priestly office. Menalaus viewed high priesthood as little more than an important position of municipal power—a position he held for nearly a decade only by brute force. His sacrilegious behavior stoked the flames of both religious conviction and rebellion as many Jews began to see the long-term implications of Hellenism.

The tense situation in Jerusalem escalated in 168 B.C. when rumors reached the city that Antiochus had been killed in his campaign against the Ptolemies in Egypt. Emboldened with the news, Jason and his supporters forced Menelaus to step down as high priest. Many Jews also saw this opportunity as a chance to reinstate their Jewish religious practices. Antiochus, however, had not died. He had just been defeated—and in an extremely humiliating manner. A single envoy from Rome had arrived in Egypt and warned Antiochus to cease his campaign and leave Egypt at once or face the fury of Rome. Antiochus, the insignificant king that he was, left immediately.

When news of the uprising in Jerusalem reached Antiochus on his way back to Syria, he was outraged. Fearing that news of his defeat in Egypt and the rebellion in Jerusalem might encourage others to rise up against him, Antiochus vindictively ordered his soldiers to sack the city. In addition to restoring Menelaus to power, they tore down the walls of Jerusalem, plundered the temple, and either slaughtered the rebels or sold them into slavery. To ensure that the Jews would not revolt again, Antiochus built a fortress south of the temple area and placed a garrison there. He also issued legislation that aimed to destroy the Jewish religious faith. Jews were prohibited from observing the Sabbath, abiding by Jewish food laws, and circumcising their children. Antiochus also ordered that Jewish Scriptures be destroyed and that all Jewish rituals in the temple cease (1 Macc. 1:41–50). The final blow came in the winter of 167 B.C. when the temple was dedicated to the worship of Zeus. For the next three years, pigs and other unclean animals were offered in sacrifice on the altar of burnt offering to a pagan god (vv. 47, 60).

The Maccabean Revolt (167–141 B.C.)

The extreme Hellenization being forced on the Jewish inhabitants of the Holy Land and the desecration of their sacred temple led to a massive uprising beyond anything Antiochus ever imagined. The revolt broke out when a Greek soldier in the village of Modein attempted to force a priest named Mattathias to sacrifice to Zeus. Mattathias, who was from the influential Hasmonean family, not only refused the command but he also killed the soldier and destroyed the pagan altar. He then fled to the wilderness of the Negev, where, with the help of his five sons, he launched a guerrilla warfare campaign. Many Jews flocked to join the new resistance movement, including members of the Hasideans, who had long resisted the forces of Hellenization in their homeland. Under the leadership of Mattathias, the Jewish insurgents not only attacked the Seleucid forces in the region but also tore down pagan altars and sought to enforce the observance of Mosaic law among Hellenizing Jews—including forcibly circumcising Jewish boys whose parents had not circumcised them.

When Mattathias died some time later, his son Judas took his place. Judas was such a gallant warrior in fighting against the Seleucids that he earned the nickname "the Maccabee," meaning "the hammer." One of the principle reasons the Jewish freedom fighters were so successful under Judas was that Antiochus had to divert the majority of his troops out of the region to fight against the Parthians in the east. After three years of intense conflict, the Jewish rebels eventually gained control of the temple in Jerusalem. The temple was cleansed and rededicated to the service of the God of Israel in 164 B.C. To commemorate the event, the Jews instituted an annual Dedication festival that today is known as Hanukkah (John 10:22).

Recognizing the disastrous consequence that the forced Hellenizing policy of Antiochus IV had brought about in the Holy Land, the Seleucids attempted to rectify the situation by restoring the right of the Jews to worship according to their ancestral faith. While many of the Hasideans who had joined the insurrection were satisfied with the restoration of religious liberty for the Jewish people, Judas and his brothers were not. They were determined to continue fighting until their homeland was an independent state under Hasmonean rule. Although some Jews were not supportive of the new political objectives of the Maccabean revolt, civil strife elsewhere in the Seleucid realm made it impossible for the Syrians to ever fully put down the remaining factions supporting the Jewish revolt.

When Judas was eventually killed in battle in 160 B.C., the revolt continued under his brother Jonathan. Although Jonathan was not a warrior like his brother, he successfully exploited the internal divisions within the Seleucid kingdom to strengthen the Jewish cause and extend his own hold on power. In return for supporting the claim of Alexander Balas to the Syrian throne, Jonathan was granted the position of high priest in 152 B.C. (1 Macc. 10:18–20). He then leveraged that support to win other political concessions from Alexander's competitor, Demetrius II. When Jonathan was killed in 143 B.C., his brother Simon took his place as high priest of the Jews.

Recognizing that the Seleucids needed to find a way out of the military quagmire they faced in the Holy Land in order to deal with the greater threat against their kingdom from the Parthians in the east, Simon persuaded Demetrius II, who had taken control of the Syrian throne, to grant the Jews complete political independence in 142 B.C. For the first time in early 450 years, the Jews in the Holy Land were no longer under foreign rule.

The Hasmonean Dynasty (142–63 B.C.)

Since Simon was the leader of the Maccabean revolt at the time, an assembly of the Jews proclaimed that it was fitting that he and his sons should rule over the new Jewish kingdom as high priest, military commander, and ruler of the people (1 Macc. 14:41, 47). The creation of the Hasmonean dynasty, however, doomed the fledging kingdom from the start. While many Jews gladly supported their Hasmonean rulers, others had grown to resent them bitterly. The main opposition came from the Hasideans, the devoutly religious Jews who supported the first phase of Maccabean revolt to regain religious freedom. They were outraged that the descendants of Mattathias had used what had originally been a religious revolt for their own political gain. Instead of returning the high priesthood to a member of the ancient priestly line of Zadok, the Hasmoneans had seized the position for themselves. This offense was made even worse by the fact that the Hasmoneans would eventually also claim the title of king, thereby combining the two offices that God had separated when the Jewish monarchy was first created under Saul and then David.

As the Hasmoneans consolidated their hold on power, they sought to extend the territorial boundaries of their small kingdom by waging war on the surrounding regions. After the assassination of Simon, his son, John Hyrcanus I (135–104 B.C.), launched a military campaign that brought the territory east of the Jordan under Jewish control. He also forced the inhabitants of Idumea in the south to convert to Judaism or face deportation. Ironically, the great-grandfather of Herod the Great was a member of the Idumean aristocracy who submitted to Judaism only because it was politically expedient. Hyrcanus also waged war against the Samaritans, destroying their temple on Mount Gerizim and forcing them to submit to Jewish rule. He was succeeded by his son Aristobulus I (103 B.C.), who followed in his father's example by forcing the Gentile inhabitants of Galilee to adopt Judaism and submit to Jewish rule. When he suddenly died a year later, his brother Alexander Jannaeus laid claim to the throne by marrying the wife of Aristobulus, Queen Salome, who was childless at the time. Alexander reigned for more than twenty-five years (102–76 B.C.) and continued the Hasmonean policy of territorial expansion.

Although the Hasmoneans had created a Jewish state that rivaled the size of Solomon's kingdom, the fledgling kingdom was increasingly divided and weakened by internal dissension. The fragmentation that took place during this era gave birth to three Jewish sects that were vying for religious influence in the Holy Land: the Essenes, the Pharisees, and the Sadducees.

The Essenes

Convinced that the Hasmoneans and the temple they controlled was entirely corrupt, one group of Jews withdrew from Jerusalem to live in self-imposed exile and isolation in the southern desert and other places throughout the country. While the origins of this group are not entirely known, they appear to have originally been a group of Zadokite priests who left Jerusalem in protest of the political priesthood of the Hasmonean dynasty. Philo and Josephus, two Jewish authors roughly contemporary with the NT writers, identify this sect as the Essenes. The group as a whole numbered about four thousand individuals. A group of around two hundred is known to have lived together in a monastic community near the western shore of the Dead Sea in a place that today is called Qumran. The Essenes at Qumran appear to be the authors of most of the non-biblical Dead Sea Scrolls. Although they are not mentioned by name in the scrolls, the description of the community in the scrolls harmonizes with the account we have of them in other ancient sources.

The Essenes at Qumran sought to create an alternative temple community that was characterized by strict religious obedience and meticulous ritual purity. To achieve this goal, they formed a close-knit community in which they shared all things in common, avoided contact not only with Gentiles but even other Jews, and did not own slaves. While some Essenes married for the sake of procreation, the community at Qumran chose to lead a celibate and monastic life. They dedicated a third of the day to the reading and study of Scripture, and they followed strict Sabbath and dietary laws. They also immersed themselves in water several times a day in order to maintain ritual purity.

Not surprisingly, admission to the Qumran community was not easy. It required a three-year probationary period, after which the inductee surrendered all personal property to the community and pledged to live a life of unblemished righteousness.

The Essenes at Qumran were also a messianic community who believed that the prophecies of Scripture were being fulfilled in their day. Accordingly, they interpreted their presence in the wilderness as the means through which God was preparing the way of the messiah as promised in Isaiah 40:3. Unlike other Jews, however, the Qumran community looked forward to the coming of two messiahs: a priestly messiah, perhaps someone from their own community, and also a kingly messiah. They believed the end of time was near and that it would bring about a great final battle between the sons of light and the sons of darkness in which the Essenes, who saw themselves as the sons of light, would fight alongside heavenly beings against the sons of darkness. They were certain that the victory of the sons of light would usher in the kingdom of God.

Although the Essenes are not explicitly mentioned in the NT, the existence of their community at Qumran is evidence of the messianic expectation that characterized the hope of Jews living at the time of Jesus. The exclusiveness of their community, however, stands in stark contrast to the ministry of John the Baptist. While John had also journeyed to the same desert region, he had come to call both Jews and Gentiles to repent and be baptized in preparation for the coming of the Messiah, whom he declared was Jesus (John 1:19-34).

The Sadducees

The Sadducees were wealthy Jewish priests who were based in Jerusalem and in charge of the temple and it services. While little is known for certain about their background, as

members of the Jewish aristocracy they made peace with the Hasmoneans in order to secure their political and economic interests. After the collapse of the Hasmonean dynasty in 63 B.C., the Sadducees were willing to collaborate with the Romans and Herod in order to maintain their hold on power. As a result, the position of the high priest fell to a member of the Sadducees, who also presided over the Sanhedrin, a body of Jewish elders that functioned as the supreme religious authority. Since their position was based on political stability, the Sadducees were not supportive of messianic movements for fear they might lead to revolutionary activity that would upset the status quo.

Since the temple was the center of Jewish religious life, the Sadducees played a significant role in Judaism before the temple was destroyed in A.D. 70. They were the "official" religious teachers of Judaism in the land and recognized experts in the sacrificial system prescribed in the law of Moses (i.e., the first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures).

Accordingly, unlike the Pharisees and the Essenes, the Sadducees recognized only the Torah as authoritative. This led them to reject the doctrine of the resurrection, since it is not explicitly present in the Torah. For this same reason, they were also skeptical about the belief in angelic beings. With no belief in a future resurrection beyond the grave (Matt. 22:23; Acts 23:8), the Sadducees focused on their social position in this world in relation to their duties in the temple.

Since the influence and power of the Sadducees were tied to the temple, they disappeared from history after it was destroyed in A.D. 70.

The Pharisees

Another group vying for religious influence that emerged during the Hasmonean era was the Pharisees. Like the Essenes, the Pharisees appear to be another branch of descendants of the Hasideans, the group of devoutly religious Jews who opposed Hellenization and who took up arms with the Maccabees to restore religious freedom to the Jews in the Holy Land. While the Essenes may have been a group of Zadokite priests at first, the Pharisees were not. They were a movement of lay leaders who took their faith seriously. Their rigorous desire to follow God and to encourage their fellow Jews to do the same was so respected by many of the common people that it made the Pharisees an influential group within Jewish society.

The determination of the Pharisees to follow the laws of God led them to separate themselves from those who did not share their religious concerns (cf. Matt. 9:11; John 7:49). In fact, the Pharisees' desire to separate from those whom they felt were impure seems to have led to the name Pharisees. The word "Pharisee" appears to be derived from the Aramaic word *parush*, meaning "the separated ones." The Pharisees, however, were not as extreme in this matter as were the Essenes, who largely lived in isolation from the rest of Jewish society. The Pharisees were willing to live among the Jewish population, but they were highly selective about those with whom they were willing to associate.

The Pharisees, who according to Josephus numbered about six thousand people when he wrote, were united in three fundamental beliefs that set them apart from other Jewish religious sects like the Sadducees and the Essenes.

First, unlike the Sadducees, who held that only the five books of Moses were authoritative for Jewish belief and practice, the Pharisees had a much wider canon of Scripture. They believed that God had revealed Himself in not only the Torah but also in the Writings and the Prophets—what Christians today call the OT. This led the Pharisees to believe in the existence of angelic beings, demons, and a future resurrection of the righteous dead (Acts 23:6–8), whereas the Sadducees did not. Since the Pharisees were so focused on studying and scrupulously following the Scriptures, they played an influential role in the growing importance of the synagogue within Judaism as a place of prayer, study, and worship—especially after the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70.

Second, the Pharisees looked on their own religious rules and traditions as equally authoritative as Scripture—in fact, in their opinion, the two were virtually one and the same. They claimed that their traditions, which are often called "the tradition of the elders" (Mark 7:3, 5; Gal. 1:14), were given orally to Moses on Mount Sinai along with the commandments of God. Supposedly, these traditions were then orally passed down through the centuries. In reality, their traditions were simply an accumulated collection of the teachings of Pharisaic leaders who sought to remove any element of ambiguity contained in the laws of God. One particular area of concern, for example, was Sabbath observance. While the fourth commandment is clear that no work should be done on the Sabbath, it does not define what work entails. The Pharisees sought to solve this dilemma, and others like it, by coming up with their own definitions and rules. They then evaluated themselves and others on the basis of their own traditions. Jesus often rebuked the Pharisees for placing their own religious traditions above God's law (e.g., Matt. 15:2–3, 6, 9; Mark 7:7–9, 13).

Finally, the desire to live a life of complete devotion to God led the Pharisees to urge that all Jews regulate their daily lives according to the purity regulations that governed the life of priests who officiated in the temple. The Pharisees emphasized, therefore, the importance of avoiding contact with anyone or anything that might render them ritually impure, that is, any source of impurity that would prevent a person from participating in the rituals of the temple. In addition to following the purity laws mentioned in Scripture, such as becoming impure by contact with a dead body (Lev. 11:24; Num. 19:11), the Pharisees also expanded the category of impurity to include contact with anyone or anything that may have been in contact with a source of impurity—and especially contact with Gentiles, whom they believed were impure by their very nature. Since impurity could be removed by immersing in water, the Pharisees practiced a ceremonial form of handwashing before meals (Mark 7:3–4).

The Pharisees are first mentioned as standing in opposition to John Hyrcanus who, in their opinion, should have relinquished his hold of the high priesthood. Their open opposition to the politically minded Hasmoneans initially resulted in their marginalization and even persecution. The situation turned in their favor, however, when Alexander Jannaeus died and his wife, Salome Alexandra, took the throne in his place. In order to gain the support of the Jewish people, Salome made peace with the Pharisees and allowed them unprecedented influence in affairs of state during her reign (76–67 B.C.). Since she could not serve as high priest, she appointed the older of her two sons, Hyrcanus II, to the position.

After Salome's death, the country fell into a period of civil war as her two sons, Hyrcanus II and Aristobulus II, both laid claim to the throne. Religious tensions also increased as the Pharisees supported the claim of Hyrcanus II and the Sadducees sided with Aristobulus II. Although Aristobulus II had gained the upper hand in the struggle in 63 B.C., the two rivals appealed their case to the Roman general Pompey, who was residing in Damascus after having conquered the Seleucids in Syria. Believing that it would be easier to control Hyrcanus II, since he was the weaker of the two, Pompey ruled in favor of Hyrcanus. Although Aristobulus resisted at first, his family was eventually arrested and taken to Rome, where they were imprisoned. Thousands of their Jewish supporters were also imprisoned. The Holy Land was once again under foreign control. The independent Jewish kingdom under Hasmonean control had not lasted even eighty years.

THE ROMAN PERIOD IN THE HOLY LAND (63 B.C.–A.D. 135)

After conquering Syria in 63 B.C., Pompey redrew the political landscape of the entire region to suit Roman interests. Now that the once mighty Seleucid Empire was no more, Syria was annexed as a Roman province. It was garrisoned with Roman legions to protect Rome from the Parthians in the east.

Pompey also attacked Jerusalem. The Hasmonean kingdom was in conflict because two brothers claimed the throne. The older brother, Hyrcanus, who had ruled for only a short time, was supported by the Pharisees. The younger brother, Aristobulus, was supported by the Sadducees. Pompey supported Hyrcanus, who controlled the lower city, while Aristobulus and the Sadducees occupied the temple. Pompey's engineers constructed a siege dam from the north. They worked only on the Sabbath, taking advantage of the Jewish prohibition from attacking on the Sabbath (they were allowed only to defend). The Romans were soon able to breach the walls, taking the temple and ending the conflict. This effectively ended the autonomous rule of the Hasmoneans, even though they remained on the throne for a few more decades as puppets of the Romans before being replaced by the Herodians in 37 B.C.

Since the Hasmonean kingdom was not as significant to the Romans as Syria, Pompey did not make it into a Roman province. He simply reduced its status to that of a semi-independent "client kingdom" that could serve as a buffer against Rome's enemies on its eastern border. The new Jewish state was nothing more than a puppet government under indirect Rome rule. Pompey also weakened Judea by reducing its territorial dominion to only those surrounding regions where Judaism was dominant. The Greek settlements that had been forced to convert to Judaism were liberated and organized into a confederacy of ten independent city-states known as the Decapolis. These cities, which were all on the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee and the Jordan River except for Scythopolis (ancient Beth-Shean), now answered directly to the Roman governor in Syria.

Pompey officially recognized Hyrcanus II as the high priest and appointed him as the ethnarch of the Jewish people, but he weakened his political position by not giving him the title of king. The real power was placed in the hands of a wealthy Idumean named Antipater, who was made the prime minister of Judea. Antipater seemed like an ideal choice for the Romans. He not only had the support of Hyrcanus, but, because he was an Idumean, the Romans felt he would not be supportive of a Jewish nationalistic uprising.

As Roman control over the region expanded in the years following Pompey's conquest of Syria and Judea, Hyrcanus lost more and more administrative responsibility, while Antipater increased in political power. Antipater proved to be such a gifted statesman and loyal subject to the Romans that he was allowed to function in Judea in a position like that of a prefect in 55 B.C. After helping rescue Julius Caesar from certain death in 47 B.C. when the Roman general was pinned down by Egyptian troops in Alexandria, Egypt, Antipater gained even greater privileges for himself and the Jewish people. Caesar not only confirmed Antipater in his position but also awarded him with the prized gift of Roman citizenship. In addition, Caesar reduced the required tribute from Judea, guaranteed the Jewish people the right of religious liberty, and allowed the walls of Jerusalem that Pompey had torn down to be rebuilt.

In order to strengthen his hold on the political situation in Judea, Antipater responded by appointing his son Phasael as the governor of Jerusalem and his son Herod as governor of Galilee. But as the power of Antipater and his sons increased, so did anti-Idumean sentiment toward them among the Jewish people. After several attempts on his life, Antipater died of poisoning in 43 B.C. Herod and his brother Phasael immediately filled the power void left by the death of their father. Marc Antony officially appointed the two brothers as joint tetrarchs of Judea the following year.

The Roman presence in the eastern part of the empire faced a surprising setback in 40 B.C. when the Parthians successfully overran not only Syria but also Asia Minor and Judea. Seeking to gain the support of the local inhabitants in Judea, the Parthians appointed Antigonus, one of the sons of Aristobulus II, as king and high priest. Longing for the return of the Hasmonean dynasty, many Jews supported Antigonus in his bid for power. In the ensuing conflict that took place in Judea, Hyrcanus and Phasael were captured. Since physical mutilation was a disqualification for the high priesthood, Antigonus cut off the ears of his uncle and deported him to Babylon. Phasael was executed.

Recognizing the gravity of the situation, Herod fled to Rome in order to secure Roman support for a campaign to reclaim Judea. Recognizing that Herod was just the kind of strong and pro-Roman leader it needed to drive the Parthians out of Judea and to impose peace on the troubled region, the Roman Senate appointed Herod "king of the Jews" in 40 B.C. With Roman military support, Herod returned to Judea. After three years of brutal fighting, Herod finally gained the victory after sacking Jerusalem and butchering many of its inhabitants, including Antigonus. Herod had won the war, but it came at a costly price. He was the king of a nation that hated him.

The Kingdom of Herod the Great (37–4 B.C.)

Herod proved to be a capable, though ruthless, ruler who reigned over Judea for thirty-three years. Since Herod did not have to pay tribute to Rome or fund a national army, he was able to channel the riches of the kingdom into a massive building campaign that created thousands of jobs and transformed the country. He built a series of palace-fortresses, including the Herodium and Masada, to reinforce the country's vulnerable southern border and serve as places of refugee for Herod and his family from life in Jerusalem or in the case of an uprising. The Herodium, which included both an upper and lower section, spanned over fifty acres (.2 sq. km), making it the third largest palace complex in the Roman world.

Herod's greatest engineering achievement was the founding of Caesarea Maritima, which was located on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea sixty miles (97 km) northwest of Jerusalem. The city was designed to be a monumental showcase in honor of Herod's benefactor, Caesar Augustus. Although both Jews and Gentiles eventually inhabited the city, Caesarea was founded as a Greco-Roman city with beautiful temples, civic buildings, public baths, a theater, an amphitheater, a hippodrome, an intricate drainage system for sanitation, and a spectacular palace for Herod. An aqueduct supplied the city with fresh water from springs nearly ten miles (16 km) away. The real wonder of the city, however, was its international harbor, which Herod had built by creating a massive breakwater made of hydraulic concrete. The forty-acre (.16 sq. km) harbor, which was dominated by a temple dedicated to Augustus, could accommodate three hundred ships and rivaled the famous harbor in Alexandria, Egypt, for influence in the east.

Herod is most remembered, however, for rebuilding the Jewish temple and expanding the temple complex—a massive project that began in 19 B.C. and took more than eighty years to complete. Herod not only rebuilt the temple itself, which dated back to after the Babylonian Exile, but he also expanded the foundation of the temple mount so that the platform on which the entire complex was built covered approximately thirty-five acres. The retaining walls surrounding the temple mount were built of enormous stones that in some places formed a foundation sixty feet (18 m) below ground and towered one hundred feet (30 m) above ground (regarding the rebuilding of the temple, see in "Archaeology and the Bible," p. 92). The temple, which had to be built by specially trained priests, took eighteen months to build. The temple mount was also adorned with a number of ornate buildings, courtyards, beautiful porticoes, and, at the southern end of the temple mount, a multistory basilica called the Royal Stoa. The Royal Stoa, which had its own separate entrance, was the financial, legal, and commercial center of Judea. When the entire complex was completed in A.D. 63, it was the largest religious complex in the ancient world. Tragically, all of it was destroyed just seven years later during the Jewish revolt (A.D. 70).

In spite of all his achievements, Herod's reign was marked by paranoia and bloodshed. Since he was not of Hasmonean descent or even Jewish by birth, Herod was tortured with feelings of insecurity. He knew that as far as the Jews were concerned, he was a usurper to the throne, whose Idumean background made him a half Jew at best. Fearful of losing his hold on power, Herod brutally murdered anyone who openly challenged his right to rule.

In an attempt to solidify his claim to the throne, Herod married the granddaughter of Hyrancus II, the princess Mariamne. Marrying into the line of the royal Hasmonean family, however, did little to improve his situation. If anything, doing so made it worse. Over time, palace intrigue and domestic problems led Herod to fear that his own family was secretly planning his demise. He became so paranoid that he eventually ordered the execution of every surviving descendant of the Hasmonean royal family: his seventeen-year-old brother-in-law, Aristobulus III, was drowned (35 B.C.); Hyrcanus II, who had been recalled from Babylon, was strangled (31 B.C.); his wife, Mariamne, was executed on the charge of adultery (29 B.C.); his mother-in-law, Alexandra, was executed for treason (28 B.C.); and eventually even his two sons by Mariamne, Aristobulus IV and Alexander, were strangled on charges of treason (7 B.C.).

The paranoia that marked the earliest years of his reign increased in the latter years of his life. The problems Herod now faced were largely of his own making. His decision to remarry several times after the death of Mariamne left Herod with several possible heirs from ten wives—each of them with designs for their father's throne. As the aging Herod tried to balance his plans for succession with his changing affections toward his sons, the aging king rewrote his will seven times.

It was during this time of palace intrigue, and shortly after ordering the death of his sons Aristobulus IV and Alexander, that Jesus was born in Bethlehem. As news reached Herod of the birth of a possible messianic rival to his throne, he acted as he always did when his reign was threatened. He sent out his henchmen to eliminate the threat no matter how many lives it might cost (regarding the birth of Jesus, see in "Old Testament Timeline," p. 101). It was only divine intervention that rescued Jesus from Herod's murderous plan (Matt. 2:16–18).

Herod finally died of incurable diseases in 4 B.C., just five days after executing another one of his sons, Antipater, on the charge of treason. An elaborate state funeral was held for Herod. He was buried in a beautiful mausoleum, which he had built in the fortress that bore his name—the Herodium (regarding the intertestamental period, see in "Archaeology and the Bible," p. 89).

Herod's Kingdom Divided into a Tetrarchy (4 B.C.–A.D. 6)

Although a delegation of Jews requested that Herod's kingdom be placed under a Roman governor, Caesar Augustus largely upheld Herod's final decree in which he divided his kingdom between three of his surviving sons: Philip, Antipas, and Archelaus. Each of these sons had been raised in Rome and were, therefore, completely immersed in Roman culture.

Philip (sometimes Herod Philip), son of Herod and Cleopatra of Jerusalem, was made the tetrarch of the region of Herod's kingdom east of Galilee and north of the Decapolis. He ruled for thirty-eight years (4 B.C.–A.D. 34). The territory under his rule included the regions of Gaulanitis, Auranitis, Baataneaa, Trachonitis, Paneas, and Iturea. Since the majority of his subjects were Gentiles, Philip faced virtually no opposition to his Hellenizing endeavors. He rebuilt and expanded Paneas, which was the capital of his kingdom, as a Hellenistic city. The city, which is near the ancient shrine to the Greek god Pan, was renamed Caesarea in honor of the emperor Caesar Augustus. In order not to confuse it with the city of Caesarea that Herod the Great built, it was often called Caesarea Philippi. It was while Jesus and His disciples were in this region that Peter confessed his belief that Jesus was the promised Messiah (Matt. 16:13–19; Mark 8:27–30).

Toward the end of his reign, Herod Philip married his much younger step-niece, Salome, the daughter of Herodias, who is known in the Gospels as the young girl whose dance before Herod Antipas resulted in the death of John the Baptist (Matt. 14:6–11; Mark 6:22–28). The couple had no children. When Philip died in A.D. 34, his kingdom was at first placed under the control of the governor of Syria. Shortly after Gaius Caligula became Roman emperor in A.D. 37, the territory was awarded to Herod Agrippa I, the brother of Herodias, who was a close childhood friend of the emperor.

Antipas (sometimes Herod Antipas), whose mother was a Samaritan woman named Malthace, was appointed as ruler of Galilee and Perea, the latter a region south of the Sea of Galilee and east of the Jordan River. Antipas ruled the region for forty-three years (4 B.C.–A.D. 39), and he was given the title "tetrarch" (meaning "a ruler of a fourth") because he ruled a small portion of his father's kingdom. Since he chose to represent himself as a practicing Jew and attempted to avoid offending the religious scruples of his Jewish subjects, his reign was relatively peaceful. It was during the reign of Antipas that Jesus grew up in Nazareth and later carried out most of His ministry around the northern basin of the Sea of Galilee.

Herod Antipas proved to be a far more capable and ambitious ruler than his brother Archelaus. Like his father, Herod the Great, Antipas went on a massive building campaign. He rebuilt the city of Sepphoris, which may have provided work for Joseph, and perhaps Jesus, since Nazareth was nearby. Herod Antipas also built a magnificent new capital on the western bank of the Sea of Galilee, which he named after the Roman emperor Tiberius. In order to secure the eastern and southern borders of Perea, which bordered the kingdom of Nabatea, early in his reign Antipas also consented to marry the princess Phasaelis, the daughter of Aretas IV, king of the Nabataeans. Jesus testified to the cunning nature of Antipas as a ruler when he characterized him as "that fox" (Luke 13:32).

Whatever abilities Antipas may have possessed as a leader were ultimately ruined by his lack of moral perspicuity and his unbridled thirst for power. While visiting his brother Philip in Rome, Herod became infatuated with his brother's wife Herodias, who was his sister-in-law and step-niece. When Antipas suggested that she divorce her husband to marry him, Herodias, who was an ambitious woman in her forties, agreed. In order to marry Herodias, Antipas then discarded his Nabataean wife, Phasaelis. While divorce and remarriage in such cases were legal for Roman citizens, it was forbidden in Jewish law (Matt. 14:1–11; Luke 3:19–20). When John the Baptist rebuked Antipas for this sin, he was arrested and imprisoned. Herodias, however, was not satisfied. Outraged at John's audacity to challenge royal authority, Herodias used her influence to have John executed (Matt. 14:6–12; Mark 6:22–29).

Herod Antipas's reign came to an end several years later when the new emperor Gaius Caligula stripped him of his position in A.D. 39. According to Josephus, Herodias persuaded Antipas to travel to Rome in order to petition that the new emperor change his title from tetrarch to king. The plan backfired, however, when her younger brother Herod Agrippa I, who was a close childhood friend of Caligula, claimed that Antipas was a traitor who was secretly colluding with the Parthians. Unable to convince Caligula of his innocence, Antipas was exiled to Gaul, where his wife, Herodias, joined him. As a demonstration of his imperial benevolence, Caligula awarded the territories of Galilee and Perea to the kingdom of Agrippa I, who was also made the king of Judea a few years later in A.D. 41.

Archelaus was appointed the ruler of the largest portion of his father's kingdom—Judea, Samaria, and Idumea. His mother was also Malthace, the Samaritan woman Herod had married. Instead of being appointed as king, as his father intended, Archelaus was given the title of ethnarch, which designated him simply as the leader of the Jewish people. During his ten-year reign (4 B.C.–A.D. 6), Archelaus proved to be entirely inept as a ruler. Lacking the administrative skills and initiative of his father, he ruled as a tyrant. His brutality and complete disregard for the religious sentiments of the Jewish people led to widespread revolt in the country. The governor of Syria was forced to intervene with military action and crucified two thousand Jewish rebels. The atrocities that characterized the reign of Archelaus proved that Joseph and Mary were wise to return to Galilee instead of Judea on their way back from Egypt (Matt. 2:22).

Due to the growing complaints from the Jewish people, Archelaus was recalled to Rome and banished to Gaul. As a result, the country lost its status as a client kingdom. It was designated as the province of Judea and brought under direct Roman rule with the appointment of a governor. This situation continued for roughly thirty-five years until Herod Agrippa I was named king of Judea in A.D. 41.

Judea as a Roman Province (A.D. 6–41)

Under the Roman provincial system, there were two different types of provinces: a senatorial province or an imperial province. Senatorial provinces were largely peaceful regions of the empire whose governor was appointed by the Roman senate. More troublesome regions, particularly along the Roman border, were designated as imperial provinces. Since these regions of the empire were more likely to experience revolt or face foreign intrusion, the emperor reserved the right to appoint the local governor, who then answered directly to him. If Roman legions were stationed in an imperial province, the appointed governor would be a military commander of senatorial rank, known as a legate. This was the case in Syria. If the level of threat was not as significant, the province would be garrisoned with a small number of locally recruited auxiliary troops who were placed under the command of the appointed

governor, who was a junior-level military official of equestrian rank, which at the time was called a prefect. Judea was designated as this kind of second-rank imperial province. Thus, both prefects and legates were governors.

The first prefect of Judea was a Roman named Coponius (A.D. 6–9). Caesarea was chosen as the administrative headquarters of the new province. In order to maintain peace, the prefect of Judea was given command of roughly thirty-five hundred soldiers. While most of these men were garrisoned in Caesarea, approximately one thousand were stationed in the Antonia Fortress in Jerusalem, which was located on the northwestern corner of the temple mount. The Roman prefect would travel to Jerusalem with additional troops during the annual Jewish feasts in order to discourage the possibility of a Jewish revolt.

Although the prefect had supreme authority in all judicial matters in the province, the Romans allowed the Jewish people a measure of religious independence. A council of seventy Jewish leaders, known as the Sanhedrin, served as the supreme religious authority in Judea. It also served in an advisory role in some civil matters. The Sanhedrin, which had its own security detail, was composed of select members of the priesthood (mostly Sadducees); local elders, who represented the lay aristocracy; and scribes, legal experts in religious law, who in the NT were largely associated with the Pharisees. The leader of the Sanhedrin was the high priest, who was the most influential individual in Judea other than the prefect. To ensure the cooperation of the high priest, the Roman prefect reserved the authority to appoint and depose the high priest, just as Herod the Great had done.

The first person the Romans appointed as high priest was a man from one of the most influential priestly families in Jerusalem: Annas son of Seth. Annas held the position for nearly a decade (A.D. 6–15), serving under three Roman governors. In the intervening years leading up to the Jewish revolt in A.D. 66, five of his sons also served as the high priest. He is mentioned in the NT as the influential father-in-law of the high priest Caiaphas (appointed in A.D. 18), who played a significant role in the crucifixion of Jesus (Luke 3:2; John 18:24).

Although Rome demonstrated wisdom in allowing the Jews to administer their own religious affairs, the governors assigned to the province often proved to be completely inept in relating to the religious sentiments of their Jewish subjects. The combination of Roman ineptitude and Jewish opposition to foreign rule stoked the fires of rebellion that eventually led to the revolt in A.D. 66.

Pontius Pilate is the most well-known of the six Roman prefects who ruled over Judea before it briefly became a client kingdom under Herod Agrippa I in A.D. 41 (regarding Pontius Pilate, see in "Archaeology and the Bible," p. 91). From the moment Pilate arrived in Judea in A.D. 26, he clashed with the ruling religious authorities. Pilate was arrogant, inflexible, and stubborn, and he cared little about Jewish religious beliefs. One of his first actions as prefect was to intentionally irritate the religious sensibilities of the Jews and demonstrate his power. Pilate ordered his troops to enter Jerusalem under the cover of night and to post on the walls of the Antonio Fortress their military standards, which bore images of the emperor.

When the Jews realized what happened, they were horrified. This was a clear violation of the second commandment. They pleaded with Pilate to remove such pagan images from the holy city. Pilate stubbornly refused for six days before finally ordering them to be removed.

Over the course of the ten years during which Pilate was prefect (A.D. 26–36), he continually clashed with the Jews. After using funds from the temple treasury to build an aqueduct that brought additional water to Jerusalem, Pilate used so much force to quell the public protests that the scene became a bloody massacre. Another time, Pilate overreacted when he learned that a large group of Samaritans had gathered around a charismatic religious leader who had promised to reveal to the crowd sacred vessels that Moses had supposedly hidden on Mount Gerizim. Fearful that the event was merely a pretext for a messianic revolt, Pilate's soldiers blocked the roads to Mount Gerizim and ruthlessly attacked the worshipers, killing many people in the process. The complaints about Pilate's brutality were so numerous over the years that this event finally resulted in his being recalled to Rome.

The accounts of Pilate in the Gospels reveal the actions of a self-serving politician who had no real interest in being a just ruler. Since Pilate was used to dealing with criminals, it did not take him long to recognize that Jesus was not guilty of the charges that the Jewish leaders brought against Him. Innocence, however, mattered little to Pilate. He was more worried about securing his own political position than anything else. For this reason, after first having Jesus flogged and humiliated, Pilate ultimately chose to condemn Jesus to death by crucifixion rather than face the political fallout the Jewish leaders promised would occur if he denied their wishes.

The Kingdom of Herod Agrippa I (A.D. 41–44)

In an attempt to calm the tensions that had been mounting in Judea during thirty-five years of Roman rule under a governor, the Romans appointed Herod Agrippa I as king of Judea in A.D. 41. Agrippa was the younger brother of Herodias, and thus a grandson of the Hasmonean princess Mariamne, whom Herod the Great married and later killed. After Herod the Great killed Agrippa's father, Aristobulus IV, in 7 B.C., the young boy was taken to Rome, where he received a Roman education. It was during his time in Rome that Agrippa became good friends with the imperial families. Two of the young men he befriended eventually became Roman emperors: Gaius Caligula (A.D. 37–41) and Claudius (A.D. 41–54).

When Caligula became the emperor, Agrippa was appointed the ruler of the territories that were formerly under his uncle, Herod Philip. Then after Herod Antipas was banished, Galilee and Perea were also added to his realm. When Claudius became the emperor in A.D. 41, he not only confirmed Agrippa's current position but also appointed him as the king of Judea and Samaria. The kingdom Herod the Great once ruled was again united under one Herodian ruler.

Herod Agrippa proved to be an effective ruler who was popular with his Jewish subjects. Although pro-Roman in his tastes and perspective on life, Agrippa also embraced his

Jewish heritage. He used his influence to promote the welfare of Judaism both in Judea and across the Roman Empire. He also generously supported the temple and outwardly sought to live a pious life. It was his strong support of Judaism that also made him a fierce opponent of Christianity. According to the NT, Agrippa violently laid hold of several Christians, including the Apostle James, whom he beheaded (Acts 12:1–2). When the Jewish leaders praised Herod for his actions, he also had Peter arrested and thrown into prison. But before Herod could have Peter killed, an angel miraculously released him from prison during the night. Furious that Peter had escaped, Agrippa executed the soldiers who were on duty (Acts 12:19).

Agrippa did not reign long in Judea. According to the Jewish historian Josephus and Acts 12:19–23, the king died while in Caesarea. While carrying out official duties in the provincial capital, Agrippa's royal robes glistened beautifully in the sun. Some of the Gentiles in the crowd were so overcome with the splendor of his appearance that they proclaimed he was no mere man, but a god. As Agrippa was reveling in their flattery, he suddenly collapsed and died. Josephus and Acts 12:20–23 recount that Agrippa's death was an act of divine judgment (i.e., being eaten by worms) for accepting praise that God alone deserves.

Agrippa was fifty-three years old when he died. He was survived by a seventeen-year-old son, named Agrippa II, and three younger daughters, Berenice, Mariamme, and Drusilla. Although Agrippa's crown should have been passed on to his son, the emperor Claudius felt the boy was too young to handle the responsibility of ruling such a large and difficult region. While Agrippa II would be given control of portions of Judea years later, at the time of his father's death the entire Jewish kingdom was reconstituted as the province of Judea and placed under direct Roman rule. Although the province was larger than it had been before, it was still placed under a junior-level official of equestrian rank, who was now referred to as a procurator.

Judea Again as a Roman Province (A.D. 44–66)

The Roman governors who ruled Judea from the death of Agrippa II to the outbreak of the first Jewish revolt in A.D. 66 proved to be just as inept as those who had ruled earlier. Instead of allowing for some degree of flexibility in the application of Roman policy on account of the religious beliefs and customs of their Jewish subjects, the governors of Judea ruled with a heavy hand. In fact, they seemed to enjoy aggravating Jewish sensibilities whenever possible. In this political climate, Jewish resentment of Roman rule quickly returned and led to a growing number of protests that often turned violent as the province slowly descended into anarchy.

Of the seven governors who ruled over Judea during this difficult time, two are mentioned in the NT. The first is Marcus Antonius Felix (ca. A.D. 52–59), a freedman whose brother Pallas was an important minister of the emperor Claudius. Felix was a brutal ruler whose primary interest was in using his position to satisfy his lust for pleasure and financial gain. Shortly after assuming his position as governor, Felix became infatuated with

Drusilla, the beautiful daughter of Agrippa I. Although the young girl, who was only sixteen at the time, had recently married the king of Emesa, Felix persuaded her to divorce her husband and marry him instead. She was Felix's third wife. While such behavior may have been common among the Roman elite, it certainly would have outraged his Jewish subjects since Jewish law prohibited such a union. It is interesting to note that during Paul's two-year imprisonment in Caesarea, during which Felix had hoped to receive a bribe in order to let Paul go free (Acts 24:26), Felix is mentioned as becoming nervous when the apostle spoke to him about the importance of righteousness, self-control, and the coming judgment (Acts 24:24–25).

According to the Jewish historian Josephus, the level of corruption became so prevalent under Felix that the Jewish revolutionaries gained widespread support among the Jewish people. A group of Jewish Zealots known as the Sicarii, a Latin term meaning "daggermen," arose at this time. They attended public gatherings with daggers hidden under their robes. Then hidden among the crowds, the Sicarii would knife not only Romans but even fellow Jews whom they believed to be collaborating with the Romans.

Other opposition groups, however, were not as secretive. A Jew from Egypt with messianic aspirations gathered together a large number of followers in the desert in order to attack Jerusalem and drive out the Romans. Felix, however, learned of the plot in advance. He launched a preemptive attack that slaughtered many of rebels. The leader escaped, however. When Paul was arrested a short time later in Jerusalem, the Romans initially thought he might have been "the Egyptian" (Acts 21:38).

The Roman emperor Nero recalled Felix and appointed Porcius Festus (ca. A.D. 59–62) as governor. Although Festus appears to have been one of the more capable of the Roman procurators, his reign was too short to repair the damage his predecessors had inflicted on Jewish-Roman relations. Soon after arriving in Caesarea, Festus heard Paul's case. Concerned that Festus might attempt to ingratiate himself to the Jewish leaders by allowing the Jewish Sanhedrin to determine his fate, Paul exercised his right as a Roman citizen to appeal that his case be judged before the emperor in Rome. Before sending Paul to Rome, however, Festus invited Agrippa II and his sister Berenice, who were visiting Judea at the time, to listen to Paul and give Festus their advice. Festus apparently wanted their perspective to help him formulate the official report he needed to send to Rome. After listening to the case, Agrippa II concluded Paul had done nothing worthy of prison or death. Paul was subsequently sent to Rome for trial.

After just a couple of years, Festus died unexpectedly. Before the new governor could arrive from Rome, the Jewish leaders took advantage of the opportunity to use their authority to persecute the Christians. The high priest Annas, whose father of the same name played an instrumental role in the death of Jesus (Luke 3:2; John 18:24), brought James, the brother of Jesus and leader of the church in Jerusalem, before the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin decreed that James and some others be stoned to death for breaking the law.

The situation in Judea quickly reached a breaking point under the region's last two governors. Anti-Roman sentiment increased all the more under Albinus (A.D. 62–64) as he confiscated public and private funds and increased the already heavy rate of taxes on the people. His desire for money also led him to foolishly fill the country with rebels by releasing those who had been imprisoned in return for hefty bribes.

As corrupt as Albinus was, his successor, Gessius Florus (A.D. 64–66), was worse. The event that sparked the revolt began with the governor's indifference to a mob attack against the Jews in Caesarea that resulted in the defiling of a Jewish synagogue. Recognizing that the governor would not rule on their case unless he received a bribe, the Jews gave Florus eight talents of silver. To the dismay of the Jews, the governor merely pocketed the money and did nothing. At roughly the same time, Florus also falsely appropriated seventeen talents of sacred funds from the temple.

Infuriated by such unjust behavior, some Jews openly mocked the governor by pretending to take up a collection of money in his behalf. Not amused by such behavior, the governor unleashed his troops, allowing them to plunder and kill the inhabitants of Jerusalem at their will. According to Josephus, more than thirty-six hundred Jews were killed. In turn, the Jews rose up in revolt.

The First Jewish Revolt (A.D. 66–73)

The revolt that took place in Jerusalem did not engulf the entire city at once. While some Jews were spoiling for a fight with Rome, others, recognizing the suicidal nature of revolt, wanted peace. Many of the inhabitants in Jerusalem were initially unsure with which side they should align themselves, although general Roman hostility made it easy to be sympathetic to the rebels.

After Florus had allowed his troops to massacre thirty-six hundred Jewish citizens, the rebels seized control of the temple mount and the lower city. They also besieged the Roman garrison occupying the Antonia Fortress. The leader of these insurgents was a priest named Eleazar. To signal Jewish defiance against Rome, Eleazar ceased the decades-long Jewish practice of offering a daily sacrifice on behalf of the emperor. In the eyes of Rome, this was a declaration of war. Meanwhile, another group of Jewish insurgents led by Menahem, the last surviving son of Judas the Galilean (Acts 5:37), captured the fortress of Masada by surprise and slew the Roman soldiers (regarding the intertestamental period, see in "Archaeology and the Bible," p. 89).

Many of those who favored peace with Rome were members of the Jewish aristocracy. They were primarily members of either the powerful priestly families or connected to the house of Herod. Since they all resided in the western quarter of the city, they united together in order to defend the upper city against the spreading revolt. Although Florus refused to help them, Herod Agrippa II provided them with three thousand cavalry to enable them to strengthen their military position. They desperately tried to persuade their fellow Jews to lay down their arms, but their pleas were in vain. As diplomacy broke down, hostilities broke out between the two groups of Jews.

After a week of bloody conflict, the revolutionaries, with the help of a band of Sicarii, finally gained the advantage, forcing the peace party to retreat to Herod's palace. In order to gain the support of common people who suffered under Roman taxation, the rebels set about burning down the palatial homes of wealthy Jews who were seen as Roman collaborators and also destroyed the archives office that held all the tax records. During this same time, the rebels on the temple mount at last gained control of the Antonia Fortress and massacred its Roman garrison.

After days of looting and destruction, the rebels on the western hill turned their attention back to the peace party who had taken refuge in Herod's palace. With the help of Menahem and his Sicarii from Masada, the rebels eventually took control of a section of the palace. Recognizing that their cause was lost, Agrippa's cavalry sued for peace. They were allowed to surrender and leave the city unharmed. Members of the peace party were not so fortunate. When Ananias and Hezekiah, sons of Nedebaeus who were leaders of the peace party, were found hiding, Menahem had them executed.

Although the rebels had successfully taken control of Jerusalem, peace did not return to the city. Fighting broke out among the different rebel factions as Eleazar and the priestly insurgents were outraged that Menahem was, in their opinion, trying to position himself as the leader of the revolt. Eleazar also wanted to avenge the murder of Ananias, who happened to be his father. Menahem was attacked while worshiping in the temple, and while he initially escaped, he was eventually caught and killed along with several of his leading officers. Some of his other supporters safely returned to Masada, where they remained throughout the war. Such infighting among the rebels continued throughout the revolt.

With the situation out of control, Cestius Gallus, the governor of Syria, marched to Jerusalem with the Twelfth Roman Legion and several auxiliaries to put down the revolt. After arriving and positioning his troops north of the city for several days, Cestius Gallus became concerned that he did not have sufficient military support to take the city. As his troops retreated from the city, Jewish rebels ambushed them in the Beth-horon pass. Unable to find cover from the barrage of Jewish arrows that rained down on them, the Roman legion was thoroughly routed. According to Josephus, nearly six thousand Roman soldiers lost their lives.

The Jewish victory over the twelfth legion completely undermined any hope of a peaceful settlement with Rome. Most of the Jews now rallied behind the insurgents in a nationalistic war of liberation. They were convinced that God would once again miraculously deliver them as they felt He had done during the Maccabean Revolt. In preparation for the return of the Romans, the Jews set out to fortify the country for war.

Infuriated at the incompetence of Cestius Gallus, Emperor Nero appointed General Vespasian and his son Titus to put down the revolt at any cost. By the time Vespasian arrived in Syria in A.D. 67, he had assembled a massive expeditionary force consisting of three legions (the fifth, tenth, and fifteenth), twenty-three auxiliary cohorts, six detachments of cavalry, as

well as other auxiliary forces provided by regional kings. The entire force consisted of roughly sixty thousand troops.

Vespasian first marched against Galilee from the north. Anticipating such tactics, the Jewish leadership in Jerusalem had appointed a Jew named Josephus to act as the Galilean general. Josephus and his troops, however, were no match for the might of Rome. By early A.D. 68, the only surviving elements of the Jewish revolt were the city of Jerusalem and the rebels who held Herod's desert fortresses. Jerusalem would have fallen quickly thereafter, but a reprieve came with the unexpected death of Emperor Nero in June. Vespasian was forced to suspend operations until a new emperor confirmed his military orders. Christians, remembering the counsel of Jesus (Matt. 24:15–21), escaped out of Jerusalem and went north to Pella.

Through a strange twist of fate, political intrigue in Rome resulted in A.D. 69 being a year of civil war that saw three emperors come and go in rapid succession. The situation did not stabilize until Vespasian himself was proclaimed the new emperor. The nature of these events meant, however, that it was not until nearly two years later, in the spring of A.D. 70, that Titus was finally able to resume military operations in Judea.

Titus made quick work against Jerusalem. He surrounded the city with four legions, set up a siege wall around the entire city, and then began attacking the city at its weakest point—its northern wall. The city did not last long. By early September, Jerusalem and its temple had been sacked and destroyed by the Romans. According to Josephus, more than one million Jews were killed during the siege and nearly one hundred thousand were captured and enslaved during the entire revolt. Of those captured in Jerusalem, healthy men over the age of seventeen were condemned to the mines in Egypt or for use in gladiatorial and beast shows, children under seventeen were sold as slaves, and seven hundred of the most handsome young men were reserved for Titus's triumph in Rome. A victory arch with carved panels representing scenes from the victory parade was built in Rome and named in honor of Titus to commemorate the event. Among the spoils of war depicted on the arch were several objects taken from the temple: trumpets, fire pans from the altar, the table of showbread, and the menorah. All that was left of Jerusalem and the temple were its foundation walls and the three fortification towers Herod built. Josephus claimed the destruction was so complete it looked as if the city had never been inhabited (regarding the destruction of the temple, see in "Archaeology and the Bible," p. 92).

All that remained of the Jewish revolt were the three desert fortresses held by the last of the rebels. Seeing little threat in these enclaves, Titus dismissed all but one of the Roman legions and returned to Rome. The final legion, the Tenth Fretensis, was commissioned with maintaining order in the province and finishing off the last of the rebel strongholds. According to Josephus, the fortress of Herodium and Machaerus fell quickly, while the rebels at Masada held out until A.D. 73.

The destruction of Jerusalem and its temple brought radical changes to the region and the Jewish people. Since many of the problems in Judea had arisen on account of the incompetence of the junior-level officers who governed the province, the Romans designated Judea as a regular imperial province. It would now be ruled by a seasoned governor, an imperial legate of praetorian rank. As such, the province was also garrisoned with a Roman legion (the tenth) along with auxiliaries. While Caesarea would remain as the administrative headquarters of the province, it was not the military headquarters. The main body of troops were stationed at Jerusalem, since if trouble broke out again, it would likely be connected to the site that was recognized as the religious center of Judaism.

The destruction of the temple also resulted in a fundamental change to the nature of Judaism itself. In one catastrophic event, the religious and administrative center of the Jewish world had come to an end. Not only had the Sanhedrin and the line of high priests that had stretched back for centuries come to an end, but the end of sacrificial worship made the priesthood itself of no importance. As the temple and all its services came to an end, so did the powerful Sadducees.

A group of Pharisees led by Johanan ben Zakkai filled the religious leadership void that the Sadducees and Sanhedrin had once filled. After escaping from Jerusalem in a coffin and surrendering to the Romans, Johanan ben Zakkai obtained permission to gather together a small group of religious scholars to study the Torah at Jamnia, a town near the coast below Joppa. For these scholars, the study of the Torah was an act of worship and obedience. Thus they believed that the study of the laws of sacrifices was the same as actually offering a sacrifice itself. They dedicated themselves, therefore, to studying and interpreting every aspect of the law, as well as the opinions of other Torah scholars. Over the decades that followed, the influence of these scholars reshaped Judaism into what today is known as rabbinic Judaism—a religion centered on the study of the Torah and Jewish tradition rather than the temple. Some of their opinions and traditions were eventually gathered together and preserved in the following collections of rabbinic literature: the Mishnah (ca. A.D. 200), a collection of rabbinic teachings, some of which may date back to before A.D. 70; the Tosefta (ca. A.D. 400), a collection of ancient Jewish teachings from the second century that supplement the Mishnah; the Babylonian Talmud (ca. A.D. 400) and the Jerusalem Talmud (ca. A.D. 500), both of which are commentaries on the Mishnah.

The Second Jewish Revolt (A.D. 132–135)

In the painful years following the destruction of Jerusalem, many Jews were sustained by the hope that Jerusalem and its sacred temple would be rebuilt in the near future, as it had been after the Babylonians destroyed Solomon's temple. This hope was dealt a devasting blow in A.D. 130 when Jews across Judea learned that the emperor Hadrian planned to rebuild Jerusalem as a pagan city—and on the sacred site where the Jewish temple once stood, he wanted to dedicate a temple to Jupiter. At the same time, Hadrian also appears to have banned the practice of circumcision as part of an empire-wide prohibition against customs that involved physical mutilation. Fearful that their identity as Jews was under attack, Jews from the Holy Land rose up once more in revolt in A.D. 132.

Under the charismatic leadership of Simon bar Kosiba, the Jewish rebels launched a fierce campaign of guerrilla warfare against the Roman forces stationed in Judea that lasted nearly four years. Through the element of surprise, the Jews initially gained the upper hand, wreaking so much havoc that the Romans suffered many casualties and were forced to retreat. A leading Jewish rabbi named Akiba declared Simon was the promised messiah who was destined to lead Israel to victory. Since the name Kosiba sounds like the Hebrew word for "star" (*kokhba*), Akiba called him Simon bar Kokhba ("son of the star"), connecting Simon with the messianic prophecy that a star would arise out of Jacob (Num. 24:17). This sort of religious fervor associated with the revolt was also depicted in the coins the rebels minted. One side of the coin bore the name of Simon, and the other side depicted the front of the temple with the words, "For the freedom of Jerusalem."

Simon, however, was no messianic deliverer. As was the case during the first Jewish revolt, the Romans amassed a huge military force and returned to Judea with a vengeance. They ravaged the province, destroying hundreds of villages and slaughtering or enslaving their inhabitants. After years of bitter fighting, the revolt was finally put down when Simon and Akiba were killed in A.D. 135. Rome was victorious once more.

After the conclusion of the war, Jerusalem was rebuilt and renamed Aelia Capitolina, after Aelius, Hadrian's family name. Jews, who were now widely despised, were forbidden to enter the city on pain of death. In addition to erecting a temple to Jupiter on the site where the Jewish temple once stood, Hadrian also had a temple to Aphrodite built on the traditional site where Jesus was buried (regarding the location of the tomb, see in "Archaeology and the Bible," p. 91). Any hope the Jewish people had in the restoration of the Jewish temple was gone. The only form of Judaism that would survive was rabbinic Judaism.

PAUL, THE LAW, AND SALVATION

The role of the law in the Christian life and its connection to salvation by faith in Christ has been a matter of controversy among Christians. This is particularly the case with respect to the writings and theology of Paul. The Jewish environment in which the Apostle Paul was brought up considered the divine law as the center of all revelation, so much so that the entire collection of writings that the Jews regarded as sacred Scripture—later referred to as the Old Testament by Christians—was called Torah, or "Law."

JEWS, JESUS, AND THE LAW

The threat of Hellenization in the first decades of the second century B.C. led to a movement within Judaism that was determined to make sure Jews' ancestral faith and traditions would be preserved for future generations. While salvation was God-given, they believed it was dependent on their faithfulness to the covenant God made with Israel, which required obedience to the teachings of the Torah. Strictly obeying all the commandments—and separating themselves from those who they felt were not as zealous for obedience—was, therefore, of utmost importance to them. This included following Jewish traditions regarding Sabbath observance, the offering of sacrifices, and the practice of good works—such as giving alms, praying, and fasting (cf. Matt. 6:1–18). Circumcision became the defining mark of identity, since it was seen as a clear outward indication of obedience to God's law. Those who were zealous for God's law were believed to be the faithful descendants of Abraham—the people of God.

Jesus had a very different perspective, however, and it put Him on a collision course with Jewish factions like the Pharisees. The two main charges the religious authorities brought against Jesus throughout His ministry were that He downplayed the importance of obedience to the law of God (cf. Mark 2:23–24; 3:1–6; John 5:18; 9:16) and that by associating with "sinners," He was encouraging religious impurity (cf. Mark 2:15–17; Luke 19:7). Neither of these were true. Jesus proclaimed that He was not the one who was violating God's law. The Pharisees themselves were guilty, because they had confused the observance of their own religious traditions with true obedience to the commandments God had given (cf. Mark 7:5–13). Moreover, genuine religious purity was not achieved in isolation from sinners but in the expression of heartfelt compassion and love toward everyone (cf. Mark 12:28–34; Luke 10:25–37; John 13:34–35). The problem was not with the law per se, but the way in which the law was being misused.

Accordingly, Jesus taught that inclusion in God's covenantal family was not achieved—nor even maintained—through obedience. It was based solely on the redemption that God had achieved for His people—a redemption that found its climax in Him. Thus, the defining mark of God's people was not any particular act of obedience but rather faith in what God was doing in and through Jesus. Obedience was still important but as the response of love to God for His redemption, not the prerequisite for redemption. God had chosen Israel not because of who they were, but because in His grace He wanted to use them to bring the light of His salvation to all the nations.

Since the earliest Christians were of Jewish origin, it is not surprising that they first believed that the Gentiles were beyond the scope of salvation. After all, Jesus was the Jewish Messiah, who had been promised in the Jewish Scriptures. Accordingly, the early Christians believed it was their sole duty to proclaim the gospel to their fellow Jews. When Gentiles expressed interest in becoming followers of Jesus it was not only surprising, but controversial (Acts 11:1–3). How "Jewish" did a Gentile have to become in order to be a genuine Christian? Was faith in Jesus alone sufficient? Or did the Gentile also have to keep the laws given to the Jews—which, at the time, focused primarily on the issue of circumcision.

PAUL AND THE PURPOSE AND PERMANENCY OF THE LAW

The person who seemed to grasp the implications of Jesus's ministry more than anyone else was the Apostle Paul. He argued that the distinguishing mark identifying someone as a Christian was not what a person did or did not do (whether circumcision or anything else); what made a person a Christian was a living and vibrant faith in Jesus Christ. Although the church—illuminated by the Spirit—ultimately sided with Paul on this issue, there were Jews who felt that his teachings undermined the law (Acts 21:20–21, 27–28). While a careful examination of what Paul says about the law reveals his respect for God's law and its permanent validity, he makes some statements that can be confusing. Taken in isolation, they might seem to remove the validity of the law in Christian life. For that reason, we need to analyze these statements concerning the law within the framework of a theology of grace.

The Law as an Expression of God's Will

The term Paul systematically uses to speak about the law is *nomos*. It is used in a variety of ways. In the Jewish-Hellenistic context of the early church, this could refer to the Torah—that is, the whole OT—or just the law of Moses, or the moral law reflected in the Decalogue, or a principle or standard, or even legalism. The exact meaning of the word depends on the passage in which the word appears. Therefore, context is extremely important.

Positive Elements

If we take together all the passages in which Paul speaks of the law, we discover that, in harmony with the teachings of Jesus, for Paul the law expressed the permanent will of God for humanity—which cannot be changed. Jesus declared that He had not come to destroy the law, but to fulfill it (Matt. 5:17–18). For Paul, it was very clear that we do not invalidate the law by having faith. On the contrary, we confirm the law (Rom. 3:31). Since the law is, above all, the expression of the divine will for fallen humanity, it is inevitably good—if used legitimately. God's glorious gospel—which was entrusted to Paul—showed that the law, in the form we know it, was not given for the just person but for transgressors (cf. Rom. 7:22, 25; 8:7; 1 Tim. 1:8–11). In other words, the law was not given so people might be able to earn their salvation but so they might recognize their need of salvation.

For this reason, Paul calls the law "spiritual" (Rom. 7:14) and "holy"; he calls the commandment "holy," "just" or "righteous," and "good" (v. 12). As a good Jew, the apostle considers the law to be one of the great privileges of Israel, and includes it among the best gifts of God to His people (9:4). His positive view of the law shows in his frequent references to the OT as a source of authority (3:9–20).

As a divine revelation, the law expresses the character of God and expresses the authority of the One who gave it. For that reason, to understand it we must search for its spirit or original intention—looking beyond its formulation—because the letter kills but the spirit makes alive (2 Cor. 3:6). That is what Jesus taught in His magisterial explanation of the law in the Sermon on the Mount; He did not do away with the law's requirements but highlighted its intention—going directly to its motivations (cf. Matt. 5:21–48). That is what Paul means when he affirms that love is the fulfillment of the law (Rom. 13:10). If love is the essence of the Divine Being (cf. 1 John 4:8, 16), the law reflects His character, and those who love God keep His commandments (cf. John 14:15–21; 15:10).

Negative Elements

How can we reconcile the positive evaluation of the law that Paul gives in these statements with the negative evaluation we find in other passages, which seems to reject the law as an outdated reality? He writes, for example, that we are not under law but under grace (Rom. 6:14), that we have been delivered or released from the law (7:6). The apostle affirms, on one hand, that Christian faith confirms the law (3:31), but on the other hand calls the regime of the law a ministry of condemnation and death (2 Cor. 3:7–9). These two notions are hard to integrate into a coherent system, and they are explained in different ways by different authors.

In view of these contrasting statements, some theologians conclude that Paul contradicts himself. Others, insisting on his negative statements, understand that the apostle has liberated Christianity from the yoke of the law, transforming faith into a free space—without rules—with an ethic based on other ideas. However, a careful study of the writings of Paul shows that he often places the law and the gospel on opposite sides, not because they are incompatible realities but because the law had become, in the hands of certain rabbis, an oppressive instrument. The apparently secondary place the apostle assigns to the law is simply due to the primary place the person of Jesus occupies in his theology. Paul does not discard a law that has become oppressive but insists on the secondary place of the law in the plan of Salvation as compared to Christ. The law still stands, but its observance cannot justify anyone (Gal. 3:19–22), because that is not its purpose. Only Christ saves. Our standing

before God is not based on any good thing we have done but on what God has done for us in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The only thing that can save from eternal death is the sublime grace of the great Lawgiver, which is received by faith.

The Law Reveals Transgressions

To understand Paul's statements regarding the law, one must take into account the experience of his conversion. Saul of Tarsus, as a good Pharisee, considered himself an irreproachable keeper of the law. He respected the law to the point of becoming a persecutor of its alleged transgressors. On his way to persecute the Christians in the city of Damascus, he had a personal encounter with the resurrected Jesus. It was then that he discovered that Jesus of Nazareth—who he had thought was a transgressor of the law—was truly the Messiah, who, in spite of having been crucified, had returned to life. This irrefutable revelation led him to rethink his ideas regarding God's ways (Acts 9:1–19), and it brought radical changes to his Pharisaic beliefs, which were now transformed by faith in Christ. The God of Jesus accepted Saul the persecutor just as he was, not because of his good works but in spite of his serious errors. That completely changed Paul's thinking and his understanding of the law.

The Law and Human Deficiencies

Starting from the premise that salvation comes exclusively from divine grace—manifested completely in the ministry of the Messiah—Paul explained that, by means of the law, God both manifests the high standards of His will for us and, at the same time, reminds us how far we are from reaching them. When we measure ourselves against His rules, we become conscious of our deficiencies. In Romans 3:20 we read that the law provides knowledge of sin. That is, because of the law, we discover the seriousness of our sin (Gal. 3:19). Paul declares that without the law sin is dead (Rom. 7:8), meaning that one who does not know the law is not conscious of transgressing it. Simply by existing, the law judges and condemns our sinfulness, acting necessarily as a judge. Without the law we would not have any absolute, ethical reference point; therefore, we would not be conscious of our desperate situation before God.

In that sense, the law is like a mirror that shows the dirt on the one who looks into it but who is not at all capable of removing the filth. At most, the mirror can create a desire to be clean (Rom. 3:19–20; cf. James 1:22–25). The law's function as a revealer and accuser of sin may seem negative, but it is really positive. It shows us our absolute need for grace. To those who boasted of keeping of the law by comparing themselves with the pagans, Paul offered a reminder—the pagans who broke the law did not know what that law demanded. But Paul's readers had no excuse; they knew what the law demanded and still violated it (Rom. 2:1–16). However, the apostle's intention was not to defend the innocence of the pagans but rather to show his fellow believers that knowledge of the law was not enough to make them better.

The Law and Existential Frustration

Some of Paul's harshest phrases against the law have to do with the existential frustration that the law produces in the one who desires to keep it. Although its purpose is to protect and direct life in this fallen world, Paul says that for him the law brought death (Rom. 7:10). He stated that the law had killed him (v. 11). Paul realized that no salvation could come through the law—instead it condemns all sinners to death.

When Paul stated that the strength of sin was in the law (1 Cor. 15:56), he was saying that we know how dangerous sin is only because the law reveals the seriousness of our transgressions. It is in this sense that the apostle says that the law makes sin come alive (Rom. 7:9). Thus, he alludes to the terrible psychological reality of our sinful nature: when someone imposes a standard, our desire is to transgress that law, even though the intention of the law may be to protect us and free us from ourselves. The divine law, rightly observed, is really intended to be a law of liberty (James 1:25; 2:12).

No one has described the tensions that the requirements of the law of God bring forth in our sinful hearts better than Paul: the law condemns covetousness and at the same time makes covetous people aware of sins they hardly suspected (Rom. 7:7–11). If, on the one hand, the law illuminates the conscience, on the other, it is unable to purify it. As already noted, the law is good and holy as a revelation of the divine will, but it is also terrible and disheartening for the sinner, because of its high requirements and because of the frustration provoked by one's transgressions. In a sense, the law produces reactions of both love and hate—people love it for showing the ideal conduct and hate it for the difficulty of living out such an ideal.

The Struggle between Wills

For the apostle, understanding the purpose of the law must follow the acceptance of its contrasting functions, which result from the confrontation of two wills: that of God, who sets standards, and that of human beings, who resist them. The inevitable gap between the requirements of God's law and the deficiencies of the human will is a permanent source of tension. Paul shows this painful conflict by confessing his own impotence before the law. He allows that he does not understand himself, because he wants to do what is good but cannot. In fact, he does what he does not want to do. He recognizes that he is not acting correctly, and his conscience tells him that the laws he is breaking are good. But he recognizes that sin is within him and is stronger than he is (Rom. 7:14–25).

A decisive contribution to our understanding of the law is the bridge Paul constructs between theology and practical everyday living. He reminds us that, in this fallen world, one of the main functions of the law is negative: it sounds an alarm when we transgress it and teaches us that we cannot live without grace. The law compels us in such a way that, if we want to find peace, we must accept the absolute necessity of pardon to reestablish our broken relations—as much with God as with our neighbor. We need the law even to come to the cross. Thus, the law, even in its most negative functions, is always

positive, for under the influence of the Spirit it leads us to the grace of God, which pardons and saves.

Diverse Functions of the Law

The diverse functions of the law explain Paul's surprising statements about its value and its limitations. Depending on our relationship with it, the law can be a tutor or a killer (Rom. 7:6; 2 Cor. 3:5–7; Gal. 2:19); holy, just, and good or the provoker of sin (Rom. 7:7–13). It can be confirmed by the gospel (3:31) or superseded by the arrival of faith (Gal. 3:25). Ignoring these diverse functions gives rise to numerous misunderstandings. Faithfulness to Scripture forces us to maintain the tension between these opposite yet complementary realities—not renouncing the law even for the purpose of simplifying explanations. While the law is the expression of God's will, it cannot be annulled because of the gospel, nor can it lose the smallest element of its ethical authority. Only thanks to Christ's redeeming action and the work of the Spirit can we respect the rules that the law lays down, so that the righteousness of the law may be fulfilled in us (Rom. 8:1–4).

THE LAW CLIMAXES IN CHRIST (ROMANS 10:4)

In spite of all that has been said, there are believers who conclude—based on Paul's affirmation that Christ is the *telos* ("end," "goal," "fulfillment") of the law (Rom. 10:4)—that Jesus annulled the requirements of the Decalogue. This affirmation rests on the translation of the word *telos* as "annulment" or "abrogation." While it is true that righteousness comes by faith rather than by keeping the law, this does not capture the full intent of what Paul is saying in this passage.

Christ Fulfills the Law

The center of the apostle's theology is not the law but Christ; however, this does not establish that the word *telos* here means "end" in the sense of total abrogation. In the first place, that would contradict Christ's own statement that He did not come to annul the law but to fulfill it (Matt. 5:17). Furthermore, Romans 10:4, read in its context, means rather that the law (the Torah)—that is, the whole OT—points toward Jesus Christ, in whom the promises, prophecies, and prefigurations are fulfilled. The Messiah is the culmination of the divine law, because in Him we find its fullness and fulfillment.

The Christian world—in both the Catholic and Protestant traditions—more or less kept this understanding of Romans 10:4 until the nineteenth century, when some began to explain the text in a dispensationalist sense, saying that Christ brought to an end the era of the OT law and began the Christian era, the dispensation of grace, in which the Mosaic law was no longer valid. But the Greek word *telos* (sometimes translated as "end" in Rom. 10:4) primarily means the high point—the object or goal of something. Here the word *telos* does not mean the termination or ending of something, but it has the positive meaning of a climax. Hence, we could translate Romans 10:4 to mean that Christ is the culmination—the climax of the law.

The Use of *Telos* in the New Testament

Other Bible texts help us understand that a temporal use of the word *telos* is not always acceptable. In John 13:1, we read that, before the Passover, Jesus loved His own until the end (*telos*). Obviously this does not mean that Jesus loved His own until He was through loving them but that He loved them *to the utmost*—to the point of carrying out the humble duty of a servant and washing their feet, manifesting to them the ultimate degree of love. Likewise, in 1 Timothy 1:5, the structure is identical to that of Romans 10:4. Here we read "Love is the *telos* of this commandment," which could be translated as "Love is the object of this commandment." In 1 Peter 1:9, we read that "the *telos* of faith is salvation." No one would translate that verse to read that faith does away with salvation. All translators understand this verse as saying that salvation is the objective or, better yet, the result of faith.

The Context of Romans 10:4

In the context of Romans 10:4 there are three references to the law (*nomos*). The first, in Romans 9:4, includes the proclamation of the law among the greatest privileges given to Israel—a very positive value. In the second mention, the law is also presented in a positive light as it designates an objective that Israel did not reach. Using a sports metaphor, Paul here deplores the fact that the Jews had stumbled over the Messiah announced by the prophets as they would have a stone and had kept on running after the law, not realizing that they were deviating from their objective (Rom. 9:30–33).

The third reference to the law is found in our text. Paul laments that his people have a misdirected religious fervor (10:1–2). They have forgotten that God is the One who justifies them, and they try to obtain justification in their own way. They have not accepted God's proposed way and have denied that the object of the law was the Messiah bringing salvation to everyone who believed. Jesus was the culmination of divine revelation (v. 4). If the Torah presents God's great project for humanity, Jesus represents the fulfillment and culmination of that plan.

Paul could hardly have meant that the law had been abolished while basing all his arguments on the irrefutable authority of that very law. Thus, the context leads us to understand that the law has not been abrogated but that in Christ the law has been completely fulfilled. Christ is the One who carries out the great plan of God for the justification of everyone who believes. In other words, "the culmination of the law [Torah] is the Messiah."

We may conclude that Paul did not say that the law had lost its validity or that it should be rejected. On the contrary, he unambiguously taught that, although its observance does not save us, the divine Law as expressed in the Ten Commandments is still the moral norm for the conduct of human beings today.

Law, Grace, and Faith

In the Pauline writings, understanding the relationship between law and grace can be difficult. In the law we find God's requirements for us, and grace is the work of God Himself in favor of our salvation. The matter is controversial because the understanding of "law" and "grace" are not the same for everyone. Therefore, the perception of this relationship is different for those who understand the law as the totality of God's revelation (in which case, law and grace are compatible) and those who associate the Mosaic law with legalism (in which case, law and grace would be opposites).

Of all the Bible authors, Paul is the one who speaks most directly about the tension between law and grace. He does so precisely to emphasize the different functions of the two in the plan of salvation. Actually, Paul places faith in Jesus Christ in opposition to the works of the law. As we know, the center of gravity of religious life for the Pharisees of Paul's time was faithfulness to God's covenant—the concern for the keeping of the law being paramount. Around the law of Moses they had constructed a thick hedge of supplemental rules that tried to provide for every aspect of life. Thus, they converted the divine norms—established for our good—into a heavy burden.

Simply put, we must state unequivocally that placing the law in opposition to grace does not agree with the biblical teaching. Even though the OT seems to be under the sign of the law, truly the law is part of the revelation of grace, because its objective is to free humanity. Psalm 119:29 asks for the grace of God's law (cf. 119:127), identifying law and grace as expressions of God's love. Paul explains that the law, as a careful educator, has the purpose of guiding human beings through their younger years of spiritual development into the liberty of a renewed alliance with the Legislator and Savior (Gal. 3:24–29).

Grace—that is, the divine will to save us—is at the center of the Bible, which also puts into action the means to achieve this. The Scriptures speak, above all, of what God has done, is doing, and will do in our favor to save us. The imperatives of Scripture, its standards and laws, express what God proposes—not to achieve salvation, but to live in harmony with Him and with humanity. Thus, Paul is clear that salvation is a divine enterprise. In Ephesians 2:8–9, he writes that we are saved by grace through faith and not by our own merits, for salvation comes from God, not from our good works.

Through faith we do not obtain salvation, but we manifest that we have accepted the salvation offered to us, we who do not deserve it. God first liberates His people and then teaches them how to live (Ex. 20:2–17). This basic truth is called righteousness by faith. This means that even our best efforts to keep the divine law will never be sufficient to earn our salvation; it is always a gift of divine grace.

The Reason for the Conflict

The first Christians—faithful Israelites who had accepted salvation in Christ—continued observing the precepts of the Torah. This was the lifestyle that they understood God expected from them. The conflict came when debate arose about the continuity of certain commandments—especially those related to ceremonial aspects of Jewish life. Within such discussion, the question arose regarding the function of the law in a theology of grace. Thus, the argument between the Jewish Christians of Jerusalem and the formerly pagan Christians of Antioch—regarding circumcision as a requirement to become part of the people of God (Acts

16:1–35)—produced the need for a clear solution to an essential matter: How is salvation achieved? By observing the law or by receiving grace?

The debate between law and grace would never have provoked a schism between Jews and Christians if it had been merely a matter of choosing between legalism and spirituality. But that was not the case, and here the problem arose. Orthodox Judaism had known that the law was more than a judicial text—its spiritual content needed to be internalized; without so doing, the law was no longer a genuine expression of God's will. The teachings of Jesus and Paul are situated in line with the most authentic Judaism. Nevertheless, the teaching of rabbinical Pharisaism was beginning to assert that justification was achieved by keeping the Torah. And that was the disputed point. For Paul, it was very clear: Salvation was the exclusive work of the Messiah. It did not come from a redeeming law, but from the grace of the Redeemer.

LIBERATED FROM THE LAW

The Epistle to the Galatians was born in the heat of this debate, which threatened to divide the church (Gal. 2:11–14). Paul exalted the liberating force of Jesus's gospel in opposition to the slavery of the law that some wanted to impose on the believers (4:1–25). Throughout his epistles, Paul explains that the work of Christ brings a threefold liberation: from the guilt and punishment of sin, from the power and slavery of sin, and from the presence of sin.

A Threefold Liberation

This threefold liberation—the essence of the gospel—takes place in three phases.

In the first phase, the Son of God assumes human nature and gives His life for fallen humanity—mysteriously opening the way to our redemption (Gal. 4:4–5). In this stage, the perfect life of Christ is credited to the account of the believer, who receives it by faith alone. Our salvation is definitively marked by the sign of the cross (Rom. 5:12–20; 1 Cor. 2:2; Gal. 6:14).

Christ's first objective is to free believers from the guilt and punishment of sin. While the law condemns sin, it does not provide the strength necessary to avoid it. This situation of "chronic falls" often leads to discouragement and other rebellious feelings (Rom. 7:2–25; 8:2; 10:3; Gal. 2–4; 5:1–15). Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us (Gal. 3:13). In both His life and death, Christ acted as our substitute. His perfect life covers our imperfect life and provides us with the righteousness we need to stand in God's presence. His death on the cross takes the place of the penalty of death that engulfed all of humanity as a result of sin. This aspect of liberation is the means of our justification. "Justification" is a term that refers to the positive verdict a judge pronounces when a person is found innocent of the charges brought against him or her (cf. Deut. 25:1; Prov. 17:15). In this case, the law can no longer condemn us because, through our faith in Christ, God has pronounced us as righteous (Rom. 5:1). Christ's history is now our history.

In the second phase, which really cannot be separated from the first, the Spirit begins to make personal the triumph obtained by Christ in the believer's life—which is symbolized by baptism (Gal. 3:26–29). This work of sanctification continues throughout the life of the believer as the Holy Spirit produces the fruits of a progressive liberation from sin (Gal. 5:16–25; cf. Phil. 4:13). Thus, in addition to freeing humanity from the guilt and punishment of sin, Christ has also liberated us from the power and slavery of sin. In taking humanity on Himself but never succumbing to sin, Christ broke the power of sin and death that dominated humankind (Rom. 8:3). The resurrection of Jesus demonstrates that sin is a defeated foe. Christ's victory is the basis of our sanctification. While sin is still a present force that seeks to wreak havoc in people's lives, it does not need to reign as an enslaving force in the life of a believer. Christ has made it possible for the moral and spiritual requirements of the law given to Moses to be fulfilled in the lives of His followers through the power of the indwelling Spirit (v. 4). While justification is a one-time event that happens when God declares the repentant sinner as righteous before Him, sanctification is the work of a lifetime—as the Spirit makes true in our experience what is already true of us in Christ.

In the final phase, we experience glorification: freedom from the presence of sin. This third stage of salvation will occur only at the return of Christ, when believers receive a glorified and immortal body free of every trace of sin (1 Cor. 15:51–54; Phil. 3:20–21). With the barrier of sin forever removed, believers will dwell eternally in the presence of God.

This process of liberation transcends our present life. Now, our freedom is precarious and provisional—we are awaiting definitive liberation when Christ returns. The good news is that while we seek to live for God, we no longer need to feel condemned when we make mistakes (Rom. 8:1). The good news of justification assures us that our standing before God is not based on the failures or victories of our Christian experience; it is based on the finished work of Jesus. While God wants us to experience liberation and obedience now, He works patiently in our lives, knowing that the transformation He seeks to bring about in us is not the work of a moment but of a lifetime. Our good works are the visible fruits of God's saving action in our lives. While they are not meritorious, they are demonstrative—that is, they demonstrate the ongoing work of God's Spirit in us.

Law and grace, therefore, as the letter and the spirit and form and essence, are not, by nature, mutually exclusive. They complement each other, forming an organic and inseparable totality. Those who place law and grace in opposition forget that both come from God, who gives His law to His people to make them aware of their need of Him and to help them understand the life He has called them to live. Rather than opposing the law, grace offers forgiveness for our mistakes and seeks to protect us from evil as it teaches us how to live for God's glory (Titus 2:11–14).

PAUL, THE LAW, AND LIFE IN THE GRACE OF GOD

An essential aspect of the divine law, which shows clearly to what degree it is infused with grace, was the legislation related to the sacrificial system. This legislation sought to keep humanity's relationship with God alive, and it anticipated the divine solution to our transgressions through Jesus Christ.

The Rituals of the Sacrifices

Keeping in mind the fragility of our fallen nature, God indicated, by means of some laws, the way to freedom. The sanctuary with its religious rituals—which was given in anticipation of the salvation to be fully realized in Jesus—visibly demonstrated that salvation was not rooted in anything humans could do but in availing themselves of the atonement that God provided for them. The forgiveness of our sins is not something we accomplish; it is God's business. Everything in the Mosaic ritual announced the Redeemer. Paul wrote that we are freely justified by God's grace through redemption in Christ, the propitiation for our sins, through faith in His blood (Rom. 3:24–25).

The ritual of the sacrifices was a constantly repeated reminder that reconciliation with God and the forgiveness of sins are possible thanks to the expiation carried out by our Redeemer. Restoration is not obtained by denying our errors—attempting to compensate for them by presenting sacrifices or doing penance motivated by remorse. Christ gave His life as the atoning sacrifice for our sins. In response, we are to avail ourselves of His sacrifice by confessing our sins and accepting the pardon and new life He offers us (Rom. 8:1–39). The ceremonial laws were intended to announce the sublime expiatory work of Jesus. They were an anticipation and shadow of the future (Col. 2:17) that would be brought about by Christ (cf. Heb. 8:5).

Paul insists that the gospel of the grace of God—that is, His love in action—reveals that the ceremonial part of the law has already been taken care of by Christ. That facet of the law constitutes the center of God's union with His liberated people. Therefore, it has not been abolished but realized. As a fruit of the blessings of the alliance, God frees the enslaved and makes them a depository of His revelation, so that the Savior becomes the Lord of those liberated. We might say that through His law and His grace, God divides human history into two parts with two possible end results. It is as if He said: "Before I intervened in your life, you were a slave. Now, if I stop intervening, you will continue in slavery. But if you accept Me into your life, one day you will be truly free." Everything invites us to keep our alliance with God.

Grace and Union with Christ

Consequently, accepting God's grace does not require us to abandon the law but to give up our erroneous understanding of our relationship with it. We may see its ancient text as a restriction imposed on us or as part of a liberating program. The perspective is all-important. It will depend on whether we understand that He who liberated the Hebrews from Egypt is the only One who can free us from our other forms of slavery. Without Him, we can do nothing (John 15:5). He who gave His life for us never wants us to separate from Him, and He encourages us to fully enjoy our union with Him (He will be our God and we His people; Ex. 6:7; Jer. 30:22). Only one who, like Paul, has gone through such a deep conversion can truly understand how undeserved the union that the Savior offers us is and to what extent we are unable to add anything to His divine grace.

The Righteous Will Live by Faith

Paul's message teaches us that the faith relationship Christ expects from us is more than an intellectual assent or conviction. James comments that the devils believe that God exists and yet are the perfect example of what could be called "anti-faith" (James 2:19). True faith has an existential dimension called trust or faithfulness, as well as a spiritual dimension that implies a deep union of one life with another. The faith Paul is talking about presupposes total adherence to Christ in words and actions. We might define such a faith as identification, engagement, and even obedience. It is faith that acts by love (Gal. 5:6), because true faith involves the desire to unite with Him and to do His will.

Paul summarizes the essence of this experience—and of his own theology—with the concept that the righteous will live by faith (Rom. 1:16–17; cf. Hab. 2:4). In this impressive biblical synthesis, Paul condenses all the precepts and promises of the Torah in a basic attitude: faith (*pistis*), a complete trust that binds us in union with God, which is the essential content of the alliance. Here we have the law reflected in the gospel, where all the commandments, observances, prescriptions, and rules are summarized and internalized in one spiritual attitude, which is the basis of any deep religious experience, that is, submitting to God and searching for His will. Here law and gospel must coincide. As Ellen White wrote, "No one can rightly present the law of God without the gospel or the gospel without the law" (COL 99).

The apostle faced the difficult task of making the gospel of Christ clear to congregations made up of some people who were morally deformed or morally indifferent. Paul wanted all people to clearly understand that salvation was a gift of divine grace that could be obtained only by faith. To that end, the apostle needed to rectify two extreme attitudes toward the law: the *nomism* of some and the *anomie* of others (1 Cor. 9:20–21). *Nomism*, or veneration of the law, was the attitude of many Jews; their ideal was that of the wise man who discerned the goodness of the law and attempted to apply that law to his conduct. The *anomie* of others is at the other extreme of the picture, referring to the one who lives outside of the law and whose free spirit rebels at the law's obligations and prohibitions, which may be foreign to his or her culture.

The Law in Christ

In the face of these extremes, Paul describes his personal position before the law. He was free but had placed himself at the service of all to win the most people possible. With the Jews, he acted as a Jew in order to win the Jews. With those who lived under the law (*hypo nomon*), he acted as if he also were under the law to win those who lived under the law. And with those who knew not the law (*anomois*), he lived as if he did not have the law of God while, in reality, he had the law in Christ (*ennomos Christou*) (1 Cor. 9:19–21). The three phrases—"under the law" (*hypo nomon*), "without the law" (*anomos*), and "in the law" (*ennomos*)—agree with the three situations existing in the early church.

Paul seems to have created a new word, *ennomos*, to describe his own position toward the law after his encounter with Jesus. In his first Epistle to the Corinthians (chaps. 5–10), he presents his vision of Christian ethics, placing on opposite sides the legalistic situation of the Pharisee and the libertarian attitude of the antinomian. He then places himself *ennomos Christou* ("in the law of Christ")—adhering totally to the law, but doing so through Christ. He knew that every commandment encloses an order and a promise whose realization is only possible with divine help (Phil. 4:13; 1 Thess. 5:24). Paul points out that he is not without the law of God, since his adherence to the law through Christ is no more and no less than the spiritual experience of that law. This new relation to the law in Christ avoids the risks of legalistic rigor and arbitrary anarchy, since it comes from the internal action of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:2; cf. Jer. 31:31–34; Heb. 8:8–12).

Although one should not call strict obedience to the law of Moses legalism—as that law was kept by many Jews motivated by a healthy desire to maintain the identity of Judaism in a hostile environment—it is evident that Jesus boldly combated hypocritical legalism (Matt. 23:1–39), which is a threat to any religious community and something that not even the early church could totally avoid. Paul fought against this mentality on all fronts.

The Danger of Legalism

The risk that respect for the law may lead to legalism is extremely high in a fallen world. It was not easy to preach the gospel ethic to believers from a Jewish background, who almost venerated certain religious observances (Mark 2:1–6; 7:1–23; 12:28–40), and to Gentiles, who still did not have the spiritual maturity to distinguish between voluntary obedience and rules imposed on them (1 Cor. 8–10). In a church community in which members see one another as strong and weak, as saints and sinners, or as liberal and conservative (cf. Rom. 14:1—15:6), a correct understanding of the law within the plan of salvation is all-important. Otherwise, the observance of the law's rules can become a platform for discrimination and self-glorification for some. In response to this challenge, Paul tried to educate the church regarding spirituality and lifestyle, in which personal liberty and the community's faith are in proper balance. It is not possible to foster respect for the law without bringing up the matter of legalism. This was, for Paul, one of the greatest challenges in his churches, and it continues to be a challenge in churches today. In every society—the church included—laws are indispensable. However, it is important to know that even the best laws, those of God, have their limitations. They allow us to function better in society, but they do not transform us inside. Conversion is the work of God, not of standards.

Surpassing Legalism

Paul warns us that, in spite of the goodness of the law, human efforts to practice the commandments may be counterproductive. Romans 7:10 tells us that the commandment that was originally intended to lead Paul to life had, instead, led him to death. However, is it not appropriate for a sensible, responsible, and honest person to be aware of the inevitable distance between the admired ideal and reality as it is lived out? Therefore, the only way to overcome legalism is to seek the intention of the law, summarized in love. Thus Paul

understood it: Love is the fulfillment of the law (Rom. 3:8; 13:9–10; Gal. 5:14; cf. Matt. 7:12; 22:37–40; Luke 10:25–28; James 2:8; 1 John 4:12; 5:3). Love is the opposite of legalism. The apostle urges us to never lose sight of that loving ideal; with divine help, it will be possible to answer in the affirmative its high callings. God's love can do anything (1 Cor. 16:7; Phil. 4:13).

CONCLUSION

Synthesizing Paul's thoughts, we conclude that, as an expression of the ideal will of God, the law of God is immutable. It attracts us to that ideal when we allow ourselves to be guided by the Spirit, but it discourages us or makes us rebellious when we allow ourselves to be carried away by our own impulses. Only Christ can save us from drifting and give us the righteousness required by the law. As an ethical code, either as a judge or a mirror, the law shows us our errors and judges and condemns us. Only Christ can pardon our failures, declare us as just and blameless in His sight, and provide us with the strength we need to become free from those sins that so easily ensnare us. As a standard of personal and social conduct (as a teacher), the law protects us and others from our own errors and guides and directs us at the crossroads of life (Rom. 7:10). It leads us to Christ for forgiveness when it points out our sinfulness, and it shows us the life that God wants us to live as His followers. Only Christ—as Savior, Teacher, and perfect Model—has the power to transform our lives in the pattern of the ideal He proposes. His presence allows us to live the essence of the law, which is love (Gal. 2:20), freeing us from the enslaving power of sin and the false security of legalism. That is why the end-time remnant is distinguished by keeping the commandments of God (Rev. 12:17). For, as the basis of their spiritual life, they have faith in Jesus (14:12).

HISTORICAL BOOKS

INTRODUCTION TO THE NEW TESTAMENT HISTORICAL BOOKS

In the NT, the word "gospel" (*euangelion*, "good news") identifies the arrival of God's kingdom into this world in the person of His Son, Jesus. Since this "good news" is so closely identified with Jesus, the term became attached to the four documents in the NT that detail Christ's life, death, and resurrection: the Gospels according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The first three of these Gospels show a close similarity in content and in the sequence in which the similar stories they share occur. As a result, they are often referred to as the Synoptic Gospels. The term "synoptic" comes from a Greek word that means "to see together with a common view." The Gospel of John, however, does not fall into this category. While it also tells stories about Jesus's life, death, and resurrection, the majority of its stories do not occur in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. This indicates John was composed on a more independent basis.

WHAT IS A GOSPEL?

The Gospels may be thought of as examples, though special and distinctive ones, of popular Greco-Roman biography. These biographies were continuous narratives, usually written on a single scroll (typically 10,000–20,000 words in length), that focused on the public deeds of the subject and treated the individual's death in some detail. The four canonical Gospels are distinct in that they reflect the early Christian proclamation of Jesus. For this reason, they are rich in the vocabulary and themes of the OT and were composed to be read in Christian house churches. They are not simply collections of wise sayings or blocks of Christian teaching, nor is Jesus presented as a mere example of particular virtues. Instead, the Gospels set Jesus forth as the focus of divine action in the world. They invite us to consider both His words and His actions as they call us to worship and discipleship. As such, they are more than just a historical biography; they are more appropriately designated as theological biography.

Although the Gospels share similarities with ancient Greco-Roman biography, each of the Gospel authors makes use of a variety of other types (or genres) of literature as he tells the story of Jesus. These include parables (e.g., the parable of the good Samaritan; Luke 10:25–37), miracle stories (e.g., the feeding of the five thousand; Mark 6:30–44), pronouncement stories (e.g., Matt. 8:21–22), and stories of the death of Jesus (or passion narratives; Matt. 26:30—27:66; Mark 14:26—15:47; Luke 22:39—23:56; John 18:1—19:42). One should not assume, however, that the Gospels are simply random collections of diverse literary material. On the contrary, detailed examination reveals the Gospels are carefully composed and

exhibit the craft of excellent storytellers who, under the direction of the Spirit, arranged their material with rhetorical skill.

WHAT DOES ACTS ADD TO THE GOSPELS?

The Acts of the Apostles is a close companion with the Gospels in testifying to the story of Jesus. While the Gospels offer us four scriptural accounts of the life and ministry of Jesus, we possess only one narrative account of the early Christian church. Acts completes the story of the Gospels, as it describes the period from the ascension of Jesus through Paul's arrival in Rome. Acts exhibits an especially close relationship with the Gospel of Luke, since the same author wrote both documents. At the outset of each of these accounts, Luke dedicates his work to Theophilus (Luke 1:3; Acts 1:1). It is justified, then, to refer to these two documents as a composite work, Luke-Acts, or to understand them as companion volumes, something obscured by their separation in the NT.

If the Gospels may be thought of as theological biographies, Acts may be labeled "theological history." Luke's selection and arrangement of stories results in an exciting—even entertaining—narrative. His purpose, though, moves well beyond the simple enjoyment of his readers and hearers. He is motivated by important theological concerns and offers the testimony of history to endorse them.

In Acts, Luke advances central themes that he had begun to develop in his Gospel, especially his focus on Jesus as the Savior of all and his understanding of what it means to be a disciple or follower of Jesus. While Jesus ascends into heaven at the end of Luke's Gospel and His followers can no longer see Him with their physical eyes, He does not fade from Luke's continuing story. At the beginning of Acts, Jesus announces to the apostles that His own story will continue through their Spirit-inspired witness "in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end[s] of the earth" (Acts 1:8; cf. 1:1). They will live and bear witness that Jesus is Messiah and Savior in light of a powerful new reality—that the same Jesus they knew on the dusty streets of Judea is now "exalted to the right hand of God" (Acts 2:33).

In concluding his Pentecost sermon, Peter argues that a string of salvation-history events disclosed in Luke's Gospel—Christ's healing ministry, betrayal, crucifixion, death, burial, and resurrection (Acts 2:22–32)—culminate in three additional salvation-history events: the exaltation-coronation of Jesus in heaven; Jesus receiving the Holy Spirit from the Father; and Jesus pouring out the Holy Spirit on His followers (Acts 2:33–36). Peter argues that the last of these events—the pouring out of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost—is visible evidence of the first two events, which his audience cannot see. This theme—the exaltation of Jesus and His continuing activity through the Spirit-inspired ministry of His followers—advances Luke's focus on Jesus in his Gospel and echoes throughout his second book, Acts (see especially the stories of the healing of the crippled beggar at the temple [Acts 3:6, 16; 4:8–12, 17, 30], the testimony of the apostles before the Sanhedrin [Acts 5:27–32; cf. vv. 40–41], and the testimony of Stephen before the same group [Acts 7:51–56]). At the heart of the Christian message as it extends from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8) is the conviction that Jesus is exalted at God's right hand. And it is the Holy Spirit, operative in the followers of Jesus, who bears witness everywhere to that exaltation and to the salvation offered to all through Jesus.

Luke also extends in Acts the understandings developed in his Gospel of what it means to be a follower of Jesus. In his Gospel, Luke described the rigors of discipleship (Luke 9:23–27, 57–62; 14:25–35). Most poignantly, disciples are to take up their cross every day and follow Jesus (Luke 9:23; cf. 14:27). To be a follower of Jesus, to be baptized in His name, means, in the context of Peter's sermon, to acknowledge Jesus as exalted Lord and to be empowered by the Holy Spirit as a witness to Him (Acts 2:38–39; cf. 2:33, 36). This can mean experiencing wondrous miracles and victories. However, as in Luke's Gospel, this calling does not imply a trouble-free life, exempt from challenges and failure. Rather, it may require suffering for Christ, experiencing pain, loss, and even death.

The stories of the followers of Jesus in Acts often echo the story of Jesus in Luke. For example, the story of the martyrdom of Stephen (Acts 6:8—8:1) seems patterned after the story of Christ's own suffering and death. In Luke's Gospel, Jesus conducts missionary journeys around Galilee to preach and heal and undertakes a culminating journey to Jerusalem, where He is arrested and crucified. In Acts, Paul's missionary journeys and his final journey to Jerusalem, where he is arrested, trace the trajectory of Jesus. In Acts, the followers of Jesus experience what He experienced. They are treated as He was treated. They take up His cross and follow Him. Entering God's kingdom involves passing through many difficulties (Acts 14:22). Through it all, disciples are to be attuned to the present reality of Christ's exaltation and the hope of His return (Acts 1:9–11).

If the preface to Luke's Gospel also governs his second volume (Acts), Luke's purpose in composing the second half of his account was to gather eyewitness testimony to what had been fulfilled among the followers of Jesus and share that testimony in "an orderly account" so that readers might know the certainty of the things they had been taught (Luke 1:1–4). He wrote to confirm for Gentiles who had come to believe in Jesus as Savior and exalted Lord that their inclusion in the Christian movement was a critical part of God's plan. Luke's emphasis in his Gospel that Jesus is the Savior of all, including the marginalized, the Gentiles, and the poor, becomes amplified in Acts as we watch the exalted Jesus extend His community of faith to the ends of the earth. We find ourselves invited into this powerful, inclusive movement and called to share the good news of Christ's salvation as we look toward the culmination of human history at His return (Acts 1:9–11; cf. 17:31; Luke 21:25–28).

HOW DID WE RECEIVE THE GOSPELS AND ACTS?

When we think of how we received the Gospels and Acts, we tend to focus on the time of their composition, when the Gospel writers, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, wrote them down. We may be blessed by taking a wider and longer view, tracing the hand of God in the intriguing, convoluted, episodic story of how it is that we are able to hold the Gospels and Acts in our hands as treasured and reliable accounts of the life and teachings of Jesus and the story of the early Christian church.

Oral and Written Accounts

While the Gospels and Acts are rooted in the events that occurred in connection to Jesus's ministry, those accounts, as we know them today, were not recorded until several decades after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus. This means that the story of how those events were transformed into written accounts begins with the circulation of those stories by word of mouth in the early church. While it is clear that oral transmission played a significant role in the church (e.g., 1 Cor. 15:3–7), it raises questions about the nature of that transmission. Were those oral stories passed on in a loose and unreliable fashion or in a careful, stable manner?

Recent interdisciplinary studies invite us to contemplate the orally dominant, pre-Gutenberg world of the NT, a world very different from our own, in which books were composed through dictation and were typically read aloud. This realization requires us to abandon presuppositions about how the Gospels were generated and how they were received. This realization includes rejecting the critical view that oral transmission of the period was so entirely unstable and rooted in legend and myth that it is impossible to recognize the Jesus of history in the Jesus of the Gospels. Instead, a different framework of understanding emerges in which memorized, eyewitness testimony formed a natural link in the period between Jesus and the writing of the Gospels. Given that fieldwork-based research on living oral history and tradition suggests that sacred material is handled with special care, we have a credible basis for embracing as stable and reliable the historical material that we find in our Gospels. In other words, the Jesus of history is not different from the Jesus we find in the Gospels.

As suggested by many NT passages (e.g., Acts 13:27; 15:21, 30–31; Rev. 1:3), the Gospels were written to be read aloud for the benefit of a group of listeners (e.g., Luke 4:16). Christians gathered regularly for the purpose of both rehearsing and preserving the story of Jesus, based on careful memorization of the written text in which the audience helped control the faithfulness of the performance to the community's shared traditions. When Christians gathered together to hear the story of Jesus, they were not inventing new stories to capture the attention of their audience. On the contrary, they were retelling the stories of Jesus that they already knew so they might experience the power of Jesus to meet the evangelistic, apologetic, and pastoral needs of early Christian house churches. In this way, the story of Jesus was passed on faithfully until and beyond the time when the Gospels were composed and began to circulate.

Along the way, certain stories and traditions about Jesus may have been written down, such as collections of the sayings of Jesus or stories about Christ's death (passion narratives). Eventually Gospels, more complete stories of the ministry and death of Jesus, were written down. Eyewitnesses, such as Matthew and John, wrote of their own experiences. Others recorded the experiences of the apostles (for example, some think that Mark may have relied on Peter as the primary source for his account), and still others (such as Luke) collected stories and traditions and compiled them. These accounts reflected the treasured stories known to the Gospel authors and their Christian communities. How many such Gospels eventually appeared we do not know, though Luke states that "many" had recorded such narratives (Luke 1:1). Of these, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John emerged as especially valuable and authoritative testimonies to Jesus. Since the Gospels writers do not indicate when their accounts were written, it is difficult to know with certainty when they first came into circulation. Generally accepted dates for their composition are: Mark, circa A.D. 50–70; Matthew and Luke, circa A.D. 60–85; and John, circa A.D. 80–100. Since these dates are only approximations, one must remember to be flexible rather than dogmatic when dealing with them.

The Church Fathers and the Gospels

As the Christian mission expanded beyond Judea, Christians carried the stories of Jesus and early Christians with them, copying and translating as they went. Much of the textual evidence we possess for the Gospels and Acts bears the marks of this geographical expansion. Evidence—especially Tatian's Syriac *Diatessaron*—suggests that all four Gospels were circulating among early Christians by the middle of the second century. The writings of Irenaeus (ca. A.D. 130–202) and the Latin fragment known as the Muratorian Canon (from the late second century A.D.) imply that the four Gospels were brought together into a collection in the second century. This likely initiated the addition of titles to distinguish them (e.g., "The Gospel of Matthew," "The Gospel of Mark").

Eventually, challenged by heretical views, the early Christian church felt the need to define which documents were authoritative and which were not. As evidenced by the writings of early church leaders such as Tertullian (ca. A.D. 160–220), Clement of Alexandria (ca. A.D. 150–215), Origen (ca. A.D. 185–254), Eusebius (ca. A.D. 260–340), and Athanasius (who wrote in A.D. 367), the recognition of the importance and authority of the four Gospels and Acts grew through time. An important step was taken with their inclusion in the official list, or canon, of NT books approved at the Council of Carthage (A.D. 397), culminating a four-hundred-year-long process (though various issues continued to be raised). On what basis were the Gospels and Acts validated as part of the canon? They were judged to have been written by Jesus's disciples (Matthew, John) or someone closely associated with an apostle (Mark, Luke-Acts); they already enjoyed special status and wide usage in the church; and they were regarded as offering authentic, orthodox testimony to Christian faith. This was not a judgment imposed by the church so much as a recognition of the authority inherent in these inspired documents.

The Impact of the Reformation

No understanding of how we relate to the Bible today is complete without recognizing the profound impact of the Reformation's effort to make the Bible accessible to a wider readership. The publication of a Greek NT by Erasmus (A.D. 1516) facilitated the translation of the NT into the languages of the day. The Reformation sparked an explosion of scholarship, translation, and dissemination of the Bible. Hidden away in Wartburg Castle, Martin Luther translated and then published the NT in German (A.D. 1522). William Tyndale, in exile because the effort was against English law, was the first to translate and print the NT in English (A.D. 1526), suffering martyrdom ten years later (A.D. 1536) for doing so.

The Manuscript Sources

The history of the recording and transmission of the Bible provides evidence that God has watched over His word through this long and often difficult process. Today, we possess nearly six thousand Greek manuscript sources. These include manuscripts of the NT itself and quotations of various parts of it in other early church documents. This large body of sources allows for highly dependable translation. On the other hand, we only have a few partial manuscripts for Erasmus's work. Most of these six thousand sources contain only a portion of the text, and only a few come from the earliest centuries. There are at least four categories of these Greek manuscripts: (1) There are approximately 130 papyri (manuscripts written on papyrus from the second century and later), one of which is a small fragment containing portions of John 18. This is usually regarded as the oldest NT manuscript, dating from as early as A.D. 125. (2) There are about 300 majuscule or uncial manuscripts—documents written in capital letters, without spacing between words; these are dated from the second century and later. Among these are the most important and complete manuscripts of the NT, the Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus, both of which date from the fourth century. (3) There are about 2,900 minuscule manuscripts—documents written in a cursive hand, which date from the ninth century and later. (4) There are more than 2,400 lectionary manuscripts from the fifth century and later that contain passages of the NT selected to be read in a liturgical worship service.

In addition, there are many other documents that bear witness to the text of the NT, especially (1) the writings of the Greek fathers (early church leaders who wrote in Greek), which contain tens of thousands of citations from the NT—almost the entire text of the NT could be reassembled from these citations alone; and (2) early translations into Latin, Syriac, Coptic, Gothic, Armenian, and Ethiopic (about thirty thousand manuscripts of these exist).

This expansive evidence is both unusual and important. It is unusual because for most ancient documents we possess only a few manuscripts—copies that are dated to hundreds of years after the original. It is important because, in all the copying through the years, mistakes or additions were introduced into the manuscript tradition. While the vast number of these are minor (e.g., whether a definite article is present or not), some are more significant, including whether or not John 7:53–8:11 and Mark 16:9–20 were included in the original text. By carefully comparing the elements of this rich textual tradition, scholars are able to confirm the original form of the text of the Gospels and Acts with a high degree of confidence.

As we hold the Gospels and Acts in our hands and access the NT on smartphone apps and through sophisticated Bible study software, we find ourselves the inheritors of this amazing story. We owe our ready access to the Gospels and Acts to the providence of God the Holy Spirit, who inspired the Evangelists who wrote them; to early Christians who copied, translated, and shared them; to monks and so-called heretics (such as the Waldenses) in the Middle Ages who helped preserve them; to courageous heroes of the Reformation who risked all to translate and print them; to adventurer-scholars who discovered and scrutinized manuscripts (one thinks of Constantin von Tischendorf and his discovery of one of the earliest and most complete Bible manuscripts, Sinaiticus); to researchers who have carefully sifted and collated data from the growing number of manuscripts; and to an army of linguists, editors, printers, and Bible societies who have committed themselves to the translation and dissemination of these sacred stories. As heirs of the sacrifice, devotion, and hard work of so many down through the ages, what is our best response? To treasure and study the Gospels and Acts—and all the Bible—and to share their message about Jesus.

THE FOUR GOSPELS

Two questions that can often arise regarding the Gospels are: (1) Why are there only four Gospels and not many more? (2) Why are there four Gospels and not just one?

Four Rather than More

Especially in recent years, the question has been asked, Why are there only four Gospels and not many more? Many recent writers argue that a considerable diversity of thinking about Jesus existed among early Christians, which resulted in a wide variety of "Gospels." They claim that in the process of forming the canon of the NT, these other "Gospels" were inappropriately screened out, leaving a bland orthodoxy. Indeed, there are a number of documents that lay claim to the title "Gospel." Most of these were written centuries after the four canonical Gospels and bear little resemblance to them. The list of works that claim to recount at least part of Jesus's earthly life and ministry and that may have been composed in the first two centuries after Christ is much smaller.

One of these so-called "Gospels," the Gospel of Judas, received a great deal of media attention since its release by the National Geographic Society in 2006. It claims to be a conversation between Jesus and Judas Iscariot, who, according to this Gospel, is the only true follower of Jesus. Written in the Coptic language, the manuscript was discovered in Egypt in the 1970s and consisted of more than one thousand fragments with many gaps. The document itself is dated to around A.D. 300, though it may be a translation of a mid-second-century document. If so, that still places it well beyond the time frame of the four canonical Gospels, with which it contrasts sharply in content. The Gospel of Judas is laced with false teaching about God, Creation, and the relationship of the body and soul that are generally understood as being Gnostic in nature. As a result, the document does not provide Christians with a valid alternative source for understanding the life and ministry of Jesus.

In fact, of all these so-called Gospels, there is only one document commonly regarded by scholars as possibly preserving authentic information about Jesus not contained in the canonical Gospels: the Gospel of Thomas, another Coptic document, discovered in Egypt in 1945. It consists of a collection of 114 sayings attributed to Jesus, most of which have parallels in the canonical Gospels. These are offered with little narrative framework. Like the Gospel of Judas, the Gospel of Thomas is clearly a Gnostic document, presenting Jesus as a revealer of secret wisdom and advocating distinctively Gnostic theology (which regarded the material world as evil and taught secret knowledge as the path to salvation). It was likely composed well into the second century and is dependent on the canonical documents of the NT.

So why are there only four canonical Gospels and not many more? The answer is simple: it is only in these four that we possess authentic testimony to the life and ministry of Jesus.

Four Rather than One

Down through the centuries of Christian history, the more common question has been, Why are there four Gospels and not just one? Early on, some Christians felt uncomfortable with the fact that four authoritative Gospels were circulating. After all, the four versions of the story of Jesus include some diversity in the details of His life. Some of these differences are relatively minor. For example, each Gospel has different wordings of the inscription attached to Jesus's cross (Matt. 27:37, "THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS"; Mark 15:26, "THE KING OF THE JEWS"; Luke 23:38, "THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS"; John 19:19, "JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS"). Another example is that Mark and Luke contain a story about Jesus's healing of a single demoniac (Mark 5:1–20; Luke 8:26–39), while Matthew has Jesus restoring two demoniacs to sanity (Matt. 8:28—9:1). An extreme position would require absolute agreement, discounting the testimony of the Gospels because they do not have the same wording in such cases. Such a standard may be dismissed as too stringent and failing to discern the underlying unity of the fourfold testimony to Jesus.

Other differences, though, are more complex. One only need read the accounts of the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus (Matt. 28; Mark 16; Luke 24; John 20–21) to understand that often specific details of the four accounts are not easily harmonized. The Gospels exhibit a unity in basic convictions about Jesus. There is also a rich diversity in the way His life, ministry, and death are treated, providing a fuller and deeper understanding of Christ's ministry.

Would it not be better—in service of a clear, coherent witness to Jesus—to have a single, authoritative Gospel rather than four accounts that exhibit many differences? Two notable early Christians thought so. Marcion, who died around A.D. 160, wished to distinguish between the God of the Christian faith and the Creator, the God of Judaism and the OT. So Marcion rejected Matthew, Mark, and John as too Jewish. He preferred Luke, but only in a highly edited form in which material he regarded as tainted was removed in order to restore what he considered the original Gospel. Relying on a faulty understanding of Romans 2:15-16, Marcion argued that there should be only one Gospel—his condensed version of Luke. Another early Christian, Tatian, around A.D. 170 compiled a single narrative or Gospel harmony out of the four. The resulting document, known as the *Diatessaron* ("through [the] four"), was widely popular and even supplanted the four Gospels in some geographical areas.

The Unity of the Gospels

With such options readily available, Christians have come to acknowledge the inspiration and unity of all four Gospels included in our Bibles, in spite of the differences among them. After all, if God had wanted the church to have only one Gospel, He certainly could have made that a reality. Thus, while separate accounts, they nevertheless bear witness to one gospel, so they were labeled "The Gospel According to. . . ." Two valuable, biblical statements concerning the composition of the Gospels help us understand why early Christians reached these conclusions.

The first is Luke 1:1-4. Luke tells us that in his time there were in circulation multiple written accounts of the life and ministry of Jesus that sought to preserve the testimony of the eyewitnesses. Based on this eyewitness testimony, the authors of these written accounts had done their work faithfully, since they had performed it in the same spirit and motivation ("just as," v. 2) demonstrated by the eyewitnesses.

While others have faithfully recorded their accounts, Luke felt impelled to craft his own narrative based on his careful investigation and motivated by his desire to write an "orderly account" (v. 3; this should not be taken as meaning "a chronological account"). He hoped that his narrative would have a specific impact on Theophilus and his other readers—that they possess true and certain knowledge (v. 4) about Jesus. Luke was not interested in his readers simply knowing the historical facts (Theophilus seems to have already been instructed about these). His desire was that they would understand the profound meaning of them.

Luke's desire for his readers is in harmony with that expressed in a second important biblical statement found in the Gospel of John. It was written to lead people to believe that Jesus was the Anointed One, the Son of God through whom they would have life (John 20:29-31).

John, too, was interested that his readers move beyond a simple understanding of historical facts. He wished them to come to a saving knowledge of Jesus. John's statement contains another important point: he acknowledged that he has left much out in the writing of his Gospel, operating on a principle of selectivity in crafting his account. The point is expanded in John 21:25, which indicates that Jesus did many things besides those recorded by John.

These biblical statements and the principles that we may deduce from them suggest a most profound answer to the question of why we have four Gospels and not just one: We have four Gospels because they offer different perspectives on Jesus, which are shared with different audiences. The significance of the incarnation was simply so vast that one single Gospel could not adequately describe it. In the same way, four different portraits painted of an important historical figure can provide a fuller understanding of that person than just one. Multiple portraits give us a better opportunity for a complete and well-rounded understanding of Jesus, which we can reach by reading and treasuring all four Gospels.

Ellen G. White's answer to this same question is worth noting: "Why do we need a Matthew, a Mark, a Luke, a John, a Paul, and all these other writers who have borne their testimony in regard to the life of the Saviour during His earthly ministry? Why could not one of the disciples have written a complete record, and thus have given us a connected account of Christ's life and work? The Gospels differ. One writer brings in points that another does not bring in. If these points are essential, why did not all these writers mention them? It is because the minds of men differ, and do not comprehend all things in exactly the same way. . . . Thus the whole truth is presented more clearly by several than by one. In the Gospels the records blend in one harmonious whole" (SAT 2:241).

We Christians should feel blessed that we possess four different and authoritative narratives of the life, teachings, and death of Jesus. We would do well to study the four great witnesses to Jesus—the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—in the context of the wider biblical revelation.

The Literary Relationships among the Gospels

What are we to make of the literary relationships among the Gospels? More specifically, how do the Synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—one another? And what is the relationship of the Gospel of John to the other three?

The Synoptic Problem. As we noted earlier, the Synoptic Gospels often share not only similar stories in the same order, but at times they even agree verbatim. How does one explain this high degree of similarity in the structure and wording of the Synoptic Gospels? The answer to this question is complicated by the fact that at times we also find some diversity in these three Gospels. While the same stories may occur in all three Gospels, at other times the same story is found in only two of them, and at other times in only one. How should this sort of variation in order and expression be understood? The answer to the question about the literary relationship among the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke is referred to as the Synoptic Problem. An example of the complicated relationship between the Synoptic Gospels can be seen in the table below, which provides a "synopsis" of the story of the calling of Levi (Matthew). Note carefully the key to the table:

The Calling of Levi (Matthew)—NKJV

SMALL CAPS TEXT = Identical/near identical wording in the Greek text of all three Synoptic Gospels
Italicized text = Identical/near identical wording in the Greek text of two of the Synoptic Gospels
Bold text = Quite similar wording to that in the Greek text of one or both of the other Synoptic Gospels

Matthew 9:9–10	**Mark 2:14–15**	**Luke 5:27–29**
As Jesus passed on	*As He passed by,*	After these things He went
from there, *He saw* a	*He saw*	out and saw a
man named Matthew	*Levi* the son of Alphaeus	tax collector named *Levi*,
SITTING AT THE TAX OFFICE.	SITTING AT THE TAX OFFICE.	SITTING AT THE TAX OFFICE.
AND HE *said* to	AND HE *said* to	AND HE said to
him, "FOLLOW ME."	him, "FOLLOW ME."	him, "FOLLOW ME."
SO HE AROSE AND	SO HE AROSE AND	So he left all, ROSE UP, AND
FOLLOWED HIM.	FOLLOWED HIM.	FOLLOWED HIM.
Now it happened, as	**Now it happened, as**	Then Levi gave
Jesus sat at the table in	**He was dining in**	Him a great feast **in**
the house, that behold,	**Levi's house**, that	**his own house.**
many tax collectors	*many tax collectors*	And there were **a great**
and sinners came and	*and sinners also*	**number of tax collectors**
sat down with Him	*sat together with Jesus*	and others who **sat down**
and His disciples.	*and His disciples;*	**with them.**
	for there were many, and	
	they followed Him.	

The examination of the similarities and differences in the call of Levi in the Synoptic Gospels raises the following questions:

- Do the parallels require a *literary* relationship? (That is, do one or more of these written Gospels "borrow" from another manuscript?) If not, how can the similarities be explained?
- Does the comparison of the accounts bring any fresh understanding of the story? Do the unique contributions of a given author stand out? Are the accounts in any way contradictory?
- Assuming there is a literary relationship, what does your examination of this story suggest it to be? Which of these three Gospels came first? Second? Third? Why? Or is the relationship more complicated than that?

A variety of attempts have been made to explain these sorts of similarities and variations, which are highlighted by the close study of parallel passages. Among the major solutions that have been proposed for the Synoptic Problem are the following:

The Oral Theory (the Tradition Hypothesis). Similarities among the Synoptic Gospels are attributed to the idea that all three Gospels draw heavily on the structured and durable oral traditions that circulated among the early Christian community in Jerusalem.

Matthean Priority (the Augustinian Theory and the Griesbach Hypothesis). Most early Christian authors believe the Gospels to have been written in the order in which they appear in the canon. Augustine (died A.D. 430) was one such supporter of this theory, which became named after him. The more recent Griesbach Hypothesis (named after advocate Johann Jakob Griesbach, 1745–1812) also argues that Matthew was the first Gospel, though followed by Luke and then Mark, who used both Matthew and Luke in summary form.

Markan Priority (the Two- or Four-Source Hypothesis). The most widely held hypothesis over the last century is that the similarities among the Synoptic Gospels are due to the use of the same two sources by Matthew and Luke, namely Mark and Q (from the German *Quelle*, "source"). Q, a hypothetical "sayings source," is thought to have contained sayings of Jesus shared by Matthew and Luke but not present in Mark's Gospel. In the four-source version of the hypothesis, Matthew also uses M (the source of material in Matthew that is without parallel in Mark or Luke) and Luke employs L (the source of material in Luke that is without parallel in Matthew or Mark). Scholars have found this view highly convincing for three reasons: (1) Matthew and Luke rarely agree against Mark in the wording of stories found in all three. This suggests Mark was their common source. (2) Matthew and Luke generally follow the sequence of Mark's Gospel, except in those cases where they share sayings from Jesus. This suggests that they independently used a different source for the sayings of Jesus since they occur in different places in their respective Gospels. (3) Matthew and Luke appear to expand on Mark's account and to clarify points that might be difficult to understand. The scholar whose name is most associated with the popularization of this theory is B. H. Streeter, who wrote an account on the origin of the Gospels in 1924.

Markan Priority with No Q (the Farrer-Goulder-Goodacre Hypothesis). Unconvinced about the existence of a sayings source of Jesus's teachings known as Q, more recent conservative scholars affirm the idea that Mark was the first of the Synoptics. Matthew wrote an expanded version of Mark, and Luke used both earlier Gospels in writing his Gospel. Since Luke supposedly copied or reworked the so-called Q verses of Matthew, there is no need for Q.

While the Markan Priority view (the Two- or Four-Source Hypothesis) has represented a stable consensus in NT scholarship and likely will continue to do so, we would be wise to recognize that the complex relationships among the Synoptics is not something that is easily captured in chart form. In addition, we need to be careful not to overlook the influence that oral tradition and human memory likely contributed to the process. After all, the Gospel accounts were not put together in some mechanical way with each author simply sitting down at a desk to cut and paste different manuscripts together. They were, instead, written by men who, under the inspiration of the Spirit, were guided in passing on the stories of Jesus that were circulating in oral and eventually written sources in the early church—these new and meaningful collections sought to encourage and strengthen early Christians in their understanding of and faithfulness to Jesus.

To the Bible student who wishes to hear in the Gospels God's messages of hope and guidance, the quest to determine the precise nature of the relationships among the Gospels may prove both confusing and disappointing at first. However, understanding something of the complexity of those relationships underlines the important point mentioned earlier: We have in the four canonical Gospels documents that offer both interesting literary differences and profound unity about the significance of Jesus. We do well to compare them in the interest of developing the clearest and fullest possible sense of the identity and significance of Jesus.

The Gospel of John and the Synoptics

How is the Gospel of John related to the Synoptic Gospels? It is distinctive in content. It does not include a birth narrative, the baptism, most of the parables and miracle stories included in the Synoptics, the transfiguration, the words of institution of the Lord's Supper, or Jesus's prayer in Gethsemane. It includes many passages not in the Synoptics: the prologue with its celebration of the preexistence of Jesus (1:1–18); clear statements that Jesus makes about His own identity (e.g., the "I am" sayings; 4:26; 6:35; 8:12, 58; 10:7, 11; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1); dialogues with Nicodemus (3:1–21) and the woman of Samaria (4:4–26); contrary-to-nature miracles (water-to-wine at Cana [2:1–11]; the paralytic at Bethesda [5:1–15]; the man born blind [9:1–41]; Lazarus [11:1–44]); the foot washing (13:1–20); the Farewell Discourse (13:21—16:33); and the High Priestly Prayer of Jesus (17:1–26).

Stylistically, John is distinctive in its vocabulary (in John, Jesus employed words that are infrequent in the Synoptics, such as "truth," "life," "love," to "abide," to "know," "world," to "witness"), the use of long, closely reasoned discourses (e.g., 5:19–47), and the frequent use of irony and symbolism. Geographically, Jesus spends more time in Judea and Jerusalem, making three trips from Galilee to Judea (2:13; 5:1; 7:10), in contrast to the Galilean focus of the Synoptics. Chronologically, the narratives of the Synoptics could be understood as occurring in as little as one year, whereas John notes as least three Passovers (2:13; 6:4; 11:55; cf. 5:1), implying a ministry of more than three years.

It is easy enough to catalog the distinctiveness of John but more difficult to reach a firm conclusion about the relationship of the fourth Gospel to the other three. Is John truly independent of the Synoptics? While John does not include the transfiguration, the words of institution of the Lord's Supper, or Jesus's prayer in Gethsemane, he seems aware of the events connected with them (see 1:14; 6:22–59; 12:27–28). Small features seem also to betray knowledge of the Synoptic story line (e.g., while John mentions only Mary at the tomb, she mentions "we"—she and the other women—not knowing where Jesus was [20:2; cf. Matt. 28:1–10; Mark 16:1–8; Luke 24:1–11]). It is fair to conclude that John wrote not in ignorance of the Synoptics but somehow in conversation with them. John 20:30–31 and 21:25 suggest that John, as an eyewitness, draws on a wide catalog of stories about Jesus to accent themes that are important to him, especially the divinity of Jesus and His intimate relationship with the Father.

The Unity of the Gospels in the Context of the New Testament

Focusing on the differences among the Gospels, as we have just done, carries a hazard. We may become so fixated on nuances that we miss a thoroughgoing and fundamental unity. The four Gospels cohere in offering a story about Jesus in which He is sent by the Father as His divine Son; John the Baptist prepares the way for the ministry of Jesus and baptizes Him; Jesus calls disciples; He teaches, sharing truths about God and discipleship; He heals the sick and performs other miracles; He experiences severe conflict and ultimately is executed in Jerusalem at Passover under the authority of Pontius Pilate, spurred on by Jewish leaders; He is resurrected and appears to His followers; He ascends to the Father (if Mark originally concluded at 16:8, these last two points remain true since Jesus, who is characterized as a reliable witness, predicts His resurrection [Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:34] and ascension [14:62; cf. 12:10, 35–37]); He is both the recipient of and the giver of the Holy Spirit; and He promises to return.

We are benefited as well by recalling that the Gospels' witness to the story of Jesus gains resonance, confirmation, and expansion from the wider NT. The Gospels do not stand alone in their witness to Jesus. God's action to redeem humankind through Jesus is the central message of the NT, which bears witness to the grand narrative about Him. All of the elements of this grand story are on view in the Gospels and Acts and are also highlighted in other parts of the NT.

The Reliability of the Gospels and Acts

Through this essay we have been building a case for the reliability of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Acts—one that addresses both popular and academic attacks. This case can be summarized in five central arguments. First, the NT Gospels did not result from a period of oral transmission in which wildly untrue stories about Jesus emerged but in the context of eyewitness testimony, careful recollection of stories about Jesus, and community confirmation of them. Second, the selection of the NT Gospels and Acts as part of the NT canon was an extended process that exhibited all along the way affirmation of their intrinsic value as authentic testimony.

Third, while the NT Gospels and Acts display a long and involved textual history, we can trace God's providence through that story. The large number of manuscripts and other evidence we possess enable us to recapture the original text with accuracy and confidence.

Fourth, the non-canonical Gospels arrive on the scene later than the NT documents, are dependent on them, and often exhibit Gnostic theology (about the material world as evil and offering secret knowledge as the path to salvation). They do not offer valid alternative sources about Jesus. Fifth, the differences or variations among the NT Gospels are to be treasured as offering complementary and confirming stories about Jesus rather than as so divergent that they negate positive testimony about Jesus.

The Testimony of the History

More should be said about the Acts of the Apostles, which is often thought of as inferior to the Pauline Epistles in its testimony to history. Does Luke's desire to entertain his audience or to further his theological agenda lead him to play fast and loose with the facts of history? A comparison between Acts and the Pauline Epistles does offer interesting contrasts. For example, Acts does not mention Paul's role as a writer of letters to his churches or highlight the collection for God's people in Jerusalem (but see Acts 24:17), which is accented in Paul's letters (e.g., Rom. 15:31; 1 Cor. 16:1–4; 2 Cor. 8–9). In Acts, Paul is a miracle worker (e.g., Acts 19:11–12) and an eloquent orator (e.g., Acts 17:22–34), whereas in the Pauline Epistles, miracles are not described and Paul's seeming lack of oratorical skill is mentioned (2 Cor. 10:10).

Acts, however, also displays a wealth of specific information about people, places, and cultures that has proven to be accurate. Luke's account is full of references to magistrates, provincial governors, client kings, and the like, and these references have been confirmed time and again as being historically accurate. In addition, the "we sections" of Acts (16:10–17; 20:5—21:18; 27:1—28:16) suggest that Luke was himself an eyewitness for much of the narrative he relates. Careful Bible students will avoid unnecessarily pitting Acts against the Pauline Epistles and will instead explore the ways in which Acts complements the portraits of Paul and other Christian leaders elsewhere in the NT.

Believers who have concluded that the Gospels and Acts are indeed reliable will wish to consider their claim to being inspired by God—a dynamic that moves well beyond issues of reliability. The Gospels are the result of a powerful train of revelation and inspiration, the stages of which Jesus Himself discusses in the Gospel of John, especially in the Farewell Discourse (John 14–16) and the High Priestly Prayer (17). First, Jesus receives words of truth from the Father (14:10; 15:15). Second, Jesus indicates that the words He spoke were not His alone, but also those of His Father (14:24; cf. 17:14). Third, the disciples in turn share the message of Jesus with others. They are aided in this endeavor by the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit who, Jesus promises, will remind them of everything Jesus had told them (14:26; cf. 16:12–14). Fourth, this message, as shared by the disciples, is recorded in the Gospels, making this treasure trove of revelation about Jesus widely available. The twofold witness of the disciples as eyewitnesses and the Spirit as inspiring and confirming their witness (15:26–27) creates new groups of believers who came to believe in Christ through the apostles' testimony (17:20; cf. 20:30–31; 21:24). For believers, then, the reliability and authority of the Gospels (and Acts as well) rest on this four-step process of revelation and inspiration, rooted in the heart of God Himself.

What is the message the Gospels and Acts bear to us? A number of NT passages make the point that it is in Jesus that God has made Himself most clearly known. Jesus is the exact imprint (Heb. 1:3) or "image" (Col. 1:15; 2 Cor. 4:4) of God. We behold the enlightening knowledge of God's glory in the countenance of Christ (2 Cor. 4:6; cf. John 1:14). And how is it that we have access to Christ's portrayal of His Father? Through the testimony about Jesus offered in the NT Gospels. The spiritual value of these four documents is, then, incalculable in the access they provide to the clear, high-definition view of God we are able to access in Christ, testimony that is complemented by Acts with its accounts of the activity of the risen and exalted Jesus.

AN APPROACH TO STUDYING THE GOSPELS AND ACTS

It is the profound, spiritual value of the Gospels and Acts that is foremost as we think about how to study them. Our goal is not just to acquire information about Jesus, but something far deeper and more transformative as suggested by Paul's comment about learning the truth in Christ (Eph. 4:20–21). As believers, we turn to the Gospels and Acts to absorb stories about His life, ministry, death, resurrection, ascension, and beyond in a way that is transforming, that connects us with Christ. How do we study these important books to gain real nourishment, insight into how to live our lives as disciples of Jesus, and motivation to do so?

There exists a wide variety of ways to study the Gospels and Acts, honoring them as reliable, authoritative, and inspired documents given by God to inform our discipleship. Our focus here is not on detailed, academic study of the Bible, however rewarding that may be, but on one pattern of daily devotional reading and study of the Gospels and Acts.

Choosing a Strategy

With a hunger for Jesus, prayer for the guidance of the Holy Spirit must be our first activity when studying God's word. Then we need to select a strategy. An obvious choice would be passage-by-passage study. Choosing one of our five books, we work our way through it passage-by-passage. Modern translations are helpful here in dividing the text into passages (e.g., "John the Baptist Prepares the Way," Mark 1:1–8; or "Simon the Sorcerer's Profession of Faith," Acts 8:9–13). Or, with the help of a synopsis of the Gospels or a list of parallel passages in the Gospels, we might choose to study parallel passages across the Gospels.

Alternatively, we could adopt a "whole book" strategy. As we noted earlier, the Gospels and Acts were composed for reading in early Christian house churches, where they would be read out as whole documents. ("Scripture reading" was more central to the life of believers generally, and more time was dedicated to the activity back then than it usually is now.) Reflecting this early setting, we might choose to focus our attention on an entire book, reading or listening to the entire document, which would take some time.

Choosing a Question

Having selected a strategy, we need a question or a set of questions that will guide and structure our study. We might choose to do a thematic reading guided by a topic of interest and significance. We might study one of our five books or passages within them guided by questions like these: What does this book or passage tell me about Jesus? What does it tell me about living as a disciple of Jesus as we approach Christ's return? What does it say about how to be a better father or mother? What does it say about how to be a faithful witness to Jesus? What can I learn about how I should invest my money and other resources? Any question of prayerful significance will likely yield important, life-changing results as you bring it to the Gospels and Acts and seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

You may find it beneficial to approach passages in the Gospels and Acts using a more structured set of questions. If we wish to do a careful study of a passage, we could conduct an "interrogation" of the passage in four steps:

1. Observation. Here we read and reread the passage, asking: What do I see here? What is going on in this passage? Are there people, places, or terms with which I am unfamiliar? (Using a good Bible dictionary can be especially helpful here). What type of literature is this (a narrative, parable, healing story, or something else)?

Parables, it should be noted, require close attention. We should observe closely what type of parable we are studying—an allegory, story parable, or a simile (e.g., "The kingdom of heaven is like . . ."). With story parables and similes, we should focus on the impact of the story as a whole or the main point of comparison. We must avoid drawing lessons that are inconsistent with the parable as a whole.

2. Interpretation. What did this mean in the context of the earthly ministry of Jesus? What was the author attempting to say to the original audience? What themes or ideas are being shared? Why would early Christians have found this passage helpful or useful? Why would the author express these ideas in this way? With regard to studying the Sermon on the Mount, Ellen G. White invites, "Let us in imagination go back to that scene, and, as we sit with the disciples on the mountainside, enter into the thoughts and feelings that filled their hearts. Understanding what the words of Jesus meant to those who heard them, we may discern in them a new vividness and beauty, and may also gather for ourselves their deeper lessons" (MB 1).

3. Correlation. Here we compare Scripture with Scripture, seeking to answer the question, How does this passage and its themes relate to the rest of what the Bible says? Using a concordance or Bible study software, we trace important words or themes through the Bible, broadening and deepening our understanding of what the Bible as a whole says about the themes raised in our passage. Applying this to the Gospels means that we will compare parallel passages in other Gospels with the one we are studying.

4. Application. As Christians, we do not read and study the Bible simply to acquire information or for literary pleasure (though it provides plenty of both). With a desire to follow where God's word leads and keeping in mind what we have learned from the first three steps, it is helpful to ask questions of the text that relate to our own personal experience, such as the following:

- What do we learn about Jesus in this story or passage? What should this aspect of His identity mean to me today?
- What flaws, displayed by characters in the story, might prove problematic to my discipleship? Am I guilty of the faults and sins they display? Is there a cue here for me to repent?
- What would happen if I took seriously the words or example of Jesus or His followers in this story? How would it affect the way I use my time? How might it reshape my relationships and challenge my discipleship?
- What is the risen Jesus saying to me through this passage? In this passage, what is important to me at this moment?
- How does this passage tune my worship of Jesus? How does it impel me to my knees to worship Him?

It is unlikely that a specific passage will offer answers to every question in a set of application questions like these, but one or two of the questions will help us find nourishing spiritual food in the selected passage. Time may not often allow working carefully through the four steps (observation, interpretation, correlation, application). A prayerful reading of a passage and asking prayerful questions like the ones just listed provides a helpful "shortcut" Bible study strategy.

Adding Bible Study Tools

Here we consider Bible study tools that can add depth of meaning to our study. These can be: a Bible search program, a Bible dictionary, commentaries (such as this volume), and study Bibles (such as the *Andrews Study Bible* in NKJV or NIV). Select these tools carefully, privileging those that exhibit a belief that the Bible is inspired by God and is essential for Christians today. Many have found it a valuable experience to read the Gospels and Acts alongside Ellen G. White's books *The Desire of Ages* and *The Acts of the Apostles* (the first page of each chapter of these books lists the Bible passage or passages that the chapter discusses).

Our grand challenge with regard to the Gospels and Acts is to appropriate and actualize the lessons of these sacred books in our individual lives and corporate existence. The answer to this great need is found only in the abiding work of the Holy Spirit, promised to us by our risen Lord. Praying over what you have learned and heard, invite the Holy Spirit to activate these insights in your life.

MATTHEW

INTRODUCTION

Title and Authorship. Although a title was not part of the earliest extant manuscripts of this Gospel, as with other works in antiquity, a title was eventually added (often on the outside of the scroll) to make it easy to locate among other scrolls. The title was likely added very soon after the Gospel was written. There are several versions of the title found in the earliest manuscripts of the Gospel, including: "The Gospel According to Matthew," "According to Matthew," and "The Holy Gospel According to Matthew."

The Gospel of Matthew does not state who wrote it, when it was written, or where it was written. We can work out the answers to these questions only from clues within and without the Gospel. The best clue to authorship is the fact that every copy of this Gospel that has a title identifies Matthew as the author. A disciple by this name appears in each of the Gospels and in Acts (Matt. 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13), though it is only in the Gospel of Matthew that Matthew is identified as having been a tax collector, a discipline which would have required him to write frequently, before he became one of the Twelve (Matt. 9:9; 10:3). Interestingly, he is called Levi in Mark 2:14 and Luke 5:27—apparently his second name, as was common in the ancient world (e.g., Simon Peter and Thomas called Didymus). The only story that includes Matthew as a significant character involves the dinner that he gave in honor of Jesus (Matt. 9:9–13; Mark 2:15–17; Luke 5:29–32).

The earliest evidence of authorship from outside of the manuscript comes from a writer named Papias, who was of the generation that knew the apostles. He indicates that the author was Matthew, but he does not identify him as the disciple. Irenaeus, a second-century Christian author, clearly identifies Matthew as the disciple of Jesus and the author of the Gospel. Thus the earliest documentary evidence and the earliest Christians who comment on the authorship of the Gospel all agree that it was written by Matthew who was a disciple of Jesus.

Date. The only indication within the Gospel itself as to its date is found in Matthew 27:8, which states that the field in which foreigners are buried is called the field of blood "to this day," a phrase missing from the only other description of the death of Judas in the NT (Acts 1:17–19). This phrase indicates that some time must have passed between the events surrounding the death of Judas and this writing. While we do not know how much time elapsed, the Gospel had to have been written and in circulation before the beginning of the second century, since allusions to it are found in other writings that date to that time (i.e., the *Didache* and Ignatius's *Epistle to the Smyrneans*).

Another important consideration that plays a significant role in any attempt to fix a date to Matthew's Gospel is its strong literary relationship with the Gospels of Mark and Luke. The similar stories, wording, and order of events that these three Gospels (known as the Synoptic Gospels—since the term "synoptic" means, "seen with the same view") share indicate some sort of literary interdependence exists between them. While some scholars suggest that Matthew was written first, followed by Mark (who would have then abbreviated Matthew) and Luke (who used both Mark and Matthew), most scholars believe it is more likely that Mark was the first Gospel written and that Matthew and Luke later expanded on what Mark wrote. If this is the case, then Matthew would have to have been written sometime after the completion of Mark's Gospel, likely between A.D. 60 and 85.

Those who argue for a more precise date of the Gospel are divided over whether Matthew was written before or after the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Advocates of a post-70 date claim that Matthew contains many anachronisms

that indicate it had to have been written after the destruction of Jerusalem. This includes references to the destruction of a city in Jesus's parables (Matt. 22:7; 23:36, 38) that are understood as oblique allusions to the destruction of Jerusalem, explicit references to the "church" (16:18; 18:17), and Jesus's prophecy of the fall of Jerusalem itself (24:1–2, 15–22). These objections, however, are easily overcome if we allow that Jesus was intentionally gathering and forming His disciples into a new messianic community and that in the political climate of the day, He recognized the certainty of a confrontation with Rome and its inevitable outcome. Besides, the description of Jerusalem's destruction is general enough not to have required specific knowledge of the events themselves after they occurred. Moreover, as believers, there is no reason to deny that as the Son of God, Jesus could in fact have predicted the future.

Those who favor an earlier date argue that Matthew's largely positive focus on Judaism and its depiction of Jesus as the promised Messiah foretold in the OT Scriptures point to a time when most of its readers were still Jewish believers living in Jewish circles. This situation certainly changed after the Jewish War (A.D. 66–73) and with the expansion of the Gentile church. In addition, the way Matthew narrated the sayings of Jesus seems to indicate that the temple was still standing when the Gospel was written, since if the Gospel had been written after the fall of Jerusalem, one would expect the author to have included some sort of indication of the fulfillment of Jesus's prophecy about its destruction as further confirmation of His identity. Even if Mark was written first, there is no reason to think that Matthew could not have been written sometime before A.D. 70 and Luke likely sometime after that.

While it is difficult to know for certain when Matthew was written, there is even greater uncertainty about the location where the Gospel was written. Suggestions range from general areas, such as the Holy Land or Syria, to specific places, such as Syrian Antioch, Pela in Transjordan, Galilee, and even Alexandria in Egypt. Most commentators opt for either the northern part of the Holy Land or Southern Syria, but unless further information emerges, it is not possible to be certain as to where the Gospel was written.

Theology and Purpose. In discussing the theology and purpose of Matthew, we need to examine the similarities it has with Mark and Luke and also to understand in what areas it is unique.

1. Similarities with Mark and Luke. As noted earlier, the Gospel of Matthew shares much in common with the Gospels of Mark and Luke. Like them, Matthew portrays Jesus as one who was born of known parents (the carpenter Joseph and his young wife, Mary), grew up in Galilee in the territory of Herod Antipas (one of Herod the Great's sons), and died in Jerusalem on the orders of the Roman governor of Galilee, Pontius Pilate. Also like Mark, Luke, and John, Matthew gives the most attention to the events surrounding the death and resurrection of Jesus. In doing so, Matthew highlights the importance of the death and resurrection of Jesus. The central theological insight of the Gospel is that Jesus's death accomplished the salvation of humanity. This salvation is announced to Joseph at the beginning of the Gospel by an angel, who said that Jesus will save His people from their sins (Matt. 1:21). At the time of the institution of the Lord's Supper, the drinking of the wine signified Jesus's blood, which is poured out for the forgiveness of sins (26:28). As the Gospel progresses, it emerges that the death and resurrection of Jesus has worldwide, indeed cosmic, import. This is anticipated by the resurrection of the righteous that accompanied Jesus's death and resurrection (27:52). It is Jesus Himself who will judge all the nations (25:31–46).

2. Themes in Matthew's Gospel. Much of the material unique to Matthew deals with matters that could be put under the heading "The Community of Believers." It deals with such matters as community discipline (Matt. 18:10, 14–20, 28–31); the mixed nature of the community (13:24–30, 33–43, 47–50; 25:1–13); and various leaders of the community, such as true and false prophets (7:15, 21–23; 10:41; 24:10–12, 14), Christian scribes (13:51–52), and Peter (14:28–31; 16:17–19; 17:24–27). Matthew 18:3–4, 23–35; 19:28b; 21:43; 23:8–10; 28:16–20 also relate in some way to the matter of the community of believers.

A significant portion of the material unique to Matthew deals with Christian behavior, especially how Christians should relate to the laws set out in the OT Scriptures. This is explored most thoroughly in Matthew 5:17, 19–24, 27–28; 7:21–23; 12:5–7, 11; 15:12–13; 21:28–32. The unique material also has a lot of practical injunctions on how to behave as Christians. For example, because Christians are forgiven much by God, they should themselves be forgiving of others (Matt. 6:15; 18:21–35), and their prayers should be distinctive (6:5–8, 10b; 18:19–20). Practical injunctions may also be found at Matthew 5:4–5, 7–10, 14; 16, 21–24, 27–28, 33–37, 41; 6:1–4, 16–34. Nor should it be forgotten that in Matthew, righteousness has a very important behavioral component (Matt. 3:14–15; 5:10, 20; 10:41).

Another prominent theme in the material unique to Matthew deals in some way with Judaism and the Christian's relationship to it. For example, in several places in the Gospel, the Christian mission is restricted to Jews alone (Matt. 10:5b–6, 23; 15:23–24), although this is expanded in Matthew 24:14; 28:16–20. There is a constant interaction with the Jewish religious leadership, particularly the scribes and Pharisees (5:20; 15:12–13; 16:12; 23:1–3, 5, 8–10, 15–22, 27–28, 32–33), and several of the incidents are relevant particularly to Jews (5:33–37; 6:1–4, 16–18; 9:27–31; 17:24–27; 19:28b; 21:14–17, 43).

Much of the material unique to the Gospel of Matthew deals with theological themes surrounding the end of the world and the Second Coming of Jesus. Several sayings and a significant parable deal with the closeness or delay of the Second Coming (10:23; 16:3; 25:1–13). The theme of judgment may be found in Matthew 12:36–37; 16:27; 18:23–35; 19:28b; 24:10–12, 14; 25:31–46. Matthew also has much unique material that deals with the kingdom of heaven (13:24–30, 36–52; 16:19; 18:3–4, 23–35; 19:12, 28b; 20:1–16; 21:43; 25:1–13; cf. 17:24–27; 21:14–17).

Other themes found in the material unique to Matthew include several references to geographic location (2:1, 5–6, 13–15, 19–23; 4:13–16), to healing (9:32–35; 15:29–31), to an interest in the miraculous and spiritual beings (1:18–25; 26:52–54; 27:19, 52–53, 62–66; 28:2–4, 9–10), to John the Baptist (11:14; 17:13), and to the fulfillment of prophecy (1:18–25; 2:1–12, 16–23; 4:13–16; 8:17; 21:14–17). The texts cited here and in the previous paragraphs, together with Matthew 1:18–25; 2:1–12; 2:16–18; 7:6; 10:5b–6; 11:1; 13:35, 53; 14:33; 19:1a; 20:1–16; 21:28–32; 23:5; 24:10–12, 14; 26:1; 27:24–25, 62–66; 28:11–15, comprise a complete listing of the material unique to Matthew.

3. Compositional Intent. The purpose of the Gospel is indicated by its unique theological themes. Since the Gospel includes the preservation of what Jesus had to say about community discipline (Matt. 18:15–20), it carries with it the strong implication that perhaps in some respects the community was self-governing. In particular, it most likely means that the community was independent of the synagogues. It is a truism that Jesus and His disciples were all Jews. They worshiped in the synagogue with other Jews (Matt. 4:23; 9:35; 13:54), and this practice continued in the early church (Acts 9:20; 13:5; 17:1–2, 17). But what happened to Paul was a foretaste of what happened to other Christians. Those in charge of the synagogues ensured that Christians were expelled from fellowship (e.g., Acts 13:44–46; 18:6–7). While the early Christians worshiped in synagogues, they had no control over who was included or excluded. It was only when Christians formed independent communities that they could decide who was in and who was out of the community. It is highly likely, then, that one of the purposes of Matthew's Gospel was to help define the new community as it was beginning to form independently of its roots in the synagogue. This would explain why so much attention is given to the relationship between the Christian community and its religious roots within Judaism, and why there is such effort put into understanding the relationship of the Christian to the laws of the OT. Furthermore, it explains the way the Gospel positions itself over and against the thought leaders in Judaism—the scribes and the Pharisees.

The need to help the community understand what it meant to be a Christian need not be the only reason for writing the Gospel. While the exact date of publication is uncertain, it is likely that a considerable number of the earliest followers of Jesus were now dead. Life was fragile in the ancient world, and life expectancy was much lower than in the modern world. The need to capture the witness of the eyewitnesses may well be another reason why the Gospel was written.

4. Jesus and Hope. Matthew depicts Jesus as the hope of Jews and Gentiles (Matt. 12:18–20; 28:19). Through Jesus's life and ministry, God was fulfilling the promises He made to Abraham and his descendants that imbued their existence with a deep hope in the coming Messiah. Now the Messiah was here and the prophecies were being fulfilled. The promises on which hope was built were becoming a reality in the Man from Nazareth (2:23), the Christ, the Son of David, Immanuel (1:23). But there were elements of that hope that pointed to a future consummation of Christ's work of salvation at the Second Coming (24:3). This expectation became the fundamental hope of the Christian community, and it was firmly grounded in the ministry, death, and resurrection of Christ. Through Him, God had demonstrated like never before that His promises are reliable and that He is a trustworthy God. Therefore the Christian hope is not wishful thinking or a mirage. God in Christ acted within history in a unique way and embodied in Christ the promises and hopes announced by His prophets to Israel. The Second Coming will be the consummation of that manifestation of God within history. The book concludes with a call to the disciples and through them to the church to inundate the world with the message and teachings of Jesus in order to fill it with hope (28:19–20).

Literary Features. The current organization of the Gospel of Matthew is based on three elements. First, because Matthew, Mark, and Luke describe the individual events in the ministry of Jesus in the same order (aside from Matt. 4:23—11:30), one could perhaps guess that Matthew drew on a commonly agreed order of presentation of his materials.

Second, much of the distinctiveness of the order of materials in Matthew 4:23—9:38 can be explained by observing the summary of Jesus's activities provided in Matthew 4:23 and 10:35. Both passages use almost exactly the same words to summarize what Jesus was doing: He was preaching, teaching, and healing. The contents of Matthew 5–7 can be summarized as "teaching," and that of Matthew 8–9 as "healing." Thus, in Matthew 4–9 the Evangelist gathered together materials that illustrate first the teachings of Jesus and then the healing activities of Jesus.

Third, Matthew gathered together five large blocks of the teachings of Jesus, usually described as the five discourses of Matthew. Each block finishes with the same summary phrase (7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1). Furthermore, particular themes can be observed in the five discourses:

5:1—7:29: The Sermon on the Mount
10:1—11:1: Instructions for Proclaiming the Kingdom
13:1–52: Parables of the Kingdom
18:1–35: The Upside-Down Nature of Jesus's Kingdom
24:1—25:46: The End of the Age

COMMENTARY

1:1—2:23
Infancy Narrative

The first two chapters of Matthew not only recount the events surrounding the birth of Jesus but also provide the readers of the Gospels with a context against which to understand Him. Matthew begins by recounting the genealogy of Jesus (vv. 1–17). The lineage recorded here not only includes the forefathers of Jesus back through the line of kings from David through to Josiah (Matt. 1:6–11), a king who did what was right (2 Kin. 22:2), but also takes us all the way back to Abraham (cf. Matt. 1:1), the most-honored ancestor of the Jewish nation. In Matthew, Jesus is presented as a king who has come to His people.

1:1–17. The Genealogy of Jesus. Popular websites on the internet that enable us to trace our ancestry indicate that genealogies still fascinate many people. Even so, the genealogy found in the beginning of the Gospel of Matthew not only startles the modern reader but also often provides a kind of obstacle since it is full of names that are not familiar to most modern readers. What is regarded as important today are the stories about Jesus, not where Jesus comes from. Clearly things were different when the Gospel of Matthew was written. In the first century, the information to be discovered in the genealogy was so important in Jewish circles that it was placed at the front of the Gospel.

What does the genealogy of Jesus reveal about him that would have been obvious to those who first read the Gospel? Matthew establishes that Jesus was the continuation and fulfillment of the OT story about God and His people, Israel. The very first verse illustrates this by connecting Jesus to two important forefathers: David and Abraham. Why David? In the OT, not only does David represent the ideal king, but it was from his offspring that God promised the Messiah would one day arise to claim the throne of His father David (e.g., 2 Sam. 7:12–17; Is. 11:1–11). Matthew demonstrates that Jesus was from the messianic line of David. This is why the phrase "Son of David" plays such a significant role in this Gospel. It is used no fewer than ten times, while it occurs only three times in Mark and three times in Luke. At His triumphant entry into Jerusalem in the last week before His death, the children in the crowd recognized this messianic connection when they cried out, "Hosanna to the Son of David" (Matt. 21:15). Quite understandably, the Jewish leaders were upset. They feared that such messianic fervor might lead to a revolt that would bring the wrath of Rome on their nation. They were even more upset when Jesus refused to reject their messianic sentiments. It becomes clear, however, that Jesus's role as

Messiah was vastly different from that anticipated by the people of Israel. He indeed came to save His people from their enemies. But the real enemy was not Rome but rather the forces of evil that are manifest in sin and death. His path included suffering and the inauguration of a kingdom that was not of this realm. The depiction of Jesus as the Son of David was important enough to make it part of the very first words of the Gospel.

The first verse of the Gospel also links Jesus to Abraham. While David was the most important historical figure in the nation's history, Abraham was its origin. Linking Jesus to Abraham roots Him in the history of God and His people, the Jews. But even more important, it illustrates that it was through Jesus that God's promised blessing would be brought to all the nations (cf. Gen. 12:3).

One aspect of the genealogy has intrigued generations of commentators, namely, its inclusion of four women explicitly: Tamar (Matt. 1:3; cf. Gen. 38:1–30), Rahab (Matt. 1:5; cf. Josh. 2:1–21; 6:17, 23), Ruth (Matt. 1:5; cf. the book of Ruth), and Bathsheba (Matt. 1:6; cf. 2 Sam. 11:1–27). There are at least two possibilities for the inclusion of these four women. First, they all were connected in one way or another to a problematic sexual situation. Tamar purposely lay with her father-in-law to get pregnant; Rahab was a prostitute; Ruth, however innocent her actions may have been, placed herself in a situation that could easily be misinterpreted since she was sleeping next to a man (Boaz) who was not her husband in private, at night; and Bathsheba participated in adultery with David. Yet in all these cases, God not only redeemed the situation but also incorporated each of them into the kingly lineage of David. In highlighting these stories, Matthew may also have been foreshadowing the way God's hand was at work in overcoming the scandal that Mary faced in connection to her own pregnancy (John 8:39–41). Second, each of the women were connected to foreign peoples and Gentiles—Tamar was Canaanite, Rahab was a non-Israelite from Jericho, Ruth was a Moabite, and Bathsheba was the wife of a Hittite. Their inclusion indicates that Gentiles need not be excluded from the purposes of God. It is more than possible that the women are mentioned in the genealogies for both these reasons, given that both divorce and remarriage and the status of Gentiles are themes of interest developed later in the Gospel of Matthew (e.g., Matt. 5:31–32; 10:5; 19:3–9; 28:19).

1:18–25. Birth of Jesus. Matthew begins the story of Jesus with His conception. Mary and Joseph were betrothed but had yet to marry. In all likelihood, Mary was a teenager when she discovered herself to be pregnant. Matthew clearly attributes her pregnancy to supernatural means. As he was writing in Greek, he cited the text of Isaiah 7:14 from the Greek translation of the OT, known as the Septuagint (LXX). The passage says, a *virgin* (*parthenos*) will conceive and bear a son. In the Hebrew text, the word *'almah* is used, which can mean "virgin," but usually means "young woman." For Matthew, though, the word *virgin* in the Septuagint conveyed exactly the circumstances of Jesus's miraculous birth. Mary was pregnant before she experienced sexual relations. The text of Isaiah conveyed another truth. The child would be called "Immanuel," which means "God with us," a particularly appropriate description of Jesus. Joseph was reassured in a dream from God and went ahead and married Mary, although he did not engage in sexual relations with her until after Jesus was born.

Joseph was commanded to call his son Jesus because, as the text points out, He would save His people from their sins (Matt. 1:21). *Iēsous*, generally translated as "Jesus" in the NT and "Joshua" in the OT (LXX), comes from a Hebrew name (*yehoshua'*) that means "God is salvation." Thus the very name of Jesus announces His mission to humankind.

2:1–12. The Magi. Jesus was born in Bethlehem, a town that had considerable significance to the history of Israel because of its association with King David and his forebears. It was the town to which Naomi and Ruth returned after their husbands had died in Moab (Ruth 1:19, 22). It was there that Ruth met and married Boaz, the great-grandfather of David (Ruth 2:4; 4:17). David grew up in Bethlehem (1 Sam. 17:12), and he apparently had warm memories of the taste of water drawn from a well at its gate (2 Sam. 23:15). Bethlehem, as the reply of the high priests and scribes of the people indicates, featured in a messianic prophecy announcing that a ruler would come forth to shepherd God's people (Matt. 2:3–6; Mic. 5:2).

It was in Bethlehem that Jesus was visited by the Magi. They had come to Jerusalem seeking the location of the King whose star they had seen in the sky. They apparently were viewed as people of status and were accorded a social standing that would get them an audience with Herod, the king (Matt. 2:1–3, 7). The gifts they

brought indicated significant wealth. The term "Magi" has a range of meanings. It was used in the ancient world to describe members of a priestly caste of magicians and astrologers who studied and interpreted the stars and were known for their wisdom. They may have come from Arabia, Babylon, or even as far away as Persia. What should not be overlooked, however, is that the Magi would have been regarded as pagans. Yet God revealed to these pagans the news of the Savior's birth through the appearance of a mysterious light in the heavens. As they sought to understand its meaning, they appear to have come across the prophecy of Balaam that promised a Star would come out of Jacob and a Scepter would rise out of Israel (Num. 24:17). Convinced of the importance of this event, they underwent the long and arduous journey to not only find the new King but also, when they found Him, worship Him (Matt. 2:11).

The sacrifice the Magi endured to find the newborn King stands in sharp contrast to the attitude of Herod and the indifference of the religious leaders in Jerusalem. When Herod learned the nature of the Magi's quest, he was troubled (v. 3). He felt threatened that there might be a legitimate heir to the throne of Judea. Since he had no real claim to the throne other than appointment by Rome, he was beset by this fear throughout his entire reign. In an attempt to protect his position, Herod had mercilessly killed any potential rival to his throne, including some of his own sons. Rather than seeking God's mercy and forgiveness as he neared the end of his life, Herod enlisted the help of the priests and scribes—the teachers of the law—to ascertain where the Scriptures predicted Christ would be born (v. 4) in order that he might kill Him.

The response of the religious leaders to the news of the Magi was even worse than that of Herod. The top echelon of the priesthood during that era was comprised mostly of Sadducees, while the scribes of the people would have mainly been Pharisees. While Herod had little genuine religious interest, evident by his lack of knowledge of the Scriptures, the spiritual leaders of the people displayed no interest in even investigating the situation for themselves. While the Magi were willing to travel hundreds of miles following a star with the hope of finding the promised newborn King of Judah, these religious leaders, even with the greater knowledge of the Scriptures to guide them, were not willing to travel the roughly ten miles (16 km) from Jerusalem to Bethlehem.

After the Magi left Jerusalem, the star they had seen arose again and led them to the place where the child Jesus was. Unlike the shepherds who found Jesus in a manger in a stable cave at the time of His birth (as described in Luke's Gospel), the Magi, in Matthew's Gospel, apparently arriving some time later, found Jesus in a house. Joseph was a carpenter, which actually refers to general construction work and does not limit him to working only with wood. The fact that Herod killed all the children two years old and younger (v. 16) suggests some time had passed since Jesus was born. Thus, it is likely that Joseph either built a house for them to live in during their time in Bethlehem or found a residence where they could stay, and it was into this home that the Magi came to worship the child Jesus.

The Magi brought three gifts to Jesus: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. These were very valuable commodities. Gold was greatly valued then, as it is now. Frankincense is one of the ingredients that were specified as incense for use in the OT sanctuary (e.g., Ex. 30:34–36). It was added to some of the offerings of grain that were to be burned (Lev. 2:1–2, 15–16; 24:7). Frankincense itself is a resin from the *Boswellia sacra* tree and was considered very valuable. It was bought and sold across the trade routes of the ancient world (cf. Rev. 18:13). Like frankincense, myrrh (also from the Burseraceae family of trees) is a resin that leaks from wounds in the *Commiphora myrrha* tree and then forms a gum. These trees grow across the Arabian Peninsula, and in Yemen, Somalia, Eritrea, and Ethiopia. Myrrh was used in the ancient world as perfume, a component of incense, and medicine. In OT times it was used in the anointing oil (Ex. 30:23) and in making garments smell good (Ps. 45:8). The gifts given by the Magi represented real wealth and no doubt proved very helpful when the young family fled to Egypt to save the baby Jesus from extermination by Herod the Great (Matt. 2:12–15).

2:13–23. Family of Jesus Flees to Egypt and Then Returns to Galilee. While Herod had secretly arranged with the Magi that they would inform him of the child's location, God intervened to spoil Herod's sinister plans by warning the Magi in a dream not to let Herod know and to return home via a different way that did not take them through Jerusalem (Matt. 2:7, 12). Joseph, also being warned in a dream, took Mary and the baby and fled in haste to Egypt. There they joined a sizable population of nearly a million Jews living in Egypt. This population had been in Egypt for some time. Thus, it is reasonable to suppose that Joseph may have known someone with whom they could stay in Egypt. Joseph, and later Jesus, was a carpenter by trade (Matt. 13:55; cf. Mark 6:3), so he would have found a ready source of employment in Egypt. In the same way that Jacob and his family found refuge in Egypt, so Jesus and his family also temporarily resided in Egypt. Matthew sees in this journey a reenactment of the Exodus story. Jesus was reliving the experiences of Israel (Matt. 2:15).

Once Herod recognized that a trick had been played on him, he adopted an extraordinarily ruthless expedient of slaughtering *all* the male infants in Bethlehem and in all its districts (v. 16). He had asked the Magi concerning the timing of the appearance of the sign. Based on this information, he calculated that if he killed every male child under the age of two, he would then have successfully eliminated his potential rival (v. 16). This terrible deed was carried out, much to the anguish of the parents. Matthew sees in this tragic event another similarity to the experience of Israel in the OT (Matt. 2:17–18; cf. Jer. 31:15). In citing this passage from Jeremiah, Matthew appears to be drawing not only on the sorrow that Rachel experienced during the Babylonian captivity of the children of Israel but also on the hope with which she was comforted in Jeremiah 31:16 with God's promise that in the future the children of Israel would return home. In a similar manner, the mothers of Bethlehem could also find comfort in the hope that would be realized through the sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus the Messiah (Matt. 26:27–28).

After some time had passed, Joseph received another dream, this time informing him that it was safe to return to his homeland. Herod the Great had died, and his kingdom was divided among three of his sons. Joseph decided not to return to Judea, since Archelaus had been appointed there. Soon after coming to power, Archelaus had suppressed a potential revolt by sending soldiers into the temple area, resulting in around three thousand deaths. Despite this, he was confirmed in his appointment, but his reign was short-lived. Archelaus proved to be a bad choice for ruler, and this was recognized by the Romans. After ten years, Judea was placed for many years under the direct control of Roman governors, including Pilate, the governor at the time of Jesus's trial and death nearly thirty years later. So instead of returning to Judea, Joseph and Mary settled in a small village in Galilee called Nazareth, the village where Mary had been living before her marriage to Joseph (Luke 1:26–27). It was therefore likely that Nazareth was Mary's hometown.

3:1—4:25

Announcing God's Kingdom

Matthew introduces the ministry of Jesus by first highlighting the prophetic ministry of John the Baptist. In fulfillment of OT prophecy, John the Baptist appeared as the forerunner to the Messiah. He announced the onset of the kingdom of heaven and called on his fellow Jews to repent and be baptized in preparation for its arrival (Matt. 3:1–12). Jesus Himself responded to John's call. He was baptized, and the Spirit of God descended on Him (vv. 13–17). In preparation for His ministry, the Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness, where He communed with God and then defeated the temptations of the devil that were aimed at derailing His ministry from the start (4:1–11). Jesus then began His ministry in Galilee proclaiming, like John, the arrival of God's kingdom and the need for people to repent (vv. 12–17). Great crowds flocked to hear Jesus speak about this kingdom (vv. 23–25), including four men who would become some of His closest disciples (vv. 18–22).

3:1–12. Preaching of John the Baptist. The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke all begin their accounts of the public ministry of Jesus by describing the activities of John the Baptist in some detail (Matt. 3:1–12; Mark 1:1–8; Luke 3:1–20). Matthew says that John was in the desert of Judea (3:1). As he was baptizing, he was located near the Jordan River (3:13), which flows from the Sea of Galilee down to the Dead Sea via the Jordan Valley. The closer the river gets to the Dead Sea, the more desert-like are the conditions that it flows through.

Curiously enough, we know more about the appearance of John the Baptist than that of Jesus, Paul, Peter, or any of the other disciples. John's appearance is described to make a point. He was clothed in a garment of camel's hair with a leather belt. At the time, garments were usually made from wool, flax, or animal skins (Lev. 13:48). Flax was used to make linen, and linen clothes were viewed as particularly luxurious (e.g., Gen. 41:42; Ex. 28:39; Judg. 14:12; 1 Chr. 15:27; Prov. 31:22, 24). So while not unheard of, camel hair was unusual as a fiber used for clothing. The language used to describe John is likely reminiscent of 2 Kings 1:8, where messengers described Elijah as a hairy man with a leather belt around his waist. In his appearance and

the food he ate, John the Baptist was a prophet like one of the prophets of the OT. While not a major element of the typical diet at the time, locusts (possibly either a reference to an insect or the bean from the locust pod of the carob tree) were eaten by some people. If the reference is to the insect, it must be understood that such was considered a clean food by the Israelites (Lev. 11:22). If it refers to the carob bean, it also underlines the reality that in a desert, one lived on the food that was available. Thus John ate locusts and wild honey.

Not only was John the Baptist a prophet, he is portrayed by the Gospels as the one who prepared the way of the Lord (Is. 40:3). Despite his uncompromising message and demeanor, his ministry proved highly successful, with crowds flocking to hear him from Jerusalem and all the surrounding countryside. Several elements of John's message are highlighted by Matthew. First, John focused his preaching around the nearness of the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 3:2). This would prove to be a key theme in the preaching of Jesus as well (cf. 4:17; 5:3, 10, 20; 7:21; 13:1–50; 16:19; 20:1–16; 22:1–14; 25:1–13). John was very conscious that he and those who listened to him were living at a crucial time in earth's history and that the long-awaited kingdom of God was very close.

Second, the heart of John's mission was a baptism of repentance. Baptism, or ritual bathing, was prescribed in the OT on a number of occasions, particularly when marking the transition from a state of uncleanness to a state of cleanness (Lev. 15:6, 21; 17:15; 22:6; Num. 19:7, 19). Outside the southern gates leading into the temple there were large public baths, known as *miqvaot*, which could be used by

Nazareth and Sepphoris

The size of the ancient village of Nazareth can be determined by plotting the graves found in the area. These graves form a semicircular pattern around an area of about 400 by 100 yards (366 by 91 m). The ancient village would have lain within this area, as graves were a source of uncleanness and therefore kept away from dwellings. There was but one source of water from a well, and the site of the village must have largely fallen within the grounds of the modern Church of the Annunciation. This church is built above a cave, which is said to be the house of Mary's family where she was living when the angel came to announce to her the birth of her son (Luke 1:26–38). Before the present church was erected on the site, a team of archaeologists was able to investigate it to see what remained of the ancient village; however, much evidence had been lost in the construction of the previous four major buildings successively erected on the site. Nevertheless, several significant remains were found by the excavations prior to the building of the present church.

What emerges from the archaeological record is a picture of a very simple village in which some of its inhabitants lived in modified limestone caves (cool in summer, warm in winter) and some lived in surface dwellings. What is clear, though, is that the village was too small and poor to provide full-time work for two carpenters (Joseph and Jesus). It is highly likely that they found work at a nearby city called Sepphoris, which was a mere three miles (5 km) distant. Sepphoris was the capital of Galilee at the time (the capital later was moved to Tiberius), and most importantly, during the time that Jesus was located in Nazareth, it was undergoing a significant rebuilding program. It had been destroyed shortly after the death of Herod the Great, and his son who had been placed in charge of the region—Herod Antipas—chose to rebuild it and use it as the seat of government for Galilee. It is a curious feature of the Gospels that Sepphoris, a city in which Jesus almost certainly spent considerable time, is not mentioned in the Gospel accounts and Tiberias, the other large city in Galilee, is mentioned only as a place that some people who were trying to find Jesus were living (John 6:23). Clearly, with the exception of Jerusalem, where He eventually met His death, Jesus's ministry was not to the larger cities but confined to the small villages of Galilee. This makes it all the more remarkable that within one generation Christianity became an international religious movement with a very significant presence in almost all the major cities of the Roman Empire.

the worshipers just before entering the temple grounds so that they knew that they were indeed religiously clean. This is one of the backgrounds of John's baptism. The other important background of John's baptism was the so-called proselyte baptism.

Proselytes, those converting into Judaism, went through a process of instruction in the laws of the OT. If they decided to become Jews, they would be circumcised (if male), arrange for a sacrifice to be offered at the temple, undertake a solemn oath to keep the law of God, and be baptized. Baptism signified their movement from being unclean Gentiles to becoming clean worshipers of the one true God. John's baptism was being offered uniquely to those who were already Jews. As John pointed out, the fact that someone had Abraham as an ancestor would not result in automatic salvation. Indeed, John said pointedly that God could make children from the very stones around them (Matt. 3:9).

Third, John demanded that his hearers repent. Interestingly enough, since Matthew's original audience was primarily Jewish, no mention is made here of Gentiles. Matthew instead focuses on the many Pharisees and Sadducees coming to John for baptism (v. 7). Luke's Gospel, however, which focuses on salvation for Gentiles and the marginalized, specifically includes soldiers and tax collectors among those who responded to John's call to repentance (cf. Matt. 3:5–12; Luke 3:7–14). Repentance is not merely sorrow for sins committed, but it also involves a turning away from sinful activities to righteous activities. It is a turning around of the life. Finally, John pointed to the One who was to come. There was, he said, One who was coming, and he was not worthy to even carry His sandals (Matt. 3:11). That person would bring not just water but water, spirit (the Spirit of God), and fire (the judgment of God).

3:13–17. Baptism of Jesus. In Matthew, Jesus first appears as an adult when he came to John the Baptist to request baptism. John immediately perceived a problem, in that he believed that he should be baptized by Jesus, not the other way around. Why indeed, should Jesus, who knew no sin (2 Cor. 5:21; cf. John 8:46), need to undergo a baptism of repentance? Jesus told John the Baptist that, as a representative of humanity, He would undertake a baptism of repentance in order to "fulfill all righteousness" (Matt. 3:15). By accepting baptism and by allowing His disciples to baptize (John 4:1–2), Jesus showed that entrance into the community of His followers was by baptism and that to fully become His disciple, one must experience the baptism of repentance. Just as converts to Judaism underwent baptism to symbolize their change of status from unclean to clean, so too Christians need to be washed clean from the guilt of sin and become clean through baptism.

Isaiah had prophesied that the Messiah, the Offspring of Jesse, would be imbued with the Spirit of God (Is. 11:2; 42:1; 61:1). The symbol of the dove is probably related to scriptural passages in which the dove is associated with the end of the waters of the Flood (Gen. 8:8–12), blessing, beauty (Ps. 68:13), and purity (Song 5:2; 6:9). Matthew 3:16–17 also affirms the reality of the three persons in the Trinity and is primary evidence against the ancient (and still present) heresy of modalism, which posits the idea that the Trinity consists of only one Person in three modes or manifestations.

Manuscripts and commentators differ in regard to whether Jesus alone saw the heavens opened (some have "to Him" in Matt. 3:16 and others do not) and heard the voice from heaven. Either way, John witnessed in some way what occurred and then later told the people of it (John 1:29–34). This manifestation was thus for Jesus, John, and the people.

4:1–11. Temptations of Jesus. Immediately after the high point of His baptism, when Jesus saw the Holy Spirit descending on Him and heard the voice of God confirming His special identity, Jesus then was led "by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil" (v. 1). The work of the Spirit in bringing Jesus into the desert was different from what the devil sought to accomplish through temptation during that same time. The Spirit's purpose was to test Jesus in order to prepare and confirm Him for His messianic ministry, while the devil sought to undermine that very thing by prompting Jesus to use His divine prerogatives for His own personal benefit instead of trusting in the Father.

Jesus went into the desert to fast and pray for forty days and nights. The time period is significant. It is frequently associated in Scripture with times of hardship and difficulty. It was the period of time that it rained during the Flood and the time that the waters continued on the earth (Gen. 7:12, 17), and it was one of the time periods in an early prophecy by the prophet Ezekiel (Ezek. 4:6). Since Matthew often describes Jesus's ministry as a reenactment of the experience of Israel, the time period in the desert likely also reflected Israel's forty-year wandering in the wilderness, where their faithfulness was also tested (Deut. 8:2).

But probably the most significant connection is the forty days and forty nights that Moses spent on Mount Sinai when God entered into His covenant with the people of Israel (Ex. 24:18; 34:28; Deut. 9:9–11, 18, 25). Moses was up on the mountain fasting, praying, and learning from God the shape of his mission and the basis of the covenant. So too, Jesus spent forty days in the wilderness in prayer and fasting at the beginning of His mission. Not only was Jesus a model for His followers in His baptism, He was also a model for His followers in the approach He had to His mission. Effective mission is built on effective planning and keen listening to the will of God. It was at the end of this period of time, when Jesus was tired and physically weak from fasting, that the devil sought to overcome Him with temptation.

In a literal sense, each of the temptations described in Matthew 4:1–11 were unique to Jesus. Humans are not tempted to turn stones to bread (v. 3), to leap off tall buildings to demonstrate to the crowds their supernatural powers (v. 6), or to accept sovereignty over all the kingdoms of the earth (vv. 8–9). These were, however, real temptations for Jesus. He did have the power to turn stones into bread, to leap off a tall building and know that He would not be injured, and to realistically take sovereignty over all the kingdoms of the earth. He was the Son of God and could do all these things.

At the same time, however, we must not dismiss the whole experience as if it has no relevance to our own lives. When looked at more closely, we discover in each temptation a general principle that is applicable to all the sons and daughters of God. The issue in the temptation to turn stones to bread is the question of whether we are willing to depend on the Father to meet our needs. This is evident in Jesus's reply (4:4), which is taken from Deuteronomy 8:3: Someone does not live by "bread alone," but by every word coming from God's mouth. These words go back to the testing of Israel in the wilderness. Israel was called to remember how God took care of their physical needs by providing them with manna.

The issue of trusting God is also at the heart of the second temptation. This time the devil urged Jesus to demonstrate the proof of His privileged status as God's Son by throwing Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple. The devil even supported his suggestion by appealing to the promise of God's protection of the godly in Psalm 91:11–12. Jesus, however, rejected the devil's twisted interpretation of Scripture (Matt. 4:7). He refused to try to manipulate God by demanding a miracle in response to a self-inflicted peril whose intent would merely be to win the applause of the people. Jesus chose to have the kind of trust in God that requires no test. We too are not to demand God's miraculous intervention in our lives as proof of His love but to trust in Him regardless of our circumstances. After all, God promises to preserve His followers not from death but through death. It is this conviction that has given true hope to God's followers through the centuries and strengthened the Christian martyrs, who gave their lives rather than surrender their faith.

In presenting the kingdoms of the world to Jesus in the final temptation, Satan was essentially offering to Him the possession of the kingdoms of this world without having to go through the cross (cf. Dan. 7:14, 27). It was a quick way for Jesus to accomplish His mission without involving His suffering and death. All Jesus had to do was worship him and thus acknowledge that the devil was the true master of the world with the right to give rule to whomever he willed. The underlying principle behind this temptation is one that many have unfortunately surrendered to throughout earth's history—serve the devil and rule the world. In each of these temptations, Jesus aligned Himself with the struggles and temptations that face all humanity. Yet where Adam, Israel, and all of humanity have failed, Jesus stood firm and emerged triumphant. He is the true Israelite, the faithful Son of God.

Jesus's response to the temptations the devil brought against Him is informative. He did not draw on His status or His special knowledge. Rather, He cited Scripture as the authoritative arbiter of how He should act. It is true that knowing Scripture is not a guarantee of correct action, as the devil himself cited Scripture to Jesus (Matt. 4:6), but Jesus showed that those who carefully read Scripture to ascertain the will of God will be able to find there a trustworthy guide.

4:12–17. Beginning of the Galilean Ministry. On hearing that John the Baptist had been arrested, Jesus moved from Nazareth to Capernaum. We find later that it was Herod Antipas who arrested John (Matt. 14:3–4), and Nazareth would have been uncomfortably close to Sepphoris (Herod's capital) for a relative and associate of John. Jesus moved to a small fishing village called Capernaum, which was located on the northern shores of the Sea of Galilee. Archaeologists have found remains of this village, which show it to have extended about 800 yards (732 m) along the shore at its greatest extent and to have had between 600 and 1,500 inhabitants at the time of Jesus.

Like other villages in the region, Capernaum was constructed of small groups of houses clustered around courts paved with rough stones. The walls of the houses were also constructed of field stones, and while some roofs were covered with roof tiles, many others were constructed from wooden beams covered with packed earth (see Mark 2:4). Excavations of these ancient homes have uncovered the remains of a first-century home near the village's synagogue (Mark 1:21) that early Christians identified as the house of Peter. The walls of the house are full of Christian inscriptions that attest to its use as place of worship. Today a modern church is built over the site where an ancient church once stood. Archeologists have also discovered a wharf that extended along the shore, which would have been used to tie up the fishing boats that were owned by fishermen living in Capernaum, fishermen like the brothers Simon Peter and Andrew, who became disciples of Jesus (Matt. 4:18–22).

Matthew points out that Capernaum was in the territory of the Israelite tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali, and he cites a prophecy of Isaiah that found its fulfillment in Jesus's move to Capernaum. Alongside the reference to Zebulun and Naphtali, the focus of Matthew's attention would have been on the portion of the quotation that says people dwelling in darkness will see a great light (v. 16; cf. Is. 9:2). This was fulfilled through the ministry of Jesus. Much has sometimes been made of the description "Galilee of the Gentiles" in the quotation from Isaiah (Matt. 4:15; Is. 9:1), but this should not be misunderstood to mean that Galilee was exclusively inhabited or controlled by Gentiles. Archaeologists working in Galilee have discovered that many of the towns and villages that were occupied at the time of Jesus had been first established during the time of the Hasmoneans.

The Hasmoneans were a Jewish family who came to power in the Maccabean Revolt, when religiously motivated Jews threw off the rule of the Greek Empire. The territory that was under Hasmonean control rather strictly observed the Mosaic law. In 104 B.C., the Hasmoneans took control of Galilee and forced the local inhabitants to convert to Judaism and required the males to be circumcised. This changed somewhat with the arrival of the Romans, who strengthened the Gentile cities of the Decapolis. One can consult a map of the Holy Land from the time of Jesus and discover that the Decapolis covered a territory that lay partly between Judea and Galilee. Some in the crowds who heard Jesus came from the Decapolis (Matt. 4:25; Mark 7:31). By way of contrast to the Gentile Decapolis, with its pagan temples and diet that included pork, Judea and Galilee remained strongly influenced by the Jewish religion during this time period. Among the most active promoters and practitioners of Judaism within the small towns and villages in which Jesus ministered were the Pharisees. Their influence also extended to the highest reaches of local government in Jerusalem (e.g., Acts 23:1–9). Thus, the Galilee of Jesus's day was not entirely made up of Gentiles. It was rather a region with mixed population of Jews and Gentiles. In the ministry of Jesus, these people who were in darkness received great light.

The Pinnacle of the Temple

The temple in Jerusalem was a spectacular site to behold in Jesus's day. It had been marvelously expanded and rebuilt during the reign of Herod the Great. The entire temple complex spanned some thirty-six acres (.15 sq. km). It could accommodate around 200,000 pilgrims at one time during the great Jewish festivals. The temple proper was 150 feet (45 m) tall, and the entire Temple Mount was surrounded by walls that were approximately 100 feet (30 m) tall. Since the temple was surrounded by a valley on every side but the north, the entire complex towered over ancient Jerusalem.

The pinnacle of the temple, where the devil tempted Jesus a second time, may have been the southwest corner of the wall surrounding the Temple Mount and the place from which the call to worship was made. In Jerusalem, among the rubble at the base of the wall below the pinnacle of the temple mentioned in Matthew 4:5, archeologists discovered a stone inscription that can be roughly translated "to the place [lit. house] of trumpeting, to proclaim. . . ." Numbers 10:1–10 describes two trumpets that were used on special occasions to summon the people together, especially for religious feasts, but sometimes for war.

The "place of the trumpeting" on the southwest corner of the temple was visible from a large portion of the city. To one side was a street, to the other the main stairs by which worshipers went into the temple courtyard. If Jesus were but to fling Himself safely off the pinnacle of the temple in sight of all the worshipers, He would gain instant notoriety and instant acknowledgment of His special powers. It would be a spectacular miracle showing what He could do and would immediately put Him at the center of the attention of all those living at Jerusalem.

4:18–22. Calling Four Fishermen. Jesus is given many important titles within the Gospels. He is called Lord (e.g., Matt. 8:6), Son of David (e.g., Matt. 1:1; 20:30–31), Son of God (e.g., Matt. 14:33; 26:63), and Savior (in only three verses in the Gospels, not in Matthew: Luke 1:69, 2:11; John 4:42). Jesus describes Himself as the Son of Man (e.g., Matt. 9:6; 12:8). All of these titles given to Jesus are considered important in understanding who He is. But the title that gains the least attention is teacher or rabbi. This title is given to Jesus at least as often as the title "Lord" (e.g., Matt. 8:19; 9:11; 12:38; 17:24). Jesus was seen as acting as a teacher by those around Him.

The title rabbi became a very important title in Rabbinic Judaism. The writings of Rabbinic Judaism (e.g., the Mishnah and the Talmud) reveal that the rabbis considered themselves the inheritors of the traditions of the Pharisees. They also outline how a rabbi conducted himself. Gathered around him were a circle of disciples, and the rabbi spent his time instructing them, especially in the law of God and how it should be interpreted. Living in a time when access to books was limited, their teaching methods involved a considerable amount of oral instruction with an emphasis on memorization.

One can see how the activities of Jesus could lead others to think of Him as a rabbi. There was a circle of disciples gathered around Him, He taught His disciples, and His teaching often touched on points relating to how the law of God should be observed (e.g., Matt. 5:17–48; 12:1–14). There are some crucial differences, though, between Jesus and other rabbis. For example, disciples usually sought out a teacher with whom to study, but Jesus took the initiative and sought out disciples Himself (4:18–22). While He spent much time in teaching, He did not choose disciples only so that they could learn. He chose them so that they would become fishers of people (4:19). Jesus's plan was that His teaching should be followed by action, that adherence to His teaching would bring about something new. If one were to use a modern word, the disciples were to become evangelists, as well as teachers in their own right (which was the goal of the disciples of the rabbis of the Pharisees). These fishermen were not trained in the schools of the rabbis, but they were industrious and astute businessmen.

Describing Peter and Andrew as fishers of people is more than appropriate, given that they were already fishermen. Good fishermen must possess some qualities that are uniquely appropriate for those who would be evangelists. Fishermen must have patience, perseverance, courage, and an eye for the right moment and location. Because they did not want their shadows to fall across the water and thus disturb and disburse a school of fish, they fished at night. It was hard work.

One striking thing about the interchange between Jesus and the four disciples He called is their apparent carelessness of prudent behavior. Peter and Andrew were fishing when Jesus called them, and they just abandoned their nets, thus leaving what must have represented an important part of what allowed them to earn a living. James and John, the sons of Zebedee, abruptly abandoned their duty to help their father with the family business (fishing from boats) and walked away to follow Jesus. In the response of these disciples, the message is clear. Jesus must have absolute priority in the lives of His followers. If one wanted to imagine what it would be like to meet Jesus, perhaps Peter, Andrew, James, and John can provide some insight. Jesus was the kind of person who could come up and ask people to drop everything and follow Him, and they did so immediately.

4:23–25. Ministering to a Great Multitude. In many respects, this passage serves as an introduction to what follows. It describes the activities of Jesus as teaching, preaching, and healing. In Matthew 4:23 we find a summary of Jesus's activities consisting of teaching and healing. Matthew 4:24–25 outlines the extent of the influence of Jesus. His reputation spread not just to Galilee but to Judea and Jerusalem, where the religion of the Jews was given serious attention. But it extended beyond there to the Gentile regions of Syria (v. 24), the Decapolis, and the region beyond Jordan (v. 25).

5:1—7:29

Discourse 1: The Sermon on the Mount

It is noteworthy that the incidents recorded in Matthew 5:1—11:30 are found in a different sequence and in different contexts in Mark and Luke. This is in contrast to the rest of the Synoptic Gospels, where the same incidents are described in the same order and usually even the details in the incidents are given in the same order. The material in Matthew 5–11, then, is arranged differently and likely for a specific purpose. Matthew 5–7 provides examples of Jesus's teachings, while Matthew 8–9 provides examples of Jesus's healing activities. Matthew 10 then describes the mission command given to the disciples of Jesus (including those who read the Gospel of Matthew). That the Evangelist has deliberately grouped the materials of Matthew 5–9 to reflect the teaching and healing activities of Jesus is confirmed by 9:35–38, which begins with almost the exact wording as Matthew 4:23.

The wording of Matthew 4:23–25 is very close to that of 9:35–37. Both passages report that Jesus went about teaching in the synagogues, preaching the gospel, and healing all kinds of illnesses. The similarity in wording no doubt reflects Matthew's intention, because between the two reports are found a collection of the *teachings* of Jesus and an account of several of His *healing miracles*. Matthew 5–7 is normally called the Sermon on the Mount, and it consists of many of the teachings of Jesus.

5:1–12. Secrets of Happiness. As must have happened several times in His ministry, because He was surrounded by crowds, Jesus went to a place where many could hear Him speak. In most cities where they lived, the local Romans built a theater. Archeological remains of Greek and Roman theaters can be seen throughout the countries surrounding the Mediterranean to this day. Theaters were arranged so that the actors stood on a flat surface in front of a series of seats that rose around them. This enabled a large number of listeners to hear what was said on the stage. Matthew 5:1 is one of two places in Matthew where Jesus positioned Himself in a natural theater to speak to the crowd (the other is 13:2). In going up to a mountainside, Jesus was able to position Himself at the base of a natural slope, where many people could sit around Him and above Him and still hear His words.

It is highly significant that the first teachings of Jesus that are found in the Sermon on the Mount deal with happiness. The Greek word *makarios* is often translated with the English word "blessed." Other modern translations use the word "happy." The word "happy" represents the core meaning of the word *makarios*, although it is a special kind of happiness and not a subjective state as can be misunderstood in English. In the Greek-speaking world, it was the kind of happiness associated particularly with the gods. Therefore it refers to happiness on a grand scale—a blessedness. Jesus began the Sermon on the Mount by outlining the secrets of real, deep-down happiness. And some of the things that He identified as making people happy are quite different compared with what modern consumers might believe will make them happy. Perhaps a new car will engender happiness, or a great house with a wonderful view, perhaps success at school or work. All of these things are associated with happiness, but Jesus said there are other things that lead to a deeper, richer, long-lasting happiness.

First, He said that the "poor in spirit" are happy (v. 3). This almost seems paradoxical. How can the poor in spirit be happy? Surely that is a description of mild depression, of sorrow. Yet here is the profound secret of Christian salvation. The proud and the strong are not those fit for the kingdom of God, but those are fit who fully realize that they are poor in spirit. The meaning of that is perhaps explained by the next two "beatitudes."

Jesus then applied the same word, *makarios*, to "those who mourn" and to "the meek" (vv. 4–5). It is true that real life contains much that is pleasant: family meals, beautiful sunsets, the pleasure of work well done. Jesus Himself was known as somebody who liked a good meal. In fact, He was charged by the Pharisees as welcoming sinners and eating with them (e.g., Matt. 9:11; Luke 15:2). Yet in the Gospel accounts He is equally found with those in trouble or in mourning. Jesus knew the rich tapestry of life, with its pleasures and its sorrows. At one level, when He said that those who mourn are happy or blessed, He was stating a hard truth. We do learn a great deal from the trials that touch us in life.

There is probably another level of meaning, though, that should be understood from the beatitude "Blessed are those that mourn" (Matt. 5:4). It is not only those who are physically poor who are "blessed" (v. 3) but those who are poor *in spirit*. So it is likely that those who mourn include those mourning for their sinful state. Christianity is a religion that concerns itself with the need of humans for a Savior. Paul says that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). Jesus, like John the Baptist before Him, emphasized the need to repent (Matt. 4:17; cf. 3:2). Thus the sorrow that will be comforted is a sorrow that grows out of a sincere repentance for sins.

Jesus stated that those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be blessed/happy and will be filled or satisfied (5:6), continuing the previous theme. Living in a place where water supplies could sometimes be made precarious by drought and where the poor sometimes had insufficient food to eat, Jesus was talking to those who knew real thirst and real hunger. He said that those will be filled who desire righteousness with the same yearning as those dying of thirst seek water and those dying of hunger seek food. This righteousness is something desired and sought after, the goal of the Christian's life.

The other "blessings" that Jesus proclaimed are also surprising. The meek (v. 5) are rarely held up for esteem in the modern world, and even less so in the world in which Jesus lived. Yet Jesus said they will inherit the earth. He also commended the pure in heart (v. 8) and peacemakers (v. 9). Furthermore, He said that the merciful will obtain mercy (v. 7). This resonates with one of the most terrible things found on the lips of Jesus in the Gospels. At the end of the parable about the servant who was thrown into prison because he refused to forgive his fellow servant, Jesus warned that His Father will refuse to forgive those who have not forgiven others from their hearts (Matt. 18:35). The measure by which we are forgiven is the measure by which we forgive other people.

The last two beatitudes deal with persecution (5:10–12). The early followers of Jesus often followed Him at the risk of their own lives. Jesus Himself was crucified; Stephen, an early convert, was stoned to death (Acts 7:57–60); James the brother of John was killed (Acts 12:2); Peter and Paul were arrested (Acts 12:3; 21:33) and eventually killed; and the list could be extended. Even today there are parts of the world where being a Christian is dangerous. In such places, Christians can take courage from Jesus's message that they should be glad and rejoice because of a great reward in heaven (Matt. 5:12).

5:13–16. Salt and Light. Jesus said that there is something quite distinctive about His followers. Although only a small fraction of the total population, like salt, they act as preservers of society. While representing strong moral standards, they also do so in a way that makes society "taste" more interesting. Jesus stated that those who are Christians cannot hide it but will be recognized by the good that they do (v. 16). And indeed this is so. Christians have been at the forefront of the development of education and health care. Christians have been characterized by their concern for the poor and downtrodden in society. While there have been some regrettable exceptions, by and large Christians have been a force for good in society. And this is just as Jesus would have it.

5:17–48. Jesus's Teaching about the Law. Matthew 5:17–20 introduces the theme of the rest of chapter 5, namely, how Christians should understand the laws found in the OT. Jesus insisted that He came not to destroy the law and the prophets. Rather, He came to fulfill them (v. 17). He then said that until heaven and earth pass away, not even one *iota* or *keraia* will change from the law. The *iota* indicates *yod*, the smallest letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The *keraia* is a small projection on the side of a Hebrew letter that differentiates it from another that it closely resembles, like the difference between the letter f and the letter t in English. Jesus insisted that anyone who urges others to disregard even the least law of the Bible shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven (v. 19). A Christian's righteousness should be greater than the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees (v. 20). This is rather surprising, given that the Pharisees were noted for their zeal in keeping even the smallest detail of the biblical laws.

In talking about the law, Jesus introduced the concept of righteousness, implying that Christians should demonstrate their righteousness by observing the law in a more rigorous manner than even the Pharisees. If one were to ask Jesus how many of the laws found in the Bible should be observed by Christians, clearly His answer would be "All of them." This is a startling answer in light of the many changes between what is commanded in the OT and the actual practice of Christians today. Jesus explained what he meant through a series of six examples from the law. Two of them (vv. 21–26, 27–30) are found in the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:1–17), while the rest are scattered throughout the other law codes, and one perhaps by implication in the Psalms.

The first law that Jesus chose as an illustration of how the righteousness of His followers would exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees is "You shall not murder" (5:21; cf. Ex. 20:13). By saying that anyone angry with his brother or sister (some manuscripts have "without a cause") will be liable to judgment (Matt. 5:21–22), Jesus highlighted what is new about the relationship between His followers and the law. When they read "You shall not murder," Christians should understand "Do not be angry." On His own authority ("but *I* say"), Jesus counteracted the tendency of the rabbis ("you have heard that it was said") to dwell on the external elements of the law. He reminded them that an external action (murder) is the outgrowth of an internal emotion (hate). In applying this law to an internal state, He also showed the people that the law was actually much deeper than the external righteousness of the Pharisees (v. 20). God had always been interested in the hearts and minds of His people being conformed to His will (e.g., Deut. 6:4–6; 10:16; 11:13, 18; Pss. 24:4; 51:10), and His people had been warned of the dangers of harboring anger (Ps. 37:8; Prov. 14:17; 16:32; 19:11; 22:24; Eccl. 7:9), but many of the rabbis tended to emphasize only external conformity to the law.

Jesus also drew out a practical spiritual application to His command not to become angry. If on the way to worship we remember that somebody has something against us, then we should turn back and become reconciled with that person (Matt. 5:23–24). It is just not possible to worship properly if there is something between us and somebody else in which we are at fault. Jesus then gave very practical advice about what to do in a time when a serious dispute would probably end up before the courts. He pointed out that it is much better to resolve the matter if at all possible because once the processes of law get involved, bitter results may follow (vv. 25–26).

The prohibition against adultery found in the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:14) is the second example Jesus chose to illustrate how the righteousness of His followers is to be greater than that of the scribes and Pharisees (Matt. 5:20). Just as with the law on murder, Jesus emphasized the motive that lies behind the sin and in doing so, reminded the people that our thoughts are important because it is from our hearts that our actions flow (Matt. 12:34; 15:19–20). Strictly speaking, adultery is a physical act, but Jesus went behind the act to the motive. Anyone who looks at a woman with lust in his heart has already committed adultery with her in his heart (5:28). Again, it should be noted that what Jesus was teaching was already found in the Scriptures. His people were warned against harboring sinful lust in the mind, not only engaging in the act of adultery (Ex. 20:17; Job 31:1; Prov. 6:23–25). Jesus then suggested that somebody who finds his or her eye is a cause of sin should cut it out and throw it away. Likewise, a hand should be cut off if it is the cause of a sin. He concluded that it is better to lose an eye or a hand than with two eyes or two hands to be cast into hell (Matt. 5:29–30). Jesus was not talking in literal terms. The extreme language of Jesus emphasized the importance of what He said. Where there is a choice, one should not seek out things that give access to sin or put oneself in a position where sin is likely. Jesus insisted we should be very serious about that.

Although only two verses long, the remarks of Jesus concerning divorce have generated a very large volume of commentary by academics and nonacademics alike. This can be attributed to the role that the church has had in matters of divorce, both historically and today. For example, over much of the history of the English court system, matters of divorce were handled in the church courts, not the king's courts. This created a substantial body of case law that formed the basis of many subsequent court decisions, although the last few decades have seen much of this swept away. Both the church courts and for many years the secular courts looked to this verse for guidance as to the legitimate grounds for divorce. Key among these was the idea that divorce could be granted on the basis of adultery. And indeed, that is one meaning of the key Greek word, *porneia* (v. 32), which is the one exception Jesus made to His prohibition against divorce.

It is true that the meaning of *porneia* in the Greek NT can include adultery. But in fact the word has a wider meaning. *Porneia* is used by Paul to describe the improper relationship between a man and his father's wife (1 Cor. 5:1), having sexual relations with a prostitute (1 Cor. 6:15–18), and the temptations to sexual pleasure outside of marriage (1 Cor. 7:2). The word *porneia* and a related verb, *porneuō*, are used often in Revelation to describe the activities of the whore Babylon (e.g., Rev. 14:8; 17:2–4; 18:3; 19:2). Thus the NT evidence suggests that the word *porneia* in Matthew 5:32 has the meaning of sexual immorality in any of its forms.

But to read Matthew 5:31–32 only to discover reasons that a marriage may be dissolved is to miss the point made by Jesus. The law regulating divorce quoted by Jesus (Deut. 24:1) was designed to protect the divorced women by providing her with evidence that she was actually divorced and that she could remarry if she wished. Jesus reacted against a reading of this law that suggested it was fine to divorce as long as the legal forms were met. By way of contrast, Jesus insisted that marriage was permanent. Yet He was also realistic and recognized that there are some events (i.e., marital unfaithfulness) that will sunder a marriage. But His point was that divorce should be a last resort, even under those circumstances. Marriage among Christians is a lifelong commitment before God, family, and friends not to be lightly entered into or lightly cast aside when it turns out that a partner is a real human being, not the perfect partner of our dreams.

Jesus then commented on the law that oaths of a religious nature should be kept (Matt. 5:33; cf. Lev. 19:12; Num. 30:2; Deut. 23:21). Oaths were an important part of business and personal transactions in the ancient world. The Romans had developed a system of written legal contracts, but these existed alongside a system of sealing agreements with oaths. In the Greco-Roman world oaths usually invoked the name of a god as a partner to the contract. The idea being that the god would ensure disaster would befall the one who did not keep the oath. Jews could not do this because they respected the name of God so much they did not use His name in open speech. Jesus used some of the circumlocutions that the Jews used rather than utter God's name: heaven, earth, Jerusalem, one's own head (Matt. 5:34–36). Some types of oath were used because they sounded good but were held to be nonbinding on the one who swore them. Jesus spoke out against this practice. For His followers, not only oaths but all speech should be binding. The Christian's reputation should be such that if they agreed to do something, then others would know they would keep their word. In many cases, nothing further is needed than simple affirmations or denials (v. 37).

The original law regarding legal cases asking for redress over personal harm—eye for eye and tooth for tooth (Ex. 21:23–25; Lev. 24:19–20)—had the salutary effect of limiting the process of vendetta. In a society that placed much enforcement of the law in the hands of the family, the risk was that a serious injury to a member of the family might be responded to by a larger, even fatal, injury to any member of the opposing family. This process could get out of hand very quickly. Thus, limiting personal damages to strictly equivalent damage served an important purpose. Yet Jesus said not to resist evil with violence. He said that if somebody hits us on the right cheek, we should respond by turning the other cheek to that person (Matt. 5:39). He said that if somebody would borrow from us, then we should freely give what is asked. If someone has the right to demand that we go with them for one mile (1.5 km), we should go two miles (3 km) (v. 41). These are some of the most challenging words that Jesus is recorded as speaking: Who today wishes to just lend to anybody who asks? Who today would willingly allow himself or herself to be beaten without taking thought of reprisal? Yet one has to do no more than think of the powerful way these principles were used by Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. to change whole societies to realize the power in the words of Jesus.

There are several important points of interpretation in the sayings of Jesus recorded in Matthew 5:43–48, and many of them have significant implications regarding how Christians should live their lives. The first of these issues relates to the source from which Jesus was quoting (v. 43). Clearly the first part of this phrase comes from Leviticus 19:18. However, the second part of this phrase is not found in the OT. Some have pointed to phrases similar to this in the Dead Sea Scrolls. Possibly this had become a saying that was common in Jesus's day, in the same way that some today misquote popular Bible texts.

The second and more important issue is the meaning. Here Jesus emphasized the importance of not taking vengeance into our own hands but rather trusting God to take care of justice. Jesus did not address the hatred aspect here in Matthew, focusing his words primarily on the need to love.

Jesus then pointed out that loving those who are our friends or relatives is not extraordinary behavior. It is but what is normal among humans (Matt. 5:46–47). What distinguishes Christians, though, is that they love not only those who love them but also those who hate them (v. 44).

Jesus did not leave it there. He said that in this matter, His followers must be perfect (*teleios*) in the way that God is perfect. Here interpreters, quite rightly, usually make reference to the meaning of the Greek word *teleios*. The word *teleios* can be used of an unblemished animal used in a sacrifice, something that is mature (having completed natural development), someone who has completed an action, and an animal such as a sheep that is full-grown. Some Bible versions translate it as "perfect," and others as "mature." But one has to ask how different it is to say that Christians should be as mature as God is mature compared to saying they should be perfect as God is perfect. Both ideals seem to be very far out of reach. With respect to our enemies, as the context indicates, the followers of Jesus are expected to be like God by loving them. Thus they will be perfect as their heavenly Father is perfect.

6:1–4. Almsgiving. In Matthew 6:1–4, Jesus spoke about two activities naturally associated with Jewish and Christian piety: behaving correctly and giving gifts to the poor. He addressed the motive that lies behind both activities. With the first—behaving correctly—Jesus pointed out that it is possible to do the right thing for the wrong reason. If the right thing is done so that others think better of the person doing it, then it will not be rewarded by God (6:1).

With the matter of giving gifts to the poor, Jesus painted a word picture that describes how the wealthy would garner support from the poor. Like the rest of the cultures surrounding the Mediterranean, this was an honor-based society. An individual's status in society was usually more important to that person than wealth. Indeed, wealth was used to build up positive relationships with social peers and relationships of patronage with social inferiors, who became clients. In wider Greco-Roman society, accepting gifts created a client/patron relationship, and even in the smaller villages in which Jesus ministered, the exchange of gifts was an important part of building positive relationships. Thus the wealthy would maintain their place of honor in society by the gifts they were able to give, and those who accepted such gifts were socially obliged to act and think positively toward the giver.

Jesus attacked this practice. He said that those who give gifts to the poor for such reason have already received their reward. If one wishes to be rewarded by God, then one must give gifts secretly so that God, who knows all things, will reward the giver. Yes, Christians, like Jews before them, will be characterized by their generosity to the poor. But this generosity is based on their knowledge that God has given them so much that they are thus motivated to share with others the goodness that has been provided to them.

6:5–18. Prayer and Fasting. Next Jesus touched on the heart of a Christian's relationship with the Godhead. He made two observations about prayer and provided a model prayer. Jesus first warned His followers not to seek public recognition for their piety. In a custom dating back several hundred years before the time of Jesus (e.g., Dan. 6:10), pious Jews were to pray facing the temple three times a day. Those wishing to emphasize their piety conducted this prayer in public places, such as the street corners mentioned by Jesus (Matt. 6:5). He warned that those who practiced their piety in public for public reward already have all the reward they will get (v. 5). Jesus said to pray in secret and that the God who sees in secret will reward you (v. 6).

The other type of prayer that Jesus warned against is long-winded, repetitive prayer (v. 7). He likened this to pagans who think that they will be heard because they keep repeating the same request over and over. Interestingly enough, in a couple of parables recorded in Luke, Jesus did teach that persistence is an important part of praying (e.g., Luke 11:5–13; 18:1–8), but there is a difference between persistence and vain repetition. Jesus noted a truism when He said that God already knows what we need before we ask (Matt. 6:8). Prayer, then, is more for our recognition of our needs than for informing God what we need. He already knows, and He cares for us. Meditating on our spiritual and other needs and determining which ones to take to God in prayer is an important exercise in understanding ourselves. Once the realization has been reached, there is no need to belabor the point. God already knows.

Jesus then provided a model prayer, usually called the Lord's Prayer, including six requests: three dealing with God, His kingdom, and His will and three consisting of the needs of the worshiper. It is noteworthy that the model prayer is expressed in the plural: "we," "our," "us," rather than "I," "my," "me." The model prayer is a collective prayer. At a minimum, this makes it very suitable to say this prayer in a group or in a worship service. But perhaps there is more to it than that. Perhaps, the "we," "our," and "us" are to remind us that we are part of a wider community of believers, part of a movement of faith, and part of a group of people awaiting our Lord's return.

The first word of the prayer in Greek is "Father." The prayer is addressed to "Our Father in heaven." There are many earthly fathers but only one heavenly Father. What an extraordinary privilege to address the Creator of the universe, the Almighty, as Father! Jesus Himself addressed His Father as "Abba" (Mark 14:36), which may not necessarily mean "Daddy" but which nevertheless expressed a sense of intimacy or closeness between the child and the father in the possessive, meaning something like "my father." Paul also uses "Abba" as a particularly appropriate way to address God (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6). But just the word for God—Father—answers questions relating to what kind of God Christians worship. Human fathers are not perfect. Some are irritable when they should be patient, lenient when they should be stern, harsh when they should be loving. But fallible though they are, human fathers provide us with an understanding of how we should relate to God. Like a good father, God is able to make decisions that are for our ultimate good rather than our short-term desires. But we can trust Him to always act in our best interests. Like a good father, God is willing to hear our point of view. He is interested in our actions, and He praises us when we do well and supports us when we fall short. This God is in marked contrast with the Greek and Roman gods, who tended to be portrayed as capricious and vengeful. The God whom Christians worship, in contrast with those gods, is loving and patient.

That we address God as Father also determines our relationship with others. All humanity has a common Father—God. Just as human fathers are fallible, human families are imperfect. But once again a human family provides a good model of what it should be like worshiping and working together in local churches. A family is a group of people so secure in their belonging that they are free to be themselves and to speak their mind. Just because two family members have a strong difference of opinion does not mean that they are not part of the same family—we are in the family together. We support each other in times of trouble, help each other out, give each other advice. But we are all bound by the fact that we live together, and other members of the family constitute our closest human relationships. If God is truly our Father, and if we all worship together in our local church as part of the same family, then that changes how we interact with each other.

The next petition to hallow God's name makes a connection between two concepts that perhaps need a fuller explanation. The imperative "to make holy" draws on the concept of holiness, which has a very rich background in the OT. For example, after God made the heavens, the earth, and all living creatures on the earth and in the sea and in the air in one week, God culminated the Creation of the world by creating the Sabbath, which He blessed and set aside (made holy) because He rested from His work on that day. Consequently, His people should also rest from their work on that day (Gen. 2:1–3; cf. Ex. 20:8–11). Other things set aside for worshiping God were also described as holy. Tithes were considered "holy to the Lord" (e.g., Lev. 27:30), as was some of the booty of war (Josh. 6:19), some land holdings (Jer. 31:40; Ezek. 48:14), and the priests (2 Chr. 35:3). Most importantly, the people of Israel were considered to be "holy to the Lord" (Deut. 7:6; 14:2), and this meant that they would not do some things that were acceptable for the non-Israelite (e.g., Deut. 14:21). Holy things, people, places, and times were dedicated to God for the worship of God.

The term "name" is sometimes used in English to represent "reputation" (e.g., a person had a "good name"), and almost everybody considers that it is important to keep a good name. An individual's name was even more important in the ancient world (Prov. 22:1). It represented a person's reputation. For example, the name Nabal means fool, and such he was in his dealings with David—he had to be rescued by the quick thinking of his wife (1 Sam. 25:1–37). When Moses met God at the burning bush and had accepted his commission to go to Egypt to free the children of Israel from slavery, he particularly asked God for His name. God told him to tell the Israelites, "'I AM has sent me to you'" (Ex. 3:14). God is the great self-existent One. His name is "I AM." Elsewhere God's names include "God Almighty" (Gen. 17:1; *el shadday*), the Most High God (Gen. 14:18; *el 'elyon*), the Lord your God (Ex. 34:23; *'adon yahweh*), and the Lord of Hosts (1 Sam. 1:3; *yahweh tseba'ot*). God's name was particularly associated with the tabernacle and temple, where God was to be worshiped (e.g., 2 Sam. 7:13). It was possible to profane the name of God by sacrificing children to Molech (also "Molek"; Lev. 18:21; 20:3), by swearing falsely in the name of God (Lev. 19:12), by mistreating slaves (Jer. 34:16), and by giving Him gifts while still worshiping idols (Ezek. 20:39). By hallowing God's name, Jesus combined two concepts: the concept of holiness and the concept of God's name. Given that God's name can be profaned by the sins of His people, the best way to sanctify His name is for His people to be holy.

The model prayer then says, "Your kingdom come" (Matt. 6:10). Those familiar with the teachings of Jesus will know that many of them were devoted to the kingdom of heaven/God, something particularly highlighted in Matthew. Most of the parables in chapter 13, for example, deal with the kingdom of heaven in one way or another. The kingdom is not only God's rule on earth but also something that can be entered (19:24). In this age, most of those in the kingdom are found within the church (13:24–29, 36–42, 47–50), but there will come a time in the future when Jesus will return to earth and sit on His throne (25:31–46). While there is a sense in which the kingdom of God is a present reality that is manifest in the hearts and lives of His followers, the focus here is on that latter final kingdom. As such, the petition is not simply that good will be manifest in a world of evil but that God's kingdom might be established in all its fullness and that God's will might be the reality that actuates all of creation. Therefore the prayer for the coming kingdom is also a prayer for the soon return of Jesus. This hope is significant for the present, as the next petition of the Lord's Prayer asks that God's will be done on earth as in heaven (6:10). God's will is already completely followed in heaven. The prayer seeks for God's will to be followed on earth.

The second half of the Lord's Prayer deals with petitions for those praying. The first is for God to provide bread daily (v. 11). Once again, it is bread sufficient for "us." There is no selfishness in this prayer with regard to who receives God's blessing or how much is asked. It is bread that is sufficient only for the day. Any more would be greed. Of course, at the time of Jesus bread was made every day because without refrigeration, airtight containers, or preservatives such as we have today, bread would go stale very quickly. But the followers of Jesus are concerned only with sufficiency, not with surplus. They are able to trust their Lord to continue to supply their needs. Does this mean that Christians should make no provision for winter months, when there is no wheat to be harvested? Of course not. Jesus urged Christians to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves (10:16). But we should also realize that the focus of this petition is not simply about our daily food; it is about trusting in God for each day's needs.

The last petition of the Lord's Prayer and Jesus's next comment is probably the most sobering verse in all of Scripture. We are to ask God to forgive our sins only as far as we have forgiven others their sins (6:12, 14–15). The petition shows the true heart of Christian behavior—Christians live a life of forgiveness because they have been forgiven much. Jesus warns us that if we do not forgive others, neither will we be forgiven (vv. 14–15). Forgiveness plays such an important part in the life of the believer that Matthew emphasizes the same point again in the parable of the unforgiving servant (cf. 18:21–25).

The final petition in the Lord's Prayer regards being saved from testing and preserved from evil (6:13). The Greek word *peirasmos* is usually translated as "temptation," but it can equally well be translated as "test." Temptations are indeed tests of the Christian's ability to remain true to his or her calling. But Jesus quite sensibly said not to seek such tests. They will naturally come in life. After all, this world is under the power of evil, and Jesus enjoined that we pray to be preserved from evil (or "the evil one"; v. 13). Those tests that come our way are to test our commitment. Indeed, sometimes the significant hardships that overtake all humans, including Christians, are themselves tests of our faith and commitment to God. Jesus will provide a way of escape from such tests (1 Cor. 10:13), but He said that it is better to ask God to preserve us from such tests.

In the OT, prayer is often accompanied by fasting when the situation is particularly grave (e.g., 2 Sam. 12:16). Going without food indicates the seriousness with which worshipers were taking their request. Yet, as with prayer itself, fasting could be a means for seeking the approval of others rather than of God. Jesus instructed His followers not to make their fasting clear to others but rather to take great care that others not know of the fast; then God, who sees in secret, will reward them (Matt. 6:16–18).

6:19–24. True Treasure. When Jesus talked of treasure, He alluded to one of the problems of the ancient world. Today excess wealth is "stored" in bank accounts, in stocks and shares, or in managed properties. Jesus lived in a time when the banking system was very rudimentary by today's standards and available only for the wealthy. Wealth in the ancient world consisted of goods, such as excess grain, fancy clothes, and precious metals, such as gold and silver. Cities would keep their treasures in guarded buildings. Individuals would usually have to find a place to store or hide their excess wealth. But as Jesus pointed out, fancy clothes could be eaten by moths. The other word Jesus used, *brōsis*, can mean rust, but as its basic meaning is "consumer," it is also used of insects that might devour stored grain (e.g., Mal. 3:11, LXX). Any

type of stored wealth was vulnerable to attack by thieves. Very few houses, let alone storehouses, were so solidly built that they could not be raided by digging through walls. Jesus pointed out that one who stores treasure in heaven is storing it in a place where it could not be destroyed by insects or robbed by thieves. He did not explain what storing treasure in heaven really means, but it is clear that He was saying that a life lived seeking to be a disciple of Jesus will not necessarily lead to wealth but that doing so will be storing treasure in a place where it is safe—in heaven.

Jesus then pointed out that to be a follower of His, one must have single-minded dedication. He said that because the eye is the lamp of the body, the Christian's eye must be good (*haplous*; Matt. 6:22). The word translated as "good" in some translations means "healthy," "sound," or related to giving generously. Jesus contrasted this with an evil eye that is "bad" or "unhealthy." If the eye is evil, then the whole body is evil. In this context, an eye that is evil is manifest when we hoard earthly treasures for our own benefit instead of using it to help others. Jesus described these two different mindsets toward wealth as two different masters. It is impossible to serve two masters. One will be loved and the other hated. In the same way it is not possible to serve God and seek after wealth and possessions.

6:25–34. Care and Anxiety. According to Jesus, we should not worry about our *psychē*. The word *psychē* may be translated "life," but often it designates a person considered as a whole being (or several persons as in the words translated "everybody" in Acts 2:43). Jesus did not simply say that we should not be troubled about what we should eat, drink, or wear. Instead, Jesus provided His followers with the reason why they need not worry. We serve a loving God who will provide for all our needs. We are called to look at the birds. They do not sow or gather, but the heavenly Father feeds them. In God's eyes, we are far more valuable (Matt. 6:25–26). Additionally, He asked, which of you can add an hour to your span of life (or a cubit to your height—the words can mean either) by worrying (v. 27)? There is also no need to worry about clothing, because not even Solomon was clothed in greater glory than the lilies of the field, which do no work of their own (vv. 28–29). Jesus did not suggest that humans should cease growing crops and making clothing. His message was that, rather than being consumed with these things, we need to trust in God, who will provide what we need. Our utmost concern should be our focus on the things of God.

7:1–6. Judging Others. Jesus warned to take great care in judgment of others because what judgment we make will be the kind with which we are judged. The concern here is not that we evaluate whether something is right or wrong but that we do not assume a superior attitude toward others. He illustrates this rather amusingly by suggesting that before we try to take a speck of dust out of a neighbor's eye, first we should take the log of wood out of our own eyes. So often it is easy to see the faults of others and not our own faults (vv. 1–5).

In v. 6 Jesus then urged careful consideration of the nature of the audience. It makes no sense to give pearls to pigs. Nor should Christians share the holy things of God with those who are unable to understand them. The danger is that like wild animals, those unable to understand the things of God are likely to turn on those who are sharing with them.

7:7–12. Ask, Seek, Knock. Jesus urged his listeners to ask of His Father and assured them that He would give the good things needed (vv. 7–8). It hardly needs to be said that just as children occasionally ask for things that will not be good for them, so we too sometimes ask God for what is not good for us. It is "good things" that God will give us if we but ask and if we but trust Him.

Jesus then gave his hearers this essential guide for living summed up in one sentence: Act toward others as we wish them to act toward us (v. 12). According to Jesus, the whole of the revelation of God found in the OT is summed up by this sentence. It is often called the "Golden Rule," and it is rightly seen as encapsulating the core of correct ethical behavior. Jesus's instructions are based on those that God gave the children of Israel in Leviticus 19:18 to "love your neighbor as yourself." Notice that it is not just avoiding wronging other people but actively seeking their good, as we would like others to actively seek our own good. Just imagine a group of people able to act out this principle in their own lives. The religion of Jesus produces warm, supportive community life.

7:13–23. Narrow Gate and True Leaders. To become a follower of Jesus is to choose the more difficult path. Put simply, before every person there are two choices—one that is easy and one that is hard. The easy path is reached by a broad entrance, and many find it only to discover that eventually it leads to destruction. The path that leads to life is one that is harder to find—its door is narrow, and the path itself presents challenges. But faithfully following the will of God will eventually lead to life. The choice is continually before us (vv. 13–14).

We find here in vv. 15–23 two separate sayings of Jesus recorded in different places in Luke (6:43–44; 13:25–27). Yet they belong together because they both deal with true and false religious leaders of various kinds. First, Jesus talked of false prophets. They appear disguised as sheep, but they are actually as dangerous as hungry wolves (cf. Matt. 7:15; Ezek. 22:27). He also said that one can tell false prophets by the outcome of their ministry. Just as bunches of grapes are not gathered from thorns, nor figs from thistles, so also one can tell the value of the ministry of a prophet by the outcomes associated with that ministry (Matt. 7:16–17). Does it bring discord, or does it build up the people of God? Does it bring repentance and holiness or arrogance and license? Jesus warned that every *tree* that does not bear good fruit will be uprooted and thrown into the fire (v. 19; cf. 3:10; John 15:2, 6).

Jesus then addressed the leaders who had prophesied in His name, who had cast out demons in His name, and who had performed miracles in His name (Matt. 7:22). By any account these leaders' command of miracles seemed to be evidence that they were directly linked to the power of God. Yet Jesus said that they would not be granted entrance into the kingdom of heaven on "that day" because they did not do the will of the heavenly Father (v. 21). Quite the contrary, they were workers of lawlessness (v. 23). The phrase "that day" refers to the eschatological "Day of the Lord," when God will judge the world in righteousness (cf. Matt. 13:24–30, 36–43, 47–52; 24:30, 51; 25:12, 30, 46; Is. 10:20; Joel 1:15; 3:18; Amos 8:9; 9:11; Zeph. 1:10, 14; Zech. 14:4; Mal. 3:17–18). What counts in the kingdom of heaven is not spectacular, miraculous deeds but actually living according to God's will.

7:24–29. Two Foundations. Jesus summarized how people might react to hearing His teaching in two different ways. First is someone who not only hears and understands what Jesus says but also does it. Such a person is like an individual who built a house on a foundation of rock. On the other hand, the second is someone who either does not hear Jesus's words or does not act on what he or she hears. This one is like a foolish person who built a house on a sandy foundation. It is tempting to think that Jesus is drawing on His experience as a builder here. After all, He was a *tektōn* ("carpenter" or "builder") by trade (Matt. 13:55; Mark 6:3) and may have had to give guidance to potential customers who wished to build their houses in places that might have good views, excellent access, or convenient locations but that would not last because there was not a suitable foundation on which to build a house. Not acting on the words of Jesus is like ignoring the advice of a builder and putting up a house where its foundations can be eroded and the house collapse. Jesus's teachings can form the foundation of a life well lived, but only if they are heeded and acted on.

Matthew records that as Jesus concluded His teaching, the crowds were amazed because He taught them with authority, not as the *grammateis* (7:29). These were the scribes and legal experts in Jewish law. Not only were they well versed in OT Scripture, but in Jesus's day they also joined together with the Pharisees (in fact, many of them were Pharisees) to emphasize the importance of the oral traditions of the fathers (cf. Matt. 15:2–3, 6, 9; Mark 7:3, 5, 8–9, 13; Gal. 1:14). Thus, when discussing theological points of view, they not only appealed to Scripture but also repeated the opinions of earlier Jewish rabbis. Their authority did not rest in themselves but in the teachings of others. Their style of teaching can be seen in the Mishnah and Talmud, religious writings that document the oral teachings of Jewish rabbis from roughly the first century B.C. until the sixth century A.D. Jesus, however, spoke with His own authority. For instance, in the Sermon on the Mount (cf. Matt. 5:21–38), Jesus did not appeal to the teachings of others. He spoke as one who had a higher authority. This was shocking to His Jewish audience—and outrageous to His opponents.

8:1—9:38

The Power of God's Kingdom

Having concluded his account of Jesus's teaching on the kingdom, Matthew next focuses on Jesus's ways of bringing the power of His kingdom into the lives of people. Matthew presents nine miracle stories in chapters 8 and 9 (these are scattered throughout Mark's Gospel). These stories that highlight Jesus's way of bringing healing into the lives of hurting and broken

people are organized into three groups of three (8:1–17; 8:23—9:8; 9:14–38). Separating this trio are two parallel stories of Jesus's call to people to follow Him (8:14–22; 9:9–17). In shaping Jesus's ministry in this manner, Matthew is clearly doing more than just telling stories. He is demonstrating that God wants all readers to recognize the need of healing in their own lives and to respond personally to the call to become a disciple of Jesus.

8:1–4. Cleansing a Leper. Leprosy is discussed at some length in the laws of the OT (Lev. 13–14). The word in Leviticus translated "leprosy" (*tsara'at*) could be used to describe the mold on clothing (Lev. 13:47–59) or mold on the stones that are used to build a house (Lev. 14:34–53). It is also used to describe a set of skin diseases characterized by swelling or eruption of the skin and whiteness that appears to be deep, with the hair in the diseased area turning white (Lev. 13:2–4). It has been traditionally identified as Hansen's disease (leprosy).

According to the laws in Leviticus, a "leprous" skin disease made not only the person suffering it unclean but also anybody or anything that they touched. The unclean person with a "leprous" disease was required to wear torn clothes, let hair become disheveled, cover the upper lip, cry "Unclean! Unclean!" and live alone outside the camp (Lev. 13:45–46). If the skin disease was infectious, this form of quarantine only makes sense. Living apart from the rest of society and family meant that the plight of a leper in first-century Jewish society was an unhappy one—and one that lasted a lifetime, since the healing of lepers was largely unknown in the ancient world. The only individuals in the OT who are known to have been involved in the healing of lepers are Moses (Num. 12) and Elisha (2 Kin. 5)—in both of these cases, it was clearly divine power that was the direct source of healing. Moses simply prayed for Miriam's healing, and Elisha told Naaman to wash in the Jordan River. In Judaism the ability to heal a leper was considered a messianic act (Matt. 11:5).

Matthew 8:1–4 recounts the story of when one such unfortunate individual with leprosy approached Jesus with a request that he be healed. Jesus responded and, more significantly, touched the man. He did not have to touch him. He could have healed him through spoken word alone. Yet in compassion Jesus chose to do what others feared to do—to touch a leper. Rather than making Jesus unclean, the reverse happened. The man was healed and thus became clean. Jesus, apparently concerned that His ministry might be misunderstood, then told the man to inform nobody but to go to the priests to be a testimony to the power of God (Lev. 13:1–46).

8:5–13. Healing a Centurion's Servant. The second healing story in the first trio of miracle stories surprisingly involves the healing of the servant of a Roman soldier (cf. Luke 7:1–10). As Jesus was going into Capernaum, He was approached by a non-Jewish army officer who held the rank of centurion. Centurions played a very significant role within the Roman army. Unlike the higher officers, who were frequently aristocrats with much less experience in actual war, centurions were promoted from the ranks on the basis of both their success in combat and their leadership ability. Professional soldiers and veterans of many wars, centurions were leaders of one hundred men when an army was at full strength. The centurion who approached Jesus was in the Holy Land as part of the occupying Roman army. The rest of the story makes it clear that the centurion was not a Jew. Many soldiers in the Roman army were indeed from the area of the Roman Empire that today is called Italy, but the Roman army drew its ranks from the wide number of different people groups found within, and sometimes without, the empire.

The centurion came to ask Jesus for help because somebody in his household was seriously ill. The Greek word used in Matthew 8:6—*pais*—could mean either child or servant. Different words would have been used for son (*huios*) or daughter (*thygatēr*), which is why *pais* is usually translated as "servant" in this passage. The centurion described the servant as paralyzed and in great suffering and asked that only a word be spoken.

Jesus marveled and said that he had not seen such faith at all in Israel (which confirms the suspicion that the centurion was not a Jew). Then He used language reminiscent of Psalm 107:3, Isaiah 43:5, and Zechariah 8:7, all of which point forward to the time when God will bring the faithful of all nations together to worship Him. Jesus said that in the kingdom of heaven many will come from the east and the west to a meal with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Matt. 8:11). The centurion is representative of all those from all the nations who will come into the kingdom. It is interesting to note that in Matthew this statement on the future, where people of all nations, Jew and non-Jew alike, will enter into the kingdom of heaven, precedes the words of Jesus in Matthew 10:5–6, where the disciples are told to go only to the lost sheep of Israel (see commentary on Matt. 10:1–15). The account finishes with Jesus telling the centurion that what will happen to him will be according to his faith, noting that the servant was healed at that hour (v. 13).

8:14–17. The Healing of Many People. It is from the other Gospels that we discover why Matthew 8:16 states that while Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law during the daytime, the rest of those who were seeking healing waited until evening. This is because Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law on the Sabbath (Mark 1:21, 29; Luke 4:31, 38), and others who were seeking healing waited until after the Sabbath ended at sunset. Matthew recounts later the fact that Jesus did heal on the Sabbath and that this brought Him into confrontation with the Jewish religious authorities (Matt. 12:1–14).

Matthew portrays both the healing of Peter's mother-in-law and of those others who came in the evening as evidence of a fulfilled prophecy (8:17), something that both shows the importance given to the authority of Scripture in early Christianity and emphasizes that the activities of Jesus were according to the preordained plan of God.

8:18–22. The Call to Follow Jesus. Matthew interrupts his account of the miracles of Jesus with a call to discipleship. This is the first half of the discipleship frame (cf. 9:9–13). While the stories of the leper and the centurion illustrate the kind of radical faith that resulted in healing, Matthew also wants his readers to recognize that faith also involves radical obedience. Faith and obedience cannot be separated. In Matthew 8:18–22, the Evangelist recounts how two individuals who wished to become His disciples approached Jesus.

The first was a scribe who, as the name implies, was educated in the art of writing—an important skill before the age of paper and ballpoint pens. Scribes could have had important roles in government and business. Within Jewish circles, a scribe could also have been somebody skilled in the interpretation of the laws of the OT. It is not unlikely that a scribe would have been a person of substance, which would explain why Jesus pointed out that one of the consequences of becoming His disciple would be to join one who was homeless. Though Jesus had no settled home or place to sleep (v. 20), He did have some places where He visited and stayed often—Capernaum (4:13; 9:1; cf. Mark 2:1) and the home of Lazarus, Mary, and Martha (Luke 10:38–39; John 11:1–5; 12:1–2). But His point was that following Him was not a life of settled ease but one of travel, difficulty, and poverty. He apparently detected a halfhearted commitment in this man's request. To be a disciple of Jesus demands that one follow Jesus no matter where He leads and no matter the cost (cf. Luke 14:25–33).

The second potential disciple said that he would like to follow Jesus but he had an important family obligation to attend to first: he must bury his father (Matt. 8:21). Whether this meant that he could not follow Jesus until after his father had died sometime in the indeterminate future or that his father had recently died and that he had a very strong family obligation to ensure that the funeral was conducted appropriately, it is clear that Jesus's answer told him to cast aside his family obligations and follow Him (v. 22). People become followers of Jesus for a wide number of reasons, most of which revolve around a love of Jesus. But following Jesus comes with the cost of obedience, and Matthew 8:18–22 reminds anybody contemplating Christianity of this cost—God must become first in the life, and some activities are inconsistent with being a follower of Jesus.

8:23–27. The Calming of a Storm. The second trio is of miracle stories that occurred on the Sea of Galilee, a medium-sized lake but nevertheless a place where, under the right conditions, the kind of storm described in this passage occurred. The language used is graphic. The results of the storm were like an "earthquake" (*seismos*) on the sea (v. 24), which so disturbed the water that the waves "covered" the boat. Jesus rose and rebuked the wind and the sea, and there was a great calm (v. 26). This miracle stands out from the other miracles recounted in Matthew 8–9 in that the other miracles were miracles of healing. This one shows that Jesus has power not only over illness but also over nature itself. Matthew's account of these actions of Jesus parallels the description of the power of God in the OT over all of nature (2 Sam. 22:16; Pss. 65:7–8; 89:8–9; 107:29; Is. 50:2).

8:28–34. The Healing of the Gadarene Demoniacs. After Jesus calmed the raging storm, He and His disciples reached the opposite side of the Sea of Galilee, where they were met by two raging demoniacs. Although this story occurs in each of the Synoptic Gospels, the details of

the account are not entirely the same (cf. Mark 5:1–20; Luke 8:26–39). For example, while Matthew places the healing at a place called Gadara (Matt. 8:28), Luke and Mark vary as to whether the place was Gadara, Gerasa, or Gergesa (cf. Mark 5:1; Luke 8:26). There are several likely explanations for this difference, not least of which is that some places have more than one name or that an event could take place near two separate places, either of which is a good description of where the event took place. On the other hand, there is one difference between the accounts that is harder to explain. In Matthew there are two demoniacs, but in Mark and Luke there is only one. Since the basic tenor of the account is the same in all three Gospels, there is no question regarding the historicity of the event (at which only Matthew, of these three Gospel writers, was present). One of the two demoniacs may have been more prominent than the other, and Mark and Luke (who both got their information second hand) may have focused their attention on him. Differences like these are not uncommon in circumstances were there are independent eyewitness accounts.

Matthew notes that the two men dwelt among the tombs and were so frighteningly violent (8:28) that no one risked traveling in that area lest they be attacked. When they saw Jesus approach, they attacked Him with the ferocity of their words. They said, *ti hēmin kai soi?* Literally, the Greek is "What we and you?" This is an idiom that essentially means, "What do we have to do with you?" "Leave us alone," or "What do you want with us?" (cf. Mark 1:24; John 2:4). The reason they wanted nothing to do with Jesus is indicated by their question about whether Jesus had come to torture them before the "time." The word "time" (*kairos*) refers to a "destined" or an "appointed" time. Here it is a reference to the time of final judgment, when the devil and his followers will be cast into the lake of fire (Rev. 19:20; 20:10, 14). Since that time had not arrived yet, they wanted Jesus to leave them alone. But if He were going to cast them out, they begged Him to let them go away into a herd of pigs that were peacefully feeding in the distance. Since demons are often identified as unclean spirits (e.g., Matt. 12:43; Mark 5:2; Luke 8:29), what more appropriate place for them to dwell than in unclean animals? The presence of pigs in the area is not surprising since the region east of the Sea of Galilee was predominately Gentile.

Unlike exorcists of His day, in this case Jesus did not enter into a conversation with the demons. He merely commanded them, "Go!" When the demons entered the pigs, the poor animals stampeded down the hillside and plunged to their death in the sea. The death of the pigs illustrates the destructive force of demonic possession (cf. Luke 11:24–26).

The reaction of the locals to the miracle is particularly ironic. For a long time they had had to put up with the violent, demon-possessed men, who resisted all efforts to restrain them. But now that Jesus had healed them, the response of the local people was to beg Jesus to leave (8:34). Perhaps this was because they were worried about what else that was sinful or unclean Jesus would have to remove from their lives, or perhaps they saw Jesus as an economic threat—He destroyed the pigs, a source of income for the region.

9:1–8. The Healing of a Paralytic. Matthew 9:1 introduces the third healing of the second trio of miraculous stories that Matthew gathered together. This miracle took place soon after Jesus returned to His hometown. We know from elsewhere that Jesus's hometown was Capernaum during this period of His ministry (e.g., Matt. 4:12–13). Soon after His arrival, some men brought Him a paralytic. From the other Synoptic Gospels, we know some additional interesting details about this healing. For example, from Mark 2:1–12 and Luke 5:17–26, we know that these men were unable to gain access to Jesus because of the crowds around Him, so they went up on the roof above Him and gained access to Him by digging through the roof. Luke also records that at the time Jesus was meeting with a delegation of Pharisees and scribes who had come from across Galilee, Judea, and Jerusalem to talk with Him. These details must have been known to Matthew, but he omits them to concentrate on the essential parts of this story.

Jesus said to the man, "Your sins are forgiven" (Matt. 9:2)—words that no other Gospel account records Him saying to any other person whom He healed. Indeed, in John 9:1–3 Jesus denied His disciples' suggestion that one person's blindness was a result of someone's sin. Disease is sometimes like an accident. No matter how careful a driver is, an accident may occur. It will occur more often if the driver is under the influence of alcohol or speeding, but even those who don't drink and who stay within the speed limits occasionally have accidents. Those who have poor health habits are more likely to have poor health and a shorter life, but sometimes those who live a healthy life also get ill.

Thus, Jesus did not usually link sin with disease. But sometimes a disease can be directly attributed to something wrong in a person's life—be it poor diet, alcohol consumption, smoking, or engaging in other risky behaviors. It might even be brought on by some guilt that has been gnawing at a person's conscience.

In the case of the paralytic, there must have been something in his past that had contributed to his current condition, and this past must have been troubling him. Therefore, the first thing Jesus did was not to heal the man but to assure him his sins were forgiven. Some of the scribes who were present accused Jesus of blasphemy. After all, only God can forgive sins (cf. Luke 5:21). Jesus wanted His listeners to know that He, the Son of Man, had the authority on earth to forgive sins, so He healed the man to illustrate this point.

9:9–13. The Calling of Tax Collectors and Sinners. Matthew inserts the second half of his discipleship frame (cf. 8:18–22) he has placed interspersed with his trio of miracles stories. In this account, he emphasizes that discipleship is an invitation that is extended to all people, regardless of their occupation or status in life. Even though Matthew 8–9 largely consists of descriptions of Jesus's healing activities, it includes the calling of the tax collector, Matthew, and the question about fasting before returning to three further accounts of healing. Jesus found a man sitting at a tax collection booth and told him to follow Him. Remarkably, the tax collecting agent immediately did just that—he abandoned his unfinished business and followed Jesus. Matthew refers to this tax agent as "Matthew," while he is called "Levi" in Mark 2:14 and Luke 5:27. That Matthew and Levi are two names for the same individual is clear. Others in the NT were known by more than one name (e.g., Peter/Cephas; Paul/Saul); so apparently was Matthew/Levi.

The earliest manuscripts of this Gospel are labeled "According to Matthew," and as Matthew the tax collector is listed as one of the twelve disciples (Matt. 10:3), it is generally assumed that the author of the Gospel was none other than the tax agent who answered the call of Jesus in such a dramatic manner. As a tax collector he would have needed to have mastered reading, writing, and accounting practices. His writing skills would have been very helpful in composing the Gospel.

On obeying the call of Jesus to follow Him, Matthew gathered his friends in a celebratory meal (cf. Luke 5:29). As many of those present at the meal were tax collectors and others not held in high esteem in the community, the Pharisees asked the disciples of Jesus why he did this. Jesus responded with a parable to illustrate that He chose to spend His time with sinners as they needed His message the most.

9:14–17. Fasting and New Wine. Matthew introduces his third set of miracle stories with a discussion about the "newness" of what Jesus had come to do. The ministry of Jesus involved not merely a modification of religious practice of that time but an entirely new beginning. Instead of merely mourning for the dead, Jesus would raise the dead. And rather than simply providing for the blind and mute, Jesus restored their sight and speech. The crowds at the end of this account themselves attested to the radical nature of Jesus's ministry—they observed that nothing like this had ever been seen in Israel (v. 33).

When asked by some of John the Baptist's disciples why His disciples did not fast, Jesus replied that the wedding guests cannot fast while the bridegroom is with them (v. 15). Weddings at the time of Jesus were usually week-long events, during which time the groom's parents kept a kind of open house so that friends of the two families could visit and celebrate with the newlyweds (see commentary on Matt. 25:1–13). Naturally, the time of a wedding was a time of feasting, not fasting. Thus, while Jesus was with them, His disciples should not fast. Jesus did warn, though, that when the "bridegroom" would leave, there would come a time suitable for fasting (9:15b).

Jesus indicated that while Christians would fast from time to time, what happens in Christian circles should be quite different from what had been happening in the other religious circles of His day. He gave two illustrations. First, new cloth is not used to patch old cloth, as it just tends to rip away from the old cloth making a worse tear (v. 16). Second, new wine is not put into old wineskins (v. 17). In the first century, wine was made by crushing grapes. It was then placed in amphorae (large, distinctively shaped pottery vessels lined with a waterproofing material) or containers made of the skins of animals. Because there would still be some residual fermentation taking place when wine was first placed in the skin, the wineskin would need to be able to expand a little. Old wineskins did not have the necessary resilience and would burst.

Humans have always needed to balance out continuity and change. Continuity is important, yet change is inevitable, even in religions like Christianity. We need to ensure that those changes do not affect the biblical message entrusted to the church. Unfortunately, over the centuries Christianity itself experienced sudden and dramatic changes damaging to biblical truth.

9:18–26. A Ruler's Daughter and a Sick Woman. Two healing stories are found mingled in Matthew 9:18–26, the raising of the ruler's daughter and the healing of the woman who touched Jesus's garment. From Mark 5:22 we know the name of the individual who came to Jesus to beg Him to restore his daughter to life. His name was Jairus, and he was a ruler of the synagogue. Matthew identifies him as an *archōn*—"a leader" or "ruler" and relates that he told Jesus that his daughter had died or was on the point of death (Matt. 9:18; cf. Mark 5:35).

At the house of the ruler, Jesus informed them that the girl was not dead but merely sleeping. Sleep is sometimes used as a euphemism for death (e.g., John 11:12–14; 1 Thess. 4:13). Jesus then restored her to life. For God, death is like a sleep from which He can waken us.

The issue of clean and unclean lies very close to the surface in both of the healings recorded in Matthew 9:18–26. According to Leviticus 15:25–27, a woman with a flow of blood was unclean, and anything she touched was unclean. Additionally, anyone who touches a dead body would be unclean for seven days (Num. 19:11). Yet while the unclean woman touched Jesus, and Jesus Himself touched a dead body, He did not become unclean. Instead, the woman was cured and thus became clean, and the dead child was brought back to life and thus was clean. Jesus touches the unclean, and the unclean becomes clean!

9:27–38. Healing the Blind and the Dumb. Matthew next illustrated the newness of God's acts through Jesus in recounting the miraculous story of the healing of the blind—something that had been foretold by the prophets in regard to the Messiah's work (Is. 29:18; 35:5; 42:7; 61:1) but that the Jews had not witnessed before. Faith is at the heart of this miracle of healing.

Matthew concludes his trio of miracle stories by briefly recounting the healing of a man who had become mute due to demonic possession (Matt. 9:32–34). The story highlights the newness of what Jesus had come to do and the different reactions of the crowds toward it. The account then prepares the way for a discussion of the nature of Jesus's mission in the next section of Matthew's Gospel by talking about the plentiful opportunity of the gospel harvest.

Although the crowds were amazed at the healing of the demon-possessed man and concluded that God was manifest in these events because nothing like this had been seen in Israel (v. 33), the Pharisees attacked Jesus. They suggested that He cast out the demon by the power of the ruler of demons (v. 34). The contrast between these two reactions could not be more stark. The Pharisees rejected Jesus completely.

Matthew 5–7 consists of examples of Jesus *teaching*, while Matthew 8–9 consists of examples of Jesus *healing*. In fact, He is much more often portrayed as teaching and healing than he is as preaching. Jesus's motivation for His teaching and healing ministry is revealed in Matthew 9:36–38. He has compassion on the crowds, as they were harassed (*eskylmenoi*) and dejected (*errimmenoi*), rather like sheep that were without a shepherd. According to Jesus, the appropriate response is to pray to the Lord of the harvest to put more workers into His harvest (v. 38).

Matthew's Theology of Jesus's Healing Ministry

As we look at the miracles of Jesus recorded in Matthew 8–9, we find at least five themes that keep reoccurring in them and that shed some light on their significance.

1. Centrality of Faith. Several of the miracles highlight the necessity of faith. Jesus commended the centurion for his faith and said that the healing would occur in accordance with his trust in Him (8:13). Very similar words are used in the incident of the two blind men (9:29). That the woman with the flow of blood was healed by faith (not magic) is emphasized in both Matthew 9:18–26 and Mark 5:21–43. Mark says that the woman was healed before Jesus told her that her faith had healed her (Mark 5:29–34). There is no doubt at all of the correct sequence of faith before healing. Matthew first states that the woman was told that her faith had healed her, and then he informs the reader that she was healed (Matt. 9:22). They all trusted that Jesus could do what they were requesting.

2. The Unclean Becomes Clean. The distinctions between unclean, clean, and holy form an important part of what the Bible teaches about how to approach God. Thus the observant Jew would avoid touching a leper, a dead body, or anyone who was bleeding. In the course of the healing miracles recounted in Matthew 8–9, Jesus touched individuals who fit each of these categories (8:3; 9:21–22, 25). But rather than Jesus becoming unclean, the unclean whom He touched became clean. His divine purity and holiness are more powerful than the unclean and overcome it.

3. The Centrality of Jesus. The miracle accounts are told with great simplicity. It is from the other Gospels that we learn that the men carrying the paralytic to Jesus chose to dig through the roof above where Jesus was talking to the religious leaders who had come from around the country to talk to Him (Mark 2:4; Luke 5:17–19). It is from the other Gospels that we hear that after the woman with the flow of blood touched Jesus, Jesus actually paused and asked who touched Him. His disciples looked bemused and said there is a lot of jostling that happens in a crowd. But Jesus looked around, and the woman responded to His question (Mark 5:25–34). These, and other interesting details, are absent from Matthew's account (Matt. 9:20–22). Compared to the other Gospels, then, the accounts in Matthew are very concise and highlight the centrality of Jesus and the necessity of faith.

4. Secrecy. In at least two of the healing miracles, Jesus insisted on the necessity of secrecy (the leper in Matt. 8:4 and the demon-possessed man in 9:31). Later in the Gospel of Matthew, we discover a reason why Jesus may have requested this: people widely misunderstood who He was and what His role was. After all, even Peter, who recognized that Jesus was the Messiah, denied that the Messiah would suffer and die (16:16, 21–23). While the confrontation with the Jewish leaders was inevitable, by keeping His miracles low-key, Jesus may have been seeking to postpone the confrontation for as long as possible.

5. Jesus's Comprehensive Power to Heal. Across Matthew 8–9 we see Jesus heal a leper (8:1–4), heal at a distance a servant who was very ill (8:5–13), calm a storm (8:23–27), cast out demons (8:28–34; 9:32–34), heal a paralytic (9:1–7), heal a woman with a flow of blood (9:20–22), raise a dead girl back to life (9:18–26), and restore sight to the blind (9:27–31) and speech to the dumb (9:32–34). All of this was motivated by compassion (9:36). Clearly there is nothing beyond the power of Jesus to heal or restore. He is the promised Messiah. The consummation of His healing power will be manifested at the Second Coming, when our human bodies will be redeemed, transformed, and placed beyond the influence and presence of sin and death (Rom. 8:3; 1 Cor. 15:50–57; Rev. 21:3–4).

10:1—11:1

Discourse 2: Instructions for Proclaiming the Kingdom

Like the other discourses in Matthew, the second discourse finishes with the distinctive phrase *kai egeneto hote etelesen ho Iēsous*—"And it happened, when Jesus had finished . . ." (11:1; cf. 7:28; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1). The second discourse is usually called the mission discourse, as it deals with the commissioning of the twelve disciples and Jesus's instructions to them concerning their mission. The latter part of the discourse, addressed particularly to the disciples, also has a strong message for the other followers of Jesus, both ancient and modern.

10:1–15. Choosing and Commissioning the Twelve. A very similar list of disciples is also found in Mark 3:15–19 and Luke 6:12–16. While these lists are almost the same, each Gospel writer conveys something extra about one or more of the disciples. For example, Luke names the disciple that both Matthew and Mark refer to, "Simon the Canaanite," as "Simon called the Zealot" (Matt. 10:4; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15). This is a minor change, because "Canaanite" is an alternate term for "Zealot." Mark provides the information that the father of James and John was named Jacob, and they were called sons of thunder (Mark 3:17). Matthew provides the information that the disciple Matthew was a tax collector (Matt. 10:3), information missing in the other Gospels.

An important moment in the development of the twelve apostles is now introduced. Prior to this they had been the companions of Jesus. They had heard Him preach, watched Him heal, and received His teachings. Now they were sent off in groups of two to continue the ministry of Jesus. The experience of doing this for themselves would dramatically increase their understanding of Jesus's teaching and consolidate their memories of what He did and said.

Jesus provided strict instructions about where His disciples were to go. They were to avoid going to any non-Jewish areas and were not to enter any Samaritan towns. Instead, they were sent to the lost sheep of Israel (Matt. 10:5–6). The very last two sentences of the Gospel contain the command of Jesus giving His disciples a new instruction about where they were to take His teaching (28:18–20). He told them to go and "make disciples of all the nations" (v. 19). The word translated "nations" in Matthew 28:19 is the exact same word usually translated "Gentiles" in 10:5. There seems to be a progression here. Throughout most of the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus's earthly ministry is largely confined to His own people—the Jews. There are exceptions to this rule, such as the Canaanite woman (15:21–28) and the Roman centurion (8:5–13). Nor should the presence of the four women in the genealogy of Jesus be overlooked (see commentary on Matt. 1:1–17, in particular vv. 3, 5–6). Nevertheless, the ministry of Jesus was largely focused on Jews during His earthly ministry. Yet He was ultimately rejected by many of the leaders of His own nation and many other Jews. In a passage unique to his Gospel, Matthew records the rejection of Jesus by the Jewish crowd. After the dramatic scene in which the large crowd chose Barabbas over Jesus (27:15–23), Pilate washed his hands before them stating that he was innocent of Jesus's blood. The crowd responded that His blood would be on them and their children (27:24–26).

These scenes were yet future when Jesus commissioned His disciples. He sent them out before Him to reach as many of His fellow Jews as possible with the message that the kingdom of heaven was at hand (10:7).

10:16–33. Coming Persecutions. Jesus warned His disciples that they would encounter difficult situations. While He is the Prince of Peace, His followers need to remember that they live in a world where there is a terrible struggle between the forces of good and the forces of evil. At times, being identified as a Christian can be a death sentence. It is not true that persecution was continuous in the early days of the church, but from time to time some Christians were put to death because of their belief (cf. Acts 6:8—7:60; 12:1; 2 Cor. 11:24–27). Outside of the NT, we know of a severe persecution of Christians in Rome by Emperor Nero and further persecution when Pliny was governor of Pontus and Bithynia (A.D. 111–113). These are examples of how precarious life could be for Christians in the Roman Empire.

Because Jesus was sending His followers out like sheep in the midst of wolves, He urged them to be as harmless as doves and wise as serpents (Matt. 10:16). Sheep surrounded by wolves are very vulnerable. Jesus warned His followers that while they must follow His example of meekness and humility, this does not mean that they should unnecessarily put themselves in the way of danger. This would inevitably come: His followers would be flogged in synagogues and handed over to governors as miscreants (vv. 17–18). Their appearance in court would, in fact, be an opportunity for others to hear about Jesus. They were not to worry about what to say in such circumstances because the Holy Spirit would give them appropriate words to say (vv. 19–20). Some difficult decisions would have to be made. Some of Jesus's followers would have to make a decision to fit in with their family or to accept Jesus and be betrayed by the very same family members (v. 21). Christians are to take the dramatic step of leaving when persecution arises and going to the next town (v. 23).

The followers of Jesus should not be surprised when encountering persecution. After all, Jesus was persecuted before them (vv. 24–25). Yet through all this, they need to conduct themselves wisely, not seeking confrontation with authorities or acting in ways that might aggravate the attitudes of those in authority.

Jesus then outlined how His followers are to conduct themselves as His representatives, especially when they find themselves in court. They should not fear their judges (10:28) and should trust in the Father, who is always interested in their well-being (v. 29). He assured His followers that if they acknowledge Him before others, He would acknowledge them before His Father, although if they fail to acknowledge Him before others, then He would not acknowledge them before His Father (vv. 32–33).

10:34—11:1. Risks and Rewards. Jesus warned that He came to bring conflict. Sometimes there will be conflicts about Him between fathers and sons, mothers and daughters (vv. 34–39). The very fabric of the family can thereby be put at risk. Yet alongside the risks of following Him is the opportunity to be a blessing to those who receive the Christian message and the reward that comes with it (vv. 40–41).

11:2—12:50
Different Responses to the Ministry of Jesus

In the next section of his Gospel, Matthew presents a number of stories that illustrate the different responses to Jesus and His message. Some believed Jesus to be the promised Messiah, while others were not sure what to make of Him (11:2–3; 12:15–16, 22–23, 46–50). The response of the majority of religious leaders, however, was entirely negative. No matter what Jesus did, they were sure He was a false teacher (12:1–2, 14, 24), and they conspired together to destroy Him (12:14).

11:2–19. Messengers from John the Baptist. By their very nature, prisons are unpleasant places where a person has too much time to brood, and it is in such a situation that we find John the Baptist in Matthew's account. The fearless proclaimer of God's truth and popular preacher had been imprisoned for saying that King Herod Antipas should not have married his brother's wife (14:3–4). Although what he said was in accord with biblical law (Lev. 18:16), that did not matter to Herod Antipas. He was the king, and he felt he was not subject to such ancient laws. As John sat in prison, he had time to reflect on what had happened to him. Among his memories were the circumstances surrounding the baptism of Jesus (Matt. 4:13–17). He clearly was beginning to wonder whether his hopes for Jesus were misplaced. Thus he sent messengers to Jesus to ask Him whether He was the *erchomenos*—"the Coming One" or "the One who is to come" (11:3). By using this phrase, John was tapping into the expectations in the OT of the coming of some important religious and political figure (cf. Ps. 118:26; Is. 59:20), described in the NT as the Messiah.

Jesus replied to the question by directing the attention of the disciples of John to His own ministry: the blind recover sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor receive the gospel. The language Jesus used is reminiscent of a number of passages from Isaiah (e.g., 35:5–6; 61:1), and by using similar language, Jesus showed John the Baptist that the miracles surrounding His ministry were evidences of the activity of the One announced in the prophecies of Isaiah. By this means, Jesus answered John's question and identified Himself as the one prophesied in the OT. Jesus was perhaps sending a gentle rebuke to John when He pronounced a blessing on those not offended by Him (Matt. 11:6). Jesus had not acted in quite the way John expected. Indeed, God rarely acts in accordance with our expectations, but He is seeking the salvation of all humanity and the greatest good of everyone in it. It takes faith to realize that God is always acting in our best interests, especially when things are not going well, as they were not for John the Baptist.

Jesus then shared His understanding of the role of John the Baptist and the relationship between Himself and John. He asked why people had gone into the wilderness to see John and concluded they did so because he was a prophet (vv. 7–9). Jesus agreed with this assessment of John but said that John was more than a prophet. He was the one spoken of in Malachi 3:1, a messenger sent to prepare the way. He went on further to say that those who are willing to accept that fact will recognize that John is the prophet Elijah who would come (Matt. 11:14), announced in Malachi 4:5. Jesus said that John marks the division between the old and the new (Matt. 11:12). All the prophets and law extended to the time of John. But even though none born of women is greater than John the Baptist, even the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than him (v. 11).

Jesus then likened His generation to whining children who say that their joyful music is not responded to with dancing, their lamenting not responded to with weeping (v. 17). John came without eating fine food or drinking wine, and he was accused of being demon possessed (v. 18). Jesus came eating and drinking, and they accused him of being a glutton, overindulgent in wine, and worse, a friend of tax collectors and sinners (v. 19). Jesus responded with the observation that wisdom is vindicated by (in some manuscripts) its children or (in others) its works (v. 19; cf. Luke 7:35).

11:20–24. Woes to Bethsaida, Chorazin, and Capernaum. Jesus denounced three towns for their unbelief and rejection of His ministry. The judgment placed on these towns was all the more severe since they were the primary recipients of Jesus's miracles in Galilee. Bethsaida was a small fishing village not far around the lake from Capernaum—the city that was the center of much of Jesus's ministry. Bethsaida is referenced only here in the Gospel of Matthew, but from the other Gospels we discover that

after Jesus multiplied the loaves and fishes to feed five thousand men as well as women and children, He sent His disciples ahead to Bethsaida. From John 1:44 and 12:21, we discover that Philip was from Bethsaida and that at one point in time, it was the home of Andrew and Peter. Chorazin itself was a small village in the foothills of Galilee, not that far from Capernaum. It has been excavated by archaeologists, and its ruins may be visited.

The third town mentioned is Capernaum. Matthew 4:13 notes that at the beginning of His ministry, Jesus moved from Nazareth to Capernaum and several of the incidents in the Gospel took place there. These include the healing of the centurion's servant (8:5–13) and the miraculous provision of the temple tax from a coin found in the mouth of a fish (17:24–27). The other Gospels support the identification of Capernaum as the center of Jesus's ministry (e.g., Mark 1:21; 2:1; 9:33; Luke 4:31; 7:1; John 2:12; 6:17). Capernaum has also been excavated by archeologists (see commentary on Matt. 4:12–17). In Jesus's time it was a pleasant fishing village spread out along the north shore of the Sea of Galilee and had between 600 and 1,500 inhabitants.

Matthew 11:20 notes that it was in these three towns that many of Jesus's miracles took place, yet they had not repented. Jesus reproached them and pronounced a "woe" on them, characterizing their obduracy as worse than that of Tyre and Sidon. Isaiah and Ezekiel have extensive oracles against Tyre and Sidon (Is. 23:1–12; Ezek. 26–28), which clearly outline their status as cities under the judgment of God.

11:25–30. Rest. While judgment was passed on the cities who rejected His ministry, Jesus offered salvation to all those who would heed His invitation to find rest in Him. The words of Jesus in Matthew 11:25–27 reflect the kind of theological insights that are found extensively in the Gospel of John. Matthew records Jesus as saying that everything has been given to Him by the Father (cf. John 5:22; 17:6, 9), that no one knows the Father except the Son (Matt. 11:27; cf. John 6:46; 14:6), and that significant knowledge has been hidden from the wise and intelligent but revealed to children (Matt. 11:25). These are thoughts that are expressed many times in the Gospel of John.

Jesus extended an invitation to anyone who is weary to come and take His yoke (*zygos*). Yokes are associated with animals and slaves. A yoke forms part of the harness of an ox and is placed around the animal's neck so that the ox has something to press against. The yoke of a slave enabled him or her to carry heavy burdens. It was a long bar placed over the shoulders and shaped to fit the shoulders, and it was used to distribute the weight across the shoulders rather than the arms. For both the ox and the slave, an ill-fitting yoke could cause great discomfort. Within the NT, the yoke has become symbolic of subservience, especially that of slavery (1 Tim. 6:1).

Yet Jesus urged those who are burdened to accept His yoke. In Matthew 23:4 Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for their legalistic mentality, which had the effect of binding heavy burdens on the shoulders of people. They had perverted the nature of the law given through Moses. Jesus, however, invited His followers back to God's original plan. The yoke of Jesus is easy not because its demands are lighter (cf. Matt. 5:20–48) but because it involves experiencing the law through an entirely different dimension—through a relationship with Jesus, who is gentle and *tapeinos* ("humble" or "lowly"). The stark contrast between these two different perspectives of the law is evident in the controversy over what constitutes proper Sabbath observance in the two following stories.

12:1–8. Plucking Grain on the Sabbath. Each of the four Gospels gives considerable attention to the controversies that arose between Jesus and the Pharisees on how the Sabbath should be observed. The occasion of this debate between Jesus and the Pharisees was their observation that the disciples were plucking grain and eating it on the Sabbath to temporarily assuage their hunger (cf. Mark 2:23–28; Luke 6:1–5). The basis of the Pharisees' charge that the disciples were doing what was unlawful to do on the Sabbath (Matt. 12:2) did not relate to taking grain from a crop that was not theirs, as this was their right as long as it was harvested only by hand (Deut. 23:25). The Pharisees were concerned that plucking the grain was harvesting, rubbing it between the hands was threshing, and blowing the husks away was winnowing. Harvesting, threshing, and winnowing were three of the thirty-nine separate categories of work as defined by the rabbis and most likely the Pharisees before them.

Jesus defended the actions of the disciples, saying that what they did was blameless (Matt. 12:7; *anaitios*, "without legal ground for complaint"). In defending the disciples, Jesus put forward four separate arguments. Curiously enough, none of the arguments included the observation that would probably be made today: that what the disciples were doing was too trivial to be considered work. Instead, Matthew recorded two examples of Jesus speaking about actions that would usually be considered wrong but that Jesus characterized as not wrong because of an overriding principle.

In Matthew 12:3–4, Jesus recalled a story about David (1 Sam. 21:1–6). This incident happened at a very difficult time in David's life, while he was living the life of a fugitive, escaping several attempts by Saul to kill him. On the occasion cited by Jesus, as David was fleeing from Saul with a group of his men, he came to the village of Nob, where there was a tabernacle for the worship of Yahweh served by several priests. David explained to the priest Ahimelech that he and his men were desperately in need of food. Ahimelech replied that the only food left in the village was the showbread in the tabernacle. After further inquiry, the priest gave David and the young men the showbread to eat, something that only priests were usually allowed to eat. The parallel Jesus made is clear: if it was acceptable for the anointed David and his men to eat the holy bread, how much more appropriate it would be for the disciples of the Son of David to eat during the Sabbath, rejecting scribal rules related to Sabbath observance (cf. Mark 2:23–28; Luke 6:1–5).

The second example Jesus provided relates to the work of the priests in the temple on the Sabbath. The priests were clearly doing work on the Sabbath as they set the fire to consume the sacrifice, slaughtered the animal, cut up the animal, and carried the carcass to the altar. All this was work that would not otherwise have been permitted on the Sabbath. Yet because the priests were doing this work as part of the worship services of the temple, they were guiltless (*anaitioi*; Matt. 12:5). Jesus also pointed out that something or someone greater than the temple was there (v. 6), that is, Himself.

The last two examples that Jesus provided announce two general principles. The first of these is that God desires mercy and not sacrifice (v. 7). This quotation from Hosea 6:6 provides an important principle regarding Sabbath observance. One should be understanding rather than judgmental, particularly when human regulations are being discussed.

The fourth argument made by Jesus was that as the Son of Man, He is Lord of the Sabbath (Matt. 12:8). He was making two significant claims. He was identifying Himself with the heavenly figure of the Son of Man in Daniel 7:13. As such He claimed to have authority over the Sabbath, an institution set up at Creation, one of the Ten Commandments, and a sign of the covenant (Gen. 2:1–3; Ex. 20:8–11; 31:13; Ezek. 20:12, 20). His claim of lordship over the Sabbath represents a significant claim to heavenly status made by Jesus. It is He who determines how the Sabbath should be kept.

Matthew, as was pointed out in the introduction, had a great deal of interest in how Christians relate to the law of God. The Gospel of Matthew contains two extra arguments of Jesus, both of which emphasize that the disciples did *not* break the Sabbath, and that therefore the controversy between Jesus and the Pharisees over Sabbath observance was not about *whether* the Sabbath should be observed, but about *how* the Sabbath should be observed.

12:9–14. The Man with the Withered Hand. Another story regarding the proper nature of Sabbath observance involves a case of healing. When Jesus and His disciples arrived at the synagogue for worship on the Sabbath, they discovered a man with a hand that had withered because it was paralyzed. Jesus was asked whether or not it is lawful to heal the hand on the Sabbath day (v. 10). Later Jewish law was very clear that if a person's life was at risk on the Sabbath, then everything should be done to save the life, no matter how much work was involved. It was equally clear that if the illness was not life threatening, treatment should wait until after the Sabbath ended. It is highly probable that such rules were known to the group asking Jesus this question. Since the man's situation was certainly not a life-threatening condition, according to Pharisaic interpretation of the law, it was not lawful for Jesus to heal the man on the Sabbath.

Jesus argued differently. He cited the case of a sheep that falls into a ditch on the Sabbath. It is likely that the sheep would survive until after the end of the Sabbath, but a good shepherd would not consider leaving the sheep in a condition where it was suffering. And those who were asking Jesus about whether it was lawful to heal a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath would have not hesitated to alleviate the suffering of the sheep by taking it out of a ditch—an activity that was clearly work. Jesus pointed out that a person is worth much more than a sheep (v. 12). Thus He went ahead and healed the man in front of them all (v. 13).

As with the story of the disciples plucking grain on the Sabbath, the account of the healing of the man with the withered hand highlights a controversy between Jesus and the Pharisees about *how* the Sabbath should be kept, not *whether* it should be kept. The importance Jesus placed on instructing His followers on how the Sabbath should be kept is evident from the immediate aftermath of this remarkable healing: on seeing the healing, the Pharisees counseled together about how they might destroy Jesus (v. 14). Jesus deliberately provoked confrontations about the Sabbath, even though He knew how the leaders would react. He was freeing the Sabbath of the burden of human traditions.

12:15–21. The Chosen Servant. Jesus knew the difference between courage and foolhardiness, so when the Pharisees began plotting how to kill Him, He withdrew. The crowds still followed Him, and He healed those who were ill. But He sternly warned those He healed not to make the fact known. The Greek word translated "warned," *epitimaō* (v. 16), is very strong. Its primary meaning is "to command," "to order," or "to give warning." Jesus was serious in insisting that the people not proclaim His identity. No doubt this was in part to postpone a confrontation with the religious leaders, but Matthew saw another meaning in the actions of Jesus: the fulfillment of the words of Isaiah 42:1–4 (Matt. 12:17–21).

12:22–32. A Divided Kingdom. After Jesus healed a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute, the crowd was so amazed that they began to wonder whether Jesus might be the "Son of David" (v. 23). While it is true that Jesus descended from David (1:1–17), the crowd was more probably thinking of prophecies like that of Isaiah 11:1–9, which linked the Messiah to the house of Jesse, King David's father. The individual promised in Isaiah 11:1–19 would be specially endowed with the Spirit of God (Is. 11:2). Thus, the crowd wondered whether the remarkable miracle was evidence that Jesus was the expected Messiah, who would restore their nation.

The Pharisees, however, had a different explanation. While they had earlier come to the conclusion that He must die (Matt. 12:14), they again attributed His power to demonic forces (v. 24; cf. 9:34). Jesus responded that a divided kingdom is destroyed and a divided house will not stand. Thus, if demons are working against demons, their kingdom will be destroyed (vv. 25–27). He then said two very significant things.

First, He drew everybody's attention to the fact that if, indeed, He was casting out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God had come to them (12:28). The kingdom of God is a very important component of Jesus's teachings (e.g., all six of the parables in Matt. 13:1–50 are devoted to it). It could designate that time in the future when God would come to cleanse the world from sin and to restore righteousness (Matt. 24–25), but here and in some of the parables (e.g., 13:24–30, 36–43), Jesus spoke of the kingdom as having a very real presence discernible in the activities of Jesus and His church. Jesus claimed that the healing of the demoniac was nothing less than evidence that He was working by the Spirit of God and that in His activities the future kingdom of God was already present in the world.

Second, He warned about sinning against the Holy Spirit. All kinds of sin and blasphemy can be forgiven, even words spoken against Jesus as Son of Man. But one who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, in this age or the next (12:31–32). It is the Spirit that leads us to repentance, and persistent rejection of Him will finally make our sins unforgivable.

12:33–42. Fruits and Signs. Jesus continued to warn against carelessness in speech. What people say, especially in unguarded moments, reveals what they are like inside. Just as a good tree bears good fruit and a bad tree bad fruit, so our words reveal what we are really like. Jesus even warned that words are so important in revealing our character that we will be judged at the judgment by what we have said (vv. 36–37).

It is more than a little striking that the scribes and Pharisees asked Jesus for a sign (v. 38). By this point, the reader of Matthew will have met many of the signs that Jesus performed. Jesus responded by saying that the only sign that would be given would be that of Jonah—just as Jonah was in the belly of the whale for three days, so would Jesus be in the heart of the earth for three days (v. 40). In saying this, Jesus pointed to the greatest sign of the truth of Christianity. Jesus died, was buried, and then rose to life again. His death and resurrection have shown that death is not final and that He has the power to resurrect those who follow Him.

12:43–45. Return of the Unclean Spirit. Jesus returned to His teaching regarding the exorcism of the man who had been blind and mute (12:22–45). It is somewhat fitting, then, that Jesus concluded His rebuke of the Pharisees by describing what happens when an evil spirit leaves someone. The evil spirit finds that life is barren without the human to inhabit and torment (v. 43). He thus returns to find that his previous abode has been improved and gathers other demons, worse than himself to inhabit the individual (vv. 44–45). Thus, exorcism alone is no guarantee that things will improve.

As so often in His teachings, Jesus left His hearers to work out the practical implications of what He had been speaking about. A religion such as that of the Pharisees is a religion of "do not." Resisting temptation to sin and following God's will are important aspects of being a true follower of God. Yet a negative religion is not adequate. Jesus said that if nothing replaces evil in the life, then evil will return. The evil needs to be replaced by actively doing the will of God, by deeds of goodness, and by pure thoughts that come from the contemplation of good and seeking the best.

12:46–50. The True Family of Jesus. While Jesus was still speaking to the people, his mother and brothers approached, desiring to talk with Him (see below, "The Brothers of Jesus"). In a world where family was extremely important and where genealogical roots really mattered, Jesus's response to the news of His family's presence was startling (v. 48). Who are Jesus's mother and brothers? It is not those who belong to the home in which He was raised but His disciples—those who do the will of His Father in heaven—who are His brothers, sisters, and mother (vv. 49–50). Jesus's point is not that family does not matter but that family must not come before God's kingdom (13:44–46; cf. 8:21–22). Even Jesus's own family was not to come before His mission. It is the same for the followers of Jesus. Our spiritual roots need to go deeper than our genealogical roots.

The words of Jesus offer hope to those who give up everything for Jesus. They will not be left alone. They are invited to become part of a new, wider family of those who do the will of the heavenly Father (12:50). This new community of faith takes on many of the characteristics of a family. They are held together by common bonds of love—love for God, love for Jesus, and love for one another. They have a common purpose—worshiping God and spreading the knowledge of His salvation. And they are bound together in mutual love and affection as they journey together toward God's kingdom.

The Brothers of Jesus

Jesus had not only brothers but also sisters (Matt. 13:55; Mark 6:3). Since the term "brother" is at times used in the Scripture to designate a person other than one born from the same father and mother, questions have been raised concerning the relationship between Jesus and His "brothers" and "sisters." Within some Christian traditions the need for clarification is necessary because of the belief in the perpetual virginity of Mary. For other Christians, this is primarily a question of historical value. The debate is a long one going back to the middle of the second century and has not yet been resolved to the satisfaction of all. The main reason is that the biblical evidence lends itself to different interpretations.

1. *Children of Joseph and Mary.* Some consider this to be the NT teaching. Jesus is called the firstborn of Mary (Luke 2:7), and we are told that Joseph knew Mary, that is to say, had sexual intercourse with her, after the birth of Jesus (Matt. 1:25). Therefore, the most logical conclusion would appear to be that the "brothers of Jesus" refer to children of Joseph and Mary. Besides, there is no clear indication in the Gospels that Joseph was a widower before marrying Mary or that he had children from that previous marriage. This is indeed a strong case, but not strong enough to persuade every interpreter.

2. *Cousins of Jesus.* This interpretation is partially based on the argument that the term "brother" could sometimes designate a close relative, such as a cousin. Among other things, this theory teaches that the mother of James, Joses, Simon, and Judas was not the mother of Jesus but her sister, Mary of Clopas (Mark 3:18; John 19:25). That clearly makes the "brothers of Jesus" His cousins. But the high level of speculation in this theory and the fact that there is hardly any evidence for the use of "brother" in the sense of "cousin" makes this suggestion very unlikely.

3. *Step-Brothers of Jesus.* Several arguments have been used to support this position. First, nowhere in the NT are the "brothers of Jesus" explicitly called "sons of Mary." The passage that comes closest to it is Matthew 13:55: "Is this not the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers James, Joses, Simeon, and Judas?" But even this one is not clear enough because only Jesus is specifically called son of Mary. In fact it could be argued that the text is implicitly saying that Mary was the mother only of Jesus and not of His brothers mentioned in the passage. Second, the term "brother" is also used in Greek literature to refer to a step-brother. Therefore the term itself is not decisive in answering the question.

Third, the term "firstborn" does not imply that Mary had other children. It is used in Luke 2:7 to prepare the way for the consecration of Jesus to God as firstborn (Luke 2:23). There is an ancient Jewish grave inscription referring to a woman who died giving birth to her "firstborn." Fourth, the fact that Joseph did not have sexual relations with Mary until she gave birth to Jesus (Matt. 1:25) does not necessarily mean that she had other children. The purpose of Matthew's remark was to emphasize that Mary was still a virgin when she gave birth to Jesus.

Fifth, the fact that the "brothers of Jesus" tried several times to control Him suggests the possibility that they were older than Him (Mark 3:21, 31; John 7:3, 4). In Jewish family life the older children had authority over the younger ones. Of course Jesus never accepted the authority of His "brothers." And finally, the fact that during His crucifixion Jesus entrusted His mother to John could imply that Jesus's "brothers" were not children of Mary. Otherwise they should have provided for her.

The topic is still debated among scholars, and the biblical evidence is not as clear as we would like it to be. However, the possibility that Jesus's brothers were His step-brothers seems to have more biblical support. The obvious question is why the Lord closed the womb of Mary. This is a question that the Bible does not address and about which there is no need to speculate.

13:1–52

Discourse 3: Parables of the Kingdom

Like all five of the other discourses of Jesus found in Matthew, the third discourse finishes with the words "And it happened, when Jesus had finished . . ." (Matt. 13:53; cf. 7:28; 11:1; 19:1; 26:1). The beginning of the discourse is indicated by referring to Jesus leaving the house and sitting by the Sea of Galilee (13:1). Within the discourse in Matthew 13:1–52, there are seven parables, each one dealing with the kingdom of heaven. This is explicitly stated in the last six of the parables, five of which begin by stating, "The kingdom of heaven is like" (*homoia estin*; 13:31, 33, 44, 45, 47), while another begins with the wording "The kingdom of heaven is like/compared to . . ." (*hōmoiōthē*, 13:24). The fact that the kingdom is the subject of the first parable (13:1–9, 18–23) is explicitly stated only in the explanation of the parable, when the seeds are identified as the word or message of the kingdom (v. 19). Just as Matthew earlier presents the teachings of Jesus (chaps. 5–7) followed by His miracles (chaps. 8–9), Matthew now provides the parables of Jesus for special consideration.

Within the Bible, the phrase "kingdom of heaven" or "kingdom of God" is found only in the NT and mainly in the words of Jesus. The wording "kingdom of heaven" is confined to the words of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew, where it is found thirty-two times—usually in places where the other Gospels have the phrase, "kingdom of God" (e.g., Matt. 4:17 // Mark 1:15). In Matthew 19:23–24 the terms "kingdom of heaven" and "kingdom of God" are used interchangeably. Matthew, however, seems to have clearly favored the phrase "kingdom of heaven," perhaps due to the sensitivity his Jewish readers had to an overuse of the term "God."

The pattern of usage in the Bible shows that the term "kingdom of God"—or if we use Matthew's preferred terminology, "kingdom of heaven"—is an important theme in the teachings of Jesus that is also touched on in the rest of the NT. The concept has solid roots in the OT, something that those who first listened to Jesus would probably have recognized. While Daniel 2 does not contain the exact phrase "kingdom of God," the concept is definitely present in that chapter. Daniel explained to King Nebuchadnezzar that the last part of his dream meant that sometime in the future, after a succession of human kingdoms, the God of heaven would set up a kingdom that would never be destroyed. It would crush all other kingdoms and stand forever (Dan. 2:44). In this vision of Daniel, the kingdom of God was something that will arise in the future, and its setting up will signal a clean break with the present. All earthly human kingdoms will be destroyed. That this view of the future still held sway among Christians in the early church is particularly evident in Revelation 19:11—22:5 and is also found elsewhere in the NT (e.g., Matt. 24-25; John 5:26-29; 1 Thess. 4:13—5:11; 2 Pet. 3:12-13). That this understanding might have been in the minds of those who heard Him makes what Jesus said about the kingdom in the parables found in Matthew 13 all the more intriguing.

13:1-9. Parable of the Sower. Jesus left His house in Capernaum and moved around the shore of the Sea of Galilee. Not far from Capernaum were a number of bays that formed a natural amphitheater, and as a crowd gathered, Jesus got into a boat so He could talk to the crowds gathered around Him on the lakeshore. He began recounting a parable called by modern interpreters the parable of the sower, although given the importance the different types of soil have for the parable, it could equally be called the parable of the soils. Jesus began by describing the activity of somebody sowing seed in a field—an activity that was well known to His hearers. Because of the need to conserve moisture in the soil in the Holy Land, it was usual to sow the seed before the field was ploughed.

Sowing could be done in several ways. A particularly strong and fit farmer might just tie a bag of grain across his shoulders and dip into it with his hand and strew the seed around appropriately. But those who have worked on farms will agree that bags of grain are very heavy, and farmers usually try to sow the seed in a less exhausting way. It was common in the Holy Land at that time to tie a bag of grain on the back of a donkey, for example. Once the donkey was positioned in the appropriate field, a hole was made in the bag, and the grain trickled out of the hole and onto the field. Such a method would explain why some of the seed fell on places such as the path and thin soil that a more careful approach to the sowing of seed would have avoided. In the parable, the seed that fell on the path was quickly snatched by the birds, and the seed that fell on the thin soil covering the rocks grew quickly enough but did not survive long when the heat of summer dried up the soil, while the seed that fell on the thorny ground produced plants that were quickly choked by the thorns (13:4-6). But some seed fell on good soil and yielded crops that bore thirty times, sixty times, and a hundred times as much as the seed that had been planted.

The whole parable has been leading up to this point—the yield of the seed when sown on good soil. What would the first hearers of the parable have thought about a yield of thirtyfold? Even with modern farming techniques and specially selected seed stock, yields as high as thirtyfold are highly unusual. It is true that there were some stories circulating in the ancient world that such yields were possible, but their reliability is questionable. The best evidence we have from the Holy Land is that found in the Mishnah, which reports a fivefold yield. Yields of thirtyfold, sixtyfold, and a hundredfold would have been miraculous at the time of Jesus, and even today. The parable climaxes in a miracle! But a discussion of the parable's meaning is delayed by a question asked by the disciples.

13:10–17. The Purpose of Parables. The disciples asked Jesus why He taught in parables. His answer highlights two other things. First, there are some things known to His disciples and followers that are *mystērion*—"secrets" or "mysteries"—to those outside the group. This extra knowledge is available only to those who are His followers. Some things that His followers know help define them as a group that is distinct from those who are not followers of Jesus. The second point that Jesus's answer highlights is that those who are spiritually blind will remain spiritually blind (v. 12). Just as those who are spiritually enlightened continue to grow in their understanding of Jesus, those who are spiritually blind will continue to find Him baffling and incomprehensible. At this time, Jesus was working in a hostile environment, which would eventually lead to His death. Couching His key teachings in parables served to protect Him, at least for a time.

13:18–23. Parable of the Sower Explained. Jesus explained to His disciples that the parable is about how different hearers receive the message of the kingdom of heaven. Some hear and do not understand. They are like the seed fallen on the path—the devil takes away the message of the kingdom so fast that it never has a chance to grow (v. 19). Others receive the word very gladly, and just as the grain springs up in the rocky ground, they appear to be making rapid progress in their spiritual walk. But when trouble arises, they quickly fall away (vv. 20–21). As long as Christians live in a world of sin, trouble will find them. At such moments some conclude that

faith is inadequate and discard Christianity. Others see it as an opportunity to deepen their relationship with God. They reach out the hand of faith and tell Him that while they do not understand the difficult times they are going through, they know that He understands and that He will walk with them.

Jesus explained that the seed sewn among the thorns (v. 22) represents another group who believe but find themselves being consumed with the worries of this world and the deceptive lure of wealth. This is often manifested in people who are too busy coping with the pressures of everyday life to spend time in prayer, to attend worship services, and to read their Bible regularly. The faith of many such individuals withers slowly over time, and they eventually discover that their Christianity is but an empty shell. By way of contrast, the seed that fell on good soil represents those who hear the word and understand it (v. 23). Such people are those who, when trials and troubles shake their faith in God, still reach out to God in faith and trust; it represents those who regularly spend time with spiritual things—who regularly read their Bibles, who regularly pray, who attend and participate in worship services. As with the miraculous yield of seed, such Christians are surrounded by miracles. They are imperfect human beings, but as they walk with Jesus, others see glimpses of Jesus in their lives and are drawn to Him and His followers.

13:24–30. Weeds among the Wheat. The parable of the weeds among the wheat provides an interesting glimpse of one aspect of the agricultural world from the time of Jesus. In this world, a prosperous farmer could have had an enemy who chose to attack him by sowing weeds in his wheat crop. The word *zizanion* (v. 25) designates weeds or tares. The seed the enemy sowed would have appeared no different from wheat until the harvest, which indicates the high likelihood that it was the seed of the bearded darnel plant. This plant and its characteristics were well enough known in the ancient world, and there were specific laws against its use in a situation described in this parable. Bearded darnel does, in fact, look like wheat until it is mature, when its grain turns black, rather than the golden brown of wheat. It is used for poultry feed in the Middle East, but humans find it to be a mild hallucinogen. Sowing bearded darnel in a field of wheat is a particularly spiteful thing to do, as the only good time to remove it is at harvest—already the busiest time of the year, made worse by the need to carefully remove all the darnel. Inevitably some unwanted seed would end up in the grain supply, and this would require extra time to remove the unwanted grains before grinding the grain to make bread. Any mistake in that painstaking process would mean that unpleasant dreams and visions would be experienced by those unfortunate enough to have been given bread contaminated with the darnel.

In the parable that Jesus spoke, the servants report to their master that darnel had been sown in the field of grain (v. 27). Quite sensibly Jesus warned that any attempt to eradicate the darnel too soon would in fact lead to the destruction of much of the good grain, and therefore the two crops should be left to grow side by side until the harvest (vv. 29–30). At that time the darnel could be easily identified, then removed and burned, while the good grain would be gathered into the barns.

13:31–32. The Mustard Seed. When Jesus used the words "The kingdom of heaven is like . . ." in Matthew 13, He used a figure of speech, rather like an extended simile. A simile is a figure of speech that compares two unlike things. A parable works in a similar manner. When Jesus said that the kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, He was saying that there is something similar between a grain of mustard and the kingdom of heaven—finding the similarity is the key to understanding this and other parables, especially those that make an explicit comparison.

Jesus noted two things about the mustard plant: it has small seeds, and it grows large enough to be described as a tree. The seed of the mustard plant (probably *Sinapis nigra*, or black mustard) is indeed small—the smallest found in Judea. Between 725 and 760 of these seeds are needed to make up a gram (0.001 kg). Yet the plant itself grows quite large, up to eight or nine feet (2.5 or even 3 m) in the vicinity of the Sea of Galilee. The mustard leaf was pickled and eaten. The plant is described as the largest of the herbs (v. 32).

Jesus spoke His parable, likening the growth of the kingdom of God to that of a mustard tree. It starts small and grows very large. The explanation of the parable of the weeds among the wheat highlights the intimate connection between the kingdom of heaven and the Christian church. In anticipation of that passage, it is interesting to note that the Christian church did in fact grow from very small beginnings (Jesus and a small number of disciples) to a worldwide phenomenon with millions who claim to be followers of Jesus.

13:33–35. Parable of the Leaven. Bread has been made with yeast at least since the earliest Egyptians. Yeast is a fungus that when mixed with bread dough uses oxygen and carbohydrates to create water and carbon dioxide or, when the oxygen levels have decreased sufficiently, to create alcohol and carbon dioxide. The alcohol evaporates away in cooking, but the carbon dioxide creates bubbles in the dough, and the bread tastes much better. In the times of both the OT and NT, bread was made daily, and some of the dough was kept uncooked from day to day to be the "leaven" that would be put into the new batch of bread dough to cause it to rise. During the Feast of Unleavened Bread, this practice was discontinued for a period of seven days, starting with Passover (Ex. 12:1–20). In this way, each New Year was to be marked by a discarding of the old leaven.

This parable of Jesus notes the remarkable way in which a small amount of leaven has a large impact on the greater bread mix, and it indicates that the kingdom of heaven also acts in this way—a small group can have an inordinately significant effect for good on a much larger group (cf. 1 Cor. 5:6; Gal. 5:9).

Matthew clarifies that at this time period in his ministry, Jesus spoke only in parables to those outside of His immediate group of followers. But to His disciples He explained all the parables. The respect for the OT shown in Christian circles is underlined by the Evangelist, highlighting that by teaching in parables, Jesus was in fact fulfilling the words of prophecy (Matt. 13:35).

13:36–43. The Parable of the Weeds Explained. There are two broad ways in which the parable of the weeds has been understood: a universalistic interpretation and an ecclesiological (church-focused) interpretation. According to the universalistic interpretation, the parable of the weeds has a worldwide scope. The kingdom of heaven is understood to be God's rule on the earth, and the parable has a relatively straightforward meaning that both good and evil exist in the world until the Second Coming of Jesus. According to the ecclesiological or church-focused interpretation, the parable of the weeds is about the church. It teaches that within the church there will be both good and bad until the Second Coming and that Christians should be careful in their attitudes in community discipline to avoid rooting out good along with bad.

Which of the two interpretations is the better fit with the evidence of the text? Those who would argue for the universalistic interpretation point to the wording of 13:38, which states that "the field is the world." This, they argue, means that the parable is about the whole world (i.e., has universal appeal). They also note that most scholars consider the kingdom of God to be the reign of God, which fits well with the usage of the term in the OT (e.g., 1 Chr. 26:31).

Those who argue for the ecclesiological or church-focused interpretation ask whether Jesus would have told a parable to explain that there would be good and bad people in the world until the Second Coming. Such a statement is true but trivial. They also point out that while the kingdom of God might well be best understood as the "reign of God" in the OT, within the teachings of Jesus, however, the concept seems to be one of the "realm of God," a concept of territory. For example, Jesus told Peter that he would be given the "keys of the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 16:19). Keys imply a door or a gate, such as the gate into a city. Furthermore, Jesus usually spoke of "entering" the kingdom of heaven (e.g., Matt. 5:20; 7:21; 18:3; 19:23–24). A key presupposes a boundary, as does the language of entering the kingdom. This imagery makes sense only if the kingdom of God is conceived as a place.

Where is the place in which good and bad coexist but in which there is the possibility that the bad can be identified and excluded? It is in the church. The parable deals with the issue of what to do with apparent followers of Jesus who do not measure up to the standards of some in the community. Should they be excluded? The answer provided by this parable is "no," as there is danger that overzealousness is likely to root out some of the "good seed" along with the bad seed (but see commentary on Matt. 18:15–20).

Interpreted in this way, the parable of the weeds is consistent with other parts of the Gospel of Matthew, which has several passages dealing with the problem of unworthy members (e.g., Matt. 7:21–23). Indeed, no fewer than four other parables address the problem of good and bad within the kingdom of heaven. These are the parables of the net (13:47–50), the unforgiving servant (18:23–35), the wedding garment (22:1–14), and the ten maidens (25:1–13).

13:44–46. Parables of the Treasure and the Pearl. The parables of the treasure hidden in a field and the pearl of great price deal with the importance of possessing the kingdom of heaven and being possessed by the kingdom of heaven. In both cases, though, the kingdom of heaven is associated with value such that everything else must be sold in order to purchase the object of value. In the first, the kingdom of heaven is presented as having great value. In the second, the kingdom of heaven is seeking items of great value.

Unexpectedly finding a treasure hidden in a field (v. 44) was not an uncommon event in ancient times. Indeed, to this day archaeologists come across hordes of valuable objects hidden so well that they were lost to those in ancient times. One might even consider the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls to fit this category—the scribes at Qumran hid scrolls expecting to be able to return and recover them. They never did. Times were uncertain and life was risky, and even the best laid plans sometimes proved disastrous. There was a rudimentary banking system at the time of Jesus, but not one that was accessible to everybody and not one that the wealthy could trust, especially in times of war. It was common prudence to hide some of the family wealth in a secret place. The wealth of a family could be lost by being buried in a place unknown to the survivors. In the parable that Jesus told (v. 44), somebody was ploughing a field owned by another party. Suddenly the plough turned up a treasure hoard. Jesus would have us know that the kingdom of heaven is like a treasure that, when discovered, is worth selling everything one owns in order to buy the field where it is found. To possess it is worth everything that we own.

A merchant who specialized in pearls could spend his whole life searching for the one perfect specimen. Jesus said that when a merchant had found one of great price, he sold all of his possessions to own it. The basic message concerning the worth is the same in both parables—the kingdom of heaven is worth everything. What is different between them, though, is that the treasure hidden in the field was found by somebody completely by accident. In the case of the pearl of great price, only after a long search was something found. Some, therefore, find the kingdom of heaven by accident and others find it after a long spiritual search. In both cases, what is found requires a total commitment of all they have and all they are.

13:47–50. Parable of the Net. Here Jesus returned to the theme of the unworthiness of some who consider themselves to be part of the kingdom of heaven. Not everything that is caught in a fishing net is suitable for human consumption. This was particularly true for observant Jews, who had strict rules that only fish with fins and scales were to be eaten (Lev. 11:9–12). The distinction between clean and unclean fish is not made in the parable, only those that are good (*kalos*) and bad (*sapros*). In this parable Jesus specified that the time of sorting out who really belongs to the kingdom of heaven and who does not will take place at the end of the age (Matt. 13:49). The sorting will be done by angels, not humans, as part of the last judgment. In the meantime, the kingdom of God will draw into it all kinds of people, both good and bad. The church is clearly in view in this parable. The good news of Jesus will draw all kinds of people into the church until the last judgment, which will take place at the end of the age.

13:51–52. Treasures New and Old. Jesus asked His disciples whether they had understood His parables regarding the kingdom of God. They replied that they had, and He then spoke of them as scribes who had been taught the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. As skilled interpreters of the words of Jesus, they would bring out new and old treasures from His teachings. As the church moves through the challenges that changing society and changing technology bring in their wake, there will be a need for Christian scribes—those who are instructed in the mysteries of the kingdom—to explain what it means to be a Christian today.

13:53—17:27
Different Messianic Expectations

This section of Matthew traces the ministry of Jesus as it led up to the climatic confession of Peter that Jesus is "the Christ, the Son of the Living God" (16:16). The response of Peter, however, was not the only reaction to Jesus's ministry. While the disciples increased in their faith, others in the Jewish nation became hardened in their rejection of Jesus (13:54—14:12; 15:1–20; 16:1–12). Jesus simply did not measure up to their messianic expectations. He responded to this rejection by withdrawing from the crowds and focusing His attention on teaching His disciples what it means for Him to be Israel's Messiah—a path that was to involve His suffering and death in Jerusalem (16:21–28; 17:22–23).

13:53–58. Rejection of Jesus at Nazareth. When Jesus returned to His hometown, Nazareth, He taught in the synagogue. Nazareth was a very small town, and His audience knew Him as He grew up. It is perhaps significant for our understanding of the human nature of Jesus that those with whom He grew up had little inkling of His ministry and status. They wondered at Jesus's wisdom and power. They recalled that He was the son of the carpenter, that His mother was Mary, and that His brothers were James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas, and that He also had sisters still living there. His authority seemed at odds with His familiarity and humble beginnings (v. 55). This verse provides most of the information that we have about Jesus's family and His profession. While it reveals Jesus had siblings, it does not indicate their exact relationship to Jesus (cf. John 2:12; 7:5). They may have been younger children born to Joseph and Mary after the birth of Jesus (cf. Matt. 1:25; Luke 2:7) or older stepbrothers and sisters, that is, if Joseph had been a widower before he took Mary as his wife (see "The Brothers of Jesus," p. 1252).

Large families were the norm for most of human history. They were often encouraged as a means of developing long-term economic security for their members. Population growth was limited by high infant mortality rates (only about 50 percent of children survived to age ten), and by the dreadful depredations brought about by disease, war, and famine. Yet despite this, the period of the Roman Empire saw the population of Galilee grow considerably. Jesus's own family gives evidence of this. Joseph is not mentioned as being present, nor does he appear in any of the Gospel stories after the birth narratives, except in connection to Jesus's childhood trip to Jerusalem recorded in Luke 2:41–48. It is often concluded that Joseph was an older man who was dead by this time.

Insights into the Kingdom of God: The Parables

From Daniel 2 and Revelation 19–21, it is clear that sometime in the future God will act decisively in human history to destroy all sin and those who cling to it. He then will establish His eternal kingdom on earth. Then the righteous will live in perfect harmony with God and with each other.

1. Mission and the Kingdom. According to the parables in Matthew 13, Christians who are waiting for the coming of the kingdom will be active in sharing the news of the kingdom. As they go about telling others of Jesus's love and sacrifice, they will meet with varied responses. Some will not understand (Matt. 13:4, 19), others initially will be enthusiastic but will not persevere during difficult times (vv. 5, 20). Yet others will be convinced but will allow the cares of this world to choke out their spiritual lives (vv. 7, 22). But some will pay attention, persevere through hard times, and keep an appropriate balance in their lives. These will see the worth of the kingdom of heaven and be willing to commit their whole being and wealth to possess it (vv. 44–46). They will be such remarkable individuals that they will be surrounded by miraculous increase in the numbers in the kingdom (vv. 9, 23).

2. Church and Kingdom. It has proved necessary to invoke the church at several places in interpreting the parables of the kingdom of heaven. This link between the kingdom of heaven and the church has been used in some unfortunate ways throughout the Christian era—one has to think only of the Crusades of the late medieval period; hardly a technique of persuasion that Jesus would have recommended (see 5:38–48). Yet despite some of the ways in which the connection between the church and the kingdom has been misappropriated and misused, we must not overlook the intimate connection between the kingdom of heaven and the Christian community that is drawn by Jesus in the parables found in Matthew 13. One might summarize this connection as follows: While there will be some in the kingdom of heaven who will not be found in the church, in this age most will be. It is equally true that not all of those who are in church will be found in the kingdom of heaven. This is underlined by both the parable of the weeds (13:24–30, 36–43) and the parable of the net (vv. 47–50). The message of the kingdom of heaven draws all kinds into the church—both good and bad (vv. 47–50). This problem is exacerbated by the actions of the devil, who actively sows bad seeds in the church (v. 39). In the case of the weeds, the problem is that it is impossible to distinguish the genuine from the false—a situation that makes it necessary to wait. This will be sorted out conclusively in due time—at the end of the age, in the last judgment—and those who carry out the judgments are the angels of God (vv. 41–42, 49–50). After this process is complete, then indeed only the righteous will be part of the church/kingdom.

Joseph's occupation is described as that of a *tektōn* ("carpenter," Matt. 13:55), and Mark 6:3 states that Jesus Himself was a *tektōn*. The word *tektōn* is used to describe somebody who worked in both wood and stone. Such individuals often were asked to build houses—which during Jesus's time were usually constructed more with stone than with wood. Wood was usually used in constructing the roofs of houses, but the walls were built with stone. Jesus is usually described as a carpenter, but perhaps a better description would be "builder."

Jesus noted that prophets are not without honor except in their own country and within their own families. Because of their unbelief, Jesus was not able to do many miracles during His visit to Nazareth (Matt. 13:57–58).

14:1–12. Death of John the Baptist. The death of John the Baptist is described in three places (Matt. 14:1–12; Mark 6:14–29; Luke 9:7–9). Compared to Matthew, Luke is very brief, while Mark has almost twice as many words as Matthew. Herod (Antipas) is described as Herod the tetrarch in Matthew 14:1. His father, Herod the Great, was king over an extensive territory that included Judea, Idumea, Samaria, Perea, Galilee, and Trachonitus, but at his death, his kingdom was divided into three: Judea-Samaria, Galilee-Perea, and Northern Transjordan. Thus Herod Antipas was given a title suitable for the ruler of a part of a kingdom—tetrarch (literally: ruler over a quarter of a kingdom).

Herod Antipas had offended Jewish moral sensibilities when he married Herodias, his brother's wife (forbidden by Lev. 18:16). John the Baptist had said publicly that it was unlawful for Herod to marry Herodias. A ruler would not allow such seditious talk about his wife and children, so he had John arrested. Mark provides a few more details that show it was, in fact, Herodias who wished to kill John (Mark 6:19), not Herod. According to Mark 6:20, Herod feared John and knew him to be righteous—he heard him with great perplexity but also with pleasure. These details from Mark explain why John was still kept alive, even though he was imprisoned.

An opportunity arose for Herodias when in an act of bravado (probably drunken), Herod promised her daughter anything she wished, as her dancing had pleased him. The daughter, prompted by her mother, asked for the head of John the Baptist on a platter. Now Herod faced a moral dilemma, which Matthew suggests by saying that the king was grieved (14:9). He did not wish to do this, but he had made an oath in public that he felt could not be violated. After all, public executions for matters that displeased the ruler were not uncommon. Thus we have one of the most gruesome images in the Bible—the dismembered head of John the Baptist being presented to the young maiden whose beauty and poise in dancing had so pleased the court.

14:13–21. The Feeding of the Five Thousand. Perhaps the death of John disturbed Jesus enough that He wished to withdraw to be alone (14:13). He left in a boat, but crowds of people followed Him along the shoreline (for more on the location see commentary on Luke 9:10–17). When Jesus got out of the boat, He saw the large crowd and had great compassion on them. Immediately putting His own needs aside, He began to heal the sick. When it became evening, His disciples urged Him to send the crowds away to find their own food in the neighboring villages, but Jesus said to them that the crowds need not go away—the disciples should give them something to eat. They replied that they had only five loaves and two fishes. The Greek word *artos*, translated "loaves" (Matt. 14:17), means "bread." At the time of Jesus, bread was made by placing bread dough on the inside walls of a clay oven. The process produced something similar to pita bread. The disciples were correct: under normal circumstances the five loaves of bread and two fish would not have been sufficient to feed so many people (five thousand men, plus women and children; v. 21). But Jesus calmly ordered them to all sit down. He took the bread and blessed it—an action reminiscent of the action of the head of the household at the beginning of a meal (e.g., Luke 24:30; Acts 27:35), and something that Jesus also did at the Last Supper (Matt. 26:26). In this instance, as He broke it the food multiplied so much that after everybody had eaten, there was enough left over to fill twelve baskets of fragments.

14:22–36. Walking on Water and Miracles in Gennesaret. Immediately after feeding the five thousand, Jesus commanded the disciples to leave in a boat and dismissed the crowd. Jesus was a man of prayer, and finally He was able to find time by Himself to pray. Meanwhile, the disciples had been making poor headway. They were harassed (*basanizomenon*, "tortured," "tossed about") by the waves, had a contrary wind, and were still rowing into the fourth watch—just before dawn (vv. 24–25). Romans divided the night into four watches (the Jews divided it into three), so by the time Jesus came to them, they had been rowing all night. While they had made significant distance from land, they were nowhere near the other side of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus appeared to them walking on the water (v. 25), and the disciples, who initially were afraid, were reassured by Jesus when He identified Himself to them (vv. 26–27). Peter then suggested that he should walk toward Jesus on the water, and Jesus invited him to do so. Peter succeeded until he became afraid and started to sink. He called out to Jesus to save him; Jesus caught Peter by the hand, led him back to the boat, and gently chided him for his lack of faith (vv. 28–31). As long as he was keeping his attention fixed on Jesus, he succeeded. But the moment his attention was distracted, he began to drown. Likewise, while the disciples were working in their own strength, it took them all night to do something they could have done very quickly when Jesus was with them.

Jesus and His disciples arrived at the land of Gennesaret, the Greek spelling of a town or region called Chinnereth/Kinnereth (cf. Josh. 11:2; 19:35). The Sea of Galilee is also called the Sea of Tiberias in some versions (John 21:1) and the Lake of Genessaret (Luke 5:1). The land of Gennesaret was close to Capernaum (for more on the location see commentary on John 6:16–21), and in this region Jesus healed many who came to Him.

15:1–20. The Tradition of the Elders. The Gospel of Matthew returns several times to the topic of law. In Matthew 5:17–48, for example, it records Jesus giving extended instruction that Christians should be foremost in continuing observance of the law of God, albeit transformed by the new reality and perspective that is present in the person and teachings of Jesus. Matthew 12:1–14 recounts two incidents that reveal Jesus's attitude to the Sabbath. Matthew 15:1–20 makes clear Jesus's attitude to the Pharisees' interpretation of the law.

At the time of Jesus, the Pharisees' interpretation of the law was orally handed down from rabbi to disciple. In later centuries these teachings were gathered into the Mishnah and Talmud. From these later writings, we can see that the Pharisees and their rabbinic successors spent much time working out the detailed application of the OT laws to everyday life. For example, in the Ten Commandments the believer is told not to work on the Sabbath, but it does not define what work is. The Pharisees had thought this through and determined that there were thirty-nine types of work forbidden (cf. Matt. 12:1–2). The occasion of debate in Matthew 15:1–20 is the issue of whether or not people should wash their hands before eating. The Pharisees and scribes clearly identified this as one of their traditions (the traditions of the elders, v. 2). Jesus's first response was to cite an example where the Pharisees' interpretation of the law allowed children to circumvent their obligations to their parents by declaring something the parents wanted from them as a gift to God ("Corban" ["offering"] in Mark 7:11). This removed the children's obligation to provide for their parents because it would eventually be given as a gift to the temple. Jesus then attacked them vigorously and indicated that their interpretations fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah when he said that the people were worshiping God in vain because they were teaching human commandments as doctrines (Matt. 15:9).

Jesus further explained His reasoning to the crowd. It is surprisingly practical: Food enters the body, is processed, and then eliminated. It does not actually enter the heart on the way through to defile it. What defiles the heart are evil intentions, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, and blasphemy (v. 19). These come out of the heart, and they defile a person. Spiritual defilement does *not* occur by eating with unwashed hands (vv. 18, 20). Matthew is especially clear that Jesus was not challenging the laws of the OT but the Pharisaic interpretation of those laws (see "Unclean Foods in Mark 7:1–23," p. 1305).

15:21–28. The Canaanite/Syro-Phoenician Woman. One of the issues that has an important bearing on how we should understand the Gospel of Matthew as a whole is the stance that is portrayed with regard to Gentiles (non-Jews). In Matthew 10:5, for example, Jesus had instructed His disciples to restrict their ministry to only the lost sheep of the house of Israel and prohibited them from speaking to Gentiles or Samaritans. Some commentators conclude that Matthew is therefore a Gospel directed only at Jewish Christians—those Christians who observed the laws, including laws regarding clean

and unclean foods, the Sabbath, and circumcision. But this is unlikely, not least because the last verse of the Gospel of Matthew records Jesus urging His disciples to go to all nations (or all Gentiles; 28:19–20). Along the way there are clues provided in the Gospel concerning Jesus's intention. Right from the beginning, the four women (so atypically included) in the genealogy of Jesus are all Gentiles (1:3, 5, 6). This shows conclusively that Gentiles could be included in the holy nation.

The interaction of Jesus with the Canaanite woman (15:21–28) is more than a subtle clue—it announced that Jesus's salvation is for all, even a despised Canaanite. Jesus's travels had taken Him to the region of Tyre and Sidon, a Gentile area. There He was met by a woman described in Mark 7:26 as a Syro-Phoenician. This would accurately describe somebody from Tyre and Sidon—cities that were founded by the Phoenicians. But Matthew describes her as a Canaanite, a term that is also appropriate. Numbers 13:29 states that the Canaanites lived by the sea and along the Jordan. The territory near the sea could be extended to encompass Tyre and Sidon. While appropriate, "Canaanite" was an emotionally loaded term—it conveyed the thought of a pagan nation that had been replaced by the people of Israel under God's guidance.

Jesus's attitude to the woman seems to have not been promising. He told her that He had been sent to the lost sheep of Israel (Matt. 15:24)—language reminiscent of His earlier instructions to His disciples (c.f. 10:5). The woman replied by restating her need (v. 25), and Jesus then said, in terms that would have been equally insulting in His own culture as it would be today, that it is not fitting to take the children's bread and give it to the dogs (v. 26). This language embodies the Jewish prejudice, which Jesus was about to reject. She replied that even the dogs eat from the crumbs that fall from their master's table (v. 27). Jesus answered that her faith was strong and that her wish was fulfilled, thereby showing that the healing He brought was not restricted to the Jews even during His ministry. After His death and resurrection, His disciples were told that their mission extended to all the nations (28:19–20). The interaction of Jesus and the Canaanite woman was an anticipation of this wider ministry.

15:29—16:4. The Feeding of the Four Thousand and a Sign. There are many parallels between the feeding of the five thousand (14:13–21) and the feeding of the four thousand (15:29–39). Both were preceded by Jesus healing large numbers of people. Matthew 15:30–31 carefully lists people with major conditions from which Jesus healed them (the lame, the blind, cripples, and the mute). In both instances, Jesus had compassion on the crowds who had been with Him for a long time (14:14; 15:32). In both instances He miraculously multiplied few resources into many. In one case He fed five thousand men together with women and children from five loaves and two fish (14:19); in the other He fed four thousand men together with women and children from seven loaves and a few fish (15:34). There were twelve baskets of food left over from the feeding of the five thousand (14:20) but only seven from the feeding of the four thousand (15:37). Jesus Himself later referred to these figures (16:5–12).

Pharisees and Sadducees were usually at loggerheads, and thus it is unusual to find them combining forces against Jesus (16:1). They came to Him demanding a sign. This was not the first time that such a demand had been made of Jesus (see 12:38), and His reply was a little different. He first challenged them because they seemed to be able to read the signs of the weather but not the signs of the times in which they lived (16:2–3). Then He insisted that no sign was to be given to them except that of Jonah (v. 4), echoing exactly what He had said earlier (12:39–40). In saying this, Jesus was pointing forward to His death and resurrection as the ultimate sign of His power and authority, something hidden from His followers and opponents alike until after the event.

16:5–12. Leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees. As they were traveling (Mark 8:13 reveals that they were on a boat), the disciples realized that they had neglected to bring bread. The word "bread" could also refer to any food (see Matt. 6:11). Jesus then warned them of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees (16:6). Leaven, of course, is a very important component used in baking bread, and the disciples, as they often did, misunderstood what Jesus meant. He was talking of leaven in a figurative way—a small amount of either good or bad has the possibility of influencing a much wider group. The leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees is related to their teachings (v. 12) and their hypocrisy (Luke 12:1), which was demonstrated by their demand for a sign (Matt. 16:1). Jesus referred to the disciples as those of "little faith" (v. 8) and asked them about their recent experiences. When they used only five loaves to feed five thousand, how much was left over? The disciples answered twelve baskets. With seven loaves and feeding fewer (four thousand), how much was left over? They answered seven baskets. Then Jesus clarified that He was not, in fact, talking about real bread, but the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees, which the disciples then understood to be the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees (vv. 9–12). No doubt they also considered how much more Jesus was able to accomplish with fewer resources. Working with Jesus changes how some things add up.

16:13–28. Peter's Declaration about Jesus. Jesus asked the disciples what was being said concerning Him. They reported that some said He was John the Baptist, others that He was Elijah or even Jeremiah or one of the other prophets. When Jesus asked the disciples who they thought He was, Peter said that He is Christ the Messiah, Son of the living God (v. 16). Jesus then praised Peter, saying that flesh and blood had not revealed that to him, but the heavenly Father had done so. He then said something to Peter about which there has been a lot of controversy. Jesus said to Peter (*Petros*) that He would build His church "on this rock [*petra*]" (v. 18). Whatever Jesus meant here, it does not give unqualified support to everything Peter said and did. A few verses later we read that Jesus rejects Peter's rebuke (v. 23). Jesus had just explained to His disciples that it was necessary for Him to go to Jerusalem and suffer and die (v. 21). Peter immediately remonstrated with Him, saying that such a thing would never happen (v. 22). Peter had just identified Jesus as the Messiah, and clearly for him the Messiah would not suffer and die. It was not said explicitly, but perhaps Peter expected that as the "Son of David," the Messiah would act as David did and be victorious in war and defeat the enemies of God. But for Jesus, being the Messiah meant that He would suffer and die. Thus, while Peter had the title correct, he certainly did not understand its meaning as Jesus did.

Much has been made of the difference between *Petros* and *petra* in Matthew 16:18. Since the Reformation in the sixteenth century, it has been suggested that because in Greek *petros* means a small pebble, while *petra* means a large rock, that as Jesus is the true rock (1 Cor. 10:4), He was in fact contrasting Peter (whose name meant "little rock") with the real rock, Himself. This interpretation, although possible, is linguistically unlikely. Nevertheless the text does contrast the two terms. Probably the best solution is to interpret the phrase "on this rock" not as referring to Peter but to Peter's confession that Jesus is indeed the Messiah, the Son of God, because the church is built on Him (e.g., Eph. 2:20).

Jesus then said something to Peter that He later would say to all the disciples (Matt. 16:19; 18:18). There is often a debate concerning the degree to which Christ has given His church authority to make binding decisions on earth that heaven honors. Whatever way the verse is rendered in English, the reiteration of these words in Matthew 18:15–20 demonstrates that God's church on earth is to have the authority to make decisions that should be in line with the will of God as revealed in the Bible. But it is also true that the church does not have the right to make decisions that contradict the teachings of His word (Is. 8:20; John 17:17; Gal. 1:6–10; 2 Tim. 4:1–5; Rev. 22:18–19) or to forgive sins. The following literal translation of the Greek is helpful in understanding what Jesus meant: "*Whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth, will have been loosed in heaven*" (Matt. 16:19). Note carefully the grammar used here: "will have been bound" (Gr., *estai dedemenon*). The technical name for this construction is a future perfect periphrastic passive tense. Its name is not important, but its meaning is. Jesus was not giving Peter the authority to make decisions that would then be bound in heaven. No, Peter and the rest of the disciples would be making decisions that would have already been made in heaven.

After Jesus rebuked Peter for not understanding His true mission, He turned to His disciples and laid out with great directness that becoming a follower of Jesus means to take up a cross (Matt. 16:24). Even today, where the cross has lost a lot of its dreadfulness and meaning, it is hard not to feel chilled by what Jesus said. At the time He said it, almost everybody was aware of the terrible death associated with the cross. There was nothing nice about carrying a cross—it was the route to an agonizing, slow, and horrible death. This is what Jesus promised His followers: suffering followed by death. He then pointed out that the choice is stark: if you would save your life, you will lose it; but if you lose your life, you will save it (vv. 25–26). The Son of Man was about to return to the Father and would reward everyone according to what they have done (v. 27).

17:1–13. The Transfiguration of Jesus. Six days had passed since the incident just described in Matthew 16:13–28. The reason Matthew mentions the number of days that had passed may be found in 16:28. In that verse, Jesus had promised that some standing in front of Him would not taste death until they saw the Son of Man coming in His kingdom. Thus for the Evangelist, even if the transfiguration was not the *entire* fulfillment of Jesus's words, it was at least a very definite anticipation of that event. Some of those standing there who heard the words of Jesus and saw the transfiguration were Peter, James, and John (Matt. 17:1). Jesus took them up on a mountain and was transfigured (changed dramatically) before their eyes. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became dazzling as light.

Before the startled eyes of the three disciples, Jesus was joined by two others whom they knew, without being told, were Moses and Elijah. Moses was the one through whom God gave the law and who was later resurrected (John 1:17; 7:19; cf. Jude 9), and Elijah was understood to be a great, if not the greatest, prophet and was taken alive into heaven (2 Kin. 2:11). Malachi, the last book of the prophets, had announced the promise that God would send Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord (Mal. 4:5). Thus Jesus was able to converse with the greatest giver of law and the greatest prophet before John the Baptist (Matt. 17:10–13; cf. Mal. 4:5–6; Luke 7:28). It does not say what they spoke about, but it would have been on a weighty topic, and none would have been more weighty to Jesus than His mission as suffering Messiah (cf. Luke 9:31). In further confirmation of Jesus's mission for both Himself and His disciples, they heard the voice of the Father from heaven proclaiming Jesus to be His beloved Son (cf. Matt. 3:16–17) and issuing a command for them to listen to Him (17:5).

Peter and the others were overcome by the experience. They asked Jesus why the religious leaders said that Elijah must come first—no doubt wondering about the presence of Elijah with Jesus. Jesus answered indirectly, pointing to John the Baptist as Elijah.

17:14–21. Healing of a Boy with a Demon. On coming down from the extraordinary experience of the transfiguration, Jesus and His three closest disciples met with a man who had a son who was apparently suffering from frequent and severe epileptic fits. The Greek word *selēniazomai*, used in Matthew 17:15, literally means "moonstruck," as the ancients thought the disease today named epilepsy was caused by the influence of the moon. Demon possession could have expressed itself mimicking physical sickness, but the disciples had been unable to heal him or cast out an evil spirit (which they had been given the authority to do; cf. 10:8). According to some manuscripts of Matthew 17:21, Jesus explained that prayer and fasting (cf. some manuscripts of Mark 9:29) are essential for these kinds of cases. Thus, according to these manuscripts, Jesus was revealing the remarkable fact that the disciples had become so reliant on themselves that they had neglected to pray. Matthew also highlights Jesus's earlier words about faith (17:17, 19–20; cf. Mark 9:19). In Matthew, it is the disciples' lack of faith that Jesus identified as the problem (Matt. 17:20). One is reminded of the care that Matthew had already taken (chaps. 8–9) to present the healings of Jesus as a response to faith.

17:22–27. Jesus's Death and Resurrection and the Temple Tax. Matthew 17:22–23 records the second of three occasions when Jesus clearly warned His disciples about what was going to happen to Him in Jerusalem (cf. 16:21; 20:17–19). Jesus went knowingly to Jerusalem to the fate that awaited Him there. This was something He chose to do for the benefit of humanity. It was also something that He was preparing His disciples to expect. Matthew is the only Gospel to include the follow-up story of the temple tax, which illustrated Jesus's foresight (v. 25), which supported the prediction just made regarding His own fate.

Some collectors of the two-drachma temple tax came to Peter inquiring whether His teacher contributed to the tax (v. 24). At the time of Jesus's ministry, the temple tax of a two-drachma coin (worth about two days' wages) was equivalent to the half-shekel tax collected as a poll tax for the services of the temple (Ex. 30:11–16). Since the Maccabean period, adult Jewish males from within the Holy Land and throughout the rest of the ancient world voluntarily gave two drachmas to the temple each year. Peter assured the collectors that His master did indeed contribute this tax and went in to see Jesus. Jesus anticipated Peter's question by asking him whether the children of kings are required to pay taxes or whether it is only other persons who must pay them (Matt. 17:25). Jesus implied that since they are children of God, they have no obligation to pay the contribution; but to avoid giving offense, He arranged for Peter to miraculously find the necessary money for Himself and Peter (vv. 25–27).

After the first Jewish revolt of A.D. 66–73 had been ruthlessly suppressed and the temple destroyed, the two-drachma poll tax on all Jews throughout the empire was still collected, this time as a compulsory tax imposed first by Emperor Vespasian as a punishment against the revolt. To provide an extra humiliation, rather than going to support the temple at Jerusalem, the tax was then directed to the support of the Temple of Capitoline Jupiter. Jewish Christians reading the Gospel of Matthew after that time would no doubt have taken from Jesus's words guidance in how to position themselves with regard to this hated tax. They were to consider themselves free of the obligation to pay the tax, but they should continue to do so in order to avoid causing offence.

18:1–35

Discourse 4: The Upside-Down Nature of Jesus's Kingdom

Like all five of the other discourses of Jesus found in Matthew, the fourth discourse finishes with the words, "And it happened, when Jesus had finished . . ." (19:1; cf. 7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 26:1). The beginning of the discourse is indicated by the words, "At that time" (*en ekeinē tē hōra*—"in that hour"). The disciples came to Jesus asking who was greatest in the kingdom of heaven? (18:1).

The fourth discourse focuses on Jesus's explanation to His disciples about the upside-down nature of His messianic kingdom—a reality they struggled to understand. The values on which Jesus's kingdom is built are unlike any earthly kingdom. In this kingdom, true honor is found not in power and status but in service and humility (18:1–14). It is also found in the way we consider and treat others when disputes arise in the community of faith (vv. 15–20). While there are times when recalcitrant members from the community are to be dismissed, they should not be dealt with in a cavalier manner. Instead, Jesus outlined careful steps of due process that are to be followed and bracketed the sayings on community discipline with two parables that illustrate the spirit and attitude that should guide His followers when dealing with the faults of others—the parable of the lost sheep and the parable of the unforgiving servant.

18:1–4. The Greatest in the Kingdom. The question asked by the disciples reveals their ambitious attitudes to be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven (v. 1). Jesus's answer is equally revealing, as He warned them that unless they turned from their current course of action, they definitely would not enter the kingdom of heaven (v. 3). In stating this, Jesus highlighted the fact that seeking honor and high rank has no place in His kingdom. Instead, He urged them to become like children. Children have many qualities, some of which—such as their self-centeredness and occasional cruelty to those around them who are different—are obviously not the qualities that Jesus is recommending. On the other hand, Jesus probably had in mind other qualities possessed by children, such as their simple trust and, particularly, their lack of status or concern for status. Jesus said that those who humble themselves with the status of a child will be greatest in the kingdom of heaven (v. 4).

18:5–9. Temptations to Sin. In Matthew 18:1–4 Jesus recommended that the disciples should become as humble as a child. He then highlighted the importance that Christians should place on children by stating that those who receive one child in His name will be receiving Him (v. 5). Because of their trusting natures, children are at greater risk of being led astray, and Jesus warned of the terrible consequences of causing one of the least of those who believe in Him to stumble (v. 6). The immediate context is a saying about children, so Jesus clearly had their welfare in mind. On the other hand, the reference to the believers is probably not restricted to just children. Most probably Jesus was referring to all those who believe in Him, perhaps especially those weaker or disadvantaged. A terrible fate awaits those who cause Christians to "stumble." It would be better if a millstone were hung around such a person's neck and he or she were thrown into the sea (Matt. 18:6). As a millstone was a rather large, flat stone that was used to grind grain, attaching somebody to a millstone and throwing that person into the water would guarantee that he or she drowned. Temptations, Jesus acknowledged, would come because the world is in the thrall of sin. But even so, Jesus pronounced a woe on the one who brings occasions for stumbling to others.

The importance that should be placed on rejecting temptations is found in the dramatic response Jesus recommended: if an eye or a hand causes someone to stumble, dig it out or cut it off—that is, do not allow these senses to lead us into sin (see commentary on Matt. 5:17–48) because it is better to go into the world with only one eye or one hand than with two eyes or two hands be cast into the lake of fire (18:8–9).

18:10–14. Parable of the Lost Sheep. Following this parable are recorded Jesus's instructions on what to do with a community member who refuses to listen to counsel (18:15–17). But these words are framed within the insight of the parable of the lost sheep. The true shepherd abandons the ninety-nine sheep to find the one lost sheep. Thus, the shepherds of the Christian community should do everything in their power to restore the one who is lost, even if doing so means putting the wider community in some apparent risk. Jesus risked all to save us; we should do nothing less in working to save others.

Matthew 18:6 refers to the "little ones" who believe in Jesus. There the phrase has a dual meaning: a child and all Christians, especially perhaps someone of little status within the Christian community. In Matthew 18:10 the reference seems to be to any member of the Christian community, no matter how humble. Jesus warned against mistreatment of these "little ones" because they have angels who have access to God (v. 10).

Jesus then told the parable of the lost sheep. A certain man had one hundred sheep, and one went astray or wandered. The sheep, like a member of the Christian community, can wander away from the rest of the flock. When the owner of the sheep finds it, he is more pleased with the recovery of the one sheep that had strayed than the ninety-nine who had not strayed (v. 13). It is not the will of God that any of the "little ones" should be lost (v. 14).

18:15–20. A Brother Who Sins. Businesses, organizations, clubs, and other community groups need to know who they are, and often there is quite a lot of discussion about what constitutes the "core business" of a particular group and what makes it distinctive. Christian communities are no different in this regard. To live and worship together requires some common understandings based on the Scriptures and willingness to stay together in Christ. Jesus's words in Matthew 18:15–17 both anticipate the rise of disputes and outline a clear manner in which they should be resolved.

What is set in place in this passage is practical and important. The procedure Jesus recommended has four striking features: (1) Care is made to ensure that everybody concerned has time to think things through and accurate data is gathered. (2) The goal of the procedure is to gain back the wayward one. (3) At every stage the fewest people possible are informed of the issue. (4) The decision as to who is "in" and who is "out" of the community is a decision made by the community as a whole, not by a small group of leaders.

Jesus set up a process both to investigate the issue and to resolve it in the most positive manner possible. Initially there should be a discussion between the aggrieved parties, and them alone. If both parties do not agree about the nature of the offense, a further effort for reconciliation should be initiated by the person who feels wronged by the other. This is of great importance, especially in the light of the fact that so often there is a temptation to forgo confrontation and try and get others to act on the matter. Jesus said that ideally the matter should be raised between the two individuals alone (18:15) and resolved there. Yet sometimes such a consultation, even if conducted in the very best spirit, does not resolve the conflict. In that case one or two further individuals need to be involved (v. 16). Once again, their input is designed to allow the matter to be resolved, but in the event that this is not possible, they will be able to render an impartial account of the issue and of the attempts made to resolve it.

If the matter still has not been resolved, then it is to be taken to the whole church. If the church itself is not heeded, then the one at fault should be treated as a Gentile and a tax collector (v. 17). At least two things may be concluded from the decision to treat recalcitrant community members as heathens and tax collectors. First, even at the earliest moments in Christian history, community identity was strong enough to make it possible to know who were "in" the community and who were "outside" of the community. Jesus referred here to cases of clear distinction between weeds and wheat in the life of the person. In such cases the church has the responsibility of applying ecclesiastical discipline (cf. 1 Cor. 5:1–5).

Second, it is worth remembering that Jesus Himself was a friend of tax collectors (Matt. 9:10–13), and that Gentiles are the focus of Christian mission (28:19). Seen in this light, putting somebody outside the community is not a matter of ostracism but an extreme measure designed to place people at the center of an effort to bring them back to Christianity (cf. 1 Cor. 5:9–13). The community, with heavy hearts, has discovered that such individuals do not hold with community standards of belief or behavior, but they are still objects of God's love and the focus of Christian mission.

Within Matthew 18:18–20 are words about the church that had previously been said to Peter (see 16:19), but here Jesus addressed them to the disciples as representatives of the church: "Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven" (v. 18). The language Jesus used is solemn. There will be times when a Christian community reluctantly decides that one of their numbers no longer "fits," that they are "out" rather than "in." Jesus has put in place a very careful mechanism to ensure such decisions are not made lightly or in haste. The thought that Jesus is present whenever two or three of His followers are gathered together (18:20) has provided comfort throughout Christian history and is particularly cogent to think of when the Christian community is making difficult decisions as to who is or will be "in" or "out."

18:21–35. Parable of the Unforgiving Servant. It is not by accident that the parable of the unforgiving servant in Matthew follows immediately after Jesus's comments on community discipline. When Peter asked how many times he should forgive his fellow believer, he suggested what might be considered to be a large number: seven. Jesus responded that he should forgive seventy-times seven. The parable explains what He meant.

The parable begins with a king settling up his accounts. Brought before him was a servant who owed ten thousand units of gold currency called *talantōn*—"talents." Some concept of the enormity of the amount of this debt might be gained by noting that the entire revenue of the province that contained Idumea, Judaea, and Samaria was only six hundred talents and that of Galilee itself was only three hundred talents. The Holy Land was not a particularly wealthy part of the Roman world, but even so, ten thousand talents is a number representing the gross national product of a significant province. While not the most common form of raising taxes for the Roman Empire, in some Roman provinces taxes were raised by entrepreneurs who guaranteed to return a certain amount to the treasury. Winners of such tax contracts were able to pocket any excess above the amount they had guaranteed to raise, although they would be liable to cover any losses. It would be quite possible for a bad year's harvest to wipe out a province's ability to raise much, if any, tax.

Whether or not this is the explanation behind the massive debt cannot be determined, but the size of it was spectacular and far beyond the resources of an individual to pay back to the king. Because the man did not have enough money to repay the debt, the king ordered that he, his wife, his children, and all their possessions be sold (v. 25). The man fell to his knees and begged for leniency. On hearing the pleas for mercy, the king *aphēken* (from *aphiēmi*) the debt. This term means "let go," "permit," or "forgive." Here it is used quite correctly in the sense of "forgiving" or "canceling" a financial debt, but it is used elsewhere in the NT of God forgiving us our sins.

Having just escaped the fate of slavery, the servant soon after discovered someone who owed him one hundred denarii, or silver coins (v. 28). This was a substantial amount of money, given that a wage for a full day working in a vineyard was one denarius (20:10). Thus one hundred denarii represented about three month's work from an unskilled laborer. This servant also begged for leniency, but he was instead thrown into prison (v. 30). Others heard of this behavior and reported it to the king, who was most displeased (vv. 30–32). The first servant was then given to the torturers until he paid back the full amount of the missing ten thousand talents—which given the circumstances, was unlikely ever to be paid (v. 34).

Loan collection had some considerable teeth for those with the wherewithal to enforce it in the ancient world. Such an offhand remark about the *basanistais*—"jailers" or "torturers" (v. 34) confronts the modern reader with the harsh realities of life in Roman times. Verse 35 is one of the most sobering verses in the whole Bible: it states that God will do the same to any of us who do not forgive our brothers and sisters from our hearts. This parable teaches that the test of the quality of our experience of God's forgiveness is directly related to how well we forgive those who have done wrong to us.

19:1—23:39

The Clash of Two Kingdoms

This section marks the fifth and final section in Matthew's Gospel and narrates events from Jesus's ministry (19:1—23:39), followed by a lengthy discourse (24:1—25:46). The account focuses on the events that occurred as Jesus journeyed from Galilee to Judea (19:1—20:34) and on His conflict with the Pharisees and Sadducees as He entered into Jerusalem for the celebration of the Passover (21:1—23:39).

19:1–12. Teaching about Divorce. As Jesus finished His ministry in Galilee and entered into the region of Judea beyond the Jordan, Pharisees immediately confronted Him on the question of divorce. Their questions were not sincere but rather merely the means to trap Him and discredit His ministry (v. 3). The Gospel of Matthew records Jesus's words about divorce in two places (5:31–32 and 19:1–12), so it must have been important to the Evangelist and the church. These words of Jesus are still relevant today. Divorce is a terrible process that is experienced by a significant number of those who have married, both without and within the church. We know from the later writings of the rabbis that at the time of Jesus, there was debate among the Pharisees as to what were suitable grounds for divorce. The relevant Bible passage was Deuteronomy 24:1–4, which states that a man who finds some indecency in his wife should write her a bill of divorcement. The debate was whether this indecency related only to significant matters, such as sexual impropriety, or whether it included other matters that grated on a husband's nerves. Of course, this was largely a theoretical discussion in the days of bride price (which stayed with the bride's family, even if there was a divorce) and dowry (which went with the bride when she left). Within wealthy circles in Rome, divorce may have been common, but it was not widespread throughout Jewish society.

Jesus made His position clear. First, He cited the Creation account, which contains the observation that a man leaves his father and mother, becomes united with his wife, and they become one flesh (Gen. 2:24). Jesus concluded that what God has joined together is not to be separated by anyone (Matt. 19:6). The Pharisees asked why the law allowed divorce in Deuteronomy 24:1–4 if this was the case. Jesus replied that it was allowed because their hearts were hard but that from the beginning marriage was intended to be permanent (Matt. 19:8). Then He used nearly the exact words already found in Matthew 5:32, stating that the only viable reason for divorce is *porneia*—"sexual immorality"—and that whoever divorces for any other reason and marries someone else commits adultery (on the meaning of *porneia*, see commentary on Matt. 5:17–48). In taking this perspective, Jesus sided with the subgroup of the Pharisees who restricted the grounds of divorce to sexual impropriety. Marriage is to be entered into with great seriousness because it is meant to be a lifelong commitment. Instead of looking for ways to get out of a marriage, the focus should be on making a marriage work. Jesus acknowledged that there are some occasions that will bring about the sundering of a marriage, but such occasions are a reflection of the sinful world in which we live.

Jesus's disciples found Jesus's words challenging and concluded that if divorce is so problematic, it would be better not to marry (19:10). Jesus stated that not all will submit to His instruction and pointed out that some eunuchs were born as eunuchs, some were made so by humans, and others have become eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven. Some will give up sexual activity—that is to say, they will not marry (Jesus did not contemplate sexual activity outside of marriage)—for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. But not everybody will be able to do so.

Jesus's words are somewhat like Paul's advice in 1 Corinthians 7. In that chapter the apostle gives advice to several different categories of people. He says, for example, that all those who are currently married should stay married (1 Cor. 7:10). Those who were Christians who were married to non-Christians should stay within the marriage if their partner agrees (1 Cor. 7:12–16). Paul begins his advice with the general observation that the unmarried and widows should remain unmarried, unless they find self-control too challenging (1 Cor. 7:8–9). He takes up the matter later in the chapter (1 Cor. 7:25–31) and explains his reasons for suggesting that those who are unmarried stay in that state. Paul sees a crisis in front of Christians (1 Cor. 7:26) that will bring great danger to all. How much more difficult will it be to face persecution when married and with children than as a single person? This is probably also at the back of Jesus's mind. His disciples would shortly be facing serious tests. Many would die for their faith; all would be persecuted in various ways. It is much harder to face such challenges with a family of young children.

19:13–30. Little Children Blessed and the Rich Man. The first incident, which takes only three verses, reveals much about Jesus. Children were being brought to Him for a blessing, and little wonder, given that Jesus had the power to heal. His disciples thought this beneath His dignity and tried to prevent it from happening, but Jesus said that nothing should hinder the children from coming to Him, because of such is the kingdom of heaven (vv. 13–14). Within this context, a rich man approached.

The rich young man asked Him what good thing he should do to obtain eternal life (v. 16). Jesus replied that he should keep the commandments (v. 17), and when asked which ones, He cited the commandments against murder, adultery, theft, and false witness (v. 18), and the positive command to love one's neighbor as oneself (v. 19). Aside from the last phrase, Jesus was directly citing the second half of the Ten Commandments, given by God directly to Moses while on Mount Sinai (Ex. 20:12–17). The young man declared, perhaps with honesty and a touch of pride, that he had kept all these commandments (Matt. 19:20). Jesus then said that if he wished to be perfect, he should sell all that he had and give it to the poor. The young man felt unable to do this, and he walked away.

Jesus does not, in fact, command all Christians to give away all their wealth. That is for those who, like the rich young ruler, put their wealth above service to God. Yet as Jesus meditated on the way rich people act, He concluded that it is harder for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter into the kingdom of heaven (vv. 23–24). Preachers as far back as the fifteenth century, and probably much earlier, have described a special gate in Jerusalem that was the only way into the city once the main city gates were closed. The gate was so small that the only way it was possible for a camel to go through the gate was to take off everything the camel was carrying. This attempt to explain the saying of Jesus does not appear to be valid, because such a gate has not been found in the archaeological record.

Jesus appears to have just used that expression to illustrate how difficult it is for a rich person to be saved. There is no way that a camel can fit through the eye of a needle—a very tiny hole indeed. His disciples certainly thought that this was what Jesus intended to say when they asked, "Who then can be saved?" (v. 25). Perhaps the disciples thought that the rich had the best access into the kingdom of heaven, but Jesus calmly replied that what is impossible with humans is possible with God (v. 26).

Peter then pointed out that if riches are a problem concerning entering the kingdom of heaven, he and the other disciples should be just fine—after all, they had left everything to follow Jesus (v. 27). Jesus replied that anybody who follows Him and has to give up house, brothers and sisters, father and mother, children, or lands for His name will receive what they have given up a hundredfold, as well as eternal life (v. 29).

20:1–16. Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard. The parable of the workers in the vineyard is found only in the Gospel of Matthew. It is a very intriguing parable, and one that carries within it the mystery of salvation. The story is simple. A vineyard owner had agreed with a group of workers that they would work in his vineyard for one day and be paid one denarius. This, by the way, is how we know that a fair day's wage for field workers at the time was one denarius. He went out at various times during the day and hired more workers, telling them that they would be given what is righteous or right (*dikaion*, v. 4). At the end of the day, the workers who were hired last got paid one denarius (v. 9). They naturally were pleased to receive a full day's pay for a partial day's work. As today, it was not unusual for those hired for only a short time to receive more than they may have expected if they were given an hourly rate. Those hired first naturally assumed that if their employer was so generous to those who worked only a very small part of the day, then they would be given more than the one denarius they had agreed on. But to their surprise, they received only one denarius (v. 10). They grumbled at this, saying that they did not think it right that those who had just arrived received the same amount as those who had worked the entire day and endured its heat. But the owner was adamant. He denied that he had done wrong (lit. "I did not do you an injustice," v. 13). He said that not only is it lawful for him to do with his own property as he wills, but he himself is good (v. 15).

The theme of what is right and just occurs a couple of times in the parable (vv. 4, 13); yet from a modern perspective, and even from that of the ancient world, it is hard to see that justice was done. Moreover, one may ask in what way is the action of the vineyard owner to be compared to the kingdom of heaven (see v. 1). The parable reveals the kingdom of heaven in two ways: the values of the kingdom of heaven are different from human values, and in the kingdom of heaven, reward is not related to how long one worked. The same reward (eternal life) is given to those who have worked long and to those who have just joined. In other words, the kingdom of heaven is a gift given by God, not on the basis of our works but by His goodness and love.

20:17–28. Jesus Foretells His Death and a Request. Jesus warned His disciples in great detail about what would happen to Him in Jerusalem on three separate occasions (Matt. 16:21; 17:22–23; 20:17–19). While the disciples were still quite unprepared for what happened later, the reader of the Gospel of Matthew has had three separate warnings about what was about to happen and is able to discern that Jesus knew and chose the fate that awaited Him and was not surprised by it.

While not stated here, the two sons of Zebedee were James and John (cf. Matt. 4:21). They were indeed part of the inner circle of disciples. After all, along with Peter, they accompanied Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17:2), and, although it is not recorded in Matthew's account of the raising of the dead girl (9:18–26), Mark 5:37 records that Jesus took Peter, James, and John with Him to be present at the miracle. Some suggest that the mother of James and John had been close friends with (and possibly related to the sister of) the mother of Jesus (John 19:25 says that the mother of Jesus was present at the cross, and Matthew 27:56 says that the mother of the sons of Zebedee was there too; cf. Mark 15:40). Thus the mother of James and John may have felt that these close ties, together with the closeness of James and John to Jesus, might warrant a special position in Jesus's coming kingdom.

There is a cutting irony in this request. Jesus had just said that He was going up to Jerusalem to suffer and die (Matt. 20:17–19), and immediately this mother was asking for positions in the new kingdom that Jesus would be setting up. She and the disciples were clearly thinking in terms of the kingdoms with which they were familiar. A king would have a court, and when the king sat at court, those seated closest to him were those who were particularly marked by his favor.

Despite the fact that Jesus knew His future and that the request of the mother of James and John showed that she and the disciples had misunderstood what he said, He replied kindly to the mother and her two sons. He asked them whether they were willing to drink the cup (of suffering) that He was about to drink (v. 22). In Matthew the closest Jesus comes to a throne is when Pilate orders a placard to be placed on His cross with the words "This is Jesus, King of the Jews." There were indeed two other "thrones" or crosses available there, although James and John were not on them. They stated that they were able to drink of the cup, and Jesus assured them that they would. From Acts 12:2 we know that James died as an early Christian martyr. John appears to have died of natural causes, but through early church documents we know that he suffered greatly for His faith.

Not surprisingly, the other disciples were indignant when they heard about the request of the mother of James and John that her sons receive preferential treatment (Matt. 20:24). Jesus called His disciples together and explained that leaders among His followers would act differently from leaders with whom they were familiar. Whereas among the Gentiles, rulers lord it over those they rule, in Christian circles the one who leads must be the one who serves. After all, Jesus explained, He came not to be served but to serve (vv. 25–28).

20:29–34. Healing Two Blind Men. The healing of the blind men described in Matthew 20:29–34 is also found in Mark 10:46–52 and Luke 18:35–43. From Mark we discover that his name was Bartimaeus, and curiously both Mark and Luke agree that there was only one blind man healed that day. This is not the only time that Matthew has two where the other Gospels have one (e.g., Matt. 8:28—9:1; cf. Mark 5:1–20; Luke 8:26–39). The two blind men took full advantage of the opportunity of access to Jesus. They cried out to Jesus and addressed Him as "Lord" and "Son of David," begging for His mercy (Matt. 20:30). Even though the crowd was urging them to be quiet, they continued to cry out to Jesus. Jesus stopped, saw their plight, had compassion for them, and restored their sight (vv. 31–33).

21:1–11. Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem. Jesus instructed His disciples to obtain a donkey with its colt for Him to ride (v. 2). The Evangelist Matthew then cites a text not found in the other Gospels. It is taken from Zechariah 9:9 (with a few words from Is. 62:11 LXX), and it connects the action of Jesus to the prophecy of a king coming to Zion (i.e., Jerusalem). Furthermore, Zechariah 9–14 consists of a series of oracles that portray the future intervention of God in human affairs. Thus by deliberately citing this passage, Matthew links the events in the last week of Jesus's life to the prophecies about the coming kingdom of God and the coming of the messianic king.

The crowds spontaneously threw their outer clothing in front of Jesus as He rode on the donkey. Such an action denoted significant respect (cf. 2 Kin. 9:13). The crowds also cut down branches from trees to lay them on the road. Everybody (those before and those behind) then cried out, "Hosanna to the Son of David," the One coming in the name of the Lord (Matt. 21:9; cf. Mark 11:9; Luke 19:38). The crowd was assigning to Jesus the status of Son of David using language associated with the expected Messiah. Nothing less than a kingly procession took place.

These events occurred around the time of Passover. Exodus 23:14–17 notes that the Feast of Unleavened Bread/Passover was one of three occasions that all Israelites were to appear in Jerusalem. By the time of Jesus this was rather impractical because, by some estimates, more Jews lived outside of the Holy Land than in it. Even so, Jerusalem was flooded with pilgrims at Passover. The triumphant procession and what Jesus did next attracted the attention of just about everybody in Jerusalem to this remarkable Galilean.

21:12–17. Cleansing of the Temple. The procession had started at Bethany, on the southeastern slope of the Mount of Olives, and ended up in the temple. Jesus presumably went through the eastern gate. When He arrived at the temple, Jesus discovered a scene that disturbed Him: there was much activity of selling and buying in the temple. There were also tables for those who changed money and those who sold doves for sacrifice (v. 12). John 2:14 mentions that those selling cattle and sheep were also present. One might understand that these merchants were there for very practical reasons. It was much more convenient to purchase the sacrificial animal at the actual temple than to bring it over the long distances pilgrims traveled. In such a case, there was the need to change money from the Greek and Roman coins (which had pagan symbols on them) to more acceptable coinage.

Jesus went into action and threw out all the merchants from the temple and overturned the tables of those changing money and selling doves (one can but imagine the coins scattering around the desperate money changers and the doves flying free). This event, the second time Jesus cleansed the temple (see John 2:13–22 for the first time), is also recorded in Mark 11:15–19 and Luke 19:45–48, and it reveals that when He wished, Jesus had considerable presence. His personality was so strongly revealed that many people with quite legitimate claims to be present in the temple were ejected. By the force of His personality, Jesus was able to change the very nature of the activities at the temple. As He said, the temple was to be a place of prayer. It also became a place of healing for those who were ill (Matt. 21:14). The children were running to and fro shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" (v. 15). The high priests and scribes complained to Jesus. He responded by citing Psalm 8:3, implying that the children's action was something to be approved (v. 16). In cleansing the temple, Jesus was challenging the authority of the Sadducees over the temple, and in doing so, He was acting in the manner of a king.

21:18–27. The Fig Tree and Jesus's Authority. As he was returning to the temple the next day, Jesus noticed a fig tree, and being hungry, He went to it to find figs to eat. Instead of figs, He found only leaves (vv. 18–19). He then cursed the tree, which immediately withered (v. 19). Two things are noteworthy about this incident. First, Jesus was in the temple both before and after this incident. It appears that Matthew wished to emphasize the element of judgment on a religiosity that was all show but no fruit. Second, when the disciples expressed amazement at the rapid fulfillment of His words, Jesus assured them that if they had only a little faith, they themselves would perform remarkable miracles (vv. 20–21; cf. 17:20; Luke 17:6).

After His triumphant entry into Jerusalem, Jesus had dramatically changed what was happening in the temple. Chapters 21–25 trace activities and teachings of Jesus that took place either in the temple or on the Mount of Olives. Throughout the Gospel, the Evangelist has portrayed an increasing tension between Jesus and the leaders of the various factions and functionaries such as the chief priests, the Sadducees, and the Pharisees. This tension comes to a head in chapters 21–25 and eventually results in the death of Jesus.

Matthew 21:23–27 recounts an exchange between Jesus and the chief priests and "elders of the people" (v. 23), a term that indicates they had some official representative role. It is highly likely the chief priests and elders of the temple were members of the Great Sanhedrin. Each major town or city had a governing body that dealt with religious matters, a type of Sanhedrin. The Great Sanhedrin was a larger body that was national in scope. Later, Jesus was taken before this body for judgment (26:59). Here, the representatives of the nation came to Jesus to inquire about His authority to do what He did in the temple. Jesus assured them that He would freely answer their question if they answered one of His: Was the baptism of John of God or of men (21:25)? Jesus's question associated His own activities with those of John the Baptist, at least on the level of authority. The Jewish leaders were caught in a bind. John was widely believed to

be a prophet, but they did not wish to acknowledge this. Thus they declined to answer Jesus's question, and so Jesus declined to answer their question to Him (vv. 26–27).

21:28–32. Parable of the Two Sons. This parable contrasts the behavior of two sons, although neither of them could be called a model son. One showed apparent respect and willingness but did not follow through with actions; the other was disrespectful and apparently disobedient but in the end did what was asked. The ideal son would have been willing and respectful and have followed through with actions.

Jesus provided a clear interpretation of the parable. The disobedient son represented the tax collectors and prostitutes (v. 31). Their profession clearly indicated that they had apparently turned their back on God. But these were the very people who listened to the preaching of John the Baptist and repented. The apparently pious religious leaders who had professed to be keen followers of God had listened to John and not repented. Jesus pointed out that in religious matters actions speak louder than words.

21:33–46. Parable of the Vineyard and the Tenants. In the parable of the vineyard and the tenants, Jesus described the activity of a rich landlord who planted a vineyard and provided all that was necessary for its operation: a hedge or fence around it to discourage pilfering, a winepress to process the grapes, and a tower from which the grapes were guarded from all people, birds, and other scavengers who would damage them. Archaeologists have discovered winepresses and watchtowers from the first century that remain from many vineyards throughout the Holy Land. A winepress and several watch towers dating to the time of Jesus have even been discovered at Nazareth.

As in other parts of the Roman world, absentee landlords were common in the Holy Land. The very wealthy often owned large estates and brought slaves to manage and run each property, although this is not the arrangement described in the parable. The vineyard described by Jesus was leased to tenants. Oftentimes such tenants were the previous landowners, who had been forced to sell their property because of debt or some other misfortune. In any event, the landowner made a poor choice of tenants, as they refused to provide any share of the fruit produced by the vineyard. They even attacked the slaves who were sent to collect the rent, some of whom died (v. 35). Finally, the owner sent his son, expecting that at least he would be respected, but the son was taken outside of the vineyard and murdered (vv. 37–39).

Jesus then asked what the landowner should do to such tenants. The crowd replied that they should be thoroughly destroyed (the Greek expresses the idea that "he will badly/severely destroy the evil/bad people"; vv. 40–41). All three Gospels record that the religious leaders of the Jews realized that the parable was directed against them (v. 45; cf. Mark 12:12; Luke 20:19). This is the context of the statement of Jesus that is recorded only in Matthew 21:43, in which He said that the kingdom of God would be taken away from them (the religious leaders) and would be given to a nation that would bear fruit. This parable is linked to the previous parable of the two sons. In His interpretation of this parable Jesus talked of two "nations" (*ethnei*) rather than two sons.

It portrays God as a landowner who sent prophets to His people, some of whom were beaten, others killed. The fact that the son was murdered outside the vineyard has a chilly correspondence to the death of Jesus, crucified outside the city of Jerusalem. The threat to the Jewish leaders that the kingdom would be taken from them and given to the "kingdom" that would produce the requisite fruit was nothing less than an announcement of the coming messianic community that, as the true Israel of faith, would unite Jews and Gentiles under new leaders (e.g., Matt. 13:1–9, 18–23, 47–50).

22:1–14. Parable of the Marriage Feast. The background circumstances of the story line of this parable arise out of the lack of refrigeration in the first century. Thus, once a meal was prepared, it had to be consumed within a short span of time. To ignore an invitation by a king was to insult his honor. Not surprisingly, the king reacted violently against those who had so insulted him (v. 7). In the meantime, the problem of the prepared feast remained. What to do with the food? The king's solution was to invite others. He sent his servants out to the corners of the streets to invite those who would come. The servants went out and gathered all they could find, without regard for their status. The servants gathered in both the wicked and the good (vv. 9–10).

The king discovered that one of his guests was lacking a wedding garment (vv. 11–14). There is a considerable amount of discussion in commentaries about the wedding garment in the parable. Some argue that the wedding garment was a clean, preferably long, white garment, which was the expected attire of guests invited to the palace. But it would be quite unreasonable to expect those invited from the streets without any warning to arrange for such garments. It may be concluded, then, that the only way such a last-minute guest would have been able to wear the proper wedding garment would be if the king had provided it. Despite the fact that there are no known contemporary examples of this practice, the logic of the story requires this. The food was ready, and the guests, invited straight off the streets and shepherded immediately to the feast by the servants, would not have been given time to make other arrangements for suitable clothing.

The giving of festive robes is found several times in the OT (e.g., Judg. 14:12–13, 19; 2 Kin. 10:22; 25:27–29; Jer. 52:31–33) and might have provided enough of a context to make the custom's appearance in the parable natural to its first hearers. The garments could have represented God's imputed righteousness, which leads to a new life.

Jesus introduced the parable by stating that it is about the kingdom of God (Matt. 22:2). The whole parable, then, is about what qualifications are required to be eligible to enter the kingdom of heaven. They appear to be straightforward. Stated negatively, the invitation to enter into the kingdom of heaven does not depend on one's moral status. Both evil and good people were invited to come to the feast (v. 10). The only requirement was willingness to come. Once they were there, though, there was a further requirement, namely, that they put on the provided marriage garment. To enter the kingdom one must accept the invitation and the dress. Everything comes to us as a gift of divine grace. The king examined his guests to see whether they had accepted the gifts that he so generously provided for them; thus this parable prefigures the nature of the final judgment.

22:15–22. Paying Taxes to Caesar. Matthew 22:15–46 describes Jesus's response to several questions put to Him. The first came from the Pharisees and also involved the Herodians. Little is known about the Herodians, although they are also mentioned in Mark 3:6 and 12:13. From their name, one would expect them to be positively inclined to the rule of Herod Antipas and its accommodation with the Roman Empire. By asking Jesus about the legitimacy of government taxes, they were inviting Him to speak seditiously.

Jesus had already been asked about the temple tax (Matt. 17:24–27) and had not only said it should be paid but also provided His and Peter's contributions by means of a miracle. The term used in v. 17 (*kēnsos*) could be used of taxes in general or of the poll tax that every adult male was expected to pay. Who should pay the tax was determined by a census (cf. Luke 2:1–7; Jesus was born in Bethlehem as a result of one of these regular censuses). This poll tax was much resented, and some had even objected on religious grounds.

Jesus was not fooled by the flattery of the Pharisees and Herodians. He asked to be shown a coin, and when He received it, He asked further as to whose image and inscription was on the coin (Matt. 22:19–20). On hearing the answer "Caesar," He then solved the issue by declaring that they should give Caesar what belonged to him and give to God what belonged to Him (v. 21). This answered the religious question. Coinage originated in the civil authority and the government was thereby perfectly within its rights to regulate it and tax it. It was thus "lawful" to pay the poll tax from a religious perspective.

22:23–33. A Question about the Resurrection. Many of the high priests and prominent leaders were Sadducees. The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection (v. 23). This grows out of the fact that the Sadducees recognized as Scripture only the five books of Moses (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy). They believed that the idea of resurrection was absent from those works. In their question to Jesus, the Sadducees cited a very interesting law found in Deuteronomy 25:5–10. If brothers resided together and one of them died, rather than let his widow marry outside the family, the other brother was to marry her, and the firstborn male of the union was to be given the dead brother's name so that this name would not be "blotted out" from Israel (Deut. 25:6). This law had the practical result of ensuring that the brother's landholdings and other possessions were kept within the family.

The Sadducees put a theoretical case to Jesus—one that was entirely disingenuous on their part since they did not even believe in the resurrection of the dead. There were seven brothers who died one after another but who had all done their duty for the widow left by one of the brothers. The end result, as the woman remained childless, was that she was at one time or other married to each of the brothers. The question was, then, whose wife she would be after the

resurrection. Jesus replied that those who are resurrected will be like the angels and not marry (Matt. 22:30). Thus, the problem that was put to Him was moot. Jesus did not elaborate further but instead immediately defended the doctrine of the resurrection (vv. 31–32), which was the main point of the question.

22:34–40. The Great Commandment. The question in v. 36 is less hostile than the two preceding questions. It could be that the questioner was really interested in Jesus's answer. The question was regarding which was the greatest commandment in the law (v. 36). The law, in this case, designates God's law, as revealed in the OT. Jesus had no hesitation in answering. He first quoted from a biblical passage recited by pious Jews at the time of Jesus and even to this day: Deuteronomy 6:4–5. All your heart, soul, and strength in Deuteronomy refers to nothing less than a total commitment. Matthew 22:27 has the sequence "heart/soul/mind," as do the parallel passages of Mark 12:30 and Luke 10:27. Yet the implication is the same. One must love God with one's total being.

The second "law" that Jesus cited is found in Leviticus 19:18. This text must have been a favorite of Jesus, as it is cited three times in Matthew (5:43; 19:19; 22:39), more than any other text from the OT. Jesus said that the rest of the law is summed up in the command to love one's neighbor as one's self (22:39). In saying what He did, Jesus emphasized the core of His understanding of correct behavior. It is behavior fully and totally grounded in love. This is not a righteousness by effort available to the spiritual athlete; it is reflecting in one's life the love of God that has been shown to us in His law and particularly in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus for us.

22:41–46. Question about David's Son. Jesus then asked His opponents two questions about what they thought of the Messiah ("Christ" in Greek) and whose son they believed Him to be (v. 42). The Pharisees responded predictably and correctly that He was the Son of David. But it was a partial response, as Jesus's next question shows. He cited the messianic Psalm 110, in which David calls the Messiah his Lord (v. 1). Jesus then asked them how the Messiah could be referred to as David's son when he calls Him "Lord" (v. 45). Nothing more clearly shows that the Pharisees' understanding of the Messiah was flawed. They might have understood His human antecedents, but they missed entirely the fact of His heavenly origin. This conundrum was disturbing to the Pharisees, who decided to cease their open debate with Jesus.

23:1–36. Denouncing the Scribes and the Pharisees. Several different subgroups within first-century Judaism are visible in the Gospels. In them we meet the Sadducees, the Herodians, the scribes, the Zealots, and the Pharisees. Of these groups, much more attention is given in the Gospels to the interaction between Jesus and the Pharisees than any of the other groups. The main reason for this is that the Pharisees were the group that had the most influence with the common people among whom Jesus conducted His mission.

Matthew 23:1–36 consists of an extended denunciation of the Pharisees by Jesus. He rather pointedly began by saying that one should pay attention to what the Pharisees say—after all they are interpreting the will of God as expressed in His law—but not do what they do (vv. 1–3). Second, Jesus accused the Pharisees of being religious in order to be perceived by others as religious (vv. 5–7). He said they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long. Phylacteries, or tefillin, are small boxes placed on the arm or the forehead that contain copies of certain verses from the Bible. They are worn during prayers, and at the time of Jesus, many also wore them during the whole day. The practice was based on a literal understanding of Exodus 13:9, 16, and Deuteronomy 6:8; 11:18. After providing the words of a prayer in Deuteronomy 6:4–5, the instruction is given that they were to bind them on their hands, foreheads, and doorposts as signs (Deut. 6:8–9). The fringe to which Jesus referred was something that God commanded His people to wear to remind them of His law (Num. 15:38–39; Deut. 22:12). Interestingly enough, Jesus wore such a fringe, and it was this fringe that the woman who was healed of her flow of blood touched (Matt. 9:20; Luke 8:44). Jesus did not question whether or not fringes and phylacteries should be worn by those wishing to follow the law, but He did question the motives of those who did so for display rather than piety.

Third, Jesus accused the Pharisees of trying to further their own importance through their overt practice of religion. The Pharisees, He said, liked to be recognized as they walked through the streets, liked the important seats at feasts and in the synagogues, and liked to be called rabbi (Matt. 23:6–7). Jesus then said to His followers that they should not be called rabbi or teacher

(v. 8, 10), implying that among His followers some would be qualified to be called teacher or rabbi. Jesus Himself was called teacher and rabbi and had gathered disciples around Himself. He and they lived and worked in a similar way in which other rabbis worked with their disciples and taught them to become teachers and rabbis in their turn. Thus it was natural that there were those within early Christianity who would also take on the role of teacher. All of the eleven surviving apostles would have fit this role, in that they had been part of Jesus's inner circle and had received over three years of personalized instruction from Him by the time He was crucified. But even though there were some within early Christianity who took on the role of teacher, Jesus warned His followers against self-aggrandizement and seeking after human recognition. Indeed, Jesus said that the greatest among them must be their servant (v. 11), and whoever would be exalted must be humbled instead (v. 12).

Jesus then pronounced seven woes over the scribes and the Pharisees (vv. 13–29), all but one of which addressed the *grammateis*—"scribes" or "teachers of the law"—and the Pharisees, and called them "hypocrites" (vv. 13, 15, 23, 25, 27, 29). The term *grammateus* literally means somebody able to read and write. During the Roman era in the Holy Land, like the rest of the Roman world, literacy was reasonably widespread, although not universal. Those in government positions, including the army, used the written word often in their work, as did those in commerce. But the vast majority of the population did not regularly read, let alone write. Thus somebody expert in these skills, such as a scribe, would often find himself employed in government or private bureaucracies. The Pharisees, on the other hand, were those who tried to live their lives according to the OT laws. They described their work as putting a fence around the law. This was just as one would put a fence near the edge of a cliff so nobody would fall off accidentally. The Pharisees perceived their interpretation of the law as keeping people from breaking the law. In the process they created human traditions. Because of their interest in the law, many Pharisees were also scribes.

Woe 1. Jesus accused the scribes and Pharisees of hypocrisy in that the net effect of all their interpretation of the law was that not only did they not enter the kingdom of heaven, but that they also prevented others from entering it (v. 13).

Woe 2. Jesus condemned the Pharisees' practice of outward piety while milking the widows dry of all of their resources (v. 14). In this way, He pointed out that their motivations were selfish on both accounts (greed and pride). This woe does not appear in some manuscripts, but it is similar to that found in Mark 12:40 and Luke 20:47 and thus clearly part of this discourse.

Woe 3. Jesus then accused the Pharisees of going to great efforts to make a proselyte (a convert), but because of their distorted understanding of biblical religion, the new converts would be going into perdition (Matt. 23:15). The message they were proclaiming was not a saving message.

Woe 4. Jesus then charged the Pharisees with giving very poor advice as to which oaths are binding and which oaths are not. While contracts were known and used by the wealthy elite and others (e.g., a marriage contract was very widely used), their validity was underlined by the swearing of an oath. For most of those living in the Roman Empire, this would mean invoking the name of a god. This was not to be done by Jews, who were to swear only by the altar of the temple or by the temple itself. Human nature has not changed over the centuries, and just as people try to break contracts today, they also did so in the ancient world. Jesus pointed out that it was not valid to distinguish between swearing by the temple (in which case the contract could be broken, according to the Pharisees) or by the gold of the temple (in which case the contracts could not be broken).

Woe 5. Jesus then accused the scribes and Pharisees of hypocrisy in their tithing practice. According to the law, all crops should be tithed by presenting a tenth of the produce of the land to the priests at the temple (Lev. 27:30–33; Num. 18:21–24). The Pharisees were so particular that they would even tithe from the herbs that were grown in a kitchen garden: the mint, dill, and cumin (Matt. 23:23). Jesus accused the scribes and Pharisees of ignoring the more important matters of the law: justice, mercy, and faith (v. 23; one might add love for God and humankind [Matt. 22:34–40]) while attending to this fine detail of law observance. He also suggested that one should be meticulous about tithing, and in doing so, Jesus reaffirmed the law of tithing for Christians.

Woe 6. Jesus accused the scribes and Pharisees of cleaning the outside of the cup but leaving the inside dirty. While to outer appearances they were righteous upholders of the law, inside they were full of greed and self-indulgence (vv. 25–26). The wholeness of our spiritual life requires what we do to be a clear reflection of our inner Christian values.

Woe 7. Jesus said the scribes and Pharisees were like whitewashed tombs—from the outside they look good, but inside they are full of the bones of the dead and all kinds of filth (v. 27). They look righteous to others, but inside they are full of hypocrisy and wicked lawlessness (v. 28). This woe is often combined with the previous one since the point is the same, but it also transitions nicely to the last woe.

Woe 8. He next accused the scribes and Pharisees of building tombs for the ancient prophets while being descendants of those who murdered the prophets (23:29–36). Jesus warned them that they would be held responsible for the blood guilt and that it would come on the generation hearing His words. These same men were actively conspiring against Jesus in secret but were afraid to oppose Him in public, aside from asking Him malicious questions.

23:37–39. Lament over Jerusalem. Jesus had pronounced eight woes on the scribes and Pharisees and now turned His attention to Jerusalem, the place in which the blood of prophets had been shed. Yet Jesus Himself wished to gather those in Jerusalem like a hen gathers her chicks to protect them from danger. Instead, Jerusalem itself would be laid waste, something that Jesus repeated to His disciples when they proudly showed Him the magnificent buildings of the temple (24:1–2).

24:1—25:46

Discourse 5: The End of the Age

Like all five of the other discourses of Jesus found in Matthew, the fifth finishes with words expressing that Jesus had finished (26:1; cf. 7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1). The beginning of the discourse is less clear. Does it begin in 24:1, or does the discourse include the woes against the Pharisees in 23:1–36? A case could be made for either option. We have chosen not to include the woes in the discussion of the fifth discourse.

The fifth discourse of Matthew consists of Matthew 24:1—25:46. Every one of these verses deals in one way or another with the events of the last days of earth. The discourse begins with Jesus outlining signs of His Second Coming and the end of the age, and it ends with a succession of parables that provide a framework of meaning to help the reader or listener understand the practical implications of what Jesus said about the end of the age.

24:1–2. The Destruction of the Temple Foretold. Matthew 24:1–2 describes an occasion when the disciples of Jesus showed Him the buildings associated with the temple. Much is known about what Jesus was shown. The renovation of the buildings had begun during the reign of Herod the Great, who had negotiated with the religious authorities on how it should be accomplished. They gave permission for the work to be started only after Herod had gathered together all the materials that would be needed to complete the work and all the necessary craftsmen to actually do the work. Herod had been dead for over thirty years when the disciples showed Jesus the results of his planning, although the building of the temple itself was not completed until just before it was destroyed by the Romans in A.D. 70. Even though incomplete, the buildings themselves were magnificent. Herod had extended the platform on which the temple was built and surrounded the outer walls with impressive rows of covered columns (porticoes).

Jesus's prophecy did come true. Not one stone of the temple itself was left standing on another. Today archaeologists have uncovered much of the lower walls of the temple, as well as many of the pillars from the porticoes and stones from the upper wall that had been tumbled over the walls during their destruction. The walls were made of very large dressed limestone. Some of the stones were much larger than those used to build the pyramids or Stonehenge. One can imagine the disciples' dismay when Jesus foretold the total destruction of the temple.

24:3–14. The Beginning of Sorrows. The question in 24:3 suggests that the disciples may have anticipated that the temple would be destroyed at the end of the age, when the kingdom of God would destroy all other kingdoms. With the hindsight of history, we know that the answer to the disciples' question is actually two different events. The temple was destroyed in A.D. 70, but neither the Second Coming of Jesus nor the end of the age took place at that time. So the destruction of the temple and the Second Coming are two separate events. But while they are two separate events, most of what Jesus said in His answers is true to both of the events.

Jesus began by warning His disciples that some things that others might see as signs of His Second Coming and the end of the age are not. He warned of false Christs (v. 5) and "wars and rumors of wars." He specifically said that they should not be alarmed because of the necessity for these things to occur and that the end was still future (v. 6). Jesus said that "wars and rumors of wars" were *not* signs of the end but characteristics of the time of waiting for His return. He then went on to say that nations and kingdoms would rise against each other and there would be famines and earthquakes (v. 7). These, Jesus said, are but the beginning of *ōdinōn*—"sorrows" or "birth pangs" (v. 8). Jesus compared wars, famines, and earthquakes to the pain at the start of labor. When labor begins it usually continues till a birth takes place. But it is sometimes a lengthy process, and Jesus wanted His listeners to realize that while wars, famines, and earthquakes indicate that the world will end and He will return, they are but the beginning of the process, not the immediate presages of the end itself.

The image of labor is appropriate to describe the convulsions that Jesus predicted would lead to the final events. Christians will be hated by all (v. 9), and they will be persecuted. They will be betrayed by those they love and trust (v. 10), and false prophets will arise who will lead many astray (v. 11). Many of His followers will lose their love and slip away from Christ (v. 12). Only those who endure to the end will be saved (v. 13). Jesus finally gave one of the two definitive signs of His Second Coming: the gospel would be preached throughout the earth as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come.

24:15–28. The Great Tribulation. Jesus next identified the second major sign of His Second Coming: the appearance of the abomination causing desolation that was prophecied by Daniel (v. 15). He said no more about this than that He wanted the reader to understand, directing our attention to Daniel 9:27; 11:33; and 12:13. To this list may be added the image of the beast described in Revelation 13:11–18. (For further information on the abomination of desolation, see "The Abomination of Desolation in Mark," p. 1322.)

Jesus warned His followers that when they saw the abomination of desolation, they should flee with all dispatch. If on the housetop, they should not even go into the house to gather belongings, but simply flee (Matt. 24:17). If working in a field, they should not even turn back to pick up their outer garment, but simply flee (v. 18). Matthew 24:16–19 had its most immediate application to the events that culminated in the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Across the Holy Land there was a widespread revolt against the Romans, starting in A.D. 66. It took several years, but the Romans gathered together military forces and gradually subjugated the country. When Christians saw the Roman legions approaching Jerusalem, each of them led by a standard bearer holding up what Jews and Christians alike considered to be idols, Christians remembered the words of Jesus and fled across the Jordan to a city called Pella. Thanks to the warning of Jesus, it is said that hardly any Christians died when Jerusalem finally fell to the Romans in A.D. 70.

The reason why Jesus suggested His hearers pray that they would not have to flee in winter is clear—such conditions would mean that many would perish from cold and provisions would be hard to come by. Concerning the Sabbath, it would be difficult to rest and worship while trying to flee. Jesus was not asking His followers not to flee during the Sabbath but to pray for that not to happen. The implication is that if they had to, they were to flee. It is important and valuable to note the fact that Jesus was not anticipating setting the Sabbath commandment aside after His resurrection. He was exhorting His followers to keep it holy.

Jesus did not mince words—the future He perceived was a frightening one. Things were to get much worse before God would step in to intervene in earth's history again. There would be a time of trouble such as has not been seen since the foundation of the world (v. 21). Indeed, if God Himself did not intervene, possibly nobody would survive the coming calamity (v. 22).

Jesus also warned against false Christs and false prophets claiming His secret return. He clarified that His Second Coming would be much different from His first—it will be like the lightening, visible from east to west (vv. 26–27). Everybody will know of its occurrence.

24:29–31. The Coming of the Son of Man. Jesus said that "the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light," drawing on images that are known from the Bible (v. 29; cf. Is. 13:10; Ezek. 32:7; Joel 2:10; Rev. 6:12; see commentary on Mark 13:1–37). He noted another "sign," that of "the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven" (Matt. 24:30), an image taken from Daniel (Dan. 7:13) and lying behind many references of Jesus to Himself as the Son of Man (e.g., Matt. 13:41; 15:27–28; 16:13; 17:22–23; 20:28). This sign will be of worldwide import and visibility. The Son of Man will come with "power and great glory" (24:30). At that time, all the elect will be gathered together from across the globe (v. 31).

24:32–35. The Lesson of the Fig Tree. Jesus drew a lesson from the fig tree—a tree that loses its leaves over the winter. When a leafless fig tree begins to sprout leaf buds, it is a sign that summer is near (v. 32). Just so, when Christians look at the world and see the signs, they too can know that the return of Jesus is very near (v. 33). He assured his hearers that "this generation" would not pass away until "all these things" have happened. (In Matt. 24, Jesus's use of the phrase "these things" refers to events related to the destruction of Jerusalem [v. 2; cf. 23:36–38].) It could then be argued that indeed many in the "this generation," who heard the words of Jesus, did live to see the destruction of Jerusalem (see Mark 13:28–29).

24:36–44. Unknown Day or Hour. Jesus had just said that Christians should be able to read the signs to see that His Second Coming is near (vv. 32–34). But He strongly warned His hearers that they will not know when that time will be (v. 36). Not even the angels of heaven, and much more surprisingly, "the Son" (i.e., Jesus as Son of God), know the exact time of Jesus's coming (v. 36). This does not mean that Jesus as God did not have access to His divine omniscience or foreknowledge during the incarnation (indeed, this whole discourse was a revelation of His foreknowledge; see also, e.g., Matt. 9:4; 12:25; 17:25; 26:34; John 2:24–25) but rather that this knowledge was not an inherent aspect of His human nature but rather of His divinity. The Second Coming will come as a great surprise, especially to the wicked.

Noah's generation formed an example of what it will be like before the Second Coming (Matt. 24:27). They were "eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage" until the day the Flood came and took them away (v. 38). It will be just like that at the Second Coming. Jesus said two will be working in a field, "one will be taken and the other left" (v. 41). One must note that this is not a secret event. Jesus had already said that His coming will be like lightning (v. 27)—everybody will know about it. Indeed, He explicitly warned against any teaching suggesting that His coming will be in secret and that some will be unaware of it (v. 23). Of the two working in a field—the one will be taken to meet the Lord (v. 31) and the other will not. The crucial thing is that those left will be dead (cf. Matt. 24:28; Rev. 19:11–21). Jesus communicated what is important about His coming—not the exact hour but being ready for it at all times (Matt. 24:42–44). He illustrated this with several parables, especially those of the faithful and unfaithful servant (vv. 45–51) and the five wise and five foolish maidens (25:1–13).

24:45–51. Parable of the Faithful and Unfaithful Servants. Jesus illustrated His exhortation that Christians must be watchful with the parable of the faithful and unfaithful servant or slave (the word *doulos*, used here, usually designates a slave). Educated slaves were often given quite large responsibilities in the Roman world, and it was not unusual for a master to leave his estate under the control of a slave while he was away. In Jesus's parable, a wise and faithful slave realizes that he cannot know the exact time of his master's return, so he keeps the household in an excellent condition so that whenever the master returns, he will find it ready to receive him. The bad slave knows his master will return but instead complains of his delay (v. 48). As a consequence, he begins to act badly, beating his fellow slaves and eating and drinking with drunkards. That servant will be unpleasantly surprised by the return of his master and will receive punishment rather than the rewards offered to the wise and faithful servant. In this parable, Jesus commented on possible reactions to the perceived delay of the Second Coming.

25:1–13. Parable of the Ten Maidens. The parable of the five foolish and five wise maidens reflects some of the marriage customs current in the Holy Land at the time of Jesus. Compared to modern Western societies, first-century marriage was much more under the control of the parents, although naturally the potential bride and groom took a great deal of interest in who would be chosen. As a first step, the fathers of both bride and groom entered into a contractual arrangement that a marriage would take place. This step was called a betrothal, like the betrothal that Joseph had contracted with Mary before she was discovered to be pregnant with Jesus (Matt. 1:18; Luke 1:27).

The marriage itself was an extended affair that took place over several days. An important part of the wedding took place when the groom arrived at the bride's house to lead her back to the house of his parents. After the father of the bride gave his blessing, the procession of the bride and groom between the two houses took place, accompanied by dancing and singing. The celebrations continued at the groom's house for up to seven days, and on the evening of the first day, the marriage was consummated in the bridal chamber. First-century Greek weddings contained many of the same elements, although the celebrations associated with the wedding often began at the bride's house, which delayed the return of the bride and groom to the house of the groom's parents. It was also not uncommon for there to be last-minute doubts from the father of the bride as to whether he had been strong enough in the negotiation of the marriage contract. Many things could lead to the delay of the wedding party heading back from the bride's house to the groom's house.

In Jesus's parable, the five wise and five foolish maidens awaited the groom bringing his bride back to his parent's house on the first day of the marriage. A delay in a marriage procession was not only possible but likely, so somebody who had made adequate preparation to greet the groom and bride would have taken into account the probability of a delay. In the parable, the delay was so lengthy that all of the ten maidens had fallen asleep (Matt. 25:5). When the cry went out that the bridegroom (and bride) were finally arriving, the foolish maidens discovered that they did not have enough oil to relight their lamps (vv. 6–9).

The wise had made provision for the possibility of delay, but not so that there was enough to share. While the foolish maidens were away obtaining oil, the bridegroom (and bride) arrived at the groom's house, and the house was shut up. When the five foolish maidens arrived, they were not granted access because the groom did not recognize them (vv. 10–12). While the wedding celebrations went on for some days, and the house usually was open during the period of the wedding, on the very first night, when the couple were in their marriage bed for the first time, the house was open only to close family.

The story that Jesus told, then, is a story about what happens when somebody is expected soon, so soon that preparation has not been made for the possibility of delay. In Christian terms, this describes those who have become convinced that Jesus will return very soon, so soon, in fact, that no provision needs to be made for any longer period of time. Should a Christian who really expects Jesus to return soon earn a professional qualification that can take many years? According to this parable, the answer is yes. Should a Christian make provision for retirement funds? Yes. The ideal Christian expects the soon return of the Lord at any time but makes wise provision for success in life in the event that time continues longer than expected.

The parables of the faithful and unfaithful servants and the wise and foolish maidens provide insight into two different ways of misunderstanding the teachings of Jesus about the nearness of His return, as well as providing a helpful lesson. What He said can be summarized as follows:

	Servant	Maidens
Wise	Lived on the assumption that his lord may return at any time.	Made provision for the possibility of a delay in the return of their Lord.
Bad/ foolish	Lived on the assumption that the return of his Lord would be delayed.	Expected that their Lord would return so soon that they lived as though there would be no possible delay.

25:14–30. Parable of the Talents. This parable, like the parable of the faithful and unfaithful servants, shows the considerable trust that often was given to educated slaves (*doulos*, "servant," "slave"). A householder left for an extended period of time and entrusted his servants with considerable sums of money. One talent was roughly equivalent to six thousand denarii. As one denarius was equivalent to one day's pay for an unskilled laborer (Matt. 20:2, 10), one talent represented about twenty years of labor for an unskilled laborer. Thus one talent was an extraordinary amount of money, let alone five. Nevertheless, the designated slaves were entrusted with this capital, although a distinction was made according to the ability of the slave as they received different amounts. When the master returned, He inquired about the money entrusted to the various slaves. The slaves who received five and two talents had doubled their capital investment (25:20, 22). The master was impressed and invited them to enter into his joy (vv. 21, 23). As they had proved reliable in caring for smaller matters, they were therefore able to be trusted to manage greater matters. The slave who had been entrusted with only one talent, out of fear of loss had only hidden the talent. The master said that if nothing else, it could have been earning interest with the bankers or money changers. The master commanded that the lazy and evil slave be cast into outer darkness and the one talent be taken from him and given to the one who had proved faithful with the five talents (vv. 24–28).

This lesson reflects some of life's harder realities. There are differences between people and how they manage their finances and skills. Some very talented and intelligent people do not adequately develop their potential because they lack the self-discipline and the drive to develop their skills. Like the lazy servant, over time they will find that their skills slowly atrophy away. Money management is likewise something that must be worked at, but with prudence, patience, and effort, it is possible to succeed in this field of endeavor.

The parable is about what servants should be doing while waiting for their master's return. In the context of Matthew 24–25, the master is Jesus. The parable reminds Christians that while they wait for their Master's return, they are responsible for the wise stewardship of the resources and talents with which they have been blessed.

25:31–46. The Judgment of the Nations. Jesus had already described the Son of Man coming on the clouds in power and glory (24:30). He picked up this language at the start of His parable of the sheep and the goats (25:31–46), where He said that the Son of Man will sit on His throne to pass judgment on all the nations. He likened this process of judgment to that of a shepherd separating the sheep and the goats at the end of the day (v. 32). To this day around the Mediterranean, shepherds often keep mixed flocks of goats and sheep. The two types of animals eat slightly different diets and so can graze effectively together. Having both sheep and goats is a form of diversification as well, but one that is manageable because they can be herded together. They are often separated at night because goats need to be kept warmer than sheep and so need to be kept under different conditions.

Sheep and goats may be about the same size, but it is not hard to distinguish them from each other. In Jesus's narrative, it is not difficult for the Son of Man to decide who should receive eternal life. The determining factor is how the individual treated "the least" of His brothers and sisters (v. 40). Jesus indicated that the judgment of the nations will be based on their treatment of His followers because that is also treatment of Jesus in a significant way. The fate of the nations, then, will be partly tied up with their reaction to the Christian message in the person of the Christian messengers. Jesus proclaimed judgment not on the claim to have accepted the message of Jesus but on the treatment of the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, and those in prison (vv. 35–39, 42–44). Therefore people's conduct will demonstrate whether they accepted Jesus's message.

Jesus said, as recorded elsewhere, that the poor will be always with us (Matt. 26:11; Mark 14:7; John 12:8), but Christians have sought to meet the needs of the poor, the sick, and the prisoner. In the Roman world, most people avoided the sick, but Christians tended to them. Christians have been at the forefront of establishing hospitals and orphanages, visiting prisoners, and a whole range of other efforts to help those on the margins of society. One could describe Christianity as a religion that should be actively involved in caring for others. A true follower of Jesus has compassion on those who are in need, and Jesus identified this easily observed behavior as crucial in determining the eventual fate of somebody appearing before the judgment throne of the Son of Man.

26:1—28:20

Betrayal, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus

The last three chapters of Matthew (chaps. 26–28) form one coherent and consecutive narrative, usually called the "passion narrative." They deal with events over the last days of Jesus's earthly life. Indeed, the death and resurrection of Jesus is the focus of the whole Gospel. Not only is much more attention given to this part of Jesus's life than any other, the passion of Jesus was anticipated in Jesus's predictions of His suffering and death found in Matthew 9:15; 12:14; 16:21–23; 17:12, 22–23; 20:17–19, 22–23; 21:38–39; and 26:2.

As we read through the passion narrative, several themes stand out. First, the cross is significant because of who Jesus is. He is the Christ, the Son of God (26:63–64; cf. 27:40; Dan. 7:13–14). Jesus was crucified as "King of the Jews/ Israel" (27:37, 42 // Mark 15:26, 32; cf. Luke 23:38; John 19:19). Pilate himself confirmed that Jesus is the Messiah, the coming King. But in the Gospels He is a suffering Messiah. At His death Jesus was acknowledged as truly the Son of God (Matt. 27:54).

Second, in Matthew the link between the cross of Jesus and the Passover is made clear by Jesus's comments at the Last Supper that His followers will celebrate His death until He drinks it new with them in His kingdom (Matt. 26:17–30, esp. v. 29 // Mark 14:12–26 // Luke 22:18–22; cf. 1 Cor. 11:23–25). Third, the cross is significant because of the resurrection. The cross and resurrection together became the ushering in of the end (the eschaton). Jesus was the "firstfruits" from the dead (1 Cor. 15:20; cf. Acts 26:23; Col. 1:18; Rev. 1:17). That Jesus rose from the dead is a Christian's only hope for overcoming death. The cross and the resurrection were the events (or the saving event) that changed history!

Finally, the suffering of Jesus was part of God's preexistent plan. Note the references to fulfilled prophecies: Matthew 26:31 // Mark 14:27; Matthew 27:9; and the echoes of the language of the OT in Matthew 26:64 and 27:46. These and other themes will emerge as consideration is given to the passion narrative, as found in the Gospel of Matthew.

26:1–5. Plot to Kill Jesus. Jesus foretold His coming death and linked it to the Passover (26:1). Caiaphas and the Jewish leadership were also plotting the death of Jesus—but they did not wish it to be associated with the Passover on the sensible observation that Jesus's popularity might lead to great unrest among the crowds who attended the Passover (vv. 3–5). After all, the Passover was one of the times that all observant Jews were expected to come to the temple in Jerusalem to offer a sacrifice (Ex. 23:14–17)—and since the Passover was a celebration of their freedom from Egyptian slavery, there would be a heightened sense of nationalist fervor and longings among the people. If not orchestrated carefully, an attempt to arrest a popular messianic figure like Jesus could easily lead to an open revolt against Rome. Yet as events unfolded, it is clear that the plotting of the chief priests and elders of the people was to no avail. Jesus's death did occur over Passover. These same events show also that Jesus was correct in foretelling His death during this time—a death that He accepted rather than avoided.

26:6–13. Anointing at Bethany. Jesus spent the last week of His earthly ministry at Bethany (Mark 11:11–12; 14:3; John 12:1), a small village on the Mount of Olives within easy walking distance to Jerusalem. The incident recorded in Matthew 26:6–13 took place in the house of Simon the leper. The words "the leper" are added to the name Simon to distinguish him from the four other Simons named in the Gospel (Simon Peter, Matt. 4:18; 10:2; Simon the Cananite (the Zealot), who was also one of the twelve apostles, 10:4; Simon the brother of Jesus, 13:55; and Simon from Cyrene, who carried Jesus's cross, 27:32). Simon was apparently a popular name among Israelites in the first century. In fact Josephus, the near-contemporary writer, mentions at least twenty different individuals named Simon.

The Practical Aspect of the Second Coming of Jesus

Several themes emerge from the teachings of Jesus found in the fifth discourse in Matthew. Two of these themes are general elements relating to the Second Coming and the impact this event has on the lives of believers.

1. General Elements. Jesus indicated clearly that Christians should not hesitate to discern the link between world events and the nearness of His Second Coming (24:32–34). The Second Coming will be visible throughout the whole world; those who state that it has already taken place, but in secret, show themselves to be false prophets (vv. 26–27). Jesus clearly stated that *nobody* knows the date of His coming (v. 36); our response should be to be ready for His coming at any time (v. 42).

2. Impact on the Life of Believers. Jesus spoke at length about how the knowledge of the soon return of Jesus should impact the lives of Christians. Unlike the bad and lazy servant, who lived his life on the assumption that his Lord was delayed, the Christian should be ready for His return at any time (24:45–51). Unlike the foolish virgins, Christians should conduct themselves so that if there is a delay in the Second Coming, they will have made provision to maintain themselves and their faith until such time as the Lord does return (25:1–13). Unlike the bad and lazy servant, who did nothing with the talent entrusted to him, true Christians will use the time between now and the Second Coming of Jesus productively. They will act as faithful and engaged stewards of their money, resources, and skills (25:14–30). Christians should keep a perspective that includes caring for the hungry, the thirsty, the poorly clothed, the sick, and those in prison because it is their actions toward such individuals by which a final determination will be made in the last judgment (25:31–46).

John 12:1–8 also recounts the anointing at Bethany, although he identifies it as taking place at the house of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus and identifies Mary as the one who anointed Jesus with the ointment. Later Christians asked whether Simon the leper might have been the father of Martha, Lazarus, and Mary or owned the house that they (together with Jesus and his disciples) were staying in. Luke 7:36–50 recounts an anointing of Jesus with expensive perfume at the house of Simon a Pharisee. The woman is unidentified, except as a great sinner. While the text in Luke doesn't make it clear that the woman there was Mary the sister of Martha and Lazarus, the passage in John suggests this as the best possibility.

The woman came to Jesus with some expensive perfume and anointed His head with it. Such a practice was not unknown among the very wealthy, especially when associated with an important occasion. Jesus and His disciples were not part of those with great wealth, so what happened was quite unusual among them. Indeed, the question was raised as to why the perfume was not sold and the proceeds of the sale given to the poor (Matt. 26:9). Jesus responded by linking His anointing with His death, and He told everybody that the extraordinary gift from the woman would be recounted everywhere the Gospel was preached (vv. 10–13), as indeed it has been.

26:14–16. Judas's Agreement to Betray Jesus. Verse 14 is linked to the previous passage by the word "then." It appears that Jesus's dismissal of the concern for money aroused in Judas Iscariot the urge to betray Him for money. What motivated one of the inner circle of Jesus's disciples to take this step will always be a mystery. Perhaps what he had in mind was to provide a setting that would move or even force Jesus to reveal His messianic role and power and that would result in the establishment of the kingdom. He probably thought that Jesus would not allow the leaders of the people to kill Him. This would explain his desperation when he realized that Jesus was in fact to be killed (27:3–5).

26:17–25. Passover with the Disciples. Jesus was a law-observant Jew, and since the Passover was near, the disciples asked how they should go about preparing it. He directed them to a certain individual in Jerusalem who would allow them to prepare the Passover meal at his house (vv. 17–19). It was prepared as directed.

Right at the beginning of the Passover meal, Jesus announced that one of them would betray Him (v. 21). Of those at the meal, only Jesus and Judas Iscariot knew that Judas had already set in motion the process to betray Him. Jesus thus allowed Judas Iscariot an opportunity to turn aside from his planned betrayal—an opportunity that Judas ignored.

On hearing that one of their number would betray Jesus, all the disciples responded by asking if it was him (v. 22). The Greek of the NT sometimes includes the expected answer in a question that is asked. The question asked of Jesus by all the disciples strongly implies a "no" answer to the question. For all but one, the information that Jesus would be betrayed was alarming, and they showed their distress.

Modern meals are quite different in character from ancient meals. In modern Western society, those who participate in a meal are usually seated at a table, with their own plate and eating utensils in front of them. Many paintings of the Last Supper portray the arrangements in this manner. But like all those who that night ate a formal meal in the Roman world, Jesus and His disciples reclined to eat. Houses of the wealthy during the Roman period had a room called a triclinium. Such a room was set out with benches around three of its walls, and those participating in the meal reclined on blankets and pillows on these benches. It was not uncommon to have three or four people reclining on one bench—although with the twelve disciples and Jesus, one of the benches would have had five on it. The servants circulated around, ensuring that food and drink was available to all.

The other difference to modern practice in the meal described in Matthew 26:17–25 is the fact that most of the dishes were common dishes. As it was Passover, the bread was unleavened. Each "loaf" was small, and each participant in the meal either took a whole loaf or tore off some bread, which was then used to gather food from the common dish. Jesus assured His disciples that one dipping His bread into the common meal would betray Him (v. 23). Since all of them dipped their bread into the common meal, the identity of the person remained hidden.

26:26–30. Institution of the Lord's Supper. The meal that Jesus and His disciples were eating the night of His betrayal was the Passover feast (for more, see "The Year of the Crucifixion," p. 1460). This feast had been inaugurated to commemorate the last and most dramatic miracle associated with the escape of the Israelite slaves from Egypt. On that night, the blood of the Passover lamb was painted on the doorposts, and the angel of death, who slaughtered all the other firstborn sons around Egypt, passed over the houses that had the blood painted on the doorposts (Ex. 12:26–27).

The key food present at the Passover was a lamb that had been sacrificed especially. This lamb was to be eaten in one sitting, with none left over (Ex. 12:10). Even for Jesus and His disciples, this would have been a large meal for each of them. Jewish writings from a time period after Jesus outline in great detail how the Passover meal was to be conducted. It consisted of fifteen separate parts, starting with the blessing and drinking of a cup of the fruit of the vine, then the setting aside of a special piece of bread, the retelling of the Passover story and the drinking of a second cup, the eating of bitter herbs (Ex. 12:8), the eating of the main course, the eating of the bread that had been set aside, and the drinking of a third and fourth cup of the fruit of the vine. It should be noted that wine in the ancient world did not have the high alcohol content of modern wine and was often drunk diluted. The fact that the Passover did not allow the use of leaven strongly suggests that fermented wine was not used. If Jesus was following the common Jewish pattern, then toward the end of the meal it would have been natural for Him to make a special comment over the piece of bread that had been set aside and over the cup of the fruit of the vine that was drunk at the end of the meal.

Jesus's words over the cup are particularly significant. In transforming the Passover into a Christian practice, He said that He was inaugurating a new covenant (Matt. 26:28), one that was founded on His blood. The word and concept of *covenant* is very important in the Bible. God made a covenant first with Abraham (Gen. 15:12–21). Most importantly, at Mount Sinai God made a covenant with the people of Israel (Ex. 19–20; Deut. 4:44—6:9). The covenant between God and His people had a special significance, and Jesus now established a covenant between Himself and His people based on His own blood, which He would shed on the cross. Jesus's blood flowed out for the forgiveness (or remission) of the sins of many people (Matt. 26:28)—that is, He died as their substitute. The death of Jesus was to be dramatically different from all other deaths. His would enable sins to be forgiven. Jesus then promised that He would not drink from the fruit of the vine until He would drink it with His disciples in His Father's kingdom (v. 29).

26:31–35. Peter's Denial Foretold. At the beginning of the Last Supper, Jesus had already warned the disciples that one of them would betray Him. Now He told them that they would all stumble. The word used in the Greek to capture Jesus's expression is the verb *skandalizō* (v. 31), which can be used to refer to a trap. It also has the meaning of something placed on a path that causes others to stumble, and hence it can mean a temptation to sin or even the cause of ruin. Jesus was very strongly warning the disciples that they would shortly be facing a great temptation and that all of them would stumble. He wished to reassure them, though, that after His resurrection He would meet with them in Galilee (v. 32).

Peter's protestation that he would never deny Christ (v. 33) revealed his sincere conviction. This conviction certainly was born directly from a strong sense of his own spiritual strength. However, none of the disciples (v. 35) had yet learned that the type of strength needed to face persecution comes only through recognition of one's own weakness, humbling oneself, and trusting God to control the future. Peter was not totally aware of his own weaknesses, and consequently when temptation came, he denied His Lord (vv. 66–75) as predicted (v. 34).

26:36–46. Prayer in Gethsemane. Jesus took the disciples to a place called Gethsemane (26:36; Mark 14:32) found on the Mount of Olives (Luke 22:39). The name Gethsemane means "oil press," and in all probability the place was an olive grove, rather like the small grove of olives that still exists at the foot of the Mount of Olives in the courtyard of one of the churches there.

Jesus then asked Peter and the two sons of Zebedee (James and John) to accompany Him a little farther (Matt. 26:37). These were the three disciples who had accompanied Him to the Mount of Transfiguration (17:1–8); this occasion was one of greater solemnity. Jesus felt the weight of suffering (His "cup," 26:39), and He told his three closest followers that He was overwhelmed by sorrow, even to the point of death (v. 38). At this time of crisis, Jesus apparently felt the need of human companionship, but it was to be denied Him. He came back to them twice only to find them asleep (vv. 40–41, 43).

Jesus's prayer to the Father that expressed the wish to find another way to fulfill His mission was only natural. Yet even at His first prayer, He assured God that if it were His will, then it must be (v. 39). In His second prayer, Jesus highlighted His willingness to do the will of God, even though the cost would be so great (v. 42).

26:47–56. Betrayal and Arrest of Jesus. His prayer concluded, Jesus went out to meet the betrayer. For some reason, the guards needed to have Jesus identified to them (perhaps Jesus was unknown to them and/or it was difficult to recognize Him clearly in the dark), and Judas had arranged a sign that the one whom he kissed was Jesus. So Judas greeted Jesus by calling Him "Rabbi" and kissing Him (v. 49). Curiously enough, in the Gospel of Mathew only Judas called Jesus "Rabbi" (vv. 25, 49). Furthermore, only those outside of the inner circle called Jesus "Teacher" (8:19; 12:38; 17:24; 19:16; 22:24, 36), although Jesus is identified as the rabbi and teacher par excellence in Matthew 23:7–8. Mark's and John's Gospels present the disciples as not hesitating to call Jesus "Teacher" and "Rabbi" (e.g., Mark 4:38; 9:5, 38; 10:35; 11:21; John 1:49; 4:31; 9:2; cf. Luke 21:7).

Jesus responded to the greeting of Judas by calling him "friend," knowing full well that he was betraying Him to the authorities but even now not cutting him off. He then said three words that mean something like "Why are you here?" "Why have you come?" or "For what purpose you are here?" They could also mean, "Do what you have come for" (Matt. 26:50). The phrase is ambiguous, and with any of the above meanings it seems evident that Jesus's words can be understood as a gentle chiding of Judas for his purpose in coming.

When Jesus was seized, one of the disciples tried to resist by taking out a sword and striking the slave of the high priest, removing his ear (vv. 50–51). The disciple who did this is not identified in Matthew, Mark, or Luke, but John 18:10 notes that this was Simon Peter. Jesus then demanded that Peter put his sword back in its place (Matt. 26:52). He then told the disciples that He could request more than twelve legions of angels for assistance but that He would not do it so as to fulfill God's plan for Him by dying on the cross (vv. 53–54). This idea is stressed twice within the space of three verses (vv. 54, 56).

26:57–68. Jesus before the Council. Jesus was brought to Caiaphas, the high priest, who had gathered the scribes and elders that made up the Great Sanhedrin (v. 59). In classical literature, the Greek word, *synedrion*, was used of a governing body or court. The Roman Senate was sometimes called a *synedrion*. Within the Holy Land, the Sanhedrin developed as an institution from the time of the return of the exiles from the Babylonian captivity. While Judea was ruled by a Jewish king, the Sanhedrin functioned as both high court and also as a consultative body, at least when the king took advantage of the opportunity to consult it. Herod the Great, for example, did not disband the Sanhedrin but rarely consulted it, dispensing his own royal justice independently of it. At the time of Jesus's trial, Judea was ruled by a Roman governor, and the Sanhedrin functioned as the highest court for many matters that the Romans did not consider to be in their sphere of influence. During A.D. 6–70, the Sanhedrin had even convicted and executed a few individuals. Within the NT, as here in Matthew, it is the high priest who acts as president of the Sanhedrin.

Following the leadership of Caiaphas, the Sanhedrin sought occasion to accuse Jesus of a capital crime and to actually find Him worthy of death (26:59). They allowed many false witnesses to come forward, but no two witnesses agreed (cf. Mark 14:55–56, 60). Finally, two witnesses did agree that Jesus said He was able to destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days (Matt. 26:61). These words do not appear earlier in Matthew's Gospel, although something similar is found in John 2:19–22, at the time when Jesus cleansed the temple from those who bought and sold there. There John indicates that Jesus was referring to the temple of His body.

Caiaphas asked Jesus if He had an answer to all of the charges brought against Him, but Jesus was initially silent (Matt. 26:62–63). Caiaphas then invoked an oath and demanded to know whether or not Jesus was the Christ (Messiah), "the Son of God." Jesus answered this question, presumably because if He had remained silent it would have seemed He was denying that He was the Christ, the Son of God. His response was polite: "You have said so," or "It is as you said" (v. 64). He then went on to cite Daniel 7:13 and Psalms 110:1. Jesus informed Caiaphas that there would be a reversal of roles. Now Jesus was standing before Caiaphas, who was sitting in judgment over Him, but there would come a time when Jesus, as the Son of Man, would be seated at the right hand of God and would come in judgment against Caiaphas and all His enemies. Notice that in Matthew 26:63–64 Jesus interpreted the phrase, "the Christ, the Son of

God" in terms of the Son of Man. Earlier in the Gospel, Jesus had asked the disciples who they said the Son of Man is, and he approved the answer that the Son of Man is the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matt. 16:13, 15–16).

On hearing the words of Jesus, the high priest announced that by declaring Himself to be the Son of God, Jesus had blasphemed (26:65). According to Leviticus 24:10–16, anyone, even an alien, who blasphemes, was to be put to death. Thus Caiaphas had found a legal case on which the death penalty could be enacted. What was not emphasized by Caiaphas, but was possibly implied when he phrased the question, was that by accepting the title of Messiah, Jesus was accepting a role of ruler over the people of Israel and so was therefore in rebellion against the Roman authorities. It is hard to know what the Romans would have made of a charge of blasphemy, but they would have acted with brutal decisiveness against one who claimed to be a rival to their control over the land of Judea.

26:69–75. Peter's Denial of Jesus. Immediately after Jesus was seized by those who came to arrest him, all the disciples forsook him and fled (v. 56). Peter, though, did not flee far. In fact, he took it on himself to follow Jesus to see what happened to Him (v. 58). He even went into the courtyard of the high priest's house, where Jesus was being tried before the Sanhedrin (vv. 58, 69). This took considerable courage. Who knows, perhaps Peter may have been seeking an opportunity to rescue Jesus. But in any event, having decided to take the role of a spectator, Peter's courage led him into an awkward position. When asked whether he was a disciple, Peter decided to deny it (vv. 70–71). He withdrew from the courtyard to the entrance of the house (the gate) only to be accosted again. His denial was stronger (vv. 70–72). Finally, those around him remarked on his accent and suggested to Peter that this indicated that he must be a follower of Jesus. Peter violently denied it to be the case (vv. 73–74). Luke 22:61 records that at this crucial moment Jesus turned and looked at Peter. Matthew records that at the crowing of the cock Peter remembered the words of Jesus that he would deny his Master. He then went out and wept bitterly (Matt. 26:75).

We can find interesting comparisons and contrasts between Peter and Judas that are hard to miss. They both rejected Jesus, Judas with his betrayal and Peter with his denial, and they both regretted what they did. But there were two different outcomes. Peter wept bitterly but repented, returned to the Lord, and became a leader in the early Christian movement. Judas went and hanged himself (27:3–10).

27:1–2. Jesus Brought before Pilate. The Mishnah, the "oral law" of the Pharisees that was put in writing around A.D. 200 in Galilee, specifies that a capital trial was not to be held at night. It is not possible to know whether this rule was known and observed at the time of Jesus, but Matthew 27:1 recounts that it was morning (early morning) when the death penalty was decided against Jesus. The Sanhedrin had from time to time carried out its decision to put people to death independently of the Roman authorities. For example, it seems that the Sanhedrin did not consult the Romans before putting Stephen to death years after this story (Acts 6:8—7:60). Yet it is not surprising that generally speaking the Romans reserved the carrying out of the death penalty for themselves. Jesus was taken from the hearing before the Sanhedrin to Pilate, the prefect (or governor) of Judea.

27:3–10. Death of Judas. The text of Matthew does not specifically indicate whether the outcome of his betrayal was a surprise to Judas, but his reaction suggests that was the case. It is conceivable that Judas had confidently expected Jesus to call on His powers to destroy those who were trying to destroy Him. At the end, Judas was very sorry that the outcome of his actions resulted in Jesus being condemned to death. He returned to the high priests and the elders and told them that he had sinned in betraying innocent blood. Their reaction, as might be expected, was unsympathetic. It was his business, they said (v. 4). Judas then flung down the thirty pieces of silver that had come to him for his betrayal of Jesus and went out and hanged himself.

The high priests thereupon had a discussion of a nice point of law. Could this money be put into (or perhaps returned to) the temple treasury, which contained money set aside for holy use? Clearly the answer must be no, as it was indeed blood money (v. 6). Instead they used it to purchase a field from a potter, which they would then use for burying the bodies of foreigners who would not be defiled by resting in such a place (v. 7). Verse 8 is a comment made by the writer of the Gospel, who says the field is called the field of blood "to this day." This is one of the few indications in the Gospel that there is some time between the events it describes and the writing down of the Gospel.

27:11–26. Jesus Sentenced to Die. Jesus was sentenced to death by the Sanhedrin and then delivered to the Roman authorities for execution. He finally came before Pilate. The conversation between Jesus and Pilate was short. Pilate first asked Jesus if He was the king of the Jews. The Sanhedrin had condemned Jesus to death because He claimed to be the Son of God, but Pilate ignored this charge. For the Roman governor, the more crucial matter was whether Jesus claimed political power, as He may have done when He identified Himself as the Messiah (Matt. 26:53). Jesus replied calmly to Pilate's question by saying, "It is as you say," or "You have said so." Matthew indicates that Pilate was warned later by his wife, who had received a dream about Jesus (Matt. 27:19). He realized that Jesus had been delivered up to him out of self-interested envy or jealousy (v. 18). Instead of being angry, as might be expected, Pilate was amazed at Jesus's subsequent silence (v. 14).

Pilate then tried a strategy that backfired. He sought an opportunity to release Jesus using the custom of releasing a prisoner at the "feast" (i.e., Passover). He had in prison a notorious prisoner called Barabbas (v. 16). Matthew says nothing more about Barabbas than that he was a notorious prisoner, but Mark and Luke add that he had been captured with the rebels in an insurrection and was a murderer (Mark 15:7; Luke 23:19). The Romans would have sentenced Barabbas to death on either of these grounds.

There is a textual variant found only in Matthew that mentions that Barabbas had a first name—Jesus (Matt. 27:16–17). While not in all the ancient manuscripts, this variant appears in enough of the significant manuscripts and ancient translations for some modern translations to use it—"Jesus Barabbas." One can understand why Pilate thought that Barabbas was a good choice to offer the crowd. He was an insurrectionist and a murderer. He was a dramatic contrast to Jesus of Nazareth, who was known as a religious teacher who healed people. Surely the crowd would choose Jesus of Nazareth. That the two men had the same first name would have seemed an extra bonus to Pilate, supporting the questions, "Which Jesus do you want? Jesus Barabbas or Jesus of Nazareth?"

To Pilate's obvious surprise, the crowd chose Barabbas, so he delivered Jesus to be crucified and released Barabbas. There is one final detail to notice. Jesus was crucified with two other condemned criminals. Perhaps Barabbas was conscious of the fact that Jesus died on the cross that was rightfully his.

27:27–44. Crucifixion of Jesus. The reference to Jesus as king recurs at several places in the account of the trials and death of Jesus. He admitted to Pilate that He was king of the Jews (Matt. 27:11), and above Him on the cross, a sign noted the charge that led to His death: "THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS" (v. 37). Unlike Mark 15:26 and Luke 23:38, Matthew included the portion of the full inscription ("This is Jesus") that provided the name of the Messiah, and thus the emphasis is more personal than the other two Synoptics. After Jesus was taken to the residence of the governor of Jerusalem (the Praetorium, Matt. 27:27), the soldiers there mocked Him as king of the Jews. They put a soldier's scarlet cloak on him, mocking royal robes (which were purple) and crafted a crown for Him made up of thorns. They then mocked Him in a parody of the greeting that would be given to a royal personage, saying, "Hail, king of the Jews." The strong irony of the charge against Jesus and the mocking of Him as king of the Jews is that Jesus is indeed the true ruler, not of the Jews alone, but of the whole world.

Jesus was also scourged by Pilate (v. 26). Scourging was a terrible punishment in which the victim was flogged either using a stick or using a whip embedded with some combination of small lead balls, sheep bones, broken pottery, and glass and attached to a handle via leather thongs. Too vigorous a scourging could lead to the victim's death, and Jesus was so weakened by His scourging that even though He was a man in the prime of life who had spent most of His life in the physically demanding trade of a builder, He was so weakened that He was unable to carry the crossbeam of the cross, as was usual for criminals on their way to crucifixion. Seeing this, the Roman guards compelled a passerby named Simon, a man from Cyrene, to carry the beam of the cross for Jesus (v. 32). Before His crucifixion Jesus was offered wine mixed with another substance (v. 34), but He refused the drink, which would have dulled His mind.

Jesus was crucified with two others, described as *lēstai* (v. 38), which could refer to robbers or bandits who lived by robbing others, often violently. The Roman Empire did not provide productive employment for all of its citizens, nor could the rural economy employ all those who wished to work. The unemployed in Rome were provided with food at the government's expense, but those living elsewhere were not so fortunate. They had to live by their wits, often by begging and stealing. Theft by bandits was a common phenomenon, and periodically the Roman government acted with considerable savagery against them in an attempt to stamp them out. The two others crucified with Jesus served as a Roman object lesson that no matter how desperate a person might be, being a bandit was not a safe way to try to live.

The words of mockery from those who passed by (vv. 39–43) are particularly ironic. Jesus was accused of being able to save others but unable to save himself (v. 42). But it is only through His death that Jesus was able to save others. He was further mocked because He said that even if this temple was destroyed, He would rebuild it in three days (v. 40). Then three days later, Jesus rose from the dead.

27:45–56. Death of Jesus. From the sixth hour (noon) until the ninth hour (about 3 p.m.), there was darkness (Matt. 27:45; cf. Mark 15:33; Luke 23:44). This darkness was not caused by a solar eclipse but by God's direct and miraculous involvement. In Amos 8:9, God threatened to make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight. One of the threats against those who broke God's covenant in Deuteronomy 28:29 was that they would grope at noon like a blind person in darkness.

In Matthew 27:46 Jesus finally spoke from the cross, addressing His words to God. He spoke in Aramaic, which implies that Jesus's usual language was Aramaic, and this is the most likely language in which He and the disciples talked together. His words are translated into Greek as *thee mou thee mou hinati me enkatelipes* ("My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me"). Given Jesus's special relationship with His Father, these words are of deep significance and reveal the rift He experienced between Himself and His Father at that terrible moment.

The bystanders misunderstood the words of Jesus as a cry to Elijah for help (*Eli*, "my God" in Aramaic sounds somewhat like *Ēlias*, Elijah in Greek), and they went to fetch sour wine to give to Jesus to encourage Him to live a while longer (vv. 47–48) so they could see if Elijah would, in fact, come to save Jesus. (Given their other mockery, one suspects that they had no expectation of this taking place.)

Jesus thereupon gave a loud cry and died (v. 50). Matthew then recounts several miraculous events that accompanied Jesus's death and shows that it had cosmic significance. First, the curtain in the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom (v. 51). This showed clearly that the death of Jesus brought a significant disruption in the normal way to approach God. The earthly sanctuary with its sacrificial system and priestly services had come to an end. The Lamb of God had died. From now on, access to God would be only through the crucified Messiah. Second, there was a destructive earthquake that opened many graves.

Perhaps the greatest of these events was that many of the righteous dead whose graves had been opened by the earthquake were resurrected with Jesus and appeared to many in the city afterward (vv. 51–53). Observing the darkness, the death, and the earthquake, a centurion reached the conclusion that Jesus was the Son of God (v. 54).

Matthew is careful to also note that these events were witnessed. He specifically names Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee (identified as Salome in Mark 15:40). In doing this, Matthew shares the attitude of all the Gospel writers, Paul, and other writers of the NT that eyewitnesses were important (Mark 15:40; Luke 1:1–2; John 19:25; 1 Cor. 15:4–8; 2 Pet. 1:16). These are memories of real events, and early Christianity went to great lengths to record those eyewitnesses who could be called on to testify about what had happened.

27:57–66. Burial of Jesus and Guards at the Tomb. Little is known about Joseph of Arimathea, except that he was wealthy and was a disciple of Jesus (Matt. 27:57). Like other wealthy individuals, Joseph had made provision for his own burial and those of other members of his family. There were metal tools capable of hewing into the limestone bedrock found around Jerusalem. Many tombs were constructed outside of the city walls, tombs dating back to the time of the kings of Israel and Judah, and the process continued in Jesus's day. The type of tomb described here—hewed out of rock, with a large stone that could be rolled to close its entrance—was cut into the rock, and it had several ledges on which bodies could be laid. Joseph took the body of Jesus, wrapped it in clean linen, and placed it on one of the ledges in this tomb.

To establish definitively that the location of the tomb was known (regarding the location of the tomb, see in "Archaeology and the Bible," p. 91), Matthew recounts that not only was Joseph present when Jesus was interred, but his actions were observed by Mary Magdalene and the other Mary—presumably Mary the mother of James and Joseph (27:61; cf. v. 56). Matthew 27:62 is in fact the first mention of the Pharisees in the Gospel of Matthew since Matthew 23:29, which may imply that the Pharisees had nothing to do with the plotting that eventually ended up with the death of Jesus, despite earlier attempts to act against Jesus (e.g., 12:14; 22:15). They came to Pilate on the day after the day of preparation (27:62, an unusual way of saying the Sabbath). The Pharisees and the high priests requested Pilate to take steps to ensure that Jesus's body would not be stolen. They were given a guard of soldiers and together they went to make the tomb "safe" by sealing the rolling stone (vv. 63–66).

28:1–15. Resurrection of Jesus. Matthew 28:1 first identifies the time of the coming events by stating that they took place after the Sabbath—which in modern reckoning would mean after sunset on Saturday night. To avoid the conclusion that the events about to be described happened at night, it specifies that it was at dawn. In the Greek, the word *sabbaton* is used twice, once to indicate the Sabbath, the day of worship, and once to indicate a week. Sunday is identified as the "first of the *sabbatōn* [Sabbaths]." *Sabbatōn* can be used in the sense of seven days (i.e., a week) rather than the seventh day, as it is used, for example, in Leviticus 23:15–16 (LXX). In the time of Jesus, the days of the week were numbered according to their proximity to the Sabbath: Sunday was therefore the "first" of the *sabbatōn*, Tuesday the "third" of the *sabbatōn*, and so on until Friday, which is the preparation day for the *sabbatōn*. Note *sabbatōn* is usually, but not always, used in the plural in the NT (e.g., it is used in the plural in Matt. 12:1, 5, 10; Mark 3:4; Luke 4:31; 6:2; but it is used in the singular in Matt. 12:2, 8; Mark 6:2; Luke 6:1; John 7:22–23). Acts 20:7 and 1 Corinthians 16:2 use the exact same phraseology, "first" of the *sabbatōn* (plural), to indicate Sunday.

Mary Magdalene and the other Mary (the mother of James and Joseph) were witnesses to all the important events surrounding the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus (Matt. 27:55–56, 61, 28:1–10). On first reading, it almost appears that the two women were present when the angel descended from heaven. It seems to contrast the effect of the resurrection on the two Marys and the guards. The guards became paralyzed with fear, while the two women believed. But a closer reading of the text makes it seem unlikely that they were present when the angel appeared. Why, then, would the angel have invited the two to view the empty tomb? The women shortly thereafter met Jesus Himself (28:9), so the conclusion seems to be that the angel appeared, opened the tomb for Jesus to emerge, and Jesus was resurrected before the two women arrived at the tomb.

One noteworthy feature of this passage is the emphasis on "seeing." The women came to *see* the tomb (v. 1); the angel invited the women to *view* the empty tomb (v. 6); the women disciples were told twice, once by the angel and once by Jesus Himself, to go to Galilee, where they would *see* Jesus (vv. 7, 10). The reports of the resurrection are based on what eyewitnesses reported they saw. There was an earthquake associated with both the death of Jesus (27:51) and His resurrection (28:2). The miraculous events surrounding the death of Jesus caused one set of guards to confess that Jesus was truly the Son of God (27:54). The miraculous events surrounding the resurrection of Jesus froze the other guards with paralyzing fear (28:4), but they apparently were prepared to deny the reality of the resurrection, even though they had seen it with their own eyes.

28:16–20. Commissioning the Disciples. Earlier in Matthew, Jesus had told the disciples that they were not to go and preach to any Gentiles or the Samaritans. They were rather to go to the lost sheep of Israel (Matt. 10:5–6). The death and resurrection of Jesus clearly changed this. Jesus met His disciples at the prearranged place in Galilee and declared that all authority in heaven and earth had been given to Him (28:18). Therefore, the disciples were to go to all nations (*ethnē*, the word can mean Gentiles or nations; here the context implies nations) and make disciples of them. Those who would accept Jesus were to be baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The disciples were to teach the followers of Jesus to observe all the things that He had commanded. Jesus promised His disciples that He would be with them until the end of the age. These post-resurrection promises constitute a fundamental aspect of the very core of the Christian hope and the Christian mission to the world.

MARK

INTRODUCTION

Title and Authorship. The Greek title for this book in the earliest manuscripts is *kata Markon*, which simply means "according to Mark." The implied words "The Gospel" were obviously assumed and were eventually added to the title in later copies.

Date. None of the four Gospels tells us the author's name or the date of writing. Christian writers in the late first century and early second century quote from the Gospels, and a few references seem especially close to the wording of Mark, in contrast to Matthew or Luke. These suggest the date for the writing of Mark was broadly sometime between A.D. 31 and A.D. 100.

Other information helps to be more exact. Early church leaders indicate that the John Mark known in Acts wrote his Gospel in the mid-50s to early 60s while Peter was ministering in Rome or, as most early witnesses claim, shortly after Peter's death during the persecution of Christians under Nero around A.D. 64. Our main sources for these suggestions are two early Christian authors, Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria, who wrote during the end of the second and beginning of the third centuries A.D. (according to Eusebius, a fourth-century church historian). Irenaeus and Clement link Mark's Gospel to Peter. Irenaeus indicates that Mark wrote his Gospel after the death of Paul and Peter. Eusebius, on the other hand, indicates that Mark wrote his Gospel before Peter's death and that Peter affirmed, at least in some way, the use of Mark's Gospel. Eusebius also relates another tradition that claims the stories in Mark's Gospel were an adaptation of the stories Peter shared while preaching in Rome.

Modern scholars tend to choose a date in the mid-60s, in connection with the persecution of Christians under Nero, or in the late 60s or early 70s, in relation to the destruction of Jerusalem. Those who argue for the later date tend to be critical scholars who often base their view on the presupposition that predictive prophecy is not possible. Thus, when they read Mark 13, with Jesus's clear prediction of the destruction of the temple, they believe that Mark or someone else composed a "prophecy" after Jerusalem's destruction and placed it on Jesus's lips to give credence either to Him or to the book of Mark or both. They suggest that Mark's cryptic statement "let the readers understand" regarding the abomination of desolation in 13:14 indicates the temple had been destroyed—or was at least on the verge of falling. In their opinion, Mark is just relating historical facts.

Since we maintain that Scripture is the word of God and predictive prophecy is possible, we find such arguments by modern scholars useless for dating the book. Moreover, the description of the siege of Jerusalem is far too general to assume Mark is writing about a past event. If he were, he probably would have included additional details. Instead, we accept the testimony of early Christians such as Irenaeus and Eusebius, along with the written evidence pointing to a first-century date for the book. This suggests for us that the book was written sometime in the middle of the first century A.D., possibly as a way of encouraging the church in the face of suffering and persecution following the deaths of Peter and Paul.

The Gospel of Mark nowhere in its text indicates who the author is. However, the consistent testimony of early Christian leaders such as Irenaeus and Eusebius is that John Mark wrote the book. John Mark appears in the pages of the NT as a rather minor character. While a follower of Jesus, he was not one of the twelve disciples. He was the son of a woman named Mary who lived in Jerusalem (Acts 12:12) and a cousin of Barnabas (Col. 4:10). He accompanied Barnabas and Paul on their first missionary journey (Acts 13:5), but somehow things went wrong for the young man and he decided to

return to Jerusalem prematurely (Acts 13:13). Later, when Paul wanted to go back to visit churches on a second missionary journey, Barnabas wanted to take along Mark, but Paul refused (Acts 15:36–41). They separated over this, and Barnabas took Mark with him to Cyprus.

This is the last we hear of Mark in Acts, but later in the NT he is connected with both Peter and Paul. Evidently Paul and Mark reconciled because Paul speaks of the young man as one of his companions (Col. 4:10; Philem. 23–24) and in 2 Timothy 4:11 he tells Timothy to bring Mark with him since he was helpful to him in ministry. Finally, Peter refers to Mark briefly as "my son" (1 Pet. 5:13). If John Mark were not actually the author of this Gospel, it seems unlikely that his name would have been universally associated with it.

Backgrounds. The Gospel of Mark is set in the Holy Land of the first century. The Evangelist expects his readers to know a great deal about the religious culture, history, geography, and traditions of that setting—a knowledge base that most modern readers do not have or understand only partially. Considering this situation, the reader's understanding of this commentary will be enhanced if he or she is acquainted with a basic understanding of the history and religious culture in which the events recorded in Mark's Gospel unfold.

1. History. At the time of Jesus, Judea was part of the Roman Empire. This was the fundamental governmental reality of the entire region. Historians indicate that the Romans took control of Judea in 63 B.C. under Pompey. Thereafter they controlled the region mainly through local rulers: Herod the Great (37 to ca. 4 B.C.) and his sons Archelaus (over Judea and Samaria in the south and central region, ca. 4 B.C. to A.D. 6), Antipas in Galilee and Perea (in the north and east of Jordan, ca. 4 B.C. to A.D. 39), and Philip in Trachonitis, Gaulanitis, and Auranitis (further to the northeast, ca. 4 B.C. to A.D. 34). Archelaus, who proved to be quite cruel and unpopular, was replaced in A.D. 6 by a Roman governor known as a "prefect" (later "procurator"). The prefect was responsible directly to the Roman emperor. In the time of Jesus's ministry, the prefect was Pontius Pilate (A.D. 26–36).

2. Religious Culture. Jesus was a Jew and spent almost His entire life and ministry within a Jewish context. At the time of Jesus, there were four main sects of Judaism: the Sadducees, Pharisees, Zealots, and Essenes. Josephus noted that the Pharisees (the "separate ones") followed a strict lifestyle focused on spiritual purity, which was based on the careful observance of the laws of the OT and their own religious traditions. They believed in angels, spirits, and a final resurrection of the dead, when God would judge the wicked and vindicate His followers. Although the Pharisees were laypeople who numbered only about six thousand, they were extremely influential and highly respected among the common people. As a group, however, they were highly critical of Jesus. They did not approve of the way He associated with sinful people and His disregard for their religious traditions.

The Sadducees, on the other hand, were very different. They were members of the Jewish aristocracy and were largely made up of powerful priestly families. Since the Roman authorities provided the Sadducees with a limited amount of local authority, they tended to maintain a more cooperative attitude toward the Roman governor. The ruling council of the Jews, known as the Sanhedrin, was primarily made up of Sadducees, with the chief priest being the head of the council. Unlike the Pharisees, the Sadducees acknowledged the religious authority of only the first five books of the OT. They rejected the religious authority of the traditions of the Pharisees and considered any other religious writing that extended beyond the books of Moses as secondary. For this reason, they did not believe in anything not explicitly found in the books of Moses, including the belief in the future resurrection of the righteous, the final judgment, or even angels or spirits. They held that God does not concern Himself with human affairs. Threatened by the authority of Jesus and His actions in the temple, they were largely responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus.

The Zealots are mentioned in the NT only in the list of Jesus's disciples (e.g., Simon the Zealot). Josephus described their beliefs as similar to the Pharisees, except that the Zealots were strongly attached to human freedom and recognized only God as their Ruler. This group gained control of the government of Judea during the revolt against Roman rule in A.D. 66–73.

Unlike the other Jewish sects, the Essenes are not mentioned in the NT. They were ascetic and largely separatist. The famous Dead Sea Scrolls were produced by a separatist group living at Qumran, near the northern end of the Dead Sea. This group was probably a branch of the Essenes, and we know much of their perspective on life and religion from the various scrolls discovered in caves near Qumran. From a religious perspective, they were certainly the most radical in orientation. They believed not only that the temple in Jerusalem was corrupt but also that the Pharisees were far too lax in their religious commitments and behavior.

Theological Themes. Several theological themes predominate in Mark. These include predominately issues involved in the study of Christ (Christology), those related to discipleship, and those dealing with the Cosmic Conflict and its resolution—the great hope of believers.

1. Christology. Jesus is the central focus of Mark—who He is and where He is going. Mark presents Jesus in what might be called a somewhat muted way. Christological titles of power, such as "Son of God" and "Lord," appear infrequently in the book and especially rarely on the lips of humans. Demons and unclean spirits knew who Jesus was, but He quite often silenced them. He also often told people to keep quiet about His identity or about a miracle He had performed. This phenomenon has been labeled by scholars as the Messianic Secret or the secrecy motif and appears in all three Synoptic Gospels.

But actually, secrecy is only half of the equation. It would be better to call it the revelation/secrecy motif since, almost without fail, where Jesus commands secrecy there is also revelation. What does this revelation and secrecy suggest? Jesus is the hidden Messiah who cannot be hidden. The truth has to come out. While an open declaration of His messianic role would have brought quick persecution and cut short His ministry, it was not something that could be hidden forever. Mark plays not so much on the historical necessity of secrecy as on the theological significance—the necessity to share the revelation.

The Christology of Mark is a paradoxical mixture of power and weakness. Jesus is the Son of God, the Christ, the Lord. He commanded and demons obeyed, He healed all who came to Him for help, He walked on water, and He raised the dead. He told the high priest that he would see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of power and coming on the clouds. He rose from the dead. And yet in the midst of this powerful presentation are signs of vulnerability at certain points in the story. After John baptized Him, the Spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness, where angels ministered to Him. He could not heal many people in His hometown because of their lack of faith. People did not obey His commands to keep quiet. He was arrested and tried, and most centrally, He died on a cross, crying out with the question as to why His God had forsaken Him (15:34).

The key for understanding this paradox of power and weakness is found in the meaning of the cross in Mark. Jesus says in 10:45, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve," giving His life for many. The powerful Son of God, who could banish demons, heal any disease, and raise the dead, accepted the ignominy and weakness of the cross to save humanity. Saving power touches human need and rescues the lost. Hope arises from the ashes of human need.

2. Discipleship. Revelation and secrecy regarding Christology actually play deeply into the other central theological theme in the Gospel of Mark: discipleship. At the center of the teaching on discipleship are the twelve men chosen to be apostles. The structure of the book illustrates them moving from simply followers to being appointed as apostles who went out to preach and who received more and more instruction from Jesus. They were far from perfect, but Jesus did not give up on them. He made important predictions about them that pointed to their continued ministry for Him after His resurrection. They would be His representatives to the world.

3. Cosmic Conflict and Hope. It is particularly in the confrontation with demon-possessed persons that Jesus faced evil powers that enslave human beings and oppress them. They operate in darkness and are part of a controversy that transcends human history. Yet Jesus confronted them within human history and overcame them, freeing humans from their power. This was His mission. He came to give His life as a ransom on the cross (Mark 10:45). The promised Messiah was here. His death on the cross was followed by His resurrection, and consequently it fills the hearts of human beings with hope. His death was not the end but the beginning. The risen Lord is the coming Lord. The Gospel closes by inviting us to reveal this glorious messianic message to the world. He remains the only hope for humanity.

Literary Features. Scholars outline Mark in various ways: geographical movement (from Galilee to Jerusalem), rhetorical patterns, or themes, such as Christology. One simple way to outline the book is to think of two questions: who is Jesus, and where is He going?

The first question is the focus of Mark 1:1—8:21, the second is the focus of the remainder of the book. The first half of the book is more a time of discovery for Jesus's disciples, coming to recognize that He is the Messiah. In the second half of the book, He teaches them that the role of the Messiah is to give His life as "a ransom for many" (10:45). His ministry concludes in Jerusalem (chaps. 11–16), where His predictions of His trial, death, and resurrection come to pass.

COMMENTARY

1:1—8:21

WHO IS JESUS?

The focus of Mark 1:1—8:21 is on the identity of Jesus. Who is He? While the reader knows from the first line of the Gospel that He is the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God, characters within the story learn His identity through a rather protracted process. Even though Jesus insisted on secrecy, this rarely worked, and news about Him spread far and near. The major recipients of the awakening sense of who Jesus was were His twelve disciples, who were with Him almost from the beginning of the Gospel and went through a process of increasingly stronger ties with Him. They would confess Him as the Christ in the second half of the book.

1:1–13

The Prologue

The prologue introduces the principal character of the book, Jesus Christ, and presents His relationship to the message of the OT and to His forerunner, John the Baptist. It opens with an introduction that not only sets the stage for the narrative that follows but also introduces the basic theme of the entire work, which is the good news about Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah and Son of God. This good news, which was promised in the OT, began with the coming of John the Baptist, who set the stage for Jesus's ministry. After His baptism, Jesus preached the gospel of God (1:9, 14–15).

1:1. The Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Gospel of Mark opens with what appears to be an incomplete sentence. Some accordingly suggest that the phrase is a title rather than the opening of the narrative, but this seems unlikely since v. 2 continues the thought with the words "as it is written." The good news is about Jesus Christ, "the Son of God." "Christ" is the Greek form of the Hebrew term "Messiah," which means "anointed one" and suggests a role of authority. In the OT, kings and priests were anointed, as were prophets sometimes. In Mark, the kingly perspective will predominate, as Jesus will demonstrate impressive authority over demons and disease and will be crucified as "King of the Jews." The title "Son of God" expresses filial relationship to God and is clearly a term of power and authority. It appears in settings of power in Mark—God's voice from heaven, demons resisting Jesus, the trial before the Sanhedrin, and the cross.

1:2–8. John the Baptist. Verses 2–3 quote from three passages in the OT (first from Ex. 23:20 and Mal. 3:1, then from Is. 40:3). Mark 1:2 combines Exodus 23:20 and Malachi 3:1. Both passages refer to God sending an angel or messenger. In Exodus 23, God promised to send an angel before Israel to lead them to the promised land. He warned them to obey this angel, stating that His name was in Him (Ex. 23:21). Malachi 3:1 indicates that God was sending His messenger before Him to prepare His way. The context speaks of God's way as being one of purity and of judgment on sinful behavior.

Mark 1:3 contains words from Isaiah 40:3. The context in Isaiah is one of comfort, hope, forgiveness, and new life to the people of Jerusalem. The prophet speaks of a desert road being straightened and filled in for the coming of the King. It is a picture of Yahweh leading His people back from exile through the desert, just like He did in the Exodus.

The use of these OT passages emphasizes that the "beginning of the Gospel" is the fulfillment of the very promises that God made to Israel in the past. This finds expression both in John's ministry and in Jesus's words in 1:15, where He states that the time (*kairos*—which can mean "appointed time," "period of time," "time of opportunity," or "the last times") is *peplērōtai*—"fulfilled" or "completed"—the time of fulfillment had arrived. These passages also point toward the moral reform involved in preparing the way of the Lord. This preparation both leads to salvation and involves a return to God's values, ceasing rebellion, accepting His call, and worshiping Him alone. In Mark, Jesus is always on the move, but the end of His journey is a dark place: the cross.

Each of the four Gospels connects the ministry of John the Baptist with Jesus (cf. Matt. 3:1–17; Luke 3:1–2; John 1:6–8, 19–36). The appearance of John in the wilderness at the beginning of Mark's Gospel is significant since it is in the wilderness that God acted in Israel's past to deliver His people in the Exodus and to reveal Himself to them. John's ministry not only fulfills the moral reform suggested in the words of Mark 1:3 but also signals that God is again at work in the desert to deliver His people once again through water—the water of baptism, which is linked to repentance, the result of which is the forgiveness of sin.

Ritual washing was common in first-century Judea. Jewish priests, for example, regularly immersed themselves in water as part of a process of ceremonial purification necessary for carrying out their duties in the temple. A ritual bath known as "proselyte baptism" was also a common part of the ritual that Gentiles underwent to mark their conversion into Judaism in John's day. The watery baptism that John practiced, however, was different from either of these. Whereas ceremonial washing for ritual purity was practiced frequently, John's baptism appears to have been a single event. And unlike proselyte baptism, John's new approach was to institute a baptism of repentance for people who were already part of Judaism. John's baptism was for moral purity in preparation for the coming of the Messiah. This is indicated in the word "repentance," which comes from a Greek word (*metanoia*) that refers to a change of one's mind, attitudes, and actions. Baptism for John was not simply an isolated religious ritual. It was an outward act that pointed to a change of direction in a person's life—a direction that focused on returning to God. The message of this fiery preacher, unafraid of even people in high positions, caught the attention of everyone.

John's clothing and diet are of special note. He wore camel's hair, had a leather belt around his waist, and ate locusts and wild honey (v. 6). John's clothing is reminiscent of the prophet Elijah (cf. 2 Kin. 1:8), to whom he will be linked in Mark 9:11–13. John's diet is ascetic. Instead of meat he ate locusts, and instead of wine he drank water sweetened with wild honey.

It is not until vv. 7–8 that we actually hear the voice of the Baptist saying that the One coming after him is stronger than he is, and he describes himself as less than a servant to the Messiah—not worthy to even bend down and loosen His sandal strap (v. 7). John also spoke of his own ministry in the past tense in comparison with the Messiah's coming ministry. He predicted that the Messiah would baptize "with the Holy Spirit" (v. 8).

1:9–13. Baptism and Temptations of Jesus. Jesus came from Galilee to be "baptized by John in the Jordan" (vv. 9). The Evangelist has prepared us for this picture, which initially may seem to suggest that John was superior to Jesus. The Gospel opens with clear indications of who Jesus was, how God spoke to Him, that a forerunner would go before Him, and that John is that forerunner. To ensure there is no doubt that Jesus was the superior, we hear John's words to that effect (v. 7).

But we should linger on the picture of Jesus baptized by John. This unassuming action by the Messiah, suggesting inferiority or even a need for the same type of repentance that others demonstrate, is a marker of the way of the Lord that Jesus would walk. Incredible power meets vulnerability or powerlessness in the life of Jesus. He was not in need of this baptism (cf. Matt. 3:14–15). He had no hint of sin in His life (cf. Heb. 4:15). He was the Christ, the Son of God, yet He was baptized by John. He came after John, and He would be tempted in the wilderness by the devil and be ministered to by angels. Why these markers of vulnerability? They point toward the mission He was on. He would die on a cross, apparently forsaken by God. But this combination of weakness and power brings salvation to humanity (cf. Mark 10:45).

When Jesus came up out of the water (John baptized by immersion), He saw the heavens split and the Spirit descending on Him in the form of a dove, and He heard the voice of God from heaven declaring Jesus to be His well-approved and beloved Son (1:10–11). These words were primarily addressed to Jesus Himself. His baptism in Mark is the commencement of His ministry. The Trinity was present at this crucial turning point. The Evangelist will link this inauguration of Jesus's ministry to its climax at the cross (see commentary on Mark 15:21–47).

Verses 12–13 give the brief statement of Jesus's forty days of temptation in the wilderness, which concludes the prologue. The Spirit *ekballei* Him into the wilderness (v. 12). This Greek verb, from *ekballō*, is the common word used in the Gospels to refer to exorcism of evil spirits. But here it shows the Holy Spirit casting out into the desert not demons but Jesus, the Son of God. The testing by the devil seems to have been for the entire forty days. And then we hear that Jesus was out with wild creatures while angels were ministering to Him (v. 13).

The emphasis is on Jesus being acted on more than on His own actions. Cast out into the desert by the Spirit, tempted by Satan, with the wild beasts, ministered to by angels—the Son of God was vulnerable. His incredible power that would become the hallmark of the Gospel is linked with weakness, the final weakness being the cross. Power in weakness is the fount of salvation.

1:14–45
Beginning of Jesus's Ministry

In Mark, Jesus begins His ministry in Galilee by calling His disciples and preaching in the synagogue. His ministry is characterized by the performance of many miracles through which He defeats evil powers.

1:14–20. Calling the First Disciples. The relationship between Jesus and His disciples began with His call of them and is developed throughout the book, with major turning points in chapter 3 (calling the Twelve), chapter 6 (sending them on mission), and chapter 8 (confession of Jesus as the Messiah). Verses 14–15 of chapter 1 are transitional. They look back toward the prologue with the opening reference to John and look forward with the preaching of Jesus in Galilee. Verse 14 starts with a reference to events taking place after John was arrested. No explanation is given for this shocking statement. We will not know the details of John's fate until Mark 6.

Jesus entered Galilee and began to preach the gospel (1:14). In the earliest manuscripts, the phrase is simply "gospel of God"; in others, it reads "the good news of God" or "the gospel of the kingdom of God." The content of this gospel is immediately given in three parts: the fulfilling or completion of "the time," the arrival of the kingdom of God, and the call to repent and believe in the gospel (v. 15). The gospel message Jesus preached includes time prophecy, a covenant promise, and a call to discipleship. The opening phrase referring to "the time" and the arrival of its fulfillment points the reader back to the seventy-week time prophecy of Daniel 9:24–27, which began in 457 B.C. (see Dan. 9). The sixty-ninth week of the prophecy came to fulfillment in A.D. 27, when Jesus was baptized and anointed with the Holy Spirit. The last seven years of the prophecy came to fulfillment in the death and resurrection of Jesus in A.D. 31 and the gospel going to the Gentiles in A.D. 34.

"The kingdom of God" refers to the reign or rule of God but also has temporal and even spatial qualities. The phrase is used fourteen times in Mark, with another reference to the "kingdom of our father David" in Mark 11:10 that likely refers to the same concept. The kingdom is near (1:15) but also refers to something in the future (14:25). The kingdom is not visible to everyone (4:11), but the disciples receive that secret. It starts small but grows large (4:30–32) and has a dynamic and mysterious aspect to its growth (4:26–29). It involves power and glory (9:1–8), and yet it is received like a child (10:14–15). Sin keeps us out of it (9:47), and rich people find it hard to enter (10:23–25); indeed, it is hard for anyone to enter. We can be near it (12:34) while still looking for it (15:43).

What we surmise from this review is that the kingdom of God comes with Jesus. It has a "now and not yet" aspect, and it has citizens. Some people are in, others are not. It is something we have to focus on to enter, and certain things can keep us out. Inside the kingdom is good, outside is not. The disciples of Jesus are the ones to whom the kingdom belongs. It is a glorious kingdom but also has characteristics of humility and lowliness.

The call to repent and believe (1:15) is the ethical demand of the gospel message. Similar to John the Baptist, Jesus called for people to turn back to God. "Repent" signifies a change of mind or heart. While it involves feelings of remorse for sin, it is more than that. It also involves a change of direction in a person's life. "Believe" is the verbal form of the word "faith." Where repentance indicates a turning away from the world's ways, belief designates a turning toward God, placing one's trust in Him.

Jesus encountered Simon and Andrew as they were standing on the shore casting a net. Jesus called them to follow Him and become fishers for people (v. 17). He next encountered James and John, seemingly at a higher level of income since they had a boat with their father and had hired men. Jesus called them, and they too left all and followed Jesus. The terse portrayal in these verses illustrates Jesus's power and the obedience these men displayed in following Him without question.

1:21–45. Typical Day of Jesus's Ministry. Jesus's first day of ministry helping people was a Sabbath. It was a day full of activity—preaching, casting out a demon, and healing. Later Jesus went about preaching and healing all over Galilee. The end of chapter 1 records that He met a leper, whom He healed. He then entered Capernaum again (2:1), where he had taught in the synagogue on the Sabbath (1:21). Capernaum was situated right on the Sea of Galilee (a lake approx. thirteen mi. long [21 km] and eight mi. wide [13 km]).

Jesus taught with authority and expelled an unclean spirit from a man. The unclean spirit knew who Jesus was: "the Holy One of God" (v. 24). It is a title of power and stands in sharp contrast to the spirit's unclean status. He silenced the spirit. This is the first clear depiction of the revelation/secrecy motif that runs throughout the book (see Mark: Introduction).

Jesus also visited the home of Simon and Andrew (vv. 29–31), where Simon's mother-in-law was sick with a fever, and other sick people came to the house for healing at the end of the Sabbath. Because he did not explain why they waited, it is clear that the Evangelist expected his readers to have an understanding of Sabbath law (Ex. 20:8–11; cf. Lev. 23:32).

After these healings, Jesus went by Himself to a remote place and prayed. Despite the fact that there was a great demand for Him to stay, Jesus made it clear that He was to go to the adjacent towns in Galilee to preach. So He traveled throughout Galilee, teaching in the synagogues and casting out demons (Mark 1:35–39). In the healing of a leper who came to Jesus entreating Him for help (v. 40), Mark shows the power Jesus had over uncleanliness. The Greek word used for leprosy referred to a broader range of skin diseases than what is known as leprosy today (Hansen's disease). It probably included psoriasis, lupus, favus, and ringworm. Anyone touching such a person became ritually unclean and had to bathe to remove the impurity. Consequently, most people no doubt avoided contact with such people. Jesus did not. According to most manuscripts, Mark states that Jesus was *splanchnistheis*—this term, which refers literally to the "bowels," associated with deep emotion, can be rendered as "moved with compassion." However, some other manuscripts have the less likely verb *orgistheis*—"becoming angry" or "incensed." In the former case, it would refer to Jesus's care for the man with leprosy; in the latter it could refer to His anger at the suffering caused by the disease (v. 41). Rather than becoming unclean, Jesus in His power cleansed the leper of his disease. The revelation/secrecy motif appears again here in vv. 44–45. Jesus commanded silence and an offering at the temple to demonstrate the healing. But the man went and reported the miracle everywhere.

2:1—3:12

Controversies and Healings

The section 2:1—3:12 is dominated by controversies between Jesus and religious leaders. Five stories of controversy appear here, mirrored by six controversies in 11:27—12:40. Scholars have identified, in the five stories of controversy in chapters 2–3, a ring pattern that interlinks them in the following way:

Text	Topic	Pattern
2:1–12	Healing a paralytic	Healing and sin
2:13–17	Feast at a house	Sin and food
2:18–22	Feast or fast?	Food
2:23–28	Plucking grain on Sabbath	Food and Sabbath
3:1–6	Healing a withered hand on Sabbath	Sabbath and healing

The themes in the stories link together like a chain, with the topic of one story finding an echo or repetition in the following story and the last story circling back to the first in the focus on healing. Each of the stories raises questions about Jesus that form the focus of the controversy. Together they paint a fuller picture of the nature of Jesus and His mission.

2:1–12. Healing a Paralytic. This story occurred at an unspecified house where Jesus healed a paralyzed man who had been let down by ropes through the roof. The roof described here was less substantial than roofs today and involved thatching and mud. Nevertheless, the action displayed sincere faith in what Jesus could do. When He saw the faith of the men who had brought him, Jesus immediately addressed the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven" (v. 5). The verb "to forgive" is in the passive voice, leaving the agent unspecified but implying it was divine. The religious leaders present immediately took offense, attributing to Jesus the claim to forgive sins. They maintained that a man taking God's prerogatives was blasphemy. However, they applied the definition to the wrong person since Jesus is the Son of God. In reply, Jesus asked them whether it is easier to tell the paralytic to take up his pallet and walk or to tell him that his sins are forgiven (v. 9). From a human perspective, it is easier to say, "Your sins are forgiven," since there is no way to determine if it came to pass. So to illustrate His actual ability to forgive sins on earth, Jesus did the harder task second—healing the paralyzed man, who picked up his bed and walked out in front of everyone. The words of Jesus are far different from human words. They are like the words spoken at the Creation of the world—they have life-giving power.

2:13–17. Eating with Sinners. This story links Jesus with sinners. It is a continuation of the theme of sin found in the previous controversy. He called Levi, a tax collector, to be one of His disciples. Then He proceeded to eat with tax collectors and sinners (v. 15). "Sinners" refers to people who lived a profligate or immoral lifestyle and those who did not abide by strict rules of ritual purity. The scribes asked why He ate with such people because for them, eating with such people would result in ritual defilement.

Jesus responded that it is those who are sick who need a physician, not those who are healthy (v. 17). The metaphor illustrated His care and concern for common people. More important to Him than ceremonial purity was the question of healing the spiritual sickness of those far from God. This, of course, included the self-sufficient Pharisees, who did not realize their own need. In the first controversy, Jesus showed His power to forgive. In this story, He illustrated His desire to apply that forgiving spirit to those in need—those who are sick. There is hope for all.

2:18–22. Fasting. The central story of the five controversy stories deals with the subject of fasting. The disciples of John the Baptist, together with the Pharisees, questioned why Jesus's disciples did not fast. It is well-known that fasting in ancient Judaism had several purposes. Although the only fast required by the law was on the Day of Atonement, fasting came to be seen as a way of gaining merit with God. Prayers and vows were confirmed by fasting, and it brought healing and freedom from demons. Thus, it is not hard to see the incredulity of the Pharisees' and John's disciples that Jesus's disciples did not fast.

Instead of responding to the theology of fasting, Jesus placed the question within the context of Christology via a metaphoric reply with a question: How could the wedding guests (lit. "children of the wedding hall") fast while the bridegroom was with them? Jesus was the bridegroom, and His presence denied any thought of asceticism. In the Messiah's company there was to be joy. But He spoke of an ominous day coming when the bridegroom would be taken away from them (v. 20). While this is veiled, it is a marker in the Gospel of the coming passion and illustrates the direction of the way of the Lord that Jesus was walking.

2:23–28. Sabbath Controversy. The Pharisees confronted Jesus with the fact that His disciples were plucking grain on the Sabbath. The law made provision that hungry people could satisfy their hunger from a neighbor's field (Lev. 19:9–10; 23:22; Deut. 23:25), so the dispute was not over stealing. The question revolved around the definition of work, since the Sabbath command prohibits work on God's holy day. The Pharisees saw in the plucking of the grain and probably the rubbing of it in the palms and blowing on it to remove the chaff a form of reaping and threshing. In their opinion, the disciples were working on the Sabbath.

Jesus defended His disciples by referring to the story of David coming to the high priest and asking for bread to eat. He noted that eating the showbread was something only the priests were allowed to do. In the story in 1 Samuel 21:1–6, the priest inquired if the young men with David had kept themselves from women (1 Sam. 21:4). When David responded in the affirmative, the priest allowed him to take the showbread for them to eat. The focus on ritual purity by the high priest (cf. Lev. 15:16–18) indicates that he accepted the young men's purity as sufficient grounds in David's emergency to allow the eating of the showbread.

Thus, Jesus's first argument was to use the example of David as grounds for His disciples to pick and eat grain on the Sabbath. It was as though He was saying, "My disciples are on God's errands like David's men were, so they are not guilty of breaking the Sabbath by eating this grain just as David was not guilty." The uniqueness of this argumentation is that Jesus used a story in Scripture to explain a law. It has been suggested that typically the Jews did not argue in that manner. A law or argumentation from a law was used to interpret another law.

But Jesus was not finished. He proceeded to state a maxim and then drew a conclusion from it, stating that the Sabbath had been created for human beings, not them for the Sabbath (Mark 2:27). He alluded to the Genesis 1:1—2:3 Creation story. The Sabbath is the last day of the Creation week, and one would think it to be the pinnacle of Creation. But Jesus refocused attention on the purpose of the Sabbath. Genesis 2:2–3 indicates four actions of God in relation to the Sabbath. He finished His work, rested, and blessed and sanctified the Sabbath. The first two actions are a matter of history; what God did. But the last two actions are expressions of God's will, focusing attention on the purpose of the Sabbath. The Sabbath is meant for blessing and holy use. Jesus indicated that God's loving purpose in making the Sabbath was for the blessing of humanity. The Greek term used, *anthrōpos*, is a generic term for humanity. The Sabbath was not made for Jews alone but for all humanity.

Mark 2:28 draws a conclusion: the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath. This verse has garnered much discussion because it does not seem to flow logically from v. 27. "Son of Man" is Jesus's designation for Himself. This is the second use of this phrase in Mark (see 2:10). No one else in the book ever uses the phrase. It is heard only on the lips of Jesus or the narrator reporting the words of Jesus (8:31; 9:9) and always refers to Him. The phrase comes from Daniel 7:13-14, a judgment scene in which someone like the Son of Man comes before the Ancient of Days. In Jesus's day, the phrase was not used by Jews as a messianic title, but Jesus invested it with messianic meaning.

The question of the logic of the passage revolves around just how the Son of Man being Lord of the Sabbath derives from the idea that the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath. The term "man" is key to the explanation. Jesus is linked to humanity as the Son of Man. He is part of that great group of "man," humanity, described in 2:27. But here is the paradox. In v. 27 the Sabbath is for the benefit of humanity ("man"), a gift from God to them. But in v. 28 the Son of Man is Lord over the Sabbath. It is a shift from beneficiary to sovereign. It has been suggested by some that while Jesus is human, He has christological qualities that lift Him above other human beings and make Him Lord over the Sabbath. It is striking that these christological arguments are all tied to the interpretation of Sabbath observance. Far from disparaging Sabbath observance, this passage indicates its benefit for all humanity and demonstrates Christ's authority to communicate what true Sabbath keeping is.

3:1-12. Another Sabbath Controversy. Mark continues the focus on Sabbath keeping with a story about a man with a withered hand in the synagogue in Capernaum. The religious leaders were again trying to trap Jesus in the act of Sabbath breaking, so they waited and watched to see if he would heal the man. Jesus asked them a question about Sabbath keeping (v. 4) that concerned more than just the healing of the man. It also singled out the evil intentions of Jesus's opponents. In the previous passage, the Pharisees accused Jesus's disciples of Sabbath breaking. Asking this question now placed Jesus on vantage ground. The pair of dichotomies He set before them allowed for only one answer—doing good and saving life.

The religious leaders were silent—they knew that the force of the question left them defeated in their purposes. Jesus was grieved at their stubbornness, and He refused to submit to their threats or erroneous interpretations of the Sabbath. He healed the man with the withered hand.

Incensed at Jesus's actions, the religious leaders joined with the Herodians to plot His death (v. 6). The alliance between the Pharisees and the Herodians is surprising. The Herodians were aristocratic supporters of the Herodian dynasty and pro-Roman, while the majority of the Pharisees were lay people who were strongly anti-Roman. Both groups, however, viewed Jesus as a threat to their political and religious influence. It is also ironic that those watching to catch Jesus in Sabbath breaking went forth to plot evil while Jesus healed the man. Jesus became the defender of proper Sabbath observance while the religious leaders became the lawbreakers.

The brief section of 3:7-12 is not so much a separate story as a summary of Jesus's healing work and the way in which it attracted much attention. Mark notes that people came from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, the area beyond the Jordan (probably Perea), and around Tyre and Sidon. These locations are from south, east, and north (the Mediterranean being to the west). Thus, people came from all directions to see Jesus.

3:13—6:6

Ministry with Apostles

This section has two basic foci. It illustrates the growing connection and relationship between Jesus and the group of men He designated as apostles. The other focus is the developing understanding of who Jesus is and what His message is about, which is particularly prominent in chapters 4 and 5.

3:13-19. Calling the Disciples. In all the lists of the apostles in the NT, Peter always appears first, and Judas is always listed last. The first three here (Peter, James, and John) will become the closest companions of Jesus. The significance of being an apostle is spelled out in the twofold nature of their calling. Their first responsibility was to be with Jesus (v. 14). While an apostle is one who is sent on a mission on behalf of someone else, this is not what is mentioned first. Before they were fit to go on a mission for Jesus, they first had to be with Him, to spend time in coming to know both Him and His teachings. The second aspect of their work was to preach and have authority to expel demons (vv. 14-15). This work involved doing what Jesus did, proclaiming the good news of God's kingdom as embodied in the teachings of Jesus and helping people in physical need.

3:20-35. Family and Opponents. This section contains two stories that at first appear to be unrelated. But the second story interrupts the first. This storytelling technique occurs at least six times in Mark (besides here, see 5:21-43; 6:7-31; 11:12-25; 14:1-11, 53-72). These passages are known by some in scholarship today as Markan sandwich stories. They are referred to as "sandwich stories" because the inner story nearly always provides the key to the theological purpose of the two halves of the outer story that it interrupts. Each story contains contrasting actions or contrasting characters who have ironic parallel actions. The irony created by these parallel actions says something about Christology or discipleship.

In the outer story (3:20-21 and 31-35), Jesus's family attempted to take charge of Him because they felt He was out of His mind. They deduced this from the fact that He was so busy He hardly had time to eat (v. 20). In the inner story, scribes from Jerusalem made a charge against Jesus that He was casting out demons by means of the ruler of demons (v. 22). Jesus countered this charge with a rhetorical question that showed the absurdity of the charge: How can Satan expel Satan? (v. 23). He then presented two analogies (vv. 24-25): a divided kingdom cannot stand, nor can a divided household. Both inner and outer stories have a similar point: division in any group weakens it and makes it vulnerable to failure. This leads to the conclusion that if Satan was really fighting against himself, his kingdom would already be finished—something that was obviously not the case (v. 26).

But then Jesus proceeded to another analogy, this time arguing in the opposite direction. No one can steal the property of a strong man unless he binds him first (v. 27). Jesus presented Himself as a thief entering Satan's house to plunder it. He binds the devil and sets his captives free. In combination with the previous analogies, it is an unusual pattern of argumentation. The argument goes like this: if Satan is divided against himself, he is going to fail. If he is not divided, I am obviously stronger than he is, and he is losing his captives. Either way, Satan loses.

This leads to a solemn declaration about forgiveness. It comes in two steps, with the beautiful assurance of forgiveness for all sins and blasphemies that human beings might commit (v. 28). But v. 29 sounds a solemn warning against blaspheming the Holy Spirit, something that cannot be forgiven. What does this mean? The Evangelist provides the answer in the comment that they were saying that Jesus had an evil spirit (v. 30). Here was the problem. The scribes were claiming that Jesus was casting out demons by Satan, when in actuality Jesus was casting out demons by the Spirit of God. If we call the Holy Spirit's work the work of Satan, we will not listen to the Spirit's pleas to return to God and thus will not repent of our sins. This is the sin against the Holy Spirit. It cannot be forgiven because the person committing it does not want to listen to the Spirit's conviction. This indicates how important it is to be careful what we call "the work of the devil."

In vv. 31-35 we have the closure of the outer story. Jesus's relatives arrived and stood outside asking for Him (see "The Brothers of Jesus," p. 1252). He was surrounded by a crowd, who told Him of the request. Instead of going out to His family, as would be expected in a culture that highly valued family relationships, Jesus responded that whoever follows God's will is His brother, sister, and mother (v. 35).

There is a deeper point to this identification of Jesus's family. It revolves around irony. In the inner story Jesus's enemies claimed that He was in league with the devil, while in the outer story Jesus's family thought He was out of His mind. Opposite groups brought parallel claims against Jesus.

Coupled with this, it seems strange in the inner story that Jesus said that a household or family (*oikia*) divided against itself could not stand. Would not that mean that He and His own family could not stand since they were so obviously disunited? The irony (and the riddle or paradox) is resolved with Jesus's identification of His real family as those who do the will of God. The christological teaching of the passage is that Jesus is in league with God attacking the kingdom of Satan. The discipleship lesson from this passage is that disciples of Jesus do the will of God and are His real family. Both concepts are keys for unlocking the meaning of chapter 4.

4:1-20. Parable of the Sower. In Mark 4:1-34 we find the major grouping of parables (i.e., riddles, illustrations) in this Gospel. Another parable is found in chapter 12. Mark has the fewest parables of any of the Synoptic Gospels. The pattern we will follow for explaining the parables of Jesus is to look at each parable as a story and illustrate the emphases of the narrative. Then we will note Jesus's comments, long or brief, that fill out what the emphases point to in His teaching.

The parable of the sower (4:1–20) is the first parable in the Gospel of Mark. It falls into three parts: the parable proper (vv. 1–9), Jesus's explanation of why He teaches in parables (vv. 10–12), and the explanation of the parable (vv. 13–20). The story is actually four small stories put side by side. The story of the path is told first from beginning to end, then the stories of the rocky ground, the thorny ground, and finally the good ground. We hear each story separately from beginning to end and then move to the next soil type.

Three characteristics stand out in the telling of this parable. First, each successive story takes more time than the preceding one to reach fulfillment. This conveys the idea that to reach success one must have undivided persistence. Second, failure to produce a crop occurs in three of the four stories. This creates the impression that it is extremely difficult to reap a harvest or have good results, that there is little "good ground." But all of Jesus's hearers would have known that the majority of the field is actually "good ground." The loss to birds, rocks, or weeds would be minimal. But because so much time is spent describing the bad ground, particularly the rocky soil, the portrayal is dominated by failure. The point is that the audience should be like the good ground.

Third, the final crop from the good ground is impressive. The striking feature is the contrast between this wonderful yield and the failure of the other types of ground. They produce nothing. The good ground produces a rich harvest. The contrast is stark. This rather impressive distinction between the good and the bad leads to Jesus's words in vv. 10–12, often discussed and often misunderstood. Jesus was speaking to the twelve apostles and a larger group. It was these others who asked Him about the parables. There were insiders and outsiders, according to Jesus. The insiders were given something—the mystery of the kingdom of God. Outsiders might see things, but they did not understand them. For them it was all riddles (*parabolē*).

The people with the apostles asked Jesus about the parables (plural), probably referring to both the sower parable and to the use of the term *parabolē* in chapter 3. In both instances the use of the term may well mean "riddle." That seems to be the sense in 4:11, where insiders understood and outsiders puzzled over the meaning of the parables/riddles.

The key for understanding Jesus's statement in vv. 11–12 is found in who was talking to Him and the significance of their relationship to Him. At the end of chapter 3, Jesus's own family members opposed Him. But His real family was not divided; as He noted, His family consists of whoever does God's will (3:35). It is believers who make up His family. And it is not just any type of belief. It is those who do the will of God who are the family of Jesus. We might say that one must do the truth in order to believe the truth. One must step out in commitment in order to understand the revelation.

And that is exactly what seems to be happening in 4:10–12. The believers, those committed, those doing the will of God, asked the question. Jesus indicated their privileges for having made that commitment. Outsiders do not understand because they do not believe. It all sounds like riddles to them, which seems to deepen their unbelief. Verse 12 says that they will see and not perceive, hear and not understand. If they did, their sins would be forgiven.

Some interpreters suggest that *hina* ("in order that" or "as a result") in v. 12 indicates that the purpose of the use of parables mentioned in v. 11 is so that outsiders cannot repent. In this perspective, Jesus told the parables in order that some people (the outsiders) should not understand, because if they did (*mē pote*—"lest perchance," "otherwise") they would repent and be forgiven. Such a view suggests that God predestines some people to be lost and takes no delight in any confession they make. This appears to portray God the Father and Jesus as cold and compassionless, which is not supported by the rest of Scripture.

Instead, we suggest that the *hina* at the beginning of v. 12 is the introduction of a result clause (in essence meaning "with the result that") similar to the use of *hina* in the last part of 5:23, where Jairus asked Jesus to come touch his daughter "with the result that" she would be healed and live. If 4:12 begins this way ("with the result that seeing they may see and not perceive, and hearing they may hear and not understand"), then *mē pote* ("lest perchance," "otherwise") at the end of the verse would be the shift of the scenario if they did see or hear: "Otherwise, they would turn and be forgiven." In this perspective, a paraphrase of the end of v. 11 and all of v. 12 would read like this: "But to those on the outside, who disbelieve, everything is in riddles. The result is that they repeatedly look but do not really see. They repeatedly listen but do not understand. Otherwise, if they did really see and understand, they would turn and be forgiven."

These words point to the importance of the attitude of the listener. The stubborn reject Jesus's message, and this is what leads to blind eyes and deaf ears, not unlike the unpardonable sin discussed in 3:29–30. The parables are riddles only to those who reject the will of God.

This brings us to the interpretation of the parable in 4:13–20. Jesus stated that the parable of the sower points to a division between listeners. The sower is never specifically identified. What is important is what he sows. Jesus said that he sows the word. How people respond to this word is crucial for its effect in their life. Jesus identified the different types of listeners. Each group of listeners was said to hear the word. The different types of listening described illustrate how the outsiders could repeatedly listen but not understand. Something gets in the way of the word taking root. The word's growth is blocked by several impediments. The first is Satan, who snatches away the word sown (v. 15). Two opposing forces are at work—the word sown in people and Satan. Satan gets the victory in this group. Jesus does not elaborate why, but later in the passage, in describing the group represented by the good soil, He notes that they hear the word and receive it (v. 20). Evidently the first group does not receive the word. These are people who are inattentive, people for whom spiritual things are not an important part of their life. Satan sees his opportunity and snatches away the powerful word of God from their life so that it does not take root.

The other two groups for whom the word does not have its intended effect are those who do not count the cost of discipleship and those who allow the cares and desires of life to absorb their attention. It is the push of persecution that nullifies the power of the word in some lives and the pull of passion in the lives of others.

Jesus completed the interpretation of the parable with an explanation of the good soil hearers. This is the group that corresponds with those who do the will of God referred to in 3:35, the household or family of Jesus. In 4:20, they display three characteristics. They hear the message, accept it, and thus produce fruit. The fruit is a result; the hearing is what all the groups do. So the distinctive characteristic is receiving the word. The Greek term (*paradechontai*) indicates an active incorporation of the word in the life of the believer—the word does not sit on the surface but goes into the heart. These are the ones who bear fruit and receive the moniker of "good soil."

4:21–34. Four More Parables. The rest of Jesus's discourse of parables includes four short illustrations: the lamp, the measure, the seed with harvest, and the mustard seed. These brief parables each make a specific point about the kingdom of God. The lamp is about the effect of the gospel message in a person's life. A lamp is not lit to be hid under a basket. Jesus indicated in v. 22 that what is hidden will eventually be revealed. This is part of the revelation/secrecy motif that runs throughout the Gospel. The point is that the truth must come out. It may start hidden or undiscerned, but it will end in glory and brilliant revelation.

In the illustration of the measure in vv. 24–25, Jesus began with a warning to carefully evaluate what they were hearing—literally "see what you hear." It seems that hearing the wrong words, the wrong message, or not carefully paying attention to the nature of a message is a threat to the believer. Jesus went on to indicate that the way we treat others should be the way we wish to be treated. The blessings we receive are in proportion to the blessings we give to others. He reiterated this idea in the negative by stating that those who do not have will even have their little taken away. It sounds stark but illustrates the truth that the gospel brings a blessing and its lack produces a curse.

The parable of the growing seed in vv. 26–29 is unique to Mark. It describes the "automatic" growth of the seed (*automatos*; v. 28). The emphasis of the parable is on the growing that the man does not understand. He rises night and day and the seed sprouts and grows of its own accord. This process suggests the mysterious growth of God's kingdom. There is an endpoint to this growth—the harvest, representing the end of the world when Jesus returns.

The last of the parables is that of the mustard seed (vv. 30–32). The point of this story is the way the kingdom grows from small to large. We find an allusion to Psalm 104:12, a psalm about God's power and might in creating the world, with an allusion as well to Daniel 4:12, concerning Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the great tree. This quotation and the allusion point to the magisterial and kingly power of the kingdom of God and illustrate how its humble beginnings will end in glorious victory, an idea the mustard seed growing into a large plant mirrors.

4:35–41. Rebuking the Sea. Mark 4:35–5:43 contains a set of three stories. Each of these stories involves a miracle that displays Christology. All the stories occurred around the Sea of Galilee, and although we have separated them for discussion, they should be read together. After a day of preaching parables by the sea, Jesus commanded the disciples to cross to the other side of the lake (4:35). The Sea of Galilee is in a depression with surrounding hills rising above it to the east and west. Violent storms can come up quickly on the lake, and this is what occurred in the story. Mark describes the boat being swamped by the waves and filling with water (v. 37). The contrast between Jesus and the disciples is stark, as they awoke their sleeping Master and asked Him if He cared that they were going to perish by drowning (v. 38). It is a rebuke but also a plea for help when hope seemed lost.

Jesus aroused from His slumber and immediately rebuked the storm, calling for it to "be still!" (v. 39). In Greek it is more colorful. The two imperatives have somewhat similar meanings. The first, *siōpaō*, means "to be silent, stop speaking." It pictures the wind and sea as persons or animals that must stop making noise. The second verb, *phimoō* (translated "be still") is in the passive voice and means "to be muzzled." The sea is pictured as a wild animal that needs to be tied up.

A great calm ensued. Jesus turned to His disciples and asked them, first, why they were so fearful, and second, why they had no faith (v. 40). These questions elicited from the disciples only more fear. They questioned the identity of Jesus—who is this Person whom even the wind and waters obey (v. 41)? It is one of the great christological moments in the book, reminiscent of OT depictions of God in charge of nature (cf. Ex. 14, Job 26:11–12, Ps. 104:7). The disciples' words present the human response of awe in the face of theophany (the appearance of God) but also show their lack of faith.

5:1–20. Healing a Demon-Possessed Man. Jesus and the disciples arrived on the shore of the lake at a place called the Gadarenes. From Mark's description we can ascertain a location on the eastern shore of the lake (the exact location is disputed). The eastern side of the lake was Gentile, a fact attested by, among other things, the presence of a large herd of pigs. Jesus was met by a demon-possessed man. Mark provides a long litany of the man's troubles characterized by deep impurity and utter lack of control. The man came to Jesus from out of the tombs (v. 2), a place of ritual uncleanness. The territory is Gentile, thus also unclean. The man had an unclean or impure spirit (v. 2). The story also refers to a large herd of swine/pigs (v. 11), unclean animals according to Leviticus 11.

The man was uncontrollable: chains could not effectively restrain him, and no one was able to tame or subdue him (Mark 5:3–4). Left to himself, the man wandered the mountains and tombs, crying out and cutting himself with stones (v. 5). But then he met Jesus. The rescue of this man illustrates the cosmic conflict between the forces of good and evil. The man was possessed by a multitude of demons who gave their name as "Legion" (v. 9). A full legion of Roman soldiers had six thousand men. Whether it was a full six thousand demons inside the man, we are never told. The demons simply said "we are many" (v. 9).

The man ran up to Jesus, and Mark notes that he *prosekynēsen* Him (v. 6). The verb is *proskyneō*, which means "to fall down and worship" and indicates that the man prostrated himself before Jesus. But when he opened his mouth the demon shouted at Jesus, asking Him what He wanted with him, sometimes translated as "What have I to do with You?" The Greek is literally quite terse—"What I and You?" The demon recognized Jesus as the "Son of the Most High God" (v. 7). One senses the struggle between the demons and the man's desire for help.

The demons knew who Jesus was (cf. 1:24; 3:11). The dialogue has a certain surreal character as the demons bargained with Him over leaving the man. Strangely, the man implored Jesus in the name of God to not afflict him (5:7). It is as though the demons were trying to get power over Jesus by knowing His name and by adjuring Him in the name of God. Perhaps, as has been suggested, the language is that of exorcism, but here used against Jesus! The demons requested permission to enter the large herd of pigs grazing nearby, and Jesus allowed this (vv. 12–13). The change in the demon-possessed man is marked. He is later described as sitting, fully dressed and in his right mind (v. 15).

However, the reaction of the townspeople to these events was quite different. Losing two thousand pigs was a financial disaster for the owners. When the townspeople came to see what happened, it is no surprise that they asked Jesus to leave the area (v. 17). The story unfolds like a chess game with moves by both sides

counter to each other. First Jesus invaded the unclean territory. Then the demons in the man resisted Him and tried to prevent their own departure from the region. But they were no match for Jesus. However, they requested permission to enter the pigs, and this ended with the entire herd drowned. Now it was the turn of the townspeople, who requested that Jesus leave. It seems as though the demons had really won since Jesus agreed to leave the territory.

But one last scene turns the story in the opposite direction. The last move in the chess game is a subtle slipping of a pawn behind enemy lines. The healed man begged Jesus to allow him to stay with Him (v. 18). Four times the term "beg/plead" is used in the story (*parakaleō*, "to entreat, beg, request"), first by the demons not to leave but to enter the pigs (vv. 10, 12), then by the townspeople for Jesus to leave (v. 17), and finally by the healed man to go with Jesus (v. 18). Jesus granted the first requests but not the last. He sent the man back and told him to explain to his friends the greatness of what the Lord had done for him and how He had compassion on him (v. 19). The man went through the entire region of the Decapolis declaring what Jesus had done for him (v. 20). It appears to be the case that this man (and Mark by his telling of the story) recognized Jesus as "the Lord"—Greek *Kyrios*, the term used for Yahweh, "the Lord," in the Greek translation of the OT, the LXX. Jesus told the man to declare what *Kyrios*—"the Lord"—had done for him, and he obeys by telling everyone what *Jesus* has done for him. The parallel is clear: Jesus is "the Lord"—He is God (as the analogous parallel in Luke 8:39 indicates).

This story centers on Christology as Jesus displays His mastery over the demons. It depicts the great controversy theme of cosmic forces at battle over human minds and bodies. But it also presents the type of strength and weakness in Jesus that we have noted before (cf. Mark 1:9–13). He can banish demons, but He acceded to the request of the townspeople to leave their region.

He sent to them what must seem like the unlikeliest of witnesses—the healed demoniac. But it is a stroke of genius because wherever the man went, everyone was amazed (5:20). The story also displays the revelation/secrecy motif in the demons' recognition of who Jesus is, the apparent silencing of the witness with Jesus's departure, but then the open revelation of Jesus's power in the man's witness throughout the Decapolis.

5:21–43. Jairus's Daughter and a Sick Woman. This is the second sandwich story in Mark (cf. 3:20–35; 6:7–32; 11:12–25; 14:1–11, 53–72). Two very different individuals came to Jesus for help. Both received the help they sought but in very unusual ways. In both cases, Jesus said words that elicited astonishment and raised questions about who He was. The two interlinked stories make a powerful statement about Christology.

The passage begins as one of the rulers of the local synagogue, Jairus, approached Jesus to ask for help. He asked Jesus to come touch his daughter, heal her, and save her life (5:23). Religious leaders were not usually the friends of Jesus, so it is striking that this man asked Him for help. Unquestionably, He saw in Jesus his only hope for the healing of his daughter. Jesus went with him without a word. Ominously, the text indicates that the crowd pressed around Him, clearly slowing their progress.

The narrative then focuses on the inner story, with a long flashback about a woman with a hemorrhage. Her suffering went back twelve long years—which also happens to be the entire span of the life of Jairus's daughter. But unlike the daughter of Jairus, this poor woman had no one to help. She had seen many doctors and spent all she had in the process. But instead of getting better, her condition had gotten worse. Then came the climactic and hopeful moment: having heard about Jesus, she came up behind Him in the crowd and touched His robe (v. 27). Jairus had seen Jesus; the woman heard about Him. Jairus approached Jesus openly and knelt before Him to make his request. The woman came from behind and made no audible request.

The woman was ritually unclean because of her bleeding (Lev. 15:25–27). Touching Jesus would make Him ritually unclean as well, according to the law (Lev. 15:19). This may help explain her surreptitious approach to Him. The reason for her touch is immediately given: she believed that she would be healed if she could only touch Jesus's clothes (Mark 5:28).

At this point in the story, the touch that instigated the miracle becomes the center of discussion as Jesus asked the strange question regarding who had touched His clothes (v. 30). It was an odd question to ask in a crowd, and the disciples disputed Jesus's query. The narrative gives a sense of long delay and plays on the Christological meaning of Jesus's question. What looks like a strange query is actually a display of Jesus's messianic power. When the woman finally came forward, Jesus addressed her tenderly as "daughter." He then blessed her with the benediction of peace (v. 34).

The feared result for Jairus's daughter became a reality as people came from his house with the sad report that his daughter was dead, and that he need not trouble Jesus (the Teacher) any further (v. 35). The words, so fraught with pathos, made use of the very term Jesus had just used when addressing the healed woman—"daughter" (v. 34). Jesus took only James, John, and Peter with Him and hastened to Jairus's house.

At the home Jesus made another unusual comment, claiming that the child was not dead but only asleep (v. 39). Jesus took her hand and said, "*talitha, koumi*" or "*talitha koum*" (the manuscripts vary; v. 41), an Aramaic phrase that Mark translates, "Little girl, I say to you, arise" or "get up." The term *talitha* actually means "lamb" and was a term of endearment used for a child. Catching the sense of endearment in English, we might translate this as "Little lamb, get up!" Jesus insisted on secrecy and told the parents to feed the girl (v. 43).

The two stories contain the dramatized irony that the delay from healing the chronic case of the woman with the hemorrhage likely caused the death of the little girl. This oddity of treating a chronic case first instead of rushing to help the acute case is compounded by the strange behavior of Jesus in asking who touched Him and of telling the people at Jairus's house that his daughter was not dead but only sleeping (v. 39).

These strange comments speak to His christological power. The touch of the woman was anything but unintentional and Jesus's question points to the miracle. His statement about the little girl being asleep was true because He could raise the dead. For Him, treating the chronic case first was no problem, for He had the power to raise to life the dead child. We might wonder at the rollercoaster ride of emotions for the family involved, but it was clearly a pair of events that the recipients of His grace could never forget—a day when not one but two daughters were healed.

6:1–6. Rejected at Home. The people in Jesus's hometown synagogue took immediate offense to His teaching and somewhat incredulously questioned the source of His wisdom, teachings, and power to do great work (v. 2). They linked Him to His mother, His four brothers, and His sisters—people that we already know had questions about His sanity (cf. 3:20–35). The questions may arise from the family's concerns about Jesus. Doubt has a way of multiplying when expressed.

The passage contains another window on the intriguing view of the Messiah as both a weak and strong figure, which we have seen before. Mark bluntly states that He could not do any powerful miracles there (6:5), though this is immediately tempered with the comment that He laid His hands on a few people and healed them. It seems odd that demons immediately recognized Jesus and were no match for His power, obeying His every command, but in the face of human unbelief, He was unable to do miracles. Mark tells us the root problem: their unbelief and lack of faith, at which Jesus *ethaumazen*—"was amazed" or "marveled" (v. 6). God in Christ will not impose His saving grace on people. He could hear the whisper of hopeless souls above the shouts of demons that inhabited them (cf. 5:1–20). He would heal those who asked for help (5:21–43), but Jesus never stayed where He was unwelcome. He passed on to other villages to preach.

6:7—8:21

Sending Apostles

The section begins with great hope for the disciples' mission, but it seems to end with disappointment. However, Jesus was not finished with His disciples.

6:7–31. Sending Out the Apostles. This is the third sandwich story in Mark, where one story interrupts another and the two together produce dramatized irony (see 3:20–35; 5:21–43; 11:12–25; 14:1–11, 53–72). In this insertion, the story of the disciples' mission surrounds the story of the beheading of John the Baptist. In chapter 3 Jesus called the twelve apostles, and here He gave them instructions on what they were to do and then sent them forth. The instructions called for an austere approach to the apostolic mission. While they could take a staff with them, they were not to take much else—no bags, bread, or money in their belts (6:8). They were to wear sandals and not take an extra garment (v. 9). He told the apostles what to do when people received or rejected them. If received, they were to stay at the same home until they left. For those who rejected the disciples, Jesus told them to shake the dust off their feet as a testimony against those who rejected them (v. 11).

This rather unusual action may strike us as both a bit odd and rather rude. The practice is rooted in the belief about holiness in Judaism, according to which Israel was holier than any other land. Gentile lands were deemed defiled, and consequently rabbis coming into Israel from those lands would wipe the dust from their feet. Thus, Jesus's instruction to His disciples to wipe off their feet the dust from places that rejected their message was a serious warning to those places that they were acting like those outside the covenant relationship with God.

The disciples "went out and preached that people should repent" (v. 12), exorcized many demons, and anointed sick people with oil before healing them (v. 13). Jesus made no mention of repentance in His instructions, though it was the subject of His gospel message (1:14–15). And He did not refer to healing people by anointing them with oil. Nevertheless, His ministry involved healing, so it was not strange to see this in the apostles' ministry.

The narrative at this point shifts to the inner story, the beheading of John the Baptist. The story begins with a reference back to Jesus, noting that King Herod had heard about what Jesus and His disciples were doing (6:14). This King Herod was one of the many sons of Herod the Great. His full name was Herod Antipas. He ruled Galilee and Perea from about 4 B.C. until he was deposed in A.D. 39. Herod's knowledge of Jesus came secondhand from what people around the king said (v. 15). Herod thought that Jesus was John the Baptist risen from the dead (v. 16). This leads to a recounting of the beheading of John in two steps (vv. 17–20 and 21–29). The first step is the explanation of why John had been imprisoned. Herodias had divorced her husband, Philip, and then married his brother Herod. Such a marriage was prohibited by Levitical law (Lev. 18:16; 20:21). John showed unusual bravery in rebuking the king. In Mark 6:17–20 Herod is portrayed as possessing quite an ambivalent character. He arrested John because of Herodias, but she could not carry out her wish to see John killed because Herod feared John, knowing that he was a *dikaion*—"righteous" or "just" and holy man (v. 20).

The second step of the story is the beheading of John (vv. 21–29). With irony it is stated that an opportunity came for Herodias to realize her wish (v. 21). Herodias's daughter danced before the king and his guests, pleasing them all. The king swore an oath to the girl that he would give her whatever she asked of him, even up to half of his kingdom (v. 23). This parallels OT stories, particularly that of Esther (Esth. 5:3, 6; 7:2; cf. 1 Kin. 13:7–8). However, where Esther saved her people, the maiden in our story brought the Baptist's death.

The girl inquired of her mother what she should request. This detail indicates that Herodias kept her plot to herself before this point in the story. She instructed her daughter to ask for the head of John the Baptist. The girl added to the request by saying that she wanted it on a platter immediately (Mark 6:25). The platter, reminiscent of the banquet the king and his guests had been eating, was now used to bring the head of the Baptist to the girl. John's disciples respectfully buried him.

It is at this point that the narrative rejoins the mission of the twelve apostles. They reported to Jesus what they had done and taught, and then they departed at Jesus's command to rest privately in a desolate or wilderness area—in a sense a spiritual retreat.

The parallel characters of the apostles and John the Baptist are involved in opposite actions. Jesus sent out the disciples, while John was imprisoned and beheaded. The disciples went forth to preach and proclaim, while the Baptist's voice was silenced. John the Baptist, we know from chapter 1, was the forerunner of Jesus. Here in chapter 6, he went before Jesus to death.

6:32–44. Feeding Five Thousand. The spiritual retreat that Jesus called for was interrupted by people who followed Him (for more on the location, see commentary on Luke 9:10–17). Mark quotes from Numbers 27:17, explaining Jesus took time to teach the people because they were like sheep without a shepherd (Mark 6:34). In Numbers 27, Moses asked God to appoint a leader for Israel since he was about to die. God appointed Joshua, whose name in Hebrew is *yehoshua'*, translated into Greek as *Iēsous*, "Jesus."

As the day was closing, the question arose as to how the large group of people would eat. The disciples asked Jesus to send the people away, but Jesus—perhaps to underscore their helplessness before the problem and to set up His miraculous intervention—told them to provide the people with food themselves.

To feed everyone would require at least two hundred denarii worth of bread. The denarius was the daily wage of a common laborer (cf. Matt. 20:1–16). This amount would therefore represent close to eight month's wages, a fairly large value.

After the disciples came up with five loaves and two small fish, Jesus commanded the large group of people to sit down on the green grass in groups (Mark 6:38–39). Since the location was a desert area and the grass was green, it is possible to surmise that this was during the springtime, since summers in Judea are dry and hot.

The story stresses the way in which Jesus performed the miracle. There are six steps: He *took* the loaves, *looked up* to heaven, *blessed* the food, *broke* it, *gave* it to the disciples, who *set* the food before the people. The emphasis is on the deliberate linkage with heaven in blessing and the disciples as agents to share the blessing. It is a beautiful picture of ministry.

6:45–56. Walking on the Sea. But then Jesus sent the disciples away while He dismissed the crowd (v. 45; for more on the location, see commentary on John 6:16–21). The Gospel of John's report of this same incident helps explain what is implicit in Mark. The people wanted to make Jesus king because the popular perspective was that the Messiah would set Israel free from her enemies.

The result was that the disciples ended up alone on the lake during a storm. Mark then explains how Jesus came to them at the fourth watch of the night—shortly before dawn—walking on the sea and intending to pass by them (Mark 6:48). The fourth watch would be between the hours of about 3 and 6 a.m. The reference to passing by echoes Exodus 34:6, where God passed by Moses, showing him His glory. Just so, Jesus intended to pass by the disciples as He miraculously walked on the water, much as God is depicted walking on the sea in OT passages (Job 9:8; Ps. 77:19; Is. 43:16).

The disciples thought that Jesus was a ghost, and they were afraid. Jesus encouraged His disciples by saying, "It is I" (Mark 6:50). The phrase "It is I" in Greek, *egō eimi*, literally means "I am," though "It is I" is also a typical translation. The OT name of God, *Yahweh* (the self-existent One, linked to the Hebrew verb "to be," *hayah*) is probably in view here with the sense of I AM (cf. Ex. 3:14). Jesus was walking on water like God, and He intended to pass the disciples by like God passed in front of Moses.

Jesus walking on the water is a theophany (an appearance of God). In the Bible a theophany typically has five characteristics: the divine glory, human fear, the words "do not fear," a revelation, and human response. We see all of these characteristics in this story. Jesus walking on the water was the glory (the miracle), the disciples thought He was a ghost, He said "do not fear," He revealed Himself as "I AM," and the disciples' response was disappointing because "they had not understood about the loaves" because their hearts were hardened (Mark 6:52).

Mark 6:53–56 tells of how people from all around brought their sick to Jesus for healing. It is an interesting fact throughout all four Gospels that anyone who came to Jesus for help received it. This speaks to us about great hope in our Savior's mercy today.

As we look back to Mark 5 and 6, we detect two rather striking portrayals. First is the picture of Jesus—the powerful Healer, the One who sent the disciples to preach, the Messiah providing food, and the great I AM walking on the water. Just as striking is the picture of the disciples as somewhat bumbling followers who did not understand the touch of faith (5:31), did not realize that Jesus could multiply loaves (6:37, 52), and thought He was a ghost when they saw Him walking on water (v. 49). One could be tempted to see a growing distance developing between Jesus and His disciples, but that perception would miss the fact that He sent them out on missions on which they were successful (vv. 7–13, 30–31), and He never gave up on them. Their all-too-human reactions serve all the more to illustrate the divine nature of Jesus's ministry.

7:1–23. Unclean Hands and Food. In this story of clean and unclean, Pharisees and scribes from Jerusalem confronted Jesus over the actions of His disciples. These leaders noticed that some of Jesus's disciples ate bread with defiled or unwashed hands (v. 2). What does this mean? Mark explains the Jewish custom of ceremonial washing in a long aside, noting that such washing is based on the tradition of the elders (vv. 3–4). The term translated "defiled" is *koinos*, which literally means "common, ordinary." We may wonder why a term meaning "common" would also mean "defiled." The idea is rooted in the concept that holy things are set apart, not for common use. People who did not keep these rules were considered defiled and unholy, and contact with them could transmit defilement.

Evidently the Pharisees expected that any teacher worthy of respect would instruct his disciples to abide by these rules, so they asked Him why his disciples were not abiding by the tradition of the elders and were eating with unwashed hands (v. 5). The Pharisees used the same terminology that Mark has already noted, "the tradition of the elders." This is what will become the center of the controversy. Jesus did not directly respond but rather set the Pharisees' rules in contrast with the prophetic Scriptures and the law of Moses. He quoted from Isaiah 29:13, which refers to human traditions based on vain worship, in which the lips speak of honor for God but the heart is estranged from Him. Jesus was responding to the broader question of the relationship between tradition and the word of God. In the original context of Isaiah, the prophet was accusing the religious leaders of his day of having an outward correctness of religious practice but an inner experience that stood far apart from the will of God. Jesus built on this by describing the distinction between human traditions and the commands of God, and then He explained the meaning of inner versus outer religion.

Jesus pinpointed the central problem. They had departed from God's commands in favor of human traditions (Mark 7:8). In the illustration of Corban that Jesus provided (v. 11; "Corban" means "offering, gift"), the Lord explained how the leaders had set aside God's command. The fifth commandment calls on children to honor their parents, but the rule of Corban allowed people to dedicate an offering to the temple and avoid using the funds to help their parents. Jesus was not opposed to supporting the temple (cf. Mark 12:41–44), but He did oppose hiding selfishness under a garb of piety. He defended the law of Moses against the religious leaders, who had set it aside by their traditions.

Jesus summoned the crowd and presented an enigmatic statement: Nothing entering people from the outside can defile them, but rather the things coming out from them are the things that defile them (7:15). The verb for "defile" in this verse (*koinoō*) is related to the adjective "common" (*koinos*, vv. 2–5). Rather than talking about the hands being common or defiled as the Pharisees did, Jesus talked about the whole person being defiled or made common. It is not outside things that defile but inner ones.

When He was alone with His disciples, they asked Him about the parable (*parabolē*, v. 17). Jesus reprimanded them for their lack of understanding. Then He proceeded with a sort of anatomy lesson about defilement. Foods come from outside and enter the stomach and then go out into the latrine, passing through the person. But evil character traits proceed from the heart and reveal themselves in external sinful behaviors. What comes from outside and goes into the person does not defile because it simply passes through, it does not reside inside the person (vv. 18–19). Jesus takes the issue of defilement to a new level. External sources of contamination pale in comparison with internal vices that darken and defile the heart.

Unclean Foods in Mark 7:1–23

Many consider that what Jesus says in Mark 7 abolishes the OT requirements of clean and unclean foods. But this is hardly the case.

1. *Laws of Unclean Foods*. The key passages in the OT that describe these foods are Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14:3–21. In these passages, certain animals and creatures are called "abominable/abomination" (from the Hebrew verb *shaqats*, which means "to detest," "make oneself detestable"; the noun form is *sheqets*, "detestation," "detestable thing") or "unclean" (from the Hebrew *tame'*, which means "ceremonially unclean"). The laws that describe what is permissible to eat (and what is not) and how permissible foods are to be prepared are known as *kashrut*, a term that means "fit, proper, correct." Israelites were instructed that they must not eat or even touch the carcasses of the abominable/unclean creatures. The most common of these creatures used in many cultures was, and still is, the pig. In fact, archeologists in the Middle East use the absence of pig bones as one of the key indicators that an excavation site is Israelite, although disappointingly, this is not always a trustworthy clue.

2. *Contextual Comments*. In the context of the entire passage, Mark 7:1–23, it seems rather odd that Jesus would teach the abolition of these food laws. The reason is that in 7:1–13 He was the defender of the law of Moses against the traditions of the religious authorities. It would be a most unusual move, then, if He suddenly shifted to abolishing the *kashrut* food laws of the Pentateuch. Furthermore, in Mark 7 Jesus was talking to Jews about Jewish eating practices. None of the food there would have been unclean.

3. *He Purified All Foods*. But if these assertions are true, we still must explain the ending

of v. 19 about all foods being clean. The sentence or phrase in most English translations adds a few words to the Greek text to make sense of the rather brief statement in Mark, which literally reads, "cleansing all foods." In most translations the words are taken as an aside by the Evangelist about the meaning of Jesus's anatomy lesson on defilement. In this understanding, Mark whispers in our ear, "All foods are clean. Jesus did away with the laws of *kashrut*."

We have already seen how this sense of the ending of v. 19 is questionable based on the context of 7:1–23, with Jesus defending the Mosaic law and the fact that Jesus was speaking in a Jewish context. To this we should add that according to the OT, defilement can be transmitted to "clean" objects by a variety of actions, including touching that which is unclean and then touching a clean object. In the context of Mark 7, Jesus attacked traditions dealing with "uncleanness" that go beyond the biblical law. Food eaten with unwashed hands was not ritually impure; it was clean.

In other words, when Jesus declared food as unable to defile, it was within the context of His argument with the Pharisees, who ate only clean foods. He rejected their extension of requirements beyond what the OT requires and consequently supported the commandments of God against the traditions of men. He did not remove the scriptural teaching against unclean foods. Instead, he focused attention on unclean hearts that defile.

7:24–30. The Syro-Phoenician Woman. When Jesus went to the region of Tyre and Sidon, He entered a house and did not want it to be known. However, a Greek woman who was a Syro-Phoenician by birth (v. 26) heard about Him and went to the house. The woman's race becomes a central issue in the story. Jesus's response seems blunt and unusual. He said that the children should be filled first because it was not good to take their bread and throw it to the dogs (some translations render *kynarion* as "little dog"). Much has been made of this statement, some seeing it as an illustration of rank prejudice against foreigners on Jesus's part. It is clear that the woman parallels the "little dogs" and those of Jewish descent parallel the "children."

Was Jesus prejudiced? He gives two clues to the woman in His words that He was not. He uses the term "first" in referring to feeding the children (v. 27). "First" suggests that there may be a second. It implies there might be something left over that could be given to dogs. The second clue is Jesus's use of the term *kynarion* (v. 27). This term may have been used in Jesus's time to refer to household dogs. The woman certainly took it that way (v. 28).

In reality, Jesus was verbalizing the prejudice of the Jews against non-Jews in order to demolish it and open the doors of the kingdom to all, as well as articulating the principle that this woman was in fact one of the "lost sheep" (Matt. 15:24) that Israel was appointed to rescue (see DA 402.3). Even though there was, in a sense, a prioritizing of Christ's mission for the Jews (Rom. 1:16; cf. Matt. 10:5), it was also clear throughout His ministry that He had come to save non-Jews as well. This was shown in His healing of the centurion's servant and ministering to the Samaritans and the Gadarene demoniacs. In fact, in the next few stories—the healing of the mute man and feeding the four thousand in the Gentile region of Decapolis—Jesus continued to focus on Gentiles (e.g., Mark 5:1–20; 7:31–37; 8:1–9; Matt. 8:5–13; John 4:5–42).

The woman responded in a very careful and calculated way. First, she acknowledged Jesus respectfully, calling Him "Lord" or "Sir." Second, she accepted the moniker of "dog," no doubt linked to her great love for her daughter. Third, she made expert use of her role as a "dog" under the table, claiming crumbs that fall from the children's meal. And finally, by suggesting in her repartee with Jesus that the miracle of healing her daughter was a "crumb," she magnified His power.

Jesus accepted her plea and told her that her daughter was healed. What can be learned from this story? Three lessons seem apparent. First, while Jesus used the confrontational and even insulting language of His people, His intent was mercy. Second, the use of the term "first" for the Jews was consistent with the gospel order in God's plan of redemption (Rom. 1:16), since Jesus had come to help and save non-Jews as well as Jews. Finally, faith and humility bring us within the sphere of God's healing power.

7:31–37. Healing of a Deaf Man. The unique thing about this miracle is Jesus's manner of healing the man. He took him away from the crowd (consistent with the revelation/secrecy motif). Then He put His fingers into the man's ears, spit, and touched the man's tongue (v. 33). He then looked up to heaven and sighed, saying, "Ephphatha," which is likely from an Aramaic verb that means "to open." The deaf man was immediately able to hear and speak clearly. Jesus told him and the people to not tell anyone of this miracle, but they spread the news abroad widely.

This miracle likely has symbolic meaning tied to the revelation/secrecy motif. The concluding words of the crowd, that Jesus had done all things well (v. 37), sum up Mark's theology of Jesus's healing ministry. Soon the disciples would respond to this revelation with confession of His messiahship (8:27–30).

8:1–9. Feeding Four Thousand. Jesus went through the region of the Decapolis (7:31) and came to the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee, a region largely Gentile. The events narrated in 8:1–9 appear to take place on this eastern shore of the lake. It is possible to deduce this from the references to Jesus's travels after the feeding of the four thousand (meeting Pharisees on the other side, 8:10–11; and reference to Bethsaida, 8:22). Jesus began His discourse on feeding with an expression of His compassion for the crowd (8:2–3). The disciples responded with a question similar to their response in chapter 6: they wondered how all these people could be fed adequately in such a remote location. This response seems rather odd in light of the feeding of the five thousand. However, if it was a Gentile crowd, the disciples may not have felt they deserved "the children's bread" (7:24–30). But here Jesus again showed that He had come to feed not only the Jews but Gentiles as well. In similar manner to the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus asked the disciples about their resources and then used them to supply the need of the vast throng. Having fed them, He sent them away (8:5–9).

8:10–21. Dispute and Misunderstanding. This section contains two stories, one of a dispute between Jesus and some Pharisees and the other concerning the misunderstanding of Jesus's disciples. Jesus crossed the Sea of Galilee to Dalmanutha (v. 10), an unknown location but evidently on the western shore of the lake since Pharisees immediately accosted Him.

The dispute was not a question of doctrine, but rather a request for a sign from heaven (v. 11). Jesus's reaction was to sigh deeply and ask why this generation was seeking a sign. He then declared that they would not receive it (v. 12). Jesus had given numerous illustrations of His divine origin and power, and the knowledge of these events was widespread (cf. 1:28, 45; 3:7–8; 6:33–34; 7:36–37). Thus, the Pharisees were not seeking evidence of Jesus's divine power or connection; they were looking for a way to reject His authority. Jesus immediately departed to the other side of the lake (8:13).

The departure from Dalmanutha seems to have been so sudden that the disciples forgot to bring adequate food supplies with them (v. 14). Jesus took this as an opportunity to instruct them to be cautious of the leaven (or yeast) of the Pharisees and Herod (v. 15).

Leaven or yeast is used metaphorically in both the OT and NT, sometimes with positive connotations, other times with negative. At the time of the Passover feast, all Israelites were required to remove yeast from their homes for a period of seven days (Ex. 12:15–19; 13:7; Deut. 16:4). Many offerings were made without leaven (Lev. 2:11; 6:17). However, the two loaves waved before the Lord in the feast that became known as Pentecost were made with leaven (Lev. 23:17). In Matthew 13:33 (cf. Luke 13:20–21) Jesus likens the kingdom of God to leaven that makes bread rise. But in 1 Corinthians 5:6–8, Paul compares leaven to malice and wickedness, ties this concept to the OT Passover service, and refers to the sacrifice of Christ, our Passover Lamb.

Jesus's usage of the word in Mark 8:15 is of the negative sort, since He commanded the disciples to avoid the leaven of the Pharisees and Herod. This parallels the statement in the same story as recorded in Matthew 16:12, where the linkage of leaven is specifically stated to be the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

Mark 8:21 is, in some ways, the close of the first half of the book. It ends with Jesus questioning the disciples about their lack of understanding. This question, particularly with the allusion to Jesus's solemn words in 4:10–12, indicates a rather stark disconnect between Jesus's vision of discipleship and what the Twelve actually understood. Statements like this have caused scholars to wonder if Mark is presenting the disciples as failures. The resolution of this quandary must take into consideration all the data of the book. The Gospel of Mark will move in two steps from this point in ways that decidedly demonstrate that the disciples were not rejected. First, Jesus continued to instruct them (chaps. 8–10). This was followed by Jesus's ministry in Jerusalem, where He predicted not only the disciples' failures but also the fact that they would meet Him after His resurrection and be His emissaries to the world.

8:22—16:8

WHERE IS JESUS GOING?

Mark 8:22—16:8 has a very different feel from the first half of the book. Miracles are fewer. Focus on the disciples becomes more intense, more intimate as Jesus prepares them for His death and resurrection. They continue to misunderstand, but He never gives up on them. The crux of their relationship to Jesus is found at the beginning of this second half of Mark, when Peter confesses that Jesus is the Messiah. This fundamental declaration, answering the question of the first half of Mark as to who Jesus is, sets the stage for the further revelation that Jesus will give in three passion predictions. It is no longer a question of simply who Jesus is but of where He is going. He is going to the cross, and there He will offer His life as "a ransom for many" (10:45). This concept becomes the deep theological truth of Markan soteriology.

8:22—10:52

Teaching the Disciples

This section of Mark focuses attention on Jesus's twelve disciples. It begins with the healing of a blind man and ends with another blind man healed. These two miracles serve as bookends, focusing on discernment as central to discipleship. Within these "bookend miracles," the section centers around Jesus's three passion predictions in chapters 8, 9, and 10. These predictions build on one another, and each is followed by teaching on discipleship.

8:22–26. Blind Man Sees after Two Touches. This miracle is reported only in the Gospel of Mark, and it is the only one in all the Gospels in which Jesus did not heal the individual in the initial action. The miracle occurred outside of Bethsaida at the northern end of the Sea of Galilee. People brought the blind man to Jesus and entreated Him to touch him, but at first Jesus only led him out of the town (vv. 22–23).

The manner that Jesus used to heal the man is striking. He spit on his eyes, put His hands on him, and then asked him if he could see anything (v. 23). In the ancient world, saliva was considered to have healing properties. However, Jesus's healing power came not from physical materials but rather from His union with the Father. The unusual pattern of healing is the first clue that Jesus was doing something symbolic.

After Jesus's first touch, the man's restored vision was blurry (v. 24). Jesus placed His hands on the man's eyes again, and then he could see clearly (v. 25). These last words illustrate the very strong emphasis in the passage on the idea of seeing.

Since this story and the other healing of a blind man in chapter 10 bookend the discipleship teaching section of Mark, it seems that the two healings in some way depict important ideas about discipleship. What this first story suggests, like an acted parable, is that the disciples were arriving at a first knowledge of Jesus. They would confess Him to be the Messiah in the very next verses. But their knowledge was only partial. They needed a "second touch" to understand where He was going.

8:27–30. Confession of Christ. This passage is the turning point of the book. From this point forward Jesus will focus special attention on His disciples. The venue shifts to Caesarea Philippi (v. 27), which was approximately twenty to twenty-five miles (32–40 km) north of Bethsaida. Jesus will be traveling throughout this section of the book, a physical reminder that discipleship is about following Jesus. The Lord asked His disciples two incisive questions: first, He asked who people said He was (v. 27) and second, who the disciples said He was (v. 29). The first question presents the larger context of Jesus's ministry: who did people outside of His immediate disciples think He was? The answer was discouraging, since everyone got it wrong. They thought He was John the Baptist, Elijah, or one of the prophets (v. 28), all lesser figures in comparison to His true role.

But it is in the second question that the Gospel of Mark reaches a crucial turning point. Will human beings understand that Jesus is the Messiah? Peter responded in striking clarity, "You are the Christ/Messiah" (v. 29). The remarkable nature of this response is that only a few verses earlier (vv. 14–21), the disciples were so obtuse in their understanding that Jesus compared them to the blind and deaf He described in 4:12. Suddenly, however, it seems that the disciples' vision had become clear. Peter confessed Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah. This is only the second use of the term in the Gospel of

Mark (cf. 1:1). It is used only seven times total in the entire book (1:1; 8:29; 9:41; 12:35; 13:21; 14:61; 15:32).

Jesus immediately informed His disciples that they were not to tell others that He was the Messiah (8:30). The concept of Messiah, or Christ, among Israelites in the first century had strong political overtones. Jesus would eventually be crucified as "King of the Jews." If He had allowed an open declaration of His messiahship, His ministry in all likelihood would have been cut short, and His disciples would have been unprepared.

8:31–33. First Passion Prediction. Jesus then turned to instructing His disciples about the meaning of discipleship. The instruction is the beginning of the answer to the broad question, Where is Jesus going? Mark answers that He is going to the cross to be a "ransom for many" (10:45). Jesus began with stark words, so opposite to the glorious conception of Messiah as a conquering king. He taught them that He, the Son of Man, would be rejected by the leaders of the nation, suffer many things, be killed, and rise again after three days (v. 31). Mark 8–10 will contain three passion predictions, each somewhat different. However, all three have characteristics in common describing the prelude to His death, the event of His demise, and the resurrection to follow. None of them specifically mentions the cross. Each prediction is also followed by some teaching on discipleship. This pattern indicates that Jesus's focus in this entire section was to prepare His disciples for the events that would take place in Jerusalem.

In each of the passion predictions, the phrase "Son of Man" is used. This phrase, first found in 2:10, is Jesus's self-designation and is used only by Him and the narrator of the Gospel reporting Jesus's words. Jesus most often linked this phrase with two very disparate events, namely, His death (8:31; 9:12, 31; 10:33, 45; 14:21, 41) and His glorious Second Coming (8:38; 13:26; 14:62). The Son of Man has both an ignominious and glorious role, and the two are interlinked. The ignominy of the cross will lead to the glory of the returning Son of Man in the clouds of heaven.

Mark 8:32 indicates that Jesus spoke about this openly, or plainly. This open emphasis on suffering and death was too much for Peter, who took Jesus aside and rebuked Him for saying such things. Jesus immediately rebuked Peter while looking at His disciples. This look at the disciples suggests that the words were not just for Peter. The statement was sharp; He told Peter to get behind Him, and He rebuked him for focusing more on human concerns than those of God (v. 33). It is striking that the person who had just confessed that Jesus is the Messiah was now called Satan. The first words he had spoken were correct, but the rejection of Jesus's prediction of suffering and death was a denial of Jesus's path.

8:34–38. Discipleship. Next Jesus summoned the crowd along with His disciples and gave instruction regarding discipleship. He said that all who desired to follow Him must deny themselves by taking up His cross (v. 34). In Jesus's day, the cross was the most ignominious way to die. It was reserved for the worst sort of criminals, and its use was intended to intimidate the population into submission to Rome. To willingly take up a cross would be seen as admission of the worst sort of crime. It would be the deepest humiliation and the least likely thing religious people would consider as their role.

Jesus placed together three concepts: denial of self, taking the cross, and following Him. One might say that denial of self finds its truest expression in taking the cross, since the cross meant death in the most humiliating form. But these two ideas are tied to a typical formula of discipleship—"follow me." In the beginning of Mark, Jesus called various persons to follow Him as His disciples. No mention was made at that time of a cross. Now, with the disciples reaching a deeper understanding of who Jesus was, the path He was to take became glaringly clear. It was a death march. Why anyone would want to take such a journey becomes the subject matter of vv. 35–38. Remarkably, Jesus supported His call to self-denial by talking about benefits. As some have suggested, Jesus presented His reasoning in a tightly argued set of four statements and questions, each presenting reasons why His call to carry the cross makes sense.

First, the Lord began with the most central concept of survival—self-preservation: those who wish to save their lives will lose them, but those who lose their lives for the sake of Christ and the gospel will ultimately be saved (v. 35). Verse 34 sounds like total loss, giving up all. Then, via a paradoxical statement, Jesus indicated that this very self-denial is really self-preservation. If we lose our life for the gospel, we actually save it.

How can this be? The second and third expressions in vv. 36–37 explain in the form of two questions: How does it benefit anyone to gain the whole world, yet lose his or her "soul" or "life"? What can someone give in exchange for life? Jesus described a scenario where a person gained all that the world had to offer but in the process lost his or her life. How much would that gain mean? The obvious answer is "nothing."

Fourth, the future tenses in vv. 35–37 suggest an eschatological perspective—what will happen at the end of the world. Verse 38 makes this explicit: if people are ashamed of Christ in "this adulterous and sinful generation," He will be ashamed of them when He comes again with the angels in His Father's glory. Where v. 35 presented opposing concepts—save/lose, lose/save—in v. 38 shame brings shame. The society in which Jesus lived was an honor/shame culture. People sought out that which brought their family honor and avoided actions that brought them shame. Crucifixion was the ultimate shame and thus was extremely effective in bringing conformity to Roman authority. Jesus drew the curtain aside and indicated that refusing to follow Him now meant shame in the world to come.

In summary, the argument of Mark 8:34–38 runs as follows: Discipleship involves following Jesus in His path of suffering. This path, contrary to popular opinion, is not loss but gain. Gaining the world but losing our lives is no gain at all. Being ashamed of Jesus now means having shame ourselves when Jesus returns in glory.

9:1–13. The Transfiguration of Jesus. Mark 9:1 is actually a continuation of the teaching of 8:34–38. It presents a positive outcome in contrast to the words of 8:38. Jesus spoke of His coming in the glory of His Father with the holy angels (8:38). His reference in 9:1 to the kingdom of God coming with power echoes this idea and presents a picture of a future glorious kingdom. Jesus promised that some standing with Him would see that kingdom.

This depiction raises the question of the eschatological expectation of the first disciples of Jesus and that of the early Christian church (for more, see commentary on Mark 13:1–37). In Mark 1:14–15 the kingdom of God was described as coming with Jesus. It had a "now and not yet" aspect; it also had citizens. Some people were in, others were not. It was something people had to focus on to enter, and certain things could keep them out. Inside the kingdom was good, outside was not. The disciples of Jesus were the ones to whom the kingdom belonged. It was a glorious kingdom but also had characteristics of humility and lowliness.

In Mark, the humble quality of the kingdom receives more emphasis. But in the transfiguration story, its glorious perspective is prominent. It is not coincidental that the transfiguration story follows the prediction that some would see the kingdom. The transfiguration was a revelation of the coming kingdom. Jesus's power and His Father's approbation were on full display for the disciples to see.

Jesus took three of His disciples, Peter, James, and John, with Him up a high mountain. On the top of this unnamed mountain, Jesus was transformed before the disciples in an amazing display of glory. Appearing with Jesus were Elijah and Moses. These two OT characters, one of the greatest prophets and the other the great law giver, point toward the eschatological aspect of the kingdom of God. Elijah had been translated to heaven in a chariot of fire without seeing death (2 Kin. 2). Moses had been raised from the dead by the Lord Himself (Jude 9).

A cloud overshadowed the disciples, and the voice of God was heard from the cloud proclaiming Jesus to be His beloved Son. The disciples were then commanded to listen to Jesus (Mark 9:7). Three times in the Gospel of Mark we hear words similar to this: Jesus's baptism (1:11), the centurion's declaration of His identity (15:39), and this present account of the transfiguration. (It is only here at the transfiguration that we hear God speaking directly to a group of humans about His Son.)

When they came down the mountain, Jesus instructed them to keep the experience to themselves until after He rose from the dead (9:9). They asked Him about Elijah, perhaps prompted by the appearance of the great prophet (v. 11). The scribes' speculation that Elijah would come first was based on the words of Malachi 4:5–6, which states that God would send Elijah the prophet with a ministry of reconciliation before the "day of the LORD," as well as the warning that He would strike the land with a *kherem* (curse of complete destruction) if they did not heed him.

Perhaps, as others have suggested, the disciples wanted to know if the appearance of Elijah would precede the resurrection of the Son of Man. Jesus shifted the focus from resurrection to His passion. Elijah would come first and restore all things. But Jesus also asked about the Scriptures that refer to the Son of Man and His suffering and being treated contemptuously (v. 12). He indicated that Elijah preceded Him not in glory but in suffering (v. 13). The Elijah figure is clearly John the Baptist, who preceded Jesus

in ministry and in death, and even in report of being raised from the dead (cf. 6:14–16).

9:14–29. A Demon-Possessed Boy. Jesus and the three disciples returned from the Mount of Transfiguration to a scene sharply different. Scribes were disputing with the nine disciples left behind. It becomes clear that the nine disciples had tried to cast out a demon but failed. The story places marked emphasis on the long delay and difficulties of expelling this particular demon.

The symptoms the boy displayed sound quite similar to those of epilepsy—writhing on the ground, foaming at the mouth, and rigidity (v. 18). However, all three Synoptic Gospels attribute the boy's condition to demon possession. It is not unreasonable to suggest that the symptoms of the boy's demon possession simply parallel those of epilepsy and that we need not attribute the boy's symptoms to epilepsy on the one hand, or suggest, on the other hand, that all epilepsy that is seen today is due to demon possession. Mark is clear that Jesus was casting out an unclean spirit.

At the heart of the story is the father's distraught plea for help (v. 22). It is a desperate but distrustful plea—"if you can do anything." Jesus took note of one thing—the father's lack of faith. Manuscripts and translations differ here: According to some, Jesus rebuked the man's lack of faith by putting his words back at him, "If you can?" According to others, the text reads, "If you can believe, all things are possible for him who believes" (v. 23). The man then threw himself on the mercy of Jesus in the most memorable way, saying that he believed but asking for help with his unbelief (v. 24). Jesus then rebuked the unclean spirit and healed the boy.

The story ends with the disciples asking Jesus privately why they could not cast out the demon. Jesus responded by saying that these cases needed prayer (some manuscripts add, "and fasting"; v. 29). The disciples had been given authority over unclean spirits in their missionary journey recorded in Mark 6 and had had success (cf. 6:7, 13). Now they had failed. The spirit they were dealing with in this encounter was both mute and deaf (9:25). That may have made the exorcism more difficult. But Jesus indicated that the problem was with the exorcists, who needed a deeper connection with God.

9:30–41. Second Passion Prediction and Instruction. Jesus sought privacy in order to teach His disciples. He gave the second passion prediction to the whole group of twelve—the Son of Man would be betrayed, killed, and resurrected on the third day (v. 31). In common with the prediction in chapter 8, Jesus indicated that He would die and rise again. But in this prediction He also noted that He would be handed over or betrayed. Judas was not named at this point.

The disciples did not understand, and they were afraid to ask Jesus what He meant (9:32). The result of this fear and lack of interaction with Jesus leads to the misunderstanding about discipleship that He corrects in the next section (9:33–50). The disciples lagged behind Him as they came to Capernaum, and He asked them about their discussion on the road (v. 33). They were ashamed and remained silent because they had been arguing over who among them would be the greatest (v. 34).

Jesus responded to this misunderstanding of discipleship in an interesting way. He began with the maxim that whoever desires to be first will be last (v. 35). Then He illustrated this by standing a young child in their midst and taking the little one in His arms (v. 36). In most societies in the world, children are at the bottom of the social order. Thus, placing a child in the middle of these men and affirming this little one teaches the concept of the last or lowest being first.

The Lord drove home the lesson, saying that whoever receives a little child in His name receives Him, and whoever receives Jesus receives not only Him but also the One who sent Him (v. 37). The child, the lowest in the social order, is hereby connected with God in heaven, the one highest in the universe. It is an interesting affirmation of "the first shall be last and the last first." In affirming the lowest (the child) the one who receives the child is connected with the highest being in the universe.

John then dialogued with Jesus concerning someone who was not part of their group who was casting out demons in Jesus's name (v. 38). The disciples had told the person to stop, but Jesus told them not to forbid him. Anyone casting out demons in Jesus's name could not easily speak wrongly of Him (v. 39). He concluded with a salient statement about outsiders and their relationship to the Christian community, indicating that those who are not against Christians are for them (v. 40). There is no need for Christian ministers and missionaries to waste time trying to protect the boundaries of their influence. It does not matter who receives the credit when someone is uplifted or blessed.

Jesus continued His emphasis on relationship to outsiders: those who provide a cup of water to someone who belongs to Christ will not lose their reward (v. 41). This is the only direct reference to reward in the Gospel of Mark, although in 10:28–30 it seems to refer to a great recompense for following Jesus. We may find it incongruous that salvation by faith in Christ has with it the concept of reward. However, the reward is not based on any merit of ours but on the gracious gift of God. A cup of water is a small act of kindness. The resulting blessing from God far exceeds the input of effort on our part.

9:42–50. Sin, Fire, and Salt. This passage presents interlocking ideas focused around three concepts: "causes to sin," "fire," and "salt." In some ways the passage seems to jump from topic to topic in a most unusual manner, until we note that one of these key words appears in one passage and then in the next, and a shift to a new word in one text leads to its use in a new way in the next verse.

The first concept is that of causing others to sin. Jesus said that those who cause "these little ones" to stumble would be better off being thrown into the sea with a millstone hung around their necks (v. 42). Jesus took extremely seriously the manner in which new believers ("little ones") were treated. The comparison He made is to a drowning. It would be better to be drowned than to mislead a new believer. It is a sobering thought. Teachers and leaders have a responsibility to lead new believers to deeper faith, not to unbelief.

Jesus then shifted to personal internal causes to sin (vv. 43–48). He presented these causes in a series of three examples—the hand, the foot, and the eye. In other words, what you do, where you go, and what you see. Jesus's solution used hyperbole in the idea that if our hand, foot, or eye should cause us to sin, we should cut them off or pluck them out. Such drastic "surgery" strikes us as gruesome, and so it should. Jesus's point was that it is preferable to lose a hand, a foot, or an eye rather than to sin. He was calling not for self-mutilation but rather for a proper assessment of the terrible consequences of sin.

Jesus depicted two paths, one leading to life (vv. 43a, 45a; cf. v. 47a) and the other to hell (vv. 43b, 45b, 47b–48). Those entering life go in with one hand, one foot, or one eye, while those going to hell are whole. The kingdom of God is a place of life and restoration. Hell is a place of destruction. The hyperbole presents people having just the opposite of what we expect as a marker of where they are going. This is not to suggest that we will have disabilities in heaven. Instead it is meant to impress on our minds the true danger and weight of sin.

The hyperbole that Jesus used to describe these realities is helpful in understanding His language about destruction. Jesus called the opposite of entering life being thrown into hell, where the worm does not die and "the fire is not quenched" (v. 48). This sounds like an eternally burning hell. However, the fact that Jesus had already used hyperbole in this passage suggests that He continued the same pattern in describing the fate of the lost.

Geenna ("hell") is a transliteration of the Aramaic term *gehinnom*, which referred originally to the Valley of Hinnom to the southwest of Jerusalem, where in ancient times child sacrifice was practiced. King Josiah desecrated the location, and it thereafter became a rubbish heap with ever-burning fires. Jesus used this colorful depiction of a waste and burning location to describe the fate of the lost. But this need not suggest an eternally burning hell. John 3:16 indicates that those who believe in Jesus Christ will not die but have life eternal. The wicked will be destroyed by fire that comes from God, and only ashes will be left (Mal. 4:1–3; Rev. 20:11–15). The destroying is brief, and the destruction is eternal.

In Mark 9:49–50 Jesus tied three ideas to salt. The first stated that everyone will be seasoned or salted with fire (some manuscripts add, "and every sacrifice will be seasoned with salt," v. 49). Some have suggested that the use of fire and salt together likely alludes to Leviticus 2:13, where grain offerings were salted and then burned on the altar. The offering Jesus was talking about is the disciple's life and service. The cost will be high because the fires of persecution are involved. The dedication must be total, like the purifying effect of salt.

In Mark 9:50, Jesus linked salt to the idea of complete dedication to His service. In the ancient world salt was not 100 percent sodium chloride. It included other impurities, and it was possible for the sodium chloride to be washed out and for only the impurities to remain. The powder would still be white and appear like sodium chloride—a perfect illustration of hypocrisy. Jesus noted that if the salt loses its flavor, it is difficult or impossible to make it salty again (v. 50). Hypocrisy in disciples is death. It is impure and partial service.

In the last part of v. 50, Jesus added His third and final lesson about salt: they should have salt among themselves and peace with each other. The true salt of dedicated service on the part of all disciples leads to peace among them. If we look at a church that is fighting, we will most likely find one not saving the lost. Dedication to serving Jesus brings disciples together in service to others.

10:1–12. Marriage and Divorce. Mark 10:1 reports that Jesus arrived in the region of Judea, on the other side of the Jordan River, technically known as Perea. A crowd gathered around Jesus, and He taught them. A dispute with the Pharisees began as they accosted Him with the question, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" (v. 2). Among the Pharisees there were two main schools of thought on this matter: the School of Hillel and the School of Shammai. Both groups refer to the same OT text dealing with divorce (Deut. 24:1–4) but interpret it in different ways. The debate centered on two words in Deuteronomy 24:1, *'erwat dabar*. The first of these terms, *'erwat* (from *'erwah*), means "nakedness," "genital area" and the second, *dabar*, is a more general term meaning "word," "thing," "something," "matter." The phrase means literally, "the nakedness of a matter."

The School of Shammai focused attention on *'erwat* ("nakedness") and taught that sexual intercourse with someone other than one's spouse was the only grounds for divorce. The School of Hillel focused on the word *dabar* ("a matter") and felt that divorce could be for any matter that the husband found indecent. In the Judaism of Jesus's day, the grounds accepted for divorce included childlessness, material neglect, emotional neglect, and marital unfaithfulness.

The question to Jesus in Mark 10 was categorical, asking if divorce is permitted at all. Jesus inquired what Moses commanded (v. 3), and the Pharisees responded that Moses "permitted" (v. 4) a bill of divorce to be given. Jesus then referred to Deuteronomy 24 and indicated that permission to divorce was given due to the hardness of their hearts (Mark 10:5). Divorce was not God's original design for human relationships, which Jesus showed by quoting from Genesis 1 and 2. Genesis 1:27 focuses attention on the distinction between male and female, while Genesis 2:24 refers to the joining together of a man and a woman. Jesus concluded from this that the two are now one and summarized His teaching: "What God has joined together," no one should separate (Mark 10:9).

Jesus made no mention of divorce as an option for His followers in these verses. The disciples asked Him about the dispute, and He responded clearly that a man who divorces his wife and marries someone else commits adultery against her, and a woman who divorces her husband and marries someone else commits adultery against him (vv. 10–12). Mark lists no exception under which divorce and remarriage would be permissible. However, the focus of Jesus's statement in Mark is on the individual initiating the divorce and what their actions of divorce plus remarriage would amount to (adultery against their former spouse). The spouse who did not initiate the divorce is not discussed.

Mark 10 and the same story in Matthew 19:1–9 do not need to be seen in opposition to one another. Mark focuses attention on the perpetrator of a wrongful divorce, while Matthew focuses on the outcome for the innocent party. The passage in Mark reminds us of God's ideal and original plan for marriage—one man, one woman, a lifelong commitment. In studying divorce, we must look at the whole counsel of the Scriptures to arrive at a balanced and gracious application.

10:13–16. The Little Children. This is a touching story of people bringing young children to Jesus for His blessing. For some reason the disciples rebuked these people, perhaps thinking that Jesus would not have time or interest in young children. Jesus saw what was happening and was incensed (v. 14).

In three statements, Jesus drove home His point. First, He called on His disciples to allow the children to come to Him (v. 14a). He then supported this with a statement about their relationship to the kingdom of God—they are citizens of that kingdom (v. 14b). And finally, He solemnly stated that whoever does not "receive the kingdom of God" as a child would will not enter it (v. 15). A simple incident of people bringing children to Jesus for blessing became a foundational teaching of the kingdom of God. The weak, the undervalued, the quiet, and the "little ones" belong to the kingdom of God and are a paradigm of how it is to be received and lived.

10:17–31. The Rich Young Man. Jesus moved to the topic of the relationship of His followers to wealth. A man ran after Jesus and knelt before Him. He addressed Jesus as a Good Teacher and asked what he should do to inherit eternal life (v. 17). Jesus alluded to the Jewish confession of faith in Deuteronomy 6:4, where it states, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one." Only God has that ultimate holy purity that warrants the adjective "good." Thus the question is, did the man recognize Jesus as God in human flesh?

The man asked what he had to do to inherit eternal life, and he got a clear and frank reference to the Ten Commandments, which Jesus said that the young ruler knew: prohibitions against adultery, murder, theft, falsehood, and defrauding, and the positive command to honor parents (v. 19). Other than the reference to defrauding, all of these commandments come from the second half of the Decalogue in Exodus 20 (the reference to defrauding comes from either Ex. 21:10 or Deut. 24:14 and may refer to keeping back wages from workers as a variation on the eighth, ninth, or tenth commandments). As earlier in Mark 1:44, 7:1–13 and 10:1–12, Jesus showed high respect for the Mosaic law.

Jesus was not teaching salvation by commandment keeping. Instead, His words illustrated a profound truth of biblical anthropology. In the Bible a person is a unified whole. The "soul" is the person as an entirety, not the spiritual portion in distinction from the physical part (cf. Gen. 2:7). This holistic view of anthropology has strong implications for the relationship between faith and deeds. The biblical message is that we are saved by faith but we are judged by our deeds (e.g., Prov. 24:12; Matt. 12:33–37; Rom. 2:1–16; 2 Cor. 5:10; James 2:12–26; Rev. 20:12–15). Faith and grace within the heart reveal themselves by actions in life. For this reason, we are judged by our deeds.

The man responded to Jesus that he had observed all these commandments from the time he was a child (Mark 10:20), and Mark notes that Jesus loved him. What was it about him that brought this response from Jesus? Perhaps it was his directness and enthusiasm (he ran after Jesus and bowed before Him). Jesus said he was missing just one thing: He told him to go and sell all his possessions and give to the poor so that he would have treasure in heaven. Then he should follow Jesus (v. 21). This created shocked sadness in the man, who went away grieving because he had immense wealth (v. 22). The man's problem was idolatry, money in the place of God.

Jesus had a conversation with His disciples in response to the rich man's departure (vv. 23–27). He said that it is very hard for rich people to enter the kingdom of God (v. 23). This statement was totally counter to the typical understanding of Jesus's day that wealth was a sign of God's blessing. Indeed, OT passages point to God's blessing in bestowing material wealth (Deut. 28:1–14; Job 1:10; 42:10; Prov. 10:22). Jesus's statement is neither a rejection of the OT passages nor a denigration of material possessions. Rather, it is a recognition of the subtle way in which riches can take God's place in our lives.

The disciples were shocked by Jesus's statement (Mark 10:24), so He drove it home by repetition and the addition of a striking comparison: "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle" than for a rich person to enter God's kingdom (v. 25). Jesus was speaking in hyperbole. The camel was the largest animal commonly seen in the Holy Land in Jesus's time, and the eye of a needle was exactly that—the small hole in a sewing needle. The impossibility of the feat was driven home by trying to imagine such a big animal going through such a tiny hole. It is impossible, which is exactly what Jesus wanted to convey.

Salvation for anyone is possible only by the grace of God. Material riches can be an impediment to trusting God. This might seem like a wonderful place for the discussion of riches to conclude, but Peter made a statement that prompted Jesus to say more. Peter pointed out that he and the other disciples had left everything to follow Jesus (v. 28). It is as if Peter asked, "What will we get? What is in it for us?" In the context of what Jesus has just intimated about the perils of riches, this statement by Peter may strike us as odd. But it allowed Jesus to draw the curtain aside and show the topsy-turvy nature of the kingdom of God. The disciples are the counterparts of the man who left Jesus and kept his wealth.

Jesus began with Peter's affirmation, but with the interesting addition of the words "no one." No one who has left family or possessions behind for the sake of Jesus and His gospel will miss the reward: a hundred times more both now—of family, houses, lands, but also persecutions—and in the coming age, eternal life. As in the discipleship teaching in chapter 8, so here, loss is gain. To draw all the teaching on riches together, Jesus added the words, "But many who are first will be last, and the last first" (v. 31). Focus our lives on riches and we will be disappointed. Focus our life on Jesus and we will be blessed, now and in the age to come.

10:32–34. Third Passion Prediction. Jesus's third prediction of His passion involved words that were stark, plain, and open, with more detail of how the Son of Man would be betrayed, tried, mocked, maltreated, and put to death. Again, He told His disciples directly that He would be raised after three days.

10:35–45. Leadership and Service. James and John wanted positions of power when Jesus would sit in glory, one on His right, the other on His left (v. 37). Jesus warned them that they did not know what they were asking, and then He asked them a sobering question about whether they could drink from the same cup as He and be baptized in the same way (v. 38). The references to the cup and baptism are symbolic of both the Lord's Supper (the cup) and trial that followed, both of which are tied to Jesus's death (cf. 14:23–24; Rom. 6:1–4; 1 Cor. 11:25–26). The linkage in Mark is more subtle. Jesus will struggle with the cup of suffering in the garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:36), and in chapter 15 the scene of the cross is closely tied to the scene of Jesus's baptism in chapter 1. From these linkages it is clear that Jesus was talking about His passion. On His right and on His left two thieves would be crucified.

James and John did not see this, blithely stating that they were able to drink from the same cup. Jesus then predicted that they would do exactly that (10:39). This prediction is one of the indicators that Jesus did not reject His disciples. He predicted they would be His representatives after the resurrection and would suffer for Him. The Lord then came back to the direct request of the brothers: He said it was not for Him to grant them the positions they requested but that these positions would be given to those for whom they were prepared (v. 40). Here Jesus was speaking of His glory. The places of honor were not His to give. The Father is the one who makes these decisions.

The ten other disciples were incensed when they heard about the request of the two brothers. Jesus responded with a profound teaching on discipleship. He contrasted Gentile behavior and Christian behavior. The Gentile leaders "lord it over" their people and their so-called "great ones" or "high officials exercise authority over them" (v. 42); the leaders are up, the people are down. In sharp contrast, Jesus set forth the method of leadership in Christian life: those who wish to be great will be the servants; those who desire to be first will be the slave of everyone (vv. 43–44). Here the people are up and the leaders are down. Greatness in the kingdom of God does not focus on what we can get; it is focused on how we can bless those around us.

Jesus referred to His own example as the paradigm of Christian service: "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve," giving His life as "a ransom for many" (v. 45). The word "even" suggests a possible exception, which was denied. As the Son of Man, He could require service, respect, and honor from His followers (cf. John 13:13), but He declared that He had come to serve. And if He served, all His followers must do so as well.

Next, Jesus indicated the kind of service that He would provide. It was to give His life as a ransom for many. The term "ransom" in Greek is *lytron*, meaning "price of release." It is a slave market word and represents the payment made for setting a slave free. Thus, it implies a state of bondage, here the bondage of sin. The cost of breaking that bondage is the life of Jesus. The language is substitutionary and points clearly to the cross. His sacrifice is greater than any that we can make, but it sets the example for Christian ministry.

10:46–52. Healing of Bartimaeus. As the blind beggar Bartimaeus heard who was passing by, he began to shout, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" (v. 47). In Jesus's day, two concepts were linked with the title "Son of David." One was the restoration of a king from the line of David. The expectation was a military and political leader. The other concept linked with "Son of David" was belief in this figure as a healer and exorcist. Both of these strands or concepts appear to be backgrounds to what occurred in the Gospels, as people considered Jesus a healer and a king. Bartimaeus was thus declaring Jesus to be exactly that figure, and his use of the phrase "Son of David" was a confession of his faith in Jesus as the Messiah. Peter declared Jesus as the Christ/Messiah and Jesus told His disciples to keep the matter private. Now Bartimaeus was declaring it publicly. The crowd around him told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the louder (v. 48).

Jesus called for the man to be brought to Him, thereby accepting the title Bartimaeus used. The fickle crowd then encouraged him, saying that Jesus was calling for him (v. 49). Bartimaeus made a show of his faith by throwing off his cloak (v. 50), illustrating that he was certain that he would soon see and be able to easily locate it once he was healed. This would likely be the only outer covering the man possessed. Jesus asked the blind man what he wanted Him to do for him (v. 51). It is the same, simple question that He had asked James and John when they had come to Him regarding places of honor (vv. 35–37). Their request had been focused on position and power. The blind man focused on one thing only: receiving sight (v. 51). There was no delay; Jesus healed the man immediately, and he followed Jesus on the road (v. 52).

It is a fitting end to the discipleship section (8:22—10:52), which began with the healing of a blind man at Bethsaida and ends with the healing of another blind man at Jericho. The two miracles illustrate that discipleship is about seeing the world with new eyes and following Jesus even to the cross.

11:1—13:37

Ministry in Jerusalem

This section begins with Jesus arriving at Jerusalem and ends with His Eschatological Discourse. The events from this point forward in Mark, nearly one third of the Gospel, cover only about one week of time and occur in the environs of Jerusalem. Jesus's time in Jerusalem divides into two parts—the ministry in and around the temple that results in a crescendo of controversy with the religious leaders, and the passion narrative, where a plot is laid against Jesus. He eats the Passover with His disciples, is arrested, tried, crucified, buried, and then rises on the third day.

11:1–11. Triumphal Entry. Jesus was approaching Jerusalem, the capital of the Israelite nation from the time of David. At the heart of the city and dominating its skyline was Herod's temple. The temple was constructed of local limestone and was decorated with gold. This edifice was the center of worship for the Jews of Jesus's day. Jesus's approach to the city was from the east. The Mount of Olives is east of the Temple Mount, and Jesus entered the city through one of the two eastern gates, either the gate now called Lion's Gate (earlier St. Stephen's Gate) or, more likely, the Eastern or Golden Gate, which led directly onto the Temple Mount. Since Jesus entered Jerusalem and went to the temple according to 11:11, this is probably the gate He entered.

Jesus instructed two of His disciples to find a colt in either Bethany or Bethphage for Him to ride (vv. 2–6). The use of a colt was important. Jesus was fulfilling the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9, which describes the king coming on a colt to Jerusalem. That Jesus predicted what His disciples would find and the fact that they would be able to bring the colt was a demonstration of His power and authority as the Messiah. He mounted the colt and proceeded to the city, where people honored Him by strewing clothing in His path or by going out in the fields and bringing leafy material to spread on the road. The people cried out "Hosanna," using the words of Psalm 118:25–26 as a blessing on the One who was coming (Mark 11:9). Psalm 118:26 probably originally referred to the king coming to Jerusalem in victory, and combined with Zechariah 9:9–10 could easily be taken as messianic in application to Jesus. The people also referred to the kingdom of "our father David" that was coming (Mark 11:10). This type of statement clearly has a messianic and political tone.

Jesus entered the city and the Temple Mount area (v. 11), but it was late in the day so He departed with His disciples to spend the night in Bethany. This sounds very anticlimactic, but the following day would illustrate quite a different picture. If Jesus rode into the city on a Sunday, as is the tradition, then the cleansing of the temple occurred on Monday and the finding of the fig tree withered was on Tuesday. Jesus would be crucified on Friday, so the events of these chapters all occurred within a short period of time.

11:12–26. The Fig Tree and the Cleansing of the Temple. This is the fourth sandwich story in the Gospel of Mark. As explained before (see commentary on Mark 3:20–35; 5:21–43; 6:7–31), we find two stories interlinked with one interrupting the other. The two stories contain dramatized irony, where opposite characters do parallel actions or parallel characters do opposite actions. Two more intercalations appear in Mark 14:1–11 and 53–72.

The story in this passage may be the strangest of all the stories in Mark and causes a great deal of puzzlement. The story begins in 11:12 after the triumphal entry (11:1–11), with Jesus the next day returning to Jerusalem in the morning. He was hungry and saw a fig tree with leaves. He came to it and searched for something to eat but found no fruit on the tree, for, as the narrator notes, "it was not the season for figs" (v. 13). Jesus's next act was quite unexpected. He cursed the tree and said that no one would ever eat fruit from it again (v. 14). The lack of fruit on the tree seems to be connected to the season. In the Jerusalem area, the typical time that figs ripen is May/June, but Passover occurs in March/April. However, some immature fruit does appear when the leaves come out. Even so, it seems extremely odd that Jesus cursed a tree simply because it had only leaves and no fruit.

It is the intercalation that helps to explain the meaning of Jesus's action. Jesus personified the tree and linked its outcome to His actions in the temple. The dramatized irony intertwines Jesus's fate and the fate of the Jerusalem temple. In v. 15, Jesus and His disciples entered Jerusalem. His next action was also rather surprising. He expelled those who were buying and selling in the temple and overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those who were selling doves (v. 15). This event likely took place in what is called the Royal Stoa, a portion of the great expansion of the Temple Mount by Herod the Great. The Royal Stoa was a covered portico with large supporting pillars located on the extreme southern end of the Temple Mount. It was located in the court of the Gentiles, which was open to both Jews and Gentiles, contrary to the portion of the Temple Mount closer to the temple, which was open only to Jews. Trade in sacrificial animals in the temple area probably went back to Zechariah's time (Zech. 14:21). The merchants who provided this service for the temple originally conducted their business on the Mount of Olives, outside of the temple complex. For some reason, perhaps the large number of crowds who resided in and outside of the city during the Passover, these merchants were conducting their business in an area within the court of the Gentiles on the Temple Mount itself. In doing so, they were not only disrupting worship but also acting as if the area reserved for Gentile worship was not important. In driving out the buyers, sellers, and money changers, Jesus was protecting the sacred space allotted for Gentiles to worship in the temple (Mark 11:15–17).

Jesus explained the reason for His strong action, quoting Scriptures that refer to the temple as "a house of prayer for all nations," and declaring that they had made it a den of thieves instead (v. 17). He drew from Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11 to explain His actions. The two passages in their contexts point in opposite directions: Isaiah 56 speaks of openness to Gentile inclusion, the ingathering of the nations, while Jeremiah 7 describes the coming judgment on Israel if they continued to break God's law. Jesus saw the selling of animals and changing of money in the court of the Gentiles as a desecration of the sacred purpose of the temple. But how simple money changing and the selling and buying of animals was equal to the murder, stealing, adultery, lying, and idolatry that Jeremiah 7:1–14 talks about is explained in these interconnected stories.

Jesus restored the temple courts to their original purpose. However, the religious leaders would later react sharply to His actions, arguing with Him (Mark 12), plotting His death (chap. 14), and bringing His trial and crucifixion to fruition (chaps. 14–15). It would be His death that would seal the fate of the temple. Thus, Jesus cleansed the temple, but the religious leaders turned it to destruction by rejecting both Him and His message. This is the dramatized irony of the intercalation. A cleansing would become a curse because of the leaders' rejection of the Messiah's actions.

The leaders were looking for some way to destroy Jesus. However, their fear of the people led them to seek a private manner to carry out their plans (cf. 14:48–49).

The following morning, on the way back to Jerusalem, Jesus and His disciples passed by the fig tree He had cursed the day before. Peter took note of the change in the tree and pointed out that it had withered (11:21). It is the only destructive miracle of Jesus described in all four Gospels, thus it is instructive how Jesus interpreted its meaning. He did not take a negative perspective. He encouraged the disciples to "Have faith in God" (v. 22) and went on to explain how established faith in God can move mountains (v. 23). He drew two lessons: belief in receiving requests from God (v. 24), and the necessity of forgiving others (v. 25; some Greek manuscripts do not contain v. 26).

Jesus indicated in this teaching that prayer would continue in the community of faith that believes the Messiah's teaching and forgives those who trespass against them. Far from holding the covenant community of Israel in contempt, Jesus taught a forgiving attitude that welcomes people of all nations, including Israel, to join in praying to God and believing His promises.

11:27–33. Controversy: Authority of Jesus. Mark 11:27—12:44 contains a set of controversies that parallels those in 2:1—3:6. The controversies here with the religious authorities of Jerusalem play an important role in identifying clearly what Jesus stood for in contrast to the religious leaders of His time. He returned to Jerusalem the day after cleansing the temple. The high priests, scribes, and elders confronted Him while He was walking in the temple area (11:27). They asked Him a precise, two-part question regarding the source of the authority for His actions and who gave Him this authority (v. 28). It was a question intended to trap Jesus. If He indicated that His authority was from heaven, the leaders would scoff and deride Him for such a bold claim in light of His humble origins and lack of official religious authority. However, if He said that His authority was from earth, they would dismiss His actions in cleansing the temple as an outburst of political criticism devoid of divine authority.

Jesus saw through their plot and asked a counterquestion about the nature and origin of John the Baptist's ministry—was it a divine or merely human mission (vv. 29–30)? If they said it was human, they feared the response of the many people who viewed John as a prophet. If they said it was from God, then Jesus would rebuke them for not accepting it. After choosing not to answer this question, the leaders were placed in a position of shame and embarrassment, but Jesus had more to say to them, as recorded in 12:1–12. He gave a merciful warning of where their steps were leading in the form of the parable of the vineyard that echoes Isaiah 5. In Isaiah the parable is fairly short (vv. 1–7), but the commentary on it in the rest of Isaiah 5 predicts the great judgment coming on Israel for its sins of injustice, greed, debauchery, and falsehood.

12:1–12. Controversy: The Wicked Tenant Farmers. This parable is about a man who rented out his vineyard to tenant farmers who repeatedly mistreated or even killed his emissaries (vv. 1–5), leading the owner to decide to send his beloved son, whom he thought they would respect (v. 6). It was as though the owner would not give up on the prospect of receiving fruit from the vineyard. But the farmers were undeterred in their irrationality. They laid a plot and killed the owner's son, casting him out of the vineyard and not even giving him the honor of a burial (vv. 7–8).

Jesus suddenly broke away from the story and asked a piercing question: What will the vineyard owner do? (v. 9). In the Gospel of Mark, the Greek is ambiguous as to whether the next statement was Jesus answering His own question or if the religious leaders responded. In the parallel in Matthew 21:41, it was the religious leaders who replied by declaring that the owner would come and destroy the vineyard keepers and give it to others (Mark 12:9). Jesus then drew a parallel to Psalm 118:22–23 to illustrate dramatically and clearly that the religious leaders' plan against Him could not succeed—the rejected stone became the cornerstone, and this was an astonishing work of the Lord (Mark 12:10–11).

The day before, when Jesus cleansed the temple, the religious leaders began a process of planning Jesus's demise (11:18). The next day, they sought to overcome Him by argument but were thwarted (11:27–33). Then in 12:1–11, He described their plan back to them and placed it within the context of Israel's history as God's wayward vineyard (Is. 5), clearly illustrating the irrational and morally reprehensible nature of their plans. He indicated that as the Lord's cornerstone, He would be the new foundation of the Lord's house (cf. 1 Pet. 2:4–10). Their plan could not succeed. It was a breathtaking revelation in its clarity, yet it was presented in parabolic form so that it was likely the majority of people, unaware of the plot, would not understand its implications. The private nature of this parable was yet one more appeal to the leaders to step back from the brink. They did not do so but instead continued disputing with Him and plotting His death.

12:13–17. Controversy: Paying Taxes. The attacks continued, though through more indirect means—they sent some Pharisees and Herodians to Him in an attempt to "catch" Him in His choice of wording (v. 13). They tried to cover their duplicity through flattery, addressing Him as "Teacher" and complimenting Him for His integrity and willingness to speak the truth regardless of what anyone thought (v. 14). They spoke of Him as one who literally did not care about others. This sounds odd at first, but it refers to not showing partiality. After the fawning adulation, they asked their question briefly: was it lawful for them to pay taxes to Caesar or not? (vv. 14–15).

This seemingly innocuous question carried heavy baggage for Jesus in His cultural context. Judea had been free under the Maccabees for more than one hundred years (166–63 B.C.), but since that time it had been under Roman rule with Roman taxes. To affirm the legitimacy of paying taxes was to acknowledge Roman rule. But to deny Roman taxes was paramount to rebellion against the government. Jesus indicated that there is a legitimate earthly realm of which we are residents and to which we owe allegiance, in this case in the form of taxes. But He also noted that we are citizens who owe God our service and faithfulness. The Pharisees sought an either/or solution. Instead, Jesus indicated a proper place for each realm. The NT clearly teaches that God is the supreme authority in our life with earthly governments subservient to Him (Rom. 13:1–7; 1 Pet. 2:13–17). As long as these governments fulfill their God-appointed role, they are to be obeyed. If they cross the line to require that which is opposed to God's requirements, then our path is plain; we must obey God rather than people (Acts 5:29).

12:18–27. Controversy: The Sadducees. The Sadducees came and disputed with Jesus regarding the question of the resurrection. In Jesus's day the Pharisees believed in the resurrection of the dead, while the Sadducees did not. The story the Sadducees brought to Jesus for consideration may have been a hypothetical case or an actual case in the Jewish community involving the question of levirate marriage (see Deut. 25:5–10). This OT law had been established in the patriarchal society of Israel to prevent the loss of a family's inheritance when a man died without having any sons. According to the law, the dead man's brother was to take his widowed sister-in-law as a wife. The first son born to this union would take the place of the dead man in matters of inheritance. The question they asked Jesus regarding this scenario pitted eschatology against ethics with the risqué situation of seven men with one wife.

The Sadducees claimed that the resurrection is impossible because it would create unsolvable ethical dilemmas. Jesus pointed out their errors. The first, that of not knowing the Scriptures, was a damning accusation against religious leaders. The second was that they were unacquainted with the power of God that can bring about resurrection. Jesus responded to the two errors in reverse order, explaining first the characteristic of resurrection that countered the supposed ethical dilemma and second how the Scriptures supported His teaching on resurrection. Mark 12:25 has been a point of question and conflict for some time. Jesus said that when people rise from the dead, they will no longer marry but be like the angels in heaven. "Marry" would be the part of the man, "given in marriage" the part of the woman in the patriarchal perspective of the Jewish culture.

Does this indicate that marriages we currently have in this world will be dissolved in heaven? It goes strictly beyond the text to say so, but the logic of Jesus's answer suggests that the multiple marriage issue of the woman in the illustration will not be a problem in heaven. This in turn suggests that the married state, if it exists in the coming age, will be different in nature than what existed on earth.

Jesus went on to illustrate from the Pentateuch that the resurrection would most definitely occur. He cited Exodus 3:6, the famous meeting of Moses with God at the burning bush, by saying, "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (Mark 12:26). Then Jesus said, "He is not the God of the dead," but "of the living" (v. 27). He was not suggesting that these patriarchs are alive in heaven today as disembodied spirits or eternal souls. He was arguing with the Sadducees about the resurrection. If He believed in the immortality of the soul, He would not mention the dead being raised in v. 26. On the contrary, Jesus was arguing that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob must rise in the resurrection if they are connected to God's name. Thus "I am the God of . . ." implies the resurrection of the dead.

12:28–34. Controversy: Commandments. A scribe who had been listening to the discussion asked Jesus what the greatest commandment was. The level or weight of commandments was discussed in Judaism, and the scribe's question regarding the greatest fits within that pattern. Jesus cited Deuteronomy 6:4–5 in response: the greatest commandment was the admonition to love God with all the heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mark 12:29–30). Jesus taught that God must be the center of our lives, the object of our deepest devotion, the subject of our praise, the heartbeat of our service. Nothing is to take His place; no one is to come before Him in our affections and worship. Obedience to this command guides life to its true purpose and clarifies all other relationships. Thus Jesus called it the first commandment.

The Lord went on to present the second great commandment, quoting Leviticus 19:18: "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:31). Whereas the first commandment sets our relationship to God at the center of life, this second commandment establishes our ethical responsibility toward all human beings we encounter. When Jesus indicated that God is to be the object of our supreme love and our fellow humans are to be loved as ourselves, He was not simply talking about a warm feeling but rather calling for action that demonstrates our devotion.

The scribe recognized the wisdom of Jesus's answer and the foundational nature of these commandments. Jesus declared that the scribe was near the kingdom because he recognized Jesus's wisdom, but to come into the kingdom of God would require becoming a disciple of Jesus. The scribe's affirmation placed Jesus on vantage ground. Mark notes that after these dialogues, no one dared question Him (v. 34).

12:35–40. Controversy: David, the Lord, the Scribes. But Jesus was not finished instructing. He raised the question of messianic titles: why is the Messiah (Christ) referred to by the scribes as the "Son of David"? Jesus then quoted from Psalm 110:1, where David refers to the "LORD" speaking to his "Lord," who will sit at God's right hand and have His enemies subdued under Him (Mark 12:36). Jesus's series of questions may give the impression that He was rejecting the title Son of David, but that does not harmonize with the story of blind Bartimaeus (see commentary on Mark 10:46–52), where the same title was affirmed by Jesus healing the blind man.

Instead of rejecting the title, it seems more likely that Jesus was pointing to a deeper understanding of its meaning. In Jesus's day the expectation for the Son of David, Messiah, was that he would be a military figure and ruler, and also an exorcist healer. While Jesus did not fulfill the military and political expectations of the people, He clearly carried on an extensive healing ministry.

His quotation and interpretation of Psalm 110:1 challenged the idea that He, as the Son of David, was in any way inferior to David. Jesus's lineage was not simply human but also divine (cf. Rom. 1:1–5). Thus Jesus's question was intended to extend and deepen the understanding of who the Messiah was and to expand the understanding of His role. He was pointing the scribes toward the mystery of His incarnation.

In Mark 12:38–40 Jesus rebuked the hypocrisy of the scribes. They loved marks of honor, and to their shame, they devoured the homes of widows and as a guise made long prayers. Throughout the OT, God expressed the importance of the care and protection of widows, orphans, and foreigners—the three most vulnerable groups in society (cf. Ex. 22:22; Deut. 10:17–18; 14:29; Jer. 7:6–7; 22:3; Mal. 3:5). The scribes mistreated people and pretended that they were right with God. Certain judgment was coming.

12:41–44. A Poor Woman's Offering. It is known that the temple complex had thirteen chests with trumpet-shaped openings for depositing offerings. Jesus was evidently sitting opposite one or more of these chests, watching people put their offerings into the temple treasury (Mark 12:41). As Jesus watched, a poor widow approached and dropped in two small coins (two *lepta*), which Mark interpreted as equal to one Roman *quadran* (one *kodrantēs*), the smallest of the Roman coins. Sixty-four *quadrans* made one *denarius* (one *dēnarion*), which was the daily wage of a common laborer. Thus the woman's offering was especially small, particularly in comparison with the great offerings others placed in the chests.

Jesus summoned His disciples and declared to them that this widow had put in more than all the others (v. 43). It is an amazing reversal, typical of Jesus's teaching that "many who are first will be last, and the last first" (10:31). He went on to explain why this was true: the rich gave only a portion of their copious wealth, whereas she gave all that she had (12:44).

With Jesus's sharp criticism of the religious leaders, it may seem odd that He affirmed the woman's gift to the religious establishment. But in chapter 11, Jesus cleared the temple of unholy traffic because He considered it the house of prayer for all people (11:17). His cleansing of the temple was designed to restore the service to its rightful holy purpose. The widow's gift was in keeping with Jesus's teachings and practice of faithful religion in the service of God.

13:1–37. Concerning the Temple and the End. Mark 13 is known as the Eschatological Discourse because in it Jesus describes the coming destruction of Jerusalem (A.D. 70) and the events that proceed from there to the end of our world. It is the longest connected speech of Jesus in the book of Mark. Mark 13 can be divided into four parts as follows:

1. Signs of the end (vv. 1–13)
2. Destruction of Jerusalem and tribulation (vv. 14–23)
3. Coming of the Son of Man (vv. 24–27)
4. Warning lessons (vv. 28–37)

The chapter begins with Jesus leaving the temple. Herod's temple was incredibly beautiful, with gold embellishments and massive stones, some weighing hundreds of tons (regarding the early church, see in "Archaeology and the Bible," p. 92). One of the disciples pointed out the beauty of the stones and edifices. Jesus's response was stark and shocking: The buildings would be torn down—no stone would remain on another (v. 2). This was Jesus's central prediction. It is important to note that it involved the buildings on the Temple Mount, not all the retaining wall structures that supported the buildings.

The disciples approached Jesus as He sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple and asked a question that had two aspects to it: a temporal aspect—When will these things happen?—and a material aspect: What will be the

sign of their fulfillment? (v. 4). The disciples did not specifically ask about the end of the world, though in their minds the destruction of the temple may well have been connected with the end of the world.

Jesus began His response with a warning to guard against being deceived (v. 5). The Lord began not with either the "when" or the "what" but rather with a warning about those who could distract disciples from really understanding the signs of the times. He expanded on the warning to specify more details about the persons they could expect. These people would come claiming to be the Messiah (v. 6). Such messianic pretenders, Jesus warned, would deceive many. At the time of the Jewish War, A.D. 66–73, kingly pretenders, Menahem son of Judas from Galilee and Simon bar-Giora, may well have made messianic claims.

Verses 7–8 go on to describe what will occur before the destruction of Jerusalem and how the disciples should respond. Jesus described what might be called a "false when": when they hear of "wars and rumors of wars," they should not be frightened (v. 7). The disciples might consider these "wars and rumors of wars" to be the sign that the destruction of Jerusalem was about to occur, but Jesus put the time further off. He explained the seeming delay in v. 8: nations and kingdoms fighting each other, earthquakes, and famines. The first part regards the activities of the nations, while the second refers to markers in nature. Jesus called all this the beginning of *ōdinōn*—"sorrows" or "birth pains"—colorful terminology that compares these woes with the pain of labor.

Verses 9–13 turn toward what will happen to the disciples in the run-up to the destruction of Jerusalem. The Lord again presented a sober look at what they could expect. He indicated that the disciples will be turned over to councils, beaten in synagogues, and brought before governors and kings to testify (v. 9). The history of the early Christian church fulfilled this prediction exactly. The ministry of Paul, his many beatings and trials (cf. 2 Cor. 11:21–33), and the experiences of the apostles in Acts richly portray the accuracy of Jesus's words.

But the experience of persecution also has a positive side, according to Jesus. He stated that first the gospel must be preached to every nation (Mark 13:10). He indicated that the disciples need not worry about what to say before opponents, because the Holy Spirit will give them what they need and will speak through them (v. 11).

Jesus returned to somber warning concerning what to expect, describing betrayal by family to the point of death (v. 12). Verse 13 contains both deep pathos and profound encouragement. The Lord said that all will hate His disciples because of Him but that the one who endured to the end will be saved. Being the target of hatred is never a happy experience, but it need not be the focal point of our life. Jesus promised salvation for those who persevere. Far from being a discouraging barrier, these words are encouragement that if we will cling to our Lord, He will carry us through challenging times.

Jesus mentioned the sign the disciples had asked for concerning the destruction of Jerusalem: when they would see the desolating abomination standing where it should not be, those in Judea should flee to the mountains. The sign, according to Jesus, was predicted by the prophet Daniel (see "The Abomination of Desolation in Mark," p. 1322).

The shift between "this/these" and "that/those" is clearly distinct and points to the two halves of the discourse—the events leading up to the destruction of the temple and the events that follow that destruction. The former are "all these things." The latter are "those days."

Verse 19 presents a shift with the use of new terminology: "those" days. Before this point in the narrative, the focus had been on the events leading up to the destruction of the city. The characterization of the events prior to the destruction was "these things" (v. 4). The pronouns "this" and "these" disappear in the Greek until v. 29 and the crucial v. 30, where it becomes "all these things." However, the pronouns "that" and "those," appear in vv. 17, 19, and 24, and again in v. 32 as "that day."

Verse 19 speaks of a terrible time of trouble. According to some, the phrase "those days" suggests a time further off from Jesus's perspective in the early A.D. 30s. The reference to plural "days" also indicates something that extends over time. And Jesus expressed the intensity of the tribulation, calling it a time unique in the history of the world (v. 19). From these indications it seems unlikely that He was referring only to the destruction of the temple and the terrible calamity surrounding that disaster, as terrible as it was.

What do "those days" refer to? The rest of the NT has strong parallels to Jesus's words here (2 Thess. 2, the man of sin; Rev. 6, the seals; Rev. 13, the sea beast power). These prophecies point toward the coming of the antichrist power that held special sway over many people for a period of 1,260 years (A.D. 538–1798; see "The 1,260 Days/Years," p. 1037). It was a time of persecution for the faithful.

Jesus indicated that if the Lord had not shortened those days of persecution, no one would survive (Mark 13:20). This verse indicates that, for the sake of His chosen people, the days of tribulation would be shortened. This is exactly what happened. Times of persecution decreased after the Protestant Reformation, and the people of God were able to share their faith more freely even before the close of the 1,260-year prophecy in 1798.

The people of God at that time might have had the idea that, at the end of the tribulation, the return of Jesus Christ would immediately occur. But Jesus warned that false christs/messiahs and false prophets would arise after that time (vv. 21–22). This parallels v. 6, where He said many would come in Christ's name before the destruction of Jerusalem and mislead many. Thus, deceptive people would be at work before the destruction of Jerusalem and again before the return of the Lord. This parallel illustrates that the tribulation was not simply the destruction of Jerusalem. Otherwise there would be little need to refer to the false christs a second time. These false messiahs and false prophets would show signs and wonders, miracles of supernatural power that deceive people (v. 22). Jesus solemnly warned the disciples to be on the watch (v. 23).

Verses 24–25 quote from Isaiah chapters 13 and 34, mentioning eschatological signs of the nearness of the end: the darkening of the sun and moon, the falling of the stars, and the shaking of heavenly *dynameis*. Some translations render this last term literally as "powers," while others take it to refer to other astronomical entities—"heavenly bodies." These events are also portrayed in the sixth seal of Revelation 6 and serve as markers of the nearness of Christ's return. Adventists believe these signs were fulfilled in the Great Dark Day of May 19, 1780, and the great Leonid meteor shower of November 13, 1833. Around that time period, great interest in the return of Christ revived in Christian churches, and many expected Jesus to return in those days. Although in our perspective of time the Lord's return may seem to be delayed, events taking place suggest that our world is on a collision course with destruction and that the Lord's return is near.

His return in glory is the next event Jesus predicted. Then they "will see the Son of Man coming in [the] clouds with great power and glory" (Mark 13:26). He is quoting from Daniel 7:13, a passage also alluded to in Mark 14:62; Matthew 24:30; 26:64; Luke 21:27; and Revelation 1:7; 14:14. In each case the reference is linked to the Second Coming of Jesus. The Lord indicated that He would send the angels to gather His elect from all over the world (Mark 13:27).

The Abomination of Desolation in Mark

The phrase about the abomination causing desolation appears in three locations in Daniel (Dan. 9:27; 11:31; 12:11) with a parallel in Daniel 8:13. The phraseology in Daniel is complicated by variations in the forms of the words and questions as to application.

1. Common Liberal View. Most critical scholars believe that Daniel was written in the second century B.C., and that the abomination of desolation refers to the desecration of the Jerusalem temple by Antiochus IV Epiphanes in 167 B.C. when he set up a pagan altar in the temple and offered a pig on it. However, two major problems show that this solution is incorrect. First, none of the various numbers in the prophecies in Daniel fit the history of Antiochus IV. If Daniel was written in the second century B.C., we would hardly expect the author to get the numbers all wrong.

Second, in Mark 13:14 Jesus indicated that the abomination of desolation was still in the future. In fact, this abomination was the sign that the Christians were to flee the city of Jerusalem (cf. Luke 21:20–21). Scholars who maintain that in Daniel the abomination of desolation refers to the work of Antiochus IV sometimes suggest that Jesus was reapplying the prophecy. But neither Mark nor Matthew, who include the terminology, give any such indication (cf. Matt. 24:15).

2. Parallels in Other Gospels. Since we take the words of Jesus seriously and believe that Daniel wrote his book in the sixth century B.C., we must seek a different solution to the question of what the Lord meant when He spoke of the abomination of desolation. The clearest way to solve this matter is to note the parallels in other Gospels. Matthew 24:15 has

a description of this important sign in language very close to that of Mark, but the parallel in Luke 21 is different. Luke 21:20 says that when Jerusalem is seen "surrounded by armies," then it can be known that "its desolation is near." Two points from this text help us to understand Jesus's words in Mark 13:14. First, in Luke 21 the Lord referred to Jerusalem being surrounded by armies. Second, He indicated that the desolation of the city would be near when this occurred.

We can begin with the latter of these points. Luke 21:20 speaks of the desolation of Jerusalem, which clearly portends its destruction. If the destruction of the city was the "desolation" part of the phrase about the abomination of desolation, then we can suggest that the surrounding of the city by the pagan armies was the "abomination" part of the phrase.

How could an army surrounding the city be an abomination? In the OT the word "abomination" is most commonly connected with things that are ritually unclean and with idolatry. It is the latter of these two that in particular would have a link to the Roman armies surrounding Jerusalem. The Roman soldiers carried banners or standards that included representations of the emperor, and the soldiers worshiped around those pagan standards. Thus, the Roman standards planted around the city by the soldiers involved idolatry within the land of Israel. This was an abomination and likely represents what is meant by the abomination which causes desolation.

3. Christians and the Fall of the City. However, this identification brings up another problem for our text. If the city was surrounded by an army, how could the Christians within it escape? A careful reading of Mark 13:14–16 indicates that Jesus never actually mentioned people inside the city. He told "those who are in Judea" (v. 14) to flee to the mountains and those who are "on the housetop" (v. 15) not to go down into the house or to take anything with them. Those "in the field" (v. 16) were not to go back and pick up their outer garment they had removed in the heat of work. The people normally happy with babies on the way or newborns (v. 17) received a warning of woe because of what was coming. Jesus warned the disciples to pray that the departure might not occur in the winter, because that would make the escape all the more difficult (v. 18–19). The picture is one of hurried, stressful departure, fleeing for one's life.

But in the event, even those within the city had opportunity to escape. The remarkable experience happened in A.D. 66, when the Romans came with an army under a general named Cestius. He came upon the city in the fall, at the time of the Feast of Tabernacles, thus there were large numbers of Jews in Jerusalem at the time. Josephus tells us that the Jews, on a Sabbath, rushed furiously in defense of the city to fight the Romans outside the walls and defeated them. The Romans withdrew, and the triumphant Jews returned to the city. Any Christian left in the city would have immediately known that this was the sign to escape. In fact, they had opportunity to flee from Jerusalem until the Romans returned and laid siege against it in A.D. 69. Eusebius indicates that the Christian church in Jerusalem had been warned by an oracle before the war began that they should withdraw from the city to Pella in Perea. Thus the Christians living within the city had ample opportunity to escape before it fell in A.D. 70.

Once the prophecy ends, what follows are lessons that flow from the Eschatological Discourse. The prophecy extends from the time of Jesus to the time of the end. This pattern is typical of apocalyptic prophecies.

Jesus then moved to a pair of lessons to be drawn from the discourse, each beginning with a command. The first lesson (vv. 28–32) indicated how the disciples were to think of the time periods and signs He had told them about. The second lesson (vv. 33–37) indicated what they were to do in light of the prophecy.

The Lord drew a lesson from the fig tree: when its twigs and branches become tender and display leaves, it is evident that summer is near (v. 28). As the coming of spring causes sap to flow in trees, the buds to swell and break forth into leaves, so the appearance of the signs Jesus described told the disciples of the approaching events. The two great events were the destruction of the temple (with the forewarning sign of the abomination of desolation) and the return of Christ (with its forewarning signs in the sun, moon, and stars).

But the two events are different in nature, and Jesus proceeded to explain this difference (vv. 30-32). He said that "this generation" will not pass away until all "these things" had occurred (v. 30). And He emphasized the veracity of His words with the exclamation that heaven and earth would pass away but that His words never would. If Jesus were talking about all the events in vv. 5-27, then clearly His prophecy did not come completely true. Jerusalem fell, but our Lord has not yet returned.

But we recall that Jesus was describing two sets of events, as we have suggested above: (1) the destruction of Jerusalem, and (2) the glorious day of His Second Coming. The destruction of Jerusalem is depicted using the phraseology "this/these" in vv. 4-13 and again in vv. 29-31. On the other hand, His glorious return is described with the phraseology "that/those" in vv. 17-24 and again in v. 32.

"This generation," the generation of Jesus's disciples, did see the destruction of Jerusalem. Jesus's words were very specific, marking an endpoint—the time period of His disciples. However, "that day" refers to Christ's return, and He said that no one knows the day or hour. The time frame for the two events and our ability to know their occurrence are described in very different terms, again pointing to two different times.

The second lesson is in vv. 33-37. Jesus gave His central teaching and command to be alert and pay attention because no one knows when the time will come. Not knowing the hour indicates to us that this lesson is particularly for those looking for the return of Jesus. What should the result be, because we do not know the hour of His return? Jesus gave the analogy of a man going on a journey and leaving jobs for each of his workers to do (v. 34). Particular attention was drawn to the doorman with his role to keep watch for the master's return.

Jesus then generalized the command for all to watch because we do not know what time of day the master will return (v. 35). The Lord referred to the typical Greco-Roman division of the night into four parts or watches, and then warned that if the master comes suddenly, he might find the servant sleeping (v. 36). He then reminded them that keeping watch is a duty for all (v. 37).

It is striking that the four terms for the watches of the night—evening, midnight, cockcrow, and morning—all, with the exception of midnight, reappear in the passion narrative in chapter 14. It is as if Jesus's passion is a trial run for the events of the end time. The disciples must stay awake and aware of what is going on. We would be ashamed if we were to fail miserably by sleeping right when world events should keep our attention fixed on the return of our Lord.

14:1—16:8

Passion Narrative

These last three chapters of the book of Mark are the climax of the story. They are called the passion narrative because they tell the story of Jesus's suffering, death, and resurrection. It is a gripping story that has several unique characteristics in comparison with the rest of the book. Mark 1–10 in particular are told mainly in short episodes that present Jesus giving brief speeches or healing someone. In contrast, Mark 11–16 and particularly chapters 14–16 have a much more connected and goal-oriented feel. Furthermore, in comparison with chapters 1–10, a much greater amount of space is used in chapters 11–16 to describe events that occurred during only about one week.

Jesus's main antagonists were the high priests, scribes, and elders (cf. 14:1, 53; 15:1). The Pharisees, in contrast, are not mentioned at all in chapters 14–16. While they were quite commonly the sparring partners with Jesus in earlier chapters, here they seem to have lost their drive to silence Him. Although the passion narrative is divided into eight parts, for ease of commenting here, it can as well be divided into three broad groups of stories: before His arrest, the arrest and trials, and the crucifixion, burial, and resurrection.

14:1–11. The Plot against Jesus. This is the fifth sandwich story in Mark (see 3:20–35; 5:21–43; 6:7–32; 11:12–25). Like the earlier examples, opposite characters do similar actions or parallel characters do opposite actions, producing a dramatized irony that explains truths about Christology or discipleship. In this story, two parallel characters do opposite actions. The story begins with the religious leaders hatching a plot to kill Jesus. The Evangelist notes the specific time: two days before Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread (v. 1). All four Gospel writers agree that Jesus died on a day known as the "Preparation Day" (Matt. 27:62; Mark 15:42; Luke 23:54; John 19:14, 31, 42), a term for what we today call Friday, the day before the Sabbath. According to Mark, the meal Jesus ate with His disciples the night before His crucifixion was a Passover meal. The fact that Jesus's last meal with His disciples was a Passover suggests that the meeting of the religious leaders described in 14:1–2 occurred on the Tuesday of that passion week. Since we noted above (see commentary on Mark 11:1–11) that the temple was cleansed on Monday according to Mark's chronology, it appears that the religious leaders hatched this plot on the day immediately following Jesus's dramatic action in the temple and the same day on which they disputed His authority (Mark 11–12). The leaders did not plan to arrest Jesus openly, understanding that such an action could very well lead to a riot (14:2).

The outer story cuts away to the inner story in v. 3. It focuses on an unnamed woman (who should be identified as Mary; see John 12:1–8), standing in contrast with Judas in the outer story. Jesus was in Bethany, about two miles (3 km) from Jerusalem, in the house of Simon the leper (Mark 14:3). The woman poured pure nard ointment on Jesus's head from an alabaster container. Nard came from India and Nepal and thus was very costly. Later in the story critics of the woman's act indicated that the nard could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii (v. 5). The denarius was a common laborer's daily wage, so this gift to Jesus was worth about one year's wages—impressive indeed.

The rest of the inner story (vv. 4–9) consists of responses to the woman's action. People criticized her. Speaking of the nard, they asked why it was wasted and noted that it could have been sold and the money given to the poor (vv. 4–5). Hidden beneath this seeming piety is actually a devaluation of Jesus. Anger mixed with piety is powerful medicine. It blinded their eyes from seeing the true worth of Jesus. The woman's act, for which she never gave an explanation, had the implication of preparing the Messiah for what was coming.

Jesus defended her in three steps. The first step was to rebuke the crowd. They were to leave her alone and not trouble her because she had done a good work for Him (v. 6). The second step was to explain why the crowd should not trouble her: there would always be poor people whom they could help, but they would not always have Jesus (physically) present to show their appreciation for Him (v. 7). It was a veiled passion prediction that indicated the temporal urgency of the woman's action. The third step was the elevation of the woman's action to gospel proclamation. Like the woman who gave her small offering to the temple and thereby gave more than everyone else, this woman's extravagant gift was redefined by Jesus as anointing His body for burial (v. 8). The Lord solemnly predicted what His followers must do in relation to the woman's act: wherever the gospel was preached throughout the world, what this woman did would be told in memory of her (v. 9). It is striking that this act of anointing Jesus is reported in all four Gospels, perhaps because of these very words of Jesus.

The inner story ends and the outer story resumes. Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve disciples (v. 10), went to the high priests to betray Jesus. Why he would do this is not stated. The Gospel of John fills in the detail that Judas wanted the money the perfume could be sold for (John 12:5–6). His greed and treachery stand in contrast to the beautiful liberality of the unnamed woman.

As in the other sandwich stories, there is dramatized irony here. It revolves around the concept of good, which comes up throughout this passage (and can also be translated as beautiful). Jesus called the woman's action good (Mark 14:6). He indicated that the crowd could always help the poor (v. 7). Furthermore, the woman's action would be part of the good news ("gospel"; v. 9). The good done by the woman contrasts with the selfish disciple Judas, who made a pact with the enemies of Jesus to betray his Master into the hands of His enemies. But Judas's nefarious deed did not end in evil. Jesus rose from the dead, and the good news of this (and the woman's deed) went out to all the world.

14:12–25. The Last Supper. This section of the passion narrative divides into two parts: the preparation for Jesus's Passover meal with His disciples, and the meal itself, often called the Last Supper. The preparation is described in vv. 12–16, and the supper itself in vv. 17–25. The narrative begins on the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb was sacrificed. In the Pentateuch, the day the Passover lamb was slaughtered was the fourteenth day of the first month, later called Nisan (Ex. 12:2, 6; Lev. 23:5–6; Num. 28:16–17; cf. Deut. 16:1–2, 6; see also Neh. 2:1; Esth. 3:7). The lamb was to be slaughtered just at the time of sunset according to Exodus 12 and Deuteronomy 16. But in Jesus's day thousands of lambs had to be slain and the slaughtering was started earlier on Nisan 14 in the afternoon. Technically, the Feast of Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread began at sunset when Nisan 15 began. However, in the first century, evidently the two feasts (Passover and Unleavened Bread) had become so intertwined that they were spoken of together, much as Mark indicates in Mark 14:12 (for more, see "The Year of the Crucifixion," p. 1460).

Jesus's disciples asked Him where they should go to prepare the Passover meal (v. 12). The text clearly assumed that the evening meal Jesus would eat was the Passover meal, even though after sunset would be Nisan 16. The remainder of the passage (vv. 13–16) reports Jesus's detailed instructions on how the disciples were to find the place for the supper and prepare the feast. The disciples went as Jesus commanded and found everything just as He had predicted.

The Passover meal divides into two parts, first the prediction of betrayal and then the institution of the Lord's Supper (vv. 17–25). Both parts include a prediction by Jesus, the first regarding the betrayer, fulfilled that very night, the second regarding Jesus not partaking again of the fruit of the vine until He would drink it new in the kingdom of God.

Jesus told the disciples that one of them—one who was eating with Him—would betray Him. Then, from the elements of the Passover meal, Jesus created a new festival for Christians. First He took bread, blessed it, and broke it, and then He handed it to His disciples, inviting them to eat of His body (v. 22). Then He took a cup, gave thanks over it, and told them all to drink from it; He told them that it was His blood of the covenant, which was *ekchynnomenon*—"shed" or "poured out"—for many (v. 24). These words and this service have been central to Christian understanding of the meaning of Jesus's death ever since that time.

Jesus's words here are symbolic in nature. In most of Scripture we expect literal language about literal events unless we have quite strong evidence to the contrary. Here is one of those locations. Jesus Himself was talking and breaking the bread and blessing the cup. These elements cannot literally be His actual body and blood because He was right there passing them to the disciples. The bread and cup therefore symbolize His body and blood. Similar to the phraseology in 10:45, Jesus's words here conveyed the idea of substitution. His blood was shed, or poured out, for many (14:24).

14:26–41. Gethsemane. Now begins the downward movement toward the darkness of the cross. After singing a paschal hymn, Jesus departed to the Mount of Olives with His disciples. He again predicted His passion, using a passage from Zechariah, which states that the Shepherd will be struck and the sheep scattered (Mark 14:27; cf. Zech. 13:7). This stark expression of disaster and separation is immediately followed by the prediction of hope—after His resurrection, He would go ahead of them to Galilee and meet them there (Mark 14:28).

Peter could not accept the vision Jesus set forth. He insisted that others might fall away, but he would not. Jesus met this arrogant claim with a shocking revelation: He declared that Peter would deny Him three times before the rooster crowed twice (v. 30). The fact that this is exactly what happened during that very night indicates that the other predictions that Jesus made will also come to pass. Peter remonstrated that he was willing to die with Jesus and would never deny Him, and all the other disciples agreed (v. 31).

Jesus proceeded to a place called Gethsemane (v. 32). The term "Gethsemane" means "oil press" and suggests that at this location there were likely olive trees and certainly a press for extracting olive oil. Jesus instructed the disciples to sit at an unspecified location, likely near the entrance of the garden, while He went to pray (v. 32). He took with Him Peter, James, and John, who had witnessed other events in His ministry without the other disciples. Two terms are used to describe the change in Jesus's state of mind: He began to be *ekthambeisthai* (from *ekthambeō*)—"amazed," "troubled," "deeply distressed," or "alarmed"—and *adēmonein* (from *adēmoneō*)—"troubled," "anxious," or "deeply distressed" (v. 33). These two terms together introduce the deep sense of terror and sadness that would characterize His experience in this garden.

Jesus, quoting from Psalm 42 and 43, referred to His soul being overwhelmed with sorrow, to which He added the deeper distress, that this sorrow was killing Him (Mark 14:34). In the two psalms, the repeated question is to inquire of oneself about why one is downcast and disquieted (Pss. 42:5, 11; 43:5). In both, the psalmist responds, "Hope in God."

But the picture of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane takes a different perspective even as it shares the Psalms' call on God. The depiction is of a man becoming ever more isolated from everyone else. After calling on the three disciples to keep alert, Jesus pressed on alone and fell to the earth to pray (Mark 14:35). At first we do not hear His words, only Mark's intimation of the content: He prayed that, if it were possible, "the hour might pass" from Him (v. 35). But then the meaning of "the hour" is filled out as Jesus prayed to His "Abba, Father" (v. 36).

This brief prayer has four characteristics. First, Jesus calls God "Father" (*'ab*). This is an Aramaic term that is a term of respect for a parent addressed by adult children. Second, the prayer recognizes God's ability to do anything and everything. It is Jesus's opening premise that God can solve any problem. Third, the request is simple and direct—respite from the cup of woe trembling in Jesus's hand. Jesus already spoke of this cup in 10:38, when addressing James and John and the request that they made to sit on His right and left. This cup in Gethsemane is not one of joy but one of suffering. Fourth, the fundamental point of the prayer is His submission—He was willing to fulfill the Father's will despite His own will to avoid the pain and suffering the sacrifice was causing. Jesus's distress facing the sacrifice was real. His recognition of what God could do was sure. His desire to avoid the anguish was clear. But His submission to the will of God was absolute. Jesus asked God to take away the cup of suffering, and God's answer was no, but Jesus submitted to that answer, allowing God's will to take precedent over His (cf. 1 Pet. 2:23).

However, the human heart desires support and solace in times of distress. Jesus returned to where the three disciples were three times, but he found them sleeping each time. But even then He sought to pardon their weakness; He knew that their spirit was willing, but their flesh was weak.

14:42–52. The Arrest. The betrayer's name is highlighted with the phrase "Judas, one of the twelve." We know well who he is without the reference to the inner circle of Jesus's followers, but it is that reference, repeated whenever his name appears in the passion narrative, that stresses the incongruity of such a close follower of Jesus betraying Him into the hands of His enemies. The arresting party came with Judas. They carried swords and wooden clubs and were sent by the chief priests, scribes, and elders (v. 43). Interestingly, the betrayer sought to conceal his treachery via the use of a deceptive sign—a kiss (v. 44).

Judas gave this sign while calling Jesus "Rabbi" (v. 45). Jesus was then immediately arrested, but not without the protest of Peter, who cut off the ear of Malchus, a servant of the high priest. Jesus then healed Malchus's ear (vv. 46–47; cf. Luke 22:51; John 18:10). Jesus derided the secretive nature of His arrest. The logic of Jesus's words resides in the contrast between the secretive arrest and His open teaching in the temple. He mocked the furtive actions of the mob. In secret they came to arrest an innocent man because they knew they could not get away with arresting Him in the light of day.

But Jesus also pointed to the higher purpose at work in His passion, indicating that the Scriptures predicted the events even now taking place (v. 49). Likely He was referring to Zechariah 13:7, which He had already quoted to His disciples (Mark 14:27). The religious leaders might arrest Jesus, but the will of God was coming to pass.

As though to second the veracity of His words and the reference to Zechariah 13, all the disciples fled from Jesus (Mark 14:50). Then the Gospel writer records a brief story that none of the other Gospels has. A young man who was following Jesus was wearing a linen garment, and Mark notes that it was covering his naked body. When some people tried to arrest him, he fled naked, leaving the garment behind (vv. 51–52). Many assume that this young man is John Mark himself, but there is no verification that this is the case. What the young man's hasty flight illustrates is the extreme disassociation and isolation that Jesus experienced in His passion. The young man left all to flee from Jesus, and Jesus was left all alone to face His enemies.

14:53–72. The Jewish Trial. This is the sixth and final sandwich story in Mark (see the previous stories 3:20–35; 5:21–43; 6:7–32; 11:12–25; 14:1–11). Like the earlier examples, opposite characters do similar actions or parallel characters do opposite actions, producing a dramatized irony that explains truths about Christology or discipleship. This story is the most dramatic of the six. In it two parallel characters, Jesus and Peter, do opposite actions.

The outer story is the narrative of Peter's denial of Jesus. It is introduced in 14:53–54 with Jesus brought to the religious leaders and Peter following at a distance. Peter's former expression of devotion did not lead him to stay close to Jesus. It was too dangerous. But he followed at a distance and entered the courtyard of the high priest's house or palace, where the Sanhedrin was gathering (v. 54).

Jesus's trial before the Jewish leaders came in three steps—the attempt to condemn Him (vv. 55–59), the interaction with the high priest (vv. 60–64), and the aftermath (v. 65). The attempt to condemn Jesus proved to be a colossal failure.

The Sanhedrin sought charges against Him but found none (v. 55). False witnesses gave testimony against Him, but their testimonies did not agree (v. 56). Some accused Him of a plot to destroy the temple and to replace it in three days with a temple made without hands, the language of which spoke of divine action (vv. 57–58; cf. Dan. 2:34–35, 44–45), but even this false testimony did not agree (Mark 14:59). It all seemed to be coming to naught.

At this point the high priest rose and addressed Jesus directly, asking Him specifically if He was the Christ (or Messiah), the Son of the Blessed (v. 61). To this direct question Jesus answered clearly, "I am." "And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand" of *dynameōs*—"the Power" or "the Mighty One"—and coming with "the clouds of heaven" (v. 62). It is the clearest statement by Jesus in the Gospel of Mark concerning His identity. Forthright and concise, quoting Daniel 7:13 and alluding to Psalm 110:1, it is the revelation of His messianic identity before national leaders.

The time for secrecy had passed. It was this declaration, together with His perceived threat to the temple (Mark 11:15–18; cf. 14:58), that brought His condemnation. As the preaching of Jesus at the beginning of His ministry pointed to the seventy-weeks prophecy of Daniel 9 (see Mark 1:14–15), so here, at His trial before the Jewish leaders, Jesus tied His messianic claim to the prophecy of Daniel 7:13 and its context with the depiction of worldly powers in the symbols of beasts standing against the will of the Most High and being defeated by the Almighty.

The high priest tore his garments to show his horror at the answer (Mark 14:63). Leviticus 10:6 specifies that the high priest and his male sons are not permitted to tear their clothes (see also Lev. 21:10). Later rabbinic tradition allowed a high priest to rend his garments only in a manner different than ordinary priests, from below instead of from above. Nevertheless, such an action contravenes Leviticus 10:6 and 21:10. Thus Mark may present some irony here that the condemning judge is himself condemned by his own actions.

The high priest declared that Jesus's own words condemned Him, and the rest of the assembly agreed (Mark 14:63–64). To modern ears, this system of justice seems totally unfair. But in Jesus's day when a defendant was put under oath he had to respond. If he remained silent he was considered guilty. Hence, Jesus's response would be taken as valid testimony in the trial.

But on what grounds would His testimony be counted as blasphemy by the Sanhedrin? Scholars have debated this question a great deal. Some think that Jesus pronounced the Tetragrammaton (YHWH—Yahweh, God's holy name), which, according to tradition, only the high priest was to say on the Day of Atonement. But many documents from the time of Jesus used the term "blasphemy" simply to mean insult or slander. As we will see in commenting on the story regarding Peter's denial, there is a parallel between Peter's cursing (v. 71) and the high priest's charge of blasphemy against Jesus. This parallelism narrows the possibilities for what the charge of blasphemy can mean here in Mark. It appears that the charge of blasphemy was the high priest's condemnation of Jesus's claim to authority next to that of God (v. 62). The high priest took this as an insult to the Almighty and called for the death sentence on this basis.

It is very significant that the individuals who struck the blindfolded Jesus called on Him to prophesy. We will see below that this is a central point of the irony of the passage.

The narrative then returns to the story of Peter (vv. 66–72). The earliest manuscripts put it more simply, "Surely you are from them, for you also are a Galilean." Likely it was Peter's Galilean accent that gave him away to these Jerusalem dwellers.

A servant girl of the high priest asserted that Peter was one of Jesus's disciples—once to Peter himself and later to those around him (vv. 66–67, 69). But both times Peter denied knowing Jesus (vv. 68, 70). After these denials Peter sensed that he must make a strong showing to escape recognition and possible arrest. At the next accusation, he began to curse and swear that He did not know Jesus (vv. 70–71). The verb "to curse" is *anathematizō*, which means "to put under a curse" or "to invoke consequences if what one says is not true." The term for "swear" is *omnyō*, which means "to take an oath" and contains the idea of invoking a deity to affirm the truth of a statement, with the implied invitation for punishment if it is not true. Thus, Peter called God as witness to the truth of his statement.

A rooster crowed a second time, and Peter remembered Jesus's words that he would deny Him before the rooster had crowed twice (v. 72; cf. v. 30). It all happened just as Jesus had predicted, and the memory came flooding back on Peter as the words of denial were on his lips.

It is a deeply sorrowful scene of this man coming to a sudden self-understanding, recognizing his failure. But these verses contain a much deeper message arising from the irony of the story. The irony is found in the closing words of Jesus's trial in comparison with the portrayal of Peter's denial. The servants struck Jesus and said "Prophesy!" It was mockery meant to illustrate His powerlessness before His accusers. However, it was at that very time that one of His prophecies (v. 30) was being exactly fulfilled in the denial of one of His closest disciples. The irony could not be more pointed—by denying his Master, Peter fulfilled His prophecy, thereby proving that He was the Messiah.

15:1–20. The Roman Trial. This passage divides into three parts: Pilate interrogates Jesus (vv. 1–5), Pilate questions the crowd about Barabbas and Jesus (vv. 6–15), and Jesus is mocked by the soldiers (vv. 16–20). Verse 1 summarizes what has already been decided by the Sanhedrin the night before and indicates the rush to take Jesus to the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate.

Pilate was governor, or more accurately prefect, of Judea from A.D. 26 to 36. He was a ruthless man who was hated and feared by the Jewish people. Luke 13:1 tells of him killing a group of people even as they offered sacrifices to God. The Jews did not have the legal right to impose the death penalty, so they brought Jesus to Pilate for sentencing. Again, this fulfilled Jesus's prediction about His passion (Mark 10:33–34).

Pilate began to directly question Jesus about being king of the Jews (15:2). This is the first use of this title in Mark. It reappears later in this trial and at the cross as the title above Jesus's head. This title was the Gentile equivalent of the Jewish title Messiah ("anointed one") since mainly it was kings who were anointed in the OT system. Jesus seemed to respond in the affirmative, but less strongly than at His Jewish trial: *sy legeis*—"It is as you say," or "You have said so" (v. 2). The religious leaders accused Jesus of many things, and Pilate was amazed when Jesus did not respond (15:3–5).

At this point the Evangelist broke away to describe a custom connected with the Passover feast where the Roman governor would release a prisoner as requested by the people (v. 6). Pilate recognized the envious motives of the priests, so he asked the crowd if they wanted him to release the king of the Jews, but the priests persuaded the crowd to ask for the release of Barabbas, a rebel and murder (vv. 9–11). It is striking that the pagan governor wanted to release Jesus, while the religious leaders wanted a murderer set free. The irony of this presentation is meant to grab our attention.

Pilate continued his interrogation of the crowd by asking the people what should be done with a prisoner whom they called their king, seemingly revealing his desire to release Jesus (v. 12). The response of the crowd is shocking, since the reader would expect "Release Him!" but instead they cried, "Crucify Him!" (v. 13). Pilate appeared taken aback by the suggestion and queried once again why he should execute Jesus without knowing of any *kakon*—"evil" or "crime"—He had done, but the crowd seemed beyond reasoning at this point and simply cried out more vehemently for crucifixion (v. 14).

Verse 13 contains the first use of the verb "to crucify" in the Gospel of Mark. Crucifixion was reserved for traitors and criminals of the worst sort. Invented by the Persians, it was used by the Romans to intimidate the populations under their rule. It was a slow, excruciating way to die. Little blood was lost in the process of crucifixion and death could take days to occur. Crucified individuals were exposed to the elements without food and with little, if anything, to drink. If a person were nailed to the cross, breathing and all movement was extremely painful and tiring.

Pilate then acquiesced to the desires of the crowd. He released Barabbas, had Jesus flogged (or scourged), and handed him over to be crucified. Pilate's desire to release Jesus was plain enough from the way he formulated his questions to the crowd, but he never said, "I will release Jesus." His indecisive manner of address and the fact that he questioned the crowd concerning the case indicates an irresolute attitude that the priests took advantage of.

What follows is an arresting depiction in which Jesus was totally passive as the soldiers heaped dishonor on Him. Mark calls the place the Praetorium (v. 16), likely at Herod's palace on the western side of the city near what is now called the Jaffa Gate. Mark tells us that the entire battalion came together for the mockery (v. 16). This would be a group of two hundred to six hundred men. To dishonor Jesus, the soldiers wrapped Him in a purple robe and placed a crown of thorns on His head (v. 17). They praised Him derisively as king of the Jews and struck Him over the head with a staff (vv. 18–19). They spit on Him and bowed before Him in mock worship (v. 19). Commentators point out that the scene was like the Caesar on parade being honored by his troops, though in this case the honor was turned to dishonor. After the mockery, the soldiers led Jesus out to be crucified (v. 20).

15:21–47. The Crucifixion and Burial. This scene comes in five successive parts: the movement to Golgotha (vv. 21–22), the crucifixion process (vv. 23–28), the mocking of Jesus by the bystanders (vv. 29–32), Jesus's death (vv. 33–39), and finally His burial (vv. 40–47). Like the scene of the mocking by the soldiers, the story is told in a candid manner with hardly any commentary.

The custom of the Romans was that those condemned carried their own crosses to the place of crucifixion. Mark does not narrate Jesus doing this, though it is assumed based on what happened next. As the soldiers took Jesus away, they came across a man named Simon of Cyrene coming in from the fields and commanded him to carry Jesus's cross (v. 21).

What Simon carried for Jesus was probably the large crossbeam of the cross, called the *patibulum*. The upright portion of the cross, called the *staticulum* or *stipes*, was typically left at the place of crucifixion in the ground. The *patibulum* was heavy, typically between thirty and forty pounds (13–18 kg), but could range as high as 125 pounds (57 kg). Jesus had been without sleep and food since the Last Supper. He had been tried twice and beaten and mocked by the Romans, hence the need for someone else to carry His cross.

The soldiers took Jesus to a place called Golgotha (v. 22), which Mark interprets as meaning the place of the skull. We know from elsewhere in the NT that this site was outside the city walls (cf. John 19:20; Heb. 13:11–13). The Romans would crucify people near busy roads to intimidate the local populace. The most likely spot for Golgotha is inside what is today the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, which in Jesus's day was a location outside the city wall.

The Romans typically crucified people naked to add to their shame. However, the Jews did not agree with public nakedness, and so a loin cloth might have been left in place. That Jesus was hated by the Jewish religious leadership may suggest that He indeed was crucified naked. At Golgotha the soldiers offered Jesus a drink of wine mixed with myrrh (Mark 15:23), most likely an act of mercy meant to deaden the pain of crucifixion. Jesus refused the drink. Mark does not tell us why, but it is reasonable to conclude that He chose to keep His mind sharp and clear during those crucial events in the history of salvation.

The condemned person could be tied or nailed to the cross or both. From the story of Thomas in John 20, we know that Jesus was nailed to the cross. Each hand of the condemned person would be nailed to the cross at the base of the palm between the carpal bones or between the radius and carpal bones, which could hold the weight of the body. The nail would crush or sever the median nerve that transverses the center of the wrist but would not sever any major blood vessels. The crushed or severed nerve would cause fiery pain to shoot through the arms. As stated earlier, crucifixion was not terribly bloody, and a person might survive on the cross for days.

Breathing for a crucified individual was difficult. With hands outstretched and the weight of the body suspended from the wrists, the normal breathing process was hampered. Whereas normal breathing involves active inspiration and passive exhalation, in crucifixion this is reversed. As a result, to get a good deep breath crucified persons had to press upward on their nailed feet and adduct their shoulders while flexing their arms around the nails in the wrists. It was extremely painful, with shooting pains in the arms from the crushed or severed median nerves. Exhaustion asphyxia was typically one of the causes of death.

Mark 15:24 states that the soldiers divided Jesus's garments among them and cast lots to decide which portion of them each one would obtain. These words reference Psalm 22:18. Other references to Psalm 22 occur in Mark 15:29 (Ps. 22:7—mocking and wagging of heads) and in Mark 15:34 (Ps. 22:1—the cry of dereliction). These words from the OT illustrate that God's will was coming to pass at the cross.

Jesus was crucified at the third hour (Mark 15:25), approximately 9:00 a.m. He survived on the cross only about six hours, dying at approximately 3:00 p.m. (v. 34). An inscription of the charge against Him read, "The King of the Jews" (v. 26). Like Luke (23:38), Mark emphasizes the kingship (Messiah) aspect of the full inscription ("Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews," John 19:19). Two rebels, probably companions of Barabbas, were crucified with Jesus, one on the right and the other on the left (Mark 15:27). We are reminded of the exchange between Jesus, James, and John in Mark 10:35–40 about the right and left. He said they did not know what they were asking. Now it is apparent what the cup and baptism in Mark 10:38 referred to—they were the cross. (Mark 15:28 does not appear in some manuscripts, although it does show up in manuscripts of the sixth through tenth centuries and adds words from Isaiah 53:12.)

The passersby insulted Jesus by mocking the words attributed to Him at His trial—that He would destroy the temple and build it in three days. What could not be proven in a private trial became the basis of shaming in public, as though it had been proven. The mockers called on Jesus to save Himself by coming down from the cross. His failure to do so indicated to them that He was incapable of fulfilling the prediction to destroy and rebuild the temple.

The high priests and scribes also mocked Him, saying that Jesus saved others but could not save Himself. The leaders focused on Jesus's powerlessness, His inability to save Himself. To emphasize this fact, they made reference to His past—"He saved others." These short words were meant to summarize His ministry to others; He could help them but was now powerless to save Himself. But the deep irony in these words is that the enemies of Jesus, in the very act of mocking Him, were declaring Him to be someone who helped or saved others—a savior. The Evangelist is likely pointing the reader to an even deeper ironic reality—the reason He could (and does) save others is because He *would not* save Himself from death on the cross. The cross is thus depicted as a saving or atoning event.

In cutting sarcasm, the religious leaders piled up the christological titles ("Christ," or "Messiah," the king of Israel), titles of honor, to shame Jesus. They called on Him to come down from the cross so that they could see and believe. It is similar to the request for a sign from heaven that the Pharisees made in Mark 8:11–13. Jesus had refused to give any sign then, and it was the same here. He would not come down from the cross to create belief. Belief must precede demonstration (cf. 9:14–29).

Mark tells us that darkness came over the whole land from the sixth hour until the ninth hour. It appears as though all nature was in mourning at the death of Jesus. At the darkest hour, Jesus cried out, "*Elōi, Elōi, lama sabachthani?*" (15:34). This is Aramaic, and Mark translates it as Him calling out to God, asking why He has been forsaken. It is a quotation from Psalm 22:1. This psalm is striking for its movement back and forth between deep sorrow and heartfelt praise and worship. These are Jesus's dying words in the Gospel of Mark, telling us that Jesus was praying. Just as in Gethsemane, here on the cross He cried out to God in the darkness.

Mark makes a distinct connection between the scene of the cross and Jesus's baptism. The parallels are best depicted in tabular form, as follows (see commentary on Mark 1:9–13):

Mark 1:9–11	**Mark 15:34–39**
John baptizes Jesus	Jesus's baptism (cf. 10:38)
John the Elijah figure (cf. 9:11–13)	Crowd thinks He is calling Elijah
Heavens split (*schizō*)	Veil split (*schizō*)
Spirit descends (*pneuma*)	Jesus expires (*ekpneō*)
God's voice: "Beloved Son"	Centurion: "Son of God"

These five interconnections require explanation. First, the baptism of Jesus in Mark was the initiation of His messianic ministry, where God the Father affirmed His Son and the Spirit descended on the baptized Lord. In Mark 10 Jesus spoke to James and John of His baptism, pointing not back to John's action but forward to a time of suffering. As the cup of suffering began in Gethsemane, it appeared that the baptism must be the cross, the ultimate sacrifice that was a ransom for many (10:45).

Second, John the Baptist is clearly the Elijah figure Jesus was talking about in Mark 9:11–13 (cf. Matt. 17:10–13). Surprisingly, at the cross Elijah was mentioned when in Mark 15:35–36 some of the bystanders misunderstood Jesus's cry, thinking that instead of calling "My God" (Aram. *'elahi*), He was calling to Elijah (Aram. *'eliyah*). Thus an Elijah figure is present in both chapters 1 and 15.

Third, the verb for "split," *schizō*, appears only twice in the Gospel of Mark (1:10, at Jesus's baptism; and 15:38, when the temple veil is torn in two from top to bottom). Fourth, the Holy Spirit (*pneuma*) descended on Jesus at His baptism (1:10), and at the cross Jesus expired (*ekpneō*—from the same root as *pneuma*). As the Spirit's descent marked the beginning of Jesus's ministry, so Jesus's death, His expiration, on the cross marked the completion of His ministry.

Finally, God's voice was heard speaking to Jesus at His baptism, calling Him the Son with whom He was "well pleased" (1:11), and the centurion echoed this by declaring that this man was indeed the Son of God (15:39).

These five parallels make it quite certain that the Evangelist is tying together Jesus's baptism with the scene of His death. The parallels point to the centrality of the cross as the climax of

Jesus's ministry, the place where He gave His life as "a ransom for many" (10:45). As the baptism marked the beginning of Jesus's ministry, so the cross marked the culmination.

The burial of Jesus (Mark 15:40-47) is presented in two steps. First, reference is made to a group of women who accompanied Jesus and His disciples from Galilee and ministered to their needs (see John 19:16b-27). These three would see the empty tomb on Sunday morning, hence their names are noted and repeated several times in the coming verses.

The second step in the burial story is a surprise. Joseph of Arimathea, who Mark notes was a prominent member of the Sanhedrin, "who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God" (Mark 15:43), came and asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Joseph did not appear prior to this in Mark, nor will he be mentioned after the burial. No motives were mentioned for Joseph's action. His courage in going to Pilate was noted, and his character is sterling since Mark notes that he was waiting for the kingdom of God. He was obviously a man of influence with access to the governor. This lone influential man showing respect for Jesus at the end of His life illustrates that the religious leaders were not all against Jesus. From the other Synoptic Gospels we also know that Matthew refers to Joseph as "a disciple" (Matt. 27:57). Luke says that he was a good and just person and that he had not consented to the decision of the Sanhedrin to condemn Jesus (Luke 23:50-51). John mentions that Joseph was a secret disciple of Jesus (John 19:38).

When Joseph requested the body, Pilate was surprised that Jesus was already dead (Mark 15:44). Since life typically slowly ebbed away on the cross, it was important to verify the demise. Pilate immediately sought verification from the centurion before allowing Joseph to take the body of Jesus (vv. 44–45). It is an important fact that Jesus's death was certified by the Roman centurion on duty at Golgotha.

Mark describes five actions that Joseph took in burying Jesus: he brought a linen cloth, took down Jesus's body, wrapped it in the linen, placed Him in a tomb, and rolled a stone before the door of the tomb (v. 46; regarding the location of the tomb, see in "Archaeology and the Bible," p. 91). It is all told briefly and concisely in each case with Joseph as the sole individual named. Others were involved, since 16:6 notes a plural "they" placed Jesus's body in the tomb. But Joseph is referenced as the central and most influential person involved. In closing, Mark notes that two women, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joses/Joseph (Matt. 27:56), watched where Jesus was buried (v. 47).

16:1–7. The Resurrection. The final chapter of Mark begins with a gap in time—there is mention of the fact that the Sabbath had ended (v. 1). It is a small point in the text but an important one theologically. Nothing occurred on the Sabbath, and so Mark passed over it with this brief phrase. Why does he do so? It was because everyone rested on the Sabbath (cf. Luke 23:56). Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses/Joseph (Matt. 27:56), and Salome (probably the mother of James and John; see Matt. 20:17–28) bought spices to anoint Jesus. They could not buy the spices on Friday after sunset with the beginning of the Sabbath. Therefore, they bought them on Saturday night, after the Sabbath ended, with the intention of coming to the tomb on Sunday morning. Thus, the keeping of the Sabbath is what brought the women to the tomb on the first day of the week.

It is the same three women who watched Jesus die who came early on Sunday to the tomb. Mark notes that they came to the tomb early in the morning (on the first day of the week) just after sunrise (Mark 16:1–2). They had discussed the problem of asking someone to roll away the stone from the tomb, but when they arrived, they saw that it had already been removed. A young man inside the tomb addressed them with the amazing news that Jesus had been raised from the dead! There is no better news than this!

These verses have all the characteristics of a theophany—the appearance of a heavenly being to people. Theophanies in Scripture have five distinctive characteristics: (1) the appearance of the heavenly being, (2) human awe/fear, (3) words from the heavenly being, "do not fear!" (4) divine revelation, and (5) human response to the revelation.

It is the development of this common movement in a theophany with an unusual ending in Mark that guides our understanding of the passage. The signs of the appearance of the heavenly being are first seen in the large stone rolled away, suggesting supernatural intervention. The sense of the numinous is compounded by finding not Jesus in the tomb but instead a young man dressed in a white robe. The women were frightened, and the young man, in accordance with typical theophany style, tells them not to fear (v. 5).

The young man knows why the women have come and gives them a revelation that will change the world forever. Jesus, he says, is not here; He is risen from the dead (v. 6). Several indicators point to the young man being an angel—the numinous qualities of the encounter, his knowledge of why the women came and what happened, and the reference to the women's fear. He told the women to look at the place where the body of Jesus used to be, and then he told them to go tell the disciples, and Peter, that He would meet them in Galilee just as He said He would (v. 7; see 14:28).

16:8. The Ending of Mark. But now comes the unusual twist. Verse 8 is the women's response and the last verse in the earliest manuscripts of Mark's Gospel: the women left quickly, fled from the tomb, and said nothing to anyone because they were afraid (v. 8). It is totally understandable on a human level to be frightened by such an event. From the other Gospels, we know that their silence was temporary. They eventually told the disciples the good news (Matt. 28:8, Luke 24:10; John 20:2). Some manuscripts of Mark end with Mark 16:8; others continue and contain vv. 9–20. The oldest manuscripts that have Mark 16 come from the fourth century A.D. and do not have the longer ending. Early church leaders Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 150–215) and Origen (A.D. 185–254) did not know the longer ending. Eusebius (A.D. 260–340) and Jerome (A.D. 347–420) indicate that the longer ending was missing from most of the manuscripts of Mark they knew.

We also note that v. 9 does not fit well with vv. 1–8 since it has a change of subject (women in v. 8, Mary in v. 9) and the telling of the resurrection story starts over again. Furthermore, a number of words in vv. 9–20 are found nowhere else in Mark. While many later manuscripts do have vv. 9–20, it is hard to explain why our earliest manuscripts do not. Scribes had a tendency to expand texts more than to subtract from them. And some of the manuscripts that include vv. 9–20 give evidence that these verses were not part of at least some of the manuscripts the scribe was copying from. We will speak more about vv. 9–20 below.

But if Mark ends at 16:8, what is the meaning of such an odd ending to the Gospel story? Throughout Mark we have seen a revelation/secrecy motif in which Jesus typically called on people to remain silent, but they went out and told about Him. Part of the message of the revelation/secrecy theme is that the good news about Jesus cannot be hidden. The truth will come out. People do not seem able to keep quiet about Him.

So what does this unusual ending mean? It seems that the Evangelist Mark meant to leave the reader to fill in the ending of his Gospel. It fits perfectly with his revelation/secrecy motif. Throughout the Gospel, Jesus had been telling people to keep quiet about who He was, and they disobeyed and told.

It seems that the Evangelist is driving home the point that the reader must go and tell. Mark's two great divisions of the gospel story meet at this point. The two great questions—who is Jesus and where is He going—have been answered. He is the Messiah and He goes to the cross to save humanity. Now that He has risen from the dead, the message of who He is and what Christian life is about (taking the cross and following Jesus, 8:34–38) must go out to the entire world. Mark's appeal is that the reader be just such a disciple.

16:9–20
Another Ending

These verses parallel many in the other Gospels and other passages in the NT. The story of Mary Magdalene (vv. 9–11) has affinities to Luke 24 and John 20. The two disciples who saw Jesus in the country (Mark 16:12–13) parallel those on the walk to Emmaus in Luke 24. Mark 16:14, in which Jesus rebukes the disciples' unbelief, is parallel to John 20, where Thomas did not believe, and to Luke 24, where Jesus reprimanded the disciples' surprise and questioning when they saw Him. The commission to preach the gospel in Mark 16:15 parallels the Great Commission in Matthew 28. The reference to baptism and salvation in Mark 16:16 echoes 1 Peter 3:21. The signs that follow believers mentioned in Mark 16:17–18 echo Hebrews 2:4 and Acts 8, 19, and 28. Finally, the reference to Jesus's ascension and the gospel going out to the world in Mark 16:19–20 parallels Luke 24:50–53 and Acts 1:9–11 as well as the entire book of Acts.

In vv. 9–11 the first appearance of the risen Lord is noted. He appeared to Mary Magdalene, one of the women noted earlier in chapter 16. She went and reported the appearance to the disciples, but they did not believe her (v. 11). There is a strong emphasis on the disciples' unbelief in vv. 9–14. They first disbelieved Mary. Then when the two disciples who saw Jesus in the country came and reported their meeting with Jesus, again the disciples did not believe (v. 13).

Finally Jesus appeared to the eleven disciples (v. 14). He rebuked both their unbelief and their hardness of heart. These characteristics are linked then to the experiences of the witnesses who saw and then reported their experiences. The emphasis rests on trusting those who have seen and reliably reported what they saw. It is quite reminiscent of the ending of John, where Jesus says, "blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 20:29).

In Mark 16:15–16, Jesus immediately turned to giving the disciples the gospel commission: They were told to go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to all of creation. Those who believed and were baptized would be saved, but those who did not believe would be condemned (v. 16). The call was to go everywhere without exception and share the good news. Reaction to the evangelists would be either belief or unbelief. Jesus was clear about the outcome. It was no less than a matter of salvation and life or of damnation and eternal loss.

In vv. 17–18, Jesus described the supernatural signs that would accompany the missionaries—casting out demons, speaking in new languages, being unhurt by poisonous snakes and poisons. Many of these predictions find their fulfillment in the experience of the early church—new languages at Pentecost (Acts 2), exorcisms of demons (Acts 8), Paul unhurt by a viper (Acts 28), and Peter and Paul healing the sick (Acts 3, 5, 9, 19, and 28). Sometimes these verses in Mark are used to affirm dangerous and unwarranted actions, such as believers handling poisonous snakes as a show of supposed faith. But such actions ignore the context in which Jesus said these words. The Gospel of Mark is speaking of missionaries taking the gospel message out to unbelievers and the risks that they might face in their mission experience. Missionaries are not to seek trouble or invite danger. Their mission is to share the message of the gospel with all they meet. Dangers that come their way are to be confronted in the name of Jesus as part of the mission.

Mark 16:19–20 has a wide-angle view of the kingdom of God. The Lord Jesus ascended into heaven and sat at the right hand of God, the risen Lord on His throne (v. 19). The disciples took up their mission and went out everywhere preaching (v. 20). The Gospel ends with a wonderful synergy between the Lord and His disciples. The disciples share the message, and the Lord confirms their message with miraculous signs.

As in the other Gospels, the call of the risen Lord is for His followers to fulfill the mission He entrusted to them. They have a message of hope—the Lord is raised and soon to return in glory—and it should be proclaimed throughout the world while waiting for His glorious appearance.

LUKE

INTRODUCTION

Title and Authorship. The earliest copy of this Gospel dates to the end of the second century. Although the author does not identify himself by name within the book itself, the scribes who copied the book describe it (in a postscript at the end of the book, not appearing in modern translations) as the "Gospel according to Luke." This title or a similar variation of it is present in all known copies.

The Gospel of Luke, like the other canonical Gospels, is technically anonymous. The unanimous consensus of Christian tradition, however, identifies the author as Luke, the traveling companion of Paul. This attribution finds support in the book of Acts, which identifies both works as coming from the same author (see Acts 1:1). The presence of several "we" passages in Acts also suggests the author was one of Paul's traveling companions (Acts 16:10–17; 20:5—21:18; 27:1—28:16). Taken together with Paul's references to Luke (Col. 4:14; 2 Tim. 4:11; Philem. 24) as one of his frequent companions and the author's interest in the details of Christ's healings, we may conclude that Luke, the doctor whom Paul names in Colossians 4:14, was the author of the Gospel that bears his name. Nevertheless, as he indicates in the opening verses, he was not acquainted with Jesus in person but relied on the accounts of eyewitnesses for his information. The time he spent interviewing the earliest followers of Jesus, including perhaps His mother and His brothers (cf. Acts 1:14), perhaps during the time Paul was imprisoned in Caesarea (cf. Acts 24:26–27; 27:1), enabled Luke to provide an authentic and reliable account of the life and teachings of Jesus. No doubt Luke's considerable literary capacity and his later connection with Paul further contributed to the recognition of the Gospel's apostolic origin and its inclusion in the NT canon.

Two facts suggest that Luke was a Gentile: his Gospel shows special sensitivity to Gentile-related concerns, and Paul lists Luke separately from other fellow Jewish workers (see Col. 4:11–14). Evidence of this can be seen in his excellent command of Greek. His familiarity with the Greek translation of the OT known as the Septuagint (LXX), evidenced from the numerous quotations and allusions to it throughout his two works, has suggested to some that Luke may first have been a convert to Judaism, either as a proselyte or as one of the Gentile God-fearers who frequently attended synagogue.

Date. Since the Gospel writers do not identify themselves or the date and place of their writing, modern scholars have to carefully exam each Gospel, looking for possible clues that might connect the time of writing with other events that can be more firmly determined, or at least suggest a more general time frame. In the case of the Gospel of the Luke, most modern scholars have relied on two pieces of evidence that have led to the conclusion that this Gospel was written sometime in either the early to mid-60s or perhaps a decade or so later in the 70s. The evidence relied on for these two dates is the connection of this Gospel with its companion volume, the book of Acts (Acts 1:1; cf. Luke 1:1–4), and also the strong literary relationship it shares with Matthew and Mark, the two other Synoptic Gospels (regarding literary features, see Luke: Introduction). Some critical scholars have argued for a much later date in the second century. Their views, however, are often based on the assumptions that predictive prophecy is impossible and that the theology of Luke reflects a later time period in church history. These views do not merit extensive consideration because they are based more on speculation than on actual evidence.

Evidence for a date in the early to mid-60s is generally based on the connection of the Gospel with the author's companion book of Acts, which serves as its sequel (Acts 1:1; cf. Luke 1:1–4). Since Acts takes up the story where the Gospel ends (cf. Luke 24:46–53) and concludes before Paul's martyrdom (Acts 28:30–31), some conclude this indicates that both volumes were completed before Paul's death. The lack of any reference to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 in Acts also supports the impression that it was written prior to that date.

The main reason that other scholars date Luke later is his acknowledgment of having consulted "many" other Gospel writers (Luke 1:1) in the process of writing his own. These "other" Gospels most certainly include Matthew and Mark. In fact, Mark's Gospel appears to have been a significant source for Luke, who was not an eyewitness of the ministry of Jesus, since nearly 40 percent of Mark appears in his Gospel—and often word for word. This strongly suggests that Luke was written sometime after the completion of Mark's Gospel, which was most likely written in the mid-60s, though some argue for an earlier date (see Mark: Introduction).

While Acts does end before A.D. 70, it does not necessarily mean that the Gospel of Luke and Acts were composed before that time. While Acts includes stories of Peter and Paul, the primary concern of Acts is the spread of the gospel to Jews and Gentiles across the Mediterranean world (Acts 1:7–8). In fact, that is the climax of the story—Paul's proclamation of the gospel in Rome (Acts 28:28). If the story had ended with the death of Paul and the fall of Jerusalem, the focus of the book would have changed. So although the events in Acts end around the year A.D. 62, this does not require that either Luke or Acts was written at that time. At the same time, the largely positive aspect reflected in Luke's account of Roman rule suggests that his two-volume work was most likely written before the wider outbreak of persecution against Christians that appears to have begun during the reign of Domitian (A.D. 81–96). To some this suggests that Luke's two-volume work was composed sometime in the 70s. Since the evidence for either the early or slightly later date of the Gospel of Luke cannot be demonstrated incontrovertibly, it is probably best not to be overly dogmatic about the matter and to allow for the possibility of a broader time period for when it was written, which would be sometime after A.D. 60 but before A.D. 70.

Backgrounds. Luke informs his readers that "many" had already written a narrative account of what had been fulfilled among the believers. He states that his purpose is to compose an account of all that Jesus had begun to do and teach (Luke 1:1, 3; Acts 1:1) in order that they would "know the certainty" of what they had been taught (Luke 1:4). Although familiar with the Gospel story penned by others, Luke's own information stemmed from eyewitnesses and ministers/servants (v. 2), which refers to those who were specifically entrusted with conveying accurate information regarding the ministry and teachings of Jesus (see commentary on Luke 1:1–4). He also claims to have carefully investigated and understood everything from the beginning (v. 3). In addition, his time in Rome with John Mark, Paul (Col. 4:10, 14), and, perhaps, Peter (cf. 1 Pet. 5:13) would have afforded him ample opportunity to base this Gospel narrative on a variety of reliable sources.

The early chapters of Luke introduce the reader to the Jewish world in which Jesus was born, with its ceremonies and sacrifices, and sensitively describe Israel's hope of salvation. Throughout the Gospel, Luke shows himself to be thoroughly familiar with the Septuagint, including its terminology, manner of expression, and interconnections. He also manifests some interest in historical veracity, dating key events in accordance with the reigns of kings and the Jewish religious calendar (Luke 3:1–2; 22:1; Acts 2:1). Luke also manifests a keen awareness of the larger Greco-Roman world in accordance with the literary conventions of the time.

Theology and Purpose. The Gospel of Luke, as the first part of a larger narrative project that includes Acts, is unique in its portrayal of Jesus. The author, in the book of Acts, shows the work of Jesus continuing to make an impact in the world through the life and rapidly expanding footprint of the early church. The person and message of Jesus dominate the theology of Luke.

1. *Prophetic Fulfillment.* As already mentioned, Luke makes his faith-building purpose very clear from the outset (1:4). The time of which he writes is a time of *prophetic fulfillment*, announced by angelic visitants to Zacharias (also Zechariah), the father of John the Baptist, and to Mary, the mother of Jesus (1:8–38). John was to precede the Lord and prepare the way for Him (v. 76; cf. Mal. 3:1), and Jesus—the *anatolē* ("dawn," "sunrise," or "dayspring") from heaven—would come to enlighten those who are in darkness and the shadow of death (Luke 1:78–79; cf. Is. 9:2). Simeon recognized the child as the promised Christ (Luke 2:25–32), as did the prophetess Anna (vv. 36–38). Jesus, as the Spirit-anointed One (4:18; cf. Is. 60:1–2), announced that Isaiah's prophecy was being fulfilled by His ministry of preaching and

healing (Luke 4:21), and He affirmed that everything written about Him "must be fulfilled" (24:44; cf. 22:37). The correlation between promise and fulfillment places the emphasis on the hope that unifies the two.

2. *Salvation and Healing.* Connected to prophetic fulfillment is the theme of *salvation*. Mary rejoiced in "God my Savior," and Zacharias announced that God "has raised up a horn of salvation" to save Israel from its enemies (Luke 1:47, 69, 71) and to provide the knowledge of salvation for His people through the forgiveness of their sins (v. 77). Luke quotes the promise in Isaiah that all people (lit. "all flesh") will see salvation from God (3:6; cf. Is. 40:5, LXX). Salvation terminology is found in Luke almost twice as often as in either Matthew or Mark.

The healing ministry of Jesus, especially to non-Jews, is also prominent as part of His work of salvation. Jesus mentions Naaman's cleansing from leprosy (Luke 4:27) as typical of the work He will do. Later, He heals ten lepers (17:11–19), one of whom was a Samaritan, and a centurion's slave (7:1–10), and He especially noted their faith (7:9; 17:19). Luke shows particular interest in those whom Jesus heals *as people* and avoids most of the time labeling them in terms of their disease, for example, as a "paralytic" or a "leper" (e.g., 5:18, 24; 17:12). He also adds details for understanding the impact of illness and death on families: the dead boy from Nain was a widow's only son (7:12); the demon-possessed boy was his father's only child (9:38); the dead girl was Jairus's only daughter, just twelve years old (8:42). All four Gospels describe a disciple slicing off the ear of the high priest's servant, but only in Luke do we learn that Jesus was unwilling to leave the man earless (22:51). By virtue of His birth and baptism, Jesus is Spirit-filled, Spirit-led, and Spirit-empowered to heal as well as to preach (1:35; 4:1, 14, 18–19). There is no apparent conflict between preaching and healing since Jesus heals by the power of the word (4:39; 18:42) but also by the power of the Spirit (5:17; 6:19; 8:46).

3. *The Cosmic Conflict between Christ and Satan.* This topic is vividly highlighted in Luke. Jesus saw Satan's "fall" (10:18). His authority over and expulsion of demons (also experienced by the disciples; 9:6; 10:9, 17, 19) signifies the intrusion of God's kingdom and its clash with Satan's kingdom (11:18, 20). This theme permeates both Luke (13:16; 22:3, 31) and Acts (5:3, 9; 13:8–10; 26:18). The presence of the kingdom is seen in how Jesus heals people from the oppressive effects of unclean and evil "spirits" (Luke 6:18; 7:21; 8:2; 9:42; 13:11–14; cf. Acts 5:16). It is the healing of all who were under the tyranny of the devil (Acts 10:38) that enables people to share in the eschatological salvation that Jesus brings and that they will experience in fullness at His return. Meanwhile the church witnesses to the ascension of the risen Lord and proclaims the blessed hope of His return. Therefore the church exists between a hope that was realized in the first coming of the Messiah and a hope that anticipates a cosmic reunion that will bring the cosmic conflict to an end.

4. *Jesus and the Temple.* The Gospel of Luke begins and ends in *the temple*, as the locus of God's presence on earth (1:8; 24:53). Jesus's first actions, which anticipate His future ministry, take place there, as does the devil's final temptation (2:46; 4:9). In Gethsemane, Jesus refers to His being in the temple daily (22:53). Nevertheless, its days are numbered, as the Olivet Discourse and the rending of the temple veil at Christ's death make clear (21:5–6, 20; 23:45). Focus begins to shift away from the temple as Jesus ascends to heaven and promises that "power from on high" will be with His people, wherever they are, to carry forward the gospel mission (24:49).

Literary Features. The relationship of Luke's Gospel to that of Matthew and Mark is complex. These three Gospels are referred to as the "Synoptic" (viewed together) Gospels because they present Jesus's life in a similar way and concentrate primarily on His Galilean ministry. The Gospel of John, on the other hand, witnesses to Jesus's early and extensive ministry in Jerusalem and Judea before He shifted His attention to Galilee. The Synoptic Gospels follow the same general outline of Jesus's life, which is most compactly presented in Mark. Both Matthew and Luke begin with Jesus's birth and devote more attention than Mark to the teachings of Jesus, but they do this in different ways. While Matthew is characterized by lengthy discourses of Jesus, analogous in some respects to what we find in John, the teaching blocks in Luke tend to be shorter and are not always where we might expect to find them based on Matthew.

Such differences are important because they suggest that Matthew and Luke probably wrote independently of each other and drew from some different sources of information. Other parts of these two Gospels, though, agree almost verbatim, which suggests some influence, or that there was a common written source or very careful memorization of oral transmission of at least some sayings of Jesus. However, even the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5–7) appears more briefly in Luke (Luke 6:20–49), with some of those teachings being found in other settings. Some parables in Luke are similar to parables in Matthew and yet still different enough to consider them as different stories told on different occasions (see, for example, Luke 19:11–27; cf. Matt. 25:14–30). While Luke acknowledges he relied on earlier Gospel accounts, the general approach taken here will be to compare parallel accounts without basing our interpretation on any particular theory about whether this Gospel was written first, second, or third.

The Gospel of Luke covers every major phase of Jesus's life and in that sense adheres more closely to conventions for ancient biographies. Unique to Luke is a description of events in Jesus's early childhood (2:21–40) and youth (2:41–53), His extensive ministry in Samaria and Perea during the six months prior to His death (9:51—19:10), and a detailed description of His ascension to heaven (24:50–51; cf. Acts 1:9–11). In addition to the sending out of the Twelve, Luke also mentions Jesus sending a group of seventy to prepare the ground for His ministry in the other places He was about to visit (Luke 10:1, 17).

COMMENTARY

1:1–4
PROLOGUE

The prologue (1:1–4) conforms to literary conventions of the time; its similarity to the prologue to the book of Acts (Acts 1:1–3), which explicitly refers to this Gospel (Acts 1:1), together with the fact that the storyline of the two narratives seamlessly fit together, suggests that Luke conceived these books as a two-part history: the life of Jesus and the life of the church.

Although Luke suggests that “many” had undertaken to produce a historical narrative of the events connected with the life of Jesus, his primary reference is clearly to the eyewitnesses of His ministry from its outset (Luke 1:2). In other words, he based this work on trustworthy sources who had “seen and heard” the events being described (cf. Luke 7:22; Acts 4:20; 22:15; see Luke: Backgrounds). These eyewitnesses, in addition to having a personal acquaintance with the life and teachings of Jesus, are also described as ministers or servants of the word, those who proclaim the gospel message (cf. Luke 9:6; Acts 6:4; 26:16). Luke identifies his focus as the events that were fulfilled among them (Luke 1:1), which refers to the fulfillment of OT prophecies with the coming of Jesus Christ. Already in the introductory chapters, this focus on fulfillment can be seen, an emphasis visible throughout Luke's Gospel that continues also in the book of Acts.

The assurance that eyewitnesses delivered or handed these accounts down to the “many” who collected them emphasizes the reliable nature of the sources used and that Luke employs a research model of inspired writing in setting forth this “orderly account” (v. 3). The Greek word *kathexēs*, found in the NT only in Luke's writings, is used later to signal a logical order or connection (not necessarily a chronological one) between Jesus's proclamation of the gospel in various places with what precedes and follows it (8:1; Acts 3:24; 11:4; 18:23). Luke further supports the reliability of his account of events by claiming to have *parēkolouthēkoti*—“closely followed,” “carefully investigated,” or “had thorough (perfect) understanding”—from *anōthen*—“the beginning” (lit. from “above” or “again”). In view of the context, *parēkolouthēkoti* refers to his having observed or investigated everything about which he writes. Addressing this Gospel and Acts to Theophilus (cf. Acts 1:1), whom Luke had previously instructed, underscores the close connection between these two books. The purpose of Luke's Gospel is made very clear: having “certainty” regarding the solid basis on which his (and our) faith rests.

1:5—9:50
THE EARLY LIFE AND MINISTRY OF JESUS

Luke 1:5—9:50 focuses on Jesus's birth and early life (1:5—2:52), the ministry of John the Baptist (3:1–20), and the beginning of Jesus's ministry (3:21—4:13). Like Matthew and Mark, this Gospel begins with Jesus's ministry in Galilee (4:14—9:50), which began more than a year after His ministry in Judea (described in John 1:19—5:47).

1:5—2:52
Jesus's Early Life

Of all four Gospels, Luke is the most biographical and represents an ancient *bios* or life of Jesus. In contrast to Matthew, which describes

the visit of the magi following the star to a house in Bethlehem (Matt. 2:11) and Joseph and Mary's hasty departure with the child for Egypt (Matt. 2:13–14), Luke describes events earlier and later, including announcements of the miraculous births of John and Jesus (Luke 1:5–38; cf. Matt. 1:18–21), the circumcision of Jesus and the offering for Him as Mary's firstborn son (Luke 2:21–40), and the Passover visit to Jerusalem when Jesus was twelve years old (vv. 41–52). These early vignettes may ultimately have derived from Mary, the mother of Jesus (see Luke: Introduction) or other close family members (cf. Acts 1:14).

1:5–25. Announcement of the Birth of John the Baptist. The events of the first two chapters took place in the time of Herod (v. 5), that is, sometime prior to King Herod the Great's death in 4 B.C. There were twenty-four courses of priests (1 Chr. 24:7–18), and twice a year priests from each course ministered in the temple. “According to the custom of the priesthood” (Luke 1:9), each priest was assigned a time to fulfill his duties, one of which was to pray while burning incense in the holy place at the two set times for daily prayer (cf. Rev. 5:8; 8:3): before the morning sacrifice and after the evening sacrifice. The Greek word translated “custom” (*ethos* and its verbal cognate *eiōtha*) refers to traditions or settled practices (Luke 2:42; Acts 6:14; 15:1; 21:21; 26:3; 28:17; see commentary on Luke 2:21–40; 4:14–30). Later Jewish tradition, in agreement with Luke 2:9, indicates that lots were cast to assign the various priestly duties (cf. Acts 1:26).

The special prayers offered up by the priest in the holy place included petitions for the pardon of Israel's sin and for the coming of the Messiah. Due to the large number of priests (estimated at 18,000), this privilege of serving in the temple may have come just once in a priest's lifetime. When not fulfilling temple duties in Jerusalem, priests instructed the people of their village about the law (Mal. 2:7). Those worshiping in the temple courts offered up their individual prayers with those of the priest, some apparently more prominently than others (cf. Matt. 6:5). Among the Gospel writers, Luke gives prayer the most prominence, noting it at key points in the ministry of Jesus (Luke 3:21; 6:12; 9:18, 28–29; 22:32) and emphasizing its vital importance for those who follow Him (Luke 18:1; 22:40, 46; Acts 1:14).

Since Zacharias and Elizabeth were of priestly lineage, they were careful to keep God's *entolais* and *dikaiōmasin*—“commands” and “ordinances,” “decrees,” or “righteous requirements” (Luke 1:6)—that is, the moral law and the ceremonial requirements pertaining to the temple (cf. the reference to “ordinances” [*dikaiōmata*] in Ex. 24:3–8; Heb. 9:1, 10). Their living in total faithfulness to God's revealed will qualified them for their important task as parents of this special child. Similarly, the abstinent lifestyle of John (Luke 1:15), implying a lifelong Nazirite vow (cf. Num. 6:2–4), would help fit him for the work that lay ahead: to help many Israelites turn back to the Lord their God (Luke 1:16). As the forerunner of Jesus (vv. 17, 76; cf. 7:27), John's work mirrored the work that Jesus would do in gathering the people of Israel back to God (11:23; 13:34; cf. Is. 49:5).

No doubt Zacharias and his wife had long hoped and prayed for a child, and now, when its fulfillment seemed impossible, God sent an angel with the assurance that their prayer had been heard (Luke 1:13). The word used for prayer here (*deēsis*) indicates an urgent request to meet a need. We should never give up praying for what we believe to be God's will, and yet we also should be willing to accept His answer, whatever that might be. Perceived delays in answering our prayers can be faith-strengthening opportunities. In being gracious to Zacharias and Elizabeth, God was also answering the prayers offered up in the temple for Israel as a whole. Their son was to make the way ready for the Lord (Is. 40:3) and to prepare a people to meet Him (Luke 1:17). The angel here alluded to the OT promise that “Elijah” would return (see Mal. 4:5–6; cf. Matt. 17:10–13). John's fervent preaching, including his reproof of sin (cf. Luke 3:7–9), would be similar to the work that Elijah had done before him (1 Kin. 17–21). John's ministry would also include strengthening families. A work similar to that of John the Baptist is to be done by the end-time remnant to prepare people for Christ's Second Coming (Mal. 4:5–6; Rev. 12:17).

To fit John for this work, he would be filled with the Holy Spirit while still in his mother's womb (Luke 1:15). The Holy Spirit was essential for John's unique work as forerunner of the One who would baptize with the Holy Spirit (3:16). A special preparation was required, and abstinence from alcohol was part of this preparation (1:15; cf. Num. 6:1–21). The Holy Spirit's influence on John in the womb suggests that nurturing spiritually as well as physically can begin even before birth. It also echoes other passages that indicate that God knows each person individually and that His plan for us began even before we were born (Gen. 25:23; Ps. 139:13, 16;

Is. 49:1; Jer. 1:5; cf. Luke 1:31). As parents, we should pray for the Holy Spirit to mold our children "even from their earliest moments" (AH 274) and pray that our influence on them will reinforce the work of the Spirit in them.

Gabriel, who explained to Daniel the prophecy regarding the time when the Messiah or Anointed One would come (Dan. 9:21, 25), was the angel sent to Zacharias to announce the prophecy's imminent fulfillment and was thus the first to proclaim the good news. Zacharias, who was understandably afraid on seeing the angel (Luke 1:12; cf. 1:30; 2:9; Matt. 28:2–4; Mark 16:5–8), should have recognized the angel's announcement as an answer to his prayers because his very name means "God Remembers." Certainly he was aware of how God had enabled Abraham and Sarah to have a son in their old age (see Gen. 21:1–2). His question indicated a lack of faith (cf. Rom. 4:19–21) that God could do it again. This stands in contrast to Mary, whose question showed a recognition that a virgin giving birth would be humanly impossible (Luke 1:34–35; cf. Matt. 1:20–23). Making Zacharias mute (Luke 1:20) drew attention to the promised miracle of their having a son and the work he was to do. The seclusion of Elizabeth for five months after conception may have been in response to the instruction given by the angel about this child and may have anticipated her son's lengthy seclusion in desert places (vv. 24, 80; cf. Matt. 3:1; 11:7).

1:26–38. Announcement of the Birth of Jesus. While all four Gospels emphasize the parallel ministries of John and Jesus, only Luke's narration shows this parallel beginning with their conception in the womb, both of which are miraculous in their own way. The angel Gabriel announced to Mary her special role as mother of the Messiah. His visit connected the prophecy he announced to Daniel some six hundred years earlier (Dan. 9:21, 25–26) with its fulfillment.

Nazareth was a small village in the hill country of Galilee, some fifteen miles (24 km) west of the Sea of Galilee. A Hebrew inscription found at Caesarea Maritima lists the twenty-four priestly courses with the towns where they resided following the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70. Nazareth is identified with the eighteenth course, Happizzez (1 Chr. 24:15), thus providing independent literary confirmation of the town's existence. Excavations have revealed a modest two-room house dating to the time of Jesus and evidence that the village was home to observant Jews. Although there is no way to link it to the family of Jesus, it at least illustrates what their home would have been like.

Luke emphasizes that Mary was a virgin (Luke 1:27; cf. v. 34; Matt. 1:23), probably in her early teens, which was when Jewish girls at that time would normally have been betrothed, that is, pledged to be married. Engagement in Israel was as binding as marriage, requiring a divorce to break it off (cf. Matt. 1:19). Thus, the timing of Jesus's conception, after the betrothal but before marriage, made it more difficult for Joseph to sever the relationship and yet ensured that the child could not be mistaken as their natural-born son. In fact, later aspersions at the questionable circumstances of Christ's birth (John 8:41), which may also be reflected in rabbinic literature, are consistent with the biblical claim of a virgin birth.

Gabriel's greeting and reference to Mary as "favored" literally means "she on whom grace (or favor) has been bestowed." In view of her being greatly troubled at these words, he explained that she had found favor (lit. "grace") before God (Luke 1:30; cf. Gen. 6:8; Ex. 33:17). This phrase has been used to support the concept that Mary was granted grace throughout her entire life, allowing for the Roman Catholic doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. This doctrine states that Mary was born without original sin and thus without a corrupt nature, allowing her to be the mother of God. Mary, then, as mother of God, could dispense grace, and thus the purpose of the Ave Maria (Latin for "Hail Mary") prayer used by Catholics. However, Jesus was not God because of Mary. Mary was blessed by being chosen to birth the Son of God. Jesus was divine before He was conceived. Even Mary needed to come to the Father through Christ (John 14:6), and even she recognized that she needed a Savior (Luke 1:46–47) because all have sinned (Rom. 3:23), even Mary. Considering that Mary was young and living in a relatively insignificant village in the backwaters of Israel, her deep bewilderment at the angelic greeting is understandable. Even more perplexing was the message that followed: despite being a virgin, she was going to have a son and was to name Him Jesus—the Greek equivalent of *yehoshua'*, meaning "the Lord will save" (Luke 1:31; cf. 1:47, 77; 2:11; Matt. 1:21).

In answering Mary as to how it would be possible for her to have a child, Gabriel explains that this would be the work of the Holy Spirit, who would "overshadow" her, alluding to the way in which God manifested Himself in the sanctuary (Ex. 40:35, LXX; cf. John 1:14). In a similar way, the divine cloud would later descend on Jesus at the transfiguration (Luke 9:34). Thus, through the glorious mystery of the incarnation, the child in her womb would be by nature holy (cf. 1:49) and called the Son of God. This important title occurs in all four Gospels. As a descendant of David, He would receive an eternal kingdom (1:33; cf. Dan. 7:14, 27). The theme of God's kingdom or reign characterized Jesus's gospel proclamation (Luke 4:43; cf. Is. 52:7) and pointed to the fulfillment of Jewish expectations.

Without human agency, Mary would have a son. Luke 1:37 has been translated in different ways because of the word *rhēma*. This word can mean "word" or "thing, matter, event." Accordingly, some translations convey the idea that it is impossible for any word (*rhēma*) from God to fail, while others, more correctly, render it so as to indicate that there is no matter or situation (*rhēma*) that is impossible for God (echoing Gen. 18:14). This news is illustrative of the gospel, whereby God's creative power alone is able to save human beings and restore them into His image. Mary's obedient submission to God's will (Luke 1:38), despite the obvious stigma (and perhaps worse, cf. John 8:3–5) she would suffer as a result, contrasts with the doubting response of Zacharias. No sign was needed. God's word that this would be was enough for her and she humbly surrendered her future into His hands.

1:39–56. Visit to Elizabeth and the Song of Mary. On Mary's arrival, the baby in Elizabeth's womb leaped, a word that expresses great joy (6:23). The word for rejoicing is most frequently the human response to God's work of salvation (e.g., 1:14; Pss. 9:14; 13:5; 14:7; John 8:56; Acts 16:34). Elizabeth then pronounced a threefold blessing on Mary (Luke 1:42–45), recognizing God's gracious choosing of Mary also referred to by the angel. The series of blessings culminates with the emphatic declaration that connects her having believed with the fulfillment of the things spoken to her (v. 45). Out of her humanly impossible circumstances, Mary grasped the divine promise and rested in the assurance that God would take care of her.

The Song of Mary (also known as the Magnificat) resembles Hannah's song at the birth of Samuel (1 Sam. 2:1–10). It focuses completely on what God had done. Mary magnified, glorified, or exalted (from the Greek *megalynō*) God as Lord and Savior, mighty and holy. His humbling of the proud and exalting the lowly (Mary identifying herself with the latter) is a frequent theme in Scripture (e.g., Prov. 11:2; 29:23; James 4:5; 1 Pet. 5:5). Mary's song is at its core a song of her unique experience and yet one that resonates with the marginalized, the oppressed, and the helpless throughout history who have experienced God's powerful word of hope and salvation. She sang from a knowledge of God's dealings with His people in the past, a sense of her unworthiness, and unbounded joy at the privilege of bearing the Savior of the world. The "soul" and "spirit" (Luke 1:46–47) poetically refer not to separable aspects of a person but to her whole being from which her praise arose.

The song seems to recognize the historic shift taking place through the advent of the Messiah by employing phrases like "all generations" (v. 48) and "from generation to generation" (v. 50). God had intervened. He had scattered the proud, toppled the mighty, lifted up or exalted the lowly, filled the hungry, and sent the rich away empty (vv. 51–53). Through this reversal of fortunes, God had helped His servant Israel (v. 54), a phrase that recalls Isaiah's prophecies regarding Israel in exile (Is. 41:8–9; 42:19; 43:10; 44:1, 21; 45:4; cf. Jer. 46:27–28) and their promised deliverance.

1:57–80. Birth of John the Baptist and the Prophecy of Zacharias. After remaining with Elizabeth three months and when the time had come for John's birth, Mary returned home (vv. 56–57). The birth of the promised son (cf. v. 14) led to rejoicing at the great mercy shown to Elizabeth (v. 58) and reminds readers of the joy and laughter at the Lord's removing the barrenness of Sarah (Gen. 21:6; cf. Gen. 12:2; 15:1–6; 17:19; 18:10, 14). This latest miraculous birth suggests that a new stage in God's plan of salvation had begun. In accordance with OT law (Lev. 12:3; cf. Gen. 17:10–14), the boy was circumcised on the eighth day (Luke 1:59). Circumcision signified membership in the covenant community of Israel. So important was this ritual that it was even administered when the eighth day fell on the Sabbath (John 7:22–23). It was given to symbolize a deeper heart-commitment of love to the Lord (Deut. 10:16; 30:6; cf. Rom. 2:29) and placing "no confidence in the flesh" as having any saving merit (Phil. 3:3), whether in terms of one's ancestry or one's works.

A second miracle, Zacharias being enabled to speak and praise God, drew attention to the significant role divine providence had planned for this child, and fear came on all (Luke 1:64–65)—as is typical when God's power is so openly manifested (e.g., Luke 5:26; 7:16). Luke adds that these events were talked about throughout the hill country of Judea, referring to the area south of Jerusalem, including Bethlehem and Hebron (the burial place of Abraham and Sarah). Its proximity to the temple made it convenient for priestly families to locate there. All who heard about these things pondered what the outcome of John's life would be (v. 66)—a question that the prophecy of Zacharias answers (cf. v. 67).

Like the Song of Mary, this prophecy (sometimes called the Benedictus) recognizes a clear shift in salvation history. God had visited, or come to help (*episkeptomai*), His people (v. 68). This Greek word is used here for God's miraculous intervention on behalf of His people (e.g., Gen. 21:1; 50:24–25; Ex. 4:31; Acts 15:14) and twice later in this Gospel in connection with the saving work of Jesus (Luke 1:78; 7:16). The work of salvation is highlighted in three parts: the fulfillment of God's promises is announced (1:68–75), followed by a direct address to the infant John regarding the role he would have in fulfillment of those promises (vv. 76–79), culminating with the coming of the Messiah and His work (vv. 78b–79).

John would prepare the way of the Lord (v. 76; Is. 40:3; Mal. 3:1) and give "knowledge of salvation" to God's people through the forgiveness of their sins (Luke 1:77), thus acting as a connecting link between the testaments. The messianic *anatolē*—"dayspring," "dawning," or "sunrise" (v. 78)—is a well-known metaphor (Num. 24:17; Ps. 71:7; Mal. 4:2) that emphasizes the bringing of light and truth. The word also translates the messianic title "the Branch" (Zech. 3:8; 6:12), pointing to a descendant of David from on high (i.e., from heaven). Similarly, the Gospel of John connects the work of John the Baptist with Jesus as "the Light" (John 1:6–9). Shining light on those in darkness recalls prophecies related to the Messiah (Is. 9:2; 42:7; cf. Matt. 4:15–16). Allowing God and His wisdom to guide us (Luke 1:79; Pss. 90:17; 119:133) places us in the way or path of peace (Luke 1:79; Prov. 3:17; Is. 59:8; but cf. Ps. 78:8; Rom. 3:17).

Luke concludes this section with a brief indication of John's early life, highlighting especially his spiritual growth and his solitary upbringing in wilderness areas (the plural excluding the possibility of a single location such as Qumran). John was not educated in the conventional way but prepared by his simple desert lifestyle and time of reflection for the eventual initiation of his public ministry in Israel (Luke 1:80). Luke, like the other three Gospels, focuses first on John's startling appearance and proclamation that set the stage for the beginning of Jesus's ministry (3:1–20).

2:1–20. The Birth of Jesus. Luke dates the birth of Jesus to the reign of Caesar Augustus (v. 1; 27 B.C. to A.D. 14), placing it about six months after the birth of John (1:26, 36) and prior to Herod the Great's death in 4 B.C. (1:5). While no record exists of this specific census (2:2) while Quirinius was governor of Syria, we do not have as much information as we would like of this early period. We do know that Augustus reorganized the administration of the empire and had an empire-wide tax assessment made. So a census in the Roman province of Syria and Judea might have been carried out at that time. Quirinius, who exercised military leadership over this area, was particularly well suited to administer such a census in this volatile region of the empire, inasmuch as an undertaking of this kind was liable to meet with stiff Jewish resistance, as we know occurred during a later census (Acts 5:37).

So Joseph returned with Mary to his home city of Bethlehem (about a seventy-mile [113 km] journey requiring at least four or five days) to be registered on the tax rolls there because Roman taxation was administered locally and he was a descendant of David (Luke 2:4; cf. 1 Sam. 17:12). As a result, Jesus would be born in the right place (Mic. 5:2) and through the right line (e.g., Is. 9:6–7; Jer. 23:5–6) to fulfill the prophecies relative to Israel's future Davidic king. Luke still refers to Mary as Joseph's betrothed (Luke 2:5), indicating that they were not yet married, and despite the fact that Mary was pregnant, they had not yet had sexual relations. When they were actually married is not clear. Normally, a betrothed girl would continue to live with her parents until the wedding.

While in Bethlehem, Mary gave birth to her firstborn Son (v. 7), and He received all the privileges of the firstborn (see Ex. 13:2; Deut. 21:15–17), which may explain some of the tensions he later had with His brothers (John 7:2–5). Already in OT times, the term "firstborn" came to have the extended meaning of preeminence. This is understandable in view of prominent figures who, though not physically the firstborn son, received a status similar to or even greater than the true firstborn (e.g., Jacob, Joseph, and David). The term also appears in connection with the coming Davidic king (Ps. 89:27; cf. Zech. 12:10). It is in this extended sense of preeminence that other NT writers use "firstborn" to describe Jesus's role as the new Adam (Col.

1:15; Heb. 1:6) and as the leading figure among His spiritual siblings (Luke 8:21) and within the church (Rom. 8:29; cf. Heb. 2:11), as well as to describe the uniqueness of His resurrection (Col. 1:18; Rev. 1:5).

According to Luke 2:7, Mary wrapped the newborn baby in cloth (cf. Ezek. 16:4) and set Him in a manger (a stone feeding trough for animals) because there was no room available for them in the *katalyma*—sometimes translated as "inn" or "lodging place." *Katalyma* more commonly refers to a lodging-room and even to a "guest room." The Greek term for "inn" is *pandocheion*, used only in Luke 10:34. In any case, the couple could not find a guest room and finally settled for a place in the animal quarters of a house, in the company of animals. Archeological excavations in Bethlehem indicate that many peasant homes began as caves. Over time these caves were used to house the family's animals, while a home was built over the cave itself. This may explain why some early Christians claimed Jesus was born in a cave. Whatever the case, Jesus, "the bread of life" (John 6:35), was born in Bethlehem, which in Hebrew means "house of bread," and laid in a manger, a place from which food was supplied.

The shepherds belonged to a despised and marginalized class within Israel, listed in later Jewish writings alongside gamblers and tax collectors. The biblical picture of the occupation, however, is generally quite positive (e.g., 1 Sam. 16:11–13), even symbolizing God's care for His people (Ps. 23; Ezek. 34:11–16; Luke 15:4–7; cf. John 10:11–16). Similarly, those to whom the angels announced the birth of the Christ child are positively presented because they believed the promised sign, left their flocks in order to find the baby, and made known to others what they had seen and heard (Luke 2:15–17).

The exact time of Jesus's birth is unknown, though Luke places it prior to Herod's death in the spring of 4 B.C. A census connected with taxation would likely have been scheduled sometime after June, when the harvest would be complete, and the shepherds remaining out in the fields at night (v. 8) suggest the warmer months up through October of about 5 B.C. (cf. Matt. 2:16).

Though this passage does not tell us who the angel of the Lord (Luke 2:9) was, it is reasonable to conclude that the same angel, Gabriel, who had brought messages to Daniel and good tidings/news (*euangelizomai*) of John's birth (1:11, 19) to Zacharias, also brought the good tidings/news (2:10; same verb) of Christ's birth to the shepherds (cf. Rev. 14:6, 7). Isaiah describes a proclamation of good news in the context of Israel's return from exile (Is. 40:9; 52:7; 60:6; 61:1), a book that Luke presents as forming the foundation of Jesus's teaching and healing ministry (Luke 4:18–21). So it is not surprising that ten of the eleven occurrences of *euangelizomai* in the Gospels are in Luke (the other occurrence, in Matt. 11:5, parallels Luke 7:22). The angel used three words full of meaning to describe Jesus. As Savior, He would fulfill Israel's hopes of deliverance, but what exactly this means is left unexplained. Zacharias envisioned Israel being saved from their enemies (1:71; cf. vv. 69, 74), and John the Baptist likewise anticipated salvation in a more universal sense (3:17; cf. 7:20), but Jesus would bring salvation within the reach of each individual by seeking the lost (19:9–10). As Christ (Heb., *mashiakh*, "Messiah"), Jesus was anointed by the Holy Spirit at His baptism (Acts 10:38), not to fulfill popular Davidic hopes but to proclaim the good news (gospel) to the poor and to proclaim *aphesis* for the captives (Luke 4:18). This word is usually translated as "liberty" or "freedom," but it is also the usual NT word for forgiveness (used already in 1:77 and 3:3; also in 24:47; Acts 2:38; etc.). The real enemy from which Jesus saves is sin and the death that results from it. As Lord (Luke 2:11; Greek *kyrios*, often used in the Greek translation of the OT for the Hebrew name Yahweh), Jesus embodies who God is (cf. Ps. 2:2). Jesus's work would exceed that of the expected and the coming David (Luke 20:41–44).

During Jesus's ministry, the Jews asked Him to give them a sign to prove His messianic credentials (Luke 11:16), but God had already given them a sign (which suggests a deeper symbolism): the placement of a baby wrapped only in strips of cloth, lying in a manger (2:12). Although Luke does not make the connection explicit, readers have long discerned in the cloth strips and presumed stone bed overtones of Jesus's sacrificial death and wrapping for burial in a stone tomb. Unfortunately, even Israel's leaders were largely unaware of the significance of the times in which they lived (Matt. 16:1–3). After the angel's announcement, a multitude of angels appeared (cf. Luke 2:15).

The angels are called a *plēthos*—"company," "host," or "army" (v. 13; cf. Ps. 148:2; Eph. 6:12)—and yet in their praise to God they announced "peace." In fact, the war that began in heaven and then spread to the earth (Rev. 12:7–9) was about to be decisively won through a message of peace with God (Rom. 5:1) by means of the substitutionary atonement to be made on the cross (John 12:31–32) by the "Prince of Peace" (Is. 9:6). Just as this angelic announcement at the First Advent began with praising and giving glory to God (Luke 2:14), in Revelation, a similar proclamation just prior to the Second Advent begins this same way (Rev. 14:7). The last phrase of Luke 2:14 either elaborates on what this message of peace means—"goodwill toward men"—or, as in other manuscripts, it limits peace to "those on whom his [God] favor rests." The first emphasizes that Christ came to save all (cf. 1 Tim. 2:4; Titus 2:11), while the second emphasizes that peace can really come only to those who accept this salvation as their own (Luke 10:5–6; cf. Is. 57:19–21; John 14:27). Both are true, and perhaps it is not necessary to choose between them.

It is important to ponder whether we are any more ready today for Jesus to come than Israel was then. Certainly the shepherds were, as their response makes manifest (Luke 2:15–18, 20). They not only went to see but went quickly (v. 16). They not only made known what they saw but spread the news abroad, making it widely known. More than just sharing their experience, the shepherds relayed the message spoken to them about the Child (v. 17) as Savior, Christ, and Lord. The reaction of the people to the witness of the shepherds in v. 18—*ethaumasan* (from *thaumazō*, "to wonder," "to be amazed," "to marvel")—anticipated strikingly similar reactions of the people to the things that Jesus said and did (see, e.g., 4:22; 9:43; 20:26).

Luke describes Mary's reaction somewhat differently—understandable in view of her knowing how special this child was. She *synetērei* (from *syntēreō*)—"kept" or "treasured up"—all these things and pondered them in her heart (2:19). This Greek word appears only three times in the NT. Here it refers to preserving information in the mind for careful analysis. Mary seems to have been gathering up as much true and reliable information about her Child as possible, perhaps mentally comparing these things with messianic passages in the OT in order to understand the nature of the work Jesus would do. Luke likely wrote his note about Mary to encourage readers similarly to ponder the meaning of these things (cf. 1:66; 2:51; 3:15). In sharp contrast to Mary's quiet musings, the shepherds were openly glorifying and praising God for all that they had been privileged to witness (2:20).

2:21–40. The Presentation of Jesus in the Temple. Luke's description of the circumcising, naming, and dedicating of Jesus, as well as the prophetic forecast of His future ministry, corresponds to the circumcising and naming of John and a similar prophetic forecast in Luke 1:57–80. In other words, just as the birth of John and Jesus were complementary (as would be their respective ministries; Luke 3:16), so also were their early childhood experiences. In addition, however, there are two mentions of expectant waiting—by Simeon (2:25) and by those to whom Anna spoke (2:38)—highlighting the uniqueness of the messianic fulfillment ushered in by Jesus. Regarding the significance of circumcision after eight days (equivalent to "the eighth day") and the meaning of the name "Jesus," given in obedience to Gabriel's command, see respectively 1:59 and 1:31.

Luke refers to the fulfillment by Joseph and Mary of the various requirements of the law of Moses in connection with childbirth, demonstrating not only the couple's religious devotion but also the character of Jesus's religious upbringing. In dealing with the relevant OT stipulations, however, except for this initial reference to the law of Moses and one mention of "the custom of the law" (2:27), Luke consistently refers to "the [L]aw of the Lord" (vv. 23–24, 39). This latter expression is fairly common in the OT (e.g., Ex. 13:9; 1 Chr. 16:40; 2 Chr. 17:9; Ps. 1:2; Jer. 8:8; Amos 2:4). But by referring first to Moses's law (Luke 2:22), Luke makes clear that these stipulations were all part of the ceremonial requirements written down by Moses and placed beside the ark (Deut. 31:24–26) and that they were not in any way connected with the moral law of the Ten Commandments, which were written by the finger of God and placed inside the ark (Deut. 10:1–2). Apart from this passage, neither Luke nor any other NT writer ever refers to "the law of the Lord." Paul twice mentions "the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2; cf. 1 Cor. 9:21), but in both cases his reference is clearly to the moral law.

The ceremonial requirements involved here are circumcision, when the child would be named and enrolled as a member of the nation Israel (Luke 2:21); the redemption of the firstborn male with the requisite five shekels (vv. 22–23; cf. Ex. 13:2; Num. 18:15–16); and the offering for the mother's purification forty days after the birth of a son (Luke 2:24; cf. Lev. 12:1–8). Since the Levitical law mentions only the mother's purification, Luke's reference to (in the Greek) "their purification" remains unclear and has resulted in different interpretations. Perhaps the best way to understand the plural pronoun is to suggest that it refers to the mother, who was to be purified and who at the same time brought baby Jesus to present Him to the Lord, not to purify Him; the plural points to two different actions. The other possibility is that the reference is to Mary and Joseph, suggesting that somehow he was also unclean. According to the law, a lamb should be offered along with either a turtledove or a pigeon. However, since a lamb was a relatively expensive offering, a poor family, as Joseph and Mary apparently were, could offer a second bird instead.

The timing of Simeon's coming to the temple when Jesus's parents brought Him to the temple was a divine appointment arranged by the Spirit (2:27). Simeon is described as an ideal Israelite: just/righteous and devout (v. 25), meaning that he feared and obeyed God (cf. 1:6). He was waiting, in the sense of expectantly waiting, for the coming kingdom of God (Luke 12:36; 23:51; Mark 15:43; cf. Luke 2:38). Both Simeon and Anna eagerly waited for God's intervention on Israel's behalf. The word "consolation" or "comfort" (*paraklēsis*; Luke 2:25) describes God's bringing salvation to His people (cf. Is. 40:1). The concrete noun form (*paraklētos*) is used by John as a title for the Holy Spirit, the "Comforter" or "Advocate" (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7; 1 John 2:1). The Holy Spirit brought the revelation to Simeon that he would not die before seeing the Lord's Christ (or "Anointed"), an expression used for the king of Israel (Luke 2:26; 1 Sam. 16:6; 24:6, 10; 26:9, 11; 2 Sam. 1:14, 16; 19).

Having fulfilled the law's requirements, Joseph and Mary were met by Simeon, who took the baby Jesus in his arms (Luke 2:28). The word "took" (*dechomai*) essentially means "received," suggesting that Simeon here received what he had been waiting for his whole life. The first word on his lips (in the Greek) was emphatic: *nyn* ("now") (v. 29). "Now"—at that time—the promised redemption, which Anna, too, had been waiting for, was fulfilled in Jesus. Salvation here was not an abstract concept. It arrived in the *person* of Jesus. Simeon, in seeing the baby Jesus, had seen salvation with his own eyes. While Luke does not make clear exactly how old Simeon was, the fact that he at that time felt ready to die and the parallels existing between him and the aged Anna suggest that Simeon also was very old. The blessing he pronounced was drawn from the Servant Songs of Isaiah (Is. 42:6; 49:6; 51:4). The light was bringing revelation to the Gentiles (Luke 2:32). This was the role Israel was to have—sharing the light of God's law and character with the world (Mic. 4:1–2; Zech. 8:22–23); but too often they kept it to themselves.

Jesus, as the prophesied Servant of the Lord, fulfilled this purpose as the seed of Abraham in which all the nations would be blessed (Gen. 12:3; cf. Luke 1:54–55), as the glory that would attract all people (Is. 60:1–3; 62:1–2; cf. John 12:32). As John puts it, He is the true Light who gives light to everyone (John 1:9). As Simeon took the Child in his arms, he blessed or praised God, and after speaking these words, he blessed not only the Child but the whole family (Luke 2:28, 34). Parents would later bring children to Jesus for blessing (Mark 10:13–16). Based on these passages of Scripture, parents continue to bring their children before the Lord, asking Him to bless them. Training children in the way they should go (Prov. 22:6) requires the prayerful attention of the entire family.

Despite the glorious glimpse given by Simeon of the work that Jesus would do, a dark warning also was given to Mary, that her Child would result in the fall and rise "of many in Israel" (Luke 2:34). While Simeon employed a familiar OT metaphor (Pss. 20:7–8; 36:12; 140:10; Amos 8:14), the Greek word used for "fall" appears only once more in the NT. In the Sermon on the Mount, Christ warned all who do not obey His teaching that the "fall" of their "house" would be great (Matt. 7:27). Simeon said others would rise to take their place, employing the word commonly used in the NT for the resurrection (*anastasis*).

A slightly different metaphor, but with a similar contrast, is more frequent in the NT: falling on the "stone" (a symbol of Jesus) and finding salvation before the stone falls and crushes out one's life (see commentary on Luke 20:9–19; cf. Rom. 9:32–33; 1 Pet. 2:6–8). The "sign" may also allude to this phenomenon, prefigured by Isaiah and his children, who were signs and *mopetim*—"symbols" or "wonders" (Is. 8:18). The fact that this sign would be spoken against would be painful for Mary. As a result of peoples' response to Jesus, like the piercing of a sword to the inmost being, the thoughts of many hearts would be revealed (Luke 2:35; cf. Heb. 4:12–13), including those of Mary herself.

Anna is identified as a prophetess from the tribe of Asher (part of the Northern Kingdom), showing that after the exilic period more than just the tribes of Judah and Benjamin were represented in Israel. A number of women are identified in Scripture as prophetesses, including Miriam, Deborah, Huldah, and Philip's four daughters (Ex. 15:20; Judg. 4:4; 2 Kin. 22:14;

Acts 21:9). It is unclear whether eighty-four years refers to Anna's age or to the length of her widowhood (which would make her more than one hundred years old). In either case, Anna was very old. It seems as if she never left the temple. While Simeon came into the temple (Luke 2:27), Anna was already there. Her not departing from the temple and her serving God *throughout* the night and *throughout* the day (as the Greek phrase indicates) makes the same point.

Her fastings and prayers (v. 37) are an indication of the seriousness with which she looked for redemption, that is, the coming of the Messiah (v. 38). Fasting in Christianity became much more common after the first century. Both NT references to prayer and fasting in the apostolic church are in connection with the appointment of church leadership (Acts 13:2, Barnabas and Paul; Acts 14:23, elders). Anna was longing and waiting for *the* leader of Israel par excellence (cf. Heb. 3:1), sent from the Father (e.g., John 5:36; 8:42; 20:21).

Luke concludes this section (and the next one) with a note regarding how Jesus grew physically, mentally, and spiritually (Luke 2:40; cf. v. 52; 1 Sam. 2:26). His entrance into the world as a baby enabled Him to identify with humanity at each stage of His life. Some manuscripts omit the words "in spirit" after "strong." No doubt Jesus grew to be rather muscular since, like Joseph, he worked as a carpenter (Mark 6:3; cf. Matt. 13:55), a trade that included building with stone as well as wood.

2:41–52. The Boyhood of Jesus. Unique among the canonical Gospels is this story from Jesus's boyhood. Unlike the many apocryphal gospels that began to arise in the mid-second century, picturing Him as a precocious boy wonder with magical powers, Luke's account fits well within the overall canonical depiction of Jesus and His life. It reflects the historical realities of first-century Jewish life and attributes a certain amount of theological depth to Jesus at this young age. It also gives concrete expression to the statements that Luke makes about Jesus's early life, tracing His development from baby (2:16) to child (v. 40) to boy (v. 43), and, finally, to just "Jesus" (v. 52). We learn that His family attended the Passover every year. While only males were expected to attend the three major Jewish festivals of Unleavened Bread, Pentecost, and Tabernacles (Ex. 23:14–17; 34:22–23; Deut. 16:16–17), in the case of Passover the entire family attended. Fathers were expected to teach the Torah to their sons, and so at age twelve, Jesus was instructed accordingly.

The celebration of the Passover, also called in the NT the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Luke 22:1; cf. Lev. 23:4–8), covered a full seven days. The first and last days of the feast were sabbaths of partial rest (Ex. 12:15–16; Lev. 23:7–8). Jesus's family observed the entire period of this feast because it was after the feast was finished—literally the days were fulfilled (Luke 2:43)—that Joseph and Mary left, unaware that their boy had stayed behind. Only after traveling a day's journey, when they stopped for the night, did they discover Jesus's absence and begin to search for Him. The tense implies that they looked for Him all along the return journey, asking every group they met. "After three days" (v. 46) is inclusive reckoning, referring not to their time searching Jerusalem but to the two days it took to journey away from Jerusalem and back again, finding Him on the third day.

Jesus appears to have taken the opportunity to listen to and ask questions of the revered religious teachers in the temple (v. 46), the heart of the Jewish capital. Although Luke does not inform us as to the exact nature of the teaching Jesus was listening to, it may have been connected to the meaning of the Passover celebration that had just concluded and the predicted sufferings of the Messiah (Is. 53). The Socratic-like asking of questions foreshadowed the method Jesus often used in His later teaching (e.g., Luke 5:22–23; 5:34; 6:9) as well as in His two-question reply to His parents' query (2:49). That He "must be" or "had to be" in His Father's house, or attending to the things of His Father (lit. "had to be in the things of My Father," v. 49) describes the divine necessity (*dei*) of His later ministry (4:43; 19:5) and, more particularly, of His sufferings and death (9:22; 13:33; 17:25; 22:37; 24:7, 26, 44; Acts 17:3). The reference to God as His Father was a subtle reproof to Joseph and Mary. Jesus was no ordinary son; He was also the Son of God, and they were to consider this higher allegiance. Nevertheless, as a model son of human parentage, He returned with them to Nazareth and was subject to, or obedient to, them. Submission to parents is an important biblical concept (Eph. 6:1–3; see, e.g., Rom. 13:1; Eph. 5:24; 1 Pet. 2:13–15) here modeled by Jesus. Summing up His youth and early adult years, Luke indicates that Jesus grew or increased, He enhanced His capacities in every way (see Luke 2:40). In so doing, Jesus set a perfect example for every human being.

3:1—4:13

John's Ministry Concludes As Jesus's Ministry Opens

Any outline of Luke's Gospel is necessarily tentative as there is no consensus on its organization. It seems best on the basis of textual markers, style, and content to consider the first two chapters as introducing the era of prophetic fulfillment and that the main body of the narrative begins with chapter three, in which John's ministry concludes and Jesus's ministry begins.

3:1–6. The Ministry of John the Baptist. Luke places the beginning of John the Baptist's ministry in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar (v. 1), which, taking into account the possible methods of reckoning, allows a date of A.D. 27. On the death of Herod the Great in 4 B.C., Caesar Augustus, in accordance with Herod's will, placed three of Herod's sons over the territory he had ruled: Archelaus over Judea and Samaria; Herod Antipas over Galilee and Perea to the north and east; and Philip over Iturea and Trachonitis in the far north. Although "tetrarch" technically refers to the ruler over a fourth of a region, it here refers to the rulers appointed over areas formerly ruled by Herod the Great.

Due to Jewish unrest caused by the violent rule of Archelaus, Rome brought Judea under its direct rule through the appointment of governors such as Pontius Pilate, who served as prefect over Judea from A.D. 26 to 36. Annas and Caiaphas are mentioned as high priests (v. 2), though the OT provided for only one high priest at a time (see commentary on Luke 22:54–62). Luke's account reflects the reality that the family of Annas was very powerful, providing a dynastic succession of high priests through his five sons and son-in-law, Caiaphas, and that Annas remained a key figure in Jerusalem until his death (ca. A.D. 40). It is in this historical situation, with Rome firmly in control, that the word of God—that is, the prophetic gift, itself announced by prophecy (1:67, 76)—came to John the Baptist after centuries of prophetic silence. Locating his ministry "in the wilderness" connects his ministry to the prophecy of Isaiah 40:3–5.

All four Gospels witness to John's fulfillment of this prophecy (Matt. 3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4–6; John 1:23). Clearly, the most significant aspect of John's ministry was the baptism of those who were repentant (cf. Acts 2:38)—thus his title "the Baptist," which can also mean "the Immerser" (Matt. 3:1; Mark 6:14). But identifying the location of his work in the wilderness on the other side of the Jordan (John 1:28) hints at Israel's condition at that time of being, in a sense, still in exile and their need of a new Jordan crossing, even an inner, spiritual "crossing," for the promises relative to the nation to be fulfilled. Although Isaiah had prophesied a return from Babylon, the larger OT prophetic expectation was of Israel's spiritual return to the Lord to be His holy people (e.g., Is. 10:20–21; Jer. 23:5–8), with the larger purpose that all people would recognize God's saving work (Luke 3:6; see also 2:32).

3:7–20. The Message of John the Baptist. Although John's proclamation was a startling one, seemingly designed to wake people out of their spiritual lethargy, it is referred to in some translations as preaching the "good news" (v. 18). By calling them a "brood of vipers" (v. 7), John made clear that their poisonous influence proved their lineage from the serpent rather than from Abraham (cf. Is. 59:4–5; Matt. 23:33–35; John 8:39–40, 44). It is not words that matter but *works*, like the "fruits" (Luke 3:8) of a tree. The use of a tree as a symbol for people is common both for the righteous (e.g., Pss. 1:3; 52:8; 92:12; Is. 61:3; Jer. 17:8) and the wicked (e.g., Is. 1:30; 2:12–13). Thus, the character of a person is seen by the "fruit" he or she produces. Jesus would later use the same expression to make the same point (Matt. 12:33–35). John warned that trees not bearing good fruit would be thrown into the fire, referring to the final destruction of the wicked (Ex. 15:7; Is. 5:24).

Different classes of people responded to John's message and asked what they should do to show the genuineness of their repentance. John answered in ways that anticipated Jesus's own prescriptions in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5). Since messianic expectations led people to wonder whether John might be the Christ, he pointed them to One of greater strength who would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire (Luke 3:16; cf. 24:49; Acts 1:5). The reference to fire, judging from the previous mention of trees being cast into the fire (Luke 3:9) and the succeeding reference to chaff being burned up (v. 17), suggests again that the fiery final judgment is in view, not Pentecost. Many think that hellfire will be unending, but here it is called "unquenchable": to continue until effecting the wicked one's complete destruction, leaving neither root nor branch (Mal. 4:1; cf. Matt. 10:28).

John had condemned the union of Herod Antipas with Herodias (Luke 3:19; Matt. 14:3–4; Mark 6:17–18), which led to John's imprisonment.

Herodias had been married to Herod Antipas's half-brother Herod Philip (not the Philip of Luke 3:1 but the son of Herod the Great and Mariamne II). Contrary to OT law (Lev. 18:16; 20:21), Herod persuaded Herodias to divorce her husband in order to unite with him. The other Synoptic Gospels indicate that John was beheaded through Herodias's conniving (Matt. 14:6–12; Mark 6:19–29).

3:21–22. The Baptism of Jesus. Luke gives the briefest of mentions to the baptism of Jesus (cf. Matt. 3:13–17; Mark 1:9–11; John 1:29–34), giving more emphasis to the results of His prayer: (1) the opening of heaven (also in Matt. 3:16; Mark 1:10), referring to the reestablishment of communion between God and human beings (cf. John 1:51); (2) the descent of the Holy Spirit on Him in fulfillment of John's expectation (John 1:33; cf. Luke 3:16); and (3) the heavenly voice confirming Jesus's identity. That the Holy Spirit appeared like a dove (Matt. 3:16; Mark 1:10; John 1:32) recalls the role of the Spirit at Creation (Gen. 1:2). The voice of God from heaven, who addressed Jesus as His Son with whom He was "well pleased" (Luke 3:22), paradoxically associates Jesus with both the promises of the coming Davidic Son (Ps. 2:7–9) and the Suffering Servant (Is. 42:1), echoing also the divine command to Abraham to offer His only son as a burnt offering (Gen. 22:2). The reference in the next section to Jesus being approximately thirty years old fits well our dating of Jesus's baptism at the beginning of the chapter to A.D. 27.

3:23–38. The Genealogy of Jesus. Like Matthew, Luke traces Jesus's ancestry through Abraham and King David so that these fourteen generations in the two genealogies are identical and serve to confirm the fulfillment of the covenantal promises God made to them (Gen. 12:1–3; 2 Sam. 7:12–13; cf. Luke 1:54–55, 69–73). However, the genealogy given in Luke also differs significantly: (1) its placement immediately before the beginning of Jesus's ministry rather than at the outset of the Gospel itself; (2) moving backward (in line with Greco-Roman conventions) rather than forward; (3) tracing Jesus's lineage all the way back to Adam rather than to Abraham; (4) designating Adam (and, by implication, Jesus also) as "the son of God"; (5) indicating that Jesus was thought to be Joseph's son; (6) listing forty-three generations from David to Jesus, compared with twenty-eight in Matthew; (7) not using any explicit numerical structure for the genealogy as Matthew does (Matt. 1:17); and (8) giving a non-kingly Davidic line for Jesus's ancestry—through Nathan rather than Solomon.

This last difference leads to an apparent contradiction: Matthew identified Jacob as Joseph's father (Matt. 1:16), but Luke identified Heli as Joseph's father (Luke 3:23). Various suggestions have been offered to explain this difference, generally assuming that Matthew gives Joseph's actual bloodline. One early interpretation understands the genealogy in Luke as giving Jesus's ancestry through Mary. Another suggestion is that Mary was the only child of Heli and when Joseph married her he was adopted as the legal son and heir of Heli. In support of this possibility is the focus on Mary in the birth narrative and Luke's implicit caveat at the beginning of the genealogy that Jesus was only supposed or thought to be son of Joseph (cf. Luke 4:22; John 8:41), though this is not clearly stated in the passage. Joseph's agreement to take Mary as his lawful wife would have enabled Jesus to be officially registered as a son of Abraham (cf. Matt. 1:20). Extrabiblical historical sources attesting that extensive genealogies were kept by the priests up until the temple's destruction in A.D. 70 fit well with the picture we find in Luke (cf. Luke 2:21).

A number of important theological themes are reinforced through Luke's organization and placement of the genealogy. By tracing Jesus's ancestry all the way back to Adam, rather than stopping at Abraham, the point is underscored that Jesus is not just a Jewish messiah (1:55, 71) but the Savior of the world (2:30–32; cf. John 4:42; cf. 25–26). Luke's genealogy goes even further, tracing Adam's lineage back to God, thus connecting the genealogy of Jesus with Creation (cf. the use of *genesis*, "birth" or "genealogy" in Matt. 1:1). Adam was "the son of God" in the sense that he was made in God's image (Gen. 1:26–27). Luke's placement of the genealogy immediately before the temptation narrative and the beginning of Jesus's ministry reminds readers of several important things: (1) Jesus is God's Son in a special sense (cf. Luke 1:35; 3:22), a fact on which the ensuing temptations would center (4:3, 9); (2) He had come to win back the dominion that Adam, as the prototypical son of God, delivered to Satan through transgression (4:5–6; cf. Rom. 5:12–21); and, (3) as the Spirit-anointed descendent of David (Luke 1:32–33, 69; 4:18), Jesus had come to redeem Israel's failure (1:54; cf. Is. 42:1, 19; 53:5). In short, the genealogy draws together many of the important themes introduced in the birth narratives to prepare for what follows.

4:1–13. The Temptation of Jesus in the Wilderness. Luke mentions at the outset of this section that Jesus was full of the Holy Spirit (v. 1), a description that reminds readers of John's reference to the coming One (3:16) and the descent of the Holy Spirit at Jesus's baptism (3:22) as well as the source of His strength to resist temptation. Not only was Jesus led by the Spirit into the wilderness, but the entire forty-day period was also one during which the Spirit led and instructed Jesus, similar to the training given to John the Baptist (1:80; 3:2). The location, though not precisely known, was probably the barren desert area between Jericho and Jerusalem. It is unusual for the devil to make a personal appearance on earth. In Job he appears only in the heavenly courts, but for this confrontation Satan refused to entrust the task to any of his underlings.

Jesus faced similar temptations in the wilderness as Israel had during their forty years of wilderness wandering, but He was victorious by replying with the commands of God to Israel found in Deuteronomy (Luke 4:4, 8, 10–11; cf. Deut. 6:13, 16; 8:3). By quoting the word of God, Jesus showed that, unlike the generation that perished in the wilderness, He accepted God's will as His own in each of these spheres. He also refused to enter into a debate with the devil (cf. Jude 9). The temptations came at the end of the forty days of fasting, when Jesus was in need of food. The Greek word translated "tempt" can also mean "test." Temptation is a kind of test, but it is not one that God brings. Its power comes from its alignment with the desires of the human heart (James 1:13–14).

Although both Luke and Matthew record the same three temptations (cf. Luke 4:1–13; Matt. 4:1–11), the order of the last two is the reverse of that found in Matthew. Luke records: food (stones to bread), power and possessions (false worship), angelic protection (presumption). With this order, the first and last temptations revolved around the crucial issue of Jesus's Sonship ("*If* You are the Son of God . . .") while the middle temptation involved the crux of the whole Great Controversy. The devil had taken world dominion away from Adam (Luke 3:38) through temptation. Satan underscored this point with the claim that all that he showed Christ was his own possession and that therefore it was now his prerogative to give worldly power and glory (or honor) to whomever he wished (v. 6). Jesus, as the second Adam (Rom. 5:12–18), redeemed Adam's failure. He was tempted in various ways as we are but did not sin (Heb. 4:15), and He overcame them in the same way available to us: through reliance on the word of God (Ps. 119:11). In addition, placing the final temptation in Jerusalem also aligns with Luke's focus on Jerusalem and its temple as the place where God's salvation issued forth and where the cosmic battle would be waged for the salvation of God's people (cf. Luke 2:21–38, 41–50; 9:51; 24:49, 50–52).

The first temptation—to command stones to become bread (4:3)—tested whether Jesus would trust God or rely on Himself for His needs (v. 4). During their wilderness experience, Israel was regularly tested on this point in order, as Moses indicates, to reveal what was in their hearts and whether they would maintain their loyalty to God by keeping His commandments (Deut. 8:2). Their being fed with manna and being led through the wilderness was meant to teach reliance on God and His word (Deut. 8:3; cf. Eph. 6:17).

The second temptation—to worship Satan in return for the glories of the world—seemed to be promising that Jesus could instantly have the authority He had come to earth to regain for humanity. But the devil's promises are always empty. Had Jesus bowed down to the devil, He would in reality have been acknowledging his claim to be the rightful ruler of this planet. Up until this point, Satan's claim to this dominion has not been divinely recognized. He is called the *prince* of this world (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; cf. Dan. 9:26) and the god of *this age* (2 Cor. 4:4; cf. 2 Thess. 2:4). Jesus resisted the temptation, refusing to recognize Satan's claim and rejecting the worship of anyone or anything besides God Himself (quoting Deut. 6:13; cf. Luke 10:20).

In the third and final temptation, in which Jesus was encouraged to throw Himself down from the temple, Satan urged Jesus to commit the sin of presumption—even finding apparent scriptural justification for such an act; but as in Eden, God's word was quoted selectively. Satan, by leaving out the key phrase "in all your ways" (Ps. 91:11), made the promise that angels would keep or guard His people to refer only to *physical* protection. Jesus saw through this deceptive use of Scripture, recognizing that it would have been presumptuous to put His life in danger unnecessarily or prematurely (cf. John 7:1–9). Had Satan thrown Jesus down from the temple, angels likely would have rescued the Savior. But that would not have accomplished Satan's purpose. One's will must consent to sin in order to be overcome.

Although Jesus won this battle, it was just the opening contest. The devil met Jesus when He was at His weakest point. Nevertheless, Satan would await another opportune time (Luke 10:13). His efforts to defeat Jesus and His followers through other means figures in the narrative several more times (8:12; 11:18; 13:16; 22:3, 31; cf. 10:18).

4:14—9:50

Jesus's Galilean Ministry and Preparation of the Twelve

All three Synoptic Gospels focus initially on Jesus's ministry in Galilee, where the people's reception of Jesus was generally more positive and where Jesus and most of the Twelve had been based. While the Gospel of John includes some events during this time (e.g., the feeding of the five thousand; John 6:1–14), its early chapters feature the first year or so that Jesus spent in Judea before John the Baptist's arrest and Jesus's subsequent shift to Galilee (Matt. 4:12).

4:14–30. Foundations for Jesus's Ministry. After His Spirit infilling at His baptism (3:22), followed by the Spirit-led time in the wilderness (4:1), Jesus returned to Galilee "in the power of the Spirit" (v. 14). A knowledge of God's word is a necessary but not a sufficient qualification for ministry. Even for Jesus, the Spirit made His teaching effectual so that He was acclaimed by everyone (v. 15). Like Matthew, Luke focuses first on Jesus's teaching before describing His miraculous healings. This sets the stage for His rejection in Nazareth, where He had grown up (cf. 2:39, 51), by those seeking miraculous proof of His claims. As was His "custom," Jesus attended the synagogue on the Sabbath day (v. 16). The word used here for "custom" (*eiōtha*) refers to a settled practice (cf. Acts 17:2). After the destruction of the temple by the Babylonians in 586 B.C., synagogues arose as centers of worship and religious instruction. A typical Sabbath service included reading the Hebrew Scriptures, followed by an interpretative translation into Aramaic so that the common people could understand the reading (see Neh. 8:8). A visiting teacher would often be invited by the leader of the synagogue to read and interpret the Scriptures (cf. Acts 13:15). Jesus's example of regularly attending Sabbath worship services indicates their continued importance today (Heb. 10:25).

On this occasion, the chosen reading in the Prophets was from Isaiah. It was widely understood (based on the reference in Dan. 9:24–25) that the year of Jubilee (when all debts were forgiven, all slaves were released, and all property reverted to its original owners; see Lev. 25) points to the coming of the Messiah, who would be anointed by the Spirit. In fact, ten Jubilees from 457 B.C., when the messianic prophecy of Daniel 9 began, ends with the prophecy's final climactic week of years, when the ministry of Jesus began (see Dan. 9). If this was a year of Jubilee, as some Bible scholars think, then Jesus announced the fulfillment of this prophecy through His ministry in terms of the Jubilee. The spiritual impact of a gospel of healing, forgiveness, and release to those held in bondage to sin would become clearer through the course of Jesus's ministry.

Significantly, Jesus concluded His reading of Isaiah with the reference to the Jubilee, the *dektos*—"acceptable" or "favorable" year of the Lord—leaving unread the reference to "the day of vengeance" (Is. 61:2). The Jewish people were expecting the Messiah to save Israel by judging and destroying their enemies, but Jesus came to save the lost, not to judge them (Luke 19:10; John 3:17). When Jesus announced that this prophecy was being fulfilled in their hearing (Luke 4:17–21), they realized that He would be a very different kind of Messiah than what they had hoped for, and their attitude changed dramatically. With prophetic insight, Jesus recognized their thoughts, expressed in the form of a well-known proverb: "Physician, heal yourself!" (v. 23). Their attitude was that before Jesus presumed to heal (or teach) others, He needed Himself to be well. Ironically, He who had come to proclaim the acceptable (*dektos*) year of the Lord was Himself not accepted (*dektos*; v. 24) by His own people (cf. John 1:11–12). They were looking for Him to prove Himself by doing in Nazareth the kind of miraculous works that they had heard He did in Capernaum (not yet described by Luke).

But Jesus refused their demand for miraculous proof (cf. Luke 11:16, 29; John 4:48), citing Israel's own history, in which Elijah was sent to help a widow of Zarephath and Elisha healed Naaman the Syrian (Luke 4:26–27). As a result of the widow's faith in meeting the needs of God's prophet ahead of her own, a miraculous supply of food sustained both her and her son (1 Kin. 17:8–16). Similarly, Naaman was miraculously cured of his leprosy after trusting and obeying the prophet's word by immersing himself seven times in the Jordan (2 Kin. 5:1–4). This reference to Elijah and Elisha may also hint at the work done by John the Baptist as the new Elijah, who had prepared the way for Jesus, whose miracles most resembled those of Elisha. Sadly, Israel had a history of rejecting God's messengers, and the people of Nazareth were following that pattern of unbelief. But the underlying point being made by Jesus was that even if God's own people reject Him, others would receive Him, including Gentile outcasts such as widows and lepers.

Truth has often incited opposition. Jews in Nazareth recognized that Jesus was comparing them to the wicked Israelites of the Northern Kingdom, whom Assyria wiped out of existence. Their violent reaction—attempting to throw Him off a cliff (Luke 4:29)—may have been the intended prelude to stoning, which was to be the fate of the false prophet. However, they rejected Him not on the basis of His disagreement with the word of God (see Deut. 13:1–5; Is. 8:20) but because His teaching did not conform to their preconceived ideas. Their violent reaction amounts to a reprise of the third temptation (Luke 4:9–12). Again Jesus resisted the danger, this time by a calm and apparently miraculous escape right through the crowd.

4:31–37. Casting Out an Unclean Demon. Jesus descended from the hill country of Nazareth to Capernaum, located on the northwestern shore of the Sea of Galilee. This city, where Peter lived (Mark 1:29), was a major Jewish center strategically situated on an important Roman highway stretching from Damascus to the Mediterranean. A very large limestone synagogue dating to the fourth century was built on top of earlier ruins, including those of this first-century synagogue where Jesus taught on the Sabbaths (Luke 4:31). Some think that the meaning is only one Sabbath, based on the parallel in Mark 1:21. On the other hand, Luke has already indicated that it was Jesus's practice to attend the Sabbath synagogue service, so it is not difficult to imagine Him teaching over the course of several Sabbaths in the city known as His own (Matt. 9:1).

As all three Synoptic Gospels indicate, Jesus's teaching was distinguished by the authority that accompanied it (Luke 4:32; Matt. 7:29; Mark 1:22). The scribes, or teachers of the law, debated a host of questions and, judging from the rabbinic writings, gave conflicting answers on such matters as the lawful terms of divorce (Matt. 19:3) and which commandment ranked first (Mark 12:28). Jesus, by contrast, made authoritative pronouncements on these (Matt. 19:4–9; Mark 12:28–31) and many other matters (see, e.g., Luke 20:20–40; Matt. 5:33–48). But as Luke points out, it was not just Christ's manner of speaking and answering questions but His words that possessed authority (Luke 4:32, 35–36). The word of God (and of Christ) has a distinctive, self-authenticating quality that sets it apart from every merely human word or opinion.

His word also has the power to transform lives, vividly illustrated by Christ's casting out demonic spirits "with a word" (Matt. 8:16). The impure, demonic spirit was unclean not only because it was inherently evil (Luke 7:21) but also because it led its host into impure places and activities (e.g., 8:27–29; 11:24–26) in order to hinder the host from worshiping God and listening to Jesus. Even the truth, when spoken by demonic influence, as here in calling Jesus "the Holy One of God" (4:34), would lead people to conclude that it was a false prophecy (cf. Jer. 14:14; Zech. 13:2–3; 1 John 4:1; Rev. 16:13–14), which is why Jesus commanded them to be quiet (Luke 4:35; cf. v. 41; Acts 16:16–18). When confronted by the Holy One's powerful word (cf. Luke 4:36) to leave their victim, the unclean spirits or demons came out and could do no further harm (v. 35).

4:38–44. Healing People and Spreading the Message. After expelling the unclean demons, Jesus left the synagogue and went to Simon's home. Prior to Jesus's giving him the new name of "Peter" (6:14; cf. John 1:42), Luke refers to the disciple by his original name of Simon. Thereafter, he is almost always called "Peter." While he along with his brother Andrew are said to be from Bethsaida (John 1:44), it appears that by this time Peter had relocated to nearby Capernaum. Excavations just a short distance toward the sea from the Capernaum synagogue have uncovered the remains of a first-century house that appears to have been used in the years after Jesus's death for Christian gatherings. Further evidence that this was remembered as the house of Peter (where Jesus stayed while in Capernaum, Matt. 8:14–16) includes more than one hundred Christian graffiti in Aramaic, Syriac, Greek, and Latin (regarding Peter's house, see in "Archaeology and the Bible," p. 90).

On this occasion, Peter with several other disciples, who remain unmentioned until Luke narrates their call (Luke 5:1–11; cf. Mark 1:29), requested Jesus's help for Peter's mother-in-law, who lay sick with a fever. Luke, with his medical background, expressed his concern by indicating that it was in fact a "high fever" (Luke 4:38) and thus potentially life-threatening. Perhaps this realization encouraged their making the request even before the Sabbath ended. That Jesus "rebuked" the fever shows the power of Jesus's word. The same word used to rebuke, silence, and cast out demons (4:35, 41) was able to heal those afflicted by illness. While Luke could describe those oppressed by unclean or evil spirits as being healed (e.g., 6:18; 7:21; 8:2; 9:42), he does not attribute sickness to demonic possession. As soon as the fever was rebuked, it went away and Peter's mother-in-law got up and began to serve them. Hospitality was an important concept in ancient Israel and nascent Christianity, but gratitude for being healed also led the hostess to immediately begin serving Jesus and His disciples. The word "served" (*diakoneō*) is used throughout the NT in reference to the work done by Jesus as the model Servant and by believers who followed His example (e.g., Luke 12:37; John 12:26; Rom. 15:25; 1 Tim. 3:10; Heb. 6:10).

Word spread quickly about Jesus's work so that even as the sun was setting, people began bringing the sick to Jesus (Luke 4:40), apparently to be first in line for healing after the Sabbath. Jesus healed every one of them. No one was turned away. Jesus's miraculous healing of disease was illustrative of His healing people from sin (Luke 5:31). For that reason, Jesus's preaching of the good news of God's kingdom could not be confined to Capernaum (4:43). His word "must" spread to other towns and cities also (cf. vv. 14, 37), a divine imperative indicated by the Greek word *dei* (see commentary on Luke 17:20–37). Previously in Luke the angel spoke in prophetic reference to the eternal kingdom that Jesus would usher in (1:33; cf. Dan. 7:13–14, 27), but the demonic reference to Jesus as "the Son of God" and (according to some manuscripts) "the Christ" or "Messiah" (Luke 4:41) amounted to a premature announcement of His messianic identity. Jesus needed more time to redefine for people, even for His own disciples, what that meant before His work as Messiah could be understood (cf. 9:18–22).

5:1–11. Call of the First Disciples. Although not readily obvious from the Synoptic accounts, comparison with the Gospel of John reveals that the disciples had followed Jesus for over a year at this point but apparently had not completely severed themselves from their work as fishermen. Again Luke emphasizes the centrality of "the word of God" (*logon tou theou*; v. 1) in the teaching of Jesus rather than scribal opinion or Pharisaic debates. The Lake of Gennesaret was the geographically more precise name for the Sea of Galilee, but the latter seems to have been more common, as it is used by the other three Gospels. Interestingly, the crowd pressed around Jesus to hear His teaching while the disciples seem to have been more interested in fishing as they had spent all night on the lake and were now busy washing their nets (v. 2). The nets used for deep-sea fishing during the night were long, supported by floats, and able to take in much more fish than the round casting nets used for day fishing in shallow water.

Jesus brought the disciples back into the picture by getting into the boat belonging to Simon and asking him to anchor it just offshore so that he could teach the people from the boat (v. 3). One location along the shore to the south between Capernaum and Tabgha would have made an ideal amphitheater for teaching such a large crowd from a boat in order to avoid people pressing closer and closer. The main purpose, however, may have been what followed. As Jesus did so often, He used an everyday situation to convey a memorable spiritual lesson. He asked Peter to head for the deep part of the lake and let down the nets for a catch. Experienced fishermen know that night is best for catching fish because the nets are far less visible than during the day. Peter expressed the frustration of the group at laboring all night and catching nothing but agreed to obey anyway (v. 5). Often, as followers of Christ, we may be asked to do something that we do not understand, and only in such situations is faith really expressed (cf. 2 Cor. 5:7). Peter mentioned that he would obey because it was Jesus's *rhēma*—"word." Though the term used here is different from that in Luke 5:1, the same theme of the importance of Jesus's speaking is emphasized, focusing this time on hearing and obeying it.

As a result of obeying Christ's command, the disciples learned that they did not need to divide their time between ministry and gainful employment; their temporal needs would be abundantly supplied. The miraculous catch of fish underscored to the disciples the foolishness of relying on their own expertise, that even in seemingly "secular" matters, God's will and blessing was to be sought and secured in order to be truly successful. The reference to Simon Peter (v. 8), introducing the disciple's new name, signals an important change similar to the shift in Acts from Saul to Paul (Acts 13:9). Peter's confession of his sinfulness was similar to Isaiah's reaction when confronted with the divine presence (Is. 6:1–8). Like Isaiah, Peter was also prepared for usefulness in the work for Jesus, whom he now called "Lord" (Luke 5:8) and who called him to

leave behind all other employment. From that time forward, he would be *zōgrōn* (participle of *zōgreō*); this is not the same word used in the passage for catching fish, although it could rarely express that thought. It is the word (as is seen in its LXX usage) for "capturing people alive" in military conquest. Preaching the gospel is like waging warfare against the satanic forces and those allied to them and "capturing" them for the kingdom of God. While this initial invitation was addressed specifically to Peter, Jesus called the other disciples also (cf. Mark 1:16–20), and they left everything and followed Him (Luke 5:11).

5:12–16. Jesus Cleanses a Leper. The setting in (lit.) "one of the cities" (v. 12) continues Christ's purpose of preaching in other cities besides Capernaum (4:43). He was approached by a man completely infected with leprosy (5:12). As in the previous healing episode, the problem was a particularly severe condition. Whether Hansen's disease or some other skin disease is indicated here (Lev. 13–14), exclusion from society was required and the leper had to cry "Unclean! Unclean!" (Lev. 13:45) to warn people against touching him and thus becoming ceremonially defiled. The man apparently approached Jesus on the outskirts of the city since he was prohibited from entering populated areas. He did not ask Jesus to pray for His healing—he recognized that Jesus could cleanse/heal him; the only question was whether He would. There was no thought of bypassing the priestly requirements for cleansing since Jesus commanded him to present himself "to the priest" "as a testimony" for what he had experienced (Luke 5:14; see Lev. 14:1–32).

Luke confirms that Jesus actually healed the man of the disease by indicating that immediately after Jesus touched him and pronounced him healed, the leprosy left him (Luke 5:13). Again the emphasis falls on the power of Jesus's word to heal, but here also His touch was significant. Rather than Jesus being defiled, the man was cleansed. Leprosy was one way God punished sin in the OT (e.g., Num. 12:10; 2 Kin. 5:27; 2 Chr. 26:20), so its cleansing represented an appropriate illustration of Christ's power to cleanse people from sin.

The man's healing also served a larger purpose: it was a testimony to the priests about the nature of Christ's work. This may be one reason why Jesus commanded the man not to tell anyone (Luke 5:14)—to ensure a fair verdict uninfluenced by any possible prejudice the priests might have had toward Jesus's work. Although the good news about Jesus's wonders continued to spread (v. 15), Jesus regularly withdrew from the press of the crowds and the stress of ministering in order to find a solitary place to pray (v. 16). Thus He received the physical and spiritual strength needed to continue His work.

5:17–26. Jesus Heals a Paralyzed Man. This episode begins a series of five controversies with the Pharisees (5:17, 30, 33; 6:2, 7). Although Luke does not say where the healing of this paralyzed man occurred, Mark 2:1 tells us it was in Capernaum. Obviously members of the religious establishment had begun to consider Jesus a serious threat because Pharisees and teachers of the law (or "scribes," Luke 5:21) from as far away as Jerusalem (v. 17) were present. The scribes in general, and the sect of the Pharisees in particular, prided themselves on their knowledge of the Scriptures and the oral traditions or rulings on how the law should be kept, including Sabbath observance and the handling and eating of food in a state of purity (cf. Mark 7:1–5). These legal elaborations continued to accumulate until they were eventually written down and codified in the Mishnah, the Talmud, and other rabbinic writings. Jesus opposed human interpretations being prioritized over Scripture, making it void (Matt. 15:3–6). Consequently, the more significant aspects of the law (justice, mercy, and faith) were being neglected (Matt. 23:23), as this story vividly illustrates.

Jesus, filled with the Holy Spirit (Luke 3:16, 21–22), had "the power of the Lord" to heal (5:17; cf. v. 24). In Luke's writings, "Spirit" and "power" are inseparable; to receive the Holy Spirit is to receive power for ministry (1:35; 4:14; 24:49; Acts 1:8; 10:38). People crowded into the house where Jesus was teaching. A typical house in Capernaum was a single dwelling that could accommodate no more than about fifty people, with a flat roof for use as a second level. A stairway or ladder provided easy access to the roof from the outside. These friends of the paralyzed man, perhaps at his suggestion, carried him up and dug through the roof (Mark 2:4) by removing clay pieces or tiles (the Greek word can mean either) and lowered him into the middle of the assembly (Luke 5:19). Luke has already contrasted the unbelieving Zacharias with the simple faith of Mary, who entrusted her future into God's hands (1:20, 45). Now Jesus affirmed "their faith" (5:20) by granting the man what he needed most—the forgiveness of sins.

While unexpected from what all three Synoptic Gospels describe as a physical problem, Jesus recognized the deeper need of the paralytic, just as He knew the thoughts of the religious onlookers.

To refute the unspoken charge of speaking blasphemies (in this case usurping divine prerogatives by claiming the power to forgive sins), Jesus posed a rhetorical question: Is it easier to pronounce the man forgiven or to enable him to walk? From a human perspective, the easier of the two options was to tell a person that his or her sins are forgiven. But in order to demonstrate that as the Son of Man, He had the right "to forgive sins," Jesus did the harder thing—restoring life to the limbs of the paralytic (v. 24). The title "Son of Man" is almost always found only on the lips of Jesus (except Acts 7:56), apparently as a self-designation, but ambiguous enough to frustrate the religious leaders who were seeking a clear basis for charges against Him (cf. John 12:34). Both the man who was healed and the common people praised and glorified God, recognizing that it was divine power at work.

5:27–32. The Call of Levi. Next Jesus saw a tax collector named Levi collecting customs on goods in transit. Judging from the parallel account in the Gospel of Matthew, the man was also called Matthew (see Matt. 9:9; 10:3). It was not uncommon for individuals to have two names (Acts 12:25; 13:9), even two Jewish names (Acts 1:23; 4:36). Jews who collected taxes for the Romans were considered not just accomplices in the oppression of their fellow countrymen but hopelessly apostate along with other so-called "sinners" (Luke 5:30). Yet Jesus invited him to follow Him (v. 27). Levi Matthew did not need a second invitation. He left everything behind, including his lucrative job, his status with Rome, and his earthly security for an uncertain future as a disciple of Jesus. According to the sociopolitical wisdom of the time, the welcoming of a tax collector into a Jewish teacher's inner circle was unthinkable. But love begets love, as Jesus would remind Simon the Pharisee a little later (7:47). In gratitude, Levi held a grand banquet in Jesus's honor (5:29), inviting his fellow tax collectors so that they too could meet Jesus. To follow Jesus in discipleship means to make disciples in the same way that a genuine tree produces fruit.

The Pharisees, who taught that Jews should not eat with Gentiles or even with religiously questionable Jews for fear of defilement (Acts 10:28), asked the disciples why they kept such company. If they were not being correctly taught, their teacher was obviously to blame. So Jesus answered for them. He had come to call those who recognized their need for healing, these were sinners who knew their need of repentance. Levi, in answering the call, repented—changed his mind and heart (as the Greek word indicates)—which was evidenced by leaving his former life behind and following Jesus.

5:33–39. On Fasting and New Wine. Fasting in various forms occupies a valued place in all the major world religions and was a sign of religious devotion in Israel (Matt. 6:16–18). The Pharisees fasted twice a week (see commentary on Luke 18:9–14). Surprisingly, however, the disciples of Jesus did not fast, except presumably on the Day of Atonement, when all Israel was required to fast (Lev. 16:29–31; cf. Is. 58:3; Acts 27:9). In answering why, Jesus compared His work to that of a wedding celebration; the attendants of the bridegroom should not fast when the bridegroom is with them (Luke 5:34). He and His disciples were proclaiming the good news of the kingdom. It was a new time, a time not to mourn but to be happy. In asserting that the bridegroom would be taken away (v. 35), Jesus adopted similar imagery to that used of Him by John the Baptist (John 3:29) and hinted at His own dark future. After He would be gone, His disciples would fast. The occasional mention of fasting in the NT confirms this (2 Cor. 6:5; 11:27).

The parable about the new and the old present two images: fixing an old garment with a new patch and putting new wine into old wineskins, with neither having good results. In Luke's account, the new patch is torn from a new garment, spoiling both the new and the old. It seems to represent an all or nothing choice. "Accept My whole message and ministry or reject it all." The parable shows an intention not merely to make the old better but to make it new. What better way to describe the "new covenant" (Luke 22:20) than with new wine—fresh, pure, and wholesome. Although this parable appears also in Matthew 9:14–27 and Mark 2:18–22, only here do we find that Jesus added that drinking old or aged wine makes new wine seem unpalatable—apparently a reference to the old Jewish traditions held by the Pharisees and scribes, predisposing them to reject Jesus's message.

6:1–5. Plucking and Eating Grain. Luke next presents two controversies over proper Sabbath observance (6:1–11). No hint is given here of the Sabbath being no longer important. Rather, in both cases Jesus defended the manner in which He and His disciples kept the Sabbath. In the first episode, some Pharisees observed the disciples plucking heads of grain while making their way through a field on the Sabbath. Luke adds the additional detail that they were rubbing them in order to separate the husk from the kernels (6:1). Although the law of Moses provided for gleaning to satisfy one's hunger (Deut. 23:24, 25; cf. Lev. 19:10), the Pharisees taught that such "harvesting" violated the Sabbath (Luke 6:2). Jesus, in defense of His disciples, compared their actions to those of David and his men, who ate the holy showbread that only priests were permitted to eat (vv. 3–4). Both were exceptional cases. The underlying principle of the first episode is that God does not expect us to choose between holiness and human need; they are not in conflict. If the holy bread of the temple could be used to satisfy hunger, the holiness of the Sabbath was no barrier to the disciples satisfying their hunger by plucking grain. Being the Lord of creation (John 1:3; Col. 1:16), Jesus is also Lord of the Sabbath (Luke 6:5) and best able to define how it should be kept.

6:6–11. Healing a Man With a Withered Hand. In this second Sabbath controversy, a similar principle applies: the holiness of the Sabbath did not stand in the way of Jesus relieving human suffering. There seems to have been a Jewish provision for saving life on the Sabbath. Significantly, however, all four Gospels consistently describe Jesus healing chronic conditions on the Sabbath; no life would have been lost if He had waited until the next day (cf. Luke 13:14). Jesus connected the Sabbath with restoration, just as in the beginning it was connected with Creation. Already He had gained a reputation for healing on the Sabbath (4:31–37; cf. John 5:1–9), and so He was watched (Luke 6:7). The Greek word suggests a clandestine surveillance to entrap or to harm (cf. Luke 14:1; 20:20; Acts 9:24). Jesus's enemies kept alert for an opportunity to bring legal measures against Him.

As in the previous episode (cf. Luke 6:2, 4), attention is given here to what is "lawful" to do on the Sabbath (v. 9). The way Jesus framed the question, His opponents were given a stark choice as to what comports with holiness: doing good or doing evil, saving life or destroying it? Tension mounted as Jesus looked around at them all (v. 10), apparently waiting for an answer, but none was forthcoming. The question implied that it is not enough simply to avoid doing evil. Doing nothing when we could do good is also wrong (Prov. 3:27; James 4:17). Failure to do good is to do evil; failure to save life is to kill. Thus Mark 3:5 indicates that Jesus was disturbed by their stubborn, hard hearts. Yet rather than saying "be healed," He simply told the man to stretch out his hand. While Jesus's opponents were raging and furious, there was no basis here for an accusation.

6:12–16. Selection of the Twelve Apostles. After more than a year of ministry, Jesus had attracted many followers and had been able to observe their potential and the extent of their commitment. Before selecting twelve of them for a special work, Jesus prayed to God throughout the night. At crucial points in His ministry, we see Jesus praying (Luke 3:21; 5:16; 9:18, 28; 11:1; 22:41). Such a crucial decision as the appointment of these twelve required divine guidance. Jesus even described them as those whom the Father had "given" Him (John 17:6, 9, 11–12). The number, based on the organization of ancient Israel, was deliberate. They would be the leaders on whom the proclamation of the gospel and the expansion of the church would depend. He called them "apostles," meaning "those sent out." As Jesus was the Apostle sent from the Father (John 20:21; Heb. 3:1), so here the Twelve were set apart for a special ministry. Comparing the four listings of the apostles in the NT (Matt. 10:2–4; Mark 3:16–19; Luke 6:13–16; Acts 1:13), we find them virtually identical (Judas the son of James appears to be another name for Thaddeus). Except for Simon, Philip, and James the son of Alphaeus, who are always listed first, fifth, and ninth respectively, the order of names varies. Luke also indicates here that Jesus gave Simon the name Peter and referred to him that way from then on. Judas Iscariot, by contrast, is called a traitor. Though several suggestions have been made for the meaning of "Iscariot," it probably refers to the place from which Judas came (cf. John 6:71; 13:26)—"man from Kerioth," a town in southern Judah (Josh. 15:25). If so, this would mean he was the only Judean among the Twelve.

6:17–49. Sermon on the Kingdom of God. Several differences in this sermon's setting and content compared with Matthew's similar account (see Matt. 4:24—7:27) have led some to conclude that these are two separate occasions. In both cases, however, Jesus spoke especially to His disciples, though Luke adds that it was in the hearing of the multitude (Luke 6:17, 20;

7:1; Matt. 5:1–2). Also, the sayings are very similar. Nevertheless, the differences are such as to suggest that the two accounts do not stem from a common written source. If the two versions are reporting on the same event, they can be explained as different recollections and retellings of the same sermon. In addition, Matthew includes sayings in the sermon that Luke locates elsewhere, suggesting that Jesus probably repeated some of these teachings on other occasions.

6:20–26. The Beatitudes. Of the eight beatitudes given in Matthew, Luke includes four of them, along with four contrasting woes, all of which Jesus addressed directly to His hearers: "Blessed are you" (poor/rich, hungry/full, weeping/laughing, hated/spoken well of; vv. 21–22). While we might picture Jesus speaking these blessings to some of His listeners and the woes to others there present, it could also be that Jesus deliberately challenged His hearers to evaluate their own lives and consider to which group they belonged. God effected a reversal of fortunes whereby the poor, by responding to Jesus, could actually lay claim to the kingdom of God. The time would come when they would laugh. Even if people would hate, ostracize, insult, or revile them because of their connection with Him, Jesus promised rejoicing and leaping for joy "in that day." His repeated use of the future tense indicates two aspects: future reception of the reward, yet present possession of the reward in heaven (v. 23). Jesus also warned (vv. 24–25) against the seductiveness of wealth (cf. Luke 12:13–21) and the desire to be rich (cf. 1 Tim. 6:9–10)—we cannot serve God and money (cf. Luke 16:13). It is often when people have everything they need that they are tempted to feel no need for God (Deut. 6:10–12; Rev. 3:17), while those whose needs are not met cry out to Him in faith for help. Jesus's warning about the popularity of false prophets (Luke 6:26) harkens back to the persecution of God's messengers, like David running from Saul, Zechariah murdered in the temple court (2 Chr. 24:20–21), and Jeremiah thrown into the mire (Jer. 38:6; cf. Matt. 23:35; Heb. 11:37).

6:27–36. Love Your Enemies. The sign of true disciples of Jesus is their obedience to His commands, including His command to love their enemies (v. 27). How can we love those who deserve it the least? By applying the Golden Rule of acting toward others as we would wish them to act toward us (v. 31). Love is not a feeling but a principle of action. It includes doing good in response to hate, blessing instead of cursing, praying for those who mistreat us, giving more than people ask of us, and lending expecting nothing in return (vv. 33–35). We are to invest not in perishable things but in people. Just as children are like their parents, children of the Most High should desire to be like their heavenly Father, who is kind even to those who are ungrateful and merciful to those who do not deserve the blessings of His kingdom but are given them anyway (cf. Luke 18:13–14).

6:37–42. Do Not Judge. These words are some of the most misunderstood in the entire sermon because the verses that follow are often ignored. Jesus spoke not against law and order (Matt. 5:25–26) but against jumping to conclusions about others when we do not see the whole picture. Rather than trying to remove the speck in my brother's eye, I should first remove the plank in my own eye (Luke 6:41–42). Rather than judging and condemning, we should forgive and then we will be forgiven (v. 37). In giving, we receive. Those who are generous to others will be treated with generosity (Prov. 11:25). The present tense of the command to refrain from judgment indicates that it refers to not just a single instance but to an established practice of not judging or condemning, to forgiving as a way of life. As we bless others, we receive more—far more, like grain pressed down, shaken, and running over (Luke 6:38). The measure we use in evaluating others will be the standard by which others measure us.

The emphasis on what we see and do not see is linked in this passage to a proverb about whether the blind can lead the blind (v. 39; cf. Matt. 15:14, where it refers to the Pharisees). Obviously clear vision is an essential quality for any leader but particularly a spiritual leader because the stakes are so much higher. Leading people astray is the devil's work, which Jesus's disciples are called to counteract by presenting the truth. That is why every disciple must be completely trained to be like his or her teacher.

6:43–45. A Tree Is Known by Its Fruit. The produce reveals the quality of its source (cf. James 3:11–12). Jesus, like John the Baptist (see commentary on Luke 3:7–20), likened people to fruit-bearing trees so that the "fruit," their character, is revealed not by what they say or appear to be but by their actions (cf. Prov. 20:11; 1 John 3:18). Good fruit includes loving one's enemies, being generous without expecting anything in return, and treating others as we wish to be treated. These attitudes springing from the a person's heart—the inner thoughts and motives—are the marks of a true disciple (Luke 6:45; cf. Matt. 12:35; 13:44).

6:46–49. Build on the Rock. In both Matthew and Luke this sermon concludes with an appeal to do what Jesus says (cf. Matt. 7:21–27). Confession of Jesus as Lord is not by itself indicative of a true disciple (Luke 6:46). True discipleship is likened to building a house (v. 48). Digging deep in order to place its foundation on the rock requires more than a mere casual acquaintance with Jesus and a surface knowledge of His teachings. Only putting them into practice will enable a person to endure the difficulties that will ensue when deciding to follow Jesus. Even the house against which the water crashes will not be shaken because it is strongly built on the rock. The rock is a well-known symbol of God in the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Deut. 32:4, 15, 18, 30; Ps. 18:2, 31, 46; Is. 44:8), and here Jesus uses the symbolism in relation to Himself (cf. Matt. 16:18; 1 Cor. 10:4), thus showing that He is God. True faithfulness to Christ is expressed by embracing and living out His teachings.

7:1–10. Jesus Heals a Centurion's Servant. The centurion is so identified because he commanded approximately one hundred soldiers. Being aware of Jewish scruples regarding contact with Gentiles, he sent separate Jewish delegations to implore Jesus's help (vv. 6–7). The "elders of the Jews" (v. 3) were the older, respected leaders of the community (e.g., 20:1; Acts 4:5, 8; cf. Ex. 4:29), indicating that this centurion was widely respected among the Jews in Capernaum, not so surprising in view of his having built them a synagogue (Luke 7:5). That this man had a kind heart is indicated not only by the care toward his servant, whom he held in high esteem, but also by his love for the Jewish nation, surprising because Jews were typically derided by Romans.

While the Jewish leaders exalted the man as *axios*—"worthy" or "deserving"—because of his love and generosity (v. 4), the centurion had the opposite confession: "I am not *hikanos*"—"sufficient," "able," "considerable"—not the same word that is used in v. 4, but conveying the idea that he was not significant enough for Jesus to come into his home. His humble request is relayed by friends who form a second delegation to approach Jesus as He nears the house. The centurion, whose life and those of his men depended on respect for authority and the chain of command, was clearly impressed by reports of the authority that Jesus exercised when commanding demons to leave and healing disease (4:36; 6:19). Jesus praised the man's faith. Earlier, people had *come* to Jesus and desired to *touch* Him in order to be healed, but for the centurion, Jesus's *word* is enough—even from a distance (cf. Mark 7:29; John 4:50). The healing apparently resulted from Jesus's commendation of the man's faith. And normally when Jesus healed, it was the people who were awestruck, but here Jesus was the one impressed with and amazed at the rarity of such faith, found not in Israel but among the Gentiles. The only other recorded instance of Jesus marveling—at the people's unbelief (see commentary on Luke 4:14–30)—was at Nazareth, which is suggested as the reason He could not do many miracles there (Mark 6:5–6).

7:11–17. Jesus Raises the Widow of Nain's Son. Jesus's healing from a distance was immediately overshadowed by an even greater miracle: raising the dead. Traveling the day's journey from Capernaum to Nain, located six miles (10 km) southeast of Nazareth, Jesus entered the village with a large crowd in addition to His disciples (v. 11). Coming out of the city was a large funeral procession, carrying on a bier a widow's only son (v. 12). Special concern is shown by God toward society's most vulnerable members—the fatherless, foreign residents, and widows (Deut. 27:19). The fact that this woman had lost her only means of support made her situation especially dire.

The two streams of people, one joyful and happy to be with Jesus, the other weeping and wailing with disconsolation, met near the gate of the city. This location, where people generally congregated to conduct important business, together with two very large crowds, guaranteed maximum impact for what Jesus was about to do. His command, addressed only to the widow (who would have been at the front of the procession), not the mourners, is more accurately translated, "Stop weeping." Depending on the tone of voice, such words could sound cold and harsh. However, since Jesus is described as having heartfelt compassion for her (Luke 7:13), no doubt they were spoken softly and gently, with a tender sympathy and expectancy designed to inspire the widow with faith. Just as astonishing, Jesus touched the stretcher on which the young man's body lay and brought the procession to a halt. Under normal circumstances, such contact would render a person ceremonially unclean for a week. But all that was forgotten once Jesus told the boy to rise up. He sat up and began to speak, which was proof that he was very much alive.

In reacting to the event, the people acknowledged that God *episkeptomai*—literally "visited," but conveying the idea of "caring for." This was a well-known Jewish way of expressing God's intervention (e.g., Ruth 1:6; 1 Sam. 2:21; see commentary on Luke 1:57–80). Not surprisingly, Luke indicates that word of this miracle spread far and wide, throughout Judea and all the surrounding areas (Luke 7:17). When used by itself, in Luke's writings Judea means the whole of the Holy Land (e.g., Luke 23:5; Acts 10:37).

7:18–35. John the Baptist and Jesus. From Luke's account, it appears that Jesus's raising the widow of Nain's son from the dead was included among Christ's acts that were reported to John the Baptist by his disciples to help curb his doubt. Apparently to show Jesus's healing work as an illustration of the gospel, Luke uses the Greek verb *charizomai*, from the same root as *charis* ("grace"), which is used a few verses later in the sense of "forgive" (vv. 42–43). The only other NT writer to use this verb is Paul, who employs it both ways ("graciously or freely give" in Rom. 8:32; 1 Cor. 2:12; Gal. 3:18; and "forgive" in 2 Cor. 2:7, 10; Eph. 4:32; Col. 2:13; 3:13). John's disciples became witnesses of what they had seen and heard about Jesus, just as the shepherds had been at His birth (Luke 2:20) and as the apostles, including Paul, would be after His resurrection (Acts 4:20; 22:15). These disciples had plenty to report in terms of Jesus's work as a fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecies (Is. 26:19; 29:18; 35:5–6; 61:1). Jesus added a blessing on the one who would not be *skandalizō*—"caused to stumble" or "offended"—because of Him. This was another allusion to Isaiah (Is. 8:14–15; cf. John 6:61) and thus reaffirmed John in the conviction that Jesus was the Messiah.

In His short discourse to His hearers about the mission of John the Baptist, Jesus emphasized that John fulfilled the prophecy in Malachi about preparing the way of the Lord, the Messiah (Mal. 3:1; cf. Is. 40:3). Although John performed no miracles (John 10:41), Jesus counted him the greatest of the prophets because he heralded the arrival of the kingdom of God (Luke 7:28). In addition, Luke adds, the Pharisees and lawyers who refused to be baptized by John rejected God's will for their lives, while the lowly tax collectors accepted it (v. 29). Finally, Jesus passed judgment on the people of His generation, who behaved more like children, excusing themselves for rejecting John because he did not have a more positive message and accusing him of having a demon (v. 33; the same charge would also be leveled at Jesus; see John 7:20; 8:48; 10:20). At the same time, they felt Jesus went to the opposite extreme; His message was too positive, welcoming sinners and eating with them (cf. Luke 15:2). But Jesus indicated that wisdom is recognized "by all her children" (7:35; i.e., the truly wise). Those claiming to be waiting for the Second Coming of Christ must be able to discern the true message and signs of His imminent arrival from wherever it may come and not be lulled into dismissively explaining away present truth.

7:36–50. A Sinful Woman Forgiven. The many similarities between this account and that of a woman anointing Jesus's feet just prior to His arrest and crucifixion strongly suggest that the same incident is being described: (1) All four Gospels place it at a feast in a private home and say that a woman anointed Jesus with fragrant oil, and all but Luke place it in Bethany. (2) They all agree that it occurred while the guests were reclining at a table, and the Synoptic Gospels mention Simon as the host. (3) These three also agree that the oil was in an alabaster flask, while John does not mention the container. (4) Mark and John identify the oil as spikenard, and all but Luke remark that it was very expensive. (5) Both Luke and John mention the anointing of Jesus's feet and that the woman used her hair to wipe them.

The other three Gospels, in stressing the symbolism of this act as anointing Jesus for His upcoming burial, identify it as occurring just a few days before the final Passover and focus on Jesus's reply to Judas. Thus, they agree in many other details, including the high quality and cost of the oil, the indignant reaction of some present that it could have been sold and the proceeds given to the poor, and Jesus's defense of the woman in anointing Him for His burial. Luke, on the other hand, seems to have placed this story earlier in the narrative in order to focus on Jesus's interaction with Simon, which serves to illustrate the gospel proclamation mentioned immediately afterward (8:1). This is consistent with Luke. This connection is supported by Luke's reference in that verse to his ordering of the Gospel in a logical sequence, not necessarily a chronological one (see commentary on Luke 1:1–4). The woman, then, should be identified as Mary (John 11:1, 2; cf. 12:1–3).

Luke calls her sinful and identifies her as being from the same town as Simon, who was one of the Pharisees. In the Gospels generally, the Pharisees opposed Jesus, who did not conform to their oral traditions (see commentary on Luke 5:17–26) and labeled their outward piety

hypocritical (11:39–44; 12:1). The typical manner for eating meals had the guests reclining on their sides around a low table, which explains how Mary stood at His feet behind Him (7:38). It is an emotional scene. She was weeping and washing Jesus's feet with her tears. She let down her hair, which was scandalous in such a social setting, wiped His feet, and kissed and anointed them with the fragrant oil. Mark and John identify this oil as spikenard (Mark 14:3; John 12:3), which was precious and costly—fitting for storage in an alabaster flask used only for the highest quality perfumes. Simon inwardly began to doubt whether Jesus could really be a prophet because if He were, He surely would have recognized that it was a sinful woman touching Him (Luke 7:39). The Pharisee misinterpreted Mary's actions as sexual, by which he then misjudged Jesus, who gently corrected him by means of a parable about two debtors (vv. 41–42). Turning to the woman but really speaking to Simon, He revealed not only that He understood the woman's character but also that He had prophetic insight into the Pharisee's own unspoken thoughts.

Rather than correct the misconceptions directly, Jesus first told a parable of forgiveness. Although fifty denarii was no trivial sum, five hundred denarii represented a laborer's wages for about a year and five months. Obviously the one freely forgiven the larger sum would love the creditor more. The word "forgive" is from the root word for "grace" (see commentary on Luke 7:18–35). Both the woman and the host were in need of grace. Simon had not extended Jesus even the most elemental courtesies—no water to wash His feet, no kiss of welcome, no oil for anointing His head. Consequently, He understood Mary's actions as flowing out of gratitude for forgiveness she had already experienced. She was not forgiven because she had abundant love; she was forgiven with the result that she had abundant love. Jesus had already likened His ministry of forgiveness to the year of Jubilee's canceling of debt (see commentary on Luke 4:14–30). This woman's experience not only provided for Simon a vivid lesson in forgiveness but also showed him he needed it too, especially if he was responsible for leading her into sin. When Jesus affirmed to the woman that her sins were forgiven, some asked among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" (7:49). The answer to this crucial question will continue to be unfolded for Luke's readers, who may do well to ponder for themselves what Jesus said to the woman: "Your faith has saved you." The word "save" can also mean "heal" and is used that way by Luke later (e.g., 8:36, 48, 50). But here it unambiguously refers to salvation through faith, paving the way for the reference in the next section to Mary Magdalene's having been healed (using a different word) from seven demons (8:2). Although not explicit in the Gospels, these two Marys were most probably the same person (cf. DA 568). This would provide another reason for Luke's placing this story here.

8:1–3. Women Provide Financially for Jesus's Ministry. With these verses, Luke connects not only the previous story dealing with forgiveness but also the parables that follow to Jesus's proclamation of the glad tidings, good news, or gospel of the kingdom of God (see commentary on Luke 7:36–50). Besides the twelve apostles, there were also some women followers who traveled with Jesus (8:2). Despite the fact that it was unacceptable in the Jewish culture of the time to have women disciples (see John 4:27; cf. Luke 10:39, 42; Acts 1:14), teachers did sometimes receive financial support from women.

The role of women at the crucifixion of Jesus and at the empty tomb is recorded by all four Gospels, but reference to them as disciples at this early stage is unique to Luke. This shows Jesus's willingness to teach them in order for them to be effective witnesses. Two of the three women named here reappear in Luke among the first witnesses to Jesus's resurrection and would be among the first to proclaim His resurrection (Luke 24:1–10). Mary Magdalene's having been delivered from seven demons demonstrates that even worst-case scenarios are not hopeless (cf. 11:24–26). The fact that Joanna (8:3), Herod's steward's wife, provided support for Jesus shows that His gospel message reached the elite as well as the poor.

8:4–18. Parables of the Kingdom. According to Matthew and Mark, these parables of the kingdom were told beside the Sea of Galilee (Matt. 13:1–23; Mark 4:1–25). Luke emphasizes the vast amount of people who came from many towns and cities to see Jesus.

Jesus solemnly concluded the parable of the sower with an urgent call for people to understand. This call concludes the parable of the sower in all three Synoptic Gospels (cf. Matt. 13:9; Mark 4:9), suggesting that these parables were meant to be understood by a larger circle of followers. This call is found elsewhere too, sometimes being spoken just to the Twelve (Matt. 13:43; Mark 4:23), while at other times, as here, extending to the larger multitude (Luke 14:35; Matt. 11:15; Mark 7:16; cf. Rev. 2:7, 11, 17). Through this call, Jesus invited His listeners to understand the deeper spiritual meaning in His teachings. But truly understanding this gospel of the kingdom involves more than a mere intellectual acceptance of the truth. In harmony with the Hebrew understanding that hearing includes the idea of obedience, Jesus was also calling for a personal heart commitment from His listeners (cf. v. 12) to put the principles of God's kingdom into practice. Those who had heard Christ's sermon on the kingdom of God were now challenged to reflect on their own response to His teaching.

According to the interpretation given to the disciples, this first parable explains that sowing the same seed (the word of God; v. 11) may have different outcomes depending on the condition of the soil (i.e., the hearers' receptivity to the word and their willingness to act on what they hear). The acceptance of Jesus's teachings is equated with acceptance of God's word—not too surprising if we consider them as an elaboration on and magnification of truths already latent in the OT. Unfortunately, in the parable some hearers refuse to believe and be saved (v. 12). Others joyfully accept the gospel and "believe for a while," but when tests and temptations come, rather than responding in harmony with their belief, they fall away (v. 13). A third group may act on their beliefs to some extent, but the cares, worries, riches, and pleasures of life are left to grow and, like thorny weeds, strangle their spiritual life and take over their hearts, and so they do not reach maturity (v. 14). In other words, worldly considerations rather than the principles of the kingdom control their life (cf. Matt. 6:33).

The good ground or soil symbolizes those who listen to God's word with an honest and good heart and *katechō*—"keep," "hold on," "retain" (Luke 8:15; cf. its use in 1 Cor. 11:2; 15:2; Heb. 10:23). Those who firmly believe God's word will also practice it and bear fruit, that is, the kingdom qualities described in Christ's sermon (Luke 6:20–45; cf. Matt. 7:20; Gal. 5:22–25) will be seen in their lives. Although these four types of ground represent different responses, it is not as if some are naturally more receptive than others. The Spirit of God brings the message home to each heart. The hearer may be transformed by believing the word and allowing the Spirit's work to continue (John 3:5–8); however, as the parable indicates, the soil of people's hearts may become so hardened that they neither see nor understand (Luke 8:10; cf. Ezek. 12:2).

The OT quotation (from Is. 6:9–10) refers to the effect that Isaiah's prophetic proclamation would have on people who obstinately refuse to listen. Those who persistently refuse to receive the word deeply into their hearts and lives will, like ancient Israel, fail to patiently endure (unlike those described in Luke 8:15). Such a fruit-bearing life is like a lamp that should be displayed openly for all to see (v. 16), for everything concealed or secret will be manifested in the judgment (v. 17; Eccl. 12:13–14). That is why we must carefully evaluate not only what we listen to but how we listen; otherwise, those who seem to have received the word may find even that taken away (Luke 8:18).

8:19–21. Jesus's Relatives Come to Him. As a further illustration of both the sermon and these parables of the kingdom, Luke includes here the incident of Jesus's mother and brothers coming and being unable to see Him because of the crowd (see "The Brothers of Jesus," p. 1252). Not unlike His response in the temple as a boy (Luke 2:49), Jesus prioritizes the spiritual relationship over the physical. His true family are His followers, who, as the present tense in Greek indicates, are hearing the word of God and doing it.

8:22–25. Jesus Calms the Storm. Mark 4:35 places this event in the evening, when such a violent storm, not uncommon on the Sea of Galilee, is more likely. Cold winds descending from the surrounding mountains can suddenly generate waves up to seven feet (2 m) high, and so the fear of these experienced fishermen that they might perish in the storm is understandable. The surprise is that Jesus could remain asleep even though water was overwhelming the boat. Nevertheless, to hold all thirteen men, the boat would have to have been fairly large and, indeed, Luke's wording suggests a sailboat rather than a rowboat (Luke 8:23, 26; regarding a first-century boat, see "Archaeology and the Bible," p. 90). Emphatically, the disciples cried out to Jesus twice, "Master, Master" (v. 24). This title, found only in Luke, underscores Jesus's authority, which is vividly displayed in His rebuking of the wind and waves so that all was calm (v. 24). More troubling to Jesus than the storm was His disciples' terror. "Where is your faith?" (v. 25). This, rather than their seamanship, was the vital ingredient. As they asked in wonderment who Jesus is that even nature obeys Him, they also may have profitably pondered their own human weakness and need of divine power essential for their next challenge.

8:26–39. Healing of the Demoniac of Gadara. Having faced the raging sea, Jesus and the disciples, on reaching land, were now confronted by a raging demoniac. All three Synoptic Gospels offer only an approximate location. In any case, the events described happened in the vicinity of the lake (Matt. 8:28; Mark 5:1). The most likely but less notable location, which appears in some early and important manuscripts, Gergesa, is also the only point at which the hills descend steeply to the eastern shore. Nearby the place commonly identified as the location for this story are cavern tombs (the type used for burial) with some evidence of occupation. This fits the description of the demoniac living in the tombs, a place of perpetual ritual impurity.

The man, violent and wearing no clothes, acted like a suppliant by falling at Jesus's feet, but he spoke with a demonic voice (cf. Luke 4:34, 41). As already observed, a true confession coming from demons poses a serious credibility problem (see commentary on Luke 4:31–37). Compared with the demonic speech in the Capernaum synagogue, this man showed more respect and deference to Jesus as he begged Him to leave him alone (Luke 8:28; cf. 4:34). Discerning the man's respectful approach and gesture of obeisance as an unspoken cry for help, Jesus commanded the spirit to come out, but surprisingly it resisted Him. The reason may be that although the text initially suggests that the man was possessed by only one demon (8:28–29), and Jesus commanded only a single unclean spirit to come out (v. 29; cf. the singular form in Mark 5:8), he was possessed by many more. Jesus asked the demon its name (v. 30), and it became evident that the man was possessed by an army of demons named "Legion" (analogous to the largest Roman military unit consisting of four to six thousand troops). A careful reading of Scripture reveals that demons, which are also called unclean, impure, or evil spirits (Luke 4:33, 36; 6:18; 7:21; 8:2), are actually fallen angels (cf. Rev. 12:7–9; "ministering spirits" of Heb. 1:14 refers to angels that have not fallen). The demons' fear of torment anticipates God's future judgment and the fiery punishment prepared for the devil and his angels (Matt. 25:41; Jude 6) in the abyss (Luke 8:31)—a term that generally refers to the realm of the dead (Rom. 10:7; cf. Ps. 71:20). When used in connection with the final judgment, it refers more specifically to the corpse-covered earth that constitutes Satan's prison during the Millennium (Rev. 20:1; cf. Gen. 1:2; Jer. 4:23–26). Rather than being sent to this prison prematurely (Matt. 8:29), the demons begged Jesus to send them into a herd of swine (numbering about two thousand; Mark 5:13). In permitting them, this time Jesus used a plural form of command—*hypagete*—"Go" (Matt. 8:32). The demons left the man and entered the swine, which violently rushed down the hill and drowned in the lake (Luke 8:33).

Those tending the pigs recounted to the townspeople how the man had been *esōthē*—"saved" (sometimes translated as "healed"; see commentary on Luke 7:36–50). There is overlap in Luke between the healing of disease and the expelling of demons; both point to the work of salvation that Jesus came to accomplish (cf. John 6:37). The reason for the fear that prompted the residents' request that Jesus leave is not given, but it likely was due to the enormous loss incurred through the herd of swine being drowned as well as the clear and frightening manifestation of supernatural power in the man's restoration to his right mind. Perhaps their superstitions had been aroused, causing them to worry that more calamities might come, and so they asked Jesus to leave (Luke 8:37). Despite the desire of the man to accompany Jesus and His disciples, he was told to return home. His work was to stay there, where he would tell everyone how much God had done for him (v. 39). The relatively rare Greek word translated "tell" or "proclaim" means to describe in detail, to give a complete account, and it is employed by Luke in reference to sharing one's own religious experience (Luke 9:10; Acts 9:27; 12:17; cf. the noun form in Luke 1:1). Here the man shared it with people throughout the whole region.

8:40–56. Hemorrhaging Woman Healed and Girl Raised to Life. This section contains two miracle stories, one contained inside the other. The main story is about a Jewish official who needed help for his daughter. Inside of this story there is another one about a woman who had been sick for twelve years (the same length of time that Jairus's daughter had been alive), but she had no father to intervene for her. With such an illness, Levitical law relegated her to perpetual uncleanness and seclusion (cf. Lev. 15:25–27), but she ignored this command. She had received no help from physicians. Her hope, and her desperation, was stronger than her fear of violating social norms. Luke does not mention the more negative aspects of the treatment doctors gave the woman (cf. Mark 5:26).

The woman succeeded in touching the border, or edge, of Jesus's clothing, referring to the tassels that hung from the outer garment (Matt.

9:20 uses a plural form; cf. Num. 15:38–39; Deut. 22:12). These served as a reminder to keep God's commandments. Her touching them showed not only a desire to be well but her desire to resume a normal, Torah-observant life, including visits to the temple. In asking "Who touched Me?" (Luke 8:45), Jesus differentiated this touch of faith from the random touches of the people around Him (cf. Mark 5:28). He perceived power going out to heal (Luke 8:46), and lest some magical quality be attributed to His clothing, Jesus was determined that the real explanation be known. Not only was she instantly cured, she also became a witness. Jesus affirmed her in two ways. First, in calling her "daughter," He included her as a member of His spiritual family. Second, and closely connected to the first, He affirmed that it was her faith that healed her. It can also be translated, "Your faith has saved you." Jesus's work of healing is parabolic of His work of salvation (see commentary on Luke 7:36–50).

As in the previous stories (see 8:25, 48), so in the continuing story of the daughter of Jairus, faith was the means by which Jesus could help and heal (cf. Matt. 13:58). Jesus expressed encouragement to keep on believing (as Mark 5:36 indicates by use of the present tense) following the messenger's discouraging tidings. Besides the father and mother, Jesus permitted only Peter, James, and John to enter the house with Him and to approach the place where the girl lay (Luke 8:51; cf. Mark 5:37). These three disciples would be singled out again to accompany Jesus to the Mount of Transfiguration (Luke 9:28) and, according to the other Synoptics, to watch and pray with Him in Gethsemane (Matt. 26:37; Mark 14:33; cf. Gal. 2:9).

For a prominent person like Jairus, there likely were many mourners making a loud commotion (cf. Mark 5:39). But their moaning and weeping suddenly became derisive laughter when Jesus told them to stop, that the girl was not dead but asleep, because they knew she was dead (vv. 53–54). Luke underscores the certainty of the girl's seemingly hopeless condition. Jesus likened death to sleep also in connection with Lazarus (John 11:11–14). Such a description of death is frequent in the OT (e.g., 1 Kin. 2:10; Jer. 51:57; Dan. 12:2) and in the NT (e.g., Matt. 27:52; Acts 7:60; 13:36; 1 Cor. 15:20; 2 Pet. 3:4). Having demonstrated His power over nature (Luke 8:22–25), the demons (vv. 26–37), and disease (vv. 43–48), Jesus proved again His power over death. As with the widow's only son, here too with the father's only daughter, Jesus reached out and touched to make alive.

In all three instances of raising the dead, Jesus addressed the individuals directly and commanded them to arise (Luke 7:14; 8:54; John 11:43), prefiguring the day of His calling people forth from the grave (John 5:28–29; 1 Thess. 4:16). The "spirit" of the girl (Luke 8:55) was not an entity with consciousness separate from the body. The word used here refers to the breath or life of animals as well as people (see, e.g., Luke 23:46; Gen. 6:17; 7:15; Ps. 146:4; Eccl. 3:19–20; Acts 20:9; James 2:26). Always thinking of others' needs, Jesus directed that the girl be given some food and commanded her parents to tell no one what had happened (Luke 8:55–56). This likely would have been difficult, but to spread the news could have complicated and perhaps prematurely ended Jesus's work (cf. John 11:47–53).

9:1–6. The Mission and Sending of the Twelve. Having been called to follow Jesus (5:1–11), appointed as apostles (6:12–16), and instructed extensively as to the nature of the kingdom of God, witnessing its power and presence in Jesus's ministry, the Twelve were now sent out to declare the kingdom of God and to heal the sick (9:2). The apostles were to return to the towns and villages where Jesus had been, not alone but in pairs (Mark 6:7; see commentary on Luke 6:12–16). Furthermore, Jesus gave them "power and authority" (9:1) so that they could relieve suffering as He had done. In Mark they were permitted to take a staff and sandals, while in Luke the former is prohibited, and in Matthew both are. The main point is that the apostles were to take nothing that ordinarily would be needed on an extended journey, not even a staff (which could protect against attack) or a spare outer garment. Instead, they were to seek out those who would receive them into their houses and provide for their needs, thus providing a base for preaching the gospel (the good news) and healing (v. 6) in that locale. To refuse hospitality to a fellow Jew would have been most unusual, but should that happen, those who experienced it were to solemnly shake off the dust from their feet as a testimony (v. 5). This command alludes to the practice of pious Jews, who, on their return from traveling outside Israel, would shake the dust from their feet to avoid defiling the Holy Land with Gentile uncleanness. In other words, those who would reject Jesus's emissaries would be treated like unbelieving Gentiles and have to answer for this rejection on the day of judgment.

9:7–9. Herod Seeks to See Jesus. It seems that the excitement surrounding Jesus's work and

that of His disciples reached Herod Antipas, tetrarch of Galilee. But he was perplexed (v. 7) and confused by the conflicting reports about Jesus. According to some, John the Baptist or one of the ancient prophets had been resurrected, while others said Elijah had appeared (v. 8). A similar collage of figures were mentioned when Jesus asked His disciples whom people said He was (vv. 18–19). There seems to be a hint of fear and foreboding expressed by Herod as he pondered the meaning of this (v. 9; cf. Mark 6:16). Despite his having had John beheaded, a similar work to John's was being done throughout his territory. It is unlikely that Herod wanted to see Jesus because he wanted to kill him (despite the threat in Luke 13:31; cf. Matt. 2:13); he was probably hoping to question Him and maybe even see a miracle performed (Luke 23:8–9; Mark 6:14). In any case, the setting now shifts to Bethsaida, outside of Herod's jurisdiction.

9:10–17. Feeding the Five Thousand. After the disciples told Jesus all about their work among the people, He took them to a desolate place near Bethsaida (cf. v. 12), the hometown of brothers Peter and Andrew as well as Philip (John 1:44; 12:21). The fishing village itself would not have been a secluded place, so perhaps a grassy place on a nearby hill overlooking the lake (cf. Mark 6:39; John 6:10) would have fit the setting described here. Mark 6:45 adds (when this miracle was finished) that Jesus sent His disciples "to Bethsaida," supporting Luke's assertion that the place where this feeding miracle happened was near Bethsaida but making it clear that it was not in the city of Bethsaida itself (for more on the location of this miracle, see commentary on John 6:16–21). When the crowds found Him, Jesus did not turn them away. He received and welcomed them (Luke 9:11) because they were like wandering sheep (Mark 6:34; cf. Num. 27:17). According to Matthew, He healed the sick among them (Matt. 14:14), and Mark says that He taught them "many things" (Mark 6:34). Luke has both elements, adding that Jesus taught them about the kingdom of God (Luke 9:11; cf. 4:43; 8:1; 9:2). The instruction continued until late in the day because finally the disciples suggested that the people be dismissed to find food and lodging (9:12). Instead, Jesus commanded the disciples to feed them, a seeming impossibility with just five loaves of bread and two fish, even if they were to buy food, because there were about five thousand men. Counting women and children, the total group could easily have numbered nearly fifteen thousand people. But OT precedents for miraculous feedings might have suggested that even with such meager provisions God could provide (Ex. 16; Num. 11; 2 Kin. 4:42–44). Christ's looking up to heaven (Luke 9:16) revealed the miracle's real source; as with the manna in the wilderness, it came from above.

By commanding the people to sit in groups of fifty (v. 14), Jesus facilitated not only the distribution of food by the disciples but also their counting the total number of people and reminded them of their dependence on Him in order to serve. Gathering up the leftovers in twelve baskets (v. 17), one for each disciple, encouraged both economy and opportunity for further service.

Other than Christ's own resurrection, this is the only miracle that is recorded in all four Gospels, which underscores its importance for understanding who Jesus was and the nature of His work. According to John, the miracle led people to think of Him possibly as the prophet like Moses (John 6:14; cf. Deut. 18:15–18). In Luke, Jesus raised with the disciples the question of His identity soon after the feeding (Luke 9:18–21).

9:18–27. Peter's Confession and the Cross. As often preceding significant events (6:12; 11:1; 22:41–46; cf. 3:21; 9:29), Jesus was praying in solitude. When His disciples arrived, Jesus asked them about His identity. Many people thought He was John the Baptist (cf. 9:7; Mark 8:28;). Elijah, a miracle-working prophet, was expected to return (Mal. 4:5; Mark 9:11), making him the next most popular suggestion. But the mention of John or one of the prophets from times long past also shows a widespread belief in resurrection from the dead. The next question to the disciples is the most important in all the Bible: Who is Jesus? Who do you say that He is? (cf. Matt. 27:22). It is a question that all must eventually answer. Peter, as usual, spoke for the group. Rather than the Messiah of Israel, he answered that Jesus was "God's Messiah" or "the Christ of God" (Luke 9:20). Jesus is "the Savior of the world," not just of the Jews (John 4:42; cf. Ps. 72:8), because God desires all to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4).

Yet Jesus ordered and warned them to not tell anyone (Luke 9:21), as with the leper's cleansing and the raising of Jairus's daughter (5:14; 8:56). Jesus disclosed here for the first time why. Refusing the role of a political savior (cf. 4:5–8), He was of divine necessity to suffer and be rejected (9:22; see also 2:49). He mentioned three groups of leaders: the elders, who were widely respected leaders in Israel; the chief or ruling priests; and the scribes, or teachers of the law, who were experts in how it should be kept. These three groups composing the Sanhedrin united against Jesus because He constituted a serious threat to their authority. They would hand Him over to the Romans to be crucified (9:44; 18:32), but His death and His resurrection on the third day would be in accordance with prophecy (18:33; 24:7, 46; Acts 10:40; 1 Cor. 15:4; cf. Ps. 22; Is. 53; Hos. 6:1–2). Only thus could the purpose of His life be fulfilled in bringing salvation (Luke 2:30, 38; cf. John 12:27).

Jesus went on to state that those who follow Him must take up their cross (Luke 9:23). This personal cross is not meritorious but rather the only reasonable response to receiving the atonement provided by Jesus's death (Is. 1:18; Rom. 12:1). It is also a choice to be made daily (cf. 1 Cor. 15:31). Willingness to surrender our lives for Jesus if God wills includes within itself all lesser sacrifices for the gospel. If we live for ourselves, even gaining the whole world, what compensation is that for ultimately forfeiting eternal life—being lost and destroyed in the end (Luke 9:25)? The destiny chosen by each will be revealed at Jesus's coming in glory (v. 26). Yet some would not taste death before glimpsing that glory, that is, of the kingdom of God (v. 27). The placement of this saying in all three Synoptic Gospels immediately before the transfiguration points the reader to that event as its fulfillment.

9:28–36. The Transfiguration. Although the transfiguration is recorded to have occurred about eight days later (using inclusive reckoning; cf. Mark 9:2), its close connection with the previous statement of Jesus shows that it prefigured the coming kingdom. Only those disciples who would witness His agony in Gethsemane (cf. Mark 14:33) joined him on the mountain, traditionally thought to be Mount Tabor, but the actual place is not known with certainty. Only Luke adds that He went up on the mountain to pray (Luke 9:28). It may have been night since the disciples fell into a deep sleep (v. 32). But with Jesus's face now transformed in appearance, shining "like the sun" (Matt. 17:2) and His robe white and glistening like a flash of lightning, they awoke to behold the King in His glory (Luke 9:29; cf. v. 43; 2 Pet. 1:16). They also saw two men, identified as Moses and Elijah (Luke 9:30). These two, representing the kingdom's citizens, were standing for those who would be resurrected and translated respectively. They also personified the witness of the Law and the Prophets to Christ's decease or departure (Gr., *exodus*) that would be accomplished or fulfilled in Jerusalem (cf. 13:33) with His death, resurrection, and ascension. Luke's word choice depicts Christ's work of salvation not only as a fulfillment of OT hopes but as a kind of "new exodus," by which a "new Israel" composed of believers in Him was brought into existence.

Somewhat lost in this glorious, awe-inspiring moment, Peter suggested that they make three tabernacles or shelters—he was apparently thinking that Moses and Elijah, as heavenly beings, deserved the same honor that Jesus did (cf. John 1:14). But the glory surrounding these two was merely a reflection of the glory of God that shone from Jesus's face. Perhaps Peter thought they had come to install Jesus as king of Israel, but the cross would necessarily come before the crown. As at Mount Sinai (Ex. 19:16; 24:16) and the wilderness tabernacle (Ex. 33:9–10; 40:34–38), the presence of God now came down in a bright cloud (Matt. 17:5; cf. Rev. 1:7). Some interpreters suggest that the cloud covered all six persons, and that the disciples' fear was related to their own entering of the cloud. Others suggest that the cloud only covered Jesus, Moses, and Elijah, and thus that the disciples' fear was related to their observing the cloud cover them. In either case a voice from the cloud proclaimed a message to them. Both interpretations are possible, but the fact that the disciples heard the voice speaking from the cloud seems to suggest that they were not covered by it. At Jesus's baptism, the Father acknowledged Him as His Son (Luke 3:22). Here manuscripts differ. Some read that the Father called Christ His "Chosen One," and others, that He referred to Him as His "beloved" (9:35). The best reading is probably "Chosen One." The command in Greek, *akouete* (v. 35), not only means to hear but also urges an ongoing willingness to listen and obey (cf. Deut. 18:15).

9:37–43a. Healing of a Demon-Possessed Boy. Luke's reference to "the next day" suggests that Jesus and the three disciples spent the rest of the night on the mountain and went down in the morning. Already many people had gathered to await their return because a serious case of demon possession had been brought to the disciples and they could not cast the demon out (v. 40). The epileptic symptoms (cf. Matt. 17:15)—crying out, being convulsed and falling down, foaming at the mouth—were said to be caused by a spirit or demon (Luke 9:39, 42; see 4:33).

This represents a particularly difficult case because of the prevailing unbelief (cf. Matt. 13:58) of the father (Mark 9:24), of the disciples (Matt. 17:20), and of the crowd as a whole, whom Jesus referred to as a faithless and perverse generation. Jesus repeated His indictment of "this generation" on several occasions (Luke 7:31; 11:29–32, 50–51; 17:25; 21:32; cf. Acts 2:40), attributing Israel's rejection of Him to their unbelief and alluding to it as a fulfillment of Moses's words of warning to Israel (Deut. 32:5, 20). Unfortunately, the disciples' initial failure no doubt made matters worse by confirming the onlookers in their unbelief. The fact that the boy was an only child (v. 38) made the father's situation even more desperate. Furthermore, the demon did not give up without a fight. As soon as Jesus called for the father to bring his son, the demon threw him down into a convulsion. But Jesus rebuked the demon and healed the child. Even the demons had to listen to and obey His command, and the people were led to see in Jesus's work, as the three disciples on the mount saw in Jesus's person, the majesty and greatness of God (cf. 2 Pet. 1:16–18).

9:43b–50. The Coming Passion Illuminates Greatness and Authority. Jesus was intent on making the disciples understand the true nature of His mission as Messiah (cf. 9:21). He repeated even more emphatically the prediction of His suffering by urging His disciples to let His words sink in by listening very carefully. Added to the first prediction of His death and resurrection was that He was about to be betrayed (v. 44). The choice of words suggests this event was rapidly approaching. The disciples' slowness to grasp what lay ahead is emphasized here in four ways: they "did not understand" what He was saying; "it was hidden from them;" they were unable to perceive or grasp its import; and "they were afraid to ask" Jesus what it meant (v. 45).

It may be they did not want to understand, because a dispute ensued over which one of them would be the greatest in the kingdom. Apparently they were also afraid to argue over it in front of Jesus, but He knew their thoughts (the same word used for "dispute" or "argument" in v. 46; cf. 2:35). To correct their thinking, Jesus set a little child next to Him (9:47), illustrating that greatness does not reside in a person but in actions—identifying with, receiving, and caring for the "least" in the kingdom, including the poor, the lowly, and the outcasts. The implication is that we have not really received Jesus if we are unwilling to follow His example and do as He has done (cf. Matt. 25:40, 45). Only those who do, by identifying with the least, will be recognized as truly great in the kingdom (Luke 9:48).

Apparently reflecting on what constitutes sufficient evidence of someone receiving Jesus, John referred to someone they saw exorcising demons in His name, whom they tried to stop. Again Jesus gently corrected them. Jesus said those who are not against us (or "you," according to some manuscripts) are for us (or "you" in some manuscripts). The best textual evidence supports the "you" reading.

9:51—19:27

JESUS'S JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM AND MINISTRY OUTSIDE GALILEE

Luke inserts at this point a large section of material, most of which is not found in the other Gospels. As Jesus began what appears to have been His final journey to Jerusalem, He traveled to Samaria, Perea, and Jericho, among other places. The journey was circuitous and slow, winding in and out of Judea but avoiding Jerusalem itself so as not to bring His ministry to a premature end. Along the way, Jesus sent out the seventy as He did the Twelve, encountered further controversy, and presented some of His most memorable parables and sayings. Also, many of the teachings given in Galilee were likely repeated for these new listeners.

9:51–62. Rejection by a Samaritan Village and the Cost of Discipleship. Jesus knew what awaited Him in Jerusalem, but Luke focuses on the triumphant time when He would ascend to heaven. Jesus resolved (lit. "set His face") to go forward to certain suffering and death. He would go not secretly, as He had earlier (cf. John 7:10), but publicly, sending messengers ahead of Himself to announce His coming so that as many people as possible could be invited to hear Him (Luke 9:52). The refusal of a Samaritan village to receive these emissaries because He was headed to Jerusalem (v. 53) shows the hostility and bigotry that existed between the Jews and the Samaritans (cf. John 4:9, 20). Such tensions meant that journeying from Galilee to Jerusalem through Samaria could be quite dangerous, which is why Jewish pilgrims traveling to Jerusalem for religious feasts generally went the longer way through the Jordan Valley and then up to Jerusalem from Jericho.

Indignant at this rebuff, James and John wanted permission to call fire down from heaven to destroy them (Luke 9:54), recalling a precedent set by Elijah (2 Kin. 1:10, 12). Of course the situation here was quite different, and so Jesus rebuked them. He would not force Himself on anyone. Words of rebuke appear in some manuscripts and versions (Luke 9:55–56). In going to another village, Jesus followed His consistent practice of avoiding conflict wherever possible (cf. 6:29) and seeking out those more open and receptive to His teachings.

Next Jesus was approached by three would-be disciples. One promised to follow Him wherever He went (9:57), but Jesus warned him of the rejection awaiting His followers (which was just encountered in Samaria). This rejection is again illustrated in the response of a man whom He called to follow Him but who wanted to bury his father first (v. 59). Although it was understood that the duty of burying a loved one ordinarily took precedence over all other religious duties, the unique opportunity and summons to herald the kingdom of God was even more important. In saying, "Let the dead bury their own dead" (v. 60), Jesus commanded the man to leave his father and family behind to follow Him. Jesus used familiar images in the physical world to explain the spiritual realm. The spiritually dead can bury their own; Jesus and His followers were doing just the opposite—bringing life to those dead in sin (cf. Luke 19:10; Eph. 2:1). A far weaker excuse was given by a third would-be disciple: saying farewell to his family (Luke 9:61). But looking back, being hindered by earthly ties or familial obligations, actually makes a person unfit to follow Jesus in full-time ministry (v. 62).

10:1–24. The Sent. Contrary to the half-hearted attempts at discipleship above, many others, in addition to the Twelve, had left everything to follow Jesus (cf. 5:11). These also listened to Jesus's teachings, learned, and obeyed them and so were prepared to proclaim His kingdom message. This time seventy (other manuscripts have seventy-two) were sent out; the larger number is evidence of a growing number of totally dedicated disciples. As with the Twelve, the number may be symbolic, in this case of the larger mission beyond Israel (cf. the seventy nations of Gen. 10 descended from Noah). Also like the Twelve, Jesus sent them out two by two (see commentary on Luke 6:12–16) to prepare the way for His arrival at the various towns and villages as well as to prepare His followers for when He would no longer be with them. Jesus instructed them to pray that more people would be sent out into the field to work because the harvest was abundant. In other words, potential members of the kingdom vastly outnumbered those whom Jesus had already gathered.

Not surprisingly, the instructions given to this group were substantively the same as those given to the Twelve (cf. 9:1–5; Matt. 10:1–16). As apparently helpless lambs among wolves (Luke 10:3), they were to rely on their Shepherd for help and protection (cf. John 10:3–5, 12–15). They were to greet no one on the way (Luke 10:4) because that might prevent a timely arrival and thus hinder their mission. They were to pronounce a blessing of peace on homes that received them (v. 5). A person who was a *huios eirēnēs* (lit. "son of peace") was one who had received and promoted the peace and rest offered by Jesus and His representatives (cf. Matt. 11:28–30). Those who received it would gladly provide the requisite hospitality for these laborers as the material wages for the spiritual blessings they received (Luke 10:7; cf. 1 Cor. 9:11). Furthermore, they were to eat what was offered, that is, they should not question its purity (Luke 10:8; cf. Acts 10:14; 1 Cor. 10:27–28). If a city did not receive them, they should wipe off the dust from their feet as a sign of judgment (Luke 10:11; see also 9:5). Sodom, which was destroyed by fire from heaven for its wickedness, would receive a lighter punishment than that city (10:12).

Having greater light is no advantage if it is rejected. Thus, the Galilean cities of Chorazin and Bethsaida, who witnessed the powerful miracles done by Jesus, bore a greater responsibility for rejecting that light (v. 13; cf. John 9:39–41; 19:11). The fact that almost nothing is known of Jesus's ministry in these two locales is a reminder that Jesus said and did much more than the Gospels record (cf. John 20:30–31). Their negative response to His message left them subject to a harsher judgment even than the proud Phoenician cities of Tyre and Sidon. Located on the coast northwest of Galilee, these cities rejected the warnings sent them through the prophets of Israel (see Is. 23; Jer. 25:17, 22; Ezek. 26–28). Even there, however, a few responded (cf. Luke 4:26) as some did also to Jesus (Mark 7:24–30). Clothing oneself in sackcloth and ashes was a sign of mourning and was indicative of the kind of repentance Jesus's message was meant to produce (cf. 2 Cor. 7:9–11). Even more surprising is the mention of Capernaum (Luke 10:15), which served as Jesus's home city during His ministry

(Matt. 4:13). Having been thus exalted to heaven, by rejecting Jesus it would be brought down to Hades, a reference to divine punishment (cf. Is. 5:14). It would be destroyed and abandoned. The response of the cities to the seventy would be indicative of their response to Jesus. To reject His messengers would be to reject Him and the One who sent Him (cf. Luke 9:48).

The return of the seventy is described in a concentric structure in chapter 10, whereby v. 17 is paralleled by v. 20 and vv. 18 and 19 are likewise parallel and mutually interpretative. The seventy returned with joy from their successful mission and addressed Jesus as Lord, indicating the power of the name by which the demons were subject to them (v. 17). While exorcists of the time tried various incantations and foul concoctions to drive demons away, Jesus's name alone was powerful enough to do the job (9:49; but cf. Acts 19:13–16). Jesus attributed their success to Satan's fall (Luke 10:18). The image of lightning from heaven normally stresses visibility, not duration, while the ongoing action underlying the Greek tense of "saw" suggests a process. Satan was cast out of heaven in the original rebellion (Rev. 12:7–9), but at the cross the nature of his evil course would be fully revealed and his influence destroyed (John 12:31). Jesus's followers were given authority to trample on serpents and scorpions—symbolic of Satan's power to harm, exercised through his demonic underlings (Deut. 8:15), having been broken (Matt. 16:18; Rom. 16:20). Therefore, they were promised that nothing would injure them (Luke 10:19). This was the reason for rejoicing—not because they had power over the enemy but because the enemy no longer had power over them. As citizens of the kingdom, their names were written in heaven in the book of life (v. 20; cf. Ex. 32:32–33; Dan. 12:1; Phil. 4:3; Rev. 3:5; 20:12, 15), and the power of the enemy was broken because death was no longer feared (Heb. 2:14–15).

In view of the success and joy of the seventy, Jesus rejoiced in prayer, thanking His Father for keeping hidden the truths of the kingdom from those who were wise in their own eyes (Luke 10:21; Is. 5:21; 29:13–14; Matt. 13:15), while revealing them to those who would listen (cf. 1 Cor. 1:18–31; 2:7–10). God is "Lord of heaven and earth" (Luke 10:21; Gen. 14:19, 22; cf. Acts 17:24) because He made them (e.g., Ex. 20:11; Pss. 115:15; 121:2; Is. 37:16; Acts 4:24). Jesus then identified Himself as having a special relation to the Father, who had given all things into His hands (Luke 10:22; cf. John 3:35; 5:20). Luke's version of the saying emphasizes "who the Son is" and "who the Father is" in their personhood. The word "know" means to know personally and fully, which was why Jesus was able to "reveal" Him (cf. John 1:18) to whomever He willed. The prayer of Jesus was public, but He then spoke privately to the Twelve, who were privileged to hear and see everything Jesus said and did (Luke 10:23–24). The purpose of this revelation was for them to be effective witnesses of all that they had seen and heard (Acts 4:20; 22:15; 1 John 1:3). Prophets and kings had looked forward to the days of the Messiah, but the privilege of seeing Jesus was not granted to them (cf. 1 Pet. 1:10–12).

10:25–37. Parable of the Good Samaritan. A lawyer with expertise in the Scriptures asked Jesus a question and a discussion ensued. Matthew and Mark present a similar but different episode that should not be confused with this one (Matt. 22:34–40; Mark 12:28–34). Here the questions, as well as the answer and parable in reply, are unique to Luke. As an expert in the law of Moses, the lawyer tested Jesus as to how He would answer the vital question of how eternal life is to be obtained (Luke 10:25). The perfect Teacher reversed the situation and tested the lawyer's own knowledge and understanding of the law, and in response he quoted the commands of Moses to love God and one's neighbor (vv. 26–27; Deut. 6:5; Lev. 19:18). The answer, which Jesus judged to be correct (Luke 10:28), sums up the Ten Commandments, which show specifically how we are to love God (first through fourth) and our fellow human beings (fifth through tenth; cf. Rom. 13:9–10). As the question concerned doing, Jesus affirmed the importance of hearing and doing the law (cf. Luke 6:47, 49; 8:21), not a legalistic obedience but an obedience of love (cf. Gal. 5:14; James 2:8) born out of divine love for us (1 John 4:19). Recognizing something of the breadth and depth of these commandments, that the requirement to love has no limits, the lawyer sought to justify himself. He clearly recognized his lack and desired a clear boundary, if not of love itself, at least in terms of its object. So he asked Jesus, "Who is my neighbor?" (Luke 10:29). Jesus answered his question with a parable, defining "neighbor" in terms of action rather than ethnicity.

The parable of the good Samaritan begins with a man who went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, which was a distance of about eighteen miles (29 km) and a descent of some 3,300 feet (1,006 m). The road was a common Jewish thoroughfare from Jerusalem all the way to Galilee via the Jordan River valley. According to the law of Moses, priests, because of their holy responsibilities, were prohibited from coming in contact with a dead person and thereby incurring ritual impurity unless it was an immediate family member (Lev. 21:1–4), which probably explains why they did not approach the man. Their error was that they did not even care enough to check to see if the man was dead or alive. The Levite came close enough to look at the man, but he too chose the other side of the road. While the priest, perhaps out of an inflated sense of personal importance, simply ignored the situation (turned a blind eye), the Levite demonstrated a complete lack of compassion in that he investigated, saw that the man was alive, and still walked away. Both of these men were religious leaders and yet lacked the basics of love.

A Samaritan also came and looked, but unlike the religious functionaries, he displayed compassion (Luke 10:33)—just as Jesus did to those in need (e.g., 7:13; Matt. 9:36; 14:14; Mark 1:41). He bandaged his wounds and poured oil and wine on them (Luke 10:34), which were known medicaments. Fermented wine acted as an antiseptic, while the olive oil aided in healing the wound. After transporting him to an inn, the Samaritan stayed the night with him, not departing until the next day (v. 35), and only after he paid the innkeeper two denarii, worth wages for two full days. His compassion went even further in that he promised to repay the innkeeper for whatever other expenses might be incurred in caring for the man. Details of the story suggest a traveling merchant who had perhaps patronized the inn before so that the innkeeper could be confident of the man's return to settle his account.

The contrast between the indifference of the priest and the Levite and the kind and compassionate actions of the Samaritan would have stunned any Jewish audience because they despised Samaritans as worse even than pure pagans (cf. John 4:9; 8:48). It also served as a lesson for James and John, who had only a little earlier hoped to destroy an entire Samaritan village with fire from heaven (Luke 9:51–56). Later, after the resurrection, Jesus would specifically command the apostles to be His witnesses in "all of Judea and Samaria" (Acts 1:8).

Jesus concluded by asking the lawyer which of the men acted as a neighbor to the wounded man. Clearly the lawyer had asked the wrong question! From that time onward he should ask, "Who needs me to be neighbor to them?" Every person in need of help is our neighbor, regardless of whether we know him or her and irrespective of religious affiliation or socioeconomic status. The compassion shown by the Samaritan and by Jesus Himself is left as an example for us to reflect on and then to "go and do likewise" (Luke 10:37).

10:38–42. Mary and Martha. Following this memorable parable, Luke juxtaposes an incident that happened nearby, in Bethany, just east of Jerusalem (Luke 19:29), which may have happened somewhat later, near the end of Christ's ministry (cf. John 11:1; 12:1). Martha, who did all the serving, was gently rebuked by Jesus (Luke 10:41), even though she was concerned to provide Him hospitality (v. 40), a highly respected virtue. Mary, her sister, who chose to receive rather than to serve, was commended (v. 42), even though she seemed completely oblivious to the need of helping prepare food for their special guest. She sat at Jesus's feet (v. 39), listening to His words as a disciple would, despite the fact that in Jewish culture this was not a woman's place. Martha, on the other hand, perfectly fulfilled womanly expectations of the time in her preparations and serving (*diakonia*).

Martha's desire to serve was not the issue. The concept of service elsewhere in Luke is only positively described (e.g., 4:39; 8:3; 22:26, 27). Later the same word is used to refer to many important functions within the church (see, e.g., Acts 6:1, 4; 2 Tim. 4:5). But Martha is also described as distracted, worried, and troubled. She charged Mary with leaving her to serve alone and even insinuated that Jesus was indifferent to her plight (Luke 10:40). In fact, Martha was missing a golden opportunity to listen to and learn from Jesus. This was the one thing most needful that Mary chose and that Jesus would not allow to be taken away from her (v. 42). In our own context, listening to guests can be as much a part of hospitality as serving. There will always be earthly cares that absorb our attention, but we must put first things first. Time with Jesus teaches us how to spend the rest of our time wisely.

11:1–13. Lessons on Prayer. Jesus was again praying (see commentary on Luke 6:12–16), and one of his disciples asked to be taught how to pray. On another occasion Jesus outlined principles for prayer (Matt. 6:5–8); this time He provided a model prayer, consisting of an address followed by two declarations and three requests. The version in Luke appears to be much shorter, though in many manuscripts the wording appears to have been adjusted to conform to the more familiar version of the prayer (see Matt. 6:9–13).

"Father" (v. 2; Aram. *Abba*) is both a respectful and intimate form of address to God (as in Mark 14:36; Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6). By instructing His disciples to address God as Father, Jesus exalted believers to the level of sonship (see Gen. 6:2, 4; Ps. 103:13; Is. 63:16; Hos. 1:10). "Hallowed" (v. 2) refers to reverencing God's name, not uttering it in a thoughtless way or in profane oaths (Ex. 20:7), because it sums up the essence of who He is as the eternal, self-existent One with His ineffable character of divine love, mercy, justice, and truth. "Your kingdom come" (Luke 11:2) recognizes that human life is not as God originally intended it and invites God's presence now and in its future fullness—ideas that permeate Jesus's teaching. The three requests concern present physical need and existing and potential spiritual needs. "Give us day by day [or "each day"] our daily bread" (v. 3) is a plea for God to supply what is truly necessary. "Forgive us our sins" (v. 4) is predicated on the fact of our forgiving "everyone who is indebted to us" (or "everyone who sins against us"; v. 4). We do not earn the right to be forgiven by forgiving others, but we cannot ask that we be given that which we are unwilling to give to others. Only those who have been forgiven are truly able to understand forgiveness and extend it to others. The request to not be led "into temptation" (v. 4) is a plea for protection from evil. It also implies a prior commitment to God's will and a determination not to lead oneself into temptation.

Jesus then turned His attention to the subject of persistent and prevailing prayer and God's relationship to it. To illustrate His point, he invited His listeners to consider how their own high sense of obligatory hospitality would respond to a friend who pleaded for some loaves of bread in the middle of the night to serve some unexpected visitors (vv. 5–6). Jesus's listeners would have to admit that in the face of such a friend's persistent pleas, and despite whatever inconvenience it might be to their own household, they would do whatever they could to help. Thus, applying the illustration to the subject of prayer, Jesus's listeners would see how God relates to our willingness to be persistent in our requests of Him. To underscore the parable's main point of being persistent, a series of three present imperative verbs follow, which are more literally translated "keep asking," "keep seeking," "keep knocking" (v. 9); the promise is that everyone who does so receives, finds, and has the door opened (v. 10). Lest the impression be left that persistent prayer is necessary because God is unwilling to give us what we need, Jesus then emphasized the goodness of God as Father and His readiness to give good gifts. Earthly fathers, despite being evil (v. 13), would never give their own children something harmful like a serpent or scorpion when they ask for a fish or an egg (vv. 11–12). How much more then, if we ask, will the heavenly Father give us the Holy Spirit, through whom all of God's other gifts come (v. 13; Matt. 7:11; James 1:17).

11:14–26. A House Divided. Jesus's work of casting out demons engendered amazement in some and skepticism in others. This occasion, which probably happened over a year earlier, was placed here to bring together several stories and sayings of Jesus in response to conflict and rejection. After the freeing of a man from a demon, some questioned the source of the supernatural power by which he was freed, charging Jesus with being in league with Beelzebub (or according to some manuscripts, "Beelzebul"), meaning "lord of the dwelling" (cf. the wordplay in Matt. 10:25), which is another name for Satan (Luke 11:18), the *archōn*—"ruler" or "prince" of the demons (v. 15; cf. John 12:31; Eph. 2:2). Others demanded even more proof of Jesus's commission from God in the form of a "sign from heaven" (Luke 11:16).

In response to the first objection to His freeing a man from a demon, Jesus stated a universally accepted principle: every "kingdom divided against itself" will be destroyed, and every divided house will fall (v. 17; cf. 21:20). In other words, the objection's premise itself was flawed. If Jesus's power were really from Satan, then Satan's kingdom would be divided and unable to stand. Yet Satan was still very active, and so their objection could not have been right. Otherwise, He asked, by whom do their own kinsmen cast them out? If they claimed it as being by God's power, then there was no reason for supposing that Jesus did it by Beelzebub. And if Jesus cast out demons with "the finger of God" (v. 20), then this divine intervention manifested through the ministry of Jesus showed that the kingdom of God had arrived—the time of redemption from the slavery of sin and domination of demons (cf. Ex. 8:19). Jesus set forth an allegorical parable (based on Is. 49:24–25) in which the demon-possessed are likened to goods belonging to a strong man (Satan) fully armed (the demons) to protect his possessions and Jesus to someone stronger who enters the heavily fortified palace or "house" (lit. "court," meaning this planet) to overcome him by breaking the power of the demons over people and claiming them as possessions of His victory.

In the clash between the kingdom of God and Satan's kingdom, there is no neutral ground. One must choose to be with Jesus and to help gather the lost sheep of Israel back to God (Luke 11:23; cf. Matt. 10:6; 15:24; John 10:16). Not to choose is by default to be against Him—remaining under Satan's kingdom, which aids the devil's efforts to scatter and ultimately to destroy God's flock (cf. John 10:10, 12). Jesus reinforced the point by means of a parable. A person who has been freed of demonic control but who remains uncommitted to Jesus is like a house that has been swept and put in order but, without Jesus, is defenseless and vulnerable to an even more serious possession by seven other spirits that are even more wicked (Luke 11:24–26). Those who have forsaken their former profession of faith in Christ often become the most bitter opponents of Christianity. Nevertheless, though such a person is clearly in a far worse condition, such a case may not be completely hopeless (cf. 8:2).

11:27–32. Keeping the Word or Seeking a Sign? A woman who apparently was still focused on a kingdom based on physical descent pronounced a blessing on Christ's mother, who nursed Him as a baby (v. 27). Jesus, however, insisted that His real family consisted of those who receive and adhere to God's word (v. 28; cf. 6:46–49).

Jesus then returned to the issue of people demanding a sign from heaven (cf. 11:16), that is, clearly coming from God. Jesus rejected proving His heavenly credentials this way. He called the people an evil, wicked generation because they already had plenty of evidence to believe (cf. 9:41; Deut. 32:20). Through such unbelief they were, in reality, placing themselves under Satan's dominion and giving themselves over to demons (cf. Deut. 32:17). By rejecting Jesus, Israel's future would soon become much worse and much more hopeless (cf. Matt. 12:45), though it need not have been that way (cf. Zech. 13:2).

Consequently, Jesus Himself would give no sign to prove His heavenly credentials (Mark 8:12), just as earlier He had refused Satan's demand for such a sign (Luke 4:9–12). The only sign given would be that given by heaven itself: the sign of Jonah (Luke 11:29). The prophet's time in the belly of the fish (Jon. 2:2) and his miraculous resurrection from that watery grave (Jon. 2:6) were signs to the Ninevites of his heavenly credentials. Similarly, the heavenly credentials of the Son of Man, including God's acceptance of His work, would likewise be demonstrated through death and resurrection (cf. Matt. 12:40). Although the inhabitants of Nineveh responded to the preaching of Jonah, Jesus held little hope that a similar repentance would be evidenced by this generation. By referring to Himself as greater than Jonah and greater than Solomon, Jesus identified these individuals as prophetic types. Solomon, as the son of David, typified Jesus as Israel's rightful messianic King who would judge God's people with wisdom and righteousness (cf. Is. 11:1–4; Rev. 19:11; 22:11–12).

11:33–54. Light, Darkness, and Woes. For a lamp to be beneficial, placement is key (v. 33). More prominence provides more illumination. The eye is the way through which light enters the body (v. 34), bringing illumination and understanding. If the eye is healthy and without evil motivation, then what it sees will fill the body with light and wisdom. If the eye is bad, unhealthy, and unsound, then our perception of the world will be distorted and misunderstandings may result. Worse, evil can enter our mind through the eye and fill our whole life with darkness. So we should resolve to set nothing wicked before our eyes (Ps. 101:3)—something increasingly difficult in our sex- and violence-crazed "information" age. If we are full of light, which comes from looking to Jesus and His word (John 8:12; cf. Ps. 119:105, 130), then we will ourselves be a source of light for others (cf. Matt. 5:14; John 5:35).

A Pharisee, apparently impressed by Jesus's teaching, invited Him home to have a meal with him (Luke 11:37). The word used (*aristaō*) indicates a midmorning meal. Such an invitation would enable his family and friends to hear Jesus's wisdom. It was the practice of the Pharisees, in order to ensure eating with ceremonially pure hands, to dip them in water after returning home (Mark 7:1–5). Some of the well-to-do even had a small indoor *miqveh* or pool with built-in steps for full-body immersion. That is why the Pharisee was astonished that Jesus did not wash to ensure His hands were ceremonially clean before sitting down to eat (Luke 11:38). It provided an object lesson on what constitutes true purity. No one would clean the outside of a vessel and leave the inside dirty. Similarly, spiritual purity begins on the inside. Giving food or financial assistance to the needy, when given in love and generosity, provides evidence that all of one's possessions are clean and available for God's use because they are not under the control of a heart full of greed and wickedness (vv. 39–41).

Jesus proceeded to condemn the hypocrisy and foolishness of Pharisaic practices with a series of woes, lamenting and solemnly warning of the danger such practices posed to the spiritual life. Pharisees would meticulously measure and tithe the smallest herbs but pass over or ignore issues of justice and love about which God is even more concerned (v. 42). Tithing, giving a tenth of one's increase (see Gen. 14:20; Lev. 27:30; Deut. 14:22), is important, but how we treat others is even more important. The Pharisees loved having the most prominent seats in the synagogue because it fed their egos, as did greetings in public, which were meant to honor them above others. The seductiveness of such privileges often leads people to think they are better or more deserving than others, when in God's eyes we are all needy. According to Pharisaic oral tradition, to walk over a grave was the equivalent of touching a corpse, incurring ceremonial defilement. Like unmarked graves, people were unaware of the spiritual danger inherent in the teaching and hypocritical example of the scribes and Pharisees (Luke 11:44; see also 5:17).

A "lawyer" or "expert in the law," obviously offended by a teaching that could equally apply to them, rebuked Jesus for His perceived insult (11:45). Rather than retreating, Jesus reinforced His message further by rebuking them for loading people with heavy burdens (v. 46), referring to additional religious rules (cf. Acts 15:10), many of which were later codified by the Jews in the Mishnah and considered to be even more important to observe than the law itself. Jesus also rebuked them for outwardly paying homage to the prophets by building elaborate tombs for them while rejecting God's prophetic message (Luke 11:47–48). In short, they were manifesting the same spirit that led their ancestors to kill the prophets and that ultimately led them to seek Jesus's death. His reference to God and His wisdom (v. 49) seems to show a knowledge of divine premeditation that is later expanded into a parable (20:9–17). The inclusion of "apostles" (11:49) may constitute a nontechnical reference to those in the OT who, like the prophets, were sent by God but murdered (cf. 13:34). Use of the term also suggests a further application to the apostles sent by Jesus. Abel, though not a prophet, was the first one in Scripture to suffer persecution and martyrdom (Gen. 4:8). The murder of Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada, is recorded in the last book of the Hebrew canon (2 Chr. 24:20–22), which ends with 2 Chronicles rather than Malachi due to a different ordering of the OT books. Jesus's reference to this generation as being guilty of the blood of all previous martyrs was based on their sharing the same spirit in rejecting Jesus and His message (Luke 11:50–51). Finally, He chastised lawyers for taking away the key of knowledge (v. 52), meaning that by making people dependent on them in order to know what the law required, they were effectively hindering people's entrance into the kingdom of God. They were obscuring their understanding of the Scriptures and of the salvation being made available through Jesus's ministry (cf. 1:77). Both scribes and Pharisees, incensed at these rebukes, began to ply Him with many questions—they were hunting for something to use against Him (11:53–54).

12:1–12. An Open Confession of Faith. Jesus's detractors were quickly outnumbered as a *myriadōn*—"myriads," "thousands" or "tens of thousands," here probably meaning a countless number (greater than in 11:29)—gathered to hear Jesus (12:1). While directing His teaching first or primarily to the disciples, Jesus warned them of the leaven or yeast of the Pharisees. Leaven was yeast usually naturally produced via an old batch of dough kept back to mix with the next batch so that the bread would rise. Like leaven, the hypocrisy of the Pharisees was infectious and would come to permeate the whole life. It is far easier to be doctrinally orthodox (by human measure) than to be sound in both faith and practice (as measured by God). Hypocrisy relies on an element of secrecy, but Jesus affirmed that whatever was then hidden would become known and words spoken in secret would be proclaimed on the housetops so everyone could hear (vv. 2–3). In Matthew this saying refers to the disciples' proclamation (Matt. 10:27) and may have the same significance here, judging from the larger context as Jesus went on to speak of a fearless confession. There was no need to fear those who could kill only the body (Luke 12:4). Fearing God and His judgment (Eccl. 12:13–14) and recognizing His authority to consign us to hell (Luke 12:5)—in short, living with eternity in view—are what matters.

We should not imagine hell as some kind of eternal torture chamber. The word *geenna* designates a ravine just outside and southwest of Jerusalem. It may be the place where a pyre may have been made to burn the 185,000 corpses of the Assyrian army at the time of Hezekiah (Is. 30:31–33; 37:36). In the time of Ahaz and Manasseh, child sacrifices were offered there, probably to Molech, an underworld deity. Jeremiah said it would become the place of judgment on Israel for their wickedness and that their corpses would lay there as food for the birds and wild animals (Jer. 19:6, 7; cf. Rev. 19:17–21). God promises to judge the wicked with unquenchable fire and a devouring worm that does not die (Is. 66:15–16, 24). Both images represent hell as a place of total destruction. Similarly in the NT, it is the place of darkness and of God's judgment by fire and total destruction (Mark 9:43, 45, 47–48), not a place of unending torment. Thus Jesus could speak in the next breath of God's care for His creation, including the sparrows, and His children as so precious that even their hairs are numbered (Luke 12:6–7).

How we relate to Jesus determines our destiny when the Son of Man will stand in judgment surrounded by clouds of angels (Dan. 7:9–10, 13–14; cf. John 5:22). To confess or acknowledge Him publicly means we identify ourselves with His kingdom (cf. Rom. 10:9–10). But if we deny Him, He will deny us (Luke 12:8–9; cf. 2 Tim. 2:12). The Greek verbal tense compresses the cumulative decisions of our life into a moment of time. Similarly with blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (Luke 12:10), the tense indicates one's persistent refusal to recognize the work of the Spirit in the ministry of Jesus. Those who close their mind and heart to the Holy Spirit's work close off the only avenue by which God can save them. By contrast, those who have spoken against Jesus but subsequently respond to the Spirit's plea can be forgiven (see Acts 2:36–38; 6:7). When brought before authorities to answer for their faith, as the apostles were soon after Pentecost (Acts 4:1–22), Jesus promised that we need not worry because the Spirit would teach believers just what to say (Luke 12:11–12).

12:13–21. Parable of the Rich Fool. Suddenly, with mention of being brought into judgment, someone asked Jesus to instruct his brother to divide the inheritance with him (v. 13). The law of Moses assigned a double portion of the inheritance to the eldest son (Deut. 21:17), while the others were to share equally what was left. Refusing to settle such a dispute, Jesus highlighted the core issue—covetousness or greed. To illustrate the point, He told of a rich man who had insufficient space for all his crops (Luke 12:16–17). Clearly very rich because he had many barns already, he decided to tear them down and build even bigger ones and looked forward to many years of celebration and ease (v. 18). His motto was "Eat, drink, and be merry" (v. 19). He was completely self-absorbed. This is indicated not only by the repetition of "I" and "my" (eleven times in just three verses) but by the glimpse given of the man's inner thoughts and heart. He thought only about himself (v. 17), planned only for his future well-being (v. 18), and congratulated himself (v. 19). In the end none of that mattered because he had neglected his eternal future, as the repeated mention (three times in vv. 19–20) of the man's *psychē*—"soul" or "life" (referring to the totality of one's existence)—reminds us (accordingly, some translations omit the reference to "soul" and read "I'll say to myself"). Jesus drew the lesson: amassing possessions is ultimately worthless unless one is rich toward God, that is, as God defines riches, in terms of heavenly riches (Matt. 6:19–20). Money and wealth are not themselves evil, but allowing them the central place in one's heart and life is a form of idolatry. We cannot serve both God and money (Luke 16:13) because devotion to one's wealth invariably squeezes out devotion to God.

12:22–34. No Need for Worry or Fear. Jesus now explained positively what it means to be rich toward God. It is summarized in Jesus's twin commands to His disciples that head the two subsections of this unit. He told them not to worry (v. 22) and not to be afraid (v. 32). In both cases, the underlying tense assumes the hearer's worries and fears that the hearer should not continue to harbor. The commands are really assurances. The first admonition to not worry about life (v. 22) is concise and yet so comprehensive. It includes not worrying about food and clothing.

Life (lit. "the soul") is more than food (v. 23; cf. v. 15). The soul-body distinction in this verse is apparent. Obviously, food is also important to the body and, according to how it is conventionally understood, the soul has no need for food. The biblical concept of the soul is holistic and, as here, comprises the whole life including the body. Yet life is more even than this for those who know God as their Father. There is no need to worry because He knows what we need. If He cares even for the ravens, unclean birds, how much more does He care for people made in His image (v. 24). Unlike the rich fool, they need neither storehouse nor barn because God feeds them (cf. Pss. 145:15–16; 147:9). Therefore, we need not worry that He will not feed His people (cf. Ps. 37:5), because they are more valuable than birds (cf. Luke 12:7).

There is also no need to worry because there are many things that are out of our control and that we cannot change. Verse 25 can refer to the impossibility of adding either one cubit (about 20 in. or 50 cm) to one's stature or an hour to one's lifespan. The former seems implied by the word "cubit" and the latter by the reference to *hēlikia*—"age." Perhaps (as in some translations) the cubit and the idea of age can be combined by conveying the idea of adding a cubit to the measure or span of one's life, or on the other hand the idea of *hēlikia* could be understood in terms of height. The larger context allows for either possibility. The mention of the growth of lilies or wild flowers (v. 27) fits a reference to stature, while a reference to lengthening one's life fits the preceding parable of the rich fool who, despite all his concern to provide for the future, could not prolong his life. In any case, being anxious about this life falls into the category of what is less significant (v. 26). The grass, like human life (Is. 40:6–8), is brief—thrown into the furnace (Luke 12:28), just as the wicked nations will be (Mal. 4:1; Rev. 20:7–9). Believers, however, seek the kingdom of God, which will last forever (Dan. 7:27), and their heavenly Father will ensure that all things needful for this life will be added (Luke 12:31).

The followers of Jesus also should not fear because they constitute Jesus's little flock (v. 32). Such terminology is used in the OT to describe a faithful remnant within Israel (Jer. 23:2–4; Mic. 5:2–4), and that seems to be the meaning here. The remnant that was being gathered by Jesus included not only "lost sheep" within Israel (Matt. 10:6; 15:24) but also "other sheep" (John 10:16), apparently referring to Gentiles (Matt. 28:19; cf. Is. 49:6). Though small and vulnerable as Jesus's flock, He said that their Father delights for them to receive the kingdom as a gift. Thus, far from worrying about food and clothing or being afraid of the future, they could even sell what they have and give to those in need because of their treasure in heaven, where their hearts are and their future lies (Luke 12:33–34; cf. 18:24).

12:35–48. Different Servants, Different Destinies. This unit contains two main parables: the watchful servant (vv. 35–40) and the parable of the faithful and evil stewards (vv. 42–48). At the conclusion of the first parable, Peter asked Jesus whether it was spoken only to them as His disciples or to all others as well (v. 41). Answering a question with a question and another parable, Jesus seems to imply that this second parable applies to the disciples, while the parable about watching applies to all.

12:35–40. The Watchful Servant. Watchful servants are to be clothed for work (v. 35). They should wait for their master's return from the wedding with lamps burning (vv. 35–36). The image of the wedding in the teachings of Jesus functions as the process by which those who will comprise His kingdom are revealed (Matt. 22:1–14; 25:1–12; cf. John 3:29). Here, it is those who are found watching, opening the door as soon as He knocks, who will sit down to eat (Luke 12:36–37). They will be happy and blessed with good things, which are amazingly depicted here by the invitation to eat immediately while the master girds Himself and serves them (v. 37). This role reversal (cf. 17:7–8)—the last (the servants) served first and served by their master—illustrates one of the most dominant kingdom principles: service (22:27; cf. Mark 9:35).

According to the Jewish practice of the time, which divided the twelve hours of night into three watches, the second watch of the night was from approximately 10 p.m. to 2 a.m., and the third watch was from approximately 2 a.m. to 6 a.m. The Romans had four watches instead of three (Mark 13:35). Either way, the disciples were expected to watch for their master's return throughout the night—it could be in the second watch (in the middle of the night), or in the third (toward daybreak; Luke 12:38). Jesus drew a parallel between the vigilance expected to that of a homeowner to whose home a thief might come in the dead of night. If it were known exactly when the thief would come, the owner would prevent the house from being broken into by staying awake that night. Since it is impossible to never sleep and no one knows when the thief will come, the only other way is to always be ready (i.e., by knowing the signs). This was the point Jesus was making when He told His followers to be ready because He will come unexpectedly (vv. 39–40).

12:42–48. The Faithful and Evil Stewards. The second parable contrasts a wise steward, or manager, who was left in charge of a landowner's estate, with a servant who acts irresponsibly in view of a perceived delay in his master's return. The steward was a trusted servant (cf. v. 37) who oversaw the business affairs for the owner. If he faithfully maintained order during the master's absence, including providing food for the household at the appropriate times, he would be rewarded for his service by being placed in charge of everything (v. 44; cf. 16:10). The irresponsible servant would be caught by surprise and punished severely for his unfaithfulness by being chopped in pieces, which suggests a very severe punishment, and grouped with the unbelievers (v. 46; see commentary on Luke 18:1–8). The punishment would be apportioned according to knowledge of the master's will. The one who knew that will and did not prepare by doing it would suffer the greater punishment—many stripes or blows (12:47; cf. Amos 3:2). Even the one who did not know but whose actions deserved punishment would be beaten, but only with few blows or stripes (Luke 12:48). Ignorance of divine truth is no license for wrongdoing because enough has been revealed to leave people without excuse (Rom. 1:20; cf. Rom. 2:14–15), but they will be judged less severely. On the other hand, the better a person knows Jesus and His will and practices it, the more abundant his or her life will be (John 10:10).

12:49–59. Time for Choosing. Sending fire on the earth refers to judgment of the earth by fire (v. 49; see, e.g., Deut. 32:22; Zeph. 3:8; 2 Thess. 1:8; 2 Pet. 3:10). But Jesus came to suffer the equivalent of this punishment as the substitutionary atonement for sinners (cf. John 12:27), and He actually looked forward to it because of the joy in eternity the salvation of multitudes would bring (Heb. 12:2). The baptism refers to His suffering of death and resurrection (Luke 12:50; Mark 10:38), our identification with which is symbolized by water baptism (Rom. 6:3–4). Did Jesus come to usher in an era of peace on earth? Absolutely not (Luke 12:51). He came to remove the enmity between God and human beings (Gen. 3:15). But this creates a division between those who accept Jesus's kingdom proclamation and those who do not. It will even divide the closest family relationships because Jesus was creating a spiritual family with the expectation of supreme allegiance, above even one's honoring of father and mother (Luke 12:52–53; see also 9:59–60; 14:26; Matt. 10:36; cf. Mic. 7:6).

On what seems to be a different occasion with a similar saying in Matthew 16:2–3, Jesus addressed a large group of people about the significance of His ministry (Luke 12:49–59). As usual, He began with the familiar (in this case the weather) to explain His message of the kingdom. People in Israel knew that when they saw a cloud from the west, a storm from the Mediterranean was coming (v. 54), while a south wind would bring burning heat from the desert (v. 55). He called them hypocrites because they could interpret the weather but chose to disregard what should have been just as obvious but was far more consequential—the uniqueness of the present time of fulfillment (v. 56; Mark 1:15). Since a time of final judgment is coming, it is important to always judge what is right on our own (Luke 12:57), just as one might do before going to a human court. In all ages, it was less risky and costly to settle a dispute and reconcile rather than insisting on litigation. Making diligent efforts to resolve matters directly with one's opponent may increase the chances of an amicable resolution of the dispute. Once battle lines are drawn, if the dispute is lost, the punishment of prison and having to pay the assessed penalty down to the very last penny demonstrates the foolishness of pursuing such a course. Before heaven's judgment seat justice will be done, and this parable serves as a warning that all who reject Jesus's invitation to become right with God will face eternal loss.

13:1–9. Need and Urgency of Repentance. Having just spoken of judging what is right (12:57), Jesus was asked about news of an atrocity in the temple that is otherwise unknown from ancient sources but fits what we know of Pilate's character on other occasions. The description fits one of the three large Jewish festival celebrations (Deut. 16:16), when Pilate would certainly have been present. Perhaps there was some provocation by these Galileans (cf. Acts 5:37) that led to their being killed even while offering sacrifices (Luke 13:1). Jesus's question as to whether they were worse sinners (v. 2) addresses the common assumption that such tragedies indicate God's judgment on wrongdoing—an assumption that Jesus denied (cf. John 9:1–3). They were not worse. Likewise with the eighteen people who were killed when the tower in Siloam fell on them (Luke 13:4). This tower may have been a fortification at a strategic point in the wall on the southeastern side of Jerusalem above the pool of Siloam, which was a large, ritual immersion pool and no doubt often crowded. While denying that these calamities were direct judgments of God, Jesus thought of the countless number who would perish by rejecting His message and used these incidents to underscore the necessity of repentance before it would be too late (vv. 3, 5; cf. vv. 34–35).

To reinforce this point, Jesus told a parable about a fig tree planted in a vineyard (v. 6). The vineyard was a familiar symbol for Israel (e.g., Is. 5:7; Mark 12:1), and trees are often used figuratively of people who were to bring forth fruit (see commentary on Luke 3:7–20). But this fig tree had been barren for three years (13:7) and took valuable space that could be better utilized by a productive tree. Nevertheless, the keeper of the vineyard begged to keep the tree another year, promising to dig around it and fertilize it (v. 8). The keeper of the vineyard did not speak questioning the justice of cutting down a tree that fails to bear fruit but spoke in the hope that extra care might produce a better result. A life that bears fruit begins with repentance (cf. 3:8). Time was running out; life is uncertain; and Jesus longed for people to accept His message before it was too late and the ax would necessarily be laid to the root of the tree.

13:10–17. Healing of a Crippled Woman. Jesus is again shown in a synagogue on the Sabbath (13:10), as was His custom (4:16). While teaching, He noticed a woman who had been bent over for eighteen years from a spirit of infirmity and asked her to come forward. Out of compassion for her suffering, He announced her freedom from her infirmity, placed His hands on her, and she was able to straighten up (13:11–13). Hers was not a case of demon possession, as is sometimes suggested, even though her disability was said to have been caused by Satan (v. 16), because Jesus addressed the woman herself rather than a demon, and she was healed (v. 12). The leader of the synagogue was indignant that this happened on the Sabbath (v. 14), as emphasized by the word order in Greek. Sabbath prohibitions in later Jewish traditions that are connected with healing include the use of various medicaments, straightening a child's body, and setting limbs. Interestingly, Jesus proclaimed the woman loosed or free from her infirmity before touching her, making it difficult for the synagogue leader to identify this act definitively as a Sabbath violation. Perhaps that explains why, rather than confronting Jesus directly, the synagogue leader told the crowd to come and be healed during the six working days (v. 14).

In response, Jesus addressed not just the leader of the synagogue but more broadly all who thought like he did. Many were more merciful to their animals, loosing them and leading them to water on the Sabbath (v. 15). In fact, it seems that elaborate arrangements were made to facilitate watering animals at wells on the Sabbath without transgressing Jewish laws. Jesus indicated that, if animals may be treated this way without violating the Sabbath, much more should this woman be set free (v. 16). Jesus's words are even stronger in Greek, emphasizing the length of time she had suffered (eighteen years) and that her being set free was morally necessary. Just as Abraham's son Isaac was loosed from the bonds of death (Gen. 22:9–11) so this "daughter of Abraham" must be released. So effective was Jesus's argument that those opposing Him were ashamed. The Greek word for this shaming (*kataischynō*) is used here for the only time in Luke's writings. Shame came on all who opposed Jesus, but not on those who trusted in Him (Is. 28:16, LXX). By contrast, all the people were pleased with all the things Jesus was doing (Luke 13:17).

13:18–21. Parables of the Kingdom's Advancement. Jesus's silencing of His opponents and winning of public opinion leads into a pair of parables that describe the rapid spread of the kingdom, repeated from an earlier occasion (cf. Matt. 13:31–33). In the first parable, the kingdom of God is "like a mustard seed" (Luke 13:18–19). It grew into a tree (some manuscripts call it a "large" or "great" tree). Typically the mustard seed becomes only a moderately sized bush, but it may grow to a height of nine or ten feet (about 3 m) and thus more like a tree. It also provides a home for the birds to live in its branches (v. 19), a kingdom image familiar from the OT (Ezek. 17:22–24; 31:6; Dan. 4:10–15; cf. Ps. 84:3). The second parable makes a similar point in terms of the rapidity with which leaven or yeast spreads through three measures or sixty pounds (27 kg) of meal or flour. When baking bread, some leavened dough would be kept back for use with the next batch. This huge amount of flour—about a bushel (40 L), which could feed at least 150 people—illustrates the ambitious scope of spreading the news of the kingdom over a large territory.

13:22–35. The Narrow Way. From the time Jesus set His face to go to Jerusalem (9:51), He had met adoring crowds as well as opposition, yet these extreme reactions never seem to have affected His larger determination to fulfill His mission (cf. John 2:23–25). In traveling toward Jerusalem, Jesus Himself chose the path to this destination. Judging from Luke's occasional geographic notes, Jesus seems to have been intent on covering as many cities and villages of Israel as possible. Along the way a questioner asked whether few are being saved, the present tense implying that a process was in view (Luke 13:23; cf. Acts 2:47; 1 Cor. 1:18; 2 Cor. 2:15).

Jesus responded with an exhortation and a parable, similar to instruction given to His disciples on an earlier occasion (cf. Matt. 7:13–14, 21–23), here generalized for a much larger audience. Addressing the entire crowd, Jesus urged them to strive or to exert every effort (*agōnizomai*) to enter the kingdom (Luke 13:24). The Greek word was used of athletes preparing for competition (1 Cor. 9:25) and is also used in reference to combat (John 18:36; 1 Tim. 6:12; 2 Tim. 4:7). The righteousness required is that of the Father (Luke 6:27–36), which comes through believing in the One He has sent (John 6:29); it cannot be humanly produced or the Pharisees would have succeeded (Matt. 5:20). Thus many who desire to enter will not be able (Luke 13:24), or according to another nuance of the verb *ischyō*, will not be "strong enough." The same word is used in the sermon for the stream that was not able to shake the house founded on the rock (6:48). Only those who live according to Jesus's teachings will remain firm in their faith, while those who postpone the decision will find a shut door (cf. Matt. 25:10–13).

Claiming Jesus as Lord and eating and drinking in His presence represented only an appearance of intimacy. In reality, profession is worthless. Not knowing Jesus means He does not know us and classes us as workers of unrighteousness (Luke 13:27) because the only righteousness we may have is His and from Him. The patriarchs, who died, and all the prophets as well as those from every direction and every nation (Rev. 7:9) will participate in God's banquet in His kingdom (Luke 13:29; cf. Rev. 19:9). The reversal stated as the last will be first and vice versa is a frequent theme in Jesus's teachings (Luke 13:30; cf., e.g., Matt. 19:30; 20:16) and acted out in His ministry to the poor and the outcast. The wording in Luke makes clear that this is not an exclusive principle. Being poor is no virtue in itself, as shown by the presence of a few rich and powerful among the believers (Luke 8:3; 19:8; 23:50; cf. 1 Cor. 1:26). Some also who are first will be last. This is the great tragedy, epitomized by Israel's religious leaders who rejected Jesus.

The Pharisees were not simply trying to be helpful in warning Jesus that Herod wanted to kill Him (Luke 13:31). They asked Him to go away, as the Gadarenes did (8:37), and were actively plotting His death (11:54; Mark 3:6). Jesus called Herod a "fox" (Luke 13:32) because of the animal's penchant for destruction (Neh. 4:3; Song 2:15) and, more specifically, because of Herod's execution of John the Baptist (Mark 6:17–29) and the role Herod would play in His own approaching death (Luke 23:11).

The "third day" or "after three days" is Jesus's typical formulation for the day of His resurrection (Luke 13:32; e.g., 18:33; 24:46; Matt. 17:23; Mark 9:31), emphasizing it as a fulfillment of prophecy (see commentary on Luke 9:18–27). It was for this very purpose that Jesus was heading to Jerusalem, the center of Jewish leadership, where He would be executed. Luke here ties in a saying of Jesus, uttered near the end of His ministry (Luke 13:34–35; 19:41; cf. Matt. 23:37–39). Jesus ministered in Jerusalem, trying to gather its children as a hen gathers her baby chicks. Similarly, God is described as caring for Israel as an eagle cares for its young (Ex. 19:4; Deut. 32:11), protecting and sheltering it under His wings (e.g., Pss. 17:8; 36:7; 57:1). The desolation of "your house" (Luke 13:35) indicates a divine disowning of the temple but also of the whole city, the subject of this lament, anticipating its desolation by the Romans in A.D. 70 (Luke 19:41–44; 21:20; cf. Dan. 9:26). The ultimate horizon of this passage is the Second Coming, when after a period of not seeing Jesus (John 16:16–20), the words of Psalm 118:26 will be fulfilled: "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord" (cf. Rev. 1:7).

14:1–14. Guest at a the Banquet. Here, as in the previous chapter, a Sabbath healing (14:1–6; cf. 13:10–17) is followed by parables (14:7–24; cf. 13:18–21) and a more personal appeal (14:25–35; cf. 13:22–30). Jesus was a Sabbath guest at the home of a leading Pharisee, and a man was there who had dropsy or edema, which is a swelling in the body due to excess water that can cause severe pain (14:2). The man's presence seems to have been deliberately arranged to entrap Jesus because those in attendance were examining his actions carefully (v. 1). Speaking directly to the lawyers, who were experts in the Mosaic law, as well as to the Pharisees, Jesus invited those present to answer whether it is lawful to heal this man on the Sabbath. According to the Jewish understanding of the time, even prayer for the sick trampled on the holiness of the Sabbath; saving life on the Sabbath may not have incurred condemnation, but none of the illnesses that Jesus healed on the Sabbath appear to have been life threatening. So, as before, they refused to answer His question (cf. 6:9). Jesus then reached out and healed the man (14:4), teaching that human need and Sabbath observance are not antithetical to each other (see 6:3–5; cf. Matt. 12:12). Underscoring the point, He appealed to the common practice of helping an animal (some manuscripts include "a son" or "a child") that fell into a pit or well on the Sabbath by lifting it out.

Showing concern for everyone in the room, Jesus presented two blocks of instruction, the first directed at the guests and the second at the host. Noting how the guests were choosing the seats of honor (Luke 14:7), Jesus advised them against that (cf. Prov. 25:6–7) lest the host ask for their place to be given to someone more prominent (who would generally arrive later than others). Since by then the better seats would have been taken, it would be embarrassing to be moved to a place of low importance (Luke 14:8–9). Called a parable (v. 7), this saying constitutes more than simply good advice. Within the larger context of Luke, it looks toward one's future standing in the judgment, promising that the proud who exalt themselves will be humbled while those who humble themselves will be exalted (18:9–11; cf. James 4:6, 10; 1 Pet. 5:5–6).

Turning now to the host, Jesus advised inviting those who could not reciprocate. Being repaid actually robs a person of the joy of generosity. Rather than always (as the present tense in Greek implies) inviting one's friends, relations, and rich neighbors, the poor should be invited (cf. Deut. 14:29) as well as the disabled, the lame, and the blind (Luke 14:12–13), who were excluded from the strict Jewish sect that lived at Qumran and apparently also from temple worship (2 Sam. 5:8). Despite the fact that religious authorities tended to shut out these people from the kingdom of heaven (Luke 11:52; Matt. 23:13), according to Jesus its doors are open even, and perhaps especially, to such as these (cf. Matt. 18:3–4).

The practice of reciprocation, while not wrong in itself, reflects the values of this world more than those of the kingdom of God because the rewards are immediate (cf. Matt. 6:1–6). Jesus encouraged His hearers to live instead with a view toward ultimate recompense at the resurrection of God's people and the ushering in of His kingdom (1 Cor. 15:50–52; 1 Thess. 4:16).

14:15–24. Parable of the Great Banquet. At the mention of the resurrection, someone spoke of the blessedness of eating in the kingdom of God (Luke 14:15), apparently assuming that he, along with those present, would be there. Jesus challenged this assumption with a parable about a large dinner banquet to which many were invited (v. 16). However, after confirming their attendance, when word went out that everything was ready, those invited made excuses as to why they could not come after all (vv. 17–20).

At that time, such a refusal would have been unthinkable unless some totally unexpected crisis arose. The excuses about the purchases of land and oxen are not credible since both would have been carefully considered before any purchase was made. Even the marriage excuse was not plausible. The stipulation about a man staying home with his wife for the first year was in connection with going to war, lest he be killed and the wife be left a widow (Deut. 20:7; 24:5) without children, and thus would not apply in this case. In short, all were poor excuses and the house owner, having prepared food for them at great expense, was understandably angry.

Rather than throw the food out or give it away, the host invited the very ones Jesus had recommended for inviting in the earlier parable, for which a blessing is given (see commentary on Luke 14:1–14). Interestingly, there were not enough of these outcasts to fill the master's house (vv. 22–23). More from rural areas were invited, using strong wording almost identical in Greek to the strong repulsion of the servant by the man who *anagkē*—felt the need—to "go out" to inspect the just-purchased land (v. 18). The master's servants were to *anagkazō*—a word that can mean "force," "urge" or "compel," here probably meaning "urge"—the people to come to the banquet. The anger of the house owner is further illustrated by his declaration that none of the people initially invited to the feast would taste anything from it (v. 24). This final statement of judgment by the master of the house suggests an application of the parable to those Jews who refused Jesus's message of the kingdom of God in contrast to the outcasts who were receiving it. The outreach to Gentiles is also comprehended in light of the earlier reference to the anticipated widespread progress of the gospel (13:28–30), particularly in view of the larger context of Luke through Acts.

14:25–35. Cost of Discipleship. At this juncture, readers are reminded that Jesus was journeying to Jerusalem, because many people were traveling with Him (14:25). These, however, were apparently not at the same level of commitment as previous crowds who followed Him (7:9; 9:11), because they merely accompanied Jesus (cf. 13:26–27). That is why Jesus turned to speak to them about what discipleship involves. That one must "hate" immediate family members and even one's own life indicates that these must not be placed first (14:26). Following Jesus must eclipse all other relationships. Another way of saying it is that one cannot love something or someone more and still be a true disciple of Jesus (Matt. 10:37). Bearing one's cross is required, too, because a pupil is not above his or her teacher (Luke 6:40). Crucifixion, calculated to maximize and prolong suffering, was the most shameful death imaginable (see commentary on Luke 23:13–25). While figuratively referring to the trials, the sufferings, and the stigma attached to following Jesus and His truth (cf. Gal. 6:14–16), it sometimes would include literal crucifixion for proclaiming the gospel (cf. John 21:18–19).

Jesus encouraged all would-be disciples to consider the cost before deciding to follow Him (Luke 14:28). To build a tower it is necessary to make sure there are adequate funds to complete it, which requires careful calculation. Worse than the failure would be the resulting mockery (vv. 29–30). When waging war, a king must assess the probability of success. Besides the obvious comparison of troop numbers, additional factors, both tactical and strategic, are involved in the calculation (v. 31). Unless victory is certain, it is better to make peace (v. 32) before the opposing army gets close enough to recognize their numerical superiority. Only then can a wise decision be made whether to move forward or not. This second parable suggests that doing nothing is not really an option. A decision must be made, and the cost of discipleship is huge: forsaking all one's possessions (v. 33). This is the third requirement of discipleship (cf. vv. 26–27). Following Jesus is not for the fainthearted. Many tests will be met along the way. But the cost of not being a disciple is even greater—eternal loss (9:25).

Jesus's discourse on discipleship concludes with a parable about salt. A similar saying in the context of discipleship notes the presence of salt, an indispensable ingredient for flavor and in sacrificial offerings (Mark 9:49; cf. Lev. 2:13; Num. 18:19), without which they would not be acceptable. But if that capacity were lost (Luke 14:34), then it would not be useful for any purpose, not even to fertilize the land (which suggests a compound, probably from the Dead Sea region, that was more than pure sodium chloride) or to kill weeds in a compost heap used for fertilizing. Jesus's solemn appeal inviting His hearers to hear (v. 35) shows that it was possible for the Jews to respond positively despite His earlier quotation from Isaiah in connection with this saying (8:8–10). It is the Lord who gives ears to hear, eyes to see, and a heart to perceive the truth (Deut. 29:4).

15:1–32. Parables of the Lost and Found. Immediately after Jesus's words encouraging people to listen, tax collectors and sinners came closer to hear Him, prompting the Pharisees and scribes—the teachers of the law—to grumble among themselves about Jesus's receiving such people and eating with them (v. 2). Religiously observant Jews at that time avoided associating with these people. But Jesus displayed a very different attitude (5:29–32; 7:34) and told them three closely related parables about a lost sheep (15:4–7), a lost coin (vv. 8–10), and a lost son (vv. 11–32), all of which climax with rejoicing when the lost is found. From the setting and the interpretation that follows, the first two parables (vv. 7, 10), the lost sheep and the lost coin, represent sinners who need to be found and saved in God's kingdom.

15:4–7. A Lost Sheep. A shepherd with one hundred sheep (v. 4) had a typical-sized flock and played an essential role in the Israelite economy since sheep were among the prescribed sacrifices, most notably at Passover time. In spite of later rabbinic comments that shepherds were unscrupulous and untrustworthy, they embodied qualities that were needed for faithful leadership over Israel (e.g., Num. 27:17; 2 Sam. 5:2; 1 Chr. 17:6) and, later, over the church (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2). Indeed, the shepherd symbolizes God's own care for His people (Pss. 23:1–4; 28:9; 80:1; Mic. 7:14), and Jesus refers to Himself as "the good shepherd" (John 10:11, 14, 16; cf. Heb. 13:20; 1 Pet. 2:25; 5:4). Accordingly, it is normal for a shepherd who loses one sheep to leave the ninety-nine in order to search for the one that was lost until he finds it; each is valuable. So God seeks out those who are lost (Ezek. 34:16; cf. Gen. 3:8–9) as does Jesus (Luke 19:10; Matt. 15:24). Being in the open country of the wilderness (Luke 15:4) underscores both the danger and urgency to locate the lost sheep before it suffers harm or is eaten and the shepherd's relief and joy on finding it (v. 5). His joy is so strong and long-lasting that when the shepherd arrives home, he invites his friends and neighbors to rejoice with him, reflecting the collective joy in heaven over one repentant sinner who will enrich eternity by his or her presence (vv. 6–7).

15:8–10. A Lost Coin. A second illustration of the same reality is of a woman with ten silver coins who loses one (v. 8). The coin, a Greek drachma, in Jesus's time was equivalent to a Roman denarius and represented a day's wage. The coins were probably the woman's entire savings, so losing one represented a significant

loss and justified searching thoroughly and carefully for it, which included using a lamp and sweeping the house. The typical Jewish home would have had no windows at all or very small ones and a rough stone floor, making it difficult to find a coin, especially if it fell into a crack. On finding it, she invites her lady friends and neighbors (the words here in v. 9 are feminine unlike in v. 6) to come and rejoice with her.

15:11–32. A Lost Son. While the first two parables clearly emphasize the value of what was lost, the culminating parable of the three is more complex as it contrasts different scales of value—in terms of relationships as well as the relative value of possessions compared to that of human beings. The younger of a man's two sons demanded his share of the land that would normally pass to him only after the father's death (v. 12). It was a highly unusual request, which meant that the father would probably have had to sell one third of his land, reserving the double portion for the firstborn son (cf. Deut. 21:17). The younger son was essentially telling his father that he wished he were already dead, particularly unthinkable in a patriarchal setting. Such rebelliousness by one's son could perhaps be treated as a capital offense (Deut. 21:18–21). Amazingly, though, the father acceded to the younger son's request and divided the land between his sons. While the father retained control of the income from the larger portion of the land, the older son knew that what was left would eventually fall to him. Nevertheless, it meant a reduced income for the family.

The younger son soon took his money, left home, and traveled to a distant place, where he wasted it all (Luke 15:13–14). His reckless, hedonistic lifestyle is not detailed in order to focus on his time of need. A severe famine compounded the problem because even the barest necessities would have been more expensive (v. 14). This dire setting, combined with his being a foreigner, resulted in no one giving him anything (v. 16). His desperation is vividly portrayed by his being hired by a citizen of that country (v. 15). Jews were not to associate or in any way unite their interests with foreigners (cf. Acts 10:28, using the same word), whom many Jews considered unclean (cf. Mark 7:1–4). Worse, the young man had to feed pigs, the epitome of unclean animals. Apparently, due to the famine, his employer took advantage of the boy by providing him with only the barest sustenance, and he was so hungry that he longed to be fed with the bitter, feed-grade carob pods that the pigs ate. Even so, to steal food from the pigs could have resulted in him being fired and possibly starving to death. Seemingly trapped in hopeless financial servitude, he finally came to his senses. Strikingly portrayed is the boy's realization of his own situation compared with that of even the hired servants in his father's house, who had food to spare (Luke 15:17) and his resolve to join them. Having received his inheritance, he must work for his keep.

The young son readied a contrite speech of repentance for when he would face his father. It included confession of his course of action as a sin against heaven and wrong toward his father, as well as his admission that he was no longer worthy to be called his son (vv. 18–19). The text then focuses on his father's response. Even while still at a great distance, the son was noticed (v. 20). It seems his father had been waiting and hoping for him to return. No words were necessary; his cascade of actions says it all: he saw him, had compassion on him, ran toward him, embraced him, and kissed him. The word for having compassion is rare in the NT, used only in the Gospels, and almost always describes the compassion of Jesus for people in need (e.g., Luke 7:13; Matt. 9:36; Mark 1:41; 8:2).

Running would have been not only undignified but disgraceful for a man of the father's age and station. Yet this and more—a huge hug and kiss—shows the father's warm welcome of his wayward son. The son began his rehearsed speech, but his father interrupted it, telling the servants to bring out the best robe (Luke 15:22), which would have been the father's own robe. The Greek word *stolē* refers to a long, formal garment reserved for a special celebration. The ring was the father's own signet ring, bestowing to the son his own authority. Servants went barefoot, but a son was to have sandals. Taken together, the father's actions paint an amazing picture of love, acceptance, and reinstatement of his once-rebellious son into the family. Killing the fattened calf (v. 23) would have fed the whole village, not just the family. This was no secret or shameful return; it was a village-wide celebration! The father was emphatic—this was his son. He would never be merely a servant. Added to the image of the lost being found of the previous two parables is an even more dramatic picture: resurrection from the dead (v. 24). The text refers to the beginning of the celebration because it would probably have lasted several days.

Almost forgotten was the older son who after faithfully working in the field (v. 25), approached the house and asked a servant the reason for the celebration. He was told of his brother being received "safe and sound" (v. 27). This traditional phrase translates the single Greek word *hygiainō*, which is related to healing and physical wholeness (cf. 5:31). Instead of being happy, the older brother was angry and refused to go in and celebrate (15:28). Though this was highly disrespectful, the father himself came out and pled with him to join in the festivities. Finally we see the feelings harbored by the older son. He emphasized the years he had worked for his father, not just since his brother left home, and thus he felt more like a slave than a son, hoping for a reward for all his hard work but not being given even a young goat (v. 29), a far less valuable animal than the fattened calf.

The older son emphasized his separation further by expressing his desire to have parties not with his family but with his friends, even refusing to acknowledge his relation to his brother, preferring to describe him to his father as "this son of yours" (v. 30). By implication, he was even disowning himself from the family. But having just received one son back from the dead, the father refused to accept the "death" of his eldest son, addressing him affectionately as "son" (v. 31; cf. 2:48; 16:25) and referring to the younger son as his brother. The necessity of celebrating is underscored because he had died and was alive again and had been lost and was found (15:32). Perhaps most surprisingly, the story ends here. Whether the older brother accepted his father's invitation is unknown, as if each hearer is left to make up his or her own mind how to relate to the unfathomable love and forgiveness of the Father in heaven, the real hero of this story.

16:1–13. Parable of the Unjust Steward. From a parable about the most valuable treasure of all—people—chapter sixteen turns to what people overvalue: money. This parable is troubling because it seems to commend the actions of an unrighteous *oikonomos*—"steward," "manager," or "house administrator" (v. 8)—who gave his master's money away in order to save himself. An *oikonomos* in Roman times was a highly respected position. Those who hired them often had to be away on business, and therefore these administrators were able to sign legal documents and do business in their master's name. So the most important qualifications for this position were honesty and trustworthiness. This man, however, was accused of squandering his master's possessions. The charges were believed because the manager was not only asked to give an account but was also told that he could not continue as manager (v. 2). The normal order appears to have been reversed here: the firing should have followed the accounting, assuming the facts confirmed the accusations being made.

The steward seized this unusual opportunity to secure his future. In order to ingratiate himself to his master's debtors, he wrote down their debts. The oil debt was cut by half from a hundred measures to fifty and the wheat debt was cut by 20 percent. Commentators and translations vary in regard to the exact modern equivalents of these amounts, due to varying accounts and local usages. What is clear is that these reductions of debt were huge, representing about three years and eight years of labor respectively. Even more surprising is that the master, on learning about this, commended the administrator because he had acted *phronimōs*—a word that can be translated as "shrewdly," "prudently," "wisely," or "astutely" (for other occurrences of this Greek word, see Luke 12:42; Matt. 7:24; 10:16; 25:2).

Why was the steward commended? Some suggest that he merely eliminated the interest owed, which explains the different write-off amounts for oil and wheat. Under this assumption, the steward actually made his master look very pious because Jews were not supposed to exact usury on debts owed to them by Israelites (Lev. 25:36–37); thus he not only secured his own future but enhanced his master's reputation in doing so. But if this were the case, the steward could not have been labeled *adikias*—"unrighteous," "unjust," or (because of the context) "dishonest" (Luke 16:8) because he would have been upholding Jewish law. But if he had been unjust, in what sense was he wise? By thinking of his future prospects and not just his present happiness.

Shockingly, the parable concludes that the people (lit. "children" or "sons") of this world are more shrewd than the people (lit. "children" or "sons") of the light (v. 8). In short, although professed believers should live sensible, just, and godly lives in this present age (Titus 2:12), with their eternal future in view, many manifest even less wisdom than worldly people by chasing worldly wealth, which is fleeting (Prov. 23:5; 1 Tim. 6:7), rather than being serious about living for the world to come. Worldly people at least understand the need to secure their immediate future. Jesus's counsel to all professed children of light is to make friends by means of *mamōna tēs adikias*—"unrighteous mammon/wealth" or "worldly wealth"—by using it wisely in light of eternity so that they may be counted faithful (Luke 16:11) and welcomed into the everlasting dwellings (v. 9). It is heavenly wealth that constitutes the true riches, so the wealth of this world should not be horded but used to help others, and the "friends" who have responded to Christ because of the kindness shown to them will eventually show their appreciation of this generosity in the everlasting world of the life to come. In addition, our closest "friends" will be the Lord and angels in heaven, where our true treasure is. The means entrusted to us, like in the parable of the talents/bags of gold (Matt. 25:14–30), are lent to us by God for the enrichment of His kingdom (cf. 1 Chr. 29:14). If someone should prove unfaithful in handling what belongs to God, it shows an allegiance to another master, and one can be faithful to only a single master, not two (Luke 16:11–13).

16:14–18. Clashes with Kingdom Values. The topic of wealth continues in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (vv. 19–31), preceded by these intervening verses. The Pharisees were visibly offended at the attack on wealth because they were lovers of money, and they derided Jesus (v. 14; cf. Ps. 22:7; 35:16). But wealth is no certain indicator of God's blessing, as the ensuing parable makes plain. Not what people think, but what God thinks matters, and He knows their hearts (Luke 16:15; cf. 1 Sam. 16:7). Jesus goes further. The trappings of wealth and power admired by most is utterly repulsive to God. In fact, it is a *bdelygma*—"an abomination" or "detestable," a term reserved for the most revolting practices, such as eating the flesh of unclean animals (Lev. 11:10–13, 41–42), homosexual relations (Lev. 18:22; 20:13), and abominable worship practices (Deut. 7:25–26; 12:31; 17:2–5). The Canaanites were driven out of the land on account of this (Lev. 18:24–25; Deut. 12:29–31).

Up to the time of John the Baptist, God's revelation was limited to the Law and the Prophets—the Hebrew Scriptures. After centuries of prophetic silence, John signaled a new era of God's revelation (Luke 16:16; see also 1:76–79; 7:26–27; cf. Mal. 3:1). The preaching of the kingdom of God by both John and Jesus awakened hope, leading even unlikely candidates for the kingdom to desire earnestly to enter (Luke 15:1). Furthermore, this new time was characterized by believers' fervent efforts to advance the kingdom and the certain triumph over Satan, whose warfare against God's law is futile. Not one tittle of the law, not even the slightest stroke of a letter, would fail (16:17), because it reflects God's unchangeable character.

16:19–31. Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. The opening words, identical to 16:1, signal that this too is a parable, as does the fanciful depiction of life after death. Unlike the dishonest steward, the rich man took no thought of his destiny until it was too late. In this life he seemingly had it all, dressing expensively with purple and fine linen (v. 19; cf. Rev. 18:12), feasting luxuriously every day, and living so securely that poor Lazarus (meaning "God helps") was laid not at the door but at the gate (Luke 16:20). Such an entrance would normally have been separated from a palatial residence by a courtyard. Lazarus was unable to work (as indicated by his being taken to the gate) and was nourished with only the *piptontōn*—"what was falling"—from the rich man's table (v. 21), since apparently nothing was given to him (cf. 15:16). His only help came from the dogs that licked his sores.

Jews commonly assumed that wealth was a sign of God's blessings (cf. 18:24–26), but the rich man evidenced no religious inclination, refusing even to show mercy to the poor man lying at his gate. Thus, after death, when he piously requested mercy from Father Abraham, none was granted (16:25–26). While poverty in itself is no saving virtue, Lazarus's patient endurance of his sufferings and begging for mercy (vv. 20–21) from the one who seemed divinely blessed shows his reliance on God. The opposite destinies of the two men is hinted at already by the fact that only Lazarus is named. At death, the rich man found himself in torment while Lazarus rested in Abraham's bosom—or "at his side" as some translations render it (v. 23). This depiction of the afterlife reflects popular, nontheological conceptions of the day. It may be similar to the common reference in our time to "St. Peter" guarding the entrance to the "pearly gates" as the foundation of humorous stories. Too frequently this folklore parable about Lazarus is today oversimplified into a literal teaching on heaven and hell. Such an interpretation contradicts the NT teaching that people receive their rewards at the Second Advent (Luke 21:28, 36; Matt. 16:27; 25:31–46; 2 Cor. 5:10; Rev. 22:12; cf. Prov. 24:12).

Furthermore, numerous unrealistic elements (e.g., calm conversation by the rich man while in fiery torment and the idea that a finger dipped in water would adequately cool his tongue) and the description of real body parts rather than a soulish postmortem existence indicate that this parable is not intended to be understood literally. Furthermore, neither man is actually depicted in heaven or hell; both are in Hades (Luke 16:23), the place of the dead (Acts 2:27, 31; Rev. 1:18), which the reference to the rich man's burial underscores (Luke 16:22). The picture reflects a Jewish understanding of the grave (Hades) as having separate places for the righteous and the wicked. Lazarus resting with Abraham fits the OT conception of the dead sleeping (or resting) with their fathers (e.g., Deut. 31:16; 2 Sam. 7:12; 1 Kin. 2:10). It also fits well with the teaching of Jesus (John 11:11–14) and the NT writers (see commentary on Luke 8:40–56) that death is a sleep. The great gulf or chasm fixed between Abraham and the rich man illustrates that one's chosen destiny is forever sealed by death, which is an unconscious state (Job 14:12; Pss. 115:17; 146:4; Eccl. 9:5–6, 10) from which the righteous will be awakened by the voice of Jesus (John 5:28–29; 1 Thess. 4:16; cf. Ps. 17:15).

At the climax of the parable, the rich man begged Abraham to send Lazarus back from the dead in order to *diamartyromai* to his five brothers (Luke 16:28). This word most often refers to the apostolic preaching of the gospel (e.g., Acts 2:40; 18:5; 20:21, 24; 28:23), but it can also refer to the inspired testimony of the Scriptures (Acts 8:25; Heb. 2:6). Abraham replied that his brothers have Moses and the prophets and should listen to them (Luke 16:29). Like the rich man himself, it seems his brothers did not allow the Scriptures to benefit them. The notion that someone rising from the dead would be a more persuasive witness to them was rejected (vv. 30–31).

The miracles performed by Jesus were not convincing for many Jews. Claiming that Jesus was in league with the devil (Mark 3:22–23) or demon-possessed (John 8:48, 52; 10:20), they wanted a sign from heaven (Luke 11:16). More persuasive than miracles, more certain and sure even than one rising from the dead, is God's prophetic word (2 Pet. 1:19; cf. Rev. 16:14).

17:1–4. Jesus Warns of Offenses. While the preceding remarks were aimed at the Pharisees, the sayings from 17:1 to 18:8 are mostly directed to the disciples (except for 17:20–21). It is inevitable that *skandala*—a word variously translated as "offenses," "stumbling blocks," or "temptations to sin," incitements to wrong action or belief—will come, but believers should not be the instigators (v. 1; Matt. 13:41; Rom. 14:13) as it advances Satan's work (Matt. 16:23; Rev. 2:14). A millstone was used for grinding grain and weighed hundreds of pounds, so having one hung from a person's neck while being thrown into the sea would mean certain drowning. Nevertheless, that would be preferable to the anticipated punishment for offending one of these little ones, referring to the "little flock" being gathered by Jesus (Luke 17:2; see also 12:32). The absolute admonition to *prosechete*—"take heed," "be on your guard," or "watch yourselves" (17:3; also in 21:34; Acts 5:35; 20:28)—urges a spiritual self-examination before correcting others (cf. Matt. 7:3–5; Gal. 6:1). When fellow believers sin against us, a rebuke, done in a redemptive way, rather than vengeance is necessary (Lev. 19:17–18). If they repent, they are to be forgiven. Then we have renewed fellowship with them (Matt. 18:15). The aim is to preserve the relationship, even if it is necessary to forgive not just seven times but seven times in a day (Luke 17:4; cf. Matt. 18:21–22). As we have been forgiven, we are to forgive (cf. Matt. 6:12) and thus overcome evil with good (Rom. 12:19–21).

17:5–10. Faith and Duty. The request of the disciples, "Increase our faith" (v. 5), indicates that such a forgiving spirit seemed out of their reach. They had heard Jesus describe inadequate faith as "little" (12:28; Matt. 8:26; 16:8), which suggested that they needed more; now they needed to understand that what counts is the quality of one's faith, not the amount. A mustard seed was among the smallest of seeds, and even faith that tiny could do otherwise impossible things by relying on God, for whom nothing is impossible (Luke 1:37; 18:27; cf. Matt. 19:26).

However, God's servants should not expect God to do their bidding. God's servants must always be ready to do His bidding. Jesus told a parable to clarify this point. The servant (*doulos*) was a household slave whose obedience was not optional or in any way praiseworthy. Somewhat humorously, Jesus asked his hearers to pretend they were the master and asked whether they would call their servant in from working in the field, have food ready, and invite him to eat (Luke 17:7). Of course not. The master's needs always came first, and only after he had eaten and drunk could the slave enjoy his meal (v. 8). Slaves should consider that they had only done their duty (v. 10), what they were obligated to do, and humbly acknowledge themselves as unprofitable and unworthy servants who deserved no thanks. Likewise, Christian service for the Lord can earn no merit whatsoever: first, because Jesus has already paid our incalculable debt of sin; second, because even works of faith are done through His grace and power; and third, because everything we do is tainted by sin and needs the merits and intercession of Christ to be acceptable to God (Ex. 28:38–40; Is. 64:6; Eph. 2:8–10; Phil. 2:13; 3:9; Heb. 7:25; 13:15).

17:11–19. Ten Lepers Cleansed. Still on the journey to Jerusalem, Jesus passed between Samaria and Galilee. This incident may have occurred just after the raising of Lazarus, when Jesus withdrew to the town of Ephraim (John 11:54), about eighteen miles (29 km) north of Jerusalem. On the outskirts of the town, ten lepers, who because of their unclean state had to stand far away (see commentary on Luke 5:12–16), addressed Jesus as "Master" (17:12–13). This title—elsewhere in Luke used only by the disciples (5:5; 9:24, 45; 9:33, 49)—together with the cry for Jesus to have compassion on them evidences the lepers' faith in Jesus to heal them. Recognizing their desire to be cleansed of leprosy, Jesus tells them to show themselves to the priests (v. 14). Mosaic law specifies that a healed leper must be declared clean by the priest, who would then administer a cleansing ritual (Lev. 14:1–32). Jesus's command tested their faith, and without waiting to be healed, all ten immediately headed to the temple.

After being pronounced clean by the priest, only one leper, a Samaritan, returned, praised God for the miracle, and with his face to the ground, expressed his gratitude to Jesus (Luke 17:15–16). As on other occasions (Luke 7:9; Matt. 8:10–13; 15:28), Jesus underlined by His rhetorical questions the significance of the fact that the one most responsive of the ten was a foreigner (Luke 17:18). The story reminds us that nationality or ethnicity is no impediment to the gospel and that sometimes those who seem unlikely candidates for the kingdom may indeed be the nearest (cf. 10:33). Through a series of insistent questions, Jesus confronted His disciples with the failure of those in Israel who did not appreciate the kingdom blessings being extended to them and hinted at the need for a wider mission. He also confirmed what was already implicit, that faith is decisive for being made well (v. 19)—physically and spiritually. Here again healing becomes a parable of the salvation (and restoration) that Jesus offers (see commentary on Luke 7:36–50). The command to go (17:14, 19) evokes the commission given to every believer to make disciples (Matt. 28:19) by sharing what "God has done" (Luke 8:39).

17:20–37. When and How the Kingdom Comes. More than three years had passed since John the Baptist began preaching a "baptism of repentance" (3:3) and announcing that "the kingdom of heaven" was near (Matt. 3:2). Some Pharisees, seeing no visible indication that Jesus would establish the kingdom anytime soon and perhaps implying failure regarding His mission, asked Him when the kingdom of God would come (Luke 17:20). Jesus's answer is divided by Luke into two parts: a brief and somewhat cryptic answer to the Pharisees and a lengthier answer to His disciples. In reply to the Pharisees, Jesus denied that the coming of the kingdom was something that can be outwardly observed. Nor was it to be established in a particular location on earth that could be identified (v. 21).

The phrase *entos hymōn estin* has been translated and understood variously. Some render it as "within you," others as "in your midst," and others as "among you." Luke uses certain words to convey the idea of something or someone being "among you" (*en*; 1:1, 42; 7:16, 28; 9:46, 48; etc.) or "in your midst" (*mesos*; 2:46; 4:35; 10:3; 21:21; 24:36). While it is true that the Greek word used here (*entos*) can mean "within" or "inside" (cf. Pss. 39:3; 103:1; 109:22, LXX), Jesus is not necessarily saying that the kingdom of God is within the Pharisees. Luke often uses "you" in a generic sense rather than to the specific people being addressed (Luke 2:11; 6:22; 9:48; 10:9; etc.). Even the Pharisees could become citizens of God's kingdom if they would allow Him to make them clean within (Matt. 23:26 is the only other use of *entos* in the NT).

To the disciples, Jesus explained that soon they would longingly desire to see the coming kingdom, and people would even claim that it had arrived at a specific time and place. However, when the kingdom comes outwardly in glory, it will be as visible as lightning that covers the sky (Luke 17:24). Every eye will see Him (Rev. 1:7). But the cross comes first. Jesus had to suffer as an offering for sin in fulfillment of prophecy (Luke 17:25; cf. Is. 53:10). The Greek word *dei* is used to indicate that this is a divine imperative—God *must* fulfill His promise (see commentary on Luke 2:41–52). By rejecting Jesus, the prophetic testimony of Moses regarding a twisted and faithless generation (Deut. 32:5, 20) was fulfilled in those who would seek His death. Few were saved in the days of Noah and in the days of Lot (Luke 17:26, 28) because they were so absorbed with pleasures and business that they disregarded the warnings of coming destruction. There is nothing wrong with eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, or buying and selling, but these activities can distract people from advancing God's kingdom (12:33–34; 18:22) and preparing for Christ's return (12:35–40). When the Son of Man is revealed (17:30), returning in the same way He ascended (Acts 1:11) and descending from heaven "with power and great glory" (Luke 21:27; cf. 1 Thess. 4:16), the world will be destroyed as fully by fire as it was by water (2 Pet. 3:6–7).

Sodom is the proverbial example of wickedness and of God's destructive judgment (Deut. 29:23–26; Is. 13:19; 2 Pet. 2:6; Jude 7), but the cities of Israel who rejected the greater light that came through the preaching of Jesus and the apostles will receive an even greater punishment in the judgment (Matt. 10:14–15; 11:23–24; see Luke 10:12; 12:47). God's judgment on Sodom illustrates what He will do against the wicked—fire and brimstone will rain down from God out of heaven and destroy them (cf. Rev. 14:10; 20:9). The Son of Man will be revealed at His Second Advent in burning fire against those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Thess. 1:7–8; cf. Matt. 26:64; Rev. 1:7).

Although Jesus will give similar instructions to flee and not turn back in the Olivet Discourse (Luke 17:31; cf. 21:20–22), here the focus is on the time just before His return. At that time, as in the time of Lot, Jesus's followers must forget their possessions and flee for their lives (cf. Gen. 19:17). "Remember Lot's wife" (Luke 17:32) is a succinct warning not to love earthly things or even close family members more than Jesus (see Gen. 19:24–26). Everyone who loses his life by living for heaven, rather than for this world, will preserve it (v. 33; cf. Luke 9:24). These two different destinies chosen are vividly illustrated by only one of two people being taken to heaven when Jesus comes (17:34–35; Matt. 24:31; John 14:3). The picture of two people in one bed uses a masculine form for both in order to leave indefinite whether the man or his wife are left behind (cf. Matt. 10:36) as food for the *aetoi*—rendered as "eagles" or "vultures" (see Rev. 19:17–18). This image, along with women grinding together (Luke 17:35), illustrates that everyone is responsible for their own salvation. The context indicates that this "rapture" or being "caught up" to be with the Lord at His coming (1 Thess. 4:16–17) is not secret but visible to all (Luke 17:24).

18:1–8. Parable of the Unjust Judge. With special reference to the end time, Jesus tells a parable to encourage His followers not to become worn out by discouragement but to persist in prayer. The judge is called unjust or unrighteous (v. 6) because he did not fear God or care whether people regarded him as a fair judge (v. 4). In short, he ignored the Scriptures about what constituted righteous judgment (Ex. 23:6–8; Lev. 19:15; Deut. 1:16–17; 16:18–20)—including the responsibility to defend the just cause of the widow and the fatherless (Deut. 24:17; 27:19). The unjust judge ultimately decided to vindicate the cause of the widow, not out of a sense of duty or compassion for her plight but in order to avoid the *hypōpiazō*—the "strike," "attack," or "torment"—of the widow (Luke 18:5). Jesus then emphasizes how different God is—first by calling attention to the judge's character as revealed by his verbalized thoughts and second by using the form of the question in Greek that expects a strong, affirmative answer regarding God's response to those who cry out day and night: God will vindicate His chosen people (cf. John 18:11).

While the last phrase of v. 7 is often translated as a question—Will God put off or delay His response to His people?—with v. 8 providing the answer, the theme of delay that appears in Luke 17:22 and 18:1 suggests that God's bearing long with His people is a better translation. God allows time for the true intents of people's hearts to be revealed: on the one hand, a patient looking for and hastening that day by God's faithful people (Heb. 10:35–39; 2 Pet. 3:12) and, on the other hand, an unfaithful impatience by the wicked servant who considers that the Lord is delaying His coming (Luke 12:45). The uncertainty is heightened by Jesus's question as to whether when He comes He will find faith on the earth (18:8). A strikingly similar note of uncertainty is struck in the letter to Laodicea (Rev. 3:20). This question seems to be reassuringly answered. There will be those who overcome (Rev. 3:21; 14:12).

18:9–14. Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector. The qualities of those who will enter the kingdom of God emerges as a unifying theme of Luke 18:9–30. The parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector is addressed to people who trusted in themselves and were certain of their own righteousness and accordingly despised and looked down on everyone else (v. 9). It contrasts two pray-ers and their prayers: the Pharisee who stood and prayed by himself, whose focus was on his own works, and the tax collector who simply confessed his need and pled for mercy. The Pharisee's prayer was of thanksgiving, not for what God had done but for himself and his works

His "righteousness" led him to view himself as morally superior to others. His list of villains culminates with this tax collector (v. 11; see commentary on Luke 15:1–32), who becomes a mere prop to highlight the Pharisee's outward righteousness: fasting twice a week, which later traditions identify as Mondays and Thursdays; and tithing (see 11:42), instituted by God to remind us that everything we have comes from and really belongs to Him (cf. 1 Chr. 29:14), but which also becomes a point of self-satisfying pride.

The tax collector, on the other hand, reveals humility (he stood far away, not looking up) and exhibits true repentance for his sin (beating his breast). His prayer is short (six words in Greek compared to the Pharisee's twenty-nine); his request simple (a plea for mercy); his confession clear (he is a sinner). It is a plea for propitiation (*hilaskomai*; cf. Rom. 3:25; Heb. 2:17) and forgiveness. Jesus affirms that this man left justified, having received God's gift of righteousness (cf. Is. 54:17); the Pharisee left the same as he came, empty. Both outcomes anticipate the final judgment, when one will be humbled and the other will be exalted.

18:15–17. Receiving the Kingdom As a Little Child. Even *brephē*—"infants" or "babies"—were brought to Jesus by their mothers so He could place His hands on them in blessing. Knowing how disruptive very small children could be, the disciples rebuked them. But Jesus, looking at the children, saw in these powerless little people (unlike the proud Pharisee) prospective citizens for the kingdom of God. The later wording (*paidion*; v. 16) suggests that children of various ages were brought or encouraged by Jesus to come (cf. John 6:37). Their implicit trust and total dependence vividly illustrate how to receive the kingdom. In fact, through the faith of praying parents, the Holy Spirit may mold children (cf. 1 Cor. 7:14).

18:18–30. Leaving All for the Sake of the Kingdom. From powerless children blessed by Jesus, the focus shifts to a rich and powerful ruler who called Him not just "Teacher," a sign of respect equivalent to "Rabbi," but "Good Teacher." His earnest question reflects the Pharisaic conviction that doing good is the way to inherit eternal life. Jesus immediately pointed the man to the only source of goodness—God alone—and to the only definition of goodness—God's law (vv. 19–20; cf. James 4:17). Nearly the whole second table of the Decalogue is recited (though not in order), which the man claims to have kept (Luke 18:21). The Greek form of this verb suggests he viewed the law as a list that could be checked off when completed (contrast use of the present tense form in Luke 11:28; Acts 16:4; 21:24; Rom. 2:28; cf. Phil. 3:5–7). Jesus did not challenge this claim directly, but He indicated that one thing was still lacking and commanded the man to sell all of his possessions and distribute the proceeds to the poor, promising that he would then have treasure in heaven (Luke 18:22). He concluded with the same invitation given to the Twelve, asking that he come and follow Him (v. 22; cf. Luke 5:27 // Mark 1:17). It is the call to faith, to rely on Jesus rather than on his wealth for his future. The ruler's heart stands revealed (cf. Luke 2:35; 12:34). Not mentioned earlier is the tenth commandment, "you shall not covet." Jesus's call brought to his awareness the depth of the law's requirement, just as it did to Paul (Rom. 7:7). Unfortunately, the man went away dejected and sorrowful (Luke 18:23; cf. Mark 10:22). His riches were his idol, and to forgo the seen for hope of the unseen seemed too much to sacrifice.

Some may think this command of Jesus was too hard and wonder whether He calls every would-be disciple to sell all. First of all, Scripture frequently warns of wealth's seductive power (Deut. 8:12–18; Matt. 6:19–24; 1 Tim. 6:7–12), which is why Jesus indicated that it is hard for the rich to enter the kingdom of God and even compares it hyperbolically to a camel passing through the eye of a needle (Luke 18:24–25; cf. 6:24). Clearly it is not impossible, though, because Jesus added that what is impossible with people is possible with God (18:27), and some rich individuals did become followers of Jesus (e.g., 8:3; 19:2; Matt. 27:57). These, however, were comparatively few (cf. Luke 1:53; 6:24).

Second, it is important to recognize that only those who followed Jesus as full-time disciples were called to sacrifice *all* their worldly possessions so they could be with Him and be engaged in itinerant preaching (Mark 3:14). Others who wanted to follow Jesus were directed otherwise (Luke 8:38–39; 9:59–60). Later, Zacchaeus exhibited his repentance by making restitution and a somewhat lesser sacrifice (19:8–9). The sin of Ananias and Sapphira was not in refusing to sell all but in pretending to do so and lying to God about it (Acts 5:1–11). Apart from the holy tithe that belongs to God, all are to give according to what they have decided in their hearts, "for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Cor. 9:7). In fact, Peter reminded Jesus at this point in the narrative that the disciples had indeed left all to follow Him

(Luke 18:28). Jesus reassured them, and all who have sacrificed possessions or relationships for the sake of the kingdom of God (v. 29), that they will receive many times more in this time and "in the age to come eternal life" (v. 30). Keeping in mind the hope of immortality complete with homes and thrones (John 14:1–3; Matt. 19:28) renders any this-worldly or ironic interpretation of this promise unlikely and unnecessary.

18:31–34. Detailed Passion Prediction. Following the glorious promises of the preceding verses, this stark, private portrayal to the Twelve failed to register. Its meaning was also hidden from them (v. 34; cf. 9:45) because Jews expected the Messiah to come as a triumphant king (e.g., Is. 11:1–4; Ps. 89:19–29), deliver Israel from Rome's power, and reestablish Davidic rule. Although this is often referred to as Jesus's third passion prediction based on the outline of events in Mark (Mark 8:31–33; 9:30–32; 10:32–34), in Luke it is actually the seventh and most detailed one (cf. Luke 5:35; 9:22, 43–45; 12:50; 13:32–33; 17:25). Jesus's prediction made it clear that the events that would take place in Jerusalem would be a fulfillment not only of His words but of what the prophets already had written about (e.g., Is. 50:4–9; 53:3–5), an important theme in Luke (Luke: Introduction). Jesus mentioned for the first time being delivered to the Gentiles (Luke 18:32)—the same verb that is used of Judas's betrayal of Jesus to the Jewish authorities (e.g., 22:4, 6). Once Jesus was in their hands, they would treat Him shamefully, flog or scourge Him, and kill Him, but He would rise again. Reference to His resurrection on the third day also emphasizes it as a fulfillment of prophecy (cf. 9:22).

18:35–43. A Blind Man Receives His Sight. Nearing Jericho on the way to Jerusalem suggests that this incident occurred before Jesus entered the city, whereas Matthew and Mark suggest that it happened on leaving it (Matt. 20:29; Mark 10:46). This slight change enabled Luke to include the story of Zacchaeus, which takes place in Jericho (Luke 19:1), to connect it to the parable that follows and to provide a seamless transition for narrating the triumphal entry (19:27). While Matthew mentions there were two blind men healed (Matt. 20:30), Luke (with Mark) focuses on the one named Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46). He knew that Jesus of Nazareth was able to heal him, and he even called Him Son of David (Luke 18:37–38), the only such address in Luke (cf. 20:41). It is a messianic title based on the promise made to David (2 Sam. 7:12–16) and repeated by the prophets (e.g., Is. 9:6–7; Jer. 23:5–6; 33:15–16; Ezek. 37:24–25). Significantly, giving sight to the blind is listed among the works of the Messiah (Luke 4:18; 7:21–22; cf. Is. 35:5; 42:7), and, apart from healing the man with the severed ear (Luke 22:50–51), it is the last healing miracle recorded by Luke.

Both the man's cry and the crowd silencing him are described in very strong terms. People may have thought his blindness was divine punishment for some particular sin (cf. John 9:2). Being a beggar was a shameful occupation (Luke 16:3), and Bartimaeus was determined to be healed. The attempt to silence him led him only to shout and cry out all the more. Jesus's question (cf. John 5:6) lead the man to verbalize his faith by calling Jesus "Lord" (Luke 18:41). It also opened the way for immediate healing (cf. Luke 7:50; 8:48; 17:19). Juxtaposed with this receiving of sight is the mention, only in Luke, of Jesus's approaching death being "hidden" from the disciples (18:34), which underscores their need for a spiritual eye-opening. But this would occur only after His resurrection, when Jesus "opened" the Scriptures to them (24:31–32, 45).

19:1–10. Jesus Comes to Zacchaeus's House. As Jesus passed through Jericho on the final leg of His journey to Jerusalem, a rich man named Zacchaeus was determined to see Him. As a chief tax collector (v. 2), he probably had jurisdiction over a wide area with subordinates working under him. Collecting taxes for Rome could be quite lucrative anywhere, but Jericho was particularly attractive: being situated in a highly fertile area made it among the wealthiest cities of Israel; one of Herod's palaces was nearby; bordering Perea also meant that customs duties were collected along the trade route to and from Jerusalem. Thus Zacchaeus was a wealthy person. However, unlike the preceding rich man stories in Luke (12:16–21; 16:19–24; 18:18–27), this final one is positive. Zacchaeus, impressed with John the Baptist's instructions (3:12–13), was convicted of his wrong and was determined to see Jesus and begin making restitution for the wrong. Because he was short (probably less than five feet [1.5 m] tall) and could not see over the crowd (Luke 19:3), nor was anyone inclined to make room for someone like him, he abandoned decorum and climbed into a sycamore or fig tree ahead of the procession in order to see Jesus (v. 4). The Palestinian sycamore is easy to climb and often found by the roadside.

Jesus commanded Zacchaeus to hurry down from the tree because He had to ("must") stay

at his house (v. 5). The word translated "must" (*dei*) indicates that Jesus's visit was a divine necessity in fulfillment of His messianic mission (see commentary on Luke 2:41–52). Zacchaeus instantly obeyed the command and received Jesus with joy (19:6). By contrast, all the people muttered complaints about this. The Greek word used here (*diagongyzō*) means to "grumble" or "murmur" and is used of those opposing Jesus's ministry (Luke 5:30; 15:2; John 6:41, 43, 61). Due to his occupation, many saw Zacchaeus as a sinner (Luke 19:7) and certainly not someone a respectable teacher would eat with (see 5:30). So for Jesus to stay overnight as a guest in his house (19:5, 7) was shocking indeed.

Zacchaeus publicly announced his changed course, reflecting repentance and deep gratitude to Jesus for accepting him (v. 8). Zacchaeus gave fully half of his net worth as charity, which was more than double the amount that even the most pious Jew would give; for restitution, the law required repayment with an additional 20 percent (Lev. 6:1–5; Num. 5:7) and four or five times for stealing an animal (Ex. 22:1; 2 Sam. 12:6). Zacchaeus choose the more severe penalty, which shows his genuine change as a result of meeting Jesus. Onlookers needed reminding that he was a son of Abraham (Luke 19:9); from this point he was so based on faith (Gal. 3:7). Jesus's mission to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10; cf. Ezek. 34:1–12) is illustrated frequently in His reaching out to sinners and healing the helpless and hopelessly ill.

19:11–27. Parable of the Minas. Now that Jesus was near Jerusalem and had proclaimed the arrival of "salvation" (19:9), expectations began to soar that the kingdom of God would be ushered in *parachrēma*—"immediately" or "at once" (v. 11). In the minds of many Jews these were equivalent ideas. While the kingdom was present already in some sense, Jesus had also indicated that it was not visible (see 17:21). In order to distinguish God's reign from His own imminent arrival to Jerusalem, Jesus told a parable similar to the parable of the talents but with too many differences for them to have arisen from a single story. Some of these differences include ten servants instead of three; everyone starting with the same amount rather than each servant being given talents according to his ability (Matt. 25:15); the amount given being far less, one mina, worth just one sixtieth of a talent—about a hundred days' wages. Even more significant differences will be noted shortly. It should also be kept in mind that, as with many Gospel parables, some elements appear deliberately ambiguous. For example, the servants address their master as "Lord" (*kyrios*). This may be taken simply as a title of respect ("master") but may also be designed to reinforce the disciples' faith in Jesus as *Lord* and coming *King* while avoiding any overt claim to kingship that would enable His enemies to accuse Him of treason against Rome.

Unlike the parable of the talents, here a nobleman goes to be inaugurated as king and afterward return (Luke 19:12), showing that the kingdom would not be established as soon as many were hoping (cf. v. 11). The people hate the nobleman and even send a delegation to announce their rejection of his authority over them (v. 14). Thus, Jesus seeks to prepare His disciples for the rejection that He will soon face. But the nobleman returns as king with full authority.

According to Roman law, appropriate documentation was required to act legally on behalf of another; therefore each servant must have been deemed trustworthy (cf. 1 Cor. 4:2), and the first two who were examined proved to be and were given authority over ten and five cities respectively, in accordance with the number of minas they had earned (Luke 19:17, 19). While this and other passages (e.g., Matt. 19:28; 2 Cor. 5:10) suggest differing rewards in God's kingdom, we should avoid speculating about what has not been revealed. Interestingly, the good servants (Luke 19:17) recognized that their gain was possible only because of what their master had initially given them (cf. 1 Chr. 29:14).

From what Jesus has already said about the dangers of wealth, He was not encouraging His followers to amass riches by making great investments. Multiplication of the mina illustrates how ministering to people's needs, winning their confidence, and inviting them to follow Jesus results in the multiplication of Christ's followers. Investing one's time and energy in the bank of heaven will prove to be the only lasting investment (Luke 12:33–34), secure from the end-time financial ruin that strikes all who have chosen to advance their own "kingdoms" rather than God's kingdom (James 5:1–6; Rev. 18:11–13).

Although we do not hear reports from all ten servants, the pattern of reward is clear. One servant appears who not only failed to use his master's mina profitably but kept it hidden in a cloth (Luke 19:20; cf. Matt. 25:25). This was recognized as a highly irresponsible and insecure place to keep money. That this judgment is just is shown by the fact that, since he knew what his master expected, at a minimum he should have deposited the mina safely in the bank so that it could be returned with interest (Luke 19:23).

The servant's accusation that his master collected what he did not deposit, while patently false, overlooks the fact that money well invested creates employment. Likewise, those standing nearby apparently did not consider the master fair in commanding them to take the mina away from the wicked servant and give it to the one with ten minas (vv. 24–25). But it makes good financial sense to entrust more to the one who used means the most wisely. The parable concludes with the judgment of two groups (cf. John 5:24, 28–29): those who used their lives profitably for God's kingdom and will be given more (i.e., eternal life), and those who refused the master's service or reign and will receive death—that is, even what they had was taken away (Luke 19:26–27).

19:28—21:38

JESUS'S JERUSALEM MINISTRY

Expectations had been building as Jesus traveled far and wide through the countryside equipping disciples, sending out the seventy, and teaching the people. In Jerusalem He confronted human authority (19:28—20:19), He was questioned by the authorities (20:20–38), and He finally challenged the people (20:39—21:38).

19:28–40. Royal Approach to Jerusalem. Jesus neared Bethphage and Bethany (v. 29)—two villages situated about two miles (3 km) east of Jerusalem. While Matthew and Mark also describe Jesus entering the city and the temple, Luke focuses on reactions to Jesus during His approach to Jerusalem as King. It seems that Jesus deliberately set out to fulfill prophecy in arranging to ride into Jerusalem on a colt and to announce His role as the messianic King coming in humility to bring salvation and peace (Zech. 9:9–10; cf. Matt. 21:4, 5). The specific directions He gave to two of His disciples constitutes a prophecy of how and where to find the colt as well as what would be said to them and how to respond. Luke reminds us of the disciples' apostolic role by describing the two as "sent" by Jesus. Like Mark, he also added that they found it just as He had described (Luke 19:32). Both Matthew (Matt. 21:7) and John (John 12:14) make clear, in accordance with the OT prophecy, that it was a donkey's (not a horse's) colt, the kind of animal that had been ridden by Israel's kings.

The additional detail that the colt had never been ridden (also in Mark) suggests its fitness for this holy purpose (cf. Num. 19:2; 1 Sam. 6:7) as well as why in Matthew 21:7 it had not been separated from its mother. Although the owners questioned the disciples' actions (Luke 19:33), showing that this was not prearranged, the disciples responded as instructed—that the Lord needed it (vv. 31, 34).

The disciples prepared a kind of saddle for Jesus by throwing their own clothing over the back of the colt and then, fittingly for a king, they set Him on it (Luke 19:35; cf. Matt. 21:7). The crowds caught the spirit and spread their clothing on the road as a recognition of the approaching King and as an expression of homage (Luke 19:36; cf. 2 Kin. 9:13). These events took place at the crest of the mountain. Then all the disciples began to rejoice and praise God. As the procession progressed, the crowd became larger and larger. Recounted were the great miraculous acts Jesus had done (Luke 19:37). Such acclamation and praise dispelled the disciples' fears that had been raised by Jesus's sayings about His rejection and death. The multitude recited Psalm 118:26 (Luke 19:38), which was commonly sung at major Jewish festivals and may have celebrated the return of the king to Jerusalem and his entrance to the temple for worship. Unlike Matthew and Mark, both Luke and John (John 12:13) include the acclamation of Jesus as King in connection with this psalm, which Jesus had quoted before in connection with His future role as Messiah (Luke 13:35). So troubling was this widespread acclamation to some of the Pharisees (cf. John 12:19) that they pressed through the crowd and called on Jesus to rebuke His disciples (Luke 19:39). Perhaps they feared that such a demonstration would attract the ire of Rome and result in further repression. But prophecy must be fulfilled (cf. 24:44), even if the stones must speak (19:40; cf. Hab. 2:11).

19:41–44. Jesus Weeps over Jerusalem. Jesus wept over the city that would soon reject Him (v. 41; cf. 2 Sam. 15:30). Prophets sometimes used symbolic actions and vivid representations to dramatically portray Israel's rebellion against God and the impending doom of the city (e.g., Jer. 19:10–13; Ezek. 4:1–3). Similarly, Jesus's weeping and mournful lament were prophetic.

Addressing the city as a person (with "you" or "your" twelve times in two verses), Jesus gave two reasons for His sadness. First, the people of Jerusalem did not know what they needed to enjoy peace, despite the fact that its name means "city of peace" or "foundation of peace." The "peace in heaven" (Luke 19:38) that has come with the advent of the Messiah (2:14) can be realized only through accepting Him. Instead, Jerusalem rejected the light and blindness has come (cf. 8:10). The Messiah was hidden from them (19:42). Therefore, Jesus prophesied that days would come when enemies would lay siege to the city (cf. Is. 39:6; Jer. 7:32–34), building barricades all around it, and crush it to the ground, along with its children (referring to its inhabitants; cf. Is. 54:3). So complete will be the destruction that not one stone would be left on another (Luke 19:44). A little later, in almost the same words, Jesus would refer to the destruction of the temple (21:6).

The second reason for Jesus's sadness was that Jerusalem did not recognize the time of God's coming to them in mercy or judgment. This Greek word *episkopē*, and its verbal form *episkeptomai*, can refer to God's activity both positively and negatively (e.g., Luke 1:68, 78; Gen. 50:24–25; Ex. 3:16; 32:34; 1 Sam. 2:21; Ps. 58:6; Is. 10:3, LXX). Here it could mean either the fact that Jerusalem had not recognized God's gracious visitation of mercy in Christ (cf. Luke 1:68, 78) or that they did not recognize God's impending judgment because of their rejection of Him. The context suggests that the idea is of God coming to His people in judgment. The prophets had portrayed glorious possibilities for Jerusalem, but these hopes would be dashed with the rejection of the Messiah and the razing of the city and temple.

19:45–48. Jesus Cleanses the Temple. The symbolic weeping is followed immediately in Luke by another symbolic action. Jesus went to the temple (cf. Mal. 3:1) and proceeded to drive out the buyers and sellers (Luke 19:45; cf. Mark 11:15). The same word is used for driving out demons (e.g., Luke 9:40, 49; 11:14–15; 13:32). Animals certified to be without blemish and birds, along with other goods for sacrifice (e.g., wine, oil, flour), were made available for convenient purchase, especially for Jewish pilgrims coming from long distances. The temple complex had several well-defined areas, the largest of which was the court of the Gentiles, where all this commerce was taking place. It was also the place where non-Jews could assemble for worship. Luke's account is the most concise, focusing on the purpose of the temple as a place for prayer and teaching (19:46–47). Jesus's act accomplished two purposes: it restored the temple to its original purpose, as a house of prayer (v. 46; Is. 56:7; cf. Jer. 7:11), and it demonstrated His authority over the temple, which would soon be questioned. Despite the religious leaders conspiring to put Him to death (cf. Luke 9:22; 20:1), they could not prevent Jesus from teaching daily in the temple because all the people were captivated by what they heard (19:48)—literally "were hanging on to what they were hearing from Him."

20:1–8. Jesus's Authority Questioned. According to Mark, Jesus's time in the temple spans three days (Mark 11:11—14:1). The question of authority arose on one of those days while Jesus was teaching—probably in the court of the Gentiles, which He had just restored as a place for prayer. He preached the gospel, the good news (cf. Is. 40:9; 52:7; 61:1; Heb. 4:2), to both Jews and Gentiles. The chief priests, scribes (or teachers of the law), and elders (v. 1) were the dominant groups of the Sanhedrin and wielded considerable religious authority. Clearly disturbed by His cleansing of the temple, which was an implied rebuke and an encroachment on their authority (Luke 19:47), they began to assail Jesus with questions, just as a similar group had done with John the Baptist (cf. John 1:19–27). Jesus did not simply comply with their command to answer but commanded them to answer Him first with regard to the baptism of John, that is, whether John's authority to baptize was from heaven (using a circumlocution for God) or from men (of human origin; Luke 20:4).

Since John had testified that Jesus was the Messiah (John 1:29–34), by correctly answering this question they would also answer their own question. The dilemma it posed them is clear from the discussion that ensued among themselves (Luke 20:5–6). Unfortunately, they acted as self-important and craven leaders often do—to preserve their own position and authority at all costs, rather than to understand the truth and then do what is right. Thus, they refused to acknowledge that John's authority was from heaven because the anticipated reply asking why they did not believe would establish the divine authority of Jesus and diminish theirs. Worse, if they asserted that John's authority was merely human, they would lose not just their authority but possibly their lives because the people believed that John was a prophet (Luke 20:6) and would not tolerate leaders who claimed to represent God but rejected His prophet. They chose what appeared to be the safer course (but which eventually issued in Israel's destruction) by claiming ignorance—that they did not know where John's authority came from. (v. 7). Their feckless reply underscored Jesus's authority. He would not answer or speak the truth to those who had just refused to accept it.

20:9–19. Parable of the Wicked Vinedressers. Jesus told a parable that answered the question posed by the representatives of the Sanhedrin. Using the image of Israel as the vineyard of the Lord (see Is. 5:1–7), Jesus sketched Israel's history—not its past history but its future history. Just as Moses, shortly before his death, gave Israel a preview of their future (Deut. 32:1–43), so Jesus did the same.

Planting a vineyard represented an enormous investment possible only for a very wealthy person. With such a large investment, it was common to lease it out to *geōrgois*—tenant farmers, (sometimes translated as "vinedressers" or "husbandmen"). They would take good care of the vineyard in order to meet the terms of the contract and make the agreed payment to the owner at harvest time. The landowner in the parable, like the nobleman in the previous parable (cf. Luke 19:12), journeyed to a far country. Here, however, the owner would be gone for a long time (Luke 20:9; cf. 8:27; 23:8). It was not unusual for wealthy landowners to simply send a servant to collect the fruit of the vineyard for them (20:10). What was unusual was the way the farmers treated the servants and ultimately the son.

While some of the details of this parable in Matthew and Mark vary, its essential features are the same. In Mark, as in Luke, Jesus Himself answers the question and the owner's response takes the form of three successive actions: the owner will come, he will put the treacherous farmers to death, and he will give the vineyard to others. But only in Luke is there a protest by the audience (the *laos*, i.e., the common people), saying, *mē genoito*—"Certainly not!" or "God forbid!" (v. 16; an expression occurring elsewhere only in Paul, e.g., Rom. 3:4, 6, 31; 1 Cor. 6:15). They understood immediately its import: God had sent servant after servant, prophet after prophet, to Israel, and they had been mistreated, physically abused, and sometimes killed by its leaders. Now that He had sent His Son (cf. Luke 1:32, 35; 3:22; 10:22), they would cast Him out and kill Him (alluding to Jesus's death outside Jerusalem; John 19:17; Heb. 13:12–13). The inheritance that the "farmers" (leaders) desired was control of the "vineyard" (Israel), but the parable indicates that they would be destroyed and others would take their place.

In answer to the people's objection, Jesus looked intently at them and quoted Psalm 118:22, equating the "son" (Heb., *ben*) of the parable with the "stone" (Heb., *'eben*) rejected by the builders (Luke 20:17). The cornerstone (lit. "head of the corner") was not a capstone but the most important of the four corners of the foundation as it was the largest and thus provided the most support for the entire structure. One's response to Jesus as this "living Stone" (cf. 1 Pet. 2:4–10) is decisive in the judgment: "falling" on Him, coming to Him with a "broken" heart (cf. Ps. 51:17), and relying on Him make the difference between final salvation rather than final destruction (Luke 20:18). The leaders realized that the parable was directed against them (v. 19), but in view of the people's reaction, they first had to undermine Him. In the process, they hoped to find a basis for legal accusations against Him.

20:20–26. Jesus on Paying Taxes to Caesar. The authorities in Jerusalem (cf. v. 19) watched Jesus closely, sending spies to catch Him making unguarded statements (cf. Is. 29:21) in order to have Him handed over to Pilate, the Roman governor (Luke 20:20). They pretended to be faithful Jews asking sincere questions, flattering Him as One who speaks and teaches the truth and does not show personal favoritism (vv. 20–21). While what they said about Jesus was true, flattery is dangerous and frequently condemned in the Bible (e.g., Ps. 12:2–3; Prov. 26:28; 29:5). The question about paying taxes to Caesar concerns whether it is acceptable for Israelites, whose first loyalty is to God, to pay the required poll (census) tax (Luke 20:22). If Jesus had said it was not lawful, then they would have reported His statements to the authorities as seditious; but if He said it was lawful, then they could accuse Him of opposing the law of God.

Jesus recognized their duplicitousness immediately. His first question, although omitted from some important manuscripts, is apropos (v. 23; cf. Mark 12:15). Recognizing their hidden intent, He proceeded to test them by asking for a denarius—a small silver coin worth about a day's wage (cf. Matt. 20:2). On it was the image of Tiberius (cf. Luke 3:1) and the inscription (in Latin): "Tiberius Caesar, Augustus, son of the deified Augustus." Both the image and the inscription, while offensive to Jewish sensibilities, were Caesar's. Since the coin bears Caesar's name, he was its owner. Therefore no hesitancy should have existed in returning to Caesar what belonged to him. Jesus's statement, however, went further by referring to what belongs to the things that were Caesar's, meaning any civic obligations citizens would owe. Consistently, Scripture calls on believers to honor the authorities whom God has established (Eccl. 8:2; Rom. 13:1–7; 1 Pet. 2:13–17) so long as it does not conflict with their allegiance to God (cf. Acts 5:29). Jesus's enemies were amazed at his answer, and they were silenced.

20:27–38. Jesus on the Resurrection. The Sadducees, mentioned only here in Luke, were members of a priestly aristocracy who were in charge of the temple, and their leader served as the high priest. Having charge of the temple and being largely in control of the Sanhedrin (Acts 5:17), they were dominated by the family of Annas (Luke 3:2; cf. John 18:13) and allied with the rich and powerful to maintain their comfortable status quo. They worked closely with the Romans, who gave them a measure of political autonomy. Excavations near the Temple Mount are suggestive of their lavish homes, a picture that fits well the description of priestly homes in the Gospels (Mark 14:53–54; John 18:15–18). The Sadducees apparently considered only the books of Moses as fully authoritative. They believed the soul perished with the body at death, that there was no resurrection (Luke 20:27), and that there were no such thing as spirits or angels (Acts 23:8). Consequently, they held that all rewards and punishments are meted out in this life.

Some representatives of this group presented Jesus with a hypothetical situation of seven brothers, the first of whom married and died without children. According to the Levirate law (Deut. 25:5), the man's brother should have married his widow to preserve the deceased's name and lineage. In the case presented to Jesus, each of the brothers successively took her as wife and died childless. Since all seven brothers had performed their duty according to the law of Moses, presumably they would all come up in the resurrection of life (cf. John 5:29), but whose wife was she to be then (Luke 20:33)? Polyandry (having more than one husband) was unknown in Jewish and Roman circles, and so the circumstance presented a seemingly impossible dilemma in the life to come. In reply, Jesus contrasted "this age" (v. 34), in which people marry, with the coming age (v. 35). "The resurrection from the dead" marks entrance to a life in which people cannot die (v. 36), already referred to several times as "eternal life" (Luke 10:25; 18:18, 30). Therefore, marriage and childbearing are not needed to preserve humanity. It would appear that in the life to come, marriage as we know it will be superseded by something far better. That life will also be different from what exists in this present world in that the resurrected will be like (Mark 12:25) and even equal to the angels; they are God's children—members of His family. We cannot speculate beyond what God has revealed about the life to come (Deut. 29:29).

On the resurrection, Jesus quoted not only from the books of Scripture that were the most authoritative for the Sadducees but from the story of the burning bush (Luke 20:37). This well-known account deals with (among other things) the revelation of God's name. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Ex. 3:6) would not describe Himself in terms of the dead but of the living (Luke 20:38) because, as the Creator, He is the source of all life. Luke includes Jesus's words that in one sense all are living from God's perspective. Although the patriarchs are not *now* living, their resurrection is as certain *to God* as if they were. Even Abraham himself could by faith look forward to entering the city built and designed by God (Heb. 11:10).

20:39–44. Jesus and Popular Messianic Conceptions. Such thoughtful answers led some of the scribes to recognize that Jesus had answered accurately. Though obviously unconvinced, they dared not question Him anymore (v. 40). Scribes were experts in the law (see commentary on Luke 5:17–26). Most of them were probably Pharisees, but not all (cf. 5:30; Acts 23:9); some no doubt belonged to other sects, such as the Sadducees and the Essenes. Next Jesus directed a question to them regarding the widespread assumption that the Christ—that is, the Messiah—would be the son of David. While not denying lineage from David (Luke 1:27, 32, 69; 2:4; 18:38–39), the point seems to be that, according to David himself, the Christ would be "greater than" a mere son of his (i.e., descendant). This language suggests that David would function as a type of the Messiah. The messianic psalms prophetically foreshadow the sufferings of Jesus and, as here, His exaltation as Lord, which would take place at His ascension to heaven (1 Pet. 3:21–22) and His inauguration in the heavenly sanctuary as our High Priest at God's right hand (Acts 7:56; Heb. 8:1, 2; Rev. 1:12–13). The NT writers' application of such passages to Jesus (e.g., John 19:23–24, 36–37; Acts 2:27–32) was based in this messianic interpretation of the OT by Jesus (cf. Luke 4:21; 24:44; John 13:18).

20:45–47. Jesus Warns People to Beware of the Scribes. Jesus warned His disciples not to be like the scribes, who sought to distinguish themselves above others (v. 46). Only priests were required to wear specific garments (Ex. 28); the scribes' long robes amounted to an expensive and ostentatious attempt to exhibit their elite status in Israel. The love of respectful greetings in the marketplaces and the best seats of prominence (located in the front near the leading elders) in the synagogues was a criticism earlier leveled against the Pharisees (Luke 11:43). Jesus's followers are to resist such temptations to prestige and power. Feasts and banquets were other opportunities to be publicly recognized as among the elite. All such status symbols engender pride. Spoken to the listening crowd (20:45), the warning was also intended to warn people of the scribes' hypocrisy. Their long prayers were selfishly motivated to garner more respect, whereas Jesus's disciples were to encourage not adulation (cf. John 2:23–25) but humility, giving glory to God rather than taking it to themselves. The widows (Luke 20:47) were one of the most vulnerable groups in Israel (cf. Deut. 24:17). Perhaps the scribes taught them to sell their houses in order to pay tithe on the increase in value or hinted that it was meritorious to give large donations to them. As experts in the law, the scribes would be more severely condemned for wrongdoing (cf. John 9:41; James 3:1).

21:1–4. Jesus Reverses the Evaluation of Offerings. Having just condemned the scribes for financially oppressing widows, Jesus noted a difference between the gifts to the temple brought by the rich and the two small coins of a poor widow (vv. 1–2). Heavy silver or gold coins dropped into trumpet-shaped money chests (cf. Matt. 6:2) would sound impressive. The widow's two small copper coins might hardly be heard but represented the greater gift. It cost her more than those who gave out of their abundance. The size of their offering was outweighed by the sacrificial love of God that prompted the widow's gift.

21:5–28. Jesus Forecasts Israel's Future. The instruction given about Israel's future was directed to some of the disciples (v. 5; cf. 20:45), whom Mark 13:3 identifies as Peter, James, John, and Andrew. The beautiful stones of the temple built by Herod the Great and the lavish donated gifts for its adornment (21:5) were impressive and beautiful. Yet not one stone of this temple would be left on another (v. 6).

Jesus's prediction of the temple's destruction elicited two further questions about when these things would occur and what sign would accompany them (v. 7). Since these two questions in Luke (cf. Matt. 24:3; Mark 13:4) ask about the events and signs leading up to the destruction of the temple, the passage focuses on Israel's immediate future (Luke 21:8–24), with only a very brief description of the events preceding the coming of the Son of Man (vv. 25–28). Likewise, the parable of the fig tree (vv. 29–33) concerns the certainty of the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple (cf. vv. 20–24). The closing admonition is applicable to everyone at all times—being on watch so that the coming of the Son of Man does not take anyone by surprise (vv. 34–36).

First the disciples were warned against being deceived (v. 8) by those who purported to be Jesus, repeated His words "I am" (see John 4:26; 8:58; cf. Ex. 3:14), and claimed that the predicted time had almost arrived (Luke 21:8). In fact, messianic pretenders appeared both before and after the destruction of Jerusalem. In addition, believers were not to be alarmed when they heard of wars and disturbances (v. 9). Although the prophets depicted both natural disasters and judgments on nations just before the end (see, e.g., Jer. 4:20, 23–26; Joel 3:9–14), Jesus indicated that these would be ongoing and that the end would not take place right away. In addition to wars between nations and kingdoms, great earthquakes, famines, and pestilences would occur, as would other terrifying occurrences and even great signs from heaven.

Before all these things that would lead up to the destruction of Jerusalem, the disciples would be persecuted and given over to the synagogues and put in prison, betrayed by close relatives and friends, and some would even be put to death (Luke 21:12, 16). The same language is used of Jesus, who would be betrayed by Judas into the hands of the Jewish leaders (22:4, 6, 21–22). Nevertheless, it would be an opportunity for the disciples to give a testimony (21:13). They were not to worry and meditate beforehand about what to say. Although previously it was promised that the Holy Spirit would teach them what to say (12:12), Jesus Himself (the "I" is emphatic in 21:15) would give them wise words. This promise began to be fulfilled fairly soon for some of the apostles (see, e.g., Acts 4:5–22; 24:10–26; 26). One might wonder how they could be martyred (Luke 21:16) and yet not a hair of their head be destroyed (v. 18). The apparent inconsistency points to the importance of *hypomonē*—"patience" or "perseverance"—referring to quietly enduring persecution, keeping our *psychas*—"souls" or "lives" (i.e., our whole being)—in holiness and honor (1 Thess. 4:4) in anticipation of an eternal possession (Heb. 11:25–26).

The prediction of Jerusalem surrounded by armies (Luke 21:20) was fulfilled in the aborted siege of A.D. 66 by Cestius Gallus, which gave opportunity for Christians, not only in Jerusalem but throughout Judea, to flee to the mountains. They fled not to the nearby hills but to Pella, in the more distant mountains of Transjordan. The city's desolation meant its utter destruction (cf. Jesus's allusion to Dan. 9:26 in Mark 13:14). This occurred when Titus returned with Roman troops during the Passover of A.D. 70, besieged the city, progressively broke through its fortifications, and destroyed it. The days of vengeance, the time of punishment (Luke 21:22), refers to God's wrath on Israel ("this people"; v. 23) for their rejection of the Messiah (cf. Zech. 13:7—14:2), who would be killed (Dan. 9:26). As with the city's first destruction by Babylon, there would be another dispersion into all nations (Luke 21:24).

Despite the clear application of these verses to what befell Jerusalem in A.D. 70, the second reference to the city in Luke 21:24 looks beyond this event. Both Daniel and Jesus blended descriptions of Jerusalem's destruction with more distant events that were to be revealed as His people would need the instruction (cf. Dan. 12:9–10). Those who fell by the sword and were taken captive may be compared with the remnant of Israel who would "instruct many" but must endure sword, fire, captivity, and plundering (Dan. 11:33). Thus "Jerusalem" being trampled by Gentiles (Luke 21:24) refers to the persecution of Christians through the ages (called "great tribulation" or "great distress" in Matt. 24:21). This trampling of God's people (cf. Dan. 8:10) would continue a total of forty-two prophetic months or 1,260 years (Rev. 11:2; 13:5–7; cf. see Dan. 7:25) from A.D. 538 to 1798.

Around the close of this period, signs in the sun, moon, and stars would appear. Whenever these heavenly signs are mentioned in the NT, the sun-moon-stars sequence is the same (Matt. 24:29; Rev. 6:12–13). This fact suggests a very specific fulfillment, namely, the "Dark Day" of May 19, 1780, when candles were needed at noon and a smoky haze reddened the moon; and the Leonid meteor shower of November 13, 1833. These events, one coming shortly before and the other shortly after the end of the 1,260-year period (see "The 1,260 Days/Years," p. 1037), remain unequalled in terms of their intensity, visibility, and religious impact. They signaled the raising up by God of an end time remnant to proclaim the three angels' messages and to bring the gospel work to a close (Matt. 24:14; Rev. 12:14–17; 14:6–12). Three further signs are listed (Luke 21:25–26): (1) perplexed and troubled nations, which may refer to the hopelessness that characterizes the world today; (2) the turbulence and "roaring" of the sea, which may refer to the increasing intensity of the destruction brought by sea-based natural disasters; and (3) people fainting from fear and foreboding, which may refer to the psychological disorientation of humanity. The shaking of celestial powers marks the Day of the Lord in the OT (e.g., Is. 13:13; 34:4) and the Second Advent in the NT (Heb. 12:26–29; Rev. 6:14–17). Here too they coincide with the Son of Man coming (Luke 21:27). When these signs begin to be fulfilled, God's people may know that their redemption is near (v. 28), a thought further developed by the ensuing parable of the fig tree and Jesus's closing admonition.

21:29–33. Parable of the Fig Tree. Jesus used the fig tree as an illustration of the certainty of the approach of divine judgment in connection with both the First Advent (Luke 14:6–9 // Matt. 21:19) and the Second Advent (Rev. 6:13). Just as its budding appearance of leaves (as with all the trees) signals the soon arrival of summer (Luke 21:30), so the signs Jesus foretold indicate the kingdom of God is near (v. 31). The immediately preceding verses (vv. 25–28) suggest that reference is to the kingdom of glory that will arrive at the Second Advent. However, there may also be a preliminary application to the destruction of Jerusalem mentioned just before that (vv. 20–24), since Jesus used this earlier event as a type of the more complete destruction that will occur at the Second Advent. The parable reminded the disciples to recognize the signal for fleeing the city. It also indicated that "this generation" (v. 32) refers to the generation in which the disciples themselves lived, who would see the destruction of Jerusalem, which seems to be a type of the destruction of the world at the end of time. The disciples mistakenly assumed that these two events would occur at the same time (Matt. 24:3). In answering the disciples' questions, Jesus went back and forth between these two events (see Matt. 24:34; Mark 13:28–29).

21:34–38. Importance of Watching. Jesus concluded this discourse with an appeal to put His teaching into practice (see Luke 6:46–49). Believers are not to allow their hearts to become hard (cf. Ex. 7:14) or weighed down by living like the world and worrying about the burdens of daily life. The Greek word often translated as "carousing" (*kraipalē*) refers to the loss of orientation and staggering that results from drunkenness (Luke 21:34; cf. Is. 29:9). That day when the Son of Man comes will arrive abruptly for all who do not watch (Luke 21:36) for the fulfillment of these things. The admonition to pray always echoes a similar admonition in connection with the Second Advent (18:1, 6–8). By watching and praying, believers will be enabled to escape the coming destruction and stand victorious before the Son of Man (cf. Eph. 6:13; Rev. 6:17). Luke closes this section with a summary statement about Jesus teaching in the temple during the day and spending the night on the Mount of Olives (Luke 21:37).

22:1—23:56

SUFFERINGS AND DEATH OF JESUS

Although Jesus was teaching day after day in the temple, with His betrayal by Judas, events started moving rapidly to their shocking conclusion (22:1–13). After the celebration of the Passover by Jesus and His disciples and the institution of the Lord's Supper (22:14–38), Jesus prayed all night in Gethsemane, where He was arrested (22:39–62). Then He was hurriedly tried before the Sanhedrin and condemned (22:63–71), handed over to the Romans (23:1–25), and finally crucified (23:26–56).

22:1–13. Betrayal of Jesus during Passover. Through His temple activities and teachings, Jesus threatened the authority of both the chief priests and the scribes (or teachers of the law). So as Passover approached, they were looking for a way to put Him to death (vv. 1–2; cf. John 11:45–57). That way was provided by Judas (Luke 22:3), who was Simon's son (John 12:4). Luke distinguishes this Judas from the son of James (cf. John 14:22), who was also one of the twelve apostles (cf. John 6:70), by mentioning his surname—Iscariot (see Luke 6:16). In contemplating the betrayal of Jesus, Judas opened himself up to Satan, who seized the opportunity (22:3; cf. 4:13; John 13:27). Judas consulted with the chief priests of the temple, who were seeking a legal charge against Jesus, as well as with the commanders in charge of the temple guard, who would organize the arrest. Complicating their task considerably was Jesus's popularity, so they determined to seize Him when and where the crowds were not present, at one of the usual places He retreated for prayer.

The Passover, observed on Nisan 15, was the first religious festival of the Jewish calendar. The Feast of Unleavened Bread (which began on Passover) lasted for seven days, from Nisan 15 to 21 (Num. 28:16–17; see commentary on Luke 2:41–52). Jewish pilgrims would stay through this second feast to commemorate both their deliverance from Egypt and the hasty departure with "the bread of affliction" (Deut. 16:3). Due to this close connection between the two feasts, either name could be used to refer to both. Although John mentions three and possibly four separate Passovers during Jesus's ministry (John 2:23; 6:4; 19:14; cf. 5:1), only this final one is mentioned in the Synoptic Gospels.

Passover could also refer to the paschal lamb (usually one per family) that was killed on the afternoon of Nisan 14 and eaten after sundown (i.e., on Nisan 15). According to John, Jesus died at the time of the Passover sacrifice (Nisan 14) as the true paschal Lamb (see John 18:28; 19:14; cf. 1 Cor. 5:7) so that the Passover meal was eaten before Passover (Nisan 15). Luke seems to indicate that the Passover meal was eaten by Jesus and the disciples at the regular time, which would have been *after* the Passover lamb had been sacrificed (for more, see "The Year of the Crucifixion," p. 1460). As with the triumphal entry (cf. Luke 19:29–35), Jesus gave detailed instructions to two disciples, in this case, Peter and John (22:8), as to where they were to prepare the meal. They were shown to a house with a large room upstairs that was already furnished for the event (vv. 10–12). Because the Passover had to be sacrificed at the temple and eaten in Jerusalem (Deut. 16:5–7) and accommodations would have been scarce, Jesus may have prearranged to use a guest room (Luke 22:11) in a private home for the supper (cf. Matt. 26:18).

22:14–23. Jesus Institutes the Lord's Supper. The upper room where the Lord's Supper took place apparently included cushions and low tables around which Jesus and the twelve disciples sat down or reclined to eat the meal (v. 14). Such a posture also facilitated Jesus's washing of the disciples' feet (John 13:12).

Jesus expressed His earnest desire to eat the Passover with His disciples before His suffering (Luke 22:15). They had no understanding that the prophetic symbolism of that first Passover, when the blood applied to the entrances of the Israelite homes saved the firstborn, was soon to be fulfilled. Twice already Jesus had referred to His suffering and final rejection by the leaders and "this generation" (9:22; 17:25). Despite the somber tone of the Last Supper, Jesus anticipated the joyful results of His sacrifice when He would be glorified (24:26) and they would sit around the banquet table in the "kingdom of God" (22:16; cf. Heb. 12:2).

Luke, unlike Matthew and Mark, describes two cups, one before the unleavened bread and one after. The Jewish traditions about celebration of the Passover included four cups, so it may be that Jesus abbreviated the typical Jewish practice in order to shift the application away from the Exodus and onto His approaching death. The first cup mentioned in Luke was apparently one of the first two cups of the Passover celebration. The feast of Unleavened Bread was held simultaneously with Passover, during which all leaven was removed from the house (which included that used to ferment drinks). Since yeast was associated with sin during this festival and the wine represented the blood of Jesus, it is certain that it was not fermented. The contents of the cup are nowhere in Scripture called wine but only the fruit of the vine, that is, unfermented grape juice. At a later point, thanks would be given for the unleavened bread, which would then be broken and served to the participants as a symbol of Jesus's body.

An important part of the Passover was an explanation of the meaning of each element of the ritual. In replacing it, the Last Supper was essentially an acted parable. Jesus attributed new significance to the bread, calling it His body (Luke 22:19). In Luke, Jesus added that this body was given for them, meaning that the bread symbolized the giving of Himself as the real Passover sacrifice (Mark 10:45; cf. Is. 53:7–8, 10) "for the life of the world" (John 6:51). The third cup of the Passover ritual was called one of blessing or thanksgiving (cf. 1 Cor. 10:16), and this seems to have been the second cup mentioned here because it was drunk after supper (Luke 22:20). Jesus called this cup "the new covenant" in His blood (cf. 1 Cor. 11:25). Just as the first (or old) covenant was inaugurated with blood (Ex. 24:8), so Jesus's shed blood on the cross (represented by the "blood" of the grape) ratified the new covenant (Heb. 9:15).

Both the unleavened bread and the unfermented juice of the Lord's Supper—which Jesus commanded His followers to partake of in remembrance of Him (Luke 22:19)—symbolized His pure, sinless sacrifice for the forgiveness of sin. During this unusual supper, Jesus surprised the disciples by saying that His betrayer was among them (v. 21; cf. Ps. 41:9). The sufferings of Christ had been divinely preordained, so Christ could be strengthened by knowing God's plan (John 13:18–19), but it would be terrible for the one who would betray Him (Luke 22:22). The Passover meal normally ended with a hymn (Pss. 113–118) and a final cup that pointed to the future victory of Israel, but the Last Supper concluded without the additional cup (Mark 14:26) because final victory would come only at the Second Advent, to which this remembrance of Christ's death pointed (1 Cor. 11:26; Rev. 19:6–9).

22:24–30. The Disciples Argue about Greatness. Luke contrasts the Last Supper and Jesus's willingness to be delivered to death with a dispute the disciples had about greatness (v. 24). The exact time of this dispute is left unclear. Evidently, as the cross drew closer, the disciples believed the kingdom would soon be established. Jesus seized the opportunity to explain true greatness. Among the Gentiles, rivalry for honor and power was widespread (v. 25). Surviving plaques and monuments testify to the lavish donations for public works projects made by wealthy benefactors to enhance their status and influence with the political class. But the desire for position, prestige, and power, like the desire for wealth, is never satisfied (Prov. 27:20). Among believers, the greatest should be as the youngest, taking the lowest place, and the leader should be as the one who serves (Luke 22:26). Thus Jesus affirmed that organization would exist in His church but that it would be based not on thirst for power over others but on His example as servant (cf. John 13:1–17). The community of believers is a community of servants. Although Jesus had many disciples, the Twelve stayed with Him wherever He went and shared His trials (Luke 22:28; e.g., 5:30; Mark 7:5). Consequently, they, as representatives of God's people, were promised that in the coming kingdom they would eat and drink at the same table and would also sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Luke 22:30). During the Millennium, God's people will judge the world and even angels (1 Cor. 6:2–3; Rev. 20:4).

22:31–38. Jesus Foretells Peter's Denial and His Own Suffering as the Servant. Before leaving the upper room (cf. v. 39), Jesus revealed a glimpse of His controversy with Satan, who asked (*exētēsato*) to sift or shake not just Peter but all of the disciples (v. 31), as the plural form of "you" indicates. The Greek suggests that Satan, the accuser of God's people, *demanded* the right to test them (cf. Job 1:6–12; 2:1–6). Jesus's repetition of Peter's given name, Simon, like His frequent repetition of *amēn* ("truly"; e.g., John 1:51; 3:3), introduced a solemn declaration or appeal (cf. Matt. 7:22; 25:11; Luke 6:46; 8:24; 13:34; Acts 9:4). As one of the leading disciples, his example would have a larger influence. Jesus prayed to the Father on Peter's behalf that he would exhibit a faith that would not fail under the temptation Satan was about to bring (Luke 22:32). Having foreseen Peter's impending denial and abandonment of Him, Jesus encouraged him with the hope of his return to a covenant relationship with the Lord (e.g., 2 Chr. 30:9; Pss. 19:7; 51:3; 80:19; Is. 55:7; Hos. 6:1). Only someone strong in faith can strengthen others. In John, Jesus referred to His going away to where others could not come (John 8:21; 13:33, 36), and Peter affirmed his willingness to lay down his life for Jesus. Here in Luke he intended to go with Jesus to prison and to death (Luke 22:33). Unfortunately, Peter did not know himself or His Lord, or else he would not have answered so self-assuredly. Jesus predicted that before the rooster crowed (several hours before sunrise), Peter would three times deny knowing Jesus (v. 34).

Jesus contrasted the time of peril at that time with earlier times. Then, although He had sent the disciples on missions without any visible means of support (see commentary on Luke 9:1–6; cf. 10:4), they could say they lacked nothing (22:35). But when Jesus spoke, the times were drastically different. The disciples would need not only a money bag and traveling bag for provisions but also a sword, and if necessary, one's garment was to be sold to buy a sword (v. 36). Jesus often spoke in parables and metaphors, though His listeners, as here, frequently took these sayings literally (e.g., Matt. 15:10–20; Mark 8:15–16; John 2:19–21). The sword points to strife and persecution (Luke 21:24; Matt. 10:34–36), beginning with Jesus Himself, who would be "numbered with the transgressors" (Luke 22:37). This quotation from Isaiah 53:12 shows that Jesus understood His mission in terms of being struck for the sins of the people (Is. 53:8; cf. Mark 14:27), which was the purpose of His coming. It was also fulfilled quite literally in His crucifixion (Luke 23:32–33). The disciples, pointing to two swords, failed to grasp the connection between the metaphorical admonition to buy a sword (to get ready for the approaching spiritual conflict) and the imminent fulfillment of prophecy just announced. Since all His warnings up to this point seemed to have fallen on deaf ears, Jesus acquiesced to their continued incomprehension by saying this was enough.

22:39–46. Jesus's Prayer and Agony in Gethsemane. The place on the Mount of Olives where Jesus was accustomed to go for solitude and prayer was a garden called Gethsemane, which means oil press—a fitting name since Jesus would feel the weight of sin pressing on Him there (Matt. 26:36; John 18:1). After urging the disciples to pray for strength to withstand temptation so that their faith might not fail (Luke 22:40; cf. v. 32), Jesus withdrew further into the garden to be alone and knelt down to pray (v. 41). In Luke's abbreviated account, Jesus prays only once, prefacing His plea to the Father to take away the cup with a recognition of and submission to the divine will (cf. Matt. 26:39; Mark 14:36). Although Jesus's human will in not wanting to go to the cross disagreed with the divine will, in the end He prayed that His Father's will be done.

So draining was the agony (*agōnia*, Luke 22:44) of separation from His Father that an angel came to strengthen Him for the excruciating path that lay ahead. Praying more earnestly, Jesus's sweat appeared to be like great drops of blood ("like," *hōsei*, means appearance; e.g., Luke 24:11; Matt. 3:16; Acts 2:3; 6:15). This may suggest hematidrosis, an acute medical condition of sweating blood that is caused by extreme fear or stress, sometimes observed among prisoners awaiting execution. Jesus, when returning to the disciples, found them sleeping because they were exhausted by their sorrow (Luke 22:45). The uncertainty was deeply perplexing and filled their hearts with sorrow (cf. John 16:5). Again Jesus urged them to pray for strength to face temptation (Luke 22:46). As with Jesus Himself, their primary line of defense would be prayer and a firm reliance on God's word (cf. 4:4).

22:47–53. Betrayal and Arrest of Jesus. Even before Jesus finished speaking, a large mob approached, led by Judas. Luke indicates Judas's intention was to kiss Jesus (v. 47). The kiss was a sign of affection and respect between family members and close friends, perhaps also between disciple and rabbi (Matt. 26:49). However, its purpose here was to clearly identify Jesus in the darkness for the arrest. The word order of Jesus's question in Greek emphasizes the incongruity of using a kiss for evil.

The disciples, by this time wide awake, asked whether it was time to wield the sword (Luke 22:49; see also v. 38). Amazingly, they did not yet understand the otherworldly nature of God's kingdom—it is based on love (6:27, 35; 10:27), with citizens who do not fight, not even in defense (John 18:36; cf. Matt. 26:52–53). One of the disciples, Peter (John 18:10), did not wait for Jesus to answer the question but cut off the right ear of the high priest's servant (Luke 22:50). Always in control of the situation, Jesus vividly demonstrated the nonviolent character of God's kingdom. He touched the man's ear and healed him (v. 51). Then, speaking to the religious leaders who had come with swords and clubs to arrest Him at night, He reminded them of His peacefully teaching daily in the temple (vv. 52–53). Identifying their work with the power and reign of darkness (i.e., Satan; vv. 3, 31), Jesus showed which kingdom these religious functionaries had chosen.

22:54–62. Peter's Denial and Bitter Repentance. It was not the Romans but the Jewish leaders who took the lead and arrested Jesus. According to John, Jesus was first taken from Gethsemane to the house of Annas, who was recognized by the people as the rightful high priest (John 18:13). But the Romans reserved the power of annual appointment to this office, making it essentially a political post. After several interim high priests, Annas's son-in-law Caiaphas was appointed to the position by the Roman prefect, Valerius Gratus, in A.D. 18, and it was to Caiaphas's house that Jesus was taken next (Luke 22:54; cf. Matt. 26:57). As Luke implies, such a trial was necessarily preliminary because it was still night (see Luke 22:66).

Peter mixed with those in the courtyard and sat among them rather than entering the house proper, which surrounded the open-air courtyard and was where the trial took place. Being springtime, it would have still been cold at night, so the servants and guards kindled a fire to keep warm (v. 55). As Peter sat near the fire, his face was recognized. All four Gospels note that a servant girl was the first to recognize him (v. 56). John 18:16 identifies her as the doorkeeper. Staring at him, she confidently asserted that Peter had been with Jesus, to which he responded that he did not know Him, just as Jesus had predicted (Luke 22:57; cf. v. 34). Peter, having already distanced himself from Jesus by mingling with the crowd so as not to be recognized as His disciple, prepared the way for his open denial. The battle with temptation is lost first in the heart before open transgression occurs. Once this barrier had been crossed, the second and third denials were virtually impossible to avoid (vv. 58–60). One sin paves the way for further moves downward. The third accuser was the most confident and definitive, having seen Peter in the garden (John 18:26) and observing his unrefined Galilean accent (Luke 22:59; cf. Matt. 26:73; Mark 14:70). Peter tried to reflect the same certainty, even cursing and swearing in order to disassociate himself completely from Jesus and His purity. He was ready to fight for Jesus but unprepared to suffer ridicule for His sake. At this third denial, the rooster crowed and Jesus turned and looked at Peter, apparently through an open door or window onto the courtyard. That sad, pitying look reminded Peter of the word of the Lord that predicted his threefold denial. God's word cannot be broken (John 10:35). It possesses a self-authenticating power and calls sinners to repentance (Luke 5:32). Realizing with horror how Satan had used him to inflict the heaviest blow, Peter went out and wept bitterly (22:62).

22:63–71. Jesus Is Mocked, Beaten, and Tried before the Sanhedrin. Jesus was left in the hands of the temple guard until daybreak, when the full Sanhedrin would meet. In fulfillment of His prediction (18:32), they began to mock Him. Since they had heard that Jesus was a prophet, after blindfolding Him, they commanded, "Prophesy!" and challenged Him to tell them who struck Him. The other Synoptics add that they spat on Him and hit Him with the palms of their hands (Matt. 26:67; Mark 14:65). Luke summarizes their mistreatment by indicating that they were *blasphēmountes*—"blaspheming" or "insulting"—Him with many other things as well (Luke 22:65). This could include mocking some of His sayings (e.g., Luke 23:39; Mark 15:29) or presumptuously demanding a miracle (Matt. 27:39–40).

Several procedural details, including the preceding night trial, would not have been legal according to the Sanhedrin's own jurisprudence. A verdict of conviction in capital offenses had to be arrived at during the day, thus the need for a formal session of the council, which met in the Hall of Hewn Stones within the temple complex. It included the elders as lay representatives in addition to chief priests and scribes, or teachers of the law. The preceding trials sought grounds for Jesus's condemnation and attempted to build the momentum for it. Both questions put to Jesus concerned His identity. First they asked

Him to declare to the whole council whether He was the Christ (i.e., the Messiah). Jesus refused to answer their question directly, pointing out that they would not believe (cf. Jer. 38:15). He appealed to the future, when the Son of Man would come to execute righteous judgment (Luke 22:69). The "right hand" of God indicates a position of divine authority (cf. Ps. 110:1–2). Since this reply was insufficiently clear for condemnation, a follow-up question addressed whether Jesus was claiming to be the Son of God. He answered positively in an idiomatic manner of affirming the words just spoken in the question.

23:1–12. Jesus Is Tried by Pilate, Then by Herod. Since Roman law did not permit the Sanhedrin to convict on capital offenses (John 18:31), Jesus was brought to Pilate (see Luke 3:1). Although Pilate's headquarters was in Caesarea, he resided in Jerusalem during major festivals to maintain order. To make the greatest possible impression on Pilate as to the seriousness of the case, the whole council came (Luke 23:1), bringing three charges: misleading the nation (cf. 23:14; Acts 13:8, 10; 20:30), hindering the payment of taxes to Caesar, and claiming to be the Messiah, a king. The first charge was purely a religious matter in which Pilate would have had no interest, but it provided grounds for discrediting Jesus to the populace. The second charge was purely false as Jesus had maintained the opposite (Luke 20:25). The third charge was the most serious because it could have directly threatened Roman authority and control over Israel. Not surprisingly, then, this was the charge Pilate focused on, asking Jesus whether He was the King of the Jews.

Jesus was not a king in the sense that Pilate was thinking of, but to deny it would have been unthinkable because Jesus was fulfilling the prophetic hopes of a messianic king from the line of David (see 2:4, 11). All four Gospel accounts agree exactly on Pilate's question, which could be taken pejoratively, "*You* are the King of the Jews?" Jesus's reply, "It is as you say," or "You have said so" is affirmative (23:3), as John's account (John 18:33–38) also indicates. Pilate did not consider Jesus's kingdom to be a threat because He defined His kingdom as not of this world, and consequently, Pilate said that he found no legal basis for action against Jesus (John 18:33–38; 19:8–11). Not getting the result they wanted, the Jewish leaders pressed Pilate by accusing Jesus of inciting religious enthusiasm against Roman rule throughout all Judea, even as far as Galilee (Luke 23:5). It is true that Jesus's teaching created a stir everywhere He went, but not in order to foment rebellion against Roman rule. The Jewish establishment consistently twisted the truth. On hearing that Jesus was a Galilean, Pilate sent Him to Herod, who was in Jerusalem for the Passover (vv. 6–7).

Jesus's renown as a miracle worker had spread far and wide, which led Herod to want to see Him for a long time. Earlier, Herod had feared that John the Baptist, whom he had beheaded, had risen from the dead in the person of Jesus (Mark 6:16). Reminding Jesus of his power to condemn or release, he urged Jesus to perform some spectacular *sēmeion* ("miracle" or "sign"; cf. Luke 11:16) to save Himself. Herod peppered Him with questions, but Jesus did not answer (23:9). Having already silenced the greatest of prophets with the execution of John, Herod would receive no further opportunity to engage with divinity for his trifling purposes. Offended by the silence, Herod and his soldiers ridiculed Jesus by clothing Him in an elaborate robe, mocking the idea of His being a king (cf. Mark 15:17–20). Pilate had hoped that Herod would deal with Jesus, since He belonged to his jurisdiction, but Herod returned Him to Pilate (Luke 23:11). Nevertheless, Pilate's expedient gesture was interpreted as a show of respect, and they became friends (v. 12).

23:13–25. Jesus Takes the Place of Barabbas. Pilate summoned representatives from the three main strata of Jewish society: religious leaders (chief priests), civic leaders (rulers), which probably included the leading elders and scribes (cf. 22:66), and the general populace (the people). Of the three charges brought against Jesus, Pilate mentioned only the first, the most serious from his point of view, that Jesus was misleading the people (23:14), diverting their allegiance from Rome. From the Jewish perspective, this was also the most serious charge (see Deut. 13; 18:15–22). Also noted is that Pilate had examined Jesus, which suggests that Luke has summarized a lengthier process such as that recorded by John (see commentary on Luke 23:1–12).

Pilate, announcing that he found no legal basis for convicting Jesus, nor did Herod, and that Jesus did nothing deserving of death, determined to release Him (vv. 15–16). But he also promised to chastise or punish Jesus, apparently hoping that this would satisfy His accusers. It was the mildest form of punishment, as opposed to scourging (cf. Matt. 27:26; Mark 15:15; John

19:1); the latter was reserved for more serious crimes, including capital offenses. On the other hand, with not just two trials but two verdicts of Jesus's innocence (cf. Deut. 19:15), any punishment at all would have seemed to have been unjust. (Some manuscripts add v. 17, which indicates that there was an *anagkē*—a "necessary"—custom of releasing a prisoner to the Jews during the Passover. It was unlike *dei*, which refers to something needed from God's perspective and according to the divine plan; e.g., Luke 24:26.) The custom of releasing a prisoner in honor of Passover was a practice the Jews prized. Although some early manuscripts omit this verse (cf. Matt. 27:15), such a tradition is implied in the context.

In response, all, including the common people, shouted and demanded that Jesus be taken away, meaning killed (Luke 23:18; cf. John 19:15; Acts 8:33; 21:36). They demanded that Barabbas be released instead, despite his being guilty of murder and of having led a revolt (Luke 23:19; cf. Mark 15:7; John 18:40). The name Barabbas means "son of the Father" in Aramaic, suggesting he may have been a messianic pretender. The chief priests were said to be responsible for the people's change of heart (Matt. 27:20; Mark 15:11). Those who had charged Jesus with rebellion against Rome now asked for a real insurrectionist to be released, demonstrating that their professed loyalty to Rome was duplicitous (cf. John 19:12, 15). Only Luke mentions that this rebellion took place "in the city" (i.e., Jerusalem), which also helps explain the unanimous sentiment in favor of Barabbas's release. Although Pilate tried repeatedly to release Jesus (Luke 23:13–22), the people shouted emphatically (twice) for Him to be crucified (v. 21; cf. John 19:6, 15).

Crucifixion was a particularly horrific form of slow execution in which the offender carried the crossbeam to the place of crucifixion and was fastened to it by rope or nails before being raised and secured to an upright post. Death would have occurred hours or days later by suffocation, loss of blood and bodily fluids, cardiac arrest, or a similar reason.

While Pilate did not want a riot to ensue, neither did he want to condemn an innocent man to death. In his third attempt to release Jesus, he twice underscored Jesus's innocence (Luke 23:22). But the crowds were insistent, crying out loudly (as the demon-possessed had done; Luke 4:33; 8:28). So, when forced to choose between upholding justice or preserving his own position, Pilate chose self-interest: he ordered that Jesus be crucified, released Barabbas, and gave Jesus over to their will (23:24–25). The word for release, used five times in this passage (vv. 16, 18, 20, 22, 25), refers not only to physical deliverance (13:12) but also to forgiveness (6:37; Matt. 18:27), hinting at Jesus's substitutionary sacrifice in taking the place of not only Barabbas on the cross but of the world (cf. Rom. 8:32; 2 Cor. 5:14–15; 1 John 2:2).

23:26–43. The King Is Crucified. All three Synoptic Gospels indicate that a Cyrenian named Simon carried Jesus's cross (v. 26). Normally, persons being crucified were expected to carry their own cross (or crossbeam), so Jesus must have been unable to carry it due to the physical and emotional suffering He had already undergone, which included two separate scourgings (Mark 15:15; John 19:1). Simon, the Cyrenian (cf. Acts 2:10), was coming from the country. Carrying the cross following Jesus, he modeled in a literal sense what Christians are to do figuratively in taking up their cross daily to follow Jesus (Luke 9:23).

Luke notes that a large crowd of people also trailed behind and also that women were weeping and lamenting for Jesus (23:27). Jesus, in addressing the latter as "daughters of Jerusalem" (v. 28), may have alluded to OT descriptions of the city being surrounded by enemy forces and ultimately destroyed (e.g., Is. 1:8; 3:16–17; Jer. 4:31; 6:2–6; Lam. 1:6; 2:10). The women were to weep for themselves and for their children because of the coming destruction of the city by Rome (Luke 23:28; cf. 21:20). Just as Jesus had previously pronounced a woe on women with children in those days (21:23), the barren and childless women would be blessed because of the horrific events coming on the city. As Jesus indicated, the death wish of those calling to the mountains "Fall on us!" prior to Israel's destruction by Assyria (Hos. 10:8) would be repeated during the fiery destruction of Jerusalem by Rome, representing in microcosm the global destruction that will occur at the Second Advent (Rev. 6:16). Since the green wood or tree (representing Jesus) is less susceptible to destruction by fire, the dry tree (representing the unbelieving Jerusalemites) would be even more readily consumed. Jesus alluded to an OT judgment oracle (Ezek. 17:24), employing a biblical metaphor whereby trees symbolize people (see commentary on Luke 3:7–20; cf. Matt. 7:16–20).

Placing Jesus between the two criminals who were crucified with Him (Luke 23:33; cf. 22:37), as all four Gospels indicate, identifies Him as the most prominent "transgressor." The crucifixion site was known as "the Skull"—"Golgotha" in Aramaic (cf. Mark 15:22) and Calvary (from Latin), used to translate the Greek form employed by Luke (*Kranion*). The prayer of Jesus for His persecutors, "Father, forgive them" (Luke 23:34), was not only for them but also for all people in all times. They (which is general enough to include all) do not know the full significance of their actions (Acts 3:17). The past tense verb in Greek that introduces the prayer in Luke suggests that Jesus spoke this before His cross was lifted up, making it the first of seven utterances from the cross (cf. Luke 23:43, 46; Mark 15:34; John 19:26, 28, 30). Dividing His clothing and casting lots for His well-made tunic (Luke 23:34; John 19:23–24; cf. Matt. 27:35) also fulfilled a messianic prediction (Ps. 22:18). Both through the rulers and the soldiers (Luke 23:35–36) Satan's initial temptation for Jesus to question His messianic identity was repeated. Even their mockery, calling on Him to save Himself, fulfilled prophecy (23:35; Ps. 22:7–8). But Jesus could not save Himself and still be the elect or chosen Savior (cf. Is. 42:1; 1 Pet. 2:4–6). The soldiers also mocked him and offered him sour wine vinegar (Luke 23:36). Jesus refused it because, although it would have deadened the pain, it would also have impaired His mental faculties and enabled temptation to have more readily overcome Him (see Prov. 23:29–35).

Minor variations among the four Gospels as to the posted sign written by Pilate specifying the offense (Luke 23:38) attest to the independence of their separate accounts (cf. Matt. 27:37; John 19:19) and to the part of the full inscription ("This is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews") that each author chose to emphasize. Luke chose to emphasize the kingship (Messiah) aspect of the message. It was written in Greek, Latin, and Hebrew and hung above His head for all to see. It simultaneously witnessed to Jesus as the messianic King and to the hypocrisy of the Jewish leaders in affirming Roman rule over Israel in order to reject Him (Luke 23:2–3). Although one of the criminals echoed the taunts of the rulers and soldiers (v. 39), the other one rebuked him and affirmed that their punishment was just but that Jesus had done nothing wrong (v. 41). He expressed faith in Jesus as Israel's messianic King by asking to be remembered in His kingdom and (according to the best manuscripts) addressing Him as "Lord" (v. 42).

Jesus replied emphatically to the thief's request and told him that he would be with Him in paradise (v. 43). The Greek word translated "paradise" (*paradeisos*) generally means "garden," but it can refer to Eden as well as to heaven as the future dwelling place of God's people (2 Cor. 12:2–4; Rev. 2:7), and the latter is clearly the meaning here. Although modern versions place the comma before the word "today" (*sēmeron*), as if Jesus promised that He and the penitent thief would be in heaven later that day, such punctuation ignores Luke's predominant tendency of placing *sēmeron* after the verb it modifies (e.g., Luke 2:11; 5:26; 13:32–33; etc.; cf. Deut. 4:1; 11:26; 30:18, LXX). Interestingly, while the earliest manuscripts do not regularly include traditional punctuation marks (punctuation did not become common until the sixth and seventh centuries), an early version (the Curetonian Syriac, ca. second century), translates it: "I say today to you . . ." This agrees with John's record that Jesus did not ascend to heaven until sometime after His appearance to Mary Magdalene on Sunday (John 20:17). Thus Jesus, on this day, assured the man that, even though all seemed hopeless, he would be with Him in paradise.

23:44–49. The Uniqueness of Jesus's Death. All three Synoptic Gospels describe three hours of darkness (v. 44) from the sixth hour (noon) until the ninth hour (3:00 p.m.). This long period of darkness cannot be explained from natural causes, such as a solar eclipse; it signified God's involvement in Christ's death as the substitute for sinners (cf. 2 Cor. 5:19, 21). Similarly, the tearing of the temple's veil into two pieces "from top to bottom" (Mark 15:38) signified that type had met antitype in the death of Christ, thus bringing "an end to sacrifice and offering" (Dan. 9:27). Based on Luke's dating of the beginning of Jesus's ministry to A.D. 27 (see commentary on Luke 3:1–6) and a length of three and a half years as suggested by John, Christ's death occurred at the appropriate time (Rom. 5:6), in the middle of the seventieth week (Dan. 9:27) in the spring of A.D. 31. His final words, spoken from the cross just before His death, were words of faith and submission: He committed His spirit into His Father's hands (Luke 23:46; cf. Ps. 31:5).

Luke's account records diverse reactions to Jesus's death. The centurion, who was overseeing the crucifixion and had thus watched everything, glorified God and expressed faith in Jesus as a righteous man (Luke 23:47). The large crowd who had come to watch the spectacle and recognized the darkness and the earthquake as signs of divine displeasure "beat their breasts" (v. 48), a sign of mourning and repentance over their role in condemning to death an innocent man (cf. 18:13; Zech. 12:10). But His friends and acquaintances watched and remained at a distance from these dying men (Luke 23:49).

23:50–56. Jesus Is Buried in Joseph's Tomb. All four Gospels mention that a man named Joseph requested permission from Pilate to take the body of Jesus (vv. 50, 52). Like Simeon, he was a devout man and was waiting for the kingdom of God (vv. 50–51; see commentary on Luke 2:21–40); he was also a member of the Sanhedrin that examined Jesus. Luke adds, though, that he had not consented to their decision, which may mean that not all were invited to be present at the trials (cf. John 7:50–53). Joseph was a secret disciple (John 19:38), as was Nicodemus (John 19:39). Both men probably hoped that they could help Jesus more by remaining on the Sanhedrin than risking exclusion from it by confessing Him openly. Now, unlike the apostles, who were in hiding (John 20:19), they boldly came forward (cf. John 19:38–42). Later, as a result of the apostles' Spirit-filled witness to Jesus's resurrection and fulfillment of Israel's messianic hopes, many priests and Pharisees would do the same (Acts 6:7; 15:5).

Burial in first-century Israel involved placing the body into a small cavity cut into a natural rock outcropping. Once the body decomposed, the bones would be gathered and reburied in a pile with other deceased family members or placed in a limestone box called an ossuary. The burial place of Jesus is most probably the traditional site, known as the Holy Sepulcher, because its two-chamber design was typical of that period and it is necessary to stoop down to enter (cf. John 20:5, 11). Archeological findings (regarding the location of the tomb, see in "Archaeology and the Bible," p. 91) have also indicated that the Holy Sepulcher was located just outside the first-century city wall, as the Bible suggests (John 19:20, 42; Heb. 13:12). It was a first-century burial site, as evidenced by tombs cut into the rock nearby. Certain women (cf. Mark 15:47), unable to honorably prepare Jesus's body for burial as they wished because it was the Preparation Day (Friday) and the Sabbath was approaching (Luke 23:54), took note of the tomb's location and then prepared spices and fragrant oils or perfumes (v. 56) for later use. Luke's comment that they rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment suggests that many years later the early Christians were still observing the Sabbath on the seventh day (Saturday).

24:1–51

THE RESURRECTION AND ASCENSION OF JESUS

The sadness and unbelief of the disciples turned to joy as they witnessed Jesus risen from the dead and were taught by Him from the Scriptures that His sufferings, death, and resurrection fulfilled prophecy. Jesus appeared to the women at the tomb (vv. 1–12), two disciples on the way to Emmaus (vv. 13–35), and the eleven in Jerusalem (vv. 36–49). After witnessing His ascension (vv. 50–53), they returned to Jerusalem with new hope, worshiping and blessing God in the temple.

24:1–12. "He Is Risen." All four Gospels conclude with an affirmation of Jesus's resurrection. The four accounts underscore their value as independent witnesses to the resurrection, which took place on the first day of the week (v. 1), that is, Sunday. In Greek the word translated "week" is *sabbaton*. Among Jews, the days of the week were counted in relation to the seventh-day Sabbath. The only other day of the week given a name was the Preparation Day (Luke 23:54; Mark 15:42; John 19:14, 31, 42). The Roman practice of naming days after their gods, corresponding to the sun, moon, and the five known planets, entered the church centuries later.

Although the women left for the tomb very early in the morning (while it was still dark; John 20:1) to anoint the body of Jesus, when they arrived it was already becoming light (Matt. 28:1). The stone had been rolled away (Luke 24:2; cf. Matt. 28:2) and the tomb was empty—there was no body (Luke 24:3)—and they were at a loss to understand this (v. 4). The empty tomb did not suggest to them the resurrection. Seeing two men in glowing, bright clothing, later identified as angels (v. 23; cf. Acts 1:10), the women were afraid and bowed their faces to the ground in awe (Luke 24:5). The angels' question to the women and their affirmation that He was living, having risen from the dead, was reinforced by their use of Jesus's own words predicting His betrayal and crucifixion and that He would rise again on the third day (vv. 6–7). Reference to "the third day" emphasizes the fulfillment of prophecy (see commentary on Luke 9:18–27; cf. 11:30; Jon. 1:17).

The women told all these things, first to the eleven remaining apostles and then to all the rest of Christ's followers in Jerusalem (Luke 24:9). They became the first ones to proclaim to others the resurrection of Christ. Mary Magdalene (v. 10) is named as a witness of the resurrection in all four Gospels. According to John, Jesus appeared first to her and then she went separately to tell the disciples (John 20:14–18). Apparently, the women came to the tomb from different directions and so did not arrive at the same time. Joanna (see Luke 8:3) and Mary, the mother of James (cf. Mark 15:40), were among the women who told the apostles of the resurrection. However, the disciples did not believe them (Luke 24:11). Some attribute their skepticism to the prevailing attitude that women were unreliable witnesses, but the fog of their deep depression likely also contributed to it. The story seemed to be nonsense. Luke's account often summarizes, as apparently here: it does not mention Mary Magdalene's separate witness to the disciples. Further along in his account, he would mention Jesus's separate appearance to Peter (v. 34; cf. 1 Cor. 15:5), who had gone to the tomb, finding only the linen cloths lying by themselves (cf. John 20:3–7). He went away wondering what all this could mean (Luke 24:12).

24:13–35. On the Road to Emmaus. That same afternoon two disciples, returning from the feast celebration, traveled the seven miles (11 km) to their home village of Emmaus (v. 13), a location that has not yet been confidently identified. As they discussed the tragic turn of events, Jesus joined them on the way, but they were prevented from recognizing Him (v. 16; cf. John 20:14; 21:4). The deeper divine purpose was that their faith should rest not on a miracle of resurrection but on the Scriptures (cf. Luke 16:31). As Jesus questioned them about their conversation, according to some manuscripts, they stopped walking and stood there looking downcast and discouraged (24:17). They seemed shocked that this stranger was oblivious to what had happened, and Cleopas voiced their surprise (v. 18). Awareness of Jesus's death, it seems, was widespread. They recited many facts: about Jesus's prophetic work, His mighty deeds, and crucifixion (vv. 19–20); of the women finding the tomb empty and seeing a vision of angels who said He was alive (v. 23); and even that some had gone to the tomb and confirmed that it was empty (vv. 19–24). But these facts led only to doubt with no hint of faith: they said that they had hoped that Jesus was the One who was going to redeem Israel (implying that this hope had been dashed; v. 21). They even mentioned the third day (see commentary on Luke 9:18–27). Their hopes were disappointed because they expected a messiah who would liberate them from Rome. But Jesus appeared to be just another failed messianic pretender (cf. Acts 5:36–37).

Jesus pinpointed the reason for their doubts, calling them *anoētoi* (lit. "thoughtless" or "foolish"; cf. Gal. 3:1, 3) for being "slow" to believe (Luke 24:25). They may have wanted proof of the claims made by the women, but the problem was their unwillingness to believe "all that the prophets have spoken" (v. 25). A suffering and dying messiah was unthinkable to them because they failed to believe *all* that had been revealed. Therefore, beginning with the books of Moses, Jesus explained to them in all the Scriptures passages pointing to Himself (v. 27). Numerous passages concerning His suffering might have been mentioned (e.g., Gen. 3:15; Ps. 22:1–18; Is. 53:1–10; Dan. 9:26; Zech. 13:7). The glory or exaltation of the Messiah is also found throughout the OT (e.g., Num. 24:17; Is. 52:13; 53:11–12; Dan. 7:13–14). Significantly, when they neared Emmaus, Jesus seemed to indicate that He would be going on further. The two disciples strongly entreated Him to stay (cf. Heb. 13:2; the Greek word used here is from the verb *parabiazomai*—"to strongly urge"—some translations have "constrained," but this does not mean "to force" in this context). Had they not done so, they might not have been witnesses of the resurrection. As they recognized how their Guest took bread, blessed (or gave thanks for) it, and broke the bread, while apparently seeing the scars in His hands as He did so, their eyes were opened. Suddenly they recognized the risen Jesus; but then He vanished from their sight (Luke 24:30–31).

Unable to restrain their excitement, they left their meal untouched and immediately returned to Jerusalem, where they found the eleven apostles and others with them (v. 33). Luke refers to the twelve apostles even though Thomas was not present (John 20:24). Apparently this temporarily replaced "the Twelve" as a technical term for the group until a twelfth apostle was appointed (Acts 1:26). The others present probably included the women who reported on the empty tomb as well as Jesus's mother, Mary (cf. Acts 1:14). By this time, those in the upper room could confess that the Lord had risen (Luke 24:34) and give the further report that Jesus had appeared to Simon Peter. Peter was eager to see the risen Jesus, having raced to the tomb after hearing the report of the women. Being that his last interaction with Him immediately followed his threefold denial (22:61–62), Peter may have recalled the hopeful words that Jesus had spoken to him at the Last Supper (22:32) and longed for forgiveness from and reconciliation with His Lord, and Jesus honored that desire by appearing specially to him.

24:36–49. Jesus Appears to His Disciples. Accompanying the two disciples from Emmaus and entering the upper room with them was Jesus Himself, unseen until He gave them a greeting of peace (v. 36), a typical Jewish greeting (10:5) but also a reminder of the peace that He promised to give them (John 14:27; 20:19). Nevertheless, they were shocked and frightened and thought they were seeing a spirit or ghost (Luke 24:37; cf. Mark 6:49). Jesus proceeded to prove by means of the senses (sight, sound, touch) that He not only was alive but, unlike Greek conceptions of the afterlife, had flesh and bones (Luke 24:39). He also showed them His hands and His feet (v. 40) with the scars where the nails of crucifixion had been (cf. John 20:25–27). Still, it was hard to believe their eyes, and they disbelieved (interestingly) because of their joy (Luke 24:41). So Jesus gave them another piece of evidence by eating a piece of broiled fish (vv. 42–43; honeycomb is not mentioned in the earliest manuscripts, and does not appear in some translations). Although Jerusalem, as the Jewish capital, was not near a fishing community, many goods flowed to it (Neh. 13:16), particularly during festivals like Passover.

Having relieved their fears and doubts, Jesus next reminded them of His prior predictions regarding His suffering and death (see Luke 18:31). He was quite emphatic that the Scriptures must be fulfilled (see 24:44–46). The Greek word used here (*dei*) refers to a divine necessity (see 2:49). The reference to the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms (24:44) appears to designate the three divisions of the Hebrew canon, the Psalms representing the first and largest portion of the Writings, with which the canon ends. Just as the eyes of Cleopas and his fellow disciple were opened to the meaning of the OT (24:32), so now these disciples had the same privilege. A clear, correct understanding of the Scriptures and how Christ is revealed in them is indispensable to sharing the gospel with others.

Next Jesus summarized the disciples' message and mission, first by repeating the essence of the gospel in terms of Christ's suffering (including His death) and His resurrection on the third day (v. 46; see 9:22). Through Christ's death, repentance and remission/forgiveness of sins had been made available to all and were to be preached "to all nations" in His name (24:47)—a mission faithfully carried forward in Acts (e.g., 2:38; 3:6, 16; 4:10–12). This mission included all nations (cf. Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:15). This first instance of the giving of the Great Commission was no doubt repeated to various groups of disciples, including at His meeting in Galilee with more than five hundred disciples (1 Cor. 15:6). The work was to begin at Jerusalem, with those who had witnessed the startling events of the recent Passover. Later, the plan for the mission's progress would be given in more detail (Acts 1:8). Most importantly, the disciples were witnesses (Luke 24:48). They were to share the things they had seen and heard (see 1:2 and 10:23–24). Their effectiveness in preaching the gospel could come only through "power from on high" (24:49), that is, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father had promised (cf. 1:35; Gal. 3:14; Eph. 1:13) and whom Jesus would send (John 15:26; 16:7; cf. 14:26).

24:50–51. The Ascension. For the site of His ascension, Jesus chose the Mount of Olives, where God's presence had lingered before abandoning Jerusalem and the first temple to Babylonian destruction (Ezek. 11:23) and where the shouts of the multitude had proclaimed Him King. He led His eleven disciples (cf. Luke 24:33) across the summit toward Bethany and lifted up His hands to give them a parting blessing (v. 50). Then He began ascending and was lifted up into heaven (v. 51). Luke would begin the book of Acts by connecting it with this final scene of his Gospel narrative (cf. Acts 1:9–11).

24:52–53

EPILOGUE

As they saw Jesus ascending to heaven, the disciples worshiped Him as Lord (v. 52). They knew that He would fulfill His promises and that His divine presence would be with them always (Matt. 28:20). Deep in their hearts the hope of the return of the Lord renewed, oriented, and filled their existence with meaning. Possessed by this hope and free from fear, they returned to Jerusalem and were continually in the temple (where this Gospel began; Luke 1:8). In their praising of God (24:53), the disciples reflected something of the joy in heaven as angels welcomed Jesus to the heavenly temple, where He now intercedes for His people on earth, who are eagerly waiting for Him (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 4:14–16; 9:28).

JOHN

INTRODUCTION

Title and Authorship. The title of the book, "The Gospel According to John," is consistently found in the earliest Greek manuscripts, in the writings of the second- and third-century church fathers, and in the earliest translations, although in some cases it is shortened to simply "According to John." Many later copies also add an epithet: "The Holy Gospel According to John." And in at least one twelfth-century manuscript, the title is expanded at the end of the manuscript to include a Christian tradition regarding the Gospel's origin, "The Gospel According to John, which he wrote in Greek in Ephesus." Although the title of the Gospel varies a little in some manuscripts, there is no evidence that this Gospel ever circulated without John's name attached to it. This indicates that a title naming John as the author must have been attached to it as soon as it was written.

According to Christian tradition, the "John" mentioned in the title of the Fourth Gospel has always been identified as the Apostle John, the son of Zebedee (see Mark 1:19–20; 3:17; 10:35) and the brother of James (Acts 12:2). This identification, however, is not explicitly stated in the text of the Gospel itself (cf. Rev. 1:1, 4, 9; 22:8). The Gospel says only that the author was "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (John 21:20; cf. 19:35; 21:24), indicating he was a well-known figure within the apostolic and post-apostolic church. He is presented as an eyewitness of the things he wrote, and his testimony was confirmed to be true by those who knew him (21:24).

Was he indeed John the son of Zebedee? Since he was Jesus's most beloved disciple, he must have been one of the Twelve. According to the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) Jesus had an inner group of three disciples: Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, James and John (Matt. 17:1; 26:37; Mark 5:37; 13:3; Luke 22:8). It seems natural, then, to conclude that the Beloved Disciple was one of them. Peter could not have been the author because he is clearly distinguished from John (John 13:23–25; 18:15; 20:2–3; 21:7, 20). James is excluded because he was put to death a few years after Pentecost by Herod Agrippa I (Acts 12:1–2). Certainly, the rumor that spread at a later time among the brethren that the Beloved Disciple would not die (John 21:23) could not refer to James. Only John is left, and there is nothing to preclude him from being "the disciple whom Jesus loved" and the author of the Fourth Gospel.

It is frequently observed that John the son of Zebedee is not mentioned by name in the Fourth Gospel. The same happens with his brother James. Since John played such an important role within the apostolic church (Gal. 2:9; cf. Acts 3:1—4:23; 8:15–25), it seems strange, however, that he would not have been mentioned at all—unless the omission was intentional, having been replaced by a title ("the disciple whom Jesus loved") only for literary reasons. An indication of this intentionality may be evident in the fact that in contrast to the Synoptic Gospels, it is only in this Gospel that John the Baptist is simply called "John" (e.g., John 1:6, 15, 19, 26; 3:23–27); something that does not occur, for instance, in relation to the two disciples called Judas (14:22; cf. 6:71; 12:4; 13:2). Also, some of the most important individuals are given full names (6:68; 11:16; 20:24). The most likely explanation for this difference is that the Apostle John felt no need to distinguish himself from the only other John he mentions.

Date. Determining when the Fourth Gospel was written is difficult because there is little information from which a definitive conclusion can be drawn. The Gospel seems to suggest that John was already advanced in years when he wrote it. According to church tradition, John left Judea shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. He is said to have settled in Ephesus, where he ministered to the churches and eventually wrote his Gospel. Evidence that John wrote after the temple was destroyed in A.D. 70 seems to be implied in the way Jesus is presented in the Fourth Gospel as fulfilling some of the temple's functions (2:18–22; cf. 1:14; 4:21–24) and as the one to whom the Jewish festivals connected to the temple pointed (6:4, 53–58; 7:1, 37–39; 10:22, 34–36). Additional evidence for a late date also agrees with the concern appearing in John's Gospel: encouraging the faith of a second generation of Christians, who had not seen the resurrected Jesus themselves (20:29–30; cf. 17:20). Most scholars are, therefore, of the opinion that John was written between A.D. 80 and 100, the latter date being around the time of John's death.

Besides church tradition, there is some other evidence indicating that John could not have been written after, or long after, the turn of the first century: (1) the fact that in their writings early church writers, such as Ignatius (ca. A.D. 110) and Justin Martyr (ca. A.D. 150), seem to have used it and (2) several second-century papyri texts of this Gospel (especially Papyrus Rylands 457, or simply P52, a small codex fragment containing John 18:31–33 on one side and vv. 37–38 on the other, found in Egypt in 1920 and dated to ca. A.D. 125). The importance of P52 is that it shows that this Gospel was already circulating in Egypt at the beginning of the second century. This information requires a date no later than A.D. 100 for the composition of John.

Backgrounds. Determining the specific situation that prompted John to write his Gospel is no less difficult than attempting to figure out when it was written. Broadly speaking, John's Gospel was written to encourage faith in Jesus. He said that he wrote about the signs that Jesus performed so that readers might believe that Jesus is "the Son of God," and that by believing they "may have life" (20:31). The challenge is that the passage can be understood in two significantly different ways—and the Greek manuscripts are divided on the issue. In some Greek manuscripts the verb in the phrase "that you may believe" is in the aorist tense, which indicates the purpose was to lead *unbelievers* to make a decision to follow Jesus. In other manuscripts, and probably the most accurate ones, the verb is in the present tense, meaning John was writing to encourage *believers* to continue in their faith ("that you might go on believing"). If the latter is correct, why would John specifically want to encourage believers to continue in their faith? While we do not know for sure, two of the most common suggestions are set forth below.

1. *An Internal Crisis of Faith.* Around the end of the last decade of the first century, the Christian church was facing a challenging time of transition. The generation of believers who had personally witnessed the resurrected Jesus was being replaced by a second generation of believers, who knew Him only through the testimony of others. John was himself the last living apostle, and his death was likely not far off. At this difficult time, John wrote to encourage the next generation of believers that the lack of living witnesses of the resurrection was no barrier to their Christian experience.

As noted earlier, the Fourth Gospel seems to take a particular interest in the faith of the second generation of Christians. Jesus pronounced a blessing on those who, unlike Thomas, believe without seeing (20:8–9). During Jesus's intercessory prayer, John recounts how Jesus prayed not only for Himself and His disciples but also for the faith of a generation who would believe in Him through the testimony of His disciples (17:20). These individuals are some of the "other sheep" (10:16) who would believe in Jesus, even though they had not seen Him personally (20:29).

This concern to encourage the faith of a new generation of Christians is also evident in the nature of the miracles John recorded in his Gospel. Unlike the Synoptic Gospels, which record Jesus repeatedly healing people through physical touch (e.g., Matt. 8:3–4; 14:29–31; Mark 1:29–31; 5:21–43; Luke 4:40; 7:14–15; 8:40–56), John's Gospel recounts many miracles of healing as the result of the spoken word of Jesus alone (John 2:1–11; 4:46–54; 5:1–15; 11:39–44). In choosing to tell these specific stories, John wanted to demonstrate that the absence of the physical presence of Jesus was not a disadvantage for later Christians. Jesus's words were just as powerful as His physical touch.

2. *External Conflicts.* At the same time, it is possible that the church was also facing an external crisis, in which faith in Jesus was being fiercely threatened. After the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, the Pharisees tried to rebuild Judaism. They were the ones defining orthodoxy and expected other groups, including Christians, to comply or face disciplinary actions. The tension escalated when a curse on heretics (*birkat haminim*) was added to the synagogue liturgy. According to the Babylonian Talmud, the *birkat haminim*, which refers to Christians as "Nazarenes," was introduced at the time of

Gamaliel II (ca. A.D. 85); apparently, its purpose was to drive Jewish Christians out of the synagogue, though it could also result in other kinds of punishments similar to the ones imposed by unconverted Paul (Acts 9:1–2; 22:4–5; 26:9–12). Later evidence for this development is found in Justin Martyr's disputation with a Jew named Trypho (ca. A.D. 135). He mentioned at least three times a curse that the Jews pronounced on Christians during their synagogue prayers.

We should be careful in using the *birkat haminim* as a background for the interpretation of the Gospel of John. One could perhaps suggest that in his Gospel, John decided to emphasize the fierce hostility between the Jews and Jesus based on the hostility between the Jews and his audience at the time he wrote the Gospel. Out of the seventy-one occurrences of the term "Jews" (translated as "Jewish leaders" in some versions) in John, thirty-eight involve some measure of hostility (e.g., John 5:16, 18; 7:1; 8:48, 52; 18:36; 19:7, 12; 20:19), which is all the more surprising given the fact that Jesus Himself was a Jew. John and apparently most of his readers were also Jews. In this case, "Jews" may have carried not an ethnic connotation but a religious one and would imply that at the time John was writing, Judaism and Christianity were parting ways. This might explain the emphasis John places on the identity of Jesus, His messiahship and divinity (e.g., 1:1–3, 15, 30, 41, 45, 49; 4:25–26, 29; 5:17–18; 8:53–59), which has always been the major point of contention between Jews and Christians. If this scenario is correct, John's Gospel was written not so much to retell the story of Jesus as to present Him as the divine Son of God and not so much to generate faith in Him as to strengthen the faith of those who had already believed (see 20:30–31).

John and the Synoptics. John is different from the other Gospels in many respects. Though sharing the basic outline of Jesus's ministry, as well as some sayings and incidents, the Gospel of John emphasizes Jesus's ministry in Judea, not in Galilee, reports at least three Passovers (2:13; 6:4; 11:55; cf. 5:1), instead of only one, and omits several important episodes of Jesus's life, including His birth, baptism, transfiguration, casting out of demons, and agony in Gethsemane. The Last Supper and the prophetic discourse (Matt. 24; Mark 13; Luke 21) are also missing. Another difference is the portrait of Jesus Himself. Central emphases in John, such as Jesus's full divinity and preexistence, are virtually absent from Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and the miracles performed by Jesus are more extraordinary than those reported by the other Evangelists. Those concentrated mostly on healings and casting out demons, while in John the predominance is of miracles that are contrary to nature (e.g., turning water into wine, feeding the five thousand, walking on the water, healing the man born blind). In the Gospel of John, the Evangelist does not record Jesus's parables or short sayings but instead emphasizes His long and thoughtful discourses. John also constantly uses words that are scarcely used in the other Gospels (e.g., love, truth, know, world, abide, judge, send, witness), and he records Jesus speaking of Himself metaphorically as the Bread of Heaven, the True Vine, the Good Shepherd, the Door, and the Light of the World.

How do we account for such differences? On one hand, there is no question that Jesus was too great of a teacher to limit Himself to only one teaching style or vocabulary. Possibly, when addressing the crowds in Galilee, He used a more dynamic and parabolic style than when talking to the more educated people of Jerusalem or to His own disciples. On the other hand, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that John offers a larger amount of theological insights than do the Synoptics. This is why, comparatively speaking, John has much less biographical material than the other Gospels—roughly, 40 percent less than Mark, 50 percent less than Matthew, and 60 percent less than Luke—despite being much longer than Mark, and almost as long as Matthew and Luke. In other words, John does contain biographical information as he tells the story of Jesus. He even seems to follow a stricter chronological framework in his account of that story. What concerns John the most, however, is not the story per se, but its significance for the life and faith of the church. This also means that, differently from the Synoptics, John's writing is not from the perspective of Jesus's time but from the perspective of his own contemporary situation. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13–14), he both remembers and retells the gospel episodes that were more congenial to the situation in which he found himself at the time of his writing.

Theology. In a sense, all of the four Gospels are theological, but in John's Gospel theology plays a more central role than in the others, so much so that while the Synoptics could be defined as theological biographies, John is perhaps best viewed as biographical theology. John's Gospel manifests his awareness of the greatness of Jesus's ministry (20:30–31; cf. 21:25), but he was not there just to recount the gospel story; he applied that story to the needs of the church. And he did so with great skill and authority. His Gospel is a masterpiece of early Christian theology. Behind its simplicity of language and style, there lies a profound, well-crafted, and stimulating theological presentation of Jesus (and other issues) that has proven to be vital for the Christian understanding of the person and work of Jesus. Some of John's main theological emphases are the following:

1. Jesus Christ. John's Christology is the highest one in the NT in the sense that it stresses the divinity of Jesus more clearly and consistently than does any other apostolic writing. In writing his Gospel, John does not deny or downplay Jesus's humanity (1:14; 4:6; 11:33–35; 12:27; 13:21; 19:28; 20:20, 27; cf. 1 John 4:2; 2 John 7), but it is His divine nature and origin that he wants to demonstrate. In the statement of purpose he says, "These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ [or Messiah], the Son [*huios*] of God" (John 20:31). "Christ" is the Greek word for the Hebrew "Messiah" (cf. 1:41; 4:25), and "Son of God" in John means that Jesus is "equal with God" (5:17–18) or as divine as is God (the Father; cf. 10:29–33, 36). Perhaps this is why, when talking of the childhood of the believer, John uses *teknon* ("child") rather than *huios* ("son/descendant"; 1:12; 11:52; cf. 1 John 3:1, 2, 10; 5:2). While Jesus is "Son" in the sense of possessing the same nature of God, the believer is "child" as a result of his or her faith in Jesus and through the action of the Holy Spirit (John 1:12–13; 3:3–7).

John also explicitly refers to Jesus as God—something that does not happen in any of the Synoptics—and this reference appears already in the opening verses of his Gospel (1:1–3). There we find three important affirmations concerning the divine nature of Jesus. The first is His preexistence, which is clearly stated in the very first sentence of the Gospel: "In the beginning was the Word" (v. 1a). This "beginning" is certainly the "beginning" of Genesis 1:1, that is, the point at which God created the heavens and the earth. At that point, Jesus, who is here referred to as "Word" (*logos*), already existed. He did not become; He "was." Other statements of Jesus's preexistence in John include 1:15; 8:58; 17:5, 24. The second affirmation is that Jesus is fully divine, which is the natural implication of the fact that He preexisted everything that was created. The "beginning" of 1:1 is the dividing line between the realm of God and the realm of creation. Jesus belongs in the realm of God. Before Creation "the Word was with God" (v. 1b), and if the Word was with God, it was because "the Word was God" (v. 1c). Attempts have been made to see in this statement a lesser God or a "god," but none of them has gained any credibility. From both the syntactical and the contextual standpoint, the statement cannot be read differently other than the Word was what God was. If the Word was with God, He was distinct from God, but as far as His attributes are concerned, He was fully God (cf. 20:28). This is why Jesus could say that He and His Father were one (10:30; cf. vv. 31–33).

The third affirmation relating to Jesus's divine nature in 1:1–3 is that He is the Creator God of the Genesis account, who created all things (v. 3; cf. Col. 1:15–16; Heb. 1:1–2). In John's Gospel, most of the miracles performed by Jesus are actions contrary to nature, and so they required creative power to be performed (cf. John 2:7–11; 5:5–9; 6:5–13; 9:1–7; 11:17–44). Since such miracles cannot be explained through natural processes, they testify of Jesus's creative power (cf. 10:25). After all, only someone who has life in Himself (5:26; 10:17–18) can create or impart life. John, however, goes a little further. Jesus is not only the Creator God of Genesis but also the God of the OT. No person has ever seen God (1:18; cf. 5:37; 6:46; Col. 1:15; 1 Tim. 1:17; 6:16; 1 John 4:12). But since the OT reports many people seeing God (Gen. 18:1–15; 32:30; Ex. 33:20–23; 34:6; Num. 12:8 [cf. Heb. 11:27]; Josh. 5:13–15; 1 Kin. 19:11–18; Is. 6:1), the only possibility is that it was Jesus who was seen, not God the Father. This is exactly what John says: Jesus, who is closely connected with the Father, has made Him known (John 1:18b; cf. 8:56; 12:41). In other words, God has always revealed Himself through the Son. Hence Jesus said that the Scriptures (i.e., the OT) testify of Him (5:39, 46; cf. 1:45). The issue here is not simply messianic prophecies but the real presence of Jesus in the writing of Moses and the prophets. So to the question, how divine is Jesus? John's answer is, He is Yahweh Himself, or the great I Am (cf. 8:58). This is the highest point of NT Christology.

2. Holy Spirit. Another important theme in the Fourth Gospel is the Holy Spirit. In fact, no other Gospel or NT writing has individually contributed more to the Christian understanding on the nature of the Spirit than John. While Paul and Luke provide passages that evince the personality and deity of the Spirit (e.g., Acts 5:3–4; Rom. 8; 2 Cor. 3:17; Eph. 4:30), John's Gospel makes an important contribution. In the Fourth Gospel, especially in the so-called Farewell Discourse (John 14–17), a group of five passages that refer to the Holy Spirit as Paraclete (*paraklētos*) are presented (14:16–17, 25–26; 15:26–27; 16:7–11, 13–15). This can be translated as "Spirit of truth." These are unique to John, all of them have to do with the coming of the Spirit, and they describe additional functions besides the ones found in the Gospel's narrative sections (chaps. 1–13, 18–21). While in those sections the Holy Spirit is mostly presented as a life-giving agent through whom God regenerates and transforms (3:3–6; 6:63) or an enabler for the fulfillment of the Christian mission (3:34), the predominant idea in the Farewell Discourse is that of an instructor, a witness, and a guide, concepts that provide evidence for conceiving the Spirit as a distinct person or agent who is closely related to both the Father and the Son.

Among the functions ascribed to the Spirit in the Paraclete passages are the following: teaching (14:26), reminding of everything that Jesus said (v. 26), guiding into all truth, and announcing the things that are to come (16:13). The Spirit speaks, hears (v. 13), glorifies (v. 14), testifies (15:26), and convinces of sin, righteousness, and judgment (16:8). He is also described as another Paraclete (14:16) who comes to take Jesus's place after His departure (16:7), suggesting not only that Jesus Himself was a Paraclete to the disciples but also that the Spirit would perform a role at least in some sense similar to that of Jesus. The company of the Spirit, however, would be more valuable to the disciples than that of Jesus Himself (14:26–28; 16:7), probably because He would be free of Jesus's self-imposed human limitations (14:16–17; cf. 16:8). In addition, the Spirit would come from God (15:26; cf. 16:7), that is, He would be sent by God (14:26), as John the Baptist (1:6; 3:28) and Jesus Himself were (e.g., 3:34; 6:29, 57; 7:29). The Spirit could also be known and received (14:17; cf. 7:39) as Jesus could (1:12; 6:69; 10:14; 13:20).

An essential aspect of John's theology of the Spirit has to do with the time of His coming. For John, the Spirit could not be given—in His fullness, of course (cf. 14:17)—before the ascension and glorification of Jesus (7:39; cf. Acts 2:32–34; Eph. 4:7–10), which would represent the Father's approval of the achievements of the Son (John 17:1, 4–5), including His triumph over Satan (12:31; 16:11). This is why it was convenient for Jesus to go, because if He did not go, the Spirit could not come (16:7, 28). The disciples, therefore, were expected to rejoice with Jesus's departure (14:28; cf. 17:13), as this would inaugurate a new phase in redemptive history (14:28). And the Spirit did come (7:39). For John, the coming of the Spirit was already a past event, which means that the remark in 21:24 about him testifying of "these things" makes him a witness to Jesus as much as to the Spirit and His powerful ministry in the life and mission of the apostolic church.

3. Eternal Life. The word *zōē* ("life") occurs thirty-six times in the Fourth Gospel, more than twice as much as in the Synoptics combined. This by itself shows the importance given to this theme by John. Out of the thirty-six occurrences, seventeen come with the adjective "eternal" (*aiōnios*), though without changing the essential meaning of the noun alone. That is to say, "life" in John, whether with or without the adjective "eternal," means the same: it is God's gift through faith in Jesus Christ (3:16). God is the ultimate source of life, but He gave the Son authority to impart it to those who believe in Him (5:21, 26). In fact, Jesus came into the world with the purpose of imparting life (10:10), and John wrote to announce it (20:31). This life, however, is not simply an eschatological gift but primarily a present reality, and here resides John's unique contribution on this matter. In the Synoptics, while the "kingdom of God" or "kingdom of heaven" is said to be both "already" (e.g., Matt. 4:17; 5:3; Mark 1:15; Luke 6:20; 16:16; 17:21) and "not yet" (e.g., Matt. 8:11; Mark 14:25; Luke 19:11; 21:31), the phrase "eternal life" is a future, eschatological blessing—something to be experienced in the age to come (Matt. 25:46; Mark 10:17; Luke 10:25). This was also what first-century Judaism believed, as the Fourth Gospel itself demonstrates (John 5:29; 11:23–24; cf. Is. 26:19; Dan. 12:1–2). But in John this future blessing is already made available through the ministry of Jesus (John 4:13–14; 6:33–35; 10:10). The eschatological dimension of life has not been entirely set aside (cf. 3:36; 5:28–29; 12:25), but the emphasis lies on its present reality. Those who believe in Jesus can have eternal life—or the assurance of eternal life—here and now (3:36; 6:53; cf. 1 John 5:11–12), even in the face of death (John 6:40; 8:51; 11:25–26).

4. Sabbath. In John's Gospel, the Sabbath is and remains the day of rest. There is no attempt to replace its observance or to bring this divine institution to an end. The controversies between Jesus and the Jewish leaders in the Gospel about the Sabbath have to do with whether it is lawful to perform healings on this day (5:16, 18; 7:22–23; 9:14, 16) and not with whether the

fourth commandment of the Decalogue is still valid. According to the rabbis, a person could be healed on the Sabbath only if life was in danger. Jesus, however, was not bound by rabbinic traditions (cf. Mark 3:1–6; Luke 13:10–17; 14:1–6). The healings He performed were not secular work. They were an integral part of His redemptive mission (John 5:14, 17, 19–21; 10:25, 32, 37–38; cf. Matt. 9:2; Luke 17:19; 18:42), and as such they did not contradict the divine purpose of the Sabbath.

When it comes to the death and resurrection of Jesus, no change of paradigm can be found concerning the day of rest: Friday was still the day of preparation, which means that the Sabbath commandment still preserved its full force (John 19:14, 42). Had the believers of John's time been exempt from keeping this commandment, it would have been natural to expect the apostle to refer to this (cf. Luke 23:56) considering that the book was written at the end of the first century. It is often said that it was the resurrection that determined the change from Sabbath to Sunday as the day of worship, but no biblical evidence can be adduced in support of such a claim. Despite the importance the NT writers ascribe to Jesus's resurrection (cf. 1 Cor. 15:13–18, 20–23), none of them calls for a celebration of this event on Sunday or any other day in particular. As for the appearances of Jesus on the day He resurrected, neither in John nor in the Synoptics (John 20:11–18, 19–23; cf. Luke 24:13–35, 36–43), no pattern can be established to justify a new worship theology. For John, the Sabbath continued to be the memorial of Creation (cf. Rev. 14:6–7), and—because Jesus rested in the grave on this day—also the memorial of God's redemptive work for fallen humanity.

5. Sanctuary. In John, most of the times that the temple is mentioned, the reference is to the temple of Jerusalem in connection to Jesus's ministry (John 2:13–21; 7:14, 28; 8:2, 20, 59; 10:23; 11:56; 18:20). There is also a reference to Jesus Himself as the temple (2:19–21), thus suggesting a christological fulfillment of the tabernacle/temple typology for God's presence on earth, the place through which He dwelt among His people (Ex. 25:8) and manifested His glory (Ex. 40:34–35; cf. 1 Kin. 8:10–11; 2 Chr. 7:1–3). The book of Revelation contains the eschatological fulfillment of such typology (Rev. 21:3, 22). The christological understanding of the temple in John 2:19–21 echoes the more subtle reference in 1:14. The verb *skēnoō* ("to dwell") in the context of Christ's incarnation and the manifestation of His glory points back to the wilderness tabernacle (*skēnē*), the portable sanctuary prototype of the temple in Jerusalem and the ancient dwelling place of God in Israel. It is interesting that as the presence of a holy God among a sinful people required a means of atonement (Ex. 29:42–46; cf. Lev. 26:9–13), so Jesus is presented in John's Gospel not only as the tabernacle of God's presence among us but also as "the Lamb of God" who atones for the sin of the world (John 1:29, 36). It was such provision of grace that allowed sinners to be in His presence and behold His divine glory (vv. 14, 16).

John also has at least one reference to the heavenly sanctuary. When trying to comfort the disciples the night before His death, Jesus said that He was going to "prepare a place" for them in His Father's house and then would come back to gather believers and take them to heaven (14:2–3). There seems to be no question that the "Father's house" refers to the eternal dwelling place of God in heaven, the heavenly sanctuary (Pss. 11:4; 102:19; Mic. 1:2–3; cf. Ex. 25:9, 40; Heb. 9:23–24; Rev. 11:19; 15:5), which is also the final dwelling place of the redeemed (John 17:24; Rev. 21:3; cf. Pss. 23:6; 27:4). The passage includes a pictorial description of the abundance of space in the Father's house. And since the immediate context has to do with access to God (cf. John 14:4–6), the passage in fact is about the intercessory ministry of Jesus in the heavenly sanctuary (cf. Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25; 1 John 2:1), at the end of which He will come again to take those who are His to be with Him forever (cf. John 17:24).

6. God's People. Terms such as "God's people" and "Israel" are rare in John's Gospel, while "church" is completely absent. Nevertheless, the concept of God's people is an integral part of John's theology. It assumes the covenant between God and the Jewish people but transcends it to make it universal, according to its original purpose (Gen. 12:1–3). John 1:11 says that Jesus came to "what was His" (*ta idia*), but "His own" (*hoi idioi*) did not receive Him. While *ta idia* may refer to God's creation, contextually it is better to find here a reference to Israel as God's holy people. In that case, and based on the Gospel of John, "His own" would designate those from Israel who rejected Him (cf. John 8:33, 39, 42–43; 12:37). In John the privilege of being God's children is defined on the basis of one's decision in relation to Jesus Christ (1:12–13; cf. Eph. 2:11–22). But not all Jews rejected Jesus. The disciples accepted Him and became the nucleus of the Israel of faith—those who believed in Him—or His "own" (John 13:1). In chapter 17, Jesus prayed not only for the disciples but also for those who would come to believe in Him through their testimony (17:20). This seems to anticipate the ingathering of Gentile believers, the universalization of the faith of Israel (cf. 10:16; 11:51–52), as already foreseen in the OT (Is. 2:3; 56:6–7; 60:6; Mic. 4:2; Zech. 14:16–17). The concept of God's people in John's Gospel, therefore, has an inclusive character (John 17:20–23; cf. 3:14–16; 4:42; 12:32).

7. Two Worlds. The theological structure of the Synoptics is dualistic in the sense that it entails a contrast between two ages—this age and the age to come. It is, therefore, what can be called a horizontal dualism. John's theology is also strongly dualistic, but his dualism is essentially vertical, not horizontal. The contrast is not between two ages but between two worlds—the world above and the world below, which is this world. Jesus told the Jews that they were from below and contrasted them with Himself: "I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world" (8:23). The world above is where the Father is (16:28), while this world is the realm of sin and darkness (1:29; 12:46), whose ruler is Satan himself (12:31; 14:30). Nevertheless, this world is the object of God's infinite love (3:16), and so He sent His own Son to save it, not to condemn it (3:17; 12:47; cf. 4:42; 6:33; 1 John 4:14), though the ruler of this world has already been condemned (John 12:31; 16:11).

Jesus came as light to expel the darkness of sin (8:12; 9:5; 12:46), enlighten humankind (1:9; 8:12), bear witness to the truth (18:37), and rescue those who live in darkness (12:46). He expected them to believe in the light so that they could become children of light (12:36, 46). The world at large, however, did not believe in the light and because of their sinfulness preferred darkness (3:19–20). But those who did believe experienced a new, spiritual birth, a birth from God (1:12–13; cf. 1 John 5:1). Consequently, their status changed and they were no longer counted as part of this world (John 15:19; 17:6, 14; cf. 13:1). They were in the world but did not belong to it anymore (17:16; cf. 1 John 5:19). Jesus, who does not belong to the world, would go back to the place where He came from (John 6:62; 16:28), but they were to stay behind (17:11); they had a mission to fulfill in the world (v. 18). The world would hate them as it hated Jesus (15:18–19; 17:14; cf. 1 John 3:13). They would even face tribulations, but Jesus's victory was to bring them comfort and encouragement (John 16:33). Jesus also prayed for them (17:15) and gave them His peace (14:27). There was no reason, therefore, for fear or anxiety, all the more so because of the hope of His coming to take them to Himself to be with Him forever (14:1–3; 17:24).

8. Last Events. Despite the predominance of vertical dualism, horizontal dualism is also found in John's Gospel, though it is not as evident as it is in the Synoptics. The kingdom of God, for example, which is the central theme of Jesus's teaching in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, is mentioned only twice in John as an eschatological reality (3:3, 5). Even eternal life, as already noted, can be eschatological (3:36; 12:25), particularly in connection with the resurrection of the body (5:28–29; 6:39–40, 44, 54). What is now a spiritual reality will become an accomplished fact on the "last day," as John says—that is, when this age comes to an end and the age to come fully breaks in (6:39–40, 44, 54; 11:24; 12:48). The event that signals this transition is the Second Coming of Jesus, though Jesus simply said that He would come again to take His disciples to Himself (14:1–3). In other words, the Parousia (Jesus's Second Coming) is not as prominent in the Fourth Gospel as it is in other parts of the NT, but it is unequivocally affirmed as the object of hope (cf. 21:22). The judgment will also take place on the "last day" (12:48), but its result depends on one's response to Jesus here and now. He did not come to condemn (3:17; 12:47), but His self-revelation is so decisive that those who do not believe in Him are already condemned (3:18). In fact, what really matters regarding the judgment is not so much that we are sinners but what we do with Jesus (cf. 3:17–20; 5:22–24; 12:46–48).

9. Hope. The noun *elpis* (hope) does not occur in the Fourth Gospel, while its verbal form, *elpizō*, occurs only once (5:45). Nevertheless, the concept is there, and it is connected with both the resurrection of Jesus and His Second Coming, both mentioned in the Farewell Discourse (chaps. 14–17). In view of His impending death, Jesus tried to bring the disciples comfort and peace by promising that He would come back to them (14:18–20, 27–29; 16:16–24). This would be His return by means of the resurrection, which would fill their hearts with joy and assurance (14:20, 29; 16:20–24, 32–33). As for the Second Coming, the hope John sought to impart is bidirectional: it is our hope in relation to Jesus, and Jesus's hope in relation to us. The former results from the assurance Jesus gave the disciples—and all His followers—that at the end of His intercessory work in the heavenly sanctuary, the "Father's house" (14:2), He would

come back to take them to Himself so that they could be with Him forever (v. 3). No other promise was as dear to the apostolic church as this one (cf. Titus 2:13), and most believers even thought that Jesus would come back in their own lifetime (cf. John 21:22–23). But in John's Gospel, and only there in the whole NT, the Second Coming is also presented as the supreme hope of Jesus's own heart; the hope of reunification. Jesus had expressed already (in 14:3) His desire to always be with the disciples, and in 17:24 this was in fact His last wish to the Father. Perhaps this is why Jesus's agonizing prayer at Gethsemane does not appear in this Gospel (cf. Mark 14:32–42). John did not want any other wish to overshadow Jesus's burning desire to live forever with those whom He created (John 1:3) and for whom He gave His own life (3:16; 10:11, 15; 15:13). The (eternal) reunion of creature and Creator at Jesus's Second Coming, therefore, will be the point at which human hope and Christ's hope will converge. This is the supreme goal of salvation.

COMMENTARY

1:1–18

THE PROLOGUE

John's prologue has been one of the most influential passages in the NT with regard to the church's understanding of the deity of Jesus Christ. From the literary standpoint, it introduces some of the major themes that are later explored in the narrative (e.g., life, light, darkness, witness, belief, world, knowledge) and at the same time summarizes the experience of Jesus (cf. 1:11–12).

1:1–5

Preexistent Christ

John introduces his Gospel with the same statement that opens the Creation story—"In the beginning" (Gen. 1:1)—in order to establish Jesus's divine preexistence and active role in creation. As in Genesis, "the beginning" is the point where everything starts, and as such it represents the dividing line between the realm of God and the realm of creation. By saying that in the beginning Jesus (the Word) already was, John clearly located Him in the realm of God; He preexists everything that was created.

Four times in the prologue, and nowhere else in the Gospel, John refers to Jesus as the Word (*logos*) (John 1:1[3x], 14; cf. 1 John 1:1; Rev. 19:13). Since Logos was such an important concept in Greek philosophy—in their speculations about their gods and their gods' relationship to the material world—it has been suggested that John used a term that was familiar to his contemporaries simply as a linguistic artifice to introduce Jesus, the true Logos. Others have argued that John's Logos points to the creative and dynamic word of the Lord of the OT (Ps. 33:9; Is. 55:10–11), which sometimes comes very close to being personified (Pss. 33:6; 107:20). A more plausible explanation, however, may be found in the Jewish Targums, that is, the Aramaic paraphrases of the Hebrew Scriptures that were customarily recited in the synagogues for the benefit of the worshipers who had come to speak Aramaic after the Babylonian Exile (cf. Neh. 8:8).

In hundreds of cases in which the Hebrew text speaks of God (*Yahweh*), the corresponding passage in the Targums speaks of the divine Word (*memra*). That is to say, in the Targums "the Memra [Word] of Yahweh" is a standard surrogate for Yahweh Himself when a direct allusion to the sacred name is avoided out of reverence. Considered against this background, John's references to Jesus as the Word are simply a way of identifying Him with the God of Israel. Thus, the God of Israel (Yahweh) was Jesus Christ (cf. John 5:39, 46). It is not that Jesus was first God, but then He was not. The point is that He is and will always be the self-expression of God—the Word of God. This will become even clearer in the third part of the prologue (1:14–18).

From the start, therefore, John made it clear that there is (at least) a duality within the Godhead. The Synoptics say the same thing in their own way (Matt. 22:43–45; Mark 12:36–37; Luke 20:42–44; cf. Ps. 110:1). Jesus, the God of Israel, was not alone in the beginning. He was with God (John 1:1b–2), and this is the God that the Fourth Gospel repeatedly (120 times) identifies either directly or indirectly as the Father; the first two occurrences are in the prologue itself (vv. 14, 18). Since He was with the Father in the beginning, before anything was created (17:5, 24), Jesus has to be as divine as the Father. This is the meaning of v. 1c. Neither the context nor the Greek grammar allow for a different meaning. The claim that the Greek text calls for the translation "the Word was *a* god" is completely unfounded. It is true that in Greek "God" (*theos*) does not have the article, but the conclusion that its absence always requires the indefinite article in the translation is not true. For instance, see in the prologue itself the following examples:

"beginning" (1:1), "light" (v. 4), "God," "John" (v. 6), "blood [natural descent]," "God" (v. 13), and "God" (v. 18). In addition, the translation "*a* god" would have polytheistic connotations, implying that the Word was but a secondary god in a pantheon of gods. The text, however, is rather clear: there is God (the Father), and there is the Word (Jesus), and everything that God is, the Word is (cf. 5:17–18; 10:29–33).

Everything that exists was brought into existence through Jesus (1:3). Nothing exists apart from His creative activity (cf. Col. 1:15–16; Heb. 1:1–2). He Himself has to be uncreated. He belongs to the realm of God, not to creation. He was the light that allowed life to come into existence (John 1:4–5; cf. Gen. 1:11–12). The present tense verb in John 1:5 indicates that the shine (*phainei*) of His light has never ceased. Darkness has never prevailed in His presence except when the light was rejected (John 3:19–20). Not even the Creator can change the fate of those who shut themselves out of the divine light. So the appeal is to "believe in the light" and walk in it (12:35–36).

1:6–13
Incarnate Christ

In common with the Synoptics, John starts the earthly ministry of Jesus with the account of John the Baptist. While in the other Gospels John the Baptist is the precursor of the Messiah (Matt. 3:1–12; Mark 1:2–8; Luke 3:1–18; cf. Mal. 3:1; 4:5–6), in this Gospel he is mainly a witness for Jesus (John 1:6–8, 15, 19–27, 29–31, 32–34), though his role as a precursor has not been entirely forgotten (3:28; cf. 1:22–23, 26–27, 31). John did not want simply to retell the gospel story; He examines its significance. Thus, in addition to John the Baptist, he lists several other witnesses who were able to testify on behalf of Jesus: the Father (5:37; 8:18); the Holy Spirit (15:26); Jesus Himself (8:14, 18); His works (5:36; 10:25; 14:11; 15:24); those with whom Jesus came into contact (4:39; 9:25, 38; 12:17); John himself, as Jesus's most beloved disciple (19:35; 21:24); and the Scripture as a whole (1:45; 5:39, 46; 12:41). When John wrote his Gospel, Christianity was on trial so to speak (see John: Introduction), and the main charges centered on Jesus's messianic and divine claims. This Gospel is a powerful defense of those claims (cf. 20:30–31).

Despite being spoken of in a highly favored manner (1:6–7, 31, 33–34; 3:29; 5:35; 10:41), John the Baptist was not the light referenced (1:8). He was a light (5:35) but not the "true" Light (1:9). The adjective "true" (*alēthinos*) implies not that the Baptist was a false light but that he was only an imperfect or temporary light. Only Jesus can say, "I am the light of the world" (8:12; 9:5; cf. 12:46) in an absolute sense. Obviously, every believer can in his or her own sphere of influence be a light to illuminate others' lives (Matt. 5:14–16). The OT describes the coming of the Messiah in terms of light (Num. 24:17; Is. 9:2; 42:6–7; Mal. 4:2). By saying that Jesus is the "true" Light (John 1:9) as well as "the true bread from heaven" (6:32) and "the true vine" (15:1), John probably wanted to present Jesus as the fulfillment of OT expectations and hopes. In all these passages, *alēthinos* underscores the climactic nature of the Christ event.

In v. 9, the Greek text is ambiguous. The verb "coming" could refer to "everyone" ("every person") or to the Light. If we translate it "gives light to everyone ('every person') coming into the world," it would mean that every human being is in one way or another reached by the light of Jesus. If we render it "the true light coming into the world," the emphasis would be on Jesus coming as light to give humans abundance of life (3:19; 10:10; 12:46; cf. 9:5; 12:35). In John, "light" is a symbol for "life" (1:4; 8:12). Both options are possible. The argument in 1:10 is highly rhetorical and destined to emphasize the irony of Jesus's fate. The world He Himself created did not know Him.

Verse 11 specifies even more the tragedy of Jesus's life and clarifies that knowing means receiving, which in turn is equated in v. 12 with believing. "His own" (*ta idia/hoi idioi*) in v. 11 is like a small circle within a broader circle. That is, what v. 10 says in general terms ("the world") is here narrowed down in a very specific way. The reference is to Israel as God's people, the people of the covenant. What John describes here, therefore, is the rejection of the Messiah by most Jews (cf. 12:27), but not the rejection of the Israelites by the Messiah. He came to them as the fulfillment of the messianic prophecies to transform them and the whole world into "children of God" (1:12). All the nations of the earth were being blessed, as was promised Abraham (Gen. 12:1–3; cf. John 1:12–13).

1:14–18
Incarnation and Covenant

The last part of the prologue explores the significance of the incarnation and brings the discussion on the divine identity of Jesus to an even

higher level. Verse 14 is the high point of the entire prologue. The God of Israel and Creator of all things took on human flesh, entered history like a human being, and dwelt among us. In John, "flesh" means only human nature in general (3:6; 6:51–56, 63), without determining whether it is sinful or not, as it does in Paul (e.g., Rom. 7:18, 25; Gal. 5:16–21). By saying that the Word *skēnoō* (translated variously as "dwelt," "made His dwelling," "took up residence," "made His home") among us, John makes an explicit allusion to the tabernacle in the wilderness (*skēnē*), the portable prototype of the temple and the ancient dwelling place of God in Israel. As in the past when God took up residence among His people in the tabernacle (Ex. 25:8), which was filled with His glory (Ex. 40:34–35; cf. 1 Kin. 8:10–11; 2 Chr. 7:1–3), now Jesus Himself became the very reality of God's presence among us, and His glory was visible for all to see (John 1:14) through the miracles Jesus performed that testified to the presence and power of God on earth.

Jesus came as the *monogenēs* (v. 14—see below, "Only [Begotten]"). This term is used in this context qualitatively to express the unique relationship that Jesus has with the Father (cf. 10:30, 38) and does not imply that Jesus had a beginning.

Besides representing the ancient tabernacle/temple as the medium of God's presence on earth, Jesus was "full of grace and truth" (1:14) when He lived among us. This is the same expression God used to reveal Himself to Moses at Sinai (Ex. 34:6). It refers to His covenantal faithfulness, which is now made available through Jesus Christ (John 1:16). Then John makes the surprising statement that the One who appeared to Moses and revealed Himself as "full of grace and truth" was also Jesus (v. 17). This verse does not oppose Jesus to Moses, the gospel to the law, or the NT to the OT as some think. In the original Greek, there is no "but" between the two clauses. It describes only what happened at Sinai. As Moses was the instrument through whom the law was given, Jesus was the One who revealed God's grace and truth. In v. 18 the Evangelist completes the argument explaining that no one has ever seen God (cf. 5:37; 6:46; Col. 1:15; 1 Tim. 1:17; 6:16; 1 John 4:12). It is Jesus who has always revealed Him. John's point was that throughout the entire OT history, when many

Only [Begotten]

The traditional designation of Jesus as the only begotten son does not accurately represent the underlying Greek text of John's Gospel. If it did, John would have used the Greek word *monogennētos* instead of *monogenēs*. But *monogennētos* is not used either by John or by any other NT writer. This expression seems to have arisen at the end of the fourth century in Jerome's Latin Vulgate, and from there it passed to the KJV and other Western translations. Jerome used *unigenitus* ("only begotten") to replace *unicus* ("only"), which was the customary translation up to his time. Jerome used this particular expression to refute the Arians, who claimed that Jesus was not begotten but made. *Monogenēs* appears nine times in the NT, and Jerome rendered it by *unigenitus* mostly when referring to Jesus (John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9; cf. Heb. 11:17), while in the other passages he used the traditional *unicus* (Luke 7:12; 8:42; 9:38).

The Greek word *monogenēs*, however, appears to draw on its use in the Septuagint (LXX), where it is one of the terms used for the Hebrew *yakhid*, which means "only" (Judg. 11:34; Amos 8:10) or "precious" (Pss. 22:20; 35:17); *yakhid* is also translated in the LXX by *agapētos*, "beloved" (Gen. 22:2). This means that *monogenēs* and *agapētos* are to some extent equivalent, and this equivalence is also found in the NT: while John described Jesus's relation to the Father using *monogenēs*, the Synoptics use *agapētos* (Matt. 3:17; Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22). In both cases, the two expressions point to the unique relationship that Jesus has with the Father. Most modern translations reflect this and do not use "begotten." In referring to Jesus's glory in conjunction with that relationship, John wanted to emphasize not only the factuality of the incarnation—Jesus's glory was visible to all, particularly through His miracles—but also Jesus's divine origin and power. It is unfortunate that many of those who saw His divine glory did not respond with faith (John 2:11; 4:48; 6:30, 36; 9:35–41; 10:25–26, 37–38; 12:37).

people are reported as having seen God (Gen. 18:1–15; 32:30; Ex. 33:20–23; 34:6; Josh. 5:13–15; Judg. 13:21–22; 1 Kin. 19:11–18; 22:19; Is. 6:1), it was Jesus Christ all along (cf. John 8:56; 12:41). In the Fourth Gospel, it is certainly in this sense that the Scripture—that is, the OT—testifies on behalf of Jesus (cf. 1:45; 5:39, 46). John was thinking not only about messianic prophecies but also about the real presence of Jesus in the OT.

1:19—2:12

THE BEGINNING OF JESUS'S MINISTRY

The material in this section, which leads into John's account of Jesus's public ministry, can be divided into three main parts: John the Baptist's testimony (1:19–34), the first disciples (1:35–51), and Jesus's first miracle (2:1–12). The episodes happened on seven consecutive days (cf. 1:29, 35, 39, 43; 2:1).

1:19–34

John's Testimony

In the prologue, the Baptist is identified as a witness, and here the Evangelist shared the testimony he gave on behalf of Jesus. There is one week of real time between John 1:19 and 2:1.

1:19–21. Who John Was Not. On the first day of that week some Jewish religious authorities, identified in v. 24 as Pharisees, sent priests and Levites to probe John the Baptist's person and activity. John's more combative and charismatic personality, combined with his powerful preaching, filled the people with expectation concerning their messianic hopes (cf. Luke 3:15). When interrogated, however, he did not hesitate to say, "I am not the Christ [Messiah]" (John 1:20). "Christ" (*christos*) is the Greek word for the Hebrew term "Messiah," which means "the anointed one" (1:41; 4:25). Questions regarding two other possible prophetic figures—Elijah, of Malachi's prophecy (Mal. 4:5–6), and the prophet like Moses (Deut. 18:15, 18)—also met with negative answers.

1:22–28. The Voice in the Wilderness. The emissaries, however, did not want to come back empty-handed, so when they insisted on knowing his identity, the Baptist shifted their attention from himself to his mission and explained it in the prophetic terms of Isaiah 40:3. He was the voice in the wilderness calling for people to "make straight . . . a highway for our God." The Synoptics report the same statement (Matt. 3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4), with minor differences. John claimed to be a mere "voice." He was only God's spokesperson, the last one of the prophetic line (cf. Matt. 11:13–14), preparing the way for the real "Word."

Then the emissaries demanded to know why John baptized. The real issue was John's authority. The Synoptics inform us that he was performing a new kind of baptism, a baptism of repentance and forgiveness (Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3; cf. Acts 13:24; 19:4), which was unknown at that time, and the Jews wanted to know under what authority. In his answer, as was typical of him, John again pointed to Jesus. In what follows, the reader would expect a remark saying that the Messiah would perform a different kind of baptism, such as a baptism with the Holy Spirit, as found in the Synoptics (Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16). The fourth Evangelist stated that in a different context (cf. John 1:33). At this point, he wanted only to highlight John's testimony that he was not the Christ—nor Elijah, nor the prophet. He also revealed John's humility. Untying the straps of someone's sandal was the task of a slave; something that not even a disciple was expected to do.

The manuscripts are divided concerning where the episode took place (1:28), whether "Bethabara" or "Bethany." The latter is the earliest and most widely attested reading. In the third century A.D., Origen suggested an updating of the place name to Bethabara (on the west side of the Jordan), since there was not a Bethany known in his time on the east side of the Jordan. That this Bethany was beyond the Jordan means it was distinct from Judean Bethany (11:1, 18; 12:1), the hometown of Lazarus, Martha, and Mary, which is just east of Jerusalem (on the west side of the Jordan). Archaeologists working in Jordan in the early 1990s claimed to have discovered Bethany beyond the Jordan. While this may be the case, some scholars feel the site they have identified is not close enough to Galilee for Jesus to have returned there on a day's journey (1:43).

1:29–34. Lamb of God. On the second day of this week, John saw Jesus coming to him and then pronounced the famous words identifying Him as "the Lamb of God," who "takes away the sin of the world!" (v. 29). This saying, which is partially repeated the next day (v. 36), finds no parallel in the NT, though the book of Revelation frequently speaks of Jesus as "the Lamb" (e.g., Rev. 5:6, 8, 12, 13; 6:1, 7, 16). Although the two words are different in Greek (*amnos* in John; *arnion* in Revelation), they probably have the same meaning. When in his Gospel John combines the image of a lamb with the removal of sins, he was speaking in sacrificial or expiatory terms. He may have had in mind the Passover sacrifice (Ex. 12:3–11; cf. 1 Cor. 5:7), the daily sacrifice (Ex. 29:38–42), the sin offering (Lev. 5:5–7), or most probably the lamb of Isaiah 53.

The phrase "of God" could mean "provided by God" (cf. Gen. 22:8), but in John it is better to take it simply in the sense of "sent [or given] by God" (John 3:16–17, 34; 6:29; 8:42; 17:3; cf. 5:23, 36–37; 6:44, 57; 8:18; 10:36; 12:49; 14:24; 17:21, 25). The verb "takes away" (*airō*) implies the idea of substitution. The only way the Lamb can remove sin is by vicariously taking it on Himself (cf. Is. 53:5–6, 10, 12; Gal. 3:13).

In the next five verses (John 1:30–34), the Evangelist recorded further testimonies of the Baptist on behalf of Jesus, including the fact that he came to know who Jesus really was when the Spirit descended and remained on Him like a dove. This was a sign from heaven that Jesus was God's Son (v. 34). There is no question that this is an allusion to Jesus's baptism (Matt. 3:13–17; Mark 1:9–11; Luke 3:21–22), which is not recorded in this Gospel. In fact, it is highly probable that the events of the second day took place after Jesus's forty days in the wilderness, not mentioned in this Gospel (cf. Matt. 4:1–11; Mark 1:12–13; Luke 4:1–12).

1:35–51

The First Disciples

This section marks a transition from John's ministry to that of Jesus.

1:35–42. Andrew and Peter. On the third day of the week, John again testified that Jesus was the Lamb of God, and two of his disciples decided to follow Jesus. One of them was Andrew, Peter's brother; he was from Bethsaida (cf. v. 44). Andrew's companion, however, is unnamed. As noted earlier, this anonymous disciple was likely the Evangelist himself, the disciple whom Jesus loved, since he never refers to himself by name anywhere else in the Gospel. The quickness with which these two disciples transferred their allegiance to Jesus presupposes further instructions received from John the Baptist that are not recorded in the Gospel. The role of a true witness is to raise disciples for Jesus, not for himself or herself.

This happened at about four o'clock in the afternoon (the tenth hour; 1:39), which is implied by the custom of counting hours from sunrise to sunset. The time of day here specified was when the events of the day began to wind down and preparations began for the main meal of the day. The fact that they remained with Jesus the rest of that day suggests that they probably shared a meal together and may have even spent the night with Him.

What comes next belongs to the fourth day. On that day, one more person joined Jesus as His disciple: Simon Peter. This happened under the direct influence of his brother, Andrew (vv. 41–42). Each mention of Andrew in this Gospel has him bringing someone to Jesus (cf. 6:8; 12:22)—a mark of true discipleship.

1:43–51. Philip and Nathanael. On the fifth day of the week, before leaving the Jordan Valley to Galilee, Jesus invited Philip and Nathanael to follow Him. In the Synoptic Gospels, little is said about Philip. His name merely occurs in the list of the apostles of Jesus. In John's Gospel, however, Philip plays a more prominent role (6:5–8; 12:21–22; 14:8–9). Although he is Jewish, Philip's name is Greek (meaning "lover of horses"). He may have been chosen because he spoke Greek and because he was from Bethsaida (12:21), a city located in the predominantly Greek district of Gaulanitis. Bethsaida is also identified as the hometown of Andrew and Peter (1:44). Since the two brothers resided in Capernaum during Jesus's ministry (Mark 1:21, 29), the reference here is probably to the place where they grew up before leaving later in life, similar to Jesus being identified as from Nazareth, though he also moved to Capernaum (e.g., John 1:45; Matt. 2:23; 4:13; Mark 1:9; Luke 1:26; 2:4, 39).

Like Andrew, Philip found Nathanael and announced to him that he had found the Messiah (cf. John 1:41, 45). Since Nathanael is not mentioned in the Synoptic Gospels, he is thought to be identified as Bartholomew, who is always coupled with Philip in the list of the apostles (Matt. 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:14). Since Bartholomew actually means "son of Tholomaios," Nathanael might be his personal name. Despite being praised as a sincere and honest person, Nathanael was at first highly skeptical about the messiahship of Jesus because he could not conceive of the Messiah as coming from Nazareth (John 1:46), a town with little or no significance at all in Galilean political or religious geography (cf. 7:52). Rather than enter into a dispute, Philip simply encouraged his friend to "come and see" for himself (1:46). This invitation to evaluate the claims of Jesus was not just for Nathanael. It is also a recurring theme in John's Gospel, recording calls for individuals like Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, and Thomas to consider Jesus for themselves. Placed here at the beginning of the Gospel, it also serves as an invitation to the readers to also consider the testimony John set forth and to make a decision about Jesus for themselves.

What finally convinced Nathanael that Jesus was the One about whom Moses and the prophets wrote was Jesus's allusion to something that recently happened to him while he was under the fig tree. What exactly happened? The text does not say. If Nathanael was one of the followers of John the Baptist, perhaps he was considering the Baptist's declaration about Jesus (DA 140). Whatever it was, the realization of Jesus's supernatural knowledge along with the testimony of Philip removed Nathanael's doubts. He declared Jesus to be the Son of God and the King of Israel. While the reader will recognize the deeper meaning associated with calling Jesus the "Son of God," Nathanael used both titles in a messianic sense, as was common in Jesus's day. He acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah, the promised Davidic King (Ps. 2:7).

As impressed as Nathanael was, however, Jesus assured him that he would see far greater things. He would see "heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending" around Jesus (John 1:51). The promise, however, was not to Nathanael alone. The "you" in v. 51 is plural, implying that the vision is for all followers of Jesus. While the imagery is drawn from the vision Jacob witnessed while fleeing Beersheba, there is a significant difference. In Jacob's vision, Yahweh stood at the top of the heavenly ladder (Gen. 28:12–13, 17), while in the vision described to Nathanael, Jesus was the ladder linking heaven to earth (cf. John 1:51; cf. 3:13). The message is clear. Jesus is the one who unites heaven and earth. He is the one who had come to reveal the Father, and through Him God now had come down to earth to dwell among His people. It is not by chance that Jesus's first miracle appears as the next incident recorded in the Gospel.

2:1–12

The First Sign

This next incident appears as still part of the preparatory phase of Jesus's ministry insofar as it concerns more specifically the disciples rather than the public in general.

2:1–11. Wedding in Cana. The journey to Galilee must have occurred on the sixth day of the week, which is passed over in silence in the narrative. According to the inclusive mode of reckoning then current, "on the third day" (v. 1) brings us to day seven, that is, two days after Philip's and Nathanael's call. On that day, there was a wedding in Cana, the town where Nathanael lived (21:2). Although the identity of the couple being married is not stated, it was likely a relative of either Mary or Joseph since Jesus, His mother, and His disciples were all invited (DA 144). Learning that the wine had run out, Mary informed Jesus of the situation (2:3)—apparently expecting Him to intervene in some earthly manner and solve the problem. Jesus's reply is somewhat surprising: *ti emoi kai soi* (lit. "What to me and to you?"). This has been translated variously. Jesus also added, "My hour has not yet come" (v. 4). Although His words were not disrespectful, they contained a polite corrective. Why? As His ministry was beginning, Jesus reminded His mother that He had come to do the will of His heavenly Father (5:30; 8:29). His ministry would not be subject to the influence or agenda of anyone else—not even that of His own mother (cf. 7:6, 8). In this case, Jesus had already determined to act, but in a manner that was in accordance with His Father's will for His life—and in a way Mary would never have imagined.

In response to the situation at the wedding at Cana, Jesus performed His first miracle—or sign, as John says (2:11)—turning water into wine and saving the party from a premature and embarrassing end, and more significantly, demonstrating God's ability to turn what is ordinary in our lives into something extraordinary (see "The Seven Signs in the Fourth Gospel," p. 1417). The miracle is highly impressive; first because it required creative power and second because the six stone jars together held roughly between 120 and 180 gallons (450 and 680 L) of wine. There have been many attempts to find the meaning of the miracle, in which the stone jars, the number six, the water, and the wine are taken symbolically or even allegorically. According to v. 11, since Jesus revealed His glory in the miracle and His disciples believed in Him, the implication is that all the elements in the narrative must be taken at face value. In both the OT (Gen. 49:10–12; Is. 25:6; Joel 3:18; Amos 9:11–13) and other Jewish traditions, the coming of the Messiah was associated with the lavish outpouring of wine.

As for the nature of the wine produced by Jesus, whether fermented or unfermented, the following considerations strongly suggest the latter: (1) the Greek word for wine (*oinos*) by itself is inconclusive, as it may refer to both alcoholic wine and fresh grape juice; (2) there were already in the NT times several methods for preserving grape juice, so even if the miracle took place in springtime, about six months after vintage, there is no need to think that the wine that ran out was alcoholic; (3) the comment made by the master of the feast about inferior wine in John 2:10 was in reference to the general practice of the day—wine was mixed with water; (4) the good or best wine (v. 10) Jesus produced does not refer to high-quality alcoholic wine, but to the excellent quality of pure grape juice; (5) It is highly doubtful that Jesus would produce such a vast amount of intoxicating wine for the use of the guests—men, women, and even children—who were present at the feast; this would have made Him morally responsible for causing, extending, or perhaps even strengthening their intoxication (cf. Prov. 20:1; 23:29–32; 31:4–5; Hab. 2:5; Eph. 5:18).

2:12. Capernaum. After the wedding, Jesus and those with Him—His mother, brothers, and disciples—headed to Capernaum for a short visit. This is the first time this town is mentioned in the gospel story. According to the Synoptics, Jesus later moved from Nazareth to Capernaum (Matt. 4:13; Mark 2:1; cf. Matt. 9:1) and made it the center of most of His ministry. His mother is not mentioned again until the passion narrative, and His brothers (Matt. 13:55) were either younger sons of Joseph and Mary (cf. Matt. 1:25; Luke 2:7) or sons of Joseph's first marriage (see "The Brothers of Jesus," p. 1252). In the latter case, Joseph would have been a widower when he took Mary for his wife.

Coming back to John's chronological sequence, according to the Mishnah, a second-century compilation of rabbinic laws, the wedding of a virgin should take place on a Wednesday. If this particular regulation was already in force in Jesus's time—as some regulations were—and was followed in this occasion, Jesus's journey to Galilee would have started on Monday, after Philip's and Nathanael's call (John 1:43–51), and He effectively would have begun His ministry on a Sabbath with the call of Andrew and (supposedly) John, the first disciples (1:35–39). Peter would have joined Him on Sunday (1:41–42).

2:13—4:54

JESUS REVEALS HIMSELF TO ISRAEL

This whole section, together with the previous one (1:29—2:12), is entirely omitted in the Synoptics, which begin their account of Jesus's ministry only after the imprisonment of John the Baptist (Matt. 4:12; Mark 1:14–15; Luke 3:19–20). It covers approximately the first year of

The Seven Signs in the Fourth Gospel

Although Jesus performed countless miracles during His earthly ministry (John 20:30; 21:25), John chose to recount only seven specific miracles or, as he calls them, "signs" (*sēmeia*).

1. The Seven Miracles. (1) Water turned to wine at Cana (2:1–11); (2) healing the royal official's son in Cana (4:46–54); (3) healing the invalid at the pool in Bethesda (5:1–15); (4) feeding of the five thousand in Galilee (6:1–14); (5) walking on the water in Galilee (6:16–21); (6) curing the man born blind in Jerusalem (9:1–12); and (7) raising Lazarus from the dead (11:1–44). Why only these seven?

2. Significance of Seven. We do not know for sure why only seven, but the number seven seems to have been important since John also recounts seven "I am" sayings (6:35; 8:12; 10:7, 11–14; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1–5). He may have chosen seven since it is the symbolic number of perfection in Judaism, or it may indicate that Jesus is the Perfect One, the One to whom everything in the OT points. John refers to these miracles as signs because of their revelatory function. It was through signs that Jesus manifested His glory (2:11; 11:40; cf. 1:14) and made known His mission as Son of God and Israel's Messiah (6:14; 7:31; 12:18; 20:30–31). They were intended to validate His divine claims (3:2; 6:14, 29–30; 9:16; 10:25) and generate faith in Him as they reveal the nature of His kingdom (2:11, 23; 4:53; 9:35; 11:47–48; 14:11; 20:30–31; cf. 12:37).

Jesus's public ministry (in Judea, Samaria, and return to Galilee) after calling the first disciples.

2:13–25

The Cleansing of the Temple

The scene shifts first to Jerusalem and the temple, where Jesus celebrated the Passover, one of the main festivals of Jewish religious calendar.

2:13–17. The Father's House. The Passover was instituted at the Exodus to commemorate Israel's deliverance from Egypt (Ex. 12:1–28). It was celebrated in the spring and was immediately followed by the seven-day Festival of Unleavened Bread (Lev. 23:4–8). The first night of the Festival of Unleavened Bread was combined with the Passover (Ex. 12:6–11, 17–19); but by the first century A.D., the entire Feast of Unleavened Bread was commonly called "Passover" (cf. John 2:23; Luke 2:41–43; 22:1; Acts 12:3–4). John's Gospel makes reference to three Passovers (John 2:13; 6:4; 11:55), though another one seems to be required between the first and the second, which implies for Jesus's ministry a duration of approximately three and a half years.

All four Gospels have an account of the cleansing of the temple. The cleansing in the Synoptics occurs just before the crucifixion (Matt. 21:12–13; Mark 11:15–17; Luke 19:45–46), and in fact is the event that raises the fury of the Jewish leaders and leads to Jesus's execution (Matt. 26:61; 27:40; Mark 14:58; 15:29). John describes the cleansing at the beginning of Jesus's public ministry. Some scholars have been inclined to think that there was only one cleansing—the one reported by the Synoptics. If that were the case, they have argued, John's movement of this event to the beginning of his account of Jesus's ministry would be for theological rather than historical purposes. But major differences in wording, setting, and time suggest there were indeed two different and yet similar episodes.

The precise reasons behind Jesus's strong reaction in the temple court are not spelled out in the text. Sacrifices required animals, and not all who came to worship from far away could bring their offerings with them. Also, the payment of the temple tax was expected to be made only in the temple currency (Ex. 30:13–16). The people were expected to exchange their Roman coins for those of the temple. The selling of animals and the exchanging of money, therefore, could be considered quite normal in Jerusalem's life, especially during the main festivals. For Jesus, however, these things were incompatible with the nature of the temple and its worship, even if no dishonest gain was involved, as recounted in the Synoptics (e.g., Mark 11:17). The location in the temple where the incident took place was the outer court, also known as the court of the Gentiles, the largest section within the temple complex, which was accessible to almost everyone. That section, which was intended to be a place of meditation and prayer for all peoples (cf. Is. 56:7), had become a noisy marketplace. The lesson is clear: the ends do not justify the means, even if we are dealing with religious matters.

Jesus's attitude, however, also has an intense messianic connotation. The disciples saw His actions as the immediate fulfillment of Psalm 69:9 (John 2:17), but it may also relate to the prophecy of Zechariah 14:20–21, which indicates that the Messiah would make holy the temple and all in it, and there would no longer be traders in the house of the Lord. By His action, therefore, Jesus was not only seeking to reform the temple but also giving Israel clear signs of His messianic credentials and the new order He was inaugurating.

2:18–22. Raising the Temple in Three Days. The Synoptics have nothing equivalent to this section. After casting out those who were defiling the temple, Jesus was asked to validate His actions with a sign, implying that the Jews had also been able to discern in it some measure of messianic implication. Asking for signs was typical of Jews, as seeking out wisdom was among the Greeks (1 Cor. 1:22; cf. John 6:30–31; 7:31; Matt. 12:38–41; 16:4; Mark 8:11–12). Jesus enigmatically responded that they could "destroy this temple" and He would raise it up in three days (John 2:19). The temple had been under construction for forty-six years, since the time of Herod the Great, hence the "three days" sounded ridiculous (see "Herod's Temple," p. 1419). That must have been the end of the conversation, but the Evangelist explains that Jesus was referring to His own body (v. 21) and that after He rose from the dead the disciples remembered His words and were strengthened in their faith (v. 22).

2:23–25. Jesus's Knowledge of People. Every miracle Jesus performed was a display of His glory and a sign of His messianic claims (2:11; 3:2; 5:36; 20:30–31). The resurrection would be the confirmative proof, so to speak, of His messiahship (cf. Matt. 27:64) and would become the main pillar of the Christian faith (1 Cor. 15:12–19). However, nobody had to wait until the resurrection to believe in Him, and during that

Passover week the Evangelist says that many believed in His name on account of the signs He performed (John 2:23). Jesus, who knew human nature very well, was not impressed by their sudden excitement (cf. 6:64). Throughout Jesus's ministry many are said to have believed in Him (7:31; 8:30; 10:42; 11:45; 12:42), but only a few remained in their faith (5:38, 46–47; 6:36, 66; 7:5; 8:45–46; 10:24–26; 12:37–41). Perhaps this is why we find in John's Gospel an implicit appeal for a faith that transcends the transitory and selfish effect of signs (4:48–50; 20:29). Those in the gospel story who focused only on Jesus's signs, instead of looking through them to what they really revealed, were the same ones who tried to make Him a King (6:14–15). Jesus invites people to have faith in Him for who He is, not only because He can meet their needs or expectations (6:26–27).

3:1–21

Jesus and Nicodemus

The conversation with Nicodemus explains what was lacking in most people's faith and why Jesus did not entrust Himself to them (cf. 2:23–25).

3:1–10. The New Birth. Nicodemus is introduced as a Pharisee. Further, he was a leader of the Jews, meaning that he was a member of the Sanhedrin, the supreme court of Israel, which at the time of Jesus consisted of both priests (who were mostly Sadducees) and Pharisees (cf. 7:45–52; 11:47; Acts 23:6). Impressed by Jesus's signs, Nicodemus wanted to become better acquainted with Him, but Jesus went straight to the point, telling him that one must be born again [*anōthen*] to see the kingdom of God (John 3:3). It has long been observed that the word Jesus uses (*anōthen*) has a double meaning ("again" and "from above"), and that both meanings may be intended here. Nicodemus, however, took it in a literal way ("again"), probably because he found it difficult to apply Jesus's message of a new, spiritual ("from above") birth.

The Pharisees were indeed very religious people who adopted a strict observance of the law—both written and oral, the so-called

Herod's Temple

When Herod the Great became king of Judea, he undertook a number of massive building projects. His most ambitious and best-known project was the reconstruction of the Jewish temple complex—a project that took more than eighty years to complete. The project began in 19 B.C. Before work began on the temple and its surrounding structures, Herod first expanded the platform or foundation on which the temple complex stood. Since the temple was not originally built on a flat surface, huge retaining walls had to be built to support the dirt needed to expand the foundation.

The construction of the temple itself was even more complicated. Since the sacrificial services could not cease, the new temple had to be built while the older structure was still in use. Since the temple was holy, Herod could not hire local craftsman for the work. He had to train one thousand priests to do the work. The temple itself was completed in a year and a half, though work on the other buildings continued for decades. Designed to host more than 100,000 visitors during the Jewish festivals, the entire temple complex covered an area of roughly thirty-five acres (.14 sq. km)—making it the largest religious structure in the Roman world at the time.

According to the Jewish historian Josephus, when the temple was finally finished in A.D. 63, just three years before the outbreak of the Jewish War with Rome that would end with its destruction in A.D. 70, eighteen thousand workers were left unemployed.

The Jews at the temple who questioned Jesus after He had cleansed it at the beginning of His ministry claimed that it had taken forty-six years to construct what had been built by that time (John 2:20). If the Jews' statement is accurate and the forty-six years are reckoned from the time when the work on the temple commenced, then the date connected to this event in John's Gospel would be A.D. 28—about six months after Jesus was baptized. This incidental remark would therefore testify to the historical accuracy of placing the cleansing of the temple in the Gospel of John at this point in Jesus's ministry.

"tradition of the elders" (Matt. 15:2; Mark 7:3, 5)—and of purification rituals (cf. Mark 7:1–5). They separated themselves from common people (cf. John 7:49) and even thought that God was well pleased with their exclusive religious behavior (cf. Luke 18:10–12). Nicodemus's evasive question led Jesus to make clear that He was talking about a birth from "water and the Spirit" (John 3:5), which could mean only moral purification and inner transformation by the power of the Spirit (cf. 1:12–13). The church has always seen here a reference to Christian baptism, which symbolizes both (cf. Acts 2:38; Rom. 6:3–14; Titus 3:5). The point Jesus demonstrated was that those who are born only of the flesh cannot escape the limitations imposed by the flesh; this can happen only through the Spirit.

Driven into a corner, Nicodemus tried to defend himself with a question that served only to embarrass him even more (John 3:9). The teaching about the new birth, or the renewal by the Spirit, should not have been strange to Nicodemus (e.g., Ps. 51:10; Ezek. 18:31; 36:26–27). His problem was not lack of understanding but reluctance to apply Jesus's words to himself. To some extent, it seems easier for God to change a bad person into a good person than a good person into a new creature (cf. Mark 2:17).

3:11–15. Serpent in the Wilderness. Jesus was not talking about theoretical things but factual information. This only served to increase Nicodemus's embarrassment, for up to that moment he was not showing any willingness to receive Jesus's testimony. The new birth is elementary ("earthly things"), and by stumbling over such a basic point, Nicodemus indicated that he was not ready for further instruction about God's kingdom ("heavenly things"), which was available only through Jesus (John 18:37; cf. 8:14; 9:39; 12:46–47), not through Abraham, Moses, or other bygone saints who were believed in contemporary Judaism to have ascended into heaven and to have received special revelations on divine mysteries (3:11–13).

Jesus turned back to the new birth (vv. 14–15) and explained it by means of an object lesson, a story with which Nicodemus was certainly familiar since childhood: as Moses lifted up the bronze serpent in the wilderness to cure the Israelites (Num. 21:4–9), so would Jesus be lifted up (cf. John 12:32) to cure fallen humanity. In the final analysis, it is Jesus's death on the cross that makes the new birth possible (1:12–13). All that is necessary is to look at Him in faith.

3:16–18. Mission of the Son. What follows from v. 16 through v. 21 is a reflection on the meaning of Jesus's final words to Nicodemus. This passage probably records the words of the Evangelist himself rather than Jesus, as the cross and Jesus's mission as a whole appear here as in the past. There are also terms and expressions that are distinctly Johannine as they are found in the writings of John but not on the lips of Jesus: "only" (vv. 16, 18; cf. 1:14, 18; 1 John 4:9), "believes" in Him (His name) (John 3:18; cf. 1:12; 2:23; 1 John 3:23; 5:13), and to act according to "the truth" (John 3:21; cf. 1 John 1:6).

John opens his comments on the significance of what Jesus had just said (John 3:14–15) with a statement that sums up better than any other in this Gospel the purpose of Jesus's coming into the world. God's love is so wondrous that He gave the best He could: His only and beloved Son (cf. Mark 1:11; 9:7). It is also so immense that it embraces all humanity; nobody is excluded (cf. John 1:29; 4:39–42; 6:33, 51). And it is so powerful that its effects will last forever; the life it engenders will never end (cf. 4:14; 6:40; 10:28). God's love is not compulsory, that is, it can be enjoyed only when we respond with faith in Jesus (3:16; cf. 6:40; 7:38; 8:24; 11:40). Eternal life is a gift from God, but we can accept or reject it. In case of rejection, the inexorable result is to "perish" (3:16; cf. 3:36; 8:24). There is no other possibility.

Since Jesus came to save the world, not to condemn it (cf. 12:47), those who believe in Him are not condemned. On the other hand, those who do not believe in Him are already condemned (3:18). This verse does not teach that we cannot lose salvation (or condemnation). It only highlights the fact that the verdict on the final judgment depends on our present decision concerning Jesus Christ (cf. 5:22–29). In matters of salvation, the only time we can really count on is the present (cf. Acts 22:16; Heb. 3:7–8, 13, 15; 4:6–7). The past is gone and the future may never come.

3:19–21. Coming to the Light. In John's Gospel, the contrast between light and darkness advances the topic of condemnation. Christ is the true Light who came into the world to enlighten everyone (cf. John 1:9; 8:12; 12:46). If light is life (1:4), then darkness means death, not biological death per se but death as a result of God's judgment (cf. 3:36; 6:53; 1 John 5:12). Biological death is not a problem for God. Darkness in John is a synonym for eternal death. The only prospect for those who reject the gift of God's love, which is eternal life, is to perish (eternally). And those who perish will in fact reap only what they have sown because in practical terms they loved darkness rather than light (John 3:19). Eternal death is only the result of their own choice, and therein lies their condemnation.

People hate light and love darkness because of the evil deeds of the human heart. They reject light because they do not want to have their evil deeds exposed. The process may be painful, yet they are inexcusable because exposing the bad deeds is part of the healing process (cf. 3:14–16). On the other hand, those who live by the truth simply come to the light (v. 21). They do not fear being reproved because their deeds are done in God and this is what the light will reveal. Nicodemus is an example of someone who dwelt in spiritual darkness but did the right thing in coming to Jesus. In doing so, he moved from darkness to light (1:4, 5; 3:19–21; 8:12; cf. 9:5). Further along, the Gospel presents the opposite in the case of Judas, for he moved from light to darkness (13:30).

3:22–36

John's Final Witness

John the Baptist's final words recorded in this Gospel provide further evidence on behalf of Jesus.

3:22–26. Issue of Purification. After the Passover, Jesus and His disciples left Jerusalem for the country districts of Judea, where they baptized (v. 22). The Evangelist will make it clear that Jesus Himself did not baptize but His disciples did (4:2). This is the only reference in the Gospels to the disciples performing baptisms, a practice that was certainly inherited from John the Baptist. John's baptism was a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3; cf. Acts 13:24; 19:4), and so was (and still is) Christian baptism (Acts 2:38; 22:16; Eph. 5:25–27; Titus 3:5–7). In other words, John's baptism was a spiritual and moral baptism, not a ceremonial one. It was related to sins, not to cultic impurity, and was radically different from all other first-century Jewish washings, including proselyte baptism, the baptism of Gentiles converted to Judaism.

By this time, several months had elapsed since Jesus's baptism by John. John himself continued his baptismal ministry, though he had now moved from Bethany on the other side of the Jordan (cf. John 1:28) to Aenon near Salim (3:23). This overlapping between John's and Jesus's ministries is known only through John's Gospel, as the fourth Evangelist was careful in pointing out that these events occurred before John was imprisoned (3:24; cf. Matt. 4:12; Mark 1:14; Luke 3:19–20).

What prompted John's statement about Jesus was a discussion about purification between a certain Jew (according to some manuscripts, a group of Jews) and the disciples of John. Since several Jewish groups bathed every day in cold water for cultic reasons, John's moral baptism was open to misunderstandings by Jewish observers. When his disciples came to John, the conversation took a curious twist and ended up being about Jesus, whose baptismal ministry had already become more popular than John's. The reaction on the part of John's disciples seems to have involved some measure of envy and disappointment, but instead of stirring up rivalry, John maintained his resolute support for Jesus.

3:27–30. Friend of the Bridegroom. John's answer was an attempt to justify Jesus's success. It is not clear whether he was referring to Jesus or to himself when he told his disciples that a person can receive only what has been provided from heaven (John 3:27). If fewer people were coming to him—or if more people were coming to Jesus—it was because God willed it so (cf. 19:11) and that was exactly what God intended in relation to both. To demonstrate his argument, John the Baptist reminded his disciples of what he had already said to the Jews (1:19–28): he was not the Messiah, implying that Jesus was, and he had been sent as His forerunner. Then he uses an illustration taken from the wedding context to make his point: Jesus is the bridegroom, whereas he is only the bridegroom's friend. By describing himself as the friend of the bridegroom, John emphasized his subordinate position as well as the role he performed in the beginnings of Jesus's ministry. In a Jewish wedding, the bridegroom's friend was the equivalent of what we would call today the best man. He assisted the bridegroom before and during the wedding in everything and even acted as a kind of master of ceremonies. Having fulfilled that role, it was time to leave the scene, for the bridegroom must increase whereas the friend must decrease (3:30). This is an enduring example of humility and sense of mission. The faithful messengers of God will never seek honor for themselves.

3:31–36. Primacy of the Son. Since the tone of vv. 31–36 is similar to that of vv. 16–21, it is reasonable to assume that the voice here is also the Evangelist's, not John the Baptist's, though it was John the Baptist's testimony that triggered this new reflection on Jesus and His mission. Even if John the Baptist was divinely commissioned to be the precursor of the Messiah, he had an earthly origin and so could speak only of earthly things. He had received divine revelations (1:33–34), but he did not have the same firsthand knowledge of heavenly things that Jesus did. Jesus was above all, including John. The words spoken by the One whom God had sent are the words of God, for it is not by measure that God gives Him the Spirit (3:34). The receiver of the Spirit is not identified, but the context, including the next verse, identifies the receiver as Jesus.

The love the Father has for the Son lies at the heart of the Son's mission in the world (10:17; cf. 5:20; 15:9; 17:23–24, 26). It is because of God's love that the Son has come. Consequently, the fact that the Father loves the Son makes clear that the mission of the Son is also that of the Father (5:43; 7:28; 8:42; 14:10). Therefore, those who believe in the Son can already enjoy the gift of eternal life from the Father (3:16; 6:27, 33, 40). Those who resist the gospel message engage in an act of insolence (cf. Acts 14:1–2; Rom. 15:31). Therefore, those who maintain an insolent attitude toward the Son cut themselves off from the atoning benefits of His mission and remain fully exposed to God's wrath (cf. Rom. 2:2–11). This is the notion of retribution, which is integral to God's moral universe.

4:1–42
Jesus's Visit to Samaria

Having finished His journey to Judea, Jesus returned to Galilee through Samaria, where He spent two days, and many people believed in Him.

4:1–6. Jacob's Well. The scene next changes from the Judean countryside to the region of Samaria. The reason is that the Pharisees, who had serious reservations about John (John 1:19, 24), were beginning to show opposition to Jesus. Wishing to avoid an early escalation of opposition, Jesus decided to leave Judea and return to Galilee. The shortest route available was through the semihostile Samaritan territory, though most Jews took the longer route through the Jordan Valley. On His way north, Jesus stopped at the village of Sychar, near the field that Jacob gave to his son Joseph (cf. Gen. 33:19; 48:22; Josh. 24:32); Jacob's Well, which still exists, was located there (John 4:6). Tired from the long journey, Jesus sat beside the well about noontime. His tiredness and thirst (cf. v. 7) are indicators of His genuine humanity (cf. 1:14; 1 John 4:2; 2 John 7).

4:7–19. Samaritan Woman. While Jesus's disciples were in town obtaining food, a local woman came to draw water from the well where Jesus was resting. Jesus asked her to draw some water for Him so He could quench His thirst (John 4:7). Women usually would not come to draw water alone and especially not at that time of the day (the sixth hour, which was noon; v. 6). This suggests that she was deliberately trying to avoid running into anyone, likely due to a sense of public shame for her immoral life (4:16–29). Jesus's request surprised her. Not only was it not customary for a man to talk to a woman he did not know in public, but Jews did not associate with Samaritans for fear of ritual defilement. This mentality can be seen in claims from later rabbis who taught that all the daughters of the Samaritans menstruate from birth and are therefore in a perpetual state of ceremonial uncleanness.

The Samaritan people were part Israelite, descended from a mix of foreign peoples brought in by the Assyrians after the fall of Samaria (see 2 Kin. 17:24–34). They adopted the religion of Israel, which was a corrupted version because of Jeroboam's golden calves (1 Kin. 12:26–33; 2 Kin. 17:7–23); however, they were monotheists and accepted the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Hebrew Bible) with the expectation of the coming Messiah (John 4:25), whom they called *taheb* (the "restorer" or "returning one"). The religion of the Samaritans was corrupt (based, in part, on the religion of the Northern Kingdom, for corruption was the reason they went into exile; 2 Kin. 17:34–41), which meant that the Samaritans had to be avoided and thus had no share whatsoever in the covenantal mercies of Israel.

Jesus directed the woman's attention to Himself. Had she known who He was, she would have asked Him for "living water" (John 4:10). She assumed that by living water Jesus was referring to spring water or running water as distinct from water in a well or cistern (cf. Jer. 2:13). Jacob's Well, to be sure, was fed by a fresh spring, but that could not be the source of water about which Jesus was talking. Even today the well is over one hundred feet (30 meters) deep, and Jesus had no bucket to draw water from it. She saw Jesus as just another Jew, so her question about whether He was greater than the patriarch Jacob expected a negative response.

Later in the Gospel, living water is explained in terms of the Holy Spirit (John 7:38–39), and the meaning here has additional nuances. In the OT water is a symbol of God's salvation (Pss. 36:9; 42:1; Is. 12:3; 44:3), and people were summoned to come to the waters and drink freely (Is. 55:1). More importantly, by offering water that would quench thirst forever, Jesus was clearly making a messianic claim. It was in the messianic era that salvation would be extended to all and nobody would be thirsty or hungry again (Is. 49:8, 10; cf. 35:7; Ezek. 47:1–12; Zech. 13:1; 14:8). The woman, however, still failed to understand Jesus. Taking His words literally, she exclaimed that she would gladly welcome an unending supply of water because she would no longer need to come to the well (John 4:15). While Jesus was talking about spiritual realities, she was thinking about material things—the same mistake Nicodemus had made (3:4–8).

In order to open her eyes to the spiritual truths He wanted to share with her, Jesus took the conversation to a different level by delving into her personal life. Her life was a relational mess. She immediately realized that the One before her was not an ordinary person. At this stage of the conversation she concluded Jesus must be a prophet (with an indefinite article)—one favored with supernatural knowledge (v. 19; e.g., 1 Sam. 9:19; 2 Kin. 4:27; Luke 7:39; Eph. 3:5).

4:20–26. True Worship. Uncomfortable with the direction of the conversation, the woman attempted to change the subject to a less personal topic—religion. The Samaritans worshiped on Mount Gerizim, not far from Jacob's Well. In order for the Samaritans to justify their claim biblically, they expanded (in their version of the Pentateuch) the tenth commandment of the Decalogue (after Ex. 20:17 and Deut. 5:21) with a directive to build an altar on Mount Gerizim and reworded Deut. 12:5 to read "has chosen" instead of "chooses" or "will choose." They also developed a tradition that both Abraham's offering of Isaac and his meeting with Melchizedek took place on that mountain. In fact, at about 400 B.C., the Samaritans, who refused to worship in Jerusalem, built their own temple on Mount Gerizim. This temple was destroyed by the Jews in 128 B.C. Yet even today, Samaritans continue to have religious services (and even sacrifices) on their holy mountain.

Jesus transformed the topic that the woman believed would be a safe diversion into an issue of personal and spiritual relevance. The issue of geography, Jesus said, would soon be irrelevant, for more important than *where* people worship is *how* they do it. True worship is governed not by human preferences or traditions but by God's own nature. The reference to the Spirit harkens back to Jesus's dialogue with Nicodemus (John 3:5–6): only those who are born from the Spirit and live no longer under the constraints of the flesh can worship God in spirit. The term "truth" in turn points to the Evangelist's first reflection on the meaning of Jesus's mission (3:21): only those who live according to the truth can worship God in truth. Jesus was in principle announcing the end of the sacrificial system.

Though agreeing with Jesus, the woman tried to avoid the personal challenge that He placed before her by expressing the conviction that when the Messiah came, he would clarify all these issues. According to some translations, Jesus made the most explicit admission of His messiahship before His trial by applying the divine epithet "I AM" (Ex. 3:14; cf. John 8:24, 28, 58; 13:19) to Himself, as in His words later in this Gospel (see "The 'I Am' Sayings," p. 1430). The Greek here is *egō eimi, ho lalōn soi* (lit. "I am—the one speaking to you"); it is similar to the words of God in Isaiah 52:6 (John 4:26; cf. Mark 14:61–62). On the other hand, Jesus could simply have been indicating that He, the One speaking to her, was the Messiah. In either case, Jesus was affirming His divine identity as the Christ. It is significant that this admission occur ed not in Judea or Galilee but in Samaria. For many Jews the term "Messiah" carried so much political and military connotations that it could not be used without the risk of being misunderstood (cf. John 6:14–15, 26; Mark 8:29–30).

4:27–30. The Woman's Witness. The disciples' astonishment at finding Jesus talking to a woman reflects the conventions of the day. Because of a strict interpretation of Deuteronomy 23:9 that required God's followers to keep themselves from evil, some Pharisees would close their eyes whenever they passed by a woman in the street. They believed that whoever looked at a woman would eventually fall into transgression. According to some rabbis, men should not talk much with a woman, even if it was with his own wife at home. The rationale was that it would be a misuse of time that could otherwise be used to study the law. Jesus, however, was not controlled by such an ideology. He never shut His eyes to anyone. He never despised anyone (cf. Acts 10:34), no matter what the Jewish religious leaders thought of Him (Mark 2:15–17; Luke 15:2; cf. Mark 6:34). He came "to seek and to save" the lost (Luke 19:10), and nothing would prevent Him from doing that.

Besides standing in sharp contrast with that of Jesus, the disciples' attitude also contrasts with that of the woman herself, who rushed to Sychar to share the good news with the villagers (John 4:28; cf. Luke 19:39–40). The disciples still lacked the apostolic sense of mission, perhaps even the basic missionary spirit expected from every believer. Therefore, Jesus tried to teach them a lesson concerning the fields and the harvest (John 4:35–38). In her enthusiasm, the woman was able to bring many people to Jesus. "Every true disciple is born into the kingdom of God as a missionary" (DA 196).

4:31–38. Samaritan Believers. Jesus took advantage of the disciples' request for Him to teach them about His priorities, which also were to become their priorities (cf. 13:20; 17:18; 20:21). They not only lacked a sense of mission but also had a shallow understanding of Jesus's own mission. The Synoptics (and Acts) inform readers that even after Jesus's death on the cross, the hopes of the disciples concerning Him as the Messiah were politically oriented. They expected Him to reinstate the Davidic dynasty and free the land from Roman occupation (Mark 10:35–37; Luke 24:21; Acts 1:6). Jesus, however, came to save His people and the world, and nothing would distract Him from fulfilling His divine mission. His food, He said to His disciples, was to "do the will" of God, who had sent Him to finish His work (John 4:34; cf. 5:30; 6:38–40; 10:17–18; 17:4). Jesus came with a definite purpose in mind, and it oriented His whole existence (8:50; 9:4–5; 12:49–50; 14:31).

In the Holy Land, four months elapsed between the end of sowing (December) and the beginning of the harvest (April). The statement concerning the four months until the harvest (John 4:35) may have been a common saying indicating that things were to be expected not immediately but in due time. Jesus, nevertheless, asked the disciples to raise their eyes and see that the world was already ripe for harvest. Though the apostolic mission would be officially inaugurated at Pentecost (7:39; cf. Acts 1:8; 2:32–33; Eph. 4:7–10), Jesus was trying to infuse the disciples with the same sense of urgency He had (John 9:4–5; 17:18). There was to be no delay. The sowers had just finished their work—a possible reference to all those who came before them, such as the prophets, including John the Baptist, or perhaps to Jesus Himself, whose life would be sacrificed (the sowing) in order to bear fruit (the reaping; cf. 12:23–24). Now the time was coming for the reapers to do their part. God was allowing the disciples to enter into the labor of others and to reap what they themselves had not sown, yet they should rejoice because the wages for gathering people would be eternal life (4:36).

4:39–42. Savior of the World. The arrival of the Samaritans brings the story to its climax by exemplifying what Jesus had just told the disciples. The fact that many from the village believed in Him demonstrates that the fields were indeed ready for harvest. The woman's witnessing was effective not only because of the many who came with her but particularly because they had their own personal experience with Jesus. She had told them to come and see for themselves (v. 29), knowing that they would not base their religion simply on her conviction. They realized that Jesus was not only a good Man who lived an exemplary life, not only a Teacher with an interesting doctrine, not only a Prophet with a special message. He was the One who came to give His life for the life of the world (3:16; 6:33, 51; 10:11).

4:43–54

Jesus's Return to Galilee

After spending two days in Samaria, Jesus resumed His journey to Galilee, where He was well received by those who had seen Him at the Passover celebration in Jerusalem.

4:43–45. His Own Country. John's comment in v. 44 seems disconnected from both the preceding and the following verses. In order to explain Jesus's journey to Galilee, the Evangelist quoted the familiar saying of Jesus that "a prophet has no honor in his own country." How could this have been a reason for going to Galilee (v. 43) if Jesus was from Galilee and was well received when He arrived there (v. 45)? If the verse is interpreted in light of the Synoptics, the difficulty disappears. It is important to note that the Greek word translated as "country" (*patris*) can also refer to one's "hometown." In the other Gospels we learn that Jesus used this saying after being rejected in Nazareth, where He was raised (cf. Matt. 13:57; Mark 6:4; Luke 4:24). In this case, what John 4:44 seems to imply is that on arriving in Galilee, Jesus did not want to go to His hometown because He would not have been welcomed there. He chose instead to visit Cana again (cf. John 4:46), which was only nine miles (14 km) north of Nazareth.

4:46–54. The Bureaucrat's Son. While Jesus was in Cana, a bureaucrat came from Capernaum and begged Him to heal his son. Since Capernaum was roughly sixteen miles (26 km) away, the journey to Cana would have taken the man nearly an entire day. The Greek (*basilikos*) actually suggests that this man was a "royal official"—one who served the king, as most translations indicate. Jesus referenced the need to see signs and wonders before belief (v. 48). At the man's insistence, Jesus healed his son right away from the distance. This is Jesus's second sign recorded in this Gospel (v. 54; cf. 2:11; see "The Seven Signs in the Fourth Gospel," p. 1417). In the Synoptics, we also read of a Roman centurion who came to Jesus because his servant was sick and close to death, and Jesus also healed him from a distance (Matt. 8:5–13). But despite the similarities, these seem to be two distinct episodes. According to the Synoptics, Jesus also performed a third healing from a distance, that of the Syrophoenician woman's daughter (Matt. 15:21–28; Mark 7:24–30).

The most remarkable thing about the Johannine story of the bureaucrat's son is the lesson Jesus taught him. When Jesus spoke about unbelief before sight, He was probably revealing what was inside that man's heart. But instead of going with him, Jesus simply told him to go and that his son would live (John 4:50). This certainly was a difficult test. Jesus was asking him to believe in Him without a sign. Jesus does not always give what we would like to receive, even if we ask in faith, but faith is the necessary condition for us to receive.

5:1—6:71

THE RISING OF JEWISH HOSTILITIES

Chapters 5 and 6 occupy a pivotal place in the development of the Gospel's drama. The self-revelation of Jesus became even more challenging because of the ever-increasing opposition on the part of some of the Jews, particularly their leaders, both in Jerusalem (chap. 5) and in Galilee (chap. 6). The strong note of unbelief and defection at the end of these chapters (6:66) contributes to set a tone persisting through the closing of Jesus's public ministry (chap. 12).

5:1–18

The Third Sign

Jesus was back in Jerusalem, where He performed the third sign recorded in the Gospel of John, namely, the healing of a man at Bethesda on the Sabbath.

5:1–9a. Healing at Bethesda. Jesus went up to Jerusalem once again during one of the feasts; the second time since His baptism (cf. 2:13). The feast is not identified, though it could have been Passover. While walking through Jerusalem, Jesus stopped at the pool of Bethesda, located north of the temple compound, just outside the city walls. There were two large trapezoidal pools of different sizes at Bethesda that were aligned north and south of each other and surrounded on four sides by porticos, with an additional portico across the middle. It was probably in the shade of these porticos that Jesus found a man who had been sick for thirty-eight years. We are not informed about the nature of his sickness, but the way he was healed suggests he was either paralyzed or lame (cf. vv. 6–9). This man and many others accepted the common superstitious belief that the water was invested with miraculous healing properties and that the first person to step into the pool when the waters were supernaturally stirred would be healed. Verses 3b–4 are found in Greek manuscripts only from the fifth century onwards, making it possible that they were not part of John's original text, but were added in order to explain the man's comment in v. 7.

As for the stirring up of the waters, as recent archaeological research has shown, this was probably caused by the movement of water in the channel between the northern and southern pools. At any rate, Jesus healed the man by the power of His word and not by helping him to get into the pool before anyone else. After all, how could Jesus have validated the distorted picture of God implied in such a superstitious healing process? The common belief represented in vv. 3b–4 suggests that the healings at Bethesda rested on the principle of the survival of the fittest; the more selfish and stronger the person, the more probable he or she would get into the pool first, running over those who could not help themselves and actually preventing the most needy from being healed. God does not work that way.

5:9b-18. Conflict over the Sabbath. Jesus performed this miracle on the Sabbath. After seeing the man carrying his sleeping mat, the Jewish leaders immediately reacted. For them, this was a violation of the Sabbath—not of the biblical commandment of the Sabbath, however, as carrying a mat did not involve secular work, much less commercial interest (cf. Neh. 13:15; Jer. 17:21-22). It was a violation of regulations developed by the rabbis. According to Jewish tradition, there were thirty-nine classes of work that were forbidden on the Sabbath. Among them was carrying a sleeping mat or a couch, except in cases when a living person was on it. The Jews interrogated the man first, and soon they targeted Jesus (John 5:16). This is the first open hostility against Jesus recorded in this Gospel.

For the Jews, if the man was guilty of carrying his sleeping mat on the Sabbath, then Jesus was also guilty for healing him. The rabbis taught that healing on the Sabbath was prohibited except when life was in danger, and they were fairly flexible in their interpretation. This, of course, was not the case here; the man could well have waited until the next day. Jesus, however, was not guided by the tradition of the elders (cf. Mark 3:1-6; Luke 13:10-17; 14:1-6). He defended His action saying that both He and His Father had always been working (John 5:17). There are two important points here: God's continuous work and Jesus's divine authority. If God could work on the Sabbath, so could Jesus, on account of His equality with God, a claim the Jews did not miss (cf. v. 18). That God worked on the Sabbath was something that even the Jews admitted. Without God's unceasing care, the whole universe would collapse.

But the words of Jesus in this passage are related not only to God's sustaining activity but also to His redemptive work on behalf of fallen humanity. God is continuously engaged in the work of redemption, and this is what Jesus also came to do (3:16-17; 10:10; 12:27, 46-47). In other words, the Sabbath as a divine institution is not incompatible with Christ's work of redemption (5:19-20; 10:25, 32, 37-38; 14:11). The miracle at Bethesda included more than physical healing. Later on, Jesus said to the man that he should cease his sinful ways lest something worse happen to him (5:14; cf. Matt. 9:2; Luke 17:19; 18:42). More than one year later, when Jesus went back to Jerusalem for a third time (John 7:1-2, 10; cf. 6:4), the healing at Bethesda on the Sabbath was still an issue, and for the first time in John's Gospel it is stated that the Jewish leaders were trying to kill Him (7:9-25; cf. 8:37, 40; 12:10; 18:31).

5:19-47
Jesus Explains His Mission

The strong reaction of the Jewish leaders (v. 18) led Jesus to further elaborate on His relationship with the Father and the meaning of His divine mission.

5:19-24. Jesus's Unity with the Father. Jesus explained the healing at Bethesda in terms of His Father's and His own joint work (v. 17). This is what lies at the foundation of the important discourse that begins with v. 19. The first part of the discourse takes up the charge that Jesus was making Himself equal to God (v. 18). He did not reject the accusation. On the contrary, He continued to put Himself next to God in that He continued to refer to God as Father and to Himself as His Son (cf. 10:29-33, 36). What He did reject, though, and with great emphasis (5:19), was the insinuation that He was assigning to Himself the authority and freedom that belonged only to the Father in the context of Jesus's earthly mission. In other words, making Himself equal to God does not mean denying His submission to the Father during the incarnation. While fulfilling His mission, Jesus always acted in complete dependence and obedience to the Father (4:34; 5:30; 6:38; 10:25, 32, 37; 12:49; 14:10, 24; 17:4). To do otherwise would have meant giving up His unity with the Father and betraying the Father's love. In fact, all Jesus's actions were but an exact reproduction of the Father's actions because of His essential unity with Him (cf. 8:38; 10:38; 14:10-11). So two apparently conflicting ideas are present here: equality and submission—equality in nature (cf. 10:30; 17:21) and subordination at the functional level, the level of mission. As God in human flesh, Jesus voluntarily assumed a subordinate position in relation to the Father (cf. 14:28). Both essential equality and functional subordination are central to Johannine Christology and should be kept together. Neither of them should be underemphasized.

The argument, then, moves on to the issue of judgment (5:21-24), but still against the background of the healing at Bethesda. Giving life is a prerogative of God the Father (cf. Deut. 32:39; 1 Sam. 2:6; 2 Kin. 5:7; Job 33:4; Is. 42:5). No Jew would have questioned this. And it is exactly because Jesus is the Son of God that He is entitled to do whatever the Father does, including imparting life (cf. John 4:14; 6:33, 41, 51, 58, 63). So in John's Gospel the man's healing is put into the context of Jesus's divine prerogatives. And in a sense, this was an act of judgment for two reasons: contemporary Jewish theology saw sickness as a sign of divine retribution for sins—that is, God's judgment against sin (cf. 9:2)—and Jesus's works of healing were redemptive (5:14; cf. Matt. 9:2; Luke 17:19; 18:42). Perhaps this explains why in the Gospel of John, life—which always means eternal life—is mostly a present reality (John 3:36; 5:24-25; 6:40, 47; 10:10; cf. 1 John 5:11-12). In order to impart life, Jesus was both exercising and anticipating the final divine judgment on the basis of His divine prerogative. If life can be bestowed now, the verdict of the final judgment is given now. This does not undermine the reality of a future judgment before God, as is evident from other passages (e.g., Matt. 16:27; Rom. 2:6-11; 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:10). It merely means that believers will not experience condemnation in the judgment. Condemnation or salvation depends entirely on our decision with respect to Jesus (John 3:17-20; 5:22-24, 38-40; 12:46-48). What really matters, in God's judgment, is our relationship with Jesus.

5:25-29. The Son Has Life in Himself. Again, with great emphasis, Jesus confirmed His previous statement that it is on account of His essential equality with the Father that He is entitled to carry on His saving ministry and to bring life and judgment to the world. Most first-century Jews believed in resurrection and eternal life, but always in connection with the age to come as a future, eschatological blessing (cf. 11:23-24). For Jesus, however, the new age had already begun. Through Him the future is here. Not that He is blurring the distinction between present and future, transitory life and eternal life, but that through His redemptive activities, death as the everlasting condemnation for sin (cf. 8:24) has been superseded and eternal life can—in principle—be anticipated here and now irrespective of what will happen to our transitory life (cf. 6:40; 8:51-52; 11:25-26).

The same applies to the concept of judgment. The emphasis also falls on its present aspect. This does not mean, however, that John has done away with the concepts of eschatological resurrection and final judgment—not at all. Though his Gospel here manifests more concern with the present than with the future, the present is only an anticipation of the future, which means that those who die before the closing of this age will not be forgotten. They will hear the voice of the Son of Man, and doers of good will resurrect to a never-ending life, and evildoers will receive their final condemnation (*kriseōs*; 5:28-29; see "Son of Man," p. 1428). These verses do not teach salvation by works but simply that at the final judgment, one's actions will be the indisputable evidence of a decision already made in this life (cf. 3:19-21; 6:39-40, 44, 54).

The title "Son of God" or "God's Son" in this context (5:25) is noteworthy. This is the first of its three occurrences in John's Gospel on the lips of Jesus (the others are 10:36; 11:4), though His use of the term "Son" alone to describe His relationship with the Father occurs thirteen times, most of them in this very chapter (5:19[2x], 20, 21, 22, 23[2x], 26; 6:40; 8:36; 14:13; 17:1[2x]; cf. 1:18; 3:16-17, 35-36). By referring to Himself as "Son of God," Jesus reaffirmed even more explicitly His essential equality with the Father as the basis for His works of redemption (cf. 5:17-18). The healing at Bethesda on the Sabbath was in full accord with His divine prerogatives, as was His entire life-giving ministry. If He can bestow life it is because, like the Father, He has life in Himself (v. 26). That is to say, the Father is self-existent, and so is the Son (cf. 8:24, 28, 58).

5:30-39. Witness of the Father to Jesus. Jesus's saving activities could be contested by human observers. From the perspective of the interpretation of Jewish tradition, He was a blasphemer and transgressor of the Sabbath. Nevertheless, He was fully conscious of the legitimacy of His actions in that He never sought to do His own will but only the will of the One who sent Him. And since He came from the Father Himself, His actions were in full harmony with what He had heard directly from the Father. There were no intermediaries such as Abraham and Moses (cf. John 1:17; 6:31-32; 7:19; 8:56-58). Jesus was greater than them because He had firsthand knowledge of God's eternal mysteries. Notwithstanding, He would not testify on His own behalf, neither would He rely on John the Baptist's testimony only (5:31, 33; cf. 1:19-27). Jesus had in His favor a testimony much greater than John's, and that was the testimony of the Father Himself, which was fully visible through His works (5:36-37). Words could be contested, but the divine works of the Son were tangible evidence that the Father had sent Him (10:25, 32, 37-38; 14:11; cf. 15:24), though the Father Himself had never been heard or seen (1:18; 6:46; 1 John 4:12; cf. Col. 1:15;

1 Tim. 1:17; 6:16). God's own Word (the Scriptures of the OT) had been neglected. The Greek of John 5:39 is ambiguous; it could be read as indicative, "You study the Scriptures," or as imperative, "Search the Scriptures." While the latter emphasis is an important part of Jesus's teachings, including in this passage (John 5:46; Matt. 13:52; Luke 16:29–31; 24:27), the former nuance better fits the context (John 5:45). The Jews were constantly searching the Scriptures, hoping to find in them eternal life, but had the search been more diligent and met with true belief, they would have been able to see Jesus in the sacred pages. The Scriptures, like His works, testify about Him. Jesus was talking not only about messianic prophecies but also about His very presence in the OT as the God of Israel (cf. 1:1–5, 11, 14–18, 45; 5:46; 8:56; 12:41).

5:40–47. Unbelief of the Jewish Leaders. Despite God's witnesses on behalf of Jesus through His own works and the Holy Scriptures, not to mention John the Baptist's witness, the Jewish leaders were unwilling to come to Jesus to have life (v. 40). The problem was the human will. If the heart is not willing, belief is not possible no matter how strong the evidence may be. The Jews were ready to praise Jesus for His mighty works (2:23; 3:1–2; 7:31), but He knew that they did not have the true love of God in their hearts (cf. 2:24–25). Their enthusiasm was superficial and selfish (6:15, 26), and it did not take long for it to be replaced by suspicion and even open incredulity (6:36, 66; 8:45–46; 10:24–25; 12:37–43).

Jesus did not come apart from the Father. He had come in His Father's name (5:43)—under His Father's authority and according to His sovereign plan. His mission was not an ordinary one. The Jewish leaders claimed to follow Moses and were proud of that (9:28–29). They trusted him and had set their hope on him (5:45). They had developed a peculiar system based to some extent on formalities that in some cases led to self-glorification (cf. Matt. 6:1–2, 5; 23:28). But it was Moses himself (i.e., his writings) who would stand at the final judgment as a witness against them. He wrote about Jesus (cf. John 1:45), and yet they did not believe in Him. This thought parallels that of 5:39. By not believing in the written words of Moses, which they constantly examined, the spoken words of Jesus about Himself, His relationship with the Father, and the divine origin of His mission sounded to them as blasphemy.

Son of Man

In John's Gospel, and even more in the Synoptics, Jesus often used the self-designation "Son of Man" (1:51; 3:13–14; 5:27; 6:27, 53, 62; 8:28; 9:35; 12:23; 13:31; cf. 12:34).

1. Background of the Title. Instead of referring to His humanity—as opposed to His divinity, expressed by "Son of God" (cf. 5:17–18; 10:29–33)—"Son of Man" is probably related to Daniel 7:9–14, where the term is linked with the idea of judgment and vindication. This seems to emphasize the decisive role of Jesus's ministry (cf. John 3:17–20; 5:22–24; 12:46–48), especially His death on the cross, in anticipation of God's final victory in redemptive history (12:23; 13:31) and the judgment of the world (5:27; 12:31). It is noteworthy, however, that in Jewish apocalyptic literature, the "Son of Man" became a messianic figure of heavenly origin and is further portrayed as God's Son and the Elect One. All of this constitutes the background for Jesus's use of the title.

2. Jesus's Use of the Title. Due to the political connotation the concept of Messiah evoked in Jewish minds at the time (cf. 6:14–15, 26; Mark 8:29–30), "Son of Man" seems to have become Jesus's favorite way of claiming messianic identity without giving away the notion of His death. There are a number of references, especially in Mark, that combine the "Son of Man" of Daniel 7 and the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53 (Mark 9:12; 10:45; 14:24, 61; cf. Matt. 26:67; Luke 23:34; 24:46). Also significant is the fact that when identified as the Messiah, Jesus always responded by speaking of the "Son of Man" (Mark 8:29–31; 13:21–22, 26; 14:61–62; cf. John 9:35–38). The only occasions in which Jesus acknowledged Himself to be the Messiah/Christ using that specific term were when He was in Samaria (John 4:25–26), in Caesarea Philippi (Matt. 16:13–20; Mark 8:29–30; Luke 9:18–21)—both outside the Jewish borders, and in the latter case, to the Twelve only (by implication in John 10:24–25)—and before the Sanhedrin (Matt. 26:63–64; Mark 14:60–63; Luke 22:67–70) the very day He died.

6:1–71

The Bread from Heaven

As in chapter 5, chapter 6 begins with a miracle (a double miracle) and continues with a lengthy section about Jesus's confrontation with the Jews because of their unbelief. The Passover was near, apparently the third one since Jesus started His ministry (cf. 2:13; 5:1). There is no indication that He went to Jerusalem this time for the celebrations.

6:1–15. Feeding the Five Thousand. This is the only miracle of Jesus recorded in all four Gospels (cf. Matt. 14:13–21; Mark 6:30–44; Luke 9:10–17) and is one of His most remarkable. It happened on a hillside near Bethsaida (for more on the location, see commentary on Luke 9:10–17; John 6:16–21), which is on the edge of the Sea of Galilee, also known as the Sea of Tiberias (cf. John 21:1). It is actually an oval-shaped lake of fresh water about seven miles wide by thirteen miles long (11 by 21 km), and nearly six hundred feet (182 meters) below sea level. It is fed by the Jordan River, which flows through it from north to south.

The Creator God does not need preexisting material (cf. Matt. 4:3) to create (cf. Gen. 1), but here, perhaps to reward a young boy's generosity, Jesus was willing to multiply the five barley loaves and two fish to feed the multitude (John 6:9–11). The crowds, however, did not recognize Jesus for who He really was. They thought He was a prophet, perhaps the prophet of Deuteronomy 18:15, 18 (John 6:14; cf. 1:21; 7:40). The fact that they wanted to make Him king (6:15) suggests that they also identified Him as a political and military Messiah who would force the Romans out of the country. This was not the recognition Jesus envisaged. He knew they wanted to use Him to pursue their own ends (cf. v. 26); therefore, He decided to slip away into the hills.

6:16–21. Walking on the Water. There are two other accounts of this story (Matt. 14:22–33; Mark 6:45–52). John's is the shortest one. Mark 6:45 suggests, at first glance, that the disciples were headed toward Bethsaida on the lake, which seems contrary to John 6:17. However, when Mark 6:53 and Matthew 14:34 are considered in connection with the location of the feeding of the five thousand (Luke 9:10), it seems that Mark included a small detail of the itinerary that was not included in the other two accounts (which is a common occurrence in the Gospels). The feeding of the five thousand took place near Bethsaida but outside of the city on a hill (perhaps even on the western side of the river that feeds into the Sea of Galilee necessitating a crossing over via boat; for more, see commentary on Luke 9:10–17). Since all accounts (including Mark's) have them ending up near Capernaum in the region of Gennesaret (which is west of Bethsaida, along the northwest shoreline), it may be that Jesus first sent the disciples to Bethsaida (along the northeast shoreline) after the feeding of the five thousand before they set out for Capernaum across the northern tip of the lake.

Because the Sea of Galilee lies about six hundred feet (182 meters) below sea level, it is subject to sudden storms when the cool air from the mountains rushes in against the warm moist air over the lake. The miracle itself is not named by John as a sign (cf. John 2:11; 4:54; 6:14), neither was it a public manifestation of Jesus's divine glory. Its significance lies in the fact that it shows the power of Jesus over nature. His words, "It is I" (*egō eimi*) (6:20), however, do not at first seem to have the character of a divine designation (as in 8:24, 28, 58). These words may have been a self-identification destined to calm the disciples and encourage them. Nevertheless, the divine designation may not be totally absent from Jesus's meaning because He used the expression as a self-revelation in an extremely unusual circumstance—He was walking on the water (see "The 'I Am' Sayings," p. 1430).

That day the disciples experienced two opposing realities: from the mountaintop of excitement and hope, as they also shared the same messianic hope of those who were fed (cf. Matt. 20:20–24; Mark 10:35–41; Luke 24:15–21), to the valley of trials and anxieties. But Jesus was there to alleviate their fears and bring peace to their hearts. No matter how deep and frightful our valley is, Jesus will always be there with us (cf. Ps. 23:1–4).

6:22–29. Food that Endures. Still impressed with the miracle of the bread, the following day the multitude looked for Jesus and found Him in Capernaum, on the northwest side of the lake (John 6:22–24). They were surprised as they recalled that the night before there was only one small boat on the shore and that Jesus had not sailed in it with the disciples. By mentioning these details, John certainly furnishes indirect evidence for the supernatural way in which Jesus crossed the lake. Jesus told them to drastically change their perspectives and priorities, leaving behind their short-sighted and materialistic notions that controlled their existence (cf. v. 15). They were to work for the food that endures forever (cf. 6:33; Matt. 4:4). That food, which in this context stands for life, would not be theirs by a human achievement but was something the Son of Man would freely give to them (John 6:27). In fact, v. 29 clarifies that by using the verb "to work" Jesus means "to believe." In the Gospel of John, the only way to have eternal life is by believing in Jesus as the One who came from God (17:3; cf. 6:40; 20:31; 1 John 5:13).

6:30–40. Bread of Life. By stipulating a sign as a condition to believe in Jesus, the multitude confirmed what Jesus had just said, that is, that they were there for selfish reasons. Thousands of people had been miraculously fed the day before, and in spite of this they asked for a sign (John 6:30). They appeared to be merely looking for an unending supply of food. In fact, by reminding Jesus of the manna, the "bread from heaven" (v. 31; cf. Ps. 78:24), that for forty years their fathers ate in the wilderness (Ex. 16:35), they seemed to suggest that Jesus either repeat His earlier miracle or do something even greater. This gave Jesus the opportunity to affirm two important truths: (1) it was not Moses who gave them the bread from heaven, but God (John 6:32; Ex. 16:15–16;), and (2) the true bread from heaven, the bread that gives life to the world, is the one that the Father gives (John 6:33; cf. 1:14, 45; 5:39–40, 46), and those who receive it will never be hungry or thirsty again (6:35). This is truly a messianic claim (cf. Is. 49:8, 10) that combines two images: the bread of life and the living water (John 4:10–14). The condition of the people seemed to be hopeless. They had already seen the sign they were asking for, and yet they did not believe. Jesus clarified that believing is not a human achievement independent from God. No one can come to Him without divine activity in his or her heart (cf. 6:44–45; 10:27–29; 16:7–9; 17:2, 6–8; 18:9). Yet every person can decide how to respond (3:19–20; 5:40; 8:24; 12:46). These people were not responding favorably, and by not coming to Jesus in faith they are depicted in stark contrast to Jesus's obedience to the Father.

6:41–51. Complaint of the Jews. In most passages in John where Jesus met opposition, the topic is in regard to the origin of Jesus (John 6:41–42, 62; cf. 7:27–29, 41–44; 8:14, 23–27, 56–59; 9:29). As long as His opponents concentrated on His earthly origin (6:42), ignoring the divine, they would both continue to take offense at Him and be unable to enjoy His gift of eternal life (cf. 1:46; Matt. 13:55). The idea of John 6:44 parallels that of v. 37a. These texts teach not unconditional predestination (cf. John 5:40) but only that God takes the initiative in the salvation of believers (cf. 16:9; Phil. 2:13; 1 Thess. 4:8; see "Predestination," p. 1583). Those who come to Jesus are those who allow themselves to be taught by God (Is. 54:13). Being taught by God, however, does not mean having visual, direct access to God (cf. John 1:18; 5:37; 1 John 4:12). Only the One who has come from the Father has in fact seen Him because He is the Father's only Son (John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9). Hence the Son has divine authority to bestow eternal life on whoever believes in Him. The crowd was looking for a permanent resource of bread, like the manna, but all who ate from it had eventually died (cf. John 6:58). Only Jesus is "the bread of life" (v. 48) or "the living bread" (v. 51). Anyone eating from this bread would never die, because the bread that He would give for (*hyper*) the life of the world was His own flesh, an unequivocal reference to Jesus's substitutionary death on the cross. (For the same use of the preposition *hyper* in John, see 10:11, 15; 11:50, 51–52; 15:13; 17:19).

The "I Am" Sayings

The Fourth Gospel recounts seven unique "I am" sayings Jesus pronounced during His ministry, each with *egō eimi* ("I am") and a predicate: (1) I am the Bread of Life (6:35, 41, 48, 51); (2) I am the Light of the World (8:12); (3) I am the Door of the Sheep (10:7, 9); (4) I am the Good Shepherd (10:11, 14); (5) I am the Resurrection and the Life (11:25); (6) I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life (14:6); (7) I am the True Vine (15:1, 5).

1. *Significance of the Sayings.* These sayings are unique in that they not only emphasize an important aspect of Jesus's ministry but also describe the divine qualities He offers humanity. The salvation God promised in the OT was present in Jesus (cf. Ezek. 34:20–31). Jesus is the Light, the sustaining Bread, the Good Shepherd, etc. In addition to these "I am" statements, Jesus also had others not followed by a predicate (e.g., John 6:20; 8:24, 28, 58; 18:6). In these statements Jesus declared He is the Great I Am, the One who was before Abraham, the God of the OT (e.g., Ex. 3:1–20; cf. Is. 41:4; 43:10–13).

2. *Why Only in John?* Why are none of these sayings found in the Synoptic Gospels? Since these sayings occur in connection to Jesus's ministry in Judea, they appear to have been a more distinctive element of His ministry there. The principle method of His teaching in Galilee was with parables.

6:52–59. Flesh and Blood. The reference to eating Jesus's flesh and drinking His blood must have shocked the Jews. They knew He could not be taken literally (cf. Gen. 9:4; Deut. 12:16), yet that seems to be the natural sense of His words. The eating and drinking spoken of here are to be understood as a strong and vivid metaphor to denote the believer's complete appropriation of Jesus by faith. In John's Gospel, even in the present context, eternal life is the result of believing in Jesus (John 3:15–16, 36; 5:24; 6:35, 40, 47; 11:25; 20:31; cf. 1 John 5:13). It is only when we come to Him in faith, believing that He came from the Father to give His life for the life of the world, that we will have eternal life (John 6:51). There is also a connection in His words with the Lord's Supper. When we participate in the emblems of the ritual, we are symbolically eating the flesh and drinking the blood of Jesus—appropriating the benefits of His death for us—in order to renew our complete commitment to Him. His sacrificial death continues to nurture our spiritual life (see DA 660). The Jews insisted on physical bread, but it is only Jesus's flesh and blood, given as a sacrifice for us, that is real food that is able to sustain life forever. Those who feed on Him will live forever because He partakes of the Father's life. That these things happened in the synagogue in Capernaum (John 6:59) indicates that the entire episode from v. 22 on may have taken place on the Sabbath (cf. 5:10, 16).

6:60–65. Spirit and Life. Among those who heard Jesus's words at the synagogue, there were many disciples of His. In view of v. 66, it is clear that the reference here is not to the Twelve (cf. v. 70) but to a larger group of disciples (see 4:1). For many of them it became clear that Jesus was not what they anticipated. They were probably expecting a Messiah who would become the head of a revolutionary movement that would eventually defeat the Romans and drive them out of the land. For such a group, the words of Jesus were very hard to *akouein* (lit. "hear"), but this can also mean "listen to" or "accept" (6:60) What Jesus had said to them caused them to be offended or stumble (v. 61; *skandalizō*, "to make someone to stumble"). They had no doubts that Jesus was talking about spiritual realities, but He was demanding a degree of commitment they were unwilling to give. Jesus insisted that if they were stumbling at the idea of eating His flesh and drinking His blood, they would stumble much more at the cross (part of the implied meaning of v. 62). The text talks about ascending, which in this Gospel is a reference not primarily to Jesus's ascension but to His departure to the Father (e.g., 7:33–34; 8:14; 14:2–3, 12; 16:5, 7, 16, 28; 17:11), the cross being the first step in the process (3:14; 8:21, 28; 12:32; 13:33; 16:19–20).

Jesus, then, put His finger on the problem: the reason the disciples were taking offense at His words was because they had not been renewed by the Spirit (see chap. 3). They were flesh, and flesh is of no avail. Since Jesus's words are spirit and life (6:63), only those who are transformed or made alive by the Spirit can accept them (cf. 1 Cor. 2:14). John 6:64 returns to the theme of faith, making it clear that such a transformation can occur only in the lives of those who believe. Jesus knew that the interest of the disciples in Him was superficial, materialistic, and selfish (cf. John 2:23–25). When we block God's initiative and try to do things according to our preconceived ideas, God cannot accomplish in us the miracle of His loving grace.

6:66–71. Confession of the Disciples. This passage is placed at a critical juncture in the content of the book. It closes Jesus's ministry in Galilee and results in a shifting of His ministry to Judea, the heart of the Jewish nation. It sets the tone for the remainder of the public ministry of Jesus in the sense that the unbelief and rejection depicted here persist through chapter 12. It marks the end of revelatory discourses in the structure of the Gospel. From this point on we will find a series of encounters, conversations, and confrontations between Jesus and the Jewish leaders, which served only to worsen the opposition. Finally, this passage separates the Twelve from the mass of untrue disciples, and that culminates with the confession of faith by Peter (cf. Matt. 16:16). At the end of this chapter it is clear that the ministry of Jesus will end in betrayal (John 6:71).

This last point deserves further elaboration. When everybody turned away from Jesus, only the Twelve remained. In the end, there would be a few more (cf. 19:25, 38–39), but the disciples represent those receiving Jesus, believing in Him, and becoming God's children through the transforming work of the Holy Spirit (cf. 1:12–13). Peter's confession is noteworthy. In this context, "Lord" (6:68) is not simply a polite way of addressing someone (e.g., 4:11, 15, 49; 5:7; 6:34). It could be an acknowledgment of the divine status of Jesus (cf. 20:28). Peter may have not understood much of the preceding discourse, but by saying that Jesus has the "words of eternal life" (6:68), he seems to have correctly grasped the meaning of Jesus's words recorded in v. 63. In v. 69, some manuscripts read "the Holy One of God" instead of "the Son of the living God." The statement highlights His unique relationship with the Father (cf. 10:36). In a sense, the confession indicates that they had been chosen by Jesus. But Jesus knew that one of them would betray Him, namely, Judas. By referring to him as "a devil" (lit. "the devil"), Jesus expressed the truth that Satan himself would be the source of Judas's betrayal (13:2, 27), yet without canceling out Judas's own responsibility (cf. Mark 14:21).

7:1—8:59

JESUS'S RETURN TO JUDEA

Starting from chapter 7, the story moves to Judea and remains there through the end of Jesus's public ministry (chap. 12). The opposition of the Jewish leaders grew ever stronger. Both chapters 7 and 8 are filled with polemics, with the enemies of Jesus having more to say against Him than in any other section of the Gospel. All the objections, however, had answers.

7:1–52

The Life-Giving Spirit

While in Jerusalem, Jesus explained the significance of the Feast of Tabernacles in terms of the saving experience He was bringing.

7:1–9. Brothers of Jesus. In the first part of chapter 7, Jesus is still in Galilee, but the attention is already focused on His visit to Jerusalem, the third one since the beginning of His ministry (cf. 2:13; 5:1). With the increase of opposition, going to Judea became a dangerous enterprise, so much so that Jesus hesitated about the idea of attending the Feast of Tabernacles, one of the three great pilgrimage festivals of the Jewish year (Ex. 23:14–17; 34:22–23; Deut. 16:16).

The way Jesus's brothers are depicted suggests that they also thought of Him as a political liberator. On one hand, they challenged Jesus to perform signs in Judea, at the very heart of the nation, rather than staying in obscurity forever (John 7:3–4). On the other, we are told that they did not believe in Him. That is, they believed He could perform miracles, but they lacked a correct understanding of His mission (and Person). Their attitude was similar to that of Mary at the wedding in Cana (2:3), as was also Jesus's answer: His "time" had not yet come, but their time is always present (7:6). The word "time" (*kairos*) carries a qualitative connotation, pointing to the right time, the appropriate moment for something. This might be another instance in the Gospel where words are used with an intended double meaning (cf. *anōthen*, "again" in 3:3). On the surface, Jesus's statement may refer to the time for going up to Jerusalem. Arriving earlier with His brothers would certainly have given Him much more exposure than arriving later, when the crowds were already there. Besides, the sympathy of the crowds could have protected Him from the hatred of the Jewish leaders (cf. 11:47–48; 12:17–19; Mark 11:18; Luke 22:2). On a deeper level, Jesus may also have been referring to His time in redemptive history. Elsewhere this Gospel records Jesus referring to His "hour" (John 8:20; 12:23, 27; 13:1; 17:1)—the hour of His glorification and return to the Father, including His death (see 6:60–65). Even if the word here is "time," not "hour," the idea is still present, especially in view of 7:7–8. Due to the increase of hostilities, going up to Jerusalem posed a threat to Jesus's life, and Jesus initially preferred to postpone His journey rather than have His mission cut short on account of the intolerance of the Jewish leaders (cf. 12:23, 27; 17:1, 4–5). (On Jesus's brothers, see commentary on John 2:12; "The Brothers of Jesus," p. 1252.

7:10–18. Jesus's Credentials. Jesus's last visit to the city had been about one and a half years before (cf. John 5:1). The Jews who were looking for Him (7:11) were certainly the leaders of the religious establishment of the day (accordingly some translations consistently render *Ioudaioi* as "the Jewish leaders" rather than "the Jews") and were differentiated from the people in general (v. 12). The people were divided in their opinion about Jesus. The Jewish leaders had a definite evil purpose in trying to find Him (cf. v. 1). Their antipathy toward Him had reached such a level that even the throng of pilgrims knew about it and feared being arrested for following Him (cf. 9:22; 12:42–43; 16:1–2).

The Feast of Tabernacles was kept for seven days, but Jesus did not appear in Jerusalem until the feast was halfway over. As soon as He arrived, He began to teach in the temple court. The Jewish leaders were amazed, not at the knowledge of Jesus (cf. 7:46; Matt. 7:28–29; 22:22; Luke 4:22) but perhaps at the fact that He was teaching as a rabbi (cf. John 1:37, 49; 3:2; 4:31; 6:25; 9:2; 11:8) without proper and formal rabbinic instruction (7:15). It was a question of authority. In reply, Jesus identified the One who sent Him, the Father, as the source of His authority (v. 16). His teaching was not based on human knowledge and neither was He speaking on His own. In fact, Jesus argued, any sincere person, a person ready to do the will of God, would have the necessary spiritual acumen to know whether His teaching was from God or from Himself (v. 17). He was implicitly condemning the qualifications of the Jewish leaders and their presumed religiosity. That Jesus was not speaking on His own is demonstrated by the fact that He was not seeking merely His own honor and glory (v. 18; cf. 5:41; 8:50, 54).

7:19–24. Charges and Defense. Jesus undermined the religiosity of the leaders by pointing to their hypocrisy (7:19). These leaders prided themselves on the fact that they were the bearers of the law (9:28–29; cf. Rom. 2:17; 3:1–2). The law, they thought, was one of the three pillars on which the world rests—the other two being the temple and good works. Jesus differentiated between having the law and keeping it (cf. Rom. 2:13). The fact that they were trying to kill Him indicates that they were ready to violate the law they claimed to treasure so much (John 7:19). The people who were there, however, had no evidence of an assault against Jesus. They apparently concluded that He was suffering from demonic paranoid delusions (v. 20). The charge of demonization occasionally refers to insane behavior (8:48–52; 10:20–21; cf. Matt. 11:18; 12:24–27). Thus, their comment could be the equivalent of "You are crazy." Instead of refuting the accusation, Jesus revealed the real issue: the Jewish leaders wanted to kill Him because of His miracle at Bethesda more than a year before (John 7:21; cf. 5:18).

In His defense against the charge of breaking the Sabbath, Jesus resorted next to a well-known rabbinic argumentation technique called *qal wahomer* ("light to heavy"). There are several examples of this technique in the NT (Matt. 6:26, 30; 7:11; 10:25; 12:5–6; Luke 13:15–16; 18:6–7). It consists of the use of a less important situation (the "light" or "lesser") to justify a more important one (the "heavy" or "greater"). In John 7:22–23, the point Jesus made was that the lawfulness of circumcising someone on the Sabbath implied the much larger lawfulness of restoring the whole person on the Sabbath (cf. Mark 3:4). According to the rabbis, circumcision was so great that it overrode even the rigor of Sabbath observance. Therefore, everything needed for circumcision could be performed on the Sabbath. In rabbinic theology, circumcision took precedence over the Sabbath because it was regarded as the supreme sign of loyalty and adherence to Judaism. Had the Jews seen Jesus's miracle under the correct perspective, as an essential part of His redemptive activity, they would have understood that the bodily healing of a person was not in contradiction with the Sabbath commandment. Jesus was not arguing against the validity of the Sabbath as a divine institution. On the contrary, He was pointing out that His deeds of mercy were in full harmony with the nature of the Sabbath.

7:25–32. Is this the Christ? The arguments with which Jesus seemed to have silenced the dignitaries of the Jewish religion were so dramatic that some people assumed their failure to arrest Him was due to their recognition of His messiahship (John 7:26). But the people were confused with respect to the origin of Jesus. They knew where He came from, whereas in the case of the Messiah (v. 27), they believed, nobody would know where he came from. He would simply appear. Jesus, therefore, did not meet their expectation. His earthly origins were easily traceable. He was associated with Nazareth (cf. vv. 41–42) and His family was widely known (cf. 1:46; 2:12; 6:42; Mark 6:3).

Jesus admitted that some of their information was accurate, but He told them that in fact they knew much less than they thought. He reiterated that He had not come on His own (cf. John 5:43; 8:42) but was sent by the One who is true, the One whom they did not know (7:28; cf. v. 18; 8:19, 26). He knew Him because He came from Him (7:29; cf. 8:55; 10:15; 16:27–28; 17:25). Jesus was reinforcing the argument He used before (cf. 5:19–20, 24, 30, 32, 36–37). It was that argument, with its unmistakable claim to divinity (cf. 5:18), that raised the fury of the Jewish leaders and moved them to action. Their attempt to seize Jesus, however, was unsuccessful. The text does not say how Jesus escaped, but the reason given is that His "hour had not yet come" (7:30; see 7:1–9). As a result of the discussion, many people believed in Him (v. 31). They were ready to think of Jesus in messianic terms because they could not conceive of a Messiah performing more miracles than Jesus did. Jesus's signs were meant to generate faith (2:11; 12:37; 14:11; 20:30–31), but He expected people to go beyond their stereotyped messianic ideas (cf. 4:48–50; 9:41; 10:25, 37–38; 12:37; 20:29) and engage in a saving relationship with Him (3:3, 5–7; 4:10, 13–14; 5:39–40; 20:31), as well as with the Father who sent Him (5:24; 12:44–45; 13:20; 17:3).

The Jewish leaders had wanted to kill Jesus since the time of the healing at Bethesda (5:16, 18), but only at this time did the first real attempt to arrest Him occur. When the religious leaders heard that some of the people were inclined to accept Jesus as the Messiah, they sent guards to arrest Him (7:32). The combined reference to Pharisees and chief priests points to the Sanhedrin (cf. v. 45; 11:47, 57; 18:3), indicating a formal decision. The story resumes in 7:45, and its development suggests that the command was not to arrest Him immediately, or perhaps publicly, but to wait for the best moment.

7:33–36. Jesus's Return to the Father. The decision of the Sanhedrin gave Jesus the opportunity to speak about His soon departure from this world. This is a common theme in John's Gospel (e.g., 8:14; 13:3; 14:2–3; 16:5, 16; 17:11), which matches the emphasis on Jesus coming from the Father (e.g., 3:34; 4:34; 5:22–38; 6:38–40, 57). In John, Jesus comes from above (8:23; cf. 1:14) and must return to the place He came from (6:62; 16:28). This entails an allusion to His death because the cross was the way by which He would return to the Father (3:14; 8:21, 28; 12:32; 16:19–20). Up to this point, we are told that Jesus's hour had not yet come (7:30), but from this point on He knew that His death was near (v. 33; cf. 16:16). Soon His followers would no longer be able to reach Him (7:34). Their eternal destiny was at stake (cf. 8:21). But once again He was misunderstood. The Jews knew about His earthly origins (7:27), and the Holy Land was a small territory. They found it difficult to imagine a place where Jesus could go and not be found, unless He were to go to the Jews living in the Dispersion—that is, the majority of Jews who were scattered throughout the Greco-Roman world (v. 35). During Jesus's time, it is estimated that the Jews represented about ten percent of the entire population of the Roman Empire and that up to sixty percent of them (roughly five million) lived outside the Holy Land.

7:37–44. Springs of Living Water. Jesus saved His most important pronouncement for the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles. During the feast the Israelites were required to dwell in booths made of branches of palm trees (Lev. 23:42). This was a reminder of the wanderings of Israel in the wilderness after the Exodus from Egypt. After the Babylonian Exile, a water-pouring ceremony was added to the celebrations. The words of Jesus in John 7:37–38 are based on this ceremony. On each of the seven days, the high priest was to fill a golden flagon with water from the pool of Siloam and bring it to the temple in a procession accompanied by the joyful blowing of a trumpet. As the pilgrims watched, the temple choir sang the Hallel (Pss. 113–118). When the choir began to sing Psalm 118, the water was poured into a silver bowl beside the altar and flowed through a pipe to the base of the altar. Meanwhile the pilgrims shook palm branches and shouted three times, "Give thanks to the Lord!" The ceremony took place at the time of the morning sacrifice and symbolized God's providential supply of water in the wilderness. It pointed to the waters of salvation and the outpouring of the Spirit in the messianic age (Is. 12:3; 44:3).

It is against this background that Jesus's pronouncement is to be understood. In words reminiscent of John 4:10, He invited the thirsty to come to Him and drink (John 7:37). He used the symbolism of the water and applied it to the living water of salvation that He had come to offer. Then He added that this living water would flow from all who believe in Him, just as the Scriptures had indicated (v. 38; cf. Is. 55:1; 58:11; Ezek. 47:1–12; Joel 3:18; Zech. 13:1; 14:8). According to John 7:39, Jesus was referring to the work of the Spirit. In speaking of living waters that would flow from within, Jesus seems to have represented the refreshment and renewal of the inner person by the power of the Holy Spirit (cf. John 3:3, 5–8; 6:63). It is this redemptive experience that Jesus is calling people to have by truly believing in Him. The reference to His glorification as the condition for the coming of the Spirit is significant (7:39). The glorification would signify the Father's approval of the accomplishments of the Son, including His victory over Satan (17:1, 4–5; 12:31; 16:11). As the people listened to Him, they were divided with respect to the identity of Jesus (7:40–43). Some referred to Him as the prophet (cf. Deut. 18:15–18; see commentary on John 6:1–15), while others identified Him directly as the Messiah. Those who insisted that the Messiah would come from Bethlehem (Mic. 5:2; cf. Matt. 2:1–6), not from Galilee, were probably Judeans.

7:45–52. Meeting of the Sanhedrin. This section resumes the account of the incident reported in John 7:32. The Sanhedrin was upset with the guards for not arresting Jesus (John 7:45). The dialogue indicates that the Sanhedrin believed that Jesus had been deceiving the people (v. 47). Their next question about whether any of the rulers or Pharisees had believed in Jesus implies a negative answer. The contrast between the attitude of the religious authorities and that of the people aimed at shaming the guards in case they had any sympathy toward Jesus. The people are described as being under a curse for not knowing the law (v. 49), that is, for not being educated and zealous in their observance of the law. The Pharisees had a low view of the common people, whom they pejoratively called *'am ha'arets* ("the people of the Land;" cf. 9:34; Luke 18:9). Feeling that the discussion was prejudicial, Nicodemus spoke up in defense of Jesus by raising a procedural issue (John 7:50–51). The Sanhedrin, however, did not want to change the focus of the discussion. They argued that no prophet was to be expected from Galilee because no prophet had ever come from there (v. 52). The argument was neither historically true (Jonah was from Galilee; 2 Kin. 14:25) nor relevant because the power of God transcends geographical limitations.

7:53—8:59

The Light of the World

After the feast Jesus was three times confronted by His adversaries (including the episode of the adulterous woman).

7:53—8:11. Adulterous Woman. The account of the woman taken in adultery is one of the best examples of Jesus's redeeming love, yet it comes with a perplexing textual difficulty. The story is entirely missing from all Greek manuscripts of the Gospel of John up to the fifth century, and none of the earliest church fathers mention it as being part of John's Gospel. It is only after the ninth century that its textual attestation becomes more common, but even then it appears in only approximately twenty-five percent of all NT Greek manuscripts. While this reality challenges the canonical record of the account, it does not necessarily undermine its historical reliability. Because of its self-authenticating character and what appear to be references to it in some second- and third-century Christian writings, many scholars are convinced that the story is most probably one of those numerous incidents of Jesus's life that originally were not recorded in our Gospels (cf. John 20:30–31; 21:25). Somehow it remained alive in the memory of the church until it became part of the textual tradition. While it was tacked on to some manuscripts at the end of Luke (after Luke 21:38 or 24:53), or even the end of John (John 21:25), it most frequently follows John 7:52. It seems to have been inserted at this point to illustrate Jesus's statement in 8:15 that they judged according to human understanding but He judged no one.

A group of religious leaders set a trap for Jesus, as the absence of the adulterous man clearly indicates. According to the law, in cases of adultery both the man and woman were to be put to death (Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:22). The Jewish leaders thought Jesus had two options. He could recommend stoning the woman, but in that case He would be legislating against Roman law, which did not require the death penalty in a situation like this. His other option was to take a clear stand against God's law. In either case, Jesus definitely would lose support from the people, and the Jews would have a reason for accusing Him. What the Jews were not expecting was that Jesus could come up with a third option. Bending down, He began to write in the dust with His finger. We are not told what He wrote. It has been suggested that He was writing the sins of those accusing the woman. Others have argued that the action of Jesus should be explained in light of a Roman forensic practice. It was the common practice of the presiding judge to write down the sentence before pronouncing it. According to some manuscripts, the accusers were "convicted by their conscience"; this would suggest that Jesus was writing about their private lives (John 8:9). Jesus did the unexpected by calling the accusers to examine their own lives (v. 7; cf. DA 461). This changed the grounds for the legal decision without setting the law aside.

In the case of a capital crime, the witnesses were expected to be the first to throw the stones (Deut. 13:9; 17:7). Jesus did not require her accusers and witnesses to be sinless, but He made them aware of their own sinfulness. His words were also meant to reveal the malicious intentions of the religious leaders toward the woman. At the end, He was able to treat her graciously without violating the law or overlooking her sin, providing an eloquent illustration of the fact that He came to save, not to condemn (John 3:17; 12:47). "Men hate the sinner, while they love the sin. Christ hates the sin, but loves the sinner" (DA 462). Jesus's command to "go and sin no more" or "leave your life of sin" is not the condition for grace but the proper response to it (John 8:11; cf. 5:14).

8:12–20. The Father's Witness. While still in the temple, perhaps in the so-called court of women, where the offering chests were supposedly located (8:20; cf. Mark 12:41–43), Jesus made another amazing claim: "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12; cf. 9:5; 12:46; see "The 'I Am' Sayings," p. 1430). In the OT, the coming of the Messiah is associated with light (Num. 24:17; Is. 9:2; 42:6–7; Mal. 4:2). Jesus introduced Himself as the fulfillment of messianic prophecies. In John, light is a symbol of God's gift of life through Jesus (John 8:12; cf. 1:4, 9). Against the accusation that witnessing on His own behalf was invalid, Jesus argued the opposite on the basis of His divine origin and His participation in God's redemptive plan (cf. 5:19–20, 36). By accusing Him, the Jewish leaders demonstrated only their own disqualification and complete ignorance concerning His real identity. They were judging Him on the basis of the appearance of things (i.e., according to human standards; 8:15) and not on the basis of the true facts revealed by His works (5:36; 10:25; 14:11; 15:24). But Jesus introduced another witness: His Father. He was doing the work of the Father (5:19–20, 36; 10:25, 32, 37–38; 14:11), evidenced through His own works. The legal requirement of two witnesses had been met (Deut. 19:15). The question of the Jewish leaders in John 8:19 only proves Jesus's point: they do not know anything about Him. That being the case, how then could they know anything about the Father? (cf. John 14:7, 9; 16:3).

8:21–30. "I Am He." Knowing that the situation was deteriorating, Jesus warned the Jewish leaders about His soon departure (to the Father) and their ultimate loss: they would die in their sins (see 6:60–65). They did not know where He would be going because they were from beneath/below, whereas He was from above (8:23), and consequently they could not follow Him to the place He would be going. In their ignorance they concluded that Jesus was considering suicide (cf. 7:35). Their situation was apparently hopeless. The only way they could avoid their fate was by accepting Jesus's claim (8:24; lit. "I am" [*egō eimi*]). This statement is remarkable because it is used without any predicate (e.g., "I am Peter"; also in 8:28, 58; 13:19), which is not common in Greek. Most interpreters have been convinced that it points to the "I AM" of Exodus 3:14 and Isaiah 40–55 (see Is. 41:4; 43:10, 13, 25; 46:4; 48:12), where it refers to the God of Israel. By applying these words to Himself, Jesus was not only claiming divinity but also identifying Himself with the God of the OT.

The lack of understanding of the Jewish leaders led Jesus to wonder whether He was wasting His time with them. John 8:25b is usually translated as Jesus answering their question "Who are you?" by saying that He was who He had been telling them He was from the beginning. But it can also be translated as a rhetorical question: "Why do I speak to you at all?" There were many things Jesus could have said regarding them and with regard to their judgment, but for the moment He refrained from doing so (John 8:26). When they would lift up the Son of Man, they would finally understand His real identity, all the more so because His death would be His way to the Father (v. 28; cf. 3:14; 12:32, 34). This might be another example of a Johannine double meaning: being "lifted up" means both to die and to be exalted (cf. 6:62; 7:33; 14:2–3, 12, 28; 16:5, 10, 28; 17:11; 20:17). Jesus concluded His argument by once again pointing to His essential relationship with the Father. Everything He had spoken or done was in full accord with what the Father taught Him (8:29). He had not done anything on His own (e.g., 4:34; 10:25; 12:49; 14:10). In the end, we are told that many believed in Him (8:30). We just do not know whether these came from the opponents who disputed with Jesus or from the bystanders who were there.

8:31–47. Seed of Abraham. The Jews here (v. 31) may not have been the same people referred to in v. 30, as they seem to have passed too quickly from belief to unbelief (vv. 45–46), and even to a desire to kill Jesus (vv. 37, 44). Jesus may have been addressing those who believed (v. 30) but was being attacked by the religious leaders who did not believe. The harsh dialogue that follows is a strong critique of the Jewish exclusive dependence on their connection to

Abraham. Jesus argued that being a descendent of Abraham also means acting the way he acted. Jesus's appeal in v. 31b stands as a call not only to persevere but also to accept Him and His words (cf. v. 37c). Those who abide in Him will know the truth, and the truth will set them free (v. 32). The content of the truth here is the truth about Jesus—His nature, mission in the world, and message (cf. v. 36; 14:6).

The context makes it clear that the freedom Jesus was talking about is soteriological—that is, freedom from sin—for He goes on to speak of the slavery of sin (8:34). Only Jesus can grant the unending privilege of true sonship (cf. 1:12). The Jews, however, did not understand Him, and they resorted to their Abrahamic lineage to argue that they were free. Obviously, they were not referring to political freedom because they had been under Roman occupation for almost a century (since 63 B.C.). Instead, they seemed to be talking about spiritual freedom. It appears that for them, to be Abraham's descendants (8:33, 37) or Abraham's children (v. 39) meant to be God's children (cf. v. 41). Jesus, however, acknowledged that they were children of Abraham but also introduced a new argument. To be children of Abraham means to act as Abraham had done (v. 39). Unfortunately, their works indicated something entirely different. They were seeking to kill Him (vv. 37, 40). They had become instruments of the devil (vv. 44, 47).

After depicting the devil as a murderer, a liar, and the father of lies, Jesus made an astounding claim of sinlessness (v. 46). Both the preceding and following statements refer to Jesus telling the truth, but by using the term "sin," Jesus was claiming complete absence of any moral fault or blemish. This verse is about Jesus's own nature. Anything less than that would invalidate the point He was trying to make.

8:48–59. Existing before Abraham. The bottom line of the preceding discussion could not be clearer: by seeking to kill Jesus the Jewish leaders were not connected with God (v. 47). Without any counter argument to Jesus's logic, all that was left to them was to accuse Him of being a Samaritan and demon-possessed (v. 48; see 7:20), implying that no further meaningful conversation with Him was possible. However, Jesus was only obeying the Father (cf. 3:34; 5:19–20; 17:8, 14) and seeking the glory of the Father (5:41; 7:17–18; 8:54; 13:31–32; 14:13; 17:1, 4–5). His work was not to promote Himself but to save whoever believed in Him so that they would "never see death" (8:51). The Jewish leaders did not understand how Jesus could offer something (eternal life) that not even Abraham or any of the prophets had.

The argument here in John leads up to another astonishing claim of divinity on Jesus's part. To the question whether He was greater than the patriarch, Jesus answered that Abraham rejoiced to see His day: "he saw it and was glad" or rejoiced (*echarē*; v. 56). Understanding exactly what this means is not easy. Some Jewish traditions claimed that Abraham foresaw the future of Israel and of the Messiah, while others indicated that the description of Abraham as being advanced in age (Gen. 24:1) meant that he went into all the days of the future. Since the text is not about seeing God but about seeing Jesus's day, the emphasis appears to be on the saving work of Jesus. We could then suggest that it was probably in the experience of the sacrifice of Isaac that Abraham saw the saving power of Jesus (Gen. 22). There he gained a true understanding of the work of Christ; he saw and experienced it.

Jesus had existed before Abraham ever lived (John 8:58). Nothing else needed to be added. Jesus was not simply claiming that He existed before Abraham. By saying "I AM" without any predicate (cf. vv. 24, 28; 13:19), He was unquestionably identifying Himself as the God of the Hebrew Scriptures (Ex. 3:14; cf. Is. 41:4; 43:10, 13, 25; 46:4; 48:12 LXX). This was much more than a claim to preexistence. This was a claim to divinity in its fullest sense. To the Jews, the words of Jesus were unmistakably blasphemous, requiring stoning as its penalty (John 8:59; cf. Lev. 24:16). But before they could enforce the penalty, Jesus had slipped away. The text does not say whether He simply managed to hide Himself among the people or He escaped with supernatural intervention. In any case, the way the story ends allows the reader to understand that the cross would not be an isolated action but the culmination of a progressive, deliberate hardening process on the part of the Jewish leaders.

9:1—10:42

FINAL MINISTRY IN JERUSALEM

9:1–41

The Healing of a Blind Man

While still in Jerusalem, Jesus performed His sixth sign, the healing of a man born blind (see "The Seven Signs in the Fourth Gospel," p. 1417).

The fact that the miracle also took place on the Sabbath (cf. 5:9) exacerbated the opposition and resulted in the expulsion of the healed man from the synagogue. This prepares the reader for the discourse of the good shepherd in chapter 10. The account of the healing of a blind man, which parallels the healing at Bethesda (chap. 5), shows again the divine origin of the mission and authority of Jesus.

9:1–12. Theological Question. The question that prompted the miracle revealed the traditional belief that suffering is a divine punishment for sin (cf. Job 4:7). In the case of a congenital disease, it was not easy to identify the guilty party (John 9:2). Jesus, however, while acknowledging the possibility that suffering may be the result of sin (5:14), took the discussion away from the issue of punishment (cf. Luke 13:1–3) and saw the man's blindness as an opportunity for a divine revelation (John 9:3).

The "must" (*dei*) in v. 4a tells us about Jesus's adherence to the divine plan for Him and His willingness to follow it. Doing the Father's work was not an option but a necessity for Jesus (cf. 4:34; 6:38) because the opportunity would not always be available. By saying that "night is coming" "when no one can work" (9:4b), Jesus may have been presenting a cryptic reference to His soon departure from the world (7:33–34; 12:35; 13:1; 16:16). In John, the word "night" by itself could stand for "darkness" (cf. 1:5; 8:12; 12:46). Jesus once more spoke of Himself as "the light of the world" (9:5; cf. 8:12). In this case, the man's blindness took on a symbolic meaning, which makes the miracle doubly significant: it restored sight to the man (9:1, 20), and it illustrated what Jesus meant when He claimed to be the spiritual light of the world.

This was another miracle performed by the power of the word of Jesus. It is true that He spat on the ground, made mud with the saliva, and spreads it over the man's eyes, but the miracle properly speaking happened only when the man responded faithfully to Jesus's command to wash in the pool of Siloam (v. 7). Those who knew the man were so astonished at the miracle that they could not believe that he was the one who had been blind. This provided the opportunity for him to witness on behalf of Jesus (v. 11), though at that very moment he did not know who Jesus was.

9:13–17. Preliminary Discussions. The text does not inform us about who took the healed man to the Pharisees, but it could well have been those mentioned in v. 8. One could assume that since the miracle took place on the Sabbath (9:14; see 5:9b–18), they may have felt offended and decided to take the former blind man to the religious leaders. The fact that Jesus mixed clay with saliva complicated things. According to Jewish tradition, kneading (dough) was one of the thirty-nine classes of work forbidden on the Sabbath, and making clay from spittle could well have been considered as falling under the same prohibition. When the Pharisees asked the man how he received his sight, the answer he provided divided them (9:16). Some had already concluded that since Jesus, according to their traditions, violated the Sabbath, He could not be from God. Others preferred to evaluate the situation on the basis of the miracle itself, reminding us of the words of Nicodemus to Jesus in 3:2 (cf. 7:31). The nature of the miracle did not seem to square with the idea that Jesus was a sinner or a Sabbath-breaker.

The embarrassment of the Pharisees is shown by the fact that, once again, they turned to the man and asked him what he thought of Jesus. In fact, even though it was the healed man who was being interrogated and the name of Jesus was not even mentioned, the real target was Jesus. It is interesting to note how the man progressively changed his assessment of Jesus throughout the story. First, he referred to Him as human (9:11); then, as a prophet (v. 17); later, he would recognize that He must have been "from God" (v. 33); and eventually, he would believe in Him and even worship and adore Him (vv. 35–38). As for the Pharisees, though some were struck by the miracle, they ended up insisting on the thesis that Jesus was a sinner and had nothing to do with God (v. 24). At the end, it was the Pharisees who were blind and sinners (v. 41). The presence of the light always intensifies one's blindness.

9:18–23. Examining the Parents. The Pharisees proceeded to interrogate the parents of the man. Even if the neighbors could have testified that he was blind from birth (cf. v. 8), they could have been mistaken, but not His own parents. And once the Jewish leaders confirmed that the man was blind from birth, they gave their case away by asking the parents how it was that their son could see (v. 19). Their efforts backfired as they realized for themselves that a miracle had taken place. In other words, they had no option but to believe in the miracle (cf. v. 18b). They had come very close to believing in Jesus as the blind man almost intuitively sensed when he asked them if they wanted to become His disciples (v. 27).

The Evangelist makes it clear that the Jews were using intimidation techniques in order to avoid a public confession of Jesus as the Messiah. The parents wanted to avoid being dragged into a situation over which they had no control and that could damage them. In this context the expulsion from the synagogue was probably a temporary deprivation of the community privileges (v. 22; cf. 12:42; 16:2), though permanent excommunication was already known in Judaism at the time of Jesus. Either measure was greatly feared by the Jews. By the end of the first century, when John's Gospel was written, disciplinary actions against followers of Jesus seem to have become a serious threat (see John: Introduction), perhaps even more than before the conversion of Paul (cf. Acts 9:2; 22:19; 26:11). Jesus Himself had indicated that this would happen (Luke 6:22). Faith in Jesus does not exempt us from difficulties (John 16:33; James 1:2–3). No matter the situation, however, nothing can separate us from the Lord of life (cf. Luke 6:23).

9:24–34. Interrogating the Man. Unable to contest the miracle, the Jewish leaders tried to create doubts about the integrity of the spiritual life of Jesus. Concluding that it would be unproductive to continue to interrogate the parents of the former blind man, they called the man for the second time. This time they attempted to convince him that God, and not Jesus, should be praised for the miracle. In their estimation Jesus was a sinner, a transgressor of the law. Their logic was fraught with problems. By accusing Jesus of breaking the Sabbath they were in principle assuming that the miracle took place, whereas by telling the man that the miracle should be ascribed to God, not to Jesus, they were admitting that God worked through Jesus, something the man did not fail to notice (cf. John 9:31). In this case, the fact that it was a Sabbath day would not have been the most important thing. Perhaps this is why, contrary to what happened in relation to the healing at Bethesda (chap. 5), the issue of the Sabbath itself was not that important in the discussion. The more the Jews insisted that Jesus had broken the Sabbath, the more they would have recognized that He performed the miracle.

The man, however, did not want to go into the theoretical discussion of whether Jesus was a sinner or not. The objectivity of his answer is impressive: one thing he knew, that he was blind and now could see (9:25). The miracle could not be disputed, and it was up to the Jews to explain it. The dialogue that follows is delightful, perhaps more than any other in the Gospel. The simplicity of the man's logic was unsurpassed even by those who supposedly were the wisest representatives of contemporary Judaism. The bottom line is that while their unbelief prevented them from acknowledging that Jesus was from God (cf. v. 29), the miracle itself demonstrated exactly the opposite. By accusing the man of being born in sin, they were tacitly recognizing the two points they were trying to challenge, namely, that he was blind from birth and that a notable miracle had been performed. Thus, they lost their case. In their stubbornness, no other option was left but to resort to violence by throwing the man out of the synagogue (cf. v. 22). As often happens, when we lack persuasive arguments to defend a case, we tend to turn to violence in words or actions to settle our differences.

9:35–41. Confession of the Man. After the man's expulsion from the synagogue, Jesus apparently searched for him. The question He asked presupposed a positive answer and is designed to call the attention of the man to the true identity of Jesus (v. 35). There is no indication that the man had yet seen Jesus. All he could remember was His voice, but his experience had prepared him to believe that Jesus was not an ordinary man (cf. v. 33). When Jesus came to him and identified Himself (v. 35; cf. 4:25–26; see "Son of Man," p. 1428), the former blind man did not hesitate to express his belief and to adore Him. This is the only reference in John to someone worshiping Jesus prior to the crucifixion (cf. 20:28). In the dialogue, the man addressed Jesus twice as "Lord," moving, in the Greek, from a polite greeting (9:36) to a full acknowledgment of His authority (v. 38). The title "Son of Man" emphasizes the polarizing character of Jesus's self-revelation (cf. 3:17–20; 5:22–24; for further information see 5:25–29). In John, whenever Jesus reveals Himself through words or actions, He divides people into believers and unbelievers. Judgment, however, was not the purpose of His coming (3:17; 12:47), but it is the inevitable outcome. That is to say, when confronted by Jesus, the people pass judgment on themselves by the way they respond to Him.

In 9:39, and certainly based on the miracle, this idea is worked out in terms of sight and blindness. Jesus justified the miracle by saying that He had come as the light of the world (v. 5;

cf. 8:12; 12:46). The paradoxical effect of light—even natural light—is that at the same time that it dispels darkness it dazzles sight. When applied to Jesus, this means that with His coming, those who have been blinded by the darkness of sin could be enlightened, while those who do not feel the need for light move into deeper darkness. The healed man belongs to the first category, the Pharisees to the second. Unbelief is inexcusable (9:41; 15:22). Had the Jewish leaders recognized their spiritual blindness and humbly come to Jesus for healing, they would have found it. But no one, not even Jesus, can help those who deceive themselves and shut their eyes to the divine light (cf. 3:19; 5:40; 8:24).

10:1–21

Jesus, the Good Shepherd

In His last public address in Jerusalem, Jesus illustrated the redemptive nature of His mission using the experience of the shepherd and his sheep. It also serves to reveal the nature of those who use the sheep for their own personal purpose.

10:1–6. Shepherd and Sheep. In John's Gospel, the strong affirmation of truth *amēn, amēn* (translated variously as "truly, truly," "very truly," "most assuredly") never begins a discourse, implying that this section is a continuation of the events described in chapter 9 and that, therefore, it is not an independent discourse. This means that the target audience, "the Jews" or Jewish leaders (10:19), was essentially the same and that its general context is probably the healing of the man born blind (cf. v. 21). It is a little difficult to identify the literary type of the content of vv. 1–6. Though it is customary to speak of it as a parable, it must be borne in mind that the word "parable" (*parabolē*) never appears in this Gospel. John himself refers to it as a *paroimia* (v. 6), which was used to indicate a proverb, a figure of speech, or a metaphorical saying (cf. 16:25, 29).

More important than what we call it is its content, which is plain and easy to follow. It speaks metaphorically of a shepherd, a thief—who is also referred to as a robber and a stranger—and a flock. There is also a reference to a gatekeeper, used only to complete the scene, and a sheepfold and its gate. Such images were rather familiar to those who were listening to Jesus. In His time, the sheepfold would have been a roughly round courtyard surrounded by a stone wall and topped by briers to discourage the incursion of thieves or robbers. The fold would have had only one entrance, which was guarded by a gatekeeper, whose job was to guarantee the safety of the sheep, especially at night. Several small flocks could have shared the same fold. This would not have been a problem because, as a rule, not only did the shepherd know each of his sheep individually, but the sheep also knew the voice of the shepherd and would easily have followed him. Sometimes, due to the personal intimacy between the shepherd and his sheep, an individual sheep would even have recognized its own name and responded to it.

10:7–10. Door of Salvation. Though the images used by Jesus were common features of Jewish life, the Jewish leaders failed to understand their intended meaning (cf. 10:6). There is little if any question, however, that this illustration is to be read against the background of Ezekiel 34, where God, the supreme Shepherd (cf. Pss. 23:1; 80:1; Is. 40:10–11), strongly rebukes the shepherds (i.e., the leaders) of Israel for going after their own interests and failing to care for His people (Ezek. 34:2–8; cf. Is. 56:9–12; Jer. 23:1–4; 25:32–38; Zech. 11:4–17). Such useless and unfaithful shepherds would be removed (Ezek. 34:9–10), and God Himself would take over their responsibilities. He would retrieve His dispersed sheep (John 10:11–12), tend them with utmost care (vv. 13–16), and commit them to His servant, the Davidic Messiah (vv. 23–25).

In light of such a background, the main teaching of the illustration does not seem to be problematic. Perhaps the exception would be that Jesus interestingly applied to Himself two different images: the Door (vv. 7–10) and the Shepherd (vv. 11–18). That He is the Shepherd who calls His sheep and leads them out of the fold is what would be expected, but that He is also the door comes as a surprise. The illustration speaks of a gatekeeper, whose responsibility is to guard the entrance of the fold and keep the sheep safe. By speaking of Himself as the door of the sheep, Jesus said that He is the exclusive way to salvation (see "The 'I Am' Sayings," p. 1430); it is available only through Him (cf. 14:6). Whoever comes in through Him will be saved, that is, will be able to enjoy the freedom to come and go and the abundance (pasture) of God's salvation (10:9). The thieves and robbers (v. 8) probably refer to some of the Jewish leaders of the day. Such leaders do not contemplate the well-being of the sheep but think only of their own selfish interests (cf. John 7:49; 12:42–43; Matt. 23:2–7; Mark 7:6–13; Luke 16:30–32; 18:9).

10:11–18. Shepherd and the Hireling. In this passage the statement that Jesus came to impart life (John 10:10) serves as a transition from the metaphor of the door to that of the shepherd. Perhaps no other verse in John better describes the purpose of Jesus's coming than this one (cf. 3:14–16; 6:33, 51; 17:1–3; 20:31). It is because He had come to impart life that He could speak of Himself as the Good Shepherd, for the Good Shepherd gives up His life on behalf of the sheep (10:11). This is another unmistakable reference in this Gospel to Jesus's substitutionary death (cf. 10:15; 11:50, 51–52; 15:13). The contrast now is no longer between Jesus and thieves and robbers but between Himself and the hired man—someone paid to do the work. The hired man is not a shepherd, nor does he act like a shepherd. At the first sign of danger, for example, when a wolf is drawing near, he abandons the sheep and runs away. This person is interested only in money, not the sheep, and is not willing to risk his life for someone else's sheep.

The meaning of the hired man and the wolf is not clear, but there is no doubt that the Good Shepherd is being applied to Jesus. One of the characteristics of a good shepherd is that he knows the sheep. Jesus knows perfectly well those who belong to Him; as perfectly as the Father knows Him and He knows the Father (10:15). Once again, Jesus was claiming a level of relationship with the Father that could be possible only if He were one with the Father, something He actually stated as recorded farther down in the chapter (v. 30). But it is not only the good shepherd who knows his sheep; the sheep also know him (v. 14). This was objectively exemplified in the story of the blind man. After the miracle, all he could remember of the One who had healed him was His voice, and when they met again, he did not hesitate to follow Him. As He did with this man, Jesus will gather His sheep and unite them with His other sheep not of that fold—an obvious allusion to Gentile believers (cf. 11:51–52; 17:20). Then there will be one flock and one Shepherd (10:16). The saving call of Jesus was to reach outside the borders of Judaism, and as the true Messiah, He would universalize the saving faith of Israel, making it available to the Gentile world (cf. Gal. 3:26–29; Eph. 2:11–22; 4:3–6).

This section ends with a comment of Jesus about His sacrificial death for the sheep that further explains the thought of John 10:15. Jesus had already said in the context of the healing at Bethesda that He is life in Himself (John 5:26), but next He added that no one takes His life from Him. The immediate application of this statement was the intention of the Jewish leaders to kill Him (5:16, 18; 7:1, 19, 25; 8:37, 40, 59). It was Jesus who would voluntarily lay down His life (cf. 6:51) and take it up again (cf. 2:19)—an expression of divine love (3:35; 5:20; 10:17; 14:31; 15:9–10; 17:26). No one would take His life from Him, but He was willing to offer it out of His own free will and love as a sacrifice to God (15:13; 1 John 3:16). It is important to note that the passage does not say that after Jesus would lay down His life, He would take it up again independent of the Father. Elsewhere in the NT, the resurrection of Jesus is always referred to as an act of God (cf. Acts 2:24; 3:15; 10:40; 13:30, 33; Rom. 6:4; 10:9; 1 Cor. 6:14; Col. 2:12; Heb. 13:20; 1 Pet. 1:21). The meaning of this passage is not only that Jesus has authority, in compliance with the plan of the Father, to give His life (John 5:30; 6:38–40; 10:17–18; 14:31; 17:4; cf. Acts 2:23; 3:18; 4:27–28; Rom. 8:32) but that the Father also granted Him "authority" or "power" (*exousia*) to receive it back again. It is only in obedience to the Father that at the appropriate moment, He would come out of the tomb by the power of the life that was in Him as the Son of God.

10:19–21. Reaction of the Jews. Once again, the Jewish leaders were divided about who Jesus was (cf. John 9:16). While some insisted that He was demon-possessed and raving mad (cf. 7:20; 8:48, 52), others were still trying to make sense of the fact that He restored a blind man's sight. They knew that a miracle had been performed. Some were perhaps inclined to believe in Him, but in the end, with the exception of just a few (19:38–39), they turned away from Him. Jesus's works or signs spoke for themselves—and they still do—confronting every person with a decision of eternal proportions. No other alternative is left: either we believe that He is the Son of God, or we only lay bare the madness of our own heart. The truth is that nothing could have been more divine and wonderful than what Jesus did when He lived among us.

10:22–42

Feast of Dedication

Though still related to the speech of the good shepherd (cf. 10:26–29), the episodes that follow occur a bit later, during the celebration of the Feast of Dedication. This feast—also called Hanukkah or the Feast of Lights—is an eight-day feast that is celebrated in winter (cf. v. 22), in the second half of December. It is a relatively recent institution, not prescribed in the Hebrew Scriptures. The feast remembers the reconsecration of the temple and its altar by Judas Maccabaeus in 165 B.C., three years after Antiochus IV Epiphanes erected a pagan altar in the temple and sacrificed pigs (sacred to Greeks) to Zeus.

10:22–30. Jesus's Interrogation. Jesus had been in Judea for about three months since the Feast of the Tabernacles (chap. 7), which was celebrated in the autumn. This was probably the year A.D. 30. At the temple court, under a two-hundred-yard-long (61 m) roofed structure supported by pillars (the so-called Portico of Solomon; John 10:23; cf. Acts 3:11; 5:12), the Jews gathered around Jesus and asked Him whether or not He was the Messiah (v. 24). The question was framed in a way that gives the impression that Jesus had not been quite fair to them. The answer of Jesus was a denial of the accusation that He had not told them. It is true that because of the political connotations attached to first-century Jewish messianic expectation (cf. 6:15; 11:48), Jesus as a rule avoided referring to Himself as the Messiah. But the works He had openly performed in the Father's name testified loud and clear to His being the Messiah (2:11; 3:2; 5:36; 7:31; 12:37; 14:11; 15:24; 20:30–31). If they were unwilling to believe, it was because they were not part of His flock (cf. 8:47). His sheep know His voice and follow Him (10:3–4) and are known by Him (vv. 14, 16). Jesus was talking about a redemptive experience (vv. 10–11, 15). As the Good Shepherd, He would give His life for the sheep, and consequently, they would never perish (cf. 3:15–16; 6:51, 58; 8:51–52; 11:26). No one would snatch them out of His hand. The text does not say anything about whether, in the course of time, one could stop believing, but it indicates that the ultimate safety of sheep is in the hands of the Good Shepherd (10:28). Even the weakest sheep becomes all-powerful in the hands of an all-powerful God (cf. Phil. 4:13). In the final analysis, to be in Jesus's hands is the same as to be in the Father's hands, for Jesus and the Father are one (John 10:29–30).

10:31–39. Charge of Blasphemy. The Jews immediately recognized the implications of Jesus's words and were again ready to stone Him under the charge of blasphemy (cf. Lev. 24:16); He had claimed to be God (cf. 5:17–18). Once again, Jesus confronted them with the works He had performed from the Father (10:32), but they did not want to consider any evidence concerning the divine origin of Jesus (cf. 9:39–41; 12:37–40). In His answer, Jesus resorted to an exegetical irony—an argument from Scripture. He quoted Psalm 82:6 to show that if Israel's unjust judges, who were infinitely inferior to the supreme God, were called "gods," why would they take offense at Him for claiming to be the Son of God (John 10:34–36)?

Jesus used the OT passage to present two clearly stated arguments. First, it was taken from the Scriptures, which could not be broken or set aside (v. 35), and second, Jesus was far superior to the judges called in the passage "gods" (see commentary on Psalm 82:1–8). He had been sanctified by the Father prior to being sent into the world (John 10:36). In other words, Jesus did not deny that He was putting Himself next to God, but He denied the Jews' assessment of His claims. The point is clear: It does not matter what He would do, the Jewish leaders had decided not to believe. If they were at least willing to consider the evidence of His works (cf. 14:11), there would be a chance for them to recognize and acknowledge (some manuscripts have here *gnōte* and *ginōskēte*—"know and continue to know"—while others have *gnōte* and *pisteusēte*—"know and believe or have faith") that the Father was in Him and He was in the Father (10:38). But they were not willing. In their stubbornness, they were persuaded that Jesus was a sinner—a transgressor of the law and a blasphemer. They again tried to arrest Him but failed (v. 39; cf. 7:30, 32, 44; 8:20). In other cases, John indicated that they could not arrest Jesus because His hour had not yet come (cf. 7:30; 8:20). We can certainly assume that this was also the case at this time. That "hour," however, was getting closer (cf. 12:23).

10:40–42. Back to the Beginning. Following the attempt of the Jewish leaders to arrest Him, Jesus withdrew to the land on the east side of the Jordan River. The adverb *palin* suggests that this was not the first time that Jesus had done this. The exact location is not mentioned, but since it was the place where John was first baptizing (10:40), the reader is able to identify it as Bethany or Bethabara (cf. 1:28), the place where Jesus Himself was baptized and called His first disciples. Though far away from Jerusalem, Jesus did not stop His activities. People were still coming to Him as they had come to see John the Baptist. The comparison between the two could not be avoided. That John did not perform any sign was probably intended to mean that Jesus did perform additional signs among them (10:41; cf. 20:30). These and the previous testimony of John on behalf of Jesus caused many to believe in Him (cf. 1:29–34). The adverb *ekei* in 10:42 implies a contrast between Jerusalem, the center of Jewish life, and that rural location. Despite the threats against His life on the part of the Jewish officials, Jesus still had many true followers among the people.

11:1—12:50

THE CLOSING OF JESUS'S PUBLIC MINISTRY

About three months after His strategic departure to the east side of the Jordan, Jesus was back in Judea, where He resurrected Lazarus, was anointed by Mary, and made His last, triumphal entry into Jerusalem just a few days before the crucifixion. This section, then, occupies a pivotal role in the development of John's drama. It brings this Gospel's account of Jesus's public ministry to its end and prepares the reader for the sufferings and death of Jesus.

11:1–57

The Raising of Lazarus

Instead of eliciting faith, Jesus's seventh and most astonishing sign in this Gospel became the final reason for the Jews to decide to kill Him (see "The Seven Signs in the Fourth Gospel," p. 1417).

11:1–16. Death of Lazarus. These introductory verses are intended to set the stage for the miracle. Outside John's Gospel, Mary and Martha are mentioned by name only in Luke, who tells us that they lived in a village (Luke 10:38–42). John, in turn, not only says that Lazarus was the brother of Mary and Martha but also identifies the village as Bethany. The village was located on the farther side of the Mount of Olives, about two miles (3 km) from Jerusalem on the road to Jericho (cf. John 11:18). According to John, Lazarus, a dear friend of Jesus, was ill. The urgency of the message sent to Jesus implies that Lazarus's condition was critical and that Jesus was expected to come quickly (cf. vv. 21, 32).

From the very beginning of the incident Jesus was aware of the fact that the real issue was going to be not the death of Lazarus but His own glory as the Son of God (cf. vv. 4, 40). His delay of two days in returning to Bethany (v. 6) does not mean that He deliberately waited for Lazarus to die. If by the time He arrived in Bethany Lazarus had already been dead for four days, Lazarus must have died before the message reached Him (cf. v. 15). The surprise of the disciples at the decision of Jesus to go to Judea is to be understood in light of the increasing hostilities on the part of the Jewish authorities toward Him (v. 8). Judea had become a dangerous place for Him, and the disciples themselves were fearful for their lives (cf. v. 16). Jesus's reply indicates that it was still safe to go to Bethany. The idea that he who walks during the day has nothing to fear because they will be able to see from the light of this world (v. 9) may be another example of Jesus using words with a double meaning (cf. 3:3; 7:6; 8:28). As long as the disciples were with Him, the light of the world (cf. 8:12; 9:5; 12:46), they were safe.

Knowing that Lazarus was dead, Jesus referred to his death using the metaphor of death as sleep (11:11). Such a metaphor, which is rather common in Scripture, both in the OT (1 Kin. 1:21; Job 7:21; 14:12; Ps. 13:3; Jer. 51:39, 57; Dan. 12:2) and in the NT (Matt. 27:52; Acts 7:60; 13:36; 1 Cor. 7:39; 11:30; 15:6, 18, 20; 1 Thess. 4:13–15; 5:10; 2 Pet. 3:4), is not to be taken literally, as if death were an intermediate state in which the souls of the dead remain dormant and unconscious in the grave until the resurrection. The biblical concept of death is that it terminates the life of the person in all of its expressions (Ps. 146:4; Eccl. 12:7; cf. Gen. 2:7; Job 7:21; 14:12; 33:4; Eccl. 9:5–6, 10). The metaphor works only at the visual level on account of the fact that death and sleep appear to be similar, that is, the dead person seems to be sleeping and is described as such. The disciples, however, took the words of Jesus at face value, concluding that sleep would be good for Lazarus. They misunderstood Jesus not because they were unfamiliar with the metaphor but because they did not know that Lazarus was already dead (cf. John 11:13–14). In addition, by using the metaphor Jesus was not simply saying that Lazarus was dead but also denying that his death was irrevocable (cf. Mark 5:39). In other words, when Jesus said that He would wake him up (John 11:11), He was in fact preparing the disciples for the miracle.

11:17–27. Jesus and Martha. When Jesus reached Bethany, Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days (v. 17). This remark called attention to the reality and grandeur of the miracle that was about to take place. One could imagine that there were many people in the house, including flute players (cf. Matt. 9:23) and professional weepers and wailers (cf. Mark 5:38). These were common figures in ancient Jewish funeral practices. As a rule, the Jews buried their dead on the day they died, but the rabbis recommended that the burial be followed by a period of seven days of deep mourning and thirty days of light mourning.

Martha was the first to see Jesus. She took the initiative and went out to meet Him, while Mary remained at home, grieving the loss of her beloved brother (cf. John 11:31). Rather than being an expression of disappointment at Jesus's delay, Martha's words reveal her conviction that Lazarus's fate would have been different had Jesus been there. Yet, contrary to what v. 22 apparently indicates, she was not expecting Jesus to raise him up. Later on in the narrative, when Jesus ordered that the stone be taken away from the tomb's entrance, Martha's objection (v. 39) shows that she was not considering the possibility of an immediate resurrection. Like most first-century Jews, she did believe in the resurrection of the righteous in the last day (v. 24; cf. 5:28–29; Pss. 16:10–11; 49:14–15; Is. 26:19; Dan. 12:1–2; Matt. 22:23–30), but the last day was not yet present. Besides, she was fully aware of the fact that the body of her brother was already in the process of decay (cf. John 11:39).

Then Jesus made the astounding claim that He is "the resurrection and the life" (v. 25a; see "The 'I Am' Sayings," p. 1430). In His following comments He explained the meaning and scope of such a claim from the standpoint of both the dead and the living. Even though those believing in Jesus may die, they will live (11:25b). And He added that whoever lives and believes in Him will "never die" (v. 26a). The Greek actually says not that whoever believes in Jesus will "never" die but rather that those who believe shall not die "eternally" (*eis ton aiōna*). In other words, for believers it does not matter whether they are already dead or are about to die, death does not have the final word. The final word for them is life because Jesus has conquered death (2 Tim. 1:10; cf. Rom. 5:18–19; 1 Cor. 15:54–55; Rev. 20:14), and He imparts life to those who believe in Him (John 6:47; 10:10; 1 John 5:11–12). This great promise lies at the very center of the gospel and fills the human heart with hope (Rom. 6:23). When Jesus asked Martha, "Do you believe this?" (John 11:26b), He was giving her the opportunity to express her faith in spite of the fact that she probably did not fully understand the significance of His words. Yet Martha responded affirmatively by referring to Jesus as the "the Son of God" (v. 27).

11:28–37. Jesus and Mary. Since Martha met Jesus right before He entered the village, it is possible that their dialogue was not witnessed by anybody else except the disciples. Now Mary, as soon as she learned that Jesus was asking for her, quickly came to Him, accompanied by those who were trying to comfort her and who thought that she was going to the tomb to weep. The scene must have been heartbreaking, especially because of the flutes and the wailing. The first words of Mary to Jesus remind us of those of Martha, as she noted that if He had been there her brother "would not have died" (v. 32). Others may have shared the same opinion or perhaps understood His delay as a sign of indifference toward His dear friend (cf. v. 37). When Jesus saw all the grief and pain, He "groaned" or "was deeply moved" (*embrimaomai*) in His spirit and was troubled (v. 33). The Greek term translated as "deeply moved" or "groaned" has the basic meaning of being "moved with anger," which indicates that Jesus's emotions went way beyond sorrow or sympathy to actual indignation. What is not immediately clear, however, is the precise object of His indignation. It could not have been death itself as part of the human lot, for He was just about to assault the reign of death and bring one of its captive back to life. It is more likely that He was indignant with the pretended sorrow of the mourners, their unbelief, and the willingness of some of them to side with the Pharisees against Him after witnessing the stupendous miracle that He was about to perform (cf. v. 46).

At any rate, His feelings were so intense that He could not hide them. When He asked for the place where Lazarus was laid, He began to weep (vv. 34–35). Again, the text does not say why. It is reasonable to conclude that it was partially because of the long years of past, present, and future human suffering, of which this scene of grief was but a microcosm. In view of the previous verse, His tears also could have been a sign of deep sadness motivated by the stunning unbelief of the people and the fact that some of them were plotting His own death. From this perspective, the weeping of Jesus would be an integral part of the Gospel's drama and not only of the story of Lazarus. He wept because He knew what the final balance of His ministry would be (cf. 1:11; 12:37).

11:38–44. Resurrection of Lazarus. In the first century, typical Jewish tombs consisted basically of a roughly square, rock-hewn burial chamber with several arched niches cut into the

surrounding walls, the entrance wall excepted. It was in one such niche that the body was laid. The entrance to the tomb was low and square with a stone lying against it. Based on the description provided by John, the tomb of Lazarus was of this kind (v. 38). It was certainly located outside the village to prevent any risk of ritual impurity through contact with the corpse (cf. Lev. 21:1; Num. 19:11; Lam. 4:14; Hag. 2:13). The order of Jesus to remove the stone (John 11:39) was unexpected, not only because of the matter of contamination but also because by then the corpse would have been in a state of decomposition. The protest of Martha seems appropriate because she had not yet really understood what Jesus said to her. By furnishing such details, John is not simply trying to add drama to the narrative but rather stressing the reality of the miracle. Each of Jesus's miracles was a revelation of God's glory through Him (1:14; 2:11; cf. 5:19–20, 36; 10:25, 32; 14:10). They witnessed to His messianic claims and the divine origin of His mission (3:2; 5:36; 6:14, 29–30; 7:31; 9:16; 20:30–31). He had told the disciples before they came that Lazarus's illness would lead to God's glory (11:4), and the messengers who brought word to Jesus of Lazarus's illness (v. 3) may have told Martha of His words to the disciples. He also may have been referring to His words to her in vv. 23 and 25 concerning His divine, life-giving power and the resurrection. It is also possible that the original dialogue with her recorded in the Gospel was longer than the version recorded by John (as seems to be the case with a number of other narratives).

The narrative provides for us the first invocation of the Father by Jesus in the Gospel of John (v. 41; cf. 12:27–28; 17:1–26). It was loud enough to be heard by those who were with Him. So far, He had spoken of the Father in the third person, claiming to have come from Him (e.g., 4:34; 5:22–38; 8:18, 42; 10:36) and to be one with Him (10:30, 38). Now, in a more defiant way than ever before (as the Jewish leaders might have thought), He addressed the Father directly, using the second person (11:41). But before anyone could even think of accusing Him of blasphemy, He shouted, "Lazarus, come forth [come out]" (v. 43). To the amazement of all, Lazarus heard the creative, life-giving voice of Jesus and came out of the tomb exactly the way he had been buried, that is, his feet and hands bound with linen strips and his face wrapped in a headcloth (v. 44). These incidental details reinforce the historicity of the event. The account ends rather abruptly because what really matters is the miracle itself and what it reveals about the identity of Jesus.

11:45–57. Faith and Unbelief. As expected, the miracle divided the people (cf. 7:12–13, 40–44; 9:16; 10:20–21). While many of those who came to comfort Martha and Mary believed, others apparently did not and went straight to the Pharisees to report what had happened (11:45). The striking news about the resurrection called forth an extraordinary meeting of the Sanhedrin, the supreme court of Israel (cf. 3:1; 7:45; 11:47; 18:3). In the time of Jesus, the Sanhedrin was controlled by the chief priests, who were mostly Sadducees, with Pharisees representing an influential minority.

Having learned from their previous mistakes (cf. 9:18–34), this time the Jews did not contest the miracle (cf. 11:47) but instead tried to find political reasons to get rid of Jesus. The argument was that Jesus represented a threat to both their holy place, known from other Jewish literature as a common expression for the temple, and to the nation as a whole. Obviously, the Romans would not have tolerated any popular uproar fueled by messianic expectations. Caiaphas's intervention could not have been more cynical. What he was really saying was that killing Jesus was the next and easiest solution to the problem. According to John, Caiaphas, who served as high priest from A.D. 18 to 36, was not speaking by himself but was actually prophesying about the meaning of the death of Jesus. In his interpretation of that unintentional prophecy, John explains that Jesus would die not only for Israel but also for the purpose of gathering together into one people the dispersed children of God (v. 52). That is, the death of Jesus would be on behalf of all, Jews and Gentiles, to unite them into one (cf. 10:16; 17:20). Through His death Jesus universalized the true Jewish messianic expectation and its saving power (cf. 1:12–13).

Aware of the Sanhedrin's decision to kill Him, Jesus decided to retreat to a town named Ephraim (11:54) in the Judean hill country about twelve miles (19 km) north of Jerusalem. The third and last Passover mentioned in the Gospel was near (cf. 2:13; 6:4), and many pilgrims were already coming to Jerusalem to participate in rituals of purification (11:55; cf. Lev. 7:21; Num. 9:6). There is a great deal of irony here. While the common people were concerned about purity, the religious leaders themselves were exhibiting the deep, chronic impurity of their own hearts by conspiring to kill the Son of God.

12:1–50
Final Coming to Jerusalem

The last events of Jesus's public ministry took place in Jerusalem, where He came after being anointed in Bethany in preparation for His death and burial.

12:1–8. Anointing at Bethany. All four Gospels have an account of Jesus being anointed by a woman (cf. Matt. 26:6–13; Mark 14:3–9; Luke 7:36–50). The accounts in Matthew and Mark are nearly identical, while that of Luke and John provide additional details. Matthew, Mark, and Luke point out that the episode took place at the house of Simon, a Pharisee and former leper. Matthew, Mark, and John point out that Simon's house was in Bethany. Matthew and Mark indicate that Mary anointed Jesus's head, while Luke and John indicate that she anointed His feet. The main difference is chronological. Matthew, Mark, and John place this story shortly before His death, while Luke seems to place it when John the Baptist was still in prison. Since Luke, perhaps for theological emphasis, did not always place events in strict chronological order, it is possible that explains the placement of this story in his Gospel (see commentary on Luke 7:36–50).

According to John, Jesus arrived in Bethany six days before the Passover (John 12:1). The supper likely occurred at the conclusion of the Sabbath, Saturday evening, which was technically the start of the first day of the week. The fact that Martha was serving does not necessarily point to her house as the place where the dinner was offered, otherwise there would have been no need at all to say that Lazarus was there as well (v. 2; cf. Matt. 26:6; Mark 14:3; Luke 7:36, 40).

The Greek says that they reclined rather than sat at the table (John 12:2), indicating a Roman-style low table (known as a *triclinium*) with divans or cushions around it. The guests would lie on their left side facing the inside, leaving their right hand free to eat the meal. This is why Mary could have come from behind and have had easy access to Jesus. The unguent she used amounted to one *litra*, a measurement of weight equivalent to the Roman pound (327.45 g, or 11.5 oz.), and was made of pure nard (v. 3), also known as spikenard, a fragrant oil derived from the root and spike (hair stem) of the nard plant. It was used by the Romans for anointing the head while water was usually provided for the feet; this would be done by a servant. This implies that Mary's action was a sign of humility as well as devotion.

12:9–11. Plan to Kill Lazarus. The news about the resurrection of Lazarus spread rather quickly, particularly after the Sanhedrin gave express orders to arrest Jesus (11:57). By this time throngs of pilgrims had already come for the Passover celebrations (vv. 55–56). After learning that Jesus was back in Bethany, many wanted to see Him and Lazarus. The text suggests that Lazarus was the main attraction, and after seeing him many believed in Jesus (12:9, 11). Yet just a few verses later, it says that the people did not believe (vv. 37–43), which seems to suggest that their belief was a superficial, fleeting faith, of which there are several examples in the Gospel of John (cf. 2:23–25; 3:2–3; 6:15, 26–27, 34–37, 64, 66; 7:3–5, 12–13; 8:31–33). Nevertheless, the fact of the resurrection of Lazarus posed another problem to the Jewish leaders, especially to the Sadducees, who did not believe in the resurrection of the dead (cf. Mark 12:18; Acts 23:6–8). The idea to kill Lazarus was a desperate attempt to get rid of the physical evidence of the miracle (John 12:10–11; cf. 11:53).

12:12–19. Triumphal Entry. The narrative of the triumphal entry is found in all four Gospels (cf. Matt. 21:1–11; Mark 11:1–11; Luke 19:28–40). It is only at this point that the Synoptic Gospels start their account of Jesus's ministry in Jerusalem. John's account is the shortest of the four, though it has some features of its own. It is the only Gospel to date the episode, the only one to mention the palm branches and the lack of understanding of the disciples, and the only one to connect the episode to the resurrection of Lazarus. The "next day" (John 12:12) refers back to v. 1. The day was probably Sunday, and Jerusalem was packed with visitors who came for the Passover. It has been estimated that on such occasions the population of about one hundred thousand would increase to one million—though many of these pilgrims had to reside outside the city. Moved by the miracle (cf. vv. 17–18), the people received Jesus as a kingly Messiah, waving palm branches, a sort of national symbol. The Synoptics add that they spread their cloaks on the road (Mark 11:8; Luke 19:36) while shouting "Hosanna" (lit. "help" or "save, I pray"; John 12:13). This was a general expression of acclamation or praise. The two biblical citations (Ps. 118:26 and Zech. 9:9) also indicate that Jesus was being received as the messianic King (John 12:13, 15).

Jesus had previously refused to be hailed as King (cf. 1:49; 6:15), but not this time. The fact that He was riding a donkey and not a war horse or a chariot indicated the kind of King He was. In the culture of the day, the donkey was associated with humility and peace (Zech. 9:9–10), not necessarily with a political warrior (1 Kin. 4:26; Is. 31:1–3; cf. Rev. 19:11–16). In His triumphal entry Jesus accepted being welcomed as the King of Israel, but not exactly according to the predominant views of the day and not on the literal throne of David (cf. Matt. 21:5). His real glory would be fully revealed only at the cross (cf. John 12:23). The disciples initially failed to grasp this point because they also shared the same messianic hopes of the people in general (cf. Matt. 20:20–24; Mark 10:35–41; Luke 24:15–21). It was only after Jesus had been glorified, and through the action of the Holy Spirit, that they came to understand the true significance of this act (John 12:16; cf. 2:22; 7:39; 14:26; 20:9). For the Pharisees, however, this indicated that they were losing the battle and that they had to hurry and immediately put into effect their plan to kill Jesus.

12:20–30. His Hour Has Come. The Pharisees were in a state of desperation. John indicates that they could feel the world going after Jesus. This is neatly illustrated by introducing in the narrative the visit of some Greeks asking to see Jesus (12:20–22). At this point in the narrative, Jesus finally announced that the hour had come for the Son of Man to be glorified. The desire of the Greeks matched that of the disciples, who were Jews (1:36–39, 41, 45; 6:67–69), and of the Samaritans (4:29–30, 40), thus affirming the universal scope of His mission (cf. 1:29; 3:14–15, 16–17; 4:42; 6:33, 51; 12:32, 47). Jesus's enigmatic statement (12:24) was about His future and illustrates the paradoxical nature of His death. Jesus's life-giving mission would be accomplished through death, when He would be glorified and life would be given to others (cf. vv. 32–33).

The following verses (vv. 25–26) move from the sacrificial death of Jesus to its significance for the believers. Since Jesus's death was the necessary condition for life, it is only by dying to our sinful life in this world that we receive eternal life. In dying Jesus generated life, making it possible for us to die in order to receive Jesus's gift of life. We enjoy new life by following Jesus as His servants and honoring God.

Jesus was deeply moved by the prospect of death. This is understandable because death was His enemy. He came to the world to die, and when the difficult moment was closing in on Him, the willingness remained (cf. 3:16–17; 10:11, 15; 12:47; 15:13). His actual prayer acknowledged the Father's sovereignty (12:28a). Jesus's death would be the means through which God Himself would be glorified (cf. 13:31–32; 17:1, 4), and nothing could deviate Him from pursuing that end (cf. 4:34; 5:30; 6:38; 14:10, 24). The voice from heaven, which came not so much for Jesus's sake but for the benefit of the crowd (12:30), affirmed the Father's trust in Him. It is true that the people did not understand the voice, but they should have seen in the supernatural event a sign of divine affirmation of Jesus and His ministry. God was with Him.

12:31–36. Judgment of the World. The hour of Jesus's glorification would be the hour of the judgment of the world (v. 31; cf. v. 23). There are two important implications in this statement. The first is that the ruler or prince of this world would be expelled (v. 31; cf. 16:11). To the human eye the cross was shameful, but from the divine perspective it is the triumph of God and the defeat of Satan. The image of the Son of God hanging on the cross could be taken as a symbol of the triumph of evil, but in fact it is the deepest revelation of the love of God for all of His creatures as well as the vindication of His character in the cosmic conflict against all evil powers. The second implication is that by dying on the cross, Jesus would draw all people to Himself (12:32–33; cf. 3:14). The meaning is not that all would come to Him, as if everyone in the whole world would be saved, but that all who would come to Him would do it because of the power and attraction of the cross.

The people found it difficult to understand why Jesus was talking about His death. They believed that according to the Scriptures the Messiah would remain forever (e.g., 12:34; cf. Pss. 89:3–4; 110:4; Is. 9:7; Ezek. 37:25; Dan. 7:13–14). But they missed the Scriptures that also refer to the death of the Messiah (cf. Gen. 22:1–19; Num. 21:8–9 [cf. John 3:14–17]; Is. 52:13—53:12; Dan. 9:26). This has traditionally been understood in terms of two different phases of the work of the Messiah: His atoning death the first time He came (the Suffering Servant) and the establishment of His eternal kingdom the second time He comes (the conquering King). Perhaps as a result of the Roman occupation, first-century Judaism lost sight of the first phase and focused mostly on the second one. Hope was set on a political Messiah who would restore David's dynasty and establish a kingdom that would last forever.

Jesus once again referred to Himself as the Son of Man (John 12:23), His favorite messianic self-designation (see "Son of Man," p. 1428), and the Jews asked who that was (12:34; cf. v. 23). In His answer, Jesus spoke about the light rather than about His title. The metaphor of light, which harkens back to 9:4 and 11:10, stresses the fact that they did not have much time left to believe and to become children or, literally, sons of light (12:36). The light would not remain with them much longer (cf. v. 46). Perhaps in order to illustrate the passing of the light, Jesus literally left and hid Himself. His hour had come, and soon the unbelief of His listeners would leave them in complete darkness (v. 35).

12:37–43. Outcome of the Ministry of Jesus. Despite the appeal of Jesus (vv. 35–36), the Jews were unwilling to believe. Their unbelief was then described as a fulfillment of prophecy. The point is not that unbelief—here described in terms of blinding and hardening—is caused by God Himself but that human decisions are taken seriously by God and that He incorporates them into His plan. The phrase "they could not believe" (v. 39) is not about unilateral, unconditional predestination but about the fact that what Isaiah saw happening will indeed happen. Blinding and hardening are not arbitrarily imposed by God on people. In this case they were the deliberate choices of those listening to Jesus, and they will assume responsibility for their actions (cf. 3:19; 5:40; 8:24; 9:41). God allows such things to happen, thus respecting human freedom. Some of the Jews believed (cf. 2:23; 6:2; 7:31; 8:30; 10:42; 11:45; 12:11), but even among them some turned back to unbelief. It could be that the fear of expulsion from the synagogue by the religious authorities prevented many from openly taking their stand with Jesus (9:34–35; cf. 7:32, 45; 11:47, 57; 20:19). They prioritized the affirmation of people over God's affirmation (12:43).

12:44–50. Message of Jesus. It is at this point in the narrative that the public ministry of Jesus comes to an end. This passage seems to contain a fitting summary of His message by emphasizing four main points: (1) Jesus did not come on His own initiative (cf. 5:24, 30, 43; 6:38; 7:16, 18, 28; 8:42); hence, not believing in Him is the same as not believing in the One who sent Him (12:44; cf. 5:37–38; 8:42, 47; 13:20). (2) He came as light to the world (12:46; cf. 8:12; 9:5), implying that rejecting Him means remaining in the darkness of sin forever (cf. 3:19; 8:12; 9:41). (3) He came to save, not to condemn (12:47; cf. 3:17), and condemnation is the inevitable result of unbelief (3:18) because when the saving word is rejected, it becomes a statement of condemnation (cf. 5:45). (4) Jesus spoke not of His own accord (12:49; cf. 3:34; 7:17; 8:26–28, 38, 40; 12:49–50; 14:10, 24; 17:8) but only as instructed by the Father, and the divine intention is eternal life (12:50; cf. 6:40; 17:3).

13:1–38

IN THE UPPER ROOM

Except for a few statements in the context of His arrest and trial, Jesus would not again directly address the people. For the next five chapters, the Gospel is concerned only with Jesus's final instructions to the Twelve. He spoke to them in the upper room (chaps. 13–14) and then on the way to Gethsemane (chaps. 15–17). John does not explicitly mention the upper room itself (cf. Mark 14:15) or the name of the garden (cf. Mark 14:32).

13:1–30

The Lord's Supper

Jesus's final instructions to the Twelve were proceeded by an evening meal (no details of which are given by John), the ordinance of foot washing, and the announcement of His betrayal.

13:1–11. The Foot Washing. The Lord's Supper was the Passover meal, the time reference which has been the subject of debate (before Passover, John 13:1) notwithstanding (cf. Matt. 26:17; Mark 14:12; Luke 22:7–8). Does the time reference refer only to the actions described in John 13:1, in particular to Jesus's foreknowledge of what awaited Him, or does it also include the meal itself (v. 2)? The debate is ongoing.

The Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread commemorated the deliverance of the children of Israel from their bondage in Egypt. In remembrance of how the firstborn of Israel had been "passed over," while the firstborn of Egypt had died, Israelite families sacrificed a lamb on the afternoon of Nisan 14 (before sundown) and prepared it so that after sundown (the beginning of Nisan 15), it could be eaten at the Passover meal (Ex. 12:6; Lev. 23:4–6). The Feast of Unleavened Bread, which lasted an entire week, also began that day at sundown (Ex. 12:8, 15, 17–20). In remembrance of the haste in which their ancestors left Egypt, no leavened bread was to be eaten during the festival or even kept in the house. Although these two events were originally different festivals, they were so closely intertwined that by the time of Jesus they had essentially become a single festival celebrated for a week. It is for this reason that the entire celebration can be referred to in the NT as the Passover (Luke 22:1).

Knowing that His hour had come (John 13:1; cf. 7:30; 8:20; 12:23, 27; 17:1), Jesus directed His attention to the Twelve as the representatives of the new messianic community (cf. 1:11–13; 10:3–4, 16, 26–27; 17:6–9, 20–21). The Greek behind the phrase "to the end" (*eis telos*) also means "to the utmost"—and both meanings might be present here. The foot washing ceremony should be understood within the context of Jesus's most intense love for the disciples. Foot washing, always done before a meal, was customarily the work of a servant. Surprisingly, the text makes it clear that this had not been done. Thus, it was only after the meal (13:2) that Jesus used this as an opportunity to teach a profound lesson on humility. It summarized the whole life of Jesus as one of service to humanity; a service that would reach unanticipated expression on the cross. As recorded in the Synoptics, there was a dispute among the disciples as to which of them was the greatest. In this context an acted-out parable on the importance of humility and service was appropriate (Luke 22:24). However, in His dialogue with Peter, Jesus clearly demonstrated that foot washing also involved a spiritual cleansing without which no one could sit at the table to have fellowship with Him (John 13:8). From this perspective, the action of Jesus was fully related to His atoning work on the cross (cf. v. 7). The key text is v. 10, which brings out a significant contrast between the verbs "to bathe" (*louō*) and "to wash" (*niptō*). On a literal level, "to bathe" may relate to the ritual bathing performed by Jews in preparation for the Passover (cf. 11:55), while "to wash" certainly refers to the custom of the hosts arranging to have the feet of the guests washed on arriving at the house for a meal. But the way Jesus used both verbs implies that those who have surrendered their life to Him in faith and baptism have been cleansed from their sins (cf. 3:5–6; 6:63; 1 John 1:9). Consequently, the foot washing serves as a reminder of such an experience and as a symbolic renewal of the cleansing. That all the disciples were clean except one (John 13:11) shows that no rite by itself, even if performed by Jesus Himself, is enough to guarantee spiritual cleansing.

13:12–20. Object Lesson. Having washed the feet of all the disciples, Jesus resumed His place at the table and invited them to think about the significance of His act. They had referred to Him as "Teacher" and "Lord" (v. 13), which He said was correct. "Teacher," the equivalent to "rabbi," was the respectful way of addressing a religious instructor (e.g., 1:38, 49; 3:2, 10, 26; 6:25). In the present context, "Lord" could be either a title expressing politeness (e.g., 4:11, 15, 49; 5:7; 6:34) or a recognition of divine status (cf. 6:68; 20:28). Using a *qal wahomer* technique (see commentary on John 7:19–24), Jesus argued that if He, being Lord and Teacher (He changes the word order), was willing to wash their feet, so much more should they wash each other's feet (13:14). Jesus was modeling for the disciples what He expected from them. They were not to cling to their dignity to the point of avoiding any possible humble task performed in service to others (v. 16; cf. 15:20; Matt. 10:24; Luke 6:40). "The only greatness is the greatness of humility. The only distinction is found in devotion to the service of others" (DA 650). The content of "these things" (John 13:17) is not immediately clear, but the use of the verb "to do" indicates that foot washing was not only an example but particularly an ordinance of the Lord to be always performed in preparation for the Lord's Supper.

Then the narrative shifts rather abruptly from the disciples in general to Judas. The language of choosing/election implies not unilateral, unconditional predestination but simply the foreknowledge of Jesus concerning the one who would betray Him (cf. 6:64), which was previously announced through a prophecy that was to be fulfilled at this time (cf. Ps. 41:9). At this moment His words remained enigmatic to the disciples. It was only after Judas carried out the betrayal that they would understand the full meaning of His words and would believe that He was the "I am" (John 13:19). The expression almost certainly refers to Jesus's divinity, as it implies that He was the One He claimed to be (cf. 8:28, 58).

13:21–30. The Betrayal Predicted. After explaining the meaning of foot washing, Jesus moved to the identification of Judas as the betrayer. As Jesus was doing this He was "troubled in spirit" (v. 21). The word "troubled" (*tarassō*), already used of Jesus in 11:33 and 12:27, offers another glimpse of His human nature, strongly attested in John's Gospel (1:14; 4:6–7; 11:35; 19:1–2, 17–18, 28, 33–34; 20:20, 27). In the present passage, the inner turmoil of Jesus was caused by the awareness of His approaching sacrificial death for the sins of the world. This is not the first time the betrayal is announced in John's Gospel (cf. 6:64, 70–71; 12:4; 13:2, 11, 18–19), but now the moment had come when Judas would sever his relations with Jesus.

The disciples did not understand Jesus and through the end of this section remained in suspense. John, the disciple "whom Jesus loved" (13:23; cf. 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20), would soon come to know. It was Peter who took the initiative by signaling John to ask Jesus to identify the traitor. All would have been reclining on their left sides (in order to use only their right hands to eat with) so their feet would have been away from the table set in semicircle, with Jesus at the center. John was reclining next to Jesus, to His right, so he could lean back with his head and rest on the chest of Jesus to speak to Him (for the description of a Roman-style dining room, see commentary on John 12:1–8). Peter's position is not mentioned, but it was not to the left of Jesus because the one probably reclining there was Judas, who could be easily reached by Jesus (13:26). This put Judas at Jesus's back—the most honored position at the table and thus likely why the disciples did not suspect him. By honoring Judas in this way, Jesus made one last attempt to win him over before he departed on his mission of betrayal. Jesus identified the traitor to John by giving Judas the piece of bread. This would go unnoticed by the other disciples, suggesting that Jesus did not want to expose Judas before he fully carried out his intent. But Jesus knew the disposition of Judas's heart, and when John said that Satan entered into him (v. 27), the Evangelist wanted to reveal the cosmic magnitude of the betrayal. Satan was the real architect of the plan of Judas, though he needed Judas's consent and participation (cf. Mark 14:21).

The command of Jesus (John 13:27b) shows that He was not an ignorant victim but that He was in charge of the whole situation; Jesus was in control. He was fully aware of what was happening, thus accentuating His willingness to die for others (cf. 10:18). The remark "it was night" (13:30) serves to call attention to the tragedy of the life of Judas. By leaving, he had separated himself from the light of the world and moved into deep darkness.

13:31–38

Prelude to the Farewell Discourse

With Judas's departure, the story of Jesus advances to its final chapter. Between the departure of Judas (13:30) and the Farewell Discourse (typically designated as chaps. 14–17), Jesus spoke to the disciples about love and loyalty.

13:31–35. New Commandment. To begin, Jesus referenced His death as an accomplished fact (cf. 12:23). Yet, contrary to normal human expectations, His death was the moment of glory, not of shame, for Himself and for the Father (13:24–28), who was the very Source of His mission (3:16–17; 6:57; 8:42; 12:49; 13:20; 17:18; 20:21). The benefits of Jesus's triumph were reciprocal: since the Father was glorified through Him, He would soon be glorified by the Father (13:31; 17:1, 4–5, 24).

The glorification of Jesus would imply a temporary separation from the disciples, whom Jesus referred to as *teknia* ("children"; 13:33; cf. 7:33–34; 8:21; 12:35). In order to instruct them on how to live in His absence, He announced a new commandment: they should love one another (13:34). The Greek word for "new" (*kainos*) does not have a temporal connotation—as does *neos*, which means "new" in the sense of fresh or recent. This means that the commandment was not a novelty introduced by Jesus (see Lev. 19:18; cf. Matt. 5:43; Luke 10:25–27). What is new is the revelation of it in Jesus and not the commandment itself. The disciples were to love as Jesus loved them (cf. John 13:1; 15:13; 1 John 3:23; 4:7–8, 11–12, 19–21). Love was to be the supreme characteristic of God's new messianic community.

13:36–38. Peter's Denial Foretold. Jesus's prophecy of the denial of Peter appears in all four Gospels, with minor differences (cf. Matt. 26:33–35; Mark 14:29–31; Luke 22:31–34). Peter's question of where Jesus was going (John 13:36) clearly picks up on v. 33. The enigmatic answer of Jesus anticipates the next question of Peter (v. 37). It also suggests that Peter would fully understand His departure only later, when he would be ready again to follow Him (cf. 21:18–19). In keeping with his well-known spontaneity, Peter stated his unwillingness to wait and that, if necessary, he would even die for Jesus. The question of Jesus in v. 38 probes Peter's self-assured enthusiasm. It must be read as an ironic "Really?" He knew that later that same night, when given the opportunity to confess His Lord, Peter would three times deny Him (cf. 18:17, 25–27). A rooster crowing would remind Peter of Jesus's prophecy.

14:1—17:26

FAREWELL DISCOURSE

After discussing love and loyalty, Jesus presented a lengthy Farewell Discourse that has several components referred to here as the first, second, and third parts, and it is closed by a prayer. This was meant to prepare the disciples for His death and the coming of the Spirit.

14:1–31

The First Part of the Farewell Discourse

The first part of the Farewell Discourse began while Jesus was still in the Upper Room with His disciples. In this part, He discussed His Second Coming, the way to the Father, the importance of faith, and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

14:1–3. Second Coming of Jesus. The major concern of Jesus in this part of the discourse was His soon departure, that is, the tragic events that lay just ahead of Him. He began by assuring the disciples that He would come back to take them to be with Him. The verb "believe" (*pisteuō*—"to have faith or trust in"), used twice in v. 1, can be read in Greek as an imperative or an indicative. Since in John there can be no faith in God apart from faith in Jesus (cf. 5:23, 43, 46–47; 6:40; 8:42, 47), it is possible to take both forms as imperatives. In this case, Jesus urged the disciples not to lose faith and hope in facing His soon departure (death) because there are many *monai* in His Father's house (14:2). This Greek word is sometimes translated as "mansions," which comes from the Latin *mansio* (which was used in this passage in the Latin Bible), whose meaning is almost equivalent to *monē*: "dwelling place." The notion of a large, impressive house attached to the English "mansion" cannot be derived from the Greek or the Latin. The "Father's house" is most probably a reference to the heavenly sanctuary (1 Kin. 8:43; Pss. 11:4; 102:19; Mic. 1:2–3; cf. Ex. 25:9, 40; Heb. 9:23–24; Rev. 11:19; 15:5), where He would prepare a place for them.

If the Father's house is the heavenly sanctuary, which is also the eternal dwelling place of the redeemed (Pss. 23:6; 27:4; Rev. 21:3; cf. John 17:24), we may also detect a reference to the intercessory ministry of Jesus in heaven in 14:2–3 (Rom. 8:33; 1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 4:14–16; 7:25; 8:1–2; 9:24; 1 John 2:1). This would indicate that Jesus's primary emphasis was on access to the Father (John 14:6; cf. Heb. 10:19–21). This promise will find its ultimate fulfillment at the Second Coming of Jesus (cf. John 21:22), when salvation will be brought to completion and we will be permanently reunited with Jesus (cf. 1 Thess. 4:13–17).

14:4–11. The Way to the Father. Jesus told the disciples that they knew where He was going as well as the way there. This triggered a series of questions, first by Thomas (John 14:5), then by Philip (v. 8), and finally by Judas son of James (v. 22; see Luke 6:16). Thomas's question prompted the sixth "I am" saying of John's Gospel (John 14:6; cf. 6:35; 8:12; 10:7, 11; 11:25; 15:1; see "The 'I Am' Sayings," p. 1430). Jesus knew that we can approach the Father because He is the Way. By claiming to be "the way" He was also claiming to be the Truth and the Life—the truth about the Father because He is one with the Father (14:9–10; cf. 10:30, 38; 17:21). He is also the expression of the life that the Father is willing to give to the world because the Father granted Him to have life in Himself (5:26; 10:17–18; 11:25). That is, it is only because Jesus is the Truth and the Life that He can be the Way—the only Way—to the Father.

The conditional construction in 14:7 implies that the disciples had not been able to understand that in Jesus the Father had made Himself fully known (1:18). Consequently, they did not yet know the Father. The question of Philip (14:8) only reinforces this point. By now all of them should have known that Jesus is the revealer of the Father and that to see Him is to see the Father, but that did not seem to be the case (cf. 12:45). Jesus insisted that there is a close relationship between Himself (the Son) and the Father, and it was expressed in both His words (teaching) and works (miracles): in His words, because He did not say anything on His own (3:34; 7:17; 8:28, 38; 14:24; 17:8), and in His works because everything He did was in full accord with the Father's will (4:34; 5:19–20; 10:25, 32, 37; 12:49; 14:10). Jesus spoke of the mutual indwelling of Father and Son again in 14:11, accompanied by a call to the disciples to believe it. The miracles of Jesus also revealed this intimate relationship (cf. 5:36; 10:37–38).

14:12–14. Result of Faith. In addition to the more creedal faith mentioned in 14:11, Jesus also spoke of faith in Him. This faith would enable them to do even greater things (v. 12), and they were assured that their prayers would be heard (vv. 13–14). The "greater" things include miracles, but it must be taken more broadly as a reference to all God's redemptive acts for humanity. These greater works are the accomplishments of the church in announcing redemption through Christ, which would exceed the works of Jesus because He was returning to the Father. This is probably an allusion to His glorification and the subsequent outpouring of the Spirit, which would enable the church to fulfill its worldwide mission (cf. 7:39; 14:17; 20:21–22; Acts 2:32–34). The promise that Jesus would answer the prayers of the disciples is repeated several times in the Farewell Discourse (John 15:7, 16; 16:23, 24, 26). The power of prayer is unlimited, as shown by the use of "whatever" (14:13), which refers to the "greater" things of the previous verse. Asking in Jesus's name is not a magic formula but an expression of faith in Jesus and the recognition of His work as our mediator (cf. 5:27; 17:2).

14:15–17. Coming of the Spirit. This new section starts rather abruptly with an emphasis on the words "love" and "keep." The verb "to love" appears eight times among 14:15, 21, 23, and 24. The keeping of the commandments refers to Jesus's commands, inclusive of His summary of the Decalogue (8:47; 12:49–50; 13:34; 15:10–12; cf. Mark 12:29–31). The Greek manuscripts are divided as to whether the form of the verb in 14:15 regarding commandment keeping is an infinitive, "to keep" (*tēreō*), future, "will keep" (*tērēsete*), imperative, "you must keep" (*tērēsate*), or subjunctive, "you would keep" (*tērēsēte*). The future tense has the strongest textual support and fits well the conditional clause "if you love Me." The conjunction "and" (*kai*) at the beginning of v. 16 makes it clear that the promise that follows would become a reality only if the disciples would take seriously their commitment to Jesus, that is, if they would love Him and keep His commandments.

The promise (vv. 16–17) refers to the Holy Spirit. In fact, this is the first of a series of five passages where the Holy Spirit is called the *paraklētos*—translated variously as "Helper," "Advocate," "Comforter," or "Counselor" (see below, "The Meaning of *Paraklētos*")—and *pneuma tēs alētheias*—"Spirit of truth" (cf. 14:25–26; 15:26–27; 16:7–11, 13–15). Such passages are unique to John and are among the most important ones in the entire NT for a theology of the Holy Spirit (see John: Introduction). Jesus spoke of His departure to the Father (14:12). He said here that "another" (*allos*) *paraklētos* would take His place and be with the disciples forever (v. 16). This suggests that He Himself had been a *paraklētos* to them, though the term is never applied to Jesus in this Gospel (cf. 1 John 2:1). As for *allos*, contrary to popular interpretation, this adjective does not say anything about the Holy Spirit other than He is not Jesus Himself, as it only implies numerical distinction (e.g., "another parable," Matt. 13:24, 31, 33; 21:33).

14:18–24. Manifestation of Jesus. Jesus's announcement of His return to the disciples (John 14:18–20) has been interpreted as a promise of the coming of the Spirit, as a reference to the resurrection of Jesus, and as a reference to the Second Coming of Jesus. Though explicitly mentioned in the same chapter (v. 3), the reference may not be to the Second Coming. It is possible that Jesus was referring to His return to them after His resurrection. This is mentioned in vv. 19–20. But the fact that soon after His resurrection Jesus would go to the Father suggests that He would leave them orphans. It is perhaps better to find here a reference to both the resurrection and the coming of the Spirit, through whom Jesus would remain with them to the end (vv. 15–17).

The Meaning of *Paraklētos*

The exact meaning of *paraklētos*, whether "advocate," "counselor," or "helper," is highly debated. In the first case, it would be related to the verb *parakaleō* ("call to one's side"), and in the second, to the noun *paraklēsis* ("encouragement/comfort"). The third option tries to combine the previous ones. The problem is that neither "advocate" nor "counselor" fits the role ascribed to the Holy Spirit in the Paraclete passages (John 14:15–17, 25–26; 15:26–27; 16:7–11, 13–15). "Helper" lacks precision, though it can be useful. Another possibility is to relate *paraklētos* to the Aramaic *peraqlita*—itself a transliteration of the Greek term—which is sometimes used in Jewish literature with notions of instruction. In this case, *paraklētos* would mean "instructor," and this corresponds very closely to what John says about the Paraclete (14:26; 15:26; 16:7–8, 13–14). But since the Spirit is more than an instructor, it would be better to retain "helper" as expressing the ideas of One who instructs and speaks for humanity. One thing is clear, the title indicates that the Spirit is a person.

Verses 19–20 are most probably dealing with the resurrection of Jesus. What is often translated as "a little while" or "before long" points to the approaching crucifixion (cf. 7:33; 12:35; 13:33), whereas "because I live" points to the resurrected life of Jesus (14:19). It is because of Jesus's imminent death that the world would no longer see Him, but through the resurrection, the disciples would see Him again. Then, on "that day" (v. 20), they would finally understand the intimate relationship that exists between the Son and the Father, which in turn functions as a model for the intimate relationship that Jesus wishes to have with His followers (15:1–7, 10–11; 17:21, 23).

The question of Judas, son of James (14:22), like those of Thomas (v. 5) and Philip (v. 8), helped to advance the discussion. He was intrigued by the distinction Jesus made between the world and the disciples (v. 19). Jesus clarified that only those who love Him and keep His words will have full fellowship with the Father, saying that Jesus and the Father will come to them to make their home with them (v. 23). This experience goes way beyond His post-resurrection appearances to include the permanent indwelling in the hearts of believers.

14:25–31. Jesus's Final Remarks. Verse 25 suggests that Jesus was referring back to His previous statements (cf. 15:11; 16:1, 4, 6, 25, 33). The words that follow bring the first part of the Farewell Discourse to an end. By saying that such words were spoken while He still was with them, Jesus wanted to call the disciples' attention to the dreadful event that was just about to occur. The Spirit, however, would occupy His place and keep them mindful of everything He said. This is the second of the so-called "Paraclete passages" (cf. 14:16–17; 15:26–27; 16:7–11, 13–15). This passage clearly says that the Paraclete is the Holy Spirit, whom the Father would send in the name of Jesus to remind the disciples of everything Jesus told them (14:26). There were issues related to Jesus and His teachings that the disciples had not yet been able to understand, and the Spirit would clarify them. The Gospel of John itself contains a high Christology that is the result of the teaching role of the Spirit within the apostolic church.

In these final remarks, Jesus also bid the disciples farewell, wishing them peace and in fact granting it to them. He granted them the peace surpassing everything the world could offer, grounded on the assurance of His victory on the cross (v. 27; cf. 16:33). This peace, then, had redemptive connotations (cf. Rom. 5:1; Col. 1:19–20). The conditional clause about loving Him (John 14:28) is in fact an invitation to the disciples to express their love by rejoicing at the departure of Jesus, probably because death would not hold Him for too long (cf. 16:22). Jesus's statement about His Father being greater than Him (14:28) does not refer to His essential being or to a supposed hierarchy within the Godhead (cf. 10:30–33). It is simply highlighting the fact that the Father, as the supreme author of His saving mission (5:19–20, 30; 7:16–18, 28–29; 8:28, 42; 12:49–50; 14:24), was more than able to bring glory out of the shame and tragedy of the cross (cf. 12:24–28; 13:31–32).

John 14:30–31 concludes the first discourse. The unmistakable reference to Satan (cf. 12:31) was a warning that he was coming personally and in the actions of Judas (13:27). Judas was just about to finalize the betrayal (cf. 18:2–5). By saying that Satan *en emoi ouk echei ouden*—variously translated as "has nothing in Me," "has no claim on Me," "has no power over me" or "has no hold over me"—Jesus was actually using a Semitic idiom to establish the fact that Satan has no legal claim or charge against Him (14:30). His death could be seen by some as evidence of guilt, but the resurrection would prove His innocence. Jesus was not afraid to go to the courtroom, so to speak, as the Father commanded Him, for there He would publicly demonstrate His love for the Father. He then confidently told them to rise up and depart (14:31).

15:1—16:4a

The Second Part of the Farewell Discourse

When they left the upper room, Jesus and the disciples walked to a garden on the east side of Jerusalem, right across the Kidron Valley (18:1; the garden of Gethsemane; e.g., Mark 14:32). On the way there, they apparently stopped somewhere in the city, probably the temple, where Jesus continued His Farewell Discourse (John 15–16) and prayed for the disciples (chap. 17). In the second part of the Farewell Discourse, Jesus instructed the disciples concerning their relationship with Him, with one another, and with the world.

15:1–8. True Vine. This part of the discourse opens with another illustration somewhat similar to that of 10:1–6. "I am the true vine" (15:1) is the seventh and last metaphorical "I am" saying of Jesus in John (cf. 6:35; 8:12; 10:7, 11; 11:25; 14:6; see "The 'I Am' Sayings," p. 1430). In the OT, the vine is a recurrent symbol for Israel (cf. Ps. 80:8–16; Is. 5:1–7; Jer. 2:21; Ezek. 15:1–8; Hos. 10:1), but in the second discourse Jesus applied it to Himself. The Father represents the vinedresser. This fits the Johannine presentation of the role of the Father in Jesus's redemptive mission (cf. John 6:37, 44–45; 17:6–8; 18:9). The Father looks over the vitality of the branches, which stands for the disciples, taking away (*airō*) the unfruitful ones and pruning (*kathairō*) the others so that they may be more productive (15:2–5). There seems to be an intentional play on the two Greek verbs, which do not often have those meanings. The fruit is not defined, but in light of v. 10, it may refer to the faithful commitment to Jesus and His words (cf. 5:24; 8:47; 12:47; 14:23–24).

The statement in 15:2 sounds like a threat, but Jesus immediately added that the disciples were already "clean" (*katharos*; v. 3). This is the same word used in 13:10, but the contexts are not related. Jesus explained that the pruning process had been done by the word He had spoken, probably referring to the positive response of the disciples to the challenging nature of His teachings (cf. 6:60, 66–69; 12:46–48). But being clean is not the only requirement for bearing fruit. The disciples were reminded that only the branches that are not taken away can remain productive (15:4). Jesus's call to abide or remain in Him as He does in them (v. 4) in this context is conducive for understanding the mutual indwelling mentioned in 14:20–21, 23. It also makes clear that the strength of the branches depends on their vital union with the vine. Simply put, no branch can bear fruit of itself (15:4–5). This is an apt illustration of two spiritual concepts: the real Christian life exists only when there is an intimate, unbroken relationship with Jesus, and faith and obedience are not the natural results of human effort (6:44, 65; cf. Rom. 10:17; 12:3). Believers must choose to believe and to remain in Jesus (cf. John 5:40) or they will be cut off (15:6), that is, the divine Vinedresser will let them follow the course of their own choosing (cf. 3:19; 8:24).

The promise in 15:7 parallels that of 14:13, which suggests that it should be understood in the context of the mission of the disciples. Abiding in Jesus is also a necessary condition for the church to continue the mission of Jesus in the world in obedience to the Father's sovereign plan (13:20; 17:18; 20:21). When this happens, the Father is glorified (15:8), as He is glorified in the mission of the Son (cf. 13:31–32). Then the goal of discipleship is fulfilled, or, as Jesus indicates, it is demonstrated that they are His disciples (15:8; cf. 8:31; 13:35).

15:9–17. Love One Another. At this point Jesus abandoned the illustration. The correspondence between 15:8 and 13:35 facilitates the transition to the subject of love, which in turn explains the character of the mutual indwelling of 15:4. The relationship Jesus had in mind is based on love and is modeled after the relationship that exists between the Father and the Son (vv. 9–10; cf. 3:35; 5:20; 10:17; 16:27). Genuine love, however, expresses itself in terms of a personal commitment. We remain in the love of Jesus only if we keep His commandments, which in John's Gospel primarily corresponds to the instructions and teachings of Jesus as an expression of the will of God for us (15:10; cf. 5:24; 8:47; 12:47; 14:23–24). The commitment Jesus demands is not different from His commitment to the Father (3:34; 7:17; 12:50; 17:8). Either it is complete or it has no value. A divided heart does not please the Father (cf. Matt. 6:24).

Jesus then introduced the logical implications of the words just stated (John 15:11; cf. 14:25; 16:1, 4, 6, 25, 33). This refers to the disciples' unrestricted commitment to Jesus that allowed them to experience the joy that Christ Himself would feel after finishing His mission—the joy of the resurrection (cf. 14:28; 16:20–22, 33). The singular commandment (15:12) identifies that which certainly was the most important thing Jesus ever told the disciples concerning their mutual relationship (cf. 13:34). By experiencing the love of Jesus, the disciples would have a template to know how to love one another. This completed the chain: the Father loving the Son (15:9; cf. 3:35; 10:17); the Son loving the disciples (15:9; cf. 13:1; 14:21; 15:13); and the disciples loving each other (cf. 13:34, 35; 15:17). The first link of the chain (the Father's love for the Son) was about the inner being of God that the disciples could access. But the second link (Jesus's love for them), which determined the third link (their love for each other), is expressed in a most sublime way (15:13). That a person would die for a friend (v. 13) is an unparalleled description of genuine friendship—the disciples were the friends of Jesus, and He was ready to gives His life for them (cf. Rom. 5:7–8).

It was not the disciples themselves who decided to follow Jesus, as was customary when someone wished to be taught by a Jewish rabbi. They just responded favorably to the call of Jesus (John 15:16; cf. 1:43; 10:4, 14–16). Divine activity always precedes human response (cf. 6:37, 44–45; 16:8), though this response can unfortunately be negative (cf. 3:19–20; 5:40; 8:24). That the disciples were appointed to "go and bear fruit" (15:16) means that discipleship involves a life of faith that goes out to reach the world. Every disciple is called to bear fruit and to glorify God for the benefit of the world (cf. 15:8; 17:18; 20:21). It is in the context of Christian mission that Jesus says that the Father will give us whatever we ask in His name (see commentary on John 14:12–14). John 15:17 is a concluding summary of what Jesus had just said. Love is the essential ingredient in our relationship and in the fulfillment of our mission in the world.

15:18–27. Hated by the World. To some extent the opposite of love is hate, and this is what the disciples would face as they went out to the world to fulfill their mission. So far, the disciples' relationship with Jesus had been explained in terms of His relationship with the Father (15:10; cf. 3:35; 5:20; 10:17; 16:27), but at this time they were told that their experience in the world would be similar to that of Jesus; they would face rebuff and hostility (cf. 7:7; 16:20, 33; 17:11, 14–16, 18). As servants, the disciples should not expect to avoid what even their Master could not (15:20). The context explicitly refers to persecution (see Matt. 10:22–25). The reference to suffering may have been meaningful to John's original audience, whose members were probably facing religious intolerance (see John: Introduction). John 15:21 refers back to the negative reaction of the world (vv. 18–19). The disciples would suffer for the same reasons Jesus did, that is, because of the refusal of the world to recognize the divine origin of their message (cf. 5:37–38; 7:28–29; 8:19, 42)—a refusal that would lead to hostility. Christ's message is so clear that its rejection increases a person's guilt. Since its rejection is willful, there is no excuse for their sin (15:22), the sin of unbelief (cf. 8:21; 9:41). Our reaction to Jesus is equivalent to our reaction to God (15:23; cf. 12:44; 13:20; 16:3), a reality that highlights the absurdity of unbelief. This idea continues through 15:24–25. According to the OT quotation in v. 25 (Ps. 35:19; cf. Pss. 69:4; 109:3), no one can take credit for believing (John 6:37, 44–45), but we are responsible for not believing.

The section closes with another reference to the *paraklētos* (15:26–27)—the third one in the Farewell Discourse (cf. 14:16–17, 25–26; 16:7–11, 13–15). In the face of hostility and persecution, the disciples were promised the Holy Spirit to assist them. The divine Instructor is once again described as the Spirit of truth (cf. 14:17). The reference to the Spirit proceeding or going out from the Father means that He would be sent "from the Father" (15:26; cf. 14:26). This places the mission of the Spirit in continuity with that of Jesus. He would testify of Jesus by inspiring the disciples to defend their faith and carry out the proclamation of the gospel. The use of the verb "to testify" (*martyreō*) implies legal testimony as in a court of law. The disciples, however, would also be able to offer their personal testimony of the things they had seen and come to believe during the ministry of Jesus among them.

16:1–4a. More on Persecution. This paragraph resumes the discussion on the relationship between the disciples and the world. Previously the disciples were told why they would face persecution (15:19–21), but at this time Jesus gave them more information as to the nature of that persecution. Informing them about this would prevent the disciples from stumbling or falling away (*skandalizō*—16:1; cf. 6:61; Mark 14:27–31). It may seem strange to suffer because we believe in Jesus Christ. But there is an enemy (John 12:31; 14:30), and Jesus does not want us to have false expectations. Even if the enemy has already been judged (cf. 16:11), it is only at the Second Coming that we will be finally liberated from his oppressive influence (14:1–3). John specifically refers to excommunication, probably because of the situation in which some Jewish Christians found themselves at the time John wrote his Gospel (see John: Introduction).

Jesus said the time was coming (16:2), emphasizing the certainty of the statement, when the disciples would even be put to death. This crime would be committed as a supposed service to God. Much blood has been spilled in the name of the Lord. Unfortunately, so-called Christians themselves have throughout history been guilty of such a crime. The reason for such persecutions, as in 15:21, has been ignorance of God's revelation through Christ (cf. 5:37–38; 8:19, 42; 16:27). Jesus sought to inspire confidence and serenity in the disciples (16:4). When such times would come, they would remember His words—certainly under the guidance of the *paraklētos* (cf. 14:26)—and recognize that nothing happens outside His control.

16:4b–33

The Third Part of the Farewell Discourse

The third part of this discourse shares some common themes with the other two, though it advances the idea of the disciples' relationship with the *paraklētos* and the world.

16:4b–6. Disciples' Sorrow. The transition from the second discourse to the third one is not as clear as the transition from the first to the second (cf. 14:31). It has been argued that the change of thought introduced in 16:4 could indicate the end of one discourse and the beginning of the other. We follow this suggestion.

In the third discourse, Jesus turned to emphasize His departure to the Father. He had been with the disciples since the beginning of His ministry, but now He wanted to prepare them for the new situation that would come after His death. Jesus pointed out with an implied rebuke that none of them were asking Him where He would be going (16:5). This seems to contradict 13:36 and 14:5, where Peter and Thomas asked this specific question. The point, however, is that Jesus never gave a direct answer to them, especially not to Peter. He just changed the subject and did not return to it. The sadness mentioned in 16:6, suggests that the disciples had not yet fully understood either the real nature of Jesus's departure or His final destiny.

16:7–15. Work of the Spirit. At this point, Jesus introduced the fourth *paraklētos* saying (vv. 7–11; cf. 14:16–17, 25–26; 15:26–27; 16:13–15). It has been suggested that by saying that His departure would be beneficial to the disciples, Jesus meant that He and the Spirit could not be with the disciples at one and the same time. This is too simplistic, however. The point is that the coming of the Spirit (at Pentecost) was contingent on Jesus's glorification in heaven (7:39; cf. Acts 2:32–34; Eph. 4:7–10; Rev. 5:1–14). This event would signify the Father's approval on the achievements of the Son (John 17:1, 4–5), His triumph over the forces of evil (12:31; 16:11), and His installation in heaven as our Mediator (14:16). The glorification of Jesus, therefore, would launch the eschatological era in God's plan of salvation—a worldwide mission led by the Spirit and not subject to the spatial limitations of the incarnate Jesus (cf. 14:12).

Jesus provided a detailed description of the threefold work of the Spirit in relation to the world (16:8–11). The translation of *elenchō* in v. 8 is debated. It is not easy to identify a meaning that would fit well with sin, righteousness, and judgment. Some translations have "convict," others "reprove," and others "prove wrong." If this is the nuance intended, Jesus would have been saying that the Spirit would convict or reprove the world for its conceptions of sin, righteousness, and judgment—that the three things Jesus would go on to mention would show them true conceptions of themselves, and correct their false ideas. Another possible translation is "convince." The Spirit would work directly on the conscience of the world, aiming at convincing it of sin because of its failure to believe in Jesus (v. 9); of Jesus's righteousness, because He was going to the Father (v. 10) and would be recognized as innocent; and of judgment, because in His victory over Satan on the cross, He would reveal Himself as the Judge of the world (v. 11). These things Jesus had already been doing—trying to convince the world of sin (cf. 7:7; 8:21; 9:41; 15:22, 24), of His own innocence (cf. 7:16–24; 8:46–49), and of the reality of judgment (cf. 3:18–19; 5:27, 30; 12:31). After His glorification, this task would be assigned to the Holy Spirit. "It is the Spirit that makes effectual what has been wrought out by the world's Redeemer" (DA 671).

The statement that appears next (16:12) makes the transition from the fourth to the fifth (and last) saying about the Spirit (*paraklētos*; vv. 13–15). Jesus was not specific about the considerable amount of other information that the disciples could not bear at that time. The impartation of this information would be done by the Spirit as He guided the church into a deeper understanding of Jesus and His saving work. The Spirit will not speak on His own accord (v. 13; cf. 3:34; 7:17; 8:26–28, 38, 40; 12:49–50; 14:10, 24; 17:8). Everything necessary for salvation was revealed to us through the Son of God. The Spirit, although a distinct person, is not an independent force. Rather, He is a divine agent speaking only what He hears and what is yet to come. He would deepen and unfold the significance of the work of Christ and would declare it to the believers. His ministry would in a sense be a continuation of the ministry of Jesus after His departure to the Father. He would constantly glorify Jesus by upholding His teachings and His saving power. In 16:15, Jesus emphasized the role of the Father in redemptive history, that is, the relation of Jesus with the Spirit is not independent of His relationship with the Father. This is another way of expressing the unity that exists between the Father and Jesus (cf. 10:30, 38; 17:21). Jesus said that everything that belongs to the Father also belongs to Him.

16:16–24. Sorrow Turned into Joy. The abrupt change of theme may indicate selectivity on John's part (cf. 20:30; 21:25), that is to say that the Farewell Discourse could have originally included more material than what we have in this Gospel. At any rate, the theme of sorrow is a development of the statement found in 16:6 and in the first discourse (cf. 14:19–20, 28–31). The same expression, "a little while" (16:16), used in 14:19 (also "before long"; cf. 7:33; 12:35; 13:33) in relation to the world, appears here as applied to the disciples. The reference is to Jesus's resurrection that would take place shortly after His death—more precisely, "in three days" (2:19–20). Some translations add "because I go to the Father" at the end of 16:16 (which is also mentioned in v. 17). The whole passage is intended to clarify the exact meaning of the departure of Jesus and particularly the enigmatic "a little while," which intrigued the disciples. They did not understand what He was talking about (v. 18).

Recognizing the interest of the disciples, Jesus started saying in a solemn way that the coming events would make them weep with deep sorrow (v. 20), whereas the world—that is, those who were opposed to Him (cf. 1:10; 14:17; 15:18–19; 17:14–16)—would rejoice. The sorrow/rejoice pattern, however, would also be experienced by the disciples themselves (16:22). The sudden change from extreme distress to lavish joy typical of childbirth is what would characterize the reaction of the disciples to His death and then to His resurrection (v. 21). Their grief would be replaced by a joy that no one could take from them. The wording of v. 22b seems to have been inspired by the beautiful promise of Isaiah 66:14. "In that day" (John 16:23) certainly points to the time after Jesus's resurrection (cf. 14:20). In John, the verb *erōtaō* ("to ask") can mean either "to ask a question" (1:19, 21, 25; 9:2; 16:19, 30) or "to ask for [something]" (4:31; 14:16; 16:26; 17:9). In 16:23, the latter meaning seems preferable. The disciples would not ask Jesus anything else, but they would ask the Father in Jesus's name. The resurrection (and glorification) of Jesus would inaugurate a new state of affairs. His accomplishments in redemptive history would grant validity to any request made in His name (see commentary on John 14:12–14).

16:25–33. No Longer in Figures. Jesus again referred to the importance and nature of what He was saying to the disciples (16:25; cf. 14:25; 15:11; 16:1, 4, 6, 33) as the Farewell Discourse in John is coming to an end. The figurative nature of what Jesus was saying (*paroimia*) probably refers to the discourse as a whole and not to the immediately preceding parabolic illustration (16:21). In light of the resurrection, the use of veiled language would no longer be necessary. The last clause of v. 25 does not refer to further teachings about the Father, but to the time when everything Jesus said would begin to make sense to the disciples. That Jesus would not ask (*erōtaō*) the Father on behalf of the disciples (v. 26b) does not contradict the NT affirmations of Jesus's intercessory work (e.g., Rom. 8:33; 1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 4:14–16; 7:25; 8:1–2; 9:24; 1 John 2:1). The meaning here is that, though the disciples would ask in His name (cf. John 16:23–24), it would be the *paraklētos*, not Jesus Himself, who would mediate to them the understanding referred to in the previous verse (cf. 14:25–26; 15:26–27; 16:13–15).

By expressing their conviction that Jesus came from the Father and was about to return to Him, the disciples concluded that all their difficulties had finally been cleared up (16:29–30). But this was not the case. Their reaction to the imminent crisis would demonstrate that they did not yet understand. Assuming a prophetic posture, Jesus announced that the disciples would be scattered, leaving Him alone (v. 32). The use of this verb ("to scatter") is an allusion to Zechariah 13:7 (cf. Mark 14:27). However, though the disciples would abandon Jesus, the Father would not (cf. John 8:16, 29), even if it feels that way (cf. Matt. 27:46). This reminds us that ultimately the church owes its existence not to the virtues of its founding members (the disciples) but to the faithfulness of God in carrying out the plan He established before the beginning of time (cf. Rom. 16:25–26; 2 Tim. 1:9–10; Titus 1:2). The concluding thought of the Farewell Discourse (John 16:33) points back to what Jesus said in 15:18—16:4a concerning the hatred of the world toward Him and His followers. Thus, if trials and sorrows are the inevitable ingredients of our lot in this world, we should always take courage because Jesus triumphed over the world. His victory must continually give us the assurance that, in spite of our failures and deficiencies, through Him we can also be victorious in our Christian life (cf. Rom. 8:37; Rev. 3:21).

17:1–26

Jesus's Intercessory Prayer

The three parts of the Farewell Discourse are followed by the so-called Intercessory Prayer offered by Jesus for the disciples, the longest and most sublime of His recorded prayers. This prayer caps off the Farewell Discourse.

17:1–5. Glorification of the Son. Jesus started His intercessory or priestly prayer with a reference to the Father's work of salvation. Since the first step toward the glorification of Jesus would be His death on the cross (John 12:16, 23–28; 13:31–32; cf. 7:39), He prayed that the Father's plan would be fully accomplished in and through Him. From the very beginning Jesus was fully conscious of the main purpose of His mission (cf. 3:16–17; 10:11, 15; 12:47; 15:13). Now the hour had come, and He prayed to the Father to glorify Him, that He might also glorify the Father (17:1). Jesus's request to be glorified expressed His total willingness to return to the Father via the cross. This was the glory through surrendering His life for others. But the exaltation of the Son through the cross also brought glory to the Father because His death was part of the plan of the Father for the salvation of the world (3:16–17).

Jesus received from the Father authority over all people (lit. "flesh"; 17:2a) in the sense that He might give eternal life to all those the Father had given Him (v. 2b). That is to say, the eternal destiny of all humankind had been committed to Jesus. That final clause of the verse highlights the divine initiative in salvation, a recurrent theme in John's Gospel (6:37, 44–45; 10:27–29; 17:6–8; 18:9; cf. 16:9). In the final analysis, every person is responsible for his or her response to God's offer of salvation, as the next section clarifies (17:3; cf. 3:19–20; 5:40; 8:24; 12:46). Salvation or eternal life is experienced only when the Father is acknowledged as the only true God and Jesus Christ as the One sent by Him (cf. 5:43–44). This practical knowledge is obtained by means of a personal, intimate relationship with God (cf. Is. 1:3; Jer. 31:34; Hos. 6:2–3). This is the way Jesus knows the Father (John 10:14–15; 14:10, 20; 17:21) and how He wants us to know Him (14:20–21; 15:4–9). What Jesus was emphasizing at this time included the experience of salvation itself, going way beyond the simple act of believing. Believing can sometimes be superficial and transitory (2:23–25; 8:30–31; 12:11; cf. 12:37).

Jesus returned to the main topic and provided the grounds for His urgent request: He asked to be glorified with the same glory He had before creation because He had glorified the Father by completing the mission the Father assigned Him (17:4–5). This is certainly an affirmation of the preexistence of Jesus (cf. 1:1–3, 15; 8:58; 16:28; 17:24), but it is much more. In the conflict Jesus faced on earth against evil powers, what was at stake was not only His own glory in heaven but also that of the Father. Consequently, the victory of Jesus is acclaimed as a source of assurance (16:33; cf. 17:11). It represents the victory of the Father as well.

17:6–10. Given from the World. The main part of the prayer deals with the disciples. The most important aspect of the earthly mission of Jesus was the revelation of the character of the Father (14:9). His works revealed as much about the Father as about Himself (5:19–20; 10:25, 37–38; 14:10–11). Such revelation was available not only to the disciples, but they were among the ones who responded favorably to it. They accepted the divine message or word (14:15, 21; 15:10; 17:6). The disciples believed and confessed that Jesus came from the Father (16:30; 17:8), and now Jesus added that they also knew that His work was from God (17:7). They had also embraced His words as the words of the Son of God (see commentary on John 6:66–71). Therefore, Jesus interceded for them before the Father.

By saying that He was not praying for the world (17:9), Jesus was not saying that He had no concern for the world—just that at that moment His deepest thoughts were with those whom the Father had given Him from the world (cf. v. 6). In fact, the salvation of the world was envisaged in the mission of the Twelve (v. 23), and Jesus would also pray for those who would believe through their testimony (vv. 20–26). The idea that it was the Father who gave Jesus the disciples (vv. 6, 9; cf. 6:44–45) implies that it is only through divine influence that people can come to believe in Jesus (16:9; cf. Phil. 2:13; 1 Thess. 4:8). And since the Father and the Son are one and have everything in common, Jesus could speak of the disciples as His own (John 17:9–10). As He was talking about the belief of the disciples, Jesus returned to the thought of glory (cf. vv. 1–6). It is not that the disciples would reveal the glory of Jesus just as He revealed the glory of the Father during His mission (cf. 13:31–32). The thought is rather that the effectiveness of Jesus's ministry was made manifest in the fact that the disciples believed in Him. Whenever a human being turns to Jesus, He is glorified.

17:11–19. Well-Being of the Disciples. Starting from v. 11, Jesus prayed for the well-being of the disciples. Since He was soon to return to the Father, Jesus spoke from the perspective of His absence. He prayed for the protection of the disciples and made four special requests. First, that the disciples might be one (v. 11; cf. v. 21), just as He and the Father are one (10:30). Such a unity is by itself a divine gift and can be attained only by God's grace. Up to this point Jesus had kept them safe in the name of the Father, except for Judas, the one headed for destruction (17:12; cf. 13:21–30). Second, He prayed that they would be filled with His joy (17:13), which was possible by remaining in the Father's love and by obeying His words (cf. 15:11; 16:20–24). Third, Jesus's request was that they might be protected from "the evil one" (17:15). The reference is to the active forces of evil in the world, which was expressed in hostility toward the disciples (cf. 15:18). Jesus did not ask that the disciples be taken out of the world because they had a mission to fulfill (cf. 17:18; cf. 13:20; 20:21). This is a reminder that though we are not of the world (17:14, 16), we are not to be detached from it, because the world is our mission field.

The last request of Jesus was that the disciples might be sanctified by the truth (v. 17). To be sanctified means to be brought into the realm of the sacred, to be dedicated to holy use. This sanctification was to be realized through the constant application of the Father's word to the life of the disciples because His word is truth. Here is the real tension between being in the world and not belonging in the world. The sanctification Jesus talked about had a mission purpose: the disciples were to be sanctified in order to be sent into the world (v. 18; cf. 13:20; 20:21). Jesus Himself was determined to sanctify Himself for the sake of the disciples (17:19). This carries a sacrificial connotation because He sanctified Himself for the task of dying for them (cf. 6:51; 10:11, 15; 11:50, 51–52; 15:13). It was His sanctification that made it possible for the disciples to be sanctified for their saving mission in the world.

17:20–26. Future Believers. Jesus directed His attention to the future generations of believers; He was praying for us as well as for those who will come after us. By the time John wrote this Gospel, the apostolic missionary activity had already achieved remarkable success (cf. Rom. 15:19; Col. 1:6). This happened in spite of the fact that the church was facing challenges from both inside and outside, threatening the faith and the unity of the church (see John: Introduction). In this prayer, Jesus's dominant concern was for the unity of His followers, grounded in the unity of Jesus with the Father (John 10:30, 38; 14:10, 20). The point is that, together with love (15:12–13; 17:26), unity is essential in the life of believers because it demonstrates the reconciling power of the mission of Jesus in the world (17:21; cf. v. 23). To achieve this unity, Jesus had given His followers His own glory (v. 22). Of course, Jesus referred not to His preexistent glory (v. 5; cf. v. 24) but to the glory of the character of the Father as a reflection in their own lives. Jesus displayed this glory in every aspect of His earthly ministry (1:14; 2:11; 11:4, 40; 14:9) because of His oneness with the Father (10:30). The unity of believers is neither self-generated nor an end in itself. It is the result of our inner apprehension of God's character through an intimate association with Jesus and the Father (14:20–21, 23; 15:4–7). This unity testifies to the world; it is the evidence the Father presents to the world to demonstrate that He sent His Son to save the world (17:23).

As Jesus moved to the end of the prayer, He expressed the desire that His followers might be with Him forever and see His preexisting glory (v. 24; cf. v. 5). This echoed the promise in 14:1–3. This request was based on the conviction that the Father loved Jesus (17:24) and that the disciples truly knew that Jesus had come from the Father (v. 25; cf. 6:68–69; 16:27). Despite the fact that the world did not accept His revelation (cf. 1:10; 8:55; 16:3), Jesus was pleased with the response of the disciples, though they still had much more to learn. He would continue to instruct them through the work of the Spirit (14:26; 15:26; 16:12–14) in order that the love with which the Father had loved Jesus would be in their hearts (17:26; cf. 13:34; 15:9–10, 12).

18:1—20:31

THE PASSION NARRATIVE

The arrest, execution, and resurrection of Jesus represent the climax of the story. John's account coheres with the Synoptic Gospels, although some differences in emphasis are found as well as some new material (19:35; 20:2; cf. 21:24).

18:1—19:16a

Jesus's Arrest and Trials

The events of Jesus's arrest and trial started in a garden, similarly as recorded in the Synoptics, and ended in the Roman Praetorium, where Pilate handed Him over to be crucified.

18:1–11. Betrayal and Arrest. John does not tell us where Jesus was when He finished the

Farewell Discourse and prayed for the disciples (chaps. 15–17). Apparently, He was not in the upper room (cf. 14:31). Since it was late at night (cf. 13:30; 18:3), the suggestion that it was in the temple area does not seem altogether impossible. At any rate, when the prayer was over, Jesus went out with His disciples to a garden (Gethsemane) on the other side of the Kidron Valley, which separated the old city of Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives. The garden is not named by John, but he says that Jesus and the disciples frequently went there (see also Luke 22:39). This explains why Judas, who betrayed Him, also "knew the place" (John 18:2).

The detachment of guards mentioned in v. 3 presupposes the betrayal story told in all three other Gospels (Matt. 26:14–16; Mark 14:10–11; Luke 22:3–6). The question Jesus asked about who they were looking for (John 18:4) highlights the fact that He was in full control of the entire situation (cf. 10:15, 17–18; 13:1–3, 27). In response to the answer of the guards He said, literally, "I am" (18:5). He identified Himself as the great I Am (cf. 8:24, 28; 13:19), and His divinity seems to have manifested itself with power, causing the soldiers to fall to the ground (18:6; cf. Ezek. 1:28; 44:4; Dan. 2:46; 8:18; Acts 9:4; 26:14; Rev. 1:17; 22:8). The guards probably realized that this was not an ordinary man (John 18:5, 7), but we are not told how this experience impacted them. In keeping with the main purpose of His mission (3:14; 10:11, 15; 15:13), Jesus surrendered Himself to them, but not without first securing the safety of His followers (18:8; cf. 17:12–16). The attack of one of the disciples on the servant of the high priest is mentioned in all four Gospels (Matt. 26:51–54; Mark 14:47; Luke 22:50–51), but only John gives the names of the two persons involved, Simon Peter and Malchus (John 18:10; cf. v. 26).

The reference to the "cup" Jesus must drink (v. 11) closes the arrest narrative and at the same time presupposes the agony of Jesus in Gethsemane (cf. Matt. 26:36–46; Mark 14:32–42; Luke 22:39–46). The cup, which is used here as a metaphor for death, also brings to mind the cup of God's wrath that evildoers will have to drink (cf. Ps. 75:8; Is. 51:17, 22; Jer. 25:15–17; Hab. 2:16; Rev. 14:10; 16:19). It is this cup that Jesus would drink for us. It is exactly because He would drink from the cup of God's final wrath against sin that those who accept Him can freely and abundantly drink from the living water that He has to offer (John 4:10–14; cf. Is. 55:1).

The Year of the Crucifixion

The salvation offered as a result of the crucifixion is not dependent on knowing the year of the crucifixion. This, of course, does not make the year unknowable or unimportant. Because the year of the crucifixion is not a stand-alone date, moving the date of the crucifixion affects other well-established data points. The crucifixion is inexorably tied to the seventy-weeks prophecy of Daniel 9 and to the 2,300-day prophecy of Daniel 8, the ends of which (1798 and 1844) are confirmed in both Daniel 12:11–12 and in the historical events associated with them. These two dates (and thus the crucifixion) are tied to 457 B.C. (the seventh year of the reign of Artaxerxes I; Ezra 7:11–26; Neh. 2:4–10, see "The Decree of Artaxerxes I as Fulfillment of Daniel 9:25," p. 584) and to A.D. 508 (see "The Union of Church and State," p. 1033).

The timing of the crucifixion was associated in some way with the Lord's Supper and the feast of Passover (John 13:1–2; 18:28; Matt. 26:17; Mark 14:12; Luke 22:7–8). According to John's Gospel, the feast of Passover began on the Friday evening on which Jesus was crucified. Thus, one proposal for dating the year of the crucifixion is to identify the year that Passover began on a Friday night using astronomical data (although there are some difficulties in doing this).

Another proposal for dating the crucifixion is to establish the beginning year of Jesus's ministry by dating the year of His baptism. Jesus had a ministry that lasted about three and a half years, a fact widely recognized through careful analysis of all four Gospels; thus, simple calculations from His baptism should also provide the year of the crucifixion.

Regarding the first proposal, there are a number of problems with attempting to identify the year of the crucifixion using astronomical data. The most obvious is that we are able today with our technology to finely tune the identification of the new moon and to calculate its appearance using advanced mathematics. Then, using this data, we can identify every new moon in every month going back in time forever anywhere on the globe. However, it is certain that the skill of the first-century priests in detecting the first faint glow of the crescent moon in conjunction with the movements of the sun (since the new moon is invisible) after the vernal equinox was not as highly accurate, resulting in a necessary flexibility of a day or even two from our rigid calculations. Further, if there were certain indications that spring had not yet arrived (such as the ripening of barley, cessation of the winter rains, the drying of the roads, and young pigeons fledging), the council would meet and declare a thirteenth month (Adar 2). Thus, if one of these extra months might have occurred in the year of the crucifixion, it would throw off the correlation with our modern astronomical calculations. Those who hold to an A.D. 30 or A.D. 33 year for the crucifixion do so based almost solely on modern science's ability to identify the exact day of the week that Passover should have fallen between A.D. 26 and 36 (the years Pontius Pilate served as governor), which results in Passover being on Friday only in those two years during that span under the assumption that Jesus was crucified on Passover (Nisan 15). This technical "certainty" does not allow for the practical realities that existed in Jewish festal calendars at that time.

Regarding the second proposal, Luke 3:1–2, provides crucial data that may be used to calculate the year that Jesus was baptized. The most prominent data point is that the baptism took place in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar. There is some debate regarding when Tiberius's fifteenth year was. Because Augustus Caesar was sick, Tiberius was declared co-princeps (emperor) in a ceremony in A.D. 12, when he returned from Germania. Augustus died in A.D. 14, which began Tiberius's solo reign. If the fifteen years are counted from when he was declared co-princeps, then Jesus was baptized in A.D. 27. If the fifteen years are counted from his solo reign, then Jesus was baptized in A.D. 28 or 29 (depending on how one counts). Either of these methods of identifying Tiberius's year fifteen eliminates the A.D. 30 date of the crucifixion, for if Jesus did indeed have a ministry of three and a half years, there is no way to arrive at A.D. 30. The A.D. 27 or 28 date of the baptism also, for the same reason, eliminates the A.D. 33 date for the crucifixion. This is why those who maintain an A.D. 33 date for the crucifixion also maintain an A.D. 29 date for the baptism. On the choice between A.D. 27 or 29, historicist interpreters of Daniel 9 find that passage definitive in establishing the fall of A.D. 27 as the beginning of the Messiah's ministry, which began formally at His baptism. Thus His three and a half years of ministry ended at the cross in A.D. 31.

18:12–14. Interrogation by Annas. After His arrest, Jesus had a preliminary hearing before Annas, the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was the high priest (John 18:13). This hearing, which is recorded only in John, seems to have had an informal character—perhaps only in deference to Annas's continuing influence.

18:15–18. Peter's First Denial. The narrative is skillfully interrupted to insert the story of Peter's first denial of Jesus. His second and third denials follow in John 18:25–27. The unnamed companion of Peter was probably the Beloved Disciple (cf. 20:2–4, 8), that is, the fourth Evangelist himself. The fact that this disciple was known to the high priest (18:15) and consequently was allowed to enter the courtyard does not preclude his identification with John the son of Zebedee. There are certainly many ways in which a simple Galilean fisherman (cf. Mark 1:19–20) could have become acquainted with the high priest in Jerusalem. The question of the maid, aiming at identifying Peter as a disciple of Jesus (John 18:17), provides the context for the first denial. Perhaps Peter's impulsive, crude answer may have reflected only his desire to have access to the courtyard. Unfortunately, it was a denial that paved the way for other denials.

18:19–24. Back to Annas. The narrative then returns to the hearing before Annas. The high priest questioned Jesus about His followers and His teachings. Even if the interrogation was not an official hearing, the procedure was illegitimate because among the Jews a trial was not to be held at night. Besides, the accused were not expected to incriminate themselves. In other words, no case was to be established until the evidence of the witnesses had been stated and confirmed. And this is exactly the point Jesus tried to make. Determined to protect His followers, He made no reference to them. Instead, He brought attention to Himself while pointing out to Annas that it should not have been difficult to find eyewitnesses to confirm the nature and content of His teaching. He could not be identified as the leader of an underground or seditious movement because everything He had said He said in public (vv. 20–21). Implied in His answer is the idea that if Annas wanted to proceed with the trial, he should do it in accordance with the law (v. 23). Jesus's argument probably embarrassed the high priest as well as others who were there because one of the guards struck Jesus with his hand (v. 22). By inviting the guard who struck Him to show evidence that He had done wrong, Jesus was again calling into question the integrity of the legal procedure. Annas decided to send Jesus on to Caiaphas; that is to say, to the Sanhedrin, which was presided over by Caiaphas (cf. Luke 22:66–71)—the details of which John does not recount.

18:25–27. Peter's Final Two Denials. The attention shifts back to Peter. The Evangelist had already said that it was a cold night and that the servants of the high priest together with a number of officers made a charcoal fire in the courtyard to warm themselves (John 18:18). Peter was warming up among the enemies of Jesus (v. 18). This was the last place he should have been, especially after Jesus's warning (13:36–38). The result was almost inevitable. When he was questioned two more times, asked if he was a disciple of Jesus or whether he had been with Him in the garden, his denials were very emphatic. And then, as Jesus predicted, the rooster crowed (18:27; cf. 13:38). John does not say anything about the effect of this experience on Peter (cf. 21:15–17).

18:28–40. Interrogation by Pilate. From the Sanhedrin, Jesus was taken to the Praetorium, the official residence of Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea (A.D. 26–36). John's account of the Roman trial is by far the most detailed and dramatic in the Gospels. As has been noticed by scholars, he narrates the proceedings before Pilate in seven units with an alternating pattern of outside and inside scenes: outside (18:29–32); inside (18:33–38a); outside (18:38b–40); inside (19:1–3); outside (19:4–7); inside (19:8–11); and outside (19:12–15). This section covers the first three scenes.

It was early in the morning. According to rabbinic tradition, the homes of Gentiles were considered unclean. By entering such homes, a Jew would become ceremonially impure—a spiritual defilement that would last seven days and prevent them from entering the temple. In order for the Jewish authorities to celebrate the Passover, they did not go inside to see Pilate (18:28) but waited for him outside. (On the relationship of the Lord's Supper, the Passover, and the crucifixion of Jesus, see "The Year of the Crucifixion," p. 1460.)

As required by Roman law, Pilate asked first for the charges, and as soon as he was informed, he showed no interest in getting involved in what he considered to be an internal Jewish dispute (cf. Acts 18:12–16). It was only after the Jews responded by pointing out that they did not have the legal right to execute people (John 18:31) that Pilate concluded that the situation deserved a closer look. The Jews wanted an execution, but capital punishment was a criminal charge that only the Roman governor could legally authorize. From John's perspective, if Jesus was to be "lifted up" (3:14; 8:28; 12:32, 34), He would have to be handed over to the Romans.

Having taken Jesus inside the Praetorium, Pilate started examining Him, asking if He was the King of the Jews (18:33; cf. Matt. 27:11; Mark 15:2; Luke 23:3), which indicates what the charges were (cf. John 18:34–35). In His triumphal entry, Jesus was acclaimed the King of Israel, and He did not oppose it (12:13; cf. 1:49). This was conveniently used to persuade the Roman governor that Jesus represented a potential threat to the Roman Empire. Jesus did not deny the charges but clarified that His kingdom was "not of this world" (18:36). He was assuring Pilate that He was not seeking political rule and that consequently He was not leading an insurrection against the Romans.

Annas and Caiaphas

Under Roman occupation, the high priesthood became a political office. Annas was appointed high priest in A.D. 6 by Quirinius, the Roman governor of Syria, and deposed in A.D. 15 by Valerius Gratus, Pilate's predecessor in Judea. For many years thereafter, however, Annas continued to exert significant influence, not only because his deposition was considered arbitrary among the Jews, who thought of the high priesthood as a life office, but also because five of his sons and Caiaphas, his son-in-law, became high priests at one point or another. Caiaphas held the office from A.D. 18 to 36.

The point Jesus was trying to make was that His kingdom is not like the kingdoms of the world, represented by Rome, but that it is spiritual. He had come into the world to bear witness to the truth—the truth about Himself and His saving mission (cf. 3:16–17; 12:47; cf. 4:42; 6:33)—and He said that everyone of (i.e., on the side of) the truth listens to His voice (18:37). This probably impacted Pilate because the accused was placing the Roman governor on trial. Pilate was challenged to stand by the truth, but he was not willing to pursue that subject any further. His question, "What is truth?" (v. 38), may have been a sincere desire to come to know the truth, but the pressure was too high, and he did not have time for Jesus. He ended the conversation, thus distancing himself from the implicit challenge posed by Jesus. But in fact he had made a choice against the truth as revealed in Jesus and this led him later on to sentence Jesus to death.

Without waiting for the answer (cf. 14:6), Pilate went outside to the people and proposed releasing Jesus. He was convinced that Jesus was not guilty of anything, much less of suspicious political activities. By referring to the king of the Jews (18:39), he sought to influence the crowd in favor of Jesus and to appease his own conscience. But the plan failed. The Jews emphatically refused Jesus and asked instead for the release of Barabbas, a criminal who had probably been a member of the resistance movement against the Romans (v. 40; cf. Matt. 27:16; Mark 15:7; Luke 23:19).

19:1–11. Pilate Capitulates. Since the first attempt of Pilate to release Jesus failed (John 18:39–40), he tried another tack. Hoping that the Jews would be satisfied with the humiliation of the accused and would not pursue the death penalty (19:4; cf. Luke 23:16, 22), he had Jesus severely beaten, abused, and mocked by his soldiers. Such beating was a brutal torture. It was inflicted with a whip (*flagrum*) of several leather thongs loaded with small lead balls and/or sheep bones and often had broken glass. The Romans knew three types of such beatings: from least to most severe, the *fustigatio*, the *flagellatio*, and the *verberatio*. We are not informed which one was applied to Jesus, but it was probably the *fustigatio*, as it seems to have been intended only to appease the Jews. The *flagellatio* was much more severe, but not as severe as the *verberatio*, which was so violent that not infrequently the (naked) victims died while still bound to the post.

After the beating, the soldiers indulged themselves in mockery. Jesus was accused of claiming to be king, so they arrayed Him in royal purple, placed on His head a crown of thorns, and saluted Him (John 19:3). When Jesus was brought before the crowd, dressed in this shameful apparel of royalty, Pilate pronounced his famous words, *idou ho anthrōpos* (v. 5; Lat. *Ecce homo*)—"Behold the Man" or "Here is the Man!" There are some usages of this phrase in classical literature in what appears to be a condescending tone like, "Look, the poor fellow." But in the present setting it could simply have been an expression of mockery with the term "man" standing for alleged king (cf. 1 Sam. 9:17). Even though insisting on the innocence of Jesus (John 19:4), Pilate did not hesitate to submit Him to this theatrical, humiliating mockery. But the priests and the temple guards were not moved at all by any feeling of sympathy toward Jesus and vociferously called for crucifixion (John 19:6).

Pilate tried to distance himself from what was happening and told the crowd to take Him themselves and crucify Him (v. 6). The tone of his words seems to have been sarcastic, for he knew very well that the Jews could not enforce the death penalty, but even if they could, they would probably stone Jesus rather than crucify Him (see commentary on John 18:28–40). The Jews answered that Jesus was condemned by their law because He had declared Himself to be "the Son of God" (19:7). This was the real issue. The Jews were not entirely abandoning the charge of political insurrection (cf. v. 12) but were raising the additional charge of blasphemy, which for them was in fact much more serious (cf. 5:18; 8:58–59; 10:30–31, 33). Pilate was right from the very beginning: this was an internal Jewish affair (cf. 18:31).

Pilate took Jesus back inside to gather more information from Him. His question about the origin of Jesus (19:9) touched on that which is perhaps the most important and sensitive issue in the ministry of Jesus (e.g., 6:38–39, 41–42, 46–51, 57–58; 7:27–29; 8:14, 23–27). Pilate's authority, even if he represented the power of the Roman Empire, was granted to him from the heavenly Father (cf. Rom. 13:1). Jesus's response to Pilate's statement contrasted the source for their authority: the Jewish authorities versus Jesus, Himself. Pilate was at this time only exercising an authority that was legitimately entrusted to him. Though Jesus did not excuse what he was about to do, He clarified that Pilate's sin was not as great as that of the one who had handed Him over to him; probably meaning the high priest (John 19:11; cf. 9:41).

19:12–16a. No King but Caesar. Pilate tried to set Jesus free, but the price was too high. Political survival was much more important to him than his commitment to justice. Of course, he had reason to fear the threat of the Jewish leaders (v. 12). Emperor Tiberius was notorious for dealing ruthlessly with those who threatened his position and subordinates suspected of misconduct and disloyalty. The threat worked, and Pilate gave in. At noon (the sixth hour) on Friday (Preparation Day; v. 14), Pilate sat down on the judgment seat, normally located in the forecourt of the governor's residence, to pass the death sentence against Jesus. He brought Jesus out and told them to look at their king (v. 14). The tone was cynical as he mocked the Jews while displaying before them their king. Under subjection to Rome, this wounded and abandoned prisoner was the only king they could expect to have. Even as the Jews insisted that Jesus be crucified, Pilate pulled out another ironic question, asking if he should crucify their king (v. 15). The answer was, "We have no king but Caesar." The true King of Israel was left out of the picture; in fact He was heading to the cross. In order to please them and to protect himself, the weak Pilate handed Jesus over to be executed.

19:16b–42

Crucifixion and Burial

John's account of Jesus's crucifixion and burial is somber, but not as intense as that of the Synoptics. It also includes several details not recorded there.

19:16b–27. The Crucifixion. Pilate handed Jesus over to be crucified, and the Roman soldiers took charge of Him. At this point, He must have been beaten a second time. It was the brutal *verberatio* that was used on such occasions (see commentary on John 19:1–11). John says that Jesus carried the cross Himself, though the Synoptic Gospels clarify that at some point He was helped by Simon of Cyrene (Mark 15:21). Jewish practice required that stoning should take place outside the camp or city (cf. Lev. 24:14, 23; Deut. 22:21; Acts 7:58), and the same certainly applied to crucifixion (John 19:20; cf. Heb. 13:12). The Aramaic name of the place where Jesus was crucified was Golgotha, which means "skull" (Lat. *calvariae*). John's description of the crucifixion, as well as that of the other Gospels, is short and objective. Contrary to popular piety, none of the Evangelists lays emphasis on the sufferings of Jesus. What really matters for them is that He was dying for us. The four Gospels indicate that Jesus was crucified with two others, one on each side (John 19:18; Matt. 27:38; Mark 15:27; Luke 23:33).

An inscription was attached to the cross indicating the reason for which Jesus was being crucified. There are some differences among the Gospels in the exact wording of the inscription, which demonstrate different emphases of the full inscription ("This is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews"). All four Evangelists agree on the main part of it: "The King of the Jews" (John 19:19; Matt. 27:37; Mark 15:26; Luke 23:38). John and Matthew both name Jesus, but only John records the portion of the inscription that describes where He was from. In this John further personalizes the Messiah. Also, only John adds that the inscription was written in three languages and that it was read by many passersby. It was the Roman custom to locate crucifixions along main roads in order to serve as a warning for others. Most archaeologists have agreed that the traditional site of the crucifixion, which is now within the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, is accurate and that in Jesus's time it was located outside the city wall, near the Garden Gate (see "Archaeology and the Bible," p. 91).

As Jesus was being crucified, the soldiers divided His outer garment into four pieces, one for each soldier—a possible indication that, following the Roman practice, Jesus may have been crucified naked. They also cast lots over His tunic, which was seamlessly woven in one piece from top to bottom (John 19:23). John identifies this as a specific fulfillment of prophecy (cf. Ps. 22:18). In addition to the four soldiers, among the bystanders was a group of four women standing beside the cross: the mother of Jesus (Mary), who is not named in this Gospel (cf. John 2:1–5, 12; 6:42); the sister of His mother, who may be the same woman as the mother of the sons of Zebedee, who was named Salome (cf. Matt. 27:56; Mark 15:40); Mary, the wife of Cleopas (cf. Luke 24:18); and Mary Magdalene. While hanging on the cross, Jesus made provision for His mother, who almost certainly was widowed with little or no personal income and dependent on Him. The fact that He entrusted her to the disciple whom He loved (John 19:26), and not to one of His brothers, is probably because of His brothers' unbelief (cf. 7:5; see "The Brothers of Jesus," p. 1252). By caring for His mother amid all His physical pain and mental anguish, Jesus provided "the perfect example of . . . filial love [which] shines forth with undimmed luster from the mist of ages" (DA 752).

19:28–30. Death of Jesus. Knowing that everything that brought Him to this earth had already been accomplished, Jesus said that He was thirsty (John 19:28). Again, John related this as the fulfillment of prophecy (cf. Ps. 69:21). The sour wine vinegar that was given to Him (John 19:29) is a reference to cheap wine. This was different from the wine with myrrh that was offered to Jesus on the way to the cross and that He refused to drink (Mark 15:23). While the latter was believed to have sedative effects, sour wine vinegar—as the presence of the sponge and the hyssop branch suggests—seems to have been intended to hydrate the victim in order to extend the time the person had to suffer on the cross (cf. Luke 23:36). When the sponge was lifted to Jesus's lips, He exclaimed, "It is finished" (John 19:30). Then, bowing His head, He died, crowning His mission with glory and bringing His redemptive work to its expected end (12:27–28; 13:31–32; 17:1, 4).

19:31–37. Piercing of His Side. Crucifixion was a slow, painful execution in which the person was nailed (or tied) to a large wooden cross and left to hang until dead. This could take several days. According to Jewish law, however, the body of an executed criminal should not remain hanging overnight (Deut. 21:23), that is, it should be buried on the day of death. The day Jesus died was Friday, and the following day was the Sabbath of the Passover week. The Jewish leaders asked Pilate to have the legs of those crucified broken to hasten death so that the bodies could be taken down (John 19:31). Since Jesus was already dead, a Roman soldier used a spear to pierce the side of Jesus, and blood and water flowed from it (v. 34). Medical experts have suggested that the water would have been the fluid from the pericardial sac that would have come out mingled with blood.

This description of what happened at the cross had an impact on the mind of the Beloved Disciple (v. 35; cf. 1 John 5:6–9)—water (John 4:10–14; 7:37–39; Rev. 7:17; 22:1) and blood (1 John 1:7; Rev. 1:5; 5:9; 7:14; 12:11) are important symbols of the sacrifice of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit in John's writings. By recording this incident, he was explicitly claiming eyewitness credibility in order to elicit faith on the part of the readers (cf. John 20:31; 21:24). In keeping with his interest in showing how several details of the death of Jesus had been foretold by the prophets (cf. 19:24, 28), John introduces two more of these: that none of His bones was broken (v. 36; cf. Ex. 12:46; Num. 9:12; Ps. 34:20) and that He was pierced (John 19:37; cf. Zech. 12:10).

19:38–42. Burial. Jesus's burial brought to the stage two silent disciples, so to speak: Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, both members of the Sanhedrin (cf. John 3:1; 7:50–52; Mark 15:43). Joseph of Arimathea (and perhaps also Nicodemus) was one of those alluded to in John 12:42–43, that is, Jewish leaders who believed in Jesus but who kept their faith secret for fear of compromising their reputation and religious privileges (cf. John 9:22, 35). In addition, as members of the Sanhedrin, they were attempting to be more helpful to Jesus. When Jesus was crucified, Joseph stepped forward and revealed his true identity as a believer (19:38). It was common for disciples to organize the burial of their master, so Joseph of Arimathea used his influence to ask for Jesus's body, while Nicodemus brought along about seventy-two pounds (33 kg) of a mixture of myrrh and aloes. Wrapped with spices in long sheets of linen cloth, the body of Jesus was laid in a tomb never used before (v. 41) that had recently been hewn in a garden near the place where He was crucified. Since it was late Friday afternoon (cf. Mark 15:42), it was necessary to get the burial done before sunset, when the Sabbath would begin.

20:1–29

The Resurrected Lord

Concluding the passion narrative, chapter 20 records the resurrection of Jesus and His appearances to both Mary Magdalene and the disciples.

20:1–10. The Empty Tomb. Very early on Sunday morning, before it was light, Mary Magdalene headed to the tomb to anoint Jesus's body. When the Synoptics state that the sun had already risen (Mark 16:2), they were actually referring to the time when she arrived at the tomb site. The use of the plural form "we" (John 20:2) suggests that a few other women who had also witnessed the crucifixion were with her (Mark 16:1; cf. John 19:25). Realizing that the stone that sealed the tomb's entrance had already been removed, she concluded that the body of Jesus had been taken away (cf. Matt. 27:62–66; 28:11–15).

The story that follows involving Peter and the Beloved Disciple (probably the Evangelist himself; see John: Introduction) is intended to highlight the historical reliability of the resurrection of Jesus. When they saw the empty tomb, the linen strips of cloth, and the cloth handkerchief that had covered Jesus's head, they finally understood and believed that Jesus had resurrected (John 20:8). No one would have taken the corpse of Jesus leaving behind the head cloth and linen strips. The fact that there were two men renders credibility to the story, as under Jewish law at least two witnesses were required to establish the evidence (Deut. 17:6; 19:15). A woman's testimony usually was not accepted in court. The reference to "Scripture" (John 20:9) indicates that the resurrection was foretold in the OT. Though no specific passage is given (see also 1 Cor. 15:4), John could have had in mind Psalm 16:10, Isaiah 53:10–12, Hosea 6:2, and Jonah 1:17 (cf. Matt. 12:40).

20:11–18. Appearance to Mary. After telling Peter and the Beloved Disciple of the empty tomb, Mary Magdalene returned to the tomb and stood outside crying (John 20:11). She still did not know about the resurrection (cf. v. 13). As she bent down to look inside the tomb, she saw "two angels in white" (v. 12), who asked her why she was crying. She was looking at the past, to an empty tomb, not knowing that the future was behind her—her hope was alive. When the resurrected Jesus stood behind her, she did not immediately recognize Him, as was also the case in other of His post-resurrection appearances (cf. John 21:4; Luke 24:16). He was the same Jesus, with a body that could still be seen and touched (John 20:27; Luke 24:39; 1 Cor. 15:5–8) and bearing the marks of crucifixion (John 20:20, 27). The problem seems to be that Mary was looking for a dead body, not a living person, and consequently she confused Jesus with the gardener. Anxious to give Jesus a decent burial, she let her sorrows and tears obscure her vision of the risen Lord. It was only after Jesus called her by her own name (v. 16) that she realized this man was Jesus—there might have been something special in the way Jesus pronounced her name that the written record is not able to preserve for us, such as the tone of His voice. At any rate, this is a stirring illustration of the fact that the sheep know the voice of their Shepherd (cf. 10:3–4).

The Greek behind John 20:17 may be taken to mean that Mary was either trying to embrace Jesus or, more probably, had already done so. There was nothing wrong or sinful in her action (cf. Matt. 28:9). Jesus's words suggest nothing more than a sense of urgency, in that He did not want Mary's homage to detain Him from His immediate ascent to the Father. This might have been a temporary, private ascension different from the public one that occurred forty days later (Acts 1:1–11). The purpose of such an ascension is not given by John, but it might have been related to the completion of Jesus's earthly ministry (cf. John 12:27–28; 17:4–5; 19:30). By referring to His Father and their Father, rather than "our Father," Jesus was perhaps intentionally establishing an important difference between His divine Sonship and that of the believers. He is Son in the sense of possessing the same nature as the Father (5:17–18; 10:29–33), while believers can enjoy such status through the operation of the Holy Spirit (1:12–13; 3:3–7; cf. 1 John 3:1–2, 10; 5:2). It is noteworthy that the first person to see the risen Savior was Mary Magdalene—not Peter or even John—and now she was appointed to share this important message with the disciples, who are here referred to as the brothers of Jesus (John 20:17; cf. Matt. 12:49–50). First, on believing, they were "disciples" (John 2:2, 11); then, by separating themselves from the world, they were "friends" (15:13–15; cf. 6:66–69; 17:6, 16–17); and, lastly, after the resurrection they were brothers (20:17). One of the most inspiring teachings of the NT is that through His death on the cross, Jesus constituted us members of the family of God and He became our eldest Brother (Rom. 8:29; Heb. 2:11–12, 17).

20:19–23. Appearance to the Disciples. Sunday evening (the first Easter), Jesus showed Himself to the disciples, who were gathered somewhere in Jerusalem—probably the same upper room of Thursday night (cf. Mark 14:15–16) because the Feast of Unleavened Bread was still in progress. That the doors were locked for fear of the Jews highlights Jesus's miraculous entrance. "Peace be with you" (John 20:19) is a common Jewish greeting (cf. 1 Sam. 25:6). On this occasion, it may have been particularly intended to dispel the fear of the disciples, but it certainly underscored the saving gift Jesus was bringing to them (see commentary on John 14:25–31). Though no reason is given in John for Jesus showing His hands and side (but see Luke 24:36–43); this is intended to prepare the reader for the story of Thomas (John 20:24–29).

John's account of the commissioning of the disciples parallels that of the Synoptics (Matt. 28:18–20; Luke 24:46–49), except for the breathing of the Spirit on them (John 20:22), probably a dramatized parable in anticipation of the actual coming of the Spirit at Pentecost (cf. 7:39; 16:7). No argument on the nature of the Spirit should be derived from such an episode. As for John 20:23, the gift of the Spirit would enable the church to declare forgiveness of some sins but not of other sins. This is not about actually forgiving or withholding forgiveness, as this is a divine prerogative (Mark 2:7; cf. 1 John 1:9). In Greek both verbs *apheōntai* ("forgiven") and *kekratēntai* ("held," or in this context, "not forgiven" or "retained") are in the perfect tense, which seems to indicate that the divine actions actually precede the statement of the church. The church proclaims what God has done for us.

20:24–29. Appearance to Thomas. In this first appearance to the disciples, Thomas was not present (John 20:24). When told about what happened, he required physical evidence before he could believe (v. 25). His initial reluctance provides additional (circumstantial) evidence for the resurrection of Jesus. About a week later, when Jesus appeared again to the disciples, including Thomas this time, the evidence was provided, and he was moved to declare, "My Lord and my God!" (v. 28). This is the climax of the Gospel. For the first time Jesus is acknowledged and proclaimed with unmatched clarity and conviction to be who He really is: Lord and God. Now John was ready to bring his Gospel to a close. But before doing so, he recorded one of the most precious remarks made by Jesus: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (v. 29). The blessing travels through time and reaches each one of us. The physical presence of Jesus is not incumbent for faith because the gospel story itself speaks. The written word can elicit the same faith as the incarnate Word, as John moves on to say (vv. 30–31).

20:30–31

Purpose of the Gospel

Having finished the gospel story, John stated the purpose for the writing of his Gospel and underscored its sufficiency for faith. John's main concern was not about retelling the story of Jesus but about drawing out its significance. The Evangelist was fully aware of the fact that the ministry of Jesus was extremely rich and that He did many other signs, but he selected only seven (see "The Seven Signs in the Fourth Gospel," p. 1417), most of which Jesus performed through His spoken word and not by His touch, as often recorded in the Synoptics. For those to whom he wrote, those who did not have the privilege of seeing Jesus, this might have been particularly meaningful: Jesus's word is as powerful as His touch, which means that His physical absence is not an obstacle for faith (cf. 20:29). And so John wrote in the service of faith—more precisely, to strengthen faith, as the present tense (*pisteuēte*) indicates: "that you may [continue to] believe" (v. 31). His ultimate goal, however, went far beyond this. He wrote in order for men and women to enjoy eternal life—the divine gift for those who believe that Jesus is what He claimed to be (cf. 3:16, 36; 5:24–25; 6:40, 47; 10:10).

21:1–25

THE EPILOGUE

To close his Gospel, John added an epilogue dealing with some church-related issues: the reinstatement of Peter, set in a fishing context by the Sea of Galilee, and the impending death of the Beloved Disciple. Though it looks more like an appendix, there is no question that this section is the work of John himself, with the possible exception of a portion of the last two verses (vv. 24–25).

21:1–14. Catching Fish. This is the third account of the appearance of the resurrected Jesus to the disciples (v. 14), and it took place by the Sea of Galilee (also known as the Sea of Tiberias; v. 1). That the disciples—only seven are mentioned—were back in Galilee indicates that the Passover week was over (cf. 13:1; 18:28, 39). They returned to the profession they had before they met Jesus. The first part of this section deals with the restoration of Peter. The story of the miraculous fishing, despite its significance, only provides the occasion for Jesus's dialogue with Peter.

The richness of details with which the story is told is impressive: Jesus's command to toss the net over "the right side of the boat" (21:6); the remark (in the Greek) that Peter was naked (some translations hold that "naked" here means "without his outer garment") before he jumped into the sea (v. 7); the distance the boat was from the land (v. 8); the charcoal fire and the bread (v. 9); the exact number of fish; and the information that the net was not torn (v. 11). Why so many details? On the one hand, they are evidence of a firsthand witness, which implies that the Evangelist was one of the seven disciples. In fact, this is the only episode in John's Gospel that combines in the same narrative the eyewitness character of the author (cf. v. 24), the Beloved Disciple (v. 20), and the sons of Zebedee (v. 2), who are elsewhere in the NT identified as John and James (Mark 1:19; 3:17; 10:35). On the other hand, we should by all means resist any temptation to find a symbolic meaning in each one of the details. There is nothing to suggest that they are symbolic, much less fictitious. One thing, however, should be emphasized: the miracle happened as a result of the faithful obedience of the disciples to the command of Jesus. Salvation is by grace, but when we obey, we put ourselves in a position where God can operate in and through us.

21:15–19. Restoration of Peter. After breakfast, Jesus proceeded to restore Peter. Peter's threefold affirmation of love for Jesus corresponds to his threefold denial the night Jesus was arrested (John 18:15–18, 25–27). Although Jesus had already forgiven him, the public nature of the denial demanded a public reinstatement to service (e.g., Acts 1:15; 2:14, 37; 3:1, 12). It is frequently pointed out that Jesus used two different words when probing Peter's love. In the first and second questions (John 21:15–16), He used *agapaō*, which is said to represent a higher type of love than *phileō*, the word used by Peter in each of his three replies. In His third question, Jesus used *phileō* (v. 17), as if doubting whether Peter felt even the lesser form of love for Him, and this has been taken to be the reason why the disciple was grieved. Despite giving an appealing interpretation to the dialogue, however, it is highly doubtful whether such subtle distinction can be maintained. In this Gospel, the two verbs are used interchangeably. Both are used to describe the Father's love for the Son (3:35; 5:20) and the love of Jesus for both Lazarus (11:5, 36) and the Beloved Disciple (20:2; 21:7). In addition, the text clearly says that Peter was grieved because Jesus asked the same basic question three times.

There is no reason to think that any special significance should be attached to the change from lambs in 21:15 to sheep in vv. 16–17, as if Jesus entrusted to Peter not only His individual lambs but also the whole flock. It is more likely that the two words are simply different ways of designating the same thing—the one flock of Jesus Christ. It is also important to recognize that this passage deals with Peter's restoration and reinstatement to service, not to some kind of elevation to primacy in the church. He was not being invested here with a distinctive authority as the earthly vicar of Jesus or being appointed as the chief shepherd who should rule over all other shepherds (cf. 1 Pet. 5:4). He was simply being commissioned to take care of Jesus's flock, as were all of the disciples and as are all of those God has chosen to lead His people.

Jesus added a thought that probably struck Peter. The night he denied Jesus, Peter said he would give his life for Him (John 13:37), and here Jesus told him how this would happen. The enigmatic language Jesus used seems rather general, but in the ancient world the expression "stretch out your hands" (21:18) was widely taken as a reference to crucifixion. And according to Christian tradition, Peter was crucified in Rome under Nero around the year A.D. 67 several years before the writing of this Gospel.

21:20–23. John's Imminent Death. The introduction of the Beloved Disciple into the scene and the way Jesus referred to him generated among the brethren the rumor that this disciple would not die before the return of Jesus (vv. 22–23). By the time John wrote his Gospel, the rumor might have become even more serious, for he was the only apostle still alive, the last living link between Jesus and that generation of believers. It is as if hope in the Second Coming could be maintained only as long as John lived, whereas his death could sink the church into a deep crisis. It was, therefore, necessary to prepare the believers for the reality of his own eventual departure. The Second Advent of Jesus (14:1–3) should not be tied to John's life—or, for that matter, to any other definite period of time. Our hope has to be based entirely on the faithfulness of the One who made the promise (Heb. 10:37; Rev. 22:20; cf. Hab. 2:3).

21:24–25. Concluding Words. The statement in John 21:24 should be read primarily in the context of vv. 20–23, but by extension it also represents a validation of the entire Gospel (cf. v. 25). The identity of the "we" in v. 24 has been a subject of debate. The idea that the first-person plural is a self-reference to the Evangelist himself seems the least satisfactory solution, as there is a clear distinction between the disciple

who testified and wrote these things and those who knew that his testimony was true. A better alternative is to think about a group of church leaders, probably at Ephesus, who knew John well enough to confirm his testimony to the believers of their own time, as well as to those of future generations. John's astonishing Gospel is the product of an eyewitness, someone very close to Jesus—in fact, the disciple "whom Jesus loved" (13:23; 20:2; 21:7, 20)—and his trustworthiness was recognized from the very beginning.

The Gospel closes with a reminder that its content is no more than a short selection of what Jesus did and taught. The greatness of Jesus cannot be limited to one single book, not even to four. If everything had been written, the world would not even be able to hold all the books that would have been produced (21:25). This is hyperbole, of course, as far as Jesus's physical life is concerned, but in relation to His spiritual accomplishments, no truth could be more accurate. Jesus came to save the world (3:17; 4:42; 5:34; 10:9; 12:47) and to reveal the Father's glory (12:28, 45; 14:9, 13; 16:14; 17:4). Both of these were accomplished at the cross, which became the instrument through which God's final victory over the forces of evil was secured (12:31; 16:11; 19:30) and creature and Creator were finally brought together again (14:3; 17:24). In fact, the entire universe and the whole eternity would not be large enough to record the full significance of Jesus's accomplishments when He was made flesh and lived among us. The power of the ministry and work of Jesus is today as effective as it was when He was with the disciples. His constant victory over spiritual powers and His resurrection from the dead assure us that our hope for the consummation of that victory at His glorious return is certain and unmovable.

ACTS

INTRODUCTION

Title. The earliest extant title associated with the book of Acts is simply "Acts of Apostles." This title appears as a short postscript at the end of two fourth-century manuscripts (Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus). Later variations of the title include not only the traditional "Acts of the Apostles" but also expanded titles like "Acts of the Holy Apostles," "Luke the Evangelist's Acts of the Holy Apostles," and even "The Wise Acts of the Wise Apostles." In contrast to these lengthier titles, one manuscript from the tenth century is simply titled "Acts."

As is the case with the Gospels, it is unlikely that any of these titles were originally part of the book. While the traditional title is familiar to modern readers, the use of the term "apostle" has caused some to wonder if this accurately fits with the contents of the book. Within both Luke and Acts, the term "apostle" almost always applies in a specific sense to those who lived with Jesus and witnessed His ascension (Acts 1:21–22). The only apostles of this category mentioned in the book, however, are Peter, John, James, and Matthias. However, more than half of the book focuses on the ministry of Paul, who does not *technically* fit into the category of an apostle. While he is designated as an apostle twice in Acts (14:4, 14), where the title is used to refer to one who was "sent," it is also used of Barnabas. It is in this broad sense that the traditional title of the book is fitting. The titles associated with the book also may have arisen in the late first or early second century in connection with the identification of Peter and Paul as the two chief apostles in the church.

Authorship. As is the case with the Gospel of Luke, Acts is technically anonymous. While the two books were clearly written by the same author, nowhere in either book is the name of the author mentioned. Clues about his identity, however, are numerous throughout the two volumes. The preface to Luke, which introduces both the Gospel and Acts (cf. Luke 1:1–4; Acts 1:4–5), reveals that although the author was not an eyewitness of the events of Jesus's life, he had contact with some who were eyewitnesses. In addition, he was a well-educated individual who had not only read other written accounts of the life of Jesus (apparently Matthew and Mark) but also personally and carefully investigated the events himself. The presence of several "we" passages in Acts even suggests the author had served as a frequent member of Paul's missionary entourage (Acts 16:8–17; 20:5–15; 21:1–18; 27:1—28:16). Eliminating the names of the individuals associated by name with Paul during those "we" sections in Acts and comparing the remaining individuals Paul identifies as his colleagues in his Epistles suggest that Luke was the author. This was the unanimous viewpoint of the early church by the end of the second century.

Date. The date attributed to the writing of Acts is contingent on the dating assigned to the Gospel of Luke (see Luke: Introduction). Since Luke acknowledges having consulted other accounts of the life of Jesus in preparation for his own Gospel, some time had to have elapsed before his account could have been written. A careful examination of Luke's Gospel in Greek makes it clear that the Gospel of Mark was at least one of those earlier accounts. Assuming Mark was written in the late A.D. 60s, sometime after Peter's death but before the fall of Jerusalem (see Mark: Introduction), Luke's two-volume work would have come after that—perhaps in the 70s or early 80s. This coheres with the viewpoint of Irenaeus, the second-century church father from Gaul, who said Luke wrote his Gospel after Peter and Paul were martyred. It is also affirmed in the *Muratorian Canon*, the oldest known Christian list of authoritative books that is thought to date to the late second century, and also in the works of the fourth- and fifth-century church father Jerome. A later date than this is not plausible because Acts does not make any reference or allusions to the collection and circulation of Paul's authoritative letters among the churches at the end of the first century. Moreover, it is hard to imagine that the author would have written so positively about Rome's attitude toward the church if it had been written during the persecution some Christians experienced under the reign of Domitian (A.D. 81–96) for refusing to comply with the demands for emperor worship.

However, since Acts ends with Paul's situation unresolved as he awaited trial in Rome, it can be argued that Acts could not have been written after A.D. 62 or 63. If the author knew the outcome of Paul's story, how could he have ended the book at that point? In order to accommodate an earlier date for the composition of Acts, it can be concluded that Mark must have been written in the late 50s, rather than nearly a decade later. It is important to remember that Acts is not a biography of the lives of Peter and Paul. Although Peter plays a significant role in the first half of the book, he completely disappears after chapter 15. The reason for Peter's absence is almost certainly not that Luke had no further information about Peter. The focus of Acts is not Peter but the spread of the gospel to Jews and Gentiles from Jerusalem (2:1—8:1), to Judea and Samaria (9:1—12:19), and finally to Rome itself (cf. 1:8). Peter fades out of view when his role in that larger story has been fulfilled. It is the same with Paul. The purpose of Acts is not to tell Paul's story but to tell the story of how the gospel reached Rome. And that is the climax of the story—Paul proclaiming the gospel in Rome (28:28). So, although Acts ends around the year 62 and does include the deaths of other apostles, it does not require that it was written at that time. However, without incontrovertible evidence, it is best not to be overly dogmatic. Acts (along with Luke) would have been written sometime after A.D. 60 but sometime before A.D. 70.

Recipients. Like the Gospel of Luke, Acts is addressed to a certain Theophilus. While the name Theophilus means "loved by God," that does not imply that the name was simply a synonym for Christian believers. The name Theophilus was a common name among both Jews and Greeks at that time. The individual Luke addresses was likely his patron, that is, the individual who provided the funding necessary for Luke to research, write, and publish his two-volume work. Although addressed to Theophilus, Luke certainly envisioned a larger audience—the members of the early church, whom he sought to encourage and confirm in the teachings they had already heard (Luke 1:4). His primary readers were most likely Gentiles—since the book largely focuses on the gospel going to Gentiles and takes a rather positive view on the Greco-Roman world.

Luke's account makes it clear that the early church was characterized by strong tensions between Jewish Christians and those of Greek origin. The problem raised at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) and Paul's need to emphasize his loyalty to Jewish law (Acts 21:17–26) reveal this tension. Within this challenging context, Luke's account seeks to demonstrate that there was no discord between Peter and Paul, the leaders of these two groups, on the essentials of the gospel. And in response to the opposition of some Jewish believers to Paul's ministry, Luke was moved by the Spirit to praise Paul's work and his calling to preach the gospel to the Gentiles.

Paul's name is mentioned 128 times in the book of Acts, and his calling is reported three times (Acts 9:1–19; 22:6–21; 26:12–18). Luke goes so far as to establish, for the sake of Judeo-Christians, that Paul could not rightly be accused of unfaithfulness to tradition (23:9; 25:8). Although he does not meet all the requirements to be an apostle in the technical sense of the word—he was not one of the Twelve (1:21–22)—Luke makes it clear that the risen Christ commissioned Paul to proclaim the gospel (9:15) and that the church officially recognized his calling (13:1–3). In doing so, Luke assures his readers that the inclusion of Gentiles into the church was part of God's overall plan to bring salvation to the world and that Jewish and Gentiles believers should be united in together proclaiming that same gospel.

Theology. As already indicated, the book of Acts is a sequel to the Gospel of Luke (Acts 1:1). The complete work comprises about one fourth of the NT. The book underlines the fact that the work of Jesus did not end with His death and resurrection. The Gospel gives an account of what Jesus began to do and teach (1:1). By contrast, the book of Acts recounts the continued accomplishments of Jesus through the Holy Spirit in the establishment and development of His church. It brings focus to the importance of the mission that must be fulfilled during the "intermediate" period spanning His ascension and His return in glory.

1. Acts of the Apostles. The book could have been called "Acts of Peter and Paul," considering that the first twelve chapters of Luke's work are dedicated to Peter's efforts in spreading the gospel, though he is not mentioned beyond chapter 13, with the exception of a short intervention at the Jerusalem Council (15:7–11). The rest of the book is entirely focused on Paul's efforts to spread the gospel. In the Hellenistic world of the time, commemorating the "acts" of major figures, such as Alexander, Hannibal, and others, was common practice. Christians chose to commemorate the "Acts of Martyrs" and the acts of some apostles (often referred to simply as *Acts*), probably to differentiate them from this work of Luke.

We might also contrast this work of Luke with those of Josephus, a Jew who lived at the time of Paul, whose writings were an attempt to portray Judaism in a favorable light. Indeed, Luke's work portrays the Romans as helpful (21:31–36) and appreciative of Paul's Roman citizenship (chap. 25). In fact, Paul's first convert was a Roman administrator (13:12). The book concludes with an emphasis on the freedom of action Paul enjoyed in the pursuit of his work of evangelization despite being a prisoner of Rome (28:31). These adverse circumstances led to the conversion of a slave by the name of Onesimus (Philem. 10).

2. Acts of the Spirit. This book might have also been called "Acts of the Holy Spirit." Indeed, the Holy Spirit is mentioned seventy times in its pages. The Spirit presided step by step over the geographical and ethnic deployment of the church and its mission. He used the church to fulfill the command of Jesus (1:8) to spread the gospel message from Jerusalem (chaps. 1–7), to Judea (5:16), and beyond to Samaria (chaps. 6–12), Asia Minor, and finally Rome (chaps. 13–28). It was through the work of the Spirit that the gospel reached even the Gentile world. The book reports the conversion of Jews (2:41–46), Samaritans (8:1–14), an Ethiopian previously converted to Judaism (8:26–40), and Cornelius (10:1–2), a "God-fearer" who was a convert to Judaism and fervent in his practice of Jewish rituals. Lastly, the book narrates the activities of Paul and Barnabas in the deployment of their divine mission to the Gentiles (13:12, 46–47).

According to Acts, the mission of the church is fulfilled through the activity of the Holy Spirit manifest in the lives of all kinds of individuals. The mission is to reach all people no matter who they are. The good news of salvation is for all humanity.

3. Mission and Hope. Acts is about the hope based on the promises God made to His people in the OT and their fulfillment in Christ Jesus. This was the hope of the coming of the Messiah and His death and resurrection (26:7–8). David placed his hope in the future Messiah (2:25–26), and after He had come, Paul and the other apostles suffered on account of serving and preaching Him (28:20). But since the work of Christ continues on behalf of His people, the promise of His return fills the hearts of people with hope. The Jesus that the disciples saw ascending to heaven will return again (1:9–11). It is this hope that propels the church, empowered by the Spirit, to go to the nations to proclaim to them Christ's redemptive work and His soon return in glory.

Hope in Acts also includes the resurrection from the dead (23:6; 24:15). Without this hope the emphasis on mission that is patently clear in the book would be meaningless. Hope energizes the church for mission.

Text. The textual history of Acts is of special interest since it circulated in the early church in two different forms. These two forms are often referred to as the Alexandrian text and the Western text—though it should be noted that there are no longer grounds for locating "Western" texts in the West and "Alexandrian" texts in Egypt. The Alexandrian text of Acts is the basis for all modern Bible translations, and the earliest representatives of it are the two great fourth-century Greek manuscripts, Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus, as well as two significant third-century papyri (P45, P53). The so-called Western form of Acts, however, includes additional narrative details and explanatory comments that make it about 10 percent longer. This expanded form of Acts is found in Codex Bezae, a fifth-century bilingual manuscript, with Greek and Latin on facing pages, as well as in some Latin, Syriac, and Greek manuscripts that date to the late third century. Since the Western text as a whole has a fondness for paraphrase, harmonizing difficult texts, and the rather free addition of other material, most scholars tend to consider the differences in the Western form of Acts to be later and secondary additions, even though some of the additional material may include factually accurate information at times. Western readings will be noted in the commentary only in places where they reveal a difference between modern translations or may have some other significance.

COMMENTARY

1:1—5:42

BEGINNINGS OF THE CHURCH, ITS MISSION, AND CONFLICTS

In this section Luke lays down the foundations of the mission entrusted to the apostles (1:1–11) and identifies their basic elements: the divine mandate, the gift of the Holy Spirit, the proclamation of Christ as Lord of all, and the unity of the church. He then discusses how the apostles dealt with conflicts.

1:1–11

Prologue or the Foundations of the Mission

The prologue of the book of Acts shows that the church was not born to spread a new philosophy, nor was it founded on utopian ideals or an idle millenarian hope. It is the risen Lord Himself, exalted to the right hand of God, who continues His redemptive work through the auspices of His church. He is the Lord of the harvest (Matt. 9:38).

1:1–3. Origin of the Mission. The mission of the church is entirely rooted within the ministry of Jesus, thus showing a deep continuity between the Gospel of Luke and Acts. The Gospel narrates what Jesus began to do, while the book of Acts narrates what Jesus continued to do. The mission is focused not only on teaching but also on accomplishment (see Matt. 28:19–20) through those set apart (Acts 13:2) and sent (Rom. 10:15) to serve (*diakonia*; Acts 1:25). The resurrection of Jesus is the substance of the mission. Without it there would be no mission (Rom. 15:15–19) because there would be nothing to announce. Jesus made Himself visible to His disciples and personally testified to them that He was alive. Particularly instructive is the fact that for forty days Christ also instructed them in regard to the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3). This post-resurrection instruction opened the eyes of the disciples to understand like never before the significance of the ministry and work of Jesus and prepared them for their mission.

1:4–8. Power and Extent of the Mission. According to Acts, nothing can be accomplished without the power of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is mentioned fifty-six times in Acts. He comes to us as a gift, and His work in the hearts of people is essential (8:16–17; 19:2; Gal. 5:22). The mission is unlimited in time and scope. The church is not to be obsessed with the question of the timing of the return of the Lord. This is a matter that is in the hands of the Father, and we are called to trust Him (Acts 1:6–7). The main concern of the church should be its mission to the whole world (v. 8). It is a community on the move: from Jerusalem (1:12—7:60), to Judea, Samaria (8:1—12:25), and the rest of the world (13:1—28:31).

1:9–11. Mission and Hope. The ascension of Jesus imbued the disciples with hope as they got ready to fulfill the mission. The ascension was bodily and therefore visible. The incarnate God ascended with a glorified human body to the Father, His return will also be visible, and He will descend analogously to how He left ascending (v. 11). Since then, the Christian church has been looking forward to seeing the Lord coming in glory from heaven. Meanwhile He is sitting at the right hand of God (2:33) and has placed His own omnipotence at the service of the mission of His church (cf. Matt. 28:18–20).

1:12—2:4

The Church United and Equipped

The mission started in Jerusalem, and the church was to be equipped to continue it. Its primary purpose was to announce to the Jews that the long-awaited Messiah had come in the Person of Jesus. The new community was not formed outside of Israel or adjacent to it but from within the Israel of faith and in continuity with its history.

1:12–14. A Community of Prayer. Jesus ascended to heaven, and from there He reigns above all rule and authority, power and dominion (Eph. 1:20–21), whether visible or invisible (Col. 1:16). His redemptive power is to be manifested through the church, which is motivated and moved by the power of His Spirit. The promise that in the seed of Abraham all nations of the earth would be blessed was about to be fulfilled through the mission of the church, the Israel of faith (Gen. 12:2–3; 18:18; Rev. 7:9).

The apostles returned to Jerusalem, to the upper room, to pray and wait for the coming of the Spirit. Jesus left, but the Spirit was coming to be with them. There were eleven apostles, plus a number of women and members of Jesus's family. These women may well have been those who followed Jesus (Matt. 27:55; Mark 15:40–41; Luke 8:2–3; 23:55) and the spouses of the apostles. Together they formed the first community of believers, the core of the church in Jerusalem. Luke emphasizes the fact that the community was Jewish and that they respected the rules related to Sabbath observance (e.g., 1:12, 16, 20; 2:1, 16–21, 25–28, 34–35). Through prayer the church makes itself open to the outpouring of the Spirit, and it was a primary feature of the original community (Acts 1:14, 24; 2:42; 3:1; 4:31; 6:4; 12:5, 12; 13:3).

1:15–26. A Community of Service. Peter was the first to take a stand (1:15). Rehabilitated after his denial of Jesus (John 21:15–17), Peter spoke to the young community of faith. His own experience with the merciful Jesus led him to avoid any derogatory terminology when referring to Judas (Luke 6:16). He simply reported on the behavior of Judas. In order to emphasize the fact that the vocation of Israel was to be perpetuated through the church, Luke recounts Peter's initiative to fill the void left by the absence of Judas. The original core of Israel was to be reconstituted (Rev. 7:1–8) to fulfill the divine plan of salvation that could not fail. The replacement was conducted in two phases: the loss of Judas (Acts 1:15–19) and his replacement by Matthias (vv. 20–26). Both segments of this section are introduced with expressions of certainty: *edei plērōthēnai tēn graphēn*—"it was necessary for the Scripture to be fulfilled" (v. 16)—and *dei oun*—"therefore one must" (v. 21). This wording should not be understood in terms of predestination. Scripture facilitates the understanding of events by bringing clarity on their fulfillment (John 14:29). God did not predestine the actions of Judas, but He foreknew them (Acts 2:23; 4:27–28; cf. 2:31).

The death of Judas is mentioned only to show that Judas left a void that had to be filled in the ministry (*diakonia*, "service") of the apostles (v. 17). Judas left a *topos*—"a place" or "part" in the ministry—and went to another *topos* that was fatal to him (v. 25). The ministry of the gospel and the church are safely protected from the assaults of Satan as long as it remains in its God-appointed place (*topos*) conducting the mission to which it has been called (Rev. 12:14). This place of ministry is twofold: it involves prayer and preaching (Acts 6:4).

Three criteria determined the choice of a new apostle. It had to be a disciple who was active in the ministry of Jesus since the beginning, devoted to service, and an eye-witness of the resurrection (v. 22). Drawing lots made possible the integration of Matthias into the group of eleven. By using lots, the decision was removed from the hands of the congregation and left to God. This did not mean that there was going to be some sort of ongoing apostolic succession. James, who was killed by Herod (12:2), was never replaced as an apostle. Subsequently, those selected by the church to further the cause in any fashion, whether as evangelists (6:5–6), elders (14:23), pastors (1 Tim. 4:14), or missionaries (Acts 13:3), were to be chosen under the guidance of the Spirit and commissioned with prayer and by the laying on of hands. If Paul could rightly say of himself that he was an apostle, it was only because he used the term in its original sense: as one who was sent (22:21; 26:17), not as one of the Twelve (1 Cor. 15:9), whose mandate he affirms (Acts 13:4; Gal. 1:18–19, 2:2, 9). Of course, we should also keep in mind that Paul witnessed the resurrected Jesus (1 Cor. 15:8).

2:1–4. Coming of the Holy Spirit. At Pentecost the Spirit of God who presided over Creation (Gen. 1:2), inspired the prophets (2 Pet. 1:19–21), and anointed Jesus for His ministry (Is. 11:1–2; Luke 3:22), acted to empower the church for mission. The community of believers gathered in anticipation of the gift of the Spirit. Luke does not specify the location or the number of those present. The disciples did not always meet in the same place and often went to the temple to worship (Acts 2:46; Luke 24:53). Although Luke mentions the presence of only apostles (Acts 2:14), we can assume that others were present because the gift of the Spirit was not reserved for the apostles alone (2:38). All 120 present were probably included in the bestowment (1:15). Luke insists on the facts that the community was tightly united (1:14; 2:1) and that they were seated (2:2) to pray and meditate (see AA 36–37). This type of unity was for Luke an essential feature of the church in its infancy (2:42, 46; 3:1; 4:24; 5:12). Later it was to safeguard the unity of the church that Paul opposed Peter at Antioch concerning eating with Gentiles (Gal. 2:11–14). Unity is indeed an essential precondition for the survival of the church (John 17:20–21).

The gift of the Spirit was given at Pentecost, fifty days after Christ's resurrection and ten days after His ascension (Acts 1:3). Pentecost was the Feast of First Fruits (Lev. 23:15–17). It symbolized beautifully the beginning of the great harvest of faith that was brought about by

the gift of the Spirit (Acts 2:41). To mark the solemn moment when the promised Spirit was bestowed along with the commitment of the church to the mission, Luke uses an unusual verb. For him the day of Pentecost was *symplēroō* ("accomplished"; 2:1). He uses the same form of speech in Luke 9:51 in reference to the ascension of Jesus.

The wind, noise, and fire associated here with the outpouring of the Spirit were visible manifestations of the presence of God—a theophany. When God came down on Mount Sinai to give the Law, there were thunders and trumpets, fire and lightning (Ex. 19:16–18; see also Rev. 11:19). In the same way, the sound of a mighty wind and the tongues of fire at Pentecost indicated that the coming of the Spirit was indeed a manifestation of God (Acts 2:2–3).

On Pentecost God brought the gospel within the reach of all languages and cultures. A kind of "second Pentecost" occurred during the Protestant Reformation, when the Scriptures were translated into the languages of the common people. Up until that time, the Bible had been translated only into Latin during the Middle Ages. Since the common people could not read Latin, the Bible had become the exclusive property of the educated clergy. In the spirit of Pentecost, the Bible continues to be translated into as many languages and dialects as possible.

2:5—3:26

The Gospel Announced with Power

Through an inspired sermon Peter spoke to the hearts of the people, the good news was received by many, and a miracle provided Peter with the opportunity to speak again to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

2:5–13. Crowd's Response. Pentecost was celebrated during a season when people "from every nation under heaven" (v. 5) gathered together in Jerusalem. The list of fifteen nations in vv. 9–11 describes the different regions around the ancient world where there were large numbers of Jewish inhabitants. The list of the nations appears to be organized on the basis of the four cardinal points of the compass: Parthian, Medes, Elamites, and the dwellers of Mesopotamia were east of Jerusalem; Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia Minor, Phrygia, and Pamphylia were to the north; Egypt and Libya could be reached only by traveling south; and Rome was to the west. Completing the list are those people to whom the gospel was to be addressed first: the Jews and their proselytes. The scope then broadens to include the nomadic shopkeepers of the sea, the people of Crete, and those of the earth, the Arabs. This description provides a universal synthesis of all the people to whom the gospel was to be proclaimed.

The whole context of Pentecost suggests that speaking in tongues was the gift of speaking known foreign languages (AA 40): (1) The apostles spoke in *heterais glōssais*—"different/other tongues" (Acts 2:4). (2) The listeners heard them in their own language (2:6, 8). (3) Yet the apostles were recognized as Galileans (2:7), implying that they were assigned to a particular geographical location and language. It is therefore surprising that they spoke as they did. (4) Clearly, the apostles were not in a state of ecstasy. Contrary to what happens with glossolalia (speaking in tongues; 1 Cor. 14:27–33), the apostles were able to keep silent while Peter addressed the crowd. (5) The text quoted by Peter to explain the event speaks about proclaiming a prophetic message (cf. Acts 2:17–21; Joel 2:28–32). Peter was teaching, as indicated by his emphasis on the prophetic nature of the message and by adding phrases not found in Joel's prophecy (Acts 2:18). (6) The charge of drunkenness against the apostles was made by scoffers (v. 13) who were not credible because the hearts of those who heard the message about the greatness of God were touched (v. 11). Those people understood Peter's message with clarity.

Speaking in Tongues

Ancient civilizations were familiar with ecstatic speaking in tongues. Plato described the phenomenon involving individuals who had lost their senses while in a trance. This is totally different from the experience of the apostles, who spoke with clarity. Isaiah spoke out against whispering and muttering mediums and spiritists (Is. 8:19). He implored the people to return to the understandable clarity of the word in Scripture (Is. 8:20). Hosea the prophet compares infidels to those who utter indistinguishable and foolish sounds (Hos. 9:7). Paul emphasized the same thing when he encouraged the Corinthians to use intelligible words (1 Cor. 14:7–12), going as far as to say that those who prophesy bring edification, encouragement, and comfort to people (v. 3).

2:14–39. Peter's Sermon. The gift of the Spirit gives to those who receive a clear understanding of salvation along with the courage needed to testify about it (Acts 4:31). Peter stood up and explained the meaning of the cross and resurrection of Jesus. He stated that the gift of the Spirit that they had received was the result of the mediation of Christ at the right hand of the Father as the exalted Lord (v. 33). His sermon, the very first recorded in the history of the church, brought up two important points: the church anticipated what was expected for the end time (2:14–21), and Jesus was the promised Messiah (2:22–36). Each segment of the sermon began with a call to *akousate*—"listen" or "hear" (v. 22)—and in v. 14 the verb *enōtisasthe* is used, which literally means "to put it in your ears."

Quoting from the prophet Joel to explain their experience, Peter emphasized the universality of the gift of the Spirit, regardless of age, gender (v. 17), or social condition (v. 18). Peter stated only conditions of repentance and baptism (v. 38). The eschatological signs mentioned in vv. 19 and 20 emphasize the grandiosity of the events that would mark the time just before the return of Jesus with His offer of salvation to anyone willing to turn to the Lord (v. 21; see "Outpouring of the Spirit," p. 1084). The second part of the sermon develops a central dogma of Christianity, the risen Christ. Jesus is first introduced in terms of His human condition—Jesus was a "man" (Acts 2:22–23). This type of preaching develops extremely important theological themes that summarize the entire gospel message. Jesus must be proclaimed as the Word that became flesh who is now at the Father's side, from where He fills us with His grace (John 1:1–18; see also Phil. 2:5–11; Col. 1:14–20; Heb. 1:1–4).

Peter's sermon is a model of preaching that should influence those who now proclaim the gospel. It progressed toward a highpoint that placed the listener at the heart of Christian theology with the conclusion that God made Jesus, whom they had crucified, to be both Lord and Messiah (or Christ) (Acts 2:36). It offered God's grace along with a call to follow Him.

Peter introduced his sermon by bringing up the notable recent event that brought the people together with curiosity (2:12). He began by telling them that what had just happened was not what they thought (vv. 14–15). Answering the implied question, Peter recalled Joel's prophecy. He knew that for his Jewish listeners a statement from Scripture would be of greater value than a thousand words.

First, Peter placed the statement within its context. What was taking place was an eschatological event (v. 17a). Although the phrase referring to the "last days" is not in the text of Joel, it is implied in vv. 19–20. This was about a momentous event, and people had to make a vital decision before the great and magnificent Day of the Lord would arrive. The quotation from Joel (vv. 17b–18) explains the event in question. God was to pour out His Spirit and bestow the gift of prophecy to His servants. Joel associated the Holy Spirit's gift of prophecy with endtime events. Verse 21 justifies this exhortation because the period before the Day of the Lord was identified as a time of grace—giving sinners a special opportunity to find salvation.

A listener might have wondered why he or she was considered a sinner. As Jews, they had come to Jerusalem for ritual cleansing. Had they perhaps violated one of the cleansing rules or omitted a precept? No, worse than that: they had behaved like criminals (vv. 22–23). Jesus of Nazareth was well known. He had performed countless miracles, and these miracles were obvious signs that God was acting through Him (v. 22). Peter did not mince his words. Consequently, God vindicated Jesus by raising Him from the dead (v. 24).

What proof do we have that Jesus was resurrected? First, we have the prophecy of David (vv. 25–31). Obviously, the Holy One of God (v. 27) who would not see corruption could not be David, who was still in his grave (v. 29). David, says Peter, was talking about someone other than himself, and that other was Jesus (v. 32). Second, the gift of the Holy Spirit they had witnessed demonstrated that He was resurrected (v. 33). Finally, Scripture makes it clear that Jesus is seated at the right hand of God (vv. 34–35). Since God vindicated Jesus and made Him Lord (v. 36a), those who crucified Him need repentance (v. 36b).

The public was moved to ask what it was that they could do to change their status before God (v. 37). The listeners may have felt that an act of piety might be in order, such as a sacrifice or an offering that would appease the wrath of God. Peter's approach was simple and clear: receive freely the forgiveness and grace God has given you in Christ (v. 38). Indeed, Peter preached salvation by grace. Not cheap grace, but a grace that involves a heartfelt repentance, resulting in a radical change expressed through the acceptance of baptism and a new life under the guidance of the Spirit. With great fervor Peter extended the gift of God's grace to his audience, including even their children. The call itself would come from God (v. 39).

In his conclusion, Peter addressed all of the people of Israel (v. 36) as well as all the rest of the visitors to Jerusalem (v. 38). The listeners were not just from Jerusalem but also from all across the ancient world (vv. 8–11). The plight of all human beings as condemned sinners (Rom. 3:9) as well as the promise and offer of grace and forgiveness are both universal and personal (Rom. 3.9).

2:40–47. A Vital Church Growth. The action of the Spirit appealed to the hearts of the listeners (Acts 2:37). Peter exhorted them to set themselves apart from this *skolios*—"crooked," "corrupt," or "perverse"—"generation." The Greek word *genea* ("generation") had a particular meaning at the time of Peter. The term applies not specifically to the Jewish people or a certain age group but to all people responsible for resisting the message of salvation. This concept was developed by the Essene community at Qumran, who felt that ever since the beginning, the world was divided in two "generations": the unfaithful generation of Cain (Gen. 4:17–24) and the generation of Seth, the faithful one (Gen. 4:26).

God responds to the commitment of those who receive baptism and gives them a new life through the gift of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22–23). The reference to God's calling (Acts 2:39) reminds us that it is not the human response that saves. Salvation is an individual matter that remains in God's hands. Peter's sermon included the offer of salvation to the Jews and their posterity, as well as to all who are far away—that is to say, to all people. The ethical requirements of the Holy Spirit were not earmarked just for a few people.

The apostolic preaching bore fruit, and as a result the early church community continued to grow. Verse 42 provides a description of the life of the community of believers, which included the proclamation of the apostles' teachings, that is, the message of the gospel explaining the meaning of the cross of Christ (3:15) with an interpretation drawn from the OT (3:22–26). This message was in line with the teachings of Jesus that everything written in Scripture pointed to Him (Luke 24:27, 44–45). Luke also mentions the church's *koinōnia*—"fellowship" or "community." This is an essential attribute of the Christian mission. It implies unity among believers (Acts 2:44, 46), their willingness to share (v. 45), as well as their openness toward all people without exception. The Council of Jerusalem extended this level of communion to all believers of Gentile background (Acts 15). (3) The "breaking of bread" is also mentioned. This was the expression of the unique identity of a community united in Christ (Luke 22:19) and living with the expectation of His return (1 Cor. 11:26). (4) Also noted by Luke are prayers of the church; these were petitions offered in the synagogues and the temple (Acts 2:46) or extemporaneously (4:24–30). Prayers addressed for one another strengthened the unity of the church.

3:1–10. A Lame Man Healed. The account of Peter and John healing the lame man, followed by their testimony before the Sanhedrin, provides the opportunity for Luke to discuss the work of the Holy Spirit and how it strengthens the preaching of the gospel, especially when the testimony is bolstered by miracles (4:30–31; cf. Mark 16:15–18). Luke also shows how obstacles can be overcome with courage and faith.

Peter and John went together to the temple. This is the first explicit mention of John in Acts. The two are paired together in Acts several times (Acts 4:13, 19; 8:14), and this pairing of Peter and John may harken back to the way Jesus arranged the disciples for ministry (Luke 10:1; 22:8). In his gospel, John underlined the connection between these two men (John 18:15–16; 20:2–3; 21:7, 20–21).

The apostles were respectful of the ceremonial time for prayer. We can assume that Peter and John were going to the temple not just to pray but also to testify. Like Jesus, they accomplished their purposes through deeds and words (Acts 2:22; 3:22). True discipleship is recognizable when deeds harmonize with the message proclaimed (Matt. 5:16, 19–20). The apostles continued to visit the temple at the time designated for prayer. Luke reminds us of this fact to show that the new faith was not in opposition to the faith of Israel. The crippled man appears to have been a paraplegic because he had to be carried to the temple (Acts 3:2). Excluded from worship in the temple because of his condition, he sat at the busiest gate begging for alms. Though the lame man was able to see (v. 3), Peter stared at him and asked the man to look at him (v. 4). Peter perceived something more important than this man's lameness; he saw a unique opportunity to testify. The reference to silver and gold was a common way of referring to a large amount of money (1 Pet. 1:18). Living in a community that shared their belongings (Acts 2:44–45), the apostles would have lived modestly with limited financial resources. Peter recognized that he had something far more valuable to give to the lame man—new life in Jesus Christ of Nazareth (Acts 3:6).

The use of the name of Christ (v. 6) was not a magic formula. It was another way for Peter to say that he had nothing to offer and no special power of his own (v. 12). The paralytic was healed by his faith in Jesus (v. 16). He had heard about the teachings of Jesus and wished to be healed by him (AA 57–58). By helping the paralyzed man to stand (*egeirō*) on his feet, Peter testified of the power of Christ, who raises (*egeirō*, "to resurrect") the dead. The man now had access to God's presence in the temple along with the privileges of fellowship (Acts 3:8). The fact that he leapt in the temple is reminiscent of the eschatological song in Isaiah 35:6 along with the praises following in v. 10 of that passage. From now on it is clear that all the sick, rejected, or marginalized have access in Jesus to all the blessings He bestowed to His church.

In a sense the healing of the lame man could be spiritually pointing to the healing of Israel. Indeed, it was after his fight with the angel that Jacob was named Israel. Having received a blow in the hip, he became lame (Gen. 32:31), and the limp he sustained was symbolic of the spiritual condition of his descendants (cf. 1 Kin. 18:21). Now, however, their faith in Jesus made it possible for Israel to be raised, as was the lame man Peter healed, to enjoy communion with God in His temple (Acts 3:25–26). Two additional meaningful symbols frame the story: the ninth hour, when the apostles went to the temple (v. 1), was the exact time of Jesus's death (Luke 23:44), and the man was over forty years old (Acts 4:22), which was the length of Israel's sojourn in the desert. Thus, the healing of the lame man in the name of Jesus has been seen by some commentators as a type of the healing still made available to Israel by entering into the joy of salvation.

The crowd reinforced Peter's testimony (4:16, 21). They knew that the man had been paralyzed but that now he was cured. Ultimately, the fact that Jesus did not heal the man during His earthly ministry served the cause of the gospel. Peter's listeners are characterized by three Greek terms: *thambos* ("wonder," "amazement," or "fright") and *ekstasis* ("beside oneself," "amazement," or "not knowing what to think") in v. 10 and *thaumazō* ("marveling," "admiration," and "astonishment") in v. 12. This mixture of inquisitiveness and anxiety was probably due to the fact that Peter was mistaken for a magician. At first glance he appeared to have supernatural powers.

3:11–26. Preaching in Solomon's Portico. This passage is structured similarly to the experience of Pentecost. The crowd rushed to them because something extraordinary had taken place, and Peter explained what had happened. His message serves as a model for how to present the gospel to the Jews (vv. 12, 26): it placed the Passover within the historical context of Israel (v. 13); it provided a true Christology by proclaiming the real identity of Jesus of Nazareth (vv. 13–15); it interpreted Scripture (vv. 18, 22–24); it included a call to conversion (v. 19); and it proclaimed salvation in Jesus (v. 26) and His Second Coming (vv. 20–21). The sermon is rich in theology and Christology, and it includes the following points:

1. God Is the Mastermind of the Plan of Salvation. He made a covenant with Abraham and the patriarchs (v. 25); from the Creation of the world He announced that He would restore all things (v. 21); He repeated it continually through His prophets (v. 21); through them God also announced that the Messiah would suffer (v. 18) and that He would raise Him from the dead (v. 15) and glorify Him (v. 13). We should note that Peter mentions the glorification of Jesus first because without it we would not understand His nature or His work (Phil. 2:9–11). The NT never presents God in opposition to Jesus. Jesus did not come to change God's attitude toward humanity. It is because God loved the world that He gave His only son (John 3:16). Jesus is the mediator between God and humanity (1 Tim. 2:5), in contrast to the false belief that Mary can mediate on behalf of humans. Jesus does not need to persuade the Father to love us because the Father already loves us (John 16:26–27).

2. The Glorification of Jesus Reveals His True Identity. Peter spoke of Jesus as the Messiah/Christ (Acts 3:18), the servant of God (vv. 13, 26), the holy and just or righteous One (v. 14), the Prince, the Author of life (v. 15). Each title contributes to a fuller understanding of His redemptive work. The title "servant" is understood through the prophecy of Isaiah 52:13—53:12. Jesus was the Suffering Servant for whose death all humanity is responsible (Acts 4:27). Peter quoted this prophecy explicitly to encourage all those suffering from bondage to recognize Jesus as their example (1 Pet. 2:21–24).

3. God Is "the Holy One" (Is. 40:25; Hab. 3:3), "the Holy One of Israel" (2 Kin. 19:22; Ps. 78:41). By calling Jesus holy, Peter proclaimed His divine sonship (cf. Matt. 16:16; John 6:69). He was conceived by the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35), as confirmed in His baptism (Luke 3:22). In the OT the terms "Yahweh" and "the Holy One" are equivalent (Ps. 71:22; Is. 5:24). Raised to the right hand of God (Mark 16:19), Jesus was exalted and given the name "above every name" (Phil. 2:9), making it possible for Him to present Himself as holy and true (Rev. 3:7).

4. Jesus Fulfilled the Prophecy of Isaiah 53:10–11 as the Righteous Servant. By His sacrifice, Jesus justifies many believers by bearing their iniquities. The concept of "the Righteous One" is linked to Calvary. It was at the foot of the cross that a centurion recognized Jesus as "a righteous man" (Luke 23:47). Himself the victim of murderers (Acts 7:52), Jesus was crucified in the place of a murderer (3:14; Matt. 27:19). Enlightened by the Spirit, the apostles understood that the murderers mysteriously fulfilled the purpose of God (Acts 2:31; cf. Rom. 8:32) that He might forgive our trespasses (Rom. 4:25). His humiliation all the way to the cross (Phil. 2:8) also revealed the divinity of Jesus (Matt. 27:54).

5. The Title archēgon tēs zōēs *(3:15) Is Unique.* In Greek the noun *archēgos* is a compound word. It includes *archē*, which means "first," "source," and "author," and the verb *agō*, which means "to go." Thus, *archēgos* has a dynamic meaning: Jesus is the source of life (Acts 3:15), salvation (Heb. 2:10), and faith (Heb. 12:2). As the Author of life and our Savior, He is the One who came to offer Israel repentance and forgiveness for their sins (Acts 5:31). In contrast to His suffering and death, these four references extol the dynamic impact of the resurrection and glorification of Jesus.

Peter concluded his sermon with a call beginning and ending with a reference to the grace of God (Acts 3:17–18) and the steadfastness of His promises (vv. 25–26). He did not place himself as a judge accusing his listeners but spoke on their level, calling them fellow Israelite brothers and sisters (v. 17; cf. 2:29). Their condition was not hopeless because they acted out of ignorance (v. 17), but through them God succeeded in carrying on His purpose (v. 18).

Ignorance (v. 17) does not absolve the sinner's fault. It is only the starting point of a journey that involves listening and learning. The listeners were aware of the innocence of Jesus, but they had not yet identified Him as the Messiah, whose full identity had been revealed through His resurrection. They could, however, recognize Him through the miracles He performed (2:22). The reference to ignorance, therefore, calls the listeners to grow in knowledge. Paul would later employ the same procedure to address Jews (13:27) and Gentiles (17:30). Acknowledging ignorance could lead to repentance (3:19).

Christ had suffered (v. 18) because salvation required the Messiah's death. The prophets had announced that the plan of salvation (3:24–25) includes God's forgiveness for whoever places faith in Him (10:43). And in one way or another, they all announced the sufferings Christ would endure. His death was foreknown from eternity because God loved the world before its foundation (Matt. 25:34; John 17:24; Eph. 1:4; 1 Pet. 1:20). His love is so great that He was prepared all along to hand His Son over (John 3:16–17; 1 John 4:9, 14) to the depraved (Acts 2:23). The prophets had been announcing this plan since the beginning of the world (3:21; cf. Gen. 3:15).

God fulfilled what He had foretold (Acts 3:18). Despite the reckless actions of humans, God had accomplished His work. Likewise, the census ordered by Caesar Augustus (Luke 2:1), which was intended to collect more taxes, allowed the fulfillment of the prophecy concerning the Messiah's birth in Bethlehem (Matt. 2:5–6). In the course of the story, the divine web was intertwined with human strands to fulfill God's plan of salvation.

Peter then called on the people to repent (Acts 3:19). God fulfilled His promise, requiring a response. Peter connected this call to what he had previously said by using the word *oun*—"therefore" or "so then." Some of Paul's Epistles are also segmented by the word "therefore." Having highlighted justification by faith in Romans 1–11, Paul introduced in chapter 12 a resounding "therefore" to indicate how we should live our faith (cf. Eph. 4:1; Col. 3:1). There is no such thing as a Christian faith without a Christian life. Jesus did not come for the sole purpose of providing forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38; 3:19) but also to change behavior (3:26).

Peter promised that Jesus would return (Acts 3:20–21). Faith in the soon coming of Jesus was part of the early missionary preaching. Jesus had prophesied His return (Matt. 24:30–31; Mark 13:26–27; Luke 21:27) and emphatically promised it (John 14:1–3). He took an oath before the supreme court of Israel, the Sanhedrin, that He would return (Matt. 26:64). Even angels corroborated His declaration (Acts 1:11). From this point forward the gift of the Holy Spirit was to testify that Jesus was indeed elevated to the Father's right hand (2:33; 3:21), from where He would return (3:20). Peter demonstrated the remarkable dynamism of this hope decades later (2 Pet. 3:1–13).

Peter also discussed the covenant with Abraham (Acts 3:22–26). Moses and all other prophets announced the coming of the Messiah based on the covenant made with Abraham and the promise it involves (v. 25). It is possible that Samuel was mentioned first after Moses because of the prophecy of Nathan (2 Sam. 7:16) regarding the throne of David, of which Jesus is the heir (Acts 13:23; Matt. 1:1; 12:23; 21:9; 22:42; Luke 1:32; John 7:42; Rev. 5:5; 22:16). As children and heirs, the Israelites were to be the first beneficiaries (Acts 3:26) not only in terms of the temporal order but also in terms of their right to the Son's salvation. The Septuagint expresses the concept as a promise made to all the tribes (*phylē*; Gen. 12:3; 28:14), peoples, or nations (*ethnos*; Gen. 18:18; 22:18; 26:4), and Peter added that it is being offered to all families (*patria*), including the Jews. The call to repentance and conversion belongs to a long tradition found in the OT. God calls His children to conversion, calling them to return to Him (Mal. 3:7; cf. 2 Kin. 17:13; 2 Chr. 30:9; Neh. 1:9; Jer. 3:22; Hos. 14:2; Zech. 1:3). The initiative comes entirely from God. He offers to convene all those who have turned away from Him. Though Peter emphasized the warning of Moses (Acts 3:23) by inserting the word of Leviticus 23:29, he did not fail to emphasize the fact that Jesus came not to condemn but to bless (Acts 3:26; cf. John 12:47).

4:1–37

Peter and John before the Sanhedrin

The mission did not progress without obstacles. With faith and courage, Peter and John confronted the Jewish authorities. On returning to the community of believers, they prayed, not for deliverance from difficulties but for the ability to overcome them.

4:1–4. Peter and John Arrested. In the temple, Peter and John had been preaching and teaching the resurrection of Jesus for three hours. At the ninth hour (3:00 p.m.), a disabled person was cured, and dusk was falling rapidly. The first reaction came from the priests. Their leaders had been very aggressive against Jesus during His trial. They are mentioned in every narrative of His death (e.g., Matt. 26:47; 27:1, 12, 41). Jesus's message and cleansing of the temple were viewed as assaults against the sanctuary and the priesthood. In fact, it was because of statements made about the sanctuary that Jesus was first charged before the Sanhedrin (Matt. 26:61). The captain of the temple was also a priest. He was personally involved with the arrest of Jesus (Luke 22:2, 52). The Sadducees, who did not believe in the resurrection (Luke 20:27), were also involved. Most of the priests were Sadducees (Acts 5:17). Strangely, the Pharisees, who believed in resurrection (23:8; Matt. 27:63), are not mentioned.

One wonders why the elite called to serve in the Sanhedrin were so opposed to the apostles. It should be kept in mind that as far as the Pharisees were concerned, the resurrection from the dead was an eschatological event. It was to occur only at the end of the world, along with the restoration of all things. Yet Peter and John were now preaching about a resurrection by the name of Jesus (Acts 4:10, 18). Unlike the resurrection of Lazarus or the son of the widow of Nain, the resurrection of Jesus was that of the last resurrection. His resurrection was to anticipate the end of time (Heb. 10:11). The gift of the Holy Spirit was the announcement that the end was on its way (Acts 2:16–17) and the present was the time to be converted (2:38–40). One's faith in the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus energizes hope "now," though it is "not yet" fully manifested (John 12:31; Eph. 2:6; 2 Tim. 1:10–12; Heb. 9:26; 1 John 3:2). In the mind of the crowd listening to the apostles, the end of the world was associated with the termination of the sanctuary services (Matt. 24:1–3)—no wonder the priests were offended.

With the arrival of the evening (Acts 4:3), the work of the Sanhedrin stopped, and Peter and John were placed in custody. In spite of the opposition, the Holy Spirit accomplished His work in the hearts of the people, and the number of believers increased from three thousand to five thousand (v. 4; cf. 2:41). Luke was careful to mention this fact because in its deliberations the Sanhedrin was compelled to take the fast-growing number of believers into account (4:16–17).

4:5–12. Addressing the Sanhedrin. Peter and John had to face the Sanhedrin, the highest court in Israel. It was a gathering of the political authorities (rulers, elders), lawyers (scribes), as well as the highest religious authorities—the priests, the presidency of which belonged to the high priest (v. 5). During the period in question two high priests presided: Annas, the rightful high priest deposed in A.D. 15, and his son-in-law, the well-known sitting high priest, Caiaphas (v. 6). The mention of their names suggests that Peter and John were to follow a path similar to that of Jesus (John 18:13, 19). In fact, they were arrested on the same grounds as Jesus—the sensitive question of legitimate authority (Acts 4:7; Matt. 21:23).

The priests held the reins of spiritual authority (2 Chr. 15:3; Ezek. 7:26). Considering that Peter and John were teaching in the temple, they were doing so in the very place where priests exercised their power. Thus, in the eyes of those in charge, Peter and John had no legitimate right to teach on the temple's premises. However, by making a fuss over the question of authority, the Sanhedrin fell into its own trap. Its members knew that the apostles were preaching in the name of Jesus, whom they regarded a crucified criminal. By declaring themselves disciples of Jesus, the apostles were aligning themselves with the offender, thus they were legally declaring themselves His accomplices. Yet Peter and John were proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus. The problem for the Sanhedrin was that they decided to question the actions of the apostles and not so much what they were saying (Acts 4:7). Respectfully (v. 8), Peter handled the facts of the matter before giving his interpretation. He stressed the absurdity of the situation: they were being condemned not for any wrong they might have committed but for having done something good (v. 9). The man who was healed was present (v. 14). The witness responsible for supporting the charges against them became a star witness for their defense.

Under the inspiration of the Spirit (v. 8), Peter boldly confessed his faith in Jesus of Nazareth and became an accuser. Why did you crucify Him, the Author of healing? By so doing you became adversaries of God (2:23–24). Peter quoted Psalm 118:22, as Jesus had done before (Acts 4:11; cf. Matt. 21:42; Luke 20:17). His listeners would have certainly recognized the passage as messianic (DA 597). They were at a crossroad (Matt. 21:23–41). Their choice would determine their future. Either the vineyard would be left in their keep or it would be entrusted to others (Matt. 21:43). Peter's speech ended with a call to accept salvation in Jesus (Acts 4:12). His entire speech revolved around a matter of salvation. The paralytic was saved/healed (v. 9), and this confirms that Jesus was indeed the Savior. Salvation could be obtained not through the performance of temple rituals or through personal works but only through the Person of Jesus. For Peter, all are in need of salvation, and as any good preacher would, he included himself among those called to salvation ("we"; v. 12).

4:13–22. The Name of Jesus Forbidden. The members of the Sanhedrin were perplexed. First, they were amazed at the ability of the apostles to quote Scripture judiciously in spite of their lack of formal education (v. 13). The apostles were among those despised and even cursed for their alleged lack of the knowledge of the law (John 7:49; see John 7:15). Yet Peter, with the assistance of the Spirit, had mastered the law well (Luke 12:11–12; 21:12–15). Like Peter, we must trust in the promises of Jesus and the assistance of the Spirit when given the chance to testify for the Lord.

The Sanhedrin was also concerned about the beneficiary of the miracle—the lame man—and preferred not to deal with him. The miracle was so powerful that it could have been only the work of God (cf. John 3:2). But they were unwilling to recognize this fact. Clearly, if Jesus was the One acting through the apostles, it must have been that He was resurrected and seated at the right hand of God.

The Sanhedrin adjourned to deliberate. It had no option but to acknowledge that a miracle had

Jesus the Stone

As a response to Peter's confession that Jesus was "the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16), Jesus stated that He would build His church on the rock represented by this confession of faith (v. 18). Peter later demonstrated his understanding that Jesus was the living Stone on which the church must be built (1 Pet. 2:4–7). But not just any understanding of Jesus was adequate; it needed to be the perception of Jesus preserved for us by His apostles (1 Cor. 3:10), the church's confession of Him as Lord (Rom. 14:9) and as the Word of God (John 1:1) and Creator of the universe (Col. 1:15–16), by whom all things are upheld (Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3). After quoting from Psalm 118, Jesus declared that those who fall on the stone will be broken, but those on whom it falls will be crushed (Matt. 21:44–45; cf. Luke 20:18). This is a direct reference to Daniel 2:44–45, where the victory of the stone cut out of the mountain is announced. It will break not only the kingdoms of the world but also the hardened hearts of unbelievers. Jesus is not only the Foundation of the church but also its Cornerstone, the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last (Rev. 22:13), the Beginning and the End (Rev. 21:6, 13; see Col. 1:18).

been accomplished (Acts 4:16) and to concede that it was done in the name of Jesus (v. 17). Yet this was the one thing they refused to do. To emphasize their refusal to link the miracle to Jesus, they avoided mentioning the name of Jesus in their speech—choosing instead to refer to "this name" (v. 17). And in an attempt to extract themselves from this difficult situation, they decided neither to convict nor to acquit Peter and John but simply to threaten them and to place a ban on any further evangelistic activity. The Sanhedrin feared the situation and wanted to do everything they could to contain the activities of the apostles so that it would not spread any further (v. 17).

After being informed about the final decision, Peter appealed to the conscience of the members of the Sanhedrin. It is clear that for them obedience to God was paramount. But in condemning the apostles they revealed their inconsistency because Peter and John had not violated the law. While Peter revealed surprising courage (v. 13), the Sanhedrin demonstrated cowardice—they feared the people who were impelled to glorify God in the face of this undeniable miracle (v. 21). The Sanhedrin demanded that the apostles recant. But their threats were empty because the apostles had managed to not only maintain their self-confidence (v. 13) but also strengthened their position (v. 31). When Jesus was arrested, the Sanhedrin had managed to sway the people to their side (Matt. 27:20). This time the people were siding with the apostles. Faith can reverse outcomes and discard fear.

4:23–31. Prayer for Boldness. The apostles did not flaunt their courageous achievement before the Sanhedrin (v. 23); there was no boasting. They merely gave an account to the believers of the Sanhedrin's position against them. The believers must have been praying for their safety, fearing that the Sanhedrin would condemn them as they had condemned Jesus (AA 67). They must have been overwhelmed with joy when the apostles were released despite the Sanhedrin's opposition.

Descriptive accounts of prayers are rare. Here, Luke provides for us a typical prayer from the early Christian communities. The prayer is addressed to the Creator God in terms reminiscent of the Decalogue (Ex. 20:24). It recognizes in the experience of the church the fulfillment of events foretold by prophets (Acts 4:25–28) and includes a request (vv. 29–30). The main purpose of prayer is to glorify God. Peter quoted Psalm 2, a messianic Psalm often quoted by Christians (Acts 13:27–41; Matt. 21:37–45; Phil. 2:9–11). The psalmist's words were regarded as the utterance of God. The Holy Spirit was viewed as having mediated God's word to David. The Master of the universe is not surprised by the revolt of humans; instead this becomes an instrument in His hands to accomplish His redemptive plan. Together, Herod and Pontius Pilate represent the union of church and state. John later denounced this union in his description of the prostitute sitting on the beast (Rev. 17:3). The separation of these two powers is necessary for religious freedom to be preserved.

The prayer of Acts 4:29–31 is surprising. It does not request deliverance but instead asks for the strength that emanates from trusting in God. It does not request power to work miracles but asks God to accomplish them. These requests were intended not to serve the believers but to glorify and exalt God through the name of His holy Servant Jesus (v. 30). This selfless prayer of faith was answered with power in accordance with their request (v. 31).

4:32–37. Sharing in All Things. This section includes a chaism in vv. 32–35 with its center in v. 33. Verses 34 and 35 merely develop the topic introduced in v. 32: unity made possible through the presence of love in the community. The prayer of Jesus in John 17:2 was being fulfilled. The mutual love of believers strengthened the testimony of the apostles (Acts 4:33; cf. John 13:34–35). But it was the content of the message that unified them: the resurrection of the Lord Jesus (Acts 4:33). This message is the centerpiece of the passage. It also initiated the fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah 25:8. For Jews the resurrection is an eschatological event without parallel. For Christians the resurrection of Jesus is an anticipation of and what makes possible the resurrection of God's people (cf. 1 Cor. 15:54; Rev. 7:17; 21:4). The resurrection of Jesus instills in the heart hope and the assurance that He is "coming soon." Consequently, the possessions of this world begin to lose their luster, and their value is relativized.

It should be noted that Luke does not say that *all* those who owned land sold their property or that those who did sold everything at once. It appears rather that those who had means did not see their possessions as their own but were willing to generously liquidate their assets to meet the needs of the community as they arose over time. After all, we are told in Acts 12:12 that some ten years later a believer named Mary still owned a home. The behavior of the Jewish

believers reveals a sacrificial willingness to put the needs of the community of faith before their own. To live in hope is a matter not of expecting Jesus to return in a distant future but rather of waiting for Him in the here and now. This was particularly emphasized by Jesus when He called us to be ready for His return now (Matt. 24:44; Luke 12:40). Luke depicts the early community not as a model but as an example for any community that is waiting for the coming of the Lord.

Barnabas is an example to follow (Acts 4:36–37). He was among those who served in the temple and was converted (cf. 6:7). In order to provide for the needs of Jewish believers in Jerusalem, Barnabas sold a piece of property he owned. We are not told whether the property was located on Cyprus or somewhere around Jerusalem—or if this was all the property he owned. Whatever the case, it was a generous gift from which he expected no special privilege in return. He merely placed his offering at the feet of the apostles (4:35–37). The mention of Barnabas prepares the way for the narrative of Ananias and Sapphira.

5:1–42

God's Interventions

Acts 5 shows the difficulties the church met and how it overcame them with strength and courage. The first is the experience of Ananias and Sapphira (vv. 1–11), which is followed by a report about the growth of the church (vv. 12–16). Finally, we have a narrative about the imprisonment of the apostles and their deliverance (vv. 17–42).

5:1–11. Lying to the Holy Spirit. The story of Ananaias and Sapphira demonstrates that there were some serious imperfections among the believers. Yes, they were all filled with the Holy Spirit (4:31), but Satan had filled the hearts of two persons (5:3). Ananias and Sapphira had apparently publicly accepted the call to liberality (4:32). Unfortunately, what they really coveted was the prestige that would come from giving a large offering (AA 72). They lied by claiming that they were giving all the proceeds to the apostles from a piece of property they had sold. Like Achan (Josh. 7:1), however, they secretly decided to keep back some of the money for themselves. The sudden nature of the death of both Ananias and Sapphira indicates it was an act of divine judgment. Whether the actual cause of their death was a heart attack or shock due to the public exposure of their deceit or if it was entirely supernatural is not stated. They had failed to recognize that God sees and knows all and that people are ultimately accountable to Him for their actions. The love of money and the pursuit of human recognition and praise lead to spiritual death, for they are always accompanied by duplicity and hypocrisy. Only the presence of the Holy Spirit in the heart makes it possible to live one's faith with integrity.

5:12–16. Continuing Power in the Church. Although the Sanhedrin banned their preaching, the apostles continued to gather together in Solomon's Portico (5:12; cf. 3:11). Likely concerned with how the Jewish leaders might retaliate against such public defiance, many people who had great respect for the apostles chose to keep their distance. However, God worked to overcome the fears of the people, and through the ministry of the apostles, many more men and women joined the church. Victories over Satan are noticeable (5:3) as the apostles healed the sick and cast out evil spirits (vv. 15–16). Even residents of Judea flocked to the city to receive healing. Even though not all is well in the church, as the episode with Ananias and Sapphira demonstrates, it pursues its mission with strength as it at the same time tries to remain pure for the Lord. It should not be overlooked that Luke specifically mentioned women among the converts (v. 14).

Though one might think that the sick people over whom Peter's shadow was cast were healed (Acts 5:15–16), Luke does not clearly state it. Those healed may have superstitiously thought that it was his shadow that healed them, but Peter knew very well that this was the work of the Spirit (cf. 4:32). It is true, however, that God makes His sun shine on both evil and good (Matt. 5:45) and that Jesus showed Himself full of compassion for all (Matt. 14:14; 15:30–32).

5:17–21. Imprisoned Apostles Freed. Another arrest opened the door for a new testimony before the Sanhedrin. Persecutions were consistent with Jesus's predictions that His followers would be persecuted and would have to testify before the authorities of this world (Mark 13:9; Luke 21:12). The gospel was spreading beyond the city limits of Jerusalem (Acts 5:16), and the success of the apostles once again aroused the indignation of the priests, all the more because Annas and Caiaphas recognized that they had lost a great deal of popularity. This time they wanted to strike a heavy blow, so they arrested all the apostles and incarcerated them in a common/public prison to malign them before the people (v. 18). But the walls of the prison could not thwart the progress of the gospel. God intervened through a miracle, sending an angel to deliver them (v. 19). This would also happen later to Peter (12:4–10) and Paul and Silas (16:25–34). Things worked out differently for James, however (12:2). In this case, all the apostles were set free by an angel of the Lord, who told them to continue teaching in the temple.

Early in the morning (5:21), as soon as the temple doors opened for the morning sacrifice, they proclaimed the life-giving message to all the people—even those who wanted them dead (vv. 20, 33). The apostles were preaching in the temple because this was the place from which truth should flow to the people (cf. Is. 66:6; Hab. 2:20). This was also the place where Jesus taught the crowds (Luke 20:1). The angel had told them that they must "stand" (Acts 5:20). In the Greek, the theme of standing appears several times using different Greek words: previously, the high priest *anastas* to arrest them (v. 17), and later on the guards were *estōtas* (from the same verbal root, *histēmi*) outside the prison after the apostles had escaped (v. 23). But it was the apostles who at the end were *estōtes* ("standing") in the temple teaching the gospel (v. 25). Looking forward to the final crisis, Jesus gave the same admonishment to His followers: they are to *anakyptō*—using a different but related word meaning "to straighten up" (Luke 21:28).

5:22–32. The Apostles on Trial Again. After their deliverance, the apostles returned to the temple to instruct the people about the gospel of salvation. They were risking their lives in fulfilling the divine mission assigned to them. This time the authorities had valid accusations against them: the apostles had disobeyed the strict orders given them (v. 28; cf. 4:18, 21). But those in power had to take into account the fact that the crowd favored the apostles. The religious and civil authorities were afraid (5:21–26), while the apostles manifested surprising courage (4:13).

The high priest pressed charges on three counts: the apostles had defied an order, disturbed the peace, and accused members of the Sanhedrin of murder. Nothing was said about the escape from prison, perhaps to avoid dealing with its supernatural element—the involvement of an angel—because the Sadducees among them did not believe in angels.

Answering the charges, Peter argued that the apostles followed a higher order, that of God Himself (Acts 5:29; cf. 4:19). Obedience to God first and foremost was the premise of all Christian martyrs in history. As witnesses filled with the Holy Spirit, it was their duty to make known to all people what God had done through Jesus (5:32). A true witness cannot remain silent, hiding the truth. Lastly, Peter pointed out the disparities between God's actions and those of the Sanhedrin. Using antithetical parallelism, Peter made the following statements (vv. 30–31):

A You killed with your hands, and
  B You hanged Him on a tree. But,
A′ God raised Him, and
  B′ God exalted Him to God's right hand.

The goal was not to accuse but to raise awareness because immediately afterward God's forgiveness was offered. Note the contrast between God's tribunal and that of humans. God considered the Sanhedrin guilty of murder (v. 30), but this was followed by an offer of grace. The human tribunal plotted to murder despite the lack of evidence (v. 33). Peter was focused on God, the glorified Jesus, and the Holy Spirit.

Women in the Early Church

In Acts Luke gave an account of the important role women played in the early church. They participated in prayer meetings before Pentecost and received the Holy Spirit along with all of the others (2:4). They, like any male believer, believed in the Lord (5:14), received baptism (8:12), and suffered persecutions (8:3; 9:13; 22:4). They were taught the new doctrine (8:12) and enjoyed full integration within the new community of believers (2:1–5). While some prominent Jewish women in Pisidian Antioch were instruments of persecution (13:50), others were converted (17:12) and contributed to the spread of the gospel (16:14). One was declared to be a good mother (16:1; 2 Tim. 1:5). Luke mentions some by name for their generosity, such as Lydia (Acts 16:14–15), some for their helping hands, such as Tabitha (9:36), some for being notable believers, such as Damaris (17:34), and some even as missionaries, such as Priscilla (18:2; cf. Rom. 16:3; 1 Cor. 16:19). They were doing the work of ministry for Jesus and His church.

5:33–42. Gamaliel's Advice. An important and influential Pharisee came to the rescue of the apostles and their mission. He was among the few on the Sanhedrin who believed in the resurrection of the dead (Acts 23:6–8). He seems to have recognized the voice of God in Peter's message (AA 82). After recalling two examples of failed revolts, he advocated entrusting to Providence the fate of the gospel (Acts 5:38–39). His persuasion seemed to peak when he warned his companions of the risk they were taking by the possibility of opposing God.

To save their pride the Sanhedrin decided to punish the apostles. A twofold measure was administered, both through a physical blow—the apostles were whipped (*derō*, to punish by flogging with a three-stranded strap of calf hide typically on the back and chest of the victim)—and a moral blow as the apostles were again forbidden to preach (v. 40; cf. 4:18, 21). Far from being discouraged, the apostles were happy to have been worthy of suffering shameful treatment for the sake of Christ. Only faith can bring joy in the face of hardship (Acts 20:24; 2 Cor. 7:4; 8:2; 1 Thess. 1:6; Heb. 10:34; James 1:2; 1 Pet. 4:13). The Greek word *chairontes* ("rejoicing") is a present participle, meaning that the joy that comes from God is permanent, not occasional. Similarly, the preaching of the gospel had not been ended, and it still persisted within the temple. Not only that, but Luke adds that they were in the temple and in homes every day, with the good news spreading more than ever despite the many obstacles.

His Blood Be on Us

Although prior to Jesus's crucifixion the Jews had shouted to Pilate that His blood would be on them (Matt. 27:25), here Caiaphas clearly did not want to be found guilty of Jesus's blood (i.e., death; Acts 5:28). Unfortunately, Christians later in the history of the church labeled the Jews as killers of God, planting the seed of anti-Semitism. They forgot that Jesus's blood was shed for the forgiveness of sin (e.g., Acts 20:28; Matt. 26:28; Mark 14:24; John 6:53–54; Rom. 3:25; 5:9; Eph. 1:7). This obviously does not excuse the Jewish leaders from doing what they did. They were the ones who manipulated the crowds. But here again Peter did not seek justice; instead, he offered forgiveness in the name of Jesus (Acts 5:31). Speaking of the God of their ancestors, Peter called attention to the fact that God had not abandoned His people Israel.

6:1—9:31

THE MISSION SPRANG OUT OF TRADITIONAL JUDAISM

The first section of Acts begins in 1:15 ("in those days"). It describes the development of the Christian community composed of Israelites. The second section begins in Acts 6:1 ("in those days"). It describes the development of the Christian community as it began to include believers of different backgrounds: Greek-speaking Jews (6:1–7), Samaritans (8:4–8), an Ethiopian proselyte (8:26–39), and people from other Gentile regions, such as Azotus and Caesarea (8:40). Like the first section, the second section involves a number of crises. There was dissension between Hebrew-speaking and Greek-speaking Jews (6:1–7). The apostles faced new opposition from the Sanhedrin, but this time it resulted in the death of the accused (7:8–15, 54–60). Hellenist Jews suffered persecution (8:1–3), and once again we find a new believer, Simon the magician, falling from the faith on account of the lure of money (8:14–24). But the church, through the power and intervention of the Holy Spirit, overcame these crises and began to grow beyond the walls of Jerusalem.

6:1—7:60

The Hellenists and Stephen

In these chapters we first observe tensions within the church that led to the development of church order and differentiation of functions (vv. 1–7). What follows deals with the experience and speech of Stephen that resulted in his death. This speech plays a very important role in the narrative of the work of the Spirit in the apostolic church and is connected to the prophecy of the seventy weeks in Daniel 9 (see "Prophetic Significance of Stephen's Speech," p. 1487).

6:1–7. Seven Chosen to Serve. This section is placed between two affirmations of the growth of the church (vv. 1, 7). Anything that could have facilitated or hindered the development of the church was of central importance. The Greek term having the infinitive *diakonein* is used three times in this section: In v. 1 it refers to the daily distribution or serving of food to the widows. In v. 2 it is used to refer to the work of serving at or waiting on tables—the work that the apostles were not able to do in addition to attending to the word of God. In v. 4 it refers to this very work of the ministry or service of the word of God that they refused to neglect due to other matters. The new community of faith faced problems, most likely because new converts were excluded from the benevolent services of the synagogues. Thus, the new church was led to create its own plan of benevolence (4:35).

The sudden spurt of growth revealed some malfunctions within the system. The Hellenists—that is, Greek-speaking believers of Jewish ethnicity—began to complain that their widows were being neglected in the distribution of goods. Their complaints were evidently justified and no one disputed them. The apostles recognized the importance of delegating responsibilities to others. Ultimately, their spirit of openness to one another's opinions and gifts resolved the crisis. The apostles suggested sharing responsibilities and delegating to others the responsibility of serving at the tables. Their assignment of this work to seven men with names of Greek origin suggests that in all wisdom they resolved the crisis by choosing individuals from within the ethnic group manifesting displeasure. It was not the intention of the apostles to suggest that the services/ministries related to tables were more important than those related to prayer and teaching. In order to administer the food distribution, one had to be filled with the same Holy Spirit as the apostles (6:3, 5). Like them, they would be also engaged in the work of evangelization and teaching (vv. 8, 10). Luke insists on the importance of wisdom in the selection (vv. 3, 10). It was not their purpose to elect deacons as we know them today, although when Luke was writing, there were deacons with specific functions in the church (Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:8, 12). Luke uses not the word "deacon" (*diakonos*) but the word *diakonia* ("service") or the verb *diakoneō* ("to serve"). All the ministries of the church were considered services (6:1, 2, 4).

Prayer and teaching including the ministry of the word (v. 4) are foundational in Jewish tradition (3:1). The text stresses that the apostles were devoted to evangelizing Jews in locations traditionally designated for this work, the temple. Stephen, leader and representative of the group (6:5), taught Jews of the Diaspora in the Synagogue of the Freedmen (v. 9). This was the beginning of a new ministry that would eventually reach out to Gentiles, a movement initiated by Hellenists (8:5). Paul later demonstrated that he was Stephen's true heir in the faith (7:58).

Luke emphasizes the fact that order needed to be established within the new community. Seven qualified men, headed by Stephen, were chosen to serve. Philip was second in charge. The rest of the story focuses entirely on the helpful actions of these two men. Nothing is known of the other five, with the exception that Nicolas was a proselyte—a Gentile converted to Judaism. Luke specifies this fact as the acknowledgement that the election of a former pagan to a church function marked an opening of the gospel to the Gentiles.

In this episode the authority of the apostles was not disputed. The laying on of hands did not fill the deacons with the Holy Spirit because they already had the Spirit (6:3, 5). This action indicated that they were being authorized or appointed to fulfill a specific function within the church (v. 3). Once the crisis was resolved, the church continued to grow. Unity was restored. While the number of disciples was multiplying before this crisis, it now was increasing significantly—Luke uses the Greek word *sphodpa* ("exceedingly"; v. 7). God's word was spreading (*auxanō*—"to multiply," "to increase"). The past tense of this verb conveys a continuing action.

6:8–15. Stephen: Accused of Blasphemy. This story is sandwiched between two descriptions of Stephen (vv. 8, 15). First, Hellenists confronted him (vv. 9–12), then the Sanhedrin (vv. 13–14). Stephen followed the same path as Jesus. He was unceremoniously arrested (6:12; cf. Luke 22:54), accused of blasphemy (cf. Matt. 26:65), and taken before the Sanhedrin (Acts 6:12; cf. Luke 22:66). False witnesses (Acts 6:13; cf. Matt. 26:60) distorted some of Stephen's statements about Jesus (Acts 6:14; cf. Matt. 26:61; Mark 14:58) and accused him of antagonism toward the temple. Stephen's life ended showing the same spirit of forgiveness Jesus had demonstrated during His death (Acts 7:70; cf. Luke 23:34). Like Jesus, Stephen called out to God before he died (Acts 7:59; cf. Luke 23:46). In both cases, the Son of God was described as standing at the right hand of God (Acts 7:56; cf. Luke 22:69).

The Hellenists

The "Hellenists" were Jews who spoke Greek and were open to Greek culture. They were different from "Hebrews," whose language was Aramaic or Hebrew. Most of the Hellenistic Jews were scattered throughout the Mediterranean Basin. Many Hellenists were among the pious Jews who came to Jerusalem to celebrate Pentecost. Some of those who became Christians chose to remain in Jerusalem to live within the new community of believers.

Stephen, like Jesus (Acts 2:22) and the apostles (2:43), is also recognized as coming from God because of the signs and wonders. The power (*dynameōs*) that energized his work came from the divine aid he received. Some manuscripts indicate that he was full of power and *charis* ("grace"), while others have *pistis* ("faith"). Of course the concepts are closely related, and either way the point is clear that Stephen's ministry was made possible only through divine aid (6:8). It was not in the temple but in a synagogue that he delivered his specific message. His discourse was reiterated later in his speech before the Sanhedrin (7:1–53), the essence of which can be gathered through the accusations of the false witnesses. The allegations were false because they distorted the truth of the matter. Stephen was accused of blasphemy (which carried a death penalty; Matt. 26:66) against Moses and God (Acts 6:11), which is to say against the temple and the law (v. 13). But he was simply announcing that the sanctuary services and its archaic customs were to be terminated (v. 14; cf. Luke 21:12–15).

Throughout the charges, Stephen proclaimed some of the most revolutionary teachings of Jesus, namely, His Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:17–48), containing insinuations against certain traditions, and His eschatological message (Luke 21:5–36) announcing the destruction of the temple. Those who thus far had favored the Christians (Acts 6:8) and opposed the Sanhedrin's murderous intentions (4:21) were now siding against Stephen (6:12). His face, like that of Moses (Ex. 34:29), was glowing like that of an angel, indicating that he had been in communion with God. His message carried the seal of divine approval.

Prophetic Significance of Stephen's Speech

The speech of Stephen is located at a critical juncture in the narrative of the book of Acts. It is therefore important for us to point here to its significance. The ending of the prophecy of the seventy weeks mentioned in Daniel 9, which occurred in A.D. 34, connects his speech to some elements of that prophecy (see commentary on Dan. 9:20–27). When exploring the importance of the speech, it is necessary to look at the development of the plot of the book of Acts.

1. The Place of the Narrative in Acts. The story of the church recorded in the book of Acts begins with a meeting of Jesus with the disciples in *Jerusalem* and ends in the city of *Rome*, where Paul was preaching while under house arrest. The proclamation of the gospel moved from Jerusalem to the capital of the Roman Empire. In a sense, the development of the story is summarized in Acts 1:8: Jesus commanded His disciples to be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. The disciples moved geographically from Jerusalem (2:42—6:7), through Judea and Samaria (6:8—9:31), to Syria (9:32—12:24), to the eastern part of the empire (12:25—19:20), and eventually to Rome itself (19:21—28:31). The speech of Stephen and his martyrdom led to the mission to the non-Jews (7:1—8:1). The account is located at a significant point in the narrative.

2. The Purpose of the Speech. Stephen's speech was an indictment against the Jewish leaders and their supporters who did not recognize Jesus as the Messiah and who actively opposed Him (7:1–53). Although many of the Jews and priests in Jerusalem became Christians (6:7), there was strong opposition to the disciples from the Jewish leaders, particularly from the Sanhedrin. The speech traced the history of Israel from the call of Abraham to the time of Moses in order to show God's dealing with Israel and the opposition of the people to Moses, who like Jesus was God's instrument of deliverance. Then Stephen said that the Israelite temple is not indispensable for the worship of God. Interestingly, Stephen did not call the Jewish leaders to repentance and conversion, as was the case in the previous speeches in Acts (2:38–39; 3:19); he simply indicted them. The leaders were being condemned by the Lord.

3. The Impact of the Speech and Death of Stephen. The speech and death of Stephen played a very important role in the development of the Christian mission by pushing it beyond the limits of Jerusalem and Judea to the rest of the world. His ministry led to the universalization of the Israelite faith as it found its fulfilment in the coming of Jesus as the promised Messiah. Daniel 9 had prophesied that during the 490 years the covenant faith would reach beyond the boundaries of Israel. This is precisely what we find in Acts after the death of Stephen. First, his death resulted in the scattering of the church through persecution, forcing the apostles to go to the non-Jewish world to preserve their lives. They were forced by the circumstances to leave Jerusalem. Second, the result of the scattering of the church was that the message of salvation through the Jewish Messiah reached a new audience in Samaria and the rest of the world who were avid to hear the gospel. Under the leadership of Jewish-Christian apostles and believers, God's original plan to bless all the nations of the earth through Abraham was being fulfilled (Gen. 12:1–3).

Third, God indirectly used the persecution to spread the gospel to the Gentiles, and with the conversion of Paul and the mission that God entrusted to him, God Himself was assuming center stage in moving the church to a universal mission. This took place at the historical junction created by Stephen's speech and death. Stephen's ministry did not close the doors of salvation to the Jews but opened them up for the influx of Gentiles into the experience of salvation through faith in Christ, the Messiah. God's plan was progressing as He intended, and prophecy was being fulfilled. That should reaffirm our conviction that the rest of God's redemptive plan for humanity will also achieve its divinely intended purpose through Christ.

7:1–8. Stephen's Address: The Call of Abraham. In Stephen's speech, he related how God constantly labored to save His people. He did not mention the name of Jesus but only alluded to Him (7:37, 52, 57), probably because the accusations were aimed at Stephen's teachings about Jesus (6:14). His purpose was not to discuss the history of Israel but to teach his listeners about salvation using the work of God among them. This methodology had been used previously by God, including in Jesus's ministry (e.g., Matt. 12:3–5), and was aimed at reaching the people where they were. His account commanded authority in the eyes of his listeners.

The high priest asked Stephen if the charges against him were true. Stephen responded respectfully, all the while including himself as part of Israel, referring to "our father Abraham" (Acts 7:2). Stephen's defense aimed to explain why he was accused of speaking against the temple and the law in the name of Jesus (6:13–14). He used the experience of Abraham for several reasons: God revealed Himself to Abraham in a foreign land, Mesopotamia (7:2). Abraham left his country and went to the land where the Israelites currently lived, but Abraham never had possession of it (v. 5). God promised to give this land to his descendants, but first they would have to live in a foreign land (v. 6). God, however, promised to deliver them in order for them to serve Him in the promised land (v. 7). Abraham entered into a covenant relationship with the Lord, whose sign was circumcision, which would demonstrate that God keeps His word (v. 8). One of the important theological insights of the passage is that God's self-revelation is not restricted to the land of Israel. God is with His people wherever they are. What matters is faithfulness to God. Unfortunately, the generation that left Egypt proved unfaithful (v. 39).

7:9–16. Stephen's Address: The Patriarchs in Egypt. This account follows the same structure as the experience of Abraham: God was with Joseph in a foreign land, Egypt (vv. 9–10). Jacob found refuge in Egypt (v. 12). Joseph was there to rescue them (v. 13), reuniting the divided family in Egypt (vv. 14–15). Finally, the patriarchs did not get to enjoy the promised land; they died and were later finally buried in Shechem (vv. 15–16). So God revealed Himself outside of the Holy Land.

God was shown to have been with Joseph throughout his ordeal. The suffering he endured was not an indication that God had rejected him or that he had sinned. God was present and active even in Gentile territory.

7:17–36. Stephen's Address: God Delivers Israel by Moses. Stephen spent more time in his speech discussing Moses perhaps because he

had been accused of speaking against Moses (6:11). While his Jewish listeners may not have realized it, thanks to Stephen's speech Christian readers are now led to perceive Moses as a type of Christ. There are two sections about Moses in the speech. The first is about Moses in Egypt (7:17–29). Once again Stephen emphasized the fact that Judaism began abroad (v. 17) and that Moses received his training in Egypt (v. 22). Moses was mighty in action but also in his words (v. 22). A popular misconception of Moses was that he stuttered. However, Stephen's own claim here was that while Moses was still a prince in Egypt, he spoke well. Speaking well was highly valued in ancient Egypt. This helps us understand that when at the burning bush, some forty years after fleeing from Egypt, Moses's claim to slowness of tongue and speech (Ex. 4:10) had more to do with the ever-changing nuances of the Egyptian language and his forty-year absence than with any physical condition. It should be noted that this characterization of Moses (that he was mighty in action and in his words) is almost exactly the same as the disciples' description of Jesus in their conversation on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:19). Christian readers can draw a clear parallel between Moses and Jesus. This is especially true considering that God wanted Moses to deliver his people, but the people failed to understand (Acts 7:25; cf. John 1:11). Moses was to bring reconciliation and peace (Acts 7:26). The Greek text literally indicates that "he reconciled them [*synallassō*] for peace [*eirēnē*]." The theme of reconciliation through Christ is prevalent in the NT (e.g., Rom. 5:10), while that of peace pervades the message of Jesus (Luke 19:42). Moses was pushed away (Acts 7:27, 39) as Jesus was later rejected (Luke 17:25; 20:17).

Shechem

According to the Bible, the patriarchs were not buried at Shechem but in Hebron (Abraham: Gen. 23:19–20; 25:1–9; Isaac: Gen. 49:30–31; Jacob: Gen. 50:1–14). Only Joseph is mentioned as having been buried in Shechem (Josh. 24:32). It is possible that the remains of the patriarchs were later transferred to Shechem. By specifying Shechem (Acts 7:16), which is in the territory of Samaria, Stephen was pointing out the fact that the patriarchs were buried in a foreign land—another way of saying that the promised land was no longer a matter of significance. The people of God were not to be exclusively defined on the basis of geography because the faith of Israel had been universalized.

The second part of Luke's account of the speech dealing with Moses is about Moses in Sinai (Acts 7:30–36). Moses found relief in Midian, a foreign land where he prospered (v. 29); and he met God at Mount Sinai, holy ground (v. 33), though God's people were still in Egypt (v. 34). The temple was not the only place where God heard the prayers of His people (1 Kin. 8:30); He also heard them in Egypt (Acts 7:34). Thus, God revealed Himself everywhere, and the Holy Land was in principle wherever God revealed Himself while recognizing His people (even in hostile territory). Moses is associated with the words *archōv* ("ruler"), *dikastēs* ("judge"), and *lytrōtēs* ("deliverer," "redeemer"; v. 35). All these functions are those of Christ. Jesus is recognized as the Beginning or Ruler (*archē*; Col. 1:18), the Head who guides, the Judge (*kritēs*) of the living and the dead (Acts 10:42), and the one through whom we have redemption (*apolytrōsis*; Rom. 3:24). Moses was sent by God to encounter those who had rejected him (Acts 7:35)—to bring them out of Egypt (v. 36) while performing signs and wonders (v. 36), as Jesus did (2:22). In this passage Stephen established himself as an admirer of Moses, contrary to the claims of his accusers. That admiration for Moses and his ringing affirmation for Moses's authority allowed him to describe his listeners as the very ones were who were unfaithful to Moses (7:53).

7:37–43. Stephen's Address: Israel Rebels against God. Stephen was accused of blasphemy against Moses, when in fact the forefathers were the ones who rejected Moses (v. 39). They did not want to enter Canaan and would have preferred to have returned to Egypt (v. 39), which implies that the Holy Land was not important to them. Furthermore, they turned their backs on God to worship idols (vv. 40–43). By contrast, Stephen did not reject the law of Moses. For him it was God's living words or oracles—"words of life"—delivered by a heavenly being (v. 38). God's response to the rebellious forefathers, who turned back to Egypt in their hearts (v. 39), was to turn away from them (v. 42). God allowed humans to bear the consequences of their own choices. He withdrew the protection they rejected; He *paredōken*—"handed them over" or "gave them over/up" (v. 42; cf. Rom. 1:16, 26, 28). Without the help of God, we are left to our own devices, but through Christ there is freedom from our own deceptions (Col. 1:12–14; Heb. 2:14–15; Rev. 1:6).

7:44–50. Stephen's Address: God's True Tabernacle. In this section, Stephen dealt with the accusation that he was opposed to the temple as the dwelling of God. He first discussed the instructions God gave to build a tabernacle for Him according to the model He showed Moses. It was a symbol of His presence among His people. The people brought it into the land of the Gentiles (the nations), of which they took possession (vv. 44–45). Under David a place was found to construct a temple for the Lord, but he was not to build it (vv. 46–47). Second, the task of building a temple was given to Solomon, who soon realized that God does not live in a temple made with human hands (vv. 47–50). This theological insight was misused by the Sanhedrin to accuse Stephen of speaking against the temple (6:13). His defense was that this insight originates in the speech of Solomon during the dedication of the temple. God is a universal and cosmic Being who cannot be totally contained in temples built by humans (1 Kin. 8:27).

The implications are clear. First, according to Stephen, God manifests His presence anywhere in the world. This universalistic vision clashed with Hebrew conservatism. Second, he had also made clear that the Holy Land was defined by God's presence. The patriarchs did not possess the promised land, and the forefathers preferred Egypt. Third, the people of Israel proved rebellious as they turned away from God to worship idols. Fourth, the worship services in the temple were at this time pointless because God did not dwell there any longer. Stephen was echoing the words of Jesus to the Samaritan woman, that the time would come when people would worship God neither on Mount Gerizim nor in Jerusalem and that all worship, no matter where it takes place, must be in spirit and in truth to be pleasing to God (John 4:21–24). The only thing left to do was for Stephen to draw his conclusion. He brought his accusers to God's tribunal using their history and theology and found them guilty of the same charges they raised against him.

7:51–53. Stephen's Address: Israel Resists the Holy Spirit. Before his martyrdom, Stephen pronounced three accusations: (1) His contemporaries were no better than their forefathers because they also resisted the Holy Spirit (v. 51). They prided themselves on the circumcision of the flesh but failed to understand the circumcision of the heart (Rom. 2:28–29; cf. Jer. 9:25–26). (2) The forefathers persecuted and killed the prophets, but his listeners had done worse; they murdered the Just One whom the prophets had announced (Acts 7:52; cf. Luke 23:47). (3) They accused Stephen of not keeping the law (Acts 6:13), but they were the ones who failed to keep it (7:53; cf. John 7:19). This accusation hit them particularly hard because his listeners presumed themselves to be guardians of the law (Rom. 2:17–20, 23). The implicit unstated conclusion was that the covenant was broken, not by God, who is ever merciful, but by His people.

7:54–60. Stephen the Martyr. Stephen was the first Christian martyr, the first link in a chain that would extend over centuries. But God takes that which is senseless and brings out of it that which serves His purpose. Following this aggressive persecution, the mission of the church burst out of the walls of Jerusalem to reach the world. The charges Stephen made (v. 54) failed to produce repentance (cf. 2:37); instead, they instigated anger and indignation. Though Stephen was disapproved by the Sanhedrin, he was approved by God (vv. 55–56). When accused of blasphemy against God (6:11) because of his teachings about Jesus (6:14), he stood up and informed them that this same Jesus was at this time standing at God's right hand (7:56). Jesus was condemned for saying that they would see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of God coming on the clouds of heaven (Matt. 26:64; see also Mark 14:62; Luke 22:69). This was exactly what Stephen claimed to have seen in heaven, anticipating Jesus's glorious return when he would be rewarded for his faithfulness to the Lord.

God in the History of Salvation

Although Stephen took his time to deal with the lives of Abraham, Joseph, Moses, and the forefathers, the central figure portrayed in this historical review of salvation was the One responsible for all the action verbs: God. All initiatives for the redemption of His people are His. He appeared to Abraham (Acts 7:2), brought him to Canaan (v. 4), promised to give him land and posterity (v. 5), and gave him the covenant of circumcision (v. 8). God thwarted the plans of Joseph's brothers (v. 9), sustained Joseph and delivered him from his trials, and gave him wisdom and the graces of Pharaoh (v. 10). Later again, it was God who wanted to deliver His people through Moses (v. 25). He appeared to Moses (v. 30), spoke to him (v. 32), and sent him to deliver His people (vv. 34–35). Though God allowed His people to follow after their own inclinations (v. 42), He continued to manifest His presence in the tabernacle (v. 44) and to overcome their enemies (v. 45). Finally, by placing Jesus on His right hand, God demonstrated that the history of salvation was continued in Jesus (v. 55). God never abandoned His plan to save, even when the attitudes of those whom He intended to save disappointed Him (v. 52). The blood of Stephen became the seed from which Paul's ministry sprouted (v. 58).

The very idea that the One they condemned was now ruling in heaven was utterly unacceptable to the Sanhedrin (Acts 7:57–58). In accordance with the law (Lev. 24:14), Stephen was dragged out of the city as was Jesus (John 19:20). The clothing of witnesses was laid down at the feet of a young man. The language reminds us of Barnabas and Ananias and Sapphira, who brought their gifts and laid them at the apostles' feet (Acts 4:36–37; 5:1–2). Perhaps the idea is that it was in obedience to the apostles that the gifts were brought to them. In this particular case, Saul was held responsible for what was happening, and he hastened to take action (8:1; Gal. 1:13).

8:1–40

From the Jews to the Gentiles

The gospel spread out of Jerusalem at this time, and the result was that non-Jews joyfully received the good news of salvation through Christ. The church was gradually coming to an understanding of the full magnitude of its mission. The content of this chapter is organized as follows: Philip's evangelization of the Samaritans (8:1–13); Peter's approval of the work of Philip and purification of the church (8:14–25); Philip's evangelization of non-Jews (8:26–40). This structure intends to show that the expansion of the church is taking place in a spirit of unity.

8:1–4. Saul Persecuted the Church. Luke recounts the revival of the mission in a brief paragraph in a chiastic style:

A Persecution caused dispersion, except for the apostles, who remained in Jerusalem (v. 1)
  B Devout men buried Stephen (v. 2); contrary to the requirements of the law to hang a man who had been stoned to death (Deut. 21:22–23), Stephen was buried as a righteous man
  B' Saul persecuted the Hellenists who were Stephen's companions (Acts 8:3); the apostles were spared and allowed to move about freely (8:14)
A' Dispersion (*diaspeirō*—"disperse" or "scatter," from *speirō*, meaning "to sow seeds") allowed the spread of the gospel (v. 4).

This literary construction, in which the mission frames the death of Stephen and the persecution that Saul (later called Paul) was perpetrating, emphasizes that the mission was fulfilled in spite of persecutions. Nothing can impede God's plan. Thus, the death of Stephen, like that of Jesus, marks not an end but a new beginning in the fulfillment of God's plan of salvation.

8:5–8. Christ Preached in Samaria. The gospel spread beyond Jerusalem and Judea into Samaria. Painful circumstances led the church to fulfill its mission to testify in Samaria (Acts 1:8). Just as evangelism in Jerusalem went through a crisis that was surmounted (5:1–11), so also evangelism in Samaria faced a crisis created by Simon the sorcerer. In both cases money was at stake. But the church emerged purified from the crises. We are left to realize that emotional enthusiasm leading to baptism does not necessarily mean that we are true citizens of God's kingdom. Conversion should transform our lives.

Philip, the second evangelist (21:8–9) in the list of seven (6:5), took over the duties of Stephen and evangelized Samaria. This Philip should not be confused with the apostle of the same name. In fact, the apostles remained in Jerusalem (8:1). Philip preached Christ (v. 5), His salvation, and His coming in glory. The passage indicates that he went to the city of Samaria, where his preaching was received with unexpectedly positive results. This is the first time Luke spoke of the crowds in the plural (Gr. *ochloi*; v. 6) and portrays them as undivided (Gr. *homothymadon*—"united together with the same purpose"). Unlike the united—*homothymadon*—priests and rulers in Jerusalem, who covered their ears (7:57), these listened to Philip. The people were interested not just in the signs or miracles that Philip performed; they also listened attentively and were persuaded by his teaching and preaching about Christ (8:6). However, Simon's interest peaked because of the miracles (v. 13).

For Luke, miracles were signs intended to expand the meaningfulness of the message. They were intended to corroborate Philip's teachings as coming from God (cf. Mark 16:20). Once again, healing and preaching were meant to dovetail. The Christian message is the expression of God's love and includes caring for those who suffer. This is consistent with the ministry of Jesus (Matt. 8:16-17). Preaching resulted in great joy (Acts 8:8; see also 2:46; 8:39; 13:48; cf. Matt. 13:20; Luke 2:10; Phil. 4:4; 1 Thess. 5:16), a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22).

8:9-13. The Sorcerer's Profession of Faith. The territory where Philip labored had for a long time been influenced by the work of a man called Simon (vv. 9, 11). He had claimed to be someone great. Philip, in contrast, pointed away from himself to Christ (v. 5). The people of Samaria were originally mostly expatriates from Babylon and Arabia (2 Kin. 17:24). The Samaritans had accepted monotheism and the laws of Moses, but they had incorporated idolatrous customs and beliefs (2 Kin. 17:29-33). They were fascinated by magic and witchcraft, and they readily accepted Simon as almost divine (Acts 8:10; cf. 14:11-12).

The truth Philip taught drew the Samaritans away from the misleading demonstrations of Simon. A conflict had been ongoing between Jews and Samaritans over the temple in Jerusalem (John 4:20). The Samaritans were inclined to side with the Hellenists, who challenged the importance of the temple itself (Acts 7:48-50). True evangelism, Philip demonstrated, is about preaching the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ (8:12), not the location of the preaching. Preaching the name of Jesus Christ is acknowledging that He is Savior and Lord because He was resurrected from the dead (Phil. 2:9-11). Preaching the kingdom is proclaiming the return of Jesus (Dan. 2:44; 7:13-14; Heb. 1:8). Philip harvested in a place where he had not sown (John 4:37) because Jesus had previously prepared the hearts of the people when He met the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:39-42). Simon was also baptized, but unlike other believers, who were converted on the basis of what they heard (Acts 8:12), he was attracted by what he saw—the signs and miracles (Acts 8:13; cf. John 2:23-25). Baptism is not a pursuit for power but the acknowledgment of our helplessness and need of a Savior.

8:14-25. The Sorcerer's Sin. Although believers were scattered, contacts between believers in Jerusalem and the apostles persisted. Philip's preaching was obviously not limited to the one city of Samaria. The gospel was spreading throughout the province. The apostles sent Peter and John to pray for the believers and to lay their hands on them for the reception of the Spirit. The laying on of hands by Peter and John had two functions: the apostles welcomed the newly baptized members into the larger community of believers, and the believers received the Holy Spirit to equip them to testify (see 1:8). The Holy Spirit is essential to the mission of the church. The apostles did not control the Spirit but only prayed for the believers to receive the Spirit. According to the words of Peter at Pentecost, the gift of the Holy Spirit was to follow baptism (2:38), but this was not always the case (10:44-48). God works in different ways in order to achieve His intention for us. Simon also was baptized (8:13), but apparently he did not receive the Spirit (cf. 1 Cor. 12:11). He wanted the power to give the Spirit to others, totally misunderstanding the work of the apostles.

The narrative of Simon the sorcerer reminds us of the other Simon who left everything to follow Jesus (Luke 5:10-11, 18, 28). The present Simon wanted to possess everything and even to buy what came as a free gift (Acts 8:18-19; cf. 2:38). The sorcerer was driven by personal ambition (8:9) and a quest for power (v. 19). Peter rebuked him severely and exhorted him to pray to God for forgiveness (vv. 20-22), to which Simon responded with a request for Peter to pray for him for divine protection (v. 24).

Peter and John not only endorsed the work of Philip but also continued to provide support by testifying and preaching in many villages in Samaria (v. 25). Luke shows that though Peter and John came from Jerusalem, they were totally open to share the gospel with the Samaritans. In the near future further steps would have to be taken to reach the world with the gospel.

8:26-40. Christ Preached to an Ethiopian. God was behind all the actions that took place in the story of Philip and the Ethiopian (vv. 26, 29, 40). Philip was God's faithful and obedient instrument, so he obeyed and went as he was commanded (v. 27). Philip embodied the attitude of a true disciple of Jesus. A man of Ethiopia (that is to say, from Nubia, the remote kingdom south of Egypt) was returning home. He was a very important and powerful person because he was responsible for the treasury of his queen, and perhaps even the state. But he was probably considered weak and despised by many because he was a eunuch. The fact that he had visited Jerusalem in order to worship in the temple and was reading from Isaiah indicates he was likely a proselyte—a convert to Judaism. Since Luke seems to clearly identify Cornelius as the first Gentile convert (10:45; 11:1), it is unlikely that the Ethiopian was simply a Gentile interested in visiting the temple. Although eunuchs were officially prohibited from entering the inner courts of the temple (Deut. 23:1), he could have certainly worshiped in the outer court. Moreover, it is difficult to know how or whether the prohibition against eunuchs was actually enforced. Whatever the case, it is certainly possible that during his stay he had heard echoes of the apostles' preaching in the temple.

The passage he was reading was from Isaiah 53 about the Suffering Servant. The passage may have spoken to his heart because he too had likely suffered from rejection because he was a eunuch. As he wondered about the identity of this Suffering Servant, Philip approached. As was the custom in antiquity, the man read aloud, which led Philip to ask him about his reading. How humble this high-level official was in being willing to invite Philip, whom he did not know, into the privacy of his chariot in order to learn from him. In the process of explaining to him the good news about Jesus, Philip must have also taught him about baptism (cf. Acts 2:38). The confession of Acts 8:37 found in some manuscripts ("I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God") is possibly not original (it is found only in the Western text; see Acts: Introduction), but it is consistent with the faith of the apostolic church (e.g., Rom. 10:9). The baptism was by immersion, as indicated by the meaning of the verb *baptizō* ("to go under water") and the context of the story (Acts 8:38).

After the baptism, the eunuch "went on his way rejoicing" (v. 39). Although Luke does not mention it, the Ethiopian would have certainly taken great joy in having read just three chapters later in Isaiah 56:3-8 the promise of a messianic age when eunuchs would no longer be excluded from God's assembly. He would certainly have believed that day had now arrived in Jesus. It may not be wrong to suggest that his joy led him to introduce the gospel in sub-Saharan Africa. His conversion was part of God's plan for that region of the world.

A Church United

In Acts 8 Luke emphasizes the importance of preserving the unity of the church within a community that was growing and embracing people of non-Jewish origin. In this particular case the evangelization of a new territory needed the approval of the mother church (Jerusalem) in order to be integrated into the larger community of believers. The risk was that the church would be divided between Christians of Gentile background and people of Judeo-Christian background (strongly attached to the Jewish traditions; hardly any interaction with Gentiles [10:28]; insistence on the rite of circumcision [15:1]; respect for ritual purification [21:21-24]). Luke, a disciple of Paul, whose concern for church unity took center stage (Gal. 2:11-14), highlights the importance of integrating the Gentiles within the Christian community. The narrative indicates that Peter and John not only approved of the work of Philip among Gentiles but also labored with him (Acts 8:25), although Peter clearly still wrestled with their acceptance until God showed him his error in a vision (Acts 10-11).

Philip pursued his evangelization efforts along the Mediterranean coast. He stopped at Caesarea, a Roman city, and settled there (Acts 8:40; 21:8). Peter would later baptize a Roman centurion and his family in that city (Acts 10). The gospel was thus reaching far and wide into Gentile territory. At this point, the narrative turns back to Saul and his conversion (Acts 9), which would result in the message being taken even farther afield.

9:1-31

Conversion of Saul of Tarsus

Saul was the man who approved the murder of Stephen (8:1) and who was involved in the great persecution against Christians in Jerusalem (8:3). And he was even ready to deal with those who fled to Damascus, but on the road his life changed forever. The persecutor became the persecuted and became a witness for Jesus. On the way to Damascus Saul experienced the gift of divine grace that enlightened and determined his entire ministry.

9:1–9. The Damascus Road: Saul Converted. While Philip continued his work as an evangelist (8:40), Saul was still intent on persecuting Christians. The text describes this in the vivid terms of breathing murderous threats against the Lord's disciples (9:1). He remained a zealous fundamentalist closed to new light (1 Tim. 1:13). By persecuting the Christians, who are here called the disciples of the Lord, Saul was really fighting against their Master. He would be defeated, however, because he was up against an undefeated opponent who would reach him through His mercy and grace (1 Tim. 1:13–14).

Judaism was tolerant of different religious sects, such as the Pharisees or Sadducees, but only insofar as they were respectful of Jewish traditions. But here an emerging sect (Acts 24:14) called "the Way" opposed the values of the temple. It is called "the Way" because it was the way of salvation (16:17), the way of the Lord (18:25), the way of God (18:26). The expression sheds light on the foundation of Christianity: (1) ethically it is a way of living life, a way of being (Matt. 7:13–14; 22:16; cf. 21:32), a path on which one must walk (John 12:35; Gal. 5:16; Eph. 5:2, 8); (2) in a christological sense, it is Jesus (John 14:6; Col. 2:6, Heb. 10:20); and (3) in a soteriological sense, it is the path that leads to God (Luke 1:79; John 14:4, 6; Heb. 9:8), the way to salvation (Acts 16:17), the way to achieve peace (Luke 1:79, Rom. 3:17). As a pure traditionalist, Saul could not tolerate this new Way.

To continue his persecution against Christians outside of Judea, Saul needed official documentation from the Jewish high priest and Sanhedrin authorizing him to arrest the followers of Jesus (who were seen as wayward Jews) and to transfer them back to Jerusalem to be tried and punished (Acts 9:1–2). Women were included in the persecution (v. 2), probably because of the important role they played in Christianity from the very beginning (1:14).

On his way to Damascus, Saul saw a light coming from heaven. This was clearly a manifestation of God (cf. Matt. 16:1; Luke 3:22; John 1:22; 3:27, 31). Jesus knows each of us by name, and in this instance, He spoke Saul's name twice. The repetition of his name shows insistence on the part of Jesus. He then asked Saul why he was persecuting Him (Acts 9:4; see Matt. 25:40). Saul asked two questions, first inquiring who the Lord was. Jesus answered, "I am [*egō eimi*] Jesus." The phrase reminds us of the true identity of Jesus as the great I Am (John 8:58). The second question is not found in some manuscripts of Acts, though it is mentioned in one of the two other accounts of the vision in Acts (Acts 22:10). This question implied Saul's surrender and demonstrated his measure of respect for God. It is a question every believer should place before God every morning: "Lord, what do You want me to do?"

Though Jesus appeared to Saul on the road to Damascus, He did not request that Saul work independently of His organized church in some type of independent ministry. Saul was to be at the service of the church. It was through its auspices that he was to recover his eyesight (v. 18), to join through baptism (v. 18), and to be instructed (v. 19; cf. 1 Cor. 15:3). He was always loyal to this relationship to the Lord and His church (Gal. 2:2, 9). He who believed he was enlightened was now blind (Gal. 1:14; cf. Acts 9:8), and he would recover his physical and spiritual sight through conversion (v. 9).

9:10–19. Ananias Baptizes Saul. A twofold vision (vv. 10, 12) made possible the encounter between Saul and Ananias. Ananias expressed his fear even though the Lord told him that Saul was blind (v. 12). Saul was a symbol of terror to Christians (Gal. 1:13; 1 Tim. 1:13), who here are referred to as those who call on God's name (Acts 9:14). Invoking the name of Jesus or praying to Him was a characteristic of the new Way (Acts 7:59–60; 22:16; 1 Cor. 1:2).

The mission to which Saul was now called was well defined (Acts 9:15). His first duty was to make known (to be a witness to) the name of Jesus to the Gentiles in accordance with the mission entrusted to the apostles (1:8; cf. Matt. 28:10). In the eyes of the Pharisees, the Gentiles were despicable, as were those who did not know the law (John 7:49). Saul was also to testify before kings—another category of people often neglected in Christian witnessing—and before the Israelites. It is with them that he began his ministry by teaching in their synagogues (Acts 9:20; cf. 13:14; 14:1; 17:1–2, 10; 18:4, 19, 26; 19:8) because God had not rejected them (Rom. 11:1). He was to suffer a great deal during his ministry (v. 16), not only physically through torture, stonings, and shipwreck (2 Cor. 11:8, 23–27; Gal. 4:13–15) but also emotionally (2 Cor. 11:28; 2 Tim. 1:11–12). Ananias referred to the new convert as "Brother Saul" (Acts 9:17). With these words, Saul was welcomed into the Christian community and invited to join it through baptism. Saul was then filled with the Holy Spirit, as were the apostles (2:4). He remained in the company of the disciples in Damascus to learn about his new faith.

9:20–22. Saul Preaches Christ. With his baptism, Saul was introduced to the mission of the church. He did not procrastinate but immediately obeyed the call (Acts 26:19–20; Gal. 1:15–16). Obedience is a form of faith (Rom. 1:5). Saul preached or proclaimed (*kērysso*) Christ, attesting Him as the Son of God. Proclaiming Christ is equivalent to proclaiming the gospel (1 Thess. 2:9). The proclamation is in fact teaching the meaning of Christ's death (1 Cor. 1:23; Gal. 2:20) and His dignity as the Son of God (2 Cor. 1:19) and as Lord (2 Cor. 4:5). This teaching (1 Tim. 2:7; 2 Tim. 1:11; 2 Pet. 2:5) was known as the *kērygma* or the doctrine of the Christian faith (Rom. 16:25–26; 1 Cor. 2:4–5). We are sent to fulfill this ministry (Rom. 10:15). Thus, faith in Christ is not merely a matter of believing in the Person of Jesus; it is the acceptance of His teaching that expresses itself in a new way of life (Gal. 1:16; 2:20).

9:23–25. Saul Escapes Death. The reference to *hēmerai hikanai* ("many days" or "quite some time"; v. 23) is to be differentiated from that of *hēmeras tinas* ("some days" or "several days"; v. 19). It allows for the time needed for Saul's sojourn in Arabia (Gal. 1:17–18). Here the one who had not been afraid to kill others (Acts 22:4; 26:10) was now the object of a plot to kill him. The Jews of Damascus had probably obtained favors from the governor of the city to place guards at the gates in order for Saul not to escape (2 Cor. 11:32–33). Because of this, he owed his survival to those in Damascus whom he had come to persecute.

9:26–30. Saul at Jerusalem. On returning to Jerusalem after three years in Arabia (Gal. 1:18), Saul was not received as a hero (Acts 9:26). His conversion was in doubt because the church had suffered much and suspected that this may have been a ploy of the Sanhedrin to capture them. Barnabas was appropriately called the son of encouragement (4:36), and it was he who introduced Saul to the apostles. This terminology is rather broad because he saw only Peter and James (Gal. 1:18–19; cf. Acts 15:13). By saying that Barnabas brought him to the apostles, Luke called attention to the unity of the church and the *bond* of harmony between Saul and the apostles. He *diēgēsato* (from *diēgeomai*—"explained," "described in detail," or "told") the experience of Saul and, in particular, his encounter with the risen Christ (v. 27). This is important in order to establish the forthcoming authority of Saul (1 Cor. 9:1; Gal. 1:1, 11–12, 15). Because he saw Christ on the Damascus road, Saul could also be said to be a witness of the resurrection of Jesus (Acts 1:22). After Barnabas's introduction, Saul accompanied the apostles freely (9:28).

It is surprising that Saul was no longer apprehensive of the high priest or the Sanhedrin. Two main reasons can be suggested: (1) Caiaphas was no longer the high priest, and the Sanhedrin may have been troubled over something more disturbing: the need to dissuade Emperor Caligula from his order that a monument of himself be erected in the Jewish temple. (2) The fact that Saul was a Roman citizen also made it difficult to arrest him. We find Saul arguing with the Hellenists who had put Stephen to death and who wanted to kill him also (v. 29), at which point the believers decided that it would be better for Saul to leave Judea. The text suggests that the decision was not his own, considering that he was always ready to face danger with courage, but that of the church. He boarded a ship in Caesarea and traveled to Tarsus, his native city in Cilicia (21:39). From there he spread his influence throughout the provinces of Syria and Cilicia (Gal. 1:21–22), where he probably established churches (Acts 15:23, 41). Roughly six years would pass before Saul's next appearance in Acts (11:25).

9:31. The Church Prospers. With the departure of Saul, the church enjoyed peace. The text does not specify the reason for the earlier trouble, but probably the presence of Saul among them had upset the Jewish authorities. Some manuscripts read "church" and others "churches"; either way the terms designate an entity with universal meaning that includes all the believers in Judea, Galilee, and Samaria. The church was united in a bond of peace. It grew in the fear of the Lord, that is, an attitude of respect and obedience supported by the presence of the Holy Spirit. Consequently, the church grew and was being edified.

9:32—12:24

PETER'S MINISTRY

Before focusing his attention on the ministry of Paul in the narrative, Luke writes about Peter's ministry. Through Peter the Lord performed mighty miracles and reached out in decisive ways to the Gentile communities. In a sense, Peter continued to do the ministry of Philip while at the same time anticipating the ministry of Paul.

9:32–43

Peter's Miracles

Miracles played a significant role in the early apostolic church and are associated with the proclamation of the gospel to both Jews and Gentiles. They reaffirmed the divine presence among the small group of disciples in a hostile environment. These miracles testified about the power of Jesus and served to reaffirm His resurrection. He was still alive bringing spiritual and physical healing to suffering humanity.

9:32–35. Aeneas Healed. In the absence of persecution, the church enjoyed peace, which made it easier to fulfill its mission. Peter left Jerusalem to evangelize, traveling by way of the road leading to the sea. Apparently, he took the initiative to go alone; John is not mentioned. He was planning to go to Lydda, Joppa, and Caesarea (Acts 8:40), following the footsteps of Philip and traveling extensively (9:32). Along the way he healed a man (vv. 33–34) and resurrected a woman (vv. 36–41), showing that the benefits of the gospel are accessible to men and women. In Lydda he met a new community (v. 32), probably converts of Philip, along with some who fled Jerusalem (8:1). These were probably Jews of Greek origin because the paralytic's name, Aeneas, is Greek. Peter began his foreign ministry among Jews of Greek tradition just as he had previously ministered to Jews of Jewish tradition—by healing a paralytic (cf. 3:1–8). Luke, a physician, provides details about the patient: the man in Acts 3 had been paralyzed since birth, and Aeneas had been bedridden for eight years (3:2; 9:33). Unlike Simon the sorcerer, who sought notoriety (Acts 8:19), Peter diverted the attention away from himself by saying that Jesus Christ was the One who healed the man (9:34). Then, following Jesus's example, Peter urged him to stand and make his bed. Aeneas must have been well known by the inhabitants of this town as well as by those who had come from the rich valley of Sharon to see him. As a result, many turned to the Lord (v. 35). They were Jews who were persuaded that Jesus was indeed the promised Messiah.

9:36–43. Dorcas Restored to Life. Tabitha was recognized as a disciple living in Joppa. This is the only place in the NT where the word "disciple" is used in its feminine form. Her name is translated Dorcas ("gazelle"). She was full of good works, always doing charitable deeds and helping those in need, similar to the seven deacons who were full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom (Acts 6:3). She ministered in the community of Joppa. Philip may have influenced her to undertake such a work, based on the model of Jerusalem, involving a service to widows. Her unexpected death brought tears to many in the church (9:39). Peter was requested to come at once while she was being prepared for burial. The widows showed him the clothes she had made for them, and the mood of the verb implies that they were wearing the clothes. Peter approached the deceased and knelt down and prayed. Though he had received the power of the Holy Spirit, Peter recognized his dependence on God and humbly called on Him. Persuaded that his prayer was heard (Mark 5:41; Luke 8:5), and following the model of Jesus, he commanded Dorcas to stand (Acts 9:40). Then taking her by the hand, he presented her to the community of believers. Again, many were led to believe in the Lord Jesus (Acts 9:43; cf. v. 35).

After this, Peter continued to stay in Joppa with Simon, a tanner (v. 43). Simon lived by the sea to facilitate the use of water to wash the animal skins and to separate his business from the community because of the bad smell his trade produced. Leviticus 11:24–25 indicates that touching the flesh of a dead unclean animal made the person ritually unclean. Consequently tanners (who worked with hides from an assortment of clean and unclean animals for a variety of uses) were stigmatized in Jewish society. It was likely that animals who were victims of accidental death or disease were brought to Simon to process their skins. Peter showed great openness of mind by staying in the house of an unclean Jew—though only a vision from God would make him feel comfortable associating with an unclean Gentile!

10:1—12:24

The Gospel to the Gentiles

Once again, the church continued to grow under the influence of the Holy Spirit. Though Cornelius observed the Jewish rules, he was not only uncircumcised but also Gentile. This new reality would serve to transform the church. The obedience of Peter and that of the church brought Christianity to a new level; it was no longer a Jewish sect—it had become a universal movement sharing the faith of Israel with the world.

10:1–8. Cornelius Sends a Delegation. Cornelius lived in Caesarea, the city designated for Roman procurators responsible for Judea. He was a centurion, who commanded a military unit, likely comprised of eighty to one hundred soldiers, that was called the Italian Regiment or cohort (v. 1). He probably belonged to an auxiliary force, since no Roman legion was posted in Judea at the time. The name Cornelius suggests that he was a Roman citizen, a foreigner in the land (v. 28). He was devout, full of love for God and eager to keep His laws (Deut. 10:12–13). He and his family feared God with the respectful kind of fear that leads to the observation of basic rules such as almsgiving and prayer (Matt. 6:1–7; 11:23; Luke 18:12). We are told that he regularly prayed, implying that he observed the designated times for prayer (Dan. 6:10; Luke 1:10). The ninth hour, which is 3:00 p.m., was the time designated for ritual prayer and was one of three times during the day when devout Jews prayed (9:00 a.m., 3:00 p.m., and sunset). Earlier in Acts, Peter and John went to the temple to pray at the ninth hour, also reflecting this practice (Acts 3:1). Thus, Cornelius appears to have been following this practice in his own life (10:3), demonstrating his devotion to what he believed God desired.

As he was praying, Cornelius had a vision in which an angel appeared to him (v. 3). He was told of the Lord's care for the uncircumcised and that He was pleased with his pious life and prayers (vv. 4, 31). The angel who was speaking to him was well informed about the details of the life of Peter—for example, his name, his address, and his associate (vv. 5–6)—indicating that God pays careful attention to the lives of those who serve Him and that He cares for them. As a good soldier, Cornelius obeyed and sent two servants accompanied by a soldier from his personal guard to protect them in their journey (v. 7). This attending soldier was one who shared in Cornelius's devotion (vv. 2, 7, 31).

10:9–16. Peter's Vision. Caesarea was about thirty-one miles (50 km) north from Joppa (modern Tel Aviv), a trip that would take about fifteen hours on foot. Joppa was the major port city (2 Chr. 2:16) until Herod had Caesarea built to replace it. Cornelius did not waste any time. The fact that his messengers arrived around noon (Acts 10:9) indicates that they must have left the very same night Cornelius received the vision. Peter had obviously remained in Joppa to complete his mission. The miracles he performed increased the interest of the people in the gospel (vv. 35, 42). Mission and prayer are inseparable in the life of believers.

Peter, like Cornelius, was praying. Noon was not the time for ritual prayer. It is a little surprising to find Peter praying on the roof of the house during the heat of the day. By specifying that he was hungry, Luke made it clear that Peter's vision was not caused by exposure to the heat. Peter, in the vision, refused to follow the heavenly command to eat, asserting that he had never eaten anything common or unclean. In response, Peter was told that he must not call anything that God had cleansed "common" or "defiled" (*koinos*).

This passage is often interpreted to mean that God was removing the distinction between clean and unclean animals. That is not what the text says, however. The problem was not that Peter declined to eat the unclean animals. It was that Peter refused to eat the clean animals because he believed they had become common (defiled) by coming into contact with the unclean ones. In doing that he was calling "common" what God had made "clean." During the intertestamental period, Jewish tradition expanded the OT laws of separation to include the belief that animals, humans, and even objects could become ritually "defiled," or made "common," by their association with items declared to be unclean (cf. Mark 7:2–9). This unbiblical belief had made observant Jews unwilling to associate with Gentiles for fear that they would become ritually impure in the process. The purpose of Peter's vision was not about a new approach to diet. It was to prepare Peter to accept the invitation to go to the home of Cornelius. Without this sort of divine intervention, Peter might have refused. Although Peter did not understand the meaning of the vision at first (Acts 10:17), he eventually recognized that God was telling him not to call any person common or unclean (v. 28). Thus, the vision was about the way Jewish Christians were to relate to Gentiles (10:34–35; 11:17; 15:7). It had nothing to do with clean or unclean food except to use those symbols as metaphors for the purpose of the vision. If Christians were afraid to associate with unbelievers, the mission Jesus gave to the church would never be fulfilled.

10:17–23. Summoned to Caesarea. Peter was confused (*diaporeō*—"to be perplexed;" cf. Acts 2:12; Luke 9:7). The heavenly voice did not clearly explain the vision to Peter. Its meaning would be clarified as the story developed. While Peter was immersed in his thoughts on the roof, Cornelius's messengers were carefully searching (Gr. *dierōtaō*, "to ask for directions") for the location of his house. They finally stood near a large gate (*pylōn*, "portal") by the courtyard of the house (Acts 10:17).

The messengers introduced Cornelius as well as any Jew could do it: he was righteous, a God-fearing man, and of good reputation among the Jews (see also Luke 7:4–5). The overnight hospitality Peter offered to these travelers revealed his open-mindedness (Acts 10:23, 28–29; 11:3). He left with them the next day because the messengers doubtless had needed rest and food and because Peter wanted to be better informed. He also took along six local Jewish Christians, perhaps as witnesses to whatever might transpire. As any good leader, he did not act alone or hastily.

10:24–33. Peter Meets Cornelius. Peter and his companions arrived the fourth day after the vision of Cornelius (v. 30). Cornelius had a great deal of faith in the success of the mission. Anticipating the arrival of Peter, he gathered all his family to share this important event. Some manuscripts read "he entered/arrived" (that is, Peter; the preferable reading) while others read "they entered" (the whole group). The singular verb could be used for Peter's entrance as the leader of the group, while also implying their arrival as well. Later, some Jewish Christians would reprimand Peter for defiling himself by entering the house of an uncircumcised Gentile (11:3).

Seeing Peter, Cornelius fell down at his feet—a gesture of respect in the Middle East. To this gesture Luke adds the Greek verb *proskyneō*, with the same meaning, but in biblical language it expresses the idea of worship, as in the presence of the divine (Matt. 4:10; Heb. 1:6; Rev. 19:10). The immediate reaction of Peter suggests that he realized that this could be interpreted as an act of worship, and he told Cornelius to get up (Acts 10:25–26). The messenger should never give even the impression of willingness to take the place of the Sender.

At first Peter seemed to be a little apologetic, but then he warmed up to his hosts. The word he used to say that a relationship between Jews and Gentiles was not permitted is not from the Greek word *nomos* ("law"), normally used to designate the law of God, but from the word *athemitos*, implying the rules of customs (v. 28). In Israel, according to the Torah, aliens had rights (Gen. 17:12; Ex. 12:19, 49; 20:10). It was only after the Exile that Pharisees established traditions that over time built walls of separation between Jews and Gentiles—including the idea, mentioned above, of defilement by association. In the house of Cornelius, Peter referenced not the law of God but human traditions. In Acts, the law of God retains its rightful place in the life of believers.

10:34–43. Cornelius's Household Listen to the Gospel. Peter's testimony is a model of apostolic preaching to the Gentiles. Let us consider both the theology and the methodology involved. First, regarding the theology of the passage, found at the beginning and closure of the text, (1) salvation was now available to all and not only to the Jews (v. 42). This notion of "all" is repeated eight times and highlights the universality of salvation. He refers to all nations (v. 35); Jesus is Lord of all (v. 36); Jesus healed all who were under the devil's power (v. 38); and all who believe in Him receive forgiveness (v. 43). (2) The work of salvation is from God Himself. He is not partial (v. 34); He anointed Jesus with the Holy Spirit and power; He was with Jesus (v. 38); He raised Him from the dead (v. 40); He chose His witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus (v. 41); and He established Jesus as the supreme eschatological Judge (v. 42). (3) To believe in Jesus is to acknowledge that He is Lord (v. 36) and that He was appointed to judge over the living and the dead (v. 42; see also Luke 5:21–24; John 5:22–23; 2 Tim. 4:1; 1 Pet. 4:5). (4) Salvation is about forgiveness (Acts 10:43) and peace (v. 36)—that is to say, our reconciliation with God (Rom. 5:1, 10; 2 Cor. 5:18–21).

Second, we find the methodology used by Peter to share the message to non-Jews. He moved from what was known to the unknown: They knew about the ministry of John the Baptist (Acts 10:37) and the baptism of Jesus and His ministry (v. 39), which show that God was with Him (v. 38). Then what they did not know was that Peter and the other disciples were alongside Jesus during His ministry (v. 39); that Jesus was crucified but God raised Him from the dead and Jesus appeared to His followers (vv. 40–41); that after the resurrection they even ate with Him (v. 41); that He ordered them to testify about Him (v. 42); and that all Jesus went through was according to the Scriptures (v. 43).

Seeing they were pious people who feared the Lord, Peter invited them to accept Jesus as the Messiah, through whom there was forgiveness of sin for all who believe (v. 43). Peter no longer doubted that the gospel was also for the Gentiles. He saw the truth that God does not show favoritism or partiality. This is a major theme in the NT (e.g., Rom. 2:10; Gal. 2:6; Eph. 6:9; Col. 3:25; 1 Pet. 1:17). With regard to salvation, there are no distinctions based on gender, social status, or race (Gal. 3:28). The message was clear: Jesus Christ is Lord of all (Acts 10:36).

10:44–48. The Holy Spirit Falls on the Gentiles. Peter was still preaching when the Holy Spirit came on all who were hearing his words (v. 44). The gift of the Spirit is dependent on the divine freedom to bestow it on whomever God chooses (8:17–18), before or after baptism (19:2). Peter's companions were astonished (*existēmi*—"to be amazed," "to be out of one's mind") that the Spirit had fallen on Gentiles (10:45). Thus Peter's companions realized that circumcision is not required to receive the Holy Spirit or to be part of God's people.

Those who received the Spirit were speaking with tongues and magnifying God (v. 46). The association of these two actions implies that the new converts spoke intelligible languages. Similarly, when the apostles received the Spirit at Pentecost, they prophesied (2:17). Peter, in response to what had happened, invited them to be baptized. Baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ indicates that the listeners had accepted Jesus as Lord and appropriated the message Peter had proclaimed about Him (10:38, 40, 42–43).

11:1–18. Peter Defends God's Grace. In Jerusalem Peter was compelled to defend his actions. It was important for the believers in Jerusalem to accept that the Gentiles could be part of the people of God. This would be important for the future unity of the church. Peter summarized his experience with Cornelius but chose to modify a few details that might have inflamed the prejudices of his Hebrew listeners.

Luke does not report the reaction of the other apostles to the conversion of Cornelius. But some of the Christian Jews challenged Peter, particularly those who believed that new converts should undergo circumcision and practice the traditions of Judaism (vv. 2–3). They considered Peter's actions inappropriate because he was willing to fellowship and to eat with uncircumcised Gentiles—let alone the fact that he also baptized them (see Matt. 15:2; Mark 7:4; Luke 15:2). This was the position Peter would have advocated before he had his vision as recorded in Acts 10.

While the story Luke told in chapter 10 addresses the reader, chapter 11 addresses a Judeo-Christian public. Peter summed up the discussion with arguments in his favor. He specified that in his vision he saw all kinds of animals (11:6). Cornelius is mentioned not as being a Roman officer but as a "man" (v. 12), implying that the gift of the Spirit was not only for Cornelius but also for any person who believes. Peter said that a heavenly angel spoke to Cornelius and that his message implied that salvation was for him and all his household (v. 14). By shortening his discourse, Peter placed the emphasis on God's intervention on behalf of Gentiles. Peter closed his report by arguing that God had made clear His intentions and that he could not oppose God's purposes (v. 17; cf. 4:19; 5:29; 5:39). His emphasis had been on the work of the Spirit (11:12, 15), Jesus (v. 16), and God ("from heaven," vv. 5, 17). The positive reaction to Peter's speech was crucial in order to preserve the unity of the church. The church had already survived the danger of a split between the Hebrew and the Hellenist converts (6:1). While unity was preserved once again, the threat of a rift remained (see chap. 15).

11:19–26. Barnabas and Saul in Antioch. Judeo-Christians of Greek origin fled along the coast toward the north in a centrifugal pattern. From Phoenicia, where the ports of Tyre and Sidon were located, some sailed to Cyprus, while others went farther north to Antioch. At that time Antioch was a cosmopolitan city with a population of about 500,000—the third largest of the empire after Rome and Alexandria. Luke specifies that they were preaching exclusively to the Jews (v. 19), distinguishing them from the Jewish Hellenists (see 6:1).

Conversely, in a centripetal movement some believers left Cyprus and others Cyrene, now Libya, and made their way to Antioch, where they spoke to non-Jews. They proclaimed Jesus as Lord (11:20), implying that through His resurrection He demonstrated His divinity as well as His status as Judge and Savior (cf. 2:36; 10:42–43). We do not know who taught them about Jesus, but perhaps it was Simon of Cyrene, who carried the cross (Mark 15:21), or the prophet Lucius (Acts 13:1). The reference to the Lord's "hand" being with them (11:21) is a reference to the manifestation of power (Ex. 14:31), sometimes miraculous (Acts 9:3; 13:11). Through the use of this expression Luke suggests that miracles continued to complement their preaching (cf. 2:43; 4:30). New believers placed the Lord at the center of their lives. Though faith involves the teaching of ethics, it is primarily a commitment to Jesus (11:21, 23).

When the gospel first reached the Samaritans, the apostles had sent Peter to evaluate the situation. This time the church sent Barnabas.

Surprisingly, he did not return immediately with a report but spent a year ministering to the Gentiles. Barnabas was the man for the job. He was a peaceful and good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith (v. 24). As a Levite he had the trust of conservative Jews, and as a Cypriot he was well accepted by the Greek-speaking Jews. Seeing what the grace of God can accomplish, Barnabas was glad (v. 23). If there is joy "in heaven over one sinner who repents" (Luke 15:7), there is joy on earth as well.

Given the large number of converts (Acts 11:24), Barnabas needed help, and he thought about Saul, whom he had last seen some six years earlier (9:27). Remembering that Saul had gone to Tarsus, Barnabas went and brought Saul to Antioch (9:25–27, 30). Both preached Christ, leading the Gentiles to use for the first time the nickname "Christians" (11:26). The word is Greek with a Latin ending, which suggests the name did not come from the Jews. The Jews referred to the Christians as "Nazarenes" (24:5). Though the name was initially intended to be disrespectful (1 Pet. 4:16; cf. Acts 26:28), believers willingly adopted it as their own.

11:27–30. Relief to Judea. The mention of the prophet Agabus and famine allowed Luke to highlight the unity that existed between the church of Antioch and that of Jerusalem. The organizational structure of the apostolic church was not congregationalist. It was deeply united through the bonds of faith and service. Paul himself recognized the importance of the mother church (Gal. 2:2–9; cf. Acts 15:2; 18:22; 21:15, 17) and endeavored to maintain the connection with it (Rom. 15:26; 1 Cor. 16:1; 2 Cor. 8:1–7; Gal. 2:10). Strong bonds of faith were not alone responsible for the unity of the church; solidarity was equally important. Donations were delivered to the elders, not to the apostles. This suggests that the church was not organized hierarchically with Peter as its first pope. Paul appears to make reference to this visit in Galatians 2:1–10 (see Galatians: Introduction).

12:1–4. Herod's Violence to the Church. When Herod Agrippa I (ca. 9 B.C.–A.D. 44) began to assert his power over the Christians, he caused a great deal of pain and suffering. But ultimately, he suffered a terrible fate (12:23). Luke introduces him simply as Herod because he belonged to a line of persecutors. Herod the Great, his grandfather, murdered the children of Bethlehem (Matt. 2:16), and his uncle, Herod Antipas, beheaded John the Baptist (Matt. 14:1–12). Luke later introduces his son, Herod Agrippa II, as simply Agrippa to differentiate him from his predecessors on account of his favorable inclination toward Paul (Acts 25 and 26).

Promoted to office by Emperor Claudius, Herod sought to find favor with the ruling class by beheading James the apostle (Acts 12:2). James became the first martyred apostle and the only one Luke mentions, probably to show that despite obstacles, the mission persisted. Though later Peter was miraculously delivered, God allowed James's work to be completed with his martyrdom.

Seeing that the Jews were pleased with what happened to James, Herod also arrested Peter (12:3). In doing so he was taking aim at the church leaders who had been spared during the earlier persecution (8:1). Here the term "Jews" refers to those who opposed the new faith. It was only out of respect for the celebrated Feast of Unleavened Bread that Peter was not immediately executed. Thus, Herod kept him in prison until the end of the festivities. Four squads of soldiers were assigned to keep watch on him, a total of sixteen soldiers. The day was divided into four watches of six hours each; four soldiers were thus assigned every six hours to guard Peter. Two soldiers were chained to Peter and two others kept watch at the door (12:6). These details are given to demonstrate that it was impossible for Peter to escape. His release would have to be a case of divine intervention (see 5:18–25).

12:5–19. Peter Freed from Prison. After the arrest of Peter, the church responded with continual prayer that was *ektenōs*—"intense," "earnest," "constant," or "fervent" (v. 5). The conflict was really between Herod and God. Clearly, the outcome was divinely appointed (v. 23). On the eve of his scheduled execution, Peter was sleeping between two wide-awake guards (v. 6). In this dark place a light shone that the guards could not see. God was privately communicating with His servant, and the solders did not have access to this experience. Luke clearly emphasizes the miraculous nature of the deliverance of Peter by walking the readers through each part of the miracle (vv. 7–10).

Once outside, Peter went to the house of Mary, mother of John Mark (v. 12). The fact that she had her own house indicates that some believers continued to own property, and thus the earlier account that some believers sold their houses for the benefit of the community must have been a voluntary act. Peter knocked at the small door within the larger portal that allowed entry into the courtyard. The church had been praying for Peter's release. The humorous story of the servant Rhoda, who forgot to open the door for Peter, shows that even believers were prone to disbelief. They were astonished when they finally opened the door for Peter (v. 16). This parallels the reaction of the apostles after the women told them that Jesus had risen from the dead. After attributing the entire development to the action of the Lord (v. 17) and requesting that James, the Lord's brother who played a leading role in the church (15:13), be informed, Peter left without specifying where he was going. Rome was obviously not his destination because he had to remain not too far from Jerusalem to attend the first council (15:7) and to fulfill his ministry in Antioch (Gal. 2:11). The disappearance of Peter from prison was not noticed until the next day. Herod was humiliated and did to the soldiers responsible for keeping Peter in prison what he had intended to do to Peter (Acts 12:19).

12:20–24. Herod's Violent Death. Tyre and Sidon were two independent seaports supervised by Rome. These municipalities were trying to maintain a low profile and a peaceful existence with the help of Blastus, Herod's chamberlain (v. 20). Herod was angry against these two cities, probably for financial reasons. With the arrival of representatives from both cities (v. 21), he took advantage of the situation to boost his tarnished image. He arrayed himself in his royal apparel and sat on the throne to deliver an oration, a public speech that ignited the crowd (v. 21). The crowd enthusiastically flattered him and hailed him as a god (v. 22). Having achieved his objective, Herod managed to overcome the insults suffered when Peter escaped his control. Unlike Barnabas and Paul, who refused to be regarded as gods by the Gentiles (14:15), Herod was delighted. But as a Jew, he should have known that accepting such a title was a grave sin (Gen. 3:5; Is. 14:14; Luke 4:7–8). As a result, the God of heaven struck him when he was at the height of his glory. Contrary to what normally happens (Job 24:19–20), he was eaten by worms before dying (Acts 12:23). This was obviously more than a common intestinal disease. At the very least, his must have been an agonizing and horrifying death. Interestingly enough, the Jewish historian Josephus also mentions the death of Herod Agrippa I. He describes it as having come about as an intense, violent pain arising in his belly.

The obstacle for the spread of the gospel was now removed. When Herod's oration was silenced, the word of God persisted (12:24). It was like a seed of life growing even more (Luke 8:7–15; 13:19; cf. 1 Cor. 3:6–7), and through the ministry of Paul it would reach Rome itself.

12:25—15:35

PAUL'S FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY

Set apart to proclaim the gospel to the Gentiles, Paul was officially appointed and enabled to fulfill his vocation to its fullest extent. He accompanied Barnabas to Cyprus, Pamphylia, Pisidia, and Cilicia, where the Jews violently opposed them while the Gentiles enthusiastically welcomed them. The conversion of many non-Jews raised questions about their status in the church.

12:25—14:28

The Gospel in Asia Minor

Luke writes extensively about the spreading of the gospel in Asia Minor through the ministry of Barnabas and Paul. He describes for us their method of working, their success, and the difficulties they encountered.

12:25—13:3. Barnabas and Saul Appointed. Barnabas and Saul finished their ministry in Jerusalem by handing over the donations from the church in Antioch (11:30). When leaving Jerusalem to return to Antioch, Barnabas and Saul took with them a young man named Mark. Unlike Jerusalem, the church of Antioch had no apostles. Instead, they had five prominent leaders (13:1): (1) Barnabas, an evangelist who was full of the Spirit, who acted as a representative of the church in Jerusalem (11:22). (2) Simeon (or Simon), also called Niger ("black"). Some believe that he might have been Simon of Cyrene (Mark 15:21), who was converted with his two sons. (3) Lucius of Cyrene was from the same region—Cyrenaica, on the African coast, which was a Roman colony where a number of people became believers (Acts 11:20). (4) Manaen was a high-level Jewish aristocrat who was a childhood friend of Herod Antipas, known as the Tetrarch. Manaen had been faithful to God and had demonstrated that the gospel could reach the highest social classes. (5) And finally, there was Saul. Although Jesus had personally assigned him his mission and he had already preached the gospel in Damascus (9:23–25) and Jerusalem (9:28–29) at the risk of his own life, Saul was humbly placed at the end of the list of ministers in Antioch.

These leaders are identified as prophets and teachers—the two most important ministries after apostleship (1 Cor. 12:28). The teachers were to instruct believers and to work for the preservation of the unity of the church in faith and knowledge (Eph. 4:11–15). Saul was such a person (2 Tim. 1:11). Among the responsibility of these persons was leading in worship (*leitourgeō*, "to serve," "to minister," or "to worship;" a term used to refer to the ministry of priests in the tabernacle; Heb. 10:11). The worship of the early church included, among other things, hymns, some of which may have been preserved in the NT (e.g., Phil. 2:6–11; Col. 1:15–20; Rev. 19:6–8); prayers (Acts 2:24–31; 1 Cor. 16:22; Rev. 22:17, 20); fasting (Acts 13:2); preaching (20:20); and the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:20–26).

By order of the Spirit, Barnabas and Saul were selected to do the work for which the Holy Spirit had called them (Acts 13:2). The divine calling reached them before they were set apart for service, as determined by the Spirit. The Spirit also moved the church to recognize the call of Barnabas and Saul. The setting apart was done through the laying on of hands, a gesture signifying blessing, the recognition of a vocation, and ordination of service. It also served to establish a lasting bond of fellowship between those who remained and those who departed. Barnabas and Saul would not act independently from the church but were expected to report back (14:27). The text says that they were sent away (13:3). Who sent them? We do not know. The verbs in v. 3 do not refer to a specific subject; one must read v. 4 to find one.

13:4–12. Preaching in Cyprus. Although God uses humans to lead His church, ultimately all was done under the guidance of the Spirit. Barnabas and Saul were sent on their mission by the order of the Holy Spirit (v. 4). This was a divine assignment instigated by the Spirit, thus confirming the spiritual nature of their mission. Since Barnabas was from Cyprus (4:36), he began his mission among his own countrymen. Saul also preached the gospel first to his brethren (Rom. 1:16), before turning to the Gentiles. Such a mission approach had also been used by Jesus (John 1:11).

They evangelized the island from east (Salamis; Acts 13:5) to west (Paphos; v. 6). John Mark accompanied them (15:37), serving as their assistant (*hypēretēs*—"helper," "assistant," or "servant"; v. 5), probably helping them with practical matters (e.g., finding food and shelter) and in the work of evangelism. Their method consisted of visiting the many synagogues on the island to share the gospel. Other Jewish converts had already ministered on the island (Acts 11:19–20), preparing the way for the work of Barnabas and Saul.

When they reached Paphos, they met a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet named Bar-Jesus or Son of Yeshua. The term "sorcerer" could designate a wizard, a rogue miracle worker (8:9–11), or a learned savant wise man (Matt. 2:1–2). This mix of descriptions Luke provides gives us an insight about the man. As a Jew, his focus should have been the Torah. As a prophet, he should have been a teacher of salvation. As a magician, he must have been considered a wise man deserving of being heard. But he was a false prophet. He seduced the proconsul, who was an intelligent man (Acts 12:7). The rest of the story contrasts the ways of the Lord with this man's understanding of salvation. The proconsul was on a quest for truth. Hearing about Barnabas and Saul, he asked them to come because he was intensely interested in listening to the word of God (13:7). Luke loved to characterize the gospel as the *logos*—"word" or "message" (e.g., 2:41; 4:4, 29, 31; 6:2, 4, 7). It is a reference not only to Jesus (John 1:1) but also to the word He taught the disciples that had to be proclaimed (Acts 8:4, 25; cf. 2 Tim. 4:2). This is the creative word that gives life to those who listen to it (Phil. 2:16; cf. Gen. 1:20–23).

The magician was known by a second name: Elymas (Acts 13:8), which is also a title for the wise and erudite. He withstood Barnabas and Saul, possibly by challenging their teaching and using arguments intended to confuse the proconsul. Saul identified him as a son of the devil, rejecting the idea that he was a son of salvation, and called on the Lord to blind him. God used the miraculous immediate blinding of Elymas to convince the proconsul of the truth of Saul's teachings, and he became a believer (v. 12).

It is at this point in Acts that Saul's name is changed to Paul (meaning "the small one"; v. 9). Being both a Jew and a Roman citizen, Saul had both a Hebrew name, "Saul," as well as a Roman name, "Paul." The fact that his Roman name is similar to that of the proconsul Sergius Paulus was merely coincidental. Since he was now in a Gentile territory, he preferred to use his Roman name. From this point forward in the narrative Paul also becomes the prime speaker. Barnabas begins to fade, and they are referred to as "Paul and Barnabas" (13:43, 46, 50–51; 14:1, 6; 15:2, 22, 35; except 14:4). However, at the Council of Jerusalem, Barnabas spoke first (15:12) and was the first one mentioned in the official letter of the church (15:25). Apparently Barnabas remained at the helm in the eyes of the church of Jerusalem (11:22).

13:13–41. At Antioch in Pisidia. Paul and his companions boarded a ship to reach the port that today is called Antayla and went on to Perga (v. 13). They did not stop there but pressed on to Pisidian Antioch, the first of four cites they would visit in southern Galatia. They had to cross over the mountains of western Taurus, the passes of which can be as high as 5,000 feet (1,524 m). In that region the weather is cold and dry much of the year. Traveling on foot over unsafe roads while taking time to testify along the way and to gather the basic requirements for the journey made the trip challenging. This may have been what discouraged John Mark and prompted him to return home to Jerusalem (v. 13). Whatever the case, Paul was not pleased with the decision (15:37–40).

Paul and Barnabas attended Jewish synagogues in every town they visited. This was not only missionary strategy but also observance of the Sabbath. We know that Paul was a faithful observer of the law (23:29; 24:14; 25:8), referencing the Decalogue many times in his letters (first and second commandments, 1 Thess. 1:9; third, Rom. 2:24; fourth, Heb. 4:9; fifth, Eph. 6:2; sixth, seventh, eighth, and tenth, Rom. 13:9; ninth, 1 Cor. 15:15). It was customary in the Jewish synagogue to give passing visitors the opportunity to voice their views. Paul used this gesture of hospitality to share his faith. Although the invitation to speak was given to both Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:15), Paul was the one who spoke. Their word of exhortation based on the Law and the Prophets impressed the synagogue officials. The Greek word *paraklēsis*, sometimes translated "exhortation," can also be translated as "encouragement" or "consolation." Since Jesus is indeed the consolation of Israel (Luke 2:25), the opportunity was thus afforded to Paul to talk about Jesus.

It is interesting to compare the first evangelistic speech of Peter at Pentecost and the first recorded speech of Paul in a synagogue. Although different in form because of context and audience, they are identical in substance.

Sermons of Peter and Paul

Peter Acts 2:14–39, 43	**Paul** Acts 13:16–41	**Notes**
v. 22: people of Israel	v. 16: people of Israel and those who fear God (non-Jews)	Paul also included non-Israelites
v. 22: Jesus of Nazareth	vv. 23, 27, 33: Jesus	Peter was on Israelite territory
v. 24: God raised Jesus from the dead	v. 30: God raised Jesus from the dead	Jesus is proclaimed as the resurrected Lord

God-Fearers

Many Gentiles were accepted in the synagogues. Among them were proselytes, who should be distinguished from God-fearers. Proselytes (Heb. *ger habberit* or *ger tsedeq*, "proselytes of the covenant" or "proselytes of justice") were all Gentile converts to Judaism who had been circumcised and also had received the ritual cleansing and brought offerings to the temple. They observed all mosaic rules and were fully integrated into Judaism. Those who were called God-fearers (Heb. *ger toshab*) were pious Gentile sympathizers who observed the Sabbath and had forsaken seven practices: idolatry, blasphemy, adultery, murder, theft, eating pork, and eating meat containing blood. Many of them attended synagogue services because they were attracted to the simplicity and order of Jewish worship as well as to the high moral values they expounded. In their search they received instructions from the Holy Scriptures (cf. Acts 15:21). They had not, however, converted to Judaism, and the men remained uncircumcised. This group proved to be more open to the gospel. At first most of Paul's converts appear to have been from this kind of Gentile.

v. 32: the apostles were witnesses	v. 31: the apostles were witnesses	Peter and Paul gave recognition to the testimony of the apostles
v. 27: quotation of Psalm 16:10	v. 35: quotation of Psalm 16:10	Same scriptural reference: Psalm 16:10
v. 29: reference to David and his tomb	v. 36: reference to David's death and burial	
v. 36: God had made Jesus to be Lord and Christ (Messiah)	v. 23: God had brought the Savior Jesus to Israel	The word "Christ" or "Messiah" originally conveyed the idea of a Savior to the Jews, but not necessarily to Gentiles
v. 38: forgiveness or remission of sins	v. 38: forgiveness or remission of sins	The same Greek word (*aphesis*) is used in both passages
v. 38: repentance and baptism	v. 39: belief and justification	Paul preaches righteousness by faith to Jews and Gentiles; Peter insists on conversion
10:43 belief and forgiveness		Peter seems to have gained a greater understanding of righteousness by faith after Cornelius's conversion

This table shows that Paul followed very closely the same basic theological argument that Peter did. They both offered the same message of salvation in essentially the same form of argument. Later, Peter came to Paul's defense at the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15:7–11). Paul's sermon can be outlined as follows: (1) Historical arguments (13:17–25); (2) Jesus the Savior (13:26–32a), (3) biblical arguments (13:32b–41).

1. Historical Arguments (13:17–25). Paul addressed his fellow Jews and those who feared God. Many God-fearers and proselytes were searching for answers to their own existential questions.

Paul, like Stephen (Acts 7:2–47), began his sermon with a historical overview. The purpose was not so much to attract the attention of his audience but to unpack lessons from a narrative that would have been meaningful to his audience. The subject of the story was God and His actions. The last statement before introducing Jesus referred to God's plans being accomplished by David (v. 22). Paul highlighted twelve actions by which God demonstrated his care and saving concern for His people: God (1) chose the Patriarchs (v. 17), (2) prospered and exalted the people while in Egypt (v. 17), (3) guided them out from there (v. 17), (4) was patient with them in the desert (v. 18), and (5) destroyed and overthrew seven nations in Canaan (v. 19). He (6) gave Canaan to His people as an inheritance, distributing the land among them (v. 19), (7) gave them judges (v. 20), and later (8) gave them King Saul (v. 21). After (9) God removed Saul, (10) He raised up David and made him their king, (11) about whom He testified that (12) He had found David. So Jesus did not come to move God to love His people, but rather He is the culmination of a divine project of love manifested throughout the history of Israel. Paul said God had acted again in Jesus Christ: He had kept His promise and had given Israel Jesus the Savior (13:23).

Paul stressed the Davidic descent of Jesus, an argument on behalf of His messianic identity. While Saul was requested by the people, David was not. He was appointed, raised up by God to be king of Israel (13:21–22). Jesus was a descendant of David (v. 23). Not only was Jesus of royal lineage, but He was also appointed and raised up by God to be King (Col. 1:15, 19) and, like David, to do God's will (cf. Heb. 10:9). In support of his interpretation, Paul mentioned John the Baptist, whose reputation was known beyond the borders of the Holy Land. John the Baptist had announced the coming of the Messiah and preached repentance in preparation for His coming (cf. Matt. 3:2; see also 2 Pet. 3:9, 11, 14).

2. Jesus the Savior (13:26–32a). In this section of the sermon, Paul announced to his audience of both Jews and Gentiles the word or message of salvation (v. 26), the joyful good news (v. 32). He described the saving death and resurrection of Jesus (vv. 26–32). First, he argued that the dwellers of Jerusalem, and particularly the leaders, were ignorant of the messianic prophecies of the OT and, in putting Jesus to death, they fulfilled the prophecies (v. 27). Second, he limited his charge of ignorance to the Jews in Jerusalem and not to all Jews. In other words, only the Jews in Jerusalem, particularly their leaders, killed Jesus. Third, they did not have a legal basis to put Him to death and consequently they executed an innocent person; Jesus was not a criminal. Fourth, the Jews took Him from the cross and buried Him. Paul was not making any distinction between the evil plots of the Jewish leaders and the concern of some of Jesus's followers to give Him a proper burial (v. 29). Fifth, God was also active in the drama of Jesus and vindicated Him by resurrecting Him from the dead. Sixth, Paul argued that this really happened because the resurrected Jesus *ōphthē*—"was seen" or "appeared" (cf. Luke 24:34)—for many days by His disciples, and they had publically testified about it (Acts 13:30–31). Faith is to be based not only on the fact that *humans* were able to *see* the resurrected Jesus but also on the fact that Jesus *made Himself visible*, or revealed Himself, to them.

3. Biblical Arguments (13:32b–41). At the end of his speech, Paul targeted the Jews more specifically in referring to himself and his contemporaries as the children of the ancient ancestors to whom the promises were made (vv. 32b–33). For Paul, the resurrection of Jesus was the moment when Jesus was made King (Rom. 1:4; cf. Heb. 1:5; 5:5). The quotation from Psalm 2:7 is interpreted in the light of the resurrection of Jesus, when He was declared to be the Son of God. Paul also stated that after the resurrection Jesus was glorified. He did not experience corruption in the tomb and would never experience it because He has been exalted (Acts 13:34). The quote from Isaiah 55:3 reaffirmed that Jesus had inherited the kingdom of David. He was indeed the messianic King.

In concluding, Paul brought his message home to his audience. Forgiveness of sins is possible only through this man, Jesus (cf. Heb. 2:14–18). It is also through faith in the resurrected Lord that anyone is justified before God (Acts 13:38–39). Compliance with the law cannot justify us in the eyes of God (Gal. 3:10). Saving grace is available only through Jesus the Christ. Paul's last warning (Acts 13:40) was based on Habakkuk 1:5. God announced through the prophet a message that seemed unbelievable to those who did not have faith. The implication was that now God had done something even more inconceivable through the death and resurrection of Jesus, and only those trusting Him would benefit from this saving act.

13:42–52. Blessing and Conflict at Pisidian Antioch. The initial reaction to Paul's message seems to have been positive. There is a manuscript difference in v. 42. Some manuscripts indicate that as the Jews left the synagogue, the Gentiles begged the apostles to preach to them the next Sabbath, whereas other manuscripts indicate that as Paul and Barnabas left the synagogue, the people in general made this request, not differentiating between Jews and Gentiles. The best textual evidence supports identifying Paul and Barnabas as the referent of "they went out." The noun "Jews," found in some translations, is not in the Greek text. Based on the best Greek manuscripts, we can read v. 42 as follows: "As they [Paul and Barnabas] were going out, they [the leaders of the synagogue—the Greek text does not mention the Gentiles; cf. v. 15] begged that. . . ." The Gentiles did not have the authority to invite speakers to the synagogue. Eventually many Jewish people, converts to Judaism, as well as Gentiles believed the apostles' message (v. 43). The initial response in Pisidian Antioch was positive. Many accepted Jesus as their Savior, and Paul and Barnabas encouraged them to *prosmenein*—"to remain attached to," "continue in," or "remain faithful to"—the grace of God (v. 43).

The situation changed the following Sabbath, as the preaching of the apostles upset almost everyone in the city. A large number of the Jews became upset and envious of the success of Paul and Barnabas. They began to contradict and *blasphēmeō* in opposition to Paul's arguments (v. 45). This verb sometimes translated "blaspheme" can be understood two ways: they were either insulting Paul or blaspheming Jesus Christ. Paul and Barnabas were not intimidated. It is interesting to note that the apostolic preaching based in the OT and the message of salvation through Christ is considered to be the word of God (v. 46)—that is to say, it was authoritative (cf. 1 Thess. 2:13). The two preachers, instead of accusing their opponents, drew some conclusions from their attitudes (Acts 13:46). The gospel was to be proclaimed first to the Jews, but their rejection of it resulted in the fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah 49:6: the faith of Israel would be universalized and would reach the Gentile world.

It would be incorrect to conclude that Paul and Barnabas would never again preach to the Jews. Paul continued to testify in the synagogues of Thessalonica (Acts 17:1), Berea (17:10), Athens (17:17), Corinth (18:4), and Ephesus (18:19; cf. 19:10), and many Jews accepted Jesus as the Christ. Later, even from his prison in Rome, Paul gathered the Jewish leaders of the city to announce to them the kingdom of God (28:17, 23).

The Gentiles were glad to hear the words of the apostles and glorified or honored the word of the Lord (v. 48). To glorify or honor the word of the Lord means to acknowledge its incalculable value and grant to it the importance it deserves in our lives. Salvation was also accessible to the Gentiles. The conversion of Gentiles was such a wonderful experience that Luke attributes it entirely to God. They had been appointed to eternal life (v. 48). This is about the miracle of conversion for which we cannot take any credit. We are to acknowledge that God loved us and planned for our salvation before the foundation of the world (Rom. 8:29–30; Eph. 1:4–6). Verse 48 is not teaching that God predestined some to salvation and others to damnation. This is about those who are saved and indicates that others will be lost because they decided not to honor the word of the Lord (see "Predestination, p. 1583).

The Jewish leaders were not happy that the word of God was spreading throughout the region (Acts 13:49), so they used the influential women of the city and the leading authorities to expel Paul and Barnabas from the region (v. 50). By shaking the dust from their feet, they indicated that they had fulfilled their responsibility (v. 51; cf. Mark 6:11). The disciples who remained in the region were filled with the joy of salvation and of the Holy Spirit (13:52), and Paul later returned to these regions to encourage the new disciples (14:22).

14:1–7. At Iconium. Instead of continuing their journey north, Paul and Barnabas branched off southeast, toward Derbe. They focused their efforts of evangelization primarily on cities that had larger concentrations of people and synagogues where they could meet. At Iconium they were exceptionally successful, and a great multitude of Jews and Greeks became believers (v. 1). However, some unbelieving Jews stirred the Gentile population against the new converts (v. 2). Luke uses the Greek term *apeitheō*, referring to the disobedient. Faith or its lack expresses itself in obedience or disobedience (Rom. 1:5; Heb. 3:18–19; 1 Pet. 2:7–9). In spite of opposition, Paul and Barnabas continued preaching and encouraging the new believers, instructing them in the practical aspects of the Christian faith. According to Luke, evangelism was accompanied by the testimony of Jesus through signs and wonders and in many other ways (Acts 14:3).

The opponents sowed discord among the population. The city was divided between the Jews and the apostles (v. 4). Luke uses the term "apostle" (only Acts 14:4 and 14) in the sense of being sent and not as a title he reserved for the Twelve (1:2, 6; 15:2; 16:4). The intention of all of the Jewish and Gentile opposition was to stone Paul and Barnabas, though this was a Jewish punishment never practiced among Greeks or Romans. Becoming aware of the plot against them, the two decided to leave but would return later (see 14:21–22).

14:8–20. Idolatry at Lystra. Paul and Barnabas were now in unchartered territory. The fact that they preached the gospel directly to the people in the open suggests that Lystra may not have had a synagogue. Sitting in the crowd was a paralytic who was deeply impressed by Paul's words of grace (v. 9). Luke provides three characteristics of this man: he was sitting, he was lame, and he had never walked (v. 8). Like Peter by the gate called Beautiful (3:2–4), Paul stared at the man (14:9), saw his faith, and with a loud voice ordered him to get up (v. 10). The man jumped to his feet and began to walk (see also 3:8). Although Paul had also performed other miracles (14:3), Luke reported this particular one likely because of its similarity to Peter's healing of the lame man in Jerusalem. It shows that God bestows His graces equally on Gentiles and Jews. In a sense this man represents all the Gentiles of the world. They lack hope because they are without God (Eph. 2:12), but some of them are willing to listen to the word of salvation.

In a dialect that the evangelists did not understand (Lycaonian), the crowd shouted that these two men were gods (Acts 14:11). Barnabas was likened to Zeus, the Greek name for the Roman god Jupiter, the father of all the gods of mythology. This may well be because Barnabas was advanced in years and looked dignified. Paul was likened to Hermes, the Greek name for the Roman god Mercury, the deity of eloquence believed to be the messenger of the gods. The notion that the gods could visit humans was common among pagans. The priests of Zeus, whose temple was outside of the town, prepared oxen and garlands to offer sacrifices. When Paul and Barnabas learned about the people's intentions, they tore their clothes in mourning and rushed toward the crowd to stop them.

The brief sermon that followed gives us an insight into Paul's message to the Gentiles. Instead of using the history of Israel or biblical references, this time he began with common beliefs shared by his listeners (cf. 1 Cor. 9:19–23). He compared the living God with their inanimate idols that were unable to move without being transported (cf. Is. 44:13–19). The very materials used to make these pagan images were the product of God's creation (Acts 14:15). The language of this verse is reminiscent of the Sabbath commandment (Ex. 20:11). Paul told them that the span of time that preceded the coming of Jesus was a time of divine forbearance (Acts 14:16; cf. Rom. 3:25; 9:22). It was not a period of silence, for God was still speaking to them through nature, lovingly bestowing on them all kinds of blessings (Acts 14:17; cf. Matt. 5:45). The reference to rain and seasons is particularly eloquent, considering that in this arid region of scarce rainfalls one must dig deep wells to have water.

Meanwhile, unbelieving Jews arrived from Pisidian Antioch and Iconium, and taking advantage of the crowd's disappointment, persuaded the multitude to stone Paul (Acts 14:19); Barnabas was spared, likely because he was not the one speaking before the crowds. The way the scene is described suggests a spontaneous act of mob violence—Paul was stoned within the city limits. Believing he was dead, they dragged Paul's badly beaten body out of the city. Removing Paul's body away from the scene of the crime may have been an attempt by his persecutors to avoid having any charges made against them (cf. Acts 19:40). Paul kept a painful memory of this occurrence (2 Cor. 11:25; 2 Tim. 3:11). This incident, however, did not discouraged the disciples, who gathered around Paul (Acts 14:20). Were they trying to protect him from further abuse, paying him their last respects, or tending to his wounds? The text does not say. Whatever the case, God worked a miracle. Paul stood up, gathered his energy, and returned to the city. Due to the difficult situation there, Paul and Barnabas left the next day for Derbe, where they planned to continue to proclaim the gospel of salvation through Christ. This trip even under the best of circumstances would have taken several days.

14:21–28. Strengthening the Converts. Paul and Barnabas arrived at Derbe, and there they made many disciples. After this successful mission they decided to return to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, where they had encountered so many challenges. By their living example they were able to strengthen and encourage the disciples and urged them to remain firm in the faith (v. 22).

The new communities they had established needed to be organized. Elders were appointed in every church (v. 23). The verb *cheirotoneō* ("to appoint") literally means "to stretch out the hand to." However, the structure of the sentence gives the impression that Paul and Barnabas appointed the elders (cf. Titus 1:5). Whatever mode of selection may have been used, it was under the initiative of Paul that elders were chosen to administer the affairs of the church according to a model similar to that of the Jewish communities (cf. Num. 11:16). These locally elected elders were responsible for local work and not the work of the disciples (Acts 14:23). Through prayer and fasting the new leaders were commended or entrusted to the protection of the Lord. There is no indication that the laying on of hands was part of the ceremony at this early stage of the history of the church.

Instead of choosing the shortest route through Tarsus, the apostles preferred to take a rather wide detour through Pisidia and Pamphylia before boarding a boat that would take them to Antioch in Syria, where their headquarters was located. Although they experienced many difficulties along the way, their trip was a success. They made many disciples and organized at least seven churches (Salamis, Paphos, Perga, Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe). By the grace of God, they completed their mission (14:26). On returning to Antioch in Syria, Paul and Barnabas reported their activities directly to the whole church (v. 27). The report was not about what they had accomplished but about what God had accomplished through them and how He opened the door (an expression Paul liked; cf. 1 Cor. 16:9; 2 Cor. 2:12; Col. 4:3) of faith to the Gentiles. The report clarifies that God was the primary force in the mission of the church.

15:1–35

The Council of Jerusalem and the Gentiles

The joy Paul and Barnabas's report brought was quickly dampened by the attitude of some Jewish Christians who insisted that all male Gentile converts had to be circumcised in order to become genuine Christians. The church in

Syrian Antioch brought the matter before the church in Jerusalem. In order to reach a decision, the elders and the apostles heard the views and opinions of different factions, such as the Jewish Christians and Paul and Barnabas. Rather than quickly proceeding to a vote that might have divided the community, James suggested an arrangement that would be acceptable to both Jews and Gentiles.

15:1–5. Conflict over Circumcision. A long time had already elapsed since the missionaries had returned from their journey (14:28). At first, information regarding the conversion of Gentiles was heard by the church in Antioch without any opposition. But apparently some individuals from Judea, without any official mandate (15:24), began to create a disturbance. These were probably the same Judean Christians Paul identifies in Galatians 2:12 as having come "from James" (see Galatians: Introduction). As sometimes happens, instead of spreading the gospel to the world, they chose to focus their actions on the believing community by sharing with the believers, those who were converted Gentiles, their own personal views. In their opinion, believing in Jesus and receiving His grace was not enough to be saved. They were persuaded that the new male converts should be circumcised according to the Mosaic custom. These Judeans reasonably believed that salvation was for the people of Israel and that in order for converted male Gentiles to be saved they had to be circumcised and become Jews.

The topic was very divisive. There was significant *stasis*—"disagreement," "dispute," "dissension," "uproar" (cf. Acts 19:40; 23:27). Assuming that Galatians was written shortly before the Jerusalem Council (see Galatians: Introduction), the trouble caused by these Judean Christians had influenced Peter, who was visiting in Antioch at the time, along with Barnabas and other local Jewish believers to avoid eating with the uncircumcised Gentile converts (Gal. 2:11–13). Recognizing the hypocrisy of such behavior—and fearing it might destroy the unity of the church—Paul publically confronted the situation (Gal. 2:14–21). In an attempt to resolve the problem, the church of Antioch sent their own delegation with Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem to discuss the matter with the leaders. The journey was made on foot, allowing them time to speak to the churches along the way about the conversion of Gentiles. The result was rejoicing among believers, particularly in the churches in Phoenicia and Samaria, where the Gentile population was dominant.

On arriving in Jerusalem, the delegation from Antioch was welcomed by the three groups involved in the council (Acts 15:4): the church (the followers of Jesus in Jerusalem, mostly Jewish believers); the apostles (the surviving members of the Twelve who were present in Jerusalem); and the elders (the leaders of the Jerusalem church, including James, the brother of Jesus). After they were welcomed, Paul and Barnabas recounted what God had done through them among the Gentiles but did not say anything about circumcision (Acts 15:4).

Circumcision

The question of circumcision arose justifiably. The practice had been commanded to Abraham (Acts 7:8) as a symbol of his acceptance of God's covenant (Gen. 17:10–11). As such, it was meant to be the visible, personal sign of the inner faith that was to characterize the covenant relationship between God and Abraham (and to continue with his descendants). When Israel was later formally organized as a nation at Mount Sinai, God incorporated circumcision into the Mosaic law (Lev. 12:3). It was considered not only a sign linked to the covenant but also a sign of belonging to God's people Israel. Accordingly, foreigners who wanted to participate in the Passover, Israel's celebration of their deliverance from Egyptian slavery, had to first be circumcised and become Israelites (Ex. 12:48).

Unfortunately, over time they largely lost sight of the symbolic meaning of circumcision—the experience Scripture calls the circumcision of the heart (Deut. 10:16; 30:6; Jer. 4:4). And without the inner experience of the heart, the physical act of circumcision had no spiritual significance (Jer. 9:25). It became nothing more than an outward mark of national identity. By insisting that male Gentile converts could not become genuine Christians until they were first circumcised, Jewish believers were inadvertently teaching that outward human behavior was what really mattered most—the very opposite of the original meaning of circumcision. Guided by the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 1:8–9), the church recognized that this was nothing short of legalism. Gentiles did not need to become Jewish to become Christian—what mattered most was the condition of the heart (Matt. 15:11).

Some of the Jewish believers, however, were not pleased with the report that was given. It is important to remember that a number of Jewish believers, including former religious leaders, had received Jesus as their Lord and Savior and joined the church (6:7). Among them were Pharisees who continued to be concerned with purity and loyalty to tradition. It was this group of Pharisaic Jewish Christians who spearheaded the opposition to Paul. They rose up in protest, insisting that if the Gentile converts wanted to be recognized as genuine Christians, they had to be circumcised and to keep the law of Moses (15:5). In his letter to the Galatians, Paul refers to these troublemakers as false brothers and sisters (Gal. 2:4).

15:6–21. The Council of Jerusalem. The apostles did not take on themselves the authority to make unilateral decisions. They met with the elders to discuss issues (v. 6). The questions raised in this case were important ones: How are Gentiles saved? What is the content of the gospel that should be preached to them? Peter opened the debate not with a reference to his apostolic authority but as a witness of the Lord. His speech was obviously very important because James quoted from its contents to close debate (15:14).

For Peter the conversion of Cornelius was not to be considered an exceptional case. Indeed, it was to be a model of the basic knowledge God wants all Gentiles to receive. The outline of his speech was very telling. Peter began by qualifying his intervention. He was siding with Paul and Barnabas because like them (chaps. 9 and 13), he was called by God to take the gospel to the Gentiles. In a tense atmosphere (15:7), Peter built his arguments in a chiastic order:

- **A** God gave the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles as He did to us all (v. 8).
  - **B** God cleansed their hearts (v. 9).
    - **C** One should never oppose God (v. 10a).
  - **B′** Ritual cleansing characterized as an unbearable yoke (v. 10b).
- **A′** Grace is offered to the Gentiles as God offers it to us (v. 11).

It should also be noted that as far as Peter was concerned, the mission was not to be under the total control of humans; it was God's mission. God is the One who decided (v. 7), who knows, who gives (v. 8), and who makes no distinctions between persons and purifies the hearts of believers (v. 9). Thus, it would be a mistake for the church to test God (v. 10) by failing to accept His clearly expressed will. There is only one approach to salvation: the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ (v. 11). The cleansing needed is that of the heart (v. 9), and it is not the result of submission to laws related to ritual impurity (v. 10). God makes no distinction between Jews and Gentiles, and He showed this by bestowing His Spirit and salvation on all people (vv. 8–9, 11; cf. Gal. 3:25–29).

Peter's speech was so persuasive that the debaters were silenced (Acts 15:12), making it possible for Barnabas and Paul to testify. They reported not on what they accomplished but on what God accomplished through them, thus falling in line with Peter's approach. What they reported confirmed what Peter had said. The meeting could have ended right then and there with a letter confirming the declarations of Peter. But James chose to introduce guidelines that would facilitate relationships between Jewish Christians and Gentiles.

James, a brother of Jesus (Matt. 13:55) and probably the highest-ranking member of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 12:17; 21:18), closed the debate. He was known as a conservative (Gal. 2:12), which provided greater credence to his support (Gal. 2:9). He took advantage of the fact that Barnabas's and Paul's reports did not raise new disputes to be addressed in the meeting (Acts 15:13–15). James began by commenting on Peter's speech and casting new light on its content. He clearly understood that God had *epeskepsato*—"visited" or "intervened on behalf of" the Gentiles in order to have a people for His name from among them (v. 14). As far as the Jews were concerned, the people of Israel were God's only people. Therefore, there were only two possibilities: either the converted Gentiles were to be a people apart from the Jews or they were to be fully integrated into the people of God. James chose the latter.

James not only provided rational arguments but he also relied on the words of the prophets (v. 15). The texts of the Minor Prophets were written on a single scroll, which may explain the plural reference to the prophets in the speech by James. The Hebrew text of Amos 9:11–12 predicts Israel's enemies (represented here by

Edom) being possessed by Israel, and reference is made to the remnant from Edom and from the nations called by God's name (cf. Acts 15:14, 17). Then the coming of the Messiah was announced: He would be the One who fulfilled the promises of the covenant made with David (2 Sam. 7:11–16). James's quotation from the Greek version of the OT (the Septuagint) amplifies the Hebrew text, reinforcing this comprehensive promise concerning a faithful remnant coming out of the Gentiles and becoming part of God's people (cf. Acts 15:14).

In considering what other issues might hinder the fellowship of Jewish and Gentile believers, James formulated a decision (*krinō*—"I judge" or "I have decided") involving four guidelines. This decision is mentioned three times in Acts (15:20, 29; 21:25). Drawing on the laws in Leviticus 17 and 18 that addressed the behavior of foreigners living among Israel, the ruling applies to Gentiles turning to God by accepting the new way of life established by God Himself.

The first guideline deals with all forms of corruption related to idols (Acts 15:20) and anything sacrificed to idols (v. 29; 21:25; cf. Lev. 17:3–9). New converts, of course, would not be expected to abandon family ties, friendships, or relationships with neighbors and other residents. The challenge was, however, that those ties often involved invitations to share meals prepared and served in pagan temples. Jews, however, did not participate in such meals because in their eyes doing so would violate the second commandment (Ex. 20:4–6; Deut. 5:8–10; cf. Rom. 2:22). To preserve the unity and fellowship of the church in a mixed community, James desired that the new Gentile converts be sensitive to the concerns of the Jewish believers and avoid participating in any behavior that might be associated with pagan idolatry. The threat this sort of issue posed to the fellowship of the church can be seen in the sharp divisions that arose among believers in Corinth more than a decade later over whether it was appropriate to eat food offered to idols (1 Cor. 8:1—11:1).

The second guideline prohibits sexual immorality. The Greek word *porneia* is broad enough to include all illicit sexual relations (1 Cor. 5:1) mentioned in Leviticus 18 and 20:10–21. Jesus also mentioned the sixth commandment (Matt. 5:27–32; 19:18) on *moicheia* (adultery; Ex. 20:14; Deut. 5:18). The Epistle to the Hebrews (Heb. 13:4) calls for the respect of marriage and prohibits *porneia* and *moicheia*.

The third guideline involves things "strangled," "smothered," or "choked." It is difficult to interpret this prohibition because it is virtually impossible to choke or strangle a sheep, let alone an ox. Some commentators have suggested that it refers to the rare cases of animals killed while hunting (Lev. 17:13–14) or accidentally (Lev. 17:15; Deut. 14:21). More generally, it is believed that this unusual statement refers to eating meat from animals whose blood was deliberately prevented from draining out properly at the throat during slaughtering. Such a practice, if not avoided, again would have prevented Gentile and Jewish believers from enjoying table fellowship together.

The fourth guideline is a prohibition against the consumption of blood, which was a law from the time of Noah (Gen. 9:4). It is also in Leviticus (Lev. 7:27; 17:10–14) and is related to respect for life (Gen. 9:5–6). Greek orgiastic cults involved the consumption of newly slaughtered animals' warm blood.

James concluded with a reference to the instruction given in the synagogues during the Sabbath (Acts 15:21). New Gentile converts could learn much by attending them (see below, "The Council of Jerusalem and the Decalogue").

The Council of Jerusalem and the Decalogue

The Decalogue is not explicitly mentioned in Acts 15 as a requirement for Gentile converts. But this does not mean that the council rejected it as a norm for the Christian life. There is enough in the apostolic decree to indicate the opposite. We should keep in mind the context of the passage and the significance of the content of the decree.

1. Understanding the Problem. The problem faced by the church is clearly expressed at the beginning of Acts 15. Some Christian Jews were telling Gentile converts that unless they underwent circumcision according to the instruction given to Moses, they were precluded from salvation (v. 1). Circumcision was the ritual of entrance into the Israelite faith (Ex. 12:48–49). It would appear, then, that the idea of circumcision being necessary for salvation reveals more than just a legalistic mentality. It assumes the biblical truth of salvation coming through the Jews (cf. Rom. 9:4–5) and that in order to experience salvation one needs to become part of God's people, the Jews. But the argument was that a Gentile needed first to become a Jew in order to benefit from the salvation that Christ brought to all. Paul was strictly opposed to this idea.

But the text says a little more. Some Jewish believers expected Gentiles to be circumcised and to obey the law of Moses (Acts 15:5). It could be that, according to them, Gentiles would have been keeping the law of Moses by being circumcised, but they seem to have had something else in mind. Peter suggested that the problem the council was facing included the laws of ritual uncleanliness. Speaking of the Gentiles, he said that God made no distinction between them and the Jewish believers, for in both cases God purified their hearts by faith (15:9). In other words, God did for Jews and Gentiles what the ritual laws could not do: He purified their hearts (cf. Acts 10:15; 11:9). Therefore, Gentiles did not need to follow the laws of ritual impurity.

2. Understanding the Decree. The decree established that circumcision was not to be required from Gentiles converts in order for them to become Christians, meaning that they did not need to become Jews in order to be saved. The truth of the statement made by Peter was assumed by all: all believers, both Jew and Gentile, are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ (15:11). Salvation reaches both groups the same way: through Jesus.

The decree itself is based on Leviticus 17–18 establishing four expected aspects of abstinence for the Gentile Christians (Acts 15:29). First, they were to abstain from things polluted by idols (Lev. 17:3–9); second, from sexual immorality (Lev. 18:1–30); third, from what had been strangled (Lev. 17:15–16); and fourth, from blood (Lev. 17:10–14). We are dealing here with three closely related aspects of the Christian life. The first one is basically a statement against idolatry and is a reaffirmation of the first commandment of the Decalogue. This suggests that the Ten Commandments were not being set aside. The second one is about moral purity and is based on the seventh commandment, but it includes all kinds of sexual immorality. The last two are related to the health laws found in the OT (Lev. 11). They forbid the consumption of blood by drinking it or by eating the flesh of animals whose blood was not drained out. These stipulations reaffirmed the validity of the health laws found in the Bible by assuming that the flesh of the animals mentioned here is that of clean animals. The decree was promoting the spiritual, moral, and physical well-being of Gentiles believers, making it easier for them to relate to Jewish Christians.

3. Understanding the Law. Based on our previous comments, it could be stated that the decree not only assumed the validity of the moral law of God but also reaffirmed its value in the life of Gentiles Christians. This is not new in Acts. According to Acts, many Gentiles attended the synagogue during the Sabbath and kept the law, but they had not formally become Jews (e.g., the God-fearers; Acts 17:4, 17). When many of them became Christians, they were already keeping the Sabbath. It may be that Acts 15:21 is pointing to the practice of Christians, both Jews and Gentiles, of every Sabbath attending the synagogue where they were instructed about the moral and religious aspects of the law of God. Circumcision, as part of the ritual law, was not imposed on Gentiles.

15:22–29. The Jerusalem Decree. The church not only welcomed the messengers (15:4) but also actively participated in the decision-making process (v. 22). It supported the conclusions of the apostles and elders. Subsequently, representatives of the Jerusalem church were appointed to accompany Paul and Barnabas back to Antioch to report the decision reached. We know nothing about the identity of Judas, though he must have been a prominent person since he is mentioned first. Silas would become Paul's traveling companion (15:40; 17:4); Silvanus (2 Cor. 1:19; 1 Thess. 1:1; 1 Pet. 5:12) is the Latin form of his Aramaic name. Both men were prophets (Acts 15:32). They were made responsible for bringing the letter and commenting on its contents (v. 27). The letter was addressed to several churches confronting the issue of circumcision: Syrian Antioch and those of the regions of Syria and Cilicia, the area where Paul was born

(v. 23). The church poured out a great deal of affection and esteem on Barnabas and Paul (vv. 25–26), thus corroborating their teachings and ministry. The council not only quoted Scripture but also interpreted its teachings under the guidance of the Spirit (v. 28)—a Spirit of grace and mercy. Though necessary, the instructions provided by the Council of Jerusalem were not considered conditions for salvation. Grace had not been replaced by a set of laws. These guidelines were to indicate how to *do well* in the Christian life (v. 29).

15:30–35. Continuing Ministry in Syria. On returning to Antioch in Syria, the envoys gave a report to the whole church. The exposition of the instructions found in the letter was received with joy because of its positive content (v. 31). Now Gentiles were recognized as genuine members of God's people without having to be subjected to circumcision or other rules and rituals. Judas and Silas felt the need to stay a little longer to encourage the believers and to nurture the unity achieved by the decision of the Council of Jerusalem. Some manuscripts include the further comment that Silas eventually chose to remain in Antioch rather than to return to Jerusalem (v. 34), while others do not have this information. Accordingly, some translations omit v. 34, as supported by the best textual evidence, while others mention it in a footnote or include it in the passage. The spirit of brotherhood and cordiality shown by the Jerusalem church revived the spirit of evangelism in which Paul and Barnabas participated along with many others. But once again, we see how divisions in the church can impede the fulfillment of God's mission.

15:36—18:22

THE SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY

Paul and Barnabas chose to separate from each other. With Silas as a new traveling companion, Paul headed north through Tarsus, revisiting the communities organized in southern Galatia during his earlier trip. After Timothy joined them in Lystra, they traveled to Troas before crossing the Aegean Sea into Macedonia and founding churches in Philippi and Thessalonica. Due to opposition, they eventually journeyed to Athens and Corinth. Paul remained one and a half years in Corinth. Eager to return to Syria, Paul set sail for Ephesus, where he remained three months, before finally reaching Antioch via Caesarea. During this journey of about three years (A.D. 49–52), Paul traveled roughly 2,800 miles (4,506 km) and wrote at least two letters: 1 and 2 Thessalonians.

15:36—16:40

From Asia Minor to Macedonia

An emotional disagreement concerning Mark resulted in Paul and Barnabas going their separate ways. Barnabas and Mark returned to Cyprus, while Paul and Silas traveled to the new churches established in southern Galatia before finally crossing over to Macedonia. While the Lord blessed his efforts in Thessalonica, Paul also suffered much because of the misconduct of a young girl.

15:36–41. Division over John Mark. Paul cared a great deal for the churches left behind in Pamphylia and southern Galatia. He was anxious to reconnect with his converts (Gal. 4:20; Phil. 1:8). After some time in Antioch (Acts 15:39), he suggested to Barnabas that they revisit the churches to evaluate how they were doing. Desiring to give his cousin John Mark (Col. 4:10) another chance, Barnabas was intent on taking him along again. Paul, however, did not agree. He did not want an unstable young man who had previously abandoned them (Acts 13:13) to go along. The disagreement between the two men became so sharp that they chose to go their separate ways. At some later time, however, Paul reconciled with both Barnabas and Mark—practicing in his own life the gospel message of forgiveness and reconciliation (cf. 1 Cor. 9:6; 2 Cor. 5:16–20; Col. 4:10)—and considered Mark a valuable collaborator (2 Tim. 4:11; Philem. 24). Barnabas returned to Cyprus, his island of origin, and Paul went back to the province of Cilicia, where Tarsus, his hometown, was located (Acts 21:39). Paul took with him Silas, who, being from Jerusalem, would prove to be of greater support in future disputes over the question of circumcision.

16:1–5. Timothy Joins Paul and Silas. Traveling once again, on foot rather than by boat, Paul and Silas went through Tarsus before reaching Derbe and Lystra, the city where he had been stoned three or four years earlier. Paul's courage in returning to Lystra was rewarded, for during his time there he became highly impressed with a young man named Timothy. Along with his grandmother and mother, Timothy had likely been baptized in connection to Paul's earlier visit to the city. Although his father was a Greek, Timothy was considered to be a Jew because his mother was Jewish. Apparently due to his father's opposition, Timothy was not circumcised as an infant. His mother Eunice and grandmother Lois (2 Tim. 1:5), however, made sure he was instructed in the knowledge of the Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:15). After his baptism, Timothy earned a positive reputation among the believers for his ministry in Lystra and Iconium. Recognizing much promise in the young man, Paul invited him to join his missionary team (Acts 16:3). Timothy accepted the invitation. It is perhaps at this time that Paul and the local church leaders publically recognized the Holy Spirit's calling of Timothy to the gospel ministry by laying their hands on him (1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6). Under Paul's guidance, Timothy became not only a "minister of God" (1 Thess. 3:2) and a valued coworker (Rom. 16:21; Phil. 1:1) but also Paul's most beloved colleague and spiritual son (1 Cor. 4:17; Phil. 2:19–20; 1 Tim. 1:2).

Since Timothy was considered to be Jewish, his lack of circumcision posed a problem to his witness to his fellow Jews. To facilitate his own testimony among Jews and that of Timothy, Paul circumcised him (Acts 16:3). Though Paul was against the idea that circumcision was necessary, he wanted to be a servant to all and to win as many people as possible (1 Cor. 9:19–23). To remove all confusion regarding circumcision, Luke mentioned that Paul and Silas made it widely known in the various cities that the Jerusalem decree no longer required circumcision for converted Gentiles, a recommendation that could have astounded the Jewish converts. Thus, with all ambiguity resolved and obstacles removed, the church continued to grow spiritually and numerically, as it did in Antioch of Syria.

16:6–10. The Macedonian Call. Paul probably intended to continue his journey toward Ephesus, but the Holy Spirit was in control of the mission of the church and did not allow it. Perhaps this was a time during which Paul was afflicted by a painful eye disease (Gal. 4:13–14) or a chronic condition he never overcame (2 Cor. 12:7–8). This may explain why at this time Luke, a physician, joined the team to provide the needed support (notice the use of "we" and "us" in Acts 16:10). It appears that Luke was converted before Paul arrived in Troas because he had already been involved in the preaching of the gospel in that city (v. 10).

Prevented from going east into the province of Asia Minor or north to Bithynia and the Black Sea, Paul traveled northwest to the city of Troas. While he was there, Paul received a vision in which he saw a man calling (*parakaleō*—"to urge," "to beg," or "to request") him to come to Macedonia (v. 9). This call to Macedonia was significant in relation not only to the expansion of Paul's ministry into Europe but also to the expansion of Christian missions around the world. Through the centuries, this story has led many believers to leave the comforts of home and to face, as did Paul, the dangers of proclaiming the gospel in remote mission fields.

16:11–15. Lydia Baptized at Philippi. Responding to the vision, the missionaries boarded a vessel bound to reach Macedonia as quickly as possible. They probably concluded that the favorable winds were a sign of God's providence. In two and a half days they covered a distance that later on, when traveling in the opposite direction, would take five days (20:6). They disembarked in a seaport roughly ten miles (16 km) from Philippi, which they would have had to travel on foot. Philippi was a Roman colony with 5,000 to 10,000 inhabitants (16:12). The call from the Macedonian might have suggested that they were called to Philippi, thus the team remained a few days in the city (v. 12). However, it was not a man but a woman who ended up welcoming them.

On the Sabbath they left the city in search of a place where they could pray (v. 13). Although the Greek term *proseuchē* ("place of prayer") can refer to a synagogue building, it is unlikely that Luke refers to that. If he had, one would expect him to have simply called it a synagogue (*synagōgē*), since that is what he does elsewhere in Acts (cf. 6:9; 9:2; 17:1, 10, 19). The fact it is not called a synagogue suggests there was not a significant Jewish presence in Philippi to establish one—not a surprising fact, since Philippi was populated with retired Roman soldiers. When a synagogue was not available, Jews often were known to gather together for prayer and worship outside the walls of a city near a riverbank. Access to water made it easy for Jews to carry out ceremonial washings (cf. Lev. 18:19). This appears to have been the case in Philippi.

When Paul and his companions found the place, there were only women present. Among them was Lydia, the head of a high-fashion trading company specialized in the extraction of purple from a certain shell or madder root used to color exquisite fabrics. Lydia was from Thyatira, a city where a guild of fabric dyers using purple had attained a great reputation. She probably owned a retail shop in Philippi.

Lydia was a God-fearing Gentile who was well acquainted with Judaism. Paul did not deliver a sermon but simply talked with the women. Lydia listened attentively, and God opened her heart (Acts 16:14).

As a result of hearing the gospel, Lydia and her household were baptized. Once baptized, she put what she had at the service of the servants of the Lord by demonstrating her hospitality (see Phil. 2:25; 4:10). In fact, Lydia had to firmly persuade Paul to accept her hospitality (*parabiazomai*, "to strongly urge," "press"; Acts 16:15).

16:16–24. Paul and Silas Imprisoned. Until this point Paul had largely had to endure the opposition of Jews who opposed his testimony. At this point in his ministry, however, he had to endure the rejection of Gentiles. As Paul and his coworkers were on their way to worship outside of the city, they encountered a slave girl possessed by a *pneuma pythōv* ("a spirit, namely, a Python," or "a Pythonian spirit). The term *pythōv* refers to a soothsaying spirit originally conceived of as a snake called Python, which Apollo killed near Delphi. It was believed that this spirit was what enabled the priestesses at Delphi, who were called *Pythiai*, to foretell the future. The slave girl in Philippi claimed to have such supernatural powers and used them to advise the superstitious people around her—and to enrich her owners. The Greek verb *manteuomai*, translated "fortune-telling" (v. 16), was used by the Greeks to designate prophets who had the ability to interpret unintelligible speeches of people who claimed to be speaking in unknown tongues. The Bible condemns such practices (Deut. 18:10; 1 Sam. 28:8; Ezek. 13:6).

The young slave girl stalked Paul and his companions, proclaiming that these men were the servants of the Most High God and were declaring the way of salvation. What she said was true, but it created confusion by suggesting that their teachings were in agreement with her own divination. Paul and his companions would have been perceived as mere clairvoyants, like her (cf. Mark 3:11; Luke 4:41). Paul did not want his ministry to be associated with this type of activity, but he patiently waited for several days, probably hoping to avoid the consequences of a conflict. Finally, he ordered the evil spirit in the name of Jesus to leave her, and immediately it came out of her. The exorcism of the demonic spirit brought an end to the girl's soothsaying abilities and also to the financial gains produced by it (Acts 16:19). The incident became a matter of conflict. We can surmise that her masters and those who profited from her services feared that Paul and his team would take over their business or at least damage their income. So they dragged them before the magistrate.

Three formal charges were brought against Paul and Silas: (1) They were Jews, who disregarded the gods of the city. (2) They were causing disturbances in the city—a serious charge, particularly in a Roman colony that prided itself on order. (3) They were disrespecting the teaching and customs of Rome, which was politically reprehensible—a serious charge in a Roman colony that was founded to mirror the values of Rome. After apparently tearing off the prisoners' clothes themselves, the judges ordered that Paul and Silas be publicly flogged and thrown in prison. Paul had a painful memory of the ordeal (1 Thess. 2:2). The jailer, who was responsible for prisoners at the cost of his life, was not satisfied with placing the two men in a dark dungeon, so he also had stocks placed on their feet. These were ill-fitting pieces of wood attached to the ankles to keep prisoners in a painfully uncomfortable position.

16:25–34. The Philippian Jailer Saved. While the jailer was sleeping, Paul and Silas were praying and singing to the Lord, unconcerned about their condition and relying on the Lord. In a place where commonly one would have heard screams, curses, and insults, hymns of praise were raised to God. The presence of God's servants transforms jails into cathedrals. In a sense, Paul and Silas were preaching through their loud prayers and hymns to the prisioners who were listening to them (v. 25).

Suddenly a massive earthquake shook the foundations of the prison, causing walls of stone to collapse, locked doors to open, and prison chains to be loosed. Miraculously all the prisoners were free but unharmed. Awakened by the earthquake, the jailer rushed out and found the doors of the prison wide open and immediately assumed that his prisoners had escaped. This was the worst thing that could happen to a Roman jailer; it was a total disgrace. He immediately decided that suicide was preferable to the shame of a public execution for allowing the prisoners to escape (v. 27; cf. 12:19). Recognizing what the jailer was about to do, Paul called out to him to not take his own life, for none of the prisoners had fled.

In the face of such a miracle, the Gentile jailer fell before Paul and Silas and then took them out, addressing them respectfully as "sirs" (16:30). He asked them what he should do to

be saved. He had been listening to the hymns and must have been impressed by the Spirit. Paul told him about the real Lord Jesus Christ and that salvation could be had by believing in Him (v. 31). During the rest of the night Paul shared the gospel with him and his household. After the jailer washed their wounds, he and all his family were baptized. In gratitude he invited the two men into his house and placed food on the table before them. The joy of salvation filled the heart of this new convert (cf. 8:39; 13:52).

16:35–40. Paul Refused to Depart Secretly. As the sun rose, the judges sent word that the two prisoners were to be released, and presumably to leave the city. Luke does not elaborate on the reasons for this turn of events. Did they know about Paul and Silas's noble attitude during the earthquake? Did they see the earthquake as a sign of the gods' displeasure? Or did they simply feel that the two men had been punished sufficiently for their offense? The jailer received the news with joy and enthusiastically released them (v. 36). But Paul did not want to leave secretly, perhaps to protect the new believers in Philippi. To the surprise of the jailer, Paul told him that both he and Silas were Roman citizens (v. 37). According to the Porcia law of 248 B.C., it was forbidden to flog a Roman citizen under penalty of permanently losing one's official post of duties, and, depending on the mood of the sovereign, the entire city could have been penalized. Paul wanted to press charges against the judges because they had shamed them by beating them publicly, they did not hear both sides of the incident, and they had condemned and illegally imprisoned two Roman citizens (22:25–28). This was enough for the magistrates to have been dismissed or to have been severely punished. One can understand why on hearing these charges they were not only regretful but also frightened (16:38).

Paul's demand that the magistrates appear personally at the prison to arrange for their release likely was driven not by a concern merely to vindicate his own name but also by a concern for the new believers in Philippi. He wanted to make sure that they did not have to live under the shadow and potential ridicule of being the followers of a man who was seen as some sort of a criminal. Before leaving the city as requested, Paul went to Lydia's home, where a house church was budding. He exhorted the group before leaving town with Silas. From this point forward Luke no longer made mention of himself ("us"). He evidently stayed there to encourage the new believers in Paul's absence. He does not appear again in Acts until Paul's return to Philippi some six years later (20:6). Lydia continued to support Paul's ministry, for she, with the church, often sent aid to provide for his needs (Phil. 4:15–16).

17:1—18:22

Paul Ministering in Greece

Paul had great success among fair-minded Jews and not much among the Greek philosophers. But the infamous city of Corinth would be a place where there were many people (18:10) ready to receive the gospel.

17:1–4. Preaching Christ in Thessalonica. Paul and Silas were traveling once again on the Via Egnatia, a Roman road that connected the Black Sea to the Adriatic across the Balkans. They were going to Thessalonica, the most important seaport in Macedonia, located about ninety miles (145 km) from Philippi. With a population between 40,000 to 65,000 inhabitants, Thessalonica was much larger that Philippi. They probably knew there was a large synagogue in that city. As a Sabbath keeper, and in accordance with his practice, Paul went to the synagogue. Since visitors were called on to talk, Paul took full advantage of the opportunity, and for three Sabbaths in a row, he made Jesus known to those who were attending. We can also assume that during the two weeks, he accepted the hospitality of some of the relatively wealthy female believers (v. 4).

We find a number of verbs that show the method used by Paul to teach Jews: (1) *Dialegomai* ("to reason," "to debate"), from which we get the word "dialogue" (v. 2). It is a method of learning based on the Greek diatribe in which a series of questions are raised in a search for an answer (cf. Rom. 3:27–31). (2) *Dianoigō*—"to open," "to explain." By opening the Scriptures, Paul interpreted the text to them (Acts 17:3; cf. Luke 24:32). (3) *Paratithēmi*—"to present," "place on the side," or "side by side," as food is placed on a table (cf. Acts 16:34; 1 Cor. 10:27), in this case carrying the connotation of "demonstrating" or "proving" (Acts 17:3). In his exposition Paul placed biblical texts side by side to interpret the Scriptures. Some of the Jews were persuaded, as well as many God-fearing, devout Greeks, and many women who were *prōtos*—"first," "preeminent," "prominent"—also followed Paul and Silas (Acts 17:4). This aroused the jealousy of the Jews.

17:5-9. Assault on Jason's House. The jealousy of the unbelieving Jews is to some extent understandable. Paul was very successful among the Jewish proselytes in the synagogue and quite successful in reaching out to the Greeks (1 Thess. 1:9)—more so than the Jewish preachers among the Gentiles (cf. Matt. 23:15). The love that emanated from Paul's person most certainly had a part to play with his success (1 Thess. 2:7-8).

Paul and Silas were staying with Jason (Acts 17:5), who appears to have been a Greek-speaking Jew, since that name was common among Jewish men who, like Paul, grew up outside of the Holy Land. He must have been a man of some means, since his home was large enough to serve as the house church for the believers as well as to host Paul and Silas. He may be the person identified in Romans 16:21 as a Jew, along with Sosipater, who may be Sospater from Berea (Acts 20:4).

Since Emperor Claudius had forbidden Jews from living in Rome, it was rather easy to denounce them as disruptive. Using Paul as a pawn, the Jews of Thessalonica managed to whitewash themselves in the eyes of the population. They gathered disruptive elements in the marketplace and incited them to attack Jason's house (Acts 17:5).

When they were unable to lay their hands on Paul and Silas, these ruffians decided to haul Jason and other believers before the local magistrates instead. When they arrived, they accused Jason of harboring dangerous men. They laid two accusations against Paul and Silas: They were itinerant troublemakers with a track record of causing problems in other cities, and they were guilty of sedition for claiming that Jesus, not Caesar, was King. Sufficiently alarmed by these charges, the magistrates banned Paul and Silas from their city and required Jason to pay some kind of fee (v. 9) to ensure the two men would not return (cf. 1 Thess. 2:17-18).

17:10-15. Ministering in Berea. Due to the problem in Thessalonica, Paul and Silas had to flee the city during the night. Luke clarified that they left not out of fear but on the request of the brethren (v. 10). Continuing on the Egnatian road, Paul and Silas arrived at Berea, where once again Paul showed his love for his fellow Jews. Despite the opposition they had just experienced, the two companions went to the synagogue. The fact is that the Bereans showed themselves fully capable of overcoming their prejudices to listen eagerly to the word. They initiated their discussion by looking first at what the Scriptures had to say (v. 11). (Luke uses the word *anakrinō*—"to search" or "examine"; it is a verb that applies to legal settings, often used in terms of interrogation.) The Bereans were not satisfied with just listening; they asked questions. They were so interested that they studied the Scriptures every day (v. 11). The success was commensurate with motivation. Numerous Jews and Greeks, both men and prominent women, were accepting the new faith (v. 12). Apparently, many women were attracted to the teaching done in the synagogues (13:50; 16:13; 17:4, 12). The framework of the law offered them guiding principles of life and a sense of increased security. While the Greco-Roman world was steeped in amoral and orgiastic cults, Judaism promoted proper sexual behavior (Ex. 22:16-20; Lev. 18, 20; Deut. 22:22-30) and highly valued the family.

News of the success of Paul and Silas quickly reached the ears of their opponents in Thessalonica, who decided to follow them and agitate the crowds as they had done before. The brethren decided to play it safe and placed Paul on the first ship bound for Athens, and some remained with him until his arrival. Silas and Timothy were less exposed and remained in Berea.

17:16-21. The Philosophers at Athens. Once in Athens, Paul went to the *agora*, the marketplace, where he could observe and learn. He saw a city full of idols and with statues erected in honor of countless heroes and all kinds of deities. The city had become an art gallery. Since he was raised in Tarsus, Paul was used to seeing idols in public places, but his devotion to the one and only God made this abundance of idols disturbing to him. He felt a strong need to discuss the matter with the Gentile worshipers and fellow Jews (v. 17).

Athens was a highly intellectual metropolis where Plato and Aristotle had taught, but the most popular philosophers at that time were the Stoics and Epicureans. The political, economic, and social turmoil of the time had paralyzed societal progress and divided people into fixed social classes, giving everyone the feeling that their fate was sealed. Everything good or bad was explained through *fate* or *providence*. Stoics and Epicureans had different understandings regarding destiny. The Stoics held that God was active and present in the material world as divine reason (*logos*), ordering everything according to providence. Happiness was found, therefore, in learning to live in harmony with

nature and letting go of emotions that resist our fate. Nothing existed beyond this material world. The Epicureans, however, believed that the cosmos was the result of an accident and that the gods were remote and did not interfere in this world. The best one could do was to try to find happiness through achieving an inner tranquility (*ataraxia*). This was done by learning to be content with simple things and in living moderately with friends. In short, these were ways of dealing with one's inevitable fate with as little pain and suffering as possible.

The attitude of the Epicureans and the Stoics gave Paul the chance to share the gospel with them (v. 18). Some disparaged Paul by referring to him as a *spermologos* (lit. "scavenger of seeds"), a term used to designate indigents who picked up scraps after the market closed but which in this context is a reference to a novice, an amateur "babbler" who picks up scraps of information from others. But Paul was able to spark their curiosity, and they took him to the Areopagus, where magistrates responsible for maintaining order and traditions congregated. Paul went from the synagogue (Judaism) to the center of Greek philosophy. The Areopagus was normally the place in the city where matters related to jurisdiction were debated. Discussions about foreign gods (v. 18) that challenged the legitimacy of national gods were forbidden.

17:22-34. Addressing the Areopagus. Standing in the midst of the assembly and in keeping with his customary approach (1 Cor. 9:19-22), Paul adapted his discourse to his audience; He did not use Scripture because its authority would not have been recognized by the Greeks. Luke provided a summary of the content of Paul's speech. The Athenians wanted to know this doctrine (Acts 17:19) so they could rationally examine it. They attentively listened without any objection before the reference to the resurrection. The introduction of the speech (v. 22) was appropriate and consistent with the rules of oratory. With relentless logic Paul made use of philosophical concepts and vocabulary to bring his listeners to a decision. Paul began with a common point of agreement: Athenians were religious. The Greek term *deisidaimōn* is applicable to both piety and superstition. The townspeople were careful to ensure the favor of the gods, living in constant fear of their anger and seeking to appease them. It is not surprising that they would have raised an altar to the unknown god. Paul felt free to make some comments about this most unusual phenomenon.

Playing with words, Paul took his listeners from the God they did not know (*agnōstos*) to the truth they did not know (*agnoeō*). He offered them a personal God, the Creator of the *kosmos*, the entire world (v. 24). Paul used logical reasoning as he developed his speech. The one God who created everything is logically the sovereign Lord of His creation and as Creator cannot be circumscribed to live in a sanctuary made by human hands. Paul was attempting to demonstrate that God is greater than the universe He made. Since God is the One who gives life, breath, and all things we need, He does not need anything from us (v. 25). On many of these points, the Epicureans probably would have agreed with Paul. But he was remarkably courageous to say all this near the Parthenon—a temple that was the pride of the Athenians. Paul was also criticizing the use of idols made by human hands to serve in some way as a dwelling of the gods.

The apostle used language that brought him very close to the idea of *fate* in an effort to connect with his audience. He argued that all humans have the same origin and that God is the One who determines the staging of nations in time and space (v. 26; see Gen. 1:28). The order of this world is in the hands of a generous God in whom we "live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). But Paul's real argument was that, with a common human ancestor and a God who created everything, humans have the same basic needs and are accountable to only this one God. He was now ready to conclude the speech. Having established that God made the world (v. 24), that He gives life generously to all (v. 25), that He determined appointed times and dwelling boundaries (v. 26), and that He allows Himself to be known (v. 27), Paul then concluded that God cannot be reduced to gold, silver, or stones, no matter how artfully they might be carved by industrious human hands (v. 29). Thus far the Epicureans and Stoics would have been able to approve of much of Paul's speech. But at this point he introduced a key Judeo-Christian component of faith that they would not accept: repentance. God is a personal God who can be offended by us and who calls us to repent (v. 30). This is, Paul implied, our common need based on the fact that God will judge every human being.

Paul introduced Jesus to this Greek audience in a unique way through the concept of God's universal judgment. Paul presented God as the Judge who would judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He had appointed and ordained (v. 31; see 10:42). At this point Paul introduced the topic of the resurrection. He argued that God had given proof that this Man had been appointed by God for this task by raising Him from the dead. This was the best evidence He had to offer to demonstrate God's continuing activity in human history, with the consequential need to listen to Him and His will. But Paul's audience rejected the message of the resurrection of Christ and with it their only hope.

Was Paul's message to the Athenians a success or a failure? This is a subject of debate. Dionysius, who was a member of the Areopagus council, was converted. So also was a woman by the name of Damaris. The mention of her name implies that she belonged to the higher echelons of society. Still others joined the group of converts. Considering that Jesus would have given His life to save even a single soul, it is easy to make the case that Paul's speech was a success (cf. Luke 15:7).

18:1–17. Ministering at Corinth. Paul was not persecuted in Athens, but he decided to leave the city and relocate in Corinth, about 45 miles (72 km) away (v. 1). Regarding his stay, which lasted a year and a half, Luke mentions only three episodes: the split from the synagogue (vv. 5–8); the vision from the Lord (vv. 9–11); and the Jewish charges against him (vv. 12–17). These three episodes are characterized by three significant speeches: Paul to the Jews (v. 6), the Lord to Paul (vv. 9–10), and Gallio to the Jews (vv. 13–15). Despite the disruptions brought forth by the Jews of Corinth, Paul exercised a long ministry in the city thanks to the Lord's protection and the goodwill of the civil authorities.

Corinth was a Roman colony, the capital city of the province of Achaia. Located on a narrow land bridge connecting mainland Greece with the Peloponnese Peninsula, Corinth was an important north-south crossroad for overland trade and east-west for maritime commerce. To increase its commerical advantage, a paved road (called the *Diolkos*) was built across the four and a half miles (7 km) separating the Gulf of Corinth from the Saronic Gulf. In order to allow cargo and small ships to be transferred from one port to the other, a paved road was built connecting the city's two harbors: Cenchrea in the east and Lechaeum in the west. This road made it possible to avoid the long and dangerous journey around the Peloponnese. A vibrant and colorful cosmopolitan population enlivened the city of Corinth. It was a commercial city par excellence, where countless slaves were busy working in workshops, in stores, and in transporting goods. Its population might have reached 200,000 people. On the heights of the Acropolis was the temple of Aphrodite, the goddess of love and beauty, which contributed to the city's licentious reputation.

It was in this Gentile city that Paul's ministry flourished. On arriving in Corinth, probably while in the synagogue, Paul met a Jewish couple named Aquila and Priscilla, who offered him accommodations in the city. Forced out of Rome on orders of Emperor Claudius, the couple had come to Corinth and set up their own tentmaking shop. It is likely when Paul met them they had already accepted the gospel. Aquila and Priscilla appear to have been affluent enough to own their own business. Later, in Rome they hosted church services in their home (Rom. 16:3–5), as they also did in Ephesus (Acts 18:24–26). They were sufficiently educated to enlighten Apollos (v. 26) in the faith. Paul valued their hospitality, and since they practiced the same trade, he worked with them in the manufacturing of tents. It was part of Jewish rabbis' training to learn a trade to ensure their financial security. Paul benefitted from that vocational skill throughout his ministry. Not only did it provide for this livelihood, but it was also the means through which he could meet and share the gospel with Gentiles (1 Cor. 9:13–18).

The eventual arrival of Silas and Timothy allowed Paul to give himself entirely to the work of evangelization (Acts 18:5–8). In a way, they brought him good news (1 Thess. 1:6–10) and financial support (cf. 2 Cor. 11:8–9; Phil. 4:15), though not enough for him to give up working with his hands (1 Cor. 9). Energized by these expressions of God's grace, Paul devoted himself entirely to sharing the message with the Jews, testifying to them that Jesus was the promised Messiah.

The Jewish opposition against Paul was unreserved. Luke uses the verb *antitassō*—"to oppose" or "to resist," and even "to prepare for battle." Although Paul based his teachings on Scripture, his listeners were denigrating Jesus to the point of blasphemy. Paul decided to end the debate (Acts 18:6). On the strength of a common Jewish saying, "Your blood be on your own heads" (v. 6; cf. 2 Sam. 1:16; 1 Kin. 2:32–33; Ezek. 33:4), Paul disclaimed any liability from the potential bad consequences that a rejection of God's grace would bring on them. When Paul announced that from that time on he would turn to the Gentiles, he was still hoping to touch the hearts of

his listeners (cf. Acts 13:46). He began to teach in a house near the synagogue where a Roman named Justus, who was a God-worshiping proselyte, was living (18:7). At that time Jews and Christians were worshiping the same God side by side but in separate buildings. The image was powerful: the gospel to the Gentiles was not in opposition to that of the synagogue; the two were very close to one another. There was indeed a temporary separation but not a divorce, because the first convert was Crispus, the chief of the synagogue, followed by his whole household (v. 8). Some Gentiles, slaves, and common people also accepted the message of salvation (1 Cor. 1:26). In addition to baptizing Crispus (1 Cor. 1:14), Paul also baptized Gaius, Stephanas and his family (1 Cor. 1:14–16), who were probably prominent people in the city (1 Cor. 16:17; cf. 1:11), and Erastus, who was the city treasurer (Rom. 16:23). Despite these successes Paul was deeply saddened by the disbelief of his fellow Jews (cf. Rom. 9:1–3), and perhaps by the depravity of the city.

Paul had good reasons to be fearful. The conversion of the chief of a synagogue as well as many Gentiles could create a violent reaction against him. It was at this moment that Paul had a vision from the Lord in which God encouraged him not to be afraid and promised him protection (Acts 18:9–11). This is how He had spoken with Moses (Ex. 3:12), Joshua (Josh. 1:9), and Jeremiah (Jer. 1:8). The prophet Isaiah proclaimed the same message to the people of God (Is. 41:8–11; 43:1–7). There are times when we feel weak and unable to deal with difficult situations in our personal lives and in the work of evangelism, but the grace of God is always available to sustain us (see 2 Cor. 12:9).

Paul was also encouraged when God said to him that He had many people in the city (Acts 18:10). The implications were that in a city as depraved as Corinth, there were people willing to listen to the gospel; there were Jews and Gentiles who did not yet know Jesus; Jews and Gentiles are one in Christ (cf. John 10:16); and the love of God for the lost is actively present before we come to love them. Encouraged by the vision, Paul continued there and taught them the word of God for a year and a half (Acts 18:11), during which time he also wrote 1 and 2 Thessalonians.

Once again Paul faced the opposition of the Jews, this time initiating a formal charge that forced him to appear before the governor (Acts 18:12–17). Honoring the official gods was a civic duty because these gods were believed to ensure the well-being of the city. The practice of certain religions was either authorized or prohibited by Roman law, and Paul was accused of introducing an unauthorized religion. But the proconsul Gallio wanted to determine first if Paul was really violating a public order. He found that Paul was not guilty of wrongdoing, premeditated offense, wicked crimes, deception, or misrepresentation. He was merely debating matters related to Jewish law. Gallio did not press charges, choosing instead to dismiss the case.

This incident is of particular importance because Gallio, who was the elder brother of the Stoic philosopher Seneca, happened to also be a friend of Emperor Claudius. As proconsul, he spoke on Rome's behalf. Depending on the outcome of this judgment, it might be determined if Christianity should be considered lawful or not. On hearing the charges, Gallio determined that Christian teachings were merely a dispute related to Jewish law, not Roman law. Since the Jewish religion was legally recognized under Roman law, Judeo-Christianity could not be considered subversive or disruptive of public order. From Gallio's point of view the debate was internal to Judaism.

At this point Sosthenes, who probably was the successor of Crispus or the leader of another synagogue, was attacked. It is not entirely clear who attacked him. The Greek literally says that they all seized and beat him (v. 17). Some interpret this to have been an anti-Semitic outburst by the Greeks, who beat him for wasting the court's time, others see it as the Jews attacking their own leader for the shame brought on them due to his inefficiency, and others see poor Sosthenes being clobbered by both Greeks and Jews. If this is the same Sosthenes mentioned in 1 Corinthians 1:1, then he too eventually became a Christian, perhaps influenced by the way his fellow Jews turned on him.

18:18–22. Paul's Return to Antioch. Luke notes Paul's trip to Jerusalem and Antioch to emphasize that his missionary journey continued uninterrupted. He begins by pointing out that once again Paul was undeterred by persecutions (v. 18). His desire was to continue his work in Syria, and to do so, he took a boat to cross the Aegean Sea. Before setting sail from Cenchrea, the western port of Corinth, Paul made a vow and shaved his head. Paul's vow might have simply been a prayer of rededication to God asking Him to bring him back safely to his own country (cf. Gen. 28:20). Perhaps he feared that the brethren in Jerusalem would not fully approve his ministry.

Regardless of the reason for his vow, while in Ephesus Paul took the time to meet with the Jews in the synagogue, where this time he was welcomed (Acts 18:20), as he had been in Berea (17:11). Needing to resume his trip, Paul declined the invitation to remain with them in the city, but Aquila and Priscilla, who had traveled with him, remained in Ephesus. Paul would later return during his third missionary journey and stay three years in Ephesus (20:31). After arriving in Caesarea, Paul went to Jerusalem, where he addressed the church before going to Antioch.

18:23—21:36

PAUL'S THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY

During this third missionary journey, Paul did not attempt to share the gospel in new territories. He strengthened the churches previously founded and for three years focused his efforts on Ephesus. Although it is not mentioned in Acts, it was during this trip that Paul wrote several letters that are included in the NT: 1 Corinthians from Ephesus, 2 Corinthians from Macedonia, and Romans from Corinth. In addition to summarizing the nature of Paul's ministry in Ephesus, Luke also provided a few entries of a travelogue highlighting significant events that occurred while Paul was passing through Troas and Miletus.

18:23—19:41

Paul at Ephesus

This section of Acts focuses on Paul's sojourn in Ephesus, and many consider this the pinnacle of his missionary work (Acts 19:18–20). The success of the gospel in Ephesus did not come without opposition. Paul faced strong hostility from both Jews (vv. 8–9) and Gentiles (vv. 23–40). In both cases, however, God turned the situation for the good. The power of the gospel to transform human lives was magnified (vv. 9–12, 18–20), and the Christian faith was exonerated of the charges brought against it (vv. 37–41). The Lord's name was glorified among the people (v. 17), while those who called on the name of the goddess Artemis were silenced (v. 36).

18:23–28. Ministry of Apollos. Antioch was not Paul's final destination but a stopover of undetermined duration. He eventually left there to lend a helping hand to suffering Christian communities in Galatia and Phrygia and to strengthen the faith of the disciples.

At this point Luke almost unexpectedly introduces the experience of a man named Apollos, who had also worked in the city of Ephesus (1 Cor. 3:6). In a sense, this story links the success of Paul in Ephesus and Asia Minor with the work of Jesus in the Holy Land. Indeed, the life of Jesus, His identity, and His ministry were not confined to the narrow boundaries of the land of Israel but were also spoken about in synagogues as far away as Alexandria and Rome (Acts 18:2). Apollos was an eloquent scholar; he was educated in Alexandria, which was one of the most prestigious schools of antiquity. It is also clear that he had mastered the Hebrew Scriptures. Although he had known only the baptism of John, he was able to teach accurately, from the Scriptures, that the Messiah was Jesus (18:24–25).

On arriving at Ephesus Apollos spoke boldly in the synagogue where Priscilla and Aquila were attending. One can admire the humility of such a scholar, who willingly accepted the instruction given by a woman, Priscilla (named first in the text; v. 26; cf. v. 2), and Aquila, her husband. Apollos had not yet heard about what had happened at Pentecost and the powerful outpouring of the Spirit. The positive manner in which Luke records Priscilla's involvement in teaching Apollos reveals not only his approval of her activity but also the variety of roles women played in the early church (cf. 1:14; 16:13–14; 17:4, 12, 34; 21:9).

Apollos left Ephesus to travel to Corinth with the support and recommendations of the brethren in Ephesus. There he helped people whom Paul had previously converted and was able to vigorously refute the Jews in their assemblies. Later, Paul would write that he planted, Apollos watered, and God caused the growth (1 Cor. 3:6). The relationship between Paul and Apollos was always fraternal and gracious. Although some believers expressed a preference for Apollos (Acts 1:12), Paul considered him with respect (4:6) and requested Titus to take good care of him (Titus 3:13).

19:1–7. The Baptism of the Holy Spirit at Ephesus. According to his promise to the Ephesians and fully assured that it was God's plan (18:21), Paul returned to Ephesus. There in Asia Minor, Paul encountered a group of disciples well versed in the message of John the Baptist and the baptism of repentance (19:3). They were living righteously as they anticipated the soon coming of the Messiah, just as John the Baptist had taught them (Luke 3:1–18). As regards the events of Pentecost, however, these disciples had not heard anything (Acts 19:2). Clearly, in Paul's view the baptism of repentance preached by John the Baptist was insufficient.

As far as Paul was concerned, a believer needed the gift of the Spirit. He was not satisfied with laying hands on disciples for the reception of the Holy Spirit; he felt compelled that they be baptized again. Christian baptism requires neophytes to place their faith in Jesus. The gift of the Holy Spirit is intricately linked to baptism. The same was the experience of Peter (2:38), who baptized Cornelius and his family although they had already received the Holy Spirit (10:47). Baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus (19:5) involves believing that salvation is obtained only by way of Jesus (3:19–20; 4:12; 16:31; 20:21). It is a matter not only of starting a new life (26:20) but also of participating by faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus (Rom. 6:3–4) and of making us members of the body of Christ, His church (Acts 2:41). The Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of Jesus (16:7), brings the presence of Christ into our hearts (Col. 1:27) and enables us to testify of our new faith (Acts 19:6).

19:8–12. Missionary Work of Paul. Paul attended the synagogue on the Sabbath as a devout Christian who was still keeping the Sabbath. Luke also specifies that Paul was able to *parrēsiazomai* ("to speak boldly" or "freely") and to *dialegomai* ("to argue" or "dialogue") persuasively (*peithō*, "to convince," or "persuade," which he did for three months; v. 8). In the synagogue, Paul spoke about the kingdom of God. The Jews had been expecting the restoration of the kingdom of Israel (1:6). Instead, Jesus had announced to them the kingdom of God (1:3). Given their hardness of heart, lack of faith, and public denigration of the message, Paul distanced himself from the Jews to protect the new disciples from their negative influence. There were indeed good reasons to fear that public disorder might force him to leave (1 Cor. 16:8–9). However, this time, as in Philippi (Acts 16:19–24), the menaces came from Gentiles at odds with the Christian message.

Paul decided to move his meeting place to the school of Tyrannus. This man might have been a Jewish teacher or possibly a well-known Greek philosopher who lived in the city. Interestingly enough, the so-called Western text inserts that Paul taught between 11:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. (the fifth to the tenth hour). If this is case, then Paul was making use of the building during off hours—the hot hours of the day, when many people took a siesta. While it is uncertain whether this manuscript tradition contains the original reading, the timing does make sense. In any case, Paul taught there for two years, to which we must add the previous three months and the timeline implied in v. 22. This gives us a ministry of three years in Ephesus (20:31).

The move away from the synagogue compelled the Christians to organize their Sabbath worship at the homes of believers. Paul preached in homes and in public places (20:20–21) with the support of collaborators such as Gaius and Aristarchus in Ephesus (19:29), Timothy and Erastus in the province of Asia Minor (19:22), and Epaphras in Colossae, Laodicea, and Hierapolis (Col. 1:7; 4:12–13). During these three years the gospel spread tremendously throughout Asia Minor. The miracles seen and experienced by the people in Ephesus testified to the fact that Paul's ministry was both supported and accredited by God. Some individuals even took handkerchiefs and aprons Paul used in the tent-making workshop to apply them to the sick or to those possessed with evil spirits so that God would free them from their ailments. This behavior illustrates that God can use different ways to manifest His healing power. In the superstitious setting of the Ephesians, this approach served initially to legitimize the work of the apostles among them. God saw fit to use material things in the performance of miracles in both the OT (i.e., Ex. 14:16; 17:6; Num. 21:9; 2 Kin. 2:14; 13:21) and the NT (Matt. 14:34–36; Luke 8:43–48; John 9:6–7). However, the miracle was the result not of placing the object on someone but of the power of God's grace, which was recognized by the people in Ephesus (Acts 19:17).

19:13–20. Failure of Simony. There were among the Jews itinerant exorcists (Matt. 12:27; Luke 9:49; 11:19) such as the sons of a Jew named Sceva, an unknown high priest whose name is not documented in the lists of high priests who served in Jerusalem. These exorcists were taking advantage of people's superstitious gullibility. Impressed by the success of Paul (Acts 19:12), these seven sons claimed the ability to exorcise demons in the name of Jesus. Having access to someone's name was thought to give a magician power over a person or power to use the name to do unusual things. But God does not allow Himself to be manipulated (Gen.

32:29; Ex. 3:13–14; Judg. 13:18), and to take His name in vain is a serious offense (Ex. 20:7; Lev. 24:16; Deut. 5:11; 28:58–59; Zech. 5:4). These exorcists realized the name of Jesus was powerful against demons. But by referring to him as "the Jesus whom Paul preaches," they were demonstrating that they did not know Jesus personally (Acts 19:13). The demons did not recognize their authority (v. 15). Like Simon Magus (8:18–19), these professional exorcists were trying to take personal advantage of the new faith. The disastrous outcome for the exorcists shows how dangerous it is to venture into the field of spiritualism (19:16). The people of Ephesus drew the right conclusions and responded with appropriate fear and honor to God (19:17).

The exorcists misused the name of the Lord (v. 13), with damaging results for them. But as a result of their experience, the name of the Lord was glorified (v. 17), and the word of the Lord continued to increase in influence and power (v. 20). Many confessed and renounced their use of magic and burned their books in a public and solemn act of devotion to Jesus. The value of the books represented about fifty thousand days of a worker's earnings (v. 19), or about 137 years of salary (Matt. 20:9–10). The significance of this burning ceremony is all the more notable because Ephesus was a city renowned for its books about magic, even though Roman law had banned their use. This experience in Ephesus was one of the highest points in Paul's ministry.

19:21–41. The Riot at Ephesus. The phrase *hōs de eplērōthē tauta*—"after all these things were fulfilled," "after all these things were finished," or "after all this happened" (v. 21)—suggests the conclusion of an important achievement. Paul could therefore consider turning the page and leaving Asia Minor for Rome (v. 21), thinking even about the possibility of going to Spain (Rom. 15:24).

Once again Paul wished to return to Jerusalem to tell the brethren about the progress made in the Lord's work and to strengthen the unity of the church. Before leaving he wanted to revisit the churches in Macedonia and Achaia to gather an offering of solidarity for the church in Jerusalem (2 Cor. 9:1–15; Gal. 2:10). While Paul chose to remain in Asia Minor a little longer, Timothy and Erastus were sent to Macedonia in advance to make preparations for Paul's arrival (Acts 19:22). At this time Paul confronted opposition not from the Jews but from a Gentile syndicate of silversmiths. Luke recounted the episode in three stages: a mobilization of tradesmen led by Demetrius (vv. 23–28), the uprising of the people (vv. 29–34), and the intervention of a city clerk (vv. 35–40).

It is clear that Paul's message challenged the worship of idols for being incompatible with the way of the Lord (v. 23). As far as Paul was concerned, believers were to radically break away from all idols (1 Cor. 5:9–11; 6:9–10; 10:20–22). The second commandment (Ex. 20:4–6) preserved Israel from such aberrations. The prophet Isaiah had ridiculed such practices (Is. 40:18–20; 44:12–18). Idolatry has always been a prosperous commerce of religious artifacts.

Demetrius, an artisan silversmith (Acts 20:24), benefited greatly from the sale of silver shrines, probably cast in molds, dedicated to the goddess Diana. Diana is the Roman name of Artemis, the great Greek goddess of fertility and the patron goddess of Ephesus. The Ephesians had built such an extravagant temple on her behalf that it was recognized for centuries as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. A figure of her made of cedar or ebony wood covered with gold leaf was believed to have fallen from heaven (Acts 19:35). It was placed at the center of a magnificent temple that was 144 feet long by 85 wide (44 by 26 m) and comprised of 127 marble columns. The worship of Artemis attracted people from all walks of life, particularly during popular celebrations that involved carrying this effigy in solemn procession through the city.

Demetrius defended his personal interests by making it sound like Paul had unleashed a major disaster. Skillfully, he shifted from the problem of his own failing business to that of his companions (v. 25) and the worldwide reputation of the goddess (v. 27). The target of his attack was clearly identified as Paul (v. 26), and he stimulated the anger of his companions who stood for Artemis (v. 28). Soon the whole city was in turmoil and confusion (vv. 29, 32). Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul's companions, were led to the huge theater, which could hold 24,000 spectators seated on sixty-six bleacher levels. They might have been placed on the 130-foot-wide (40 m) stage or in the arena between the stage and the bleachers (v. 29). Luke emphasizes once again that Paul was unafraid of the lurking danger. He was ready to face the crowd, but the disciples intervened once again (v. 30; cf. 9:25, 30; 17:10). Even some of the officials of Asia Minor (*Asiarchēs*) begged him not to venture into the theater (19:31). The Asiarchs were wealthy civic leaders of Ephesus who were

elected for one-year terms. It was their duty to organize, at their own expense, the provincial celebrations to honor the emperor and to pay for the games associated with the festivities. They were allowed to retain their titles even after their term of service concluded. Considering that the great festival of Artemis was taking place in spring, it is possible that these officials were present in the city for the occasion. Paul had in fact intended to stay in Ephesus until Pentecost (1 Cor. 16:8–9). It is remarkable to see that these high-level personalities showed concern for Paul.

Amid such confusion, a Jew named Alexander was pushed toward the front in order to speak to the crowd (Acts 19:33–34). Probably it was his intention to show that the Jews had nothing to do with Paul. But this Alexander was unable to defend the position of his coreligionists (v. 33). Recognizing that he was a Jew, the crowd did not listen to him and for two hours shouted, "Great is Artemis [Diana] of the Ephesians!" (v. 34).

At this point the secretary or clerk of the city intervened. His job was to take notes at city meetings—he was an influential man expected to enforce all decisions made. He requested the crowd to quiet down and then, as a good lawyer, he decided to evaluate carefully the validity of the claims. First he considered the situation to be a *matter of religion*. Ignorant of the facts, the crowd came to the defense of the goddess, shouting that she was great. This was, of course, an established fact not in dispute (vv. 35–36). The clerk argued that those under scrutiny had not undermined the dignity of the temple by stealing from it or speaking blasphemies against the goddess (v. 37). Therefore, he implied that at the very least the crowd was acting precipitously (v. 36). Then he dealt with the *matter of merchandizing*. If Demetrius and his companions wanted to complain in defense of their businesses, they could have taken their cases to the courts available for that purpose (v. 38). Note that the clerk did not mention Paul's name; he preferred instead to remain rather vague by using the term *tina*—"anyone"/"anybody" (or since the term is masculine—"any man"; v. 38). Finally, the clerk concluded addressing the *matter of social relationships* that affected both the crowd and the silversmiths. Indeed, he argued, the entire city was now in danger of being held accountable for this revolt (v. 40). The Roman authorities were intolerant of unrest. Demetrius and the silversmiths were running the risk of capital punishment, and the city was at risk of losing some of the very privileges that contributed to its wealth. Having said all this, the grounds for disputes were resolved, and the city clerk dismissed the assembly. It is clear from this episode that even when Christianity challenged the validity of temple worship, whether Jewish (7:48) or Gentile (17:24), it remained respectful of public order.

Luke does not recount all the hardships that Paul suffered in Ephesus. In 1 Corinthians 15:32 Paul speaks metaphorically about the fierce battles he confronted in Ephesus. We know that Paul had many opponents in Ephesus (1 Cor. 16:9) and that Priscilla and Aquila saved him at the peril of their lives (Rom. 16:3–4). He may have been in prison with Andronicus and Junia (Rom. 16:7) in Ephesus, where he may have also been exposed to some of the suffering he mentions in 2 Corinthians 11:24–27.

20:1—21:36
Marching on to Jerusalem

The account describing the conclusion of Paul's missionary journeys is narrated by Luke in the form of a long excursion that led Paul to Corinth, the most remote point of his missionary endeavors, and his long journey that took him from Corinth to Jerusalem. Paul traveled several months, covering about 2,700 miles (4,345 km), about half of which were on land. Paul was following the path of service of his Master (Luke 9:23).

20:1–6. Journey in Greece. It was Paul's intention to go to Rome after Jerusalem (19:21). Prior to his departure he wanted to visit once again the communities he had recently founded to encourage them (20:2). He began in Macedonia (v. 1), where he had received a warm welcome (Philippi and Berea), and then he went to Achaia (southern portion of modern Greece), where he remained in the city of Corinth for three months during winter. It was during this time that Paul wrote his letter to the Romans (Rom. 16:1–2, 23). A plot perpetrated by Jews, probably at the seaport of Cenchrea, forced Paul to abandon his intention to take a boat bound for Syria, and instead he backtracked to Macedonia (Acts 20:3). It is possible that he wanted to reach Jerusalem for Passover by way of the sea, but his plans had to be changed.

The roads were quite unsafe, especially considering that Paul was responsible for bringing generous contributions from the Greeks and Macedonians to the poor in Jerusalem (Rom. 15:25–29). Thus he was accompanied by seven representatives of different churches (Acts 20:4): Sopater of Berea, perhaps the same person mentioned as Sosipater in Romans 16:21; Aristarchus of Thessalonica (Acts 27:2); Secondus of Thessalonica; Gaius of Derbe; Timothy of Lystra (16:1–3); Tychicus (Eph. 6:21–22) and Trophimus, both from Ephesus (Acts 21:29). On arriving at Philippi Paul found Luke ("we"; 20:6), whom he had earlier left there (16:16–17). Paul remained in Philippi, where he spent the Passover in a loving environment (20:6; cf. Phil. 1:3, 7, 8; 4:10). Paul and Luke then boarded a ship in Neapolis, the seaport of Philippi, and arrived at Troas, where five days later they rejoined the seven companions sent as forerunners (Acts 20:5).

20:7–12. Ministering at Troas. After keeping the Sabbath, during which Paul did not travel, he decided to leave. On the first day of the week he had one more meeting during which he gave final recommendations to his disciples (see below, "The First Day of the Week").

The room where they met was lit by many lamps, suggesting that this was an evening meeting. Luke, a physician, specifies that young Eutyichus fell from the height of a three-story building and that he died. The miracle wrought through Paul brought comfort to the believers (20:12). What would have been a tragedy became an occasion to rejoice in the goodness of the Lord. Incidentally, the name Eutychus means "Lucky"—and he certainly was blessed that a miracle made his life an encouragement to other believers.

The First Day of the Week

Some have used Acts 20:7–12 to support the position that Sunday was a special day of worship in the apostolic church to replace the seventh-day Sabbath. But several elements in the narrative itself preclude such an interpretation of the passage.

1. The Time of the Meeting. Although the text says that the meeting was held "on the first day of the week," the mention of lights in the room and the reference to midnight indicate that this was an *evening* meeting. If Luke was using a Jewish calendar, according to which days were reckoned from sunset to sunset, then that would mean that the evening of the first day of the week (Sunday) would be what we today call Saturday night. If he was using the Roman calendar, according to which days were reckoned from dawn to dawn, Sunday evening would be our Sunday evening and the next day would have been Monday. Some who maintain a Sunday Sabbath argue that Luke combined the Roman time reckoning (dawn to dawn) with the Jewish calendar, in which the first day was Sunday. This is highly unlikely. The best option is that Luke was using the Jewish calendar (see Luke 23:53–56) and that in this case the meeting took place on what we call Saturday evening.

2. The Type of Meeting. The text indicates that this was not a regular day of worship. First, Paul met with church members because he intended to depart the next day (Acts 20:7). This was clearly a farewell meeting. Second, the meeting was not strictly speaking a worship service—there are no references to prayers and singing—but a long meeting during which Paul interacted with the audience. Luke uses two verbs to describe what Paul was doing: "to speak," (*dialegomai*; vv. 7, 9) and "to talk" (*homileō*; v. 11). The verb *dialegomai* ("to argue," "to instruct") conveys the idea of reasoning and engaging others in dialogue. Paul did this in the synagogue (e.g., 17:2; 18:4; 19:8) and in the marketplace (17:17). *Homileō* ("to speak," "to converse") implies dialogue and interaction (e.g., Acts 24:26; Luke 24:14–15). In postapostolic times it came to mean "to preach." Both verbs indicate that Paul was dialoguing with believers, instructing and answering questions. Third, the phrase "to break bread" does not necessarily designate the Lord's Supper but was the common Jewish designation for having a meal (e.g., Acts 2:42 [cf. v. 47]; 27:35; Luke 9:16; 22:19). In the second century A.D. the phrase became a technical expression for the Lord's Supper. This meeting was a farewell meal taken after midnight before Paul left. Even if, in this case, it was a Lord's Supper, this would not indicate which day of the week the meeting was on or the type of service since even the first Lord's Supper was not on a Sabbath.

3. The First Day of the Week. The reference to the first day of the week is almost casual, used to date the event. Luke likes to date events (e.g., Acts 20:6, 15–16; 21:1, 4, 15). What is more important is that the previous day was a Sabbath day, during which Paul would not have traveled. In other words, he kept the Sabbath and waited until Sunday to travel. The sequence of events is quite clear: During the Sabbath Paul worshiped with believers, and during the evening (the first day of the week) he met with them to instruct them and answer questions before he had to leave early the next morning. The death and resuscitation of a young man lengthened the meeting. Paul returned to the meeting hall and continued to teach. Early in the morning they had a meal, and Paul finally departed. Perhaps the main interest of Luke was to report the impact of the miracle on the believers, and in doing this he placed it within its historical context—it happened in Troas before Paul left, during the first day of the week. It is clear that Luke was not promoting Sunday observance.

20:13–16. From Troas to Miletus. Navigation by sea was most often undertaken by sailing along the coast from port to port. Paul first traveled from Troas to Assos on foot (about thirty miles [48 km]), but no specific reason is given for this decision, although it would have afforded much time for meditation and prayer. Paul rejoined his companions at the port of Assos. Each day involved a new stage, seven of them in all if Troas is included in the count. It appears that the group may have rented the boat, considering that Paul was the one who gave the marching orders (v. 13) and who decided not to stop at Ephesus (v. 16). Interestingly, he called a meeting of the elders of Ephesus at Miletus, roughly fifty miles (80 km) away. Luke provides a reason for not stopping at Ephesus: Paul was in a hurry. He wanted to reach Jerusalem before Pentecost in order to meet more people. Of course, it is also possible that the captain of the ship decided not to stop in Ephesus because he had planned to stop for a day at Miletus to load or unload goods.

20:17–38. The Ephesian Elders Exhorted. Paul's address to the elders of Ephesus is divided into four parts. There is an introductory section (vv. 18–21), followed by three others introduced by *kai nyn idou* ("see now" or "now behold"; vv. 22, 25) and *kai ta nyn* ("and now" or "so now"; v. 32).

1. Paul Defended His Ministry (Acts 20:18–21). In this section Paul justified the way he had led his ministry (cf. 2 Cor. 1:12; 1 Thess. 2:1–12; 2 Thess. 3:7–8). The defense illustrates how we should perform our own ministry: We should understand that in our ministry we are serving the Lord, whose ministry is our model for ministry (Acts 20:19). Ministry should be undertaken with profound humility, implying that we are willing to courageously experience trials as we serve others (v. 19; cf. 2 Cor. 4:7–11; 11:7), which was also the experience of Jesus (cf. Is. 53:7). Also like Jesus, Paul's preaching was of a practical nature or helpful (*sympherō*, "useful," "helpful," "profitable"; Acts 20:20) in order to demonstrate how the Christian faith affects a person's everyday life. In his ministry, Paul did not seek to please people but rather to fully instruct them (vv. 20, 27). He preached the need and importance of repentance and of placing one's faith on our Lord Jesus Christ (v. 21).

2. Paul Spoke about His Coming Arrest (Acts 20:22–24). He was going to Jerusalem compelled by the Spirit (or alternatively, "bound" or determined in his own mind, as some translations imply) as prisoner of his vocation (v. 22). The statement does not specify if the prospect of martyrdom was for him an inner feeling or a revelation he received from the Holy Spirit (v. 23). In any case, Paul was persuaded that the Holy Spirit was leading him (cf. Acts 16: 6–7; Rom. 8:14) and that imprisonment and persecution awaited him in Jerusalem (Acts 20:23). It is also possible that prophets had warned Paul about his travel to Jerusalem (cf. 21:11). As a faithful servant of Jesus (cf. Luke 9:23–26), he was willing to give his life for the Lord, not because life was unimportant to him but because he fully trusted in Him (cf. Phil. 1:20–21; 2 Tim. 1:12).

3. Paul Spent Time Exhorting the Church Elders (Acts 20:25–31). It was the duty of the elders to watch over the flock that the Holy Spirit had appointed to them as its overseers (v. 28). Paul made three specific statements. First, he testified that he had fully equipped the elders to take charge of the church (v. 27). He described the content of his preaching in various ways: turning to God for repentance and having faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (v. 21); testifying about the good news of God's grace (v. 24);

preaching the kingdom of God (v. 25) and the *boulē*—"purpose," "intention," or "plan"—of God (v. 27).

Second, Paul exhorted the elders to *prosechō*—"be on guard," "pay careful attention," "take heed." Here, for the first time in the passage, Paul used a verb in the imperative form. Knowing the truth of the gospel carried responsibilities and consequences for those who ministered in the church. In particular, they were expected to take care of themselves and to behave as good instruments of God (1 Tim. 6:11), meaning that they were to be true to God's mandate (2 Tim. 2:15), as was Paul (Acts 20:19–20, 24, 26). They were also to keep watch over the community of believers (v. 28; cf. John 21:15–17; 1 Pet. 5:4) and to consider the church as the property of the Lord, remembering the high price He paid for its salvation (Acts 20:28; cf. 1 Pet. 5:1–3; see below, "By His Blood").

Third, Paul said the elders were to feed the flock of God. Continuing the symbolism of the shepherd and his flock, Paul evoked "wolves" (Acts 20:29), a metaphor Jesus had already used (Matt. 7:15; 10:16; Luke 10:3). The reference is to false apostles and teachers who would lead the church into apostasy. Paul was very well aware of the dangers of heresy that would threaten the church. This prediction began to be fulfilled in Paul's own day and continued after the apostles died, when the church allowed the introduction of false teachings and rejected biblical truth (cf. 1 Tim. 4:1, 7; 6:3; 2 Tim. 3:6–7). Therefore, it would be important for the elders to watch and protect the flock of the Lord.

By His Blood

The phrase referring to the church of God, which He purchased/obtained with His own blood (v. 28), is unique in the Bible. Is "His own blood" referring to God the Father or to Jesus the Son? Since in the NT the blood that saves is always that of Jesus, most interpreters find here a reference to Jesus's blood. This could be supported by the fact that the Greek could be also translated "with the blood of His Own" implying His own Son. If we take the noun "blood" to mean sacrifice, then we could perhaps keep what appears to be the most natural way of interpreting our passage: God purchased the church through His own sacrifice. The Godhead was directly involved in the sacrifice of Christ. It was the Son who died on the cross, but God the Father was in Christ reconciling us to Himself (2 Cor. 5:19). The saving death of Christ was the work of the Godhead. The giving of His only Son for our salvation is the greatest sacrifice God could have made for us (cf. Rom. 3:25, John 3:16). But perhaps the ambiguity of the Greek text is intentional in order to force us to reflect on the glorious fact that our salvation was infinitely costly to the Godhead. (See "Paul, the Law, and Salvation," p. 1186.)

4. Paul Concluded with Words of Encouragement (Acts 20:32–35). No one can control his or her future, thus Paul placed the community of Ephesus in God's hands. Echoing an image dear to him, that of the church as a building (e.g., 1 Cor. 3:10–14; 8:1), he placed the church in the hands of its founder, Jesus Christ (see Matt. 16:18). He also reminded them about their glorious inheritance, available to those who are sanctified (Acts 20:32). It is God Himself who sanctifies us by means of the truth contained in His word (John 17:17–19; 1 Thess. 5:23). Paul concluded his exhortation by reminding the community that his service had always been selfless (Acts 20:33–35; cf. 1 Tim. 3:9; 6:8–10). This detail should be interpreted in the context of the work of greedy and self-centered false teachers (see 1 Tim. 6:5; Titus 1:11; 2 Pet. 2:3, 14).

The narrative closes with Paul's departure (Acts 20:36–38). There were prayers and tears as these church leaders separated from Paul knowing that they would not see him again until the return of the Lord in glory (v. 38). The type of kiss used at the farewell was common among Jews (Luke 7:45; 15:20; 22:47) and was adopted by the church as a greeting and farewell (Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 1 Thess. 5:26, 1 Pet. 5:14). They accompanied Paul, their beloved teacher, to the ship and probably stood by the seashore watching it disappearing on the horizon.

21:1–14. Warnings on the Journey to Jerusalem. Luke documented here the stages of the journey from Miletus to Jerusalem. Navigation had to take place during daylight. As they passed near the island of Cyprus, Paul must have remembered his first missionary journey with Barnabas (13:4–12). While waiting for a new ship to go down the coast, the travelers took the opportunity to seek the local disciples and eventually found some (21:4). For seven days Paul and his companions enjoyed their hospitality. During that time, the believers attempted to dissuade Paul from going to Jerusalem (v. 4). That

they spoke to him "through the Spirit" means not that the Spirit forbade Paul to go to Jerusalem but that the Spirit was telling him what was going to happen. This led the believers to discourage him from going to Jerusalem. Finally, they with their wives and children accompanied him to the sea. Once more the encounter ended with a prayer (v. 5; cf. 20:36). Paul was persuaded that his life was in God's hands. If he should die, God would raise him on the last day (2 Cor. 4:14). His faith in Christ delivered him from the fear of death (Heb. 2:15).

The ship took them to Ptolemais, and there they spent a day with the brethren (Acts 21:7). They finally managed to reach Caesarea, where Paul had previously fled on his way to Tarsus when his life was threatened in Jerusalem (9:30). Luke does not specify whether they traveled on foot or by boat. There were about thirty-five miles (56 km) between Ptolemais—now called Acre—and Caesarea, where they found shelter in the home of Philip. This Philip was one of the seven evangelists (6:3, 5), and he had four unmarried daughters still living with him who had the gift of prophecy (21:9). This implies that they contributed to the edification of the church (1 Cor. 14:3). Many prophets are known to have participated in the development of the early church (Acts 11:27–28; 13:1; 15:32; 19:6). Joel's prophecy announced that this gift would also be given to women (Acts 2:17; quoting Joel 2:28), and Paul recognized its rightful place in the church as a gender-inclusive gift (1 Cor. 11:5, 11; 14:5).

In Caesarea, the prophet Agabus, who came down from Judea (from the heights of Jerusalem), is introduced in the narrative (Acts 21:10; cf. 11:27). In a symbolic gesture Agabus used Paul's belt to announce to him the ordeal he would suffer in Jerusalem (21:11). Unlike v. 4, here Luke made a clear distinction between the prophetic announcement inspired by the Spirit (v. 11) and the expressions of affection from the disciples who were trying to keep Paul from pressing on to Jerusalem (v. 12). Ultimately, the Romans fulfilled the prophecy of Agabus when Paul was seized and beaten in the temple and then arrested by the Romans (vv. 30–33; cf. 24:1–27).

21:15–25. Paul Urged to Make Peace. Before leaving for Jerusalem the company prepared the luggage. The group still had to travel about sixty miles (96 km) before reaching Jerusalem, and the road was never safe. Before reaching Jerusalem, lodging was provided in the house of a long-time disciple, a native of Cyprus called Mnason (vv. 16–17). The welcome of the brethren in Jerusalem was heartfelt. Paul presented them with the gifts from the churches in Asia Minor, Macedonia, and Greece, a beautiful expression of their spirit of sacrifice. This gift not only helped the believers but also resulted in many people offering thanks to God (2 Cor. 9:12).

The next day Paul was to meet with James and the council of elders of the church in Jerusalem. In the meetings, Paul made reference not to his own work but to the work God had accomplished among the Gentiles through him (Acts 21:20). The Jerusalem church praised God and spoke of the many Jewish converts to Jesus (v. 20). These Jewish converts remained faithful to Jewish laws and customs (vv. 20–21) and continued to practice circumcision. The Council of Jerusalem had dealt with matters related only to Christian Gentiles. Unfortunately, many of these Jewish believers misunderstood Paul's message of justification by faith as a rejection of the Jewish traditions (13:39; 18:13; 21:28). Their concern was not so much about Gentile believers but about Paul encouraging Jews in the Diaspora to reject their Jewish customs. The elders knew that these accusations were false because they did not criticize Paul (21:24).

James and the elders were concerned about Paul's presence among them, fearing that it might provoke the Jews. In the year A.D. 58 the ideas that led to the revolt against Rome that culminated with destruction of the temple in A.D. 70 were already circulating. Strong nationalist undercurrents were agitating the Holy Land, and assassinations were common (v. 38). The turmoil surrounding Paul's ministry had probably been reported to the Sanhedrin (v. 22), and Paul could be accused of endangering the peace and unity of the nation. Again, the accusations were not about Paul's message to the Gentiles, but about what he was assumed to be teaching the Christian Jews.

Instead of defending Paul, James and the elders asked him to demonstrate to his accusers that as a Jew he was not opposed to Jewish law. In a spirit of conciliation, and probably also to protect the converted Gentiles, Paul made the fateful decision to try to be "all things" to everyone (1 Cor. 9:19–23). He saw no reason to oppose his coreligionists for preferring to persist in their religious practices, but only so far as they would not consider these practices a condition for salvation (Acts 13:39). On behalf of all (21:23), the leaders of the Jerusalem church suggested that Paul should join four men who were about to take a vow, most probably a Nazirite vow. According to Numbers 6:1–8, during the vow, which lasted at least one month, the Nazirite was not to cut his or her hair, drink wine, or approach a dead person. At the end of the period, a lamb, a sheep, a ram, a basket of bread, and cakes were presented in the temple as an offering of thanksgiving. Then the Nazirite was to shave his or her head and burn the hair in the fire of the thanksgiving offering (Num. 6:13–18). The elders requested that Paul pay for the expenditures of the four men (Acts 21:24)—an expensive request. Paying from his own money instead of using some of the offering he brought would show that he was sincere in what he was doing, and he later clearly stated that the money was given to his people, the nation of Israel (24:17).

As if that were not enough, James and the elders requested that Paul purify himself as well. It was customary for most Jews to purify themselves in the temple when they returned from a foreign land. Paul would thus demonstrate that he remained a faithful practitioner of Judaism by remaining pure despite living among Gentiles (21:24). His presence at the temple was not contrary to his convictions considering that he had himself made a vow while in Corinth (18:18). To reassure Paul, they confirmed that the decision made in favor of non-Israelites at the Council of Jerusalem was not in question (21:25). Paul met the demands the very next day. He went to the temple with the four men to make arrangements for the date when the sacrificial offerings would be made (v. 26).

21:26–36. Arrested in the Temple. The presence of Paul had not gone unnoticed in the city (v. 29). The Jews from Asia Minor, probably from Antioch in Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, and Ephesus, had seen him in the company of Trophimus of Ephesus, one of his traveling companions (20:4). The appropriate moment came when Paul was alone in the temple. They roused the crowd to riot, as they had done in Lystra (14:19), by igniting their nationalistic fervor. They accused Paul of discrediting everywhere the people of Israel and their law and temple (21:27–28). And since such a charge would not have been enough to put him to death, they accused him of having admitted Greeks into the sacred places in the temple, which was strictly forbidden (v. 28). Signs prohibiting Gentiles from trespassing under penalty of death were erected around the courtyard. The Jews seized Paul and tried to lynch him (vv. 21, 32). Extremists and ultranationalist zealots did not hesitate to kill anyone lacking commitment to their cause. Among them were many murderers (v. 38).

Paul was dragged out of the sacred area, lest his blood should stain the sanctity of sacred places, and the doors of the temple were closed (v. 30). The situation was so difficult that the guards of the Antonia Fortress, which adjoined the temple, were alerted. The garrison commander Claudius Lysias (23:26) was informed. The cohorts under his command consisted of between 600 to 1,000 soldiers. Since the Pentecost festivities always brought lots of people to Jerusalem, the Roman guards were on permanent alert, always ready to quell possible riots. Using the stairway linking the fortress to the Temple Mount, the officer took immediate action and rushed into the crowd, which was quick to yield passage to the Roman forces (21:32). Paul was tied at the wrist with two small chains (*halysesin*), as was Peter when he was earlier tied to two soldiers while in prison (12:6). Luke specifies that the officers acted justly as they sought information regarding the nature of the charges brought against Paul. However, since the crowd was in disarray, they led Paul to the fortress for questioning.

Paul and the Law

While Paul preached justification by faith in Jesus Christ (Rom. 3:28; 4:14–16; Gal. 2:16), salvation by grace (Rom. 6:14; Gal. 2:21), and the inability of the law to save us (Rom. 3:20), including circumcision (Gal. 5:3–4), he upheld the legitimacy of the law (Rom. 3:31; 7:12, 16; 1 Tim. 1:8). It is not a means of salvation but an instrument of condemnation to bring to an end any attempt to obtain salvation through works (Rom. 3:19–20; 7:5–9; 9:31; 1 Cor. 15:56; Gal. 3:10–11). But the law is also a guide for the Christian life that assists believers in their character development (Rom. 2:15; 8:4; Gal. 3:23–24; 5:14, 22–23; Eph. 4:24). Since the law is a law of love (James 2:8; 1 John 5:3; 2 John 1:6) and love is the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22), love fulfills the law (Rom. 13:10). Because Paul knew the Ten Commandments were as applicable as they had always been, he continued to rely on the Decalogue to admonish believers (e.g., Rom. 13:9; Eph. 6:2).

21:37—26:32

FOUR DEFENSES OF PAUL

Luke recorded four occasions during which Paul testified to different groups about his experience and faith. He first spoke to the crowd in Jerusalem (21:37—22:21), then to the Sanhedrin (22:22—23:10), next to the Roman governor Felix (24:11–21), and finally to the Jewish king Agrippa (26:2–23). Though the differences between the defenses are at times significant, they were primarily due to adaptations made to reach each audience.

21:37—22:21

Addressing the Mob in Jerusalem

Paul's speech to the people in Jerusalem is composed of four parts: his commitment to the Jewish traditions (22:3–5); his encounter with the risen Lord (vv. 6–11); his conversion and baptism (vv. 12–16); and his mission (vv. 17–21).

21:37—22:2. Paul Asks Permission to Speak. As Paul was about to disappear behind the heavy fortress doors, he addressed the commander in Greek. Though Romans were fluent in Latin, Greek was the language of the higher classes. The commander was surprised because he thought he had arrested an Egyptian who was the ringleader of an insurrection (v. 38). Felix, the procurator, had earlier persued the troublemakers and killed many, but the Egyptian got away. Capturing this Egyptian would have benefited the commander, as it would have greatly impressed his superiors (cf. 23:27). At first Paul did not reveal his Roman citizenship; he was known as a Jew (cf. 16:37–38). Thus, he could reject any charges of illegally entering the temple premises. By reporting that he was from Tarsus, the capital of Cilicia, a city as prestigious for its culture as Alexandria in Egypt and Athens in Greece, he could expect more respect. Intrigued by all this, the Roman officer consented to allow Paul's request to address the crowd (v. 40). In a rather authoritative manner (cf. 12:17; 13:16: 19:33), Paul spoke in Aramaic, the local language, to the fascinated crowd. His speech and demeanor did not manifest anger or revenge.

With great empathy and respect Paul addressed his brothers and fathers, offering them an apology or a defense for his faith (22:1).

22:3–5. Paul, the Jew. Paul summarized his biography in four steps (v. 3). (1) He was born in Tarsus of Cilicia. This fact made him a fellow citizen of his most malicious accusers, the Jews from Asia Minor (21:27). It was as if he were saying, "I am one of your own," while at the same time questioning their attitude toward him. (2) Paul was brought up in Jerusalem, suggesting his family moved from Tarsus to Jerusalem, where he was exposed to the purest Jewish tradition. (3) He was taught by Gamaliel, the famous rabbi who was highly respected by all the people (5:34). As such, not only had Paul learned the Mosaic law, but as a Pharisee he was also trained to follow it strictly. These three steps are the same ones Stephen used when talking about Moses (7:20–22). This biographical information was intended to be a rejection of the accusations that his teachings opposed the law (21:21, 28). (4) Finally, Paul showed his profound loyalty to the Jewish faith through his zeal for God.

Two testimonies corroborated Paul's statements: (1) He persecuted to death the new Way (v. 4) and sent to prison its followers, both men and women. The affront to the dignity of women in wartime was considered a supremely criminal act (Is. 13:16; Amos 1:13). (2) The highest religious authorities of the land, including the high priest and elders, all had supported Paul's zeal (Acts 22:5). It is probable that some were still alive and listening to him. Paul kept alive the memory of his crimes until the end of his life (1 Cor. 15:9; 1 Tim. 1:3), but who can best appreciate the grace of God if not the one who has been forgiven much (1 Tim. 1:14; cf. Luke 7:47).

22:6–16. Paul Encountered the Resurrected Jesus. Paul now dealt with the incident in his life that radically changed him. En route to achieve his nefarious designs in Damascus, Paul was stopped dead in his tracks. Jesus came to him in a glorious event. The statements of Jesus are once again reminiscent of those of Gamaliel (Acts 5:34–39). To persecute the church is to enter into conflict with the divine Messiah (Luke 10:16). Indeed, the reference to light, great or bright and gloriously brilliant, coming from heaven (Acts 22:6, 9, 11), greater than that of the sun (26:13), is a depiction of a theophany (in this case a Christophany). The answer Jesus gave to Paul's question became foundational in his teachings: the crucified Christ is the glorified Christ, and the One in heaven is indeed Jesus of Nazareth (Phil. 2:10). The sudden appearance of Jesus on the road to Damascus involved for Paul more than an exchange of ideas; it was the very source of his gospel (Gal. 1:12). The coming of the Messiah and the resurrection of the dead was, for the Jews, the very sign of the end of this world and the beginning of the new. The vision of the risen Messiah persuaded Paul that the times had been fulfilled (Gal. 4:4), that the old things had passed away (cf. 2 Cor. 5:17), and that believers were at this time invited to enter a new life in the Spirit (Rom. 8:10, 14). Thus, a new era had just begun, though the former endured (Gal. 1:4). While the foundation of his faith was given to him through his encounter with Jesus (Rom. 1:1–6; Gal. 1:16), Paul shared the traditional teachings of the church as they had been transmitted to him (1 Cor. 15:3) by believers such as Ananias, who had baptized him (Acts 9:18–19; 22:16). The character of Ananias is not otherwise known, but he seems to have been respected and appreciated for his spirituality within the Jewish community of Damascus (22:12). The mention of baptism for the forgiveness of sins (v. 16) was intended to bring back to the minds of his Jewish listeners the message of John the Baptist announcing the soon coming of the Messiah. The reference to Ananias and indirectly to John the Baptist served to reinforce Paul's testimony.

The words of Ananias deserve our attention because they are about the divine call and the mission of Paul. Although at first believers referred to God as the God of their fathers or ancestors, the divine intention was that Paul would carry forward the promise given to Abraham that all the nations of the earth would be blessed through him (Gen. 12:3; 18:18). The God of Israel destined Paul to accomplish three things, each expressed through a verb and a compliment (v. 14): (1) To know His will. Paul knew God's will as revealed in the Torah, but now he had to understand God's will as revealed in both the Torah and in Christ. He was gaining a deeper understanding of the God of his fathers and of His plan for humanity. (2) To see the Just or Righteous One. The Christological title "the Just/Righteous One" (Acts 3:14; 7:52) is a reference to the Servant of the Lord in Isaiah 53:11. This statement in context is referring to the encounter that Paul had just had with the risen Jesus outside of Damascus and perhaps to others he would have in the future (e.g., Acts 22:17; 2 Cor. 12:1; Gal. 1:12; Eph. 3:3). But at a deeper level it was the announcement of the profound knowledge Paul would gain concerning the mystery of Christ (Rom. 16:25–26; Eph. 3:4; 1 Tim. 3:16; cf. Eph. 1:7–10; 3:6; 5:32; Col. 1:27; 2:2–3). (3) To listen to the voice/words of God's mouth. To listen (Heb. *shama'*) to the voice of God means to obey Him (*shama'* is often translated as "obey"; see Ex. 23:21–22; Deut. 13:4; Jer. 40:3; cf. Heb. 3:7). In the OT the people were called to listen to the voice of God, but now the call was to listen to the voice of Christ. This obedience of Paul to the Messiah who appeared to Him on the road to Damascus is comparable to that of God's appearance to Abraham (Acts 7:2), which made him into a witness to all people (22:15). Witnessing is about testifying (v. 18) and the willingness to experience suffering for the Lord (v. 20).

After staying some days in Damascus (Acts 9:19), Paul went to Arabia and later returned to Damascus (Gal. 1:17). Three years later (1:18), after testifying to the Jews of Damascus (Acts 9:20, 22), Paul went to Jerusalem, where he continued to communicate the new way to his fellow Jews (9:28; 26:24).

22:17–21. Vision and Mission in Jerusalem. In continuing his defense, Paul told his listeners about a previous experience he had while praying in the temple. In the context of the current accusation against him of desecrating the temple, he told them that it was there that three years after his conversion Jesus appeared to him in a vision (see Acts 21:28). Up to this point the crowd had listened intensely to his message. That a person received visions and that God spoke to him and sent him on a mission to all people was perfectly consistent with the experience of the forefathers and prophets of old. But what Paul was about to say presented a real challenge. It is the only place where he spoke about it from a position of defense. At first, it might appear that there seems to be a conflict between what Jesus expected of Paul and what he was doing. Indeed Paul, who was sent to preach to all people, ended up in Jerusalem in the company of fellow Jews. He wanted to be with them, and it was to them that he was speaking at this time. He came to Jerusalem, but Jesus told him to leave Jerusalem immediately. He wanted to testify before the Jews, but Jesus told him that his testimony would not be received (v. 18). He wanted to be with his brothers, but Jesus told him to go to the Gentiles (v. 21). But Paul was not resisting his divine calling. He was identifying with the experience of his fellow Jews. He was once where they were. It was solely on account of God's direction that he had taken the gospel to Gentiles (cf. 1 Cor. 9:16; Gal. 1:15–16; Col. 1:25). It was God's plan. He was indirectly trying to persuade them that they, too, should accept that the gospel, the faith of

Israel, had now been universalized as a result of the coming of the Messiah in Jesus the Christ.

22:22—23:10

Addressing the Sanhedrin

Paul's audience did not want to listen to him anymore and silenced his voice through loud shouts, violent actions, and calling for his death. They felt deeply offended by Paul's defense and wanted to permanently end his witnessing (vv. 22–23).

22:22–29. Paul's Roman Citizenship. The contrast between the attitude of the Jews in Jerusalem against Paul and the consideration of the Roman authorities is impressive. This portion of the story is in a sense an address to Roman readers. It shows that Paul, who was a Roman citizen, did not hold against them the abuse to which they subjected him. The idea that God would want to send messengers to the Gentiles angered the ultra-nationalism of the Jews. The extreme agitation of the crowd was incomprehensible to the Roman commander. Torture by whipping was the method Romans used to obtain confessions, but that was not permissible against Roman citizens. Unlike the experience in Philippi, this time Paul revealed his identity before the torture. He immediately placed himself on legal ground (v. 25). Becoming a Roman citizen was not easy to achieve. Indeed, Lysias had acquired it during the reign of Emperor Claudius (A.D. 41–54) and had attached, as was the custom, the name of the emperor to his own (Acts 23:26). Paul belonged to a family with Roman roots for a long time; he was a Roman by birth (22:28).

22:30—23:10. The Sanhedrin Is Divided. Since the commander was unable to obtain a confession by torture, he released Paul from his bonds and decided to have him appear before the Sanhedrin (v. 30). His intention was not to allow the Jewish court to reach a verdict (cf. 23:10) but to better understand the accusations against Paul (23:28) in order to prepare a report for the governor.

Unlike a culprit, Paul did not look downcast. Instead, he was able to look the various members of the council straight in the eye (23:1). In fact, although he had not been in Jerusalem for six years and was many more years removed from the circles of Jewish power, he may have recognized some of his former acquaintances. Instead of addressing them as rulers and elders (Acts 4:8) or fathers (7:2), he chose to call them brothers. In doing this, he intended to remind them that he had once been in their position and that he still considered himself one of them. He began his defense by stating that He had lived his life as a law-abiding Jew and therefore his conscience before God was clear (v. 1). The expression Paul used in v. 1—*politeuomai*—means to live as a good citizen (Phil. 1:27), hence denying on his part any disruptive social behavior offensive to God and to others (Acts 21:28, 38).

Apparently offended at Paul's claim of innocence, the high priest Ananias ordered the bailiffs (cf. John 18:22) to strike Paul on the mouth (Acts 23:2). Ananias—not to be confused with Ananias of Damascus or with Annas, the father-in-law of Caiaphas—was an ambitious and cruel man. He had been elevated to the esteemed position of high priest by Herod of Chalcis, brother of Herod Agrippa I, and his pro-Roman sentiments allowed him to serve as high priest for over a decade (A.D. 47–59). His friendship with the Romans got him murdered later by assassins hired by his own son at the outbreak of the Jewish revolt a decade. The highest spiritual authority of Israel was simply interested in shutting the mouth of a prophet God had sent to proclaim to him the good news of salvation.

Paul reacted vigorously to this physical insult (v. 3; cf. John 18:23). The mention of the whitewashed wall is a reference to Ezekiel 13:10–15, where the prophet denounced false prophets, whom he compared to plastered-over walls of Jerusalem in an attempt to hide the obvious spiritual cracks instead of returning to God for total reconstruction. The words of the prophet included threats from God, just as Paul's did. Like prophets claiming to be speaking on God's behalf while telling lies, Ananias claimed to be judging according to the law while actually doing the opposite.

One might wonder why Paul did not recognize the high priest until informed of his identity. Three reasons might explain this detail: he had poor eyesight (Gal. 4:14–15; 6:11); the trial was not held in the courthouse where the high priest normally sat; or Ananias was not wearing the traditional garb of his function. But perhaps the idea was that the high priest was not recognizable because his conduct was inconsistent with his function.

On hearing the charge of blasphemy brought against him (as high priest Ananias was supposed to represent God), Paul defended himself. Not only did he not know who Ananias was, but also, as a faithful observer of the law, he cited

Exodus 22:28. It is true that the text refers to civil, not religious, authority; however, since the return from exile, the high priest had been given almost supreme authority. By quoting Scripture Paul showed his knowledge of the law as well as his willingness to live in accordance with its precepts.

Unable to rely on the fairness of the high priest, who failed to follow the recommendations of Deuteronomy (Deut. 13:14; 17:4), Paul addressed the assembly composed of both Sadducees and Pharisees. He was not attempting to manipulate or sidetrack the proceedings by addressing the assembly. Instead, he used the positive attitude of many Pharisees by calling himself a Pharisee and the son of Pharisees. In fact, while he showed himself more Roman than the commander, he also showed himself more Pharisee than the Pharisees because he was the son of a Pharisee. The day before, he had introduced himself as a disciple of Gamaliel, and the story he told about his vision of the risen Christ raised no objection from Pharisees. The Pharisees believed in the resurrection of the dead on the basis of Job 19:25–27, Isaiah 26:18–19, Ezekiel 37:1–14, and Daniel 12:1–3. Paul was merely displacing the debate from the secular, where there was no substance for argument, to the level of religion, particularly to the topic of the hope of the resurrection of the dead (Acts 23:6). Instead of remaining cautious, as did Gamaliel, the Pharisees sided vigorously with Paul (v. 9). The ruckus and commotion that ensued became such that the commander in charge of the security of a Roman citizen began to fear for Paul's life and ordered the police to take him back to the fortress (v. 10). To deliver Peter from prison God had sent an angel (5:19; 12:7); to deliver him from the Sanhedrin He had sent Gamaliel and a Roman commander. God's help can sometimes come in surprising ways.

23:11—24:27

Addressing a Roman Administrator

Paul needed encouragement. Although he was a man of prayer dedicated to Jesus and the mission, he also experienced discouragement. He was not alone in the barracks; the Lord was with him, ready to encourage him. God comes to us in our most difficult moments to comfort us and to prepare us for our next service for Him.

23:11–22. The Plot against Paul. During the night the Lord came to Paul's side (v. 11). It must have been a wonderful privilege to rub shoulders with the living Christ. Did not Jesus promise to be with His servants until the end of the world (Matt. 28:20)? Jesus gave Paul credit for his courage to testify on His behalf in Jerusalem in obedience to what He told Paul in a previous vision (Acts 22:18). Now Jesus told him that he would also witness for Him in Rome. No obstacle could possibly prevent the mission from moving forward. Paul would go to Rome to testify there (19:21).

Unfortunately, the powers of darkness were not about to give up. A group of Jewish conspirators, perhaps associated with the Zealots (also called the Sicarii), got carried away with hatred and vowed to eliminate Paul. Their vow not to eat or drink demonstrates the extent of their fanaticism and suggests they planned to act soon. The problem was that Paul was being kept in the safety of the Antonia Fortress. They needed to find a way to get him out of there. The assassins approached the Jewish leaders (see 4:5) and informed them of their plan (23:14). Although Acts does not state the reaction of the chief priests and elders, it is implied that they agreed to join the conspiracy against Paul. One can only feel dismay for the deplorable condition of the religious authorities at that time.

The subterfuge of the assassins' plan in regard to the Sanhedrin was subtle. It exempted the Sanhedrin from all liability while remaining free to pursue their project. A ploy of some kind was required because the Sanhedrin had no legal right to put to death a convict, let alone a Roman citizen. In addition, the demand to investigate the matter further (*diaginōskō*—v. 15) was legitimate, given the confusion that occurred following the previous investigation.

Somehow news of the conspiracy leaked out. We do not know how it happened, but Paul's nephew became aware of the ambush that was planned. Before his conversion, Paul had been sympathetic with those who advocated the use of violence to purify Israel, so perhaps members of his family continued to have ties with such individuals—or at least connections with others who did. We do not know if Paul's family members in Jerusalem had become Christians. In any case, his nephew does not appear to have been a fanatic; otherwise he would not have risked his life to expose the conspiracy. As we have already seen, God does not always send angels to protect us; He might also send a brother, a friend, or even a stranger.

Paul did not suffer a sentence as severe as that of Peter (Acts 12:6), for he was allowed visitors while he was under arrest (cf. 28:17, 30–31). Although Jesus had told him he would go to Rome (23:11), Paul did not stand idly by, waiting for yet another miracle. Instead, the arrival of his nephew was for him a sign that he should take immediate action. He called one of the centurions and asked him to lead the young man to the commander (v. 17). He knew how easy it would have been for his nephew to be denounced before the Sanhedrin, so he did not give any reason for requesting such a meeting. Presumably one can assume that because of the same concern the commander took the boy aside (v. 19) and asked him not to tell anyone about the plot (v. 22). The Jewish authorities had sufficient connections with the Roman authorities to create trouble for the commander if they knew that he had sided with Paul. The commander also could have faced serious accusations for allowing the assassination of a Roman citizen. The clash between Roman guards and real or potential conspirators could easily have degenerated into a massive uprising. Claudius Lysias had to take immediate action. After all, dealing with this matter appropriately might also contribute to his personal advancement. Even the personal ambitions and interests of people can be used by the Lord to accomplish His design for us.

23:23–35. Sent to Felix. The precautions the commander took are impressive. He gathered 470 men (v. 23), half of his garrison, to safely take Paul to Caesarea. Presumably, he might have wanted to remove Paul from his jurisdiction as soon as possible to avoid a Jewish revolt. In any case, the commander did not have legal power to do anything to stop the plot, free Paul, or remove him from his jurisdiction. Thus, Lysias referred Paul to his superior. Unaware of the standing of his prisoner, he chose to play it safe by avoiding any possible reprimand. This story made it possible for Luke to establish how carefully the Romans protected their citizens at that time, even those of the Christian faith. Paul traveled on horseback like a person of import (v. 24), while most of the troops had to walk.

Claudius Lysias wrote a letter in Latin, of which the basic message is provided in Acts (vv. 26–30). It was his duty to report on the charges made against the prisoner. He exposed the matter to his advantage and somewhat distorted the facts because he had learned about Paul's Roman citizenship only after his intervention, not before. Out of this report we gather the following points: The Sanhedrin abused its power by planning to kill Paul (Acts 23:27); Paul was innocent (v. 29); he deserved protection because he was a Roman citizen (v. 27); and a plot was threatening Paul's life (v. 30). All these elements could play in Paul's favor when he would later appear before Caesar.

The company left at night (9:00 p.m.) bound for Antipatris, about thirty-seven miles (60 km) away. Then the seventy horsemen traveled the remaining thirty-one miles (50 km) to Caesarea with Paul while the infantrymen returned to Jerusalem.

Caesarea was the seat of the central administration for the Roman province of Judea. It was a strategic city on the edge of the sea, which would have made it possible for the procurator to escape by way of the sea in the event of an uprising. Governor Felix seemed rather embarrassed by the arrival of the prisoner. As with Pilate's dealings with Jesus, he asked Paul which administration had the jurisdiction over his case (v. 34; cf. Luke 23:6–7). When he learned Paul was from Cilicia, Felix decided to handle the case himself (vv. 34–35). Since eastern Cilicia, like Judea, was officially under the supervision of the Roman legate in Syria at the time, there was no reason to send Paul anywhere else.

While Felix could have referred the case directly to the legate in Syria, he likely did not want to run the risk of bothering his superior with a relatively minor matter. Besides, if things worked out, he hoped he might be able to extract money from Paul in return for his freedom (see Acts 24:26). Until Felix could meet with Paul's accusers, the governor ordered that Paul be held in the Praetorium, a palace built by Herod the Great that had become the official residence of governors. Meanwhile, Lysias informed the Sanhedrin that Paul had been legitimately transferred to the governor. God did not produce miracles to allow Paul to continue his mission, but He preserved Paul's life from those who wished to kill him (24:27).

24:1–9. Accused of Sedition. Paul lived in peace for five days in Caesarea in the governor's palace. The high priest Ananias took advantage of this time to gather a few Sadducee accomplices, including Tertullus, a rhetorician and lawyer familiar with Roman law. He was probably Roman, considering his Latin name. The fact that the high priest Ananias went to Caesarea himself demonstrates how important this case was to the religious authorities in Jerusalem. They wanted a guilty verdict, and they hoped that such a prestigious group of Jewish dignitaries would influence Felix accordingly.

Tertullus began his speech with thanksgiving in honor of Felix (vv. 2–3). It is impressive that Luke would so carefully report what these people said considering their unreliable character. This adds credibility to the veracity of Luke's historical account. Indeed, Felix is praised for the peace he was procuring (v. 2) while the country was undergoing several rebellions (cf. Acts 21:38), for reforms (v. 2) that brought prosperity, and for widespread support of the people (v. 3) while many Jews were rebelling against him.

Felix seemed to show signs of impatience with so much hypocritical flattery. Tertullus decided to end his opening words (v. 4) and to deal with the matters at hand. Three complaints were raised against Paul: The first accusation was the most important because it was designed to show that Paul was a threat to the public order (v. 5), a matter of great interest to Rome. Paul, he said, created strife or insurrection among the Jews. Paul was then accused of being the leader of a sect, that of the Nazarenes (v. 5). This made him a most dangerous person. Lastly, it was stated that Paul had desecrated the temple (v. 6), which legally required the death penalty. Verses 6b–8a are not found in some Greek manuscripts. They convey further details of Tertullus's attempts at accusation, adding that the Sanhedrin had not been able to try Paul because Lysias took him from their control and then asked them to come to see Felix (vv. 7–8a). A charge was thus brought against the commander of Jerusalem in order to discredit or reduce the value of his official report. But Tertullus erred on a matter of the law. He said that Lysias requested the accusers to appear before Felix, but in fact he had never made that request. The scene was all the more preposterous in that the Jews who were present were fully corroborating the lawyer's statements.

However, Felix was not fooled. The charges were far too vague, and the request to further investigate the matter allowed Felix to handle the matter without losing face and to drag the case on for two years. It was a way to bury the issue. Felix satisfied the Jews with the promise not to release Paul (v. 27). But he granted Paul relative freedom (v. 23).

24:10–21. Defense before Felix. The defense of the apostle was in keeping with the rules of Roman law. It attempted to show the following: the complaint had no reason to be presented to Felix because it was not a matter of public law but a simple religious dispute; the accusers failed to present any evidence of wrongdoing; the detention of Paul lacked a legal basis. After being granted authorization by the governor to speak, as required by Roman law, Paul began his defense. The moderation of his introduction contrasts greatly with the flattery of Tertullus. Felix had been in his post for a half dozen years and was sufficiently aware of the situation in the province for Paul to trust him.

Paul began by refuting the accusations of the Sanhedrin by providing the facts of the case that could be easily verified. Since Tertullus indicated that what he said was verifiable (24:8), Paul suggested to Felix to go ahead and actually check the facts (v. 11). Paul indicated that an investigation should be relatively easy considering the fact that Paul had been present in Jerusalem for only twelve days—clearly, not enough time to organize a mutiny (v. 11). Paul had come to Jerusalem for the sole purpose of worshiping, as pilgrims did during Passover (v. 11), he had caused no incident in the temple, in synagogues, or in any part of the city (v. 12), and no evidence could be brought forth to validate the charges (v. 13).

In the second part of his defense Paul provided a confession of faith. He happened to be in the very condition Jesus had predicted (Matt. 10:17–18). His confession was deserving of special attention because it shed a great deal of light on the nature of Christianity. The people of Israel considered Deuteronomy 6:4 their confession of faith: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one." Christians specified in a form of confession that "Jesus Christ is Lord" (Phil. 2:11). This public confession of faith (1 Tim. 6:12) is a requirement for salvation (Rom. 10:9–10) and is at the heart of worship (Phil. 2:10; Heb. 13:15). It was not, however, in competition with the Israelite confession of faith.

Paul confessed that he worshiped the God of his ancestors. Thus, his faith was not in opposition to Judaism but was anchored on the message of the Law and the Prophets (Acts 24:14). It is interesting to note that had he rejected the Sabbath in favor of Sunday, as is sometimes suggested today by modern scholars of early Christianity, he could not have made such a claim. The fact that his accusers did not focus on this critical point of Jewish life is yet more evidence that there was no such early change. Paul also testified that Christianity is a path, a way of life, a *halakah*, not a political movement (v. 14); that this path involves moral obligations considering that judgment will follow the resurrection of the dead (v. 15); and that

he strove to live with a clear conscience, one offending neither God nor humans (v. 16). Therefore, his case did not fall within the realm of public policy but in the realm of religious thought and schooling.

In the third part, Paul counterattacked the arguments of the members of the Sanhedrin who were present: They had accused him of being as undesirable as a plague (v. 5), when in reality he came to Jerusalem to bring offerings to his nation (v. 17). They accused him of creating dissension (v. 5), when in fact, Jews from Asia Minor attacked him (v. 18). They accused him of defiling the temple (v. 6), when in fact he was in the temple to cleanse himself (v. 18). They said that they were judging him in accordance with the law (v. 6), when in fact they had silenced key witnesses (v. 19; cf. Deut. 17:6; 19:15).

Finally, Paul brought an argument that must have surprised his accusers. Faith in the resurrection of the dead was widely shared by the Jews. Some believed only in the resurrection of the righteous, but only the Sadducees denied all forms of resurrection. That was exactly the position of his accusers. Thus, Paul confronted head-on the position of the Sanhedrin regarding the resurrection. In believing in the resurrection, Paul was being more faithful to the Jewish faith than his accusers. They were being unfaithful to tradition. His accusers remained silent. Felix, who was knowledgeable about these things (24:22), must have smiled at the skill of Paul's legal self-defense.

24:22–27. Felix Procrastinates. Felix was clearly embarrassed, but he knew that the Sanhedrin had the right to complain before the emperor. Whether the complaints were justifiable or not, the simple fact that this problem was under his jurisdiction could affect his professional advancement. Cleverly, Felix took advantage of Tertullus's suggestion to verify his report (24:8). The lawyer had expected Felix to believe him. But Felix had read the report of the commander, and it was different from the lawyer's declaration. This allowed Felix to buy time and to embarrass the Jews because they could have imagined very well what Lysias would say. So the announcement was made that additional information was needed (v. 22). Felix could not release Paul without incurring the wrath of the Sanhedrin. Moreover, he could not release Paul to the Sanhedrin without risking the accusation of having failed to care for a Roman citizen. So he kept Paul in a safe place in relative freedom.

In his confession, Paul did not mention the name of Jesus, but Luke suggests that Felix was aware of the problems between Christians and Jews not only because he was a political leader but particularly because his second wife, Drusilla, was Jewish (v. 24). Paul's reference to the Way (v. 14) was a clear allusion to Jesus and His teachings. Additionally, Felix knew that Paul was speaking about Jesus because he had intended to ask him about faith in Christ (v. 24). Paul preached salvation by grace, but he was clearly not speaking of cheap grace, because he also dealt with the moral and ethical implications of salvation (v. 25). Interestingly, in this scene the accused appears full of courage, and the judge is afraid. For two years Felix had the opportunity to hear the gospel. He seemed interested, considering that he conversed with Paul several times, but he lacked the courage to make a decision for Jesus. Instead, he plunged into greater evil by suggesting that Paul should pay a ransom to be released, something that Roman law officially forbade and that Paul was not willing to do (v. 26).

Felix missed the opportunity God provided him. The arrival of Porcius Festus was a bad omen because Felix had to leave his office. Emperor Nero had summoned him to Rome following a complaint made by a delegation of Jews. Indeed, Felix had been brutal in his repression of riots in Caesarea. To avoid making things worse, he left Paul in prison (v. 27). Finally, Nero dismissed Felix from his functions because of all his wrongdoings. His brother Pallas attempted to defend him, but Pallas was poisoned. About Felix, nothing further is said in history.

25:1—26:32

Addressing Agrippa: A Jewish King

Festus went to Jerusalem to visit its citizens. As was often the case when a new leader was appointed, the Sanhedrin made a motion on a point that the predecessor may have failed to grant. In this case, they requested a retrial for Paul. This request resulted in the decision to send Paul to Rome.

25:1–12. Paul Appeals to Caesar. The Jewish leaders feared that Festus, an official known for his integrity, might choose to release Paul because no charges had yet been filed against him. Resentment against Paul was obviously still alive, and the assassination project was reinstated (v. 3). Festus did not want to give the impression of being weak. He decided not to make a legal decision while in Jerusalem but promised to rule on the day following his return to Caesarea (v. 6). As a good lawyer, he requested that those who were qualified for the occasion should come down to Caesarea for the prosecution. The name of the high priest Ananias is not mentioned because he had been deposed toward the end of the reign of Felix and replaced with a man named Ishmael son of Phiabi.

Once again, accusations without evidence were brought against Paul. According to Paul's defense (v. 8), the accusations were always the same ones: he was against the Jewish tradition, the temple, and Rome (21:28; 24:5–6). The Jews requested a favor (24:3), and Festus tried to compromise by granting it (25:9). He was willing to allow the trial to take place in Jerusalem. This would have made it possible for him to resolve the problem as rapidly as possible. However, he stipulated that the judgment had to take place in his presence in order to safeguard the rights of Roman citizenship.

Paul was not willing to return to Jerusalem and refused the compromise. Instead of remaining passive, waiting for a turn of events in his favor, Paul appealed to Caesar. The risen Lord had told him that he would go to Rome, and he was ready to go (23:11). Roman law allowed any Roman citizen to refer any matter of conviction deemed unfair to the emperor. Paul had not yet been tried, but he was threatened in front of the governor, therefore he was already legally in Caesar's court (24:10). The appeal was therefore a mere extension of his current situation. Festus was uncomfortable because he had no evidence to provide to the emperor (cf. 25:26). He called a meeting of the court, but he eventually preferred to rid himself of a burning issue by accepting Paul's appeal to the emperor.

25:13–27. Paul before Agrippa. Paul remained in prison for a few days before departing for Rome. Plans had to be made for the transfer not only of Paul but also of other prisoners to Rome (27:1). In the meantime, King Herod Agrippa II and his sister Bernice arrived for a courtesy visit to welcome Festus as the new leader. Agrippa, whose full name was Marcus Julius Agrippa, was the son of Herod Agrippa, whose death was reported in Acts 12:20–23, and great-grandson of Herod the Great. He was thirty-two years old at the time he arrived in Caesarea. His sister Bernice was a year younger, and as a widow she went to live with her brother, with whom she was accused of having an incestuous relationship. During the war with Rome she became the mistress of Titus.

Festus was largely unfamiliar with Jewish affairs and doctrinal issues. He took advantage of the opportunity to ask Agrippa—a Jew to whom Rome had granted the responsibility of appointing the high priests—to help him better understand the charges against Paul. Agrippa was supposed to be knowledgeable of the Jewish religion, so it seemed like an opportune situation. In reviewing the case with Agrippa, Festus noted that Paul was right to refuse a return to Jerusalem to be tried (25:9–11) because he would have clearly been handed over to the Jews (v. 16), and since they were intent on murdering him (v. 3), a transfer to Jerusalem would have been a sentence without trial.

The challenge for Festus was that he recognized that the charges were related not to Roman law (v. 18) but to the Jewish religion and that in this regard he was too ignorant to decide. However, he understood the nature of the debate, which he summarized by saying that the matter was about a certain Jesus, who died but whom Paul believed was alive (v. 19). This happens to be the foundation of the Christian faith, yet it was incomprehensible to a Roman official (cf. 1 Cor. 1:18, 23). Paul had appealed to the emperor, but he continued to be held temporarily in Caesarea (Acts 25:21). Festus's request for Agrippa's help flattered his pride. Indeed, this gave him an opportunity to make himself important. Agrippa decided to grant Paul an audience. The next day he appeared garbed in his most beautiful pageantry in the auditorium, where the questioning was to take place (v. 23). He showed the same interest for Paul his great-grandfather had shown toward Jesus (Luke 23:8).

Festus took the opportunity to invite the celebrities of the city of Caesarea (Acts 25:23), local members of the Greek and Jewish aristocracy alongside the military commanders of the five cohorts of auxiliary soldiers at the governor's disposal. Thus, just as previous enemies Herod and Pilate became friends during the arrest of Jesus (Luke 23:12), Festus attempted to reconcile Jews and Romans during Paul's trial. Bound in chains (Acts 26:29), Paul was introduced to the assembly. Festus confirmed Lysias's report and emphasized the paradoxical nature of this meeting. For the third time Paul was declared innocent of the charges against him (23:29; 25:18, 25). Pilate had done the same thing to Jesus (Luke 23:4, 14, 22). Just as Jesus had to appear before Herod the Great (Luke 23:8–11), Paul had to appear before Herod Agrippa II. Festus had

handed over the charge of the debate to Agrippa. In reporting these facts Luke emphasizes the unreasonableness of the suspicions brought against Christian missionaries, whose activities were not illegal considering that they were limited to matters of religious teachings. For the reader, this case is a confrontation between the lord of Festus and the Lord of Paul.

26:1–11. Paul's Early Life. King Agrippa took charge of the session with caution. He used an impersonal form of speech to inform Paul that he could speak: *epitrepetai*—"You have permission" or "it is permitted," rather than "I allow you," in order to include Festus in the role of chairman. In accordance with the custom of the time, Paul may have raised his hand with three fingers up and two folded down. He began with a statement of courtesy. He could speak more freely to the king than he did before Festus since the litigation was regarding religious issues about which Agrippa was well informed (v. 3).

Paul's first line of defense was to show that in spite of the fact that he was accused by Jews, he was not in conflict with the Jews because he was one of them, using the terms "my" and "our" to allude to his identity with them (vv. 4–7). Within his nation Paul had acquired quite a significant reputation. Since his youth the people of Jerusalem had been aware of the fact that he had been a zealous, activist Pharisee (vv. 4–5). If these people were willing to testify honestly, they would be not against him but for him. His argument was about the hope he shared with them regarding God's promised Messiah. Behind these remarks we can detect an implied call to the Roman courts to be cautious not to accuse Christians of incivility or social crimes when in reality the problems they faced were motivated by Jewish religious concerns.

Paul had not yet specified the nature of the promise and hope about which he was talking. His purpose was to first demonstrate that this promise represented the very essence of Jewish faith and religion (v. 7). This faith was founded on the belief in the resurrection of the dead (v. 8) and the last judgment (cf. 24:15, 25) shared by all Pharisees. The controversy was not whether God raises the dead (26:8) but whether to believe that the resurrection of Jesus was indeed the fulfillment of God's promise and that consequently He was the promised Messiah (cf. 13:32; 23:6; 24:14–15; 28:20, 23). It was therefore with great zeal that Paul had been proclaiming Jesus as the promised Messiah. Paul also talked about his involvement in the death of Stephen and the persecution of many other Christians and indicated that he did all of these things on behalf of the high priests (26:9–10; cf. 9:1–2). We also learn that he had been obsessedly enraged against Christians in the synagogues and had compelled them to blaspheme (26:11)—or perhaps, according to some translators and interpreters, he tried to compel them to blaspheme. Speaking ill of Jesus (cf. 1 Cor. 12:3) was considered a blasphemy against God.

After describing the darkness of his past conduct, Paul described the light of the revelation that came to him on his way to Damascus. This rather long report was intended to help listeners to better understand the radical change he experienced in his life. By persecuting Paul, were they now not committing the same error Paul committed in his past?

26:12–23. Paul Recounts His Conversion. This section is divided into three parts (see vv. 12–18, 19–21, 22–23). Each one of these parts comprises four elements: the vision of Jesus, Paul's ministry, his message, and his listeners and their response.

1. The Vision of Jesus. This is Luke's third account of Paul's encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus (cf. Acts 9:3–22; 22:3–16). Apart from minor differences compared to previous accounts, this one is theologically significant and deserves special attention. Four actions highlight the first section: Paul traveled (26:12), he saw (v. 13), he heard (v. 14), and he spoke (v. 15). Paul had left on a trip, but he was not traveling on the right path. Christianity is the Way (24:14), the way of salvation (16:17), but Paul was on the way of darkness as he traveled to Damascus. He was not following "the way of the Lord" (18:25; 19:9, 23). He was persecuting the children of God (26:10) and was pushing them to blaspheme God (v. 11). But while on this dark way he saw a light (v. 13). It enlightened Paul because that light was Jesus (v. 15) and the light of the gospel that he was called to proclaim (v. 23). Paul heard the voice of the heavenly Christ in the innermost of his being, speaking in his native tongue (Hebrew or Aramaic). His words were taken by Paul to be a helpful message from God (v. 22; cf. 1 Tim. 1:16). This voice made it possible for him to walk on the right path.

2. Paul's Ministry. Jesus instructed Paul to rise up and stand. He appeared to him in order to make him a servant/minister and a witness of what he had seen and what God would reveal to him (Acts 26:16). Here, the definition of Christian ministry is given, which is to be witnesses of the resurrection and the teachings of Jesus. To be a witness is not just a matter of reporting facts; it implies being filled and compelled by these facts. Paul's conversion is a testimony to the truthfulness of his message. The call becomes almost irresistible, something he could not disobey (26:19; cf. Gal. 1:16). He could not do anything else but to stand and testify for the Messiah. Paul did not resist the call of God on his life (Acts 26:22), and as such he fulfilled the divine plan that was intended for him before he was born (Gal. 1:15–16). Paul implied that his audience and readers should do as he did.

3. Paul's Message. God's message carried by Paul had become the testimony of his own experience. He had personally passed from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to that of God (Acts 26:18)—an experience that led him to invite others to repent and convert (v. 20). The call to repentance is needed because faith in the resurrection of Jesus is deeply connected to the last judgment (17:30–31; cf. Dan. 12:2; John 5:29; 2 Pet. 3:7; Rev. 20:11–13). And the call to conversion is a challenge to live a new life of faith. The resurrection of Jesus brought the light of life to both Jews and Gentiles (Acts 26:23). God wants sinners not to die but to repent and enjoy true life (cf. Deut. 30:19; Is. 18:23; 33:11; Col. 2:4–6; 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9). Paul's message was consistent with the teachings of Moses and the prophets (Acts 26:22).

4. Paul's Listeners and Their Response. On the basis of Galatians 2:7–8, Paul has been considered the apostle to the Gentiles. This is not exactly the understanding Luke conveys. Not only was Peter called by God to bring the gospel to both Jews and a Gentile (Cornelius), but Paul also claimed to have been given a message that was universal. He was sent (Acts 26:17; cf. Rom. 1:1; 1 Cor. 9:1; Gal. 1:1), like all the apostles (Matt. 28:19), to preach to both Jews and Gentiles (Acts 26:17; cf. 22:21) from Damascus to Jerusalem, from Judea to other nations (26:20), to the small and the great alike (v. 22), bringing light to all people, whether Jews or Gentiles (v. 23). The light was not his own, but it appeared to him on the road to Damascus. Jesus was indeed the Servant of the Lord described as the One who was to become a light to all nations (Is. 49:6). Like Jeremiah, Paul was called from the womb (Jer. 1:5; cf. Gal. 1:15). Like him, he became a prophet to all nations (Jer. 1:5). Like Jeremiah (Jer. 1:10) Paul's mission was to build and to plant (Jer. 1:10; 1 Cor. 3:6; 14:3, 4, 17; Eph. 2:20, 22). His prophetic mission and authority were unquestionable. Paul's testimony was not given without struggle. It took the power of God to deliver him (Acts 26:17) from those who wanted to kill him (v. 21). The listeners' response to his message was similar to the response his Master had endured.

26:24–32. Reactions to Paul's Defense. Festus reacted in a similar way as the Athenians had (17:32). Apparently, it was inconceivable to him that a dead person could be raised from the grave. This was folly to the Gentiles (1 Cor. 1:23). He attributed Paul's teachings to mental damage (Acts 26:24) that his academic training had done to him (2:13). Someone who is not willing to listen to the voice of God may come up with strange reasons to justify decisions (e.g., Acts 2:13). Paul answered Festus respectfully, telling him that what he said was truthful and reasonable (26:25), the two pillars of philosophy. He told Agrippa that his teachings about Jesus were well known and that he was fully aware of them (v. 26).

Paul was not just a debater but a person interested in the salvation of the perishing. As such, he indirectly made an appeal to Agrippa. Paul was convinced that the king believed in the prophets and that he probably believed in the resurrection, although not in the resurrection of Jesus. The king's answer is difficult to translate (Acts 26:28). It can be translated, "You almost [*oligos*—"little" or "short"] persuade me to become a Christian," "In a short time you will persuade me," or "Are you trying to persuade me in such a short time?" Paul appealed also to the audience, sharing his prayer to God that Agrippa as well as all the other hearers would become a Christian like he was himself (v. 29). He wanted for all of them to have what he received from the Lord. In order to release any possible tension, he added with a touch of wistful humor, "except for these chains" (v. 29). The embarrassment of Agrippa became obvious, and not knowing what else to say, he rose to end a risky dialogue. Clearly, Paul was innocent of the charges raised against him (v. 31). What Agrippa did not know was that it was God's plan to take Paul to Rome.

The finale of this court appearance anticipates what is to come in the book of Acts. Paul was made a prisoner in Rome, but this fact did not prevent him from fulfilling his ministry (28:30–31). Paul remained a prisoner without charges ever being registered against him (25:26) after being found innocent several times (26:32). The situation was simply unreasonable (25:27). An appeal to a higher court was possible only in the

event of an unjust sentence. But God sometimes uses human absurdity to carry out His plans (23:11). Thus, Paul was able to go safely to Rome without fear of assault by zealots.

27:1—28:31

FROM CAESAREA TO ROME

Luke concludes his book with an account of Paul's journey from his prison in Caesarea to his prison in Rome. The narrative can be divided in five parts: sailing into a storm (27:1–44); Paul's mission to the Gentiles in Malta (28:1–10); Christians welcoming him in Rome (28:11–16); Paul's mission among the Jews (28:17–29); and Paul's universal mission (28:30–31). The message Luke intended to convey through this narrative will also be explored.

27:1–44

Adventures on the Sea

The time had finally come for Paul to leave for Rome. It appears that Luke was traveling with Paul (notice his use of "we" and "us"), along with Aristarchus (v. 2; cf. Col. 4:10; Philem. 24). However, Luke also appears to have been absent some of the time because he uses the third person plural ("they") in Acts 27:13–17, 27–29, 36–44.

27:1–8. The Voyage to Rome Begins. The trip is consistent with the sailing routes in the eastern Mediterranean Sea that took into account the prevailing winds. The vessels followed a circular course connecting Alexandria to Sidon, Ephesus, Corinth, Syracuse, and Rome. From Rome the ships sailed to Carthage or returned to Alexandria along the African coast of Cyrenaica. Paul and his companions thus left the secondary port of Caesarea bound for Sidon, where larger ships anchored. The prisoners were in the custody of a Roman officer named Julius of the Imperial Cohort; its importance is indicated by the use of the name of Augustus (v. 1). Julius was very considerate of Paul throughout the trip (v. 32) and even saved his life (v. 43). At Sidon, where all passengers disembarked, Julius treated Paul humanely (*philanthrōpōs*—"benevolently"), even allowing him to enjoy the company of friends, who may have been Christians in that city (v. 3; see 11:19; Luke 6:17).

An atmospheric depression brought strong headwinds on the seas, and the ships were compelled to continue along the coast while waiting for a change of weather. They managed to reach Myra, a port in Lycia. Fortunately, the centurion found a strong Alexandrian ship going to Italy—a kind of passenger cargo ship that could take on two hundred and seventy-six people in addition to a load of wheat (Acts 27:38). Egypt, from which it had come, was at that time one of the major granaries of the empire. Despite the vessel's power, the journey was very slow and painful (vv. 7–8), but it finally took them to a place properly called "Good Port" or "Fair Havens."

27:9–12. Paul's Warning Ignored. During the months between November and March, there was hardly any navigation in the Mediterranean Sea. Since compasses did not exist at that time, navigation was by sight along coasts and islands by daylight or by the stars by night. Luke dates the time of the year using the Jewish calendar by indicating that the Day of Atonement ("the Fast") had already passed (v. 9). It was celebrated on the tenth of the month of Tishri, in late September or early October. Paul, who had experienced shipwrecks before (2 Cor. 11:25), urged them not to pursue the trip because it was too dangerous (Acts 27:10). But the Roman officer chose to trust the knowledge of the helmsman or pilot and the owner of the ship. Following their advice would, in case of an accident, help him to justify his decision to his superiors. But the shipmaster and the captain had their good reasons to move on. By remaining too long in the ship's hold during the wet winter season, wheat was likely to be damaged and unsellable. Although the port was known as "Fair Havens," they found it unsuitable (v. 12) to sustain their cargo. They decided to reach the island of Crete, where they could store the wheat in granaries throughout the winter. By choosing to leave despite Paul's advice, the two men reluctantly suffered what they had wanted to avoid: the loss of goods (vv. 10, 21, 38). The best human calculations can result in failure when one lacks faith and confidence in the prophetic word. The second part of the narrative will show that confidence in the words of God's messengers brings salvation.

27:13–44. In the Tempest. The ship was facing such strong and threatening headwinds that only total trust in God would make it possible for all passengers to survive. The story is organized as follows: (1) salvation by works is always doomed (vv. 13–20); (2) the message comes from heaven (vv. 21–26); (3) solidarity is necessary for success (vv. 27–32); (4) the communion or sharing of bread (vv. 33–38); and (5) salvation for all (vv. 39–44).

1. The Failure of Human Efforts. The main problem facing the travelers was the strong wind, which Luke refers to by various designations: *anemos*—"wind" (vv. 4, 7, 15); *notos*—"the south wind" (v. 13); *eurakylōn*, or as in some manuscripts *euroklydōn*—"a strong northeast wind" or "Northeaster" (v. 14), which is described in the same verse as an *anemos typhōnikos*—"a tempestuous wind," "hurricane wind" or "typhoon." In sum, the crew did not know which wind they should depend on and ended up encountering a northeastern wind that pushed them back where they came from. By not listening to the will of God as Paul expressed it, they faced a storm (see Jon. 1:3–4; cf. Pss. 61:3; 91:1). They finally found refuge near an island called "Clauda" or "Cauda" (Acts 27:16). Thinking themselves masters of their destiny, they engaged in superhuman efforts to save themselves. They allowed the ship to drift and hoisted the lifeboat with difficulty because it was probably filled with water (v. 16). Then they reinforced the ship by stringing cables (v. 17), probably already in place, and tightened them using winches; they lowered the sails (v. 17) because they feared being stranded on the sandy coast of Cyrenaica in North Africa; and they lightened the ship by throwing overboard all unnecessary baggage (v. 18) but kept the cargo food of grain and wheat (v. 38), all too important to be lost. The sailors were exhausted from the work, so the travelers helped them to throw overboard the ship's tackle, probably the mainsail, ropes, and masts (v. 19). Now they had no means of navigation, not even the sun or stars to serve as benchmarks (v. 20). When the sailors had lost all hope, the word of salvation reached them.

2. Salvation Is Freely Offered by God. Paul appears to have taken charge of the ship since he spoke freely and everyone listened. Without naming the God he served, probably because he was among Gentiles, Paul gave them hope: not one of them would die (v. 22). This message, Paul said, was given to him during the night by an angel of the God he belonged to and served (v. 23). These words renewed their courage despite the fact that they had had to suffer material loss (vv. 22, 26). This is the first time God is mentioned in this story. With it Paul offered them God's grace. In the story of Jonah, all the sailors were endangered because of the unfaithfulness of the prophet (Jon. 1:12), but in this account the passengers were all saved because of the presence of a true prophet of God (Acts 27:24).

3. A Lesson on the Value of Solidarity. Luke indicates that the navigation continued for fourteen more nights. He does not mention the "days," perhaps to emphasize the sailor's dependence on God. While the sailors had been afraid to get too near the coast of Africa, they were relieved to realize that they were nearing the Adriatic Sea, which was the route to their destination. It was during the night that the sailors saw their first hope of salvation thanks to probes into the sea (vv. 27–28; cf. Matt. 25:6). They were hoping for the daylight of their deliverance (Acts 27:29). It is at this point that the selfishness of the sailors led them to lower the lifeboat to try to save themselves without helping the passengers or soldiers (v. 30). Knowledgeable as they were of the sea, they knew the risks involving grounding the ship (cf. 27:41). But the soldiers finally cut loose the last hope of human salvation left by cutting the rope that held the lifeboat to the vessel so the sailors could not abandon them.

4. A Meal That Brought Hope. At the dawn of a new day Paul invited the passengers to overcome their fears and renew their strength by eating some food (vv. 33–34). Four verbs highlight the scene of the meal: he took bread, he gave thanks, he broke the bread, and he began to eat (v. 35). The action Luke describes has led some to associate this meal with the celebration of the Lord's Supper—and in that the celebration also of the Passover meal. While the terminology is similar, the context indicates that Luke is simply describing a normal meal and how Jews and Christians gave thanks to God when they ate (cf. 2:42, 46; 20:7, 11). After all, there is no mention of the cup, no explanation of the elements, and the participants were not believers. And rather than distributing the elements, Paul simply began to eat. In taking the initiative in officiating at the meal and giving God thanks, the apostle sought to reassure all those on board that God was in control and also to encourage them to get the nourishment they would need to survive the rest of the journey. After eating, they all helped to lighten the ship by throwing overboard its precious cargo of wheat that had been the cause of the bad decision of the pilot (27:38).

5. All Were Saved. Having eaten, the sailors began operations for a forced landing on a beach they could see in the distance (v. 39). But a rise of the sea bottom did not allow them to make it to the beach. They remained stuck in the sand at a distance from shore. The soldiers knew that they would be severely punished if the prisoners escaped, so they wanted to kill the prisoners. But the centurion dissuaded them from their plan because he did not want Paul to die (v. 43). He immediately organized the escape of all of them from the ship (v. 44). This is unquestionably a story of hope and salvation that encourages us to hope in the Lord in the midst of our own storms, anticipating our ultimate deliverance.

28:1–31
Mission to the World

The difficulties Paul confronted did not bring to an end the mission Jesus had entrusted to him. After throwing themselves into the sea, the passengers arrived soaking wet on the island of Malta. They were shivering from cold and rain, but fortunately, the local inhabitants (*barbaroi*—"individuals who did not speak Greek") of the island rescued them.

28:1–10. Paul's Ministry in Malta. On the island, the life of Paul was once more threatened when he was bitten by a viper. Miraculously the event had no effect on him. He lived, and the snake ended up in the fire from which it was attempting to escape (v. 5). In the final destruction, Satan, the ancient serpent, will also be thrown into a lake of fire (cf. Rev. 20:10). This event in Paul's life foreshadows that eventuality.

The first reaction of the Maltese was to conclude that prisoner Paul must be an evil person who was able to survive the sea but who finally met the justice of God. They were sure he would die. They believed that evil is always associated with a fault committed (28:4; cf. Luke 13:1–5). But on seeing that Paul did not die, they, like the inhabitants of Lystra (Acts 14:11–12), considered Paul to be a god (28:6). This time, however, Luke does not tell us about Paul's reaction. The matter was cleared up later in the narrative, when through a second miracle Paul demonstrated that he was only an instrument of God.

Having been well received by Publius, the most prominent leader of the island, Paul was given the opportunity to heal the father of his host. He did it by praying, thus demonstrating that he was not a god (v. 8). We note in passing that the cure of the patient came about by the laying on of hands, including the hand the snake had bitten. Miracles accompanied the proclamation of the gospel as demonstrations of victory over the enemy (cf. v. 9; Peter, Acts 4:30; 5:16; Philip, 8:7; Paul, 19:12). Luke does not tell us that there were conversions on the island, and yet they benefited from God's mercy (cf. Luke 6:35–36). What is clear is that the entire paragraph is built on the unusual kindness of the Maltese (Acts 28:2) and their amazing expressions of generosity (v. 10) toward people who had lost everything in a shipwreck. We can only suggest that in the hearts of such Gentiles, the word of the gospel must have found a positive response.

28:11–16. Arrival at Rome. The stay on Malta lasted three months, the time needed for spring to arrive and navigation to become possible again. Luke no longer mentions the other passengers but focuses only on Paul and his companions, which include the Roman soldiers. They heard about a ship from Alexandria whose owners had wisely chosen to spend the winter in an island seaport and were able to sail with them (v. 11). From port to port the ship made its way closer to Rome, apparently docking in Puteoli (v. 13) because from then on the journey would be on foot because Rome was not a port city.

Was the centurion who accompanied Paul converted? Luke does not say, though one certainly would have to conclude that at the very least his heart was warmed toward Paul and the gospel he proclaimed. Not only was he responsible for saving Paul from death on the ship (27:42), but he also showed no urgency to rid himself of his prisoner. He even allowed a week-long stay with the believers in Puteoli (28:14), and his report was so favorable that Paul enjoyed a wide range of privileges from the soldier in charge of his care in Rome (vv. 16, 30).

Despite the warm welcome of his brothers in Puteoli, Paul seems to have been worried about the welcome he might receive from the churches in Rome. He was encouraged when brothers from Rome arrived to meet and welcome him on his way to the city (28:15). Although Paul had received specific visions (23:11) and divine reassurances (27:24), like everyone else, he also needed brotherly love.

28:17–31. Paul's Ministry in Rome. On arriving in Rome, Paul was transferred from the care of the centurion Julius to that of a lower-ranking Roman soldier and placed under house arrest as he awaited a verdict in his case (vv. 16, 20). The fact that Paul was not imprisoned indicates the weakness of the case against him. Luke describes Paul's ministry in Rome in three sections: Paul justifying himself before the Jews (vv. 17–22); the exposition of Paul's message and the reaction of his Jewish listeners (vv. 23–29); and the continuation of Paul's universal ministry (vv. 30–31).

1. Paul Justified Himself before the Jews. After three days in Rome, Paul resumed his missionary work. He took the initiative to convene some Jewish leaders to justify or clarify his presence in Rome. The authorities in Jerusalem had not sent a delegation to complain about him as would have been expected; therefore, Paul took the initiative in the dialogue. He assured the elders of two things: he had not done anything against his people or against the customs of the fathers (28:17), and he had no intention to raise charges against his nation before Caesar in order to establish his innocence (v. 19). As he had previously said in Jerusalem (23:6), it was because of the hope of Israel, the hope in the coming Messiah, who for him was Jesus, that he was indicted (28:20). He did not want his self-justification to be offensive to his Jewish audience.

The response of the elders was largely positive. They had not been officially informed about Paul by the authorities in Jerusalem, and people who had come from there had not spoken evil against him. Nevertheless, they were interested in listening to what he had to say about this sect that was being opposed everywhere. They were interested in Paul's teachings (v. 22).

2. Paul Defined His Teaching. Paul took the opportunity to share with his invitees the testimony from the Scriptures (v. 23) in accordance with the mission entrusted to him—to proclaim the good news of Jesus, especially how His life and death fulfilled the Scriptures (15:3; 20:24; 23:11; 26:16, 22; cf. 1:8). For him Jesus was the living Christ who is Son of God and Lord through His resurrection from the dead (cf. Rom. 1:4). Using the Scriptures, he tried to persuade them that Jesus was the Messiah. Unfortunately, sometimes the proclamation of the gospel pulls people apart, and in this case some believed and others did not (Acts 28:24). For Paul, accepting Jesus as Lord and Savior meant being faithful to the customs of his ancestors (v. 17). If the hope of Israel (v. 20) failed to be received by those to whom it was first given, it would bear much fruit among the Gentiles (v. 28). He told his Jewish friends that the faith of Israel was being made accessible to non-Jews because there is only one Messiah for humankind. The quotation from Isaiah 6:9–10 was not intended to condemn the Jews but was an expression of God's painful reaction to the misunderstandings, deafness, and hardening of the hearts of His people (Acts 28:26–27). In this concluding section Luke talks not about a rejection of the Jews but about the fact of the disagreement between those who believed and those who did not (vv. 24–25). Some manuscripts contain v. 29, which refers again to the disagreement between the believing and unbelieving Jews (cf. vv. 24–25) and to the great debate they had among themselves.

3. Paul Pursued His Ministry. The book of Acts closes with a positive picture of Paul as a servant of the Lord proclaiming and teaching the gospel with no one forbidding him to do it. Luke relates that from Rome he was preaching to all people (vv. 30–31; cf. Rom. 1:14; 1 Cor. 1:24). Luke stresses that the mission of the church was not about to end. It was to be taken, according to the words of Jesus, to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8; cf. Matt. 28:14).

The narrative ends with Paul in Rome proclaiming the hope that God entrusted to His people and that now belongs to humanity. It is a hope that found fulfillment in the coming of the Messiah and that looks forward to its consummation in the return of the Jesus, who ascended to heaven (Acts 1:9–11). That hope remains alive today.

EPISTLES

INTRODUCTION TO THE NEW TESTAMENT EPISTLES

The proclamation of the gospel through the apostles and believers resulted in the growth and expansion of the Christian church. As the groups of believers multiplied, they faced challenges of persecution, false teachings, and natural disasters. To encourage and guide the believers through all these challenging circumstances, and under the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the apostles communicated with their congregations through written correspondence.

Besides the four Gospels and the book of Acts, the New Testament contains twenty-one letters, or epistles, written by several authors. Most were written to specific congregations or to individuals ministering in the fledgling Christian movement, while some were meant for a broader Christian audience. These letters, together with the rest of the New Testament and the Old Testament, are the exclusive foundation for Christian doctrine, hope, and ethical behavior. The mission impetus of the church is reflected in the writing of the Epistles, and the Epistles provide guidance for conflict management and the organization of the church.

SIMILARITES BETWEEN THE NEW TESTAMENT EPISTLE AND THE GRECO-ROMAN LETTER

When comparing the early Christian letters to secular Greco-Roman letters of the first century, scholars find many similarities. Most letters were sent as rolled-up scrolls, and most began with the same basic elements: a salutation, a greeting, and a declaration of thanksgiving. The NT Epistles exhibit these common characteristics.

Salutation

At the top of the letter was the salutation. It included the name of the writer, along with his or her title or role and the name of the recipient. Thus, recipients could know at a glance—merely by the first few lines of the scroll—where the letter was sent from and for whom it was intended.

Greeting

The salutation was typically followed by a greeting, which was a wish for good health. A typical Greco-Roman greeting used the Greek word *chairein* (from the verb *chairō*, meaning "to rejoice" and thus "to wish one well"). Among the NT letters, only James uses *chairein*; all other authors replace this term with the similar-sounding word *charis*, usually translated as "grace" in English. Jewish letters usually add the greeting of "peace," from the Hebrew word *shalom*. Early Christians, however, appear to have been the first to make use of the composite greeting of grace and peace (e.g., Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:3; 1 Pet. 1:2; Rev. 1:4). This greeting embodied a blessing from God Himself and from His Son Jesus Christ. The usual Greco-Roman desire for the recipient's good health is found only in 3 John 2.

Declaration of Thanksgiving

The NT Epistles focus their thanksgiving on God. Paul's correspondence is noticeable for typically following the greeting with words of thanksgiving for his audience (e.g., Rom. 1:8; 1 Cor. 1:4; Phil. 1:3). He specifically thanks God for their growing faith, their love, and their Christian witness in order to build up the believers and to encourage a spirit of thankfulness to God in all Christians.

Body

The main part of the letter—the body—shares the author's main concerns for writing. Naturally, there are considerably different reasons someone might want to write a letter. Some letters mention previous correspondence and answer questions posed or further instruct on teachings only partially explained during an apostle's visit to the congregation (e.g., 1 Cor. 5:9; 7:1). In the Epistles, the apostles frequently struggled against the influence of false teachers and the incorrect understanding of spiritual themes. Thus, the NT letters attempted to correct doctrine or practice. Instructions were given for resolving conflicts, for qualifications of leaders, and for congregational worship and the use of spiritual gifts.

Concluding Remarks

Occasionally, Paul marks the conclusion of his letter with the term *loipon* ("finally" or "what remains," "other matters"; e.g., 2 Cor. 13:11; Eph. 6:10; Phil. 4:8; 2 Thess. 3:1). In each case, it is followed by an exhortation to pursue some course of Christian action: to pray, to rejoice, to think on spiritual themes, or to live in harmony with one another. These closing thoughts often summarize Paul's main points in the letters. The conclusion of these letters reveals their personal nature by including greetings to specific individuals in the congregation to which the letter is addressed, as well as passing along greetings to the church from individuals present with the author (e.g., Rom. 16:3–16, 21–23). Such greetings provide hints about Paul's traveling companions and his location when writing, and they even provide accountability for the recipient's behavior with respect to certain exhortations or imperatives given.

The way several of Paul's letters end may hint at what was once his original way of ensuring that the recipients knew the letter was from him, even if the bulk of the letter was penned by a scribe (e.g., 1 Cor. 16:21; Gal. 6:11; Col. 4:18; 2 Thess. 3:17; Philem. 1:19). Paul's statement at the conclusion of 2 Thessalonians is especially revealing, as he confirms that the letter was indeed from him (2 Thess. 3:17). This made it possible to distinguish Paul's letters from other correspondence.

Many of the letters conclude with a benediction: either a final wish for grace to the recipients (e.g., Rom. 16:24; Heb. 13:25), or for peace (1 Pet. 5:14; 3 John 14), or with a hymn of praise (Rom. 16:25–27; 2 Pet. 3:18; Jude 24–25). These letters exhibit graciousness and Christian love at both the opening and the closing. Several letters have unique conclusions. James and 1 John both end rather abruptly, lacking any type of salutation or greeting. James 5:12 uses the term *pro pantōn* ("above all") in a way similar to Paul's use of "finally," suggesting a cadence and therefore some closure; but the conclusion of 1 John is odd and somewhat puzzling, introducing idolatry for the first time in his writing at the very end of the document. The other two letters of John are quite brief and share similar endings. They conclude with a desire to continue correspondence face-to-face as opposed to with pen and ink (2 John 12; 3 John 13–14).

ANCIENT MANUSCRIPTS

The field of archaeology has uncovered—at the time of this writing—more than six thousand handwritten fragments or complete collections of the NT, more than any other ancient source. These manuscripts are made up of various materials and were used for different purposes.

Papyri

The oldest of these manuscripts are written on papyrus, a reedlike plant whose pithy centers were split open, placed in two layers—one horizontal and one vertical—then pressed together and dried, making an early type of paper. The fragile nature of these manuscripts and the passage of many centuries, during which they were subject to many external forces (natural decay, neglect, destruction, accident, war, and other depredations), make it difficult to find complete papyri of the biblical text. Even so, with the exception of only 2 Timothy, all of the NT Epistles in Greek have been found on papyrus. One of the oldest manuscripts, Papyrus 46 (P46), contains most of the epistles of Paul and is dated by papyrologists to between A.D. 175 and 225, with the possibility that it may be even older. This confirms, remarkably, the accurate preservation of the apostles' messages from an era when all writing was done by hand on relatively perishable materials. This evidence from archaeology gives readers of the Bible a strong basis to believe that the biblical text we have today is a reliable copy of the thoughts and intentions of the original writers.

Parchments

Over time, more durable material for writing was developed. The most common for many centuries was dried, stretched animal skins called parchment. Most of the complete collections of the NT (e.g., the fourth-century manuscript known as Codex Sinaiticus) and all of the Epistles have been found on this more easily preserved and durable material.

Scrolls and Codices

While some of these documents may have first been copied and distributed in scroll format, by the early second century they were nearly all copied and bound in codex (plural, *codices*) form—the precursor to our modern book. Be[illegible] the pages of a codex could have writing on both front and back, it was possible to gather more documents in one place. Also, finding specific sections of the Gospels or referencing single letters was far easier in a codex than in a long scroll. By the fourth century, the popularity of the codex led to the abandonment of the scroll altogether in the broader culture, though the scroll is still used for the Hebrew Scriptures in Jewish tradition to this day.

LITERARY STYLE, SCRIBAL ASSISTANCE, AND CANONICAL ACCEPTANCE

The authors of the NT Epistles—few of whom were formally educated—present us with a range of literary styles and rhetorical techniques.

Differing Language and Style

The letters of John (often referred to as the Johannine Epistles) are, in spite of their profound themes, written in a basic style of Greek with common vocabulary. That is, they are written in a way that suggests Greek was not John's primary language. The simplicity of John's letters contrasts with the beautifully poetic and refined literary style of the Epistle to the Hebrews and with the complex vocabulary and the rich sentence structure of 1 Peter. The letters of the Apostle Paul fall between these extremes, generally revealing a broad knowledge of both Hebrew and Greek, as well as the literature common to the day. Each author displays a unique style, yet within this diversity an underlying thematic unity can be found.

Amanuensis

Several Epistles indicate the use of an amanuensis—a scribe who did the actual writing from the author's dictation. We find a greeting from Paul's penman Tertius in Romans 16:22. The introduction to the letter clearly states that Paul was the author of the content, but this verse reveals it was an amanuensis who did the actual writing. The use of an amanuensis by a biblical author should not disturb readers, as there is little reason to believe a literary assistant would knowingly alter the apostle's language or message without permission or review. The use of different scribes at different times by the same author helps explain the subtle differences in vocabulary and literary style that scholars have noted among an author's various letters.

Acceptance and Canon

Forming the NT collection of documents into a single book (a canon) was a process both fluid and intentional. Collections of NT letters have been possible as early as Christians started saving and sharing Paul's letters. One of the first lists containing most of our current books is the Muratorian Canon, a document that dates to about A.D. 180. As the church continued to grow and expand over the next two hundred years, the desire to possess copies of the apostolic writings led councils of church leaders to discuss which books should be recognized as sacred Scripture and which should not. While there was general agreement on most of the documents, there was ongoing debate surrounding the inclusion of others—the Epistle to the Hebrews, for example, which sounded very Jewish to some, and the book of Revelation, whose apocalyptic genre made it very different from other NT writings.

By roughly the end of the fourth century, however, our current collection of twenty-seven books was widely recognized and received as canon, and thus Scripture (see "Formation of the Biblical Canon," p. 21).

ORGANIZATION OF THE LETTERS

Once the canon was recognized as such, the individual documents had to be arranged in a logical format. The letters were not organized chronologically by the date they were written. Rather, their organization seems to have been influenced by the preferences of their users, based on the geographic spread of the gospel message. In the West, the Epistles were grouped first by author, then generally by length. The Pauline Epistles comprise the first and largest section, while the remaining documents were gathered in a separate group and identified as the General Epistles or Catholic Epistles ("catholic" meaning general or universal). In the East, in Bibles influenced by the Eastern Orthodox Church, the General Epistles precede the Pauline Epistles.

Pauline Epistles

Within the Pauline collection, scholars recognize two subcategories. The first is made up of the four Prison Epistles—Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon—so called because in each letter Paul indicates that he is a prisoner at the time of writing (Eph. 3:1, 4:1; Phil. 1:7–17; Col. 4:3, 10, 18; Philem. 1, 3–13, 23). The second subcategory is the Pastoral Epistles comprising three letters: 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus. Even though the Greek text of 1 Timothy is longer than several other Pauline Letters, this collection was kept together, proving an exception to the length-order rule. The stated recipients of the Pastoral Epistles are Timothy and Titus, two of Paul's close colleagues. These two men were appointed as Paul's apostolic delegates and were entrusted with providing spiritual leadership for the struggling believers in Ephesus and Crete.

With perhaps the exception of the Pastoral Epistles, the rest of Paul's letters were intended to be read to entire congregations. At least one letter, Ephesians, was probably intended as a kind of circular correspondence—a letter or tract originally intended for several of the churches in Asia Minor.

General Epistles

The final eight letters of the NT form a collection penned by at least four different authors. These constitute the General or Catholic Epistles. They are referred to as general or catholic in the sense that they are written to the entire church rather than to a specific congregation or individual. The first of these, Hebrews, has been subject to much debate regarding its origin, mainly because the letter is anonymous. Scholars have proposed several possible writers, and although tradition ascribes it to Paul, its placement outside the length-ordered collection of Pauline writings reveals some uncertainty. The letter is unique even among the Pauline writings due to its highly polished language and use of the Septuagint, the Greek

version of the OT. While some of the themes certainly harmonize with Paul's theology, its poetic style, grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structure are considered of a quality superior to any other writing in the NT canon, setting it apart—stylistically at least—from the other Pauline Letters.

The Epistles of James and Jude are traditionally attributed to two of the brothers or step-brothers of Jesus (see "The Brothers of Jesus," p. 1252). Two epistles bear the Apostle Peter's name, and three are attributed to John the Beloved Disciple. Many secular scholars dispute these traditional attributions, but legitimate reasons remain for assuming their authenticity and accepting the traditional attributions. Further details about authorship are found in the introduction to each of these Epistles in this commentary.

Apocalyptic Letter

The only book in the NT considered apocalyptic in nature is Revelation. While not considered part of the collection of Epistles, it incorporates some of the typical marks of a Greco-Roman letter in its opening chapter (see Rev. 1:4–11). The original audience of the Apocalypse is stated in 1:11 as seven specific literal congregations in Asia Minor, located on or near what is today the western coast of Turkey. Most of Revelation's content—the unique imagery, allusions to the OT, and narrative style—is quite different from the main body of the rest of the Epistles. However, John returns to the epistolary format in the benediction in Revelation 22:21. At least portions of Revelation, therefore, should be read with the epistolary genre in mind.

HISTORICAL SETTING AND CHRONOLOGY OF THE PAULINE EPISTLES

Luke's careful attention to sequential narrative in the book of Acts and his occasional historical references to known events and people make it possible to reconstruct a tentative chronological timeline of Paul's ministry and missionary travels. This chronology allows scholars to narrow the range of possible dates for the writing of some of Paul's works to within a couple of years. Such reconstruction is valuable since it offers a historical context for the letters and in turn helps interpreters better understand the issues facing the recipients—giving deeper meaning to the apostles' teachings and advice.

The Chronology of Pauline Epistles Based on Acts

A history of the four Gospels places the baptism of Jesus in A.D. 27 (cf. Luke 3:1–3; 21) and His death some three and a half years later. It can be assumed that events in Acts begin in A.D. 31. Moreover, in Acts Luke recalls historical events and rulers that may be dated with certainty, such as the Judean procurator Felix (Acts 23–24), who governed from A.D. 52 to 58; his successor, Porcius Festus (Acts 25–26), who governed from A.D. 59 to 62; and the Sanhedrin ruler and Pharisaic rabbi Gamaliel (Acts 5:34; 22:3), who died circa A.D. 52.

The first half of Acts follows Peter's Spirit-led ministry as he comes to learn about and accept God's plan for saving the Gentiles by faith. The book gives no indication of specific timing and cannot be used to date the Epistles Peter wrote. The second half of Acts shifts to Paul and his missionary endeavors. First referred to by his Jewish name, Saul, he is introduced in Acts in connection with the violent stoning death of Stephen, a Greek-speaking Christian (Acts 7:58). After Stephen's death, Saul became more directly involved in the persecution of other Greek-speaking believers (8:1–4). This persecution resulted in the scattering of believers, which ironically resulted in the spread of the gospel beyond Jerusalem.

Acts and Galatians

The narratives of Acts and the first two chapters of the Epistle to the Galatians correlate somewhat chronologically. The systematic persecution of believers by Saul took him down the road leading to Damascus, where he was confronted by the risen Christ (Acts 9:1–2; Gal. 1:13–14) and accepted Jesus as the promised Messiah (Acts 9:3–9; Gal. 1:15–16). His conversion and commission as an apostle to the Gentiles is commonly dated to A.D. 34, the year of the stoning of Stephen, corresponding to the fulfillment of the seventy-weeks prophecy in Daniel (Dan. 9:24–27). Soon thereafter, Saul began using his Greco-Roman name, Paul (Acts 13:9), most likely as a way to identify more closely with his Gentile audience.

After his conversion, Saul spent several days in Damascus preaching in the synagogues (Acts 9:19–22). Galatians 1:16–17 adds that during the "many days" mentioned in Acts 9:23, Saul traveled into Arabia and after three years returned to Damascus. It is at this time that local Jews plotted to kill him, but he escaped (9:23–25). Three years later, Paul visited Jerusalem for the first time, but fear and suspicion about the authenticity of his claims to be a Christian prevented him from meeting any of the apostles other than Peter and James, Jesus's brother. It was at this time that God convinced Paul in a vision to leave Jerusalem hastily, because the Jews there sought his life. He was brought to Caesarea and then sent on to his hometown of Tarsus (Acts 9:30; 22:17–21; Gal. 1:21).

Several years later, Barnabas traveled to Tarsus, seeking Paul's assistance for the growing work among the Gentiles in Antioch. Paul accepted the invitation and ministered in Antioch for a year (Acts 11:22–26). During that time, a great famine struck Judea. To support their fellow Jewish believers, the church in Antioch sent Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem with a monetary gift to help with the purchase of food (11:29–30; 12:25). For more on the relationship of this famine to the time of the Jerusalem Council and the writing of the book of Galatians, see Galatians: Introduction.

After concluding their visit to Jerusalem, Paul returned to Antioch with Barnabas and John Mark (Acts 12:25); soon after, Peter came to visit. It appears that, at this time, Peter—influenced by Jewish Christians who felt the new Gentile converts needed to be circumcised before they could become genuine Christians—refused to eat with Gentiles. Recognizing Peter's hypocrisy, Paul rebuked him publicly (Acts 15:1; Gal. 2:11–21). This confrontation must have taken place before the Jerusalem Council mentioned in Acts 15, or Paul likely would have cited the Council's decision to accept Gentile believers without first being circumcised.

Paul's First Missionary Journey

Paul and Barnabas took Mark and set off on the first of Paul's three missionary journeys (Acts 13:4—14:28). This first trip took them to the island of Cyprus, then to the southern coast of Asia Minor. John Mark abandoned Paul and Barnabas at this point. But the two pressed on, continuing inland to the regions of Pamphylia and as far north as Pisidian Antioch. During this time, Paul also visited four cities in the southern portion of the Roman province of Galatia: Iconium, Lyconia, Lystra, and Derbe, where he raised up a significant number of disciples (14:21). It is possible that Paul wrote his letter to the Galatians either near the end of his first missionary journey or soon after returning to Antioch (ca. A.D. 49).

The reception of the Spirit by Gentiles brought questions from the Jewish believers, especially Pharisees who had accepted Christ as the Jewish Messiah: Why were the Gentiles not being encouraged to be circumcised and to follow the ritual law of the Torah? A council convened in Jerusalem to decide this as well as other matters relating to food sacrificed to idols, sexual immorality, the eating of blood, and the eating of animals that died without regard for hygienic methods of slaughter. After prayer and discussion regarding the work of the Spirit among the Gentiles—and based on evidence presented by Peter (15:7–11), Barnabas, and Paul (v. 12)—only a few Jewish practices were enjoined on the new Gentile believers in order to preserve fellowship among all the saints (15:1–29).

Paul's Second Missionary Journey

Decisions from the Council had to be reported to the churches, and Paul and Barnabas wished to revisit the congregations they had planted. But due to a disagreement over John Mark's involvement, Paul and Silas went one way and Barnabas took Mark another. Once again, the split caused by sharp dissention served to advance the kingdom: more territory could be covered by two missionary teams than by one (15:36–39).

Paul and Silas embarked on what would be Paul's second missionary journey (ca. A.D. 49), traveling first through Syria and Cilicia, then returning to Derbe and Lystra. Here they met Timothy, and it appears they took him along on their journey. Acts mentions that at this time they worked their way through the regions of Phrygia and Galatia. This may be a reference summarizing their movement from the area in southern Galatia to Phrygia in the north and then to Mysia and Troas (15:40—16:8). Others interpret the reference to Phrygia and Galatia (16:6) to mean that Paul visited the cities of Ancyra and Pessinus located much farther north in the geographical region that originally made up the ethnic kingdom of Galatia (for more on the background to Galatians and the North Galatian Theory, see Galatians: Introduction). Whatever the case, Paul eventually arrived at Troas, where he had a vision inviting him to Macedonia. In response to the vision, Paul and his companions sailed across the Aegean to Philippi (16:9–40).

After founding a church in Philippi, Paul continued westward through Amphipolis and Appolonia before stopping in Thessalonica, where he reasoned from the Scriptures in the synagogue that Jesus was the Christ, that is, the Messiah. As some Jews and Greeks responded positively to the gospel message, other Jews stirred up a mob (17:1–9). Paul and

Silas were forced to leave. They traveled first to Berea and then on to Athens (17:10–34). Concerned for the Thessalonian believers, Paul sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to check on the spiritual condition of the new believers there, while he and Silas remained in Athens (1 Thess. 3:1–7). After strenuous reasoning with the Athenian philosophers, Paul won a handful of new converts and turned from Athens to Corinth.

Paul ministered in Corinth while also joining Aquila and Priscilla in making tents to support himself. He remained there for a year and a half (Acts 18:1–17). Scholars date the writing of the Thessalonian correspondence to Paul's time there (A.D. 50–51). The second epistle was likely sent soon after Timothy returned to the Athens-Corinth area with their response to his first letter. When Paul finally headed back toward Syria and home, he made his first stop in the port city of Ephesus (18:18–21). A brief but promising meeting with local Jews led him to promise to return once he settled his business in Antioch.

Paul's Third Missionary Journey

No sooner had Paul returned to Caesarea and Antioch than he set out again for Ephesus, as he had promised, stopping along the way to revisit the churches in southern Galatia (18:22–23; 19:1). For nearly three years Paul remained in Ephesus, teaching in the school of Tyrannus (19:9–10). While in Ephesus, news reached Paul about problems in Corinth. First Corinthians was written in an attempt to solve those challenges and to addresses several questions the believers had asked of him in a letter sent to him. Opposition to Paul's ministry in Ephesus arose sometime later and led Paul to leave the city. News that the situation in the Corinthian church had deteriorated influenced him to travel to Greece via Macedonia. On the way to Corinth, however, word that the situation had improved seems to have prompted Paul to write another letter to the believers there: the letter we know as 2 Corinthians (2 Cor. 2:12–13; 7:5; 8:1–5; 9:2). After arriving in Corinth, Paul remained there for about three months, likely writing his letter to the Romans while there (A.D. 56–57). If the churches of Galatia consisted of the churches Paul may have founded in the ethnic kingdom of Galatia during his second missionary journey—instead of the churches in southern Galatia—then some claim this may have also been the time when Paul wrote his letter to the Galatians.

The last part of Paul's third missionary journey took him somewhat hurriedly from Corinth, by way of several cities along the eastern coast of the Aegean Sea (Acts 20:4—21:15), so he might be present in Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost. Paul's eagerness appears to have been at least partially motivated by the evangelistic opportunity of preaching Christ to all the Jews who would be present in Jerusalem to celebrate Pentecost. Paul was also bringing a financial gift from the Gentile churches for the poor community of Jewish believers in Jerusalem (Rom. 15:25–27; 1 Cor. 16:1–4). Accompanied by a delegation of representatives from the Gentile churches Paul founded (Acts 20:4–5), this gift not only symbolized a bond of fellowship but also the fulfillment of the OT prophecies that spoke of the wealth of the Gentiles coming to Jerusalem (Is. 45:14; 60:5–17; 61:6).

Although Paul had been warned of the dangers that awaited him in Jerusalem—the prophet Agabus even foretold his arrest—he was determined to present Christ there (Acts 21:8–15). Agabus's prophecy came true. Paul was arrested on false charges and eventually felt forced to appeal to Caesar.

On the way to Rome, Paul was shipwrecked on the island of Malta but safely, and finally, reached Rome about A.D. 60 or 61 (27:1—28:15). Once there, he was kept under house arrest (28:16) and given freedom to meet with Jews (28:16–22). It is likely that during this time of custody in Rome Paul wrote the Prison Epistles—Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon—since in those letters Paul claims to be a prisoner.

Last Days of the Apostle Paul

The book of Acts concludes with Paul in prison for two years in a rented house but offers no conclusion to the apostle's life or Roman ministry. However, evidence from some of his later letters (2 Tim. 4:20; Titus 3:12–13) suggests that his expectations for a soon release (Phil. 2:23–24; Philem. 22) were realized and that, for a brief time, he was free. By the time of the writing of 2 Timothy, he found himself back in chains again (2 Tim. 2:8–9; 4:6–8). Based on the testimony of early Christian writers, Paul's life ended in Rome at the hands of Nero, who died in A.D. 68.

If Paul was released from prison in A.D. 63, he would have had several years to again visit the congregations he had established and to write his final three canonical letters: the Pastoral Epistles. First Timothy recalls a visit to Ephesus, where Timothy remained to better organize the work, while Paul journeyed to Macedonia (1 Tim. 1:3). The Epistle to Titus confirms Paul's work on the island of Crete, where he also left Titus as his apostolic delegate (Titus 1:5) and mentions wintering in Nicopolis (3:12). Second Timothy suggests Paul had also visited Troas and likely had to leave personal belongings behind due to another imprisonment that would eventually return him to Rome, where he spent his last days (2 Tim. 4:17). Thus, 1 Timothy and Titus were probably written about A.D. 65 or 66, after Paul's first Roman imprisonment. Second Timothy, however, was written sometime later, shortly before Paul's execution—probably about A.D. 66 or 67.

THE GENERAL EPISTLES

While the authorship of some of the Epistles and the dates of their composition can be determined with varying degrees of accuracy, other Epistles in the NT are not as clear. For these reasons, these are referred to as General Epistles. It is also helpful to look at these General Epistles together to establish common themes.

Issues of Chronology

While the chronology of Paul's ministry in Acts and his letters can be outlined with some certainty, the same cannot be said for the General Epistles. Scholarly discussion regarding the dating of these letters often hinges on the conclusions of authorship, an at-times debated subject. Accepting the stated or traditional author gives tentative, but definitely more solid, ground on which to form dating conclusions. It is possible that the earliest of the letters written was James, perhaps sometime in the mid to late A.D. 40s, based on the distinctively Jewish nature of the letter (e.g., James 1:1; 2:2, 8–13, 21, 25; 4:4) and on the absence of any reference to the conflict between Jews and Gentiles, which we would expect if the letter was written after the Jerusalem Council. The Epistle to the Hebrews is usually dated to the years just preceding the Jerusalem temple's destruction in A.D. 70. This seems reasonable, because in the extensive discussion of the sanctuary, the author never mentions Jerusalem's destruction, even when such an argument would unquestionably bolster his focus on the heavenly sanctuary. The latest written letters are likely the Johannine correspondence, which, based on theological and historical situations in the church, are frequently dated to the late first century (see the introduction to each epistle).

Themes

Each epistle identifies Jesus of Nazareth—the Jewish Messiah—as its primary subject, with all other subjects secondarily linked to Him. Various sections of some of the Epistles interpret the life and teachings, death, resurrection, ascension, and heavenly ministry of Jesus in the context of the cosmic battle between God and Satan. Some of them emphasize the confirmation of Jesus as the fulfillment of OT prophecy and reveal the work of the Holy Spirit as a continuation of the ministry of Jesus despite His physical absence. They at times proclaim the Christian hope in the physical, glorious return of Jesus and the judgment that accompanies it. They also sometimes apply the teachings of Jesus and the ramifications of His salvific work to congregational life in order to prepare the church for the "blessed hope" of the appearance and glory of Jesus Christ, our God and Savior (Titus 2:13). In short, the Epistles encapsulate the gospel: the good news as it is found in Christ.

Jesus Christ and His Work. The primary theme across the NT is the centrality of the person and work of Jesus Christ as the sole basis of the salvation of humanity. The historical reality of Jesus of Nazareth is affirmed by the apostles (e.g., 1 Cor. 15:1–8; 1 John 1:1–3; 1 Pet. 1:16–18). Yet the Epistles reveal Jesus as far more than just human; He is equal with God (Phil. 2:6), the image of the invisible God (Col. 1:15), and the ultimate radiance of the Father's glory and exact impress of His substance (Heb. 1:3). Paul even calls Christ "our great God and Savior" (Titus 2:13).

Christ's glory is juxtaposed with human need. The Gospels affirm God's holy law and that this moral law defines humanity as lawbreakers. The sad condition of humanity is summed up in Romans 3:23 and 6:23: "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" and "the wages of sin is death." Sin in Judaism has been defined as breaking the Jewish law, especially the Moral Law of God that is enunciated in the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20 and Deut. 5). Paul argues that the Law's purpose is to point out sin—to make sin a tangible and reprehensible object that can be dealt with objectively (cf. Rom. 7:7–13; 1 Tim. 1:8–11). Without help from an outside source, humans are doomed to a short life on earth filled with pain and

little more; they certainly have no hope for life after death. God's loving nature, in an expression of His grace, moved Him to open a way of salvation for humanity by sending His own Son, Jesus, who has "redeemed us from the curse of the law" (Gal. 3:13; cf. Col. 1:13–14).

There are many metaphors for salvation in the Epistles that point toward the realities of redemption from the slavery of sin (e.g., Rom. 3:24, Eph. 1:7), adoption by a new Father (e.g., Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:5), forgiveness for sin (e.g., Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14), substitutionary atonement (e.g., Heb. 2:9; 1 John 2:2), ransom from abductors (e.g., 1 Tim. 2:6; 1 Pet. 1:18), moral influence (e.g., Rom. 5; 1 John 4:9–11), restoration of relationship (Rom. 5:1; 2 Cor. 5:14–21), and others. Each one contributes to our understanding of what God has done in Christ. But the fundamental message is clear: Salvation is God's work, in which human beings are invited to participate. It is not the result of their work. In many of these metaphors, the sacrifice of Jesus while hanging on a Roman cross forms a central necessity for the reconciliation of God and humanity. No one but God, through Jesus, could carry out this work of salvation, because only His blood could truly cleanse the conscience from works of death (Heb. 9:13–14).

For the apostles, the death of Jesus was the act that revealed in a unique way the character of God in the cosmic controversy. But it was the resurrection of Jesus that ultimately and conclusively proved that Christians are no longer helpless in the controversy with sin and Satan. The power that raised Jesus from the dead is now available to believers as the Holy Spirit falls on them and fills them with power from above. Paul devoted an entire chapter to the resurrection (1 Cor. 15), showing that if Jesus did not rise from the dead, Christian faith is useless. Jesus is our divine Lord—alive and seated with His Father on the throne of grace. The empty tomb testifies that God has conquered death, not only providing hope in a future resurrection of the sleeping saints but also promising believers a hope-filled life of victory in the present. The victorious life is synonymous with the experience of growing in godliness or holiness—often termed sanctification—and influences the exhortations found throughout the Epistles (1 Pet. 1:14–16).

Christ's present work for His saints extends beyond His sacrifice on Calvary. It includes a ministry at the right hand of God, interceding for His people (Rom. 8:34), offering forgiveness and grace in time of need (Heb. 4:16), and guiding His church (Rev. 2–3). The cross and resurrection form the basis for Christ's ministry in heaven, where He serves in a temple of which the earthly sanctuary was only a shadow or copy (Heb. 8:1–5).

But a purely spiritual relationship with Jesus was, for the apostles, a temporary situation. The Gospels record Jesus's promise to return, and the disciples looked with joyful and awe-filled expectation for the day they would be physically reunited with their Savior and Friend. In his correspondence with the Thessalonians, Paul borrows the OT language of the "day of the Lord"—the great day of God's visitation of judgment on Israel and the nations—when speaking of Christ's return (1 Thess. 5:1–7; cf. 2 Thess. 2). He suggests that the coming of Jesus will initiate the first resurrection (1 Cor. 15:23; 1 Thess. 4:13–18). This coming of Jesus is also referred to as "the arrival" (*parousia*; cf. Matt. 24:27; 1 Thess. 2:19; James 5:7; 2 Pet. 3:4) and "the appearing" (*epiphaneia*; cf. 1 Tim. 6:14; Titus 2:13). At this grand event Christ will raise the dead, perfect the saints, and bodily reunite with His church.

Ethical and Moral Standards. The Epistles contain many moral imperatives that govern Christian relationships. Christ's teaching and modeling of loving service was a corrective renewal of God's high moral standard. Where the Moral Law served to regulate human affairs—often through prohibitions—the spirit behind these commands had been lost sight of in Jesus's day. The imperatives Christ initiated and the apostles strengthened do not ignore or abandon the Moral Law entirely; rather, they prescribe positive behaviors toward others. In fact, far from disregarding moral laws emphasized in the Scriptures relating to things such as sexual purity, murder, and divorce, the Epistles strengthen those laws by revealing the issues of the heart involved and pointing the Christian to Christ's power to effect change.

In order to carry out these ethical imperatives, believers are to be baptized with the Holy Spirit, a fulfillment of the words of Jesus in Luke that they would be enveloped by God's power from above (Luke 24:49). The Spirit empowers Christians to walk in obedience to the Law—a walk that goes beyond the letter of the written code without ignoring it, thus fulfilling the OT through love (Gal. 5:13–18). Christians who walk by the Spirit remain connected to the Source of physical and spiritual life and cannot help but bear fruit from this same Spirit. In Galatians 5:19–25, Paul contrasts the fruit of the Spirit with the actions of the *sarx* ("flesh"), which can be interpreted in this context as a reference to our sinful nature. The fruit of the Spirit is also a new covenant expression of Paul's exhortation to submit to one another (Eph. 5:21).

Several Epistles deal with household codes: guidelines governing behavior between husbands and wives (Eph. 5:22–33; Col. 3:18–19; 1 Pet. 3:1–7), fathers and children (Eph. 6:1–4; Col. 3:20–21), slaves and masters (Eph. 6:5–9; Col. 3:22—4:1; 1 Pet. 2:18–25), and citizens and governing leaders (Rom. 13:1–7; Heb. 13:17; 1 Pet. 2:11–17). The intent was to create a condition in which believers could live in peace with one other and, as much as possible, with society (see "Ancient Household Codes," p. 1721).

As is the case with any organization made of two or more people, disagreements and divisions can arise. The apostles used the unity that Christ established as a foundation for all relationships. The Epistle to the Ephesians, especially, is concerned with the unity of the believers (cf. Eph. 4:3). Paul warns believers to remain far from those who cause divisions (Rom. 16:17), and to find ways to agree with one another so that divisions may not occur and so that unity in both mind and thought can be preserved (1 Cor. 1:10). Only by an intense focus on the life and teachings of Jesus and the hope of His return could this unity be preserved.

Mission and Organization. The early church was not a static body; it was mission-focused, necessitating thoughtful and practical organization. The believers are likened to a beautifully created body where all the individual members work together under the loving guidance of Christ's headship (1 Cor. 12:12–27; Eph. 5:23; Col. 1:18; 2:19). Paul also compares believers in the world to an aroma of life (2 Cor. 2:15–17). Christians support the work of missionary preachers (1 Cor. 9:11–12; 2 Cor. 11:8; 3 John 5–8) and divide the work between different individuals (Gal. 2:8).

First Timothy and Titus provide directives on selecting local leadership in new congregations. The earliest evidence for organized labor is found in Paul's letter to the Philippians, where he mentions elders and deacons in his salutation (Phil. 1:1). Qualifications for elders/bishops (1 Tim. 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–16) and deacons (1 Tim. 3:8–13) are outlined in some detail; but surprisingly, very little is said about actual job descriptions. Either the congregations already knew what the work entailed or, more likely, the primary work of the overseer or deacon was ministry through the example of godly behavior. The qualifications *were* their primary ministry. Such teaching accords with the words of Jesus that those in the world exercise "authority" over others, but that it would not be so among the followers of Jesus (Mark 10:42–45).

The fulfillment of Christ's promise to send the Holy Spirit was attended by special, often supernatural, abilities called spiritual gifts. These gifts include capabilities such as missionary calling, knowledge and wisdom, healing ability, leadership, administration, generous giving, prophecy, and speaking in other languages or having the ability to interpret them (cf. Rom. 12:4–8; 1 Cor. 12–14; Eph. 4:11–12; 1 Pet. 4:10–11). These spiritual gifts are intended to sanctify the saints, strengthen the congregations, equip believers for service and mission, and organize and unify their efforts (see Eph. 4:12–13).

Greco-Roman Worldview and Heresy. The monotheistic faith of Judaism and Christianity was diametrically opposed to the Greco-Roman worldview and its polytheism. Several heresies with roots in pagan ideas are alluded to in the Epistles. John's first and second letters speak against an "antichrist" movement that denied the human nature of Jesus (1 John 2:18–23; 4:1–3; 2 John 7). This heresy, which came to be known as Docetism, claimed that Jesus only seemed to be human, but in reality he was a spiritual being who did not truly suffer in the flesh. Closely related to this heresy is Gnosticism—the modern name given to a loosely organized religious and philosophical movement in the second century that claimed elements of the divine are entrapped in the evil world of matter and can be liberated only when they learn the secret *gnōsis* (Gr. "knowledge") of their true identity. When later false teachers applied these concepts to the Christian faith, they claimed the material world was created by a lesser god, whom they often associated with the "god" of the OT. Additionally, Jesus was not considered to be God, but He came to show the way to salvation by revealing the secret, esoteric knowledge to those who themselves had a divine spark within them. Because the flesh was evil, Gnosticism either punished it to bring it into submission (aestheticism) or fed its lusts (libertinism). Although full-blown Gnosticism did not develop until after the NT documents had been written, proto-Gnostic ideas may have had some influence on the problems found in the Epistles. For instance, Colossians rejects self-abasement, the worship of angels, and abstinence from certain foods, since these have no power to truly control human desires (Col. 2:18–23). On the other hand, Peter and Jude both critique the supposed liberty offered by those saying that fulfillment of lusts or desires was now permissible in Christ (2 Pet. 2:12–22; Jude 7–8, 17–19).

The apostles, much like Paul to the Ephesians in Acts 20:29–31, were worried about their congregations being led astray. In confronting these heresies, the apostles sought to keep the congregations centered on the historical life and teachings of Christ, on their mission, and on the truth of the Scriptures.

Christian Hope. Although the Epistles were written in the midst of—and sometimes due to—conflict, they are permeated with hope (see "Hope and the Advent of God," p. 2). This is fitting, since hope finds its origin in God (Rom. 15:13). The Greek word for hope, *elpis*, means more than simply wishing for a certain future outcome; rather, it is the confident expectation of a certain outcome, the locus of Christian faith (Col. 1:5). As mentioned earlier, the Epistles consistently assure their readers that the followers of Jesus have much to look forward to both in this lifetime and in the future at Christ's return. This hope is manifested in the following specific aspects.

Personal Hope. The salvation found in Christ has personal ramifications to which all believers look forward. It is in the person of Jesus Christ that believers daily and directly place their hope (2 Cor. 1:10; Eph. 1:12; 1 Tim. 1:1). It is rooted not only in what Christ has done for us in His life, death, and resurrection but also in His present work for us as our High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary (Heb. 6:13–20). The transformation of life that begins when we place our faith in Christ will be carried to completion when righteousness becomes normative (Gal. 5:5; Phil. 1:6). The fact that the Spirit of God lives among even Gentile believers is evidence of God's work (Col. 1:27). John affirms this truth, saying that living hope in Christ has a purifying effect in the present as we await its fullness at the Second Coming (1 John 3:2–3).

In Romans 5:2–5, Paul points out that God can even use personal trials to develop Christian character that culminates in a strong hope that will not end in disappointment. Believers can have hope that because of the power of the Holy Spirit working in them, God's purpose for them will be fulfilled (Rom. 8:23–25). Hope is one of the greatest spiritual virtues, along with faith and love (1 Cor. 13:13). Paul even argues that the OT was written for our encouragement—that it might develop hope in us (Rom. 15:4).

Missiological Hope. Paul had the highest of expectations that God would work out His will and purpose for those who heard the gospel (2 Cor. 3:12; 10:15; Phil. 1:18–24). The faith of the believers was Paul's greatest earthly hope—that many would come to place their faith in Christ (1 Thess. 2:19–20).

Eschatological Hope. Many of humanity's fears and griefs have been addressed by Christ's work of salvation, and the Epistles point to a future time when even our greatest enemies will be overcome. A study of last-day events—known as eschatology—places the consummation of

human hope in the events surrounding the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. When writing to Titus, Paul refers to this coming as "the blessed hope" (Titus 2:13). Certainly some will be alive when Christ returns, but what of those who have passed away before that time? The Christian can also hope in the resurrection. At Christ's return, graves will be opened and the resurrection of loved ones who have fallen asleep in death will reunite families (1 Cor. 15). Paul also contrasts our eager expectation of resurrection with the Gentiles who "have no hope" (1 Thess. 4:13–18). The resurrection will result in physical life that will never end (Titus 3:7).

Christ's return also brings an end to this current age, including the kingdoms of this earth that have for too long ruled unjustly, while their peoples scorn opportunities for repentance (2 Pet. 2:1–13). Psalm 110 is cited or alluded to in the NT as the hope that God will place all Christ's enemies under His feet like a footstool (Heb. 1:13; 10:13; cf. Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1). This picture is revealed in symbolic form throughout Revelation, especially chapter 19.

While we Christians wait for these exciting events, we are encouraged to be prepared to give a defense of our hope (1 Pet. 3:15). What could be better than inviting others to join us in this optimistic experience?

ROMANS

INTRODUCTION

Title and Authorship. The title "To the Romans" presumes a larger collection of letters with the title "The Letters of Paul" that was collated and then circulated among early Christians. Based on its length and importance, this letter to the Christians in Rome is placed first in the collection of thirteen of his letters found in the NT. Romans claims to have been written by Paul (Rom. 1:1), and no serious scholar doubts that he was in fact the author.

Date. No date is provided in any of Paul's letters. His travel itinerary in Acts 20:1–3 included a three-month stay in Corinth near the end of his third missionary journey in the mid-50s, during the first half of the Emperor Nero's reign. Paul's host, when he wrote the letter, was probably the same Gaius of Corinth he himself had baptized (Rom. 16:23; 1 Cor. 1:14). Phoebe, who carried the letter to Rome, was a church leader in the nearby port city of Cenchreae (Rom. 16:1). This means that the letter was written in Corinth, which helps with the date of writing.

Backgrounds. The Christian believers in Rome were a mixed lot of Jews and Gentiles. A close look at Paul's long list of people he greeted in chapter 16 reveals many names typically bestowed on slaves. This suggests that the message of the risen and soon-returning Christ resonated particularly with slaves and freed slaves. The mention of a house church in 16:5 and the clustering of names in 16:3–16 supports the view that early Christians were denied the right to own worship centers other than their homes. Paul's greeting by name twenty-six people in a city he had never visited demonstrates the mobility of early Christians throughout the Roman Empire.

Rome as the capital of the empire was the destination of every new religious movement, to the consternation of its more traditional citizens. Unnamed Jewish Christian missionaries had brought the gospel of Christ to Rome "many years" earlier (15:23). Visitors from Rome were part of the audience of devout Jews who heard Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost and were likely among the three thousand who responded and were baptized (Acts 2:10, 41), eventually returning home and sharing their new faith. Sometime later, Emperor Claudius ordered the expulsion of Jews from the city (Acts 18:2). By the time Paul wrote to them, most of the Roman believers were Gentiles, though some Jews had returned, including Paul's dear friends Priscilla and Aquila (Rom. 16:3, 7, 11). The letter reveals Paul's awareness that the relationship between Jewish and Gentile believers had become strained (11:13–24).

Romans is the only surviving letter Paul wrote to a church he had not founded. For years Paul had been engaged in planting and establishing churches from Jerusalem to the Balkans (Illyricum; 15:19). Convinced that he had reached the eastern half of the Mediterranean with the gospel of Christ (15:19–23), he began to lay plans for a mission to Spain in the west (15:24). At the time of the writing of the letter Paul had not yet reached Rome, though he longed to visit the believers there (1:13; 15:22–23). He was determined to spend time with them. The Roman church could serve as a vital base for his evangelistic foray into Spain. But first, Paul had to fulfill his promise to return to Jerusalem and take with him substantial funds donated by the believers in Greece (Achaia) and Macedonia for the impoverished mother church (15:25–26; cf. Acts 20:16; 1 Cor. 16:15; Gal. 2:10). This gift, from largely Gentile congregations, was to be a tangible expression of gratitude to the Jewish believers in Jerusalem for sharing the gospel and a sign of the solidarity that bound otherwise hostile Jews and Gentiles into one body in Christ.

Theology and Purpose. Romans is a letter of introduction to believers in Rome that displays

Paul's understanding of the gospel as well as its implications for their communal life. We can only surmise the impact of the letter on its original hearers. But there is no mistaking the letter's role as a theological treasure house and as a source of spiritual renewal throughout the history of the Christian church. We will summarize some of its most important theological topics.

1. *Divine and Human Righteousness.* Two fundamental realities frame Paul's argument in Romans 1–8. The first is the righteousness of God; the essential character of God is revealed in His response to the unrighteousness of humanity. Like the moon's reflected light of the sun, the righteousness of the Creator ought to be matched by respect and righteous conduct from humanity. But faced with ungodliness and disrespect, God's righteousness requires a judgment against the ungodly (1:18). Divine indifference or tolerance of unrighteousness in the created order would be tantamount to a betrayal of the Creator's own righteous character.

Along the way, Paul levels all claims for removal from the list of the condemned. The only way forward to life for any of us passes through the gate of universal condemnation. Not only the blatant violators of human nature (1:24–27) but also the mass of humanity who live in a miasma of corruption and incivility (1:28–32). Not just the uncircumcised pagans, but also the people of the circumcision (2:17–26). Not just those ignorant and willingly indifferent to the divine laws but even the teachers learned in those laws will all stand condemned before the Judge (2:1–5, 17–21).

But what is unexpected in moral terms is the response of a righteous God to the unrighteous. Unrighteousness, sin, and evildoing cannot be redeemed. But in His everlasting love, God seeks to redeem and restore the unrighteous. The righteousness of God first damns and then delivers the unrighteous both from their fate and from the power of sin that binds them together for judgment. Taking a cue from the OT, where the righteous Judge was responsible not only for condemning the oppressor but also for rescuing the oppressed, Paul presents a God who not only condemns the evildoers but delivers them from the very evil that entraps them (cf. 7:4, 24–25). In other words, God, as the righteous Judge of the universe, is not satisfied to simply condemn sin and unrighteousness. His righteous and loving nature seeks to redeem and restore the sinners from their unrighteousness. Achieving this requires a great sacrifice and humiliation on the part of God: the public sacrificial death of His Son (3:24–25; 5:6–11). That death revealed in the most striking way conceivable both the righteous judgment of God against sin and the restoring righteousness of God, who has removed the barrier separating sinners from Him.

2. *Faith as Response to Grace.* The second reality that pervades Paul's letter is faith—a faith that acknowledges God's righteous condemnation and accepts the gracious gift of salvation through Jesus Christ. Paul does not speak much about the believer's love for God (except in 8:28). Saving faith involves more than mere assent; it must include the surrender of the whole of one's being to divine grace. Paul commends this faith as the sinner's only hope (3:28–31). Furthermore, only the believer (lit. "the faith-er") who renounces all sinful practices and boasting (3:27) receives undeserved salvation from the certain sentence of eternal death. True faith is faithful and leads to holiness.

3. *The Indwelling Powers of Sin and the Spirit.* Paul has an extended call for holy living intended to undercut every argument and temptation to fall into the old patterns of sin (6:1—7:6). For believers, there must be a complete change of loyalty from sin to righteousness. The initiating rite of baptism marks the bonding of believers with Christ in His death and resurrection. Baptism ought also to mark the death of any allegiance to the power of sin (6:1–11). To continue in sin is antithetical to the reign of God and the rule of righteousness. But Paul acknowledges the paradoxical effect of pressing the law's demands on fallen human nature, even when one seeks to live a holy life. Sinful passions are further aroused by the law's demands, and the power of sin increases its hold (7:5–25). Knowledge of the law's righteous demands seems to increase the impotence of the human will to do what is right. Both the righteous law of God and the human will are captive to the power of sin, the law only serving to tighten the hold of sin on the will. Only another presence beyond what we possess can release us from this bondage. Only by the indwelling of the Spirit of God can the deeds of the fallen nature be put to death (cf. 5:5–10; 7:6; 8:13). The united effort within the Godhead, strikingly evident in the Spirit's and Christ's intercession on our behalf (8:26–27, 34), breaks the hold of sin that pits our warring members against us.

4. *Cosmic Hope.* In Romans, Paul moves from the tragedy of sin and rebellion, which undermined the ability of humans to live at peace with God, to the restoration of that relationship for all through Christ. He also discusses the new life in Christ, who has freed us from the power of sin.

But there is another aspect of his understanding of salvation that needs attention: the consummation of salvation. He introduces it in the discussion using the subject of Christian hope. For Paul, the object of this hope is the future manifestation of "the glory of God" (5:2). This hope is so otherworldly that we can safely boast in it because it is not a human accomplishment. Such a hope is inseparable from joy (12:12). We can also boast in our tribulations because they produce not only perseverance and character but also hope (5:3–4); they reaffirm our hope in the future manifestation of the glory of God. This eschatological hope will not shame or disappoint us, because it is grounded in the love of God that we have experienced through the work of the Spirit (5:5). The possession of the Spirit strengthens Christian hope.

Paul develops these ideas a little more in 8:18–25, where he returns to the subject of suffering to establish that it cannot be compared at all with the glory that will eventually be revealed in us (8:18). The hope of glory empowers us to face the tribulations we go through at this present time. This does not mean that suffering is unreal, but rather that hope overcomes it. There is a cosmic yearning for the manifestation of the eschatological glory of God. The natural world is earnestly expecting this most radical event in order to be freed from the bondage of corruption and futility (8:19–20). But this liberation will not occur in isolation from the redemption of the children of God. We, too, live in expectation, eagerly awaiting the completeness of adoption and the redemption of our bodies (v. 23). When we were saved through the power of the gospel, we received this magnificent hope (v. 24). At the present time, both nature and humans groan, but we also rejoice in waiting for the manifestation of the glory of God. This wonderful hope should fill believers with joy (12:12) because it is grounded in the Scriptures (15:4) and is to be realized through Christ, the Messiah (15:12). It is deeply connected not only to Christ but also to the Father and to the Spirit, who make it possible for us to be filled with hope (15:13). Hope is the result of the work of the Trinity. The cross has enriched the life of believers by giving them a glorious hope: the manifestation of the glory of God that will consummate the saving power of the cross.

5. *The Jews and the Messiah.* In chapters 9–11, Paul confronts the Jewish rejection of the Messiah. Why did the majority of Israel fail to receive the righteousness that comes through faith, and how will God respond to their refusal? What happened to God's promised blessings to Israel? This conundrum was compounded by the widespread embrace of the gospel by non-Jews, who possessed none of the covenantal advantages of Israel. Paul discerned both human and divine factors at work. Israel tried to establish a right standing with God by keeping the law instead of accepting the righteousness that God bestows through faith in Christ, apart from human striving (9:30—10:4). Out of mercy for all humanity, God temporarily blinded part of Israel so that the gospel would be offered to the non-Jewish world (11:7–10). In time, the blessings of salvation among the Gentiles would incite Jewish envy, resulting in the salvation of "all Israel" (11:11–14, 26). In the meantime, the Gentile believers were not to look down on the nonbelieving Jews, lest this result in their being cut off from the people of God (11:17–24). All this is the outworking of God's confinement of all humanity in the prison of disobedience in order that He may show mercy to all humanity (11:32; cf. 1:18—3:31). So God's apparent partiality, first toward Israel before their rejection of the Messiah and then toward the Gentiles, turns out to be an expression of His impartial righteousness toward all humanity (1:16–17).

6. *Sanctification Is a Communal Task.* The last major section of the letter (chaps. 12–15) is not an afterthought. The arc of the letter's argument must reach to the heart of the worshiping community, which is nothing less than one body in Christ (12:5). While no sinner can rely on the righteousness of anyone other than Christ, no Christian is expected to advance spiritually apart from the nurture and encouragement of other believers. The renewing of the mind is a communal task (12:2). To accomplish that transformation, God has distributed gifts and abilities among the believers, who are to use them for one another's benefit (12:3–8). Nonetheless, the individual conscience of each believer must be respected (14:10–23), and the strong are to bear with the failings of those weaker in faith (15:1–2). Secondary issues and differences must not rend the fabric of faith that binds all together (14:17–20). God reserves the right to judge in those matters (14:5–12). Reserved for God also is any vengeance to be taken against the unjust actions of outsiders (12:17–20). Even pagan rulers are to be honored as God's appointed agents for order (13:1–7). In short, the faithful are not to "be overcome by evil" but rather to "overcome evil with good" (12:21). Harmony and sobriety are to characterize the faithful while they await the day of salvation (13:11–14).

Literary Features. Like the other letters of Paul, Romans contains, but is not constrained by, the conventional features of letters. The formal Hellenistic elements of sender, addressee, greeting, and thanksgiving are greatly expanded in 1:1–15 as Paul introduces his devotion to the gospel. The final greetings and blessing include the names of twenty-six people. Much of the letter is pervaded by passages from the OT that buttress his arguments and appeals. Throughout the letter, the readers are plied with questions that Paul then answers himself. He provides lengthy catalogs of sins (1:28–32) and eloquent lists of virtues (12:9–21). Paul devotes the first half of the letter to an unparalleled exposition of the gospel. The second part addresses more practical matters that flow from the theological section.

COMMENTARY

1:1—8:39

DIVINE INITIATIVE

In the first half of the letter, and after the introduction (1:1–17), Paul shows that only the gospel is the power of God that provides salvation for all believers (1:16); only the gospel can meet the desperate spiritual crises of both Jews and Gentiles (1:18—3:20). God has graciously taken the initiative through Jesus Christ to offer to all a righteousness available solely through faith in Christ (3:21—4:25). The enslaving powers of sin and death that came into the world through Adam have been overcome through Christ, the second Adam, bringing freedom to believers in Him (5:1–21). Consequently, those who have been baptized into Christ have emerged from the waters as new creatures no longer beholden to sin (6:1–23). But Paul also addresses the role of the law, because it has become an instrument of sin providing the occasion for sinning (7:8–25). The struggle with sin, as a dethroned king, will continue, but the presence, power, and intercession of the Holy Spirit can break the grip of the fallen nature in the lives of believers and permanently unite them to Christ and God (8:1–39).

1:1–15

Bringing God's Good News

Paul greatly expands the expected opening formalities of a letter to enlarge on the gospel, his own apostolic orders to the Gentiles, and the new identities of the Roman believers. He mentions his long-delayed plan to see them in person for their mutual encouragement and to preach the gospel in Rome. How he envisioned fulfilling this obligation is revealed at the end of the letter.

1:1–7. Salutation and Blessing. Paul's letters usually contain an expansion of the simple opening greetings that were characteristic of letter writing at that time to mention concerns or topics he intends to develop in the letters. In this case, Paul centers on "the gospel of God" (v. 1) and his desire to bring it to the nations. He introduces himself as a *doulos* (a "bond servant," "servant," "slave") of Jesus Christ who was called to be an apostle (v. 1). Like an imperial Roman slave who possessed immense power on behalf of the emperor but who was always under the absolute authority of the master, Paul writes as one fully conscious of his role as the slave of the Messiah, Jesus. Later, he will remind Roman believers that they are to see themselves as slaves or servants of God (6:22). Paul had previously been a Pharisee who was expected to avoid defiling contact with non-Jews. But Jesus Christ had called him to be an apostle to those very same people. The Roman believers, a largely Gentile body, were among those who had responded to the gospel call (cf. 1:6).

The gospel of God is literally the good news concerning God's Son that Paul was constrained to proclaim. It is identical to the Son's gospel (v. 9), "the gospel of Christ" (15:19), and "my gospel" (2:16; 16:25; cf. 1:15; 11:28; 15:20). The gospel is not a divine afterthought but the fulfillment of what God had previously promised through His prophets (1:2; cf. 1 Cor. 15:3, 4). Not surprisingly, scriptural quotations undergird Paul's argument and appear throughout the letter.

Romans 1:3 refers to Jesus's fulfillment of the prerequisite that the Messiah would be a descendant of David. The declaration of Jesus as the Son of God in power in this context refers to His resurrection and His ascension to "the right hand of God" (Rom. 8:34; cf. Eph. 1:19–21; Phil. 2:9). It is not that Jesus became the Son of God after the resurrection. Rather, this declaration confirms Jesus as the preincarnational Son of God, spoken of in Romans 5:10 and 8:3. Christ's entrance into human history as the messianic Son of David and His ascent as the empowered Son of God mark the greatest miracle of all.

Paul's commission as an apostle was to bring the Gentiles to an obedient faith (Rom. 1:5). For

Paul, faith involved the complete entrusting of oneself—including the past, the present, and the future—to the care of God. This verse captures the appropriate response to the gospel, namely, obedient faith (see 15:18; 16:19, 26). It probably refers to the life that is the consequence of the believer's faith, which consists in the renewing of the mind in accordance with God's perfect will (12:2).

The gospel had changed the status and identity of the Gentile believers. They were called by Jesus Christ (1:6) and had become the Messiah's own possession. The inconceivable had happened; the uncircumcised Gentiles had been appointed by God as *hagiois* ("saints," "holy people") set aside for a sacred purpose to lives of holiness. They were *agapētois* ("beloved," "loved"; v. 7)—a word God had used with regard to His chosen people, Israel (cf. Is. 5:1). Now, through Christ, God had poured out His love on all peoples (Rom. 5:5–8; cf. Col. 3:12; 1 Thess. 1:4; 2 Thess. 2:13). The Gentile converts had become Paul's brothers and sisters (Rom. 1:13). The abbreviated blessing of grace and peace from God the Father and Jesus Christ the Lord (v. 7) is best understood as a prayer. The priestly blessing (Num. 6:25–26) includes both grace and peace. Paul likely had this Jewish blessing in mind when he transformed the typical greeting used in Greek letters into a religious expression.

1:8–15. Longing to Preach in Rome. In nearly all of Paul's letters to the churches he founded, a thanksgiving section follows the opening salutation and blessing. In this letter, he thanks God that their faith was being proclaimed throughout the world (Rom. 1:8), that is, the Roman Empire. Their geographical location in Rome at the center of travel and communication in that empire gave the believers special prominence. The Greek noun for "faith," meaning "trust," was also used to mean "faithfulness" or "fidelity"; here it refers to the faith of the Roman believers (cf. 3:3; Gal. 5:22).

Usually, Paul's letters include an intercessory prayer, but this letter begins by acknowledging God as Paul's witness (Rom. 1:9) to assure the readers that they had long been on his prayer list. His prayer for the Romans includes a personal request that he might find a way to come to them according to God's will (v. 10) to impart a spiritual gift to them (v. 11) and to preach the gospel (v. 15). At the end of the letter (15:23–24), he reveals his further intention to evangelize Spain, for which the support of the Roman believers would be crucial. But here, lest they were to conclude that they were merely a means to accomplishing his real interest elsewhere (in Spain), he emphasizes his deep interest in their spiritual welfare. Paul spoke of his responsibilities to peoples who did not speak Greek (1:14; lit. "barbarians") and were considered by the Romans to be uncivilized and inherently inferior.

It had always been Paul's intention to preach the gospel where it had not yet been proclaimed (see 15:20). Why then had he been praying for the opportunity to preach to the Roman believers to have a fruitful harvest among them also (1:13)? The letter does not mention any basic theological heresy regarding the gospel that needed correction. In 15:14, he acknowledges that the believers in Rome were filled with goodness, knowledge, and the capacity to teach each other. Paul was probably thinking about adding new converts to the church through his missionary work while in Rome.

1:16–17

The Power of the Gospel

Paul's conception was that the gospel is the power of God that provides salvation for everyone who believes and that it is a revelation of the righteousness of God. These ideas receive further elaboration in 3:21–26 and 5:1–11. This short statement (1:16–17), supported by a scriptural reference to Habakkuk, catches the essence of the rest of the first half of the letter. Paul's declaration that he is not ashamed of the gospel (v. 16) expresses his pride and confidence in the gospel. The Christian message, which centered on a crucified Jew who was executed by the Romans as a criminal, naturally evoked scorn among many detractors. But Paul declares that such a message is the power of God, which provides salvation (v. 16; cf. 1 Cor. 1:17, 23–24). The present tense of the verbs in Romans 1:16–17 demonstrates that the gospel's power continues to be effective in the present despite being dependent on the past events of the death and resurrection of Christ. Through the preaching of the gospel by Paul and others, people were coming to a saving faith in Christ.

This passage refers to the gospel being presented first to the Jew, then also to the *hellēni* ("Greek," "Gentile"; Rom. 1:16; cf. 2:9–10; Acts 13:46, 28:25–30). This is an acknowledgment of the sequence of God's redemptive engagement with humanity. The central portion of the letter (Rom. 9–11) is devoted to the status of God's covenant promises with Israel in light of the fact that many Jews had rejected Jesus as

Messiah. But first Paul establishes that in God's eyes there is no difference, because all have sinned (3:9).

Paul asserts that the righteousness of God is revealed through the gospel (1:16–17). The biblical understanding of righteousness as an attribute of God conveys more than a static aspect of God's holy character. The righteousness of God conveys a righteous God in action, with a disposition to make right what is wrong, to restore broken relationships, to act on behalf of His people—a God who is loyal to the covenant. In the context of the death of His Son, His righteousness is expressed in forgiveness.

English has no corresponding verbal form for "righteousness" that can convey the full range of possible meanings in the Greek language. The corresponding Greek verb conveying the meanings of "to rectify," "to right," or "to declare righteous" is typically rendered in English as "to justify." As conventional as this usage is, it is not without problems, since "justify" commonly means to give a reason or even to offer an excuse for a deed. There is no excuse for sin. In describing the gospel as the righteousness of God in action, Paul was seeking to show that God's surprising justification of sinners—that is, of reconciling sinners to Himself through the death of His Son—is a powerful expression of His righteousness (3:21–26; 5:8–10). This created for Paul a theological problem that he would address later, namely, that God justifies sinners, not the innocent.

God's righteousness is revealed and grounded in faith from beginning to end (1:17), and it leads to obedience that flows from faith (v. 5). Here (v. 17) Paul cites Habakkuk 2:4, the first explicit scriptural quotation in the letter, which serves to support the assertion that in the gospel God reveals His righteousness through faith (Rom. 1:17; see "Habakkuk 2:4 and the New Testament," p. 1125). Paul was using the passage to show that life is preserved only by faith (in Christ) in submission to the gospel message.

1:18–32

The Wrath of God Revealed

Before the gospel can be grasped as a compelling necessity, the desperate human need for it must be laid bare. Lest there be any doubt of the need for the gospel, Paul begins with an extended indictment of universal sinfulness and culpability, starting with the Gentile world (1:18—2:16) and then including the Jews (2:17—3:20).

While no ethnic group is identified in 1:18–32, Paul and the believers in Rome would have understood Gentiles or non-Jews to be the primary target of this opening section of his critique. Three times Paul declares that the wrath of God (v. 18) was revealed when He handed over the idolaters to moral impurity (v. 24), disgraceful passions (v. 26), and a corrupt mind (v. 28). Divine wrath reveals the human willingness to suppress the truth by humans' unrighteousness (v. 18). Paul then proceeds to explain his intention by pointing to the fact that God had manifested Himself to all. God's invisible attributes—His eternal power and deity—have been perceivable by all since Creation through what He created, leaving humans without excuse when they suppress the truth (vv. 19–20). Instead of giving glory and thanks to God the Creator, humans chose darkness and foolishness (vv. 21–22). Consequently, they worshiped images and other elements of creation and not the Creator (v. 23).

The passive verbs in vv. 21–22 (*emataiōthēsan*, *eskotisthē*, *emōranthēsan*) imply the action of God—the handing over (*paredōken*; v. 24)—as an act of God's wrath. But all is not lost, for in 8:32 the same Greek word appears, speaking of God as having handed over His own Son to death for us all. With both actions based on God's initiative, the second action brings deliverance from wrath to all who accept the gift of grace.

Paul assumed and built on accepted Jewish beliefs that the Gentiles' failure to honor God led to immorality. Fallen human nature needs no encouragement for the emergence of the perverse and pervasive sins cataloged in vv. 24–32. Sins of dishonor against the Creator lead inevitably to dishonor against humanity and one's own body. Same-gender sexual conduct became Paul's prime evidence of Gentile sinfulness (vv. 24–27). Unlike many in the Greek and Roman world who condoned and even praised same-gender sexual conduct, Jews with one voice considered such conduct to be against the natural order and God's will. Any suggestion that Paul, if writing today, would have tempered his words when confronted with a loving, monogamous, and faithful same-sex couple or with evidence of homosexual orientation as a genetic predisposition is groundless. The Levitical laws against same-gender sexual conduct, with one male taking the role of the female, confirmed his position (Lev. 18:22; 20:13; cf. Deut. 23:18; 1 Cor. 6:9–11; 1 Tim. 1:8–11; Jude 5–8). Paul's indictment in Romans 1 includes women engaged in unnatural same-gender sexual conduct, which was well known among Greeks. The focus of Paul's condemnation is on same-gender sexual conduct itself. Such conduct is the result of our sinful nature, which is always subject to temptation, whether momentary or chronic, and is always remedied by reliance on faith in Christ to resist and overcome sin.

Paul asserts that the unnatural and evil deeds of humans were to some extent their own punishment (Rom. 1:27). Humans degrade themselves by engaging in that which is degrading. Paul takes up at length the naming of the wicked fruits of a debased mind (vv. 28–32). All the varieties of sin and sinners are rooted in the same soil of a mindset determined to do what ought not to be done. The list of evil does not exhaust Paul's moral vocabulary (cf. Gal. 5:19–21; 1 Tim. 3:1–5). He places all humankind, practicing all manner of evil, under the sentence of divine judgment. The composite picture is bleak in the extreme—humans filled with all kinds of evil, envy, murder, strife, deceit, and maliciousness (Rom. 1:29). There is seemingly no room left for virtue and goodness. The litany closes with a rapid, hammer-like string of adjectives: "unwise," "untrustworthy," "unloving" (some manuscripts add "unforgiving"), and "unmerciful" (v. 31).

Adding insult to injury, the evildoers were persisting in their evil, knowing full well that those who practice such things are worthy of death (v. 32). What was the source of that knowledge? In 2:14–15, Paul points to the law of right and wrong written on the hearts of the Gentiles who lack direct knowledge of the Decalogue. Their brazen persistence in evil deeds was topped by their approval of others practicing them (v. 32), creating a community of wickedness with members applauding each other, drowning out the voice of conscience.

2:1–16

God's Just Judgment of All

Paul then addresses all those who would present themselves as morally superior because they condemned the evildoers portrayed in 1:18–32. The wide sweep of Paul's argument involves anyone who passes judgment (2:1), including those Gentiles who claimed a higher ethical standard than the mass of sinners as well as the religiously observant Jews. Both Jews and Greeks are explicitly mentioned in v. 9.

These critics stand in contrast to those offering open support and applauding evildoers (1:32). But their claim of moral superiority is a sham, because they are guilty of the same things they condemn in others (2:1). In spite of their agreement with God's standards, they can claim no higher moral ground. In fact, their condemnation of others only deepens their own guilt. Fallen human beings who see themselves as morally superior to others are apt to become unloving and unmerciful (1:31; cf. Luke 18:9–14). The list of sins in Romans 1:28–32 also includes the more easily concealed sins (e.g., envy and greed). The openly self-righteous are often able to preserve their reputation in the eyes of others (cf. Matt. 23:25–28; Luke 16:14). This recalls the all-too-familiar news of people who publicly oppose some aberrant practice, even to the point of sponsoring laws against that practice, but who turn out to be secret practitioners themselves.

The declaration that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice evil (Rom. 2:2) is not new to evildoers (cf. 1:32), but it is all too often set aside by those who presume that the kindness of God condones their complacent sinning. The goodness and kindness of God shown by the delay of the day of His wrath should lead the sinner to repentance (2:3–5). Only the fool interprets God's patience as weakness. Nothing short of contempt adequately describes the stubborn heart that confuses divine patience with indifference and refuses to repent (v. 5). Although the emphasis in presenting the gospel must be the love of God, when only medical intervention will save a careless patient's life, no physician would rightfully conceal the seriousness of the condition. Thus, Paul here uses the strongest language to warn the complacent and the self-satisfied of the dire consequences awaiting them (v. 5).

The mention of God's righteous judgment refers to the judicial decisions in the heavenly tribunal prior to the Second Coming of Christ, to be revealed on the day of His wrath (v. 5), based on human deeds (v. 6). This aspect of God's wrath differs from the wrath of God in 1:24, 26, 28, revealed when God turned idolaters over to the control of the sinful desires of their hearts. This permissive form of God's wrath does not replace but anticipates the more active expression of God's eschatological wrath against sin and sinners (2:5, 8–9). The suffering and shame humans endure when under the power of passion and an evil mind foreshadow the anger, trouble, and distress to come on every evildoer, whether Jew or Greek (2:8–9); by contrast, believers receive glory and honor and have the hope of immortality (v. 7).

The Pax Romana, the peace proclaimed as an achievement of imperial Rome, was imposed on the conquered territories and tribes, ensuring Roman domination under the guise of an enforced peace. In contrast, the promise of ultimate peace and security in God's presence (v. 10) is even now foreshadowed by the present inner peace from the God of peace (1:7). Believers "have peace with God" (5:1) because He has reconciled them to Himself through Jesus (2 Cor. 5:18).

There is no favoritism or partiality with God (Rom. 2:11). In the midst of the argument on universal sinfulness (chaps. 1–3), the constant is the absolute fairness of God, both in condemnation and in salvation (2:11–16). All are judged as falling short of the glory of God (3:23). Neither a Jew's knowledge of God's law nor a Gentile's ignorance of it will excuse either of them in the judgment (2:13–16). Paul states that the Gentiles have the law written on their hearts, and their conscience bears witness to their knowledge of the moral law (v. 15). The doers of the law will be justified (v. 13). The emphasis in 2:3–13 indicates that the justification in view was to come at the final judgment. Paul also speaks of a past justification (8:30; 1 Cor. 6:11; Titus 3:7). Through Christ we may be justified, be reconciled with God, and be confident in the judgment.

So far, Paul has sought to show access to moral standards not only for Jews but also for the non-Jews who know God but disregarded Him. Now, in Romans 2:14–16, Paul further unpacks his argument of Gentile culpability to include those Gentiles whose conscience either commends or corrects their conduct. Verse 14 can be translated and punctuated as: "For when Gentiles, who do not have the law by nature, do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are the law for themselves." Gentiles, as such, do not naturally possess the revealed law given to the Jews. Nonetheless, at least sometimes they perform the deeds demanded by that law. Verses 14–16 need not be viewed as an exception to Paul's argument of the universal need for salvation through the grace of God apart from works. Instead, they further underscore the Gentiles' culpability when they at times do the requirements of the law. God has the moral requirements of the law written on their hearts (v. 15). Their own consciences confirm this when their minds affirm their good conduct or condemn their own evil deeds. But God's knowledge is not restricted to the outward deeds. So in the coming judgment, the inner thoughts, whether of conscience or evil secretly nurtured, will also be summoned to bear witness.

2:17–29

Claims for God's Favor Set Aside

In vv. 17–24, Paul argues that the Jews' knowledge of the law, which allowed them to excel as

Judgment by Works

How shall we square Paul's emphasis in 2:6–10 on a future judgment—when God is to reward everyone according to their deeds (v. 6; cf. Ps. 62:12; Prov. 24:12; Jer. 32:19)—with his denial of any justification based on human works (Rom. 3:20–24)? The declaration that God's judgment will be based on the deeds of the judged (2:6, 13) is uncontestable, since it is grounded in Scripture (e.g., Ps. 62:12; Prov. 24:12; cf. Matt. 7:21–27; 16:27; Phil. 1:9–11; 2:5–16; Rev. 22:12). What God calls for is heartfelt repentance, a personal turning away from evil (Rom. 2:4). Good deeds are the evidence of repentance (Acts 26:20) and the outgrowth of the fruit of the indwelling Spirit (cf. Rom. 8:8–11; Gal. 5:22–23). Believers who follow the Spirit will not be following the sinful desires of the flesh (Rom. 7:12–23). To the Galatians who were no longer under law but under grace, Paul categorically declared that those who would continue practicing the deeds of the flesh would not inherit the kingdom of God (Gal. 5:18–21; cf. Rom. 1:29–31; 1 Cor. 6:9–11). In contrast, those with the Spirit would bear fruit accordingly (Gal. 5:22–23). Righteous deeds are not the basis of salvation. But for Paul, they are the hallmarks of those who have died to sin in solidarity with Christ (Rom. 6:1–7). Paul describes in Romans 8 the life in the Spirit of Christ bestowed on believers. Empowered by the indwelling Spirit of Christ, though they struggle against the pull of sin, they are free from its dominion (8:1–2; cf. 6:14; 13:14; Gal. 5:24–25).

teachers, would not count in God's eyes if the righteous deeds demanded by the law were absent in their lives. In vv. 25–29, Paul addresses the value of circumcision, the identifying mark of male Jews. In both sections, the moral demands of the law override legal expertise and ritual obedience.

Paul addresses another imaginary interlocutor who bore a Jewish name, relied on the law, and boasted in God (v. 17). This person appeared to possess higher moral sensibilities than the previous one, who merely disapproved of evil while participating in it (vv. 1–5). This Jew heartily approved of that which was morally superior. He made a significant effort to know God's will revealed in the law (v. 18) and made himself available to instruct others he considered to be blind, in darkness, and foolish (vv. 19–20). Paul addresses such self-confident Jewish teachers with a series of questions about Jews' own conduct (vv. 21–23). Condemning stealing and adultery while practicing them is a tragic self-deception and a moral failure (vv. 21–22). When the Jews claimed to belong to God, the name of God was blasphemed among the Gentiles because of them (v. 24; cf. Is. 52:5; Ezek. 36:20–21). Perhaps from his years as a rabbinical student in Jerusalem (Acts 22:3), Paul had experienced and observed the pervasive human failure to carry out the mandates of the moral law among those who most loudly proclaimed the necessity of allegiance to its particulars (cf. Matt. 23:13–28). Lest this indictment serve to justify the anti-Semitism in the centuries that followed, it is important to recognize that Paul was a Jew who thoroughly identified with his fellow Jews (Rom. 9:1–4). His imaginary encounter with a skilled but hypocritical teacher raises a warning to every Christian educator who excels in the knowledge of Scripture.

Here the discussion in Romans shifts to the value of circumcision for Jews (Rom. 3:1–2). The question of whether Gentile converts needed to be circumcised was foremost in the earlier letter to the Galatians (Gal. 2:1–6; 5:1–12; 6:12–15; cf. 1 Cor. 7:18–19). The Jerusalem Council had determined that male Gentile converts did not need to undergo circumcision (Acts 15:23–29). Paul asserted that obedience to ritual circumcision when the circumcised one is a law-breaker was useless; the circumcision did not matter (Rom. 2:25). Indeed, the physically uncircumcised, if they fulfilled the law, would condemn the lawbreaking circumcised Jew in the judgment (cf. v. 26; Luke 11:32). But to the one keeping the law, circumcision was indeed valuable (Rom. 2:25). Paul did not elaborate here on that value (cf. 9:4–5), but law-abiding Jews would bring honor to God, in whose name they were circumcised.

But more important is the required inner circumcision of the heart (Deut. 30:6; Jer. 4:4, 9:25; cf. Acts 7:51), which points to a wholehearted devotion to God that is evident in righteous deeds. The outward circumcision points to the higher circumcision of the heart to be performed by the Spirit of God. Only one so circumcised could rightfully be called a Jew (Rom. 2:28–29). The mention of the Spirit (v. 29) is not a reference to the spiritual aspect of the person. It designates the Spirit of God, who in Ezekiel is connected to the circumcision of the heart (Ezek. 36:26–27). The *gramma* ("letter") refers to the written code of the law, which included the command of circumcision (cf. 1 Cor. 7:6; Gal. 5:3). A true Jew was one whose praise did not come from other people but from God (Rom. 2:29). In Paul's cultural world, receiving public recognition was considered a worthwhile achievement (cf. Matt. 6:2), but for the follower of Christ such recognition was not to be sought (cf. Rom. 13:3; 1 Cor. 11:17–22). Instead, the aim of life was to receive the approval and praise of God (Rom. 2:7, 10, 29).

3:1–20

Wrapping Up the Prosecution's Case

In Romans 3:1–20, Paul concludes the long indictment that began in 1:18, presenting all humanity, Jews and Gentiles alike, standing together as sinners facing the judgment of God. This universal condemnation lays the foundation for the proclamation of a universal solution for "all who believe" (3:21–26) in Jesus Christ. In 3:1–9, Paul voices several objections from an imaginary Jewish interlocutor, each of which he briefly counters. The prosecution ends in vv. 10–18 with a collage of scriptural quotations establishing that no one is righteous (v. 10). In vv. 19–20, Paul notes that the law cannot be an ally in averting God's judgment since it actually functions to make the world answerable to God (v. 19).

3:1–9. Objections Raised. Paul adopts a style of question and answer to address several objections to his conclusions. If Paul was right about circumcision, is there any value in being an observant Jew (vv. 1–2)? Will human unfaithfulness to the covenant cause God to abandon His promised blessings (v. 3)? Is God fair in condemning humanity (v. 5)? There is even the question of whether Paul's gospel actually fostered sin (vv. 7–8). Several of the issues and accusations in this section are repeated and refuted at greater length later in the letter. The absurd charge that Paul was advocating sinning to increase God's grace (v. 8) will be met head-on in 6:1–23.

The first objection rises naturally after Paul's declaration in 2:29. If one could become a follower of a Jewish Messiah without becoming a Jew and without following the ordinances of the Torah, what is the advantage of being a Jew? Paul's answer is that there are considerable advantages in many respects (v. 2). He then mentions the important advantage of having been trusted to receive God's *logia* ("words," "oracles"; v. 2b; cf. 2 Tim. 3:16). They possessed the very utterances of God as a treasure. Paul appears to have had in mind the whole of Scripture, including the covenant promises to the Jewish people, as suggested by the next question concerning whether their lack of faith could nullify God's promises (Rom. 3:3).

In light of the moral condemnation of Jews along with Gentiles, the question naturally arises regarding whether God would withdraw the blessings of the covenant from the descendants of Abraham. This would imply the conditional nature of the covenant that God made with Abraham and that was ratified at Sinai. Later (chaps. 9–11), Paul provides a full discussion of God's response to the unbelief or unfaithfulness of some of Paul's Jewish contemporaries. But here, his brief assertion anticipates the fuller discussion: *mē genoito* (lit. "May it not be!"). For even if everyone were a liar, God would still be true to His own righteous character (v. 4; cf. Ps. 116:11) in His dealings with the chosen people—indeed, with all humanity. Paul associated God's faithfulness (Rom. 3:3) with God's integrity (v. 4), which must not be compromised in His condemnation of sin and in His justifying of sinners. The quotation in v. 4 comes from Psalm 51, in which David acknowledged his sin and the fairness of God in dealing with his affair with Bathsheba.

Translations vary in regard to the end of Romans 3:4. Some have God being judged, while others suggest that it is God who is doing the judging. Both ideas have some linguistic and contextual warrant. In either case, the main point is that at the final judgment, God's justice will be recognized by all. In vv. 4–26, God's righteousness (v. 5), an attribute closely related to His faithfulness (v. 3) and integrity (v. 4), dominates the flow of thought. But the question now is, If our unrighteousness reveals that God is righteous, then is not God unjust when He inflicts wrath? Paul's answer is another emphatic *mē genoito* ("Absolutely not!"). There is no contradiction between the ideas that in the judgment God's justice is recognized and the wicked are condemned. This is what the final judgment is about; this is how God judges the world.

The charge in v. 5 is essentially repeated in v. 7: If my lie adds to God's glory, why should I be condemned? Paul then (almost sarcastically) raises the question of whether God should be pleased if we deliberately do evil, since the results will include the good (v. 8). Some, he clarifies, affirm that this is exactly what he was teaching, but he rejects the charge. His full answer will be developed in 6:1–23.

Paul returns to the question of the advantage for the Jews and clarifies that there is none (v. 9), which would appear to contradict what he said in v. 2. But the question here could be rephrased as follows: "Are we, as Jews, worse than the Gentiles?" One could answer that the Jews were worse in the sense that they were under greater condemnation because they had a greater knowledge of the will of God and yet disobeyed His will. Paul dismisses that possible answer by indicating that, as he had already shown, both Jews and Gentiles are equally under the power of sin (v. 9). Paul is indicating that God deals equally with Jews and Gentiles.

3:10–20. Universal Condemnation. In this concluding round, Paul takes the role of a teacher of the law to biblically establish God's indictment of all humanity. Based on Psalm 14:1–3, he demonstrates that there is no one who is righteous or who seeks God—not even one (Rom. 3:10–12). The assumption Paul shared with the Roman believers is that these words were not those of a pessimistic psalmist but God's considered judgment regarding humanity. The descriptive accusations that follow (vv. 13–18) assume this universal indictment. Drawn largely from the Psalms but also from Proverbs and Isaiah, they depict deceptive and blasphemous speech leading to murder, ruin, misery, and the end of peace. The descriptions of violence and verbal abuse record the consequences of these twin failures (vv. 13–17). The final line sums up the original sin of disrespect: "There is no fear of God before their eyes" (v. 18). This statement matches the earlier declaration that no one seeks God (v. 11). It is not natural for humans to acknowledge their moral failure and to seek after God. The hunger for holiness is an unseen and often unacknowledged gift from God (2:4; Acts 5:31; 11:18; 2 Tim. 2:25).

The declaration that "whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law" (Rom. 3:19) indicates that Paul understood the scriptural citations to be part of the law of God, albeit as divine indictments. The intention of the indictments is that all mouths will be silenced and the whole world is *hypodikos* ("answerable," "accountable"; some translations render it "guilty" because of the context). Those whose mouths will be stopped will be speechless in the sense of being left without defense, recognizing themselves as indeed accountable to God. Paul refers to all as awaiting the full force of the wrath of God. The conclusion is obvious that no one is justified (or acquitted as righteous, implying a final appearance before the throne of God for all humanity) in the sight of God by the deeds of the law.

These deeds of the law (v. 20) are the attempt to obey the law of God by means of human effort, a matter Paul addresses more fully in 7:14–24. The brief declaration that it is by the law that sin is known (3:20b; cf. 4:13) indicates that the law as a moral standard reveals the expression of sin in human behavior. The law condemns but cannot justify sinners. It cannot rectify what is wrong; it cannot atone for what has been done. (The role of the law in pointing out sin is discussed further in 7:7–12.)

Up to this point, Paul has shown that both Jews and Gentiles knew what was right, even though the Jews had the fuller understanding of the will of God. Both were accountable to God, who alone deserved their worship and respect (cf. 1:21–23). Both had failed to give God the appropriate response, both in their sinning and even their failure to repent (cf. 2:4). Both faced the coming judgment before God (2:3, 16). Both were unable on their own, by their own deeds, to obey the demands of the law—to be "justified" or declared right with God. Both stood before the bar of God condemned.

3:21—5:21

Revelation of God's Righteousness

Presuming that his audience members were now convinced of their condemnation, Paul next offers the divine prescription. The good news is that sinners can be restored to a saving relationship with the righteous Judge through the death of Jesus Christ on their behalf (3:21–26; 5:6–11). This justification, this reconciliation, comes wholly from God's initiative, apart from human achievement. Even Abraham was justified apart from his deeds, becoming the father of all who put their faith in Christ (4:1–16). The supreme achievement of Christ in bringing justification and eternal hope for all is far superior to the disastrous result of Adam's sin, which affects all people (5:12–21).

3:21–26. Revealed through the Faith of Jesus. Translators differ on the meaning of key words and phrases in this section. But the central point is clear: the righteousness of God and His integrity, faithfulness, and saving power have been upheld and even confirmed by His acquittal of sinners through the redemptive death of His Son. In the background lies the matter of the covenant between God and Abraham, extended to his descendants (cf. 9:4; 11:27). But first, Paul declares God's righteous resolution of the universal condition facing all humans.

In the original Greek, Romans 3:21–26 comprises a single complex sentence. One way Paul directed the flow of thought through this complex sentence is by the use of the Greek preposition *dia*, which is translated as "through" or "by means of." Its use shows that this is about the righteousness of God from beginning to end. The emphasis on righteousness is even more evident when the words sometimes translated as "justified" and "just" (vv. 24, 26) can equally be translated as "declared righteous" and "righteous," respectively, since they share the same Greek root as "righteousness." This emphasis, along with the stress on faith, faithfulness, and belief in Christ, should guide the interpretation of the passage.

Having established in 1:18—3:20 the utter futility of evading the wrath of God, Paul next announces the good news in 3:21–26: God provides a solution to the universal human predicament. All are acquitted and set right with God in the same way. The contrast is between God's righteousness and human sinfulness. The central concern is God's integrity and faithfulness in His dealing with sin "apart from the law" (v. 21). Can God's righteousness be upheld if He declares sinners to be justified even though they stand condemned by the law? The answer is yes, because in His righteous act, God sent forth His Son as a sacrifice to pay the price for human sinfulness (vv. 24–25). God's saving action through Jesus demonstrates that God is righteous when He justifies or rectifies sinners, declaring them righteous in Christ, restoring the broken relationship.

The Greek phrase *tēn pistin tou theou*, correctly translated as "the faithfulness of God" or "God's

faithfulness" in 3:3, has led some interpreters to translate the parallel phrase in v. 22 (there usually rendered as "faith in Jesus Christ") as "the faithfulness of Jesus Christ." Understood in this way, the death of Christ as a willing act of faithfulness was in complete harmony with the faithfulness of the Father in offering His Son (8:32). This reading is possible, but the emphasis in Paul's writings on the importance of placing our faith in Christ (e.g., Gal. 2:16; Phil. 1:29) better supports the common translation. Paul clarifies his intention by adding that God's righteousness is for "all who believe" (Rom. 3:22). Faith, here, is embracing the saving power of God in Christ as the only way to be reconciled and justified before God.

Inserted in the middle of the long sentence (vv. 21–26) is a parenthetical statement (vv. 22b–24) that explains the emphasis on "all" in v. 22b. God's saving solution reaches beyond the covenant's privileges: there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles in the sense that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (v. 23). The choice of using the present verb tense "fall short" points to the ongoing failure of humans to realize the moral excellence God has intended for them. For this reason alone, a restored relationship with God cannot be based on human performance but must be based on being justified freely by His grace (v. 24).

Human righteousness cannot be restored through any legal system, even that proclaimed by God from Sinai. Neither can human sinfulness be ignored by a righteous God who in His forbearance had for a time not dealt with previous sins (v. 25). Paul may have had in mind here the sins committed before the coming of Christ. He declares that God's righteousness is definitively demonstrated through the death of His Son, Jesus Christ, whom God Himself set forth as the way of redemption. Instead of the typological reconciliation through animal sacrifices in the sanctuary services, God now offers all humanity redemption as a free gift to those who entrust themselves to Jesus Christ as the sacrificial victim.

Paul does not offer a detailed explanation of how the death of Christ is adequate to redeem all human sinners. Here he speaks of the redemption in and by Christ Jesus (v. 24) and a *hilastēriov* (variously translated "propitiation," "expiation," "sacrifice of atonement") through His blood or sacrificial death (v. 25). Redemption implies the previous enslavement of humans and their subsequent deliverance through Christ. A sacrifice removes the barrier of sin (expiation) and restores peace between God and humans (propitiation). In all of this, God's love is assumed because He Himself put forth His Son as a sacrifice that displayed God's righteous judgment against sin (cf. 8:3; 2 Cor. 5:21). The Greek word *hilastēriov* (Rom. 3:25) appears only one other time in the NT, in Hebrews 9:5, where it designates the mercy seat (some translations favor "atonement cover") or "propitiatory" of the ark of the covenant in the tabernacle. The Greek version of the OT uses the same word for the mercy seat (cf. Ex. 25:18–22). Linguistically, it would be correct to translate it as "mercy seat" or "propitiatory," but in this context it seems to be a forced image. It can be rendered contextually as "sacrifice of atonement."

It is evident that Paul understood God's righteousness to refer not only to His holy character but also to His gracious saving action that removes human sin and restores the right relationship with Him. The righteous judge in the OT was expected to condemn the guilty and to make sure that the wrong was righted. In some passages, God's righteousness is synonymous with His saving activity on behalf of His people, even when their condition was the result of their own unfaithfulness. The final phrase of Romans 3:26 refers to God being just as the One who justifies a person who has faith in Jesus. It means that it is essential that God be seen as righteous when He declares anyone who trusts in Jesus as righteous (cf. v. 4). While Paul expresses confidence in God's righteousness and fairness (vv. 3–6), the death of Jesus renders baseless any accusation against God's treatment of sinners (cf. Zech. 3:1–5; John 12:31–32; Rev. 12:9–11).

3:27–31. Justification Apart from Deeds of the Law. Paul returns to the human tendency to boast of one's inheritance or achievements. But here boasting is excluded because of the "law"—in this case perhaps more like a "principle"—of faith (Rom. 3:27). Any supposed advantage on the grounds of being a Jew vanishes in the presence of God, who impartially judges all as sinners and justifies by grace all who believe, whether Jew or Gentile, circumcised or uncircumcised (v. 30).

A person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law (v. 28). The means to attaining righteousness in God's sight, or being declared righteous before God, lies apart from human deeds. In his German translation, Martin Luther added the word "alone" in "by faith alone," which is not in the Greek text but which makes explicit what is implied, since all other human approaches to God are excluded. Furthermore, faith itself is not a basis for boasting, as if it were a saving work, for it is not the human trust in God that saves; it is God who saves the one who trusts Him.

Paul argues against any claim to justification based on keeping the law by referring to a central conviction of Jewish Scripture: there is one God (v. 30; cf. Deut. 6:4). As Creator of all humanity, He must also be the God of the Gentiles (Rom. 3:29). The covenant God made with Abraham intended to bless all the nations of the earth (Gal. 3:8). No one has an exclusive claim on God's love, for He is the God of all. Since there is only one God, there is also only one way of salvation.

Since justification is apart from the law, the imaginary Jewish interlocutor in Romans 3:31 responds by asking if we make void or nullify the law by faith. In the strongest terms, Paul emphatically insists *mē genoito* ("Definitely not!"). We establish and uphold the law through faith. In what sense is that so? The law is established or upheld because God's righteous condemnation of all human beings on the basis of the law has been affirmed, and the removal of this guilt has been accomplished by Christ's having taken the penalty of the law—death—on Himself on our behalf (Rom. 3:21–26; cf. 5:19; 2 Cor. 5:21). Later in the epistle, Paul explains further how the law of God is upheld even when sinners are acquitted by faith in Christ and not through obedience to the law. Through the love of the Spirit in the hearts of believers (Rom. 8:1–11), "the fulfillment of the law" is expressed (13:10; cf. Gal. 5:22—6:2). By the Holy Spirit, God pours His love into our hearts (Rom. 5:5) so that "the righteous requirement of the law" will be fulfilled or fully met in us, who do not live (lit. "walk") "according to the flesh but according to the Spirit" (8:4).

4:1–25

Father Abraham, the Star Witness

In the first three chapters, Paul establishes that all, whether Jew or Gentile, have sinned and that the wrath to come may be averted only through faith in Christ. Next, he presents his star witness: Abraham, whose trust in the promise of God to provide an heir for him is accounted by God as righteousness (Gen. 15:6; see also Gal. 3:6–18; Heb. 6:12–20; 11:8–10). He is the father of the "ungodly" (Rom. 4:5, 11). This is established by a chronological sequence: God counted Abraham's faith as righteousness years before He commanded Abraham to be circumcised (vv. 10–12). The fact that Abraham's and Sarah's bodies were as good as dead made it impossible for them to fulfill the promise through their works. Abraham simply trusted in God's promise (vv. 16–22). The promise God made him—that as father of many nations he would inherit the earth (v. 13; cf. Gen 15:7, 18–21)—included all those sharing in his faith. He is the spiritual father of Jews and Gentiles trusting in the God who raised Jesus from the dead for their justification (Rom. 4:24–25). Abraham, who had believed even when there seemed to be no reason for hope (v. 18), also became the believers' paradigm of enduring hope (cf. 5:2–5).

4:1–8. Faith Reckoned by God as Righteousness. In the inspired record of God's dealings with Abraham, Paul found a firm basis for his claim that God justifies the ungodly who entrust themselves to Him. God's reckoning of Abraham's faith for righteousness is the prototype of how God always justifies the ungodly (4:5). When Romans was written, Jewish writers were presenting Abraham as a paragon of perfection. Based on Genesis 26:5, they believed that he kept all of God's commandments, even those given at Sinai. His faith was considered a righteous work. But even Abraham was a sinner (Rom. 3:23). Paul is not suggesting that by trusting God to keep His promise Abraham deserved to have his faith *elogisthē* (from *logizomai*; "reckoned," "credited," "accounted") to him for righteousness (4:3). Otherwise, his faith would have ended up being another form of meritorious works, a payment for what was earned (v. 4). The divine reckoning was a gift, according to grace (v. 16; cf. v. 4). Father Abraham had no more grounds for boasting than anyone else (cf. 2:17, 23; 3:27).

Two witnesses were required by Mosaic law to establish truth (Deut. 19:15). Thus, Paul calls a second star witness: David (Rom. 4:7–8). In Psalm 32:1–2, David recites God's blessing on the person whose transgression is forgiven (Ps. 32:1; cf. Rom. 4:7) and whose sins are not taken into account (Ps. 32:2; cf. Rom. 4:8). Faith is counted as righteousness because the sin is forgiven, or not credited to the sinner. Paul's point was that it was credited to someone else: Jesus. This quotation from Psalms provides the only use of the specific Greek word for "forgiveness" in the book of Romans. Paul prefers instead to speak of God's grace (cf. Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14; 2:13). He emphasizes God's grace in the justification of the ungodly, by which He puts them

in a right relationship with Himself. This He accomplishes by justifying them by faith in Christ. But by quoting Psalm 32:1–2, Paul shows that God's forgiveness is part of righteousness by faith. The justification of the ungodly is not a legal fiction. To be justified is, above all, to be put right with God by God, free from condemnation. It is a restored relationship with God through the sacrificial offering of His Son on behalf of sinners. It requires from sinners an acknowledgment of their sinful state, repentance, and unqualified trust in what God offers through His Son.

4:9–12. Abraham: Father of the Justified Uncircumcised. God's reckoning of Abraham's faith as righteousness (Gen. 15:6) predated by fourteen years his obedience to the command to circumcise (Gen. 17). Paul asserts that Abraham's subsequent circumcision was in fact a symbolic recognition that God had already reckoned his faith as righteousness (Rom. 4:11). Paul's contemporaries, whether Jew or Gentile, understood circumcision to be the external sign of an observant Jew and the rite that proselytes to Judaism were required to undergo to become part of the covenant people. But now the experience of Abraham was akin to that of uncircumcised Gentile Christian converts. Abraham became the father of both the circumcised and the uncircumcised who trusted in the Jewish Messiah. When God made an "everlasting covenant" with Abraham (Gen. 17:7, 13, 19), as part of the covenant requirements, He commanded him and the males in his family to undergo circumcision (Gen. 17:10). At the same time, God repeatedly promised Abraham that he would be a father of many nations (Gen. 17:4–6). Paul understood this promise to be fulfilled not with Jacob's large family but when non-Jews from many nations accepted the gospel that offered salvation through the Jewish Messiah, Jesus. Later, Paul addresses the status of these Gentile converts as if they were branches grafted on to an olive tree (Rom. 11:17–24). To place Abraham as the father of both the Jews and the Gentiles helped remove the long-standing barrier between them.

4:13–17. Righteousness Before and Apart from the Law. Even in the midst of the close-up on the life of Abraham from the viewpoint of faith, Paul underlines the limitations of the law from a chronological perspective. God made the promise about Abraham's descendants hundreds of years before giving the Ten Commandments at Sinai. Had God waited to make the promise until after giving the law, the condition for the promise's fulfillment would have been compliance with the law's demands. The promise would never have been realized, because the giving of the law unfortunately increased human transgression. The promise would have been an exclusive gift from God to the Jews. Paul took with utmost seriousness this sequence of Abraham's justification before the giving of the law, since it establishes an authoritative precedent for God's current work of justifying sinners through Jesus Christ apart from the law.

4:18–22. Abraham's Unwavering Faith. Paul next pursues the enduring nature of the faith of Abraham, who trusted God regardless of the fact that his age and that of Sarah would have made it impossible for them to have a child. For his fellow Christians, Paul drew an explicit comparison between Abraham's ostensibly dead body and Sarah's dead womb, from which God gave life, and Jesus's dead body, raised by God from the dead. In both cases, God's power brought life from death. Abraham's faith in God's promise was strengthened by God even as his body was as good as dead (v. 20; cf. 1:23). God is glorified when we do not waver in our trust in His promises, especially when circumstances seem to deny them.

4:23–25. Trust in God, Who Brings Life. Paul uses the case of Abraham to demonstrate that righteousness by faith had been God's way of salvation even before the law was given at Sinai. It is imputed to us who believe in Christ as the resurrected Savior, who through His death delivered us from our sins. He is the One who, by being raised, established the certainty of our justification. Christian faith stands on an even more certain footing: the truth of the death and resurrection of Jesus. The statement that Abraham's faith was counted as righteousness (v. 3) is for us a divine promise that is still alive and relevant, providing added assurance of our justification (v. 25) that will lead to our future glorification (cf. 5:2, 3; 8:17, 21, 30).

5:1–21

The Fruits of Justification for All

Chapter 5 is easily divided into two halves, the first celebrating the extravagant generosity of God's act of reconciliation through Jesus Christ (vv. 1–11) and the second highlighting Christ's achievement in more than restoring what was lost through Adam's sin (vv. 12–21). The chapter serves as a bridge between 3:21—4:25 and 6:1—8:39. The reconciliation with God achieved through the death of His Son, Jesus Christ (5:10–11), is a consequence of the righteousness of God revealed in the redemptive sacrifice of Christ (3:21–26). The believer's hope in God's promise of full restoration (5:5–6, 9–10) recalls Abraham's persistent hope that the promise of God would be fulfilled (4:18). Looking ahead, we see that the reign of sin and death introduced in 5:14, 17, and 21, figures large in chapters 6 and 7. Chapter 5 begins and ends with the dominion of grace through our Lord Jesus Christ (vv. 1–3, 21).

5:1–11. A Justified Boasting. The first result of justification is peace with God (v. 1). Knowing for sure that we were reconciled with the Almighty fortifies us against whatever anyone else may think about us. We can flourish in an atmosphere of grace while we await the return of our Lord. Even the experience of persecution strengthens that confident expectation (vv. 3–4). The certainty of God's love for us is based first on the fact that while we were still sinners, enemies of God, His Son died for us (vv. 8–10) and second on the fact that the Holy Spirit has been given to us (v. 5). Furthermore, we no longer fear the coming judgment of God against sin and sinners. Instead of bowing our heads in shame and fear, we exult—even boast—in this God who has embraced us in His love.

In 2:17 and 23, Paul accuses the Jew who boasts in God and in the law but dishonors Him by breaking the law. In 3:27, boasting is excluded, because the justifying of sinners is solely the work of God. Even Abraham was denied the right to boast (4:2). However, the same Greek word (*kauchaomai*) for boasting appears in 5:2–3 and 11. But here the context is different. In these instances, the spotlight is no longer on the wrongful boasting by sinful humans but on the Christian's hope and on the Giver of that hope. Admittedly, the Greek word translated as "boasting" has usually carried a negative flavor. Nonetheless, we must not miss the deliberate contrast Paul makes between what was forbidden and what is now demanded in response to the extravagant kindness of God. That is certainly something to celebrate. Earlier he had declared that he would "boast" in the cross of Christ (Gal. 6:14).

One can boast (or "exult" or "glory," as the word *kauchaomai* is sometimes translated) without reservation in the Christian hope of sharing the glory of God (Rom. 5:2) and ultimately in God, who has reconciled us to Himself (v. 11; cf. Jer. 9:24). But the idea that we would boast in suffering and tribulation (Rom. 5:2) seems beyond human reach, if not masochistic. The tribulation Paul had in mind included the unbelievers' mocking of the believers' faith in a crucified Jewish Messiah (cf. 2 Cor. 10–12). Here, in Romans 5, it is the experience of a common hostility shared by those who lived for Christ's sake (cf. 8:35–39). Tribulation can toughen the resolve to endure and strengthen one's character if taken in the spirit of Christ. Christians who live in a kinder age or a safer place than Paul's may glory in the burdens and setbacks of life if these are understood as being permitted by their Lord in order to keep alive their hope to share the promised glory of God (5:2; cf. 12:14–21).

Romans 5:5 presents a beautiful image of God's love. The biblical "heart" is the center of the person, including the will. Beyond the mental picture of a precious liquid being poured into an empty container, the metaphor serves as an introduction to the work of the Spirit of God in transforming the human heart (cf. 8:1–27).

Two of the most striking declarations in Scripture are that Christ died for the ungodly (5:6) "while we were still sinners" (v. 8) and that God justifies the ungodly (4:5). Paul moves from a generic "the ungodly" to include himself alongside his readers (by using the terms "us" and "we" in 5:8). The Christian message will never fall out of fashion with those who know themselves to be among the "ungodly." It manifests our needs and assures us of our rescue. The lack of apparent moral advance from a righteous person to a good person in v. 7 can be better understood if by "good" Paul is referring to a benefactor or patron whom one had promised to protect with one's life, as was the practice at that time.

God demonstrated His love for us in the death of His Son (v. 8). The emphasis on God's love is easy to overlook, especially if one holds the view of an angry God who is reluctant to save sinners and who has to be persuaded through the pleading of the Son to forgive them. His love for us was manifested on the cross while we were sinners. Given God's sacrificial offering of His Son, everything else is assured for us (8:39). The assurance of being justified or set right with God "through our Lord Jesus Christ" (5:1) is matched by the announcement in v. 10 of being reconciled to God through the death of His Son. Paul acknowledges the unfinished character of the realm of grace but points to the certain result of the reconciliation: we will be saved through His

life (v. 10). This concept points to the ongoing ministry of mediation of Christ on behalf of His own, ensuring that nothing will ever be able to separate us from His love and the full realization of our salvation (8:31–39). In the end, justification and reconciliation are two sides of the same coin, for justification describes the action of God through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ that enables Him to restore authentic relationships with sinners who stand in His grace without pretense or fear and with full confidence of their future glory in His presence.

5:12–21. Grace's Triumphant Reign. At one level, this section is an extended paean to "Jesus Christ our Lord" (v. 21). Paul compares and contrasts the universal impact of "one man," Adam, with the One Man, Jesus Christ (vv. 12–19). With a single act, each changed the course of human history. One's disobedience led to universal disobedience and death. But the other's obedience led to the offer of acquittal for all. Christ's achievement soars above Adam's disastrous defeat. Through Him the ruptured relationship with God has been restored. Instead of condemnation, Christ's one righteous act brought justification (vv. 16–18). Humanity has been salvaged with a path toward moral wholeness.

These verses also introduce sin and death as if they were sovereign powers ruling over humanity since the sin of Adam (vv. 14, 17, 21). But they make their appearance here as powers already broken by the death of Jesus Christ, who ushered in the reign of grace (vv. 15, 17, 20–21). The contest between the two rival powers continues, but Paul asserts that sin will not rule us because we are not under law but under grace (6:14).

The whole section (5:12–21) is constructed as a chiasm and displays an intricate weaving of several rhetorical devices that compare and contrast the effects of Adam's and Christ's acts. The centerpiece of the chiasm is v. 17. The dramatic repetition of "much more" in vv. 9, 10, 15, and 17 ties the two halves of the chapter together. Paul presents the achievement of Christ in its eclipse of the devastation that entered with Adam. In the end, those who have welcomed the overflowing grace of God and His gift of righteousness through the One Man, Jesus Christ, will reign (v. 17).

Paul does not explain just how the sin of Adam infected his descendants. As all parents know, the self-centered and even willful nature of small children is a reminder of the subsequent struggle each human faces against an inclination toward sin and selfishness. In 7:9–24, Paul describes in vivid detail the power of the sinful nature that can be mastered only through the intervention of the Holy Spirit (8:1–5). There has been much discussion regarding the question of how to define "original sin." The Catholic understanding—which holds that a newborn is already sentenced for eternal punishment unless the taint of the original sin of Adam is cleansed by infant baptism—is to be rejected as lacking biblical basis. The biblical understanding of baptism requires personal faith in the saving work of Christ. As a result, children are not responsible for the sins of their ancestors. What Paul describes here in Romans is not the guilt of Adam's sin but a weakened human nature with a propensity to sin, which was introduced to humanity through Adam's rebellion and which humans, by themselves, cannot resist.

Paul uses "many" in 5:15–19 in some cases to mean "all," in the sense of every human being, and sometimes in the actual sense of "many." On the basis of the statement in v. 18b, some have concluded that Paul taught that everyone would eventually be saved. The statement in the original language can be translated as "there resulted justification of life to all people." In this view, Paul expected the hard-hearted and impenitent sinner to eventually repent through the overwhelming grace of God, if not in this life, then in some future one not mentioned elsewhere in Scripture. But the wicked who will be raised at the end of the Millennium will show no sign of repentance. Instead, they will rush to destroy the new Jerusalem (Rev. 20:7–10). The doctrine of universalism may be attractive to some, but the thin threads on which the doctrine hangs cannot bear the weight of Paul's own statements. Those who practice evil will not inherit eternal life (Rom. 2:5–12; cf. Gal. 5:19–21). It is only the recipients of God's abundant grace and gift of righteousness who will reign in life through Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:17). There is no mention of a second chance. Paul's point here is that the price has been paid. So the offer of eternal life is earnestly extended to all but, tragically, not accepted by all.

In vv. 13 and 20–21, the law emerges as a partner with sin and death in a devastating trio. The assertion that sin is not *ellogeitai* (from *ellogeō*; "imputed," "charged," "counted") when there is no law (v. 13; cf. 4:15) has puzzled interpreters. Paul could not have meant that humanity was sinless before the giving of the law, because "all sinned" and death spread to all people

(5:12). The word *ellogeō* here was used in the commercial world for the recording of a financial obligation (cf. Philem. 18). Paul appears to have been referring to a divine recording in the books of heaven (cf. Rev. 20:12). Though sin through death reigned before Sinai, the giving of the law with its specific commands against wrongdoing actually intensified the power of sin. The law also reveals sin, so that there would be an increased recognition of its dominion. The purpose of the law is to provide moral guidance (Ps. 19:7). The ironic effect of the law to incite sinners and deepen the hold of sin will be portrayed more fully in Romans 7:5–10.

6:1—7:6

If No Longer "under Sin," Then No Longer "in Sin"

What shall be the attitude and practice of the believer toward sin and sinning? The comparison between Adam and Christ in 5:12–19 concludes that the reign of sin has been overthrown by the reign of grace (5:20–21). Paul emphatically denies that there should be any compromise with or submission to sin (6:1–2, 15). He buttresses his arguments first from the believer's baptism in Christ (vv. 3–13), then from the not-unheard-of practice of voluntary enslavement (vv. 16–22), and finally with an illustration about marriage (7:1–6). Each section prepares for the next. Paul tightly connects the three sections.

6:1–14. Dead to Sin, Alive with Christ. Paul returns to refute an earlier charge hurled against him by opponents who claimed he taught that people should do evil in order to increase the good (3:8). To even suggest that continued sinning enhances the glory of God through the increase of His forgiving grace (6:1) misses the intended outcome of God's grace. The announcement of a generous forgiveness will never silence the call for righteousness in the life of the one forgiven.

Two closely related key truths emerge in this section. First, the death of Christ can be understood as His death to sin once and for all (v. 10). While Christ's death can be understood as the atonement for the sins of all humanity, His death points to the believer's death to sin. Having shown that sin brings death to all, for all have sinned (5:12–21), Paul turns the language of death on its head. Here he speaks not of our physical death but about death to sin through a union with the crucified Christ (6:2–3). The believer's old self is to be considered as dead, because having died to sin he or she simply cannot live under its rule. The reference to the "old" person describes the former way of life when the self was subservient to the power of sinful desires (v. 6; cf. Eph. 4:22; Col. 3:9). Talk of a personal relationship with Jesus can be superficial and even self-serving unless it begins with the crucifixion of our old person, that is, our sinful self, with Christ.

When did we die to sin? The simple answer is at our conversion and baptism (Rom. 6:3), which Paul viewed as a single event. Through our baptism we were buried with Him (v. 4). In an earlier letter to the church at Corinth, Paul wrote that all died, if One died for all (2 Cor. 5:14). There is no contradiction here. Baptism signals our embrace of Jesus's death on our behalf, making His atoning sacrifice effective for our salvation. There is a clustering of words in Romans 6:4–8 that point to a profound relationship with Christ.

The second key concept in this section is that Christ's resurrection has decisively broken the power of death over Him (v. 9) and has resulted in a new life. Believers are called to live (lit. "walk" in) a new life (v. 4). As Christ now "lives to God" (v. 10), so believers are to consider themselves "alive to God in Christ Jesus" (v. 11), no longer under the reign of death-dealing sin. Their physical and mental aspects, formerly dedicated as weapons of wickedness, must now be dedicated as instruments or weapons of righteousness in the service of God (v. 13). Baptism into the death and resurrection of Christ has not freed believers from the reality of death in this present age. Nonetheless, their freedom from the reality of death is assured through the victory of Christ's resurrection (vv. 5, 22–23; cf. 1 Thess. 4:13–18). Admittedly, the struggle against the temptations of our sinful past will continue until our mortal bodies are transformed at the coming of the Lord. Otherwise, the appeal not to allow sin to reign in these bodies (Rom. 6:12) would be pointless.

In v. 14, Paul switches from the verbal imperatives of vv. 12–13 to the future tense of the verb "to rule": sin will not dominate as master (v. 14). Paul is implying that more than human effort is required, since believers are not under law but under grace. After exposing at length the impotence of mere human effort (7:14–25), Paul points to the empowering presence of the Spirit of God as enabling believers to kill the sinful practices of the body (8:1–17, especially v. 13). Thus, the promise that sin will not rule is fulfilled (6:14).

There is a clustering of words in vv. 4–8 that points to a relationship with Christ that endures beyond this present age. Our old self was crucified with Him (v. 6). Through baptism we were buried with Him (v. 4). Being united with Him in baptism in a manner similar to His death gives assurance that we will be united with Him in a resurrection like His (v. 5) and will live with Him forever (v. 8; cf. 1 Thess. 4:17).

Baptism announces that believers have died to sin as a way of life and have entered into solidarity with the crucified, buried, and risen Christ to a life directed toward righteousness. The phrase "into Christ" (Rom. 6:3) is unique to Paul (cf. Gal. 3:27). For the convert to Judaism, circumcision was a rite of passage into becoming part of the people who belonged to the covenant God made with Abraham and his descendants. Christians baptized into Christ become part of the one body in Christ (Rom. 12:5). The experience of baptism presupposes the crucifixion of Christ, who died for the redemption of the believers and in their place. Christ beckons them to consider themselves as crucified with Him (cf. 6:6). Paul's own confession was that he was "crucified with Christ," and that it was no longer he who lived, but Christ who lived in him (Gal. 2:20; cf. Gal. 5:24 and 6:14).

Paul's argument in Romans 6:3–4 presupposes the practice of baptism by total immersion and a level of understanding not possessed by infants, who are incapable of repentance (cf. Acts 2:38). Sprinkling or pouring water on the head of the person being baptized falls short of representing the believer's burial with Christ. For other passages that strongly support the practice of total immersion in the NT, see John 3:23 and Acts 8:38–39.

6:15–23. From Slaves of Sin to Slaves of God. Are we free to sin because we are under grace and not under law? Not at all (v. 15)! Being freed from the condemnation of the law could suggest that we can continue committing our favorite sins with impunity, given the abundance of grace. To use a comparison, the availability of powerful antibiotics is not an excuse for continuing risky sexual behavior. In his rebuttal to this dangerous presumption in vv. 15–23, Paul reinforces what he emphasized in 6:1–14 by expanding on the theme of slavery introduced in v. 6. Those under the power of a slave master do not have the right to offer their servitude to another. But since they were "crucified with" Christ, they died to sin and are free to serve Him (vv. 6–7).

In vv. 15–23, Paul deepens the appeal he made earlier in v. 13 with the language of voluntary enslavement—he encourages believers to present their members (parts of their bodies) as slaves of righteousness (v. 19), for they have become slaves of God (v. 22). The practice of human enslavement was a reality to his readers. It appears that a majority of believers in Rome may have been either slaves or former slaves (see commentary on Rom. 16:3–16). The practice of offering oneself to become the slave of another was common in the Roman world as a way to deal with debt, financial loss, and so on. We already live in servitude (6:19). Absolute autonomy is an illusion. On the physical level, our bodies depend on oxygen, water, and food for survival. Morally and spiritually, we are born with a corrupting tendency to evil and selfishness that marks our involuntary enslavement to sin (5:12). Only the power of God can set us free from the hold of sin and give us the power to live in a better way.

Through the proclamation of the gospel and the ministry of the Spirit of God, we can be freed from servitude to sin and enabled to serve Christ. In this voluntary servitude, obedience comes from the heart (6:17), that is, from the willing mind. Paul hastens to declare that servitude with God is not a demeaning enslavement but the way of freedom—freedom from a downward spiral of increasing wickedness and lawlessness (v. 19) leading to death (v. 21). We have become slaves of righteousness (v. 18) because we have enslaved ourselves to God (v. 22). We have the freedom to become holy, to be transformed through the renewing of our minds (vv. 19, 22; 12:2), and to receive the gift of everlasting life (6:22–23) when we choose God as our Master.

Whereas in v. 13 Paul appealed to the believers to present their members as instruments or weapons of righteousness to God, now he urges his hearers to complete their enslavement by presenting every part of themselves as slaves of righteousness for the purpose of holiness or sanctification (v. 19). No talent or ability, no part of the person, can be reserved for the pleasure of sin under the old master. The stark contrast in v. 23 between "death" and "the wages of sin" on the one hand and "eternal life" and the "gift of God" apart from works on the other shows that only fools remain in the service of sin.

7:1–6. A New Relationship After Death. After declaring the freedom from sin and death that comes from enslavement to God (6:15–23; cf. 7:6), Paul returns to the role of the law in the believer's life. He reaches out to address his fellow Jews, who should have recognized that their knowledge of that law had been linked with the reality of sin in their experience. Enslavement to sin in our fallen nature is ironically strengthened by our knowledge of the law's demands, thus deepening our condemnation. No longer enslaved to sin, we are free from the condemnation of the law. In this sense we have died to the law. The law remains, but the believer's primary focus is not on its prohibitions. Instead, the believer's mind is to be oriented toward Christ in a new life in the Spirit (v. 6; cf. 13:8–10; Matt. 22:37–40).

The line of thought in Romans 7:1–6 builds on Paul's earlier treatment of baptism as the burial of the crucified old sinful self (6:1–11), but here he emphasizes the corresponding freedom from the paradoxical effect of the law to increase the power of sin (7:5; cf. vv. 8–11). Paul uses an analogy from marriage to clarify the believer's changed relationship to the law. First, he lays down an obvious principle: The law has power over a person only as long as that person lives (v. 1). A married woman who lives with a man other than her husband is, according to the law, an adulteress. But this is true only as long as her husband lives. At his death, she is released from the law that connected her to him (v. 2) and is free to become another's wife without being charged with adultery. Similarly, believers who have died to the law (v. 4) are now to consider themselves bound to Christ as if entering into a new marriage. In this new union with Christ, they are released from the law as the instrument of condemnation in order to be fruitful in righteousness pleasing to God.

In the marital analogy, Paul identifies Christ as the new husband but does not identify the counterpart of the first husband who died. Pressing for a closure that Paul does not provide, interpreters have identified sin or even the law as the first husband. But Paul never said that the law had died. Instead, believers have become dead to the law (v. 4). Furthermore, the Moral Law does not disappear but remains to define an adulterous relationship and a morally acceptable one. Thus the law, which condemns adultery, remains even in the second marriage. What then is the role of the law in the Christian's walk with Christ? The law calls for righteous living in a holy relationship with God. But as an external guide to righteous living, the law itself is unable to produce righteousness within us while we are enslaved to sin (6:20). Knowing the law's demands while living in servitude to sin actually arouses sinful desire and rebellion within our fallen nature (7:5). But in the new marriage relationship with Christ, we serve Him as our marital Master in the new way of life in the Spirit (v. 6).

The crucial role of the Holy Spirit (v. 6) remains a central feature in virtually all of Paul's letters—and, for that matter, in the entire NT. Up to this point in Romans, Paul has only briefly mentioned the presence and work of the Holy Spirit. The effective inward circumcision of the heart is performed by the Spirit (2:29). Through the Spirit, the love of God has been poured out in our hearts (5:5; cf. 15:13). A fuller treatment of the vital role of the Spirit in believers' lives lies ahead (8:1–27; see also 9:1; 12:11; 14:17; 15:13, 15–19, 30). The cumulative witness in Romans and the rest of the NT reveals that the ministry of the Spirit is that of a Person rather than an impersonal influence.

7:7–25

Prelude to Victory: The Power of Sin through the Law

Later in the letter, Paul will devote his attention to this new life in Christ led by the Spirit (8:1–17). But first, he clarifies the distinction between the law and sin (7:7–12) and establishes that the law by itself is unable to free us from the power of sin (vv. 13–25).

7:7–12. Sin Takes Advantage of the Law of God. The law could appear to be abetting and increasing the force of sin. The law, with its commands against sin, deepens our awareness of it. Paul states that in pointing out what is sinful in the eyes of God, the law ironically became a vehicle for expanding his sense of sinfulness. The last of the Ten Commandments, "You shall not covet" (v. 7), moves from the external world of action to the internal world of desire. As a child, Paul was blind to the deeper hold of sin. In that sense he was alive without the law (v. 9). But because of his own fallen nature, Paul's introduction to the law's command against coveting spawned all kinds of evil coveting and desires in him (v. 8). In other words, sin, using the law against coveting as a subterfuge, deceived him and killed him (vv. 7, 11). However, insofar as it reveals the will of a holy God, the law remains holy, righteous (i.e., just), and good (v. 12).

7:13–25. Uneven Battle against the Sinful Self. Paul next expands on the basic point that the holy law of God is unable of itself to help us break the grip of sin, which grows even stronger

under the condemnation of the law. Few passages in Romans have produced greater discussion and more proposals than the description of the power of sin in these verses. Who is the "I" in these verses? Was Paul speaking of his own experience as a Pharisee before meeting Christ? Since Paul used the present tense in vv. 14–25, was he speaking of an ongoing enslavement by his sinful nature even as a believer? Or was Paul speaking allegorically of the first Adam or of the Jewish people, unable to keep the covenant? Assuming that Paul was speaking for himself in vv. 9–11, possibly the best option would be to take the plainest reading of the rest of the chapter as autobiographical.

In recounting this uneven battle, Paul was not speaking solely about his own experience. He assumed that those who heard or read his words would recall a similar discovery of the power of sin twisting what is holy and good into an instrument of death. Paul diplomatically encourages his hearers to find themselves here as well. Notice how he begins: "We know that the law is spiritual" (v. 14); it is of divine origin. Then he shifts to the first person to indicate that he was *sarkinos* ("of the flesh," "carnal," "unspiritual"). While sin's power deepened because of an increased awareness of the law's demands, another impulse arose as well. Paul speaks of a desire, even a delight, in the law that he here explicitly refers to as the law of God (v. 22). He even says that he had the disposition to do what was right by the law. In speaking this way, Paul echoes the attitude enumerated at length in Psalm 119, where the psalmist repeatedly declares his love for the gift of the law (Ps. 119:47–48, 97, 113–119, 127, 163–167). Yet this desire to do what is commanded has proven powerless to break the pull of sin. The moral self is like a king under siege, holed up in his capital city while an enemy force dominates the rest of the kingdom.

Throughout the first half of the letter, the word "law" appears more than sixty times, always alone and without a modifier. Here, in Romans 7:22 and 25, Paul states the obvious truth that the law is in fact God's law (e.g., Ps. 119:1, 18, 29, 44), in which he delighted. The law is the recognized standard by which humans are judged and condemned. Paul acknowledges the law to be holy and good (Rom. 7:12), though fallen human nature subverts the good law. He makes it clear that the problem is not with the law of God but with the human mind, where fallen human nature exerts control over the bodily functions of speech and action, thus causing the helpless "I" to be a prisoner of sin (v. 23).

Some confusion about the law can arise when reading vv. 21–25. We speak of the *law* of gravity when referring to the way gravity exerts its inevitable force. Likewise, in v. 21, Paul speaks of the pull of sin on our fallen nature as the law of sin, an inescapable reality.

In the opening section of Romans, Paul shows that all humanity stands under the condemnation of the law, since all have sinned. Here he speaks of the power of the sinful nature in overwhelming even the desire to do what is right. The isolated "I" finds itself in an uneven and hopeless struggle that led Paul to declare his helpless wretchedness and need for deliverance (v. 24). The passage as a whole expresses in the most vivid language a view of human nature that distinguishes Christianity from other religions, in which the formula for transformation lies in reincarnation or meditation or even the fear of punishment. At the outset of the letter, Paul declares his loyalty to the gospel as the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes (1:16). Christian faith holds that only a Power beyond ourselves is able to save us from the condemnation of sin by breaking the power of sin in our lives, even when we are attracted to what is good and holy. Notice that throughout this tragic recital of impotence in the struggle against our fallen nature, there is no mention of Christ or the Spirit. This absence may be what makes it difficult to settle once and for all the identity of the "I" in the passage. But the truth is that the pull of our fallen nature continues in the Christian walk and that Paul was well aware of the believers' ongoing struggle with sin (12:2, 21; 13:13). But the way forward is hinted at in Paul's exclamation in the midst of apparent defeat: we can thank God that He delivers us through Jesus Christ our Lord (7:25). This path to victory is developed in 8:1–17.

8:1–39

Life Led by the Spirit

This wide-ranging chapter provides a dramatic and positive conclusion to the first half of the letter. It answers Paul's earlier cry about being a wretched man (7:24) by describing the Christian's life in the Spirit (8:1–13). This new life confirms our adoption into God's family (vv. 14–17) and infuses us with hope in the midst of affliction (vv. 18–25). Now the Spirit is interceding for us (vv. 26–27). In all of these changes, God has taken the initiative (vv. 28–30) and united us to Him in an unbreakable bond of love (vv. 31–39).

8:1–13. Life in the Spirit of Christ versus Life in the Flesh. In contrast to the condemnation of sin that falls on humanity (Rom. 5:18), there is "now no condemnation for [to] those who are in Christ Jesus" (8:1; cf. 3:24). Sin itself has been condemned through the incarnation and death of Christ. The phrase "in Christ Jesus" conveys a sense of security (cf. 8:35–39; John 10:28). The one who believes in Jesus Christ is placed "in Christ Jesus." Earlier, Paul described God's gift of salvation as "eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:23). Here in Romans 8:1–13, he adds that to be "in Christ" (v. 1) is also to be in the Spirit, because the Spirit of God dwells within us (vv. 9–10). Later on, Paul will note that the many believers form one body (12:5) and urges his hearers to clothe themselves with the Lord Jesus Christ (13:14). Collectively, these phrases point to the empowering union of believers with the Triune God and with one another that is the result of being "in Christ Jesus."

The unique formulation referring to the "law of the Spirit," which brings life and freedom through Christ (8:2), introduces the active role of the Holy Spirit described more fully in 8:1–17. Paul clearly did not mean that we are saved by the law. In this case, the Greek word translated as "law" could be referring to the ruling power of the Spirit, or more probably to the law of God used by the Spirit, in contradistinction to the law of God placed at the service of sin and death. In v. 3, Paul sums up the dismal portrayal of the impotence of the law of God discussed in 7:7–24. The law of God condemns the sins committed in the flesh, yet it remains helpless in enforcing its demands for righteous behavior within sinful beings. But God was not helpless. He gave up His own Son to break the hold of sin and death, showing that human nature was not irreversibly under the power of sin. The Greek term *hamartias* in the latter part of 8:3 can be translated "on account of [for] sin" or "as a sin offering" (cf. Ps. 40:6b, LXX).

Paul was careful to avoid saying that Christ was born with a sinful nature (cf. Heb. 4:15; 1 Pet. 2:22; 1 John 3:5). The goal of Jesus's sinless life and sacrificial death was to fulfill the righteous demands of the law of God in order that God's righteousness might be fulfilled in those who allow themselves to be led by God's will rather than their own desires (Rom. 8:4). Only the perfect life and the atoning death of Christ can fully meet the requirement, but Paul is also alluding to the law being fulfilled in "us," referring originally to himself and to the recipients of his letter. How is Christ's atoning death related to our fulfillment of the righteous requirement of the law? In 5:18–19, Christ's obedience, by which "many will be made righteous," can be understood as God's declaration that the sinner is forgiven and reconciled on the basis of Christ's sacrificial death. When believers are justified by faith and at peace with God through Jesus Christ, they also receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, through whom the love of God has been poured out in their hearts (5:5). The presence of the indwelling Spirit of God enables us to meet the demands of the law of God for a holy life; and yet, due to the innate sinfulness of our nature (the weakness of the flesh referred to in 8:3 as well as in the preceding chapter), it is only by constantly relying on Christ's sacrificial death that our obedience is acceptable to God.

Is the believer then an inactive vessel? No, indeed, for Paul goes on to point out the necessity of believers setting their minds on the way of the Spirit rather than on the way of the flesh (8:5). The result of that new focus is "life and peace" (v. 6) and personal transformation (12:1–21; cf. 13:13–14; see Col. 3:3). At the same time, believers will not dare claim absolute perfection or sinlessness. In fact, the closer their walk with God, the greater their awareness of personal imperfections.

Paul gives special attention to having a carnal mind, or a mind set on the flesh. In Romans 8:5–8, he refers to those living in conformity to the sinful desires of the flesh. God's will is expressed in the precepts of His law. As a result, their failure to be subject to God's will inevitably is acted out in rebellion against God's law (cf. 1 Cor. 7:32). So they tragically continue to live in the realm of death.

The close relationship among the members of the Trinity is evident from Paul's equating the Spirit of God with the Spirit of Christ. The Spirit is bestowed when Christ is acknowledged as Savior and Lord. The Greek words sometimes translated as "if indeed" or "if" (Rom. 8:9–11) do not suggest a doubt on Paul's part as to whether the "Spirit of Christ" was dwelling in the believers but instead strongly assumes that the Spirit was indeed dwelling in them.

The body of the believer is "dead," that is, doomed to die (v. 10). If all die, what is the ultimate difference between living in the Spirit and living in the flesh? Paul points to the resurrecting power of the Spirit of God, who raised up Jesus from the dead. In due time, the same Spirit will raise the Spirit-led believers and grant eternal life to their mortal bodies (v. 11). In the meantime, while their bodies are destined for the dust of death, the living Spirit imparts spiritual life and moral power by putting to death the immoral deeds of the body (v. 13; cf. 13:12–13).

8:14–17. The Spirit of Adoption. Separating Paul's stream of thought into discrete sections can mask the flow of his thought. But in vv. 14–17, he pauses to introduce the theme of believers as heirs through the power of the Spirit. Already Abraham's descendants, as heirs of the promise made to him, believers await their inheritance, "the world" (4:13). Here Paul is referring to all believers as children of God (8:14; cf. vv. 17, 21). Our present status as such is not based on the fact that we have been created by God but on our adoption (v. 15). The presence of the Spirit gives us assurance that we have indeed been adopted by God and so are entitled to the inheritance as joint heirs with Christ, the Son of God (v. 17). As God's adopted children, we are enabled by the Spirit to cry out, "Abba," which means "Father."

While "fear" is sometimes used by Paul in a positive sense (cf. Phil. 2:12), the fear mentioned in Romans 8:15 is the result of being enslaved to sin (cf. Rom. 6:17–20). Fear characterizes the condition of a slave who lives under the threat of punishment if the master is displeased. Even worse, the one enslaved to sin faces the wrath of God and the certainty of death (8:13; cf. 6:21–23). In contrast, those who live in Christ and are led by the Spirit have the assurance of eternal life (8:11; cf. 6:21–23). Those who are coheirs with Christ are given the ministry of suffering, as it were, with Christ, bearing the shame that comes from kinship with a crucified Messiah.

8:18–25. Present Afflictions. Paul stops to acknowledge the pain and suffering inflicted not only on the believers but also on the entire creation as a result of the Fall (Gen. 3:17–19) and to affirm that the Spirit sustains us in suffering. The personified groaning of all of creation captures the inescapable cycles of death and decay that dominate the present order. To restrict the "creation" to nonbelievers is to miss one of the rich metaphors of the Hebrew Bible. The psalmist depicts the meadows wearing flocks and the valleys covered with grain as shouting for joy and singing (Ps. 65:13). Conversely, Jeremiah warns that the earth would mourn because of the devastation of the judgment of God against the sins of His people (Jer. 4:28). Yet the effects of the entrance of sin through the disobedience of Adam and Eve were never intended to be final. Therefore, Paul personifies the whole creation as eagerly waiting for the children of God to be revealed (Rom. 8:19). The adoption is a present reality with a future aspect. In the final restoration, the adopted children of God will be fully and openly acknowledged as His own. In a similar vein, Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers," for they will be called God's children (Matt. 5:9).

In the meantime, believers are called to hold on to the hope they were given when they first believed. Hope must be sustained while that for which they hope remains unseen (Rom. 8:24–25). And their hope is nurtured through a determined perseverance that takes up the tasks at hand. The Greek word commonly translated as "patience" or "perseverance" conveys the sense of persistence in maintaining one's hope in spite of the suffering that comes from being a follower of Christ in this present world.

The assurance of God's restoration of the present world from its degradation (vv. 20–21) cannot justify a further degradation or even a neglect of the earth and its resources. Nonetheless, attempts to develop biblically based environmental ethics would be better served by looking elsewhere in Scripture. There is no explicit reference here to stewardship. But Romans does declare that all human life is inextricably linked together, with all created beings sharing a common fate both here and in a future restoration that will transform the whole created order.

The reference to "the firstfruits of the Spirit" (v. 23, lit. the "firstfruit [singular] of the Spirit") is without parallel and should not be confused with the "fruit of the Spirit" (Gal. 5:22). The meaning seems to be that the Spirit is indeed the firstfruit, reinforcing the certainty that all the rest of the promised inheritance will be given. Paul has reversed the usual understanding of "firstfruits." It originally referred to the consecrated first portion of a crop that humans offered to God (Ex. 34:22, 26). Here Paul speaks of the Holy Spirit as God's offering to humans, reversing the usual direction of the firstfruits offering. Together, the gift of the indwelling Spirit and the gift of God's Son as a sacrifice on our behalf (Rom. 8:32) are the two witnesses attesting to the certain fulfillment of the divine promise.

8:26–27. Intercession of the Spirit. Paul next focuses his attention on the work of the Spirit on our behalf. In our weakness, our most pressing need is knowing what to pray for. It is the work of the Spirit to rephrase the ignorant specifics of our prayers to align them more accurately with the will of God and to our *real* needs. Paul expresses belief in the efficacy of prayer (15:30–32). It is God, after all, to whom we pray. To the questioning mind, prayer may seem unnecessary. Does God need to be encouraged by our words to carry out His will? Scripture does speak of the importance of humans asking God to carry out His will in their lives, but the circle of influence in intercessory prayer widens to include others (cf. Matt. 6:10). At their core, prayers of petition are appeals for alignment with the divine will, granting God access to the hearts and minds of the petitioners, which in turn transforms them. Attempts to explain the process and even the fairness of intercessory prayer must acknowledge our human limitations and the assurance that God's disposition toward those for whom Christ died is one of impartial love.

Alongside the groaning of the believers and of nature for redemption, the Spirit also groans in intercession (Rom. 8:22–23, 26). The wording conveys the Spirit's deep emotional engagement. Words are not necessary, for God knows the mind of the Spirit. One should be cautious to avoid pressing the imagery of intercession beyond what is biblically sound. Along with the Spirit, Christ, at the right hand of God, is also interceding (Rom. 8:34). Their joint ministry should not be construed as joining forces to overcome the resistance of the Father to love believers. Rather, the entire Godhead is united in earnest efforts on behalf of God's children.

8:28–30. Divine Initiative. What follows is a vivid restatement of what "we know" (v. 28). It is, in fact, a succinct summary of the message of the whole of Scripture. With the coming of Christ, there is a glorious new chapter in the old book. The long-announced goal of God to restore fallen creation takes a new expression. Now the goal toward which God is working for good through all events is the surrounding of His Son with many brothers and sisters, all conformed or shaped into His likeness (v. 29). Suffering cannot thwart God's plans for us, because He makes sure that the end result of our suffering is what is good. This audacious task of transforming sinners into legitimate children depends solely on God's decision. Paul continues with an emphasis on the inexorable results of the divine initiative to reconcile sinners to God. The work of justifying or setting humankind into a new relation with Himself through Christ has occupied much of the letter so far. But the sweep of the divine initiative is realized only when those who have been justified stand alongside the Son and share in God's glory.

The point of reference for the believer is the image of the Son. His sinless life and sacrificial death met and incarnated the righteous demands of the law, thus upholding the law and expressing its fullness in His self-sacrificing love. Paul speaks of the whole process of God's work of restoration—including the glorification of the believers—in the past tense, as if all has already been accomplished. Earlier, their glorification was described as a future hope (v. 17). How shall both statements stand together? Seen from the perspective of the certainty of God's promise, it is correct to speak of glorification in the past tense, as already completed (v. 30), even though its actualization remains in the future. From the viewpoint of divine certainty, consider it done (cf. Rev. 21:5–6). But from the perspective of time, the glorification of the children of God is still coming.

There are two possible subjects for the verb *synergeō* ("work together"; Rom. 8:28)—"all things" or "God." If the antecedent is "all things," Paul is not suggesting that things will work themselves out on their own. Paul did not believe in a self-regulating universe, a cosmic gyroscope able to right itself. Scripture does not hold a pantheistic view identifying God with the world. It is more likely that "God" should be taken as the subject in v. 28. This does not mean that He is the direct cause of all that happens but that in the complex interplay of multiple decisions and events God is able to work out His intention of blessing those who love Him. Rather than manipulating human decisions and actions like a cosmic puppeteer, God, in ways unseen but sometimes detected in the rearview mirror, picks up the shattered fragments from misguided human decisions and deeds to make something greater than the sum of their broken parts. From Joseph's brothers selling him into slavery for twenty shekels of silver to the betrayal of the Son of God for thirty pieces of silver, human treachery has often been the detestable currency by which God works to redeem and bless this broken world.

Human love toward God is a response to God's prior love toward us. Under the influence of the Spirit of God, divine love awakens love in the human heart. Some interpreters limit God's love to those predestined by God for salvation. The strict doctrine of double predestination, largely based on Romans 8:28–30 and 9:6–21, requires that God's sovereign and irresistible grace toward part of humanity must be matched by His inexplicable but sovereign decision not to extend that grace and love toward

the rest of humanity, dooming certain people to eternal separation from Him. This teaching offers a reason why some have no interest in their spiritual condition. But the words of Scripture do not support such arbitrary limitation of God's love. He loves the world so much that He gave His only Son (John 3:16). It is instructive to note that in Romans 8:28–30 Paul does not speak of a divine decision to exclude people from salvation apart from their choice to reject His offer of salvation. It is a mistake to conclude from Paul's words that God has indiscriminately decided who shall be cut off from the real possibility of salvation. Paul's words here aim at encouraging beleaguered believers who are engaged in an inner struggle to trust God's ability to finish the work He began in them (see below, "Predestination").

Predestination

The topic of predestination has been discussed for centuries in the Christian church and continues to be a matter of disagreement. Its discussion raises questions related to human freedom and God's sovereignty and the relationship between these two. Some expositors, in order to preserve human freedom, limit God's sovereignty in some form. Others make a special effort to emphasize God's sovereignty and sacrifice human freedom. The teaching that God, in His mercy and power, predetermined from eternity who will be saved and who will be lost (double predestination), presupposes that God's grace is irresistible and immutable. This theological position needs some evaluation accompanied by a brief summary of the biblical understanding.

Unconditional Predestination

1. Misrepresentation of God. The doctrine of unconditional predestination—which usually includes the idea that God controls all things by His unilateral will—depicts God as an arbitrary and even tyrannical being who is more interested in His sovereignty than in displaying the fullness of His mercy and love. He arbitrarily predetermined—arbitrary in the sense that there is no reason to justify His decision—that He will show mercy and save some sinners, and He will let others burn in hell. He could have shown mercy to all, but He intentionally willed to let some suffer for unending ages.

What kind of God actually and effectively wills the destruction of humans? This explains why this doctrine has been extremely controversial in the history of Christian thought. Divine unconditional predestination involves such a strong emphasis on God's sovereignty that it logically leads to the conclusion that God wills the existence of sin, including, in some theologies, the fall of humans into sin. This involves projecting a concept of God that is cruel, even atrocious.

2. Grace Is Irresistible and Immutable. This doctrine correctly affirms that humans are by themselves incapable of responding to God's grace, but the solution it offers to that incapacity is theologically unsound. It states that for the objects of God's election, grace is irresistible, that is to say, they are absolutely unable either to accept or to reject the divine call. It is usually indicated that according to Paul, God prepared both vessels of wrath and vessels of mercy (see commentary on Rom. 9:14–29).

We find several problems in the concept of irresistible grace. First, it is argued that free will has been so damaged by sin that the only way for God to save humans is to force saving grace on them as a gift. This is certainly not the case. With respect to Romans 9–12, Paul is indeed emphasizing God's sovereignty through the use of the image of the potter and the description of the expression of His grace independent of human virtue, but in the process he is not denying that humans are indeed responsible for their actions. He made that very clear in Romans 1:18—3:20.

Paul also exhorts us to listen to the word of God, implying that God's grace, manifested in the Word and through the influence of the Holy Spirit, enables people to use their rational abilities and their will to decide for or against Christ (10:8–14). This has been referred to as "prevenient grace"—the grace that precedes. It is the idea that God reaches out in various ways to all human beings through His Spirit, word, and providence in order to cause them to see their need of repentance and salvation through the gospel (e.g., Rom. 10:13–21; John 1:9; 12:32; Acts 17:24–31; Titus 2:11). In fact, humans will be judged according to their works, something that presupposes responsibility for responding or not responding to God's grace (Matt. 25:34–36, 41–43; 2 Cor. 5:10). The emphasis on irresistible grace denies that free will is still God's gift to humans (cf. Gen. 2:17) and fosters the notion that one divine gift destroys a previous one. Free will has undoubtedly been damaged by sin, but it still continues to define us as humans. In other words, the doctrine of predestination tends to dehumanize us as beings created in the image of God by, at least in the area of salvation, deactivating or ignoring the exercise of free will.

Second, defining grace as immutable asseverates that those chosen by God to be objects of His grace will never fall from grace. In other words, some are to be saved no matter what and others will perish no matter what. Such an understanding of grace makes irrelevant the constant exhortations that we find in the NT to persevere in the faith (e.g., Eph. 4:1; Heb. 4:11; 2 Pet. 1:10). Many other passages in the Bible make it clear that believers can fall from grace (e.g., Heb. 6:4–6).

Third, such an understanding of divine grace makes the proclamation of the gospel totally unnecessary. If people all over the world have already been chosen for salvation or perdition, independent of their will, and will unquestionably be saved or lost, why must we still proclaim the gospel to them? The gospel would no longer confront us with a choice for or against Christ, meaning that the offer of the gospel would not be a genuine offer to the non-elect.

Fourth, such an understanding of grace places divine election and justification by faith in tension. Justification by faith requires acknowledging our spiritual condition, finding in Christ the only solution, and placing our faith in Him. The appropriation of justification requires the presence of free will at some point in the process of salvation.

Fifth, irresistible and immutable grace could easily excuse human sin. Those who are lost could excuse themselves by arguing that God did not give them the possibility of salvation and that therefore they are incapable of doing anything else but continuing in their sins. They were never the objects of God's love.

3. *Limited Atonement.* The doctrine of unconditional predestination teaches that Christ died to save only the elect. If God unilaterally limited the gift of His saving grace to a fraction of humanity, then the sacrificial death of Christ was not intended to deal with the sins of the world (John 1:29) but only with the sins of some of the people in the world. This seems to imply that the problem of sin itself has not been totally solved. The Bible at times speaks about Christ dying for a particular group (in the sense that these are the people who receive the full benefits of Christ's death), but it also makes clear that He died on behalf of all (e.g., 2 Cor. 5:14; 1 Tim. 2:4–6; Heb. 2:9). One of the most fundamental theological messages flowing from the cross of Jesus is that the divine will to save is not restricted to any particular group. God's saving perspective has always been global (Gen. 12:1–3; Eph. 1:9–10; 1 Tim. 2:4; Rev. 14:6–7).

4. *Spirit and Predestination.* The doctrine of predestination is based on the human incapacity to respond to God's grace and is based on divine sovereignty: God makes for humans the decision that they cannot make and forces it on them. The picture we find in the NT is significantly different from this particular approach. The corruption of human nature is affirmed (e.g., Rom. 3:9–20; 8:7), but the solution is the work of the Holy Spirit in the human heart as the Spirit calls people to surrender to the Lord, synchronizing the human will with the divine will in an act of freedom (e.g., John 16:7–10; cf. Matt. 26:39). The Spirit places in the heart the desire to be reconciled with God and frees humans from the power of sin in order for them to become willing servants or slaves of the Lord (Rom. 6:17–18).

Predestination in the Bible

What we have said so far does not deny that the Bible speaks about predestination and that we do need to listen to what it has to say about this topic. Here we offer a brief summary of some of the biblical elements associated with it.

1. *The Term "Predestination."* The noun "predestination" is not used at all in the NT; instead we find the verb "to predestine" (Gr.

proorizō, "to decide on beforehand"), having God as the subject and humans as the object. We also read about God's foreknowledge and election of humans (see "Divine Election," p. 1594). There are passages that do not contain the terminology itself and yet contain the concept. The question is how we should approach this topic. We suggest paying close attention to the passages and not going beyond what they say—avoiding any speculation about divine sovereignty that sets very specific limits on God's gracious love.

2. *God's Act of Predestination.* The divine decision to save was not an afterthought but something done by God in eternity (1 Cor. 2:7). This is explicitly reiterated in Ephesians 1:4, which indicates that God chose us in Christ before the world was created. The implication is that the pre-Creation divine decision was not influenced by human activity, good or bad, because humans had not yet been created. Unquestionably, the emphasis is on God's sovereign power and love toward His creatures and on what God was willing to do for them in a world that would be damaged by sin. Divine sovereignty is clearly inseparable from the fullness of divine grace and love.

3. *Predestination Presupposes God's Plan.* What God predetermined was not the result of accidental or isolated decisions. God had a plan, a design for His creation, and what He predestined to happen was an intrinsic part of it. When the divine events occur within human history, they happen according to God's plan (Eph. 1:11). This purpose or plan is conceived in the divine mind, willed by God, and worked out in history according to His will. The foundation and motivating force of the plan was God's love (Eph. 1:4–5). This indicates that the plan was intended to be for the benefit of His creatures and not for their destruction.

4. *Predestination and Christ.* What Jesus experienced at the hands of Herod, Pilate, the Gentiles, and the people of Israel was what God had determined in advance (Acts 4:28). Notice that God did not predetermine the evil actions of His enemies but the suffering of His Son at their hands. God does not have to move people to do evil, because it is natural for sinners to practice evil. Moreover, because He knows all the specific evil actions people will do in certain situations, He can and does use even these evil actions to further His plan of salvation (Rom. 8:28; Gen. 50:20). Romans 8:29 suggests that Jesus was also predestined by God to be the first-born among many brothers and sisters. The incarnation of the Son of God is part of the divine plan configured in eternity. He was going to be one of us and in the process would make us His brothers and sisters.

5. *Predestination and Believers.* There are certain specific things that God predetermined for His people. For example, He decreed that His wisdom, revealed in the person of Christ, would be "for our glory" (1 Cor. 2:7). This is not something that God will perhaps do for us but rather something that He has determined to do for us. We will be glorified through Christ. God has also predestined us to be adopted as His children only through Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:5). For God, this is not negotiable. He acted unilaterally, creating a way for our adoption into the heavenly family before we existed. In addition, the plan includes God's intention to conform us to the image of His Son (Rom. 8:29). This is His plan for those who love Him (8:28). Our Lord's predetermined plan is to transform those who believe into the likeness of His Son.

6. *God Predetermined Everything Related to Salvation.* With respect to the salvation of His people, God did not leave anything to chance. Based on His foreknowledge, once predestination was put into effect, we are called for salvation. The acceptance of the call leads to justification and to our final glorification at the Second Coming (8:30). No power on earth can alter God's plan for us except our rejection of it. Notice that the language of predestination is always associated with those who believe. God has unilaterally determined that those who believe in Christ will be saved and those who reject the abundance of His grace will perish, but He has allowed us the freedom to accept or reject His grace and His offer of eternal salvation.

"Predestination" is a good word, but we should not attempt to construct with it a doctrine of unconditional double predestination. The usage of the verb indicates that it designates God's unalterable plan for the salvation of His people through the incarnation and death of our Savior. At the heart of divine predestination we find the unfathomable depths of God's eternal love.

8:31–39. The Unshakable Love of God. Placed at the halfway point in the letter, this hymnic section lifts up the spirits of believers as it did those of the original audience. Christians have constantly turned to these words for comfort and strength in times of tragedy and confusion. God's redemptive love will triumph over all hostility and every obstacle. In these few poetic lines, Paul also displays his absolute confidence in the unbreakable grip of God's love before leading us into the complex argumentation in chapters 9–11.

The section rests on two theological certainties. The first is couched in a question at the beginning—"If God is for us, who can be against us?" (8:31)—which expects the response "No one!"

Paul is responding to the questions and doubts that can haunt the believer under siege in a hostile world. Is suffering for the sake of Christ really worth it? If one succeeds in enduring the trials of the present world, will the promises really be fulfilled? Or do our present sufferings show we are already adrift from the favor of God? Paul assures us that although circumstances can give the impression that we have been abandoned by God, we are now and for all time will be embraced by God's unbreakable and all-conquering love. After all, God has already given the most precious gift of all—His Son, Jesus Christ. He will surely keep His word in bestowing the promised inheritance. But it is not enough simply to declare the certainty of the triumph of God's love. Paul proceeds to name all the enemies of faith—first in a parade of seven (v. 35), followed by another ten (vv. 38–39), real and potential—before declaring all of them impotent in the face of God's fierce protective love.

By leading with the question of what should be said (v. 31), Paul draws the listeners into a response. Only in Romans does he use this approach (6:1; 7:7; 8:31; 9:14; 9:30). Listeners would understand the succinct question "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (8:31) to mean "If God is on our side, who would dare to go up against God, and, if daring to try, who would have any chance of effectively overthrowing His support of us?" As indicated, the ongoing intercession of Christ (v. 34; cf. Heb. 7:25), alongside the intercession of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:26–27), does not presume a hardness on the part of God. Paul does not here specify the content of the intercession. But when Satan (whose name means "the accuser"; cf. Rev. 12:10) contests the worthiness of the believers, his charges are more than countered by the united ministry of the Godhead. The intercessory ministry of Christ is no mere assignment but springs from His everlasting love for those redeemed through His death on the cross, His supreme act of love (Rom. 8:34–35).

In considering what could conceivably separate us from Christ's love, Paul recites a sevenfold list of hardships (v. 35), all of which he had already personally endured for the sake of Christ, except for the last, the sword (cf. 1 Cor. 4:10-13; 2 Cor. 6:4–5; 11:23–27). How could such things separate us from God? First, persecution and suffering tend to discourage and to create a feeling of abandonment in believers who experience them. How can this be happening to us when we have put ourselves into God's care? Second, enemies can taunt, suggesting that God would surely take better care of us if we were truly His children (Matt. 27:43). But the truth points in the opposite direction. Earlier, in Romans 8:17, we are reminded that sharing in the sufferings of Christ is actually a necessary prelude to sharing in His glory (cf. Matt. 5:11–12; Phil. 1:29; 3:10–11). The quotation in Romans 8:36 from Psalm 44:22 points out that suffering for God's sake in a hostile world has long been an experience of those loyal to Him. Suffering for Christ's sake is therefore not evidence of His abandonment, as some might suggest, but of a deep fellowship of suffering with Him.

With a note of defiance, Paul declares that in the midst of hardships we are overwhelmingly victorious (Rom. 8:37). Tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, the sword—we rise above them all, not merely surviving but surpassing them, overcoming them and the temptations they bring, thus becoming super-overcomers. Even the sharp edge of the sword cannot separate us from God's love, decisively demonstrated in the death of His Son. This triumph comes not by heroic human endurance but through the One who loved us, because nothing can break the grip of the Godhead's sacrificial love.

The Greek *pepeismai* (v. 38) has been translated as "I am persuaded" or "I am sure," but it can also be understood as "I have become convinced," which would imply a conviction settled in the past and enduring into the present. The substance of the first half of the letter provides the basis for that unshakable conviction. In a final declaration, Paul contends that all conceivable entities and forces, present and future, human and supernatural, are utterly powerless to "separate us from the love of God" (v. 39), which is evident through Christ. This love is itself the core of God's being (1 John 4:8). The ten entities are placed in paired opposites, except for two. The effort of interpreters to specify in what sense every item can be a means of separation from a loving God may be misguided. The point is that nothing at all—nothing anywhere or everywhere in the entire universe—has or will have the power to separate us from God's love. Period! Let there be no mistake: the ultimate triumph of God's all-encompassing love was magnificently displayed for all through the cross, the resurrection, and the reign of our Lord Jesus Christ.

9:1—11:36

RESPONDING TO ISRAEL'S REJECTION OF JESUS

Chapters 9–11 constitute a distinct section of Romans. Here Paul grapples with the paradox that many of his fellow Jews had rejected the promised Jewish Messiah while many Gentiles were embracing Him. Repeatedly during his missionary travels, Paul's appeals to fellow Jews resulted in many accepting Jesus as the Christ. But others turned against him and persecuted him. Beyond his personal pain, Paul saw that this rejection of the Messiah would appear to some to invalidate the promises God made to Abraham: that his descendants would be as the sand on the seashore (Gen. 22:17; cf. Gen. 13:16; 15:5). In this section of Romans, Paul addresses this and other concerns.

Throughout chapters 9–11, Paul quotes heavily from Jewish Scripture, often discerning fresh applications to show that his contemporaries' rejection of the Messiah had not caught God by surprise. The overall direction of Paul's thought in chapters 9–11 is readily discernible. Care must be taken to read individual statements within the context of those chapters, within the whole of Romans, and within the whole sweep of Scripture.

9:1–29

Divine Election

Paul shares with the readers his anguish at witnessing the experience of Israel (vv. 1–5) and goes on to discuss the question of rejection and selection (vv. 6–13) and that of rejection and the power of God (vv. 14–29). From the beginning, in His dealings with His people, God has been free to choose who will receive the promised blessing and free to use the resistance of those who oppose Him (e.g., the Egyptian pharaoh of Ex. 7–12) to further His sovereign purposes. When reading this section, one ought to keep in mind Paul's conclusion at the end of chapter 11: God's ultimate purpose in all His dealings with Jews and Gentiles is that He might have mercy on everyone (11:32).

9:1–5. Paul's Anguish over Israel. Unlike Paul, a significant number of his fellow Jews were not embracing Jesus as the Messiah. This caused

Christian Anti-Semitism and Romans 9–11

The modern reader of Romans 9–11 cannot avoid addressing the chasm between Paul's resolute solidarity with his fellow Jews and the facts of nearly two thousand years of Christian anti-Semitism. For centuries, Jews in Christianized Europe and elsewhere lived under the threat of violence as "God-killers," for the role of some of their ancestors in securing the execution of Jesus. Refusing to convert and accept the Christian faith, they were denounced as agents of Satan and as the cause of plagues and natural catastrophes. Even those Jews who converted under pressure faced the scrutiny of the Inquisition in Portugal, Spain, and Italy. It was Luther's discovery that "the just shall live by faith" that gave a powerful impetus to the Protestant Reformation. Later, in 1543, he wrote of Jews who did not respond to the message of the Reformation as "venomous serpents and devil's children." He advised that all their synagogues, schools, and homes be destroyed, and that they should be expelled from Christian Europe to free it from their diabolical and blasphemous sins. Luther's outburst against unbelieving Jews, repeated and echoed for centuries, flies in the face of Paul's resolute solidarity with his fellow Jews, evident in the latter half of the book of Romans. It is tragic that Romans 9–11 was employed to support the horrors of the Holocaust as the most recent instrument of anti-Jewish genocide. We should study these chapters in the context of the church in the NT.

Paul much sorrow (9:2). His deep anguish was not assuaged by his successful mission among the Gentiles. His concern for his fellow Jews led him during his missionary travels to first engage them in the local synagogue (Acts 13:5, 14; 14:1; 16:13; 17:1–2, 10; 18:4). There he would engage in dialogue and, when invited, present his understanding of the prophecies of Scripture about the suffering Messiah and His resurrection to those present, including God-fearing Gentiles. Only when denied access to the synagogue would he reach out more directly to a non-Jewish audience in other facilities (Acts 18:6–7).

Having just said that nothing can "separate us from the love of God" (Rom. 8:38–39), Paul nonetheless wishes that he were cursed (9:3) if it would bring his people to faith in their Messiah, Jesus (cf. Ex. 32:31–32). Paul was willing to be eternally lost to save his unbelieving countrymen (Rom. 9:3). Then he lists the spiritual endowments or gifts the Jews had received in a succinct sevenfold list in v. 4.

First, Paul writes that his countrymen were Israelites. Instead of using the generic ethnic word "Jew," he selected the nation's name for descendants of the patriarch Jacob, whom God renamed Israel (Gen. 32:28). In his use of the present tense, Paul emphasizes that his people were still Israelites, the people of the promised blessings, in spite of their resistance to their Messiah. He uses the term "Israel" to refer both to the physical descendants of Abraham and to the faithful covenant people or remnant within those physical descendants.

The second blessing, "adoption," refers to God's identification of Israel as His son (Ex. 4:22). The third blessing, related to "glory," is otherwise unattested in Scripture. But "glory" itself is widely used in Scripture to speak of God's radiant presence that accompanied the Israelites after the Exodus (Ex. 16:7, 10; 24:16–17) and took up residence in the sanctuary (Ex. 29:43). Paul has already spoken at length of God's glory remaining to be "revealed in us" (Rom. 8:18).

The fourth endowment, "the covenants," can refer to all the covenants made with Israel, starting with Abraham (e.g., Gen. 15:18; Lev. 26:42; Jer. 31:31–34). The fifth privilege, "the law," can refer both to the Ten Commandments given by God at Sinai (Ex. 20) and to the collected laws from God throughout the Pentateuch. Paul's high estimate of the intrinsic value of the law is evident (Rom. 7:12). The sixth endowment, *latreia*, sometimes translated as "service," can also be translated as "worship" and can refer to the whole system of Israel's worship as instructed in detail by God in the Torah.

The final gift on the list, and therefore of particular importance, is "the promises," referring to the promises made by God to Israel, often couched as blessings, starting with Abraham and repeated to each generation, on which Paul will draw his arguments in Romans 9–11. In a summary statement, Paul avers that Christ became a Servant of the Jewish people (lit. "the circumcision") in order to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs (15:8). It is important to recall the content of the covenant promises: Abraham's descendants were to possess the promised land and become a great, even innumerable nation (Gen. 12:2, 7; 13:14–17; 15:5, 18; 17:8; 22:17; cf. 28:13–14). In Genesis 17:4–6, Abraham was promised that he would be the "father of many nations." Three times God promised that through his descendants (and ultimately through Christ; Gal. 3:16) all peoples of the earth would be blessed (Gen. 12:3; 22:18; 28:14; cf. Gal. 3:7–8).

In Romans 9:5, Paul links the patriarchs with the previous promises and adds that (from the perspective of His human ancestry) Jesus came through their lineage—from the lineage of David (1:3). Paul extends Jesus's lineage back to the promises given the patriarchs, starting with Abraham. The Greek word *christos* is the linguistic equivalent of the Hebrew word *mashiakh*; both words refer to an anointed one. Thus, here in 9:5, Paul refers to Jesus as the Messiah of the promise.

9:6–13. Israel's Rejection and God's Selection. The minor break in thought between the "amen" in v. 5 and what follows in v. 6 can be bridged by seeing Paul as resuming his thoughts on Israel's failure (started in vv. 1–3). Paul's concern was with the integrity of God's promises made in the past and the present. The widespread rejection by Paul's countrymen of the crucified Jesus as the Messiah and the conversion of non-Jews could appear to expose God's covenant promises to Israel as hollow. For if God could not fulfill His promises to Israel, especially when the promised Messiah appeared, what assurance was there that God would fulfill the promises of salvation through faith in Christ that Paul was proclaiming to Gentiles?

Paul asserts that God's promises to Israel had not failed—but it was not that the word of God had taken no effect (v. 6). First, notice to whom the promises apply: Not all who are biologically descended from Israel are actually Israel in the fullest sense, that is to say, part of the faithful Israel. Only the children of the promise

are considered to be the true descendants (v. 8), that is, the legitimate inheritors of the promised blessing of the covenant. Paul offers two examples: Isaac and Jacob. Abraham received the covenant, but this did not mean that all of his biological descendants were included in those covenantal promises; only Isaac was included, as clarified by a further promise made by God before the birth of Isaac (Gen. 17:19–21). Ishmael, the older son of Abraham, was blessed by God (Gen. 17:20) but still set aside, while Isaac, the younger son, became the carrier of the covenant promises (Gen. 17:21). In turn, Isaac fathered twin sons, Esau and Jacob, but only one was selected by God as the child of the promise (Gen. 25:23).

The important point is that before either child was born, God selected the younger son, Jacob, in contradistinction to the usual laws of primogeniture. Both examples show that God's freedom was present before Jacob was renamed Israel (Gen. 32:28). Paul assumed God's freedom to select who will be the children of promise, even among the descendants of the patriarch. Paul says that God made His selection when the twins were not yet born, before they had done any good or evil (Rom. 9:11), and therefore did not base it on either son's works. As a matter of course, the moral conduct of both sons left a great deal to regret. The divine decision shows that God's selection of Jacob was not a matter of human works (v. 11)—yet another reminder that the grace of God is not a reward for moral achievement. Mere biological descent does not, and even good works do not, create an obligation on God. The narratives of Genesis demonstrate that Jacob, despite his many flaws and failures, had faith and trust in God while apparently Esau did not; he was a *bebēlos* ("worldly," "godless," "profane") person (Heb. 12:16). Although twins raised in exactly the same environment, they were unique and had the freedom to choose their own way. God foreknew which brother would respond in faith to His call.

What does Scripture mean by the language of hate in regard to Esau (Rom. 9:13; Mal. 1:2–3)? It certainly does not carry the usual English sense of a strong negative emotional state. The intended meaning of hate in this context is to choose one person for something and not the other. Jacob was "loved" in terms of being chosen by God as the depository of the promises, while Esau was not chosen. In a similar vein, Jesus spoke of the necessity to "hate" one's parents and even one's own life by choosing to follow Him (Luke 14:26). Paul does not address Esau's personal eternal destiny.

9:14–29. Rejection and God's Power. What Paul says next about God's election can raise

Romans 9:5 and the Deity of Christ

Scholars have given much attention to the second half of this verse. Punctuation is typically missing in the Greek manuscripts and must be supplied in the translation. The word order in the original language without punctuation is "the Christ [Messiah] according to the flesh the One being over all God blessed forever amen." In this case, there are two main punctuation choices for translators—one places a period after "according to the flesh," while the other uses a comma. In the first option, the sovereign God "over all" is the One who is "blessed forever." But the placement of "blessed" after "God" is not characteristic if Paul's intention was to say "Blessed be God." In the case of the comma after "according to the flesh," "the Christ" is being further described as God "over all" and the blessing would refer to Him. On grounds of normal Greek language usage, this second option is preferred, though not without objection (see 2 Cor. 11:31). In Romans 1:3–4, Paul had already placed the human and the divine aspects of Jesus side by side. Note that Paul also speaks of Christ as God in Titus 2:13, similarly in Philippians 2:6 and possibly Galatians 2:20. In Romans 10:9, Jesus is called Lord, and in 10:12 the reference to the Lord being over all is contextually applicable to Jesus. This is also the case in 10:13, where it is stated that anyone who calls on the Lord's name will be saved. This phrase translates the Hebrew word for the God of Israel, Yahweh, in Joel 2:32 as "Lord." Paul knew that seeking salvation from any human being would be blasphemous. Of course, the divinity of the Messiah, as well as His shameful death, was difficult for Paul's Jewish contemporaries to accept. Paul's encounter with the resurrected Christ convinced him on both counts.

moral hackles and appears to contradict what he earlier asserted, namely, that there is no favoritism or partiality with God (Rom. 2:11). Here he quickly answers the question that there is no unrighteousness with God (9:14). In other words, is God unrighteous in rejecting, or not choosing, Ishmael and Esau? A negative answer suggests God's mercy at work behind this decision. In a sense, mercy does not exist on the basis of fairness. When we ask for mercy, we are not asking for what we deserve. In fact, the scriptural citation from Exodus 33:19 in Romans 9:15 comes from a dialogue between God and Moses after the Israelites worshiped the golden calf, thus breaking the covenant. The dramatic dialogue between Moses and the people and between Moses and God resulted in God changing the sentence, but the divine change did not ultimately come even from Moses's intercession. God was not beholden to Moses, because it is not from desire or effort that mercy is earned (9:16). His mercy is extended to the unworthy—a central theme in the book of Romans (e.g., 5:6–8).

In Romans 9:17, Paul introduces the matter of the hardening of Pharaoh as an illustration (on the hardening of Pharaoh's heart, see commentary on Ex. 4:18–31). God raised up Pharaoh as ruler knowing that when confronted his heart would harden. God did this in order to display His mercy to the whole world, seen in the deliverance of the enslaved Israelites (Rom. 9:15, 18). The point for Paul in this passage is that in order to exercise His mercy, God chose to raise up a man He foreknew would harden against Him. Later on, Paul returns to the hardening of Israel's heart (11:7–10, 25). Even more than in the case of Pharaoh, the result of that hardening would be seen as the outpouring of God's mercy on all (11:32). If God raised up Pharaoh for the purpose of showing His power in all the earth, how much more was God's election of Israel intended to result in the worldwide recognition of His name.

The promise to Abraham was that through his descendants all the nations of the world would be blessed (Gen. 12:3; cf. 22:8). While that promise began to be realized through the coming of the Messiah, Israel itself had a role in God's plan for the nations. The prophets foresaw the coming of the Gentiles to Israel to learn the way of the Lord (Is. 2:1–4; 60:3; Mic. 4:1–5). The tragic exile of the Jews to Babylon led Nebuchadnezzar to praise the King of heaven (Dan. 4:37). Jesus extended this expectation to His Jewish listeners in saying, "You are the light of the world," indicating that others might see their good deeds and glorify God (Matt. 5:14, 16). It is that role of Israel that Paul saw as jeopardized.

In Romans 9:19, Paul takes up a more specific version of the charge of injustice. If God's will is irresistible, then how can the wrongdoer be held accountable by God? The assumption here is that Pharaoh and other objects of God's hardening did what was wrong as a direct result of the divine will. Lurking unstated in the background is the issue of the accountability of Jews who rejected their Messiah. Paul first rises in indignation, declaring that the accusation of God being the cause of evil is a charge against God (Rom. 9:20). In chapters 1–2, Paul had already given his negative assessment of human nature, including Jews and Gentiles, based in part on Scripture. His conclusion included those who are rebellious and hateful toward God—full of disobedience and arrogance (1:28–32). Paul rephrases the charge of Isaiah 29:16 when he questions if the one formed has the right to ask why he or she was made "like this" (Rom. 9:20). Paul responds by drawing attention to the potter's right to decide the purpose of each pot he makes, whether as an object of beauty or as a chamber pot. In his rebuttal of the accusation of injustice, Paul stands firmly in the company of the prophets (see Is. 45:9; Jer. 18:1–11). Paul was not denying the possibility of repentance.

The summary in Romans 9:30–31 provides a fitting conclusion. Paul divides humans into two groups—those of wrath and those of mercy. Saying that God was patient with those of wrath (Rom. 9:22) serves to answer the accusation against God's justice voiced in v. 19. The purpose of God's enduring patience in delaying the execution of His wrath is to make the riches of His glory known to those to whom He shows mercy (v. 23; cf. 2:5–9). Notice that the text says that God had "prepared" in advance those of mercy "for glory" (9:23). Concerning those of wrath, the text only says that they are "prepared for destruction" (v. 22)—the action is not explicitly or implicitly attributed only to God.

In Paul's analogy of the two categories of people, he does not identify those of wrath, that is, those destined to experience God's active wrath. Later he asserts that his unbelieving countrymen could be seen as "enemies" of God, but he hastens to describe them also as those loved by God (11:28). Who, then, are those of mercy prepared for glory (9:23; cf. 1:7)? Paul includes himself and his Roman readers, both Jews and Gentiles, whom God called. The modern reader may prematurely conclude that God unilaterally predetermined who would be saved and who would be lost. While Paul would agree that God as Creator has that right, he also shows throughout this section of the letter (as well as elsewhere) that God has independently determined the conditions of salvation—it involves a free human response to God's grace, a grace that enables the will to accept or reject His call to secure the work of Christ on one's behalf (9:30–31; 10:3–4, 9, 10–21; 11:20–23). It has always been God's intention to have mercy on everyone (11:32; cf. 1 Tim. 2:3–4; 2 Pet. 3:9).

Paul quotes the words of God spoken by Hosea, originally directed toward the rebellious Northern Kingdom of Israel, whom God had declared were not His people (Rom. 9:25–26; cf. Hos. 1:8–9). But God also promised to call them His people if they would repent (Hos. 2:23). The Northern Kingdom as an entity was never reconstituted after being scattered throughout the Assyrian empire in 722 B.C. So here Paul saw a fulfillment of this promise in God calling the Gentiles, who had previously not been God's people, to conversion (cf. Eph. 2:12–13). In His mercy, God granted them the status of being His people, His children (Rom. 9:26; cf. 8:14, 19).

Returning to the painful rejection of the Messiah by many of Paul's Jewish countrymen, Paul draws on the words of Isaiah to show that this rejection was predicted (Is. 10:22–23). While God had promised Abraham that his descendants would be like the sands of the sea (Gen. 22:17), Isaiah cried out that "a remnant" would be saved (Is. 10:22; cf. Rom. 9:27). Isaiah did not say that "only" a remnant would be saved, and neither does Paul, at least not at this point. The remnant Paul refers to here are the Jews with faith in Jesus—the "called" (v. 24). He will return to the matter of the remnant in 11:5. For Paul, the important thing is the grace of God, who removes sin and its punishment and restores the promised blessing. So God's word has not failed (9:6), and Paul expresses confidence in the Lord to complete His work speedily and decisively (v. 28). The context suggests that Paul was referring to the advancement of the proclamation of the gospel.

9:30—10:21

Israel's Rejection of the Righteousness of God

In accounting for the disturbing response of Israel to the gospel, Paul pays attention to the sovereign freedom of God to show mercy to whomever He chooses, even if it means hardening those who harden their own hearts to achieve that end (9:6–29). Paul next takes up Israel's responsibility in this failure. Jews as well as Gentiles needed righteousness (9:30–33), but Paul proclaims it as available only through Christ (10:1–13), making it necessary for the gospel to be proclaimed to all (vv. 5–13), for faith comes only through hearing the word of God (vv. 14–17). Finally, Paul answers a number of questions (vv. 18–21).

9:30–33. Pursuing Righteousness. Paul was visualizing Jews and Gentiles as runners in pursuit of righteousness. The Gentiles had effortlessly reached the goal of righteousness, being in a right relationship with God through faith, even though they did not pursue righteousness in the manner of the Jews, by works of the law. The other runner, the Jews, strenuously had pursued the law as a means of righteousness (v. 31) but stumbled and so failed to reach the goal. In referring to this law, Paul probably meant that the law had the purpose of producing righteousness, but the Jews had desired to pursue righteousness by works (v. 32), thus tripping over the "stumbling stone" (vv. 32–33; cf. 1 Pet. 2:6–8). Later Paul asks if all have irrevocably fallen (without the possibility of repentance) and answers negatively (Rom. 11:11). Paul does not specifically identify here (9:32–33) who or what the stone is (although he does later in 10:9–11). He crafts the statement in 9:33 by combining two separate metaphors drawn from Isaiah 8:14 and 28:16. The foundation stone (Is. 28:16) becomes the stone that causes stumbling (Is. 8:14). By this juxtaposition, Paul draws attention to Israel's rejection of the Messiah, who should have been received as their foundation stone but who became a rock on which many Jews tripped (Rom. 9:33). In Isaiah 28:16, both the speaker and the stone are identified as God, thus supporting the earlier reading in Romans 9:5 of Christ as God.

The promise that those who believe in Him will not be put to shame (9:33; cf. 10:11) returns the reader to the primacy of faith. Modern Western readers may not catch the power of the threat of shame in the biblical world (see Job 30–31; Jer. 20:7–18). Paul did not mean to say that the follower of Christ would be protected from the ridicule coming from nonbelievers (Rom. 8:35–39; cf. Matt. 5:10–12). Instead, the followers of Christ were taught to overlook the dishonor of believing in a crucified Messiah, looking forward instead to the praise of their Father, the supreme God, at the final review, when eternal honor and shame will be meted out.

10:1–4. Christ the Righteousness of God. For a second time, Paul expresses his heart's desire for the salvation of his fellow Jews who had rejected the Messiah, Jesus. (On the practice of prayer in Paul's life on behalf of fellow Christians, see 1:9.) Here in 10:1, Paul reveals his practice of praying for those who considered him an enemy. Given Paul's own persecution of Jesus (Acts 9:5; cf. Gal. 1:14, 16; Phil. 3:6), he shows his awareness of the danger of a misplaced zeal based on a misunderstanding of God's righteousness (Rom. 10:3), that is, God's saving action through Jesus Christ. In this case, ignorance is not excusable, as Paul shows in the rest of the chapter. His reference to his fellow Jews' desire to establish their own righteousness suggests that they saw their standing with God as far superior to that of the idolatrous Gentiles. This mindset contrasts with God's single plan of salvation through Christ, which embraces all.

The Greek verb *hypotassō* used at the end of v. 3 for the Jews' lack of submission points to a failure to respond at a specific point in time either to Jesus's message of the kingdom of God or to the post-resurrection proclamation of the gospel. What Paul meant by the righteousness of God (v. 3) is first taken up in the succinct and almost cryptic sentence in v. 4 and then unpacked through vv. 5–13. Short as it is, the sentence in v. 4 needs to be read in its entirety. In the last part of the sentence, Paul makes room for the Gentiles who through Christ achieve right standing with God.

Understanding what Paul meant by stating that Christ was the *telos*—the "end," or "culmination," of the law (v. 4)—must begin with the usage of the Greek word *telos*. The word can mean either "termination" (cf. 6:21–22) or "purpose." Obviously, Paul did not mean that Christ abolished the law. Note Paul's own high value of the law (7:12; 9:4). In 6:21–22, Paul speaks of death as the *telos* of enslavement to sin and eternal life as the *telos* of enslavement to God. The initial position of *telos* in the sequence of Greek words suggests that Paul was emphasizing the purpose, the goal, of the law. Christ is the "goal" of the law in that it witnesses or points to Him as the only one through whom God's righteousness and the restoration of one's relationship with God are available.

10:5–13. The Scriptures and the Gospel for All. In this section, Paul explains the meaning of his declaration in v. 4 that the goal of the law is to point to a righteousness available to all who put their trust in Christ. He references the words of Moses and the prophets and interprets them in light of the reality of Christ. At the same time, Paul continued undercutting any excuse for his countrymen who had not believed. What did Paul intend in quoting Moses from Leviticus 18:5 regarding the righteousness from the law, that those who do the things in the law will "live by them" (Rom. 10:5; cf. Luke 10:25–28)? Earlier Paul spoke of the commandment that was intended to bring life but led to death (Rom. 7:10–11) because in their weakness and sin, human beings could not attain to life by the law (8:3). While the law could point out the benefits of a life lived by its principles in a general sense, it could not provide eternal life unless it were kept without any deviation whatsoever—something no human being (except the God-Man Jesus) has ever done (3:19–20).

In his next verses (10:6–8), Paul quotes the words originally spoken by Moses in reference to the conditions for a renewed prosperity and security in the land to be given to the Israelites if, after being exiled for disobedience, they would return to obeying God (Deut. 30:12–14, cf. 30:1–11). Paul applies these words to the person who hears the gospel. The basic idea is that God took the initiative in coming to the aid of His people. Moses removed any excuse for Israel's failure to heed the words of the Lord, for they were near at hand, even on the lips of those who recited them. Likewise, as Paul shows, there is no excuse for Israel when the word of the Lord regarding the death and resurrection of the Messiah, or Christ, is proclaimed, offering salvation to those whose lips confess faith from the heart. If the law's commands, as God's words, were accessible to Israel, even more so is the proclamation of Jesus's resurrection (Rom. 10:7; cf. v. 9).

In Romans 10:9–10, Paul restates his argument in the plainest language to those who heard the preaching of the gospel. Saving faith in Jesus rests on the confidence that God has raised Him from the dead and must lead to confessing Him as Lord (v. 9; cf. Matt. 10:32). The assertion that belief in the heart leads to the righteousness of justification (Rom. 10:10) brings us back to the matter of a saving righteousness raised in vv. 3–4. In other words, the believer is justified or declared righteous at the moment there is a personal, faith-filled response to the content of the gospel that announces salvation only by faith in Christ; justification is not on the basis of efforts to keep the commandments.

In 3:21–22, Paul speaks of the righteousness from God, apart from the law, to which the Law and the Prophets testify as available to all who believe. In 10:5–8, Paul draws on words of Scripture to underscore God's offer of a righteousness realized through faith in God's Messiah. Here Paul summons from Israel's prophets the assurances that the gospel of Christ is for all who believe. Isaiah affirms that whoever believes will not be put to shame (Rom. 10:11; Is. 28:16; cf. Rom. 9:33). The reference to all believers points to the impartiality of God, who is Lord of all (10:11–13; cf. vv. 4 and 18). The promise from Joel 2:32 recorded in Romans 10:13 is a call to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ to avert the coming wrath (cf. 5:9). Since Paul refers to Jesus as Lord (10:9), most likely the underlying thought is of Jesus as Lord of all, the One who shares His riches with all who call on Him (vv. 12–13). Paul was intent on demonstrating that salvation, as promised by God in Israel's Scripture, is to be given without national distinction (v. 12; cf. 11:32).

10:14–21. Faith and the Preaching of Christ. In his indictment of Israel (vv. 14–15), Paul raises four unanswered questions, expecting the listeners to supply the answer: "They cannot." The problem lies with disbelief. The first question suggests that, logically, a person must believe in the Lord before calling on the Lord. The second question points to the importance of hearing. This hints at an important truth not yet stated. The third question begins to explain that truth. Christ was active and present in Paul's preaching. Paul knew that Christ must be the point of the preaching. But it is in the fourth question that the truth becomes most clear. God, or Christ, offers the gospel invitation through the words of the preacher (v. 15; cf. v. 17; 2 Cor. 5:20; 1 Thess. 2:13). God sends the preacher to preach about Christ so that people can hear thoughts they have never before contemplated, resulting in belief and salvation. As a result, the one who is sent is doubly blessed. In the quotation from Isaiah 52:7 quoted in Romans 10:15, the synecdoche of "feet" refers to the messengers who bring the gospel. The good news offered is so gracious that it is considered "beautiful" or "timely." The good news of Christ arrived at an appropriate time (cf. Rom. 5:6 and Gal. 4:4–5)—another reason to expect an appropriate response.

Paul's mission was to bring about the obedience connected with faith (Rom. 1:5; 16:26). Failure to respond to the gospel with belief is a form of disobedience (10:16). The problem of disbelief did not arise with the preaching of the gospel, as if there were some defect in the message. Paul cites the opening line of the messianic poem of the Suffering Servant by asking who has believed the report or message (v. 16; quoting Is. 53:1). The believing that is necessary for salvation is dependent on the preaching of Christ (Rom. 10:17).

Paul raises two key questions regarding the cause of the Jewish rejection of Jesus that are worded in a way that anticipates a negative answer. The English equivalents would be "They did not hear, did they?" and "They did not understand, did they?" But both questions are resoundingly answered in the positive. Paul draws on the words of Psalm 19:4—which refers to the spread of God's revelation going to the ends of the world—to illustrate the scope of the preaching of the gospel to the Jews scattered throughout the Roman Empire. The second question—which can be rendered as "Israel did not know, did they?"—receives a more extensive rebuttal. Both Moses and Isaiah are named as witnesses. The quotation from Deuteronomy 32:21 in Romans 10:19 introduces the thought of jealousy, which Paul develops later in 11:11–16: God desired to use the jealousy of the Jews regarding His favor of the Gentiles to provoke them to reconsider their rejection of Christ. The words of God referring to His being found by those who did not seek Him on the one hand and His holding out mercy to rebellious and disobedient people on the other (10:20–21; from Is. 65:1–2) describe the surprising Gentile response (cf. Rom. 9:30) and the persisting disobedient unbelief of Paul's countrymen (cf. 9:31). But there is hope: we are left with the picture of God still holding out His hands for a response from His people.

11:1–36

Israel in the Plan of God

Paul next clarifies the present and future status of his countrymen. The rejection of the Messiah had been partial (vv. 1–15) and not final (vv. 16–24). In the meantime, Gentiles had been the beneficiaries of God's mercy, but they needed to avoid any arrogance (vv. 11–24), because with respect to Israel God would work in a mysterious way (vv. 25–32). The section closes with a doxology (vv. 33–36).

11:1–10. Israel's Hardening Is Not Total. Paul emphatically denies that God had *apōsato* (from *apōtheomai*; "cast away," "rejected," "repudiated") His people, whom He foreknew (vv. 1–2).

"Even though Israel rejected His Son, God did not reject them" (AA 375). While some did not submit to the gospel, many Jews, including Paul, embraced the gospel of salvation through Jesus, the promised Messiah. Paul identified himself as an Israelite of the tribe of Benjamin. Only the tribes of Judah and Benjamin remained loyal to the house of David when the kingdom was divided. Paul then compared the believing Jews of his time with the seven thousand in the time of Elijah who had "not bowed the knee to Baal" (Rom. 11:4; cf. 1 Kin. 19:18). When questioned by God, Elijah claimed that he was the last surviving prophet. Paul quotes God's counter-assessment that there were many others who had not abandoned the Lord. Paul also characterized himself and the other believing Jews as being a remnant chosen by grace (Rom. 11:5), their election resting not on human merit but on God's grace (see below, "Divine Election").

Divine Election

The subject of God's election is mentioned several times in Romans 9–11 and therefore deserves more attention in the light of the rest of the NT.

1. Election of Some. In the Bible, election is the act of choosing from a group. For instance, God elected Israel from among the nations of the earth (Deut. 7:6–7), He elected Christ to be our Savior (Luke 9:35), and He chose Paul as a missionary to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15), just as Jesus elected twelve disciples (John 6:70). In His sovereign will, God chooses some individuals and not others to perform a particular task (Rom. 9:14–24). When people are described as the chosen or elect in the NT, the designation always refers to those who place their faith in Christ, those people chosen by God for a particular purpose. Election could designate the individual believer (Acts 1:24) or collectively the church (Titus 1:1; 1 Pet. 1:1), but it never applies to the world in general independent of a faith relationship with the Lord.

In the context of Ephesians 1:4, an important text on election, Paul makes clear that the chosen are the "saints" or "holy people," the "faithful" (Eph. 1:1), those who put their hope in Christ or trust in Him (Eph. 1:12), and so forth. He is unmistakably referring to believers. When he says that God "chose us," he is describing the experience of believers and not the situation of the sinful world. From Paul's time perspective, the Christ event was to have a universal impact, because through Him God purposes to unite all things, both in heaven and on earth (Eph. 1:10). Although this was not yet a reality in Paul's day, evidence of it was observable in the union of Jews and Gentiles in the church (Eph. 3:6). Election is universal only in the sense of God's choice not only of Jews but also of Gentiles through the preaching of the gospel and the work of the Spirit (1 Thess. 1:4–5). Jesus said that many are called or invited but "few are chosen" (Matt. 22:14). The chosen are those who accept the call. God is doing all He can to move everyone to accept the call and be saved, but saving grace is not forced on anyone (cf. 1 Tim. 2:3–4).

2. Pretemporal Election. Paul states that God chose us before the world existed (Eph. 1:4). Election is grounded in God Himself and not our intervention; He took the initiative. This decision took place before we existed—before the creation of the world. The text is not stating that we preexisted, but rather it is affirming the preexistence of Christ. It is the decision to elect us that occurred before the creation of the world. The certainty of our election is expressed through the use of the verb in the past tense (He "chose"). God's intention for us is not ambivalent but firm.

We are in reality discussing God's pre-Creation plan for us, what He had predetermined to do on behalf of His people. That plan was revealed to us in Christ. This is what we find in 2 Timothy 1:9–10. Here Paul is saying that at some point in the past eternity, God entrusted His purpose and grace to His Son and that by giving it to Christ, God was giving it to those who accept Him as Savior—a salvation not based on works. God called us with a holy calling through a plan crafted in eternity past. Paul uses similar ideas in Titus 1:2–3. In this case, instead of speaking about God's predetermined plan, Paul writes about what God had promised before time began—that is to say, in His eternal purpose—and what had been manifested in Christ. This wonderful gift, from God to Christ for us,

manifested itself in human history with the coming of Christ, thus becoming effective in our salvation.

3. Election in Christ. In God's purpose and sovereign will, He predetermined our election to take place exclusively in Christ (Eph. 1:4). That is to say, our election is a reality *through* and *in union with* Christ. He is the Person, the sphere within which election occurs. Therefore, election is the mystery of God's work for us in His Son. What God granted to His Son in eternity (His plan and grace) is for those who are "in Him," for believers. In fact, salvation and all its benefits belong to those who are "in Christ," to everyone who has put their faith in Him. He continues to be the sphere of divine activity on our behalf and our call and election are ours in Him.

4. Activation of Election. The realization of election does not take place outside human history but in the Incarnated One, in Christ (Eph. 1:4); it presupposes the incarnation. This historical election expresses itself in a holy life: we have been chosen to be holy and without blame (Eph. 1:4). Such a life cannot be separated from election without robbing election of its meaning, content, and actuality. The passages dealing with God's election are not texts about double predestination or about the pretemporal election of all humanity outside history. Paul is assuring believers that their election is rooted in God's inscrutable purpose for them in Christ. Paul does not even examine, when dealing with election, the connection between free will and election but assumes that the actualization of election requires God's grace to free the bound human will by His Word and Spirit so that a decision can be made. What is usually stressed is God's prior action on our behalf. This action is further defined in Ephesians 1:5 as our foreordination (*proorizō*, "to predetermine," "decide on beforehand") to adoption (see "Predestination," p. 1583).

It would be appropriate to conclude that "those who respond to the drawing of Christ, through the sovereign mercy of God, are elected to be saved as the obedient children of God. Upon them is manifested the free grace of God, the great love wherewith He hath loved us. The Father sets his love upon his elect people, who live in the midst of men, because they accept the redemption which Christ has purchased for them by his own precious blood" (*Messenger*, April 12, 1893, par. 5).

In Romans 11:2–4, Paul again picks up the concept of the remnant first mentioned in 9:27 in the quotation from Isaiah 10:22–23, in which the remnant that will be saved refers to a smaller portion of the whole of Israel. The preservation of the remnant provides credibility and substance to the promises God made to the patriarchs (cf. Rom. 4:13). Even in the apostasy of nearly all Israel in the time of Elijah, God preserved a faithful remnant. The concept of the remnant pervades the prophetic writings. Paul is the only NT writer to draw expressly on the remnant concept to deal with the anomaly of Israel's rejection of the Messiah.

The Jews who rejected the gospel were blinded or hardened in a spiritual sense (11:7–8). The Scriptures testify about the ongoing role of God in the blinding of Israel from the beginning to "this very day" (11:8; cf. Deut. 29:4; Ps. 69:22–23). Does this mean they bear absolutely no responsibility for their condition? Paul did not draw that conclusion. In fact, he exhorted the Gentile Christians to continue in God's *chrēstotēs* ("kindness," "goodness"; Rom. 11:22). If salvation can be lost, then God's grace can be resisted. Paul envisioned that Jews who were cut off would be grafted in again if they did not remain in unbelief (11:23). To make saving grace irresistible for some while extending an offer of the gospel to all would be untenable, because it would result in a final judgment based on unjust principles. To claim that a person's rejection of the offer of salvation is an inevitable consequence of God's prior decision to withhold salvation from that person runs directly counter to the assertion of Scripture that Jesus "died for all" (2 Cor. 5:15; cf. Rom. 5:18; 1 Tim. 2:6).

11:11–15. Israel's Hardening Is Not Final. Paul offers the image of someone stumbling badly, but not necessarily falling, to describe the prospects of the unbelieving Jews. He argues that since the Jewish failure brought blessing to the Gentiles, how much more could be anticipated when they responded fully to the gospel? In the plan of God, the conversion of Gentiles through

Jesus Christ, which brought glory to God, was to incite jealousy on the part of the Jews still zealous for God (cf. Acts 22:3). Earlier, Paul cited Moses's words saying that God would make Israel jealous (Rom. 10:19; Deut. 32:21), anticipating his more extended assertions in Romans 11:11, 14. In a brief aside directed to the Gentiles (Rom. 11:12–13), he points to his own ministry, which was designed to provoke his fellow Jews to jealousy and would result in the salvation of some of them (vv. 13–14). This does not mean that the only or even the main reason Paul preached to the Gentiles was to convert Jews (cf. Acts 13:44–48; 19:8–10; 28:17–31).

In Romans 11:15, Paul discusses how the future acceptance of the Messiah by the Jews would be of benefit to the Gentile world. He speaks of *apobolē* ("rejection," "being cast away") followed by a future acceptance resulting in life from the dead. He anticipated that many Jews would embrace Jesus as the Messiah before His Second Coming. The reference is not to the general resurrection, because the phrase "life from the dead" is not used elsewhere for that meaning. The best way to understand the phrase is in terms of a movement from spiritual death to spiritual life prior to the Second Coming (see Eph. 2:1, 5; Col. 2:13).

11:16–24. Warnings against Arrogance. In quick succession, Paul offers two illustrations. The first is based on the offering of the firstfruits from a small portion of dough, which results in the whole being holy (v. 16a; cf. Num. 15:19–21). The firstfruits represented Paul's Jewish contemporaries who believed in Christ while the lump of dough represented the Jewish people as a whole, still set aside for a holy purpose in the eyes of God. The idea is that the future influx of Jewish believers would result in a rich blessing for the world (Rom. 11:12–15).

In the second illustration (v. 16b), Paul's emphasis is on the branches of an olive tree nourished by the root. Paul does not explicitly identify who or what the root or the tree represents. The prophets and poets of the OT compared Israel to various species of trees and to the grapevine. The olive tree appears less frequently as a metaphor for Israel (cf. Jer. 11:16; Hos. 14:5–6). The tree cannot simply be all ethnic Jews for at least two reasons. First, many natural branches had been broken off in their failure to acknowledge the Messiah, even though they could trace their ancestry back to the patriarchs. Second, the Gentiles who had entrusted themselves to the Jewish Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, represented by the branches from the wild olive tree (Rom. 11:17), had been grafted on to the olive tree. The idea that the olive tree represents the Christian church that had replaced the Jewish nation goes beyond Paul's intention, because the remaining natural branches represent a Jewish remnant (v. 5). Though accepting Jesus as their Messiah, they did not cease to be Jews but remained as natural branches. The most natural conclusion is that Paul assumes the olive tree to be the faithful Israel or the Israel of faith on to which the Gentiles who put their faith in the Messiah, Christ, are grafted.

The aim of Paul's remarks in this section is clear: Gentiles who had accepted Jesus as the promised Messiah were not to look down on those Jews who had not accepted Him. What had happened so far in both instances was actually part of God's plan to have mercy on all (v. 32) through a mystery that Paul was partially disclosing. Throughout vv. 13–32, Paul explicitly directs his comments to the Gentiles listening to his letter (v. 13). What Paul said about Israel's hardening came out of his concern about Gentile Christians who were condescending (v. 18) and prideful (v. 20) toward Jews who had not accepted the gospel and perhaps even toward those Jews who had. In addressing his Gentile audience, Paul reverts in Greek to the singular pronoun "you" (vv. 18–24), as if directing his message to each individual Gentile believer facing a serious spiritual risk from any attitude of superiority.

The notion of natural branches being broken off and branches from a wild olive tree being grafted on to a cultivated olive tree fits well into Paul's view that God had been actively involved both in the Gentile conversions and in the Jewish resistance (vv. 17–24). Yet Paul is clear that the branches were broken off because of unbelief (v. 20); the grafted Gentiles are secure only through an abiding faith in God's *chrēstotēs* ("kindness," "goodness"; vv. 20–22). Earlier, Paul had written about boasting being excluded from matters of the law (3:27). He had previously warned against Jewish boasting (2:17–23), and now he was warning against Gentile boasting (11:17–18). A sense of superiority and boasting would indeed be sufficient cause for being cut off (v. 22).

11:25–32. Threefold Mystery. Throughout vv. 25–31, Paul addresses the Gentile believers as a whole, using the Greek plural pronoun ("you"), as he outlines God's mystery and reminds them not to think too highly of themselves (v. 25). Paul presents a threefold mystery that had been revealed to him. First, a partial hardening or blinding had happened to Israel (implying again that God had not rejected Israel); second, this hardening would remain until the fullness of the Gentiles would come in; third, all Israel would be saved. The extent of the blindness was "in part"—meaning either part of Israel had been blinded or that the blindness was partial. The former meaning is to be preferred, since part of Israel, the believing remnant, was not blinded. Paul understood the hardening or blinding to involve more than willful resistance on the part of his countrymen who rejected the Messiah. God's role in their unbelief was the basis for the assurance that the hardening would not be permanent. The duration of the hardening is tied to the success of the Gentile mission. The reference to the *plērōma*—"fullness"—can be understood as a predetermined number, known only to God, or to the completion of the gospel proclamation to the whole world (cf. Matt. 24:14). The reference to the Gentiles coming in designates either the ongoing fruits of evangelism among the Gentiles and their acceptance of the Jewish Messiah or the grafting of Gentiles on to the olive tree. The Gentile believers had been engrafted through their faith and thus had become part of the faithful Israel.

The first part of Romans 11:26 is one of the most contested sentences in Romans. Several proposals for understanding Paul's declaration regarding the salvation of "Israel" have been offered. One is that, according to Paul, God will save every ethnic Jew who has ever lived, even apart from a decision regarding Christ. This interpretation flies in the face of Paul's own preaching.

A second proposal imagines a massive conversion at or after the return of Christ, when all deceased Jews are resurrected and confronted with the returning Christ. Jesus predicted the resurrection at His Second Coming of those complicit in His death (Matt. 26:64). But evidence of a massive conversion of Jews at that time does not appear in the NT.

A third position views the Christian church as the true Israel, replacing the Jewish people, with a new covenant of grace replacing the old covenant. It draws on the words of Jesus to the Jewish religious leaders that the kingdom of God would be taken away from them and given to a nation that would bear fruit (Matt. 21:43; cf. 8:11–12; Mark 12:9; Luke 20:16). So "all Israel" in Romans 11:26 becomes the equivalent of a nation producing fruits of the kingdom of heaven. Though widely held, this position is not without difficulty. While Paul was speaking of cutting off individual Jewish branches and grafting on Gentile branches (Rom. 11:19–20), he never even suggested that the olive tree itself had been replaced.

A fourth option revisits the term "Israel" in light of the metaphor of the olive tree and calls for an inclusive sense that embraces all, Jew or Gentile, who through faith, especially faith in Christ, have become children of Abraham (4:11). This position presumes that for Paul the olive tree represented the faithful Israel, the true people of God in the OT and NT, on to which Gentiles could be grafted. Paul's warning to the Gentiles who had been grafted on to the olive tree that they could be removed as well (11:20–22) shows the Gentiles to be part of the Israel of faith (cf. 2:29).

In 11:32, Paul sums up his line of thought. God's ultimate goal in consigning all to disobedience is to have mercy on all. The context indicates that all humanity is in view in both halves of the sentence. Paul foresaw a time beyond the writing of Romans when there would be among Jews a renewed openness to the gospel. Their future (11:12) would match that of the Gentiles' acceptance of the gospel (11:25). Their future acceptance of the resurrected Christ would be "life from the dead" (11:15). God's covenant promise of forgiveness (11:6, 27; cf. Is. 27:9; 59:20) would be realized in that future grafting of Jews as "natural" branches on to the olive tree (Rom. 11:24). This would happen shortly before the coming of Christ. "There are among them [the Jews] many who will come to the light, and who will proclaim the immutability of the law of God with wonderful power. The Lord God will work. He will do wonderful things in righteousness" (Ev 578).

11:33–36. Doxology. Paul concludes his unveiling of God's plan for Israel with a hymn in which he invites his hearers, then and now, to join him in worship as he praises the unfathomable riches and wisdom and knowledge of God. The hymn captures Paul's amazement at God's plan for showing mercy on all the human family, including his temporarily hardened fellow Jews; he expresses his awe at the depth of the riches of God's wisdom and knowledge (v. 33). The hymn makes clear that the ways in which God expresses His grace are unfathomable. It is a fitting response of gratitude to God's mercy.

The quotations Paul cites in vv. 34–35 raise three questions that relate in reverse order to the exclamations about the "riches," "wisdom," and "knowledge" of God (v. 33). The questions are rhetorical, anticipating the answer—"No one!"—to be supplied by the attentive reader. God's sovereignty is unquestionable: God owes no one anything (v. 35). This conviction lies at the foundation of Paul's thoughts in Romans. We cannot put God in our debt because He does not owe us anything. Even the covenant between God and Israel was an expression of God's gracious initiative. There is nothing we can give God that is not already in His possession, except worship freely expressed from a grateful heart.

The hymn's last word is "amen." This is not the only "amen" in Romans (cf. 1:25; 9:5; 15:33; 16:27). On the basis of Paul's comment in 1 Corinthians 14:16 regarding the need for words of praise in worship to be intelligible so others can respond with "amen," we can assume that the "amen" here (11:36), as elsewhere in Romans, comes from Paul's intent to engage the listeners by drawing from them a responsive "amen" to the doxology. Responsive readers of Romans ever since have added their own "amen."

12:1—15:13

RESPONDING TO THE MERCIES OF GOD

In the first eleven chapters, Paul laid out the plan of a holy God to offer sinners the gospel, which is the power of God that provides salvation for all who believe (1:16), as the only path to escape condemnation and death. In spite of human defiance, including the Jews' tragic rejection of their Messiah, God has been working unceasingly for the good of His creation. Next, Paul considers the appropriate human response to the mercies of God. It would be a grave mistake to conclude that the practical guidance in chapters 12–15 is a perfunctory afterthought. The section can sensibly be divided into three parts: 12:1—13:14, which explains how a Christian community, including the Roman believers, ought to live together; 14:1—15:6, which deals with divisive attitudes over matters of dietary scruples; and 15:7–13, which is an appeal for the believers to accept each other, whether Jew or Gentile, and to live in hope.

12:1—13:14

How Christians Should Live Together

In this section, Paul sets the foundations for the believers' communal life in a world hostile to God. It is necessary that an inner transformation of the mind attuned to the will of God replace conformity to that world. He writes of the differing gifts bestowed by God for Christians' mutual benefit, not as grounds for self-importance but as obligations for service to one another out of a genuine love (12:3–9). Regarding their relationships with nonbelievers, Paul enjoins them to bless their persecutors, leaving revenge in God's hands, and so overcome evil with good (vv. 14–21). Since God appoints civil authorities, Paul directs believers to submit to them as God's servants, even in the payment of taxes (13:1–7). Genuine love fulfills the law and serves as the gold standard against which all is measured (vv. 8–10). Paul teaches that all are to live as if the day of salvation were at hand (vv. 11–14).

12:1–2. The Living Sacrifice. Before launching into more specific counsel, Paul appeals to believers to present their bodies as a living sacrifice by the mercy of God (cf. 15:30 and 16:17). "Therefore" indicates that the advice that follows flows naturally out of what Paul had already written, including but not limited to the previous doxology (11:33–36). The reference to God's mercy is a reminder of God's aim to have mercy on all (11:30–32, cf. 9:16).

Human sacrifices were forbidden in Scripture (Mic. 6:6–8). Paul's call here is for something quite different—"a living sacrifice," a voluntary and continuous dedication to God as the fitting act of worship. The term "bodies" does not limit the sacrifice to the purely physical aspect. The call for the renewing of the mind (Rom. 12:2) shows that the whole person is in view here. The use of the plural "bodies" followed by the singular "living sacrifice" means that Paul was telling the whole community to offer itself up as a single living sacrifice. Paul deals in this section with communal issues and attitudes, aiming at motivating believers to live holy lives and to be witnesses in the present evil world. In other words, believers are to glorify God with their unified speech and thinking (15:6). The collective witness of different personalities and dispositions living together in harmony is a marvel to behold, a miracle of God's grace. The service or worship is to be offered in light of who God is and what Christ has done, and it is to be *logikos* (12:1). This word has been rendered as "reasonable" or "proper" but can also carry the nuance of "spiritual." The only fitting response is to live a holy communal life, acceptable or pleasing to God.

The use of the present tense of the verbs here suggests an ongoing process—we are to continually resist being conformed to the values and outlook of the world that is often at odds with the good, acceptable or pleasing, and perfect will of God (v. 2). We are to keep on being transformed through the renewing of our minds. For example, rivalry and self-assertiveness were valued in Roman times, as today. But the competitive and combative instincts of human nature can easily destroy the harmony and holiness of a community of believers. Instead, Paul's message states the importance of giving preference to one another (cf. Phil. 2:3).

The agent of transformation cannot be the human self, as the passive tense of the imperative verb "be transformed" indicates. It is the Spirit's renewing of our minds (cf. Rom. 8:4–11) that allows us to discern and concur with the will of God. Yet there is a role for the human subject in this transformation, since Paul urges readers to continue being transformed (12:2). We must respond to the promptings of the Spirit. In contrast, since the unregenerate do not retain the knowledge of God, God gives them over to minds that are *adokimos* (lit. "not passing the test," "rejected" [translated as "depraved" or "debased"]) which in turn leads to behavior of the same sort (1:28–32). Paul uses the word *euarestos* ("pleasing," "acceptable") to describe the "living sacrifice" (12:1) as well as the believers who, with transformed minds, are able to discern God's perfect will. God does not ask us to act out of character, but in character—His character.

12:3–8. Exercising One's Gift. In v. 3, Paul confronts the human tendency toward inflated self-assessment, especially when comparing oneself with others. Surveys repeatedly reveal that most people rate themselves as above average compared to others. Paul exhorts all of them to engage in a sober self-assessment. How does a person make a proper self-assessment? Paul's answer to this implied question starts with the examples in vv. 4–8. Believers must not only recognize the gifts bestowed by God on each but must actually apply themselves in exercising the gifts given for the blessing of others (vv. 6–8).

The grace given to Paul refers to Paul's apostleship (v. 3; cf. 1:5; 15:15–16). All have been gifted through the grace of God, though in differing ways (v. 6; cf. Eph. 4:7). Paul avoided ranking the gifts in importance or prestige, though he begins with the gift of prophecy, which is listed second in the other enumerations of spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11). The meaning of Paul's statement about faith in Romans 12:3 remains unclear. It could mean that faith is the measure or that faith refers here to faithfulness in the exercising of the gift. It probably means that each believer has received the gift of faith.

The human body, with its various members, illustrates the unity in diversity appropriate among believers (Rom. 12:4–5). Elsewhere, Paul describes the believers as making up "the body of Christ," that is, the possession of Christ, with Christ as the head (1 Cor. 12:27; Eph. 4:12, 15; Col. 1:24). Here in Romans, believers are one body in Christ and offer one "living sacrifice" (Rom. 12:1). Instead of being an assortment of autonomous individuals, they all belong as members of each other so that they and their gifts belong to each other (v. 5).

The list of seven gifts is not exhaustive; however, it illustrates not only the variety of the gifts but also the necessity of exercising them with a proper attitude—all of which can aid in the self-examination urged on each believer in deciding whether one is thinking soberly of oneself according to the measure of faith (v. 3). The Greek construction, not readily translated into smooth English, indicates that our identity is expressed by the spiritual gift we have received. The first item (dealing with prophecy) refers to the exercise of the gift in accordance with the proportion of faith (v. 6). Whatever Paul had in mind must be consistent with the meaning of the proportion of faith mentioned in v. 3; and it would not lead to unfavorable comparisons among the faithful, as if the gift of prophecy implied spiritual superiority. The next three items seem to state the obvious—the gift bestowed is to be exercised, whether in ministry or service, in teaching, or in exhortation or encouragement (vv. 7–8). The gifts of philanthropy, leadership, and showing mercy are to be exercised, like any other gift, with liberality or generosity, diligence, and cheerfulness (v. 8b).

12:9–21. Transformed Community. The varied directives and appeals that make up this section describe how a transformed community should live according to the will of God (v. 2). The first section applies more directly to the relationships among the believers (vv. 10–13), while the latter portion (vv. 14, 17–21) describes a blessed assertiveness toward outsiders. The use of plural nouns and verb forms in these verses shows that Paul is describing the true love that must characterize the whole community of believers (cf. 1 Cor. 13).

In the original language, the opening line in Romans 12:9a serves as a heading for the long string of participles found in vv. 9–13 that flesh out the expression of genuine Christian love.

Love can be sincere and devoid of hypocrisy only when we turn away from what is evil and cling to what is good (Rom. 12:9b). Good and evil reappear at the end of the section in the dramatic imperative: "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (v. 21). All the directives that Paul gave in vv. 10–20 are summed up as the overcoming of evil with good.

Paul's admonition to *philostorgos*—"devoted love" (variously translated "brotherly love," "love one another deeply as brothers and sisters," or "love each other like the members of your family"; v. 10)—conveys the idea that there should be familial love in the Christian family created through faith in Jesus the Messiah. In a society where honor and recognition were prized, Paul was urging believers to take the lead in showing honor to each other (v. 10). The Greek phrase *pneumati zeontes* could refer either to spiritual fervor or to being fervent (lit. "hot") in the Holy Spirit. In either case, this state of earnestness should coincide with "serving the Lord" (v. 11). Hope in the Lord's return and constant prayer enable perseverance in the midst of trials (v. 12). The material needs of fellow believers are not to be ignored. Paul urges Christians to extend hospitality to all believers (v. 13), a practice that was especially vital in his day since public facilities for the traveler were notorious for their immorality. The NT is replete with admonitions to extend hospitality (Heb. 13:2; 1 Pet. 4:9; 2 John 10; 3 John 5–8; cf. Acts 16:15; 1 Tim. 3:2; 2 John 10).

The followers of a crucified Lord lived with hostility ranging from scorn and harassment to physical harm. The words of the curser typically invoked supernatural powers to wreak harm on the person cursed. Conversely, the believers' words of blessing, uttered in response to cursing directed at them, called on God to deal kindly with their persecutors (Rom. 12:14). Invoking the power of the Almighty on behalf of one's enemies is the most assertive expression of overcoming evil with good (v. 21; cf. Matt. 5:44; Luke 6:28).

To share rejoicing with others (Rom. 12:15a) involves setting aside any feelings of envy over the blessings others enjoy (cf. 1 Cor. 12:26). To share grief with others (Rom. 12:15b), one must take the time to embrace the mourner's loss rather than secretly congratulating oneself for escaping the calamity that befell another. Paul also encourages harmony with one's associates and the treating of each and all equally without regard to position. He also speaks against the human tendency to be proud because of social standing or to wish to associate solely or primarily with those seen as socially higher. Instead, believers are to associate with people of low or humble positions (v. 16b) while maintaining a modest self-assessment (cf. v. 3).

After the brief imperative on responding to persecution with blessing and not cursing (v. 14), Paul next provides a fuller treatment of the Christian response to persecution and hostility (vv. 17–21). The NT writers with one voice categorically forbid the wronged believer to seek revenge (cf. Matt. 5:38–44; 1 Pet. 3:9). Returning evil for evil gives added life to the initial wrongdoing (cf. Prov. 17:13; 1 Thess. 5:15; 1 Pet. 3:9). Instead of focusing on retaliating, one should take the initiative in pursuing what is recognized as good even by the nonbelievers (Rom. 12:17b). Not all social norms of the nonbelievers are wrong, and Christians ought at least to maintain the moral standards of their communities. As one who suffered persecution, Paul knew it is not always possible to be at peace with everyone (v. 18). But all efforts should be made to be at peace, certainly within the circle of faith, but ideally outside it as well (cf. Matt. 5:16, 21–48).

In Romans 12:19, Paul turns to the topic of the pursuit of vengeance—taking matters into one's own hands. Instead of taking vengeance, one is to allow room for the wrath of God to deal with wrongdoers. Many translations supply the words "of God" (or "God's wrath") because the second half of the verse quotes God's claim that vengeance belongs to Him (quoting Deut. 32:35; cf. Jer. 5:9; 23:2; Hos. 4:9; Joel 3:21; Nah. 1:2; Heb. 10:30). Linked with the hope of salvation is the confidence in God to carry out a comprehensive and complete work of justice against evildoers (Luke 18:1–8; 2 Thess. 1:6–8; Rev. 6:9–10). But Paul in the next section of the letter (Rom. 13:1–7) goes on to note that the civil ruler could also be God's appointed servant to visit wrath or punishment on the evildoer.

Our human desire to inflict on others the pain they have inflicted on us is a strong instinct. It is also the basis for the widening and reciprocal cycle of revenge that plagues the relationships between tribes and nations, leading to the horrific slaughter of innocent people. For an individual believer or even a group of believers to pursue vengeance is to take the matter out of God's hands. It shows a lack of faith or confidence in the Lord's ability or intent to deal thoroughly with evil. As God's beloved children, we can rest in the assurance that God will deal justly with those who wrong us rather than take a fallible vengeance with our own puny hands.

The vivid picture of putting coals of fire on the head of a hungry or thirsty enemy by caring for that person's needs (12:20) comes from Proverbs 25:21–22. Heaping hot coals on the head could refer to an experience resulting in a change of behavior. In other words, showing kindness to an enemy could destroy evil (cf. Rom. 12:21; 2 Kin. 6:18–23). Paul's concluding command serves as a summary of the whole section. The passive imperative not to be overcome by evil is followed by the active imperative to overcome evil with good. The means by which one does not allow evil to overcome is often a matter of attitudes and responses to matters outside of one's control. Yet Paul calls for an active response because love cannot be passive or even merely reactive—it requires assertiveness. In reality, we do not often completely overcome evil in the world. The oppressors continue to thrive, but ultimate victory belongs to God. In a lesser sense here, on our street where we live, as evil and evildoers engage us, we are to respond proactively in such a way as to assist God in breaking the power of evil in the lives of others. We are to use the active methods mentioned in the previous verses: never flagging in prayer, invoking the blessing of God on behalf of evildoers in their presence, openly and intentionally pursuing the general good, taking the initiative in pursuing peace, avoiding any personal retaliation, and providing for the enemy's needs. All the while we are to recall that we are the beloved friends of God (Rom. 12:19) and that He is the One who will provide the complete and final resolution to evil. We look forward in hope to God's final resolution.

13:1–7. Obeying the Secular Servants of God. Prior to the final resolution, God also appoints civil authorities as His servants to exercise His wrath against evildoers. The call for submission to secular rulers as servants of God parallels Paul's call elsewhere for believers to submit to each other within their relationship with God (Eph. 5:21). Paul's directive that everyone should be subject to the governing authorities out of respect for God's authority (Rom. 13:1) rests on the assumption that all authority ultimately issues from God (cf. Dan. 2:20–21, 37–38; 4:17).

The vagueness of the term "governing authorities" suggests a wide application. Perhaps this would range from the ruling authority of the emperor down to local authorities appointed by God to carry out His will for order and justice (see "Submission to Governing Authorities," p. 1602). As those who serve God as His ministers, a concept repeated three times for emphasis (Rom. 13:4–6), Paul says that civil authorities are to be obeyed. The punishment of evildoers by civil authorities anticipates the final exercise of God's wrath (2:16; 3:6). The advice Paul gives is parallel to that in 1 Peter 2:13–17, though there it is stated without the explicit insistence that the authorities are ordained by God. The phrase "bear the sword" (Rom. 13:4) has been understood by some to entail the propriety of capital punishment, while others suggest that the phrase may refer to the authority of the office, symbolized by the sword.

In v. 5, Paul summarizes the reasons for submitting to the authorities: first, to avoid being punished, and second, to follow our consciences, by which Paul means the commitment to submit to the will of God. He acknowledged that the Roman Christians were already paying taxes to the secular authorities (v. 6). In fact, all those in authority are to be paid what they are owed, whether taxes, other fees, honor, or respect (v. 7). Believers are to give preference to others in honoring them (12:10). The believer's obligation of submission, respect, and honor extends to the unbelieving world as well (cf. 1 Sam. 24:1–11; 26:5–23; Acts 23:1–5; 1 Pet. 2:17). This respect does not extend to expressions of worship, which would amount to idolatry.

13:8–10. Love Fulfills Law. Paul identifies believers' one perpetual obligation: love one another. After dominating much of the first half of the letter, the law makes its last appearances in this passage. Paul declares that those who love others have fulfilled the law, especially as exemplified in the prohibitions in the second half of the Decalogue against murder, adultery, theft, lying, and covetousness (Rom. 13:9; see Ex. 20:13–17). The aims of love and of the divinely ordered law are the same: the welfare of everyone. Jesus placed Moses's command to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:37–40; cf. Lev. 19:18) alongside the command for a wholehearted love for God as the summary of all the teachings of Scripture. In Romans, Paul speaks only of the love toward one's neighbor as fulfilling the law. In general, instead of speaking of loving God, Paul preferred to speak of the believer's faith in God (but see Rom. 8:28). If the believers could not develop a communal life together as brothers and sisters under the lordship of Christ, the gospel would be a public mockery. Yet the great truth that love fulfills the law can legitimately be extended to the Christian's relationships with unbelievers. Paul's telling choice of *ton heteron* ("others," "another") in 13:8b implies an otherness outside of the circle of faith (cf. Lev. 19:34).

Paul gives no basis for setting aside the Decalogue. Christ "condemned sin in the flesh" (Rom. 8:3), making it possible for "the righteous requirement of the law" (8:4) to be fulfilled in us through the power of the Spirit. Strictly speaking, the negative commands in the Decalogue describe how love does not act. But Christian love goes beyond the avoidance of wrongdoing. Love must recast the negative commands into positive actions. Thus, love more than fulfills the limited demands of a narrow reading of the Decalogue.

13:11–14. Putting Aside the Works of Darkness. The new day of our salvation is the fast-approaching Second Coming of Christ, the Christian hope. Now believers must wake up, take off the nightclothes—the works of darkness—put on the armor of light, and walk properly, uprightly, as one does in the daytime. Believers are to live holy lives now as if the day of their deliverance were about to arrive. Paul was not suggesting that he himself and the Roman believers were enveloped in the deeds of darkness. In 15:14, he expresses his confidence in their goodness, knowledge, and capacity to teach each other. But for the honest-hearted follower of Christ, conversion is not a distant event in the past. It involves a daily recommitment to Christ, a daily putting on of the armor of Christ in the continual battle against the sinful nature.

Paul provides a short list of the deeds of darkness, ending with an emphasis on avoiding *eris* ("strife," "dissension") and *zēlos* ("envy," "jealousy"; 13:13), which may anticipate the long section on the conflict between two factions in the church that follows in 14:1—15:7. The invitation to put on the protective "armor of light" (13:12) really means to clothe ourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ (14:14a; cf. Gal. 3:27; Col. 3:10–12). This dramatic expression of total submission to the lordship of Christ may refer to a literal changing of clothes during baptism. We allow room for the desires of the flesh (14:14b) by dwelling on the possibility of evil. Resisting temptations involves guarding our immediate environment—what we see, hear, and think about (Rom. 12:1–2; Matt. 5:28; 15:18–19). For example, keeping certain foods out of the cupboard and refrigerator strengthens the decision to lose weight. Also, Jesus pointed out that whoever views another person with lustful intent has already committed adultery.

Submission to Governing Authorities

Modern interpreters have questioned Paul's call for submission to governing authorities without apparently considering whether they are worthy of support (Rom. 13:3–4). The use of Paul's words by Adolf Hitler and others to quell any Christian opposition to abhorrent government policies has sensitized modern readers not to take Paul's words as calling for passivity in the face of evil. A host of believers from a large part of the world once under the domination of colonial powers bring their bitter history to the reading of Romans 13.

1. Experience of Christians. Paul and the Roman believers knew from wide experience that punishment by civil authorities was not always limited to evildoers. Paul dictated these words with scars on his body from receiving thirty-nine lashes five times at the command of Jewish authorities and three beatings with rods from Roman authorities (2 Cor. 11:24–25) in misguided efforts to preserve the public peace and political stability (cf. Acts 16:22–23). Paul finally arrived in Rome after spending two years in prison in Caesarea because the Roman governor, Felix, was waiting in vain for a ransom before releasing him (Acts 24:26–27). Yet civil and military authorities also intervened several times to save his life and those of others from mobs intent on lynching them (e.g., Acts 19:35–41; 21:31–36; 23:10).

The already marginalized believers lived with the suspicion of their neighbors and already experienced persecution. Earlier in the letter, Paul wrote of the harsh realities that Christians face, including persecution, even as he denied that such realities could separate them from Christ (Rom. 8:35–36). Noting that such unfair treatment of those claiming the name of Christ is not new, in Romans 8:36, he quotes Psalm 44:22. Nonetheless, Paul could declare that "in all these things we are more than conquerors" through the

One who loves us (Rom. 8:37). After all, Paul reminds his hearers that in all things God is working for the ultimate well-being of those who love God (8:28).

2. Reasons for the Counsel. In trying to understand Paul, we should first keep in mind that Paul and the Roman Christians believed that Jesus Christ was enthroned as Lord and would be returning to establish an everlasting kingdom that would replace the kingdoms of this earth. This belief could have been a starting point for a spirit of disrespect to the present rulers, soon to be replaced, and that could have led to disastrous consequences.

Second, Paul wrote this letter to the Romans expecting it to be shared in the various house churches in Rome. He knew this letter could be intercepted or heard by someone engaged in surveillance of the Christian community, whether officially or unofficially. Therefore, anything that could be construed as a call to rebellion against civil authority would have created problems for the Christian community in Rome. This was the experience of Jesus when the Jewish leaders accused Him of being a politically dangerous person threatening the rule of Rome (John 19:12; cf. Acts 17:7; 1 Cor. 1:23). Paul himself was a figure who drew suspicion from within and without the Christian community, accused of causing disturbances all over the known world (Acts 17:6).

Third, it would be going too far to claim that in Romans 13:1–7 Paul was disingenuously seeking to improve both his and the Roman believers' relationship with the governing authorities. But it is also true that in Romans Paul did not write anything that could be construed as antigovernment beyond his assertion that the Roman rulers were servants of the Jewish-Christian God, appointed to carry out justice to evildoers. Because he was a recognized leader in the movement, Paul's words could have helped allay suspicions.

Fourth, Paul did not say everything he could have said on the subject of the authorities, Jewish or pagan. He restricted their power to punish evildoers, but he did not deal with the misuse of that power when oppressing believers for doing good in the service of God.

3. Relevance of Paul's Counsel. How then shall the counsels of Paul be read and used by believers today? First, read them in the context of the whole Bible, which contains stories of individuals, such as John the Baptist, who were called by God to confront governmental evil, as well as the speeches of the prophets calling on rulers for reform and justice. Second, respect government as ordained by God to protect the public welfare. This means Christians ought to be law-abiding citizens who pay their taxes and obey the laws of the land. Third, if one lives in a country where there are opportunities to vote on issues and elect individuals to public office, one should consider those opportunities as obligations just as binding as that of obedience to the laws. Fourth, if Christians are to submit to the governing authority because of their conscience (Rom. 13:5), they should also obey God rather than humans because of their conscience whenever the demands of the state conflict with the will of God (Acts 5:29).

14:1—15:7

Threats to Faith

While this part of the letter may appear to begin abruptly in translation, a more precise rendering of the original language in 14:1 would be: "So then receive the one who is weak in faith." Paul had laid the groundwork for dealing with this delicate matter in 13:8–10 with his emphasis on love. Disputes over secondary matters can destroy the bonds between believers and even threaten their individual spiritual survival. Paul had learned of a deep division among the Roman believers over food and days. At risk was that vital unity that would allow them to "glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (15:6).

Nowhere in his handling of the controversy does Paul urge the divided parties to come to complete agreement, even though he was clearly agreeing with one side. Walking or acting in love (14:15) does not depend on settling all differences of opinion. Paul was confronting the destructive attitudes of both groups toward one another. All disputes must be measured in light of the gospel and the precious unity of the church in Christ. Secondary matters assume a false importance when we lose sight of the greater truths of salvation.

14:1–4. Acceptance without Condemnation or Condescension. From some source now unknown, Paul had received news that the believers in Rome were divided over issues involving food and days. He offered a directive to those likely making up the majority of the believers. They were to welcome those whose faith was weak. To describe what they should avoid in this process, Paul uses the word *diakrisis*, which can mean "the ability to pass judgment" but can also mean "quarrel." Quarreling over *dialogismōn* ("doubtful things," "disputable matters," "opinions") should be avoided (v. 1). It is unlikely that those weak in faith would have described themselves in these terms. The expression may have been Paul's own choice, since later on he points out that the weak in faith are particularly liable to stumble due to lack of faith (v. 23). Not all possess a faith as robust as Abraham's (4:17–25).

Because they did not have church buildings, believers in the first century met and worshiped in private homes, often eating together and celebrating the Lord's Supper (Acts 2:46; cf. 1 Cor. 11:17–22). Imagine being invited to someone's home and discovering they had purposely prepared food you consider forbidden. Those who were characterized by Paul as weak in faith witnessed their Christian brothers and sisters eating what they considered forbidden and were therefore deeply offended. Their counterparts were prone to look down on the less enlightened, those believers weak in faith abstaining from what they considered good food. Hospitality should not be an occasion for disputes over unimportant matters (Rom. 14:1).

Paul selected what may have been the extreme positions in his characterization of the two sides: one person eating only vegetables or greens and another believing it was permissible to eat anything (v. 2). It is not clear why a believer would make it a matter of principle to eat only vegetables. The eating of some animals and fish was allowed in Leviticus 11. Jewish food laws did not promote vegetarianism, though the original diet given humans did not include animal flesh (Gen. 1:29; cf. 9:3). Those who believed themselves to be permitted to eat all things might in good conscience eat all food healthful for the body. Weakening one's body by consuming what one knows to be harmful would be a violation of stewardship.

It was necessary for the more scrupulous believers to remember that God had already received and accepted the less scrupulous (Rom. 14:3), that is, He had extended the hospitality of salvation to them. Paul compares the believer's relationship to God to that of master and servant (a household slave), in which the servant's work must pass the master's scrutiny (v. 4). God has not given one servant in His household the task of passing judgment on another servant. To do so would usurp His authority as Master and Judge (cf. 2:1; James 4:11–12). Paul acknowledges that all will eventually come before the judgment seat of God, who has access to that which is concealed from human eyes and understanding (Rom. 3:6; 14:10; Heb. 9:27). Fortunately, God is more than our Judge. Like a dedicated teacher fully able to prepare students to pass the final examination, the gracious Master is willing and able to make His household servants stand without accusation in that final inspection (Rom. 14:4; cf. Eph. 3:20; Jude 24). The assurance of God's enabling does not reduce the seriousness of the coming judgment, but it removes the need for believers to condemn one another.

14:5–9. Living for the Lord. Paul takes up a second point of contention: the issue of viewing certain days as more important than others (v. 5a). Regardless of the difference in viewpoint, it is necessary for each person to recognize that no one can be the conscience of another person. While all must be done with an eye to the approval of God, believers are directly responsible to God for being fully convinced in their own minds and then acting accordingly. What both parties should have in common in their differences over days or food is their determination to honor the Lord and to offer heartfelt words of thanks to God. We ought to live all of our days to the Lord (v. 6). Even on our deathbed we entrust ourselves to the Lord. Throughout our existence we are in the Lord's care, never simply serving our own interests, never abandoned, even if we are without human support. We are the Lord's (v. 8; cf. 8:38–39).

In the midst of this context of what Christians ought to eat there is a brief shift in 14:5–6 regarding when to eat and when to abstain. The assumption that the issue was over the day to worship is extremely unlikely. It is more likely that Paul had in mind days of fasting—an important matter for Jews and Christians in the first century (see Matt. 6:16–18; Luke 18:12). During the second century, Christians were advised to fast on Wednesday and Friday, instead of Tuesday and Thursday with the Jews.

Many interpreters have assumed that Paul was referring to the weekly Sabbath in Romans

14:5–6. This is unlikely for several reasons. First, the context throughout chapter 14 is about food. Second, directions in the OT regarding the observance of the Sabbath make no mention of foods to be eaten or avoided altogether. Third, the brevity of Paul's treatment of "days" indicates that he was not referring to a dispute among believers about whether the Sabbath was to be observed. If Paul intended his readers to conclude from his brief remarks in vv. 5–6b that the observance of the Sabbath, commanded by God in the Decalogue, had now become optional, he would have had to mount a more sustained argument. It would have been an extremely important matter. Fourth, Paul would not have taught the abolition of Sabbath for the sake of Christ, because he was aware of the gospel stories according to which Jesus went to great lengths to show how to keep the Sabbath rather than to abolish it (Matt. 12:1–12; Luke 13:10–17).

Paul indicates that in matters of conduct where clear guidance from the Lord has not been provided and where differences in conviction threaten unity, we are to remember the common aim to bring honor to God in all that we do (cf. 1 Cor. 10:31). We must acknowledge the sincerity of those with whom we disagree and uphold their responsibility to follow their own convictions. In Romans 14:13–21, Paul lays out another principle that must be balanced with that of individual responsibility.

In the midst of his treatment of secondary matters, Paul directs our attention to what really matters: Christ who died and rose again, resulting in His installation as "Lord of both the dead and the living" (v. 9). Throughout vv. 4–14, Paul uses "Lord" to refer to the "Lord Jesus Christ" (cf. 13:14; 14:14). The title implies a mandate for the believer to submit to the authority of Christ in all matters and under all circumstances, even in the face of death. The best antidote to getting caught up in secondary matters is to stay focused on the central truths of the gospel.

14:10–12. Standing in Judgment. Paul returns to the divisive scorning and judging that threatens the unity of believers, this time with a stern reminder. Each of us will someday stand before the judgment seat of Christ (v. 10; cf. 2 Cor. 5:10), who will demand an accounting of our attitudes and words, including those that contributed to the spiritual death of others. Regarding Paul's immediate audience, unstated but implied is how unimportant the disputes over food and days would then appear, except for the damage they had caused. While we ought to care for one another out of love for Christ's sake, Paul does not hesitate to point out the sober and certain reality of the judgment. This strong warning must be put alongside his earlier assertion that the divine Master is able to ensure the safe passage of those who acknowledge His lordship in all they do and say (Rom. 14:4).

The surviving manuscripts differ as to whether the original reading in Romans 14:10 was the judgment seat of God or Christ. Nonetheless, Paul speaks of everyone having to give an account of himself or herself "to God" (v. 12). Previously, Paul spoke of the day when God would judge the secrets of all people through Jesus Christ (2:16; cf. Acts 17:31). Paul backs up his assertion of the coming judgment by Christ with a solemn oath from the Greek version of Isaiah 45:23: every knee will bow to the Lord (Rom. 14:11). The emphasis here and in Philippians 2:8–11 is on the universal acknowledgment of the lordship of Christ.

14:13–21. Do Not Make Brothers or Sisters Stumble. What excuse could possibly be acceptable in the judgment if one's behavior or attitude on a secondary matter contributes to the spiritual ruin of another person for whom Christ died (cf. Matt. 18:5–6)? If there is to be any judging, everyone should resolve (Gr. "judge") not to place stumbling blocks in the way of other believers (Rom. 14:13). Whatever the issue, determine never to be party to another's destruction (v. 15). Judging is done by people who consider others to be inferior in understanding God's will. Those who condemn others over their sincerely held views imagine themselves to be on God's judgment seat. Arrogant condescension by the strong can lead to weak believers' dismissal of the gospel itself. Exercising one's so-called rights in a manner that injures a fellow believer puts both parties in spiritual jeopardy, because it is a failure to act (lit. "walk") in love (Rom. 14:15). The rights of one person do not include the right to harm another. The principle of restraint in exercising one's rights to avoid another's disastrous spiritual harm applies in every age and congregation.

Most interpreters understand that Paul's view in v. 14 that nothing is "unclean" amounts to a blanket dismissal of the food laws found in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14. In addition, translators usually render the Greek word differently here. In most other cases, they translate it as "common" but here (Rom. 14:14) as "unclean." The evidence for this conclusion with the resulting translation deserves closer scrutiny, however. The specific difference in 14:2 was whether eating only vegetables was the best way to honor God. Paul did not have the Levitical laws regarding unclean meat in mind when speaking of food as not common (see commentary on Acts 10:9–16).

Paul was widening the horizons of significance by pointing out the danger of having that which is good spoken of as evil (Rom. 14:16). Division among believers over secondary matters would inevitably seep outside, leaving them and the gospel open to ridicule. The communal life of believers in the crowded cities of the empire could not be hidden from the scrutiny of pagan neighbors. The gathered believers were outposts of the kingdom of God where Christ was even now Lord and their life together bore witness to the power of the gospel. The power of the gospel must not be contradicted by contentions that come to the attention of critics (cf. 1 Cor. 6).

Contentions over secondary ritual matters by both the weak and the strong endanger the very hallmarks of the kingdom of God—righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14:17). Indeed, finding agreement over what are secondary matters in any generation will prove elusive unless the primary matters are kept in sight. Earlier, Paul noted the changed relationship with God we enjoy when we are reckoned as righteous by faith and live at peace with God. Through Christ, we rejoice in the hope of the coming glory of God (5:1–2). But the results of this restored vertical relation with God must be seen inside the circles of faith where Christ is now Lord. In spite of irreconcilable differences over secondary matters, we are called to live at peace with one another, upright in our dealings and filled with joy as we contemplate the glorious future. The one who lives this way is accepted by God and approved by people (14:18). This is the "living sacrifice" that is pleasing to God (12:1). Outsiders will notice and admire the unusual harmony enjoyed by believers, especially if their conduct toward nonbelievers is above reproach. The brief but telling mention of the Holy Spirit reminds us that all of this is achieved through the presence of the Holy Spirit (cf. 8:1–16).

How then should we act toward one another? Paul provides two permanent standards. First, consider what makes for peace and edification (14:19). The pursuit of peace must not compromise the core values of the kingdom, and any effort to promote the spiritual and moral growth of another cannot be done in the spirit of superiority. Whoever seeks to exercise moral surgery on another must win that person's consent and must give priority to the delicate and ongoing workings of the Holy Spirit on the conscience. Second, our actions, including what we eat or drink (v. 21), must not weaken a brother's or sister's confidence in the gospel. The real danger from secondary disputes, beyond distraction, is the destruction of the work of God (v. 20)—whether it be the unity of the believers or faith in the heart of the weak.

14:22–23. Avoid Sinning against Convictions. Some versions translate v. 22a so that it seems to say we are to keep our faith to ourselves. Other versions are clearer in saying that it is what we believe about these things (the points of contention) that we are to keep between ourselves and God. As noted in 14:1, conversation for the purpose of disputes is off the table. The aspect of faith in view in vv. 22 and 23b would best be understood as one's personal convictions. The blessing from God referred to in v. 22b applies when one's true convictions are the same as what is openly supported. Those with scruples over food ought not to succumb to social pressure to participate in what the voice of conscience, based on sincere convictions, tells them is wrong. Their acquiescence would be sin until the full implication of the gospel becomes clear to them.

The beatitude of v. 22b warns believers in every age against allowing cultural pressures or authoritative voices to lead them to do what they believe is wrong. The tragic collaboration of ordinary people in following orders during the Holocaust demonstrates how naturally vulnerable we are to cave in to authority and conform to the unethical demands of employers or governmental officials or even powerful voices in the church. In some matters, there will be differences of understanding regarding precisely what God's will requires. In all matters, the integrity of one's conscience must be preserved and the right of others to act according to their conscience over disputed matters must be upheld. This principle does not protect an unexamined position or an uninformed conscience. If by God's grace we have entrusted ourselves as sinners to God's mercy and received the assurance of forgiveness, all our convictions and beliefs, habits, and practices need to be examined in the penetrating light of divine love flowing from the cross.

15:1–7. The Obligation to Follow Christ's Example. The example of the Lord Jesus Christ makes clear that the strong are under obligation to wholeheartedly accommodate the scruples of the weak rather than to please themselves (v. 1). Acceding to the needs of the weaker serves the larger goal of the edification (v. 2) or "building up" of the community, making it possible for them to glorify God with unified thought and speech (v. 6).

For the first and only time in Romans, Paul here uses the term "strong," and only with the obligation to bear the weaknesses of the weak (v. 1). By using the word "we," he openly identifies himself with the strong, which is not surprising in light of his declaration in 14:14. An obligation can seem to stifle the motivation of love. But there is a place for obligation in the Christian life in light of what Christ our Lord has endured for us (15:3). Paul found it necessary to draw the connection between the believers' obligation to one another and their gratitude to Christ. Their obligation was rooted in the soil of gratitude. Christ, who suffered the shameful death reserved for slaves and state criminals, overturned the prevailing Roman ideal that the weak conform to the wishes of the strong or powerful. The enduring force of this upheaval ought not to be missed by the modern reader. Note Paul's personal obligation to the Greeks and non-Greeks (sometimes translated "barbarians"; 1:14), and the believers' obligation to be led by the Spirit and not by the flesh (8:12–13).

In an aside in 15:4, Paul reminds us that the Scriptures are a divinely bestowed resource for encouraging us to endure difficulties and for sustaining our hope of the coming redemption of all things. He applied the words of David (v. 3) in Psalm 69 (a psalm related to Christ a number of times in the NT; Rom. 11:9–10; Matt. 27:27–30, 34; John 2:17; 15:25; Acts 1:20) to Christ's experience of being insulted for the sake of God's purposes and implicitly encourages us to do the same by not pleasing ourselves (Ps. 69:9). Romans 15:4 conveys the idea that the Scriptures are a source of encouragement, aiding believers in an unwavering commitment nurtured by a steady hope in the promises of God.

Then Paul appeals to God to provide those same blessings—*hypomonē* ("patience," "endurance") and *paraklēsis* ("encouragement," "comfort")—to lead the believers to a oneness in their acceptance of each other (Rom. 15:5–6). If they would accept and receive each other, just as Christ had accepted them (v. 7), then God would be glorified. The sharp differences over the secondary matters of diet and days would fade into insignificance when, like a chorus of singers, their harmonious voices would declare to those on earth and in heaven the glory of the "Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 6). Paul refers to the glory of God, the public acknowledgment of God's sovereign rule shown through the words and deeds of the believers, including the widening circle of praise from Gentiles drawn to faith in Christ (vv. 9–11; cf. Matt. 5:16; 1 Cor. 10:21; 2 Cor. 4:15).

Paul begins Romans 14:1–4 with a command to receive those weak in faith. Now he widens it to include "one another," that is, to accept one another as full-fledged members of the family of God, as Christ has received and accepted us (Rom. 15:7). Christ's saving acceptance is not merely the example for accepting one another but is its actual basis.

15:8–13

Conversion of Gentiles

The focus moves beyond disputes over scruples in matters of diet and days to the larger canvass of God's inclusive mercy toward the Gentiles, reminiscent of the theme of chapters 9–11. Paul declares that Jesus Christ became a servant to the Jews (lit. "the circumcision") for the purpose of fulfilling the truth of God (15:8). That is, Christ had established the truthfulness of God's covenant promises made to Abraham. Paul immediately adds that this was also done so that the Gentiles could glorify God because of His mercy (v. 9). God's merciful inclusion of the Gentiles lies at the heart of those Jewish promises. They, too, would join the Jewish voices in giving glory to God. The cascade of scriptural quotations that follows (vv. 9–12) has one word in common: "Gentiles," which indicates that the inclusion of Gentiles was not a divine afterthought. Their placement at the climax of the body of the letter shows Paul's determination to root the gospel and his mission to the Gentiles in the prophetic word of God.

The first biblical quotation, cited in v. 9, comes from Psalm 18:49, in which God is praised among the Gentiles. Commentators have suggested that the "I" used in the text is a reference to Christ, perhaps through the ministry of Paul to the Gentiles, taking up and fulfilling the desires of the psalmist. The second quotation is from the Song of Moses, calling Gentiles to rejoice with God's people, that is, the Israelites (Rom. 15:10; Deut. 32:43). The third quotation extends a universal call for all the Gentiles and all the peoples, including the Jews, to praise the Lord (Rom. 15:11; Ps. 117:1). The proclamation of the gospel to the whole world will fulfill this appeal. Finally, Paul cites Isaiah 11:10 as a messianic prophecy fulfilled in Jesus, who as the Root of Jesse, a descendant of David, was to reign over the Gentiles, who were to place their hope in Him (Rom. 15:12; cf. Phil. 2:9–11). Paul and his listeners knew that wherever Jews and Gentiles gathered together to acknowledge Him as their Lord, Christ's messianic reign had already begun. Paul closes with a warm prayer of blessing centered on the confident hope in what God has promised (Rom. 15:13).

15:14–33
Paul's Plans

The formal teachings and exhortations of the letter are finished. After expressing his sense of satisfaction in planting the gospel throughout the eastern Mediterranean, Paul speaks openly of his plans to take the gospel to Spain on the western edge of the Mediterranean after a short visit with the believers in Rome. He reminds them of important matters (vv. 14–16), informing them about his mission to the east (vv. 17–21) and his future visits to Rome (22–24) and Jerusalem (vv. 24–29), closing with an appeal for prayers (vv. 30–33).

15:14–16. Bold Reminders. While Paul acknowledged the spiritual maturity of the Roman believers who were fit to instruct one another, and while he was not the one who brought them the gospel and so would not be expected to be responsible for their spiritual life, he had nonetheless been impelled to write boldly to them about some points (v. 15). It is doubtful that Paul was speaking ironically when he credits them as being filled with all knowledge and able to instruct or admonish each other (v. 14). But having credited them so generously, Paul was carefully construing his bold words as simply reminding them (v. 15) of some points they already knew. He does not enumerate which matters in the letter were written to remind his readers of what they were at least at risk of forgetting. Doubtless among those reminders are the direct and personal warnings in 11:17–24 against individual Gentiles boasting of their apparent replacement of the broken-off Jewish branches and the lengthy appeal in 14:1—15:6 for unity between the strong members inclined to belittle and the weak ones inclined to judge. While Paul tactfully refrained from itemizing his hearers' needs, he points to himself and to the impetus that had compelled his frank words, namely, the grace given to him by God, that is, his apostolic commission especially to the Gentiles (15:15–16; cf. 1:5; 12:3), which included the bulk of Roman believers. Dramatically, he presents himself as a minister of Christ making a priestly offering to God. Instead of animals to be slaughtered for sacrifice, he was offering his Gentile converts won to the gospel and made holy by the Holy Spirit (15:16). Paul foresaw presenting his converts to Christ at the Parousia (2 Cor. 11:2; Col. 1:21–29).

15:17–21. Mission Accomplished in the East. The word *kauchēsin* in v. 17 can be translated as "glory" or "boasting." Paul found pride in his ministry to win obedience from the Gentiles because Christ had accomplished it through him, in word and deed, accompanied by the power of the Spirit of God marked with mighty signs and wonders for the Gentiles' obedience and faith (Rom. 15:18–19; cf. 1:5; 16:19, 26). Paul's method of operation had been to present the claims of Christ to those who had never heard the gospel, rather than building on someone else's foundation (15:20–21). The prophecy from Isaiah 52:15, cited in Romans 15:21, serves as a motto for Paul's commission to proclaim Christ to those who had never heard of Him.

Is there a contradiction between Paul's determination not to build on someone else's foundation and this lengthy letter to the Roman Christians, to be followed by a visit that would allow him to impart a spiritual gift to them (Rom. 1:11)? Not in Paul's mind. After all, he was seeking the vital support of these Roman believers for the pioneering evangelism he was planning farther west in Spain (15:24, 28). Any suspicion they might have had about his understanding of the gospel or any division among them over how the gospel should be lived out would have weakened their wholehearted support.

The powerful signs and wonders referred to in v. 19 meant that the evidence of miracles often accompanied the apostolic preaching of the gospel and thus confirmed its supernatural origin. Though Paul's letters provide no specific instances of miracles, he shared in the apostolic power of healing promised by Jesus (Acts 14:3; 15:12; 19:11–12; 2 Cor. 12:12; Gal. 3:5; cf. Matt. 10:7–8; Acts 1:8; 2:22; Heb. 2:4). Not all apparent miracles originate with God (2 Thess. 2:9; Rev. 16:14), nor must all preaching of the gospel be legitimized by physical miracles. Still, the effectiveness of prayer for healing and other miracles continues to open prejudiced minds to reconsider the gospel even today.

15:22–24. Rome at Last, but Not for Long. Paul explains his long delay in coming to Rome as due to his having been hindered from coming to them (Rom. 15:22) because of the demands of his mission to plant churches in the major cities of the northeastern Mediterranean regions. For many years, the commission to proclaim the gospel took precedence over his longing to visit them (v. 23). Establishing mature congregations able to withstand persecution and other threats to their survival was no simple task. In v. 23, Paul mentions that he had planted the gospel in the major cities of the region and thus now felt ready to fulfill his longing to visit the believers in Rome. For the first time, Paul reveals his true destination—Spain, to the west, at the edge of Roman rule. He hoped to be aided by the Roman Christians on his way there (v. 24). The wording (*propempō*) implies financial support (cf. 2 Cor. 1:16; Tit. 3:13). Paul may have needed assistance in other ways as well in dealing with the languages and customs of Spain and in recruiting coworkers. There is no evidence in the NT that Paul's plans to embark on a new Spanish mission ever materialized. For at least four years after his arrest in Jerusalem, he languished in prison, first in Caesarea and then in Rome, before his release (Acts 21:30–33; 24:27; 28:30–31). Taking the pastoral letters 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus as written by an older Paul after his release in Rome, the vision of Spain appears to have faded completely from his horizon. He returned to labor in the eastern Mediterranean until a second arrest and imprisonment, implied in 2 Timothy, from which he was not released before his death.

15:25–29. Service for the Saints in Jerusalem. Before making the long-anticipated trip to Rome, Paul planned to travel to Jerusalem, accompanied by representatives from Gentile congregations from Achaia (Asia Minor) and Macedonia, to offer financial aid to the poor believers in Jerusalem (see 2 Cor. 8–9). According to Galatians 2:10, the idea of the support of the poor in Jerusalem originated with Jewish Christian leaders in Jerusalem during Paul's earlier visit there. In the world of Paul, it was the duty of the family, the synagogue, or the guild, rather than the state, to care for the indigent. But faith in Jesus Christ could often result in being cut off from the support of one's immediate family or synagogue. Thus, very early in the history of Christianity, the believers found it incumbent to care for brothers and sisters in the faith who were in need (Acts 6:1; 9:39; 1 Tim. 5:3–16). But the importance of the collection went beyond relieving the poor believers in Jerusalem (Rom. 15:26). Paul saw the gifts from the Gentile believers, who had been grafted like a wild olive tree shoot on to the fruit-bearing olive tree root (11:17), as the material expression of the faith now shared between Jew and Gentile. Their collection was offered as a *karpon*—variously translated in this context, but in its most literal sense a "fruit" (15:28). The Gentiles had shared the spiritual blessings of the Jews, so now they were obligated to share their material blessings with them (v. 27). Elsewhere, Paul speaks of the offering as an acknowledgment of the gospel of Christ that would result in thanksgiving to God and prayers because of God's grace being manifested in generosity (2 Cor. 9:12–15). Success in the mission to Jerusalem would signal for Paul that he would arrive in Rome in the full blessing of the gospel of Christ (Rom. 15:29). Not until v. 31 does Paul raise the possibility of failure.

15:30–33. Appeal to Strive Together in Prayer. Next, Paul lays bare the two risks he would be taking. He pleads with his Roman hearers to strive with him in prayer that he might be delivered from unbelievers in Judea (v. 31). His fear was well founded. According to Acts 20:3, Paul found it necessary to alter his plans to travel from Achaia to Jerusalem to avoid a plot on his life on the way there. A riot in the temple area erupted over a false report that he had defiled the temple by bringing in an uncircumcised Gentile (Acts 21:27–30). After Roman soldiers arrested him (Acts 21:31–36), two further plots to kill him were uncovered (Acts 23:12–30; 25:1–5).

Paul's second prayer request was that the gifts brought to Jerusalem would be approved of and accepted by the believers there (Rom. 15:31). He had in mind the generous and sacrificial gift of money from the Gentile churches he had raised up. Any resistance to accepting the gift would imply continued suspicion, if not rejection, of Paul's ministry and the full inclusion of the uncircumcised Gentile believers. Even if the money were accepted on behalf of the needy poor, his hope of strengthening the fellowship between Jew and Gentile still might not be fully realized. Paul's urgent request that the Romans strive together with him in prayer to God on his behalf need not imply a lack of faith or a reluctance on God's part. Jesus repeatedly called for His disciples to persevere in prayer (Luke 11:5–9; 18:1–8). Love, joy, and peace are woven into the prayer request (Rom. 15:30, 32–33). The impulse of self-sacrificing love is a fruit bestowed by the indwelling Spirit of God. Peace and joy are also fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22). The "amen" at the end calls for a responsive "amen" from the listeners (Rom. 15:33).

16:1–27

Final Greetings

After commending Phoebe, the probable carrier of the letter, Paul requests that greetings be given to nearly thirty people in Rome, usually by name, along with those associated with them. The extended list of greetings is unique among all the letters of Paul. Some have questioned whether the list was originally part of the letter to the Romans, since Paul had never been to Rome and some surviving manuscripts of the letter do not include chapter 16. But scholars in general agree that the chapter was indeed part of the original letter. Presumably, the omission occurred as a scribal decision when the letter was copied for wider circulation to people who would not have been acquainted with those being greeted.

Interpreters have long wondered why Paul asked the believers to personally greet by name so many people he knew. Surely those named would share their positive memories of their association with him in various mission endeavors and thus lay the groundwork for supporting him in the mission to Spain after his trip to Jerusalem (15:23–24, 28). Paul also included personal greetings from eight members of the church he had founded in Corinth, where he wrote the letter. Both lists give us a glimpse of the rich and sustaining web of relationships among the believers in the early church.

16:1–2. Phoebe Our Sister. Scholars judge that Phoebe is the most likely person responsible for carrying and delivering the letter. Whether she was asked to read the letter and explain its contents is less likely, though plausible. The title *diakonon* (v. 1) indicates that she served as a deacon among the believers in Cenchrea (also Cenchreae). The Greek word *prostatis* ("benefactor," "helper"; v. 2) indicates that, as a person of some means, she provided financial support to Paul and many other believers who passed through that port city. Her spirit of generosity entitled her to assistance from the Roman believers for her needs to a degree worthy of God's holy people (v. 2). What her needs may have been and whether the purpose of her visit to Rome was to prepare for the mission to Spain remain matters of speculation.

16:3–16. Many Greetings. Paul was not directly greeting the people named but was asking the assembled saints to greet them in his absence. Most of the twenty-six names are not mentioned elsewhere in the NT. Of those that are used elsewhere, we cannot always be sure they refer to the same people. Two of those named, Aristobulus and Narcissus, may have been unbelievers owning Christian slaves (vv. 10–11). It is unlikely that all these people had immigrated to Rome and that all had met Paul in other places in the empire, though Paul's description indicates this to be the case with some.

A careful reading of the greetings gives us precious glimpses into these early believers. Obviously, Paul was not unique among believers in his use of Roman roads and the seas for travel and in his commitment to spread the gospel. Many of the names in the list were commonly given to slaves, suggesting that many of the Roman believers were either slaves or freed slaves. Paul's observation to the Corinthian believers that not many of them were influential or of noble birth (1 Cor. 1:26) could also be said of the Roman believers. The prominent role of women is evident from the fact that seven of the twelve names commended for their service were women.

In the greetings, priority and therefore special recognition is given to Priscilla and Aquila, with Paul expressing gratitude because they risked their own lives (lit. "their necks") for his life (Rom. 16:4). He does not reveal the specific nature of their intervention. A comparison of Paul's troubles in Acts with his list of ordeals in 2 Corinthians 11:24–26 reminds us that a number of dark chapters in Paul's life remain unknown to us. As fellow workers with Paul, Priscilla and Aquila shared his evangelistic mission and outlook. The gratitude from all the churches of the Gentiles (Rom. 16:4) grew out of their far-ranging ministry. Evicted from Rome with other Jews in A.D. 49, they first met Paul in Corinth. He stayed with them for eighteen months, working alongside them as tentmakers (Acts 18:1–3, 11). They accompanied Paul to Ephesus, where in his absence they gave the eloquent Apollos a thorough grounding in "the way of God" and hosted a church in their home (Acts 18:24–28; 1 Cor. 16:19). By the time of Paul's writing, they had returned to Rome, where they again provided leadership. The unusual placement of Priscilla's name ahead of her husband's implies a primacy of some sort, whether of social standing or of prominence in ministry.

Paul was sending greetings to the church in Priscilla and Aquila's house (Rom. 16:5); their home was characteristically a home church (see 1 Cor. 16:19). Based on the clustering of names in the greetings, there is evidence for five or more groups of believers. Where these others met for worship remains uncertain, though it is unlikely that all were able to gather in the home of Priscilla and Aquila.

Epaenetus (Rom. 16:5; lit. "praiseworthy") was the *aparchē* (lit. "firstfruits"), the first convert in the Roman province of Asia (sometimes translated as "Achaia"), now known as western Greece on the Peloponnese peninsula (see Acts 18:12–18). Presumably, Epaenetus had become a believer as a result of the efforts of Priscilla and Aquila and joined them on their return to Rome. (On the significance of the firstfruits offering to God, see Rom. 11:16; Deut. 18:4; Ezek. 44:30.)

Adronicus and Junia are commended as people of note, or outstanding among the apostles (Rom. 16:7). Whether Paul identified both of them as apostles is a matter of debate but is highly probable. The title "apostle" was not limited to the original twelve. Barnabas, Paul's fellow worker, was also described as an apostle (Acts 14:14; cf. 2 Cor. 11:13). Matthias replaced Judas (Acts 1:26), and Paul calls himself the least of the apostles (1 Cor. 15:9). Perhaps Paul uses the term "apostle" in recognition of their ministry and the fact that they had been followers of Christ before him.

The name Junia has been found in more than 250 inscriptions as a proper Latin name for a woman, while the male form is unattested. The weight of evidence points in favor of understanding these two Jews, who suffered imprisonment along with Paul, to be a husband-and-wife team, like Priscilla and Aquila, committed to evangelism. Paul sent greetings to Rufus and his unnamed mother, who in some sense cared for Paul (Rom. 16:13). This mothering, as Paul affectionately terms it, would have taken place before the mother and son arrived in Rome. Much has been made of the name shared by Rufus, son of Simon of Cyrene, who carried Jesus's cross (Mark 15:21), and this recipient of Paul's greeting. The unusual mention of the names of two sons, Alexander and Rufus, when their father's deed is pointed out by the writer of Mark, suggests that the original readers knew them. This, combined with the early tradition that the Gospel of Mark was written for a Roman audience, gives support to the view that Paul was greeting the son of the man who carried Jesus's cross.

Finally, after naming people he knew or knew about, Paul urged his Roman hearers to greet one another with a holy kiss (Rom. 16:16). This was a recommendation of Paul elsewhere in two of his troubled churches (1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12; 1 Thess. 5:26; cf. 1 Pet. 5:14). The kiss was acceptable between family members of the same gender (Gen. 27:26; Ruth 1:9; Luke 15:20). The elders from Ephesus, recognizing they might never see Paul again, wept and kissed him farewell (Acts 20:37). The family language variously rendered as "brethren" or "brothers and sisters" appears throughout the letter (Rom. 1:13; 7:1; 15:14–15, 30; "sister," 16:1, 15). Paul shared with Christians in Rome and elsewhere the awareness that their common bond in Christ had created a new kinship that would endure for eternity. The holy kiss between the members of the Christian family (v. 16) would fulfill the earlier instruction to show familial love and devotion to each other (12:10).

16:17–20. Warnings against Predators. Paul here reminded his hearers that they needed to avoid some people who were causing division and hindrances (v. 17). At first glance, this section appears to be an interruption of, if not an intrusion into, the flow of thought with a change of tone. But we find similar warnings throughout the NT against unlimited hospitality and reciprocity (e.g., 2 John 10–11) and false prophets (Matt. 7:15–20). Paul provided several tests for discernment beyond smooth talking and flattering words (Rom. 16:18). Did the smooth talkers uphold the gospel that the believers—whose obedience had become widely known (v. 19)—had already embraced? Were the fruits of their ministry peace and the building up of the believers, or did their influence threaten the unity they were enjoying in Christ? Was their influence used to serve their own cravings to fulfill selfish or even sensual ends? These three standards remain useful to the present day. Whether Paul had any specific group in mind when speaking of *skandala* ("causes of stumbling," "offenses," "traps," "hindrances") in v. 17 is pure speculation.

Paul warns against deceivers of the *akakōn*, a word variously rendered as "simple," "innocent," "naive," or "unsuspecting." In v. 19, he admonishes all to be *akeraious* (a related word; "innocent" or "pure," lit. "unmixed") in regard to evil. Eve accepted Satan's offer of the knowledge of good and evil with disastrous results (Gen. 3:4–6). To be wise concerning what is good is to possess a deep yet practical understanding of what is good, and this would be the best preparation for detecting what is counterfeit.

Satan is the ultimate source of dissension and the disseminator of discord (Rom. 16:17). The image of crushing Satan underfoot arises from Genesis 3:15 (see also Ps. 91:13; Is. 66:24; Mal. 4:3). Depictions of conquerors stepping on their defeated foes were characteristic of royal propaganda. But Paul was careful to modify the imagery so as to avoid misuse. Using this passage as a pretext for hunting down and killing heretics is a serious mistake. The crushing is done by God, not by believers; and the crushed is Satan, not the congregational predators. After all, Paul earlier urged the believers to avoid any revenge or retaliation (Rom. 12:17–21). Instead, the believers were to avoid those skilled at dividing the saints and seducing the innocent. Paul's counsel becomes even more credible when one has encountered those whose toxic behavior has destroyed congregations. The destruction of Satan is to happen shortly. In the meantime, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ sustains us.

16:21–24. Greetings from Paul's Companions. Though the letter's salutation came from Paul alone, his companions added their greetings at the end, starting with Timothy, his closest coworker, whose name is found beside Paul's at the beginning of five of Paul's letters. The three kinsmen Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater (v. 21) were fellow Jews who may be identified respectively as Luke, Paul's traveling companion in Acts; Jason, Paul's host in Thessalonica (Acts 17:1–9); and Sopater from Berea, who with others accompanied Paul to Jerusalem (Acts 20:4). Tertius wrote down Paul's dictation (Rom. 16:22). His name literally means "third," pointing to his standing as a slave. But Paul allowed him to add his own greetings "in the Lord," whose gift of salvation levels the distinction between slave and free (Gal. 3:28). Gaius, in whose home Paul dictated the letter (Rom. 16:23) and who had a reputation for providing hospitality for the whole church, would later accompany Paul on the journey to Jerusalem (Acts 20:4).

Including the greeting from Erastus, a well-placed citizen who openly embraced the Christian faith, imparts a sense of respectability to Paul's mission. An inscription has been recovered from the site of ancient Corinth honoring a certain Erastus, whose administrative post was comparable to the title used by Paul: *oikonomos* (variously translated "treasurer," "director of public works," "chamberlain") of the city (Rom. 16:23). Paul's fellow Christian was most likely the same wealthy freedman and Roman citizen.

16:25–27. Doxology. As the opening words of the letter signal the important matters to be addressed, the closing words remind us of the essential truths covered in the letter. The doxology is addressed to Him "who is able to establish you" (v. 25; cf. 1:11). The assurance of Paul's gospel message (16:25; cf. 1:15–16) offers salvation to sinners apart from human effort. Thus, the fear of the coming wrath has been replaced by a confidence in both God's ability and His disposition to preserve struggling believers. The gospel came as a revelation of the mystery (16:25; cf. Col. 1:26, 27) but in hindsight can be seen to have been foretold in prophetic writings of the Scriptures (Rom. 16:26; cf. 1:2). Paul's commission to bring all nations to an obedience related to faith (16:26) first emerged in Paul's opening salutation (1:5). All peoples, Jews and Gentiles, are summoned to entrust themselves to Jesus, through whom God is glorified forever (16:27). This doxology sums up the aim of Paul's ministry and the standard of conduct for every believer (cf. 11:36; Matt. 5:16; 1 Cor. 10:31).

Paul has taken his readers through the way of salvation offered to us by Christ, who found us in a state of hopelessness and offered us a hope that is solidly rooted in His sacrificial death. It is through Him that we are by faith justified before God and empowered to live the Christian life in total peace with God. The future that Christ has offered us in the present is accessible only through hope. It consists of the future manifestation of the glory of God, when humans and creation itself will be rescued from decaying bondage and ushered into the glorious freedom of the children of God (Rom. 8:21).

1 CORINTHIANS

INTRODUCTION

Title and Authorship. Like all of Paul's Epistles, this letter to the believers in the city of Corinth did not originally have a title attached to it. As Paul's letters began to be copied and shared with other congregations, titles were added to help separate and distinguish one text from another in the larger collection of Paul's letters. "To the Corinthians A" is the title found in the oldest extant manuscript of the epistle. Based on the information in the opening salutation, later scribes identified Paul as the author, with some describing him further as an "apostle" and/or as "holy." Over the centuries, other scribes added further descriptions, even including in the subscript their thoughts on where they believed the letter had been written, often Ephesus, with others erroneously suggesting Philippi. While there is some variety among the titles, all the manuscripts identify this epistle as either "Corinthians A" or "First Corinthians," indicating that this was not the only epistle that Paul wrote to the Corinthians.

Few scholars dispute the fact that Paul wrote 1 Corinthians. He identifies himself as the author in the opening verses of the letter along with Sosthenes, a ministerial colleague. Sosthenes is likely mentioned because he was known to the Corinthians and may have helped Paul in some way with the letter as a scribe. Whatever the case, throughout the letter Paul clearly reveals his role as the primary writer. While confronting some of the problems the Corinthians faced, he refers to his specific actions among them (1 Cor. 1:13–15). He even refers to himself as the one addressing them in the letter (4:14).

Date. Paul appears to have written 1 Corinthians around A.D. 55 while residing in the city of Ephesus during his third missionary journey. After founding the church in Corinth during his second missionary journey, Paul left the city to return to Antioch in Syria (Acts 18:1–11, 18). A brief, but positive, stop in Ephesus along the way prompted him to return to Ephesus (Acts 18:19–21). It was during that time that news reached Paul regarding some challenges facing the church in Corinth. First Corinthians was written in response to those problems. At the end of the letter, Paul revealed his circumstances at the time of his writing by telling the Corinthians that his plans at the moment were to stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, because a significant door for effective work was open and there were many who opposed him (1 Cor. 16:8–9).

Backgrounds. The city of Corinth known to Paul was not the fabled city-state of Greek history, but the city that Julius Caesar refounded as a Roman colony in 44 B.C. The armies of Rome destroyed the earlier city in 146 B.C., and it was abandoned for more than a hundred years. Due to its strategic location on the narrow land bridge connecting mainland Greece with the Peloponnese peninsula, it did not take long for Roman Corinth to quickly reestablish itself as a major center of trade in the ancient Mediterranean. It not only controlled the trade routes running north and south, but with two harbors—the port of Cenchreae in the east and Lechaeum in the west—it also controlled the east-west trade route connecting the Aegean and Ionian Seas. Rather than risk transporting their cargo around the notoriously dangerous southern tip of the Peloponnesus, merchants preferred to pay the necessary costs to transfer their goods from one port to another in Corinth instead.

The opportunity of financial prosperity, and with it the possibility of upward social mobility, attracted all sorts and nationalities of people to Corinth. It quickly became a diverse melting pot of retired veterans, Romans, Greeks, artisans, freedmen, slaves, and even a large number of Jews. By the time Paul visited the city, the population had grown to around a hundred thousand people, making it one of the larger and more important cities in the Roman Empire.

The economic revival of the city brought other benefits that increased its significance even more. Rome rewarded the city by designating it the capital of the province of Achaea. This made Corinth important politically. It also meant that the Roman governor and his attendants would reside in the city. The Isthmian Games, the Panhellenic athletic festival second only to the Olympics in importance, also returned to Corinth. These games, which were held once every two years, attracted large crowds of foreigners and generated yet another source of revenue for the city.

As a relatively new city, Corinth was far more welcoming of the presence of foreigners and open to new ideas than most of the much older tradition-conscious cities across the Mediterranean. This made Corinth a promising location for the message of the risen Christ to find a receptive audience among the city's population, as is evident in Paul's evangelistic work in the city. At the same time, however, the openness to diversity in Corinth also had its challenges for the work of the gospel. It meant that some of the Gentiles who had come to faith in Christ in Corinth might have also been more open and accepting of other ideas and practices that were not in harmony with the gospel. It is evident in Paul's correspondence with the Corinthians that he experienced both of these circumstances during his ministry in Corinth.

According to the book of Acts, Paul first visited Corinth during his second missionary journey (Acts 18:1–18). Rather than traveling with Barnabas, this time Paul was accompanied by Silas as they revisited the churches which Paul had founded on his previous journey. Timothy joined the missionary team in Lystra, and Luke appears to have done the same in Troas. After responding to a vision urging him to come to Macedonia, Paul and his colleagues traveled to Philippi and Thessalonica, where they founded churches. Due to difficulties that arose in response to his evangelistic efforts, Paul ultimately was forced to leave both of these cities. After brief stays in Berea and Athens, he finally arrived in the city of Corinth.

On arriving in Corinth, Paul met Aquila and Priscilla, a Jewish couple who had themselves just recently arrived in the city from Rome because of a decree issued by Emperor Claudius in A.D. 49. The decree had banished all Jews from the capital. Aquila and Priscilla were tentmakers by trade and had set up a shop in the city. Since Paul was of the same trade, he ended up staying and working with them (Acts 18:1–3). During this time, Paul attended the synagogue and powerfully proclaimed that Jesus was the promised Messiah/Christ (Acts 18:4–5). While some accepted his message, other Jews rose up in strong opposition. In response, Paul turned to the Gentiles and many Corinthians believed and were baptized.

Hoping to end Paul's evangelistic efforts, local Jews attempted to bring legal charges against Paul before the governor, a man named Gallio. Ancient records indicate that Gallio, who was the younger brother of the famous Roman Stoic philosopher Seneca, held this position from July A.D. 51 to July A.D. 52. This indicates that Paul would have been in Corinth during that time. The charges leveled against Paul likely occurred in the early stages of Gallio's proconsulship. Much to the chagrin of the Jews, however, Gallio dismissed the case. It appeared to him to be merely a religious dispute among Jews with no bearing on Roman civil law (Acts 18:12–16). Paul ended up spending eighteen months in the city (Acts 18:11) before ultimately heading back to Antioch in Syria. Since he stayed on for many days after his acquittal, he may have left in the spring of A.D. 52 (Acts 18:18).

On his way to Syria, Paul briefly stopped in Ephesus. Since the initial response of the Jews to the gospel message was positive, Paul promised to return once he settled his business in Syria (Acts 18:19–21). True to this word, he returned to the city during this third missionary journey. The opportunity in Ephesus was apparently so promising that Paul remained there for nearly three years, until A.D. 55 (Acts 19:8, 10; 20:31).

Several problems had arisen among the believers in Corinth during Paul's absence. Although it is uncertain how Paul first learned of these problems, it is clear that he responded by writing them a letter. Paul refers to this earlier letter in 1 Corinthians 5:9, but unfortunately it no longer exists. Sometime after that, Paul received a report from a group of individuals identified as people associated with Chloe (1:11). Some commentators and translators take this as a reference to Chloe's household, while others refer to them more generically as "Chloe's people." The Greek simply has a genitive article followed by Chloe's name. They had apparently traveled to Ephesus on business in her behalf. They informed Paul that during his absence dissension had arisen among the believers and a spirit of factionalism was undermining the church (1:12–15; 11:18). At about that same time, three official delegates from the church also arrived in Ephesus sharing their own perspective on the situation in Corinth (16:17–18). They also brought a letter from the church asking for Paul's advice on several issues (cf. 7:1). It is in response to these circumstances that Paul wrote a second letter to the Corinthians, the letter now known as 1 Corinthians. For a fuller discussion of Paul's correspondence with the Corinthians, see 2 Corinthians: Introduction.

Theology and Purpose. In 1 Corinthians we learn about the experience of a community of Christian believers living in a Roman pagan city under the influence of its idolatry, immorality, and a deep interest in human wisdom. As we examine the letter, it becomes clear that Paul's primary interest was on instructing believers how to live the Christian life in such a setting. The emphasis throughout the letter is on the biblical understanding of the church of Christ. It is the body of Christ, a spiritual community united in love to the Lord and to each other, grounded in the work of God, Christ, and the Spirit.

1. *The Church and the Trinity.* The church is the result of the saving activity of God and is His most valuable possession on earth (2:7). It is the result of the wisdom of God brought to fruition through the work of the Father and the crucified Christ (1:18–25), and it is revealed to believers through the work of the Spirit (2:10). The divine plan included the redemption of humanity through Christ, our Passover who was sacrificed (5:7; cf. 6:20; 7:23) and "died for our sins" (15:3). The natural human inability to grasp and understand the wisdom or mystery of God in Christ is overcome through the Spirit of God (2:12).

Those who believe constitute the church of Christ or the body of Christ and they are washed, sanctified, and justified in "the name of the Lord Jesus" and "by the Spirit of our God" (6:11)—the three members of the Godhead are personally and directly involved in the salvation of sinners. The church is the result of the majestic work of God through Christ and the effective work of the Spirit in the human heart. It is the depository of the wisdom of God. The members of Christ's body have been joined together through the work of the Father, the Messiah, and the Spirit who gives gifts that contribute to the building up of the church. Any attempt to damage the church is considered a frontal attack on God (3:16–17).

2. *Unity of the Church.* The unity of the church sets it apart as a unique phenomenon from God in a society characterized by a host of contradictory expressions of human wisdom and false gods—an ideological market of confusion and darkness. The church is a body within which ethnic, social, and gender superiority is overcome through the work of the Father, Christ, and the Spirit. In order to preserve such oneness, vigilance and constant instruction are required. In 1 Corinthians, Paul addresses some of the main threats to the unity of the church, providing the guidance needed as we face similar challenges today.

At the heart of the unity of the church is the message of the cross of Christ. For Paul, this was so important that he unequivocally stated that Jesus Christ crucified was the all-pervasive focus of his message (2:2). This message went against the thought of a pagan society and was considered foolishness by the Greeks and a stumbling block by the Jews. And yet it puts to shame human wisdom (1:21–25). Human wisdom is unable to know the true God (1:21); it only fills humans with pride and arrogance and is consequently unable to free them from their existential predicament. If such a way of thinking comes into the church, as it did among some of the Corinthians, it will cause divisions and contentions that damage the unit of the church.

If the cross of Christ is at the center of the life of the church, division and contention are out of place. Yet, in Corinth some were claiming to have been so impressed by the wisdom of some of their preachers and instructors that they created loyalty clans (1:12). In this exaltation of individuals and their human skills, Paul saw the inroad of human wisdom within the church threatening the oneness of Christ and His church. Paul emphatically stated that the role of the preachers of the gospel is to be servants of Christ and His church (4:1–3). All are baptized in the name of Jesus and they all belong to Him (1:13). Jesus shamed human wisdom by revealing to the world that God used humility, the weakness of the cross, and not pride and arrogance as the means of redeeming humans from the plight of sin (1:16–21). What human wisdom could not accomplish, the humbleness of divine wisdom accomplished for all. This divine achievement is now visible in the oneness of the church and in the hope of the resurrection, which was also being questioned by some of the Corinthians (15:12).

The church is united in the worship of the one God. This monotheistic understanding of God makes it possible for believers to place their absolute loyalty in the only true God without having to be concerned about pleasing the multiplicity of pagan deities. The result is spiritual peace through Christ. The Corinthians believed in the one Christian God (8:4–6), and because of this some were willing to eat meat offered to idols—gods who did not exist—in pagan temples (8:10). In doing this they were exposing themselves to demonic powers that were active behind the mask of false gods (10:20). Fellowship with demons, directly or indirectly (through loyalty to the spirits of the ancestors or to exposure to the occult or spiritualism) is incompatible with the church's fellowship with the risen Lord (cf. 10:20–21). It could pull believers apart, even resulting in their abandoning the Lord.

But God is to be worshiped in a way that builds up the church. Paul used, as an example, the worship service that expresses in a unique way the union of the church with the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ, namely, the Lord's Supper (11:23–26). This is a memorial of the death of Christ on our behalf, a most sacred moment. It points back to the oneness made possible through the cross of Christ and also to the future coming of Christ that will perpetuate forever a union with Him and with all the redeemed ones. Yet, for some of the Corinthians, this was a moment of gluttony and disdain toward the less fortunate members of the church (11:17–22). Instead of being a time for expressing unity and love toward God and each other, the Lord's Supper was pulling believers apart because they were partaking of the food in the way it was done at some pagan meals. Worship must bring honor to God and express the unity of the church. The principles that Paul used and promoted are propriety and order (14:40).

Worship should also be done in a way that respects Christian values and does not damage the reputation of the church in its cultural setting. The role of women in the worship service is something that was important for Paul. He established that when praying and prophesying in church they should do it in a proper way. In such cases, it was important for women to cover their heads (11:2–16) in order to show respect to their husbands and thus protect the reputation of the church in the pagan environment. Paul also addressed controversies during worship, requesting different groups to be quiet (14:28, 32), including women who were apparently involved in controversial issues (14:34–35). The church should be a place where God is glorified and believers show their submission and gratitude to Him as Savior and Lord. The oneness in Christ and His message should unite them in true worship. At the heart of that worship is the cross of Christ (2:2).

The church is united by the power of the Spirit that sanctifies it. Immorality within the community of believers breaks its union with the Lord and brings it into oneness with the world. Wrong theology can lead to immoral behavior (cf. 5:1–2). Some of the Corinthians appear to have accepted the pagan idea that the body, being composed of matter, is by nature evil and irredeemable. Therefore, whatever was done with it could not damage the spiritual dimension of the person. The exalted spiritual condition of the person transcended the body and could not be damaged by its actions. Not so according to the Scriptures. The body, created by God, is good and will experience redemption through Christ (cf. Rom. 8:23). Though it dies, it will be resurrected and transformed at the Second Coming of Christ and will be free from its corruptibility and mortality (15:52–53). It is the whole person in spirit, mind, and body that is united to Christ through baptism. Consequently, Paul said that believers were to glorify God in their bodies (6:20). The holiness of the church is grounded in the work and power of the Spirit who dwells in each believer (6:19) and in the church as the temple of God (3:16–17). He constitutes it in the body of Christ.

Holiness of life is compatible with a Christian marriage. Paul's instructions about marriage are to some extent connected with his concern for holiness in the church (chap. 7). Human sexuality is to be satisfied within the boundaries of the holiness of a Christian marriage and not with prostitutes (7:20). The body of the wife is under the authority of the husband and that of the husband under the authority of the wife (7:4). The couple submits to each other in love and respect; they have equal rights. This particular insight went against pagan practices. The immorality of the pagan world, tolerated by some believers at Corinth, was incompatible with the holiness of a church joined by faith and love with Christ (6:15–17). This is so important that Paul required the church to act immediately against those members living immoral lives (5:3–5).

The unity of the church is also based on submission to Christ. Before conversion, believers were enslaved to sin, living in the way pagans lived (6:9–10). But now they had become the property of God, had been delivered from the power of sin, and were living in submission to Christ. The use of the new freedom in Christ was a matter of serious concern for Paul. Some of the Corinthians were misusing their freedom to achieve their own personal interests. There was little concern for how their conduct was

impacting those who disagreed with them on, for instance, the matter of eating meat sacrificed to idols (8:9). Paul called them to control themselves for the good of others. Christians are to be oriented toward the well-being of others, even if this requires abstaining from something that they feel is their right to do (8:11–13; cf. 6:7). Paul illustrated his argument with his personal practice of abstaining from his right to receive financial benefits for his work as an apostle. He did not want people to accuse him of abusing his authority in the gospel (9:15–18). What people do can help or damage others. Consequently, we should be vigilant in all we do. Otherwise, we may be controlled by our selfish hearts. In order to assist the Corinthians in overcoming selfishness, Paul invited them to participate in the collection for the poor in the church in Jerusalem (16:1–4).

The foundation of this type of behavior—undivided concern for the goodness of others—is the love of God. Paul had much to say about love (chap. 13). According to him, *anything* we do detached from God's love is simply useless noise—a wasted and truly unproductive action (13:1, 3). Human wisdom or knowledge inflates pride (lit. "puffs up"), but love edifies (lit. "builds up"; 8:1); it creates the context within which all can work together as one to edify the church. In fact, the proper use of Christian freedom finds its true expression in love (13:5); toward the end of his letter, Paul returns to the role of love in the Christian life (16:14).

The gifts of the Spirit contribute to the unity of the church (12:4). The Spirit distributes the gifts in order to build up the church; that is to say, gifts are given to each church member for the benefit of the community of believers (12:7–11). These are not private gifts given for the exclusive benefit of the person. The diversity of the gifts shows the complexity of the church and its multiple needs (cf. 12:4–11); nevertheless, the many members who receive the gifts constitute one body (12:20). They all need each other and are to be at the service of others. Believers, gifted by the Spirit, constitute the "body of Christ" (12:27). The metaphor expresses the deep unity that exists between believers and Christ and serves to identify the church as the place in which Christ is particularly active through the presence and influence of the Spirit of God.

The misuse of gifts can result in division and conflict within the church. Some of the Corinthians believed that the most important gifts were the gifts of tongues and prophecy, but they assigned to tongues a higher spiritual significance. They thought that to have this gift meant to enjoy a higher spiritual experience than the rest of the believers, and thus they were becoming filled with pride. They also assigned the gift a predominant role during worship, and this was transforming the worship act into an unintelligible, noisy, and disorderly activity (14:6–12). They had privatized the gift and used it for their own glorification. It was no longer building up the church. For Paul, the purpose of any gift was to edify the church and consequently he rejected the misuse of the gift by the Corinthians and gave priority to the gift of intelligible and church-edifying prophecy (14:4–5). The basic theological concept is that of proper order during the worship service and the orderly use of the gifts to edify the church. Any gift of the Spirit that is used to exalt the person is a misuse of it and damages the unity of the church. Through the gifts, the Spirit uses us for the glory of God and the benefit of the church.

3. *Hope and Christ.* The Christian hope plays a central role in 1 Corinthians and, as in the rest of the NT, it is directly related to the work of Jesus. It is an indissoluble part of the gospel that Paul was preaching to the Corinthians. He specified that what he was delivering to them was what he had received, namely, that Christ had died for their sins, was buried, and was raised up on the third day (15:3–4). To this we should add the promise of Christ's Second Coming, kept fresh in the minds of believers by their participation in the Lord's Supper (11:26) and for which they are eagerly waiting (1:7). This hope defines the nature of the church as the body of believers living in expectation of the coming of Christ. Paul emphasizes in 1 Corinthians the resurrection of Christ and of those who died while waiting for Him. In fact, the hope of the resurrection from the dead is dependent on the resurrection of Jesus. Paul states that as God raised up the Lord from the dead, so He will also raise us up through His power (6:14).

For some reason, a group of believers at Corinth concluded that there would not be a resurrection of the dead (15:12; see commentary on 1 Cor. 15:1–58). They believed that the resurrection of Christ was enough for them. For Paul the death of Jesus and His resurrection were necessary, even indispensable, in order for Christians to be resurrected. Therefore, to believe that there is no resurrection of the dead means in fact that Christ would not have had to die and be resurrected. We cannot have one without the other. It is there that our hope is located; for if Christ did not come back to life, then the Christian faith is futile and we are still under the power of sin and without hope in this world (15:13–19). Christ was the "firstfruits" of the resurrection, and at the Second Coming those who belong to Him will experience the resurrection (15:23). The wicked will be resurrected at the end, after the Millennium, for the final judgment. Paul expressed his belief that Christians will judge the world and fallen angels and used this eschatological expectation to oppose Christians taking other believers to secular courts (6:1–6).

For Paul, the resurrection is the moment when death itself will be permanently defeated and God's people will be finally delivered from its power (15:54–55). The resurrected ones as well as the faithful ones alive at the Second Coming will both be transformed. Their new real bodies will be free from mortality and from the corruption of a sinful human nature (15:52–53). Meanwhile, the church exists on earth as the community of the forgiven ones, moving forward while proclaiming the gospel of salvation and looking at the horizon in anticipation of the realization of their hope in Christ.

COMMENTARY

1:1–9

Introduction

Paul showed a mastery of both Greek and Jewish customs by utilizing and amending the standard Greek epistle format to include not only a theologically packed greeting (1:1–3) but also a profound statement of thanksgiving for the difficult Corinthian congregation (vv. 4–9). The introduction alludes to the problems that Paul intended to address, and the level of restraint and goodwill with which he expressed himself is a testament to his commitment to the gospel message of peace.

1:1–3. Greeting. Paul opens with the assertion that he was an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God (1:1). In stating his apostolic credentials, Paul was making it clear to the Corinthians that he was writing to them as one who bore the authority of God (cf. 14:37–38). He was called to spread the gospel and establish churches. Sosthenes is also mentioned as the co-sender of the letter. As already noted, Sosthenes's role in the letter was limited at most to some sort of scribal activity, perhaps as Paul's amanuensis (cf. Rom. 16:22). He was most likely mentioned because he was known to the Corinthians; otherwise Paul would not have identified him only as "our brother" (1 Cor. 1:1). Sosthenes may be the same person mentioned in Acts 18:17. If so, he would have become a Christian sometime after that event.

In referring to the Corinthian church as "the church of God" (1 Cor. 1:2), Paul may have been intimating that the church did not belong to any local leader—neither to its wealthy patrons nor to those members who had a variety of gifts and considered themselves spiritually superior. Instead, he suggested that the church belonged to the larger network of believers in all places. This reflects Paul's concerted effort to remind the Corinthians of their affiliation not only with him but with the universal body of Christ. Paul further emphasized his point with reference to believers everywhere who call on the name of Jesus—He is Lord of all believers (v. 2). Paul's call to holiness applies to everyone who calls on the name of the Lord (Joel 2:32; cf. Ps. 99:6; Acts 2:21; Rom. 10:13)—a call that will be repeated in 1 Corinthians 6:9–11. He concludes his greeting with the blessing of grace and peace from "God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (1:3). The blessing points to the saving grace of God that through faith in Christ reconciles believers with God. These gifts flow from God and are not the result of human achievements.

1:4–9. Thanksgiving for God's Grace. Although Paul was anxious to address the problems undermining the gospel in Corinth, he first paused to give thanks to God for the grace He had given to the Corinthians through Christ. It is remarkable that Paul includes in his thanksgiving the gifts of speech or utterance (Gr. *logos*) and knowledge with which they had been enriched. As will become clear later in the letter, it is the abuse of these two gifts that was part of the problem in Corinth (cf. 1:17–18; 2:1–4; 13:1—14:25). In thanking God for these gifts, Paul makes it clear that the problem was not the gifts themselves but the attitude of the Corinthians toward them. He addresses the proper attitude and use of these gifts later in the letter.

Although the Corinthians were enriched with these gifts, Paul subtly reminded them that they had not yet arrived since they still were eagerly waiting for the Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed (1:7). The "revelation" (*apokalypsis*) of which Paul speaks is the hope of the Second Coming. Waiting for the coming of the Lord in a world still suffering under the power of sin is not easy. The Corinthians did not need to despair, however. They could rest in the fact that Christ would confirm or establish them in the end (1:30; 6:11; cf. Rom. 3:21–26; 5:17–21) so that they would be blameless in the day of the Lord (1 Cor. 1:8). The certainty of this hope was not rooted in the spiritual condition of the Corinthians; they were anything but blameless in their own experience. It was based solely on the fact that God is faithful to His covenant promises. And He had called them into the fellowship of His Son (v. 9).

1:10—4:21

Division and Dissension in the Church

News that the Corinthians had aligned themselves with certain spiritual leaders, who they were exalting over and against others, made it clear to Paul that the believers in Corinth had forgotten the centrality of Jesus. He was warning them that their behavior was undermining the very gospel they claimed to follow and the unity of the church. Paul begins with a call to unity (1:10–17) centered on the cross of Christ and not on human wisdom (vv. 18–31). He argues that unity is centered in the message of Jesus (2:1–9) and on His revelation through the Spirit of wisdom (vv. 10–16). Division in the church demonstrates a spiritual immaturity (3:1–9) that makes it almost impossible for believers to work together to build up the temple of God (vv. 10–17). Part of the problem with dissensions is a wrong self-perception that leads to pride. Instead, the Corinthians were to see themselves as servants of God and of His church (3:18—4:5). In fact, they were to be willing to see themselves as fools for Christ (4:6–13). Paul closes his discussion on the unity of the church with a call to imitate him as a servant of God and His church (4:14–21).

1:10–17. Paul's Exhortation for Unity. Paul begins his discussion on the unity of the church by avoiding authoritarian language. He appeals to his readers and exhorts them to agree with each other in their speaking (lit. "speak the same"; v. 10a). Since the church is connected as the body of Christ, there should be no divisions (Gr. *schisma*) among them (1:10b; cf. v. 12). The word *schisma*, often used to describe a rift or tear to be mended, indicates that these problems could cause separation within a once-healthy congregation. The picture is that of a body being torn limb from limb and destroyed (cf. chap. 12).

The reason for Paul's concern was the report he had received from people associated with Chloe that there were rivalries among them (1:11). Although Chloe was a woman well known to the Corinthians, we know little about her since she is mentioned only here. While the exact nature of the situation is unknown to us, it appears that instead of being united together, the believers in Corinth were divided into various opposing groups, each attached to the wisdom of their favorite teacher. Some claimed to be followers of Paul, others of Apollos or of Cephas (the Aramaic form of the name Peter), and others of Christ (v. 12). This does not necessarily mean that Paul, Peter, and Apollos were in doctrinal conflict—otherwise, Paul would have rebuked them for it—but rather that their would-be "followers" were. These factions appear to not only have had disagreements but also to have fallen into childish or immature rivalries trying to increase their own prestige and power at the expense of others in the congregation (cf. 4:6). Paul was rebuking this partisan mentality as complete foolishness, including those who championed his name. It was reflecting the wisdom of the world, and it had no place among God's people.

To illustrate the foolishness of their partisan spirit, Paul asked the Corinthians three rhetorical questions (1:13). The first question is the most difficult to understand: Is Christ divided? It could mean, "Has Christ been divided up into bits and pieces?" If so, then Christ would no longer be the One holding the church together. Or, since one of the groups appears to have designated themselves as the "Christ party," it may have the meaning "to apportion out": "Has Christ been apportioned out so He belongs to only one group?" Whatever sense Paul had in mind, his obvious answer was an emphatic no. Christ is not divided and neither should the church be divided.

Paul next asks his readers if he was crucified for them, or if they were baptized in his name (v. 13). Of course not! Paul was arguing that he was not the leader of any particular group, because the Corinthians were united to Christ through baptism and not to him. The Corinthians were overlooking the very foundation of the message of the gospel itself—the centrality of the cross of Christ. No other person could accomplish what Christ did in our behalf at Calvary.

Even those who were baptized by Paul were not to boast. In fact, he expresses thankfulness that he did not baptize many in Corinth (v. 14). Paul was not disparaging the rite of baptism itself (cf. Rom. 6:3–4; Gal. 3:27), but he was using the fact that he baptized so few in Corinth to show that he was not seeking to bind people to himself, but to Christ. He did baptize a few individuals in Corinth, specifically Crispus and Gaius (v. 14). Crispus was likely the ruler of the synagogue in Corinth who quickly became a follower of Christ (Acts 18:8). Since Paul identified Gaius as his host in Corinth (Rom. 16:23), it is possible that he was to be identified with another early convert, Titius Justus, a worshiper of God also mentioned as Paul's host in Corinth (Acts 18:7). His full Roman name would have been Gaius Titius Justus. Then Paul remembered that he had also baptized the household of Stephanas (1 Cor. 1:16; see 16:15, 17). None of them were baptized in Paul's name but in Christ's.

The apostle's primary function was to preach the gospel in such a way that its saving power would be revealed to the audience. Merely human wisdom makes the gospel ineffective. When the Corinthians had emphasized the wisdom of a particular preacher and had aligned themselves with one of them, they had lost sight of the gospel itself. Mere human eloquence may attract a crowd and cause people to admire the abilities of the speaker, but exalting this feature makes the cross of Christ void of its power (1:17). Genuine gospel preaching does not exalt the preacher; it exalts Christ.

1:18–31. The Cross and Human Wisdom. Paul strengthened the contrast between the message of the cross and the wisdom of the world. In Roman culture, the notion of crucifixion was deplorable, and coupled with the strict separation of divine and human realms in Greco-Roman thinking, the idea of the God-man Jesus dying on the cross was beyond comprehension; just foolishness. Paul exhorted believers to concentrate on Christ as the wisdom of God and not on human wisdom. Quoting Isaiah 29:14, he points out that God had promised to destroy the wisdom of the wise and had done so through the gospel. Paul asks a series of rhetorical questions (1 Cor. 1:20a) to show that God had confounded the most cherished ideas in the world through an act of weakness, the cross of Christ. God had demonstrated that the wisdom of the world is foolishness. After all, it was through the foolishness of the proclamation (v. 21) that the Corinthians were drawn to become followers of Christ.

Human wisdom cannot lead to a true saving knowledge of God, which is only available through the foolishness of the gospel (v. 21). While the world requires signs and wisdom, Paul boldly preached Christ crucified, who is a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles (some manuscripts and translations have "Greeks"; v. 23b). It was this point of contention for Jews and Gentiles that bridged the gap between them and made them one body. What unites people is not human wisdom but Christ crucified. To reinforce his argument, Paul reminded the Corinthians of their calling to the gospel (v. 26), emphasizing that they were not called on the basis of their wisdom or abilities but by God's loving and providential will. The gospel message defies all human expectations and logic as God uses the things which are not to negate the things that are (v. 28). Consequently, no one should glory or boast before the Lord, because everything we have comes through Jesus who is our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification/holiness, and redemption (v. 30). What matters is the wisdom of God through which we are justified, sanctified, and redeemed. Consequently, the one who boasts (or "glories") should do so in the Lord (v. 31; Jer. 9:24). Pride divides, but Christ unifies.

2:1–9. One Message: Christ. Paul condemned division in the church by reminding believers that when he came to them he did not speak to them about himself but about the crucified Lord. In fact, the persuasiveness of his message was a demonstration not of his oratorical skills but of the power of the Spirit. While Paul may not have been a master of rhetoric, his message had far more substance than any skilled speaker for he had declared to the Corinthians the *mystērion* of God (2:1b) The word *mystērion* refers to a revealed mystery that had previously been unrevealed. Here it has sometimes been translated more generically as "testimony." In either case, the content of this proclamation involved as its major focus the crucified Christ (v. 2b). Although Paul had appeared to the Corinthians in weakness, fear, and trembling (v. 3), his confidence was not in himself but in God and in the gospel message. The life and ministry of Paul testified that we should not trust in human wisdom but in the power of God (v. 5).

Paul did not eliminate the need for human reason, but merely subjected it to God. This is evident in his affirmation that he was speaking with wisdom among the mature (v. 6). The wisdom of God is not found in the different human sources of wisdom. It is a mystery (v. 7a); that is to say, it is the hidden wisdom of God or His eternal plan of salvation through His Son that is revealed to those who believe. This God has done for our glory (v. 7b). The darkness of

sin is such that none of the rulers in Christ's time (v. 8a) understood God's wisdom; otherwise, "they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (v. 8b). The title "Lord of glory" emphasizes His transcendence and preeminence over all things. To support his point, Paul offers a loose paraphrase of Isaiah 64:4, perhaps combining it with Isaiah 65:17 (1 Cor. 2:9). It is important to note that Paul does not say that God prepared all these things for those who know Him but rather those who love Him. Love is the key to unlock God's divinely prepared revelation. Paul was telling the Corinthians that what truly matters is love and not human wisdom.

2:10–16. One Revelation through the Spirit. The Spirit is mentioned six times in vv. 10–14. The wisdom of the cross, which was once hidden from humanity, is revealed by the Spirit of God, for only the Spirit understands the deep things of God (v. 10). Paul explains this through the use of an analogy. In the same way that a person's spirit is the only viable source of what is in his or her own mind (v. 11), so also only the Spirit of God knows God's plans and purposes (v. 12; notice that although the spirit of a person is in him or her, the Spirit of God is not in God because He is a different Person). The Spirit of the Lord is not the divisive spirit of the world. On the contrary, the Spirit unites around God's gift to humanity (v. 12). That revealed truth should be passed to others untouched by mere human wisdom but as it was received by us from the Spirit (v. 13). The Greek phrase used at the end of v. 13—*pneumatikois pneumatika synkrinontes*—has been rendered variously. Some translations have "comparing spiritual things with spiritual," while others specify the meaning on the basis of the context to "explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words," or alternatively, "interpreting [or explaining] spiritual truths to spiritual people." The important points to notice are that the first term (*pneumatikois*) refers to what had just been mentioned—what is taught by the Spirit—and the second term (*pneumatika*) refers to either the content of this teaching—contextually, the "words" mentioned at the beginning of the verse—or to the spiritual nature of the person being taught, the emphasis of the following verse. Both interpretations thus have contextual warrant. Due to the pursuit of worldly knowledge, humans are unable to discern truth from error, but those in Christ are able to discern the failure of human understanding with the true spiritual wisdom of God (vv. 14–15).

Paul concludes his argument by quoting Isaiah 40:13 in v. 16. No one knows the mind of the Lord so completely as to instruct Him. Paul had noted that the Spirit of God knows the mind of God, so those who have the Spirit can know what the Spirit reveals. For this reason, Paul states that we have the mind of Christ. In this verse, we have another example of the way in which the early church took texts that spoke of God and applied them to Christ. Since v. 16 is the only place in the NT where we find the phrase "the mind of Christ," the question is what exactly Paul meant by this statement. Usually this expression is related to what Paul said in Philippians 1:27 and 2:5 about humility and unity in the church. But Paul may also have been including the idea that, by possessing the mind of Christ, Christians are now equipped in some sense or in some ways to see the world as God sees it. And it is only through the cross of Christ that the depths of God's love for humanity can truly be understood. Thus, the unity of the church is established and preserved.

3:1–9. Division and Immaturity. Growing disputes within the Corinthian church undermined the effectiveness of members' ability to comprehend the cross of Christ. Their boasting and desire for power had created a mundane and worldly or carnal (Gr. *sarkinos*, "of the flesh") status among the members. The controversies within the church over human authority and the divisions among believers were indications that the believers were, spiritually speaking, still infants. They were not acting like mature adult Christians (v. 1). They had to grow to participate fully in the mystery of God. Their current condition meant that they needed to be fed milk, that is to say, baby food (v. 2). This condition of spiritual immaturity was revealed through jealousy and strife (some manuscripts add "divisions" in v. 3) and by members claiming allegiance to Paul or Apollos (vv. 3–4). When a teacher of philosophy and rhetoric, known as a sophist, arrived in a Greek city, he would announce his arrival and people would gather to hear him. If people liked the new teacher, elite families would send their sons to be his disciples. Sophists were well paid if they proved themselves to be able teachers. Apparently, the believers in Corinth understood the itinerant Christian preachers as some kind of sophists. Some preferred Apollos because his oratory and bodily presence were better than Paul's. Some rallied behind Paul because he was the first Christian teacher with whom they had come into contact.

Paul chastised the Corinthians, because in acting in this way they were acting (lit. "walking") like ordinary human beings (v. 3) rather than as followers of Christ.

Paul placed himself and Apollos in their proper roles: both servants of Christ (v. 5) involved in the same work and not in competition with each other. Paul planted, Apollos watered, but God provided the growth (v. 6). This agrarian analogy makes God the legitimate owner of the field and, therefore, the ultimate benefactor of any fruit. Paul and Apollos were mere servants (Gr. *diakonos*) planting and sustaining healthy crops in God's field. Ultimately the success of the harvest was dependent on God and not on Paul or Apollos (v. 7). The servants had to work unitedly—one planting and the other watering—and were to be rewarded accordingly. Paul then applies the illustration to the situation in Corinth (v. 9). Paul and Apollos were coworkers while the church stood as God's field or building. Paul introduces the analogy of the building as a transition to his next and preferred example of the church: the sacred or holy building. There is one field and one building.

3:10–17. The Dwelling Place of God. Paul next equates the church with a building (cf. 2 Cor. 5:1; Eph. 2:21). He asserts that as the founder of the church in Corinth, he was the one who laid the foundation (3:10) on which others had built. The foundation of the church is Jesus Christ (v. 11), and the main message of the church is the gospel of Him crucified (cf. 1:23; 2:2; 15:1–9). For this reason, Paul desired that believers take heed of how they built on that foundation. They were to evaluate their ministry to make sure that their real intentions were not merely the pursuit of power and position (3:12–13). For just as the quality of a building in the ancient world was ultimately seen in its ability to survive a fire, so also the work done in the church in the name of Christ was to be revealed by fire (v. 13), that is, the fire of divine judgment (2 Thess. 1:7; Rev. 18:8). On that day, each worker in the cause of Christ will be held accountable for his or her work. What matters is the quality of the work (cf. Matt. 7:21–22). Paul describes three types of builders. The first is the individual whose work survives because it is built with gold, silver, and costly stones—this is someone who has faithfully proclaimed the gospel. God will reward the faithful laborers for the work done (1 Cor. 3:14). The second builder is the person who builds with the inferior supplies of wood, hay, and straw (v. 12b). Although such individuals may have good intentions, their work does not focus on the matters of most importance—and therefore it will not last. This is the case of an incompetent worker, not an evildoer. God, out of His mercy, will still save this individual to His kingdom (v. 15). It is also possible to find in v. 12 a reference to a single builder, representative of some teachers in the church. Such teachers had both valuable building materials of gold, silver, and costly stones as well as areas of ignorance or mistakes represented by wood, hay, and straw. Thus, the final judgment will reveal which teachings and work were essentially good and correct and which were less valuable, incomplete, or unintentionally misleading or negligent.

What we are calling the third builder, described in v. 17, however, is an entirely different situation. It is the case of a builder who is destructive and profanes the temple of God. Paul explains the illustration: the church is God's temple and the Spirit of God dwells in it (3:16). The use of the second-person plural in Greek ("you all") indicates that Paul is referring to the entire body of Christ, the church. The church is the place where the Spirit of God dwells in a special way. Therefore, God will destroy those who destroy His temple (v. 17). Paul here is describing the fate of any church members who through dissension undermine the unity of the church. Instead of building up the church, they divide it in an attempt to create their own followers. Those who cause destruction will themselves be destroyed.

3:18—4:5. Unity and Self-Perception. The primary danger the Corinthians needed to face was that of self-deception. They believed that what they were doing was good and that they were wise. Yet in order to be wise, they needed to see themselves as foolish. On account of sin, our natural self-perception is skewed. It has to be set right by God's Spirit. Paul cites two passages from the OT to support his point: Job 5:13, which indicates that humans often get trapped in their own schemes, and Psalm 94:11, which states that God knows that the thoughts of humans are futile. To illustrate just how distorted the views of the Corinthians were regarding the various factions within the church, Paul notes that the believers in Corinth did not belong to any of the apostles. On the contrary, the apostles belonged to them. The apostles were God's gifts to minister to the needs of the church. The believers belonged only to Christ, and Christ to God (1 Cor. 3:21–23).

If the apostles were gifts from God to the church, how were the Corinthians to understand Christian leadership? Paul urged them to consider Apollos, Cephas, and himself not as mighty rulers who imposed their will on others but rather as servants of Christ and trustees of God's mysteries, which were being revealed (4:1). Both of the terms Paul uses to describe true Christian ministry involve servanthood (cf. Matt. 23:8–12; Mark 9:35; 10:42–45)—a concept foreign to the Corinthians' idea of leadership. The Greek word translated as "servants" is *hypēretēs*, and it refers to an assistant whose task was to follow the instructions of another. The Greek word *oikonomos*—"steward" or "trustee"—was used of individuals who managed the affairs of another (e.g., the manager of a household). Like an assistant, a steward also had to give an account to his master. The main quality desired of such individuals was not wisdom or eloquence but faithfulness. The same is true of Christian ministers.

Since Paul was called to be a faithful servant to the Lord Jesus, he was not worried about what the Corinthians thought of him or his ministry (1 Cor. 4:3). As an apostle, he was accountable not to them but to God alone. Moreover, the Corinthians had no right to sit in judgment of him or his ministry. The only person who could pass judgment on him was God, the One who knows everything and is able to judge all (v. 4). No one should pass judgment on others (v. 5). His admonition not to judge others is another way of avoiding the mentality that had led to the factions within the church who were interested in power and control.

4:6–13. Fools for Christ's Sake. Paul explains that the point of his discussion of the relationship between Apollos and himself had not been to criticize Apollos. The point was to make it clear that the Corinthians were not to exaggerate the importance of any teacher within their midst. They needed to realize that ministers were not working against each other but with each other, in order to lift up Christ. So, it made no sense to form cliques around church leaders. They were to learn an important principle of not going beyond what is written (v. 6), that is, what God had revealed. Paul was admonishing the congregation to remain close to the Scriptures so that they would not become conceited in their advocacy of one person against another (v. 6).

Paul equated the current power struggle within the church with arrogance and offered a set of rhetorical questions to emphasize the absurdity of the divisions (v. 7). As all members received their gifts from above, there was no room for boasting. No one was superior to another, given the wealth of divinely distributed gifts to the whole church. To undermine the misplaced boasting of the Corinthians, Paul found in their arrogance evidence of their pride in absolute spiritual achievements (v. 8). He contrasted that attitude with the experience of the apostles who, rather than reigning as kings, had been made a spectacle to the *kosmos*, which can mean "world" but here is more broadly defined because Paul mentions angels. Thus, the rendering "universe" is also appropriate in this context (v. 9). The apostles were like captured slaves paraded through the streets of Rome after a military victory and destined to die in the arena. Paul then notes the contrast with three ironic antitheses, which juxtapose the pride and notoriety of the Corinthian factions with the humility and disparaging of the apostles (v. 10).

Paul continues the contrast by describing the sacrifices the apostles had willingly endured to share God's revelations with the world (vv. 11–12a; cf. 2 Cor. 11:23–29; see "A Profile of Paul's Ministry" p. 1670). The gospel, when properly shared, will inevitably bring difficulties, but these challenges must be met in a manner consistent with Christ's methods. In the midst of the trials, Paul blessed, endured, and entreated (1 Cor. 4:12b–13a). He ends this section of reversals by demonstrating and comparing the growing disparity between the works of those promoting factions in Corinth and the ministers of Christ. Instead of seeking positions of authority or prestige, those who disseminate the mysteries of God willingly become the lowest of the low (v. 13b). They are indeed servants of God and of His church.

4:14–21. Imitate Paul in Christ. Paul had presented a series of strong reproaches, but his admonition was far from over. It was necessary that the church continue to grow in the power of Christ (cf. 1:4–9), and to achieve this goal Paul would warn the members as his cherished children (4:14). The church required not only severe language but also reminders of Paul's love for it. He reminded the believers of the difference between an instructor and a father; his concern for their welfare went beyond that of just a faithful worker; it was fatherly in nature (v. 15). As their spiritual father, Paul encouraged the Corinthians to become imitators of him (v. 16), referring to what he had just told them about his ministry and his self-perception as a servant of God and the church.

Since Paul was unable to go to the Corinthians at that time, He was sending Timothy to remind them of his way of life in Christ Jesus, that is, his lifestyle as a believer and as an apostle. While some in Corinth were continuing in their pride as though Paul would never return, he promised that, God willing, he would visit them (vv. 18–19). And then it would be clear that what really matters is not just eloquent words but power—the power that characterizes the kingdom of God, that is, God's rule over the lives of the believers (v. 20). Those who were using wisdom and words to secure their authority had no real power compared to the power of God. If they would repent of their behavior, Paul would come in a spirit of love and gentleness; but if they remained unrepentant, he would have no other recourse than to deal with the problem. The choice belonged to them (v. 21): church members either work to build up the church or receive the results of dividing it.

5:1—6:20

Immorality in the Church

Having addressed the problem with the various factions within the church, Paul next turns his attention to three issues among the believers in Corinth that were undermining their calling as Christians and tarnishing their reputation with outsiders: an incestuous relationship (5:1–13), lawsuits among believers (6:1–11), and consorting with prostitutes (6:12–20). The fact that Paul did not address the individuals involved directly but reprimanded the church as a whole suggests that he was building on his previous instruction regarding the church as a holy temple. Apparently, while boasting about their heightened state of spiritual knowledge (cf. 4:6–8; 5:6), the church members had developed a lax attitude toward morality. Their emphasis on the primacy of knowledge gave the impression that behavior was not as important. Paul condemned the immoral behavior and warned that publicly known sins should be addressed for the sake of unity. He therefore urged the church to turn away from such ungodly behavior and to pursue the holiness to which they were called.

5:1–8. Immorality and Discipline. News had reached Paul, perhaps from Chloe's people (1:11), that there was sexual immortality within the church. The Greek word Paul uses (*porneia*) is a broad term that can refer to any form of forbidden sexual intercourse. In this case, the particular offense was that a man was having sexual relations with his father's wife. The verb *echō* (lit. "has," "hold") here is a euphemism for sexual intercourse. The terminology Paul uses suggests that the woman was not the man's biological mother (cf. Lev. 20:11; Deut. 22:30; 27:20), though that hardly makes the situation better. The woman apparently was not a believer, and therefore no judgment was passed on her conduct (1 Cor. 5:12).

We do not know if the man's father was still alive or had divorced the woman. Regardless, Paul makes it clear that the relationship was illicit. The relationship was not only prohibited by Levitical law (Lev. 20:11; Deut. 22:30; 27:20), but Paul notes that even the Gentiles, who themselves tolerated all sorts of sexual behavior, found this situation repulsive. What Paul found most troubling, however, was the indifference of the church toward the situation. The willingness of the church to overlook the situation suggests that the man was likely a person of influence in the church, either through wealth or a position of leadership in the community. If he were a patron of some sort, then those indebted to him would have been hesitant to do anything. Whatever the case may have been, Paul states that the church should have mourned and made sure that this person was removed from among them (1 Cor. 5:2).

Since the church members had failed to act, Paul had to intervene. His statement about not being physically present (lit. "in body") but present in spirit does not mean that his spirit would travel to Corinth. He was merely asking them to judge the case rightly, as if he were present in their midst and in agreement with his counsel. He had judged the case as if he were actually present among them. The man's bold defiance of God's law called for immediate and drastic action. The punishment of delivering the man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh (v. 5) does not refer to the death of the individual; it is a metaphor that refers to his expulsion from the church. Since by his actions he had chosen to enter the realm of Satan, the decision of the church was to confirm his choice. He would be left to suffer the consequences of his evil actions. The action of the church, however, was not intended to be only punitive but also redemptive. Paul wanted the man to recognize where his actions had taken him—outside of the body of Christ. In turn, he hoped this decision would ultimately result in the destruction of the man's flesh, that is, his sinful inclinations. If this would occur, the man would receive the gift of salvation at the return of Jesus.

5:6–13. Do Not Associate with Corrupted Members. Paul again addresses the pride of the Corinthians (v. 6). While Jesus used a parable of leaven to teach the good influence of the kingdom (Matt. 13:33), Paul employs it here to teach the bad influence of immorality. The tolerance of immorality within the church would influence the community as leaven or yeast ferments the whole dough. Therefore, Paul instructed them to clean out the old yeast (1 Cor. 5:7). Paul was using terminology associated with the Passover to emphasize the need to purify the community (Deut. 16:4). For their purity, Christ sacrificed Himself as the Passover lamb. Only through the sacrifice of Christ could the community of faith stand as a morally pure entity. In this context, Paul's invitation to keep the feast (1 Cor. 5:8) without the old yeast of malice and wickedness was an invitation to live Christlike lives of moral purity in light of His sacrifice on our behalf, commemorated in the Communion service (which Paul discusses in chap. 11)—something that replaced Passover. Just as ancient Israel was to clean out the leaven from their homes in light of Passover, so should Christians clean out the leaven of malice and evil in light of Christ's atoning sacrifice celebrated in Communion.

In an earlier letter, which Paul had written before he wrote 1 Corinthians but which no longer exists (see 1 Corinthians: Introduction), Paul had warned the church not to associate with sexually immoral people. He here expands the list in vv. 9–11 to include other sinful behaviors (v. 11). Paul clarifies that he was not referring to those who practice these sorts of behavior outside the church. That would be absurd since in that case believers could not even live in this world (v. 10). Christians were supposed to be active in society in order to save as many as possible. When Paul instructed them not to associate with such people, he was referring to those who practiced such things within the church. They were not to associate with such people or even eat with them (v. 11).

To some modern ears, Paul's instructions may sound narrow and harsh. However, it is important to realize that eating with a person in the first century involved much more than just a shared meal. It was an event that created a social bond and symbolized the acceptance of the other person—including his or her behavior. Since the individuals Paul had in mind were those living blatantly immoral lives, he did not want anyone to conclude that their conduct was representative of what it means to be a Christian. If Christians are seen to be no different than those in the world, the entire mission of the church to reach the lost will be jeopardized.

Paul made it clear that his main concern for the church was the spiritual health of its members and not the state of affairs of the world (vv. 12–13). While the church must trust and allow God to deal with the world, it cannot overlook blatantly immoral acts committed within the church. In those cases, the church must take action. It is the task of the church to judge insiders. To support his instructions, Paul quoted the Torah (v. 13; cf. Deut. 19:19). His counsels and warnings against the defiant sinful actions of some in the church were not something that he invented. They were an application of the basic disciplinary standards in Deuteronomy that required exclusion from the community of Israel (cf. Deut. 22:21–22, 30; 13:1–5; 17:2–7; 19:16–19; 21:18–21; 24:7). Paul clearly saw continuity between the word of God that was given to guide God's people in the OT and the belief and practices of the emerging Christian church.

6:1–11. Lawsuits between Believers. The congregation not only had a problem with open sin, but growing discord had caused some within the church to file lawsuits against other members. Paul saw this action as evidence of additional division and the failure of the church to be what God intended it to be. Paul saw the Corinthians' inability to deal with their internal disputes as ironic. How could they boast about their wisdom and gifts, yet there was no one among them with the gift of wisdom and judgment? This is even more surprising in light of the fact that in the final judgment believers will judge the world and even fallen angels (vv. 2–3).

The concept of God's elect having a part in the judgment of the world was not new. Jesus also touched on this issue in connection to the prophecy of Daniel about the saints of the Most High possessing the kingdom (Dan. 7:22; Matt. 19:28; Luke 22:30; cf. Rev. 3:21; 20:4). Jesus taught that at the last day the elect will "sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matt. 19:28). Although Paul did not indicate precisely how or when Christians will be involved in the end-time judgment, in Revelation we are told that this will take place during the Millennium after the Second Coming of Christ (Rev. 20:4). Since God's followers will be involved in such great matters of eternal destiny, Paul saw no reason why the church thought itself incapable of judging even the least significant cases (1 Cor. 6:2).

Verse 4 has been understood in different ways. Some interpret the *exouthenēmenous* ("the despised ones") as referring to those outside of the church. The appointing or asking for a ruling (lit. "to sit") in this case would apply to the situation of the Corinthian Christians presenting their cases to secular courts to judge. This is unlikely because the Corinthian believers had no say in the appointment of the secular judges who would hear their cases. It makes more sense to consider the "despised ones" as those of little importance in the church, and to then read v. 4 as a command: "If then you have judgments concerning things pertaining to this life, appoint those who are least esteemed by the church to judge!" Not only does this make better sense, but it also agrees with the way Paul uses the word *exoutheneō* ("despised") elsewhere in his letters to the Corinthians. It is always used in connection to members of the church, not to outsiders (1:28; 6:4; 16:11; 2 Cor. 10:10). This would then be another example of the way God uses those in His service who are despised by the world (cf. 1 Cor. 1:28).

Paul was shocked by the situation in Corinth (6:5). He seems to be asking how it is that those who boast of being full of wisdom rely on the secular powers to resolve their internal disputes. It is not that secular courts have no role to play in human society. Paul made it clear in Romans that in criminal matters God has appointed earthly magistrates to restrain and punish evil (Rom. 13:1–5). His concern was that in turning to the courts to decide issues of civil law between fellow believers, the divisions within the Corinthian church would only become greater. The Roman legal system was quite corrupt and the wealthy always had an advantage. In such matters, the poor were always at a disadvantage.

Paul condemned the entire situation (1 Cor. 6:7). Regardless of the outcome in these sorts of internal disagreements, there is no winner; all lose spiritually. For in the process not only is the fellowship of brothers and sisters in Christ lost, but the church fails in witnessing to the secular world the transforming power of Christ in the lives of His followers. In such trivial disputes, it is better to be wronged and cheated for the cause of Christ. For in doing so, we follow the example of Jesus, who not only taught us to turn the other cheek (Matt. 5:39), but who Himself unjustly suffered wrong at the hands of others.

To impress on the Corinthians how serious it is to wrong and cheat their fellow believers (1 Cor. 6:8), Paul reminded them that their actions mattered to God (vv. 9–10). If they were to persist in their wayward behavior, they would find themselves in danger of divine judgment. Paul provides a list of the kind of people who will not be part of God's kingdom. The behaviors he describes are cases of open rebellion against God. The list includes six types of sinners who Paul had mentioned earlier (5:10–11): the sexually immoral, idolaters, covetous, drunkards, slanderers, and extortioners. He adds four more to the list. Adulterers are those involved in sex outside of marriage. The Greek word *malakos* (sometimes translated as "homosexuals") means "soft" and was used in a pejorative sense specifically to describe effeminate men, often young boys, who assumed the role of the passive partner in a male same-sex relationship. The Greek word *arsenokoitēs*, which literally means "bedders of men," describes the active partner in a homosexual relationship. The final term, *kleptēs*, is someone who steals from another (cf. "kleptomaniac").

Paul contrasts the lives of the believers before and after they accepted Jesus, demonstrating that they had more in common with each other than with the world (v. 11). In theologically rich language, he affirms the status of the believers in the kingdom of God. When they repented, they began a transforming journey. The power of the gospel washed, sanctified, and justified them. Their salvation was three-dimensional. They were washed from the filth of their former lives; they were sanctified, set apart by God for holy purposes; and they were justified, so that they might be right with God. Paul wanted believers to remember what Jesus had already done for them so they would act accordingly within the church.

6:12–20. Glorify God in Body and Spirit. Some scholars consider this section new and unrelated to the previous verses, but this is not necessarily so. This section can be read as the consequences and continuation of the mentality of some within the church who openly engaged in immoral sexual behavior as a result of a misinterpretation of their freedom in Christ. The reference to all things being lawful or permissible (6:12; 10:23) may have been a slogan of some in Corinth, or alternatively one from Paul that they may have been misusing. They argued that their spiritual freedom allowed them to do whatever they wanted with respect to sexuality. Paul contradicted this argument by pointing out the weakness of being subject to any power, because not everything is beneficial. Their supposed freedom was nothing more than slavery.

Paul quotes another slogan, again possibly used by the Corinthians to justify their sexual freedom: food(s) for the stomach and the stomach for food(s) (6:13a). They reasoned that just as it was not wrong to provide for the body's need of physical food, neither was it wrong to satisfy the body's need of sexual intimacy. Paul offered a counterargument: the body is not for the purpose of sexual immorality but rather for the Lord; and the Lord is for the body. Paul was not only challenging the premise of their argument but he was also emphasizing the deepening connection between God and the believers. When the Corinthians accepted the gospel and joined the Lord, the Lord also joined them to the point that His resurrection was assuring their resurrection (v. 14). The future did not point to death but to life. Paul's argument presents continuity between this life and the life to come. What we do with our physical bodies in this life will impact our future, and therefore we should take proper care of our bodies. Some in Corinth had adhered to a dualistic view of the body, in which the new life did not apply to the body. They believed that what they did with the body did not matter, since God would destroy it in the end. Paul pointed out, however, that the body would be resurrected, thus placing a significant value on the whole person.

What is significant here is that Paul was not pointing to any individual in particular as the body of Christ but rather was admonishing the entire Corinthian church. Their lives were intimately bonded with Jesus, and any sexual immorality would damage that connection (v. 15). Once again, in making this argument, Paul linked the present body with the future body, something he expands on in chapter 15. He left no room for licentiousness (6:16) and even connected the present life with the creative intention of God by referring to the marriage of Adam and Eve. Paul equated the acceptance of the gospel to a marriage contract and thus equated doing anything contrary to the Scriptures with spiritual adultery.

Paul concludes with an exegetical insight concerning the marriage of Adam and Eve. Their relationship was not just physical but spiritual as well; therefore, the Corinthians also were to enjoy a spiritual union with Jesus (v. 17) manifested in moral purity. To deepen the gravity of sexual sin, Paul placed it on a different level (v. 18)—sexual sin is sinning against one's own body. This may be taken literally or as referring to the church and Christ. It is likely that Paul meant both possibilities and that he saw sexual sin and the replacement of healthy intimacy as damaging both to one's physical and spiritual lives.

All of the personal pronouns in v. 19 are plural. For Paul, the singular act of sexual immorality affects the entire church body in the deepest, most intimate way possible. The Corinthian believers collectively made up the temple of the Holy Spirit; one error in this construction marred the entire structure. As a body, the church stood within a physical-spiritual marriage contract and thus was subject to God (cf. 11:3). The marriage contract between God and believers did not come cheaply, but at an infinite cost, the redeeming death of Christ (6:20). For this reason, both the physical (body) and spiritual (spirit) were to be wholly consecrated to God.

7:1–40

Questions Related to Marriage

Having addressed the reports he had heard about the church in Corinth, Paul next turns his attention in the rest of the epistle (chaps. 7–16) to a number of issues that the Corinthians apparently raised in their most recent letter to him (cf. 7:1; see 1 Corinthians: Introduction). The questions deal with a wide range of items, including marriage and divorce (chap. 7), food offered to idols (8:1—11:1), church at worship (11:1—14:40), the resurrection from the dead (chap. 15), and an offering for the believers in Jerusalem (16:1–4). The first issue is related to matters of marriage (chap. 7).

Considering the strong marital image employed in chapter 6, Paul first addresses the questions related to marriage he had received from the Corinthians. Since Paul's counsel is in response to specific questions about marriage, it is important to recognize that his response here does not represent a systematic account of all of his views on marriage. He had much to say about husbands and wives in Ephesians, for example, that is not found here.

7:1–7. Advice for the Married. Notice that the second half of v. 1 is not a statement from Paul. He was merely quoting a statement from the letter the Corinthians had written to him. The verb *haptō* ("to touch") is used here as a euphemism referring to sexual intercourse. Thus, it is not a question about marriage in general, but about whether it is good to abstain from sex. In an extreme response to the issue of sexual immorality, some had come to believe that all sexual activity should be avoided, including sex within marriage.

Although Paul had chosen to live a life of celibacy himself, he recognized the danger of this position for those already married (v. 2). Concerned that a vow of celibacy might cause one marriage partner to be drawn into sexual immorality, Paul insisted that married couples regularly provide for the sexual needs of their partners (v. 3). In accordance with social practices at the time, it was natural to expect that the wife would provide for her husband's need for sexual intimacy. Husbands, however, were under no similar obligation. Paul counteracted the normal customs by advocating for the equal worth and responsibility between husbands and wives. While he wrote that the husband has authority over the wife's body, he also stated that the wife has authority over the husband's body (v. 4). In other words, the marriage relationship should be characterized by mutual submissiveness.

Although sexual abstinence is not to be the norm in a marriage, Paul did allow for it in one specific instance, but only for a limited time (v. 5). The only time when spouses should deprive themselves of sexual intimacy is when both agree to do so for the sake of prayer—but Paul did not say why this would even be necessary. He did not see a moment when the lack of agreement should guide a spouse to act against the wishes of the other. All this highlights the importance of conjugal intimacy and the need to walk as equal partners. The discussion does not support a marital hierarchy.

The concession (v. 6) of which Paul speaks did not refer to marriage in general, but to the immediate context of the previous verse, namely, the temporary abstinence from sexual relations in marriage by mutual consent during special times of prayer (vv. 6–7). Although Paul embraced a life of celibacy, he did not want married couples in Corinth to conclude that his comments about temporary abstinence were a divine command. Marriage, and the sexual intimacy it involves, is a gift from God. Marriage provides a pathway for a meaningful and mutual sexual satisfaction that minimizes the temptation of sexual immorality and deepens the intimacy and unity of husband and wife. Paul's preference for celibacy emerged as a sacrifice for the gospel, but he acknowledged that not all are called to serve Christ in this manner (v. 7).

7:8–9. Advice for the Formerly Married. Having addressed married couples, Paul next turns his attention to another group within the church: the unmarried and the widows. By "unmarried" (*agamos*), Paul was most likely referring to widowers (regarding those who never married, see vv. 25–38). Since Paul dealt with the situation of both men and women in the groups addressed in this chapter, it makes sense that the male counterpart to "widows" in v. 8 would be "widowers." To those bereaved of their married partner, Paul advised that it would be good for them to remain single, that is, as Paul was. However, this should be done only if they had mastered self-control (v. 9). Once again, Paul did not mandate celibacy. He only recommended it when a person was not bound by marriage and was also able to control his or her sexual desires. If that was not possible, he recommended marriage.

7:10–11. Divorce and Christian Marriages. Paul firmly believed that Christians should not divorce their believing spouses. Unlike his previous counsel, this is not merely his advice, but a command from the Lord Jesus (v. 10). Paul was clearly aware of the teachings of Jesus against divorce—and he saw them as authoritative for the Christian (Matt. 5:31–32; 19:3–12; Mark 10:2–12; Luke 16:18). So, although he acknowledged that while a wife had the legal right under Roman law to leave her husband, he urged her not to exercise that option. At the same time, Paul recognized that people do not always follow God's principles. So, if a wife did depart from her husband, he said she should remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband (v. 11). What is expected of a Christian wife is also expected of the Christian husband (v. 11). Like Jesus, Paul viewed marriage as a permanent relationship. While difficulties will arise, divorce should never be viewed as a solution to the problem.

7:12–16. Divorce and Mixed Marriages. What about those situations when one partner in a marriage becomes a Christian, while the other spouse remains an unbeliever? Is this a legitimate reason for divorce? Should a Christian divorce his or her spouse in order to marry another Christian? Since Jesus did not address this situation, Paul had no word from the Lord to share with the Corinthians. Nevertheless, he considered his advice as consistent with the divinely revealed principles concerning mixed marriages (cf. 7:40). Paul clarifies that believing spouses are not bound to a marriage if their partner persists in divorcing them (vv. 12–13).

However, he urges believers to practice patience and grace toward their unbelieving spouses, striving to remain if the partner is willing.

Instead of the pure becoming defiled by coming into contact with the unclean, which was a common belief in the ancient world, Paul argues that it is just the opposite in a married relationship (v. 14); the blessing of one impacts the other. As long as a marriage is maintained, the presence of God in the life of a believing spouse can have a transforming influence on all the individuals in a home. In this way, the unconverted spouse and the children are influenced by the Christian behavior of the spouse—the children can be "holy" (v. 14b). In other words, the probabilities of conversion diminish if the believing spouse leaves the relationship. What is the believer to do, however, if an unbelieving spouse pursues a divorce? In the case of abandonment, the believing partner is free to marry again (v. 15). At the same time, Paul encourages the believing spouse not to easily give up on the marriage (v. 16). As demonstrated in Paul's own life, God can work in the lives of people in ways we would never imagine.

7:17–24. Serve God Where We Are. Paul pauses momentarily from his specific instructions regarding Christians and marriage to reflect on the general principles behind his advice. Three times in this section he emphasizes the point that Christians are not to make it their primary purpose to change their position in society (vv. 17, 20, 24). Their focus should be on serving God to the utmost of their ability no matter where they find themselves. While the immediate social situation Paul had in mind was the marital status of a believer, he uses two other social settings as illustrative analogies to highlight his point: circumcision and slavery.

Circumcision was a controversial topic in the early church. It had become such an important mark of identity in Judaism that some Jewish Christians insisted that Gentile converts needed to be circumcised to become Christians. Paul strongly disagreed. He argued that insisting on circumcision as a prerequisite for becoming a Christian amounted to the rejection of the exclusive role of Christ as Savior. Here the question is not theological. Paul was referring to circumcision as a mark of ethnic identity—whether a person was a Jew or a Gentile. Paul was saying that these sorts of distinctions between humans do not ultimately matter to God. Jews who responded to God's call in Jesus did not need to become Gentiles, nor did Gentiles need to become Jews to follow Jesus (v. 18). The gospel transcends and eliminates ethnic distinctions (Gal. 3:28). Our true identity is found in Christ, under the new creation. Therefore, circumcision and uncircumcision were nothing—keeping God's commands was more important (1 Cor. 7:19). It is not that our lives should not change. They should. The call to follow God requires that we put God and His will first in our lives and that we allow Him to transform us. But it does not require us to change our race, gender, or social status—or, as in the case of the Corinthians, our marital status. No matter our situation in life, our primary goal should be to follow Christ. Therefore, Paul's conclusion to this matter is that people should each remain in the condition in which they were when God called them (v. 20).

With this understanding in mind, Paul's statement about slavery not only illustrates his overall point even more but it also provides a stunning message of freedom (v. 21). Paul was not justifying the perpetuation of slavery. Although he did not openly condemn the institution of slavery, throughout his letters he redefines the role of slavery within a church dedicated to the gospel (see commentary on Philem. 1:1–25). Paul's promotion of manumission along with his stunning calls for humble masters (cf. Eph. 3:6, 9; Col. 4:1; 1 Tim. 6:2) denied the traditional roles of master and slave. In this passage, Paul wanted Christians who found themselves as slaves to recognize that their status as slaves need not define them. If they could obtain their freedom, he encouraged them to do so; but free or not, they could still serve God.

Paul explains that the slave who becomes a follower of Christ belongs to Christ. A Christian slave is the Lord's free person, and a free Christian is Christ's slave (1 Cor. 7:22). Although a freed person was a former slave who had been released from slavery, the former slave was not entirely free. In return for their freedom, freed slaves were legally obligated to serve their former masters whenever needed for the rest of their lives. At the same time, however, the former master became their patron. He was obligated to look after their welfare. Thus, in the same way that freed persons benefited from the status and honor of their patron, so Paul notes that as Christians our status is not determined by our own position in society—whether free or slave—but on the basis of our position in the household of Christ. Therefore, since we now belong to Christ, we should not allow the values of the world to determine our sense of worth and importance. We were bought at a price; therefore, we should not become slaves of people (v. 23). Paul ends his counsel by repeating the advice he stated earlier (v. 24).

7:25–38. Advice for the Engaged. Having addressed the situation of married persons and those bereaved of their spouses, Paul next turns his attention to a group within the church described as virgins (*parthenos*). Although the term can refer in a broad sense to both unmarried women and men (cf. vv. 28, 34, 36, 37, 38; Rev. 14:4), the context suggests that here it refers to betrothed young women within the church (1 Cor. 7:36; cf. Matt. 1:18, 23; Luke 1:27; 2 Cor. 11:2). There was apparently some question about whether these women should go ahead and marry.

Regarding this specific situation, Paul told the Corinthians that he had no commandment from the Lord (v. 25). As in the case of those who were married to pagan spouses, Jesus never addressed this question in His ministry. Nevertheless, Paul's counsel should not be taken lightly. After all, he was one who by the Lord's mercy was reliable (v. 25). In light of what he said in the previous section (vv. 17–24), his advice should not come as a surprise; Paul encouraged them to remain single. Paul's use of the word *distress* (*anankē*; v. 26) can be taken to refer to a local, present, temporal persecution, or it can be a warning of future persecutions to come. Paul recognized the current problems of the church and saw them as signs of the future troubles the church would face at the end of time. For Paul, the expectation of Jesus's return was always seen as imminent. The advice of Paul is quite simple and pragmatic: There is nothing wrong with being married or with remaining single (v. 27). Making either decision is not a violation of the will of God. The "trouble" mentioned in v. 28 probably refers to the problems that families could face when the church would encounter social conflicts and persecutions.

In v. 29, Paul is not advocating that married couples should adopt a life of celibacy. He argues for just the opposite in vv. 1–7. What he means is that those who are married should live in recognition that the things of this world are only temporary (v. 31). Ultimate reality lies in the future world made new. Our duty, therefore, is not to depart from the world but to participate meaningfully in life with the understanding that everything is incomplete. Paul is emphasizing the continuity of relationships within society but with a changed mindset centered on the hope of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

Paul did not believe that the proclamation of the gospel should be limited to men; he made it clear that women also have an important role to play in the cause of Christ. Yet while men and women are both called to share the gospel, Paul believed that single persons have an advantage since they are not distracted by the cares of family life (vv. 34–35). His final comments (vv. 36–37) have been understood in very different ways. The difficulty centers on the ambiguity of the expression that begins v. 36 (lit. "if anyone"). Who did Paul have in mind? Some claim that Paul was referring to the dilemma a father faces in deciding if he should marry off a daughter who has reached marriageable age. According to this scenario, if the father feels it is improper to keep his daughter at home, he has the right to arrange for her to marry. On the other hand, if the father is determined that his daughter should remain single, Paul affirmed his decision to keep her at home. Since Paul said nothing specifically about fathers in this entire passage, this interpretation seems unlikely. Moreover, it is hard to believe that Paul would actually commend a father who destined his daughter to a life of celibacy.

Another view claims that Paul addressed couples who had legally married but had not consummated the relationship, since they had taken a vow of sexual chastity. In this scenario, the man was having a difficult time restraining his sexual desires. The question was whether he would be committing a sin if he broke his vow and consummated the marriage. While Paul would not condemn him for his actions, he believed it would be better if he did not. This can hardly be right, for it contradicts Paul's earlier counsel that married couples should maintain sexual relations (vv. 2–7).

The most likely scenario is that Paul is addressing engaged couples throughout this entire section. While Paul had argued that it was better in his opinion that engaged couples remain single, he acknowledged that decision is not for everyone. So, if the man is struggling to restrain his sexual drive, it is not a sin to marry. In fact, it is better to marry instead of acting inappropriately in regard to his betrothed virgin (v. 36). Of course, if sexual desire could be restrained, Paul would still have preferred they not marry. This is, in effect, the same counsel he gave to those who were married but whose spouse had passed away (vv. 8–9).

7:39–40. Concluding Advice for Wives and Widows. Paul concludes his counsel on marriage with a final reminder about the permanence of the marriage union (v. 39a). At the same time, Paul emphasizes that if a husband dies, his widow is free to marry again. He does, however, qualify a statement (v. 39b), suggesting that her new husband should be a Christian. Yet once again, Paul believed she would be happier if she were to remain single (v. 40). Paul does not say why. He merely acknowledges that he had the help of the Spirit of God in making his judgments.

8:1—11:1

Questions Regarding Food Dedicated to Idols

Paul next turns his attention to another issue that the Corinthians had raised in the letter they had written to him (see 7:1): the question of whether it was permissible to eat food that had been dedicated to idols. One group within the church had no qualms about the legitimacy of eating idol meat, while others were seriously opposed to it. The discussion of this topic is applied to several aspects in the life of the church.

8:1–13. Knowledge versus Love. Paul begins his discussion on idol meat by noting the knowledge that all Christians have. Some scholars believe that Paul is quoting a slogan of the Corinthians here, but this is not certain. Paul had previously addressed a group within the church who were identified as "arrogant" or "puffed up" (4:6, 18–19), the ones who acted like they were kings (4:8). Their exalted view of themselves led them to believe that they possessed a far greater knowledge about spiritual things than others in the church—and particularly about food offered to idols.

While Paul did not contest their knowledge, he noted that mere knowledge itself is not sufficient. Knowledge itself can lead to arrogance, while disinterested love (*agapē*) edifies (8:1–2). Paul disqualified their claim about having superior knowledge. In effect, he was saying, "You think that you know something—perhaps you do; but this is not real knowledge." True knowledge does not emerge from mere information; it is always based on relationships. The knowledge of God that is part of the Christian experience is not a set of facts that we possess based on our own understanding. God is the One who took the initiative in drawing us to Himself because of His love for us. Thus, the entire Christian life is really only a response to God's love for us. So, it is foolish to boast about our knowledge of God and the things related to His kingdom.

To better understand the relationship of Paul's argument to the question of food sacrificed to idols, it is important to recognize that a pagan temple functioned not only as a place of worship and sacrifice, but also as a sort of restaurant. After an animal had been dedicated

Food Dedicated to Idols

The importance of the topic of food offered to idols is to some extent related to the fact that the church needed instruction on how to relate to other pagan practices that predominated in its social context. The fact that Paul spends some time discussing the topic reveals that this issue had the potential to split the church.

1. Two Groups. One group of believers not only saw nothing wrong with eating meat that had been part of a sacrifice offered in a pagan temple but they also saw nothing wrong with eating the meat in a pagan temple (8:10). After all, the pagan gods were not real—every Christian would have known that (cf. 8:1, 4). Moreover, Paul had not barred Christians from fellowshiping with nonbelievers. So, where was the harm in attending a wedding feast or funeral for a friend that was held in a pagan temple, as they regularly were, or in participating in social or business activities that would have required joining in a meal being hosted at one of the many temples in Corinth? Overly confident in their own wisdom, these individuals looked down on those with different opinions as spiritually naive.

Those who were opposed to eating idol meat saw the situation in a very different light. Although they also believed in the existence of only one almighty God, they were extremely uncomfortable with having anything to do with idolatry. They recognized that the pagan cult was very dangerous. No matter what anyone said, they wanted nothing to do with meat offered to idols, whether it was eaten in a temple or even bought in a local market. Paul refers to these individuals as the "weak," since their consciences would not allow them to eat meat sacrificed to idols (cf. 8:9–12). The practice of those in the church who had no problem with eating food offered to idols, however, put the "weak" in a difficult position. They not only had to deal with the pressure from their fellow Christians within the church but they also faced the social pressure from outside the church as they struggled to explain why they refused to join in public celebrations at pagan temples, while other Christians had no problem in doing so. As is often the case in these sorts of interpersonal problems, the "weak" apparently responded by condemning the "strong" for claiming the freedom to eat idol meat (10:29–30).

2. Paul's Approach. Since the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 had already reached a decision about the question of food offered to idols (Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25), Paul could have responded to the situation in Corinth by requiring them to comply with that decision. But he did not even mention it. Paul recognized that the believers in Corinth needed far more than just another rule. The church had deeper issues that needed to be addressed. They were not struggling with a lack of information but with the failure to see how that information should affect the way they lived the Christian life. He wanted to address the situation in a way that would help the Corinthians to develop a more mature level of obedience in response to the work of Christ.

It is also important to note that Paul chose not to take a particular side on the issue. At first glance, his appeal to the "strong" (chap. 8) to discontinue eating meat in an idol's temple for the sake of the "weak" (vv. 7–13) appears to place Paul in the camp of those opposed to idol meat. His warning against idolatry (chap. 10) also gives the same appearance. Yet just when it seems that Paul is taking the side of the "weak," he turns around and says that believers should eat whatever they can buy in the meat market (10:25). This certainly was not the position of the "weak." Not only did Paul not see a problem with Christians purchasing and eating meat offered in the meat market, wherever its source, he added that when invited to the house of an unbeliever they should also eat whatever food was served to them without worrying about whether it had been offered to an idol (v. 27).

3. Paul's Goal. Paul's ultimate goal in trying to stay above the fray was so he could solve the problem by reframing it around the issue of love. He wanted the "strong" to look at the issue from a larger perspective than just themselves. He wanted them to consider the issue from the standpoint of unity. How would their actions affect the church as a whole and its mission? What impact would their actions have on the spiritual life of others within the community of faith and on those they worked to attract to Christ? Paul's exposition aimed at answering these questions.

and sacrificed to a temple's god or goddess, a portion of the sacrificial meat would often be cooked and then served to the worshiper and family as part of a celebratory meal in one of the many banqueting rooms within a temple complex. Such celebrations were notorious for leading to other forms of unseemly behavior, particularly sexual immorality. With few public spaces large enough to accommodate significant events, temples were a popular place to gather for celebratory events involving a meal.

It is within this context that Paul first affirms that an idol has no real existence (v. 4). Christians recognize that there is one God (v. 6). So, there is a sense in which those in Corinth who had argued that it did not matter whether food had been dedicated to an idol or not were correct—either way, it was just food. Yet at the same time, Paul wanted them to realize that there were others in the congregation who did not possess that knowledge (v. 7). It was this group within the church who had a difficult time separating the eating of food dedicated to an idol with participation in the pagan cult itself. This group likely included individuals who had been caught up in pagan idolatry before becoming Christians. For them, eating idol food had always been an act of worship.

Anticipating the response of some within Corinth, and perhaps even quoting a statement from

the letter they had written to him, Paul acknowledged that it was true that the food offered to idols that they ate, would, in general, not make them better or worse before God (v. 8). However, the Corinthians also had to realize that they needed to be careful that insisting on their right of eating idol meat would not become a stumbling block to the weak (v. 9). The "stumbling" Paul had in mind here was not that other Christians might be offended by seeing them eating in pagan temples (v. 10). It was that a "weak" brother or sister might conclude that idolatry and Christianity are compatible and thus be drawn back into the evils of paganism, which could lead to those for whom Christ died being eternally lost (v. 11).

Paul presents the consequences as tragic. The arrogant believers were not only committing a sin against their own brothers and sisters in Christ but they also were committing sin against Christ Himself (v. 12). Then Paul declared that he would never again eat meat if it would make his brother or sister stumble (v. 13). Instead of commanding "the strong" to surrender their rights, Paul explained, in chapter 9, how his own ministry was not based on getting what rightfully belonged to him, whether familial or financial rights (9:5–12a), but in living a life of self-denial for the benefit of others (vv. 12, 15–23).

9:1–14. Paul's Apostolic Right of Support. Paul asked a number of rhetorical questions about his status as an apostle (v. 1). Responding to those who might question his authority, Paul stated that at the very least, he was an apostle to them (v. 2a; cf. 4:15). He then affirmed with confidence that they were the seal of his apostleship in the Lord (v. 2b); their conversion demonstrated that he was called to be an apostle.

In vv. 4–11, Paul asks another set of rhetorical questions, demonstrating that as an apostle he was aware of his rights to receive financial support in return for his ministerial work. In fact, if he were married like the other apostles, he could also have received support for a wife (vv. 4–5). Paul then provides other examples drawn from everyday life of people receiving compensation for their work (v. 7). But even more than that, the right of compensation was not merely a human practice but a divine command (v. 9; cf. Deut. 25:4). Although the letter of the law applies to animals, the same principle applies even more so to humans. Whether it is the beast or the human who threshes the grain, each has a right to the grain. If this is true of grain, it is just as true in regard to the proclamation of the gospel. Paul also uses the example of those serving in the temple receiving tithe in the OT (v. 13). The implication is that gospel workers should benefit from the tithe of the church (v. 14); the church should provide for their needs.

9:15–23. Paul's Rejection of His Rights. Although Paul had the right to receive compensation for his ministerial work, he had chosen to waive that right (v. 15). He could not even entertain the idea of making a living off the gospel (v. 15b). To understand Paul's practice, we should remember the dramatic encounter he had with Christ on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1–22). At that moment the grace of God had forgiven his sin against the Lord and His church, which he was persecuting. Equally important was the grace of the Lord that had transformed him and called him to be an apostle of the Lord. Everything Paul had received from God was a gift of grace, and his grateful response was to show the same grace in the preaching of the gospel by abstaining from receiving the material provisions that the Lord Himself commanded for the ministers of the gospel (1 Cor. 9:9–14; Luke 10:7). Proclaiming the gospel free of charge gave Paul the privilege of boasting in God's grace and to some extent contributed to disarming those who opposed his apostleship (v. 18).

In vv. 19–22, Paul notes that everything he did was done for the sake of spreading the gospel. This led him to make three statements about the fundamental nature of his ministry. Although he was free from all people, he willingly made himself a servant to all (v. 19). His claim about being free harkens back to the question in v. 1, "Am I not free?" Instead of demanding his rights as an apostle, Paul willingly laid them down so he could become the slave of all. Instead of conducting his ministry from a position of power, he did it through weakness—a ministry rooted in the foolishness of the cross. He did this so that he might win more people to the cause of Christ (v. 19). The Greek word translated "win" (*kerdainō*) belongs to the field of business, merchandise, and profit (cf. vv. 19, 20 [2x], 21, 22; Phil. 3:8). The profit that Paul gained was bringing both Jews and Gentiles to Christ, doing so by adapting his methods to reach them (vv. 20–22). By appearing in some sense as one who was literally speaking "lawlessness," Paul was not actually promoting lawlessness, for he immediately clarified his status as being under the law of Christ, that is to say, the law as interpreted by Christ (Matt. 5:17–32; 2 Cor. 3:12–16; Gal.

6:2). His becoming all things to all people had an evangelistic emphasis (v. 22).

The implication here is that in the same way that Paul adapted his ministry to meet the needs of the people he was seeking to win for Christ, he wanted the "strong" in Corinth to be sensitive to the needs of the "weak." The "strong" must love the "weak" in order to win them for the proclamation of the gospel, even if it means that they must waive their rights in matters of food. Since Paul would later request that he be used as an example (11:1), it is clear that he was expecting some changes in the behavior of both groups within the church in order to maintain the unity of the church.

9:24–27. Analogy of the Isthmian Games. To illustrate that Christians should not live a life of self-indulgence but of self-restraint, Paul compared the Christian life with the disciplined life of an athlete preparing for a race. The imagery the apostle draws from is likely from the Isthmian Games, which the city of Corinth hosted every two years. Since the Isthmian Games were second in importance only to the Olympics, Paul would have experienced them in one way or another when they were held in Corinth in the spring of A.D. 51. Visitors and athletes from all across Greece would have flooded the city for the festivities. Like modern-day sponsors, wealthy patrons provided the food for banquets throughout the city. The stadium, theater, and hippodrome would have been packed with spectators who had come from far and near to watch the contests: footraces, wrestling, boxing, discus and javelin throwing, chariot racing, and more.

With these sorts of competitions in mind, Paul was reminding the Corinthians that although many athletes compete in a race, only one receives the prize (9:24). Since there is no prize for second place, those who run the race should do everything they can to make sure they win. How does an athlete do that? By being disciplined and self-controlled in all things (v. 25). In order to participate in the events, athletes had to agree in advance to undergo ten months of rigorous training. Although such training was difficult, athletes were willing to do it just to have the opportunity of gaining the temporary honor associated with winning a perishable crown—a victory wreath that at the Isthmian Games was quite often made of withered celery.

If athletes are willing to undergo a life of self-restraint simply to win a crown representing temporary honor, how much more, Paul says, should Christians be willing to live a life of self-restraint to obtain the honor of receiving a reward from God that will last forever (v. 25). Applying this teaching to the previous issue of eating food offered to idols, which may not be a sin in and of itself, Paul was wanting the Corinthians to practice self-restraint for the greater good instead of insisting on the "right" they had to eat. He called the Corinthians to run the race in order to win collectively instead of individually.

Since Paul wanted the Corinthians to imitate his manner of life (11:1), he explained to them that this was how he lived the Christian life. There was no hesitation in Paul's commitment (9:26). He was no shadow boxer who merely threw punches at the air. Paul would do whatever it took for the cause of Christ to be triumphant. And he would do so by subjecting himself to a life of restraint (v. 27). The bringing of the body into submission of which Paul spoke is not self-flagellation. He was talking in a symbolic sense of his athlete-like willingness to forgo some rights for the sake of a greater goal. He was willing to deny himself in order to save others. He was doing what he was calling on others to do.

10:1–13. A Warning from the Example of Israel. Paul continues to address the situation in Corinth regarding food offered to idols by issuing another warning to the "strong" in Corinth. In response to the claim that eating idol meat involved no spiritual danger, since they knew that there was only one true God, Paul had appealed to them to consider that such behavior did, however, endanger the faith of the "weak" (8:10–13). Previously, Paul had used his own example of setting aside his apostolic rights for the sake of the gospel as an indirect model of how he hoped the Corinthians would themselves stop insisting on their rights at the expense of others in the church. Next, Paul warned the Corinthians that an uncompromising attitude might lead to their own spiritual downfall, as it did to the generation of Israelites who left Egypt under Moses and who failed to enter the promised land.

As Paul began to recount the story of Israel's exodus from Egypt, he referred to the Israelites inclusively as their ancestors. Although this may sound like a surprise since the congregation in Corinth was largely Gentile, it reveals Paul's understanding of the church. The history of Israel was the shared history of Gentile believers, because by faith they had become part of God's covenant people, part of the Israel of faith (Rom. 11:17–24; Gal. 6:16). This was the

eschatological fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham that all families of the earth would be blessed through his offspring (Acts 3:25). Thus, the story of the Exodus belonged not only to the Jews but also to the Gentiles who had accepted the God of the OT.

As Paul recounts the story, he first emphasizes the inclusive nature of the events through the repeated use of the adjective "all." Paul was not quoting directly from the Septuagint (the Greek text) or the Masoretic text (the Hebrew text). He was doing a loose commentary on the story that explored questions of ethics and theology. Although Paul did not directly state the point he was trying to emphasize, it appears to be connected with the change of the adjective "all" (vv. 1–4) to "some" (vv. 7–10). He likely saw in this contrast a reflection of the situation in Corinth, where although "all" had responded to the call of Christ, "some" were in grave danger of losing their way, just as many of the Israelites who left Egypt did.

In order to highlight the connection Paul saw between the Israel of old and the followers of Christ, the apostle describes events from Israel's past with terminology that reflects Christian practices. For example, the expression in v. 2 clearly draws from the imagery of baptism, where believers are baptized "into Christ" (Gal. 3:27; cf. Rom. 6:3). Paul portrays Moses as a type of Christ who brought redemption for the people of God. Thus, in terms of their experience, both groups have shared deliverance through a kind of baptismal event at the beginnings of their spiritual journeys.

Paul continues to highlight these sorts of parallel events with references to the "spiritual food" (10:3) and "spiritual drink" (v. 4) of which the Israelites partook in the wilderness. The reference is to the manna and water that God provided for the Israelites. For Paul, the food and drink were analogous to the bread and the wine of the Lord's Supper (10:16; cf. John 6:55). Paul will later explain the symbolism and function of the emblems of the Lord's Supper as an example of the mutual acceptance among members. One of his concerns here was to establish a connection that would later serve as a critique of the idolatrous participation of the "strong" who were openly consuming idol meat served in pagan temples.

The statement that the Israelites drank from a spiritual Rock that was with them, and that that Rock was Christ (1 Cor. 10:4), is significant. The biblical text states that God provided water twice for the Israelites—once at Rephidim in the Wilderness of Sin at the beginning of their desert pilgrimage (Ex. 17:6) and once again at the end in Kadesh (Num. 20:8–11). But what did the Israelites do for water between those two miracles? Some ancient readers believed that the two rocks were one and the same. So, the rock must have followed them through the desert. Paul's point is not about an actual rock or the water it provided. He was thinking of "Rock" being used as a title for God in the Song of Moses (Deut. 32:4, 15, 18, 30, 31), which he connects to Jesus. The rock therefore serves as a metaphor for the divine source behind the water, the presence of God, who graciously provided for the needs of His people and accompanied them in the wilderness.

Yet in spite of God's abundant blessing, the Rock of salvation became a stumbling block for others (Rom. 9:33). The tragic history of Israel is that many disdained the Rock of their salvation (Deut. 32:15) and became recipients of God's judgment. Although they all experienced God's deliverance from Egypt, not all of them made it to the promised land (1 Cor. 10:5). They became idolaters (v. 7), they practiced sexual immorality (v. 8), and because of their tempting of the Lord they were destroyed by serpents (v. 9). Paul's purpose with these examples was twofold: to point out to the believers in Corinth that they also craved evil things (v. 6) and to remind them that the stories from history were written as a warning (v. 11).

The stories Paul referenced from Israel's past outline four transgressions that were to function as a warning to the Corinthians: idolatry (v. 7), immorality (v. 8), putting Christ to the test (v. 9), and complaining (v. 10). One of Paul's concerns through this section is related to the issue of idolatry. He refers first to the experience of Israel connected to the worship of the golden calf (Ex. 32). Instead of mentioning the golden calf explicitly, Paul quotes the part of the story that involved the people eating and drinking in its presence—a clear connection to the practice of the Corinthians in eating meat in an idol's temple. Paul's point seems clear: eating and drinking in the presence of idols is dangerous, for, as the Israelites discovered, it often leads to immoral behavior.

What is implied in the people's revelry is made explicit in Paul's second example (1 Cor. 10:8). The reference here is to the tragic events that occurred thirty-eight years later at Baal-Peor (Num. 25:1–9). After being drawn into sexual immorality with the women of Moab, the Israelites were led into idolatry. They ate and bowed down to the gods of Moab (Num. 25:2). The story connects Israel's idolatry with eating the sacrifices offered to the pagan gods—another clear warning to the Corinthians of the danger connected to eating meat in an idol's temple. As a result of Israel's rebellion, a plague fell on the nation and twenty-three thousand people died in a single day (1 Cor. 10:8).

The mention of "twenty-three thousand" who died in single day (v. 8) has puzzled interpreters, because the number given for the dead in Numbers 25:9 is twenty-four thousand. Why is there a difference of one thousand people? Scholars have suggested several different solutions. For some, this is a simple lapse of memory on Paul's part, while others claim that Paul may have confused the number with the twenty-three thousand male Levites from the census of the people taken after the plague (Num. 26:62). Perhaps Paul was saying that in one day only twenty-three thousand died, while the other thousand may have died subsequently. While it is impossible to know for certain why Paul mentions twenty-three instead of twenty-four thousand, it does not undermine his main point about the danger of idolatry.

Paul returns to another story from Israel's past connected to food—the story of the deadly serpents (1 Cor. 10:9; cf. Num. 21:4–9). The children of Israel were angry with having to eat manna instead of regular food, and they "spoke against God and against Moses" (Num. 21:5). Although the account in Numbers does not mention the people "tempting" or "testing" God, that concept does appear in Psalm 78 when the story is retold (Ps. 78:18; cf. Num. 21:6). In referring to "Christ" (1 Cor. 10:9) instead of "the Lord," Paul may have been again tying the story of the Corinthians to the history of the Israelites. As the cravings of the Israelites for the food they liked and wanted ultimately led to their rebellion against God, so the interest of the Corinthians in food offered to idols could also place them in danger of doing the same.

The final story in 10:5 most likely refers to Israel's opposition to Moses recorded in Numbers 14 after the spies reported that the promised land was filled with giants (Num. 13:31–33). In response to such outright rebellion, the Lord stated that all Israelites who were twenty years old and older were doomed to die in the desert, except for Joshua and Caleb (Num. 14:27–30; 1 Cor. 10:5). Although the original account does not refer to them dying at the hand of the destroyer (such as an angel), it appears that Paul was drawing on the language of the "destroyer" from Exodus 12:23 to refer to the nature of the divine judgment (1 Cor. 10:10). Paul likely was referring to this story because he saw in the attitude of the Israelites toward the leadership of Moses a parallel with the attitude of the Corinthians toward him. He wanted the Corinthians to be aware that in opposing him they were also opposing God.

In concluding his remarks about God's judgment on Israel in the wilderness, Paul makes explicit the basis on which he made connections between Israel's history and the experience of the Corinthians (v. 11). While Jewish believers would have understood this basic principle, it would not have been as familiar to the largely Gentile church in Corinth. The story of Israel is not just history. It is applicable for God's people today, that is, those who live in light of Christ's fulfillment of the promises made to earlier generations. As Christians, we can find in God's prior dealings with His people some examples that can guide and direct us in our own circumstances or, just as in the case of the Corinthians, even serve as a warning for us.

Temptations and trials come to all people, but God in His faithfulness will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we are able to bear (v. 13). Not only that, but God will also provide an alternative escape so that we can endure. This does not mean that as Christians we will not experience difficult circumstances. We will. The point is that God will give us the strength needed to endure those times.

10:14–22. Prohibition against Feasting at Pagan Temples. In light of his discussion of the rights of a believer (chap. 9) and the warnings against idolatry in the OT, Paul finally returns to his long argument against feasting in pagan temples that began in 8:1. While he initially approached the issue by addressing the detrimental effect such behavior had on "weaker" believers, here he addresses the danger that such practices pose for Christians who engage in such things themselves.

Following on the heels of the warnings against idolatry, Paul reaffirms the conclusion he had reached earlier about eating meat in an idol's temple: all were to flee from idolatry (10:14). Since the "strong" in Corinth prided themselves on their wisdom, Paul addressed them as wise and sensible people and asked them to consider the evidence for themselves (v. 15). On the basis of their own experience in celebrating the Lord's Supper, he reminded them that those who partake of the emblems of the cup and the bread, which symbolize Christ's blood and body (v. 16), become one body, for they all share from the same bread (v. 17). The same principle was true with the peace offerings in the Jewish temple (Lev. 3). Not only did the priests receive a portion of the offerings but the people also received a portion as well—and by eating of the same sacrificial food, the two groups became connected to the same altar (v. 18); they enjoyed a communion meal in the presence of the Lord. Thus, Paul's point is simple: the sacred meal that Christians and Jews shared among themselves in the presence of God created a bond with the One being worshiped.

Before applying the situation to the Corinthians partaking of idol meat in pagan temples, Paul recognized that the Corinthians might object to his line of reasoning by claiming that his logic was faulty because they knew that there is only one true God—so eating in an idol temple was not a problem. Although Paul agreed that idols have no real existence (cf. 1 Cor. 8:4), there are other spiritual forces at work in this world arrayed against God, namely, demons. And it is those demonic forces that were connected to what went on in pagan temples (10:19–20). Since the Gentiles were sacrificing to demons and not to God, Paul wanted the Corinthians to not participate in fellowship with demons (v. 20). They could not have it both ways. It was impossible to share both in the fellowship with the evil powers connected to the pagan cult and in fellowship with God. Either they were one body in fellowship with Jesus through the Lord's Supper or not. God demands absolute loyalty (v. 21). So, while idol meat may not have been harmful in and of itself, Christians could not eat idol meat in connection with pagan temples without being negatively influenced. Paul reminded them that they were not stronger than God and should not arouse His jealousy (v. 22).

10:23—11:1. Regarding Food Purchased in the Market. Having already stated his position on the question of eating food in an idol's temple, Paul next draws the entire topic to a close by providing the Corinthians with some practical advice on how they were to exercise their freedom in Christ in relation to others. While his advice is related to the current issue of eating food, the principle behind it is applicable to the entire Christian life.

Paul begins by entering into an imaginary conversation with the Corinthians on the issue of Christian freedom. He does this by restating the misused principle and possible slogan of the Corinthians mentioned earlier in 1 Corinthians 6:12—that all things (in regard to these types of issues) are lawful or permissible. Yes, that may be true in these cases, but all of these things are not of benefit or edifying in their import (10:23). The Corinthians believed that they had the right to express their freedom without regard to anyone. This sort of mentality indicates that they believed that the essence of the Christian life was found in knowledge and rights. The problem with this sort of perspective is that it leads only to pride and selfish behavior. Paul argues that the true essence of the Christian life is rooted in love. For it is only love for God and others that builds up the church and encourages believers to exercise their freedom for the benefit of others. Therefore, Paul admonished the Corinthians to not seek only their own good, but that of others (v. 24).

A life lived for the well-being of others means that the freedom and rights of a believer must always be subservient to the needs of others (8:1; 13:5; 15:2; Rom. 14:7; Gal. 6:2; Phil. 2:1–4). Paul wanted the Corinthians to think about what is best for the body of Christ instead of merely thinking about themselves and their own interests.

To illustrate this point, Paul provides two examples related to the issue of food offered to idols. The first involves food offered for sale in the marketplace. Since meat was a delicacy in the ancient world, much of the meat in a Gentile market was surplus meat that had been originally offered as part of a sacrifice in one of the local temples. In such circumstances, Paul said the Christian had the right to purchase the meat and to eat it without worrying about whether it had been dedicated to an idol at some earlier point (10:25–26). Instead of asking the seller where the meat came from, Christians were to thank the Lord for providing them with food. So, while Paul was opposed to eating meat in an idol's temple, he was not concerned about eating the meat itself.

Paul's second example concerns an invitation for a Christian to attend a private meal in the home of an unbeliever. How should a Christian respond? Paul said that if believers were to accept such invitations, which Paul did not discourage, they were to eat whatever was presented to them without asking questions of conscience about it (v. 27). Paul's point here was the same as buying meat in the marketplace (v. 25). Since an idol is really nothing, the believer should not embarrass the host by asking whether the meat had come from a temple. After all, accepting such invitations was a wonderful way for Christians to build relationships and to share the gospel with nonbelievers.

Paul did, however, make one exception. If the visiting believers were specifically told that the food had been offered to idols, they were not to eat it for the sake of the one who told them about the source of the meat and that other person's conscience (vv. 28–29). Who is the person who might have provided this information? Some have suggested that it is a reference to the host, while others have believed it to be a pagan guest or another Christian guest or slave present at the meal. If it is the host or a pagan guest, Paul may have had in mind some sort of announcement about the food that honored or indicated allegiance to the pagan gods to whom the food had been dedicated. In that case, the Christian should not eat, since eating would have been an act of religious compromise. Another possibility would be that of the host or a pagan guest, as a courtesy, informing the Christian that the meat had been offered to a pagan god. The host may have been thinking that the Christian would not want to eat it because of its connections to paganism. Paul's counsel was that in such a case the believer should not eat the meat. If the Christian were to eat the meat, it might indicate to the unbelievers that Christians had no objections to paganism.

On the other hand, if the person announcing that the food had been offered to idols was a fellow Christian, perhaps another guest or a household slave, then Paul had in mind one of the "weaker" believers fearing that eating the food would be an act of religious compromise. In this case, Paul also said that the believer should not eat the meat. Eating meat offered to idols would create a moral dilemma for the "weaker" believer that could destroy his or her faith. In referring to the conscience of the person who might announce that the food had been offered to idols (v. 29), Paul was stating his main principle about how Christians should exercise their freedom. It is not only what the Christian knows that matters; what others believe should also be considered. A Christian's freedom in Christ should always take into account the interests of others.

Having digressed from his main point about the Christian being at liberty to eat food purchased in the marketplace or to accept an invitation to eat at the house of an unbeliever, Paul next explains why a believer has the right to eat what is offered to him or her (vv. 27, 29–30). Unless someone announces that food has been offered to idols, a Christian has the freedom to eat that food. Christians should eat in a prayerful spirit of thanksgiving to God and not feel condemned.

Paul again restates the basic principle that he was longing for the Corinthians to follow: Christians should not insist on their rights without considering others. In the area of eating and drinking, we should thoughtfully avoid causing offense to others by our actions. And in this matter, Paul offered himself as an example (v. 33). Paul desired that the Corinthians would imitate him, just as he also imitated Christ (11:1).

11:2—14:40

The Church at Worship

The next major section of Corinthians deals with a variety of issues connected to the worship practices of the community of believers in Corinth. Paul first addresses cultural issues related to the proper decorum of men and women during public worship (11:2–16). He then responds to troubling reports about divisions within the church manifested in the celebration of the Lord's Supper (11:17–34) and addresses questions that the Corinthians appear to have raised regarding the manifestation of the Spirit in worship (12:1—14:40).

The entire section needs to be read in continuity with Paul's advice in 10:23. In each of the situations Paul addressed, his concern was that the Corinthians would learn not to seek only their own good, but that of others (v. 24). This should especially be the case for the church when gathering together for public worship as the body of Christ. Worship should be conducted in an orderly and dignified manner and within an atmosphere of mutual love and respect.

11:2–16. Communal Worship and Head Coverings. In their letter to Paul, the Corinthians appear to have affirmed their loyalty to the traditions and practices they had received from Paul. While the apostle praised them for remembering him (11:2), he did not approve of the practice of women no longer wearing head coverings in public worship.

Although there was nothing intrinsically wrong with women not covering their heads, it was a problem culturally. A woman who did not cover her head in public in the Greco-Roman world was seen as immodest. As such, these women were causing a distraction during worship that was bringing shame on the Christian community and was also dishonoring their husbands. Paul addressed the issue on three levels: the order of creation; the customs and social practices of propriety in the Greco-Roman world; and the basic principles of nature.

In appealing to these women to change their ways, Paul was arguing that their actions with their own heads had huge implications for their metaphorical head, that is, their husbands (v. 3). Paul based his argument on the pattern of relationships he saw in the creation order of men and women (cf. Gen. 2:18–25; 1 Cor. 11:8) and in reference to Christ. Some commentators understand Paul's metaphorical use of "head" (*kephalē*) in a hierarchical sense, indicating "authority." Understood in this way, Paul's argument was that a man or husband has authority over the woman or wife. "Head" could be also understood in a metaphorical sense to mean "the source of existence," as in the source or head of a river. Although this is not a common meaning elsewhere, the context in which a word is used matters most. But perhaps what makes this view more reasonably valid is that this is the way Paul explains his reasoning in 11:12 about the sources of men and women. Thus, the three illustrative relationships Paul had in mind in v. 3 are: (1) Christ as the source encompassing all of humankind (as in Eph. 4:13); (2) the man, Adam, as the source of the woman, Eve (Gen. 2:21–23); and (3) God as the source, in relation to Christ (the Messiah), in sending Him to redeem humankind (cf. Luke 1:31–32).

In 1 Corinthians 11:4–6, Paul describes the problem that was occurring in the church. The issue had to do with cultural expectations for men and women within the Greco-Roman world regarding the wearing of a head covering. His specific concern was that the actions of believers in this regard were bringing dishonor rather than honor on their heads (vv. 4–5). The specific reference to praying or prophesying indicates that the discussion was in regard to the worship customs of the community of believers. Paul did not express concern about women's involvement or noninvolvement in praying or prophesying (cf. 14:1–5) in public, but rather the way in which women attired themselves in that setting.

Paul's comments in 11:6 emerge from the belief at that time that a woman who did not cover her head was in danger of being considered a prostitute. Thus, the practice of some women to worship without covering their heads would have been scandalous (v. 16). In order to explain why men should not wear a head covering and women should, Paul drew again on the Creation account of men and women in Genesis 2. In 1 Corinthians 11:7–9, Paul did not deny that the woman was created in God's image and as man's equal partner, but he argued that the fact that the first woman was created from Adam's side indicates that a wife also brings glory and honor to her husband. The behavior of women in Corinth was doing just the opposite. Rather than shame their husbands, they were to cover their heads and bring honor to them, for in doing that all honor and glory during worship would be given to God.

But it is important to note that Paul does not stop there (vv. 11–12). The honor in marriage of which Paul speaks is not a one-way street. Although the woman was originally created from man, today men also come from women. This means that neither the husband nor the wife should do anything that would offend the other or damage the influence of the gospel.

Verse 10 is one of the most puzzling verses in the NT. The difficulty revolves around two issues: the identity of the angels and what Paul meant by the references to "head," "authority," and "angels." Who are the angels? Some commentators have suggested that Paul was thinking of evil angels. They have argued that Paul wanted women to protect themselves from the lustful desires of evil angels, like those who, in the opinion of some, cohabited with humans before the Flood (cf. Gen. 6:1ff.). It is more likely, however, that Paul had in mind holy angels, who veil their own faces in the presence of God (Is. 6:2). Thus, women in church should also dress with propriety for worshiping God. In his first letter to Timothy, Paul also acknowledges that our actions are not only visible to God but also to the "the elect angels" (1 Tim. 5:21; cf. 1 Pet. 1:12).

According to some, Paul was saying in 1 Corinthians 11:10 that a head covering is a symbol of the authority under which a woman has been placed. Thus, by choosing to wear a head covering, a woman was acknowledging her subjection to a man. If this is the case, however, it seems strange that Paul would use the word "authority" and not the word "subjection" itself. Others claim that the head covering is not an indication of a woman's subjection to a man but rather a symbol of her authority or freedom to pray and prophesy in public worship. In this case, the head covering gives her the authority to fulfill a role she otherwise could not have performed before. One of the main difficulties with both of these views is that the word "symbol" is not actually in the text. Some translators have added it in an attempt to help the reader make sense of the passage.

The text literally reads, "a woman ought to have authority over her head." In other words, it is the woman, not anyone else, who has authority over her own head. Understood from this perspective, Paul is simply saying that the woman has the authority (i.e., the freedom to choose) to do as she pleases with her own head. She has the authority to decide whether she should wear a head covering. In light of his earlier remarks about honor and dishonor, and in light of the presence of the holy angels during worship, Paul desired that women should exercise their authority by wearing a head covering. In choosing to wear it, the women would honor their husbands and maintain their dignity.

Paul concludes his appeal with a final reason drawn from nature regarding why women should cover their heads, that is, from what society believed was natural. It was natural for men to have short hair and for women to have long hair (vv. 14–15). In the Greco-Roman world, hair length was an indication of gender distinction. Men kept their hair short, while women kept their hair long. Since long hair was believed to be sign of effeminacy, long hair on a man was seen as a mark of gender confusion—and thus unnatural. Paul's comments should not be understood as a divine endorsement of the cultural views of the Roman world. He was simply drawing on the prevailing customs to make a point his audience could identify with. In this case, it is simply that in the same way long hair provides a woman with a natural covering, a head covering during worship reaffirms that which is natural.

How should modern Christians relate to Paul's counsel regarding head coverings? While his counsel has been applied in a variety of different ways, there are three main views that should be noted. The first is that Paul's views are so firmly rooted in the culture of his day that they simply do not apply to Christians living in a very different world. Paul's remarks are merely descriptive of the cultural values of his day and Christians, therefore, need not concern themselves with Paul's counsel. The second view argues the exact opposite. Paul's instructions transcend human culture and should therefore be taken literally. This conviction is then applied to Christians in all cultures and at all times. Although it is not as common in the Western world, the influence of this viewpoint can be seen in various Christian traditions around the world where women cover their heads in church. A third view falls between the two just mentioned. While Paul's instructions are certainly related to the cultural conditions in which they were written, they nevertheless contain general principles that apply to all ages and cultures. In this case, Paul's main point was not head coverings in and of themselves but the more fundamental issue of the distinction between men and women that is ultimately rooted in the Creation account. Christians should not seek to blur the lines of distinction between men and women. While various cultures may express that distinction through different types of clothing and outward forms of expression, Christians should not seek to eradicate those distinctions. Attempting to do so will only bring shame on the Christian community.

In addition, although Paul affirmed a clear distinction between men and women, he did not use that distinction to prohibit women from participating and speaking in public worship. On the contrary, he argued for the functional equality of both men and women in worship. Men *and* women are to pray and prophesy in church—they just need to do so in a manner that does not bring shame on their spouses, themselves, or the community. Since cultures vary around the world, the application of this principle will also vary.

Paul ends this section with a final appeal in v. 16. The word usually translated as "contentious" (Gr. *philoneikos*) means to be fond of strife. Paul probably had in mind some in the church who still may have had a defiant attitude about the importance of a woman wearing a head covering. If that is the case, Paul was reminding them that what he had said reflects the common custom of "the churches of God" (v. 16).

11:17–34. The Celebration of the Lord's Supper. The discussion and instructions on the appropriate attitudes in corporate worship continue. In this section, Paul directs his attention to problems related to the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Though Paul began the chapter by praising the Corinthians for maintaining the traditions he had delivered to them (v. 3), in this section he offers them no such praise. In fact, he specifically mentions his lack of praise twice (vv. 17, 22). Paul had been informed that during the church gathering there were divisions among the members (v. 18).

Since church buildings did not emerge until the second half of the third century, Christians gathered together in homes that were large enough to accommodate their needs. Modern archaeological excavations in Corinth have revealed the existence of Roman villas with a main dining space, known as a triclinium, with four

or five adjacent rooms with an entrance to an atrium or a colonnade place in the center around a pool to collect rainwater. These Roman villas could accommodate between thirty and fifty people. The most important, honored people (around nine or ten) would gather together with the host in the triclinium and partake of the best food. Next in importance were the second-class guests and friends, who would gather in the adjacent rooms. Those of least importance, the poor and slaves, would meet around the atrium and would be served the worst of the food. It was a gathering of believers in a home similar to this one that Paul had in mind.

Early Christians celebrated the Lord's Supper in connection to a meal known as an *agapē* ("love") feast. The combined service served as a commemoration of the Passover meal Jesus celebrated with His disciples on the night He was betrayed. Individual members contributed food to the meal and the community then ate the meal together. It was a symbolic expression of the love and acceptance that characterized the life of the church. The church was not a place where people were divided by caste or social status; they were one in Christ. The practice of sharing a meal in connection to the Lord's Supper continued until about the fourth century, when churches became too large to celebrate a common meal together in this manner. At that time, the Lord's Supper became a separate service.

In Corinth, however, instead of members partaking of a meal together and then sharing in the Lord's Supper, some were eating before others so that some remained hungry and others got drunk (11:21). The most likely explanation for the divisions surrounding the Lord's Supper is the different economic statuses of the members of the community. As a result, the congregation had divided into first- and second-class believers, or, as the Greek indicates, the "haves" and the "have-nots." While this type of behavior was common in a private home, it was not appropriate for a community of Christians gathered together to celebrate the Lord's Supper. Paul found the entire situation shameful (v. 22).

To make his point, Paul reminded the Corinthians of the tradition regarding the Lord's Supper. Since Paul's letter likely predates the four Gospels, this may be the earliest recorded recollection in early Christianity of an oral tradition about the practice of the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Paul reminded the Corinthians of what Jesus said regarding those who were to partake of the emblems of the Lord's Supper: they were to do so in remembrance of Him. The broken bread symbolizes Christ's perfect life that was broken for us, while the cup symbolizes His blood shed for us. As we eat the bread and drink from the cup, we are called to reflect on the substitutionary death of Jesus on our behalf. In the same way that physical food gives life to the human body, so the repentant, believing sinner derives spiritual life from Jesus. The new covenant was made possible through the blood of Christ (v. 25). This new covenant is the fulfillment of the covenant promises of God in the OT (Jer. 31:31–34). The promise of forgiveness portrayed in the sacrificial system in the OT is now a reality.

Paul also connected the Lord's Supper with the Christian hope of Christ's coming. It helps the participants to look back on the death of Jesus and forward to His coming. Therefore, the Lord's Supper is a bridge that connects the two most important events in redemptive history. Since the Lord's Supper was such a significant event, Paul warned the Corinthians that anyone who ate of the bread and drank from the cup of the Lord "in an unworthy manner" would become guilty of the body and blood of the Lord (v. 27). In fact, the warning is so important that Paul states it twice within just three verses (v. 29). What does it mean to participate in "an unworthy manner"? Unfortunately, many have mistakenly understood this to mean that a person must be worthy enough to participate. Nothing, however, could be further from the truth. The Lord's Supper is, after all, a reminder that we are not worthy. We are all sinners in need of Christ's forgiveness.

Contextually, Paul was talking about the unworthy manner of celebrating the Lord's Supper. The Corinthians were partaking of the table in an irreverent way. They were not only treating it like a regular meal, with some people even getting drunk, but they did not even eat the meal together. They were divided up into different groups based on their socioeconomic positions within society without regard for the needs of others. It is in this sense that they were not discerning Christ's body (v. 29), that is, the true nature of the community of believers that make up the church, the body of Christ. Instead of caring for others within the church, they were acting in a selfish manner, focusing on their own spiritual life and their social privileges. In the very act that defined the church as one body in Christ, the Corinthians were acting like anything but a church.

Instead of experiencing God's grace in connection with the Lord's Supper, the Corinthians were experiencing judgment. While the suffering and death of some of the believers in Corinth may have been a consequence of their drunken and gluttonous behavior, to Paul it also was the evidence of God's judgment (v. 30). He wanted this to be a warning to the church. If the Corinthians did not want to fall under God's judgment, they were to take the time to evaluate their own behavior (v. 31). Paul desired that they would heed his advice so that the next time they came together to eat, they would wait for each other so they could eat together (v. 33). And if anyone was hungry, they were admonished to eat at home first. Paul had other issues he wanted to deal with in Corinth, but he did not say what those were. Whatever they were, he wanted to deal with those circumstances in person (v. 34).

12:1–11. Many Gifts but One Spirit. Chapter 12 is part of the larger section that stretches from 11:2 to 14:40 and deals with issues connected to the church at worship. The specific issue in chapters 12–14 revolves around the proper use of spiritual gifts. Here Paul sets the stage by describing the role of the various gifts within the church (12:1–31a). This chapter is followed by the famous passage on love (chap. 13). The subject of love is actually the fundamental basis on which Paul wanted the use of spiritual gifts to be expressed. It is in chapter 14 that we discover one of the reasons for the entire discussion of spiritual gifts: the abuse of the gifts of tongues and prophecy in church.

The first words of 12:1 signal the introduction of a new topic (cf. 7:1; 7:25; 8:1; 16:1, 12). While most Bibles prefer to translate the Greek word *pneumatikōn* as "spiritual gifts," it is possible to translate the term as "spiritual persons." While spiritual gifts are discussed in the chapter, Paul's ultimate concern was with the individuals who regarded themselves as "spiritual" (cf. 14:37). There was a danger—and in some cases a reality—of people claiming that they had a higher spiritual status within the community, which created disparity among the believers. Paul rejected this kind of mentality and explained that those who supposedly had inferior gifts were just as needed and valuable as anyone else (12:22).

In vv. 2–3, Paul emphasizes that the first gift of the Spirit is the confession of faith that "Jesus is Lord." This confession is a clear mark of the presence and activity of the Spirit. It constitutes a fundamental point of unity that distinguishes those who speak by the Spirit from those who do not. Faith begins with the gift of the Spirit. The most basic gift of the Spirit is faith in Jesus. This gift sets Christians apart from non-Christians and is the basis of Christian unity.

Within the Christian community there is diversity, which is manifested not only in the different spiritual gifts the members have received but also in the ministries and activities. Paul sought unity amid this diversity. The word "unity" presupposes diversity. Gifts are diverse, but the recipients of those gifts recognize the Holy Spirit as the sole Giver of the gifts (v. 4). In Him we are united. While highlighting the gifts of the Spirit, Paul did not ignore the functions of God and the Lord. He mentions each member of the Godhead: "the same Spirit" (v. 4); "the same Lord," that is, Jesus Christ, the Son (v. 5); and "the same God"—in this case a reference to the Father (v. 6). The order, however, is not Father-Son-Spirit, but Spirit-Son-Father. In the same way that the Godhead is one, so believers can experience unity in the midst of a diversity of gifts, ministries, and activities. All these diverse gifts, ministries, and activities are from the Triune God and strengthen the unity of the church. Paul's listing of knowledge, wisdom, and faith as being spiritual gifts does not imply that only some members have access to these gifts. Clearly these are important for all members (1:5; 2–3; 2:5). If this is the case, he would be saying that some members have special gifts in wisdom and knowledge, particularly in "word" or "message" (*logos*), and that some have special gifts of faith, particularly as it is manifested in healing, miracles, and prophecy, and that some have special gifts regarding tongues and their interpretation.

Paul explains that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are given for the benefit of the entire church (12:7). In vv. 8–10, he provides a list of some of the gifts of the Spirit while in v. 28 he provides a list of the various ministries in which these gifts are manifest. The word or message of wisdom (v. 8) referred to here is not of the world (1:17—2:16) but of the Spirit. It does not refer to an esoteric kind of human wisdom that some of the Corinthians valued but rather to the message of Christ crucified as the true wisdom of God (1:24, 30; 2:7). In the OT book of Proverbs, wisdom refers to the righteous application of knowledge and understanding to one's life. Here Paul clarifies that this righteous application (wisdom) should be guided by the knowledge and understanding of Christ's crucifixion. In other words, what we know and believe should find real manifestation in what we do and how we do it. The word or message of knowledge (12:8) should be understood as informing the word or message of wisdom.

Since the faith (v. 9) Paul mentions is not the faith given to everyone, it must refer to a special manifestation of supernatural faith connected to miracles—the kind that can move mountains (13:2). Gifts of healings (12:9) were manifested in the ministries of Jesus and the apostles. This gift does not enable a person to heal everyone at any given time. It is a gift that is given in a specific instance when God uses someone as an instrument through which His healing power is manifest. Miracles (v. 10) may include all other kinds of supernatural activities beyond the healing of the sick.

The gift of prophecy (v. 10) is a declaration from God that is given to His prophets for His people. While this can at times include the disclosure of future events (i.e., "foretelling"), it is primarily a proclamation of God's will for the present (i.e., "forth-Telling"). In the Christian church, prophecy was a gift that Paul wished all could have (14:1).

The discerning or distinguishing of spirits (12:10) is literally "discernments of spirits." This gift tests whether spirits are from God, and at the same time it is used particularly in judging prophecies (cf. 1 John 4:1–3). This gift immediately follows prophecy in the order of gifts listed. The gift of tongues (1 Cor. 12:10) was and is controversial. It was the favorite gift among some of the Corinthians. It is likely for this reason that Paul lists it near the bottom. Paul never forgot to mention its companion, that is, interpretation (v. 10). This is given because of the unintelligibility of the tongues. It could be something like translation. It is a Spirit-inspired gift of utterance, and it may be given either to the tongues speaker or to another. Paul concludes by reminding the Corinthians that one and the same Spirit is in charge of *all* the diversities of gifts (v. 11).

12:12–31. The Church and the Analogy of the Body. In order to make his point clearer, Paul uses an analogy that compares the church to a human body with many parts representing unity in diversity. Although the church has many members, they all constitute the one body of Christ. The body does not need only eyes but also ears and a nose. God created the human body in such a way that all these different organs are needed. If there were no diversity, there would be no body. Otherwise, it would just be an eye, an ear, a nose, or a foot.

In the same way that the human body has many individual parts that work together for the overall good of the body, so the church is made up of different members who are called to work together to represent Christ in the world. The church crosses boundaries of gender, social status, class, and ethnic origins: men and women, rich and poor, slave and free, Jews and Gentiles (vv. 12–13; cf. Gal. 3:28–29). It is only in this oneness in diversity that Christ can be fully represented to the world. So, no member of the body of Christ should ever say to another member that he or she is not needed (v. 21). To make his point, Paul focused on how valuable those parts of the body are that are often thought to be weaker (v. 22), less honorable, and unpresentable (v. 23). Everyone is necessary and, since we are all connected together as one body, there should be no divisions in the community.

To prevent the Corinthians from getting caught up in the pursuit of the gifts they believed were the most spectacular, personally gratifying, and bestowed on them the greatest honor, Paul told them that there is a more excellent way. Indeed, as the Greek can and has been rendered, it is the *most* excellent way (v. 31). He had in mind those gifts that work to comfort, encourage, and edify the body of Christ. And the basis of all those gifts is love. Love is not one gift among many. It is the means through which all of the gifts reach their ultimate purpose. And it is to this gift of the Spirit that Paul next turns his attention.

13:1–13. Love: The More Excellent Way. Paul's discourse about love is not a digression. It plays a critical role in the discussion about spiritual gifts. Genuine love for others, which is a gift of the Spirit (Rom. 5:5; Gal. 5:22), was what the Corinthians desperately needed to replace their tendency toward self-centered spirituality. Paul begins by noting that the gifts of tongues, knowledge, and prophecy, which the Corinthians highly valued, are useless if they are devoid of love (1 Cor. 13:1–3). Without love, speaking in tongues is no better than a clanking chunk of brass; it is just noise. The same is true of the gift of prophecy and the ability to comprehend all mysteries and all knowledge (v. 2). As important as that kind of revealed knowledge can be, without love it is just meaningless information (cf. 8:1–3). Since God is love (cf. 1 John 4:8, 16), He can be fully known only through love. For this reason, love is even greater than the supernatural faith that can move mountains. Without love we cannot know God, and without God we are nothing (1 Cor. 13:2).

Verse 3 may seem surprising at first because providing for the poor and submitting to affliction appear to be examples of self-sacrifice for the sake of others. Such things, however, are not always what they appear to be. Outward actions, no matter how impressive, do not always reveal the true motivations of the human heart. As Jesus often noted, religious behavior can often be done for one's own glory (cf. Matt. 6:1). This appears to be Paul's point as well. He is saying that even acts involving self-sacrifice are meaningless if they are not motivated out of love.

In vv. 4–8a, Paul explains the nature of love—what love is and what it is not. In describing love, Paul does not use adjectives to define the nature of love. He uses sixteen different verbs because love involves action; love is something we do. There are nine verbs with a negative or destructive value and seven with a positive or constructive value:

Positive Qualities	**Negative Qualities**
Love is patient (v. 4)	Love does not envy (v. 4)
Love is kind (v. 4)	Love does not boast (v. 4)
Love rejoices in the truth (v. 6)	Love is not arrogant (v. 4)
Love endures/protects all things (v. 7)	Love is not rude/disrespectful (v. 5)
Love believes all things, or always trusts (v. 7)	Love is not self-seeking (v. 5)
Love hopes all things (v. 7)	Love is not easily angered (v. 5)
Love endures all things, or always perseveres (v. 8)	Love does not keep a record of wrongs and thinks no evil (v. 5)
	Love does not delight in evil (v. 6)
	Love never fails (v. 8)

Love involves a patient response to others and is kind in its immediate response (v. 4). The following eight verbs express what love is not. The Greek word for envy (*zēloō*; v. 4) can be used in either a negative or positive sense. Negatively, it can refer to feelings of jealousy because of another's achievements. It was this sort of envy that was behind the division and strife among the Corinthians. It can be used in a positive sense to refer to an "earnest desire" for something (cf. 12:31; 14:1, 39). The desire the Corinthians had for spiritual gifts (14:12) may have led to the envy they had of others.

Love does not boast or parade itself. It literally means to "behave as a braggart," or to "be a windbag." People with such characteristics desire to call attention to themselves. Paul may have been alluding to the boastful mentality that seems to have characterized some of the Corinthians. Closely related to boasting is the idea of being puffed up or arrogant (v. 4). The Corinthians who stood against Paul were described as being proud or puffed up (4:6, 18–19; 5:2; 8:1).

Love does not behave rudely or dishonorably (v. 5). The Greek verb *aschēmoneō* may not only refer to shameful behavior in general but it may also have sexual overtones. If it does, Paul may not only have had in mind the shameful behavior of the women in worship and of the church in connection to the celebration of the Lord's Supper (chap. 11) but also the immoral behavior of some of the believers in Corinth (cf. 5:1–2; 6:15). Love is also not self-seeking (13:5). Paul identified yet another one of the faults of the Corinthians. Love does not put its own interests above that of others, whether it is for self-gain, self-justification, or self-worth. To the contrary, it seeks the good of others, neighbor or enemy alike. Accordingly, it is not provoked (v. 5) easily to anger by others, nor does it think evil. The word *logizomai* literally means to "reckon." In other words, love does not keep a record of the wrongs it has experienced with the goal of inflicting vengeance in return.

In v. 6, the first clause is balanced by the second clause. One who has love rejoices in the truth, over every victory gained, every forgiveness offered, and every kind act received. It does not rejoice in wickedness, the evils of war, the oppression of the poor, or the fall of a brother or sister. Verse 7 includes four action verbs preceded with the adjective "all" (or perhaps "always") to describe an all-inclusive and unlimited love. The word *stegō* is usually translated as "bears" or "endures," but it also can be and has been rendered as "protects." Its literal meaning conveys the idea of covering. In describing a love without limits, Paul was contrasting true love with the four negatives characteristic of verse five.

In the conclusion of this section, Paul compares the permanence of love with the spiritual gifts so prized by the Corinthians—prophecy, tongues, and knowledge. No matter how impressive these spiritual gifts may appear to be in this present age, love is superior because love never fails (v. 8). Spiritual gifts, on the other hand, are limited, partial, and temporary. They belong to an age when things are only conceived and understood in part as we await the fullness of God's presence. Thus, even at their best, the gifts of tongues and prophecy are merely indirect ways of knowing and communicating with God (vv. 9–10). Just as childish things are left behind when a person becomes an adult (v. 11), so spiritual gifts will no longer be necessary when Christ returns. Then all the indirect ways of communicating with God will become obsolete, because we will communicate with God face-to-face (v. 12).

Paul concludes his discussion by noting that not only is love superior to spiritual gifts but also to the triad of virtues that should define the Christian life now and in the age to come. It was love—the greatest of the three enduring virtues of faith, hope, and love (v. 13)—that the Corinthians were to seek above all else (14:1a).

14:1–5. Prophecy and the Gift of Tongues. Paul was ready to deal with the misuse of the gift of tongues among the Corinthians and to regulate its use and that of the gift of prophecy in the church. He intended to show the superiority of prophecy without undermining the gift of tongues. Many have argued that speaking in tongues here does not refer to human languages but to a spiritual language. Paul's reference to human languages (vv. 10–11), however, suggests that the gift is about human languages. This is supported by the fact that in Acts 2, the gift enabled the apostles to speak other languages (see "Speaking in Tongues," p. 1475).

Paul agreed with the Corinthians that it was good to desire the gifts of the Spirit, but he would have liked for them to have desired more the gift of prophecy (cf. 12:31). He gave priority to prophecy without disparaging the gift of tongues. In vv. 2–5, Paul contrasts the two gifts. Since speaking in tongues is not intelligible to the congregation (the person is speaking only to God), it benefits only the individual to whom the Spirit is revealing mysteries. The word "mysteries" does not necessarily refer to hidden or incomprehensible things but to things revealed through Christ by the Spirit (cf. 2:1, 7; 4:1; 13:2; 14:2; 15:51).

Concerning the gift of prophecy, it expresses itself through upbuilding, encouragement, and comfort. In this passage, prophecy is not mentioned in the context of being a prediction of future events, because the emphasis is on the present experience of the congregation. The noun *oikodomē* ("edification," "strengthening") and the related verb *oikodomeō* ("to build," "to build up," "to strengthen") indicate that one of the primary purposes of the gift of prophecy is to build up the church. The latter two—exhortation or encouragement and comfort—point to the pastoral side of the gift. The basic distinction between the gifts of tongues and prophecy is that tongues edify the person while prophecy edifies the congregation. Therefore, Paul considered prophecy preferable to tongues. The gift of tongues can meet the criterion of building up the church if the message is translated. Community building remains at the heart of Paul's discussion of the gift of tongues.

14:6–12. Intelligibility in Worship. Paul then proceeds to develop the importance of intelligibility during church worship. He uses himself to illustrate his point. Whenever he would visit them, it would be better for them to hear him speaking by revelation (a revelation God gave him), by knowledge (a gift of the Spirit; 12:8), by prophecy (inspired utterances in church; 14:3), or by teaching (a gift; 12:29), for such things edify the church or are *ōpheleō* ("be of use, benefit" or "good") for them. Paul also uses musical instruments as an illustration (the flute or pipe, the harp, and the trumpet). The sound they emit should be precise enough for the listener to know what is being played. In the case of the trumpet, the call for battle should be clear enough for the soldiers to know what to do. The illustrations are applied to the life of the church. In order for the church to know what is being said, it is necessary for the language to be easy to understand; otherwise, it would be like speaking into the air (14:9). He adds another illustration. All languages communicate meaning, but if we do not know the language of the speaker we will both be like *barbaros* ("foreigner," a person speaking a different language) to each other (v. 11). Paul concludes the section with an appeal, encouraging the Corinthians, who were eager to receive spiritual gifts (Gr. *pneumatōn*, "spirits," or spiritual things; perhaps the gift of tongues), to strive to excel in those gifts that edify the church (v. 12).

14:13–25. Interpreting Tongues. The apostle returns to the need to interpret the utterances of the gift of tongues (vv. 13–25). He uses the rhetorical "I" to illustrate what takes place inside the person who speaks in tongues when praying during worship. In such cases, Paul's inner being (his spirit) was praying, but the intelligibility of what was being communicated was useless or unfruitful, having no profit for the congregation (v. 14). Therefore, it is better to pray and sing in such a way that the congregation grows in understanding. Since worship is to some extent interactive, understanding is important; otherwise, when the speaker blesses the congregation or gives thanks while speaking in tongues (in the spirit), the church would not be able to properly respond by saying, "Amen!" (v. 16). Paul specifically calls the person who does not understand an *idiōtēs*, that is, an untrained person. This could perhaps refer to someone who attends church but who, by being unable to understand what is said, appears to be unskilled. In order to reaffirm the importance of intelligibility in worship, Paul adds an autobiographical note. He spoke in tongues more than all the Corinthians, but he would rather speak a few intelligible words in church than thousands in tongues (v. 19).

This discussion is followed by an exhortation in which Paul appealed to the Corinthians to be like mature adults in their thinking and not to behave like children, requiring constant correction and discipline (v. 20). With respect to the evil of malice, it was fine for them to be babes (*nēpios*, children that were not yet able to speak), that is, not to experientially know about it. The reference to *kakia* ("wickedness," "depravity," "malice") is not accidental, because the only other place Paul uses it in 1 Corinthians is in 5:8, where it designates the immorality found in the church. Though many Corinthians prided themselves as being spiritually superior, they had not been able to deal correctly with the problem of sin in the church.

The role of the paraphrased quotation from Isaiah 28:11 in 1 Corinthians 14:21 is difficult to establish. Notice that the term for "law" (Gr. *nomos*) designates here the OT as a whole. The intention of the quotation is not entirely clear, but perhaps it is used to suggest that speaking in foreign tongues does not make the message of God accessible to others but in fact blocks it. This is illustrated by describing the impact that speaking in tongues would have on unbelievers present in a congregation. The lack of intelligibility in worship would cause the uninformed or unbelievers—that is to say, those knowing little about the gospel or non-Christians—to conclude that Christianity was like some of the Roman religions in which ecstatic religious experiences resulted in irrational behavior or *mainomai* ("to rage," "to be insane"). In such cases of unintelligibility, speaking in tongues would be a negative sign of irrationality instead of a positive sign as it was intended if interpretation were provided (v. 22). If all were prophesying, it could happen that an unbeliever would be convicted by the Spirit when listening to the message and join believers in the worship of God. In fact, that person would testify that God was truly among them (v. 25) and that the church is the temple of God (cf. 3:9, 16–17).

14:26–40. Order in Worship and Appeals. The last section of the chapter consists of instructions about order in worship accompanied by some appeals (vv. 26–40). When coming to church, it is appropriate to bring something to share with others, be it a psalm (a hymn), a teaching (instructions on matters of faith), a tongue (a manifestation of the gift), a revelation (a message from God), or an interpretation of tongues (v. 26). Paul provides a general principle: everything done during worship should contribute to the edification of the church. Order in worship is necessary because it facilitates the building up of the church. Concerning the gift of tongues, Paul indicates that no more than three people should speak, that they should not speak at the same time, and that there should be an interpreter (v. 27). In the absence of an interpreter, such persons should worship in silence (v. 28). This indicates that the gift of tongues was not an ecstatic experience during which the person lost self-consciousness or self-control.

Concerning the gift of prophecy, Paul required that no more than two or three speak, and the others were to evaluate what was being said (v. 29). The "others" could have been the whole congregation, but this may have been impractical. The reference could be to other prophets sitting in the congregation or those having the gift of discernment (12:10). In any case, the task would be to evaluate whether the teaching was from the Lord, and in a sense it could be an evaluation of the prophetic claim itself. The text does not explain how this was to be done, but it would have included harmony with the apostolic teaching (1 Cor. 4:6; 7:10; 15:3; Rom. 12:6; 2 Thess. 2:15). A further regulation stipulates that if a prophet were speaking and another prophet in the congregation had a revelation from the Lord, then the previous prophet should be silent and permit this person to speak. This regulation allowed for all prophets to speak in an orderly way to instruct and encourage the church. Paul rejected the idea that prophets are unable to control themselves and comments that the spirits of the prophets (the inner spiritual

experience) are subject to the prophets (1 Cor. 14:32). He anchors orderly worship to the theological conviction that peace and harmony come from a God who is not the originator of confusion. Order characterizes the universal church of God (cf. v. 33).

Paul returns to the topic of the participation of women in worship (vv. 34–35), which was addressed before in 11:2–16. Some Greek manuscripts place vv. 34–35 after v. 40 and this, among other reasons, has led a number of scholars to argue that these verses are a later interpolation by a copyist. This argument is not enough to prove the case because most ancient documents going back to about the second century have the passage in its current position. It states that women are to keep silent (they are not permitted to speak) in church and to be submissive. If they want to learn something, they are to ask questions of their own husbands at home. Two reasons are given for these regulations: submission is based on the law (most probably Gen. 3:16) and it is shameful for women to speak in church (v. 35), that is, it is not a socially acceptable practice for women to speak in public.

There are two things that we can affirm about these regulations with a high level of certainty. First, this is not an absolute prohibition against women speaking in church. Paul had already regulated the circumstances under which a woman could pray and prophesy in church (prophesying includes edifying, exhorting, and comforting the church; 14:3; see also 11:2–16). Second, the context of 14:34–35 is about confusion, disorder, and lack of intelligibility in worship (cf. 1 Tim. 2:11–12). The implication is that some women were somehow involved in that situation and Paul wanted it to stop. Through their conduct, they were damaging the reputation of the church. Another possibility would be that Paul was dealing with husband-wife relationships. The Greek word used here for "women" (*gynē*) is the same one used for "wives." Moreover, the text specifically refers to these women asking their husbands at home. According to this line of interpretation, it could be speculated that some of the wives were evaluating the prophecy of their husbands in an inappropriate way, such that their actions were a violation of the principle of marital submission cited from the "law" and confirmed in other Pauline passages (Gen. 3:16; cf. Eph. 5:22–31; 1 Tim. 2:8–11; 1 Pet. 3:1–7), which had to do with wives, not all women in general. Other suggestions could be made to explain why Paul asked women to be silent, but they will be inferences drawn from the text and from social practices. We should also remember that Paul had already ordered some others to also keep silent during worship (14:28, 30).

At the end of the chapter (vv. 36–40), the apostle was speaking directly to the Corinthians with respect to the authority of his instructions. The two rhetorical questions addressed to the Corinthians intended to make clear that they had no authority to do what they were doing; the Lord was not guiding them. Paul provided a test for those claiming to be prophets (to have the gift of prophecy) or spiritual (to have the gift of tongues): it was necessary that they acknowledge his instructions for the church as commands from the Lord (cf. Col. 4:10). This statement indicates that Paul considered what he wrote to be an authoritative revelation from God. He concludes with words of judgment against those who would not listen to him (v. 38). Paul appealed to the Corinthians as brothers and sisters to desire earnestly the gift of prophecy without forbidding speaking in tongues under the guidelines he provided in these verses. The general principle is reaffirmed: in the church of Christ, everything should be done in an appropriate and orderly way (v. 40).

The Gift of Prophecy

Among the many gifts given by the Spirit to the church, the gift of prophecy is considered to be of major importance for the people of God. In fact, the Bible itself is the result of the work of the Spirit through humans, called prophets, who were endowed with the gift. Paul exhorts believers to engage in love and desire spiritual gifts, especially that of prophecy (1 Cor. 14:1).

1. Prophetic Experience. The gift of prophecy is in some ways unique. The prophets and prophetesses sometimes received messages from God that were predictive, but most of the time they were not. In such cases, the aim was to encourage, provide guidance, or call God's people to repentance and consecration to Him. The message received from God was called a revelation and would reach the prophets through dreams, visions, and auditions (see "Introduction to the Old Testament Historical Books," p. 350 and "Introduction to the Prophetic Books," p. 820).

During the reception of the message, the prophets sometimes went through unique experiences. They found themselves in a state in which they were able to see what God wanted them to see or receive. Sometimes those around them could not see what they were seeing (Dan. 10:7). Other times the prophets fell down (Num. 24:4) and their strength left them (Dan. 10:8). Daniel fell into a deep sleep (10:9). John fell at Christ's feet as though dead (Rev. 1:17), that is to say, he was unable to breathe. Even after a vision, prophets sometimes experienced physical trauma: Paul was blind (Acts 9:8); Zechariah could not speak (Luke 1:20); and Daniel was exhausted and sick for a number of days (8:27). These experiences were not always present in the life of the prophet. While under the power of the Spirit, prophets at times had conversations with angels (e.g., Luke 1:8–20). The message received was delivered orally (in forms such as discourse, narratives, parables, and poetry) or in written form.

2. *Testing the Prophets.* The OT testifies about the constant conflict between false prophets and the prophets of the Lord. Distinguishing between them was at times difficult, but the task was unavoidable. The Israelites asked the Lord how they could recognize whether the Lord was speaking through a prophet (Deut. 18:21). John counseled the church to test the spirits because of false prophets (1 John 4:1). The OT provides at least two cases in which the decision was crucial—Micaiah (1 Kin. 22) and Jeremiah in his encounter with Hananiah (Jer. 28). Since the topic is very important, the Scriptures provide some guidance.

First, the prediction of the prophet must be fulfilled (Deut. 18:22; cf. Jer. 28:8–9). This is a negative test—what was predicted did not take place—and apparently a clear one. Yet, it is very difficult to apply. It cannot always be immediately determined whether someone is a true prophet. It can be applied only when it is obvious that the prophecy was not fulfilled. In order to assist their audiences, sometimes a prophet gave, within a long-term prophecy, a short-term one that was immediately fulfilled (Jer. 28:16–17), thus demonstrating that he or she was a true prophet. Also, in some cases, the predictions of a false prophet could also be fulfilled (Deut. 13:1–2). This implies that this criterion is not self-sufficient.

Second, the messages of the prophets must agree with the messages of previous true prophets. This criterion presupposes that the prophetic messages could be used to evaluate new claims of prophetic revelations (Deut. 13:2; cf. Is. 30:8). Those listening to the new revelation would need a deep knowledge of the Word of the Lord. In the NT, the revelation of God through Jesus becomes the central criterion in conjunction with the written word (John 17:17; 1 John 4:2–3). This criterion is more difficult to falsify, but it can be falsified by evil forces masquerading as instruments of God (2 Cor. 11:13–14). Nevertheless, knowing the truth as it is in Jesus will protect God's people.

Third, true prophets will be faithful to the Lord and their lives will demonstrate it. False prophets will not live up to the covenant stipulations and will not condemn sin (Ezek. 13:22). They are described as arrogant (2 Pet. 2:18), deceitful (Acts 13:6–10), and often motivated by greed (2 Pet. 2:3, 13). This is a good test, but some people can give the impression of being holy while dressed in sheep's clothing (Matt. 7:15), in an attempt to validate their messages.

Fourth, the result of the ministry of a true prophet should be a blessing to God's people. Their fruits should be good (Matt. 7:16–17). This criterion is closely related to the previous one but goes beyond it by examining the end results of the ministries of those who claim to be prophets. The application of this criterion will require time. This long-term criterion will be difficult to falsify because deception sooner or later reveals itself for what it is.

Based on the previous biblical information we can conclude, first, that we should be open to the possibility that God may speak to us through a prophet. Second, in order to identify a true prophet, we must have a solid knowledge of and be firmly grounded in Scripture. We should use the holy Scriptures to evaluate the teachings and ministry of anyone claiming to be a prophet (1 Cor. 14:29). Finally, we should not hastily accept

somebody's claim to the prophetic ministry. We must allow time for the fruits to manifest themselves. Testing the spirits takes time and requires prayer and knowledge of what God has already revealed to us.

3. *Perpetuity of the Gift.* Paul establishes that the gifts of the Spirit are to remain in the church to the very end (Eph. 4:12–13) and connects them to the Second Coming of Christ. He told the Corinthians that they were not lacking any gift as they were waiting for the revelation of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 1:7; 13:9–10). The perpetuity of the gift of prophecy has been a topic of debate among Christians.

4. *Jesus: The Ultimate Prophet.* In the OT, the prophetic ministry pointed to the coming of the Prophet, Jesus Christ, the prophet like Moses (cf. Deut. 18:15). In the OT, Moses is a unique prophet. The Lord did not communicate with him through visions and dreams, but directly (Num. 12:7–8), yet the revelation of God to him was partial. In order for God to fully reveal Himself, the instrument of revelation must be divine. The Son of God became human in order to reveal the Father to us (John 1:14). His communication with the Father was direct and unmediated; we are never told that Jesus had visions or dreams. He was a prophet like Moses yet superior to Moses. The revelation and the message Jesus brought to us from the Father was final and complete; no other revelation can add to His self-revelation. Through the Spirit, this most glorious revelation has been expounded and preserved for us by the apostles and constitutes what we now call the *New* Testament.

If this reasoning is correct, then a question must be raised: Is post-apostolic prophecy needed? What would be its purpose if all that we need was brought to us by the greatest Prophet known on earth, the Son of God? Many Protestants believe that since we find in Christ all the truth necessary for salvation, a post-apostolic prophet is not only unnecessary but irrelevant. They believe that the gift of prophecy came to an end after the apostles died. This idea is rejected by many others who believe in the perpetuity of the gift of prophecy. Post-apostolic prophecy is not foundational for the church, but it aims to edify the church and provide comfort to believers by ministering to their spiritual needs. Through it the people of God are called to faithfulness to the Lord and to study and embrace biblical truth. God's people are to contribute to the building up of the church while at the same time remain subservient to the Scriptures.

15:1–58

The Resurrection of the Body

Up to this point in his letter, Paul has spent most of his time addressing the troubling behavior of the Corinthians. In chapter 15, however, he turns his attention to their beliefs about one of the most basic, fundamental truths of Christianity—the resurrection of the dead, the Christian hope. Although this section of the letter may at first seem to be completely unrelated to his previous instructions, they appear to have been closely related in Paul's mind. The aberrant behavior of the Corinthians was not an isolated issue. It was an outward indication that they had failed to understand fully the significance and implications of the apostolic proclamation of Christ's death and resurrection. The bodily resurrection of Christ from the dead affirms the value and importance of the body. It is also the basis of the Christian hope that the dead in Christ will be raised in bodily form at the return of Jesus. This reality stands in stark contrast to the negative view of the body commonly expressed in the Greco-Roman world. Accordingly, what Christians do with their bodies matters. It testifies to the transforming power of Christ in this world—the body will itself be transformed into a glorious body when Christ returns. Viewed from this perspective, Paul's discussion of the resurrection is the glorious foundation on which his entire letter is built, and it is the basis on which the Corinthians were to evaluate their lives.

15:1–11. The Gospel and the Certainty of Christ's Resurrection. Paul begins his discussion of the nature of the resurrection by reminding the Corinthians that the death and resurrection of Jesus are the very heart of the gospel (v. 1) he had proclaimed to them and that had changed their lives when they received it (v. 2). He starts to establish an area of mutual agreement from which he could then help them understand the implications of the resurrection of Christ that they had failed to recognize. This was so important that Paul reminded them again of his instruction to them about the centrality of Christ's death and resurrection (vv. 3–4).

The terminology of "delivering" or "receiving" (v. 3) indicates that Paul was passing along a tradition that predated his own conversion. The death and resurrection of Christ were the foundation on which the church originated. The way in which Paul states the tradition he received suggests to many that he drew from terminology from an early Christian creed, a confession of faith, or even perhaps a portion of an early hymn. That tradition was rooted in the belief that Christ's death was not simply a miscarriage of justice. It was part of God's divine will and served as an atoning sacrifice for our sins (v. 3). Moreover, although Christ was buried, He was resurrected on the third day (v. 4). Paul notes that this belief among early Christians was not simply wishful thinking; it was according to the Scriptures.

Although Paul does not indicate what particular passages of Scripture he had in mind, they would likely have included passages such as Isaiah 52:13—53:12 in connection to Christ's death and allusions to Christ's resurrection that Christians saw in passages like Psalm 16:9–11 (cf. Acts 2:24–32), perhaps combined with other passages that speak of God's deliverance on the third day (i.e., Hos. 6:2; Jon. 1:17; cf. Matt. 12:40). The Scriptures played such a pivotal role in the church's understanding of Christ that they are not only mentioned twice in 1 Corinthians 15:3–4, but Paul even places the testimony of the Scriptures before the list of eyewitnesses who saw Christ after His resurrection (vv. 5–11).

Paul continues proclaiming the death and resurrection of Jesus by reminding the Corinthians of the accounts of Christ's appearances to others after His death and resurrection. Since the Corinthians were familiar with the events he was describing, Paul did not provide the circumstances or details concerning these appearances. In a seemingly hierarchical sequence marked by adverbs such as "then," "at once" or "at the same time," and "last of all," he lists several resurrection appearances. Paul uses the passive form of the verb "was seen" (Gr. *ōphthē*) to indicate that Jesus took the initiative in the appearances (cf. Gen. 12:7; 26:24; 35:1, 7; Ex. 3:14–16). The list of eyewitnesses at the resurrection of Christ begins with Cephas, the Aramaic name which Paul normally uses for Peter (1 Cor. 1:12; 3:22; 9:5; Gal. 1:18; 2:9, 11, 14). Next is a reference to the twelve, a term Paul uses as an official designation of the apostolic group of Jesus's disciples. Paul likely had in mind the first appearance of Jesus to the disciples when Thomas was not there (John 20:24). There is no account in the NT about Christ's special appearance to more than five hundred people in one gathering (1 Cor. 15:6). The book of Acts mentions the meeting of about 120 disciples in the upper room (Acts 1:15), but since the appearance that Paul mentions occurred to more than five hundred disciples simultaneously, it must have happened somewhere else, perhaps in Galilee (cf. Matt. 28:10, 16).

Jesus was then seen by James, the brother of Jesus, and then by "all the apostles" (1 Cor. 15:7). Although the appearance to "all the apostles" may refer to Christ's final appearance to the Twelve at the time of His ascension to heaven (Acts 1:2–12), Paul seems to have had a different group in mind. Since he regarded James, the brother of Jesus, as an apostle (Gal. 1:19), the word "apostles" here is most likely being used in a more general sense to refer to a larger group of witnesses who had seen the risen Lord and who had been commissioned by Him to proclaim the gospel (cf. Rom. 16:7).

Paul concludes his list of witnesses to the resurrected Christ with his own experience (v. 8). Paul mentions that he had been *ektrōma*, which has been rendered as "born out of due time" or "abnormally born." This should not be understood to mean that Paul merely lived after the time of Jesus and the apostles. This Greek verb is used only here in the NT and three times in the Septuagint (cf. Num. 12:12; Job 3:16; Eccl. 6:3), and it refers to a birth that does not follow a normal pregnancy, whether it be due to an abortion, a premature birth, or a miscarriage. Thus Paul is saying that in comparison to the other disciples, he was no better than a stillborn child. He did not have the privilege of growing in his faith as did the disciples during Jesus's earthly ministry. He was suddenly and dramatically changed from a persecutor to an apostle. He may also be expressing his sense of unworthiness to be numbered among the apostles because of the ways in which he had persecuted the church (cf. 1 Cor. 15:9–10; 1 Tim. 1:12–15).

15:12–19. The Consequences of Denying the Resurrection. Now that Paul had reminded the Corinthians of the historical basis of Christ's resurrection, he set out to show how illogical it was that some of the believers in Corinth denied the idea of a general resurrection of the dead. This may sound shocking, but it is not really all that surprising in light of the common

beliefs at the time. There were two main ideas about the nature of death in the Greco-Roman world. The first view, known as annihilationism, states that death is simply the end of life; there is no life beyond the grave. Based on the Platonic idea of the immortality of the soul, the second view indicates that death frees the soul from the material limits of a physical body to go on living in a disembodied state. Just as modern culture influences people today, some of the new believers in Corinth were likely still holding on to some of the views of the society around them. They appeared to have embraced the miraculous resurrection of a hero like Jesus, but a general resurrection did not fit with their view of reality. To help them see the illogical nature of their view, Paul listed the negative results that would follow if there were no general resurrection (vv. 13–19).

According to Paul, denying the possibility of a general resurrection would result in the collapse of Christianity itself: (1) Christ would not have been resurrected (v. 13); (2) Paul's preaching would have been useless (v. 14); (3) the faith of the Corinthians would be futile—a good-for-nothing sham (v. 17); (4) preachers like Paul would be false witnesses (v. 15); (5) the Corinthians would be enslaved in their sins with no hope of inheriting the kingdom of God (v. 17); (6) fellow believers who died would be lost for all eternity (v. 18); and (7) if life in this world is all there is, Christians would be the most miserable people, since they would have suffered so much for nothing (v. 19).

15:20–28. Implications of Christ's Bodily Resurrection. Since the Corinthians agreed that Christ had indeed risen from the dead, Paul explains that thus they logically must accept the hope of the general resurrection of believers. His first argument states that on account of His resurrection, Christ became "the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" (v. 20). Christ is the beginning of the resurrection, not the end. The firstfruits indicates that there is much more produce to come soon. The future harvest still to come is the resurrection of the dead who are described as "those who have fallen asleep" (v. 20). Death is not the end; it is just a temporary state similar to sleep, and the resurrection is the awakening of the dead (cf. Job 3:11–17; Dan. 12:2; John 11:11–14; 1 Thess. 4:15–17).

In explaining the process of death and resurrection, Paul refers to "all" of humanity twice. All die in Adam, and all will be made alive in Christ (v. 22). The first "all" is easily understood, but in what sense will all be made alive in Christ? Paul was not arguing here for some sort of universal salvation of both the righteous and the wicked. Although his focus in chapter 15 is on the resurrection of believers, his terminology here is general enough to point to the final resurrection that will result in eternal life for those who have followed God and the resurrection of condemnation for those who have not (cf. John 5:28–29). In 1 Corinthians 15:23–24, Paul reveals the order of resurrection: Looking through the lens of the Apocalypse, the resurrection of the wicked and their final judgment will occur at the end of the Millennium (Rev. 20:1–15). The complete restoration of the kingdom of God will be accomplished only after Christ's defeat of all the forces of evil arrayed against God, represented here as dominion, rulership, authority, and power (v. 24), and finally His destruction of even death itself—the last enemy (v. 26). When that day comes, Christ will then deliver the kingdom to God the Father (v. 24). The world will once again be subjected to God. Nothing will ever again challenge God's rule.

Perhaps surprisingly, Paul notes that on the day when Christ will have forever conquered the power of sin and death in this world, He will hand this world back to the Father, so that "God may be all in all" (v. 28). Verse 28 has led to much discussion regarding the relationship of the Father and the Son. Some have mistakenly interpreted Christ's submission to the Father to reflect an eternal functional role in both nature and being. While this passage indicates that Christ clearly subjects Himself to the Father, it says nothing about Christ being by nature inferior—an idea expressed in the early Christian heresy known as Arianism. Nor does it teach that Christ has been eternally submissive from eternity past. The language Paul uses here is functional, referring to Christ's work of redemption. It is a continuation of Christ's voluntary submission to the Father when He took humanity on Himself for all eternity (Phil. 2:6–11). In relation to His divine nature, however, Christ will never be inferior to God. Thus, Paul's purpose in 1 Corinthians 15 is to demonstrate the magnificent reality of Christ's continued solidarity with resurrected humans in God's restored kingdom.

15:29–34. If the Resurrection Were Not True. To help the Corinthians recognize how foolish it was for them to continue to deny the resurrection of the dead, Paul points out two additional negative consequences of their denial (cf. vv. 12–19). The first example is the foolishness of the practice of baptism for the dead, if there is no resurrection (v. 29). The second is drawn from Paul's own sufferings for the gospel (vv. 30–32). Paul's basic point is clear. Since baptism is itself a symbol of a believer's union with Christ in His death and resurrection (cf. Rom. 6:3–4; Col. 2:12), it makes no sense to deny the reality of the resurrection. What would be the purpose of baptism if there were no resurrection? What is difficult to grasp, however, is what Paul meant by the expression "baptized for the dead" (1 Cor. 15:29). Different suggestions have been offered, but it is better to interpret the expression as referring to the decision of some to be baptized so that they would be able to be reunited with dead loved ones at the resurrection. It could also be that the decision to be baptized was a response to the exemplary life of those who had died in Christ. This case would refer to people not being baptized in place of the dead but because of the dead. The lives of faithful Christians who have died in the faith have motivated others to be united to Christ. Why would these people be baptized if there were no future resurrection? This view makes sense of Paul's terminology, and it does not involve a baptismal practice that is contrary to the Scriptures.

Paul's second and last argument was drawn from his own personal experience (v. 30). He and the other apostles had constantly faced difficulties and hardship on account of their commitment to proclaim the gospel. The threat of danger was so real that Paul declared that he was confronted with death every day (lit. "I die daily"; v. 31). Paul is not speaking metaphorically here but about real death. The word he uses (*apothnēskō*) is the same one he used earlier to refer to death in a literal sense (cf. 8:11; 9:15). If there is no resurrection, Paul's entire ministry was for no purpose. Why would he risk his life on a daily basis if life in this world were all there was?

Writing from the city of Ephesus, Paul illustrates his point by referring to the real dangers he faced in Ephesus from those who opposed the gospel (v. 32). It is unlikely that Paul was claiming to have actually been thrown to the wild beasts in an arena in Ephesus. Barring a miracle, Paul would not have survived that event. And if God had intervened to save his life, Paul would have certainly mentioned it in the list of missionary hardships he recounts in 2 Corinthians 11:23–28. The beasts are more likely a metaphor for the enemies he faced in Ephesus, such as Demetrius (Acts 19:23—20:1). The challenges in Asia were so difficult that, in his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul states that he despaired even of life itself (2 Cor. 1:8). The only thing that sustained him was his belief in God, who raises the dead (2 Cor. 1:9).

Beginning with a well-known quotation taken from the Greek playwright Menander (1 Cor. 15:33–34), Paul called the Corinthians to awake to righteousness and avoid the sins of corruption by bad company and willful ignorance of God while they were waiting for Jesus's coming, when all things would be subject to His rule (cf. 15:28). Paul had reprimanded the Corinthians for acting like immature infants (3:1). Now here, in response to their denial of the resurrection, he even more shockingly declared that some did not know God (15:43). In spite of all their claims to be spiritually enlightened and to possess "knowledge" (8:1), many of the Corinthians were actually no better than the pagans who did not know God.

15:35–49. The Physicality of the Resurrection. Paul continues his discussion of the resurrection by addressing two related questions about the nature of the resurrected body (v. 35). He answers these questions with three analogies (vv. 36–41) and then applies them to the resurrection (vv. 42–44). He begins by chiding the Corinthians for failing to recognize that the body is like a seed sown in the ground. Although it goes into the ground in the form of a seed, it comes forth as a plant. He reminds them that, for this transformation to take place, the sown seed must die (v. 36). While modern science has proven that a seed does not actually die, the point is still the same. For a seed to become a plant, it must cease to be a seed. How this occurs is a mystery, but it is God who provides the new body according to His plan (v. 38). By way of analogy, the same is true of the human body. The dead body that is buried in the ground will, by a miraculous act of God, come forth as a resurrected human body. This leads Paul to his second and third analogies (vv. 39–41).

Building on the analogy of the seed, Paul points out to the Corinthians that there are different types of flesh in the world God has created (v. 39). While the word "flesh" (*sarx*) is used in a wide variety of ways in the NT, here it simply refers to the outward appearance of the physical body. Humans, animals, birds, and fish each have a different type of body that is appropriate for the earthly realm in which they live. At the same time, Paul notes that this

is true not only of the bodies in the terrestrial world but also of the bodies in the celestial (*epouranios*) or heavenly world. Paul adds another element, an important difference. The "glory" (*doxa*) or "splendor" of the bodies in the earthly world is not only different from the heavenly bodies but the heavenly bodies also differ from one another (v. 41).

The point behind these two analogies is simple: in the same way that God has fitted the created order with the appropriate kind of body for the sphere of its existence, so God will provide a new form of existence for the resurrected human body. The "glory" of the resurrected body, however, will be far more glorious than the body that was buried. It is on this point that Paul elaborates in more detail in the conclusion to his argument.

All the analogies Paul has employed lead to one fundamental point regarding the resurrection from the dead (v. 42). While there is a level of continuity between the human body that dies and the resurrected body, the body that will come forth from the grave will be far more than just a recycled human corpse. Paul highlights these differences with four antitheses (vv. 42–44).

Paul is indeed defending a bodily existence in the resurrection. The resurrection will entail a transition from bodies of "flesh" to glorified spiritual bodies. To illustrate his point, Paul uses Adam and the resurrected Christ as examples of these two types of bodies. Adam is an example of the "natural" (*psychikos*) body that is fit for existence in this world. It is a body that is subject to the limitations of temporal existence in this world. Christ, as the second Adam, is an example of the "spiritual" (*pneumatikos*) or glorified body necessary for existence in the world to come. Although it is a "spiritual" body, it will still be a real body. Jesus demonstrated the physical reality of His resurrected body when He appeared to His disciples and even ate in their presence (cf. Luke 24:39, 43; John 20:17, 27). Adam became "a living being," and Christ became "a life-giving spirit" (1 Cor. 15:45). Thus, in the same way that everyone born into this world has a body that is subject to death, so those united to Christ receive a new life in Christ now and will receive a glorified immortal body at the resurrection. They will bear the image of the heavenly Man (v. 49). This transformation must take place for humans to inherit the kingdom of God (v. 50).

Paul notes, however, that the natural precedes the spiritual (v. 46). In other words, the resurrection will be an experience after death and not before. In contrast to the belief that the soul is immortal and goes on living in a disembodied form once the material body dies, the dead will rest in graves until the resurrection occurs. It is only at that time that believers will receive a spiritual body.

15:50–58. The Eschatological Resurrection. Paul starts to draw his discussion about the nature of the resurrection to a close by summarizing what he said in vv. 35–49. Paul uses the expression "flesh and blood" as a figure of speech to describe the nature of human existence in this world (v. 50). The mortal and corrupt body that all humans have in this world is not fit for the perfect world to come. Our bodies must be radically changed before we can receive God's inheritance for us.

When and how will that transformation occur? Although the answer to that question was once a mystery (v. 51) hidden from human understanding, it has been divinely revealed (vv. 51–52). The glorious transformation that Paul describes will affect all of God's people—both the living and dead. The dead will be brought forth from the grave with immortal bodies, while those who are alive when Christ returns will also be changed without experiencing death (cf. 1 Thess. 4:13–18). Paul explains that this transformation will not occur over a period of time, but in an *atomos* ("moment," "flash," "instant"), the shortest possible time period that could be expressed in the Greek language. Paul reinforces his point by also comparing it to the blink of an eye. At that moment, every trace of corruption and imperfection will be forever removed and our lowly bodies will be made like Christ's glorious resurrected body (Phil. 3:21).

Immortality is not ours at the time of death. Paul was clear that God's followers will receive immortality only at the resurrection when Christ returns in judgment as conquering King. It is only at that time that our mortal bodies will be clothed with immortality. The goal is not to be rid of a body but to be clothed with an immortal body (cf. 2 Cor. 5:1–5). Until that day comes, those who have died will rest in the grave awaiting the resurrection.

When that glorious transformation will occur at the resurrection, victory over death will be final and absolute (1 Cor. 15:54–55). Paul draws together two passages from the OT: a quotation from Isaiah 25:8 and an allusion to Hosea 13:14. Although death is still at work in the world, believers need not despair. Paul assures us that death will not be triumphant forever. Christ's death will not be triumphant forever. Christ's victory over the power of sin and death is the hope and guarantee of the full and final restoration that will occur when He comes again. Until that day comes, Paul encourages believers to remain firm and consistent in their faith as they recognize that their labor in the Lord is not in vain (v. 58).

16:1–24

Closing Instructions

Having addressed the major issues he needed to deal with at Corinth, Paul concludes his letter to the Corinthians with instructions regarding a financial collection for the poor in Jerusalem (vv. 1–4), some miscellaneous comments connected to his tentative travel plans (vv. 5–18), and final greetings followed by an appeal for love (vv. 19–24).

16:1–4. The Collection for Jerusalem. Paul desired that the believers in Corinth participate in a collection to help support the needy Jewish believers in Jerusalem. Based on the comments he made here and in his other letters, this collection was part of a wide-ranging project that involved the support of Gentile churches in Galatia, Macedonia, and Achaia (cf. Rom. 15:26; 2 Cor. 8–9). The economic situation of the believers around the time Paul was writing appears to have reached a crisis. Although Paul does not explain the reason they were in need, there are at least three possible reasons.

First, it has been suggested that the situation of the church in Jerusalem went back to a severe famine that had been experienced some five or six years earlier. It was so severe that it was mentioned in the writings of later Jewish and Roman historians. In response to this situation, believers in Syrian Antioch sent Paul and Barnabas with financial help for their fellow believers (Acts 11:28, 29). The consequences from that famine may have lingered on for years, contributing to the growing needs of the poor in Jerusalem.

Second, others have argued that the extreme generosity that prompted the earliest believers in Jerusalem to sell all their property and to donate the money for the common good may have over time also depleted the community's ability to continue to provide for their own needs (cf. Acts 2:44–45; 4:34–35), and this made Paul's collection necessary.

Third, according to others, the persecutions that the Jewish Christians experienced at the hand of nonbelieving Jews would have certainly made life extremely difficult for the church in Jerusalem. Ostracized by their fellow Jews, the Christians in Jerusalem would have had little to no help in times of need.

Whatever the case, the collection Paul organized was unusual in the ancient world. The Greco-Roman world had a system of public benefaction for the needy, but nothing that raised funds to be distributed to the poor of a different ethnic group and in a country hundreds of miles or kilometers away. Although Paul did not explain the reason why he wanted the Gentiles to join him in this task, he certainly would have believed that this act of kindness would strengthen the bond between Gentile and Jewish Christians and demonstrate that Christian unity transcended ethnic barriers (cf. 2 Cor. 8:16–24). He may also have seen it as a fulfillment of the OT prophecies that spoke of the wealth of the Gentiles coming to Jerusalem (Is. 45:14; 60:5–17; 61:6).

So that he would not have to worry about organizing the collection when he arrived in Corinth, Paul instructed the believers there to set aside and store up some money appropriate to their income (1 Cor. 16:2). Although some have seen an example of Sunday worship in this passage, there is nothing in the context that would suggest that the collection was connected to a worship service on Sunday. The NT is clear that the early Christians continued to worship on the Sabbath (cf. Acts 13:14, 42, 44; 15:21; 18:4). Paul merely wanted individual families to evaluate their needs at the beginning of a new week and to systematically set aside at home a regular amount according to their ability. In that case, the phrase "the first day" of the week would simply mean on a weekly basis. This would allow the church to give over a period of time rather than trying to raise a large amount all at once.

To avoid any suspicion, Paul indicated that once the money was collected, it would be necessary for the Corinthians to appoint a local church representative to take the gift to Jerusalem (1 Cor. 16:3). If everything worked out for Paul to make the trip himself, he wanted them to travel with him. The book of Acts indicates that Paul was able to make the trip and that a delegation of Gentile believers did accompany him on that journey (cf. Acts 20:4–6, 16).

16:5–18. Thoughts Related to Paul's Travel Plans. Paul informed the Corinthians that he intended to visit them. He planned to remain in

Ephesus, from where he was writing to them, until Pentecost (v. 8), that is, until sometime in the spring. At that point, he planned to travel through Macedonia (v. 5) on his way to Corinth, no doubt to visit the churches he founded in cities like Philippi and Thessalonica. Paul hoped to spend a considerable amount of time with them, perhaps even the winter if the Lord would permit (vv. 6–7). In the meantime, Paul hoped that the Corinthians would welcome Timothy on his behalf and that he would not be treated with disrespect (v. 11).

Paul had good reason to be concerned for his younger colleague. Earlier in his letter, Paul mentions that he had sent Timothy to Corinth in order to remind them of his ways in Christ (4:17). Since those instructions were connected to Paul's rebuke of the Corinthians for their arrogance, there was a chance that a negative response toward Paul might be directed toward Timothy. Paul eagerly waited for the return of Timothy, hoping that he would come back with positive news about the situation in Corinth (16:11).

The Corinthians may have asked that Apollos visit them again. While Apollos was in Ephesus with Paul, he was unwilling to come at that time (v. 12a). Although no reason is given for this decision, Apollos did not want to contribute to the divisive elements in the church that had attempted to pit Paul and him against each other (1:12). Paul had spoken out strongly against this sort of mentality, and Apollos did not want his presence in Corinth to undermine what Paul had said. Once the situation had clearly taken a turn for the better, Apollos would return when he had an opportunity to do so (16:12b).

In the meantime, Paul admonished the Corinthians to be alert and steadfast and to have faith, courage, and strength while doing all things in love (vv. 13–14). And in addition to these general exhortations, he specifically encouraged the Corinthians to submit to the household of Stephanas and to those who worked and labored with Paul and his associates (vv. 15–16). The members of the household of Stephanas had not only been Paul's first converts in Asia (v. 15; cf. 1:16) but they had also devoted themselves to caring for the needs of church (v. 15). Their behavior served as a model of the type of servant leadership needed in the church at Corinth. Paul wanted the various factions in Corinth to follow that example of leadership.

16:19–24. Final Greetings and an Appeal for Love. As Paul's letter draws to a close, he concludes, as he regularly does in his letters, with several greetings from believers who were with him at that time (vv. 19–20). The churches of Asia would have included all the believers living in the western part of Asia Minor, modern-day Turkey, with Ephesus as the region's economic and administrative center. This would have included the seven churches mentioned in Revelation 2–3, as well as the churches at Colossae and Hierapolis (Col. 4:13–16).

The personal greeting from Aquila and Priscilla (1 Cor. 16:19) was especially appropriate since this Christian couple had played an integral role in helping Paul establish the church in Corinth (Acts 18:2). When Paul left Corinth during his second missionary journey, this couple had not only traveled with him to Ephesus (Acts 18:18) but they also allowed the believers in Ephesus to meet in their home for communal worship. Paul was likely living with them when he wrote his letter to the Corinthians.

Paul's instruction to "greet one another with a holy kiss" (v. 20) symbolizes the strong bond of fellowship experienced among the early Christians. He mentions this practice in several of his other letters (Rom. 16:16; 2 Cor. 13:12; 1 Thess. 5:26). Since Paul refers to the kiss as "holy," it was more than just a socially appropriate greeting. It served as an outward sign of the new community of men and women from different backgrounds, nationalities, and races that God had brought together as His church—the family of God.

Paul ended the letter by writing out the benediction with his own hand (1 Cor. 16:21). This was his regular custom, as he mentions in several of his other letters (Col. 4:18; 2 Thess. 3:17; Philem. 19). After dictating the letter to a scribe (Rom. 16:22), Paul would write out the final benediction himself, as a person might add a signature at the end of a typed letter.

While the anathema or curse in 1 Corinthians 16:22 on anyone who "does not love the Lord" may sound startling to modern readers, it is a warning of the judgment that awaits anyone who rejects the lordship of Jesus. Paul's fervent longing for the day when the Christian hope will be realized at the return of Christ is expressed in his expectant cry for the Lord to come. These words are not written in Greek but in the Aramaic, the language of the earliest Christians. The English word "maranatha" comes from the Aramaic expression meaning "Our Lord, come." Christians applied "Lord" (as when referencing God in the OT) to Jesus. It forms a fervent prayer for the Lord Jesus's soon return, bringing the world at long last into subjection to God (15:28). Christians were constantly looking forward, hoping for the return of the Lord.

After offering the blessing that typically brings his letters to a close—that the grace of Jesus would be with them (16:23)—Paul expresses his love to all of them "in Christ Jesus" (v. 24). While Paul had to confront a number of challenging issues in his letter to the Corinthians, even using strong language at times, he reached out to them one last time at the end with a reminder that not only did God love them but that he loved them as well. It is in the context of his deep love for the Corinthians that Paul longed for his words to be understood and for the divisions in the church to be healed. The letter closes with two fundamental Christian concepts: hope and love.

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2 CORINTHIANS

INTRODUCTION

Title and Authorship. In the Greek, the title of this letter is *Pros Korinthious B*, "To the Corinthians 2." This title is found in the oldest extant copy of the manuscript, which dates to about A.D. 200. There are similar and longer titles that also appear in other manuscripts from much later dates. In all the titles ascribed to the letter, it is either the alphabetical letter *B* or the word "second" that is used, although a few also add a place name like "written from Philippi" or "Macedonia." The title clearly indicates the presence of an earlier epistle to the Corinthians. As is the case with all of Paul's letters, this one would not have originally had any title. The title was added by later scribes based on the opening salutation (2 Cor. 1:1) and their awareness of the existence of an earlier letter to the Corinthians.

Paul's authorship of 2 Corinthians is not a matter of scholarly dispute. Early church fathers like Polycarp (ca. A.D. 155), Irenaeus (ca. A.D. 185), Clement of Alexandria (ca. A.D. 200), and Tertullian (ca. A.D. 210) recognized Paul as the author of the letter and used it authoritatively. As is the case in several of Paul's other letters, Timothy is identified as a co-sender and witness to the letter (Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:1; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1; Philem. 1). Timothy would have been well known to the Corinthians. He had traveled to Corinth as Paul's emissary (1 Cor. 4:17), and was likely the one who brought back the disturbing news about the continuing problems in Corinth (1 Cor. 16:10–11).

While there is little doubt about the Pauline authorship of 2 Corinthians, some scholars have suggested that the letter might actually be an edited compilation of anywhere from two to five originally independent letters. Evidence for this is supposedly seen in the shift from the generally positive tone in chapters 1–9 to the more negative one in chapters 10–13, as well as in the presence of some rather rough transitions throughout the letter (e.g., 2:14; 6:13; 7:1; 8:24). Connected to this question is the fact that Paul wrote at least four letters to the Corinthians, and some of those letters are missing. His first letter, which is referred to in 1 Corinthians 5:9, no longer exists. This makes the letter we know as 1 Corinthians actually Paul's second letter to them. The third letter he wrote to them is the "painful" letter he mentions in 2 Corinthians 2:3–4; 7:8, 12. Thus this would make 2 Corinthians the apostle's fourth letter. Some suggest that rather than the "painful" letter being lost, a truncated portion of it remains in 2 Corinthians 10–13. Others claim that the final chapters of 2 Corinthians are part of yet another letter.

Though the transitions in 2 Corinthians are not always smooth, and the tone does seem to shift in the final four chapters, these elements do not necessarily indicate that 2 Corinthians is not a unified document. If the letter was written over an extended period of time as Paul traveled through Macedonia, it is not hard to imagine that changing circumstances and additional news along the way would have impacted the structure and nature of the letter. While that is possible, it seems even more likely that the entire letter is simply a twofold response to the news Paul heard from Titus when he returned from Corinth. Encouraged by the positive developments in Corinth, Paul wrote chapters 1–9 in an attempt to build on the spirit of goodwill that had been reestablished with the Corinthians. Then in chapters 10–13, Paul turns his attention to the source of the earlier problems in the church—the presence of self-appointed apostles who were creating doubts about Paul's apostolic ministry. Evidence of the unity of 2 Corinthians is seen in the fact that, outside of a few fragments, 2 Corinthians has been preserved as a single literary unit throughout its entire manuscript history.

Date. Second Corinthians was written while Paul was traveling through Macedonia (cf. 2 Cor. 2:1–12; 7:5ff.). A careful examination of the account of Paul's travels in Acts, the situation outlined in 1 Corinthians, and the events that led to the writing of 2 Corinthians all lead to the conclusion that 2 Corinthians was written roughly a year after 1 Corinthians, probably in the fall of A.D. 56. There is a significant amount of information supporting this conclusion. According to Acts, Paul ministered in Corinth for eighteen months during his second missionary journey (Acts 18:11). When he arrived in the city he met Aquila and Priscilla, a Jewish couple who had recently been forced to leave Rome as a result of Emperor Claudius's expulsion of Jews from the capital. This expulsion occurred around A.D. 49 (18:2). While Paul was in Corinth, the Jews brought charges against him before the governor, a man named Gallio. Ancient inscriptions indicate that Gallio held this office from July A.D. 51 to July A.D. 52. Since Aquila and Priscilla had recently come to Corinth from Rome, it is conceivable that Paul had arrived in the city in A.D. 49 or quite early in A.D. 50. In an attempt to take advantage of the early stage of Gallio's proconsulship, the Jews appear to have brought their accusations against Paul in the autumn of A.D. 51. Since he stayed on for some time after his acquittal, he may have left in the spring of A.D. 52.

After returning to Syria, Paul set out on his third missionary journey in A.D. 53. During that time, he ministered in Ephesus for nearly three years (Acts 19:8, 10; 20:31). His own comments make it clear that he wrote 1 Corinthians while in Ephesus, sometime before the feast of Pentecost (1 Cor. 16:8) in the spring of A.D. 55. On account of the growing problems in Corinth, Paul eventually traveled to Corinth via Macedonia, during which time he wrote 2 Corinthians (2:12–13; 7:5; 8:1–5; 9:2). His impending third visit announced in 2 Corinthians 12:14 and 13:1 suggests that this letter was written in the fall of A.D. 56, before he arrived in Corinth for the winter (see 8:10; 9:2).

Backgrounds. Corinth was strategically located on the narrow land bridge separating Athens and the Greek mainland to the north from Sparta and the Peloponnese peninsula to the south. With the Gulf of Corinth to its west and the Saronic Gulf to its east, Corinth established itself as an influential center of international trade and commerce between the eastern and western parts of the Roman Empire by building a harbor in each gulf: Cenchreae in the east and Lechaeum in the west. In order to allow cargo and small ships to be transferred from one port to the other, a paved road (called the *diolkos*) was built across the four miles (6 km) separating the two harbors. Merchants were glad to enrich the treasury of Corinth for this service, instead of taking the risk of sailing around the Peloponnese and its notoriously dangerous Cape of Maleae. Like many cities that have prospered through trade, Corinth also had developed a reputation for sexual promiscuity.

Although Corinth had been completely destroyed by the Romans in 146 B.C. when it attempted to break away from Rome, Julius Caesar rebuilt the city as a colony in 44 B.C. Its location quickly made it prosperous again. Inhabitants of the new Corinth included retired soldiers, slaves, freedmen, some Greek residents, a considerable number of Jews, and a large influx of wealthy merchants. In recognition of the city's achievements, Rome established Corinth as the capital of the senatorial province of Achaia in 27 B.C. Like other provinces in the Roman Empire, Corinth was Hellenized in terms of culture, philosophy, and religion. Greek was the lingua franca. It was in this new and flourishing Corinth that Paul preached and established a Christian community.

As noted earlier, Paul founded the church in Corinth during his second missionary journey (Acts 18). As was his custom, he first attended the synagogue and proclaimed to Jews and God-fearing Gentiles that Jesus was the promised Messiah (Acts 18:4–5). When opposition arose to his message (Acts 18:6), Paul moved from the synagogue to the house of Justus and remained in Corinth for one and half years (Acts 18:7, 11). During his stay, he preached the gospel of Jesus Christ, which he called the foundation of his ministry (1 Cor. 3:10–11; cf. Acts 18:11). Paul then left for Caesarea through Ephesus, and finally returned to his home church in Syria Antioch (Acts 18:21–22).

Shortly after returning to Antioch, Paul embarked on his third missionary journey. He returned to Ephesus and remained there for almost three years (Acts 19:8, 10; 20:31). During this time, news reached Paul that there were some challenges facing the believers in Corinth. Paul wrote a letter to the Corinthians instructing them not to associate with sexually immoral people (1 Cor. 5:9). This letter no longer exists. In response to additional reports, Paul wrote another letter to them from Ephesus—the letter we know as 1 Corinthians (1 Cor. 16:8). In it he promised to visit the church at Corinth (1 Cor. 16:5–8). In addition, Paul sent Timothy as his personal envoy to assess the situation (1 Cor. 4:17; 16:10–11). Timothy appears to have returned to Ephesus with news that the problems in Corinth had grown worse. Concerned about the rapidly deteriorating situation in Corinth, Paul apparently changed his plans and decided to visit Corinth immediately. Without notifying the Corinthians, Paul sailed directly across the Aegean from Ephesus to Corinth. His surprise visit, however, did not go well, as it seems that he experienced a hostile response (2 Cor. 2:1). Some ringleaders had hijacked the church and were now questioning Paul's leadership (2:5–8, 10; 7:12; 3:1–3; 11:13–15).

Worried that another visit to Corinth might result in more confrontations, Paul decided to deal with the disciplinary problems in Corinth by sending the church a letter in which he sharply rebuked the members for their behavior (2:1–4). Titus was given the responsibility of delivering the letter (2:4, 13; 7:12). This letter is now lost. After Titus left for Corinth with the letter, Paul began to worry that the Corinthians might fail to see the deep love and concern behind his candid words. Eventually, Titus returned with a good report about the church's attitudinal change toward Paul (7:6–16). On receiving this news, the apostle wrote to express his relief and joy. As indicated earlier, Paul wrote our present 2 Corinthians probably while traveling through Macedonia on his way to Corinth (2:13; 7:5; 9:2).

Once this ailing relationship appeared to have been restored, Paul addressed other equally pressing issues in the letter. First, he wrote to encourage the church members to complete their promised collection for the needy saints in Jerusalem (8:6–7, 10–11; 9:3–5). Second, he differentiated his apostolic ministry from the workings of the false apostles in order to safeguard the fragile faith of the Corinthian believers (2:17; 3:1, 12; 11:3–4, 13–15). Third, he wrote to prepare the Corinthians for his third visit to the church, hoping to avoid taking any disciplinary action (10:2, 5, 11; 11:3; 12:19–21; 13:10).

Theology and Purpose. Several notable theological themes are present in 2 Corinthians: (1) the Trinity-Godhead, (2) comfort and hope, (3) stewardship, and (4) apostolic or pastoral ministry. The central theme seems to be the apostolic/pastoral ministry as Paul sought to reaffirm his integrity and the nature of his ministry.

1. The Trinity-Godhead. The Godhead formula appears in 2 Corinthians 13:14. In the epilogue, Paul extends to the church grace from Jesus Christ, love from God the Father, and fellowship or communion with the Holy Spirit. These divine Persons played a significant role in Paul's purpose for writing to the church. He focuses on their collective role in his apostolic ministry as well as in the salvation story of the church. The person of God pervades this letter. The Greek word for "God" is used more than seventy times. God the Father willed Paul's apostleship and made him and his coworkers able ministers of the gospel. Believers in Corinth constituted the church of God, highlighting ownership (1:1; 3:6; cf. Gal. 1:15). God bore true witness to Paul's ministry as an authentic ministry (2 Cor. 1:23; 2:17; 11:31) made possible by His power (2:14; 6:6–7; 10:4–5; 12:19, 21; 13:4, 7). His faithfulness is emphasized (1:18–19). Just as Jesus was raised up by God, believers are to be raised up by Him in the last day (4:13–15). Therefore, He becomes the object of praise (1:3; 4:15; 9:15; 11:31). God is woven into all facets of Paul's ministerial calling, service, existence, and final redemption.

Paul's designation of Jesus as Christ is significant in addressing issues that called forth the writing of the letter. By this designation, Jesus is the Anointed One. The mission of Christ was foretold by Isaiah and Daniel (Is. 61:1; Dan. 9:24–29). The title Christ appears more than forty times in 2 Corinthians. This means that Paul attached to it great significance. Jesus Christ was the source of Paul's apostolic authority (1:1; 5:20; 10; cf. Acts 9:5, 15), and He is, as the Son of God, the substance of the gospel that Paul preached to the Corinthians (2 Cor. 1:19; 4:4–5; 10:14; 11:4). "In Christ," a frequent Pauline phrase, is employed several times to affirm the sphere of salvation and the believers' union with Christ. It explains and motivates the conscious and spontaneous actions of believers (1:21; 2:14, 17; 3:14; 5:17; 11:3; cf. Rom. 3:24; 1 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 2:16; Eph. 2:10). Christ is the reason and the motivation for ministry, godly acts, and perseverance in the faith (2 Cor. 5:14–16; 8:9; 12:9–10). There is only one Christ to whom the church is metaphorically married (11:2). This title suggests that Jesus was divinely appointed, commissioned, and accredited as the Savior of humanity (John 1:1–14; Acts 2:22; Gal. 4:4). Since Paul was appointed by Christ as His apostle and the content of his preaching was Jesus Christ, the meaning of his ministry revolved around the significance of this name.

The Holy Spirit features briefly in 2 Corinthians. The ministry of Paul and his associates had been sealed with the Spirit as a guarantee for successful ministry (1:22; 3:3; 5:5; 6:6). As Paul stated elsewhere, the signs and wonders accomplished among the Corinthian believers by him were the result of the influence of the Spirit (12:12; Rom. 15:19; Heb. 2:4). The Holy Spirit was with both Jesus and His disciples when they performed signs and miracles (Mark 3:22–29; Luke 12:12; John 20:22; Acts 1:8). The promise that the Spirit would have a close relationship with God's people is echoed in 2 Corinthians 13:14. Just as the Spirit guaranteed Paul's ministry through thick and thin, so also He would continually be by the side of the Corinthians.

2. *Comfort and Hope.* Christian suffering is one of the principal theological themes in 2 Corinthians. Paul recounted the life-threatening sufferings he experienced for the sake of Christ (1:3–11; 4:7–18; 6:3–10; 12:1–10). He was anxious when he could not find Titus in Troas, from whom he expected some news from Corinth (2:13). But amid the sufferings and instability, God the Comforter and Deliverer comforted and delivered him (1:10; 7:7; 11:32–33). Even if God would not deliver him, Paul was determined to persevere in the faith because God would preserve him in the midst of his trials (2 Tim. 4:17–18; cf. Dan. 3:17–18).

Christ's death and resurrection are given special attention in 2 Corinthians. If Paul died for the sake of Christ, he trusted in God's promise of the resurrection (2 Cor. 1:8–10), when everything mortal may be "swallowed up by life" (5:4). The hope of the resurrection is also firmly anchored in the historic resurrection of Jesus (4:14). On the basis of this hope, Paul and his associates did not lose heart but remained faithful to the end (4:7—5:10; cf. 1 Cor. 15). The final judgment was mentioned to motivate believers to faithfulness to God (2 Cor. 5:10). Ministry aims at creating hope in the human heart based on God's promises and in nurturing this hope to the end.

3. *Stewardship.* Christian stewardship is more pronounced in 2 Corinthians 8–9 than in any other NT book. Paul appealed to the Corinthians to support the needy saints in Jerusalem with their financial resources. The church was made to feel responsible for relieving the physical needs of the saints (8:14; cf. 1 Cor. 16:1–3). Willingness to support the needy is emphasized as the true essence of Christian stewardship (2 Cor. 9:5). Two primary motivations for giving are mentioned. The first one is the gift of divine grace, which reached the believers through the proclamation of the gospel and that instilled in them a disposition to give (cf. 8:1). A gift received, in this case from God, should move believers to give with a disposition coming from the Lord. Second, believers should give because they have received many blessings from God (9:8–11). The Corinthians had received enough from the Lord to provide for their needs and to share with others. Third, the most important motivation to give is found in Christ, who became poor for us in order to redeem us (8:9). He gave all He had for us in the most sublime manifestation of divine love. Stewardship is in essence a response of gratitude to God for all He has given to us and particularly for what He did for us through His Son. Therefore, any offering given willingly and generously to the Lord is a freewill offering (8:3; 9:11–12). It is in fact the embodiment of the loving disposition of our hearts to surrender our lives to the Lord.

4. *Apostolic or Pastoral Ministry.* Apostolic or pastoral ministry is defined in terms of its impact on the spiritual growth and life of the church. This is the central theme of the letter. Jesus Christ was the source of Paul's apostolic and pastoral ministry (cf. 8:23), and Paul was ministering to the church as its founder (2 Cor. 1:19; 11:2, 28; cf. Acts 18:8; 1 Cor. 1:14–17; 2:1–2). Hence, he was relating to the church as a father (2 Cor. 6:13; 12:14) who, as a tender pastor, was sensitive to the needs of his flock (1:24; 2:6, 7; 6:1; 10:2; 13:5, 10). He entreated his children to reconcile fully with him (1:14; 6:11—7:2), expressed his joy over the children's repentance, and strongly urged them to forgive and comfort the offender who had shown signs of repentance (2:5–11; 7:9, 16). Paul appealed to sinners within the church to repent and tried to avoid taking ecclesiastical disciplinary actions (12:20—13:3). His approach in ministering to the financial needs of the saints in Jerusalem indicates how he viewed believers as one, irrespective of their geographical locations. Since they were one, they were to care for each other wherever the need was. The practice of pastoral care epitomized in this letter demonstrates the true spirit of pastoral ministry.

It could be said that 2 Corinthians serves as a pastoral manual for a responsible and result-oriented ministry. For Paul, ministry was not a profession but a divine calling to service requiring a deep spiritual relationship with Christ. As an ambassador of God, the minister is to represent Him through proper conduct and through the clear proclamation of the message of reconciliation through Christ. Ministry is the result of a calling, election, and enabling work of the Spirit and is accompanied by a profound sense of responsibility toward God and His people. In other

words, at the core of ministry, according to Paul, we find unwavering commitment to and love for God and His people. For Paul, the ministry required a willingness to proclaim and defend the message given by God to His church against false teachers. There are forces that oppose the gospel and that can influence the church. In such cases, it is necessary to lovingly minister to the church so as to win the people back to Christ. Since the opposition comes from both outside and within the church, ministry is often characterized by suffering. In this case, perseverance is needed while we keep in mind that God is our source of comfort. True ministry reconciles sinners to God and establishes them in the faith in the anticipation of the return of Christ, when He will reward us according to our works of love (5:10).

COMMENTARY

1:1–11

PROLOGUE

One of the chief characteristics of ancient letters is the prologue, which establishes a relationship between the sender and the recipient. It also provides significant information about the content and the main themes of the entire letter. The opening eleven verses of 2 Corinthians were designed to serve these intentions. In a circumstance in which Paul's relationship with the church was strained and his authority was being questioned, it was inevitable for him to reassert his qualifications and his ministry. The prologue consists of two main parts: the salutation (1:1–2) and the thanksgiving (1:3–11). Paul revealed the source and nature of his apostleship (1:1–2) and described the close bond existing between him and the church. He praised God in the midst of trials for His comfort and for delivering him from death (1:3–11).

1:1–2. Salutation. The salutation identifies Paul as the sender of the letter and Timothy as co-sender. The church of God in Corinth and the believers—"saints" or "holy people"—in the whole region of Achaia (v. 1) were the recipients of the letter. Paul extended greetings to the church from God the Father and Jesus Christ (v. 2). The main focus of this section is Paul's special relationship with the church as occasioned by the will of God. Usually, letters from the Greco-Roman period began by naming the sender, that person's office or profession, and the recipients, followed by greetings and wishes for good health. Paul followed this practice with marked differences. With the exception of 1 and 2 Thessalonians, Philippians, and Philemon, Paul called himself "an apostle" of Jesus Christ (1:1) in all his letters (e.g., Rom. 1:1; 1 Cor. 1:1). He claimed equality with the twelve apostles on the basis of the special revelation of Christ that God had granted him during his conversion and call (Acts 9:15; 1 Cor. 9:1; Gal. 1:15–16; 2 Cor. 12:1–14). Particularly in 2 Corinthians, such a claim may have been due to the recent arrival of the self-commended apostles and the growing questioning of Paul's apostleship (10:12; 11:13, 23). In this way, he distinguished himself from the *apostoloi* ("apostles," "messengers") of the churches who were to deliver the collection to Jerusalem (8:23). In essence, his apostleship was not by self-assertion or congregational appointment but by divine election. He was a chosen instrument through whom God would reach out to both Jews and Gentiles (Acts 9:15). The implication of his divine appointment is that rejecting Paul's apostolic authority would be the same as rejecting God's authority (2 Cor. 5:18–20).

Paul called his coworker, Timothy, "our brother" (2 Cor. 1:1). This is the normal reference for carriers of his letters, who were personally known by the recipients (1 Cor. 1:1; cf. 1 Cor. 4:17; 2 Cor. 1:1; Col. 1:1; Philem. 1:1). Perhaps equally important was the need to remind the Corinthians of the close bond shared by believers because they all belonged to the one body of Christ (Acts 9:17; Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 12:12; cf. Rom. 16:22). Timothy was Paul's envoy to Corinth and may have even delivered the letter of 1 Corinthians (1 Cor. 4:17; 16:10–11). Titus was given that task for the second letter (2 Cor. 8:6, 16–18).

Paul extended his greetings to the church of God in Corinth and to all the saints in Achaia. The believers in Corinth were designated as the church (*ekklēsia*, "assembly") of God. This qualification, "of God" (1:1), intimates that the church belonged to God. Since Paul's apostleship was occasioned by God, the church that he founded with the power of God (3:1–6) was the "church of God" (1:1), not of Paul. The other addressees included believers in neighboring cities like Athens and Cenchreae, where Paul had also proclaimed the gospel (Acts 17:34; Rom. 16:1). He described them as *hoi hagioi* ("saints," "holy people") because they were called to be separate from the world and set apart for God's service. While the church in Corinth constituted Paul's primary audience, he probably included those in all of Achaia in anticipation of his instructions about the collection that was being gathered throughout Achaia (9:2).

In greeting the audience, Paul mentions "grace" (*charis*) as underlining Christ's sacrificial death, which furnished us with the forgiveness of our sins (1:2; cf. 6:1; Rom. 3:18–25; 5:18a, 19). He adds "peace" (*eirēnē*), probably indicating the result of accepting the death of Christ, which closes the eternal gulf that on account of sin separated us from God (cf. Gen. 3:8; Rom. 5:1). Since we have peace with God, we can call Him "our Father" (v. 2). Since it is through Jesus that humanity has been reconciled to God, Paul can call Jesus "Lord." In effect, both God and Jesus work together for the salvation of humanity.

1:3–11. Praising God in the Midst of Trials. This section reveals Paul's practice of praising God in the midst of trials, a theme that the apostle will develop throughout the letter. In such situations, God is to be looked on as the only source of hope (vv. 9–10). As Paul was comforted by God in trials, he became better equipped to comfort the Corinthians in their own trials. He expresses his appreciation for God's comfort and its effect on the church (vv. 3–7). He then makes a specific reference to how God comforted him in the province of Asia (vv. 8–11).

Following a salutation, Paul normally gives thanks to God on behalf of his recipients (Rom. 1:8; 1 Cor. 1:4–9; Philem. 1:4). But in 2 Corinthians 1:3, through a blessing, he gives thanks to God for comforting him. The word "comfort" (*paraklēsis*) is associated in other places with someone who comes alongside another, offering encouragement and help. It is closely related to the word used to describe the work of the Holy Spirit (John 16:16–18). It is this personal divine comfort that Paul received in tribulation that enabled him to comfort those in any painful experience (2 Cor. 1:4). The Greek word in v. 4 is *thlipsis* ("trouble," "tribulation"), which can refer to oppression or pain that is brought by either outward events (e.g., Rom. 2:9; 5:3; 8:35; 1 Cor. 7:28; 2 Cor. 1:8; 4:17) or by a mental state (2 Cor. 2:4, 13; 7:4–5). The former meaning of the word fits Paul's discourse in that it corresponds to "the sufferings of Christ" (1:5). The word "suffering" (*pathēma*) refers to passion, misfortune, physical pain, or death (Rom. 7:5; 8:18; Gal. 5:24; Phil. 3:10; Col. 1:24; 2 Tim. 3:11). But in v. 4, when Paul speaks of God comforting him in all *thlipsis*, he has in view the specific tribulation described in 2 Corinthians 1:8–11, an occasion in which he was almost killed. Hence, God's comfort may refer not only to consolation of inner feelings but also to deliverance by God from deadly peril (v. 10). For Paul, God is the only One who comforts those who are downcast or depressed (7:6). Paul understood his sufferings to be a reminder to trust God alone and an enabling force to empathize with those in any kind of hardship. In a world of suffering and oppression, we are also called to comfort those who suffer.

Paul next explains why tribulation was better for preparing him to share God's comfort. The abundance of suffering is always accompanied by an abundance of consolation from God through Christ (1:5). We are never left alone to confront our sufferings. Paul believed that he was suffering as Christ suffered because of his decision to follow Him (cf. 1 Thess. 3:3–4). He found, in the sufferings of Christ, the strength to persevere in the midst of his own suffering (Acts 14:22; Col. 1:24). Obviously, his sufferings were by no means equal to those of Christ, who, though He was righteous, suffered for the sin of the world (John 1:29; Rom. 3:25–26; 5:7–8; 8:18). Paul was aware that when he was sharing in the sufferings of Christ, Christ was identifying with his affliction (Acts 9:4–5) and providing the comfort needed (1 Cor. 10:13). In 2 Corinthians 1:6a, Paul repeats the thought from v. 4b: his afflictions put him in a better position to comfort the church. He was firmly hoping that the Corinthians would be comforted when faced with afflictions in the future (v. 7).

Paul next cites an unpleasant incident exemplifying God's comfort in the midst of the trials just described (vv. 8–11). He mentions the affliction that came on him in Asia, that is, the Roman province in western Asia Minor, the capital of which was Ephesus. It seems difficult to determine exactly where and what kind of tribulation Paul had suffered. The Corinthians perhaps knew this incident, which would explain why they prayed for him (v. 11). Elsewhere, Paul recounts numerous personal experiences of suffering for the sake of the gospel (11:26; 12:2–4; cf. Acts 19:23—20:1; 1 Cor. 15:32). Since he likened his afflictions to those of Christ (cf. 2 Cor. 1:4–5), his sufferings were for the sake of the gospel. Paul did not provide specific details about his sufferings but stressed the fact that his human limitations led him to totally rely on God. At any rate, humanly speaking, the affliction was unbearable and Paul even despaired of life (v. 8). The situation appears to have been so hopeless that he was not able to even appeal

to his Roman citizenship as he had done at least once elsewhere (cf. Acts 22:25–29). Only God, who raises the dead, was able to deliver him from such an intensely life-threatening situation (2 Cor. 1:9–10a) and would continue to deliver him from any deadly peril in the future (v. 10b). Trusting in the Lord for deliverance is the only refuge for the afflicted (Ps. 22:20; Jer. 39:17–18; Dan. 6:16; Acts 26:17; 2 Tim. 3:11). Paul believed that the Corinthians' prayers of intercession played a significant role in his deliverance (2 Cor. 1:11). This solidarity shown to Paul in their prayers underlines the bond of which he wanted to remind the Corinthians existed between them. He hoped that they would offer God prayers of gratitude on his behalf (cf. 1 Cor. 1:4). Obviously, church leaders still need the prayers of the church.

1:12—7:16

PAUL, THE CORINTHIANS, AND HIS APOSTOLIC MINISTRY

After the thanksgiving in 1:3–11, the body of Paul's letter begins by focusing on three main issues concerning charges raised against his character and ministry. A defense of his travel plans had become necessary to address the question of his integrity (1:12—2:13). Some of the believers were still suspicious of him as an apostle, so he needed to clarify any misconceptions about his ministry (2:14—7:4). He responded joyfully to the positive report that Titus had brought concerning the church's attitudinal change toward him (7:5–16).

1:12—2:13

Defense of Paul's Travel Plans

Before delving into a defense of his travel plans, Paul briefly responded, presumably, to charges of improper actions and deceptiveness (1:12–14). After successfully rebutting these charges, he addressed the accusation of being inconsistent in his travel plans (1:15–22). He specifically explained to the church why he had canceled his third visit immediately after one that had caused pain and sorrow (1:23—2:4). On hearing the report that the church member who had offended him had repented, Paul urged the church to demonstrate forgiveness to the offender (2:5–11). He described his emotional restlessness in Troas when he could not meet with Titus as planned (2:12–13). This part of his defense strategy was geared toward strengthening the bonds of fellowship between him and the church.

1:12–14. An Affirmation of Paul's Sincerity. This passage is strategically placed here to reinforce the relationship between Paul's behavior and his ministry. In vv. 3–11, he established that he and the church shared in the same fate and that God comforted them all. It was hoped that they would acknowledge his sincerity toward them. Apparently, his integrity as a messenger of God seems to have been questioned. In his defense, Paul appealed to his own conscience as his witness and to the Corinthians' knowledge of his conduct (v. 12). This conscience was telling Paul that there was no contradiction between his inner convictions and his actions. He had been doing what the Lord had taught him with respect to the proclamation of the gospel to the world (cf. 1 Cor. 4:4–5). This means that it was necessary that he exercise what is in the Greek called *haplotēs* ("simplicity," "uprightness"), which designates the absence of duplicity, and godly *eilikrineia*, which connotes sincerity or purity of motive in dealing with the Corinthians and the world. The Greek words *haplotēs* and *eilikrineia* are frequently used in Paul's writings to designate lives transformed by God (2 Cor. 2:17; Rom. 12:8; 1 Cor. 5:8). Paul's character was driven by divine values and principles. Consequently, his letters were not intended to deceive his audience (2 Cor. 1:13). He did not work on the basis of wisdom that is *sarkikos* ("fleshly," "worldly"; v. 12). He had not employed any worldly wisdom to deceive or defraud the Corinthians but had solely relied on the grace of God in his dealings with them. But Paul knew that his readers had at least understood some of the things he had written to them previously and was hoping that they would gain full knowledge (1:14). The desired results were that they would be proud of Paul as a messenger of the gospel and that he would be proud of them in the Day of the Lord, that is, they would be the fruit of his ministry (2 Cor. 1:14b; 5:10; cf. Rom. 14:10).

1:15–22. Charge of Inconsistency. Once Paul's integrity had been reaffirmed by appealing to his godly conscience and the Corinthians' knowledge, he proceeded to explain and defend the change in his travel plans (vv. 15–17). This defense was successfully achieved by appealing to God's faithfulness and the content of his preaching, which is Jesus Christ (vv. 18–20). The defense aims at reaffirming his authority as an unwavering messenger of God.

Paul intended to visit Corinth following his founding visit and to stay there for a while (cf. 1 Cor. 16:5–7). He apparently planned to leave Ephesus for Corinth through Macedonia and then go to Judea with the offering he was collecting as a sign of support for the struggling Jewish believers in Jerusalem (Rom. 15:26; 1 Cor. 16:5–6). But meanwhile, the situation in the church at Corinth had deteriorated and Paul decided to make an unplanned visit to the church. He sailed directly across the Aegean from Ephesus to Corinth. Unfortunately, this visit did not go well (1 Cor. 2:1).

Following this experience, Paul returned to Ephesus and wrote a severe letter to the Corinthians, rebuking them for the way he had been treated. Titus was given the responsibility of delivering the letter to Corinth. Shortly after Titus left, however, Paul began to worry that the Corinthians might not understand the love and concern that had prompted his letter. He feared that rather than solving the problem, his letter might have actually made the situation worse. Eager to hear back from Titus about the response of the Corinthians to this letter (2 Cor. 7:5), Paul traveled to Troas, where the two men had apparently planned to meet (2:12–13). Titus was not there, so Paul continued on to Macedonia, where at some point the two finally met.

While Paul was overjoyed to learn that the Corinthians had responded positively to his letter (see 7:6–9), it also appears that he had learned from Titus that some in Corinth had seized on his change of plans and accused him of being insincere—claiming one thing but doing another (v. 17). Paul denied the charge, insisting that his change of plans was not done in a worldly insincere manner (v. 17b). As a messenger of God, he could not say one thing while planning to do another. His attitude toward them was not a whimsical yes and no (v. 17). On the contrary, it was always a positive yes, though it might have been expressed in different ways (v. 18). This reminded Paul of God's faithfulness. For in Jesus, every promise of God is a resounding yes for humanity (v. 20).

Paul then went on to again refresh the minds of the Corinthians concerning the content of his preaching (cf. 1 Cor. 3:10–11). He, together with Timothy and Silas, had preached Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah, and the fulfillment of God's promises to the Corinthians (2 Cor. 1:19–20; cf. Acts 18:5). This content was the clear answer to the human problem of sin. Jesus Christ remains the same as the only answer to the human predicament (cf. 2 Cor. 5:18–19, 21). With this answer, both Paul and the Corinthians had been legally secured as people of God at peace with Him (1:21; cf. Rom. 5:1). In his ministry, Paul reflected the consistent actions of God through Christ (the Yes of God).

1:23—2:4. An Explanation of a Canceled Visit. Additional reasons explain Paul's change in travel plans and emphasize his love for the entire Corinthian church. Apart from his conscience, Paul called on God as his witness against his life (cf. vv. 12, 18). This highlights the seriousness of what Paul was saying. He had not taken the change of travel plans lightly. He simply wanted to spare the Corinthians another painful visit. Visiting them so soon after the previous sorrowful encounter could have worsened his relationship with them. Overreacting to problems in the church is not the best way to solve problems. We need to give the Spirit time to do His reconciling work in the church. Of course, as an apostle and their spiritual father, Paul had the right to discipline them (13:1–4, 10; 1 Cor. 4:19–21), but he was mindful of his role as a servant to the people of God (4:5). He had no selfish interest in unnecessarily displaying his apostolic authority. His concern was to promote their highest joy and save them from unhealthy pain. If they were happy, he was also happy and vice versa. Since their pain would have been his pain, Paul had sent Titus to them rather than risking another confrontation if he had come (vv. 1–2; cf. v. 23). Paul was convinced that both he and the church should share the same joy, not sorrow. The ultimate reason for writing the sorrowful letter to the Corinthians and for having changed his travel plans was his sincere concern for them. Love motivated his change of travel plans (2:4).

2:5–11. A Call to Forgive the Offender. Thanks to God's working, the sorrowful letter yielded positive results. The church sided with Paul and disciplinary action was taken. That was a relief (cf. 7:5–13). Paul, however, would next urge the church members to reaffirm their love to the offender; otherwise, Satan might take advantage of their unforgiving attitude.

During Paul's unplanned and painful visit, a certain man had openly grieved him, apparently challenging his apostolic authority. At that time, the church might have sympathized with the offender. Not siding with Paul to discipline the offender during his visit seems to have created the tension between Paul and the church. In fact, his offense affected both Paul and the church (2:5). However, after Titus delivered the painful letter in which Paul rebuked the situation while reaffirming his sincere love for the Corinthians, the majority of the church implemented Paul's disciplinary action against the offender. Paul appreciated the Corinthians' obedience in this regard (v. 6), but he also recognized the importance of redeeming the offender (v. 7b). Since the man appears to have repented, Paul urged the church to demonstrate love by forgiving and comforting him. Paul empathized with the psychological trauma of the offender, which could have led to his abandoning the faith. He showed his pastoral care for the welfare of the offender and had already taken the initiative by forgiving him (v. 10). Likewise, the church members had to forgive. If they did, it would be strong evidence that they acknowledged Paul as their spiritual father (v. 9). The true existence of the community of faith as the church of God is tied to how its members treat repentant sinners. If they do not forgive, they cease to be the church of God. It is in and through forgiveness that we all become and remain children of God (cf. Matt. 6:12, 14–15; 18:23–35). The idea is that Christian discipline should be administered in love with the attitude of transforming and reconciling the offender to God.

2:12–13. Waiting and Preaching in Troas. Having recounted the positive response to the painful letter and its implications (vv. 5–11), Paul resumes his case, introduced in v. 4, where he intimates the emotional condition in which the letter had been written in the context of his travel plans. After Paul had sent the letter with Titus from Ephesus, he moved to Troas to preach the gospel and to wait for Titus. Troas was an important port city that connected Asia and Macedonia. During his second missionary journey, Paul had briefly preached the gospel in Troas but had left for Macedonia upon receiving a vision (Acts 16:8–10; cf. 20:7). Meaning to revisit Troas, Paul arranged to meet Titus there. That may have been his primary reason for going to Troas. Although there was a positive response to his ministry in the city (v. 12), Paul was not at peace. He was experiencing inner distress waiting for Titus to return from Corinth. What was keeping him? How had the Corinthians responded? When Titus did not show up, Paul finally and anxiously set sail for Macedonia, where he hoped he would meet Titus, perhaps in Philippi. The distress Paul experienced in Troas waiting for news from Corinth underlines the unconditional affection he had for the wayward church.

2:14—7:4

Apostolic Ministry Clarified

Up to this point, Paul had been defending his integrity regarding his travel decision. When Paul was writing 2 Corinthians, he had already received the positive response from the Corinthians. With 7:5, Paul resumes the discussion in 2:13, where Paul is said to have left Troas for Macedonia to meet with Titus. The favorable report Titus brought suggested God's vindication of Paul's apostolic ministry. The passage 2:14—7:4a contains a speech sandwiched between 2:13 and 7:4b aiming at Paul's vindication of his own ministry. While in 1:12—2:13 the emphasis is on sufferings from within and without, in this speech, Paul, in a polemic tone, speaks to the uniqueness of his ministry (2:14—4:6), the sufferings and rewards of the apostolic ministry (4:7—5:10), the place and role of it (5:11—6:10), and its openness (6:11—7:4).

2:14—4:6. Uniqueness of the Apostolic Ministry. In this subsection of the discourse, Paul begins to describe the privilege of being an apostle (2:14–17). He was convinced that the Corinthians were evidence of his apostolic ministry (3:1–3) and that his ministry was effective because of God's enabling (3:4–6). He argued that his apostolic ministry was life-giving and superior to the Mosaic ministry of death (3:7–11), because in Christ the veil of Moses is removed (3:12–18). God through this ministry brings the light of the knowledge of Himself (4:1–6).

In spite of all the challenges, Paul thanked God for always making him triumphant in Christ and for using him to spread the knowledge of God everywhere (2:14). He employed the metaphor of a Roman triumphal procession to depict the progress and success of the gospel proclamation in the face of trials. While the details of the corresponding realities in the procession may not have been the primary concern of Paul, God's leading him and his coworkers, as victorious soldiers seems to have impacted Paul's use of the metaphor. He understood that Christians share in the victory of Christ (Rom. 8:37). It is God who triumphs, and Paul was delighted to be part of this triumph. He seems to be describing himself and the believers as an incense offering whose fragrance, being diffused in every place, is the saving knowledge of Christ. This is the aroma that brings life to those who believe the gospel and the aroma that leads to death for those who reject it (cf. John 3:18). Ultimately, the propagation of the gospel is pleasing to God because it is the aroma of Christ. Those who preach the gospel for personal gain (2 Cor. 11:20) do not know about its life-giving aroma. Paul's ministry took place in the sight of God and Christ and was proclaimed with sincerity (*eilikrineia*, "purity of motive").

Letters of recommendation were common in the ancient world (8:16–24; Acts 18:27; Rom. 16:1–2; 1 Cor. 16:3, 10–11). They served to establish the credibility of the bearer. Paul's opponents possibly bore letters of recommendation from Jerusalem to challenge the integrity of his ministry (2 Cor. 3:1b). In 2:14–17, Paul had just laid out his special role as an apostle. His work was known in all places, and his suffering for the sake of the gospel bore a mark of his apostleship. He had founded the Corinthian church (Acts 18), and the Corinthians were further proof of his apostleship. Their changed lives, wrought by the Spirit of the living God, were proof of what he considered to be a valid ministry. The author of these changed lives was Christ, the epitome of the new covenant (cf. Jer. 31:33; Ezek. 11:19). Therefore, unlike peddlers of the gospel, Paul did not need any letter of recommendation to establish his authority. As the founder of the church in Corinth, the only necessary testimony of his apostolic credibility were the changed lives of the Corinthian believers.

The existence of the Corinthian church bolstered Paul's confidence toward God (3:4–6). It was not his physical prowess and intelligence that brought the church into existence. The confidence, signified by the existence of the church, came through Christ. Paul's opponents may have complained about his self-commendation, but his answer was acknowledging God as the source of his commendation (v. 5; cf. Acts 9:15, 17–19). He and his colleagues had been made ministers not of the old covenant but of the new covenant (2 Cor. 3:6; Matt. 26:28). The old covenant symbolizes the legalistic experience of those who rely on their own obedience as the means of pleasing God, like the experience of the unbelieving Jews at Sinai (cf. Ex. 19:3–8; Deut. 5:28–29; Jer. 31:31–34). The new covenant, however, represents the experience of those who rely completely on God's grace to do all that He has promised (see commentary on Gal. 4:21–31). Here Paul intimates that the old covenant was just a written code that, separated from faith in Christ, only condemns and kills us (cf. Rom. 7:6–11; 8:3; Gal. 3:19–22). While the law of God makes us aware of our sin against God, it lacks the ability to empower our will and motives to please Him (see commentary on Gal. 3:19–22). On the other hand, in the new covenant ratified by the blood of Christ (Eph. 2:13; Heb. 13:20), God not only forgives our sins but also, through the indwelling Spirit, empowers us to live to His glory (Rom. 8:4). Paul viewed the ministry of Christ and the transformative power of the Spirit in believers as the fulfillment of the OT prophecy of the new covenant between God and His people (Jer. 31:31; Ezek. 36:27).

The two covenants are compared in terms of their attendant splendor (2 Cor. 3:7–11). Paul offered an implicit rabbinic Midrash (commentary) on Exodus 34:29–35. When Moses descended from Mount Sinai with the Ten Commandments, his face shone so brightly that the people of Israel could not look steadily at him (2 Cor. 3:7b). Admittedly, the attendant glory of the giving of the Law to the Israelites speaks for itself as noble, yet the Law sentences human beings to death because it lacks life-giving power. However, in the ministry of the new covenant, the Spirit empowers human beings to reflect the righteous ways of the Lord based on their acceptance of His atoning sacrifice. Comparing the impact of each of the two covenants, Paul notes that it is indeed much more glorious than the ministry of condemnation or the old covenant (v. 9). The old covenant, which was characterized by a gradual fading glory, was replaced by an everlasting covenant with a far surpassing glory (Heb. 8:6–13; 13:20). By every measure, the ministry that produces righteousness in human beings is permanent and remains much more glorious.

If this new covenant is more glorious, permanent, and effective, Paul together with his colleagues could boldly and clearly proclaim its reliability (v. 12). The power of the gospel of Jesus Christ is not veiled. The fact that Moses veiled his face to cover a glory that was passing away (Ex. 34:29–35) is taken by Paul to point to the gradual fading away of the old covenant. The full significance of the old covenant is understood when the veil is removed, that is to say, when we find Christ in it. Paul argues that the unbelieving Jews needed to recognize that the old covenant was pointing to Christ. Only in Him would they fully appreciate the redemptive work of God. For Paul, this was making his ministry a superior and unique one.

In vv. 16–18, Paul infers that if the Jews and sympathizers of Judaism (i.e., God-fearers) would turn to God by accepting Jesus Christ, they would gain a fuller knowledge of the truth. Since the Lord and the Spirit are inseparable, if the people would turn to the Lord, the Spirit would grant

them freedom from the condemning aspect of the old covenant. They would experience the transformative power of God through the Spirit (cf. Is. 61:1; Zech. 4:6; John 8:32–36; Acts 26:18; Rom. 6:16b; 7:23–25; 1 Pet. 3:18). Notice that the Lord is characterized as the Spirit in order to emphasize His work in the human heart (2 Cor. 3:17; cf. John 4:24). The glory of the new covenant, which is the glory of the resurrected Christ, transforms the people into the image of the Lord, thus restoring God's image in them (2 Cor. 3:18; cf. Rom. 6:4; Gal. 5:13–18, 22–24).

Paul reaffirmed the certainty of his appointment by God as a minister of the new covenant by pointing to the transparency of his ministry (2 Cor. 4:1–6). He himself was transformed by the Spirit and therefore he was not walking in deceptive ways. There was nothing hidden in his ministry, but everything was done in the sight of God. He was not handling the gospel deceptively, because it is by nature a manifestation of the truth (4:2; cf. 2:17). To those who argued that Paul's gospel was hidden—that it was a deception—Paul characterized it as veiled only to those who were perishing on account of their unbelief (4:3–4; cf. Rom. 10:16, 18–21; 11:11; 1 Cor. 1:18; 2 Cor. 2:15). They still had a veil. Those willing to look to Christ as the image of God would not be proclaiming their own message but the glory of Christ and would see themselves as His servants (2 Cor. 4:5). This is true ministry. The church should remember that the content of this message is Christ, "the image of God" (v. 4), the visible representation of the invisible God (vv. 4, 5; cf. John 1:18; Rom. 10:9; 1 Cor. 12:3; Col. 1:15; Heb. 11:3). Paul was able to dispense the knowledge of Christ once God liberated him from darkness. The absence of the knowledge of salvation in Christ means existing in a darkness that can be dispersed only by the power of the Creator God (2 Cor. 4:6; cf. Gen. 1:2–3).

4:7—5:10. Suffering, Reward, and the Apostolic Ministry. It was by God's initiative that Paul became an apostle. But the fulfillment of his ministry was accompanied by afflictions, and he was sustained by the power of God. God's power manifests itself when we are weak (4:7–18). The painful experiences of the present do not determine the way we live but authenticate true ministry. Paul employs a series of metaphors to convey how expectant he was of the ultimate divine deliverance from the present condition at the Second Coming of Christ (5:1–10).

Paul begins the first part of this section (4:7–18) by declaring that it is the gospel that is of ultimate value, not the messenger who proclaims it. The relationship between the messenger of the gospel and the gospel itself is likened to an expensive ointment contained in an inexpensive and easily broken container. The frailty of the gospel messenger demonstrates that the excellent and powerful ministry of salvation is the work of God and not of us (v. 7; cf. 6:7; 12:9). God formed Paul from the dust of the ground and appointed him to disseminate His knowledge (cf. Gen. 2:7; Is. 29:16; Lam. 4:2; 1 Thess. 2:4), but as a vessel Paul was fragile and weak. His only hope was in God, who enabled him to withstand all sorts of animosities (see 1:4, 8–11). These sufferings, which are occasioned by the sharing of the message of salvation, were part of his ministry as they were of Jesus's ministry (12:10). In the hands of the Lord, the apostle's sufferings could become a blessing for the Corinthians' Christian experience (4:7–12; cf. 1:3–7).

In vv. 13–18, Paul shares his motivation for not retreating in the face of persecutions. He was persuaded that even in his humiliation the Lord would deliver him (v. 13). Hope and perseverance come together, allowing the apostle to say that even if his mortal body were killed, he would be confident that God would raise him up at the Second Coming (v. 14). His confidence and hope were grounded in the resurrection of Christ guaranteeing his future resurrection. With God on his side, the outward pressures were not in any way commensurate with the future glory. Suffering may be taking a toll on us, but the Lord is renewing us in our inner being day by day. Paul called his sufferings "light" and temporal in comparison with the experience of eternal life after the resurrection (vv. 17–18; cf. 1 Cor. 15:43; Phil. 3:21; Col. 1:16). What we experience is temporary; but that which is not yet visible—what we contemplate in hope—is permanent. Although suffering becomes a blessing in the hands of God, it is not by itself desirable. It will come to an end.

Humanity and all of creation yearn for freedom from affliction (Rom. 8:22–23; cf. Gen. 3:17). Paul develops the idea of yearning for the ultimate redemption of our bodies in 2 Corinthians 5:1–10. In v. 1, Paul provides an explanation of 4:18. We should therefore understand 5:1–10 in the context of Paul's earthly suffering and his reward at the return of the Lord. He contrasts the temporal earthly tent-house with the more desirable and eternal heavenly house. Paul likens the earthly tent to his mortal body, susceptible to corruption (4:10–11, 16). But he was yearning to be clothed with the heavenly house (or immortality) made by God (5:2–4). Paul refers clearly here to the work of God (v. 5), who will clothe us with immortality. Not being "found naked" (v. 3) is a metaphor for death. Thus, the hope of Christians is not to be separated from our mortal bodies but to be remade with new immortal bodies. The active working of the Spirit in us is a source of hope and assurance that we shall be clothed with immortality at the coming of the Lord (Rom. 8:23, 26; Eph. 2:10; 1 Pet. 5:10).

Verses 6–10 of 2 Corinthians 5 climax in the assured hope of clothing the earthly tent-house with a heavenly, glorified body at the *parousia*, that is, the return of Christ. Paul emphatically wished to be with the Lord but away from the body (v. 8). Up to this point, he had been contrasting his afflicted body with the immortal body from heaven (vv. 1–4). To be absent or away from the Lord (v. 6) parallels being in the earthly tent-house, which is the mortal body (4:10–11, 16; 5:1). Paul was ready to be present with, or at home with, the Lord (v. 8). This statement has been understood by some to refer to the intermediate state of the righteous dead before the coming of Christ. However, following Paul's consistent use of certain phrases to describe earthly and heavenly realities in 5:1–4, it can be maintained that to be present with the Lord and at home with Him parallels being clothed with the permanent and eternal heavenly house, which is the resurrected immortal body to be received at the Second Coming of the Lord (1 Thess. 4:14–17; cf. 1 Cor. 15:51–54; 2 Tim. 4:6–8). Paul taught elsewhere that the transformation of our mortal bodies into immortal ones does not occur when we die but at the moment of the glorious return of Christ (1 Cor. 15:52). It was with confidence that Paul expressed his readiness to be present with the Lord. He knew that the fruits of his ministerial work wrought by God in him would be acceptable to Christ (2 Cor. 5:10). Paul presented Jesus Christ as a righteous judge who was to judge believers and unbelievers on the basis of works done in the mortal body (cf. 1 Cor. 4:5). The legal decisions in the heavenly tribunal are based on objective evidence and are not arbitrary. Our works show whether we have remained in a faith relationship with the Lord to the end. Justification by faith cannot be separated from a sanctified life. Those who accept Jesus as Savior should not continue to walk in darkness (1 Cor. 6:9). As children of light, believers must show forth their good works (Matt. 5:16; 12:50). These good works do not save us, but they testify to the fact that we have been saved. They are the fruit of our salvation. Or, to put it another way, our works are not meritorious—they do not earn our salvation. Rather, they demonstrate the authenticity of our faith. The judgment that Paul foresaw motivated him to do what was pleasing to God in his ministerial work (v. 9). He had been a faithful minister of the gospel that had been entrusted to him many years earlier.

5:11—6:10. Place and Role of the Apostolic Ministry. The coming judgment was motivating Paul to proclaim the gospel with humility, because in this work he was being propelled by the love of Christ manifested in His sacrificial death (5:11–15). Paul's apostolic ministry was deeply connected with and defined by the message of reconciliation through Christ (5:16—6:2). Because the good news of reconciliation in Christ is so important, Paul was living a blameless life to avoid damaging his ministry of reconciliation (6:3–10).

In view of the certainty of the final judgment and Christ being the divine judge (5:10), Paul was earnestly trying to persuade people to embrace the gospel (v. 11), but in an unselfish way. According to Paul, if someone were to boast, it should have been the Corinthians who had come to know the message of salvation through Paul (v. 12). This knowledge enabled them to give an answer to the charges raised against Paul by the false teachers. If the church members were to fully come to appreciate the true intent of his apostolic ministry, they could withstand any gospel detractors (5:12). For the sake of argument, Paul accepts the charge of the detractors that he is insane. This apparent insanity is at the service of God and approved by Him. The evidence for this is that the church had experienced the blessings of Paul's ministry (cf. 4:12, 15).

According to Paul, the deepest motivation for ministry is the love of Christ manifested in His sacrificial death for all (see "The Death of the One and the Death of the All," p. 1669). With this understanding, Paul urges everyone who has accepted Christ to unselfish service to Him as the resurrected Lord (5:14–15). Every Christian is to walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:4; Col. 3:1–2). Just as Paul's selfless ministry serves as evidence of living a life that pleases Christ, so also every believer must live a life that pleases Christ. Believers are no longer servants of the power of sin but are servants of righteousness (Rom. 6:19; cf. 2 Cor. 5:21).

5:16—6:2. Ministry of Reconciliation. If every person has been an object of divine love through the death of Christ, then there is no place for ethnic prejudice on the scale of values of the economy of salvation. All humans share the same deadly fate of eternal separation from God (cf. Rom 3:9, 23), and to everyone has been offered reconciliation through Christ, who gave Himself as a sin offering for all. On account of the work of Christ, God removed all barriers between Him and us, making our reconciliation with Him possible (5:19). All that is necessary for salvation has been accomplished through Christ. We simply need to accept what God has already done for us. In that sense, reconciliation is an invitation. God has taken the initiative in the process of reconciliation, making it possible for us to be reconciled to Him through Christ (v. 19). Those who accept Christ become new creatures. They have died through Christ and they are now a new creation, at peace with God. The divine initiative reaches its goal when we are actually reconciled to Him (5:16a, 17–18a; cf. John 3:16).

The Death of the One and the Death of the All

Second Corinthians 5:14–15 is an important passage for the understanding of the significance of the saving power of the death of Christ. The phrase noting that if One "died for all," then "all died" deserves particular attention.

1. Christ's Death. The one who died is obviously Jesus, whose love compelled Paul to faithfulness in his ministry. His death was on the cross. The Greek preposition *hyper* ("for") could be translated "on behalf of"; but since by the NT period it had come to express the idea of substitution, it could also be rendered "in place of" (e.g., John 11:50). The context suggests that the idea of substitution is also present here (2 Cor. 5:21). Jesus did not only die as our representative ("for us") but also as our substitute ("in our place"). His death was for the benefit of others and not for His own benefit.

2. Benefit of His Death. "All" refers to the extent of Jesus's atoning death. He did not only die for the elect but for every human being who has ever lived or will live in this world. "All" is probably another way of referring to the "world," mentioned in v. 19. The universal impact of the death of Jesus is emphasized. He died for Jews and Gentiles. This is the meaning of the phrase "Savior of the world" in John 4:42. His sacrificial death did not involve ethnic barriers or any other barrier, because all are sinners and in need of a Savior. It is universal in its range and significance.

3. Dying through Christ. The idea that One died and then all died is difficult to understand. How did all die? What kind of death is this? With respect to Christ, His death was a real, literal one; He expired on the cross. This cannot be said concerning the "all." Hence, we have to ask, In what sense did all die? In our passage, Paul does not provide a clear answer to this question. Scholars have provided different possible answers. But v. 15 seems to provide one, suggesting that those who are alive are those who died to self and were also resurrected with Christ to a new life through baptism (Rom. 6:1–6).

The only death implicit in the context, apart from the physical death of Christ on the cross, is death to our selfish nature. The connection between the death of Christ and the death of the believer to self is part of Paul's theology and teaching. It could then be suggested that the phrase "all died" (v. 14) simply means that the death sentence pronounced against humanity was actually executed in the person of Christ on the cross and that there is no reason for anyone to perish. Christ paid the penalty for the sin of humanity. In other words, when Christ died, all died in the sense that they were given not only the possibility of escaping their deserved destiny of eternal death but also the possibility of living a new life for their Savior. Death was no longer the inexorable destiny of humanity. According to v. 21, Christ was made sin for us and died for us, providing salvation for all. He died in place of all and consequently His death is objectively the death of all, though not all have yet actually died to sin. It is only in the sense that when He died, we all died. The passage is thus stressing the objective significance of Christ's death on the cross and its implication for humanity.

This message of reconciliation through Christ had been given to Paul and his fellow workers (2 Cor. 5:18b—6:2). According to it, Christ is the exclusive means of divine reconciliation. But in this task Christ was not acting alone, as if He were an object of divine hatred: God was "in Christ" reconciling the world to Himself (5:19). The divinity of Jesus Christ, as well as His incarnation, is emphasized here to indicate the sublime truth of divine love. God made Jesus Christ a sin offering for us (i.e., to be sin for us) in order for us to become the righteousness of God in Christ (v. 21). God's righteousness is ours only in our union with Christ (cf. John 1:14, 18; Phil. 2:7).

From the human point of view, Paul had previously regarded Jesus Christ as one of the failed messiahs (2 Cor. 5:16b; cf. Acts 5:34–39). But after his Damascus experience, he came to appreciate Jesus as the divinely appointed Savior whose death had guaranteed eternal life to believers. This message was entrusted to Paul and his workers as ambassadors of Christ. On behalf of Christ, Paul appealed to the Corinthian church to "be reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:20). This call to reconciliation for the Corinthians may appear superfluous because they were believers in Christ. But our reconciliation to God is inseparable from our reconciliation to each other, and the Corinthians—at least some of them—needed to be reconciled to Paul (13:5–6). So, Paul pled with them to make a positive decision regarding their attitude toward him and his ministry (6:1–2; cf. Is. 49:7–9). Like his Master and Savior, Paul sincerely and passionately sought to help the unrepentant to renew their commitment to God (2 Cor. 6:2; cf. Luke 15:7–10).

Paul and his workers had learned to remain resolute in order for the ministry of reconciliation not to be ridiculed (6:3–10). Verse 3 continues the logic of v. 1 and 5:20 with its focus on the ministry entrusted to Paul and his workers. It had not been the intention of Paul and his workers to put stumbling blocks in anybody's way so as to damage the gospel (6:3). In vv. 4–10, Paul provides a list of ministerial experiences that would commend his ministry to the Corinthians (see below, "A Profile of Paul's Ministry"). Under any circumstances, Paul and his workers had not given occasion for anyone to dishonor the gospel (cf. Acts 14:14–19; 20:7–11, 13, 31; 27:21–22; 2 Cor. 11:25–27). In other words, the gospel is far more valuable than human pride and preferences (cf. Luke 9:24; Eph. 6:13–17). Irrespective of present circumstances, the minsters of the gospel should always seek to glorify the One who called them to His service (cf. Matt. 5:16; Rev. 2:10).

A Profile of Paul's Ministry

Second Corinthians contains four lists of Paul's ministerial experiences and convictions (4:8–9; 6:4–10; 11:23b–29; and 12:10). In 6:4–10, the list specifically aims at commending his ministry to the Corinthians. It reveals how Paul perceived himself and how he dealt with his ministerial experiences in the light of the cross and his divine calling. Scholars have analyzed the list in slightly different ways, but we will simply list the items and draw some conclusions from it.

1. *Facing Difficult Circumstances.* The phrase "in much patience" (or "in great endurance") is probably describing how Paul faced at least the following nine difficult *circumstances* in his ministry, all of them introduced by the Greek preposition *en* ("in"; "in the midst of"): in tribulations (troubles), in needs (hardships or calamities), in distresses (anguishes), in stripes (beatings), in imprisonments, in tumults (disturbances or riots), in labors (hardships, hard work), in sleeplessness, in fasting (hunger) (vv. 4–5).

2. *Virtues and Means for Ministry.* Paul next adds a number of qualities or virtues and means needed for an effective ministry. All of them are again introduced by the preposition *en* ("in"), but this time with the sense of "by" ("by means of"): by purity (sincerity), by knowledge (understanding), by longsuffering (patience, forbearance), by kindness (goodness, generosity), by the Holy Spirit, by sincere love (genuine love [*agapē*]), by truthful speech (by the word of truth, or the reliable word; probably a reference to the gospel), by the power of God (power provided by or coming from God; vv. 6–7a). Paul continues his list of qualities or means using the preposition *dia* ("by," "through," or "by means of"): by the armor and weapons of righteousness. At this point he shifts to a list of antitheses based on perceptions of his person and ministry. The list still emphasizes important experiences in his ministry: by honor and dishonor, by evil or bad report and good report (defamation or slandering and good report or reputation).

3. *A True Minister.* Paul next shifts to the use of the conjunction *hōs* ("as") to contrast the truth about him with what others have said about him: as deceivers, and yet true (as impostors, but honest, truthful, genuine); as unknown, and yet well known (as not well known or regarded as unknown, and yet being well known). He also mentions divine deliverance from some threatening experiences: as dying, and yet living; as chastened, and yet not killed (punished, disciplined, beaten, and yet not put to death). He concludes on a positive note, stressing the greatness of his ministry in spite of its difficulties. He describes himself as being "sorrowful, yet always rejoicing" (v. 10); as "poor, yet making many rich" (v. 10; cf. 8:9); and as "having nothing," yet possessing everything (v. 10; cf. 1 Cor. 3:21–23).

4. *Overview of Ministry.* In commending his ministry, Paul provides some basic elements in a Christian understanding of ministry. First, Christian ministry takes place in a context of adversity and requires from believers a strong willingness to persevere. Second, adversity arises from outside the parameters of the church (e.g., imprisonment) or in the context of the life of the church (e.g., defamation). In both cases, perseverance is needed. Third, opposition to the ministry is to be overcome through a consecrated life (e.g., purity, love, the presence of the Spirit, righteousness, and a full knowledge of the truth). A life of unquestionable integrity makes ministry powerful and effective. Fourth, ministry and message are inseparable. Paul's intense defense of his ministry was motivated by the fact that a rejection of it by the Corinthians would have been a rejection of the message he was proclaiming. Fifth, ministry requires a positive attitude in the midst of adversity based on the conviction that God can always deliver us or strengthen us. There is always reason to rejoice in the Lord and to see ourselves as rich in Him and able to enrich others with the gospel truth.

6:11—7:4. Openness and the Apostolic Ministry. As ambassadors for Christ Jesus, Paul and his workers once again were registering their unconditional love for the Corinthians (6:11). Their ministry among them had resulted in a filial relationship between them and the church (1:18–19; 3:2; 10:14; cf. Acts 18:2–17). Both Timothy and Titus were brothers of the church (1:1; 12:18), and Paul in a sense was the father (2 Cor. 6:13; 12:14–15; 1 Cor. 4:14–15). Everything the apostle had experienced had been for the benefit of the church (2 Cor. 1:4, 6; 4:12, 15; 5:13). They shared one common history and hope (cf. 1:14), and he was ready to die together and live together with the church (7:3). As far as Paul was concerned, he was still the father of the Corinthian church (6:13). Therefore, he was appealing to the Corinthians to reconsider their love toward him (vv. 11–13) and to disengage themselves from unbelievers (vv. 14—7:4).

First, Paul was appealing to the Corinthians to open up their hearts to him. He only addressed his audience by name (Corinthians) when his emotions had been deeply affected (6:11; cf. Gal. 3:1; Phil. 4:15). As far as he was concerned, there was nothing in his heart against them. He recognized that the Corinthians were holding back their affections from him and was entreating them to unleash their love toward him as his children (vv. 12–13; cf. 11:2).

Second, returning to Paul would mean breaking away from those who were unbelievers in the gospel of Paul. At first, 2 Corinthians 6:14—7:1 seems to break the flow of Paul's appeal for the affection of the Corinthians, which is resumed in 7:2. But it can also be considered a logical development of the discourse. If the Corinthians were to return their affection to Paul, they would need to break away from any other relationship militating against this new move. While it was necessary to heal a broken relationship, it was equally significant to discontinue an existing one that would make healing impossible. Some have understood 6:14—7:1 as Paul's charge to the Corinthians to dissociate themselves from pagans and their influence. It is maintained that pagan relationships such as marriage, business, eating of food offered to idols, and solving issues at pagan courts should not be entertained. This understanding is possible since Paul had already discouraged some of these relationships in his previous correspondence (cf. 1 Cor. 1:11–12;

5:1–2, 9–10; 6:1–8; 7:12–15; 10:19–28). However, contextually Paul was talking about unbelievers who were Christians who had rejected the gospel he was proclaiming, and he was encouraging the Corinthians not to be unequally yoked with them (2 Cor. 6:14). (See below, "Unbelievers").

In 6:14a, Paul appeals to an OT imagery of crossbreeding animals of different kinds to discourage the union between the Corinthians and unbelievers (cf. Lev. 19:19; Deut. 22:10). He also employs five rhetorical questions with expected negative answers (2 Cor. 6:14b–16a). These questions stress the incompatibility of a relationship between Corinthian believers and unbelievers that would have included marriage. He further quotes the OT to appeal to the church members to dissociate themselves from unbelievers and to return to God as their Father (vv. 16b–18; cf. Ex. 4:22; Is. 52:11). Paul was encouraging the church as the temple of God to cleanse itself from uncleanness (7:1), restating the theme introduced in 6:14a.

Finally, after appealing for disengagement from the false ministers, Paul closes this section of the epistle by pleading again for reconciliation (7:2–4). As Paul had demonstrated, he had not offended anybody and the church could bear witness to this (4:2; 5:11; 6:3). He had not taken financial advantage of anyone when ministering among them (11:9; 12:16–18; cf. 1 Thess. 2:9–10; 2 Thess. 3:7–10). He was wanting the Corinthians to understand that his attempt to exonerate himself of the false charges against his integrity and ministry was not amounting to his disowning them. He still loved them (7:3; cf. 11:2). In other words, nothing, including these charges, could make him grow cold toward them. It is true that he had freely spoken to them about their problems, but at the same time he had been telling others great things about them (v. 4). Paul's outlook with respect to the Corinthians was very positive. Here, we are looking into the heart of a true pastor.

Unbelievers

Technically speaking, the Greek term *apistoi* ("unbelievers") as used in Paul's writings commonly refers to non-Christians (1 Cor. 6:6; 7:12–15; 10:27; 1 Tim. 1:13; 5:8). However, it is context that gives meanings to words. In 2 Corinthians 6:14—7:1, Paul discusses a situation in which believers were no longer in the faith.

1. Contextual Considerations. When we examine 2 Corinthians, it is clear that in Paul's call to the Corinthians to be reconciled he was thinking about both his ministry and his message (5:18—6:4). This suggests that the believers in Corinth were expected to dissociate themselves from a ministry that was competing with Paul's ministry for their loyalty (6:11–12; 7:2). He was aware of false ministers of the gospel who most probably thwarted the Corinthians' loyalty to Paul by questioning his apostolic authority (11:1—12:13). The Corinthians had started to allow themselves to be courted by these false ministers, who commended themselves, not Christ. So, Paul and his associates were urging them to dissociate themselves from these false ministers, who were not the true ambassadors of Christ (5:20). From Paul's perspective, such individuals were "unbelievers." Similarly, in 1 Corinthians 15:33, the Corinthians were strongly urged not to continue to allow themselves to be deceived by those questioning the resurrection of the dead (cf. 1 Cor. 15:12b). This was a call to break away from an already existing relationship that was competing for the Corinthians' loyalty to Christ (2 Cor. 6:14a).

2. Christians as Apistos. Paul discouraged believers from associating with nonbelievers who were fornicators, coveters, extortionists, and idolaters (1 Cor. 6:9–10) and specifically forbade association with any believer who also shared in these habits (1 Cor. 11–12b). Though the technical term *apistoi* ("unbelievers") is not used in this passage, conceptually believers can be designated as *apistoi* ("unbelievers"; cf. 2 Cor. 4:1–6; Titus 1:15). Any Christian relationship with unbelievers that was negatively infectious to the Christian was to be severed. Believers were expected to take the initiative in breaking away from these associations. Perhaps the only exception was a believer already married to an unbeliever. In such a case, a believer was not to take the initiative to leave the unbeliever (1 Cor. 7:12–15); the sanctity of marriage was essentially revered by Paul (1 Cor. 7:10).

It is suggestive that a believer can essentially be termed an "unbeliever" if he or she is promoting a message different from the basic rudiments of the Christian faith. It is clear that in the Corinthian correspondence, a "believer" (*pistos*) was one in a consensual agreement with Paul's gospel. Any teaching that questioned the content of his gospel to the Corinthians was a farce, and any peddler of such a teaching was an unbeliever (2 Thess. 3:6).

7:5–16
Titus's Return

After the discourse vindicating his ministry (2:14—7:4), Paul resumes the account of his movement in search of Titus in Macedonia (7:5; cf. 2:13). The return of Titus from Corinth brought comfort to Paul (7:5–7). Paul recounted the effect of the painful letter that had been sent through Titus to the Corinthians (7:8–16).

7:5–11. Impact of the Painful Letter. In 2:13, Paul indicated that in his quest to know the result of the painful letter that he had sent to the Corinthians through Titus, he left Troas for Macedonia. In Troas, he was emotionally distressed because Titus did not show up (7:5–7). On coming to Macedonia, he was physically restless and emotionally anxious as he waited to see Titus. With the coming of Titus, Paul was comforted because the Corinthians showed signs of repentance and a desire to defend Paul's ministerial integrity (v. 7; cf. 2:5–10). Paul found in this change of attitude divine comfort in his afflictions (cf. 1:1–9), attributing the power of repentance to God.

At some point, Paul regretted sending the letter that had hurt the Corinthians (7:8). But after Titus reported to him the change of mind among the Corinthians, what Paul had intended to accomplish, he was happy that he had written it (v. 9). The emotional instability of Paul during his search for Titus in Troas and Macedonia was the result of his fear that the letter could have had an adverse effect on his already estranged relationship with the Corinthians. But God worked on their hearts to appreciate the intent of the letter (v. 10). The Corinthians bore witness to the positive effect of the letter even though it had caused them pain (v. 11).

7:12–16. Response of the Church to the Letter. Paul next highlighted the ultimate purpose and intended result of the painful letter. Apart from the fact that he had to demonstrate his dissatisfaction for the attitude of the erring believer, Paul needed to make the Corinthians appreciate his love for them from God's perspective (v. 12). Since the founding and nurturing of the Corinthian church, Paul had consistently shown his affection for the church. Even when the Corinthians' love grew cold toward Paul, his love for them did not. He capitalized on the situation to show his love even more to them (cf. 2:2–3). The positive response of the church made him happier. In his experience as the father of the church, he boasted to Titus that the ailing relationship was temporary. Titus was well received by the Corinthians, and Paul was pleased with the reception of and obedience to his demands (cf. Eph. 6:5; Phil. 2:12). Paul was happy with the response, but there was still a restraint among a minority of the Corinthian believers (2 Cor. 1:14; 3:5–6; 11:7–12; 12:13–16). Paul cared not only for the majority that had embraced him but equally sought to gain the affection of the others too. Titus had established a good relationship that Paul was ready to capitalize on in order to reinitiate a call for a further demonstration of their love.

The Corinthians, Paul, and the Church Today

The lengthy attempt by Paul to defend his ministry and to call the Corinthians to reconciliation with him speaks to the church today as it faces similar internal conflicts. From his discourse we can learn how to deal with conflicts in the church and avoid them.

1. Perhaps one of the most important things we learn from the experience of the Corinthians is that even today the church, in spite of being holy, is not yet what God expects it to be. It is on a journey toward that ideal, but it has not yet arrived. Therefore, we should not allow conflicts within it to weaken our conviction that God is indeed sanctifying and leading the church. The imperfections of the church are the imperfections of its members, and we should do all we can to avoid allowing our imperfections to damage the unity of the church. It is only through the reconciling power of Christ that the unity of the church can be preserved in spite of our imperfections.

2. The experience of the Corinthians tells us that turmoil in the church is often the result of self-asserting and strenuous individuals, like false teachers, whose judgmental attitudes plant seeds of distrust in the minds of its members. They usually bypass God's appointed ministers and appoint themselves as true exponents of the message of salvation when in reality what they bring is division, animosity, and conflict.

3. Paul is telling us that in such situations church leaders are to clearly speak up and not to negotiate the message of the church. This appears to have been the purpose of the painful letter that Paul had sent to the Corinthians. For Paul, his message of reconciliation that was being threatened through attacks against his ministry was worth fighting for. This message was not his to negotiate—and neither is it ours—but it was given to him and to all of us by our resurrected Lord. We have no choice but to proclaim it. In any situation of church conflict, the gospel has to be reaffirmed and its implications for the life of the church made clear, because only the gospel of salvation through Christ can unify us.

4. In seeking to resolve conflicts within the church, love should characterize all we do and say. Paul constantly reaffirmed his love for the Corinthians, as well as the sincerity of all his actions toward them. The most powerful agent of change is the love of God working in our hearts. Often this love reaches us through the love of fellow believers. Paul was not seeking revenge against those who offended him but their restoration through forgiveness. The most fundamental purpose of church discipline is bringing healing to all the parties involved.

5. Since the main source of church dissension seems to be self-appointed teachers, Paul states that in order to avoid division or to restore harmony in the church, it is indispensable for church members to separate themselves from such individuals. Their influence needs to be restrained, and this is something that church members must do. In some situations, it would be necessary for them to disengage from such individuals by ending any type of relationship that would be damaging to their faith and the church.

6. For Paul, the change that took place in the hearts of the Corinthians was a display of the reconciling grace of God. In examining the way he had handled the situation, he at times seems to have regretted some of his techniques. At least he regretted sending the painful letter. But together with Paul, we should realize that God is powerful enough to use us, in spite of our imperfections, to His glory and for the benefit of His church. God does not abandon His church when it faces internal conflicts, but He works within it to bring about healing. In this task, God uses church members and ministers who are humble enough to be used by Him. The intensity of His love for the church is such that He will never let it go from His loving hands.

8:1—9:15

THE COLLECTION FOR THE SAINTS IN JUDEA

Once the ailing relationship apparently had been restored, certain measurable obligations needed attention. In 1 Corinthians, Paul had urged the Corinthians to give financial aid to the needy saints in Jerusalem (16:1, 3; cf. Rom. 15:25–27). This directive had also been given to the churches in Galatia and Macedonia, and they complied (2 Cor. 8:1–2; 1 Cor. 16:1). In Paul's understanding, it was the responsibility of the well-to-do believers to attend to the needs of impoverished believers (Rom. 15:27; 1 Cor. 16:1). Since Paul's painful visit occurred after Timothy had been ill-treated in Corinth, Paul could not request this financial aid. But now that the Corinthian church had responded positively to the letter sent by Paul through Titus, Paul could remind them of their financial responsibility toward the needy saints in Jerusalem. It is important to note that Paul knew the financial strength of the Corinthians; hence, he did not make an unreasonable demand. When Paul ministered to the Corinthians, Corinth was the hub of the Achaean economy owing to its location and two sea ports. It can be said that the Corinthian believers were active workers who could start saving money from the first day of the week (see commentary on 1 Cor. 16:1–4). Paul reminded them in two different ways about

their responsibility for the needy. First, he refreshed their minds concerning the need to contribute to the aid fund (2 Cor. 8:1–15). Second, he made a case for the integrity of the envoys who were to gather the money in anticipation of his third visit to Corinth (8:16—9:15). Chapters 8–9 constitute Paul's appeal to the Corinthians to prepare to give liberally for the needy saints in Jerusalem.

8:1–15

The Need for Liberality

In this section, the Corinthians were reminded of the need to give generously. Paul began by citing the generosity of the Macedonian churches, namely, the congregations in Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea (8:1–5). He then appealed to the Corinthians to give generously (vv. 6–15).

8:1–5. The Free Giving of the Macedonians. Before his appeal for funds from the Corinthians, Paul cited the generosity of the Macedonians to motivate the Corinthians to give generously (v. 5). Even though the Macedonian churches were facing persecution and were financially weak, they gave abundantly (8:1–3). Persecution usually renders one poor (cf. Rev. 2:9). In spite of these imposing situations, the Macedonian churches insistently pleaded with Paul to be given the opportunity to contribute to alleviate the more pressing needs of the saints in Jerusalem (v. 4). Serving the dire needs of believers is a privilege and flows from a heart that has been voluntarily given to the Lord. If the whole self is willingly surrendered to the Master Jesus Christ, then all material things can generously be given to His service. Through this request, Paul implies that the Corinthians were willing to truly and fully renew their commitment to Christ and to him so as to understand and practice Christ-centered stewardship. Ultimately, the disposition of the Macedonians was occasioned by God's will.

8:6–15. Appeal to the Corinthians. In view of the exemplary generosity of the Macedonians in their disadvantaged situation, the Corinthians were also to be willing to give. Since Titus was well received by the Corinthians, Paul considered him to be the perfect envoy to help gather the collection (vv. 6, 10). Paul saw a correlation between recognition of apostolic authority and obedience to apostolic directives (v. 7). Unlike his command in 1 Corinthians 16:1, he was pleading with them to willingly contribute to the aid fund (2 Cor. 8:1–8). The change in tone is a reflection of their renewed relationship. For Paul, the exemplary giving of the Macedonians was not the most important motivation for liberal giving; it was Jesus. Even though He is God, and therefore rich, He identified Himself with the needs of humanity by becoming poor for us (cf. John 1:14; 2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 2:6–8). True stewardship is grounded in the sacrifice of Christ (2 Cor. 8:10). This does not mean it was appropriate that the Corinthians should have been overburdened and destitute as a result of helping the needy. They were entreated to contribute according to their means. The stress of Paul's appeal lies in the fulfillment of the promise made by the church to contribute to the aid fund (vv. 11–15; cf. 9:5). It is important to note that Paul did not encourage laziness (cf. 1 Thess. 4:11–12; 2 Thess. 3:10–13). The dire conditions in Jerusalem were the result of extreme and prolonged poverty brought about by a famine that struck Judea in the first half of the first century (cf. Acts 11:28–29). The need in Jerusalem was certainly legitimate. And due to the growing opposition Jewish believers encountered from their fellow Jews, their only real source of help would be their fellow believers living outside of Judea.

8:16—9:5

Mission and Commendation of Titus

Assuming that the Corinthians would be ready to give generously, a trustworthy person had to go and collect the money. In view of his apostolic integrity, Paul felt obliged to recommend certain individuals to collect the money. He recommended Titus and two other believers and urged the Corinthians to welcome them (8:16–24). In view of their visit, the Corinthians were to prepare and cooperate with the delegates (9:1–5). Paul emphasized the blessings that may accrue from generous giving (9:6–15).

8:16–24. Integrity of Titus and His Companions. Both Paul and Titus shared the same passion for raising funds to help the saints in Jerusalem. Titus had developed a good relationship with the Corinthians (cf. 8:6) and had willingly decided to go back to Corinth for the collection. Paul chose his words carefully to underscore the willingness involved in the act of that specific giving. He commended Titus for this task as a fellow worker (vv. 16, 17, 23). The church could attest to this information, so no one could question the integrity of Paul (cf. 2:13). Paul wanted total transparency in the way the collection was being gathered and regarding the process of taking it to Jerusalem. As a wise pastor, he left no room for suspicion (8:20). In addition to Titus, Paul also recommended two unnamed brothers in the faith to participate in the collection. The first brother was known by the Macedonian churches for his sincere service to the gospel and was chosen by the churches. Paul was not involved in the appointment of this first brother. Paul reported exactly what happened to safeguard his integrity before God and believers (vv. 18–19, 21). Another brother, who had proved diligent on several occasions, was commended to be one of the delegates. These individuals are likely part of the group of delegates identified by name in Acts 20:4, three of whom were Macedonians (Sopater from Berea and Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica). Whoever they were, these two unnamed brothers were special messengers of the Macedonian churches while Titus was Paul's partner in ministry and known to the Corinthian church. Paul recognized that one sure way of building up and preserving his integrity in the ministry was to be transparent in financial matters.

9:1–5. Preparation for the Collection. The content of chapter 8 was intended to motivate the Corinthians to give willingly, as they had promised the previous year (v. 10). It was their initial zeal to contribute to the fund that inspired the Macedonians to give (8:11; 9:2). Paul's concern in chapter 9 was to make sure that the Corinthians would follow through on their promise to give generously when the delegates arrived to collect the donations of the Achaeans, including the Corinthians (vv. 2, 5). Paul's purpose in reminding the Corinthians about the Macedonians was not to increase the size of the offering by pitting one group of believers against another; it was to remind the Corinthians that not only was their reputation at stake on this issue but his was as well. Not wanting to be shamed if the Corinthians failed to honor their zeal to give, Paul appealed to their collective conscience to persuade them to cooperate with the delegates in their generous gift. If they would cooperate, his boasting of their zeal to contribute to the aid would be affirmed. If he would come with some of the Macedonians to Corinth and they would not be prepared, his integrity might be at stake. Therefore, if the church had again embraced him as their spiritual father, it was appropriate that they would honor him by giving generously but not grudgingly. So far, Paul had appealed to them in three scenarios: (1) the exemplary generosity of the Macedonians; (2) the selfless and voluntary sacrifice of Jesus; and (3) the integrity of Paul and the Corinthians. These scenarios were to motivate them to give generously.

9:6–15. The Result of Liberality. The fourth motivation for helping the needy involves the blessings that accrue from generous giving. God uses mortal beings to shower His blessings on other mortal beings (cf. Gen. 12:2). Paul employed a common shared analogy of reaping what one sows on the field (2 Cor. 9:6; cf. Luke 6:38; Gal. 6:7). This analogy is used to stress the principle of generous giving (2 Cor. 9:5). The Corinthians were to remember that all material prosperity belongs to God, and He distributes His gifts to any benefactor who attends to the needs of the poor (cf. Ps. 112:3, 9). Such a benefactor will be blessed by the Lord. Those who have should be willing to assist the destitute (cf. Luke 12:1, 13–21; 14:14). Paul was persuaded that we receive God's blessings in order to practice liberality regularly (2 Cor. 9:11). The liberality of the Corinthians would not only supply the needs of the saints (v. 12a) but would also bring glory to the Lord (vv. 11b, 12b). Additionally, the saints in Jerusalem would pray to God on their behalf. All in all, the Corinthians were to remember the gift of Jesus Christ, whom God had given to them so that they might be saved (cf. Rom. 5:15, 17; 6:23; 1 Cor. 1:7). The indescribable gift of God (2 Cor. 9:15) is what transforms humans from selfish creatures into beings willing to emulate the Greatest Giver of all, our Lord and Savior.

10:1—13:10

Paul's Defense of His Apostolate

Paul changes gears to discuss issues relative to the defense of his apostolic authority. The tone of 2 Corinthians 1–9 is a reflection on bruised relations that had recently been eased. Chapters 10–13 present a picture of uneasiness. As noted in the introduction, this change of tone has led some to question whether chapters 10–13 constitute part of Paul's original letter, while others who see these chapters as authentically Pauline have criticized what they see as the mercurial temperament of the apostle. Neither of these conclusions are necessary. Not a single Greek manuscript supports the view that the original letter ended at chapter 9. And the issue of commending oneself in the gospel ministry has been addressed in both major sections (2:17; 3:1–3; 5:12; 10:12; 11:22–24). These frequent references suggest the presence of false teachers in

Corinth, perhaps from Jerusalem (11:22–23), who had been competing for the loyalty of the Corinthians. Thus, chapters 10–13 do not necessarily indicate that Paul wrote them because he had received fresh information about any sudden and negative changes of attitude on the part of the Corinthians toward him. After all, the reference to sinners who should have repented but who had not (12:21—13:2) suggests that some of the issues addressed in chapters 10–13 had been longstanding ones. And the impression that Paul loved the Corinthians more than they loved him permeates the entire letter (e.g., 6:13; 11:11; 12:15). In addition, Paul had repeatedly mentioned his upcoming visit as his third one (12:14; 13:1), which clearly seems to follow the painful visit mentioned earlier in 1:23—2:4. Although the tone of chapters 10–13 seems to deviate from chapters 1–9 to some degree, it is important to recognize that the entire letter is polemic; it seeks to defend the integrity of Paul's apostolic ministry as a whole.

Understood from this perspective, the entire letter appears to have served as a twofold response to Titus's overall report on the situation in Corinth. Building on the positive reaction of some in the church to his earlier letter, Paul first erects bridges of goodwill with the church in chapters 1–9. Then in chapters 10–13, he addresses the crux of the problem—the individuals who had created doubt in the minds of the Corinthians about the integrity of his apostolic calling and ministry. In these final chapters, Paul develops the defense of this apostolic authority along three lines. First, he brings to view the nature of the spiritual authority of his apostleship so as to further strengthen their fraternal bond among themselves (10:1–18). Second, he specifically outlines the nature of a true apostle over against that of the false apostles (11:1—12:13). Finally, he again announces his upcoming third visit, at which time, if the troublemakers in Corinth had not turned from their contentious ways, he would have demonstrated the power of his apostolic authority in bringing the situation to a decisive end (12:14—13:10; cf. 9:4–5).

10:1–11. The Spiritual Authority of the Apostle. By the measure of some, Paul should have been boastful of his authority and accomplishments when he visited the Corinthians. Instead they observed that he had acted with boldness and authority only when he wrote to them (v. 10). Paul appealed to them by the humbleness and gentleness of Christ, hoping that he would not have to be bold with the Corinthians, even though he feared that he would need to be bold with those who argued that he walked according to the flesh (vv. 1–2), that is, with those who claimed that he was not guided by the Spirit and was living according to the standards of this world. These individuals were not to confuse his humility with timidity. He had the apostolic right to come to the Corinthians "with a rod" to discipline or in love and gentleness (1 Cor. 4:21). He acknowledged that in one sense he did walk in the flesh, that is to say, that he was human just like everyone else. However, in the performance of his ministry, he was not waging war according to the flesh—in a worldly manner—but in the power of the Spirit. In other words, Paul was arguing that his ministry could not be judged according to human standards because his ministry had to do with spiritual matters (2 Cor. 10:3–5; cf. Eph. 6:11–17). Paul indicates that in this war the spiritual weapons were powerful enough to overcome the arguments and human sophistries of the enemy and to finally defeat them. The results involve bringing people to obedience to Christ (2 Cor. 10:6) and punishment to those who oppose the message. Paul had been given the authority to build up the church. Thus, the focus was not to be on him but on Christ (vv. 7–8). In terms of worldly standard and appraisal, he may not have displayed rhetorical competence or physical strength. However, even those who sought to subvert his authority admitted that his letters were powerful in content. Therefore, he was repeating his desire to be bold or powerful when he would visit them; he chose to be bold only when necessary. Somehow a section of the church had misunderstood his ministerial strategy. He was interested in building up the body of Christ, not in tearing it down (vv. 9–11).

10:12–18. The Place for Apostolic Boasting. Even if Paul had to boast about his authority, there was a place and a proper way to do it. In his Damascus experience, the mission of Paul was clearly spelled out. God gave him the authority to officially relay the saving act of Christ to Gentiles and Jews (Acts 9:15). This authority was further affirmed at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:1–21). The Jerusalem church had recognized his authority to minister to Gentiles, including the Corinthians (cf. Gal. 2:7–8). In other words, if he were to boast, he would do it in a place where he had ministered. In such a situation, the Corinthian church, established by him, was evidently the subject of his boasting. This understanding was to inform and educate the so-called apostles who had invaded his ministerial territory and were commending themselves (2 Cor. 10:13–15). Unlike Apollos, these busybodies had come to Corinth to supplant Paul (cf. 1 Cor. 3:5–6). Paul shared the conviction that true apostles should not be prideful in a place where they had not sown the seed of the gospel (2 Cor. 10:16; cf. Rom. 15:18–21). But more important than commending oneself in a defined jurisdiction is the commendation that is done by the Lord (vv. 17–18). The only legitimate boasting is boasting in what Christ has done for or through us (Rom. 15:18; Gal. 6:14). All glory is thus given to God as the source of our success. It is only this kind of individual who, like Paul, will receive the commendation of Jesus (2 Cor. 10:17–18; cf. 5:9–10).

11:1—12:13

Characteristics of True and False Apostles

In this part of his defense, Paul continues to outline specific differences between apostles commended by Jesus Christ and self-commended ones. In this regard, Paul confined his effort to safeguarding the Corinthians against false messengers (11:1–6). He had been charged with lacking love toward the church because he had not requested financial aid from it for his personal sustenance. Here, he responds to this charge so as to defend his ministerial credentials and expose the works of the false apostles (vv. 7–15). For the sake of argument, he boasts in the same way as the false teachers, namely, as fools (vv. 16–33). But in truth, his privileges as an apostle of Jesus Christ were uncontested and he boasted in what made him dependent on Jesus (12:1–2). He finally makes a case for his apostolic ministry (12:11–13).

11:1–6. Safeguarding the Church against False Messages. Some of the Corinthians had been sympathetic to the false teachers who commended themselves (5:12; 10:7, 12; 11:12–18). Paul was imploring them to bear with him as he, like his opponents, boasted about his apostolic credentials (11:1–6). Although Paul clearly felt that boasting in this manner was improper, he still did so since this was the type of criterion his opponents laid claim to and that was apparently valued by the Corinthians themselves (v. 4). Accordingly, Paul offers three reasons for why he should be allowed to boast. First, the Corinthian church was the result of his ministry. He felt responsible for their spiritual purity until Christ's coming. Like God's own jealousy for Israel, Paul was jealous for the Corinthians' exclusive love for Christ, their spiritual husband (cf. Ex. 34:12–16; Hos. 2:19–20; 4:12; 6:4; 11:8). Paul described himself as the father of the bride. As such, it was his responsibility to present her as chaste to her bridegroom, Jesus Christ, at the Second Coming (2 Cor. 12:141; 1 Cor. 4:15). This nuptial imagery reveals his pastoral responsibility and love for his converts. Based on this relationship, he was to be allowed to boast briefly in the Lord (2 Cor. 11:2–3). Second, since the Corinthians had entertained a different gospel message from the self-promoting troublemakers, they were to allow Paul to do what the false teachers did but to do so in the Lord. Paul recognized how vulnerable the church was to being deceived by these sorts of religious charlatans (vv. 3–4). Third, in the context of entertaining these troublemakers, the Corinthians were not to regard Paul as inferior or lacking in comparison to the eminent or "super" apostles. It appears that these ostensibly great apostles were different from the "pillars" of the Jerusalem church or the twelve apostles and probably refers to the false teachers troubling the church in Corinth (Acts 15:6; 1 Cor. 15:5; Gal. 2:9). At the time 2 Corinthians was being written, the Jerusalem church had recognized Paul's ministry and gospel (Acts 15:22–27). The message of these people was considered different from Paul's (2 Cor. 11:4). Even though he was not as versed in rhetorical training and skill as they were, he was more than proficient in the knowledge of the gospel. To him, style was less important than substance.

11:7–15. Paul's Financial Self-Reliance. Paul had been accused of not loving the Corinthians because he had rejected their financial help. In 1 Corinthians, Paul had argued for the apostolic right to be remunerated by his converts (1 Cor. 9:3–18). In fact, some itinerant philosophers in the Greco-Roman period often supported themselves by charging a fee for their tutorial services. Others worked at a trade as they sought to maintain their reputation. However, while Paul's principle did not contravene that of Christ and the apostolic church (Luke 9:3–4; 10:4, 7; 1 Cor. 9:6, 11, 14; 1 Tim. 5:17–18; 3 John 5–8), he consciously refused to accept any financial help from new converts to whom he was currently ministering at his founding visit (2 Cor. 11:9; 1 Cor. 16:17; Phil. 4:14–16; 1 Thess. 2:9). He would receive financial help from his converts after the message had been accepted and the church had been established (1 Cor. 16:6, 11). In Corinth, he worked at his trade as a tentmaker

during his founding visit (2 Cor. 11:9; cf. Acts 18:3). He provided for himself so that the gospel would not be hindered (1 Cor. 9:12). After Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself to the preaching of the gospel (Acts 18:5). It can be implied that Silas and Timothy brought some monetary gift from Macedonia to Paul, which encouraged him to devote himself entirely to preaching the gospel (Phil. 4:15; cf. 1 Thess. 3:6). Paul had no hidden agenda, and God knew his motive and love for the Corinthians (2 Cor. 11:11). Paul's opponents in Corinth had, however, taken money from the Corinthians for sharing their gospel. Then, in order to justify their behavior, they had sought to discredit Paul's apostolic ministry for not receiving remuneration. The difference between Paul and the false apostles was clear, and the Corinthians should have been able to identify him as the true apostle rather than listening to the false apostles whose interest lay in financial reward (v. 12).

In vv. 13–15, Paul identifies these self-acclaimed teachers as ministers of Satan. They were deceitful workers, mimicking the father of all lies (John 8:44). In his attempt to deceive, Satan was able to transform himself into an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14; cf. Rev. 13:13). These deceivers had won the loyalty of some of the Corinthians by cunningly mischaracterizing Paul's financial independence as a demonstration of his lack of affection for the Corinthians. Even though these individuals claimed to be ministers of the gospel, their misconduct had rendered them ministers of the adversary. As noted earlier, they preached a different gospel (2 Cor. 11:4). Their message lacked the true substance of the gospel (cf. v. 6). Such "apostles" would also be subject to judgment by their works (v. 15). This statement is a reaffirmation of Paul's belief that the way we execute our divinely assigned responsibilities and commitments will be evaluated in the final judgment (5:10).

11:16–33. Paul's Boasting as a Fool. Paul had been responding to the Corinthians as an "ignorant" (*aphrōn*, "foolish," "senseless," "unlearned") person. Foolish people tend to boast about their limited perspective of experience, hence betraying their emptiness. Paul was answering the ignorant apostles according to their ignorance (Prov. 26:5). He was pleading with the Corinthians to entertain his ignorant speech as well. They knew that he did not boast like that, but for the sake of argument he craved their indulgence as he was doing a little boasting (2 Cor. 11:16; cf. v. 1). This ignorant boasting was not in the Lord in that it did not mimic the "gentleness of Christ" (10:1); rather, it followed the line of the intruders from Judea (11:17–22). It appears that the Corinthians had recognized the false apostles by foolishly remunerating them for their preaching of another gospel. The point was that if the Corinthians had gladly put up with these peddlers, they should give Paul a little room for boasting. In other words, the attitude of the Corinthians had occasioned Paul's boasting (vv. 19–20).

Paul was not boasting as an ignorant fool but also as a madman. It was a shameful boasting, but he had no choice but to boast! The Corinthians had fallen in love with the Hebrew heritage of the false apostles; for the sake of comparison, Paul reminded the Corinthians of his rich Hebrew cultural heritage (Acts 18:12b–15; Eph. 2:12; Phil. 3:5). Both he and the false apostles shared the same national identity and cultural heritage. They were not better than him in this regard (2 Cor. 11:21–22). In relation to ministry, they claimed to be ministers of Christ. Paul contended that he was even more. This means that if the Corinthians were regarding them as supreme apostles (v. 5), then it was necessary that they regard Paul even more highly (v. 23a).

Shortly after arriving in Corinth, Paul wrote to the believers in Rome. He told them that not only had he planted churches all across the eastern Mediterranean region of the Roman Empire (Rom. 15:19) but he had also finished collecting the aid fund for the impoverished saints in Jerusalem (Rom. 15:26–27). The account of Paul's missionary activities in Acts indicates the large geographical scope of the apostle's ministry (Acts 9:22–26; 13:4—14:26; 16:6—18:19; 19:1—20:31). Paul was consciously aware of both the spatial and numerical scope of his ministry. He was able to boldly and without provocation opine that by the grace of God he had labored more than even the apostles themselves (1 Cor. 15:9–10). Therefore, the claim that the false apostles could not match him in terms of labor was certainly true (2 Cor. 11:23c).

To clarify even more what is involved in a better ministry, Paul provides another list of difficult ministerial experiences identifying him as a true apostle, because only a true apostle could go through them and remain committed to the divine calling (vv. 23b–27). While Luke's account of Paul's ministry in Acts fills in some events that otherwise would not have been known today, we should not expect it to provide us with a detailed perspective of Paul's afflictions in ministry. Both Luke and Paul had their own individual reasons for writing. Still, at times, their writings offer us a complementary view of some of the significant historical events that took place during Paul's career. For example, Paul stated that he suffered frequent imprisonments, severe beatings, and frequent exposure to death (2 Cor. 11:23). Luke related one of these events that occurred before Paul's founding visit to Corinth—his arrest, beating, and imprisonment in Philippi (Acts 16:23–40). In addition to the general characterization of his ministry as one beset with the threat of death (2 Cor. 11:23), Paul goes on to list a number of more specific events, some of which are not found in Luke's account in Acts. Paul recalls that he received thirty-nine lashes five times, the traditional Jewish punishment for certain offenses (Deut. 25:1–3). Three times he was beaten with rods, once he was stoned, and three times he suffered shipwreck (2 Cor. 11:25). These specific incidents of Paul's personal afflictions portray a minister who had been tested almost beyond measure but who had stayed true to this calling. But the list does not stop there. Paul goes on to mention other experiences involving personal deprivations for the gospel, such as physical rest, food, water, clothing, and warmth. And on top of all of that, he was constantly concerned for the well-being of the churches, identifying himself with their experiences (v. 28).

Such is the nature of a Christian ministry that is characterized by unselfish service to God's people. Paul was not complaining or giving a report to the Corinthians of his ministerial experiences; he was not accountable to them but to the Lord. He simply cared for all the churches that came into existence with or without his ministry (cf. Rom 1:5, 8–11; 15:20–23; 1 Cor. 3:6; 4:15; Col. 2:1). He shows deep interest in fostering good relationships between people of different descents and ideologies (Rom. 11; 14:1–13; Eph. 2:10–19; Phil. 4:2; Philem. 10–12, 17). He also ensures a consistent vertical relationship of believers with God (Phil. 1:9–10; Col. 1:9–10; 1 Thess. 5:17–19, 22; 2 Thess. 1:11–12). Whereas he fervently cared to attend to the basic financial needs of the poor (2 Cor. 8–9; cf. Rom. 15:25–26), he was equally discouraging to lazy believers who failed to develop their God-given intelligence to take care of themselves and those in need (Eph. 4:28; 2 Thess. 3:10–11; 1 Tim. 5:8). When a believer stumbled in sin, he selflessly dealt with such a person. If sinners did not show signs of repentance, Paul disciplined them with the view of restoring them to Christ. When sinners repented, Paul rejoiced in their repentance (cf. 2 Cor. 2:6; 7:9–12; 1 Tim. 1:20). He also ministered to churches from a distance through letters and delegates (2 Cor. 2:13; Rom. 1:7–12; 1 Cor. 4:17; 7:7–8; Gal. 6:11; Phil. 2:25; Col. 1:7; 4:12).

Paul reminded the Corinthians, lest they misunderstood the object of his boasting, that contrary to what they may have been thinking, he could boast only about his weaknesses (2 Cor. 11:30). It was only in the Lord that he could boast, because in his weaknesses the mighty hand of God was evinced (1:8–10; 4:7, 10–11; 12:5–10). His sufficiency amid these weaknesses was coming from God (3:5).

A frequent reference to God as a witness to Paul's claim characterizes the defense of his integrity and apostolic ministry (cf. 1:17–18, 23). To be more specific, in case the Corinthians would doubt his uncountable difficult experiences, the epistle recounts Paul's nocturnal escape from Damascus (11:32–33). Luke confirmed that immediately after conversion, Paul engaged the Jews in Damascus, proving that Jesus was the anointed Savior. Consequently, the Jewish leaders plotted to kill him, but he was able to escape from the city during the night (Acts 9:22–25). The governor of Damascus was under the rule of Aretas IV, king of the Nabataeans. It should be recalled that Paul went to Arabia after his call and conversion and returned again to Damascus (Gal. 1:17). It is conceivable that the Nabataean king opposed Paul's evangelistic activities and had instructed his representative in Damascus to apprehend him. Paul's narrow escape through a window was an act of God (2 Cor. 11:33). In any event, the import of 2 Corinthians 11:31–32 is the trustworthiness of the accounts of Paul's personal afflictions, which he considered to be his weaknesses. If Paul were to boast, he would boast about what God had done for him. This is elaborated in the next section.

12:1–10. Vision of Christ and Boasting. In order to clarify his understanding of boasting, Paul relates his visionary experience from fourteen years earlier (v. 2). According to Luke, Paul had several visionary experiences. First, during Paul's call and conversion on the road to Damascus, Jesus audibly spoke to him in a vision (Acts 9:10; 26:19; Gal. 1:16). Again, during his second missionary journey while intending to minister in Troas, Paul saw a man in vision beckoning him to come to Macedonia (Acts 16:8–9). Also, when he was afraid to preach the gospel in Corinth during his second missionary journey,

God assured him of divine protection in a vision (Acts 18:9–11). Furthermore, when Paul visited Jerusalem immediately after his conversion, he was praying in the temple when he had a vision. In this experience, Jesus asked him to leave Jerusalem because of the unreceptive attitude of the people to the gospel (Acts 22:17–21). Finally, when Paul was arrested, the Lord appeared before him to assure him that Paul would minister for Him in Rome (Acts 23:1). The form of Paul's encounter with Jesus is not described, but it can be assumed that Jesus appeared to him in a vision (cf. Acts 27:23, 24). In these supernatural experiences, Luke describes what Paul heard and saw.

In 2 Corinthians 12:1–2, Paul recounts his experience in an indirect way, as if it had happened to some other person. Since 2 Corinthians was written in A.D. 56, this experience may have occurred around A.D. 42. It is commonly held that Paul remained in Tarsus from A.D. 37 to 45. In other words, this revelation would have occurred in the early and unknown years of Paul's apostolic ministry in Tarsus—a time when Paul was no one important. He betrayed his bewilderment concerning whether he was caught up to heaven in the body (physically) or out of the body (spiritually; in a vision). This experience is unique to all the attested experiences in Luke and other Pauline writings. Why did Paul refer to this unique experience?

A cursory reading of vv. 2–3 would lead one to think that Paul was boasting about another person's achievement. In v. 2, he refers to "a man in Christ." In the context of boasting, appealing to the experience of somebody else would weaken his argument (v. 5). But he then employs the first-person singular as he relates the connection between this experience and his boasting (v. 7). Only God knew the precise nature of his earlier experience (vv. 3–4). Taking Paul to the third heaven was an act of God. This experience was not gradual but a sudden ascent to the third heaven or paradise.

Jewish apocalyptic literature of the time reveals that some Jews believed in the existence of seven heavens, beyond which was the divine throne. Those who desired to experience a revelation of the presence of God had to embark on a visionary ascent through the heavens. While Paul lacked awareness of the condition of this experience, he had a clear knowledge of different heavens. However, it is very unlikely that he shared the apocalyptic viewpoint of a seven-heaven cosmology. If he had, his opponents could have easily criticized him for having only been taken to the third heaven. Moreover, outside of this passage, Paul says nothing about visionary ascents through the heavens; he speaks only of God's descent to the earth through the revelation of Christ. By the third heaven, Paul is referring to the highest heaven, the dwelling place of God (cf. 1 Kin. 8:27).

In v. 4, Paul's terminology switches from being caught up to the "third heaven" to being caught up into paradise. The word "paradise" was borrowed from a Persian word, which meant "Garden of God." Following this sense, it was used in Judaism to refer to the Garden of Eden. In later writings dating to the time of Jesus, it also came to refer to the place of God's dwelling, as well as that of the righteous dead. It appears that Paul uses it in the former sense as an equivalent of the third heaven (vv. 2, 4; cf. Luke 23:43; Rev. 2:7; 22:2, 14), that is, the place where God dwells. Since what he heard in the third heaven or paradise was reserved for him alone, there is no need for us to speculate about it. He certainly had every right to boast about this honor God granted him (2 Cor. 12:5a). However, Paul preferred to boast in his weaknesses (v. 5b). Only fools would boast of such rare privileges, and he was not a fool (v. 6). Though he recognized the natural human tendency to be proud as a result of these visionary experiences, he refrained. It is likely that the false apostles boasted of their visionary experiences in their ministry. This may have called forth Paul's recounting of this rare honor that God had granted him. But his point is that visionary experiences do not necessarily validate true ministry. They can be falsified (cf. 11:13–15).

Paul was not immune to falling prey to boasting. But God, in His own wisdom, is willing to protect us from it (12:7–10; cf. 4:6–7). This God had done for Paul by allowing him to experience a physical affliction (12:7). This was personified as a messenger of Satan and was not from God; but God was using it for the benefit of Paul, that is, to keep him humble (cf. Matt. 26:67; Mark 14:65). It is likely that Paul suffered from some bodily ailment known to him and his contemporaries but unknown to us. Certainly, it was something Paul detested. Three times he requested that the Lord take it away from him (v. 8). The repetitiveness of the prayer for healing demonstrates the debilitating nature of the ailment and the sincerity of Paul's request (cf. 2 Sam. 12:16–23). The Lord's answer was sublime and reassuring. Paul would always have enough grace to outweigh the difficulties inflicted by the ailment. The assurance that God is aware of human pain and that He provides the grace we need to bear such things should strengthen our faith and perseverance in the midst of hardships and unbearable situations. Our prayer for healing may not be answered in the way we expect, but God answers it by strengthening us through His grace to bear patiently our burden while trusting in Him. We, like Paul, should boast in the magnificent power of God that sustains and preserves us (2 Cor. 12:9–10). That is why Paul could boldly claim that he could do everything through Christ who gave him strength (Phil. 4:13). This distressing affliction may have appeared to hinder his ministry, yet he humbly accepted the will of God for him.

Sin has subjected humanity to inexplicable diseases, hardships, and tormenting pains. As long as we are on this sinful earth, believers are not exempt from these predicaments (cf. Luke 13:16). They test our persistent faith and love for Christ. But we are assured of the ever abiding presence of Jesus Christ amid uncertainty and hopelessness (cf. Matt. 28:20b). God did not answer Paul's prayer the way he wished. It was not because Paul did not have enough faith but because God knew what was best for him. Here the issue is not faith (cf. James 5:15) but the *will* of God for His servant. God had performed great signs and wonders through Paul, but not this time (2 Cor. 12:12). God is not only good when things are going well for us but He is also good to us in the midst of our loneliness and suffering. His will seeks always what is the best for His children. Jesus had an accurate knowledge of the tormenting persecutions of the believers at Smyrna. However, He urged them to be faithful until death (Rev. 2:10).

12:11–13. Evidence of Paul's Apostolic Ministry. Even though Paul had been trying to resist the temptation of boasting, he finally realized that he had been compelled to boast a little. Since the Corinthians entertained and recognized the foolish boastings of the false ministers (11:19–20), he was moved to respond appropriately. When his ministry was attacked, he expected the church to commend and defend it (12:11). Paul was never interested in making himself the center of his own ministry (cf. 4:6). But humanly speaking, he was not inferior to the false and self-appointed apostles (11:5, 21–22). Again, humanly speaking, he was just a vessel that the Lord employed to disseminate His saving word (cf. 4:6–7). The Corinthians could bear witness to the signs, wonders, and mighty deeds wrought among them. God demonstrated and authenticated Paul's ministry with mighty deeds even in the face of persecution (12:12; Heb. 2:4). The apostolic signs and wonders in his ministry underlined his apostolic office (Acts 5:12; 15:12; Rom. 15:18–19; 1 Cor. 2:4–5). Since Paul was not inferior as an apostle, the Corinthian church was not inferior to other churches that he had established. The Corinthians had enjoyed all the benefits of his apostolic ministry but had not had to bear any of the financial burden of supporting Paul (2 Cor. 12:13). Remuneration was his right but not a mandate. He strategically forwent their financial help to safeguard his ministry even though he had more right to receive it than any credible apostles (1 Cor. 9:12). If his refusal to accept their financial assistance offended the Corinthians, Paul was sorry (2 Cor. 12:13).

12:14—13:10

Announcement of Paul's Third Visit

With this misunderstanding clarified, Paul could confidently announce his third visit to the church. During this third visit, he would continue to be financially independent of the Corinthians. He took a firmer stand on his policy not to be remunerated but rather to consolidate his love toward them (12:14–18). He was seeking to purge the church from the moral uncleanness that was threatening the sanctity and unity of the church (vv. 19–21) and was warning the persistently disobedient of an inevitable discipline at his coming (13:1–4). Finally, he made an appeal to those who questioned his ministry to examine themselves before he would come to see whether they were in the faith (vv. 5–10).

12:14–18. Promise Not to Be Burdensome. Paul expressed his readiness to visit the Corinthians a third time. This coming would not be a surprise visit because the apostle wanted to utilize its announcement to achieve several objectives. First, he intended to reaffirm his love toward the Corinthians, which would mean that they would learn to equally love him. How was he going to demonstrate his love? As the founder of the church, he would continue to maintain his policy of self-reliance in financial matters. Once they would come to appreciate it as his apostolic right to either enjoy or forgo remuneration from them and that this did not render him less apostolic, they could meaningfully relate to the ultimate intent of his ministry. He made clear that his interest lay in their spiritual well-being, not what he could get from them (12:14–15). This expressed his love for the church. The principle he espoused here concerning parent-child relationships should be strictly taken in the context of his ministry to the Corinthians (cf. 1 Cor. 4:14–15). This counsel is not in conflict with Paul's appeal to believers to care for their relatives, including parents (1 Tim. 5:8; cf. Mark 7:10–12). At least the Philippian church, which he had established, had been helping him financially (Phil. 4:15–16). His financial independence underlines a holistic attitude to the proclamation of the gospel. By working at a trade while evangelizing an area, he demonstrated a positive attitude toward work. His work also provided him with a way to meet individuals with whom he could share the gospel. Converts were strongly urged to follow this example (cf. 2 Thess. 3:8–10). Love for Christ does not warrant laziness or discourage personal development. In any event, as far as Paul was concerned, he had not defrauded the Corinthians (2 Cor. 12:16). The self-appointed apostles may have claimed that Paul defrauded them through Titus (vv. 17–18). Paul challenged them to give evidence of their claim because, as far as he knew, Titus was also clean. The church could bear witness to this fact.

12:19–21. An Appeal to the Unrepentant. Paul's second objective for announcing his visit was to motivate those who had sinned to repent. Their present situation could emotionally impact him (cf. 2:3). First of all, he was reminding the Corinthians not to see the defense of his ministry and integrity as implying that he was guilty of the charges. He was not accountable to them but to God (cf. 5:10). The purpose of his defense was to build them up and not to tear them down (12:19). What mattered most was their full devotion to God. Second, Paul wanted to avoid again going through what he had experienced during the sorrowful visit. He was hoping that when he arrived at Corinth there would not be serious problems (see the list in vv. 20–21). He was expecting a peaceful relationship and hoping that neither he nor they would be frustrated. They both were to look forward to a good experience free from the divisive presence of sin. This would require the repentance of those who had sinned (v. 21). In 1 Corinthians, Paul had stated that some of the believers were once dreadful sinners but had been washed, sanctified, and justified "in the name of the Lord Jesus" (1 Cor. 6:9–11). Now Paul wanted to present them to Christ as an undefiled, chaste bride (2 Cor. 11:2). He was not only interested in their early conversion but also in establishing them in faith and devotion to God until the coming of Christ (4:14).

13:1–4. Warning of Inevitable Discipline. The inevitable would happen if the Corinthians would not repent. For the unrepentant, Paul's third coming would not be good news. Paul's reference to the establishment of every word by "two or three witnesses" (13:1b) may point to the inevitable discipline due to unrepentant sinners who had been cautioned severally in this context. This understanding is confirmed in v. 2, where he states that failure to heed his present as well as previous admonitions would subject them to discipline during his third visit. It is clear in 12:21 that some of the Corinthians had been involved in fornication (*porneia*) and lasciviousness (*aselgeia*; 12:21). These words are descriptive of the unbridled sexual behavior of some of the church members.

Paul's strong words are understandable if we keep in mind that some of the Corinthians had concluded that Paul was weak and that Christ was not using him; they wanted evidence that Christ was speaking through Paul (13:3). He was reacting to the accusation by arguing that what really mattered was that Christ was not weak in relationship to them but rather full of might and power. They had experienced the saving power of Christ. Then, he identified himself with Christ, who was crucified in weakness but lives by the power of God (v. 4). The idea is that the power of God is revealed in weakness. By way of argument, Paul's conclusion was that we are all weak in Christ's weakness (the Crucifixion), but we will experience the power of the resurrection of Christ. This power was already working in the Corinthians. Paul was simply telling the Corinthians that the question was not whether he was weak but whether they had experienced the weakness of Christ and were living by the power of His resurrection. The implication is that the presence of sexual immorality and dissension in the church seemed to point to the contrary and that he would deal with this situation when he visited them. Paul's attitude toward sinners in the church is appropriate and consistent with Christ's teachings (cf. Matt. 18:15–20). Paul had verbally warned these sinners, but he was more interested in their repentance than in excommunicating them (cf. 1 Cor. 5:5, 13). However, if they remained in their sin, he would not spare them.

13:5–10. Appeal for Self-examination. Although some of the Corinthians had questioned whether Paul was a spokesperson for Christ, it was evident in their lives that Christ had used Paul to effect significant changes in them. These changes were the result of accepting Christ as Savior (8:9; 13:3–4; cf. 1 Cor. 6:11). In a sense, challenging Paul's authority amounted to discrediting the source of his authority and the work that the Lord had performed in them. Paul had consistently told them that Christ was the source, the content, and the reason for his ministry (cf. 2 Cor. 1:1, 5, 19; 2:10, 15; 4:5; 5:14; 10:14). Paul was now appealing to them to examine themselves to see whether they were in the faith (13:5). For him, doing this was more important than seeking again to establish the authenticity of his apostolic authority. Paul believed that although there was a possibility of failing the test, they would pass it because Christ was in them. Some of them may still have believed that he was disqualified, that Christ was not in him, but that at this point did not bother Paul. What was important for him was that they would do what was right and honorable (v. 7), and to this end he was praying for them when coming to the end of his letter. They were all to be totally committed to and working for the truth (v. 8). Paul tenderly told them that he would be glad to be weak as long as they were strong in Christ (v. 9). He was praying again that they may *katartisis*, which means to be "made perfect," "completed," or "restored" (v. 9). He was praying for their restoration to their original state when they were one in Christ (v. 11).

No good leader is interested in dealing with tensions. That is why Paul was writing to the Corinthians hoping that when he visited them there would not be any need to use his apostolic authority to apply discipline. But he was making it clear that if he had to discipline some of them, they should understand that he was trying to edify them and not to destroy them (v. 10). There is a genuine pastoral concern in the application of church discipline.

13:11–14
CONCLUSION

Characteristic of Paul's letters as well as Greco-Roman letter writing is the use of greetings in the epilogue. But unlike the secular Greco-Roman letters, Paul generally added a doxology or benediction. In this case, he closes with a few exhortations, a brief greeting, and a benediction.

The term *chairō*, used at the outset of v. 11, literally means "to rejoice" (i.e., expressing a fond farewell) and is an excellent way of ending a letter in which Paul had dealt with very sensitive issues (cf. v. 9). Joy is a gift of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22) and is present in those who have experienced the saving power of Christ. A call to rejoice is a call to remain in union with Christ. This is followed with an exhortation to be *katartizō* ("to perfect," "to complete," "to restore," "to put back into order"), that is, to return to their original condition as a church when they were one in Christ. Paul's use of *parakaleō* ("to comfort, "to encourage," "to exhort") may mean "listen to my exhortations" or simply "cheer up." Paul next tells them to "be of one mind" (or "agree with one another" or "be like-minded") in 2 Corinthians 13:11 with respect to the faith taught to them by Paul in this epistle and in all of his instructions to them. There was a body of beliefs that could keep them together in their Christian experience.

Paul's admonition to "live in peace" (v. 11) addresses the root of the problem of the Corinthians; they needed to be reconciled with God and Paul and with each other. This peace would be the result of being justified by faith in Christ (Rom. 8:1). Paul introduces a statement or a promise: "The God of love and peace will be with you" (2 Cor. 13:11). The idea is not that if the Corinthians were to follow the exhortations God would be with them but that God would be with them as they procured to put them into practice. Only God's presence makes it possible for us to love each other and be at peace. The final exhortation in the letter is to greet each other with a "holy kiss" (13:12). This form of greeting expressed love and peace (Gen. 27:26; 31:28; 1 Kin. 19:20; Ps. 2:12; Song 1:2; 8:1; Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12; 1 Thess. 5:26; 1 Pet. 5:14). Jewish men and women expressed their affection by kissing those of the same gender in the synagogues during worship. Such a kiss could be misused to hide evil intentions (2 Sam. 15:5; 20:9; Matt. 26:48; Mark 14:44; Luke 7:45; 22:47). Paul made a distinction between a mere formality and a meaningful demonstration of love and respect by calling it a "holy kiss" (see 2 Cor. 13:12; Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 1 Thess. 5:26). As such it would have been free from any evil motivation, expressing the unity of love they had found in Christ.

Paul closes the letter with a greeting from all of God's people ("the saints" or "holy ones"; v. 13), that is to say, from the church members in Macedonia where he was located when he wrote the letter. The greetings at the end of Paul's Epistles emphasize the solidarity and oneness of the Christian church. The benediction is expressed using a Trinitarian formula (v. 14). He invokes the blessings of the Lord Jesus

Christ, God, and the Holy Spirit. It is only in this book that Paul employs the Trinitarian formula in the epilogue to highlight the distinctive roles of the Godhead in the work of salvation (cf. Rom. 16:27; 1 Cor. 16:23–24; Gal. 6:18). Second Corinthians is replete with high emotive language used to depict Paul's affection for the wayward Corinthians (2 Cor. 2:4; 6:6, 11–12; 11:11; 12:15). The unusual order of the Trinity is prominently functional (Jesus Christ, God, and the Holy Spirit). Jesus Christ is the source of the apostleship of Paul (2 Cor. 1:1). It was through Him—the content of Paul's apostolic message (4:5–7)—that God reconciled believers to Himself (5:17–19). In this benediction, the saving grace of Jesus Christ and the love of God are emphasized. The Holy Spirit is the One who creates fellowship or communion in the church and is the seal and guarantee of salvation (13:22; cf. 3:3; 5:5). Grace, love, and communion are not natural to human beings, but they flow to the church from the members of the Godhead as divine gifts. These were the gifts that could heal the church in Corinth and that would prepare it for the realization of the Christian hope at the return of the Lord.

GALATIANS

INTRODUCTION

Title and Authorship. As a personal letter written to the churches of Galatia, Paul's epistle originally did not have a title attached to it. The earliest evidence of any sort of formal title is a line added at the end of the document (a subscription) that identified it simply as being "To the Galatians."

Date. Although some scholars have argued that Galatians was written as late as A.D. 57, based largely on its similarity to the message of Romans, a growing number believe the letter contains several clues that suggest it may have been written earlier, making it possibly one of the earliest written documents in the NT.

The first clue for dating Galatians appears in Paul's reference to his conversion experience and the two subsequent visits he made to Jerusalem. He states that the first visit occurred three years after his conversion (1:18) and the second fourteen years after it (2:1), which indicates that Galatians was written several years after Paul's conversion, thus representing the apostle's seasoned theological viewpoints. Assuming Paul's conversion happened around A.D. 34, Galatians could not have been written any earlier than A.D. 48.

Another indication appears in Paul's appeal to the Corinthians to participate in a special offering for the Jewish believers suffering in Jerusalem (1 Cor. 16:1). He informed the Corinthians that he had made a similar request to the churches of Galatia. While an allusion to the origin of this collection may occur in Galatians 2:10, no direct appeal is found in Galatians. In light of the problems Paul was confronting, it would not have been the appropriate time to request a donation. The invitation to the Galatian churches must have been extended sometime after Paul's letter to them; and since 1 Corinthians was written around A.D. 53 or 54, Galatians would have been written sometime before that.

A more precise clue is found in Paul's account of a confrontation he had with Peter in Antioch soon after his second visit to Jerusalem. In a desire to gain the approval of a group of Jewish believers who had recently arrived from Jerusalem, Peter had stopped eating in the company of the uncircumcised Gentile believers in Antioch (Gal. 2:11–12). His actions influenced even Barnabas to separate from the Gentile believers (2:13). Since Peter, James, and John had agreed in an earlier meeting with Paul in Jerusalem that Gentile believers did not have to submit to circumcision (2:9–10), Paul interpreted Peter's behavior as an act of hypocrisy. It is hard to imagine that Peter and Barnabas would have directly contradicted the council that met in Jerusalem in late A.D. 49 (which ruled publicly in favor of Paul's position on circumcision; Acts 15:22–29), so this situation suggests that Galatians was likely written *prior* to the Jerusalem Council, when there were still no official guidelines regarding the issue of circumcision for Gentile believers. Therefore, Galatians most likely represents Paul's thoughts on the matter in A.D. 49, shortly before the council met in Jerusalem to make a decision regarding the issue. Further information about this early date is found below under "Backgrounds."

Backgrounds. Paul's missionary activities among the Gentiles in Galatia must be understood in relation to his missionary activities as described in the book of Acts. After successfully working with Barnabas to attract Gentile converts at Antioch in Syria for several years, Paul embarked on a series of missionary journeys across Asia Minor and Greece. On his first journey, from about A.D. 47 to 48, he and Barnabas traveled to Cyprus and then on to Asia Minor, where they founded churches in Antioch in Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe (Acts 13:14—14:23). After returning to Antioch in Syria, they were sent to Jerusalem to aid the suffering believers located there (Acts 11:29–30). Shortly after this, in A.D. 49, the Jerusalem Council decided against making circumcision a requirement of Gentile believers (Acts 15).

At this point, Paul and Barnabas went their separate ways (Acts 15:37–39), and Paul, accompanied by Silas, returned to Asia Minor as part of a second missionary journey (from A.D. 50 to 52). They returned to the churches of Derbe and Lystra, where Timothy joined them (Acts 16:1–5), and from there they journeyed through Phrygia and the region of Galatia (Acts 16:6) on their way to Alexandria Troas. After crossing into Europe, Paul and Silas returned to Antioch in Syria via Caesarea.

Concerned about the welfare of the churches he had founded, Paul set out on a third missionary journey (from A.D. 52 to 57). He again traveled through the region of Galatia and Phrygia (Acts 18:23) and even to Ephesus, where he remained for nearly three years. After leaving Ephesus, Paul visited the churches of Macedonia before returning to Jerusalem, where he was arrested and imprisoned (Acts 21:17–33).

Locating Paul's letter to the Galatians within the timeline of Paul's ministry in Acts largely depends on whether the churches of Galatia are to be identified with the cities of Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe, located in the southern portion of the Roman province of Galatia (called the South Galatian Theory), or with cities such as Ancyra and Pessinus, located much farther north in the geographical region that originally made up the ethnic kingdom of Galatia (the North Galatian Theory). If the latter is correct, Paul may have visited the northern region of Galatia during his second missionary journey with Silas (cf. Acts 16:6; 18:23). The visit to Jerusalem described in Galatians 2 would then correspond with the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15. Allowing time for the problems in Galatia to develop, Paul's letter to the Galatians would have been written during his third missionary journey, either shortly after he arrived in Ephesus (i.e., A.D. 53–55), or soon after he left the city a few years later (i.e., A.D. 56–57). This was the only viewpoint held by scholars at the turn of the twentieth century.

More recent archaeological evidence has caused the majority of biblical scholars to conclude that the biblical account better fits with the churches Paul founded in southern Galatia during his first missionary journey with Barnabas (Acts 13:13–28). According to this South Galatian Theory, Galatians provides a window into the earliest days of the church when it was first struggling with the question of circumcision and Gentile converts. If this is the case, Galatians was written sometime after Paul and Barnabas returned from their joint missionary endeavor but before the Jerusalem Council reached a conclusion on the issue of circumcision in Acts 15. This would make Galatians Paul's earliest letter, written in late A.D. 48 or early A.D. 49.

The South Galatian Theory takes into consideration the fact that in Paul's lifetime the Roman province of Galatia encompassed the entire central region of Asia Minor, extending from just south of the Black Sea in the north to the slopes of the Taurus Mountains bordering the Mediterranean in the south. By the fourth century, however, the province of Galatia had been broken up into smaller administrative units, with Galatia being restricted to a smaller region in the north that had historically been associated with the earlier ethnic kingdom of Galatia. Since the earliest commentaries on Galatians date to the fourth century and later, it was assumed that the area referred to as Galatia in the NT was the same as the northern geographical region of Galatia of their day. Later scholars followed this interpretation for centuries until archaeological evidence revealed that Galatia had once covered a much larger geographical area.

Since the South Galatian Theory appears to provide the most persuasive framework for understanding Paul's letter and placing it in the historical context of the early church, it will serve as the basis of the notes for this commentary. This approach in no way alters the message of the Epistle to the Galatians. According to this perspective, Paul's letter appears to have been written to the churches he and Barnabas founded in south Galatia during their missionary journey around A.D. 47 or 48. Shortly after they left that area, the churches became divided on whether Gentile believers needed to be circumcised. Before this issue was decided at the council in Jerusalem in late A.D. 49, Paul shared his views on it via his letter to the Galatians.

Authorship. Although critical scholars have questioned the authenticity of several of the letters attributed to Paul in the NT, the authorship of Galatians has never been seriously questioned. It is most likely that Paul dictated the original letter to a scribe (cf. Rom. 16:22) before writing the final few sentences with his own hand (Gal. 6:11–18).

Theology and Purpose. The sustainability of Paul's work among the Gentiles in Galatia was at risk. The new believers were teetering on the edge of spiritual collapse. Although these Gentiles had responded positively to the invitation to become followers of Jesus, shortly after Paul's departure, a group of Jewish Christians tried to convince them that Paul had not told them the whole truth. They argued that while professing faith in Jesus was important, faith by itself was not sufficient. If the Gentiles wanted to experience salvation and be genuine followers of Christ, they would also have to be circumcised (Gal. 6:12–15). Galatians is Paul's fiery response to these accusations.

Even though the question of circumcision is no longer an important issue in the church today, Paul's letter to the Galatians continues to be just as relevant as it was two thousand years ago. The issue at the heart of Galatians runs more deeply than the physical act of circumcision itself. It strikes at the very heart of what Christianity is all about: salvation and access to it. It is about who can be considered a Christian. Paul was convinced that there was only one answer to this question, and it was not based on ethnicity or works. The distinguishing mark of a Christian is a life defined first and last by faith in God and His promises. This type of faith was the defining characteristic in the life of Abraham, who was circumcised, but circumcision was merely an outward sign of his inner faith in God—a faith that marked his life before he was circumcised. Thus, while a Christian will certainly seek to do God's will, what transforms a person into a Christian is an inner circumcision of the heart (Deut. 30:6; Rom. 2:29)—a living and vibrant faith in God and what He has done for us in Jesus Christ.

Paul demonstrates this by not limiting the issue in Galatians to circumcision alone but expanding it to include any work of the law humans perform in an attempt to secure God's favor (2:16). Paul is appealing to the Galatians to have faith in the faithfulness of Jesus, the Savior, rather than trusting in human works. Christ's faithful obedience is credited to us through faith, a process Paul refers to as justification by faith (2:16).

Paul continues to highlight the importance that faith has in the life of a believer by appealing to the experience of Abraham and to passages from the OT. He shows how Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham that He would bless the entire world through his descendants (3:15–16). The giving of the Law on Mount Sinai did not alter God's promise to Abraham at all. The Law was given to make people aware of their sins and to point them to faith in Christ as the only real solution to the sin problem (3:17–29). Instead of trying to relate to God through a set of rules as though they were slaves, Paul was urging the Galatians to have faith in God's love for us as His children and heirs (4:1–11). Any attempt to relate to God on the basis of behavior will always fall short of what God requires. Abraham's attempt to produce his own heir through Hagar resulted in God's disapproval and rejection of Ishmael as the promised child (4:21–31).

Because Galatians is so focused on the gospel, it has little to say on other central Christian doctrines, including the hope of the Second Coming. Does that mean it is irrelevant to those awaiting Christ's return? Hardly! Jesus Himself asked whether He would find faith in the world (Luke 18:8). To be faithful as we await Christ's return is to have faith in Christ and *His* gospel, not some other, counterfeit version. Jesus comes to redeem those who acknowledge their need of salvation, not self-righteous people who rely on their legalistic behavior. As a training manual for such a perspective, the Epistle to the Galatians has no equal. In studying this letter, we must keep this Second Coming perspective in view—Galatians is training us to meet Him! It clarifies the relation between faith and law, so important to those waiting for the coming of the Lord. At its core, Galatians is a letter about what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ. As such, it will always be of utmost relevance as we seek to experience the fullness of what God has done for us in Jesus and to relate to Him in the way He desires as we look forward to His return with hearts full of hope.

COMMENTARY

1:1–10
Introduction

The introduction to the letter contains a greeting (1:1–5) and a rebuke for those who preach a false gospel (1:6–10). Although Galatians begins with the usual greeting found in ancient letters, Paul's greeting is far from a mere formality. Paul transforms these elements of letter writing into a distinctly Christian message of hope specifically suited for the situation of the believers in Galatia. In doing this, Paul's opening greeting reveals the main purpose of his letter: to defend his credentials as an apostle and to demonstrate the truth of the gospel he proclaimed. Paul's decision to replace the customary prayer of thanksgiving, which typically follows his greeting, with a fiery rebuke of those who were preaching a distorted version of the gospel indicates how concerned he was with the spiritual well-being of the Galatian churches (cf. Rom. 1:8; 1 Cor. 1:4; 2 Cor. 1:3).

1:1–5. Greeting. After identifying himself as the principal author, Paul begins Galatians with an emphatic defense of the divine origin of his apostolic credentials. He was responding to accusations that questioned the nature of his authority in spiritual matters—perhaps, since Paul had not been one of Jesus's original disciples, his authority was derived from humans, either from leaders in Antioch, who had commissioned him as a missionary (Acts 13:1–3), or from Ananias, who had baptized him (Acts 9:10–18). Such accusations and insinuations were a deliberate attempt by Paul's opponents to undermine his spiritual authority and his teachings about the gospel. Recognizing the danger of these false allegations, Paul states that his apostleship rested solely in the commission he received from God.

The greeting of grace and peace (v. 3) appears to have been uniquely coined by Paul, since it occurs nowhere else in ancient literature before Paul's letters. The usual practice was simply to say "greetings" (cf. Acts 23:26; James 1:1), but Paul replaced "greetings" with one of his favorite words: "grace." He not only uses the word more than any other NT author, but he also places it as a harbinger of divine hope at the beginning and the end of each of his letters. Its most basic meaning emerges from the OT Hebrew verb *khanan* ("to be gracious to someone," "to demonstrate goodwill"), which was associated with the way God cares for His people (cf. Gen. 6:8; 39:21; Ex. 33:12; Ps. 51:1). In this word, Paul saw a revelation of God's ultimate act of kindness in not treating us fallen humans as we deserve but in forgiving our sins, bestowing on us Christ's righteousness, and empowering us with His Spirit (cf. 1 Cor. 15:10; 2 Cor. 12:9; Eph. 2:1–10).

In talking about peace, Paul was also drawing from his knowledge of the OT. The Hebrew word for "peace" is *shalom*, and the richness of its meaning makes it impossible for any single word in English to convey all that it entails. It points not only to the absence of hostility but also to the positive state of unhindered unity and harmony. It is a peace that brings completion, wholeness, prosperity, health, and wellness. As such, it is only God who can bring true peace to humans, who are inherently broken because of sin (cf. Num. 6:24–26; 1 Chr. 22:9–10; Ps. 85:8), and it is through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus that Paul realized God had begun to offer that fullness of peace to every descendent of Adam and Eve.

To help the Galatians understand all that the gospel involves and to anticipate what he develops later in his letter, Paul expands on his distinctive greeting by adding a succinct summary of the gospel. He refers to Jesus as the One who gave Himself for our sins (v. 4). Salvation is not rooted in anything that humans can do to earn it but in what Jesus has already done for us in laying down His life as a substitutionary sacrifice for the sins of the world. The self-sacrifice of Christ is an important and recurring theme in Paul's writings (e.g., Gal. 2:20; Eph. 5:2, 25; 1 Tim. 2:6; Titus 2:14).

The purpose of Christ's atoning sacrifice was that He might *exaireō* ("set free," "deliver," "rescue") us from the present evil age (cf. Acts 7:10, 34; 12:11; 23:27; 26:17). Paul is speaking about a divine deliverance from the power of sin that reigns over humanity like a wicked taskmaster—a divine deliverance that occurs *in* this world (cf. John 17:15; Rom. 6:6–7, 11–14; 8:1–4). The fact that this immediately follows the reference to Christ's substitutionary sacrifice indicates that for Paul, the gospel involves more than merely rescuing humans from the penalty of sin through forgiveness; it also brings with it the good news of deliverance from the enslaving power of sin. However, that deliverance is not the basis of salvation; it is a result that follows what God has already done for us in Christ. Reflecting on this good news led Paul into a spontaneous doxology as he concludes his opening greeting (v. 5).

Within a few short verses at the beginning of his letter, Paul has masterfully described the essence of the gospel message. Throughout the rest of the letter, he expounds in more detail on the nature of the message and the implications it has for the Christian life.

1:6–10. Fiery Rebuke. Although Paul often responded to a variety of local challenges in his letters, it was still his custom to follow his opening greeting with a word of thanksgiving to God for the faith of his readers; however, Galatians is different. Paul was so shocked, concerned, and upset to discover that the Galatian believers were in the process of abandoning the gospel that he omitted the thanksgiving entirely and replaced it with a fiery rebuke (v. 6).

Paul charges the Galatians with abandoning (v. 6) the true gospel—the good news of what God has done to save us through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The Greek word here literarily means to change one's allegiance or to desert. The verb is in the present tense, indicating that the Galatian believers had not yet fully turned their backs on the gospel but were in the process of doing so. In some of the strongest terminology recorded in the NT, Paul pronounces a curse on anyone who preaches a false gospel (v. 8). The Greek word used here is *anathema*, and in Paul's letters, this term always refers to something given over to divine wrath for destruction (cf. Gal. 1:8–9; Rom. 9:3; 1 Cor. 12:3; 16:22). Its application here to anyone who distorts the gospel of Christ illustrates Paul's firm conviction that there is only one gospel for Jews and Gentiles alike: the gospel Jesus preached. Paul is so emphatic on this point that he states the curse twice (vv. 8–9). We should not dismiss this language merely as an inappropriate outburst. Paul's words did not arise out of personal animosity but out of a deep concern for preserving the truth of the gospel. For this reason, Paul desires that the curse of God fall on *anyone* who perverts that message, including himself.

1:11—2:21

Paul's Defense of His Apostolic Calling

Having gained the attention of the Galatians with this strongly worded rebuke, Paul sets out to defend the truth of his gospel in the first major section of his letter (1:11—2:21). His purpose was to demonstrate his earlier claim that his gospel was not of human origin. He provides an autobiographical account of the events before (vv. 13–14), during (vv. 15–17), and immediately after his conversion (vv. 18–24) to demonstrate that he did not receive his gospel from anyone, nor was he taught it; God revealed it to him. The autobiographical specifics continue in chapter 2, where Paul goes into much more detail to describe a second visit to Jerusalem that occurred more than a decade after his previous visit. This supports Paul's overall point, for it was during this second trip that the apostles recognized the validity of God's divine calling on Paul's life and the truth of the gospel he proclaimed (2:1–10).

The section ends with the account of a conflict that occurred in Antioch between Paul and Peter shortly after the Jerusalem visit had concluded (2:11–21). When Peter, Barnabas, and other Jewish Christians capitulated to the demands of a group of Jewish believers from Jerusalem that contradicted the truth of the gospel, Paul did not hesitate to protest. Because he had received his gospel directly from God Himself, he was empowered to confront Peter, just as he was when confronting the Galatians over the same issue.

1:11–17. Paul's Conversion and Divine Calling. The opening two verses in this section announce the theme that Paul develops in the larger passage that extends to 2:21: the divine origin of his gospel message. Echoing the comments made in v. 1, Paul states forthrightly that he had not received his gospel from any human being. Instead, he had received it through an *apokalypsis* (from which we derive the English words "apocalypse" and "revelation") *Iēsou Christou*. This phrase can be understood in two ways, as is evinced by the renderings of various translations. It could refer to a divine revelation that Jesus personally presented to Paul or to a revelation Paul received containing information about Jesus. While the latter appears to be primarily in mind in vv. 15–16, it is difficult to completely eliminate the former option, since the appearance of the risen Christ to Paul on the road to Damascus also played a key role in his conversion and understanding of the gospel (cf. Acts 9; 22; 26). Paul could have had both ideas in mind.

In order to show that his radical transformation had been brought about by God's divine intervention in his life, Paul reminds the Galatians of the vastly different path he walked before becoming a Christian. He had not only disagreed with the beliefs of the Christians but had also been their foremost persecutor. His crusade against the early Christians had been nothing short of a deliberate and sustained plan to exterminate the Christian faith (cf. Acts 8:1–3; 9:1–2, 13–14, 21; 22:3–5). From a human perspective, there was certainly no reason for Paul to have suddenly joined the ranks of those he had been dedicated to destroying. His campaign against Christians had won him the approval and blessing of many influential Jewish leaders, including the most powerful and respected person in all of Judaism: the high priest (Acts 9:1–2). Some even see in v. 14 an indication that Paul's religious fervor had earned him a seat in the Sanhedrin, the highest governing authority in Judaism at the time. Outside of an act of God, there is no way to explain or understand this radical change in Paul's life.

It is important to note that when Paul refers to the traditions of his fathers or ancestors at the end of v. 14, he is referring both to the laws recorded in the Torah and to a collection of oral laws associated with Pharisaism (cf. Mark 7:1–5). These oral laws were traditional explanations and rulings based on the Torah. They served as a "hedge" or a "fence" around the law to protect people from violating the written laws of God in the Torah. In the eyes of the Pharisees, a group of which Paul himself was a member (Phil. 3:5), these traditions were as authoritative as the Torah itself. In fact, in actual practice, they often appeared to be even more important than the Torah.

Paul's course of life changed because God had a vastly different plan for him—a plan for which he was destined from the day he was formed in his mother's womb (v. 15). Paul's words are an allusion to Jeremiah's consecration in his mother's womb and to his call to be "a prophet to the nations" (Jer. 1:5). Likewise, Paul saw a divine purpose being revealed in his life. From the very beginning, it was God's plan for him to be a prophet to the Gentiles (cf. Acts 9:15; 22:21; Rom. 15:15; 1 Tim. 2:7).

Since Paul's encounter with the risen Christ on the road to Damascus had also revealed the essence of the gospel to him, he did not need to consult with anyone (v. 16). There was no need for any human to provide him with an authoritative explanation of the gospel. Paul knew that Jesus is in fact the risen Lord and had commissioned him to be His missionary to the Gentiles. So, instead of traveling to Jerusalem to learn the gospel from the apostles, Paul traveled to Arabia (v. 17). This is probably a reference to the Nabataean kingdom that roughly coincided with the southern parts of modern Israel and Jordan. Although this area is largely barren today, it was prosperous in the first century, with a number of large cities. While Paul does not state the reason for going to Arabia, it was likely connected to his calling to take the gospel to the Gentiles. Paul spent three years in Arabia before returning to Damascus.

1:18–24. Paul, Jerusalem, and the Judean Believers. After returning to Damascus, Paul traveled to Jerusalem (v. 18). His first trip to Jerusalem must have taken place after his three-year stay in Arabia, around A.D. 37 (Acts 9:26). The purpose of this second trip to Jerusalem was not to obtain the approval of the apostles; rather, he wanted to see Peter (also called Cephas [see John 1:40–42], the name actually used here in the Greek). The visit, which Barnabas may have arranged (see Acts 9:27), was probably intended to be a means for Paul to become better acquainted with Peter and to learn firsthand some of the historical details about the life and ministry of Jesus (cf. 1 Cor. 11:23; 15:3–5).

Although Paul met with Peter, he is emphatic in Galatians that the visit added nothing to the essence of his gospel message. Paul emphasizes this in two ways: First, he states that his visit to Jerusalem was very brief, lasting only fifteen days (v. 18). Second, he affirms that while he was there, he did not see any of the other apostles except for James, the Lord's brother (v. 19; see Matt. 13:55; Mark 6:3). Paul even takes an oath to prove that he is telling the truth (v. 20). Although James did not believe in Jesus during Christ's earthly ministry (John 7:3–5), he met the resurrected Jesus (1 Cor. 15:7) and became an important leader in the Jerusalem church (Gal. 2:9, 12; Acts 15:13; 21:18).

After leaving Jerusalem, Paul traveled to the regions of Syria and Cilicia (v. 21), heading specifically to Tarsus, the city of his birth (Acts 9:30; cf. 21:39; 22:3). Tarsus was the capital city of the Roman province of Cilicia, strategically located on the main road connecting Rome to Syria in the east. Paul stayed there for nearly six years before finally joining Barnabas in Antioch around A.D. 43 (Acts 11:25–26). Paul points out, however, that after he departed from Jerusalem (v. 21), the believers in Judea continued to rejoice because their former persecutor was now a preacher of the gospel (v. 24). For Paul, this was an explicit approval of the validity of his gospel message (vv. 22–24) and was recognition of the fact that he received his gospel directly from God.

2:1–10. Paul and the Jerusalem Church. Paul now recounts in more detail the events associated with a second trip he made to Jerusalem several years after his first visit. This private meeting is not the same as the formal meeting in Jerusalem recorded in Acts 15 but is Paul's second trip to Jerusalem recorded in Acts 11:27–30 and 12:25. In Paul's view, this meeting validated his calling, since three of the leading apostles—Peter, James, and John—formally acknowledged Paul's message (2:7–9). It also demonstrated that the truth of the gospel had to be preserved in the face of those who were requiring Gentiles to submit to circumcision in order to become so-called genuine Christians (2:3–5).

Paul's second trip to Jerusalem likely took place sometime in the mid-40s, though the exact date is difficult to determine with certainty. Two of Paul's colleagues in ministry, Barnabas and Titus, joined him on this visit. Barnabas, also known as Jose or Joseph (see Acts 4:36), was Paul's primary companion during his first missionary journey (Acts 13–14). Titus was Paul's uncircumcised Gentile understudy, whom he called a "true son in our common faith" (Titus 1:4), and he played a prominent role as one of Paul's delegates to Corinth (2 Cor. 2:13; 7:6, 13–14; 8:6, 16, 23; 12:18).

Paul states that he did not travel to Jerusalem at the behest of the apostles but rather by a divine revelation (2:1–2). This may be a reference to the revelation of Agabus in Acts 11:28 that prompted the church in Antioch to send Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem to provide aid for their fellow believers. This theory agrees with Paul's description of the trip as a "private" visit with the leaders of the Jerusalem church, particularly with the leaders of reputation (i.e., Peter, James, and John; cf. 2:9) rather than the public and more formal council described in Acts 15. Paul notes that during his visit, the apostles did not compel Titus to be circumcised (2:3) in order to be recognized as a fellow Christian. This is important, because circumcision was the very issue troubling the churches in Galatia (cf. 5:2–3; 6:12–13). While the apostles did not require Titus to be circumcised, Paul records that a group of Jewish Christians had tried. They were deceptive (2:4). They argued that Gentiles like Titus had to be circumcised in order to be genuine Christians (cf. Acts 15:1). For these individuals and for Judaism in general during that time, circumcision had become the definitive sign of national and religious identity. It was originally the outward sign of an inner faith that was to characterize the covenant relationship between God and Abraham and his descendants (cf. Gen. 17; Rom. 4:11–12), but unfortunately, many Jews had lost sight of that important distinction. There is a constant need for us to guard against failing to distinguish between outward forms and inner faith. If we do not, religious convictions have no value.

In vv. 6–10, Paul states that the leading apostles offered him "the right hand of fellowship" (2:9). The practice of giving the right hand marked the conclusion of a formal agreement between two parties, and its use here indicates a formal acceptance of Paul as an equal colleague in the task of proclaiming the gospel. Peter's background was better suited for applying the gospel to the needs of his fellow Jews, while Paul was better equipped to take the gospel to the Gentiles. Paul's customary way of referring to Peter is "Cephas" (2:9; 1 Cor. 1:12; 3:22; 9:5; 15:5). The Greek (i.e., official) name Peter reminds the reader of the official nature of the decision cited in 2:8. The division of missionary work—for the Gentiles and for the Jews, respectively—should be understood more as a division of responsibility than as a fixed division based on ethnicity or geography. We know that Paul reached out to Jews, and Peter's first letter seems directed to Gentiles.

The leading apostles only asked Paul to remember the poor (2:10). The specific reference could be to the Jewish believers in Jerusalem who had sold all their possessions for Christ (Acts 2:44–47). This concern was important due to the rapid growth of the church among the poor and marginalized of society and because of a severe famine that struck Judea in the mid- to late 40s (Acts 11:28–29). Paul fulfilled their request by taking up a collection from his churches and personally delivering it to the Jewish believers in Jerusalem at the end of his third missionary journey (Rom. 15:25–27; 1 Cor. 16:1–3; 2 Cor. 8–9).

2:11–14. Confrontation in Antioch. Although the Jerusalem leaders had agreed that circumcision was not a requirement for Gentiles to become Christians, during a subsequent visit to Antioch, Peter completely backtracked on his commitment to the decision. Antioch was the third-largest city in the Roman Empire and was a hub of Gentile Christianity (cf. Acts 11:19–21), as it was the city in which the first Gentile church was established.

The rapid growth of this Gentile church brought with it some concern from Jewish believers in Jerusalem. Members of the "circumcision party" in Jerusalem had been critical of Peter's connection with the baptism of a Roman centurion (Acts 11:1–3). They certainly would have been even more suspicious of a larger infusion of uncircumcised Gentiles into the church in Antioch. In response to these concerns, James sent a delegation of Jewish believers from Jerusalem to assess the work being done in Antioch (Gal. 2:12).

Paul mentions that it had been Peter's custom to regularly eat with the Gentiles before these Jewish believers arrived (2:12). It is sometimes assumed that this passage indicates that Peter and the other Jewish believers in Antioch had ceased following the OT food laws, but it is implausible to believe that *all* of the Jewish Christians in Antioch had abandoned the food laws entirely at a time when the early church was almost completely Jewish. If they had, there would have been an even greater uproar within the church, and there is no indication of such an

event. When the Jewish believers arrived in Antioch, they were scandalized to see their fellow Jews eating with uncircumcised Gentiles. Since Jews viewed Gentiles as ritually unclean, it was common practice to avoid social contact with Gentiles as much as possible. It was Peter's violation of this norm that had outraged the Jews when he had associated with the Roman centurion Cornelius (Acts 11:1–3). In fact, Peter had struggled with this issue himself; it was only a vision from God that helped him see the error of his ways (cf. Acts 10:28).

What bothered Paul was that Peter had since begun to refuse to fellowship with the uncircumcised Gentile believers out of a fear of condemnation from the Jerusalem brethren for openly fellowshiping with Gentiles. Because Peter was withdrawing and separating himself (2:12), his actions were compromising the message of the gospel. Although Peter and the other Jewish believers supported the gospel in word, their actions spoke differently. As Paul says, they acted hypocritically (2:13). For them, uncircumcised Gentile believers were nothing more than second-class Christians. Gentiles could eat with Jewish Christians only after submitting to the rite of circumcision. Paul's reference to the fact that even Barnabas went along with the hypocrisy (2:13) reveals the deep sense of betrayal and disappointment he felt in response to the actions of his trusted colleague (see 2:9).

For Paul, Peter's hypocrisy was doubly ironic in that while Peter was living a manner of life undefined by Jewish customs, he was urging the Gentiles to live as Jews by following Jewish traditions (2:14). The word Paul uses here literally means "to Judaize," that is, to adopt a Jewish way of living. In this case, the outrage was that circumcision was being deemed the ultimate sign of whether a person was a true follower of God rather than faith in Jesus being first and foremost.

Since the truth and integrity of the gospel message was at stake, Paul confronted Peter publicly. In recounting the event in his letter, Paul desired the Galatians to avoid Peter's mistake and not submit to circumcision. Instead, he wanted them to follow his own example of standing firm for the gospel. The story is an important reminder for us today to ensure that our actions are in harmony with the central beliefs we hold as people of faith, regardless of whether we receive the approval of others.

2:15–21. Justification by Faith. This passage provides a summary of the essence of Paul's gospel message and brings to a close the first section of Galatians. In relation to the previous section, it functions as a continuation of Paul's speech to Peter, though the account has been expanded to address the Galatians' broader situation as well.

In addressing his fellow Jews, Paul employs terminology that emphasizes the traditional distinction between Jews and Gentiles. Although we might find the generalized terminology for Gentiles as sinners (2:15) incendiary today, his Jewish audience would not have interpreted it that way. Gentiles were sinners in the sense that they did not have the restraining influence of God's law; they lived outside of God's covenantal promises (Rom. 2:14; Eph. 2:12).

The word "justified" (*dikaioō*) in v. 16 and its verbal siblings (e.g., "justification," "righteousness") are key terms Paul employs to explain the gospel. In Galatians alone, these terms occur a total of thirteen times (Gal. 2:16–17, 21; 3:6, 8, 11, 21, 24; 5:4–5). The verb is used to refer to the positive verdict a judge pronounces when a person is declared innocent of the charges brought against him or her (cf. Deut. 25:1; Prov. 17:15). Since it is the opposite of condemnation, it involves much more than pardon or even forgiveness; it involves the positive declaration that a person is considered righteous.

The phrase "works of the law" (Gal. 2:16) refers to any act of obedience to God's law, whether moral or ceremonial, done in an attempt to earn God's favor (see Gal. 2:16; 3:2, 5, 10; Rom. 3:20, 28). While outward acts of obedience might identify someone as Jewish in the eyes of the world, Paul's point is that those actions themselves will never be sufficient to put a person in a right relationship with God. The law cannot resolve the human need for salvation because it can only condemn us; it cannot reunite us with God.

Since we humans cannot earn God's favor through our obedience, the only hope we have is to trust in what God has done for us through Jesus. The *pisteōs Iesou Christou* (v. 16) is literally "the faith of Jesus." While the general sense of what Paul is saying is clear, in the Greek the phrase can be understood in two equally valid but specific and nuanced ways: (1) As is the case with most modern Bibles, it can be translated as "faith in Jesus Christ." Since Paul often contrasts works of the law and faith in Jesus, this fits with his writings elsewhere. The repetition between "faith" and "belief" in the passage is not superfluous; it is emphatic. Paul is emphasizing the necessity of faith in Jesus as the only means by which humans can be right with God. (2) The phrase "the faith of Jesus" can also be understood as referring to "the faithfulness of Jesus." This literal translation is important. According to this understanding, Paul is saying that the solution to finding favor with God ultimately resides in Christ's faithfulness. Through the incarnation, Jesus did what Israel and every individual Israelite failed to do: He was faithful to God in every moment of His life. He lived the perfect life that God's law requires, and in doing so, He rewrote the history of humanity as the second Adam (Rom. 5:18–19). It is because of what Christ did that God offers every person a new identity, not one marked by sin and failure but with the spotless life of His Son. Faith in Jesus is important, but it comes only as a response to His faithfulness. To make Christ's perfect life our own, we are called to believe, or trust, in what Christ has already done for us, effectively placing our faith in Him. It is important to note that these two ways of understanding the phrase "the faith of Jesus" are not necessarily contradictory. They both agree with Paul's overall understanding of salvation.

Although the Jewish Christians agreed that a person is not justified by obedience to the law (2:16), they felt that Paul's emphasis on justification by faith in Christ *alone* was going too far. In their opinion, Christ is a crucial component of salvation, but faith in Christ is not sufficient by itself. It has to be augmented by obedience to the law. They feared that Paul's "law-free" gospel would make belief in Christ an excuse and vindication for lawless behavior (cf. Rom. 3:8, 28; 6:1).

In v. 17, Paul emphatically rejects the idea that his gospel would engender a lawless lifestyle. While it is possible for people to return to a former way of life after coming to Christ, the fault would not lie with the Christ-centered gospel but with their own wrong choices. Why is Paul so confident that his law-free gospel will not lead to a life of lawlessness? The answer is that a genuine Christian is someone who has died to his or her old way of living and has become a new person in Christ. Paul illustrates this from his own experience: he says that he died to the law through the Law (2:19), which is a reference to the radical transformation Christ had worked in his life. It was Paul's zealous, though mistaken, understanding of the law that led him to see in the followers of Jesus a threat to the spiritual purity and identity of Israel. Compelled by this mentality, Paul vigorously persecuted the followers of Jesus until Christ personally met him (cf. Gal. 2:13–14; Phil. 3:6). Paul's new union of faith with Christ had so radically changed his life that he now saw himself as "dead" to his former way of life, which had been dominated by his mistaken perspective of the nature of the law (cf. Phil. 3:7–9). Like Paul, all Christians are dead to the law as the way to salvation.

Paul was so profoundly overcome by his experience with Christ that he saw his life as no longer his own. His life had been united completely with Christ in faith; he had been crucified with Christ (2:20). In other words, Christ's death had become his death, and Christ's life his life (cf. Rom. 6:1–4; 2 Cor. 4:10; Phil. 3:10). The use of the perfect tense in Greek indicates that Paul did not see his death in Christ as merely a singular past event that occurred at his conversion but as a past event with saving power that continued to manifest in his daily life.

The gospel was more than just a theory for Paul. In it, he experienced the Jesus who loved him and gave Himself for him (2:20). He found in the gospel the astounding and humbling realization of the depths of God's love for him in Christ (see commentary on Gal. 1:1–5).

3:1—5:12

Paul's Defense of the Gospel

Having stated that a person is accepted in God's sight on the basis of faith alone and not by the works of the law (Gal. 2:15–21), Paul recognized that his opponents in Galatia would object to his claim about the all-sufficiency of faith. In anticipation of their protest, Paul dedicates the third and main section of his letter (Gal. 3:1—5:12) to demonstrating why faith alone is the only reliable means of securing God's favor. He makes his case in two ways: First, he approaches the issue from the perspective of the Galatians themselves in reminding them of their own experience when they accepted the good news about Jesus (Gal. 3:1–5). Second, since Scripture is the ultimate authority on questions of belief and practice, Paul proceeds to explain how the OT reveals that salvation has always been based on a response of faith to God and His promises (Gal. 3:6—5:12).

3:1–5. The Experience of the Galatians. Paul was so shocked and anxious regarding the Galatians' about-face on the gospel that he refers to them as being "foolish" (lit. "mindless"; 3:1). Paul's point is not that the Galatians were not thinking clearly but that they were not thinking

at all! Their behavior was so completely illogical that Paul even wondered if demonic forces had cast a spell over them (cf. 2 Cor. 4:3–4).

What surprised Paul the most about the Galatians' apostasy is that they should have known from their own experience that salvation was not rooted in their own achievements but solely in what Christ had done for them. In an attempt to bring them to their senses, Paul was reminding the Galatians that when he first came to them, he presented the message of the crucified and risen Christ so clearly that it was as if he had depicted (in Greek it is something like "placarded" or "painted") the events right before their eyes. In response, the Galatians had simply accepted this message, placed their trust in Christ, and received God's promised Spirit (3:2). They had come to Christ just as they were, and He had accepted them. Had they forgotten that?

Through their behavior, the Galatians illustrated that they had become confused about the distinction between justification and sanctification. As Paul indicated earlier, justification is the act whereby God legally pronounces a sinner to be just or righteous in His sight because of what He has already done for that person in Christ (cf. Gal. 2:16–18; Rom. 3:23–26). Justification, therefore, is our admission into heaven. Sanctification, however, refers to the enabling power of the Spirit that begins to work in us when we are justified (cf. Col. 3:5; 1 Thess. 4:3–8). Sanctification is not the means by which we gain access to heaven; it is the way God readies us to live in heaven.

3:6–9. Experience of Abraham. Jews looked to Abraham as both the father of the Jewish race and as an example of what a true Jew should be like. Many believed that obedience was the defining characteristic of Abraham's life; after all, Abraham had forsaken his homeland, accepted circumcision, and had even been willing to sacrifice his son at God's command (Gen. 11:31–32; 12:1–5; 17:22–27; 22:1–3, 15–19). Some even claimed that God declared Abraham righteous because of his obedience. Paul's opponents appear to have supported similar arguments.

Paul, however, turns the tables on his opponents by presenting Abraham as the utmost example of the all-sufficiency of faith. He anchors his argument in the passage from Genesis that describes Abraham's trust in God's promises and how God counted, reckoned, or credited righteousness to him for his expressions of that trust (Gal. 3:6; cf. Gen. 15:6). To understand how important this verse was to Paul, it is helpful to know that the word "faith" and the verb "to believe" come from the same root word in Greek (*pisteuō*). For Paul, this meant that regardless of what his opponents might say, Scripture clearly states that it was because of Abraham's faith—his belief in God's promises—that God considered him righteous. His faith in God's promises was the defining characteristic of his life, and although his faith wavered at times, he continued to believe, against all odds, that God would fulfill His promises (Gen. 12:1–3; Rom. 4:18–25; Heb. 11:11–12, 17–19). As important as Abraham's obedience was, it was only a by-product of his faith. Consequently, Paul sees in Abraham's experience a paradigm of the gospel.

3:10–14. Testimony of Scripture. The experience of the Galatians and even of Abraham himself implies that faith is sufficient for salvation, but Paul adds that the Hebrew Scriptures themselves explicitly teach that human obedience to God's law will never be sufficient to merit salvation. He does this by alluding to several passages from the books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy (Lev. 18:5; Deut. 21:23; 27:26), each of which indicate that the law requires perfect obedience to all of its precepts, all of the time. Since no one has done that perfectly except Jesus, all of us, Jew and Gentile alike, are under the law's curse, that is, condemned as sinners and thus separated from God.

Therefore, obedience itself cannot be the way to attain absolution from God (Gal. 3:11). Paul finds hope, however, in two other passages from the OT, the first of which is taken from Habakkuk 2:4. Habakkuk, a prophet of God who lived at a time when there seemed to be little hope for the survival of Israel, proclaimed that the only way to life was faith, trusting in God's promise to provide for His people. The second passage refers to what God has done through Christ to free humanity from the curse of the law. In v. 13, Paul refers to our emancipation from the curse of the law—Christ became a curse for us. Paul then quotes Deuteronomy 21:23, where it is stated that a person would be under God's curse if, after execution, the body was hung on a tree or a pole. Jesus's death on the cross was seen as a fulfillment of this (Acts 5:30; 1 Pet. 2:24). This explains why the cross was a stumbling block for so many Jews; they could not fathom the idea that the Messiah was cursed by God. Paul, however, saw this as exactly God's plan. The curse Christ bore on the tree of Calvary was not His own but the curse that rested on humanity in its entirety.

In referring to our redemption in Christ (3:13), Paul introduces a new metaphor to explain what God has done for humanity in His Son. The word "redeemed" was a common secular word in Paul's time, literally meaning "to buy back." It connoted the paying of a ransom price to secure the release of individuals who were being held as hostages or the act of paying money to free a person from slavery. Likely building on Jesus's own use of this image in relation to His ministry (Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45), Paul applies it to what Christ has done for us (Rom. 3:24; 1 Cor. 1:30; Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14; Titus 2:14). Since "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23), the curse of the law was ultimately a death sentence: permanent separation from God. Jesus paid the penalty of our sin by becoming our sin-bearer (1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23), voluntarily taking our curse on Himself and suffering the full wages of sin on our behalf (2 Cor. 5:21) so that we might be reconciled with God.

3:15–18. God's Unchangeable Promise. In an attempt to demonstrate to the Galatians that God's covenant with Abraham and all his descendants was based on faith without the works of the law, Paul draws on an example taken from everyday life: the unalterable nature of confirmed human covenants and testaments (3:15). The word translated as "covenant" (*diathēkē*) can also refer to a person's legal "will." Paul appears to pick up on this double meaning, and he uses it to highlight specific ways that God's covenant with Abraham is similar to a person's final will and testament. Like a human will, God's covenant concerns a specific beneficiary: Abraham and his offspring (Gal. 3:16; Gen. 12:1–5). It also involves an inheritance (Gen. 13:15; 17:8; Rom. 4:13), but most important is the unchanging nature of God's covenant. If a legally ratified will cannot be altered or modified in any way once the testator dies, God's covenantal promise to Abraham is all the more unchangeable, for God is not a promise-breaker (Is. 46:11; Heb. 6:18).

Not wanting the Galatians to miss the main point of his comparison between God's covenant and a person's final will, Paul writes of the historical priority of the promise to Abraham over the law (the law was given 430 years later) and of the incapacity of the law to annul the promise confirmed by God in Christ (Gal. 3:17). The Galatians could say all they wanted about the law, but God never related to Abraham on the basis of law, for the law (i.e., the Torah, in all its specificity) had been entrusted to the children of Israel several hundred years after His covenant promise to Abraham was made (cf. Gen. 15:13; Ex. 12:40). Faith was all God required when making a covenant with Abraham and his descendants. For the Galatians to say that the law is a requirement to receive God's promise of salvation would have meant that God had defaulted on His word.

As a parenthetical note, Paul clarifies that the promise to Abraham and his Seed (i.e., Christ; Gal. 3:16) did not relate to Israel as a nation of many individuals but that its primary focus was ultimately about the coming of the Messiah (cf. Gen. 3:15). Paul notices that, although the word for "seed" or "offspring" in Hebrew and Greek can have a collective sense attached to it, the word is actually singular in number. That fact suggests to Paul that this is a reference to Christ as the true Seed of Abraham and thus also the promised Messiah through whom *all* the nations of the earth would be blessed (cf. Gen. 12:1–3).

3:19–22. Why the Law Was Given. In this section of Galatians, Paul anticipates the question he knows his opponents are bound to ask: "If God's promise to Abraham was entirely unaffected by the law, why did God give the law to Abraham's descendants at all?" The interpretation of Paul's reply in 3:19 has been a debated question for centuries. Some understand it to be a reference to the ceremonial law of sacrifices and offerings that ended through Christ's sacrificial death on Calvary, while others say it refers to the Ten Commandments, claiming that they were abolished at Calvary. To understand what Paul meant, we need to carefully examine several aspects of this verse.

The first item to be considered is Paul's use of the word *nomos*, which occurs more than one hundred times in Paul's letters. It can refer to God's will for His people, the Pentateuch (Rom. 3:21), specific books in the OT (1 Cor. 14:21), the entire OT Scriptures (Rom. 3:10–19; 5:13), a general principle (Rom. 7:21), or even to the moral law of the Ten Commandments (1 Tim. 1:8–11). Since it does not always mean the same thing, the identity of the law in Galatians can only be determined within the context of Paul's overall message in the letter.

Although Paul is arguing against the necessity of circumcision, his concern is far broader than just ceremonial rituals. He is arguing that any attempt to be accepted by God on the basis of a law or obedience is insufficient regardless of whether the focus is on the demands of the ceremonial or the moral law. A careful examination of the more than thirty places in which the

word "law" (*nomos*) occurs in Galatians illustrates this very point. When Paul mentions the law in this epistle, he almost always has a more general definition in mind (e.g., 2:21; 5:3–4, 23; 6:13). The law is not a group of ceremonial laws versus a separate group of moral laws. Such strict divisions are more the result of modern attempts of systemization than they are explicit biblical categories. When Paul says the law was added 430 years after the covenant was made with Abraham, he has in mind *all* of the legislation given to Moses at Mount Sinai, both in its ceremonial and moral dimensions.

If the use of the law in Galatians includes all the legislation given to Moses, why does Paul say that it was "added" (3:19) at Mount Sinai? Paul is not saying that the law did not exist before it was given at Sinai, as that would make no sense in light of the many references in Genesis and Exodus to both the commandments and to the ceremonial laws that predate the giving of the law at Sinai (e.g., Gen. 2:1–3; 8:20–22; 12:8; 26:5; Ex. 16:22–26). Neither does Paul mean that the law was added to God's covenant with Abraham as if it were a later addendum to a will that somehow altered its original provisions. Paul has already denied that in the letter (Gal. 3:15–18).

Why then were the laws "added" or "given" to the children of Israel? Paul says that the law was given because of transgression, and he has two aspects in mind here. The first can be seen in a similar statement in Romans 5:20, where Paul refers to the impartation of the law resulting in the increase of trespasses, or offenses. While in Egypt, the Israelites had lost sight of God's greatness and high moral standards and consequently failed to recognize the extent of their own sinfulness. The law was given on Sinai to reveal to the children of Israel their true condition and need of God's grace, as it continues to do for us today. The law was not intended to be a ten-step program on how to "earn" salvation. The moral law with its "Thou shall nots" reveals that sin is not a normal, legitimate condition but a violation of God's law (Rom. 3:20; 5:13, 20; 7:7–8, 13). Even the ceremonial laws were given to reveal the brokenness of humanity before God and the need for divine forgiveness.

While similarities between Galatians 3:19 and Romans 5:20 do exist, there are also important differences. First, there is the absence of the word "increase" in Galatians 3:19; second, there is the use of the word "trespass" (*paraptōma*) in Romans but "transgression" (*parabasis*) in Galatians. "Trespass" refers to a deliberate sinful act while "transgression" is a more generic term for "disobedience." Paul's comment in Romans limits the role of the law at Sinai to an entirely negative function—it reveals sin. Although this is true, Paul is not nearly as explicit about this in Galatians, where in 3:19, he simply says the law was added because of transgressions. The general nature of this statement does not limit his meaning to the negative aspect of revealing sin.

Paul's terminology is broad enough to understand the "adding" of the law as also a positive response—because of transgressions. The law in itself points to the remedy for transgression. The children of Israel not only failed to recognize the gravity of sin during their slavery in Egypt but they also lost sight of the remedy for sin that is illustrated in the sacrificial system. God expanded the laws of sacrifices and offerings at Sinai to indicate more fully that He had provided a means of atonement for human sinfulness. According to Paul, God gave the law in a public manner to reveal sin and to direct His people to the remedy for sin that was foreshadowed in the sacrificial system associated with the sanctuary.

What did Paul mean when he said the law was added until the Seed to whom (or concerning which) the promise was made had come (3:19)? Since Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed (1 Cor. 5:7), it is true that there is no longer any need for animals to be sacrificed (Heb. 9–10), but one should not conclude that in Galatians 3:19 Paul is proclaiming that the Moral Law had been abolished. Such a conclusion is faulty for at least two reasons: First, Paul specifically denies such allegations. In a similar discussion in Romans 3:31, he asks whether we *katargeō* ("make void," "nullify") the law through faith. Paul uses *katargeō* frequently in his letters, and it can be rendered as "to abolish" or "set aside" (Eph. 2:15), "to do away with" (Rom. 6:6), to make "without effect" or "nullify" (Rom. 3:3), or even "to destroy" (1 Cor. 6:13). Had Paul wanted to indicate that the cross terminated the law, this would have been the occasion to do so. But he not only denies that idea with an emphatic "no"; he also states that his gospel establishes the law.

Second, the word translated as "till" or "until" in Galatians 3:19 does not indicate that the law would end after a certain period of time. While it can occasionally imply the end of a specific period of time, it does not always have this temporal sense. For instance, in Revelation 2:25, Jesus tells believers to cling to what they have *until* He comes. Obviously, Jesus does not mean that once He returns we no longer need to be faithful. Or, how about Paul's instructions to Timothy to devotedly ensure that there be reading (of Scripture), teaching (doctrine), and exhortation in preaching *until* Paul came (1 Tim. 4:13)? While Paul's arrival would certainly alter some things, it does not mean Timothy would cease to do any of those things. In both examples, the words "till" or "until" do not imply an end to the activity described. They merely emphasize that a change occurs.

The same is true in Paul's use of this word in Galatians 3:19. The role of the law did not end with the coming of Christ; it continues to reveal sin (cf. Gal. 3:21–22). Paul is saying that the advent of Christ marks a decisive turning point in human history. While the giving of the law on Sinai was the defining point in Israel's history, the incarnation of Christ far outshines it. Christ can do what the moral and ceremonial laws could never accomplish: provide a true remedy for sin, that is, justify sinners and fulfill His law in them by His Spirit (Rom. 8:3–4).

3:23–25. The Coming of Faith. Having said the law does not oppose God's promise (Gal. 3:21–22), Paul turns his attention to what the law does and how the coming of the promised Messiah affects the role of the law. Although Paul said the law was added "because of transgressions" (3:19), he expands on what that means by using three terms to describe what the law does and what it is like: *phroureō* (3:23), *sygkleiō* (3:23), and *paidagōgos* (3:24). The first (*phroureō*) comes from a word that literally means "to keep" or "to guard." While it can be used in a negative sense, such as "to hold in subjection" or "to watch over" (see 2 Cor. 11:32), in the NT it generally has the more positive meaning of protecting or keeping (cf. Phil. 4:7; 1 Pet. 1:5).

The same is true of the second word (*sygkleiō*; Gal. 3:23). The Greek word means "to shut," "to close," or "to enclose," and can have a positive, negative, or even neutral meaning. For example, the Septuagint employs it to refer to God "closing" the wombs of the wives of Abimelech until he returned Sarah to Abraham (Gen. 20:18). It can also refer to individuals confined to a specific geographical area or city (Ex. 14:3; Josh. 6:1; Jer. 13:19). In the NT, it can refer to the nets that enclosed the disciples' miraculous catch of fish (Luke 5:6) or the process by which God "confines" or "imprisons" people in sin (Rom. 11:32; Gal. 3:22).

As demonstrated earlier, the context is important in understanding the term "law" in Galatians 3:19. It is also crucial in determining whether the words in v. 23 should be interpreted in a negative, positive, or neutral sense. The way Paul understood these terms is seen in his usage of them in vv. 24–25 in relation to the law as a *paidagōgos*.

The idea of the law guarding and confining brought to Paul's mind the role of a specific type of slave called a *paidagōgos* in Greco-Roman society. This slave was placed in charge of his master's sons from the time they turned six or seven until they reached maturity. The responsibilities of this slave were so diverse that there is not an equivalent word in English that encapsulates them all; he was something like a nanny, a chauffeur, a tutor, a nurse, a bodyguard, and a parent all rolled into one. His duties for the master's sons would include drawing their baths, providing them with food and clothes, and caring for them when they were sick. He was also to ensure that his master's sons went to school and did their homework. He was not only expected to teach and practice moral virtues but to make sure the children learned and practiced them as well. However, the primary task of the *paidagōgos* boiled down to protection, prevention, and correction. Some pedagogues were kind and loving, but the predominant description of them in ancient literature is of strict disciplinarians. It was their duty to ensure obedience, whether it was secured via wise counsel, harsh threats and rebukes, or whipping and caning if necessary.

Paul envisioned God's law from this same perspective; it is like a *paidagōgos*. In Galatians 3:23, Paul describes the law as a controlling power that both guards and condemns. As discussed earlier, he is referring to both the ceremonial and moral aspects of God's law (Gal. 3:19); it is God's law as a whole that both guards and confines. So, did Paul envision the law as positive or negative? While the law has the negative role of revealing and condemning sin, it also has the positive function of guarding and protecting us from evil—of acting a guide for the Christian life. Even the negative aspect of condemning sin ultimately helps us realize our need for Christ. The answer is not really either-or, but rather both-and. The law is simply necessary.

Although the law is essential in light of the sin problem, how does this correlate with Paul's statement that we are no longer under a *paidagōgos* after faith has come (Gal. 3:25)? Considering Paul makes positive comments about the law elsewhere (e.g., Rom. 3:31; 7:7, 12, 14), he cannot be dismissing the law here. God's law did not expire with the arrival of Christ. To be sure, certain aspects of it were fulfilled in Him, but its moral truths continue to be applicable today. What has changed is the position of the law in relation to God's people. It no longer condemns us, because Christ took on Himself the condemnation of the law. When it comes to salvation, the law is not the ultimate authority, but Christ is. He is the epitome of all it requires and more (Gal. 6:2; 1 Cor. 9:21). While the law continues to be applicable as a guide for the Christian life, we do not merely follow a set of rules; we follow Jesus. We are called to live a life that is pleasing to Christ (1 Thess. 4:1), and Paul refers to this as walking in the Spirit (Gal. 5:18). Christ writes His law on our hearts (Heb. 8:10) and makes it possible for the righteous requirement of the law to be fulfilled in us (Rom. 8:4); we are no longer under the law's condemnation (v. 3). We simply enjoy the privilege of being under grace (Rom. 6:14–15), manifested through loving obedience to the law of God.

Thus, Christ's coming marks a fundamental shift in the epic of salvation history, just as it should in our own personal lives. The ultimate goal of every Christian is total conformity to Christ, for it is in conformity that we truly fulfill all that the law requires. Therefore, neither sin nor the law lords over the believer. In the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the promised Messiah, we find the true Lord of our lives. In that sense, we could say that He has overshadowed the law. Christ first and Christ last—that is the nature of the Christian life. Within this context, obedience to the law of God is our response of love.

3:26—4:7. From Slaves to Heirs. Galatians 3:26 marks another stage in Paul's overall argument. He gives a second reason as to why believers are not under the law: they are God's children. They are no longer minors but adults. Paul previously explained the relationship between the law and the promise, but here he turns his attention to the relationship between the law and sonship. The development of the concept of sonship in Galatians 3:26—4:7 brings an end to his thoughts regarding the identity of the true sons of Abraham that was first introduced in 3:7.

Although it is easy to overlook, Paul's shift in pronouns in v. 26 is significant. He had directed his previous comments to the Jewish believers (the "we" in vv. 23–25), and here he addresses all the Gentile believers in Galatia by using the second person pronoun "you" (plural in Greek). The statement he makes in v. 26 is revolutionary: the Gentiles are called the children of God, a designation that God had historically used as a special term of affection to refer to the nation of Israel (Ex. 4:22–23; Deut. 14:1–2; Hos. 11:1). By calling uncircumcised Gentiles God's children, Paul was completely casting aside the us-versus-them mentality promoted by some Jewish believers. The blessing that was to come on *all* the families of the earth as part of God's promise to Abraham had now become a reality in Christ.

Paul explains the rationale behind this declaration in vv. 26 and 27. The Gentiles had become part of God's covenantal family—first, not because of anything *they* had done, but solely on the basis of what Christ has already done for them (cf. Gal. 2:16; 3:26); and second, Gentiles became united with Christ through baptism (Gal. 3:27). This union means that what is true of Christ is also true of us. Since Christ is the "seed" or "offspring" of Abraham and we are fellow heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:17), we also inherit all the covenantal promises made to Abraham (Gal. 3:29). Christ's faithfulness has become our faithfulness and His identity our identity (Gal. 1:15–16; 2:20). Verse 28 underscores the fact that a believer's primary identity in the church is "in Christ Jesus," not in social position, race, or gender. This was an important concept in Paul's time and still is in ours, given the sinful human tendency toward division and conflict between these various subsidiary markers.

In Galatians 4:1–3, Paul elaborates on his thoughts using the theme of inheritance. His terminology envisions a situation in which an owner of a large estate has died, leaving all his property to his eldest son. His son, however, is still a minor, and the father's will stipulates that his son is to be subject to supervision until he reaches maturity, which, in ancient wills, was usually twenty to twenty-five. Until then, the son would be master of his father's estate in title alone. How are we to understand Paul's analogy? Paul refers to being in bondage to *stoicheion* as children (v. 3). The meaning of this word is debated, as indicated by the various renderings in major translations. Scholars have interpreted *stoicheion* as a description of the basic elements that compose the universe (2 Pet. 3:10, 12), the demonic powers that control this evil age (Col. 2:15), or the rudimentary principles of religious life, that is, the most basic fundamentals of religion (Heb. 5:12). Paul's emphasis on humanity's status as minors before the coming of Christ (Gal. 4:1–3) suggests he had in mind the last translation—the rudimentary principles of religious life. His basic point seems to be that any religious system that does not have Christ as its center is an enslavement that consists of rudimentary principles deprived of saving power. The Jews were heirs of God's promises, but because they did not find in Christ the saving power of God, their religious regulations became enslaving elementary principles. They only needed Christ in order to inherit (see 2 Cor. 3:7–18). For the Galatians to turn to a law-based religious experience after Christ had already come was like the adult son in Paul's analogy wanting to be a minor once again.

In Galatians 4:4–7, Paul explains that we have become the adopted children of God through the coming of Christ as our Savior and Lord. Paul is the only NT author to use the word "adoption" (Gr. *huiothesia*) as a metaphor for salvation (Gal. 4:5). Like today, adoption in the Greco-Roman world functioned as a legally binding agreement guaranteeing that adopted children would have the same rights accorded to a biological child. Building on the rights we now have as God's adopted children, Paul says we also have the privilege of enjoying the close and intimate relationship children have with their parents. We can call God "Abba" (cf. Gal. 4:6; Rom. 8:15–16), which was the intimate name Jewish children used to address their fathers, somewhat like the word "daddy" or "papa" today. This concept would have certainly seemed radical to Paul's Jewish audience, for outside of Jesus, no Jew had ever referred to God as Abba (Mark 14:36). Yet, now as joint heirs with Christ, we, too, have that special privilege.

4:8–11. The Call Not to Return to Slavery. In Galatians 4:8–11, Paul asks the Galatians to live the Christian life like sons and not to return to their former state of spiritual slavery. Paul likely had in mind the idol worship and superstitious practices that dominated the life of pagans in the ancient world. Ancient calendars revolved around the observance of days dedicated to the pagan gods, religious festivals, and sacrifices, which functioned much like national holidays.

In spite of this reality, some interpret Paul's objection to calendrical observances in v. 10 as a reference to the Jewish ceremonial laws and the Sabbath. Such an interpretation is unsustainable. We have no list of Jewish customs or practices identical to those referenced in Galatians. If Paul really wanted to single out specific Jewish practices, he could have easily identified them by name (cf. Col. 2:16); however, he is more ambiguous. The context indicates that Paul is drawing a more general parallel between the Gentiles' former practices in paganism and their willingness to base their new Christian life around works of law.

4:12–20. Paul's Pastoral Appeal. Galatians 4:12–20 is one of the most immensely personal and gripping passages in all of Paul's letters. Although Paul is notably upset about the events taking place in Galatia (cf. Gal. 1:6–9; 3:1; 5:12), his concern is rooted in the deep love he has for the Galatians. His burden is evident in his personal appeal to become like him (v. 12). The Greek word *deomai* ("to urge," "to beg," "to plead") has a strong sense of desperation connected to it (e.g., 2 Cor. 5:20), so, in essence, Paul is really saying, "I'm pleading and begging that you change your course!"

Paul's heart was bound up in the lives of the people brought to Christ through his ministry. He was their spiritual father and they were his children (1 Cor. 4:14–15; 1 Thess. 2:7). He compares his concern for the Galatians to the anguish that accompanies a mother in childbirth (Gal. 4:19). Paul thought his previous labor had been sufficient for their "safe delivery," but when the Galatians wandered from the truth, he experienced those labor pains all over again. He knew that their picture of Christ and what He required of them would affect every aspect of their lives and their eternal destiny could be at stake.

4:21–31. The Two Covenants. Galatians 4:21–31 is a highly complex argument that requires a broad knowledge of OT persons and events. In order to make sense of this passage, we first need a basic understanding of the OT concept of the covenant, which is central to Paul's argument (5:24).

A covenant in the OT designates a binding contract, agreement, or treaty. Covenants often involved the slaughter of animals as part of the process of making (lit. "cutting") a covenant. The killing of animals symbolized what would happen to a party that failed to keep their covenantal promises and obligations. In order to convey the certainty of His promise to redeem humans from the consequences of sin, God chose to enter into a formal covenantal relationship with them (cf. Gen. 6:18; 9:8–10). The most notable example of this is His covenant with Abraham (Gen. 15), in which He promised to make Abraham a great nation even though Abraham and Sarah were childless (Gen. 12:1–3). Although Abraham trusted God, after waiting for ten years, he began to wonder if he had misunderstood Him. To reassure Abraham of the certainty of His promise, God deigned to

enter into a covenant with him (Gen. 15:7–18). Abraham slaughtered the animals and God symbolically passed through the pieces of the sacrificed animals to indicate that He staked His very life on the certainty of the promise He had made to Abraham.

The second element necessary to understand Galatians 4:21–31 is the tragic circumstances surrounding Abraham's relationship with Hagar, whose place in the story is directly related to Abraham's failure to trust God's promise. In spite of the covenant God had made with Abraham, he and Sarah decided to help God by bringing about the birth of the promised child through Hagar, whom Sarah gave to Abraham as a concubine-wife. Although strange to us today, according to ancient customs, a female slave could serve legally as a surrogate mother for her barren mistress. However, the child that was born (Gen. 16:3–4) was not the one God had promised (Gen. 17:15–19). The birth of Ishmael revealed Abraham's lack of faith. God was not waiting on Abraham to "do" anything, because the promise to Abraham was all about God doing something for people that they could not do for themselves. The divine plan to bless the entire world would begin with the miraculous birth of Abraham and Sarah's child.

Paul sees a connection between the experience of Abraham and Hagar and the actions of the Galatians. They thought they, too, needed to do something—in this case submit to circumcision—in order to experience God's promised blessing of salvation. But their efforts, like Abraham's, were ultimately insufficient in God's sight. In the same way, our efforts to gain God's favor through obedience will never be sufficient. Instead, we are to trust that in Christ, God has given us the salvation that we never could have earned, like the miraculous birth of Isaac to Sarah (Gen. 21:1–3). Thus, Hagar and Sarah represent two paths to salvation: Hagar the false way, based on human effort, and Sarah the true gospel rooted in absolute faith in God.

Paul associates the covenant relationship between God and Israel on Mount Sinai (vv. 25–26) with the false path to salvation symbolized by Abraham's experience with Hagar. While some see this association as an indication that the law is inconsistent with the true gospel of salvation in Christ, this is certainly not the idea Paul had in mind. First, when God brought Israel out of slavery in Egypt, He desired to share the same covenant relationship with them as He had with their forefather Abraham. The Lord told Abraham and the Israelites what *He* would do for them (Gen. 12:1–3; Ex. 19:4–6). He did not ask the Israelites to promise to "do" anything to "earn" His salvation. The Hebrew words translated "to obey" (*shama'*) and "to keep" (*shamar*) in Exodus 19:5 literally mean "to hear" and "to treasure." The Lord wanted Israel to have the same faith that characterized Abraham's response to His promises. The covenant on Sinai was to be a covenant of grace.

Why then does Paul compare Mount Sinai with Hagar's negative experience? As discussed previously (see Gal. 3:17), the giving of the law at Sinai sought to reveal both humanity's sinfulness and the remedy, which was God's abundant grace typified in the sanctuary services. The problem at Sinai was not on God's part but with the faulty promises of the people (Heb. 8:6). Instead of responding to God's promise as Abraham did, the Israelites responded with self-confidence that they would comply with everything God had told them (Ex. 19:8). Their response was typical of slaves: "Whatever you say, we will do it." It was not that their choice of words offended God; He declared that their words were correct (Deut. 5:28). The problem was the condition of their hearts. They failed to appreciate what salvation was all about and had a naive confidence in their own efforts and abilities (Deut. 5:29). In the same way that Abraham and Sarah tried to help God fulfill His promises, the Israelites sought to turn God's covenant of grace into one of works.

In Galatians, Paul is not claiming that the law given at Sinai was evil or abolished. In fact, he actually never explicitly mentions the *law* at Mount Sinai. He only refers to it as a parallel to the experience of Abraham and Hagar. Paul was concerned with the Galatians' legalistic misapprehension of the law. They, too, had perverted God's purpose in giving the law. Instead of being convicted of the impossibility of earning God's favor through law-keeping, they concluded that through obedience they would contribute to their salvation.

When Paul refers to these two covenants, he does not see them as a matter of time but as the condition of the human heart. They depict two different ways of trying to relate to God. The old covenant symbolizes those who mistakenly rely on their own obedience as a means of earning the promise, as did the unbelieving Jews at Sinai. The new covenant, however, represents the experience of those who, like Abraham, rely wholly on God's grace. The new covenant is the everlasting covenant; it is the one true gospel (see Gen. 3:15), promised and experienced by

Abraham and his descendants (Gal. 3:8). It was foreshadowed in the laws and rituals given to Israel, and it reached its ultimate expression and fulfillment in Christ. In Him, God kept His promise. Paul's references to the experience of Abraham, Sarah, Hagar, Isaac, Ishmael, and the children of Israel at Sinai indicate that his discussion is not ultimately about abstract theological ideas. It is not so much about what we should "think" as how we should live.

5:1–12. Freedom in Christ. In concluding this major section of Galatians (3:1—5:12), Paul's appeal reaches its climax. Having argued from the experience of the Galatians and the testimony of Scripture that faith in God alone (not faith and circumcision) is fully sufficient for salvation, he summarizes the entire purpose of his letter in 5:1.

In the original Greek, the command to remain firm does not appear at the beginning of v. 1; an important fact precedes it: Christ set us free for freedom. Christians should stand firm in their freedom because Christ has *already* set them free. True freedom is the result of what Christ has already done for us (cf. Rom. 6:6, 12; 1 Cor. 6:20; Eph. 4:1; Col. 2:6). This is Paul's way of telling believers to "become what you already are in Christ." Contextually, Paul is referring to freedom from the bondage and condemnation of a law-driven Christianity, but his message also includes freedom from sin (Gal. 3:22; Rom. 3:9), death (1 Cor. 15:51–56), and demonic powers (Gal. 1:4; Col. 2:13–15; Heb. 2:14–15).

Paul's introduction to vv. 2–12 indicates the importance of what he is about to say, as is evident in various translations of the Greek word *ide* (from *horaō*, "to see"), such as "behold," "indeed," "look," "listen," or "mark my words." He even evokes his full apostolic authority with the words "I, Paul" (5:2). If the Gentiles wanted to embrace a legalistic understanding of Christianity, Paul wanted them to realize why legalism is so deadly. He highlights several reasons. First, the primary problem with trying to earn God's favor by by submitting to a legalistic requirement for legalistic reasons is how it affects our relationship with Christ. The point is so important that Paul states it twice (vv. 2, 4). Legalism ultimately alienates, severs, and estranges us from Christ. It involves a rejection of God's path to salvation through Christ. If keeping the law had been sufficient, Christ's sacrifice would not have been necessary. When Paul mentions circumcision, he is referring to it from a legalistic perspective. Obviously, he was a circumcised Jew, and he even had Timothy circumcised (see Acts 16:3), so the problem was not circumcision in and of itself (Gal. 5:6; 6:15) but the way it was being forced on the Galatians as a so-called requirement for salvation.

Second, legalism obligates a person to keep the whole law (5:3). Paul is saying that submission simply to circumcision is not enough. The Galatians would have had to faithfully keep the whole law if they wanted to base their absolution before God on their behavior; they could not simply pick which commands to follow. It is all or nothing, as far as the law is concerned. Such an attempt would sunder any who tried it from Christ (v. 4).

Third, legalism hinders spiritual growth. Paul uses an athletic metaphor to address this point (5:7). The analogy here is of a runner whose progress toward the finish line has been sabotaged. Greco-Roman military circles employed the word *egkoptō* to refer to damages inflicted on an enemy to hinder them from completing their main objective. Legalism does the same: it hinders our spiritual advancement by causing us to take our eyes off Jesus. When Christ is no longer the focus, we either develop a false sense of self-righteousness or experience guilt-ridden despair. In either case, legalism engenders a faultfinding mentality that results in division. Paul compares the results of legalism to the savage behavior of a pack of wild dogs that mercilessly bite and devour one another (Gal. 5:15).

Fourth and finally, Paul says legalism removes the offense of the cross and the persecution he was suffering because of it (5:11) by implying that we can contribute to our salvation. This is flattering to human pride, whereas the message of the cross is offensive because accepting the cross means acknowledging that we are fully dependent on Christ. Paul was so outraged at his opponents that he wished that the knife used for circumcision would slip and his opponents would castrate themselves (5:12). Strong words, but not nearly as deadly as the false gospel of the Judaizers.

5:13—6:10

Defending the Freedom of Faith

Galatians 5:13 marks an important turning point in this letter. Whereas until now the apostle has focused entirely on the theological content of his message, in this final section, he turns to the issue of Christian behavior (5:13—6:10). How should a person who is saved, not by works of the law but through faith in Christ, live the Christian life? Aware of the human tendency for self-indulgence, Paul warns the Galatians not to allow their freedom in Christ to become an excuse to live as they please (5:13). Instead, he appeals to them to live a Spirit-empowered life (5:16–26) that fulfills the law of God by reflecting His love to others (5:13–15; 6:1–10).

5:13–15. Fulfilling the Whole Law. Paul begins his explanation of what freedom means by warning the Galatians not to use the freedom that comes through faith as an opportunity for the indulgence of the flesh (v. 13). The word *aphormē* refers to a starting point or a base from which an expedition is launched, and the word *sarx* (flesh) refers to a life centered on pleasing the self. Paul says believers should never use their freedom in Christ as a starting point for indulging their self-centered desires but should instead serve one another out of love (cf. Gal. 5:13; Lev. 19:18).

The love that defines the Christian life does not oppose God's law. Paul specifically says love fulfills the whole law (v. 14), meaning true Christian behavior is much more than the outward obedience of "doing" the law or following it as a list of rules. Rather, love fulfills the law. For Paul, the word "fulfill" goes far beyond simply doing; it implies that the obedience offered meets more than the minimum requirement of the letter of the law because it encapsulates that which satisfies the intent of law, namely, love. This type of obedience is rooted in Jesus (see Matt. 5:17). It is not an abandonment of the law nor is it a reduction of the law to love only, but it is the way through which the true intent and meaning of the law can be experienced.

5:16–24. Walking in the Spirit. Next, Paul illustrates his point by describing the destructive works of the flesh in contrast to the life-giving and law-fulfilling fruit of the Spirit. The basic contrast between these two ways of life is introduced through a tantalizing promise, found in v. 16. The realm of the Spirit and that of the flesh stand in stark contrast with each other, for a life lived according to the flesh seeks to satisfy its own desires while a life given over to the Spirit seeks to please God. Ancient philosophers recognized that humans always seem to make happiness dependent on satisfying some sort of desire (e.g., lust for food, sex, power, money). For them, the answer to the problem of desire boiled down to the conviction that a proper understanding of the nature of life leads to right living. In other words, the problem of desire was simply faulty thinking. Paul's diagnosis, however, is vastly different. Sinful desire is not simply a by-product of incorrect thinking; it is an enslaving and destructive power at work within every human being. Right thinking is not enough. Freedom from the power of sin ultimately resides in submission to the power of God's indwelling Spirit, or, as Paul says, in the act of walking in the Spirit (5:16).

Walking is a metaphor drawn from the OT that refers to a person's way of life. Although Paul employs this image to describe the type of conduct that should characterize the Christian life, he connects walking with the Spirit instead of its usual association with the law (e.g., Deut. 26:17; 28:9; 30:16; 1 Kin. 11:38), thereby effectively saying that Christians should live by the Spirit. Once again, it is not that Paul was opposed to the law; rather, he was rejecting the legalistic misuse of the law in Galatia. The obedience God desires is the result of an inward motivation produced by the Spirit (Gal. 5:18). Since it is the Spirit who set us free (Rom. 8:2) and who sustains our freedom in Christ (2 Cor. 3:17), it is only the Spirit who can enable us to fulfill God's law (Rom. 8:3–4; 15:16). Paul goes on to outline the types of behavior associated with the flesh and the Spirit: fifteen destructive works of the flesh and nine grace-filled manifestations of the fruit of the Spirit.

The lists are noteworthy in at least two ways: First, Paul refers to them in different ways. He labels the vice list as actions coming from the flesh (5:19), but the virtue list he calls the fruit of the Spirit (5:22). The distinction between works and fruit is significant. The works of the flesh describe the results of the detrimental behavior of fallen humanity's pursuit of its own interests (e.g., fornication, hatred, envy, murder). Those who follow a life focused on the self will experience God's final judgment against sin: permanent exclusion from the kingdom of God (Gal. 5:21). A life graced with the fruit of the Spirit, on the other hand, places the welfare of others before its own. This behavior is not generated by humans themselves; it is what the Spirit produces in them (i.e., the fruit).

Second, the vice list is deliberately labeled as being plural in number (5:19), while the fruit of the Spirit (5:22) is singular. This difference may suggest that a life lived in the flesh promotes disruption, divisiveness, and disunity. Sin lacks purpose; it only fragments. In contrast, life in the Spirit produces *one* fruit of the Spirit, God's love, which manifests itself in different forms to foster unity. This prioritizing of love agrees with the central role it has already been given in Galatians 5:6 and 5:13 and with the emphasis on its being first place in Paul's virtue lists elsewhere (2 Cor. 6:6; 1 Tim. 4:12; 6:11; 2 Tim. 2:22). Love is not one virtue among many but the cardinal Christian virtue, the key to all others. It is the supreme gift of the Spirit (Rom. 5:5; 1 Cor. 13:13) that should fill the life of every follower of Jesus (John 13:34–35).

Although the fruit of the Spirit is the moral life that the Spirit produces in us, this transformation does not happen automatically. Five verbs in Galatians 5:16–29 indicate that believers play a role. The first four demonstrate the necessity of a daily decision to allow the Spirit to work within us; we are to walk (v. 16), be led (v. 18), live (v. 25), and conform to the Spirit (v. 25). God will not force Himself on us. In addition, being led by the Spirit suggests that we also need to learn to discern the Spirit's prompting in our lives, and this can develop only when we spend time in private communion with God in prayer.

The final verb Paul employs is the most startling; he instructs us to crucify the flesh with its passions or affections and desires or lusts (v. 24). While Paul was obviously speaking figuratively, the basic point of his terminology is clear: we are to work with the Spirit by taking drastic action in regard to our old way of life. It must be put to death (cf. Rom. 8:13). Crucifixion becomes a reality in our lives when we feed our spiritual life and starve the desires of the flesh through the strength of the Spirit (Rom. 13:14). It is important to note that crucifying the flesh is not something we do in our own strength. We welcome the Spirit into our lives to do what God already did for us in Christ at Calvary.

6:1–6. The Gospel and the Church. Paul's discussion of Christian behavior after Galatians 5:13 is largely theoretical. He explains that God's law is fulfilled through love (5:14) and that it is the Spirit alone who can produce that love in people's lives (5:16–26). To help the Galatians better understand what is involved in a life defined by God's love, Paul concludes the body of his letter with several practical examples that illustrate what such a life should look like.

The first example deals with the situation of a fellow believer falling into sinful behavior. The situation Paul envisions in v. 1 does not appear to be an act of deliberate apostasy. This is evident in his choice of the word *paraptōma* (lit. "to fall beside"; variously translated as "wrongdoing," "sin," "fault," "trespass"), which was used figuratively to describe a person who makes a false step. Therefore, rather than dealing with a case of defiant or intentional sin (cf. 1 Cor. 5:1–5), Paul is referring to a mistake in the Christian life that has drawn one into sin. In such a case, Paul says the church should seek to restore the person. The word translated as "restore" (*katartizō*) means "to mend" or "to put in order." The NT uses it in reference to mending fishnets (Matt. 4:21; Mark 1:19), and Greek literature employs it as a medical term describing the process of setting a broken bone. As members of the body of Christ, it is our responsibility to gently care (5:23) for our brothers and sisters in Christ who may stumble and fall as we walk together in our Christian pilgrimage.

Paul also counsels those involved in the ministry of restoration to take into account their own vulnerability to temptation (Gal. 6:1). The word *skopeō* literally means "to look at carefully" or "to pay careful attention to" (cf. Rom. 16:17; Phil. 2:4), so Paul is instructing us to keep a careful eye on ourselves lest sin also take us by surprise. The earlier warning against becoming proud or conceited (lit. "empty glory"; Gal. 5:26) suggests that Paul is specifically warning the Galatians against feeling spiritually superior over those in need of restoration. This warning, repeated in v. 4, implies that in recognizing our own frailty, we should not boast on account of the failures of others.

Love is also to be manifest in the church by believers bearing one another's burdens (6:2). "Burden" refers to a heavy load that is difficult to bear over a great distance, and it became a metaphor for any type of trouble or difficulty (e.g., Matt. 20:12; 1 Thess. 2:9; 2 Thess. 3:8). The immediate context of Paul's injunction to bear one another's burdens certainly includes the moral lapses of the believers mentioned before, but the idea he has in mind is much broader. God does not intend for us to shoulder all our burdens alone. The church is a living entity, like a human body; what happens to one member affects the rest of the body (1 Cor. 12:12–26). The church is a community of believers who interact with and care for each other. Paul calls on us to care for others and to allow others to care for us. Unfortunately, we are often far more willing to assist others in carrying their burdens than we are to allow anyone to help us shoulder our own. Paul condemns this attitude of self-sufficiency as human pride that refuses to admit that we, too, have needs and weaknesses (v. 3). Such pride robs us of the comfort of others and prevents others from fulfilling the ministry that God has called them to perform.

Paul connects bearing burdens with fulfilling "the law of Christ" (v. 2). The phrase "the law of Christ" occurs nowhere else in the Bible, though Paul uses a similar expression in 1 Corinthians 9:21. Some mistakenly argue that this expression indicates that the law of God given at Sinai has been replaced with a different law: that of Christ. Others claim that the word "law" simply designates a general principle (Rom. 7:21), such as following the example of Jesus (1 Pet. 2:24). While the latter concept has some merit, the context and Galatians 5:14 suggest that fulfilling the law of Christ is another reference to fulfilling the Mosaic law through love.

Paul has already shown that the coming of Christ did not annul the Moral Law. Instead, the Moral Law interpreted by love continues to play an important role in the Christian life. This is the epitome of what Jesus taught and practiced during His earthly ministry. In bearing others' burdens, we are not only following in the footsteps of Jesus but also fulfilling the law. Viewed from this perspective, the law is not about legalistic rules that focus our attention primarily on ourselves, but it is about how we should love God and care for other people (Lev. 19:18).

Paul reminded the Galatians that caring for each other in love includes caring for the financial needs of their spiritual leaders as well (Gal. 6:6). In Philippians 4:15, he mentions the financial support the Philippians had so generously "shared" with him. Although it had been Paul's practice not to rely on his churches for financial support, he acknowledges that financial remuneration is a right a teacher or preacher can expect to be honored (1 Cor. 9:3–12). His counsel to care for the teachers (Gal. 6:6) was also appropriate for Gentile believers, for unlike Jews, who were accustomed to supporting their spiritual leaders through tithe and offerings, the Gentile world had no similar practice.

6:7–10. Sowing and Reaping. Paul rounds out his counsel on what the church is called to be with a general exhortation about sowing and reaping to the flesh and to the Spirit (cf. Matt. 13:1–11, 18–23). Paul uses the counsel to highlight his previous comments about the flesh and the Spirit in Galatians 5. His metaphor has two types of soil—the flesh and the Spirit—and humans can choose which one to sow in. Following Paul's analogy, the type of soil that one uses for sowing determines the crop that is produced (cf. John 3:6). The flesh can never produce a spiritual crop and the Spirit can only yield a spiritual harvest. Everything depends on how a person sows. For the church to be what God has called it to be—His representative on this planet—it must invest in spiritual things. Hence, Paul urges the Galatians not to tire of doing good in order to reflect God's love in tangible ways to everyone, especially to those in the church, the house (or family) of believers (6:10).

6:11–18
Final Thoughts

Paul's concern for the situation in Galatia compelled him to make one last appeal to the Galatians to turn from their foolish ways (6:11–17) before concluding the letter with a prayer (v. 18).

6:11–17. A Last Plea. The closing remarks in Paul's letters usually include three elements: (1) personal greetings for specific individuals associated with the church to which the letter is addressed (e.g., 1 Cor. 16:19–20), (2) a personal signature (e.g., 1 Cor. 16:21), and (3) a closing benediction (e.g., 1 Cor. 16:23). When these typical features are compared to the final remarks in Galatians, two significant differences appear: First, Galatians contains no final greeting. Had Paul not omitted the usual word of thanksgiving at the beginning of this letter, the absence of the final greeting might not seem too significant. The omission of both elements, however, can hardly be accidental. They are another indication of Paul's strained relationship with the Galatians.

Second, Galatians contains a long appeal written by his own hand. Like many others in antiquity, Paul's standard practice was to dictate his letter to a scribe (cf. Rom. 16:22; 1 Pet. 5:12). Afterward, he would take the pen and write the closing benediction with his own hand to authenticate the letter (cf. 2 Thess. 3:17). In this case, when he took the pen from the scribe, his concern for the Galatians prevented him from simply writing a final benediction. He felt compelled to appeal to them once more to return to the true gospel.

Paul begins the appeal by calling the Galatians to notice the size of his large letters (v. 11). Some see this remark as indicating the apostle's poor eyesight (see Gal. 4:15; 2 Cor. 12:7–9), while for others the reference is to the letters' misshapen form. They speculate that Paul's hands were either so crippled from persecution or gnarled from leatherworking that he could not shape the letters with precision. While both views are certainly possible, Paul may simply have been writing with large letters to emphasize his point and to get their attention.

Although Paul hinted earlier at the agenda and motivation of the Judaizers (see Gal. 1:7; 4:17; 5:10, 12), his remarks in Galatians 6:12–13 are his first direct comments about them. He describes them as wanting to make a prideful display in the flesh (lit. to put on "a good face"; 6:12). The Greco-Roman world used this same word to describe the mask an actor would wear in the theater when playing a role. This suggests that Paul is comparing the Judaizers to actors who seek the audience's approval. In forcing the Gentile believers to submit to circumcision, the Judaizers appear to have been seeking the approval of their fellow Jews in Galatia and other Jewish Christians back in Jerusalem. Like David, who presented the foreskins of two hundred Philistines to King Saul in order to become his son-in-law, the Judaizers wanted to boast in the Gentile foreskins they had acquired as an indication of their own spiritual accomplishments (cf. 1 Sam. 18:25–27). Having exposed the dishonorable motives that prompted the Judaizers' insistence on circumcision, Paul summarizes his gospel message to the Galatians one final time. For him, the gospel rests on two fundamental tenets: (1) the centrality of the cross, which excludes human boasting (6:14), and (2) the doctrine of righteousness by faith, or what he calls the new creation (6:15).

In summarizing the gospel message, Paul makes a paradoxical comment that in Christ neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is important (6:15). Since he has been arguing strongly *against* circumcision (5:2–4), how can he now declare that neither circumcision nor uncircumcision really matters? Paul did this to prevent the Galatians from misunderstanding his main point. He does not want anyone to conclude that uncircumcision is more pleasing to God than circumcision. True religion is not rooted in any form of external rituals but in the radical work God does in the human heart that results in a new creation.

The word *ktisis* (6:15) can refer either to an individual creature or creation (2 Cor. 5:17) or to all of the created order (Rom. 8:22; Heb. 9:11). Both imply the action of a creator, and that is Paul's point. Salvation is not something that can be brought about by any human endeavor, whether circumcision or anything else. He refers to it as new because it is something that we do not naturally possess. It involves a total change, a divine act. Jesus described this same process as a new birth (John 3:5–8). It is a new birth or a new creation because it is a divine act by which God takes a spiritually dead person and breathes spiritual life into him or her.

Before the final benediction, Paul makes what seems to be a rather cryptic statement: no one is to trouble him, because he bears on his body the marks of the Lord Jesus (6:17). The Greek word used here is *stigma*, from which we derive the English word "stigma." Some have seen in this comment a reference to the practice of branding slaves with the insignia of their master to identify them or to a ritual in some mystery religions in which participants branded themselves as a sign of devotion. It is more likely, however, a reference to the scars left on Paul's body by the persecution and hardship he had experienced in proclaiming the gospel (cf. 2 Cor. 4:8–10; 11:24–27).

The reference to these imprints or scars is directly connected to Paul's message and to his experience with the Galatians. In contrast to the mark of circumcision, Paul says he bears on his body marks that are a much more significant indication of his true devotion to Jesus: the physical scars he acquired as a consequence of proclaiming the gospel of Christ. Anyone questioning his apostolic calling and message need only look at these marks to find evidence of his divine commission. Some of these marks, as the Galatians knew, were the result of the persecution he experienced when taking the gospel to Galatia (Acts 14:19; cf. 2 Cor. 11:25).

6:18. A Prayer. The apostle's last word to the Galatians is the same word that begins and ends all his letters: grace (6:18). Grace, it has been said, provides the bookends of the gospel. His prayer for all his churches was grace first and grace last. It was the grace that Paul saw poured out on Calvary that had captivated his heart and changed his life. He concludes by praying that the Galatians would experience this same grace anew. It is the same grace that enables us all to hope.

EPHESIANS

INTRODUCTION

Title and Authorship. The absence of the place-name "in Ephesus" (1:1) in the text of three of the earliest and often most reliable Greek manuscripts that date back to the third and fourth centuries (P^{46}; Codex Sinaiticus [ℵ]; Codex Vaticanus [B]) has led some scholars to wonder if this epistle was originally intended to be a general letter written to several of the churches in Asia Minor instead of just to the church in Ephesus. The fact that, unlike Paul's other epistles, this letter does not contain a single personal greeting to any individual in Ephesus appears to support this theory (cf. Phil. 4:2–3; Col. 4:15–17).

There are two potential explanations for the absence of the place-name "in Ephesus." One possibility is that the phrase was originally included in the letter but was omitted at some later time to make its message more relevant to other churches. This same type of scribal activity appears to be the reason the words "in Rome" (Rom. 1:7) were omitted from later copies of Paul's letter to the church in Rome. The other possibility is that the phrase was in fact originally absent because the letter was meant for the churches in Asia Minor. While both explanations are viable, the nearly unanimous use of the title "to the Ephesians" (cf. P46; Codex Vaticanus) demonstrates that from an early date, this letter was very dear to the Christians in Ephesus. Being the most significant city in Asia Minor as well as the base for Paul's ministry for nearly three years (Acts 19:10), the letter probably circulated first among the local churches in Ephesus before eventually being shared with the other churches in the surrounding area.

Date. Together with the other Prison Epistles (i.e., Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon), Ephesians was likely written during Paul's two-year imprisonment in Rome from A.D. 59 to 61 (Acts 28:30; cf. Eph. 3:1; 4:1; 6:20). Among the Prison Epistles, Ephesians and Colossians are closely connected. Not only do they have a high degree of resemblance but also both were sent through the same courier: one of Paul's companions named Tychicus (6:21; Col. 4:7). This connectedness indicates that Ephesians and Colossians were written and sent at the same time. When they were written, Epaphras, who brought the report from Colossae to Paul, was still with the apostle (Col. 4:12). Allowing time for Paul to have received communication in Rome from the churches at Ephesus, Colossae, and Philippi and for ministering to Onesimus before sending him back to Colossae with Tychicus, Ephesians was likely written late in his imprisonment, around A.D. 61.

Authorship. Although the epistle identifies Paul as its author (Eph. 1:1; 3:1), critical scholars have questioned the Pauline authorship of Ephesians based on the resemblance between Ephesians and Colossians. They have argued that Paul would not have needed to write Ephesians after writing Colossians and that an imitator used the latter to produce the former. While there are similarities in the overall structure and sequence of the two epistles, there is actually only one verse in the Greek that is identical in both of them: Ephesians 6:22 and Colossians 4:8 (although, interestingly, they are not always translated in identical ways). The content of these two passages, however, is not theological and would have hardly required someone to copy from the other.

In spite of such basic similarities, each letter has its own distinctive theological emphasis. Ephesians focuses on the unity of the church as the body of Christ with Christ as the head, while Colossians focuses on the supremacy of Christ. The juxtaposition of these similarities and differences likely suggests that these two epistles were written within a short time of each other and that Paul, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, developed and modified his thoughts to better address the different needs of his readers. Colossians addressed a specific threat that faced the believers in Colossae while Ephesians dealt with the more general needs confronting the churches in Asia Minor.

Although early church fathers from the second and third centuries A.D. were aware of later Pauline forgeries, their statements unanimously affirm the Pauline authorship of Ephesians. We find no significant reason to disregard the strength of this testimony and affirm Paul as the author of Ephesians.

Backgrounds. Paul visited Ephesus for the first time toward the end of his second missionary journey (Acts 18:19–21). He returned on his third missionary journey and stayed for about three years (Acts 20:31; cf. 19:7–10). It was probably some of Paul's converts who brought the gospel message to the cities surrounding Ephesus. Epaphras, for example, was likely the one who founded the churches in Colossae, Laodicea, and Hierapolis (Col. 1:7; 4:12, 13). There is no indication in the letter that Paul wrote in response to a specific report from the church in Ephesus as he did in the other Prison Epistles (cf. Phil. 2:25; Col. 1:7–8; Philem. 1:10–12). After receiving a report from Epaphras about the church in Colossae, Paul wrote a letter to the Colossians and appointed Tychicus with the responsibility of delivering it (Col. 4:7). Recognizing that Tychicus would have to pass through Ephesus, Hierapolis, and Laodicea on his way to Colossae, Paul probably also entrusted Tychicus with the letter to be read in Ephesus (Eph. 6:21). Realizing that no one within his circle of companions was currently in Ephesus since Timothy and Epaphras were with him (Col. 1:1; 4:12), and anticipating the coming of the false teachers he had predicted a couple of years before (Acts 20:29), Paul would have felt the need to strengthen the faith of the Christians in that territory as well as their unity in Christ. Thus the letter to the Ephesians was written. Since the church in Laodicea was located near Colossae and was likely facing challenges similar to those among the Colossians, Paul advised the believers in Colossae to share his letter with the Laodiceans (see commentary on Col. 4:7–18). The fact that Paul encouraged the Colossians to share his message with neighboring churches supports the idea that he may have written the letter to the Ephesians in such a way that its message could also be shared with surrounding churches as well.

Theology. One of the most important theological topics in Ephesians is the church of Christ, particularly its union with the Lord and its inner unity. We also find an emphasis on hope and love.

1. Unity of the Church. The unity of the church in Ephesus and of those in Asia Minor in general was one of Paul's primary concerns (Eph. 2:11–22; 4:1–16). He emphasized not only unity among the members of a local church but also unity among the churches. He described the church as a human body with Jesus Christ as the head (1:22; 4:15; 5:23) and Christians as members of the body (5:30). Together, all Christians comprise the household or the building of God with Jesus as the chief cornerstone and the apostles and the prophets as the foundation (2:19–21). In Christ, the church has become one (2:15–16); the church has access to the Father in "one Spirit" (v. 18). For the church, there is only "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (4:5), "one God and Father" (v. 6). The church is to live harmoniously in the love of Christ (5:21–33) collectively and in the relationships between husbands and wives, parents and children (6:1–4), and masters and servants (6:5–9). He reminded the Christians of the salvation granted to them by grace through faith (2:1–10) and that they should be confident of their status as heirs of salvation and sharers of God's promise (3:1–20).

2. Christian Hope. The people of God are to be united in one hope (4:4; cf. 1:18)—a hope based on Christ, who died, rose again, and ascended to heaven, bringing captives with Him (4:8–10). Thus, this is the hope of resurrection and ascension. In his other letters, Paul related this hope to the Second Coming of Christ (1 Cor. 15:19; 1 Thess. 4:13; Titus 2:13). Although there is no explicit mention of the Second Coming in Ephesians, Paul may have had this event in mind when talking about hope. He explained that Christ, who died and rose again, had been seated at the right hand of the Father in a "heavenly" location (Eph. 1:20). He is above all in the current "age" and in the one yet to come (v. 21), which means that those who believe in him have hope not only now but also in the future. The coming of Christ is the hope of the future. Therefore, the epistle encouraged the church members to be growing and united in faith while waiting for the fulfillment of their hope at the Second Coming of Christ.

3. The Centrality of Love. The phrase *en agapē* ("in love") appears in Ephesians quite often. Of the twelve uses of the phrase in the Pauline writings, six are found in Ephesians (1:4; 3:17; 4:2, 15, 16; 5:2). *En agapē* is presented as the reason why God has adopted those who believe in Him to be His children in Jesus Christ (1:4–5). In order to comprehend the love of Christ, Paul instructed the Christians to be "rooted . . . in love" (3:17). Paul then admonished God's people to be patient with one another "in love" (4:2), to speak the truth "in love" (v. 15), so that the body of Christ may grow "in love" (v. 16). The last appearance of *en agapē* relates to the love of Christ as a basis for Christians to walk in love (5:2). Unfortunately, about thirty-five years later, the church of Ephesus abandoned their first love (Rev. 2:4).

COMMENTARY

1:1–2

Opening Greeting

Paul introduces himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ "by the will of God" (v. 1) and acknowledges that he was not the only apostle, but one of many. He became an apostle according to God's design for him, an idea that is repeated several times in his letters (cf. 1 Cor. 1:1; 2 Cor. 1:1; Col. 1:1; 2 Tim. 1:1). With the exception of the Gospel of John, the concept of God's will appears more in Ephesians than in any other book in the NT (Eph. 1:5, 9, 11; 5:17; 6:6). This concept refers not only to God's redemptive plan for humanity but also to His initiative, resolve, and active intervention in human history in bringing that plan to fruition in Christ (1:5, 9, 11). Because of what God has done for us, we are to serve Him and do His will from our hearts (6:6), and as we live the Christian life, our goal should be to grow in our understanding of His will (5:17). Therefore, by referring to his apostleship as being realized by the will of God, Paul points to a divine calling that benefits others. God's calling to every Christian is of this same nature. Paul called the Christians—meaning "saints" or "holy people"—in Ephesus "faithful" (v. 1). This description of believers only appears here and in Colossians (Col. 1:2) and is one of the parallels between the two epistles. By calling the Christians faithful in Christ Jesus, Paul was emphasizing that despite his absence, their faithfulness was to be grounded in their union with Christ. This is the kind of faithfulness that should characterize the life of every Christian.

1:3—3:21

The Church as the Community of the Redeemed

In this section, Paul lays a foundation for understanding the nature of the church of Christ. After highlighting all the spiritual blessings Christians receive in Christ (vv. 3–14), Paul offers a prayer on behalf of the church (vv. 15–23), discusses the conversion of Gentiles as a transition from death to life (2:1–10), and then proceeds to discuss the unity of the church in Christ (2:11–22) and his ministry among the Gentiles (3:1–13) before concluding with another prayer (3:14–21).

1:3–14. Spiritual Blessings in Christ. This section emphasizes the spiritual blessing we receive from God. In v. 3, Paul introduces the concept of blessing God and being blessed by Him using the adjective *eulogētos* ("blessed," "praised"), the verb *eulogeō* ("to bless," "to bestow blessing"), and the noun *eulogia* ("blessing," "gift"). In short, the reason for blessing God is that God has already blessed us abundantly in Christ (v. 3). The eleven appearances of the "in Christ" motif in this section indicate that the hope of humanity is not rooted in anything we can do for ourselves, but only in our union with Christ, who is the Son of God. Outside of Christ, all we have are sin, condemnation, and death.

Paul uses a singular noun, "blessing," with the adjective "every" to indicate that the blessing is one and yet many (v. 3). This overarching blessing is realized in the many blessings we receive in Christ. The first blessing is that before the world began, God chose us to be holy and blameless in Him (v. 4). Before Creation, God determined that our election to a holy and blameless life would occur only in Christ, who was chosen to be the sacrificial Lamb "without blemish" (1 Pet. 1:19). The second blessing is that our adoption as God's children is possible through Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:5; cf. Gal. 3:26). To those who believe in Him, He gives "the right to become children of God" (John 1:12; cf. Rom. 8:17). Our adoption through Christ is rooted in God's love (Eph. 1:4; cf. 1 John 3:1).

The third blessing is that *en tō ēgapēmenō* (in "the Beloved," in "the One He loves," meaning Christ), God has accepted us by His grace (v. 6). Grace is a prominent theme in Ephesians. Saving grace has been given and not earned (3:7–8; 4:7); by His grace we have been saved "through faith" in Christ (2:8). He has accepted us according to the riches of His grace that grants forgiveness of sins (1:7). It is by His grace (*charis*) that God gives us grace (*charitoō*). Grace is only from God and is bestowed on us in Christ. Thus, by receiving Christ, we receive God's grace; in Christ, we are in favor before God (Rom. 5:1–2).

In Christ, "we have redemption" through His blood (Eph. 1:7). This is the fourth spiritual blessing. He died once and for all as a sacrificial Lamb (Rom. 6:10). The references to redemption we can have through His blood and "the forgiveness of sins" (Eph. 1:7) suggest that we are redeemed or reclaimed from the power of sin and that it is possible through the sacrificial blood of Jesus (cf. Heb. 9:22). The plan of redemption is a mystery of God's will, hidden from the ages (Eph. 1:9; cf. 3:3–4, 9; 6:19), and is revealed in the fullness of time (cf. Gal. 4:4). It is a mystery, because it is only accessible to us through divine revelation. Even after the mystery has been revealed, God's love for sinners and Christ's sacrifice on the cross remain unfathomable.

Predestined

A superficial reading of Paul's remarks in Ephesians 1:5, 11, and Romans 8:28–29 and 9:9–16 has led some to the erroneous conclusion that God has arbitrarily predestined some individuals for salvation and others for damnation irrespective of their personal choice (see "Predestination," p. 1583).

First, this view not only distorts the words of Scripture but also gravely misrepresents the character of God (cf. John 3:16, 17; 1 John 4:8, 16). Scripture is clear. God desires that all would be saved (1 Tim. 2:4) and that no one would perish (2 Pet. 3:9). Second, here in Ephesians, Paul proclaims that before the world was created, God made provision for all sinners to be restored to divine favor and He predestined (Gr. *proorizō*, "to decide beforehand") that all who accept this provision will find salvation in Jesus Christ. Third, the idea that the course of a person's life is somehow fixed by fate is exactly the mindset Paul was confronting in the ancient world. Pagans believed that their lives were hopelessly predestined or predetermined by the stars and planets, which they regarded as gods. The announcement that God had acted to offer them a vastly different reality and future would have been very good news.

The fifth spiritual blessing is that in Christ we were chosen for an allotted inheritance (Gr. *klēroō*, either "appointed by lot" or "obtain an inheritance"; Eph. 1:11). The inheritance is first for the Jews (vv. 11, 12) and second for those who believe after hearing the message of the gospel: the Gentiles (v. 13). The past tense in v. 11 indicates that when God adopted us as His children, the inheritance was there for us. The inheritance is something that we, by the guaranteeing power of the Holy Spirit (v. 13), keep until the redemption of the possession (v. 14). It is through the work of the Spirit that we come to believe in Jesus after hearing the word of truth (v. 13). If the Spirit abides in our hearts, we have the guarantee of salvation (see 2 Cor. 1:22). It is in this sense that the Holy Spirit "seals" or marks us as God's. The redemption of the possession (Eph. 1:14) refers to the completion of the atonement for those who have been reclaimed. This inheritance is preserved by the guaranteeing power of the Spirit. Implicit in the text is the Second Coming of Jesus Christ (4:30; see Luke 21:28, 34). The many spiritual blessings flow from the one blessing of salvation in Christ.

This section of Ephesians describes the Triune God—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—working together for the salvation of humanity. God the Father bestowed on us His grace through His Son and adopted us as His children (Eph. 1:3–6). The Son shed His blood for us and made possible the redemption and forgiveness of sins (vv. 7, 11). The Holy Spirit seals those who believe and works to keep them in faith (v. 13). The fact that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit work together for the salvation of humanity demonstrates how important our salvation is to God. The gift of salvation is based on the character of God, love (1:4), and comes from the counsel of His will (v. 11).

The bestowal of the many divine blessings should lead us to praise Him—to acknowledge His power and glory. We praise Him for His grace (v. 6), for what He accomplished for us through His beloved Son (v. 6), and for the guaranteeing power of the Holy Spirit (v. 14). Although at the beginning of this section the praise and honor go only to the Father (v. 3), it is clear that the Son and the Spirit also deserve praise and honor. There is no better expression of gratitude for what the Triune God has done for us than praising His name.

1:15–23. Paul's Prayer. Paul informs the believers that he had been praying for them from prison. The prayer is based on the spiritual blessings they had received and on what Paul had heard about their faith in and love for the Lord (v. 15). He was praying for them before his letter reached them. The introductory words to the prayer, *dia touto* ("therefore," "for this reason"), indicate that Paul was building his prayer on the content of the previous section (vv. 3–14). Prayer and thanksgiving are to be offered for all the material and spiritual blessings we receive. Paul also emphasizes that he was praying unceasingly for them (v. 16; see Col. 1:3, 9; 1 Thess. 1:2, 3; 2 Thess. 2:13) and that the Ephesians should always pray for him as well (Eph. 6:18, 19), implying that church leaders should pray for believers and that believers should pray for them in turn. Believers praying for one another strengthens the unity of the church.

The prayer is a long sentence with only one request introduced by *hina* ("that," "so that"; v. 17): that God would give the Christians in Ephesus the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of God for the purpose of knowing Him better. What makes the prayer longer is the discussion of the result of receiving the Spirit of "wisdom" (v. 17). Paul asks God to give wisdom to the church so that they could increase their knowledge of Him (v. 17). Asking is one of the main components of a prayer (see Matt. 6:11; 7:7; 18:19; John 15:16). Paul ends the previous section by highlighting the role of the Spirit in salvation (Eph. 1:13–14), and here he asks for the Spirit of "wisdom and revelation" (v. 17), that is, the wisdom and revelation that come from the Spirit (cf. James 1:5). Indeed, the Spirit is the source of wisdom and knowledge (Is. 11:2; Acts 6:3, 10; 1 Cor. 2:4, 13; 12:8), and fortunately the heavenly Father gives the Spirit to those who ask Him (Luke 11:13).

In the previous section, Paul mentions the wisdom God gives to understand His grace (Eph. 1:8); here, he prays for God to give the members of the church the Spirit of "wisdom and revelation" (v. 17). The Christian's understanding of the grace of God is not simply the result of the wisdom given to him or her; it is gained through it being revealed by God. With wisdom and revelation, Christians may have a deeper knowledge of God (v. 17). Every believer needs to grow in his or her knowledge of God and His grace. This knowledge is specifically based on a deep commitment to Him and His will for us. The more we understand God and His grace, the stronger we become in Him.

The purpose of asking for the Spirit of wisdom is so that Christians may know three things: First, Christians may know the hope of God's calling (v. 18). Paul does not explicitly explain what he means by hope. In this epistle, he simply mentions that there is "one hope" (4:4), which is only for those who are in Christ (2:12). From the content of the previous section, we know that this is the hope of salvation. Second, Christians may know the riches of God's glorious inheritance among His people ("the saints," "holy people"; 1:18). This is the inheritance mentioned twice in the previous section (vv. 11, 14). Believers, who are the portion or inheritance that on this earth belongs to God, receive the riches of the inheritance (v. 18) from the riches of His grace (v. 7). Third, Christians may know the greatness of God's power for them (v. 19). This is the same power that raised Christ from the dead. After dying and returning to life, Christ was seated at the right hand of the Father in the heavenly places, exalted above all other rulers, powers, and domains (v. 21). It is this power of God that enables the followers of Christ to stand firm against the spiritual powers of darkness that seek to overcome them (see 6:10–13).

In this prayer, Paul introduces a new concept to his audience: Christ is the head of the church, which is His body (1:22–23). He is the head because salvation is made possible in Him. The church, Christ's body, is "the fullness" of the One who fills all things in every way (v. 23). The word *plērōma* ("fullness," "completeness") appears twelve times in the Pauline Epistles, but only in Ephesians and Colossians is it used to describe the fullness of Christ or of God (Eph. 1:23; 3:19; 4:13; Col. 1:19; 2:9). Despite this verbal parallel, there is a thematic difference between the two epistles in the use of the word. In Ephesians, the fullness of Christ or of God fills the church (Eph. 1:23; 3:19; 4:13). In Colossians, the fullness of God already dwells in Christ (Col. 1:19; 2:9). As noted earlier, Paul's emphasis in Colossians is on Christ, who reigns supreme over the cosmos (Christology). Paul's goal in Ephesians, however, is to underline the significant role the church plays in God's plan to redeem humanity (ecclesiology). Although Christ reigns over all the cosmos, it is the church and the church alone that is described as being His body (Eph. 1:22–23), which He rules and fills with all of His fullness. The fullness of Christ dwells in the church in the sense that He fills it with His Spirit, grace, and gifts.

Therefore, it is in the church that all of the saving benefits of Christ's work are effective. He is the sovereign Lord over both the church and the cosmos (1:10).

2:1–10. From Death to Life. In his prayer in the previous section, Paul asked that his audience might receive the Spirit of wisdom to know the power of God that raised Jesus from the dead (Eph. 1:20). Here, Paul emphasizes that the same power had made those who were once dead in trespasses and sins alive with Christ (2:1, 5). His arguments in this section can be divided into three parts: (1) dead in sin (vv. 1–3); (2) alive in Christ (vv. 4–7); and (3) the way of salvation (vv. 8–10). Parts 1 and 2 have parallels and contrasts; they both make the point that we were dead in sins (vv. 1, 5) and juxtapose being dead in sins with being alive in Christ. For Paul, life is a journey and we walk either in the way of Christ and life or in the way of sin and death (see below, "Walking in Christ as a Way of Life").

It is important to realize that in vv. 1–3, Paul is not merely describing the excessive sinful behavior of some excessively immoral pagans but is portraying the natural condition of all of humanity outside of Christ. It is a condition in which we all once lived (v. 3). The plural reference to sins provides a comprehensive account of the sinful behavior of humans. The word *paraptōma* ("trespasses," "transgressions") refers to a false step—a deliberate crossing of a known boundary. The word *hamartia* ("sins"), however, describes any action that falls short of a standard of right behavior. Together, these words encompass both the rebellious nature of human sin as well as the ways in which even the best of human behavior falls short of God's ideal. In this state of alienation from God and under the influence of evil powers, humanity is enslaved to the desires and lusts of the flesh and the mind (v. 3). As a consequence of our condition, Paul says we are by nature children of wrath, that is, we deserve God's divine judgment. The solution to this predicament is Christ, who, through His death on the cross, created a new way of life for believers.

After describing the hopelessness of being dead in sins (Eph. 2:1–3), Paul turns his attention to being alive in Christ (vv. 4–7). This passage contrasts two attitudes: wrath (v. 3) versus love and mercy (v. 4). God's love is emphasized using the noun *agapē* and the verb *agapaō* (v. 4). God loved us before we could love Him (cf. Rom. 5:8) and demonstrated it by giving His Son to die for us. This is what Paul calls grace (Eph. 2:5; cf. 1:6–7; 2:7–8). It is through this grace that God made us alive with Christ, even when we were dead in our trespasses and sins (v. 5). In other words, He did not wait for us to be sinless to save us (cf. Rom. 8:1–2). It was in our sinful condition that God granted us forgiveness. This is saving grace by faith in Christ (Eph. 2:8).

Walking in Christ as a Way of Life

The believers had once lived in sin (vv. 1–2). The verb used here, *peripateō* ("to walk," "conduct oneself"; v. 2), carries the connotation of walking on a certain path in a certain direction.

1. The Way of Life. Figuratively, this verb describes the Christian way of life. Paul contrasts walking in trespasses and sins (vv. 1–2) with walking in good works in Christ (v. 10). In chapter 4, he contrasts walking in God's calling (4:1) with walking in the ways of the Gentiles (v. 17). Then, in chapter 5, he repeatedly encourages Christians to walk (i.e., live) in "love" (5:2), "as children of light" (v. 8), and vigilantly (v. 15). Paul uses the same present imperative verb *peripateite* ("walk," "live") three times to call believers to remain in the way of life while contrasting the two ways of life. Jesus did the same. When He said to enter via "the narrow gate" (Matt. 7:13), He also highlighted the difference between the two ways: the broad way leads to destruction (Matt. 7:13) and the narrow way to life (Matt. 7:14). There are only two options, and we are encouraged to choose life.

2. The Way of Sin. Paul clarifies what it means to walk in trespasses and sins. Walking in sins means walking in the ways of the world (Eph. 2:2). The course or way of this world is driven by the lusts, evil desires, and cravings of the flesh (v. 3; cf. 1 John 2:16). Walking or living in sins also means to follow the ruler or prince of the kingdom or power of the air (Eph. 2:2). He is the spirit who works in those characterized by disobedience (lit. "sons of disobedience"; v. 2). There are two spirits: the Holy Spirit with whom we are sealed when we believe in Jesus (1:13; cf. 4:30) and who is the source of wisdom and revelation that allows believers to know God (1:17), and the spirit who works for disobedience (2:2)—the spirit who comes from the prince of the power of the air (v. 2). This prince appears to be the chief commander of all the evil spirits who work in the hearts of fallen humans to encourage the fulfillment of the lusts of the flesh.

3. The Two Ways in the Cosmic Conflict. Toward the end of Ephesians, Paul reemphasizes that the struggle of the Christians is against evil supernatural powers (6:12). This statement follows Paul's warning to the Christians to be aware of the tricks of the *diabolos* ("devil"). Thus, the devil is the prince of the evil spirits. This belief is in line with the apocalyptic narrative that states that the devil, or Satan, was cast out from heaven with a group of his supporting angels (Rev. 12:7–9). Paul wanted his audience to see the two ways of life in the context of the Great Controversy between good and evil, between Christ and Satan, between the Holy Spirit and the evil spirit. Christians are not controlled by the world or by the evil powers of the present age but are bound to heaven, waiting for the coming of Christ. They do not live according to the way of this world.

In this passage, three compound verbs with the prefix *syn* ("together with") appear: *synezōopoiēsen* ("He made alive together with"; v. 5), *synēgeiren* ("He raised up together with"; v. 6), and *synekathisen* ("he seated together with"; v. 6). God is the subject of the actions and Christ is the one we join (vv. 5–6). The idea is that without Christ we would not be made alive, would not be raised from our death in sins, and would not sit in heavenly places. Therefore, Christ is the guarantee, the manifestation, the executor, and the benefactor of God's grace (cf. Eph. 1:20; Rev. 3:21).

Ephesians continues, after contrasting death with life and destruction with salvation, by presenting the divine grace of salvation (Eph. 2:8–10), clarifying what it is and what it is not. First, it is by grace through faith, and not of ourselves (v. 8); and second, it is the gift of God and not of our works (v. 9). We are not the source of our salvation, and neither do we attain it through our good behavior. Instead, it is by God's grace alone; it is the gift of God. It comes from God's grace through faith. The role of faith should not be misunderstood. Our faith is not the source of our salvation—it is a divine gift that enables us to positively respond to the grace of God. This certainly excludes all boasting.

Notice that in Ephesians 2:1–10, Paul uses the active voice when speaking of how it is God or Christ who "made us alive" (v. 5), showed us great love (v. 4), "raised us up" (v. 6), and had us sit with Him (v. 6), that He "might show" His grace (v. 7). On the other hand, when salvation is associated with humans, the apostle uses the passive voice: "You have been saved" (vv. 5, 8). This indicates that God has the active role in salvation and that we receive it by faith. Salvation is possible because of the works of God and not because of our works. Paul uses the word *ergon* ("work," "deed," "action") twice in seemingly contradictory ways. On the one hand, he argues that salvation is not by ("from," "of") works (v. 9), but we are created for good works (v. 10). Although the verb "to create" could refer to the creation of human beings (Gen. 2:7), here the emphasis is on the new creation in Christ. This concept is present in the phrase "created in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:10). The phrase "in Christ," "in Christ Jesus," or "in Him" has been used many times thus far in this epistle to refer to what God has done in or through Christ for the salvation of humanity (1:3, 4, 7, 10, 11, 12, 13, 20; 2:5, 6, 7).

Therefore, the phrase "created in Christ . . . good works" refers to being saved in Christ for good works. It does not mean we do good works in order to be saved but because Christ has already saved us. Salvation comes first by God's grace through faith, and we who are saved in Christ will do good works as a response of love for what God has done for us (Gal. 5:6). Works are not the means of salvation but are the fruit of the Christian life. We are not saved by our good works (Eph. 2:9), but to do good works (v. 10). In fact, it is only those who are part of the new creation in Christ who are able to truly do good works (Rom. 8:3–4, 7–8; 2 Cor. 5:17). We are God's *poiēma* (Eph. 2:10), a term Paul uses to refer to the works of God at Creation (Rom. 1:20) and to His work in our salvation.

Therefore, just as creation is fully the work of God, so also is the salvation of human beings.

Paul closes this section by describing the way of the Christian life: walking or living in good works (Eph. 2:10). The verb *peripateō* ("to walk," "to conduct oneself") is used at the beginning (v. 2) and the end (v. 10) of the passage. Believers formerly walked or lived in sins and trespasses according to the way of the world (v. 2). After being saved by God in Christ, they walk or live in the way of good works, which are the fruit of our salvation, not the means.

2:11–22. One in Christ. While Ephesians 2:1–10 presents the vertical reconciliation between repentant sinners and God through Christ Jesus, this section emphasizes the horizontal reconciliation between the Jews and the Gentiles through Christ. Reconciliation with God should naturally be followed by reconciliation with fellow human beings. In vv. 1–10, Paul contrasts the way Christians lived before accepting Christ with their way of life after, and in vv. 11–22 he compares the relationship between Jews and Gentiles before and after they accepted Jesus. Notice the use of adverb of time *pote* ("used to," "once," "formerly," "previously") in vv. 2, 3, 11, and 13. His point is that Christ can transform our lives if we respond to God's grace by placing our faith in Christ.

The use of the present imperative "remember" in v. 11 indicates that Paul wanted his Gentile Christian audience to continuously remember their former and present lives and how God in Christ stepped in, bringing a dramatic change to their ways of life. He urged them to remember that they had once been (v. 11) Gentiles in the flesh, they had been referred to as uncircumcised, and that they had been separate from Christ (vv. 11–12). The Jews considered themselves the people God would save based on the covenant of circumcision. For them, the uncircumcised Gentiles had no hope; they could not enjoy the covenant promises. Gentiles were excluded from citizenship in Israel (v. 12), but God had plans for the Gentiles. God treated the house of Israel and strangers alike even in the OT (e.g., Lev. 17:8, 10, 13; 19:34). However, many Jews had mistakenly concluded that God's promises and covenant were exclusively for them. Instead, God had acted to provide a way of salvation for the Gentiles exclusively through Christ: by believing in Him (Eph. 2:13–19).

In vv. 13–19, Paul describes the condition of Gentile believers who were in Christ: They had been brought near (had access to God) by the blood of Christ, and both they and the Jews had been made one people (v. 15). The wall that had separated the two groups had been broken (v. 14) and there was no more enmity or hostility (vv. 15–16). They had access to the Father (v. 18) and were citizens and members of God's household (v. 19).

Gentiles and Jews alike are saved only through Christ. Paul always refers to Jews and Gentiles as "both" or "the two" in the context of being one in Christ (vv. 14–16, 18). This is how he explained to his audience that the church is one body. Through Christ, the faith of Israel is to reach the Gentile world; it has been universalized. Spread throughout the epistle is this emphasis on the oneness of the church as the body of Christ: "one body" (2:16; 4:4), "one Spirit" (2:18; 4:4), "one" human (2:15), "one hope" (4:4), "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (4:5), "one God and Father" (4:6), and "one flesh" (5:31). The unity of the church is very dear to Jesus (John 17:21). At the center of this unity is Jesus Himself, who keeps the church together through the one message of salvation entrusted to it, the work of the Spirit, the sacrament of baptism, a new way of life for believers, and a common hope.

Christ's death brought the animosity between Jews and Gentiles to an end, cultivating peace through His blood (Eph. 2:13–15; cf. Rom. 5:1). The death of Jesus is described as having broken the wall of separation. This image is probably taken from the structure of the Jerusalem temple before its destruction in A.D. 70. It was forbidden for Gentiles to go further than the outer court of the temple (called the Court of the Gentiles), while the Jews could go into the inner court. Separating these two sections of the temple was a balustrade, a lattice fence made of stone, which, according to the Jewish historian Josephus, stood nearly six feet tall (1.8 m). Posted at various intervals along the wall were signs written in Greek and Latin warning Gentiles not to proceed further on pain of death. This literal wall symbolized the exclusiveness of salvation that was removed by Christ. The Gentiles who were once held far off had been brought near to God and could now enjoy salvation through Christ, the Messiah (2:13).

On account of what Christ had accomplished for humanity, Gentiles had become part of the household of God—the church (Eph. 2:19). In context, the phrase regarding members of God's household is parallel with the phrase

"fellow citizens" (v. 19)—God's people. Gentile Christians had become a part of the household of God's people. The term *hagios* (lit. "holy ones"; v. 19) itself refers to the followers of Christ (1:1; cf. 4:12). In the NT, Christians gathered for worship and fellowship in the homes of their fellow believers. Paul refers to these congregations and the individuals who hosted them throughout his letters. We learn, for example, about the "the household of Aristobulus" (Rom. 16:10), "the household of Narcissus" (Rom. 16:11), and the church in the house of Philemon (Philem. 1:1–2). We find cases in which a person was baptized along with his or her household, constituting a gathered group of believers in that particular house (e.g., Lydia and her household [Acts 16:15], "the household of Stephanas" [1 Cor. 1:16], the keeper of the prison in Philippi [Acts 16:31–34]). All believers are members of God's household (cf. Eph. 2:19; 1 Tim. 3:15). The church is God's, and Christ is its head. The church in Ephesus belonged neither to a Jewish nor a Gentile family but to God alone (Gal. 3:26–28). It is this concept of oneness in Christ that is reinforced by the reference to God's "household" (Eph. 2:19).

Paul uses a building metaphor to describe the church as the household of God (vv. 20–22). Its foundation is "the apostles and prophets" (v. 20), a phrase that is used again in Ephesians 3:5 in the context of the revelation that those making up the foundation had received from the Holy Spirit concerning Christ's work of salvation (vv. 3–5). This salvific message was preserved by the apostles and prophets in the Scriptures (cf. Rom. 1:2; 2 Pet. 1:20, 21). The apostolic teachings were indeed the foundation of the church and Christ the chief cornerstone, but the ultimate foundation of the church is Jesus Christ Himself (1 Cor. 3:11). The function of the apostles and the prophets was to lay the foundation. Paul presents Jesus as "the chief cornerstone" of the household of God (Eph. 2:20; cf. Matt. 21:42; Mark 12:10; Luke 20:17; Acts 4:11; 1 Pet. 2:6–7), because without that stone the foundation is not strong enough to support the building. In fact, He is the chief cornerstone that joins the whole building together (Eph. 2:21–22). In other words, in the absence of Christ, there can be no church. Thus far, three metaphors have been used to represent the church: the body of Christ (1:23), the household of God (2:19), and a holy temple or a dwelling place where God lives by the Spirit (cf. 2:21; 1 Cor. 3:9–17; 6:14–20; 1 Pet. 2:4–8). In the first two metaphors, Christ has the most important role: the head of the body and the chief cornerstone of the building. Just as there is no body without the head, so also is there no house without the foundation. Near the end of the letter, Paul also describes the church as being the bride of Christ (Eph. 5:23–27) and as an army combating evil (6:10–20).

Abolishing the Law of Commandments

The reference to the law that Paul said had been abolished or set aside (Eph. 2:15) does not mean that the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:1–17; Deut. 5:6–21) were done away with at the cross, as some have claimed. That can hardly be the case when, throughout his epistles, Paul calls on the followers of Jesus to live their lives in accordance with the Moral Law given on Mount Sinai (Ex. 20:1–17; Deut. 5:6–21). Out of gratitude for the salvation already given to them in Jesus, Christians are to honor their parents (cf. Eph. 6:1–3; Col. 3:20), avoid committing adultery (cf. Eph. 4:17–24; 5:3–5, 21–33; Rom. 13:9), refrain from stealing (cf. Eph. 4:28; Rom. 13:9; 1 Cor. 6:10), avoid bearing false witness (cf. Eph. 4:25; Rom. 13:9), and abstain from coveting (Eph. 5:5; Rom. 13:9; 1 Cor. 6:10; Col. 3:5).

The law of commandments Paul was discussing refers primarily to the ceremonial laws of the OT that found their fulfillment in Christ and were consequently brought to an end. It could also include the Pharisaical way in which the whole system of OT law had been used to create a complex set of rules and regulations—human traditions—that resulted in the erection of a serious barrier between Jews and Gentiles. It would then be that specific misuse of God's law and its ceremonial components that Christ brought to an end in His flesh, that is, through His life and death (cf. Matt. 5:17–19; Rom. 7:12, 14).

This section ends with two uses of the relative pronoun (2:21–22), introducing a parallel as follows:

v. 21	v. 22
A in whom/ him [the Cornerstone]	**A** in whom/ him [the Cornerstone]
B the whole building	**B** you also/ too
C fitted/ joined together	**C** are being built together
B′ Grows/rises into a holy temple	**B′** a dwelling for God
A′ in the Lord	**A′** in the/by his Spirit

These parallels suggest that the whole building united together in the Cornerstone is the church, the people of God. The uniting together of the people of God makes the church a holy temple—the place where God dwells. The chiastic structure of v. 21 suggests that the whole building (B) is a holy temple (B′), and the structure of v. 22 indicates that each church member (B) is a place for God to dwell (B′). The A and A′ of both verses suggest that the building may be united together only in Christ and the Spirit. Line C, the center of the structure, reemphasizes the result of abiding in Christ: the unity of the people of God. This unity is described by two verbs with the prepositional prefix *syn* ("together"): *synarmologoumenē* ("being joined together") and *synoikodomeisthe* ("be built together"). In both the previous section (Eph. 2:1–10) and here in vv. 20–22, Paul uses this kind of verb multiple times to emphasize the unity between believers and Christ (vv. 6–7).

3:1–13. Paul's Ministry to the Gentiles. This section begins with a prepositional phrase, "for this reason" (v. 1), linking this passage to the preceding one. After emphasizing that the Jews and the Gentiles had become one body in Christ Jesus, Paul describes himself as the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of the Gentiles (v. 1; cf. Philem. 1:1, 9), to whom the mystery of Christ had been revealed—a mystery that specifically refers to the inclusion of the Gentiles in the inheritance of salvation in Christ (Eph. 3:6). The statement "for this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus" (v. 1) lacks a verb. Perhaps the best solution would be to find the verb in v. 13, for after a long digression, Paul returns to what he had wanted to say in v. 1: as a prisoner of Christ, it was his wish that his troubles not discourage them or cause them to lose heart. The fact that he was the prisoner of Christ had something to do with encouraging his audience not to lose heart. In describing himself as a "prisoner of Christ" (v. 1), Paul refuses to see himself as a prisoner of Rome. The only reason he was imprisoned was because it was in some way part of God's plan. Later in his letter, Paul states that he was the "prisoner" of the Lord (Eph. 4:1; cf. Philem. 1:9). Paul maintained this same mentality even during his second Roman imprisonment, when he knew his death was imminent (2 Tim. 1:8). Being a servant of the Lord, he was confident that no matter what happened to him, it took place in the Lord—under the Lord's control. Thus, the Christians in Ephesus did not need to lose heart (Eph. 3:13).

During this imprisonment, Paul continued to be an ambassador of the gospel (6:20), for what had been considered an affliction had turned out to be for the advancement of the gospel message (Phil. 1:12). The whole palace guard and others had been introduced to Christ (Phil. 1:13), and his imprisonment had encouraged others to preach the gospel even more boldly (Phil. 1:14). The Lord turned what was intended for evil into a blessing for others (cf. Gen. 50:20). For this reason, Paul beseeches his fellow Christians not to be discouraged.

In this section, Paul also speaks of "the mystery," a term he introduced in Ephesians 1:9. Of the six uses in the Greek of the word *mystērion* ("mystery") in this epistle, three appear in this section (Eph. 3:3–4, 9). It is the mystery of Christ made known to Paul by revelation. Their union with Christ had made Jews and Gentiles fellow heirs, fellow members of the body, and fellow recipients of God's promise (v. 6). Thus far, Paul had emphasized eight things in which the Jews and the Gentiles were sharers in Christ. The first three are what both groups had experienced together with Christ: they were made alive together, raised up together, seated together (2:5–6). The next two indicate that they had been joined together and built together in Christ (vv. 21–22). The last three describe what they shared together in Christ: the status of being fellow heirs, fellow members of the body, and fellow recipients of God's promise (3:6). Therefore, the essence or nucleus of the mystery is Christ Himself.

It seems Paul uses two interchangeable terms to describe the mystery: unfathomable or incalculable riches of Christ (v. 8) and the manifold wisdom of God (v. 10). The phrase "riches of Christ" (v. 8) refers to all the gifts and benefits of salvation that God has made available to us through Christ. Obviously, the ultimate gift, the full richness, is Christ Himself. In the Septuagint, the adjective *anexichniastos* ("untraceable," "unsearchable," "incalculable") is used only to describe things God does (Job 5:9; 9:10). In the NT, Paul is the only author that uses this term, and he uses it consistently to describe the wisdom of God (Eph. 3:8; Rom. 11:33). The work of salvation through Christ reveals the wisdom of God, and we will never fully grasp its depth.

Looking back to his past, Paul describes himself as less than the least of all the saints (i.e., God's people; v. 8) and as "the least of the apostles" (1 Cor. 15:9). Jesus said that anyone who wants to be the greatest must be the least, the one who serves (Luke 22:26). Paul contrasts his self-described status as less than the least of the saints (Eph. 3:8) with the incalculable riches of Christ in an attempt to highlight that it was because of God's grace in Christ Jesus that he had been saved and called to be a minister of the gospel (vv. 6–7). Although the wisdom of God is incomprehensible, it had been revealed to Paul and he shared it with the church through his writings.

The task Paul was performing may be described as an "administration" or "dispensation." The Greek term *oikonomia* ("management of a household, task, work, responsibility") appears twice in this section: the *oikonomia* of God's grace (v. 2) and the *oikonomia* of the mystery (v. 9). This word also means "stewardship" (Luke 16:2–4), the management of a property entrusted to someone. The administrator is called an *oikonomos* ("manager," "steward," "treasurer"; Luke 12:42; 16:1, 3, 8). Paul says that he and his coworkers had been entrusted with "the mysteries" of God (1 Cor. 4:1). These mysteries had been hidden for ages before being revealed through Christ (Eph. 3:9). Paul not only enjoyed knowing "the mystery of Christ" (v. 4) but also the blessings of the mystery itself—he had been saved (vv. 7–8). He, as a good administrator of what he had received and enjoyed, was responsible for proclaiming it to all, particularly to the Gentiles. The mystery is, in fact, the gospel message of salvation in Christ.

This mystery was to be made known by the church to the rulers and authorities (v. 10), who were to a large extent influenced by the unseen wicked supernatural powers in the heavenly realms that opposed the church (6:12). The church is involved in a cosmic conflict between Christ and Satan. The revelation of the grace of God, the proclamation of the gospel, and the positive response of an individual to the grace of God are all attacks against evil powers. The book of Revelation describes how the church is involved in the controversy through the proclamation of the three angels' message to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people (Rev. 14:6). This implies the entrusting of "the mystery of Christ" (Eph. 3:4) not only to the apostles and the prophets but also to the church at large. All of us are stewards of the grace of God. The Godhead is involved in this task, for the mystery is made known by God the Father (3:2–3) through the Holy Spirit (v. 5) and is accomplished in Christ Jesus (v. 11). Paul's goal in this section was to encourage the Christians in Ephesus not to lose heart because of his tribulations (3:13). His imprisonment was a chapter in the cosmic conflict, and it was being used by the Lord for His own glory. Therefore, he encourages Christians to see tribulations from heaven's perspective.

3:14–21. Prayer for the Church. Appearing in the middle of this epistle is another prayer introduced by the phrase "for this reason" (v. 14), flowing from Paul's concern for the Ephesians not to lose heart. It is offered to the Father (cf. Matt. 6:9) in the name of Jesus Christ as Mediator on behalf of the church, which is a part of God's family in heaven and on earth. The Spirit is mentioned as being the church's source of power (Eph. 3:16). After Paul's petitions, the prayer closes with an acknowledgment of the sovereignty of God and His glory (3:20–21; cf. Matt. 6:13).

There are three petitions in this prayer, each introduced by the conjunction *hina* ("that," "in order that"): (1) God would strengthen the believers' inner life through the power of the Spirit (Eph. 3:16), so that Christ would dwell in their hearts (v. 17); (2) they could comprehend the love of God that surpasses understanding (v. 18); and (3) they would be filled with the fullness of God (v. 19). These three requests are deeply interrelated. Paul was praying that believers be spiritually strengthened through the Spirit, who had revealed the mystery of God's grace to the prophets and the apostles. Paul wanted Christ to dwell in their hearts and be the center of their lives, for this would enable them to comprehend the love of God. Gaining knowledge of God's love means participating in His saving power;

it is not only an intellectual apprehension of doctrinal knowledge. This type of divine knowledge brings us close to God.

With the Spirit in our hearts and an understanding of the love of God, we will be filled with the fullness of God (3:19), which most likely refers to the constant presence of God in the Christian life. This presence is mediated through Christ and made effective through the Spirit, and it grants believers the ability to reflect and proclaim the divine love that surpasses all knowledge.

Filled with the Spirit and with Jesus abiding in their hearts, Christians will grow into the completeness of God's love. Love is important in this intercessory prayer. The noun is used twice (vv. 17, 19), and Paul mentions the width, length, depth, and height of the concept between those two appearances (v. 18). This is the fullness of God that surpasses understanding. Paul emphasizes love throughout the epistle, writing on the love of Christ for the church (2:4; 5:25), the love among the saints (1:15), and the love between husband and wife (5:25, 28, 33). It is because of this *agape* ("love") of Christ that the church as a whole is united vertically with God and its members united horizontally with one another.

In the prayer, love is also presented as the soil and foundation of the Christian life; Paul discusses being grounded or established and rooted in love (3:17). The roots of the Christian experience are to dwell deep in the abundant love of God. Those whose lives are rooted in Christ's love will not only be able to endure the scorching rays of the sun (Matt. 13:6, 21; Mark 4:6, 17; Luke 8:13) but will also bear the fruit of the Spirit, for "the fruit of the Spirit is love" (Gal. 5:22). Love is also the foundation on which the Christian life is to be built. The verb Paul uses here is the same one Jesus used to describe the wise builder who built his house on bedrock (Matt. 7:25). Clearly, the only Christian journey that will withstand the storms and trials of life is the one grounded in the love of Jesus. Jesus is the rock of our faith (1 Cor. 10:4), and it is on that Rock that the church is built (Matt. 16:18).

4:1—6:20

Instructions to the Church in the World

Following these instructions on the concept of salvation and the nature of the church, Paul moves to specific instructions for the Christian life. These include topics such as the unity and the diversity of the church (Eph. 4:1–16), characteristics of the new person in Christ (4:17–32), walking in the light (5:1–21), manifestations of love (5:22–33), and Christian warfare (6:10–20).

4:1–16. The Unity and the Diversity of the Church. While on the one hand the church is united in Christ (vv. 1–6), on the other it is rich with the diversity of spiritual gifts (vv. 7–13). The church is strongly established and grows in Christ through both its unity and diversity (vv. 14–16). Paul introduces his exhortation with a pastoral appeal for Christians to walk or live a life worthy of their calling (v. 1). The appeal is grounded in their election and is a call to a holy life (1:4). Their way of life should correspond to the divine intention for them. Paul concentrates on the way believers should relate to each other as an introduction to his emphasis on the unity of the church. He urges them to be gentle, patiently "bearing with one another in love" (4:2). It is a call for believers to be kind, patient, and supportive of each other. They are to seek the unity of the Spirit in a "bond of peace" (v. 3), which is the result of the work of the Spirit that manifests itself in the church as peace and harmony. "The unity of the Spirit" (v. 3) could mean the unity in or by the Spirit. For Paul, there is one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father of all (vv. 4–6). The basis of the unity of the church is found in the unity of the Godhead.

Using the body as a metaphor for the church, Paul identifies church members as body parts, Christ as the head, and the gifted individuals identified in v. 11 as joints or ligaments that help unite the body (see particularly vv. 15–16; cf. Col. 2:18–19). He highlights that the unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God (Eph. 4:13) is the fundamental purpose for all the spiritual gifts. By one Spirit different gifts are bestowed to edify the one church, in order for it to be united in its knowledge of Christ. The unity of the church was of utmost importance to Jesus (cf. John 17:3, 21), and Paul offers a way to fulfill Jesus's prayer for the church. Before listing the different gifts, Paul emphasizes the foremost gift of God: His grace that was given as Christ apportioned or measured it to the Ephesians (Eph. 4:7). God's grace is given in the person of Jesus Christ, who Himself is the supreme gift. It is only by accepting the gift of Christ that a believer may receive spiritual gifts. The Spirit gave some the gifts required for apostleship, some those for prophesying, some those for evangelism, and some the gifts for pastoring and teaching (v. 11). Since the spiritual gifts stated here vary with those found in Romans 12:4–8 and

1 Corinthians 12:4–11, 27–30, each of these lists appears to offer examples of possible gifts rather than exhaustive lists.

The term *apostolos* ("apostle") literally refers to someone who is sent out with a message. In the NT, this term is used in two distinctive ways: First, it is used in a formal manner to refer solely to the twelve disciples Jesus appointed as His representatives and to whom He gave the authority to act in His name in founding the church (Luke 9:2, 10; cf. 17:5; 22:14; Acts 1:26; 2:37, 43; 4:33, 36; 5:12, 18, 29, 34, 40; 6:6). Although Paul was not originally a part of the Twelve, the risen Lord commissioned him with the same divine authority when He appeared to him on the Damascus road (e.g., 1 Cor. 1:1; 15:8). James, the brother of the Lord, also seems to have been included in this group, since the risen Christ appeared to him as well (1 Cor. 15:7; Gal. 1:19). Second, the word "apostle" is used by Paul to describe other believers whom he saw as "messengers" or "representatives" of the churches (2 Cor. 8:23; cf. Phil. 2:25). This group includes individuals such as Titus, Epaphroditus, and others who served the church as messengers of the gospel and who were tasked in establishing churches and encouraging believers in the faith (Acts 13:1–3; cf. 14:4, 14; 15:22, 27). In these cases, an apostle was like a missionary or a church planter. The different ways the word "apostle" is used in the NT indicate that while God sends out some individuals within the church to proclaim the message of salvation as gospel missionaries, they are not "apostles" in the technical sense of the word.

The gift of prophecy is the supernatural way in which God speaks to His people at specific times and for a particular purpose through the mouths of His prophets. This gift is not limited to the times during which the Bible was written; it is a permanent gift in the church. In the NT, there are references to prophets from Jerusalem and to others such as Agabus (Acts 11:27, 28; cf. 21:10), a prophet in Crete (Titus 1:12), some prophets in Antioch (Acts 13:1), and the four daughters of Philip (Acts 21:8, 9). In the end time, the gift of prophecy will also play a very important role. In fact, it is one the characteristics of the end-time remnant (Rev. 12:17; cf. 19:10).

The gift of evangelism refers to the proclamation of the gospel. This gift is obvious in the ministry of Philip, who was one of the Seven (Acts 6:5; 21:8). The role of the evangelist is related to preaching the word of God. The verb "to preach" appears frequently in descriptions of Philip's ministry with words such as *kēryssō* ("to proclaim," "make known," "preach"; Acts 8:5) and *euangelizō* ("to preach the good news"; Acts 8:12, 25, 35, 40). Paul uses one definite article for both pastors and teachers (Eph. 4:11), joining the two functions as one. This suggests that pastoring and teaching are two inseparable roles. A person with the gift of pastoring is usually talented in the realm of teaching as well. One task of pastoral work is to keep the believers from false teachings by instructing them in the truth (Acts 20:28–30).

The long sentence of Ephesians 4:11–16 presents the different purposes of the spiritual gifts. First, it is stated that the purpose of the gifts is for (Gr. *pros*) the equipping of the saints (God's people) for (Gr. *eis*) the work of serving in ministry as well as for (Gr. *eis*) the edifying or building up of the body of Christ (Eph. 4:12). Paul uses two different prepositions to describe the purpose: *pros* ("toward," "for the purpose of") and *eis* ("into," "to"). The first preposition introduces the basic purpose, the equipping of God's people, while the second preposition indicates what is expected from those so equipped: to serve in the work of ministry for the edifying or building up of the body of Christ. The pastor is to train church members so that they are prepared to serve in ministry. Spiritual gifts are not for personal interest or benefit but are for the benefit of the body of Christ. Consequently, every member of the body should be ready to serve.

The preposition "until" or "till" suggests that the work of equipping should be an unceasing effort made by the church until it attains unity of faith and has grown into the fullness of Christ (v. 13). The members of the church are to continuously help one another grow spiritually and in the knowledge of the Lord. In fact, this is the end result of the utilization of the gifts: to grow in all things or every respect into the Head, which is Christ (v. 15). In this section, Paul uses the adjective "all," or "every," twice. He emphasizes first that *all* believers will grow into the fullness of Christ (v. 13) and second that they would grow in *all* or *every* way into Christ (v. 15). Therefore, the spiritual gifts are given to equip the members of the church for the work of ministry and the fortification of the body of Christ (v. 16; cf. Joel 2:28–31).

4:17–32. Do Not Live as Gentiles. This section contrasts a Gentile pattern of life (Eph. 4:17–19, 22) with the Christ-inspired pattern (vv. 20–21, 23–32). The Gentiles' way of life was a result of their ignorance of the truth. Their way revealed a darkened understanding of God, a blindness regarding Him, and alienation from Him (v. 18). This was the condition of Gentile Christians before they came to Christ. From this point onward, they were expected to live a holy life (v. 24), to speak the truth, and to do good things (vv. 25–29).

Using the imagery of a change of clothing, Paul exhorts believers to put off (v. 22) the old pattern of life and put on (v. 24) the new Christ-inspired one (cf. Rom. 6:1–14; 13:12; Col. 3:9–14). The contrast is between the old person living a corrupt life (Eph. 4:22) and the new person re-created in true righteousness and holiness (v. 24) that reflects the image of God. Thus, the purpose of redemption and salvation is the restoration of God's image in fallen humanity. It is important to note that Paul's counsel suggests that this transformation does not happen instantly but is a process in which believers reflect God's character more and more as they continue to learn (v. 21).

Since the Holy Spirit is the One who transforms a person, Paul admonishes the Christians not to grieve the Holy Spirit of God (v. 30). When the Spirit is allowed to work in the heart, believers utilize their spiritual gifts to build up the church and to produce the fruit of the Spirit in their own lives. When such transformation does not happen, the Spirit is grieved (*lypeō*, "to become sad," "to offend," "to insult"). Paul stresses the importance of the Spirit in the Christian life by mentioning one of His important functions: the sealing of believers for the day of redemption (v. 30). This sealing means that they already belong to the Lord, and this will be clearly manifested in the day when their redemption will be consummated: at the Second Coming of Christ (v. 4).

Ephesians 4 presents the active participation of the Triune God in equipping believers with the spiritual gifts and the fruit of the Spirit. Paul mentions "one Spirit" (v. 4), "one Lord" (v. 5), and "one God" (v. 6), and then he continues to emphasize God as "Father" (v. 6), Christ as "the Son of God" (v. 13), and the Spirit as "the Holy Spirit of God" (v. 30). This is a unique presentation of the Godhead as the Members are listed twice in a chiastic structure: one Spirit—one Lord—one God—the Father—the Son of God—the Holy Spirit of God. This is the only place in the epistle where the titles "the Son of God" and "the Holy Spirit of God" are found. In fact, this is the only place in the whole Bible where the latter title is used. Within the church, two of the functions of the Godhead are to equip believers with spiritual gifts and to help them produce the fruits of the Spirit in their own lives.

5:1–21. Walk in Love as Children of Light. In the previous section, Paul presents the contrasting realities of the "old" and the "new" person in Christ. Here, he presents another pair of contrasting realities: walking or living in the darkness versus walking or living in the light (5:8; see "Walking in Christ as a Way of Life," p. 1712). In the NT, darkness is associated with dwelling outside God's kingdom (Matt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30), the world (John 12:46), death (Luke 1:79; John 1:4, 5; 8:12), the works of Satan (Luke 22:53; Acts 26:18), and sins and evil deeds (John 3:19). However, light is associated with Christ and life (John 1:4; 8:12), the gospel and the truth (Acts 26:23; 2 Cor. 4:4; 2 Tim. 1:10), and good works (Matt. 5:16).

As a result of the work of the Spirit, believers are called to be followers or imitators of God and to walk or live as Christ did (Eph. 5:1–2). In imitating Christ, we also imitate God, who forgave us in Christ (4:32). Christ is the supreme example of love because He gave Himself as a sacrifice that was acceptable to the Father, and therefore Christ made us acceptable in Himself (see Lev. 1:9). This is atonement through sacrifice as a manifestation of divine love. We imitate Christ when we walk in love, a topic that will be further developed later in the epistle (Eph. 5:25, 28, 33; 6:24). Of all the deeds of darkness, Paul emphasizes three that should not even be mentioned among the saints: *porneia* (any type of illegitimate sexual acts, including fornication), *akatharsia* (all types of moral corruption, uncleanness, or impurity), and *pleonexia* (covetousness, greediness, avarice). In 5:5, the doers of these deeds are called *pornos*, meaning sexually immoral people (including fornicators), *akathartos*, meaning unclean or impure persons, and *pleonektēs*, meaning covetous or greedy people who are idolaters and who will have no inheritance in the kingdom of God (v. 5; cf. 1 Cor. 6:9–10; Rev. 21:8, 23; 22:15). Paul also mentions other evil deeds that damage not only our spiritual life but also our peaceful coexistence with others in the church. In contrast to those who embrace these practices, Paul encourages believers to live with a heart full of gratitude to God and to others (Eph. 5:4). Believers are not to be associated with the evil deeds of the children of wrath (v. 7) but with the promises of God (3:6). There is a clear border between good and evil and light and darkness, and we are called to live in the light of salvation.

It is the responsibility of the children of light to bring that light to the darkness and to abolish the deeds of darkness—a missiological task (5:11–13). The purpose of this task is to bring those who are in darkness to the light (cf. 1 Pet. 2:9). This movement from darkness to light is described metaphorically as being awakened from sleep or being resurrected from the dead (Eph. 5:14), which is another way of speaking about the new birth or creation of the new person through Christ and implies repentance and conversion.

Paul proceeds to highlight the implications of the movement from darkness to light (vv. 15–17). Believers are to carefully watch their way of life (v. 15), which is described using a contrasting statement: they are not to be fools but wise. To be wise is explained as understanding what the Lord's will is for us (v. 17). Paul admonishes believers to make the most of their time and their opportunities, so that they can redeem that time. The Greek here reads, literally, "to buy out the time" (v. 16), a phrase that is borrowed from the marketplace (see also Col. 4:5). Like bargain hunters during a brief sale that offers large discounts, Paul urges us to use our time wisely, taking advantage of the opportunities available to us as much as possible, because we are living in evil days. Those who walk in light are to be filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18), which in practical terms means speaking to one another in psalms, singing, making melodies (v. 19), and giving thanks for everything (v. 20). The Christian life should be a joyful life filled with constant gratitude. As Paul closes this section and introduces the following one, he commands God's people to submit to each other because of their reverence for God and Christ (v. 21).

5:22—6:9. Christ-Oriented Life in the Christian Household. The phrase about submitting "to one another" (5:21) in the previous section serves as an introduction to this one. In this section, three groups are called to mutual submission: (1) wives and husbands (vv. 22–33); (2) children and parents (6:1–4); and (3) bondservants and masters (vv. 5–9). The verbs "to submit" and "to obey" are not applied to husbands, parents, and masters, which raises a question regarding the meaning of the reciprocal pronoun *allēlōn* ("one another"; v. 21; see v. 33) in the context of this section. This question may be answered by looking at the three mutual relationships (see below, "Ancient Household Codes").

1. Wives and Husbands. Although most English versions have the verb "submit" or "be subject" in Ephesians 5:22, there is no verb in the Greek text. However, it is clear that it is to be supplied from v. 21. Paul begins with exhorting the wife to submit to her husband as to the Lord. The submission is expected, but Paul restricts it to the marriage relationship and grounds it in the submission of the wife to the Lord. The wife

Ancient Household Codes

It was not uncommon for ancient authors, both in and outside the NT, to compose lists of rules to regulate social behavior, particularly for how members of the family or "households" were to treat each other (for NT examples, see Col. 3:18—4:1; 1 Tim. 6:1–2; Titus 2:1–10; 1 Pet. 2:18—3:7).

1. Household Codes in Roman Society. In the Roman world, the *paterfamilias* (father of the family) had, in principle, full authority and control over all the members of his household, including not only members of his immediate family but also members of his extended household, that is, slaves, servants, laborers, tenants, and even freedmen. In non-Christian examples, the focus of the household code was always on how the various members of the household were to act toward the *paterfamilias*. While the *paterfamilias* was expected to provide for the welfare of his household, little if anything was usually said about the way he should treat them—except for advocating the use of harsh treatment to ensure the protection of his honor.

2. Paul's Household Codes. While Paul acknowledges the social structures of his time, he advocates filling and transforming those relationships with the values of the gospel. Motivated by their commitment to Christ, wives, children, and slaves were to offer the appropriate submission and obedience. At the same time, husbands, fathers, and slave owners were not to misuse their authority but to put aside threatening and to deal tenderly with those in their care.

submits to the husband as a Christian woman submits to the Lord along with all believers in the church. Paul gives a reason for the submission: the husband is the head of the wife. This idea goes back to Genesis 3:16, but Paul does not explicitly refer to it. He uses the lordship of Christ over the church as his model for establishing the relationship between husbands and wives: Christ is the head of the church, and as such, He saved the church. The emphasis is not on the authority of Christ over the church but on what He did for the church, an idea that controls the discussion. The conclusion is clear: since the church is subject to Christ, so wives should be to their husbands in everything (v. 24), meaning in everything that is comparable to their submission to Christ as head of the church. Verses 22–24 form a nice literary structure:

A Wives submit to your husbands (v. 22a)
  B as to the Lord (vv. 22b)
    C Husband is the head of the wife (v. 23a)
    C′ Christ is the head of the church (v. 23bc)
  B′ The church is subject to Christ (v. 24a)
A′ Wives be subject to their own husbands (v. 24b)

The structure reveals that the subjection of wives to their husbands flows from a Christological perspective that provides a Christian basis for the submission; the model for the submission of wives to husbands is the submission of the church to Christ. Paul does not identify specific ways in which the wife is to submit to her husband.

Paul then addresses the husbands, admonishing them to love their wives. This is not a call to exercise authority as head of the wife. Paul redefines the exercise of headship in terms of Christ's love for the church; He exercised His headship over the church by loving her, and this love was manifested in His sacrificial death on her behalf. He did this exclusively for her own benefit, to make her holy (sanctify her), cleanse her by washing with water (a reference to baptism) by the word (probably a reference to the gospel; v. 26). His intention was to present her to Himself as a glorious bride without spot or wrinkle; holy and blameless without blemish (v. 27). The discussion on marriage led to a discussion of what Christ accomplished for His church as an expression of His love for her.

After describing the meaning of the headship of Christ over the church, Paul returns to the responsibility of the husbands as heads of the wives: so husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies (v. 28). The "so" (or "in the same way") grounds this imperative in the love of Christ for His church, but by referring to the wives as "their own bodies," Paul introduces a new idea that helps him strengthen the imperative to love them: a husband who loves his wife also loves himself, because no one ever hates his own body or flesh. This is an argument from common sense but is based on the oneness and unity of the couple as stated in Genesis 2:24. In marriage, the husband and the wife are one. Paul applies it here to Christian marriage, saying that instead of hating his flesh, the husband nurtures and cherishes his body just as Christ does the church (v. 29). According to Paul, this is the function of the husband as head of the wife and of Christ as head of the church. Christ continues to be the model for headship at home. The oneness and unity of the husband and the wife is grounded in Genesis, and Paul uses it to provide a Christological view of headship for those who are a part of Christ's church in a world of sin.

Paul concludes by stating that what he had just discussed is a profoundly great mystery, which he then clarifies as being the mystery of Christ and the church (v. 32), that is, the unity of the Lord and His church. The chapter concludes with Paul finally summarizing his discussion on husbands and wives: husbands should love their wives as themselves, and wives should respect (*phobeō*, "to fear," "to show respect") their husbands (v. 33). Here, to submit to the husband means to respect him. We can speak of the mutual submission of the wife and the husband (see 5:21) if submission is understood as the wife respecting her husband and the husband loving his wife.

2. Children and Parents. The second mutual relationship that is presented in this section is the one between children and parents. Paul states that children should obey their parents in the Lord, or as they would obey the Lord (6:1). He uses the word *teknon* ("children"), five times in Ephesians (2:3; 5:1, 8; 6:1, 4). Besides relating it to the verb "to obey" (6:1–4), he connects it with the verb "to walk" ("to conduct oneself"; 2:2–3; 5:1–2, 8). The life of a child is described as walking on a path with rules to obey and with someone to follow or imitate. This is the reason Paul uses the verb "to obey" in describing the duty of children (6:1). The verb *hypakouō* means listening with a willingness to follow what is said. Although the parents are to be obeyed, they need to live an exemplary life. Therefore, children's obedience to their parents should be "in the Lord," meaning children should obey or imitate their parents as they obey or imitate the Lord (6:1). This is the right thing to do, which Paul demonstrates by quoting the fifth commandment of the Decalogue: "Honor your father and mother" (6:2; cf. Ex. 20:12). It is right, because it is what the law requires, but there is a further motivation expressed when Paul notes that this was the first commandment given with a promise. There is a special blessing for those who honor their parents: they will enjoy a long life.

Paul proceeds to describe the responsibilities of parents. He first describes what they should not do: fathers should not exasperate their children, provoking them to anger (Eph. 6:4). "Father" represents both parents and thus the mother is included. Parents should treat the children in a way that fosters their children's love toward them and does not stimulate anger toward them, which unmistakably excludes verbal or physical abuse. Moving to what they should do, Paul says parents are to rear their children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (v. 4). The rearing of children is to be done in a loving and caring way. The parents are to educate and instruct them on proper conduct based on God's purpose for them and on Christian values. The mutual submission consists in the fulfillment of their respective duties.

3. Servants and Masters. The last advice on interpersonal relationships concerns masters and their servants (6:5–9). Slavery was common in Greco-Roman society. In Galatians, Paul says that in Christ there is "neither slave nor free" (Gal. 3:28), but society had not yet arrived at this conclusion; therefore, he provides relational instructions for slaves and masters. Although from the human perspective slaves have human masters, Paul says slaves are to be as Christians are slaves of Christ (Eph. 6:6); in other words, their obedience to the human masters is to be with a sincere heart, as they would obey Christ (v. 5). They are to seek to please God and not merely their human masters (6:6–7), for the Lord, not their masters, would truly reward them (6:8). Both masters and slaves belong to Christ through redemption (1:14), and the fear of the Lord should determine how they relate to each other (v. 5; cf. 5:21).

The masters are to realize that before the Lord, they and their slaves have the same Master in heaven (v. 9), and He does not recognize the social distinction between slaves and masters; there is no favoritism or partiality with Him. Social equality is firmly established on God's will for humanity. Paul specifically mentions that masters are not to threaten their slaves. Threats and punishments were inseparable in disciplining slaves, but Paul says that this should not be the case among Christians. He promotes a relationship in which slaves obey the master out of respect for the Lord and masters treat slaves with the respect and dignity that exclude verbal abuse and physical discipline. This is a way of expressing mutual submission. Love and respect are to be the ruling principle even in the relationship between master and servant.

6:10–20. The Church's War against Evil. This concluding section makes explicit that Christians are involved in a cosmic conflict and that it is necessary for them to be strong in the Lord and in the vastness of His mighty power. The idea of a conflict appears previously in Ephesians in such contrasts as works versus grace (2:8–10), far versus near (2:17), foreigners versus citizens (2:19), old person versus new person (4:22, 24), darkness versus light (5:8) fruit of the Spirit versus unfruitful works (5:9–10), and being filled with wine versus being filled with the Spirit (5:18). This war is not against flesh and blood, that is, against mere human beings (cf. 1 Cor. 15:50; Gal. 1:16); it is against the rulers of darkness (Eph. 6:12), including the devil himself (6:11). Satan is working through many *methodeia* ("trickery," "tricks," "tactics," "wiles," "schemes"; 6:11) to try to overcome God's people. Paul refers to false doctrines as the result of the human trickery in the cunning craftiness (*methodeia*) of deceitful schemes (4:14). Adam and Eve were "tricked," so to speak, by the enemy through his lies (Gen. 2:16–17; 3:1–6). Jesus Himself labeled Satan as a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44).

However, Christians can overcome this spiritual enemy by putting on the full armor of God (Eph. 6:11). The verb "to put on" conveys the idea of taking off the old clothes and permanently wearing the new ones (see Eph. 4:22–24; Rom. 13:12; 1 Cor. 15:53–54). So important is the armor of God that Paul gives his counsel twice (6:11, 13), and between each instance is the description of the enemy. This repetition suggests that the only way to stand strong against the enemy is by putting on the armor of God, which includes seven military devices.

The girded waist indicates a readiness to do a task (v. 14; cf. 2 Kin. 4:29; 9:1; Nah. 2:1). By wearing the belt of truth, Christians are ready to fight against the enemy. This is the truth of the gospel that has transformed the lives of believers (Eph. 1:13; 4:15, 25) and that reveals Jesus as the truth (John 14:6).

A soldier of Christ should also be equipped with the breastplate of righteousness (Eph. 6:14) and the helmet of salvation (v. 17), which cover and protect the head and the heart during battle (cf. 1 Sam. 17:38). Only Jesus can protect us in this spiritual warfare. He is our righteousness (Rom. 5:17) and our salvation (Acts 4:12; 1 Thess. 5:9). It is by His blood that the end-time saints can overcome Satan (Rev. 12:10–11). Another crucial piece of gear in the spiritual battle is the feet shod with readiness for the gospel of peace (Eph. 6:15). Christians should be prepared to proclaim the gospel that is peace or that brings peace (Is. 52:7). Active involvement in the proclamation of the gospel is a weapon against Satan. Another device is the shield of faith (Eph. 6:16), which is a large shield that protects believers from anything the enemy might throw at them. Faith is total trust in the Lord under the most difficult circumstances they can face. To take up the shield of faith is to recognize that God is reliable—that He is our refuge.

The different elements of the armor listed so far are for defense and protection, but there is one device designed for attack: the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God (v. 17). The Scriptures, inspired by the Spirit (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:20–21), have proven to be an effective weapon against Satan. Jesus overcame the enemy in the wilderness through the use of God's word (Matt. 4:1–11). In our spiritual battle, we hold with one hand the shield of faith and with the other the sword of the Spirit. It is the Spirit who makes the word effective in the human heart. Faith and the word of God are inseparable, because faith comes by hearing the word of God (Rom. 10:17). The last device is prayer, which is presented without a militaristic analogy. In fact, this is a device that is invisible and untouchable by the enemy. It has been literally used by the soldiers of God's people (1 Kin. 8:44; 2 Chr. 6:34) and can be used at any time and in any circumstance. It puts us in touch with our supreme military leader, Jesus Christ, who empowers us with His power (Eph. 6:10). Paul asks the Christians to pray for themselves, for other people, and for him (vv. 18–19). In the earlier part of the epistle, he mentions three times his praying for the Christians in Ephesus that they would be strengthened by the Spirit (3:16), that they would understand the love of Christ (3:19), and that they would be filled with the fullness of God (v. 19). Here, he wants the audience to pray for him, so that he might be able to boldly make known the mystery of the gospel (v. 19). He was telling his audience that even though he was a prisoner, he was remaining an ambassador of Christ and of the gospel. Intercessory prayer is important in the cosmic conflict in which we are all involved.

6:21–24

Concluding Instructions and Greetings

Paul concludes his letter by commending Tychicus, whom he was to send to the church with a report of how he was doing (v. 21). Tychicus had been a faithful minister or servant (v. 21) from Asia (probably Ephesus) who joined Paul during his third missionary journey (Acts 20:4). When Paul requested that Titus leave Crete to go to Nicopolis, Tychicus was sent to replace him (Titus 3:12), and when Paul called Timothy to meet him in Rome, he sent Tychicus to replace Timothy in Ephesus (2 Tim. 4:12). In fact, Tychicus was the one Paul sent to strengthen the faith of the churches in Ephesus and Colossae (cf. Col. 4:7). He was indeed a faithful minister.

Finally, Paul closes the epistle with a benediction that brings together peace, love, faith, and grace and that identifies God and Christ as their sources. He underlines the importance of love by using both the noun *agapē* ("love") and the verb *agapaō* ("to love"; Eph. 6:23–24). He reemphasizes the importance of the love of Christ for His church, the love of the church for Christ, and the love of Christians for one another. An additional word Paul uses that is unique to this benediction is *aphtharsia* ("imperishability," "immortality"; v. 24). Of its eleven appearances in the Pauline Epistles, he uses this word six times to describe the blessed hope of the resurrection at the Second Coming (1 Cor. 15:42, 50, 52, 53, 54; 2 Tim. 1:10). It could be that in this benediction Paul was asking that God's grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ "in immortality" (Eph. 6:24), that is to say, in anticipation of being invested with immortality at the coming of Christ. If this is the case, Paul was ending the letter on a note of hope.

PHILIPPIANS

INTRODUCTION

Title and Authorship. Like most of the epistles of the NT, the letter to the Philippians had no title when it was first written. A title was unnecessary because the introduction to the letter unambiguously states that it was addressed to the Christians in Philippi, Macedonia (1:1; cf. Acts 16:12), the first church among the many Paul founded in Europe. The earliest title associated with the letter was simply "To the Philippians." It was later expanded to include Paul's name as well as other scribal assumptions about the origins of the letter, one of the most common being "To the Philippians written from Rome through Epaphroditus."

With few exceptions, Paul has always been acknowledged as the author of Philippians. Although he mentioned Timothy as coauthor, he used the first-person singular throughout his letter (e.g., 1:3–4, 7–9, 30; 2:2, 16–20; 3:1, 4; 4:1–4) and tended to distinguish himself from Timothy as the author (2:19–24). The picture of Paul portrayed in the epistle coincides with what is found in his other letters. Paul spoke about his incarceration (1:12–14), expressed his personal and innermost feelings (1:15–24), mentioned coworkers (2:19–24), shared information about his life (3:5–11), and mentioned the assistance the Philippians provided him (4:15–16; cf. 2 Cor. 8:1–5).

Date. There is no doubt that this epistle was written while Paul was imprisoned (1:7, 12–14), although the letter does not identify the place of incarceration. References such as "the whole palace guard" (1:13; lit. "praetorian guard," a detachment of soldiers assigned to the emperor) and to members of "Caesar's household" (4:22) have led most interpreters to conclude that it was most likely written during his first imprisonment in Rome sometime between A.D. 61 and 62 (cf. 1:19–24; 2:24; Acts 28:16, 30–31). Due to the large distance between Philippi and Rome and the time it would have taken for Timothy and Epaphroditus to travel back and forth between the two cities, other scholars have more recently suggested that Paul must have written his letter from a closer city during another imprisonment, perhaps connected to his ministry in Ephesus (Acts 19; A.D. 54–57), his imprisonment in Caesarea (Acts 23:33–35; 24:22–27; A.D. 58–60), or, as has been less commonly suggested, from Corinth (Acts 18:1–17; A.D. 50). While the basic argument makes sense, there is little evidence to support it. There is no record that Paul was imprisoned in either Ephesus or Corinth, and while he was imprisoned in Caesarea for two years, the distance between Caesarea and Philippi is also considerable. For these reasons, this commentary will assume that Paul wrote to the Philippians from Rome between A.D. 61 and 62.

Backgrounds. In ancient times, Philippi was a small village called Krenides, but in 358–357 B.C., Philip II, king of Macedonia and Olympias and father of Alexander the Great, conquered the village and renamed it after himself. The city quickly became one of the most important cities of Macedonia (Acts 16:12). After the combined forces of Mark Antony and Octavian defeated Brutus and Cassius at Philippi, retired Roman soldiers often settled in the city, which led to Rome granting it the privileged status of a Roman colony. This designation allowed Philippi to enjoy a certain degree of autonomy regarding the provincial government and the right to rule over civil issues and mint its own coins.

Philippi was an important commercial and military urban center in Macedonia. This was largely due to its strategic location along the Via Egnatia, the main Roman road that stretched from Rome in the west to Byzantium in the east. It was a main thoroughfare for Roman legions traveling across Macedonia, and it served as an intense trading route near Neapolis, the harbor town of Philippi, currently Kavalla, which favored the personal and commercial interest of many people from other regions of the empire.

The city was characterized by wide religious diversity. Egyptian, Roman, and Greek gods were worshiped beside those of the native Thracian religion. Among others, gods such as Silvanus, Isis, Serapis, Apollo, Asclepius, Men, and the great mother-goddess Cybele were worshiped. Due to its heterogeneous population, Philippi had imperial, aboriginal (Thracian), Italian, Anatolian, Syrian, Egyptian, and Greek cults. The city also had a small Jewish community. The absence of a regular synagogue service, evident in the fact that Paul had to find an informal meeting of women gathered at a river for prayer on the Sabbath, suggests Judaism had at best a modest role in the community.

The rise of the Christian community in Philippi occurred between A.D. 49 and 52, when Paul and Silas arrived in Macedonia during Paul's second missionary trip. The decision to travel from Asia Minor to the continent of Europe had been made in response to a vision Paul received while he was in Troas, which urged him to journey to Macedonia (see commentary on Acts 15:36—18:22). Philippi was the first city Paul visited. With a population of only five thousand to ten thousand inhabitants, it was not particularly large—at least in comparison to leading cities such as Antioch or Jerusalem (Acts 16:12).

According to the book of Acts, Paul's ministry in Philippi began on a positive note with the conversion of Lydia, a businesswoman from Thyatira, and her household (Acts 16:12–15). Shortly thereafter, the situation became more difficult as Paul and Silas were arrested, beaten, and thrown into prison (Acts 16:16–24). God, however, turned what appeared to have been a great defeat into an opportunity for the proclamation of the gospel, as the two men were miraculously released and the jailer and his household were brought to faith in Jesus (Acts 16:25–34). After their release, Paul and Silas left the city. Luke, however, one of Paul's traveling companions, remained in the city to encourage the new believers in Paul's absence. He seems to have remained in Philippi for several years, since we do not hear from Luke again in Acts until Paul's return to Philippi about six years later (Acts 20:6). Nevertheless, the bond formed between Paul and the Philippians was so strong that the church provided their beloved apostle with financial assistance from time to time in order to care for his needs (Phil. 4:15–16).

Paul's letter to the Philippians was written some ten years after his initial visit to the city. The letter indicates that when Paul wrote it, there were adversaries threatening the church in Philippi. Paul referred to them as "enemies of the cross of Christ" (3:18–19; cf. 1:28; 3:2) and regarded them as perverting the Christian message. Unfortunately, determining the exact identity of these opponents is difficult. It is hard to know whether Paul had one specific group in mind or if he envisioned a variety of adversaries. And just who were these individuals? Should we envision them as unbelieving Jews, Christian Judaizers, or other Gentile Christians? And were they advocating a legalistic theology, a form of antinomianism, or perhaps some kind of pre-Gnostic doctrine? While a definitive answer to these questions is elusive, the references to Jewish practices make it virtually certain that either Jews or Judaizers were involved in some way.

Theology and Purpose. The Philippians had joined Paul in advancing the gospel and were a constant source of friendship and financial support to his ministry (1:5, 15–18). Therefore, Paul wrote the letter to thank and comfort them regarding his own situation as a prisoner (1:12–14) and to inform them about his plans for the future (2:19–30). Joy seems to be a significant topic, because in this letter the Greek word for "joy" appears five times (1:4, 25; 2:2, 29; 4:1) and the Greek verb for "rejoice" appears eleven times (twice in 1:18; 2:17, 18; 4:4; once in 2:18, 28; 3:1; 4:10). For this reason, the letter has been called Paul's hymn of joy, the central command of which may be defined as "rejoice in the Lord always" (4:4). Within the framework of this command, Philippians reveals a set of convictions or ideas that give some structural organization to Paul's theological statements, requests, and arguments.

1. God. The occasional theological statements found in the epistle place great emphasis on God (2:6–11; 3:3, 9, 13–14; 20–21; 4:19). He offers righteousness, salvation, and peace in Christ (1:11, 28–29; 2:6–11; 3:8–16, 20–21; 4:6–7, 9) and originates the community of God's holy people in Christ Jesus (1:1; 4:21), who are the "children of God" (2:15). "God our Father" (1:2) is at the beginning and end of the salvation that His children enjoy in Christ (1:28–29; 3:9). Salvation is the "good work" that God begins in them and that He will complete (1:6; cf. 3:9, 14), because He is working in them in order to enable them to desire and carry out His righteous purposes (2:13).

God is the "God of peace" who is with His children (4:9) and who guides them and supplies their needs (4:6–7, 19), particularly the need of righteousness that comes through faith in Christ

(3:9). Their final reward is also found "in Christ Jesus" (3:14). What God has done for us through Christ and the Spirit (1:19; 2:1; 3:3) will be "to the glory and praise of God" (1:11; cf. 2:9–11; 4:18, 20). God's character is described as being full of grace and peace (1:2), and also mercy (2:27).

The Holy Spirit is at work in several vital aspects relating to our salvation in Christ: He leads in the accomplishment of God's purpose, and thus He vindicated the apostle and the proclamation of the gospel during his imprisonment (1:19–20). He promotes unity of purpose and love in the body of Christ (2:1–2), and He inspires and leads people to true worship and service to God (3:3). Thus, salvation in Christ is accomplished through God the Father, with whom the plan originated; Jesus Christ the Son, who accomplished the work of salvation within history; and the Holy Spirit, through whose work we appropriate it (1:6; 3:3).

2. Christ. The epistle to the Philippians reveals the central role of Christ in Paul's theology of salvation. For Paul, "to live is Christ" and "to die is gain" (1:21). His primary desire in Philippians is to "depart and be with Christ" (1:23). His first choice is to consider all things a loss compared to the inestimable value of knowing the Lord Jesus Christ and being found in Him, not having his own righteousness based on the law but on a righteousness from God through faith in Christ (3:8–9).

Knowing Christ intimately and totally is the first goal (3:13–15). Christ is the content of the gospel (1:12, 15–18; cf. 1:27), which is associated in this letter with the person and the work of Christ. Preaching Christ (1:15–16) means proclaiming the word of the gospel to be "the word of life" (2:16). To live "worthy of the gospel of Christ" is to live worthy of Christ (1:27). His death on the cross is the premise underlying both our suffering because of Him (1:29) and our having Him as the pattern for our "already-but-not-yet" present Christian existence (2:5–8; cf. 3:10). Our justification is "through faith in Christ" (3:9), which means that those who accept it are found in God—not with their own righteousness, but that which is of God.

In Philippians, Paul did not attempt to develop his theology in a systematic way. However, theology is an inseparable part of his exhortations to believers as indicated in 2:12–13. Through His atoning death, complete and sufficient, Christ fully revealed the character of God and became the ultimate and only perfect model of Christian life. It is precisely in His being such a supreme example, as explicitly shown in the narrative of His humiliation (2:6–11), that Paul's theology reaches its highest point and deepest meaning, infusing Christian hope with a cosmic expectation that anticipates the moment when Christ will be universally recognized as Lord of all.

Thus, the Christians in Philippi could rejoice in Christ (3:3), because the Lord had accomplished the work of salvation on their behalf (1:11; 3:12). Christ is the foundation and assurance of trust (2:24), hope (1:20), and rejoicing (3:1; 4:4). Everything they did had meaning only if done in and through Christ.

3. The Christian Life. The theological focus that we find in Philippians has two primary purposes: (1) to encourage the Philippians to live at that historic time in the righteousness that is found through faith in Christ (3:9) while awaiting the end of the ages at Jesus's coming (1:6, 10; 2:16) and (2) to be filled with the fruits of righteousness (1:11) because of their citizenship in heaven (3:20). Paul tried to motivate the Philippians to cherish certain attitudes and behaviors (1:9–11; 2:1–4) and to forsake others (2:3–4). There may have been a lack of Christian love among them that resulted in attitudes of unmistakable selfish ambition or conceit (2:3, cf. 2:4; 4:2–3), which in turn led to some internal complaining and arguing (2:14). Paul urged them to live in harmony and humbleness in the context of love (1:9; 2:1–4).

Such love is defined in the letter as humble thinking (2:3) that leads to a lifestyle in which Christians regard others above themselves and prioritize not only their own interests but also the interests of others (2:3–4). This attitude was exemplified in Christ, who is equal with God yet humbled Himself to the status of an obedient Servant and died on the cross (2:6, 8). The story of Christ (2:6–11) illustrates the need for the Philippians and modern readers alike to live humble and selfless lives dedicated to serving others as the fruit of righteousness, a reality for which Paul prayed (1:11). On account of the knowledge of Christ, the apostle renounced everything (3:8–11) in order to serve those in need, and he presented himself as another model to be imitated by both the Philippians and modern readers (3:15–17).

COMMENTARY

1:1–11

Introduction

The introduction to Philippians consists of a salutation (1:1–2) and a prayer of thanksgiving

(1:3–11). It also contains some key theological topics to which Paul would return in the rest of the epistle.

1:1–2. Salutation. Paul began his letter by identifying himself and his companion Timothy without any reference to his apostleship, as was his custom in most of his letters. Timothy was Paul's faithful son in the Lord (1 Cor. 4:17; cf. Acts 19:22), one of his closest associates in the preaching of the gospel (Rom. 16:21; 1 Cor. 16:10; 2 Cor. 1:1, 19; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1; 1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2; Philem. 1), and his faithful representative and messenger (Phil. 2:19–20). It is apparent that Timothy was not a coauthor of the letter in the strict sense of the word, because Paul constantly uses the first-person pronoun "I" (e.g., 1:12, 20, 22; 2:17, 19–20; 3:4, 8; 4:2, 18).

Paul called himself and Timothy *douloi* ("bond-servants," "servants," "slaves"; 1:1) of Jesus Christ, the same title used in other of his epistles (Rom. 1:1; Gal. 1:10; Titus 1:1; cf. James 1:1; 2 Pet. 1:1; Jude 1). The term conveys the idea of complete and utter devotion to Christ, as well as loyalty to and a personal relationship with the Lord. In other words, Paul belonged to Christ wholly and completely.

Paul called His Lord "Jesus Christ" (1:2). "Jesus" means "Savior" (Matt. 1:21), and "Christ" means "Messiah." By using the compound name Jesus Christ, Paul pointed to the work and functions of his Lord. From the very beginning of his letter, he emphasized that the Person to whom he submitted himself was none other than the Savior, the Messiah, in whom God's promises and the hope of Israel were fulfilled. The name Christ used by itself is most common in the letter (1:10, 13, 15, 17–18, 20–21, 23, 27, 29; 2:1, 16, 30; 3:7–10, 18), but Paul also used "Christ Jesus" (or "Jesus Christ"; 1:1; 2:5, 21; 3:3, 12, 14; 4:7, 19, 21), "Jesus" (2:10), "Lord Jesus Christ" (1:2; 3:20; 4:23), "Lord Jesus" (2:19), "Lord" (2:24, 29; 3:1; 4:1–2, 4–5, 10), and "Christ Jesus my Lord" (3:8).

Paul addressed his letter to all of God's "holy people" (alternatively translated as "saints") in Christ Jesus (1:1). This statement does not refer to any particular group in Philippi that was considered sinless, exceptional, or morally and religiously perfect. The same use of a title appears in the opening of some of his other letters (e.g., 1 Cor. 1:2; Eph. 1:1) to describe or perhaps define what the Christian church is, namely, those called by Jesus through the Spirit to belong to Him, to be His people. The phrasing stresses the fact that the letter was sent "*to all*" Christians in Philippi (1:1; emphasis added).

The letter is also addressed to the *episkopois* ("overseers," "bishops") and deacons—two groups that had leadership responsibilities (1:1). These *episkopois* were the same as the "elders of the church" or "presbyters" in Ephesus (Acts 20:17; cf. 1 Tim. 3:2–5; Titus 1:5–6), "overseers" (Acts 20:28), and shepherds (1 Pet. 5:1–2). The term "deacons" means "servants" or "ministers" who serve the needs of the congregation. Notice that Paul addressed his letter to God's people "with" or "together with" the overseers and deacons. Had Paul used the conjunction "and," he would have implied that there were three groups in the Philippian church, but he did not do that because the church at large is made up of God's holy people (they are "saints" only in their union with Christ), and this includes *all* of its members.

The distinctive Christian greeting pattern used in most of Paul's letters began with an expression of grace and peace and was followed by an expression of gratitude or blessing "from God our Father" (Phil. 1:2). The expression "our Father" echoes the model prayer Jesus taught the disciples (Matt. 6:9). God, not Paul, is the source of grace and peace. He was the God of the apostle and of the addressees of the letter, and all blessings come from Him. By saying "and the Lord Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:2), Paul indicated that he regarded the Father and Jesus Christ as equals. They are coequal in attributes, power, and glory. They, as one, are the source of grace and of peace.

1:3–11. Prayer of Thanksgiving. Next in Paul's epistle is his usual expression of gratitude (1:3–8) and a prayer (1:9–11). He strove to positively capture the attention of his addressees by telling them how thankful to God he was for them (1:3), how much he loved them (1:7, 8), and how often he prayed for them (1:9–11). In his brief prayer, he asked for the church to (1) grow in love and in the knowledge of God's will (1:9); (2) have the capacity to determine what is most valuable (1:10); (3) be in right standing before God *eis* ("for," "until," "at") the Second Coming of Christ (1:10); and (4) be filled with the fruits of righteousness (1:11; cf. Gal. 5:22–23). He was reminding them that all blessings are possible only by or through Jesus Christ. Christians can stand blameless before God only through Christ alone, not through their own efforts (1:11).

1:12–26

Paul's Hope through Trials

Paul moves to a new topic using the transitional phrase "I want you to know," proceeding to tell the Philippians about himself in the context of his imprisonment and opposition in Rome (1:12–18) and about his hope to be set free for the glory of Christ and the progress and rejoicing of the Philippians (1:23–26). In two sections, Paul describes the advancement of the gospel being preached both inside and outside the prison (1:12–14), each in a setting of opposition (1:15–18).

Paul's words about church members being his family are tender; he calls them brothers and sisters, an expression that seems to be his favorite (cf. 3:1, 13, 17; 4:1, 8, 21). He wanted the Philippians to know that what he was going through had not hindered the progress of the gospel but had in fact contributed to its spread (v. 12). First, due to his imprisonment, the whole palace guard had come to know that he was chained for the cause of Christ (1:13), that is to say, that he was not a criminal. The controversies surrounding Paul's imprisonment resulted in greater knowledge of the gospel on the part of the Roman guard (*praitōrion*). The Greek indicates that these soldiers were members of the elite force known as the Praetorian Guard, who served as the emperor's personal bodyguards and were tasked with protecting Rome. While carrying out their supervisory duties, they would have easily come in contact with the imprisoned Paul, learned of his situation, and marveled at the spirit in which he bore his incarceration. Second, though Paul's commitment to Christ's cause placed him in prison, others were becoming more courageous in proclaiming the gospel message (lit. "the word") "without fear" (1:14). Because of Paul's imprisonment, the believers in Rome were actively proclaiming the name of Christ more than before.

Verses 15–18 can be divided into two parts: Paul (1) describes those who preached in Rome in response to his imprisonment (1:15–17) and (2) expresses his joyful reaction to the situation. Paul rejoices because Christ was preached, encourages the Philippians to rejoice with him in spite of his imprisonment, and emphatically states that he would continue to rejoice (the Greek allows for the translation "and what is more, I will rejoice"; v. 18). It should be noted that the Majority text (e.g., the NKJV) and the Alexandrian text (e.g., the NIV) reverse the order of Philippians 1:16–17.

Paul expressed his conviction to always glorify Christ (1:20–26). He faced the future rejoicing in the Lord because of his certainty that (1) he would be delivered from prison and (2) he would not experience shame because Christ would be honored in his body, whether by his life or his death (1:20). He anticipated that the Philippians' joy would increase at his deliverance and reunion with them (1:25–26). The first conviction that brought him unfailing joy was the fact that his life would be spared and that he would remain and continue to support all of them in their progress and joy in the faith (1:25).

The second conviction that fed Paul's continual joy was the assurance that nothing would shame him (1:20). With the assurance of his deliverance and the foresight of his defense and affirmation of the gospel during his probable trial before the Roman tribunal (1:7, 16), Paul did not consider the court as something that could humiliate or threaten his life and ministry. It was a suitable stage from which to proclaim the gospel, because Christ would be exalted (v. 20) no matter what happened. Christ would be known by a greater number of people either by Paul's release or his conviction and possible death.

Despite Paul's confidence in his deliverance from prison (1:24–26), the phrase "by life or by death" (1:20) shows that he was prepared for both options. He preferred Christ above all (1:21). Everything he did was inspired by and done for the sake of Christ, who gave direction, meaning, and purpose to his life. Therefore, to preach Christ and to die for Him as a martyr would be an honor. He would glorify Christ both by living (in liberty) or dying (through conviction).

The meaning of v. 23 is debated. Some see in Paul's statement an indication of the belief that death is the gateway to heaven, for they claim that when a person dies the soul lives on with Christ in heaven. This viewpoint, however, is a misunderstanding of what Paul and the Scriptures teach about the nature of death.

The Bible teaches that death has two dimensions; the first is temporary and the second permanent. With the exception of those who will be alive at Christ's return, all humans will experience the first dimension of death: the end of human existence in this world. The Bible describes this aspect of death as "sleep." Everyone who experiences this dimension of death will rest in the grave until they are brought back to life at the final resurrection of the righteous and unrighteous (Dan. 12:2; John 5:28–29; 11:17; 12:17; Acts 2:29; 5:5–10; 8:2; 1 Cor. 15:4, 35). The second dimension of death is eternal and permanent; it is the penalty of separation from God (2 Thess. 1:9) that befalls all who reject His gift of life and choose to remain in sin. Those who accept God's gift of salvation, however, will receive the gift of eternal life at the resurrection and will dwell with Christ forever (John 14:2–3; 1 Thess. 4:16–18). As Paul awaited his own certain death in Rome several years later, he made it clear that his reward would not occur at the moment of his death but at the resurrection of the dead at the Second Coming (2 Tim. 4:8). Thus, it is clear that Paul was not teaching that we will immediately be with Christ in heaven when we die.

What exactly then was Paul saying in this passage of Philippians? Here we have a window into the heart of the apostle as he reflected on the meaning of life and death in the context of his apostolic ministry and on which of the two he would prefer for himself. Death would release him from the challenging circumstances of ministry (2 Cor. 11:24–33) and would lead to his being with Christ since his next conscious experience following death would be seeing Christ at the Second Coming. The interim period between the two events would be spent in a sleep (e.g., 1 Cor. 15; 1 Thess. 4:13–18). While being with Christ was Paul's personal preference, his own preferences were not what directed his decisions in life. Unlike those having ministry rooted in "selfish ambition" (Phil. 1:16 [NKJV]/17 [NIV]), Paul put the interests of others before his own and added that to remain alive would be more beneficial for his fellow believers (v. 24). For this reason, he was willing to continue on in the difficulties of his ministry so he might encourage and strengthen the Philippians. Paul's comparative expressions reveal that both options were in balance. One was much better, but the other was needed more (vv. 23, 24). Paul himself had already made clear that both desires were equally strong, to the point that he acknowledged that it was difficult to make the choice (v. 22). Paul knew that the Philippians needed him, so this caused him to desire to remain and continue with them in their progress and joyful faith (v. 25).

1:27—2:18

Exhortation to Unity

Paul instructed the believers in Philippi to continue being united in the Spirit (1:27–30), to be "like-minded," following the example of Christ (2:1–11), and to live without complaining and arguing in this dark world (2:12–18).

1:27–30. Conduct Worthy of the Gospel. The apostle exhorted the Philippians to live as good citizens in the midst of opposition, behaving according to the gospel of Christ. This way of living would promote in their community unity, peace, hope, good works, service, and solidarity toward the needs of others. While they were faced with the mockery and challenges of their opponents, Paul motivated them to be united around one exclusive purpose: to preserve and defend the faith brought to them by the gospel (v. 27). They were not to be intimidated by their opponents but were to show courage and boldness in the defense of the gospel (1:28). Through their suffering for Christ, Paul and the Philippians were communing with each other and with Christ, the Sufferer (1:29–30; 3:10). This life of complete commitment to Christ is a life worthy of the gospel of Christ.

2:1–4. One Mind in Love. Paul reiterated the idea that unity was essential for the Philippians and should be accompanied by humbleness (2:3) and self-denial on behalf of the needs of others. The four conditional "if" clauses in Greek that make up the beginning of Paul's appeal in v. 1 should not be understood as actual questions but rather as an appeal based on the certainty ("since there is") of the spiritual realities expressed (2:1) in the Christian life. The Greek word *paraklēsis* conveys the ideas of consolation, comfort, and encouragement—these would strengthen the Philippians morally and spiritually in Christ. A word similar in meaning, *paramythion*, is connected with love of Christ, which soothes our difficult experiences in life. The *koinōnia* ("fellowship," "sharing") in the Spirit refers to enjoying a fellowship established by the Holy Spirit. *Splanchnon* literally means "bowel," but it is often used as a metonymic way of referring to affection or tenderness of the heart. *Oiktirmos* means "compassion," "pity," or "mercy." Here, these words may refer to what the Philippians were called to express toward each other or toward Paul. However, since Paul depicted God as the source of all of these blessings (2 Cor. 1:3; cf. Rom. 12:1), he was most likely referencing the manifestation of God's compassion and mercy toward the Philippians (cf. 1:2–3; 3:3, 9; 4:6–7, 9; Acts 16:12–40).

Since these four virtues should have been a reality in the Philippians' lives, Paul was appealing to them to complete or fulfill his joy, that is to say, to add to his joy for them by being like-minded in a union of intentions and goals expressed in a common love toward each other and toward Christ (2:2). He further explained what he meant by listing three negative attitudes and actions that were hindering the unity of the church. Selfish ambition describes those who promote their own agendas to satisfy their conveniences more than the general interests of the church (cf. Rom. 2:8; 13:13; 2 Cor. 12:20; Gal. 5:20). Conceit points to people who arrogantly promote their ideas, creating strife within the church. Their concern for their own reputation incites rivalry among others (cf. Gal. 5:26).

Christians should consider not only their own interests (2:4) but should also think about and do what is good and best for the community of believers (cf. 1 Cor. 10:24; 13:5). Paul wanted the church to understand that an overemphasis on the individual would destroy the unity of the church. True unity requires that everyone humbly regard others above themselves (2:3), which ultimately means to consider others as equals—if we could mutually see each other as better, then we would all be equal. This requires a humility that consists of an awareness of our own shortcomings and our total dependence on God. Our real value originates from Him.

Paul's counsel on how to relate to and care for others stands in stark contrast to the rigid hierarchical structure of society in the Roman Empire. Roman society was extremely class-conscious. The status of a person was based on wealth, position, freedom, and citizenship. At the top of Roman society was the emperor, his family, and members of the senatorial class (mainly wealthy landowners). Further down the social ladder were members of the equestrian order (wealthy businesspeople) and rich freemen. The vast majority of people, however, were at the bottom: the poor working class and freemen and slaves. The higher a person's rank in society, the more honor and privilege he or she received. Since members of the different classes dressed differently, it was always clear who was deserving of more honor than others. These kinds of societal constructs should not be the lens through which the followers of Christ consider others. Instead, we are called to love, value, and serve others as equals. To illustrate his teachings (2:2–4), Paul presented the greatest example of love, self-denial, and service on behalf of others: the life of Christ Jesus (v. 5).

2:5–11. Model of Self-Emptying. Paul described three moments of Christ's existence: His pre-incarnation (2:6–7a), His life during the incarnation (2:7b–8), and His exaltation post-resurrection (2:9–11). Paul's main purpose of this section was not so much to present a theological exposition of these conditions but rather to urge the Philippians to imitate the generous surrender that characterized the life of Christ. Paul expected the same attitude demonstrated by Christ Jesus (2:6–8) from his addressees (2:2–4).

The relative pronoun "who" affirms that the historical Jesus (2:6) existed before His physical incarnation, having the same character as God because He *is* God. The Greek term *morphē* ("form") designates the very nature of a person and consequently identifies Jesus as having the nature of God (see vv. 6–7). The meaning of Jesus's motivation in v. 6 is to a large extent determined by the Greek word *harpagmos*, which could designate something to which one has a claim. The scholarly study of the use of this word in extra-biblical literature indicates that it could mean "something to be used for one's own advantage" or "something to take advantage of." In the context of this passage, Paul was saying that Christ Jesus, who was fully divine, did not use His divine nature for His own advantage but for something else.

Jesus *ekenōsen* ("made Himself nothing," "made Himself of no reputation," "emptied Himself"; v. 7). This does not mean that He left His divinity in heaven or had only some divine attributes as a result of the incarnation. Had that been the case, He would not have been God in human flesh. It means that during the incarnation He did not use His divinity for His own benefit. This is indicated by the following description of Christ taking the *morphē* ("form," "nature") of a servant, when He fully became a Servant of God. His self-emptying consisted of becoming a Servant of God, and this was possible only because He did not use His divinity for His own advantage. Christ came in the likeness of a human being. Here in v. 7, the participle *genomenos* ("was made," "coming") is contrasted with the present participle *hyparchōn* ("being") in v. 6. The incarnation had a beginning, but the divine nature did not. The noun *homoiōma* can mean "likeness," as in the sense of a similar form or appearance, or it can refer to an identical duplicate of the original. The expression as used here does not mean that the incarnate Christ had only the appearance of a man; otherwise, it would imply some form of docetism, the heresy that Christ only seemed to have a human body. It is better to take the term "likeness" (*homoiōma*) as implying both the idea of identity and distinction; Jesus was both fully human and yet not like sinful humanity (cf. Rom. 8:3; Heb.

4:15). No wonder that when referring to Jesus's conditions for His priestly ministry, the author of Hebrews also expressly added the adjectives "holy," "harmless" or "blameless," and "undefiled" or "pure" to underline the absence of everything perverse or reproachable (Heb. 7:26). It is clear that Jesus had no need to offer sacrifices for His own sins before offering one for humanity's (Heb. 7:27; cf. Heb. 9:14).

He was "found in appearance as a man" (Phil. 2:8). The Greek term *schēma* ("appearance") could designate not only the outward look but also the inner nature. In the context of this passage, the latter meaning may fit better. Christ was fully divine but became fully human and took on the nature of a humble Servant (v. 7). Here, Paul provides a little more explanation and detail regarding what he meant by calling Jesus a servant: Jesus humbled Himself and became obedient even to death on a cross (v. 8). The basic characteristic of a servant is obedience. In the case of Christ, taking on that nature was an act of humility, an attitude that Paul wanted the Philippians to have. As a divine Servant, Christ was obedient to the point of the unimaginable. Obediently He died, but He died on a cross as a criminal. He indeed emptied Himself by humbly giving all He had for us. Paul pointed to the climax of the spectrum of Christ's humiliation, which was made possible by His willingness to obey and fulfill God's purposes.

After expounding on Christ's self-humiliation (2:7b–8), Paul describes His exaltation (2:9–11). God exalted the One who had emptied Himself and placed Him above all things after His resurrection and ascension (v. 9; cf. Acts 2:32–33; 5:30–31; Eph. 1:20–21; 1 Pet. 1:21). God gave Him the name that is "above every name" (v. 9). The title that distinguishes Him from all beings in the universe is *kyrios* ("Lord"; Phil. 2:11), and the name used to translate God's sacred, covenantal, OT name into Greek is Yahweh.

Paul then explains God's purpose in exalting Jesus and naming Him Lord: that at Jesus's name "every knee should bow" (v. 10). This is the moment when the cosmic conflict will come to an end, for at that time the entire universe will acknowledge Jesus as Lord and will pay reverence and homage to Him (v. 11). Those in heaven are the heavenly beings, those on earth are humans, those under the earth in the residence of the demons of the ancient world are the demonic powers (v. 10). Before evil powers and unrepentant sinners are extinguished from the universe, they will acknowledge that Christ is indeed the Lord and that they were wrong in opposing Him. All of this will be done "to the glory of God the Father" (v. 11). His wisdom in the resolution of the issue of sin will be recognized and He will be praised (see Rev. 15:3–4).

In 2:5–11, we find the climax of the apostle's presentation concerning the principles underlying humbleness and exaltation. Paul's goal was that his readers learn that God can exalt only those who humbly serve Him as Christ did. Just as the servant Jesus, who was no greater than His Lord (John 13:16), the Philippians were to live in humility and sacrificial service to others.

2:12–18. Call to Faithfulness. An emphasis on obedience and faithfulness links this section to 2:5–11. Paul was exhorting the Philippians to be shining lights in the world amid a corrupted generation (2:15). The affective expression *agapētoi* ("my beloved," "my dear friends"; 2:12) is one of the apostle's favorites (e.g., Rom. 1:7; 2 Cor. 12:19; Phil. 4:1; 1 Thess. 2:8). The Philippians had been obedient in the past, but they should have been growing in their willingness to obey God. Since they had shown some unhealthy traits that were inappropriate for church members (2:3–4), Paul was urging them to "work in something useful" (*katergazesthe*), that is, in their salvation and spiritual well-being (2:12). The salvation they received through Christ should have been expressing itself in all they were doing, allowing them to display the humility of Christ and overcome selfishness, strife, and factionalism. This was something they were to do not only when Paul was present, but even more in his absence. They were always to have a spirit of humility and respectful obedience (cf. 1 Cor. 2:3; Eph. 6:5).

Paul recognized that what he was asking is something humans cannot accomplish by themselves; God works in us to will and act according to His good purposes (Phil. 2:13). Only God could give the Philippians the power to bring about the necessary changes in their wills, intentions, and behaviors; He is the One who works efficiently and effectively in the lives of believers (cf. 1 Cor. 12:6, 11; Gal. 2:8; 3:5; 5:6; Eph. 1:11, 20; 2:2). But whatever task they did, they were to do it without complaining and arguing. The Greek word here suggests the continuous murmuring, whispering, and muttering of those who complain (cf. Matt. 20:11; John 6:41, 43; Acts 6:1). Such an attitude causes strife, arguments, debates, and disputes that result in planting doubts that hinder rather than enhance the harmony and unity of believers (Phil. 2:14; cf. Luke 9:46; 24:38; Rom. 14:1). Therefore, Paul invited the Philippians not to complain about the way God was leading them and not to doubt God's methods.

If the Philippians would lead lives worthy of the gospel of Christ (i.e., following the exhortations Paul gave them [1:27—2:18]; "striving together" for the "faith of the gospel" [1:27]; being unafraid of their opponents [1:28–30]; "being like-minded" with the "same love" [2:1–2]; and following Christ's example in humility [2:3–11]), they would be blameless, pure, and harmless children of God without fault (2:15). As a result of that way of life, they would shine as *phōstēres* ("lights," "stars") through the darkness of a corrupt generation (v. 15).

Paul was exhorting the Philippians to cling to the word of life (v. 16), that is, the gospel that he preached and that they accepted (cf. Acts 16:11–34; Phil. 1:27). If they would follow his instructions, Paul indicated that he would rejoice at the Second Coming of Christ because he would know that he had not labored in vain (v. 16). The topic of joy surfaces again, but this time it was to be experienced in "the day" of Christ, a typical expression in the NT (1:6, 10; cf. Acts 17:31; 2 Cor. 1:14; 2 Tim. 1:12; Heb. 10:25) to refer to the coming of Jesus. The verb "run" (v. 16) introduces an athletic metaphor (1 Cor. 9:24–27; Gal. 2:2) to refer to Paul's missionary work. His hard work involved resistance and determination while awaiting the final reward. The expression "in vain" (v. 16) implies the idea of running and working without purpose (cf. 2 Cor. 6:1; Gal. 2:2; 1 Thess. 3:5).

Paul used another metaphor drawn from the sanctuary services in v. 17. The metaphor of a sacrifice (an offering brought to the Lord) was applied to the active faith of the Philippians, and the ministry of Paul was like a drink offering poured over the sacrifice to complete it. Together, they would be bringing an offering of love to the Lord, which would result in mutual joy.

2:19–30

Timothy and Epaphroditus

The mention of Timothy appears at first to be casual, but that is not the case. Paul spoke of him to show his sincere concern for the Philippians and to further illustrate the values of working together in harmony. Paul was interested in knowing how the Philippians were doing and was planning to send Timothy to visit them sometime in the near future (2:19). Verse 20 has been rendered in at least two different ways: According to some translators, Paul was simply saying that there was no one like Timothy; no one else could care for them like he could. According to others, Paul said he and Timothy worked closely together because they were similar in their thinking and that Timothy would therefore care for them in the same way Paul cared for them. Some people are interested in their own things and not in the things that are of Christ Jesus (v. 21), but not so with Timothy; he had been an effective servant whose work had benefited the church.

To provide a more immediate source of encouragement while the Philippians awaited Timothy's visit, Paul would send Epaphroditus to them, a coworker and soldier (v. 25). The church in Philippi sent Epaphroditus to Paul to assist him while he was in prison, and during this time, Epaphroditus became seriously sick (v. 27). Although he had recently been ill, he was more concerned about the Philippians than about his own condition. This is an illustration of true Christian love, about which Paul was writing to them. Fortunately, Epaphroditus was healed and Paul praised the Lord and rejoiced because he was delivered from the grief of losing a beloved coworker (v. 27). Now Paul was sending him back in the hopes that the church would rejoice to see how well he was doing. Paul exhorted the Philippians to receive him with joy and gladness and to consider him as very valuable because of his willingness to serve even at the risk of dying (vv. 29–30). Epaphroditus's presence was an extension of the Philippians' service to him.

3:1–16

Warning: False Teachers

The letter next turns to Paul's concern about false teachers. This section begins with the word *loipon*, translated by some as "finally," "to conclude," as if bringing the letter to an end. However, others render this as "and now," "further," or "what's more." This is followed by the theme of the letter: "rejoice in the Lord" (3:1; cf. 1:18; 2:17–18; 4:4, 10). Paul believed that if the Philippians were to take his appeal to "rejoice in the Lord" (3:1) seriously, they would be free from murmurings, disputing, conceitedness, and divisions and would also be safeguarded as they faced the false teachers. The danger of false doctrines perverting the gospel truth was real, and in v. 2 Paul emphasizes this by using the imperative *blepete* ("be on your guard against," "take care with," "pay attention to," "learn your lesson from"), repeated three times in the Greek. Paul referred to these troublemakers as "dogs"

(v. 2). The term is probably used here to clearly identify the heretics as dangerous people, since at that time dogs were seen as unclean animals that attacked whatever was defenseless. Paul also identified them as evil *ergatas* ("workers"; v. 2), perhaps because of their dependence on works as illustrated in the promotion of circumcision, or alternatively as "evildoers"—those regularly engaged in evil. Paul also calls them *katatomēn*, "the cutters," "those who mutilate the body," that is, the "false circumcision" (v. 2), instead of the *peritomē*, the "circumcision" (v. 3), which he reserved for believers who had experienced the true circumcision of the heart.

Paul develops his argument through a series of participial phrases, all having to do with how he referred to Philippian believers as "the circumcision" (v. 3). First, the appropriation refers to worshiping and serving God in or by the Spirit, which likely implies that they had received the Spirit and were guided by Him during worship. Second, "the circumcision" indicated that they were to *kauchaomai* ("boast," "glory," "rejoice") in Christ Jesus, only glorying or taking pride in what God had already done for them in Christ rather than in their own good works. Third, Paul's allocation was based on their having no confidence in the flesh. We Christians today, instead of depending on ourselves, trustingly subject ourselves to God's promise and accept the free gift of salvation in Jesus Christ. We have become "Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal. 3:29).

Using his own experience, Paul listed the reasons used by the false teachers to have confidence in the flesh (3:4–11). The apostle described himself in Jewish terms to show that he had the same status as the best of them—indeed, he had even more reason than they did to have such confidence (v. 4). Yet, despite his reasons to trust in himself, he would not do it. Such a negative statement does not stem from the fact that he was inferior to another Jew. Unhesitatingly, he went on to mention his personal advantages in Judaism, establishing himself as the ideal or ultimate Jew.

He was circumcised, a practice Jews take pride in, on the eighth day, in perfect compliance with the law (Gen. 17:11–12; Lev. 12:3; cf. Luke 1:59; 2:21). He could consider himself a true, naturally born Jew since he belonged to the nation of Israel, and he therefore had all the Jewish rights and privileges by birth. Moreover, he was from the tribe of Benjamin (Rom. 11:1), a small (Ps. 68:27) but highly respected tribe that was influential in the community. Saul's election as Israel's first king gave the tribe a certain prestige (1 Sam. 9:1–2). In addition, it was the only tribe that remained faithful to Judah during the division of the kingdom (1 Kin. 12:21). Hence, settled in the heart of the Israelite territory, the tribe had a far-reaching influence.

Paul was a Hebrew of the Hebrews, which perhaps meant that he spoke Hebrew and was ethnically from the elected people of God (see Deut. 7:6; 14:2; 26:18–19). He was also a Pharisee in regard to the law. In his speech before the Jewish authorities in Acts 23, Paul declared that he was the son of a Pharisee (Acts 23:6) and had consequently been brought up and trained among the Jews in Jerusalem as an experienced Pharisee in the law (Acts 26:4–5). As Gamaliel's disciple (Acts 5:34; 22:3), Paul had been more zealous in the traditions than his ancestors had (Gal. 1:14). "Pharisee," therefore, was not for him a disparaging term, but rather an honorable title. Through the designation, he was recognized as someone who obeyed, in the highest sense, all the duties prescribed by the law. His Jewish and Pharisaic zeal was demonstrated in his persecution of the church (Phil. 3:6; 1 Cor. 15:9; Gal. 1:13; cf. Acts 8:1, 3; 26:9–11). He was also "blameless" or "faultless" in regard to the righteousness based on the law (Phil. 3:6), his use of "righteousness" meaning compliance to the rules required by God in order to be considered righteous. In his own opinion and in that of his religious colleagues, he was blameless.

Paul's encounter with Christ changed his value system, and what he had considered to be a gain he now counted as a loss (3:7). He had been analyzing things from the perspective of the flesh, that is, from a human perspective, and not from God's perspective. The arrival of God's promised Messiah, the Christ, had globalized the Jewish faith, but many Jews had not yet realized it. The impact Christ had on Paul was so strong that it brought about an almost complete upheaval of his life, but Paul considered the loss he experienced to be a gain. His human self-perception was set aside because of the inestimable value of knowing Christ Jesus his Lord (v. 8). This is not only knowledge about Jesus but also knowledge through a personal and experiential communion with the crucified and exalted Lord. Paul's life revolved around Christ, and everything else for him was *skybala* ("excrement," "dung," or "rubbish," "garbage"), because what he deeply wanted was to gain Christ. The values of his life were determined by Jesus.

Finally, Paul states three reasons for counting all those things a "loss": (1) That he might gain Christ (v. 8). The verb *kerdainō* ("gain"), when understood in the light of Paul's image of profit and loss, his proverbial account and balance sheet, suggests that Christ was for him the real profit and a superior advantage more than anything else was (cf. 1:21, 23).

(2) That he might be found in Christ (v. 9). Jesus was the sphere of life for Paul, and he wanted to be in that sphere of life on the judgment day. He feared to be before God, the Judge, in the flesh, on his own and in the sphere of his self-attained righteousness from the law. When standing before the Judge, he wanted that which is attained through faith in Christ, the righteousness that comes from God via faith (cf. 3:4–11). This is the key statement in this section. Paul's testimony was a rebuttal to his opponents, who insisted that salvation could be attained only through strict obedience to the requirements of the Mosaic Law, starting with circumcision (3:2–3). They taught that before becoming Christians, the Gentiles had to first become Jewish proselytes by submitting to the ritual of circumcision (cf. Acts 15:1, 5). However, according to Paul, the righteousness that entitles anyone to be in the presence of God comes exclusively through faith in Christ. Moses had already declared to the Israelites that their relationship with the Lord was not based on their self-righteousness (Deut. 9:4–6), and that concept became Paul's foundational principle in his teaching of righteousness by faith (Rom. 1:16–17; 3:21–28; Gal. 2:16).

(3) That he might know Christ (Phil. 3:10). To know Christ is to know "the power" of His resurrection, that is to say, to have been risen with Christ into a new life (cf. Rom. 6:4) and to anticipate this power in the future resurrection of the dead. To know Christ and share in His sufferings likely means that Paul had "died with Christ" (Rom. 6:8) and that his sufferings for Christ were a way of strengthening his communion with the suffering Lord.

Paul was well aware that his knowledge and understanding of Christ was partial, and he awaited the day when the partial will give way to a perfect knowledge and understanding of Christ. Conscious that there was still a lot more to know and understand about Christ, Paul pressed on toward a fuller understanding of Christ. His goal was to know Christ fully with his mind and heart in order to take hold of Him in true faith (3:13–14). However, taking hold of Christ had been preceded by Christ first taking hold of him.

After carefully and repeatedly weighing all the evidence (v. 13), Paul reaffirmed his conclusion that he had not perfectly comprehended the meaning of Christ. Therefore, he pressed toward the goal (3:14) of knowing Him and better understanding Him. He underlined this supreme aim by stating that he would do one thing: he would not allow the past to determine his future but would rather move forward, pursuing without distraction his goal of knowing Christ Jesus and receiving, according to God's heavenly call, the final reward of his career—being found in Him (3:9)—meaning to be reliant on Him for salvation and united with Him in that salvation.

Paul called on those who thought of themselves as "mature" to forget the past and go continually forward with the same goal. However, if anyone thought this aim was not crucial, God would reveal to that person the importance and relevance of keeping Christ as his or her life's goal (3:15). In spite of the different levels of comprehension among the Philippians, Paul pointed out to them the importance of cooperation and harmonious action and urged them to be aligned with him (3:9, 12–14).

3:17—4:1

Warning: Materialism

Truth is more visible and easier to comprehend when it is modeled by true believers. Hence, Paul offered his life and those of others as a pattern or model for the Philippians to follow (e.g., Timothy and Epaphroditus). He established Jesus as the supreme example (2:5–11) in his life by counting everything a loss for the sake of knowing (3:7–8) and proclaiming Christ (1 Cor. 4:9–13) and not seeking self-righteousness but the righteousness that comes from God by faith in Christ (3:9–11; cf. 4:9). Paul, with deep sorrow and crying, reminded his readers of something he had told them previously: many people live (lit. "walk") as "enemies of the cross of Christ" (3:18). The conjunction "for" at the beginning of the verse explains the reason Paul urged the Philippians to imitate and follow the steps of other leaders like him. In contrast to those who were leading the people in accordance with the pattern set by the apostle, there were others who behaved differently. These individuals were the enemies of the cross of Christ. The "cross of Christ" sums up the essential content of the gospel (v. 18; cf. 1 Cor. 15:3): the Messiah had to die for the forgiveness of sins, which was a "scandal" to the Jews (*ioudaiois men skandalon*: "stumbling block," "a cause of falling or sinning"; 1 Cor. 1:23), because what

God did on the cross was the opposite of what they expected Him to do.

These individuals were on a trajectory toward final destruction (cf. Rom. 6:21; 9:22; Gal. 6:8), the total opposite of salvation (cf. Phil. 1:28; 3:20). Their god was their stomach, they were proud of what they should have been ashamed of, and their minds were set on earthly things (v. 19). Some interpreters have suggested that *koilia* ("stomach," "belly") is used here to identify those giving in to their sensual desires and living in self-complacency (cf. Rom. 1:21–32; 8:12–13; 16:17–18; 1 Cor. 6:9–10, 13; Gal. 5:13–26; Eph. 5:12; 2 Pet. 2:12–13, 19) rather than living for "the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31). They boasted of their freedom yet became a source of shame. In Romans 16:17–18, Paul used this term to describe self-interested persons who were causing divisions and teaching doctrines contrary to what they had learned (cf. Phil. 4:1, 8–9; 1 Cor. 1:10–17; Gal. 1:6–10). They were not serving the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 16:18; cf. Phil. 3:18c) but their own stomachs. Paul urged the Christians in Rome to not get caught up in controversies, discussions, and contentions as such people do, but to avoid them (Rom. 16:17; cf. 1 Cor. 5:8; 2 Thess. 3:6). The use of *koilia* in the context of Philippians 3:18–19 probably refers to false teachers who were spreading their fallacies, motivated by personal gain. They were focused on earthly things.

Christians do not set their minds on earthly things, because they have something better: the blessed hope of their heavenly citizenship. In 3:20–21, a cornerstone of Paul's teachings, the apostle provides the definitive answer in his debate with the Jews, whose minds were set only on earthly things related to the pride of ethnic identity (cf. 3:5–6). They were to see themselves as citizens of the heavenly city, the place from which they were awaiting the coming Savior, "the Lord Jesus Christ" (3:20). At His coming, He will transform the bodies of our current humble condition into the likeness of His own glorious body (v. 21). The Savior will make effective His work of salvation on our lowly bodies, that is to say, our fallen, weak, corruptible, and mortal nature. They will be changed at His return (cf. 1 Cor. 15:42–58) and be made into the likeness of His own body of glory. In doing so, Christ will use the same power that brings all things into subjection to Himself. Since the Philippians were heavenly citizens (3:20–21), Paul urged them to remain unmoved in the Lord (4:1) as warriors faithfully fighting "for the defense of the gospel" (1:16 [NIV]/17 [NKJV]) and as athletes who unhesitatingly run toward the end goal (3:13–14).

4:2–9

A Call for Unity, Joy, and Peace

Leaving behind theological and controversial issues, Philippians continues with Paul's personal and practical exhortations in which the imperative mode predominates, addressing the case of two church leaders involved in a dispute. Paul exhorted two women, Euodia and Syntyche, to reach an agreement in the Lord, that is, to "be of the same mind in the Lord" (v. 2; cf. 1:27; 2:1–5; 3:15, 19; 4:7). He urged the church to which the letter was addressed to help these women, both of whom worked with Paul. The verb used here, *synathleō*, means "to contend with" or "alongside." They were not false teachers, but their disagreement had to be dealt with in order for them to have an effective ministry. These two women were Paul's coworkers in the proclamation of the gospel. He was indeed proud of them, because they fought side by side with him, Clement, and the rest of his spiritual coworkers. The Philippians knew Clement so well that Paul did not need to identify him further. Paul noted that the names of his fellow workers, including the names of the two female workers, are in the Book of Life (cf. Ex. 32:32–33; Ps. 69:28; Dan. 7:9–14; 12:1; Rev. 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12; 21:27). They are citizens of the heavenly city, and their names are recorded in the registry of that city. The labor of these individuals on behalf of the gospel will never be forgotten.

Paul did not want controversies that rob the church of its vitality, and he enjoined believers to always rejoice in the Lord (Phil. 4:4). We should not let small matters damage our joy in Christ but should resolve them and rejoice in all circumstances in life. This joy expresses itself in *epieikes* ("gentleness," "reasonableness," "graciousness"), a quality Paul indicates should be noticeable to everyone (v. 5), including the community of believers (cf. John 13:35). The life of joy and gentleness is lived under the conviction that the Lord is coming soon (Phil. 1:6, 9–11; 2:16; 2 Thess. 1:7–8; Heb. 10:24–25; James 5:8; Rev. 1:7; 22:20). This hope does not detach us from the present life, but it should fill our hearts with joy and kindness toward our fellow human beings.

Paul further exhorted the Philippians to not be anxious about anything, or, to put it another way, to stop worrying (Phil. 4:6). By using three parallel synonyms, *proseuchē* ("prayer"), *deēsei* ("petition," "supplication"), and *aitēmata* ("requests"; cf. 1:4, 9; Eph. 6:18; 1 Tim. 2:1; 5:5), the apostle admonished the Philippians to be free from cares by living a life of constant prayer. God is greater than the greatest problem, and He rewards those who diligently and earnestly seek Him (Heb. 11:6; cf. 1 Pet. 5:6–7). The emphatic conjunction "and" in v. 7 suggests that "the peace of God" is the result of perseverance in prayer. Such a peace surpasses anything we can ever imagine and protects our inner life—emotional as well as rational—from the various kinds of damage caused by anxiety. By using the word *loipon* (usually translated as "finally") here, Paul meant that he was introducing the last imperatives, which help us understand how to stand firmly in the Lord (4:1): *logizesthe* ("think," "consider," "meditate on") these things (v. 8) and do them as well (v. 9). The list includes a sample of the things that should occupy our minds as we wait for the Lord. Paul clarified that people have different understandings of what is true, noble, pure, and so forth, and he consequently added that anything excellent, virtuous, and praiseworthy should be dwelled on (v. 8). The criterion to be used in evaluating the options that might fit within this broad definition was the instruction given to believers by the apostle. They had the promise that "the God of peace" would be with them (v. 9) and would provide peace for those who place their trust in Him (cf. 1:2; 4:6–7; Rom. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:11; 1 Thess. 5:23).

4:10–20

Expression of Gratitude

The church in Philippi had sent Paul, through Epaphroditus (4:18), financial assistance, which had been a source of joy for the apostle and a blessing to the Philippians, who had been practicing true stewardship (4:15–19). Paul was moved to express his gratitude for their love for him. Their selflessness greatly increased Paul's joy in the Lord. The ultimate cause of Paul's joy was the Lord, but the Philippians' care and concern for him was acknowledged in this case as his greatest reason for rejoicing (v. 10). Paul did not complain about his needs, because he had learned to be *autarkēs* ("independent," "self-sufficient," "strong," "jubilant," usually translated "content") in whatever situation he might find himself (v. 11), an attitude that obviously contributed to his joy in life. He knew about having little and having much, about being hungry and being full, about living in abundance and living in poverty (v. 12). Paul's secret was a simple one: he could do everything through Christ, the One giving him strength (v. 13). That is, he knew he could face anything, because he knew that the Lord would carry him through; His grace was sufficient for him. This was the secret of Paul's self-sufficiency. The driving force behind Paul's independence when facing life was his dependence on Someone above him. His self-sufficiency was the result of His vital union with an all-sufficient source of power: the One who generated power in him and enabled him, the Lord Jesus Christ. The same language is used elsewhere in Paul's writings (Eph. 6:10; 1 Tim. 1:12; 2 Tim. 2:1; 4:17; cf. Phil. 3:7–10).

Of course, Paul did not undermine the loving gift of the Philippians; he told them that their donations had been a blessing both for him during his time of difficulty (v. 14) and for the donors (v. 17). This was not the first time that the Philippians ministered to Paul's needs; they had done it before when no one else provided any help to the apostle (v. 15). Therefore, the apostle not only thanked them for the donations at this time but also for the services previously received. He was aware that their donations in the present were just an outflow of many past ones. Willingness to give was part of the Philippians' Christian experience and should be in the heart of every believer.

The generosity of the Philippians was shown not only after Paul left Macedonia but also before when he was in Thessalonica (v. 16), the very place from which he avoided receiving help (1 Thess. 2:9; 2 Thess. 3:8) in order to prevent giving the new believers the impression that he was a peddler. Paul was not requesting financial support from the Philippians, because he eagerly desired that the results of their generosity be credited to their heavenly account (cf. Heb. 6:10–12; 10:34). Paul then declared that he had received everything he needed and had even more than he needed—an abundance (Phil. 4:18). Having received from Epaphroditus (v. 18; cf. 2:25, 30) the gift of love and grace sent by the Philippians, Paul could say that his needs had been met (4:19).

Using the OT sacrificial language (Ex. 29:18, 25; Lev. 1:9, 13; cf. 2 Cor. 2:15; Eph. 5:2), Paul describes the things sent as a grateful fragrance, a most precious offering (Phil. 4:18). Using the same OT language (cf. Lev. 1:2–17; 2:1–13), he acknowledged that the gift was a costly one for them (2 Cor. 8:1–2) and therefore was an acceptable sacrifice that pleased God (cf. Rom. 12:1;

Heb. 13:16). The possessive adjective "my God" indicates that his God would provide the Philippians—who had so generously helped him—with everything they would need, and that this would flow from the *ploutos* ("fortune," "treasure," "abundance") of His glory in Christ Jesus (v. 19). The Bible tells us that, as Creator, God is unendingly and infinitely rich (Pss. 24:1; 104:1–9, 24; Hag. 2:8; 1 Cor. 10:26); but He is not only rich, He is also good, and He provides for the temporal needs of humankind out of His goodness. He is equally rich in grace and mercy (Eph. 2:4, 7), and according to the richness of His grace, He also provides for the spiritual needs of His people. All of this is possible through Christ Jesus.

The reference to Christ is placed at the end of the sentence for emphasis and should be interpreted in connection with the verb "shall supply"/"will meet" (v. 19). God's fullness is boundless through Jesus Christ our Mediator. Because of what God has done in supplying for our needs, Paul breaks out in a doxology addressed to "our God and Father" (v. 20). To give glory to Him is to be grateful to Him and to align our lives to His will. Our gratitude to God for what He has provided for us through Christ will last forever and ever (lit. "unto the ages of the ages"; see Gal. 1:5; 1 Tim. 1:17; Heb. 13:21; 1 Pet. 4:11; Rev. 1:6; 4:9; 7:12; 11:15; 15:7; 19:3; 22:5). To this Paul adds "Amen," a spontaneous and joyful confirmation of all that has been said (v. 20; cf. Rom. 9:5; 11:36; 1 Cor. 14:16; Gal. 1:5; Eph. 3:21; 1 Tim. 1:17; 1 Pet. 4:11; Rev. 1:6, 7). It is the yes of the church praising God and accepting His promises in Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 1:20; cf. Rev. 5:14; 7:12).

4:21–23
Greetings and Blessings

There are three different groups that Paul mentions in bringing his epistle to a close (4:21–22). He greets every believer "in Christ Jesus" (v. 21). In the epistle, Christ Jesus is both the source and the reality of the life that Paul and the Philippian church enjoyed together. Paul shared the greetings from the brethren in Rome (v. 21), who were Paul's closest associates—individuals such as Timothy, Aristarchus, and Epaphroditus. He also sent the greetings of all of God's people, especially those who were a part of Caesar's household (v. 22). The reference here is not to the emperor's family but to individuals—most likely slaves and freemen—tasked with carrying out the domestic and administrative responsibilities connected to the emperor and his property. The context indicates that Paul was speaking specifically about those who assisted the apostle in his imprisonment and who had been converted through his ministry.

Paul closes his letter with a mention of God's supreme gift of grace (v. 23; cf. 1:2). With few exceptions (Eph. 6:23; Col. 4:18; 1 Tim. 6:21; 2 Tim. 4:22; Titus 3:15), Paul always mentions the grace of Jesus Christ in the final benediction of his letters (Rom. 16:24; 1 Cor. 16:23; 2 Cor. 13:14; Gal. 6:18; 1 Thess. 5:28; 2 Thess. 3:18; Philem. 25). Although at the beginning of this letter, grace is offered from both God and the Lord Jesus Christ, in the final benediction, Paul highlights the "Lord Jesus Christ" as the One who bestows that grace (v. 23). This was possibly done to emphasize the means through which God's love and favor were made known among the Philippians (Phil. 1:6–11, 27–28; 2:12–13, 27; 3:12–15; 4:6–7, 19–20) and to remind them that Jesus is the source of all joy and hope (1:21, 23; 2:5–11; 3:1, 3, 8–11; 4:1, 13). Some manuscripts read "your spirit" in v. 23 (cf. Gal. 6:18; 2 Tim. 4:22) and do not have the final "Amen." Other manuscripts read "you all" and include the "Amen." The most probable reading seems to be, "[May] the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen."

At the close of the letter, the reader is left with a description of a powerful God who cares for the needs of human beings and who uses them to help others. He modeled such an attitude through His Son, who, being divine, became human, humbled Himself, and gave His life on the cross. His resurrection and exaltation anticipate an event of cosmic dimensions, when all intelligent creatures in the universe will proclaim Christ as Lord. This event belongs at the heart of the Christian hope.

COLOSSIANS

INTRODUCTION

Title and Authorship. Written as a personal letter to the Christians in Colossae, Paul's original letter did not have a title. The simple title "To the Colossians" was added to the letter sometime after its composition, probably when scribes first began to collect and copy Paul's letters. Later scribes expanded the title, identifying it more formally as The Epistle of Paul to the Colossians.

Though the letter begins by identifying Paul, who was with Timothy at the time, as the author (1:1), a growing number of critical scholars now question the letter's authenticity. They claim that the letter's vocabulary, writing style, distinct theological emphases (e.g., a more highly developed Christology and a realized eschatology experienced in the present instead of a future salvation when Christ returns), and the inability to correlate the false teachings the letter confronts with known first-century groups from Paul's time all indicate that a later author wrote the letter but used Paul's name to address realities that emerged after the apostle's death.

Other scholars, however, do not find these arguments convincing. While the vocabulary and style are not identical to Paul's other letters, they are easily explained as being the result of his need to use different vocabulary to address the specific heresy troubling the Colossians. Moreover, there is much that is similar, and what is different may be accounted for in part by his likely use of an amanuensis, a literary assistant who took dictation (cf. Col. 4:18; Rom. 16:22).

Although Colossians does have distinct Christological and eschatological emphases, it is not inconsistent with what Paul teaches elsewhere. He speaks of the supremacy of Christ in his other letters (cf. Rom. 8:38–39; 1 Cor. 2:6–8; Phil. 2:10) and of how Christ's resurrection can empower the way one lives life in the present (Rom. 6:7, 11; Phil. 3:20–21). Thus, Paul was merely expanding and applying the gospel to the problems in Colossae. For this reason, Colossians is best understood as having been composed by the Apostle Paul, a view that was unquestioned during the first nineteen centuries of Christian history.

Date. The most concrete fact we learn from Colossians about the location and date of its composition is that Paul was in prison (Col. 4:3; cf. 1:24). Therefore, Colossians is one of the letters known as the Prison Epistles (referring to those written during Paul's first imprisonment in Rome), joining Ephesians, Philippians, and Philemon in clearly identifying Paul as a prisoner at that time. Paul was also a prisoner at a later date when he wrote 2 Timothy, one of the Pastoral Epistles, referring to letters written to mentees. Among these Prison Epistles, Colossians shares much with both Ephesians and Philemon, the latter being addressed to a Christian slave master in Colossae.

But where was Paul imprisoned? Two of his incarcerations are the most likely candidates: (1) Ephesus (see 1 Cor. 15:32) and (2) Rome (Acts 28:11–31). If Paul was imprisoned at some time during his lengthy stay in Ephesus (Acts 19:1—20:1), he may have composed the Prison Epistles there. This idea is supported by the mention of frequent journeys between the churches in Asia Minor and the place of imprisonment in these letters. As for Rome, at the end of Acts, Luke describes Paul's initial imprisonment in the city (Acts 28:11–31) as being a "house arrest," during which time he was able to live by himself, though a soldier guarded him (Acts 28:16), and he occupied his own rented house for "two whole years" (Acts 28:30), a degree of freedom that seems to be reflected in the Prison Epistles (Col. 4:3–4, 7–14; Eph. 6:19–20; Philem. 23–24). Careful study of the Pauline companions who are mentioned in Colossians, Ephesians, and Philemon also suggests Rome is the best choice (see commentary on Col. 4:7–18). Since the early church fathers supported

Rome and since no strong argument against it has emerged, it is best to identify Colossians as being written by Paul during his initial imprisonment in Rome (Acts 28:30) in the early A.D. 60s.

Backgrounds. The founding of the church in Colossae is not mentioned in Acts. Rather, we learn about its beginnings from three passages that mention Epaphras: Colossians 1:6–8; 4:12–13; and Philemon 23.

From Colossians 1:6–8, we learn that Epaphras was most likely the first to preach the gospel in Colossae, was Paul's "dear fellow servant" and still "a faithful minister of Christ" (v. 7) through prayer, and was the source of the joyful report concerning the believers in Colossae. In Colossians 4:12, Paul describes Epaphras as "one of you," likely indicating that he was a native of Colossae (cf. Col. 4:9), and as a *doulos* (variously translated "bondservant," "servant," "slave"). We know that Paul was with Epaphras since he was conveying his greetings and that the former joined the latter in earnestly praying for the addressees (cf. 1:3–12; Luke 18:1). Paul employs a verb, *agōnizomai*, that was typically used to describe athletic contests (1 Cor. 9:25) or battles (John 18:36) to depict Epaphras's sustained and extreme efforts in the ministry. (Luke 22:44 uses the related noun *agōnia* in describing the prayers of Jesus in Gethsemane.) Paul also says that Epaphras worked zealously for the believers in Colossae, Laodicea, and Hierapolis, the latter two of which were a short distance from Colossae (Laodicea was 10 mi. [16 km] to the west; Hierapolis, 12 mi. [19 km] to the northwest). Philemon 23 adds that Epaphras sent greetings to Philemon and mentions Paul's description of Epaphras as "my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus" (cf. Col. 4:10), probably meaning that Epaphras was imprisoned with Paul or had been at an earlier time.

In light of these descriptions, it seems probable that Epaphras became acquainted with Paul during the apostle's extended ministry in Ephesus (Acts 19:1—20:1), since Colossae was 110 miles (177 km) to the east of Ephesus. While in the city, Epaphras accepted Christ and began to share his newfound faith. Later, he returned to the Lycus River Valley and preached the gospel in Colossae, Laodicea, and Hierapolis. Having won converts, he remained as a shepherd to the new believers. Motivated by the presence of erroneous teachers in Colossae, Epaphras visited Paul and informed him of their teachings (cf. Col. 1:4, 7–8). The Epistle to the Colossians is Paul's response to this news.

In the letter, Paul strongly affirms Epaphras to prepare for his return. If believers would follow the evangelist's lead, they would not be duped by erroneous ideas but would be called back to the faith he had first preached to them (1:5–8, 23; 2:6). Thanks to Paul's descriptions, we learn something about the history of the church at Colossae and about Epaphras, who offered a model of spreading the gospel and ministering through focused, heartfelt prayer.

Theology and Purpose. The theology that Paul offers in Colossians presents rich seams of truth. Paul was concerned about issues of Christian identity, keen for believers to understand both the privileges that they possess in the present (1:3–14) and the powerful motivation offered by the hope of Christ's return (see 1:5, 23, 27; 3:4; cf. 3:6, 25; for a discussion of how Paul developed the theme of a future, Christ-centered hope, see commentary on Col. 3:1–17). This epistle demonstrates Paul's additional concern that the Colossians' behavior should reflect their commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord (3:1—4:6).

These themes are not random but are presented in relation to the purpose of the letter: to offer sustained argument against the erroneous teachings circulating among the Christian congregations in Colossae—teachings that tended to diminish the status and power of Christ by placing Him in competition with other powers. As a result, the letter offers some of the most important statements in the NT about Jesus.

1. The Nature of the Heresy. While much of the letter seems to be written in relation to the erroneous teachings, it is difficult to know which of Paul's ideas reflect them directly. Paul's core arguments against the heresy are contained in Colossians 2:8–23, which suggests that the following features are prominent: (1) worshipful attention to spiritual powers such as angels, thrones, powers, and principalities/authorities (2:9–10, 15, 18–19; cf. 1:13–23; 2:6); (2) submission to worldly elements (2:8, 20), which are likely astral powers or deities; (3) misplaced attention to "sabbaths" or "Sabbath days" (2:16); (4) asceticism focused on overly stringent regulations on diet (2:14, 16–17, 20–23); and (5) an interest in special, secretive knowledge and religious experience obtained through visions (2:22; cf. 1:9–10, 28; 2:2–4).

Identifying the erroneous teachers at Colossae is one of the most vexing challenges of NT studies; one dated catalog suggests more than forty differing opinions. Were they Pharisees, speculative and ascetic Judeo-pagan syncretists,

or Gnostic Ebionites? Or were they disciples of Apollos, syncretistic ascetics influenced by philosophy, myths, and the mysteries, or . . .? One of the more commonly accepted explanations is to correlate the opponents with synagogue Judaism that reflected views very similar to the errors being discussed in the Epistle to the Galatians. However, there are significant differences between the two contexts, the first being a very different tone. In Galatians, Paul reacts very strongly to a threat that had already swept through the church, whereas in Colossians, his reaction is more benign, apparently addressing a set of errors that was threatening but had not yet influenced the church. Second, the word "law" (*nomos*), which occurs thirty times in Galatians, does not appear in Colossians. Third, circumcision, which was central to the crisis in Galatia, is only mentioned as a conciliation in Colossians and the use points toward Christian baptism as a way to reconcile Judaism and Christianity (2:11–12). In addition, some features of the heretical teaching, particularly ascetic elements (e.g., regulations regarding drink, v. 16; the rules about not tasting, touching, or handling, v. 21) do not easily fit into the context of synagogue Judaism.

As a result, it is now common to identify the false teaching at Colossae as syncretistic, borrowing from multiple streams of religious and philosophical thought. If this is true, did such a permeable set of beliefs have a pagan cast to them while borrowing elements from Judaism, or do they lie within Hellenistic Judaism, which could itself borrow quite broadly? Or, did they represent a less normative "folk Judaism" at the edges of the religion, an explanation that has recently become popular?

Given the variety of opinions regarding the erroneous teachers discussed in Colossians and the ambiguity of the evidence in the epistle, we should avoid placing confidence in any one view and using that view to interpret Colossians. Rather, we should attend carefully to the content of the letter itself, being content with the descriptions Paul offers and focusing on the inspiring theology he provides in countering the heresy. (For more on the concepts advocated by the false teachers in Colossae, see commentary on Col. 2:8–23. For a discussion of how the "sabbaths" or "Sabbath days" [2:16] figured into the controversy, see "Meaning of 'Sabbath' in Colossians 2:16," p. 1751).

2. Centrality of Jesus. In contrast to the false teachers' interest in a variety of powers, Paul sets forth Jesus Christ as the risen, ascended, and coronated Lord of all to whom every power owes allegiance. Paul argues that true Christian faith must be judged by its relationship to Jesus: Is He all that He should be? Is He regarded as both Creator and Redeemer (1:15–20)? Additionally, given all His cosmic significance, Christians are not to worship Jesus from afar. Instead, they are invited to personally participate in Christ and to acknowledge their identity as being bound up with His, as can be seen in how frequently the phrase "in Christ" is used in the letter. While this confidence in Christ is exhibited everywhere in the letter, Paul specifically addresses Christ and His importance to believers in 1:13–23, 2:6–23, and 3:1–4.

Literary Features. Colossians exhibits a close literary relationship with the Epistle to the Ephesians in that both letters seem to follow a similar pattern, which results in many parallel sections—though Ephesians includes unique sections devoted to the theme of the church. They share a description of Tychicus as the bearer of the letter (Col. 4:7; Eph. 6:21), a relationship best explained by understanding that both letters were composed by Paul around the same time and that he customized the content of each to address the realities at hand. As a result of this literary relationship, it is a helpful strategy to look to parallel sections in Ephesians as a way of enhancing our understanding.

COMMENTARY

1:1–2
Introduction

The letter begins by naming the authors and the recipients and offering a word of greeting. Paul identifies himself as an apostle of Jesus "by the will of God" (Col. 1:1), a description that points to his authority as a spokesperson for Christ and his direct commission from the risen Christ (Acts 9:1–9; 22:1–10; 26:12–18).

The letter came from both Paul and Timothy, the latter of whom was an early convert who was considered the most durable and valuable of Paul's coworkers (see Phil. 2:19–22) and who may have served as secretary for the letter. Timothy also acted as coauthor with Paul in several other letters. While this letter begins with the first-person plural "we" (Col. 1:3, 9; cf. 4:3), major sections of the letter (1:24—2:5; 4:2–18) are written in the first-person singular "I" or "my," suggesting that Paul is largely responsible for the content.

Paul's way of identifying the believers in Colossae was to call them holy and faithful (1:2). His use of *charis* ("grace") is probably related to the usual Greek word for "greetings" (*chairein*), which he joined to the standard Jewish greeting *shalom* ("peace"). These terms, which were Paul's characteristic way of beginning a letter, are not simply formalized greetings but are representative of the profound outcome of God's work through Christ.

1:3—2:5

God's Salvation Offered to the Believers at Colossae

In the first of two major segments of Colossians, Paul proclaims central concepts of Christian faith. Initially, these proclamations take the form of a "prayer report" in which he recalls how the believers in Colossae first heard the gospel (1:3-12). Paul builds to one of the most inspiring statements about Jesus, the beloved Son of God, and how the cosmic scope of His work of redemption impacted the believers in Colossae (1:13-23). While Paul did not found the church in Colossae and therefore did not know his addressees personally, he describes in some detail his concern and labors for them (1:24—2:5). All of this was in the interest of reconfirming their earlier acceptance of the gospel as a way of inoculating them against the false teachings he addresses in 2:8-23 (a motive made explicit in 1:23; 2:6).

1:3-12. Paul's Thanksgiving and Prayers for the Colossians. Colossians 1:3-12 is a treasure. It is an entry from Paul's prayer journal, a "prayer report" or "thanksgiving" in which he told believers in Colossae that he was praying for them. Inspired by news of them, he offered joyful prayer full of thanksgiving (vv. 3-8) as well as petitionary prayer for them (vv. 9-12).

Paul usually begins his letters with a "thanksgiving," and the one he offers here is lengthy and complex. These thanksgivings are not just tacked on but are closely connected to the issues he addresses later in the letter. In the thanksgiving in Colossians, Paul accomplishes two tasks as he establishes the argument of the letter: in consideration of the heresy that was threatening the church, he calls to mind the addressees' conversion experience and the power and purity of the gospel message in which they believed while also assuring them that the hope harbored in that gospel message was reliable. They could depend on it; it needed no correction.

In the first half of his thanksgiving or prayer report (vv. 3-8), Paul traces the Colossians' Christian experience back to the moment they first heard the gospel from Epaphras:

- Paul prayed for them (v. 3).
- Paul received a report of their faith and love (v. 4; cf. v. 8).
- Having been converted, the believers in Colossae possessed a secure, Christian hope (v. 5a; noting here in vv. 4-5 the frequent use of the triad faith, hope, and love; cf. 1 Cor. 13:13; Gal. 5:5-6; 1 Thess. 1:3; 5:8).
- Paul gave an extended description of the day (Col. 1:6) they heard and accepted the truth (vv. 5b-8; with a joyous excursus regarding the progress of the gospel throughout the world, v. 6; cf. v. 23).

In view of the threatening heresy, Paul called the believers back to the moment of their conversion, when their hearts were first touched by the love of Christ (cf. 1:23; 2:6; 1 Cor. 6:9-11; 15:1-2; Gal. 1:6-9; 2 Thess. 2:13-15). Paul seems to suggest that there was much to learn from the early days when they "first believed" in childlike simplicity (Rom. 13:11).

Paul begins the section with a thanksgiving to God (Col. 1:3). While it is clear that Paul was petitioning God on behalf of the believers in Colossae (vv. 9-12), he was praying in a tone of thanksgiving, collecting the blessings of God and thanking the Giver. He prayed for people by thanking God for His activity in their lives.

In writing that he and Timothy were always praying for the Colossians (v. 3), Paul probably did not mean that they were literally praying all the time, but that they were praying regularly at the appointed hours of prayer in the morning, at noon, and in the evening (see Ps. 55:17; Dan. 6:10, 13). It is tempting to think of Paul as a busy tentmaker and missionary who fit prayer in whenever possible, but Paul was dedicated to the work of prayer and observed set times for it. He did not see it as an expendable add-on. Prayer was at the heart of his work in spreading the gospel.

In the midst of Paul's prayer is a phrase that deserves close attention regarding the hope that is in heaven for believers (Col. 1:5; cf. v. 12, "the inheritance"). The phrase summarizes the supreme value of the gospel to both the Colossian believers and to all who await Christ's return. We have an assured, God-established hope, not simply a fleeting human wish or unrealistic dream. As a way of accenting the security of this Christian hope, Paul uses the verb *apokeimai*, which means "to put away for safekeeping" (as in Luke 19:20) or "to be reserved in readiness" (as in 2 Tim. 4:8). To further underline the confidence we may have in this hope, Paul notes that it is laid up "in heaven" (cf. Matt. 6:19-21). This priceless treasure—everlasting life offered through Jesus Christ—is not subject to risk or loss; it is secure. The certainty of this hope helps steady us and fill us with joy as we await "the blessed hope" of Christ's glorious coming (Titus 2:13; see commentary on Col. 3:1-17).

The phrase about love in the Spirit (Col. 1:8) is the only mention of the Holy Spirit in Colossians (in some translations, the adjective "spiritual" is used in 1:9 and 3:16, which likely alludes to the Spirit). This is especially curious given the emphasis placed on the Spirit in the closely related letter to the Ephesians (Eph. 1:13-14; 2:18, 22; 3:5, 16; 4:3-4, 30; 5:18; 6:17-18). Paul focuses his attention in the shorter letter to the Colossians on the major issue in question: the importance of Jesus Christ. However, this mention of the Spirit reminds us that His work was essential to Paul and that the Spirit was known to the believers in Colossae as the One who inspired love within the Christian community.

Having worked his way back in time to the moment the Christians at Colossae first believed, Paul reverses the narrative flow of time in Colossians 1:9-12. When Paul heard of their conversion, it triggered a pattern of prayer that he and Epaphras had practiced ever since (cf. v. 3; 4:12-13). (Epaphras is mentioned in 1:7-8, 4:12-13, and Philemon 23. See Colossians: Introduction for a discussion of the inspiration we gain from his good example.)

Continuing his prayer, Paul traces his spiritual goals for these new believers—goals that are not unrelated to the threatening heresy. Paul hoped and prayed that the following goals would be realized in the lives of the believers in Colossae who believed that his report was inspired by God:

1. They Would Have Insight into God's Will (Col. 19b). Paul wished them to be filled with the knowledge of God's will, which likely relates to the false teachings circulating in Colossae. Paul twice affirms that all fullness dwells in Christ (1:19; 2:9), and it is in Christ that "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" are to be found (2:3). Paul prays that his addressees would be filled with this Christ-centered wisdom rather than a secret, speculative knowledge touted by the false teachers.

2. They Would Live within God's Will (Col. 1:10a). Paul admonishes the Colossians to live a life (lit. "walk") worthy of the Lord. He uses here a common OT expression that portrays life as a journey on foot (cf. Eph. 4:1; 1 Thess. 2:12). (On pleasing God, see Rom. 8:8; 1 Thess. 2:4; 4:1.)

3. They Would Grow in Christian Experience (Col. 1:10b; cf. v. 6). In using the language of being fruitful and increasing, Paul seems to be reflecting God's command in the Creation story to "be fruitful" (Gen. 1:22, 28), a theme that is carried down through the OT story (e.g., Gen. 8:17; 17:20; Ex. 1:7; Jer. 3:16). The ultimate fulfillment of the command embedded in the Creation story is to be found in the re-creation of humankind through Christ (see commentary on Col. 3:1-17).

4. They Would Be Steadfast in Their Christian Commitment (Col. 1:11). Paul exudes confidence in God's ability to provide all the power believers need. He envisioned the Colossians being strengthened with mighty power on the grand scale of God's own glorious power (cf. Eph. 1:18-20).

5. They Would Have a Strong Prayer Life (Col. 1:12). They were not to take credit for any of these positive qualities but were to join Paul in thanking God, since He had enabled them to share the inheritance of His people. Paul begins to use language drawn from Exodus as he transitions to the next section of his argument (Col. 1:13-23), where such language is more pronounced. In the OT, these terms describe the territories allotted to the tribes in the land of Israel (e.g., Josh. 12:7; 18:6). Paul spiritualizes this theme (cf. Deut. 32:9), applying it to the privilege of being part of the people of God who live in "light" (Col. 1:12) in the new promised land of God's grace.

As we review Paul's impressive prayer for the believers in Colossae, do not miss its buoyant tone. He believed that these grand blessings were readily available through God's grace that is expressed in Jesus Christ. In His name, we have the right to lay claim to them today.

1:13-23. God's Action in Christ to Redeem the Colossians. Colossians 1:13-23 could be described as the theological heart of the epistle. The poem in vv. 15-20 serves as a high point, if not the summit, of Paul's teachings about Christ. It is in these treasured words, focused on the person and work of Christ, that we find some of the most inspiring themes in the entire Bible.

In vv. 13-14, Paul speaks geographically of what happens when someone accepts Christ. The person is transferred by God from one kingdom to another—from darkness to "the kingdom of the Son" (v. 13), where believers enjoy redemption and forgiveness (v. 14). Redemption (*apolytrōsis*) is a term borrowed from the slave market and indicates the freedom from slavery gained through having been purchased by a benefactor. Paul's vivid language draws on the Exodus story (esp. Ex. 6:6; cf. Hos. 13:14; Mic. 4:10) and the history of Egypt as a place of slavery and darkness (Ex. 10:21–29). For Christians today, Colossians 1:13–14 result in both searching questions (e.g., "Does my life exhibit the dramatic shift Christ has won for me?") and heartfelt praise.

Verses 15–20 display poetic features, such as the repeated use of the term "firstborn" (vv. 15, 18), a variety of phrases that refer to Christ (e.g., "He is," "through Him") and the phrase "all things." Because of these poetic features, the passage is often thought to have been an early Christian hymn that Paul used and perhaps edited to address the issues at hand. However, it may simply be Paul's own creative composition.

A variety of structures have been proposed for the poem. It seems best to view it as two stanzas (vv. 15–16; 18–20), with vv. 17–18a serving as a transition in which the former summarizes the first stanza and the latter introduces the second. The first stanza (vv. 15–16) celebrates Christ's work as Creator of all things (cf. John 1:3, 10; 1 Cor. 8:6; Heb. 1:2–3, 10), and the second (Col. 1:18–20) celebrates Christ's work in reconciling all things through His blood on the cross (v. 20). The two halves of the poem are drawn together by a consistent focus on Christ, first as Creator and then as Reconciler, and by the presence of "all things" as the object of both creation and reconciliation. The acts of creation and redemption are unified in the person and power of Christ.

It is worth reflecting carefully on the meaning of each important phrase of the poem. The first stanza (vv. 15–17) opens with the assertion that Jesus is "the image of the invisible God." The Greek word Paul uses for image is *eikōn*, which means "image," "likeness," or even "idol." Paul continues to draw on the Creation story, which asserts that God created humankind in His own image (Gr. *eikōn*; Gen. 1:27). Hebrews 1:2–3 and 2 Corinthians 4:6 both describe this concept further. Paul argues that if we wish to have access to God (i.e., to see the invisible God and to know Him), we must look to Jesus. The believers in Colossae, who were being tempted to look elsewhere for the definitive revelation of God, needed this reminder, and so do we.

Next, Jesus is described as "the firstborn over all creation" (Col. 1:15), a phrase that the second stanza of the poem echoes (vv. 18–20) in describing Christ as "the firstborn" from among the dead (v. 18). In the NT, the Greek term for firstborn, *prōtotokos*, is often used to describe the first son to come from the womb (Heb. 11:28), but it is used more frequently in a figurative sense as a title for or description of Jesus (see Rom. 8:29; Heb. 1:6; Rev. 1:5; cf. Ex. 4:22; Ps. 89:27). Used in this way, it describes Jesus as the One who is supreme in position, who is supreme over or has priority over time, or who existed before others. These meanings are confirmed by Paul's description of Christ as the One through whom "all things were created" in heaven and on earth (Col. 1:16) and by his expansion on Christ as "the firstborn from" (or "firstborn from among") the dead who has preeminent supremacy over everything (v. 18). Logically, the idea that Christ created all things excludes Him from creation and distinguishes Him from created beings (a point that the New World Translation of the Jehovah's Witnesses seeks to deny by inserting the word "other" several times in vv. 15–20; for example, "By means of him all other things were created" [v. 16]). In using the term "firstborn," Paul accents Jesus's importance and supreme position over all creation.

In v. 16, Paul provides the basis for these bold assertions concerning the descriptions of Jesus as the image of God and the Creator of all things (vv. 15–16), drawing on the language of both Genesis 1 and the Sabbath commandment (Ex. 20:8–11) to proclaim Christ as the One who has created everything (see "Christ and the Creation of All Things," p. 1745). Christ's creative power moves through the boundaries of cosmic geography (i.e., in heaven; on earth). It is not limited to the spectral bandwidth of human sight, since it includes both the "visible" and the "invisible" (v. 16).

However, Paul's special interest was in asserting that there are no invisible, powerful, or spiritual beings who do not owe their existence to Jesus. It is not important to differentiate the meanings of the terms Paul uses for these spiritual beings, which may have been expressions used by the false teachers in Colossae (cf. 2:10, 15; Rom. 8:38–39; 1 Cor. 15:24; Eph. 1:21; 3:10; 6:12). All these terms designate spiritual powers and may include both good and evil beings. Paul's purpose was to argue that all spiritual beings were created by Jesus, and because this is true, all owe Him their worship and allegiance by implication.

Next, Paul restates and extends Christ's role in creation, noting that everything was created both through and for Him (Col. 1:16b). Christ is not only the Agent but also the Goal of creation. He is not only the Origin of all things but their Destiny as well. Cosmogony (how the world began) is joined with eschatology (how the world will end) in accordance with Ephesians 1:10, which looks toward the time when all will be fulfilled as God brings together everything in heaven and on earth.

The next phrase (Col. 1:17a) conveys the thought that Christ is "before all things," an idea that has already been expressed in the poem (cf. "the firstborn over all creation"; v. 15), and extends it by stating that in Him, all things *synestēken*. In this context, the Greek word means to "cohere," "hold together," or "exist." The significance of Jesus in creation is not limited to His work as the Creator at the beginning (vv. 15–17a) or to His role as the One unifier of all things at the end (1:16b; Eph. 1:10). The current existence of all creation (i.e., "all things") depends on the powerful command, authoritative rule, and unifying power of Christ. To the Colossian believers, Paul was declaring that "the hand that sustains the worlds in space, and holds in their orderly arrangements and tireless activity all things throughout the universe of God, is the hand that was nailed to the cross for them" (AA 471; cf. Col. 1:20).

While the first half of the poem (vv. 15–17) focuses on the role of Christ as Creator, it also has in view His cosmic significance both in the

Christ and the Creation of All Things

In Colossians 1:15–20, Paul is very interested in establishing that God, through Christ, created everything in the realms of heaven and earth. To make this point, he draws on two OT passages that describe God's creation of the world: the story of creation in Genesis 1–2 and the Sabbath commandment as expressed in Exodus 20:8–11.

Genesis 1:1 (LXX, "In [the] beginning God made the heaven and the earth") and Exodus 20:11 (LXX, "[The] Lord made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all the things [*ta panta*] in them") hold particular significance in this epistle, as is seen in Colossians 1:16: "all things" in heaven and on earth.

The phrase *ta panta* ("all things") in 1:15–20 has often been thought to come from various schools of ancient thought (esp. Stoicism or Gnosticism). It is best to acknowledge that it is a biblical phrase. Paul borrowed it from the language of the Sabbath commandment and uses it to underline the boundless dominion of Christ: there is nothing that lies outside of His authority, since He is both Creator and Reconciler of "all things" (vv. 15–17, 20). This point was very important to Paul, as is evidenced by the number of times he evokes the phrase "all things" in these few short verses. In his initial description of Christ, he uses the phrase "all creation" (v. 15) before providing the full description: "all things" on heaven and earth (v. 16). To refer back to this fuller description, he uses the phrase "all things" several times (vv. 16–20) before returning at the end of the passage to a fuller version, "things on earth or things in heaven" (v. 20). Additionally, much of the rest of the language of the poetic passage, especially the description of the various powers (v. 16), is an explanation, expansion, or application of this phrase. If it is correct to see in the use of "all things" in Colossians 1:15–20 an allusion to the fourth commandment, it is a much-repeated point that is central to the structure of the passage.

There is no tension here between the worship of Christ and keeping the Sabbath commandment. Paul does not "spiritualize" the Sabbath by suggesting that it was completed, done away with, or replaced by Christ. On the contrary, Christ is placed at the center of the narratives of Creation and redemption as the Creator who is inherently to be worshiped on the Sabbath. To truly keep the Sabbath, one must acknowledge the limitless lordship of Jesus Christ who created "all things" (see "Meaning of 'Sabbath' in Colossians 2:16," p. 1751). For Christians, it is Christ who is to be worshiped on the Sabbath as the Creator of "all things . . . visible and invisible" (v. 16), and it is Christ through whom God reconciles everything to Himself, "whether things on earth or things in heaven" (v. 20). The Sabbath is not to be worshiped; Christ is to be worshiped on the Sabbath.

present and at the end of time. It sings of the wonder and significance of Jesus Christ not only "yesterday" but also "today" and "forever" (Heb. 13:8).

Having celebrated Christ's work as Creator in the first half of the poem (Col. 1:15–17), Paul next praises Christ as Redeemer in the second half (vv. 18–20). While all things coexist or cohere in Christ, He has a special relationship to His church. For a poetic description of that relationship, Paul turns to the body metaphor (v. 18), which he employs in Romans 12:4–5 and 1 Corinthians 12:12–31. In these earlier uses, the head is one body part among many others and is not assigned any special importance (1 Cor. 12:21; cf. 1 Cor. 11:3). When Paul uses the metaphor in Ephesians and Colossians, he designates Christ as the head of the church, which is His body (Col. 1:18; 2:19; Eph. 1:22; 4:15; 5:23; cf. Col. 2:10; see commentary on Col. 2:8–23).

Borrowing another important term from the Creation story (Gen. 1:1), Paul describes Jesus as "the beginning" (Col. 1:18). He makes it clear that he is highlighting Christ's role as the initiator of salvation, the new creation, by referring to the "firstborn from" (or "firstborn from among") the dead as a way of describing Christ's resurrection (Acts 26:23; 1 Cor. 15:20; on "firstborn," see commentary on Col. 1:13–23). Christ's resurrection results in His possessing universal supremacy (Col. 1:18b; cf. Rev. 1:5).

Colossians 1:19–20 reveals why Christ possesses supremacy in all things: because of His divinity (v. 19) and because, as the divine Son, He reconciles all things through His blood on the cross (v. 20). While in later Gnostic heresies *plērōma* ("fullness"; v. 19) refers to a series of emanations or aeons from God who are spiritual beings, here in 2:9 it refers to God Himself or the presence of God dwelling in the human body of Christ. The presence of God, thought of in the OT as residing in the temple, dwells in Christ (see Ps. 68:16, which in the Greek OT shares the vocabulary of Col. 1:19). The idea that all the fullness of God dwells in Christ emphasizes His divinity and authority.

A second reason for the supremacy of Christ in all things (v. 18) is His work as the agent of reconciliation (v. 20). The Father has reconciled all things to Himself through Christ's death on the cross. Paul accents the extent of Christ's reconciling, peacemaking work, which impacts all things in heaven and on earth (borrowing the language of Ex. 20:11; see "Christ and the Creation of All Things," p. 1745), and the means by which that work is accomplished: through the blood of Christ shed on the cross (cf. Eph. 2:13–16). The theme of reconciliation offered in Christ is a central one for Paul (see Col. 1:21–22; Rom. 5:9–11; 11:15; 2 Cor. 5:18–21; Eph. 2:16). It is not the guilty party but the offended God who took the initiative, through the death of His beloved Son, to reconcile or make peace with sinners. Once enemies, believers are now reunited with God (Col. 1:21–22) as His treasured sons and daughters. Ultimately, Christ's reconciling work includes the pacification of His enemies (see 2:15) and will be fulfilled when "the great controversy is ended" and when "all things, animate and inanimate, in their unshadowed beauty and perfect joy, declare that God is love" (GC 678).

Paul's poem (vv. 15–20) provides fresh inspiration for our personal and shared worship. We learn here of the cosmic significance of the One who died for us. The "image of the invisible God" (v. 15), who possesses all the fullness of God (v. 19), He is the Creator and Sustainer of "all things" (vv. 15–17). Fully God, His reconciling, peacemaking work changes everything (v. 20). His authority knows no boundaries of time or space, and He is our Lord.

Having sung the praises of Christ in cosmic scope, Paul returns the focus to the believers in Colossae (vv. 21–23). How were they linked to the metanarrative of God's creation and reconciliation of "all things" through Christ? Paul offers brief but vivid before-and-after descriptions: *Before* they accepted Christ, they were alienated from Him in their thinking because of their wickedness (v. 21). *After*, through accepting the death of Jesus on their behalf, they had become reconciled, holy, blameless, and free from accusation in His sight (v. 22).

Here, Paul signals a note of great concern related to the heretical teachings offered by some by continuing with the word "if." Their new reconciled, holy, and blameless status would hold only *if* they remained true to the gospel they had first heard from Epaphras (v. 23; cf. vv. 3–8). Paul seems to practice hyperbole in v. 23 by claiming that the gospel had been preached to "every creature under heaven." However, perhaps the statement should be read less as a mission report than as a theological conviction: given the role of Jesus as the agent of both creating and reconciling "all things" (vv. 15–20), it follows that the gospel would have penetrated throughout the entire creation.

Paul's renewed interest in believers (vv. 21–23) invites us to reflect on the theme of Christ as Creator (vv. 15–17) from a personal point of view.

We are aided in this reflection by the thoughts of the psalmist in Psalm 139:13–16: since Christ created all things, He made *us*, knitting us together in our mothers' wombs. As a result, we owe Him our allegiance and worship. This revelation in Colossians is not just a story about how the cosmos came to be or the origin of spiritual powers; it is about us and our origin and how we fit into the grand story of redemption.

1:24—2:5. Paul's Work on the Behalf of the Colossians. Thus far, Paul's focus has been on God the Father (1:3–12) and God the Son (1:13–23). Here, he turns to a discussion of his own ministry as a servant of Christ in two sections: (1) 1:24–29, which details his sufferings and ministry for the church as a whole; and (2) 2:1–5, which describes his struggle on behalf of believers in Colossae and Laodicea. At the heart of each section is a statement celebrating Christ as the revealed mystery of God (1:26–27; 2:2–3).

In 1:24—2:5, Paul talks a lot about himself, praising his own preaching and hard work (cf. Rom. 15:14–21; 2 Cor. 11:16—12:11). Itinerant teachers of the time were expected to share their own qualifications, just as we might do if asked to submit a résumé, and to offer themselves as examples to their disciples. Paul was simply following the conventions of his day, and it is imperative that we hear these words with that in mind.

In Colossians 1:24, Paul describes his sufferings on behalf of the body of Christ, the church (cf. v. 29). His declaration that the sufferings in his flesh were filling up what was lacking regarding the afflictions of Christ is difficult to understand. The apostle seems to claim that Christ's death did not accomplish everything that was necessary and that he therefore must make up the difference through his own suffering. However, Paul is very clear that through Christ's death on the cross, God provides all that is needed for our salvation (e.g., Rom. 3:21–26; Phil. 3:8–10). Elsewhere in Colossians, Paul eloquently defends the sufficiency of Christ and the salvation He offers (1:13–14, 18–22; 2:9–15). Therefore, he must have meant something different by his reference to Christ's afflictions. In fact, he does not use the term "afflictions" (*thlipsis*) anywhere else to refer to Christ's suffering on our behalf.

While it is fairly easy to determine what Paul did *not* mean by this statement about his sufferings—that the death of Christ on our behalf was somehow insufficient—it is more difficult to determine what he *did* mean. There are at least two potential explanations: Paul could be referring to his (as well as other Christians') suffering as involving Christ's own suffering. On the road to Damascus, Paul learned that Jesus identifies with His people in their suffering when he was asked why he was persecuting Him (Acts 9:4; 22:7; 26:14). A second explanation was revealed when the Lord told Ananias that He would show Saul how much he would suffer for the sake of Christ's name (Acts 9:16). Therefore, the sufferings of Paul and others, experienced as they witnessed about Christ, may be called the afflictions of Christ. In Paul's mind, a certain quantity of these sufferings must be experienced before Christ returns (cf. Dan. 7:21–27; 12:1; Mark 13:20; Rev. 6:9–11; 7:14; 12:13–17). The thought that his own sufferings could hasten the return of Christ and spare other believers similar sufferings increased his joy.

Another common explanation sees Paul drawing on Jewish and early Christian apocalyptic thought with the concept that God has assigned a certain amount of suffering, "the woes of the Messiah," that must be endured before the end of time (building on the biblical understanding of an apocalyptic time of suffering for believers; see Dan. 7:21–27; 12:1; Mark 13:20; Rev. 6:9–11; 7:14; 12:13–17). In this view, Paul saw himself as helping complete those assigned sufferings and hasten Christ's return by enduring afflictions as the "apostle to the Gentiles" (cf. Rom. 11:13). The first explanation is preferable.

In Colossians 1:25, Paul describes himself as a "minister" (or "servant"; Gr. *diakonos*) of the body of Christ, the church. While this language is developed further in Ephesians (1:22–23; 4:1–16), members of the church are described as a body several times in Colossians (1:18; 2:19; 3:15; regarding earlier uses in Paul's writings, see commentary on Col. 1:13–23). Paul was given a stewardship or commission by God to fulfill His word. This "word of God" (1:25) may be the prophecy God disclosed at the time of Paul's conversion and call. He was to be God's chosen instrument to present God's name to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15; cf. Acts 22:21; 26:15–18; Gal. 1:15–16). This conforms with the view taken of Paul's suffering in Colossians 1:24.

The central affirmations of 1:24–29 are not about Paul but Christ. The mystery, long hidden, was entrusted to Paul, who participated in revealing it to God's people (v. 26). As in the parallel passage in Ephesians 3:1–13, "the mystery" here refers especially to the dawning understanding that the Gentiles should also be heirs, together as one body, sharing in His "promise in Christ" (Eph. 3:6). So "this mystery" is "Christ in you," meaning Gentile believers, "the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27). The Messiah (Gr. *Christos*) was, amazingly, indwelling Gentiles. Because Jewish-Gentile divisions are quite distant for many of us, it is difficult to partake in Paul's excitement over this gospel mystery. Rereading Colossians 1:24–29 and Ephesians 3:1–13 helps us do so. There is nothing so rewarding and energizing as participating in the unfolding plan of salvation and sharing the open secret of Christ.

In the phrase "the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27), Paul points to the grandest moment in the plan of salvation: "The blessed hope" and the appearing of Jesus Christ, "our great God and Savior" (Titus 2:13). Paul, empowered by God, was working toward that day (Col. 1:29) when He would present each person as perfect or fully mature in Christ (v. 28; cf. 4:12; 1 Cor. 11:2).

In Colossians 2:1, how is it that Paul was engaged in an *agōn* ("conflict," "struggle," "fight") on behalf of the Christians in Colossae and Laodicea, since they had not met him personally? (On Laodicea, see commentary on Col. 4:7–18.) Paul likely alludes to being in prison as a result of his commission as apostle to the Gentiles (4:3, 10, 18; cf. 1:24). He may also refer to his worries (cf. 2 Cor. 11:28) and prayers for them (Col. 1:3, 9), which would align with his praise for Epaphras, who earnestly strove for them in his prayers (4:12; cf. 1:28–29). Paul uses the same root word in those references with the word *agōnizomai* ("to struggle," "to fight"), hoping that an understanding of his struggle as part of God's plan (cf. 1:24) and as an expression of his deep commitment to them would have three positive results: encouragement, an enhancement of their unity and love for each other, and a deeper understanding of Christ as the mystery of God (2:2; cf. 1:9–12).

Manuscripts differ in regard to the ending of 2:2. Some refer to the mystery of God and of Christ as being separate, but the best manuscripts support the idea of Christ Himself being the mystery, and this is Paul's main point as well: Christ, as in 1:27, is the mystery, now revealed to believers. Paul describes Christ as the One in "whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (2:3) and adds a note of warning motivated by his concerns regarding false ideas at Colossae (v. 4), which in their deceptive emptiness (v. 8) were offering "an appearance of wisdom" (v. 23). Some may have imagined esoteric insights being available through reverence to other powers. Paul wished the believers to know that all true wisdom and knowledge is to be found in Christ, a foundational thought for Christian life and education.

In discussing wisdom, Paul may have been drawing on the rich OT and Jewish tradition of the personified wisdom being present with God at the Creation of the world (see esp. Prov. 8:22–31), a line of thinking that may influence the content of Colossians 1:15–20 as well. The term "wisdom" (Gr. *sophia*) is used six times in Colossians. It is a quality to be displayed by believers as a gift from God (1:9; 3:16; 4:5), and it characterizes Paul's teaching ministry (1:28). Erroneous practices are described as having "an appearance of wisdom" (2:23). The most profound and theologically weighty use of the word is found here in v. 3, where "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" are described as being hidden in Christ (cf. Is. 45:3), which reminds us that Christ is the source of wisdom. In Colossians, wisdom is in Christ and is bequeathed by Him to His followers.

We often use Paul's words regarding being absent in body but present in spirit (Col. 2:5) to express our solidarity with friends who are geographically distant from us, and the apostle meant something similar here. Through his letter, which Paul crafted to be read aloud to the congregation, he imagined himself participating with them and applauding their orderliness or discipline and the firm steadfastness of their faith in Christ. It would be good to dwell on the thoughts that Christ in us is the hope of glory (1:27) and that He is the treasure house for all wisdom and knowledge (2:2–3).

2:6—4:6

Counsel for the Believers

The body of Paul's letters usually contain two major sections. The first focuses on doctrinal issues (e.g., 1:3—2:5), while the second offers direct counsel relating to the situation of the believers (e.g., 2:6—4:6). In 2:6, Paul begins to draw on what he had said about the conversion experience of his addressees (1:3–12), God's actions to redeem them in Christ (vv. 13–23), and how he was viewing his own ministry (1:24—2:5) to encourage and counsel the believers on how they should live. After an opening exhortation (2:6–7), Paul provides warnings against false teachings and teachers (2:8–23), an exhortation regarding the old self and the new self (3:1–17), rules for the Christian household (3:18—4:1), and a variety of concluding urgings (4:2–6). Paul also offers answers to a most important question: if we take Jesus Christ as Creator and Reconciler (1:15–20) seriously, how do we live? It is a privilege to receive his counsel, which remains important for those who await Christ's return.

2:6–7. Importance of Living One's Beliefs. In a short introduction to the second major section of the letter, Paul begins his direct counsel to believers in Colossae by recalling his praise for their early Christian experience (1:3–8). He exhorted them to become what they were, meaning steadfast disciples of Jesus (v. 6) whose lives are marked by thanks to God (v. 7; cf. 1:12). Given the strong emphasis on Christ in the letter (esp. 1:13–23, 27; 2:2–3) and the attention given later in the epistle to Christ in contrast to rulers, officials (2:15; cf. 2:10), and angels (2:18), we should notice the full title he uses for Jesus: Christ Jesus the Lord (cf. "the Lord Jesus Christ," "our Lord Jesus Christ"; 1:2–3). Jesus is both the Christ, that is, the promised Messiah, and the Lord. To confess Jesus as Lord is to offer one's undiluted allegiance to Him in acknowledgment of His resurrection and exaltation, which would have been considered blasphemy by Jews (Acts 7:54–60; concerning the idea of living or walking in Christ, see Col. 1:10). These two verses, and especially Jesus's full title, provide an apt summary of the epistle and also highlight its purpose. The letter reflects Paul's interest not in mere intellectual assent regarding the importance of Christ but in transformation of the life through the wholehearted confession of Christ Jesus as the Lord.

2:8–23. Warning Concerning False Teachings and Teachers. Colossians 2:8–23 is a challenging passage and is sometimes described as the most difficult passage in the NT, because, while Paul refers to the erroneous thinking at Colossae in various ways, reading it is like listening to one side of an intense telephone conversation. Paul and his audience (thanks to the communication fostered by Epaphras; 1:7–8; 4:12–13), were sharing an understanding of what was happening at Colossae. They were hearing both sides of the exchange. We hear only one and therefore must play a guessing game to piece the whole story together.

Fortunately, while it is difficult for us to understand the details, the big picture is clear. Paul was concerned that believers were being tempted to think less of Jesus and more of authorities, principalities, powers, spirits of the universe, and angels than they ought. Paul's central word of counsel is to invite believers to reflect carefully on what they think of Jesus. Do they really understand who He is? Do they grasp how important He is to the past, present, and future of the universe (1:15–20)?

Paul had praised the decision of Christians in Colossae to believe in "our Lord Jesus Christ" (1:3–8); prayed for that faith to be strengthened (1:9–12); portrayed the cosmic importance of Christ as the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer of all things (1:13–23); and described his own work as a servant of Christ (1:24—2:5), who is the mystery that had been hidden (1:26), "the hope of glory" (1:27), and the One "in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (2:3) before describing the erroneous thinking more directly in 2:8–23. All of this is summarized in the exhortation of 2:6–7, which adds Paul's fresh call to believe in and live for "Christ Jesus."

Within the framework of 2:8–23, the big picture—the call to worship and live for Jesus Christ as Lord and to turn from any competing allegiance—is equally clear. Paul opens the section by pitting deceptive, vacuous philosophy and worldly forces or principles—whatever the exact identity of these items—against Christ (v. 8). This opening cues a new lengthy description of Jesus and His importance for Christian identity (vv. 9–15). All the fullness of God is located in Him. Being filled or completed is experienced in Christ alone, who is the head over all powers (vv. 9–10). Identifying with Christ's death and resurrection through baptism and discipleship is at the heart of Christian identity (vv. 11–13). Christ wiped out the handwriting of requirements or indebtedness (v. 14; see "What Was Nailed to the Cross?," p. 1750) and, through the cross, conquered the "powers" (v. 15). The practices described in v. 16 are shadowy practices in contrast to the substantive reality of Christ (v. 17). False practices and attitudes toward worship (v. 18) are critiqued for not remaining firmly connected to the head, which is Christ (v. 19). Human-generated rules, which are created and followed in obeisance to worldly forces or principles, are wrong because believers have died with Christ to these very elements (vv. 20–23).

Lack of precision in our ability to identify the heretical thinking does not cloud the big picture and is not especially important for our application of Paul's counsel to our lives today. The identity of Jesus's competitors changes with time and place, but Paul's central point is always applicable: Can we confess Jesus Christ with a full heart (2:6)? Is our allegiance to Him untrammeled by undue loyalty to any lesser power? Does Jesus mean all to us that He should? This is the great interrogation of Christian faith, and Paul was pressing it eloquently and repeatedly on the Christians at Colossae. It echoes down to us with strength and clarity. This is the big picture, the clear framework within which we wrestle with the obscure details of 2:8–23.

In v. 8, Paul offers a pointed warning as he opens his refutation of the erroneous views circulating in Colossae. It is possible that he may have been warning against a certain one whom he did not wish to name (cf. 2:4; Gal. 1:7; 5:10). Paul was warning the church against those who would *sylagōgeō* ("cheat," "spoil," "take captive," employing a military metaphor; cf. Matt. 12:29; Mark 3:27; Luke 11:21–22). Note that Colossians 2:8–15 begins and ends with military language, reminding believers that they are combatants in a spiritual struggle: the Great Controversy.

The phrase in vv. 8, *ta stoicheia tou kosmou* (cf. v. 20), may refer to "elementary teachings," meaning false and juvenile concepts offered by the heresy (cf. use of *ta stoicheia* in Heb. 5:12), or to the elemental spiritual forces of the world, thought of in the context of the astral religion of the day as celestial powers requiring loyalty and worship (cf. 1:13, 16; 2:10, 15, 18; cf. Gal. 4:9).

The mention of Christ at the end of Colossians 2:8 cues a fresh description of Him as the fullness of God (see 1:19) who completes or fills believers and is head above all powers (v. 10; cf. 1:16, 18). It also begins a lengthy section exploring how identification with Christ in His death and resurrection shapes Christian discipleship. Paul describes baptism as being buried with Christ (vv. 11–12a; cf. Rom. 6:4) and the new, Christian life as being raised with Him (v. 12b) or being made alive with Him (v. 13; cf. Rom. 6:4; Eph. 2:1–10). Paul closes the section by describing two acts of God in salvation history that enable this death to sin and the experience of new life in Christ: the forgiveness of sins through removing what was against us (Col. 2:13–14; see below, "What Was Nailed to the Cross?") and the conquest of the authorities or principalities and powers through the cross (v. 15).

In vv. 11–13, Paul uses circumcision figuratively to refer to conversion, baptism, and the Christian life in contrast to the uncircumcision of the pre-Christian life of sin. False teachers in Galatia had advocated enforcing the practice of circumcision for Gentile believers, something Paul strongly opposed (Gal. 5:2–6, 11; 6:12–15), and the topic was taken up by the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:1–29), which definitively decided that circumcision is not required. Was this controversy alive at Colossae, or was Paul simply drawing on this language as a now-standard way of discussing Christian identity and baptism (cf. on circumcision; Acts 15:13; Eph. 2:11)? The irenic tone suggests it to be the latter.

What Was Nailed to the Cross?

Having described the participation of believers in Christ's resurrection, Paul celebrates the forgiveness offered in Him (v. 13). God made that forgiveness available by erasing a handwritten document (*cheirographon*) that contained dogma (ordinances or rules; cf. 2:20; Eph. 2:15) and opposed us. Paul elaborates that the handwritten document was taken away and nailed to the cross (Col. 2:14).

Some regard this as a picturesque way of portraying the cancellation of God's moral law, the Ten Commandments. However, in Colossians, Paul alludes to several of the Ten Commandments remaining valid for Christians (3:5–9, 18–21; cf. Eph. 6:1–2, which quotes the fifth commandment), and, as we have seen, he drew on the language of the fourth commandment to describe Christ as Creator and Reconciler of "all things" (see commentary on Col. 1:13–23). Therefore, the imagery may be understood as describing the annulment of the ceremonial or ritual laws of the OT, which were augmented in the interest of barring Gentiles from being known as people of God. These ritual laws, which had become burdensome (Luke 11:46; Acts 15:10), were fulfilled by Christ, and believers are no longer required to practice them (see PP 365).

An alternative view, reflected in a number of translations, understands the *cheirographon* to be a written certificate of debt composed by the sinner as an acknowledgment of guilt and used by the worldly powers (cf. Col. 2:15) to taunt the sinner and justify condemnation. In this view, Paul visualizes the forgiveness God offers in a dramatic way (v. 13), indicating that God canceled our legal indebtedness to the Law, which condemned us. It is not God's Moral Law that is annulled but the incriminating records of the sinner's guilt.

In Colossians 2:15, Paul concludes this section by celebrating Christ's victory on the cross over the authorities or principalities and powers. When Christ's disciples witnessed His crucifixion, they experienced it as a crushing defeat; however, His resurrection precipitated a great reversal in understanding regarding what happened at Calvary. Paul uses the language of the Roman victory parade, the Triumph, to describe what God accomplished in Christ on the cross. Through the cross, God conquered the powers who had been created by Christ (1:16) and who were in rebellion against Him. He rendered them harmless when He defeated and disarmed them. Then He included them in Christ's victory parade as bound captives, making them the recipients of open cosmic shame.

Paul's description of the defeat of these powers was powerful rhetoric in the first century and it remains so today. Paul was asking those ancient believers why they would consider offering worship and allegiance to the powers who had already been defeated and humiliated by Christ. They did not deserve worship. The Lord Jesus Christ is the only One worthy of it (2:6–7).

In vv. 16–19, Paul offers two parallel commands: First, to let no one judge and to reject such judgment in a number of areas specified in a list (vv. 16–17; see below, "Meaning of 'Sabbath' in Colossians 2:16"), because these practices are "a shadow" of what is to come whereas the substance or reality (*sōma*, "body") belongs to Christ (v. 17). To adopt such practices in obeisance to the powers would be to grasp at a shadow, to miss the fact that Christ both created (1:15–20) and conquered them (2:15). Christ is no shadow; rather, He is the head of all powers (2:10), the reality. How we eat and worship should correspond with the joyous news that Christ, who personifies all that is substantive and real, has come.

Meaning of "Sabbath" in Colossians 2:16

What are we to make of the mention of "sabbath" in Colossians 2:16? Opponents of the seventh-day Sabbath often regard this as the pivotal passage that speaks against the Sabbath, so it is vital that we consider the issue carefully.

The issue begins with a number of important initial questions, the first of which is whether the word "sabbath" is plural as in some translations ("sabbaths") or singular, "a Sabbath" or "a Sabbath day," as in other translations. Though the Greek form appears to be plural (*sabbatōn*), it is used elsewhere in the NT with a singular connotation (Matt. 28:1; Luke 4:16; Acts 13:14; 16:13) and, in the company of the singular terms "festival" and "new moon," should be regarded as singular here as well. However, that does not answer the more central question of whether the "sabbath" in question is the weekly Sabbath or a yearly ceremonial one.

Another initial question has to do with the situation Paul had in mind when he counseled that we let no one judge us (Col. 2:16). Were the judgmental people to whom Paul alludes criticizing the believers in Colossae for engaging in these practices, for not engaging in them, or for participating in them incorrectly according to their perception? Whatever judgment they were presenting, Paul opposed it. The precise nature of the critique in question is less clear.

A common view among Christians is that this is a negative mention of the weekly seventh-day Sabbath and that Paul was advocating that Christians should no longer observe it. This view is an unlikely option for a number of important reasons, including the following two.

First, it would be the only negative mention of the seventh-day Sabbath in the NT, which consistently portrays both Jesus (Luke 4:16) and Paul (Acts 17:2) as regular Sabbath-keepers. Sabbath-keeping was important to Paul's mission strategy and to the congregations he was founding (Acts 13:14, 27, 42, 44; 16:13; 18:4; 24:14; 28:17), and when early Christians worshiped, they sometimes did so in the language of the Sabbath commandment (Acts 4:23–24). If this were to change, one would expect an extended and stormy controversy to erupt (as happened with circumcision; see Acts 15:1–29 and the Epistle to the Galatians). However, we find only oblique and ambiguous references to holy days (Rom. 14:5; Gal. 4:10) and this "sabbath." It seems unlikely that this would be the only direct evidence suggesting that early Christians had moved away from worshiping on the seventh-day Sabbath.

Second, the seventh-day Sabbath did not emerge at the time of the giving of the law on Mount Sinai (Ex. 19–31). It is a Creation ordinance that has universal applicability (Gen. 2:1–3). Paul was aware of this as he composed Colossians, as can be seen in how he treated Colossians 1:15–20 and how he alluded to the Creation story in drawing on the language of the Sabbath commandment (Ex. 20:8–11) to describe Christ as the Creator of "all things" in heaven and on earth (Col. 1:16). Having linked Christ to the seventh-day Sabbath and placed Him at the heart of the drama of Creation, it would have been strange for him to then have argued for the abolishment of the weekly Sabbath.

If this is not a negative mention of the seventh-day Sabbath where Paul argues for its past abolishment, what is it? Three views, which are in harmony with the commitment of Paul and other early Christians to worship Christ on the seventh-day Sabbath, are worthy of consideration.

A long-standing view is that the "sabbath" mentioned here is a reference to the ceremonial sabbaths of the Jewish calendar (Lev. 23:4–44). With the arrival of Christ, Christians no longer needed to observe these "sabbaths" or "sabbath days," which were "a shadow" of what was to come (Col. 2:17). In this view, Paul was writing against the incorrect advocacy for observing Jewish ceremonial "sabbaths," such as Passover and the Day of Atonement. A major criticism of this view is that it discounts Paul's list of yearly (festival), monthly (new moon), and weekly (sabbaths) observances (1:16), which is frequently reflected in the OT (see 1 Chr. 23:29–31; 2 Chr. 2:4; 8:12–13; 31:3; Neh. 10:33; Is. 1:13–14; Ezek. 45:13–17; 46:1–15; Hos. 2:11). However, this understanding of the OT background of the three terms simplifies the OT evidence, which often does not present a very exact parallel. Hosea 2:11, where the annual sabbaths rather than the seventh-day Sabbath may be under discussion, may offer the closest parallel to Colossians 2:16. It should be noted that this view, in which the "sabbaths" of 2:16 have been understood as annually held ceremonial ones rather than the weekly seventh-day Sabbath, was the common view of the passage among Christians in the United States during the nineteenth century and has been the traditional position advocated by Seventh-day Adventists.

A second view identifies the "sabbath" of the passage not as the festivals themselves but as the sacrifices to be offered during the festivals. The weekly seventh-day Sabbath is indeed mentioned, but Paul narrowly refers to the ritual sacrifices that were to be offered on it. This view is plausible, because OT passages closely associate the yearly, monthly, and weekly observances with the sacrifices offered on them (see the passages listed earlier as well as Num. 28–29, esp. 28:1–2, 9–10; 29:39). The mention of food and drink (v. 16) aligns with this perspective, since these terms refer more naturally to the food and drink offerings mentioned in the OT (Num. 28–29; Neh. 10:33; Ezek. 45:17) than to any OT dietary laws. In addition, the phrase translated "with regard to" or "regarding" is more accurately translated "in part of," suggesting that Paul is referring to only a part of a feast, or new moon, or sabbath. That "part" is best identified as the ritual sacrifices. Paul, then, was speaking against continuing to practice the sacrificial system, which is no longer to be observed by Christians, as it was a shadow of what should come that has since given way to Christ, the reality (Col. 2:17; cf. Heb. 10:1–10, which may be seen as expanding the thought of Col. 2:16–17).

A third view holds that Paul, in the passage, is reflecting the OT sequence of yearly, monthly, and weekly observances and that "sabbaths" or "a Sabbath (day)" is a mention of the seventh-day Sabbath. However, Paul mentions sabbath in light of the controversy at hand, in which he was opposing a heresy honoring the philosophies of the world (v. 8) instead of Christ, who is "the head" of all power (v. 10)—spiritual forces that have

been totally conquered by Christ (v. 15). The word that begins v. 16 points back to this context. Having mentioned sabbath, he again argues against the "worship of angels" (Col. 2:18), obeisance to the philosophies of the world (v. 20), and not staying connected to Christ (v. 19). Paul was not opposed to keeping Sabbath, but to keeping it as an occasion to honor powers who have already been defeated by Christ and are not worthy of reverence. It is not the use of festivals, new moon celebrations, or Sabbath that he decries, but their misuse. Following Jesus's example (e.g., Matt. 12:1–8; Luke 13:10–17; cf. Mark 7:1–13), Paul weighed in against the perversion of God-given laws, which in their sullied form reflect human philosophy, which can be deceptive (Col. 2:8, 22). When celebrated in honor of the powers, these observances become "a shadow" of what is yet to come instead of a celebration of Christ, as should be the case (v. 17). (In this view, Paul was not addressing rituals attached to the temple that had been fulfilled in Christ, a topic that is discussed elsewhere in the NT; see Matt. 26:26–28; John 4:19–26; Heb. 8:1–5; 10:1–10.) If Paul was drawing on the language of the Sabbath commandment (Ex. 20:8–11) in Colossians 1:15–20 to place Christ as Creator and Redeemer at the heart of the seventh-day Sabbath, he had already offered a corrective to the erroneous use of the Sabbath he addresses here.

In the context of a complex passage that presents challenging questions and where only tentative conclusions seem prudent, this last option may be the most defensible because it reflects the core dispute most clearly, which concerns the worship of Christ in contrast to the powers. It is difficult to see the direct connection of "sabbath," understood as the annual ceremonial sabbaths or as Sabbath sacrifices, to this central controversy that Paul was so keen to address (for discussion of the Colossian heresy, see Colossians: Introduction; see commentary on Col. 2:8–23).

Whichever view is adopted, the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath as a day to look back to God's Creation of the world and to celebrate Christ's work both as Creator and Redeemer should be affirmed: for through Him "all things were created . . . visible and invisible" (1:16). The seventh-day Sabbath is now a memorial of both Creation and salvation and should be kept, not with any attempt to earn our salvation, but with thanksgiving for all that God has done for us through Christ Jesus, Creator and Redeemer.

Paul's second command in 2:16–19 continues the tone set by the first: he admonishes the Colossians to let no one cheat or disqualify them from their reward (v. 18). Believers are to beware of the person who advocates for humility, which is usually a positive term (e.g., 3:12; Eph. 4:2; Phil. 2:3), but here likely means asceticism or harsh treatment of one's body (cf. Col. 2:23); practices the "worship of angels," which probably means "worship offered to angels" but could also mean "worship performed by angels" (i.e., heavenly worship); and boasts of visions or false claims about what is unseen. (Manuscripts differ here; some refer to those who enter into "things which he has not seen," while others refer to those who enter into "that which is seen." In either case, the claims are false and show that the humility being advocated is false as well, as the visions or false claims result in false teachers being "puffed up.") Visions are not inherently evil, as evidenced by how Paul himself experienced them as an important source of divine guidance (Acts 9:12; 16:9–10; 18:9–10; 23:11; 27:23–24; 2 Cor. 12:1–7). However, the visions to which Paul refers seem to have been related to worshiping angels rather than honoring Christ and resulted in pride on the part of the visionary. All of these—humility, worship of angels, and visions—were practiced in a way that detracted from the undiluted loyalty to Christ that should be the hallmark of discipleship. Those who practiced them were at fault, losing their connection with Christ, the Head, who Paul describes as the One who nourishes, unifies, and grows the church, His body (v. 19; cf. Eph. 4:1–16).

In Colossians 2:20–23, Paul assumes that Christians have died with Christ to the things of the world (cf. vv. 11–12a). He notes the disjuncture between this fact and human-crafted taboos, which had apparently been adopted in honor of the elemental spirits of the universe (see commentary on Col. 2:8–23) and have a surface appearance of spirituality in that they exhibit "self-imposed" religion and worship, "false humility," and mistreatment of the body (v. 23). It is a thin veneer, since keeping such taboos proves to be of no value against the indulgence of the flesh (v. 23), abstaining from which is one of the marks of genuine Christian discipleship (3:5). Paul did not protest to establishing rules for behavior; he sometimes uses language very similar to the taboos he opposed. For example, in 2 Corinthians 6:17, he tells believers not to touch anything unclean, and in Colossians 3:1—4:6, he offers quite a number of rules or guidelines. However, these do not reflect loyalty to the powers but commitment to putting on the new self, fashioned in the Creator's image (3:10).

3:1–17. The Old Self and the New Self. Having criticized the false teachers for failing to stay connected to Christ (2:8–19), Paul moves on to define a genuinely Christ-centered life. In this rich vein of exhortation regarding Christian identity, Paul expresses three fundamental facets of life in Christ: how Christian existence is rooted in the risen, exalted Christ (vv. 1–4); the need to take off old, destructive patterns of life (vv. 5–11); and the need to put on new, Christlike patterns of building a grace-filled, Christ-shaped community in the church (vv. 12–17). In this passage, each mention of Christ demonstrates the way Paul continues to pursue his theme: the importance and centrality of Jesus.

In vv. 1–4, Paul first describes how believers' past solidarity with Jesus in His death, resurrection, and exaltation transformed the present (vv. 1–3) before recounting how believers' present solidarity with Jesus transforms the future (v. 4). Having just reminded the Colossian believers that they had "died with Christ" (2:20; cf. 2:11–12; 3:3), Paul next reminded them of their resurrection and exaltation with Him (v. 1; cf. 2:12–13; Eph. 2:4–7), thus urging them to focus on what is above rather than on the things on earth (Col. 3:2; on the exaltation of Christ "at the right hand of God" [v. 1], see Ps. 110:1; Acts 2:33–36; Rom. 8:34; Eph. 1:19–21). Paul is not asking believers to disconnect from the realities of life. Rather, he is asserting that intentionally focusing on the reality of Christ and His status as the victorious, exalted Lord (1:15–20; 2:15; Phil. 2:10–11) is a vital aspect of living life as a Christian.

Because believers are "in Christ," they can anticipate a hope-filled future centered on Christ's Second Coming, which is often described as His appearance (v. 4) in the NT (e.g., 2 Thess. 2:8; Titus 2:13; 1 Pet. 5:4; 1 John 2:28). The current solidarity between believers and Jesus will be mirrored in that grand event when we join Him in His glorious appearance (cf. 1 Thess. 4:17; 1 John 3:2). In Colossians, Paul ties the theme of future hope directly to the person of Jesus. Hope is reserved for us in heaven (1:5), because that is where Christ is, sitting "at the right hand of God" (3:1). Christ Himself is "the hope of glory" (1:27), the content of the hope that can be found in the gospel (1:23). The gospel reward is not disconnected from Christ but is personified in Him. While our Christ-centered hope is currently stored in heaven (1:5) and is therefore hidden from sight, that will change when believers appear with Him "in glory" (3:4). Jesus is our hope!

With an identity rooted in the exalted Christ (vv. 1–4), believers are to "put to death" (v. 5; cf. vv. 8–9) or set aside their old pattern of life, which is marked by sexual sins (vv. 5–7) and the misuse of speech (vv. 8–9), and "put on" a new Christlike pattern of living in which usual divisions are dissolved (vv. 10–11).

All of the terms for vices in v. 5 (and those for desire in 1 Thess. 4:5 and covetousness in Eph. 4:19; 5:5) likely indicate sexual sins. The word used here means "greediness," the uncontrollable desire for sex, or what we might call a sexual addiction today. In Jewish literature, it was common to trace such sexual sins to the basic sin of idolatry. In modern times, when addictions to pornography are so prevalent, it is not difficult to see the connection between idolatry, which can be the worship of pornographic images, and a life consumed by sexual sins.

Does our passage offer any hope to escape such self-destructive patterns of behavior? Paul sharply criticizes the rules and practices of the false teachers as not being valuable in controlling indulgences (Col. 2:23) and proclaims that the remedy for such a lifestyle comes in grasping and actualizing one's identity in Christ. In baptism, believers identify with Christ in His death and experience the power of His resurrection, giving them the ability to live a new life (2:11–13, 20). This does not mean that baptized believers are perfect; they must still combat sin by activating and actualizing the new life in Christ by putting to death (3:5) whatever remnants of their old life remain.

If the old life is marked by sexual sin (vv. 5–7), it is also scarred by the use of speech to destroy relationships and poison communities in outbursts of emotions such as anger, malice, and bitterness (v. 8; the word here sometimes translated as "blasphemy" probably refers to slander against another person rather than speaking directly against God, though it may include that as well; see Eph. 4:31; 1 Tim. 6:4.) Filthy language and lying are signs of the old life (Col. 3:8–9), and as with sexual sin, the remedy for the believer is to embrace one's identity in Christ and combat these sins by embracing the new life, which is renewed according to the image of the Creator (v. 10). Christ as "the image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15) is the pattern for the re-creation of believers (cf. Rom. 8:29; 1 Cor. 15:49; 2 Cor. 3:18; 4:4), just as God was the pattern for the creation of humanity (Gen. 1:26). Paul relies on the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:1–17; Deut. 5:6–21) in detailing the vices of Colossians 3:5, 8–9, with a number of the commands reflected here. This demonstrates Paul's continued appreciation for the Ten Commandments as a standard for Christian behavior.

Turning away from sexual sins and the misuse of speech by adopting a Christlike pattern of life offers a new kind of community (vv. 10–11). The Greco-Roman world was marked by divisions between Jews and Gentiles and between the slaves and the free. It was also a world in which prejudices were rife, especially against the "barbarian," who lived on the fringes of the Roman Empire and did not speak Greek, and the ultimate outsider, the Scythian (v. 11), who had a reputation as the most savage of the barbarians. For Paul, the power of God, demonstrated in Christ Jesus, is powerful enough to transform the most uncouth, uncivilized, and violent person and draw him or her into the church as the theater of God's grace. Paul dared to imagine the church exhibiting a new type of community in which the most intransigent divisions and deep-seated prejudices are swallowed up in Christian identity—a community in which Christ pervades all and is all (v. 11; cf. 1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:28).

In vv. 12–17, Paul makes it clear that the type of church fellowship he was thinking of offers more than the absence of the usual divisiveness; it offers a profound, Christ-shaped fellowship marked by virtues such as kindness and humility (v. 12; cf. Gal. 5:22–23) as well as the practices of bearing with and forgiving each another, in accordance with Christ's own actions toward believers (Col. 3:13). These practices are crowned by the virtue of love, which binds everything together in a perfectly harmonious way (v. 14). Paul encourages the addition of thankfulness and peace from God (v. 15) to this already impressive list of virtues to be practiced in Christian congregations.

Paul imagined these winsome qualities of Christ-shaped community affecting the worship life of the house church or churches in Colossae (v. 16). He imagined believers teaching and admonishing one another, especially through psalms and hymns, praising God in an attitude of grace or thankfulness.

In this section (vv. 12–17), Paul once again emphasizes the importance of having a proper reverence for Christ while also discussing the related subject of Christ-shaped community. The forgiveness believers are to practice is Christ's own (v. 13), the peace that is to reign is Christ's (v. 15), and the word that is to ring out in their midst is Christ's message (v. 16), so Paul's charge in v. 17 seems entirely appropriate in its call for believers to live their lives "in the name of the Lord Jesus," with thanks being passed to God the Father through Christ.

The largest questions raised by 3:1–17 are not interpretive ones. The clear language of this eloquent passage leaves us hungry for the Christian life and thirsty for the Christian community that Paul envisioned. The largest questions are these: How do we, as believers, live out this new life in Christ? And how do we, as congregations, experience this grace-filled, Christ-shaped community? Part of the answer surely comes in bringing these important questions back to this passage again and again and asking the Holy Spirit to help us hear and live the answers. In these verses, Paul announces the indications of God's grace in Christ: we have been raised with Christ and possess a new identity in Him, and our congregations are the body of Christ, nourished and renewed through Him. Paul also declares the imperative of becoming what we are in Christ: experiencing life in Christ requires us to set our minds on Him, and experiencing Christ-shaped community requires us to "put on" the tender mercies of Christ and forgive one another as He has forgiven us. We must rejoice in the indications of God's grace and strive to respond to the imperative—His claim on us. The structure of Paul's argument suggests that it is in pursuing these two central Christian callings that we will come to know and experience answers, which will always be personified in Christ Jesus our Lord.

3:18—4:1. Rules for the Christian Household. In 3:1–7, Paul explores how the values of the gospel, such as grace, forgiveness, love, and peace, should transform the congregation's relationships and worship. Here, by providing a household code or list of rules, he describes how the values of the gospel should infuse the Christian household. Paul did not invent the household code, which is reflected in Jewish literature and in the wider Greco-Roman world. Our passage and the closely related and more extensive one in Ephesians 5:21—6:9 are the two clearest examples of this code in the NT (cf. Titus 2:2–10; 1 Pet. 2:13—3:7). Paul addresses three sets of relationships: wives-husbands (Col. 3:18–19), children-fathers (3:20–21), and slaves-masters (3:22—4:1).

Paul's counsel regarding these relationships may seem antiquated and time-bound, but comparing it with other ancient counsel concerning these relationships helps highlight its distinctive qualities. Sirach, a collection of Jewish writings from the second century B.C., offers the following counsel: Regarding wives, "Woman is the origin of sin, and it is through her that we all die. Do not leave a leaky cistern to drip or allow a bad wife to say what she likes. If she does not accept your control, divorce her and send her away." Regarding children, "He who loves his son will whip him often. . . . Pamper a child, and he will terrorize you; play with him, and he will grieve you." Regarding slaves, "Fodder and a stick and burdens for a donkey; bread and discipline and work for a slave. . . . Yoke and thong will bow the neck. . . ." Against the backdrop of such counsel circulating in Paul's day, his advice stands out as quite distinct. Whereas most ancient counsel was directed only to the husband, father, and slave master, Paul addresses wives, children, and slaves as well. Whereas most ancient counsel was preoccupied with maintaining the honor and power of the husband, father, and slave master, Paul brought the values of the gospel to bear on these relationships, emphasizing mutuality and community between all parties. Paul expresses his interest in the good name of Christian faith (4:5; cf. 1 Pet. 2:12) and in appropriate order and decorum in Christian households. However, he also manifests his deep commitment to the transforming values of the gospel and the dramatic impact they should have (Col. 3:11), mentioning the Lord as the arbiter of all relationships seven times in the Greek (the mention of "the Lord Christ" in v. 24 suggests that it is Christ who is in view in all of these expressions). Both of these motivations are evident as he gives his counsel.

Paul offers his brief words of guidance to wives and husbands in vv. 18–19. As in each set of relationships, he addresses the less powerful partner in the relationship first, counseling wives to submit to their husbands. That word of counsel is constrained by his added phrase that they should do so only "as is fitting in the Lord" (v. 18). As important as the relationship is between a husband and a wife, the Christian wife, through her belief and baptism, has established a still more important relationship with Jesus Christ as Lord. Tender, Christian love (*agapaō*; cf. 3:12; related to the noun *agapē*; cf. 2:2; 3:14), rather than bitterness or harshness, should characterize the Christian husband's relationship to his wife.

In his advice to children and fathers in vv. 20–21, Paul asks children in Christian households to always obey their parents (drawing on the Ten Commandments; Ex. 20:12; Deut. 5:16; cf. Eph. 6:1). However, he again points to the still more important relationship with the Lord and states how this obedience pleases Him. Fathers are encouraged not to exercise unbounded authority over their children but to avoid provoking and discouraging them.

While his counsel to husbands and wives and parents and children is very brief, his advice to Christian bond servants or slaves is more extensive (Col. 3:22–25). We know the name of one Christian slave, Onesimus, and one Christian slave master from Colossae, Philemon (see commentary on Col. 4:7–18; the Epistle to Philemon). Paul again counsels complete obedience, but he carefully nuances the appropriate motivation (sincerity) and productivity (working diligently) as directed ultimately not toward the slave master but to the Lord. The Christian slave, as a possessor of the Christian hope (see commentary on Col. 3:1–17), may look to the Lord for a reward for the work done, which will consist not of mere wages but of an inheritance (v. 24).

Verse 25 contains a final note that is likely directed to both slaves and slave masters, reminding both that there is no favoritism with the Lord (cf. Eph. 6:9). Paul's direct counsel to masters instructs on fair treatment of slaves, reminding masters that as Christian disciples, they "also have a Master in heaven" (Col. 4:1).

The inclusion of slavery, which is an inherently immoral social structure, in the NT household codes (3:22—4:1; Eph. 6:5–9; Titus 2:9–10; 1 Pet. 2:18–25) suggests that the lasting significance of these passages is not to enforce any specific pattern of marriage or parenting (e.g., hierarchical vs. egalitarian) but to underline the need for Christians of any era to allow the values of the gospel to inform and transform relationships between husbands and wives and between parents and children.

4:2–6. Concluding Exhortations. Before providing closing greetings and instructions (4:7–18), Paul offers concluding exhortations that deal with how the Colossian believers could support his mission through prayer (vv. 2–4) and how they should live among nonbelievers

(vv. 5–6). A single theme moves through the segment: the need to prayerfully take advantage of time and opportunities to share "the mystery of Christ" (v. 3).

At the beginning of the letter, Paul recounted at some length his own prayer life on behalf of the believers in Colossae (1:3–14), so it is appropriate that he should return to this theme at the letter's end, both here in vv. 2–4 and in his praise of Epaphras in v. 12. The times demanded earnestness and vigilance in prayer, and Paul was laying special claim to their intercession on behalf of his mission to spread the gospel, a task to which he was dedicated in spite of being in prison (vv. 3–4; cf. Eph. 6:18–20, which shares thematic and verbal parallels). This is the final reference to thankfulness in the letter (Col. 4:2), which Paul mentioned repeatedly when he took up the topic of prayer (1:3, 12; 2:7; 3:17). For Paul, thanksgiving did not seem to be only a helpful feature or characteristic of Christian prayer but the very essence of it. To pray is to thank God for what He has done for us in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Still concerned about the progress of the gospel, Paul exhorted the addressees to be wise in interactions with nonbelievers and to speak to them with grace and care (4:5–6). By being wise in their relationships with outsiders, the believers could participate in "redeeming the time," making the "best use of the time," or making "the most of every opportunity," as the phrase has been variously interpreted (v. 5). Paul uses a marketplace term, *exagorazō*, which has to do with "snapping up bargains" while they are on offer, to visualize making the most of the time before Christ's return (cf. Eph. 5:16). That speech should be "seasoned with salt" may reflect similar uses in Greco-Roman literature. Paul would then have been imagining Christians fellowshiping with non-Christians in the marketplace and at the meal table and attracting them to their faith through their winsome speech and grace-filled answers to questions about their beliefs. Alternatively, Paul's words here may draw on the OT laws for offering sacrifices accompanied by salt (Lev. 2:13; Ezek. 43:24). We would do well to think of our speech in the presence of nonbelievers as an offering to God and therefore invite Him to purify and bless it.

4:7–18

Closing Greetings and Instructions

We come now to the end of this significant letter with its vigorous testimony regarding Jesus. It might be tempting to see this final section as a string of unimportant notes about minor characters; however, it mentions several interesting people, fine examples of a community of coworkers who, with Paul, were invested in the proclamation of Jesus as Lord. This section serves as a bracing reminder that belief in Christ is not simply a mental exercise but is to be lived out in worship and service.

In concluding the letter, Paul first introduces Tychicus and Onesimus (vv. 7–9). We presume that they are the letter bearers, and it is likely that Tychicus is the one who read the letter to the believers in Colossae, perhaps blushing as he articulated these laudatory words (see v. 16). Tychicus, from Asia Minor, accompanied Paul as a delegate from the Gentile churches in the region when, prior to Paul's arrest, they delivered the collection to the believers in Jerusalem (Acts 20:4). As Paul's trusted confidant and faithful coworker, he sometimes served as a surrogate for or messenger from Paul (2 Tim. 4:12; Titus 3:12). That Paul calls Tychicus his fellow servant (Col. 4:7) is particularly striking since Tychicus was to accompany Onesimus from Colossae. Onesimus was the slave of Philemon, to whom Paul composed a letter requesting his freedom.

Several facts suggest that the Epistles to Colossae, Ephesus, Philemon, and Laodicea (v. 16) were written at about the same time and were carried by Tychicus and Onesimus on the same journey: in the Greek text, vv. 7–8 are nearly identical to Ephesians 6:21–22, five of Paul's associates who are mentioned here in vv. 7–18 (Epaphras, Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke) are also named in Philemon 23–24, and in each of the existing letters, Paul shares the news that he was a prisoner at the time.

Paul next offers the Colossians greetings from three men he labeled as his coworkers: Aristarchus, Mark, and Jesus "who is called Justus" (Col. 4:10–11), the only Jews who were with him at that time (vv. 10–11). In a touching note, he adds that these three had proved to be "a comfort" to him (v. 11). Paul calls Aristarchus "my fellow prisoner" (v. 10), a term which means "fellow prisoner of war." A native of Thessalonica, Aristarchus worked with Paul in Asia Minor and was with him during the riot in Ephesus, bearing the brunt of the crowd's anger (Acts 19:29). He traveled with Paul from Troas to Asia Minor (Acts 20:4, 6) and also to Rome (Acts 27:2; Philem. 24).

Mark, also known as John Mark, had deserted both his cousin Barnabas and Paul on their first missionary journey (Acts 13:13), and Paul's subsequent refusal to take him on the succeeding trip resulted in Paul and Barnabas parting ways (Acts 15:36–41). However, given the positive mention here and Paul's request to Timothy to bring Mark with him because of his previous helpfulness to Paul (2 Tim. 4:11), the relationship had obviously been mended and Mark had once again become a trusted coworker and friend (for more on Mark, see Mark: Introduction). Since he is mentioned only here, we know nothing further about the Jesus who was also called Justus. (For discussion of Epaphras and the fine example he offers us [Col. 4:12–13], see Colossians: Introduction.)

Colossians 4:14 is the only place in the NT where Luke, Paul's traveling companion, is called a physician, and it is also from this passage that we learn he was a Gentile, since Paul did not include him in the list of Jewish coworkers (for more on Luke, see Acts 16:10–17; 20:5—21:18; 27–28; Philem. 24; 2 Tim. 4:11; see Luke: Introduction). Demas was a Gentile coworker of Paul's who apparently later deserted him (2 Tim. 4:10).

In Colossians 4:15–16, Paul asks the Colossians to convey his greetings to brothers and sisters in Laodicea, a city about eleven miles (18 km) west of Colossae (Laodicea or Laodiceans are mentioned several times in vv. 13–16 and in 2:1). Laodicea is the final of the seven churches of Revelation (Rev. 3:14–22). By Paul's time, Laodicea had become a wealthy, thriving city that overshadowed the smaller Colossae.

Two puzzles present themselves in these verses: Some translations mention Nymphas and the church that was in his house (Col. 4:15), clearly understanding the name to be masculine. However, based on a different understanding of the manuscript evidence, most other translations read, "Nympha and the church in her house." In this view, Nympha would be the patroness or leader of a house church meeting in Laodicea (cf. Phoebe in Rom. 16:1–2; Priscilla in Rom. 16:3–5; 1 Cor. 16:19; and perhaps Mary the mother of John Mark in Acts 12:12). The other puzzle comes in wondering what became of the letter Paul wrote to the Laodiceans (Col. 4:16). Marcion the Heretic (died c. A.D. 160) calls the Epistle to the Ephesians by that name, but in all likelihood the letter was simply lost (see Ephesians: Introduction). That Paul encouraged the exchange of letters between Colossae and Laodicea suggests that even during his lifetime Paul's letters began to be collected and shared, pointing to their eventual inclusion in the NT (cf. 2 Pet. 3:15–16).

Paul instructed the Colossian believers to speak a word to Archippus on his behalf. The message is somewhat ambiguous; was it a word of encouragement or of warning? His inclusion in the opening greeting of Philemon (Philem. 2) suggests that he may have been a member of Philemon's household, perhaps his son. Since Paul labels him there "our fellow soldier," they must have ministered together at some earlier time (see Philemon: Introduction; see commentary on Philem. 1–3).

Paul concludes with an authenticating signature (cf. 1 Cor. 16:21; Gal. 6:11; 2 Thess. 3:17; Philem. 19), a call to remember his chains, which may be a renewed request to pray for him (cf. Col. 4:2–4) or to provide financial help, and a brief benediction that reads, "Grace be with you" (to which some manuscripts add the Greek word *amēn*, reflected in some translations).

To review this final section is to be impressed with the number of Paul's coworkers and their importance to him, especially in relation to a church he had not visited. In both Acts and the Pauline Epistles, some one hundred different people are associated with Paul, nearly forty of whom are designated in some way as his co-workers. Paul clearly understood the importance of recruiting and training others to join the effort of spreading the gospel. He treasured those who worked alongside him and valued their partnership, modeling the Christ-shaped community about which he wrote so passionately (3:12–17). One can only wonder at Paul's joy when, at the moment of the realization of the Christian hope, the hope of glory (1:27), he will meet them again.

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1 THESSALONIANS

INTRODUCTION

Title and Authorship. This letter does not have a formal title attached to it. However, the introduction to the letter indicates that it was written "to the church of the Thessalonians" (1:1).

Three individuals were involved in its production: Paul, Silas (or Silvanus), and Timothy. While they adopt a common voice throughout (e.g., 1:2, 6), Paul addresses the Thessalonians directly three times (2:18; 3:5; 5:27). This indicates that he was the primary author. Silas was a multilingual prophet and leader entrusted by the Jerusalem Council to accompany Paul on his missionary journeys. This was to ensure the enforcement of their decision on circumcision (Acts 15:22–32). Like Paul, Silas was a Roman citizen (Acts 16:37–38). Timothy, whose mother was a believing Jewess and his father a Greek, was chosen by Paul to complement his team (Acts 16:1–3; 2 Tim. 1:5).

Date. The letter was written in Corinth (Acts 18:1–17). Luke, another coworker of Paul, identifies the proconsul in office during Paul's stay in Corinth as Gallio (Acts 18:12). Inscriptional evidence indicates that Gallio held office from A.D. 51 to 52. This makes this letter one of our earliest Christian texts and, depending on how one dates Galatians, maybe even the earliest (see Galatians: Introduction). Thus, this letter was probably written in late A.D. 50 or sometime in A.D. 51.

Backgrounds. According to Acts 17, Paul arrived in Thessalonica during his second missionary journey (ca. A.D. 49–52). Wanting to share the gospel with the local Jews, he addressed the synagogue over three Sabbaths, demonstrating from the OT that it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer and to rise from the dead (Acts 17:3). A number of Jews—God-fearers and some leading women—responded positively. Consequently, the remaining Jews became jealous and rose up in opposition against Paul. After inciting a mob that failed to find and assault Paul, the unbelieving Jews lodged a formal accusation against Paul before the magistrates, charging that his message about Jesus was a direct challenge to Caesar's rule (Acts 17:1–9). The authorities banned Paul from their city, forcing him to leave the new congregation of believers unexpectedly (1 Thess. 2:17–18). Paul and his coworkers fled to Berea (Acts 17:10–13). From there, Paul proceeded alone to Athens (Acts 17:14, 16–34) and then to Corinth (Acts 18:1–4). This sequence of events, dependent on the record in Acts, largely agrees with what is indicated in this letter to the Thessalonians. A seeming difference between the two accounts is that Paul states in 1 Thessalonians that Silas (or Silvanus) and Timothy were present with him in Athens. It is possible that the two could have joined him in Athens later. Worried about the spiritual well-being of the Thessalonian believers, Paul sent Timothy back to Thessalonica (1 Thess. 3:1–2). When Timothy returned with an encouraging report, Paul had already moved on to Corinth (cf. 3:6; Acts 18:5). Thus, it was from the city of Corinth that Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians.

First Thessalonians reflects the standard form of a Greco-Roman letter. We find an "A to B, greetings" (1 Thess. 1:1); introductory prayers (1:2–10; 2:13–16); a closing greeting (5:26); and a blessing (5:28). The central sections of Paul's letters do not conform to any one particular structure but rather reflect the specific situations he faced.

Theology and Purpose. The primary purpose of the letter is to maintain hope amid the people of God as they await their future salvation. This is done by addressing several important theological topics.

1. *The Identity of God's People.* Paul seeks to affirm the identity of the Thessalonians as the people of God by applying the story of Israel to this fledgling Christian community. Israel was chosen by God to be a holy nation over which He would rule (Deut. 7:6–7). They were to manifest His holiness and to serve Him rather than other gods (Ex. 20:3; Lev. 11:44–45; 19:2; Josh. 24:15). The practicalities of holiness and service were spelled out in various covenants. God's response to Israel when they were faithful was to sanctify them and deem them blameless (cf. Gen. 17:1; Lev. 21:8; 22:32). However, due to Israel's persistent unfaithfulness, they were sent into exile. Postexilic Jews anticipated a great "day of the Lord" when God would save them from foreign oppression through an outpouring of His wrath on the ungodly (Is. 13:6–10; 59:15–20).

Paul applied elements from this storyline to the Thessalonians. They had been called by God to be His people (1 Thess. 1:4; 2:12; 5:24). They were to serve Him and had turned away from other gods (1:9). God would make them holy so that they might be counted blameless as His people on the Day of the Lord, when through His saving wrath, He would deliver them from persecution (1:10; 3:13; 5:9, 23). Paul wanted the Thessalonians to understand that they were firstly children of God and only secondly citizens of a particular city.

2. Nurture and Hope. Paul expressed his immediate concern that the Thessalonians remain faithful to their calling, be holy in love, and maintain their hope in the Day of the Lord. He used the three virtues of faith, love, and hope, introduced in 1:3, to convey this purpose. Paul was concerned that the Thessalonians had abandoned their calling due to persecution and so sent Timothy to ascertain the condition of their faith (3:2, 5). Timothy returned and reported that the Thessalonians were continuing in faith and love (3:6). Conspicuously absent from his report, however, was any reference to hope (3:6; cf. 4:13). This is because the Thessalonians were in danger of experiencing a crisis of hope related to the future regarding those who had died (4:15b). The dead in Christ would not lose out, and the Thessalonians were not to grieve as those who had no hope (4:13). This divine revelation enabled them to put on the breastplate of faith and love, and the helmet of the hope of salvation (5:8). The three virtues of faith, love, and hope might once more be experienced in all their fullness.

3. Divine Instruction. Paul portrayed both himself and God as caring and considerate teachers tailoring their teaching to the situation facing the Thessalonians. Good teachers taught through two means in the Greco-Roman world. Firstly, they communicated their values and ideas through their words. This required their students to actively listen and understand. Secondly, they provided a living paradigm to imitate through their deeds. Good teachers tried to ensure that their deeds matched their words. Paul portrays himself as a good teacher in this context. He defended, in 2:1–12, the contents of his earlier preaching. From a distance, he continued to speak words of encouragement through Timothy, his emissary, and through his letter to the Thessalonians (3:1–2; 5:27). He reinforced his message by holding up his life as a model to imitate (1:6; 2:1–12).

The Thessalonians had also been "taught by God" (4:9), fulfilling the OT expectations of how God would relate to His people (Is. 54:13; Jer. 31:34). Through Paul, God had communicated His invitation to join His people (1 Thess. 1:4–5). Through Paul, God had taught them how to love (4:9) and, through the Lord's revelatory word (4:15), had spoken tenderly to the Thessalonians in their grief. This tenderness flowed from the presence of the Spirit in Paul's heart and moved him to write to them as brothers and close friends in the faith. In addition to accepting the various words spoken by God, the Thessalonians were to imitate His deeds through the paradigm He had provided. This paradigm is Jesus, described as the one who "died and rose again" (4:14; see also 1:6; 5:10). Paul assured the Thessalonians that even if they died, they would imitate the resurrection of Jesus by being resurrected themselves upon His return (4:14–18; 5:9–10).

COMMENTARY

1:1—2:16

Greetings and Thanksgiving

The opening of the letter includes four elements typical of Greco-Roman letters: the senders are named (Paul, Silas [Silvanus], and Timothy; 1:1), the addressees are identified ("to the church of the Thessalonians"; 1:1), a greeting is given (of grace and peace; 1:1), and a prayer is invoked—or, in this case, two thanksgiving sections (1:2–10; 2:13–16). It is highly likely that Paul was schooled in letter writing. This would have involved the use of manuals that contained samples of different letter types. In the first chapters of 1 Thessalonians, we find many themes associated with the "friendly" type of letter. These

themes include the recalling of shared memories (1:2–3; 2:1), an acknowledgment of the suffering caused by the physical separation of writer from addressee (2:17—3:1), expressions of concern for each other (2:9; 3:2, 5), and an affirmation of reciprocal feelings (3:6). The inclusion of such themes would have signaled to the Thessalonians that one of the primary purposes of the letter was to maintain friendship. The focus on friendship in the first two chapters of the letter was to establish sufficient rapport between Paul and his audience so as to enable the acceptance of his pastoral exhortations and eschatological revelation in chapters 3 to 5.

1:1. Greetings. The letter begins with a salutation from its senders to its addressees (v. 1). In this letter—one of the earliest written by Paul—there is little stress on his apostolic role and identity. He is introduced in a manner equivalent to that of his coauthors—simply by name. This contrasts with his later letters, in which he consistently introduced himself as an apostle (e.g., Rom. 1:1–6; Col. 1:1), often in distinction from his coauthors not identified with the status of apostle (see 1 Cor. 1:1; 2 Cor. 1:1). It most probably reflects the fact that there is no indication in the letter that his identity as an apostle was disputed by the Thessalonians.

The recipients of the letter are described as the "church [*ekklēsia*] of the Thessalonians" (1 Thess. 1:1). In technical usage, the Greek term *ekklēsia* refers to a democratic assembly of full citizens. In more general usage, it referred to a gathering or a community of people with shared beliefs. Paul's usage of this term parallels the way in which the people of Israel are described in the Greek translation of the Hebrew OT, commonly referred to as the Septuagint (LXX). They are described as the "assembly of Israel" (*ekklēsia*; Deut. 31:30; 1 Kin. 8:14, LXX), and "the assembly" of the people of God (Judg. 20:2; cf. 1 Sam. 17:47, LXX). The designation "assembly of Israel" refers to a specific ethnic group—those later referred to as Jews. The Roman authorities sought to classify and control both existing and emerging communities in order to maintain imperial peace and safety (1 Thess. 5:3). In Paul's day, the Jews were accorded special privileges as an ethnic group by the Roman authorities. One of these privileges included a degree of self-governance over both the Holy Land and diaspora communities. In comparison to Jews, the followers of Jesus appeared Jewish in terms of their practices and beliefs, while at the same time being very ethnically diverse. Talk of a new *ekklēsia* would have posed a problem for the Roman authorities; they would have needed to decide if followers of Jesus qualified for privileged Jewish status.

When Paul uses the term *ekklēsia*, he is not referring to a whitewashed edifice with an imposing steeple. He is talking about a community. Scholars have suggested a number of parallels between communities established by Paul and the Greco-Roman household, religious associations, the synagogue, and philosophical or rhetorical schools. The Thessalonian community does not fit neatly into any of these categories. Rather, they represent the people (or "kingdom"; 2:12) of God, who assembled in houses and operated as a family (Acts 17:5–7; 1 Thess. 2:7, 11), were organized like an association (1 Thess. 5:12–13), worshiped and prayed like those who met in a synagogue (5:17–18), and taught like a philosophical school (4:2). In this fluid social context, Paul affirmed the foundational reality that their key identifying characteristic was neither a particular social or organizational structure nor a geographical location, but was found in their identity as the *ekklēsia* in God the Father and in Jesus (1:1). What made them unique as a community was the God they proclaimed as Father and the confession that Jesus is both Lord and Messiah.

1:2–10. Thanksgiving. Greco-Roman letters would normally include a prayer to the gods on behalf of the addressees in their opening section. Paul adapted this tradition by starting his letter with the first of two thanksgiving prayers. Scholars have attempted to categorize the contents of his thanksgiving sections by identifying a number of common elements. These include: (1) thanks; (2) God; (3) always; (4) for you; (5) because . . .; and (6) "as a result," "therefore," "so that." These elements are also found in both 1 Corinthians 1:4–9 and 2 Thessalonians 1:3–4 (see also Rom. 1:8–15). Further, both thanksgiving sections of 1 Thessalonians 1:2–10 and 2:13–16 include the majority of these elements. These opening prayers introduce the main themes of the letter—a function highlighted through the use of extended sentences. In the Greek text, 1:2–5 comprises one extended sentence that evokes one subject after another (cf. 1 Cor. 1:4–8; Eph. 1:3–6; Phil. 1:3–7).

The prayer starts with a reference to thanksgiving. The use of *eucharistoumen* ("we thank"; 1 Thess. 1:2) in the present tense indicates a constant and repeated activity reinforced through the adverb "always." This ongoing thanksgiving would indicate that Paul was not merely making a rhetorical or epistolary remark. He was alluding to actual practice—thrilled at what God had achieved among the Thessalonians. Three participle clauses indicate the means of Paul's giving of thanks: first, by mentioning the Thessalonians in prayer (v. 2b); second, by remembering their faith, hope, and love (v. 3); and third, by knowledge of their calling by God (v. 4). These three clauses form the contents of the thanksgiving. Paul alludes in the first clause to an ongoing presentation in prayer of shared memories before God (v. 3). As noted above, the reference to shared memories was a common motif found within the "friendly" type of Hellenistic letters. Paul thus indicates his keenness to maintain his bond of friendship with the Thessalonians.

The idea of the first clause is reinforced and expanded in the second clause, which refers to Paul's remembrance of the Thessalonians' faith, love, and hope (v. 3). In many of his letters, Paul uses these three virtues—characteristic of the people of God in the OT (cf. Gen. 15:6; Ex. 20:6; Lev. 19:18; Pss. 33:18, 22; 42:11)—to appraise the spiritual condition of his audience. This threesome thematically dominates the rest of the letter. The order in which the virtues are listed varies from letter to letter (cf. Gal. 5:5–6; Eph. 1:15–18). Often the virtue listed last is of primary importance. Paul urged the divided believers in Corinth to pursue faith, hope, and love (1 Cor. 13:13). The listing of love as the final virtue of three indicates that, for the Corinthians, it was a higher priority than faith and hope. The reference to the three virtues of faith, love, and hope in 1 Thessalonians 1:3 indicates that Paul had used these virtues to assess the spiritual state of the Thessalonians. Though a community less than a year old, they nevertheless received a positive appraisal. Paul remembered their faithful work, loving labor, and enduring hope (v. 3). Faith, somewhat surprisingly, involves work. Love is expressed practically through the kind of effort associated with hard physical labor, and hope needs patience. Each virtue demands effort and cannot be reduced to merely an emotion.

The positive sentiments of the first two participle clauses are further developed in the third clause in 1:4–5 and the accompanying material of 1:6–10. These verses are dominated by first-century educational language. In the Greco-Roman world, imitation supplemented oral discourse as the primary methods of teaching. The disciple learned through hearing his teacher's words and imitating his deeds (see Luke 24:19). Using these two didactic elements—the teacher speaking and the disciple hearing, and the teacher acting and the disciple imitating—Paul affirmed the Thessalonians because they had become imitators of their teachers and of the Lord (1 Thess. 1:6) by proclaiming the word of the Lord (v. 8) that they had both heard and accepted. He implicitly affirmed their status as good disciples—without needing to use the term "disciple"—because they had both heard and acted upon the word of God.

First, let us consider the educational theme of speaking and hearing. As with Israel in the OT, the Thessalonians had been called by God to be His people. They were followers of Jesus as a result of the deliberate actions of God. The use of the noun *eklogē* ("election," "calling"; 1:4) refers to God's choice or selection, realized in the act of calling—a prominent motif found throughout the letter (2:12; 4:7; 5:24). This calling was communicated through Paul's preaching of the gospel, not in word only but also with power, the Holy Spirit, and full confidence. Paul drew attention to God's transformation of his words into something much greater than the sum of human effort. The Thessalonians had not just heard the words of an itinerant entertainer or philosopher, but had heard the voice of God Himself. Much theological ink has been spilt on the issue of calling and election (see commentary on 2 Tim. 2:8–13). Our sources simply indicate that Paul preached without fear to many in Thessalonica (Acts 17:1–4). Luke says that some were persuaded (Acts 17:4). For them, the preaching of the gospel was a calling by God—an act that conveyed to the small and insignificant group of new converts a value and status equivalent to that of the people of God in the OT, the elect of Israel (Deut. 7:6–7; Is. 43:20; 45:4).

According to 1 Thessalonians 1:9–10, the gospel message was a call for the Gentile Thessalonians to turn from idols "to serve the living and true God" (v. 9) and to await His Son from heaven (v. 10). For many of us who grew up in Christian communities and who have a knowledge of God's will, the experience of conversion is often characterized by an act of repentance. We know that we are sinners and we receive forgiveness for our sins through faith in Jesus. However, for the pagan Thessalonians, who knew neither God nor His will, conversion was not primarily an act of repentance but rather the positive acceptance of God's call to turn away from other gods and to serve Him and become part of His family. This call to reject idolatry was not unique to Paul. Many Greeks who followed Judaism—known as God-fearers (Acts 10:22; 13:26)—were attracted to the moral clarity of Jewish monotheism. Unique to Paul's gospel, however, was his call to wait for the return of Jesus on judgment day (1 Thess. 1:10). This was Paul's radical alternative to the solutions for society's woes offered by the philosophers and mystery religions of his day. Others, who heard the same words, were not persuaded (Acts 17:4–5; cf. Matt. 13:3–9, 18–23).

At the end of this thanksgiving section, Paul affirmed the Thessalonians as successful disciples. They had heard and accepted the call of God expressed through Paul and now deserved to be heard by others. In 1 Thessalonians 1:8, Paul mentioned how the word or message of the Lord was strongly proclaimed from and through the Thessalonians to those in Macedonia, Achaia, and, indeed, throughout the whole known region. He had heard a report of their faithfulness, the welcome they extended to Paul, their turning from idols to the living God, and their desire to await the return of His Son from heaven (vv. 9–10). The new believers simply could not wait to tell others about their new-found faith. Their report was accurate and full and as such did not need to be supplemented by Paul (v. 8). They had become an authoritative source and deserved to be heard.

We next return to the complementary educational themes of deeds and imitation. As good disciples, the Thessalonians had also become supporters of Paul and his associates, as well as the Lord (v. 6). The term used for them is *mimētēs*, a reference to the act of imitation. Further along in the letter are Paul's statements concerning how they were to imitate Jesus (see commentary on 1 Thess. 5:1–11). The order of first imitating Paul and then the Lord may seem somewhat surprising. This is, however, the historical order in which the Thessalonians encountered Paul and Jesus. First, Paul introduced himself to them. Second, he introduced them to Jesus. The gospel was mediated through human agency. Paul did not hesitate to put himself forward as an example to imitate in contrast to the hesitancy of contemporary philosophers (see also 1 Cor. 4:16; 11:1). The purpose of following Paul's example was to follow that of God (Eph. 5:1). The call to imitate both Jesus and the human agency through whom He is mediated challenges those cultures that exalt a form of spiritual freedom through isolation and the construction of a highly individualized spiritual "self." "Me and my Lord" is replaced by the Thessalonian experience of "Us, Paul, and our Lord." The result of successfully imitating Paul and the Lord was that the Thessalonians had become a *typos* or pattern for those in Macedonia and Achaia (1 Thess. 1:7). The imitators were themselves imitated. Paul's affirmation of their status as a valid pattern for others confirms that they had positively imitated him. Later, in 2:14, Paul would compliment them further for becoming "imitators" through Jesus of God's churches in Judea. By defining their development as members of the people of God through the familiar pedagogical concepts of hearing and imitation, Paul was able to compliment and encourage the Thessalonians in terms they readily understood.

2:1–12. Defense of Paul's Visit. In this passage, Paul offers a sustained defense of his ministry. He refutes possible criticisms—appealing to both God and the Thessalonians as his witnesses (v. 10). In Greek, a "martyr" or "witness" was not simply a passive observer of events but rather someone willing to testify in public concerning what had been seen or heard. The Thessalonians had already acted as Paul's witnesses by sharing their account of his visit with those in Macedonia and Achaia. Paul maintained their role as witnesses throughout 2:1–12 by repeatedly affirming the nature and extent of their knowledge ("you know"; vv. 1, 2, 5, 11; "you remember"; v. 9).

Why did Paul need to mount such a defense? There is no indication in the letter that the Thessalonians were hostile toward Paul. They received his message with joy despite the persecution that followed (1:6). Indeed, they and God were his key witnesses (2:10). Neither does Paul's defense address the specific accusation of the Jews as recorded in Acts. In Acts 17:6–7, the Jews of Thessalonica charged Paul and his companions with disturbing the world (*oikoumenē*; "inhabited area"; i.e., the Roman Empire) and challenging the authority of Caesar by proclaiming another ruler: Jesus. A more preferable suggestion is that Paul was attempting to counter any false conceptions that might have been associated with his ministry due to his sudden departure from Thessalonica. The ancient world was full of wandering charlatans who bounced from one city to another peddling their wares in an attempt to win fame and fortune from anyone gullible enough to believe them. To avoid being associated with such riff-raff, Paul defended his ministry as one not based on error, impure motives, trickery, or greed. His message and ministry was one approved by God (1 Thess. 2:4). For this reason, Paul put himself forward as an example of good leadership to imitate. In doing so, Paul used many of the terms employed by contemporary philosophers to defend their honor. He was willing to match, and indeed to surpass, society's expectations of good and noble behavior.

Paul's defense may be divided into two sections: 2:1-8 and 2:9-12. The first section includes three denials that follow the same grammatical pattern. Each denial is introduced in Greek with a conjunction often translated "for" (vv. 1, 3, 5); the denial itself is stated; and then supporting evidence is presented, signaled in Greek by the use of a conjunction of opposites, often translated "but" (vv. 2, 4, 7). The second section includes a positive description of Paul's gospel and example (i.e., his words and deeds).

Paul's first denial was that his visit had no results (vv. 1-2). His leadership was successful due to the clarity of his message and the manner of his delivery. He referred first to his and his colleagues' boldness despite significant opposition (v. 2). Like a Greek philosopher, he spoke with the sought-after quality of boldness or frankness. To speak frankly is to speak candidly about someone's condition. Having diagnosed the problem, the philosopher would then prescribe the remedy, which, unsurprisingly, would be his own brand of philosophy. This often resulted in conflict. Stoic and Cynic philosophers thus described themselves as athletes in a competition or in conflict with immoral men and women to help them turn from lives of vice to lives of virtue. Paul's preaching of the gospel likewise resulted in conflict. This conflict was not a one-off occurrence, as demonstrated by the suffering and insults he experienced in Philippi. He, like the good philosopher, was willing to put his life on the line to save others. In contrast to the philosophers, however, Paul's boldness resulted from being helped by his God and his prescription for society's ills was the gospel from God (v. 2).

Paul's second denial was that his exhortation or appeal was driven by negative motives (vv. 3-4). In v. 3 he rejects three possible motives for delivering his gospel. He was not motivated by error, uncleanness, or deceit. Paul rejected these and instead argued that his sole motive was to please God, a motif associated with the people of God in the OT (Ps. 69:30-31; Is. 59:15). He had been tested by God and, as a result, entrusted with the preaching of the gospel (1 Thess. 2:4). This testing was also not a one-off event. It was an ongoing process by which Paul sought God's continual approval of his motives. Paul modeled personal accountability to God. Note the repeated references to God throughout this section (2:2, 4, 8). Paul was conscious of living in the presence of the very God he proclaimed to the formerly pagan Thessalonians (1:9).

Paul's third denial was that his ministry was self-serving and that he sought to enhance his own glory with flattering words (2:5-8). Paul's defense was to appeal to the example he had provided them: he and his colleagues shared the gospel of God as well as their own lives (v. 8). The words of the gospel they had heard were validated by the lived example he had provided for them to imitate (1 John 3:18; cf. Matt. 23:3; Rom. 2:1, 21-23; James 2:14-18). Philosophers similarly promoted this widely accepted test of genuineness: that one's deeds should match one's speech. Paul also used imagery associated with good pastoral care that would have been familiar to the Thessalonians. Philosophers argued that new converts to philosophy were like babes in need of motherly care. Paul argued that he had laid aside his rights as an apostle and instead approached the Thessalonians in gentleness, as a nursing mother cares for her own children (1 Thess. 2:7). His actions confirmed and demonstrated the motives he professed.

In vv. 9-12, Paul appealed directly to both the Thessalonians and God as witnesses of the message he preached and the example he provided. This appeal includes themes already encountered in the letter. In chapter 1, Paul described the Thessalonians' experience in terms of two elements: hearing and imitation—the two primary methods of teaching employed in first-century education. In chapter two, he defended the training he provided in the same terms. With respect to speaking and hearing, Paul had preached the gospel of God (vv. 2, 4, 8, 9) and encouraged, comforted, and admonished (vv. 11-12) the Thessalonians. In terms of deeds and imitation, Paul and his companions were pleased to impart to the Thessalonians not only the gospel of God but also their own lives (v. 8). He had confidence concerning how he had behaved among the Thessalonians (v. 10). Paul desired that the Thessalonians would follow his example and ensure that their behavior was worthy of their calling from God, who called them into His kingdom and glory (v. 12).

At the heart of this section is the question of how we may know whether someone's ministry is genuine or not. Paul's defense required both God and the Thessalonians to judge the nature of his message, his motives for preaching, and the supporting example of his life. Too often the last

two elements—motive and lived example—are neglected in preference for a detailed scrutiny of the message. Paul's account of his own ministry amounts to more than an appeal to his own authority. He could have appealed to his own education at the feet of the great rabbi Gamaliel—grandson or son of Hillel, founder of the famous Pharisaic school of interpretation, the "House of Hillel" (Acts 5:34-40; 22:3). Paul had the equivalent of a Harvard, Oxford, or Cambridge education. Alternatively, he could have appealed to the various visions he had had of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 12:7; Gal. 1:12; 2:2). Instead, Paul opened himself up to the judgment and scrutiny of his witnesses, God and the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 2:4, 5, 10), to have them decide whether his deeds matched his words. This willingness to be held externally accountable ensured his genuineness and provided a model for the church leaders in Thessalonica and beyond to imitate. The implication for those of us who would model Paul's approach is that we must share our own lives with those who listen to our gospel. Through our deeds, the new or non-believer is able to test the truth of our words. Our deeds are as important as our words.

2:13-16. Thanksgiving. In 1 Thessalonians 2:13-16, we encounter a second thanksgiving section. It includes many words and themes common to the first thanksgiving prayer (1:2-10). For example, in both sections we have references to constant thanksgiving (1:2; 2:13), the reception of the word of God (1:5; 2:13), imitation of others (1:6; 2:14), works of faith (1:3; 2:13), suffering (1:6; 2:14), and wrath (1:10; 2:16). More parallels may indeed be observed. These parallels reinforce the sentiments of the previous thanksgiving section in confirming the Thessalonians as members of the people of God and reaffirming their friendship with Paul. As good disciples, they had received Paul's word not as merely human words but as the word of God (2:13). They were an audience able to discern truth. As good disciples, they had imitated Paul and the Lord (1:6) and had also become imitators (*mimētai*) of God's churches in Judea (2:14). However, unlike their imitation of Paul and Jesus, this imitation was not intentional. This imitation arose as a result of their shared experience of persecution (vv. 14-15).

Paul applied the motif of the persecution of the prophets to the Jewish treatment of Jesus and the church in Judea. This motif was common within Judaism and early Christianity (Jer. 2:30; Matt. 5:12; Luke 11:49; Acts 7:52). The result of this persecution was that the Judean Jewish leaders had displeased God, hindered the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles, and so filled up their sins to the limit (1 Thess. 2:16). In the OT, the concept of "filling up sins" refers to periods of historical transition (e.g., Gen. 15:16). Just as the opening thanksgiving concluded with a reference to impending wrath (1 Thess. 1:10), so Paul also ended this thanksgiving section with a reference to God's wrath. This wrath had come upon his own countrymen in Judea as a result of them hindering the salvation of the Gentiles (2:16). The God who is normally gracious (Ex. 34:6) had decided that He could endure their sins no more and must intervene in His wrath. Paul did not go into specific detail as to the manner in which God's wrath was manifested. He may have been referring to any one of several events that occurred around the time he was writing: the famine that struck Judea in A.D. 45-47, the massacre during the Passover in Jerusalem in A.D. 49, or the expulsion of Jews from Rome by decree of the Roman Emperor Claudius in A.D. 49 (Acts 18:2). Paul's terminology may also point to a future judgment so certain it is spoken of as having already arrived. In any case, this allows his audience to infer a similar divine response to those persecuting them.

2:17—3:5

Timothy's Visit

This section of the letter addresses the means by which Paul maintained his apostolic *parousia* ("presence") amongst the Thessalonians (see also 2 Cor. 10:10; Phil. 1:26; 2:12). Paul usually asserted his presence by three means: his physical presence, emissaries, and letters. The need to maintain his presence both as the one proclaiming the gospel (1 Thess. 1:5; 2:2, 4, 9) and as an example to imitate (1:6; 2:8, 14) was vital for the spiritual growth of the new Thessalonian believers. Paul tied their development to his ministry. The theme of friendship dominates this section and serves to reaffirm his relationship to them prior to his exhortations later in the letter.

2:17-20. Previous Attempts to Visit. In this section, Paul explains his inability to visit the Thessalonians in a manner intended to reaffirm his friendship. In many of his letters he expresses his intention to visit those to whom he writes and his frustrations at any perceived delays that might have occurred (Rom. 15:14-33; 1 Cor. 4:14-21; Phil. 2:19-24). He had not, after all, been avoiding or neglecting them. Such sentiments, found in 1 Thessalonians 2:17–18, were common in friendship letters and would communicate Paul's desire for continued and intimate involvement in the lives of the Thessalonians. Another friendship theme was the pain of separation. Paul describes his separation from them as being taken away or orphaned (v. 17). This intense pain of separation resulted in a strong desire to visit in person. Paul was unable to fulfill this desire, however, because Satan had hindered or blocked his visit (v. 18).

Paul clearly believed in a personal evil power that opposed God (Rom. 16:20), tempted believers (1 Cor. 7:5), and caused him physical discomfort (2 Cor. 12:7). How might Satan have hindered Paul from visiting the Thessalonians? One suggestion is that Paul experienced a physical illness—a "thorn"—while in Corinth (2 Cor. 12:7). There is little support, however, for this suggestion in the letter. He was more likely referring to the actions taken by the Jewish leaders against him while he was in Thessalonica. They were jealous because Paul had reduced their influence by converting many Greeks and significant women, some of whom would likely have been wealthy patrons of their synagogues (Acts 17:4). They stirred up a rabble and searched for Paul. Unable to find him, they dragged Jason and a number of other believers before the five or six magistrates who governed the city, presenting the charge that the believers had extended hospitality to those (i.e., Paul) who were a threat to Imperial Rome (Acts 17:6–7). The Jewish leaders aligned their interests with Rome, as previously in the trial of Jesus.

Jason was held responsible for Paul as his host and had been given the somewhat lenient punishment of being required to give money on his behalf for his release (Acts 17:9). This verdict would stand as long as the magistrates who made this decision held office. Paul had not faced trial, yet he had been found guilty in his absence. He had been unable to present his defense and was banned from returning to Thessalonica. Expulsion from cities was a common means by which ancient authorities dealt with those thought to be socially disruptive. Despite these "satanic" setbacks, Paul was able to maintain his presence through his letters and his emissary Timothy. God turned setback into unanticipated blessing in that Paul's apostolic "presence" now extends through every age to all believers who have access to his letters.

In 1 Thessalonians 2:19–20, Paul further affirmed his friendship by declaring the high status in which he held the believers. They represented the basis of his boasting before the Lord Jesus at His coming (*parousia*; v. 19; cf. 3:13; 4:15; 5:23). While the word *parousia* can simply refer to the arrival or presence of someone (e.g., 1 Cor. 16:17; 2 Cor. 7:6), it was commonly used in a more technical sense to refer to an official visit from a royal dignitary, or even the Roman emperor himself. The formerly pagan Thessalonians would have understood *parousia* as referring to a visit by an imperial ruler. These sorts of royal visits were always accompanied with the pomp and circumstance and splendor worthy of a king. Cities would be cleaned, roads would be repaired, and commemorative coins would be minted in preparation for the event. The ruler would receive celebratory gifts and honors upon arrival and would then reward those who had been faithful while executing judgment on enemies. Paul and other NT authors built on this imagery to illustrate how majestic the day will be when the Lord Jesus returns (see commentary on 1 Thess. 4:13–18). On that day, He too will both receive all honor and execute judgment (1 Cor. 15:23–24; Phil. 2:10; 2 Pet. 1:16). The faithfulness of the Thessalonians to the gospel was Paul's gift to his returning King (see Phil. 2:16). The Thessalonians were his hope, joy, victory crown, and glory, which like the two faithful servants who presented the fruits of their service to their returning master (Matt. 25:14–30), he would present to his Lord as evidence of his devotion and service.

3:1–5. Timothy's Substitute Visit. Paul's response to being unable to visit the Thessalonians was to send Timothy in his place. He twice communicated this decision: in vv. 1–2 and in v. 5. In both passages he used identical vocabulary: *stegō* ("to stand," "to endure"; vv. 1, 5), *pempō* ("to send"; vv. 2, 5), and *pistis* ("trust," "belief," "faith"; vv. 2, 5). In vv. 1–2, the emphasis is on Paul and his coworkers making the decision together. In v. 5, the emphasis is on Paul as the sole decision maker. In both passages, the purpose of Timothy's visit is stated: to strengthen, establish, and encourage the Thessalonians in their faith (v. 2) and to know whether this faith was remaining (v. 5). This repetition emphasizes the unity of purpose of Paul with his coworkers. It establishes Timothy's visit as the equivalent of a visit by Paul himself. These statements bracket vv. 3–4, in which Paul stated the reason for his concern for their faith. He was worried that they may have been shaken by afflictions.

The purpose of Timothy's visit was to ensure that the faith of the Thessalonians was not shaken by persecutions (vv. 3–4). Many today believe that when they become followers of Jesus, the economic and social quality of their lives should automatically improve. Life should get easier. The danger of this attitude is that it reduces Christianity to just one more self-help religion. The experience of the Thessalonians was that their acceptance of Paul's call to worship the one true God resulted in a strange mixture of both joy and suffering (1:6). They received the gospel of Jesus Christ and as a result experienced persecution (3:3). Such persecution should not have taken the Thessalonians by surprise, however. Paul had warned them about the certainty of trouble ahead (v. 4). For Paul, however, affliction held an additional eschatological significance. In the Bible, the people of God are portrayed as enduring a time of suffering prior to their deliverance at the coming of the Son of Man (Dan. 7:13; 12:1; Matt. 24:21, 30; Mark 13:19). Paul believed, in line with these convictions, that the Thessalonians might take their suffering as evidence of their status as the eschatological people of God.

Timothy was uniquely suited to be Paul's emissary or "presence." His Jewish mother was a believer, and his father was a Greek (Acts 16:1). Some scholars suggest that Timothy's parents are our only certain case of intermarriage between Jew and Greek from the Greco-Roman world. In general, Jews strongly opposed interracial marriage. Timothy's unique ethnic background enhanced his ability to minister to a mixed church of Jews and Gentiles along with Paul (Acts 17:1–4). His ethnic identity is not, however, identified as determining his suitability to be Paul's emissary. Instead, he is identified as a brother, making him of equal social status to Paul and Silas, and as a minister or fellow worker of God and of the gospel of Christ (1 Thess. 3:2). His mission was to encourage the believers (v. 2). This description reflects the earlier descriptions of Paul and his coworkers as the ones who worked (2:9), shared the gospel of Christ (1:5; 2:2, 4, 8, 9), and encouraged the believers (2:12). In receiving Timothy, the Thessalonians were, in fact, receiving Paul. Timothy was willing to continue in this supporting role (1 Cor. 4:17). Paul could trust Timothy to share his gospel and model his ways to others.

3:6—5:11

Paul's Response to their Crisis of Hope

This section of the letter includes Timothy's report of his visit and Paul's response. The material is mostly paraenetic in character. *Paraenesis* is the Greek term for advice or moral exhortation on matters related to practical living. Such exhortation was not new to the Thessalonians. Paul had encouraged or exhorted them during his time in Thessalonica (2:12) and had also sent Timothy to encourage them (3:2). This section includes his instructing and urging them (4:1, 10) in the hope that they would imitate him and comfort or encourage each other (4:18; see also 5:11). He wished them to extend to one another the pastoral care that he had modeled to them. They needed to treat each other in the same manner that he had treated them.

Much of the first two chapters of the epistle focuses on recalling past events. In 3:6–10, Paul shifted to the present through the use of two Greek adverbs meaning "now" (vv. 6, 8). These common adverbs are not used anywhere else in the letter. This shift would have had the effect of reinforcing Paul's "presence" when the letter was read to the Thessalonians. This shift from the past to the present anticipates a further shift in 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 to the future hope-giving coming or *parousia* of Jesus.

3:6–10. Affirmation of their Faith. This section includes Timothy's report of his visit, its emotional impact on Paul, and his response of thanksgiving to God. Paul recounted Timothy's report of his visit to the Thessalonians in v. 6. The three virtues of faith, love, and hope introduced in 1:3 play a key role. Paul had been concerned about the continued faithfulness of the Thessalonians (3:2, 5). Timothy delivered a glowing report about their faith and love—two virtues out of the original three of faith, love, and hope (v. 6). Two virtues remain, but one is absent, namely, hope. This situation shaped the contents of subsequent portions of the letter (faith [3:7–10]; love [3:12—4:12]; and absent hope [4:13–18]). By the end of the letter, the Christian virtues of faith, love, and hope appear, restored as an integrated whole in the experience of the Thessalonians (5:8).

Paul left incomplete the account starting in 3:6 of Timothy's visit. Instead he spoke to the impact the news of the Thessalonians' faith (vv. 7, 10) had had on him. Paul had been greatly comforted or encouraged (*parakaleō*; v. 7) by Timothy's report, which he described as good news (v. 6). This led him to give thanks to and rejoice before God (v. 9). He prayed more than ever—night and day—to see them (v. 10). This section is dominated by friendship language by which Paul sought to highlight factors in common between him and his audience. He genuinely addressed them as brothers and sisters (v. 7). He said that they had good memories of him (v. 6), just as he had positive memories of them (1:2). Paul had previously expressed his desire to see them face-to-face (2:17–18). Now, Timothy's report had confirmed their desire to see him (3:6). Paul sent Timothy to encourage them in their suffering (vv. 2–3). Timothy's report encouraged Paul in his affliction and distress (v. 7). These reciprocal factors indicate that the Thessalonians had ministered to Paul as he had to them. It also communicated that their situation was similar to his—the implication being that they should continue to imitate Paul by remaining faithful amid suffering.

3:11–13. Prayer. Paul followed his reference to praying night and day (3:10) with an actual prayer for himself and the Thessalonians. There are three parts to the prayer—each part summarizing different sections of the letter as a whole. First, Paul prayed that God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ might facilitate the means by which he could fulfill his desire to visit the Thessalonians (2:17–20; 3:10). The second element of the prayer was a request that the Lord would cause them to have abundant and overflowing love for each other, as well as others—just as Paul and his coworkers loved them (v. 12). This relates to Paul's exhortation to imitate him in love in 4:1–12. Finally, he prayed that God would establish their hearts as blameless and holy before God the Father at the coming of Christ (v. 13). This reflects the hope-giving emphasis on the return of Jesus in 4:13—5:11. Paul lifted up the contents of his letter to God in prayer. The impact of this letter would be dependent not only on the reader responding positively. Paul knew that God Himself and the Lord Jesus Christ needed to respond to his prayer and to the letter's petitions for it to be more than a pious expression of friendship between the evangelist and his isolated followers. This prayer is also of great historical importance as one of our earliest documented Christian prayers. It indicates that traditional Jewish ways of addressing God were developed to incorporate references to Jesus. For example, in Sirach, an early second century B.C. Jewish text, God is addressed in prayer as "Lord, Father and Master" (Sir. 23:1) and "Lord, Father and God" (23:4). In 1 Thessalonians 3:11–13, Paul twice applied the terms "Father" to God and "Lord" to Jesus. In this way, he addressed Jesus using terms normally reserved in Jewish prayers for God. For a Jew like Paul, this was a stunning development based on divine revelation.

4:1–12. Exhortation to Love. In this paraenetic section of the letter, Paul gently encouraged the Thessalonians to do more of what they were already doing. In this way, he sought their progress without adopting a critical tone. He modeled how to share moral instruction (see Eph. 5:21—6:9; Col. 3:18—4:1; 2 Thess. 3:6–13). In Greco-Roman letters, paraenetic material typically included advice on friends, family, money, sex, and food. It was general in nature and usually reflected accepted virtues and behaviors. It was presented as material so familiar that the audience did not really need any reminder. This helped to avoid sounding critical and aided the acceptance of the advice, which although general in nature, was selected with an eye toward the situation of the addressees. In this vein, Paul affirmed that the Thessalonians had already been taught by both himself and God (1 Thess. 4:1, 9). Once more we return to the theme of education. They already knew the commands and instructions given by Paul and his associates and supported by Christ's authority (v. 2); they had no need for him to write to them concerning certain issues (v. 9; see also 5:1). Paul knew that extreme tact is required to successfully influence moral behavior.

Paul started by urging the Thessalonians to continue following the teachings he had shared with them during his visit (4:1). The purpose of these teachings was to instruct them how to live (lit. "walk") and to please God (v. 1; cf. Gen. 17:1; 24:40; 48:15; Deut. 8:6). While affirming that the Thessalonians were already successfully doing as they were instructed, Paul nevertheless encouraged them that not only were they to maintain this lifestyle, but they were also to seek to continually improve (1 Thess. 4:1). This reinforced his earlier prayer that God would cause their love to continually increase (3:12). Paul's vision was of a dynamic and ever-developing Christian experience.

He exhorted the Thessalonians to holiness in both sexual (4:3–8) and brotherly love (vv. 9–12). His moral exhortation did not merely reflect societal norms. Instead, it was shaped by the OT Levitical holiness regulations—the people were to be holy as God is holy (Lev. 20:26). Paul's exhortations on sexual and brotherly love follow the same sequence as Leviticus 18–19, which first prohibits sexual immorality (18:1–30), then promotes familial and neighbourly love (19:17–18). Paul urged the Thessalonians,

as the people of God, to please Him through following His will, which is their sanctification (*hagiasmos*; 1 Thess. 4:3). They were to walk, or rather live, in holiness (*hagiasmos*; v. 7).

In vv. 3–8, Paul urged the Thessalonians to holiness in sexual matters, avoiding all forms of *porneia* or unlawful sexual immorality (v. 3). The term *porneia* derives from the Greek term for prostitute and refers to any form of illicit sexual activity. The necessity of making a decisive break from the accepted sexual mores of the Greco-Roman world was an important and needful reminder because Gentile converts often struggled in this area (cf. Acts 15:20; 1 Cor. 5:1; 6:13; 18; Gal. 5:19). In 1 Thessalonians 4:4–5, Paul specified the practical steps that would enable the Thessalonians to avoid sexual immorality. They were to control their *skeuos* in a sanctified (holy) and honorable way (v. 4). This Greek term *skeuos* is ambiguous and may refer either to a man's wife (1 Pet. 3:7) or his own body (2 Cor. 4:7). In the first case, Paul exhorted them to take a wife as a means of avoiding sexual sin (see 1 Cor. 6:12–20; 7:2–7). In the second instance, he urged sexual restraint and self-control. Whichever way *skeuos* is interpreted, the physical act of *porneia* is identified in 1 Thessalonians 4:5 as originating from an inability to control the passion of lust. The physical act results from internal indiscipline. As a result of knowing God, however, the Thessalonians knew how to control their passions. Ethics flow from theology. In contrast, the Gentiles who did not know God were unable to control their passions (v. 5). The Gentiles were guilty of sexual immorality, a behavior ultimately originating from their idolatrous worship of other gods (Rom. 1:24–27).

Paul provided a number of motives for avoiding *porneia*. First, in 1 Thessalonians 4:6 he warned that they should not take advantage of each other in this regard. In the ancient world, the offense caused by *porneia* was primarily viewed as occurring between men (and even then only between those who were social equals). When a man committed adultery, he caused harm to the woman's husband. When he slept with an unmarried girl, he caused harm to her father. Prior to marriage, the woman belonged to her father, and within marriage, to her husband. The implicit offense caused to or by the woman, present in all acts of heterosexual *porneia*, should be acknowledged. As sexual immorality, *porneia* also applies to homosexual acts (see Rom. 1:26–29). *Porneia* was never a private matter for Paul, as it destroys relationships within the Christian community (1 Cor. 6:18–19). It hurts brothers and sisters.

The second motivation to sexual holiness is the strongest sanction Paul could possibly give: that the Lord would punish those who transgress (1 Thess. 4:6). Sexual sin is not a matter of indifference with God (see Lev. 18:6–30). Those who disregard the boundaries God has placed around sexuality and who take advantage of others for the sake of their own lust will face the wrath of God when Jesus returns (cf. Rom. 1:24–27; 1 Cor. 6:9). Paul concluded his exhortation on sexual love with a final reminder that the calling of God is a call to holiness rather than impurity (1 Thess. 4:7). Therefore, those who ignore Paul's exhortation are in fact rejecting God Himself, who gives the Holy Spirit (v. 8). The description of the Spirit as holy means that anyone who commits fornication—identified as a turning away from God's call to holiness—necessarily rejects the Holy Spirit. For Paul, holiness was not restricted to a small and privileged spiritual elite able to retreat to secluded cloisters. Instead, simply by avoiding *porneia*, the people of God demonstrate holiness in their sexual behavior.

Why did Paul place such a strong emphasis on sexual purity? His exhortation on *porneia* should be set within the context of the earlier Jerusalem Council, held possibly just one or two years prior to the writing of this letter. At the Council, the early church leaders met to decide whether Gentile believers should be circumcised, the implication being that circumcision represented a commitment to observe all the Jewish law (Acts 15:1–29). While the Council ultimately agreed that Gentiles did not need to be circumcised in order to be genuine Christians, it did note that Gentile believers should abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals, and from blood (Acts 15:20). These stipulations reflect the minimum requirements of the Levitical holiness code for Gentiles living among Israelites. Both Israelites *and* Gentiles were prohibited from eating meat with blood (Lev. 17:10–16), inappropriate heterosexual and all homosexual relations (Lev. 18:1–30), and idol worship (Lev. 20:1–5). These practices, above all others, limit a person's ability to relate to God. By adopting these requirements, the Jerusalem Council acknowledged that Gentile Christians were required to follow the same legal stipulations required by Jews or Gentile God-fearers who worshiped in the synagogue (see commentary on Acts 15:1–35). Paul's exhortations to sexual holiness demonstrate his willingness to promote a definition of what it means to be part of the people of God in agreement with the Council's decision. Paul was no loose cannon, and he was willing to listen to the voice of the wider church.

In 1 Thessalonians 4:9–12, Paul exhorted the Thessalonians to continually increase in love for each other (*philadelphia*; v. 9). They could love because they had been taught by God Himself to love (v. 9). The prophet Isaiah predicted that a restored Israel would be taught by the Lord (Is. 54:13). For Paul, this promise had come true in the fledgling community of Thessalonian believers. They had demonstrated love for one another, and Paul was hoping that it would increase. He was, in reality, asking believers from very different social and ethnic backgrounds—many of whom would have been rejected by their families due to their conversion—to treat each other as blood brothers and sisters. God is creating a family for Himself, and as such, believers are to relate to each other as fellow family members.

Paul explained in practical terms his call to love more and more (1 Thess. 4:11–12). The Thessalonians were to *philotimeomai* ("endeavor") to lead a quiet life (v. 11). This Greek term implies that this was how they might practically demonstrate their love (*philia*). The expression "the quiet life" had specific connotations in Paul's day. Many Greek philosophical schools reacted against the imperial dominance of Rome by advocating a passive form of political resistance. The Epicureans believed that happiness was possible only if one led a quiet life—a life of withdrawal and retirement from the world—separated from the messiness of public life and political intrigue. This disengagement resulted in sharp criticism from those who sought to make the best of a bad situation. It would have been understandable for Paul to have made a similar call to withdraw, considering the persecution he had experienced at the hands of the Roman authorities (Acts 17:1–9). Instead, his "quiet life" required the Thessalonians to engage socially and economically with society through manual labor (1 Thess. 4:11). Further, they were to mind their own affairs, to be gainfully employed as modeled by Paul himself in order that they relate appropriately to non-Christians (those "outside") in order to win their respect, and to avoid being in need due to lack of industriousness (vv. 11–12). Their love was to be expressed through how they handled their finances. In this manner, they would avoid further conflict with the authorities and demonstrate values approved by nonbelievers.

4:13–18. Exhortation to Hope. In this section of the letter, Paul sought to restore the Thessalonians' hope. Timothy's report affirmed their continued faith and love but omitted any reference to hope (3:6). Some within their midst had died, and they were in danger of grieving without hope (4:13). Paul's response was two-fold. First, he shared a hope-giving word from the Lord (4:15b) clarifying the status of those who had died, the "dead in Christ" (4:16). They would participate in both the resurrection and the *parousia* as equals of those alive when Jesus returns. Second, in 5:1–11, Paul used the end-time teachings of Jesus to exhort believers (those who are living and waiting for Christ to come) to continual watchfulness. Watchfulness is required to maintain hope. Maintaining hope is neither easy nor natural. Both sections—whether dealing with the situations of those dead or those living—conclude with an appeal to comfort, edify, or encourage (*parakaleō*) one another with these words (4:18; 5:11). First-century disciples were expected not only to imitate their teacher's deeds but also to repeat the teacher's words and teachings. As good disciples, the Thessalonians were to repeat Paul's words, whether concerning the dead (4:13–17) or the living (5:1–10), thereby imitating and extending his pastoral concern for them to one another.

Paul starts this section by affirming that he did not want the Thessalonians to be unaware regarding those who were asleep in death (v. 13). This contrasts sharply with Paul's repeated affirmations of the Thessalonians' knowledge ("you know"; 1:4; 2:1, 2, 5, 11; 3:3, 4; 4:2; 5:2) and signals this as the revelatory heart of the letter. The result of this ignorance was that they were in danger of grieving as others (*hoi loipoi*; lit. the "rest" or "remnant") having no hope (v. 13). Pagan Gentiles held a variety of beliefs about the afterlife. Some believed in the finality of death. Others argued for an immortal soul that survived death. Such ideas were usually vague and, it seems, not widely held. The result was a general hopelessness in the face of death. In contrast, Paul sought to comfort believers with a transforming revelation of hope grounded on the communal confession that "Jesus died and rose again" (v. 14; Rom. 10:9). Paul reasoned that if Jesus died and rose, so too would God bring with him those who sleep in Jesus (1 Thess. 4:14). The metaphor of death as a sleep reflects the Judeo-Christian belief that death is only a temporary state from which all will awake at the resurrection, when God judges the world (cf. Dan. 12:2).

The reference to God bringing with Him those who sleep has been taken by some to indicate that God will return from heaven with the disembodied souls of the righteous. The Greek has Paul saying that the dead believers have "fallen asleep *through* Jesus." This is unusual, in that Paul normally refers to those who have died as being dead "in Christ" (1 Thess. 4:16). The phrase "*through* Jesus" could equally well belong with "God will bring." Greek word order is relatively flexible and allows for this interpretation. This would result in Paul saying that Jesus is the means through whom God will receive the resurrected dead. Thus, the passage could be read as saying that God, through Jesus, will bring with Him (Jesus) those who are sleeping (v. 14). This interpretation is supported by the order of events depicted in vv. 15–17.

A climatic word of the Lord in vv. 15–17 clarifies beyond doubt the future of those asleep in Jesus. Some scholars have taken the last part of v. 15 alone as the word. In this case, vv. 16–17 are Paul's explanatory comments. Other scholars have seen vv. 15–17 in total as the word. In terms of its origin, the word may be an *agraphon*, a quotation of Jesus that was unrecorded in the Gospels (e.g., Acts 20:35). Alternatively, it may be a prophetic pronouncement given directly to Paul that provides further revelation of the teachings of the earthly Jesus (Acts 9:12; 16:9; 18:9; 22:17; 2 Cor. 12:1, 7; Gal. 1:12). Whatever its length or origin, the word of the Lord appears here as a direct appeal to the highest source of authority possible. The Thessalonians might hope because the Lord Jesus Himself had shared a unique revelation with them in their grief. In their darkest hour, the Lord would not remain silent. He had spoken.

The word of the Lord (1 Thess. 4:15) was communicated to ensure that the grieving Thessalonians would understand its message. It is replete with familiar OT and extra-biblical Jewish imagery. The Lord will return with a cry of command, the voice of an archangel (Jude 9), and the trumpet of God (Ex. 19:16, 19; Is. 27:13; Joel 2:1; Zeph. 1:16; Matt. 24:31). The dead in Christ will, following their resurrection, be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord. In the OT, clouds often serve as evidence of God's presence and occasionally as a heavenly vehicle of God (Ezek. 1:4–28; Dan. 7:13). In addition to this imagery, Paul employed terms readily understandable to all members of his audience. The Lord's return will be His *parousia* or "presence" (1 Thess. 4:15). This Greek term is used in a technical sense to refer to the visit of a ruler or dignitary to a city. The inhabitants would send a delegation to meet, welcome, and petition the approaching ruler (see commentary on 1 Thess. 3:11–13). The technical term for such a meeting was *apantēsis* ("meeting"), Paul's very word describing the meeting of the righteous with the Lord in the air (4:17). This mixture of Jewish and Greco-Roman imagery would require any Gentile believers unfamiliar with the OT imagery to seek help from their Jewish brothers and sisters to understand Paul's message, thereby knitting the community closer together in a time of grief.

The Lord's revelatory word (v. 15) favorably compares two groups: those already dead and those who would remain living until the *parousia*. Nothing is said about the fate of the wicked or the nature of the post-resurrection physical transformation (1 Cor. 15:51–57). Paul's writing was not out of curiosity but in order to comfort. His emphasis was to assure the Thessalonians that those who had died in Christ would participate in the dramatic events of the Second Coming. They would not be disadvantaged, for example, by being resurrected but somehow missing out at the *parousia*. Some Jews held that only those alive at the end of the age would be carried to heaven, while the righteous dead would be resurrected but remain on earth. Related to this view, Paul's emphasis on divine wrath could easily have been misconstrued (1:10; 2:16). Paul might have been arguing against a belief that the death of believers was a form of divine punishment that would disadvantage them. In contrast to such views, he revealed that those asleep in Christ would be resurrected and rise with those alive to meet Him in the air (4:16–17). This

The Rapture

The word "rapture" is derived from the Latin translation of the Greek verb *harpazō*, translated as "caught up" in 1 Thessalonians 4:17. The word literally means "to grab or seize suddenly," "to snatch," or "to take away." It indicates both the suddenness and irresistible force of the event. There will be, however, nothing secret about this "rapture." The return of Jesus will be not only visible (cf. Matt. 24:27, 30–31; Acts 1:11; Rev. 1:7) but also loudly audible. However, it is not the loud noise itself that will raise the dead but the loud, authoritative, and divine command from Jesus that will summon the dead to return to the realm of the living.

description demonstrates an equality of experience between the two groups, signaled through the threefold use of the preposition "with" ("with Him"/"Jesus," "God," v. 14; "with them," v. 17a; "with the Lord," v. 17b). The promise relating to the climax of these shared events is that we will be with the Lord forever (v. 17). Paul does not comfort those grieving simply by assuring them that they will see their dead friends or relatives again, true as that will certainly be. He redirects their focus to their future reunion with Jesus. Paul's word here signals divine approval and ultimately gives hope, requiring no further comment by him.

5:1–11. The Day of the Lord. In addition to being worried about the fate of those who had died, the Thessalonians were also anxious about being prepared for the *parousia* themselves. They had come to believe that knowing the times or dates related to Christ's return (Acts 1:7) would enable them to be better prepared for it. Paul reminded the Thessalonians of the pointlessness of trying to determine the time of Christ's return, because as he had told them previously, it would be unexpected and sudden. Consistent with contemporary paraenetic practice, he diplomatically affirmed that they had no need that he should write (1 Thess. 5:1), that they knew the material he desired to share (v. 2), and that they were already doing that which he required (v. 11). This rhetoric probably matched the reality—much of the imagery in this section is highly reminiscent of that found in the end-time sections of the Synoptic Gospels. Paul would have taught the Thessalonians these teachings during his stay. The coming of the "day of the Lord" as a "thief in the night" (v. 2) accords with the teachings of Jesus on the coming of the Son of Man (Matt. 24:43–44; Luke 12:39–40). The "day of the Lord" is portrayed as a destructive event that would come with the suddenness of a woman entering labor (Matt. 24:8; Mark 13:8). Also like Jesus, Paul stressed the unexpectedness of the Day of the Lord, and called believers to constant watchfulness (1 Thess. 5:6; see Matt. 24:36–42, 44; Mark 13:32–37). Paul's point is clear: The solution to the Thessalonians' anxiety about the return of Christ was not to know the "when" of the return but to stay alert spiritually and not allow themselves to become complacent in their faith.

Paul used the theme of "the day" to structure his appeal. He started by affirming that the timing of "the day of the Lord" is unknown and that it would catch those who say "peace and safety" (1 Thess. 5:3) by surprise. "Peace and safety" was a highly charged political slogan used in imperial propaganda to justify the continued existence and expansion of the Roman Empire. This peace was enforced through the use of brutal military force as experienced personally by Paul and his coworkers (Acts 16:19–24; 2 Cor. 6:4–10). Those who trust in such kingdoms will not escape the destruction that will occur when God saves His people from such earthly powers on the day of judgment (Joel 1:15; 2:31–32; Amos 5:18–20; Obad. 15; Zeph. 1:14–16; Zech. 14:1–21; 1 Cor. 5:5; 2 Thess. 2:2). Paul then used the theme of "the day" to contrast the people of God with outsiders. Members of God's family are sons of the day and light and thus remain watchful, awake, and sober (1 Thess. 5:5–6, 8). Those of the night and darkness sleep and get drunk (vv. 4–7). Again, Paul was using very familiar imagery. Within Judaism and throughout the NT, darkness and night represent the state of those in spiritual ignorance and apathy. In contrast, those in a state of readiness and truth are of the day and in the light (Matt. 4:16; 6:23; Luke 11:35; 22:53; John 3:19; 11:9–10; Eph. 5:8–9; 1 Pet. 2:9; 1 John 2:8–11). Paul heightened this contrast by alternating throughout the passage from one group to the other. In effect, Paul defines in both positive and negative terms what it means to be part of the people of God.

After restoring the Thessalonians' hope of salvation through a word of the Lord and exhorting them to watchfulness, Paul was then in a position to conclude his faith, love, and hope theme introduced in 1 Thess. 1:3. He encouraged those of "the day" in 5:8 to clothe themselves with the breastplate of faith and love and the helmet of the hope of salvation (compare Rom. 13:12–13; 2 Cor. 6:7; 10:4; Eph. 6:13–17). With the addition of hope, they were then in a position to fully clothe themselves with the spiritual armor necessary to survive the sudden destruction that would come on those trusting in the peace and security configured by the world (1 Thess. 5:3).

Paul refers in vv. 9–10 to "our Lord Jesus Christ," who "died for us." This is the only place in the epistle where Paul addresses the purpose of the death of Jesus. The fact that he did not develop the topic most probably indicates that the Thessalonians had a good understanding of the purpose of the death of Jesus (see 1 Cor. 15:3). One of the challenges the apostles had was explaining the reason for the death of their Messiah. Therefore, an answer must have been provided from the very beginning of the Christian church. Here we find probably one of the earliest understandings. The phrase "died for us" could mean that He died as our substitute or for our benefit; the one does not exclude the other. The context supports this interpretation. It suggests that His death was salvific for us because it delivered us from the wrath of God mentioned in 1 Thessalonians 5:9–10. Besides, since His death is contrasted with the promise of living together with Him, we can conclude that His death occurred in order for us to live. A life is given for the lives of others. These ideas would be further developed by Paul and other apostles, making Jesus's death absolutely central in the theology of the NT.

We also find cases where salvation is directly associated with the resurrection of Jesus. This is specifically the case in Acts 1–8. In the speeches of the apostles, Jesus's death is consistently portrayed as a brutal act of murder (Acts 2:23; 3:14–15; 4:10; 5:30–31; 7:52). The apostles repeatedly quote the OT to chacterize His death in several ways, including to show that His death was nevertheless an avoidance of the corruption or decay of His flesh (Ps. 16:10 in Acts 2:31), an act of rejection (Ps. 118:22 in Acts 4:11), rebellion (Ps. 2:1–2 in Acts 4:25–26), humiliation, and a denial of justice (Is. 53:7b–8a in Acts 8:32–33). In contrast, salvation was proclaimed as available to all who call on the name of Jesus (Acts 2:21; 3:6; 4:12–18, 10:43; 22:16; see also Luke 24:47; Rom. 10:13; 1 Cor. 1:2).

First Thessalonians also focuses on the resurrection of Jesus. Throughout the letter, Jesus is the one whom God raised from the dead (1:10), who was killed by the Jewish leaders (2:14–15), and who died and rose again (4:14). In this context (5:10–11), Jesus appears as the one who died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we might live together with Him (vv. 10–11). The emphasis on the resurrection does not indicate lack of reflection on the salvific power of the death of Christ but assumes it. In fact, 1 Thessalonians confesses the two together: "we believe that Jesus died and rose again" (4:14).

In Greco-Roman literature, heroes were held up as embodying particular virtues that deserved imitation. Heracles was the model of endurance and Penelope of faithfulness. In this epistle, Jesus is not presented as merely the embodiment of a particular virtue. Rather, through Jesus's own death and resurrection, God Himself had provided a life-giving paradigm that the Thessalonians might imitate. They too, though they die, might "imitate" Jesus through their resurrection from the dead. Those who would identify with Jesus in His death would imitate Him in His life (1 Cor. 6:14; Phil. 3:10–11). This would help remove any sense of crisis the Thessalonians might have experienced as a result of deaths within their community.

Paul's words were intended to assure the Thessalonians that they had nothing to fear about Christ's return because God did not appoint them to wrath but to the possession of salvation (1 Thess. 5:9). God was not against them, but rather He was on their side. After all, God took the initiative in saving humans by sending Jesus to die for the sins of the world (John 3:16; Rom. 5:6–10). So, whether the Thessalonians would live to see the *parousia* or would die before its occurrence, they had nothing to worry about. Their eternal destiny was secure in Christ.

5:12–28

Final Exhortations and Greetings

Paul's letter concludes with final appeals (vv. 12–22), a wish-prayer (vv. 23–25), greetings (vv. 26–27), and a benediction (v. 28). The appeals are general maxims that cover five areas: attitudes toward leaders (vv. 12–13); exhortations to those in particular need (v. 14); personal relationships (v. 15); the religious life (vv. 16–18); and living with the Spirit (vv. 19–22). The call "to serve the true and living God" (1:9) is to impact every area of the believer's life. Many of the maxims here include verb forms with similar sounding endings in the Greek. The effect of this repetition is to bind the exhortations into a rhetorical unit, in which no one exhortation should be singled out for special attention or subject to neglect. It also makes them easier to memorize. His maxims include (lit.): "always rejoice" (*chairete*; 5:16); "constantly pray" (*proseuchesthe*; v. 17); "give thanks" in everything (*eucharisteite*; v. 18); "the Spirit, do not quench" (*sbennyte*; v. 19); "prophesy, do not despise" (*exoutheneite*; v. 20); "all things, test" (*dokimazete*; v. 21); "to good, hold fast" (*katechete*; v. 21); and "from every kind of evil, abstain" (*apechesthe*; v. 22). The genre of these exhortations would have been highly familiar to the Thessalonians. Greco-Roman philosophers used such short, pithy sayings to encapsulate their teachings. Students of philosophy were taught to keep such maxims "ready to hand" so that whatever situation they encountered, they always had a guiding principle to shape their response.

In sharing these maxims, Paul provided the people of God with revealed, general truths that he expected them to memorize, constantly meditate on, and use as guiding principles, thus allowing God to shape their lives in holiness (see Rom. 12:9–21; 1 Cor. 6:12–13; 1 Pet. 3:8–12). They are not to apply the principles blindly, but rather with pastoral sensitivity they are to ensure that the medicine matches the ailment (1 Thess. 5:14). This was and is a fundamental principle of good pastoral care. Not only had Paul restored the Thessalonians' hope (4:13—5:11), but as a good teacher, he had also provided them with sufficient principles to guide them in any and every situation they might face. Note the repeated use of "always," "all," and "every" throughout this section. Paul was forced by persecution to leave Thessalonica and to maintain his presence among the Thessalonian believers from a distance through his coworker Timothy (3:1–3) and then through his letter. Through these maxims that summarize his ethos and teachings, he hoped to continue to influence the lives of the believers. It is thus with confidence—having provided the Thessalonians with sufficient instruction—that he appealed to God to totally sanctify them, so that as the people of God they would be blameless at the Second Coming (5:23). He who called them to be His people would deliver them because He is faithful (v. 24; 1 Cor. 1:8–9). The hope that Paul renewed in the hearts of the Thessalonians influenced the way they lived while waiting for the return of the Lord.

2 THESSALONIANS

INTRODUCTION

Title and Authorship. Like other personal letters in antiquity, Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians did not originally have a title attached to it. As it was copied and shared with other churches, it was given the title "To the Thessalonians II" (*Pros Thessalonikeis B*) in the earliest Greek manuscripts to distinguish it from Paul's other correspondence. Later scribes expanded the title in some manuscripts to include the name of the Apostle Paul, while in other copies they mistakenly identified the letter as being written from Athens (following a common assumption at the time connected to 1 Thessalonians), and in a few they even claimed it was written from Rome.

The opening salutation identifies Paul, Silas (also called Silvanus), and Timothy as the senders of the letter. While Silas and Timothy may have been with Paul as the letter was written, it is unlikely that they were anything like joint authors. Paul was clearly the primary author. While the first-person plural "we" is used from time to time (e.g., 1:3; 2:1; 3:4), Paul identifies himself as the principal author (2:5; 3:17), and the style and language of the letter are also his. Another clear indication of Paul's authorship is that the letter ends with his signature alone (3:17).

Silas was Paul's traveling companion and coworker during the second missionary journey, after the apostle's separation from Barnabas (Acts 15:36–41). Timothy was Paul's convert in Lystra during the second missionary journey and later joined Paul in his ministry (Acts 16:1–4). These two men brought Paul the report of the situation in the Thessalonian church (1 Thess. 3:1–6; cf. Acts 18:5). Paul may have identified these two men as co-senders of the letter due to their relationship with the Thessalonians and because they may have provided Paul with some sort of secretarial assistance in the writing process, as was the case with his other letters (e.g., Rom. 16:22).

Paul's authorship of 2 Thessalonians was supported throughout church history. However, in the nineteenth century, the authenticity of the letter began to be disputed. Today, 1 Thessalonians is generally recognized as written by Paul, but the authenticity of 2 Thessalonians is rejected among critical scholars. One of the arguments against the traditional understanding is the strong similarity between 1 and 2 Thessalonians. Some critical scholars do not believe Paul would have written two letters with so many similarities in such a short span of time. Others cast doubt on the authenticity of 2 Thessalonians on the basis of what they believe are alleged differences in the theology of the two letters. According to these scholars, the Second Coming in 1 Thessalonians is described as soon and imminent—Paul implied that it would occur in his lifetime (1 Thess. 4:16–17)—whereas in 2 Thessalonians it would be preceded by a great apostasy and the revelation of the man of sin/lawlessness.

Many other scholars do not find these arguments persuasive. While a close examination of the two letters does indicate that they share a strong similarity in style and language, it seems unwarranted to conclude that the similarity the letters share is credible evidence of the inauthenticity of 2 Thessalonians. It seems far more logical to conclude that these two letters share so much in common because Paul wrote them both. After all, why would the apostle not revert to the same terminology when addressing a similar issue a second time—especially if the second letter was written closely after the first? The claim that the two letters advocate vastly different theological views is also far from convincing. Instead of being contradictory, the theological differences are really a case of different emphases. This is exactly what one would expect to find since 2 Thessalonians was written to correct some misunderstandings the Thessalonians had regarding

Paul's statements about the Second Coming in his first letter. For example, whereas he highlighted the imminence of Christ's return in 1 Thessalonians, in his second letter he reminded them that as they were awaiting the return of Jesus, they should not withdraw from life in this world, because certain events must take place before the Lord returns (2:1–2; 3:6–12). These two views are not contradictory. Paul was merely providing the Thessalonians with more detail about the same subject. Although there are certainly some challenging issues of interpretation, there is no valid reason for denying that Paul was the author of 2 Thessalonians.

Date. Paul probably wrote his second letter to the Thessalonians not long after 1 Thessalonians, perhaps only a few months later. His two coworkers, Silas and Timothy, were still with him (1:1; cf. Acts 18:5). The letter was written to address concerns raised by reports coming back to Paul from Thessalonica while he was still at Corinth. It may well be that the letter bearer of 1 Thessalonians brought back a report of the recipients' response to Paul's first letter and of other events taking place in the Thessalonian church. Since Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and a half, 2 Thessalonians was most likely written either in late A.D. 50 or sometime in A.D. 51.

Backgrounds. Paul established the church in Thessalonica during his second missionary journey (Acts 17:1–4); but after working in the city for a few weeks, he was forced to leave suddenly because of persecution, thereby leaving the new converts at a very difficult time. While Paul traveled to Berea and then on to Athens, his concern for the spiritual well-being of the new converts in Thessalonica compelled him to send Timothy back to the city to strengthen them spiritually (1 Thess. 3:1–2). When Timothy and Silas eventually joined Paul in Corinth, they provided Paul with a report of the situation in the church (2 Thess. 3:11). This prompted the apostle to write a warm and personal letter to the church (1 Thessalonians) in order to assure them of his love and to encourage and strengthen them, especially those who had lost loved ones.

The bearer of 1 Thessalonians eventually returned, bringing Paul an update about the church. The believers were still undergoing persecution (2 Thess. 1:4–5). Some among them had misunderstood what Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians about the Second Coming and were caught up with end-time excitement (2:2). Also, the idleness that Paul had addressed in the first letter (1 Thess. 4:10–12) was now more serious; the excitement about the Lord's soon return had led some of them to stop working (2 Thess. 3:11–12). All of this caused great disruption in the life of the church. Upon learning of these new developments, Paul decided to write a second letter, with the primary purpose of correcting the misunderstanding regarding the timing of the Lord's return (2:1–12), but also to encourage the church members who were experiencing the hardship of persecution (1:5–12) and to instruct them in orderly conduct and righteous living (3:6–15).

Theology and Purpose. As Paul's second letter to the church in Thessalonica, the theology of 2 Thessalonians builds on the theological content of the first letter.

1. The Godhead. The central foci of 2 Thessalonians are God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, both of whom are the source of grace and peace (1:1–2, 12; 3:16). They loved the Thessalonian believers, gave them eternal comfort and eternal hope by grace, and would establish them in every good word and work (2:16-17; 3:3). But the book also refers to all three members of the Godhead as working together for the salvation of human beings. God the Father had, from the beginning, chosen the Thessalonians for salvation through being sanctified by the Spirit and believing the truth and then called them—through Paul's preaching of the gospel—so that they would have the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ (2:13–14; cf. 1 Thess. 1:3–5). They might go through trials and tribulation, yet the day was coming when God would give them rest from their hardships and repay those who were afflicting them (1:5–9). God is faithful and would protect the Thessalonians from the evil one (3:3–4).

2. Eschatology: The Christian Hope. The whole epistle is written from the perspective of the Second Coming of Christ—the Christian hope—which is referred to in terms of the eschatological Day of the Lord (1:10; 2:1–3). The letter stresses three points with regard to the Second Coming that focus on the particular concerns of the Thessalonian believers.

First, the faithful suffering the hardships of persecution were to find comfort in the hope that their suffering would not last forever. Christ's coming in power and glory would bring them relief and deliverance from persecution and suffering—good news for the faithful but bad news for their oppressors. At Christ's return, "those who do not know God" and "do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" will undergo the righteous judgment of God (1:6–8).

Second, in an effort to correct the misunderstanding of what he had stated regarding Christ's return in 1 Thessalonians, Paul wrote his most extensive description of the final events that would precede the Second Coming (2:1–12), a portrayal that has significant resonances in Revelation 13:1–7. While 1 Thessalonians presents the Second Coming as a joyous event for the faithful, the focus of 2 Thessalonians is on Satan's extensive activities in the world preceding the Second Coming. We should remember, however, that in 2 Thessalonians Paul does not provide an exhaustive description of end-time events; he rather reminds the Thessalonians of what he previously told them (2:5).

Third, in addressing the particular situation of the church in Thessalonica, Paul gave general instructions for how Christians, while awaiting Christ's coming, should conduct themselves—living an exemplary life worthy of their calling (3:6–15; cf. 1 Thess. 4:11). The Christian hope has an impact on the daily lives of believers.

COMMENTARY

1:1–12

INTRODUCTION

The introductory part of 2 Thessalonians is written in the form of a typical Greco-Roman letter, which customarily consisted of the identification of the sender and the recipient(s), a brief greeting, and a thanksgiving (e.g., 1 Cor. 1:1–4; Phil. 1:1–3).

1:1

Addressees

Except for a small difference in wording, the prologue of 2 Thessalonians mirrors that of 1 Thessalonians. Although later in the letter Paul twice identifies himself as the primary author (2:5; 3:17), he also names Silas and Timothy as the co-senders (see 1 Thess. 1:1). They were well known to the church because they had been involved in evangelizing Thessalonica (Acts 17:1–10; 1 Thess. 3:2). Timothy and Silas may also have brought Paul a report of the situation in the Thessalonian church (Acts 18:5). They regularly prayed to God regarding the church's spiritual well-being (1 Thess. 1:2–5; 2 Thess. 1:11–12).

The letter is addressed to the church of the Thessalonians. Thessalonica was the capital of the Roman province of Macedonia. It was a seaport city and was located on the major imperial road connecting Rome with the Orient. This made Thessalonica one of the greatest and wealthiest commercial centers of the Roman Empire. It had the status of a free, self-ruled city, which earned it many privileges from the Roman government. The city was crowded with pagan temples in which rituals were performed, and citizens were expected to participate in the festivities. Those who did not participate faced persecution and social isolation, as well as the loss of their legal status. This caused serious problems for the Christian community in the city.

The Greek word *ekklēsia* ("church") denotes an assembly. This assembly of Christians was those who had responded to the gospel message preached by Paul and his associates and who had turned away from idolatry "to serve the living and true God" (1 Thess. 1:8–9). They are described as being "in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thess. 1:1). Paul may have been pointing to two things here. First, both the senders and the believers in Thessalonica belonged to one Father and, as such, were brothers and sisters of the same family of God; Paul regularly addresses them in the epistle as his siblings (2:1, 13; 3:1, 6, 13). Second, the God in whom the Christians in Thessalonica were established was not a distant deity but the One who was in a close relationship with them and interested in their well-being in the same way an earthy parent cares about his or her own children. The church was, at that time, going through persecution and the confusion of theological misunderstandings. Thus, they were in need of encouragement and correction concerning their beliefs.

Paul referred to Jesus Christ as "the Lord" (*kyrios*; "master"; also in 1:2). The twofold designation of Jesus as Christ (or Messiah) and the Lord is central to the gospel Paul preached. The former indicates what Jesus has done for us, while the latter designates His claim on us. As our Lord, He demands our obedience and undivided service.

1:2–4

Greeting and Thanksgiving

Following the customary practice of including a greeting, Paul salutes the church with the common greeting among early Christians: grace and peace (cf. Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:3; Phil. 1:2). This greeting conjoins the customary Greek greeting *charis* ("grace") and the Hebrew greeting *shalom* (Gr. *eirēnē*; "peace"), which expresses the idea of well-being. This phrase, however, conveys more than a mere conventional greeting. It expresses an important theological concept. Grace and peace are intrinsically related; they always go in the order of "grace and peace." Grace refers to God's unmerited favor bestowed on the believer, resulting in peace that the Thessalonians might enjoy in the midst of persecution and suffering. The source of grace and peace is God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Here, Paul repeated the wording from the previous address (see 2 Thess. 1:1).

In the Greek text, 2 Thessalonians 1:3–10 consists entirely of one sentence, focusing on the events that will take place at the Second Coming. But Paul began by addressing the believers as *adelphoi* (sometimes translated as "brothers" or "brethren," but also including "sisters"); they were his siblings (see 2:1, 13; 3:1, 6, 13). This points to the intimate relationship between them. They were all members of one spiritual family, and God was their Father (1:1). Paul and his coworkers felt that they ought to thank God always on their behalf, as was appropriate (v. 3). Previously, Paul worried about the faith of the Thessalonians (see 1 Thess. 3:1–10), but now he was compelled to thank God on their behalf. While in 1 Thessalonians he commended them for their work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thess. 1:3), he also constantly prayed that their faith would grow and that their love toward one another would increase and abound (1 Thess. 3:10–12). Now, months later, Paul was able to see that there was continual growth of their faith and that their love for each other was also increasing (2 Thess. 1:3). In the Greek, the verbs used here are in the present tense, which points to a continual experience; their growth in faith and love is ongoing. Thus, Paul felt suitably compelled to thank God for them in his prayers.

This growth of faith and love toward each other was something that Paul and his coworkers could boast about among the other churches he visited (v. 4). This is especially significant because their patience/perseverance and faith were manifested in the midst of the persecution and trouble they were undergoing. In this, the Thessalonians had become a model of Christian faithfulness.

1:5–12

Encouragement in Persecution

In this section, Paul provided encouragement to the Thessalonians as they underwent persecution, pointing to God's righteous judgment at the Second Coming (vv. 5–10). He referred to both positive and negative aspects of judgment: the vindication and reward for the persecuted Thessalonian believers and the punishment for their persecutors. He concluded this section by assuring the members of his constant prayers for them (vv. 11–12).

1:5–10. God's Righteous Judgment. Paul saw the patience and faith of the Thessalonians in the midst of persecution as evidence of God's righteous judgment (v. 5). The judgment in view here refers to the future judgment. The Greek word *endeigma* means "evidence," "indication," or "proof," and *dikaios* means "righteous" or "just." In what way was the tribulation of the Thessalonians proof that God's judgments are justified? Paul wanted to assure them that their tribulation was not evidence of God's disfavor against them but that God's righteous judgment would demonstrate their being "counted worthy of the kingdom of God" (v. 5). The patience and faith they had manifested in the ongoing persecution were the clear evidence of God's power working in their lives. The future judgment would vindicate them and show that God was working on their behalf (see 1 Pet. 4:13).

On the other hand, the persecution and affliction of the Thessalonians were the evidence that it is just and righteous for God to avenge His people and to take vengeance on those who afflicted and wronged them (2 Thess. 1:6). In his letters, Paul often mentioned God's retribution against those who wrong His people (cf. Rom. 12:19). The afflicters and persecutors of God's people will have to face the coming righteous judgments of God—bad news for the wicked but good news for believers. On the day of divine retribution, when God will afflict the afflicters, He will give respite to those who have been troubled (2 Thess. 1:7). The Greek word *anesis* means "loosening," "rest," or "relief." God's people will get relief from their suffering on the day when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven accompanied by His strong angels (cf. 1 Thess. 4:16). Jesus spoke of His coming accompanied by angels (Matt. 24:30–31; 25:31). The verb "revealed" is a translation of the Greek noun *apokalypsis*, meaning "uncovering," "unveiling," or "revelation," as in the name of the last book

of the NT. The word denotes uncovering something that was previously hidden. The literal translation of the clause "when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven" (2 Thess. 1:7) is "at the uncovering of the Lord Jesus from heaven." Christ's presence with His people on earth and His care for them are for now hidden to the eyes of the world. The Second Coming will result in the full uncovering of the presence of Jesus Christ and His care for His people.

The revealing of Jesus from heaven will be in burning fire to execute vengeance on those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of Jesus (v. 8). In the Bible, the execution of divine judgment is regularly associated with fire (cf. Is. 66:15–16; 2 Pet. 3:10–12). The Greek word *ekdikēsis* can mean "vengeance" or "vindication," the rendering of justice. This is in agreement with Paul's earlier reference to God's righteous judgment and His just retribution on those who wrong and afflict His people (2 Thess. 1:5–6). The phrases, "those who do not know God" and "do not obey the gospel" describe those who have knowingly and willfully turned away from God and have chosen to disobey the gospel of Jesus Christ. In Greek, "the gospel of Jesus Christ" may mean "the gospel from Jesus Christ" (subjective genitive) or "the gospel about Jesus Christ" (objective genitive). Either fits the context. The gospel has its origin in Jesus Christ, who is also the focus of the gospel.

Those who have chosen to disobey the gospel of Jesus Christ shall be "punished with everlasting destruction" (v. 9). Paul here refers to the eternal annihilation of sinners. The mortal body is not able to stand in the presence of God's glory. Revelation 6:15–17 describes those who have spurned God's grace as trying to hide themselves from God's face and exclaiming that no one can endure His wrath.

The coming of Christ is the moment when He will be glorified in His holy people (the saints), who will be in awe of Him (2 Thess. 1:10). With the annihilation of evil, Christ will bring deliverance to those who, by believing, responded to and accepted the gospel. This is in contrast to those who chose not to believe the truth; these will be condemned and will receive eternal destruction (2:12). This is how Christ will be glorified and honored among His people.

1:11–12. Praying for the Thessalonians. In closing this section, Paul assured the Thessalonians that he and his coworkers were continually praying for them, just as he prayed for other churches (see Rom. 1:9–10; Eph. 1:16; Phil. 1:3–4). He asked God, first, to consider them worthy of His calling (2 Thess. 1:11)—that God might activate their calling through a life corresponding to His calling (cf. 1 Thess. 2:12). This mirrors what he later wrote to the Ephesians when he urged them to live (lit. "walk") "worthy of the calling" they had received (Eph. 4:1). The Thessalonian believers had been called to be His representatives, so Paul prayed that they would be worthy of that calling.

He also prayed that God would finish ("fulfill") what He had begun among the Thessalonians: His desire or goodwill for them, which flowed from the goodness of His nature (or, according to some renderings, the desires of the believers for goodness), and the works of faith powerfully executed in their lives of service. This was so that the name of the Lord might be glorified in them, and they in Him (2 Thess. 1:12). This statement echoes what Paul previously stated in v. 10; the glorification of Christ's name would result in the glorification of His people. It reminds us of Jesus's prayer in John 17, when He said that He was glorified in the disciples (John 17:10), then prayed that His followers would one day share in His glory (John 17:24). All of this is possible because of "the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thess. 1:12). Grace is God's unmerited favor shown to humanity and made available through Jesus Christ (cf. 1 Thess. 1:1). It was the source of the hope of the Thessalonian believers as they faced persecution and affliction due to their faithfulness to the gospel.

2:1–12

THE GREAT APOSTASY

Paul next turned to correcting some misconceptions regarding the Second Coming among the Thessalonian believers. In correcting them, he delineated the events in the world prior to Christ's return. He discussed the man of sin/lawlessness (vv. 1–4), the restrainer (vv. 5–7), and the coming of Satan (vv. 8–12). Paul's intention was not to provide a detailed description of last-day events but rather to reiterate what he had previously taught the Thessalonians (v. 5).

2:1–2

Misunderstanding the Coming of Christ

Paul began the discussion by addressing the Thessalonians as his siblings (Gr. *adelphoi*; "brethren" or "brothers and sisters"; see 1:3), which indicates that he was beginning a new section. The issues he wanted to address were related to the coming of Jesus and being gathered together to Him (2:1; see Matt. 24:31). He had discussed these at length in his first letter (1 Thess. 4:15–17), but apparently some new developments had since taken place. Paul admonished the members to not be nervously shaken or disturbed (2 Thess. 2:2). The word *tacheōs* ("quickly," "soon") refers to the very short time since Paul initially spoke to them about this subject. Paul used three words to describe the threat they were then facing. The first is *saleuō*. In Greek, it refers to something being tossed or swayed by stormy winds or waves (cf. Luke 6:48). The word *nous* refers to the reason, the process of thinking. The Thessalonian believers were in danger of being quickly tossed away in their way of thinking by the winds of an erroneous teaching. The third word, *throeō* ("disturbed," "alarmed") refers to the inward emotional anxiety caused by disturbing news (cf. Matt. 24:6).

The Thessalonian believers were relatively new converts who were not yet firmly established in Scripture. They were alarmed by speculative teachings introduced among them supposedly coming from Paul. The phrase "by spirit" or "by a prophecy" most likely refers to false prophets claiming to have authority from the Holy Spirit. The references to "word" and "letter" refer to either a false letter sent in Paul's name or a misinterpretation of something he wrote in his authentic letters. The latter is in agreement with 2 Thessalonians 2:15, where Paul urges believers to uphold what they were taught by his words or in his writings to them.

Whatever the source of their confusion, the Thessalonians were attracted to the idea that the Day of Christ had come. The Greek verb *anestēken* is in the perfect tense, meaning "has come," not "is near" or "at hand." The Thessalonian believers assumed that somehow Jesus had already returned, perhaps in a spiritual sense (cf. 2 Tim. 2:17–18). Whatever the case, they clearly failed to heed Paul's warning in 1 Thessalonians regarding date-setting for Christ's return (5:1–3) and the knowledge that Christ's coming will be literal and visible (4:15–17). Their mistaken views had an alarmingly negative impact on their spiritual life and conduct (see 2 Thess. 3:6–15).

2:3–4

The Apostasy

Paul emphatically rejected such erroneous teachings as a deception (v. 3). In His eschatological discourse on the Mount of Olives, Jesus spoke about the danger of deception (Matt. 24:4-5, 11). While in 1 Thessalonians 5:2 Paul told the Thessalonians that Christ's coming would be sudden, he now explained that it would not occur until two related events had taken place (the clause "that [d]ay will not come" is not found in the Greek text, but is appropriately supplied by most translators). First, the *apostasia* (sometimes translated as "falling away") regularly denotes political or military rebellion—in this case, against God. Paul's use here is in a spiritual sense, referring to an upcoming religious uprising and rebellious opposition to God orchestrated by evil forces.

Then, in the context of that great rebellion, "the man of sin" (some manuscripts read "the man of lawlessness"; *ho anthrōpos tēs anomias*) would be revealed. The word "man" with the definite article shows that Paul refers to a definite figure or power. Later verses refer to the mystery or secret power of lawlessness (2 Thess. 2:7) and "the lawless one" (*ho anomos*; v. 8). These references mirror the words of Jesus that, prior to His coming, lawlessness and wickedness would increase (Matt. 24:12). The genitive noun *anomias* ("of sin/lawlessness") and the adjectival noun *anomos* ("the lawless one") describe this man of sin/lawlessness as the figure acting contrary to the law and opposing God's government and order.

The coming of the man of sin/lawlessness is described in Greek using the word *apokalyptō* (2 Thess. 2:3, 6, 8), meaning "to uncover" or "unveil" something that was previously hidden. Previously, the noun *apokalypsis* ("revealing," "unveiling") occurs with reference to Christ's coming (1:7). Although this wicked power was already at work, its revelation was restrained (2:6–7). The unveiling of this lawless one was, from the perspective of Paul, in the future (v. 8). Paul further identified this "man of sin/lawlessness" as "the son of perdition" or "the man doomed to destruction" (v. 3). The identifying phrases "the man of sin" and "the son of destruction" are parallel. While the former points to the rebellious aspect of this anti-Christ figure, the latter spells out his ultimate doom (cf. John 17:12; see "The Antichrist(s)," p. 1909). Paul would next state, concerning this anti-Christ figure, that the Lord would destroy him with the breath of His mouth and the appearance of His coming (2 Thess. 2:8). Thus, Paul begins the description of the lawless one by stating his fate in order to comfort God's people. The approaching great rebellion

against God and His work would ultimately come to its end.

This man of lawlessness is unidentified in 2 Thessalonians, but Paul mentions that he had told the Thessalonians about him previously (cf. v. 5). The description that Paul provided, however, gives us some identifying clues. First, his behavior and activities reflect those of Satan in the Bible (v. 4): he opposes God and His work, which brings to mind the same malicious activities of Satan in Zechariah 3:1; he exalts himself above everything divine and all objects of worship, a description recalling the prophecy of the king of the north in Daniel 11:36; and he places himself in God's temple and claims to be God, which recalls the OT portrayal of Satan as exalting himself above God and desiring to sit on God's throne (cf. Is. 14:12–15; Ezek. 28:12–19). This portrayal refers to the work of the little horn described in Daniel (Dan. 7:21–22, 24–25; 8:9–12). According to the prophet, the little horn would interfere with the work of Christ's mediation in the heavenly sanctuary by pretending to exercise a role that belongs only to God and His Son. This attempt to usurp the function of Christ as High Priest manifested itself in history in a system that controlled the church for centuries and that clouded the work of Christ before the Father.

Secondly, Paul describes the activities of the man of sin literally as "the one opposing and exalting himself." The present tense participles in Greek show that Paul considered him to be at work already, something he later explicitly stated (2 Thess. 2:7). The participles point to a continual activity that is not restricted to a particular period. Paul also shows that the lawless one will continue to operate until the Second Coming. These facts point to Satan as the ultimate personification of lawlessness and of all rebellion against God.

We must remember, however, that in his rebellion and opposition to God, Satan has operated through various human agencies, institutions, and systems. Some examples explicitly mentioned in Scripture include Babylon (Is. 14:4, 12–15) and Tyre (Ezek. 28:12–18). It is significant, as already indicated, that Paul's description of the man of sin/lawlessness is based on the prophecies of Daniel regarding the blaspheming figure of the little horn, opposer of God and His people (Dan. 8:9–12, 23–25; 11:36–39). Thus, in describing the man of sin/lawlessness in 2 Thessalonians 2:3–4, Paul foresaw the great apostasy in the Christian church that would occur sometime in the future from his perspective. The only period that fits aptly into this temporal framework is the Middle Ages, during which the established church of Western Europe, with its papal system, united the political and religious powers. The medieval papacy fulfilled the predictions of which both Daniel and Paul spoke.

2:5–7

The Restrainer

Verses 5–6 function as a parenthesis, in which Paul reminds the Thessalonians of his previous teaching regarding these things; he asked them to recall what he had previously shared with them (v. 5). But there is more. He also reminded them that they knew what was holding back (or restraining) the man of sin/lawlessness (v. 6). Paul used the Greek neuter participle (*ho katechōn*), which might imply an impersonal power. However, in the NT, neuter forms in Greek often denote persons (including the Holy Spirit) rather than things (John 14:17; 16:13; Heb. 7:7). In 2 Thessalonians 2:7, Paul referred to the restrainer as a personal figure. Paul further explained that the mystery (secret power) of lawlessness was already at work at the present time (v. 7). Paul said that, because of the restrainer the lawless one was not yet fully revealed, but that this would change when the restraining one was "taken out of the way" (lit. "until the one restraining now gets out of the middle"). In contrast to the neuter participles used in v. 6, Paul referred to the restrainer with the masculine participle (*ho katechōn*; "the one restraining").

The restrainer's identity is not specified in 2 Thessalonians—probably because, as Paul stated, the Thessalonians knew who he was. The text establishes several things about the restrainer: Paul referred to him as a personal figure; he was holding back the revelation of the lawless one in Paul's day; his restraining work would end at the proper time; and Paul referred to him as powerful enough to restrain the revelation of Satan and his agents. Among the possible identifications of the restrainer, probably the most likely would be God Himself. He has power to set temporal limits to the revelation of the lawless one. A number of NT texts describe God as restraining the evil forces until an appointed time. In Revelation 7:1–3, God restrained the destructive winds from blowing on the earth, and in 9:1, the removal of the restrainer unleashes the demonic activities. It is also possible that Paul had in mind the Roman Empire, which God used to restrain the revelation of the man of sin/lawlessness for some time.

In summary, in 2 Thessalonians 2:3–7, Paul outlined the course of Christian history from his time until the return of Christ. Before the Second Coming, there would be a rebellion against God, orchestrated by Satan, and the appearance of the man of sin. The lawlessness was already operating undercover in Paul's day because God restrained its full revelation. Then, somewhere in the future from Paul's perspective, God would remove the restraint and the man of sin would be fully revealed (see vv. 3–4). At the end, there would be an outbreak of satanic activities, and Satan, the true antichrist, would launch the greatest deception ever witnessed in history. This is the focus of the following section.

2:8–12

The End-time Revelation of Satan

After the restrainer is removed, "then the lawless one will be revealed" (v. 8). This "then" stands in contrast to "now" in v. 6. At the proper time, God will let the lawless one be "revealed" (*apokalyptō*; "uncover," "unveil"), which points back to the "revelation" (*apokalypsis*; "uncovering," "unveiling") of Christ at His coming (1:7). Thus, Paul portrayed the manifestation of the lawless one as the counterfeit of Christ's coming. However, this end-time satanic manifestation will end in total defeat: the Lord will consume him with the breath of His mouth and destroy him with the *epiphaneia* (lit. "appearance," sometimes translated as "splendor" or "brightness"; 2:8). Paul saw the destruction of this lawless one as the direct fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy of the messianic Branch slaying the wicked with the breath of His mouth (Is. 11:4).

Paul next focused on the end-time drama. He further explained the end-time appearance of the lawless one involving Satan's work: his power, signs, and deceptive wonders (2 Thess. 2:9–10a). Here, Paul again used the word *parousia* to describe the arrival of the lawless one, the same word he had previously used with reference to the "coming" (*parousia*) of Christ (v. 1). Thus, the revelation and the coming of Jesus Christ will be preceded by the revelation and coming of Satan. This indicates that Satan will imitate or try to falsify the coming of Christ. He will do this by performing miraculous wonders and signs, just as Jesus did—signs that are evidence of divine power (Acts 2:22). Jesus warned of antichrists imitating His coming by means of deceptive signs and wonders (Matt. 24:24–27). Later, John used that same language to describe the end-time deceptive activities of the lamb-like beast empowered by Satan prior to the Second Coming (Rev. 13:13–14; cf. 16:13–14). Paul used such imagery and language to portray the end-time revelation and activities of Satan as an impersonation of Jesus Christ and a counterfeit of His Second Coming.

The purpose of this end-time revelation of Satan is to deceive those who are perishing because they do not accept or love the truth that could have saved them (v. 10). Paul showed that Satan's end-time deception will be in the context of the preaching of the gospel (cf. Matt. 24:14). It is the acceptance of the gospel and the love of the truth that will protect Christians from the final deception. The love of the truth in 2 Thessalonians 2:10 parallels belief in the truth in v. 12. As a result of rejecting the love for the truth, God will send them a delusion so that they will believe the lie (v. 11). This is another way of saying that God will give them over to their deliberate choices and decisions (cf. Rom. 1:21–26; Rev. 17:17). God will respect their choices and consequently will hand them over to satanic deception. Believing the lie is the result of not loving and believing the truth. They did not believe the truth but were pleased with *adikia* ("unrighteousness" or "wickedness"; 2 Thess. 2:12). This is in contrast to those who believe and accept God's goodness and power with faith (1:11). While the love of the truth results in salvation (2:10), the rejection of the truth inevitably leads to sin and wrongdoing, which results in condemnation and eternal loss. Our choices have moral implications.

2:13—3:15

EXHORTATIONS AND ADMONITIONS

Following the discussion of the events preceding the Second Coming, Paul provided some practical instructions to the Christians in Thessalonica. This section consists of a series of exhortations and admonitions to stand firm (2:13–17), pray (3:1–5), and live orderly lives (3:6–12).

2:13–17

Stand Firm

Paul hoped that the members of the church would not stray from the truth he had brought to them. So, he endeavored to encourage them to stay firm in the salvation that God had secured for them, concluding with a benedictory wish-prayer. In language reminiscent of 1:3, Paul said that he felt compelled to always give thanks to God for them (2:13). The conjunctive "but" at the beginning of the verse contrasts the ones who did not believe the truth (v. 12)—ones facing eternal destruction (v. 10)—with those who responded with belief in the truth. Feeling compelled to thank God, Paul reminded the believers that God chose them for salvation through the sanctification of the Spirit and belief in the truth (v. 13). Some Greek manuscripts, instead of "from the beginning" (*ap' archēs*), have "as first fruits" (*aparchēn*); the difference in Greek is only one letter. God chose them from the beginning, probably meaning "from eternity" (cf. John 15:16; Eph. 1:4; 2 Tim. 1:9), for salvation. The election was not arbitrary because it was connected to sanctification; election is to salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and a commitment to God's truth. God initiated the process and made it effective through the Spirit. Not only did God choose them, but He also called them to salvation through Paul's preaching of the gospel so that they would have the glory of their Lord Jesus Christ (2 Thess. 2:14). Since God had chosen and called them to salvation, He would not let them be lost unless they willingly chose to turn away from Him.

In view of God's work for them, Paul urged the Thessalonians to do two things. He first urged them to remain firm (v. 15). This is the opposite of being quickly shaken and alarmed (see v. 2). He then urged them to hold to the oral and written traditions that they had received from him and his associates (v. 15), in contrast to the inauthentic messages regarding the coming of Christ that he had repudiated in the preceding passage (v. 2). Paul used the word *paradosis* (lit. "traditions," sometimes translated "teachings") with reference to the instruction he had handed to them by word of mouth or by his letter (cf. 1 Thess. 4:2). The apostle knew that the believers would continue to face the deceptive doctrines of false teachers and that, consequently, they would have to adhere continually to the apostolic teachings of Paul and his associates.

Paul concluded the exhortation with a prayer for the Thessalonians (2 Thess. 2:16–17). They had been shaken and alarmed by false teaching, but in the prayer Paul assured them that God would comfort their hearts and give them stability both in the ongoing persecution and in the teaching they received. This would happen because God loved them and had already given them, by grace, everlasting *paraklēsis* (variously rendered as "consolation," "comfort," or "encouragement") and hope (v. 16).

3:1–5

Exhortation to Pray

Following his prayer for God to comfort and establish the Thessalonian believers, the apostle next asked them to pray for him and his coworkers. He asked them to pray, first, for the effectiveness of their ministry: that God's word/message would be rapidly spread (lit. "run") and be honored/glorified, just as it was in their case (v. 1). This recalled the response of the people to Paul's preaching in Antioch in Pisidia: they "glorified/honored the word of the Lord" (Acts 13:48). Paul was, at that time, experiencing difficulties and increasing opposition in Corinth by people hostile to the gospel (cf. Acts 18:17). In referring to the spread of the word, Paul used imagery taken from Psalm 147:15, which refers to God's word "running." Additionally, the words "run" and "glorified" placed side by side bring to mind the winning runner at the Isthmian Games—held every two years in Corinth, the city in which Paul wrote his letter—who at the end of the race received due glory and honor.

Second, Paul asked the Thessalonians to pray for divine protection from hostile people for him and his coworkers (2 Thess. 3:2). The definite article in Greek ("from the . . .") identifies this as a specific group of people—those by whom he was surrounded in Corinth (cf. Acts 18:5–17). His observation immediately follows that not everyone has *pistis* (2 Thess. 3:2). This Greek word may mean either "believing"—in response to the gospel—or "being faithful." The former is seemingly in view here, which is further affirmed by the fact that the Greek text reads "*the* faith" (with the definite article), denoting the body of Christian beliefs. Paul's opponents in Corinth were unbelievers (2:12).

Paul shifted his focus to the Thessalonian believers (3:3–4), adding that the Lord is faithful. In the Greek text, Paul deliberately used a play on words here. The word *pistos* ("faithful") is analogous to *pistis* ("faith") in the previous verse. He stated that human unbelief will not damage the faithfulness of God, which means that He would strengthen and establish the Thessalonian believers and guard them from the evil one. In the Greek, *tou ponērou* may mean "from the evil" or "from the evil one," namely, Satan. Most likely, the latter is in view. Paul expressed full confidence in the Lord that the Thessalonians were following and that they would continue to follow his instructions to them in spite of all the obstacles Satan had set before them.

Paul offered another prayer on behalf of the Thessalonians (v. 5). The phrases referring to love and patience/perseverance may be interpreted as "God's love for us" and "Christ's patience" or "our love *for* God" and "our patience *for* Christ." Both meanings are probably in view here. Paul prayed that God would direct the Thessalonian believers to reflect the same love that God showed toward them and to reproduce the patience that Christ showed while on earth.

3:6–15

Exhortation: Orderly Life

This section contains some ethical instructions that were applicable to the Christians in Thessalonica. The doctrinal misunderstanding of the Second Coming that Paul discussed led him to give practical exhortations to the church.

3:6–10. Idleness in the Church. Paul began this section urging Christians to not associate with unruly, idle members (v. 6). The Greek adverb *ataktōs* ("out of order," "disorderly") and related terminology described a group of disruptive members who were not working but were "busybodies" instead (v. 11). These people did not live (lit. "walk") according to the teaching tradition that Paul had handed to them when he was with them—both by words and by his example (vv. 7–10). He instructed them that anyone unwilling to work should not eat (v. 10). In the first letter, he had already admonished them to lead a quiet life, to mind their own business, to work with their own hands, and to not live at the expense of others (1 Thess. 4:11–12).

By the time of the writing of 2 Thessalonians, idleness had obviously become a serious problem in the church (3:11–12). Some Christians, alarmed by the prospect of Christ's coming and the end of the world, had given up their work and were waiting in idleness. They refused to listen to Paul's instructions. While in the first letter he urged the members to warn these disorderly persons (1 Thess. 5:14), here, in the second letter, he urged believers to disassociate from them.

In order to convince the Thessalonian believers, Paul pointed to his own example. Repeating almost verbatim what he stated in the first letter (1 Thess. 2:9), he reminded them that, during his stay in Thessalonica, he and his associates were not undisciplined, did not accept food (lit. "bread") from anyone without remunerating them, and worked day and night in order to not be a burden to anyone (2 Thess. 3:7–8). Paul most likely supported himself by tent making, as he did in Corinth (Acts 18:3). He did this not because he did not have the authority or right to accept help but to set himself as an example or model that they should follow. As he indicated when he wrote to the Corinthians, he had the right to ask for the financial support of his ministry because the Lord commanded that "those who preach the gospel" should earn their living by it (1 Cor. 9:14). However, he did not impose this right on anybody in order to avoid hindering the preaching of the gospel (v. 12). In a similar way, he urged the members in Thessalonica to follow his example by working and supporting themselves. In addition to his example, he and his associates repeatedly commanded them that those refusing to work should not be allowed to eat (2 Thess. 3:10). Those unwilling and refusing to work should not be allowed to live at the expense of others.

3:11–12. Warning Against Idleness. After presenting his own example, Paul resumed the theme he started in v. 6. He had heard that some believers were living (lit. "walk") in an unruly, idle, and undisciplined way and meddling into other people's business—they were "busybodies" (v. 11). In his first letter, he admonished such persons and asked the church to warn them of their disruptive behavior (1 Thess. 4:11; 5:14). While the major problem with those persons was the refusal to work, they also occupied themselves with other people's business and interfered in their lives. Their behavior and activities had become disruptive to the church. So, in the language of 1 Thessalonians 4:11–12, Paul commanded and exhorted these people to settle into their own work and earn their own food (lit. "bread"; 2 Thess. 3:12). The hope of the Second Coming does not mean giving up normal living and avoiding necessary duties and work. Paul called on the disorderly ones to conduct themselves according to the tradition he had handed down to them, which excluded idleness and irresponsible behavior and conduct.

3:13–15. Disciplining the Disorderly. In conclusion, Paul addressed the whole church, urging them not to become worn out in doing what was right and good (v. 13). The possible reason for this exhortation is that Paul was aware that the disrupting behavior and activities of some in the church might have caused the faithful members

to become dispirited in doing good. Hence, Paul urged them not to lose heart (cf. Gal. 6:9).

In closing, he reiterated what he stated in 2 Thessalonians 3:6, warning them not to have fellowship with those not accepting of his instructions in the letter (v. 14). As noted earlier, in his first letter, Paul instructed the Thessalonians to warn the disorderly (1 Thess. 5:14). Next, he went one step further. If they refused to heed Paul's instruction and comply, the members were to stay away from them (2 Thess. 3:14). His warning about association with them is another way of instructing them to not condone conduct and behavior. In doing this, perhaps, those persons might become ashamed of their behavior. But Paul balanced his counsel by instructing them not to consider or treat them like enemies but to exhort them as brothers or sisters who were part of the family of faith (v. 15). Church discipline is not a matter of personal animosity or hostility but redemptive correction. By referring to the disorderly as a brother or sister, the members in Thessalonica were to keep in mind that such disruptive persons were still members of God's family. Instead of animosity, they should admonish them gently, as siblings, with the purpose of restoring them back into the family of God.

3:16–18

EPILOGUE

The last three verses of 2 Thessalonians, which conclude the letter, consist of Paul's prayer for peace, a salutation, and a benediction of grace. This prayer for peace and grace in vv. 16 and 18 parallels the bestowing of these blessings at the beginning of the letter (1:2).

3:16

Prayer for Peace

Paul had addressed the situation in the Thessalonian church regarding the speculative teachings about the Second Coming and the disorderly behavior of some believers. Closing the letter, he prayed for their peace in all times and circumstances (v. 16). While he refers to "the God of peace" (1 Thess. 5:23) in the closing of the first letter—as he does regularly in his epistles (cf. Rom. 15:33; 2 Cor. 13:11)—here he changed it to "the Lord of peace," implying Jesus Christ. This substitution is obviously deliberate and applicable to the specific situation of the Thessalonian church. In this letter, Paul had just issued instructions to the members on how to deal with those persisting in their disorderly behavior and conduct. Now, he doubtlessly envisioned a possible tension as the believers carried out those instructions. So, he prayed that the Lord of peace Himself might provide them with continual peace toward each other in all circumstances (cf. Eph. 2:14–16). Christ is the only one who could give them the needed peace. The permanency of that peace was a result of Christ's constant presence with them. Paul assured the Thessalonian believers that they were not alone—Jesus Christ was with them and would continue to be with them no matter the situation or circumstances in which they found themselves.

3:17–18

Salutation and Benediction

At this point, Paul identified himself as the author of the letter (v. 17). In writing his letters, Paul normally used secretarial help (cf. Rom. 16:22). But, as he explained, he wrote a salutation with his own hand in the conclusion of the letter (cf. 1 Cor. 16:21; Col. 4:18) in order to ensure the letter's authenticity. Earlier in the letter, Paul pointed to the possibility of spurious letters sent in his name (2 Thess. 2:2).

Paul closed the letter with the customary benediction: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all." This benediction is almost identical to the one in the first letter (1 Thess. 5:28) except for the use of "all" here. The verb "be" is not in the Greek text but is supplied by translators; it can also be read as "is with you." This phrase is much more than just a customary benediction. Its purpose was to assure the Thessalonians of their only hope being in the grace of Christ. It embraced all the believers in the Thessalonian church, including the disorderly. The hope and grace of Christ would transform their behavior and conduct and enable the rest of the believers to remain firm in the face of the hardship of persecution and of the problem of false teachings in the church. This benediction applies to all Christians, regardless of time and place, who continue to wait for Christ's coming.

1 TIMOTHY

INTRODUCTION

Title and Authorship. This letter appears in the earliest manuscripts (e.g., the great fourth-century-A.D. Codex Sinaiticus) under the title *pros timotheon a*: "To Timothy 1." The letter states it was written by Paul to his fellow worker Timothy (1:1–2; cf. Rom. 16:21). Early church fathers accepted Paul as the author. Polycarp, writing between A.D. 110 and 135, alludes to 1 Timothy 6:7 and 6:10, suggesting that he was drawing his instructions from Paul. Similarly, Irenaeus (ca. A.D. 140–202), the Muratorian Canon (A.D. 180–200), Clement of Alexandria (ca. A.D. 150–215), and Tertullian (ca. A.D. 155–220) also acknowledge Paul as the author.

Date. According to 1 Timothy 1:3, Paul left Timothy in charge of the church at Ephesus when he went to Macedonia, expecting to return shortly (cf. 3:14). Since Acts provides us with only a limited outline of Paul's ministry, and nothing at all after his imprisonment at Rome (Acts 28), some scholars suggest the Macedonian trip to which Paul refers occurred at some point during his ministry described in Acts. The most common suggestion is that it was written in the mid-50s A.D.—during or at the end of the apostle's two-year ministry at Ephesus (19:1—20:1). The difficulty with this view is that the strong similarity between 1 Timothy and Titus indicates that the two letters were likely written around the same time. Identifying Paul's Macedonia trip with the account in Acts would necessitate his visit to Crete occurring on his way to Jerusalem some three years later, around A.D. 58. While Paul did stop briefly at Crete at that time, he hardly had enough time to do any evangelization. For this reason, most scholars have rejected this position. The more likely situation is that 1 Timothy was written in the mid-60s A.D., after Paul's release from his first imprisonment in Rome around A.D. 65 or 66.

Backgrounds. Ephesus was the capital of the province of Asia and proud temple keeper of the famed goddess Artemis (Diana). With its prosperous seaport, the city boasted a large and diverse population that made it one of the largest cities of the Roman Empire after Rome, Alexandria, and Antioch. Although Paul was not the founder of the church at Ephesus (Acts 18:24–26), his ministry in the city helped it to become an established center of Christianity (Acts 19). In spite of the strong Christian presence in Ephesus, the believers in the city suffered from both persecution and the influence of false teachers. Paul was threatened by a riot (Acts 19:23–41), fought beasts (1 Cor. 15:32), had many opposing him (1 Cor. 16:8–9), and faced such difficult affliction that he was not sure he would live (2 Cor. 1:8). Regarding false teachings, Paul describes them as "falsely called knowledge" (1 Tim. 6:20) and the teachers as hypocritical liars, eager for gain (6:5), with seared consciences (4:2). They were preoccupied with fables or myths and "endless genealogies" (1:4), corrupted speech, and opposition (6:20, cf. 4:7). They also forbade marriage and promoted dietary restrictions and other forms of physical asceticism (4:3; cf. 4:8).

Theology and Purpose. The Epistle of 1 Timothy was sent to instruct Timothy on how he should act as the leader of the church at Ephesus to protect it from false teachings and other dangers. The specific instructions deal with a diversity of subjects: false teachings (chap. 1), church worship (2:1–15), appointment and characteristics of leaders (chap. 3), care for widows (5:3–16), resolving charges against elders (5:19–22), and behavior of slaves and the wealthy (6:1–2, 17–19). A key concept that provides theological coherence to 1 Timothy is Paul's emphasis on God's way of ordering things (see commentary on 1 Tim. 1:3–7) as the standard for church management. Thus, Paul often resorts to the teachings of the OT to establish order or solve problems in the church (2:13–15; 4:3–5; 6:7) with the purpose of producing love, good conscience, and faith (1:5). But God's way of ordering things is also evident in the salvation He provided through Christ (e.g., 2:3–7; 3:16; 4:10), and that brings with it a hope and trust that we should all embrace (1:1; 4:10; 5:5; 6:17). One could say that the church order Paul promoted in opposition to false teachers is the order that only the gospel can establish and preserve. The fight against false teachings is essentially a defense of the Christian faith.

Literary Features. First Timothy is more than a personal letter from Paul to Timothy. Although it contains specific instructions on how Timothy was to lead the church at Ephesus, many of the instructions are intended for the church in general. It resembles the mandate documents that rulers gave to their subordinates as they were installed into office—instructions that were, in many cases, read and displayed publicly in inscriptions.

COMMENTARY

1:1–20

Opposing False Doctrines

After the greetings (vv. 1–2), Paul addressed three specific issues (vv. 3–7): the need to oppose false teachings, the need for a deep spiritual experience, and the need to gain a proper understanding of the law. He developed these three topics further in the rest of the chapter. He defined the nature of the law (vv. 8–11), used his own experience to define the nature of a true Christian experience (vv. 12–17), and then returned to his charge to Timothy to oppose false teachers (vv. 18–20).

1:1–2. Greeting. Although Paul begins his epistle in customary fashion—identifying himself and the recipient of the letter and sharing a blessing—his greeting also includes key concepts he will pursue more fully later. One of these concepts is connected to his self-description as an apostle by God's command and by Jesus Christ. Throughout the letter, Paul instructed Timothy to command (*parangellō*, also translated "charge," "urge," "instruct") the church regarding certain issues (e.g., 1:3; 4:11; 5:7; 6:13, 17) and wanted him—and the church as well (see 1 Timothy: Introduction)—to remember that Paul himself was under divine orders. The descriptions of God as "our Savior" and of Jesus as "our hope" (1:1) also establish the theological horizon of the letter. Paul emphasized both the salvation (1:15; 2:3–6; 4:10) and the hope provided through and embodied in Jesus (4:10; 5:5; 6:17; cf. Col. 1:27). So, salvation is not obtained not through knowledge (1 Tim. 6:20) or asceticism (4:1–3) but from God; hope is based not on human effort or on riches but on God (4:10; 6:17). The themes of salvation and hope encompass the past of Jesus's incarnation and death and His Second Coming. Timothy was Paul's "true son in the faith" (1:2). This not only expresses Paul's close and affectionate relationship to Timothy (cf. Phil. 2:19–20; 2 Tim. 1:2) but also illustrates the kind of relationships that should pervade the church (1 Tim. 5:1–2).

1:3–7. Timothy's Charge. Paul left Timothy in charge of the church at Ephesus with the specific task of addressing false teachings. Timothy was sent on similar missions to the Macedonian churches (Acts 18:5; 19:22), Thessalonica (1 Thess. 3:2), Philippi (Phil. 2:19), and Corinth (1 Cor. 4:17; 16:10–11) and appears as a co-sender on six of Paul's letters (2 Corinthians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, Philemon). He may have been young, but he was not a novice.

Paul contrasted the work of the false teachers with his command to Timothy. False teachers were paying attention to myths or fables and "endless genealogies" (1 Tim. 1:4). The Greek verb *prosechō* ("pay close attention") may imply devotion and even attachment. They were addicted to that which was exciting and controversial. It is not clear what these pursuits were, but they seem to have been religious speculations without any basis in the Christian message and in conflict with it. In their ambition to be considered teachers of the law, these individuals had tried to create a name and a following for themselves by devotion to novel and probably obscure ideas. Paul was not castigating their ambition (cf. 3:1; 1 Cor. 12:28–31) but contrasting their teachings to the gospel entrusted to Timothy (1 Tim. 1:12–20). While their teachings were complex and "endless" (1:4, 7; cf. 2 Tim. 3:7), the gospel is simple and easily summarized (1 Tim. 1:15; 3:16). Their teachings were speculative, produced conflict, brought attention to the human teacher, and were divisive. The gospel produces love (1:5) and focuses on God.

Paul suggests that the opposite and better approach is to focus on *oikonomian theou* (v. 4).

This has been translated in various ways. Most likely it refers to the way God manages or orders His household (cf. 3:15). Paul considered his commission to be that of a steward of God's household (Col. 1:24–25). Thus, Paul charged Timothy with the task of steering the interests of believers away from the preoccupations of the false teachers to the "way God orders things." This order is specifically grounded in the gospel of salvation. Paul constantly refers to the plan of salvation to solve difficult issues in the church. This focus on God's plan produces love (1 Tim. 1:5) and is inherently unifying.

For Paul, sound teaching goes beyond knowledge to the transformation of the inner being. While sound teachers have love "from a pure heart," from "a good conscience," and from "sincere faith" (v. 5), false teachers have departed from and turned away from these virtues (vv. 6–7; cf. 2 Tim. 3:1–7). Theological fallacies reveal a spiritual problem. Spiritual failure produces vain discussion (1 Tim. 1:6).

1:8–11. The Appropriate Use of the Law. Paul deals first with the misunderstanding of the nature and function of the law by the false teachers. This seems to have been the root of their problem. We know, Paul says, that "the law is good" (v. 8). It is good because it expresses God's will for us so that we may have abundant life (Is. 48:18; Matt. 19:17; Rom. 7:10). It is a guide for the Christian life, but it cannot solve the problem of fallen humanity. The law describes how the righteous should live, not how the sinner can be made righteous (Rom. 3:20–28; Gal. 2:16). It cannot produce the "pure heart," "good conscience," and "sincere faith" mentioned above in 1 Timothy 1:5. It is a standard, not a solution. The law is properly used only in connection to Christ as the One who can make us righteous (1:12–15; cf. Gal. 3:24). False teachers failed to grasp this and misused the law. Their obsession with speculations led them to oppose marriage and certain kinds of foods (1 Tim. 4:3) and to advocate some forms of physical asceticism (cf. 4: 8). Instead of being an instrument for good, the law diverted attention from Christ and became an instrument of oppression.

The law is not made for the righteous person in the sense that it is made not to oppose the upright but to oppose lawless and rebellious people (1:8–9). The law is against what is bad and evil. This is the condemnatory role of the law as contrasted to its positive role as a guide for the Christian life. Paul proceeds to enumerate vices that are against the law (vv. 9–10). The list seems to be ordered according to the Decalogue. Paul refers to persons without respect for moral norms. The first four terms bring to mind the first four commandments. The reference to those who murder their parents reminds us of the fifth commandment. The next three terms refer to murderers, the sexually immoral, and those engaging in homosexual activity (*arsenokoitēs* designates a male who has sex with another male); these are suggestive of the sixth and the seventh commandments. The last three terms (referring to those who kidnap or enslave, liars, and perjurers) close the list with references to the eighth, ninth, and tenth commandments (since coveting speaks to the motivation behind a kidnapping).

1:12–17. Paul's Life and the Power of Grace. Paul's experience provided evidence the false teachers had ignored: that the real power for righteousness comes through divine grace. In the final analysis, what enables a person to serve God or to teach the law is the personal experience of His grace.

Even though Paul was a teacher as well as a blameless observer and defender of the law (Acts 6:13–15; 8:1–3; Phil. 3:5–6), he had not always loved with "a pure heart," from a "good conscience," and from "sincere faith" that characterizes the gospel and is the essence of the fulfillment of the law (1 Tim. 1:5; Rom. 13:8–10). He identified himself as one of the unrighteous described in 1 Timothy 1:8–10: a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolently violent man (v. 13). What empowered Paul to be righteous was the abundant, outflowing "grace of our Lord" (v. 14; cf. Rom. 5:20; 2 Cor. 4:15) along with the "faith and love," which are in Christ Jesus (v. 14). They are the goals of the commandment entrusted to Timothy but ignored by false teachers (1 Tim. 1:5–6; cf. Gal. 5:6). So, grace accomplished what the law could not.

Paul gives two reasons for the mercy shown to him. First, he acted with ignorance in unbelief (1 Tim. 1:13). This does not mean that only sins committed in ignorance are eligible for forgiveness. What limits forgiveness is not God's provision but our willingness to receive it. Second, Paul received God's mercy in order for Christ to display it through his story (v. 16). Paul was to become an example of those who would believe in Christ. He was God's exhibit in the courtroom of human opinion—that God is able to save to the uttermost. If Paul, the worst of sinners (v. 15), was shown mercy (1 Cor. 15:9–10; Gal. 1:13–17), then all would be.

1:18–20. Timothy's Charge Concluded. Paul concludes his introductory exhortation—begun in v. 3—by reminding Timothy of the importance of being faithful to the task entrusted to him through "prophecies" (v. 18). It is not clear what these prophecies said, or if they were made in connection to the specific task at Ephesus or in connection to Timothy's general commission to the gospel ministry (Acts 16:1–3). It seems clear, however, that at some point the Holy Spirit directed elders to commission Timothy for the work of the gospel (1 Tim. 4:14), just as Paul had been (Acts 13:1–3).

Timothy needed to keep those prophecies in mind so that he might fight the battle of life in the way he should (1 Tim. 1:18). They were to keep him focused and to remind him of the sacredness of his task. This task was like waging a war, and he needed to keep "faith and a good conscience" (v. 19)—which is, in fact, the purpose of the command entrusted to him (v. 5)—so as not to experience spiritual death, expressed as suffering "shipwreck" (v. 19). It was necessary that he not only remind the churches of the gospel but also experience it as an example to the believers (4:12; cf. 1 Cor. 4:16–17). In contrast, "Hymenaeus and Alexander" (v. 20; cf. Acts 19:33–34; 2 Tim. 2:17–18; 4:14) violated their consciences and apostatized. Paul gave them over to Satan. This action refers to their exclusion from the community of believers as a disciplinary measure (1 Cor. 5:5; cf. Job 2:6). Paul hoped, however, that they would be taught not to blaspheme, as he himself had learned (1 Tim. 1:13).

2:1–15

Dealing with Improper Conduct in the Church

In this chapter, Paul provided Timothy with practical counsel on dealing with the problems that had arisen in Ephesus. Since many in the church had lost sight of the gospel, Paul reminded them that prayer is a fundamental aspect of what it means to be Christian. He urged them to pray for all people (vv. 1–7). This epistle then addresses the behavior of both men (v. 8) and women (vv. 9–15). More time was needed on counseling women because the false teachers were trying to use them to propagate their own teachings.

2:1–7. Prayers for Humanity and Authorities. Paul's first instruction to the believers in Ephesus was to pray for all people, kings, and those in authority (vv. 1–2). The emphasis on praying for "all" people ("all" is repeated in vv. 1, 2, 4, and 6) not only focused attention on the universal mission of the church but also served as a rebuke to the exclusivist mentality of the false teachers. Prayer affirms that God is the source of all human authority (Rom. 13:1–7; cf. Ezra 6:8–10; 1 Pet. 2:13–14). Prayers were to be offered so that the believers might have peace and quiet (freedom from controversies; 1 Tim. 2:2), enabling them to more easily focus on accomplishing the mission of the church (cf. v. 7). This passage, then, is not primarily about the believers' personal security but about the fulfillment of the church's mission.

In this society, Paul enjoined believers to live in *eusebeia* and *semnotēs* (the Greek terms at the end of v. 2). The first term, *eusebeia*, denotes a deep connection between the knowledge of God and personal conduct. It expresses the OT idea of the "fear of God." The second term refers to behavior considered worthy of respect by others: "respectability." Paul wanted the believers to be respectable and to mirror their faith in their behavior (cf. 3:2–12). He feared that incongruous behavior would obstruct the advance of the gospel.

In the NT, prayer, praise, and thanksgiving are "spiritual sacrifices" acceptable to God (Heb. 13:15–16; 1 Pet. 2:5, 9). Paul here identifies prayers for others (1 Tim. 2:1–2) as something that pleases God (v. 3) and thus an appropriate part of Christian worship. In the OT, God accepted the sacrifices and rituals of honest-hearted worshipers; now, He accepts prayers as spiritual sacrifices. A deeper theological motivation for such prayers is the divine will to save: God, being the God of all, desires that all people be saved and come to know the truth (v. 4). Besides, the fact that "there is one God" (v. 5; cf. Deut. 6:4; 1 Cor. 8:6) means that there is one source of salvation for all (cf. Rom. 3:21–31; 11:26–32). Finally, there is only one Mediator—one way of salvation available to all people—in the person of Jesus Christ (1 Tim. 2:5). It is indeed good to pray for all to our God through our Mediator. Paul expands on the mediatorial role of Jesus by describing Him as the One who gave Himself as "a ransom for all" (v. 6; cf. Mark 10:45). He paid our ransom by giving His life as a substitute. Paul then indicates that Jesus came as the witness from God at the appropriate time, in accordance with God's plan (1 Tim. 2:6; cf. Heb. 1:1–2). Jesus as our Mediator does not mean that God is our adversary but that both Jesus and God work together for our salvation (see 1 Tim. 2:3–4).

2:8–15. Men and Women in Worship. Paul introduces this section with the conjunctive adverb "therefore," indicating that it is related to the previous section. In vv. 1–7, Paul noted that righteous and respectable behavior was necessary when praying for all. In this section (vv. 8–15), Paul unpacks what that means in relation to the participation of men and women in church: men should be temperate and women modest to avoid any reproach against the gospel (cf. 5:14).

Male believers are to lift up "holy hands" as they pray (2:8). Sanctuary regulations required priests to wash their hands before ministering to the Lord (Ex. 30:19–21). Similarly, Paul indicates that acceptable worship demands spiritual purity (cf. Matt. 15:18–20). Believers should abstain from anger and doubting or disputing (1 Tim. 2:8; cf. Matt. 5:23–24). Context suggests that the meaning here at least includes "disputes" or "controversies" (one of the connotations of the Greek word *dialogismos*), referring to the disputes that the false teachers raised in the church (1 Tim. 1:4; 6:4; cf. 2 Tim. 2:23; Titus 3:9).

Following the same train of thought (the Greek has *hōsautōs* [1 Tim. 2:9], which connotes "also" or "in the same way"), Paul instructed female believers regarding their personal adornment (1 Tim. 2:9–10) and attitude (vv. 9–15). Women should wear modest clothing, which he defines in relation to both internal and external aspects. On the internal side are propriety and *sōphrosynē* (v. 9). This important second term refers to the supreme virtue of Greek women. It conveys the idea of prudence and self-control. Paul refers to this virtue at the beginning (v. 9) and at the end (v. 15) of his instruction to women, indicating the important role it plays in the paragraph. On the external side, Paul excludes the use of elaborate braided hairstyles, gold, pearls, and expensive clothing and encourages good works. Roman culture assigned much importance to the way women dressed. There were laws regulating the dress of married women, adulteresses, and even prostitutes. In practical terms, dress determined—to large extent—public identity. Greco-Roman writers described ideal wives as modest in their demeanor.

Jewelry also played an important role in the Greco-Roman world, and it was directly related to social status and values. The significance of the use of jewelry among Roman women is complex. In general, moralists condemned its use and/or the luxurious aspect of it. Still, the hairstyles and jewelry mentioned by Paul were common among wealthy Roman women and even among prostitutes. While the practice often contradicted the opinion, Roman society considered such hairstyles and jewelry superfluous because, among other reasons, they were unnecessary, unlike clothing. Paul also considered jewelry unnecessary. He rejected the ostentatious display of wealth associated with costly clothing and jewelry. Christians should seek to be clothed with something far better than these things—with doing good (v. 10) and with the inner beauty that is appropriate for both men and women who profess loyalty to God.

Paul brings up another topic related to the work of the false teachers. They had been deceiving some female church members who, according to Paul, were "always learning" but never able to come to "knowledge of the truth" (2 Tim. 3:6–7). Therefore, he specifically instructed women to learn quietly and submissively (1 Tim. 2:11). Instruction had a positive side. Women did not normally enjoy the education that men did. In this sense, the gospel brought equal opportunity of education for men and women in the church. But Paul makes it clear that they should be taught by those appointed to teach and not by false teachers. He goes on to describe how the learning should take place. Women were to be silent and in submission only when being taught. The Greek term *hēsychia* refers here to the quietness or silence that Paul required and not to absolute silence. In v. 2 he uses the corresponding adjective, *hēsychios*, to describe the peaceful and quiet demeanor that is to characterize the Christian life. Here, it specifically refers to the respectful disposition needed in order to avoid conflicts (e.g., v. 2; 2 Thess. 3:11–12). The submission Paul refers to is not to the husband but to the teacher offering the instruction. Students were expected to respect their instructors and not to argue with them, particularly if the discussion included elements of the teachings of a false teacher. Paul did not permit a woman to teach or to *authentein* (from *authenteō*) a man. The Greek term *authenteō* is found only here in the NT, and it carries the sense of "domineering." Paul's use of this uncommon term suggests that he was opposing women exercising a domineering attitude that would disrupt the teaching process. These women were not yet ready to teach, and their attempts were resulting in the rejection of the authority of the church-appointed instructor.

The meaning of 1 Timothy 2:13–14 is a matter of disagreement among Bible students. It is probably an illustration used by Paul to clarify what he is saying. It is important to note that Paul is talking about what happened not after the fall but before. We should keep in mind that elsewhere Paul expects women not to be silent in church but to pray and prophesy (1 Cor. 11:5; cf. Titus 2:3–5). He also commends women who had authoritative roles in the church, such as Phoebe (Rom. 16:1–2; cf. 1 Cor. 3:5; 2 Cor 3:6; 6:4; 11:23), Priscilla with her husband (Rom. 16:3; Acts 18:26), and probably Junia and her husband (Rom. 16:7). Elsewhere in Scripture, we find reference to women speaking and having leadership roles (e.g., Judg. 4–5; Joel 2:29; Acts 21:8–9).

Therefore, the point of the illustration is to be connected to the false teachers. Paul mentioned Eve not as an example of a woman who did not submit to her husband but as a woman who was deceived. He simply stated that Adam was created first and then Eve; yet it was Eve, not Adam, who was deceived (1 Tim. 2:13–14). Even though Eve had a companion from the beginning, she was deceived. Why? The implication is that she went after knowledge independent of her companion. They should have stayed together against their common enemy. Paul's point is that women should do the same when facing false teachers in order to preserve unity in the church. Men and women should stay united against the common enemy of the gospel. The women in the church were, like Eve, being deceived by an outsider.

As indicated by the Bible texts, women were probably some of the main propagators of false teachings in the church (1 Tim. 4:7; 5:13–14; cf. 2 Tim 3:6–7). The heresy's aversion to marriage (1 Tim. 4:3) suggests that there were other teachings that were especially attractive to well-to-do Christian wives and widows, tempting them to shun home duties and seek a life of independence and liberation (5:11–15).

Paul's concluding instruction to women affirms that they would be saved in or through childbearing if they would continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control or propriety (2:15). This is a difficult passage. It could refer to physical safety in childbearing or to (spiritual) salvation "through" childbearing. It most likely refers to the latter. Affluent Greco-Roman women were often averse to having children because of its impact on their appearance and used preventive methods (including abortion) that put them in physical danger, though Roman moralists often considered children to be the true adornments of a woman. Since the heresy that Paul was opposing denied the value of marriage and thus childbearing (4:3), he may have been arguing about the value of childbearing—that it can indeed cohere with Christian faith. Paul also affirmed that by bearing children and upholding Christian values (2:15), the female members of the church were manifesting the qualities of a virtuous wife in Roman society (cf. 5:14).

3:1–16

Leaders of the Church

Since spiritual leaders play such a significant role in the church, in this section Paul focuses his attention on the selection of those leaders, offering advice regarding the appointment of church elders (vv. 1–7) and then for the selection of deacons (vv. 8–13). The last section (vv. 14–16) provides the theological foundation for church order. It is significant to note that Paul focused not on the duties of church leaders, but on the type of character they were to possess.

3:1–7. The Overseer/Elder. The term *episkopē* means literally "overseer" or "supervisor" but is sometimes translated "bishop." This individual was to serve as the leader of a congregation, perhaps together with other elders (4:14; see commentary on Phil. 1:1–3). The leadership structure Paul described was like a synagogue, which had a leader, a board of elders, and an officer known as *khazzan* ("helper"), who carried out practical functions. Leaders were in charge of coordinating the activities of the community, including public prayer, reading and exhortation (1 Tim. 2:1–3; 4:13), charity distributions to widows (5:3–16), hospitality (3:2), and settling disputes (5:19–20; cf. Rom. 12:7–8). The qualities of the overseer included various virtues. They are, essentially, what would be expected from every Christian, but it is especially important that the elders exemplify these virtues. Elders are to have these characteristics because they recommend the elders as faithful or trustworthy (1 Cor. 4:2). So, it is necessary that the elder must be *mias gynaikos andra* (a one-woman/wife man; 1 Tim. 3:2; cf. 3:12; 5:9; Titus 1:6). This could be understood in several ways, but the context simply suggests marital faithfulness. A church leader must be able to manage his home well (1 Tim. 3:4), evidenced by his children obeying and respecting him. The church is God's household (v. 15), and the elder's inability to manage his own house would indicate a lack of capacity to manage God's household (v. 5). Being "hospitable" and "able to teach" (v. 2) were also important for the early church, whose development and health depended, to a large degree, on sending out and receiving guests and on successfully dealing with false teachings (cf. 3 John).

Other characteristics seek to prevent the dangers of leadership. Elders must be "temperate" (1 Tim. 3:2) and not addicted to alcohol (*paroinos*, "a drunkard"; v. 3), lest their behavior and judgment be corrupted by pleasure. They are "not violent" and "not quarrelsome" (v. 3), enabling them to promote peace and to avoid pride or envy. They should not be greedy for money (v. 3), so as to avoid corruption by avarice. They must be sober-minded or self-controlled (v. 2), so that their decisions reflect the best of their mind and character. They must not be recent converts (v. 6), because Paul knew that there is always a danger of arrogance in a quick ascent to leadership. In summary, they must be "above reproach" or "blameless," with nothing the devil could use to damage the reputation of the church.

3:8–16. The Deacon. The term deacon (*diakonos*) means, literally, "servant." Paul required from the deacons qualities similar to those of the elders. The differences serve to identify characteristics especially important in view of their roles. The deacons must be *semnos* (v. 8), which refers to being respectable and dignified. They should not be double-tongued or insincere (v. 8), since this could create problems in the church by their saying one thing to one person and something different to another. They should also not be greedy (v. 8; cf. 6:5). This was especially important for those who managed charity programs. As in the case of any leader, the deacon's life must be congruent with his professed faith and, therefore, he must be tested first (v. 10; cf. 5:22).

Some translations suggest that 3:11 refers to the wives of the deacons, but this is not clear. It could also refer to women who are deacons. They are introduced using the same term employed for deacons (v. 8; *hōsautōs*; "likewise"; cf. Rom. 16:1). Their attributes parallel those of the deacons and elders, including demeanor ("respectable"), speech ("not malicious slanderers"), temperance, and faithfulness (v. 11).

3:14–16. Theology and Order. The church order Paul promotes in this epistle is dependent on a proper understanding of the gospel. This means that vv. 14–16 are the theological climax of the letter. The church Paul talked about is the community of believers—not a building. He was interested in how we conduct our lives as members of that community (v. 15). The church is the pillar and grounding foundation of the truth (v. 15), not in the sense that the truth is founded and dependent on the church but in the sense that the church provides sure and unmovable support for it. False teachers were damaging this understanding of the church by claiming that truth resided in them and not in the church. Paul's understanding of the church was directly related to the mystery of godliness (v. 16; cf. v. 9). So, he encapsulated the mystery of the gospel in a beautiful literary construction (cf. Rom. 1:3–4; 16:25–27; 1 Cor. 15:3–7; Phil. 2:6–11; Col. 1:15–20). Six affirmations about Jesus are carefully balanced, both grammatically and conceptually (1 Tim. 3:16). The first refers to Jesus's incarnation (He was revealed in the flesh) and the second to His resurrection (He was justified or vindicated by the Spirit). The key Greek term is *edikaiōthē* ("justified" or "vindicated"; from *dikaioō*) and refers here to God's demonstration of Jesus's innocence by the Holy Spirit at the resurrection (cf. Acts 2:22–36; Rom. 1:4). The third affirmation probably refers to Jesus's proclamation of victory before evil powers (He was seen by angels; cf. Eph. 3:9–11; 4:8–10; Col. 2:15; 1 Pet. 3:19) or to the moment when the angelic hosts saw Him coming out of the tomb. The fourth and fifth affirmations refer to His proclamation and acceptance among the nations (He was preached and believed), and the sixth to His exaltation (He was taken up and received in glory). The affirmations contain interplay between heaven and earth. Jesus is manifested and exalted in both realms, giving the gospel's impact cosmic proportions. In this beautiful construction, probably a hymn, Paul reminded the leaders that the church's mission to all the nations corresponds with Jesus's mission to earth as "a ransom for all" (1 Tim. 2:6). If they would remain faithful to the gospel, Jesus's success would be theirs too.

4:1–16

Addressing False Teachings

In this section of his letter, Paul describes the nature of the false teachings (vv. 1–5), and, in response, exhorts Timothy to teach true doctrine and to be an example to all (vv. 6–16).

4:1–5. The False Teachers. The Spirit predicted and warned that in later times some would leave the faith and pay attention to the teachings of deceiving spirits (v. 1; Matt. 24:24–28; Mark 13:22; 2 Pet. 2:1–3; 1 John 4:1–3; cf. 2 Thess. 2:3–4; Rev. 13:1–17). In 1 Timothy 1:4, the expression *prosechō* ("devote oneself to"), translated here in 4:1 as "giving heed" or "follow," denoted the false teachers' devotion to fables and endless genealogies. In 3:8, it referred to addiction to wine. False teachers had arisen from inside the church and Paul wanted the church to be aware of the demonic origins of their unlawful interpretations of the law (1:3–7). The rebellion against the law of God that will culminate prior to the second advent is already active within the church (cf. 2 Thess. 2:7; 2 Tim. 2:1, 6).

The false teachers were forbidding marriage and commanding abstention from food (4:3). We find a similar combination of false teachings in the Colossian church (Col. 2:20–23). Paul's point was that God created both marriage and food for our benefit and that instead of rejecting them we should receive them with thanksgiving (cf. 1 Cor. 10:25–33). In this sense, the false teachers had fallen into the same mistake as the ungodly, who failed to acknowledge the goodness of creation and give thanks to God and who finally corrupted His gifts (Rom. 1:18–32).

The problem was not related to the distinction between clean and unclean foods. The false teachers were prohibiting what God created to be received with thanksgiving (1 Tim. 4:3); they were opposed to God's instruction about what should be eaten (this included clean animals; Lev. 11). They had gone beyond Scripture, making an unlawful use of the law (cf. 1 Tim. 1:8). Paul presented the positive side by stating that the food God created was good (v. 4). We can eat of it using what the Bible teaches about diet ("the word of God"; v. 5) as our criterion and by offering a prayer of thanksgiving.

4:6–11. Exhortation to Teach. If Timothy would instruct the people in this way, he would be a good minister of Jesus Christ (v. 6). The word for "minister" is literally "deacon" (*diakonos*; "servant"; cf. 3:8, 12), one who ministers to others. Timothy was to give an example (v. 12) that church leaders could follow. He was to be nourished in the words of faith and good doctrine (vv. 13–16), as opposed to the doctrines of demons (v. 1). This is much more important than discussions about *mythoi* ("fables" or "myths"; v. 7). Creating an athletic image was common in Paul's time (e.g., Heb. 12:1, 11; cf. Acts 20:24; 1 Cor. 9:24; 2 Tim. 4:7). In 1 Tim. 4:8, he affirms that physical exercise is good but what is truly valuable is godliness. Godliness is profitable because it impacts the present life and the future one as well (v. 8). In v. 10, some manuscripts read *oneidizometha* ("we suffer reproach"), but others read *agōnizometha* ("we struggle" or "we contend for a prize"). If the latter reading is accurate, Paul may have intended to continue the athletic imagery. The *agōn* was an athletic contest—traditionally a race or a wrestling competition. Paul considered all his toil and struggle for being found faithful to God worth the effort because God is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe (v. 10). Paul was not teaching universalism, the idea that at the end God will save everyone. He affirmed that God is the only way of salvation (2:3–4).

4:12–16. Exhortation to be an Example. Paul instructed Timothy—and the church that overhears—to not let anyone think less of him because of his youth. His instructions elsewhere suggest that Timothy had a mild and yielding disposition (1 Cor. 16:10–11; 2 Tim. 4:1–4). He reminded Timothy that authority to lead comes from the power of example. Timothy was to be a model in word and conduct (1 Tim. 4:12). These are intimately connected. Jesus said that speech reveals what is in the heart (Matt. 15:18–19). So, the one who does not speak wrongly is a perfect man (James 3:2). Timothy was also to be an example in purity. In the moral literature of the time, this term often referred to sexual purity (see 1 Tim. 5:2).

The apostle counseled Timothy to devote his attention (4:13; cf. 1:4; 3:8; 4:1) to the work of a minister that consists of reading Scripture, preaching/exhortation, and teaching/doctrine. The context suggests that Paul meant the reading of Scripture in worship, as it was customary in the synagogue (Neh. 8:1–8; Acts 13:15; 15:21). The reference to preaching, or exhortation, probably refers to the sermon that came after the reading of Scripture (Acts 13:15; cf. Rom. 12:8; Heb. 13:22). The "teaching" or "doctrine" (1 Tim. 4:13) referred to comes from the Greek word *didaskalia*. In short, Timothy was not to neglect his gift (v. 14). This "gift" refers to the ministry Timothy received from God through prophecy and was recognized by the church through the elders laying their hands on him (cf. 2 Tim. 1:6). This ministry, like that of Paul and others, was, in fact, a gift from God to the church for the common good and edification (Rom. 12:6; 1 Cor. 12; Eph. 4:11–16). Note that Paul's commission had come by prophecy as well and was also confirmed by the laying on of hands (Acts 13:1–3). The elders referenced here were perhaps a leadership board in each church, corresponding to the *gerousia* ("eldership") of the synagogue and the *presbyterion* ("eldership") of the Greco-Roman *collegium* or association. Paul does not make clear if this happened at the beginning of Timothy's ministry or at a later time (1 Tim. 1:18; Acts 16:1–2).

Timothy needed to take care of his ministry. If he guarded his behavior and focused on the work required of him, he would save not only himself but also those who heard him (1 Tim. 4:16).

5:1—6:2a

Relationships in the Church

In this portion of the letter, Paul instructed Timothy on how to deal with different groups in the church. It begins by depicting the church as a family (vv. 1–2), followed by a long instruction about widows (vv. 3–16). Finally, Paul counseled Timothy on how to treat church elders (vv. 17–25) and on matters related to slavery (6:1–2).

5:1–2. The Church as a Family. The model of the church used here by Paul is not patriarchal or matriarchal but that of a family in which all relate to each other on the basis of mutual respect. Timothy was not to humiliate older members but to exhort them (v. 1). Younger ones he should treat as brothers and sisters and older women as mothers (v. 2).

The Laying on of Hands

The laying on of hands refers to several things in Scripture. In the OT sacrifices, the gesture indicated the offerer's identity with the sacrifice and the giving or dedication of the sacrifice to God (e.g., Ex. 29:10; Lev. 4:15; 8:14; see "The Laying On of Hands," p. 243). Thus, the laying on of hands during the consecration of the priests may have referred to the people's dedication of the priest to God for His service (Num. 8:10–11). On other occasions, the gesture could indicate who or what the focus of the ritual or action was (e.g., Lev. 24:14) and was used for the appointment of Joshua as successor of Moses (Num. 27:18; Deut. 34:9). In the NT, the gesture is used in healings (Mark 7:32; 10:16; Acts 9:12–17), blessings (Mark 10:13–16), baptism with the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:16–19), and the appointments of elders or other leaders (Acts 14:23; 2 Tim. 1:6).

5:3–16. Widows and Their Financial Support. This is the longest and most complex of Paul's instructions in the letter. Widows and orphans were especially vulnerable and often chronically poor. In the OT, God is described as a protector of the widow and the orphan (Ex. 22:21–27; Ps. 146:9; Prov. 15:25) who issued legislation to provide relief for them (e.g., Deut. 14:28–29; 16:11–14; 24:19–22). Jewish synagogues administered a relief system for the poor, and the early church shared their possessions for the common benefit (Acts 2:44–45; 4:32–35). The administration of a relief system, however, posed challenges (cf. Acts 6:1–7). The instructions of Paul in this passage address the question of who should receive financial help in the church.

Paul instructed Timothy to give appropriate help to those who were truly widows (1 Tim. 5:3). The Greek verb *timaō* ("to honor") often took the specific form of financial support, as it was implied in the commandment to "honor" parents (vv. 3–4; Ex. 20:12; cf. Matt. 15:4–6). The biblical support Paul gives later for the instruction to give "double honor" to elders who govern well makes clear that, in this passage, "honoring" implies financial support (1 Tim. 5:17–18). Paul draws a stark contrast between the "real widows" (vv. 4–5, 9–10) who should receive support, and widows (vv. 6, 11, 13, 15) who should not. They are described in terms of their socio-economic and spiritual situation and age. Real widows were those with no children or grandchildren—those left alone (vv. 4–5). Widows with children should be supported by them in order not to burden the church (v. 16). Paul considered this a matter of religious duty (v. 8; cf. James 1:27). Both the fifth commandment and God's own concern for the widow and the orphan demanded that believers care for them. Furthermore, Greco-Roman law required that children care for their parents in old age. Thus, Christians who neglected their own parents were worse than an unbeliever (1 Tim. 5:8).

Real widows (those over sixty years of age; v. 9) could not support themselves and were unlikely to marry again. Paul identifies such a widow as above reproach (v. 7), the same quality Paul required from the elder and from Timothy (3:2; 6:14), and as putting her trust and hope in God (5:5; the ideal for the whole community; e.g., 4:10; cf. Pss. 7:1; 16:1; 31:1; 37:3). Paul identified her as having been a faithful spouse (1 Tim. 3:2, 12; 5:9) and finally as having a reputation for doing good (5:10). The author mentions hospitality (e.g., washing believers' feet),

relief efforts, and that she had raised children (cf. 2:15).

"False widows," on the other hand, are described as a threat to the spiritual health of the church and to its reputation. Some of them were living for pleasure (Gr. *spatalaō*) and were spiritually dead (5:6; cf. Rev. 18:7–9). The Greek term *spatalaō* refers to a life of luxury with immoral overtones and was used to describe life in Sodom (Ezek. 16:49, LXX; cf. James 5:5). Another problem was their sensual desires causing them to become separated (Gr. *katastrēniaō*) from Christ (1 Tim. 5:11). The Greek verb *katastrēniaō* denotes being dominated by strong physical desire (often sexual). Paul argued that these sensual desires were pitting them against Christ, occasioning their desire to marry. Marriage was not the problem, since Paul himself required younger widows to remarry (v. 14; cf. 1 Cor. 7:8–9, 39). But Paul condemned marriage with unbelievers, which would lead widows to abandon their commitment to Christ, since wives typically adopted the religion of their husbands (1 Cor. 7:39). Paul also worried that financial support given to "false widows" would encourage them to go from house to house speaking inappropriate things (1 Tim. 5:13). Gossip was probably not the only concern. Women were favored targets of false teachers (4:7; 2 Tim. 3:6–7), and their idleness would be especially dangerous for the church.

Paul was instructing Timothy to do two things: First, he should refuse the younger widows (1 Tim. 5:11). Paul probably meant more than not including them in the financial relief roster, but also staying away from them (see 4:7; 2 Tim. 2:23; Titus 3:10). The advice may seem harsh, but specific concerns may have motivated Paul. There was a sexual revolution occurring in the Greco-Roman world at the time of Paul. Prominent and affluent women claimed the sexual liberty normally permitted to men. Young widows were especially vulnerable to this tendency, since their legal situation freed them from the restrictions of marriage, and were often the butt of jokes about sexual indiscretion. Rome, in fact, tried to reduce promiscuity by issuing legislation against adultery (committed by married women) and sex with unmarried people (committed by men, widows, and free women).

The second instruction was that younger widows should marry, bear children, and manage their homes (1 Tim. 5:14). This was the Greco-Roman ideal for honorable women. In fact, Roman law penalized widows between twenty and fifty years of age who did not remarry and have children.

Paul wanted only widows who were alone, were unable to sustain themselves, and had a good reputation to be included in the church's relief system. His concern went beyond the finances of the church to its spiritual health and reputation. The church should give no opportunity for an adversary of the church to slander it (v. 14).

5:17–25. Relationship with Elders. Paul advised Timothy that good leaders should receive double honor. He referred especially to those who preach and teach doctrines from the word (v. 17). This was especially valuable in view of the false teachers who threatened the integrity of the church (1:3–4). Paul quoted two passages from Scripture that suggest that "double honor" refers to material compensation, as in the case of the widows. The first passage (Deut. 25:4) prohibits muzzling an ox while it treads out the grain (see 1 Cor. 9:9). The second passage is Jesus's teaching in Luke 10:7, stating that the worker is worthy of his wages. It is significant that at this early stage Paul considered Jesus's teachings as Scripture.

Paul also advised Timothy not to receive an accusation against a leader unless backed by the testimony of two or three witnesses (1 Tim. 5:19). Timothy was to follow the criteria used for dealing with accusations in the OT—which the early church also followed (Deut. 19:15–20; cf. Matt. 18:15–20; 2 Cor. 13:1)—and rebuke in the presence of all those who were sinning (1 Tim. 5:20). This does not contradict Jesus's advice that public discipline should come only after two private warnings (Matt. 18:15–20). Paul himself instructed Titus to reject a person only after a first and second warning (Titus 3:10). The expression used with regard to the elders sinning normally indicates a continuous action and may imply a person who persists in his behavior after being warned. The general purpose of the public rebuke was that the rest might also fear (cf. Deut. 19:20). It refers to the OT concept of the "fear of God" that prevents a person from sinning. The Greek term *elenchō* ("rebuke") could imply a range of different disciplinary measures: exposure and convincing of wrongdoing, correction, censure, or discipline. The public rebuke could be accomplished by any of these, depending on the particular situation.

Paul reminded Timothy of the importance of this task. Paul may have feared that Timothy's yielding disposition would lead him to shun the important but difficult task of reproving sin (see 1 Tim. 4:12). So, Paul charged Timothy before the heavenly court to perform this duty without prejudice or partiality (5:21; cf. 2 Tim. 2:14; 4:1). He was not to prejudge cases or proceed with favoritism. Neither was he to appoint leaders (laying hands on them) without careful consideration (1 Tim. 5:22). Paul implied that Timothy would share in other people's sins if, because of negligence, he appointed a leader who was in sin or allowed a leader who was in sin to continue in his position. Timothy should keep himself pure because his authority to deal with the crisis at Ephesus depended on that.

Paul also advised Timothy to use a little wine because of his stomach and frequent ailments (v. 23). This is a medicinal use of wine. It is not clear how this advice relates to the rest of the paragraph. It is possible that it was necessary because of Timothy's concern about keeping himself pure. (Nazirites, for example, drank neither fermented nor unfermented wine [Num. 6:1–9; cf. Acts 21:23–24].) It is clear that Timothy's custom was to drink only water. The Greek term *oinos* ("wine") could designate either fermented or unfermented wine. Both Aristotle (384–322 B.C.) and Pliny (A.D. 24–79) commented explicitly that unfermented wine was used for stomach problems.

Paul finished the section with a reminder to Timothy that in some cases it is difficult to identify sin in the church. Sometimes sins are obvious, but Timothy should be certain that his judgment would confirm God's judgment (1 Tim. 5:24; cf. Matt. 18:15–20). In other cases, facts would become clear only later. Timothy should not worry, though. God, in the end, would judge the hidden things (Eccl. 12:14; Luke 12:2; Heb. 4:13).

6:1–2a. Masters and Slaves. Paul finished his instruction regarding relationships in the church by addressing the relationship between slaves and masters. Some slaves despised their masters, especially Christian masters. This attitude probably originated from Paul's own teaching that in Christ "there is neither slave nor free" (Gal. 3:28; cf. 1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 6:8; Col. 3:11). Paul did not attempt, however, to overturn the existing social order. He understood its wickedness (cf. 1 Cor. 7:21), but his priority was that God and the gospel might not be slandered (1 Tim. 6:1). Yet, he did undermine it in a subtle and foundational way. He described the service of Christian slaves as a "benefaction" to their Christian masters. In ancient society, only patrons could exercise benefaction that made them worthy of honor. Paul reversed the language of honor—just as Jesus did (Luke 22:25–27)—and described the slave as the benefactor who serves from a position of honor and strength. Thus, the master became a beloved fellow believer (1 Tim. 6:2a).

6:2b–21

Conclusion

Paul closed his letter to Timothy by recapitulating the main instructions at the beginning of the letter. Timothy was to confront false teachers through both teaching and behavior. Paul dealt first with the false teachings and the character of the teachers (6:2b–10), then again counseled Timothy to model true teaching (vv. 11–21).

6:2b–10. False Teachings, Godliness, and Greed. Paul had charged Timothy at the beginning of the letter to confront false teachers and their misunderstanding of the law (1:3–20). In this section (6:2b–10), Paul charged him to confront them on their misunderstanding of godliness. Verse 2b points to what was said before and to what is going to be said. Verses 3 to 5 describe false teachers in terms of the content of their teaching as well as their character. False teachers distorted what Paul had presented. They rejected the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ, and their teaching did not produce godliness (v. 3). By the latter, Paul referred to a life in which faith in God is congruent with behavior. The history of the false teachers' character followed a downward path. Everything began with a state of pride that blinded them so that they ended up knowing nothing. Pride and ignorance produce a state of spiritual sickness characterized by conflict, envy, and strife. The end of the process is a corrupted mind, devoid of the truth (v. 5; cf. Rom. 1:18–32). The false teachers had become incapable of understanding the truth, believing that godliness was a means of gaining riches. Their apparent godliness was for financial profit. Timothy should withdraw from such.

Paul conceded that godliness is in fact a "great gain" when characterized by "contentment" (1 Tim. 6:6–8). The concept of *autarkeia* ("contentment," "self-sufficiency") was an important virtue in Greco-Roman philosophy. Paul and Jesus, however, understood it not as a discipline, but as an outgrowth of faith in God's loving care (Matt. 6:25–34; Luke 12:22–32; Phil. 4:11–12). Those who desire to be rich face many dangers. Desire makes a person vulnerable to temptation. Ironically, those who fall into it are trapped by many other foolish and harmful desires as well (1 Tim. 6:9). They are foolish because they ignore God's knowledge and purposes and are harmful because they lead to total destruction. The love of money is a powerful, blinding force (v. 10). It first makes people abandon the faith and secondly, leads them to impale themselves with many sorrows (v. 10).

6:11–21. Final Instruction to Timothy. Paul's instructions to Timothy (vv. 11–16), with their description of Jesus's confession (v. 13) and God's nature (vv. 15–16), provide the rhetorical basis on which exhortation to the rich is to be built (vv. 17–19) and on which a final exhortation is offered (vv. 20–21). Paul commanded Timothy to model the true life of faith, which others—including the rich—should have. Timothy was to lead by example, but he himself needed to follow the example of Jesus and God.

Paul described Timothy as a "man of God" (v. 11; see Deut. 33:1; 1 Sam. 9:6; 1 Kin. 13:1; 17:18; 2 Chr. 8:14). As such, Timothy was to "flee" the evil ways of the false teachers (1 Tim. 6:3–10). He should, instead, pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience/endurance, and gentleness. This list of virtues contrasts the vices of the false teachers, characterized by envy, strife, and reviling (vv. 4–5). The last in the virtue list—sometimes translated as "meekness" or "gentleness"—is a rare term (*praupatheia*) and denotes a quality especially appropriate in view of the contentious spirit of the false teachers. Timothy was to fight the good fight of faith—focused on the final goal of eternal life and anchored in the remembrance of a pivotal moment of his own story: his good confession in the presence of many witnesses (v. 12). Paul could have been referring to the moment Timothy was commissioned for the work of the gospel (4:14) or, more likely, his baptism. Paul did not describe the content of such a confession, but the fact that Jesus Himself gave it before Pontius Pilate (6:13; John 18:36–38) suggests that it consisted in avowing Jesus as both Christ (Messiah) and Lord (cf. Rom. 10:9–10).

Paul urged Timothy, in light of God's purview (1 Tim. 6:13), to keep this commandment purely (v. 14), referring to all the instructions contained in the letter (cf. 1:3–7). Paul reminded Timothy of his accountability to God. Paul invited him for a second time to imagine himself called before the heavenly court (cf. 5:21; 2 Tim. 4:1), reminding him to keep the instructions of the letter until the appearing of Christ, the Christian hope. Then the truth of the Christian confession would be irrefutably clear to all. Augustus was often celebrated as "savior" of the world. His "appearance" had brought hope to humankind and marked the beginning of "good tidings." Paul confessed, however, that the only "appearance" that brought true hope and good news was Jesus's Second Coming. This will be brought about by God, who is the only *dynastēs* ("Ruler," "Sovereign," "Potentate"). God is superior to anyone else in terms of position and nature. In terms of position, He is "King of kings and Lord of lords." These titles also belong to Jesus (Rev. 17:14; 19:16). In terms of nature, God alone has immortality (1 Tim. 6:16), a quality often attributed to Jesus (John 5:25; 10:15–18; 13:8), while believers will receive immortality as a gift from God (1 Cor. 15:53–54).

The doxology of 1 Timothy 6:15b–16 (cf. 1:17) is intimately related to the instruction to rich people that follows (6:17–19). Paul commanded the rich to not be proud (v. 17). Wealth provides power to its possessor and attracts flattery; it is a constant source of temptation. The wealthy should not trust in the uncertainty of wealth. People are often tempted to think that real life can be found in pleasure, possessions, and power, but God is the only One who can give life. The contrast here between the unreliability of riches and the trustworthiness of God is the same as between idols and God in the OT (e.g., Jer. 10:8–10). God is the only One who has life in Himself and is, therefore, the Life Giver for all (1 Tim. 6:13) and the One who "richly" provides for us (v. 17; cf. James 1:5). Once we understand that material possessions are a gift from God, we are ready to relate to them wisely. As gifts, whatever power they may have depends on God. They offer no life in themselves. If their pursuit separates us from God, both they and we will perish. The rich should, instead, be rich in doing good (1 Tim. 6:18). Those who share their riches in this life store them for the future; those who are ready to give generously are truly grasping eternal life (v. 19).

Paul concluded his charge to Timothy by summarizing his instruction to engage the opponents (vv. 20–21; cf. 1:3–20). While there are instructions in the letter that may not appear to be related to the heresy, Paul's conclusion suggests that the letter should be read in that context. False teachings are described as "falsely called knowledge" (6:20). It is possible that Paul's opponents liked to call the content of their teachings "knowledge" (cf. 1 Cor. 8:1; 13:2; Col. 1:9–10; 2:3). This reference to "falsely called knowledge" provides a fitting conclusion to the letter. The pursuit of the "falsely called knowledge" by those desiring to be teachers of the law and of riches by those desiring to be rich are similar in nature and outcome. Both are, in the end, false idols that will cause the destruction of those who worship them. Timothy was, instead, to protect what was given into his trust (1 Tim. 6:20), namely, the Christian message. Thus, the epistle comes to an end, reminding us of the presence of false teachings and the need to affirm true Christian teaching as we await Christ's return.

2 TIMOTHY

INTRODUCTION

Title and Authorship. As a personal letter written to Timothy, this epistle did not originally have a title attached to it. When Paul's letters were gathered together into a collection, early scribes entitled it *pros timotheon b* ("To Timothy 2"). The title was later expanded, identifying it as "the Second Epistle to Timothy," with later manuscripts also listing "holy" or "apostle" Paul (and in some cases "the holy apostle Paul") as the author.

This epistle is Paul's second letter to his faithful younger colleague, Timothy (1:1, 2). The first verse of the epistle states that Paul is the author and, unlike most of his other letters, has no reference to a colleague helping him write it. As is the case in 1 Timothy and Titus, differences in language, vocabulary, themes, and style—in comparison to Paul's other letters—have led critical scholars to question whether or not the apostle was its real author. While these differences are certainly present, they need not undermine Pauline authorship. They are most likely the result of the particular circumstances in Paul's life as well as the unique situations he was confronting in each of these letters, including his probable use of an amanuensis in the writing process (Rom. 16:22). Early Christian writers unanimously attest to Paul being the author of the letter.

Date. This epistle is generally believed to have been written from Rome during Paul's second imprisonment. The book of Acts closes with Paul under house arrest in Rome (Acts 28:30) around the year A.D. 62. Although his freedom was restricted during this time, Paul preached the gospel in Rome and wrote four of his epistles: Ephesians (cf. 6:20), Philippians (cf. 1:13, 14), Colossians (cf. 4:18), and Philemon (cf. 1, 9). When finally released two years later, he returned to Greece and Asia Minor and wrote letters to Timothy and Titus. He was later arrested again, taken back to Rome, and executed in A.D. 66 or 67. Second Timothy is the last known document Paul wrote as he awaited execution in the autumn of A.D. 66.

Backgrounds. It is commonly acknowledged that Paul was martyred in Rome during the persecution of Christians by Nero after the great fire of A.D. 64. Although the people of Rome suspected that Nero instigated the fire in order to rebuild a wide section of Rome with new buildings and palaces, he diverted suspicion from himself by accusing the Christians. Though the Bible makes no mention of Nero's persecution, it shapes the immediate historical background of this letter. It was the persecution of countless Christians in Rome that ultimately resulted in the martyrdom of Paul and Peter. Second Timothy is Paul's last letter, written from prison at a time when he was anticipating his own death (4:6). At the time Paul wrote 2 Timothy, he had already stood trial (4:17) but apparently had not yet been sentenced to die. He was alone, except for the companionship of Luke (4:11). Writing to Timothy, Paul urged his younger colleague to come to him "before winter" (4:21) and to bring his cloak and his books, "especially the parchments" he had left in Troas (4:13). Troas may have been where Paul was arrested—leaving behind some of his possessions. Whether Timothy was able to respond to Paul's request is unknown.

Theology and Purpose. This epistle has been called the last will and testament of the apostle. He wrote it personally to Timothy and to the church at Ephesus. Paul had three reasons for writing to Timothy: first, he was lonely and wanted Timothy to join him in Rome; second, he was concerned about the welfare of the churches and admonished Timothy to guard the gospel and, if necessary, suffer for it; and third, indirectly, Paul desired to write to the church at

Ephesus through Timothy. His message can be summarized under three main ideas.

1. Hope and Death. Imprisoned in Rome and anticipating his execution, Paul felt isolated and in need of companionship (4:9–11). As he reflected on the nature of his ministry, he did not express feelings of guilt or frustration. He declared with confidence: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" (4:7). He was ready to pour out his life as a drink offering; he was at peace (4:6). The source of his strength was the grace of God (2:1), which assured him that if he died with Christ, he would also live with Him (2:11). This is the Christian hope of the resurrection of the dead, which some false teachers in Ephesus were saying had already occurred (in some sense not specifically identified in the text; 2:18) but which was firmly established in the resurrection of Jesus (1:10; 2:8). As in the rest of the NT, in 2 Timothy the Christian hope is exclusively dependent on the salvific work of Christ. At the present time we live in hope, but this hope will be realized only during His epiphany at the Second Coming (4:1)—what Paul calls "that day" and which includes the establishment of God's kingdom (1:12, 18; 4:8). At "that day," God will also judge the living and the dead (4:1). Paul's hope includes the reward that God will grant His servants on "that day." He defined it as "the crown of righteousness," which could refer to the vindication of God's followers in the final judgment (4:8). Hope is an eschatological expectation that impacts the present. It gave Paul the strength not only to suffer in the proclamation of the gospel but also, if necessary, to die for it. The significance of our present life and experiences is determined by the hope of the coming of Christ.

2. Suffering for the Gospel. Suffering for the gospel could be discouraging, particularly for a young minister or a recent convert. In Paul's day, many believed that suffering was a divine indictment against a life of disloyalty to God. Paul often testified that he had suffered much for Christ in the performance of his ministry, but he rejected that popular interpretation (1:8; 2:9). According to him, those who truly serve the Lord will be persecuted (3:12). Therefore no one should be ashamed of those who suffer for the gospel or of their own suffering for it (1:8, 16; see "A Profile of Paul's Ministry," p. 1670). Paul knew that the innocent could also suffer. Jesus suffered, but He endured it, and those who endure suffering for Him will reign with Him (2 Tim. 2:12). Such suffering is not, by nature, good, and therefore God can deliver us from it (3:11; 4:18). Meanwhile, suffering for the gospel may at times provide the opportunity to proclaim the gospel in unexpected places, as it had for Paul in Rome (4:17). What Christians need is perseverance in their faithfulness to the Lord in spite of the suffering they will experience (4:5).

3. The Christian Message. Paul placed significant emphasis on the proclamation of the true gospel. He addressed the matter of false teachers wasting their energy and time in unprofitable discussion on matters of no value to the church (2:14). Others were promoting false teachings not only opposed to the gospel but also resulting in the overturning of the faith of some (2:18). These individuals needed to be confronted with gentleness but firmness (2:24; 3:8), the antidote for such teachings being the knowledge of the Holy Scriptures (3:15–16). Timothy should have been able to accurately handle (that is, correctly teach) the word (2:15) and to remain loyal to the apostolic teaching he received from Paul and through the study of the Scriptures (1:13; 3:10, 14–15). Paul instructed Timothy to entrust the gospel message to other individuals who could, in turn, pass it on to still others (2:2). For Paul, the Christian message was to be taught without distortion because he received it from the Lord. In the fulfillment of the mission of the church, the message we proclaim is what we have received from the Lord through the Scriptures. Any attempt to change it would result in a spreading, deadly disease (2:17). False teaching would become heresy. Safety from heresy is found only in a deep knowledge of the word of God (3:16–17).

COMMENTARY

1:1–5
Introduction

1:1–2. Greeting. Paul began by affirming his apostolic ministry. He was an apostle of Jesus—as he first said—appointed by Him and at His service. Although not one of the original twelve apostles chosen by Jesus, Paul believed his calling to apostleship came directly from Jesus in his encounter with Him on the road to Damascus (Acts 26:12–20; Gal. 1:12). Second, his apostleship was an expression of the will of God for him. This was not something he was seeking to obtain, nor was it the result of human intrigues. God had chosen him for this task. He never forgot this life-changing call to the ministry and often referred back to it as his chief source of courage and conviction when faced with difficulties. Third, Paul also understood his apostleship to be according to the promise of life in Christ (1:1). His work consisted of making known the promise of life that comes to those united to Christ—accessible only through Him. Paul's apostleship was about life in Christ. As he approached the end of his life, his focus was on the promise of eternal life that every believer has in Christ, and also on the new life of righteousness and peace one has in the present life.

The epistle is addressed to Timothy. Paul likely met and shared the gospel with Timothy during his first missionary journey to Lystra and Derbe (Acts 14:6). During his second visit to that area (Acts 16:1), Timothy joined Paul's team of evangelists. Thus, Paul claimed him as a beloved, dear son. Timothy served as Paul's messenger to Corinth (2 Cor. 1:1) and to Thessalonica (1 Thess. 3:2, 6). He must have been with Paul during his first imprisonment in Rome, for he is mentioned as a coauthor of Paul's epistles to the Philippians (Phil. 1:1), to the Colossians (Col. 1:1), and to Philemon (Philem. 1). Later, Timothy ministered in Ephesus (1 Tim. 1:3). At the time of this letter, Timothy was likely in his mid to late thirties. Paul's greeting ends, as usual, with a blessing of grace, mercy, and peace. These blessings express the foundation ("grace," "mercy") and the result ("peace" or reconciliation with God; cf. 2 Cor. 5:17–19) of accepting God's saving work (1:2).

1:3–5. Thankful Memories of Timothy's Faith. Paul considered prayer an essential part of his daily routine and wanted Timothy to know this, no doubt indirectly inviting him to do the same. Paul prayed constantly for Timothy, perhaps to motivate him and his readers to practice intercessory prayer. Such prayers turn our concern from ourselves to the needs of others in true Christian service. Paul followed the example of Jesus, who prayed for His followers (John 17:6–26) and is the Mediator between humanity and the Father (1 Tim. 2:5). Paul and Timothy had apparently formed a tender bond the last time Paul had visited. Paul had been impressed and encouraged by the sincerity of Timothy's relationship with God. His sincere faithfulness to God was, to a large extent, the result of the same faithfulness exemplified and taught to him by his mother and grandmother; Timothy was a third-generation believer. Paul implicitly exhorted him to persevere. Paul's words of encouragement remind us of the value of seeing the good in others instead of seeing only their weaknesses. It is easy to find faults in others, but the power of a kind word, a smile, or a warm embrace provides a boost in spirit and a renewed strength to continue in the good path.

1:6—2:13
Encouragement to Faithfulness in Ministry

Moving on from Timothy's past experiences, Paul next exhorted him to remain faithful in ministry and to continue his labor for Christ despite hardships. Paul's point of reference is the work of Christ and its impact on the life of the believer (1:9–10; 2:8–13).

1:6–14. Boldness to Endure Suffering. The thanksgiving moves almost imperceptibly into an exhortation. On the basis of Timothy's heritage and faith, Paul first exhorted him to stir up or keep burning the gift of ministry. This means not that the fire was about die out but that it needed to be developed and used in order to keep it aflame (cf. Matt. 25:14–30). This was possible because God has given us a spirit not of fear or timidity but of power that works and love that cares and a sound, disciplined mind to understand and faithfully teach the word of God (2 Tim. 1:7). The giving of the gift is associated with the laying of Paul's hands on Timothy (v. 6; cf. 1 Tim. 4:14). This means not that Timothy did not have the Spirit and the gift previously but that through the laying on of hands, the gift was now officially activated and could be developed for the service of the church. Paul secondly urged Timothy not to be ashamed of the gospel or of Paul in his imprisonment (2 Tim. 1:8). Shame would have led Timothy to distance himself from Paul and his message, denying its efficacy. Instead, Paul invited Timothy to share in his sufferings for the gospel, strengthened by the power of God.

The reference to the gospel caused Paul to review its content. It is, first, God's saving activity, implying at this point what will be explicitly stated, namely, that this is the exclusive work of God. Second, the gospel is also God's activity in calling us to holiness. Third, the saving and the calling are not based on our alleged good works, because before the coming of the gospel we did not have any. Fourth, the gospel is the expression of God's eternal saving purpose, which reaches us through divine grace. This is about His eternal plan for the salvation of sinners. Fifth, it was also established in eternity that saving grace was ours only and exclusively in Christ. He is the eternally appointed channel through which the saving power of the gospel will reach sinners. Sixth, the divine plan of salvation through grace was hidden in God throughout eternity, but it was revealed to us at the first epiphany of Christ: the incarnation, ministry, death, and resurrection. Here, the main emphasis is on His resurrection, through which death was overcome—making life available to all (vv. 8, 10; cf. 2 Cor. 5:12–15, 21). The resurrection of Jesus not only assures us of our own resurrection in the future but also empowers us to live the fullness of life to which God has called us.

Paul affirms that he had been appointed as a preaching herald, apostle, and teacher (2 Tim. 1:11). According to him, the proclamation of the gospel often entails suffering (cf. 2 Cor. 6:4–10), which could be considered dishonorable. But Paul assured Timothy that he was not ashamed of the sufferings he now was enduring, knowing in whom he had believed (2 Tim. 1:12; cf. Rom. 1:16–17). On account of the gospel, Paul was convinced that he could place his entire life in the hands of the Lord. And even though his death was imminent, he was confident that his life would be given back to him on that day when Christ would return in glory. Paul indicated that the gospel makes unashamed service to and suffering for Christ possible. Paul also urged Timothy—and urges us—to keep the pattern of the gospel: the sound words Paul had taught and proclaimed (v. 13) in the apostolic teachings or Christian doctrines. The church has only one message, and the Lord entrusted it to her. Timothy was to proclaim the apostolic teachings in the faith and love found in Jesus, and by the effective power of the Holy Spirit. There is no limit to the usefulness and influence of someone who is consecrated to the will of God and guided by the Holy Spirit.

1:15–18. Examples of Disloyalty and Loyalty. Paul mentioned three examples to illustrate the results of being ashamed or unashamed of the gospel. While in the province of Asia, whose capital was Ephesus, Phygel[l]us and Hermogenes abandoned him. Nothing is known about this incident, but it is possibly related to Paul's final arrest. If so, it is possible that they deserted Paul because they feared for their own lives or were ashamed of his imprisonment. The text does not provide a motive. The household of Onesiphorus, however, stood in contrast as an example of loyalty and willingness to suffer for the gospel. Onesiphorus often refreshed Paul with his care (v. 16). Knowing Paul was in prison in Rome, Onesiphorus searched diligently until he found him (v. 17)—a hazardous and life-threatening endeavor. The chapter ends with Paul, moved by Onesiphorus's loyalty, commending him to God's mercy on the day of judgment (v. 18; cf. Matt. 25:36). This could indicate that Onesiphorus was dead by then and that Paul was anticipating that things would go well for him in the judgment.

2:1–7. Be Strong and Endure Hardship. With these examples in mind, Paul urged Timothy to be strong in the grace of Jesus Christ (v. 1) and to commit the teachings he had heard from Paul (which were also attested by many other witnesses) to faithful persons. These individuals would be able to teach others (v. 2). This passage sets in motion the importance of the reliable transmission of the apostolic message within the Christian church. The apostles trained their colleagues (e.g., Timothy) and entrusted to them the Christian message of salvation in Jesus; they, in turn, were to commit this message to faithful individuals who could teach it to others. In his task of teaching and proclaiming the gospel, Timothy had to be strong and ready to suffer along with Paul, enduring hardship like a good soldier of Jesus Christ (v. 3). In a world of sin and opposition to the gospel, Christians will confront trials and hardship, but they should face them with courage and trust in God's sustaining grace.

Paul illustrates the importance of Christian determination by highlighting the experience of three kinds of individuals: the soldier (vv. 3–4), the athlete (v. 5), and the farmer (v. 6). As a soldier, we need to please the One who called us to service and not become entangled with everyday life to the extent that it distracts us from our purpose. Total dedication to a cause is required, while self-indulgence is to be set aside. The athlete, in order to be crowned in a competition, must compete according to the rules of the event. The emphasis is on self-discipline, manifested in service to God, that will involve hardship. The Christian is also likened to a farmer, who is expected to labor first in order to enjoy the benefits later. This requires patience and endurance. Paul asked Timothy to carefully consider and reflect on these words of instruction, and he prayed that the Lord would give him comprehensive insight and understanding (v. 7). The gift of discernment is indispensable for all believers.

2:8–13. Remember Jesus's Sufferings. Paul closes this section by pointing to the work of Christ and its significance for our Christian life: Christ also suffered—even to death—but was raised from the dead; He is alive! By His death and resurrection, Jesus accomplished redemption for humanity. This is the wonderful, good news for which Paul was willing to suffer. In fact, he was already in chains, as if he were an evildoer or criminal (v. 9). The word of God, however, is not chained. Even though Paul was in prison for his faith, he was still proclaiming the word of God (see Acts 28:30–31). His suffering was worthwhile if, in the end, he could assist the elect (the believers) so that they might obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory (2 Tim. 2:10)—to experience the consummation of their salvation at the end. This salvation is available to all only in union with Christ. There is no reason to be fearful or ashamed of the gospel (see 1 Cor. 1:6–7; Eph. 3:13; on election, see "Divine Election," p. 1594).

Paul further developed the implications of the work of Christ for the believer with what looks like a hymn of endurance in the face of suffering. The trustworthy, faithful saying refers to what follows. He set forth four conditional statements, and all four are assumed to be true. The first part of each statement gives the condition and the second part gives the result. Two describe what is expected of believers and two describe what is not. What seems to be emphasized is God's faithfulness, implying that we should also be faithful to our commitment to Him.

The first statement refers to repentance, symbolized by dying to sin—also symbolized in the rite of baptism (see Rom. 6:2–7). As a result of dying, we shall also live with Him. This is both a reference to the new life in Christ (Rom. 6:5–11) and to the promise of eternal life after the resurrection (cf. John 3:16; 14:3). The second statement focuses on the necessity of endurance or perseverance during times of difficulty in the Christian life. Present hardship and suffering are transitory in light of the fact that we will reign with Christ in His kingdom (see 2 Tim. 4:1, 18; Rom. 8:16, 17; Rev. 20:4).

The third and fourth statements refer to unacceptable behavior for believers. If we deny or disown Him (2 Tim. 2:12), He will also deny or disown us in the judgment (cf. Matt. 10:33). The denial here refers to apostasy. Jesus cannot mediate for those who have completely rejected Him as Mediator before the Father (cf. 1 Tim. 2:5). The last statement is about the frailty of our faith that occasionally manifests itself in temporary lapses of faithfulness to God. If we are faithless, Paul reminds us that God is always faithful to His word because He cannot deny or disown Himself (2 Tim. 2:13). Because of His very nature, God cannot fail to fulfill His promises (Num. 23:19; Heb. 6:18; 10:23). When the NT speaks of God as faithful, in almost every case it is in terms of loyalty and trustworthiness to the believer and the promises He has made to them (1 Cor. 10:13; 2 Cor. 1:18–20; 1 Thess. 5:23, 24; 2 Thess. 3:3; 1 Pet. 4:19). Paul's last statement assures us that as long as we allow God's lovingkindness to lead us to repentance (Rom. 2:4), there is no sin that can separate us from His love (Rom. 8:31–39).

2:14—3:9

Dealing with False Teachers

In this section, Paul provides guidance on how to deal with false teachings. He encouraged Timothy to resist false teachings (2:14–19), explained how the spiritual condition of the church contributes to this problem (vv. 20–21), described the responsibility of Timothy (vv. 22–26), and concluded with a prophecy about deception in the last days (3:1–9).

2:14–19. Resisting False Teachers. Referring to the truths of the gospel, Paul next invited Timothy to keep reminding believers about these things. The exhortations combine negative and positive statements. The first is not to quarrel about words or teachings that are useless and lead to the ruin of those who hear them (v. 14; cf. 1 Tim. 1:6; 6:4; Titus 3:9). These disputes could be about trivial matters or pointless theological speculations that perhaps do not seriously damage those involved but that have a negative spiritual impact on those who listen to them (cf. 1 Tim. 1:4; Titus 3:9). Paul exhorted Timothy to counter this situation by seeking God's approval and by accurately teaching the "word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15). The antidote to these disputes is correctly interpreting, understanding, and teaching the word of God, and thus preventing misinterpretations that may cause one to lose faith in Jesus.

Paul's second recommendation to Timothy is phrased in a negative form: avoid worldly, empty talk (v. 16). Trivial and speculative topics were not to be part of Timothy's teaching ministry. Such conversations lead only to increased ungodliness and do not edify the faith of believers. These errors spread like a disease; they sweep through the church like a plague.

Clear apostolic truth alone leads to godliness and harmony among believers.

Two teachers who had caused such trouble by worldly and empty discussions were Hymenaeus and Philetus. This is likely the same Hymenaeus of 1 Timothy 1:20, who made a shipwreck of his faith and whom Paul excluded from the church in hopes that he might repent. The error of Hymenaeus and Philetus was not a minor matter or a mere mistake but one of doctrinal substance: they had deviated from the path of truth by teaching that the resurrection had already taken place (v. 18). In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul challenged those who denied the physical resurrection of Jesus. It is possible that they were claiming that it was only a spiritual resurrection—that believers were already resurrected with Christ and thus there was no need for a future resurrection. If so, this false teaching may have been influenced by a Greek understanding of the natural immortality of the soul. This might be what Hymenaeus and Philetus were teaching: that the resurrection consisted only of the believer's present spiritual relationship with Christ. But ultimately, we do not know what they were teaching because the text does not indicate the basis for their conclusions about the resurrection. What is clear is that their teaching opposed the Christian faith (2 Tim. 2:18).

Against such spreading error stands the certainty of God's knowledge and power. The church rests on God's firm foundation (v. 19; cf. Matt. 16:18; Eph. 2:19, 20). It is the product of God's grace and the object of His greatest concern and will ultimately triumph. This foundation is certified by a seal or inscription of authenticity (Rom. 4:11). To be sealed with the approval of God constitutes an assurance to believers that they belong to God: the Lord knows those who are His. This seal challenges believers, as those who claim to belong to Christ, to turn away from unrighteousness (2 Tim. 2:19; see Num. 16:26–27).

2:20–21. Analogy of Household Containers. Paul used a brief metaphor to illustrate what he had been saying. In any large house, there are containers for noble purposes made of precious metals and some for less virtuous purposes made of wood and clay (v. 20). The illustration indicates that in the church—the large house—there are two classes of people. There are those who belong to the Lord, who are known of Him, who walk in fellowship with Him, and who depart from wickedness. Then there are those who profess His name but remain in their evil ways. If true believers are to be useful containers for the Master, they must cleanse themselves from the dishonorable containers by moving away from their wickedness and false teachings and be ready to serve God through works of love (v. 21). In this way, being purified from these things refers back to either the containers of dishonor or to some other antecedent, such as the wickedness mentioned in v. 19. If it refers to the containers of dishonor, it could mean either that they were to purify themselves and become honorable by the grace of God or, more likely, that the believers were to avoid the false teachings of the containers of dishonor. A believer's life is to be set apart for God's service—"sanctified" or "made holy" (v. 21).

2:22–26. Timothy's Responsibilities. Paul returns to his exhortation to Timothy, urging him to flee from the *epithymias* ("desires" or "lusts") of youth (cf. 1 Tim. 6:11). This term is usually interpreted in the context of sensual desires, but it could also refer to the youthful desire to act quickly or to overreact, thus engaging in useless discussion with false teachers. Instead of doing this, Paul asked Timothy to pursue four Christian virtues: righteousness, faith, love, and peace.

Righteousness is conforming one's life to God's moral character and law; faith is an active trust in God or faithfulness to God; love is the self-sacrificing attitude and action of commitment to other believers; and peace is the harmonious relationship with God and others. These characteristics are ways in which the purity of the inner being, the heart, manifests itself in daily life (2 Tim. 2:22). Timothy's service, if exemplifying these characteristics, would have a better effect among those being deceived by false teachings. He would be able to avoid the disputes of the fool that simply result in division and contention in the church (v. 23). Instructions on how he was to relate to those who are deceived are found in vv. 24–26.

Paul called Timothy a servant or "slave" (*doulos*) of the Lord (v. 24). Jesus and Paul used this term to refer to those involved in the gospel ministry (Matt. 20:27; Rom. 1:1; Col. 1:7; 4:7, 12). The title indicates a complete dedication to God, just as it did for those who were called "servants" of the Lord in the OT (e.g., Josh. 14:7; 2 Kin. 17:23). That a servant must not quarrel is Paul's first counsel (2 Tim. 2:24). Instead, this person should possess a demeanor that is gentle or kind toward all, and that enables the person to teach even those who are disagreeable. Being *anexikakos* ("tolerant" or "patient") and *prautēs* ("considerate" or "humble") are qualities that are also needed to correct false teachings. Ministry/service done in this manner can touch the hearts of opponents. Paul hoped that those in opposition to his message would not reject God's call to repentance and would come to know the truth (v. 25). By his example and proper attitude, Timothy could accomplish much in correcting errors. One cannot underestimate the power of a good example in helping opponents to come to their senses (lit. "to return to soberness") after being intoxicated by false teachings (v. 26). These false teachings have been used by the enemy to hinder people from seeing the truth. There is a spiritual struggle for the control of minds and hearts. While the Lord seeks to free people with a knowledge of the truth (John 8:32) so that they might do His will, the devil seeks to deceive them through false teachings (2 Tim. 2:26). This situation will deteriorate even more as we approach the last days.

3:1–9. Troublesome Times in the Last Days. In the early church, the concept of the "last days" referred to the time period between the outpouring of God's Spirit at Pentecost and the day when Christ would return in the clouds of heaven (cf. Acts 2:17; Heb. 1:2; James 5:3; 2 Pet. 3:3). During that time—as Jesus had told His disciples—the increasing activity of the devil would lead to a moral breakdown in society (cf. Mark 13:3–13; 2 Pet. 3:3; 1 John 2:18; Jude 17–18). Paul did not want Timothy to be surprised or naïve about the troubling events occurring in Ephesus. The challenge Timothy faced in the church was merely a part of the larger outbreak of evil that would ultimately reach a climax of intensity before Christ returned. The progressive moral depravity of humanity today testifies to this truth and reveals the utter inability of human beings to save themselves.

Paul uses nineteen terms to describe the sins and sinners that characterize this age (2 Tim. 3:2–5). Three terms in this list speak of misdirected love: lovers of themselves, lovers of money (v. 2), and lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God (v. 4). The characteristics of these sins are the antithesis of the Christian spirit of unselfishness (1 Cor. 13:5) and meekness (Matt. 5:5). Self-centeredness is the key characteristic of end-time immorality. This self-absorption manifests itself in people having a boasting attitude and trusting in their own abilities regardless of the rights of others; they are proud, consider others with contempt and disrespect, and *blasphēmos*. This term can refer specifically to disrespecting God or more broadly to being disrespectful and slanderous toward other people as well (i.e., speaking evil of others to damage their reputation).

The next five characteristics speak of the degeneration of family and social relationships, referring to people as disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy or impious (2 Tim. 3:2), unloving, and unforgiving (v. 3). The list then widens with the next seven words, indicating the terrible antisocial behavior of those who lack self-control, are slanderous, are brutal ("savage"), do not love the good, are treacherous, reckless, and conceited (vv. 3, 4). To conclude the list, Paul then relates all this immorality to spirituality. Such sinners also profess to be religious, but they are committed to self-pleasure and not to God. They may appear to be pious but lack the purity of a life of true love. Since they have repudiated truth and holy living, believers are instructed to turn away from such people and have nothing to do with them (v. 5; see 1 Cor. 5:2, 11, 13).

In the experience of the false teachers we see the shadow of what is to come. Paul returned to these false teachers, describing their current activities in the church. They are deceitful guides, propagating their religious views and creeping or worming their way into households (which could be a reference to false teachers attending meetings of house churches)—succeeding in taking captive or deceiving *gynaikaria* ("gullible," "idle," or "foolish") women. These women were more vulnerable because they were loaded down with or guilty of some sins, and thus more readily deceived by the offer of false hopes (2 Tim. 3:6). Paul also describes these women as being led away by various lusts or longings, possibly appeasing their consciences by excursions into religious novelties and a quasi-religious life. They were not satisfied by the teachings given to them in church and were always ready to listen to other voices (v. 7). Every new religious fad or sensation captivated them and, consequently, they never reached any settled convictions. Of course, this was not a temptation only for women; men were also gullible and attracted to false religious ideas. In this context, Paul warned Timothy that such a scenario is also a sign of how perilous the last days will be.

Paul likened these false teachers to the magicians in Pharaoh's court who opposed Moses (v. 8; Ex. 7:11). Although not identified by name in the OT, Paul follows the Jewish tradition that associates the names Jannes and Jambres with two of these pagan opponents to

God. The false teachers had corrupted or depraved ways of thinking that demonstrated that the true Christian faith was not in them. Time would manifest their foolishness, just as it did with Jannes and Jambres (v. 9). As time goes on, the distinction between truth and error will become more visible to those who know the Scriptures well. To this essential element of one's ministry, Paul next turned his attention.

3:10—4:8

Final Charge to Timothy

In the final charge, Paul summarized his experience as a servant of the Lord (3:10–13), then exhorted Timothy to persevere in the teachings he had learned from the Holy Scriptures (vv. 14–15), to preach the word (4:1–2), and to be watchful (v. 5). The section concludes with Paul's own testimony of faithfulness to Christ (vv. 6–8).

3:10–17. Another Appeal. Paul introduces his appeal by summarizing his experiences and Christian conduct and sharing how God had protected him. Timothy was well-acquainted with Paul's life, which stood in striking contrast to those of the false teachers. He had witnessed how Paul stood firm in the face of persecution and suffering in three cities in the province where Timothy grew up (Acts 16:1): Antioch of Pisidia (Acts 13:14–50), Iconium (Acts 13:51—14:6), and Lystra (Acts 14:8–20). Paul rejoiced in testifying that the Lord delivered him from all of them (2 Tim. 3:11) and encouraged Timothy to be willing to endure humiliation and pain for the gospel. The same applies to all believers because those who follow Christ by living a pious life may have to face persecution (v. 12; Matt. 5:10–12). A life lived consistently for Christ will generate antagonism and maliciousness from those who do not share the Christian faith. As we approach the Second Coming of Christ, the evilness of false teachers or impostors will increase (2 Tim. 3:13). In each generation, evil people learn from their predecessors, adding to the intensity and volume of evil (Matt. 24:12).

Paul next addressed Timothy with his first appeal to remain faithful to the Christian message (2 Tim. 3:14). The reliability of the message is found in the witness of the Holy Scriptures and should never be left behind as we grow. The challenge is—and will continue to be—faithfulness to the biblical instruction. The Scriptures Paul refers to are primarily the OT. They reveal God's wonderful plan for the salvation of sinners through faith in Jesus Christ. This is possible because the content of all Scripture was given by inspiration of God (v. 16). Only in it has God revealed to us His salvific intentions and plans. (See "Revelation and Inspiration of the Bible," p. 11.)

In v. 16, the word *theopneustos* ("God-breathed") is used to refer to the inspiration of the Scriptures. This is the classic passage on the divine inspiration of the Bible. Along with 2 Peter 1:21, which teaches the divine inspiration of the human writers, this passage upholds the divine origin of the sacred Scriptures (cf. Gen. 2:7; Ps. 33:6). Paul expanded on four functions of the underlying purpose of the Bible: it is profitable and useful for doctrine or instruction in biblical truth, for reproof/rebuke (making people aware of their sinfulness and need), for correction (improving one's life), and for instruction or training in righteousness or righteous living (2 Tim. 3:16). Scripture provides the only truthful teaching about salvation, refutes false teachings and restores truth, and outlines a way of life that will help a person to grow into the likeness of Christ (see Eph. 4:13). Submission to the Scriptures will enable people to live fruitful lives in the service of God and others (2 Tim. 3:17). Christians must be well acquainted with such a God-given and profitable instrument for their spiritual growth and development.

4:1–5. Preach the Word. The second exhortation to Timothy (see 3:14) is introduced by a reference to the Second Coming of Jesus and a reference to the judgment. These are two important Christian doctrines. The judgment is universal, but for those who wait for the coming of the Lord in hope and love, the judgment means deliverance from an evil world. Anticipating the Lord coming as Judge, Paul charged Timothy to proclaim the word (vv. 1–2). In a context abounding with false teachings, Timothy was to preach the word of God. The content of the preaching comes from the inspired word of God, not from the foolishness of false teachers. Timothy, and every believer, should be able and ready to minister to others under any circumstances, whether it is convenient or inconvenient (v. 2). The gospel is always needed even though people may not realize it. As part of his preaching and teaching ministry, Timothy was to convict, rebuke, and encourage (v. 2; see 3:16). The proclamation and teaching are to be done with long-suffering or in a state of tranquility and patience. Harsh and severe rebukes never move a sinner to love Christ.

The time will come when people will not tolerate sound doctrine. Until the very end, erroneous teachings will somehow attract people. People are attracted to the sensational and the exotic. Perverted desires or lusts create a shallow-mindedness—"itching ears" seeking fanciful theories and interpretations of Scripture (4:3). Such people are interested only in those portions of Scripture that promise peace and security. They neglect the demands of sound doctrine, which cut deep into a person's heart. They have a superficial desire for spiritual growth, but only for what will not disturb the routine of their corrupt lives. Thus they seek their own instructors, disregard the truth, and accept fables or legends/stories instead of truth (v. 4; see 1 Tim. 1:4).

In contrast, Paul gave Timothy a third exhortation formed by four imperatives (see 3:14 and 4:1). Verse 5 opens with the command to *nēphe* ("to be sober" or "to be alert"). The next three imperatives could be a development of the first one: there are admonishments to endure suffering, particularly when encountering opposition to the gospel; to do the work of an evangelist—preaching the gospel instead of teaching fables; and to fulfill one's ministry, that is, one's service for the church (v. 5).

4:6–8. Paul's Final Testimony. Paul's final testimony gives another reason for the preceding charge and indicates that he expected his current imprisonment to end with his death. He used sacrificial images to describe his expectation: his life was to be poured out as a drink offering, a libation (v. 6; see Ex. 29:40; Lev. 23:13). There was no self-pity; rather, he saw his death as an offering to God. The imagery of "departure" compares his death to the loosening of ropes on tents when taken down or the releasing of the mooring ropes of a ship preparing to sail. There is no suggestion here of an immortal soul.

Then in three graphic phrases, Paul summarized his life and ministry: he fought a good fight and did not surrender; he finished the race and did not stop or give up along the way; and he kept (or guarded) the faith and did not betray what had been entrusted to him (2 Tim. 4:7). He was to die with the firm conviction that, by the grace of Christ, he had fulfilled God's plan for him. Though he had endured many afflictions and hardships, he had not failed to guard the gospel entrusted to him. His example of faithfulness continues to challenge any follower of Christ.

Paul faced death with hope, rejoicing in the reward awaiting him, namely, the crown of (or "that is") righteousness. Although an earthly judge may have condemned him, Jesus Christ, the righteous Judge, had decided otherwise. Paul, along with all those who have loved and longed for Jesus's appearing, will receive their rewards on that day (v. 8). Paul knew that there was no immediate entrance into heaven at death. The Second Coming of Jesus will be the day when the redeemed will be rewarded with eternal life. That is indeed a glorious hope.

4:9–22

Personal Remarks and Greetings

In this final section, Paul asked Timothy to come to Rome and to bring along with him Mark, as well as some personal effects he needed. He gave Timothy a final warning regarding Alexander the coppersmith, sent greetings to a few friends, and told Timothy that his days were numbered. In spite of this, Paul's faith remained strong.

4:9–18. Personal Remarks and Instructions. Paul longed for human companionship and asked Timothy to come quickly to visit him. Three companions had left him. Demas was at one time a coworker of Paul (see Col. 4:14; Philem. 24). The contrast between Demas, who loved this present world (lit. "age"; 2 Tim. 4:10), and those who had loved the Lord's appearing (v. 8) is evident. Crescens, Titus, and Tychicus—who had helped Paul—had also left, likely to preach the gospel in other regions (vv. 10, 12). Tychicus was probably the bearer of the letter, entrusted with delivering it to Timothy on his way to Ephesus (v. 12). Of his many colleagues, only Luke remained with Paul (v. 11).

The request for Mark's presence comes as a surprise (v. 11; Acts 13:13; 15:37) but indicates a change of heart for Paul, who had come to appreciate Mark's ministry. Mark had already been with Paul during his first imprisonment (Col. 4:10; Philem. 24), and the apostle believed Mark could continue to be useful and helpful to him. Paul also requested that Timothy bring along a few things he had left in Troas with Carpus. Likely, he had had to leave unexpectedly and left behind his cloak—a heavy overcoat needed in wintertime—and his books (i.e., scrolls) and parchment, most likely a reference to scrolls of the Scriptures that Paul used for his study (2 Tim. 4:13). Paul warned Timothy about Alexander the coppersmith or metalworker because Alexander opposed Paul's message (vv. 14–15). This man may be the Alexander Paul had earlier disfellowshipped from the church in

Ephesus (1 Tim. 1:19–20) or perhaps the troublemaker mentioned in Acts 19:33–34. In any case, this man had caused Paul serious harm, but the apostle trusted that the Lord would repay him according to his actions (2 Tim. 4:14).

The first defense mentioned in v. 16 is probably the first hearing of Paul's case associated with his current imprisonment. At that time, all his friends—probably out of fear—abandoned him, but he here asks God not to hold it against them but to forgive them (v. 16; cf. Luke 23:34). He was not abandoned by all, because the Lord stood with him. Although all may fail us, the Lord will always be faithful to us. On that occasion, Paul shared with the court his understanding of the gospel message so that all the Gentiles might hear it (2 Tim. 4:17). Even under such adverse circumstances, he fulfilled his divine calling. For the moment, he had been delivered from imminent danger. Even if physical death came upon him, he knew that the Lord would deliver him from every evil and bring him safely to His heavenly kingdom (v. 18). Hope was deeply embedded in the fabric of Paul's life.

4:19–22. Final Greetings. Paul concluded his letter with greetings to several people: Priscilla (or Prisca) and Aquila (cf. Acts 18:1–3, 18–26; Rom. 16:3–4) and the household of Onesiphorus (2 Tim. 1:16–18). His friend Erastus had remained in Corinth, and his friend Trophimus remained in Miletus due to sickness. In 2 Timothy 4:9, Paul had urged Timothy to come quickly, before winter, as stormy weather would make his travel difficult and prevent Paul from having his cloak (v. 13). Finally, a few other companions of Paul in Rome—three of them with Latin names, suggesting they were likely local believers—sent greetings to Timothy. Christian tradition identifies Linus as the first bishop of Rome (v. 21).

Paul's last words were a blessing to Timothy. The first part concerns Timothy personally, asking that the Lord be constantly with him—with his "spirit." "Spirit" designates the whole person, with an emphasis on the spiritual and mental aspects (see Gal. 6:18; Phil. 4:23; Philem. 25; cf. 1 Thess. 5:23, 28). The second part asks that the favor of God, His grace, be with all those in the church (2 Tim. 4:22). Paul closed the letter caring for the church, knowing that he would soon give his life in the service of the Lord but encouraged by a living hope that anticipates the heavenly kingdom.

TITUS

INTRODUCTION

Title and Authorship. As is the case with all of Paul's letters, his letter to Titus did not originally have a title attached to it. As Paul's letters were copied and circulated among the churches, titles were added to help readers distinguish each letter. Among the earliest manuscripts, it is simply titled "To Titus." In an attempt to provide readers with more information about the letter, scribes expanded the title with additional details they believed were associated with the letter. The most common expanded title that emerged in the tenth century and later is "To Titus, appointed as first bishop of the church of the Cretans, written from Nicopolis of Macedonia." Despite the good intentions of some later scribes, in this case the expanded title is not entirely correct. At the time Paul wrote this letter, he was not yet at Nicopolis (3:12), and Titus was more of an apostolic delegate than an actual bishop.

From the earliest days of the Christian church, Paul was identified as the author of the letter to Titus. After nearly two millennia of acceptance, this view began to change with the rise of the Enlightenment and the development of biblical criticism among German scholars. Critical scholars claimed that the letter's vocabulary, ecclesiology, and literary style were so different from Paul's other letters that someone else must have written it. While differences certainly do exist, they are not the decisive evidence against Pauline authorship, as critical scholars claim. They can easily be accounted for by Paul's probable use of an amanuensis (e.g., Rom. 16:22)—a scribe or literary assistant who would write what was dictated by an author, yet sometimes in their own style and words—and by the fact that he was addressing a personal colleague. It is the assumption of this commentary that the Apostle Paul wrote to Titus toward the end of his life, likely with the help of a scribe, in response to specific challenges facing the church.

Date. Due to the similarities between Titus and 1 Timothy, it is likely that they were written about the same time, probably around A.D. 65, while Paul was on his way to the city of Nicopolis in Macedonia (3:12).

Backgrounds. See 1 Timothy: Introduction. Crete, the original destination of the letter, is an island in the Mediterranean Sea that lies south of the Aegean Sea, separating Greece from Asia Minor. Paul had apparently worked in Crete with Titus and left him there to complete what was unfinished and to appoint elders (1:5). While Paul was concerned about the appointment of spiritual leaders, he also had concerns about believers who were being persuaded by false teachers. He wrote to anchor the new believers in the hope that is found only in Christ.

Theology and Purpose. The messages of hope and practical godliness dovetail throughout this letter. Paul desired that the hope of the Second Coming of Jesus (2:13) would have an impact on the daily life of the believer (2:12). The introductory section of the letter (1:1–4) gives an indication of the message, with specific themes that are developed within the letter. It is the longest introduction of the Pastoral Epistles (1 Tim., 2 Tim., and Titus).

1. Importance of Hope. There are a number of theological topics that are inseparable from the hope of the community and that are mentioned several times in Titus: faith appears in all three chapters of the epistle (1:1, 4, 13; 2:2, 10; 3:15); knowledge is explicitly found in 1:1, 16, and it is implied in 2:1–10; godliness features explicitly in chapters one and two and implicitly in chapter three (1:1; 2:12; 3:3–7); hope is mentioned in all three chapters (1:2; 2:13; 3:7); and we also find references to eternal life (1:2; 3:7) and salvation (1:3, 4; 2:10–11, 13; 3:4–6). There is also an emphasis on hope in connection with a godly life (1:1–2; 2:11–12; 3:1–7). Each of these themes contributes to highlight the message of hope that is anchored on God, whose promises are reliable because He "cannot lie" (1:2). This picture of God is vastly different from Zeus, a Greek deity, who was born on Crete and was well-known for his deceptive ways.

2. *The Community of Believers.* The unique way in which God is presented in the letter to Titus brings to focus the need of the community of believers to whom it was addressed. The faith of the Cretan believers and their growth in the knowledge of the truth had to bear fruit. The transforming power of the gospel needed to be exhibited in godly lives. The end result of the outworking of the word of God—given through the teaching of sound doctrine (2:1)—is the hope of eternal life based on God's own promise (Acts 26:6; Rom. 14:13–20).

The way the community of believers was addressed seems to resonate with the societal structures of the time (2:1—3:8; cf. Eph. 5:21—6:9; Col. 3:18—4:1; 1 Tim. 2:1–15; 5:1–2; 6:1–2). This should not be understood as a divine endorsement of first century society. It simply reveals that God meets people where they are, with the goal of transforming them into the people He wants them to be. The message of the gospel does not change, but the methods are adapted to meet the needs of the audience.

Paul assigned Titus, his apostolic delegate or representative, to facilitate the selection of leaders and counseled him on how he should go about this task (Titus 1:5–9). He also had other concerns relating to the spiritual growth of the members, like the threat of the false teachers who were already gaining ground (1:10–16). Paul therefore instructed Titus to work with the different groups and emphasized the importance of teaching the members and grounding them in the faith (2:1–15).

COMMENTARY

1:1–4
Opening Greetings

Titus 1:1–4 identifies Paul as the writer of the letter, states the purpose of his ministry as an apostle (v. 1), and establishes the foundation of his apostleship (vv. 2–3). Paul identifies the recipient of the letter as Titus (v. 4). In this section, Paul introduces the key concepts that will be developed throughout the epistle.

Paul used two titles to introduce himself: "servant of God" and "apostle of Jesus Christ" (1:1). By calling himself a "servant/slave" of God he identified himself with Christ, the true Servant/Slave of God (Phil. 2:7). The title emphasizes submission, dependence, and willingness to serve. "Apostle" designates Paul as one sent by God on a mission of love. It places the emphasis on the authority that God gave him to proclaim the gospel and to function as a leader in the church. The two titles together affirm the exercise of authority in the context of service and submission to God and to others. It reminds us that leadership in the church has to manifest itself in a spirit of humble service to the people of God.

The titles lead to a description of the goal of the ministry of Paul the apostle. What he was doing was for the benefit of "the faith of God's elect" (Titus 1:1). He would nurture their faith through instruction about its content and its implications for the Christian life. Believers are described as chosen or elected by God. They are His people. Paul also aimed at proclaiming the knowledge (or acknowledgment) of the truth. This is the rational understanding of the truth of salvation received through the proclamation of the gospel (cf. 1 Tim. 2:3–6). There is a body of biblical beliefs that should be understood and incorporated into life. But Paul wanted his readers to understand that this type of knowledge is more than knowing the facts of our salvation; it is related to a life of godliness. Biblical truth should lead to godliness; otherwise it has not been fully comprehended. Godliness designates the life that is pleasing to the Lord because it is lived in submission to His loving will. Although this specific term is not used in Paul's earlier epistles, godliness plays an important role in the message of the Pastoral Epistles (1 Tim. 4:7–8; 6:3, 5, 11; 2 Tim. 3:5). As Paul reflected on the life of the church in his later years, and likely the growing problem with the false teachers, he reminded the followers of Jesus that they should never separate the knowledge of the truth of salvation from a life that corresponds to the life of our living Lord.

In his greeting, Paul introduced his message of hope based on the promises of a God who cannot lie (1:2). God's promises would culminate in the "blessed hope," ushering in the Second Coming of Jesus Christ (2:13). Believers are made heirs according to "the hope of eternal life." The relationship between God the Father and God the Son is expressed in the usage of the word "Savior"—used six times in Titus: three times with reference to God (1:3; 2:10; 3:4) and three times to refer to Jesus (1:4; 2:13; 3:6).

1:5–16
Qualified Leaders

The relationship between Paul and Titus may be traced to the time when they worked together in the Lord's vineyard (2 Cor. 7:6, 13–15; 8:16–17; Gal. 2:1, 3; 2 Tim. 4:10). The cooperation between these leaders is seen by Titus's work in Crete under Paul's guidance (Titus 1:10–16; 3:12–14). The island of Crete had a Jewish community already in existence by the first century. This is confirmed by the mention in Acts 2:11 of some Judeans from Crete who came to celebrate Pentecost in Jerusalem. After these devout Jewish Cretans heard the preaching of the apostles, they went back to share the message with the Jewish communities on the island.

The task assigned to Titus came with specific guidelines from Paul on how to implement it. Titus was to appoint leaders and to equip the church to deal with the growing presence of false teachers. Although the problem with false teachers in Crete does not appear to have been as widespread as it was in Ephesus (cf. 1 Tim. 1:3–11, 18–20; 4:1–7; 6:3–10, 20–21), Paul still recognized that having the right kind of spiritual leaders plays an invaluable part in the health and life of the church. Paul demonstrated that the goal of his ministry was the faith of the elect motivated by the hope of eternal life (1:1–2). He gave a set of criteria to be followed in appointing church elders. The list is virtually identical to the guidelines Paul gave to Timothy in Ephesus (cf. 1 Tim. 3:1–7). One of the notable differences, however, is that in 1 Timothy, Paul also set forth the criteria for the selection of deacons (3:8–13). This is likely because the church in Ephesus was larger and better established, thus requiring additional leaders.

Before considering the criteria that should guide in the selection of local church elders, note that the focus is not on the type of gifts and abilities a person may have but rather on the character of the individual. While the church certainly benefits from gifted leaders, character is always more important. In order to assess a person's character, Paul began with familial relations (Titus 1:6). The reason for this is simple: people are best known through their familial relationships. The Cretan believers were largely organized according to households. Therefore, Paul, guided by the Spirit, placed an emphasis on the ability to lead a household and used this as a criterion for leadership in the church. Elders were expected to be faithful to their spouse (see 1 Tim. 3:2) and to have faithful, believing children (grounded in the faith) who were not profligate or rebellious, particularly with regard to their parents (cf. Ex. 20:12).

Paul stated some vices that should not be found in an elder (Titus 1:7) and some expected virtues (1:8). This list is not exhaustive, but it gives an idea of what the church was grappling with on the island of Crete. The qualifications do not require that elders be married, but if married they should have—as much as possible—an exemplary family. Paul was aware of the presence of false teachers and wanted to have leaders for the Cretan church who would be a positive influence when imparting proper gospel teaching to the new converts. They should be qualified to deal with the false teachings that were threatening the young church (1:9). These new leaders had to rely on God's word to achieve the purpose for which they were called to leadership. There is also an emphasis on maintaining the true, faithful word or message as it had been taught and passing it on like a torch of light through exhortation.

Among the list of qualifications for an elder is the ability to teach (cf. 1 Tim. 3:2). In Titus, there is an added emphasis on the trustworthiness of the word (1:9). The word is not simply a tradition passed on from one apostle to the next but it is traced back to God. Paul acknowledged the importance of rightly maintaining the true word—something that God had commended to him and commanded he proclaim (1:3). The qualifications for leadership swing on this important hinge: faithfulness and commitment to the reliable word. Verse 9 ends the leadership profile required and offers a transition to the discussion of the function of leadership in ministry.

Paul's aim was more than to simply criticize the Cretan community for their evils. He wanted to expose the false teachers in the church for their lies. Therefore, in bringing up the riddle drawn from Cretan literature—known by the community—he humorously put to shame those who were trying to bring down the work that he and his associates were trying to build up. Paul warned and charged the leaders to rebuke the false teachers sharply so that they would all learn to be sound in the faith (v. 13). Faith, in this context, does not have an object; therefore it sums up what it means to be a Christian. With this in mind, faith can also be understood as the message of the gospel or the truth (cf. Rom. 1:5; Gal. 1:23; 1 Tim. 1:2, 4; 2 Tim. 1:5; 2:18). In the church, erroneous teaching cannot coexist with sound teaching. It is therefore imperative that Scripture and sound teaching, based on the word of God, become the standard by which deviating members are rebuked.

The conjunction "for" in v. 10 indicates that what follows in vv. 10–16 is directly connected to Paul's instructions regarding the selection criteria of church leaders. The church needed to have the right kind of spiritual leaders due to the corrupting influence of false teachers, as well as others identified as rebellious and insubordinate: vain talkers and liars (v. 10; cf. 1 Tim. 1:6–7; 6:4, 20–21). The origin of these troublemakers was particularly among "those of the circumcision"—an expression Paul uses elsewhere to refer to Jews (Rom. 4:12) but more frequently to Jewish converts to Christianity (Gal. 2:7–9, 12; Col. 4:11). These individuals were teaching forbidden things for the sake of dishonest gain (Titus 1:11; cf. 1 Tim. 6:5–10). But the problem was more than just what they believed and taught; it was also their behavior. In their actions, they undermined their profession of knowing God—being repulsive, disobedient, disqualified, and unfit for working for the Lord (Titus 1:16). These false teachers had been successful in persuading whole households or families to turn from the truth (v. 11; cf. 2 Tim. 3:6–7). They were following mythical, human-centered ideas (Titus 1:14; cf. 1 Tim. 4:7). They professed to know God, which also implied a claim to know the truth (Titus 1:1), but their behavior denied that claim, as revealed in their lack of godliness (1:1; 1 Tim. 4:7–8).

While these problems were similar to those in Ephesus, they do not appear to have been as developed in Crete, since Paul did not focus on them as much. Nevertheless, these individuals were still unsettling the faith of many in Crete, and Paul felt that they should not be allowed to speak. The Greek word used here is *epistomizō*. It literally means "to put something on the mouth" to silence it, such as gagging a person or muzzling an animal. The manner in which Paul envisioned this happening can be seen in his instructions to rebuke them sharply (Titus 1:13) It also explains the importance of selecting church leaders grounded in the truth and therefore able to guide the church with correct teachings and to oppose those contradicting them (v. 9). It is important to note, however, the redemptive purpose of such stern rebuke—to move them to be "sound (healthy) in the faith" (v. 13). Throughout the history of Christianity, individuals and groups have pursued paths contrary to the faith. Paul, in this passage, models to Titus how the church should deal with such deviant members. The aim should always be to reclaim the dissenting members (cf. 2 Tim. 2:24–26). Paul's assessment of the situation in Crete had apparently not yet reached a point where the members had to be removed from the community of faith (cf. 1 Cor. 5:1–5; 1 Tim. 1:19–20). There was still hope that the labor of Titus and the elders of the church would yield positive results that would bring about a turnaround of the situation. Paul's focus in Titus is more on teaching than on discipline. He may have realized that the need for quality leadership provided an opportunity to deal with deviant behavior and beliefs. He therefore instructed Titus to "set in order the things that are lacking" (Titus 1:5).

2:1–10

Instructions to Various Groups

Titus was charged with the responsibility of preaching what was fitting for sound doctrine (v. 1). Paul provides the basic instruction to be given to the household of believers. We find similar passages in other parts of the NT (e.g., Eph. 5:21—6:9; Col. 3:18—4:1; 1 Tim. 2:1–15; 1 Pet. 2:18—3:7; see "Ancient Household Codes," p. 1721). While there are notable similarities between the passages that carry these household codes, there are also significant differences. For example, Colossians 3:18—4:1 addresses groups in pairs of familial relationships (husbands/wives; children/parents; slaves/masters). In Titus 1:1–10, the congregation is divided according to age and sex (cf. 1 Tim. 5:1–6).

Titus 2 contains sets of instructions for older men (v. 2); older women (vv. 3, 4); younger women (vv. 4, 5); younger men (v. 6); Titus, the pastor (vv. 7, 8); and slaves (vv. 9, 10). In Titus 3:1–2 there are instructions for the entire congregation. The household codes listed above differ in content and form. The best explanation for this diversity is that these household codes deal with real, concrete, and contextual issues and needs within the church.

It is imperative to seek the principles behind the instructions that will always be relevant to the church. The key element is the teaching of a sound doctrine that leads to sound faith (2:1–2). This kind of faith is further described in 2:10 in contrast to robbery. The end result of faith in this sense is that they would *kosmeō* the teachings from "God our Savior" (v. 10). *Kosmeō* can mean "to adorn," "put in order," "do credit to," or "to make attractive." The way the verb is used here suggests the meaning "do credit to" or "make attractive." Instead of robbing Christian

doctrine of its value, we ought to do credit to it and make it appear as attractive as it truly is. This is further demonstrated in the ethical life that finds its basis on sound faith and doctrine (vv. 1–10).

2:11–16

The Blessed Hope

While Paul customarily begins with the good news of God's grace as revealed in Jesus and then provides ethical instruction on how life should be lived in response to the gospel (cf. Rom. 3:21—8:39; 12:1—15:13), here the process is reversed. Having started with the ethical responsibilities of the Christian (Titus 2:1–10), the apostle next provides the reason or basis for living a virtuous life. He highlights his point by applying the literary device of personification to God's grace.

God's saving grace has appeared to all people (v. 11). While this passage does not teach universalism, it does affirm God's gracious disposition to all humanity. It is by grace that salvation is freely offered to every human being on account of Christ's atoning sacrifice (3:4–7). The coming of Christ was an epiphany of saving grace unlike anything before it (John 1:14, 16). But grace is not only personified as Savior. It also acts as an instructor who teaches us (Titus 2:12) that we should live sensibly, justly, and godly in this present age. The depiction of God's grace offered here is not a permissive grace that downplays the importance of obedience. Through sound teaching, grace instructs and enables us to live in harmony with God's ideals. As we submit to its work in our lives, it also changes the way we view the world. For God's people the world is not an end in itself, for they are anticipating "the blessed hope" (v. 13).

Paul identified the appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ as the focus of the blessed hope. Exactly whom Paul had in mind in this verse has puzzled many. Is he referring to two persons, that is, God the Father and Jesus our Savior—or one person, Jesus, who is identified as both God and Savior? Those who believe two persons are in view note that although Paul often refers to God and Christ side by side (e.g., Titus 1:4; 3:4–6; 1 Cor. 1:3; 2 Cor. 1:2; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1–2; 1 Tim. 1:1–2; 2 Tim. 1:1–2), he always distinguishes between them. They also note that, with perhaps the exception of Rom. 9:5, Paul never explicitly refers to Christ as God.

The evidence suggesting Paul was referring to Jesus as both God and Savior is significant. In Greek there is no definite article before "Savior," implying that the one article before God governs both nouns, as it does elsewhere in Greek. Additionally, in every other place where the Greek word translated as "appearing" occurs (*epiphaneia*), it describes an epiphany of Christ (2 Thess. 2:8; 1 Tim. 6:14; 2 Tim. 1:10; 4:1, 8). The context of the passage also seems to imply this, since the following verse describes Christ alone (Titus 2:14). This is, in fact, the way the majority of Greek church fathers understood the passage. Finally, it is also noted that during the first century, the expression "God and Savior" was a phrase used to refer to a single deity, or at times to the Roman Emperor.

Regardless of which interpretation an individual may find more convincing, it should be noted that in both cases Jesus Christ is still placed on an equal level with God. The second interpretation only makes Christ's equality with the Father more explicit.

Twice in vv. 11 and 13 an "appearance" is mentioned. In the first case, God's grace in history offering salvation to all people is said to have appeared (v. 11), and in the second (v. 13), we read about Jesus Christ appearing in glory at the end. Sandwiched between these epiphanies is an educative process (some have called it the school of grace). Grace and salvation are meaningless without a growing understanding of the person of Jesus Christ and what it truly means to follow Him. This becomes clear in the second epiphany (v. 13), in which Jesus Christ is described explicitly. This appearance is described as the "blessed hope." This implies that the God who is introduced in 1:2 as a God who promised the hope of eternal life to His expectant children will not fail to deliver His promise of salvation. The three specific outcomes of the educative process brought about by grace in the life of a believer are salvation (2:11), godliness (v. 12), and hope (v. 13).

Throughout the epistle, there is a sense of godliness and ungodliness in contrast. The use of the word in v. 12 relates to the human relationship to God, and it means to live in a godly manner. This manner of living is not an end in itself but rather finds meaning in the hope of God's salvation through Jesus Christ (cf. Ev 220).

In a world of broken promises and relationships, the hope of the coming of Christ helps us to live sensibly, justly, and godly in this present age (v. 12). This hope is based on a reliable source: a "God who cannot lie" (1:2). The currencies of this world provide the hope for many, but with the ever-changing economic climate, we should put our treasure in heaven (Matt. 6:20). This blessed hope is a climax of God's grace that has appeared in the person of Jesus Christ to all people (Titus 2:11). The climax of God's revelation is Jesus, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from all wicked lawlessness and to purify for Himself a special people, eager and zealous for doing what is right (v. 14). This hope separates God's people from the people of the world. Tragically, the members of the Cretan congregation were being robbed of this hope by the false teachers, who persuaded entire families and households and who were teaching forbidden things for the sake of dishonest gain (1:10).

There is an interesting textual connection between Titus 2:14 and the OT. A comparison between Psalm 129:8 and Titus 2:14 suggests that Paul was drawing on this earlier OT passage. In the LXX translation of the psalm, it is God "who will redeem Israel from all its lawlessness/iniquity" (*lytrōsetai ton Israēl ek pasōn tōn anomiōn autou*), and in Titus 2:14, it is Christ who gave Himself to redeem us from all lawlessness and iniquity (*lytrōsētai hēmas apo pasēs anomias*). In Psalm 129:8, the object of redemption is "Israel," while in Titus 2:14 it is "us." The clear similarity in thought and expression between these two passages indicates that Paul believed God's promises to His people were now being fulfilled in Christ. Titus speaks about God's intention to cleanse a special people for Himself, indicating how important it is to live a holy life before the Lord, who is in charge of cleansing us. The outcome of the appearance of the Messiah in history, and the educative process implied in His first coming, prepares a people eager and zealous for doing what is right (v. 14).

3:1–11
Christian Conduct

The ethical instructions that begin this section of Paul's letter to Titus were directed to the congregation as a whole, not to any specific group. The instructions focus initially on the importance of being subject to the "rulers and authorities" (v. 1) and further extends to instructions for dealing with all people (v. 2). The civil conduct of the members and their respect for civil authorities was not to be motivated by earthly concerns but by a solid theological and ethical foundation (vv. 3–7). In developing this theological basis, Paul used the same epiphany language he had used earlier (2:11–13). He explained that they used to be foolish, disobedient, and enslaved to evil desires and pleasures—living in malice, envy, and hatred. But then the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared (3:3–4). The means of salvation is through Jesus Christ, as was mentioned in the previous chapter. But this time it is added that Jesus saved us in His mercy through the Holy Spirit's washing, rebirth, and renewal (v. 5). The language used to describe how the Spirit comes to the believer suggests a possible connection with Ezekiel 36:18, 27. Titus 3:6 and Ezekiel speak about the pouring out of God's wrath (Ezek. 36:18) and the promise of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (36:27). In Titus 3:3 we read that the Cretans, because of their sinful behavior, were the objects of God's wrath. Then Paul says that the Holy Spirit was poured out through Jesus Christ (v. 6).

There is an implicit contrast between ungodliness and godliness in vv. 3–7, even though the words are not used. The vices listed in v. 3 that can be summed up as ungodliness are juxtaposed with the kindness and love of God (v. 4). It is not by our own virtues that godliness is achieved. Salvation is God's work all the way, and the end result—godliness—is also credited to Him. The climax of God's work in us is the "hope of eternal life" (v. 7). Therefore, the emphasis on good works in v. 8 is understood from the perspective that salvation is the work of God and godliness is the product of faith in God.

In this passage, the work of the Holy Spirit in salvation is highlighted (vv. 5–7). In Ephesians, Paul told the church members that they were sealed with the Holy Spirit, who pledges a guarantee of our coming inheritance (Eph. 1:13–14). Our hope of eternal life is guaranteed by the work of the Holy Spirit. He is at work in the hearts of individual members—washing, regenerating, and renewing lives deadened by sin. We were brought again into favor with God by the washing, renewal, and rebirth of the Holy Spirit. This washing is the burial with Christ in the water in the likeness of His death, representing that all who repent of their sins receive purification and cleansing through the work of the Holy Spirit.

Baptism represents and certifies true conversion—the work that the Holy Spirit has accomplished in the life of the believer. This work of the Spirit in the human heart is inseparable from our willingness to serve the Lord. There are things that Christians should avoid: foolish arguments, genealogies, and controversies and fights over the law (Titus 3:9). Paul also outlined a method for dealing with a divisive person.

Ever-present hope for the person's repentance necessitates opportunity through the first and second warnings (v. 10). Paul said the divisive person who does not heed the warnings given may be excluded from the community of faith.

3:12–15
Last Words

In his closing remarks, Paul mentions four of his fellow workers: Artemas, Tychicus, Zenas, and Apollos. The passage discloses some of the ways in which the movement of workers took place in the apostolic churches. Paul wanted Titus to join him in Nicopolis; before Titus left, however, Paul wanted to make sure that either Artemas or Tychicus would take over Titus's responsibilities. Paul also asked Titus to make sure that two other co-workers had all they needed before going out as missionaries. This moved Paul to encourage the church to do good deeds of loving service by providing for the needs of others. This is a characteristic of the fruitful Christian life.

Paul and those who were with him sent their greetings to Titus and to "those who love us in the faith" (v. 15). This last phrase could suggest to some that there were people in the church who did not love Paul and that he was not sending greetings to them. This is probably true, because the false teachers would not be interested in Paul and he would not want to give the impression that he was supporting them by greeting them as Christians. In that case, the phrase "in the faith" could mean "as Christians" or "as believers," or even in a common faith. The benediction is found in the last sentence: Paul's wish that God's grace be with them all. He asked God to always be gracious to them as they struggled for their faith in difficult situations. He reminded them that they were not alone in their Christian pilgrimage—a pilgrimage that will reach its climax in the realization of "the blessed hope" (2:13).

PHILEMON

INTRODUCTION

Title and Authorship. As a personal letter, Paul's epistle to Philemon did not originally have a title. The earliest copy of Philemon, a papyrus fragment written in Greek that dates to the third century (P87), also has no title. It is not until the fourth century that the title "To Philemon" (*pros philēmona*) appears as a short subscript added by a scribe to the end of the letter (Codex Sinaiticus).

Although critical scholars once questioned the authenticity of the Epistle to Philemon, there is little doubt today that Paul the apostle was its author. The style and vocabulary, as well as the theological themes of reconciliation and forgiveness that comprise the letter, are characteristically Pauline. In addition to Paul, Timothy is also identified in the salutation as a co-sender of the letter (1:1). Co-sender, however, should not be understood as joint author. While the first-person common plural is mentioned once in some Greek manuscripts (v. 7), Paul addressed Philemon directly a total of eleven times (vv. 4, 7, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 19, 20, 21, 22). Timothy's name was likely included in the salutation—as it is in several of Paul's other letters (2 Cor. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:1; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1)—on account of the relationship Timothy had with its recipients. It is not hard to imagine that during the nearly three years Paul spent in Ephesus, Timothy would have had the opportunity to become acquainted with Philemon, perhaps at a time when Philemon journeyed to Ephesus on business.

Date. Paul wrote this personal and persuasive letter to Philemon while a prisoner (vv. 9, 23). A comparison of the names in this epistle and those mentioned in Colossians indicate that the two letters were written from the same location, and at roughly the same time (cf. Col. 4:7–17). Although some scholars have suggested Caesarea or Ephesus as the place of imprisonment, it almost universally accepted that the letter to Philemon was written during Paul's imprisonment in Rome, described in Acts 28:14–31 (see Colossians: Introduction). Assuming this is the case, these two letters were likely written sometime between A.D. 60 and 61.

Backgrounds. Colossae was a city in the Roman province of Asia (part of modern Turkey). It was located about one hundred miles (161 km) east of Ephesus and more than one thousand miles (1,609 km) southeast of Rome in the Lycus River Valley. It was not far from the other two main cities in the valley: Laodicea and Hierapolis. The churches in these cities had been founded not by Paul but by a local inhabitant from Colossae named Epaphras (see Colossians: Introduction). Epaphras appears to have become acquainted with Paul and accepted the gospel due to the apostle's ministry in Ephesus. Epaphras then took the good news back to his friends and family in the Lycus River Valley (Col. 1:7).

The catalyst of the letter was a crisis in the life of a young man named Onesimus. Onesimus was a slave owned by Philemon, a wealthy Christian businessman. Due to Paul's statement that if Onesimus had wronged Philemon in any way that Paul would provide reimbursement (Philem. 18), it has generally been assumed that Onesimus had wronged his master in some way, as slaves often did, and had fled, perhaps helping himself to some money as he left. We do not know why he fled to Rome. Some have suggested his motivation was to obtain his freedom. Wanting to get as far from Colossae as possible, he fled to Rome, hoping to disappear among the imperial capital's teeming mass of nondescript slaves and start a new life. Then, through a stroke of providence, one of Paul's colleagues happened upon Onesimus and brought him to Paul.

Another possibility is that Onesimus was captured and ended up imprisoned with Paul, although Onesimus might not have been a runaway

slave at all, at least not in the strict sense of the term. Overcome with worry and seeing no way out of the trouble he faced with his master, Philemon, Onesimus fled to Rome to find Paul and to ask him to intervene on his behalf. While Roman law severely punished runaway slaves, and those who sought to harbor them, slaves had the legal right to seek the help of a prominent individual to act as an intercessor on their behalf. In these cases, a slave could not legally be considered a runaway. If this was the case, the purpose of Onesimus's trip to Rome was to achieve reconciliation with his master.

Whatever the exact circumstances may have been, it was while in prison that Paul appears to have shared the gospel with Onesimus and led him to Christ. Subsequently, Onesimus devotedly attended to Paul in his imprisonment, and the two men established a strong Christian bond (vv. 10, 11, 16). Unless Onesimus wanted to live the rest of his life as a fugitive, however, his situation had to be resolved legally. Roman law provided Paul with three possible solutions: he could arrange for Onesimus to be sold to a new master, with the proceeds from the sale being returned to Philemon; he could arrange for Onesimus to find refuge at a temple until he could be sold to another master or purchase his own freedom; he could intervene with Philemon to rectify the situation and reconcile the two men. Paul opted for the final option but even asked Philemon to grant Onesimus his freedom and to receive him as an equal brother in Christ (v. 16).

Without waiting for Philemon's response to Paul's appeal on his behalf, Onesimus set out on the one thousand-mile (1,609 km) journey from Rome to Colossae. The journey would have been hazardous for Onesimus to make alone—especially as a runaway slave—so Paul arranged for Onesimus to return to Colossae with Tychicus. In addition to bearing Paul's letter to Philemon, Onesimus and Tychicus also appear to have carried Paul's letters to the Colossians and the Ephesians (Col. 4:7–9).

Unfortunately, Scripture says nothing about what happened once Onesimus arrived in Colossae. The fact that the book of Philemon was included in the biblical canon, however, makes it reasonable to assume that Philemon responded positively to Paul's appeal. Fifty years later, an early Christian named Ignatius made reference to a trip to Rome in which he met the bishop of Ephesus—a much beloved man by the name of Onesimus. If this is the same person mentioned in the book of Philemon, as many believe, it would be a fitting conclusion to the amazing power of divine love, so transformative to the hearts of the Christians in Colossae that a lowly slave became not only a brother but a bishop.

Theology and Purpose. The book of Philemon is brief but life-changing. Its primary theme is forgiveness through the work of a mediator. This forgiveness results in loving reconciliation, Christian unity, and the practical acceptance of the equality of all believers. This passionate and persuasive account provides a living example of the power of the gospel to overcome inadequate cultural and social norms and prejudices. It provides a foundational road map for Christian interpersonal relationships in the church and in society. Its full implementation in the church will define it as a community of believers free from social and racial inequalities that are incompatible with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

1. Possible Theological Perspectives. This practical letter can be studied from various perspectives. It can be approached from the vantage point of *Philemon*, a slave owner who faced the dilemma of the conveniences of slavery versus the obligations of Christian equality. Next is the viewpoint of *Onesimus*, the converted slave, who understood the indignity of being chattel and experienced conflict regarding the duty of restitution. Then there is the standpoint of *Paul*, advocate of the Christian paradigm, who subtly challenged the existing social institution of slavery. There is also the unique outlook of *Tychicus*, companion of Paul and traveling partner with Onesimus, who understood the dynamics of the crisis, its resolution, and the interpersonal dilemmas.

2. Theological Topics. Philemon also contains other theological themes that can be helpful when studying, preaching, and teaching. First, it demonstrates the interplay of Christian duty and restitution with equality and human rights. Second, it reveals the outworking of God's providence in the lives of human beings. Third, it provides an example of Christian persuasion, emotional intelligence, and healthy confrontation. Fourth, it exhibits the what, why, and how of forgiveness in practical Christian living. Finally, it illustrates how leaders can personally advocate for and assist those in need.

3. The Theology of Mediation. Perhaps the theological center of the Epistle to Philemon is found in the role of Paul as mediator between Onesimus and Philemon—using as a model the mediation of Christ for us. An offense was committed, a relationship was broken, and the result was alienation between Onesimus and

Philemon. Paul interceded for Onesimus on the basis of the love characterizing the life of Philemon (vv. 5, 9). Without that love, Philemon's decision would have been made under compulsion (v. 14). Paul simply wanted the love uniting him and Philemon to extend to Onesimus.

But what about the damage done? The intercessor and mediator would assume responsibility for it and pay it on Onesimus's behalf (vv. 18–19). It seems obvious that Paul is using Christ's work on behalf of believers as a model of reconciliation between Onesimus and Philemon. Christ offered to be our Mediator and to intercede before God for us and, based on their mutual love for humanity, to ask that the divine Love grant us forgiveness and acceptance. Christ freed us from the power of sin and took our infinite debt; He paid that debt on the cross so we could be reconciled to the Father. The proper response to this divine expression of grace is gratitude.

COMMENTARY

1–25

RESTORING BROKEN RELATIONSHIPS

With this letter, Paul was attempting to persuade Philemon to receive Onesimus as a brother in Christ and to treat him as such. After the salutation (vv. 1–3), Paul recognizes the quality of the Christian life of Philemon and his love for believers (vv. 4–7). This is followed by a direct appeal to him (vv. 8–14) and a direct intercession on behalf of Onesimus (vv. 15–22). The letter closes with a farewell (vv. 23–25).

1–3

Paul's Greetings

The letter follows the first-century practice of including the name of the author and the recipients as part of the salutation. Within the NT, Philemon (lit. "affectionate," "loving") is one of only three persons to have received a personal letter from the Apostle Paul (Timothy and Titus were the others). The letter opens with the name of its author, Paul. Reference is made to Timothy, Paul's well-known companion and fellow leader. Paul considered himself to be a prisoner (*desmios*; "a captive in bonds"), not of Rome but of Christ, because of his providential call to His service (cf. Eph. 3:1; Phil. 1:13; Col. 4:3; see also Acts 26:32, 28:30, 31). Paul refers to his imprisonment six times (Philem. 1, 9, 10, 13, 22, 23). Philemon was apparently a close friend (*agapētos*; "beloved" or "dear"; v. 1) of Paul and may have been converted during the apostle's ministry in Ephesus (ca. A.D. 54–57; cf. v. 19).

Most scholars suggest that Apphia was Philemon's wife and Archippus was his son and a minister (cf. v. 2; Col. 4:17). The letter is also addressed to the church that met in Philemon's home. By expanding the letter's recipients, Paul widened the circle of accountability and was instructing the church on the subject of forgiveness. Paul greeted them with grace (*charis*; "unmerited favor") and peace (*eirēnē*; "harmony"), as the gifts coming from the Father and the Son.

4–7

Paul's Affirmation of Philemon

Paul prepared Philemon for his request by sincerely emphasizing the quality of Philemon's commitment to Christ and to the church. He was grateful to God for Philemon, whom he mentioned constantly in his prayers (v. 4). He had been impressed by Philemon's love and faith in the Lord, manifested in the way he dealt with others. Philemon's humility and self-sacrifice were well-known (v. 5). Those who have such qualities manifest devotion to God and to believers (cf. Rom. 5:5; Gal. 5:22; 1 John 3:14). The most effective service Paul could provide for Philemon was praying that his faith might continue to be effective on behalf of others (Philem. 6). Clearly, Philemon would need prayer for strength when he met Onesimus, who had dishonored him. By providing thanks and prayers, Paul established a rapport, preparing Philemon and other hearers to accept his counsel concerning the crisis that would challenge their spiritual advance.

Paul knew that the sharing of Philemon's faith had resulted in Christian community (v. 6). The word used here (*koinōnia*) is generally translated "fellowship" or "partnership" and refers to believers enjoying all aspects of life together because of their common faith and heritage in Christ. As believers share, their effectiveness and fruitfulness increase by *epignōsis* ("knowledge," "recognition," or "understanding") that every good thing (*agathos*; "useful, beneficial") that is ours comes from our common union in Christ (v. 6).

Paul wanted Philemon's actions of love and forgiveness to increase. He intimated to Philemon that his coming request would be a spiritual opportunity. Since Philemon's faith and love had already resulted in fellowship, if he responded positively to the spiritual challenge to forgive Onesimus, the ripple effect would be extraordinary: deeper *koinōnia* and a better understanding of every good thing available in Christ. The community had already experienced joy and *paraklēsis* ("encouragement" or "comfort") in Philemon's demonstration of love (v. 7). Now, his character was to be tested. He would be asked to love, forgive, and be reconciled with one who had publicly wronged him. With the previous words of recognition, commendation, and affirmation, Paul paved the way for his appeal on behalf of Onesimus.

8–14

Paul's Appeal to Philemon

The appeal is based on three spiritual realities: the indwelling work of the Holy Spirit; recognition of Philemon's own dependence on God's forgiveness; and acknowledgment that Philemon was his spiritual child and owed him a debt of love and respect. Paul's desire and intention were that Philemon welcome Onesimus back as an equal (see v. 17).

Paul did not command or order Philemon, even though he could have done so using his apostolic authority (v. 8; cf. 2 Cor. 11:22–33). Instead, he appealed (Philem. 9) to his age and the respect that should come with it and to his sufferings for Christ (cf. 2 Cor. 11:23–30). By now, Paul was approximately sixty years old, in an era when anyone over fifty was considered old. His request was clearly expressed: Paul appealed (*parakaleō*; "to exhort," "to encourage") to Philemon for his "child" Onesimus, taking the position of a subordinate and asking Philemon to graciously forgive and receive Onesimus as a brother in Christ. The appeal was based on love.

It was after writing a third of the letter that Paul finally raised the issue of Onesimus (v. 10). In the Greek, he doesn't mention Onesimus's name until the end of the sentence. Paul's reference to Onesimus as his "son" or "child" implies that he was instrumental in the conversion of Onesimus, preferring to introduce him as his son in the faith and not as Philemon's slave. Paul does not provide the details of Onesimus's conversion; he simply refers to its reality.

In a creative play on words, Paul notes that Onesimus ("profitable") was unprofitable or useless prior to his conversion, but upon his conversion he revealed traits of character that made him profitable and useful to both Paul and Philemon (v. 11). The timing for Onesimus's return coincided with Paul's desire to dispatch Tychicus to deliver letters to churches in Asia Minor, namely, Colossians and Ephesians (v. 12). Onesimus agreed to voluntarily accompany Tychicus (Col. 4:7–9) back to Colossae and to meet with Philemon—an act signifying His deep faith in God. For Paul, Onesimus is his "heart" (*splanchnon*; "the inward organs"), indicating the deep ties of love uniting them. Paul was sacrificing himself by returning him. He appreciated the services of Onesimus and would have gladly retained him as his assistant in Rome. However, Paul's ethics would not allow him to do this. He wanted something even better for Onesimus and Philemon. So he told Philemon that he did not want to do anything without his consent (v. 14).

15–22

Paul's Advocacy for Onesimus

The word *tacha* ("perhaps," "maybe") suggests that Onesimus's situation involved more than meets the eye. Just as God brought something wonderful out of Joseph being sold into slavery (see Gen. 50:19–20), so the incident with Onesimus was also possibly being used in the divine economy for a greater good. Paul suggests it was God's providential way of enlightening the church on the subject of forgiveness and the means to secure Onesimus's eternal salvation.

Verse 16 may be considered the climax of the letter. Paul seems to be saying to Philemon: "You love me, so I am asking you to receive Onesimus—not as a slave but as a beloved brother—even as you would receive me." Paul knew Philemon had legal right to take punitive action against Onesimus. However, on the basis of the love of Christ, respect and affection for Paul, and a recognition of the implications of Onesimus's conversion, Paul challenged Philemon to forgive and accept Onesimus as a brother in every sense of the word. Paul recognized that both Onesimus and Philemon were his spiritual sons and that they were spiritual brothers whose well-being was important to him. Consequently, Paul appealed boldly to Philemon based on sociological and christological principles (cf. Gal. 3:28; Eph. 2:11–22).

Paul suspected that the situation of Onesimus constituted a testing of Philemon's faith. His request was based on the fellowship Philemon enjoyed with him—to receive and welcome Onesimus as he would receive and welcome Paul himself (v. 17). This would publicly demonstrate God's saving grace in the community at large. When Paul asked for Onesimus's emancipation, he was doing so in a way that would solidify

Philemon's honor and integrity in the church. This would constitute a spiritual breakthrough and create immeasurable good.

Paul further told Philemon that Onesimus was his brother in Christ, and even though Philemon was indebted to Paul, nevertheless if Onesimus had wronged (*adikeō*; "to act unjustly or wickedly") him or if there was any outstanding debt, it should be *ellogaō* ("charged") to Paul's account (v. 18). Someone should pay for the damage done, but it would not be Onesimus; Paul, following the example of Jesus, was ready to do it for him (see 2 Cor. 8:9; Gal. 3:13). Paul reaffirmed his willingness to take on the debt, saying that he was writing with his own hand, and that he would repay (*apotinō*; "to pay off in its entirety") anything that Onesimus owed Philemon. He used the language of a promissory note, saying that he was signing with his "own hand" that he would take responsibility for Onesimus's debts. This passage beautifully mirrors Christ's redemptive work for the sinner (see Rom. 5:6–11). In similar fashion, Paul asked Philemon to see Onesimus not as guilty but as guiltless and debt-free.

The acceptance and forgiveness of Onesimus would fill Paul with joy; it would benefit and be useful to him and would greatly refresh (*anapauō*; "to revive") him (Philem. 20). Philemon had "refreshed" (v. 7) the hearts of the saints, and it was time now to refresh Paul. In v. 20, Paul indicates that whatever Christians do should be based on or determined by their union with God through Christ—"in the Lord," "in Christ." Paul was confident that Philemon would do even more than he had requested (v. 21). That is to say, Philemon would accept Onesimus back in full Christian fellowship and most probably grant Onesimus his legal freedom. Here, Paul clearly implies the qualities and principles of Christian equality. Full fellowship in Christ within the community of believers breaks down social and ethnic barriers. The slave would now be their equal. Paul then spoke of unconditional friendship and created a subtle accountability by expressing his desire to visit and fellowship with Philemon, requesting that a guest room be prepared for him (v. 22). By doing this, he reaffirmed his relationship with Philemon and simultaneously imposed a sense of accountability in regard to the Onesimus matter.

23–25

Paul's Farewell

It was common for Paul to end his letters by passing on greetings from those who ministered with him. Here was a band of five additional witnesses who were consonant with Paul's appeal and counted on Philemon and the church at Colossae to respond positively to Onesimus. Epaphras, one of Paul's converts and founder of the church in Colossae, was a compatriot of Philemon and a leader who traveled to Rome to inform Paul of the doctrinal challenges in Colossae (cf. Col. 1:4–8; 4:12–13; see Acts 19:1–3). The inclusion on the list of Mark (i.e., John Mark), whom the Colossians knew (Col. 4:10), illustrated that Paul had successfully worked through issues of forgiveness himself. John Mark had defected from Paul's first missionary journey due to hardship, and therefore Paul did not take him on his second missionary journey. However, it is clear that he had repaired relations with John Mark and had reinstituted him on his ministry team (cf. Acts 15:36–40; 2 Tim. 4:11). Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica, had been a companion of Paul on several missionary journeys (cf. Acts 19:29; 27:2; Col. 4:10). Demas was a capable worker at this time but later deserted Paul and the ministry for the attractions of the world (2 Tim. 4:9–10). Luke, Paul's personal physician, was a faithful traveling companion and author of the Gospel of Luke and Acts.

Paul's letter closes with a prayer and blessing (v. 25). The plural "your" is used: once again Philemon and the members of the church in Colossae are included in the dispensing of grace (cf. v. 3) so that they might be stimulated to fulfill the intent of this letter, which at its core is a message of the hope of reconciliation.

HEBREWS

INTRODUCTION

Title and Authorship. Among Greek manuscripts for the first thousand years of church history, the only title associated with this epistle—when one is supplied—is simply "To Hebrews" (*pros Hebraious*). It is unlikely that this title is original, however. There are early manuscripts where no title is given, and there is also nothing in the epistle that affirms such a specific designation. It was likely the result of an inference made by an early scribe. In later manuscripts the title was expanded to "The Epistle to the Hebrews" or, more commonly, "The Epistle of Paul to the Hebrews." Some later manuscripts even include historical statements at the end of the title: "written from Rome," "written from Italy through Timothy," or even "written to the ones in Jerusalem." While it is unlikely that any of these titles were originally part of the epistle, they do reveal the way in which it was perceived within the church.

Strictly speaking, the Epistle to the Hebrews is anonymous. Unlike other letters within the NT, the author chose not to identify himself. In fact, the only Christian identified by name in the entire letter is Timothy, who the author says has been recently released from prison (13:23). The letter's anonymity led to speculation about the identity of its author as early as the second century. In the A.D. 190s, Clement of Alexandria concluded that Paul wrote the document in the Hebrew language and that Luke translated it into Greek. Others within the early church attributed it to Barnabas, while still others preferred Luke or Clement of Rome. Origen, the early third-century Christian scholar and philosopher from Alexandria, Egypt, left the matter open ended, saying, "But who wrote the epistle, in truth, God knows."

It was this lack of certainty about its authorship—combined with the fact that attention was given to the OT—that made some feel the book was more Jewish than Christian, resulting in Hebrews being one of the last books to be included in the NT canon. For a book to be considered canonical, it had to be written by an apostle or by someone closely associated with an apostle (like Luke or Mark). It was only after the Pauline authorship of Hebrews was acknowledged that the letter found universal acceptance—though many continued, and still continue, to question the mysterious identity of its author.

While there is much we do not know about the author, some things are certain. The letter clearly indicates that the author was a Greek-speaking Christian who had a formal education and was a skilled communicator. It reveals a compelling use of images, complex arguments, and the hand of a person highly proficient in the Greek language. The author was thoroughly acquainted with the OT and its sacrificial system, yet recognized that Jesus was the climax to which it all pointed. In fact, no other document in the NT quotes the OT as often as Hebrews. Finally, and above all else, the author was a pastor at heart. The sole purpose of the letter was to encourage its readers to remain faithful to Jesus amidst persecution and hardship.

The question of the authorship of Hebrews is of particular interest to Seventh-day Adventists. This is because Ellen G. White, who we believe received the gift of prophecy, occasionally attributes the book to the Apostle Paul. Since Pauline authorship was the traditional perspective at the time, one should be careful not to attribute too much significance to what may simply be incidental references. This is important since at other times she simply refers to the author as "the apostle"; but this could also be a reference to Paul.

Those who favor the Pauline authorship of Hebrews face major, but not insuperable, difficulties. First, the Greek of Hebrews is unlike that in any of Paul's other letters. Moreover, the author does not refer to himself as one of the apostles (2:3–4; 13:6–7). And he also uses terms like "law" and "faith" in ways that are different from what we find in Romans and Galatians.

While these difficulties should not be lightly set aside, it must also be remembered that we know very little about the process that led to Paul's writings. On occasion, the apostle wrote in his own hand (Gal. 6:11), while at other times he dictated his letters, allowing a scribe or amanuensis some degree of freedom in actually doing the writing (Rom. 16:22). Furthermore, the letters that carry Paul's name show considerable variation in style and subject matter, as can be seen when comparing the style of the letters to the Romans and the Galatians with the style of the letters to the Corinthians or to Timothy and Titus. It seems likely that Paul's terminology and style would vary based on his audience and subject matter. It would also be difficult to find a person other than Paul within the early church who had such insights into the OT sacrificial system and the new era that had been inaugurated by the coming of Jesus of Nazareth.

But in the end, Hebrews is anonymous—although of apostolic origin. Hebrews is a magnificent document that has enriched God's people in all ages. It unquestionably bears the stamp of inspiration and, as we seek to understand and heed its great ideas, we shall be abundantly rewarded.

Date. It is unlikely that Hebrews was written before A.D. 60. The letter makes it clear that the recipients had been part of the Christian community for an extended period of time after the death of Jesus (Heb. 2:3; 5:12; 10:32), and during that time some church leaders (13:7) had passed away. On the other hand, the sustained references to the superiority of the new covenant over the old covenant—with its earthly sanctuary and endless sacrifices offered year after year (8:13; 10:1-2)—strongly suggest it had to have been written before the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Besides, if the sacrifices of the temple had actually ceased, as they did when the Romans destroyed the temple, it is hard to imagine that the author would not have mentioned it, since it would have proved his point. Paul was arrested and executed very late in A.D. 66 or sometime in 67. If he is the author, Hebrews would have been written in the early to mid A.D. 60s.

Backgrounds. A careful study of Hebrews reveals a clear spiritual profile of the Christians it was originally written to reach. They were not members of a recently planted congregation because, although they had had sufficient time to grow in Christian understanding, they were still spiritual infants (5:11-14). They could recall the preaching of the apostles and the miracles associated with the gifts of the Holy Spirit (2:3-4). Previously, they had suffered insults, persecution, and confiscation of their property; when some of their fellow believers had been imprisoned for Christ, they stood with them (10:32-34). They had begun, however, to grow weary in the Christian way. The years had rolled on and Jesus had not come back (10:35-37). They felt like drifting away (2:1). Unbelief had begun to take root (3:13-16). Some had quit attending church (10:25), and some may even have publicly renounced Christ (6:4-6; 10:26-31; 12:15-17).

The apostle's solution to the spiritual state of the Hebrew Christians corresponds to the problem. He exhorted them to stay alert (2:1), to hold on firmly (3:6, 14; 4:14), to persist (4:11), to focus on Jesus (3:1), to encourage one another (3:13; 10:25), to remember earlier times (10:32), and to endure (10:36; 12:1). One quality stands out above all others: faith. Faith characterized the lives of both Jesus and Moses (3:2); lack of faith led to Israel's failure (4:2). The heroes of old overcame physical hardships and conquered temptations through faith (11:1-39), and so could the apostle's readers.

Hebrews bears almost none of the usual marks of a letter: the writer does not identify himself or the intended recipients, nor does he include the usual introductory greeting or discuss personal matters. Rather than addressing a series of concerns, the document develops, from the outset, as a carefully planned theological argument. The writer describes the work as a "word of exhortation" (13:22) and periodically injects homiletic applications into the theological discourse. The Book of Hebrews is, therefore, more like a written sermon than an epistle.

While the author includes greetings from people in Italy at the conclusion of the letter (13:24), the phrase is inconclusive. It could mean that the document was written either from Italy (presumably Rome) or to Italy. Some have suggested Jerusalem as the likely destination for the letter, due to its repeated references to the sacrifices of the temple. While that makes sense to some degree, it is far from conclusive since Jews scattered all across the Roman Empire looked to Jerusalem and its temple with admiration. Thus, while the circumstances in the church that led to the letter being written

are fairly clear, its provenance and destination remain just as mysterious as the identity of its author.

Theology and Purpose. Jesus, magnificent in person and work, dominates the thought patterns of Hebrews. He is the Captain or Pioneer who has passed over life's course of suffering and temptation (2:10; 12:2); He is also the Apostle of our faith who was sent to earth for us (3:1) and the Forerunner who has gone on ahead to the heavenly courts (6:20).

1. Unified Theology. The book of Hebrews is a marvel and a mystery. On one hand, it is a superbly wrought piece of literature—composed carefully and executed beautifully. Here, students of the original Greek encounter many words that do not occur in any other book of the NT and a few that cannot be found elsewhere in the literature of the times. Some of the NT books bear evidence of having been written in haste—Galatians is a notable example, put together in white heat by a deeply troubled Paul—but not Hebrews. Its leading ideas are briefly introduced in turn, then developed and, at length, rounded off.

Yet this literary masterpiece is built of ideas—priest, temples, and sacrifices—that seem remote to modern thinking, especially that of Protestants. The reasoning in some parts of the book is dense, with ideas seemingly difficult to grasp: the description of the ancient priest, King Melchizedek, as being without father, mother, genealogy, beginning of days, or end of life (7:3); or the patriarch Levi, before he was born, paying tithe to Melchizedek through his ancestor Abraham (7:9-10).

In studying Hebrews, it is critically important to listen to the text, allowing the Holy Spirit to disclose the author's meaning. The reader should begin with the opening words—where the argumentation immediately starts—and move forward with the writer. To plunge into a passage of the book without having journeyed with the author is to invite lack of comprehension and confusion of thought. Hebrews was written whole and is to be understood as a whole.

2. Jesus as High Priest and Sacrifice. The predominant focus in Hebrews is the portrayal of Jesus as our great High Priest. Elsewhere in Scripture we find the idea alluded to or suggested, but in Hebrews it is developed and expanded. The theology of the first seven chapters focuses on this theme, concluding with the declaration of 8:1 that the main point of the book is that Jesus is our High Priest "at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty" of heaven. Jesus as High Priest is superior to any and all other priests. Because He is both God and man, He constitutes the bridge between heaven and earth. Unlike the Aaronic high priests, who were sinful and mortal, He is holy, innocent, separated from sinners (7:26) and lives forever.

Jesus is not only High Priest—He is also God's all-sufficient sacrifice for our sins. By dying on the cross, He provided what the multiplied sacrifices of Israel's sanctuary system could never accomplish: a final solution to the age-old sin problem. One no longer needs to bring a lamb or a goat as an offering for his or her sins, for complete atonement has been made by the once-for-all sacrifice on Calvary. Jesus's sacrifice was once for all time—forever effective with no need of being repeated (10:12). Under the old system, only the high priest could enter the Most Holy Place of the sanctuary, and on just one day each year: the Day of Atonement. Jesus, however, broke down all barriers between heaven and earth by his sacrifice. By faith, every believer may now enter the very presence of God (4:16). What a portrayal of our Lord! If those early Christians could have but grasped the magnificence of His person and work, they would have been rejuvenated and would have determined never to give up or turn back to the world. Not surprisingly, a key word of Hebrews is often translated "better" or "superior." We read of a better name (1:4), a better hope (7:19), a better covenant (7:22), a better ministry (8:6), better promises (8:6), better sacrifices (9:23), a better country (11:16), and better blood (12:24).

While Jesus as High Priest and sacrifice are the ruling motifs of Hebrews, we also find several other theological ideas of note: full assurance in Jesus (10:19-22), the seriousness of neglecting or rejecting such a great salvation (2:3; 6:4-6; 10:26-31; 12:15-17), the Sabbath (3:6—4:11), the Christian life as a pilgrimage (11:13-16), faith (11:1-40), and the Second Coming (9:27-28; 10:25-37; 12:26).

3. A Message of Hope for Today. Hebrews is startlingly relevant to Christians in our time. When faith has grown cold and the world seems so alluring, this book will turn our eyes back to Jesus. Our security and our hope are in Him alone. If we have grown tired of waiting and every vision seems to have failed, Hebrews assures us that divine history did not come to an end at the cross. Heaven is still actively working out our salvation. Jesus ministers in the heavenly sanctuary. One day His work will be over and He will come back for those who eagerly wait for Him (9:28).

Hebrews holds special significance for Seventh-day Adventists. We look to it for key support for our unique doctrine of the heavenly sanctuary. That doctrine is a construct built principally on four books of the Bible: Leviticus in the OT, with Hebrews as its counterpart; and Daniel, with Revelation as its counterpart. In Hebrews, the typological function of sacrifice, priesthood, mediation, and temple find their fulfillment in Christ. Throughout Christian history, devout men and women have found here the grandest ideas and the loftiest conceptions, but above all a portrait of Jesus as High Priest in the heavenly temple, as a sacrifice, and as Coming King—unmatched in power and beauty.

COMMENTARY

1:1—7:28

JESUS OUR GREAT HIGH PRIEST

The motif of Jesus as High Priest dominates the first seven chapters of Hebrews. Although the term "High Priest" does not appear until 2:17, the developing ideas prepare for this disclosure. The apostle argues for a high Christology in which the word "Son" is paramount. His use of this term and the accompanying reasoning force the conclusion that the Son is everything God is. But, after sharing this exalted nature of Jesus, the author presents Him as starkly human—suffering, tempted, crying out to the Father for help. This portrayal of Jesus as truly God but also truly man climaxes in the affirmation that *therefore* He is our merciful and faithful High Priest (2:17–18; 4:14–15). Events in time play a crucial role. Jesus, rather than eternally being High Priest, *became* High Priest. He qualified to be High Priest by becoming human. In three places, the theological exposition is interrupted by exhortations: 2:1–4; 3:6b—4:16; 5:11—6:20. These passages, which encourage the Hebrew Christians to hold firmly to their faith, all flow from the arguments for the magnificence of Jesus that the apostle will present.

1:1–4

The Better Revelation

The first four verses of Hebrews are more than an introduction to the document. In masterful fashion, they summarize the major theological ideas that will be developed. They are a brief overture, sounding in rapid succession themes that will later be addressed. These lines also set the tone of the writing—their measured, rolling cadences immediately take us into the presence of the God who speaks and acts. The passage develops in two parts. The first, vv. 1–2a, has God as its subject—the God who speaks; the second, vv. 2b–4, center on the Son—the climactic Speech of God.

In v. 1, we confront the God who spoke. The apostle makes no attempt to prove that God exists, nor does he try to establish the fact of divine self-revelation. He presupposes both, merely reminding us of the OT conception of God. We are not alone in an insensate universe. Beyond our pain of emptiness, of alien space, is God. He is not found by experimentation in the lab, nor can He be "proved" by philosophical reasoning. God is before all and beyond all, but does not remain in splendid isolation. He comes to His creation continually, revealing Himself. He speaks.

The author's mention of the various times and ways in which God has spoken reminds us of the OT stories of God. In the Garden, to Abraham, by the terebinths of Mamre, to Moses in the desert, to the Hebrews in Egyptian bondage, to David as a shepherd boy, and to the young urbanite Isaiah—Yahweh came. In a thousand circumstances and a multitude of ways, He came. Because He is the speaking God, He revealed Himself over and over.

The lines of vv. 1–2 are carefully balanced. There are exact correspondences between the old revelation and the new:

The Speaking God

The Old Testament	The New Testament
Spoke	Has spoken
In the past	In these last days
To the fathers/ ancestors	To us
By the prophets	By His Son

Only the phrase about many various times and ways finds no counterpart. In the original, the omission comes with greater effect because these words are placed at the very beginning. The construction suggests a strong contrast between the old revelation and the new. The old came in fragmentary, episodic fashion—here a little, there a little—and, as a result, was incomplete, partial, and imperfect. But the new comes in one climactic speech of God the Father, at one time, in one person: His Son. With Jesus, all the

revelation of God from the OT is gathered up and surpassed.

The Son dominates the second part of the passage. With the introduction of His name, He moves into the limelight, and God the Father recedes. In rapid strokes, the apostle gives us a sketch of His person and a summary of His work. The name "Son" is significant. It is this that designates Him superior to angels, as shown by a comparison of vv. 4, 5. In each place where this term is used of Him in the document, it carries heavy weight, pointing to the special nature of the Person. "Son" suggests a preexistent quality of being. In Hebrews, "Son" indicates revelation with finality (1:2), superiority to angels (1:5–14), qualification for the new and better priesthood (5:4–6; 7:20), and One whom we are warned not to despise (6:6; 10:29).

Ellen White affirms the divine connotations of the term "Son." "Christ is the pre-existent, self-existent Son of God. . . . He is the eternal, self-existent Son" (Ev 615). However, while asserting the eternal Sonship, she suggests that the incarnation made Him Son in a different way. "While the Son of a human being, He became the Son of God in a new sense. Thus He stood in our world—the Son of God, yet allied by birth to the human race" (1SM 226).

The superiority suggested by the pregnant term "Son" is now spelled out: He is the *apaugasma* of God's glory and the *charaktēr* of His being (1:3). The first metaphorical term (*apaugasma*) denotes radiance, brightness, a shining forth, or an effulgence. The Son is the shining forth of the glory of God. The second term (*charaktēr*) is drawn from the seal that reproduces its likeness on wax. What God is, the Son is. Furthermore, the Son does not become the divine ray or inherit the divine nature. He was that way at Creation and Incarnation, as shown by the Greek *ōn*, from the verb of being.

This is an exalted conception of Jesus—a high Christology. Only the grand opening words of the Gospel of John (John 1:1–18) approach it in the status assigned to the Person of Christ. The Son's Person is matched only by His work. That work falls into three phases in time: preincarnate, incarnate, and postincarnate (Heb. 1:1b–4).

- Preincarnate: He was the agent of creation (v. 2), and He sustains all things (v. 3).
- Incarnate: He accomplished purification for sins (v. 3).
- Postincarnate: He is regnant (v. 4) and appointed heir of all things (v. 2).

The earthly life of the Son is encompassed in a handful of words. Birth, miracles, teachings—all are passed over. Only one accomplishment is brought into light here: He Himself accomplished purification for sins. That work, the apostle tells us, was fully achieved: He sat down, signifying a completed task. This idea, so briefly mentioned here, will be expatiated in 8:2–10, where the apostle focuses on Jesus as our all-sufficient sacrifice for sins.

The passage closes on a regnant note. As the Son is Lord of space—bringing all things into being and upholding them—so He is also Lord of time. He sits in exaltation at the place of heavenly favor, superior to angelic beings. That sitting, that exaltation, is a guarantee that, in due time, the universe will find its ultimate place in Him. God has appointed Him heir of all things. All things, once begun by Him, will at last return to Him. That time, however, is in the future. Now, only in the church is Christ acknowledged as Lord; the promise of heirship guarantees a universal acclamation in God's time. We, His followers, are in a waiting time—a time of preparation (10:12–13; cf. 1:13).

1:5—2:18

The Better Name

This section falls into three distinct parts: 1:5–14, where the Son's superiority to angels is stressed; 2:1–4, a break in the exposition for the first homiletic application; and 2:5–18, a discussion of the Son's life on earth as a human. Throughout, the Person of the Son is the ruling interest. That personhood gives Him a status denied to any angel, it leads to warning about neglecting the salvation He has brought, and it is in no sense denied by the incarnation, when He became, for a while, less than the angels.

1:5–14. The Son Better than the Angels. By a series of OT citations, the apostle elaborates the point of the greater excellence and superiority of the name of the Son, which he introduced in 1:4. He sees the OT, in its entirety, pointing to the Messiah. Thus, he finds allusions to the Son in the royal psalms concerning Israel's king's adoption as Yahweh's son (Ps. 2:7), in Him being praised (Ps. 45:6–7) and crowned (Ps. 110:1), in Yahweh's promise to David about his successors (2 Sam. 7:12–16), and in the prayer of the afflicted person (Ps. 102:25–27). The apostle is dependent for these applications upon the Greek text of the OT—commonly referred to as the Septuagint (LXX)—rather than the Hebrew, which differs significantly in some of the citations.

The series of quotations argues for the Son's superiority to angels in four steps. First, the name "Son" is predicated only of Him. God never called an angel "Son," but He thus addressed Christ in Psalm 2:7 and 2 Samuel 7:14. Second, angels are to worship the Son. Here the author cites the LXX of Deuteronomy 32:43. Third, the Son and angels have different natures. Angels are "winds" and a "fiery flame" (Ps. 104:4, LXX), but the Son is directly addressed as God, whose throne will last forever and who is exalted above all (Heb. 1:8). Here, Psalm 45:6–7 is quoted for support. Further, the Son is the eternal, unchanging one. All else grows old and fades away, but He is the same for all time. Here, the apostle cites Psalm 102:25–27. Finally, the Son and the angels have contrasting service. On one hand, the Son reigns at God's right hand—the place of honor. On the other, the angels are "ministering spirits" (Heb. 1:14) sent out to serve the people of God.

The apostle regards the OT highly. For him, a word from Scripture is the end of discussion—the clincher in a theological argument. Scripture, regardless of who the original speaker in the OT setting may have been, delivers the very word of God. Thus, although in Psalms 45 and 102 the statement quoted by the author is from a human suppliant, the apostle puts the quoted words directly in the mouth of God. In this view of Scripture, God speaks directly and immediately to the reader. It is a perspective that will be maintained throughout the rest of the book, and one that Bible lovers still experience as they study the word.

Angels in Hebrews

The long string of quotations in 1:5–14 suggests that the apostle felt compelled to drive home to his readers the Son's superiority to angels. Studies of the background to the NT period give strong indication of a deep interest in angels. We know from Paul's letter to the church at Colossae that some Christians were troubled by ideas of angel-worship (Col. 2:18). Non-biblical literature—especially that associated with Jewish apocalyptic—also indicates angelic speculation and veneration, sometimes centering in angelic ministry in a heavenly temple. A scroll from Qumran assigns even the figure of Melchizedek a role of heavenly mediation. This sort of thinking may be behind the author's warnings in Hebrews about strange doctrines (13:9). Thus from the outset, the author—arguing for the superiority of the Christian faith—went to some lengths to establish that angels are inferior to the Son by reason of name, status, and service.

An exalted Christology emerges. Whereas in Hebrews 1:3 the apostle already placed the Son in the closest conceptual relationship to deity without calling Him God, here, the equation is explicitly made: "Your throne, O God . . ." (1:8). Nowhere else in Hebrews does the writer return to the height he touches here, preferring instead to work with the "Son" terminology.

The point of the argument in 1:5–14—that the Son is greater than angels—leads directly into the warning in 2:1–4. The reasoning is from the lesser to the greater: if the revelation that came through angels carried a threat of punishment on the transgressor, how much more will be the retribution that comes with the greater revelation through the Son?

2:1–4. The First Exhortation. The writer selected the high point of OT revelation—Sinai—to make the contrast with the salvation provided by Christ. Although the account in Exodus does not mention angels, other passages of Scripture indicate their presence (Deut. 33:2; Gal. 3:19). Thus, the author drew the contrast: that which was spoken through angels (Heb. 2:2) against that which was spoken through the Lord (v. 3)—who from the context is Jesus. This word was also attested by the apostles and was accompanied by manifestations of the Spirit through signs, wonders, and miracles (v. 4). The exhortation is shaped by a strong warning: how shall we escape? (v. 3). The implied answer is that we have no way to escape divine retribution if we neglect that which has come with so much greater revelation than was previously revealed.

The verb translated "drift away" (v. 1) is a nautical term. Like a ship whose anchor drags in the night or is imperceptibly pulled off course by wind and currents, we may find ourselves far from the harbor of the Son's salvation. The verb may also be used for the ring that slips unnoticed from a finger. Hence, there is an earnest call to pay the closest attention (v. 1). If we want to hold course to so great a salvation (v. 3), we must not take it for granted. When that which is most precious to us is treated casually or simply neglected, we suffer great loss.

2:5–18. The Son Lower than the Angels. To the argument about the Son's superiority to angels,

readers might raise a strong objection: if the Son is greater than angels, how do we account for His human experiences, when He clearly was lower than the angels, especially on the cross? The exposition of 2:5–18 takes up this issue. We find a response that moves from apologetic to constructive. The writer first defends the Son's inferiority to angels as a temporary phase, then he argues that His human experiences were necessary in the divine plan. By becoming man—by suffering and being tested and dying—the Son destroyed death and qualified to become our great High Priest.

In vv. 5–9, the author appeals to the OT for support. He quoted Psalm 8:4–6, where the Son of Man became lower than the angels. In its original setting, the psalm is a hymn to the glory of humanity, who is only slightly less than God. Some scholars see its use here as a messianic prophecy of Christ fulfilling the original divine purpose of the dominion of humanity over creation (Gen. 1:26–28). However, v. 9 picks up the words of the psalm and applies them to Jesus—made lower than the angels and later crowned with glory and honor. That is, Scripture already portrayed the Son's career of descent and exaltation.

The argument thus far is apologetic. Are the Son's human experiences, which mark Him as inferior to angels, a problem? The OT had already predicted them. And that same Scripture foretold that they would be only for a little while. The Son, greater than angels, became their inferior for a short time but is again crowned with glory and honor. All things, at last, are to be put in subjection under his feet.

The final part of v. 9 contains two items of interest. First, a large number of church fathers—as well as a few other Greek manuscripts and early translations of the NT—suggest a different translation to the majority reading "by the grace of God" (see below, "The Interpretation of Hebrews 2:9"). Second, the apostle's words regarding Christ tasting death point to the full experience of dying. Chrysostom, the great preacher of the early church, held that Christ's "tasting" death was like a physician who takes a sip of a bitter potion before handing it to his patient. In this instance, the famous homiletician badly missed the mark; Hebrews sets forth Jesus's death as a terrible, grim reality. He didn't merely sip the cup; He drained it to its dregs.

The death of Jesus was not a temporary thwarting of the Son's career. It was because Jesus tasted a desolating death that He could subsequently be crowned with glory and honor. And the experience of death into which He fully entered brought with it universal benefits. It was for everyone—a saving death for the whole world.

The writer of Hebrews presents the death of Jesus as very important. He refers to it in many places, and it forms the high point of the theological argument in 9:1—10:18. There, the ideas first sketched in 2:5–18 come to full expression.

Verses 10–13 emphasize the reality of Jesus's humanity. The leading word is *adelphos* ("brother," which connotes either a man or a woman—brother or sister). Because the Son became human, He is not ashamed of us—we are His brothers and sisters. The apostle cited three passages from the OT to support this point. The first quotation comes from Psalm 22:22, the psalm that includes several messianic references, including the despairing cry from the cross ("My God . . ."). The second citation derives either from Isaiah 8:17 or Psalm 18:2. The third reference comes from Isaiah 8:18. In its original context, it applied to Isaiah and his sons; however, as we have already seen, the meaning of inspired texts reaches beyond the original setting revealing a deeper meaning.

In Hebrews 2:10, we find a statement about God that is without parallel in the NT: that it was fitting or appropriate for Him to act as He did. Everywhere else, God is never called into question—He is above considerations of appropriateness. The statement here is in the context of the human experiences of Jesus, especially those involving suffering. God, as the source and end of all things, purposed the sufferings of Christ so that He might be the *archēgos*

The Interpretation of Hebrews 2:9

As indicated, a large number of both Eastern and Western church fathers and a number of Greek manuscripts and early translations of the NT include a variant reading that involves the change of just a few Greek letters but produces the result "without God" (*chōris theou*) instead of "by the grace of God" (*chariti theou*). While unlikely original, this sharp shift in meaning suggests the recognition of the loneliness Jesus experienced on the cross. It is a picture that we find again in 5:7–8: Jesus cried out with loud entreaties and tears to be saved from death. This stark scene is matched only by Jesus's prayer in Gethsemane and by the cry of dereliction from the cross regarding why God had forsaken Him (Mark 15:34).

("captain") of salvation for suffering humanity. This term has the idea of a pioneer or pathfinder. It is translated variously as "captain," "founder," "pioneer," or "source." It is the same term, sometimes translated as "author," which is used in 12:2 regarding Jesus.

The apostle tells us that the Son was made perfect through sufferings. He speaks of this idea in two other places (5:9; 7:28). The idea does not imply that Jesus was raised to a divine status that He did not previously have; Hebrews 1:1-3 and 5-14 clearly rule this out. Nor does he mean that the Son had a personal problem of sin that had to be removed by His own suffering. Elsewhere, the author specifically predicates the sinlessness of the Son (4:15; 7:26-28). Rather, the perfecting motif indicates a maturing—a preparation for divine work. That is, the human experiences of the Son qualify or equip Him for the role laid out in the divine purpose. The role of His humanity becomes clear in 2:7-18. The suffering motif features prominently in Hebrews (2:10, 15; 5:7-8; 9:26; 13:12). In almost every case, the discussion focuses on the death of Jesus, not on the general human condition of heartaches, sicknesses, tragedies, and grief. Jesus's death was marked by intense suffering as it accomplished the divine will.

Hebrews 2:10-13 highlights the reality of the Son's humanity. His closeness to us is underscored in the pregnant term "one" (v. 11). It points to Jesus's commonality with us, because He became truly human. In vv. 14-18, we see four benefits that flow from the Son's becoming human and, for a little while, lower that the angels.

First, Christ—by taking flesh and blood—entered into the dreaded experience of death and thereby destroyed it (v. 14). The Son had to become human in order to die and in so doing destroy the kingdom of death from within. Jesus's victory over death accomplished more than giving Christians hope for a future existence. It releases those who, throughout their lives, are held captive to their fear of death (v. 15). Unlike the rest of humankind—whose lives are lived under the grim certitude that all their joys, hopes, and dreams will eventually come tumbling down—we who believe know that death is a conquered foe. Death will not—cannot—hold us in its clutches when our little life comes to a close, nor can it keep us as its slaves while we live. Because of Jesus, the Conqueror of death, we no longer fear death.

Second, by becoming human, the Son was qualified to be our great High Priest. He had to be made like His brothers and sisters (v. 17). This indicates divine necessity. An angel could not be our high priest—only One who had passed through the same experiences we do and would thus be both merciful and faithful. These two characteristics will be elaborated in reverse order in 3:1-6 and 4:14—5:10.

As High Priest, Jesus atones for and makes propitiation for the sins of the people (2:17). The apostle will go on to describe the help that Jesus is able to offer us, but he first mentions Christ's atoning work. This work will be the focus of the concluding theological exposition in 8:1—10:18. The word often translated "propitiation" or "atonement" from the Greek conveys the sense of taking away or expiation. The Septuagint uses this word for the covering of the ark of the covenant, on which the blood was sprinkled on the Day of Atonement. Sin is not something light, to be casually forgiven and forgotten. Sin is a terrible weight that no human being can remove. Only God Himself can deal with it. He did and He does—through the sacrifice of Jesus, our great High Priest.

Finally, Jesus, by virtue of His human experiences of temptation and suffering, is able to help those who are tempted (2:18). The help He provides is more than empathetic understanding of our struggles—it is overcoming help (see 4:14-16). He who went through the fires of testing and emerged unscathed comes to the aid of His people as they go through the same fires.

In one glorious passage, Hebrews 1:5—2:18, the apostle has sketched the career of the Son. It is a passage that reaches sublime heights as Christ is addressed as God but also one that sees Him having become lower than angels, having suffered, having been tempted, and having died. In the divine economy, nothing happens by chance. All unfolds as the outworking of the plan to rescue lost humanity. At center stage in this drama of the ages we see Jesus—He who is eternally and truly God, He whom angels worship and obey at His bidding—having humbled Himself to become truly one with us. What a contrast—from highest heaven to earth's lowest point! But what a victory—over death, over the fear of death! And so, truly God and now truly man, He has become our High Priest, making expiation for our sins, ministering mercifully and faithfully on our behalf, and supplying overcoming help in our sufferings and temptations.

3:1—4:13
Inheriting a Better Promise

In 3:1-6, the apostle compares and contrasts Christ and Moses, both of whom are termed faithful. In 3:7-19, he highlights the experience of Israel in the wilderness as a warning to his readers. They failed because of unbelief (*apistia*). Then, 4:1-13 contains the writer's exhortation to his readers to have faith so that they may obtain the promised rest. Throughout 3:1—4:13, the key word is *pistis* ("faith"). The adjective *pistos* ("faithful") and the negative *apistia* ("unfaith" or "unbelief") derive from it. *Pistis* and its two cognates structure the three parts of the section.

3:1-6. Christ, the Faithful High Priest. Hebrews 3:1-6 opens with a call to consider Jesus as Apostle and High Priest. The early Christians to whom the author was writing were to contemplate the victory that Jesus had achieved. The call is not an encouragement to engage in metaphysical speculation about the Person of Jesus, nor is it an incentive to understand Jesus primarily as an example of Christian conduct and the model for Christians. The discussion of Christology here and throughout the book leads in another direction. Readers are to trust what Jesus has done rather than trying to do what He has done.

The term "High Priest" is a major motif of the document. The term will be developed in chapter 4. This is the only use of "Apostle" for Jesus in the entire NT. Its basic idea is that of sending: an *apostolos* is one who is sent. The Gospel of John frequently uses language expressing that Jesus is the One who had been sent from God (e.g., John 20:21). In Hebrews 3:1, the term is appropriate in view of the theology of the first two chapters. They argued for the preexistence of the Son and of a temporary break in His exalted state, during which He became human and was lower than the angels. Thus, "Apostle" sums up what has gone before, even as "High Priest" gathers together the theology that will be elaborated through 8:2.

The writer compares Christ and Moses. These leaders have one outstanding trait in common: they were faithful to God. Christ, however, is greater than Moses on four counts:

Christ	Moses
Son	Servant
Builder of the house(hold)	Part of the house(hold)
Over the house(hold)	In the house(hold)
Fulfillment of the Old Testament revelation	Witness to what would be spoken in the future

"House" or "household" refers to the people of God. The view is of two periods of history: that of the Exodus and that of the new exodus involving Christians. The argument prepares the ground for the warning and exhortation that commences in 3:7. Moses is not an important figure in the book of Hebrews. He is listed among the heroes of faith (11:23-24), and again in a vivid passage in the following chapter (12:18-24). Moses's role, as shown in 3:1-6 and 12:18-24, is to stand as a representative of the old covenant sacrificial system. The author of Hebrews continually highlights the superiority of the Christian religion by holding it up against the old system given at Sinai. This point will be emphasized in later comparisons of Christ and Aaron (5:1-10), the priesthood of Christ with the old priesthood (7:1-28), the new covenant with the old (8:6-13), and the new sacrifice—of Christ Himself—with the old system of sacrifices (9:1—10:18).

The apostle is determined to underline the fact that Jesus is a faithful High Priest. He argues that the human experiences of the Son (2:5-15) enabled Him to become a merciful and faithful High Priest (2:17). In 3:1-6, he summarized this point by comparing and contrasting Christ and Moses.

3:7-19. Lessons from Israel's Unfaithfulness. The "if" of v. 6 introduces the second exhortation of Hebrews. In a long passage, the appeal turns from warning in 3:7-19 to encouragement in 4:1-13, as the focus shifts from Israel in the desert to the Christians.

Inclusion among the people of God is not automatic, nor is it independent of human appreciation. Rather, it is to be constantly reiterated by a life of confident steadfastness. The wandering tribes in the desert illustrate that mere inclusion in the chosen people is not sufficient to win the final goal. Inclusion must be accompanied by faith. The apostle bases his warning from Israel's failure on Psalm 95:7-11 rather than from passages in the Pentateuch. His frequent citations from the OT are drawn from the Psalter in preference to any other portion of Scripture. One text, Psalm 110:4, assumes a critical role in the theological presentation; the author cites it frequently in whole or in part (see Heb. 7).

The apostle immediately applies Psalm 95:7-11 to the situation of his readers. In a gigantic leap, he bridges the centuries from the psalm's composition—the word of God confronts Christians in the here and now. They, not the Israelites, are the "you" of the ancient text; the One who warns and exhorts them is the "Holy Spirit," not the psalmist. The exhortation commences with an arresting note of appeal: "today." "Today" is God's eternal now, not to be shunted aside for a more "convenient" time (Acts 24:25). It denotes urgency—a challenge for immediate consideration and response. Every day is that "today" (Heb. 3:13). The urgent appeal and warning lead to a succession of "todays," in which Christian assurance remains unwavering to the end (vv. 14–15). At 4:7, the apostle again invokes the "today" of Psalm 95:7–11—this time not as warning but as an invitation to enter now into the promised rest.

Israel of old failed to heed the warning voice of God. The hearts of the people gradually hardened through the deceptive nature of sin (Heb. 3:13). The hardening of their hearts denotes a refusal to obey—a determination to go their own way. It resulted in acts of rebellion. Thus, it was necessary that the "Hebrews" to whom the apostle wrote be on their guard. It was possible that a slow, insidious change was taking place—toward a wicked, unbelieving heart (v. 12). They might eventually find themselves far from the people of God—apostates having come to this sad place by neglect rather than by design.

The warning parallels the first exhortation of 2:1–4. Both passages describe a carelessness in religion, not overt rejection. Especially in 3:12–15, the exhortation parallels that of 2:3. The expression "the living God" (3:12) carries a note of judgment and retribution similar to the warning "how shall we escape?" (2:3). Elsewhere in Hebrews, "the living God" suggests retribution (10:31; 12:22, 25).

Israel, despite the presence of Yahweh in its midst, failed to enter His rest (3:18). That "rest" was the inheritance of Canaan, toward which they had set out from Egypt. But they had floundered in the desert and failed to attain the promised rest. In a similar manner, the Christian readers may fail to attain God's promised rest defined for them in 4:1–11. Only by heeding the urgent "today" of the Holy Spirit, only by heeding the voice of God through a faithful, persevering life, may they be assured of reaching God's goal for them. So 3:14 again sounds the "if" of v. 6—the warning of possible failure.

The final verses of the chapter focus exclusively on Israel of old (vv. 16–19). Here, we find a further aspect of their failure and a concise statement for its reason. The Israelites all came out of Egypt, led by Moses. They had started well, and they had a faithful leader (vv. 1–6). But they fell short of the goal; they lacked perseverance. Their fault is encapsulated in one word: "unbelief" (*apistia*; lit. "unfaith"). The point is repeated in 4:2 using "faith" (*pistis*) instead: the Israelites failed from a lack of faith, all other benefits notwithstanding.

The apostle's study of Israel's failure suggests that faith and its negative counterpart, unbelief, illustrate types of responses to God and His deeds. They suggest two particular mindsets out of which two modes of conduct emerge. Chapter 11 will elaborate the meaning of faith (*pistis*); unbelief (*apistia*) is clearly more than a matter of the mind. For the writer of Hebrews, "unbelief" sums up the hardened heart—the person who falls away from God and His goal for him or her. The element of inconsistency—of a lack of perseverance—is much broader than an absence of mental assent.

4:1–13. Invitation to Faithfulness. The apostle next turns from warning to invitation. Urging his readers to take heed of the wilderness generation's failure to enter Canaan, he holds before them the divine promise of rest. "Rest" is the key word throughout the passage. We find the noun eight times (vv. 1, 3, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11), in every case from the Greek word *katapausis*—the same word used in 3:6–19. In two places, the verb form occurs, also derived from *katapausis*. At 4:9, we find a different word translated "rest." Instead of *katapausis* it is *sabbatismos*. It is of particular interest to Seventh-day Adventists.

The logic of vv. 1–11 is difficult in places; however, we may discern its essential steps. (1) Only two generations are in view: that of Moses and that of Jesus, the latter being the people of God in the apostle's reading audience. (2) The apostle can therefore argue that a promise of entering God's rest remains (v. 1). He reasons this way on the basis of Psalm 95:7–11, arguing that the warning given in Scripture shows that the promise is still unrealized (Heb. 4:8–9). (3) He says it remains for some to enter it (v. 6). The word of God carries with it a divine inevitability: what is stated in Scripture must find fulfillment—if not at the first promised time, in some subsequent manifestation. (4) Israel's failure to enter rest was not due to any divine falling short. The rest was available from the beginning of the world (v. 3), as shown by God's own resting on the seventh day from all His works (v. 4). (5) Any failure, therefore, is the fault of humanity, not God. The wandering tribes in the desert fell short because, although the gospel was proclaimed to them, they lacked faith and fell into disobedience (vv. 2, 6, 11). (6) The Christians addressed in Hebrews should have learned from Israel's failure. They too had received the good news, but unlike Israel it was necessary that they respond to the divine call of the Spirit's "today" and by faith enter into the rest that God provides (vv. 3, 6, 9–11). (7) The concept of rest undergoes a transposition of meaning. In 3:7–19, it signified rest from enemies in the land of Canaan, but vv. 4–11 deny, on the basis of Psalm 45:7–11, that the rest has yet been realized. So the apostle holds out a particular spiritual experience toward which Christians must persevere.

Behind these logical steps, we see the word of God. If God has said it, it *will* come to pass. Because God has promised rest, some of His people *will* attain the goal. Spanning the centuries, it is as real and vital now as when it first called men and women to God's goal.

The question of the time element in the "rest" spoken of in 4:1–11 is curious. On one hand, the apostle in several statements speaks of it as something that may be attained now. Those who have believed are entering that rest (v. 3), and the one who has entered His rest has rested (or ceased) from works as God did from His (v. 10). The emphasis on "today" (vv. 6–8) reinforces the idea of an entering into rest in the present.

Other statements, however, point to the future. The exhortation of 4:9–11 grows out of Israel's desert wanderings and clearly has a future tilt; for the wandering tribes, "rest" was a promise (Canaan) that was never fulfilled. Further, the promise of entering "rest" still remains (v. 6); it is something yet to be attained or lost. The "rest" itself remains (v. 9), and Christians are to fear falling short of it (v. 1). They are to be diligent, making every effort to enter that rest (v. 11). All these statements point to an unrealized goal of rest. The "rest" of 4:1–11 thus contains both present and future elements. God's people may now enter His promised experience of rest, but rest in its fullness will be experienced only at the Second Coming of Jesus.

As we find throughout the NT, in Hebrews the work of Jesus includes both benefits already realized and those still to come. The grand opening of the book (1:1–4) portrays the person of Christ Himself as the climactic Speech of God, who has provided purification of sins, and is sitting at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven waiting for the full assumption of lordship over the universe. The argument for the better sacrificial system in 9:1—10:18 will stress what the blood of Christ has already accomplished, but the writer strongly points to the Second Coming as the ultimate hope (10:35–39). Thus, the "rest" of 4:1–11 is the bliss of salvation into which we enter by faith in Him. It is a joy that is already a reality for Christians, but one that will attain an even deeper dimension in our eternal home with God.

The "works" mentioned in v. 10 do not refer to any system of works-righteousness as opposed to righteousness by faith. Nor are the works from which we cease to be equated with God's creative deeds. Rather, the point of the analogy is in the idea of cessation. The total line of argument that commences at 3:7 shows that humans cease their labors as they enter God's rest: rest that comes by faith. That is, works (labors) are the antithesis of the way of faith; they are the result of a rebellious, wicked heart of unbelief that has been hardened through sin's deceptiveness (3:16), a heart of disobedience (3:18; 4:6, 11) and unfaithfulness.

In the final two verses of the exhortation, the apostle returns to the note of warning (4:12–13)—He describes the all-seeing eye of God: everything is uncovered and openly visible to the eyes of Him to whom we must give an account. Those eyes are able to pierce to our innermost secrets and intentions. The verb *trachēlizō* used in v. 13 (sometimes translated as "open" or "exposed") means "laid bare." It is a term from wrestling, portraying a person pinned to the floor—utterly immobile and powerless. Thus, the apostle reaches back to the admonition that began at 3:7, reminding his readers that God can detect the unbelieving, evil heart and the hardening through sin's deceptiveness (3:12–13). So, we notice a change in subject in 4:12–13. We begin with the word of God that comforts us and searches our motives, as in Psalm 95:7–11. But then the encounter becomes one with God Himself, to whom we must give account. It is God who speaks to us personally; we should indeed be careful and fear the possibility of falling short (4:1).

4:14—5:10

Christ, the Merciful High Priest

In this section, the apostle develops and expands the theme of Jesus as High Priest first mentioned in 2:17. Christ's faithfulness as High Priest was elaborated in 3:1–6; now the emphasis falls on the merciful aspects of His ministry. The section has two distinct parts: 4:14–16, where the apostle gives an overall statement about Jesus as our great High Priest and what He means to us, and 5:1–10, where he compares Jesus and

Aaron, who was a high priest under the Levitical system.

4:14–16. Our Great High Priest. Once again, we find in the Greek the construction *dio, oun, dia touto* ("therefore" or "so"; although sometimes not translated in English) followed by a collective admonition (see 2:1, 3:7; 4:1). Christianity is based on objective reality: we have a great High Priest. This reality transcends our subjective experiences and is independent of them. It is rooted and grounded in a Person external to us but preciously near to us. That is why, despite passing states of feeling or waves of hard times, we are to hold firmly to our confession of faith. We are to confess who He is and what He has done. This man—and only this man—has led us to God.

This is the third time that the apostle mentions Jesus as High Priest (4:14; cf. 2:17; 3:1). Apparently, the idea was already familiar to the Hebrews; he did not need to explain it. Throughout the book, he could assume his meaning was understood. His concern, instead, was to show the superiority of Christ's High Priesthood. Nowhere else in the NT is Jesus specifically called High Priest; however, we find various allusions to the idea (e.g., John 17:1–28; Rom. 8:34; 1 John 2:1; Rev. 1:13; 5:8–10).

Hebrews 4:15 elaborates on Jesus's ability to sympathize with our weaknesses. The basis of His sympathy lies not in His divine capacities as Son but in His humanity: He was tempted in every respect as we are. His own suffering in the tests of life on earth qualified Him to give help to those in the heat of the test (2:18). The apostle stresses the reality of the temptations of Jesus. The reality of the sympathy He feels and the help that He offers (4:16) are as genuine as the reality of His own tests during the phase of inferiority to angels. Christ was in all aspects tempted as we are. The basic issue in temptation is the same today as it was two thousand years ago: will we keep trusting God and seeking to follow His plan for us? It does not matter that Jesus was not exposed to all the areas of temptation that we face or that He encountered some that we will never experience. He was truly human and shared our human experiences—one with us in suffering and temptation.

In all Jesus's tests He emerged blameless: He was without sin (v. 15). There was no deviation from the divine will. This interpretation is preferable to the one that would link His being without sin to the phrase that immediately precedes it: His being tempted as we are, that is, sin excluded. Reading v. 15 as an attempt to safeguard the sinless nature of Jesus distorts the thrust of the passage and introduces an issue that is foreign to the apostle's thought (he underscores the sinlessness of Jesus in 7:26–27).

Because we have such a High Priest, we may approach God's throne of grace with confidence and boldness (4:16). The word here translated as "boldness" or "confidence" comes from the Greek *parrēsia*, denoting assurances or confidences. It occurs several times in Hebrews (3:6; 4:16; 10:19, 35). The term denoting the invitation to "approach" or "come" to God's throne is the Greek word *proserchomai*, which indicates that the doors of heaven's temple swing wide to welcome us. The help that our High Priest offers is primarily overcoming help. No doubt the author would not exclude the idea of forgiving help (the mention of "mercy" allows for it), but this is not his logical conclusion in the passage. Rather, his argument has set forth the portrait of a High Priest who, having victoriously undergone the fires of human test, now understands our struggles in the same sort of tests and stands ready to supply help.

Hebrews 4 and the Sabbath

1. *"Rest" Terminology.* In 4:4, the apostle refers to God's rest on the first Sabbath (Gen. 2:2) and picks up the idea in v. 9—a "rest" or "Sabbath rest" (*sabbatismos*) remains for the people of God. All through 3:7—4:11, apart from this verse, the author uses a single word for "rest": *katapausis*, which signifies rest or ceasing. At 4:5, we meet a word found nowhere else in the NT or the literature of the first century: *sabbatismos*. It connotes "Sabbath rest," "Sabbath-like rest," and "Sabbath-ish rest." The author very likely coined this word. He clearly meant it to be equivalent to *katapausis*, since he returns to that term in 4:10, but wishes to link the rest of what he says to the earlier reference to Genesis 2:2.

2. *Rest and the Sabbath.* His readers no doubt quickly saw the link. The rabbis taught that the Sabbath was more than a ceasing from labor; it was a foretaste of the age of the Messiah. Similarly, the rest Christians enter into now looks forward to full realization in the presence of God when Jesus returns. For the author of Hebrews, the Sabbath had a strong, positive connotation. Our rest in Christ, he argued, is like the Sabbath; it has the quality of the Sabbath. Obviously, both he and his audience were keeping the Sabbath. They had no thought about any other day; they were not debating the merits of Sabbath versus Sunday. Only in such a context could he call rest in Christ a *sabbatismos*.

5:1–10. Christ and Aaron. The comparison of Christ and Aaron proceeds in two parts. We first find a brief account of the characteristics of high priests in the OT (vv. 1–4), then a description of Jesus as High Priest (vv. 5–10).

Seven features of the Aaronic high priests are specified: (1) appointed by God to the office (vv. 1, 4); (2) coming from among the people, that is, having a representative function (v. 1); (3) acting on behalf of the people, playing a mediatorial role (v. 1); (4) serving a function in the system of worship, offering both gifts and sacrifices (v. 1); (5) offering sacrifices for sins (v. 1), that is, fulfilling an atoning function; (6) able to be gently compassionate toward sinners, since they are also subject to weakness (v. 2); and (7) needing to offer sacrifices for their own sins as well as for those of the people (v. 3).

The apostle here presents the divine plan for the priesthood. Unfortunately, far too many priests fell far short of it. They not only failed to be gentle and compassionate with the ignorant and wayward but, like Eli's sons, they flaunted their immoral conduct and were greedy for the spoils of their office (1 Sam. 2:12–17); or, like Pashhur, who opposed Jeremiah and put him in the stocks (Jer. 20:1–6), they opposed the work of God. The apostle does not embark on a point-by-point comparison of Jesus and Aaron. Instead, he selects just two of the features and applies them to Jesus: divine appointment to office and showing mercy.

The apostle underscored the divine appointment of Aaron (Heb. 5:4) and immediately applied it to Christ (v. 5). He found evidence for the latter in Psalm 110:4, which predicts the rise of a priest according to the order of Melchizedek (Heb. 5:6). The characteristic of a merciful high priest—first specified in v. 2—receives elaboration in a vivid passage about Christ's sufferings and temptations (vv. 7–10). This very strong language—entreaties and petitions, with vehement crying and tears (v. 7)—echoes the Gospel accounts of the struggles of Jesus in Gethsemane (Matt. 26:36–46; Mark 14:32–42; Luke 22:39–46). Our Lord looked full into the ugly visage of death and shrank from it. Even though He was a Son, He was not spared the grim reality of the test or given superhuman resources to avoid it. But He learned obedience (Heb. 5:8); He learned new levels of submission to the divine will and was thus perfected (v. 9). Through suffering, He qualified to become the cause and source of eternal salvation (v. 9). Just as the Aaronic high priest was to be able to be gentle and compassionate toward the ignorant and misguided, so the Son, by His own tests, experienced the realities of human experiences so He might be a sympathetic High Priest.

The logic of vv. 5–6 calls for closer consideration. We expect the apostle to immediately connect the announcement of the divine appointment to the priesthood in v. 5 with the citation of Psalm 110:4—a description of the eternal priest according to the order of Melchizedek. Instead, he first quotes Psalm 2:7 with its description of the King as the Son of God. The declaration of Sonship is attached to the divine appointment as the primary plank in the reasoning. The second statement, from Psalm 110:4, although important, is secondary, as shown by its introduction as something he says in "another place" (Heb. 5:6). Thus, it is because Christ is Son that He may be designated as High Priest after becoming human and being made perfect through sufferings (2:10).

The priesthood of Jesus emerges in new light. While Aaron shares features in common with Christ—in particular divine appointment and humanity—there is an immense difference between them. Aaron and all subsequent high priests were but faint representations or illustrations of the greater High Priest who would, at length, appear. Christ alone is the true High Priest, for only He combines, in His person, Sonship and humanity. Because Christ is Son, He has access to the very presence of God. Because He became human, He connects irrevocably to us. He is sympathetic, merciful, and helpful in our struggles. The final word of chapter 7 ("forever") sums up the point. The law appointed high priests who had weaknesses, but the promise coming after the law appointed the Son, who is perfected forever (7:28).

Looking back over 5:1–10, we see that the apostle is not only comparing Christ and Aaron, he is contrasting them. Of the seven features of the Aaronic high priest that he lists, the first two—divine appointment and mercy—find parallels with Christ. Two other features show considerable difference: Christ is not just another man; He is the Son, who became a man. And, unlike the Aaronic high priest, He has no need to offer sacrifices for His own sins, being sinless. The remaining three features—representative, worship system, and atoning functions—form the backdrop for the discussion of Christ as our great High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary (8:1—10:18).

5:11—6:8

Rebuke and Encouragement

In this exhortation, the apostle addresses the lack of spiritual maturity in his audience (5:11–14), explains the need to move on to spiritual perfection (6:1–3), and gives his audience a serious warning (6:4–8). He was concerned with the spiritual well-being of believers.

5:11–14. Spiritual Immaturity. The author abruptly breaks off the discussion of Jesus as High Priest. He had difficult material in hand—apparently the Melchizedekian priesthood, since this was the point where he terminated the argument and where he resumes the discussion in 6:20—and it is difficult to explain it clearly to his readers because they have become indolently inattentive (5:11). They were not ready for it; they had not grown spiritually. By this time, they ought to have been teachers, but instead they needed someone to again teach them the elementary principles of the word of God. They needed milk and not solid food (v. 12). They were still babies when they should have been of mature age—experienced in the ability to distinguish between good and evil (v. 14).

The term in v. 11 describing his indolently inattentive readers (*nōthros*) means "blunt," "dull," "sluggish," "remiss," or "slack." We see a development beyond the previous homiletic applications. Whereas 2:1–4 and 3:1–7 highlight the danger of these early Christians drifting away from the faith or of their hearts becoming hardened by the deceitfulness of sin, here the apostle is concerned with what has already happened to them.

6:1–3. Going on to Perfection. Having just castigated his readers for being immature and needing milk rather than solid food, the apostle announces his intention to give them solid food. And indeed he does by providing the reasoning for the priesthood of Christ after the order of Melchizedek (6:19—7:25). The apostle was not, as some commentators have suggested, dividing his audience at this point—offering the solid food to those who were ready to receive it. He apparently held that, given the spiritual state of the Hebrews—failing to grow and in danger of neglecting the great salvation they had been given and turning back to the world—only intellectual stimulation would meet their needs. They could be rejuvenated only by a deep consideration of the person of Jesus and what He had done for them.

6:4–8. A Severe Warning. This passage has disturbed Christians from the earliest centuries of the faith. Its apparent denial of repentance for sins committed after baptism led to the practice of putting off baptism until one's deathbed. It led to subsequent modification, as in the second century writing *The Shepherd of Hermas*, where one—but only one—post-baptismal lapse was permitted. Another second-century writer, Tertullian, applied his warnings only to sexual offenses. Commentators have tried to explain the passage in various ways. Some have suggested that "impossible" (v. 4) really means "difficult"—an unsatisfactory bending of the meaning of the word.

The passage can best be understood by observing it in relation to its parallels elsewhere in the book. The apostle repeats its ideas in a different form in 10:26–31 and 12:15–17. Both of these passages contain the same severe strictures against overt rejection of Christ. To grasp the meaning of 6:4–6, we should consider all three passages together. In all three, we discern privilege, offense, result, prospect of judgment, and reasons for the divine rejection.

Privileges

- 6:4–6: Enlightened, tasted the heavenly gift, sharers in the gift of the Holy Spirit, tasted the word of God, powers of the age to come
- 10:26–31: Knowledge of the truth, blood of the covenant, the Spirit of grace
- 12:15–17: The birthright/inheritance rights

Offense

- 6:4–6: Fall away
- 10:26–31: Sin willfully, trample Son of God underfoot
- 12:15–17: Profane, godless, selling of the birthright/inheritance rights

Result

- 6:4–6: Impossible to restore the repentance
- 10:26–31: No longer a sacrifice for sins
- 12:15–17: No place for repentance and regaining the blessing

Prospect of divine judgment

- 6:4–8: Rejected, cursed, burned
- 10:26–31: Fearful expectation of judgment, worse punishment than for the violator of Moses's law, falling into the hands of the living God
- 12:15–17: Falling from God's grace, being rejected

Reasons for divine rejection

- 6:4–6: Since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God and put Him to an open shame and public disgrace
- 10:26–31: Someone has trampled the Son of God underfoot, treated the blood of the covenant as something common and unholy, and insulted the Spirit of grace
- 12:15–17: Profane, godless

The emphasis shifts with each passage. Whereas 6:4–6 underscores spiritual privilege, 10:26–31 accents judgment, while 12:15–17 focuses on the impossibility of rehabilitation. The author is not attempting to produce a theology of repentance or a treatise on the unpardonable sin. Each passage occurs in a homiletic context, not a theological exposition. And in 6:9, the apostle immediately excludes his readers from the strong words he has just pronounced, being confident of better things in their case. In these three passages, he was holding out a practical possibility, warning them of what might happen if they took the values of the Christian religion lightly.

In each passage, the nature of the offense is especially significant. It points to an open, defiant rejection of Christ—to wanton, public disregard for His sacrifice. It is not a matter of a lapse or fall; it is the repudiation of Christ by a man or woman who once had known the joy of forgiveness and the newness of life in the Spirit. Such people take the place of the crucifiers of Jesus, making light of the cross, that in which they once found hope. They profane the holy, despising the salvation they had known. If Christ is rejected, there is no other way of salvation!

The book of Hebrews, which contains words of the most confident assurance in the NT, also includes the most severe statements. Both flow from a single idea. Because Christ is so precious, we may have absolute confidence in Him; but to reject Him is heinous. Spurning His blood that puts away our sin renders our case hopeless. What is needed is a life of faithful continuance in the Christian way. If these privileges are abused, we are like earth that produces thorns and briers (v. 8). Then, like it, we deserve divine judgment (burning; v. 8). This illustration ties together the strong rebuke of 5:11–14 with the severe warning of 6:4–6.

6:9–20

An Encouraging Word

Throughout the remainder of this third exhortation, the emphasis is upbeat—the apostle first praises the readers' good works (vv. 9–12), then encourages them with the certainty of God's promises (vv. 13–20).

6:9–12. Perseverance. We do not know if some Christians had already rejected Christ in the manner of 6:4–6. Perhaps that was still only a theoretical possibility; certainly, those for whom he prepared the document were far short of that denial. They were involved in better things (v. 9), and God took note of their labor for Him and for fellow Christians as it had been manifested in the past and was still displayed. The apostle's concern, however, was that they persevere in this way to the end.

Verses 11–12 encapsulate the purpose of Hebrews: that the hearers were to display earnest diligence until the very end to enable their complete assurance of the realization of their hope. The writer thus encouraged them, as in 5:11, not to be *nōthros* ("indolently inattentive") but rather to imitate inheritors of the promises through faith and patience. The practical goal in the writing of Hebrews is summed up in the concepts we find here: diligence, assurance, hope, the dangers of inattentiveness, faith, patience, and promise.

6:13–18. Abraham. The author next sought to set out the absolute certainty of God's promise. He cited Abraham as an example that illustrates both the nature of the divine promise and the appropriate human response to it. When God made a promise to Abraham (v. 13) of both descendants and land (Gen. 22:16–17), He made the promise doubly sure. First, it was His promise, and God's word is sure. Second, He guaranteed it by confirming it with an oath

(Heb. 6:17), just as humans interject oaths for confirmation (v. 16). We Christians are also heirs of the promise (v. 17), and likewise we are greatly encouraged because of this hope before us (v. 18). We too have both divine promise and divine oath—the two immutable things about which it is impossible for God to lie (v. 18). In our case, the oath is the prediction found in Psalm 110:4—that the Messiah would be an everlasting priest in the order of Melchizedek. The apostle referred to this oath specifically later, again coupling it with hope (7:19–22). On his part, Abraham patiently endured and eventually received the promise (6:15). So also must the Christians to whom the apostle wrote persevere in the faith.

6:19–20. Christian Hope. The long exhortation that began at 5:11 with a sharp rebuke closes with a ringing affirmation of the nature of the Christian's hope. Our hope is not a blind optimism, a buoyancy of spirit, or a conviction that, at last, everything will get better. Nor is it vulnerable to the vagaries of changing emotions. Christian hope is based on realities outside the believer. It rests on the fact that Jesus is our great High Priest (v. 20) who has entered into God's presence—which was, in the ancient sanctuary, manifested behind the curtain (v. 19). Unlike Aaron and the high priests of the old order, He continues forever following the order of Melchizedek (v. 20). That He has gone before us as the forerunner guarantees that, at length, we too will attain to the actual (realized) presence of God. Those facts make Christian hope an anchor of the soul (v. 19).

So far, the discussion of Jesus as High Priest has centered on the special features relating to His Person: His Sonship and His human experiences. But the prophecy of Psalm 110:4 goes further. With the designation of Christ as priest according to the order of Melchizedek, it points as well to a superior line of priesthood. Chapter 7 will take up this new dimension.

Behind the Veil

The phrase "behind the curtain/veil" (in some translations "within the veil") in Hebrews 6:19 is of particular interest to Seventh-day Adventists. In the past, it has been a point of theological controversy. Interpreters like Albion Foss Ballenger, a former minister, argued that the term in the Septuagint always refers to the Most Holy Place in the Israelite sanctuary. Therefore, he contended, the Book of Hebrews places Christ in the Most Holy Place in heaven, thereby contradicting Adventists' theology of Christ going into the Most Holy Place in 1844. But Ballenger failed to recognize that there were actually two occasions when the Most Holy Place was entered. One of those occasions was on the Day of Atonement; the other was when Moses placed the ark of the covenant in the Most Holy Place and dedicated it with oil before anointing Aaron as high priest (Ex. 40:1–9; Lev. 8:10–12; Num. 7:1). Which of these two events did the author of Hebrews have in mind?

While nothing in the immediate context refers to the Day of Atonement, there is evidence of the thought of an inauguration event. We are told in Hebrews 5:5–6 that Christ did not seek to glorify Himself in becoming High Priest, but God the Father said that He would be "a priest forever" following the order of Melchizedek. This is inauguration language. The inauguration of the earthly sanctuary and the appointment of Aaron as high priest are analogous to God's appointment of Christ as High Priest. As Christ assumed His role as our High Priest, he passed through the veil consecrating the heavenly sanctuary with His own blood and provided access to God. While the inauguration of the heavenly sanctuary is not described specifically in Hebrews 6:19–20, it is elaborated on in Hebrews 9:11–14, 23–24, and in 10:19–20.

Working through 8:1—10:25, we see that the entire argument ushers in two great ideas that show the magnificence of Jesus's offering of Himself: finality of sacrifice—because He died once for all—and access to the entire heavenly sanctuary, not just the Most Holy Place, because He has broken all barriers separating us from God. It is in this larger context that "behind the veil/curtain" is to be understood and not as a reference to Christ entering a specific apartment of the heavenly temple, particularly when one realizes that the meaning of the phrase is quite ambiguous or at least debatable.

7:1–28
The Better Priesthood

After the long exhortation, the apostle picks up the discussion where he left off at 5:10: Jesus was proclaimed by God as a High Priest in the order of Melchizedek. As in 4:14—5:10, where he expounded the role of Jesus as High Priest, he now elaborates His better priesthood—one after the order of Melchizedek.

7:1–3. Melchizedek. Apart from the book of Hebrews, Melchizedek is mentioned only twice in the Bible: first, in Genesis 14:17–20, which records his encounter with Abraham, and second, in Psalm 110:4, which announces the rise of a priest after the order of Melchizedek. In Hebrews 7, it is the second passage that becomes the center of interest. The apostle played on the various facets of the text as he demonstrated that Christ, although not qualified by birth to be a priest of the Levitical line, nevertheless is priest—one of a different, and superior, order (vv. 11, 15–17, 20, 21, 24, 28).

Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God (7:1), fascinated the rabbis. Considerable speculation endeavored to account for this seemingly mysterious character who, although not one of the chosen people, nevertheless was a genuine priest. He suddenly appears in the story of Abraham, without father, mother, genealogy, beginning of days, or end of life (v. 3). In these verses, which have puzzled many Christians, the apostle was simply following a recognized hermeneutic of his time, one in which he reasons out of the silence of the biblical record as well as its data.

There is nothing in Genesis to suggest that Melchizedek was anything other than another human being. But we do not find there any record of his parentage, birth, or death. He comes abruptly into the scene—combining in his own person the office of king and priest—and then disappears forever. The author of Hebrews builds on this omission of data to emphasize the perpetuity of the Melchizedek priesthood. In summarizing the story of Abraham and Melchizedek, the apostle was also selective. He did not mention the bread and wine that the priest-king gave to Abraham, which echoes the elements of the Lord's Supper. Likewise, he did not develop the royal aspect of Melchizedek; his interest ran a different course. He was content merely to show that Melchizedek was both king and

Psalm 110:4 in Hebrews

Psalm 110:4 permeates the book of Hebrews. The author continually quotes it in full or in part, or alludes to it as the theological source for the High-Priestly ministry of Jesus.

- In Hebrews 5:6, the words of appointment are quoted in full to show that Christ is divinely designated as High Priest, as Aaron was. Hebrews 5:10 summarizes 5:6.
- In 6:20, only the final part is quoted about becoming the High Priest forever following the "order of Melchizedek." By this, the author picks up the thread dropped at 5:10 and also introduces the entire discussion of chapter 7.
- In 7:11, he alludes to Psalm 110:4—reasoning for the necessity of a new order of priesthood.
- In 7:15, 17, the words of institution are again quoted in full. Here, he contrasts the new order with the old one—which required physical descendancy from Levi.
- In 7:20–21, the stress falls on the first part of Psalm 110:4 with its divine oath: "The LORD has sworn" and will not relent or change His mind.
- In 7:24, there is an allusion emphasizing the continuing High Priesthood of Christ in an unchangeable, permanent priesthood.
- In 7:28, there is a final allusion to Psalm 110:4, in which the motifs of High Priest, oath, divine appointment, and eternal office come together.

We may set out the changing emphases in the allusions to Psalm 110:4 by underscoring the key words for each of the above instances: Christ is *priest* forever (5:6), the order of *Melchizedek* (6:20), the *order* of Melchizedek (7:11), the *order of Melchizedek* (7:15–17), the Lord *has sworn* (7:20–21), *forever* (7:24), *forever* (7:28).

priest, as is the Son, while for both the spotlight falls on the sacerdotal office.

Melchizedek is not the center of attention in Hebrews 7. He enters into the discussion only in the first ten verses; subsequent references are to the *order* of Melchizedek, not to him personally. Even in the opening ten verses he is not the real focus of argument—Jesus is. The three verses that provide the mysterious cameo portrait issue in the conclusion of Melchizedek as made like and resembling the Son of God (v. 3). The epistle presents Melchizedek as like Jesus, not vice versa.

7:4–10. Melchizedek and Levi. The seven verses of this section make a theological point, namely, that Christ's priesthood is superior to that of Aaron and his descendants. Two acts establish the superiority of Melchizedek over Abraham: the patriarch gave him a tenth of his spoils (v. 6), and Melchizedek blessed Abraham (v. 6). The greater blesses the lesser (v. 7). But the author's interest runs beyond Abraham. Although most of the section deals with the patriarch and Melchizedek, vv. 9–10 reveal his real emphasis of Melchizedek as greater not only than Abraham but also than Levi.

The author reaches this conclusion by reasoning that Levi, who received tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, as it were—indicated by the phrase *hōs epos eipein* ("so to speak," "in a sense," "one might even say"; v. 9). The logic sounds strange to our Western ears—nurtured for so long on the philosophy of the individual: the one person, alone, before God and humanity. The Bible provides a necessary corrective. It tells us that we are more than individuals—that we have, as the people of God, a corporate identity. We are part of one another. When anyone suffers, hurts, or dies, we too are diminished. When Jesus confronted Saul of Tarsus on the Damascus road, Saul had been harassing the followers of Jesus, not Jesus Himself; but Jesus and His followers are so bound together that to persecute Christians is to persecute their Lord (Acts 9:4–5). We find the clearest expressions of corporate identity in the key terms "in Adam" and "in Christ" (1 Cor. 15:22; cf. Rom. 5:12, 19). We are all in Adam: we are one people, one race—sinners with one doom. But Christ has made a new race of people who have eternal life in Him (see Rom. 5:19; 6:5; 1 Cor. 15:22). In any case, the apostle is not saying that Levi literally paid tithe through Abraham. His phrasing indicates his figurative speaking.

Verse 8 introduces another point of contrast between Melchizedek and Levi. Melchizedek is declared to be one who lives, that is, the record does not mention his death. So in that sense, he remains a priest (v. 3). The apostle will draw out the implications of this idea when later (7:23–25, 28) he lays out the superiority of Jesus's priestly order.

7:11–13. A Change in the Priesthood. The "if" of v. 11 introduces a contrary-to-fact condition, that is, the very prediction of a new priesthood shows that the Levitical one was imperfect. The apostle considers it impossible that God would have two concurrent orders of priesthood (seen again in 8:4). Further, his view of Scripture supports the inevitability of the fulfillment of Psalm 110:4 in a new priesthood. His treatment of the priesthood here is similar to his discussion of "rest" in 4:1–11.

The specific point he wishes to develop in this passage emerges in 7:12–16, namely, the possibility of Christ becoming a priest. Perhaps he sensed some reluctance on the part of his hearers to grant the point. If, as seems likely, they came out of a Jewish background, their attachment to the old priesthood would be considerable. That Jesus belonged to another tribe—from which no one had ever served at the altar (v. 13)—would have been a major hindrance to their acceptance of the author's arguments for Jesus's priestly role.

The answer to this implied difficulty was in a total change of the priesthood. When the priesthood changed, the law also had to be changed (v. 12). Because the old priesthood, in which genealogy is crucial, was to be superseded by a new one, Christ could now become a high priest. This is what the author meant by his reference to a change of the law (v. 12). Here, "law" refers to the regulations concerning the old order (that is, one had to be born of the tribe of Levi), not to the moral law of the Ten Commandments or to tithing.

The apostle denied that perfection was possible under the old order (v. 11). He referred to the previous regulation/commandment (concerning the old covenant system of worship and sacrifices) as being weak and unprofitable, then stated flat-footedly that the law (the old law of the priesthood) "made nothing perfect" (vv. 18–19). Already in 2:10 and 5:9, the apostle used the language of perfection with reference to the Son, who was perfected by a series of human experiences, that is, He became qualified to be our great High Priest. In Hebrews 7, we find the same terminology in a different

context; now it is used with a negative slant to describe the inadequacies of the old system. The author would develop this idea at length later while taking up the discussion of Christ's sacrifice (9:1—10:18).

7:14–17. A Better Priesthood. The apostle built his argument about the priesthood of Christ on two interlocking facts—one of which is evidently clear (v. 14), and the other even clearer (v. 15). Both of these statements reach back to his assertion in the preceding section: that a change in the priesthood necessitates a change of the law (v. 19). He brings forward two facts to establish this assertion. The first is the fact that Christ "our Lord" came (lineage-wise) from the tribe of Judah, of which Moses had indicated nothing about a priesthood (v. 14). The second is the prediction in Psalm 110:4 of a priest who would arise not because of genealogy but on the basis of the power of an endless, indestructible life (Heb. 7:16–17).

7:18–19. The Superiority of the New Order. These verses sum up the arguments advanced thus far in the chapter and point ahead to what will be elaborated in chapters 9–10. The previous commandment (of the old system) was weak and unprofitable (v. 18); it made nothing perfect (v. 19). These words echo 6:19–20 and highlight the theme of access to the presence of God—an idea that will be underscored in the following chapters. To this point in Hebrews 7, then, we see three ways in which the new order surpasses the old: (1) Melchizedek was greater than Levi, so the Melchizedekian order is better than the Levitical (vv. 4–10); (2) the Melchizedekian order centers in the power of an endless, indestructible life (v. 16); and (3) the Levitical order, based on mortal human beings (v. 7) could not bring perfection (vv. 11, 19), but the new order, which is better, presumably can—and Hebrews 8–10 will show that it does.

7:20–22. Priest by Divine Oath. In vv. 20–28, the apostle gives more reasons why the priesthood of Jesus surpasses the Levitical priesthood. The first of these comes in vv. 20–21: Jesus was designated Priest by God's oath. The former priests were made so without an oath, but Christ became a priest based on God's oath, as the author shows by again quoting Psalm 110:4—"the Lord has sworn" that the Messiah is "a priest forever." The oath removes any uncertainty as to the facticity of His priestly office—and goes beyond. It suggests a divine involvement in the new order that the old one could not claim. Hebrews 7:22 introduces another key motif of Hebrews: covenant. As elsewhere in the book, the author here merely gives the reader a hint of what is to follow. He takes up the motif again later, explaining it at length (8:6–13; 9:15–22; 10:16–18).

7:23–25. A Continuing Priest. The apostle now contrasts the impermanence of the Levitical priests with the continuing ministry of Christ. There were many priests (v. 23)—their length of service restricted by their mortality. Christ, however, remains forever and thus has an unchangeable, permanent priesthood (v. 24). Because Jesus lives forever, He has a permanent priesthood. His service is continuous—unbroken by succession, secure against death. We now have one Priest. Commentators have expressed different viewpoints over the meaning of the Greek phrase *sōzein eis to panteles* (v. 25). Some have seen its meaning as signifying "to the full extent" and thus render it as "save to the uttermost" or "completely save." Others, however, have understood it to mean "for all time," and have rendered it "save forever" (or with a different nuance, "always able to save") rather than viewing it as meaning "to the full extent." Although the latter understanding enshrines a truth of Christianity—Christ's ability to lift up men or women no matter how hopeless their condition—the apostle's emphasis in this passage is primarily on the ongoing ministry of Jesus in heaven above. He is the same for us as He was for Paul, Peter, and John. His ministry goes on—never ceasing—in the heavenly courts. Therefore, the translation "for all time" is also valid, and possibly preferable.

In His High Priestly ministry, Christ makes intercession for His people. This work is suggested elsewhere in Scripture (e.g., John 17; Rom. 8:34; 1 John 2:1–2). His intercession does not imply any reluctance on the part of the Father to accept sinners; there is no divine question or tension concerning our standing with God. The Bible teaches that God through Christ was reconciling the world to Himself, not ascribing people's own sins to themselves (2 Cor. 5:19). God loved us before Jesus came and died, not because He came and died (John 3:16). Christ's heavenly work of intercession therefore involves a ministry that, based on His atoning sacrifice, is imbued with compassion and sympathy because of His own experiences when He lived and suffered on earth. His work of mediation indicates that all of heaven's blessings reach us through Him.

7:26–28. A Sinless High Priest. Our great High Priest provides the solution to the sin problem; He is not part of it. Under the old order, the high priests needed to offer sacrifices first for themselves, then for the people's sins (v. 27). They were part of the problem they were trying to deal with. But not Jesus! No such need of sacrifice for Him. He is the High Priest from outside the system—set apart from sinners because He is holy, innocent, pure, and undefiled—serving in a superior place higher than the heavens (v. 26). Such a High Priest was appropriate for our need (v. 26). Although, like us, He experienced suffering, temptation, and submission to the divine will, He was radically different from us in that He needed no sacrifice or forgiveness.

Verse 27 introduces a new motif: "once for all." It will become a key idea in 9:1—10:18, encapsulating the apostle's affirmations about the all-sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice. Finally, the new priesthood has the perfected Son as its High Priest (v. 28). This is the final and climactic point of the apostle's presentation of Christ's better priesthood. Even in its purest manifestation, the Levitical order could never approach this mark. The Son—who has been perfected forever—pulls together the exposition of 1:5—2:18 and 4:14—5:10, and the author's references in v. 28 to the weakness of human beings and the surety of God's oath summarize the argument he has just concluded. It is a powerful finale.

8:1—10:18

JESUS, THE ONCE-FOR-ALL SACRIFICE

We have now arrived at the summit of the theological development of Hebrews. The discussion moves from the person of Christ to His work. In a sustained passage of close reasoning and deep power, the apostle will unpack the meaning of the phrase we encountered at the beginning of the book regarding Christ purifying us from our sins (1:3).

The long passage 8:1—10:18 progresses through five stages. At first, the writer speaks of the better ministry of Christ in a summarizing way (8:1–6a). Then, Jeremiah's prophecy of the new covenant (as cited in 8:8–13) lays the groundwork for a description of the old sacrificial system that highlights its inadequacies (9:1–10). This is followed by an explanation of the ministry of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary with its "better" blood (9:11–22). The superiority of the new sacrifice, which deals decisively with the sin problem, closes out the argument (9:23—10:18).

8:1–6a

The Better Ministry

The first stage in this long passage (8:1—10:18) makes a case for the better ministry of Christ. To do this, the earthly sanctuary is compared with the true heavenly sanctuary and the service of the earthly priests is compared with that of Jesus.

8:1–2. The Place of Ministry. In v. 1, the author indicates that we have reached the main point of his presentation. It is that we have a High Priest who sat down "at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty" in heaven. This central affirmation is echoed throughout the book (2:18; 4:14; 7:25; 10:19; 13:10). In several places, the apostle sets out the superiority of the heavenly sanctuary. He calls it the "true tabernacle" (*tēs skēnēs tēs alēthinēs*; "tent"; 8:2), of which the earthly sanctuary was but a "copy and shadow" (8:5). In 9:11, the heavenly is "the greater and more perfect tabernacle," which was not made by humans, that is, not of this creation. At 9:23–24, the author reverts to the language of "copies" and goes on to call the heavenly sanctuary "heaven itself."

In 8:2, the Greek term translated "sanctuary" is *tōn hagiōn*. This term—in its singular form as here, or as the plural *ta hagia* or *hagia*—occurs a total of ten times in the NT, all of them in Hebrews. Different Bible translations render the expression in different ways, which can be confusing to the student of Hebrews. We will give careful attention to this term as we follow the apostle's argumentation in the chapters just ahead. Here at 8:2, the translations "sanctuary" or perhaps (lit.) "holy places" seem to be correct, as shown by the context (see "*Ta Hagia* in Hebrews," p. 1841).

8:3–6a. The Earthly Sanctuary and the Heavenly Sanctuary. A shift in discussion from the person of Christ to His sacrifice is suggested by the reference to the appointed priests offering gifts and sacrifices (v. 3). Just as the earthly high priests had to offer sacrifices of animals, so it was necessary that Christ as High Priest have something to offer (v. 3). The writer perhaps gives us a clue to the date of his writing in stating that there are priests who offer the gifts required by the law (v. 4). This could indicate that the Jerusalem temple system was

still operative—placing the book's writing before A.D. 70, when the temple was destroyed by the Romans.

The earthly sanctuary was a copy and shadow of the heavenly sanctuary (v. 5). Moses was given a pattern of the work he was to do and told to adhere to it strictly (v. 5; Ex. 25:40). That pattern was a blueprint for construction—it was not the heavenly reality. No human structure could duplicate the dwelling place of God; at best, it could only point to the perfect temple in heaven. Thus, in referring to the earthly sanctuary, the apostle compares and contrasts the earthly and the heavenly. While there are similarities, the heavenly is clearly superior. Thus, Christ our High Priest in heaven above has obtained a ministry that exceeds the old one (v. 6).

In the apostle's description of the heavenly sanctuary, his vocabulary shows close affinities with that of Philo, a Jewish writer influenced by Greek thought who lived in Alexandria, Egypt, from about 20 B.C. to A.D. 50. Philo, like Plato before him, set out a two-level cosmology, with things on earth as shadows or copies of heavenly archetypes. For him, the language of the heavenly sanctuary was a vehicle for allegorization; the heavenly sanctuary was the universe. Thus, some interpreters of Hebrews have understood the treatment of Christ's work in the heavenly sanctuary as setting out great truths, but not pointing to a specific ministry in an actual heavenly temple.

Careful consideration of the argument of 8:1—10:18, however, leads to a different understanding. While Hebrews does show similarities to Philo's ideas—a two-level cosmology where things on earth are a copy of eternal, heavenly archetypes—in Hebrews, time plays a crucial role. The heavenly realities do not stand against the earthly copies or shadows in eternal contradistinction—they are crossed by time. Events in time—events on earth—impact events in heaven in a manner that Philo, or Plato before him, would not have accepted. Christ is not eternally High Priest in a heavenly temple; He became High Priest after undergoing human suffering and death. Nor does He always have a heavenly sacrifice to offer; it is Calvary that marks His moment of sacrifice (see 9:1—10:18). In Hebrews, the vertical, special schema of Philo is crossed by a linear, temporal one: the law was a shadow of the coming things, not the actual true form or image of the heavenly things (10:1).

Ta Hagia in Hebrews

1. *Diversity of Translations: Ta hagia*, with its variants, occurs a total of ten times in the NT, all of them in Hebrews. It is neuter plural and means literally "the holy things" or "the holy places." Translations of this expression vary greatly, the differences being most pronounced in four places: In 9:8, some translate it as "Holiest of All," others as "Most Holy Place," some as "sanctuary," and others as "holy places." In 9:12, some have "Most Holy Place," others have "Holy Place," and others have "holy places." In 9:25, some have "Most Holy Place" others have "Holy Place," and others "holy places." In 10:19, some have "the Holiest," others have "Most Holy Place," others have "sanctuary," and others "holy places."

2. *Usage in the Greek Version of the Old Testament:* The Septuagint helps a little in solving the problem of how to understand *ta hagia*. The plural with the article is used 109 times with reference to the sanctuary to designate specifically the whole sanctuary (106 times) or the Holy Place (three times). If this statistical information is correct, *ta hagia* is never used in the Greek version of the OT to refer to the Most Holy Place of the sanctuary alone. This is important, in that one could argue that the author of Hebrews used *ta hagia* along the lines of the Septuagint. But before jumping to this conclusion, we need to consider additional evidence.

3. *Usage in Extra-biblical Jewish Writings Written in Greek:* Since the Septuagint came into existence some two hundred or more years before the book of Hebrews was written, it is also important to consider the usage of *ta hagia* in Jewish literature that stands in closer proximity to the milieu of Hebrews—writings such as the OT Pseudepigrapha (200 B.C.–A.D. 200) and the works of Philo and Josephus, both of whom were contemporaries or near contemporaries of the author of Hebrews. As was the case with the Septuagint, the examination of these writings also reveals *ta hagia* was never used to refer to

the Most Holy Place alone. It always refers to the entire sanctuary. While this does not prove that the author of Hebrews used the term identically, it does suggest that the customary use of the word would have led any first-century author or reader to use or understand a reference to *ta hagia* as a reference to the sanctuary in general and not to the Most Holy Place alone. With this in mind, we turn to the use of *ta hagia* in Hebrews.

4. Usage in Hebrews: Where the apostle's reasoning in Hebrews clearly indicates he was referring to a particular apartment, we should feel free to designate *ta hagia* or its variants as "sanctuary," "Holy Place," or "Most Holy Place." Where the context leaves his meaning uncertain, however, we are wise to translate it according to its customary use as "sanctuary." In 8:2, the plural *ta hagia* contextually designates the sanctuary as a whole, while in 9:1 the singular *to hagion* is also used for the sanctuary. In 9:2, *hagia* (without the article) refers to the "Holy Place," while the special phrase *hagia hagiōn* (both nouns are plural without article) in 9:3 is a superlative meaning "Most Holy Place." In 9:8, *ta hagia* is a reference to the heavenly "sanctuary" in contrast to the earthly sanctuary. We suggest that *ta hagia* in 9:12 is also designating the heavenly "sanctuary" into which Christ entered after His ascension. The same applies to the use of the term in 9:24. In the case of 9:25 there is a possibility that *ta hagia* refers to "the Most Holy Place" because the context mentions the "high priest" and "every year" (see 10:1–4). But if we keep in mind that during the Day of Atonement the high priest entered the Most Holy Place by first ministering in the courtyard and the Holy Place, it would be better to translate *ta hagia* here also as "sanctuary." *Ta hagia* in 10:19 should also be translated as "sanctuary" based on 9:12 and 24 with their emphases on access to God through Christ. Finally, in 13:11, *ta hagia* could be translated "Most Holy Place," but this is also not required because the blood of the sin-offering was occasionally brought inside the sanctuary throughout the year and not only on the Day of Atonement. The translation "sanctuary" would be appropriate in this case.

It appears that the use of *ta hagia* in Hebrews is in harmony with its use in the Septuagint, the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, and in the writings of Philo and Josephus. As such, it should consistently be translated as "sanctuary," recognizing that there are some contextually debatable cases.

In recent years, biblical scholarship has swung away from the Philonic interpretation of Hebrews. More and more, it is recognized that apocalyptic Judaism rather than Hellenism is the thought world of the author and that he believed in an actual heavenly sanctuary. The Dead Sea Scrolls strongly support this understanding; they indicate that the sectaries behind these writings taught a real sanctuary in heaven with angels ministering in it.

8:6b–13

The Better Covenant

In the OT, no motif is more important than that of covenant (v. 6). Its basic meaning is "contract" or "agreement," but with features that set it apart from the contracts familiar to us in human relations. When Yahweh in loving condescension enters into a covenant, the parties involved are not equal. Yahweh is infinitely greater and dictates the terms. The human party can only accept or reject the agreement; when they do accept, the covenant embraces them with precious promises that are assured by the divine commitment. Even though there is really only one divine covenant, we find Yahweh making many covenants: with Noah after the Flood (Gen. 9:8–17), with Abraham (Gen. 15:13–21), with Israel at Sinai (Ex. 19:3–6), and so on. Then, later in the OT, we find the prediction of a "new covenant" (Jer. 31:31–34).

In the NT, the covenant motif continues to be important (see commentary on Matt. 26:26–30 and Gal. 4:21–31). In Hebrews, "covenant" takes a somewhat different turn. The apostle connects it with the priestly work, either that of the OT—the first covenant (9:1)—or the heavenly ministry of Christ—the new covenant (8:8, 13; 9:15–18; 10:16, 29; 12:24; 13:20). Note that the same word, the Greek *diathēkē*, can be translated as either "covenant" or "testament."

The quotation from Jeremiah 31:31–34 in Hebrews 8:5–12 is the longest citation in the NT. It contains several promises: the law of God put within the heart (v. 10), no need for teachers because God will teach each person directly, everyone knowing God personally (v. 11), and the forgiveness of sins (v. 12). Unlike the apostle's approach in chapter 3, where he applied the quotation from Psalm 95:7–11 point by point, or chapter 7, where the prediction of Psalm 110:4 was dissected in detail, in the long citation from Jeremiah he did not expound on the various ideas. Only one aspect engaged his interest. At the conclusion of his exposition on the sacrifice of Christ, he again cited Jeremiah 31, but only in part—finishing with the reference to God's promise that He will no longer remember their sins and lawlessness (Heb. 10:16–17). Then, he added that the forgiveness or remission of these sins results in a situation where there is no longer any need for an offering for sin (10:18). This is the chief point he wished to establish with the citation from Jeremiah: under the new covenant the age-old problem of sin is decisively dealt with.

The better promises of 8:6, then, are the divine promises that the believers' sins and lawlessness will no longer be remembered (v. 13). These promises stand in contrast to the faulty promises the people uttered at Mount Sinai when they declared that they would do anything that the Lord asked (Ex. 19:8). While their intentions were good, the people at Sinai failed to realize the inability of sinners to accomplish all that God requires (Deut. 5:28–29). In the same way, the priestly mediation of Aaron and his sons could not truly atone for sin. Because the sacrificial system of the first covenant could not accomplish this, it was inadequate. If it had been faultless, there would have been no need or occasion for a second covenant (Heb. 8:7). The very prediction of a new covenant exposed the flawed nature of the first covenant with its priestly system. Just as the prediction of the Melchizedekian priesthood indicated the demise of the old priestly system (7:11–19), so the prophecy of the new covenant rendered the first obsolete and soon to disappear (8:13).

9:1–10

Limitations of the Old System

Hebrews 9:1–10 falls into two distinct sections. The first five verses give a thumbnail description of the OT sanctuary (vv. 1–5), while the second five point out the inadequacies of the former services (vv. 6–10).

9:1–5. Description of the Earthly Sanctuary. In his sketch of the earthly sanctuary, the apostle bases his discussion on the sanctuary that Moses constructed according to the divine plan (8:5). Throughout the description he refers to the tabernacle (*skēnē*; "a tent"; 9:2, 3, 6–8), rather than to the temple that Solomon built and which, after the captivity of the Jews, was restored and enlarged by Herod the Great.

The account of the Mosaic sanctuary highlights the two main features of its tabernacle: *hagia* ("the Holy Place"; v. 2) and *hagia hagiōn* ("the Most Holy Place," "holy of holies," or "holiest of all"; v. 3). The author shows no interest in attaching spiritual meaning or application to the various items of furniture in each of the two apartments. He eliminates any such discussion by saying that he cannot discuss these things in detail at the present time (v. 5).

One item in this description initially appears not to conform to the OT account. The author places the golden altar of incense (or censer) in the Most Holy Place (v. 4) rather than in the Holy Place (Ex. 40:17–27). Instead of concluding that the author simply made a mistake, it is important to note that the golden altar was connected in function to the priestly ministry carried out in the Most Holy Place. It was on this altar that special incense was burned that symbolized the continual intercession that arose before the presence of God in the Most Holy Place (Ex. 30:7–10, 34–38). For this reason, when Moses was instructed to place the golden altar in the Holy Place of the Tabernacle, the location of the altar was not described in connection to the other furnishings within the Holy Place. Rather, the golden altar's location was in relation to the articles within the Most Holy Place (Ex. 30:6; 40:5), even though it was physically in the Holy Place. The connection between the golden altar and the Most Holy Place is also indicated in 1 Kings 6:22, where it says that the altar was (Heb.) *laddebir*, "the inner room," the Most Holy Place. The Hebrew preposition *le* used here can have a number of different nuances, including "belonging to," as some translations have rendered it in this passage. Thus, while the altar "belonged" to the Most Holy Place in terms of its function, it was placed in the Holy Place because the priests needed to be shielded from God's visible presence.

Hebrews appears to recognize this distinction between function and location. When describing the location of articles within the Holy Place in 9:2, the author says that the lampstand, the table, and its bread were *en* ("in") it. The terminology changes, however, in vv. 3–4, where it says that the Most Holy Place *echousa* (was "having" or "had") the altar, the ark, and their associated instruments. The Greek *en hē* in v. 2

clearly refers to location, while the change to *echousa* ("having") suggests the idea of function.

9:6–10. Limited Access. The apostle next comes to the point he wished to make in his description of the Mosaic sanctuary and its rituals. He lays bare the two inadequacies of the old sanctuary system: limited access and limited cleansing. The priests carried out their services in the Holy Place, the outer room, the first part of the tabernacle (v. 6). This was an ongoing ministry: they entered the first apartment *dia pantos* ("always," "continually," "regularly"; v. 6). But only the high priest once a year (v. 7) could enter the second inner room, the Most Holy Place (v. 7). Further, the continual ministry by priests and high priests—the very repetition of the services—pointed to their incompleteness. In themselves, they could not pronounce the final word against sin. The various gifts and sacrifices (v. 9) were merely external (lit. "of the body or flesh," "physical") ordinances that in God's purposes served for a limited time—until the time of reformation and the new order of things (v. 10).

As long as the first sanctuary (v. 8) had standing, the way into the heavenly "sanctuary" ("sanctuary" is the more accurate translation here; see "*Ta Hagia* in Hebrews," p. 1841) could not be opened. Just as the old priesthood gave way when the new appeared and the new covenant made the first obsolete, so the ministry of the heavenly sanctuary could come into play only as the old ceased to have standing.

As the discussion of Jesus's saving work develops in Hebrews 9:11—10:18, the two points of access and cleansing will feature prominently. The apostle will show that, in contrast to the situation in the old earthly sanctuary, Christ's ministry in the heavenly sanctuary—offering not the blood of animals but Himself—opens up access to the very presence of God to all—not just to the high priest once a year—and provides a complete answer to the problem of sin that negates the need for any further animal sacrifices.

Hebrews 9:6–10 introduces two new motifs that play important roles in the ensuing argument. The first is blood: the earthly high priest entered the Most Holy Place each year, not without blood (v. 7). The second is conscience (v. 9). The apostle's meaning of this apparently familiar term will become clear in the unfolding argument. Thus, the contrast between the old system and the new will come to expression in the terms of imperfection/perfection (v. 9), and conscience/physical regulations (vv. 9–10).

9:11–22

Defilement and Purification

This passage falls into two sections: the first (vv. 11–14) sets out the superiority of the blood of Christ over the sacrifices of animals; the second (vv. 15–22) shows the relation of blood to covenant. Each section contains statements that reveal the basic axioms on which the author's argument rests.

9:11–14. The Better Blood. Just as the apostle sets out the human dilemma in terms of defilement (see "Sanctuary Language in Hebrews," p. 1845), so he presents the cleansing agent par excellence: blood. But not just any blood, and certainly not animal blood, providing outward or ceremonial purification but unable to cleanse the conscience. No, he tells of better blood than all others: Christ's blood that opens the way into the heavenly sanctuary (this is the better translation of *ta hagia* in v. 12; see "*Ta Hagia* in Hebrews," p. 1841).

The description of Christ's entrance into the heavenly sanctuary in Hebrew 9:12 has often been understood to mean that He assumed a Most Holy Place ministry at His ascension. In addition to assuming that *ta hagia* is a reference to the Most Holy Place, those advocating this position have also interpreted the blood of goats (*tragōn*) and calves (*moschōn*) as a reference to the calves and goats sacrificed on the Day of Atonement. While the word for "calf" (*moschos*) does appear in the description of the Day of Atonement sacrifices in the Septuagint translation of Leviticus 16, the word for "goat" (*tragos*) does not; in fact, *tragos* is never used for the Day of Atonement sanctuary legislation in the Pentateuch. The term used instead in Leviticus 16 is *chimaros*. It is significant that the only place *tragos* occurs in relation to the OT ceremonial system in the Pentateuch is in Numbers 7, where it is connected to the inauguration rituals of the earthly sanctuary. Thus the event alluded to in Hebrews 9:12 is not the Day of Atonement but rather the rituals related to the inauguration of the sanctuary. The author makes this point explicit just a few verses later, when the blood of these same two animals is mentioned again in clear connection to the inauguration of the covenant (see "Behind the Veil," p. 1836).

As we have already seen, Hebrews 9:1–11 describes the transition from the (earthly) covenant and its sanctuary to the new covenant and its (heavenly) sanctuary. Building on that point, in v. 12 the author describes how Christ opened up the way into the heavenly sanctuary (cf. v. 8). This occurred at the ascension, when Christ began his High Priestly ministry by inaugurating the heavenly sanctuary, not with the blood of goats and calves—as was done when the earthly sanctuary was inaugurated—but with his own blood. Then, in vv. 13–14 and 10:4, the author expands the reference to demonstrate how Christ's sacrifice surpasses the whole system of sacrifices in the OT.

As we carefully examine the writer's logic in these chapters, we detect the axioms on which he has structured the argument. Three passages stand out: 9:13–14, 9:22, and 10:4. The following pattern emerges:

Basic Axiom—9:22. The necessity of blood for purification and removal of sins.

Sub-Axioms

- 9:9–13 and 10:4. Animal blood is able to provide an external level of purification, but it is impossible for it to provide decisive purification of sins.
- 9:14. The blood of Christ, however, brings such purgation of sins (cleanses the conscience).

Thus, 9:13–14 emerges as the pivotal passage in the closely reasoned argumentation of Hebrews. It shows that the author maintains a strict line of thought closely connected with

Sanctuary Language in Hebrews

Hebrews 9:11–22 plays on four important motifs: defilement, purification, blood, and covenant. The human problem is described here as defilement. Human beings are dirty—defiled. They cannot come before a Holy God because of the uncleanness that clings to them. They need to be washed—to be purified. This motif of Hebrews has been widely overlooked by commentators. Just as outward or ceremonial impurity barred the ancient Israelites from worshiping at the sanctuary, our impurity, which embraces the total being, keeps us from the heavenly reality.

Although we occasionally find terms other than purification to describe Christ's saving work, such as redemption (9:15), the primary description in Hebrews is that of cleansing or purgation. The apostle sets the pattern from the outset, in his opening statement of the book summarizing Christ's work (1:3). As he brings his theological development to a climax in 9:1—10:18, he again stresses the purification motif:

9:13	Animal blood brings ceremonial purification (outward cleansing or "purifying of the flesh") to those who are outwardly unclean.
9:14	Christ's blood, however, cleanses the "conscience"
9:22	Under the OT system, almost everything was purified with blood.
9:23	The earthly things, which were copies of the heavenly, were purified with animal sacrifices, but the heavenly things required something better.
10:1–2	If animal sacrifices could have purified or cleansed the worshipers, they would not have needed to be offered year after year.

In dealing with the language of defilement and purification in Hebrews, commentators have tended to unconsciously glide to more familiar terminology, such as guilt and justification. But, while defilement/purification points to the same reality as the other terminology, the models are not collapsible. We must allow the apostle to speak to us in the language that the Holy Spirit revealed to him.

The argumentation of Hebrews moves within the theological orbit of defilement and purification. In this respect, it is the counterpart of the other biblical book that centers on the ceremonial system: Leviticus. Just as Leviticus sets out detailed regulations concerning ceremonial defilement and the means of purification, with blood being the preeminent agent, so Hebrews provides its complement. Here we find, in the ministry of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary, the meaning of the old system as well as the reason for its being superseded.

the sacrificial system, with the idea of the better blood of Christ summing up his thesis. He does not suggest that the OT sacrifices were "primitive" or infantile; rather, he gives them a place but shows their ultimate inadequacy to deal with the problem of sin. It is not a matter of the old being bad and the new (Christ's blood) being good or of the old being material and the new, spiritual. Rather, we see the good and the better—both being bloody sacrifices within the orbit of defilement-purification.

The term "blood" (*haima*) is of great significance to the apostle. At times, he refers to "sacrifice" (9:26; 10:1–3, 5, 11, 12), and even "body" (10:5–10), but he returns to "blood" for his most emphatic affirmations (9:7, 12, 13–14, 18–21, 22–23; 10:4, 19, 28–29; 12:24). For him, "blood" carries its own argumentative force, and we should be wary of simply equating it with "death" or "sacrifice."

This term, "blood," seems reducible to no other. It signifies Christ's death—but more, His death applied to our problem of defilement. It points to Christ's life poured out for us—life that gives us life and brings cleansing and healing. Just as the language of defilement and purification strikes a deep response within our conscience, so the language of better blood speaks directly to our religious need in a manner that cannot be replaced by other terminology.

9:15–22. Blood and the Covenant. In vv. 15–20, the apostle picks up the covenant motif from chapter 8. This passage is one of the most difficult to interpret in the NT. Its difficulties arise from both the problems of comprehending its ideas and the possibility of translating the Greek (*diathēkē*) as either "covenant" or "testament" (will). Accordingly, three schemes of interpretation have been advanced: (1) *diathēkē* translated throughout as "will" or "testament," an option that has attracted little support since vv. 15 and 18–20 point irrevocably to covenant; (2) *diathēkē* translated throughout as "covenant," in which the principal objection arises in vv. 16–17 as it is argued that it simply is not true that the death of the covenanter must be established; and (3) *diathēkē* being used as a play on its double meaning, changing from "covenant" in v. 15 to "will" or "testament" in vv. 16–17 and reverting to "covenant" with v. 18. Most translations have chosen this option, usually giving the reader an indication of the dual possibilities involved in *diathēkē*.

This line of reasoning is flawed, however. It is too subtle and breaks the development of the covenant motif that began in chapter 8 and reaches its finale in 10:18. The apostle is talking about "covenant" throughout, not switching to "will" for two verses and immediately dropping back to "covenant." The linking of covenant and death is precisely his point. The death of Christ alone establishes the new covenant. Verse 15 made that assertion: Christ is the Mediator of the new covenant through His death.

Despite the obscurity surrounding the interpretation of vv. 16–17, the author's overall meaning in the passage is clear. He is arguing for the fulfillment of the promises of the new covenant, quoted in chapter 8 from Jeremiah 31:31–34. The new covenant is now in force, he asserts, because Christ's death has ratified it. Although Jeremiah 31:31–34 does not make mention of bloody sacrifices, the author ties the covenant to the sacrificial system. He calls the reader's remembrance to the story of Exodus 24:1–8, when the Sinai covenant was inaugurated by the sprinkling of blood (some manuscripts have "goats and calves," others just have "calves," as is reflected in the different translations; Heb. 9:19). In the same way, the blood of Christ brings about the new, wherein sins are decisively dealt with.

Although the covenant idea predominates the OT, the apostle here makes it subservient to the blood motif. The new covenant prediction of Jeremiah 31:31–34 is important because it promises purgation of sins; it is the blood of Christ, however, that brings that promise to reality. Thus, the prime axiom of Hebrews 9:22—that without the shedding of blood there is no remission or forgiveness of sin—stands over the lintel of the discussion, and the covenant is brought beneath it.

The expression "shedding of blood" (v. 22) comes from a single word in the Greek: *haimatekchysia*. This word occurs nowhere else in the NT, or in Greek literature of the period, so we are dependent on the context to indicate its meaning. As we trace the author's reasoning throughout 9:1—10:18, his emphasis does not fall on the slaying of animal sacrifices but rather on the application of their blood. Thus, in 9:7 the high priest offers blood on the Day of Atonement for himself and for the sins of the people. A similar argument is made in 9:11–14. In vv. 18–21, the first covenant was dedicated with blood when Moses sprinkled the blood of calves and goats on the book/scroll, people, tabernacle, and vessels of ministry. It therefore seems likely that the meaning of *haimatekchysia*—a word possibly coined by the apostle—is blood sprinkled or applied rather than blood shed.

The apostle did not explicitly attempt to explain how the blood applied takes away sin. In 9:22 we get a glimpse into a system—the mystery of how God takes care of the sin problem. His solution stipulates that Christ's blood alone is the agent of purification. In 9:22 the word translated as "remission" or "forgiveness" is the Greek *aphesis*, which means "removal" or "taking away." The author's use of purification language in parallel with *aphesis* in v. 22, and then again in v. 23, indicates that his meaning in v. 22 carries the idea of the eradication of sin—not only its remission or forgiveness. The language is related to the sacrificial system and the sanctuary and is to be understood in this setting.

9:23—10:18

Superiority of the New Sacrifice

In the author's description of the old system (9:1–10), he underscored its two limitations: restricted access to the presence of God and no finality in dealing with sin. The passage before us will argue for the superiority of the blood of Christ by showing how it accomplishes what the old system could not. The first section (9:23–28) will especially bring out the access ideas, while the remainder will contrast the repeated nature of the OT sacrifices with the single, efficacious self-offering of Christ (10:1–18).

9:23–28. Finality—Once for All. An arresting concept opens the discussion. The apostle asserts that it was necessary that the copies of the heavenly things (that is, the earthly sanctuary, which was a copy [8:5] of the heavenly temple) should be purified with these animal sacrifices, but the heavenly things themselves (that is, the heavenly sanctuary) with better sacrifices (that is, the blood of Christ) (v. 23). The idea of heavenly things being in need of cleansing boggles the minds of many commentators, especially those holding to a Philonic understanding of Hebrews. But if the author, like the Jews of that time, believed in an actual temple in heaven, his comments are readily comprehensible. Although he does not elaborate on the meaning in his cryptic comments, it seems clear that Christ's heavenly work entails a cosmic-scale benefit stemming from His sacrifice that was typified through the ritual of the Day of Atonement (see commentary on Dan. 8:9–14).

The theme of access dominates this section and continues into chapter 10. As the high priest entered the presence of God always with blood (9:7), so Christ entered heaven with His own blood as sacrifice. What is the exact comparison the author is making between the old system and the new, both here and in the subsequent section? The previous context suggests it is the cleansing associated with the inauguration of the temple and the ratification of the covenant with the people (vv. 12–22). Verse 25, however, reflects the backdrop of the Yom Kippur services, that is, the Day of Atonement. We know this by the mention of a high priest (as opposed to just a priest, who was restricted to the first apartment of the tabernacle) and "every year" (v. 25).

As noted previously, 9:25 has been translated in various ways: "Holy Place," "sanctuary," "Most Holy Place," or "holy places" (see "*Ta Hagia* in Hebrews," p. 1841). The apostle argued that the blood shed at Calvary opened full access to God; its breaking down of barriers between humanity and God was only hinted at in the access provided the OT high priest once a year on Yom Kippur. Not only did the blood of Christ open access to the presence of God in a manner that the old services could not, it also differed from the ancient sacrificial ceremonies of the Day of Atonement in that it was a single sacrifice by which the heavenly sanctuary itself was cleansed. The author hammers home this point by contrasting the repetitive nature of the sacrifices of the old system in vv. 25–26 with the singular occurrence of the sacrifice of Christ in vv. 26 and 28. Thus, in 9:23–26 we see the balance and contrast of ideas as the author stresses the superior nature and benefits of the blood of Christ:

Old Sanctuary System	New Sanctuary System
Purified	Purified
By blood	By blood
BUT	
A copy of the reality	The true sanctuary
Blood of another	Sacrifice of Himself
Repeated sacrifices	Once for all
Earthly Most Holy Place	Presence of God

The apostle's teaching of unhindered access to the presence of God is an appealing one. There are no favorites here—no dividing of humankind on the basis of learned and ignorant, rich and poor, male and female, privileged and suppressed. The doors of the heavenly temple have been flung open; all are welcome. No need now to bring a gift, to seek to placate, or to hire a go-between. The "so great a salvation" (2:3) of Hebrews proclaims the end to all gifts, all devices, and all intermediaries. Because Christ is our great High Priest, we have access (by faith) to God in His heavenly temple.

The finality of Christ's sacrifice comes into sharp focus in a particular term: *ephapax* ("once for all") or *hapax* ("once"). We first find the idea in 7:27, where the apostle wrote that Christ offered Himself "once for all" (*ephapax*). In 9:11—10:18, however, it becomes a leading thought: in 9:12, Christ entered the heavenly sanctuary *ephapax*; in 9:26, He came *hapax* to take away sins; and in 10:10, we have been made holy by Christ's sacrifice *ephapax*.

In contrast to Christ's once-for-all sacrifice, the priest in the earthly sanctuary had to offer repeated sacrifices: in 9:6, the priests regularly served in the Holy Place; in 9:25, the earthly sanctuary required sacrifices every year; in 10:1, the same sacrifices were offered repeatedly, year by year; in 10:3, the same sacrifices were offered on the Day of Atonement every year; and in 10:11, the priest offered the same sacrifices repeatedly.

So, we see the third of the apostle's contrasts in 9:1—10:18: not only full access to the heavenly temple instead of limited access to its copy; not only thorough cleansing from sin instead of merely ceremonial purification; but also one sacrifice instead of many—one sacrifice never to be repeated; one sacrifice for all peoples; one sacrifice that brings all other sacrifices to an end.

The writer's eschatology comes to sharp expression in 9:26–28. Throughout its theological argumentation, Hebrews looks back. The "once for all" (*ephapax*) motif focuses its concentration on the Son becoming man and by His death offering the decisive sacrifice for sin. It is because of the certainty of what has already happened—in the person of the Son and His becoming our great High Priest—that the apostle can speak with such assurance and admonish his readers to hold fast their confession of the Son. With this strong note of realized eschatology, there is nevertheless also an emphasis on the future. It was first sounded in the initial four verses of the book—in the suggestion of a waiting time before the regnant Son takes up His total rule. Now, in 9:26–28, the idea reappears in undeveloped form: He will appear a second time, apart from sin, to save those eagerly waiting for Him. The *parousia* (Second Coming), however, will add nothing to His achievement already won on Calvary. That event was the end or culmination of the ages (v. 26).

The apostle's strong belief in the eschaton—the climax of human history when Jesus will come again—receives strong emphasis in the long exhortation that follows the theological argumentation of 8:1—10:18 and that rounds out the book (10:36–39; 11:39–40; 12:25–29).

10:1–4. Perfecting of the Conscience. In this passage we again meet the notions of being made perfect (v. 1) and the guilty conscience (v. 2). They recur in the context of the author's denigration of the OT sacrifices on the basis of their repetition. His basic argument is that the very fact of the repeated services every year (vv. 1, 3) shows their inability to eradicate Israel's sin. The sacrifices were only a shadow of what would follow—not the true form of the reality (v. 1) of Christ's death and its decisive dealing with sin.

In vv. 1–3, the following parallelism of ideas emerges:

v. 1	Make perfect those who draw near to God
v. 2	Worshipers purified or cleansed
v. 3	Worshipers have no more guilt or consciousness of sins
v. 3	No more reminder of sins every year

The word used for the feeling of guilt in v. 2 (*syneidēsis*) is the same one that has the connotation of "conscience" elsewhere in Hebrews (9:9, 14; 10:22; 13:18). Its meaning now becomes clear: it is not the moral arbiter of an individual—as the term is commonly understood—but the continual consciousness or remembering of sins. Nor are the apostle's remarks directed toward the individual, as ours are when we speak of conscience. Rather, the author is portraying Israel's national consciousness before Yahweh—a consciousness that is shown by the repeated need to observe Yom Kippur.

The point he wishes to make is this: the one sacrifice of Christ has removed all reminder of sin. All defilement has been purified, just as all barriers between humanity and God have been broken down. Now there is no need for annual ceremonies of fasting and sacrifice, for a decisive purification of sin has been made that will be consummated at the coming of the Lord.

While the OT sacrificial system could not perfectly clear the conscience or consciousness of the worshiper (9:9–10; 10:1–3), Christ's single offering has perfected them forever (10:14, 22). They have obtained purgation of the pervasive sense of unease before God. The two references to perfection in chapter 7 (vv. 11, 19) now become clear. No perfection was possible under the law of the old system, because its sacrifices were simply inadequate in themselves. The imperfection was intrinsic to the sacrifices: it was impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins (10:4). With 7:19, we see an extension of the meaning of perfection: by the new sacrificial system we draw near to God, that is, have access. Thus, the "perfection" of Christians in Hebrews is a term related to the sanctuary system, not an ethical one. It embodies the twin aspects that the knowledge of the sacrifice of Christ has brought: unhindered access to God with consciousness that the defilement of sin has been fully purified.

10:5–10. Christ's Death Fulfills God's Will. Once again, the apostle looks to the OT for a prediction of the sacrifice of Christ. He finds it in Psalm 40:6–8, which speaks of the divine turning away from animal sacrifice to the offering of the body of Christ. The author is dependent on the Septuagint for the key word "body" (vv. 5, 10) in the passage cited; the Masoretic Text has "open ear" instead. And, as in his presentation earlier (see 7:11, 18; 8:12), the very fact of prediction ensures the end of the old. As with priesthood and covenant, so with the sanctuary system—the first is taken away so that the second can be established (10:9).

We again see the hand of deity superintending all. It is the divine will that the old system be put aside. That same will sent forth the Son to our world, where He became qualified to be High Priest and to make atonement for sins. Ultimately, it is that will that has brought so great a salvation to Christians. The concept of being sanctified or made holy (v. 14) suggests the status of belonging to God, set apart for His worship.

10:11–18. The Old and the New Summarized. The final passage of the long theological exposition that began at 8:1 pulls together the leading motifs and summarizes—by terse comparison and contrast—the benefits of the better blood of Christ. Here we find the crucial differences between the old worship system and the new (10:11–12):

Old Sanctuary System	**New Sanctuary System**
Every priest (that is, many)	This one, this priest (one only)
Stands (unfinished work)	Sat down (completed)
Offering repeatedly (unfinished work)	Offered (completed)
Same sacrifices (many)	One sacrifice
Repeatedly, again and again	Forever, for all time
Daily	Offering complete
Religious services (limited access)	Right hand of God
Never take away sins	Perfected forever (v. 14)

The contrast is striking and radical: one instead of many, sitting instead of standing, one sacrifice instead of repeated sacrifices, one completed offering instead of ongoing offerings, the work completed forever instead of daily ministration, the very presence of God instead of limited access, and the thorough purgation of sins instead of sacrifices needing to be performed over and over.

Verse 14 hammers home the once-for-all totality of the sacrifice of Christ in dealing with the age-old problem of sin. It is one sacrificial offering that accomplished God's purpose and sealed the plan of salvation. That offering has perfected His people. That is, in the parlance of Hebrews, it has removed the pervasive consciousness—the guilt of sin. And it has removed it forever.

The apostle's understanding of sanctification is noteworthy. On one hand, he states in v. 10 that we have been sanctified or made holy (past tense), but on the other hand, he states in v. 14 that we are being sanctified or made holy (present tense). This coupling of ideas in close proximity helps us to understand that God's plan of sanctification of His people includes both a status of being set apart as holy and an ongoing process of becoming holy. The apostle adds a third dimension later in the book: he states that without holiness no one will see the Lord (12:14). Thus, although Christians are already perfected and have been set apart by a holy God for Himself, they are to grow in and pursue holiness.

In 10:16–18, the apostle returns to the long citation of Jeremiah 31:31–34 that he quoted in full in Hebrews 8:8–12. Now, however, he cites only the opening and closing portions of the passage. The point he wishes to underline is the closing part that predicts the end of sins. This is clear from his conclusion: when sins are completely forgiven, there is no more need for sacrifices (10:18). The passage from Jeremiah predicted a time when animal sacrifices would cease because thorough purgation of sin was to have come into being. Thus, these concluding words of the long exposition of 8:1—10:18 once again contrast the old sanctuary system (inadequate to deal with sin) with the new one, where Christ is our great High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary, ministering the benefits of His once-for-all, all-sufficient sacrifice of Himself.

The apostle's strong, repeated argumentation setting out the superiority of the new sanctuary system over the old indicates that his hearers had a strong attachment to the Jerusalem temple and its rituals. That they came from a Jewish background therefore seems highly likely. With 10:18, the theology of Hebrews reaches its climax and conclusion. From the great WHAT—how magnificent is Jesus and how magnificent His work—it has established the basis for the SO WHAT that follows—how we therefore should live. This exhortation and application will continue to the close of the book.

10:19—13:25
EAGERLY AWAITING CHRIST'S RETURN

The "therefore" (Gr. *oun*) of Hebrews 10:19 marks the transition from exposition to application. Since 7:1, the apostle has engaged his readers in a sustained argument designed to establish and elaborate on Christ as their High Priest and sacrifice. Now, he will devote the remainder of the book to indicating how this theological construct should affect their lives. He will first show that Christian existence on this earth is a pilgrimage in which believers travel to the better country (10:19—12:2) and to the better city (12:3—13:15). In this discussion, faith is a key characteristic to help lay hold on the invisible world (10:19—13:25). Throughout 10:19—13:25, the note of hope predominates. The "not yet" of the gospel—suggested in the author's reference to the Son being "appointed heir of all things" (1:2) and sounded again in the encouragement that Christ will appear a second time to save those who are eagerly waiting for Him (9:28)—now comes to full expression.

10:19—12:2
The Better Country

This section falls into five parts. The first three are short, taking up in turn the full assurance that the high-priestly theology brings (10:19–25), a strong warning against deliberate turning away from the new system in the blood of Christ (vv. 26–31), and an exhortation to faithfulness (vv. 32–39). Chapter 11 comprises the fourth part. Here we see the need of faith, as the apostle lists a long line of men and women of old who, sensing that they were but pilgrims on earth, lived in hope as they faithfully sought a better, heavenly country (11:16) that God had prepared for them. The final part (12:1–2) encouraged the Hebrews to contemplate Jesus while striving to be steadfast in their pilgrimage.

10:19–25. In Full Assurance. The first four verses summarize the accomplishment of Christ for which 7:1—10:18 argued and show its significance for Christian living. They are a succinct statement of the purpose of the book—theology and exhortation flowing together under the rubric of full assurance of faith (10:22). Again, we see the twin benefits of Christ's work. He has opened the way into the heavenly sanctuary, where He Himself is High Priest. There is now unimpeded access to the presence of God. Further, Christ has sprinkled our hearts clean from an evil, guilty conscience (v. 22). He has made full purification of sin. These two blessings of the salvation provided in Jesus express the openness of God toward humanity. They express the good news of the NT that seems impossible to grasp because it reverses human priorities and striving and tells us that, before we try to win acceptance with God, He already has taken us to Himself.

We notice the means by which these blessings have come—by the blood of Christ (v. 19). According to Hebrews, there is no mistake in the tragedy of the cross. While it was a gross miscarriage of justice, it was the divine instrument of salvation.

So the Christian's response: boldness, or confidence, to enter (v. 19) and draw near with an honest heart and with the full assurance that faith provides (v. 22). The word translated *parrēsia* ("confidence" or "boldness") occurs elsewhere in the book (3:6; 4:16; 10:19, 35). A second word, parallel in meaning to *parrēsia*, is *plērophoria* ("assurance"). Both words denote a robustness of spirit—a buoyancy of faith that is able to lay hold of the realities of the work of Christ. We should note a couple issues of interpretation. First, the term *ta hagia* is used in v. 19, which is translated as "the sanctuary," "Most Holy Place," "holy place," or "holy places." "Sanctuary" fits well because the passage does not specifically point to the Day of Atonement (see "*Ta Hagia* in Hebrews," p. 1841).

The second issue concerns the relationship between the curtain, or veil, and Jesus's body, or flesh, in vv. 19–20. Many commentators understand the flesh of Christ to be symbolic of the curtain of the heavenly sanctuary. That is, the language of the curtain expresses a spiritual truth rather than referring to the actual curtain of the heavenly sanctuary. But such an interpretation is out of sync with the apostle's sanctuary language up to this point. Throughout 8:1—10:18 he sets forth a real heavenly sanctuary with a real High Priest and a real offering (see "Behind the Veil," p. 1836). To suddenly introduce a spiritualizing note here—so that the curtain (veil) in the heavenly sanctuary is a code word for Christ's body—is asynchronous with all that has gone before.

The Greek text can be understood in a different manner, however, so that the new and living way opened by Jesus is the way of His flesh, that is, provided by His incarnation. The NEB has rightly captured the intent of the passage: "So now, my friends, the blood of Jesus makes us free to enter boldly into the sanctuary by the new, living way which he has opened for us through the curtain, the way of his flesh." A close analysis of the structure of the passage supports the NEB interpretation. Some scholars have noted the parallel structures of vv. 19–20:

Verse 19	**Verse 20**
a. To enter	a. A new and living way
b. The sanctuary	b. Through the veil (curtain)
c. By the blood of Jesus	c. That is, His flesh

In vv. 23–25, the apostle begins to lay out specifics of the lives of Christians who trust in the salvation promised in Christ: They will hold firmly to hope without wavering (v. 23); they will be considerate of fellow Christians, encouraging them to love and good works (v. 24); they will not neglect meeting together (v. 25); and they will encourage one another all the more as the Day approaches (v. 25). While some Christians have grown tired or neglectful, they remain firm, professing hope without vacillating (v. 23).

Thus, the problem of apathy—first broached at 2:2–9 and exposed several times subsequently—has been met head-on by the apostle. He did not merely tell his readers that they ought to be earnest Christians and attend church; rather, he laid a christological foundation for existence, in that our lives as Christians are to be shaped and continually renewed by an awareness of the person and work of Christ. To know His life of suffering and death is to know ourselves. In this passage, the apostle supplied four reasons in answer to a question of high relevance in our time: "Why go to church?" He answers: because of what Christ has done, because of who we are, because of the opportunities for mutual encouragement and growth, and because Jesus is coming soon.

10:26–31. A Strong Warning. From some of the most reassuring words of the NT to its sharpest warning—the change in tone is abrupt. The apostle tells us that entrance into the eternal future God has prepared does not follow automatically. Just as judgment fell on those who rejected God's commands in the time of Moses, so anyone who despises Christ and His sacrifice should not expect free salvation.

This oscillation from assurance to warning is a feature of Hebrews. Our study of the first severe warning (6:4–6) showed the rationale that can hold together such radically different emphases. We observed that the author's concern to set forth the magnificence of Christianity—its superiority to all that went before in the OT and that pointed to Christ—provides the key. And in that presentation, the sacrifice of Christ is the most important element. It is because of His blood (10:29) that the surpassing benefits of Christianity become available. When that blood is rightly accepted, it brings absolute confidence of our salvation; when it is treated carelessly—spurned—the case is hopeless.

The key word in 10:26–31 is *hekousiōs* ("deliberately" or "willfully"; v. 26). We will have to battle sin as long as we are in this world—as long as the Spirit has our old nature opposing Him. Victory in this struggle comes from Christ alone, but we must choose Him daily. Just as we first chose Him—confessing Him as Savior and Lord—so we must make our decision for Him anew every day.

In 6:4–6, the emphasis fell on the blessings once enjoyed by Christians but later rejected. In 10:26–31, it is on the prospect of fearful judgment. This change is understandable in view of the long passage of 7:1—10:18, where the apostle fully treated the work of Christ and its benefits. We note his preference for emphasizing the blood of the covenant here (10:29) rather than a description of crucifying the Son of God again (6:6); recall the weight that the motifs of "blood" and "covenant" have carried in the preceding chapters.

As we trace the series of exhortations that laminate the argument of Hebrews, we note a progression of ideas. In 2:1–4, the apostle's concern is with drifting away—neglecting the great salvation. In 3:6—4:13, it is with the gradual hardening of the heart through lack of faith. In 5:11—6:19, it is with a lack of growth in Christ and the possibility of falling away from Christ. Here, in 10:26–31, the slide reaches its lowest point: the abyss of open, willful sin, with gross insensitivity to the meaning of Christ's atoning blood. As suggested in the discussion of 6:4–6, the apostle is not attempting to set forth a theology of sin and repentance. The "if" of 10:26 sets out starkly what *might* be, not what has indeed happened. Nevertheless, his presentation demolishes any teaching of "once saved, always saved." Even those who have known the truth (v. 26), the blood of the covenant (v. 29), and the Spirit of grace (v. 29) may turn in wanton rejection of them. As 6:4–6 highlighted the flouting of Christian values, so 10:26–31 explains that the most important concepts of the nature of the offense are its willful, deliberate nature (v. 26), its angry trampling of Christ (v. 29), its assessing the blood of the covenant as a "common" or "unholy" thing (v. 29), and its rebellious insulting of the Holy Spirit (v. 29). Verses 28–29 recall the first exhortation (2:2–4). The reasoning is similar, but elaborated and heightened. Instead of merely neglecting, ignoring (2:3), or drifting away (2:1) from salvation, 10:26–31 describes an overt denial of the Christian faith.

10:32–39. A Valiant Past. In vv. 32–34, we catch a glimpse of the background of the readers of Hebrews. The apostle's reference to earlier times (v. 32) indicates that they had been Christian for some time—certainly several years. They had suffered terribly for their faith (v. 33), supporting those persecuted (v. 33) and in prison chains (v. 34) and having endured confiscation of their possessions (v. 34). Their being *phōtisthentes* (from *phōtizō*; "enlightened" or "illuminated"; v. 32) possibly refers to baptism; the term was so used later among Christians. It certainly indicates the knowledge of Christ that had brought them new life (cf. 6:4). After they became Christians, they had gone through great difficulties. The picture limned by the apostle is a poignant one, evoking that world when the early Christians were a small, despised, illicit sect. When abuse and hardships were heaped on them publicly, they had no civil rights to which appeal might be made. Faced with a hostile society, they found refuge in the company of fellow Christians. When subjected to physical suffering and plundering of their property, they looked to one another for encouragement and to the better, enduring possessions (10:34) in heaven.

Perhaps they faced a new threat of persecution. The apostle seems to hold out this possibility (10:35–39; 12:3–13). That thought may have been almost too much for some of them to bear. After the struggle at the dawn of their Christian life, they had enjoyed years of respite. They shrank from the prospect of a return to hard times. Perhaps this is why the apostle warned them so strongly in 6:4–6 and 10:26–31 about the possibility of their public renunciation of Christ and His cross.

The note of suffering in 10:32–34 joins a refrain that sounds throughout the NT. We hear Peter, in his first epistle, encouraging believers who were persecuted simply for being Christians; we catch Paul's remarks about sharing in the sufferings of Christ (Phil. 3:10) and of filling up in his own body what was still lacking in the afflictions of Christ (Col. 1:24; see also 2 Tim. 1:8, 3:12). Most Christians in the West cannot comprehend this aspect of the NT; it is altogether outside their experience. For Christians in other countries who do not enjoy religious freedom, this NT refrain of suffering resonates deeply.

In mentioning their sufferings, the apostle reminded them of previous times (10:32); however, Paul wanted readers to reflect on the faithfulness that they had displayed in the midst of hardships. Although he did not make the link, they were like Israel fresh out of Egypt described in chapter 3. They had begun well, but the wilderness lay before them. In 10:35–39, the backward look gives way to a forward one. Instead of wavering, shrinking back (v. 39), and losing the reward (v. 35), the readers needed patient endurance (v. 36). God's promise is sure: in just a little while the *parousia* would take place. Christ would come and no longer delay (v. 37).

Confidence (v. 35), endurance (v. 36), and faith (v. 38)—these three concepts overlap in exhortation. The first reminds us of the heavenly realities on which Christian life is grounded (Christ's death and High Priestly ministry). The second denotes perseverance in confidence—a steadiness of course that is able to withstand the pressures of a hostile environment and the relentless passage of time without the appearance of the long-awaited Lord. But it is the third of these, faith, which is to receive closest attention. We shall see that faith partakes of both of the

above elements; it lays hold of the unseen but ultimately real, and it looks to the fulfillment of God's promises, that is, it is close to faithfulness.

When we studied the apostle's lessons drawn from Israel's wanderings in the desert (3:1—4:13), we saw how *pistis* ("faith") and its cognates shaped the discussion. The journeying tribes manifested un-faith (*apistia*); Christians, who are also striving to enter the promised "rest," are exhorted to have "faith." So here in 10:35–39 we return to the same theme—the pilgrim people of God. The reference to a better, enduring possession in 10:34 opens the door to the pilgrim theme, v. 35 tells of the reward, and v. 36 of receiving the promise. In chapter 11 this theme with its call to faith will be taken up and fully expounded.

11:1–40. Faith, the Indispensable Quality. The eleventh chapter of Hebrews is undoubtedly the best-known section of the book. It is often referred to for its definition of faith and for its depiction of the line of heroes and heroines of the OT. The passage is beautifully structured; after the two opening statements, which stand as a summary of the section, the rhythmic "by faith" pattern leads the reader forward in time. The pattern is not mechanical, however; Bible characters are not dealt with equally, and we sense movement toward a climax. With Rahab the listing breaks off, and Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, and Samuel are gathered together in an onrushing statement that highlights the exploits of prophets, martyrs, and mothers. And, after the surge of this climactic summary, we hear the last, gentle melody (vv. 39–40), the final notes that bridge the years to the reader's own time.

As we attempt to understand the author's idea of faith, we should keep in mind that *pistis* is a word with many facets. When we move from one NT writer to another, we discern the variety of ways of setting forth this vital Christian quality. With Paul, the interpretation usually applied to *pistis* is essentially "trust"—trust that accepts the divine gift of salvation in Jesus Christ in an act of commitment. That trust signifies at once a turning from confidence in one's own works to an appropriation of the divine instead (see Rom. 1:17; 3:19–31; 4:1–5). With James, the use of *pistis* undergoes a marked shift. There we read that even the demons have it (see James 2:4–26; we must remember that "belief" and "faith" are translations of the same Gr. *pistis*). Here, the intellectual element is at the fore—hence James's strictures against those who have "faith" without works. In the Synoptic Gospels, the emphasis in the use of *pistis* changes yet again. Faith is linked to the miracle-working ability of Jesus; all things are possible to the one who has it (e.g., Mark 9:24).

This quick survey of three parts of the NT helps us to see the multihued beauty of *pistis*. Faith is like a diamond, gleaming in the light as writer after writer turns it for examination. Now we are better prepared to discern the facet of faith that the author of Hebrews has to show us; we are less likely to read in ideas from other parts of the NT.

The first verse of Hebrews 11 can be translated variously: "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." "Faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see." "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." "Faith is the reality of what is hoped for, the proof of what is not seen" (v. 1). The two clauses, though in parallel, are not repetitious. Whereas the first is time-oriented, the second is space-oriented. The first looks to the future in the certainty that hope will become reality—promise becoming fulfillment. The second, however, looks to the present reality of the invisible world, confident that the truly real is beyond the sensory.

We have met these intersecting conceptions already in Hebrews. On the one hand, the author has taken pains to assert that, while the empirical world is real, it is not the ultimate reality. An unseen, eternal world, the world of the heavenly temple where Jesus is High Priest, is the true, the genuine. The earthly sanctuary and its services were but shadows of them (8:1–5). But the flow of time also is of crucial importance: the genuine does not stand in eternal juxtaposition with the earthly. Christ becomes High Priest; likewise, while Jesus has opened the heavenly temple to all, Christians live by promise, journeying like Israel in the desert toward the Promised Land. That is why they must persevere in the way. The spatial and temporal conceptions intersect; it is the present reality of the invisible world that guarantees the fulfillment of the promise. In Hebrews 11:1 then, the author is not merely giving a definition of faith. Nor is he attempting to explain it psychologically. Rather, his statement concerning the nature of faith points to its two preeminent functions, as he sees them: it turns hope to assurance and the unseen to the "seen."

The words he uses to bring out these points are very strong. The first (*hupostasis*) may be rendered as "title deed," as archeological findings have shown. It is likely that such a translation captures the force of the author's intent. An illustration may help. We have never been to Hawaii, but one day the mail contains a letter. Our long-forgotten Aunt Harriet has died, leaving her property in Hawaii to us. We have never seen the land, but the property is ours. The title deed assures us that we will be able to claim it. So too is faith a title deed to the promised reward. Likewise, it is eyes that pierce through the intervening darkness to perceive the invisible world. Faith is both based on a reality and the means of seeing that reality. As we study the list of examples that follows, we will notice these two elements of faith, singly or together, that the author emphasizes in every case.

- **v. 3** The creation itself is understood by faith—the sensory world results from invisible things.
- **v. 4** Here is the example of Abel, whose sacrifice was accepted over his brother's because of his faith. The precise manner by which *pistis* was demonstrated is in question. Was it his sense of the presence of God or his hope of being accepted as righteous? The author's reference to Abel's righteousness being witnessed and commended points in the direction of the latter.
- **v. 5** Enoch likewise received divine approval, showing that he had faith. The element of pleasing God probably suggests faith as both seeing the invisible and putting hope in the reward, as the following verse states.
- **v. 6** This general statement applies to every seeker of God. The twin characteristics of *pistis* are clearly delineated here: faith believes that God exists, that is, the conviction of the invisible; and faith believes that God rewards, that is, the assurance of hope.
- **v. 7** Noah likewise saw the unseen. The aspect of looking to the future also characterized his faith.
- **v. 8** Here we see elements of the unseen—Abraham not knowing where he was going and looking toward the future and the coming inheritance similarly mark the *pistis* that he possessed.
- **vv. 9–10** After Abraham's arrival in the promised land, his existence was still by faith. His living in tents contrasts with the city—which God has built. So Abraham's faith looked forward and to the invisible as he awaited the possession of the city of God.
- **vv. 11–12** Sarah turned from the sensory world that had ruled out all possibility of her bearing a child in her old age. Instead she trusted in God and his promise.
- **vv. 13–16** This general statement sums up the faith of the patriarchs. Once again we detect the two characteristics of v. 1, although the emphasis falls on the reality of the unseen. The language is forceful; the worthies saw the promises and welcomed them from a distance. They hoped for the future reward, which is referred to as a homeland (or lit. "fatherland"; Gr. *patris*)—a country of their own (v. 14), a heavenly country (v. 16), and a city (v. 16). They regarded themselves as strangers and temporary residents on the earth. With the concepts of promises, seeking, and desiring in these verses, we also discern the aspect of faith as an assurance of hope.
- **vv. 17–19** Here in this reference to Abraham and Isaac, the accent falls on the future. Although Abraham offered up his son, by faith he was assured of Isaac's resurrection. But the second element is not far away: it is because Abraham believed in God's ability to raise Isaac (i.e., seeing the unseen God) that he was ready to sacrifice him.
- **v. 20** Here in Isaac's blessing of Jacob and Esau, faith is predicated on the idea of a title deed of things hoped for.
- **v. 21** The blessing of Jacob is likewise future-directed. Faith guarantees its fulfillment.
- **v. 22** The final words of Joseph also looked to the future. They spoke of the Exodus from Egypt and of his burial in Canaan. Because faith laid hold of what was to come, his words were not merely an idle wish.
- **v. 23** Because the faith aspects of the story of the baby Moses are not specified, the author may have had both elements in mind.

- **vv. 24–26** Moses's rejection of the pleasures of Egypt in favor of the company of the ill-treated people of God suggests both parts of Hebrews 11:1. He looked beyond appearances; he saw a reality deeper than the honor of the court and the fleeting pleasures of sin. He looked beyond these to the future—the reward (v. 26).
- **v. 27** The second aspect of faith is underscored: Moses was able to oppose the king and remain steadfast because he saw the unseen.
- **v. 28** Moses's keeping of the Passover and sprinkling the blood likewise showed his confidence in the word of the unseen God—a word that called for provision for the immediate future.
- **v. 29** The crossing of the Red Sea was by faith. Once again, the empirical order was set aside and the divine promise fulfilled.
- **v. 30** In similar manner the walls of Jericho fell. The conviction of the reality of this unseen world made the Israelites' hope of conquest of the city sure.
- **v. 31** Even Rahab is included in the list. She, too, looked to the future, though it was only a short-range one for her.
- **vv. 32–38** In this summary statement of the exploits of other great figures from Israel's history, their deeds seem to be of three types: acts of unusual political or military greatness (vv. 33–34), acts outside the normal course of nature (vv. 33–35), and acts of great endurance under insult and extreme suffering (vv. 36–38).

What did the author wish to convey by this record of stirring deeds? Presumably, the manner in which faith is able to transcend the ordinary, sensory world. While these heroic men and women were part of humanity, the world was not worthy of them (v. 38). They belonged to another world: the invisible one. Because of their ability to grasp its reality—to *see* it—they performed these extraordinary feats. And they lived in hope of the future promise even though they did not receive it in their earthly lives; that point is made explicit in v. 39. With all their heroism—growing out of their roots in the ultimate world—they looked forward to the time when God's people all together would enter into the reward already prepared in, and made sure by, the invisible world.

Our study of the long list of examples of chapter 11 confirms the understanding of the nature of *pistis* arising out of v. 1. We now see how this book portrays faith in its own distinctive way. Faith in Romans and Galatians is presented as the act of trusting acceptance of the gift of salvation in Christ. In the Gospels, faith is manifested by reliance on the miracle-working power of Jesus. True faith (as opposed to dead faith) in James is presented as more than an intellectual assent. Here in Hebrews, faith is shown to be an ongoing characteristic of Christian life—a quality that enables people to persevere in the midst of hardship and, at times, against seemingly insurmountable odds. All these aspects of faith are complementary and flow out of the trust in Christ for salvation; He is the One who rewards those who seek Him. Faith is very close to faithfulness. It is an endurance rooted in the conviction of the reality of the unseen world. Therefore, it is able to appropriate as title deed the divine promises of future reward.

With our grasp of the spiritual condition of the addressees, we can appreciate the value of this emphasis. The heavenly sanctuary and liturgy—Jesus as High Priest and the superior nature of His sacrifice—all rest on the ability to see the unseen world. Only as believers look away from earthly attractions and hardships to discern the transcendent realities will they find the absolute confidence of a salvation so great. With such faith-vision they will be able to persevere in hope, no matter what difficulties may arise, knowing that the reward to come is already guaranteed by the invisible world. After the general designation of the nature of *pistis* in 11:1, the author stated that the ancient believers were commended for their faith (v. 2). The list of examples, from Abel to the general summary, reiterates this idea. From the understanding of the nature of *pistis* that the chapter revealed, we can see the reason: only by faith can the invisible God Himself be acknowledged and found.

12:1–2. Looking to Jesus. These verses are best considered as associated with the thought of chapter 11, rather than starting a new section. The Greek *oun* ("therefore") with which they commence indicates that the apostle wishes his readers to apply the examples of faithfulness that he has just completed. The passage deals with the race of life. Its central advice, however, is to keep our focus intently on Jesus (12:2). Although the "cloud of witnesses" (v. 1)—presumably the heroes and heroines of chapter 11—surround the runners, they are not to look to them. The exhortation is to look to Jesus. They are to run straight ahead, eyes fixed on Him—not looking back. They are not to be occupied with introspection, shutting themselves in a corner to pray and struggle over their individual weaknesses. Instead of looking to others, or to themselves, they are to dash for the finish line with eyes firmly focused on Jesus.

Are Christians here called to do what Christ has done or to trust in what He has done? The distinction is an important one. In the second chapter of Hebrews, the apostle showed how similar the human experiences of Jesus were to ours: temptation, suffering, being forsaken, death. There, however, the author did not drive home the exemplary idea at what would have been the most fitting place for it. Nor does he anywhere else in the book. His discussion of the sufferings of Jesus is to show the reality of His High Priestly ministry, not to present a pattern for Christians to emulate.

Likewise, in Hebrews 12:1-2 the apostle indicated a qualitative distinction between Jesus and us: He is both the *archēgos* and the *teleiōtēs* of our faith (v. 2). The first term denotes (and has been translated as) "Author," "Founder," "Pioneer," or "Source." In other NT passages, it can have the connotation of "Prince." The second term conveys the idea of "Perfecter," "Completer," or "Finisher." By reason of His own race of life, He has become High Priest at the right hand of God. We should note the use of the Greek preposition *anti* in v. 2. Most translate this as "for" (meaning "for the sake of" or "because of") which is a possible way of understanding it. This would convey the meaning that Jesus endured the shame of the cross because of the joy that would follow. An alternative translation—and one perhaps closer to the basic sense of *anti*—is "instead of." This results in a sharp change of meaning. Instead of the joy of the Son's preexistent status (described in 1:5-14), He took the cross and its shame, thus becoming qualified to be our High Priest. The verse then contains, in miniature, the course of the Son's career as chapter 2 outlines it.

For this section (10:19—12:2), we have employed the title "The Better Country." In view of the material it contains, it might have been designated "In Full Assurance" (10:22), "Faith," or "Exhortations to Faithfulness." Our title comes from 11:16 and picks up the pilgrimage motif of the passage. It reminds us of the leading ideas of the section: that Christians live by faith, not by sight; that the accomplishment of Christ, while it has broken down all barriers between God and humanity, has still left a waiting time for the people who live in the hope of His Second Coming; and that perseverance and endurance are therefore necessary for those who, trusting in Jesus as High Priest and Sacrifice, hold to the title deed of the better country.

12:3—13:25

The Better City

The author has come to the close of his sermon. In masterful fashion he laid the theological foundation as, step by step, he developed the high priestly argumentation. Each leading motif was briefly introduced, taken up in due course, and then rounded off. The progression of logic was steady—inexorable—as the apostle sought to show what he meant by "so great a salvation" (2:3). Over and over, he showed the superiority of Christianity with its surpassing system of worship providing decisive removal of sin and access to God. But all this theological groundwork was aimed at a practical purpose: to address the problem of spiritual anemia. If the Hebrews could come to realize the supreme value of their religion, they would not neglect it; they would certainly not turn in public repudiation of it, even though persecution might break out. On the contrary, they would persevere in the Christian way. Hence, the central word of the exhortations—that quality that the author wanted them to display above all others—is *pistis* ("faith"). As he brought the exhortation to a close, the author called them to steadfastness (12:1-17), briefly described the privileges they had (12:18-24), warned them (12:25-29), and advised them (13:1-9). A final benediction closes the document (13:20-25).

12:3-17. Exhortations to Steadfastness. The remainder of the apostle's call to faithfulness places the readers in the context of children being disciplined by a loving heavenly Father. The first section (vv. 3-11) provides the strongest suggestion of present suffering in the entire book. We read of the importance of enduring *paideia* ("discipline," "chastening," "hardship"; v. 7), which is not pleasant or joyful at the time it occurs but painful (v. 11). Verse 4 with its reference to bloodshed implies that the hardships ahead may even bring death to the followers of Jesus. The author's basic response to the problem of their suffering is in terms of

divine discipline. The Greek word *paideia* in vv. 5-11 lies behind our English terms for education such as pedagogy. "Discipline" accurately conveys the meaning of the Greek if we understand discipline as training and not necessarily as something negative.

The apostle again turned to Scripture, quoting Proverbs 3:11-12 to show that the Christians to whom he wrote should not be surprised by their present hardship; rather, they should expect it. Then he went further, indicating that discipline serves a positive function. He showed, first, that discipline indicates that we are truly children of God (Heb. 12:7) and not illegitimate (v. 8), because God is taking an interest in us. Second, God brings discipline for our benefit, that we may have a share in His holiness (v. 10). Discipline is a training that produces the harvest of peace and righteousness (v. 11).

The manner in which the topic is broached (vv. 3-4) could have led to a very different line of response. The author referred to the exceeding sufferings of the Son (v. 2; bloodshed in v. 4 signifies death). He might have built on this, playing on Son/sons. Instead, the citation of Proverbs 3:11-12 shapes the argument: our sufferings are not taken up so much because of our commonality with the Son, who also suffered, but because God is a Father who disciplines His children. As with the advice of the Christian race (Heb. 12:1-2), the figure of Jesus serves primarily as One to contemplate, more than to emulate. While Peter, in his first epistle, acknowledges the role of Christ as our example in sufferings (1 Pet. 1:20-25), neither he nor the author of Hebrews called for Christians to measure up to or equal Christ's sufferings. Christ suffered for us in ways that we could never emulate. He is our Substitute; our own suffering could never atone for our sin—only His could. Once again, we notice the overruling hand of God in regard to the Christian experience. The apostle does not tell us the nature or source of the present hardship. Ultimately, God is behind all that happens to people (through strategic allowance as well as direct involvement) and wills an eternal purpose from the apparently chance happenings that befall them.

Hebrews 12:3-11 addresses a crushing problem of our age and of every age. It does not wrestle with the philosophical issues of good and evil; it does not develop a theodicy. Instead, it suggests a religious answer. Its teaching is that even suffering and death may serve an ultimate purpose—that a Christian called to go through the swelling of the Jordan may find a new beauty of character and awareness of the God who is Father. And it points us to Jesus, who Himself endured trial and is now enthroned as High Priest for us. Verses 12-14 sound a call to perseverance in view of the previous discussion. Again the apostle alluded to the OT: the admonition to tired hands (lit. hands that hang down) and weak knees (v. 12) is drawn from Isaiah 35:3, while that regarding straight and level paths (v. 13) comes from Proverbs 4:26. Thus, the same Scriptures that explain the reason for hardship exhort to endurance.

The fourteenth verse issues a challenge to strive for holiness. This is the same Greek word (*hagiasmos*; "sanctification") that the apostle in 2:11 and 10:14 spoke of as already accomplished. Again we encounter the tension between the "already"—what Christ has done—and the "not yet"—our status as pilgrims on this earth, journeying in hope.

With the third section (vv. 15-17), the apostle again raises a note of severe warning. His treatment is very brief this time, but the thrust is identical to the two earlier passages (6:4-6; 10:26-31). His treatment of Esau reminds us of his strong words earlier. In all three passages, we find the loss of something precious and the grim thought that it may be gone forever (6:4; 10:26; cf. 12:17). Whereas 6:4-6 focuses on the high privileges that have come with Jesus's salvation, and 10:26-31 on the certainty of judgment if we despise His saving death, 12:15-17 highlights the certain loss of God's spiritual blessings if we do not value them. The bitter root (v. 15) is an allusion to Deuteronomy 29:18, with its context of idol-worship. Its significance at this point is uncertain. It is interesting to note, however, that in this context the apostle returns to the language of defilement that is prominent in the book.

12:18-24. Privileges of the New System of Worship. From the darkness of Esau's rejection, the apostle turns the spotlight to full strength as he brilliantly summarizes the benefits of the work of Christ. Access (v. 22), confidence rather than fear (vv. 18-19), the new covenant (v. 24), blood (v. 24), superiority (better; v. 24)—the familiar words reappear, but not in wooden reiteration. He has shaped a passage that gathers them up into a new, creative statement that takes its place alongside the other high points of Hebrews: 1:1-4; 4:14-16; 10:18-22; 11:32-34.

The force of the contrast is unmistakable: Where "you have not come" (11:18) is significantly different from where "you have come"

(v. 22). This plays again that refrain of the superiority of Christ that we have heard over and over and is embodied in the "better" affirmations of the book. As we saw in the exposition of the system of worship, the chief religious results of this contrast are access and confidence. First, the apostle painted a picture of Mount Sinai at the giving of the law. He did not set out its grandeur but, rather, its inaccessibility and terror. It could not be approached; even a beast that touched the mountain was to be stoned or shot with an arrow (v. 20). The accompanying phenomena—fire, darkness, gloom, storm, and a terrifying voice (vv. 18–19)—made even Moses tremble with fear and caused the Israelites to beg that the frightening voice not speak to them any further (v. 19). A more vivid portrayal of lack of access and lack of boldness is difficult to imagine.

The author avoided mentioning God in his account of Sinai. Only the voice speaking words (v. 19) suggested God to the reader familiar with the account of Exodus 19–20. But not so with the new system of worship established by the blood of Christ. Through it, Christians come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem (v. 22). Now, God is truly accessible. It is not a terrifying mountain; it is the place of God Himself. It is a festal gathering where angels, saints, and Jesus Himself are present. It is a place of grace—not of fear—and all because of the blood that speaks something better than that of Abel (v. 24).

The apostle reversed the scheme of reality. From the empirical point of view, Sinai was a strong basis for religion. Here was a mountain, enveloped in phenomena to be seen and heard—if not touched! The voice that spoke laid down the will of God for humankind. What better basis for the religious life could be found? But not according to the apostle. For him, the real was for now invisible. It is appropriated by faith, not by the senses. It is access to the very presence of God, where fear dissipates and we approach with absolute confidence. But it belongs to the transcendent order.

12:25–29. Final Warning. As before, the apostle reasoned from the lesser to the greater. Those who refused to listen to the one who spoke on earth did not escape, and those who refuse Him who speaks from heaven will have even less chance to escape. While some translators and interpreters understand the one speaking on earth to be God (and thus sometimes capitalize "Him"), others imply that the reference is to Moses. The passage is exactly parallel in form and content to 2:1–4 and 10:26–31. One difference surfaces in this warning, however. Whereas the others were argued on the basis of the preciousness of the salvation provided in Christ, this one includes an eschatological factor. The superiority of Him who speaks from heaven (v. 25) at first reminds us of the Lord, who is greater than angels (2:1–4), and the Son of God, who is greater than Moses (10:26–31). The reasoning takes a new turn, however, as the author predicts a future shaking (vv. 26–27). Once again, an OT passage (Haggai 2:6) shapes the discussion. The apostle found, in the ancient text, a prophecy of a future divine judgment that was to separate the permanent—the unshakeable things—from the transient—those things being shaken (Heb. 12:27). The reasoning is as follows: God promised that He will test everything in both heaven and earth, screening out the faithful from the unfaithful. Let us therefore heed His warning lest we also come under divine judgment.

Once more the present possession of salvation is tempered by the caution that it may be lost. Any failure will not be on God's part, for the kingdom cannot be shaken (v. 28). We must beware; we may refuse to heed the divine summons (echoes of 3:6—4:13) or reject the opportunities afforded. In Hebrews, the gospel comes as a promise—a promise to be made concrete through the life of faith. So Christian life is to be a movement toward the goal; it is faithfulness—it is an offering to God in which we serve Him acceptably with reverence and *deos* ("awe" or "godly fear"; v. 28).

13:1–19. Sundry Advice. The author took opportunity in his closing remarks to impart jottings of practical advice that he thought the readers needed to keep in mind. The practices are all part of the life of Christian faithfulness held up before them throughout the book. The apostle's list runs the gamut of life in the world. We see, in turn, relations among Christians (v. 1), hospitality toward strangers (v. 2), concern for prisoners and the mistreated—probably fellow Christians in both cases (v. 3)—marriage and sexual relations—no praise of celibacy or denial of immorality (v. 4)—economic matters—freedom from both the love of money, resulting in covetousness, and financial anxiety (v. 5)—and the place of their leaders—following in the footsteps of their faith (v. 7).

Although it is futile to press any system upon these incidental injunctions, they do show the

comprehensiveness of the Christian life. As we have seen, in Hebrews the good news comes shaped by the theology of Jesus Christ as High Priest and Sacrifice. But that "what" of His accomplishment issues in a "so what" for His followers. The author's leading concerns in exhortation are to prevent casualness, indifference, and certainly an overt rejection of Christ. Hence his accenting of *pistis*. The shopping list for Christian conduct suggests a wider perspective, however. It shows that the gospel projects a new way of life in the world. It is not an ethic of withdrawal from the world of society, business, and marriage; rather, it introduces in all these areas a new ethic that arises out of the great salvation (2:3) provided by Jesus Christ.

Verse 8 contains the gist of Hebrews: Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. The apostle points to the accomplishment of Jesus already made at Calvary, to the present work of High Priestly ministry in the heavenly sanctuary, and to the *parousia*, when He shall enter into His eternal heirship. In v. 9, the author alludes to false teachings without elaboration. Apparently, ascetic practices are involved, since he contrasted grace with food. Then comes another statement glowing with Christian confidence: "We have an altar" (v. 10). Some exegetes see a eucharistic allusion in these words, but the statement is merely the argument related to the system of worship in a nutshell, equivalent to earlier ones (e.g., 2:18; 4:14). The polemical setting of Hebrews emerges sharply in this passage. The new system of worship in Christ is consciously opposed to the Jewish one; it is an altar from which those who serve or minister at the tabernacle (*skēnē*; "tent") "have no right to eat" (v. 10). We catch reverberations of the early conflict between Christianity and Judaism; the author, as elsewhere in the book, asserted the superiority of the new. His presentation strongly suggests that the temple with its services is still operative.

The apostle next draws a homiletic lesson from the sin offerings of the old system (vv. 11–13). The sin offering was handled in one of two ways: either the priest who offered it ate a portion of the flesh in the court of the tabernacle (Lev. 6:24–30), or some of the blood was brought into the "sanctuary" (*ta hagia*), sprinkled in front of the veil/curtain, and put on the horns of the altar of incense (Lev. 4:1–7). When the latter procedure was followed, the whole animal was carried outside the camp to a clean place and burned (Heb. 13:11–12). It is this ritual that the apostle referred to, drawing a parallel between sacrifices burned outside the camp and Jesus suffering outside the gate of Jerusalem.

The expression "outside the camp" (vv. 11–12) occurs several times in the OT (Lev. 13:46; 24:14; Deut. 23:12) in connection with the wandering tribes in the desert. It suggests an unclean place—a place of separation and death where lepers roamed, criminals were executed, and the bodies of animals used for sin offerings were burned. And that is where Jesus died. Not in the temple, not in the place consecrated for sacrifices, not even within the precincts of the holy city—but outside the gate (Heb. 13:12) on profane ground. So, says the apostle, let us join Him outside the camp, bearing reproach and disgrace with Him (v. 13).

The implications for Christian living are profound. Because Jesus died in a profane place, He removed all separations of temples and holy places on this earth. His cross has sanctified every secular spot. We no longer live in a two-compartment world of sacred and profane; all is Christ's, and our every act is to be for Christ. So the world is holy, it belongs to Him, and we are all priests—continually offering the sacrifice of praise to God (v. 15), doing good, and sharing (v. 16).

Once more, for the last time, the apostle refers to the city (v. 14). Unlike 12:22, where he could say that Christians have already come to Mount Zion—to the city of the heavenly Jerusalem—here he states that we are seeking the one (that is, city) to come in the future (v. 14). There is no contradiction. He again expresses the tension between the "already" of Christ's accomplishment and the "not yet" as we eagerly wait for His return. The list of sundry exhortations closes with an appeal for submission to those in positions of leadership (v. 17–18) and prayer for the author himself (vv. 18–19). The Greek verb *hēgeomai*, used in regard to the leaders in v. 17, expresses the idea not so much of ruling but of leading and guiding. The responsibility of such leaders is to keep watch over their souls, that is, to care for them and to do it with joy instead of grief. Believers are called to trust (*peithō*; "to be persuaded," "to have confidence in," "to depend on") and submit (*hypeikō*; "to yield," "to submit") to them.

13:20–25. Benediction and Closing. The benediction (vv. 20–21) contains the only direct reference to the resurrection of Christ in the entire document, though it is alluded to implicitly by references to Christ sitting down triumphantly at the right hand of God immediately following His earthly life and atoning death (1:3; 10:12; 12:2).

The Shepherd/sheep (v. 20) motifs do not occur earlier. The author very likely calls upon liturgical language familiar to his readers; its motifs of blood and covenant (v. 20) recall the major ideas of his argumentation. Only in the closing verses (vv. 22–25) do we find personal marks characteristic of the epistolary form. They are not sufficient to change our conception of the work as a whole. It is, as the writer says, a word or message of exhortation (v. 22). Indeed, it is a masterfully wrought sermon, wherein theological exposition lays the basis for practical instruction. The great salvation (2:3) is to give the addressees full assurance (10:22) and hope for faithful Christian living in anticipation of the return of their High Priest from the heavenly temple.

The Theology of the Sanctuary in Hebrews

The book of Hebrews makes an important contribution to the biblical understanding of the work of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary and, consequently, to the Adventist understanding of the sanctuary doctrine. Hebrews is in fact critical to the Adventist theology of the sanctuary.

First, it provides the clearest evidence in Scripture for the existence of the heavenly sanctuary. Although we find many biblical passages referring to the temple in heaven, Hebrews states the case categorically in 8:1–2: there is a true tabernacle or tent in heaven, where Christ serves as our High Priest.

Second, it informs us that Jesus is our great High Priest, who conducts an ongoing ministry in the heavenly sanctuary. He mediates our access to God (10:20); grants us cleansing and holiness (9:14) and mercy and grace (4:16); and equips us to be victorious over temptation (2:18; cf. 13:20–21). Although Hebrews does not detail everything that ministry entails, it clearly describes it as intercession or mediation (7:25; 9:15) and assures us that Christ's ministry is effective because of the once-for-all, all-sufficient sacrifice of Himself (9:13–14; 10:11–12). We may therefore be confident that divine history did not come to a close at Calvary. Heaven is active on behalf of a world in distress as God works out His purposes for a glorious finale at the Second Coming of Jesus.

Third, Hebrews points out our need of cleansing. Sin has defiled us; we are unclean in the sight of a holy God (1:3). With this emphasis Hebrews takes us back to the book of Leviticus, where defilement and purification are major motifs. It likewise echoes Daniel 8:14, which predicts the eschatological cleansing of the sanctuary.

Fourth, Hebrews indicates that the death of Jesus on the cross has cosmic ramifications. Throughout Hebrews, the apostle underscores the power and efficacy of Calvary. On the cross Jesus defeated the devil, delivered His followers from the fear of death, and brought the Mosaic system of sacrifices to an end. His death provided thorough cleansing from sin. But Hebrews goes further: it indicates that the heavenly sanctuary itself needed cleansing through the sacrifice of Christ (9:23).

This verse, indicating the need for cleansing of heavenly things, has caused great puzzlement among interpreters of Hebrews. For Seventh-day Adventists, however, it is not mysterious. Our understanding of the cosmic conflict sees the need for God's salvation plan to set right not just the earth but the entire universe. Christ's better sacrifice was for the purpose of cleansing all things—both in heaven and on earth.

Thus, the book of Hebrews plays an indispensable role in the Adventist theology of the sanctuary. Although it does not elaborate on every aspect of Christ's two-phase heavenly ministry (daily and annual), it indicates the close of His work of mediation with the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary followed by the Second Coming of Christ (9:23–28). The connection with judgment, although present, is not emphasized. Hebrews tells of the judgment to come (2:2–3; 3:12, 17–19; 4:1, 11–13; 6:7–8; 10:26–31; 12:25–29; 13:17), and places it in the context of the cleansing of the heavenly temple and the coming of Christ (9:23–28). It is only by bringing Leviticus, Daniel, and Revelation together with Hebrews and many other biblical passages that we arrive at our doctrine of the ministry of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary.

JAMES

INTRODUCTION

Title and Authorship. The earliest copies of this letter bear the simple title: "The Epistle of James." Later scribes indicated their recognition of its sacred nature by describing it as a "holy epistle," and/or by referring to James as an "apostle" or a "holy apostle."

Who exactly was this James? The answer to this question is not entirely clear; he describes himself only in general terms as a servant "of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ" (1:1). There are at least five people named James in the NT: (1) James the son of Zebedee (Mark 1:19) and brother of John the apostle (Matt. 4:21), who was martyred about A.D. 44 (Acts 12:2); (2) James the son of Alphaeus—one of the Twelve (Mark 3:18)—who is not that prominent in the NT; (3) James the Less—which means the less well-known or the "smaller" or "younger" (Mark 15:40), whose mother seems to be more prominent than he is since she is often mentioned in the synoptic passion narrative (cf. Matt. 27:56; Mark 16:1; Luke 24:10); (4) James the father of Judas Thaddaeus (Luke 6:16; cf. Matt. 10:3), a relatively unknown apostle; and finally, (5) James the (half-)brother of Jesus (Mark 6:3; Gal. 1:19) and the brother of Jude (Jude 1), who played a prominent leadership role in the account of the early church in Acts.

Since the author was prominent enough to be recognized among the Christian community by the simple designation "James," the mostly likely candidate is James the (half-)brother of Jesus (Acts 12:17; 15:13; 21:18; Gal. 2:9, 12; see "The Brothers of Jesus," p. 1252). This has been a common assumption throughout the history of the church and is even reflected in the titles of a handful of extant manuscripts of the epistle itself.

The NT gives the following information about James the brother of Jesus: he was an unbeliever before Jesus's resurrection (John 7:5); Christ appeared to him after His resurrection (1 Cor. 15:7); after Paul's conversion, James received a visit from him (Gal. 1:18–19); he was considered a pillar in the church in Jerusalem (Gal. 2:9); he presided over the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:13–19); and he received Paul after his missionary trip and urged him to respect the Jewish customs (Acts 21:17–21).

The Epistle of James also has strong similarities to James's speech recorded in Acts 15:13–21. For example, the greeting in James 1:1 (*chairein*) is identical to the greeting given in Acts 15:23, likely also by James. The word *episkeptomai* (to "visit" or "look after"; James 1:27) appears in Acts 15:14. The term "turning" (*epistrephō*), which describes a sinner who comes to God (James 5:20), also appears in James's address in Acts 15:19. Finally, the term *onoma* ("name") is used in James 2:7 and in Acts 15:17. Clearly, a good case can be made to support the view that James the brother of Jesus is the author of the book of James.

Date. Since the letter itself does not state when it was written, two options have been proposed for its date. Some scholars advocate an early date—sometime in the mid to late A.D. 40s. This view is based on the following reasons: the distinctively Jewish nature of the letter (e.g., 1:1; 2:2, 8–13, 21, 25; 4:4); the absence of any reference to the conflict between Jews and Gentiles, which would be expected if the letter was written after the Jerusalem Council; the economic conditions of the poor (5:1–6) reflecting the social demographic of the church in its earliest years; and the thought that the simplicity of theological expression—including the absence of an explicit Christology—also fits best with the earliest decades of the church.

Those who favor a later date suggest it was written shortly before James suffered a martyr's death in A.D. 62. In support of this view, they claim the following: Paul's teaching on justification needed to be in circulation for a considerable time in order for James to respond to its misunderstanding, and the challenges of worldliness that James was confronting in the letter reflect the sort of typical problems that would confront a second generation of believers (4:1–7). Concerns about worldliness, however, hardly need a long period of time to develop. While a definitive conclusion cannot be reached regarding the date of the letter, the evidence makes the earlier date seem more probable.

Backgrounds. James has been included among the so-called General or Catholic (meaning "universal") Epistles of the NT because it does not address a specific audience. Yet the letter was intended for a specific audience, namely, the twelve tribes in the Diaspora. James referred to his readers as the twelve scattered tribes (1:1). This is a rather ambiguous designation. Some suggest that this term is a metaphorical way of referring to Christians in general (cf. 1 Pet. 1:1), while others suggest that it would be more natural to regard the intended readership as Jewish Christians based on the following internal evidence: (1) the way in which the OT law is mentioned (1:25; 2:8–13); (2) the reference to their meeting place as a synagogue (2:2); (3) the teachers and elders as leaders of the group (3:1; 5:14); (4) the oppression of the addressees by the rich non-Christians (2:6–7); and (5) the suggestion that most of the readers were poor (5:1–6).

The phrase "scattered abroad" or "scattered among the nations" (Gr. *diaspora*) was used to denote Jews living outside the Holy Land (cf. John 7:35; see commentary on 1 Pet. 1:1–2). Acts tells us of Christians from Jerusalem who were "scattered" (*diaspeirō*) because of persecution connected with the stoning of Stephen. They traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, and preached to only the Jewish people (Acts 11:19). Identifying James's readers with these early Jewish Christians would fit the early date of the letter and explain why it was written. James—the leader of the Jerusalem church—wanted to minister to his scattered flock and could do so only by a written letter.

Theology and Purpose. The epistle does not contain any christological reflection, and there is no doctrinal development. The lack of christological discussion is so striking that Martin Luther held the epistle in lowest esteem and called it a "straw epistle." James stresses sound deeds and not just orthodoxy or sound doctrine, regardless of Luther's evaluation. The book is characterized by its very strong practical and moral religion. Its emphasis on morals is similar to that of Jesus's teachings. In fact, it has a strong similarity with the teachings found in Jesus's Sermon on the Mount (cf. humbleness in James 4:10 and Matt. 5:5; judging in James 4:11–12 and Matt. 7:1; swearing in James 5:12 and Matt. 5:34–37). James is merely applying the teachings of Jesus to the life of the early church. Good works are considered a manifestation of our faith. As Calvin rightly observed: "We are justified by faith alone, but the faith that justifies is not alone."

The epistle provides an overview of the Christian life and emphasizes that all aspects of it are to be lived in submission to the Lord. It speaks about patiently facing trials (1:2–4); the importance of speaking the truth (vv. 16–27); the inappropriateness of showing partiality (2:1–13); the profitability of faith manifested in good works (vv. 14–26); the power of the tongue (3:1–12); the characteristics of humility and dependence on God (chap. 4); the perversion of treasures (5:1–6); and perseverance in trials (vv. 7–20). Thus, James as a whole is an ethical book stressing the practical and moral side of Christianity.

Several reasons for writing the epistle of James can be derived from the text: to comfort persecuted believers (1:2–4, 12); to commend "pure" religion (v. 27) and to convict the mere professors of faith who were not "doers" of faith (2:14–26); to exhort the audience about controlling their tongues (3:1–12), the value of humility (4:1–12), and dependence on God (4:13—5:6); and to offer prayer for the afflicted (5:13–18). Hence, the aim of the letter—like the Sermon on the Mount—is to set forth a life lived according to God's will. Living this type of life demonstrates that believers are patiently waiting for the realization of the Christian hope—the coming of the Lord (5:8), when the Lord will give them the crown of life (1:12).

Literary Features. This epistle represents a Jewish way of expression because of how figures of speech (3:6), illustrations (1:11), emphasis (2:9), and proverbs (e.g., 1:5, 19; 3:13–18) are used. Thus, the book of James has been called the "Proverbs of the New Testament." It is written in high quality Greek, but the syntax remains Semitic. In addition to being written to a wide audience of Jewish believers, it is highly impersonal and encyclical in nature. Unlike the Pauline letters, there are no personal references, greetings, or prayer requests in the entire book.

COMMENTARY

1:1–27

Greeting and Introductory Topics

The first section of James consists of a greeting (1:1) and a discussion of key topics that James will mostly return to for further development and discussion. These introductory topics include trials (vv. 2–4), wisdom (vv. 5–8), poverty and wealth (vv. 9–12), faith and testing (vv. 13–18), God's word (vv. 19–25), and true religion (vv. 26–27).

1:1. Greetings. We have suggested that James was one of the brothers of Jesus (see James: Introduction; cf. Gal. 1:19). He likely chose not to mention his natural kinship with his half-brother Jesus, since by this time Jesus was the exalted Lord, known by faith and crowned with "glory" (2:1). Thus, James describes himself as only a *doulos* ("servant," "bondservant," or "slave"). This implies obedience, humility, and loyalty, but also authority. In the OT, leaders were often called servants of God (2 Sam. 7:5; 1 Kin. 8:53; Jer. 7:25; Amos 3:7; Zech. 1:6). This term came to denote the ministry of service in the church.

James addresses his readers in terms of both their status and location. They are the twelve tribes scattered abroad. The twelve tribes reflect the historical origins of Israel, made up of the descendants from the twelve patriarchs (Acts 7:8). As a result of the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities, most of the tribes were exiled and scattered all over the Mediterranean world. The phrase "scattered abroad" translates a Greek phrase that literally means "in the diaspora." "Diaspora," or "Dispersion," became the technical name to refer to the displacement of Jewish people living in the nations outside of the Holy Land (John 7:35). James uses that terminology here in a figurative sense—referring, most probably, to Jewish Christians dispersed as a result of persecution (Acts 11:19).

1:2–4. Trials and their Purpose. James immediately launches into his first major topic: the genuineness of faith will be tested. The readers are addressed as his brothers (and sisters) (cf. 1:16, 19; 2:1, 5, 14; 3:1, 10, 12; 4:11; 5:7, 9–10, 12, 19), an affection restricted to those within the church. He invited his readers to wrestle with the paradox of beginning to consider it a joy when facing trials. It is paradoxical in that it is to be applied to a situation in which a joyful reaction would be most unnatural. The term "trial" can refer to inner enticement to sin (1:12–15) or to the affliction of persecution (cf. 1 Pet. 4:12). In this context, the various trials could include financial poverty (James 1:9–11), economic and religious persecution (2:6–7), or illness (5:14).

James is not saying that there will not be a component of sorrow in trials. The reason for the joy is found in the fruit it induces: patience (v. 3), maturity (v. 4), and wisdom (v. 5). The Greek word for "testing" (*dokimion*; v. 3) is often used to refer to the process by which silver or gold is refined by fire (see LXX Ps. 12:6; Prov. 27:21). This is probably the intended meaning. Suffering is a means by which faith—tested in the fires of adversity—can be purified and thus strengthened. The idea is not that trials determine if a person has faith or not, but the intended outcome is patience/perseverance. But perseverance is not the final goal, because it contributes to the process of making believers *teleios* (v. 4). This word (which denotes "maturity" or "perfection") is a key term in James (1:4 [twice], 17, 25; 3:2) and, together with the following descriptive term ("complete"), points to full Christian development (see Matt. 5:48; 19:21). Mature Christians are the end-product of trials. Only then will Christians "lack nothing" in their panoply of virtues.

1:5–8. Wisdom, Prayer, and Faith. Structurally, this passage is linked with the previous one by the use of the word *leipō* ("to lack"; vv. 4–5). James, at this point, moves from moral integrity to wisdom. His readers already know that trials experienced with perseverance will mature Christians so that they may lack nothing. But a question immediately arises: where can one get the wisdom to interpret these trials in the right way? James's answer is that believers should ask God, who will give abundantly and without rebuke (v. 5). The imperative verbal form used here implies a command for people to ask if they truly wish to obtain wisdom.

Wisdom, generally speaking, is the ability to make sound judgments; but the wisdom about which James writes is divinely given (cf. Prov. 2:6) and bears the character of God (James 3:17). This wisdom is not obtained by pursuing suffering but is acquired by asking. God provides what He demands. Wisdom as God's gift to believers enables them to see personal experiences from a divine perspective. The person who asks for wisdom must remember two things: how God gives and how they must ask. James tells us that God gives abundantly and unreservedly without rebuke or reservation. Unlike pagan gods or human beings, God's giving is not devious; it comes with no strings attached. God's willingness to hear and respond to His children's call in their need is well-attested in the teachings of Jesus (Matt. 7:7a; cf. Luke 11:13).

Suffering, maturity (perfection), and wisdom are linked together in the Christology of the NT (Heb. 5:8–9). Paul describes Christ as the manifestation of God's wisdom (1 Cor. 1:24). In Christ, God gave the best He had without reservation.

The other side of the transaction is how one should petition. James tells us that Christians should believe God and trust Him; the request must be made in faith (James 1:6). Doubt is a form of passing judgment on God's word and thus the opposite of faith. James means not that believers may never have a measure of uncertainty regarding God's will but that they should not question the integrity of God. Doubters are depicted as a wave susceptible to change and manipulation because they lack sufficient grounding.

The warning in v. 7—that doubting people should not anticipate receiving anything from the Lord—refers to an action in progress. James commands readers to stop toying with the thought of asking God while questioning God's integrity. Such a person is "double-minded" (v. 8), suffering from what could be called "spiritual schizophrenia." The double-minded person is ultimately trying to serve two masters. Such a person is unstable in everything (v. 8). Without a firm faith, life is chaotic—lacking stability.

1:9–12. Poverty and Wealth. This section is considered an opening salvo against wealth in light of the even harsher language of 5:1–6. The main problem seems to be not wealth itself but certain attitudes toward it. Humble people are contrasted with the rich, which suggests that James is dealing not with the issue of a humble attitude but with that of a humble position. Many early Christian believers were from among the poor and could "boast" in their humble circumstances only because they knew of the eschatological reversal, when they would experience the "high position" (1:9; cf. Luke 16:25).

Verses 9–10 could lead us to initially think that the rich people were also members of the Christian community. The "rich" in v. 10 is most naturally related to "*adelphos* ("brother," a believer) in v. 9, and parallel to "humble." The community to which James was writing might at least have had within it some who were fairly well-off, able to travel on business and brag about the prospects of making money (4:13–17). In other passages, however, James describes "rich" people as wicked oppressors of the people of God (2:1–6; 5:1–6). Thus, many interpreters think that the rich people must have been non-Christians.

Regardless of whether the rich people here are Christians or not, the meaning of vv. 10b–11 is clear: riches are worthless in the face of death and judgment because rich people—along with their riches—are ephemeral. The botanical comparison is unmistakable; as go the flowers, so will the rich people go (v. 10). In v. 11, the author continues discussing the topic of the transitory nature of life. As a whole, the passage echoes Jeremiah 9:23–24. Wealth, according to James, can lead a person to arrogance, pride, ruthlessness, and faith in oneself instead of in God. Wealth can also lead a poor person to envy and obsequiousness. It is not wealth that is the problem but the rich person's attachment to it and the poor person's lust for it.

With v. 12, James returns to the topic of trials discussed earlier and forms a verbal bracket with 1:2–3. The verse is expressed like a beatitude (see Matt. 5:3–12; Luke 6:20–23). The word "blessed" (v. 12) does not mean quite the same as the English word "happy." The latter refers to a present emotional state, whereas the former refers to wholeness in relation to God and has its primary manifestation in the future. In this verse, this future manifestation is called the "crown of life" (cf. Rev. 2:10), that is, the crown that is life.

1:13–18. Faith and Testing. The catchword that connects v. 12 with this section is *peirasmos* ("testing," "trial," or "temptation"). In the context of a strong belief in God's sovereignty, it is easy to fall into the trap of blaming God for one's own failure. Therefore, James commands his audience not to give way to the thought that God is tempting anyone (v. 13). The Greek verb *peirazō* (related to the noun *peirasmos*) expresses both of the ideas of testing and temptation. In v. 13, there is a shift from the external push (testing) to sin toward the internal pull (temptation). Of course, sometimes trials are followed by temptations. For example, financial difficulty can tempt some to question God's providence in their lives. The suffering of the righteous poor and the ease of the wicked rich can tempt one to question

God's justice. However, while God allows testing through external pressure, He does not try to lure people into sinning. James says that God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He tempt anyone (v. 13b). Temptation is an impulse to sin, but since God is not susceptible to any such desire for evil, He cannot be seen as desiring that for humans. Thus, James describes God's incapacity for evil as a passive and active agent.

The ability to tempt and to be tempted is rooted in an evil disposition within each person (v. 14). The illustration used is evocative of fishing and hunting, then continued with the imagery of sexual reproduction (v. 15). Sin is not the end in itself, but it produces death—the offspring of sin. James has presented several different sequential chains: such as testing, endurance, perseverance, and maturity (1:2–4); and testing, endurance, perseverance, and life (1:12). Here, we are presented with another sequential chain: desire, sin, and death. James expresses that the immense magnetism of desire and the genealogy of sin is not traced further than the person's own desire. The admonition "stop being deceived" (v. 16) warns readers to stop being deceived (lured) by temptation.

While temptation could eventually take life away from a person, God gives good and perfect gifts from above (v. 17). He generously gives wisdom from above (1:5; cf. 3:15). He is the Father of lights since He is the Creator of the celestial lights (Gen. 1:14–18). Ordinary lights produce shadows, but God's light is shadowless. Given the instability of the world in which the nascent community of believers lived, the reliability of God's wisdom was a stable corollary. Just as God brought forth the heavenly lights, so He also brought forth believers by the *logō alētheias* ("word of truth"; v. 18). All four occurrences of this phrase (sometimes translated as "truthful speech," "message of truth," or "true message") in the NT refer to the gospel as the agent of salvation (2 Cor. 6:7; Eph. 1:13; Col. 1:5; 2 Tim. 2:15). The word is the instrument through which God brings people to life to be "a kind of firstfruits" (James 1:18). The firstfruits were the finest produce set apart as an offering to God (Ex. 23:19). So, the early Christians were to be the beginning of God's redemption of all creation (Rom. 16:5; 2 Thess. 2:13; Rev. 14:4).

1:19–25. Doing God's word. The connection between what preceded and what follows in this section is the idea of the truthful word or message (v. 18); the word planted in believers (v. 21); the word (v. 22–23); and "the perfect law" of freedom (v. 25). This section begins with a number of sentences that have a proverbial character. Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger (v. 19). What should the audience be quick to hear? The object of the command seems to be the "word of truth" (v. 18) or, simply stated, the word of God. However, such hearing results in being slow to speak and slow to anger. Controlling the tongue is a major component of true faith (1:26; 3:10; 4:11). James here echoes wisdom teachings (cf. Prov. 17:28; 29:20). He even explains why Christians should be slow to become angry. Anger does not produce the righteousness of God (v. 20). To produce righteousness seems to mean to do that which God requires from His people. The combination of the verb "do" or "produce" with the noun "righteousness" makes it very difficult to think that James was referring to God's act or gift of righteousness (cf. Matt. 5:20). James's point here is that human anger does not produce a behavior that is pleasing to God (cf. Eph. 4:26).

James touches on four aspects of hearing/receiving God's word: first, the proper preparation for receiving the word (remove all filth and rampant evil); second, the required attitude (humility/meekness); third, the thing to be received (the implanted word); finally, the expected results (salvation; v. 21). The metaphor of putting off evil is common (Rom. 13:12; Eph. 4:22, 25; Col. 3:8; Heb. 12:1; 1 Pet. 2:1; cf. Zech. 3:3–4). The reference to filth seems to assume that the audience has not just a few peccadilloes that must be disposed of but a multitude. The Greek word *prautēs* in James 1:21 ("meekness," "humbleness," "gentleness") stands in contrast to slander (Titus 3:2) and is commended by Jesus as part of the fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:23). The implanted word reminds us of the gospel through which the believer was given birth (James 1:18) and which is to take root in the believer's life. The outcome of such implantation is salvation.

The one hearing the word of God, James argues, must also act on it. Listening to the word must lead to doing. Both Jesus and Paul also contrast the hearer of the word with the doer (cf. Matt. 7:24–27; Rom. 2:13–16). Those who merely listen deceive themselves (cf. James 1:22, 26). Furthermore, James contrasts the hearer and the doer in *what* they look at, *how* they look at it, and what the *result* of their looking is. The hearer looks at his face in the mirror (v. 23), while the doer looks at the "perfect law" of liberty and freedom (v. 25). Hearers look hastily at their face but forget what it looked like (v. 24); doers look intensely into the law and act on it (v. 25). Hearers remain unchanged because of their superficial glance at themselves, while doers are changed since they act, receiving a blessing in what they do.

James shifts from the "word" (vv. 21–23) to God's "law" (v. 25)—probably because they refer to the same thing. The word *nomos* ("law") is the Greek equivalent to the Hebrew *torah*. The *torah* comprises not just legal statutes but also the teaching of Scripture. The statement "perfect law" goes back to Psalm 119:43, which refers to the *torah* as "the word of truth" (cf. Ps. 19:7). It is perfect because God is its originator. Later in the letter, James will call it the "royal law" (2:8).

1:26–27. True Religion. Two ties link this section with what has gone before: first, the introduction of the sin of rash speech (v. 19) and, second, the discussion of being not merely hearers but also doers. In both this and the previous section, self-deception plays a significant role. The three manifestations of pure religion mentioned here—to which James will later return—are controlling the tongue (1:19–20; 3:1–12; 4:11–12), showing concern for the helpless (2:1–13, 15–16; 5:1–6), and avoiding worldliness (4:4–10). The problem with the audience of James seems to rest with people who could not control their tongue—the control of which represents the virtue of self-control.

According to James, what God desires is a religion which is *katharos* ("pure") and *amiantos* ("undefiled" or "faultless," two synonymous adjectives). The word translated "religion" (*thrēskeia*) can also be translated "worship." While worship is usually associated with religious rituals that occur as part of a church service, James reminds his hearers that it encompasses much more than that. It is seen in how we *episkeptomai* ("visit," "look after," "seek out"; Acts 6:3), or care for (Heb. 2:6), the orphans and widows in their affliction (James 1:27). These two social classes are frequently connected in Scripture because they represent those most vulnerable to exploitation (cf. Deut. 10:18; Is. 1:17; Ezek. 22:7; Mark 12:40; 1 Tim. 5:3–16). Because of their situation, they are identified as special recipients of God's concern, care, and protection (Deut. 10:18; Ps. 68:5). Like the prophets of old, James declares that religious ritual and liturgy can never substitute for sacrifice and service to those who are in need.

The second aspect of pure religion acceptable to God involves keeping oneself from being stained by the world (James 1:27). To keep unstained from the world does not mean that we are to withdraw from it. It is a call to avoid being influenced by the corrupt values of the world that stand in opposition to the way God would have us live.

2:1—5:18
Detailed Thematic Expositions

In the main portion of the letter, James develops most of the themes already discussed and introduces new ones. The emphasis is on how to live the Christian life in a way that corresponds to the will of God and that will bring glory to Him.

2:1–7. Favoritism. James applies many of the key ideas discussed before (1:19–27) to the discrimination of the poor within the church. The object of his concern is partiality or favoritism. The Greek term *prosōpolēmpsia* comes from the Hebrew term *nasa' panim* (lit., "lifting up the face") and connotes regarding someone with special favor. In this passage, it means to make judgments about people based on external appearance. The OT condemned such an attitude (Deut. 10:17–18; Prov. 18:5; Mal. 2:9; cf. Acts 10:34). It was Paul's conviction that Gentile and Jew stand under a like judgment in the sight of God, for with God there is no favoritism (Rom. 2:11). Since favoritism mirrors the standards of the surrounding culture, it is an obvious example of being stained by the world's way of thinking (James 1:27). By falling into the sin of partiality, one denies their adherence to their glorious Lord, Jesus Christ (2:1). The phrase used here can be read as "the Lord of glory" or more literally as "of the glory." This suggests that "of the glory" functions as a title of Jesus. He is "our Lord Jesus Christ, the Glory." This phrase is a rare example of Christology in the book of James that identifies Jesus with the Shekinah, the visible manifestation of the glory of the divine presence in the holy of holies (cf. Ex. 25:8; 40:34; 1 Kin. 8:10).

The case of favoritism James alludes to involves two people coming to the same meeting but being treated differently. Although it is introduced as a hypothetical situation, the specificity of the passage, especially in 2:6, suggests that it reflects actual events. The "assembly" or "meeting" where these two individuals come is referred to as a *synagōgē* in Greek—the place where Jews met together for both worship and community matters. Its identification as "your synagogue" or "your meeting/assembly" could suggest an early time in the church when Jews and Christians still met together. The first person who entered was well-dressed and wore a gold ring, indicating a high social status. The second individual, however, was a poor person who entered wearing filthy or shabby clothes. The rich person was offered a seat of honor, whereas the poor person was disdainfully tolerated. "At my footstool" or "by my feet" (v. 3) suggests that the poor person was considered to be socially beneath the other. Paying attention to outward appearance is one of the primary ways of showing favoritism.

Although James describes the meeting as occurring in a synagogue, the nature of the gathering may not have been for communal worship. It could have been a gathering to decide a legal issue, a judicial proceeding. While it might appear strange to us today, synagogues were used as courts of laws where Jewish communities could settle their own issues internally (cf. Luke 12:11). Early Christians had a similar practice (cf. Matt. 18:15–20; 1 Cor. 6:1–16). The use of legal language seems to support this suggestion. James describes, for example, Christians who discriminate in this manner as "judges with evil thoughts" (James 2:4) and later refers to believers dragging fellow believers into court (v. 6).

Whether it occurs within the church or society, James proceeds to explain why favoritism and all forms of discrimination are wrong (vv. 5–7). They contradict God's own attitude, as revealed in His treatment of the poor. In Jesus's first sermon in the synagogue in Nazareth, He claimed that God had anointed Him to preach good news to the poor (Luke 4:18). Paul told the Corinthians that not many of them were wise or powerful according to worldly standards (1 Cor. 1:26). It is not that Christ and the church do not want the rich and the wise and the mighty. They should all be treated with Christian respect. There is no inherent virtue in poverty. But James encourages the church to show concern and honor for the poor and helpless as God does.

James does not condemn riches but the conduct of some rich people. Three charges in particular are mentioned: they oppress or exploit (v. 6); they drag people into court (v. 6); and they blaspheme the noble name by which they are identified (v. 7). The prophets often denounced rich people who oppressed the poor (Amos 4:1). In the time of James, the rich would drag the poor to court because of their debts, rents, and wages and the prevalence of usury. The charge of blasphemy could refer to slander, but it usually has a religious nuance, involving the profane abuse of sacred things—especially impious speech (cf. Matt. 9:3). The rich are not just blaspheming the poor but the name by which they are called. Christians are named after Christ to whom they belong and whom they acknowledge as their glorified Lord (2:1).

2:8–13. Discrimination and the Royal Law. Showing favoritism is sin (2:9), and it makes the one who shows favoritism as much a lawbreaker as the murderer and the adulterer. This section concludes with two reminders. First, we will be held accountable for what we say and what we do (2:12). Second, mercy has greater weight than judgment (Luke 6:36), and those who expect to receive mercy must likewise exhibit mercy (James 2:13). James's references to the law and judgment are reminiscent of Jesus's instruction (Matt. 22:39). Jesus quoted Leviticus 19:18 as the second greatest commandment, and James reminds his hearers that the command to love summarizes a series of commands in Leviticus that includes a prohibition against partiality (Lev. 19:15). James 2:10—pointing out that to transgress one part of the law is to transgress the whole—echoes Matthew 5:19. The concluding verses (vv. 12–13) echo the beatitude in Matthew 5:7, as well as Jesus's parable of the unforgiving servant (Matt. 18:23–35).

James refers to the law as the "perfect law" of liberty (1:25), the "royal law" (2:8), and the law that provides freedom (2:12). God's law is complete, kingly, and liberating. The use of law (*nomos*) instead of "command" (*entolē*) makes it appear decisive that the whole Law of God is intended, rather than a single commandment. The reference to two of the Ten Commandments—adultery and murder—indicates that when James spoke about the perfect law of liberty and the royal law he had in mind the Decalogue and that he considered it to be a moral guide for Christians. The Law summarized in love is "royal" because it is the "law" of the kingdom of God.

2:14–26. Faith and Works. Not only is this section the best-known, but it also receives the most extended treatment of any subject in the letter. It is so well-known because many claim that James's insistence on the importance of works (deeds or actions) in relationship to being justified (or considered righteous) by faith (2:24) contradicts Paul's declaration that a person is "justified by faith" apart from the works of the law (Rom. 3:28). While the two apostles certainly use the same terminology in different ways, on closer examination the contradiction is only apparent. The difference between the two is the result of different concerns, different backgrounds, and different audiences.

The discussion of faith is divided in three subsections: faith without works is dead (James 2:14–17); genuine faith involves more than just mental consent (vv. 18–19); and (3) Abraham and Rahab illustrate that genuine faith is expressed in good works (vv. 20–25). James had already condemned the double-minded person whose faith waffles between God and something else (1:6–8) and now develops it further.

Faith without works is dead (2:14–17). The main theme discussed in the second half of chapter 2 relates to a faith that is inactive and therefore ineffective, dead, and worthless. In Greek, the second use of the term faith in v. 14 has a definite article "the faith," pointing to the previous reference to faith. The question should be understood as: "Can this [inactive] faith save him?" The reference is to the faith of a person who claims to believe in God but has no commensurate deeds. The "works" to which James refers are faith-deeds, which are as endemic to faith as breath is to the life of a human being (2:26). James expresses his concern with the failure of Christians to care for those who lack adequate clothing or daily food in the community. Well-wishing or a *shalom* greeting is meaningless to such persons, and the professing Christian receives no blessing from inactive faith (cf. Matt. 25:31–46).

Genuine faith involves more than just mental consent (2:18–19). James next interacts with a hypothetical interlocutor. James is opposing the notion that works and faith are separable—that works or faith are each a viable approach in one's relationship with God. He insists that they are inseparable. He also challenges the false notion that faith is simply an intellectual acceptance of doctrine (v. 19). He argues that even the demons believe that there is one God (the Shema, "hear"; Deut. 6:4), but they react to this belief with shuddering, not with submission to God. Certainly that is not an example of genuine faith.

Abraham and Rahab illustrate that genuine faith is expressed in good works (James 2:20–26). Those who attempt to separate faith from works are described as "foolish" (v. 20), probably because their faith is senseless and lacks substance (v. 26). To demonstrate his point, James gives two examples of genuine faith. First, James speaks of Abraham as being justified by the means of offering up Isaac (v. 21). This has generated much dispute since the Reformation because it seems to contradict Romans 3:28. As we noted earlier, Paul's concern in Romans and Galatians is different. His focus is on our legal standing before the eschatological tribunal of God. He expresses his interest in how God can rightly give a verdict of "just" to a sinner and how one can appropriate it. The solution offered is that the verdict is given on the basis of the believer's union with Christ, and it is appropriated by faith. Here in his epistle, James's concern is not in discussing how we are saved, but how we should live the Christian life. Genuine faith demonstrates itself in works that are viable and effective (James 2:14, 17, 20, 26). James is not saying that Abraham, by offering Isaac, was declared righteous in the Pauline sense by that event, because the declaration of Abraham's righteousness (Gen. 15) occurred several years before that time (Gen. 22). The righteousness discussed in James refers to righteous behavior (James 2:15–16). The phrase "by faith only" or "by faith alone" (2:24) clearly shows that James refers to the bogus faith that he has been attacking throughout this section. The example of Rahab, the prostitute, also demonstrates that the faith that God requires is a faith that manifests itself in good works (2:25). Like Abraham's, Rahab's faith was justified or proven to be genuine in the hospitality, protection, and help she provided for the two Israelite spies who entered her house (Josh. 2:1–21). James concludes this section by reiterating once again his observation that faith without works is like a corpse; it is devoid of life (v. 26).

Paul and James on Works and Faith

The language used by James contrasts somewhat with the way Paul refers to God's offer of salvation through faith in Christ. Often, James has been interpreted as contradicting Paul. But this is not the case.

1. Paul on Justification. When Paul says that justification is by faith alone, he is confronting the problem of legalism: the attempt of fallen humans to earn their own salvation through obedience to God's Law. In confronting legalism, Paul's focus is on the nature of salvation; how does a sinner find forgiveness and acceptance before a holy and just God? The answer is justification by faith alone: God's acceptance of humans not because of what they have done but solely because of what Jesus has done for them in His perfect life, death, and resurrection.

2. James on Works. James addresses a very different problem. His concern was not with legalism but with laxity in the Christian life—the belief that the way we act as Christians is not really that important. These individuals wrongly conclude that what matters most is that they consent to the correct religious beliefs. In dealing with this misconception, James focuses on not how a person becomes a Christian but how people should demonstrate that they are Christians (or, to put it another way, how a person who is saved by faith in Jesus should live). James is not saying that faith is meritorious. He is emphasizing that our faith should be demonstrative; it should demonstrate that we love and care for others because we have already been saved. Faith is no less important to James than to Paul. That is why James condemns the hypocritical faith that does not produce the proper behavior.

3:1–12. Teachers, Tongues, and Trouble. While the focus of the previous section was on social ethics, this section deals with the importance of proper speech. The discussion moves from the specific (wanting to teach; v. 1) to the general (control of the tongue; vv. 2–12; see 1:26).

James begins the discourse with a warning that not many of his readers should become teachers. What is the basis for his counsel? James recognizes that teaching is an important spiritual gift (cf. Rom. 12:7; 1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11). Teachers have considerable influence over the lives of others and, as a result, are often looked up to as role models. While some might desire the status of a teacher, James wants them to realize that with wider influence comes greater responsibility. In fact, teachers—and here James includes himself as well ("we")—will be judged more strictly because of their position (see Luke 12:48; cf. Num. 20:11–12). James is also concerned that too many seek the position without the required moral qualifications. Being a teacher, therefore, is dangerous because controlling the tongue—exhibiting self-discipline in what one says and does—is not easy. James acknowledges that even with our best intentions we all stumble in many ways (James 3:2). In identifying himself with his audience, James gives greater credence to his warning. Due to these challenges, only those who are self-disciplined in their speech should strive to become teachers.

James smoothly transitions from speech to the instrument that produces speech: the tongue. With a triad of vigorous illustrations, he warns against the tongue run amok. Horses are controlled by bits, ships—though driven by fierce winds—are controlled by small rudders, and a small fire can set ablaze a huge forest (v. 5). The point of all three analogies is the same: the tongue's effectual power is grossly out of proportion to its size. The tongue's potential for damage—like that of a wildfire—extends well beyond its point of origin (v. 6).

Having established the potential destructive power of the tongue, James reminds his audience of the difficult task of controlling the tongue. Different creatures from the animal kingdom have been tamed, yet the tongue is an unruly or restless evil "full of deadly poison" (v. 8). Is James suggesting that the ultimate taming of the tongue is impossible (v. 8)? He had already suggested that some people can subdue their own tongue (3:2). He now states that it is people in general who cannot subdue the tongue.

In characterizing the tongue as unruly and restless, James uses the same word employed to describe the double-minded person in 1:8. The critique of the tongue is brought to conclusion by attributing to it the duality that James so often deplores in his letter (1:8; 4:8). The duality is illustrated: it can be used to praise God and to curse human beings. Cursing a human being is evil because such a person has been made in the likeness or similitude of God (v. 9). Such a thing, while not impossible, is totally inconsistent with the Christian way of life. James considers what comes out of the mouth a barometer of spirituality (cf. Matt. 12:37). With the analogy of a spring that does not alternate between bringing forth fresh and poisonous water, or a certain kind of tree that produces only certain kinds of fruits, the point is clear: bad things do not produce good things. The ethics of pure speech are the product of a self-controlled, mature person.

3:13–18. True Wisdom Brings Peace. Just as genuine faith is distinguished from false faith by works, so heavenly wisdom is differentiated from earthly wisdom by its results. In addressing the topic of wisdom, James returns to what he first introduced in 1:5. Earthly wisdom is characterized by envy, selfishness, and disorder, while heavenly wisdom is characterized by love and peace. James assesses one's claim to wisdom in practical terms (v. 13). The concept that genuine wisdom is humble originates in the OT (see Prov. 11:2). Wisdom begins with the fear of the Lord (Prov. 1:7) and enables a person to discern what is right and just (Prov. 2:9). Humility, however, was usually not prized by the Greeks. They prized intellectual ability and knowledge of divine secrets, often to the detriment of the moral life.

The results of false wisdom are mentioned: bitter envy and rivalry (James 3:14). The term "envy" (*zēlos*) has a positive meaning (and can be rendered as "zeal"; cf. John 2:17) as well as a negative meaning (rendered as "jealousy"; see Acts 5:17; Gal. 5:19–20). The negative is supported here by the qualifying adjective "bitter." Since *zēlos* is paired with rivalry here, the word most likely refers to "envy." James warns people characterized by these negative traits to not boast and slander the truth (James 3:14). The truth is that such wisdom is not from above; it is earthly, sensual/unspiritual, and demonic (v. 15). Jealousy and selfish ambition are of demonic origin. The contrast is between a wisdom that leads to humility (v. 13) and a worldly, fleshly, and demonic wisdom.

James goes on to describe the results of the different kinds of wisdom (vv. 16–18). Demonic wisdom—characterized by jealousy and selfish ambition—results in *akatastasia* ("confusion" or "disorder" and all kinds of evil; v. 16). Paul comments that God approves not of *akatastasia* but of peace (1 Cor. 14:33). The preeminent attribute that heavenly wisdom produces, says James, is purity, from where the other attributes flow. All three adjectives—*eirēnikos* ("peaceful"), *epieikēs* ("kind," "gentle," or "considerate"), and *eupeithēs* ("compliant," "willing to yield," or "obedient")—show the disposition of the wise person. The nouns "mercy and good fruit" disclose the wise person's actions, while the last two adjectives—without partiality/favoritism and without hypocrisy—describe the enduring, stable, sincere, and transparent consistency of the wise person. As the capstone of the two contrasting wisdoms, one produces disorder and the other produces peace (cf. Matt. 5:9). The ambiguous phrase regarding the fruit or harvest of righteousness should be understood as fruit/harvest that is righteousness (James 3:18).

4:1–10. Lust and Repentance. Building on his commendation of those who make peace in 3:18, James turns his attention to a number of problems in the community that do not contribute to peace. Several themes already introduced are here blended together: the destructive power of speech; doubters who do not have because they do not ask; the eschatological casting down of the proud and the exaltation of the lowly; worldliness against godliness; and the strife that comes from arrogance rather than from true wisdom. This section begins not with the expected vocative "brothers"/"brothers and sisters" as other sections do (e.g., 1:2, 16, 19; 2:1) but with a rhetorical question. It ends with a summary of proverbial material (4:7–10; cf. Prov. 3:34).

In contrast to having the peace that true wisdom brings (James 3:17), some of the addressees of James were involved in a power struggle and backbiting (4:1), which characterizes the world. Battles and fights are outward manifestations of what is in the human heart and speak of a church governed by the wisdom from "below" (3:15). James identified desire as the source of these quarrels (4:1). The Greek word here is *hēdonē*, from whence comes the English word *hedonism*. The term occurs only three times in the NT (Luke 8:14; Titus 3:3; 2 Pet. 2:13), always with a pejorative connotation. These pleasures that are in conflict within can be understood as the internal struggle within a person or the external struggle among members of a community. Animosity escalates when desire is frustrated (4:2).

The terms used here, such as battles, fights, murder, and adulterers (vv. 1–4), are almost certainly hyperbolic or metaphorical (cf. Matt. 5:21–26). However, some scholars have understood killing as literally having taken place in James's community. James indeed exhorted his readers not to kill anymore (see James 2:11; 5:6). Nevertheless, the context makes it difficult to suggest that literal killing is intended. James would not have passed so quickly over such a serious issue. The killing could be related to the use of the tongue or to indifference to the needs of the poor. All these vices are the outward manifestation of self-centered desires.

"You do not have because you do not ask," James states (4:2). What is it that James's readers were wanting? The context points out that they were seeking the wisdom that would have enabled them to gain recognition as leaders in the community. James had warned them against wanting to become teachers (3:1) and

against priding themselves on being "wise and understanding" (3:13). Apparently, they wanted to lead the church but did not have the right kind of wisdom. Earlier, James exhorted them to ask God for wisdom (1:5). His readers, however, were not receiving wisdom because they were not asking for the right kind of wisdom. Instead, they were asking only for what they could "spend" (*dapanaō*) on their own selfish gratification, to their own detriment (4:3). The word translated as "spend" means to "spend freely" in the sense of squandering. It is the same term used for the prodigal son who squandered his father's possession (cf. Luke 15:14).

The abrupt and harsh opening of James 4:4—with the vocative "adulterers" or "adulterous people" (lit., "adulteresses")—marks the beginning of the call for repentance. There is nothing in the context to suggest that the literal sin of adultery is what James was addressing. Adultery may refer to spiritual betrayal. The background of the accusation is found in the OT, where the prophets compared the relationship between God and His people to a marriage relationship (Is. 54:5–6; Jer. 2:2; cf. Matt. 12:39; 16:4). For James, the world represents an ethos of life in opposition to God and His reign. Hence, when James berates the world's "friends" as "adulteresses," he implies that flirting with the world is akin to spousal unfaithfulness.

James 4:5 is probably the most difficult text in the whole letter. The major debate concerns whether "God" or "the spirit" is the subject of the Greek verb *epipotheō* ("to yearn" or "to long"). In other words, is James referring to God's jealousy for His people or is he referring to the human tendency to be envious? The immediate context provides strong and decisive support for understanding it as divine jealousy. Verse 5 supports the point made in v. 4—that those James was addressing were committing spiritual adultery by following the world instead of their true "spouse," the Lord. This is corroborated by the OT evidence of God's jealousy (Ex. 20:5; 34:14; Deut. 4:24; Zech. 8:2). However, James highlights that God's grace is completely adequate to meet the requirements imposed by His jealousy (cf. Prov. 3:34).

James concludes this section with ten imperatives. The command to submit to God, placed emphatically at the beginning of the sentence, is comprised of a negative statement that calls to resist the devil (something that can be done with promising result: "he will flee from you"; v. 7)—whose main purpose is to separate God and humanity (Gen. 3:1–8). But there is also a positive statement calling believers to draw near to God—an action that will be reciprocated (4:8). The following imperatives echo a strong cultic call to purity and repentance. Both the washing of hands and the purifying of hearts allude to external behavior as well as internal attitude, which if not changed will leave a person a sinner and double-minded (v. 8). The double-minded person reminds the reader of those who are unstable—who doubt God (1:8). In this context, the double-minded is the one who seeks to be friendly with the world as well as with God (4:4). In prophetic language, unrepentant people are urged to mourn, wail, and weep (cf. 2 Sam. 19:1; Neh. 8:9; Matt. 5:4; 1 Cor. 5:2), while those laughing display the attitude of a fool (cf. Eccl. 7:6). Those who submit to God, however, will humble themselves in the Lord's presence, and He will raise them up (James 4:10; cf. Luke 18:14).

4:11–12. Defamation and Censure. Unchecked desire does not seem to be the only cause of dissension among James's readers, but also the matter of defamation and censure. Here, again, we are reminded that speech can be used for evil (3:1–12). Raging battles and wars manifest themselves in slandering brothers and sisters (4:11). James's previous harsh address to his readers as adulterers and as sinners and double-minded persons gives way now to the familiar address of "brethren" or "brothers and sisters." This terminology is used to introduce his counsel against slandering others, referring to harmful speech of incorrect accusations (1 Pet. 2:12; 3:16) or questioning someone's legitimate authority (Num. 21:5).

James claims that criticism of a fellow believer is tantamount to criticism of the law. He has in mind Leviticus 19:16–18. He assumes that slandering a fellow believer contradicts the demand to love our neighbors as ourselves (James 2:8). He contrasts judging the law with keeping or performing it. Judgment is reserved for God, who stands at the beginning and the end of redemptive history (4:12; cf. Matt. 10:28). To usurp His authority makes one a lawbreaker, because the law is not obeyed. In light of the above argument, we should not conclude that James is prohibiting the church body from disfellowshiping those who are in flagrant disobedience to the word of God (cf. 1 Cor. 5:11–12; 6:1–11). The disputes in James's community were conducted with unrestrained tongue (James 3:1–12), including perhaps cursing (3:10) and denunciations of one another (4:11–12).

4:13–17. Warning to Merchants. Those whom James now warns do not seem to be rich, but their travel plans and business expectations portray them as belonging to the well-to-do merchant class. The words quoted in v. 13 seem to be the words of self-confident people who plan where they will go, when they will go, how long they will stay, and how much profit they will make. There is nothing unethical in such plans, but James rebukes these merchants because of their secular self-confidence in pursuing their business in the face of the brevity and transitory nature of life. The tenuousness of life is a recurring theme in the OT (Job 7:7, 9, 16; Ps. 39:5–6; Prov. 27:1). James calls attention to the foolishness of making plans apart from God, because life is a "vapor," "wisp, or "mist" (v. 14). The Greek term can refer to smoke (Gen. 19:28) or a cloud of smoke (Acts 2:19). These people not only leave God out of their planning but brag about it as well (James 4:15). Such boasting is evil (v. 16).

Instead, believers should acknowledge that God is sovereign in life, and one should consciously seek to know His will when making plans (v. 15). Since James is promoting submission to God's providential guidance in all of one's planning, failure to do so is considered sin. Scripture makes it clear that there are not only sins of commission but also sins of omission (cf. Matt. 25:31–46). Simply knowing the right thing—namely, being conscious of God's sovereignty—but failing to actually incorporate Him into planning is not just foolish or bad; it is sin (James 4:17).

5:1–6. Warning to Landlords. This section begins—as it did in 4:13–17—with the formula of address: *age nyn* ("come now" or "now listen"; 4:13; 5:1). Both of these sections condemn the pursuit of wealth that fails to recognize the reality of God and His will for humanity. The rich whom James attacks in this section are wealthy landowners (v. 4). The sins for which they are attacked are their selfish hoarded wealth (vv. 2–3), the defrauding of their workers (v. 4), their self-indulgent lifestyle (v. 5), and their oppression of the righteous (v. 6).

The imperative to "weep and howl/wail" is reminiscent of the prophets, who cried out against the judgments of the heathen nations (Is. 15:2–3; Jer. 9:1; 13:17), while the warning in James 5:2–3 resembles Jesus's warning in Matthew 6:19–21 not to collect and store treasures on earth, where they may be destroyed. Even the metals of gold and silver—generally impervious to rust—would not survive the coming judgment (James 5:1, 5, 7). But James may also be playing on words here. The Greek word for "rust" (*ios*) is homonymous with the word for "poison" (*ios*), which James uses to describe the tongue (3:8). Just as the tongue is likened to poison and to destructive fire, so too is wealth, since it will eat their flesh like a fire (v. 3).

The specific background to 5:4 is the OT principle of prompt payment of wages (Lev. 19:13; Deut. 24:14–15). It appears endemic to human nature for the rich to oppress the poor, and the Greco-Roman world was no exception. James condemns not the simple enjoyment of material blessings but the sybaritic enjoyment of material wealth that has been acquired in an unrighteous manner. The phrase in a "day of slaughter" (James 5:5) may be referring to the moment of the poor being exploited/slaughtered by the rich who have fattened themselves at their expense. The reference could also be to the feast days, when many animals were slaughtered and people ate much meat. But the phrase could also designate (as in the OT) the judgment day (Is. 30:25; 34:2; Jer. 12:3), perhaps suggesting the coming of another day of slaughter against the wicked. In the climax of the denunciation, James accuses the rich of having condemned and murdered the righteous (v. 6) in the sense of depriving them of their livelihood. The withholding of wages from the laborer is tantamount to murder, and the laborer is not in a position to resist (cf. 2:6).

5:7–11. Faith and Patience. This section summarizes the theme of the rich and poor with the call to patient endurance and community harmony. Patient endurance is the appropriate response to testing (1:2–3). Here James gives the eschatological motivation for endurance: the nearness of the coming of the Lord. Christians are to wait until Jesus returns and sets the oppressed free. This hope will require patience. James illustrates the concept of patience using the climate in the Holy Land. The early spring rain provides groundwater for the spring growth, while later, autumn rain secures a good harvest (Deut. 11:14; Jer. 5:24; Joel 2:23–24). The power to exercise patience lies in the conviction of the imminence of the time of judgment (James 5:8).

At first glance, the exhortation to not grumble against one another (v. 9) does not seem to fit in this context; however, grumbling does occur when people are under pressure. James's readers—under the pressure of poverty and persecution (5:1–6)—might vent their frustration on one another (cf. Ex. 2:23; Lev. 19:18). As an example of endurance amidst suffering, James points to the prophets. Although we are not told what specific prophets James had in mind, we may think of those "who spoke in the name of the Lord" (5:10), like Jeremiah, who suffered hardship from his own people or Isaiah, who appears to have died as a martyr by being sawed in two (Heb. 11:37; cf. ST Feb. 17, 1898). One more example of perseverance is added: Job. In the Bible, Job is portrayed as rather impatient as he complains to God about the injustice he is suffering (Job 3). However, the kind of patience James had in mind is not the passive kind but the persevering kind in the face of suffering (James 5:10). It is accompanied by a blessing (5:11). Such was Job's patience. The blessedness, however, is not a subjective emotional feeling but an objective state of favor with God (1:12).

5:12. Oath Rejection. This verse serves as a bridge between the imperatives of patient perseverance (5:7–11) and perseverance in prayer (5:13–18). It contains a negative command not to swear and a positive command to tell the truth. Swearing is necessary only in a society where truth is not revered. Christians should abstain from taking additional oaths to assure the truthfulness of their speech. Their words should be as trustworthy as a signed legal document (see Matt. 5:34–37). The Bible records oaths taken by God Himself (Num. 14:23; Heb. 3:11, 18; 4:3; 6:13, 16; 7:21), and in some cases the swearing of oaths was commanded (Ex. 22:9–11). The OT laws did not prohibit oaths but demanded that a person be true to the oath taken (Lev. 19:12). Some Christians, like the Anabaptists, have taken the statement of James as a prohibition to take oaths in the courtroom. Here, James most probably refers to voluntary oaths taken in addition to the verbal statements already made by a Christian.

5:13–18. Faith and Prayer. The opening question is tied to the reference to the prophets who suffered (v. 10). This suffering or trouble could refer to the suffering of the righteous at the hands of the rich (v. 6), involving economic oppression, or the suffering caused by physical illness. In response to such suffering, Christians are to pray. If believers are cheerful, then let them sing. All three NT occurrences of the verbal form "to sing" imply a song of praise to God (Rom. 15:9; 1 Cor. 14:15; Eph. 5:19).

A third circumstance for praying is sickness (v. 14). The term "sick" (it can also mean "weak," in the sense lacking the full vitality of life) stands in conjunction with the statement that the Lord will raise them up (v. 15) and the word "healed" (v. 16)—pointing to a physical malady. When the verb *astheneō* ("to be sick") refers to spiritual weakness, it is accompanied by a qualifier (as in "weak" in the faith; Rom. 14:1; or being weak in conscience; 1 Cor. 8:7). James, rather than urging only those who are sick to pray, suggests that they should ask for the elders of the church to pray over them and to anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord (v. 14). The elders were people in the local congregations who were trusted and recognized for their maturity of faith (Acts 11:30; 14:23; 15:2). However, the power to heal is invested in prayer, not in the elders. These verses help us to understand the corporate nature of faith: intercession, confession, and forgiveness to produce health. James's mandate to anoint with oil for healing has some precedents in Jesus's disciples (Mark 6:12–13).

What is the purpose of the anointing? Is it medicinal, sacramental, or symbolic? Oil was used to treat wounds (Luke 10:34), but why should the elders do the anointing if its purpose was solely medical? James tells us that the anointing should be done in the name of the Lord, indicating more than just applying medical unguent. This text, however, offers no support for the sacramental understanding of this procedure, according to which only the priest has the authority to perform the rite. The association of James 5:15 with preparation for death did not develop until the Middle Ages. James recommends anointing in case of any sickness and associates it with the process of healing—not with preparation for death. Anointing in the OT is often associated with consecration to God's service (Ex. 28:41). It could be that the anointing symbolizes a consecration of the sick person to God or the presence of the Spirit of the Lord during the prayer for healing. The prayer "in the name of the Lord" (James 5:14) is reminiscent of Jesus's promise to do anything that is asked in His name (John 14:14).

The prayer mentioned by James needs to be a prayer characterized by trust in God and in His supreme will since, as in Paul's case, the prayer for healing might not be granted even when the prayer is offered multiple times (2 Cor. 12:7–9). What then are we to make of the declaration that the prayer of faith will *sōzō* the sick (James 5:15)? It is important to recognize that this verb can refer to eschatological salvation (Rom. 5:9–10) or to physical healing (cf. Matt. 9:21–22;

Mark 3:4; 5:23, 28, 34; John 11:12). Based on the context, James is discussing physical restoration. The spiritual aspect of healing, however, should not be underestimated; James also assures the person of forgiveness of sins (v. 16).

How is it that healing and forgiveness depend on the faith and prayer of the elders and not on the faith and prayer of the sick person? The answer may lie in the corporate nature of the people of God; when one person suffers the whole body suffers (1 Cor. 12:26). This verse also raises the question of the degree of connection between sickness and sin. The NT seems to recognize such a connection to a certain degree (Mark 2:1–12; 1 Cor. 11:30), yet in discussing the situation of the man born blind in John 9, Jesus urged caution in any specific situation. Not all sickness is the result of a personal sin.

Corporate prayer requires corporate confession so that the healing might be possible (James 5:16). This exhortation implies not a confession of every sin one has committed to fellow believers but an application of the teachings of Jesus in Matthew 5:24 that members should be reconciled with one another. This is particularly the case in sins that involve the body of believers, such as internal conflict (James 4:1), slander ("speaking evil") of someone else (4:11), or complaining about one another (5:9). Corporate confession of corporate sins and prayer for one another heals the church.

While the discussion of faith and patience (5:7–11) ended with the example of Job, this section closes with the example of Elijah (vv. 17–18), who is described as a common human being. The same applies to Paul and Barnabas, who implored the citizens of Lystra to consider them not as gods but as humans just like themselves (Acts 14:15). James clarifies that Elijah prayed not only for the drought to end but also for it to begin and that it lasted three and a half years (taking into consideration that the interval from the previous rain to the drought was six months; cf. Luke 4:25). When Elijah prayed for the rain to return after the showdown on Mount Carmel, his servant had to look out to the sea seven times before the great downpour finally occurred. Likewise, the believer in times of trouble may need to wait and pray patiently before a prayer is answered.

5:19–20
Conclusion

James concludes with an exhortation to refrain from disobedience—not with an epistolary-styled ending. With another direct address to his "brethren" or "brothers and sisters," he places responsibility on the congregation for every erring person, who willfully disobeys and departs from the truth. Whoever helps a person to turn back to God will meet positive consequences. James 5:20 is somewhat ambiguous. Whose soul is saved and whose sin is covered? Is it the repentant, formally erring person or the one who turns him or her back? It is more likely that the soul or person saved and the sins covered is referring to the sinner turned back to God. The one who reclaims the lost is assumed to have already experienced the forgiveness of sins. The covering of sins does not mean that sins are hidden or concealed but signifies forgiving, removing, or eliminating them (cf. Pss. 32:1; 85:2).

If James is something like a sermon in epistolary form, then these last verses are an appropriate conclusion. The reader should not only do the things discussed by James but also be concerned that others do them also. In so doing, their hearts will be established in preparation for the coming of the Lord (5:8). For now, they are to be patient until that time (5:7–8).

1 PETER

INTRODUCTION

Title and Authorship. Among ancient Greek manuscripts, the earliest extant titles given to this epistle date to the third and fourth century and are simply "Epistle of Peter A" and "of Peter A." As with other NT letters, later scribes occasionally expanded the title to make it more descriptive. This resulted in titles like "The (First) Epistle of the Holy Apostle Peter," "The (First) Catholic Epistle of the Holy Apostle Peter," and, in one eleventh-century manuscript, "The First Letter Peter Decreed for the Faithful Jews." The word "catholic," which means "universal," was attached to some titles because the letter is not addressed to any specific church. This is why 1 Peter is also placed in the section of the NT known as the Catholic or General Epistles (the letters of Peter, John, James, and Jude).

The author identifies himself as Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ (1:1), an "elder," and a witness of the sufferings of Christ (5:1). Not only does the account give the impression that the author was, in fact, an eyewitness of Jesus's ministry (2:20–25), but the terminology also resembles some of the words attributed to Peter in Acts (e.g., 1:2, 20; 2:4 and Acts 2:23; 1 Pet. 1:12; 3:22; 4:1 and Acts 2:33; 1 Pet. 1:11; 3:15; 4:12 and Acts 2:36; 1 Pet. 3:22 and Acts 2:38; 1 Pet. 4:5 and Acts 10:42). While early Christians unanimously recognized Peter as the author, some recent scholars have raised objections that the fine quality of the author's Greek could not have been written by someone like Peter, who lacked formal training (Acts 4:13). Additionally, it is claimed that the letter shares far too many similarities to Pauline theology for Peter to have written it. These objections, however, are easily explained, given that Peter used the erudite Silvanus (Silas) as his secretary (1 Pet. 5:12), and that Peter and Paul shared a similar Christ-centered theological outlook (Gal. 1:18; 2:7–9). If Peter were not the author, it would be strange that only his name was attached to this epistle in the ancient manuscripts.

Date. The letter was written before Peter's death, which occurred in Rome during Nero's persecution of Christians. Nero blamed the Christians for a fire that destroyed much of the city in A.D. 64. Since Peter was encouraging Christians to respect the emperor (1 Pet. 2:13, 17), the letter was likely written in the early A.D. 60s, before all the trouble began in Rome (which Peter figuratively refers to as "Babylon"; cf. 5:13; Rev. 14:8; 16:19; 17:5, 9, 18). Early Christian tradition confirms that Peter spent the last years of his life in Rome before he was martyred for his faith.

Backgrounds. Peter wrote at a critical time in the history of the early church. Although the Neronian persecution in Rome (A.D. 64–68) had not yet broken out, trouble was in the air for Christians across the empire. Up until this point, most of the opposition believers faced had been from overzealous Jews who felt threatened by this new faith and was limited in scope. The Roman authorities had more often served to protect than to persecute Christians (e.g., Acts 18:12–16; 21:30–32). The situation was quickly changing, however, as a growing number of Gentiles became followers of Jesus. The decision of these new converts to stop participating in public banquets and ceremonies held in pagan temples (1 Pet. 4:3–4) and to no longer worship the traditional Roman gods not only surprised but concerned their contemporaries. The social equality practiced in the church—that united all believers in Christ regardless of their ethnic background, social class, or gender—also served to further threaten the established social order of the empire (1:18).

Concerned that the departure of these Christian converts from their ancestral ways might anger the gods and result in punitive consequences for their communities, community members often reviled and reproached Christians for their faith (3:9; 4:4, 14) and accused them of being evildoers (4:15). Communities that had once been indifferent were now beginning to notice the growing new faith and to respond violently against it at times (4:1).

Written to believers scattered across Asia Minor (1:1), Peter's letter sought to strengthen the church in the face of opposition and suffering, reminding them that they were standing in the "grace of God" (5:12) and that, though society might reject them, God had chosen them as His special people (2:9–10). If they would remain faithful in the midst of suffering, as Jesus did, they too would be strengthened and vindicated by God in the end (5:10).

Theology and Purpose. The main focus of 1 Peter is on the need for believers to stand in God's grace (5:12)—remaining in the faith received at a time of impending crisis. The crisis in view is the prejudice against Christians that was beginning to unfold and would soon break out in forceful persecution. But also in view is an anticipation of the end, the expected realization of their hope: the notion that the last days were dawning on the world and that the judgment of God would follow. Against this backdrop the following theological concepts stand out:

1. Christians as Pilgrims and Exiles. One of the foundational themes of 1 Peter is the identification of the people of God as foreign pilgrims and exiles (1:1; 2:11)—and not simply that but specifically as *parepidēmois diasporas* ("pilgrims"/"exiles" of the "Diaspora"). This terminology is significant. The word "Diaspora" comes from the Greek verb *diaspeirō*, which means "to scatter in every direction." While the term was used to describe any displaced group of people, in Jewish literature it specifically refers to Jews who were forced to live outside of Israel due to the Babylonian conquest of Judea (Jer. 15:7; 41:17, LXX [34:17 Eng.]; cf. Dan. 12:2). On the basis of this terminology, many early commentators assumed that Peter's audience was comprised of Jewish Christians. But Peter was clearly writing to Gentiles who had been redeemed from the hedonistic lifestyle described in 1 Peter 4:3, that is, from the aimless and empty ways (1:18) they had inherited from their ancestors.

In an attempt to help these Gentile converts recognize and embrace their identity as the people of God, Peter's epistle applies terminology associated with Israel to the Christian communities scattered across Asia Minor. He wanted them to know that they were part of God's covenant family. As such, they too were to see themselves as exiles from the true land of promise: heaven. Although in the world, they were called to stand apart as God's chosen people. It is because of this apartness that they were living life by a different set of values and morals than that of society around them—while at the same time being careful not to cause undue offense by their actions (2:12–17). In recognizing their identity as people of God (2:9–10), they would understand why the world often treated them with reproach and contempt (2:12; 3:9, 16; 4:4, 12, 14); they did not truly belong to the communities in which they lived. The reference to "Babylon" at the end of the letter indicates that this concept of God's people as foreign travelers and exiles is the framework in which Peter's entire letter should be understood. As travelers, the Christians were nurtured by the hope of the coming of Christ when the journey was to end.

2. Jesus Christ. Although Peter highlights various aspects of the role of each member of the Godhead in the plan of salvation (1:2, 3, 10–12, 17; 3:18; 4:19), Jesus Christ is the central focus of his theology. Through Jesus, the divine plan established by God the Father before Creation has become a reality (1:20). This salvation was accomplished through Christ's redemptive suffering on the cross (2:24; 3:18), through His resurrection from the dead (1:3, 21; 3:18), and at His ascension, when He declared victory over the demonic powers and took His rightful place at the right hand of God (3:19–20, 22).

There are several distinctive aspects of Peter's theology of Jesus that are also worth noting: Peter identifies Jesus as the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 52:13—53:12. While other NT writers quote from this section of Isaiah (Matt. 8:17; Luke 22:37; John 12:38; Acts 8:32–33; Rom. 10:16; 15:21), no other author interprets the suffering and death of Jesus in connection to the Suffering Servant of Isaiah as fully as Peter does (1 Pet. 1:10–11; 2:21–25; 3:18). It is also only in Peter that we see the beautiful image of the church as a spiritual building founded on Christ, the living cornerstone, and composed of individual Christian believers, who are living stones (2:4–8). It is through the identification of Christ as both the Suffering Servant of Isaiah and the Cornerstone rejected by human builders that Peter set forth the pattern of worldly rejection and divine vindication that is to be the expected pattern of the life of Christians in this world (4:1, 12–14, 19; 5:9–10) as they await His return.

COMMENTARY

1:1–2

Introductory Greeting

The author of the letter identifies himself as Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ. His original Hebrew name was Simon ("answering [prayers]"); Peter was his Greek name. He was born in Bethsaida on the northeastern shore of the Sea of Galilee (John 1:44) and grew up to become a fisherman called by Jesus to be one of His apostles. "Apostle" designates a delegate sent by someone with a message. Peter was the messenger of Jesus, who Himself was the Messiah (or "the Christ" in Greek).

The letter is addressed to the elect ones sojourning in the Diaspora (for more on theology and purpose, see 1 Peter: Introduction)—those who had been scattered to various places outside their homeland (see 1 Pet. 2:11). The specific countries where they were residing as pilgrims or exiles were all located in Asia Minor. God, in His foreknowledge, chose them to be part of His people. This election was effected through the sanctifying power of the Spirit, to which they freely responded through an obedience that was totally dependent on the effectiveness of the cleansing blood of Christ's sacrificial death (see 1:17–20, 22, 23; 2:21–25; 3:18). These Christians were living in the world as pilgrims or foreigners facing prejudice as a result of living according to the values of their heavenly home.

When Peter calls believers "elect" or "chosen" (1:1) and "a chosen generation" or "people" (2:9), he is using language employed elsewhere for Israel (cf. Ex. 19:5–6; Deut. 7:6; Ps. 105:6, 43; Is. 45:4). However, 1 Peter was written primarily for a Gentile Christian audience. How can this be? The universalization of the faith of Israel through Jesus, the Messiah, made salvation available to all. Since many Gentiles chose to believe, they became children of Abraham by faith (Gal. 3:7) and part of the Israel of faith.

1:3–12

Praises for a Great Salvation

After the initial salutation, Peter praises God for the great work of salvation unfolding in the lives of believers. He will discuss the nature of God's saving acts (vv. 3–5), the joy of salvation in

The Israel of Faith

Israel was the name given to Jacob after he wrestled with the angel of the Lord on his way back to his father's home (Gen. 32:28). It means "God prevails/wins" or "he who prevails/wins with God." As such, it designated Jacob's new status that brought him peace and forgiveness. Israel is a name that highlights his spiritual identity.

To be part of Israel, one had to accept the covenant God made with the people on Mount Sinai. Israelites who violated the covenant could be cut off from the people (Lev. 7:20, 21, 25, 27; 18:29; 19:8). Conversely, foreigners who adopted the covenant were incorporated as full members of Israel (Ex. 12:38; Num. 11:4; 13:6; 32:12; Josh. 2:1–22; Ruth 1:16; 2 Sam. 11:10–11). In the time of Solomon, there were 153,600 foreign proselytes in Israel (2 Chr. 2:17). In the second century B.C., the nation of the Idumeans was forcefully converted *en masse*. The covenant of Israel was therefore an open one to which new members could be added and from which violators could be expelled, much like it happens in a church. Indeed, Stephen calls Israel the *ekklēsia* ("church") in the wilderness (Acts 7:38)—a term also used repeatedly in the Septuagint (e.g., Deut. 4:10; 9:10; 18:16; 23:2–8; 1 Sam. 17:47; Ps. 21:23, LXX).

This outlook is foundational if we want to understand the concept of Israel in the Bible. Paul declares that the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable (Rom. 11:29). The promises God gave to Abraham and his descendants were going to be fulfilled. How? Paul compares Israel to an olive tree, explaining that some of the branches were broken off because of unbelief (Rom. 11:17, 20). New ones, of Gentile background, were then grafted into that same tree through faith (Rom. 11:19–20). Thus, the once beautiful tree that became tattered because of the broken branches became complete and beautiful again, and thus "all Israel"—that is, the Israel of faith—will be saved (Rom. 11:26).

the midst of trials (vv. 6–9), and the prophetic foundation of salvation through Christ (vv. 10–12). The passage dynamically deals with the past, the present, and the future dimensions of salvation.

1:3–5. Nature of God's Saving Act. Peter provides the fundamental reason to praise "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1:3): He has saved us through Christ. This salvation is firmly grounded in the resurrection of Jesus and is a glorious manifestation of God's limitless or abundant mercy (*eleos*; "compassion"). This mercy worked within believers, and they were reborn to a new hope, suggesting that apart from divine mercy humanity lacks true hope. This hope is solidly grounded in the resurrection of Jesus. Divine mercy has also provided a heavenly inheritance essentially different from any earthly inheritance (v. 4). It is reserved in heaven for us and is therefore untouched by the corruptibility and defilement of sin. It does not fade away—the passage of time does not damage it. God is preserving it for us. The assurance of this salvation is based on the fact that the power of God, which is operative in us through faith, is able to keep us until the fullness of salvation is manifested in the "last time" (v. 5): at the Second Coming of Christ.

1:6–9. Joy of Salvation and Trials. According to Peter, salvation fills the human heart with joy. He also knew that believers were going through the distress caused by trials and that this may have seemed incompatible with the joy of salvation. The Greek word for "trial" (*peirasmos*) could also be translated as "temptations," but here it means "trial" or "tests." As Peter was writing, Christianity was coming under pressure from different directions. In the not too distant future, the Christians in Rome would face the fierce persecutions of Nero. Peter returns to the idea of suffering for the sake of faith repeatedly throughout the epistle.

Such pressure understandably causes grief. But more importantly, the trials of believers become a test, revealing the depth and genuineness of their faith. This faith is more valuable than gold, and God will reward it by giving them glory and honor at the glorious return of Jesus (v. 7; cf. Rom. 2:7). Human life is so tainted by our sinful, human nature that it is difficult for us to think about God praising us—especially in the midst of trials. But we should remember that, first, the new birth that Peter speaks about in v. 3 leads to a new life exemplified by qualities that are indeed praiseworthy. Born again believers learn to follow the Lamb wherever He goes (Rev. 14:4). Second, having been ransomed by the Lamb, believers now belong to Him. The praise, honor, and glory Christ receives He shares with them.

Therefore, instead of grieving over trials, believers have reason to rejoice in Christ. Although they have not seen Him, they have believed in Him and love Him (1 Pet. 1:8; cf. John 20:29). This has filled their hearts with inexpressible joy in anticipation of the goal of their faith, namely, the salvation of their souls (v. 9). Their commitment to Christ is based on the grace of God and the prophetic word. Having been an eyewitness to Jesus was no doubt considered a great privilege (e.g., 1 Pet. 5:1; Luke 1:2; 24:48; Acts 1:8, 22; 2:32; 3:15), but the witness of Scripture was an even stronger foundation for faith (2 Pet. 1:19).

1:10–12. Prophetic Foundation of Salvation. The salvation that is a present reality but that in hope looks forward to its consummation was revealed by God to His prophets. When God told them about this future salvation, they searched for its timing and manner (vv. 10–11). The content of this prophetic revelation was the manifestation of the grace of God in the sufferings of Christ, the promised Messiah, and the glories that would follow, that is, His exaltation and the exultation of His people (v. 11). They received this revelation through the Spirit of Christ, who was in them (v. 11), revealing the future work of Christ. The Spirit told them that this glorious saving action would not be fulfilled during their lives but that they were predicting what has happened through Christ—being proclaimed through the power of the Spirit. The mystery of salvation, revealed to the prophets and which angels desire to look into, has been manifested in Christ. The verb translated "look into" (*parakyptō*) involves stooping to see more clearly, as, for example, when Mary and later the disciples stooped to look into the empty tomb (Luke 24:12; John 20:5, 11). In the case of the angels, who dwell in heaven, the idea is probably looking with amazement at how Christ humbled Himself by becoming human, took the form of a servant, and was willing to die on the cross for the salvation of sinful human beings (Phil. 2:5–11). The whole cosmos seems to be astonished at this glorious manifestation of the saving grace of God.

1:13—2:3
A Call to Be Holy

Peter is very much interested in the theme of holy living. In the previous section (1:3–12), he briefly described the great gift of salvation God has bestowed on believers—as a result of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus—as a past, historical event. This salvation has filled their lives with love and hope in the present and looks forward to the return of Jesus. Salvation through Christ is the foundation for a holy life. In this section, Peter sets the tone by calling believers to live a holy life (1:13–16), by motivating them (vv. 17–21), and by challenging them to live up to what they are supposed to be in Christ (1:17—2:3). God's work of salvation through Jesus has set His people apart from the world and calls them to live as foreigners.

1:13–16. Holy Calling. "Therefore" implies that what follows is based on what was said before. Because of what God has done, believers are now also asked to do, or rather be, holy (v. 16). Believers need to *anazōsamenoi tas osphyas* their minds (v. 13). This phrase, translated as "minds that are alert" or "prepare your minds for action," is also rendered in a literal sense as "gird up the loins of your mind." Ancient Jews usually wore long, flowing garments. When they had to work in a field or workshop, they would fold the garment upward and tie it at the waist so that it became like a pair of short trousers. This would give them greater freedom to act efficiently. To "gird up the loins" in a spiritual sense would mean to be ready for focused, deliberate Christian living in pursuit of holiness. "Holy" is that which is set apart for a special purpose. Holiness therefore implies both a separation from former things and an attachment to the things of God. With regard to the former, believers should no longer conform to former lusts or "desires" (*epithymia*; v. 14). This Greek word may refer to sexual immorality (e.g., Rom. 1:24) but can also describe other types of desire, be they noble (e.g., Luke 22:15) or inappropriate (e.g., Mark 4:19). Here, the word obviously has negative connotations and refers not only to sexual lust but to all kinds of sinful desires that spring from a carnal mind (cf. Rom. 6:12). The separation from a former life controlled by sinful desires should lead to a desire to be holy, as God is. To add force to this concept, Peter quotes the Scriptures where the Lord calls His people to "be holy" because He is holy (1 Pet. 1:16; Lev. 11:44, 45; 20:7, 26).

1:17–21. Motivation for Holy Living. A holy life consists of acting according to the fear of the Lord, knowing that He whom we call the Father is an impartial Judge who judges all according to their works. "Fear" means living a life of reverent submission to God. Peter goes on to indicate that God is not only the Judge but also the Redeemer. Believers have been redeemed from their previous aimless and empty lives through the sacrificial death of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He took their place as a sacrificial victim in order for them to be without blemish or spot. What Jesus did was what the Godhead foreordained before the creation of the cosmos, and that has now been revealed to those who have placed their faith in Him. The plan of salvation was formulated by God long before Creation. It included not only His incarnation, death, and resurrection but also His glorification. It is the realization of how great a price God paid for our redemption—the precious blood of Christ—that motivates us to live holy lives.

1:22—2:3. Become What You Are. Peter exhorts believers to be what they are: they are already holy by obeying the truth—the gospel of salvation—with its ethical ramifications. The Spirit had placed in their hearts sincere love for each other as brothers and sisters. This is what they had already experienced. Now it was their duty to love one another earnestly from a pure heart (v. 22). The love they had should flow out from a holy heart and touch others. Peter knew that what he was describing is not a natural response of the human heart but the result of a new birth produced by the word of God, which is an incorruptible seed that abides forever (v. 23). What is earthly—the grass, human glory, and the flowers—fades away, but not God's word. The implication is that a holy life, made possible through God's word, is destined for eternity. This powerful word reached the believers through the gospel and transformed their lives. Therefore, they had to lay aside (*apotithēmi*; "abandon," "remove something," "get rid of") all *kakia* ("malice," "wickedness," "ill-will"), *dolos* ("deceit," "guile," treachery"), *hypokrisis* ("hypocrisy," "pretense," "playing a part"), *phthonos* ("envy," "jealousy"), and *katalalia* ("evil speaking," "defamation," "slander") (2:1). Peter offers the positive side of the picture using the image of a newborn (see 1:23) who is to be fed with the milk of the word of God that will facilitate spiritual growth in grace. This is based on the recognition that we have experienced the goodness of God through Christ as described in 1:18–21.

2:4–12

A Spiritual Temple

From the image of church members as babies, Peter turns to the image of the church as a temple and believers as stones. He discusses the image of living stones (vv. 4–6), explains the significance of the imagery (vv. 7–10), and moves to the image of exiled pilgrims (vv. 11–12). The key point of the image of the temple is that Christ is the cornerstone on which we are being built. Rejecting Christ is like stumbling on a stone and falling.

2:4–6. Precious Stone in the Temple. Believers come to the Lord, mentioned in the previous verse, as a living stone. Jesus is compared to a stone that is alive. People had rejected Him as a valuable stone for the construction of their lives, but He had been chosen by God as a very precious and valuable stone. This cornerstone (*akrogōniaios*; "cornerstone" or "capstone") is the one on which believers are to build their lives as a spiritual temple (v. 6). Believers are temples and at the same time a holy priesthood (v. 5) to offer spiritual sacrifices that are acceptable to God because they are offered through the work of Jesus as High Priest. A holy life is one dedicated to God, as the sacrifices were. Building on Jesus is the same as believing in Him (v. 6).

2:7–10. Interpreting the Image of the Temple. Peter proceeds to explain the image of the temple. Those who believe in Jesus are those who realize that He is indeed precious and of great value. Those who reject Him as a precious stone are rebellious and disobedient; He has become a stumbling stone to them on their way to acceptance before God. They did not listen to the word through which they could have been reborn (1:23). The stone is also identified with the word—Jesus's message of salvation. The reference to the fate of those who stumble as being destined or appointed (2:8) is not teaching predestination to condemnation. What God has established is that disobedience, which presupposes the use of free will, results in stumbling.

Believers were chosen by God to become His people: a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special possession. Previously Peter talked about a "holy priesthood," but now he speaks about a "holy nation." Both expressions refer to the high status of believers as God's people. The emphasis on holiness continues. The purpose of their election is that they proclaim the praises of the One who called them out of darkness into His wondrous light. People, by nature, exist in darkness, and the possibility of light is a reality only in God. This means that, originally, Gentiles were not part of the people of God. But now they have received divine mercy and are included. They did not stumble over the Living Stone.

2:11–12. Believers as Sojourners. If believers belong to the people of God, they have become sojourners or foreign exiles in this world. Peter exhorts them to live as such. He first exhorts them to abstain from *sarkikōn epithymiōn* ("fleshly lusts," "sinful desires," "worldly desires"; 2:11; see 1:14). Such behavior does not characterize those who are people of God. Peter here echoes sentiments expressed by Paul in Romans 7:7—8:2. Paul wanted to live in harmony with God's good and holy law (Rom. 7:12, 21), but the power of sin and death dwelling within him was pulling him in the opposite direction (7:14, 15, 18–20). Paul realized that only in Christ can the believer withstand and gain mastery over these sinful desires (Rom. 7:25—8:4).

Second, Peter exhorts believers to live with good, honorable conduct among the pagan Gentiles (1 Pet. 2:12). Given the mounting social pressure on the young church, Peter hoped that honorable conduct would serve to dampen the negative feelings of the Gentiles. More important, however, was the hope that in seeing the good lives and works of Christians, some would turn from being persecutors to being believers. This is what Peter had in mind with his hope that they may glorify God on the day of *episkopē* ("visit," "overseeing"; v. 12). This day is the day of judgment. The holy life of a Christian could obviously have a positive impact on society.

2:13—3:12

In the World but Not of the World

Peter next provides specific instructions to different groups within the church on how to live a holy life as they relate to others. He began with the secular authorities (2:13–17); then the relationship between servants and masters (vv. 18–25); then wives and husbands (3:1–7); and finally, gave general admonitions for the church (vv. 8–12).

2:13–17. Secular Authorities. Peter encouraged believers to be submissive to the king or emperor (v. 13) or to local governors (v. 14) because it is God's will (v. 15; cf. Rom. 13:1; Titus 3:1). The advice may sound strange. The Roman Empire would eventually launch severe

persecutions, putting heavy pressure on Christians to abandon their faith in Jesus Christ or face imprisonment and even death. Were believers to submit to such authorities? We need to keep two things in mind. First, obedience to secular authorities is required only insofar as it does not violate our duty to God. Peter seems to intimate as much when he says that believers should submit to authorities for the Lord's sake (2:13). Clearly, the "for the Lord's sake" is the guiding motivation, and it primarily refers to submission in order to honor the Lord and not to shame Him in the eyes of unbelievers. Implicit is the idea that if secular authorities were to require believers to act in ways that violated God's will for them, they should not submit to them. Paul gave similar advice when he stated that Christians should live peaceably with everyone, adding the caveat "if" or to the degree that it is possible (Rom. 12:18).

Second, up to the time of Peter the Roman authorities had not yet persecuted Christians but had at times intervened to protect them (see 1 Peter: Introduction). The growth of Christianity was beginning to be noticed, however, and antagonism was developing against Christians; in some cases, they were subject to physical violence (1 Pet. 4:1). Although unknown to Peter at the time, it would also not be long before the Emperor Nero would capitalize on the growing ill will expressed toward Christians and blame them for starting the great fire that left seventy percent of Rome in smoldering ruins. By showing themselves to be good citizens and by honoring all persons (2:17), believers could debunk some of the hatred beginning to grow against them and perhaps postpone or dampen the impact of the more widespread persecutions that were to follow.

2:18–25. Servants to Masters. Peter's advice to servants to be submissive to their masters—both the good ones and the harsh ones—with *phobō* ("fear," "respect," or "reverence" if God is the referent—in the sense of allowing reverence for God to inform the conduct of the slaves; v. 18) is somewhat perplexing. Peter was not endorsing slavery in any form or shape. He did not justify slavery or the fact that economic circumstances or war had made some masters over others. On the contrary, he indirectly condemns slavery by drawing a parallel between Jesus and servants. The sufferings of Jesus were unjustifiable; He never did anything wrong (v. 22). By implication, a servant who behaves respectfully but still suffers wrongly is walking in the steps of Jesus. The Lord is on the servant's side, not the master's.

The experience of Jesus should function as a model for servants. When mistreated and abused He did not attack His abusers but placed the matter in the hands of the divine Judge. As the Servant of the Lord, He "bore our sins" in His own body on the cross (v. 24) and died for us (see Is. 53). To "bear sin" means to assume responsibility for it by receiving its penalty. This Jesus did by dying on the tree (the cross). He received what was ours in order for us to receive what was His. His stripes/wounds, which were to be ours on account of our sins, brought us healing/salvation. He died in our place in order for us to live for righteousness—to live in a new way (Rom. 6:3–4). Based on Isaiah 53:5–6, Peter referred to his audience as sheep having gone astray but now under the care of Jesus, the Shepherd and Overseer of their souls (see 1 Pet. 2:25). He is the unmatched leader of the church as Shepherd and Overseer, constantly caring for it. As such, He cares in a particular way for the slaves suffering under the oppression of their masters. But their sufferings could bring about something good for them and others, as Jesus's did (cf. Rom. 8:28).

If Christian servants had been involved in acts of disobedience or even rebellion against their pagan masters, Christianity would have been considered a subversive and dangerous religion. Rome had already experienced substantial slave unrest in the rebellion of Spartacus and did not take kindly to any signs of sedition. Peter's advice aimed at protecting both servants and believers in general from being perceived as opposed to the order of the empire. In the corrupt context of the first century Roman Empire, the best way for Christians to impact their world would be to follow the example of Jesus, the Servant of all servants.

3:1–6. Wives to Husbands. Peter next deals with the relationship of wives and husbands, and admonishes wives to be submissive, even if the husband is not a believer (v. 1). This and similar verses in Paul (Eph. 5:24; Col. 3:18; Titus 2:5; cf. 1 Cor. 14:34) have been wrongly used to suggest that wives are less than equal in the marriage relationship. The Greek verb translated "submissive" (*hypotassō*) is a passive participle, indicating that the submission is done voluntarily and is not to be imposed by force by the husband. Jesus willingly submitted to His parents (Luke 2:51); believers should be submissive to the leaders in the local church (1 Cor. 16:15–16) and to one another (1 Pet. 5:5; Eph. 5:21);

and the church submits to Christ (Eph. 5:24). In these examples, submission is not forced but is offered voluntarily. Moreover, while in the case of Christ and the church there is an element of clear primacy of one party—Christ, over the church—in all other cases it is a question of relationships between equals. The advice of Peter, therefore, does not indicate the superiority of one spouse over the other.

It is also important to note that the advice is focused primarily on wives who became Christians while their husbands remained pagans (1 Pet. 3:1). In Roman society wives were accorded few rights by law and husbands had almost absolute authority over them. If the Christian wife were to claim independence in any form, it would bring disrepute to the Christian faith and troubles for the wife. Their submissiveness was to be motivated not by societal expectations but in the fear of the Lord (cf. 1:17; 2:17; 3:2), that is, out of reverence to God. This advice, in accordance with the earlier admonitions of duty to government and masters, was to bring change through a kind and humble spirit.

In 3:3–4, Peter encourages wives to cultivate inward beauty as opposed to focusing on their outward adornment. This sort of warning was not uncommon during Peter's day. Pagan authors often criticized the extreme hairstyles of wealthy women and the ostentatious ornamentation that emphasized their high status in society. Peter's primary concern is to emphasize that what ultimately matters in the sight of God is a godly character (v. 4). Rather than following the fashions of the day, Christian women should develop an inward beauty based on the Scriptures and on God's will (see 1 Tim. 2:8–10; see below, "Christian Adornment"). He mentions the example of Sarah, who called Abraham "lord" or "master" (1 Pet. 3:5–6), thus honoring him before his noble guests (Gen. 18:12).

3:7. Husbands to Wives. In contrast to Peter's lengthy advice to wives, his words to husbands are few but powerful (v. 7). A husband is to live together with his wife with understanding (lit., "according to knowledge," also translated as "be considerate" or "understanding"), which probably means according to the knowledge of God and not according to cultural practices. What rules the relationship of the husband to the wife is the will of God. This includes the command to the husband to honor and respect his wife—that is, not to do or say anything that would shame her. Three reasons are given for this: First, she is to be honored because she is considered a "weaker" partner (or lit., "vessel," implying that the husband is also a vessel). The Greek *asthenēs* can refer to either physical or emotional lack of strength. It could also designate the lower social status of women in the Roman world. What exactly Peter had in mind is hard to gauge, but the bottom line is that the husband, being in a physical or social position of strength should not humiliate his wife but honor her.

The second reason given for honoring the wife is that she is an equal recipient of the gift of God's grace: the grace that is life (3:7). Peter is not saying that if it were not for grace the wife would have a lower status. Rather, against a backdrop of male dominance in Roman culture, the fact that Jesus treated all people equally—and that women were equal in receiving the gift of salvation—indicates that in God's eyes they are equal to men and should be treated with honor and respect.

The third reason to honor the wife is that God will not listen to the prayers of the husband if he does not treat her as specified here. John 9:31 declares that God does not listen to sinners. Those who knowingly and continually choose to disregard God's will may discover God's unwillingness to answer their prayers. The fact that Peter ties respect for the wife with God lending a listening ear to the husband's prayers indicates

Christian Adornment

Peter's instruction on adornment was taught and promoted by the early church for the first three or four centuries. Then it was abandoned to be reinstated by the more radical Reformers. Adventists consider it to be one of the norms of the Christian life. Therefore, it may be useful to take a closer look at what Peter is saying.

1. *Contextual Elements.* Peter was interested in the demeanor of Christian women. He indicates that they should be submissive to their husband and live a pure life based on the fear of the Lord, that is to say, in reverential trust in Him. The purpose of this submission is to win their husbands to the Lord. The implication is that such a life is their winsome, spiritual adornment. This leads Peter to discuss the nature of this type of adornment a little more. He does this by contrasting external and internal adornment.

2. *External Adornment.* Peter mentions three specific examples: arranging the hair, wearing gold adornments, and wearing fine apparel. He is referring to a particular type of hairdo that involved raising the hair up with wires, hanging different types of jewelry on it, and braiding the hair with threads of gold or silver. Wearing gold probably refers to adornments in the form of necklaces, earrings, or rings. Fine clothing designates expensive and ostentatious dresses, implying that although clothing (in contrast to jewelry) is needed, certain types of it are incompatible with the Christian life. Peter calls this adornment outward; it does not really add value to the person.

3. *True Adornment.* Against the specific outward adornment that Peter is rejecting, he identifies the adornment that is pleasing to God. It is an inner beauty consisting of "a gentle and quiet spirit," which is precious in God's sight (3:4). The ultimate criterion for proper adornment is that which is precious in God's sight. A gentle spirit is based on trust in the Lord (Matt. 5:5; cf. 11:29). A quiet spirit refers to a disposition of tranquility and peacefulness that results from being at peace with God. Its absence generates personal and social turmoil. Peter indicates that the type of external adornment he is discussing is not an expression of submission and dependence on the Lord. When contrasted with a "quiet spirit," such adornment becomes an expression of a restless attitude, a symbol of a need, or even a quest for inner peace that should have been fully met through the gospel. Hence, this adornment is incompatible with the fruits of the Christian message.

4. *Nature of the Instruction.* The translation "Do not let your adornment be *merely* outward," adopted by some versions, suggests that the use of jewelry is not strictly forbidden, but that it is not the most important type of adornment for the Christian woman. The adverb "merely" is not in the original Greek text. The problem is that in Greek we have a third person imperative that does not exist in English (we have only a second person imperative). Some translators use what is called an imperative of permission: "Let not your adornment be. . . ." But the Greek third person imperative has the same imperatival force as the second person. What we have here is a negative command followed by, or contrasted by, a positive one. This type of construction is introduced by a negative adverb ("not") and it closes with a contrastive particle ("but" or "rather"). This is what we have in Greek: "Let *not* their adornment be [third person imperative] the outward consisting of . . . *but* that of your inner self. . . ."

In other places in the NT, the Greek allows for a translation of this construction as "not so much [this] . . . as [this]," implying that the first part of the sentence is not totally negated (e.g., Mark 9:37). This would mean, in our text, that using jewelry is not necessarily prohibited. But the same construction can be also translated "not [this] . . . but [this]," totally rejecting the first element (Matt. 5:17). The question is which of these two possibilities applies to 1 Peter 3:3–4. When in the NT the construction "Not [this] . . ." is denying a phrase in the imperative, as is the case in our passage ("Do not adorn . . .), the following "but [this]" introduces the contrasting subject and means "but on the contrary." That is to say, the first element ("Let not their adornment be . . .") is negated. In that case, Peter would be forbidding the use of jewelry for personal adornment and probably as a mark of social standing (see Is. 3:19–23). Peter wanted to make clear that the adornment that should matter most to the Christian is the development of a godly character.

5. *The Foundation of Peter's Command.* Peter is not merely promoting the values he found in Greco-Roman society. His source is the OT. He refers to the experience of the holy women in the Scriptures (1 Pet. 3:5–6). The implication seems to be that part of their adornment consisted in showing honor/respect to their husbands. Peter also grounds his command in God's will for His people—in what is precious and worthy in God's sight (v. 4). True Christian adornment is an expression of Christian virtues and not a display of elaborate hairstyles, gold jewelry, or fine clothing.

that he considered the respectful treatment of the wife a subject of utmost importance.

3:8–12. General Admonitions. Peter next addressed the church members in general and called them to be united in *homophrones* ("of one mind," "like-minded," "harmonious"; see Phil. 2:2), which he explains to mean to be *sympatheis* ("sympathetic," "suffer with," "compassionate"), to have *philadelphos* (mutual love) among believers, to be *eusplanchnos* ("tenderhearted," "compassionate," caring tenderly for others), to be *tapeinophrōn* ("courteous," "showing humility" to each other; 1 Pet. 3:8), and to not be vindictive but to bless others as they are and will continue to be blessed by the Lord (cf. Matt. 5:44; Luke 6:28).

Such an attitude is not only a Christian imperative (1 Pet. 3:9; all Christians have been called to it); it is also a sure way to receive the blessings of God and to learn to enjoy a good life (v. 10). This works in two ways. First, those who fill their lives with bad feelings, attitudes, and words for wrongs suffered will ultimately hurt themselves. Such things destroy the Christian peace. More importantly, the attention of the Lord is on the righteous. While responding to evil with evil may give a corrupted sense of justice, it brings the displeasure of God. By contrast, a person who responds to evil by doing good follows in the footsteps of Jesus, is counted righteous, and will receive a due reward.

3:13—4:11

Suffering and Vindication

The conceptual thread that runs throughout this passage is suffering. The audience of Peter was soon to suffer even more because of their faith. How should they behave in the context of persecution? Rather than being discouraged, Peter invited them to be courageous because Christ also suffered. They should be ready to suffer for doing what was good (3:13–17), understanding that they would be vindicated (vv. 18–22) and noting the connection between suffering and holiness (4:1–6). This section concludes with a passage dealing with life within the church (vv. 7–11). The passage logically follows the previous call to reject vindictiveness.

3:13–17. Suffering for Doing Good. Peter's audience was suffering on account of their faith. This opposition had not yet taken the form of violent persecution, but it appears to have been primarily in the form of prejudice against the Christian faith. Peter declares that it is better to suffer for doing good rather than for doing evil, because the first is deserved and the second will be rewarded. Early Christians were accused of a number of things, including immorality (they professed love for each other), disrespect for deities (they rejected the many gods honored by Greeks and Romans), antisocial behavior (they did not participate in civic festivals usually held in honor of pagan gods), anti-family behavior (new Christians were often rejected by their families), introducing a new religion (Romans loved their traditions), and, by some, even of cannibalism (a misunderstanding of the nature of the elements in the Lord's Supper). Such accusations stemmed from ignorance, malice, or both. Peter therefore declares that believers should always be ready to give a reason for their hope with *praytētos kai phobou* ("gentleness and respect" or "meekness and fear"; vv. 15–16). When the accusations were shown to be baseless, the accusers would be put to shame (v. 16).

3:18–22. Suffering and Vindication. Peter presents Jesus as the most powerful example of the suffering of the innocent. It was through His death and resurrection that He triumphed over the forces of evil and then sat at the right hand of God. His suffering was vicarious in that He, the Just One, suffered for the unjust in order to give us access to God. He was put to death by human instrumentalities but was resurrected by God through the Spirit (see "The Spirits in Prison," p. 1885) and as resurrected Lord, proclaimed to the evil powers His victory over them. These evil powers had shown their disobedient and rebellious spirit during the time of Noah.

The experience of Noah is described as a baptism. While the water destroyed the wicked, Noah and his family passed safely through it inside the ark. The experience of Noah is used as a type of Christian baptism, the antitype. Christians are also saved through the waters of baptism—its effectiveness is determined by the resurrection of Jesus. Baptism is not for the cleansing of the body, but it is rather the expression of a deep spiritual cleansing of the inner being. The answer of a good (clear) conscience toward God indicates that baptism is a commitment to preserve that good conscience through obedience to God or that the forgiveness of sin that restores a good conscience in us is accepted (cf. 2:19; 3:16). The threatening experience of Noah resulted in salvation for him and his family, while the deadly experience of Jesus resulted in salvation for believers. Peter concludes

by indicating that the sufferings of Christ resulted not only in His victory over evil powers but also in His enthronement at the right hand of God. All powers are now subject to Him. The implication is that those who suffer oppression in the service of the Lord will also be victorious over their enemies.

4:1–6. Suffering and Holiness. The prejudice and accusations believers were facing might have tempted some to give up their faith. But after Peter explains that it was through His suffering that Jesus attained complete victory, he proceeds to challenge believers to holy living by arming themselves with the same *ennoia* ("purpose," "attitude," "mind," "way of thinking") that Jesus had (v. 1). They should consider themselves dead to their sinful life because Jesus also suffered and finally died in their place. Trials could encourage them to come closer to the Lord

The Spirits in Prison

First Peter 3:18–20 is one of the most difficult passages in the Bible and has been interpreted in many different ways. The main problem is establishing the identity of the "spirits in prison." We will discuss and evaluate four suggestions.

1. Disembodied Spirits. The most popular suggestion is that the "spirits" in prison were disembodied souls or spirits. It is suggested that when Jesus died, He visited them in hell—also in disembodied form—and preached the gospel to them, since they had died without ever hearing it. This interpretation is untenable both theologically and exegetically. Theologically, according to the Bible humans do not possess an immortal soul and consequently when they die they are totally dead (Eccl. 9:5). They cannot communicate with the living, with each other, or with God (Ps. 6:5; Eccl. 9:6). After death, there is no opportunity for repentance (Heb. 9:27).

Exegetically, the phrase being "put to death in the flesh [or body] but made alive by [or in] the Spirit" (1 Pet. 3:18) is thought to indicate that even though Jesus died physically on the cross, His spirit was still alive and visited the spirits in prison. The Greek literally reads, "put to death by/in flesh, made alive by/in spirit." The Greek participle translated "made alive" is masculine. By contrast, "spirit" (*pneuma*) in Greek is neuter, while "soul" (*psychē*) is feminine. So, "made alive" cannot refer to the alleged disembodied spirit or soul of Jesus. It refers to Jesus as a whole: as an indivisible being. Moreover, the idea of "making alive" suggests that the person being made alive was dead. It shows that Jesus had been dead, the very opposite of the view promoted in this interpretation.

The whole phrase is a reference to the death and resurrection of Jesus as a person, not to any supposed constituent part of His being. The phrases "in the flesh" and "in the spirit" indicate agency and should be translated "who was put to death by flesh" (i.e., humans; 1:24) but was "made alive by the Spirit." Jesus was not a disembodied spirit and did not visit disembodied beings.

2. Watchers. A second suggestion is that the spirits in prison were the Watchers, a group of two hundred fallen angels who, according to Jewish tradition, took human wives before the Flood. It is suggested that their offspring were the giants who led the world astray and precipitated the Flood. The whole myth—probably influenced by Greek mythology—is based on a misinterpretation of Genesis 6:1–4. According to this interpretation, the "sons of God" were the angelic Watchers. Jesus supposedly visited them either before or after His resurrection and announced their doom to them.

This is based in two main arguments. First, the Watcher myth was very popular in first-century Judaism, so Peter would have been aware of it. Second, in 1 Peter 3:20 the spirits in prison are directly connected to the Flood, just like in the Jewish myth. We will argue that this approach is not defensible. First, the phrase "sons of God" used in Genesis 6:2, often designates righteous people (e.g., Deut. 14:1; Matt. 5:9; Luke 20:36; Rom. 8:14). Second, angels do not marry (see Matt. 22:30; Mark 12:25). Third, the Jewish tradition of the Watchers is not found in the Bible.

3. Sinful Humans. A third suggestion is that the spirits in prison were the sinful humans in Noah's time. This theory suggests that when Noah proclaimed the coming

Flood, it was not just Noah speaking but rather the preincarnate Jesus, who, through the Holy Spirit, inspired Noah. After mentioning the death and resurrection of Jesus in 3:18, Peter looks back to the generation of the Flood and asserts that Jesus was active back then. This view makes much more sense than the previous two but still has a few problems. First, while the word "spirits" may refer to humans (e.g., 1 Cor. 2:11; cf. 1 Cor. 15:45), it is not the common way to do so. Second, while *phylakē* ("prison") may refer metaphorically to spiritual bonds of sin (see Ps. 141:8, LXX [Eng. 142:7]), it is not a common usage. Third, while it is not impossible to assume that immediately after mentioning the resurrection Peter would look back to the Flood in 3:19, it is more natural to assume that 3:19 follows 3:18 chronologically, in which case the preaching to the spirits took place after the resurrection. Nevertheless, this interpretation remains a viable possibility.

4. Fallen Angels. The fourth suggestion is probably the best way to interpret the imprisoned spirits: to identify them as fallen angels. This suggestion looks to the use of the original language. Hebrews 1:14 calls angels "ministering spirits," while the phrases "impure" or "evil" spirits are used repeatedly for fallen angels (e.g., Mark 3:11; 5:13; Acts 8:7). Moreover, the noun *phylakē* ("prison") is used forty-seven times in the NT—mostly in a literal sense. But in Revelation 18:2 and 20:7, *phylakē* is specifically used in relation to Satan and his angels, while 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6 describe their imprisonment. The prison of the fallen angels might not have bars and gates, but it is biblically accurate to say that fallen angels are imprisoned—their freedom of movement is curtailed by God.

Although the Greek verb *ekēryxen* ("preached") is usually employed in relation to the preaching of the gospel, it can simply mean "to proclaim," or "to announce" (e.g., Rev. 5:20; cf. Gen. 41:43; Ex. 32:5; 2 Chr. 20:3). In light of this evidence, we can suggest that 1 Peter 3:18 declares that Jesus was put to death by humans but was resurrected by the Holy Spirit. In 3:19, it is explained that after the resurrection Jesus announced to the spirits in prison (Satan and his angels) their defeat and impending doom (cf. 3:22; Col. 2:15). It is in part because of this proclamation that Satan, knowing that he has only a little time left (Rev. 12:12), is going around like a "roaring lion" seeking to devour (1 Pet. 5:8).

This suggested interpretation is supported by a rarely noticed parallel between 1 Peter 3:19 and 3:22, missed in English translations but clear in the Greek. In 3:19 Jesus "went" to the spirits in prison, but in 3:22 He "has gone into heaven" and is at God's right hand. It seems, therefore, that after the resurrection Jesus did two things: (1) He went to the fallen angels to announce their defeat and doom; and (2) He went to heaven to sit at the right side of the Father. The two are related. His victory over the forces of evil led to His enthronement as King at the side of the Father.

This interpretation faces one difficulty. According to 3:20, the spirits in prison were disobedient while God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In what sense were the fallen angels "disobedient" when the ark was being prepared? Perhaps the text is simply indicating that the period leading up to the Flood was a time of intense demonic opposition to God's plan for humanity.

and to set aside a life of sin. The contrast is between a life of sin and a life of submission to the will of God. Holy living includes leaving behind the desires of the flesh. Peter mentions some of the prevalent fleshly desires to which believers had probably once been enslaved before coming to faith: *aselgeia* ("lewdness," "debauchery," "sensuality," "liscentiousness"; behavior that violates social, spiritual, and moral values), *epithymia* ("lusts," "passions," "[evil] desires"; the unsanctified cravings of the human nature), *oinophlygia* ("drunkenness," "excess of wine"; absence of alertness and watchfulness; 1:13; 4:7; 5:8), *kōmos* ("revelries," "orgies," "carousing"; participating in pagan religious feasts), *potos* ("drinking parties," "wild parties"), and *athemitos eidōlolatria* ("forbidden," "disgusting," "detestable" idolatries; 4:3; cf. 2:1). Peter describes such a lifestyle as *asōtia* ("wild living," "dissipation," "debauchery"; 4:4), or a disorderly life.

The last two verses of this section (vv. 5–6) conclude Peter's call to perseverance in

suffering by pointing to the final judgment, when God will bring all people, the dead and the living, to account. The clear implication is that God does not judge humans when they die but rather in the final judgment. Peter declares that God is ready to judge (v. 5), expressing God's eager anticipation to judge in order to consummate the redemption of His people and to put an end to sin in all its manifestations. On v. 6, see below, "The Gospel Preached to the Dead."

4:7–11. Life in the Community of Faith. This passage is primarily a conclusion of 2:13–4:6 and concentrates on the Christian life within the community of believers. The situation faced outside the church is difficult, but inside the church it should be different. Peter introduces this passage by saying that the end of all things is near. In the previous verses he wrote about the final judgment; now he exhorts his audience to live in constant expectation of the return of Christ, giving them specific instructions to that end.

The Gospel Preached to the Dead

In the discussion of 1 Peter 4:6, two key questions stand out: Who are the dead to whom the gospel was preached, and to what does "live according to God in the spirit" refer?

1. Suggested Solutions. First Peter 4:6 is often tied to 3:18–20, so that the interpretation of one passage determines the interpretation of the other. Those who believe that Jesus preached to disembodied spirits between His death and resurrection contend that the dead in 4:6 refers to those same disembodied spirits. As indicated in the commentary on 3:18–22, that interpretation is untenable not only theologically but also exegetically. Therefore, the interpretation that the dead in 4:6 refers to disembodied spirits is not a viable option. Those who believed that the spirits in prison of 3:18–20 were the generation of Noah have contended that the dead mentioned in 4:6 heard the gospel while they were alive. While this interpretation makes better sense if these two passages are connected, it does not explain how the generation of Noah heeded the gospel or how they were judged according to men. Only Noah and his family heeded the message. It is highly unlikely that when Peter talks about preaching the gospel to the "dead" his reference is to Noah and his family. Some have concluded that this passage refers to those who are spiritually dead but who had once accepted the gospel of salvation. However, according 4:5, Peter refers to God judging those who are physically dead in the final judgment. There are no contextual indicators of Peter moving from a literal to a figurative view.

2. Important Phrases. Several important phrases used in this passage deserve some attention. The references to the body/flesh and the spirit do not mean in a physical body versus a disembodied existence. Theologically, the biblical view of death is not dualistic (body and soul/spirit as separate entities) but monistic; the human being is one complete, indivisible whole (Gen. 2:7). The phrase translated as "in the flesh," or "in regard to the body," as noted in the discussion on 1 Peter 3:18–20, may also be translated "by flesh" or "by humans." As such, we can translate the whole phrase thus: "That they might be judged by humans according to men [i.e., according to human standards]."

The last clause in 4:6 reads, "but live according to God" in the spirit. The verb "live," though in the present tense, is in the subjunctive mood and therefore indicates a future goal or aim. Given that 4:5 and 4:7 both refer to the final judgment, the future life in view is the life to be received at the resurrection. While unbelievers may consider Christian faith as futile and malign it, Peter foretold God judging believers according to His righteous standard, acquitting them because of the sacrifice of Jesus and giving them the gift of eternal life. Finally, the words translated as "in the spirit" or "in regard to the spirit" may be translated as "by the Spirit," referring to the life to be received at the resurrection. Believers will participate in the experience of Jesus (3:18; Rom. 8:11).

3. Contextual Interpretation. Perhaps the key for the interpretation of 1 Peter 4:6 is to note that the gospel was not preached (a past action) to people who were dead. It was preached to people who were alive when they heard the gospel but had since died. Who are these people? The best contextual answer is that they are Christians who, when Peter was writing, were dead. These had been evangelized and had accepted the gospel of salvation (cf. 1:12, 25) but were now deceased. While they were alive they had been judged or evaluated by human standards (i.e., humans found fault with their Christian behavior, as they were still doing to Peter's audience). This judgment was in the past. In Greek the phrase "that they might be judged" is referring to a past action ("although they were judged"). Peter was telling the church that they should not despair in the face of rejection and oppression, because at the end the true universal Judge would grant them the gift of life.

First, the spiritual life is to be characterized by constant prayer. But when praying, they are to have alertness of mind and integrity. The verb *sōphroneō* refers to having self-control and a sound mind (translated variously as "alert" or "serious"); it refers to a life characterized by thoughtful self-control. *Nēphō* ("to be sober"; also translated as "watchful," "clearheaded," or "disciplined") means to be in a state of alertness, free from confusion or mental drunkenness. Prayer is not a mystical exercise but the expression of a life of self-control and clarity of mind.

Second, Peter introduces the most important Christian virtue: love. He calls Christians to earnestly and constantly love each other. His reference to love covering a multitude of sins (Prov. 10:12) identifies a major aspect of love; it is always willing to forgive.

Third, Peter tells believers to be hospitable to one another, particularly to those who travel, gladly, without grumbling or complaining. Peter's admonition to be hospitable is timeless. While in many places pastors and evangelists rarely need the home of believers, hospitality can take many forms. Hospitality is the principle behind taking care of the needy and making people feel welcome in the fellowship of faith. Love and hospitality combined serve as the glue that keeps the family of God united and attracts unbelievers (John 13:35).

Fourth, Peter exhorts believers to minister to one another according to the gifts they have and as stewards of the grace of God. He concludes the section with a doxology: The goal of the Christian life is to bring glory to God in all that we do through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory, power, and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

4:12—5:11

Spiritual Well-Being of the Church

After the doxology in the previous passage, Peter introduces a new section using the term *agapētos* ("beloved," "dear friends") to refer to his audience. He did the same in 2:11. In this section, Peter goes back to some of the topics he discussed before to amplify them and to emphasize their importance. The main emphasis is on Christian suffering, which frames this section (4:12–19; 5:10). This passage, like the previous one, closes with a doxology (5:11). The topic of glory runs throughout (4:14, 16; 5:1, 4, 10, 11). It deals with suffering and glory (4:12–19), leadership and glory (5:1–5), and submission and glory (5:6–11).

4:12–19. Suffering and Glory. Peter considers suffering in the life of believers to be a threat to their faith and exhorts them to remain loyal to Christ in spite of it. He first argues that we should expect trials in the Christian life. They should not surprise us. We should rejoice when facing them because we have the privilege of participating in Christ's sufferings (v. 13). Suffering in itself is meaningless, Peter seems to be saying, but we rejoice in the midst of it because we are experiencing what Jesus experienced when on earth; we can identify with Him. We will also greatly rejoice in the future when His glory is revealed at the Second Coming. Then we will be free from all suffering forever.

Second, those who are reviled for serving Jesus are blessed, because it indicates that the Spirit of glory and of God rests on them. Suffering demonstrates that believers are under the care of God's glorious Spirit. This conviction and experience enrich the lives of believers. Jesus had already told the disciples not to worry about what to say when they were dragged before human courts, because the Holy Spirit would give them the right words at the right moment (Matt. 10:17–20; Luke 12:11–12). Peter takes this promise a step further, assuring his readers that the Spirit would accompany them beyond the courts and into whatever suffering would be imposed on them. (The sentence "On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified" [1 Pet. 4:14] is not found in some Greek manuscripts.)

Third, believers should not be ashamed of suffering for Christ; they should not abandon their faith but should glorify God in their trials. They should praise the Lord, recognizing that He is with them—sustaining them. In order for suffering to have any spiritual value, it needs to be for the right reasons. If a believer suffers as a criminal or meddler (v. 15), then such suffering will bring neither glory to God nor benefit to the believer; it is deserved suffering (see 2:20).

Fourth, Peter argues that the suffering Christians experience is not comparable with the suffering of the wicked at the final judgment. According to him, since the time had come for the final judgment to begin with God's people—servants of the Lord—one could not even begin to imagine the fate of those disobedient to the gospel of God (v. 17). The idea is taken from Ezekiel 9:6, where God begins to judge His people in the temple, and indicates God's people as the first to be judged in the final judgment. Peter quotes Proverbs 11:31 to support his argument. His reference to the righteous being "scarcely saved," "barely saved," or "saved with difficulty" (1 Pet. 4:18) indicates that the goodness of believers does not suffice for their salvation. Only Jesus ensures their salvation, contrasting with the end of the wicked in condemnation and perishing (cf. Ps. 1:4–6).

First Peter 4:17–18 contains an often missed chronological juxtaposition. Peter says it is time for the judgment to begin with God's household, and Peter asks about the *telos* ("end" or "outcome") of those who do not obey the gospel of God. "Begin" refers to the beginning of judgment and "end" to what was to happen at the end, namely, the destruction of the ungodly. There is an obvious chronological development here: the judgment beginning at the house of God with the righteous and concluding with the condemnation and destruction of the wicked. Peter implies that there are different phases or aspects to the final judgment; it does not end until all is accomplished.

This section concludes with an exhortation (v. 19). Peter appeals to believers who are suffering according to the will of God to commit themselves to Him and to do what is good. It is not that God wants them to suffer but that when they face suffering they must do what is good in obedience to Him. They have assurance that God is faithful and that they can indeed trust their lives (sometimes translated as "souls") to Him, who as Creator will preserve them.

5:1–5. Leadership and Glory. Peter turns now to life within the church and exhorts church leaders to correctly perform their duties. The term "elders" (*presbyteros*) designates church leaders performing the work of pastors. The exhortation is introduced by some important remarks. First, he writes to them as a co-elder (fellow elder) because of their common responsibility. Second, they also have a common mission: to testify about the redemptive sufferings of Christ (2:21–25; 3:18). This is the very core of the mission of the church and particularly of those appointed as pastors of the flock. Third, they also have a common hope: they will share in the glory that will be revealed. The reference is to the glorious coming of Christ.

The exhortation is now introduced: shepherd the flock of God (5:2; cf. John 21:15–17). They are to watch over the well-being of the flock by protecting them from spiritual wolves (Matt. 7:15) and by providing the spiritual food and water they need. This emphasis on taking good care of the flock is based on the fact that the flock is not theirs but the Lord's, and therefore they are accountable to Him. Peter instructs elders on how to do their job. First they should do it not under compulsion (grudgingly, because they do not have any other option) but willingly. Second, they should not do it to gain personal benefit from it but should guide with eagerness—with a positive disposition and fervor. Third, they should not be domineering, lording it over those entrusted to them (1 Pet. 5:3; cf. Matt. 20:25–26), but should lead by being a good example. Peter assures them that their work will be recognized by the Lord—the Chief Shepherd—at His coming. They will receive from Him the unfading crown of glory, that is, the crown that consists of glory (v. 4). Christ will share His glory with them.

Peter then exhorts the young people in the congregation. In the same way that the elders are expected to submit to Peter's exhortation, the young people are asked to submit to the elders (v. 5). He immediately continues by addressing everyone, exhorting them to be clothed with humility in dealing with each other (some Greek manuscripts specifically add "be submissive to one another," while others omit it). Humility is the opposite of pride. The reason for this exhortation is that God opposes the proud but extends His grace and favor to the humble (cf. v. 5; Prov. 3:34).

5:6–11. Submission and Glory. Peter provides some specific exhortations for church members.

First, he develops the topic of humility, introduced in the previous verse. True humility is based on the recognition of the unique power and greatness of God who, in due time—that is to say, at the coming of Christ—will exalt them (v. 6). Meanwhile, they should cast all of their concerns or anxieties (their trials, sufferings, and fears) on the Lord, for He cares for them (v. 7). Pride is not the solution, but total reliance on God is. Second, Peter calls believers to be sober (be on the alert or be of sound mind) and vigilant, watchful, and alert because they have an enemy (the adversary, the devil) who is ready to oppose and even destroy their faith in the Lord (v. 8).

Third, Peter exhorts them to resist the devil (cf. James 4:7) by remaining firmly established and steadfast in the faith (probably a reference to their faith in Jesus and His teachings; v. 9). The devil seeks ways to inflict suffering on believers everywhere. But God is involved in their battle against the enemy. He who called them to share in His eternal glory through the work of Christ (cf. Rom. 8:30; 2 Thess. 2:13, 14) will provide the grace they need to remain faithful to Him. Yes, they may have to suffer a little more, but God will *katartizō* ("perfect," "prepare," "restore," or "equip"), confirm, strengthen, and establish them, placing them on a settled, firm, steadfast foundation (1 Pet. 5:10). Peter concludes the passage with a doxology proclaiming that all glory belongs to God, whose dominion will last forever, thus implying that the forces of evil will eventually come to an end (v. 11).

5:12–14
Final Greetings

The last three verses of 1 Peter contain Peter's final greetings to believers. He first introduced Silvanus (or Silas), perhaps his amanuensis or secretary, or the bearer of the letter. He is probably the same person who accompanied Paul on his second missionary journey (cf. Acts 15:22—18:5; 2 Cor. 1:19; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1). In the process of introducing Silvanus, Peter provides a summary of the content of the letter: to exhort and testify that this is the true grace of God (that is, the gospel) on which they were standing and were to continue to stand (1 Pet. 5:12). The epistle is in fact a combination of exhortations and theological expositions calling the readers to stand firmly on it. Peter gave them greetings from "she who is in Babylon" and from Mark (v. 13). Most interpreters identify Babylon with Rome and "she" with the church in Rome. Peter refers to these believers in Rome as "chosen together" or "elect together" with his readers, which suggests that the greetings were from the church (1:1). Peter mentions the greetings of Mark and refers to him as his son. Mark abandoned Paul and Barnabas during Paul's first missionary journey, and when at the beginning of the second Barnabas wanted to take him along, Paul refused. As a result, the two apostles parted ways, Paul taking Silas instead and Barnabas going with Mark (Acts 15:37–41). The trust Barnabas placed in Mark paid off. The once fearful Mark became a stalwart disciple. He not only helped Barnabas in his missionary endeavors but later again became a close companion of Paul (Col. 4:10; 2 Tim. 4:11; Philem. 1:24) and, of course, of Peter, under whose guidance Mark composed the Gospel that bears his name. Peter encouraged the church to greet one another with a kiss of love (1 Pet. 5:14) as an expression of affectionate love.

Peter's final greeting to the believers is one of peace. The more common greeting formula was grace and peace (e.g., Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:3; 2 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:3; Eph. 1:2; Phil. 1:2; Col. 1:2; 1 Thess. 1:1; Rev. 1:4). The phrase is a prayer for the well-being of the church—for a life that is totally integrated, free from inner disruption in their mutual union with Christ (see 1 Pet. 1:2). It reminds us of the words of Jesus to the disciples in the upper room on the evening after the resurrection (Luke 24:36; John 20:19, 21) and again a week later (John 20:26). It seems that the experience of seeing the resurrected Christ while congregated in fear in the upper room left such a lasting impression on Peter that now—in his own parting words to his readers—he wants to share the same beautiful greeting that Jesus shared on that wonderful evening. The church continues to experience this peace in the midst of suffering because Christ strengthens it and because its living hope is grounded in the resurrection of Christ (1 Pet. 1:3).

2 PETER

INTRODUCTION

Title and Authorship. The earliest copy of this letter dates back to around the third or fourth century A.D. It bears the title "The Second Epistle of Peter" and is part of a papyrus codex that also includes 1 Peter and Jude. Unlike many other NT epistles, this title occurs across the manuscript tradition with little variation. The only minor difference is its designation, in a few manuscripts, as a "catholic" (meaning "universal" or "general"; see 1 Peter: Introduction) epistle and/or the identification of Peter as an "apostle."

The opening words of the letter identify the Apostle Simon Peter as its author. Although Simon was a common Jewish name, the name Peter (Aram. *Cephas*) was not. By using the two names together, the author underlines that this letter was written by the apostle who received this nickname from Jesus himself (John 1:42). This is confirmed later, when the author identifies himself as an eyewitness of Jesus's transfiguration (2 Pet. 1:16–18; cf. Matt. 17:1–5).

From very early times, the church has puzzled over how this letter and the letter of 1 Peter could both be written by the same person. The style of writing, the terminology, and the themes differ greatly between the two letters. Likely for this reason, it took several centuries before 2 Peter was universally recognized as part of the NT canon.

This does not necessitate—as is often argued—that Peter was not the actual author of this letter. The letters do not differ as much thematically as is often suggested, and the cause of those themes that do differ may be traced to the brevity of the letters and the different situations addressed by each (cf. 2 Pet. 3:10–12; 1 Pet. 1:13). A reasonable explanation for other differences is Peter's likely use of a secretary, or amanuensis, in writing one or both letters. (1 Pet. 5:12 may be referring to Sylvanus [Silas] as the amanuensis who helped with 1 Peter; cf. 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1). In the Greco-Roman world, it was common to use an amanuensis to assist in the writing of a letter. An amanuensis could take word-for-word dictation. But additionally, as with secretaries today, an amanuensis who shared the understandings and commitments of the author could, where needed, assist in selecting the wording and phraseology that would most effectively convey the author's message to his chosen audience.

Date. If the reference to an earlier letter in 2 Peter 3:1–2 is to 1 Peter, this letter was written after 1 Peter. Second Peter 1:14 suggests that it was probably written near the end of Peter's life. Early church writers agree that Peter died during Nero's persecution of the Christians in Rome—about A.D. 65.

Backgrounds. If this letter was written to the same people as 1 Peter, the original audience can be identified as those who were pilgrim exiles dispersed or scattered throughout "Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia" (1 Pet. 1:1). These recipients of 1 Peter were largely Gentile (1 Pet. 1:18; 2:10; 4:3). A number of them had likely been brought to Christ by the Apostle Paul (Acts 16:6; 18:23). A close examination of the author's concerns in 2 Peter makes evident that those to whom this letter was written were in danger of being distracted from their commitment to God and to living out His work in their lives. False teachers and scoffers questioned certain truths they had been taught about Jesus and His coming and suggested that they were free to follow after their own sinful desires.

Second Peter is not concerned with pinpointing the exact identity of these false teachers or with providing a full description of their beliefs and actions. Peter, speaking from a prophetic viewpoint, initially says that they *will* come (2:1), but later speaks of them as already present among the believers (2:10, 13). This suggests that some were already present or would be soon after the receipt of this letter.

It appears that these false teachers had once followed Jesus (2:20, 21) but had concocted erroneous doctrines that in some way denied Him (2:1) and twisted the NT teachings about Christian liberty (2:19). In doing so, they apparently questioned the reality of the judgment and thus placed themselves among the scoffers who had been predicted as coming in the last days (2:3, 9; 3:3–4). As is generally the case, these erroneous beliefs were closely connected with evil actions centered in following their own sinful desires (2:10, 13–14). These actions included covetousness or greed (2:3, 14), sexual immorality (2:14, 18), and arrogance in the face of powers greater than themselves (2:10). In the ferment of philosophical beliefs in the cities of the first century, such ideas would not have been uncommon. The false teachers were possibly influenced by the agnostic philosophy of Epicureanism or were early predecessors of the Gnostics, who troubled the church greatly in the mid to late second century.

Theology and Purpose. The main concern running throughout the Second Epistle of Peter is that people need to be ready to meet the Lord with joy at His coming (1:4, 10–11, 16; 3:11–13). As Peter makes clear in both the beginning and ending of this letter, such readiness comes through personally knowing Jesus Christ and the Father, who sent Him (1:2–3; 3:18). By this means God has made grace and peace available—together with everything needed for life and godliness—and believers are urged to diligently take hold of these provisions by putting this reality into action in their own lives (1:3–8). Despite the claims of false teachers and scoffers to the contrary (2:1—3:4), Peter assures believers that the promise of Jesus's coming is no myth; Peter was given a glimpse of Jesus's coming glory, and the prophecies of His coming in the OT were inspired by the Holy Spirit Himself (1:16–21). The Lord will come at His appointed time, and it will be a terrifying event engulfing all wickedness in complete destruction (3:3–10). This truth should cause believers to soberly examine their own lives in a spirit of repentance and to urge others to do the same (3:11–12). However, those who have accepted His cleansing and are diligently growing in godliness need not despair but may be at peace; they can instead look forward to a new earth, which God Himself will supply for them (1:11; 3:13, 18).

Literary Features. Second Peter is written in the standard letter format of the day. It opens with an identification of the author and the addressees, followed by a blessing. Since no single church or individual is named, it is likely a general or circular letter, meant to be passed from house church to house church. In form, 2 Peter also would likely have been heard as a farewell address—a record of an individual's last words for a particular person or group. As with similar works, the author states the imminence of his death (1:13–15) and warns of what his audience was to face before the certain and blessed coming of the Lord. In tone and content, 2 Peter is similar to Paul's last words to the elders of the Ephesian church, reported in Acts 20:17–38. As the last words of the beloved Peter, this letter would have been read with special interest and solemnity.

A word must be said about the relationship between 2 Peter and Jude. Many concerns found in 2 Peter 2 regarding false teachers are also found in the letter of Jude, sometimes with the same exact Greek wording. Such an integration of one author's writings into the work of another was normal in that day and age and was considered an honor. It appears that Peter most likely made use of Jude, since Jude exhibits a clear structure that is missing in the second half of 2 Peter. As noted in the commentary on Jude, it would have been difficult for Jude to have constructed that part of his letter out of what Peter had written. If this is the case, Peter apparently came across Jude's letter and felt it contained aspects that were important to pass on to his own readers along with the other concerns he was sharing. Such a decision is not out of harmony with the diverse ways in which the Holy Spirit inspired individuals to communicate God's message elsewhere in Scripture (see commentary on Luke 1:1–4).

COMMENTARY

1:1–2

Letter Opening

A letter from Jesus's friend and apostle, Simon Peter, would have been received by early Christians with great respect and joy. The author, however, does not emphasize his own importance but identifies himself instead as a *doulos* (translated as "bondservant," "slave," or simply "servant"). Being a *doulos* meant that he was not great or powerful in his own right but that he belonged wholly to Jesus Christ and was dependent on Him. As Jesus's apostle, it was Peter's work to faithfully represent his Master and to communicate His word (see also Ex. 32:13; Titus 1:1). By identifying the letter's recipients simply as ones having the same precious faith that he had, Peter underlines the fact that their trust and allegiance to God carried no less value or privilege than that of the chosen apostles who knew Jesus face-to-face. Such faith is not obtained by human effort, as Peter notes. Rather it is Jesus—in His righteousness—who supplies it. By the use of a single article before the phrase "God and Savior" in 2 Peter 1:1, Jesus is clearly identified not only as Savior but as God as well. This is one of the clearest declarations in Scripture of Jesus's divinity. Peter recognizes God the Father and Jesus as two distinct persons, yet at times does not distinguish between the two when he uses the words "God" and "Lord" (see 1:2–3; 3:8–12).

Peter expresses his wish for the believers' "grace and peace"—a common greeting in the NT (e.g., 1 Cor. 1:3; 2 John 1:3). He does not treat this greeting merely as a formality, however. Instead, he goes on to point out how one can receive these two precious blessings. They are received through the knowledge (*epignōsis*) of God. Knowing God is one of the most important themes in 2 Peter. Not only can it bring grace and peace but, as 2 Peter later makes clear, it can protect believers from deception and make eternal benefits possible.

1:3–11

The Gospel Message Summarized

The first main section of the letter explores more deeply the incredible provisions God has made available to those who know Him. It then explains what receiving these blessings from God will mean in the lives of believers.

1:3–4. What God Has Provided. Through knowing Christ, believers receive everything they need to live the abundant life He has provided even now and to live it with godliness (v. 3). The Greek word used here is *eusebeia*, meaning to live one's whole life in devotion to God. It, along with its alternative (*asebēs*; "ungodly") are key words throughout the letter (1:3, 6, 7; 2:5–7, 9; 3:11). Even one's own belief in God is not due to human initiative. Rather, it is He who first called and then provided for us (cf. 1:1). The glory and virtue (*arête*; "goodness, "excellence") of His character—evidenced above all in Jesus Christ—is what draws us to Him. Further, because of this goodness, He has showered us with extraordinary promises (v. 4). Many of these have already been fulfilled in Jesus's life and sacrifice on our behalf, others are being fulfilled in our lives today, and the rest will come to completion at His return (1:11; 3:9–10, 13).

God's purpose in providing all of this is that believers be fully reshaped into the divine image He originally planned for them (Gen. 1:27). As Peter points out in the verses that follow, this is

Knowledge in 2 Peter

Although it is not clearly evident in English translations, 2 Peter uses three main Greek word roots for knowledge, each pointing to somewhat different, though overlapping, ideas.

1. Gnōsis, a common noun used to speak of knowledge, generally carries the idea of comprehending or understanding something experientially. Second Peter uses it (and its related verb *ginōskō*) for knowing Jesus Himself (3:18) and the reliable messages He passed on through His prophets and apostles (1:20–21; 3:3–5; cf. 3:17). Such knowledge of Him is to grow deeper and deeper as one matures in the Christian life (1:5–7; 3:18).

2. *Epignōsis*, a related and somewhat more intensive noun, is always used in 2 Peter for the experience of knowing Jesus. By it, 2 Peter indicates not simply knowledge about Jesus but the reality that one has come into relationship with Him in a personal and transformational way and made a commitment to Him as Lord and Savior (1:2, 3, 8; 2:20). Peter uses the verb form of this word when speaking of knowing "the way of righteousness" found in Jesus Christ (2:21).

3. *Oida* is a verb used in 2 Peter for possessing information about, or knowing how to do, a particular thing (1:14; 2:9). In the face of what false teachers and scoffers claimed, Peter points to knowledge about Christ and His message as the most reliable and valuable knowledge (1:12).

not something we must await passively until we are changed at His coming but an adventure that begins immediately. Because we know Him personally and have the benefit of all the promises He has fulfilled and is fulfilling in Christ, we are, even now, by His generosity, sharers in the love and virtue and power that are essential to His nature. Partaking of God's own nature involves leaving behind the moral and, ultimately, the physical corruption caused by *epithymia* (a Greek word that can refer not just to sexual lust but to any sort of desire). Peter speaks here of sinful desires. In contrast to those whom Peter speaks of later as being slaves of corruption or depravity (2 Pet. 2:19), those who have responded in faith to God's call have—through His provision—already escaped such slavery and are free to act as they were created to be.

1:5–7. Living Out God's Purpose. With all these things already provided by God, believers need only to take hold of what He has already made theirs—by putting it into practice in their own lives (cf. 1 Pet. 1:13–16). To describe what this looks like, Peter uses a well-known literary form called a "virtue list." In such a list, the quality understood as the foundation for all the others is placed first and the culminating (or capstone) quality is placed last. Though a number of these virtues were highly valued at that time, by grounding this list in faith and crowning it with love, Peter set apart this list of prime Christian qualities from all other virtue lists of the day.

The first five qualities in the list focus primarily on the internal aspects of the believer's character. Faith in Jesus is often spoken of as the beginning point of the Christian life (John 1:12; 1 Pet. 1:20–21). Since it has already been provided by the righteousness of God (2 Pet. 1:1), it now waits to be put into practice by the believer. *Aretē* connotes "virtue," "goodness," or "moral excellence" and here is suggested to grow out of a genuine faith in God. Verse 3 has identified this quality as a divine one that first draws the believer to God. Accurate knowledge (*gnōsis*) is essential for ongoing growth in the Christian life. Self-control (v. 6) allows these qualities to become reality—restraining sinful emotions and desires and choosing the good that God has provided. Perseverance enables one to be consistent in holding out against temptation and practicing the positive qualities God makes possible.

The last three qualities are more outwardly focused. Godliness (*eusebeia*) involves the reverence and loyalty we give to God through these and other qualities and actions. Again, God has been identified as the One who makes godliness possible (1:3; cf. 3:11). Brotherly kindness or mutual affection refers to the kind of love shared within a human family. The NT calls for this kind of love among believers also—who are to live as a family in Christ (e.g., Acts 2:44–45; Rom. 12:10; 1 Pet. 1:22). *Agapē* love leads a person to seek to benefit others even at one's own expense. It reaches beyond the positive love for family to include everyone we meet, friend or foe. It is a central defining quality of God (1 John 4:8) and is the highest and most encompassing quality of Christian behavior (cf. Matt. 22:37–40; 1 John 3:23; 4:7).

1:8–11. Eternal Results. Peter now turns to the long-term results of one's choices in response to what God has done. While God calls and provides for all, two kinds of Christians are shown to exist: One group has these qualities (v. 8) growing in their lives—arising from their relationship with Jesus (cf. vv. 2–4; John 15:1–8; Gal. 5:16–24)—thus giving clear evidence of the surety of their calling and election. Those in the second group lack these qualities (2 Pet. 1:9) because they have allowed themselves to become blind to the cleansing Jesus has already provided for them (cf. 2:21–22; Mark 4:19).

The first group is encouraged to continue to live out what God has done. This is not in order to earn salvation; they were cleansed and chosen by God when they came to Him and were baptized (1:9–10; Acts 2:38; 1 John 1:9). Rather, it is so that what God has already given them can be brought to completion when He comes. Like a fruitful grapevine or fig tree, it is the work of God through their knowledge of (that is, their connection with) Jesus that enables them to bless the Gardener and bear fruit (Is. 5:1–2; Luke 13:6–9). The Greek word *pleonazō* (2 Pet. 1:8) has the basic meaning here of "increasing," "abounding," or "becoming more and more." Peter's assurance to them is a powerful one: if you are growing in these qualities, you will most certainly not stumble (*ptaiō*; meaning here, "meet with destruction"; v. 10). Indeed, while the believers were, in v. 5, encouraged to take responsibility to add (*epichorēgeō*) positive qualities to their faith, in v. 11 believers are assured that it is God who supplies (using the same Greek word, *epichorēgeō*) entrance into the kingdom.

The second group is mentioned here only briefly to warn against blindly missing out on the glorious future God has planned. Instead of living out the cleansing He has provided, these people return to the very things from which He had cleansed them (cf. 2:21–22). Jesus and the prophets warn of the ultimate consequences of a barren and unfruitful plant (a metaphor for someone who is ineffective and unproductive) that refuses to benefit from the Gardener's provisions (Is. 5:3–5; Matt. 3:10; 7:19). In 2 Peter 2, Peter will further reveal the reason for his deep concern that these believers act on what God has provided.

Peter insisted that there were only these two options, and he fervently urged believers to put the effort of their whole heart into the diligent action commended in v. 5, directing their attention toward the ultimate and joyous culmination of their hopes in the kingdom of Jesus. By concluding with the promise of a rich welcome and entrance into the kingdom abundantly supplied for them, Peter ends the first main section of the letter as it began—with the focus on what Jesus has done.

1:12–21

A Message Worth Remembering

In view of his impending death, Peter expressed his concern that believers keep in mind the good news he had just summarized and trust firmly in the promise of Jesus's coming. He demonstrated the reliability of these things on the basis of his own glimpse of Jesus's future glory at the transfiguration and of the Spirit-inspired nature of the OT prophecies.

1:12–15. The Urgency of Remembering These Things. This paragraph contains the purpose statement of Peter's letter. His audience already knew (*oida*) the present truth, that is, the body of truth about Jesus and His coming kingdom (v. 12). Yet because of the eternal importance of how we respond to God's graciousness, Peter's goal was to be sure that they would always have a reminder of "these things." For weak humans, it is all too easy to become blind and forgetful (v. 9) and thereby distracted from the essentials of the gospel (2:2, 3, 14, 18–19). This is why Peter summarized the good news for them in vv. 1–11. Peter's concern was made even more urgent by the expectation that he would soon die. In this prediction, he seems to recall Jesus's prophecy about his death in John 21:18–19 (cf. 13:36; early church tradition tells us that Peter was crucified upside down by the emperor Nero). Peter spoke of his death as removing or storing his tent—referring to his body. This was a familiar way of speaking about death for the Greeks among Peter's audience. It likely serves here to emphasize the temporary nature of human life on earth, in contrast to the eternal and incorruptible life the believer will receive from the Lord at His coming (2 Pet. 1:4; cf. 1 Cor. 15:44, 50–54; 2 Cor. 5:1).

As these were likely Peter's last words to this group of people, he must have chosen them with great care to ensure that he had communicated the most essential things for them in as persuasive a manner as possible. In several ways, his message is similar to other farewell speeches in Scripture, like those of Moses (Deut. 33) and Joseph (Gen. 50:24–26). Like them, Peter was speaking of things past, recalling truths he held most important, and warning of dangers to come. By speaking in this way, he was underlining the gravity of what he had to say. And by communicating these teachings in a letter, he was ensuring that his instruction would always be available to them.

1:16–21. The Reliability of the Promise of His Coming. In vv. 16–18, Peter gives the first of two reasons why the things he was reminding the believers of are reliable and worth keeping closely in mind. As the rest of 2 Peter reveals, there were some who were suggesting that what Peter taught about Jesus's coming was not worth remembering at all but was instead a cleverly crafted myth (1:16; cf. 3:3–4). In reality, however, it was likely these doubters were teaching such fables (2:1, 3, 18; 3:3–7). The reference to the coming of Jesus that Peter emphasizes here almost always in the NT points toward Jesus's future coming in glory to set up His kingdom (e.g., Matt. 24:3, 27; 1 Cor. 15:23; cf. 2 Pet. 1:11; 3:4). Power is identified as a central aspect of that coming (3:12; Dan. 7:14; Matt. 24:30; 2 Thess. 2:8) in an even greater sense than was evidenced by Jesus at His first coming (Luke 4:14, 36).

The first evidence Peter gives of the certainty of Jesus's future coming is the majestic and excellent glory with which God surrounded Jesus at the transfiguration—an event witnessed by Peter personally, along with James and John (Mark 9:2–7). Jesus Himself had pointed toward this transfiguration event as a foretaste of His Second Coming when He predicted, only a few days earlier, that some of His disciples would see the kingdom of God with power (Mark 9:1). Jesus's transfiguration was an especially assured indication of His honor and glory (2 Pet. 1:17), for it climaxed in words sent from heaven by God's own voice. In ancient culture, such a fatherly declaration was essential in order for a son to be accepted as carrying his father's full approval and authority.

The eyewitness evidence of the transfiguration is in agreement with, and provides further confirmation of, the prophetic word or message (v. 19) that had pointed forward long ago to the coming of God's kingdom. This term ("prophetic word/message") was used in Peter's day to refer to writings of the OT—either as a whole or with reference to one particular prophet or prophecy. It is possible that Peter may also have been thinking here of NT prophecies about Jesus's Second Coming (e.g., Matt. 24:27–31; 1 Thess. 4:15–17; cf. 2 Pet. 3:16).

At the mention of the prophetic word, Peter pauses momentarily in his demonstration of the reliability of his message to emphasize that the words of Scripture are essential for the believer to *prosechō* ("heed" or "pay attention to")—not simply to read but to carefully consider and devote oneself to what is written (Ps. 1:1–3; John 8:31–32). Believers need not stumble around in darkness as those who do not benefit from the light of God's word to show them the way do (Ps. 119:105; Prov. 6:23; John 3:19; cf. 2 Pet. 1:9; 3:5). Instead, a dedicated study of God's word will provide guidance and hope until Jesus comes again, bringing the full light of day into our world and our hearts (Num. 24:17; Is. 60:1; Mal. 4:2; Rev. 22:16).

Turning back to his larger concern, Peter insists that as believers study Scripture, they keep the reliability of what they are studying *prōtos* ("first"), or above all in their minds (cf. 2 Pet. 3:3). The promise of Jesus's coming, along with the rest of the teachings of Scripture, is fully trustworthy because it did not come about by the prophets' own private interpretation. Rather, as 1:21 goes on to say, these men were moved by the Holy Spirit. Indeed, as Scripture affirms elsewhere, those who seek to interpret God's word should not put their trust in their own private interpretations but instead seek and be open to the leading of the Spirit (John 5:39; 7:17; 16:13, cf. 2 Pet. 2:1; 3:16).

Peter's words regarding the prophets being moved or carried by the Holy Spirit speak against any suggestion that the words of Scripture were formed by human will (1:21) or were based on cleverly crafted myths (1:16). At the same time, there is no suggestion that the Holy Spirit dictated the exact words the prophets were to say. Rather, what the prophets communicated originated in and was guided by the Holy Spirit, with the result being that they can be trusted to faithfully convey what God wished to reveal (see "Revelation and Inspiration of the Bible," p. 11).

2:1–22

Beware of False Messengers

Peter here warns that, just as in OT times there were both godly, Spirit-led prophets and false prophets, so false teachers would exist in his day. In chapter 2 he describes the false teachers his audience would face and makes known the certainty of their destruction.

2:1–3. False Prophets and False Teachers. It would be a mistake to assume a major break between chapters 1 and 2, for Peter next makes another point regarding OT prophets. There were not only inspired prophets in OT times but also false prophets, whose messages were not from God (v. 1; Jer. 14:14; Ezek. 13:2–7). These false prophets sought their own advantage by insisting that people need not worry about preparing for a coming judgment (Jer. 6:13–14, 17–18; Ezek. 13:10; Mic. 3:5–11). As a result, they were soon to meet their just reward (Deut. 18:20; Jer. 14:15).

Similarly, there would be false teachers among Peter's audience. While these may not have claimed prophetic inspiration, they evidenced similar characteristics to the false prophets (2 Pet. 2:2–22; 3:3–4) and sought to lead believers away from the good news of Jesus Christ (1:2–11; cf. Matt. 7:15–23). Indeed, their behavior must have been remarkably bold and blatant for Peter to speak so strongly against them. Peter appears to draw on much of the same language used in Jude 4–19 to warn against false prophets (for more on the relationship of 2 Peter and Jude, see 2 Peter: Introduction).

Peter introduces these false teachers by identifying three of their key characteristics, paired with three important consequences of their teachings: (1) They would bring in destructive and divisive ways of thinking, even denying Jesus (2 Pet. 2:1). Peter does not spell out here exactly how they would deny Him—from the rest of chapters 2 and 3, it appears that it at least would involve denying Jesus's authority or power to judge. Their teachings, Peter says, would result in destruction without delay. (2) The wicked way of life advocated by these teachers would be remarkably popular among believers and would thereby cause outsiders to reject and revile the "way of truth" to which

God had called them (v. 2; Is. 48:17; 59:8; Luke 1:79; Acts 9:2; cf. 2 Pet. 1:3–8). (3) In reality, the false teachers did not do these things from good motives but out of covetousness or greed, hoping to gain things such as influence, honor, immoral pleasures, or monetary support from followers (2 Pet. 2:3). Again, Peter insists that their destruction was most certainly on its way, though it had not yet actively come about.

2:4–10a. The Certainty of Judgment. The next seven verses make plain how important it is to recognize the certainty of the judgment that awaits the ungodly, with Peter also assuring his readers of God's faithful deliverance of His righteous ones from this destruction. Peter demonstrates these realities by pointing to three moments in biblical history in which judgment was clearly brought on a group who had rebelled against God.

Though Peter does not give details about the first example (2:4), it is best identified with the casting down of the angels who joined Satan in warring against God before sin came into our world (Rev. 12:7–9; cf. Is. 14:12–15; Jude 1:6). These beings were cast out of heaven and were confined to darkness to await the final execution of their sentence following the coming of Jesus. (The word *tartaros*, often translated as "hell," was the place where Greek mythology depicted Zeus casting the Titans, the primeval powers of chaos, when he defeated them—an analogy many among Peter's Greek-speaking audience would have easily understood.)

The second example points to God's unmaking of the ancient world (2 Pet. 2:5). The inhabitants of this world are described simply as "ungodly" (*asebēs*), meaning that instead of living out the godliness (*eusebeia*) God sought to provide (see on 1:3), they were acting as if there was no God. In contrast, Noah, who was rescued along with seven others, is called a "preacher of righteousness." Righteousness (*dikaiosynē*) refers to a state of being in right and just relations with both God and humankind.

The final example of certain judgment deals with a third vivid instance of large-scale supernatural destruction in the ancient world: that of the ungodly people of Sodom and Gomorrah (2:6–8). The focus in Peter's telling falls on Lot, who is twice described as righteous (*dikaios*; vv. 7–8). While the Genesis account shows Lot to have been a weak and foolish man at times (e.g., Gen. 13:7–13; 19:7–8, 30–38), Peter attests that he hated the filthy, depraved conduct around him and left willingly when called (cf. Gen. 19:1–30). Thereby, despite his flaws, Peter speaks of him as righteous.

No details are given regarding the sins leading to these three instances of destruction, although some attention is given to the positive traits of Noah and Lot, whom God chose to deliver. Rather, Peter gives primary attention to the inevitability of the end that must come on the unjust or unrighteous (in Greek, the *adikos*; the opposite of the righteous). He also refers to the fact that this punishment is certain for them, although it has not been fully carried out yet (cf. 3:7). At the same time, Peter assures believers that God is still able to preserve the godly (*eusebēs*; cf. *eusebeia* in 1:3, 6–7). Peter points to two things particularly deserving of these consequences: unchecked sinful desires (or "lusts") and despising of authority. He will pick up and expand on these in the next passage.

2:10b–16. Characteristics of the False Teachers. Although Peter first introduces the false teachers by saying that they *were* to come (2:1), from v. 10 on he makes evident that some indeed were already present. The first characteristic of the false teachers that Peter elaborates on seems to be related to the reference, in vv. 9–10a, to despising authority. It is not certain to whom the term *doxa* (lit., "glories") refers. Some translate it as "dignitaries," and others as "celestial beings" or "angelic majesties." Jude, in a parallel passage, uses this same word to speak of the devil (Jude 8–10), and by it, Peter may additionally be referring to the evil powers allied with Satan (cf. Eph. 3:10; 6:12). While these are all without a doubt evil, mere fragile humans ought to speak cautiously about beings more intelligent and powerful than themselves. Some have suggested that Peter uses the term *doxa* to refer to all heavenly beings, although that seems to be contradicted by the reference to angels in 2 Pet. 2:11. Either is certainly beyond what the false teachers, or any human being, could understand (v. 12). Peter's main point in mentioning these "glories" is clear: the false teachers' derogatory speech about them was demonstrating how blindly presumptuous, brash, self-willed, and arrogant the teachers truly were (v. 10).

The lustful behavior noted in v. 10a is further discussed in vv. 12b–14. As if they had no powers of rational choice or self-control, they were acting unashamedly to please their own corrupt desires, deceiving others into joining in with them and becoming the willing objects of their lusts. By stating that they were engaging in these deceptions even while feasting with the believers (v. 13), Peter seems to imply that they were even bringing their sin and deception into the meals celebrating the Last Supper of the Lord (Mark 14:12–25; 1 Cor. 11:17–34).

In describing these false teachers as covetous or greedy (2 Pet. 2:14) and following the way of Balaam (v. 15), Peter also underlines that they were really interested not in the good of those who were following them but rather in their own self-indulgence. With ironic humor, Peter points out that even Balaam's donkey showed more sanity than Balaam did (2:14–16). Church leaders should be careful not to drift into the realm of false teachers like Balaam, using their ministries to gather benefits for themselves—bringing shame on the church by immoral behavior. It is the challenge of every believer to recognize the symptoms Peter describes—in oneself and in one's leaders—and steer far clear of them.

2:17–22. The Degrading Nature of Their Promises. Peter's opening analogies (v. 17) in the next section make vivid the reality that these false prophets promised what they did not and could not deliver. Nothing is so disappointing as a waterless spring to a thirsty soul. According to some manuscripts, the false teachers are like a type of fog (*omichlē*) or mist—defined by Aristotle and others as a haze that precedes dry weather. According to others, they are like a cloud (*nephelē*). The description of empty, pompous and arrogant words further underlines this same point.

One means used by the false teachers to deceive believers becomes apparent in vv. 18–19. They had apparently told their hearers, many of whom were new Christians, that they were at liberty or had the freedom to act in whatever way they might desire. This suggests that they likely questioned the reality of a final judgment (cf. 3:3–7). It is possible that they were distorting the teachings of Paul in order to support this false idea (cf. 3:16). Even beyond the fact that their actions were corrupt and bound for destruction, they were also actually placing the doer in a position not of freedom but of slavery to their own wrong desires. This image of being overcome or mastered and thus taken into bondage derives from the ancient practice of selling those who surrendered in battle as slaves. The certain destruction promised for these false teachers shows how untrue their promises of liberty were. The corruption they spread contrasts tragically with Peter's own earlier promise that believers would be enabled to escape corruption (1:3–4).

To have actually known (*epiginōskō*) Jesus, His goodness to them, and His plan for them and then to have rejected all of it only makes their guilt and ruin more profound (2:20–22). Peter must have shaken his head in despair at these unaccountable choices. The proverb in v. 22 combines a saying from Proverbs 26:11 with another well-known saying of the time to challenge believers to truly recognize the ludicrousness of the actions advocated by the false teachers.

3:1–16

The Certainty of the Lord's Coming

In this final section of his letter, Peter demonstrates the error of doubters concerning Jesus's Second Coming, urging believers to prepare for that great and awesome day.

3:1–4. Some Will Scoff at the Promise of His Coming. As in his first letter—probably the epistle we know as 1 Peter—Peter wished to help sincere believers to keep two things firmly in mind: Understanding how easy it is for people to be distracted by things of lesser importance, he sought to remind them of the reliable messages spoken in the past by the OT prophets (v. 2), messages which culminate in the ultimate

fulfillment of all things at Jesus's Second Coming. Peter also wanted them to treasure in their minds the instruction or command—in the singular but broadly of the whole of Jesus's instruction—that the apostles had passed on from the Lord (2:21; cf. Rom. 7:12).

Peter and the False Teachers

Peter's words about the false teachers in 2 Peter 2—like Jesus's woes upon the Pharisees—evidence that there are moments when it is necessary to speak strongly in the face of stubbornly held and blatantly evil practices condemned by Scripture. The Bible witnesses, however, that such speech should be used only on the rarest of occasions, when all other attempts have failed. Jesus Himself reasoned earnestly on many occasions with the Pharisees. Even when there was no other way to get their attention or to help the people see the truth about them, Jesus spoke with mournful woes rather than proud arrogance. The principles of Scripture regarding gentle and courteous speech are clearly spelled out on many occasions (Prov. 10:19; 15:2, 18; Col. 3:8; James 1:19–20; 3:1–18; 4:11) and are centered on Jesus's instruction to love one's neighbor as oneself (Matt. 22:38–40; cf. Lev. 19:18), and to treat them as one would want to be treated (Matt. 7:12).

At the same time, believers need to be prepared to deal with scoffers, who Peter says would come in the last days (2 Pet. 3:3). Peter does not seem to point to a specific prophecy here. It may have been something Jesus spoke of with the apostles (v. 2; cf. Matt. 24:45–51). Certainly Malachi 2:17—3:2 deals with similar behavior by pointing to the coming of the Lord. Mockers who questioned the "coming" of God's judgment appeared often in the experience of the OT prophets. These prophets, like Peter, predicted their doom (Ps. 73:9–11; Is. 5:16–20), even when it was right upon them (2 Chr. 36:16–17; Jer. 5:11–14; Ezek. 12:21–23).

While from our vantage point in the twenty-first century we look to the future for the completion of "the last days" (2 Pet. 3:3), in Peter's mind—as elsewhere in the NT—the last days began with the first coming of Jesus (Acts 2:15–17; 1 Pet. 1:20; 1 John 2:18; Jude 1:18; cf. Heb. 1:2). Thus, while such scoffers should continue to be expected and even to increase as time passes and the coming of the Lord draws near, Peter seems to find in the experience of the church a partial fulfillment of this prophecy.

Indeed, the false teachers spoken of in chapter 2 seem to have been on his mind as he wrote 3:3–4; for a main characteristic of these too was living according to their own desires (2:10, 13–14, 18). Further, the false teachers' claims to liberty (2:19–20), which Peter counters in demonstrating the certainty of judgment (2:4–10), fits well with the scoffers' sarcastic question of 3:4. As so often even today, the attraction of corrupt living appears as the initial problem, and the questioning of biblical teaching arises as a justification for unprincipled actions. The scoffers' rationalized that the earth was still pretty much as it had been since the "fathers" (i.e., ancestors) "fell asleep" (i.e., died). Here, Peter likely refers to the deaths of the OT patriarchs, the common biblical meaning for "the fathers" or "ancestors." Some also suggest that it could refer to the first Christians, who had expected Jesus's immediate return but who had died before His coming.

3:5–10. The Promise of His Coming is Sure. Peter's answer to the scoffers' claims is in two parts, beginning first, in vv. 5–7, with their rationale for doubting the coming of Jesus. To their claim that things simply proceed as they have since the time of the patriarchs (3:4), Peter responds with three parallel statements demonstrating God's active authority over the affairs of the earth: First, they were forgetting that God is the One who created, by His own word, both the heavens (Gen. 1:1, 6–8; Ps. 33:6) and the earth (2 Pet. 3:5). In the Greek, Peter's words at the end of v. 5 indicate that the earth came out of water (Gen. 1:1) and by means of water (in that land appeared because of the gathering together of the waters into seas; Gen. 1:9–10). Second, by God's word and with water, the world He had created was destroyed in a great flood (2 Pet. 3:5–6; cf. Gen. 6–8). Clearly, all things had not remained as they were since Creation as the scoffers claimed. Third (2 Pet. 3:7), by this same word the heavens and the earth are even now being preserved until God is ready to bring judgment on them—this time not by water but by fire (Is. 66:15; Mal. 4:1). Peter drives home his point by noting that this judgment would come on the ungodly, implying especially these scoffers in their lustful behavior.

Having demonstrated that God is definitely in charge and will carry out His promise in His own time, Peter turns in 3:8–10 to the scoffers' initial question of v. 4 regarding the promise of Christ's coming. Peter had just finished pointing out things the scoffers were forgetting (v. 5) and now urged believers not to forget (v. 8). His initial point here is that God's view of time is different from ours, alluding to one of those reliable declarations of OT Scripture that he had spoken of earlier (Ps. 90:4; cf. Ps. 39:4–5). Neither Peter nor Moses advocated any sort of specific symbolic numbering system for calculating prophetic time in which one day would represent exactly one thousand years. Rather, he warned of the unexpected nature of the Lord's coming (2 Pet. 3:10).

Instead of worrying that the Lord is slow to keep His promise, believers can be grateful for His long-suffering/patient compassion in allowing time for all who are willing to repent (v. 9; Ex. 34:6; Joel 2:12–13; cf. Hab. 2:3). Repentance (*metanoia*) means a change or turning of one's heart to live in submission to God (Luke 3:8; Acts 26:20; 1 Thess. 1:9–10). Such repentance is appropriate not just for false teachers, Gentiles, or non-Christians but for any who have slipped away from their commitment to God (Luke 3:7–8; James 4:1–10; Rev. 2:5, 19–20).

The day of the Lord's coming will indeed arrive, though unexpectedly (2 Pet. 3:10). Peter's vivid description of this arrival is a dreadful and sobering one. One can almost feel the intense heat melting the elements and hear the roaring noise of the heavens being destroyed. The final word in the verse varies in different manuscripts. Some manuscripts have the word *katakaēsetai* ("will be burned up"), while others have *heurethēsetai* ("will be exposed/laid bare/found"). The textual evidence suggests that, rather than "burned up," we should keep the verb *heuriskō*, meaning literally "will be found/disclosed." This seems to suggest the idea that all things done on this earth will be "found out" by God at the judgment (compare the use of "found" in 3:14; cf. 1 Pet. 1:7).

3:11–16. What His Coming Means for Believers. Peter next turns from the scene of destruction at the Lord's coming to suggest implications for those professing to believe. In view of the fearsome portrayal in the previous verse, the first point is that believers will, of course, not want to be a part of this destruction (v. 11). Certainly, those who have accepted by faith the cleansing and empowering of God spoken of in 1:3–11 will seek godly and holy ways of living, set apart from the corruption of the false teachers and the world. Yet sinful desires, such as those practiced by the scoffers and false teachers, are always a temptation. The reality of the coming destruction, described a second time in 3:12, is a reminder of the ultimate outcome of following such desires.

The best way to remain prepared for His coming is to be constantly looking forward to it (v. 12). The word translated here as "looking for" (*prosdokaō*) is used three times in vv. 12–14 and suggests not just patient waiting but confident expectation. Peter does not explain here how one might hasten or speed His coming, however v. 9 has revealed that one aspect of God's waiting is His desire for people to repent. Coming to Him in repentance for our own wrongdoing, and drawing others to repentance, is a part we can play in hastening His coming (cf. Matt. 24:14; 28:19–20). The beauty of God's character, as described by Peter in 1:5–7, when lived out in and by the church will contrast vividly with the growing destruction and ugliness brought about by sin in this world and will lend credibility and attractiveness to the last day message of repentance before God in the face of His soon coming.

Believers look for the Lord's coming not simply out of fear or because every trace of evil—every hurt and oppression of sin—will be done away with forever (3:13). Rather, they long for the promise of a new heaven and a new earth, prophesied long ago in Isaiah 65:17. Replacing the rule of degradation and ruin caused by sin will be its opposite—the pure and loving righteousness of God.

Looking forward to dwelling in a new earth characterized by righteousness provides rich motivation to diligently seek to be found spotless, blameless, and at peace with God (2 Pet. 3:14). These descriptors are the exact opposite of those attributed to the false teachers Peter spoke of in 2:13. These had forgotten their cleansing from past sins (1:9). Believers, however, can joyfully recall their own cleansing and seek to continue to be found spotless in Him through repentance (Ps. 51:2–3; Jer. 33:8; Eph. 5:25–27; Col. 1:22; 1 John 1:7, 9). This cleansing—gifted to us by God through Christ's blood—is never separated in Scripture from a corresponding cleansing of one's heart and life. Rather, recalling God's provision (2 Pet. 1:3–4) stimulates diligence in growing the qualities of godliness (1:5–7; 3:17) in preparation for life in a realm where righteousness dwells. In this way, believers will be found at peace by Jesus at His coming, when they will find a welcome entrance into God's eternal kingdom abundantly supplied for them (1:11; cf. 1 Pet. 1:3–5).

Since many of the believers to whom Peter wrote were likely brought to Christ by Paul, Peter notes that Paul too had written of Jesus's coming, His salvation, and the place of godly living in the life of the believer (Rom. 2:1–11; Gal. 5:19–25; 1 Thess. 4:15–18). The acknowledgment that some of Paul's writings were hard to understand—even at that time—suggests that Peter knew of some distortions (likely by the false teachers) of Paul's teaching. These teachers may have falsely supported their claims to liberty by misusing Paul's teaching on salvation by faith alone (e.g., Rom. 3:28; Gal. 2:16). Peter refers to Paul's writings as Scripture, meaning they were recognized even at this point as inspired by God and authoritative for believers, a claim that Paul himself also made (e.g., 1 Cor. 11:23; Gal. 1:8–12; Eph. 3:3).

3:17–18

Letter Conclusion

In the final verses, Peter condenses the two main concerns of the letter. The basis on which he argues for each of them is the knowledge of the certainty of Jesus's coming, with its moments of terrible judgment that will ultimately usher in a perfect and everlasting new world. He first

speaks of the defensive task, discussed in chapters 2 and 3a, of being vigilant against falling for error (3:17), such as that evidenced in the behavior of the false teachers and scoffers. The word *athesmos* (here and in 2:7 of the residents of Sodom) refers to people in abandonment of all moral restraint. Peter's second and fundamental concern is the one with which he began the letter: the positive privilege of Christian growth. As in 1:8–11, he emphasizes the ongoing nature of this growth. Turning from his recent emphasis on the human response of diligence toward growth, he refers back to his original point in 1:2–4: it is in the grace ("undeserved favor") and personal knowing (*gnosis*) of Jesus Christ that ongoing growth and escape from this world's corruption is possible. No wonder Peter ends with praise to God in a doxology (v. 18), referring to the wonderful hope of glorifying God throughout eternity.

1 JOHN

INTRODUCTION

Title and Authorship. The earliest extant Greek title of John's first letter is "of John A" (*iōannou a*), which occurs as a postscript in the two important fourth century manuscripts Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus. Later scribes expanded the title to make it more descriptive, resulting in titles like "John's First Epistle," "First Epistle of the Holy Apostle John," "First Epistle of the Evangelist and Apostle John," and "Catholic Epistle of the Holy Apostle John." The inclusion of "catholic" ("universal") in the last title reveals how the letter was perceived in the church. The word was attached to the letter because it is not addressed to any specific church. It is one of the General or Catholic Epistles of the NT (the epistles of Peter, John, James, and Jude), meaning that its message was generally applicable to all Christians.

Strictly speaking, 1 John is anonymous. Nowhere in the entire letter does the author introduce himself, nor does he inform us about his audience. Yet the letter was well-known by the early church fathers and from early on—with some exceptions—was commonly attributed to the Apostle John, the author of the Fourth Gospel. A comparison of the Gospel of John with 1, 2, and 3 John reveals numerous similarities in vocabulary and concepts, suggesting that the same author likely wrote them. These similarities include, among others, distinctive terminology and ideas like "light" and "darkness" (1 John 1:7–10; John 1:4–5; 3:19–21), being "born" of God (1 John 2:39; 3:9; John 1:13), "the Savior of the world" (1 John 4:14; John 4:42), and keeping His commandments (1 John 2:3; John 14:15). We also find differences, but these are largely due to their different objectives and audiences. The indirect reference in 1 John to the twelve apostles as eyewitnesses, among whom the author includes himself, also provides an argument in favor of John the apostle as author.

Date. The doctrines of the false teachers fit quite well into a situation toward the end of the first century, as does the problem in 3 John with Diotrephes, who usurped power and opposed the apostle. This would place the writing of the Johannine letters sometime in the early 90s of the first century, making these letters some of the last documents written in the NT Canon.

Backgrounds. It is difficult to establish the religious background against which John wrote. The churches to which he wrote faced theological conflicts, particularly related to the nature of Jesus. The opponents were former Christians (1 John 2:19) who, among other things, denied that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God (2:22). They apparently did not deny that the Christ had come, but they denied that He came in human flesh (4:2–3). They seemed to have rejected the real incarnation of the Christ. When we look for early Christian movements promoting ideas similar to those attacked by John, the closest is Docetism. The term Docetism comes from the Greek verb *dokein* ("to seem," "to have the appearance of"). Docetism taught that Christ did not have a real human body—that He was human only in appearance. Building on the platonic idea that physical matter was evil, they could not believe that God would assume a material body. His body, they reasoned, must have been a phantasm—and without a real body His suffering would also have been only apparent. Although Docetism was a phenomenon of the second century, it seems that some of its basic ideas were already present among some Christians in the time of John. The apostle realized that without a real incarnation there is no salvation and strongly argued that Jesus was unquestionably the Son of God in human flesh.

Theology and Purpose. The theology of the epistles of John is about the Father and His Son, Jesus the Christ. The doctrine of the

incarnation is at the very center of this theology, seeking to instill hope and perseverance in the hearts of believers who were under attack by false teachers. The emphasis is on the work of God through His Son and on its significance for believers.

1. The Father. The concepts used by John to describe who God is were probably chosen because they carry ethical implications. Two of them are particularly important, namely, God is light (1:5) and God is love (4:8). John contrasts light and darkness and identifies God with light and His antagonist with darkness. Darkness is an existence deprived of fellowship with God and His truth (1:6) and is characterized by hatred (2:9). Such persons walk in darkness and are consequently disoriented—they lack hope in their lives (2:11). God is the only and exclusive source of light for humans, who are imprisoned in darkness. As light, He has made Himself known through the Son, the Word of life manifested and seen by the apostles (1:1–3). Light seems to refer to God as the Source of life that, through the Son, illuminates the life of believers. Therefore, to exist in the light—abiding in God—means to have fellowship with one another and to have been cleansed from all sin through God's Son (1:7). In the truly enlightened life, there is an absence of hatred and a fullness of union with others and God.

"God is love" takes us into the mystery of unmerited grace. The love of God is made known to us by the cross, where the Son of God laid down His life for us (3:16). In fact, the love of God—His very nature and character—was manifested toward us, in that God sent His Son into the world so that we would live through Him (4:9). Divine love saves and sustains by being directly connected to the concept of life. The image of light and love are brought together to clarify the significance of divine love (4:14). The nature of this love is such that it moves toward unworthy subjects and embraces them before they can embrace the Lord (4:10). Divine love manifested itself in actions that did not consider the value of its objects but that constituted the actions of divine love into God's children (3:1). This theology is applied by John to the life of the church and becomes the grounds for his exhortations.

Since God loved us and manifested that love in the magnificent death of His Son, John says, "we also ought to love one another" (4:11). Our love for God and for others is not natural to sinful human beings but is a gift of the Spirit. This love is of God; it comes from Him and is ours only when we are born of God (4:7). Therefore to love is to abide in God, and we know that we are in union with Him because He has given us the Spirit (4:12–13). But love for God also manifests itself in keeping His commandments (5:3). John gives the topic of love a particular theological twist when he states that we can know that we are loving the children of God when we love God and observe His precepts (5:2). Our love and obedience to God is evidence that we genuinely love others.

2. The Son of God. The Son of God is the means by which God's love and power are manifested to us. According to John, the very gift of life is ours through the work of the Son of God—Jesus the Messiah (the Christ; 2:22; 5:2). If we do not have the Son, we do not have the Father, because they are inseparable. John emphasizes the titles Jesus, the Messiah, and the Son of God to indicate that God indeed became human—a real human being (4:2). Without Him, eternal life would not be ours and the love of God would not have been manifested to us. We would not have passed from darkness/death to life (3:14). It is only through the sacrificial death of the incarnated Lord that we have life. John's epistle is for those who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that they can know that they have eternal life and continue to believe in the Son of God (5:13). They already believe, but they are exhorted to continue to believe that Jesus is the Son of God (4:15) and to abide in Him (2:24). Only through Him can they overcome the world and sin (3:9; 4:4; 5:4–5).

3. Love and Hope. The love of the Father and the Son also has a forward-looking dimension. God's love has been consummated in us and this gives us assurance in the final judgment and expels fear from our hearts (4:17–18). The hope of full acquittal in the judgment is solidly established by the love of God for us. This hope is firm because it is built on the work of the Father, who through the Son brought us cleansing, forgiveness of sin, new birth, the Spirit, and salvation. Without the incarnation, none of these would have been possible.

One of the motivations given for abiding in the Son is the hope of eternal life at the coming of Christ (2:28). This hope impacts and transforms the present experience of believers. They live expecting and anticipating the revelation of the Son, when they will be like Him and see Him as He is (3:2). Those in possession of this glorious hope purify themselves just as Christ is pure (3:3).

COMMENTARY

1:1–4
The Prologue

The opening verses of 1 John lay the foundation for the rest of the letter. In a community of believers where different ideas were being advanced about the person and work of Jesus, who should be trusted? Only those called to be His disciples—eyewitnesses of His life, death, and resurrection—were trustworthy. John establishes himself as a disciple at the outset of his letter. His testimony is based on what he saw, heard, and touched—a genuine sensory experience. Echoing the prologue of the Gospel of John, Jesus is referred to as the "Word [logos] of life" (cf. John 1:1–3, 14; 14:6).

Jesus is the Word that was "from the beginning." He is divine, and through Him God speaks to us. Jesus is also the eternal life that was seen, looked upon, heard, and touched—eternal life in human flesh. God has "come in the flesh" in Jesus Christ (1 John 4:2). The human Jesus and the divine Christ are the same person. Apart from Him there is no life, and He has granted it to those who believe in Him (5:11–13). This eternal life transforms the quality of life here and now. It is important to have a correct understanding of who Jesus is, because to know and have Him means that we already have this new and wonderful life.

The author uses two different Greek words for sight when describing the basis of his testimony about Jesus: "We have seen" (*heōrakamen*) and "we have looked" (*etheasametha*). These two verbs describe two different aspects of seeing. The first is clearly a reference to the sensory experience—he saw Jesus with his own eyes. The second, however, refers to the ability to see something beyond what the eye is able to comprehend (e.g., 4:14; John 4:35). Here, it appears to refer to the fact that John's testimony about Jesus was based not only on what he physically saw, but also on a deeper spiritual perception that saw the true nature and purpose of Jesus's life and death (1 Cor. 2:14).

First John 1:1–3 moves from "we"/"our"/ "us" to "you" and then back to "we." The "we" in vv. 1–2 refers to the eyewitnesses who had had direct contact with Jesus. Among them was the author of 1 John. He, therefore, could provide reliable information about Jesus and eternal life. The "you" is his audience. In v. 4, some manuscripts read "your joy" while others favor "our joy." Generally, scholars have preferred "our joy." While in vv. 1–3 the eyewitnesses and the audience are separated, in v. 4 they together share the same joy. In order to witness with integrity and persuasion, we must know the Lord ourselves (see Acts 19:13–16).

The last part of the prologue states the purpose of the proclamation of the Word of life. John mentions two elements: "fellowship" and "joy." He invites his audience to accept his testimony about Jesus in order to experience a twofold fellowship. Accepting Jesus means enjoying fellowship with God the Father and the Son and being added to the family of believers, the church. This understanding of fellowship militates against an individualism that seeks union with Jesus in baptism but that shows no interest at all in His church. The "joy" in v. 4 may also refer to the future appearance of our Lord. Thus, 1 John 1:1–4 may encompass the time from the preexistent Christ to His Second Coming.

1:5—2:2
Turning Away from Sin

For John, knowing that God is light is of fundamental importance as we relate to Him (v. 5) and as we face the problem of sin (vv. 6–10). John indicates that in our struggle with sin we have before the Father the Advocate Jesus Christ (2:1–2).

1:5. Character of God. How can we have fellowship with God (1:3)? First, we have to know Him. Second, we have to live in such a way that our walk reflects His character. This verse introduces the fundamental statement of the passage. God's character is described as "light." He is absolutely righteous, good, holy, perfect, and pure. In 2:9, light is associated with love. Light also points to God's absolute glory and majesty and may even describe His transcendence (see 1 Tim. 6:16). Furthermore, light is associated with life (see John 1:4) and the source is the Father and Jesus. Walking in the light (1 John 1:7) means to live a life separate from sin (1:5—2:2) and to obey and love (2:3–11). The words "no darkness at all" have an emphatic double negative in Greek, which points to God's absolute separation from sin and evil. God, by nature, is devoid of negative attributes and negative actions.

1:6–10. The Sin Problem. After reflecting on the purity of God's character, John next focuses on the attitudes and behaviors of believers. Verses 6–10 form a well-structured unit. Verses 6, 8, and 10 are negative—focusing on human sinfulness—while vv. 7 and 9 are positive statements containing divine promises. Verses 6, 8, and 10 describe the worsening self-deceptive claims of humans, and the divine evaluation becomes more and more serious:

Human Claim	Divine Evaluation
v. 6 – having fellowship with God while walking in darkness	we lie and do not act truthfully
v. 8 – having reached a sinless state	we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us
v. 10 – having never sinned	we imply that God is a liar, and His word is not in us

The first misguided claim (v. 6) refers to one of the oldest problems plaguing humanity: claiming spiritual or moral uprightness when languishing in sin or, as John describes it, while still walking in darkness. It is the description of an inconsistent life, where faith-talk is not matched by faith-walk. Right beliefs must go together with a righteous life—theology with ethics. This darkness is not only living in sin but also hating one's brother (2:9–11). Genuine fellowship with God is impossible while living in open sin and not having fellowship with His children.

Those who walk in the divine light and have "fellowship" with the church of Christ are being cleansed "from all sin" through Christ (1:7). "The blood of Jesus" stands for His sacrificial death on the cross that provides forgiveness and sanctification. John is not referring to persons coming to Christ for the first time; he has in mind believers who are in need of constant cleansing from sin. This is one of the paradoxes of the Christian walk: the closer believers draw to God, the more they feel the need for cleansing. The reference to "all sin" indicates that no sin is too grievous to be forgiven. The good news is that there is a solution to the sin problem and that it is found not in denial and false claims but in Jesus and what He has done for us.

While the problem in v. 6 was essentially a cavalier attitude toward sin, the problem identified in v. 8 is just the opposite. It is the claim to have no sin—to have reached a state of sinless perfection. Confident in their own ability or spiritual progress, people in this condition no longer realize the full extent of their ongoing need to be purified by the blood of Jesus (v. 7). In vv. 7–10, John uses "sin" in the singular and in the plural. This may suggest that he has in mind the basic sin of living alienated from God, as well as sinful acts.

Instead of claiming sinlessness, true believers acknowledge and confess their sins. In forgiving us, God is faithful to His covenant promises which include forgiveness for repentant covenant breakers (v. 9). He is also righteous, since at the cross Christ bore the penalty for human sin. This is about God's character—He is both faithful and righteous in forgiving us (cf. Rom. 3:25–26). First John 1:9 is a conditional clause that has the force of a command. We should lay our sins before God, and He will forgive us and cleanse us. This cleansing is more than just freedom from the penalty of sin; it frees us from the power of sin that seeks to reign in our lives (cf. Rom. 6:1–14). As serious as it is to claim that one has reached a state of sinlessness (1 John 1:8), it is even more serious to claim that "we have not sinned" at all (v. 10). This is a denial of the biblical testimony that all humans—except Jesus—are sinners (1 Kin. 8:46; Ps. 14:1–3; Prov. 20:9; Eccl. 7:20). This group has no need of Jesus and His substitutionary death. As a result they make God a "liar."

2:1–2. The Christian's Challenge and Comfort. John writes in support of Christians not denying the problem of sin or claiming absolute freedom from it. Sin is too costly and should never be taken lightly. He speaks kindly, calling church members "children," writing to them so that they do not sin (v. 1). This is what walking in the light means (1:7). John pleads for Christians to stay away from any sin. Yet he balances his admonition, referring to what they should do when they do sin. Christians, through human frailty, commit acts of sin—but they should not habitually sin. They constantly need someone to help give them victory over temptation and to assist them if they sin. John presents Jesus as the only One who can secure forgiveness for us. How is this done?

First, Jesus is our Advocate, speaking on our behalf with the Father." The Greek term *paraklētos*, used only by John, is applied to Jesus and the Holy Spirit (2:1; John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7). It designates a person called to the side of someone else for comfort and support. It may be a helper or a friend. Second, this Advocate is "Jesus Christ the righteous"; He has a righteous character and understands us. Third, our forgiveness is secure because Jesus Himself is the propitiation (or atoning sacrifice) for our sins.

The atoning sacrifice of Jesus is universal in extent because it deals with the sin of "the whole world." Salvation has been made available to everyone through Christ's atoning sacrifice. The mediation of Jesus does not mean that God must be persuaded to forgive us. It was the Father who in His great love sent His only Son to secure our salvation and to be the only means through which His grace reaches us.

2:3–17

Obedient and Loving Life

The contrast between light and darkness encompasses not only 1:5—2:2 but also 2:3–17. Walking in the light means avoiding sin (1:5—2:2), living a life of obedience and love (2:3–11), and renouncing the world (2:12–17). The second part of chapter 1 contains three false claims, and 1 John 2:3–11 also contains three claims—addressed by John in vv. 4, 6, and 9: the claim to know God while not keeping the commandments; the claim to know God; and the claim to be in the light while hating one's brother.

2:3–5. Knowing and Obeying God. The verb "to know" (*ginōskō*) appears four times in vv. 3–5. In 1 John, *ginōskō* designates the intimate relationship that humans may have with God. In v. 3, the perfect tense of the verb indicates that Christians came to know God, that they still know him in a personal and experiential way, and that they must grow in this knowledge. This type of knowledge is manifested in keeping the commandments. The term *gnōsis* ("knowledge"; related to the verb *ginōskō*) became a key term among heretic Christians known as Gnostics (Gnosticism). In Gnosticism, the emphasis was on mystical experiences or esoteric myths about God and self. Salvation was gained through secret knowledge, not through the death of Jesus, and there was little concern for moral behavior.

The keeping of the commandments (v. 4), however, is very important for John in this epistle, as it was for Jesus (2:3–4; 3:22, 24; 5:3; John 14:15, 21; 15:10; cf. Rev. 12:17; 14:12). The term "command[ment]" occurs in the singular (1 John 2:7–8; 3:23; 4:21) and in the plural (2:3–4; 3:22–24; 5:2–3). The singular points to love toward God and church members (4:21) and to faith in Jesus Christ (3:23). The plural includes the Decalogue. Some of them are indirectly found in 1 John:

Apostasy (2:26; 3:7)	first commandment
Murder (3:15)	sixth commandment
Lying (1:6, 8; 2:4, 20–22; 4:20)	ninth commandment
Lust (2:16)	seventh and tenth commandments

The Propitiation (Atoning Sacrifice) for Our Sins

The Greek word is *hilasmos*, which some Bibles translate as "propitiation," "expiation," or "atoning sacrifice." In the Greco-Roman world this term usually implies appeasing an angry God, but this pagan meaning is certainly not what John had in mind. The meaning of the word is better understood in relation to its use in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the OT, where it occurs in connection with the removal of guilt through the sacrificial system (1 John 2:2; 4:10; see Lev. 25:9; Num. 5:8; Ps. 129:4; Ezek. 44:27; Amos 8:14). The cognate noun *hilastērion* is used to describe the "atonement cover" or "mercy seat"—the golden cover of the ark of the covenant, located within the Most Holy Place (cf. Heb. 9:5). The mercy seat was located between the presence of God and the Ten Commandments within the ark, and blood was sprinkled on it on the Day of Atonement. As such, the cover on the ark represented the mercy through which God related to His people.

While the terminology of *hilasmos* is the same as that used among the Greeks and Romans, the meaning associated with it could not be more different. In the pagan world, humans brought sacrificial offerings in an attempt to placate bad-tempered and capricious gods. But the sacrificial system in Judaism was not instituted by humans to placate an angry God; it was the means through which God removed sin from His people and dwelt among them. Moreover, as demonstrated in the NT by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, God acted to bridge the gap caused by sin in offering His own Son as the *hilasmos*, the atoning sacrifice, to do away with sin and to save us. Thus, John portrays Jesus as both Sacrifice and Intercessor—the one who lived a sinless life among us, died on the cross, rose from the dead, and ascended to heaven to intercede for us.

Keeping the commandments is not a condition for knowing God but a sign that we know and love Him. Therefore, knowledge of God is not just theoretical; it leads to action. "Him" may refer to the Father or Jesus. Verse 4 states the same truth in a negative form and may refer to a false claim made by John's opponents. By arguing that they knew God while disregarding His commandments, they had become liars.

Verse 5 repeats v. 3 in general terms but replaces the term commandments with "word" and connects love for God with obedience. Keeping the word is truly knowing that we are in Him. The two phrases regarding keeping the commandments (vv. 3–4) and keeping the "word" (v. 5) are somewhat parallel. But while keeping the word includes the commandments, it may also point to other issues such as believing in the promises of God.

2:6. Walking as Jesus Walked. Abiding/remaining/living in God stresses the continuity and permanence of a close personal relationship with Him. Those who abide in Him must walk as He walked (i.e., live as He lived). How does this work? First, they have to observe in Scripture how Jesus lived. Second, they have to model their lives after Jesus's life. Third, they have to love and live for others as Jesus did. He laid down His life for others, and they should be ready to do the same (3:16). This means to follow Christ in the spiritual, social, and moral life.

2:7–8. The New Commandment. The new commandment and the old commandment (vv. 7–8) seem to refer to the same thing. The context suggests that this is about brotherly/sisterly love (v. 10). The commandment of neighborly love was already present in the OT (Lev. 19:18). Since Jesus deepened its significance through His life—and particularly in His death—love became a new commandment for the church. When John wrote his letter, Jesus's instruction about a new commandment (see John 13:34) was already well-known. Therefore, John could say that they had it from "the beginning" and that it was a word or message that they had heard. In this sense it was old. Yet in another sense this commandment is still new because it is continuously realized in the life of Jesus ("in Him"; He still loves us) and His followers ("in you"). John could then say that "the darkness (the absence of love) is passing" and that "the true light is already shining," that is, true love (see 1 John 2:8). This is an abiding characteristic of Jesus's eschatological community.

2:9–11. Loving Brothers and Sisters. This section begins and ends with a reference to hatred. John refers to some claiming to be "in the light" while hating other Christians. He identifies such persons as "in the darkness" (v. 9) and as those who walk in darkness, their sight having been "blinded" by the darkness (v. 11). In the center (v. 10), we find the true believers, who love others and who are abiding "in the light." They are not stumbling or becoming a stumbling block for others. Hate (vv. 9, 11) is contrasted with love in v. 10. John wrote about the problem of hating other believers (vv. 9, 11; 3:15; 4:20) while also knowing that Christians will be hated by society (3:13). Hating can refer to literal hate but can also mean to despise, to disregard, or to be indifferent. John has much more to say about love as indicated by the fact that the word family *agapē* is employed by him fifty-two times.

2:12–14. The Spiritual Status of Believers. John now deals with the new status of believers that distinguishes them from their opponents. In these three verses, John twice addresses children, fathers, and young men. By "children" he means church members in general. The "fathers" could be those older in faith and more mature, while the "young men" could refer to those younger in faith, both male and female.

John stresses three important things related to the status of believers: their sins have been forgiven, they have known Him who was from the beginning, and they have overcome the evil/wicked one. While the false teachers may have denied the existence of sin in their lives, genuine Christians do not deny their sinfulness but have accepted salvation through Jesus Christ (this is why John refers to the forgiveness coming through Christ's name; v. 12) and therefore have the assurance of forgiveness.

This is contrasted with the false teachers, who claim to know God and Jesus while having a false understanding of the divinity and humanity of the Messiah. Genuine Christians have known Him "who is from the beginning" and they know "the Father" (vv. 13–14). They came to know and continue to know Him. The phrase "from the beginning" reminds us of Jesus Christ (see 1:1). They know Father and Son. In knowing God there are intellectual, moral, spiritual, and relational aspects.

Christians have overcome and will overcome evil, including false doctrines, because they belong to Christ, believe in Him (5:5), and claim His victory (John 16:33; Rev. 3:21; 5:5). The consummation of this victory will occur at the coming of Jesus. The "word of God" (1 John 2:14) is the source of their strength. So, Christianity is about forgiveness of sins, knowing the Godhead, and victory. Forgiveness of sins and knowledge of God are characteristics of the new covenant (Jer. 31:31–34; Heb. 8:8–12).

2:15–17. Renouncing the World. This passage begins with a call to not love the world or things in the world (v. 15). In this section, the most frequently used term is "world" (*kosmos*). According to John, the world is in need of salvation and therefore in need of Jesus (v. 2; 4:14). The world is hostile to God and His people (3:13) and under the power of the evil one (5:19). False prophets, antichrists, and deceivers are in the world (4:1, 3). Christians are to overcome the world (5:4–5). In John's epistles, the term "world" is predominantly negative. Love for the world is discouraged and contrasted with love for the Father. In 1 John 2:15, the Greek has a phrase that can be translated "love of the Father" or "love for the Father." It can thus be understood as the love that belongs to God or our love for God. John may have had both in mind.

John associates three things with "the world": "the lust of the flesh," "the lust of the eyes," and the boastful "pride of life" (v. 16). The Greek term *epithymia* (often translated as "lust") can also mean desire, longing, passion, or covetousness. It is often used in a negative way. *Epithymia* may include idolatry, homosexuality, greed, envy, murder, strife, and deceit (Rom. 1:24). But desires can also be positive (Luke 22:15; Phil. 1:23; 1 Thess. 2:17). John had in mind evil desires or cravings.

"Flesh" may be used in a neutral or negative metaphorical way. It is in the latter sense that it is employed here (1 John 2:16). The "lust of the flesh" describes a self-centered approach to life. It includes sinful sexual desires that may lead to various types of sexual activity outside of marriage, and much more. It manifests in intemperance and in an unbalanced lifestyle. While the lust of the flesh points to problems arising from our sinful human nature, "the lust of the eyes" may point to external influences through which evil desires are aroused. By themselves, eyes are neutral—even innocent—but they can become means through which lustful looks (Gen. 39:7; Matt. 5:28), covetousness and greed (Josh. 7:21), or pride and arrogance (Is. 5:15) can access us (Is. 3:16–24). Perhaps this temptation even goes beyond visual stimuli and includes desires caused by mental images and reflections.

The boastful "pride of life" is the third problem. The term "life" (*bios* rather than *zōē*) could designate material possessions (1 John 3:17). People boast in what they have and what they do. We may trumpet our own achievements, forgetting that all we have and all we are is from God. There is no room in the Christian life for pride. Not only do those who love the world boast in their material possessions, they also exploit others and thereby upset the social order.

The hostile world with its evil desires is diametrically opposed to God (2:16). All negative attitudes and behaviors are "not from the Father." We should not love the world, because the love of the world and the love of the Father are incompatible (v. 16), and the world is impermanent, transient, and even unstable (v. 17). It is better to choose that which remains forever.

2:18–29
Rejecting Antichrists

From the very beginning, Christianity has had to wrestle with the problem of false teachings. In 1 John, the apostle turns from words of encouragement to words of warning, focusing on the presence of many antichrists intent on deceiving believers.

2:18. The Last Hour. From the very beginning of his letter John had in mind the false teachers troubling the church, but it is only toward the end of chapter 2 that he specifically mentions them. Although they had evidently left the church, they were still causing problems. Their activity convinced John that "the last hour" had come. The "last days" (Acts 2:17; Heb. 1:1–2) and the "last times" (1 Pet. 1:20) began with the incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of the Messiah. The entire period between Christ's First and Second Comings is considered the last days, although it has a last segment prior to the Second Coming called the time of the end. Since Jesus's first coming, the present evil age and the age of the kingdom of God overlap. The kingdom of God appears now as a kingdom of grace—later it will be the kingdom of glory. Although, the expression "last hour" is unique in the Bible, it may designate the "last days" of other NT authors that end at the Second Coming. In Revelation 18, John uses day and hour interchangeably (Rev. 18:8, 10, 17). On the other hand, John may have used the phrase to mean that a moment of crisis had arrived for the church similar to what is to take place at the future coming of the antichrist.

2:18–23. Antichrists and the Antidote. In Scripture, the term "antichrist(s)" is used only in 1 and 2 John. In this context the antichrists are not so much replacements of Christ but opponents of Him (see Matt. 24:24), their teachings opposing Christ and denying His divine-human nature. John foretold the eschatological antichrist (singular), also a false Christ. Does the antichrist in John refer (1) to an individual person or system opposed to Christ, (2) to a group of persons—in the sense that there are many antichrists—or (3) to both—various antichrists and *the* antichrist? John uses the singular once and the plural four times (1 John 2:18 [twice], 22; 4:3; 2 John 1:7). He uses his language carefully, allowing for multiple antichrists that deny the Father and the Son without rejecting the future coming of one specific antichrist. First John 4:3 talks about the spirit of the antichrist, meaning that the antichrists (human beings) reveal the spirit of *the* antichrist. From John's time perspective, the real antichrist was still to come (2:18).

2:20–29. The Anointing and Abiding/Remaining. True believers "have an anointing from the Holy One," who is in them, teaches them, and provides genuine truth (vv. 20, 27). John wanted to reassure believers that they, rather than the antichrists, had the truth. The reference to the anointing goes back to the statements of Jesus about the Holy Spirit (John 14:16–17; 15:26; 16:7) and to the fact that Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:38). Therefore, it is most likely that the anointing stands for the Holy Spirit.

Here we may have a deliberate play on words because the term "Christ" in antichrist and the Greek term *chrisma* ("anointing") are related. Christ is the Anointed One. The antichrists may claim some sort of anointing or inspiration that gives them special knowledge, but only true believers have the anointing from "the Holy

The Antichrist(s)

John furnishes the following insights on the antichrists: (1) Although there is one specific antichrist, there are also a number of minor figures ("many") called antichrists (v. 18). (2) "They went out from us" (v. 19). The antichrists had been members of the church, but they had left the church. John also states that if these people had truly been part of the church in the fullest sense, they would have remained in it. For John, their departure meant that they had never been genuine Christians. Obviously, John did not include among the apostate group members of the church who were still wrestling with a correct understanding of Jesus or who were momentarily wavering because of false teachings. (3) The antichrists must have claimed superior knowledge, because John says that only believers "know the truth" and have the Holy Spirit (vv. 20–21).

(4) Antichrists deny that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and are thus opposed to the apostolic witness of the prologue in chapter 1. They are made "liars" by separating Jesus from the Father. But John mentions the Father and Son together four times (vv. 22–24), thus emphasizing their unity. Therefore, anyone who denies the Son does not have the Father (v. 23). The correct understanding of Jesus is crucial and determines one's relationship with God. (5) Because true Christians accept the apostolic message—rejecting theological misconceptions and errors—and remain in the Son and in the Father, they have "eternal life" (vv. 24–25). John, by implication, characterizes the secessionists as not having eternal life. Instead, they will be ashamed before Him at His coming (v. 28). Biblical doctrines are not dry and irrelevant statements that can be ignored. They affect our lives now and in the future. (6) These antichrists not practicing righteousness have not been born of Him (v. 29). For John, those who oppose Christ and His church manifest the character and attitudes of the future antichrist and are themselves antichrists.

One"—the Father or the Son (see John 6:69)—and therefore "know the truth" (1 John 2:21).

Some manuscripts read in v. 20 "all of you know," while others have "you know all things." The first option is preferable (see 3:2). Genuine Christians not only have the Holy Spirit to teach them but also do not need anyone else to do so (2:27). John's readers knew that Jesus was the Christ, who became flesh, died on the cross, rose from the dead, and saved them. John did not need to teach them again. He reminded them so that they would not be shaken by the claims of their adversaries. In other respects, there was need of further teaching.

In the confrontation with the antichrists, believers can rely on the gospel of Jesus that they have "heard from the beginning" (v. 24) and on the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives—the "anointing" received from Him that remains in them (v. 27). Furthermore, the word of God (v. 14) and the truth (2 John 1:2) abide in Christians.

The antidote to the messages of the antichrists is God's word as communicated by the Holy Spirit. It is the objective standard by which doctrines can be evaluated. The church should constantly abide by it over religious, philosophical, or scientific convictions that may oppose God's revealed will for us.

So John returns to the theme of abiding/remaining/living (*menō*) introduced in 2:6. The verb *menō* is used seven times in vv. 18–29. It is used for the secessionists who left the church (v. 19). The other references relate to true believers (vv. 24–28). They contain affirmation and exhortation, promise and challenge. While Christians abide in God and God in them, they are nonetheless called to hold on to this intimate relationship with their Lord and Savior. They have been promised "eternal life" (v. 25) and confidence "at His coming" (v. 28). The Christian hope is a strong motivation to maintain our union with Christ.

3:1–24

Living as Children of God

First John 2:29 is a transitional passage that introduces the topic of the new birth (cf. 3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18; John 1:12–13; 3:3–8). The mention of those who are born of God (1 John 2:29) prepares the way for a discussion of the privileges and responsibilities of being children of God. The phrase "children of God" occurs three times in this passage and opens and closes it (3:1, 2, 10). Verses 4–7 and 8–10 parallel each other.

3:1. The Privilege of Being Children of God. The imperative calling us to "see" or "behold" implies reflection and understanding. John's words suggest astonishment and admiration regarding God's love toward humanity. It consists of loving unloving creatures and seeking their best. The expression of this love is manifested in calling believers "children of God."

John was especially interested in the fact that believers are God's children. The designation "children of God" designates not all humanity but only those who have experienced a spiritual birth, believed in Jesus as God's incarnate Son (John 1:12), and followed Him in a life of love and righteousness. Therefore, the antichrists are not children of God but rather children of the devil (1 John 3:10). Since the world and the heretics do not accept Jesus as the Christ and therefore do not know the Father, they do not know God's children either (3:1). When we look at the vastness of the universe and think about ourselves as insignificant creatures traveling through it on the surface of a planet, we cannot help but be utterly astonished at the magnificent love of God that has transformed us into His children.

3:2–3. Results and Responsibilities. Knowing that we are "children of God," we can anticipate a glorious future. Our deepest hope is that "we shall be like Him." Satan, Eve, and Adam sought to be like God in power but not in character (Gen. 3:5; cf. Is. 14:14; Ezek. 28:2). Christians should be like Him in loving others, in selfless service, and in exhibiting purity of thought and righteousness of action. For them the issue is character, not power. They long for Jesus's Second Coming and for a transformed existence into the likeness of His image.

First John 3:2 closes with a reference to His coming and the promise that we will see Him as He is. Who is being referred to here? "He" could be God the Father (v. 1), but the reference to Christ's appearing, or being revealed, suggests that it most probably refers to the Son (2:28). The "hope" in Christ's Second Coming is dynamic and works within the children of God, purifying them as Jesus is pure (3:3). This idea is developed in vv. 4–10. True hope leads to the purification or sanctification process, and it is based on Jesus as the supreme example.

3:4–7. Sin versus Righteousness—Part 1. The secessionists may have not only propagated false doctrines but also ignored the importance of living pure lives. They were not concerned about

sinning. John lays out a general rule applicable to all humans—demonstrated by the phrases used in vv. 4 and 6 regarding (in Greek) *pas* ("all," or in v. 8, "the one" or "he," referring to anyone). The word for sin (*hamartia*) used by John conceives sin as missing the mark or falling short of a target. John states that those who continually sin in a willful way (as indicated by the present participle *poiōn* ["practicing" or "doing"] in the Greek; v. 4) are involved in "lawlessness." "Sin is lawlessness."

The term "lawlessness" points to opposition to God and reminds us of the "man of lawlessness" (2 Thess. 2:3), the antichrist par excellence, and of the climax of his activity just prior to the Second Coming. This lawlessness is exhibited by the antichrists when they flagrantly rebel against God and align themselves with Satan (1 John 3:8). The implicit exhortation is to stay away from sin as lawlessness.

The verb *phaneroō* ("to be manifested," "to appear"; v. 5) is found nine times in 1 John. In some cases it is related to the preexistence and incarnation of Jesus (1:2; 3:5, 8) or to His Second Coming (2:28; 3:2). Jesus appeared the first time to "take away our sins," thus solving the sin problem (v. 5). We are not clearly told how Jesus did it, but the context makes clear that this happened through His death on the cross (cf. 1:7; 2:2; 4:10). Jesus took care of the sins (plural), pointing to sinful actions and to the consequences of sin. His atoning sacrifice is sufficient for all. The antichrists did not comprehend and rejected the salvific value of the cross. John states that in Christ there is "no sin." Here, he stresses more than just the absolute sinlessness of Jesus during His earthly ministry. His statement implies that Christ's followers cannot expect to remain in Him while living in open sin, for there is no sin in Him.

John makes some perplexing statements about sin in vv. 6 and 9. How can these statements be reconciled with 1:6–10 and 2:1–2, where John states that claiming sinlessness is a lie and that although it is the Christian's goal not to sin, they need Jesus Christ as mediator?

We can safely assume that John did not contradict himself. Our present passage must be understood in the light of his previous discussion about sin. We can then suggest that John was talking about habitual sin, that is, willfully persistent sin. Believers may have sin that does not lead to death (5:16)—inadvertent, nonrebellious sin that is part of their nature (Lev. 4–6; 1 Kin. 8:46; Ps. 19:12–13; Prov. 20:9; Jer. 17:9; Rom. 7)—but they do not have the sin that leads to death (1 John 5:16–18). The verbs "to sin" and "to do" (sin) are participles found in the present tense pointing to continuous action. John was saying that believers cannot continuously sin willfully. They may fall in sin here and there but are opposed to sin and do not practice a life of sin. While 3:7 warns against the deception of the antichrists, it adds that true believers do what is right, just as Jesus is righteous. So, both subsections (vv. 4–7 and 8–10) end with a reference to righteousness.

3:8–10. Sin versus Righteousness—Part 2. Jesus came to take away sin and to destroy what the devil has done (v. 8). He was actively undoing whatever evil Satan had done. Therefore, there is no reason for believers to willfully practice sin. Otherwise they would be "of the devil," who has been rebellious "from the beginning" and who is the originator of sin. (On v. 9, see commentary on v. 6; the two verses should be studied together). God's "seed" can be understood as the Holy Spirit (John 3:6, 8); Jesus, who abides in the believer (John 6:56); or the word of God (James 1:18, 21; 1 Pet. 1:23–25), which they had "heard from the beginning" (1 John 2:24). One and two mean the same thing because Jesus abides in us through the Spirit. John probably had all of these ideas in mind. While 3:7 is positive, v. 10 is its negative counterpart. John points out that righteous deeds are a sign of a righteous character. True Christianity is lived in righteousness and love. The mention of "love" transitions us to the topic of the next section.

3:11–18. We Must Love Each Other. 1 John 3:11–24 can be divided into two sections. The first deals with brotherly love (vv. 11–18), and the second with confidence and keeping the commandments (vv. 19–24). These two sections are connected by a number of common words and phrases.

The passage on love begins with a call to "love one another" (v. 11; see also 2:10) and ends similarly (3:18). John does not set out to give a lexical definition of love; he simply shows what love is and is not. He uses the example of Cain, who killed his brother because he was following "the evil one" and his works were "evil" (v. 12), to show that in the same way the "world hates" and persecutes the followers of Christ (v. 13). In contrast, love among the followers of Christ evidences that they have passed over into the sphere of life (v. 14); a person who hates is a murderer and does not have life (v. 15; see Matt. 5:21–22).

The Greek word *adelphos* ("brother" or "sister") is used seven times in 1 John 3:11–18. It refers to church members (vv. 13, 14) and to Abel, the brother of Cain (v. 12). It is easier to claim to love all brothers and sisters in general than to actually love one of them (v. 15). The negative example of Cain is followed by a positive one (v. 16). Jesus "laid down his life for us." This is the supreme demonstration of love, but it is more than just an example. Since the Father sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice (2:2), believers have passed from death to life. This is demonstrated through their love for each other (3:14). This mutual love means, in principle, that we are willing to "lay down our lives" for our brothers and sisters (v. 16). Love shows itself in self-giving and self-sacrifice. It also means to forgive and not to allow past mistakes and sins to shape the present and the future. In Jesus's case, love meant dying to save others.

Love must manifest itself in actions (vv. 17–18). The positive example (v. 16) is followed by a negative example: Someone has their material needs fully met, sees a brother or sister in need, but refuses to help (unlike the situation among the early Christians in Acts 4:32–35). This is love with words instead of love with genuine action. Here, John is not opposed to love expressed in words. Encouraging and loving words can have a great and positive influence and can heal strained relationships at home, in the church, and at the workplace. John is opposed to a superficial expression of love (cf. James 2:15–16). God not only informed us that He loves us; He showed it through the death of His Son as our substitute. People who love much do much, because real love is dynamic.

3:19–21. Crisis of Confidence. This section seems to depict a potential crisis of confidence based on wrong self-perceptions. It is possible for believers to feel that they do not fully belong to the truth (v. 19). The term "confidence"/"confident" is used four times in 1 John, expressing the author's desire that believers be confident when they approach God in prayer (3:21–22; 5:14), in view of Christ's coming (2:28), and in regard to the final judgment (4:17). While their own hearts may—justly or unjustly—condemn believers, God can overrule the accusations of the heart; God is greater than our hearts and knows everything (v. 20). When it comes to their relationship with God, Christians should not rely on their feelings. They are to rely on God and the fact that He loves them.

The previous thought is contrasted with the heart that does not condemn—a heart that does not accuse others and that is at rest. With such a heart, believers have confidence and unrestricted fellowship with the Lord. Morbid self-condemnation should be replaced by confidence toward God, who has loved and saved us and who listens to our prayers (v. 22).

3:22–24. Love and the Commandments. Believing in Jesus, keeping God's commandments, and doing things pleasing in His estimation give Christians confidence that God hears their prayers (vv. 22–23). Following God's will allows for mutual abiding—we in God and God in us—and shows that the Holy Spirit is active in our lives (v. 24). The importance of keeping the commandments is underlined by the fact that in this short passage, "command"/"commandment" is used three times. Of course, John makes it clear that salvation is through the atoning sacrifice of Christ and not by works.

4:1–21

Living as Children of God: Love

This chapter returns to the topics of the antichrists (cf. 4:1–6; 2:18–29) and love (4:7–21).

4:1–6. Antichrists. This passage begins with an important exhortation: "Do not believe every spirit"—that is, any person who claims to have Spirit-led teachings—without testing his or her message (v. 1). We should distinguish between truth and error. The truth is that the divine Christ "has come in the flesh," that is, He became a human being. There are two contrasting statements. The first, a positive test, describes true believers as those who confess or acknowledge the incarnation and, thereby, the preexistence of Jesus Christ. For the Son of God is truly united to human flesh. The second, a negative test, is about not confessing or acknowledging Jesus. Those who have rejected the apostolic message, affirmed by the Spirit of truth (v. 6), according to which Jesus is the Christ and the incarnate Son of God, are "antichrists" (2:18).

Apparently, the false teachers claimed to be inspired. This is suggested by the use of the terms "spirits" and "false prophets" to describe them (4:1, 3). However, their erroneous views show that they were influenced by the "spirit of the antichrist" (v. 3). They possessed the traits of character and disposition of the antichrist. In contrast to the overcomers (v. 4), they did not belong to God. Their lives were oriented by "the world" and the world listened to them (v. 5). The contrast between the two groups is highlighted; the false teachers follow the world's way of thinking, while true Christians follow God's way (vv. 4–6). With respect to the doctrinal conflicts, believers were on the side of God.

4:7–10. God and Love. This subsection (1 John 4:7–16) can be divided into three segments.

God and Love (4:7–10)
We should love one another (v. 7).
Why? Because God is love (vv. 8–10).

Love and Abiding (4:11–18)
We must love one another (v. 11).
Why? Because whoever loves lives/abides in God, and God, who is love, abides in them (vv. 12–18).

Love for God and the Brothers and Sisters (4:19–21)
We love (v. 19).
Why? Because loving God and loving believers go together (vv. 20–21).

The passage begins with a call to "love one other" (v. 7); the reason provided is that love is from God. It is not natural to the human heart to love others. Therefore, the one who loves others is "born of God and knows God." One cannot claim to be a believer while not practicing love (v. 8). The deepest theological reason for loving others is that "God is love" (v. 8). We are dealing here with the very essence of God (vv. 8, 16). Not only does He love, but He is love in Himself. The false teachers had missed the heart of the matter: God is love. All His actions are expressions of His love. Christian love, with its ethical implications, has its source in the love of a God who loves undeserving sinners. True love always comes from God. Human love—which can be corrupted—must be constantly refreshed by leaning on God.

The question of how we know that God loves us is immediately answered: look at the cross because His love for us was manifested in the atoning sacrifice of His Son "for our sins" (vv. 9–10). While in chapter 3 the emphasis is on the Son, who laid down His life, here the emphasis is on the Father, who sent His Son into the world. This is emphasized three times (vv. 9, 10, 14). Why did the Father send His Son into the world? John provides three answers: so that we may live through Him (v. 9); so that Jesus could be the atoning sacrifice for our sins (v. 10); and so that He could be our Savior (v. 14). This is a matter of life or death.

4:11–18. Love and Abiding. This section again begins with an appeal: "We also ought to love one another" (v. 11). To "love one another" means that God dwells in us and that His love has been perfected or completed in us—it has achieved its goal (v. 12). As God's love was manifested in the life and death of Jesus, it now aims to be manifested in the lives of believers. To love means to enjoy an intimate relationship with God and to walk in the light. Abiding is a reciprocal experience: we live in Him, and He in us (vv. 13, 15, 16). This experience has been possible because God has given us His Spirit (v. 13). Together with love among believers, the Spirit is a sign that God abides in us (v. 12). It is the Holy Spirit and the apostolic proclamation—"we have seen and testify"—that allow believers first, to understand God's plan of salvation (v. 14); second, to confess what the opponents have denied, "that Jesus is the Son of God" (v. 15); and third, to know God and to accept with trust the love that God has for us (v. 16). Love, faith, and abiding in and knowing God are interrelated in this passage and summarized in v. 16.

John emphasizes that love has been perfected or made complete "among us" (v. 17). We cannot love God and at the same time flee from Him in fear. Those who live in God must have confidence/boldness on the day of judgment; we must be free from fear of torment/punishment. Love and fear are incompatible; "perfect love" expels fear (v. 18).

4:19–21. Love for God and Others. The third section begins with a statement or confession: we love (v. 19). This phrase should be read without an object (such as Him). It is a general statement, followed by the reason we are able to love. It is because of God, who took the initiative to love those who are unworthy of being loved. A person cannot claim to love the invisible God while at the same time not loving his brother or sister, who is visible. Such a person is a "liar." While the previous two subsections began with a call to love, the last subsections end with an indirect appeal: the one who loves God must love his brother or sister also (v. 21). Love for others and love for God are here summarized in a single command from God.

5:1–12

Living as Children of God: Keeping Faith

John returns to the question of true believers, indirectly contrasting them with false teachers (vv. 1–5). He will also discuss once more the identity of the Son of God (vv. 5–8), the testimony of God and Jesus in the controversy (vv. 9–10), and the practical results of believing in Jesus (vv. 11–12). The way we think about Jesus dramatically influences how we relate to God, understand the plan of salvation, and have assurance of salvation. In this section the topic of love is present, but the emphasis is on faith and on the christological titles "Son of God" (vv. 5, 10, 12), "His [God's] Son" (vv. 9–11), and "the Son" (v. 12). These designations are of special importance because they were being challenged by the antichrists.

5:1–5. Overcoming by Believing in Christ. This section begins and ends with references to believing in Jesus as the Christ (v. 1) and as the Son of God (v. 5). Obviously, these titles were questioned by the antichrists. John is precisely affirming believers in the conviction that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Whoever accepts this truth and exhibits true love is "born of God."

John also adds to this by saying that all who love God—those who are born of Him (in this case the child is not Jesus but the believer)—will love their fellow believers, who have also been born of God. We can know that we "love the children of God" only "by loving God" and obeying Him (vv. 2–3). Our relationship with God determines the nature and the possibility of loving others. John has indicated that it is impossible to love God without loving fellow believers (4:20–21), but here we find the other side of the coin, namely, that it is impossible to love the children of God without loving God (5:2). They go together. Keeping God's commandments is also an act of love. Love is not only an emotional response but also an action ruled by principles.

The last two verses of the first paragraph (vv. 4–5) focus on overcoming or conquering the world. In order to conquer the world, one must be "born of God" and have faith. The new birth is a supernatural event by which a person joins the family of God and is no longer under the power of the world. The foundational content of the faith is the deep and personal conviction that "Jesus is the Son of God."

The battle that Christians have to fight is a spiritual battle. Nowhere in Scripture are Christians called to set out as crusaders and convert others by force. The NT does not equate a nation to be defended or expanded through violence with the kingdom of God. In the Johannine literature, the way to overcome is not by the use of violence but by faith exhibited in acts of love. The conqueror par excellence is Jesus Christ, and His victory is ours. John says that believers are to overcome indifference toward others, aversion to God's commandments, immoral pressures from our sinful nature and from society, heresy, and trials such as persecution.

5:6–8. The Jesus in Whom We Believe. John shows his audience who this Son of God is by calling to the stand three witnesses. He states that the Son of God "came by water and blood," probably referring to Jesus's baptism and death (1:6). In John's Gospel, water is associated with baptism (John 1:26, 31, 33; 3:5, 23), and this seems to be the case in 1 John. Jesus came as the incarnate Lord and began His public ministry by being baptized with water. His ministry reached its climax when He shed His blood on the cross. The first two witnesses—baptism and crucifixion—revealed who Jesus is. In both cases we find a divine manifestation and human reactions testifying to Jesus as indeed the Son of God (Matt. 3:17; 27:50–54).

The false teachers did not deny that the man Jesus was baptized and died, but they did not assign salvific importance to these events, because Jesus was neither the Messiah nor the Son of God. If the Son of God left the human Jesus before His crucifixion, then the atoning death of the Son of God was not necessary for our salvation. Salvation would be through "knowledge" (*gnōsis*; the secret teachings of the false teachers) and not through the cross. The third witness—after water and blood—is the Holy "Spirit," who "is truth." The activity of the Holy Spirit is described in the present tense—most likely pointing to His ongoing ministry as He testifies about Jesus. He does this through Scripture and through the inward experience of believers.

In 1 John 5:8, the three witnesses of v. 6 are repeated in almost reverse order. The Holy Spirit comes first, followed by water and blood. These three witnesses agree with each other. In the OT, two to three witnesses were required to confirm a matter (Deut. 19:15). John makes it clear that the case for Jesus has a sound foundation.

5:9–10. Jesus and the Testimony of God. God also testifies on behalf of His Son, and the testimony or witness of God is greater than human testimony or witness (v. 9). How does God testify for His Son? The threefold testimony mentioned in vv. 6–8 is at the same time God's testimony. Through them, He speaks to us about who the Son is. People are usually willing to accept the testimony of others. We often take at face value what others tell us. We are willing to believe.

How much more should we accept God's own witness and believe in Jesus as portrayed in the NT? God is reliable and true (v. 20). If we do not accept His testimony, we are implying that He is "a liar" (v. 10) and will stand condemned before Him.

5:11–12. The Result of Believing in Jesus. God has provided eternal life for humanity, available "in His Son." We receive it by accepting God's testimony about His Son—in other words, by believing in Jesus. John's discussion of the importance of faith in Jesus, of belief in who Jesus is, and of the need to accept God's testimony has a practical goal, namely, that we find eternal life in the Son of God. John's opponents, who were questioning the true divinity of Christ or the true humanity of Christ or who were having problems accepting Jesus as the Messiah and the Son of God, were proclaiming a different Jesus. Since they did not have the Jesus of Scripture, they did not have eternal life. Even if they claimed to possess eternal life and to have "superior knowledge," their claims were not true. John clearly states that those who do not have the Son of God do not have life, while those who have the Son have life (v. 12). Eternal life does not mean that a part of us survives at death (John 6:54). It is already a present reality. True believers enjoy a new quality of life here and now (John 10:10) and live with the assurance that at Jesus's Second Coming they will be resurrected.

5:13–21
Epilogue: Confidence

The conclusion of 1 John again stresses confidence—this time concerning the assurance of eternal life, prayers being answered, and three affirmations: perseverance, being children of God, and knowing God. This section corresponds to the beginning of the letter. In both passages the issue is Christology, and Jesus is called God the Father's Son Jesus Christ (1:3; 5:20), probably to refute the "antichrists." In both passages the important problem of sin is addressed (1:7—2:2; 5:16–18). And in both passages we find the concept of life (1:1–2; 5:13, 16, 20).

5:13–17. Eternal Life and Prayer. The topic of eternal life is further developed and justifies the writing of the letter. John wanted his audience to know that they already had eternal life and that to receive it they needed to believe in Jesus as the Son of God. God wants us to have assurance of salvation. Such an assurance leads to confidence with regard to our prayers; if we ask anything according to God's will, He hears us (v. 14). At the same time, we have confidence that we have already received what we had been praying for. Since we do not fully and clearly know God's will for us in every situation, we present our petitions to Him in submission to His will. In many cases, God's will is clearly expressed in Scripture.

1 John 5:7—A Textual Addition

Verse 7 is very short but contains an expansion, called the Johannine comma, which was added centuries after the NT canon was in place. Instead of reading, "for there are three that testify" and then continuing with v. 8, where the three witnesses are mentioned again, the verse was enlarged to read (as in the NKJV): "For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one." By referring to the three heavenly witnesses in v. 7, the three witnesses of v. 8 lacked an introduction. So another insertion was necessary: "And there are three that bear witness on earth." Consequently, the amplified text contains three heavenly witnesses—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—and three earthly witnesses: the Spirit, the water, and the blood.

The additions are not found in any Greek manuscript older than the fourteenth century A.D., nor are they quoted by the early Greek Fathers, although they would have helped during the Trinitarian controversies. The additions are not needed, because the divinity of Jesus and the concept of the plurality in the Godhead are strongly established in the Johannine literature (e.g., John 1:1–3, 14; 8:58–59; 10:30–31; 20:28; Rev. 5:8–14). First John 5:1–12 is not about the Trinity but about faith in Jesus as the Son of God. What disturbs most is the tampering with the biblical text, against which we are warned (Rev. 22:18–19). Fortunately, the Johannine addition is an exception rather than the rule.

If we confess our sins and ask for forgiveness, God does not put us on a waiting list; we have confidence that as we end our prayer, forgiveness of sins has been granted. If we ask him to make us His children because we accept Jesus as Savior and Lord, God will answer such a prayer right away. Whenever the will of God is revealed in Scripture—whether in a commandment or a promise—and we claim that expression of His will, we know that we "have" (present tense) an affirmative answer. Prayers in accordance to God's will are answered while we are still praying.

If we have any need that is covered by God's commands or promises—freedom from worries (1 Pet. 5:7), the gift of the Holy Spirit (Luke 11:13), wisdom (James 1:5), love for enemies (Matt. 5:44)—we may turn to God, ask Him for what we need, refer to His promise (1 John 5:14–15), and thank Him for answering our prayer. We do not rely on our feelings but trust in Him (Rom. 1:17; Heb. 11:6; cf. SC 51).

John turns to intercessory prayer (1 John 5:16–17). These verses do encourage us not only to be confident when interceding for others but also to be concerned about the spiritual welfare of our Christian brothers and sisters and to pray more consistently and earnestly for them.

5:18–19. Confident of Being Protected. The phrase about knowing is used three times in 5:18–20. Each verse begins with this very statement. However, the passage is not primarily concerned about knowledge of facts. This is the knowledge that is expressed in confidence in the Lord in spite of challenges. A true believer, "born of God," does not keep on sinning. There are different readings of the verse: one uses the reflexive pronoun "himself" ("he who has been born of God keeps himself"), and one uses the personal pronoun "him" ("He who has been born of God keeps him"). In the first case, the person that is born again keeps himself/herself from sinning. In the second case it is Jesus who keeps the believers from sinning. This is a promise that we are in Jesus's hands and that He will take care of us if we remain in Him. The second reading fits the context and John's theology better. In this case the one "born of God" in the first line describes the believer (see 3:9). The verb occurs in the perfect tense and may describe the lasting effect of our regeneration. The second phrase, "born of God," describes Christ and occurs in the past tense, which may be referring to Christ's incarnation. The usage of the same term for Jesus and His disciples may point to the fact that Jesus became one of us, although He is still different from us—He is the Son of God.

Deadly and Not Deadly Sin

The meaning of John 5:16–17 has been a matter of discussion. Certain observations could help us to understand what John had in mind. (1) John's focus is on intercessory prayer for brothers and sisters who are sinning (v. 16). The main concern is willingness to help others. Instead of spreading rumors, we are called to pray for each other. (2) A sin that leads to death is mentioned in passing and is not the main topic. The death mentioned here could be spiritual death, and it could mean "tending in the direction of/leading to spiritual death." This could result in eternal death. (3) All unrighteousness is sin and should not be justified or tolerated (v. 17). In the end, all sin leads to death (Rom. 6:23). (4) John does not prohibit praying for those who have committed the sin that leads to death. He seems to be saying that the efficacy of such prayers is limited by the will and condition of the sinner. (5) In v. 16, life is connected to prayer.

We do not know precisely what John had in mind when making the distinctions in vv. 16 and 17. Among the different attempts to understand the passage, the following two interpretations seem to be the most probable. (1) The sin that leads to death is the unpardonable sin that Jesus talked about: the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (Matt. 12:31–32). It is a persistent sin, not a single act of sin—a habitual sin characterized by the total rejection of the call of the Spirit to repentance. (2) The sin that leads to death is apostasy. The false teachers had completely rejected Jesus by not accepting Him as Christ and Son of God. They had also separated themselves from the church (cf. Heb. 6:4–6).

The second option is favored by many expositors. But John may have had both ideas in mind; the two options are not significantly different. Some church members may have been tempted to accept the teachings of the antichrists, and John was warning them. Church members should pray for each other so that they do not reject Jesus Christ. However, if sinners repent and return to God, their sin will be forgiven (1 John 1:7, 9). Sin does not inexorably lead to death. We should pray for others, even in the case of apostasy.

John then refers to God ensuring that "the evil one" is prevented from doing permanent harm (v. 18). This promise is applicable only as long as we abide with God. The "evil one" may refer to an evil power instead of to an evil person (v. 19), but since in v. 18 the evil one refers to Satan, it is evident that it also points to him here. This is a brief glimpse of the Great Controversy between Christ and Satan. The "world" is the arena of the evil one, but true believers can be confident because they belong to God and are protected by Jesus. Consequently, they are able to say no to sin and to withstand temptations.

5:20–21. Knowledge of the Godhead. For a third time John states "we know" (v. 20). "The Son of God," Jesus, has come into this world and has revealed God the Father to us. This knowledge not only is superior to the "knowledge" of the secessionists but also leads to a close connection with God. Believers are in God, that is, in union with Him. Although "the true God" may be a reference to the Father, it most probably refers to the Son (v. 20). Throughout his first letter, John switches easily from the Father to Jesus. In some cases, the third person personal pronouns may even refer to both Father and Son. John uses the word "true" three times in 5:20. The first reference may point to God the Father. The second reference may refer to Jesus—God's Son Jesus Christ. The last part of this clause seems to explain the first: The Son of God is the one who is true. The last reference occurs in the last sentence: "He [or "This"] is the true God and eternal life."

Until this point, John has not mentioned idols (v. 21) and idolatry in his letter. Instead, he has wrestled with false ideas about Jesus and their influence on still-faithful church members. Why would he introduce a topic at the very end of his letter that had not been discussed before? Obviously, John considered false views of Christ to be idolatry. As the sin leading to death is a rejection of Jesus as Son of God, so idolatry is associated with the antichrists' teachings about God and Jesus. Their understanding of the Godhead is an idol.

John finishes his first letter on a very positive note. Although he warns against false teachings and the resultant lifestyle, he uses the last paragraph of his epistle to call us to confidence. Christians do not need to live in fear, uncertainty, and doubt. On the contrary, God wants us to enjoy confidence regarding our relationship with Him. When we have the Son of God, we have assurance of salvation, confidence that our prayers are answered, and certainty about our connection to God. This certainty is nurtured by the hope that we will see Him again (3:2–3).

Jesus as God

The "true God" of whom John speaks in 5:20 is Jesus. The closest antecedent of the pronoun "He" is Jesus Christ. Although "true" is an attribute of the Father (John 7:28; 17:3), it is more frequently used to describe Jesus (see also 1 John 2:8; John 1:9; 6:32; 15:1; Rev. 3:7, 14). In the Johannine writings, Jesus is without question God. This true God is "eternal life." Life is again and again associated with Christ (e.g., 1 John 5:12; John 1:4; 11:25; 14:6). According to 1 John 1:1–2, Jesus is the Word of Life, the life, and the eternal life. By calling Jesus the "eternal life" in the beginning and the end of 1 John, the apostle opens and closes his letter with an important topic. Since John is dealing with antichrists challenging the divinity of Jesus, it would be most appropriate to affirm His deity at the end of the letter. The Gospel of John begins and ends by calling Jesus God (John 1:2; 20:28). The same approach seems to be used in 1 John (1:1–3; 5:20). They both climax in the declaration that Jesus is God and that eternal life is found only in Him.

2 JOHN

INTRODUCTION

Title and Authorship. This commentary holds that John the apostle was the author of this letter. (For the arguments supporting this view, see 1 John: Introduction.) Essentially the same range of titles discussed in relation to 1 John also applies to this letter; the only difference is that it is identified as the second letter (see 1 John: Introduction).

Date. This letter was written late in the first century A.D., likely after 1 John. (For more, see 1 John: Introduction.)

Backgrounds. John's second letter resembles 1 John in many respects. Although it is much shorter it uses to a large extent the same vocabulary. We also find the same themes and concerns. There is, however, a more personal touch as John lovingly encourages his church members. Unlike the earlier epistle, this one is clearly a letter with a formal introduction and conclusion. The main body of the letter contains praises, exhortations to love and to walk according to the commandments, and a section dealing with the antichrists. But 2 John does not simply repeat the same subjects of 1 John as a letter intended to be circulated among believers. It is also more straightforward than 1 John. At the end of the letter, the elder expresses his wish to see his audience soon.

Theology and Purpose. See 1 John: Introduction.

COMMENTARY

1–3
Greetings

The apostle, as an elder, addresses the elect (chosen) lady and her children. At the very end of the epistle, her sister's children are mentioned (v. 13). The term used for "lady" is the female form of the term "lord." The elect lady has been understood as (1) an unnamed woman, either a lady called Electa; Mary, the mother of Jesus; or Martha, which in Aramaic stands for "lady," or (2) a metaphor for the church. In the first case, the lady, her children, and her sister would have to be understood literally. In the second case, she would represent a church and its members. A cursory reading of 2 John suggests that the letter is addressed to a group of believers. A statement similar to 2 John 1:1 is found in 1 Peter 5:13, which seems to refer to a local church. Other places in the NT also portray the church as a woman (e.g., Eph. 5:22–32; Rev. 12:1–6).

John says the elder loves the church. But to understand the nature of true love among Christians, a qualifier is needed, namely, truth (2 John 2). Christian love is love expressed in the context of truth. The emphasis on love and truth indicates that John's churches were facing a crisis of both. It almost seems as if "truth" is personified. Truth abides in us and will be with us forever. Truth reminds us of Jesus, who is the Truth (John 14:6). The Holy Spirit and truth will be with believers forever (2 John 2; John 14:16). Both truth and love ultimately point back to God and belong together in the Christian faith and experience. They form the main theme of 2 John. Truth is needed to discern deceptions and their results (vv. 7–8) and to abide in the teaching of Christ (vv. 9–10).

The salutation is in fact a promise or affirmation—not a mere wish. Grace, mercy, and peace come from both God the Father and Jesus. The Father and the Son are placed on the same level. This statement prepares the way for a similar association in v. 9 and for the discussion of the problem with the antichrists (v. 7), who deny the divinity of Jesus and the true humanity of Christ. The Godhead's revelation and blessings are closely associated with truth and love and should be prominent in the messianic community. The truth is that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. The combination of truth and love indicates that truth must be expressed in love and that love must be grounded in truth.

4–6
Walking According to the Commandments

It is encouraging for church members to know that their spiritual leader has rejoiced greatly because they are walking in the truth (v. 4). It motivates them to continue their Christian life in truth, as they receive a command from the Father. But although John rejoiced that some of the children were walking in truth, his statement implies that some were not—perhaps due to the problems addressed in his earlier letter.

After the rejoicing comes a request and exhortation (vv. 5–6): love one another. John moves from the concept of commandment to the concept of love because the content of the commandment is love. In the context of falsehood and schism, love must be strengthened and intensified. To love is to keep the commandments (v. 6). Love is not merely what we feel; love is what we do, how we act, and how we relate to others. John talks about walking in truth (v. 4), walking in obedience to His commands (pl.), and walking in "it." (sing.; v. 6). The closest antecedent of the pronoun "it" is the command referring to mutual love. To walk in the truth means to live a genuine life committed to God and His truth as revealed in Jesus Christ. It also means walking in love—keeping the commandment to love each other. Love is the foundational element of walking in all of God's commandments. Obedience to the law is not opposed to the gospel; salvation does not depend on works. Truth, love, and obedience to the commandments had been partially lacking in the Johannine community and needed to be recovered.

7–11
Warning against Deceivers

John addresses the problem of the deceivers and their false understanding of Jesus. The situation is similar to what we encountered in 1 John. They promoted a radically different understanding of Jesus, and many had left the church and become deceivers themselves. Of course, many were still walking in the truth (v. 4), and John wanted to affirm them.

The false teachers are described as many, those who do not acknowledge (or confess) that Jesus Christ is coming in the flesh, those who have left the church and have gone out into the world, and "antichrist" (v. 7). At first the singular is used to refer to them, then the plural, and finally the singular "antichrist" is employed. Obviously, the deceivers prefigure the future antichrist (see 2 Thess. 2; Rev. 13). While 1 John 4:2 notes that "Jesus Christ has come in the flesh," 2 John 7 remarks that Jesus Christ is coming in the flesh, employing the present tense. This coming of Jesus could be referring to His Second Coming but most probably designates His incarnation "in the flesh." The incarnation happened once, but its results remain. Jesus Christ became flesh/human and remains human (continual present tense).

John counseled church members to watch out constantly to avoid being deceived and thus losing their complete reward (v. 8). Some Greek manuscripts refer to what "you" have worked for instead of "we" have worked for. "We" is preferred by the majority of English translations and the Greek text. The full reward may refer to the reward of eternal life (1 John 5:11–12). A wrong understanding of Jesus means losing eternal life. But those not following the heretics would receive a free gift from God.

John says whoever joins the secessionists has run ahead and goes too far/transgresses (2 John 9). Such persons may have considered themselves enlightened, but in reality they were separated from God. While John supported a better understanding of biblical truth, he opposed any misrepresentation of the person and work of Christ. Teaching (doctrine), mentioned twice in v. 9, may designate instruction given by a teacher or the content of what has been taught. In this passage, the challenge is to the apostolic teaching about Jesus. Whoever accepts this biblical teaching and faithfully remains in it has both the Father and the Son. Falsehood brings one's relationship with God to an end. John was convinced that doctrine matters. Apostasy usually begins with minor deviations from the truth before it is clearly identified as such. John warns us to watch out and not to go beyond the teachings of Jesus and the apostles.

The apostle alerted believers against any false teacher: do not receive him into your house nor welcome him (v. 10). In the Bible, hospitality is a great virtue (e.g., Heb. 13:2; 1 Pet. 4:9). But if hospitality leads to the support of false teachers, it should not be practiced. In the first century A.D., teachers traveled around preaching in various places and staying with church members, who provided food and lodging to them. If such teachers were propagating false doctrines, Christians were not expected to receive them in their homes.

The last phrase of v. 10, repeated in the beginning of v. 11, has been rendered "not to give him a greeting" (NASB, ESV) or "to greet him" (NKJV), while others use "not to welcome him" (NIV) or "not to bid him God speed" (KJV). Although "to greet" is a correct translation, the issue is not about saying hello but about welcoming and supporting the teachers in their actions. John is not suggesting hating or completely avoiding contact with persons who think differently. But Christians must be aware that certain behavior could be understood as an endorsement of ideas opposed to the truth.

Heresies can be very damaging to the church and its message. We should not be indifferent to biblical truth and consider any opposition to heresy to be judgmental or arrogant. Uncontrolled tolerance could lead to compromise, and compromise leads to heresy. No church is immune to such developments. John reminds us that there is a basic difference between truth and error, that what we believe matters, and that our beliefs affect our relationship with God.

12–13
Farewell

Verses 12 and 13 constitute the conclusion of the letter. John refers to the lady's sister (v. 13). The concept of joy (v. 4) is repeated in v. 12. The author wanted his congregations to experience complete joy. The conclusion of 2 John shows John's personal interest in his audience and his desire to meet with them personally—to reaffirm and warn them. Open and tactful communication is normally better than assuming that issues will disappear by themselves. It is better to solve a problem than to ignore it, and it is better to encourage each other than to never say an affirmative word. The message of John's letters is quite strong. When it came to antichrists, John left no room for negotiation or compromise. It was his duty to protect the church and its members.

John's second letter shows his concern for his church and his longing for all members to be strong in their faith. He encouraged, exhorted, and cautioned them—stressing truth and love. In our Christian life we must walk in the truth, in love, and in God's commandments. Then, instead of being deceived, we will be able to help others. As we approach the realization of the Christian hope, the message of 2 John is very relevant—calling us to be vigilant in love against deception.

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3 JOHN

INTRODUCTION

Title and Authorship. As noted in regard to 1 and 2 John, this commentary holds that John the apostle is the author. Also, the same range of titles discussed in relation to 1 John also applies to this letter, the only difference being that this is his third letter (see 1 John: Introduction).

Date. This letter was written late in the first century A.D., likely after 2 John. (For more, see 1 John: Introduction.)

Backgrounds. While 1 and 2 John deal primarily with Christ, who had been misrepresented by false teachers, 3 John wrestles with a leadership crisis in a local church. On one side were the Apostle John (the elder), Gaius, and Demetrius; and on the other side was Diotrephes, who was attempting to establish his supremacy. The apostle was writing to provide guidance to the church on how to deal with this situation.

Theology and Purpose. History is filled with the record of individuals who sought power by exploiting, enslaving, and killing thousands—even millions—of innocent people. The cosmic conflict itself began with a power struggle in heaven. This conflict manifested itself in the life of the Christian church. At the end of the first century A.D., most of the eyewitnesses to Jesus—including most of the twelve apostles—had passed away. New leaders had to take over, resulting in some difficulties. In 3 John the problem in the church was not primarily doctrinal but administrative—one of personal ambition and possibly an attempt to change the way churches were governed. In the long run, this situation could also impact the message of the church. Similar attempts to occupy positions of power—including well-intended ones—led to the establishment of the monarchical episcopate in the second century A.D.—that is, the consolidation of power in one person, called the bishop, who presided over all the activities of the church in a geographic area—instead of shared leadership among groups of elders. As a result, a strict hierarchy was created, and the church became more or less identical with the so-called clergy. This model of ecclesiastical hierarchy reached its peak in the Medieval Ages, when one person became the sole ruler over not just Christianity but to some extent kings and emperors.

The study of 3 John should lead us to think about the nature of Christian leadership. According to the NT, all believers are part of the royal priesthood (1 Pet. 2:9; Rev. 1:5–6) and all have received spiritual gifts necessary for the church (1 Cor. 12:7, 27–31). A distinction between laity and clergy is foreign to the NT. God has called some persons to leadership positions in the church (1 Tim. 3:1–7), and they should be respected (Heb. 13:7, 17). But church leaders are not infallible and should not pretend to be so. In some cases, there may even be justified reasons for complaints (1 Tim. 5:19), but these should be presented carefully and lovingly. Leaders must indeed lead out, be shepherds, and most of all be examples for the rest of the body of Christ. They must equip church members to perform the ministry to which they are called (Eph. 4:11–12). John was writing against conflicts of leadership in the church because of their threat to the unity of the church and their damage to its message. The epistle discusses and evaluates a positive character—Gaius (vv. 1–8); a negative character—Diotrephes (vv. 9–10); and another positive character—Demetrius (vv. 11–12).

COMMENTARY

1–4
The Elder and Gaius

The Apostle John introduces himself as "elder" (v. 1), although his ministry surpassed the local level. There are a number of possible reasons for the use of this title: (1) it may refer to John's position, age, or both; (2) John may have been indicating that the letter was an official communication; (3) the title may point to the respect and authority due to its holder; (4) other apostles used the title (1 Pet. 5:1), and John may have been following this practice; and (5) the use of "elder" may point to John's humility and collegiality, which differs widely from the attitude of Diotrephes.

Third John is one of the few letters in the NT addressed to an individual. It is an extremely important witness of what was taking place in the early church toward the end of the first century. The conflict we see here became more pronounced in the subsequent centuries. It also contains important lessons for the Christian faith today.

John wrote the letter to Gaius (v. 1). Since Gaius was a common Roman name, we do not know if this individual is the Gaius of Macedonia (Acts 19:29), of Derbe (Acts 20:4), of Corinth (Rom. 16:23), or some other Gaius. He might have been a Gentile Christian who was wealthy enough to support and accommodate traveling missionaries. Or perhaps he was an important and well-respected person in the local church, although he probably was not the main leader. The fact that John was writing to someone other than the head elder of the church may indicate strained relations.

Four times John calls Gaius his beloved friend (vv. 1, 2, 5, 11), suggesting he had a very good relationship with him. The emphasis on love (vv. 1, 6) and truth (vv. 1, 3, 4, 8, 12) is common in the Johannine Epistles. There is also an important stress on ethical behavior. It is connected to the idea of walking in the truth (vv. 3–4). Gaius was doing well spiritually, but his physical health may have been wanting (v. 2). John wished and prayed that Gaius would be healthy in all aspects of his being. Today, we know that our emotional, mental, and spiritual dimensions are interconnected. Physical sickness can lead to depression and to questions or doubts about the Lord's goodness. If one aspect of our personality suffers, the others are also affected. The desire for physical health and wholeness requires that we take personal responsibility for our well-being. The passage does not support a "prosperity gospel," however, according to which God's children will always enjoy health and abundance of wealth. John rejoiced that Gaius was walking in the truth (vv. 3–4), practicing the Christian message, and that fellow believers praised his wonderful Christian life. For his part, John longed to see Gaius soon and to talk to him personally (v. 14).

5–8

Gaius's Ministry to the Church

In his second letter, John had addressed the issue of hospitality and warned against being hospitable to traveling missionaries who were teaching heresies. In 3 John, the apostle comes back to the issue of hospitality. He praised Gaius for being faithful in his service for the brothers and sisters, especially strangers. The apostle encouraged him to continue extending hospitality to true itinerant missionaries (vv. 5–6). John criticized Diotrephes for refusing to receive these servants of the Lord, building his own power basis instead (vv. 9–10).

The traveling missionaries needed help (vv. 5–6, 8). They were doing God's work by going out to spread the message for His name's sake, taking nothing from the pagan Gentiles (v. 7), preaching the gospel for free but needing food, lodging, and support to continue their journeys. They were not, as a matter of policy, to become dependent on Gentiles, begging them for money. There are many good causes to fund, but believers are expected to support the proclamation of the gospel with tithe and offerings and to be hospitable (Rom. 12:13; Heb. 13:2; 1 Pet. 4:9). In doing this, church members become workers together for the truth (v. 8).

9–10

Diotrephes

The Greek term *epidechomai* ("to accept"/"receive"/"welcome"/"acknowledge") marks the beginning and end of the discussion about the unacceptable behavior of Diotrephes:

A Action of Diotrephes: not receiving/welcoming/acknowledging John and his group (v. 9)
  B Future action of John: calling attention to his deeds (v. 10a)
A' Action of Diotrephes: gossiping maliciously about John and his church; not receiving nor welcoming the believers, forbidding those who wish to, and putting them out of the church (v. 10b)

Pointing to Gaius and his ministry has prepared John to tackle the problem of Diotrephes, the leader of the church. Diotrephes was hindering hospitality and disfellowshiping church members who supported traveling missionaries (v. 10). Why was John sharing this information with Gaius? Gaius and Diotrephes were probably members of the same church, but Gaius may not have known much about the situation in the church because he might have lived far from the church and/or his poor health did not allow him to attend church regularly; or Gaius may have been fully familiar with Diotrephes's attitude. John had written a previous letter to the church (v. 9), possibly addressed to Diotrephes, who in turn may have suppressed or even destroyed it because he did not like the content and was not willing to take directives from the apostle. Now John was writing another letter—3 John, addressed to Gaius—hoping that Gaius would share it with the church. John included information that Gaius was familiar with but that was important for the church to know. He may have been letting the church know that he was working on a solution.

Obviously, the situation was rapidly deteriorating. Church members were being pushed aside or even disfellowshipped for showing basic Christian courtesy, while Diotrephes likely was trying to establish himself as the one in absolute control of the congregation. He may have confused lust for power with zeal for the gospel. Arrogantly, he rejected the authority of the Apostle John and others.

This was a dangerous development because Diotrephes wanted to act independently of those who oversaw the church, thus becoming an autocrat. Such an attitude had the potential to dramatically change the nature of the church and the role church members should play. The problem was not theology. John and Diotrephes probably agreed on Christian doctrine. The issue was power. John criticized Diotrephes for loving to put himself first, not wanting to have anything to do with the apostle and his group, bringing false charges against John using malicious words, refusing to welcome the believers, hindering those willing to care for traveling missionaries, and being ready to excommunicate those who did not support him.

11–12

Testimony about Demetrius

John encouraged Gaius to continue to follow what was good and to imitate not evil but good (v. 11). The children of God are recognized by doing/practicing what is good. It is important to follow the right examples in life and to have the right friends. Verse 11 is a transitional statement. It builds a bridge between what John had said about Diotrephes and what he was about to say about Demetrius. Diotrephes found an evil example to imitate. In the case of Gaius, Demetrius was a good model to follow (v. 12). His name indicates that he was a Gentile Christian. He supported the Apostle John and may have been one of his associates and a traveling missionary. He had a threefold testimony: from everyone, from the truth, and from John himself. John may have wanted him to be present during his future meeting with Diotrephes. He may have been the bearer of the letter. And it may have been Gaius's task to grant Demetrius hospitality.

13–14

Concluding Remarks

The conclusion of 3 John is similar to that of 2 John, perhaps indicating they were written at the same time. While some Bible translations have fifteen verses in 3 John, others have only fourteen. Some have merged verses 14 and 15 into a single verse. John knew that his letter was not sufficient. He could have written a longer letter (v. 13), but what he really wanted was to visit Gaius (v. 14). The ending of 3 John contains a greater sense of urgency than the conclusion of 2 John. John knew he must come very soon and was hoping to be able to talk to Gaius face-to-face. The wish for peace is very appropriate in this letter and refers to the need to always be at peace with God and with each other (v. 14). In the midst of all the turmoil that Gaius and those who sided with the apostle found themselves, the peace of God provided comfort, rest, trust, and hope.

John tells us that we all influence others and that this can help or hinder them. We can either be Gaius or Demetrius, who labored for the kingdom of God, or Diothrephes, who hindered God's cause. John exhorts us to follow the right model and to enjoy the peace and hope of heaven.

JUDE

INTRODUCTION

Title and Authorship. The author calls himself Jude, which is a shortened form of Judas or Judah, a very common Hebrew name with deep patriarchal and tribal roots (Matt. 1:2–3; 2:6). There are several people called Judas in the NT, the most famous of whom is Judas Iscariot (Matt. 10:4; 26:14, 25, 47; 27:3). But we also find the revolutionary Judas the Galilean (Acts 5:37); Judas of Damascus, in whose house Saul lodged (Acts 9:11); Judas called Barsabbas, a Jerusalemite prophet (Acts 15:22, 27, 32); and Judas the son of James, a disciple of Jesus (Luke 6:16; Acts 1:13). The author of this letter, however, designates himself as the "brother of James" (Jude 1:1), one of the siblings of Jesus (Matt. 13:55; Mark 6:3)—presumably a stepbrother. Whether Jude was a full brother, a half or stepbrother, or a cousin has been debated for centuries. Some manuscripts even included an opinion on this question as part of the title (e.g., a fourteenth-century manuscript bears the title, "The Catholic [meaning "universal" or "general"; see "Introduction to the New Testament Epistles," p. 1544] Epistle of Jude, the Other Step-brother [i.e., in addition to James], to the Pious Faithful"; see "The Brothers of Jesus," p. 1252).

Jude was not a follower of Jesus during His ministry (Mark 3:21, 31) but became a believer after His resurrection (Acts 1:14). That may explain why Jude modestly refers to himself as "a servant of Jesus Christ" rather than a brother of Jesus. The "brothers of the Lord" were known in the early church, along with the apostles, as traveling missionaries (1 Cor. 9:5). Thus, the evidence from within the NT favors identifying Jude as the brother of Jesus and James.

Date. Like all the documents in the NT, the date associated with the Epistle of Jude depends on several factors. Since Jude 17 encourages the reader to remember the "apostles," some commentators conclude the letter must have been written sometime after the death of the apostles. This is unlikely, however, since the reference is to the instructions the believers received from the apostles who founded the church at the believers' conversion (vv. 3, 17). The past comprised the missionary activity of establishing the church, not the apostolic period.

A more helpful clue in determining the letter's date is the strong similarities that Jude shares with 2 Peter. Analysis suggests that Peter paraphrased the epistle of Jude. It is unlikely that Jude made use of 2 Peter, since Jude's epistle exhibits a clear structure that is absent from the second half of 2 Peter. It would have been difficult for Jude to have constructed his letter out of what Peter had written. If this is correct, the letter of Jude must have been in existence before 2 Peter was written and prior to Peter's death, which was sometime around A.D. 65. Therefore, a plausible date for Jude would be the late A.D. 50s or early 60s.

Backgrounds. It is difficult to establish the audience of the epistle of Jude. Calling them beloved friends (vv. 3, 17, 20), Jude reminded them of what the apostles had *proeirēmenōn* (from the verb *prolegō*). This could mean (and has been translated as) either something previously mentioned or something predicted (v. 17). This seems to indicate that Jude was not the founder of whichever church he was writing to. Some scholars favor a Jewish Christian audience because the author presupposes familiarity with Jewish literature and traditions. This is not decisive, however, because Jewish literature was also used in instructions for Gentiles. Therefore, a predominately but not exclusive Jewish Christian audience seems to best account for what little we know about the audience. Some scholars suggest that it was written to Christians living in Syria, but Asia Minor, with its large Jewish communities and

antinomian tendencies (the churches in Pergamos and Thyatira [in Asia Minor]; cf. Rev. 2:14, 20), seems more probable.

Theology and Purpose. The purpose of the Epistle of Jude was to contend for the faith (v. 3). Originally, Jude intended to write about the common ground of their shared salvation (v. 3), but the Spirit impressed him to address the danger of false teachers. The opponents were a group of itinerant, charismatic, libertarian teachers opposed to the law. They had infiltrated the church unnoticed—ungodly people who perverted the grace of God into sensuality and who denied their Lord Jesus Christ (v. 4). These false teachers relied on dreams, rejecting authority (v. 8) and speaking evil of everything they did not understand (v. 10). Jude further describes them as complaining, judgmental, hedonistic, insincere in their false boasts and flattery designed to gain their own advantage (v. 16), and interested in financial gain, like Balaam (v. 11). Finally, Jude tells us that they lacked the Spirit (v. 19). Their ultimate fate would be revealed at the coming of Christ, when the Christian hope will be unveiled (vv. 14–15).

Although Jude is short, it does highlight some important theological themes.

1. *God's Righteous Judgment*. The certainty of God's judgment on evil is one of the central theological themes in Jude. Although false teachers were at work undermining the truth of the gospel message (vv. 4, 8, 10–13, 16), Jude reminded his readers that these individuals would not be successful. Certain destruction awaited them at the end of the age at the Lord's return in judgment (vv. 14–15), as had been predicated in the past (v. 4). These individuals would experience God's righteous judgment just as the rebellious Israelites (v. 5), the fallen angels (v. 6), and the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah (v. 7) did.

2. *Hope*. While Jude speaks of the certainty of the judgment of evildoers, he also speaks confidently of the hope that Christ's followers can have. He encouraged his readers to be firm in the faith, reminding them that the difficulties they experienced should come as no surprise, since the apostles predicted such things would occur (vv. 17–18). He urged them to recognize the time in which they lived and to not only look forward to the mercy they were to receive from Christ (v. 21) but also extend mercy to those struggling with doubt (v. 22). He then concluded his letter with one of the most encouraging words of hope in the NT—the assurance Jesus would protect His followers from falling and present them faultless before God (vv. 24–25).

Literary Features. From a literary point of view, this document is an ancient letter with all its conventional parts: an epistolary opening (vv. 1–2); the main body of the letter—which sounds more like a homily than a letter, consisting of a series of scriptural texts (vv. 5–19); an exhortation (vv. 20–23); and a doxology (vv. 24–25).

COMMENTARY

1–2

Greetings

Jude begins his letter by identifying the sender (Jude, a [bond]servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James) and the addressees (the ones who have been called and loved and belong to Jesus), and by sharing a greeting: a blessing of mercy, peace, and love (vv. 1–2). Jude refers to himself not as an apostle but as a slave of God—an honorific title (see Ex. 14:31; Josh. 1:1; Rom. 1:1; Gal. 1:10; James 1:1; 2 Pet. 1:1). Unlike in other NT letters, the addressees are not identified by geographical location. This suggests that this is an encyclical letter to be read by all churches. Jude refers to the addressees as called and loved by God and admonishes his readers to keep themselves in God's love (v. 21).

The author also refers to the audience as "preserved" or "kept" in Jesus Christ. This could mean preserved for or by Jesus, but perhaps the emphasis is on the second option (see v. 24). Concluding his opening wishes, Jude shares a wish-prayer for mercy, peace, and love. The greeting varies from the typical Christian wish-prayer, which mentions "grace" (e.g., Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:3; 2 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:3). The omission is surprising but understandable since the fundamental problem Jude addresses is a perverted understanding of grace (v. 4).

3–4

Reasons for Writing

Jude initially planned to discuss the theme of salvation (v. 3)—a reference to the messianic salvation accomplished through Jesus Christ, whose sovereignty and lordship the false teachers were denying (v. 4; cf. Acts 4:12). However, challenges facing the church prompted Jude to change the theme of his letter. Outsiders had wormed their way into the church and were promoting an altered doctrine of "grace" that lacked self-restraint and denied the authority of Christ (Jude 4). Concerned about this development, Jude exhorted the followers of Christ "to contend" for the faith: an image of athleticism drawn from competition in the games or from the context of warfare. The terminology here applies to the preservation of the apostolic faith "once for all"—delivered or entrusted to the *hagiois* ("to the saints" or "to God's people"; v. 3; cf. Gal. 1:9).

Jude declared that these sorts of heretics had been identified from ages past for judgment (v. 4)—a theme that is outlined in the epistle (vv. 5–7; 10–15). The writer characterizes the outcome of their teachings and lifestyle as sensual corruption (v. 4). They were denying the Lord Jesus Christ through their behavior (see Titus 1:16) and using God's grace as an excuse to justify their own lack of moral restraint.

5–7

Exodus, Angels, and Sodom and Gomorrah

As an example of the certain judgment to fall on those who perverted the gospel, Jude reminded his readers of the fate that befell three groups of evildoers: the rebellious Israelites (v. 5), the fallen angels (v. 6), and the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah (v. 7). The heretics, like the Israelites, failed because they were not faithful to God's covenant (cf. Num. 13–14). The failure of the Israelites serves as a warning: people who have experienced God's saving power are not immune from becoming lost themselves if they rebel and fall away from the truth (see Heb. 4:2; 2 Pet. 2:20; 3:17).

The second group in Jude's trio of examples of divine judgment is the fallen angels. They were privileged to live in the presence of God but did not keep their *archē*. This Greek term—which can denote authority or beginning—may here refer to either an office that they held or a realm they inhabited. Jude 6 and 2 Peter 2:4 mention the judgment of angels. Different interpretations have been given for this passage in Jude, but Jude was most probably thinking of the cosmic conflict alluded to in Isaiah 14:12–15 and 24:21–22. These angels were apparently not satisfied with their status. As a result, they were kept in chains and darkness—a situation of their own making—waiting for the execution of their sentence. Their end points by implication to the similar fate that awaits the apostate teachers.

The third group Jude holds up as an example of judgment is the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19), a group long regarded as the paradigm of divine judgment (Deut. 29:23; Is. 1:9; Jer. 23:14; Matt. 10:15; Luke 10:12). The cities were suffused with sexual immorality. People went after *sarkos heteras* (lit., "different," "other," or "strange flesh"). This has sometimes been translated as "perversion" or "unnatural desire." Many have interpreted this phrase to be a reference to the flesh of the angels, not homosexual gang-rape (see Gen. 19). However, in the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, the citizens demanded that Lot bring out "the men" to whom he showed hospitality. The citizens did not know that the men were angels. Going after *sarkos heteras* ("different flesh," "strange flesh," or "perversion") designates the sin of homosexual activity. These cities were destroyed by an eternal fire—"eternal" indicating that its result was irreversible. All three examples illustrate the certainty of God's judgments on evil.

8–10

Defilement, Rejection of Authority, and Blasphemy

With the term *homoiōs* ("likewise" or "in the same way"), Jude connects the heretics in his audience with other ancient sinners. Dreams in Scripture could convey divine revelation (e.g., Gen. 37:5; Dan. 1:17; Matt. 1:20; Acts 2:17; 18:9). These heretics, however, claimed divine revelation in support of their sensual behavior (Jude 8; cf. v. 4). Jude shared three accusations:

First, he said the heretics "defile the flesh" or "pollute their own bodies." Contextually, Jude is speaking here about the improper use of the body in sexual acts: a moral defilement (cf. vv. 4, 7, 23). In the second charge, Jude said that they rejected authority. Given that Jude had already charged the heretics with denying the Lord Jesus Christ (v. 4), their main problem seems to have been the rejection of the authority of Christ. In the final accusation in the trilogy, Jude said that they *blasphēmousin* (from the verb *blasphēmeō*; "to blaspheme," "revile," "speak evil," "abuse," or "slander") the *doxas* (from *doxa*; lit., the "glories"), a term that has been variously rendered as "dignitaries," "celestial beings," "angelic majesties," or simply "angels." What is the identity of these beings? The analogy of the heretic's behavior and that of Michael—who did not blaspheme the devil (vv. 8–9)—seems to identify the glorious ones as supernatural beings. Jude denounced the heretics

for their behavior, contrasted with that of the archangel Michael.

Even Michael, when arguing a just case against the devil, did not pronounce a word of judgment against him. He deferred that matter to God, since as the Supreme Judge, judgment is God's prerogative alone. The biblical background for this story is Deuteronomy 34:1–6, which describes the death and burial of Moses. Jude, guided by the Spirit, supported the Jewish tradition that Michael contended with the devil about the body of Moses. The fact that Moses was with Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17:1–8) allows us to conclude that Michael was victorious over the devil and resurrected Moses.

But who is Michael? In Zechariah 3:1–5, the scene is one of dispute between "the Angel of the LORD" and Satan over the unworthiness of the high priest Joshua. "The Angel of the LORD" pronounces the same verdict on the devil: "The LORD rebuke you, Satan!"—exactly as in Jude 9. This has led many to correctly conclude that Michael the archangel and the angel of the Lord from Zechariah 3 are none other than the preincarnate Christ. The appellation of "Angel" to Christ in no way implies any kind of subordinate position in the Godhead. The word simply means "messenger," and it is evident from a number of other OT passages that this "Angel" is Yahweh. He has the authority of Yahweh and is in fact referred to as Yahweh (see Gen. 16:7, 9, 11; 22:11–18; 31:11–13; Ex. 3:2–6; 14:19; 23:20–23; Judg. 2:1–5; 13:2–23; Hos. 12:3–5). In contrast to Michael, the heretics (v. 10) passed judgment on everything they did not understand while morally corrupting themselves.

11–13

Cain, Balaam, and Korah

Jude offers his second trio of examples of evil conduct. This time the focus is on those who led others into sin. The passage opens with woe pronounced against the heretics (v. 11). The intention is to dissuade readers from following these negative examples and to thus avoid sharing their fate. Jude charges the heretics with following the way of Cain, whose crime was murder (Gen. 4:1–16). The heretics had not literally killed anyone, but killing is ultimately rooted in hatred of others (1 John 3:11–15).

The second example is Balaam. Driven by greed, Balaam instructed Balak to use Moabite women to sexually entice the men of Israel and to lead them to sacrifice to the Moabite gods (Num. 25; 31:16). As a result of his actions, Balaam died by the sword (Num. 31:8).

The third example is Korah, the Levite who rejected the authority of Moses—which was actually a rebellion against God (Num. 16). God punished Korah and his followers by causing the earth to split apart and swallow them. Each of these individuals came under God's judgment not only for their own sins but also for leading others astray; the fate of the false teachers troubling the church would be the same.

Jude next commented on the character of the heretics based on five graphic metaphors (vv. 12–13). First, he compared them to spots or blemishes at their love feasts. The Greek term *spilades* (from *spilas*; rendered as "blemishes" or "spots") could also designate rocks/reeds under the water. The heretics were like rocks under the surface of the water—which would do irreparable damage to a vessel. In the early church, the Lord's Supper was celebrated as a complete meal called an *agapē* ("love") meal. These meals, which were supposed to encourage fellowship, had turned into a cause of division (see 1 Cor. 11:17–30). The false teachers became the stain of these meals and caused irreparable damage by their behavior. They were feasting without fear (v. 12), a likely accusation of being devoid of the fear of God (cf. Prov. 15:16). The text also denounces them as acting like shepherds or leaders but feeding and serving themselves rather than their flocks (i.e., those in their care). Jude was most likely alluding to Ezekiel 34:2–10, 18–19, evoking the image of the evil shepherds of Israel who were feeding themselves.

Second, Jude likens them to clouds that never rain, a common image in Scripture (cf. Prov. 25:14). Here, it describes useless teachers—unable to help those who are spiritually thirsty.

Third, the heretics are compared to autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, pulled up by the roots. The reference to fall anticipates the harvest. Without fruit and uprooted suggests a double death: the impossibility of fruitfulness and, consequently, their destruction.

Fourth, Jude says the false teachers are like raging, wild waves of the sea—foaming up their own shame. Wild waves are a typical description of the sea under stormy conditions. The heretics had brought instability and insecurity, serving only to reveal their own immorality.

Finally, the heretics were tagged as "wandering stars." In a time devoid of telescopes, the stars guided travelers. However, a "wandering star" was useless—just like the heretics.

14–16

Prophecy of Enoch

Jude 13 closes with a promise of judgment and v. 14 delivers that promise from a rather surprising source: a prophecy about the coming of the Lord attributed to Enoch, the faithful antediluvian mentioned in Genesis 5:24. The saying is part of a widely known pseudepigraphical Jewish work known as 1 Enoch, which was probably written in the third century B.C. Although Enoch did not actually write 1 Enoch, it seems that 1 Enoch refers to a real event that, under the illumination of the Spirit, Jude used as an example of a true prophecy (cf. Acts 17:28; 1 Cor. 15:33; where quotations of extrabiblical sources are used). Jude states that this prophecy was to find its fulfillment in the lives of the heretics at the return of Christ; He will come, accompanied by His angels, to judge all people (Jude 14–15; Matt. 13:41; Mark 8:38; Rom. 2:6; 1 Thess. 3:13; 2 Thess. 1:7).

Christ will come not only to judge but also to convict of sin (Jude 15). The sins of the heretics are ungodly actions stemming from their ungodliness and all the *sklēros* (lit., "hard" or "rough"; here connoting harsh and defiant words) they have spoken against Christ (cf. Matt. 12:36). They would be held accountable for both their deeds and their words of irreverence toward God—their fundamental sin being their denial of the Lord Jesus Christ (Jude 4).

Jude 16 moves to the final list of evil characteristics of the false teachers. They were discontented and accusing grumblers and were motivated by their own evil desires. One of the chief characteristics of the Exodus generation was grumbling—often against Moses (Ex. 15:24; Num. 14:36) and/or Aaron (Ex. 16:2; Num. 14:2) but principally against God, who had appointed these leaders (Ex. 16:7–9, 12; Num. 14:27, 29). The heretics were not only grumbling but also finding fault with others—probably with church leaders. These were sins not only of the tongue but of the character. In their conduct, they were governed by their own selfish desires (cf. Rom. 7:7–8; Gal. 5:16–17; 1 Tim. 6:9). This accusation may be part of Jude's denunciation of the heretic's unbridled sexual desires (Jude 4–8). His denunciation continues, charging them with speaking arrogantly (v. 16). The focus seems to be on the heretic's arrogance, evidenced through their boasting. Finally, they are charged with flattering people to gain an advantage, feeding the people's egos (cf. 1 Thess. 2:3–5).

17–19

Apostolic Prophecy about Dividers

While in vv. 5–16 Jude described characteristics of the heretics, in vv. 17–19 he transitions to a warning mode. Jude turns to apostolic prophecy about the end. "Remember" (v. 17) is the first imperative in the letter. This imperative becomes more common in the rest of the document. Jude then refers to what the apostles had *proeirēmenōn* (from the verb *prolegō*). This could mean (and has been translated as) either something previously mentioned or something predicted (v. 17). The audience was expected to remember the oral warnings given by Paul (Acts 20:29–31; 1 Tim. 4:1–2; 2 Tim. 3:1–9) or John (1 John 2:18, 22; 4:1), going back to Christ's Olivet discourse (Matt. 24:11).

The prediction tells us that in the last time there would be *empaiktai* (from *empaiktēs*; "scoffers," "mockers," or "cavilers"), who would follow their own evil, ungodly desires (v. 18). Three items deserve attention: First, like other NT writers, Jude recognized that the last days had already begun with the Advent of Christ (see Acts 2:17; 1 Cor. 10:11; Gal. 4:4; Heb. 1:2; 9:26; 1 Pet. 1:20) and acknowledged that the forces of evil were especially hard at work (2 Tim. 3:1–9). Second, the prediction includes the advent of people who ridicule. Peter describes them as those who would deny the certainty of the return of Christ (2 Pet. 3:3–4). They would cause divisions within the church because of their lifestyle (Jude 19). Third, their lifestyle would follow the dictates of their own ungodly desires (see v. 16). The charge stands at the very heart of Jude's warning against the heretics (v. 4).

Jude's final charge against the heretics consists of three vices (v. 19): First, they caused schisms in the congregation—a matter of major concern to Jesus (John 17:21) and the apostles (Rom. 16:17; 1 Cor. 1:10; 11:18; Gal. 5:20; Titus 3:9–10). Scholars have suggested different reasons for the division. The most likely is that of the second vice mentioned in v. 19, namely, that they were *psychikoi* (from *psychikos*; lit., "natural" and variously translated as "sensual," "those who follow natural instincts," or "worldly"). In the NT however, a *psychikos* was placed in contrast to a "spiritual" person. The *psychikos* was an unspiritual person (see 1 Cor. 2:14; 15:46–49; James 3:15). The third vice, a development of the second, indicates that the heretics did not have the Spirit. The presence of the Spirit of God in someone's life testifies to the Christian experience (Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 6:19; 2 Cor. 4:13). The heretics were devoid of the life changing Spirit of God.

20–23

Exhortations

At the beginning of the epistle, Jude urged his readers to contend for the faith that was—once for all—delivered and entrusted to God's holy people (v. 3). From that point on to v. 19, he outlined the behavior of the heretics. Next, Jude provided positive instructions on how to contend for the faith.

The emphatic "but you" introduces a contrast between the believers and the heretics. The believers, Jude's beloved friends, are exhorted to build themselves up on their holy faith (v. 20). This construction metaphor is used throughout the NT (e.g., Rom. 15:2, 20; 1 Cor. 8:1; Eph. 2:21; 1 Thess. 5:11) to convey the exact opposite of the division promoted by false teachers (v. 19). The foundation on which the church is to be built is the "holy faith" (v. 20) given to God's people (v. 3). When Christ's followers build on this sacred foundation, their lives are holy—in contrast to the immorality resulting from the antinomian attitude of the false teachers. These individuals were devoid of the Spirit (v. 19), whereas the church is marked by the possession of the Holy Spirit.

Jude continues his catena of exhortations by urging the believers to keep themselves in the love of God. Previously, Jude told them that as God's elect they were "preserved in" or "kept for" Jesus Christ (v. 1). Now, he was exhorting them to keep themselves in the love of God. Jesus told His disciples that to abide in His love is to keep His commandment (John 15:10)—contrary to the false teachers' practice. The church is also to look for the mercy of Jesus Christ for eternal life (v. 21). The Christian hope of the Second Coming is directly linked to Christian behavior (1 Thess. 1:9–10). Hope does not lead to escapism but determines how one lives in the present age.

With vv. 22 and 23, Jude provides instruction for how to deal with those persuaded by the heretics. There is a manuscript difference in v. 22: According to some manuscripts, the last word of the verse is a participle in the nominative case, which refers to those having compassion or mercy. Jude was admonishing believers to have compassion, but in the process they were to be "making a distinction"—evidently between different cases (cf. v. 23). Other manuscripts have the participle in the accusative case, which refers to those who were doubting and who should receive the mercy and compassion of those who are in the faith. Both ideas fit with the following verse (cf. Matt. 5:7; James 1:6). They were also to save others by grabbing them and pulling them out of the fire (cf. Zech. 3:2). The fire from which some needed deliverance is most likely that of the final judgment (2 Thess. 1:7–8; 2 Pet. 3:7, 10; Rev. 20:9). Since these people needed to be snatched from the fire, the implication is that they had capitulated to the teaching of the heretics. For Jude, the possibility of apostasy was real. Care for errant members should be a key value in the life of the church (Matt. 18:15–20; 1 Cor. 5:1–5; 1 Thess. 5:14; 2 Thess. 3:6–15).

The last rescue operation concerns those whose tunics were stained/defiled by the flesh. Jude previously spoke about the "flesh" in relationship to the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah (see commentary on 5–7) and the heretics who had defiled the flesh (i.e., their bodies; v. 8). Most likely, Jude had in mind sexual immorality since this was the hallmark of the heretic's life (vv. 4–8, 10–12, 16, 18). Believers are expected to show mercy even to such individuals. However, this mercy is to be mixed with "fear" because of the contaminating power of sin. Believers in such rescue operations must be on guard against becoming defiled themselves (see Gal. 6:1).

24–25

Doxology

Jude concludes his letter in a positive manner by offering a doxology of praise to God, who is able to keep His followers from stumbling (see John 17:12). Paul expressed a similar idea when he told the Thessalonians that God would shelter them from the evil one (2 Thess. 3:3). This work of God goes together with our responsibility to keep ourselves in God's love (v. 21). While salvation is the work of God, it requires a human response.

God not only guards His children but also wants to present them faultless in His presence with great joy. The term "faultless/blameless" was used with reference to sacrificial animals, which had to be flawless (Lev. 1:3; 3:1). Through Christ's blameless sacrifice, believers have the assurance that they are counted as blameless before God (Col. 1:22; Heb. 9:14).

Praises are further lifted to Him as God our Savior. Usually, Christ is portrayed as the Savior in the NT (e.g., Luke 2:11; John 4:42; Eph. 5:23)—with some exceptions (Luke 1:47;

1 Tim. 1:1; 4:10; Titus 2:10; 2 Pet. 3:2). The OT is filled with the confession that God is the Savior (Deut. 32:15; Pss. 24:5; 25:5; 27:9). Christ is God, and the triune God—including the Holy Spirit—is involved in this salvific work (e.g., John 3:5; Titus 3:5).

It is common in doxologies to praise God's attributes of glory, majesty, dominion, authority, and power (1 Tim. 6:16; 1 Pet. 5:11) because these are attributes of God. He did not acquire them; they are His now and forever. Jude's time reference covers past, present, and future. The picture is of cosmic dimension and anticipates a time when all will praise God's glory, majesty, and power forever. This is part of the Christian hope.

PROPHECY

REVELATION

INTRODUCTION

Title and Authorship. The opening words provide the title of the book. The word "revelation" comes from the Greek word *apokalypsis* ("uncovering," "unveiling"), which is related to the modern English word "apocalypse." The title shows that the Apocalypse is from Jesus Christ and that He is the central figure of the book, which provides a description of Him and His post-Calvary ministry on behalf of His people.

The author of Revelation identifies himself simply as John (1:1–4, 9; 22:8). Although the book does not specify which John this was, the fact that he did not find it necessary to further identify himself shows that he was well-known to the original readers. The earliest Christian authors unanimously identified him as the Apostle John, the son of Zebedee (Matt. 10:2) and the author of the fourth Gospel and the three epistles bearing his name. This identification is affirmed by numerous verbal parallels between Revelation and the Gospel of John.

Date. John received the visions of Revelation while he was on Patmos, a small rocky island in the Aegean Sea southwest of Ephesus. The island was ten miles (16 km) long and six miles (10 km) wide at its widest part. Early tradition testifies that the Roman authorities banished him to this remote island because of his faithfulness to the proclamation of the gospel (Rev. 1:9). The majority of scholars today hold that the book was written around A.D. 95, near the end of the reign of Emperor Domitian. This dating is unanimously affirmed by early Christian authors such as Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, and Origen, as well as the Muratorian Canon.

Backgrounds. Revelation was originally written to the seven Christian congregations in the most populous cities of Asia Minor (Rev. 1:4, 11), which was the southwestern part of modern Turkey. At that time, Christians suffered all kinds of pressure from pagans, including opposition for their refusal to participate in pagan religious activities. Christians were accused of atheism for not participating in the worship of emperors and pagan gods. Consequently, they were threatened with losing their legal status in the city and suffered social isolation, persecution, and martyrdom. However, a more severe persecution was yet to come. The book was therefore written to encourage the Christians in those churches in the midst of their dire situations. Although the book was originally sent to the churches in Asia Minor, Revelation was not written only for them but also for all Christians throughout history.

Interpretative Approaches to Revelation. In the last several centuries, the question of how to interpret the prophecies of Revelation and apply them historically has generated much scholarly debate. Today, there are four distinct interpretative approaches to the book.

Preterism. Preterism (from Lat. *preter*, "past") as a method of interpretation places the whole significance of Revelation in the past. According to this view, the book deals exclusively with the situation of the Christian church in Asia Minor in its struggle with Rome at the time the book was written. Understood in this way, Revelation offers no predictions of the future. John wrote only about events that took place in his time or in his immediate future. The whole purpose of the book was to encourage the Christians of John's day to persevere in their faithfulness to God.

Futurism. In contrast to preterism, the futurist method interprets the prophecies of Revelation exclusively from an end-time perspective. Futurist interpreters hold that chapters 4–22 will be fulfilled shortly before the Second Coming. In other words, the prophecies of Revelation will be fulfilled in the time of the last generation of

Christians. Futurism interprets the symbols of Revelation as literally as possible. Today, this is the method of most Protestant Evangelicals.

Idealism. The idealist approach is based on preterist ideas. While recognizing that Revelation describes what was happening to the Christians in the first century, idealist interpreters contend that the book describes in vivid symbolism the ongoing struggle between good and evil that will result in God's ultimate triumph over evil. With this understanding, the book does not talk about literal events that were fulfilled in the past or that will be fulfilled in the future but generally provides guidance to every generation of Christians through its vivid symbolism. Idealism is the successor to the allegorical interpretation of the Bible that characterized the centuries-long medieval interpretation of the Scriptures.

Historicism. The historicist approach of prophetic interpretation holds that Revelation uses symbolic presentations to portray the history between the first century and the time of the end. Some prophecies of the book have been fulfilled in the past from our perspective today, some refer to the present time, and some have yet to be fulfilled. Historicism was the method of prophetic interpretation used by Protestants until the nineteenth century, when precedence was given to other interpretative approaches.

Evaluating these approaches reveals a defect in preterism: it limits the relevance of Revelation's messages to first-century Christians. Similarly, futurism limits the prophecies of Revelation exclusively to the last generation of Christians. These two methods imply that Revelation has nothing to offer the generations between John's time and the end time. However, careful analysis of the book shows that while the first three chapters primarily concern John's time (see Rev. 1:11), the focus of chapters 4–11 is on the movements and events in Christian history from the first century until the end time, and chapters 12–22 deal primarily with the events that will occur at the end time. As a result, preterism and futurism cannot reliably be used in the interpretation of the book of Revelation.

A major problem with preterism and idealism is their denial of the predictive prophecies of the book. Revelation claims to be a book of prophecy (Rev. 1:3; 22:7, 10). John the Revelator states clearly in both the introduction and conclusion of the book that its purpose is to show God's people the events that were going to take place in the future (1:1; 22:6). Any interpretative method that denies the predictive nature of the prophecies of Revelation pays no heed to the obvious claims of the book. Both preterism and idealism fail on this ground.

This leaves historicism as the only adequate approach for prophetic interpretation. Historicism sees the events predicted in Revelation as taking place both in the past and the future as well as in the centuries that lie between. This method also recognizes the spiritual applications of the book's messages. It therefore becomes evident through using the historicist approach that the messages of Revelation are relevant to all generations until the end of the age.

Organization and Structure of Revelation. Understanding the basic structure of a book helps the reader fit smaller sections into the book's overall theme and safeguards the reader against interpreting passages in isolation from the rest of the volume. Understanding the literary arrangement of Revelation helps unpack the broad meaning of the text within the context of the entire book.

At least three organizational structures may be observed in Revelation, none of which are mutually exclusive. Considered together, they unpack a wide spectrum of theological themes and motifs within the book.

Chiastic Structure. The word "chiasm" is derived from the Greek cross-shaped letter X (read as *chi*). This literary feature is used widely in the OT. While modern literary structures are typically based on an A–B–C outline, the chiastic structure is based on an A–B–A′ outline. The climax of the text is set in the center with the corresponding sections moving up to and away from it—section A parallels section A′ at the end, B to B′, until we come to the center, C. An understanding of how a chiasm works helps us discern the theological emphasis of the content of the book as intended by the inspired author. We suggest the following chiastic structure of Revelation:

A. Prologue (1:1–8)
  B. The messages to the seven churches: promises to the overcomers (1:9—3:22)
    C. The seven seals: God's work for the salvation of humanity (4:1—8:1)
      D. The seven trumpets: God's wrath mixed with mercy (8:2—11:18)
        E. The great conflict between Christ and Satan (11:19—14:20)
      D′. The seven last plagues: God's wrath unmixed with mercy (15:1—18:24)

C'. God's work for the salvation of humanity completed (19:1—21:4)
B'. The restored earth: promises to the overcomers fulfilled (21:5—22:5)
A'. Epilogue (22:6–21)

One might observe that the first half of this structure (A–D) focuses on the entire history of the Christian age while its chiastic counterparts (D'–A') focus on the time of the end. The segment at the center points to the central theological theme of the book (11:19—14:20): the great conflict between Christ and the satanic triumvirate (Satan, the sea beast, and the earth beast). This shows that the entire book was written with a focus on the Great Controversy and a special emphasis on the final conflict at the conclusion of this world's history, which includes the coming of Christ and the establishment of God's eternal kingdom.

Sanctuary Imagery. The structure of the book of Revelation also alludes to some of the sanctuary services in the OT. The book is replete with references to the temple or tabernacle and some its furniture. In this structure, Revelation falls into seven major parts, each of which is introduced with a heavenly sanctuary scene. The book pictures all divine actions on earth as a direct result of the activities in the heavenly temple:

Prologue (1:1–8)
  1. *Introductory sanctuary scene* (1:9–20)
    The messages to the seven churches (chaps. 2–3)
  2. *Introductory sanctuary scene* (chaps. 4–5)
    The seven seals (6:1—8:1)
  3. *Introductory sanctuary scene* (8:2–5)
    The seven trumpets (8:6—11:18)
  4. *Introductory sanctuary scene* (11:19)
    The wrath of the nations (12:1—15:4)
  5. *Introductory sanctuary scene* (15:5–8)
    The seven last plagues (chaps. 16–18)
  6. *Introductory sanctuary scene* (19:1–10)
    The eschatological consummation (19:11—21:1)
  7. *Introductory sanctuary scene* (21:2–8)
    The new Jerusalem (21:9—22:5)
Epilogue (22:6–21)

This sevenfold structure of Revelation reflects the daily and annual services of the earthly sanctuary and provides insight into the occurrences in the book that would otherwise be indiscernible:

1. Revelation 1:9–20. The first vision of Revelation pictures Christ in the midst of seven lampstands, wearing the garments of the high priest. The lampstands represent the seven major churches in Asia Minor in John's day. Jesus is portrayed as ministering to the churches in their needs in a way similar to the priests of the earthly temple. However, this scene does not necessarily describe the heavenly sanctuary as the whole vision is set on earth, not in heaven. The sanctuary imagery is used only to illustrate Jesus's activities on behalf of the churches as the high priest.

2. Revelation 4–5. In this vision, the scene shifts from earth to heaven (Rev. 4:1), taking place in the throne room of the heavenly temple where the Holy Place and the holy of holies are merged into one room. There are more allusions to the sanctuary and its furnishings in these two chapters than anywhere else in the book. It is in this room that John witnessed Christ's enthronement in His royal and priestly ministry, which took place at His ascension to heaven (see "Enthronement Scene," p. 1952).

3. Revelation 8:2–5. This sanctuary scene pictures an angel receiving incense, which represents the prayers of God's people, and offering it on the golden altar of incense before God. In response to the prayers, judgments in the form of fire are hurled at rebellious humanity. This scene clearly shows that intercession is taking place in the heavenly sanctuary.

4. Revelation 11:19. The heavenly temple is open in this vision, with the ark of the covenant in its innermost part, the Most Holy Place. While the sanctuary imagery shows that the events in the first half of the book were to occur in the context of Christ's mediatory ministry in the Holy Place, Revelation 11:19 points to the beginning of a new phase of Christ's ministry in the heavenly sanctuary. The book shows that before the Second Coming, judgment was to take place in heaven (14:7) to separate the faithful from those who spurn God's mercy. At the conclusion of the pre-Advent judgment, Christ will come to reward every person according to his or her deeds.

5. Revelation 15:5–8. At the conclusion of the proclamation of the end-time gospel (14:6–20), the temple in heaven is presented as being filled with God's glory, so that no one is able to enter to receive forgiveness (see 1 Kin. 8:10–11). This is the conclusion of Christ's mediatory ministry in the heavenly sanctuary, as the destiny of every person has been decided and there is no more need for intercession.

6. Revelation 19:1–10. A scene of jubilant rejoicing over the destruction of end-time Babylon is seen next. Although the entire scene takes place in the heavenly temple (cf. Rev. 4–5), no reference to the temple and its furnishings is made because the heavenly temple has lost its function as the place of intercession. Christ's mediatory ministry on behalf of human beings no longer takes place there.

7. Revelation 21:2–8. The last sanctuary scene brings the reader back to earth. John saw that there is no temple in the new Jerusalem because the abiding presence of God makes it a city-temple (21:22). The earthly sanctuary was the place where God symbolically dwelled among His people, but on the new earth, there will no longer be a need for a temple as a symbol of God's presence because God will be literally present with His people in the new Jerusalem for all eternity.

The sequence of these introductory sanctuary scenes reveals the line of progression of the heavenly sanctuary services, beginning with the inauguration and continuing with the phases of intercession, judgment, the close of intercession, and the absence of priestly activities. The sequence concludes with the actualization of God's literal presence with His people in the new Jerusalem.

1. Revelation 1:12–20	Earth
2. Revelation 4–5 Inauguration	
3. Revelation 8:3–5 Intercession	↑
4. Revelation 11:19 Judgment	Heaven
5. Revelation 15:5–8 Cessation	↓
6. Revelation 19:1–10 Absence	
7. Revelation 21:2—22:5	Earth

The structure of Revelation, which is based on the daily and yearly pattern of the earthly sanctuary, helps us locate the key visions of the book within history. It points to Revelation 11:19 as a dividing line between the historical and end-time sections of Revelation. While the first half of the book focuses primarily on the Christian age, the second half focuses primarily on the time of the end. This suggests that the visions of the seven seals and the seven trumpets, which fall in the first half, span Christian history, while the seven last plagues, which are in the second half, will take place at the time of the end.

Threefold Structure. Apart from the prologue (1:1–8) and the epilogue (21:6—22:21), the main body of Revelation falls into three distinct parts: (1) the messages to the seven churches (1:9—3:22), which primarily address the specific problematic situations the seven main churches in Asia Minor were facing in John's day but also represent seven distinct church eras; (2) the historical section (4:1—11:18) that focuses primarily on the sweep of history from the first century until the time of the end (first with the seals and then with the trumpets); and (3) the eschatological section (11:19—22:5) that focuses primarily on the time of the end and the events leading up to the coming of Christ, the eternal destruction of Satan, and the establishment of God's kingdom. These divisions are related to the three periods of history from the book's perspective: John's time, the Christian age, and the time of the end.

Theology. Revelation has been appropriately placed at the end of the NT. In this book, "all the books of the Bible meet and end" (AA 585). The overarching theme of Revelation is that God has redeemed us through the Lamb, will defeat the forces of evil, and will establish His everlasting kingdom. The elements of theology within this theme are (1) God; (2) the Great Controversy; (3) salvation; (4) the people of God; and (5) eschatology.

1. God. In Revelation, God is revealed as a Trinity working on behalf of human beings (1:4–6; 4–5). While united in purpose and activity, the three divine Beings are distinct in personality. The first Person of the Godhead is the Father, referred to as the Eternal One (1:4, 8; 4:8; 16:5). The phrase often translated as "who is and who was and who is to come" (1:4, 8) is most likely a reference to the divine name Yahweh (Ex. 3:14) and denotes the eternal existence of God in terms of the past, present, and future. He is the Alpha and the Omega, which are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, the Beginning and the End (Rev. 1:8; 21:6). God is the Creator and Sustainer of heaven and earth and of all things in them (4:11; 10:6; 14:7). He is also the sovereign Ruler over all creation—His throne is mentioned more than forty times in the book.

He is the Lord God Almighty (*pantokratōr*; 4:8; 11:17; 21:22), a title that refers to His omnipotence; as such, He is the only one to be worshiped (14:7; 15:4). Lastly, He is the Judge; the whole world is to stand before His throne in judgment (20:11–15).

The second Person of the Godhead is Jesus Christ. Several titles are used in reference to Him, including the Son of Man (1:13), "the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David" (5:5), the "Offspring of David" and the "Morning Star" (22:16), the "Word of God" (19:13), and the Lord of lords and King of kings (17:14). However, Christ's most prominent title is the Lamb (5:6; 13:8), which appears twenty-eight times in the book and points to His sacrificial death on behalf of all human beings. In Revelation, Jesus Christ has all the OT characteristics of God. His equality with the Father is explicit: He is "the Alpha and the Omega" and "the Beginning and the End" (22:13), titles applied to the Father (1:8; 21:6); He is "the First and the Last" (1:17; 22:13), a title claimed by God alone in the OT (Is. 44:6; 48:12); and He is the Beginning, Ruler, and Originator of God's creation (Rev. 3:14) in that it began with Him. In addition, Jesus and the Father are presented as being worshiped equally (5:13–14; 7:9–10; cf. 19:10, where only God is worshiped); they both express wrath (6:16); they jointly claim the heavenly throne (22:1, 3); and they both share the kingdom (11:15). This sets Christ apart from other beings in the universe, a point that is furthered by the fact that He took the form of a servant (Phil. 2:7) and became the God-man, the Davidic Messiah (5:5; 22:16) who, by virtue of His sacrificial death and resurrection, has provided for the redemption of humanity (1:17–18; 5:9–10). At His ascension, He was inaugurated into his royal and priestly ministry in the heavenly sanctuary (chap. 5), and at the end of history, He will come as the Divine Warrior to wage the final war against the forces of evil (19:11–21) and establish God's eternal kingdom.

The third Person of the Godhead is the Holy Spirit. He is symbolically referred to as the seven spirits of God (1:4; 3:1; 4:5; 5:6), an expression that refers to the universality and fullness of the Spirit's activity in the world, seven being a number of fullness. The Holy Spirit communicated the visions of Revelation to John (1:10; 4:2; 17:3; 21:10) and conveyed Christ's messages to the churches through him (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22; 14:13; 22:17).

2. *The Great Controversy*. In Revelation, the earth is portrayed as the arena of the great cosmic conflict between God and Satan. This conflict originated in heaven with the usurper, named the devil and Satan (12:9), the serpent (12:9; 20:2) of Genesis 3:15, and the archenemy of God and His people (12:10). The key issue of the conflict concerns who the real ruler of the universe is. In Revelation, Satan is a real enemy and his existence is undeniable. He and his evil forces stand behind all the evil in the world, and his activities on earth intensify at the end of time. In the final conflict, Satan finds two allies in an attempt to achieve his goal: the sea beast (13:1–10) and the earth beast (13:11–18). With the key issue in the final drama related to worship and God's law, the people on earth are identified as either the worshipers of the true God or the followers and worshipers of Satan. The final conflict will once and forever resolve the question of God's right to rule over His creation. God's people are in the midst of the conflict, looking forward to the coming of the Lord as their only hope of ultimate deliverance. This end-time conflict will result in God's triumph over Satan and his forces and the establishment of God's everlasting kingdom.

Three-Part, Seven-Vision Outline

	John's Day	Historical Section		Eschatological Section			
Vision Number	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
Vision Subject	Church	Throne room/seals	Trumpets	Wrath of the nations	Fall of Babylon	End of conflict	New earth
Passage	**1:9—3:22**	**4:1—8:1**	**8:2—11:18**	**11:19—15:4**	**15:5—18:24**	**19:1—21:1**	**21:2—22:5**
Introductory Sanctuary Scene	1:9-20	4:1—5:14	8:2-5	11:19	15:5-8	19:1-10	21:2-8
Basic Prophetic Description	History 2:1—3:22	History 6:1—8:1	History 8:6—11:18	End time 11:19—15:4	End time 16:1—18:24	End time 19:11—21:1	End time 21:9—22:5
				Judgment			
			Intercession		Cessation		
		Inauguration				Absence	
	Earth						Earth

3. *Salvation*. Revelation recognizes the existence of sin in the world. The book agrees with the four Gospels that the salvation of fallen humanity was accomplished by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ on the cross and His defeat of Satan (1:5–6; 5:9–10; 7:10), but it goes one step further. After His ascension, Jesus was inaugurated into His post-Calvary ministry on behalf of His people as King and Priest, and this divine inauguration marked Satan's permanent expulsion from heaven (12:7–12). The only hope for God's people to gain victory over sin is found in the blood of the Lamb (7:14; 12:11) and in Jesus's ministry on their behalf in the heavenly sanctuary. Entrance into God's kingdom is granted on the condition of total obedience and loyalty to God, but the righteous deeds of the saved are a direct result of divine activity in their lives (7:14; 19:8). All those who spurn God's gift of salvation and refuse to repent become the prey of demonic forces (9:4; 13:3; 14) and will share in the destiny of Satan and his evil servants.

4. *The People of God*. While in Revelation this world is in a state of rebellion against God, He has faithful people who choose to follow and obey Him. They are referred to as servants of God (7:3), saints or God's holy people (e.g., 11:18; 13:7; 14:12; 17:6; 18:24), the wife or bride of the Lamb (19:7), a kingdom of priests (1:6; 5:10), the followers of the Lamb (14:4), and the remnant (12:17), among other things. They are comprised of people from all tribes, tongues or languages, peoples, and nations (5:9), and they are regularly portrayed as being with Christ in heavenly places (14:1–5; 15:1–4), unlike the wicked, who are regularly referred to as the earth's inhabitants. God's people appear as targets of oppression and persecution in a hostile world (6:9–11; 11:7; 12:13–17). The people of God have strengths and weaknesses, yet they are presented as the victorious people of God. The purpose of the book is to instruct them on how to remain faithful and obedient to Christ as they wait for the future to unfold. Throughout history, God's people have been portrayed as a faithful woman, which is a symbol of the true church (chap. 12). However, Revelation presents this faithful woman as turning at the time of the end into a deceptive prostitute, siding with Satan (17:1–6). God's faithful people then appear as the remnant, which is comprised of those who follow God's principles and who have placed their faith in Jesus (12:17; 14:12). These faithful followers are commissioned to preach the end-time gospel to the world (10:8–11; 11:3–14; 14:3–12). The book concludes with a glorious picture of the long-awaited union of Christ and His people at the Second Coming, metaphorically portrayed as a wedding in the new Jerusalem (19:7–9; 21:9).

5. *Eschatology*. The entire book of Revelation is written from the perspective of the end time and the establishment of God's kingdom. While the first half of the book portrays the spiritual struggles of the church in the world throughout the seven Christian ages, the fundamental focus of chapters 11–22 is on Satan's end-time activities in the world and God's subsequent response to them. This section depicts Satan working to seduce the people in the world (chap. 13). At that time, a final proclamation of the end-time gospel will go throughout the world (14:6–13), resulting in a great separation between those on God's side and those on Satan's side (14:14–20). Following that, the wicked will experience the results of their choices in the outpouring of the seven last plagues (chaps. 15–16). The book concludes with God's ultimate triumph over Satan and his evil forces (chaps. 17–20) and the establishment of God's everlasting kingdom (chaps. 21–22). All these things are revealed to God's people so that they will be ready for what will happen and will not be taken by surprise.

Literary Features. Revelation portrays the broad sweep of history while maintaining a focus on the conclusion of world history and

God's triumph over evil. The contents of the book were communicated to John in symbolic presentations (1:1–2) that appealed to the first-century readers of the book, who would have been familiar with the symbolic language of biblical and Jewish apocalyptic literature after which Revelation is styled. The contents of the book are saturated with scenes and images from the OT, which necessitates a good working knowledge of the OT for proper interpretation. Revelation is a Christian book at the center of which is Christ's saving work. It is only in Christ that the messages of Revelation receive their ultimate meaning and significance.

COMMENTARY

1:1–8

PROLOGUE

The prologue of Revelation provides a general summary of the whole book. It states how and for what purpose the book was written and defines the book's main themes.

1:1–3

Introduction

After providing the title of the book, this section explains how Revelation was transmitted from Christ via John to the churches and concludes with a blessing. The opening statement generates the title of the book. The Greek word translated as "revelation" is *apokalypsis*, literally meaning "uncovering" or "unveiling." In the NT, it is used exclusively for divine revelation (Rom. 16:25; Eph. 3:5). The opening phrase shows that Revelation both came from Jesus Christ and is about Him, decidedly establishing Christ as the central figure of the book (Rev. 1:8; 22:13).

The purpose of the book of Revelation is to show the things that would soon occur (see 22:6). In the Greek, the words used here are an allusion to Daniel 2:28 (LXX) and to Jesus's apocalyptic discourse on the Mount of Olives (Matt. 24:6). Elsewhere in Revelation, the end is referred to as being near (22:7, 12, 20). With the death of Jesus on the cross at Calvary, the history of this world has entered the beginning of the end, and the end has been increasingly near for every generation since. John specifies that the future events were "signified" or "made known" to him by Christ. The Greek word *sēmainō* means "to show by means of a symbol," and in the NT, this word is used for figurative presentations of a future event (John 21:19; Acts 11:28). It also appears in Daniel 2:45 (LXX) where Daniel explains to King Nebuchadnezzar that God had shown the king what would take place in the future by means of a symbol (i.e., the statue made of gold, silver, bronze, and iron). The visions of Revelation were thus shown to John in figurative or symbolic presentations, and this calls for a symbolic interpretation of the majority of the book.

The content of Revelation is described as the word of God because, like all prophetic messages in the OT (Jer. 1:2; Hos. 1:1; Joel 1:1; Zech. 1:1), it originated with God. It is also described as the testimony of Jesus Christ because Jesus communicated it to John in vision. In Revelation 19:10, the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy. Revelation thus originated with God since Christ communicated it to John as His testimony and John passed it on to God's people as the words of prophecy (see 1:3).

We find the first of seven beatitudes in v. 3. It promises blessings to its reader (cf. Luke 11:28), who is the person who reads Revelation ("the words of this prophecy") to the church and makes it understandable. Those who hear are the assembled congregation listening to the reading. While reading and hearing are important, the full blessing is promised to those who heed the messages of the book, for "the time is near" (Rev. 1:3).

1:4–6

Trinitarian Greeting

John's opening address to the seven churches in Asia (v. 4) is reminiscent of the opening statement in some of Paul's letters (1 Cor. 1:1–2; Phil. 1:1). This shows that Revelation is a letter that was written in prophetic style and was originally sent to the local Christian congregations in western Asia Minor, located in modern-day Turkey. Yet, while originally sent to those who lived in the past, the book is also written for all Christians throughout history. The greeting formula containing grace and peace was a common one in the early church (cf. Rom. 1:7; 1 Pet. 1:2). It was a combination of two well-known addresses: the Greek *charis* and the Hebrew *shalom*. It encapsulates the idea that it is because of God's grace that His people enjoy peace—with God, with others, and with themselves.

The suppliers of grace and peace are the three members of the Godhead, the first of whom is God the Father. The description of Him as the Eternal One who is, who was, and who is to come is a reference to the divine name Yahweh (1:4; cf. Ex. 3:14) and denotes the eternal existence of God in terms of the past, present, and future. The reference to the seven spirits of God is a symbolic way of declaring the Holy Spirit to be the second member of the Godhead (v. 4). The phrase describes the fullness of His work in the seven churches, seven being a number of fullness.

The third member of the Godhead is identified by name: Jesus Christ (v. 5). He is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. These three titles refer to Jesus's death, resurrection, and heavenly reign, respectively. The OT background of these titles is Psalm 89:27, 37 (LXX), where the Davidic king is referred to as Yahweh's firstborn, the most exalted king, reigning as the faithful witness. These three titles introduce Jesus as the fulfillment of all OT messianic hopes and longings.

Having described who Jesus is, John next writes about what Jesus did. His three titles correspond to Christ's three activities on His people's behalf: He loved us, He died on the cross for us, and He "washed" or "freed" us (there is only one letter difference in Greek between "washed" and "freed") from our sins through His own blood and raised us to the status of kings and priests (v. 5; see Rev. 5:9–10). Once again, Revelation alludes to the history of Israel recorded in the OT: because God loved Israel (Deut. 7:6–8), He delivered them from Egyptian slavery and promised them that they would be a kingdom of priests on earth (Ex. 19:5–6). All these promises, originally given to Israel, are, in the NT, applied to the Israel of faith (1 Pet. 2:9–10).

1:7–8

The Keynote of the Book

The prologue concludes with the keynote of the book: the Christian hope, the return of Christ in power and glory. John describes it by employing wording from Daniel 7:13, which says "Coming with the clouds"; Zechariah 12:10, where mourning for the One they pierced is mentioned; and Jesus's speech on the Mount of Olives: "Coming on the clouds" and "all . . . of the earth will mourn" (Matt. 24:30). In this way, John wanted us to understand that the personal and literal coming of Christ is rooted in biblical prophecy and in Jesus's promise to come again. Revelation points here to a special resurrection of certain persons just before Christ returns (cf. Dan. 12:2). John wrote that Christ is coming (1:7). In the NT, Christ referred to His coming with the phrase "I am coming" rather than "I will come." The prophetic present tense refers to the future event as already occurring, which affirms the certainty of Christ's promise to come again. This certainty is further established with the Greek words *nai* and *amēn*, the first of which is an affirmative word ("yes," "certainly") and the second the Greek transliteration of the Hebrew word *amēn*. The combination of these two words expresses an emphatic affirmation. This certainty of Christ's return is reaffirmed at the conclusion of the book (22:20).

The concluding words of the prologue are those of self-identification (v. 8; see also 22:13). Alpha is the first letter and Omega the last letter of the Greek alphabet, so the phrase in v. 8 is akin to saying "I am from A to Z." It affirms that Christ is the One who is eternal and powerful (see also 4:8; 11:17), and it assures the readers that Christ's return is as certain as His integrity and His ability to do what He says. The promise to come again is given by the same God who has kept all of His promises in the past, so we can rest in the certainty that this one will be fulfilled as well.

1:9—3:22

MESSAGES TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES

The first major division of the book consists of two parts: John's vision of the glorified Christ (1:9–20) and the messages to the seven churches (chaps. 2–3).

1:9–20

Vision of the Glorified Christ

This introductory vision to the seven churches describes the circumstances in which John had his visionary encounter with the glorified Christ, who commissioned him to record the things he was about to witness and pass them on to the seven churches.

1:9. Place and Circumstances. John wrote Revelation without formally introducing himself to the original readers. The self-designation "I, John" shows that he and the Christians in Asia knew each other. Other early Christian authors unanimously identify him as the Apostle John, son of Zebedee and author of the fourth Gospel (Matt. 10:2). John's self-identification is reminiscent of "I, Daniel," which occurs regularly in the prophetic section of the book of Daniel

(Dan. 8:15, 27; 9:2; 10:2, 7; 12:5). This shows that Revelation builds on the book of Daniel and that together the books appear to be like a two-volume set.

John further affirmed his relationship with the Christians in Asia by identifying himself as their brother and fellow participant in suffering. The Greek word *thlipsis* denotes a situation in which someone is under pressure that crushes, and in this instance, the word describes the suffering of the Christians in Asia as a result of their faithfulness to Christ. John himself went through such tribulation on Patmos, a barren, rocky island in the Aegean Sea some fifty miles (80 km) from Ephesus. Early Christian authors testify that the Romans used it, along with other islands in the area, as a penal colony for political offenders. John was banished there because of his faithful preaching of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ (see Rev. 1:1–2).

1:10. Time. John states that he was taken in a vision "in the Spirit," as he does elsewhere in the book (4:2; 17:3; 21:10). He says this to let his readers know that the messages of Revelation are not a product of human will but a record of what was revealed to him in vision by the Holy Spirit (2 Pet. 1:20–21).

The vision took place on "the Lord's Day," an enigmatic phrase that has occasioned several views of what the Lord's Day is. Although later in history it became associated with Sunday, the Bible indicates that the Lord's Day is the seventh-day Sabbath (Ex. 31:13; Is. 58:13; Ezek. 20:12). In addition, Jesus pointed to Himself as Lord of the Sabbath (Mark 2:28). Together, these two facts show that John was taken into vision on the seventh day of the week, the Sabbath. Another day the Bible refers to as the Lord's day is the eschatological "day of the Lord" mentioned often in both the OT (Is. 13:6–13; Amos 5:18–20; Zeph. 1:14) and NT (1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Pet. 3:10). Since the Sabbath in the Bible has eschatological significance (Is. 58:13–14), it is quite possible that John used the expression "the Lord's Day" to show that he was taken in the vision on the Sabbath to witness the events leading up to the eschatological day of the Lord (see Rev. 1:7). Such an understanding is consistent with the portrayal of the final events in Revelation, in which the Sabbath will have central significance in the end-time drama (see Rev. 14:7).

1:11–16. Vision of Christ. While in vision, John heard the voice of Christ, which sounded to him like a trumpet. In the Bible, a trumpet-like voice represents the voice of God (Ex. 19:16). The voice instructed John to record the things he was about to witness in vision and to send them to the seven churches located in the major cities of the Roman province of Asia at the end of the first century: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos/Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. In John's day, there were more than seven churches in Asia, including those in Colossae, Troas, and Hierapolis. That only these seven were chosen shows their universal significance due to the symbolism of seven being a number of fullness. Thus, those churches represent the Christian church as a whole throughout history.

In the vision, John saw Christ in the midst of seven golden lampstands, each of which stood with a lamp at the top. Later, Christ explained that these lampstands symbolize the seven churches (1:20). In the Israelite temple, the lampstand provided light (1 Kin. 7:49), representing God's plan for Israel to be His light-bearing witness to world (Is. 42:6–7; 60:1–3). Such is the role of the church in the world today (Matt. 5:14–16; Phil. 2:15).

John saw Christ dressed in a garment that went down to the feet with a golden band around His chest, which was the attire of the high priest in the OT (Ex. 28:6–28). The daily task of a priest in the Jerusalem temple was to keep the lamps in the Holy Place burning brightly. He would trim and refill the lamps that were waning and would replace the wick on the lamps that had gone out, refill them with fresh oil, and relight them (Ex. 30:7–8). In the context of this temple background, Christ appeared in the role of a priest performing the daily services and ministering to the churches by helping them in their needs. He has full knowledge of the spiritual conditions and needs of each church.

The exalted Christ appeared like the Son of Man, which is a way of saying "like a human being." This title was Jesus's favorite self-designation (Matt. 26:45; Mark 13:26) and is a direct allusion to Daniel 7:13. John's portrayal of Christ mirrors the description of the manlike divine figure in Daniel 10:5–12 and combines it with some of the OT characteristics of God.

The use of the word "like" points to the metaphoric meaning of Christ's descriptions. Christ's hair was white like wool (v. 14), just as the hair of the Ancient of Days in Daniel was (7:9), signifying wisdom and experience (cf. Job 15:10; Prov. 20:29). His eyes were like flames, denoting His ability to penetrate the innermost secrets of the human heart (Rev. 2:18, 23). His feet were like bronze, symbolizing stability and strength (v. 15; Ezek. 1:7), and the sound of His voice was like many waters, representing the powerful voice of God (Ezek. 43:2). Jesus was also equipped with a sharp sword coming out of His mouth (Rev. 1:16; Heb. 4:12), and in the vision, He appeared and acted in the full authority of God. Finally, His face was like the shining sun in all its brilliance (v. 16), just as the divine being's face was in Daniel's vision (Dan. 10:6), and it indicated Jesus's exaltation (Matt. 17:2). All of these clearly show that in this humanlike figure, John recognized the glorified Lord with all of His divine characteristics and prerogatives.

These divine characteristics are recorded in the opening section of the message to the seven churches. As such, they are connected to the particular situations of the churches, to each of which Jesus was to come as the One who could relate to their peculiar circumstances and needs.

1:17–20. John's Encounter with Christ. Having seen Christ in His glory, John collapsed at His feet in awe (v. 17), just as he had done on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17:6–7). This is the common reaction of a person in the presence of God's glory (Josh. 5:14; Matt. 28:9). Christ's reassuring words in v. 17, "Do not be afraid," are in the present imperative in Greek, indicating the action is already in progress—Jesus told John to stop being afraid, just as He had often stated before (Matt. 17:7; 28:10; John 6:20).

By referring to Himself as "the First and the Last" in v. 17, Jesus assumed the title of the God of the OT (Is. 44:6; 48:12). This title points to the divinity of Jesus. The Greek word for "last" is *eschatos*, from which the word "eschatology" comes. This shows that the focus of eschatology in Revelation is not end-time events but Jesus Christ and His presence with His people. Revelation presents Him as having the last word regarding the final events; He is the Living One, in possession of the keys of death and Hades. Keys are a symbol of power and authority. Christ has conquered death by experiencing it and returning to life. God's people need not fear death any longer, because death and Hades, referring to the abode of the dead, are under His control.

Christ commissioned John to record the things shown to him in vision (vv. 11, 19). They are categorized into three groups in v. 19: what he had seen, which refers to the vision of the exalted Christ (1:1–18); what was present, referring to the messages addressing the current situations in the seven churches in Asia (chaps. 2–3); and what would happen after that (see 4:1), which refers to the prophecies regarding what would occur throughout history until the time of the end.

In the conclusion of His words to John, Christ makes an interposed explanation regarding the meaning of the stars in His hand (v. 16) and the seven lampstands (vv. 13, 20). The stars are the angels of the seven churches. In the Bible, the word "angel" can figuratively refer to persons in God's service since, in the Greek, it simply means "messenger" and thus does not refer to heavenly beings alone (Mal. 2:7; 3:1; Matt. 11:10). John's text regarding the angels most likely indicates the respective leaders in the seven churches. Christ held those leaders in His hand as His chosen instruments in the service of the churches, which are symbolized by the seven lampstands that stood with Christ in their midst. Christ gave to John a special message for each of the seven churches (see "The Seven Churches: Application and Organization," p. 1942).

All seven messages have the same organizational structure. Each begins with an address to the "angel" of the church in question followed by an introduction from Jesus. Then the messages outline Jesus's appraisal of the church and give His counsel and warning to it. Finally, each message concludes with an appeal to hear the Spirit and the promises to the overcomers.

2:1–7

Message to the Church in Ephesus

2:1a. Address. The first church that Jesus addressed was in Ephesus (modern-day Selçuk, Turkey), the capital city of the province of Asia. With a population of about a quarter of a million people, Ephesus was an important political, commercial, and religious center. In the city, there were two temples devoted to the worship of the emperor and about fifteen temples devoted to different deities. The grand temple of Artemis attracted multitudes of pilgrims each year for the annual Artemisia festivals. A thriving silversmith business was associated with the temple and contributed to the city's wealth (Acts 19:24–27). It was simultaneously a treasury and a refuge for fleeing criminals while it also played a vital role in community life. The city was famous for magical practices and arts (Acts 19:19) and was notorious for immorality and superstition, yet an influential Christian church was located there. Established by Paul during his three years of ministry in the city (Acts 19), the church grew rapidly and soon became an important center of early Christianity. At the time Revelation was written, the church was still strong in faith. The city was most likely the residence of John prior to and after his exile.

2:1b–4. Description of Christ and Appraisal of the Church. Christ introduced Himself to the church in Ephesus as the One who walks among the seven gold lampstands and who holds the seven stars in His right hand. The Ephesians were given an assurance of Christ's firm presence in the church and His knowledge of their situation and needs when He commended them for having worked hard and demonstrated patient endurance for the sake of the gospel in spite of living in a pagan environment. Despite the external pressure, they had not grown weary and had stood firm in the face of persecution. The church was doctrinally sound and the members did not tolerate evil in their midst. They had tested false apostles and did not tolerate their false teachings (see v. 6).

However, Jesus rebuked the members of this hardworking and faithful church for not continuing to love as they had in the beginning. In their early days, the Ephesians were known for their faithfulness and love (Eph. 1:15), but several decades later, that love had started to fade, just like Israel before the Exile (Jer. 2:2). As the Ephesians emphasized sound doctrine and good works, their love for Christ and their fellow members began to wane. Their works were orthodox, but in the absence of love, they had little value (cf. 1 Cor. 13). Throughout history, Christians have often found themselves torn between strict religious observance and expressing love and compassion. The message to the church in Ephesus is a perennial warning to all Christians whose primary concern is doing right. Christians must always keep in mind the central theme of the gospel: the love of God.

The Seven Churches: Application and Organization

Was John speaking only to the seven churches of Asia Minor, or are these messages of prophetic value to the Christian church throughout history? We suggest that the content of the messages has three potential applications.

1. Historical Application. The seven messages were originally sent to the churches in Asia Minor to help them address the challenges of the pagan environments that were threatening the Christian faith in the first century. It is therefore of the utmost importance to discover how these messages applied to the Christians to whom they were originally sent.

2. Universal Application. Although they were originally written to the churches in Asia Minor, the seven messages speak equally to all Christians in any time and place and have spiritual lessons that can strengthen our relationships with our risen Lord in our journeys of hope.

3. Prophetic Application. The fact that Revelation is a prophetic book (1:3) points to the prophetic significance of these messages. The spiritual conditions of the seven churches correspond remarkably well to the spiritual conditions of Christianity at different points in time. The seven messages were thus intended to provide a panoramic view of Christianity from the first century until the time of the end from heaven's perspective. (See below, "Christian Epochs: Seven Lampstands," which shows the positions of those who divide the messages in terms of historical periods.)

Christian Epochs: Seven Lampstands

Lampstand Church Name	Church Era Characteristic	Suggested Dates
Ephesus	Loveless	(ca. A.D. 31–100)
Smyrna	Persecuted	(ca. A.D. 100–313)
Pergamos	Compromising	(ca. A.D. 313–538)
Thyatira	Corrupt	(ca. A.D. 538–1517)
Sardis	Spiritually dead	(ca. A.D. 1517–1755)
Philadelphia	Faithful	(ca. A.D. 1755–1844)
Laodicea	Lukewarm	(ca. A.D. 1844–End)

2:5–7. Exhortation and Promise. Jesus urged the church, listing three imperatives: First, the Ephesians were to consider (lit., "remember") how far they had fallen (v. 5). The Greek text reads "keep remembering." They had not forgotten the relationship they once had with Christ, but they were failing to keep it in mind in their daily interactions with others. By recalling the ardent love for Christ and for each other they had had when they first accepted the gospel, the members would realize their present spiritual condition. Then it was necessary that they repent (v. 5), which, in the Bible, denotes a radical turnaround in one's life. Jesus called the Ephesians to turn away from their present condition and return to God. Finally, they had to return to doing the works they had done in the beginning (v. 5). Jesus did not urge them to love to the detriment of doing good works. In fact, the revitalization of their first love would result in good works. If the Ephesians would return to their first devotion for Christ, there would be an overflow of love for others. If the church did not reflect the love of God, it would lose the very reason for its existence. Its lampstand would be removed from its place by Jesus.

Christ commended the church for resisting the practices of the Nicolaitans in particular (v. 6). Some early Christian authors have identified the Nicolaitans as followers of Nicolas of Antioch, one of the seven deacons of the Jerusalem church (Acts 6:5) who later fell into heresy. They advocated conformity to pagan practices in order to avoid the discomfort of persecution. In the message to the church in Pergamum (variously translated Pergamos), the Nicolaitans are linked to another heretical group, the Balaamites (Rev. 2:14–15). Several decades earlier, Paul warned the Ephesians of the upcoming apostasy in their midst (Acts 20:29–30), and this prediction was partially fulfilled. However, the church had not yielded to the perverse doctrines of these false teachers, making every effort to preserve the purity of the gospel.

The situation in the Ephesian church aptly corresponds to the general situation and spiritual condition of the church in the first century, beginning with Christ's ascension and enthronement and ending around the beginning of the second century. The early church was characterized by love and faithfulness to the gospel, but by the time John wrote the book of Revelation, the church had begun to lose the fire of its first love, slowly departing from the simplicity and purity of the gospel.

The overcomers in the church were promised the chance to eat from the tree of life in the paradise of God (v. 7). After Adam and Eve sinned, they were forbidden to eat from the tree of life, but those in Ephesus who remained faithful would be allowed to eat from the tree in the restored Garden of Eden (22:2).

2:8–11

Message to the Church in Smyrna

2:8a. Address. The city of Smyrna (modern-day Izmir, Turkey) was situated about thirty-five miles (56 km) northwest of Ephesus. With a population of some two hundred thousand residents, the city rivaled Ephesus in importance. Its trade, surrounding fertile area, and location on the major crossroad to Phrygia and Lydia that formed an important trade route between Greece and Asia made Smyrna a wealthy city. The city was well known for its science and medicine industries, for its famous stadium and library, and for having the largest public theater in the province. Its wealth and exceptional beauty brought the city a reputation of being the "glory" of Asia. Smyrna's special relationship with Rome earned the city many privileges, including the honor of building a temple to honor Tiberius. This made Smyrna a center of emperor worship, which was compulsory for all citizens. An act of loyalty, it was a civic duty for all citizens to go to the temple once a year and burn incense before the statue of the emperor and proclaim, "Caesar is Lord!" The person then received a certificate that allowed him or her to hold a job or conduct business. Those who refused to comply faced persecution and death. Because the Christians in Smyrna didn't participate in emperor worship and other pagan rituals, they faced persecution, the loss of their legal status, and even martyrdom.

2:8b–9. Description of Christ and Appraisal of the Church. Christ introduced Himself to this church as the First and the Last, the One who died and came back to life. These characteristics of Jesus correspond to the situation of the Christians in Smyrna who were going through the hardship of persecution. Jesus understood their situation because He was persecuted to the point of death. He knew the labor and difficulties they faced (Gr. *thlipsis*, "affliction," "tribulation," denoting a pressure that crushes; v. 9) and knew their poverty as well (Gr. *ptōcheia*, denoting extreme poverty). Their poverty was related to the persecution they were experiencing. Because of their loyalty to Christ, many members were ostracized and lost their jobs, some suffered imprisonment, and some even martyrdom. However, in spite of their poverty in material goods, the Smyrnians were rich in grace and faith.

Jesus also mentioned the slander of those who claimed to be Jews but who, in reality, were not. Toward the end of the first century, the Jews in Smyrna faced difficulties with the local officials. Since the Romans often identified early Christians as Jews—most of them were Jews—and that brought the ostracization of being a Christian, non-Christian Jews disassociated themselves from Christians by slandering them before the local authorities. Although they considered themselves to be the synagogue of God, these false Jews actually constituted "a synagogue of Satan" (v. 9) because they sought to harm God's people.

2:10–11. Exhortation and Promise. The Christians in Smyrna were in constant fear of the future. Jesus gently admonished them not to fear when He used the present imperative, which showed that the situation was already in progress: "Stop being afraid!" They were about to experience more serious trials and imprisonment for a period of ten days, similar to the ten days of testing that Daniel and his friends endured in Babylon (Dan. 1:12–15). Jesus urged them to remain faithful even to the point of death. If they did, He would give them the crown of life, the crown of victory (Gr. *stephanos*, denoting the garland given to the winner of the ancient Olympic Games). The crown Jesus promised the faithful in Smyrna is eternal life, and it will be given at the Second Coming (2 Tim. 4:8; James 1:12).

The experience of the church in Smyrna coincides with the severe persecution of Christians throughout the Roman Empire during the second and third centuries and is sometimes called the Age of Martyrdom, the end of which corresponds to the end date of the Diocletian persecution. The "ten days" (2:10) mentioned in the message could be prophetically applied to the notorious persecution initiated by Diocletian and continued (A.D. 303–313) under his successor, Galerius. In this understanding, the church in Smyrna could represent the period in church history beginning in the second century and ending in A.D. 313, when Constantine the Great issued the Edict of Milan and granted Christians religious freedom. The overcomers in Smyrna were promised that they would not be hurt by the second death (v. 11). Physical death is a temporary sleep, and, as such, it is not a final tragedy. The hope of the resurrection overcomes the terror of death. It is the second, eternal death, from which there will be no resurrection, that should be feared (Matt. 10:28).

2:12–17

Message to the Church in Pergamos

2:12a. Address. The city of Pergamos or Pergamum (modern-day Bergama, Turkey), which was about forty-eight miles (77 km) northeast of Smyrna, served as the capital city of the province of Asia for more than two and a half centuries. It was a center of intellectual life in the Hellenistic world, a fact exemplified by its library of nearly two hundred thousand volumes that was the world's largest after the one in Alexandria. The city was also famous for its magnificent temples dedicated to pagan gods. On the acropolis of the city stood the remarkable altar of Zeus, the central portion of which is now exhibited in the Pergamum Museum in Berlin. Near the city stood the immense shrine of Asclepius, the Greek god of healing who was also called "the Savior" and who was represented by a serpent, an emblem retained by the modern medical profession. People came from all over the world to the shrine of Asclepius to be healed. Pergamum was also the first city in Asia to embrace emperor worship, a practice that was compulsory as in Smyrna. Once a year, the citizens were obliged to offer incense before the statue of the emperor and proclaim, "Caesar is Lord."

These things created a difficult situation for the Christians in Pergamum. They were surrounded by paganism and its splendid temples and lived in a climate hostile to their faith. They constantly witnessed the smoke rising from the altar of Zeus that was located above the city and dominated the entire area. They would have heard stories of the miraculous healings at the Asclepeion (the ancient Greek temple dedicated to Asclepius) circulating at a time when Christian miracles were less common. The city was indeed the place Satan's throne was located (2:13).

2:12b–15. Description of Christ and Appraisal of the Church. Jesus introduced Himself to the Christians in Pergamum as the One with the sharp, double-edged sword. The Roman governor in Pergamum had the right to put a person to death, known as the right of the sword. No doubt he used that power against the Christians. However, Jesus assured the church that He alone

has the ultimate power over life and death. A human being may claim that power, but the last word belongs to Him. Jesus knew that the Christians in Pergamum lived in the city where Satan dwelled and had situated his throne (v. 13)—in other words, at the very headquarters of Satan's activities—yet most of them remained unwavering in their faithfulness to Christ. They were ostracized for not condoning emperor worship and for not respecting pagan gods and practices. Antipas, a prominent Christian in the church, was even put to death by the Roman authorities for his refusal to comply.

However, there were some who compromised their Christianity with pagan practices, referred to as the Nicolaitans (v. 15) and the ones who adhered to the teachings of Balaam (v. 14). The fact that these two groups are mentioned together suggests that they were related. Just as Balaam seduced the Israelites on the way to the promised land (Num. 31:16), these people were encouraging their fellow Christians to compromise regarding pagan practices—to eat food sacrificed to idols and to commit sexual immorality. While the church in Ephesus staunchly resisted their teachings (see Rev. 2:6), these false teachers clearly won some supporters in the church in Pergamum.

2:16–17. Exhortation and Promise. Jesus encouraged the church members not to compromise their faith with pagan practices. He exhorted them to repent. If they did not turn away from their current course, Christ would come to fight against them with the sword of His mouth (v. 16). As Balaam and those he had seduced were killed by the sword (Num. 31:8), a similar judgment would visit these false teachers. The only way for the Christians in Pergamum to avoid the impending judgment was to make a decisive turnaround in their relationship with Christ.

The church of Pergamum aptly represents the situation of the Christian church during the period following the ending of the Diocletian persecution and preceding the issuing of the Edict of Milan. Just as Christianity finally persevered in its struggle against paganism, many in the church went the way of compromise. Although many remained unwavering and faithful to the gospel, the fourth through sixth centuries witnessed spiritual decline and apostasy as the church wrestled with the temptation of compromise.

The overcomers in Pergamum who refused to participate in pagan practices were promised the chance to eat the hidden manna, the food of angels (v. 17; Ps. 78:25). Due to their refusal to participate in emperor worship, they were deprived of the certificates with their names on them issued by the Roman governor. In the place of a temporal certificate, Jesus promised them a white stone with a new name engraved on it that would entitle them to special privileges that surpassed any pleasure of pagan life.

2:18–29

Message to the Church in Thyatira

2:18a. Address. Thyatira (modern-day Akhisar, Turkey), located about thirty-eight miles (61 km) southeast of Pergamum, was the smallest and least important of the seven cities addressed in Revelation. It had no political importance or cultural significance, though the city was known for many trades. Lydia, the purple fabrics dealer in Philippi and the first Christian convert in Europe, was from Thyatira (Acts 16:14). Unlike the well-situated residents of the previous three cities, the residents of Thyatira were mainly poor laborers and tradespeople. In order to run a business or hold a job, a person had to belong to a trade guild, each of which had a patron god. Guild members were expected to attend the guild festivals that honored the patron god, at which participants became drunk, shared a common meal in the temple that included meat sacrificed to the patron god, and often engaged in immoral activities with temple prostitutes at the festival's end. A refusal to participate in these festivals resulted in expulsion from the trade guilds, which further resulted in the hardships of social isolation and economic sanctions. The danger to the Christians in this city came directly from these trade guilds, because they could not join them without participating in the guild festivals.

2:18b–23. Description of Christ and Appraisal of the Church. Christ introduced Himself to this church as the Son of God, whose eyes blazed as fire and whose feet shone like polished bronze. While Jesus appeared to John as a Son of Man (1:13), He came as the Son of God to the church in Thyatira. His flaming eyes denoted His penetrating ability to see into the innermost part (see Rev. 2:23), and His feet, which looked like exquisite brass, symbolized His uncompromising stance against the seductive influences that affected the church.

Jesus described Thyatira as a loving, faithful, service-oriented, and persevering church. Unlike the church in Ephesus, whose love was fading, this church is noted for an increase in faith and love, their later endeavors being more than their first ones (v. 19). In the Bible, love and faith go together (Gal. 5:6; Eph. 1:15; 1 Thess. 3:6). Furthermore, service is an outcome of love (1 Thess. 1:3) and perseverance a product of faith (Col. 1:23; 2 Thess. 1:3–4).

The problem was that the church tolerated the teaching of an influential woman in their midst. Jesus names her Jezebel, after the notorious wife of King Ahab who led all Israel into apostasy (1 Kin. 16:31–33). This woman claimed to be a prophetess who had a direct message from God saying it was fine for Christians to engage in sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols in order to avoid social isolation from the trade guilds (v. 20). Her influence led many in the church into compromise and apostasy.

Jezebel is referred to as a spiritual harlot because of her seductive advocacy for compromise with paganism, such as engaging in sexual immorality. All those who condoned her teachings were committing spiritual adultery with her (v. 22). Jesus used such severe language because He wanted to impress on the Christians' minds the gravity of their actions. Since harlots' activities take place in bed, the bed was the place where Jezebel and those in adulterous relationships with her would be judged. If they did not repent, Jesus would throw them together into terrible suffering. A similar fate would come on Jezebel's offspring, who would follow in her footsteps.

God's judgment on Jezebel was designed to demonstrate to all the churches that Christ is the One who searches minds (the seat of intelligence) and hearts (the seat of emotions) and that God alone possesses that ability (Jer. 17:10). With his penetrating flame-like eyes (see Rev. 2:18), Christ is able to see what is in human hearts; and as an impartial judge, He will give to each according to his or her works.

2:24–29. Exhortation and Promise. Not all members of the church sided with Jezebel; there was a remnant that refused to become familiar with the deep things of Satan. Jezebel offered the members arcane teachings, and her teachings were diabolically deep. In the OT, the phrase "to know" denotes an experiential knowledge; as such, it is used here to refer to sexual relations (Gen. 4:1; 19:5). This remnant had not been involved in spiritual adultery with Jezebel in exchange for a chance to experience the depth of Satan's deceptive teachings. Jesus promised to place on them no other burden than to hold firmly to what they had received thus far (vv. 24–25).

The situation in the church in Thyatira applies to the condition of the church at large during the Middle Ages. The danger to the church did not come from outside but from those within who claimed to receive their authority from God. During that period, tradition replaced the Bible, a human priesthood and sacred relics replaced Christ's priesthood, and works were regarded as meritorious. Those who did not condone the corrupting influences of the institutional church experienced severe persecution and even death.

Jesus promised a share in His victory to the ones in Thyatira who would remain faithful to Him. He would give them dominion over the nations (v. 26), just as He had received authority from the Father (v. 27). He would also give them "the morning star" (v. 28), which is a symbol of Jesus Christ Himself (22:16). In other words, Jesus promised the greatest gift to those who would remain faithful: Himself.

3:1–6

Message to the Church in Sardis

3:1a. Address. The city of Sardis (modern-day Sart, Turkey), which was about thirty miles (48 km) southeast of Thyatira, had a splendid history. Some six centuries prior to the book of Revelation, Sardis had been one of the greatest cities in the ancient world. It was the capital of the kingdom of Lydia, ruled by the wealthy Croesus until he was defeated by Cyrus of Persia. By the Roman period, the city had lost its prestige in the ancient world. While continuing to enjoy prosperity and wealth, the city's glory and pride was rooted in its past history rather than in its present reality. It was known as a trading center for the wool, dyeing, and garment-making industries, providing its residents with a luxurious lifestyle. The city's patron deity was the goddess Cybele, whose temple hosted eunuch priests. The goddess was believed to possess the special power of restoring the dead to life.

The city was built on the peak of a steep hill. Due to its location, it was a natural citadel, as it was accessible by only one route and was therefore easy to defend. As a result, the citizens were so overconfident in their safety that the city walls were guarded carelessly, if at all. The city was captured by surprise twice, first by Cyrus the Persian (549 B.C.) and later by Antiochus III (218 B.C.). On both occasions, enemy soldiers climbed the precipice at night and found that the Sardinians had not posted a guard on the walls. The city was taken and destroyed because

of the overconfidence of its citizens and the failure of the guards to keep watch.

3:1b–1c. Description of Christ and Appraisal of the Church. Jesus introduced Himself to the church in Sardis as the One who had the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. He came to the members of this church with the fullness of the Holy Spirit to awaken them from their lifeless slumber. The church in Sardis received only a rebuke from Jesus. The members were not blamed for specific sins or heresy but for being lifeless. Its reputation claimed that it was alive, but in reality, it was spiritually dead. Their works did not measure up to God's standard; He found them lacking and imperfect (v. 2). Their underlying issue was spiritual complacency and lethargy. Their compromise with the pagan environment had killed their spiritual life and their ability or motivation to witness for the gospel.

3:2–6. Exhortation and Promise. Jesus exhorted the Christians in Sardis to be alert and to strengthen those who still had some life in them but were about to die (v. 2). Like the Ephesians, they needed to remember what they had received and heard, namely, the gospel in the beginning of their Christian experience, and to cling to it and repent (v. 3). This would result in turning from their present lethargic condition and experiencing a new beginning in their relationship with Christ. However, Jesus warned that if they did not wake up and keep watch in their spiritual lives, He would come unexpectedly to them in judgment, like a thief. Their destiny was to mirror the past history of the city: as Sardis was unexpectedly conquered twice because of a lack of vigilance, so Christ would visit the church in unanticipated judgment of its spiritual lethargy.

There were some Christians in Sardis who were still unwavering in their faithfulness to Christ and who had avoided compromising with paganism (v. 4). However, they were a minority group in the church and even they were dying (see v. 2). Jesus promised that they would walk with Him dressed in white clothes, for they were worthy (see 7:9). The white robes they would receive correlate to their faithfulness to Christ.

The message to the church in Sardis corresponds to the condition of the church in two periods of time: the Reformation and especially the post-Reformation era known as Protestant scholasticism. The vibrant generation of Reformers rediscovered the gospel that had been forgotten during the medieval period and put the Bible into the hands of the people, rejuvenating Christianity. Unfortunately, once the Reformers passed away, lifeless formalism began to invade the church. The Reformers' successors became overly involved in doctrinal polemics and controversies, gradually degenerating into a state of spiritual lethargy. Under the influence of the rising tide of rationalism and secularism, focus on the saving grace of the gospel and commitment to Christ waned, giving way to rationalism and theological arguments. The church at this period, although appearing to be alive, was in reality spiritually dead.

Jesus promised that the overcomers in the church would be dressed in white clothes (3:5), which reaffirms the promise made in the previous verse. Those who would keep their garments undefiled from the pagan environment would walk with Jesus in white robes. Jesus also promised not to erase their names from the Book of Life but to acknowledge their names before the Father and His angels (v. 5; cf. Matt. 10:32).

3:7–13

Message to the Church in Philadelphia

3:7a. Address. The city of Philadelphia (modern-day Alasehir, Turkey) was located about twenty-five miles (40 km) southeast of Sardis and was the youngest of the seven cities mentioned in Revelation. The city was founded by Attalus II Philadelphus, the king of Pergamum, who named the city Philadelphia ("brotherly love") after the love he had for his younger brother Eumenes II. The city stood on the imperial trade road that connected all parts east of the province with all parts west of it. From its foundation, it was intended to serve as a missionary city for promoting the Greek language and culture to the area of Lydia and Phrygia.

3:7b–10. Description of Christ and Appraisal of the Church. Jesus presented Himself to the church in Philadelphia as He who is holy and true (v. 7). The Holy One is a reference to God in the OT (Is. 43:15; Hab. 3:3), and Jesus is the True One (see Rev. 19:11). The church may therefore rely on Him completely. Jesus also declared that He had the key of David; when He opens a door, no one can shut it, and when He shuts a door, no one can open it. This description of Jesus goes back to Isaiah 22:22, which talks about Eliakim, king Hezekiah's chief steward, who was entrusted with the key of the royal palace and thus exercised the full authority of the king. Jesus presented Himself to the church as the One with full authority and access to the heavenly storehouse. This is why He is able to make great promises to His people.

The church in Philadelphia did not receive any rebuke from Jesus. He declared that He knew the members' works: they had kept His word and had not denied His name (v. 8). Like the Christians in Smyrna, they suffered from Jewish opposition. Even though these Jews claimed that they were serving God, Jesus identified them as actually belonging to the synagogue of Satan (3:9; cf. 2:8–9). However, Jesus assured the church that He was already dealing with its opponents. The day was coming when those who harmed the Christians would be forced to admit that God was with them. Although faithful, the church in Philadelphia had little strength (v. 8). Similar to the situation of the church in Sardis, the appealing influence of the pagan environment had greatly impacted Christians' spiritual lives. Yet as weak as they were, Christ promised to set before them an open door of opportunities that no one could shut (v. 8). Because they had consistently kept His command to persevere in their eyes, Jesus promised to preserve them during the "hour of trial" that would come to test everyone dwelling on the earth (v. 10), which in Revelation is a code for the wicked. This time of trials was to be God's judgments of the seven last plagues (chaps. 15–16). Jesus promised to be with His faithful people and to protect them during this time of tribulation.

The church in Philadelphia coincides with the condition of Christianity during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This period was characterized by a great revival of Protestantism. Various movements, often identified as the First and Second Great Awakenings (including the Wesleys' Methodist and Millerite movements), revitalized genuine faith in the saving grace of Christ that resulted in restoring the spirit of Christian fellowship and self-sacrifice. The church of this period was driven by a genuine desire to carry the gospel to the whole world. As a result, there was a great proclamation of the gospel as never before experienced in Christian history.

3:10–13. Exhortation and Promise. Jesus, who is coming soon, exhorted the Philadelphians to hold on to what they had, meaning the spark of faithfulness that was still burning, so that no one, whether people or Satan himself, could take their crown (*stephanos*, "the crown of victory"; see Rev. 2:10). Jesus promised that overcomers would be permanent pillars in the temple in the new Jerusalem with the names of God, the new Jerusalem, and Christ on them. Pillars in the earthly temple provided stability and permanence, and in the NT, they are a symbol of the church (1 Tim. 3:15). Promised to always be in God's presence, the faithful would serve God in His temple and He would dwell among them (Rev. 7:15).

3:14–22

Message to the Church in Laodicea

3:14a. Address. The city of Laodicea (modern-day Eskihisar, Turkey) was located about forty miles (64 km) southeast of Philadelphia. It was situated near the cities of Hierapolis and Colossae on the major trade route between Ephesus and Syria. Because of its favorable location, the city came to be one of the greatest commercial and financial centers of the ancient world. Laodicea was enormously wealthy due to its clothing manufacturing industry, its banking transactions, and its status as a great banking center where an enormous quantity of gold was stored. It was also famous for its medical school, which was renowned throughout the ancient world for its treatment of eye diseases by means of an ointment made from "Phrygian powder" mixed with oil.

The commercial, financial, and industrial prosperity filled the wealthy residents of Laodicea with a spirit of pride. When the city was devastated by an earthquake around A.D. 60, its residents proudly refused imperial help and rebuilt the city using their own resources. However, for all its prosperity, the city had a great problem with water. Aqueducts that stretched for many miles supplied the city with water from the hot springs near Hierapolis and probably Colossae. The latter was known for its cold mountain water; but by the time the water reached the city, it would have become lukewarm in the aqueduct.

3:14b–17. Description of Christ and Appraisal of the Church. Jesus presented Himself to the church in Laodicea as the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, and the Ruler and Originator of God's creation (v. 14). The word "amen" comes from Hebrew and means "in truth." In the OT, God is called true (Heb. *'amen*; Is. 65:16), which relates to how Christ's discerning testimony exposed the true condition of the church in Laodicea. His ability to create out of nothing was the only hope for this half-hearted and lukewarm church.

The Laodicean church was in such poor condition that Jesus had nothing positive to say about it. The members were not charged with a specific sin, apostasy, or heresy, but no other church received such a rebuke. Jesus likened their condition to the city's water supply. They were neither cold nor hot, but lukewarm. As such, Jesus warned that He was about to spew them from His mouth (v. 16). The proud spirit of the city had pervaded the members of the church; they reflected the complacency of the city that prided itself on its accomplishments and wealth. They viewed themselves as being rich and in need of nothing (v. 17), regarding their wealth as divine favor just as Ephraim did in the OT (Hos. 12:8). In contrast to the Christians in Smyrna, who were materially poor but spiritually rich, the Laodiceans were wealthy and yet wretched, miserably pitiful, poor, blind, and naked (Gr. *ptōchos*, denoting extreme poverty). The irony is that they lived in a city famous for eye salve while they remained spiritually blind. Their pride prevented them from seeing themselves as they truly were.

3:18–22. Exhortation and Promise. Jesus counseled the church to buy three things from Him: First, He offered gold refined in the fire (v. 18), which symbolized a proven faith that could last until the end (1 Pet. 1:7) and would make the Laodiceans truly rich. Second, Jesus offered them white garments to cover their wretched condition, symbolizing salvation (Is. 61:10; Rev. 7:9–10). To be dressed in white and clean garments means to be in a right relationship with God (Rev. 3:4–5). Third, Jesus offered them salve to anoint their eyes, so that they might see their true spiritual condition (Eph. 1:18). That Jesus gave them the opportunity to buy all these things from Him shows that it was necessary for the Laodiceans to give up their pride and complacency in order to receive riches from Christ.

However, Christ was not giving up on this church. As bad as they were, He loved the Laodiceans. However, this love was expressed through rebuke and discipline (v. 19), since God disciplines us so that we will not be condemned along with the world (1 Cor. 11:32; cf. Prov. 3:12). Christ made every effort to make this church realize its condition and break the chains of self-sufficiency that held it down. The only escape for the Laodiceans was through genuine repentance: turning away from their complacency and making a fresh start.

Jesus concluded His appeal to this church by depicting Himself standing at the door and knocking, a picture that mirrors the lover in the Song of Songs as he knocked at the door of his beloved and pleaded with her to let him in (Song 5:2–6). The whole church had been admonished up to this point, but here, Jesus began addressing individuals in the church. All those who would open the door and welcome Him in would have an intimate, loving dinner with Him, an act that refers to an intimate relationship.

The church in Laodicea represents the spiritual condition of the church today. Furthermore, the strong verbal links with the warning given in Revelation 16:15 shows that the message to the church in Laodicea represents the church at the time of the end. This last church exists in a peculiar time of great political, religious, and secular upheavals and faces unique challenges, yet it is self-sufficient and lukewarm, struggling with its authenticity. Christ's warning to this church has a far-reaching implication for all in the church at the close of this earth's history.

Jesus promised to share His throne with the overcomers in the church just as He overcame and shared His Father's throne (v. 21). It is particularly significant that while the number of promises to the other churches increased in proportion to their spiritual decline, Laodicea was given only one promise. However, this promise incorporates all of the promises given to the churches, since it ensures permanent union with Christ in the presence of the Father.

4:1—8:1

THE SEVEN SEALS

Chapter 4 begins a new section of Revelation as the scene shifts from earth to heaven and from John's day to a near and distant future (4:1). There is also a shift in language. While the seven messages are written in straightforward language with which the meaning of the infrequently used symbols can generally be easily understood, from this point on, the book employs complex symbolic language reminiscent of Jewish apocalyptic literature. The section begins with a vision of the heavenly throne room (4:1—5:14), followed by the opening of the first six seals (6:1–17). Before the seventh seal is opened (8:1), there is an interposed description of the sealing of the saints (7:1–17).

4:1–11

The Heavenly Throne Room

This scene has been interpreted in different ways throughout the years. The view set forth here corresponds well with the imagery and language used by John and the overall message of the book of Revelation. Before the future history was revealed to John, he was given a glimpse of Christ's inauguration into His post-resurrection ministry in heaven. Revelation 4–5 thus provides heaven's perspective on the meaning of the future events recorded in the book.

4:1–3. A Door into the Heavenly Throne Room. John was transported in vision to heaven, where he saw a door standing open. The trumpet-like voice of Jesus (see commentary on Rev. 1:9–20) invited him to come up, so that he could be shown what would happen after the time of the seven churches (see 1:19). Having witnessed the situation in the church of his day, John was then to be shown the panoramic survey of history from his time until Christ's return. Through that door, John was able to look into the heavenly temple. What first caught his attention was the majestic throne on which God the Father sat. John did not attempt to describe God, focusing instead on His radiant glory. Paul reminds us that God dwells in unapproachable light (1 Tim. 6:16), and the OT speaks often of the splendid glory surrounding the Father (Ps. 104:2; Ezek. 1:26–28), which is impossible to capture in human language. John described it in terms of the dazzling glow of precious stones: jasper, sardius (carnelian or ruby), and emerald (Rev. 4:3). In the ancient world, these three stones were considered to be representative in nature. Exodus refers to sardius and jasper as the first and last stones on the breastplate of the high priest, representing Reuben as the eldest and Benjamin as the youngest of Jacob's sons. The emerald was the fourth stone on the breastplate, representing Judah (Ex. 28:17–21).

The flashing brilliance of the precious stones produced a rainbow that surrounded the throne, similar to the one Ezekiel witnessed in a vision centuries earlier (Ezek. 1:28). The rainbow functions as the sign of God's covenant (Gen. 9:12–17). The precious stones and the rainbow are intended to provide an assurance of God's covenant promise to His people and of His faithfulness to that promise.

4:4. The Twenty-Four Elders. John saw twenty-four other thrones, with twenty-four elders sitting on them, arranged in a circle around God's throne. They were all clothed in white robes and wore crowns of gold. The identity of these elders is a matter of discussion. Some consider them to be heavenly beings, while others consider them to be human beings. The description of the elders suggests that they are probably human beings—glorified saints (see below, "Identity of the Twenty-Four Elders"). In the vision, they were part of the heavenly council that was meeting to participate in Christ's enthronement ceremony.

Identity of the Twenty-Four Elders

While the possibility that the elders were heavenly figures who had representative functions as members of the heavenly council cannot be excluded completely, there are several arguments for identifying them as glorified human beings. First, the title "elders" in the Bible is used always for humans. They sat on thrones, as human overcomers are promised (Rev. 3:21), in contrast to angels, who always stand in God's presence. They appeared in the vision wearing white robes, the attire of God's faithful people (3:4–5; 6:11; 7:9). The crowns on their heads were the victory crowns (Gr. *stephanoi*) reserved exclusively for the victorious saints (2:10; 3:11). John presents their symbolic number as consisting of two sets of twelve. He later depicts the new Jerusalem as having twelve gates named after the twelve tribes of Israel and twelve foundations named after the twelve apostles (21:12–14). The twenty-four elders in the vision could thus represent God's people from both the OT and the NT, the church in its totality.

In the OT temple, there were twenty-four divisions of priests who took turns in the temple services (1 Chr. 24:4–19). Each division had a "leader" (1 Chr. 24:4), and in Jewish tradition, these chief priests were called "elders." Throughout Revelation, the activities of the twenty-four elders are presented as continuous worship (Rev. 5:8–10; 19:4), resembling the work of the priests in the earthly temple.

The twenty-four elders had never before been mentioned in any biblical record of visions of the throne of God. This indicates that when John saw them, they were a new group who had not previously been present in the heavenly throne room. They must have arrived shortly before the scene was set up. If the view that they were humans is correct, then they were most likely the ones raised from the dead at the time of Jesus's death (Matt. 27:51–53). Paul states that when Jesus ascended to heaven, He took a host with Him (Eph. 4:8). It is therefore possible that the twenty-four elders ascended with Jesus as the representatives of humanity, to witness God's fairness in His actions and to participate in the heavenly judgment. Here, in the vision, they were ushered into the heavenly throne room to witness the exaltation of Christ to the heavenly throne at the right hand of the Father.

4:5–6a. The Throne of God. The throne was central to everything that took place in the scene; it is featured seventeen times in chapters 4–5, and everything in the throne room is portrayed in relation to the throne: around the throne (4:3, 4, 6; 5:11), from the throne (4:5), in front of the throne (4:5–6, 10), or in the midst or center of the throne (4:6; 5:6). The centrality of the throne in the vision is fundamental to the theology of the entire scene. The throne of God represents His ruling authority over the universe—an authority that is challenged by a usurping enemy power (13:2; 16:10). The central issue in the ongoing conflict between God and Satan is who has the right to rule. Revelation 4–5 portrays a decisive event in that conflict: the exaltation of Christ to the heavenly throne as a result of His sacrificial death on the cross of Calvary.

The account presents lightning flashes, rumbling voices, and thunderclaps from the throne that accentuate the splendor of the occasion. The scene evokes the memory of the presence of God giving of the law at Mount Sinai (Ex. 19:16; 20:18) when Israel, having been rescued from Egypt, was inaugurated as the people of God, "a kingdom of priests" (19:4–6). In a similar fashion, John observed Christ, as the slain Lamb (5:6), having redeemed humanity by His blood, receiving the sealed scroll from God and inaugurating the redeemed into a royal priesthood (Rev. 5:9–10).

Before the throne were seven lamps of fire that symbolized the Holy Spirit as the second member of the Godhead. The reference to the seven spirits of God denotes the fullness and universality of the work of the Holy Spirit in the church (1:4) and the world (5:6), as seven is a number of fullness. John also saw before the throne a flat expanse that appeared to him like a sea of glass (cf. Ex. 24:10; Ezek. 1:22).

4:6b–7. The Four Living Creatures. On each side of the throne there were "four living creatures" that faced the four directions of the universe. Their appearance resembled the heavenly beings in Ezekiel's vision of the throne of God (Ezek. 1:5–14; 10:12–15), in which the four living creatures are identified as cherubs (10:20–22) that have four faces and four wings each (1:6). In Revelation, they are identified as having six wings (Rev. 4:8) like the seraphs in Isaiah's vision (Is. 6:2).

The four living beings were therefore the exalted angels who serve God as His agents and as the guardians of His throne, as is evidenced in how the Bible often portrays God as sitting on the throne between the cherubim (2 Kin. 19:15; Ps. 80:1; 99:1; Is. 37:16). The depiction of the four living creatures in Revelation is symbolic. Their wings (Rev. 4:8) point to their swiftness in carrying out God's orders, and their eyes represent their intelligence and discernment. Their appearances in terms of a lion, a calf (Gr. *moschos*, variously translated "ox"), a man, and a flying eagle represent the entire order of creation. Revelation presents them as constantly leading the heavenly hosts in praising God (4:8–9; 5:8–9; 7:11–12; 19:4) and being involved in the execution of God's judgments on the earth (6:1, 3, 5, 7; 15:7).

4:8–11. Heavenly Worship. John next describes the heavenly liturgy in the throne room. He saw that it started with the acclamation of praises by the four exalted angels (v. 8), who echoed the praises of the seraphim in Isaiah's vision (Is. 6:1–3). The threefold repetition of "holy" emphasizes God's holiness and omnipotence as manifested in the past, the present, and the future. John presents their praise as being followed on every occasion by the response of the twenty-four elders (v. 11), who fall to the ground and lay their crowns before the throne, honoring God as Creator and Lord who has all power, honor, and glory. With their praise, the elders recognized God as the Creator of all things to whom every created being owes its life.

John also presents their praise as emphatically stressing Christ's act of redemption (5:8–10), which is in accordance with the fact that the worship scene in Revelation 4–5 points to two things: creation (chap. 4) and redemption (chap. 5). In short, it shows that the essence of true worship is to recount and celebrate God's mighty acts of creation and redemption. God, who created the world, also has the power and ability to restore it by providing eternal salvation for lost humanity.

Revelation 4:8–10 suggests that what John saw is something that occurs regularly in heaven (v. 9) and was not a singular event that took place at a specific point in time. Furthermore, the OT visions of God often show Him seated on His throne and being worshiped by countless heavenly beings (Is. 6:1–3; Ezek. 1:22–28; Dan. 7:9–10). However, the scene in chapter 4 is preparation for the splendid occasion that occurs in the following chapter.

5:1–14
The Enthronement of Christ

Revelation 5 continues the throne room scene of the vision as the heavenly worship suddenly stops and the focus of the heavenly assembly in its entirety turns back toward the heavenly throne. Some Adventist interpreters argue that Revelation 5 describes a judgment scene. The interpretation offered here is based on a close examination of the biblical text in its literary context, the structure of the whole book, and the OT history behind the scene.

Enthronement Scene

Revelation 5 describes one of the most significant events in the history of the Great Controversy: Christ's enthronement and inauguration into His post-Calvary ministry as our King and Priest in the heavenly sanctuary after His ascension to heaven. This whole scene was described according to the enthronement of the kings of Israel in the OT. The Israelite kings were required, at their enthronement, to provide for themselves a scroll of the law, the covenant scroll, to read and obey (Deut. 17:18–20). In later Israelite history, the covenant scroll was presented to the newly crowned king as the royal emblem, as was the case for King Joash (2 Kin. 11:12). After taking the scroll, the newly crowned king would sit on the throne and begin his reign.

The possession of the covenant scroll and the ability to open and read it demonstrated the king's right to rule. Placed before the royal throne, the scroll functioned as the constitution of the kingdom and provided instructions for the life of the nation. It also specified the covenant terms and conditions of God's promises to His people. The king was to read it regularly, obey it, and educate the people regarding its contents. In this role, the Israelite king was the covenant mediator and guardian of God's law in the land. After the Babylonian exile, the Jews no longer had a king from the line of David on the throne in Jerusalem. People hoped and longed for the coming of the Messiah, who would be from the Davidic line and who would sit on the throne of Israel and rule with justice (Jer. 23:5–6; Ezek. 37:24–28).

The seven-sealed scroll of Revelation 5 is symbolically comparable to the covenant scroll of the law that was handed to the Israelite kings at their enthronement. To take it symbolized the right to sit on the throne and reign. To unfold the scroll meant to unfold God's plan of salvation for fallen humanity. Jesus, as God, was worthy of sitting on the throne in heaven at the right hand of the Father and, as the eschatological Sovereign, of bringing the history of sin on this planet to an end.

The sealed scroll that symbolized the plan of salvation, also known as the covenant book, was here handed to the triumphant Christ, the long-awaited messianic King of Davidic lineage. In this scenario, by taking His seat on the throne at the right hand of the Father (Ps. 110:1) along with the scroll, Christ was made the rightful King of the earth. What was lost with Adam has now been regained. All authority and sovereignty were given to Christ (Matt. 28:18), who will be coronated on the earth after the Millennium in the sight of all the righteous and wicked (immediately prior to the final and permanent destruction of the wicked), so that what happened in heaven in A.D. 31 (i.e., Jesus's enthronement and subsequent sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost) will be affirmed before earth's inhabitants.

As Jesus was inaugurated into His post-Calvary ministry, fallen human beings were given free access to God through Him. The work of the Holy Spirit is now unlimited in applying Christ's victorious death to the lives of human beings and to announcing God's kingdom throughout the earth. By Christ receiving the scroll, the destiny of all humanity was placed into His hands. His ability to break the seals and open the scroll entitle Him to carry out the plan of salvation to its ultimate realization. While earlier in the book, the Holy Spirit is presented as being regularly before the throne (1:4; 4:5), here we see Him sent out into the earth. This activity correlates with the enthronement of Christ after His ascension to heaven ten days before Pentecost (Acts 2:32–36). When Jesus was enthroned at the right hand of the Father, the Holy Spirit descended on the disciples in fulfillment of the promise Jesus had made to them.

5:1. The Seven-Sealed Scroll. John next noticed a scroll lying on the throne at the right hand of God. The attention of the heavenly assembly was focused on it. The Greek word *biblion* denotes a scroll rather than a codex (see Rev. 6:14), and the Greek text *epi tēn dexian* clearly shows that the scroll was not "in" the right hand of God, as various Bible translations suggest, but at the right hand of God. The person who would take the scroll was supposed to take His place on the throne.

The scroll is described as an opisthograph, a document with text on both sides. As such, it evokes the imagery of the two tablets with text on both sides that Moses brought down from Sinai (Ex. 32:15) as well as the scroll Ezekiel saw in vision that contained the impending judgments against Israel (Ezek. 2:9–10). These similarities suggest that the scroll of Revelation 5 was related to a prophetic revelation of the future and God's covenant with His people.

The scroll is described as being sealed with seven seals. In ancient times, to protect a document from tampering, the scroll was rolled up and tied with a cord and the seal was impressed on blobs of clay or wax over the knots. In John's day, the practice of sealing documents with more than one seal was not uncommon. The sealed scroll could not be opened nor its contents disclosed until all of the seals were broken by an authorized person. The scroll in Revelation 5 was sealed for the obvious purpose of concealing its contents.

The act of sealing in Daniel and Revelation denotes a concealment of God's revelation until the appointed time (Dan. 12:4, 9; Rev. 10:4). Revelation 10:7 shows that the meaning of the sealed scroll is related to the concept of "the mystery of God" regarding God's purpose in solving the problem of sin, saving fallen humanity, and establishing His eternal kingdom. The sealed scroll functions as a symbolic reference to the divine plan of salvation. It would be officially unsealed on the breaking of the seventh seal (8:1) at the sound of the seventh trumpet (11:15) at the Second Coming, when the plan of salvation would be consummated (see commentary on Rev. 10:1–11).

5:2–4. The Crisis in the Throne Room. In John's vision, a mighty angel challenged the assembly by asking who was worthy to open the scroll and break its seals (v. 2). In order to take the scroll from the throne, open it, and read its contents, the worthy one must have unique qualifications. In John's day, "worthiness" denoted distinctive qualifications based on outstanding achievements. In Revelation 4:11, the twenty-four elders' responsive proclamation to the angel's challenge stated that only God is worthy to reign over the universe on the basis of His creative power. Thus, the taking and opening of the scroll required the unique qualification of divinity. No created being in the universe fulfills such a qualification.

This lack of worthiness caused John great sorrow and he cried many tears (v. 4). His weeping represents the tears of all God's people, from Adam to the conclusion of the Great Controversy and the end of time. Humanity became lost and hopeless at the Fall. The sealed scroll contained the record of the cosmic conflict and its resolution. Since only the slain Lamb could open the scroll (vv. 6–14), the act of breaking the seals was tied to the plan of salvation; once opened, God's plan for the salvation of fallen humanity could be explained and consummated.

5:5–6. Worthiness of Christ. The fact that the elder declared Jesus to be "the Lion of the tribe of Judah" (v. 5) is significant because it refers to what Jesus did as king: He conquered. Furthermore, Jesus was fully qualified to take the scroll and reign on the throne because of who He is. The expression "the Root of David" is used in the OT to refer to the promise of the coming Messiah, the Anointed One, who would be worthy of sitting on the throne of David and of ruling over God's people and would thus have come from the tribe of Judah and the lineage of David.

When John turned to see the Lion, however, he saw a living slain Lamb instead. While the figure of the Lion refers to what Jesus did, the figure of the Lamb shows how He did it: His sacrificial death on the cross. Christ's victory on the cross made Him eligible to take the scroll of the covenant, break its seals, and share the heavenly throne with the Father (3:21).

Christ the Lamb is described as having seven horns and seven eyes. Seven is the number of fullness. The seven horns denote Jesus's full authority to rule over the universe and take the scroll, and the seven eyes signify the fullness of His discernment and intelligence that allow Him to read and instruct His people. These two sevens are particularly significant in light of the fact that the scroll was sealed with seven seals. The seven horns and eyes are believed to be the seven spirits of God that were sent out into all the earth and that denote the fullness of the activity of the Holy Spirit in the world.

5:7–14. The Enthronement of Christ. Christ the Lamb, following the manner and tradition of the Israelite kings, took the scroll. The four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before Him in worship as in Revelation 4:9–10, exclaiming, "You are worthy to take the scroll," so as to open its seals as the One who was slain (5:9). By this act, the exalted angels, the living creatures, and the elders validated Christ's sacrifice on behalf of humanity. By His blood, He paid the ransom for fallen human beings all over the world and redeemed them for God, giving them a kingdom and priesthood (5:9–10). While the former two were accomplished on the cross, the latter will be realized at the Second Coming of Christ (20:4–6).

By taking the scroll, Christ was made the rightful King over His creation. John saw that the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders were joined by the countless angelic hosts in surrounding the throne and addressing royal praises to the newly enthroned King (5:11–12). After this, all creation in heaven and on earth joined together in offering royal adoration to both the Father and Christ (v. 13). The fact that this praise was offered to both the Father and Christ shows that they were jointly seated as co-rulers on the heavenly throne (3:21). The praise of the heavenly beings was met with an "amen" (meaning "truly"; v. 14) by the four living creatures and the prostration of the twenty-four elders, thus confirming the truth of their joint rulership.

As with the seven churches (chaps. 2–3), there is also a general correlation between the seven seals and different epochs in Christian history. The breaking of the seals began with the enthronement of Christ at Pentecost in A.D. 31 and will end with the Second Coming. Chapter 6 thus encompasses the history of the Christian church from the first century until the return of Christ.

Understanding the Seals

The events triggered by the breaking of the seven seals must be understood in the context of the OT covenant curses described in terms of sword, famine, plagues, and wild animals (Lev. 26:21–26). In Ezekiel, they are referred to as God's four judgments (Ezek. 14:21), and in Jeremiah, four kinds of destruction (Jer. 15:2–3). These plagues were the disciplinary judgments by which God chastised His people when they became unfaithful to the covenant. There are some minor differences in the interpretation of the seals among Adventist historicists. What is set forth here is a biblically viable interpretation simultaneously acknowledging that others may understand the events somewhat differently.

There is also a close correlation between the seven seals and Jesus's apocalyptic discourse on the Mount of Olives, in which Jesus explained to the disciples what would happen throughout history, up to the end (Matt. 24). The parallels between the seals and Matthew 24 suggest that the seven seals are the means by which God keeps His people on the right track by reminding them of the reality of Christ's return. The seals are opened in the throne room in chapters 4 and 5 and thus continue the established theme in which the seals can be opened only by the slain Lamb. In this way, the opening of each seal is tied to both redemption and salvation.

6:1–2
The First Seal

Revelation 6 builds on chapter 5. Christ could take the sealed scroll because of His place on the heavenly throne as the legitimate ruler of the earth, an important event that took place at Pentecost (Acts 2:32–36) in A.D. 31. Pentecost marks the beginning of the spreading of the gospel throughout the world. With the proclamation of the gospel, Christ expanded His kingdom by winning human hearts to Himself. After taking the scroll, Christ began to break its seven seals.

As Christ the Lamb opened each of the first four seals, John heard one of the four livings beings commanding a horse and its horseman to appear on the scene (Rev. 6:1, 3, 5, 7). Some translations imply that the command was given to John, but it appears that this is not the case. As the first seal was opened, a white horse appeared on the scene. The white color is a symbol of purity and is regularly associated with Christ and His followers. The horse's rider held a bow, a detail pointing to how God is sometimes pictured in the OT as riding a horse with a bow in His hand, conquering the enemies of His people (Ps. 45:4–5; Hab. 3:8–13). Revelation 19:11–16 portrays Christ as riding a white horse and leading the heavenly armies into the final battle of earth's history.

The rider was given a crown. The Greek word *stephanos* denotes the crown of victory and is regularly associated with Christ and His victorious people (see 2:10; 3:11). This rider appeared in John's vision as a conqueror. The concept of conquering in Revelation is associated with Christ's overcoming on Calvary. The scene of the first seal is symbolic. It describes the spreading of the gospel message, which started at Pentecost in A.D. 31. When Christ was exalted on the heavenly throne, He began the expansion of His kingdom. There were many territories to conquer and many people to win for the kingdom. In its initial stage, the proclamation of the gospel had a powerful start through the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:41, 47; 4:4). This expansion will continue throughout history until the ultimate conquest is achieved at the time of the end.

Christian Epochs: Seven Seals

Seal Opened	Seal Interpretation	Seal Period (Approximate)
1st	Pure message	ca. A.D. 31–100
2nd	Stained message	ca. A.D. 100–313
3rd	Corrupted message	ca. A.D. 313–538
4th	Restricted message	ca. A.D. 538–1517
5th	Reformation	ca. A.D. 1517–1755
6th	Awakening and judgment	ca. A.D. 1755–Second Coming
7th	Conflict ended	

When applied historically, the first seal thus corresponds to the era of the church in Ephesus (2:1–7), referring to the apostolic period during which the gospel message spread rapidly throughout the world (Col. 1:23).

6:3–4
The Second Seal

Christ opening the second seal brought a fiery red horse onto the scene. Red is the color of blood and corresponds to the mission of this horse. The rider had a sword and was allowed to take peace from the earth, so that people would kill one another. The Greek word *sphazō* in Revelation is used to refer to the death of Christ (5:6) and His people because of their witness to the gospel (6:9; 18:24). The rider that John saw in vision did not do the killing himself, but he took peace from the earth, which resulted in the people slaying one another.

The second seal describes the consequences of the rejection of the gospel message in general terms. The first horseman represents Christ as He waged spiritual warfare through the preaching of the gospel. However, the forces of evil mounted strong resistance, resulting in the subsequent persecution (cf. Matt. 10:34). Thus, the second seal corresponds to the era of the church in Smyrna (2:8–11), which represents the period of persecution in the Roman Empire from the end of the first century to the beginning of the fourth century (ca. A.D. 313).

6:5–6
The Third Seal

When Christ the Lamb opened the third seal, a black horse appeared. John saw the rider holding a scale for weighing food in his hand and heard an announcement from one of the four living creatures regarding the prices of wheat and barley. In ancient Israel, grain, oil, and wine were the basic necessities of life (Deut. 11:14; Joel 2:19), and to make and eat bread by carefully weighing the grain indicated great scarcity or famine (Lev. 26:26; Ezek. 4:16). In John's day, a denarius was a daily wage (Matt. 20:2). In normal circumstances, a daily wage would have bought all of the necessities for an entire family. However, a famine would have enormously inflated the market price. In the scene of the third seal, it would have taken a whole day's work to buy just enough food for only one person, since a quart (1 L) of wheat was the daily ration for one person. In order to feed a small family in this setting, a day's wage would have been used to buy three quarts (2.84 L) of barley, which was a cheaper, coarser food for the poor.

The scene of the third seal points to what is to befall those who reject the gospel message. The black color corresponds to the mission of the horseman. Black is the opposite of white, so if the white horse represents the purity of the gospel being preached, the black horse denotes the absence or further corruption of the gospel. Grain in the Bible symbolizes the word of God (Luke 8:11). The rejection of the gospel usually results in a famine of the word of God similar to the one prophesied by Amos among the Israelites (Amos 8:11–13). Applying it historically, the third seal aptly corresponds to the era of the church in Pergamum (Rev. 2:12–17), which represents the fourth to sixth centuries of Christian history, a span of time that was characterized by a spiritual famine of the word of God. The famine of the third seal was not to be fatal, however. The same voice that commissioned the horseman announced that the oil and wine would not be affected and would continue to be available (6:6). Spiritually, oil symbolizes the Holy Spirit (1 Sam. 16:12–13; Luke 4:18; Acts 10:38) and wine symbolizes salvation in Jesus Christ (Matt. 26:27–29; 1 Cor. 11:25). Even when the word of God is scarce, the Holy Spirit is still at work and salvation is still available to all who desire it.

6:7–8

The Fourth Seal

With the opening of the fourth seal, a pale horse appeared. The Greek word *chlōros* denotes the ashen gray color of a decomposing corpse. John saw the rider, Death, accompanied by Hades, the abode of the dead. These two were allowed to destroy people over one-fourth of the earth by sword, famine, death or plague, and wild beasts. Noticeably, the single action of the fourth horseman comprised the actions of the previous three horsemen. The fourth seal called forth pestilence and death. The graphic portrayal of the scene conveys the perennial truth that spiritual famine of the word of God typically results in spiritual death. The good news, however, is that the power of Death and Hades is very limited; they were given authority over only a part, one-fourth, of the earth. Jesus assures us that He has the keys of Death and Hades (see 1:18). Death does not have power or authority over those who accept the gospel.

Applying it historically, the fourth seal corresponds to the church in Thyatira (2:18–29), which represents the spiritual death that characterized Christianity during the dark Middle Ages when the Bible was unavailable to people and tradition overruled its teachings.

The remaining three seals are very different from the first four. There are no horses with riders in action, and while the first four seals exclusively concern God's people, the remaining three refer to judgments that were to fall on those who would oppress God's people.

6:9–11

The Fifth Seal

The scene of the fifth seal portrays the souls of those who had been slain for the sake of the gospel. In the Bible, the Hebrew term *nepesh* (e.g., Gen. 2:7) and the Greek term *psychē* (e.g., Acts 2:41), both of which mean "soul," "life," or "living being," usually denote the whole person and are never used to signify an eternally conscious, incorporeal entity that survives death. The martyrs are pictured here as being under the altar, alluding to the sacrificial blood or life poured out at the base of the bronze altar of sacrifice in the courtyard before the tabernacle of the earthly sanctuary (Ex. 29:12; Lev. 4:7). The deaths of the martyrs are described as a pouring out of their lives as sacrificial blood before God (2 Tim. 4:6). Since believers "sleep" in death until the return of Christ (cf. 1 Thess. 4:13–18), this is a symbolic portrayal along the lines of the "crying out" of the blood of Abel as a witness to his unjust death (Gen. 4:10).

John heard the martyrs crying out to God for vindication against those who persecuted them. The expression "those who dwell on the earth" or "the inhabitants of the earth" in Revelation refers to those who oppose the gospel and are

against God's people (8:13; 11:10; 13:8; 17:2). The cry of the martyrs was for vindication concerning the injustice of their deaths. They placed their trust in God. Here, through their unjustly spilled blood, they were asking God to bring justice and vindicate them. God responded to the plea: First, He gave them each a white robe, which in Revelation signifies Christ's righteousness by which God covers those accepted by Christ (3:4, 18). It also represents the future reward to overcomers in the church of Sardis (3:5). Believers receive assurance of salvation and eternal life through the scene.

Second, God told the martyrs that they were to rest and wait a little while longer until their brothers and sisters, who would go through a similar ordeal, would be made complete (v. 11). In the Bible, God promised that He will avenge the blood of His servants (Deut. 32:43; Ps. 79:10). Revelation 8–9 speaks of God's judgments being poured out on the inhabitants of the earth (8:13) throughout Christian history. The day is approaching when Christ will come in judgment to those who have not obeyed His gospel. They will be punished with "everlasting destruction," barred from the presence of the Lord and His glorious power forever (2 Thess. 1:8–10).

Most Bible translations insert the word "number" (Rev. 6:11), postulating that the martyrs had to wait for the completion of the number of martyrs. However, the word "number" does not appear in the Greek text. Revelation does not refer to a specific number of martyred saints that had to be reached but to the completeness of their characters. Those who have yet to go through martyrdom are to be made complete, just as the slain martyrs under the altar were. The text indicates clearly that those martyrs were perfected through receiving the robe of Christ's righteousness rather than through their own merits.

"How long . . . ?" has been the cry of God's oppressed people throughout history (Ps. 79:5; Dan. 12:6–7; Hab. 1:2). The fifth seal thus describes the experience of God's suffering people from the time of Abel until the time God finally judges and avenges the blood of His servants (Rev. 19:2). The scene is intended to assure God's suffering people that He hears their prayers.

The scene of the fifth seal may apply historically to the postmedieval period through the Protestant Reformation. God brought comfort to His persecuted people. Although millions of Christians were martyred because of their faithfulness to Christ during the medieval period and many more still will fall throughout history until the coming of Christ, justice will ultimately be dispensed (6:15–17).

6:12–17

The Sixth Seal

Knowledge of the fifth seal is essential for the interpretation of the sixth seal. The time had come for God to intervene in answer to the prayers of His people, who suffer injustice in a hostile world. The sixth seal portrays the signs that lead to the Second Coming, which include judgment against those who have harmed God's people. Its opening triggered cataclysmic events: a disastrous earthquake, the sun being blacked out, the moon appearing blood red, the stars falling, and the sky receding like a scroll (6:12–14). These cosmic signs are the same events Jesus foretold in Matthew 24:29–30, which were to occur at the conclusion of the tribulation of the Middle Ages. The sun, moon, stars, and sky are literal here; the use of the word "as" or "like" points to a symbolic analogy of an actual event. Christians in the Western world have recognized the fulfillment of this prophecy in the events of the Lisbon earthquake of 1755; the dark day and blood red moon of May 19, 1780, that was experienced in eastern New York and southern New England; and the spectacular meteor shower over the Atlantic Ocean on November 13, 1833, which in turn led to a series of revivals in North America known as the Second Great Awakening.

However, these supernatural events will be witnessed again at the return of Christ. John observed people of all walks of life panicking, trying to hide from the terror of the upheaval of the coming of Christ. He saw them begging the rocks and mountains to cover them in order to protect them from the One sitting on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb (6:16; cf. Is. 2:19). This scene echoes the warning of Jesus, who, quoting Hosea 10:8, pointed to the time when His persecutors would "say to the mountains, 'Fall on us!' and to the hills, 'Cover us!'" (Luke 23:30). The vision records the arrival of the time for justice to be dispensed, when Christ's coming is imminent. At that time, He will be glorified in His people and wondered at by all who believe (2 Thess. 1:10).

The scene concludes with a rhetorical question from the terror-stricken wicked: Who can stand in the great day of the wrath of God (6:17; cf. Nah. 1:6; Mal. 3:2)? Revelation 7 answers that question.

7:1–17

The Sealed Saints

Chapter 7 provides the answer to the question raised in the conclusion of the scene of the sixth seal (6:17). As a prophetic parenthesis, it presents those able to stand on the great day of God's wrath as being the sealed people of God.

7:1–3. The Four Angels and the Winds. The scene begins with four angels at the four corners of the earth, which is an ancient way of referring to the four points of a compass. This description denotes the global significance of the scene. John saw the angels restraining the four winds from destroying the earth, the sea, and the trees. In the OT, winds are a symbol of destructive forces by which God executes judgments on the wicked (Is. 66:15–16; Jer. 23:19–20; Hos. 13:15), and the concept of the four winds is well attested (Jer. 49:36; Dan. 7:2). The blowing of the winds correlates with God's wrath in Revelation 6:17 and is another way of describing the seven last plagues that are to be poured on the wicked just before the Second Coming (Rev. 15–16) during the time of "the great tribulation" (7:14). However, these destructive forces are restrained by divine intervention until God's people have been sealed.

Next, John saw another angel coming up from the east, having the seal of the living God. In the Bible, the east is regularly associated with the direction from which God comes (e.g., Ezek. 43:2). For example, Jesus prophesied that the Son of Man would come from the east (Matt. 24:27–30). Therefore, the angel whom John saw was coming from God Himself. The angel instructed the four angels not to unleash the winds until God had placed His seal on the foreheads of His servants. In ancient times, the fundamental meaning of sealing was ownership; a seal impression on an object pointed to the owner. This is the meaning of the symbolic sealing in the NT as well. According to Paul, the meaning of the seal is that the Lord knows those who are His (2 Tim. 2:19). God recognizes those who belong to Him and seals them with the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13–14). To grieve the Holy Spirit means to lose one's sealing (Eph. 4:30). From John's prophetic standpoint, at the time of the end, a seal on the forehead was used to distinguish those who were on God's side from those who were not. Those siding with the beast were to receive the mark of the beast on their foreheads or their right hands (Rev. 13:16–17). However, those worshiping God were to be sealed only on their foreheads (14:1).

The faithfulness of the sealed has been tested in every generation of Christians. Revelation presents the test in the final crisis as being the keeping of God's commandments (see Rev. 12:17; 14:12), with the fourth commandment being the test of obedience to God (14:7). As the Sabbath was the sign of God's people in biblical times (Ex. 31:12–17; Ezek. 20:12, 20), so John presented it as the sign of loyalty to God in the final crisis.

At the time of the end, the seal was to have additional significance, functioning as a sign of protection as well. Revelation presents those with the seal of God on their foreheads as the ones who are protected from the destructive forces of the seven last plagues. This entire scene echoes the vision of Ezekiel 9, which concerned the destruction of Jerusalem before the Exile. In this OT vision, the mark on the forehead distinguished those who were on God's side from others who were unfaithful and idolatrous and provided the faithful with protection from the impending judgment (Ezek. 9:1–11). As in Ezekiel's vision, the seal in Revelation 7 identifies God's people and protects them from the symbolic blowing of the eschatological winds. The question raised in Revelation 6:17 is finally answered as the vision identifies those who are able to stand on the day of divine wrath: the sealed people of God.

7:4–8. The Sealed 144,000. As the sealing was taking place, John heard the number of those who had been sealed: 144,000 from the tribes of Israel. Both the number 144,000 and the tribes are symbolic due to the fact that Revelation is a symbolic book (cf. 1:1). It stands for the totality of God's end-time people (see "The 144,000 and the Twelve Tribes," p. 1959).

The announcement of the number of the sealed marks the completion of the sealing. The destructive forces of the seven last plagues were then to be unleashed and the sealed 144,000 were then about to enter the great tribulation. However, the great tribulation is portrayed not in Revelation 7 but in Revelation 16.

7:9–14. The Great Multitude. At this point, John saw an innumerable multitude from every nation, tribe, people, and language "standing before the throne and before the Lamb" (v. 9). Many interpreters have asserted that the 144,000 are the end-time generation of the faithful who will go through the great tribulation of the last days and the great multitude refers to God's people of all ages. However, the evidence does not seem to support such an assertion. The passage indicates that the great multitude was to go through the great tribulation (see 7:14–15).

The key to an understanding of the relationship between the two groups is found in the literary feature "I heard" versus "I saw" that occurs in the book. Many times, John heard one thing in vision but saw an entirely different symbol when he turned to look (see 5:5–6; 17:1–3). This is the situation in Revelation 7. We must keep in mind that John had previously only heard that the number of the sealed people of God was 144,000. They were on earth, pictured as the militant church, organized and ready to enter the great tribulation. But John had not yet seen them; when he did, they were a great, incalculable crowd coming out of the great tribulation (7:13–14). They were the church triumphant, no longer on earth but in heaven before the throne of God. The war was over and they were no longer organized into military divisions. They were celebrating their great victory and were about to receive their

The 144,000 and the Twelve Tribes

The number 144,000 is arrived at by multiplying twelve by twelve, which totals 144, and then multiplying it by one thousand. In the OT, twelve is the number of the tribes of Israel, who were the people of God, and in the NT, it is also the number of the church, built on the foundation of the twelve apostles (Eph. 2:20). In this way, the number twelve functions as a symbol of the church. In the vision of the new Jerusalem, the names of the twelve tribes of Israel are inscribed on the twelve gates of the city and the names of the twelve apostles on its twelve foundation stones. Thus, 144,000 represents the fullness of the people of God at the close of the cosmic conflict on earth.

Furthermore, the list of the twelve tribes of Israel (vv. 5–8) is also symbolic for at least two reasons: First, the twelve tribes of Israel are not in existence today. During the Assyrian conquest of the northern kingdom of Israel, the ten tribes were taken into captivity (2 Kin. 17:6–23), where they soon became amalgamated with other nations and largely disappeared. With the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, the two remaining tribes, Judah and Benjamin, were scattered throughout the Roman Empire. As a result, the Judaism of today is not comprised of the original twelve tribes. Second, the list of the twelve tribes in Revelation 7 is not a regular list of the tribes of Israel. Judah is listed as the first tribe instead of Reuben, and the tribes of Dan and Ephraim are missing while Joseph and Levi are included instead. The obvious reason for their exclusion is that in the OT, the two tribes of Dan and Ephraim were associated with idolatry. Dan was the first of the tribes to turn to idolatry (Judg. 18:27–32) and, later in Israel's history, it became such an influential center of idolatrous worship that it competed with the temple worship in Jerusalem (1 Kin. 12:28–31). Ephraim refused King Hezekiah's invitation to the Passover, and this tribe's name became associated with idolatry throughout the entire northern kingdom of Israel (2 Chr. 30:1–10; Hos. 4:17). The Jews of John's day believed that the antichrist would come out of the tribe of Dan, which shows that the list of tribes in Revelation 7 represents a theological reality: God's purified church. The unfaithfulness that characterized the tribes of Dan and Ephraim explains why they are not mentioned among the sealed people of God.

The twelve tribes in Revelation 7 stand for the whole people of God in the last days. The church in the NT is referred to in terms of the twelve tribes of Israel (James 1:1) and "the Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16; cf. Rom. 11:26). The symbolic number 144,000 describes the militant church as being comprised of 144 military units of one thousand each, or in other words, as an army ready to battle Satan and his army of two hundred million (Rev. 9:16). Revelation 19:18 shows that Satan's army is symbolically organized into military units of one thousand each, since the word *chiliarchos* ("captain," "general") denotes a commander of one thousand soldiers (cf. 6:15). Such language is used to emphasize the reality of the final conflict.

reward. The 144,000 and the great multitude seem to be the same group of God's end-time people pictured at two different points in the great conflict between good and evil. The calculable symbolic number—144,000—stands in contrast to the incalculable and literal great multitude. This does not mean that the great multitude could not be counted, just that 144,000 is the symbolic number of the great multitude whose number is not given but is much greater than 144,000.

John saw that the great multitude were clothed in white robes, had palm branches (signs of triumph and victory) in their hands, and were praising God and the Lamb for their salvation (v. 9). In ancient times, Roman generals and soldiers were clothed in white robes and palm branches were used to celebrate a successful military victory. Here we see the fulfillment of the promise to the overcomers in Sardis that they would walk before Christ clothed in white garments (3:4–5). Revelation 7:14 shows that the robes of the multitude were made white by the blood of the Lamb.

The redeemed saints expressed their rejoicing before the throne by giving gratitude to God and the Lamb for their salvation (v. 10), which resulted from Christ's great victory on the cross, not from their own holiness and works. Their praise echoes the praise of the twenty-four elders in 5:8–10; it was on the cross that Christ purchased people from every language and nation for God, paying with His blood. The redeemed in Revelation 7 recognized that their salvation was a result of what Christ had done for them (v. 10). The white robes that were washed in the blood of the Lamb made all the redeemed equal before God (7:14).

7:15–17. The Reward of the Redeemed. At the conclusion of the vision, John was given a glimpse of the future glorious reward of the redeemed, which he describes more extensively in chapters 21–22. "They are before the throne of God," where they serve both day and night in His temple (7:15). God promised that He will "dwell with them" (see 21:3). By using language that describes ancient Israel, God was declaring that their wilderness experience had concluded. Their hunger, thirst, and suffering from heat will be relieved (7:16). The Lamb will shepherd them and lead them to living water springs (7:17), where they will finally find their homeland (see 22:1). God further promised that He will wipe all tears from their eyes (see 21:4). Here is the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy about the rest and security of God's people (Is. 32:18).

8:1
The Seventh Seal

Having described those who will be able to stand firm at the upheaval of Christ's coming, John concluded the scene of the seven seals. When Christ the Lamb opened the seventh seal, "there was silence in heaven for about half an hour." In the Bible, silence is regularly associated with the coming of God in judgment (e.g., Zeph. 1:7; Zech. 2:13). The Jews of John's day believed that silence occurred in heaven so that the prayers of the saints could be heard and answered in judgment against the wicked. Since the seventh seal is to be opened after the Second Coming, as indicated by the fact that 6:12–17 is a description of that event, we suggest that the silence in heaven will occur in the context of the final judgment and the conclusion of the Great Controversy. "Half an hour" refers here to a relatively short time.

8:2—11:19
THE SEVEN TRUMPETS

Revelation 8:2 begins a new vision that describes the seven angels blowing trumpets. After the sixth trumpet (8:2—9:21), there is an aside that deals with the vision of a mighty angel and the two witnesses (10:1—11:14). Then John introduces the seventh trumpet (11:15–18). The sounding of the trumpets was to trigger a chain of events on the earth. As in other visions of Revelation, the symbolism of the trumpets is rooted in the OT. Numbers 10:8–10 describes trumpets as sacred instruments that were blown by priests in different contexts: worship, battles, harvesttime, or festivals. They were used for the purpose of calling on God to "remember" His covenant with His people. The blowing of the trumpets went hand in hand with prayer. During a battle, the trumpet sound would "remind" God to intervene on behalf of His people and to deliver them from their enemies (see 2 Chr. 13:14). This concept is the backdrop for the trumpet series of Revelation 8–11. Each trumpet affects a third of the earth. In the OT, judgments against apostate Israel are described as affecting one third of the nation (Ezek. 5:12–13; Zech. 13:8–9). In Revelation, the expression "a third" refers to a part of Satan's kingdom being affected by divine judgments (12:4; cf. 16:19).

8:2–6
Introduction to the Trumpets: The Prayers of the Saints

The vision opens with a scene of the seven angels, all of whom were given trumpets to blow, standing before God. However, it is not until v. 6 that the angels are seen blowing their trumpets. In between, vv. 3–5 function as an introduction to the trumpets. The sanctuary setting provides the theological context for the seven trumpets, and the introduction replicates the daily services of the earthly temple. After the sacrificial lamb had been placed on the bronze altar of sacrifice, the blood was poured out at the base of that altar (Lev. 4:27–30). The appointed priest would take a golden censer, fill it with coals, and offer incense on the golden altar in the Holy Place (Ex. 30:1–8). Afterward, according to later Jewish Mishnah tradition, the priest would come out of the temple and throw the firepan on the pavement between the entrance to the temple and the altar of sacrifice, producing a very loud noise. At that point, seven priests blew trumpets, marking the end of the daily services. It is possible that the casting down of the firepan and the blowing of seven trumpets in Revelation parallels this practice.

John saw another angel holding a golden censer and standing at the altar, which was probably the altar of sacrifices in the courtyard of the earthly sanctuary. In biblical typology, the court of the tabernacle stood for the earth (cf. Rev. 11:2). This shows that the activity of the angel whom John saw (8:3–5) began on earth but would move to the heavenly temple. The angel is portrayed as standing at the same altar underneath which, according to the fifth seal, the blood of the martyred saints cried out to God for vindication and justice (6:10). At this altar, the angel was given a large amount of incense to offer, representing the prayers of God's "people" or "saints" (Rev. 5:8; cf. Ps. 141:2) on the golden altar in the heavenly temple before the throne. The smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God. In such a way, the prayers of God's suffering people are heard by God.

The angel then filled the censer with fire from the altar and hurled it down to the earth. The thunderclaps, rumbling voices, lightning flashes, and earthquake represented the presence of God and signaled the seven angels to blow their trumpets. This hurling of fire mirrors the scene in Ezekiel's vision in which the man clothed in linen took coals of fire from between the cherubim and hurled them on rebellious Jerusalem (Ezek. 10:2). Ezekiel's vision shows that the hurling of fire on the earth in Revelation 8:5 denotes judgment on rebellious humanity. This whole scene defines the seven trumpets as God's judgments on rebellious humanity in response to the prayers of His oppressed and persecuted people.

The seven-trumpet series, like the seven seals, covers the course of history from the cross until the conclusion of this earth's history. The trumpets are blown while intercession goes

Different Historicist Views on the Seven Trumpets in Revelation 8–11

Position 1		Position 2		Position 3	
Trumpet Warnings	**Church Era**	**Trumpet Warnings**	**Church Era**	**Trumpet Warnings**	**Church Era**
Fall of Jerusalem	1st	Fall of Jewish nation	1st	Attack of the Visigoths	3rd
Fall of Rome	3rd	Christians martyred	2nd	Attack of the Vandals	3rd
Truth compromised	4th	Truth compromised	3rd	Attack of the Huns	3rd
Sources restricted	5th	Sources restricted	4th	Fall of Western Rome	3rd
Secularist movement	6th	Secularist movements	5th	Islamic forces/ Crusaders	4th
Atheist philosophies	7th	Atheist philosophies	6th/ 7th	Ottoman Turks	5th
Wicked destroyed	7th	Wicked destroyed	7th	Wicked destroyed	7th

on in heaven (8:3–6) and the gospel is preached on earth (10:8—11:14). There is some diversity of interpretation of the trumpets among Adventist historicists. We offer here what we think is a biblical and viable interpretation that simultaneously acknowledges that others may choose a different reading.

8:7

The First Trumpet

When the first angel blew the trumpet, hail and fire mixed with blood were hurled on the earth, and a third of the trees and all green grass were burned up. This scene recalls the seventh plague to fall on Egypt (Ex. 9:23–25). In the OT, hail mixed with fire that causes bloodshed is the means of judgment against the enemies of Israel (Is. 30:30; Ezek. 38:22–23). On the other hand, trees and grass are frequent symbols of God's people (Is. 44:2–4; Jer. 17:7–8). This leads to the conclusion that hail and fire mixed with blood destroying trees and green grass in the first trumpet's scene symbolize God's judgments against apostate believers who have joined the ranks of the opponents of God (Jer. 11:16; Ezek. 20:47). The scene of the first trumpet clearly echoes the words of Jesus in Luke 23:31. In addressing the inhabitants of Jerusalem, Jesus compared Himself to a green tree and those who rejected Him to dry trees. Jesus was symbolically referring to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, which took place several decades later (Luke 21:20).

This suggests that the first trumpet heralds judgment on those of God's people who were involved in persecuting Christ and the early church. While many Jews and Jewish leaders accepted Christ, many of them rejected Him and became opponents of the gospel. Consequently, they placed themselves outside the protection of the covenant. Just as how in the OT hail and fire were used to signify God's judgments against the enemies of Israel, so in John's prophecy the first trumpet brought judgments against God's own people who had turned into persecutors of the followers of Christ. The first trumpet appears to be portraying the events of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in A.D. 70, one of the bitterest chapters in Jewish history.

8:8–9

The Second Trumpet

At the sound of the second trumpet, something resembling a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea. Mountains in the OT are sometimes equated with kingdoms (e.g., Ps. 48:1–3; Jer. 51:25; Ezek. 35:2–4), and the fact that the mountain in the second trumpet is described as large or great (Gr. *mega*) shows that a great empire is in view. The sea in the Bible frequently symbolizes large populations of people who often are violently opposed to God (Rev. 17:15; e.g., Is. 17:12–13; 57:20; Jer. 51:42). The plague of the second trumpet turned a third of the sea into blood, causing the death of a third of the living creatures and wrecking a third of the ships. This scene of water turning to blood echoes the first plague against Egypt (Ex. 7:19–21). Furthermore, the destruction of ships as the conveyers of wealth refers to the subjugation of human pride (Ezek. 27:29–32; Rev. 18:17–21). Here again, the phrase "a third" shows that a part of Satan's kingdom is affected by the judgments of God.

The second trumpet particularly echoes Jeremiah's prophecy concerning the fall of Babylon. Because of the atrocities done to Judah, Babylon would, like the burning mountain (Jer. 51:25), be cast into the Euphrates River to sink and rise no more (Jer. 51:63–64). The same language is used in Revelation 18:21 to describe the demise of end-time Babylon. In John's day, the name Babylon was used for the great Roman Empire (e.g., 1 Pet. 5:13). Because Rome, like Babylon, destroyed Jerusalem and the temple, it was to suffer a similar fate. At the time of John, Christians, who viewed Rome as the new Babylon, could easily identify the symbolic burning mountain of the second trumpet as a prophecy of the downfall of the Roman Empire—the empire involved in putting Jesus to death and persecuting the early church in an effort to prevent the spreading of the gospel to the world.

8:10–11

The Third Trumpet

When the third trumpet sounded, a great star burning like a torch fell from heaven. Stars in the Bible often represent angels (Job 38:7), and the fact that this star is characterized as great shows that this particular angel is of an exalted rank. Satan is a likely candidate, since Isaiah 14:12–15 refers to him as "fallen from heaven" and he is portrayed elsewhere in Revelation as having been cast from heaven to the earth (Rev. 12:9).

The star of the third trumpet is named Wormwood, after an herb notorious for its bitterness and poisonous qualities (Deut. 29:18). The Wormwood star turned the waters bitter, causing many to die. In Jeremiah, when the people

of Israel spurned the covenant with God, they were given wormwood to eat and poisoned water to drink (Jer. 9:13–15; 23:15).

The Wormwood star fell "on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water" (v. 10). A third of the waters turned bitter and caused many people to die. The waters spoken of here symbolize spiritual nourishment for spiritually thirsty people (John 7:37). The scene of the third trumpet describes Satan polluting the springs and streams of truth and salvation with human teaching, which had a poisonous and deadly effect. Paul predicted a great apostasy that would invade the church (e.g., 2 Thess. 2:1–12). However, this apostasy would not come until the removal of the restrainer. It is possible that Paul had the Roman Empire in mind, which God used to restrain the revelation of "the man of sin" or "man of lawlessness" for some time (see commentary on 2 Thess. 2:3–4 and 2:5–7). Following the interpretation that sees in the second trumpet the collapse of the Roman Empire, which plunged the world into the darkness of the Middle Ages, mainstream Christianity departed from the purity of the gospel and replaced it with tradition and scholastic teachings. The gospel truth was corrupted into a system of dogmas with devastating effects. Thus, the third trumpet describes the consequences of the medieval apostasy in terms of the spiritual death of those who drank from its polluted water.

8:12–13

The Fourth Trumpet

The plague, after the fourth trumpet sounded, struck a third of the sun, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, causing darkness on a third of the earth. This scene evokes the ninth plague that brought darkness across the land of Egypt (Ex. 10:21–23). In the OT, the darkening of celestial bodies announces the coming of God's judgment (Is. 13:9–11; Joel 3:15). Darkness is also a symbol of judgment for apostasy (Mic. 3:6). Since light in the NT stands for the gospel message (John 8:12; Col. 1:13), darkness denotes the absence of the gospel. When people reject the gospel for darkness, they bring God's judgment on themselves (John 3:19).

The fourth trumpet may describe the condition of the world in the post–Middle Ages period. The Reformation of the sixteenth century restored the Bible as the rule of faith and teaching. However, the vibrant generation of Reformers was succeeded by lifeless Protestant scholasticism characterized by theological polemics and controversies. Such a situation had a ruinous effect on Christianity. The intellectual revolution in Europe during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries led to the rise of rationalism, skepticism, humanism, and liberalism, which ultimately gave birth to secularism. Despite its positive impact on science, politics, religious liberty, arts, and education, with its materialistic orientation and denial of supernaturalism, secularism gradually eroded Christian faith and robbed millions of the hope of salvation. The fourth trumpet scene thus describes the dreadful consequences of the darkening of the spiritual source of the true light under the prevailing influence of secularism.

At this point, John heard a voice of one flying through the air announcing a triple "woe," warning the inhabitants of the earth of more severe punishments to come (8:13). While some manuscripts read "angel," the earliest known manuscripts have "eagle" or "vulture" here. In the Bible, the eagle or vulture is a symbol of impending judgments (Deut. 28:49; Hos. 8:1). This brings to mind the words of Jesus that eagles (or vultures) will gather (Matt. 24:28). The worst is yet to come on the inhabitants of the earth.

9:1–11

The Fifth Trumpet

The description of the plagues heralded by the fifth and sixth angels is more detailed and frightening. There is a divergence of opinions concerning the interpretation of the details of these two trumpets. The view expressed here follows a reexamination of the interpretation of these two trumpets that is based on a careful evaluation of the language used in the prophecy and its symbolic meaning in the Scriptures. The interpretation that follows is not intended to be dogmatic; it is offered to stimulate further investigation.

9:1–6. The Demonic Locusts. At the sound of the fifth trumpet, John saw a star that had fallen to the earth (v. 1). This is the same star spoken of in the third trumpet that poisoned the streams and springs of water (8:10–11) and is thus a reference to Satan himself, the ruler of the power of the air (Eph. 2:2) who had fallen from heaven (Rev. 12:9; Is. 14:12; Luke 10:18). Later in the text, he is identified as the angel of the abyss or bottomless pit and the leader of the demonic army (9:11). The star was given the key to the bottomless pit (*abyssos*), which has been the abode of Satan and the fallen angels since their expulsion from heaven (Luke 8:31). They are temporarily confined there with limited freedom of movement until they receive their punishment (2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6). In the fifth trumpet, however, the vision presents the restraint as having been removed, giving the demonic forces more freedom to do their harmful work.

As John watched, the star opened the bottomless pit, releasing a dense cloud of locusts that resembled the smoke of a large furnace (v. 2). In the OT, locusts are a symbol of overwhelming judgment (Ex. 10:14–15; Jer. 51:14; Joel 2:4–10). The power of these locusts is compared to the power of scorpions (also in 9:5). Jesus used scorpions as a metaphor for demons (Luke 10:17–20). By using the symbol of a scorpion-like locust, John describes the supernatural demonic forces that will operate deceptively and overwhelmingly in the world as we near the end of time. This gigantic cloud created thick darkness in the sky, which echoes the locust plague on Egypt (Ex. 10:13–15) and the prophecy of Joel in which the locust plague caused the darkening of the sun, the moon, and the stars (Joel 2:2, 10). Darkness is the opposite of light. Since the light stands for the gospel, the darkness symbolizes the absence of the gospel (see commentary on Rev. 8:12–13). The demonic locusts in the prophecy of the fifth trumpet seem to have obliterated the light of the gospel. What followed was spiritual torment and mental anguish that had devastating effects.

The demonic locusts were commanded not to harm the grass, plants, and trees (v. 4), all of which symbolize God's people (see Rev. 8:7). They could harm only those who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads. The vision thus presents God's people as protected from the locusts' harmful activities by the seal of God (see Rev. 7:4). Furthermore, these demonic locusts were not permitted to kill people, but only to torment them for five months. There is disagreement among historicist interpreters concerning the specific years covered by this prophetic period. The only mention of a five-month period in the OT is in connection with the Flood, during which Noah and his family were under divine protection from the floodwaters (Gen. 7:24; 8:3). In a way similar to how the floodwaters overwhelmed the wicked while the righteous were preserved, the torment of the demonic locusts was both spiritual and mental, driving the wicked into suicidal anguish (v. 6) while those who were sealed and therefore under God's protection were spared.

9:7–11. The Description of the Locusts. In seeking to describe the demonic locusts, John uses eight figurative analogies: they appeared like horses prepared for battle, they wore something like golden crowns, they had humanlike faces and hair like women, their teeth were like those of lions, they had iron-like breastplates, the sound of their wings was like that of battle chariots, and they had scorpion-like tails (vv. 7–10). This symbolic description of the demonic locusts echoes the description of locusts in Joel 2:2–11.

As in Joel's prophecy, the locusts resemble an army. However, they were not a real army, for their activity was not military but spiritual. Their weapons were tails with stingers like scorpions, which they used to afflict people. In the Bible, the tail is a symbol of deception. Isaiah refers to the false prophet who deceives as "the tail" (9:14–15). The tail of the dragon caused one third of the heavenly beings to rebel against God (12:4, 9). In contrast to regular locusts that have no leader (Prov. 30:27), this locust-like demonic army in Revelation had a leader who is identified as the angel of the bottomless pit. His name in Hebrew is Abaddon ("destruction"), and in Greek Apollyon ("destroyer"). No doubt this demonic leader is Satan himself, the ruler or prince of demons (Matt. 12:24) and of the kingdoms or powers of the air (Eph. 2:2). He is the fallen star from heaven to whom authority was given over the abyss in the prophecy (Rev. 9:1). His followers are referred to as the destroyers of the earth (11:18).

The fifth trumpet describes the spiritual condition of the world in the aftermath of the Age of Enlightenment, which was characterized by the rise of rationalism, skepticism, humanism, relativism, and liberalism. Ultimately, it gave rise to secularism and its negative effects on Christianity. God-centered theology was replaced by atheistic, human-centered philosophy, which has little or no room for God. Rationalism and human philosophies, which have become the ultimate standard of truth, alienated people from God and from each other, thus creating in them the agony of emptiness and meaninglessness. Resistance to the transforming power of the gospel provides an opportunity for Satan and his demonic forces to fill this emptiness. The situation is similar to that of the time of Amos, when Israel turned justice and righteousness into bitter poison (Amos 6:12) and swarms of locusts came on their land (Amos 7:1–2). By rejecting the gospel, the people of the world are left defenseless against demonic activities (Amos 8:10–11).

9:12–21

The Sixth Trumpet

Unfortunately, the worst was yet to come with the sixth and seventh trumpets that followed the frightening woe of the fifth trumpet (i.e., the self-sufficiency of modern secularism).

9:13–15. Release of the Demonic Army. At the sound of the sixth trumpet, John heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar of incense in the heavenly temple ordering the angel with the sixth trumpet to release the four angels who were bound at the great river Euphrates (see Rev. 16:12). The fact that the scene of the sixth trumpet is initiated from the altar of incense shows that the prayers of God's people were still remembered (8:3–4) and the door of salvation was still open. The four angels that were to be released correspond to the four angels that were restraining the destroying winds in 7:1–3. The Euphrates River in the OT was the boundary that separated God's people from their enemies (Is. 7:20; Jer. 46:10), who came from this great river. Their attack was often described in terms of the overflowing waters of the Euphrates sweeping over the land of Judah (e.g., Is. 8:7–8). The four angels had been prepared for the "hour and day and month and year" (Rev. 9:15), an expression that does not seem to be a prophetic period but refers to a specific point in time appointed by God for the release of the angels to kill a third of humankind, all a part of Satan's kingdom. In the prophecy, this divinely appointed time had come.

9:16–19. The Description of the Demonic Army. At this point, a huge army of "twice ten thousand times ten thousand" or "two hundred million" cavalry troops appeared. The reference to having "heard" the number (see Rev. 7:4) shows that the number two hundred million stands in contrast to the 144,000 of God's end-time people. The demonic forces that were shown afflicting humans in the fifth trumpet had grown into a huge army that was spiritually killing humanity. In the fifth trumpet, they were not allowed to kill, only to afflict (9:4–6). However, here they both afflicted and killed.

John had trouble describing this demonic cavalry. The riders on the horses had breastplates of fiery red, dark blue, and sulfurous yellow, a reflection of fire, smoke, and sulfur emanating from the horses' mouths (vv. 17–18). The heads of the horses were like the heads of lions, and out of their mouths emanated fire, smoke, and sulfur or brimstone with which they killed human beings. In the OT, fire, smoke, and brimstone or sulfur are a means of executing divine judgment (Gen. 19:24; Ps. 11:6; Ezek. 38:22). These will also be used for the destruction of the wicked at the final judgment (Rev. 14:10–11; 20:10; 21:8).

The power of the horses is said to be in their mouths and their tails, the latter of which correspond to the tails of the demonic forces of the fifth trumpet (see 9:10). This identifies the activities of the demonic forces in the sixth trumpet to be a continuation of the fifth trumpet. As previously noted (see commentary on Rev. 9:7–11), in the Bible, the tail is a symbol of deception by which Satan turns people away from God to himself. Isaiah refers to the false prophet who deceives as "the tail" (Is. 9:14–15). The mouth is a symbol of spiritual weaponry in the end-time battle between Christ and Satan (cf. Rev. 16:13–14; 19:15, 21). This shows the nature of this final crisis as not physical or military but spiritual: a battle for the minds and hearts of all people (2 Cor. 10:3–5). While in the prophecy of the fifth trumpet the tails of the demonic forces are scorpion-like and afflict people, in the prophecy of the sixth trumpet they are serpent-like and kill people. In Revelation, Satan is the ancient snake who deceives the whole world (12:9). The tails with the serpent heads, weaponry of the demonic forces, are symbols of Satan's deceptive activities by which he leads people astray from God.

9:20–21. No repentance. However, the rest of humanity—those not killed by the plagues—did not repent. They continued to worship demons and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood. This echoes Daniel 5, when the Babylonians kept worshiping their self-made gods prior to Babylon's fall (Dan. 5:23–24). Rebellious humanity, tormented by the demons, did not want to turn to God. They did not repent of their murders, sorcery, sexual immorality, or theft (v. 21). In the Bible, these vices are the fruits of worshiping idols (Rom. 1:18–32), and all are the characteristics of those who do not follow the Lamb (cf. Rev. 21:8; 22:15).

There are some strong parallels between the sixth trumpet and Revelation 7:1–4 and 16:12–16. Both the sixth trumpet and Revelation 7:1–4 mention four angels who restrained the plagues that were about to come on the inhabitants of the earth, both talk about binding and releasing the destructive forces, and both refer to John hearing a number (7:4; 9:16). Also, in both the sixth trumpet and Revelation 16:12–16, we find the river Euphrates, demonic activities, military language, and mouths used as weapons in the end-time conflict. These parallels suggest that the sixth trumpet brings us to the very time of the end. It seems to describe events leading up to the battle of Armageddon further described in Revelation 16:12–16. The scene of the sixth trumpet describes the great gathering of Satan's army for the end-time battle of Armageddon.

The fifth trumpet was a warning as the end approaches, reflecting the situation in this world that is characterized by an increase in demonic activity. While in the fifth trumpet the demonic forces were very active, their power was still limited and restrained by God (9:4–6). However, at the blast of the sixth trumpet, the evil forces are unleashed to do their harmful activities under the governance of Satan. The prophecy presents the people who lack the seal of God as being helpless against the demonic powers. It is during these intense demonic activities that God makes a special effort to reach human hearts through the proclamation of the everlasting gospel (14:6–13).

10:1–11

The Mighty Angel with the Scroll

At this point, the sequence of the seven trumpets is interrupted. Before the sounding of the seventh trumpet, there is a question to be answered regarding God's people during this time. Just as the interlude between the sixth and seventh seals identifies God's end-time people (Rev. 7), the interlude between the sixth and seventh trumpets describes their task and experience in the world during the time of the end.

10:1–2. The Angel with the Scroll. John saw another mighty angel descending from heaven. This angel was clothed with a cloud, pointing to a divine appearance (Rev. 1:7). There was a rainbow above his head as a sign of God's covenant (cf. Gen. 9:12–17) and his face shone like the sun as the face of Jesus did on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17:2). Finally, his feet resembled pillars of fire, bringing to mind the pillar of fire that led the people of Israel during their wilderness journey (Ex. 13:21–22). Since the description of this angel resembles in some detail the description of Christ in Revelation 1:13–16, it is possible that this angel is Christ Himself.

The angel held a little scroll or book open in his hand. This scroll or book could be related to the scroll with seven seals in Revelation 5 in that it contains the description of the time of the end that is portrayed in Revelation 12–22. Christ had disclosed these things to God's people via the angel (1:1) to prepare them for the coming final crisis as He had prepared Daniel in the visions of Daniel 7–12. Thus, the little book is understood to be the book of Daniel, which had been sealed, but which the second half of Revelation expands on in more depth. The following verses contain allusions to the prophecies of Daniel (vv. 5–11; cf. Dan. 12:7–13).

The angel placed his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land (v. 2), denoting the universal scope of the message to be proclaimed—a message of special significance for the entire earth. He was to make the proclamation with a loud voice that resembled a lion's roar. In the OT, God's voice is frequently likened to a lion's roar (Hos. 11:10; Amos 3:8). This identifies the angel's proclamation as coming from God and as particularly important for God's people.

10:3–4. The Seven Thunders. As the angel began to speak, John heard seven thunders. In the Bible, the voice of God is often equated with the sound of thunder (Job 37:5; John 12:28–30). In Psalm 29:3–9, the sevenfold voice of God is referred to as the sound of thunder. The seven thunders here stand for the fullness of God's message, seven being the number of fullness. John was about to write down what the thunders had said, but he was told to seal up what he had heard and not to record it. This is very unusual, because elsewhere in Revelation, John was instructed to write whatever was shown to him and not to seal up the messages of the book (1:19; 22:10).

God has revealed to us in the prophetic word all the things that are important for salvation. However, there are some things about the future that God has not revealed, such as when and how the final events will take place. Although John heard them, he was not allowed to write them down in the book. In the study of end-time prophecies, we must not engage in unfounded speculations about what God has not intended for us to know.

10:5–7. Time No Longer. The angel raised up his hand toward heaven and, with a solemn voice, swore by Him who lives forever and who created the heavens, the earth, and everything in them that there should be no more *chronos*. This word, variously translated "delay," "time," or "interval of time," denotes the duration of a period in contrast to *kairos*, which denotes a point in time, a fixed or definite period, or a

season (although the two terms often overlap in meaning).

This scene alludes to Daniel 12:4–10. Daniel was ordered to seal up the words of his book until the time of the end. Afterward, there was a question regarding how long it would be before the persecution of the saints was over and the prophesied events would take place. In response, the heavenly messenger raised his hands toward heaven and swore an oath by the One who lives forever that the persecution of God's people would last for a time, times, and half a time (Dan. 12:7). After the completion of this prophetic period, the end would come.

Revelation 10 points to Daniel 12 in all ways with the exception of the phrase "there will no longer be time" (Rev. 10:6; author's translation), which replaces the reference to the time, times, and half a time in Daniel 12:7. "A time, times, and half a time" is a reference to the prophetic period of 1,260 years (A.D. 538–1798), during which God's people were persecuted by apostate Christianity. In Revelation 10:7, God's people are assured that there will no longer be an appointed prophetic period. The time prophesied by Daniel has expired, the prophecies of the book are now unsealed, and the history of this world is nearing its close. Commenting on Revelation 10:7, Ellen White states: "This time, which the angel declares with a solemn oath, is . . . prophetic time, which should precede the advent of our Lord. That is, the people will not have another message upon definite time. After this period of time, reaching from 1842 to 1844, there can be no definite tracing of the prophetic time. The longest reckoning reaches to the autumn of 1844" (SDABC 7:971).

Although the time of the end prophesied by Daniel is set in motion, the angel's warning to John tells us that the end is not yet here. At the sound of the seventh trumpet, the mystery of God will be completed, just as He announced to His servants the prophets. The mystery referred to by the angel encompasses the whole purpose of God in establishing His eternal kingdom. This mystery is symbolized by the sealed scroll of Revelation 5, which was hidden for ages (Rom. 16:25–26; Col. 1:26–27). While that mystery was resolved in the gospel (Eph. 1:9; 3:5–12), its consummation will take place at the Second Coming.

10:8–11. The Commissioning of John. John's experience eating the scroll echoes that of Ezekiel when he was called to prophetic ministry (Ezek. 2:8—3:11). Through these similar incidents, the Lord revealed to the two prophets the experience and mission of God's end-time remnant (see "Bittersweet Experience of God's End-Time People," p. 1968).

11:1–19

The Two Witnesses

In Revelation 10, John was told that before the coming of the end, there would be a final proclamation of the gospel throughout the world. What is that message?

11:1. The Measuring of the Temple. John received a measuring reed and was commanded to "measure" the temple of God, the altar, and the worshipers, a word that in the Bible means to "evaluate" or "judge" metaphorically (2 Cor. 10:12). In the OT, the Hebrew word *madad* is used to express God's act of judging the sins of His people (Is. 65:7), and in the NT, the Greek word *metron* is used to designate the final judgment (Matt. 7:2). This scene echoes Ezekiel's vision in which the prophet saw a divine person measuring the temple for the purpose of restoring it (Ezek. 40–43). In light of Ezekiel's vision, the measuring of the temple in Revelation is related to the restoration of the temple. The temple that John was to measure is the temple in heaven. In the OT, the temple, altar, and worshipers are only mentioned together in connection with the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:16–19, 30–31), which was the annual day of judgment when God ultimately dealt with the sins of His people. This concept is the backdrop of Revelation 11:1. It shows that the measuring here refers to the judgment, which is to take place prior to the Second Coming (14:7). It will concern God's people exclusively, who are the worshipers in the temple, and its purpose will be to determine who has been faithful to the Lord and who has not.

Revelation 11:1 shows that the message of Christ's work in the heavenly sanctuary lies at the heart of the final declaration of the gospel. Throughout the history of sin, Satan has constantly challenged God's character and governance. The heavenly sanctuary message concerns the vindication of God's character and the restoration of His rightful rule over the universe. As such, it unfolds new aspects of the meaning of the gospel message regarding the atoning work of Christ and His righteousness as the only means of salvation for humanity.

11:2. The Trampling of the Holy City. The court outside the temple was to be excluded from the measuring because "it has been given to the Gentiles." The outer court of the temple in Jerusalem was the only place outside the temple building where the Gentiles were allowed to enter. It is this area that Jesus cleansed twice (Matt. 21:12–17; John 2:13–22), so that the Gentiles could worship in peace. The Greek word *ethnoi* ("nations," "Gentiles") in Revelation refers to those not among God's people or those hostile to Him (11:18; 14:8; 16:19); this world was to belong to them. The Gentiles (or nations) were to trample the holy city underfoot for forty-two months. Jesus also predicted that Jerusalem would be trampled by the Gentiles "until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled" (Luke 21:24), a prediction through which He made the trampling of Jerusalem a symbol of the persecution of God's people. Therefore, the trampling of the holy city in Revelation 11:2 refers to the persecution of God's people for a period of forty-two months (see 13:5–7) during the Middle Ages.

In Revelation, the time period of forty-two months (Rev. 11:2; 13:5) is the same as a time, times, and half a time (Dan. 7:25; cf. 12:7; Rev. 12:14) and 1,260 days (Rev. 11:3; 12:6) in Daniel. Prophetic days often stand as a symbol for years. Historicist interpreters have adopted the year A.D. 538 as the beginning of this prophetic period. By that time, the church had established itself as an ecclesiastical power and dominated the Western world throughout medieval times. In A.D. 1798, the prophetic period came to an end when the events of the French Revolution brought the church's long period of oppressive political power to its end.

11:3–6. The Two Witnesses. God was to empower His two witnesses to prophesy during the period of the 1,260 days (see v. 2). Ancient Israel's legal system required at least two witnesses to establish something as true (Deut. 19:15; John 8:17). Following that practice, Jesus sent His disciples out to preach the gospel (Mark 6:7; Luke 10:1). The concept of the two witnesses proclaiming the gospel points to the authenticity of the message.

The word "prophesy" brings to mind Revelation 10:11, where John was told that he would have to prophesy again concerning many nations. This shows that the commission to prophesy extended to the church. In the vision, the two witnesses were clothed in sackcloth, which was made of goat hair and was the usual attire of the Israelite prophets (e.g., 2 Kin. 1:8; Is. 20:2; Zech. 13:4), and in Revelation 11:10, the two witnesses are explicitly confirmed to be prophets. Sackcloth was also the garment of mourning (Gen. 37:34; Esth. 4:1–3). The portrayal of the two witnesses prophesying in sackcloth during the prophetic period of 1,260 days thus points to the difficult time God's people were to endure as they proclaimed the gospel message to the world.

Bittersweet Experience of God's End-Time People

John's bittersweet visionary experience is contextually related to the unsealing of Daniel's end-time prophecies and the proclamation that there would be no more time (Rev. 10:6). The content of the little scroll is related to the prophetic revelation John had been commissioned to communicate to God's people (Rev. 1:1). The prophet had faithfully fulfilled his prophetic task (1:2, 9), and he expected the conclusion of earth's history to occur with the blowing of the seventh trumpet. Before the end transpires, however, the gospel must be preached throughout the entire world (Rev. 14:6–7).

John's visionary experience had a deeper purpose. Since he represented the church that was commissioned with proclaiming the gospel, his visionary experience portrays that of God's end-time people as they go about realizing the task of preaching the gospel after the fulfillment of the 1,260-day prophetic period given in Daniel. After this prophetic period ended, those involved in the Millerite movement went through a bittersweet experience in 1844, which is in line with the bittersweet scroll that John consumed. The message of the soon coming of Christ was very sweet to them, but when the anticipated date passed without His return, the disappointed Millerites experienced the bitterness of the message they had proclaimed. Although disappointed and ridiculed, those who stayed firm saw in John's visionary experience the prophecy of their own situation. The command not to write down what he heard could be related to this bittersweet experience. Christ's commission to John to "prophesy again" to many peoples, nations, tongues or languages, and kings (Rev. 10:11) is the commission to God's end-time people to proclaim the message of the Second Coming in connection with the unsealed prophecies of the book of Daniel. It clearly corresponds to the messages of the three angels in Revelation 14:6–12.

John relates the two witnesses to several OT personalities. First, they are described as two olive trees and two lampstands that stand before God, the Lord of the earth. This is a reference to Zechariah's vision of the lampstand between the two olive trees (Zech. 4:2–3), the latter of which represented the two anointed ones, Joshua the high priest and Zerubbabel the governor of Judea, as they stood beside and served the Lord of the earth (Zech. 4:14). The activity of the two witnesses thus resembles Joshua and Zerubbabel in their priestly and royal roles.

Second, they are portrayed in terms of Elijah and Moses, the former of whom closed up the heavens so that it would not rain for three and a half years (1 Kin. 17) and called down fire from heaven on the soldiers who came to arrest him (2 Kin. 1:9–14). In the same manner, the two witnesses send fire from their mouths to destroy their enemies (v. 5) and have the power to withhold rain from the earth (v. 6). Just as Moses turned water into blood (Ex. 7:17–20) and struck the land of Egypt with various plagues, the two witnesses also have the power to turn water into blood and inflict any kind of plague. We must keep in mind that the two witnesses are not Moses and Elijah reincarnated but are symbolic figures. The same divine power that accompanied the prophetic activities of the two greatest prophets in Israel's history also accompanies the prophetic ministry of these two symbolic figures.

Who are these two witnesses? They represent the Bible (the OT and NT) as well as God's people in the OT and NT (see the use of the terms "witness" and "testimony" or "testify" in Matt. 24:14; John 5:39). Even though both Elijah and Moses were figures from the OT, it must be remembered the John the Baptist came in the spirit of Elijah (Luke 1:17), being the Elijah that was to come (Matt. 11:14). The proclamation of this divine word was entrusted to God's people. These two interpretations must not stand in opposition to each other. Revelation 11:8 identifies the two witnesses as one entity rather than two (the Greek reads "the dead body of them"). It is therefore appropriate to identify in the two witnesses the Bible and the people of God as they were to bear witness to the word of God during the prophetic period of the 1,260 days and again at the time of the end.

11:7–10. The Witnesses Killed. At the conclusion of the prophetic 1,260 days, the beast from the abyss would attack and kill the two witnesses from the previous section (v. 7). We already saw that the abyss or bottomless pit is the abode of Satan and the fallen angels (see commentary on Rev. 9:1–6). The beast that was to persecute the two witnesses arose from the very abode of Satan. This killing of the two witnesses thus aptly applies to the atheist assault against the Bible and the abolition of religion during the French Revolution at the conclusion of the 1,260-day prophetic period. The forces of atheism and secularism portrayed here are still alive throughout the world today.

The two witnesses were destined to lie publicly exposed on the street of the great city after their death (v. 8). This great city is identified as a territory governed by the beast that arose from the abyss at the end of the prophetic 1,260 days; as such, it should not be confused with end-time Babylon, the other great city of the end (14:8). This territory would have the spiritual characteristics of other ancient great cities: it would possess the wickedness and moral degradation of the inhabitants of Sodom (Gen. 19:4–11); would arrogantly reject the only true God, just like the king of Egypt during the Exodus (Ex. 5:2); and would embody the rebelliousness of God's professed people in Jerusalem, where the "Lord was crucified" (v. 8).

The body of the witnesses was to lay exposed and unburied for three and a half days, a period that first corresponds to the time Jesus spent in the tomb (see Matt. 12:40). The martyrdom and death of the two witnesses are linked in this way to the death of Christ. Second, historicist interpreters have usually identified this period as the years 1793–1797, during which the French government abolished religion and banned religious practices. The death of the two witnesses would cause great joy and gloating among those who dwelled on the earth (v. 10), which is a reference to the wicked (see 6:10). They would celebrate because these two prophets had tormented those living on the earth. The word of God always troubles the consciences of those who hear it but are unwilling to surrender themselves to it.

11:11–14. The Witnesses Resurrected. After three and a half days, God breathed life into the two witnesses and made them stand erect. The language used here echoes the creation of the first man in Genesis 2:7. This scene also recalls Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones (Ezek. 37:1–10). Israel was perceived by their enemies as having been defeated and killed during the Babylonian exile, but, as Ezekiel prophesied, breath entered the dry bones and they returned to life and stood on their feet.

The astounding restoration of the witnesses to life filled their enemies with terror (v. 11). They thought they had silenced the witnesses that had tormented their consciences, but the word of God ultimately triumphed. In the sight of their enemies, the resurrected witnesses were then miraculously taken to heaven on a cloud (v. 12). This exaltation from their previous humiliated position added to the terror experienced by the earth dwellers.

Historically, one of the outcomes of the French Revolution was a great revival of interest in the Bible, manifested in particular by the establishment of numerous great Bible societies and missionary societies, which were founded to spread the gospel. The two witnesses thus came back to life, setting the stage for the gospel to be preached around the world like never before in history. The ascension of the resurrected witnesses was accompanied by a strong earthquake that struck a tenth of the city and killed seven thousand people. A tenth denotes a small part of a whole; the earthquake caused the collapse of only a part of the city. A second, more severe earthquake will later strike end-time Babylon, causing its total collapse (Rev. 16:18). The seven thousand people who were killed represent the fullness of the hardened unbelievers. The two witnesses, the Bible and the people of the Bible, were to be victorious.

The rest of the people reverently gave glory to the God of heaven (v. 13). This brings to mind the appeal of the first angel in Revelation 14:7 and shows that the vindication of the two witnesses parallels the proclamation of the eternal gospel from the first angel. As earth's history nears its end, the world will once again witness a global proclamation of the gospel. John saw that this final proclamation will illuminate the whole earth with the glory of the gospel message (18:1).

Revelation 11:3–14 describes the symbolic bitterness and pain experienced by God's people as they proclaim the gospel message to the world. While the testimony of the symbolic two witnesses applies historically to the Middle Ages and the atheism born out of the French Revolution, its significance goes beyond any temporal and geographic location. It shows that just as in the past, today God has people who are faithful in bearing witness of the gospel to the world. He uses them as He used Moses during the Exodus, Elijah during Israel's apostasy, and Joshua and Zerubbabel during the postexilic times.

11:15–18
The Seventh Trumpet

The sounding of the seventh trumpet signals the conclusion of this earth's history, the final woe, and the completion of God's mystery (see Rev. 10:7). The three woes work in a progression, each leading to the next. The first woe (the fifth trumpet; 9:1–11) dealt with the lack of a person's spiritual recognition of who they are (i.e., the self-sufficiency of the secularist movement). The second woe (the sixth trumpet; 9:12–21) dealt with the lack of a person's spiritual recognition of who God is (i.e., total rejection of God that leads to a life ruled by Satan and his atheistic philosophies). The third woe (the seventh trumpet; 11:15–18) is the natural result of those recognitions that will have a very real effect, eternal death, one thousand years after the first death at the Second Advent (20:5–6, 12–15).

11:15–17. The Announcement of God's Kingdom. In this vision, John heard loud voices in heaven declaring the ultimate establishment of God's kingdom on the earth, prophesying that His reign will last forever (v. 15). In response, the twenty-four elders (see Rev. 4:4) fell down before God and sang a hymn of praise for God's power and dominion (v. 17). This planet, which has been under Satan's dominion for many ages, is shown to finally return to God's full dominion and rule. After Christ's death on the cross and His ascension to heaven, Satan, the usurper, was totally deprived of any access to heaven and Christ was proclaimed to be the legitimate ruler of the earth (12:10). However, this rebellious world is still under Satan's dominion. Christ must reign as coruler with the Father until He has put His enemies under His feet, that is, defeated them (1 Cor. 15:25). Revelation proclaims at the sound of the seventh trumpet that God will ultimately reveal His great power.

11:18. The Mystery of God to Be Finished. The second part of the hymn sung by the twenty-four elders (v. 18) outlines the events of the second half of the book of Revelation: (1) Revelation 12–14 describes Satan and his two allies, the sea beast and the earth beast, uniting the nations of the world in their anger against God and His faithful people. (2) God will respond to the anger of the nations with His wrath, portrayed in terms of the seven last plagues, as described in Revelation 15–18. (3) The time for the judging of the dead is developed in Revelation 20:11–15. (4) The reward of the prophets and all of God's people is described in Revelation 21–22. (5) The destruction of those who destroy the earth is to be fulfilled by the destruction of Satan, his hosts, and their followers in the final act of the drama of the Great Controversy (19:11—20:15).

The expression "those who destroy the earth" does not primarily refer to ecological concerns related to the destruction of the earth by modern technology. Its meaning is rooted in two OT texts. First, in Hebrew, Genesis 6:12–13 identifies the antediluvians as the destroyers of the earth, who did so by filling the earth with iniquity; as a result, God destroyed them. Second, Jeremiah identifies historical Babylon as the destroying mountain that demolished the whole earth (Jer. 51:25–26). According to Revelation 19:2, end-time Babylon was to be judged because it had destroyed (*phtheirō*, "destroy," "ruin") the earth with its immorality. This shows that Revelation 11:18 refers to the activities of end-time Babylon, which fills the earth with sins that accumulate up to heaven (Rev. 18:5). Obviously, human sin and depravity have a negative impact on the environment.

11:19
Opening of the Ark of the Covenant

When the third vision concluded, God's temple in heaven was opened, enabling John to see the ark of the covenant in the Most Holy Place. The appearance of the ark of the covenant was accompanied by thunderclaps, rumbling voices, lightning flashes, an earthquake, and a severe hailstorm, representing the divine presence (Rev. 4:5; 8:5; 16:18; cf. Ex. 19:16–19; 20:18; Deut. 5:22–23). The mention of the ark of the covenant at the beginning of the new vision points to three things: First, in OT times, the ark of the covenant was the symbol of God's throne and of His covenant presence among His people. Thus, the reference to the ark of the covenant in Revelation 11:19 reminds God's end-time people that He will be with them up to the closing days of this earth's history.

Second, the opening of the Most Holy Place shows that the events in Revelation 12–20 are portrayed in the context of the new phase of Christ's ministry in the heavenly sanctuary, represented by the work of the high priest during the Day of Atonement, which can best be defined as the pre-Advent judgment (cf. Rev. 14:7). This judgment is introduced in Revelation 11:1–2 and takes place in the context of the eternal gospel (14:6–13). When this concludes, there will be a great separation between those who have chosen God and those who are lost (14:14–20). Christ will then come to give to every person according to his or her deeds (22:12; Rom. 2:6–11).

Third, the reference to the ark of the covenant reminds us of the tablets of the Ten Commandments, the Law of God, which reside inside it (see Ex. 25:16). This Law will play a significant role in the end-time events and is mentioned several times in the eschatological section of Revelation (e.g., 12:17; 14:12). As we will see, there are specific references to most of the commandments.

12:1—14:20
THE COSMIC CONFLICT AND ITS FINAL RESOLUTION

Revelation 12 describes a new vision that begins the eschatological portion of the book. The first half of Revelation describes the spiritual struggles of the church in a hostile world throughout its history while the focus of the second half of the book is primarily on the time of the end and the events leading to the return of Christ. Revelation 12 provides a summary of the cosmic conflict from its origin to the time of the remnant. John saw the dragon that would ally itself with the beast from the sea and the beast from the earth in an attempt to exterminate the remnant in the final conflict (Rev. 13). However, Revelation shows that God's remnant people would be safe on Mount Zion (14:1–5), gathered together through the results of the proclamation of the three angels' messages (14:6–12). At the Second Coming, the eschatological harvest will begin once the third angel's message has been completed (14:14–20).

12:1–17
The Woman, the Child, and the Dragon

This section consists of three parts: Satan's attempt to destroy Christ on earth (vv. 1–6), the expulsion of Satan and his angels from heaven (vv. 7–12), and Satan's efforts to destroy the church (vv. 13–17).

12:1–2. The Woman. John saw "a great sign" in heaven (v. 1; cf. 12:3; 15:1). The Greek word for "sign" (*sēmeion*) denotes a symbolic presentation of a real object. In reference to the woman, the word "sign" depicts her not as an actual woman but as a symbol of a spiritual reality.

In the Bible, a woman is often a symbol for God's people (e.g., Is. 54:5; Jer. 3:20; 2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:25–32). In the OT, when Israel is faithful to God, the nation is called a pure and faithful woman, while apostate and idolatrous Israel is portrayed as a prostitute. In the same way, in Revelation, God's faithful people are represented by a faithful woman (19:7–8; 22:17), while a prostitute symbolizes apostate and unfaithful people (17:1–6). In Revelation 12:1–5, the woman represents OT Israel as it brought the Messiah into the world, while in vv. 6 and 13–17, she represents the Israel that has faith in the Messiah, comprised of the Christian community. The use of one symbol emphasizes the continuity of God's people. John saw that the woman anguished in labor and was about to give birth to a child. The OT often depicts Israel as a beautifully adorned woman in travail (Is. 26:17–18; Jer. 4:31; Mic. 4:10), but in Revelation, the portrayal of a woman who endured the pangs of giving birth to the Messiah is primarily an allusion to Genesis 3:15. Revelation 12 shows the fulfillment of God's promise to redeem fallen humanity through the woman's offspring.

This woman was "clothed with the sun" (v. 1), stood on the moon, and had a crown or garland of twelve stars on her head, a vision that may be reminiscent of the portrayal of the radiance of Solomon's bride (Song 6:10). The sun, as the source of light, stands for the gospel message of salvation (2 Cor. 4:6) as presented in the Bible, and the moon reflects the light of the sun. Therefore, this woman was shown to be standing in the revelation of the OT that reflected the light of the gospel. The twelve stars on her head represent the twelve tribes of Israel as well as the twelve apostles (cf. 21:12, 14).

12:3–6. The Dragon. "Another sign appeared in heaven" (v. 3); this time, John saw a large red dragon with seven crowned heads and ten horns (v. 3). In Revelation 12:9, the dragon is identified as Satan, the ancient serpent of Genesis 3. In portraying Satan here in terms of the frightening appearance of an ancient mythological monster (i.e., a multiheaded serpent), the ferocity and viciousness of the archenemy of God is impressed on our minds.

The dragon had an earthly manifestation as his seven heads represent the kingdoms in history through which Satan worked to oppose God's plans and purpose in the world and to oppress His people (Rev. 17:9–11). The ten horns on the dragon's heads symbolize political authorities (17:12), and the seven crowns refer to Satan's false claim of lordship over this world (Luke 4:6). Here, Satan stood behind the Roman Empire as he tried to destroy the long-awaited Messiah. John added another identifying characteristic of the dragon: his tail dragged a third of the stars out of the heavens and hurled them to the earth (v. 4). In the Bible, the tail is a symbolic instrument of deception (Rev. 9:10). As he fell from his exalted position in heaven (Is. 14:12–15), Satan dragged a great number of heavenly angels down to the earth, all of whom became evil spirits (2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6).

In Revelation 12, Satan is pictured as waiting for the Messiah to be born in order to destroy Him (v. 4). He had been waiting since the time God announced the coming of the woman's offspring who would crush the serpent's head (Gen. 3:15). Eventually, the messianic child was born. He was to rule (lit., "shepherd") all nations with an iron scepter (v. 5) in fulfillment of Psalm 2:7–9, a reference to His judicial role (Rev. 19:15). However, the dragon was unable to kill Him because the Child was taken up to heaven, to God's throne (12:5), which refers to Christ's exaltation to the heavenly throne after His ascension to heaven (Eph. 1:20–22; 1 Pet. 3:22). This exaltation serves as an introduction to the subsequent scene (Rev. 12:7–12). As Christ was taken to heaven, the woman, signifying God's people on earth, were to find divine protection in the wilderness during the prophetic time of 1,260 days (v. 6).

12:7–12. War in Heaven. This section transitions to a new scene in the story. We are taken to the battle between good and evil at the moment war broke out in heaven between Michael and His angels and the dragon and his angels (v. 7). In the Bible, Michael ("who is like God") is identified as the chief prince (Dan. 10:13, 21; 12:1) and the archangel (Jude 9). He is the One who appeared to Joshua at Jericho as the commander of the heavenly host and is equated with the Lord Himself (Josh. 5:13–15). This leads to the conclusion that Michael is an eschatological name for Christ, who led the heavenly army in fighting against Satan. The devil and his forces eventually lost the battle and were expelled from heaven as a result, cast down to the earth.

The original battle is used to illustrate the final triumph of Christ over Satan at the cross. According to Revelation 12:10–12, whatever access Satan had to heaven ended after Jesus's ascension. He was first expelled from heaven at the beginning of the Great Controversy when he rebelled against God's government (Is. 14:12–15). By deceiving Adam, he usurped the rule and dominion of this earth (Luke 4:6) and became the ruler of this world (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). However, he still had limited access to heaven after he was cast down to earth (Job 1:6–12; 2:1–7). The situation changed with the death of Jesus on the cross, when Satan's true character was revealed before the entire universe. Christ was exalted when the Father seated Him at His right hand in heaven (Eph. 1:20; cf. 1 Pet. 3:22) and proclaimed Him the legitimate ruler over the earth. Satan was unwilling to recognize Christ's authority and once again stood in open revolt against God. At that point, Satan was forever expelled from heaven. Jesus predicted this event when He stated that the cross was the time of the judgment of the world and the time when the ruler of this world would be thrown out (John 12:31). Since that time, Satan and the fallen angels have been confined to the earth as their prison until they receive their punishment (2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6). Satan no longer has access to the heavenly courts and he can no longer accuse God's people in heaven.

God's kingdom and Christ's authority were officially established with Satan's expulsion, for the accuser of God's people had been cast down (v. 10; cf. Job 1–2; Zech. 3). Victory over Satan is achieved only by virtue of Christ's substitutionary death (Rev. 5) and through the encouragement that comes from sharing Christ's triumph, regardless of the consequences (12:11). However, while Satan's fate was decided, his defeat was not yet complete as his claim to lordship over the earth still continued. Heaven therefore gave a warning to the earth and the sea, and the vision states that the devil has come down to them in fury, knowing his time is short (v. 12). The reference to the earth and the sea points to the global dimension of this warning; Satan's expulsion from heaven affected the entire earth. Chapter 13 is particularly significant in this regard, as it records how John saw Satan's two associates rise from out of the earth and the sea to cause the inhabitants of the earth to side with Satan in the final crisis. The fact that Satan's time is short (Gr. *oligon*; v. 12) means that his time is limited, just as a person who is sentenced to death realizes that he or she has only a short time despite the fact that the execution may take place many years from the present.

12:13–16. War on Earth. After his expulsion, Satan could no longer harm Christ, so he began to persecute Christ's church. However, the woman, who is a symbol of the church, was given the "two wings of a great eagle" so that she could fly to the wilderness and be cared for by God during the prophetic period of a time, times, and half a time (v. 14), or 1,260 days/years (A.D. 538–1798; see "The 1,260 Days/Years," p. 1037). The language used here comes from the Exodus event, when Israel left Egypt (Ex. 19:4). As God cared for Israel during those wilderness years (Deut. 8:15–18), so He cared for His faithful people during the Middle Ages. This is the same time during which the two witnesses bore their testimony to the gospel in sackcloth (Rev. 11:3) and the antichrist power persecuted God's faithful people (13:5), who took refuge in isolated places in order to escape persecution and the corrupted influences of the institutional church.

In his effort to destroy the woman, the serpent spewed a flooding river of water from his mouth (v. 15), an act that echoes the serpent's deceptive words in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:1–5). In the OT, overflowing water is also often used as a symbol of the enemies of God's people attacking and destroying them (Ps. 69:1–2; 124:2–5; Is. 8:7–8; Jer. 47:2). The water that poured from the dragon's mouth thus points to both persecution and false teachings as the weapons Satan used against God's people during the 1,260-day prophetic period.

At this point in the vision, a new entity is introduced: the earth, which was friendly to the woman and swallowed the torrent of persecution and false teachings with which the dragon tried to destroy the woman. Once again, John used the language of the Exodus, alluding to when the earth swallowed the Egyptians who were pursuing the Israelites in an effort to destroy them (Ex. 15:12). The prophecy points here to a new territory that would provide protection for the church from Satan's efforts to destroy it at the conclusion of the prophetic 1,260-day period. However, this same territory was later to become the front line of the eschatological showdown, giving rise to the political power that would become Satan's agent in the final crisis (see Rev. 13:11–18).

12:17. Satan's Attack on the Remnant. This passage summarizes what comes next in the book, namely, Satan's final attack against God's end-time people (Rev. 13). The dragon became enraged with the woman and went to war with "the rest of her offspring" (12:17). The vision says Satan turned his fury against the remnant of the woman's offspring because at the time of the end, the church was eventually going to turn from its faithfulness to apostasy (see Rev. 17). Satan therefore went after what was left of the true people of God, the remnant that remained faithful to Christ.

The Greek word *loipoi* ("remnant," "remaining ones") describes the ones who remained faithful to God in comparison to the apostatized majority (1 Kin. 19:18; Rev. 2:24; 3:2–3). Revelation 12:17 announces that at the end of time, in the midst of global apostasy, there is to be a people who will remain faithful to Christ. They are described first of all as the ones who keep the commandments of God (see 14:12). Revelation 13 shows that at the end of time, the first four commandments of the Decalogue will be particularly central to the end-time conflict. Second, these people have Jesus's testimony, a phrase that in Revelation 19:10 is equated with the spirit of prophecy. In John's day, the expression "the spirit of prophecy" referred to the Holy Spirit speaking through prophets. Jesus's testimony thus refers to His witnessing to His people through the gift of prophecy, just as He did through John (Rev. 1:2). The book of Revelation therefore shows that at the time of the end, God's faithful people are to have the prophetic gift to guide and sustain them in the midst of satanic deception.

13:1–10

The Beast from the Sea

We must keep in mind that from this point on we are dealing primarily with prophecies yet to be fulfilled. While these prophecies tell us about what will happen at the time of the end, they do not tell us exactly when and how the final events will take place. We must therefore be careful not to speculate beyond what prophecy has revealed to us. A full understanding of the end-time prophecies will be possible only at the time of their fulfillment, not before.

Beginning with chapter 13, there is a shift in Satan's strategy in his attempts to win the people of the world for himself. Previously, Satan attacked the church primarily by means of persecution and coercion, and Revelation shows that in preparing for the final crisis he will expand his strategy from coercion to include deception. This shift in Satan's strategy corresponds to the basic transition from the historical to the eschatological focus of the book. While the word "deceive" does not occur at all in the historical section of Revelation (chaps. 4–11), it appears regularly in the eschatological section (chaps. 12–20) in descriptions of Satan's end-time activities in preparation for the final crisis.

Revelation 13–20 portrays Satan's endeavors to win the world's allegiance by launching a great counterfeit of the true God and His salvific activities in the world. Revelation 13 describes a triune league formed between the dragon and his two allies: the sea beast (13:1–10) and the earth beast (13:11–18). This diabolic triumvirate is to stand as an antithesis to the Trinity of the Godhead (1:4–6). Throughout the rest of the book, the members of this satanic triad are inseparably associated in the opposition of God's activities in the world and the deception that leads people to turn away from God and side with Satan in the final crisis (16:13–14; 19:20; 20:10).

The Sea Beast and the Little Horn of Daniel

There is a long account of historicist interpretation regarding the identity of the beast from the sea. This identification often uses lists, which vary in length, of characteristics shared by both this beast and the little horn of Daniel 7. Here, we provide six shared characteristics: both the fourth beast (Rome) of Daniel 7 and the first beast in Revelation 13 came out of the sea, symbolizing the stormy social and political conditions of human society; both beasts had ten horns (Dan. 7:7; Rev. 13:1), symbolizing the people groups that arose and displaced the Romans (for more on the identification of the ten horns, see commentary on Dan. 7:1–8); the sea beast had characteristics like the first three beasts (lion, bear, leopard; Rev. 13:2) that came before the fourth beast of Daniel 7; the sea beast had seven heads (Rev. 13:1), representing the powers used by Satan to persecute God's people throughout history (see 17:9–11); the sea beast had blasphemous names on each head (Rev. 13:1), pointing to the divine title the beast blasphemously claimed (see 13:5–6) in addition to speaking blasphemies (13:5), which is one of the chief characteristics of the little horn of Daniel 7 (Dan. 7:25; cf. 7:8, 11, 20); and finally, both the sea beast and the little horn wage war against God's people for 1,260 years (Rev. 13:5, 7; Dan. 7:21, 25 ; see "The Sea Beast and the 1,260 Days/Years," p. 1976). The sea beast thus corresponds to the little horn of Daniel 7, which was prophesied to rise from among the ten horns of the fourth beast (vv. 8, 23–25).

13:1–4. Description of the Beast. Some manuscripts read "I stood," which suggests that John stood on the seashore as he watched the

beast come out of the water. However, the best Greek manuscripts read "he stood," referring to the dragon. John therefore saw the dragon on the seashore as a monstrous beast (Gr. *thērion*, denoting a savage beast) came out of the sea. In the Bible, the beast is a symbol of a political power, while the sea symbolizes the stormy social and political conditions in the world following the downfall of the Roman Empire (cf. Dan. 7:2–3).

John described the beast as it emerged from the water, saying it had ten horns and seven heads. This description mirrors that of the dragon in Revelation 12:3, showing that this power is a true representative of the dragon. The heads of the beast are the powers Satan has used to persecute God's people throughout history (see 17:9–11), and the blasphemous names on them point to the divine names the beast claims to have (see 13:5–6). The ten horns point to Daniel 7 and symbolize the nations that sprung out of the Roman Empire after its demise (Dan. 7:24). The horns in Revelation 13 have royal crowns to show that the power represented by the sea beast appears at the point in history when those nations reign. The sea beast thus corresponds to the little horn of Daniel 7.

As the beast finally stepped out of the water, John saw parts resembling a leopard, a bear, and a lion (v. 2). This beast combined the characteristics of the four beasts that came out of the sea in Daniel 7:2–8 and that represent four earthly kingdoms: Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome (Dan. 7:17; see "The Sea Beast and the Little Horn of Daniel," p. 1974).

The dragon gave the beast his power, throne, and great authority (v. 2b). Here we see an enthronement scene replicating the enthronement of Christ (chap. 5). Just as John saw in vision that the Father had given His throne and authority to Christ (Rev. 2:27), the dragon established the beast as his coregent and representative on earth. This affirms the status of this symbolic sea beast as the second member of the satanic trinity that was trying to take the place of Jesus Christ in the minds and hearts of the people.

The beast has three phases of existence, the first of which ended when one of the beast's heads was mortally wounded. This mirrors the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, as the Greek word *sphazō* is used for both the wounding of the beast and the death of Christ (Rev. 5:6). However, the mortal wound was eventually healed and the beast was restored (13:3), resulting in the amazement of the inhabitants of the earth. In admiration, they worshiped both the dragon that stood behind the beast and the beast itself, and in asking two rhetorical questions, the earth's inhabitants implied that no one was like the beast and that no one could defeat him. Their question "Who is like the beast?" stands in contrast to the question "Who is like God?" (cf. Ex. 15:11; Mic. 7:18), the latter of which refers to the incomparability of God. It is also a counterpart to the name Michael (Rev. 12:7), which in Hebrew means "Who is like God?" This ally of Satan is a true counterfeit of Jesus Christ in the final crisis.

13:5–10. Activities of the Beast. Having portrayed the beast in physical terms, John next turned to describing the beast's activities in terms of a mouth speaking great, boastful things and blasphemies (v. 5). In the NT, blasphemy denotes a claim of equality with God (Matt. 26:63–65; John 10:33) or the appropriation of God's prerogatives (Mark 2:7). The sea beast claimed the titles of God and the prerogatives that belong to God alone. In the prophecy, the beast was allowed time to exercise its authority for forty-two months or 1,260 days/years (A.D. 538–1798; see Rev. 11:2; see "The Sea Beast and the 1,260 Days/Years," p. 1976). These activities of the beast echo the activities of the antidivine power of the little horn that came out of the fourth beast in Daniel 7.

John saw that the blasphemies of the sea beast were directed against God, more specifically His name, His "tabernacle" or "dwelling place," and those who live in heaven (see v. 6). The dwelling of God is the sanctuary in heaven where Christ ministers on behalf of His people (e.g., Heb. 8:1–2). The sea beast denied Christ's mediatory work in the heavenly sanctuary by substituting it with a human system that administers salvation and forgiveness of sins. In Revelation, God's people are considered to be residents of heaven (Rev. 14:1; cf. Eph. 2:6; Col. 3:1–3) in contrast to the unfaithful who are regularly spoken of as those on the earth. The sea beast was allowed to wage war against God's people and to overcome them (see below, "The Sea Beast and the 1,260 Days/Years").

Once the beast was restored to power, the inhabitants of the world were filled with awe and admiration (v. 8). At this point, there is a switch from the past to the future tense, pointing to the time of the end. The resurrection of the beast was to win the allegiance of the whole world.

Having described the sea beast and his activities, John exhorts people to heed the message: captivity and the sword are God's punishments for those who have oppressed His people (v. 10; cf. Jer. 15:2; 43:11). The sea beast was eventually to receive retribution proportionate to the harm it had done to God's people (Rev. 19:20–21). This provides incentive for the patience and the faith of the saints. At this point, a question arises: how would the beast be healed? The answer is provided in the rest of chapter 13.

13:11–18

The Beast from the Earth

The focus of the vision shifts to Satan's second ally in the final crisis, who was to play a key role in the healing of the sea beast's deadly wound.

13:11. Description of the Beast. John saw another beast appear on the scene and used two Greek words to describe it: *allos*, meaning "another of the same kind," and *thērion*, which denotes a savage beast and is the same word used in the description of the first beast. This shows that the earthly power introduced here was of the same kind as the previous one. This time, John saw the beast come up out of the earth rather than the sea. The fact that Satan's two allies rose from the sea and the earth, respectively, points to the worldwide scope of Satan's end-time activities: woe was pronounced on both the sea and the earth, because the devil went down to them in fury (Rev. 12:12). The earth from which the second beast came is the same earth that saved the woman or church from the flooding waters of the dragon at the conclusion of the prophetic period of 1,260 days (Rev. 12:14–16). The power represented by the earth beast appeared in a territory friendly to the church and was a new player on the scene. While the sea beast had a long history, no history of the activities of the earth beast is mentioned. It arose to world power after the sea beast received the deadly wound during the events of the French Revolution. The earth beast thus functions as a power exclusive to the end times.

The Sea Beast and the 1,260 Days/Years

The text of Revelation shows that the power represented by the sea beast was to appear on the world scene as the successor of the Roman Empire and to exercise its authority and power during the prophetic 1,260 days, which is the same period of time the little horn of Daniel 7 was active (see "The Little Horn in Daniel 7," p. 1035, and "The 1,260 Days/Years," p. 1037). The only period that fits this time frame well is the Middle Ages, when many experienced religious oppression from the established church in Western Europe. Revelation 13 is a prophecy that depicts this major apostasy in the history of the Christian church—the one foretold by Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2:3–12.

Historicist interpreters have accepted the year A.D. 538 as the beginning of the prophetic period of forty-two months or 1,260 days/years, during which the state church of Western Europe shifted the position and prerogatives of God to the pope. In an encyclical letter entitled "The Reunion of Christendom," released on June 20, 1894, Pope Leo XIII reiterated these claims, saying, "We [the popes] hold upon this earth the place of God Almighty." The atoning ministry of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary was replaced by the church's priesthood, which claimed to possess the ability to forgive sins. All those who insisted on living by the Bible rather than by the state religion experienced persecution and martyrdom. History testifies that millions of Christians paid with their lives for their faithfulness to the teachings of the Bible. In modern times, characterized by ecumenism and religious tolerance, such statements are regarded as harsh, but present attitudes cannot erase historical facts.

However, the events of the French Revolution inflicted on the beast the deadly wound that brought the church's oppressive rule to an end. The year 1798 thus aptly marked the conclusion of the 1,260-day prophetic period. The state-instituted religion and the traditional God-centered theology that dominated the Western world for centuries were replaced with a human-centered philosophy and materialistic worldview. Revelation 13 shows, however, that the religious-political power that ruled during the Middle Ages was to rise again and exercise its oppressive power over the world at the time of the end.

In contrast to the terrifying appearance of the first beast, the earth beast seemed harmless, complete with two horns like those belonging to a lamb. In Revelation, the lamb is a symbol that is used to represent Christ only. This shows that this end-time power is Christlike in appearance and is friendly to God's people. The text shows, however, that this power would eventually begin to display a satanic spirit as it began to speak like the dragon. The dragon-like speech is a reference to the deceptive and seductive words of the serpent in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:1–5). This end-time power would be instrumental in inducing the whole world to worship the first beast that received the deadly wound.

The only world power that appeared in history in the postmedieval period that fits the description of the earth beast is Protestant America. Revelation 13 shows that the United States of America, which in the postmedieval period provided protection for and was a safe haven to the church, is to play a key role in last-day events.

13:12–13. Activities of the Beast. At this point, there is a change in tenses in the original Greek language from past to present, bringing us to the closing days of this world's history. The second beast began to exercise all the authority of the first. This end-time earthly power is an exact parody of the Holy Spirit; just as the Holy Spirit exercised the authority of Christ, pointing people to Him (John 15:26; 16:13–14), the earth beast will exercise all the authority of the sea beast, pointing people to it. The expression "authority of the first beast" (v. 12) refers to the coercive power that the medieval church exercised during the prophetic 1,260 days of the Middle Ages (see Rev. 13:5–8).

By exercising the authority of the first beast, the earth beast will cause the inhabitants of the world to worship the first beast, whose mortal wound will be healed (v. 12). The work of causing the inhabitants of the earth to worship the first beast correlates with the healing of the deadly wound of the sea beast. The earth beast will cause the people of the world to worship the sea beast initially through the use of miraculous signs as a means of persuasion (Rev. 13:13–14), and later, through coercion (13:15–17).

The earth beast will perform great signs, by which it will deceive the nations of the earth (see 2 Thess. 2:9–10). In contrast to the Holy Spirit, who moves people to worship Christ through miraculous signs, this end-time power will deceive the people of the world through deceptive miracles and will cause them to worship the sea beast. The greatest of these deceptive signs is making fire come down from heaven in an imitation of the prophetic role of Elijah on Mount Carmel (1 Kin. 18:36–38), living up to its moniker of the false prophet who works miracles on the sea beast's behalf (Rev. 16:13; 19:20; 20:10). The act of bringing fire down from heaven also mimics the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:3). All the activities of the earth beast will be designed to make people believe that these miraculous signs are the manifestations of true divine power.

13:14–15. The Image of the Beast. The healing of the sea beast will result in the restoration of the medieval political-religious system of worship. As previously indicated, the earth beast will deceive the inhabitants of the earth through miraculous signs. The people will accept those deceptive miracles as the manifestations of divine power due to the lamblike horns of the beast's appearance. The false prophet will persuade them to make an image, which is a copy of some reality, to the beast that received the deadly wound. The world will be enticed into creating a system of state religion that resembles the one from the period of oppression described prophetically as the forty-two months or 1,260 days. When civil and political powers join the leading religious organizations to force religion on people, they will have formed the image of the beast. However, images lack life (e.g., Ps.

135:15–17), and the earth beast therefore gives breath to the image of the beast to give it life. This brings Genesis 2:7 to mind, where, after having created Adam in His image, God breathed life into him, enabling him to function. By means of political power and a death threat, the earth beast persuades the people of the world to acknowledge the authority of the sea beast and to render allegiance to it.

Revelation 13 thus indicates that Protestant America (the earth beast) will have the leading role in the healing of the deadly wound of the papal system (the sea beast). At the time of the end, it will establish a union with the sea beast and establish an institution similar to the one that characterized medieval Christianity in Western Europe for the purpose of controlling the consciences and beliefs of the people of the world. The impact of the earth beast will be worldwide.

13:16–17. The Mark of the Beast. All who succumb to the pressure will receive a mark with the name of the beast on their right hand or on their forehead, regardless of class. To receive the mark of the beast means to belong to the beast and to worship it. The mark of the beast is the antithesis of the seal of God; just as the seal identifies those who belong to and worship God (Rev. 14:1), so the mark of the beast identifies those who belong to and worship the beast. The placement of a mark on the right hand or forehead evokes Deuteronomy 6:8, where Moses instructed the Israelites to bind God's law as a sign on their hand or their forehead. This shows that the mark on the forehead has to do with impressing God's law on the minds and behavior of His people through belief. In contrast, receiving the mark of the beast stands as a mark of refusal of God's commandments, exchanging obedience to God for obedience to the human commandments of the beast.

Revelation shows that the central issues in the final crisis will be worship and obedience to God in keeping His commandments (Rev. 14:12), with the Sabbath commandment being the most important and revealing test of one's faithfulness to God. The appeal of the three angels' messages to worship and obey the true God (14:7) rather than to worship the beast and receive its mark (14:9) clearly appears in the context of the Sabbath commandment. As the Sabbath is the distinctive sign of obedience of God's faithful people (Ex. 31:12–17; Ezek. 20:12, 20), so the mark of the beast is a sign of obedience to the beast. The mark of the beast is a direct attack on the fourth commandment, as it is a human substitute for God's commandment. The most obvious example of this is the establishment of Sunday, the first day of the week, as a day of worship in place of the seventh-day Sabbath (see below, "The Law and the Sabbath").

The Law and the Sabbath

The Law of God is of central significance in the book of Revelation. A principal characteristic of God's end-time people is that they keep His commandments (Rev. 12:17; 14:12). In the OT, the Sabbath commandment lies at the heart of the Decalogue as a seal, since the seventh-day Sabbath was a visible sign of loyalty to the one true God and of the special relationship between Him and His covenant people (Ex. 31:12–17; Ezek. 20:12, 20). The two versions of the Decalogue given in Exodus and Deuteronomy show that the Sabbath was to be a constant reminder to Israel of God as their Creator (Ex. 20:11) and their Savior (Deut. 5:15). Sabbath observance was an indication of submission and belonging to God.

Revelation shows that just as the Sabbath was the sign of faithfulness to God in the OT, so the Sabbath will once again be the distinctive sign of obedience and submission to God in the end times. This will distinguish God's end-time people from those who will choose the false apostate religious system and receive the mark of the beast on their right hand and forehead. Receiving the mark of the beast echoes Moses's instruction to the Israelites to bind God's commandments on the right hand or the forehead (Deut. 6:8). Receiving the mark of the beast thus functions as a similar sign of obedience to the end-time apostate religious system rather than obedience to God in keeping His commandments.

This concept is emphasized in the three angels' messages, which contain a call to the inhabitants of the earth to fear and worship the creator God followed by a warning to those who choose to worship the beast and receive its mark (14:7–12). This call to worship the creator God is given in the language of the fourth commandment of the Decalogue (v. 7; cf. Ex. 20:11). Relating the call to worship the true God with the Sabbath commandment and the warning not to worship the beast and receive its mark establishes the reception of the mark of the beast as a direct attack on the fourth commandment, the true Sabbath. That the mark has something to do with God's law is obvious from the concluding statement that describes God's people as those who maintain faithfulness to Christ and keep God's commands (Rev. 14:12).

However, Sunday observance today does not in and of itself determine that one will receive the mark of the beast. Sunday-keeping will become the mark of the beast only when people clearly understand the issues involved in choosing a day of worship. The time is coming when the mark of the beast will become the central issue of the Great Controversy; when every person in the world will have to take his or her stand for or against God's will.

Revelation 13:17 shows that at the climax of the end-time drama, economic sanctions for those who refuse to worship the image of the beast will play a pivotal role. Refusal to worship the beast will be treated as an act of disloyalty punishable by death. All of this is a result of Satan's age-old desire to be the sole ruler of this world, an aspiration that cannot be realized as long as there are people who refuse to acknowledge his rule. This entire scenario will conclude with the coming of Christ in power and glory, followed by the defeat of the satanic triune league and their forces (19:11–21) and the deliverance of His faithful people (Dan. 12:1).

Much of the language in Revelation 13:14–18 echoes Daniel 3, which records how Nebuchadnezzar forced image worship on his people: the image and worshiping the image (Dan. 3:5), the death threat for not worshiping the image (3:6), the universality of the scene (3:2), and the number six in regard to the image (3:1). Revelation 13 tells us that the story of Daniel 3 is to be repeated at the time of the end on a worldwide scale, when people will have to choose between worshiping the image or remaining faithful to God.

13:18. The Number 666. Revelation 13 concludes with a call to the reader to understand the number of the beast, 666, and a declaration that special wisdom and insight are needed to cultivate an understanding (see also 17:9). The wisdom in view here does not refer to intellectual ability but to divine discernment imparted by the Holy Spirit (Prov. 2:6; James 1:5). God's end-time people need divinely bestowed wisdom in order to discern the deceptive character of the beast and to be protected from the end-time deceit. Those who lack this wisdom will become victims of the duplicity and will worship the beast (see 2 Thess. 2:10–12; Rev. 13:8).

The book defines 666 as "the number of a man." The Greek phrase *arithmos anthrōpou* means "the number of humanity," like in Revelation 21:17 where *metron anthrōpou* means "human measurement." The beast of Revelation 13 does not represent a human being but a religious-political system that stands in opposition to God. Numbers regularly have symbolic meanings in Revelation, and in the Bible at large, seven expresses the perfection of God. Being one short of seven, six represents how humanity falls short of divine perfection based on the fact that human beings were created on the sixth day, a day prior to the completion of the full week of seven days. Human beings find their purpose only in the number seven, in acknowledging God as their Creator and Redeemer. The number 666 thus refers to humanity apart from God.

Six hundred and sixty-six applies exclusively to the time of the end. It refers to the sea beast in association with the earth beast and the dragon. In Greek, 666 is expressed as *hexakosioi hexēkonta hex*. Although it must be remembered that in the Greek it is expressed as the single number six hundred and sixty-six rather than as six, six, six, this trifold emphasis on "six" identifies the satanic triune league—the dragon, the sea beast, and the earth beast—as the counterfeit of the Trinity of the Godhead (see Rev. 1:4–6; see commentary on Rev. 13:1–10). As applied to the beast, 666 refers to the rebellious system that opposes God and exalts itself above God by claiming His titles and prerogatives (13:6–8; cf. 2 Thess. 2:4). This system is nothing more than a human institution that falls short of the divine character. God's message to this system is the same as the one to the king of Tyre in OT times: "You are a man and not God" (cf. Ezek. 28:9). Such an identification of this end-time antichrist system requires divine wisdom rather than intellectual cleverness and calculation.

The only other place in the Bible where the number 666 is found is in 1 Kings 10:14, where King Solomon's annual income is specified as 666 talents of gold. Right after this text, we see that Solomon turned away from God as he began to accumulate gold in his palace, multiply his chariots and horsemen, and marry many foreign wives, all of which were direct violations of God's instructions to Israelite kings (Deut. 17:16–17). In disobeying divine instruction, King Solomon became filled with pride and arrogance and turned to serve images of other gods, thus leading people away from God. The number 666 thus expresses human attempts at success without God.

In Revelation, 666 denotes an apostate system, which, like Solomon, was once faithful to God but eventually turned away from him. At the time of the end, this system, like Solomon, will lead the people of the world away from God. All those who receive the mark of the beast, which consists of the name of the beast and the number of its name, will side with an apostate system like Babylon of old that exalts itself above God and tries to take His place in the world.

14:1–4

The Victorious 144,000

As a result of Satan's intense activities in the closing days of earth's history, the whole world will be led to follow the beast (Rev. 13:8). However, during these perilous times, God will have a faithful remnant who will remain loyal and obedient to Him. They will be in Zion under the protection of God and the Lamb.

14:1–3. The New Song. The scene returns to the throne room where John saw the Lamb standing on Mount Zion with the 144,000 (see Rev. 7:4). In the OT, Mount Zion stood as the center of God's rule on earth (Ps. 48:1–3; Mic. 4:7), where God's people were secure from their enemies. The 144,000 were seen gathered under the banner of Christ. In contrast to the followers of the beast, who had the mark of the beast on their right hand or their forehead, John saw that the faithful had the Father's name written on their foreheads alone. They were sealed with the seal of protection. Since the name of God represents His character (Ex. 33:19; 34:6–7), the seal indicates that they reflected God's character in their lives.

John heard the righteous singing "a new song before the throne" (v. 3). It was the same song of deliverance sung by Israel after passing through the Red Sea (Ex. 15), though here it was sung by those who had gone through the great tribulation of the final crisis (Rev. 7:14). Only the 144,000 were able to learn that song, because it reflected their own experience. They stood firm in the midst of end-time deception and were delivered (see Dan. 12:1); hence, no other group in all creation was able to learn this song.

The Number of the Beast's Name

Throughout Christian history, numerous proposals have been put forward regarding the meaning of 666. One line of interpretation has been to assign roman numerals to various names or titles and find the sum and thus the number of the beast's name. Since the seventeenth century, this number has commonly been applied to the Latin title *vicarivs filii dei* (Vicar of the Son of God) under the assumption that it is an official papal title. We suggest a way of interpreting the number that seems to fit the biblical context better and that recognizes that applying 666 to the Latin phrase *vicarivs filii dei* can be problematic.

First, although some popes have occasionally been referred to as *vicarivs filii dei* in the past, there is no documented evidence that this has ever been an official papal title. Second, although Revelation encourages readers or hearers to calculate the number of the beast, which is specifically identified as the number 666 (13:18) immediately followed by the phrase "number of his [or its] name" (13:17), it does not at any point indicate that we ought to attach numerical value to the letters of a name. This has been the assumption. The Greek word translated "to calculate," *psēphizō*, means here "to figure out" (cf. Luke 14:28). For example, the 144,000 are described as having the name of God on their foreheads (14:1, 3), but no one has used mathematical calculations to interpret the number.

Third, the text does not specify which language ought to be used to interpret the name of the beast. In Revelation, when a name has a special meaning, the language is regularly specified as being either "in Hebrew" (9:11; 16:16) or "in Greek" (9:11). Latin is not used in Revelation; there is no indication that 666 is to be decoded in this language using Roman numerals as has been done with the Latin title *vicarivs filii dei*. Fourth, Revelation 13 shows that 666 applies exclusively to the end time in connection with the healing of the mortal wound of the sea beast as the earth beast causes the earth's inhabitants to receive the mark of the beast. Applying 666 to a Medieval Latin title does not fit the end-time context. It is obvious that we must wait for the interpretation, for only time will reveal the full meaning of this symbolic number.

14:4–5. Characteristics of the 144,000. The 144,000 are described first as virgins who have not defiled themselves with women. This defilement must be taken symbolically. In OT times, Israelite soldiers were required to keep themselves pure and to refrain from having sexual relations with women before going into battle (Deut. 23:9–11; 1 Sam. 21:4–5). Revelation speaks of how the harlot Babylon and her daughters, the apostate churches (Rev. 17:5), have seduced others into illicit relationships with them (17:1–5; 18:3, 9). The 144,000 are portrayed as militant troops who fight against Satan and his army (cf. 7:4–8) before the Second Coming and who have remained out of relationship with Babylon and her daughters and therefore spiritually undefiled, steadfastly faithful to one Husband: Christ (2 Cor. 11:2).

Second, they are described as the ones who will follow the Lamb wherever He goes. They will remain unwavering in their faithfulness to Christ, in contrast to the world, which chooses to follow the beast. Third, the 144,000 are said to be the ones who were redeemed from among humanity as the "firstfruits" to God and the Lamb (v. 4), referring to how in ancient Israel, the firstfruits belonged to God as the best of the harvest. John saw that the 144,000, purchased by the blood of Christ and as the firstfruits of the harvest, were standing on Mount Zion (Rev. 14:1–5). This implies that the harvest includes many others, redeemed by Christ throughout human history. Finally, this group is described as having uttered no falsehood and as being blameless (v. 5), which echoes Zephaniah's prophecy about the remnant of Israel, who would not lie or practice evil (3:13). The falsehoods allude to Satan's end-time deceptions (Rev. 13:14). While many choose to believe the lies, God's end-time people love of the truth and persist in abiding by it (2 Thess. 2:10–11).

The Greek word *amōmos* ("blameless," "without fault") in v. 5 does not refer to a moral, sinless status but rather to the fidelity of the 144,000 to Christ. While the former is true of the 144,000, it is not a characteristic exclusive to the last generation of saints. In the OT, Abraham (Gen. 17:1) and Job (Job 1:1) were blameless, but they were not sinless. Two thousand years ago, Christians were called to be holy and blameless before God (Eph. 1:4; 5:27; Phil. 2:15; Col. 1:22; Jude 24). Revelation presents the 144,000 as reflecting the true character of Christ. Because their robes were made white in the Lamb's blood, they are found spotless and blameless before God (2 Pet. 3:14).

14:6–13

The Three Angels' Messages

This section describes John's prophetic vision of the three vocal angels that were to fly in the sky and proclaim warnings to the inhabitants of the world. It is in response to these messages that the 144,000 were to be gathered from the nations of the world. The Greek word *angelos* means "messenger" and is often translated as "angel." In the Bible, angels often represent human beings in the service of God (Mal. 2:7; Matt. 11:10). Revelation 14:12 clearly links the three angels to God's end-time people.

14:6–7. The First Angel's Message. The first angel proclaimed the everlasting gospel (Gr. *euangelion*, "good news") to the inhabitants of the earth. The fact that the gospel the angel proclaimed is specifically called "everlasting" shows that this is the gospel of salvation, which contains both salvation and judgment. It is the good news of salvation for those who accept it, but it is judgment for those who reject it. The proclamation of the end-time gospel is worldwide in scope and is to be proclaimed to every nation, tribe, language (lit., "tongue"), and people. This angel was doing what God's people are commissioned to do (see Rev. 10:11) and is necessary because at the time of the end, the beast will offer humans its wine (14:8) and will exercise its Satan-delegated authority over every nation, tribe, language, and people (13:7). Just as Satan's deceptive activities are worldwide, so is the proclamation of the gospel in the end times.

The angel proclaimed the message with a loud voice, for it is an urgent message that concerns the eternal destiny of every single person. It consists of two exhortations, the first of which is to fear God and give Him glory. In Revelation, fearing God and giving Him glory always go together (11:13; 15:4). While the former designates a right relationship with God, the latter primarily denotes obedience to Him. God's end-time people are the ones who have reverence for God (11:18; 19:5). To fear God means to take Him seriously and acknowledge Him for who He is. It denotes a right relationship with Him and a full surrender to His will (Gen. 22:12; Job 1:8–9). Those who revere God live a life that glorifies Him by their obediently keeping His commandments (Deut. 5:29; 13:4; Eccl. 12:13; John 15:8). In Revelation, God's end-time people are characterized by their close relationship with Jesus Christ and their diligence in keeping all of His commandments (Rev. 12:17; 14:12).

We are to fear God and give Him glory because the hour of His judgment has come (v. 7). This echoes the words of Solomon when he refers to the importance of revering God and keeping His commands and when he states the fact that God will bring every action into judgment (Eccl. 12:13–14). This first message was a declaration that the judgment announced in Daniel 7:9–10, 26, the pre-Advent judgment that takes place just prior to the Second Coming, had just begun (cf. Dan. 8:13–14). The results of this judgment will be realized after the Millennium in the final judgment of the wicked (Rev. 20:11–15). Its purpose is to reveal the righteousness of God in saving His people and the final destiny of every human being (22:11). In Revelation, judgment is a part of the gospel. To God's people, judgment means vindication and salvation, but to the unbelieving it means condemnation. It is to the latter that the messages of the three angels are directed, calling them to worship the living God and offering them an opportunity to repent and turn to God (cf. 2 Pet. 3:9).

The second exhortation is to worship God, Maker of heaven, earth, the sea, and springs of water (Rev. 14:7; cf. Acts 14:15). Worship is central in the final confrontation between Christ and Satan. There will be only two groups in the time of the end: those who fear and worship God and those who fear and worship the beast. Revelation thus highlights the radical polarization of humanity.

True worship in the Bible is associated with the correct day of worship, a fact that is emphasized by how the call of the first angel to worship God the Creator directly alludes to the fourth commandment of the Decalogue (Ex. 20:11; see "The Law and the Sabbath," p. 1978). The call of the first angel to worship God the Creator is given in the context of Sabbath observance. The seventh-day Sabbath is a special sign of our relationship with God (Ex. 31:13; Ezek. 20:12, 20). The first angel's message prophesies that at the time of the end, the truth about God the Creator will once more be proclaimed to the world. This truth will counter Satan's deceptive activities, which lead the world into the false religion of serving the counterfeit god (2 Thess. 2:4).

14:8. The Second Angel's Message. The second angel announced the fall of the great city Babylon, which in Revelation is a symbol rooted in historical Babylon as the power that opposed God and oppressed His people. According to the Bible, Babylon was characterized by arrogance and rebellion against God from its very beginning (Gen. 11:1–9). Isaiah 14:12–15 equates Babylon with Satan and his attempt to make himself equal to God. In Revelation, end-time Babylon is a symbol of the satanic trinity: Satan, the sea beast, and the earth beast. Revelation prophesies that this satanic league will unite apostate religious powers under its auspices, which are referred to as Babylon's daughters (17:5). These daughters put themselves in Satan's service in opposing God and His people (see 13:11–18). Like Babylon of old, it is to exalt itself above God, seeking to occupy the place of God. The message of the second angel provides assurance to God's people that this wicked system will not last long. The twofold repetition of the word "fallen" (v. 8) points to the certainty of Babylon's end. Already fallen, it will soon come to its end, just as the Babylon of old (Is. 21:9; Jer. 51:8).

Babylon is judged because she made all nations drink her intoxicating wine of adultery. Jeremiah talks of Babylon having intoxicated the nations of the earth (Jer. 51:7). Revelation 17 pictures end-time Babylon as a prostitute who made all nations drink her wine and seduced them into illicit relationships with her (see 17:2), and Revelation 13 presents the satanic trinity's deception and seduction as they trick the people of the world into worshiping the beast and its image (vv. 11–18). The seduced nations will join end-time Babylon for economic security (18:3, 9–19), the medieval system of state-sponsored religion will be restored, and the mortal wound of the beast will be healed. The newly established religious-political union will enforce a false religion—a false gospel that controls people's consciences and conduct.

14:9–11. The Third Angel's Message. The message of the third angel gives a serious warning to those who choose to worship the beast and its image and who receive the mark on their forehead or their right hand. It presents all those who choose to drink Babylon's wine (14:8) as having to drink the wine of God's anger from the cup of His indignation. This wine is poured out in full strength (lit., "mixed unmixed"), meaning undiluted in the cup. In the OT, drinking wine from the Lord's cup is a frequent symbol of the execution of God's wrath (e.g., Job 21:20; Ps. 75:8; Is. 51:17–23). In ancient times, wine was often diluted with water to reduce its strength. Undiluted wine was supplemented with various herbs and spices to increase its intoxicating strength. This may be the meaning here, although it could also mean it is poured out unmixed with water. The undiluted wine represents the execution of God's wrath in its full strength, unmixed with mercy. The psalmist applies this metaphor to divine judgment (Ps. 75:8). This drinking of the undiluted cup of God's wrathful wine is portrayed in Revelation in terms of the seven last plagues (Rev. 16:19).

The third angel's message proclaims that all who worship the beast and its image and receive its mark will be further tormented with fire and brimstone, meaning burning sulfur, before the angels and the Lamb. In the OT, fire and brimstone is a symbol of judgment (Gen. 19:24; Is. 34:8–10). Revelation 14:11 declares that the smoke of the destruction of the wicked will ascend forever and that they will have no rest day and night. This is well-known language in the Bible. Isaiah prophesied that Edom would be destroyed by fire and brimstone and become a burning pitch that would not be quenched night or day; its smoke would rise up forever (34:9–10). Jude described the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah as suffering eternal fire as a retributive punishment (v. 7). These texts do not speak of endless burning, for neither Sodom nor Gomorrah nor Edom are still burning today. However, the effects of the fire that destroyed them last forever. Likewise, the "eternal fire" in Revelation does not refer to endless burning and suffering but rather to total annihilation. The prophesied fire is to burn until there is nothing left to burn.

The grotesque language used in the third angel's message is intended to move God's people to stand firm in the face of Satan's end-time deception. As the beast of Revelation 13 uses fear to compel the people in the world to choose false religion and receive the mark of the beast, so Revelation uses strong language to describe the ultimate fate of the wicked so that they can find peace and security in loyalty to the Lamb, thus revealing their fear of the Lord (see Matt. 10:28; Rev. 14:7).

14:12–13. The End-Time Saints. The three angels' messages conclude with a positive statement regarding the patient endurance of God's people. The word "this" or "here" in v. 12 shows that their endurance is primarily due to their faithful preaching of the end-time gospel, which counters Satan's deceptive activities. The saints mentioned here are the same ones prophetically spoken of in Revelation 12:17 as the object of Satan's furious rage and attack. They are characterized by their obedience to God in keeping His commandments and their unswerving faithfulness to Christ.

The saints are promised that if they suffer physical hardship and persecution, even to the point of death (Rev. 12:11), they will rest from their labors and their deeds will follow them (14:13). This promise stands in contrast to the proclamation that those who choose to worship the beast and receive its mark will never have rest (14:11). The eternal destiny of God's people is secure with Christ.

14:14–20

The Two Harvests

This section describes the great separation between those who have a relationship with God and those who choose to follow the beast, portrayed in terms of two harvests. Another set of three angels appeared to John in vision, coming from the temple in heaven to gather the grain into the storehouses (14:14–16) and the grapes into the winepress (14:17–20).

14:14–16. The Grain Harvest. The preaching of the gospel had been brought to an end, the destiny of every person decided, and Christ was about to bring judgment on the earth. John saw a white cloud, and on it was Jesus (14:14; cf. Dan. 7:13–14; Matt. 24:30; 26:64; Rev. 1:7). He was wearing the crown of victory (Gr. *stephanos*) and held in His hand a sharp sickle for reaping the harvest (see Mark 4:29).

John saw another angel come from the temple, the presence of God, and tell Jesus that the harvest could begin because the earth was ripe (v. 15). This mirrors Joel's prophecy of judgment against the nations (3:13). In response, Christ swung the sickle on the earth and reaped the harvest, symbolically portraying a great gathering of God's people at the end of this earth's history. Jesus explained that the reapers are angels (Matt. 13:39) and that before He comes, He will send His angels to gather His elect ones from all parts of the earth and to store them in His barn (Matt. 13:30-31). These gathered saints are the 144,000, the firstfruits of the harvest (Rev. 14:4). In Revelation 15:2-4, they are pictured in the presence of God and are securely protected from the harmful effects of the seven last plagues. At this point, the redeemed are about to experience the transformation of their mortal bodies (1 Cor. 15:51-54) and be joined by the resurrected saints. They will all be taken up to meet Jesus, who is coming in power and glory (1 Thess. 4:17).

14:17-20. The Grape Harvest. The wheat harvest was followed by the grape harvest. Another angel came out of the temple in heaven with a sharp sickle. Then an angel who had authority over fire came from the altar. This angel could be the one who ministered the incense with the prayers of God's people on the gold altar of incense before God and who, in concluding the service, hurled the fire on the earth as a symbol of God's judgment on rebellious humanity (Rev. 8:3-5). Here he signaled to the angel with the sickle to swing the sickle and gather the clusters, for the grapes were fully ripe.

The angel swung the sickle and gathered the grapes into the great winepress of God's anger to be crushed (14:19). The grapes were trodden underfoot outside the city, the new Jerusalem, into which nothing unclean would enter (21:27). Blood flowed from the winepress, rising up to the horses' bridles in extent of 1,600 *stadia* (180 mi. or 290 km), the approximate size of the Holy Land. However, since the number consists of four times four hundred, and four being the number of the earth (Is. 11:12; Rev. 7:1; 20:8), this hyperbolic distance points to the severity and worldwide scope of the execution of God's wrath. The entire world would look like a battlefield as a result of the harmful effects of the seven last plagues (19:17-21). The trampling of the grapes is described in the following section in terms of the outpouring of the seven last plagues (chaps. 15-16). Again, the picturesque language is used to warn the readers of Revelation of the seriousness of the decision they will make. Fear is expelled by a greater fear based on love. The only way to escape the destiny of the worshipers of the beast is to choose to worship and serve the true God.

15:1—18:24

THE SEVEN LAST PLAGUES

Revelation 15 begins a new vision that builds on the previous scene (14:14-20). It first describes the victorious saints gathered before the throne of God (15:1-4) and then the trampling of the rebellious in the winepress of God's anger that is portrayed in terms of the seven last plagues (15:5—19:21).

15:1-8

Introductory Vision

Revelation 15 is the introductory chapter to the whole vision; it provides vital information regarding the meaning and timing of the seven last plagues.

15:1. The Fullness of God's Wrath. The scene introduces seven angels who hold the bowls filled with the seven last plagues that were to be poured out on rebellious humanity. The plagues are identified as "last" because they are preceded by the plagues of the seven trumpets. The trumpets were preliminary judgments, anticipating the more severe judgmental plagues that were yet to come. Although punitive in purpose, they were diluted with mercy. These judgments are executed while the gospel is preached; their purpose is to awaken rebellious humanity, which is under divine judgment, and to move individuals to repentance.

However, the seven last plagues are presented as the reification of the wrath of God in its fullness on the worshipers of the beast, unmixed with or undiluted by mercy (see Rev. 14:10). In the Bible, divine wrath is defined as God's reaction to the choices people make (Rom. 1:26-28). Up to this point in earth's history, God's wrath had always been mixed with mercy. However, the time had come for all spurners of God's grace to experience the fullness of His divine wrath.

15:2-4. The Victorious Saints. Before the plagues were poured out by the angels, there was an interlude in the throne room that depicted those who choose not to worship the beast and receive its mark as standing on an expanse resembling a sea of glass. John saw them with harps in their hands and singing the song of Moses and of the Lamb (v. 3). This group of the redeemed is the same one he saw in Revelation 7:9 and 14:1-5. While in Revelation 14 their faithfulness to God is depicted in contrast to those who have sided with the satanic trinity, here they are protected by God, in contrast to the worshipers of the beast, who will experience the harmful effects of the seven last plagues. As the upcoming plagues are portrayed in terms of the plagues that struck the Egyptians just before the Exodus, the victorious saints here are proportionally pictured as if they are the Israelites on the other side of the Red Sea, celebrating the great victory and praising God for their miraculous deliverance (Ex. 15).

15:5-8. The Conclusion of Intercession. At this point, John saw as the temple or tabernacle in heaven was opened. Both "temple" and "tabernacle" are used here to allude to the Jerusalem temple as well as the sanctuary built by Moses. John saw in vision the heavenly temple or sanctuary, after which the earthly sanctuaries were modeled (see Ex. 25:9). The term "testimony" or "covenant law" (Rev. 15:5) refers to the stone tablets inscribed with the Ten Commandments, located inside the ark of the covenant (1 Kin. 8:9). This shows that the holy of holies of the heavenly temple is in view here. The angels came out of the temple with the seven plagues (vv. 5-6), coming from the very presence of God. Each angel was given a golden bowl filled with the wrath of God (v. 7; cf. v. 1). These are most likely the temple bowls filled with incense, which represents the prayers of God's people (see Rev. 5:8). Here, those same bowls were to serve as instruments for the execution of God's wrath on the enemies of His people. God was answering the prayers of His people.

At this point, the temple was filled with smoke from God's glory and power, resulting in no one being able to enter the temple (v. 8). This language is derived from the dedication of both the tabernacle in the wilderness (Ex. 40:34-35) and Solomon's temple (1 Kin. 8:10-11). On both occasions, the cloud of God's glory filled the building so that the priests could not enter to minister before Him. With the absence of the priests, there was no intercession in the temple. Revelation 15:8 shows that before the pouring out of the seven plagues on the world, Christ's intercessory ministry in heaven will be concluded, and at this point probation closes. With the preaching of the gospel being finished (14:6-20), the door of opportunity will ultimately close and the destiny of every person will have been decided.

This scene shows that the seven last plagues are not intended to bring anyone to repentance, as the opportunity for repentance has passed. They are rather intended to reveal the hardness of the hearts of the wicked. Just as each of the Egyptian plagues increased the hardness of the hearts of Pharaoh and his officials, so each last plague hardens the hearts of the worshipers of the satanic trinity.

16:1-21

The Seven Last Plagues

With the conclusion of Christ's mediatory ministry, the seven angels were ordered to pour out the bowls of the wrath of God on the earth. The judgments of these seven last plagues were to be poured out exclusively on those who chose to side with the satanic trinity and receive the mark of the beast. While the first five plagues seem to be literal (see Rev. 7:16), the last two are clearly symbolic and spiritual. The sixth plague brings us to the very threshold of the great battle of Armageddon, set in the closing period of this earth's history. The seventh plague concludes the scenario with the demise of end-time Babylon.

16:2-11. The First Five Plagues. The first angel poured his bowl on the earth, inflicting severely painful sores exclusively on those who had the mark of the beast and worshiped the image of the beast (see Rev. 14:9-10). This disease is described as causing painful and incurable boils that cover the entire body (cf. Deut. 28:35; Job 2:7). A plague of this kind struck the Egyptians during the Exodus (Ex. 9:9-11). God's sealed people were not to be affected by this plague.

The second and third angels poured out their bowls on bodies of water: the sea and the rivers and springs, respectively. These plagues echo the first plague of Egypt (Ex. 7:20-21) by turning the water to blood and killing the creatures within. Without food from the seas and clean water to drink from the rivers and springs, rebellious humanity will not survive. These plagues were to come on followers of the beast because they shed the blood of God's prophets and His people—they were given blood to drink in retribution (v. 6). The punishment fits the crime. In response, a voice came from the altar and declared the righteous nature of God's judgments (v. 7). This altar is the one spoken of in the fifth seal underneath which God's people were praying to God to vindicate them and judge those dwelling on the earth (see Rev. 6:9–10). Here, there comes an affirmation from the altar that their prayers were finally answered through these plagues. Justice will have been done.

The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, resulting in an intense heat that scorched people and caused them unbearable pain (vv. 8–9). This unbearable pain, however, did not move the wicked to repent. They had hardened their hearts to such an extent that they could not return. Instead, they cursed and blasphemed the name of God, who executed these plagues. Nothing was able to change the course of their actions.

The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, bringing total darkness over his kingdom (v. 10). This scene mirrors the ninth plague of Egypt, which struck the whole land with total and intense darkness (Ex. 10:21–23). Satan delegated the throne and authority to the beast (Rev. 13:2), but at this moment, the very seat of Satan's authority could not withstand the force of these plagues. The authority of the beast was thus undermined. As the people gnawed their tongues in pain, they became more enraged. They began to realize the impotence and inability of the unholy trinity to protect them from the effects of the plagues. They felt deceived. However, as in the case of the pharaoh during the Exodus, the terror and pain of the plagues further confirmed the hardness of their hearts. They continued to curse and blaspheme God for their pain and sores and refused to repent (v. 11).

16:12. The Sixth Plague. While the first five plagues seem to be literal (see Rev. 7:16), the sixth and seventh plagues are clearly symbolic and spiritual in nature. The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates (see 9:14), resulting in its waters drying up (v. 12). This whole scene echoes the fall of ancient Babylon to illustrate the fall of end-time Babylon (see below, "Babylon and the Great River Euphrates").

What will cause such a sudden change in attitude toward Babylon? As the people in the world experience the upheavals in nature, they will turn to Babylon for protection. However, as the fifth plague strikes the very seat of the beast's authority (16:10), the disillusioned people will realize the extent of Babylon's inability to protect them from the effects of the plagues. Feeling deceived and filled with hostility, they will unite in turning against Babylon and will destroy it.

The reason for the collapse of end-time Babylon is to prepare the way for the kings from the east. This is an allusion to Cyrus and his armies, who overthrew ancient Babylon as the oppressor of God's people. Isaiah referred to Cyrus as God's anointed (Is. 45:1), who would come from sunrise, that is, the east (Is. 41:25). His conquest of Babylon provided for the deliverance of God's people from captivity and their return to their homeland (Is. 44:28; Jer. 50:33–38). Just as the drying up of the waters of the Euphrates prepared the way for Cyrus and his forces to conquer ancient Babylon, so the symbolic drying up of the Euphrates in the end times will prepare the way for the coming of the kings from the east to defeat the end-time enemies of God and His people.

Babylon and the Great River Euphrates

In the OT, the Euphrates was the boundary that separated Israel from their enemies, such as Assyria and Babylon (Is. 7:20; Jer. 46:10). These enemy nations came against God's people from this great river (Is. 8:7–8). The Euphrates River flowed through the city of Babylon, nourished crops, and provided water for the people. Without the river, Babylon could not have existed.

In Revelation 17:1, Babylon is pictured as a prostitute who dwells on many waters, which may be a reference to the Euphrates (Jer. 51:13). The waters on which end-time Babylon will dwell represent the worldwide civil, secular, and political powers that give their support to Babylon (see Rev. 17:15). At a certain point in time, however, these symbolic waters will dry up.

The scene in which the Euphrates is dried up reflects when ancient Babylon was captured by Cyrus in 539 B.C. Additionally, the fall of ancient Babylon is associated with the drying up of the waters of the Euphrates in the OT (Is. 44:27–28; Jer. 51:36–37). Ancient historians tell us that the Persians diverted the Euphrates and entered the city through the dried riverbed, thereby taking the city by surprise. In a similar manner, the collapse of end-time Babylon, the enemy of God and His people, will take place when the worldwide civil, secular, and political powers withdraw their support and turn against the great city (Rev. 17:15–17).

The kings from the east referred to in Revelation 16 are Christ and His army of saints, who will fight in the final battle (see 17:14). In Revelation 19:14–16, at Jesus's return, the armies of heaven will be wearing "fine linen, white and clean" (19:14) as He leads them into battle. This linen represents the righteous acts of God's people (19:7–8). Elsewhere in Revelation, God's people are called royal priests (1:6; 5:10) and are pictured as an army of 144,000 warriors under the leadership of Jesus Christ as they fight against evil forces (14:1). The final battle of this earth's history involves Christ and His faithful people on one side and the coalition of the satanic trinity and their followers on the other.

16:13–14. Three Frog-like Demons. These verses explain how the nations of the earth gathered together to fight against God's people. The three angels gathered the remnant while three demonic spirits gathered the wicked. John saw three unclean spirits that looked like frogs coming out of the mouth of the unholy trinity, purposing to go to and assemble the leaders of the world for the battle of the "great day of God Almighty" (v. 14). This scene recalls the deceiving spirit that enticed King Ahab to refuse the message sent to him from God to go into battle (1 Kin. 22:21–23). The demonic spirits are the mouthpieces of the unholy trinity in the last deception. They are portrayed as the counterpart to the three angels of Revelation 14. The frog plague was the last of Moses's plagues that the Egyptian magicians were able to duplicate, by which they influenced Pharaoh to persist in his opposition to God (Ex. 8:1–15). The three frog-like demons are thus Satan's last attempt to counterfeit the work of God (Rev. 13:13–14). The satanic trinity will send them out with a false gospel to persuade the secular and political powers of the world to side with them against God and His people in preparation for the great day of God Almighty.

These frog-like demonic spirits are thus also Satan's powerful agents. Satan will enable them to perform miraculous signs as a means of persuasion. The activities of the demonic trinity will result in great success, as the kings of the world, meaning those with power, will be deceived. The stage will now be set for the final confrontation.

16:15. The Laodicean Warning. John briefly interrupted the scene with an exhortation from Jesus to His people: Christ is coming like a thief, and they are to keep alert and properly clothed lest they be found naked and exposed (v. 15). This exhortation echoes an ancient practice in the Jerusalem temple, where the temple captain would go by night to check the guards of the temple gates. If any guard were caught asleep at his post, his clothes were stripped off and burned and he was sent away in disgrace, naked. By alluding to this temple practice, Christ urged His followers to be spiritually alert. They must be like the temple guards, always dressed and on alert (Mark 13:35–37).

Jesus's admonition reiterated His earlier appeal to the church of Laodicea to clothe themselves with white garments, so that the shame of their nakedness would not be exposed (Rev. 3:18). White garments in Revelation symbolize uncompromising loyalty and faithfulness to Christ (3:4–5). In defeating Babylon, God would leave her abandoned and naked (17:16) as a small part of the severe humiliation experienced by a defeated army (Is. 20:4). Those who compromise with Babylon will have a share in her humiliating shamefulness. Only those clothed with the robe of Christ's righteousness will be able to stand firm in the final crisis.

16:16. Gathering for the Battle of Armageddon. The deceptive demonic miracles will achieve success beyond any prediction or expectation. John foresaw the world powers gathered together to the place called Armageddon in Hebrew (v. 16). The name has been interpreted in different ways, but it likely means "the mountain of Megiddo." In the OT, Megiddo was a fortress-city located in the Valley of Jezreel (or the Plain of Esdraelon) at the foot of the Carmel ridge between the Mediterranean Sea and the Sea of Galilee. The city was an important strategic site, as it stood on the great highway from Egypt to Damascus, thus providing a natural passage for the invasion of the Holy Land. The Valley of Jezreel was known for many famous battles in ancient times. In the OT, the city of Megiddo witnessed many decisive battles in the history of Israel (Judg. 5:19–21; 6:33; 2 Kin. 9:27; 23:29–30). Revelation seems to be using this motif from Israel's history to depict the final great conflict between God and the forces of evil. The religious and secular powers are portrayed as a unified army under the leadership of the satanic trinity for the final battle. In Revelation 9, their number is two hundred million, in contrast to the 144,000 of the saints.

The mount of Megiddo was Mount Carmel, situated close to the city. Mount Carmel was the site of one of the most significant battles in Israel's history, which involved the prophet Elijah and the prophets of Baal (1 Kin. 18:16–46), whose conflict centered on the identity of the true God (1 Kin. 18:21). The fire that came down from heaven demonstrated that the Lord is the only true God—the only One worthy of worship (1 Kin. 18:38–39). This connection identifies Armageddon as not a military battle to be fought somewhere in the Middle East but rather a spiritual battle between Christ and His followers and the forces of darkness (2 Cor. 10:4; Eph. 6:12). The issue to be resolved once and for all in the final battle is the same one Satan introduced at the beginning of the Great Controversy regarding the identity of the legitimate ruler of the universe. The outcome of the final battle will mirror that of the confrontation on Carmel: God's ultimate triumph over the forces of darkness.

Revelation 16:12–16 does not portray the actual battle, but only the great gathering of the religious and political powers to Armageddon. The actual battle follows the sixth plague and is described in Revelation 16:17—19:21. It will conclude with the total collapse and defeat of the satanic triumvirate and its armies.

16:17–21. The Seventh Plague. The seventh angel poured out his bowl on the air. A loud voice issued from the temple, God's throne, announcing, "It is done" (v. 17). That this announcement came from the throne of God suggests that God Himself was speaking in the same voice that commissioned the seven angels to pour out their bowls (16:1). In the NT, the pronouncement "It is done" is made three times. The first was on the cross of Calvary in an announcement of Christ's victory over Satan (John 19:30). The third and last time it is made, it will proclaim the final eradication of sin and the beginning of God's everlasting kingdom on earth (Rev. 21:6). Here, in Revelation 16:17, it proclaims God's victory over Satan and the powers of evil.

This pronouncement was followed by lightning flashes, rumbling noises, and thunderclaps (v. 18). In Revelation, these phenomena are always associated with the throne that represents the presence of God (Rev. 4:5; cf. 8:5; 11:19). A terrible earthquake then occurred, the severity of which was unlike any earthquake before in history, shattering Babylon and splitting it into three parts. End-time Babylon is comprised of the union of the satanic trinity (the dragon, the sea beast, and the earth beast) in its alliance with the religious powers of the world (see 14:8). This unity of the satanic trinity will be shattered in the earthquake.

This shattering of end-time Babylon will lead to the unavoidable collapse of the cities of the nations. The reference to nations here points to the civil and political powers of the world that will support end-time Babylon. The fragmentation of Babylon will take place when the nations of the earth withdraw their support from her. It is this event that the drying up of the river Euphrates symbolically represents (16:12).

John notes that Babylon the great was "remembered" by God and that He caused her to drink from the cup of the wine of His wrath (v. 19). In Revelation 18:5–6, God remembers Babylon's iniquities and punishes her with a double, mixed portion from her own cup. Babylon, who caused all nations to drink her wine of sexual immorality and anger (14:8; cf. 17:2; 18:3), will be given the cup of the wine of God's wrath, along with all those who choose to side with her.

The earthquake of the seventh plague will submerge every island and will cast the mountains into the sea (v. 20). In the scene of the sixth seal, the earthquake moved mountains and islands from their places (6:12, 14). Following the earthquake, large hailstones, each about a talent (ca. 100 lb. or 45 kg) in weight, will fall from the sky on the people (16:21). In the OT, hailstones were used as a means of judgment against the enemies of Israel (e.g., Ex. 9:13–35; Josh. 10:11; Ezek. 38:22). In the same way, hailstones will be used as weapons of judgment against the enemies of God's end-time people.

As with the other plagues (Rev. 16:9, 11, 21), these hailstones will not produce any change in the wicked, who will respond by cursing God and refusing to repent of their evil deeds. These exceedingly great plagues will not bring anyone to repentance but will reveal what is in their rebellious hearts.

17:1–18

The Woman and the Beast

Revelation 14:8 announced the fall of end-time Babylon and Revelation 16:19 pronounced its actual collapse. Chapters 17–18 detail how this will actually happen. Before describing the demise of end-time Babylon in chapter 18, John in chapter 17 describes the end-time apostate religious system and gives the reasons for its fall (vv. 1–11). The rest of the chapter gives further information on the sixth and seventh plagues regarding the drying up of the Euphrates River (see 16:12).

17:1–2. The Prostitute Sitting on Waters. One of the angels with the seven bowls invited John to witness the judgment of the great prostitute or harlot, who is later identified as Babylon the great (v. 5). A woman in the Bible is a symbol of God's people (see 12:1). In Revelation, God's faithful people are portrayed as a chaste woman (19:7–8; 22:17). A harlot therefore represents the apostate and unfaithful.

In describing this end-time apostate religious system, the book of Revelation combines the symbols of the women and the city (see 17:18). The angel stated that the harlot sits on many waters, which is a reference to the Euphrates River, on which ancient Babylon dwelled (Jer. 51:13). The angel later explained that these waters symbolize the civil, secular, and political powers of the world (Rev. 17:15). Just as ancient Babylon depended on the Euphrates River for its existence, so end-time Babylon will ally itself with the world leaders in order to support its plans and purposes.

Two groups are mentioned specifically, the first of which are "the kings of the earth" (v. 2), referring to the governing political powers of the world. They are portrayed as having committed sexual immorality with the harlot. In the OT, the language of fornication is frequently used to describe how Israel aligned itself with pagan nations (Is. 1:21; Jer. 3:1–10; Ezek. 16, 23). The adulterous relationship of the kings of the earth with the harlot symbolizes an illicit union between the end-time religious confederacy and the governing world powers that will occur in the final crisis.

The second group mentioned is "the inhabitants of the earth," referring to the general populace rather than the world's leaders, who were made spiritually drunk with the wine of her immorality (see 14:8). While the world's leaders committed adultery with the prostitute Babylon, the rest of the people were intoxicated by Babylon's deceptive teachings and activities, aimed at enticing them to worship the beast (14:8; 18:3). When people are drunk, they cannot think soberly, and when the effects of the drunkenness have worn off, they realize the bad decisions and actions they made while impaired. Both groups in the vision were equally deceived and came under the control of Babylon for political and economic reasons. The time will come, however, when these people realize the bad choices they have made and turn against Babylon. This realization will come too late.

17:3–6a. The Prostitute Sitting on the Beast. John was next carried in vision into the wilderness (cf. 12:14–17), where he saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast, not on the waters as he had previously been told. While the prostitute represents a religious entity, the beast symbolizes political power. The beast was filled with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns (see 13:1). The prophecy tells us that at the time of the end, there will be a worldwide union between religious and political powers. The prostitute was seen riding on the sea beast, a picture that signifies that this religious system has the support of the political powers as well as control over them.

The woman is pictured in extravagant attire, wearing purple and scarlet and lavishly adorned with ornaments of gold, precious stones, and pearls (v. 4). In ancient times, prostitutes wore scarlet clothing and lavish ornaments for the purpose of seduction (Jer. 4:30). The scarlet color of the woman's dress corresponds to the scarlet color of the beast on which she sits. Furthermore, as the color of blood and oppression, scarlet or red appropriately corresponds to the coercive character of this religious system (see Rev. 17:6). In addition, purple is used for royal attire (Esth. 8:15; Dan. 5:7) and therefore fits the harlot's claim to be a queen (Rev. 18:7).

The prostitute's dress was for the purpose of seduction, but it is also reminiscent of the attire of the high priest in the OT, which included purple, scarlet, and gold (Ex. 28:5–6). The inscription on her forehead resembles the one of sanctity to the Lord that resided on the miter of the high priest (Ex. 28:36–38). Furthermore, the cup in her hand reflects the drink offering given in the sanctuary (Ex. 30:9; Lev. 23:13). With its historic religious appearance, this end-time religious system will become Satan's powerful tool in seducing the world away from God and into apostasy.

However, although she appeared in religious garb, this woman was a prostitute or harlot. She had an inscription on her forehead, reflecting the look of a prostitute in the OT (Jer. 3:3), which referred to her as the mother of prostitutes and abominations (v. 5). While in Revelation Babylon stands for the end-time coalition of dragon, beast, and false prophet. Babylon's daughters stand for apostate and rebellious religious powers that were to unite with the satanic trinity to form an end-time religious confederacy.

The prostitute Babylon is further described as being "drunk with the blood" of God's holy people who died due to their witness for Christ (v. 6; cf. 6:9; 13:7). This clearly links end-time Babylon to the little horn of Daniel 7 and the sea beast of Revelation 13, which represent medieval apostate Christianity in Western Europe. This institution was responsible for the deaths of millions of Christians.

17:6b–8. The Healed Beast. John was filled with great amazement when he saw the woman. He obviously recognized in her the woman who had fled into the wilderness in order to escape the persecution of the dragon during the prophetic 1,260-day period of the Middle Ages (Rev. 12:13–14). This shows that this end-time opponent of God's people was once part of Christ's faithful church. The main bulk of the church that was faithful to God in the past will turn into an enemy of God's faithful remnant at the time of the end (12:17). In response to John's amazement, the angel who had invited him to witness Babylon's judgment (see v. 1) began to disclose the mystery of the woman and the beast that carried her (v. 7). These two are inseparable, for the harlot derived her character and power from the beast. As the medieval church used political power to control the beliefs of people, so Babylon will use the world-governing political powers to impose its seductive teachings and practices at the time of the end.

The scarlet beast is identified as the one that used to be ("was"), currently "is not," and "will" in the future ascend from the abyss or bottomless pit and go to its destruction (v. 8). This phrase is, first of all, a parody of the divine name, Yahweh—the One who was, who is, and who is to come in Revelation 4:8 (also 1:4, 8). On the other hand, it shows that the sea beast had passed through three phases of existence: (1) The beast "was," indicating that it existed in the past. There are clear links between this scarlet beast and the sea beast of Revelation 13—both are pictured as being full of blasphemous names and as having seven heads and ten horns. The "was" phase of the scarlet beast refers to its activities during the period of the prophetic 1,260 days (cf. 13:5). (2) With its deadly wound (see 13:3), the beast came into the "is not" phase. It disappeared for some time, yet it survived. (3) Finally, with the healing of the deadly wound (see 13:12), the beast will come to life once again, full of satanic rage against God's faithful people.

Revelation 17 thus describes the sea beast of Revelation 13:1–8 at the time when its deadly wound had been healed (see 13:12). It is on this resurrected sea beast that the end-time prostitute Babylon sits. Revelation thus tells us that religion will once again dominate and control politics as it did during the Middle Ages, albeit for a short period of time. The resurrection of the beast will prompt the admiration of the inhabitants of the earth, referring to all those whose names have not been written in the Book of Life from the beginning of the world (17:8). This reiterates Revelation 13:8, which links the scarlet beast that will carry the harlot Babylon with the sea beast that is the medieval religious system.

17:9–11. The Seven Heads of the Beast. The angel then proceeded to explain the meaning of the beast's seven heads. The prerequisite to understanding their meaning is wisdom (v. 9; see also 13:18). This wisdom refers to spiritual discernment imparted by the Spirit alone (James 1:5). Only through this divinely imparted wisdom will God's end-time people be able to discern the true character of this end-time satanic system.

The beast had seven heads like the dragon that represents Satan in Revelation 12:3. The beast existed and functioned through the agency of its heads; when one received a deadly blow, the whole beast died. The seven heads are mountains on which the woman sits (17:9). The Greek word *orē* means "mountains," though some translators have rendered it "hills," possibly to reference the city of Rome, which was known as the city on seven hills. However, neither literal hills nor mountains are in view here, for the obvious reason that these mountains are successive, not synchronic. Mountains in the Bible are often used as a symbol for kingdoms or empires (Jer. 51:25; Ezek. 35:2–5; Dan. 2:35).

The angel immediately explained that while these seven mountains symbolize seven kings, they are not individual kings, for Revelation does not deal with individual personalities but with systems. In the Bible, the word "kings" refers to kingdoms or empires (Dan. 2:37–39; 7:17). The seven mountains on which the prostitute Babylon sat thus stand for seven successive empires that have dominated the world throughout history and through which Satan has worked to oppose God. These empires have

shared the common traits of religious-political governance and coercion, which have been used to persecute and destroy God's people.

The angel further explained that five of these kingdoms had fallen, one was present, and the other had not yet come (v. 10). The identity of these seven kingdoms has occasioned a diverse variation of suggestions. In interpreting these kingdoms, we must remember that Revelation does not deal with individual personalities but rather with systems and world powers, whether political or religious. We must also keep in mind that the angel explained the meaning of these kingdoms to John in the context of his time, rather than from the end-time perspective. The kingdom the angel specified as "is" was thus the Roman Empire of John's time. The five that had fallen would be the empires that ruled the world prior to John's time: Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, and Greece. The seventh kingdom that "has not yet come" refers to the medieval papacy that, from John's perspective, was to be manifested in the future after the fall of the Roman Empire.

The angel further identified the scarlet beast itself as being the eighth head (v. 11), yet belonging still to the seven. It is most likely the seventh head that was to experience the deadly wound and come back to life once that wound was healed. We therefore now live in the era of the seventh head, for the eighth head has not yet gained power. It will appear on the worldwide scene at the time of the end for a limited time, and then it will go to its destruction.

17:12–13. The Ten Horns of the Beast. The angel explained that the ten horns of the beast represent ten kings that were to dominate with the beast during the time of the eighth head. The book doesn't explain exactly who these end-time powers are; only the future will reveal their full identity. All we can derive from the text is that the ten kings, meaning the kingdoms, are a short-lived end-time confederacy of the world's nations. Their number denotes the totality of the nations of the world who will put themselves under the control of the satanic trinity (see 17:2). They will render allegiance to the beast, something that will last only for a short time—"one hour" in prophetic terms (v. 12). The beast will use them to enforce its plans and purposes.

17:14–18. The Battle of Armageddon. At this point, the book briefly recounts the battle of Armageddon, which was introduced in Revelation 16:12–16 and described in more detail in 19:11–21. Induced by Babylon, the worldwide political confederacy will wage war against the Lamb. This shows that the final battle is not a military battle in the Middle East between Jews and various Muslim nations but between Satan and his confederacy and Christ and His faithful people, who are referred to as "called," "chosen," and "faithful" (v. 14). Babylon's aim is to defeat Christ and destroy God's people. However, the Lamb will defeat them. The battle will conclude with the triumph of Christ and the ultimate destruction of the worldwide confederacy that loyally supported Babylon (see 19:11–21).

The whole scenario suddenly changes in the final stage of the battle. The following scene correlates with the drying up of the Euphrates River in the sixth plague (16:12): the ten horns suddenly turn against Babylon, resulting in a gruesome scene (17:16). John here employed OT language of judgments against adulterous Jerusalem (Jer. 4:30; Ezek. 16:35–41; 23:22–29) in describing how the ten horns treated the prostitute Babylon. The savage act of eating someone's flesh is a token of extreme hostility and hatred (Rev. 17:16; see also Ps. 27:2; Mic. 3:3), and according to the Mosaic law, burning by fire was to be the punishment for a priest's daughter who was involved in prostitution (Lev. 21:9). This is a further indication that the harlot Babylon denotes a religious system that was once true to God but will, at the time of the end, turn away from Him. As chapter 16 indicates, the world's political powers would become disillusioned by the inability of Babylon to protect them from the plagues (vv. 10–11). Feeling deceived and filled with antagonism and hostility, they will attack her and bring her to ruin.

The scene concludes with a reminder that God is in control and that the wicked may go no further than God allows them (v. 17). In fact, the actions of the deceived governing powers will carry out God's judgment on Babylon. The angel reminded John that the great prostitute who had seduced the people of the world is the city that reigns over the kings of the earth (v. 18). The great harlot who sat on the beast and the great city Babylon that was on the Euphrates are the same entity. These two symbolize the same end-time apostate religious system that will stand in opposition to God. Divine judgment against this religious system is described in the following chapter in terms of the destruction of the historical city of Babylon, which became wealthy through economic trade.

18:1–24
Judgment on Babylon

Revelation 18 continues the tale of Babylon's demise. While in chapter 17 the judgment on this end-time apostate religious system is pictured in terms of the execution of a prostitute, it is portrayed in chapter 18 in terms of a wealthy commercial city sinking into the sea. In describing it, John employed language of the fall of ancient Babylon used by Isaiah and Jeremiah.

18:1–3. The Fall of Babylon Announced. The chapter begins with another angel coming down from heaven with great authority, whose radiance illuminates the whole earth (v. 1). The angel proclaimed with a loud voice that Babylon the Great had fallen (see 14:8). This is the language used by Isaiah concerning ancient Babylon (21:9), signifying that the fall of end-time Babylon is as certain as the collapse of the ancient city. The repetitive use of the word "fallen" (Rev. 18:2) further points to the certainty of the fall of Babylon. The glorious appearance of the angel and his loud voice were intended to ensure that all earth dwellers heard God's call to leave this apostate religious system and turn to Him before it was too late. Like Babylon of old, this end-time religious system had become a dwelling place of demons, unclean spirits, and unclean birds (Is. 13:19–22; Jer. 50:39).

Babylon will be judged and charged on religious, political, and economic grounds (Rev. 18:3). First, it will be charged with intoxicating the inhabitants of the earth with its corruptive teachings and doctrines (see 14:8; 17:2). Second, this apostate religious system will be charged with seducing the governing political powers of the world into an adulterous relationship for political and economic gain. Third, it will be charged with making the merchants of the earth rich through its own extravagant wealth and luxury (17:2; 18:3). This reveals the economic motive behind the end-time religious and political union, which was hinted at in 13:16–17.

18:4–8. Call to Separate from Babylon. Before the judgment of Babylon, a voice from heaven addressed God's people in the city. There will be many sincere, God-fearing people who are in Babylon. Just as Lot was exhorted to break off all ties with Sodom in order to escape the fate of the city's inhabitants, so God sends His final appeal to His people to cut all ties with this apostate religious system and come out of it, to escape both the sins and the plagues that will come on it (v. 4). This call echoes the appeal of Jeremiah to the Jews in ancient Babylon (Jer. 51:45). God does not want anyone in Babylon to perish, and this is the last opportunity for people to turn to God and escape the system's fate. Those who choose to stay in Babylon will consequently share in its fate. Revelation 19:1–10 shows that there are many in Babylon who will respond to the call.

The innumerable sins of the apostate religious system will have accumulated to the point that they reach heaven (v. 5), just like the crimes of ancient Babylon before it was destroyed (Jer. 51:9). God will not forget Babylon's unrighteous acts (see Rev. 16:19); He will bring retribution on this apostate religious system for what it has done to God's people, just as he repaid ancient Babylon for the evil it did to ancient Israel (Jer. 50:29; 51:24). This arrogant apostate system exhibits boastful self-glorification, claiming to be queen and that she will never be widowed or sorrowful (v. 7). This arrogant boasting mirrors the similar boastful self-glorification of ancient Babylon (Is. 47:7–8). In glorifying itself, Babylon was assuming the prerogatives of God. Babylon will be judged according to its sins, with this arrogant self-glorification as the basis for its condemnation and punishment. The judgment will demonstrate that the Lord God is strong and mighty (v. 8) and that He has the power to bring this apostate religious system to its end.

18:9–19. Laments over Babylon. Babylon's fall brought great sorrow to those who cooperated with the system for personal benefit and gain. The rest of the chapter describes three mournful laments of those who suffered personal loss as a result of Babylon's collapse, which are expressed in the form of ancient funeral dirges. Each begins with *ouai ouai* ("woe, woe," "alas, alas") and ends with emphasis on the suddenness of Babylon's fall, acknowledging how all of the devastating events took place "in one hour" (18:10, 16–17, 19).

The first who are portrayed lamenting over the collapse of Babylon are the kings of the earth who committed sexual immorality and lived in luxury with her (18:9–17a). These are the governing powers of the world spoken of in 17:2. This end-time religious system acted through them to gain control over the people and enforce its corrupt teachings and policies. Babylon promised them safety and security. These powers will finally recognize that they were deceived, and in their rage, they will turn against Babylon and

carry out its destruction (17:16). However, they will realize that Babylon's destruction means their own loss of power and wealth.

The second group of mourners is comprised of the merchants of the earth who profited from their commercial interactions with this end-time apostate religious system (18:11–17a). These prominent people (see v. 23) grew prosperous and rich by selling and distributing Babylon's corrupt goods. The catalog of the luxurious and costly merchandise provided in vv. 12–13 are similar to those mentioned in the dirge over Tyre (Ezek. 27:5–24).

The third group is comprised of sea merchants and sailors who transported Babylon's goods for the aforementioned merchants (18:17b–19). Both had acquired wealth by cooperating with Babylon. Their lament mirrors the lament over the fall of Tyre in Ezekiel 27:29–32. Here, the two groups mourn while standing at a distance as they watch the city burn. The collapse of Babylon means that they will no longer profit from its wealth. In its fate they will see their own destiny.

18:20. Rejoicing over Babylon's Destruction. On the other hand, just as the fall of ancient Babylon was good news for Israel (Jer. 51:48–49), so the fall of end-time Babylon will be good news for God's end-time people. To both peoples, the destruction of Babylon means deliverance from oppression. They can rejoice with heaven and all holy apostles and prophets because of God's vengeance (v. 20). Babylon is responsible for inducing the governing powers of the world to attack God's people. The judgment on this end-time apostate religious system will be God's act of salvation for His oppressed and persecuted people. The call to rejoice here is answered with shouts of praise in Revelation 19:1–10.

18:21–24. The Fall of Babylon Recounted. The conclusion of the vision provides a symbolic demonstration of Babylon's overthrow. John watched as a strong angel took a boulder the size of a large millstone and hurled it into the sea, declaring that this would be the violent manner in which Babylon is thrown down so that it can never be found again (v. 21). This symbolic scene reflects the one described in Jeremiah 51:59–64; the judgment of historical Babylon becomes a type of the judgment of end-time Babylon, both of which ring with finality. There will be no more music, no everyday business or domestic activities such as craftsmanship and food production. Never again will light shine in it, nor will the sound of nuptial festivities be heard (vv. 22–23).

The purpose of Revelation 18 is to assure God's end-time people that evil will not last forever. Babylon, the apostate religious system, has severely harmed and shed the blood of many of God's faithful people—of all on earth who have been slaughtered (v. 24). Jeremiah prophesied that Babylon must fall (Jer. 51:49); the apostate system has become drunk with the blood of God's holy people (Rev. 17:6). This archenemy of God and His people will finally be overthrown. God's people are assured again that God is with them even when they suffer injustice. However, they must wait patiently, for the time is coming when evil will finally be defeated and will never rise again, and it is then that they will finally be brought to their long-awaited home.

19:1—20:15
THE DESTRUCTION OF EVIL

Revelation 19–20 describes the final triumph of God over the forces of evil. This section begins with a description of the people rejoicing over the destruction of end-time Babylon (19:1–10), followed by the conclusion of the battle of Armageddon (19:11–21). Chapter 20 describes the events of the Millennium (vv. 1–10) and the final judgment (vv. 11–15).

19:1–6
Rejoicing over the Fall of Babylon

This section describes the jubilant celebration of the victory over Babylon in response to the call given in Revelation 18:20. In describing this joyful scene, John referenced many passages from different parts of the book. The description of the entire scene echoes that of the throne room scene in Revelation 4 in particular.

John heard a great multitude in heaven exclaiming praise to God for His glory, power, and salvation (v. 1). This scene echoes the shouts of the great multitude in Revelation 7:10. These redeemed saints are depicted praising God for His righteous judgment on Babylon, who corrupted the earth through her sexual immorality (see 17:1–6). The Greek word *diaphtheirō* ("destroy") used in Revelation 11:18, where the time had come for the destroyers of the earth to be destroyed, is here fulfilled.

With the destruction of Babylon complete, God will have taken vengeance on the prostitute, who represents the end-time apostate religious system and had the blood of His servants on her hands (v. 2; see 18:24). The martyrs will have been avenged and vindicated (6:10), as the destruction of Babylon ultimately answers their prayers. The smoke of the overthrown city will rise up forever and ever (v. 3; see 14:11), which is another way of saying Babylon will never again rise from the ruins (cf. Is. 34:8–10). The destruction of the oppressor of God's people is certain and permanent.

John watched as the redeemed saints were joined by the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures, the latter of whom fell before the throne and worshiped God with amens and hallelujahs (v. 4). This jubilant celebration reached its climax with the exclamation of praise to the Lord God Almighty, the Omnipotent One who rules over all (v. 6). This exclamation is reminiscent of the announcement at the seventh trumpet (see Rev. 11:17). The destruction of end-time Babylon marks the beginning of God's reign over the earth in the fullness of His unending power and authority.

19:7–9

The Wedding Supper of the Lamb

The next thing John was shown is the focus of the entire book: the long-awaited union of Christ with His people. John heard the proclamation that the wedding of the Lamb had come as well as a call for rejoicing and celebration. Christ's bride, who is to be those of God's people who have chosen not to partake in Babylon's sins, had prepared herself. In ancient Jewish weddings, the prospective groom would go to the house of the bride-to-be for the betrothal. After the payment of the dowry, the groom and the bride were considered legally married, although they could not yet live together. The groom then returned to his father's house and prepared the place where he and his bride would live. Meanwhile, the bride stayed at her father's house to prepare for the wedding. When the preparations had been completed, the groom would go back to the bride's house and the wedding feast would take place. Afterward, he would take his bride to the place he had prepared.

In a similar manner, Christ left His Father's house in heaven to come down to the earth to be betrothed to His bride, the church. After paying the dowry with His life at Calvary, He returned to His Father's house to prepare a place for His bride, while His bride remained on the earth to prepare herself for the wedding. At the end of history, Christ will come back and will finally be united with His bride and take her to His Father's house (cf. John 14:2–3).

Revelation uses the metaphor of the bride to describe God's people during the interval between Christ's First and Second Comings, during which they are preparing themselves for the Groom's long-awaited return. John saw the bride dressed in fine, bright, and clean linen to wear, which represents the righteousness of God's holy people (v. 8). This does not mean that God's people are to put on their own deeds. The robes of God's people will be supplied to them by Christ (Rev. 3:18; 6:11), washed in the blood of the Lamb (7:14). That the bride had made herself ready by arraying herself in the robes granted to her by Christ points to both human responsibility and divine activity (see Phil. 2:12–13). The righteous deeds of God's people are the external reflection of the internal works of Christ in their lives.

In concluding the scene, John was urged to write down a proclamation of blessing for those invited to the Lamb's wedding (v. 9). Revelation portrays the experience of God's end-time people from two different perspectives: the bride and the invited guests at the wedding supper. While the former points to the coming union with Christ, the latter reminds believers that they have to respond to the call and prepare themselves for that great day.

We must keep in mind that Revelation 19 does not describe the actual wedding; it only announces the coming of the time for that long-awaited event. The wedding itself will take place when God's people find themselves in the new Jerusalem, which is the Lamb's bride, His wife (21:9). The new Jerusalem and God's people are equated because God's people will be permanently united to their Lord in that city.

19:10

The Spirit of Prophecy

Filled with awe regarding what he had just heard, John fell at the angel's feet to worship him. However, the angel restrained him, explaining that he was just a servant sent to serve the community of believers, which included John, who possess the "testimony of Jesus" (v. 10). He admonished John to worship God instead. This repeats the statement in Revelation 12:17, where the remnant of the woman's offspring is identified as the ones who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus. The angel further explained to John that the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy. John would not have had difficulty understanding the meaning of this, because in his day, the expression was widely used to refer to the Holy Spirit as He spoke through the prophets. The testimony of Jesus thus refers to the special message Jesus sends to His people through individuals called by God to prophetic ministry (see 1:1–2).

Here, Revelation shows that the prophetic ministry will continue among God's people until the time of the end. What was true of God's people in all times will also be true at the end of time: God's people will be in possession of the prophetic gift. In the final crisis, when the whole world will turn away from God, Christ will provide special guidance to His people through the gift of prophecy, which will enable them to avoid being deceived.

19:11–21

The Conclusion of the Battle of Armageddon

At this point, the book turns to describe the conclusion of the battle of Armageddon. While the final battle has been spoken of two times in the book (16:12–16; 17:14–18), it is in 19:11–21 that the description of the actual battle is given.

19:11–16. The Coming of Christ as the Warrior-King. While John previously watched in vision the exaltation of Christ on the heavenly throne through the open gates of heaven in Revelation 4:1, he here saw the gates of heaven opened for Christ to come down to the earth to fight His final battle with the evil forces. Christ is portrayed as a Roman general riding on a white horse. He is called Faithful and True (see Rev. 3:14), which points to His faithfulness and His promise to provide deliverance for His people. He is about to wage the final war in justice and righteousness (v. 11). While wars are usually matters of military oppression and bloodshed, the war that Christ is about to wage will be for the purpose of establishing everlasting justice and His everlasting kingdom.

John once again saw Christ's eyes as fire (v. 12), just as he had seen them among the lampstands (see 1:14), which denotes His ability to judge. Nothing can remain hidden from His penetrating insight. On His head were many royal crowns, as the token of His absolute authority. He had a title inscribed that was known to nobody except Him. However, John later reveals that Christ's title is King of kings and Lord of lords (v. 16), inscribed on His robe and His thigh (see 17:14). In Revelation 5, Christ had been exalted, but His reign has been constantly challenged by Satan's claim to be the ruler of the earth. John saw Christ coming with all authority and power to abolish Satan's usurping rule and authority and to assume His rightful position as the only true King and Lord over the earth.

Christ's robe was dipped in blood (v. 13), a description that evokes Isaiah's portrayal of God returning from punishing Edom in a blood-stained robe (Is. 63:1–3). The fact that Christ's robe was stained with blood before the battle begins suggests that this was the blood of Christ's persecuted followers (see Rev. 17:6; 19:2). Christ was coming to avenge their blood and vindicate them. His identifying name in the final battle was the word of God. Verse 15 depicts a sharp sword proceeding from His mouth with which He was to strike down the nations (see v. 21). A sword is a symbol of the word of God (Eph. 6:17; cf. Is. 11:4). Paul prophesied that Christ would defeat the end-time apostate religious system with the breath of His mouth and destroy it with the splendorous appearance of His coming (2 Thess. 2:8). That the weapon of the final battle is symbolically pictured as coming out of Christ's mouth affirms what is evident elsewhere in the book: that the battle of Armageddon is not a military war but rather a spiritual battle fought to resolve the fundamental issue concerning the true ruler of the universe, the issue that started the Great Controversy.

Christ was accompanied by the armies of heaven, which were pictured riding on white horses and being dressed in "fine linen, white and clean" (v. 14). This army could be the army of angels that will accompany Him at the Second Coming (cf. Matt. 24:30–31; 2 Thess. 1:7). It has also been suggested that it could represent the end-time people of God. However, the angels and the end-time saints are not mutually exclusive concepts in the heavenly armies. The robes of the end-time saints signify their righteous deeds (see v. 8). Revelation 17:14 demonstrates that the end-time saints will be involved in Christ's final battle against the forces of evil. They are also described as being the kings from the east (lit., "the rising of the sun"; 16:12). While God's people are in actuality on the earth waiting for translation (1 Thess. 4:16–17), according to this interpretation, they already share in Christ's glory (Eph. 2:6). In any case, Revelation portrays God's people as joining Christ and the accompanying angels in His triumphant victory over their enemies.

19:17–21. Conclusion of the Battle of Armageddon. John saw an angel calling the scavengers of the sky in a loud voice, gathering them together for the supper of God (v. 17), where they would eat the flesh of the armies of the earth (see v. 21). This call to the birds of prey stands in contrast to the previous invitation to the wedding supper of the Lamb (19:9). This gruesome scene reflects Ezekiel's vision in which God's judgment on the pagan nations of Gog is portrayed as a sacrificial feast prepared for the birds of the air and the beasts of the field (Ezek. 39:17–21).

People of every sociopolitical level—including kings, commanders of one thousand troops (Gr. *chiliarchoi*), mighty leaders, mounted troops, freemen, slaves, and the small and the great—are all among those slain at the Second Coming. They are those who have sided with Babylon in opposition to God in the final battle. In the scene of the sixth seal, they are portrayed as trying to hide themselves from the face of God and of the Lamb (6:15–17). The link between the two texts shows that the destruction of the wicked will occur in the context of the Second Coming.

The satanic triumvirate will send their envoys to entice the governing powers of the world to engage in the final war against God's end-time people (16:13–14). A worldwide religious and political confederacy will thus be formed under the auspices of the satanic trinity. They will assemble for the great battle at Armageddon (16:16) to wage war with the Lamb, but He will defeat the religious-political confederacy (17:14; see also Dan. 12:1) when He comes in glory and power. Revelation 6:15–17 depicts the kings and mighty men as not fighting but running in panic, trying to hide themselves from the Lamb's wrath. Two members of the satanic triumvirate, the beast and the false prophet, will be captured and thrown alive into the burning lake (v. 20), which here refers to the event in which the earth is destroyed by fire in the full and ultimate end of all rebellion against God (see 20:14).

The rest of the people will be killed by the sword that proceeds from Christ's mouth. As Paul explains, they will be destroyed by the glory of Christ's power (2 Thess. 1:8–10). The whole earth will resemble an ancient battlefield, covered with the bodies of the slain, whose flesh will be eaten by the birds (v. 21). The defeat of the worldwide confederacy of rebellious humanity that gathered against God and His people in the final combat will be total and complete.

20:1–15
The Millennium

The battle of Armageddon will conclude with the total destruction of the confederacy of evil forces. Satan's two allies will be thrown into the lake of fire, and those who have supported Babylon will be slain, awaiting the final judgment. The only person left will be Satan. Revelation 20 describes the setting during the Millennium along with the fate of Satan and his followers at the final judgment.

20:1–3. The Binding of Satan. John observed an angel coming down from heaven with a key to the abyss or bottomless pit and a large chain in his hands. He seized the dragon, who is identified as the ancient serpent, the devil, and Satan (see 12:9), and bound him for one thousand years using a symbolic chain (20:2). This chaining will occur at the Second Coming. John observed as the angel threw Satan into the abyss (see 9:1) and securely imprisoned him (20:3). In the NT, the bottomless pit is the place where Satan and his demonic forces will be confined until they receive their rightful judgment (Luke 8:31; 2 Pet. 2:4). In Revelation 20, the bottomless pit denotes the chaotic state of the earth that will be caused by the seven last plagues. Such a chaotic state brings to mind the emptiness of the earth before the Creation week (Gen. 1:2) and the condition of the land of Israel during the Exile (Jer. 4:23–26).

The desolate earth will serve as Satan's prison. He will be prevented from deceiving the nations until after the Millennium (v. 3) by the simple fact that they will all be dead during this period. The one thousand years, known as the Millennium, will begin with the Second Coming of Christ. It has been suggested that it will be a literal one thousand years because after the Second Coming, time periods may no longer be symbolic. In any case, the passage seems to point to the Millennium as a real period of time that concerns Satan and the fallen angels on one side and God's resurrected people on the other.

Satan will be bound with the fallen angels by a chain of circumstances. With the death of the wicked and the transference of the living and resurrected saints to heaven (1 Thess. 4:16–17), there will be none left to deceive or harm. All that Satan and his demonic forces will be able to do is contemplate the consequences of their rebellion against God. Satan, at the end of the Millennium, will be released from his imprisonment to once again perform his deceitful activities (20:3, 7–10).

20:4–6. The Saints in Heaven. With Satan and his fallen angels confined to the earth, the vision turns to the glorified saints who are pictured sitting on thrones. Although the text does not explicitly state where they are during the Millennium, it implies that they will spend the Millennium in heaven (7:9–17; 19:1–10). Revelation says that they will be given authority to judge (v. 4), echoing Jesus's promise to His disciples that they would "sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matt. 19:28). Furthermore, Paul foretold that the saints were to judge the world and even angels (1 Cor. 6:2–3). The saints' exercise of judgment during the Millennium is related to questions concerning the fairness of God's actions in the universe. Throughout history, Satan has cast many doubts concerning God's character and His dealings with the beings He created. During the Millennium, God will allow the redeemed saints to access the records of the events of history in order to find answers to all questions related to His leading in their own lives on earth—questions concerning the fairness of His decisions regarding those who were lost.

Two groups in particular are mentioned in the prophecy, the first of which is made up of the ones who had been beheaded for their testimonies about Jesus and their fidelity to the word of God (cf. Rev. 1:2). This is a reference to the martyrs in the scene of the fifth seal (Rev. 6:9–11). The second group consists of the end-time saints, who had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. These saints had all come to life and been taken to heaven to participate in Christ's millennial kingdom. This vision presents the fulfillment of Christ's promise that the overcomers in Laodicea would share His throne (3:21). God's people, who have suffered hardships on the earth due to their faithfulness to the gospel, will be exalted to the glorious status of sharing Christ's throne.

The raising of the saints to life will be "the first resurrection" (v. 5), which will include all believers and take place at the beginning of the Millennium. The sinful rest of humanity will be resurrected at the conclusion of the Millennium, which coincides with Satan's release from his solitary confinement. John describes those raised in the first resurrection as "blessed and holy" (v. 6), not subject to "the second death" (see Rev. 2:11) that is the fate of the wicked in the lake of fire (20:14–15; 21:8). The prophet declares that the redeemed saints will be "priests of God and of Christ" during the Millennium (v. 6). As such, they will be in the immediate presence of God and will have access to the records of God's governance over the universe. At the conclusion of the Millennium, all questions involving God's justice will be forever settled. God's people will be able to see beyond a shadow of doubt the greatness of God's love and care manifested in His Son and in their own lives on earth. They will then be ready to witness the administration of God's justice at the final judgment.

20:7–10. Release of Satan. At the conclusion of the Millennium, Satan will be released from his prison in the bottomless pit at the same time that the wicked dead are resurrected at the second resurrection. If the prophetic chaining of Satan was caused by the absence of people on earth, his release will be caused by the resurrection of the wicked. Through his deceitful activities, he will gather together the wicked of all ages against God's people, who will be encamped in the beloved city. The assembled wicked are portrayed in terms of "Gog and Magog" (v. 8), the enemies that were assembled against Israel in the Holy Land and that were to be utterly destroyed by God (Ezek. 38:22–23; 39:6). John referred to this OT history to describe both Satan's final attack on the saints at the end of the Millennium and God's miraculous intervention to protect them.

The wicked will surround new Jerusalem under Satan's leadership, ready to attack and destroy God's people (v. 9). Although the descent of the new Jerusalem is not mentioned until Revelation 21:2, it is evident that the city with the saints inside will have descended prior to the time of Satan's attack. This last attack on the Holy City will demonstrate the hardness of the hearts of those who rejected God. Their rebellious hearts will be filled with the same hatred against God and His people that they demonstrated before the Second Coming and Millennium. This hatred will once again affirm that they have been rightly judged.

However, the attack will not take place, because God will intervene to protect the righteous within the city. Fire will come down from heaven and will devour the wicked (v. 9), and Satan and his fallen angels will meet their end in the lake of fire (v. 10), thus sharing the fate of the two other members of the diabolic triumvirate. The text states that they will be "tormented day and night" forever (v. 10; see also 14:10–11). As we saw earlier, the phrase "forever and ever" denotes a continuation of an action until it completes God's purpose (see commentary on Rev.

14:9–11). Satan's punishment will be irreversible, and all of his followers will share in it.

20:11–15. The Final Judgment. Having succinctly recounted the fate of Satan and his hordes, John next presents a more detailed description of how the destruction of the wicked will take place. He saw that as Satan and his hordes surround the city and are about to carry out their attack, a great white throne, on which God sits, will suddenly appear (v. 11). In response, the universe will convulse in cataclysmic terror. At this moment, every person who has ever lived on the earth but has spurned God's mercy will be brought to judgment before the throne of God. People from all ages and every socioeconomic class will be there. No one will be exempt; all will be required to give an account of the wrongs they have committed.

The books of record will be opened (v. 12). These are the records of human deeds that show whether a person has been loyal to God. Then, the Book of Life will be opened, which contains the names of all those who belong to God (Phil. 4:3). The rebellious will be judged according to the record of what they have done (v. 13; cf. Rom. 2:6). John saw that anyone whose name was not found in the Book of Life was thrown into the lake of fire (v. 15). The lake of fire is not an everlasting burning hell but rather a metaphorical description of the whole earth burning with fire (see Rev. 20:9). It is the place of complete destruction (Matt. 10:28), "the second death" (Rev. 20:14), where all who have rebelled against God will meet their ultimate end. The fire will burn long enough to consume everything completely. Its flames will destroy everything, not leaving even a root or a branch (Mal. 4:1), which symbolically represent "Satan the root, [and] his followers the branches" (GC 657).

The second death also means the end of death, since Death and Hades will also be thrown into the lake of fire. As Paul stated, the last enemy to be destroyed is death (1 Cor. 15:26). Eternal life for the redeemed can begin only when this great enemy is terminated. At that point, an eternity without sin and sinners will begin.

21:1—22:5

GOD'S ETERNAL KINGDOM

Revelation 21–22 brings us to John's last vision, which includes the conclusion of the cosmic controversy with the triumph of God over the forces of evil. Purged of all traces of sin, this earth with its capital, the new Jerusalem, will become the eternal home of the redeemed.

21:1–8

The Restored Earth

The description of the new world is given in the language of Genesis 1–3. God will restore the new earth, along with the Garden of Eden, which was lost because of sin. God's original plan for humanity will thus finally be realized.

21:1. The New Earth. The eradication of sin will bring about a new heaven and a new earth to replace the former heaven and earth. There are three heavens in Jewish tradition: the sky, the starry universe, and the dwelling place of God (cf. 2 Cor. 12:2). Revelation 21:1 obviously refers to the earth's atmosphere, the sky. In Revelation 20:11, the old earth and sky could not endure God's presence, which points to the total transformation that this planet will undergo. The Greek word *kainos* ("new") denotes something new in form and quality rather than new in origin and time. The new earth will be the renewed earth, purged by fire and restored to its original state (2 Pet. 3:10–13).

One thing in particular that caught John's attention was that the sea no longer existed. Perhaps this means that the oceans we know today will cease to exist; however, the phrase may be understood as a metaphor for the absence of the evil that stands in opposition to God. In the vision of 13:1, the sea was the place out of which the enemy of God came. With the removal of the symbolic sea, the evil that caused fear and suffering will be removed. The fact that John referred to the absence of *the* sea, which is the definite article used in the Greek, shows that he had a particular sea in mind. The sea by which he was surrounded on Patmos could have become for him a symbol of separation and suffering.

21:2–8. Life on the New Earth. God's presence among His people guarantees a life free of pain and death on the restored earth. This presence will be realized when the holy city, the new Jerusalem, descends from heaven, from God, at the end of the Millennium (Rev. 20:7–9). The fact that it is designated as "new" and that it will come from heaven shows that the city is not a rebuilt Jerusalem in the Holy Land but rather a heavenly city designed and constructed by God Himself (Heb. 11:10).

The new Jerusalem is referred to as God's dwelling place, His tabernacle, with His people (v. 3). He will live in the direct presence of the peoples (the Gr. of v. 3 is plural), all of whom are His own. In the city, there will be no temple, because the literal presence of God will be the city's temple (Rev. 21:22). In OT times, the sanctuary and the temple symbolized God's presence among His people (Ex. 29:44–45; Lev. 26:11–12; 2 Chr. 6:18–21). Because of Israel's unfaithfulness, God removed His presence from them (Matt. 23:37–38). However, He promised that He would once again make His dwelling place with His people and would be their God and they His people (Ezek. 37:27). The new Jerusalem will not need a symbol of God's presence, because God's presence will be literal and real in the city.

God's abiding presence means freedom from the suffering we know today—no more tears, death, sorrow, crying, or pain (v. 4; see Rev. 7:15–17). All of these are the consequences of sin. When sin no longer exists, the previous order of things will have expired. Isaiah prophesied that God "will swallow up death forever" and that He will "wipe away" the tears from all of our faces (Is. 25:8). Revelation describes the fulfillment of this prophecy, the realization of a glorious hope.

God then proclaimed that He was making everything new (v. 5), and John was told to write down these true and trustworthy words (see also Rev. 22:6). They are as faithful and true as God is faithful and true. A promise is as strong as the person giving it and his or her ability to do what he or she says. The promise of a life free from sin and suffering comes from God, "the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End" (v. 6), a proclamation that begins and ends the book (1:8; 22:13). God the Creator is the One who will restore this world to its original state.

This section concludes with a promise and a warning. Those who overcome are promised the status of being children of God with all the rights of natural heirs. They will inherit all the things promised in the conclusions of the messages to the seven churches in Revelation 2–3. However, those who spurn God's mercy in all their various rebellions (see the list in v. 8) will be excluded from the heavenly city (see 21:27; 22:15). Their lot will be the second death in the lake of fire prepared for Satan and his angels (Matt. 25:41).

21:9—22:5

The New Jerusalem

John next described the capital of the new earth: the new Jerusalem. While it will be a real place inhabited by real people, the city and life therein are beyond our comprehension, surpassing our imaginations (1 Cor. 2:9). It is therefore portrayed in symbolic language in terms of the fortified cities of the time, the OT temple, the restored temple from Ezekiel 40–48, and the restored Garden of Eden (Gen. 2–3). John first describes the city's exterior (21:9–21a) before moving inside the city (21:21b—22:5).

21:9–21a. The Exterior of the City. John was invited to observe the new Jerusalem (see Rev. 21:2). In the OT, the earthly Jerusalem is often spoken of as a bride lavishly adorned by and for God, her groom (Is. 49:14–18; 62:1–5). In Revelation 19:7–8, the same metaphor is applied to God's people, who are synonymous with the new Jerusalem. The new Jerusalem is depicted as situated on a great and high mountain (v. 10). The purpose of this imagery is to affirm God's ultimate triumph over the end-time apostate system.

The city will radiate the glory of God, which appeared to John as a jasper stone, clear as crystal (v. 11). In the OT temple, God's glory denoted His presence (Ex. 40:34–35; Ezek. 43:1–5). John saw the new Jerusalem surrounded by a high wall with twelve gates—three on each of the four sides, with angels by all of them (vv. 12–13). The city walls were made of jasper and transparent gold (v. 18), accentuating the splendid glory of the city. The gates on each side allowed entry from any direction, which points to the universal scope of the city. Jesus foretold that many would come from all directions to sit at the table in God's kingdom (Luke 13:29). In the new Jerusalem, everyone will have unlimited access to God's presence.

John saw that the gates of the new Jerusalem were made of huge pearls inscribed with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel (vv. 12, 21), similar to the gates in Ezekiel's vision (Ezek. 48:30–35). The twelve tribes of Israel represent God's people of the OT. The new city will have twelve foundations that have the names of the twelve apostles on them (v. 14). The twelve apostles represent God's people of the NT (Eph. 2:20). The coupling of the twelve tribes and the twelve apostles shows the continuity of God's people and identifies the city as the place for all of His people, regardless of the time period in which they lived. The foundations of the city were decorated with all kinds of precious stones (v. 19), which correlate with the precious stones that decorated the breastplate of the high priest in the OT and that were engraved with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel (Ex. 28:17–21).

The new Jerusalem in John's vision was twelve thousand furlongs or stadia (about 1,400 mi. or 2,250 km) in length, width, and height, making it a perfect cube. A cube consists of twelve edges, and since each edge is 12,000 stadia long, the entire city totaled 144,000 stadia. This figure—144,000—is the number of the totality of God's people (see Rev. 7:4). In Solomon's temple, the holy of holies was a perfect cube as well (1 Kin. 6:20). It housed the ark of the covenant, which represented God's throne. Thus, the city will function not only as the temple but also as the holy of holies, having the throne of God and of the Lamb inside (Rev. 22:3). In the earthly temple, only the high priest was allowed to enter the holy of holies to meet with God. In the new Jerusalem, this privilege will be granted to all the redeemed (vv. 3–4).

21:21b–27. Inside the City. Inside the city, John saw a street of gold so pure it resembled transparent glass. The city did not need the light of the sun or the moon, for the glory of God provided light for its residents (v. 23; see also 22:5). There will thus be no night in the city (v. 25), which is a fulfillment of another of Isaiah's prophecies (60:19–20). The nations will walk in the light of the city and the kings of the earth will bring their brilliance and majesty into it (Rev. 21:24; cf. Is. 60:3). John identified the redeemed as the nations and kings of the restored earth (see Rev. 1:6; 5:9–10). The city gates will never be closed, similar to what Isaiah foresaw (60:11). The open gates will make it possible for all people to come into the presence of God at any time.

The only condition for entering the new Jerusalem is to have one's name registered in the Lamb's Book of Life (v. 27). The unclean ones who practice abominations and lies will be excluded from the city (see 22:15). These will be the ones who have drunk from Babylon's cup of abominations and unclean things (17:4) and who will meet their ultimate end in the lake of fire (20:15; 21:8).

22:1–5. On the Banks of the River of Life. The new Jerusalem is further depicted as the restored Garden of Eden. John observed a river of life-giving water flowing from the throne of God and the Lamb (cf. Gen. 2:10). The prophets of the OT often spoke of a river of living water flowing from the restored temple in Jerusalem and giving life to all (Ezek. 47:1–12; Joel 3:18; Zech. 14:8). The river of the water of life in the new Jerusalem stands in contrast to the waters of the Euphrates on which end-time Babylon was dwelling (Rev. 17:1). God's people sat as captives at the river in ancient Babylon, longing for Jerusalem (Ps. 137). With the destruction of Babylon, the captivity of God's people will be over. It is on the banks of the river of life in the new Jerusalem that God's wandering people will finally find their home and will rest at last.

The tree of life grows on the banks of the river (v. 2), yielding fruit every month. The tree of life (first referenced in Gen. 2:9) symbolizes eternal life (Gen. 3:22). Because of sin, human beings lost access to the tree of life and became subject to death (vv. 22–24). In the new Jerusalem, the curse of sin will be removed and the redeemed will once again have access to the tree of life, sharing in the gift of eternal life that Adam enjoyed prior to the entrance of sin.

The leaves of the tree of life will be "for the healing of the nations" (v. 2; see Ezek. 47:12). This does not mean, however, that the leaves will have the power to heal sickness and disease, for there will be no sickness or death in the restored earth after the eradication of sin (Rev. 21:4). The text identifies the leaves of the tree as being for the healing of nations (Gr. *ethnoi*), not of individuals. People of all nations, tribes, and languages or tongues (7:9) will inhabit the new Jerusalem. As the redeemed gather under the leaves of the tree and eat its fruit, all the wounds caused by the barriers that have divided and torn people apart for ages—national, tribal, racial, and linguistic—will be gone. As the prophet Micah prophesied, nations will no longer raise swords against one another or train for war (Mic. 4:3–4). The redeemed of the restored earth will belong to the one great family of God.

In the new Jerusalem, there will be no sin (v. 3). Because of the curse that sin brought on the world, human beings were banished from the Garden of Eden. With the eradication of sin, God's people will be brought back to the restored Eden. The greatest of all the privileges they will enjoy in the new Jerusalem will be seeing God's face. The perennial desire of human beings throughout history has been to see God's face, something that even Moses was denied (Ex. 33:18–20). This wish will be realized in the new Jerusalem; they will serve and worship Him in His temple (see Rev. 7:15). His name will be on their foreheads (v. 4) as the reward for refusing the mark of the beast (15:2). The conclusion of the Great Controversy will mark the beginning of a full, intimate fellowship with God. The righteous of the city will reign forever (v. 5).

Revelation portrays the new Jerusalem as the fulfillment of human longings, hopes, and dreams. God's people have lived and died hoping for the coming of that wonderful city (Heb. 11:10, 16). As such, it stands in contrast to the harlot city Babylon, which represents futile ambitions for power and prosperity based on human strategies and efforts. However, the final word will be with God. Babylon will come to its end, and the new Jerusalem will rise in its place.

22:6–21

EPILOGUE

In concluding the book, John reaffirmed the things he declared in the introduction (22:6–17) and issued a final warning in his closing remarks (22:18–21).

22:6–7

Authentication of the Book

The concluding section of Revelation begins with another affirmation that all John had heard and seen was trustworthy and true (cf. Rev. 21:5). The significance of this is rooted in the fact that Christ is the One who is faithful and true (3:14; 19:11); He is the One who gave the prophecies of Revelation to John in order to reveal to His people the things that were soon to transpire (cf. 1:1). The prophecies of Revelation and the hope embedded in them are thus as reliable as Christ Himself is reliable; they will all surely come true.

22:7–17

Affirmation of the Second Coming

Jesus reminded His people that He is coming soon three times in this concluding section (22:7, 12, 20). The return of Christ is the keynote of the book (see 1:7). In referring to His coming, Jesus used the futuristic present tense: He *is coming* soon. Although a literal future event, Jesus referred to His coming as if it were already taking place—as if He had already begun to come. God's people must therefore take seriously the prophecies of Revelation in order to be ready to meet Christ when He arrives in power and glory.

Once again, overwhelmed by what he had just seen and heard, John prostrated himself to worship the angel who spoke with him. However, just as in Revelation 19:10, the angel warned him not to do so, since God alone is to be worshiped. The angel spoke of being only a servant in service to John, his fellow prophets, and all those who heed the words of the prophecy recorded in the book of Revelation. The angel instructed John not to seal the prophecies of Revelation in stark contrast to the command to Daniel to seal the end-time prophecies of his respective book (Dan. 12:4, 9). The prophecies of Daniel concerned events to take place in the distant future, and as such, they were not relevant to the people of Daniel's time. However, the prophecies of Revelation were not to be kept sealed because the time was soon to arrive (v. 10). They have to be repeatedly and consistently read and studied by God's people as the history of this world nears its end (Rev. 1:3).

At this point, a declaration is made in connection with the nearness of Christ's coming: let the evil and vile persist in their evil and vileness and the righteous and holy continue in their righteousness and holiness (v. 11). This correlates with the events we see connected to the unsealing of Daniel's end-time prophecies: there will be a separation between those who heed those prophecies and those who reject them (Dan. 12:10). Revelation 22:10–11 shows that people can choose to accept or reject the prophetic message. However, the time is coming when it will be too late to change; the door of opportunity to turn to God will close, and grace will no longer be available. Christ is coming to reward each person according to his or her choices and actions (v. 12).

The book once again reminds us of the condition the righteous must meet before entering into eternal life, calling those who keep God's commandments or wash their robes "blessed" (v. 14). Whatever interpretation is in view here, the righteous deeds of God's people are the result of Christ's work in their lives. It is because of what He has done for them and in them that they will stand in the presence of God in the new Jerusalem. On the other hand, the unfaithful and unholy, called dogs (Matt. 7:6)—practitioners of magic and sorcery, the sexually immoral, murderers, idolaters, and whoever loves and practices falsehoods—will be excluded from the city (v. 15).

Once again, Jesus affirms that He is the real Author of the book; He sent His angel to give John this message to the churches. He is the Root and Offspring of David, the bright Morning Star (v. 16). With this statement, Jesus has put His signature on the book. The prophecies of Revelation have come from Him. They were written for the churches, both of John's day and throughout history. Through these prophecies, Christ has unveiled the future of the church until the end of earth's history.

In response to Jesus's declaration that He is coming soon, the Holy Spirit makes a call through the bride, the church: "Come!" (v. 17). Those who respond must call others to come as well. Whoever is thirsty may come and drink the water of life, a free gift from God (see 21:6). The water of which Christ spoke is the message of Revelation. It is not enough to simply read the book of Revelation; we must "drink" its words, study its messages, and treasure them in our minds and hearts (see 1:3).

22:18–21
Final Warning and Appeal

At this point, Jesus gave a warning against adding to or removing from the words of the prophecy of the book. This warning echoes the exhortation of Moses to Israel at the end of their wilderness journey (Deut. 4:2; 12:32). Tampering with the prophecies of Revelation carries far-reaching consequences: whoever adds to the words of this prophetic book will have the plagues that it describes cast on them by God's punishment, and those who subtract from Revelation will be deprived of eternal life in the new Jerusalem (Rev. 22:18–19).

We must keep in mind that this warning is not simply about tampering with the actual words of Revelation; it also includes distorting and intentionally misinterpreting the prophecies of the book to suit one's own purposes or enforcing speculative ideas and views unsupported by the text. We must keep in mind that we are dealing with unfulfilled prophecies, the understanding of which will come after they have been fulfilled (John 14:29). We must stay with what is clearly stated in the text and not speculate beyond what the prophecy has revealed to us.

In addition, one may take away from the words of Revelation by deliberately undermining their divine origin and their prophetic character because the message of the book is unpopular or not widely accepted. Such a person is as guilty of tampering with the prophecies of the book as the one who adds to it. Both will suffer eternal loss.

For the last time, Christ reminds the readers of Revelation of His speedy coming (v. 20). On behalf of all of us, John responded with an affirming exclamation: Amen! Come, Lord Jesus!

The book closes with a benediction: may the grace of Jesus Christ be with us all (v. 21). This phrase is much more than just a customary benediction. Its purpose is to assure God's people that their only hope is in the grace of Christ. His grace will equip His people to go through the tumultuous times of the final crisis, and it is through His grace that the promises of Revelation will be realized when He returns to claim His faithful people as His bride and take them to their eternal home. This hope nurtures, comforts, and strengthens us as we wait for its fulfillment.

The biblical canon closes with an announcement of the complete realization of the Christian hope, given to humans in the Garden of Eden through the promise of salvation (Gen. 3:15). Many of those who embraced that promise died holding on to it. Revelation tells us that this is a living hope as it is embodied in Christ and that we will enjoy it at the moment of His glorious return.

Yes, come, Lord Jesus, come!